

MATTEO SALVINI'S LEGA¹ BACK IN GOVERNMENT: TOWARDS A RECONFIGURATION OF THE ITALIAN CENTRE RIGHT?

LA LEGA DE MATTEO SALVINI DE VUELTA AL GOBIERNO: ¿HACIA UNA RECONFIGURACIÓN DE LA
CENTRO DERECHA ITALIANA?

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1 From the original word in Italian. In English: 1) Northern League; 2) Salvini Premier's League.



Abstract || This article analyses the transformation of the *Lega Salvini Premier* (LSP), the Italian party led by Matteo Salvini, in times of pandemic: specifically, the period 2020-2021, since in that last year this political force entered the coalition headed by Premier Mario Draghi. We are interested in studying the transmutation suffered by the Lega itself in terms of political positions in the midst of the Covid19 crisis that especially hit Italy last year, to explain the participation in the Draghi government in 2021: we observe a position, on the part of Salvini and his party, closer to those of a conservative liberal character, typical of another of the right-wing parties in that country: *Forza Italia* (FI). Our hypothesis is that this scenario is helping to reconfigure the Italian centre-right alliance, where the acceptance of the *Lega* declines, in pursuit of an increase in the popularity of *Fratelli D'Italia* (FDI, Brothers of Italy) and its charismatic leader Giorgia Meloni, the only force opposing the current Italian government. Through the qualitative analysis of press material and electoral polls, we have to account for the main objective of this work.

Keywords || Centre Right, Europe, Italy, Matteo Salvini, Lega Salvini Premier

Resumen || Este artículo analiza la transformación de la *Lega Salvini Premier* (LSP), el partido italiano que lidera Matteo Salvini, en tiempos de pandemia: en concreto, el período 2020-2021, ya que en ese último año esta fuerza política entró en la coalición encabezada por el primer ministro Mario Draghi. Nos interesa estudiar la transmutación sufrida por la propia *Lega* en cuanto a posiciones políticas en medio de la crisis de Covid19 que afectó especialmente a Italia el año pasado, para explicar la participación en el gobierno de Draghi en 2021: observamos una posición, por parte de Salvini y su partido, más cercana a los de carácter liberal conservador, propios de otro de los partidos de derecha de ese país: *Forza Italia* (FI). Nuestra hipótesis es que este escenario está ayudando a reconfigurar la alianza italiana de centro-derecha, donde la aceptación de la *Lega* declina, en pos de un aumento de la popularidad de *Fratelli D'Italia* (FDI, Hermanos de Italia) y su carismática lideresa Giorgia Meloni, la única fuerza que se opone al actual gobierno italiano. A través del análisis cualitativo de material de prensa y sondeos electorales, tenemos que dar cuenta del objetivo principal de este trabajo.

Palabras clave || Centro derecha, Europa, Italia, Matteo Salvini, Lega Salvini Premier



Introduction

The purpose of this article¹ is to study the transformation of the Northern League party (NL) in Italy during the 2020-2021 biennium, which coincided with the Covid19 crisis in the world, but focusing mainly on Italy, one of the countries most affected at a (European and) global level by the current pandemic. During this period, we consider that the party led by Matteo Salvini gradually abandons the (much more) populist confrontational strategy against the Conte Bis government, in pursuit of an alignment with the new political coalition headed by Mario Draghi, where *Fratelli D'Italia* (FDI, Brothers of Italy) led by Giorgia Meloni, partner of Salvini himself in the centre-right coalition, actually remains the only party in opposition.

Based on the analysis of *The League's* (and its leader Salvini) on media feed (speech & articles), we conclude that the strategy adopted by Salvini to participate in the new government that emerged in 2021 is impacting the *Lega* (League) in three main ways: 1) abandoning the most radicalized discourse of 2020, in pursuit of Salvini himself as a future electoral option and as an efficient co-ruler of the nation; 2) this adopted change brings Salvini's *Lega* closer to classical positions of its other centre-right partner: Silvio Berlusconi's *Forza Italia* (FI), with a decided neo-conservative liberal stamp; and 3) this passage from radicalization to support for the new government has brought the League a decline in electoral approval, in favour of Meloni and his political party (which has a much more consolidated and perennial ideological core).

In order to analyse this issue, we will divide

our article in the following sections: 1) introduction; 2) revision of theory; 3) the evolution of the League under the leadership of Matteo Salvini; 4) the impact of the covid19 pandemic in Italian politics and the so-called reconfiguration of the centre right alliance; and 5) the conclusions of our work. Last but not least, it's the intention of this article to put Italy as such a unique case in the European Union (EU) when it comes to Political Science, mainly because of the rich history and succession of governments since the foundation of the Republic in 1946, which determined the end of Fascism. And, nowadays, the nation confronts quite interesting times regarding politics.

Theoretical frame: Italy and the Radical Right

This research will explore the benefits and usefulness of various approaches to the issue of new European rights and populism. Despite identifying some antecedents that provide significant contributions to the knowledge of the chosen case, we consider it's necessary to analyse the different edges that make up our object of study in a complementary way with other theoretical approaches, which allow us to illuminate other dimensions of the case and make more complex the *classic views* about the topic.

In the first place, we will consider the more *classical* contributions on the concept of populism, understanding the concept as a political logic with its own rationality (social condensation), and as a condition for the possibility of political action: "Populism is the royal road to understand something relative to the ontological constitution of the political as such"

1 The author would like to thank Dr. Mara Morini, Dr. James F. Downes, Dr. P. Matthew Loveless and Dr. Valerio A. Bruno for all the comments, questions and helpful feedback regarding the presentation of a preliminary version of this article (during the Italian Political Science Association Conference - SISP 2021).



(Laclau, 2013: 91)², being, then, “one of the ways of constituting the group unit itself” (Laclau, 2013: 97). In turn, following this logic (of democracy), political identity is the result of an antagonistic process in which dispersed elements converge in the face of a common enemy: this is where the “discursive” moment (which contains the referred antagonistic moment) lies. If we conceive that there is an increasingly evident conflict between majorities (defended by the populist right) and minorities (flags raised by government elites), it is necessary to understand this situation not as something anomalous or pathological in democratic life (Laclau & Mouffe, 2006). But as a necessary condition of its existence: “in the tension between consensus (on the principles) and dissent (on its interpretation) is where the agonistic dynamics of pluralist democracy is inscribed” (Mouffe, 1999:21).

Second, and in accordance with the aforementioned antagonistic character, it could be argued that populism is a personal power strategy where a personalist leader, through the deployment of a discursive political confrontation strategy between “friends” and “enemies”, accumulates power responding to a specific type of political performance: strong leaderships with a strong personal imprint, a people mobilized around that leadership, plus the presence of antagonistic sides (“us and them”). Following this approach, these authors consider that the populist narrative is made up of three main figures: the leader (the redeemer of the people, who embodies the popular struggle against the oppressor), the hero (with a dual character: the people and the leader who mobilizes that people) and the villain (dual character: internal and external enemies). And, furthermore, the populist leader (following his narrative) presents himself as an “outsider”, that

is, as a stranger to traditional politics and the party system; ergo, presenting his entry into politics as a forced act, in order to be able to remedy the suffering of the people he claims to represent and prevent the power elites from continuing to betray the latter (Weyland, 2001; Casullo, 2019). These theoretical contributions allow us to characterize Matteo Salvini in two central dimensions: a) his role as leader of the *Lega Salvini Premier* (LSP, League for Salvini Premier); b) the pragmatism and communicational aspect that he adopts in order to achieve political consensus. Regarding this dimension, we can also characterize the concept of populism as a “political style” or public performance (Roberts, 1995; Moffitt and Tormey, 2014): that is, the presentation of the “populist” figure in the face of the political arena or public sphere: their ways, their aesthetics, their non-verbal language, the use of the mass media, among other factors.

Beyond this approach to the concept of populism, in recent years alternative theoretical approaches have been developed, focused mainly on ideology (even defining populism as a *core of ideas*), seeking to synthesize or to add elements of analysis to understand this contemporary phenomenon in greater depth. A large part of these works enriches the previous definition, by introducing us to the concept of the populist radical right, to separate it from other categories of analysis, such as the extreme right and neofascisms. In this way we can achieve greater conceptual precision in order to characterize and analyze the rise of the right in Italy and Europe (but it seems that, judging by the current events, the process is taking place worldwide).

The works of Mudde (2000, 2007, 2010, 2017, 2019), Mastropaolo (2007), Akkerman (2017), Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017), Rovira Kaltwasser et al.

2 The translation of this and the other quotes from Laclau (2013) and Mouffe (1999) were made by the author for this article, from the original versions in Spanish.



(2017), Albertazzi et al. (2018), are arguing that the radical right populism (unlike fascism) is willing to play the rules of the game of modern democracy, but rejecting its liberal character. The paradox of the case is that these right-wing populist leaders claim to represent the *common people*, but finally end up arguing with sectors that are not part of the economic and social elites of Europe: immigrants, ethnic and sexual minorities, the excluded one of the system, etc. And why do we characterize it as “right wing”? Well, because right-wing populism has no objections to the free market, but as long as it is at the service of the nation and only of the nation, which is why it disbelieves both the European and global markets. Something similar happens with the idea of the Welfare State: it should exist, but only at the service of the neediest citizens of the country (Mudde, 2007).

That it is right-wing implies excluding otherness, segregating minorities, and/or reinforcing essentialist notions of community: in short, antagonizing sectors that do not belong to the economic and social elites, which are mainly the minorities mentioned above. And once again, we insist on the *nativist* character of this political phenomenon: state assistance, if any, must be at the service of the country’s native citizens: the unemployed, rural and aging white population; It is clear that the solidarity that is practiced is undoubtedly restrictive. All this also implies referring to the obsession with immigration issues and citizen security over rights, to the way in which they conceive of national identity in homogeneous terms. It’s important to notice that: “Centre-right parties recognised the 2008 economic crisis as a time of greater voter volatility [...] during which the populist radical right would try to secure more support through appeals to fears about immigration” (Downes, Lam, & Loveless, 2018).

Last but not least, all of these works also put emphasis on reinforcing the difference between the totalitarian governments of the 20th century with respect to this new right in a sovereigntist and nationalist key: 1) distinguishing the European situation after the Great War, with the harsh conditions imposed on Germany and Italy, collaborating in the emergence of sad mass phenomena such as both Hitlerism and Fascism; 2) these new *popular neo-conservative* leaderships of the 21st century arise due to the gradual emergence of the European Social State, as the European and Italian counterpart of capitalism in its neoliberal phase, and from this situation arises the nativist characteristic of the same that we mentioned above.

The Northern League under the Leadership of Matteo Salvini

Multiple authors, such as Mudde (2007, 2017), Akkerman (2017), Rovira Kaltwasser et al. (2017), and Casullo (2019) among others, from various perspectives, coincide in pointing out the continuous growth of radical, extreme right-wing political movements right, and national-populisms. They allow us to infer that for a long time there has been talk of the rise of the extreme right, or neo-fascism in Europe, but until very recently, this development was always seen as something marginal, although potentially expandable.

We chose the case of the *Lega* for the spectacular transformation that occurred since Salvini took over as Secretary General in 2013, emerging as a key figure in Italian politics, abandoning the regionalist position of his party (which prioritized the rich north of the country)³, until he became part of the

3 As we know, under the ‘Umberto Bossi years’ the League has mainly defended the interest of Northern Italy, arguing against the central administration in Rome. Following this, he had declared the independence of Padania in 1996: Padania: territorial entity of

coalition government LSP - *Movimento Cinque Stelle*⁴ (M5S - 5SM) during 2018-2019, adopting a populist national strategy⁵. It is during this period that Salvini's party became the most voted party on the Italian right, and was crowned (also) the most popular politician in Italy (Albertazzi et al., 2018). And by the way, we insist again on the scenario of European and international conflict, starting with the economic crisis of 2008, helped to consolidate a clearly anti-European / anti-globalization sentiment. And Italy, apparently, does not escape this equation of wanting to recover for itself the full sovereignty of its *domestic* affairs. In this key we need to considerate Salvini's ascendant.



Figure 1: The evolution of the Northern League: *Della Padania all'Italia*. Source: leganord.org (2017)

Initially, we can identify three moments (Albertazzi et al., 2018; Pucciarelli, 2019) that occurred during the rise of Matteo Salvini as the most prominent figure on the Italian political scene, namely: a) as a prominent young Padano member of the Northern League (2009-2012); b) anti Euro / anti-European Union moment (2013-2017); and c) sovereign moment, anti-immigration and as a government actor (2018-2019). It is from 2008 on that the frames change radically:

Hence the increased focus on immigration, identity issues and law and order, perfectly consistent with the changes that had already been noted during the last years of the "Bossi era", was accompanied by a development which radically contradicted the party's *raison d'être* under Bossi: the shelving of calls for regional autonomy/reform for northern Italy, and a distinct focus on the national dimension. As a result, the LN filed candidates for the 2018 general election not just in the North, but across Italy. [...] As such, the Lega has come to epitomize the rather unique case of a regionalist party that is "going national" (although through an uneven and complex path), leaving its original claims for northern regional autonomy, and the cleavages underpinning these,

the Italian North, claimed by U. Bossi as an independent territory of Italy. Composed of the rich regions of Lombardy, Veneto, Emilia Romagna, Liguria, Trentino Alto Adige, Piedmont, and Valle D'Aosta. It is the geographical area corresponding to the Padana Plain. Despite the independence aspirations, it never achieved international recognition. The possible response to the tension stated above, we have initially problematized in previous paragraphs: a regional superiority based on the economic potential and human development of the North over the rural southern country, constantly subsidized by the centralized State, and with poverty indices, informality, and rurality that do not resemble the standards of a leading EU country (according to Bossi's League). As we can infer, consolidating the Padania project (in a radical key) would allow the party supporters the virtual resolution of the ethnic-political-economic cleavage between North and South (Biorcio, 1999).

4 *Five Star movement* (5SM), the antisystem party created by the Italian actor Beppe Grillo in 2009. Initially, they enrolled virtually using an internet platform in order to discuss ideas and proposals, until they became to take over the *public space* in meetings and rallies, until they became the party (from 2012 on) that we know as such nowadays (and currently led by former Premier Giuseppe Conte).

5 It's interesting to notice the evolution of this political force, making focus since 2012 on: that is, starting from its origins in the *Lega Lombarda* at the beginning of the eighties; going through the unification into the Northern League led by Bossi; the leadership crisis of 2012 (which has as a correlation the resignation of its historic conductor Umberto Bossi); until the election of Matteo Salvini as general secretary, where a transmutation of the old League takes place with the purpose of consecrating as national option and increase its territorial and electoral presence at a federal level (period 2013-2017).



behind. (Albertazzi et al., 2018: 649-650)

According to Revelli (2019) we can consider that this change, from the rise of Salvini, is not only due to the need to confront the EU and the problem of immigration, but also to consolidate itself as the only politician capable of appeasing the Italian concerns, and unifying the country under the same political sign (displacing Social Democracy, the traditional Berlusconi liberal Centre Right [CDX⁶], and the populist 5SM). But we insist again on this point, the change is not exclusively at the political strategy level, but it is a multi-causal process composed of various edges (political, social, cultural, economic, transnational, among others).

The rise of Matteo Salvini as a key figure in Italian politics can be characterized, initially, by three facts of the Italian reality (Albertazzi & Giovannini, 2015; Albertazzi et al., 2018; Pucciarelli, 2019): 1) the scenario of social combustion, economic and political legacy left by the liberal technocracy imposed on the country by the EU; 2) the government of political "consensus" emanating from the political pact between the *Partito Democratico* (PD, Democratic Party) and FI, with the appointment of Matteo Renzi as Italian Prime Minister in 2014-2016, after the fall of the government headed by Enrico Letta. However, the great economic problems of the Republic (zero growth, record unemployment, informal work, fiscal pressure, etc.) continued without effective resolution; 3) the affective-charismatic component that Salvini resorts to both in speeches, as well as in social networks and other mass media, directing his darts towards numerous objectives: the Euro, the European bureaucracy in Brussels, extra-community immigration, the mafia, the state corruption and,

fundamentally, the failure of the Social Democracy to interpret the *ordinary Italians*. For this, an articulation of national consensus is developed in a nativist key, with the aim of recovering full sovereignty over Italian affairs.

The enemies of Italy are no longer the *Mezzogiorno*⁷ italians but the giant bank capitals, the economic and political bureaucracy of the European Union, and the *irregular* immigration that hurts the *good* Italian. In order to capitalize on the electoral flow, Matteo Salvini and his League decide the following: 1) Remove the word Nord from the party and replace the name with LSP; 2) create a subsidiary party for the southern and insular territory: *Noi con Salvini (Us with Salvini, NCS)*; thus, ensuring full representation throughout the entire territory of the Italian state (Pucciarelli, 2019).

On June 1, 2018, after general elections (which do not yield an indispensable majority to form a government with a single political sign) and subsequent (and intense) negotiations carried out with the aim of forming a successor government to that of Paolo Gentiloni, a political coalition is formed between the LSP and 5SM parties, called *Governo del Cambiamento (Government of Change)*. Giuseppe Conte, a civil lawyer and academic with no party affiliation at the time, is chosen as Prime Minister; Matteo Salvini (LN / LSP) and Luigi Di Maio (5SM) Vice-presidents of the Ministry Council and ministers of the interior and labour, respectively.

6 In Italian, often mentioned as Centro Destra (Centre Right).

7 Often referred in Italian as *Sud Italia*, the southern portion of the country, beneath Rome.



Figure 2: The political evolution of the League, from 2013 to 2018.

Source: Panorama.It (<https://www.panorama.it/news/crescita-lega-matteo-salvini-elezioni-voti>).

Italy and the post-Covid19: towards a reconfiguration of the center-right?

Italy, in mid-March of the last year, has become the European and global epicenter of the pandemic unleashed by COVID-19. This situation, in principle, served as a war riot to the Italian center-right, ready to throw blame towards the government of Giuseppe Conte and (especially) towards the European Union, for the handling that these authorities had regarding the health management of the disease (Albertazzi et al., 2021). Creating in the collective unconscious the image that "Italy is abandoned to its fate" regarding the aid promised by the EU. This has helped more sovranist and conservative right-wing parties, such as the case of FDI, under the leadership of Giorgia Meloni, to consolidate their electoral acceptance from mid-2020 onwards (Bruno & Downes, 2020; Bruno et al., 2021), reaching out an impressive 19% in the last electoral polls of May 2021, displacing nothing more and nothing less than Silvio Berlusconi's FI, and threatening to steal the limelight from the charismatic Matteo Salvini (Bruno, 2021).

Regarding what was previously argued, the research questions that trigger our work are the following: What transformations initiate (and

consolidate?) The Covid19 crisis on the Italian right? What strategies does the Lega de Salvini develop to continue positioning itself as the first party in Italy? How will the center-right alliance continue for 2022-23?

Before asking about the reconversion, there is a new government crisis that leads to the end of the Conte bis: the *Italia Viva* (IV) of Matteo Renzi, one of the parties integrated into the Conte Bis government, on January 13rd 2021 withdraws its two ministers Teresa Bellanova (Agriculture) and Elena Bonetti (Family and Equality), and the Foreign Undersecretary Iván Scalfarotto. But not only that: in addition to being part of the Council of Ministers, the parliamentary bloc of IV was essential for the survival of the coalition (and to retain its majority in the Senate). In this way, by losing that support, a new political crisis is consolidated in the Italian Republic, with a Legislature virtually destined to search for a new majority in both chambers. As planned (and after meeting with the President of the Republic Sergio Mattarella) Conte resigns from the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. And from the round of consultations initiated, President Mattarella entrusts the formation of a new government to the former president of the ECB, Mario Draghi (Albertazzi et al., 2021).

The new government headed by Draghi, a product of the consensus pact of the majority of the Italian party, with the exception of the party led by Meloni, quickly explicitly stated its main political objectives: 1) to resolve the institutional crisis; 2) administer and execute the recovery fund plan; and 3) guarantee the vaccination process against Covid19 throughout the national territory (Albertazzi et al., 2021). Now, analysing the political dynamics of the current scenario, we see how the Centre Right Coalition (CRC) is changing within itself: FI and LSP agree to join the government coalition, opting to support Draghi in



order to get Italy out of the stagnation in which it had been left after the Conte governments ended, as soon as possible.

As we previously mentioned, the centre-right coalition was affected by the expansion of the pandemic in the *Bel Paese*, resulting in a clear differentiation between the two main parties in terms of political polls: LSP and FDI: it is possible to observe an ideological right more positioned and radical in the force commanded by Giorgia Meloni, and a more pragmatic liberal conservatism in the party led by Salvini.

In this sense, statements to the press by Meloni were blunt during the lockdown adopted in 2020: "First they ask for sacrifices from Italian companies to adopt a lockdown during Christmas, then they reevaluate everything without giving precise indications on new procedures, leaving millions of citizens in total uncertainty"⁸. These types of initial statements allow a glimpse of the FDI as the only opposition party a posteriori, with the formation of the Draghi government.

In reference to the force led by Matteo Salvini, from the beginning they reflected the intention of presenting not only health proposals but also aimed at alleviating the country's companies, that is, economic measures:

The State must intervene in major crises, discussing with the EU some flexibility, of course. At this time, the health alarm must be contained. But the economic

one will last longer. The forecast is a recession. There are sectors that will need two years to recover⁹.

As for the impact of these positions on Italian electoral acceptance, since mid-2020 a takeoff of the FDI was glimpsed over its companions on the center-right: FI and LSP. This could continue to be observed gradually in 2021, where the FDI came to climb to the first position of political preferences, taking into account that only this party is outside the long coalition of government headed by Mario Draghi; and this continues to this day¹⁰. It is also important to point out that, since the Lega is once again in the government, it is expected that the management will wear out, and that is why it will be advanced by Meloni's party.

So that, before analysing the role of the League, let's see what happened with FDI and Giorgia Meloni. As we know, the political force led by the Roman journalist is the most radicalized faction of the Italian right-wing coalition, mainly for three deep-rooted reasons: a) a strong national populist component, inherited from the defunct *Alleanza Nazionale* party (AN, National Alliance); b) a strong imprint linked to popular conservatism, insofar as the Italian identity is perceived as Christian, Catholic, and founded on the traditional family (wife, husband, and children); and c) a very critical position of the European Union, fundamentally of the treatment towards Italy and its industrial and agricultural sector (north and south). In this sense, all these factors, together with the growing popularity of Meloni herself, ended up configuring a

8 *Il Tempo* (18 de diciembre 2020): Governo di irresponsabili. La furia della Meloni sul lockdown di Natale. Online: <https://www.iltempo.it/politica/2020/12/18/news/giorgia-meloni-contro-governo-conte-ritardi-dpcm-lockdown-natale-irresponsabili-cinici-25590831/>; Own Translation.

9 Verdú, D. (3 de marzo de 2020). Salvini: "El Gobierno italiano es incapaz de gestionar la emergencia del coronavirus". *El País*. Online: <https://elpais.com/internacional/2020-03-03/salvini-el-gobierno-italiano-es-incapaz-de-gestionar-la-emergencia-del-coronavirus.html>.

10 Coluzzi, T. (17 de diciembre de 2021). Sondaggi politici, Fratelli d'Italia torna primo e stacca il Partito Democratico. *FanPage*. Online: <https://www.fanpage.it/politica/sondaggi-politici-fratelli-ditalia-torna-primo-e-stacca-il-partito-democratico/>; Own Translation.

current scenario in which this force is gaining popular acceptance day by day, and today it is ranked first in electoral preferences:

The Brothers of Italy of Giorgia Meloni received 21% of support – emerging as the country’s most popular political party. The League of Matteo Salvini could take 20% of the popular vote, according to the poll. This situation could significantly impact the future of politics in Italy. (Bruno, 2021)

Now, returning to Matteo Salvini’s League, in recent months a partial loss of political support has been observed, on the part of the Italian electorate, especially after the motion of confidence and integration into the new Draghi extended coalition government: Above all, there is an orientation of very changing proposals, by following a clear pragmatism (for example, now adopting a more liberal and even pro-European policy cut). Besides, the adoption by LSP of a populist national strategy is a question that is strongly discussed indoors: the *old* League demands successful political and economic results, in order to keep maintaining the preeminence of the North over the rest of the territory.

However, Silvio Berlusconi’s intention was revealed from FI to unify a fundamental part of the centre-right together with Salvini’s party (like the PDL of past years): this would bring greater support to the figure of Matteo Salvini to be anointed Premier of the Republic in the next political elections (Europapress, 2021), thus reducing the chances of Meloni.

Finally, we must ask the following questions, facing a future scenario:

1. What will happen in the right-wing coalition if the unification between Berlusconi and Salvini is privileged, taking into account the drive and anchoring of the FDI in the south-central territory?

2. What will happen in the future with FI, given

the migration of votes from this party to the *Leiga*?

3. Will the equilibrium of the CRC, until now constant, be broken?

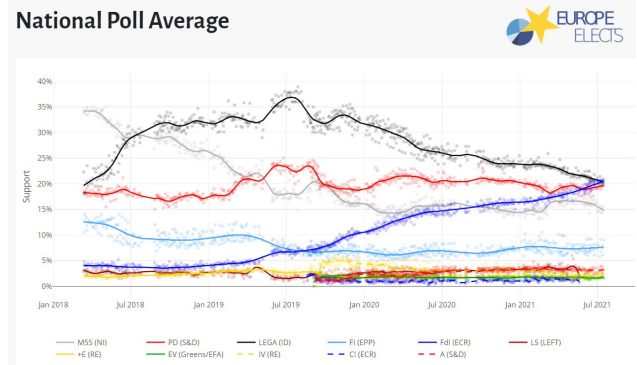


Figure 3. Political acceptance in Italy (September). Source: @ Europeanelects (www.twitter.com/Europeanelects)

Discussion and conclusions

From the beginning of this paper, we have analysed the trajectory of the party currently headed by Matteo Salvini, from its institutionalization in 1991 to the days of populist national strategy. In this sense, we have been able to consider the various moments that the formation experienced from its beginnings to the present, not without ignoring the various dynamics that were presented in the panorama of Italian politics. In fact, Schedler (2008) argues that:

Since the mid-1980s, and especially since the symbolic *annus mirabilis* of 1989, numerous anti-political-establishment parties have entered the political arena in both old and new democracies. Often described as populist or extremist, these new confrontational parties paint vivid, multi-colored images of political failure. They accuse established parties of forming an exclusionary, indifferent, and irresponsible cartel, and graphically depict public officials as a homogeneous class of lazy, incompetent, self-enriching, and power-driven



villains. (2008: 123)¹¹

Here we can infer the inextricable relationship between the process raised in Western Europe (and that does not escape Italy, of course) and the rising discredit of the traditional political class, which was explained before. But the author also emphasizes the triad that by definition makes up this type of party forces, with the following elements: 1) traditional political class (villain); 2) the people (victim); and 3) the anti-system actor (redeemer); which amplifies the existence of the conflict: for example, let's take the case of Bossi's old Lega: as a redemptive hero or actor, he comes to safeguard the Nord (victim) from the "thieving Rome" (villain).

So far, we can understand the logic that this type of disruptive actor follows. Even so, it is necessary to promptly answer the following question: what specifically is an Anti-System Party (ASP)? For this we will consider two "classic" definitions: a) on the one hand, ASP as "one capable of undermining the legitimacy of the political regime to which it opposes" (Sartori, 1976: 132)¹²; b) on the other, a more recent definition (Capoccia, 2002; Zulianello, 2017) that alludes to two issues: the first, ASP as an actor capable of activating the polarization of the political system; and the second, of an ideological nature, as the opposition of a party to any of the defining properties of the democratic system.

Theoretically reconsidering some elements of the conceptual definition, we were referring to the role predominantly oriented towards opposition to the traditional political elite. But could we consider the political force of Bossi and Salvini that way? We have seen how this growing actor, from an initially

distant role, alien to the *political class* and opposition (Schedler, 2008), becomes an active participant in the system that it considers corrupt and alienated, mainly by participating in the Berlusconi governments (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2005; Albertazzi et al., 2018). So, the reality is that the LN (currently LSP), to date, is the party with the longest existence in the country, and is far from being an option *outside* the system, but quite the opposite: it has a vocation to take government affairs for oneself and to be able to change the values of current Italian democratic life *from within*.

Finally, and returning to some questions that have been presented in the previous section, we can conclude on three critical episodes looking at the future of Italy: 1) first, the fragmentation of the Italian political system, and the progressive radicalization of the discourse of FDI and Meloni; 2) a Berlusconi, more current than ever, who acts as shipowner for the CRC; 3) a Salvini that is much more moderate than in 2017 and 2018, compared to issues such as the EU and LGBTI rights, for example. Thus, the arguments presented are not all said and nothing seems to be definitive in the political arena of *Bel Paese*¹³, and from this wealth (in terms of dynamics and processes) the interest in their study is fed back.

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11 Translation made by the author of this article from the original work in Spanish.

12 Idem note Nro. 11.

13 In English, *Beautiful Country*.



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