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**THE SURGE OF SOUVERAINISM IN RADICAL RIGHT POPULISM**

**THE ITALIAN CASE OF THE LEAGUE**

MA thesis

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I have written this Master's thesis independently. All viewpoints of other authors, literary sources and data from elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

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**THE SURGE OF SOUVERAINISM IN RADICAL RIGHT  
POPULISM.  
THE ITALIAN CASE OF THE LEAGUE.**

**Introduction**

At present, Europe has rediscovered the attraction to radicalism and in particular, the parties and movements, which benefit more, have been the far-right parties. Several nations among the European Union have found new force in a defensive and conservative behavior towards European institutions and neighboring borders. In direct opposition to the priorities indicated by the European Commission (Bassot and Hiller 2016), as instance in terms of migration and asylum policies, the right-wing movements have spread their influence across the continent, gathering support and visibility over all the social classes, even from the strongholds of the Left, as public employees and senior management. The radical right movements are proposing their elements of discrimination, nationalism and conservatism, and in doing so, they are based on a behavior of “resistance to change and the acceptance of inequalities”, mostly as a result of the modernity drama (Aspelund at al 2013). It is important to specify that within the family of the far-right Parties, there are several and very distinguished subclasses of parties. Among them, it will be taken into consideration only the populist radical right (PRR) (Ignazi 2003).

The aim of this thesis is to analyze through a critical discourse analysis the changing processes within the most popular Italian PRR, the League, in order to understand the effects of new leader Matteo Salvini in the surge of the phenomenon in Italy. Along with it, the relevance of the Salvini effect is unquestioned in the Italian panorama, and the quiet unique transformation, that occurred with the Northern League once Salvini reached the leadership, put this phenomenon under spotlight and demand analysis.

In the beginning, the Northern League was born as an anti-fascist, pro-North, Federalist Party in order to pursue the instances of the northerner population, and it remained particularly bounded to this legacy until the rise to the secretariat of Matteo Salvini in 2013. Under his leadership, the League has seen a drastic shift towards new political issues and social matters. Once removed Northern from the name, the League has transformed itself into an anti-establishment, populist radical, anti-globalization, and nationwide party, introducing in the political frame the concept and the doctrine of souverainism and some populism patterns (Albertazzi et al 2018). The purpose of this research is to answer the following question: how does Salvini's rhetoric cope with the Italian electorate incrementing demand on souverainism in his public speeches?

Despite the main features of the League has been maintained, some others, as populist souverainism must be studied. A single-N descriptive study will be developed in this thesis in order to motivate and evaluate the astonishing growth that occurred between 2017 and 2019, including a mention of the European Parliament elections, when the party reached its apex.

Therefore, since "few theoretical frameworks include internal supply-side factors" (Mudde 2007, pp.276) exists, it is the aim of this thesis to explain the effects of what can be called "Salvinism" in the surge of the PRR in Italy. To detect the term "Salvinism", firstly I will seek the bravura of the League's leader in riding the wave of people's fright in order to establish or increase the xenophobic sense of threat across the Italian social classes. And secondly, the recall to sovereignist doctrine that has created a perfect field for the growth of dissatisfaction and the rise of the PRR party. To do so, in the analyses a critical discourse analysis will be applied to the Salvini's public speeches at the Federal Congress of the League in 2017 and 2019, and Salvini's speeches taken in Pontida during the annual conference in 2017, 2018 and 2019.

It is expected that Salvini's speeches do affect the results of the outcome of the election in a positive way for two reasons: the first one is that the Italian electorate respects the characteristics for the success of PRR in terms of Mudde's micro-level (2007), the second is that the sovereignist positions are perceived as a new issue to be addressed in the national political framework, so for this reason, the League could take advantages of a political breakthrough, and in the meantime maintain a solid vote-base in its strongholds.

Following this brief introduction, this dissertation would be divided into three main sections:

1. theoretical section;
2. methodological section;
3. analysis and conclusion section.

In the first section, it would be a discussion about the theories regarding far-right movements and parties in Western Europe. Then some room would be given to the history of the League and the reasons that brought to such a growth of the party, it follows a subchapter about the far-right rhetoric and the politics of fear used by the League's leadership. A section would discuss about the outlooks of Italian electorate demand and the supply furnished by the party. Thus, and finally, some space would be reserved for the theories regarding populist radical right and souverainism. Indeed, the innovation of the League comes with the fact that its establishment implemented the populist rhetoric with the claims on sovereignty. Along with it, on one hand, the Italian political environment showed that it is possible to consider souverainism and populism as two faces of the same coin. On the other hand, the electorate behavior displayed a positive inclination to the charm of rhetoric and narrative.

Following this theoretical section, the thesis will present the methodological chapter with the analysis of the critical discourse analysis (CDA) as the main tool used in this dissertation and how it will be applied to the public and official discourses of Matteo Salvini.



Finally, there will be the core chapter of the analysis. In that chapter, thanks to the methods of CDA, the speeches of Salvini will be translated and discussed in detail according to polarization, syntaxes, identification, vocabulary, activities and shared knowledge. Moreover, this last section will conclude the thesis by reporting the results of the analysis and confirming or denying the expectations mentioned in the theoretical chapter.

## **The implementation of the souverainism in the Italian political frame**

The aim of this chapter is to unfold the most recent and applicable theories regarding three main topics and then to show how they are related to each other. The first one is the far-right parties, which have recently seen a significant growth in numbers of adepts and sympathizers. The second, the use of fear in rhetoric and discourses, and how they are used by the parties' leadership to shape both the reality and the electorate. The third, the core topic and the case study of the analysis: the League, its leadership, its rhetoric and the role in the Italian national framework.

## **The electoral success of the far-right in Western Europe**

Among the Western European countries, Italy has recently observed a rapid and incredible growth in the support of the radical right and populist movements. On one side, some academics stated that PRR in Western Europe are representing only a mere niche of the electorate (Immerzeel and Pickup 2015). However, between 2013 (year of the second-to-last parliamentary elections) and 2018 (year of the last parliamentary elections), the most prominent far-right Italian party, the League, was able to pass from the initial 4.09% to a stunning 17.35% mostly because of the shift toward the Western far right parties' ideologies. One of the main examples is Alternative for Germany (AfD): the party stepped from a softly Eurosceptic party to PRR, establishing the agenda on the anti-migrant sentiment and the ethnic threat of the so-called "losers of the modernization" who became immediately the first supporters of AfD (Arzheimer, Berning 2019).

So far, the surge of those PRR parties has been studied by several academics, who have defined, among demographic studies, that the majority of the supporters of the far right belong from a specific class of

the population: on one side, some argues that being male, young (under 25) and part of the so-called blue collar workforce or with a lower education increase the support toward PRR (Arzheimer, Carter 2006). On the other side, although, some others argue that PRR may trigger the electorate only once reached a wider consensus. In particular, Immerzeel and Pickup (2015) states that the difference between the PRR in West and East Europe lays on the factor that the majority of the voters belong to the middle class and have a higher education. To sum up, there is no correlation between PRR's electorate description of Arzheimer and Carter, but it emerges as a very vague and unusual variation of the results when it comes to the support on PRR. This division has emerged over decades of studies on macro and micro variables of the PRR. Despite many efforts have been made, most of the studies converge on the central and pivotal role of nativism and the anti-migrant behaviour of both the voters and the party leadership (Arzheimer 2018).

However, diverse other characteristics have been underlined by academics, it is important to quote the inclination of the voters against the bribe and corruption issues or the unemployment rate and other economic issues along with political issues (Immerzel, Pickup 2015). Along with the social and economic conditions of the voters, another variable that plays a very pivotal role in the political factors are the political speeches and discourses of the parties leaders, that are mostly affected by rhetorical manipulation of the politicians (Arzheimer 2011). Furthermore, as stated by Coffè et al (2007), the PRR parties result positively affected by the increase of numbers of migrants, and in particular by the Islamic fear given according to the rhetoric and the narratives of the right-wing parties. In addition, Stockemer (2017) argues that the capacity of the moderator, the rhetoric and narrative of the PRR is fundamental to foresee the future of the radical right for two reasons: because they “keep the voters and they re-attract those, who have been drifting to the fringes” (p. 52).

To sum up, on one hand, there are no perfect recipe for far-right to be successful, but in countries where there are some specific attitudes of the population in questions like nativism and souverainism is more possible to witness to the growth of PRR parties. Examples are countries like Italy, Germany, Austria or Switzerland. On the other hand, years of studies on electoral outcomes would not be able to state a perfect definition of the PRR voter because of inconsistent examples in Europe as well as in America.

### **The history of the League, from regional populist party to national sovereignist party**

The case taken into consideration in this dissertation reflects those features clearly in its statements and policy behaviour: the League or as known to Italian electorate *Lega Salvini Premier*. This is the actual oldest party in the Italian frame. It was funded in the early nineties (1991) and it has – at present – gathered the majority of the favours of the Italian voters under the leadership of the new secretary Matteo Salvini.

At the beginning, the Northern League was born as an anti-fascist, pro-North, federalist party aimed to pursue the instances of the northerner population, and it remained particularly bounded to this legacy until the rise to the secretariat of Matteo Salvini in 2013. Under his leadership, the League has seen a drastic shift towards new political issues and social matters. Along with the removal of the term “Northern” from the name, the League has transformed itself into an anti-establishment, populist radical and anti-globalization party, introducing in the political frame the concept and the doctrine of souverainism and increasing the already existing populist patterns.

As demonstrated by the accurate work of Albertazzi et al (2018) on the content analysis of the leader’s social network usage, the League experienced a rapid and drastic shift in its identity. At the beginning, it

was defined as a regional populist party (McDonnell 2006 and Albertazzi at all 2018) born with the mere interest of gathering the pro-independence movements of the northern regions, like *Lega Lombarda* in Lombardy, *Liga Veneta* in Veneto and *Union Piemontèisa* in Piedmont. The early success of the Northern League was led by two main discourses brought to the national agenda: the economic and social gap between North and South, and the anti-establishment positions towards Italian institutions and “corrupted party” system symbolised with the image of *Roma Ladrona* (Rome is a rogue) (Bulli and Tronconi 2011 and Albertazzi at all 2018). By extension, it is clear that the early Lega Nord (LN) positions were characterised by a regional exclusivity (De Winter 1998) and advocating to the issues and instances of the northern regions, they put a clear divisive line between the North and the South of the country (Albertazzi and all 2018) and by a very strong populist statements. Indeed, the only one patten that remained after the shift is the latter. Once the previous leader and secretary Umberto Bossi was forced to resign due to a reimbursement scandal, and after a short period of transition, Matteo Salvini took the leadership of the party in late 2013. As argued by Vercesi (2015), the step undertaken by the new party governance was unprecedented and an inevitable shift toward institutionalization.

The adjustments were clear from the very beginning; indeed, Salvini identified the new enemy no more in the Roman establishment, but in the European and in particular in the German leadership of the European Union. Thus, a second and very pivotal change occurred in the focuses and the frames in which the League could manoeuvre. Despite the opposition of the older establishment, Salvini turned his interest toward the South and saw Italy as a mere unity. As a consequence, one of the funding pillars fell: the regionalism and autonomy instances (Albertazzi and all 2018) and along with it also a minority of the most resilient members of the party old guard left. Despite this relatively irrelevant schism, the Salvini’s League realised

its best results in the elections of 2018, surpassing the historical partner Forza Italia and shadowing it in the European elections of 2019, marking the final step to be recognised as the party leading the Italian right coalition.

To move toward a nationalization of the party can be considered the trump card of the entire Salvini politics, indeed – according to the statistics, the League became the second most-voted party in the South of Italy beside the 5 Stars Movement in the European Parliament elections in 2019. An astonishing result, considering the fact, that the year before the League reached 6% of the preferences in the national elections in the same regions and in direct opposition with the statements that consider the League dead after Bossi. (Bulli and Tronconi 2011) However, despite several authors consider the personality of the leader the more consistent contribution to this result, others argue that the winning formula is set on the ability of the League to recruit local politicians in order to increase the national support and consensus, although the risk of a band-wagoning process can not be neglected (Francillo and De Luca 2019).

To sum up, once the party gained the apex in European Parliamentary elections (34,3% of Italian electorate), it did not stop. Then, in order to geo-localize the position of the party in the political frame of Italy, it is possible to consider the party according to the subclass of the far right family developed by Ignazi (2003). The actual party governance led to think it as populist radical right party. Despite it is possible to recognise some features typical both of the far right and a strong populist behavior. Furthermore, taking into consideration the divisions of the radical right party families described by Mudde (2000), the League clearly displays a strong inclination to the other populist parties and the government resulted with the 5SM is a direct consequence of this attitude. Finally, it is possible to state that the most important shift that allowed the League to the center-right coalition as well as the government was the glance toward the South of Italy. This must be

intended as the real turning point for the Salvini experience in the League's leadership.

### **Far-right rhetoric and Politics of fear, the League's new trump card**

In order to explain the power of the rhetoric, it is mandatory to introduce and frame the figure of Matteo Salvini, secretary and political head of the League, who definitely has played a crucial role in the growth of the League's support and whose figure as a charismatic leader cannot be negotiated. The leader's role is critically important to understand one of the most characterising features of the Far Right: the authoritarian approach (de Lange 2007). And Salvini is the pragmatic exception that confirms this rule. The success of the party has been studied to pass through the main figure and the leadership of the party, indeed, the surge of the Western European radical right parties are registered when the party itself is built and rapidly institutionalised. In this pattern, the role of the party head is particularly important because it fasts the surge to success (de Lange, Art 2011). This approach, emerged in the study of the study of the Western radical right parties, is applicable within the party by the leader. Therefore, studying the phenomena, de Lange (2007) and Kitschelt (1995) have isolated, as part of the so-called "winning formula", this approach as a central feature for the radical right success. The authors argue that, in a broader change of party systems in Western European countries, the winning formula for PRR is, on one side, to maintain the authoritarian features typical of 80s and 90s, but on the side, to assume a more moderate profile on collateral issues, as instance economy. In the case of the League, the winning outcome is demonstrated by the fact that the growth in support is increasing in the middle and lower classes of the population. Moreover, the role played by Salvini as a centraliser of power and

media target, shows the fact that the path overtook by the leadership and governance of the League is the one described in the studies above.

Generally, far right discourses are based and organised on several and distinguished layers and topics of interests mostly according to local or regional outcome, so to clearly shape what is the League now, it is fundamental to reveal its nativist attitude. Within the PRR discourses' frame, before the elections and during the period of government, the League core interests were the internal security, the recall to souverainism and the migration issue; all of these topics are dovetailed to nativism. As demonstrated by Mudde (1999), the PRR distinguish themselves in the political environment through two main features: the strive for the recreation of mono-cultural and pure nation state, based on homogeneity of the citizens and the xenophobic fear of invasion by the foreigners. Both these two characteristics were largely used in the League discourses and in slogans like "*prima gli italiani*" (Italians first) and "*stop invasione*" (stop invasion).

More precisely and as well summarised by Mudde (1999), the success of the PRR is well related to the immigration issue. That is what happens among people who live in the regions where this fear of immigrants' invasion and the misperception of immigrants (in particular those who do not have official documents) are over proportioned: in particular the peripheral areas in Italy. Indeed, in these terms it is possible to notice that there are Lombardy and Veneto, the two most important League strongholds, that count the majority of the asylum seekers in Italy. As demonstrated by a study of Istituto Cattaneo (2017) on perception and reality of the immigration issue, which reports the data of the Eurobarometer, Italians are the European populations with the higher misperception of the migrant population with +17.4%. Correlated to this data, it is notable that the most sceptics toward the migrants are the voters of the right and far right +32.4%. However, in contrast with the theories, there is the South of Italy that shows the higher misperception of the actual situation. Therefore, the data



demonstrates that the larger is the density of migrants in the population, the less is perceived the migrant phenomenon; and vice versa, the less dense is the migrant population, the more the threat of the migrant issue is perceived.

The final feature of PRR is the distrust in the political institutions and in this case the distrust toward the European Union. As demonstrated by Werts, Scheepers, Lubbers (2013), Euroscepticism is the third most important explanation for the success of the far right in Western Europe, Italy is – indeed – not an exception. Within this feature, it is important to mention the strong campaign of Matteo Salvini against the European Union, in particular against the Brussels' elite and the Franco-German axis. Those two European countries are considered the main rival for the Italian sovereignty. Several claims took place during the electoral campaign and during 2019 and many times the League leader challenged the EU with the prospect of a cleavage within the EU parliament, supporting the other far right and Eurosceptic parties across the continent. This political positioning has its roots in the Bossi's legacy of policies and in earlier Salvini's statements on the League's future direction.

To sum up, Salvini's approach in the League's rhetoric reflects the far-right traces of Western European parties, in particular, the nativism in its form of souverainism and anti-migrant and anti-Islam feeling. To some extent, it finds roots in Bossi's legacies, but he applies the previous statements to a new view from the actual context and situation through the use of fear and misperception. In addition to this, Salvini imports the Euroscepticism we well as the previous anti-national-establishment.

### **The Italian electorate attitudes in 2018 elections.**

Despite the Italian electorate appearing to be mostly secularised on topics like migration crisis management and the role of the European Union in

the Italian politics, there are some outcomes to be taken into consideration to understand the vote and the voters in the 2018 election.

As stated by Cavallaro et al. (2018), it clearly emerged that the Italian blue-collar working class has the majority of the more nativist and sovereignist position in the electoral panorama. In addition to this, the study highlights that the outcome of the elections shows a particular feature to summarise as follows: the higher is the education, the lower is the support for parties of the League's coalition (Ibid. pp. 118). To see *Tab.1*

Differently with the previous elections, the League increased its pool of voters towards what could have been considered the strongholds of the other parties: public employees, unemployed and the youngsters.

Along with the shift of the voters toward populism and souverainism, the election's outcome had shown the attitudes of the voters: to what concern the migration crisis, the theme has caught the interest as a primary issue in the 31.9% of the voters. Among them, a 45.4% feels insecure when there is a gathering of migrants and a 52% wants priority in services to the Italian citizens (pp. 124).

A second item observable is the attitude toward the European Union and the establishment in general: the statistics show that the Italian voters are most willing to take back sovereignty from the EU than to leave the Union. In particular, on one side, there is a consistent group of over-65 who are the more worried about an eventual Italexit (61%), while on the other side the youngsters (25-34 y.o.) are more polarizing when it comes to leaving option (pp. 126). To see *Tab.2*

Generally, there are two new large groups of voters who are the most polarising in terms of souverainism and anti-migration sentiment that previously did not: housekeepers and unemployed. But finally, "the category, which more strongly follows the souverainist shift and the anti-migrant attitude, remains the blue-collar workers, the same that are the more hostile towards the cosmopolitan values" (Ibid. pp. 134).

## **Demand of the Italian electorate, the supply of the League**

To explain the success of the PRR in Italy, it must be introduced the literature behind the supply and demand of the PRR. Unfortunately, it is not enough to state that “Far right is sexy” (Bale, 2012 pp. 1) to explain the development of the PRR electorate.

On one side, the demand side is related to the electorate and it generally focuses on the economic and socio cultural trends, mostly standing from a negative point of view towards them. On the other side, the supply side is linked with the ability to address the needs of the populations. Most of the time, the capability of the PRR is to capture those needs and build a stable and reliable rhetoric on it.

To explain the demand side it is necessary to take into consideration the work of Cas Mudde (2007, 9-10), he divides the demand into levels of explanations: macro-level and micro-level. Despite this categorization, the author realised that, first of all there is no result of success for PRR even though all the levels are successful, at the same time and secondly the author stated there is a lack of study regarding how macro-level influences the micro-level.

As part of the macro-level, Mudde focuses on a few items: the first one is the modernization (and to a larger degree the globalization) (Allen 2007, Cavallero and Zanetti 2020, Mudde 2007) and its effects. As a matter of fact, the PRR are very attentive to the electors who were defeated by the consequences of modernization, the so-called “losers of modernization” (or globalisation). Moreover, the effects of modernization (contained in small-N studies) support the theory that the losers are the most vulnerable and affected by the PRR rhetoric (Mudde 2007, pp 204). A second item is the crises: according with the author, there are two types of crises, the economic and the political. PRR occurs always at least after one of those two types of crises, this position is corroborated by the fact that in Post-communist Eastern Europe PRR are not as successful as in the West. Moreover, as

demonstrated by De Spiegeleire et al (2017, pp. 45), “the timeframe for the rise of populist souverainism correlates with the increase of economic insecurity and inequality”.

Furthermore, a correlation has been discovered between the level of “cartelization” of a state (signifying that the base system is funded on clientele and corruption) and the political dissatisfaction with the success of PRR. A third item part of the macro-level is the ethnic backlash, and it is in this item that it is possible to find the anti-migration sentiment and nativism. In Western Europe, ethnic nationalism has already reached the dominant political force (Mudde 2007, pp. 211) and a confirmation has been done by a strong correlation between the number of foreign-born citizens and the success of the PRR (Golder 2003, Norris and Ingleheart 2016).

Whether the macro-level focuses on general issues, which affect the PRR successful (or unsuccessful) trend, the micro-level focuses mostly on the electorate's contribution to the success. It has been observed that the majority of the voters of PRR hold radical right views, however the majority of the extreme right wing voters vote for the mainstream party. Moreover, as Mudde states, at mass level, the voters of PRR are more moved by an anti-establishment sentiment, rather than keeping a far right position. Indeed, the author assumes that the major characteristic of the voters should be insecurity. This insecurity must be intended as a larger sentiment, which comprehends “identity, job and life [insecurity] as a whole” (Ibid. pp. 223, De Spiegeleire et al 2017). Unfortunately there are positions, which invalidate this view, indeed, Norris and Inglehart (2016) state that PRR does not receive higher support in countries with high unemployment, rather in egalitarian and economically secure countries.

The position assumed by Mudde and the counter position of Norris and Inglehart could be summarised in the following assertion: there is no homogenous electorate for PRR, rather there are different electorates according to the country the voters belong to.

After this general framework regarding the demand-side, it is now necessary to explain the supply-side. This pattern is itself divided into external and internal factors, which have different meanings but both are equally fundamental to understanding the growth of PRR.

The external factors are, as evidenced by the name, non inherent to PRR itself, but are represented by the political opportunities, in terms of structure of political environment, which a PRR could undertake in order to gain popularity. On one side, the political opportunity structures, however they play a more important role when there is PRR breakthrough rather than when the party needs electorate maintenance, since the support of the political systems has decreased in the past decades (Foa and Mounk 2016) leaving space for PRR surges. On the other, there are other two interesting variables, which can amplify the growth of PRR: at cultural level, the presence of fascist past increased the effect of the nativist subculture and the PRR support; and the media coverage that can encourage or obstruct the electoral breakthrough, creating a new or renewed image of the PRR party.

The internal factors for the supply-side considers the role of the party itself as a major factor for the explanation of success and failure of PRR (Mudde 2007). Indeed, there are three most important sub-factors presented for such an explanation: the party ideology, the party leadership and the organization. Since, few theoretical frameworks have been developed to understand the role of the internal supply-side in PRR, it will be the aim of this thesis to expand it within the Italian frame. Indeed, through the means of the professional propaganda, and the study of the discourses of Matteo Salvini, a new form of unique Italian PRR would be developed under the banner of Salvinism (or *Salvinismo*).

The phenomenon of Salvinism is specifically restricted to a historical moment in the Italian frame. Indeed, the discourses of the League's leader are the quintessence of Salvinism because they are the *conditio sine qua non* we can not talk about the surge of souverainism in Italy.

Based on blurred ideology, a wider content pool and an easy vocabulary, Salvini is able to match the macro effects described by Mudde, with the outcome of the Italian electorate demand described in the *Tab 1* and *2*. The bravura of Salvini can be summarize as the capability to capture the needs of the electorate, the trends, and to transform them accordingly to his simple rhetoric made of easy answers to difficult issues. Finally, in this process, the voters' concerns are mostly endogenously formed because they are the result of the macro-level occurrences (economic and migration crisis, globalization and modernization above all).

### **Framing populist radical right and souverainism**

There is a great deal of confusion regarding the definition of what are the characteristics that really represent the PRR parties and it must be admitted that despite a tremendous job has been done so far in order to frame with the best definition the PRR, we are very far to a clear definition, which meets the majority of the academics' needs.

Despite this discouraging introduction, Mudde (2007) stated that it is possible to identify three recurring core concepts that allow the admission of a party into the PRR pantheon: nativism, authoritarianism and populism. Those three concepts allow Mudde to diversify two separated types of PRR: the mere radical right party (based on an opposition to liberal democracy) and the temporary radical right party (a reflection of the populist momentum).

Another author, along the same line, wisely claimed that PRR are characterised by a diffuse sentiment of dissatisfaction toward the institutions, showing several characters of both the radical right and populism. So, as summarised by Ignazi, those parties count on “the anxiety sentiment of the population [...] are ideologically on the right, with anti-systemic orientation, and claiming to be speaking for the mainstream of society, to what concern the organization, they are

strongly characterised by a centralised structure with a charismatic leadership” (Ignazi 2003, pp. 35).

However, as claimed by Mudde (2007, pp.41) “it is not easy to pinpoint exactly when a party is in which party family”, but in this following chapter I will try to geo-localise the League within the plethora of PRR parties.

Given the above definitions of PRR, it is now the time to introduce the environment in which the analysis would be taken: the current Italy. Italy has addressed the outcome of the Great Recession in a peculiar way, in fact, between 2008 and 2011, two governments alternated each other: Berlusconi IV and Monti I. In this period the then Northern League (LN) played the role of the ally in a coalition government with Berlusconi’s party first and the opposition role in the second course. In its discourses about the economic crisis, the party presented itself as a saviour and restorer of the lost sovereignty of the people victims of the elites, who are also known as the “losers of modernization” (Scheve and Slaughter 2004, Allen 2017, Cavallaro and Zanetti 2020). This role was emphasized during Monti’s technocratic government. As demonstrated by Kriesi & Pappas (2015), the economic crisis corresponded to a political crisis, and as an outcome of these crises there was an erosion of the trust toward the parliament and the political institutions. It is interesting to highlight that in the statements of that time the League strengthened its position against globalization and the unfair competition of China and Eastern Europe countries. As also supported by Saull (2015), this anti-neoliberalism and anti-globalization attitude “has provided the key structural context and the social space for the far-right to manage to take advantages”. This approach can also be considered populist as populist can be considered the initial anti-Rome and the actual anti-Brussels behaviour of the Northern League (Kriesi, Pappas 2015). The case of the League is relevant because it shows clearly another tenet: sovereignist doctrine, that is – indeed –

intrinsically dovetailed with the populist claims (Basile, Borri & Verzichelli, 2019).

The actual Italian situation left space and possibilities for the populist souverainism to grow and thrive. Indeed, it is necessary to briefly introduce what is intended as populist souverainism theory. To begin, authors claim that “populist souverainism is a new term” (De Spiegeleire et al 2017, pp. 36), therefore as a phenomenon is still under investigation. However, since the phenomenon could be considered already mainstream, De Spiegeleire et al. have summarised few recurring characteristic that define the core theories of the populist sovereignty:

1. They emphasize the dichotomy between the “us” and the “others” (Mudde, 2007), where the “other” might be the corrupted elite or the migrants, alternatively all those non-part of the “nation” as whole, seen as a cause of the reduction of the national welfare.
2. There is a continuous claim on the legitimacy of the will of the “people”, who represent the core aim of the policies.
3. They position themselves as outsiders in front of the already established elite and establishment. This allows the party a special status of breakthrough.
4. The political interest is focused on the national environment and the priority is the will of the “people”. (Parthonnaud, 2016)
5. They state that the national law is prior compared to the international law.

Despite the above-mentioned work of De Spiegeleire et al, and as supported by Verzichelli (2019), populism and souverainism have been studied as separated phenomena, but they could be considered an overlapping and mutually complementary phenomena whether they are studied together.

Returning on the analysis of the League, and along with the anti-migration feature that substitute the Southern Italians as “outer group”,



typical of the early League's political discourses, the more recent claim of the new leader Matteo Salvini allowed the shift of the party toward a heavy demand of national sovereignty. Therefore, the League has assumed a new populist façade embodying the instances of the weak mid-lower class Italian worker in front of the harsh overcome of globalisation.

What this study is going to pursue is to consider both these ideas as a final and single outcome occurred in the Northern League. The League itself has embodied both these two behaviours (nativism and souverainism) in order to gain popularity, support and power in the national and European frames between 2013 and 2019. Thus and most recently, the political counterparts of the League accused the leader and the follower to be fascist, to a certain extent it is possible to find some of the features that Umberto Eco listed in 1995 (and reported in a posthumously published pamphlet, 2018) of the Ur-fascism (or the continuous fascism). Indeed, the cult of the nativist tradition, the dichotomous tolerance and refuse of modernity, the frustration of the individual, the cult of the victory and the rejection of pacifism (the so-called *buonisti*) are definitely characteristics that can link the League to a fascist quintessence.

Under the leadership of Matteo Salvini, the party was able to operate with the most useful patterns of populism and souverainism with the final outcome of setting a coalition government with the 5 Star Movement (M5S) for leading the country and solve problems giving shared solutions. Indeed, during the last legislature (namely Conte I), the League was able not only to trump the M5S's political agenda, but also to increase its popularity among the voters from 17.35% (Parliamentary elections outcome in 2018) to 34.3% (EUP elections in 2019).

To summarize, the League under the leadership of Matteo Salvini have completed the transformation from a niche party to a national party belonging to the plethora of PRR. The party reflects some patterns from

the quintessence of fascism but it has no reason to be called a neo-fascist party since the populist and nativist nature are predominant.

### **Expectations**

Through the method of the critical discourse analysis, that would be discussed in the next methodological section, this thesis is expected to display the effect of the Salvinism on the Italian electorate. As already mentioned, the League's leader played an undisputed role in shaping the electorate's perception of the reality. Analysing deeply the rhetoric used, this thesis is supposed to show the impact of far-right rhetoric in the electoral outcome. To do so, the analysis would take into consideration the electoral analysis done after the national and European parliamentary elections of 2018 and 2019, in addition the analysis of the Italian electorate would be taken into consideration for tailoring the rhetoric topics exposed by Salvini. The recall to a stronger sovereignty and the nativist claims are the strongholds of Salvini's speeches and undoubtedly they are supposed to play a major role in the discourse analysis. This thesis has also the aim of demonstrate that the PRR narrative is not only limited to those two arguments, but it is deeper in themes and references. In addition, the capabilities of mutate and change the form of the rhetoric as well as the importance of the topics, makes Salvini a skilled communicator. But the fact that the discourses rotate around the same themes demonstrates also that the repetition and the insistence solidify the interest of the electorate and its support and that the trend does not change, if the rhetoric on souverainism and nativism remains.

## **Methodology**

Since data do not have a specific meaning for themselves and the meaning is always a constructed meaning (Schreier 2012), in this thesis an interpretative research method would be applied, to understand how Salvini shape a constructed meaning to his electorate. Indeed, in order to understand the growth of “souverainism” in Italy as a political phenomenon, which leads to a specific outcome in the Italian elections, it is necessary to focus on the analysis of the Italian electorate nature in relation to the far right rhetorical outcome in the cultural perspective of the electorate during the past five years. The aim of such interpretative methods is to understand the subjective knowledge of the phenomenon, which is the result of the intertwined reality represented in the forms the object and subject. (Dalla Porta and Keating, 2008) In the case of this research, the sovereignty rhetoric of the far right is taken, as a premise, to be intrinsically linked with the Italian national election’s outcome after 2013.

More precisely, the methodology applied in this research concerns the critical discourse analysis (CDA). This approach will be applied to the speeches of the League’s leader Matteo Salvini. Since the speeches of the Salvini are the clearest vehicle of disclosure of the political discourse of the party, they are going to be addressed here in order to explain how the far-right rhetoric cope with the Italian electorate’s demand on more sovereignty. Indeed, to use CDA in the election frame is not new: there are several examples that resulted beneficial, as instance Aydin-Düzgit (2016) was able to measure the impact of the language and discourses through a critical constructivist stance.

To what concerns CDA, the references for the analysis are mostly collected in the work of Wodak and Meyer (2015) about the critical discourse studies (CDS). Despite the precise description of CDA that occurs in this work, it will introduce some features for this methodology in order to explain why this pattern applies to this dissertation.

As the central element of the analysis, the discourses are to be considered as a form of social practice used by politicians in order to give rise to power. The CDA is meant to be a problem-oriented approach focused, in this case, on the rising of the far-right populism in Italian political scenario. Thus, the use and the expression of power is intended and perceived through a Foucauldian perspective: as mentioned above, it is a manifestation of a social practice, but determined as a social structure, indeed in this study the social practice are the Salvini's speeches at League Congresses and the social structure is the League's electorate knowledge and attitude. Discourses and power are dovetailed; in fact, discourses are a representation of the reality given by the speaker. The more powerful he or she is, the more valuable is the discourse. (Campbell 1992).

Along with power, the use of the language and the shape that is given to it by its rhetoric and discourse plays an important role in CDA. The language, through its use, becomes entwined with power in several ways and, particularly, its use can challenge the power and it becomes particularly helpful to subvert the power – rather than to maintain it. Furthermore, the language is the main vehicle for the expression of power in terms of a hierarchical social structure. (Campbell 1992).

CDS are not an established and precise methodology and there are several approaches associated with them. Among them, there is CDA or as named by Van Dijk (2009) the socio-cognitive approach to the discourse studies. This problem-oriented and multidisciplinary approach has been frequently applied to studies focused on the reproduction of the power abuse and the resistance against it through the use of language. As it will discuss in the following section, it fits this research since this approach is widely used to address the rhetoric and the political discourses related to the far right. Moreover, it helps to introduce the category of socio-cognitive structures that exists in the voters: socio-cultural knowledge, attitudes and ideology of the electorate. (Van Dijk, 2009). Those categories, along with the analysis of the rhetoric are the central pivot around which the surge of Salvini's politics rotates.

In the current and past decades, the rhetoric has been often addressed from different perspectives. This linguistic tool is a credible commitment device for the implementation of politics and it might be used as a signal for information for the candidates' preferences and appeal. (Aragonès at all 2005). Furthermore, Conway et. al (2012) confirms that the use of both complex or simple rhetoric in election frames can guide the result of the elections itself. Indeed, the shift from a complex rhetoric to a simpler one is more effective when it happens at the very end of the campaign.

A more exhaustive study on the rhetoric and the elections' outcome has shown that the evocation of emotions is directly related to the result of a higher consensus and mobilization around the party. Indeed, through the approach explained by Riker (1990), it is possible to deduce that an in-depth study of the words, symbols and images used in the political discourses may lead to a better comprehension of the growth of a party rather than the other one. Further, a detection of the presence of specific emotional patterns and the persistence of specific emotional themes (such as the appeals to anger and fear) may also improve the connection between the voters with the political elite. (Jerit, 2004)

Moreover, in relation to such a frame, it has been observed that rhetoric styles are very often combined with political associations: in our case, as demonstrated also in the study of Samuel-Azran et. al (2018), the far-right rhetoric responds to

in order to establish the political discourses. As observed, "death fear, dogmatism, intolerance of ambiguity is positively associated with conservatism" (Samuel-Azran et al. 2018, p.18) which is in tune with the aim of this project that will show how this same pattern is present also in Salvini's political conferences and in Salvini's discourses.

To conclude, this research will focus on a single-case study on the League's growth through the analysis of several public and official speeches of the party's leader crossing the whole surge until 2019: from the beginning of the ascension to the success apex. The methodology that will be used is the CDA also known as the socio-cognitive approach to

CDS. For this reason, we are going to proceed here with a more in-depth account of this approach.

### **Critical discourse analysis: the Socio-cognitive approach to CDS and its application.**

According to Wodak, the aim of the critical discourse analysis is “to understand the complex working of language within society, how socio-cultural structures influence and, at the same time, are influenced, by language use” (2015, p.24-26). In a more specific manner, what is going to be addressed here is the close relation between the language and power, a typical object of study from the CDA. It will discuss and analyze the mechanism through which the far-right and the populist rhetoric of Salvini is bound with the result of the elections, making the concept of power even more tangible to be studied.

Furthermore, language can also be used to legitimize power, since “the language is used as a means of domination” (Habermas 1977, p.259), hence it is necessary to quote the basic assumptions of the CDA and contextualize them in the present study. The language used as a social phenomenon in this dissertation is, as mentioned above, the far-right rhetoric of League’s leader, who is speaking on behalf of the party he is representing as well as of the social group he belongs to. The use of a systematic and repetitive pattern in the language and in the rhetoric is the focus of the analysis and the visible outcomes of polls and elections are the result of effect on the active hearers and voters. Furthermore, the centralization of power is one of the main characteristics of the League. Indeed, it is tangible the undisputed presence of the leader in the party’s activities (Ruzza 2004, p.6).

The concepts of power and language are mutually bounded, what emerges from the academic is that despite the language is not powerful on its own, but it needs the use of someone powerful to gain power, the language has

the capability to engage with power and subvert it, providing the perfect tool for this aim (Wodak 2011).

The choice to analyse the speeches in Pontida, the most important annual convention organised by the League, and in the Federal Congresses have to be discussed in the terms of what Weninger suggests: the elites the characters “play a major role in shaping the public opinion and the production and maintenance of discriminatory and biased beliefs, attitudes and ideologies” (Weninger 2008 p.146). Due to the strong hierarchical conformation of the League, it is very simple to point out who represents the elite of the party and what represents its interest. Here, only the speeches taken by Matteo Salvini will be addressed - as he represents the main figure and leadership not only of his party, but also of the majority of the right-wing voters.

As mentioned in the previous section and following the lead of Van Dijk, it is necessary to introduce three socio-cognitive structures that will aid the comprehension of the phenomenon in question:

- I.** The socio-cultural knowledge of the League electorate that lay the foundation in a very specific way and aid the constitution of a solid pool of voters; In this structure it is not possible to forget to mention the Eco’s concept of encyclopaedia (1986) as not a simple codex but a group of shared information among a cultural or subcultural group.
- II.** The generally shared xenophobic attitude of the voters, particularly towards the migrants and other members of the out-circle (which will be discussed below);
- III.** The ideology and the continuous claim for polarization and confrontation with “the other”, as members of a different and outsiders.

These three structures above are helpful in shaping the triangular socio-cognitive account of the League discourse, in which it is possible to insert the components of the political rhetoric. So, we can here consider three different patterns related:

- I. The racial component, embodied with the claim of “Italians first” and characterized by the use of specific, sovereign and populist topics and arguments of the League;
- II. The socially shared ethnic prejudices and ideology. A traditional and rephrased legacy of the previous (federalist) form of the party;
- III. The reproduction of domination and inequality by the Italian group of “good people” in relation to “the others” - such as the attitudes towards migrants for instance.

Voters and political leadership are, moreover, bound together these structures. Thus, it is possible to decompose and analyze each of the three patterns above in order to better define, and understand the role that they play in the turnout results.

Indeed, the voters’ knowledge is based on the accumulation of information, with or without a racial component, that lasts a lifetime and it is shared within a certain community. Also, it is possible to claim that the political elite are able to shape the non-experienced knowledge, also known as hearsay knowledge, according to the direction taken by the party’s leadership. Thus, the hearsay knowledge of the electors receives inputs that are considered more reliable according to the degree of importance of the interlocutor, which in the case of this research is played by the higher ranked figure in the League panorama: the secretary of the party, Salvini.

It is also necessary here to introduce some further concepts: attitudes and ideology. They will be treated unitarily, since one is indispensable for the existence of the other one: “attitudes tend to be based on organised ideologies, that control the acquisition and are able to change more specifically attitudes” (Van Dijk 2009, p.68-69) As instance, an anti-migration (racist) ideology might have different and highly unstable and variable attitudes: on one side, one League voter might allow the migration with reserves, while on the other side, another voter might go for a completely prohibition of it.



The most recent voters' attitudes had already been mentioned in the previous theoretical chapter, however, Passarelli (2013) previously analysing the national electorate realised that "the League share [with its voters] a set of beliefs that undermine the democratic system" (p. 60), moreover, quoting authors as Mudde, Ignazi and Mayer he assumed also that "the attitudinal measure provide a considerable insight into individual and group level of analysis" (p. 61). This gives me the chance to treat the speeches both from a party's point of view and from the electoral one.

Since CDA is interested in the study of power, in terms of abuse or domination of it, it is the aim of this study not to measure the exploitation itself, but to understand how the discourse can exercise power in the election frame. To do so, I will set a specific database of discourses, which will be presented and discussed in the following section, and I will decompose each of them into discourse components.

By doing so, I will address of the ideological structure of the discourse according to the following sub-division, as suggested by Van Dijk (2009), furthermore I will add some of the tools made by Gee (2014) in order to validate and solidify the methodological process in order to create a miscellaneous analysis structure based on six main points:

- I. Polarization: Are there any claims regarding the inner or outer group? Are there any descriptions to those groups? Are pronouns as 'we', 'us', 'our' used to refer to inner-group members in comparison with 'they', 'them', 'theirs'? Is it used with a different intonation that contributes to the polarization of subjects or topics? How the use of languages is used to create a relationship between speaker and listener? How is the "common and social good" created?
- II. Use of syntaxes and register: Are there any uses of slogans or mottos and how often are they used? Are there any figures of speech, if yes, what is the purpose of using them? What sort of register is used (high or low/dialect)? Does it contribute to the conversation in a positive or negative way?

- III. Identification: is there a main category used to describe the group? If yes, how many times is it recalled and what is the function of it? What is the speaker trying to communicate with the identification? Why is it chosen a subject or topic rather than another one? Why is the subject/topic designed in a certain grammatical way? Is it possible to recognize identities in terms of social/ethnic/religious group?
- IV. Use of vocabulary (or emphasis of positive self-description and negative other-description): Does Matteo Salvini use a positive/neutral/negative manner to refer to fellow members? What about the reference to immigration and souverainism? Which words are used to indicate the refugee-seekers? And which words are used to indicate the opponents and the outsider group members? Does it use any form of hyperbolic emphasis (or mitigation) in the language, if yes what is the subject of it? Is it possible to extract a ranking of relevance of the topic?
- V. Activities: How is the ideological group identified in terms of the activities carried out by it? Does it propose any simple solutions to the issues and problems mentioned? If yes, how are they reported and proposed? Which language is used to describe them? Simple or complex? Is it possible to recognize any scapegoat created *ad hoc* in the speeches?
- VI. Shared knowledge: how is the party's ideology described? Is there a use of deixis (grammatical references)? What is it said, and most importantly, what is not said in Matteo Salvini speeches? What is left to the speaker inference? What feeling and emotion emerge from the context and what emerges from the speech? What is the most common recall shared between the leader and the listeners? Does the speaker shape his own reality? If yes how? And is it effective?

Finally, the work done by Wodak (2015) is fundamental to explain several features of the populist far-right discourses: for example i) the use

of the fear of the voters as a cause of the shift of preferences; ii) the creation of scapegoats to social and non-social issues; iii) the proposal of easy and simple solution to the problems. Indeed, based on her *The Politics of Fear* (2015), I made some questions, above listed in the point VI., in order to explore and analyse the discourses of Matteo Salvini. In addition, those above three points may recall the phatic communication prevalence theory of Sedda and Demurru (2018) and Sedda (2016). The communicative style of the phatic language is more oriented toward the presence of the speaker as a symbol (figure and representation of an ideology) rather than the real content of the language itself.

Consequently, the language, which can be divided into significant and significance, used in the far right rhetoric of Matteo Salvini loses significance in what can be described as a phenomenon of empty significance (Laclau 2005). As instance, the concept of Italianess used by Salvini can change accordingly to the temporal and spatial location of the speech. Who is Italian, who “comes first”, who is a “good person”, who is the pacifist, who is “we” and who is “the enemy” changes every single time Salvini changes his audience, with the result that there is a completely blurred idea of what it is important, but with the positive outcome of creating a universal and shared-among-the-followers concept.

Furthermore, it is important to highlight the exploitation of the social media by the League’s leader. Despite the media playing a significant role in the whole analysis, this research is going to discuss the way in which the populist far-right message is sent through the media and not the use of the media themselves.

### **Database and sample**

The discourses analysed in this research will be the discourses of the League’s leader Matteo Salvini in very specific circumstances and time. Since, as reported by Wodak (2001), every discourse is historically interpreted and it is its situation in time and space that characterise it. It

ordains the legitimisation of the power, in order to address the surge of the Party as the most voted party, it is fundamental to start the analysis since the party's name mutation from the "Northern League" to the "League" that happened right after the Federal Congress took office in 2017. This very specific moment is the keystone of the whole change within the party and the way through which it is perceived from outside.

Once set the database, applying the lenses of CDA, the study will considerate how the public speeches are implicated in the surge of the party, as the goal of the research is to shed light on the function of the language in the outcome of Parliamentary elections of 2013 and 2018 and the European elections of 2019.

In order to do so, the public speeches taken into consideration will be the Salvini's speeches at the Federal Congress of the League in 2017 and 2019, and the Salvini's speeches taken in Pontida during the annual conference in 2017, 2018 and 2019 and Salvini's speech in Piazza Duomo in Milan for main conference of the League *Prima l'Italia* in May 2019.

The choice of using the public discourses, in particular in this transitional period of the party, lies on the fact that political speeches are *per se* the most persuasive means used by politicians. Moreover, since the spotlight is on the shift towards the souverainism of the party, the speeches are the solid pivotal element around which the transition rotates. Finally, since mostly the party followers attend the public speeches, the use of social media and the possibility to have access to the original record is largely available, but the analysis will be done on the above mentioned limited number of speeches. Along with it, Matteo Salvini could be considered the most influential politician in the social media frame in Italy, as instance his profiles reached 60,8 million interactions during the EU Parliamentarian campaign lasting from January until May 2019. (Ravizza & Gabanelli, 2019)

Those speeches are available on the official YouTube page of the League or the official YouTube page of Matteo Salvini, allowing them to be a reliable matter of study. Here the role of the mass media is tangible: not by

chance, the League and Matteo Salvini use one of the most common social means of communication in order to collect and record the speeches and the clips for the electorate. Thus, the annex for the digital resources would be added at the end of the next analysis chapter.

Finally, since my mother language is Italian, I will provide a translation and a contextualization of the language used in those discourses. Since, the language used by Salvini during his rallies is Italian.

In order to better introduce the analysis that follows, I will provide an example of the work here below. The speech taken into consideration is dated July 2015 and it is taken in Milan at convention namely “Euro o libertà?” (Euro or freedom?). This episode is a very clear example of the Salvini’s rhetoric against the European Union, thus this speech is pretty simple and clear, there are very few crossing topics and the theme is mostly a single one.

To what concern point I. (Polarization), the speech begins with a clear stance of the gap between the Left (time wasters) and the “ugly, racist and ignorant” *Leghisti* (League followers). Of course, the tone used describing his followers is sarcastic, but this tone will not be a single case, but apply several times. A second polarization is done when Salvini divides the electorate and the voters between “people who want to understand” and “obtuse people”. As a consequence of this division, the government members, who lead the country, are “obtuse people who act in bad faith, because they are paid to pretend to not understand that we can leave [the EU] and an alternative is possible”. A final polarization is done at the very end of the speech, here Salvini is expressing his own position regarding his ideology and accordingly “I make first the person, his value and the welfare, then it comes the spread, the trade and the finance, all those are inventions made by the man to screw the man”.

The syntaxes (II.) used has a real low profile as the register. In fact, the speech is not empty of scurrilous words and foul language; it is possible to hear *che si fotta Berlusconi* (fuck Berlusconi) or *moneta del cazzo* (shitty money [related to Euro]) or *una parte della sinistra [...] hanno le palle in*

*spiaggia* (a part of the Left [...] is wetting its ass on the seashore). Secondly, Salvini's speech is full of claims and mottoes as *o si vince o si muore* (there is a winner or dying) and again, *la verità viene prima di tutto* (truth comes first) or *sono arrivati ai titoli di coda* (they [the leftist government] arrived at the end of the path). In those mottoes we notice that the enemy is described both easily to defeat (because it arrived at the end) and a strong opposite (because it needs someone ready to die). This is a typical feature of the fascist rhetoric, the humiliation in front of the weak enemy (Eco, 1995). Another feature typical of the fascist rhetoric is the appeal to the frustrated moderate middle-class: *io guardo ai moderati [...] che hanno perso i loro risparmi e non sono per un cazzo moderati* (I look at the moderates [who] loses all their savings, those are not moderated at all). The register used contributes positively to the conversation, since the listeners are supporters and voters of the leader, indeed the figure that uses a common, dialectic and vulgar syntax appears more closer and more attentive to the deeper needs of the person.

In the speech we have a first paradoxical identification (III.) of the League voters and of Matteo Salvini himself. At the very beginning, Salvini describes in a sarcastic way the *leghisti* as *brutti, razzisti e ignorati* (ugly, racist and ignorant), secondly, the target of his sarcasm is himself. Indeed, he assumes to be a math ignorant, *io che ho fatto il liceo classico e sono stato rimandato in mate*, but able to understand that the Euro is the wrong currency for Italy, because *le diseguaglianze non fanno chiudere le fabbriche, ma l'euro sì* (inequalities do not let the company to close, Euro does). A second blurred identification occurs toward the "enemy". The first and major one is the European establishment or *bestie anti democratiche che governano l'Europa* (anti-democratic beasts that run Europe); those are represented, once again, with sarcasm. As instance, Salvini states that the authoritative voice of Romano Prodi is taking a discourse for the *disgraziati* (wretches) students of Bologna Business School, explaining that Euro is the biggest laboratory in the post-war period. With this classification, Salvini is able to compare the poor Italians

as test subjects of the European establishment, making them feel victims of the elite who surround the “ignorant and ugly” electors.

As briefly mentioned above, the vocabulary (IV.) is pretty simple and mostly vulgar in its terms, the manner used to describe the fellow members of the parties is pretty positive and creates a sort of comradeship between the “math ignorant” leader and the “ugly, racist *leghisti*”. In this short speech there is only one reference to different issues, aside the anti-Euro topic: Salvini accuses the media of bad information regarding immigration issue: *Se muore un migrante su un barcone è una tragedia, se muore una cavia non succede nulla* (if a migrant dies on a boat is a tragedy, if a test subject does, nothing happens).

At the end of the speeches Salvini enunciates his political and economical solution (V.) for the Euro issue. In fact, he states *i cinquanta miliardi? Io te li metto di tasca mia per la libertà dei nostri figli* (what about 50 billion? I will pay them out of my pocket for my children’s freedom), *li ricostruiamo come residuo fiscale versato dalla Lombardia allo stato italiano* (we will save them from per-capita fiscal balance of Lombardy region). In this circumstance, it emerges clearly as a legacy with the Northern past of the party, the Lombardy once again is represented as the stronghold of politics and economics against not only Italy but also Europe. A brief consideration about the solution proposed, the analysis of the Italexit is not complete at all and it lacks several secondary and correlated issues, so the estimate of 50 billions is completely incorrect and furthermore it is not supported by any data. This is fallacious and unreliable information, typical of PRR rhetoric. Moreover, the solution appears simple as simple is the language used, in particular when there is a strong emotional relation between the big enemy and the freedom of Italian and Lombard children.

To what concern the final element of the analysis (VI.), the shared knowledge, in this speech there is no straightforward utterance regarded the ideology of the party, however there are few adjectives that remind how the League voter must be: honest, pride and courageous in front of the

anti-democratic beast. Moreover, despite no deixis being detected, Salvini sarcastically claims that the Leftist newspapers are cradle for pearls of wisdom, letting infer the incapability of journalists and the bad faith of the Left. Finally, it is sustainable that the leader creates his own reality through the far-right rhetoric; weak but dangerous enemies thus surround the party and the voters, who have to aim to preserve the children's future.



## Analysis

### Pontida Congresses

The choice of Pontida speeches as a matter of analysis is not trivial, indeed on the stage of the annual League congress of Pontida the leaders of the League had the opportunity to talk to their voters. The location of Pontida has symbolically been chosen because of the oath of Pontida: a ceremony dated 7th April 1176, where the Lombard cities signed a pact against the Holy Roman Empire. Every year, since 1990, the League uses the anniversary of this ceremony to gather the Lombard people on the “holy soil” and there, the leaders of the League take their speeches and rallies.

### Pontida 2017: Referendum and freedom

This XXXI speech of Pontida was held in September 2017 under the slogan Referendum and freedom. Salvini decided to use a particular form of speech which increases the grade of active involvement of the listeners, indeed, during the rally Salvini asked the audience a few yes/no questions.

Starting with the polarization (I.), at the very beginning of the speech, Salvini identifies his target audience, the middle-Italian described as a good person *gente per bene*. During all the rally, when Salvini uses the pronoun us, we, our, your, and mine, he takes into consideration this good people's description. However, there are no defined lines of whether a person is or is not good, but what emerges is that the League is a family and not only a party, a family that reunites the good people. There are a few descriptions of the bad people, the first one is a very broad concept of the elite, it is geo-located both in Rome and in Brussels, and it consists of bankers, speculators, politicians, and baby-boomers or *sessantottini*. These discredits are very broad and once again there is no clear

distinction of who is the real enemy, either the elitarian bureaucrats or the socialist boomers. The second diversification comes versus the political other, in particular the 5 Star Movement's (5SM) politicians, who at that time are the rival of the League. The tone used to describe them is sarcastic and ironic, in particular, Salvini describes their leader, Luigi Di Maio, as a small mushroom, *il funghetto*. The target of Salvini's sarcasm is also the 5SM's voters, those who vote with a click and with a click choose a "martian" mayor in Rome. The relationship created between the listener and the speaker is pretty reoccurring, the fact that the leader claims as a family, with common values and identity strength the ideas and the claims of Salvini and moreover adding features and characteristics to the enemy, along with the use of sarcasm, gives confidence to the listeners who reflects him or herself within the figure of the leader.

To what concerns the use of syntaxes and register (II.) Salvini uses his common informal register with the presence of Lombard dialectal forms *scusate suu strach* (I am sorry, I am tired). Moreover, it emerges from his words a pretty optimistic behavior, amplified by sentences like *l'anno prossimo quando andremo al governo* (next year, when we will govern). This widely spread sense of victory allows the audience to feel more participants and positive towards Salvini's rhetoric. The speech is full of mottos and slogans, in particular, and mostly related to the war, the defense, and the victory: *c'è qualcuno di voi che ha paura? c'è qualcuno che ha perso la voglia di combattere?* (is there anyone who is afraid? is there anyone who lost the desire to fight?). This register is used with the mere aim of reinforcing the positions of the leadership and enhancing the group of voters. Furthermore, Salvini claims to a peaceful battle for freedom from mafia (corrupted elite) and clandestine immigration. Claiming the immigration issue in the opposite position put the League voters to believe the migrants as enemies or a real threat to the value of freedom. To emphasize the threat, not once, Salvini recalls the defense of

the children and their futures: *giù le mani dai bambini* (hands off the children).

Salvini displays a sort of identification (III.) for the League family. The description is less vague than the enemies' one, indeed the League people are nationwide recognizable with some virtues and values: *gente che studia e fatica [...], gente orgogliosa, con dignità e senso di giustizia* (people who study and toil [...] pride people, with dignity and sense of justice). Anyway, more interesting is the description of the other: initially Salvini states: *se sei immigrato per bene e arricchisci la mia comunità allora sei benvenuto* (if you are a good migrant and you enrich my community, so you're welcome), *se sei un clandestino che spaccia, stupra, molesta e fa casino [...] ti mettiamo sul primo aereo per tornare a casa tua* (if you are clandestine and you deal with drugs, rape, harras and make trouble [...] then we will put on the first airplane which brings you home). In addition, *se ti da fastidio il presepe o il crocifisso in classe allora torna da dove sei arrivato* (if you are bothered by the crib or the crucifix in class, come to your country). Salvini in this description characterizes the other within the religious frame: those who are not Christian with Italian traditions are not welcomed in Italy. Along with the use of war language, such a strong line of division between "we" and "them" have the aim of fomenting the audience and to strengthen them to the religion and its values.

To what concerns vocabulary (IV.), on one side Salvini uses a positive and based on the values for describing the followers, on the other side the vocabulary for migrants is matched with the words like rapist, drugs, harassment, and so on. Interesting is to highlight that also mafia is quoted, but with neutral vocabulary and no particular expression of detachment. So, it is possible to say that there is more interest in defining the migrants as beatable enemies than the mafia as an instance. Another different vocabulary is used to describe the political enemy: two are the uses, a strong and violent one against EU *massacra i nostri prodotti* (which destroys our products) and one more ironic towards the Italian

establishment, in this case, Renzi's government: *truffa milioni di risparmiatori italiani con il salvabanche* (cheat millions of Italian depositors with the decree save-the-banks). Finally, some space is given to the police and their jobs, in Salvini's words it is possible to listen to a winking language, indeed Salvini is giving all the freedom to the armed forces to defend the citizens, without taking care of any responsibilities: *la divisa va onorata* (the uniform must be honored) or *darò mano libera per poterci difendere per portare sicurezza, onestà e pulizia nelle nostre città* (I will give free hands [to the police] to defend us, to bring security and cleansing in our cities).

In this speech, there is no description of activities (V.) of the party followers, however, it is redundant the claim to values and Christianity. To what concern the activities that would be carried out by the leader once he will govern, we find a very clear trend that could be described as a political program: *abolizione della legge Mancino e della legge Fiano* (abolition of Mancino and Fiano laws, those are laws against the nazi-fascist propaganda), *cambieremo la legge Fornero* (we will change Fornero law on pension system), again *stop al jobsact* (stop the law on jobs), *dobbiamo rivedere l'ordine dei giornalisti, [...] c'è un problema con la libertà di stampa* (we have to control the Association of journalists, [...] there must be a problem). When it comes to sovereignist doctrine, Salvini claims *vogliamo la possibilità di controllare la moneta, le banche, i porti, il diritto al lavoro e alla pensione* (we want the possibility to control the currency, the banks, the ports, and the right to work and go to pension).

After what has been done so far, it is now possible to lead the analysis to the shared knowledge (VI.) between Salvini and the listeners. Salvini's metonymies use the name of the laws instead of explaining the content, a second inference occurs when Salvini states the crucifix and crib issues: *rispetto a chi porta rispetto, ma se ti da fastidio il presepe, il crocifisso allora torni da dove sei arrivato* (respect to whom respects, if you are bothered by crib or crucifix then you came back where are you from).

Here, it is possible to notice two interesting outcomes, the first one is that with claiming the catholic traditions, Salvini indicates as enemies all those who are not Catholic and paint all them with the same brush of the anti-Catholic tradition. In particular, Salvini remembers the chronicle relative to 2002 when a couple of parents inquired, with negative results, the removal from a class of the crucifix. The reality shaped by the leader is clear, the League family is surrounded by the enemies who want to reduce freedom and eliminate the traditions, by a corrupted establishment who stresses the entrepreneurs and destroys the products made in Italy. The only one way to defeat this enemy is to vote for the League which represents the true Italian catholic values of family, friendship, freedom, identity, love for the country and its children.

### **Pontida 2018: Commonsense to govern**

The XXXII Pontida Congress came after the largest victory of the League in the Parliamentary Elections. After the elections happened in March, the League received the mandate to form a government with the 5 Stars Movement. The Conte I government started the 1st of June, while Salvini took his speech at Pontida one month later, on the 1st of July. This was the first Pontida Conference with the League at the government since 2011. During the election, the League gained 17.35% of the Italian electorate and set itself as the third most voted party in Italy, beside 5SM and the Democratic Party (Dem). After a long negotiation, the League and the 5SM reached an agreement in order to govern together and it is possible to listen to the faith and the optimism of Salvini in his first speech as a Minister of Internal Affairs.

Beginning with polarization (I.), in this case differently from the previous year Salvini makes a clear distinction between the winners and the losers. Indeed, the party family composed by the people of the League, which finally has reached its nationwide structure, is able to run a government. As the previous year, the party is described not only as a political form,

but it is *una comunità, una famiglia e un popolo che presto cambierà il mondo* (a community, a family and a population that soon will change the world). At the apex of the pyramid there is the leadership, represented by League ministers, those who *abbiamo fatto più noi in un mese che il governo in sei anni* (have done more in one month than a government in six years). On the other side of the polarized view of Salvini there are the losers of the elections, those who are part of the opposition parties. As usual, in the large outer-group of the losers there are *i radical chic che commenteranno la brutta gente che c'era a Pontida, [...], i poveretti frustrati e disgraziati di sinistra, [...] i fenomeni di sinistra* (the radical chic who will comment on the bad people attending Pontida, the poor frustrated and wretches of the Left and the leftist champions (description with sarcasm)).

To what concerns the use of the syntaxes and register (II.) it is possible to notice that there is a relevant shift from the rally in 2017. Indeed, despite it is present again some forms of low level of language and a war vocabulary, the register is definitely more optimistic and aimed at prompting the relationships with the other part of the coalition government. Moved by the large victory in the election, on one side Salvini states that *l'obiettivo è quello di cambiare l'Europa, di dar voce ai popoli stroncati da [...] finanza, multinazionali che hanno offerto solo precarietà e paura* (the aim is to change Europe, to give voice to the people panned by [...] finance and corporations which offered only precariousness and fear). On the other, Salvini opens his arms to friendship and love *qua c'è amore, non c'è invidia, gelosia o rancore [...] lasciamo che siano gli altri ad odiare, minacciare e rosicare* (here there is love, there is no envy, no jealousy and no grudge [...] let the other hate, threat and gnaw). It is possible to notice one hyperbole used to belittle the political target, namely pension law Fornero, where Salvini emphasizes the age to go to pension: *60, 70, 80, 90 anni* (60, 70, 80, 90 y.o.).

In this rally as in the other, Salvini makes diversifications in the identifications (III.). On one side, he uses the father-son approach towards his followers: *i vostri figli sono come miei figli, e voi miei fratelli e sorelle* (your sons are like my sons, and you are my brothers and sisters). And again *sarò qui per fare un patto d'amore e onore su quello che faremo [...] la gente della Lega è onesta e ha coraggio* (I am here to do a love path and honor on what we will do [...] we, people of the League are honest and courageous). On the other side, the approach to the political opposition and the enemy is divisive, from Salvini's word it is possible to infer an offensive approach towards the elites and in particular the target of his attacks are Berlin, Paris and Brussels. Those metonymies are used to not give landmarks to the listeners and to give a larger and blurred perception of the enemy. Indeed, the European governments are accused of *toglierci le radici, cancellare le donne e gli uomini per avere numeri e consumatori al servizio delle multinazionali* (remove our roots, cancel men and women in order to have consumers at the mercy of the multinationals). They are also accused of benefiting from the illegal activity of the NGO and from the immigration business, furthermore, they also allow the untraditional islamic usage of cutting the throat of the animals in order to let them bleed and then slaughter. This very incoherent list of actions and causes increases the misperception of the reality in the audience and has the consequences of increasing the support towards the leadership since everyone reflects his or her thoughts into Salvini's ideas.

In this rally it is possible to define four different types of vocabulary (IV.). The first one is the war vocabulary, the most used words belonging to it are: *difesa, sacrificio, onore, siamo in una guerra* (defence, sacrifice, honor and of course war). The use of this vocabulary strengthened the position and the ideas of Salvini and the followers toward him. Indeed, even the appellation of *capitano* (captan) used to indicate the leader belonged to the military and war vocabulary. The second type of vocabulary, used in sentences where the League and the league's people

are the subject is the security vocabulary: here it is possible to notice words as *sicurezza, legge, ordine, giuste riforme, garanzia* (security, law, order, right reforms, warranty). This vocabulary increases the sentiment of certainty and conviction. Anyway, the most interesting vocabulary is the one used for the description of the enemy or the opposition: *disperati, poveretti, frustrati, disgraziati* (desperate, poor people, frustrated and wretches) are the people of the left, the journalists and Renzi's followers. As usual, the tone used is ironic and sarcastic, once more for mocking the opposition. Finally, the last vocabulary is the one related to history and legacy of the League: *grande genio, la voglia e il coraggio di Umberto Bossi e Roberto Maroni* (a huge genius, the desire and the courage of Umberto Bossi and Roberto Maroni, both used to be League's secretaries). This silver tongue used by Salvini shows a sort of worshipping sentiment towards his predecessors and somehow displays a continuous line in the leadership with the past, but it also underlines a step forward of the League.

To what concerns the activities (V.) carried out from Salvini, during this event it is possible to assist two actions of the leader, for the very first time, Salvini approaches the so-called life tree of Pontida with the mother of a former deputy, who died. He asks the followers to pray with him and hug the mother of the deputy, showing a romantic and sweet facade before the rally. The claim to Catholicism and religion happens not only once, but three times. The second is a quote from the catechism, used to justify his policies: *le nazioni più ricche sono tenute ad accogliere lo straniero nei limiti del possibile, e io ritengo che i limiti del possibile siano stati raggiunti*. (the richest countries are liable to accept the foreigner in the limits of their possibilities, and I reckon that those limits has already been reached). The final claim occurs at the end of the rally, in this occasion Salvini pulls out a rosary and makes a promise to the League's people: *farò che ciascuno possa nascere, crescere e curarsi nel suo paese, felice ed orgoglioso* (I let anyone to born, grew and heal in his or her country, happy and pride).



Finally, and once again, Salvini shares knowledge (VI.) with his followers, the first one to highlight is the tendency that journalists have to call the *leghisti* as fascists, racists, nazis or xenophobes. Once more, Salvini does mince his words and straightforwardly attach the order of journalists and the political oppositors. As usual, the leader uses a divisive approach in his speech to shape his form of reality, where what counts more is not the words of the free press, but the thinker as Simon Wiel, quoting her mottos as “the duties comes before the rights” or “ it is criminal everything that has the effect of eradicate a human being or prevent he or she takes roots”. Now, those quotes and references are definitely unfamiliar in Salvini’s speeches, however, to an unprepared listener it seems a stable argumentation and consolidates the ideas of Salvini in an upper level, motivated by a long-term thought.

### **Pontida 2019: Strength to be free**

Only ten days after the establishment of the new government Conte II led by the Democratic Party and the 5 Stars Movement, on 15th September took place the XXXIII convention in Pontida. The optimistic spirit of the previous year is not present anymore, but it seems reinvigorated Salvini’s fervor in battling. The tone is less relaxed than the previous year and in particular the political enemies gained the new trait of traitors. Interesting is also the violence against the boat captain Carola Rackete, who accused him for the events occurred in June and July 2019 when she was commanding Sea-Watch 3, a boat for a rescue mission. During this mission, the NGO boat saved fifty-three African migrants docking the boats during a special regime of “closed docks” ruled by the Minister of Internal Affairs, Matteo Salvini.

Starting with polarization (I.), it is clear the feeling of distance with the previous allies: *non cambierei mai la mia vita con quella di un Conte, Renzi e di Maio qualunque* (I will never change my life with some random as Conte, Renzi or di Maio). Along with the already mentioned

description of the political oppositions in the past two Pontida conventions, the Democratic Party's politicians are categorised as *poltronari* (sit on the armchair, so lazy and corrupted) and the 5SM representatives are *traditori* and *governo degli inciuci* (traitors and government of the corrupted business deals). As a counterpart to this corrupt government made by 5SM and democrats, Salvini claims: *ci sarà il governo del popolo* (there will be the government of people). As usual the government described by the League's leader is based on the value of freedom, courage and patriotism. Those values and virtues, we learned, are more and more taken to extreme by the words of contempt typical of Salvini's rhetoric. The polarization, in this case happened also with reference to the policies applied by Salvini in his quasi-year of government, indeed, the threat of delaying his security decree is addressed with sentences of challenge: *dovranno passare sui nostri corpi* (they will be over our bodies).

Once again, with respect to syntaxes and register (II.) Salvini continues along the same lines of the previous years, he insists on *prima gli italiani* (Italians first) and so on, but with one significant difference. In this 2019 speech, Salvini shows some indignation towards the Democrats: *cosa penserebbe Margaret Thatcher [...] di mettere una tassa sui prelievi sui soldi del conto corrente in banca? la follia!* (what does Margaret Thatcher [...] do about the taxation on withdraw money on bank accounts? it's madness!). This sentence is also accompanied by an ironic utterance: *neanche in Venezuela riuscirebbero a pensare a tanto* (nor in Venezuela, they'll be able to think it). In this example, it is interesting to highlight the attempt to elevate the register, quoting Margaret Thatcher, but at the same time, only one sentence later, the register is immediately reduced to what the audience is used to listening to with an example like Venezuela. This approach contributes to the aim of Salvini to appear high-flown and at the same time with a solid basement in everyday life. So, it is clear the positive contributions of this register to the rally.

The categorization and the identification (III.) go hand in hand with the previous years' rallies, there is a Italy of determined, courageous and patient voters seeking future and work for them and their voters (*determinati, coraggiosi e pazienti*). The introduction of patience is a feature given by the actual situation of the League, indeed, the fact that now is part of the opposition let the party act more on the rhetorical level rather than on the administrative level. For what concerns the claim Italian first, we have an interesting dichotomy: *per italiani intendo i fratelli e le sorelle arrivati dall'altra parte del mondo che rispettano la legge, pagano le tasse e rispettano la nostra cultura. Se invece vuoi coprire tua moglie col burqa lo fai a casa tua, nel tuo paese!* (as Italians I consider all the brothers and sisters who came from the other side of the world, who respect the laws, who pay the taxes and respect our culture. But if you want to cover your wife with burqa, do it in your country!). This sentence clearly understands who are the target of Salvini's discriminations, however, he also leaves the doors open to whom may be helpful to the country.

To what concerns the vocabulary (IV.) it is clear in this speech the dichotomy between two types of vocabulary, the words of hate and the words of sacredness. On one side, the hate vocabulary is characterized by the common behaviour Salvini has against the political enemies and the minorities. In particular, here in this occasion, Salvini railed against the 5SM calling them traitors, along with it, to argue his rhetoric he claims also: *gli schiavisti, razzisti e colonialisti oggi stanno solo a sinistra [...] sfruttatori di donne e di uomini!* (nowadays, slavers, racist and colonialists are leftists [...] exploiters of women and men). Among them, indeed, Salvini inserted also the figure of Carola Rackete *viziata comunista [...] novella eroina della sinistra* (little spoiled communist [...] a new heroine for the left). This rhetoric does nothing more than increasing the media and public opinion pressure on the forthcoming trial between them. As a consequence, this rhetoric also creates polarization among the audience. On the other side, the second vocabulary used is the sacredness

and tradition related one. Typically, Salvini claims that the League's people are tradition friendly, have dignity and pride, but this time, he added also a sphere of sacredness to his speech, indeed he claims: *difendere i sacri confini del nostro paese* (to defend the sacred borders of our country) suggesting that there will be a strong opposition for what concerns the Mediterranean issues, migration firstly.

Regarding activities (V.), it is mentionable the introduction with which Salvini jumps on the stage, the leader indeed is accompanied by the choir of Puccini's *Nessun Dorma* with the iconic verse *all'alba vincerò!* (at dawn I will win!). This choice is a clear reference to the aim of the party leadership and also a separation with the past conferences, where it was used a choir taken from Verdi's *Nabucco*, typically used by the previous League's administration as a choir of resistance and independence. As happened the year before, Salvini dedicated some time for praying by the life tree in order to remember the lost militants before the beginning of the rally. During the speech, he carried out some political opinions without any complex explanations, as instance *faremo una legge elettorale che dica: chi vince governa, basta con gli inciucci e i tradimenti, una legge trasparente ed efficiente* (we will do a electoral law efficient and transparent: who will win, will govern, stop corruption and betrayal). The second proposal introduced without data supporting is the flat tax, during the election in 2018, the flat tax was the economic backbone for the right coalition. So that, it is not a new topic introduced, but it is the first time he claimed in Pontida an economical solution for the Italian debt impasse. Of course, the tone and the vocabulary used for this policy are commonly used.

Finally, the shared knowledge (VI.) is enriched with new quotes and figures, becoming more complex. The first one to mention is the war memory: *i nostri nonni hanno dato la vita sul Piave* (our grandparents gave their lives on the river Piave). Using the river Piave as a metonymy allows the audience to remember the First World War where the Italians were occupied in the war against the Austrohungarian Empire for the

restitution of the lands under the sacred borders in Trentino, Veneto and Friuli-Venezia Giulia. A second shared knowledge comes when Salvini commends the police forces. He claims that when there is a League congress there is an *enorme differenza di civiltà* (huge difference in civilization). And, according to him, it is possible to see it in the police approach: they are happy and smiley when there is a League convention, and a counter-insurgency asset when the leftists protest.

### **Federal Congress of the League 2017: Free and Strong**

The Federal Congress in 2017 held in Parma was the perfect occasion for Salvini to celebrate his second mandate as secretary of the League and to finally break the chain with the previous party establishment. Indeed, once largely won the party's primaries against the candidate supported by Maroni and Bossi, Giovanni Fava, Salvini may consider himself free to undertake his path for the leadership of the party and the government. In the Federal Congress are joined the majority of the mayors, governors and politicians of the League, so the occasion is supposed to request a more political and less rhetorical speech, however as it is going to be displayed, Salvini decided to not follow the etiquette, and continues with his typical rally, however with some differences.

To begin with polarization (I.), Salvini uses quite a lot of examples and reasons to polarize his audience. The first one is with the Democratic Party: *il PD è il partito degli immigrati e delle cooperative che li sfruttano* (the Dem is the party of migrants and the cooperatives which exploit them), *Renzi è più tecnologico, ma noi siamo più puliti, onesti e andiamo a testa alta* (Renzi is more technological, but we are more clean, honest and we go head-on), *il PD sfila con gli immigrati invasori a Milano* (the Democratic Party is parading in Milan on the side of the migrants invasors), and again *curiosa questa sinistra che abbassa le tasse ai ricchi, noi vogliamo abbassarle a tutti le tasse* (curious fact this Left that wants to decrease taxation to the richest, we want to decrease

taxation to all). The second polarization occurs versus the 5 Stars Movement: *strizzano l'occhio al Vaticano per l'IMU sugli immobili della Chiesa e hanno anche deciso di regalare 800 euro agli immigrati con il reddito di cittadinanza* (they wink to the Vatican for the taxation on Church estates and they have decided to present 800 euros to the migrants with basic income) or again *quelli che votano con i click* (those who vote with clicks). A third general polarization is against the establishment and the elite, in this case there are two sub-polarization one is the Italian state, the second is the European elite: *i burocrati di Roma* (the Roman bureaucracy), *il primo ladro in Italia, è lo stato. Il primo mafioso, lo stato!* (the main thief in Italy is the state. The first mobster, the state!) or *il nostro portafoglio è a Berlino e i nostri confini dipendono dai cretini di Bruxelles* (our wallet is in Berlin and our borders depends on the jerks in Brussels) or *loro ci stanno provando ad imbavagliare* (they are trying to muzzle us). The aim of Salvini in those cases is to create the widest range of enemies, so that all those who feel threatened by any type of injustice (migrants, EU laws and so on) can find a safe place within the League.

As the second instance, Salvini's rally sees a standard use for syntaxes and registers (II.): it is possible to find several nationalist mottos as: *prima la nostra gente, prima gli italiani* (our people first, Italians first), or *comprare italiano, consumare italiano, assumere italiano* (buy Italian, consume Italian, hire Italian) or again *non voglio clandestini in Italia! No clandestini!* (I do not want clandestines in Italy! No clandestines!). A second group of slogans is directed towards the party and himself, and in this case they are display a opening feature: *serve aria nuova, cerchiamo qualcuno migliore di noi* (we need fresh air, let's find someone better than us), or *uniti si vince, io voglio unire, non dividere* (united we win, I want to unite not to divide) and again *includere, aprire, coinvolgere, rispettare e crescere* (include, open, involve, respect and grow) or they display some defensiveness: *siamo Davide contro Golia* (we are David against Goliath). A third group of slogans is uncommon compared with

the rallies in Pontida and it is more politically-oriented, indeed it displays some party directions, directives and philosophies: *pensare locale e agire globale* (think local and act global) and *l'articolo 1 della costituzione dice che l'Italia è una repubblica fondata sul lavoro, io vorrei che fosse una repubblica federale fondata sul lavoro davvero!* (the 1<sup>st</sup> article of Italian constitution states that Italy is a republic founded on work, I wish it were a federal republic founded on work truly). The register used in the rally is pretty low and it is not unusual to listen to cursing and blasphemy. This type of register is a double-edge sword: it positively contributes to the conversation to those who feel represented by a common and vulgar language, but at the same time, it might hurt the sensibility of those who are annoyed by such a language. Once again the aim of Salvini is to polarize his audience and to strengthen his followers around his leader position.

To what concerns identification (III.) of the inner group, Salvini claims few characteristics which classify the League and the *Leghista: la Lega è l'ultima speranza per un futuro sereno e normale* (the League is the last chance for a serene and normal future), or again *poi c'è la Lega che fa scelte normali* (then there is the League which takes normal choices), and *ovunque c'è una persona per bene, lì c'è la Lega con le sue risposte e le sue soluzioni* (everywhere there is a good person there is the League with his answers and solutions), *noi abbiamo risorse e cuore che altri non hanno* (we have resources and heart that anyone else does not), and finally *noi diamo fastidio ai potenti [...] diciamo cose scomode* (we annoy the powerful people [...] we say uncomfortable things). What Salvini aims to do is to describe the League as much normal as he can, claiming normality above anything allows the leader's thoughts and actions to be understood as normal and shearable.

Along with syntaxes, another feature to understand Salvini's rhetoric is the use of vocabulary (IV.). It is not uncommon to listen to rude vocabulary and low degree language in Salvini's rally, but in this specific case, the vulgarity seems to be a common item: *Bossi mi*

*chiamava alle due del mattino per dirmi vaffanculo* (Bossi used to call me at 2 am just to say me fuck you), *Premio nobel per la coglioneria a Romano Prodi* (Nobel Prize for jerkiness to Romano Prodi) or again, *Renzi, porta una fottutissima legge elettorale* (Renzi, please propose a fucking electoral law). Anyway, what is more interesting is the systematic linkage of the word migrants (*migranti*) and invaders (*invasori*) or clandestines (*clandestini*). Salvini, indeed creates a direct association between those three words and he repeats it so many times, that it is impossible for the listener to find differences and use them as synonyms despite they have a clear different meaning and a negative connotation. To what concerns the hyperboles, Salvini states: *quando ci sono le marce in favore dei clandestini ci sono otto ore di collegamento RAI, Mediaset, Sky e La7. Quando c'è il congresso della Lega, di riffa o di raffa, due minuti vengono fuori* (when there are marches in favour of clandestines there are eight hours of live show on RAI, Mediaset, Sky and La7. When there is the League congress, by hook or by crook, two minutes pop up). This claim wants to highlight the unfair treatment reserved to the League by the mainstream news broadcasters.

Ideologically speaking, Salvini argues that the League and its militants must carry out some activities (V.). As already mentioned above in the syntaxes section, the activists need to be opened to all those who can improve the League in political terms, without a specific connotation or collocation. Along with it, the leader stresses the urgency to govern and display some of his political positions starting with: *invertiremo la tendenza [...] mille euro al mese ai disabili e se avanza qualcosa, ma non penso avanzi qualcosa, a chi dice di scappare dalla guerra* (we will reverse this trend [...] 1000 euros to people with disabilities and if some money are in surplus, but I don't think so, we will give to those who says are running away from the war). This sentence allows to introduce the use of unreal news, indeed, the fact that Salvini does not argue with any document or data in support, and the fact that he is perceived as a reliable source of information, allow the listener to believe in his words. Another



example comes up with flat tax: *la tassa unica al 15% funziona in quaranta paesi, anche Gentiloni la propone ai pensionati ricchi e agli imprenditori ricchi che dall'estero ritornano in Italia* (the 15% flat tax functions well in forty countries, even Gentiloni – PM at the time of speech – proposes it to the rich pensioners and the investors who come back to Italy from abroad).

The final point of the analysis is the shared knowledge (VI.). With few statements, Salvini is able to flirt with the legacy and his rivals in the primary elections: Bossi, Maroni and Zaia as well. He also uses the discourse direct addressed to Bossi: *Umberto, noi ci abbiamo provato in passato, ma andando al sud da colonizzatori, scegliendo qualche capo bastone lombardo* (Umberto, we already tried in the past, but we went in the South like colonizers, and we use some Lombard as representative), with this sentence Salvini rebukes the approach the Northern League had with the South of Italy and at the same time is able to convince the audience that the direction he undertook is the right one for the victory. Secondly, he said: *i risultati portati a casa quando siamo stati al governo: Maroni e la lotta al terrorismo, il sostegno agli agricoltori di Luca Zaia o la semplificazione di Calderoli* (the results achieved when we were governing: Maroni and the fight against terrorism, the assistance to the agricultures by Luca Zaia or the simplification done by Calderoli). Once again Salvini is able to enlarge and flirt with his audience, those who voted for him in the primary and those who voted for the old establishment nominee.

### **Federal Congress of the League 2019**

Differently from the previous public rallies, in this speech Salvini seems to be very political and even mature. Indeed, this last analysis would be an important example of the transition of Salvinism and the leader's thought. The speech took place in December 2019 in Milan, Salvini had just been notified to appear in court to give answers to his security decree

when he was Minister of Internal Affairs and is part of the opposition of the government namely Conte II. The tones of the speech are very strictes and for the first time his aim is to reprimand his fellow colleagues. One other important feature of the speech is the recognition of the status of the League as the main party at continental level. Indeed, all the discourse rotates around this feature.

To begin, it is possible to recognize two types of polarization (I.), one internal and one external. On one hand, the internal is definitely a new pattern introduced by Salvini and it is related to the exceptionality of the situation. For the first time indeed, he assumes a more inclusive status of continental political force: *qualcuno non ha capito che la guerra che c'è è a livello globale e sta chiuso nel suo orticello* (someone has not understood that the war is a global war, and decided to not look beyond his/her backyard) and again *io qui ho visto litigi, pigrizia, ostinazione* (I saw internal quarrels, laziness, stubbornness). So, differently from before, Salvini appeared to be more critical towards his followers. On another hand, the classical polarization against the political enemies cannot miss: *quando Beppe Grillo va all'ambasciata cinese, va a rendere omaggio a quella che è una dittatura* (When Beppe Grillo goes to Chinese embassy, he goes paying tribute to a dictatorship), and again versus the Dem: *Non tutti hanno lo stesso concetto della parola onore e dignità, a loro gli lascio la poltrona e mi tengo l'onore e le manette se serve, a testa alta in tribunale* (not everybody understands the words honor and dignity, I let them the armchair and I take my honor and the handcuff if needed, head on in tribunal).

To what concerns the syntaxes and register (II.), the speech is rich in mottos and slogans mostly belonging from two areas or semantic groups: the war and freedom. Sentence as *battaglia globale* (global battle) or *non possiamo arrenderci* (we can't give up) as well as *siamo in battaglia* (we are in a battle) they do nothing but increase the perception of being actually in a state of war. This rhetoric goes right in what can be called politics of fear. The second group of words is related to freedom, a

typical claim of Salvini and the League, it is mostly related with the souverainism and it comprehends states as: *la libertà non è quella di avere un padrone giusto, ma di non avere un padrone* (freedom does not mean to have a rightful master, but rather to not having at all) and again *non esiste libertà senza libertà economica* (there is no freedom without economic freedom). Those two statements belong to different authors, by Salvini's own admission. The first one was stated by Cicero and the second by Margareth Thatcher. To quote a well-known historical character is not a new pattern used by the League's leader, but it gives Salvini's words an increased credibility and basement.

The new increased awareness of League's role in Europe allows Salvini to argue new identification (III.) for his followers. Indeed, he states: *Non siamo qua perché siamo più bravi degli altri, siamo qua perché gli italiani contano su di noi [...] siamo l'ultima ancora di salvezza per il popolo cristiano occidentale* (we are not here because we are better than the others, we are here because Italians count on us [...] we are the last lifeline for the Western Christian people) and again *dobbiamo essere consapevoli che siamo il primo partito con questi valori [...] gli italiani ci chiedono di essere dei bravi ed onesti amministratori* (we must be aware that we are the first party with those values [...] Italians do ask us to be good and honest administrators). Furthermore, a hooking to culture allows Salvini to claim a very uncommon state, compared with the previous rallies: *la Lega deve essere avanguardia e strumento protagonista [della cultura]* (the League must be avanguard and main protagonist [of culture]). In addition to this new feature and awareness, Salvini asks also to be: un *movimento snello, orgoglioso delle sue radici ma che guarda avanti* (an efficient movement, pride of his roots but that looks straight to the future), and again, talking about his work as Minister of Internal affairs: *processare qualcuno che ha difeso i confini, la sicurezza, l'onore e la dignità del proprio paese è vergognoso per un paese civile* (to process someone who defended the borders, the security, the honor and the dignity for its country is a shame for a civil country).

As in syntaxes section, also the vocabulary (IV.) used in this rally may belong to the war semantic group: *battaglia globale* (global battle), *guerra* (war), *conquistare il mondo con la spada* (conquer the world with the sword). A second type of vocabulary is the cursing, what emerges is that during the public speech in front of the electors he utters bad words, but in official and internal rallies like the Federal Congresses, the use of swear is pretty redundant. Interesting to highlight is the combination of the words islam and extremism. Every time Salvini calls for islam, no room is given to a different interpretation, indeed, in the listeners the islamic people are always intended as extremist when Salvini talks.

Regarding the activities (V.), in Salvini's words it is possible to listen to a large optimism. Indeed, the leader is pretty sure he will come back to govern, but in this case there are no claims on sovereignty or anti-migrant decree, rather his invective is anti-establishment: *quando torneremo al governo ci sarà la modifica della costituzione e cancelleremo i senatori a vita* (when we will come back to govern, we will change the constitution, we will cancel the life senators' offices) and again *noi vogliamo una legge elettorale che garantisca governabilità, chi vince governa cinque anni!* (we want an electoral law which ensures governability, who wins will govern five years!). In this rally, the scapegoat is not represented by Brussels or Berlin or the migrants, but it is more closer, and already surrounding the League people: the islamic believers and the Italian government. For this reason, this rally plays an important role for the turn of the League and lets suggest a possible new paradigm shift of Salvini and the party.

Finally, despite there are no spotted deixes, in Salvini's words the listener may infer the leader's innocence. Indeed, his claims of what he did during his mandate as the Internal Affairs minister, along with his anti-establishment behaviour passes the message of sinlessness of action to cope with a higher issue or problem as it might be border defence. Certainly, this point might be intended as Salvini's reality, a reality where the actions of a minister can not be processed. A reality where an

NGO captain is represented as the enemy of the people and the normality, where the League represents the common good and the future is the cult of Italianness, with its Catholic culture and no room is left for any further traditions.

## **Conclusions and results**

In this section I will go through Salvini's speeches analyses in order to understand how the League leader was able to mutate accordingly the events with a view to keep maintaining his leadership in the national and the European frame. To do so, it is necessary to understand the impact of the far-right rhetoric and the Salvinism tout cour.

The analyses showed three main differences occurring during the years: the first one could be displayed as humoral shift. On one hand, Salvini showed a strong combative spirit, typical of the far-right rhetoric, when he was in front of elections or forced in his opposition position like in Federal Congress 2019 and Pontida 2017. As a consequence of this, the electorate showed him its support and strengthened his position, giving him the energies needed to win political battles. On the other hand, after an electoral victory, like in Pontida 2018 and Pontida 2019, a strong optimism pervaded the words and the rallies of Salvini. As a consequence, along with the decreasing of the combative spirit in favor of a more relaxed behavior (as admitted by Salvini himself), also the support towards the League's leader seems to decrease.

The second one is the change of register. Indeed, it is possible to assert that the more the event is formal, like the Federal Congress, the more the register is technical and rich in cursing. At the same time, the more the event is informal, like Pontida, the more Salvini reduces the use of cursing, but also reduces the level of language. As a consequence, in Pontida speeches, Salvini shows a bond with his supporters, while in Federal Congresses he shows his pivotal role as a leader. Claims and flatterings with League's legacies are contemplated as long as his role as leader is.

More than a difference, the third observation is represented by what can be described as the turning point. There are two very visible turning points, given by the results of the elections national and European. The

first turning point is visible in Pontida 2018, Salvini moved towards the new League's cooperative party, 5 Stars Movement, and as above mentioned the optimism is palpable in Salvini's words. The second turning point occurred one year later, in 2019, when the League lost its position in the majority in Parliament, and all its ministers, but the results of the Euro-Parliamentary elections saw him as the winner in Italy and in Europe. Consequently, his awareness of the actual position in Italian and European political panorama led him to a new powerful position.

What remains unchanged are the political themes he addresses during the years. Regardless the fact he is or he is not governing the country, Salvini maintains his strongholds when it comes to use the rhetoric: as shown by the *table 1* and *table 2* and demonstrated by the rallies analyses, the topics where Salvini takes more advantages are the distrust towards the European institutions and the Italian palaces of powers (even when he was minister for Internal Affairs) and the anti-migration feelings. To the latest, in addition, it is mentionable the anti-islamic behavior, which improved its importance in the early Salvinism, but that amplified the echo of the anti-migration according to the needs of his narratives.

To sum up and answer to the research question, I assure that to cope with the Italian demand, Salvini implements the souverainist rhetoric to an already fertile and reactive ground. The Italian demand reacts positively to Salvini's shapeshifter behavior. Indeed, the leader's bravura lies on taking advantages from electorate's humoral shift and the ability to re-attract drifted voters (Stockmer, 2017); from taking the attention high on core topics, where nativism still plays a pivotal role (Arzheimer, 2018); from the simpleness and vagueness of the message, that make it largely shareable and applicable according to the diverse points of view of the electors; finally, from the attentive use of language and symbols, shaped accordingly the discourses, and which systematically recall to emotional stimuli, above all, to fear (Samuel-Arzan, 2018).

Finally, some room will be given to the limitations of the thesis. Indeed, the fact that only Salvini's public speeches in specific rallies were taken

into consideration set aside the enormous data the League leader provided in the three mandates he played in that role. Furthermore, in this thesis, the role of social media did not play any part in the analysis, but it is important to mention that if the support could be measured with the number of interactions in Salvini's accounts he would probably govern for ages. I will personally suggest an extension of this thesis in terms of time-frame and dataset, in order to shape a better comprehension of what can be considered the most right-shift of the Italian electorate since the Mussolini experience.

A final and more wider consideration could be done now at the very end of 2020. Salvini and the League seems to be stable at the first position of the Italian favors, and Brothers of Italy (the second largest sovereigntist party) is now increasing the pool of voters and supporters. The coalition of those two parties in Italy, along with the increasing interests on the far right in Europe, as instance the Visegrad countries, could draw a new horizon for the Union. However, only future elections could enshrine a better understanding of the efficiency of the rhetoric and the sovereigntist feelings.



## Annexes

In this section there are two tables taken from the work done by Cavallaro et al (2018) regarding the opinions of the Italian electorate on the issues of nativism, sovereignty and populism. Those two tables explain the positions of the Italians and the electoral pool of voters where Salvinism may take roots. The interviewees were asked to agree or disagree to the following questions:

1. Migrants (security): “if I see many immigrants around, do I feel more insecure?”
2. Migrants (welfare): “an Italian must have a priority on an immigrant, on equal terms?”
3. Euro: “would be a catastrophe for Italy to leave the Euro?”
4. Sovereignty: “do you think we might take our sovereignty back from the EU?”
5. Political costs: “one of the priorities is to reduce the costs in politics and the privileges of politicians?”
6. Elite: “the political and financial elites do their own business without taking into consideration people like me”

In the first table (*Tab.1*) there is a distinction based on the age of the interviewee, while in the second table (*Tab.2*) there is a distinction according to the level of degree obtained by the interviewee.

Tab.1

ITEM	ANSWER	Middle School	High School	University Degree
Migrants (security)	Agreement	46	42	38
	Disagreement	47	53	56
Migrants (welfare)	Agreement	52	49	43
	Disagreement	37	42	48
Euro	Agreement	58	57	67
	Disagreement	26	32	25
Sovereignty	Agreement	50	51	40
	Disagreement	37	39	55
Political Costs	Agreement	89	90	84
	Disagreement	5	7	14
Elite	Agreement	81	84	77
	Disagreement	13	11	16

Tab.2

ITEM	ANSWER	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Migrants (security)	Agreement	60	47	48	44	42	48
	Disagreement	31	49	48	48	47	45
Migrants (welfare)	Agreement	47	38	39	41	37	33
	Disagreement	45	54	51	50	52	56
Euro	Agreement	31	46	34	27	19	25
	Disagreement	58	43	58	56	69	61
Sovereignty	Agreement	40	33	40	37	36	39
	Disagreement	50	62	50	51	53	48
Political Costs	Agreement	7	9	6	6	4	7
	Disagreement	88	88	92	89	94	88
Elite	Agreement	17	11	10	14	8	15
	Disagreement	75	80	82	80	87	80

## **Annex Digital Resources**

Official YouTube account Lega Salvini Premier retrieved at:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/telepadaniatgnord>

Official YouTube account Matteo Salvini retrieved at:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/matteosalvinimi>

“Convegno “Euro o libertà?” – Intervento di Matteo SALVINI” video on YouTube, retrieved at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QjUeIM6cndQ>

“Matteo Salvini – Congresso Lega Nord – 21 maggio 2017” video on YouTube, retrieved at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-p9FFXuk1k>

“Salvini al congresso della Lega a Milano (21.12.19)” video on YouTube, retrieved at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wrqjgyQ4zww&t=53s>

“INTERVENTO DI MATTEO SALVINI DAL PALCO DI PONTIDA” video on YouTube, retrieved at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HX2tt2EQ5j0>

“Pontida 2018” video on YouTube starting at 2:14:20, retrieved at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T1WDIIo0cmQ>

“INTERVENTO DI MATTEO SALVINI A PONTIDA 2019” video on YouTube, retrieved at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=arQ9hBKptTI>

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