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Building Party Electoral Strategy:

Rival Theories Tested on the 2018 Italian General Election

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"Devi fare ciò che ti fa stare bene"

Alla LUISS Guido Carli, per avermi dato i migliori anni.

Alla mia famiglia, per avermi sempre supportato.

A BIP, per avermi sempre sopportato.

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Introduction

On March 4th, 2018, Italy held its 18th general political elections. The results of this electoral round were considered shocking by many commentators. After decades of bipolarism, the 2013 elections brought to the birth of a tripolar political system, which was consolidated in 2018, with some additional changes. On March 5th the electoral results clearly showed that the center-left – which had governed Italy during the last legislature – came out of the polls extremely weakened, with its lowest result in the history of Italy. At the same time, Forza Italia, a traditional mainstream liberal party, lost the leadership of the center-right coalition to the Lega, a former regionalist-independentist party, now led by Matteo Salvini who renewed it as a nationalist radical-right party. However, the absolute winner of this electoral round was the Five Stars Movement, the movement-party created by comedian Beppe Grillo and web entrepreneur Gianroberto Casaleggio, animated by a rhetoric of moral restoration of politics.

The new Italian electoral law, the Rosatellum, established a mixed electoral system, with 61% of seats being assigned proportionally, 37% being assigned on a uninominal constituency basis, and the remaining 2% being assigned proportionately to the votes from Italians living abroad. Even if this new electoral system was born with the idea of granting a parliamentary majority without distorting the representation of the popular vote, the Parliament that came out of this consultation did not have a clear majority in either chamber. In fact, the Five Stars Movement has roughly 32% of seats in both chambers, the Democratic Party has 18%, the Lega has 17%, Forza Italia has 14%, and the remaining seats are divided among smaller parties. This repartition of seats did not allow any government to be formed by a pre-existing coalition. In fact, not even the center-right, being the most voted coalition, could reach a majority with its 35.73% of votes. This brought to a long period of negotiations between the different parties, controlled and encouraged by Sergio Mattarella, the President of the Italian Republic. Eventually, on June 1st, a coalition government composed of the Five Stars Movement and the Lega was formed.

Another interesting feature of this electoral round was an extremely high rate of electoral volatility. In fact, in 2018, 28% of Italian voters supported a different party than in the 2013 elections. This was the third highest rate of electoral volatility in Italian electoral history, only being surpassed by the 2013 round (with 39.1%), the first political election for the Five Stars Movement, and the 1994 one (with 36.7%), when Berlusconi's Forza Italia entered the political arena. Such a high number of voters switching sides denotes an astonishing change in the electorate's and partisan positioning and, considering that both the 2018 and the 2013 elections were characterized by high volatility, it raises the question of how long it will take for the political scenario to stabilize again.

Because of these major changes undergone by the Italian political scenario on this occasion, the 2018 elections constitute an extremely interesting case study for political party strategy analysis. In fact, as this research will

point out, the Democratic Party, under the leadership of Matteo Renzi, has changed its positioning moving towards the center and its electorate has changed as well. At the same time, the Lega has gained new supporters, especially because in the years during which Matteo Salvini has led the party, it has changed its rhetoric from that of a regionalist party to that of a nationalist radical-right one. In this context, the Five Stars Movement has developed a strategy that allowed it to become the first Italian party taking voters from both the left and the right building a rhetoric based on non-ideological themes.

In order to carry out a sound analysis of the parties' electoral strategies in these elections, this research will be based on three fundamental theories of this field. The first is Anthony Downs' *Median Voter Theorem*, which is based on a spatial conception of electoral competition and, given some assumptions, supposes that parties, in order to maximize their votes, should converge towards the position of the median voter. However, Donald Stokes identified several axioms on which this theory stands, which undermine its validity. In criticizing Downs' theory, Stokes introduces a new type of issue that can be used by parties in their electoral campaigns, which falls outside the scope of the Median Voter Theorem. These are called *valence issues*, matters which find such a high consensus in the electorate, and such a coincidence of partisan positions, that voters do not worry about what party proposes the best solution for a problem. Rather, on these matters, voters consider which party is more credible and is best equipped to deal with the issues. Hence, these theories provide us with two different categories of issues. On the one side, we find *positional issues*, on which parties take different positions and compete by arguing that their solution is the best one, on the other side, we have *valence issues*, on which parties have to demonstrate their credibility and fitness in dealing with a subject. Finally, the third theory that this analysis will be based on is that of *issue yield*. This theory is based on public opinion data and provides us with a value going from 0 to 1 that allows us to understand how electorally profitable an issue-goal is for a party. This depends on the credibility that the party has on that issue (both in the eyes of the general public and in those of its core electorate), on the support that a party has in the electorate, and the support found by a given solution to that issue in the public. Hence, the theory of issue yield assumes that each party is able to decide its electoral strategy in a rational manner by picking which issues to campaign on, based on their convenience in terms of electoral support. This theory allows us to determine if a party finds more support using valence or positional issues and if it acted strategically in its electoral campaign. Most importantly, issue yield theory allows comparative analyses of electoral competitions and party strategies.

Starting from these theories, I will carry out an analysis of the electoral strategies of the seven major parties that ran for these elections: the Democratic Party, the Five Stars Movement, Forza Italia, the Lega, Fratelli d'Italia, Liberi e Uguali, and +Europa. This analysis will aim at testing the following two propositions:

Proposition 1: Mainstream parties run their electoral campaigns on valence issues and avoid positional issues, while challenger parties run their campaigns on positional issues.

Proposition 2: Parties run their electoral campaigns strategically, by emphasizing issues with high yield and avoiding those with low yield.

To do this, using CISE's survey data, I will focus on the support of the electorate for several issues, I will present which issues were prioritized by the public, and I will also look at the issue yield opportunities for each of these parties. To test proposition 1, using data from CISE's content analysis of these parties' Twitter accounts, I will illustrate which issues were emphasized by the different parties. Finally, to test the second proposition, I will analyze the issue yield of each issue in relation to how much they were emphasized by parties.

This research is structured as follows: the first chapter is dedicated to a contextual overview of the Italian political scenario before and after the election, the second chapter will focus on presenting the relevant literature on party strategy, the third chapter will present the analysis of the Italian parties' strategies for their 2018 electoral campaigns. Conclusions will follow.

Chapter 1: The context around the March 4th Elections

The objective of this analysis is to determine if the Italian parties in the 2018 elections have reasoned strategically in their twitter electoral campaign. This will be determined by testing the results of the content analysis of their Twitter accounts in the electoral campaign period against some theories elaborated by electoral scholars. In particular, we will look at their focus on positional and/or valence issues (Stokes, 1963) and at whether or not their strategy was coherent with the issue yield theory (De Sio & Weber, 2014). In order to carry on this analysis, it is important to analyze the context in which this election took place. This will be done in this chapter.

The 2018 Italian political elections present features that confirm the rupture that was established by the previous electoral round. This rupture is shown by a high value of electoral volatility (26.7%) and by the consolidation of a tripolar system, which was first created in 2013 with the entrance of the 5 Star Movement (M5S) in the legislative chambers. In fact, the 2013 elections first, and the 2018 ones after, established the third political system that Italy has seen in its democratic history. The first one was characterized by the domination of politics by the Christian Democracy. The second one, starting in 1994, featured the bipolar competition between center-left and center-right. Now, the current system entails a tripolar competition and, within it, we observe a significant change of balance of powers between the existing parties and coalitions. In fact, as shown by the electoral results, traditional parties such as the Democratic Party (PD) and Berlusconi's Forza Italia (FI) have lost much of their support, while newer rival parties such as the M5S and the Lega gathered an unprecedented number of votes. Not only were the 2018 elections an important event because of the shift in votes to newer parties, but they were also characterized by a strong regionalization of votes. To simplify this concept, it could be said that the center-right won in the North and the former Red-Zone, and the M5S won in the South. The main loser was the Center-Left who lost votes in every part of Italy except for the richer neighborhoods of bigger cities.

This chapter aims at establishing the contextual basis necessary for the analysis of these elections. In the first section, the focus will be on one fundamental novelty of this electoral round: the new electoral law and its effects. The second section will look at the change of the previous governmental party, Matteo Renzi's PD, in an effort to analyze the development of its positioning and strategy. The third section will focus on the evolution of the M5S from an opposition anti-establishment movement party, to an institutionalized and potentially governmental party. The fourth section will focus on the development of Matteo Salvini's Lega from a regionalist and independentist party to a national anti-immigration radical right party. The fifth section will look at the electoral volatility observed in this last election and analyze electoral flows from 2013 to 2018. Finally, the sixth section will conclude the chapter.

1.The “Rosatellum”: the umpteenth Italian electoral law

Those that in 1992 were already eligible to vote in political elections, in only 26 years have been summoned to the polls with four different electoral systems. These numerous changes were due to the evolution of several political and social interests and necessities, which often brought incumbent parties to develop electoral laws that could favor them in the following elections.

The 2013 elections had clearly shown how, in the newborn tripolar system, an electoral law which entails a large majority award produces distortions of representation so consistent that it would be considered unconstitutional. It was however also clear that in such tripolar setting a proportional electoral system would not have given the certainty of a parliamentary majority. Adding these complications to the political interests of the different parties, the solution that was found was the electoral law presented by PD's member of Parliament Ettore Rosato.

The so-called Rosatellum entails a mixed electoral system with a prevailing proportional component. 37% of the seats are assigned through uninominal constituencies while the remaining seats are assigned proportionately to parties who have obtained more than 3% of votes (and to coalitions who obtain more than 10%). This law also entails the possibility of a majority award for the winning coalition if it obtains at least 38-40% of the votes, if it surpasses the second coalition by at least 8%, and if the distribution of votes is homogeneous throughout the national territory.

The interesting aspect of the Italian scenario is that with the distribution of votes that was registered on March 4th, 2018 a majority could not have been reached by any electoral law. In fact, a study conducted by YouTrend after the elections (Borghese, 2018) proved that no existing electoral system could have brought to a majority in the two chambers of parliament.

One effect that the Rosatellum was expected to have on the electoral race was the development of a bi-level form of campaign. Party leaders would have had to campaign nationally for the promotion of their party in the proportional component of the vote while uninominal candidates would have had to campaign locally to gain the votes of their constituency. Nevertheless, this did not seem to happen as local campaigns never really sparked off, probably because of the short time that passed between the required official presentation of the lists to the election day (Diamanti, 2018).

In conclusion, Rosato's electoral law did not seem to have a major influence on this electoral round. The lack of a definitive majority would have occurred with any other electoral system and the campaign style that parties adopted did not seem to change accordingly to the new mixed system.

2. The New Democratic Party

Recent chronicle of the party. The Democratic Party constituted the major party of the government coalitions of the 17th legislature. The first one, under the leadership of Prime Minister Enrico Letta, was a coalition supported by the PD, Berlusconi's Popolo della Libertà, and other minor centrist parties. The second one, headed by Matteo Renzi as Prime Minister, was a coalition made up of the PD and other small centrist parties. Renzi's government ended with his resignation, which followed the loss of the constitutional referendum of December 4, 2016. After Renzi's resignation, the role of President of the Council of Ministers was given to Paolo Gentiloni, whose government was supported by the same parties as Renzi's.



The Democratic Party's electoral appeal, after peaking in 2014 with a result of 40.8% at the European Parliamentary elections, had reached a very low point in 2018, in fact, pre-election surveys were registering an appeal lower than 25%. Nevertheless, Gentiloni was seen as a trustworthy politician and as a mending figure in Italian politics, and his approval ratings maintained a fairly high level up to the formation of the new government.

Overall, the PD got to the 2018 elections facing several difficulties, both political ones, and ones regarding its image. It had to pay the price for being the incumbent in a period of economic hardship and had to endure criticism due to accusations of corruption (ANSA, 2017) and of lack of democracy within the party (La Repubblica, 2018).

The party's electorate. The structure of the PD's electorate has changed drastically in the last decade. In fact, the party under Renzi's leadership has tried to shift its position in a left-right spectrum, converging towards the center. This, in the 2018 elections, has brought new supporters towards the party while making it lose some of the more traditional leftist voters. First of all, it has lost the support of civil servants, which used to constitute a fundamental basis for the electoral support of the Italian center-left (Cavallaro, et al., 2018). Secondly, it's been observed that the PD has become the party of the élites (De Sio, 2018). In fact, the only party for which

the propensity to vote for in the last elections was influenced by social class was the Democratic Party. In 2018, contrarily to the past, the party was not supported by the working and lower-middle class, but it was the most supported party by higher classes. Data show that in this electoral round the PD was confined to represent the middle-higher stratum of Italian society, coherently with the party's campaign that pushed on civil and social rights, technological development, European integration, and globalization. However, this strategy probably had the effect of marginalizing, even more, the rest of the electorate. Nevertheless, the PD remained popular with older age groups (65-74 and >75 years old), who are usually less volatile in terms of voting (Maggini, 2018) and probably remained attached to the leftist party they used to support in the past. In addition, this party found some support in the youngest age group (18-24), who voted for the PD slightly more than the average of the whole population (Maggini, 2018). In addition, the Democratic Party had above-average support from university graduates (Cavallaro, et al., 2018).

Differing from the other leftist party that was running from elections, *Liberi e Uguali* (LEU), the Democratic Party's electorate showed higher levels of optimism, trust towards political institutions and of approval for the leadership of Matteo Renzi (Passarelli & Tuorto, 2018).

The leader. Even if the Democratic Party is extremely personalized around the figure of Matteo Renzi, the electoral campaign of the PD played on a strategic ambiguousness on the party's candidate for the office Prime Minister. In fact, as party secretary, the rules of the Democratic Party's statute identify Renzi as the automatic candidate for the role. However, given the low appeal he had, and the high opinion that Italians had of Paolo Gentiloni, as March 4th was getting closer, the PD opened up the possibility of a candidacy of Gentiloni (Diamanti, 2018). Nevertheless, the role of Renzi during the campaign was fundamental. His communication quick and direct style was adaptable to both social media and TV "zapping". The frequency of his appearances rose as the elections approached and his style became, at the same time, critic of his adversaries and calm and reflexive (Diamanti & Carone, 2018).

The electoral campaign. The PD's electoral campaign revolved around the message that the Democratic Party is the only credible and competent political force that could offer Italy a responsible government. To do this, their communication aimed at exalting the results obtained by the previous PD governments. Their advertisement campaign revolved around different themes: science, environment, culture, European integration, civil rights, and labor market. Their social media usage was complex, aggressive and focused on exalting the figure of Matteo Renzi as a leader. Eventually, only towards the end of the electoral campaign, their social media pages become more sober and institutional (Diamanti & Carone, 2018).

3.The institutionalized Five Stars Movement

Recent chronicle of the party. The M5S was born in 2005 when the whole movement was connected to the figure of Italian comedian "Beppe Grillo". At their origin, they only ran for local administrative councils with



lists called “Amici di Beppe Grillo” (Friends of Beppe Grillo). Then, after the development of a more rigid and centralized structure, the party ran for the 2013 political elections and was recognized as the true winner of that electoral round with 25.5% of votes, becoming the first party in the legislative chambers. In this legislature, after refusing to build a coalition government with the Democratic Party, their approval ratings dropped to their lowest (18.3%). In the European Parliament elections in 2014, the Movement did not reach the desired results, losing around 2.5 Million voters. In Parliament, the M5S developed a strategy of constant opposition work against the government, often converging with the positions of the Lega on issues like European Integration. Grillo’s movement rose again in 2016 when Virginia Raggi and Chiara Appendino were elected mayors of, respectively, Rome and Turin, both beating PD’s candidates. In the fall of 2017, the M5S became the first Italian party in terms of approval ratings, it kept growing and eventually managed to increase its appeal throughout the last weeks before the vote.

The party’s electorate. The 5 Stars Movement’s electorate has undergone some changes since the last electoral round, but mainly it has increased in number and variety of voters. In fact, while it was the most voted party by the younger generations in 2013, in the last elections, the M5S became the party of the middle age groups (Maggini, 2018). In addition, the Movement gained most of its new voters in the southern regions of the peninsula, gained some in the central regions, and maintained approximately the same number of supporters in the North (Biorcio & Ceccarini, 2018).

In terms of educational levels, the Movement, in the different categories of the electorate, gathered shares of votes that are very similar to that of the whole population, which goes to show the complex and variegated structure of its electorate. The same is observable when considering the distribution of votes by occupational categories. The M5S, in fact, had the more than 20% of support in all occupational categories (except for pensioners, who remain loyal to the PD), even reaching more than 30% with students, salaried workers and unemployed individuals (Cavallaro, et al., 2018).

Most of the 5 Stars Movement's electoral basis did not accept to identify itself on the left-right axis, but the party also managed to find some support with individuals claiming to identify as leftists or rightists. In general, research showed that their voters held negative views about the current economic context and were pessimistic about its future. They also believed that politicians should be distrusted because they do not "listen to the people" and that corruption is a fundamental issue within the Italian political system (Biorcio & Ceccarini, 2018).

The leader. In this last electoral round, compared to 2013, the figure of Beppe Grillo had moved into the background, as Luigi Di Maio was elected political leader of the movement with 82,7% of the votes, through an online primary election in September 2018. Throughout the electoral campaign, Di Maio's calm and reassuring character was alternated with the inflammatory and revolutionary one of Alessandro Di Battista. This way, through Di Maio, the party aimed at attracting new voters who may have been worried about the exaggeratedly pugnacious character of the M5S, without losing their more combative supporters, that were kept close thanks to the figure of Di Battista (Diamanti, 2018).

Di Maio was (and still is) in fact recognized as the face of the moderate and institutionalized faction of the M5S. Through him, the Movement's choice was clearly one of abandonment of the anti-systemic and anti-establishment rhetoric of the past, towards a more responsible and governmental positioning. He is not an inflammatory speaker, but he is able to both answer question punctually and ironically and to make deeper reflections, qualities that make him a good guest for TV political talk shows and even morning shows. Both his appearance and his communication style are refined, elegant and calm which allowed him to appear as a fresh face, rather than an inexperienced figure, also gaining the support of voters much older than him. When his adversaries criticized him for his never-obtained law degree, they discovered that such a strategy would backfire, as this was not an issue citizen were worried about. Indeed, this made him even more appealing to the electorate as it made him appear as man closer to the people and further from the élites (Diamanti & Carone, 2018).

The electoral campaign. The Five Stars Movement electoral campaign was strongly influenced by the character of its leader. Its message was one of reassurance and calm, encrusted by moments of stark criticism of its adversaries. Rally meetings were alternated by TV appearances with an approach which leaned towards moderation, but never by open debates with opposers. The M5S presented itself as an alternative governmental force, not anymore as anti-establishment one, but it maintained claims of honesty, participation, and refusal of professional politics. As said earlier, their campaign was bi-level, Di Battista maintained the consensus of existing supporters while Di Maio approached a broader electorate. In the meantime, Beppe Grillo remained in the background and detached himself from the movement.

The M5S's particular campaign move that is worth mentioning was the announcement of the Di Maio's candidates for the different ministerial roles the week before the electoral race. These announcements were

spread throughout the week and were always done on live TV. This choice, even if not institutionally correct, allowed the M5S three fundamental advantages: firstly, their positioning was remarked by the high profile and lack of political affiliation of their candidates, secondly, Di Maio was able to underline its political independence from “old politics”, and, most importantly, the Five Stars Movement controlled the media agenda of the last week before the election. The candidates were all high-profile professionals, academics or experts of their respective domains, giving even more credibility to Di Maio’s promise of stability and reassurance (Diamanti & Carone, 2018).

Overall, the Five Stars Movement’s campaign managed to cater to angry and disillusioned Italians, balancing their classical anti-political discourse with a more governmental rhetoric.

4. The Nationalized Lega



Recent chronicle of the party. The 2013 elections represented for the “Northern League”, former name of the party, a moment of true electoral hardship. In fact, the party had lost support even in the regions where it was best-established, such as Lombardy and Veneto. However, the party changed leadership with the primary election of Matteo Salvini, who, in October 2013 got 80,2% of the votes, beating former leader and founder of the Lega Nord Umberto Bossi.

With Salvini as the head of the party, the Lega quickly changes themes and rhetoric. It goes from being a secessionist and localist party to a Eurosceptic, anti-immigration, nationalist one. This process of nationalization of the party brings to the presentation of the lists “Noi con Salvini” several of which run for elections in the southern regions of Italy. In 2015, the Lega reconfirms the administration of Veneto, pivotally supports the center-right coalition for the administration of Liguria and becomes the second or third most voted party in Tuscany, Umbria, and Marche, three regions of the classic “Red Zone”.

The Lega has hence become a nationalized party, far from the localism that used to characterize its rhetoric. This culminates in 2018 when the official name of the party loses the word “Nord” and runs in the political elections simply as “Lega”. This key decision allows Salvini to gain 17% of the votes and to become the second biggest parliamentary group. A true historical record for the Lega.

The party's electorate. The electoral success of the Lega is a clear consequence of the radical transformation that its electorate has undergone. Some have in fact observed that, as of now, the Lega's electorate has a socio-demographic composition that is very similar to that of traditional leftist parties. His support comes mainly from salaried workers, but Salvini has also found fertile electoral grounds in civil servants, entrepreneurs, self-employed workers, unemployed individuals and students (Cavallaro, et al., 2018).

In terms of age, Salvini's party has catered mostly to people from 35 to 54 years of age but has remained under the average with voters from 18-24 and with older generations (Maggini, 2018).

An interesting feature of the Lega's electorate is that there is an important divergence between the beliefs and priorities of loyal Lega's voters and those of voters that crossed the party's logo for the first time in 2018. In fact, even though immigration is considered as the most important issue by both groups, there is division on other issues. Loyal Lega voters prioritize fiscal issues as they want lower taxes, while newcomers are worried about unemployment. There is also a significant difference in their view of European integration. 39% of loyal voters believe that European integration is bad for the economy, while “only” 31% of newcomers share the same opinion. Hence, Salvini and his party will have to make careful political decisions, as any move they make might bring to a significant loss of electoral support (Passarelli & Tuorto, 2018).

The leader. Matteo Salvini is recognized by most political commentators as the best communicator in the last electoral campaign, or at least as the most revolutionary one. Partly, this was because he did not try to develop a presidential figure. On the contrary, he portrayed himself as someone that was like any regular Joe, as a man of the people, wearing sweaters instead of suits during public appearances and not being afraid to speak his mind. He often used a direct and aggressive communication style characterized by harsh and borderline metaphors that easily attracted media attention and controlled the media agenda. Daily attacking his long list of adversaries on a personal basis, Salvini also managed to polarize public opinion on their reputation. Another fundamental quality that helped him throughout his electoral campaign was his ability to quickly intervene on current events giving controversial opinions and proposing, sometimes shocking, solutions to these problems (Diamanti & Carone, 2018).

The electoral campaign. Considering that the center-right coalition did not nominate a candidate for the role of Prime Minister before the elections, it was normal that all of the three parties included in it had a very personalized and leader-centered campaign. In fact, when forming the coalition, Matteo Salvini, Giorgia Meloni, and Silvio Berlusconi had agreed that, after March 4th, the party with the highest number of votes would have presented a nominee for the candidacy that would have been supported by all three parties. Hence,

the goal of the Lega's campaign was obviously to receive as much electoral support as possible increasing the personal appeal of Salvini, with the aim of becoming the first party of the coalition (Diamanti, 2018).

The first fundamental feature of the 2018 Lega's electoral campaign was the evolution of the party from the regionalist approach of the former "Lega Nord" to the nationalist approach of the "Lega". This was not only done through the change of name but also through a different rhetoric that put "Italians first" and through the change of the party's color. In fact, all the materials distributed by the party (both online and offline) had as the prevalent color navy blue, abandoning the classic "Verde Lega" (Lega's green). This was not a random choice made by the party. In fact, blue was the color with which the center-right has been identified in the last two decades, and this color also recalls a nationalist message, as blue is also the color worn by all Italian national sports teams (Diamanti & Carone, 2018).

As mentioned, Salvini's communication firstly aimed at mobilizing voters and supporters. This was done mostly online, where Luca Morisi, Salvini's social media manager, developed a strategy capable of not only attracting the user's attention (sometimes through controversial content), but also to incite the user to interact with these contents. The use of micro-targeting tactics was fundamental in this strategy as it allowed Salvini to talk to his voters almost one on one. The best example of this type of campaign was the campaign #VinciSalvini (#WinSalvini). This was used by Salvini's team to make followers interact with his posts and pictures as much as possible, in the hope of winning the possibility to meet the Lega's leader in person. As a consequence, thousands of people interacted with his contents, creating a level of engagement that was unseen on social media in political campaigns so far (Diamanti & Carone, 2018).

In general, the Lega pushed on a rhetoric that related immigration to issues of security, making fear the main driver of their campaign. This seemed to pay off as the issue of immigration was the main theme of debate on the media for most of the electoral campaign. Salvini and the Lega represented themselves, not as a potential responsible alternative for government but as the only option that could save Italy from the Islamic invasion. In fact, Salvini ended his campaign swearing an oath on the Holy Gospel with a rosary in his hands. This remarked his adherence to the traditional Catholic view, but also portrayed him as a Christian defender of the Italian culture, again, protecting it from the Islamic invasion.

5. Electoral Volatility in 2018

As we have said, with the 2013 electoral round we observed the emergence of a third electoral pole, the 5 Stars Movement, which drastically changed the Italian political landscape. The 2018 election has not seen any big transformation in this sense, and it has maintained the same poles: the center-right, the center-left, and the M5S. In what looks like a more stabilized environment, voters have not yet found loyalty for any of these three

political formations. In fact, even if the percentage of loyal voters¹ has raised from 63% to 70%, overall electoral loyalty is not at all close to what it used to be in the first Republic when it oscillated between 84% and 90% (De Sio & Schadee, 2018).

Looking at the different factions, it seems that the center-left and the center-right are impermeable to each other, with neither one losing voters to the other, and reciprocal exchanges of voters between the two amounting to around 3%. The remaining 30% of voters that changed sides in the last elections can be divided into three main groups. The first group, accounting for one fourth, is made up of physiological voters exchanges between the parties outside of these two coalitions, the second group, accounting for another fourth of this electoral volatility, is due to the disappearance of former Prime Minister Mario Monti's party, and the last group, accounting for the last half of it, is due to the transversal dynamism of the 5 Stars Movement, which is able to steal votes from both the center-left and the center-right (De Sio & Schadee, 2018).

Electoral flows to, from and within the center-right. In the 2018 elections, the center-right was the electoral pole with the highest rate of loyal voters, as it managed to remobilize 85.4% of its voters (Carrieri, 2018). This was probably due to how the center-right coalition managed to diversify its offer, going from radical right nationalist positions (held by FDI and the Lega) to more liberal pro-European ones (held by Forza Italia and Noi con l'Italia). Their strategy was mostly successful in Northern Italy which, even if it usually was an area controlled by moderate rightist parties, this time awarded Salvini's Lega in spite of Berlusconi's Forza Italia (Gatti, 2018). In a similar pattern as the North, the center-right coalition parties managed to remobilize 90% of their voters in the former "Red Zone", with the Lega now having the upper hand over Forza Italia. Here, the Lega also managed to "steal" 15% of former M5S voters and convince 12.3% of former abstentionists to turn out to vote (Bianucci, 2018). However, the area where the center-right suffered the most is Southern Italy, where Forza Italia, which here managed to maintain its role of the main party of the coalition, was only able to remobilize 51.2% of its supporters and only 17.2% of former rightist voters supported the Lega or Fratelli d'Italia (Riggio, 2018).

Electoral flows to, from and within the center-left. The Democratic Party, the main component of the center-left coalition, only managed to maintain 54.7% of loyal voters in the whole Italian peninsula while losing 12.3% of former voters to the 5 Stars Movement (Carrieri, 2018). Its problem of remobilization was also probably due to the competition to its left created by Liberi e Uguali. The worst remobilization rates the center-left experienced was in Northern Italy, where the center-left coalition, only managed to remobilize 37% of its former voters, while only gaining half of former Monti supporters (Gatti, 2018). A better result was obtained in Southern Italy, where 46.8% of former voters remained with the PD (Riggio, 2018). Its best result, and at the same time the most disappointing one, was the 59% of loyal voters that the PD had in Central Italy, the

¹ With this term, we refer to voters who have supported the same factions in two or more subsequent electoral rounds.

former Red Zone. Here, the PD lost a total of 8% of former voters to LEU and +Europa, 9.1% to abstention, and 10.4% to the 5 Stars Movement, while only gaining 47.7% of former Monti supporters (Bianucci, 2018).

Electoral flows to and from the 5 Stars Movement. The 5 Stars Movement, thanks to its transversal political nature was able to gather votes from both the left and the right. This feature makes it look more and more similar to a nation-party which, thanks to its transversal reach, benefits greatly from electoral volatility. In general, it managed to maintain 71% of loyal voters and to attract first-time voters, making it the first party voted by this category (Carrieri, 2018). In Northern Italy, the 5 Stars Movement did not obtain extremely satisfying results. In fact, only 66.8% of their former voters remained loyal and, similarly to the Lega, the M5S seemed to be most effective at mobilizing former abstentionists (Gatti, 2018). In the former Red Zone, the Movement saw 65.2% of their voters confirm their support, losing 15.5% to the Lega and 9.2% to abstention. At the same time, in this area, it managed to attract 10.4% of former center-left voters and 6.9% of former center-right ones (Bianucci, 2018). The greatest success for the 5 Stars Movement was observed in Southern Italy, where it remobilized 76.9% of its former voters, gained 36.5% of new voters and 19.1% of former abstentionists (Riggio, 2018).

In conclusion, it should be noted that this election saw very high numbers of abstentionists choosing again not to turn out to vote and that, with such low loyalty rates, the 2018 electoral round was characterized by very high numbers of electoral volatility. In general, electoral flows show that the M5S gained most votes from its left while losing them to its right, and the Lega was able to steal more votes inside its coalition than from outside of it. Overall, observing these flows, it could be said that the median position of the electorate has shifted towards the right², with votes going from the Democratic Party to the 5 Stars Movement and from Forza Italia to the Lega (De Sio & Schadee, 2018).

Conclusion

As mentioned, the March 4th elections' outcome was not necessarily surprising for the Italian political landscape, rather, it was the consolidation of a change that had already begun with the elections of 2013. A form of tripolar political competition had already started in the last electoral round with the emergence of the M5S and in 2018 it conclusively took the place of the former bipolar competition characterized by the left-right rivalry. What was probably more surprising, but not unpredictable, was the change in the balance of powers within the center-right, which saw Matteo Salvini's Lega overthrow the primacy of Berlusconi's Forza Italia. The balance of powers changed also in the center-left, where Renzi lost most of his former supporters

² This consideration is based on a simplification of the political position of the 5 Stars Movement on a left-right spectrum, as done by De Sio & Schadee (2018)

and where *Liberi e Uguali*, a former faction of Democratic Party, managed to take away some of the PD supporters.

Looking at the effects of the new electoral law, it seems that parties did not modify their electoral campaign style and strategy. The campaigns of the main parties remained on a national level, even if the new electoral regime established that 1/3 of seats in Parliament were to be assigned on a uninominal constituency basis. This was unexpected, as with smaller majoritarian constituencies we should have observed more local campaigns.

When we analyze the electoral campaigns of the three parties that gained the most votes, this outcome acquires even more plausibility. While the Democratic Party was moving towards themes that are dearer to the élites, hence losing the support of its traditional voters, the M5S was capitalizing on a widespread anti-establishment sentiment and the Lega was gathering support thanks to its masterful creation of a frame where immigration was seen as an emergency to be fought for the very survival of the nation. Adding this to Renzi's low approval ratings, the fall of the PD is easily explainable. For what concerns the Lega overtaking Forza Italia, other than Berlusconi's health issues that prevented him from doing a full-fledged electoral campaign, the merits should be given to Matteo Salvini's communication style. Being so direct and often controversial, allowed him to control the media agenda and to polarize public opinion around his figure, making him the most prominent politician during the electoral campaign.

In an election characterized by such a high rate of electoral volatility, such instability was to be expected. Overall, this election has been part of a process that drastically changed the Italian political scenario, but rather than seeing it as an earthquake it would probably be more appropriate to interpret it as the aftershock of the 2013 elections.

After having viewed the contextual scenario in which these elections took place, in the next chapter we will move on to a literature review presenting the main political science theories on which our analysis will be based.

Chapter 2: The literature on party strategy

In order to carry on our analysis of Twitter strategies of the different Italian parties for the 2018 elections, we need to first develop a framework of relevant literature on party strategy. In fact, while it is true that parties may not always behave strategically and rationally, studies regarding the supply side of policies have been developed for several decades. Interestingly, many of them have contrasting features, at least in some instances.

Generally, we are used to conceiving the political space as a spectrum going from left to right. Historically, this distinction has been fairly accurate. We used to have communist parties on the extreme left and fascist parties on the extreme right of the spectrum. This view has been hardly contestable for many decades in most Western countries. Italy was no exception, and its political scenario was dominated by the Communist Italian Party (PCI) on the left, and the Christian Democracy (DC) on the right, with some smaller parties in between these two and to their sides. The same idea of a left-right spectrum remained even in the “Second Republic” with Berlusconi’s Forza Italia on the right and with different evolutions of leftist coalitions on the left.

On the basis of this left-right spectrum, political science scholars developed several theories, some of which are going to be analyzed in this chapter. In particular, we will look at Anthony Downs’ *Median Voter Theorem* (Downs, 1957) which looks at the political space as a unidimensional one where parties should ideally converge towards the center to maximize their support. We will then look at Donald Stokes’ theory of *valence* issues (Stokes, 1963), which identifies a particular type of issues which unhinges the assumptions on which the Downsian theory is based. Finally, we will look at the theory of *issue yield* (De Sio & Weber, 2014; De Sio, et al., 2016; De Sio, et al., 2018), which is not based on an idea of a unidimensional political space, and claims that, rationally, parties should cherry-pick the issues to campaign on keeping in mind that they need to attract new voters while maintaining credibility in the eyes of their core electorate.

Considering the goal of this research, these theories are of pivotal importance because, as mentioned, the analysis that will follow in the last chapter will be testing them against the strategies put in play by Italian parties in their 2018 Twitter electoral campaigns. In particular, we will focus on their use of positional and valence issues and on their coherence with the issue yield theory. Moreover, issue yield theory is extremely valuable as it provides a useful tool to comparatively assess electoral competition, allowing comparison of both the contexts of different elections and of different parties within the same electoral round. In addition to this, the relevance of these theories is due to the fact that they provide a thorough and extended understanding of the literature on political party strategy.

1. The Downsian Median Voter Theorem

In 1957, Anthony Downs published the book “*An Economic Theory of Democracy*”, a volume destined to become extremely successful in the field of electoral studies. His theory was based on the work of economist Harold Hotelling (1929), who had developed an ingenious model for which, in a given market³, two competing firms would have to converge towards the center, in adjacent positions, in order to maximize their sales. For instance, supposing that a market develops on the length of a single street on which the public is homogeneously distributed along, and assuming that demand is inelastic, two ice-cream shops offering the same product for the same price would have to move towards the central point of the street. This would be because, in the eyes of the public, the most convenient ice-cream would be the one offered by the closest shop. For this reason, it would make no sense for either one to not be positioned in the middle of the market. This situation, with the two shops being placed at the center, would create a Nash equilibrium because neither of them could move in any way to unilaterally augment its sales.

Downs applied this idea to the political arena. Imagining that parties, in order to maximize their electoral support, would have to converge towards the center in an effort to establish a Nash equilibrium. For the sake of the explanation, Downs illustrates the political space as determined by only one dimension, that of political intervention in the economy. To the extreme left we would have total government control while to the extreme right we would have a total absence of political intervention (Figure 1).

In order for his theory to work, Downs lays down three fundamental assumptions. The first, as mentioned, is that the political conflict can be summarized in a single spatial dimension, in this case, one of state intervention in the economy. The second assumption is that each voter has a clear position on the issue, which puts him on a precise spot on this spectrum. The final assumption is that parties are only interested in maximizing their electoral support. Starting from these axioms, in a bipartisan system, it would only be logical and rational for parties to converge towards the position of the median voter, so that they can have roughly half of the electorate to their left, and half to their right (Figure 1). Downs also accounted for the elasticity of electoral demand, understanding that if “extremist” voters feel that parties are too far away from them, they might just not turn out to vote. This would have consequences on the electoral turnout as voters would not feel represented, but it would not affect the final result of the election as it would have equally damaging effects on both sides. This model would also work in a system with a multi-modal distribution, because each party would position itself under on the spot corresponding to one of the two modes (Figure 2) and, in the case where there are more than two modes, the political competition would stimulate the development of a multiparty system (Figure 3).

³ Here, “market” is intended in its physical connotation of a place where one can go to buy goods.

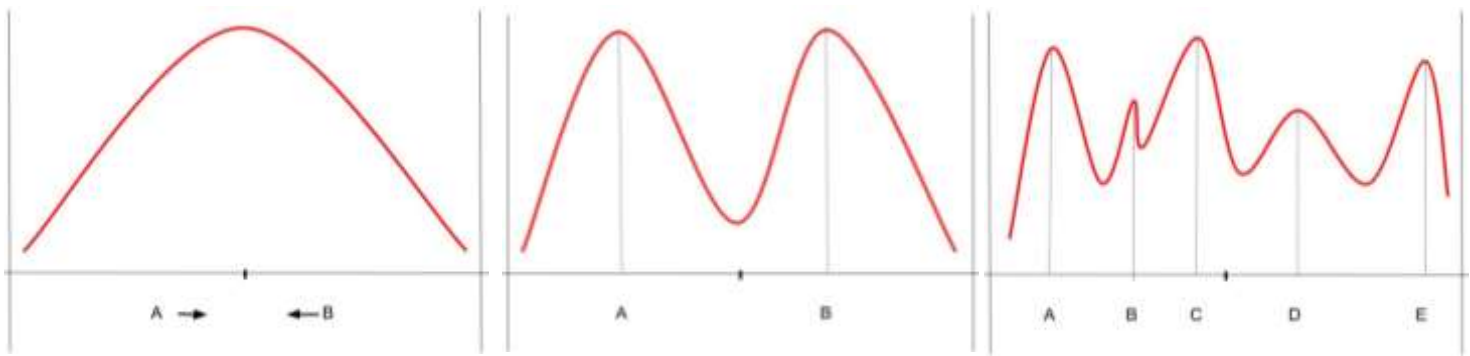


Figure 1 Party behavior in a unimodal electoral distribution

Figure 2 Party behavior in a bimodal electoral distribution

Figure 3 Party behavior in a multimodal electoral distribution

Stokes's critiques to the Downsian model. In his revolutionary paper on the matter, Stokes (1963) puts forward several critiques to Downs's theory. In particular, he focuses on 4 axioms that are at the basis of his theory. The first is the axiom of *unidimensionality*. In fact, as we previously said, Downs simplifies political competition by depicting it as a unidimensional concept. Even if that might be acceptable for illustration, this biases the whole understanding of political competition, because knowing a person's position on one issue does not tell us his position on separate ones. For instance, knowing that an individual is a liberal in terms of his stance on the welfare state, we cannot infer his position on other unrelated issues such as foreign policy.

The second axiom criticized by Stokes is the one of *fixed structure*. As a matter of fact, contrarily to Hotelling's market, the political arena is not built on a stable physical structure. This means that different dimensions of politics will be salient to the electorate at different times. Stokes rightfully states that a fundamental ability of political leaders must be to know "what issue dimensions are salient to the electorate or can be made salient by suitable propaganda" (Stokes, 1963).

The third critique he moves to Downs's theory is on the axiom of *ordered dimensions*. In fact, for this model to work, there must be a salient dimension of conflict where parties and voters can be placed on different spots of the spectrum. The only problem with this is that many of the issues presented in the political debate are not ones on which different parties and voters have dissenting positions. Stokes makes the example of the issue of corruption as it was used in the Eisenhower 1952 presidential campaign. In that occasion, obviously, both Republicans and Democrats agreed that corruption was to be fought, but Eisenhower had more credibility on the issue and exploited it. This type of issue on which virtually everybody agrees, are defined by Stokes as *valence issues* and we will get to them in detail in the next section.

Finally, Stokes points out that the Downsian model cannot work because of its axiom of *common reference*. This model, in fact, rests on the assumption that, even when giving the same salience to issues, parties and voters perceive them in the same way. Stokes here presents a disillusioned view, claiming that the public is often not rational because it makes decisions based on perceptions, and, even if parties may decide strategically

which issues to emphasize, it is not granted that the electorate will look at these issues in a rational way. This view also holds in the opposite direction, and Stokes claims that often parties perceive the behavior of the public in an unrealistic way. In addition, perception can be manipulated by political actors through framing processes which aim at presenting an issue within a context that modifies how the public looks at it.

These four critiques shake the very core of the Median Voter Theorem, rendering it a brilliant model in theory, but one that is hardly applicable to real-life political scenarios. Nevertheless, Downs' theory presents us with the possibility of looking at the political arena as a spectrum, a simplification that makes electoral strategy analysis incredibly versatile.

2. Stokes' valence issues and their consequences on electoral studies

In his 1963 paper, Donald Stokes presented his criticism of the Median Voter Theorem. In pointing out the fallacies of this model's underlying axioms, in particular, the axiom of *ordered dimensions*, he mentions the 1952 electoral campaign. This election saw Democratic candidate Adlai Stevenson running against Republican candidate Dwight Eisenhower. Many commentators of the time believed that the election was going to be easily won by the Democratic party. This was because this election came after the three Roosevelt administrations and the Truman one, during which the American economy had lived a period of regrowth, mostly thanks to the Democratic "New Deal" plan. In this context, it was believed that Eisenhower could do very little to prevent American voters from continuing to support Democratic policies.

In order to prevent this from happening, Eisenhower's campaign focused on three main themes or, rather, on fighting three wars: against Korea, against Corruption, and against Communism. This campaign is also known as the K1C2 formula, and it revolved completely around these three truly heart-felt issues for the American public. These were not only targeting a group of voters but a large majority of the electorate. Korea was important because the Korean conflict was enduring with many casualties and very little progress for the American army. Communism was a salient issue because, in the heat of the Cold War, every American lived in fear of Soviet espionage and nuclear threats. Finally, corruption was relevant in the eyes of the public because the Truman administration was shaken by several scandals of this type. Campaigning on these issues, and exploiting his popularity as an "immensely popular military figure who was seen in wholly non-ideological terms" (Stokes, 1963), Eisenhower managed to bring the electorate on his side, winning with 55.2% of the popular vote.

The definition of "valence issue". Korea, Corruption and Communism were at the time three examples of what Stokes defined as *valence issues*. These types of issues are imperative themes pointing towards a common objective on which there is general consensus. Hence, we could expect that virtually the whole electorate agrees on acting in the same manner on any given issue. Other examples could be economic growth, fight unemployment, and reducing poverty. The fundamental aspect of valence issues is that, even if the whole

electorate agrees with them, they are not easily usable for campaign purposes. In order to use these issues to gather electoral support, one must remember that credibility of the candidate and the party are key factors. What allowed Eisenhower to use the K1C2 formula, was that he was highly respected by everyone for his leadership during World War II, regardless of party color. He was believed to be the “right person” to deal with war against Korea and the Communists and to fix the problem of corruption in the American system. This was possible – and still is to this day – because on such issues, a voter does not compare his position with the parties’ and then supports the one closest to him, but he looks at which alternative is more likely to bring about the necessary changes. Hence, the argument is not about which way to go regarding an issue, but about who is better suited to deal with it.

Surpassing the rivalry between Downs’ theorem and Stokes’ theory, the next section will present issue yield theory which looks at electoral competition from the point of view of the public and how it perceives parties and issues. Being based on public opinion data, this theory allows us to see which issues are prioritized by the electorate and what parties are considered more credible in dealing with it, regardless of the issue being a valence issue or a positional one.

3. Cherry-picking policy issues: the issue yield theory

More than thirty years ago, William Riker introduced the notion of heresthetic in his book “The Art of Political Manipulation” (1986). With this term, Riker refers to the manipulation of the political competition which is perpetuated by politicians who are able to exploit the multidimensionality of the political space by choosing which issues to emphasize. This word, in fact, comes from the Greek term “*hairein*”: to choose. Using this type of manipulation, the political actor picks and chooses which issues to campaign on, based on which ones will make him more likely to win. The issue yield theory is grounded exactly on this premise. Given the multidimensionality of political competition, parties can decide to emphasize those issues that create support towards them and to avoid those ones that would make them lose voters. The point of the issue yield theory is that rational parties should aim at campaigning on those issues that reconcile two fundamental goals: uniting preexisting partisan support while also gathering broad external support (De Sio & Weber, 2014; De Sio, et al., 2016; De Sio, et al., 2018). In other words, the higher the yield of a given issue, the more support in the general electorate it will bring to the party without making it lose credibility in the eyes of its core voters.

Issue yield is defined as a summary measure that expresses each issue’s combination of risks and opportunities in terms of electoral support for a party. This must also include an evaluation of party credibility, both inside and outside of its core electorate, as it is fundamental to calculate the yield of valence issues. If we consider that “*i*” is the proportion of the electorate supporting a policy, “*p*” is the proportion of the electorate supporting a party, “*f*” is the proportion of the electorate supporting both the party and the policy, and we consider that

“cred” corresponds to the party credibility on this issue in the general electorate, and that “intcred”⁴ is the party credibility on the issue within its electorate, this will be the formula to calculate issue yield:

$$Issue\ yield = \frac{(f - ip)intcred}{p(1 - p)} + \frac{(i - p)cred}{1 - p}$$

Applying this formula, we see that the issues which are more electorally convenient for a party are those on which the party is deemed as credible and on which its internal electorate and the electorate at large agree. Contrarily, the costliest issue in terms of votes for a party will be the one on which both its own electorate’s opinion and the general public’s opinion are divided and on which the party is not considered credible. Consequently, the most rational strategical decision for a party would be to steer away from the latter kind of issue while emphasizing mostly the former one.

Issue yield theory makes for the perfect candidate to conduct this analysis and to determine if parties in the last Italian political elections have acted rationally and strategically. This is because issue yield, being based on public opinion surveys, gives us a value that indicates how the public perceives a party in relation to a given issue. Hence this will allow us to determine which issues were the most convenient for parties and if parties have adopted the appropriate strategies to capitalize on the public’s necessities. Thanks to issue yield we will also be able to determine whether, for each party, the most profitable strategies depended on positional or valence issues.

Conclusion

In order to conduct the analysis of the Twitter party strategies of the main Italian parties in the 2018 political elections, an understanding of these political science theories is of utmost importance. In fact, regardless of its inapplicability in most real-life cases, Downs’s Median Voter Theorem provides us with a spatial view of electoral party competition., theorizing that, for parties, the rational thing to do is to converge towards the modal position of the electorate. This will allow a party to maximize its electoral support. However, as denounced by Stokes, this theorem is the victim of many theoretical fallacies.

The fundamental contribution to party strategy theory made by Donald Stokes is the conceptualization of valence issues. Such issues are those on which virtually the whole electorate agrees, hence they would not automatically bring support to the party with the closest position, rather, they would make the electorate show support for the party or candidate that is the most credible in dealing with that issue. Not only does this theory

⁴ “intcred” has to be replaced with 1-intcred if (f-ip) is lower than 0 which would mean that the goal is supported in the party less than in the whole sample

part-take in the criticism of models that are based on the unidimensionality of the political space, but it also presents us with the conceptualization of a new fundamental type of political issue. Valence issues are in fact widely used in current politics as they often allow to make statements which are not risky in terms of electoral support and move the debate on the problem of credibility of a party rather than its proximity to voters.

The third theory we analyzed, the issue yield theory, puts in a common theoretical framework of party competition both positional and valence politics. Issue yield is defined as the “degree to which an issue allows a party to overcome the conflict between protection and expansion of electoral support”. For this reason, if it accounts for party credibility as well, this theory allows us to understand how any issue could favor or endanger the political support of a party, regardless of it being a positional issue or a valence one.

Having laid down the fundamental aspects of the relevant literature on party competition, we can now move on to the analysis of party strategy in the 2018 Italian political election, as exemplified by the parties’ Twitter campaigns. The analysis that will be presented in the next chapter will present which issues and goals were supported by the Italian electorate, which ones were considered as priorities, and which parties were considered fit to deal with them. Issue yield values elaborated from this data will also be presented, underlying which issues Italian parties should have campaigned on. Then, the chapter will also present the emphasis that each party put on the different issues during the electoral campaign on its official Twitter accounts. Finally, the chapter will assess how strategically sound the electoral campaigns of the different parties were, by comparing the issue yield values to the issue emphasis data that was registered.

Chapter 3: Italian Parties' Twitter Strategy Analysis

After having analyzed the context surrounding the 2018 Italian political elections, and having reviewed the relevant literature on party strategy, this last chapter will be dedicated to testing the theories that were illustrated. This will be done by checking what type of issues were emphasized by parties and whether they were valence or positional ones. Then, I will also look at the issue yield scores of each party for each issue, in order to determine whether their strategy was rational or not.

This analysis will be conducted with the aim of testing two propositions. The first one I have developed is based on the hypothesis that mainstream parties would not want to campaign on divisive issues, and, conversely, that challenger parties should purposely campaign on issues that divide public opinion. Mainstream parties should, in theory, try to avoid divisive issues because, thanks to their political experience, they are able to claim problem-solving competence. The opposite would be true for challenger parties, who, exactly by campaigning on divisive issues, have a chance to confirm their core electorate's support and potentially mobilize new voters. In order to test this proposition, I will consider positional issues as a divisive, and valence issues as issues who do not split public opinion. Hence, the first proposition will be:

Proposition 1: Mainstream parties run their electoral campaigns on valence issues and avoid positional issues, while challenger parties run their campaigns on positional issues.

The second proposition rests on the hypothesis that parties act rationally during their electoral campaign. Hence, they will try to broaden their electorate without losing credibility in the face of their grass-roots supporters. This will be tested by comparing the issues that parties emphasized in their Twitter campaigns to the electoral yield that these issues have for each party. So, the second proposition will be:

Proposition 2: Parties run their electoral campaigns strategically, by emphasizing issues with high yield and avoiding those with low yield.

This chapter has three main objectives. First, it aims at determining what was on the supply side of the electoral competition in the 2018 Italian elections. In other words, this chapter will help us look at which alternatives parties were offering to the electorate. Secondly, it aims at analyzing the demand side to understand which ones were the issues that were prioritized by Italian voters. Finally, the third objective of this chapter will be to cross-analyze this data to understand if parties acted rationally, considering which issues would have been more profitable for them to focus on.

The four following sections will be divided as follows. The first one will present how the data that will be used to carry out the analysis was gathered. The second will focus on which issues carried the best yield for each party and it will analyze whether these parties have acted rationally in their strategies according to issue yield theory. The third section will then present the demand side, looking at which issues were prioritized by the

electorate, which goals were the most supported, and which parties had the highest credibility in achieving those goals. The fourth section will look at the supply side, in particular at which were the issues that the parties emphasized on their Twitter profiles and their positions on such issues. The fifth section will then analyze the results and test the propositions. Conclusions will close the chapter.

1.Data and Methodology

This analysis will be conducted using data collected by CISE for their analysis of the 2018 political elections. In particular, the data on the public's issue support and issue priority was obtained through a survey, while the data about Twitter campaign strategy was gathered through the content analysis of the parties' Twitter accounts. The following paragraphs will detail the methodology of the data collection.

Survey on issue support, issue priority, and party credibility. This pre-campaign survey was fielded between the 6th and 12th of February through Computer-assisted web interviewing (CAWI) and answered by a representative quota sample of 1000 Italian respondents over the age of 18. This sample was representative of the whole Italian population in terms of age groups, gender, geographic provenience, and education. The respondents were asked to answer questions regarding their policy preferences and priorities in terms of policy issues. When the issue was a positional one, assuming that there were two opposing sides, the respondent was asked to rank his/her position on that theme on a scale from 1 to 6. When the issue was a valence one, virtually total support for one side was assumed. In total, respondents were asked to assess 12 valence and 22 positional issues in terms of the priority they assigned to them. In addition, for each of these 34 issues, respondents were asked which party they considered more credible in dealing with it.

Twitter campaign analysis. CISE conducted a content analysis of all parties' official Twitter accounts and of their leaders'. From January 7th to March 4th, a total of 17,667 tweets (excluding replies and retweets) were registered from the Twitter profiles of seven parties (PD, M5S, FI, Lega, FdI, LEU, +EU) and of their leaders (Renzi, Di Maio, Berlusconi, Salvini, Meloni, Grasso, Bonino). Out of these, tweets not relating to policy issues were excluded, leaving a sample of 1292 tweets. Each tweet was then assigned to human coders to be paired with one of the 34 issues. Those which could not be paired with one were ignored as they were only 19. It is important to note that this analysis included only textual tweets. Pictures, videos and other types of content are not accounted for.

2. The demand side: issue priority, issue support, and party credibility in public opinion

This section will first look at the support that each of the 22 positional issues has. For each issue, two different dimensions are distinguished, the economic (Econ) and the cultural (Cult) one. The more supported stance on positional issues will be indicated as either progressive (Pr) or conservative (C).

Table 1 shows how much support each issue has, excluding the twelve valence issues because, for them, virtual support of 100% is assumed. It is interesting to note that, out of the eleven most supported positional issue-goals, ten have progressive stances (seven of these issues are economic ones, while the others and the one with a conservative stance are cultural issues). Out of these, the five most supported positional issues are those concerning fighting tax evasion (supported by 86% of the sample), increasing economic support to families with children (85%), introducing an hourly minimum wage (80%), reducing the pension age (80%), and limiting the number of refugees (80%). On the opposite end of the table we find that the five most divisive positional issues are those relating to the legalization of drugs (52%), to limiting globalization (55%), to granting citizenship to immigrants' sons (56%), to contrasting freedom for businesses to fire employees (60%), and to restricting access to welfare benefits to immigrants (60%). Out of these five, three are cultural issues with a conservative stance, the other two are economic issues with a progressive position.

Table 1: Issue support for positional issue-goals

Issue	Type	Support
Intensify the fight against tax evasion	Econ Pr	86%
Increase economic bonuses to families with children	Econ Pr	85%
Introduce the hourly minimum wage	Econ Pr	80%
Reduce pension age	Econ Pr	80%
Limit the number of refugees	Cult C	80%
Reduce income differences	Econ Pr	79%
Maintain mandatory requirements for vaccines	Cult Pr	78%
Make the EU economic policies more flexible	Econ Pr	76%
Keep current legislation on End-of-life	Cult Pr	76%
Maintain progressive taxation on income (who earns more has a higher tax burden)	Econ Pr	74%
Introduce a basic income for those living under the poverty line	Econ Pr	73%
Legalize and regulate prostitution	Cult Pr	70%
Decriminalize the excess of self-defense	Cult C	69%
Maintain same-sex unions	Cult Pr	67%
Keep Italy in the European Union	Cult Pr	66%
Scrap the cost of university tuition fees	Econ C	62%
Stay in the Euro	Econ Pr	61%
Restrict access to welfare benefits for immigrants	Cult C	60%
Keep current regulations in the job market, making more difficult for firms to fire workers	Econ Pr	60%
Maintain the current legislation on immigrants' citizenship	Cult C	56%
Limit economic globalization	Econ Pr	55%
Keep soft drugs illegal	Cult C	52%

Moving on to the most prioritized issues, as shown in Table 2, the Italian electorate seems to prioritize valence issues (indicated with V) over positional ones (indicated with P). In fact, by looking at the first ten most important goals, eight of them are valence issues. For what concerns the two remaining positional issues in the top 10, “Intensify the fight against tax evasion” and “Limit the number of refugees”, it is interesting to

note how the survey reports a support of, respectively, 86% and 80% (Table 1), which makes them *quasi-valence issues*.

Moreover, within the top 10 issues by priority, we can recognize the demand for three macro-categories of necessities. The first is a demand for economic growth and development, formed by the issues “Fight unemployment”, “Reduce poverty in Italy”, and “Support economic growth”. The second is one of security, composed of the policy goals “Ensure the good functioning of healthcare system”, “Make citizens safer from crime”, “Protect Italy from terrorist attacks”, and “Limit the number of refugees”. The third necessity is one of moral restoration of society and politics, shown by issues like “Fight corruption”, “Intensify the fight against tax evasion” and “Renew Italian politics”.

Moving to the last column of Table 2, the one regarding party credibility on these issue-goals, we notice that the traditional mainstream parties are considered the most credible only once in the top ten most prioritized issues (FI is the most credible in supporting economic growth). In fact, the new challenger parties (M5S and Lega) are considered extremely credible on many of these issues. The Five Stars Movement is, in fact, considered the most credible in 17 of the 34 issues, followed by the Lega with 9 first places, the PD with 7, and FI with only one.

Table 2: Issue-goal priority and party credibility

Issue	V/P	Type & Stance	Priority	Credible parties
Fight unemployment	V		93%	M5S, FI, PD
Fight corruption	V		92%	M5S, PD, Lega
Ensure good functioning of healthcare system	V		92%	M5S, PD, FI
Reduce the costs of politics	V		90%	M5S, Lega, FI
Reduce poverty in Italy	V		90%	M5S, PD, FI
Make citizens safer from crime	V		89%	Lega, FdI, FI
Support economic growth	V		89%	FI, M5S, PD
Protect Italy from terrorist attacks	V		84%	Lega, FI, M5S
Intensify the fight against tax evasion	P	Econ Pr	83%	M5S, PD, Lega
Renew Italian politics	V		82%	M5S, Lega, PD
Limit the number of refugees	P	Cult C	82%	Lega, FdI, FI
Fight pollution and disruption of territory	V		81%	M5S, PD, FI
Reduce pension age	P	Econ Pr	81%	M5S, Lega, FI
Improve Italian Education	V		80%	M5S, PD, FI
Make Italy count more in Europe	V		78%	M5S, PD, FI
Maintain progressive taxation on income (who earns more has a higher tax burden)	P	Econ Pr	77%	PD, M5S, LEU
Maintain mandatory requirements for vaccines	P	Cult Pr	76%	PD, FI, LEU
Keep Italy in the European Union	P	Cult Pr	74%	PD, +EU, FI
Stay in the Euro	P	Econ Pr	72%	PD, +EU, FI
Increase economic bonuses to families with children	P	Econ Pr	71%	PD, M5S, FI
Introduce the hourly minimum wage	P	Econ Pr	71%	M5S, PD, FI
Reduce income differences	P	Econ Pr	71%	M5S, PD, Lega

Make the EU economic policies more flexible	P	Econ Pr	71%	M5S, Lega, FI
Introduce a basic income for those living under the poverty line	P	Econ Pr	69%	M5S, FI, PD
Decriminalize the excess of self-defense	P	Cult C	69%	Lega, FdI, FI
Keep current regulations in the job market, making more difficult for firms to fire workers	P	Econ Pr	64%	M5S, PD, FI
Restrict access to welfare benefits for immigrants	P	Cult C	63%	Lega, FdI, FI
Maintain the current legislation on immigrants' citizenship	P	Cult C	60%	Lega, FdI, FI
Keep current legislation on End-of-life	P	Cult Pr	59%	PD, M5S, +EU
Limit economic globalization	P	Econ Pr	58%	Lega, M5S, FdI
Keep soft drugs illegal	P	Cult C	53%	Lega, FI, FdI
Legalize and regulate prostitution	P	Cult Pr	51%	Lega, M5S, FI
Scrap the cost of university tuition fees	P	Econ C	51%	M5S, FI, LEU
Maintain same-sex unions	P	Cult Pr	43%	PD, M5S, LEU

3. The demand side: issue yield and opportunities for parties

This section is dedicated to presenting which issues are more profitable for each party. To do this, issue yield theory is used as it presents which issues are more electorally convenient for parties in terms of both credibility towards their core electorate and capacity of broadening support. Table 3 will present the issue yield values (IY) for the ten most profitable issue-goals for each party. Issue yield is presented as a number contained in an interval from 0 to 1, the higher the IY value the more profitable the issue is for the party.

Ideally, the ten issue-goals presented in Table 3 should be the ones on which parties build their electoral campaigns. It is interesting to note that the most profitable issues for leftist parties (PD, LEU, +EU) are positional ones. The composition of issue opportunity for the parties of the center-right coalition is more heterogeneous, with FdI and the Lega finding electoral profit in mostly positional agendas, and FI having seven profitable issues categorized as valence. Similarly to FI, also the Five Stars Movement is presented with a composition of issue opportunity which is mostly composed of valence issues (seven out of ten).

If valence issues are excluded from the analysis, leftist parties find high issue yield in progressive stances on any type of issue, coherently to a traditional leftist ideology, with only one exception: the tenth most profitable issue for +EU is an economic one with a conservative stance. Conversely, all rightist parties are presented with issue agendas with a composition that is a mixture of conservative and progressive stance, possibly denoting that these parties are moving away from a traditional left-right axis. Finally, the M5S, only having three positional issues in its top ten, would profit more by taking progressive stances on them.

Table 3: Top 10 issue-goals by issue yield for major Italian parties

Party	Issue	V/P	Type & Stance	IY
Pd	Stay in the Euro	P	Econ Pr	0,56
	Keep Italy in the European Union	P	Cult Pr	0,46
	Make the citizenship to regular immigrants' sons easier	P	Cult Pr	0,43
	Maintain mandatory requirements for vaccines	P	Cult Pr	0,43
	Keep same-sex unions	P	Cult Pr	0,34
	Maintain progressive taxation on income (who earns more has a higher tax burden)	P	Econ Pr	0,33
	Abolish the current legislation on the End-of-life	P	Cult Pr	0,32
	Keep current level of access to welfare benefits for immigrants	P	Cult Pr	0,30
	Continue to accept refugees like now	P	Cult Pr	0,26
	Maintain the present cost of university tuition fees	P	Econ Pr	0,23
M5S	Reduce the costs of politics	V		0,41
	Introduce a basic income for those living under the poverty line	P	Econ Pr	0,38
	Renew Italian politics	V		0,32
	Fight corruption	V		0,30
	Reduce poverty in Italy	V		0,29
	Fight pollution and disruption of territory	V		0,27
	Fight unemployment	V		0,25
	Reduce income differences	P	Econ Pr	0,24
	Reduce pension age	P	Econ Pr	0,23
	Support economic growth	V		0,22
Fi	Introduce a flat tax (pre-fixed % of income tax, regardless of the income)	P	Econ C	0,24
	Limit the number of refugees	P	Cult C	0,24
	Support economic growth	V		0,23
	Protect Italy from terrorist attacks	V		0,21
	Fight unemployment	V		0,21
	Make Italy count more in Europe	V		0,20
	Make citizens safer from crime	V		0,19
	Improve Italian education	V		0,17
	Increase economic bonuses to families with children	P	Econ Pr	0,17
	Ensure the good functioning of healthcare system	V		0,17
Lega	Limit the number of refugees	P	Cult C	0,57
	Restrict access to welfare benefits for immigrants	P	Cult C	0,48
	Maintain the current legislation on immigrants' citizenship	P	Cult C	0,42
	Decriminalize the excess of self-defense	P	Cult C	0,40
	Make citizens safer from crime	V		0,36
	Legalize and regulate prostitution	P	Cult Pr	0,36
	Leave the Euro	P	Econ C	0,31
	Protect Italy from terrorist attacks	V		0,30
	Reduce pension age	P	Econ Pr	0,28
	Leave the European Union	P	Cult C	0,27
FdI	Limit the number of refugees	P	Cult C	0,34
	Decriminalize the excess of self-defense	P	Cult C	0,31
	Restrict access to welfare benefits for immigrants	P	Cult C	0,29
	Maintain the current legislation on immigrants' citizenship	P	Cult C	0,23
	Make citizens safer from crime	V		0,20

	Abolish same-sex unions	P	Cult C	0,19
	Protect Italy from terrorist attacks	V		0,17
	Maintain the present cost of university tuition fees	P	Econ Pr	0,16
	Make the EU economic policies more flexible	P	Econ Pr	0,16
	Legalize and regulate prostitution	P	Cult Pr	0,15
LeU	Make the citizenship to regular immigrants' sons easier	P	Cult Pr	0,40
	Keep Italy in the European Union	P	Cult Pr	0,37
	Stay in the Euro	P	Econ Pr	0,36
	Keep current level of access to welfare benefits for immigrants	P	Cult Pr	0,34
	Continue to accept refugees like now	P	Cult Pr	0,31
	Maintain the current legislation on the excess of legitimate defense	P	Cult Pr	0,23
	Keep current legislation on the End-of-life	P	Cult Pr	0,22
	Maintain mandatory requirements for vaccines	P	Cult Pr	0,22
	Maintain progressive taxation on income (who earns more has a higher tax burden)	P	Econ Pr	0,22
	Keep same-sex unions	P	Cult Pr	0,21
+Eu	Stay in the Euro	P	Econ Pr	0,47
	Keep soft drugs illegal	P	Cult Pr	0,47
	Keep Italy in the European Union	P	Cult Pr	0,43
	Continue to accept refugees like now	P	Cult Pr	0,33
	Keep same-sex unions	P	Cult Pr	0,32
	Keep current legislation on the End-of-life	P	Cult Pr	0,31
	Make the citizenship to regular immigrants' sons easier	P	Cult Pr	0,30
	Keep current level of access to welfare benefits for immigrants	P	Cult Pr	0,29
	Maintain progressive taxation on income (who earns more has a higher tax burden)	P	Econ Pr	0,22
	Keep current pension age	P	Econ C	0,18

4. The supply side: Issue emphasis in Twitter campaign strategies

This will conduct an analytical overview of the different Twitter electoral campaigns for the 2018 elections. Table 4 will present “issue emphasis” (IE), the percentage share of Tweets posted by a party on its Twitter account regarding that given issue. Considering that each party touched upon many different issues throughout the campaign, several of which were only mentioned a few times, only the ten most mentioned issues will be presented for each party. The table also shows, for each party, the percentage of contents (within the ten most emphasized issues) that regarded valence issues and positional issues on their Twitter profile.

As we can see in Table 4, all the different parties ran very different campaigns. The PD balanced positional and valence issues and held only progressive stances. The M5S ran a campaign that was mostly based on valence issues, mentioning only three economic positional issues on which it held a progressive view. Surprisingly, the Movement never mentioned the minimum basic income on its Twitter accounts, even if it was its workhorse in the offline campaign⁵. Forza Italia balanced the mentions of valence and positional issues

⁵ This could possibly be explained by the fact that this content analysis only considered written tweets and excluded pictures and videos.

and tweeted about different types of positional issues holding a mix of progressive and conservative stances. The Lega campaigned mostly on positional issues, holding mostly conservative stances on cultural issues, and progressive stances on economic ones. FdI also mixed valence and positional issues (with a majority of positional issues) holding culturally conservative stances and a mix of progressive and conservative stances on economic goals. LeU campaigned mostly on valence issues, with a mix of progressive and conservative positions. Finally, +EU ran a largely positional campaign, holding progressive stances on cultural themes and a balance of conservative and progressive stances on economic ones.

Table 4: Top 10 themes by issue emphasis and party position of the main Italian parties in their Twitter strategies

Party	Issue	V/P	Type & Stance	IE
Pd	Support economic growth	V		14%
	Fight unemployment	V		13%
	Maintain progressive taxation on income (who earns more has a higher tax burden)	P	Econ Pr	12%
	Maintain mandatory requirements for vaccines	P	Cult Pr	10%
	Increase economic bonuses to families with children	P	Econ Pr	7%
	Make citizens safer from crime	V		7%
	Intensify the fight against tax evasion	P	Econ Pr	6%
	Keep Italy in the European Union	P	Cult Pr	5%
	Improve Italian education	V		5%
	Reduce poverty in Italy	V		4%
			Tot.Valence	51.8%
			Tot.Positional	48.2%
M5S	Fight pollution and disruption of territory	V		32%
	Improve Italian education	V		26%
	Ensure the good functioning of healthcare system	V		13%
	Renew Italian politics	V		6%
	Reduce pension age	P	Econ Pr	6%
	Fight corruption	V		3%
	Reduce poverty in Italy	V		3%
	Support economic growth	V		3%
	Intensify the fight against tax evasion	P	Econ Pr	3%
	Increase economic bonuses to families with children	P	Econ Pr	3%
			Tot.Valence	87.8%
			Tot.Positional	12.2%
Fi	Introduce a flat tax (pre-fixed % of income tax, regardless of the income)	C	Econ C	39%
	Limit the number of refugees	C	Cult C	14%
	Fight unemployment	V		14%
	Reduce poverty in Italy	V		10%
	Support economic growth	V		7%
	Make citizens safer from crime	V		7%
	Make Italy count more in Europe	V		4%
	Reduce pension age	P	Econ Pr	2%
	Keep Italy in the European Union	P	Cult Pr	1%

	Stay in the Euro	P	Econ Pr	1%
			Tot.Valence	50.6%
			Tot.Positional	49.4%
Leg	Limit the number of refugees	C	Cult C	27%
	Reduce pension age	P	Econ Pr	15%
	Introduce a flat tax (pre-fixed % of income tax, regardless of the income)	C	Econ C	9%
	Make citizens safer from crime	V		6%
	Decriminalize the excess of self-defense	C	Cult C	5%
	Make the EU economic policies more flexible	P	Econ Pr	5%
	Intensify the fight against tax evasion	P	Econ Pr	5%
	Restrict access to welfare benefits for immigrants	C	Cult C	4%
	Fight unemployment	V		4%
	Legalize and regulate prostitution	P	Cult Pr	3%
			Tot.Valence	12.8%
			Tot.Positional	87.2%
FdI	Limit the number of refugees	C	Cult C	22%
	Make citizens safer from crime	V		22%
	Decriminalize the excess of self-defense	C	Cult C	9%
	Fight pollution and disruption of territory	V		8%
	Introduce a flat tax (pre-fixed % of income tax, regardless of the income)	C	Econ C	6%
	Increase economic bonuses to families with children	P	Econ Pr	6%
	Limit economic globalization	P	Econ Pr	5%
	Improve Italian education	V		4%
	Fight unemployment	V		3%
	Protect Italy from terrorist attacks	V		2%
			Tot.Valence	44.8%
			Tot.Positional	55.2%
LeU	Fight pollution and disruption of territory	V		21%
	Ensure the good functioning of healthcare system	V		14%
	Maintain progressive taxation on income (who earns more has a higher tax burden)	P	Econ Pr	12%
	Improve Italian education	V		9%
	Scrap the cost of university tuition fees	C	Econ C	7%
	Continue to accept refugees like now	P	Cult Pr	5%
	Promote economic globalization	C	Econ C	5%
	Make the EU economic policies more flexible	P	Econ Pr	4%
	Reduce poverty in Italy	V		3%
	Fight unemployment	V		3%
			Tot.Valence	61.2%
			Tot.Positional	38.8%
+Eu	Keep Italy in the European Union	P	Cult Pr	39%
	Continue to accept refugees like now	P	Cult Pr	16%
	Support economic growth	V		10%
	Make Italy count more in Europe	V		5%
	Renew Italian politics	V		5%
	Legalize soft drugs	P	Cult Pr	4%
	Keep current legislation on the End-of-life	P	Cult Pr	3%
	Promote economic globalization	C	Econ C	3%
	Stay in the Euro	P	Econ Pr	2%

Keep same-sex unions	P	Cult Pr	2%
		Tot.Valence	22.5%
		Tot.Positional	77.5%

5. Testing the propositions

This last section of the chapter aims at testing the propositions presented earlier. I will first assess the validity of the first proposition, analyzing the data just illustrated in Table 4.

Proposition 1 was phrased as follows:

“Mainstream parties run their electoral campaigns on valence issues and avoid positional issues, while challenger parties run their campaigns on positional issues”

As demonstrated by Table 4, this proposition is not supported by the collected data. In fact, only the Lega and +Europa – as challenger parties – have a majority of positional issue-goals in the top ten issues of their agenda (87.2% for the Lega and 77.5%). The two mainstream parties, PD and FI, present a mixture of valence and positional issues which is surprisingly balanced. It is interesting to note that LeU, a party composed of politicians who left the PD and positioned themselves to the left of it, acted more like a mainstream, with 61.2% of valence issues, even its positioning and its electorate were those of a traditionally ideologized left-wing party. Also, Giorgia Meloni’s FdI’s Twitter agenda does not support Proposition 1. In fact, even if they could be considered a right-wing radical conservative party, their Twitter content was composed of both valence and positional issue-goals (with a difference between positional and valence content of only 10.4%). However, the most surprising results can be observed in the Twitter issue emphasis of the Five Stars Movement. In fact, Di Maio’s party campaigned mostly on valence issues (87.8%) mentioning positional goals only a little more than once every ten Tweets. With this data at hand, we can say that no party’s Twitter strategy, except for the Lega’s, is supporting Proposition 1.

Moving on to testing proposition 2, for each party, I will present a table containing the first ten issues by issue yield and their relative issue emphasis on the party’s and the leader’s Twitter accounts. This will allow me to assess how the yield of each issue was related to the emphasis parties put on their top ten most profitable issues. Proposition 2 stated:

“Parties run their electoral campaigns strategically, by emphasizing issues with high yield and avoiding those with low yield.”

As shown in Table 5, the Democratic Party was the second least strategical in this electoral campaign, with only 31% of its content that was related to its most profitable issues in terms of issue yield. In fact, its textual Tweets never mentioned half of the issues contained in this list, not even “Stay in the Euro” which was the

most profitable issue for the PD. Hence, the data collected regarding the Democratic Party does not support Proposition 2.

Table 5: Top ten issues by issue yield for the PD and relative issue emphasis

Party	Issue	V/P	Type & Stance		IY	IE
Pd	Stay in the Euro	P	Econ	Pr	0,56	
	Keep Italy in the European Union	P	Cult	Pr	0,46	5%
	Make the citizenship to regular immigrants' sons easier	P	Cult	Pr	0,43	
	Maintain mandatory requirements for vaccines	P	Cult	Pr	0,43	10%
	Keep same-sex unions	P	Cult	Pr	0,34	2%
	Maintain progressive taxation on income (who earns more has a higher tax burden)	P	Econ	Pr	0,33	12%
	Abolish the current legislation on the End-of-life	P	Cult	Pr	0,32	1%
	Keep current level of access to welfare benefits for immigrants	P	Cult	Pr	0,30	
	Continue to accept refugees like now	P	Cult	Pr	0,26	1%
	Maintain the present cost of university tuition fees	P	Econ	Pr	0,23	
					Tot. IE	31%

The data collected for the Five Stars Movement does not constitute strong support for the proposition either. In fact, as presented in Table 6, Di Maio's party only emphasized its top ten issues in 53% of its Tweets, never mentioning four of these items. As noted earlier, it is surprising to see how the M5S did not mention the introduction of a basic income or the reduction of the cost of politics – which are respectively at second and first place in the list. These two issue-goals were expectable because they were often mentioned on other media and constituted much of the Movement's political appeal.

Table 6: Top ten issues by issue yield for the M5S and relative issue emphasis

Party	Issue	V/P	Type & Stance		IY	IE
M5S	Reduce the costs of politics	V			0,41	
	Introduce a basic income for those living under the poverty line	P	Econ	Pr	0,38	
	Renew Italian politics	V			0,32	6%
	Fight corruption	V			0,30	3%
	Reduce poverty in Italy	V			0,29	3%
	Fight pollution and disruption of territory	V			0,27	32%
	Fight unemployment	V			0,25	
	Reduce income differences	P	Econ	Pr	0,24	
	Reduce pension age	P	Econ	Pr	0,23	6%
	Support economic growth	V			0,22	3%
					Tot. IE	53%

Table 7 shows the ten most profitable issues for Berlusconi’s party and their relative issue emphasis. Contrarily to the two previous examples, Forza Italia seems to have behaved in a strategically consistent manner. In fact, we find that 85% of its Twitter

content was related to issues coming from its top ten issues. In particular, 60% of it was dedicated to the top three issues. Hence, we can say that Forza Italia’s data supports Proposition 2.

Table 7: Top ten issues by issue yield for FI and relative issue emphasis

Party	Issue	V/P	Type & Stance		IY	IE	
			Type	Stance			
FI	Introduce a flat tax (pre-fixed % of income tax, regardless of the income)	P	Econ	C	0,24	39%	
	Limit the number of refugees	P	Cult	C	0,24	14%	
	Support economic growth	V			0,23	7%	
	Protect Italy from terrorist attacks	V			0,21		
	Fight unemployment	V			0,21	14%	
	Make Italy count more in Europe	V			0,20	4%	
	Make citizens safer from crime	V			0,19	7%	
	Improve Italian education	V			0,17		
	Increase economic bonuses to families with children	P	Econ	Pr	0,17		
	Ensure the good functioning of healthcare system	V			0,17		
						Tot. IE	85%

As we can see in Table 8, 63% of the content published by the Lega and Matteo Salvini on Twitter is related to its ten most profitable themes. Out of the ones considered in this analysis, the Lega is also the best party in terms of how many out of these ten issues it touched upon (tying with FdI), in fact, only two out of these ten issues have not been mentioned in its tweets. Considering this data, it can be said that the Lega’s Twitter strategy partially confirms proposition 2.

Table 8: Top ten issues by issue yield for the Lega and relative issue emphasis

Party	Issue	V/P	Type & Stance		IY	IE	
			Type	Stance			
Lega	Limit the number of refugees	P	Cult	C	0,57	27%	
	Restrict access to welfare benefits for immigrants	P	Cult	C	0,48	4%	
	Maintain the current legislation on immigrants' citizenship	P	Cult	C	0,42	1%	
	Decriminalize the excess of self-defense	P	Cult	C	0,40	5%	
	Make citizens safer from crime	V			0,36	6%	
	Legalize and regulate prostitution	P	Cult	Pr	0,36	3%	
	Leave the Euro	P	Econ	C	0,31	2%	
	Protect Italy from terrorist attacks	V			0,30		
	Reduce pension age	P	Econ	Pr	0,28	15%	
	Leave the European Union	P	Cult	C	0,27		
						Tot. IE	63%

As shown by Table 9, Fratelli d'Italia's Twitter strategy is similar to the Lega's, at least in terms of exploiting issue opportunity. In fact, a total of 60% of its contents is related to its most profitable issues and eight out of ten of these issues were mentioned on the party's accounts during the analyzed period. So, as with the Lega, we can infer that these data partially confirm proposition 2.

Table 9: Top ten issues by issue yield for FdI and relative issue emphasis

Party	Issue	V/P	Type & Stance		IY	IE
			Stance			
FdI	Limit the number of refugees	P	Cult	C	0,34	22%
	Decriminalize the excess of self-defense	P	Cult	C	0,31	9%
	Restrict access to welfare benefits for immigrants	P	Cult	C	0,29	1%
	Maintain the current legislation on immigrants' citizenship	P	Cult	C	0,23	
	Make citizens safer from crime	V			0,20	22%
	Abolish same-sex unions	P	Cult	C	0,19	
	Protect Italy from terrorist attacks	V			0,17	2%
	Maintain the present cost of university tuition fees	P	Econ	Pr	0,16	1%
	Make the EU economic policies more flexible	P	Econ	Pr	0,16	1%
	Legalize and regulate prostitution	P	Cult	Pr	0,15	2%
					Tot. IE	60%

Table 10 shows the data related to Liberi e Uguali, the left-wing party born out of the split perpetuated by some PD dissidents. Pietro Grasso's party was the least strategic in its Twitter campaign, with only 23% of its contents relating to its ten most profitable issues. LeU is the party that, most of all, undermines the validity of Proposition 2.

Table 10: Top ten issues by issue yield for LeU and relative issue emphasis

Party	Issue	V/P	Type & Stance		IY	IE
			Stance			
LeU	Make the citizenship to regular immigrants' sons easier	P	Cult	Pr	0,40	2%
	Keep Italy in the European Union	P	Cult	Pr	0,37	1%
	Stay in the Euro	P	Econ	Pr	0,36	
	Keep current level of access to welfare benefits for immigrants	P	Cult	Pr	0,34	
	Continue to accept refugees like now	P	Cult	Pr	0,31	5%
	Maintain the current legislation on the excess of legitimate defense	P	Cult	Pr	0,23	
	Keep current legislation on the End-of-life	P	Cult	Pr	0,22	
	Maintain mandatory requirements for vaccines	P	Cult	Pr	0,22	1%
	Maintain progressive taxation on income (who earns more has a higher tax burden)	P	Econ	Pr	0,22	12%
	Keep same-sex unions	P	Cult	Pr	0,21	2%
					Tot. IE	23%

Finally, Table 11 shows the data regarding +Europa, the offspring of the Italian Radical party, characterized by very strong pro-European stances. This was the second most strategically consistent party, with 66% of its

contents being related to its most profitable issues, touching on seven out of these ten issues. These data would, as well as the Lega's and FdI's, support proposition 2.

Table 11: Top ten issues by issue yield for +Eu and relative issue emphasis

Party	Issue	V/P	Type & Stance		
			IY	IE	
+Eu	Stay in the Euro	P	Econ Pr	0,47	2%
	Legalize soft drugs	P	Cult Pr	0,47	4%
	Keep Italy in the European Union	P	Cult Pr	0,43	39%
	Continue to accept refugees like now	P	Cult Pr	0,33	16%
	Keep same-sex unions	P	Cult Pr	0,32	2%
	Keep current legislation on the End-of-life	P	Cult Pr	0,31	3%
	Make the citizenship to regular immigrants' sons easier	P	Cult Pr	0,30	
	Keep current level of access to welfare benefits for immigrants	P	Cult Pr	0,29	
	Maintain progressive taxation on income (who earns more has a higher tax burden)	P	Econ Pr	0,22	
	Keep current pension age	P	Econ C	0,18	1%
				Tot. IE	66%

Conclusion

In the course of this chapter, I have analyzed the data collected by CISE's pre-electoral survey on public opinion that focused on which issue goals were supported, which ones were prioritized, and which parties were deemed more credible to deal with them. I have also worked with CISE's content analysis of Twitter campaigns, which collected Tweets posted by the official parties' and their leaders' accounts.

The chapter began with a description of the data used and the methodology employed in the survey and content analysis. Then, it moved on to a descriptive analysis of the data collected in the survey. Firstly, I presented which issues were mostly supported by the Italian electorate. In particular, noted that there were three main demands: for economic growth, for security, and for a moral restoration of society and politics. Secondly, I presented which issues were prioritized by the electorate and which parties were believed to be more credible. This analysis underlined an interesting fact that denotes the crisis of the traditional Italian political system: traditional mainstream parties were rarely considered credible in the eyes of the electorate, and challenger parties like the Lega and the M5S were taking their place. Then, I presented the issue yield combinations for the seven parties I analyzed. This part of the analysis showed how leftist parties could have found electoral profit in positional issues, as well as radical right-wing parties. Contrarily, FI and the M5S had fertile electoral ground when campaigning on valence issues rather than positional ones. Finally, I presented the data on each party's Twitter issue emphasis. This showed that each party had chosen very different strategies: the PD and FI balanced the amount of positional and valence issues, the M5S campaigned mostly on valence issues, +Eu

and the Lega focused mostly on positional goals, LeU presented a slight majority of valence-issue-related content, and FdI a slight majority of positional contents.

All the presented data allowed me to test the validity of the propositions I had proposed earlier:

Proposition 1: Mainstream parties run their electoral campaigns on valence issues and avoid positional issues, while challenger parties run their campaigns on positional issues.

Proposition 2: Parties run their electoral campaigns strategically, by emphasizing issues with high yield and avoiding those with low yield.

The analysis of the data regarding issue emphasis did not show support for the first proposition. In fact, the analyzed mainstream parties did not base their campaign on valence issues (both the PD and FI campaigned equally on valence and positional themes), and the challenger parties (M5S, FdI, and LEU) did not exploit the value of positional issues. The only exceptions were the Lega and +Europa which, coherently with their status of challenger parties, ran a Twitter campaign that was largely based on positional issues.

For what concerns the second proposition, the results showed varying support. Forza Italia's strategy was completely in line with the theory, while the PD's and LeU's strategy totally undermined it. In between these extremes, we find, in increasing order of coherence with the proposition, the M5S, FdI, the Lega, and +Eu. With such mixed results, it is hard to make statements regarding the validity of this proposition, it would be necessary to conduct the same study on other elections in order to have more certainty on the matter.

This chapter finds its value, not only in the test of the propositions, but mainly in its study of the electoral competition for the Italian political elections of 2018. The analysis conducted shows how parties have behaved and presents the priorities and necessities of the Italian electorate. By connecting these two variables, this analysis provides a good starting point to evaluate the efficacy of electoral strategies in the last political elections.

Conclusions

This research aimed at analyzing the Italian elections of March 4th, 2018, as a case study for political party electoral strategies. This constituted an interesting point of view because several of the parties that are present in the Italian political landscape had undergone relevant structural, organizational, or positional changes before the elections. Moreover, this particular electoral round was a fascinating case as it came after the 2013 elections, which had shaken the Italian political scenario establishing a tripolar system.

To approach this analysis I have first presented the context in which these elections have taken place. Firstly, there was a new electoral law in place, the Rosatellum, which established a mixed system assigning a majority of seats on a proportional basis, and 37% of seats on the basis of uninominal constituencies. Then, I looked at the transformation that the three main Italian parties had undergone and how they conducted their electoral campaigns. The Democratic Party, with a shift towards the right in its positioning, gained some new supporters but also lost a good part of its former core electorate, which explains why so many of its former voters have either voted for the M5S or not voted at all. At the same time, the Five Stars Movement managed to become a party with national aspirations, transversally gaining new voters and establishing strong support in southern Italy. The third party, the Lega, under the strong leadership of Matteo Salvini, transformed itself in a nationalist radical-right party, a strategy that paid off in electoral support, making it the first party in the center-right coalition. Finally, I have also presented an analysis of electoral flows. This overview clearly showed an extremely high rate of electoral volatility, with voters switching parties and deciding to not turn out to vote. Overall, the two losers of this mobility were easily identifiable in the two traditional mainstream parties: the Democratic Party and Forza Italia.

In the second chapter, I have presented three fundamental theories of the study of party electoral strategies. The first was Anthony Downs' *Median Voter Theorem*, which presented a unidimensional spatial conception of the electoral arena in which parties, to maximize support, had to converge towards the position of the median voter. Regardless of its fallacies – pointed out by Donald Stokes – this theory is extremely useful as it introduces a clear reading of the political competition and, most of all, it underlines the fact that the position that parties decide to adopt on certain issues will determine their electoral support. Secondly, I presented Donald Stokes' *valence issues*. These issues are those ones on which there is a virtually unanimous opinion and, hence, the electoral competition is not based on party positioning. When talking about valence issues, parties have to convince the electorate that they are credible and capable of dealing with the given matter, and the most credible party would gain more electoral support. Finally, I presented the *issue yield theory*, a theory based on public opinion data, that for each given issue-goal provides a value that indicates how profitable it would be to campaign on that theme for a given party. The value of this theory is that it allows to comparatively analyze electoral opportunities and strategies for different parties in different elections and, in the focus of this

particular research, it allows to determine for each party if it was more convenient to campaign on valence issues or positional ones.

I finally used CISE's survey and Twitter content analysis data to conduct my inquiry on the Italian case. In particular, I presented tables containing data regarding issue support, issue priority, party credibility, issue yield, and issue emphasis. This data allowed me to test two propositions. The first, supposing that mainstream parties would have campaigned on valence issues and challenger parties would have campaigned on positional ones, did not find any empirical support. The second, supposing that parties would have campaigned strategically by focusing on issues with high issue yield, found mixed support in the data. In fact, Forza Italia's strategy confirms this proposition, but LeU's and the PD's strategies do the exact opposite (all other parties only partially confirm the proposition). However, this does not mean that issue yield theory does not represent an appropriate measure of issue opportunities for parties. Probably, this suggests that not all parties have acted strategically in their Twitter campaigns.

In conclusion, we have seen how the 2018 Italian political elections constituted a peculiar case study, both for its contextual surroundings and for the strategies adopted by parties. Regardless of the particularity of this election, this research has a structural foundation that could be used to build comparative analyses of party electoral strategies, mostly thanks to its use of issue yield theory.

In further research on the matter, it would be interesting to conduct a content analysis on issue emphasis on other sources of electoral campaign content, for instance, electoral programs, tv appearances, or other social media (possibly including other forms of content other than textual posts). It would also be of great scientific value to test if, in the cases where the two propositions are met, party strategy pays off in terms of electoral support.

Riassunto

Gli italiani, nella mattina del 5 Marzo 2018, si risvegliano in un paese dallo scenario politico completamente diverso rispetto al giorno prima. I risultati della 18esima elezione politica italiana evidenziano un forte cambio nell'orientamento politico del paese e sono inaspettati per molti, anche se non erano del tutto imprevedibili. Infatti, già le elezioni del 2013 avevano mostrato il cedimento del sistema politico bipolare basato sulla rivalità destra-sinistra che aveva dominato la politica italiana per decenni. Questa direzione presa dal sistema italiano è stata poi confermata nel 2018: il sistema bipolare è ormai caduto ed è stato sostituito da un sistema tripolare. Infatti, alle due forze tradizionali che erano precedentemente in gioco, si aggiunge un nuovo partito: il Movimento 5 Stelle. Inoltre, dalle elezioni del 4 Marzo, il centro-sinistra esce estremamente indebolito (dopo anni di governo e di maggioranza) ed i rapporti di forza interni al centro-destra cambiano con l'emergenza della Lega come partito nazionale e la caduta di Forza Italia nel supporto elettorale. Questo lavoro mira quindi ad analizzare il comportamento dei partiti in questa elezione, che si è dimostrata essere un punto di svolta per il sistema politico italiano.

Questa ricerca si sviluppa nell'ambito degli studi elettorali, in particolare, in quello dell'analisi delle strategie elettorali dei partiti. L'obiettivo di questo lavoro è quello di analizzare le strategie elettorali utilizzate in Italia dai principali partiti per le elezioni politiche del 4 Marzo 2018. Inoltre, questo progetto è basato su un design di ricerca che può essere generalizzato, rendendolo utilizzabile anche in futuri studi comparati.

La letteratura esistente sulla strategia elettorale non presenta una concordanza di opinioni. Esistono infatti diverse teorie che mirano a predire le strategie che saranno utilizzate dai partiti nel corso di una campagna elettorale, o a delineare quali sarebbero le strategie migliori per essere utilizzate da essi e, spesso, queste teorie sono discordanti tra loro. Il punto di partenza di questa ricerca è esattamente quello di testare, utilizzando i dati raccolti sulle elezioni del 2018, tre teorie di fondamentale importanza in questo ambito: il *Teorema dell'Elettore Mediano* di Anthony Downs, le *valence issues* di Donald Stokes, e la teoria dell'*issue yield* di De Sio e Weber.

Per fare questo, la presente ricerca presenta nel primo capitolo una panoramica del contesto che circondava le elezioni del 4 Marzo partendo dalla nuova legge elettorale, toccando le evoluzioni dei tre principali partiti Italiani, per concludere con un'analisi dei flussi e della mobilità elettorale. Il secondo capitolo illustra più in dettaglio le tre teorie menzionate in precedenza, così da fornire una comprensione più dettagliata delle basi teoriche a cui si rifà questo lavoro. Infine, il terzo capitolo analizza, sulla base di dati raccolti dal CISE tramite un sondaggio ed un'analisi dei contenuti Twitter, le strategie elettorali dei sette partiti eletti nel Parlamento italiano e ne propone una lettura critica.

Capitolo 1

L'analisi del contesto parte, come detto, dalla nuova legge elettorale. Il Rosatellum, così chiamato perché prende il nome dal suo promotore Ettore Rosato, consiste in un nuovo sistema elettorale misto che assegna il 60% dei seggi su base proporzionale, il 37% su base maggioritaria in diverse circoscrizioni uninominali, ed il restante 2% proporzionalmente al voto degli Italiani all'estero. Questo sistema nasce con l'obiettivo di garantire una maggioranza elettorale quasi certa, senza incappare in questioni di incostituzionalità simili a quelle dell'Italicum. Come è evidente però, questo regime elettorale fallisce nel suo intento perché con la stabilizzazione di un sistema politico tripolare non è stato possibile avere una maggioranza ben definita uscita dai seggi. Questo ha quindi portato alla nascita del governo giallo-verde (M5S e Lega) guidato dal Presidente del Consiglio dei Ministri Giuseppe Conte. Un'altra conseguenza che ci si aspettava da questa legge elettorale era quella dello sviluppo di campagne elettorali locali, come conseguenza della nascita delle circoscrizioni uninominali. Questo però non successe e le campagne elettorali nazionali rimasero in primo piano.

Per quanto riguarda l'evoluzione del Partito Democratico guidato da Matteo Renzi, è importante sottolineare che il partito nel corso della campagna elettorale si è avvicinato ai temi più cari alle élite, come l'integrazione europea e la salvaguardia dei beni culturali. Questo ha portato l'elettorato tradizionalmente di sinistra a disaffezionarsi al PD, spostandosi verso Liberi e Uguali ed il M5S e facendo pagare un caro prezzo in termini di voti a Renzi. A poco è infatti servita la brillante comunicazione mediatica di Renzi (spesso percepita come troppo aggressiva) o la strategia della doppia leadership Renzi-Gentiloni del partito.

Guardando invece al M5S, si osserva l'istituzionalizzazione di un partito che era nato come anti-establishment. Sotto la leadership di Di Maio, percepito come un capo pacato ed istituzionale, il Movimento prende la direzione del partito di governo aprendosi al gradimento di nuovi elettori. Una scelta che evidentemente paga, visto l'exploit elettorale. Ciononostante, i 5 Stelle riescono a non perdere la propria anima battagliera e "di piazza" ed il loro elettorato originario gli rimane fedele.

La terza evoluzione partitica che è necessario menzionare è quella della Lega che, sotto la guida di Matteo Salvini, passa dall'essere un partito regionalista ad essere una forza politica a trazione nazionale, infatti, il nome stesso del partito cambia da "Lega Nord" a "Lega". La campagna di Salvini, anche grazie alle sue straordinarie capacità comunicative e di *agenda setting*, riesce a costruire un frame efficace che collega l'immigrazione ai temi di sicurezza e, tramite una campagna molto incentrata su di essi, riesce ad ottenere il record storico di voti per Lega.

In termini di volatilità elettorale, questa elezione si classifica come terza della storia italiana (dopo quella del 2013 e quella del 1994). Considerando i flussi elettorali è interessante vedere come, mentre centro-destra e centro-sinistra rimangono mutualmente impermeabili, entrambi perdono un consistente numero di voti al Movimento 5 Stelle che si rivela come forza dall'*appeal* trasversale e come vero vincitore della tornata elettorale. All'interno del centro-sinistra, il PD perde parte alcuni voti verso Liberi e Uguali, ma il più rilevante

flusso elettorale intra-coalizione rimane quello tra Forza Italia e Lega. Infatti, la maggior parte dei nuovi voti guadagnati dal partito di Salvini viene proprio dal partito di Berlusconi che, come detto, esce estremamente indebolito da queste elezioni.

Capitolo 2

Come anticipato, il secondo capitolo si dedica alla presentazione di tre teorie dello studio della strategia dei partiti politici che sono fondamentali per condurre l'analisi che viene illustrata nel terzo capitolo. La prima di queste teorie è quella di Anthony Downs che, applicando la teoria di Hotelling al sistema politico, elabora il Teorema dell'Elettore Mediano. Questa teoria si basa su tre presupposti fondamentali: che la competizione politica possa essere rappresentata su uno spazio unidimensionale, che ogni elettore abbia una chiara posizione su quello spazio, e che i partiti sono razionalmente interessati ad aumentare il proprio supporto elettorale. Secondo Downs, se i presupposti sono rispettati, i partiti politici in questione si muoveranno per convergere sulla posizione dell'elettore mediano, così da avere circa metà degli elettori alla propria destra e l'altra metà alla propria sinistra. Donald Stokes propone però una critica di questa teoria, che sottolinea alcuni assiomi su cui essa è basata. Però, a prescindere dalla sua difficile applicazione al mondo reale, la teoria di Downs presenta una visione spaziale della competizione politica che rende molto più semplice l'analisi di molti casi. Inoltre, questo sistema, basandosi sulla concezione spaziale del dibattito politico, si appoggia su quelle che sono le *issues* posizionali: dei temi in cui vi è differenza di posizione sia nel partito che nell'elettorato. Questo tipo di issue verrà poi utilizzato nel terzo capitolo.

Nel criticare il Teorema di Downs, Donald Stokes concettualizza le *valence issues*, che costituiscono la seconda teoria utilizzata in questa ricerca. Le *valence issues* sono quelle tematiche su cui (virtualmente) l'intero elettorato concorda, per cui si esulano dalla concezione posizionale della competizione. Nonostante non siano posizionali, queste tematiche sono spesso presenti nel dibattito politico. Questo succede perché il dibattito non si concentra più su quale posizione sia la migliore, ma su quale partito sia più capace di affrontare il tema. Una delle caratteristiche fondamentali di queste *issues* è che esse sono pressoché innocue per ogni partito e possono essere utilizzate senza incorrere in troppi rischi, ma la loro efficacia è anche altamente legata alla credibilità del partito su quel tema: un partito poco credibile su una *valence issue* non riceverà benefici elettorali utilizzandola nella propria campagna elettorale.

Infine, la terza teoria che verrà utilizzata è quella dello *issue yield*. Questo concetto viene definito come “la misura in cui una issue permette ad un partito di superare il conflitto tra protezione ed espansione del supporto elettorale”. In altre parole, lo *issue yield* presenta un valore compreso tra 0 e 1 (calcolato su dei dati di opinione pubblica) che indica quanto una determinata issue pagherà in termini elettorali ad un determinato partito, allargando la sua base di voto senza fargli perdere il proprio nucleo di elettori. Questa teoria si basa sul presupposto che per i partiti la strategia vincente si trova nello scegliere quali temi enfatizzare e quali evitare

durante la campagna elettorale, lasciando la coerenza ideologica in secondo piano. Questa teoria è fondamentale perché inserisce in un framework comune sia le issues posizionali che quelle valence, valutando per ogni partito quali di queste sono più convenienti.

Capitolo 3

Il terzo capitolo presenta i dati raccolti dal CISE nel sondaggio pre-elettorale sul supporto ad una lista di 34 issues, sulla priorità che veniva data dagli Italiani a queste issues e su quali partiti fossero ritenuti più credibili nell'affrontare questi temi. Inoltre, presenta i dati CISE dell'analisi dei contenuti testuali dei profili Twitter dei principali partiti italiani e dei loro leader.

Questo capitolo si pone tre obiettivi principali. Il primo è di determinare quali issues erano enfatizzate dai partiti nelle loro strategie elettorali per le elezioni del 2018. Il secondo è di analizzare i dati riguardanti l'opinione pubblica per comprendere quali issues erano considerate più importanti ed impellenti dai cittadini italiani e quali partiti erano i più credibili. Infine, il terzo obiettivo è di combinare i risultati di queste analisi per valutare se i partiti italiani hanno agito in maniera razionale durante le loro campagne elettorali.

Analizzando i dati riguardanti il supporto per le varie issues si notano tre bisogni fondamentali dell'elettorato italiano. Il primo è quello per di crescita e sviluppo economico, il secondo è quello di sicurezza ed il terzo è di una rinascita politico sociale. Guardando invece i dati riguardanti la priorità delle issues per l'elettorato e quali partiti sono considerati credibili nell'affrontare queste questioni, si denotano i tratti della caduta del vecchio sistema politico e dei partiti tradizionali. Infatti, il Movimento 5 Stelle è il partito più credibile nella maggior parte delle tematiche, seguito da lontano dalla Lega, dal PD e da Forza Italia. Analizzando le combinazioni di opportunità dei partiti, illustrati dai dati di issue yield, si è visto come i partiti di destra radicale (Lega e FdI) tendevano ad avere un'agenda di opportunità ricca di issue posizionali, così come i partiti di sinistra (PD, LeU, +EU), mentre FI ed il M5S avrebbero ottenuto più profitto dalle valence issues. Infine, l'analisi dei contenuti dei profili twitter indicavano che i partiti avessero scelto delle strategie molto diverse tra loro: il Partito Democratico e Forza Italia avevano bilanciato il numero di valence issues e di issues posizionali, il Movimento 5 Stelle aveva costruito la sua campagna principalmente sulle issues di tipo valence. Allo stesso tempo, la Lega e +Europa si erano focalizzati principalmente sui temi posizionali. Infine, Liberi e Uguali aveva mantenuto una leggera maggioranza di valence issues e Fratelli d'Italia una leggera maggioranza di issues posizionali.

I dati presentati mi hanno permesso quindi di testare due proposizioni:

1. *I partiti mainstream fanno campagna elettorale sulle valence issues ed evitano le issues posizionali, mentre i partiti sfidanti fanno campagna elettorale sulle issues posizionali.*

2. I partiti costruiscono le proprie campagne elettorali in maniera strategica, enfatizzando le issues con un alto yield ed evitando quelle con un basso yield

Per quanto riguarda la prima, l'analisi dei dati dell'analisi dei contenuti Twitter non ha affatto supportato la proposizione. Infatti, i partiti mainstream non hanno basato la loro campagna sulle valence issues (PD e FI hanno fatto campagna elettorale su issues sia di tipo valence che posizionali) e ed i partiti sfidanti (M5S, FdI e LeU) non hanno sfruttato il valore delle issues posizionali. Le uniche eccezioni sono state la Lega e +Europa che hanno costruito una strategia Twitter fortemente basata sulle issues posizionali.

Testando invece la seconda proposizione, i risultati mostrano diversi livelli di supporto. Infatti, Forza Italia ha costruito una strategia completamente in linea con la proposizione, mentre le campagne del PD e di LeU sono andate nella direzione assolutamente opposta. In mezzo a questi estremi, in ordine crescente di coerenza con la proposizione, troviamo il M5S, FdI, la Lega e +Eu. Con risultati così misti risulta quindi difficile avere un giudizio sulla validità della proposizione.

Conclusioni

A prescindere da come le elezioni politiche del 4 Marzo 2018 costituiscono un caso studio peculiare, sia per il contesto che le circondava, che per le strategie adottate dai partiti, il valore di questa ricerca risiede prima di tutto nella sua struttura. Questo design di ricerca infatti potrebbe essere utilizzato per ulteriori studi di questo tipo, permettendo delle analisi comparative più complesse.

In ogni caso, per la futura ricerca nello stesso ambito, sarebbe interessante condurre l'analisi dei contenuti non solo dei profili Twitter, ma anche di altri media, partendo dagli altri social media, passando per i programmi elettorali e arrivando alle apparizioni in TV dei leader politici. Sarebbe anche di grande valore scientifico se venisse condotto un test che vada a determinare se, laddove si seguono le proposizioni presentate nel terzo capitolo, la strategia elettorale ripaga in termini di voti ai partiti.

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