



Department of Political Science

Chair of Theory and History of Political Movements and Parties

**ANTIPOLITICS AND CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION TO THE
POLITICAL SPHERE IN ITALY: FROM LEGA NORD TO
MOVIMENTO CINQUE STELLE**

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Summary

The topic of this work is antipolitics, a political proposal that new parties may use to obtain consensus and strengthen citizens' dissatisfaction against the establishment, which flourishes in periods when this kind of emotions is prevailing and diffused in society. Explaining antipolitics requires the observation of the trends of people's participation to the political sphere. In fact, the final content of this dissertation is to grasp the relations between success of antipolitical organizations and common behaviours toward politics.

The reason for the undeniable importance of this subject is the diffusion of antipolitical propaganda in a lot of western countries and its influence on their history and political systems development in the last decades. In particular, in Italy, antipolitical projects have become popular since the 1980s and, at the same time, scepticism towards democracy and political parties has increased.

To answer the questions of this thesis, I have decided to examine three antipolitical movements that have been conditioning the political events in our nation since the crisis of First Republic. First of all, I introduced the concept of antipolitics, presenting Italy's three antipolitical organizations and the functions of participation in democracy. Then, I focused on the most important features of Lega Nord, Forza Italia and Movimento Cinque Stelle. Starting from the context where these proposals of change have been born, I proceeded to describe their voters' political preferences and their social and demographic profiles. Finally, I discussed the stylistic features of the leaders' speeches and their main antipolitical expressions.

Antipolitics is a propaganda aiming to break the current political situation through rhetoric based on the contrast between a new party, that wants to promote and realize a change, and the others, accused, instead, of corruption and inefficiency. Moreover, the "enemy" can also be the State, which has illegitimately extended its power through large interventions in the economy and has limited private agents' initiative with a high taxation. Finally, the heart of the problem can be identified in the politics seen as a job, leading to loose focus on the general welfare. So, because of its features, antipolitics is particularly captivating during periods when the traditional political factions live a crisis; in these moments the movement using antipolitical propaganda seeks to boost citizens' dissatisfaction and doubts and change them into votes.

Under the antipolitical point of view, the “good part” of a country is formed by the civil society and the new organization appointing itself as the representative of citizens’ rights in virtue of its non-involvement with the current political system. The electorate, deprived of democratic sovereignty, the middle class, damaged by the public intervention in the economy and a geographic area, claiming independence, are the most frequent images of society in antipolitical language.

Antipolitical groups try to create a direct contact with citizens. For example, this purpose is achieved through the association in movements, rather than in traditional parties, which, instead, imply a hierarchical and secretive structure. The rejection of classic categories “right/left” contributes to obtain consensus in all parts of society and independently from people’s ideologies, too. Furthermore, antipolitical leaders have immediate impact on voters; for this reason antipolitics is often related to a populist communication, even though, populist leaders idealize civil society and underline qualities of citizens, using emotional words, elementary concepts, and “solution-miracles”.

In the first chapter, before moving onto the analysis of Lega Nord, Forza Italia and Movimento cinque stelle, I focused on Italian participation to the political sphere, meaning all the behaviours used by citizens to influence institutional decisions, to express their opinions or to gather information about policies.

As far as the relationship between participation and democracy is concerned, the academics’ positions are conflicting. Some of them think a huge participation could stop the natural functioning of a political system because democracy could be overloaded by citizens’ needs. Others, such as Almond and Verba, believe that a democratic system which allows people to protest and boosts the strategy of “voice” wins easily voters’ trust.

During the last decades, the methods of citizens’ participation in western countries have undergone several changes. First of all, the “traditional party”, with a widespread organization and a significant ideology, has disappeared. Now there is a new kind of party, defined “electoral”, which has relations with society, especially before an election, in order to obtain more votes. Secondly, since the 1970s, new types of participation have been born, defined “non-conventional”, often causing aggressive acts against people or properties. Finally, the birth of the Internet and the diffusion of new technologies have changed the means to gather news, so that we can be constantly informed.

After this introduction, I analysed the evolution of the Italian political system, with particular attention to the passage from the First Republic to the Second one and the transition of the Second Republic.

The political structure, arising from the end of the Second World War, has been defined from historians as “republic of parties”. This expression underlines the importance of parties in leading Italy from a dictatorship to a democracy and their fundamental role in political processes. Another definition is that of “arrested democracy”: this term refers to the constant participation of Democrazia Cristiana to the governments, until the end of the First Republic. Conversely, the radical parties, such as Movimento Sociale Italiano and Partito Comunista, were *de facto* excluded from the governments.

An asymmetry between civil society and political class has emerged since the 1960s. This rift has stemmed from the large cultural differences: the citizens have shared the values and the life style of the economic boom, while the politicians have not changed their traditional ideas and ideologies and they have not acknowledged the occurring transformations. Moreover, from the end of the 1980s to the beginning of the 1990s, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the judicial scandals led to the splitting of Partito Comunista and Democrazia Cristiana.

Twenty years later, the political class, which had stood in for the First Republic’s one, has been overwhelmed by scandals as well and by the greatest economic crisis experienced by western democracies after the Second World War.

Further on, I talked about the political preferences and the social and demographic profiles of the antipolitical movements’ electorates. First of all, the votes that Lega Nord and Forza Italia obtained in 1994 came from the collapsed governmental parties, *in primis* Democrazia Cristiana. The majority of the electorate of these parties included self-employed and private enterprises workers. Movimento Cinque Stelle, instead, is a “take-all” party, achieving consensus in all employment classes. In particular, the electorate of this movement consists of people who voted left parties before, as well as people who voted right ones.

In the last chapter, I concluded the discussion on the Italian antipolitical movements with an analysis of the stylistic features of leaders’ speeches and their main antipolitical expressions. Bossi, for example, uses common words, that the voters can understand immediately, and rejects the official and formal style of traditional leaders; at the beginning he even used dialectal expressions. In his speeches, there are a lot of insults to political rivals and polemic against public intervention in the economy is the most important topic. Furthermore, this last subject is linked to Lega Nord’s claim of Lombard independence.

Berlusconi uses a simple language and a colloquial and direct tone, too. He refers to the values of self-success and wealth, spread by his televisions during the last decades, while not bothering to hide the most exuberant traits of his character (for example, he tells jokes during political speeches). Moreover, Berlusconi uses emotional words and repeats a concept a lot, in

order to imprint it in the minds of voters. The most important topics in his speeches are liberal principles, polemic against traditional parties and anti-communist propaganda. In particular, he tries to create a contrast between his political proposal and the left party's one, using oppositions like "love/hate", "join/divide", "solidarity/envy".

Finally, Grillo uses an aggressive tone, similar to Bossi's one. In his speeches, internet is viewed as the way to realize a direct democracy, where citizens can express their opinions about candidates, parties agendas and other political issues.

In the final section of the dissertation, I tried to explain the link between success of antipolitical organizations and common behaviours toward politics.

From 1985 to 2004, in Italy, the feelings of detachment (indifference and boredom) towards politics have fallen, while the negative ones (scepticism, anger, disgust) have increased. It is interesting to observe that not only people with low qualifications, but also those with high levels of education express negative feelings.

Basically, in our country, the growth of antipolitical movements votes is linked to a raise of resignation, disappointment and no trust in politics among people provided with the cognitive instruments necessary for an informed and aware participation to the political sphere. These citizens have observed the failure of all previous political projects, so now they "chase" and desire a turning point and vote each political party promising to realize that change.