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THE ROLE OF IMMIGRATION IN THE RISE OF RADICAL RIGHT-WING POPULISM IN ITALY: a case study on Lega's results at the 2018 political elections in three Italian municipalities.

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Introduction

The rise of Italian right-wing populism dates back to the 1990s, but its effects have become particularly relevant in the present century. The Italian political panorama has been sprinkled by diverse forms of right-wing populism in the last decades, many of which were particularly influent, such as Forza Italia. However, in line with a tendency that is spreading throughout Europe, Italy has been witnessing the revival of radical right-wing populist attitudes. Specifically, the recent general political elections have seen an astonishing success of Lega, which until a few years ago had almost disappeared from the political scene. The rise of Salvini as the new Carroccio leader has made it possible for the party to regain support, especially thanks to the populist stances that have been widely used during his discourses and political campaign, among which a strong anti-immigrant position. Indeed, by virtue of its geographical location in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, and its status of an economically and socially developed country, Italy has been exposed to a very fast and significant wave of immigration ever since the 1980s. The immigration flows increased during the last decade, especially in relation to the European migration crisis beginning in 2015. Clearly, this phenomenon had a strong influence on the rise of Lega as the new leading national party. Therefore, the purpose of this dissertation is to analyse the role played by immigration in the rise of Lega as the foremost radical right-wing party in Italy. Specifically, it focuses on the success obtained at the 4th March 2018 elections in three Italian municipalities particularly affected by migration flows, namely Ventimiglia, Macerata, and Lampedusa.

The first chapter provides an insight on radical right-wing populism, presenting the main concerns on the definitional debate surrounding the term and fundamental beliefs on which it rests. Moreover, it analyses the factors that drive support for radical right-wing populism, concluding with a brief historical report of the rise of Lega Nord and its transformation from a regionalist- to a nationalist-oriented party.

The second chapter concerns the migration phenomenon in Italy, a country which has become increasingly involved in the debate on immigration. However, before discussing this topic it is noteworthy to mention the nation's transition from an emigration to an immigration territory, a perspective that may be useful to better understand the present complex situation. The chapter also examines the differences existing between regular and irregular migrants, not to mention the crucial

role played by the media in their representation. Finally, it offers a theoretical overview on the intricate mechanisms lying behind anti-immigrant stances.

The third chapter investigates the correlation between the two abovementioned elements, namely radical right-wing populism and immigration. The main focus is on the theoretical explanations for the electoral success of radical right-wing parties, based on the "market metaphor" which implies that political parties are constantly competing to obtain their "market share". In this sense, various theories can be identified which may represent crucial determinants for radical-right wing parties' triumph. In addition, the chapter reviews Lega's nativist interpretation of immigration which can be considered one of the cornerstones of the party.

The fourth chapter finally presents three case studies in three Italian municipalities, namely Ventimiglia, Macerata, and Lampedusa. The selection of these towns depends on the fact that they are all crucially concerned with immigration. Ventimiglia and Lampedusa are both lands of transit. The former is characterized by the presence of migrants who try to leave Italy to reach other destinations. The latter, instead, has to deal with the arrival of thousands of migrants on a daily basis. On the other hand, Macerata is rather a land where migrants tend to settle more or less permanently. Nevertheless, the common element between these three municipalities is that they witnessed an astonishingly increased consensus for Lega and Salvini's leadership. Thus, the analysis of these cases may provide further relevance to the theoretical overview offered in the first three chapters.

Chapter One: Right-wing populism in Italy

1.1 Definitional debate on radical right-wing populism

One of the best-studied party families in political science is the populist radical-right. As literature shows, labels such as "extreme right", "far right", and "populist radical right" are used interchangeably to refer to the same entities. Indeed, scholars have widely agreed that these terms are all part of the same family since some common characteristics can be easily identified.

According to the Dutch scholar Cas Mudde[1], the first common denominator is their exclusionist, ethno-nationalist conception of citizenship, best explained by the slogan "own people first"[2]. This stance implies that a state should be inhabited by a specific group as opposed to others and is closely connected to the idea of a homogeneous and united nation. This belief gives rise to severe forms of xenophobia and Islamophobia. Moreover, Mudde identifies two additional features, namely populism and authoritarianism. Populism is a "thin ideology", a communication style based on the antagonism between the "pure people" and the untrustworthy "corrupt elite". Indeed, right-wing populism juxtaposes its identity and common interests, presumably based on common sense, with the identity and interest of those minorities, such as migrants, which are supposedly favoured by the corrupt elites. On the other hand, authoritarianism is intended by Mudde as the belief in a strictly ordered society imposing respect for authorities and harshly punishing violations. It implies an emphasis on themes such as law and order and traditional values, as well as the promotion of strong leaders who reflect the will of the people.

The study of radical-right wing parties can be divided into three academic waves of scholarship.[3] The first wave (1945 – 1980) was mainly historical and descriptive, focusing on the historical continuity between pre-war and post-war. As a consequence, the majority of the scholars were historians, mainly studying populist radical right in the light of "extreme right" and "neo-fascism". The second wave of studies (1980 – 2000) was characterized by the influence of social science literature and by the

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[1] Mudde, C. (2007) *Populist Radical Right Parties*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[2] Betz, H-G. (1994) *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe*. New York: St Martin's Press.

[3] Mudde, C. (2016). *The Study of Populist Radical Right Parties: Towards a Fourth Wave*. Center for Research on Extremism, The Extreme Right, Hate Crime and Political Violence, University of Oslo.

American studies of the "radical right" of the 1960s. During this wave, scholars tried to understand the possible reasons behind the success of populist radical right parties in modern democracies. In particular, the focused on the demand-side of far-right politics, treating the party as a dependent variable. The third wave began at the turn of the century, when scholars became more interested in the supply-side of populist radical right politics, giving the party new relevance. Moreover, the focus was no longer only the explanation of their electoral success, but also the investigation of their effects. In this way, the populist radical right party changed from a merely dependent variable into an independent variable as well.

In a nutshell, three substantial signs of progresses have been made. First, instead of focusing on the definitional debate about what radical right-wing populism is, scholars have diverted their attention to the discussion about theories and hypothesis. Second, there has been increasing attention to actually measure the ideological characteristics and policy stances of populist radical-right parties. As a consequence, most scholars agree that it is impossible to reason in clear-cut categories. According to them, radical right-wing populism is rather a matter of degree, where a party can be more or less extremist.[4]

1.2 What drives support for radical right-wing populism?

The recent success and influence of radical right-wing populism is the outcome of the interaction between a diverse range of factors. Even though the latter may vary from country to country, they generally produce political scenarios with several common elements: belief that the national identity is under threat from foreign cultures, support towards exclusive nationalism, desire to cut immigration, and distrust of the elites. Those politicians who adhere to such views have gained support and legitimacy as possible representatives in the national governments of their countries. The following section will examine the main factors which have contributed to the (re-)emergence of radical-right populism.

A key driver of support is represented by economic instability. The economic growth and the low levels of unemployment that had followed the end of the Second World War soon slowed down around 1973. The decline in growth resulted in a rapid increase in unemployment with a

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[4] Muis, J., & Immerzeel, T. (2017). *Causes and consequences of the rise of populist radical right parties and movements in Europe*. Current Sociology, 65(6), 909–930.

corresponding shift of the labour market from manufacturing industries to service sectors.[5] Likewise, during the economic crisis of 2008, many countries such as Italy, Greece, Portugal, and Spain, all found that their membership into the European Union both defined and slowed their economic recovery. It also accentuated their strong dependence on other member states. Moreover, the crisis produced unequal effects, leading to different reactions from the public opinion.[6] Those engaged in business and trade, as well as young people freely crossing Europe to travel and study, have long been characterized by strong support towards the European Union. On the other hand, workers in industry and services associate the European Union with increasing job insecurity. In addition, more and more voters believe that Europe has come to mean "an imposition of austerity and a loss of control over tools, such as monetary policy, that could ease the pain of the economic crisis".[7] Politicians following populist radical-right policies have benefitted from this situation of public disillusionment, increasingly focusing on dissatisfaction with the regulations proposed by the EU, which determine the national government's loss of control.

A second crucial factor is represented by the anxiety generated by immigration and the diversity dilemma. The beginning of the first wave of immigration around the 1970s resulted in higher ethnic and religious diversity all over Europe. However, this change produced mixed feelings. The increasing presence of immigrants coming from Muslim countries and the strong visibility of Islamic cultural symbols in public life clashed with strong resistance in certain areas, for instance Switzerland. Politically speaking, the main focus has been the issue of illegal immigration, particularly from the 1980s, when it started accelerating. Populist radical-right politicians have used this perceived anxiety to their advantage. They point out the presumed existence of an antagonism between the constituted "pure people" and the hostile enemies such as "the Jews", "the Muslims", or "ethnic minorities".[8] Their parties and movements are especially characterized by the concern for the protection of national or European culture and by their opposition to the culturally different.

Finally, a third important element fostering the rise of radical-right populism is that of security. Feelings of insecurity connected to migration started to develop soon after the first terrorist attacks

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[5] Schain, M.A. (2018). *Shifting Tides: Radical-Right Populism and Immigration Policy in Europe and the United States.* Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute.

[6] European Commission (2017). *Public opinion in the European Union.* Standard Eurobarometer 87. [online] Brussels. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/STANDARD/surveyKy/2142 [Accessed 29 Apr. 2019].

[7] Ibid.

[8] Kaya, A. (2018). *Right-wing populism and Islamophobism in Europe and their impact on Turkey–EU relations.* Turkish Studies.

were carried out both in Europe and in the United States. Moreover, some of the latest high-profile attacks, such as the ones in Paris in 2015, were carried out by people having an immigration background. This contributed to the spread of a sense of danger, particularly connected to the growing concerns about integration as well as the exposure of some vulnerable first- and second-generation immigrants to radicalization. Of course, this situation is strategically used by politicians with radical-right views in order to condemn immigration.

1.3 The rise of Italian radical right-wing populism

In 2001 Guy Hermet stated that "Italy has transformed itself into the site par excellence of populism triumph over the classical parties".[9] Such success can be ascribed to diverse reasons, the most important of which is the radical transformation that Italian politics experienced in the early 1990s. The premise of this crucial change needs to be identified in an international framework. The end of the cold war not only determined the radical mutation in the relationship between the USA and the USSR, but also led to the end of the ideological clash between the communist and the capitalist blocks, which had influenced the whole world. As a consequence, the Italian Communist Party was directly affected by the fall of communism in Eastern Europe. On the other side, the Christian Democratic party (*Democrazia Cristiana*) and the Socialist Party (*Partito Socialista Italiano*) were put under pressure by the anticorruption operation known as "Mani Pulite". The latter contributed to the collapse of the so-called "Prima Repubblica" party system, which had already been suffering a crisis of credibility from the previous decade. The two major moderate parties, namely the Christian Democratic party and the Socialist Party, were destroyed. A sentiment of indignation spread among the population, especially favoured by the media and the opposition, producing a crisis of credibility of the traditional political structure. These factors led to the citizens' refusal of those parties considered to be incapable. A wave of scepticism particularly characterized the moderate electorate, which no longer had any party representing it.

It is in this context that right-wing populism was able to flourish in Italy. In opposition to the traditional representative institutions, a new direct and plebiscitary democracy would have risen, giving a charismatic leader the task of interpreting the popular will and that of becoming the spokesman of the people. However, the already existing right-wing parties, like the *Movimento Sociale Italiano*, were not able to seize this opportunity because of the legacies of the Fascist period

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[9] Hermet, G. (2001). *Les populismes dans le monde. Une histoire sociologique, XIXe-XXe siècle*. Paris: Fayard.

and of the figure of Benito Mussolini, which aroused suspicion. It is in this context that Lega Nord and Forza Italia, the two most successful Italian right-wing populist parties, emerged. Indeed, these two parties were better able to both respond to the problems of the Italian society and to the anti-political sentiments that had spread among the population after the Tangentopoli affair. In addition, they could reflect the conservative values that were still crucial for the Catholic electorate. Nevertheless, for the purpose of the analysis, the focus will only be on Lega Nord.

Lega Nord has been considered one of the most successful regionalist parties of Europe and is classified as an ethno-regionalist populist party. The ideological strand driving it is the creation of a territory called Padania independent from the rest of Italy. The socioeconomic modernity of the region and its higher level of economic development, together with a supposedly different historical root, brought the party to distinguish the people living in Padania ("us") from those inhabiting Southern Italy ("them"), characterized by general backwardness. The ability to create, in a couple of years, such a strong sense of Padanian identity, was probably one of the biggest achievements of the party.

With the 1992 political elections, Lega Nord became the fourth biggest party in Italy. However, the hegemonic project in Northern Italy was hindered by the presence of Silvio Berlusconi and his party Forza Italia. The latter took many of the themes of Lega Nord's agenda, excluding its limit of ethno-regionalism. In this way, Forza Italia was able to reflect the necessities of a wider share of the electorate. Fearing a loss of votes, Lega Nord decided to ally with Berlusconi. However, the coalition did not improve the Carroccio's situation in a significant way. Umberto Bossi, the founder and leader of the party, decided to interrupt the alliance with Forza Italia. Between 1996 and 1997, Lega Nord engaged in a strong political campaign for the construction of the "Padanian Nation", using symbols and mass rituals able to create a new identity. Nevertheless, the road towards secession proved to be impossible to achieve, emphasizing the party's isolation and reducing its consensus. For this reason, a new alliance with Berlusconi seemed to be the only possible solution to avoid the political marginalization of the party.

1.4 Italian radical right-wing populism in the 21st century

Despite the poor consent obtained by the party at the elections, Bossi decided to maintain his alliance with Berlusconi. With the turn of the century, the focus of Lega Nord shifted towards two main topics, namely the fight against immigration and federalism. On the one hand, after the terrorist attacks of

9.11.2001, the party further emphasized its anti-immigrant position. Immigration was now associated with crime and with a specific threat towards the Padanian population. On the other hand, Lega Nord strongly pushed for a constitutional reform based on federalism, with extensive powers and competences guaranteed to each region. However, this project was rejected by the 2006 referendum.

After two years at the opposition, the party proposed as the only ally of *Popolo della Libertà* and at the 2008 political elections, it is able to get 17.2% of the votes. Such a level hadn't been reached since 1992. This success can be explained by the Lega Nord's electoral campaign especially based on the theme of security and on the association of immigration with an increase in crime. Nevertheless, after the fall of the centre-right government in 2011, the party suffered a new crisis mainly related to the alliance with Berlusconi, who was being inquired for bribery and prostitution at the time. In 2012 new investigations were conducted on the party's treasurer Francesco Belsito. Moreover, the new scandals about the Bossi family led to the leader's resignation as secretary of the party. In 2012 Maroni emerged as the new leader. His new strategy was meant to strengthen the regionalist traits of the party and to defend the economic interests of the region. Following the 2013 regional elections, Lega Nord won in Lombardy. In this way, it was able to govern the three main Northern regions, since Piedmont and Veneto had already been under the Carroccio's presidency since 2010.

In 2013 the party held its primaries, which elected Matteo Salvini as the new secretary. Salvini tried to erase any trace of the recent crisis suffered by the party, attempting to raise the level of national consensus. In this perspective, he relaunched the party thanks to two relevant changes, emphasizing a deviation from regional populism to national populism. First of all, Salvini shifted the initial fight against the central government in Rome to a fight against the European Union. Indeed, a few days after being elected, he wrote in the newspaper "La Padania" that his priority was to destroy the euro and to re-found Europe.[10] Moreover, the threat of immigration was used in a more nationalist and anti-European outlook. Secondly, Salvini promoted a more inclusive image of the party. The most evident consequence of this decision was the choice of eliminating the term "Nord" from the name of the party. While his predecessors had mainly focused on promoting regionalism, the new leader opened up to the rest of Italy using a more nationalist approach. This is why soon after the 2014 European elections, Salvini created a new sister party for those regions of Central and Southern Italy where Lega was not active. *Noi con Salvini* was able to break down the boundaries surrounding Padania, obtaining consensus in the rest of Italy thanks to anti-euro, anti-bureaucracy, anti-

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[10] Orsina, G. (2014). *Storia delle destre nell'Italia repubblicana.* Soveria Mannelli (CZ): Rubbettino.

immigration and anti-Roma stances. These new messages, together with the strong personalization of the party, made it possible to gain more than 6% at the European elections of 2014. Such a great success was surely possible thanks to the great ability of Salvini to ride the wave of the economic crisis and of the general popular discontent. Therefore, the party presented itself as a real opposition to the pro-European projects of the Italian government.[11] The attractive capacity demonstrated by Salvini was confirmed by the regional elections in May 2015. In that occasion, even those regions which hadn't been considered Lega's supporters until that time recorded a huge success for the party. For instance, in Tuscany with 16.2% or Umbria with 14%.[12]

In relation to the new identity adopted by Lega, its founder Umberto Bossi believes that it "cannot be national. Until I'm here, it is national-Padanian, because the North is always against what is Italian, against Italian centralism and fascism".[13] To those critiques, Matteo Salvini replies by highlighting his success in electoral terms, obtaining more than 14%. What is certain is that Salvini's Lega is strictly connected to a tendency that is emerging in the rest of Europe as well, where the effect of the economic crisis and of the policies promoted by the EU are dissolving the differences between the regionalist and the nationalist parties. The independentist claims of the most well-off regions have transformed into nationalist attitudes which claim greater independence from Europe. They want to defend their own people and territory from migrants, who are said to be invading it and are seen as the ones to be blamed for the decay we are experiencing. Indeed, the current Lega is ever less secessionist and anti-roman, basing itself more and more on nationalist populism.

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[11] We should remark that the parliamentarians belonging to Lega Nord had already voted against the introduction of the euro during the 90s. At the same time, the representatives of all the other parties supported the adhesion to the European economic and monetary union.

[12] Biorcio, R. (2015). *Il populismo nella politica italiana*. Mimesis.

[13] Carugati, A. (2019). *Lega, Matteo Salvini a Pontida per "aprirci al mondo" e diventare "locomotiva del centrodestra". Anche passando sopra Bossi.* [online] L'Huffington Post. Available at: https://www.huffingtonpost.it/2015/06/20/salvini-lega-adulta-contro-il-padre-fondatore-bossi_n_7628284.html [Accessed 28 Apr. 2019].

Chapter Two: Immigration in Italy

Research on migration has increasingly focused on Italy, depicted as a new country of immigration. The strategic geographical position of its Southern coasts, have converted it into the first docking point for migrants coming from overseas. The ongoing refugee crisis demonstrates that Italy is playing a crucial role in the events taking place in the Mediterranean, and in shaping public debate on the topic. As thousands of people drown in the Mediterranean every year, the country is acting as the main military patrol of the operations launched by the EU in order to prevent further migration tragedies and to detect illegal immigrants.

2.1 From an emigration to an immigration country: a recent history

In order to understand the present complex situation, it is noteworthy to show how Italy evolved from an emigration to an immigration country. Colombo and Sciortino explain that immigration in Italy can be described as a "new" phenomenon.[14] This refers to the difference between old and new types of immigration. At the beginning, massive emigration took place between 1876 and the beginning of the 1980s. More than 26 million people left the *bel paese* to find fortune elsewhere, especially in the United States, Argentina, and Brazil.[15] However, since the end of the Second World War, the in- and outflow of migration has reversed, transforming Italy into one of the main immigration destinations.

The oil crisis of 1973 strongly contributed to the general mutation in attitudes and policies towards immigration across all European countries. Nevertheless, many scholars argue that immigration in Italy was an unplanned phenomenon. The latter did not occur as a consequence of strategic, state-led recruitment of foreign workers, occurred in Northern European countries. Rather, it was a consequence of transnational economic forces and decisions of neighbouring countries. Instead, other scholars assess that the mass arrival of immigrants in Italy is connected to the Italian economic miracle (*miracolo economico*) of the 1950s and 1960s, which produced an increasing demand for labour.[16] In the 1980s the inflow of immigrants became even more systematic, characterized by a

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[14] Colombo, A. and Sciortino, G. (2004). *Italian immigration: the origins, nature and evolution of Italy's migratory systems.* Journal of Modern Italian Studies, 9(1).

[15] Bonifazi, C. (2007). *L'immigrazione straniera in Italia*. Bologna: Il mulino.

[16] Colombo, A. and Sciortino, G. (2004). *Italian immigration: the origins, nature and evolution of Italy's migratory systems.* Journal of Modern Italian Studies, 9(1).

steady rise and increasing attention from the media. As happened in many other Western European countries, it was only in the 1990s that Italy started experiencing a constant arrival of labour migrants and refugees from outside Europe and, after 1990, from Central and Eastern Europe. By the period between 2003 and 2010, the total number of foreign residents in Italy had tripled, from 1.5 to 4.2 million.[17] However, these data only refer to foreigners living in Italy under a legally, since irregular immigration is by definition quite difficult to trace.

The 2010s were particularly marked by the refugee crisis, generating from the Syrian civil war. The latter produced the greatest shift of asylum seekers since the Yugoslavian wars. Needless to say, the main focus in Italy is on the arrivals of immigrants by sea. Unfortunately, the country experienced many terrifying episodes of drownings in the Mediterranean in the last decade. The perception of migration as an emergency probably arose soon after the tragic events of 3rd October 2013. On that day, a boat carrying migrants from Libya sank near the island of Lampedusa, causing over 360 victims. The then governments regularly referred to the necessity to invest in a common European strategy, so that member state could take joint responsibility. The management of immigration started to change when the Minniti-Orlando decree was approved in 2017, aimed at reducing illegal immigration. Moreover, new investments were made in the externalization of border control by involving third-party countries. At the same time, the Italian government solicited the NGOs operating in the Mediterranean to sign a thirteen-point code of conduct, including a commitment not to enter Libyan waters and to allow police to board and investigate vessels.[18] Thanks to these measures, the UNHCR has recognized a considerable reduction in the number of refugees and migrants arriving by sea.[19]

Besides the quantitative factor, the Italian immigrant community has seen qualitative changes as well, especially in terms of countries of origin and type of migration. The main feature of the Italian immigration experience is related to the country's socio-cultural and economic differences across regions. In fact, the latter explains varying patterns of settlement of migrants across the country.[20] It

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[17] ISTAT (2010). *La Popolazione Straniera Residente in Italia al 1° Gennaio 2010*. Rome: Istituto Nazionale di Statistica.

[18] Ministero dell'Interno (2017). *Codice di condotta per le ONG impegnate nel salvataggio dei migranti in mare*. [online] Available at: http://www.interno.gov.it/it/amministrazione-trasparente/disposizioni-generali/atti-generali/atti-amministrativi-generali/documenti/codice-condotta-ong-impegnate-nel-salvataggio-dei-migranti-mare [Accessed 7 May 2019].

[19] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2017). *Europe Monthly Report*. [online] Available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/60384.pdf [Accessed 7 May 2019].

[20] Bonifazi, C., Heins, F., Strozza, S., & Vitiello, M. (2009). *The Italian transition from emigration to immigration country*. IRPPS Working Papers. [online] Available at: http://irppsepub.altervista.org/ojs/index.php/wp/article/view/24/73 [Accessed 7 May 2019].

is possible to identify three such patterns.[21] First, there is the model of the industrial city of the centre-north, where men find jobs as factory workers or in other services related to industrial production, while women find employment in the domestic or care sectors. The second one is the model of large metropolises, such as Roma and Milan, where migrants find jobs in different sectors, such as construction, restaurants, cleaning services and transportation. Finally, the third model deals with temporary employment in the South of Italy. Here jobs are temporary and irregular, many works do not have a regular status and are especially employed in the agricultural sector.

2.2 Regular vs irregular immigrants

The Encyclopædia Britannica defines immigration as "the process through which individuals become permanent residents or citizens of a new country".[22] Each State has the sovereign right to establish its own conditions of entry and stay of immigrants in its territory. Since this dissertation focuses on Italy, it is important to give a complete description of the legislation the country adopts when dealing with immigration.

The entry, stay and expulsion of foreigners in Italy is regulated by the Consolidation Act on immigration regulations and legislation on the condition of the foreigners adopted with Legislative Decree no.286 of July 25th, 1998. The latter was first modified with Law no. 189 of 2002, and more recently with Decree-Law no.113 of 2018. Foreign citizens can enter Italy if they can provide documentary evidence of the reason and conditions of their stay, as well as the availability of economic means for a living. In order to regularly enter the country, foreigners need their passport or similar travel documents and a visa. The people not complying with these requirements, or considered to be a menace either for national security or for that of the countries with which Italy has signed agreements for the free circulation of people between internal borders, will be forbidden entry in the country. This is when irregular immigration arises.

Literature lacks a precise definition of the term "irregular immigration" that could be universally accepted. This is why the term "illegal immigration" is used as a synonym to refer to the same phenomenon. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that a difference exists between the two. In

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[21] Ambrosini, M. (2013). *Immigration in Italy: Between Economic Acceptance and Political Rejection*, Journal of International Migration and Integration, 14(1).

[22] Parry, S. (2018). *Immigration. In: Encyclopædia Britannica*. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc. [online] Available at: https://www.britannica.com/topic/immigration [Accessed 12 May 2019].

fact, the phrase "illegal immigration" describes an immigration procedure which is not legal or carried out in opposition to national or international laws. It wrongly implies a linkage between migrants and criminalization. It is worth mentioning that migrants can never be illegal themselves, rather only their actions can be regarded as such.[23] Due to its discriminatory nature, the term started being criticized. Indeed, many scholars have strongly opposed to the use of such an expression for two main reasons. First, they argue that migration is not intrinsically illegal, rather this characteristic depends on the action of the states. Second, academics assess that the illegality aspect related to migration arises from breaking laws other than immigration laws, leading to a misinterpretation of the real core of the problem.[24] As a consequence, in recent years the term "irregular immigration" has been preferred over "illegal immigration". It indicates a form of migration that is "not regular", without necessarily being illegal or criminal in the legal sense. Thus, an "irregular migrant" is someone who, at some point during his migration, has failed to comply with the rules of entry or residence.

In reality, the stark differentiation between regular and irregular migrants is rare. The majority of them arrive in their host country in a regular way and only later become "irregular" due to administrative overstay. This is usually caused by faulty or overly bureaucratic migration procedures, discrimination, or more practical impediments such as high visa renewal costs, language barriers and poor access to legal aid. For the minority of migrants who do arrive irregularly, it is indispensable to specify that such irregular arrival can be justified, for example in the case of migrants seeking protection from *refoulement*.

2.3 Representation of immigration in the media

Considerations on the representation of migrants on the media are only possible when we assume that policies are largely influenced by the public discourse developing around a certain theme. The media sphere appears to be the decisive field in which such discourses are expressed and developed. It is in this sense that this becomes the space in which it is possible to construct social problems, while at the same time identifying possible solutions, through the identification of policies. It is possible to recognize three main borders used by the Italian media in order to frame immigration as a "social problem".[25]

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[23] Perkowska, M. (2016). *Illegal, legal, irregular or regular – Who is the incoming foreigner?* Studies in Logic, Grammar and Rhetoric, 45(58), 187–197.

[24] Black, R. (2003). *Breaking the Convention: Re- searching the "Illegal" Migration of Refu- gees to Europe*. Antipode, 35(1).

[25] Bruno, M. (2016). *Media Representations Of Immigrants In Italy: Framing Real And Symbolic Borders*. REMHU : Revista Interdisciplinar da Mobilidade Humana, 24(46), pp.45-58.

The first threat posed by immigration consists of the entry is a territory that is socially constructed, perceived as "ours", and imagined as a community. Specifically, in the Italian case the focus is on those borders which are "immaterial", namely the Mediterranean Sea. This appears to be uncontrollable – mainly for its wide extension – and almost impenetrable – due to the risks it poses to those who try to cross it. Therefore, it comes to no surprise that the media narrative increasingly pivots on the arrivals on the Italian coasts, as well as shipwrecks and death. As Bunotti explains, "anyone who has no identity documents provides excellent images for the media coverage of the events. Immigration thus becomes visible when it is legally invisible, deviant".[26] We currently find ourselves before a genuine distortion of the view, where irregular migration takes on a high profile and media consistency. Instead, statistics show that arrivals widely take place in a legal way and only later fall into irregularity. Contrarily, the public perception of immigration assumes a desperate, chaotic and ungovernable appearance. This construction emerges especially in relation to the use of certain expressions defining the phenomenon, like "emergency", "invasion", "assault". It is clear that the media image of migration is framed as a "conquest" by the "invaders" and "defence" of the territory by the "autochthons".

The second border is represented by the perception of immigrants as a threat to national security. The main consequence of the first border is, indeed, the social construction of fear and crime as the main way of seeing the presence of foreigners in Italy. This is a social alarm that rests on the tautology of fear and "blow up snapshots". The latter designates a caricature, an exaggeration which emphasizes an aspect of a phenomenon, usually of negative nature. This threat easily gives rise to the classic populist dichotomy between us and them, between friends and enemies. The media definition of the safety issue gives rise to an anomalous construction of social problems. It presumes a common symbolic horizon, a set of culturally transmitted and shared norms, an idea of "normality" and order, opposed to another one identifying specific circumstances as negative or able to threaten a situation of social order. Thus, the definition of social problems depends on an anchored system of values, collective identity and shared norms. In this sense, the media control the system by affirming and reaffirming the norm and defining any behaviour or person disrupting social order as deviant. The focus on individual events or the use of statistical data on crime become decisive for the construction of consensus.

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[26] Binotto, M., Bruno, M., Lai, V. and Morcellini, M. (2015). *Tracciare confini. L'immigrazione e i media italiani.* Milano: FrancoAngeli, p.141.

The third concern is related to the presumed threat that immigration poses to western culture and the religious frame. The fear of the Other is strictly connected to the fear of losing identity, a neo-racism which disapproves the risk of "mixing cultures", the contact between the traditions and norms. With respect to that, the media often overuses the religious argument, presenting the so-called religions of the immigrants – often Islam – as the cause behind the impossibility of cultural exchange with otherness. The focus of the debate has been primarily led on Islam, articulated is strongly stereotypical terms. The main arguments include the construction of mosques, the use of the veil for women as well as their role and rights, and the security issues arising from the terrorist threat of Jihadism. The wide Muslim presence in Italy produces this kind of fears. However, we should highlight that the moderate component makes up a very large majority. It can be confidently assessed that the symbolic border us versus them feeds itself thanks to the belief in an illusory cultural superiority.

2.4 Anti-immigrant attitudes: a theoretical overview

Relying on group threat theory, it is possible to explain the emergence of anti-immigrant attitudes as a consequence of important economic, political and demographic changes that Europe has experienced in the last decade. Group threat theory helps us frame anti-immigrant sentiments as a response to a perceived threat from a minority group, caused by intergroup competition for scarce resources, for instance, political power, jobs, or welfare benefits. This gives rise to prejudice as a response to explicit or implicit challenges to the dominant group's position. Put differently, group threat theory assumes that people are keener to want to benefit their own group rather than others in the struggle for scarce resources.[27] This is exactly what happens when natives feel menaced by the presence of immigrants. It is important to remark that these threats do not need to be necessarily real. Indeed, it is sufficient for people to perceive them as being such. Group threat theory also highlights the importance of the framework in which they occur. It is important to understand what happens in the wider community, since this may have an impact on people's attitude towards immigrants even when the latter do not affect them personally. Three main conditions can be observed for their decisive role in anti-immigrant attitudes.[28]

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[27] Blumer, H. (1958). *Race Prejudice as a Sense of Group Position.* Pacific Sociological Review, 1(1).

[28] Hjerm, M., & Bohman, A. (2014). I*s it getting worse?:Anti-immigrant attitudes in Europe during the 21th century.* In European Populism and winning the immigration debate (pp. 41–64). Fores. [online] Available at: http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:umu:diva-94739 [Accessed 12 May 2019].

The first factor concerns economic circumstances. Ever since the 1950s, the presence of prejudice has been explained by the contention for scarce economic resources. Accordingly, immigrants endanger the material well-being of the native population.[29] In his study, Quillian demonstrates that in Europe low levels of GDP and larger immigrant populations produce anti-minority prejudice.[30] In a nutshell, the less the majority population feels that its jobs are in danger, the more likely it is favourable to, or at least not against, higher levels of immigration.

Second, it is crucial to consider the political context as well. Literature suggests that a negative political climate leads to the rise of anti-immigrant attitudes. This is mainly caused by the stereotyping political rhetoric that pictures the presence of foreigners as the essential determinant for the tense political conditions that the host country is experiencing. Of course, this significantly influences the way in which people interpret an increment in the share of immigrants. As a consequence, clear social norms are fundamental for the way in which prejudice develops. If societal norms against prejudice are unsteady, certain political actors will have greater chances to impact mindsets on issues related to immigration and immigrant presence.

The third feature is the demographic composition of a geographic area. Logically, a bigger minority population presupposes higher levels of competition with the native group. Therefore, there is a strong relationship between the extent of the immigrant population and the individual's approach to immigration.

In addition to the abovementioned contextual factors, there are also a number of individual factors which play a fundamental role in explaining anti-immigrant attitudes. One of these is surely represented by education. Generally, the greater the number of years of studies an individual has experienced, the less likely s/he is to have a negative perception of the migratory phenomenon. Following group threat theory, the relationship existing between education and anti-immigrant attitudes is connected to the privileged employments held by the more educated. Indeed, the latter tend to have job positions that are not usually held by immigrants. Thus, the less educated are usually more involved in the competition with immigrants over jobs. This is surely an important explanation,

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[29] Sherif, M. and Sherif, C. (1953). *Groups in harmony and Tension. An Integration of Studies on Intergroup Relations*. New York: Harper.

[30] Quillian, L. (1995). *Prejudice as a response to perceived group threat: Population composition and anti-immigrant and racial prejudice in Europe*. American Sociological Review, 60(4).

but studies also show that education contributes to a possible decrease in anti-immigrant attitudes by transmitting essential social values and critical thinking in order to reject stereotypical images.

Furthermore, the actual experiences with immigrants and member of the minority groups can constitute another interesting parameter to measure anti-immigrant attitudes. Entering in contact with individuals belonging to other ethnic groups reduces the belief in stereotypes and ultimately decreases negative sentiments towards immigration. Despite that, not all forms of contact are effective in the same way. Superficial contact may have the opposite effect, exacerbating negative attitudes even more.

Other studies suggest that there can be also a psychological component determining one's propensity towards anti-immigrant attitudes. The latter is linked to particular personality traits. As a consequence, individuals who inherently prefer hierarchy and great respect for rules are said to be more prone to adopt hostile sentiments towards immigration and immigrants.

One of the most significant aspects in the research of individual factors is that they give rise to prejudice in a more or less universal way. Pettigrew suggests that these features are consistent over geographical areas, across social groups and over time.[31] Due to this characteristic, knowledge of the individual explanations is not useful to understand the change in attitudes over time. Nonetheless, it is possible to claim that aggregate changes in anti-immigrant attitudes can be determined by two sources. On the one hand, attitudinal change can be the result of individuals becoming more or less hostile towards immigration. On the other hand, anti-immigrant changes may be due to the substitution of old generations with new ones, which are more open to immigration. Yet, unfortunately, it is necessary to note that this does not automatically imply that tolerance or appreciation of diversity will become the norm over time. Even the smallest shift in the social context can rapidly change the course of things. After all, individuals are influenced by the spirit of the age, the *zeitgeist*.

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[31] Pettigrew, T. F. (2000) *Systematizing the Predictors of Prejudice*. Racialized Politics. The Debate about Racism in America. In D. O. Sears, J. Sidanius and B. Lawrence. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press

Chapter Three: The correlation between radical right-wing populism and immigration

3.1 Theoretical explanations for the electoral success of radical right-wing parties

The electoral success of radical right-wing parties has been one of the main concerns in recent debates among political scientists and sociologists. This topic has been usually framed by the "market metaphor", implying that political parties are constantly in competition over their "market share". Accordingly, it is possible to divide these explanations in terms of demand and supply. The demand-side of politics tends to focus on those "factors that have changed the interests, emotions, attitudes, and preferences of West European voters".[32] Instead, the supply-side of politics concentrates on factors related to xenophobic political programmes, national political environment, and media activity.[33] Following the market metaphor, demand-side theories have increasingly paid attention to subjective discontent, a variable that radical right parties can easily exploit. This includes economic or political crises, ultra-conservative ideologies, anti-immigrant stances, and perceived insecurity. Realistic Conflict Theory (RCT) rests on the assumption that scarcity of resources and services produces antagonism between different social groups, even when the perception of intra-group competition is stronger than how it actually is.[34] Instead, Social Identity Theory (SIT) concerns the instinctive perception of superiority of one's social group over the others.[35] This psychological feature could be reinforced by specific conditions such as prolonged immigration. The joint effects of these two theories are usually referred to as the Ethnic Competition Theory (ECT), whose main argument is: "competition [...] may reinforce the mechanisms of social (contra-)identification, the eventual outcome of which is referred to as ethnic exclusionism".[36] Perhaps, this may be the case of Lega's electoral success. The party is well known for its hostility towards migrant workers who are said to steal jobs from Italians, in line with RCT, implying that priority ought to be given to Italian workers who are said to be experiencing "counter-racism" in the labour market, thus fitting the principles of SIT, and more generally those of ECT. A fourth important theory is that of the Defended

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[32] Rydgren, J. (2007). *The sociology of the radical right*. Annual Review of Sociology 33(1): 241–62.

[33] Abbondanza, G. and Bailo, F. (2017). *The electoral payoff of immigration flows for anti-immigration parties: the case of Italy's Lega Nord*. European Political Science, 17(3), pp.378-403.

[34] Blalock, H.M. (1967). *Toward a Theory of Minority-Group Relations*. New York: Wiley.

[35] Tajfel, H. (1982). *Social psychology of intergroup relations*. Annual Review of Psychology 33(1): 1–39.

[36] Scheepers, P., Gijsberts, M. and Coenders M (2002). *Ethnic exclusionism in European countries. Public opposition to civil rights for legal migrants as a response to perceived ethnic threat*. European Sociological Review 18(1): 17–34.

Neighbourhood Theory (DNT), based on the assumption that the arrival of social groups which differ from the dominant one, fosters a violent response from the latter against the former. According to this theory, the causes of social conflict are to be found in the threat to the common social identity of the dominant group.[37] Another important approach is that of the Relative Deprivation Theory (RDT), which focuses on the frustration derived from a negative comparison with a majority social group.[38] Finally, the Modernisation Losers Theory (MLT) asserts that radical right parties' traditional view of society might appeal to those who do not accept or cannot cope with social changes linked to modernisation.[39]

Following this brief classification, two elements are clearly visible. First, theoretical approaches concerning radical right parties have exclusionary social patterns as their core assumption. Second, social marginalisation appears to be the main account for the resurgence of such parties. That being said, the sharp increase in the amount of irregular immigration that Italy has experienced in the last decades, along with the growing role of Lega as both a government and an opposition party, perfectly fit into this theoretical context. Therefore, it is safe to assume that a degree of convergence between the levels of immigration and anti-immigration voting for Lega exists.

3.2 The League: a nativist interpretation of immigration

As literature shows, originally the focus of Lega Nord discourse was directed to Italian migrants coming from the South. In this context, the party strongly valued the ethnic and linguistic distinctness of the North as the main factor justifying a project of decentralisation. Nevertheless, the migratory wave of the 1990s and the prevalence of immigrants from former communist countries led Lega Nord to widen its list of enemies. The new immigrants were framed as the reason behind all of society's problems, encompassing economic aspects, like unemployment and the reduction of wages, as well as the proliferation of crime and diffusion of insecurity. The party cultivated what Pappas defines "a sense of victimhood", namely the belief that the organic community of natives is abandoned by

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[37] Green, D.P., Strolovitch, D.Z. and Wong, J.S. (1998). *Defended neighborhoods, integration, and racially motivated crime*, American Journal of Sociology 104(2): 372–403.

[38] Runciman, W.G. (1966). *Relative Deprivation and Social Justice: A Study of Attitudes to Social Inequality in Twentieth-Century England*, Oakland: University of California Press.

[39] Minkenberg, M. (2003) *The West European radical right as a collective actor: Modeling the impact of cultural and structural variables on party formation and movement mobilization*, Comparative European Politics 1(2): 149–70.

cosmopolitan elites as a consequence an invasion of immigrants.[40] Hence, Lega Nord complained against the inability of the governing elites to meet the need of the northern community, and immediately stigmatised immigrants as criminals. After the party's crisis, the community of reference slightly changed. The priority that was initially given to northerners was abandoned in favour of a more national community. The latter has been depicted as constantly "under threat" because the importance of its culture, values, religion, economic and security benefits is underestimated by the corrupt elites in Rome and Brussel.

Under the leadership of the new secretary of the party, Matteo Salvini, Lega has preserved its nativist position of immigration. However, by carefully reading the official text "Immigration: General Guidelines, the North League", published in February 2018, it is possible to assert that the party places an emphasis on its positive evaluation of regular immigration. This is not surprising at all since populist parties are usually very respectful of order and discipline. In the official document, immigration it is clearly stated that it is time to welcome those migrants respecting Italian law and to reject those who do not. Accordingly, it is time to accommodate the demands of those migrants who have the right to live in Italy since they can contribute to the country's economic and social growth with their regular and honest job. This aspect is quite interesting because of its implicit reference to the adaptation process which every migrant experiences when arriving in a new country. Moreover, it also suggests the importance of the legal immigrant's contribution to the well-being of the native community, something unusual to be heard in Lega's discourses. Contrarily, irregular migrants and clandestines must be stopped, because they only foster situations of extreme degradation and illegality.[41] Nevertheless, the aggressiveness of the anti-immigrant discourses increased in the following interviews with the press. On multiple occasions, Salvini has framed immigration as an invasion, an attempt to ethnically substitute the native Italian population. Specifically, Lega's leader emphasizes that Italy cannot host and give support to the whole world. In addition, he relies on his Catholic faith in order to represent immigrants as a threat to the cultural and religious homogeneity of the native community.

In relation to religion, another important element in Salvini's anti-immigrant stances is his concern with Islam and the danger it implies. Many of the newcomers belong to the Islamic religious tradition,

[40] Pappas, T. (2012). *Populism emergent: A framework for analyzing its contexts, mechanics and* outcomes. EU Working Papers No. RSCAS 2012/01. Fiesole: European Union Institute.

[41] Lega Nord (2018). *Immigrazione: Line guida generali Lega Nord.* [online] Available at: https://www.leganord.org/immigrazione-lineeguida [Accessed 12 May 2019].

whose sacred text is the Koran. Lega worries that too many Muslims interpret it as a book inciting to war and violence, which converts Islam as the number one public danger. In addition, the party believes that, due to its faith, the Muslim community has not been able to keep pace with modern progress and lives as if it was lagged behind centuries. In his 2016 autobiography, Salvini assesses that the issue of Islam can only be tackled by "jealousy protecting our values and our traditions".[42]

Ultimately, it is possible to affirm that the increasing nativist position of Lega on the immigration issue is the product of a combination of xenophobia, nationalism and anti-immigrant stances. Therefore, immigration becomes a scapegoat for every contemporary problem in society. According to this logic, immigrants are the main cause of the dismantlement of the local native Italian community.

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[42] Salvini, M. (2016). *Secondo Matteo: Follia e Coraggio per cambiare il paese*. Milano: Rizzoli.

<center>**Chapter Four: The Italian case**</center>

The electoral response of the 4th March 2018 general elections ratified the unequivocal success of Matteo Salvini's strategy. Obtaining 17.4% of votes on the national scale, Lega has attained the highest result ever achieved in its thirty-year long history. To better understand how Lega's anti-immigrant campaign had a great influence on Italian's vote, it is useful to look at three specific cases: Ventimiglia, Macerata, and Lampedusa. These three municipalities, respectively from North, Centre and South Italy, have been among the most affected areas ever since the beginning of the 1970's immigration wave. Eventually, they became reception centres for thousands of migrants. As a consequence, these towns have adopted more radical, anti-immigrant stances over time, making them the perfect catchment area for the new Lega.

The subsequent sections will examine each case individually focusing on the following structure:
- Lega's situation at the 2013 general elections;
- Analysis of immigration waves and other important events between 2013 and 2018;
- Analysis of public opinion before 4th March 2018;
- Lega's electoral campaign before 4th March 2018;
- Lega's result after the 2018 general elections;

4.1 Case study I: Ventimiglia

Ventimiglia is an Italian municipality located in Liguria, near the border with France. Ventimiglia has always had a right-wing tradition, a pattern that was confirmed at the 2013 general elections. In that occasion the centre-right coalition obtained 36.91% and, specifically the then still Lega Nord achieved only 2.41% of the votes.[43] Its geographical position is particularly relevant in the analysis since it determines the town's role as a land of transits. This means that migrants do not stop at Ventimiglia, but rather they continue travelling outside the Italian territory to reach other European countries, such as France, Switzerland, Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands. It comes to no surprise that following a rise of immigration, a migrant smuggling business has developed in the area. Smugglers have been surprised in their illegal activities multiple times, both by the Italian and

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[43] Ministero degli Interni. *Archivio storico delle elezioni*. [online] Available at: https://elezionistorico.interno.gov.it/index.php [Accessed 20 May 2019].

especially the French border police. Indeed, the latter plays a fundamental role in the increasing presence of migrants in the town of Ventimiglia. Ever since 2014, the French *gendarmerie* tried to stop the arrival of undocumented immigrants in their country, forcing the latter to stay in Ventimiglia. When the number of immigrants started to increase dramatically, both due to *refoulement* and continuous arrivals on the Italian coasts, the town of Ventimiglia was already exhausted. From a land of transit, the town transformed into a "storage" town. The migrants gathered on the rocks by the seaside, protesting for the inhuman treatment they were receiving. However, by September 2015 they were forced to leave the campsite and shifted to a refugee centre of the Italian Red Cross. By 2016, the latter was closed down, as part of the new strategy of the government, which also included a greater military presence in the city so as to stop migrants. Nonetheless, this proved to be unsuccessful, since immigrants found new shelter under a bridge near the river Roja. Also Enrico Ioculano, the town's mayor, decided to suspend himself from his party, the Democratic Party, because he felt abandoned in the fight against the migrant emergency. In the summer of 2016, a new refugee centre was opened, but throughout 2017 and 2018 the conditions of migrants at the French border remained unchanged.

The constant rise in the presence of immigrants in the town of Ventimiglia has unsurprisingly led to the development of anti-immigrant stances. People increasingly believe that the money invested by the city council into the disinfestation and cleaning in the area occupied by immigrants near the river Roja is simply a waste.[44] This tendency in public opinion is reinforced by the declarations of the Ventimiglia municipality. The opposition councillor Silvia Malivindi strongly assessed her uncertainty concerning the arrival of new migrants in town. She believes that we are witnessing the increasing arrival of a new type of immigration coming from North Africa, which does not look similar either to that of asylum-seekers or that of the so-called "economic migrants" looking for a job and a better future. It seems like they are ex-prisoners benefitting of the Tunisian indulgence, landing in Italy and arriving at Ventimiglia. She continues: "Our town, already exhausted by years of reception of transiting migrants, founds itself suffering the massive presence of people who are probably disreputable".[45] In the same way, also Ioculano gave a very tough declaration on the issue: "The truth is that it has been almost three weeks since we started facing a new flow which is

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[44] Tenerelli, F. (2017). *Ventimiglia, i profughi sporcano e il Comune pulisce. A spese dei cittadini*. Il Giornale. [online] Available at: http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/cronache/ventimiglia-i-profughi-sporcano-e-comune-pulisce-spese-dei-1439059.html [Accessed 20 May 2019].

[45] Sanremonews.it (2017). *Ventimiglia: immigrazione in arrivo dal Nord Africa, il pensiero del consigliere Silvia Malivindi*. [online] Available at: http://www.sanremonews.it/2017/10/25/leggi-notizia/argomenti/politica-1/articolo/ventimiglia-immigrazione-in-arrivo-dal-nord-africa-il-pensiero-del-consigliere-silvia-malivindi.html [Accessed 20 May 2019].

completely different from the past. The main one has stopped, now we have to deal with dangerous subjects. No type of reception exists for them and we want faster repatriations".[46]

"I will come back to Ventimiglia as Prime Minister and I can grant you right now that there will not be any clandestine around. You are tired, but we are tired as well of all this situation. We open the door for all those who want to work, but those who come to loiter will only find a one-way ticket to their native country".[47] This is what Salvini commented during his electoral campaign in the town of Ventimiglia. During his rally, the leader promised to adopt a strategy similar to that of France, namely stricter controls at the border, expelling the hundreds of thousands of migrants that "do not have the right either to stay in Ventimiglia or in the rest of Italy".[48] Moreover, Salvini pointed out that mayor Ioculano could not do his best because of the presence of a superficial and corrupted government, not interested in its own population.[49] Not only it allows incessant flows of immigrants to enter Italy, but it also penalises the Italians. In other words, "the Left in Italy employs racism against Italians".[50] With the same spirit, Edoardo Rixi, Lega's regional party secretary, and Flavio Di Muro, Lega's regional party vice-secretary, have harshly accused the government of encouraging the presence of immigrants in Ventimiglia. "The Italian government left thousands of retirees without a pension, authorizing an unlimited invasion, and today even concedes the pre-emptive right to take over a tobacco shop in Ventimiglia. […] This is a very good message for all our young people forced to emigrate to find a job, and for all the merchants in Ventimiglia who have been dealing with the impoverishment of the town for the last two years, due to the presence of clandestines".[51] In

[46] Il Populista (2017). *Ventimiglia al collasso, il sindaco PD: "Rimpatriate i delinquenti nordafricani.* [online] Available at: http://www.ilpopulista.it/news/3-Novembre-2017/20124/ventimiglia-al-collasso-il-sindaco-pd-rimpatriate-i-delinquenti-nordafricani.html [Accessed 20 May 2019].

[47] Sanremonews.it (2018). *Matteo Salvini a Ventimiglia: "Qui bisogna fare come i francesi! Ioculano? Non mi sembra che i cittadini siano tranquilli".* [online] Available at: http://www.sanremonews.it/2018/02/09/leggi-notizia/argomenti/politica-1/articolo/matteo-salvini-a-ventimiglia-qui-bisogna-fare-come-i-francesi-ioculano-non-mi-sembra-che-i-citta.html [Accessed 20 May 2019].

[48] Riviera24 (2018). *Ventimiglia, bagno di folla per il candidato premier della Lega Matteo Salvini: "Tre anni di Ioculano? Non mi sembra che i cittadini si sentano sicuri".* [online] Available at: https://www.riviera24.it/2018/02/ventimiglia-bagno-di-folla-per-il-candidato-premier-della-lega-matteo-salvini-tre-anni-di-ioculano-non-mi-sembra-che-i-cittadini-si-sentano-sicuri-277790/ [Accessed 20 May 2019].

[49] Ibid.

[50] Matteo Salvini Facebook Page (2018). *Difendiamo i nostri confini, ora a Ventimiglia!.* [video] Available at: https://www.facebook.com/salviniofficial/videos/10155525394238155/ [Accessed 20 May 2019].

[51] Riviera24 (2018). *Tabaccheria per profughi a Ventimiglia, Rixi e Di Muro (Lega): "Ultima follia del governo Pd".* [online] Available at: https://www.riviera24.it/2018/02/tabaccheria-per-profughi-a-ventimiglia-rixi-e-di-muro-lega-ultima-follia-del-governo-pd-276905/ [Accessed 20 May 2019].

conclusion, at the 4th March 2018 elections, the centre-right coalition achieved 52.74% of the votes, and in particular, Lega obtained 29.66%, a result almost thirteen times bigger than the one of 2013.[52]

4.2 Case study II: Macerata

Macerata is an Italian municipality located in Marche, a region of central Italy. Macerata's political orientation changed multiple times over the course of years, shifting from centre-left to centre-right and vice versa. In fact, the 2013 general election saw the centre-left coalition winning with 31.16% of votes. In that occasion, the centre-right coalition obtained 22.27% and, in particular, Lega only got 0.61% of the votes, quite a miserable result.[53] However, this tendency was not maintained at the 2018 elections. On the 4th of March, the citizens of Macerata rewarded the centre-right coalition with 37.43% of the total votes. Lega was astonishingly able to turn the tables and it achieved 20.98%.[54] Certainly, this outcome must be considered in the light of the mutable political and social context which has brought many immigrants in town.

Contrarily to the case of Ventimiglia and, as we shall see in the following section, that of Lampedusa, the geographical factor does not play a crucial role in the attraction of immigrants. While the Northern and Southern towns are considered to be lands of transit, Macerata is rather a town where migrants tend to settle more or less permanently. The territory nearby the town is very well-known for being highly industrialised, utterly in line with the extremely developed second sector of the rest of the region. Due to this factor, the immigrants establishing in Macerata ultimately hope to find a job in the industrial field, making it the second most immigrant-populated town in the region. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that this data is in line with the national average.[55] The problem, once again, rests on the presence of clandestines. The latter are usually unemployed and often engage in illegal activities in order to make a living. Therefore, Macerata is deeply concerned with security issues arising from organized criminality and drug dealing.

It is in this framework that we should consider the tragic events that rapidly unfolded in February 2018 before the elections and that surely played a role in influencing public opinion. First and foremost, the murder of Pamela Mastropietro, an eighteen-year-old girl from Rome. On the 31st

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[52] Ministero degli Interni. *Archivio storico delle elezioni*. [online] Available at: https://elezionistorico.interno.gov.it/index.php [Accessed 20 May 2019].

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Centro studi e ricerche IDOS (2018). *Dossier statistico immigrazione 2018*. Roma, pp.379-382.

January 2018, her mutilated body was found in two abandoned suitcases. A Nigerian man, Innocent Oseghale, was arrested as the main suspect since Pamela's bloodied clothes were found in his apartment. Oseghale had an expired residency permit and a criminal record of drug dealing, the latter probably being the main reason why Pamela had approached him since she had just left the halfway house that had hosted her until a few days before. Yet this incident had an unexpected consequence. On the 3rd February Luca Traini, a twenty-eight-year-old right-wing extremist, severely wounded six African migrants in a drive-by shooting. He later stated that the attack was a revenge for the homicide of the young girl. In the same vein, it is also important to mention the attack against Gruppo Umana Solidarietà (Gus), an NGO known for its commitment to immigrant reception and integration.

Clearly, all these events produced substantial consequences on public opinion, particularly related to issues concerned with the security and safety of the citizens of Macerata. They contributed to fuel the already presumed danger represented by immigrants, a sentiment which can be easily exploited by radical right-wing parties. "Violence is never the solution, violence must be always condemned. Those who make a mistake must pay. Out-of-control immigration leads to chaos, anger, social clash. Out-of-control immigration leads to drug dealing, theft, burglary, and violence".[56] This is what Salvini tweeted soon after the shooting perpetrated by Traini. Nevertheless, Salvini had to confront with a harsh controversy concerning the fact that Traini was a member and former local candidate of Lega Nord. Many political commentator and politicians accused Salvini of spreading hate and racism in the country, labelling him as the moral instigator of the attack.[57] In response, the Carroccio's leader blamed the centre-left government for the death of Pamela Mastropietro for allowing illegal immigrants to stay in Italy. Moreover, during a meeting at San Lazzaro, he added: "I look forward to taking office at the government to bring back security, social justice, and serenity all around Italy".[58]

The tragic episodes that characterized the town of Macerata occurred almost three weeks before the general elections. On the one hand, a survey published by the newspaper La Stampa says that the

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[56] matteosalvinimi. (2018, February 3). *La violenza non è mai la soluzione, la violenza è sempre da condannare. E chi sbaglia, deve pagare. L'immigrazione fuori controllo porta al caos, alla rabbia, allo scontro sociale. L'immigrazione fuori controllo porta spaccio di droga, furti, rapine e violenza. #Macerata* [Tweet]. Available at: https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/959821942831435776

[57] HuffPost (2018). *Roberto Saviano: "Il mandante morale dei fatti di Macerata è Salvini."* [online] Available at: https://www.huffingtonpost.it/2018/02/03/roberto-saviano-il-mandante-morale-dei-fatti-di-macerata-e-salvini_a_23351937/ [Accessed 23 May 2019].

[58] HuffPost (2018). *Matteo Salvini sull'aggressore di Macerata: "Chi spara è delinquente, ma l'invasione porta allo scontro sociale. Violenza chiama violenza."* [online] Available at: https://www.huffingtonpost.it/2018/02/03/matteo-salvini-sullaggressore-di-macerata-chi-spara-e-delinquente-ma-linvasione-porta-allo-scontro-sociale_a_23351924/ [Accessed 23 May 2019].

shooting and the following controversy did not modify the voting intentions of the electorate.[59] On the other hand, some online data seem to contradict the research conducted by Piepoli. Surprisingly, the attack by Luca Traini did not reinforce the accuses against him. Rather, it split the Italian digital users in two opposing blocks, one condemning the episode in an anti-fascist and anti-racist key, the other using it to revive the classic slogans of the extreme right. In addition, also the online research made by millions of Italians seem to confirm this trend. The main keywords correlated to Macerata were "Pamela Macerata" and "manifestation Macerata". Salvini has obviously taken advantage of such a sentiment, winning the sympathy of many users. The Lega's leader was able to obtain seventeen thousand new online supporters, for a total of more than 3 millions followers, making him the most followed Italian politician on the whole social network. Hence, it is clear to see why Lega obtained such a significant result at the 2018 elections.

4.3 Case study III: Lampedusa

Lampedusa is an Italian municipality located in the homonymous island in the southernmost part of the country. Despite its close proximity to Tunisia, which is about 113 kilometres away, the island forms part of Sicily, which is at 205 kilometres. As in the case of Ventimiglia, also Lampedusa has a geographical position which is relevant in the present analysis. Due to its immediacy to the African continent, the island has become a major transit point for irregular migrants ever since the early 1990s. As a consequence, Lampedusa has always had a strong right-wing tradition, also because over time southern voters have developed a very strong elective affinity towards the political forces that have governed the country for a long period.[60] This trend was maintained at the 2013 elections, where the centre-right coalition obtained 56.46% of the total votes. Lega Nord, which formed part of the coalition, only gained a miserable 0.15%.[61]

Lampedusa is often referred to as the "door to Europe" because it is one of the main destinations of African migrants' route in the Mediterranean. They cross the sea on makeshift boats, usually fishing vessels or rafts, provided and controlled by migrants smugglers. The migratory flows are worth a fruitful turnover of hundreds of thousands euros a year. Despite the expensiveness of the travel in

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[59] Piepoli, N. (2018). *Nessun effetto Macerata: al centrodestra mancano 600mila voti per vincere.* La Stampa. [online] Available at: https://www.lastampa.it/2018/02/09/italia/nessun-effetto-macerata-al-centrodestra-mancano-mila-voti-per-vincere-o4Po9RfrKFW6RFv06kcA1O/pagina.html [Accessed 23 May 2019].

[60] Cerruto, M., Raniolo, F. (2018). *From exchange to voice. Voting in southern Italy,* Journal of Modern Italian Studies, 23:4, 418-436, DOI: 10.1080/1354571X.2018.1500214

[61] Ministero degli Interni. *Archivio storico delle elezioni.* [online] Available at: https://elezionistorico.interno.gov.it/index.php [Accessed 20 May 2019].

itself, migrants have to pay an even higher price, that is their own lives. Indeed, migrants travel on overcrowded, dilapidated boats, hosting three times more people than their actual capacity, and they live in inhuman conditions for days. Actual migrant landings are quite uncommon because boats are often detected by the coast guard and escorted to the reception centre on the island. However, Lampedusa is sadly known for being the scenery of far more tragic episodes. Due to the dreadful conditions of the boats, sinkings are much more frequent. As a consequence, every year thousands of immigrants drown in the Mediterranean. As recent statistics shows, one in five migrants either drowned or disappeared in trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea and trends do not seem to show any improvement in the situation in the near future.[62]

It is in this framework that it is noteworthy to mention the 2013 Lampedusa disaster. The 1st October 2013 a fishing vessel left the Libyan port of Misrata, carrying more than five hundred people. There are men, women, and children on board, all of them coming from sub-Saharan Africa, mostly from Eritrea and Somalia. They had been travelling packed in the small boat for two days, when around 5 AM in the 3rd October they arrive nearby the coast. They couldn't go further and nobody had spotted them yet. Someone decided to set fire to a blanket in the hope of being seen. However, the dock was sprinkled with gasoline, hence the fire soon flared up. The migrants, scared by the situation, all moved on the side of the boat causing it to upturn and sink. Those who were quick enough managed to dive into the sea, in spite of not knowing how to swim. Many others were trapped under the boat. The first aids arrived around 7 AM and the survivors were sent the refugee center in Lampedusa. The research of the drowned bodies continued until the 12th October, when it was possible to more or less exactly determine the magnitude of the shipwreck. 368 fatalities reported, 20 presumably lost, and 155 survivors. Due to the harsh media and public backlash, the government decided to intervene by implementing the operation *Mare Nostrum*. The latter consisted of a military project preventing and, possibly, avoid alike accidents. However, migrant landings and drownings continued despite all. An explicative example is the most tragic shipwreck ever occurred in the Sicilian Channel, namely that of the 18th April 2015. In that occasion, almost one thousand victims, including the dead and the dispersed, were counted.

By now migrant arrivals have become a constant for the citizens of Lampedusa. Therefore, it is logical that their electoral choices depend on the analysis of the migratory phenomenon. Not everyone has a

[62] Hayden, S. (2018). *Migrants deaths in Mediterranean reach record percentage*. The Irish Times. [online] Available at: https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/migrants-deaths-in-mediterranean-reach-record-percentage-1.3652139 [Accessed 26 Nov. 2018].

deep knowledge of the reasons and dynamics behind it, but according to many, one of the incentives is the personal interest of privates who want to seize public funds. This rationale is surely appealing to the populist Lega, whose leader has promised to close ports to the NGO boats on multiple occasions. Moreover, the mayor of Lampedusa, Totò Martello, points to the degradation that the island is facing due to the excessive presence of immigrants. "The people are intolerant and cannot stand it anymore. The last landings caused serious problems. Many houses were wrecked, some drunk immigrants go around causing trouble"[63] he assessed, pointing to the fact that Lampedusa tries to welcome millions of foreigners while steering its own population to starvation. According to him, Lampedusa is on the edge of collapse because the police force is powerless, a factor which undermines the tourist sector as well. In the same fashion, Angela Maraventano, a Lega supporter who ran for mayor in 2017, added: "It does not make sense to host these people if when they arrive they are treated like slaves: they sell drugs and do hard works. [...] Maybe in the past it was possible to offer them something, a job, while today these miserable people are treated terribly. We do not have the means to help all these poor people. It would be better for them to stay in their own countries and live with dignity."[64]

It is in this light that we should interpret Salvini's electoral campaign, mostly based on the theme of security. "It is necessary to turn off the tap, to limit the landings" the Carroccio leader said, adding that in this way it will be possible to grant more security to the whole population. In this respect, Salvini often referred to the migrant issue in Lampedusa as an "invasion out of control", denying the data provided by the Ministry of the Interior according to which the number of landings has decreased by 32.24% with respect to 2016.[65] Moreover, when asked why the Sicilians should have voted for Lega, Salvini answered by highlighting the fact that Sicily has tried all the other alternatives which proved to be unsuccessful. Contrarily, according to him, Lega is triumphant in all those territories under its government.[66] Nevertheless, the first crucial step to obtain greater consensus was probably that of removing the suffix "Nord" from the party's name. This represented the turning point for the

[63] Puglisi, R. (2018). *Il trionfo leghista a Lampedusa "La gente è stanca, non ne può più."* Live Sicilia. [online] Available at: https://livesicilia.it/2018/03/10/il-trionfo-leghista-a-lampedusa-la-gente-e-stanca-non-ne-puo-piu_939935/ [Accessed 23 May 2019].

[64] Euronews. (2018). *I migranti, Lampedusa e la Lega di Salvini*. [online] Available at: https://it.euronews.com/2018/10/10/i-migranti-lampedusa-e-la-lega-di-salvini [Accessed 23 May 2019].

[65] Sampino, A. (2018). *Migranti al centro del dibattito politico, Salvini: "Invasione senza controllo". Sbarchi a Lampedusa*. Giornale di Sicilia. [online] Available at: https://gds.it/articoli/politica/2018/01/16/migranti-al-centro-del-dibattito-politico-tornano-gli-sbarchi-a-lampedusa-salvini-e-uninvasione-senza-controllo-dbda0d23-cb57-4d90-86f1-2915d1e4a7ef/ [Accessed 23 May 2019].

[66] CataniaToday (2018). *Matteo Salvini a Paternò, "Siciliani ci votano perché sappiamo governare."* [online] Available at: http://www.cataniatoday.it/politica/matteo-salvini-a-paterno-siciliani-ci-votano-perche-sappiamo-governare.html [Accessed 23 May 2019].

acquisition of a new portion of the electorate, especially when this is constituted by the South which has always been quite conservative in its voting pattern, as mentioned at the beginning of this section. Therefore, while the result of the centre-right coalition at the 2018 elections was actually worse than in 2013, gaining 47.59% of the total votes, the performance of Salvini's party was rather different. By shifting from a regionalist- to a nationalist-oriented party, Lega has been able to obtain 14,65%, that is almost fifteen times the 2013 result.

Notwithstanding the Carroccio's success, it is noteworthy to mention that there is also the other side of the coin. Many have underlined how Salvini's attitude towards the South changed as soon as he needed its support. Many understand the real entity of the immigration phenomenon. This is "the other Lampedusa", the decal of a population which is ready to strive in order to help those migrants in need. There is the pearl of "Fire at Sea" (*Fuocoammare*), the film-documentary directed by Gianfranco Rosi on the tragedy of landings, which was widely rewarded and praised internationally. Finally, there are people like the doctor Pietro Bartolo who attempt to help others as much as they can. "The success of Lega" he comments "also springs from bad information and it is easy to be deceived. The people are tired, the youths do not have a job and there is someone who promises heaven and earth exploiting populism and protest".[67]

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[67] Puglisi, R. (2018). *Il trionfo leghista a Lampedusa "La gente è stanca, non ne può più."* Live Sicilia. [online] Available at: https://livesicilia.it/2018/03/10/il-trionfo-leghista-a-lampedusa-la-gente-e-stanca-non-ne-puo-piu_939935/ [Accessed 23 May 2019].

Conclusion

The cases of Ventimiglia, Macerata, and Lampedusa are representative of the radical right-wing tendency that Italy is experiencing at the moment. The increasing presence of immigrants in the country is fuelling a strong xenophobic sentiment resting on classic radical right-wing populist rhetoric. In this way, Lega adopts a form of banal nationalism, popularizing a national identity strongly based on ethnonationalist and ethnocentric beliefs. Therefore, the party's political agenda focuses on the representation of immigration as a threat to the native community, an invasion which must be stopped. Clearly, the inaccurate media depiction of this issue contributes to the overall anti-immigrant attitude that is widely spreading throughout the country. The perception of immigration as an encroachment, a conquest by a foreign population, has fostered an increasing fear of the unknown. Lega was particularly astute in exploiting this situation to its own advantage, presenting itself as the only possible solution to the problem.

Hence, the conception of radical right-wing populism as a "thin ideology" perfectly fits the case of Lega, whose recent success reflects that of other radical right-wing populist parties around Europe. Factors such as economic instability, the diversity dilemma represented by immigration and security might better explain the increasing support towards this kind of parties. However, in the case of Lega, it is significant to consider its historical path. From a purely regionalist party, mainly seeking the independence of the North from the rest of the country, Lega transformed into a more nationalist-oriented one, managing to attract more and more supporters to its cause. Surely the rise of Salvini as the new party secretary made it possible for Lega to obtain major consensus. Indeed, Salvini has proved to be a charismatic leader able to communicate in an efficient and effective way, breaking down the boundaries surrounding Padania and making it appealing for a larger share of the electorate to join his cause.

Since the 1980s Italy has transformed into a country of immigration. Thanks to the Italian economic miracle and the subsequent increasing demand for labour, the country has become one of the main lands of arrival for thousands of migrants. However, differences exist in the welcoming of regular and irregular immigrants, the latter being denied the permission to remain in Italy, at least in theory. As consequence, a linkage between illegal immigration and criminality wrongly develops. Moreover, that element is further accentuated by the biased representation of immigration in the media, which

fuels the already present anti-immigrant stances. The majority group feels threatened by the minority in the competition for scarce resources, giving rise to forms of prejudice. The three main external factors influencing the presence of anti-immigrant attitudes are the economic circumstances, the overall political context, and the democratic composition of a geographical area. Nonetheless, there are also individual factors which play a fundamental role, such as education and the personal experience with members of the minority group, as well as some psychological component.

Consequently, a correlation between radical right-wing populism and immigration can be found. Indeed, relying on the "market metaphor", it is possible to assess that demand-side theories have increasingly paid attention to subjective discontent, a variable that easily arises in relation to immigration. In this way, various theories can be identified all relying on some common elements such as exclusionary social patterns and social marginalisation. Since Lega perfectly fits this pattern, it is possible to conclude that there is a degree of convergence between the levels of immigration and anti-immigration voting in Italy.

However, this strategy is lighting a spark that could lead to a situation of chaos. All the anti-immigrant campaigns, discourses and decisions are in a certain sense justifying xenophobic and racist behaviours against everyone who is perceived as different. The targets of those actions are not only immigrants but also all those people trying to help them in some way. Therefore, today Italy is returning to a time of separation, exclusion, and distinction, simply based on the definition of who deserves to be included in our society and who does not.

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ABSTRACT

Lo scopo di questa tesi è quello di analizzare il ruolo dell'immigrazione nell'ascesa della Lega come principale partito populista radicale di destra in Italia. Nello specifico, l'analisi si concentra sul successo ottenuto dalla Lega alle elezioni politiche del 4 marzo 2018 ed in particolare sul risultato riscosso in tre comuni italiani fortemente interessati dal fenomeno migratorio quali Ventimiglia, Macerata e Lampedusa.

Capitolo Uno: Il populismo di destra in Italia

Il populismo radicale di destra è uno dei fenomeni ultimamente più studiati e per questo motivo è possibile identificarne alcune caratteristiche principali. In primo luogo, come spiega Cas Mudde, troviamo una concezione esclusionista e etnonazionalista della cittadinanza che dà precedenza al proprio popolo. In secondo luogo, il populismo inteso come "ideologia sottile" basata sull'antagonismo tra il "popolo puro" e l' "élite corrotta". Infine, l'autoritarismo che sostiene una società ordinata, imponendo il rispetto per le autorità e punendo aspramente le violazioni. Inoltre, la recente ascesa e influenza dei partiti populisti radicali di destra può essere spiegata dall'interazione di diversi fattori quali: l'instabilità economica, la preoccupazione generale prodotta dall'immigrazione e dal dilemma della diversità e il crescente interesse per il tema della sicurezza.

In Italia, l'affermazione del populismo di destra è da attribuire principalmente alle radicali trasformazioni politiche che il Paese ha affrontato nei primi anni novanta. L'operazione anticorruzione conosciuta come "Mani Pulite" ha contribuito al collasso del tradizionale sistema partitico della "Prima Repubblica". Un profondo sentimento d'indignazione si è diffuso tra la popolazione, specialmente tra l'elettorato moderato che si è ritrovato senza una rappresentanza politica. In questo contesto, il populismo di destra è riuscito a fiorire stabilendo una democrazia plebiscitaria, guidata da un leader carismatico con il compito di interpretare la volontà popolare. Partiti come la Lega Nord e Forza Italia si sono fatti spazio nello scenario politico dell'epoca, rappresentando le uniche forze in grado di rispondere alle necessità della società italiana.

Quello della Lega Nord può essere considerato il partito regionalista di maggior successo in tutta Europa, caratterizzato da uno spiccato etnoregionalismo. Il suo scopo primario era quello di creare un territorio, conosciuto come Padania, indipendente dal resto dell'Italia perchè giustificato

dall'elevato livello di sviluppo economico della regione. Tuttavia, in seguito alle molteplici sconfitte e al netto calo del livello di consenso, la Lega Nord si è trovata costretta ad adottare una strategia diversa. Sotto la guida del nuovo leader Matteo Salvini, il partito ha subito una trasformazione in senso nazional populista, concentrandosi sempre più sul tema dell'immigrazione come punto cardine del suo programma politico. Inoltre, ne ha promosso un'immagine più inclusiva la cui conseguenza più evidente è stata l'abbandono del suffisso "Nord" dal suo nome.

Capitolo Due: L'immigrazione in Italia

Negli ultimi decenni l'Italia è stata al centro dei dibattiti sul tema dell'immigrazione. Infatti, si è trasformata nel principale punto di approdo per i migranti d'oltremare, specialmente per la strategica posizione geografica delle coste meridionali italiane. Tuttavia, per comprendere al meglio il fenomeno migratorio è rilevante dimostrare come l'Italia, Paese di emigrati, si è trasformata in una terra di immigrazione. Tra il 1876 e i primi anni ottanta milioni di Italiani hanno lasciato la loro patria per cercare fortuna altrove. In seguito al miracolo economico degli anni cinquanta e sessanta, la crescente esigenza di manodopera ha attirato numerosi immigrati. A partire dalla crisi dei rifugiati del 2010, il tema dell'immigrazione ha assunto proporzioni colossali, con numerosi arrivi via mare.

Ogni Stato ha il diritto di stabilire le proprie condizioni di ingresso e permanenza dei migranti nel proprio territorio. In Italia questo aspetto è regolato dal Decreto Legislativo n.286 del 25 luglio del 1998. Quest'ultimo è stato modificato dalla Legge n.189 del 2002 e più recentemente dal Decreto Legge n.113 del 2018. I cittadini stranieri possono entrare in Italia se sono in grado di fornire la documentazione necessaria a giustificare la ragione e le condizioni per la loro permanenza, nonché la disponibilità di sufficienti risorse economiche per il loro sostentamento. Le persone non conformi a questi requisiti vengono etichettate come immigrati illegali. Questo termine implica un'ingiustificata associazione tra gli immigrati e la criminalizzazione: per questo motivo negli ultimi anni si preferisce parlare di immigrazione irregolare.

L'accezione negativa del termine immigrato è fortemente influenzata dai media in quanto svolgono un ruolo fondamentale nella rappresentazione del fenomeno migratorio agli occhi dell'opinione pubblica. È possibile identificare tre argomentazioni principali che i media usano per dipingere l'immigrazione come un problema sociale. In primo luogo, il rischio costituito dall'intrusione degli immigrati in un territorio inteso come "nostro" e concepito come una comunità. Questo contribuisce alla percezione generale dell'immigrazione come un'occupazione fuori controllo, una conquista da

parte degli invasori. In secondo luogo, l'immigrato è etichettato come un pericolo per la sicurezza nazionale, la cui naturale conseguenza è l'associazione dell'immigrazione alla presenza della criminalità nel Paese. Infine, l'immigrazione rappresenta una minaccia per la cultura religiosa dell'occidente. La paura dell'Altro è strettamente legata alla paura della perdita di identità, una forma di neo-razzismo che disapprova la contaminazione culturale.

Grazie alla "group threat theory" elaborata da Herbert Blumer, è possibile spiegare la presenza di atteggiamenti anti-immigrati come conseguenza della minaccia esercitata da un gruppo di minoranza nella lotta per le già scarse risorse disponibili al gruppo dominante. Tuttavia, è importante notare che queste minacce non devono essere necessariamente reali, in quanto è sufficiente che le persone le percepiscano come tali. Inoltre, questa teoria sottolinea l'impatto del contesto sociale sugli atteggiamenti anti-immigrati. È possibile osservare tre circostanze principali: il fattore economico, cioè la correlazione tra bassi valori del PIL, una vasta popolazione di immigrati e la presenza di pregiudizi contro le minoranze; il contesto politico, dove un clima negativo tende a produrre atteggiamenti anti-immigrati; la composizione demografica, in cui più è grande la minoranza, maggiore è il livello di competizione con il gruppo nativo. Oltre a questi fattori ne esistono altri di tipo individuale, come l'educazione. Generalmente un maggiore livello di scolarizzazione corrisponde a una percezione tendenzialmente positiva dell'immigrazione e viceversa. Ciononostante, anche l'esperienza personale con la popolazione immigrata contribuisce alla creazione della propria percezione. Inoltre, anche la componente psicologica non è da sottovalutare, in quanto chi predilige sistemi gerarchici e un grande rispetto delle regole è maggiormente propenso allo sviluppo di sentimenti ostili nei confronti dell'immigrazione e degli immigrati.

Capitolo Tre: La correlazione tra il populismo radicale di destra e l'immigrazione

Il successo elettorale dei partiti radicali di destra viene solitamente spiegato tramite un'analogia con l'economia, per cui è possibile dividere tali spiegazioni in termini di offerta e domanda. In particolare, queste ultime si concentrano sul malcontento individuale connesso alle crisi economiche e politiche, alle ideologie ultra-conservative, ad atteggiamenti anti-immigrati e alla percezione dell'insicurezza. È quindi possibile identificare diverse teorie. La Teoria del Conflitto Realistico parte dall'assunto che la scarsità delle risorse e dei servizi produce antagonismo tra diversi gruppi sociali. La Teoria dell'Identità Sociale riguarda l'istintiva percezione di superiorità del proprio gruppo di appartenenza rispetto agli altri. L'effetto congiunto di queste due teorie prende il nome di Teoria della Competizione Etnica. La "Defended Neighbourhood Theory" si basa sull'idea secondo cui l'arrivo

di un gruppo sociale diverso da quello dominante produce una risposta violenta da parte di quest'ultimo. La Teoria della Deprivazione Relativa si focalizza, invece, sulla frustrazione derivata da una comparazione negativa con il gruppo sociale dominante. Infine, la "Modernisation Losers Theory" spiega come l'opinione tradizionalista dei partiti radicali di destra possa risultare appetibile a coloro che non accettano o non riescono ad affrontare i cambiamenti sociali legati alla modernizzazione. La crescente immigrazione irregolare in Italia e il progressivo aumento dei consensi per la Lega corrisponde a questo modello.

Inizialmente, la Lega Nord concentrava la sua discriminazione prevalentemente verso i migranti provenienti dal Sud Italia, dando particolare valore alla componente etnica e linguistica per giustificare il progetto di decentralizzazione territoriale. Successivamente, con le prime ondate migratorie degli anni novanta, l'interesse si è spostato sugli immigrati d'oltremare, visti come la principale causa per spiegare qualsiasi problema sociale ed economico. Sotto la guida del nuovo leader Matteo Salvini, la Lega ha mantenuto la sua posizione nativista sull'immigrazione. Tuttavia, è possibile osservare una maggiore apertura nei confronti di quella regolare, in quanto contribuisce alla crescita sociale ed economica del Paese. Tale affermazione non stupisce dato che i partiti populisti di destra tendono ad apprezzare il rispetto dell'ordine e della disciplina. Al contrario, l'immigrazione irregolare viene condannata. Infatti, in più occasioni Salvini ha dipinto tale fenomeno come un'invasione, un tentativo di sostituire la popolazione italiana. Nei suoi comizi ha spesso spiegato come gli immigrati sottraggano il lavoro agli Italiani che subiscono una sorta di "contro-razzismo" nel mercato del lavoro. Inoltre, facendo affidamento alla sua fede cattolica, Salvini è riuscito a rappresentare i migranti come una minaccia per l'omogeneità culturale e religiosa della comunità nativa. A tal proposito, ha spesso condannato l'Islam e i pericoli che questo credo implica. Dunque, l'immigrazione sembra diventare il capro espiatorio per ogni problema della società contemporanea.

Capitolo Quattro: Il caso italiano

Il responso elettorale alle elezioni politiche del 4 marzo 2018 ha sancito l'indiscusso successo della strategia di Matteo Salvini. Con il 17.4% dei voti, la Lega ha ottenuto il maggiore risultato nella sua storia trentennale. Per comprendere come la campagna anti-immigrazione della Lega abbia avuto un'influenza notevole sul voto degli italiani, è utile analizzare tre casi specifici: Ventimiglia, Macerata e Lampedusa. Questi tre comuni appartengono rispettivamente al Nord, al Centro e al Sud Italia e sono particolarmente rilevanti perché hanno subito gli effetti dell'immigrazione a partire dai primi anni settanta. Ogni caso si concentra su cinque variabili: la situazione della Lega alle elezioni

politiche del 2013; l'analisi delle ondate migratorie o altri eventi importanti tra il 2013 e il 2018; l'analisi dell'opinione pubblica prima del 4 marzo 2018; la campagna elettorale della Lega prima del 4 marzo 2018; il risultato della Lega dopo le elezioni politiche del 2018.

Ventimiglia è un comune ligure situato vicino alla frontiera con la Francia. La città ha sempre avuto una tradizione elettorale di destra, confermata anche dalle elezioni del 2013. Eppure, in quell'occasione, la Lega aveva ottenuto solo il 2,41%. La particolare collocazione geografica di Ventimiglia assume un ruolo rilevante in quanto conferisce alla città l'epiteto di terra di transito. Ciò significa che la volontà degli immigrati non è quella di rimanere in Italia, bensì quella di raggiungere altri Paesi. Tuttavia, la realtà è alquanto diversa. Fin dal 2014 la gendarmeria francese ha respinto numerosi migranti colti nel tentativo di superare il confine, trasformando la città in un centro di sosta. Nonostante le numerose proteste per il trattamento disumano ricevuto dagli immigrati e l'apertura di un nuovo centro di accoglienza, la situazione è rimasta invariata. Tutto questo ha inevitabilmente prodotto un rafforzamento di posizioni xenofobe. Gli investimenti del comune volti al miglioramento di queste circostanze, sono percepiti come uno spreco e molti sono convinti che un crescente numero di criminali si nasconda dietro l'appellativo di "immigrati". Inoltre, la città si sente abbandonata dal governo centrale ed ha perso ogni speranza. Perciò, durante la sua campagna elettorale, Salvini ha più volte promesso di liberare Ventimiglia dal flagello dell'immigrazione, rispedendo a casa coloro che sono privi di documenti. Inoltre, ha più volte accusato il governo vigente di disinteresse verso il proprio popolo, permettendo alle incessanti ondate di migranti di entrare nel territorio italiano senza alcuna supervisione. Di conseguenza, non stupisce vedere come alle elezioni del 4 marzo 2018 la coalizione di destra abbia ottenuto il 52,74% dei voti totali e in particolare la Lega il 29,66%.

Macerata è un comune marchigiano il cui orientamento politico è spesso cambiato nel corso degli anni. Alle elezioni del 2013 il centro-sinistra aveva ottenuto la maggioranza dei voti mentre la Lega appena lo 0,61%. Al contrario, le elezioni del 2018 hanno visto vincitrice la coalizione di centro-destra e in particolare la Lega con il 20,98%. Tale esito deve essere interpretato alla luce del considerevole aumento degli immigrati in città. Infatti, Macerata si trova in un territorio fortemente industrializzato che quindi richiede una grande manodopera. Tuttavia, questo ha portato anche allo stanziamento di numerosi clandestini che sono disoccupati e spesso coinvolti in attività legate alla criminalità organizzata e allo spaccio di droga. È in questo contesto che devono essere interpretate tragedie come l'omicidio di Pamela Mastropietro e il successivo raid razzista di Luca Traini. Tali eventi hanno avuto un'ampia risonanza sull'opinione pubblica, specialmente in relazione ai problemi legati alla sicurezza dei cittadini maceratesi. Sfruttando ciò, Salvini è riuscito a presentare sé stesso e

il suo partito come l'unica forza in grado di garantire maggiore protezione agli Italiani, sottolineando come l'immigrazione fuori controllo porti al caos e alla violenza. In questo modo il leader leghista è riuscito ad ampliare il numero dei suoi sostenitori.

Lampedusa prende il nome dall'omonima isola situata nella parte più a sud dell'Italia. La sua prossimità alla Tunisia la rende il primo punto di approdo per i migranti d'oltremare e una terra di transito. La costante presenza di immigrati fin dai primi anni novanta, giustifica la tradizione elettorale di destra del comune. Tuttavia, alle elezioni del 2013, nonostante la vittoria della coalizione di destra, la Lega aveva ottenuto appena lo 0,15%. Con l'aumento dei flussi migratori anche il numero dei tragici episodi legati alle traversate del Mediterraneo è diventato una costante. Non tutti comprendono però le reali dinamiche di questo fenomeno, anche se molti sostengono che uno dei motivi principali è l'interesse dei privati nell'accaparrarsi i fondi pubblici. Per questo Salvini, durante la sua campagna elettorale, ha più volte sottolineato l'intenzione di chiudere i porti alle imbarcazioni delle ONG. Inoltre, la crescente percezione di degrado sull'isola ha spinto il leader leghista a sfruttare di nuovo il tema della sicurezza. Spesso si è riferito all'immigrazione come un'invasione fuori controllo, ignorando i dati statistici che invece dimostrano una diminuzione nel numero degli immigrati. Sicuramente, una delle strategie vincenti adottate da Salvini è stata la decisione di trasformare la Lega da un partito regionalista ad uno nazionalista, acquisendo una nuova porzione dell'elettorato italiano. In questo modo, alle elezioni del 2018 la Lega è riuscita a guadagnare il 14,65%.

Conclusione

I tre casi sopracitati sono rappresentativi della tendenza elettorale a cui l'Italia sta assistendo in questo momento. La crescente presenza di immigrati nel Paese sta alimentando forti sentimenti xenofobi basati sulla classica retorica del populismo radicale di destra. In questo modo la Lega adotta una forma di nazionalismo banale, promuovendo un'identità nazionale fondata su ideali etnocentrici. Dunque la concezione del populismo radicale di destra come "ideologia sottile" si adatta perfettamente al caso della Lega, il cui recente successo riflette quello di partiti simili nel resto d'Europa. Grazie alle sue capacità comunicative e allo sfruttamento del malcontento generale legato all'immigrazione, Salvini ha dimostrato di essere un leader carismatico in grado di rompere le barriere della Padania e attrarre nuovi sostenitori. Tuttavia, questa strategia fortemente anti-immigrazione sta giustificando i sempre più frequenti comportamenti razzisti e xenofobi verso chi è considerato "diverso". Al giorno d'oggi l'Italia sembra essere tornata ad un'epoca di separazione, esclusione e

distinzione basate semplicemente sulla definizione di chi merita di essere incluso nella società e chi no.