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A DOUBLE CHANCE TO INVESTIGATE POPULIST INFLUENCE: THE FIVE STAR
MOVEMENT.

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ABSTRACT

In the last decade, new kinds of European populist parties and movements characterized by a left wing, right wing or “eclectic” attitude have succeeded in entering in governments where they could exert a direct populist influence on their coalition partners or, conversely, become victims themselves of the influence of the institutional background.

Such a scenario brought this research to formulate two questions: (i) “To what extent did populist parties succeed in influencing their government coalition partners, leading them to adopt populist rhetoric and change their policy positions?” and (ii) “Have populist parties been able to retain their populist “outside mainstream politics” identity, or have they been assimilated to mainstream parties?”. As a case study this project chose the Italian Five Star Movement. Since 2018 this eclectic populist actor has experienced three different governments first with the radical right wing populist League (2018-2019) and then with the mainstream center left Democratic Party (2019-2021). In addition to this, currently the Five Star Movement is a coalition partner of the ongoing Draghi’s government.

Theoretically based on the ideological definition of populism (Mudde, 2004), on a new “revised” model of the inclusionary - exclusionary framework to classify populist parties and on a novel definition of “populist influence”, this research made use of both quantitative (bidimensional and text analysis) and qualitative methods (semi-structured interviews) and mainly focuses on the years 2017- 2020.

The importance of this study is threefold. First it contributes to the study of populist influence in government in relation to the ideological attachment of the political actors involved. Second, it contributes to understand if populists in power necessarily need to tone down their anti-system character in order to survive. Third, this study introduces conceptual and methodological novelties within the study of populism and populist influence in government.

Keywords: Populist influence; Inclusionary – Exclusionary Framework; Coalition Government; Five Star Movement, Mixed Method.

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Abbreviations

AFD= Alternative for Germany

ANEL= Anexartitoi Ellines

Chapel Hill = Chapel Hill Expert Survey

DS = Left Wing Democrats (Democratici di Sinistra)

FdI= Brothers of Italy (Fratelli d'Italia)

FI = Go Italy! (Forza Italia)

FN = Front National

FPÖ = Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs

LVP= Latvian Unity Party

LN = (Northern) League

M5S = Five Star Movement (Movimento 5 Stelle)

PD= Partito Democratico (Democratic Party)

Populism and Political Parties Expert Survey 2018= Poppa Project 2018

RRPP= Radical Right Populist Parties

SI= Italian Left (Sinistra Italiana)

5SM= Five Star Movement

ZRS= Union of the Workers of Slovakia

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Introduction

Populism is one of the most used (and perhaps overused) concepts in political science. It has been defined as a “spectral” (Ionescu and Gellner, 1969) “slippery” (Taggart, 2000), “contested” (Mudde, 2017) but still “sexy” (Rooduijn, 2019) concept difficult to define. Especially in the last decades, new and older populist parties have challenged Western European advanced democracies, succeeding in entering the highest political offices. However, between the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century, different researchers labeled populism in power as an “episodic” phenomenon which was not bound to last. In 2015, Albertazzi and McDonnell were among the first to argue that this opinion was wrong and that populism in power is actually here to stay. Most interestingly, they claimed that populism in power is actually a “contagious” phenomenon able to make a difference within the Western European scenario. In particular, once in government, populist parties can exert an influence on their coalition partners pushing them to, first, adopt populist rhetoric and, second, to change their policy positions. These reflections brought the present research to formulate its first research question as follow:

To what extent did populist parties succeed in influencing their government coalition partners, leading them to adopt a populist rhetoric and change their policy positions?

However, once in government populist parties might not succeed in exerting an influence on their government coalition partners. What is more interesting is that they might become “victims” themselves of the impact of the “experience in office” which will lead them to tone down their populist attitude and become similar to mainstream parties. This additional thought led this research to formulate its second research question as follow:

Have populist parties been able to retain their populist “outside mainstream politics” identity, or have they been assimilated to mainstream parties?

So far, studies on populist influence in government have mainly focused on radical right populist parties (Akkerman *et al.*, 2016; Carvalho 2016; Biard *et al.*, 2019). However, nowadays, compared to the time when populism was

labeled as an episodic phenomenon, different types of new populist parties characterized by different ideological attitude (right or left wing or post ideological) have succeeded in entering governments as major or minor coalition partners. In this vein, a case in point is represented by the Italian Five Star Movement (5SM). Indeed, within the current European scenario the Five Star Movement represents a unique and interesting combination of different features such as grassroots origins, an often labeled post-ideological approach, strong anti-establishment attitudes, unconventional use of technologies and fluid organizational structure. Notwithstanding its original refusal to join any kind of government coalition, since 2018 the Five Star Movement was member of three different government coalitions with very different partners: from 2018 to 2019 with the radical right populist party the League, from 2019 to 2021 with the center left Democratic party. Currently, this populist actor is a partner of the technical – political government led by Mario Draghi which took office on February 2021.

This research argues that the Five Star Movement’s participation in three Italian governments provides useful ground to investigate to what extent populism in power can be contagious for coalition partners or whether, vice versa, it can be ‘contaminated’ by its own coalition partners and the “experience in office”.

In order to answer these questions, this research provides first an overview on the major theoretical approaches that contributed to our current understanding of populism. Such an overview is deemed necessary due to the multifaceted nature of this phenomenon which, if ignored, could lead to misunderstandings. The results of this overview are presented in the first chapter, arguing why the ideational approach proposed by Cas Mudde (Mudde, 2004), based on the three key concepts “people-centrism”, “antielitism” and “General Will”, represents the most versatile and flexible way to look at populism, and why I decided to rely on this definition in my research.

Second, this study provides an overview of the different ways that have been used to classify populist parties and movements, also explaining the reasons for adopting a specific classification called inclusionary/exclusionary

framework within this research. In particular, this research added a new dimension called “institutional” to this framework. This new dimension addresses the third key concept of the ideational approach, the “General Will”, drawing the attention on the relationship between populist parties and representative democracy. According to my research, this relationship is part of the core of values that really define populism, an aspect that has been seemingly underestimated both conceptually and methodologically until now. Conversely, this research believes that the nature of the relationship between populist parties and representative democracy (better, the will to overcome representative democracy and implement direct democracy) is the key to distinguish between “pure” and “not pure” forms of populism. The result of this analysis is presented in the second chapter.

In the third chapter, in order to offer further theoretical grounds to the study of populist influence in government, this research provided a theoretical analysis of the concept of political influence and populist influence. In particular this theoretical analysis brought this project to fill an important gap present within the academic debate on populist influence through the introduction of a new definition of populist influence as “the impact exerted by populist parties on their government coalition partners in terms of communication contagiousness (people centrism, anti-elitism and general will) and policy position change (depending on the populist ideological attachment). In the presence of pure populist parties or movements these will naturally try to push their coalition partners to embrace direct democracy”.

Then, in both chapter four and five different analyses are presented which provide an answer to the first research question “to what extent did populist parties succeed in influencing its government coalition partners, leading them to adopt populist rhetoric and change their policy positions?”. As case selection both these chapters focus on the Five Star Movement two coalition experiences first with the League and then with the Democratic Party.

Chapter four made use of the expert surveys tool in order to depict the populist nature of our object of study, trace their use of populist rhetoric but also provide an analysis of the policy position of these political actors. First a

qualitative portrait of the Five Star Movement and its coalition partners (League and Democratic Party) according to the revised inclusionary/exclusionary framework up to 2018 is presented. Second, through the use of two different expert surveys datasets, the “Populism and Political Parties Expert Survey 2018” (Meijers and Zaslove, 2020) and the “Global Party Survey 2019” (Norris, 2020) this research traced the degree of populism and populist rhetoric of the Five Star Movement, League and Democratic party, according to the key concepts present in the ideational approach (Mudde, 2004). Then, through the use of the spatial approach to party competition and bidimensional analysis of the data provided by the Chapel Hill and the Manifesto Project, the policy positions of the Five Star Movement and its coalition partners are estimated to analyze how these might have changed from 2013 to 2019.

Next, in chapter five his research made use of quantitative text analysis and the application of a dictionary of populism (Decadri and Boussalis, 2019) which has been updated by this research. In particular this dictionary has been applied to a corpus of 239 Italian parliamentary speeches from 2013 to 2019. The aim of this method was to provide a further analysis to trace the degree of populism of the Five Star Movement and its coalition partners and gauge how this might have changed over time. The results obtained with quantitative text analysis are combined with a qualitative study of the corpus of parliamentary speeches which also bolster the analysis of the policy positions provided in chapter four.

In the sixth chapter, the second research question “Have populist parties been able to retain their populist “outside mainstream politics” identity, or have they been assimilated to mainstream parties?” is addressed. Once again, the focus remained on the Five Star Movement and its first two government coalition experiences. Indeed, the Five Star Movement participation in government can also provide an opportunity to investigate the extent to which this populist actor has remained faithful to its original idea of an anti-establishment movement, truly attached to the desire to implement direct democracy, or it has itself been affected by other parties and the overall institutional environment. In particular, aim of this research is to investigate to what extent the Five Star Movement has

succeeded in retaining its populist character and remain structurally different from the others political parties. To this purpose a qualitative analysis of 33 semi-structured interviews with Five Star Movement politicians at local, regional and national level has been carried out. In addition to these interviews, this research can also rely on 20 semi structured interviews to Five Star Movement representative at local and regional level in 2017. In both cases the same questionnaire - based on questions on the degree of democracy, peculiarities of the Five Star Movement structure and democratic project and political representation - was used. There was only one relevant addition to the questionnaire form 2017. Indeed, as extra question for this research respondents were required to comment the meaning of populism and to express an opinion on the leadership of the Five Star Movement and constitutional reforms promoted by the Five Star Movement. In addition to this, this study also performed factor analysis to bolster the comparison between the interviews collected in 2017 e those collected in 2021.

In the final chapter “conclusion”, an overview of the results is presented together with a reflection on the theoretical implications that these results bring to the study of populist influence in government (“direct populist influence” chapter III).

The scientific contribution that this study can give to the ongoing debate on populism is threefold. First, it provides an opportunity to explore the extent to which an ideological attachment (or the complete lack of defined ideological attachment) in addition to “organizational effectivity” (Christiansen *et al.*, 2019, 91-92) exert a major role within the process of populist influence in coalition governments. In particular, the government coalition of the Five Star Movement and the League offers a rare chance to explore which populist party dominates the political playing field and why, taking into consideration the remarkable differences between these two actors. Second, the different Five Star Movement government coalition experiences provides the conditions to explore whether populist actors strongly attached to the concept of direct democracy (“pure populism”, chapter III) succeed in staying different once in power. Third, this research introduced new conceptual and methodological novelties in order to

provide further categories to define populist parties (chapter II) and investigate populist influence (chapter III).

In addition to these main contributions, it is important to note that this research might also contribute to the ongoing debate on “what is populism”. In particular, especially thanks to the interviews collected in 2021, this research brings important insights in terms of “what is populism for populist actors?”.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that part of this research was presented in three different conferences in 2021: IPSA World Congress of Political Science 2021, ECPR General Conference 2021 and ECPR General Conference 2022.

CHAPTER I

POPULISM: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In the last decades different kinds of European populist parties have succeeded in entering the higher political institutions and joining government coalitions with mainstream parties also with other populist actors. In this sense, populism in power has been defined as a contagious phenomenon which is “here to stay” (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2015). Beyond representing a spreading trend among voters, the main goal of this research is to investigate if, once in government, populists are able to exert their appeal also on their coalition partners bringing them to imitate their populist attitude and positions or if, conversely, under the impact of the experience in government they are forced to tone down their populist and anti-system character. However, before entering into such an investigation it is crucial to establish some theoretical basis that will lay the foundations for the research pathway of this project. First, taking into consideration the controversial nature of populism, it is necessary to have a clear idea of what populism is and entails. For this reason, the present chapter will be devoted to providing an overview of the main approaches aimed at the study of populism in order to clearly explain why, according to this research, the ideational approach of Cas Mudde (2004) represents the fairest definition to portray such a complex phenomenon.

1.1 Populism a Spectre that is (still) Haunting the World

Since 1969, populism has been defined as a “a spectre (that) is haunting the world” (Ionescu and Gellner, 1969, 1). Today this claim is still valid (Mudde, 2004; Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2015), although, from the onset of research on populism, it has been clear that defining this phenomenon in absolute terms was destined to be a very challenging and frustrating task. As Isaiah Berlin pointed out, research on populism is affected by a “Cinderella Complex”, otherwise understood as the obsession to find “a shoe for which somewhere there must exist a foot” (Berlin, 1968, 6).

In the first place, populism recalls the idea that “people” comes first in politics against the selfish interests of some kind of elites, however this assumption is far from being exhaustive. Indeed, populism has always appeared to be so multifaced that claiming to find an ultimate definition for it irremediably

leads to an avoidance of the phenomenon's complexity and thus to conceptual and methodological mistakes. This is the reason why the starting point of this research is providing an overview of the most important conceptual steps and insights that made it possible to reach a flexible definition of populism that encompasses those key elements that are present in every form of populism.

The onset of the use of the term "populism" can be found in the 19th century in Russia with the Narodnik movement and much later in the United States with the People's Party (1892). Both addressed agrarian life but were ultimately quite dissimilar. The *narodnik* populist experience was the first example of a (clandestine) populist movement inspired by rural life, although it was not pushed forward by peasants but rather by the Russian intelligentsia (Walicky, 1969, 91) whereas in the United States the People's Party (or Populist Party) had its origins in a previous agrarian "cooperative movement" experience (Goodwyn, 1976) which built up on "the faith in the Jacksonian common man" (Canovan, 1981, 58) and the idea that common people should rule the government. While the Russian and U.S. populist experience formed the basis of the populist phenomenon, it is the Ionescu and Gellner's book 1969 "Populism, Its Meanings and National Characteristics" that laid the foundations for current and future studies on populism. As Rovira Kaltwasser *et al.* (2017) stressed, the period between the 1950s and 1970s in particular marked "the first real development of a modern body of scholarship on populism" (Rovira Kaltwasser *et al.*, 2017, 5) and Ionescu and Geller's work on populism represented a milestone of this fruitful period of study of populism.

The researchers involved in this first comparative study, were aware of the complexity and limit of trying to define populism. Yet, they made the first important academic effort to provide interpretations which are still valid today. In particular, different contributions to this book (where much attention was devoted to Latin American¹ populism of the first half of the 20th) tried to single

¹ So far, Latin America is still "the region with the most enduring and prevalent populist tradition" (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, 27).

out specific populist features. The result was that, overall, these authors showed agreement on the general assumption that on one hand populist parties and movements stood for the defence of people from self-interested elite and, on the other hand, that populist parties and movements tended to be characterised by undefined ideology and a poor organizational structure often driven by very influential and charismatic leaders (e.g., Juan Domingo Perón in Argentina²). However, despite the general agreement on these common features, populism was defined in different ways, namely as a “style”, an “ideology”, a movement or a “syndrome” (Ionescu and Gellner, 1969).

Among the others, Donald Mac Rae defines populism as an “ideology” which can also be part of other ideologies (Mac Rae 1969, 154). Inspired by the reflections of Isaiah Berlin on populism, Mac Rae points out three main populist features. First, populism addresses the importance of roots to a past and ideal *Gemeinschaft* of “unbroken men” and characterized by social equality and fraternity (Berlin 1968, 7-9). Second, populism is “apolitical” and thus populists perceive political institutions only as a means to achieve its goals (Berlin in “To define populism”, 1968, 8). Third, there is not a populist defined kind of enemy, but every kind of elite (“economic, political or racial”) that might represent an obstacle to the return to the idealized *Gemeinschaft* is considered a threat by populism (Berlin in “To define populism”, 1968, 10). As consequence of these specific populist aspects, Mac Rae argues that populism aims to create a society made of people independent in their way of living and thus very similar in their personalities and needs: “Their judgement would be free but would coincide” (Mac Rae, 1969, p. 160). Therefore, as Mac Rae stresses, populism is essentially

² Generally, in this first comparative study on populism, charismatic leaders were presented as successful in mobilizing unsatisfied and socio-economically marginalized citizens, establishing an unmediated (non-institutional) relationship with them. The strength of these leaders lay in the way they presented themselves as motivated to speak solely in the interest of the common people. Eventually, citizens were excluded from the populist leaders’ decision-making processes. Conversely, masses were subjected to rural patronage and caudillismo (Hennessy, 1969, 33).

anti-plural and anti-pluralism is also the reason that populist ideology is more prone to give birth to “a-political social movements” than to political parties (Mac Rae, 1969, 157).

On a different note, according to Worsley, looking at “structural properties” (e.g., composition and leadership) or “ideological emphases” is not enough to single out the essential character of populism. In this sense, Worsley decided to embrace the interpretation of populism provided by Edward Shils in his *The Torment of Secrecy* (1956): “The will of the people as such is supreme over every other standard, over the standards of traditional institutions, over the autonomy of institutions and over the will of other strata. Populism identifies the will of the people with justice and morality” (Shils 1956, 98; Shils in Worsley 1969, 244). In Shils general definition of populism, it is possible to single out a fundamental key principle or first imperative of the populist creed: the moral superiority of the people’s will (Mudde 2004; Müller 2016; Urbinati 2020). According to this principle typical of the populist attitude, what people (as a whole) want is superior to any other rule of law or institution which means that people’s will is also superior to the authority represented by institutions and political system: “what the mass wants is infallible and cannot be contested by any institution whatsoever: “Populism abhors the division of powers” (Shils 1956, 102). In this sense also political representation itself is perceived as misleading, because the people's will should not be mediated but directly put in practice thanks to the actions of the populist leader. The refusal of institutional mediation represents the second key principle (or imperative) of the populist creed. It is However, according to Worsley if the second populist imperative (refusal of institutional mediation) is dropped and only the first (supremacy of the will of people) is held, populism does not necessarily undermine democracy but rather it appears as a neutral “dimension of political action” (Worsley 1969, 248).

Through the analysis of Mac Rae and Worsley reflections on populism and in general through the analysis of some of the main insights of Ionescu and Gellner’s book from 1969, this research aimed at identifying some of the essential traits of the populist phenomenon: nostalgia for an idealized past,

predominance of charismatic leadership able to mobilize people, mistrust towards economic and political elites, morality superiority represented by the people's will and controversial attitudes towards institutions. However, as the study of the populist phenomenon has continued over time, it has become clear that some of these features have always been present in varieties of populism whereas others (such as the presence of charismatic leadership) may have been lacking. In search of the fundamental elements of populism this overview led us to clarify the ever-present traits in the populist logic and to study them in accordance with what the current political scenario offers on the subject of populism in power and populist influence.

In this sense, for this research it has been important to address to the work of Margaret Canovan (1981) which was one of the first researchers that tried to compare different families of populism looking for common features. In particular, Canovan's main purpose was to provide a classification based on Wittgenstein's "family resemblances" theory (Canovan 1981, 7). This theory states that it is not possible to identify an essential common trait among similar phenomena, rather only similarities. According to Canovan's analysis it is possible to distinguish between four types of political populism - i) populist dictatorship; ii) populist democracy iii) reactionary populism iv) politicians' populism (Canovan 1981, 294) – and in particular, two of these can be labelled as a real novelty for the study populism in the 80s which up to that moment had been mainly focused on Latin America populist dictatorship experiences: "populist democracy" and "politicians' populism". On the one hand "populist democracy" calls for a horizontal model of citizen participations to politics³ and it arises whenever representative democracy - literally "the government of the people" - is perceived as an unfulfilled "promise" to the people (Canovan, 1981, 174). On the other hand, as already the Ionescu and Gellner (1968) comparative work anticipated, populism can also be a "style" used by politicians or "catch-

³ This type of populism demands a more radical form of democracy, based on the direct involvement of people in the political decision-making through tools such as "referenda, recalls and initiatives" (Canovan 1981, 193- 199)

all people's parties" that claim "to speak for" all the people. In this sense, politicians' populism sees people as a "single entity" in which divisions do not exist or should not exist (the so-called "ideology of popular unity", Canovan, 1981, 261). Thus, speaking on behalf of everyone means not committing to any particular group, topic, or policy within society. The result is that this strategy ensures populist politicians large and multifaceted support. Not surprisingly, politicians' populism is anti-elitist and "*antipolitical*" (Canovan 1981, 165) and "populist parties" have the tendency to be "amorphous" and claim to represent everyone with no exception.

Despite the differences that might exist among different families of populism, Margaret Canovan's analysis reached the conclusion that at least two key characteristics are always present in different forms of populism: the "exaltation of and appeal to the people" and "antielitism" (Canovan, 1981, 294)⁴. Equally important in Canovan's reflection on populism is the "amorphous" character of politicians and populist parties' populism. Indeed, as also previous research pointed out populism per se does not present any specific ideological attachment besides "being on the people side" and "against an (undefined) elite" category.

Canovan's description of politicians' populism and populist parties as "amorphous" has become a leitmotiv of the further study on populist parties over time. In particular, this populist amorphous character was further developed between the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st when, in parallel to the rise of a new wave of populism the study of the populist phenomenon has increased, focusing in particular on Europe and Latin America⁵.

⁴ Most of the works encountered in this analysis have addressed the exaltation of the people and anti-elitism as ever-present elements on which every type of populism is built, but the merit of Margaret Canovan's reflections' is to have singled out these two elements within the populist imaginary once and for all.

⁵ This study is aware of the massive importance of the long-standing Latin American populist tradition developed over its three populist waves: "classic, neoliberal and radical" (De la Torre, 2017, 195). However, for the sake of simplicity and in line with

More specifically, from the end of the 1980s, the European political scenario experienced the rise of radical right-wing populist parties (Kaltwasser *et al.* 2017; Taggart 2017) namely populist parties that clearly presented attachment to the right-wing ideology. As Hans Georg Betz stressed this electoral success coincided with the crisis faced by established political parties between the 1980s and 1990s when the old politics started to be considered as untrustworthy and struggled to maintain its electoral support. The result was that overall, the decline of trust in long-standing political parties decreased electoral participation and increased electoral volatility and protest voting (Mair 1984; Dalton 1989; Ignazi, 1992; Betz 1994; Mény and Surel 2002). Additionally, especially in the second half of the 1980s, massive waves of immigration (especially from the East) towards Europe intensified xenophobic sentiment fostering radical right-wing anti-immigration propaganda and creating the right conditions for radical right populists to mobilize people's fears and discontent attracting voters (Betz 1994, 38; 1995 76).

In the same vein of Betz, Paul Taggart was one of the first to identify a strict relationship between the 1980s electoral success of “far right-wing parties” and populism. More specifically, Taggart theorized a “new wave of populism”⁶ (Taggart 1995, 2000) composed of parties united by “one nation-conservatism” (Mair 2002, 90) and by the same opposition to the “new politics of the libertarian left” (Taggart 2000, 86) which main aim was to challenge and subvert the institutional system (Taggart 2000, 3). However, even if the ideological affiliation of the new populist wave belongs to the far-right spectrum (Ibidem), Taggart stresses that populism itself presents no defined core of values. Rather, it is characterized by a “chameleonic” attitude, which makes it adaptable to every kind of context (Taggart, 2000). On this point, Taggart in the same line of Margaret Canovan agrees that the concept of “people” in populism is a

the main research purpose of this study, the focus will mostly remain on Western European populism.

⁶ The new populist wave interested European and non-European countries alike, such as the U.S., Canada and Australia (Taggart 2002, 65).

“monolithic” and it appeals to an ideal homogenous “self-aware” and virtuous majority (Taggart 2000, 92). In this sense, Taggart claims that populism appeals to an imaginary virtuous people’s “heartland”, which in the 90s was used by far-right populists as a rhetorical flag to provide voters of a sense of community and something to fight for (Taggart 2000, 95). It is hard to define who actually takes part in this “heartland”, although it is easier to assess who is excluded from it. More specifically, through the individualization of those excluded from the heartland and their continuous denigration, new populists can create the illusion of the existence of one group of virtuous people and another of corrupt elites (Taggart 2000, 95; Mény and Surel 2002, 12). The heartland is essentially the representation of the virtuosity embedded by the true people and as such, it needs to be protected by populist parties. Eventually, different kinds of populism can have their own heartland but surely, they all have one (Taggart 2000, 98). So, basically, it is also possible to assume that who belong to the heartland can be considered as the authentic people whereas who is excluded from it belongs to the elite.

In conclusion, this section argued that since the first comparative work on populism dated 1968 the study of populism has led researchers to narrow down the main characteristics of such complex phenomenon. Up to now this research compared some of the most influential reflections on populism from the 60’s to the beginning of the 21th century with the aim of singling out key features that might help to choose the fairest definition of populism possible. So far, in its literature review this analysis identified “appeal and exaltation of people” which belong to an imaginary (undefined) heartland, “antielitism”, amorphous ideological attachment, superiority of the people’s will and refusal of institutional mediation.

Nowadays, researchers approached the populist phenomenon through four main interpretations: populism as a strategy (Weyland, 1969), a style (Norris, 2019; Moffit 2013, 2016), a discourse (Laclau, 2005; Mouffe 2018) and, finally, the most popular one as an ideology (Mudde, 2004). For completeness, in the next section, this analysis will provide a short description for these

interpretations and then will explain further the reasons that led this study to rely on the ideational definition of populism provided by Cas Mudde (2004).

1.2 Main Approaches to the Study of Populism

Starting from the 90's, the new rise of European "radical right wing" populist parties (Betz, 1994) has led to a renewed interest in the study of populism with a particular focus on the European scenario. Since then, researchers approached the populist phenomenon through four main interpretations: populism as a strategy (Weyland, 2001), a style (Moffit, 2013), a discourse (Laclau 2005; Mouffe 2018) and, finally, the most popular one as an ideology (Mudde, 2004). In this section, it will be provided an overview of these main approaches. It is important to note that for this study, this overview in combination with the previous analysis on the roots of the study of populism represented a necessary theoretical step in order to choose fairly which definition of populism to apply for the aims of this project.

This overview will start with the analysis of Ernesto Laclau discursive approach which was initiated in the 1970s and later developed in collaboration with Chantal Mouffe during the end of the 20th century. Ernesto Laclau's approach has characteristics deriving from psychoanalysis, linguistics, structuralism and Marxism (Anselmi 2018, 30). In the same vein as Canovan, Laclau argues that it is not possible to identify populism once and for all because populism is not a properly defined phenomenon. Populism cannot be identified by any specific ideology or movement, but rather in the way these ideologies or movements are articulated (Laclau 2005, 33). Indeed, for Laclau and Mouffe, the reality is "discursively" constructed and each discourse consists of a "network of meanings" (Stavrakakis 2004, 256). Within this network of meanings, populism is "a way of constructing the political" (Laclau, 2005, xi) and it corresponds to the predomination of an antagonistic discursive construction. More specifically, populism emerges from a discursive articulation

that creates the conditions for the specific identity⁷ of a group (the people) to rise and oppose institutions and administrative apparatus (elites). The populist “people” identity, which itself is an empty signifier⁸, grows when multiple social demands (e.g., call for civil rights) remain unheard and unsatisfied by the institutional apparatus at individual level. In a nutshell, when citizens realize that they are not alone in their social disappointment, with other citizens feeling the same frustration as them (Laclau 2005, 73), this feeling of mutual dissatisfaction (“deficient being”, Laclau 2005, 125) creates an “anti-institutional” (Laclau, 2005b, 38) ‘chain’ of equivalence which, in turn, gives birth to a single meaningful ‘emergence’ of multiple social demands (Laclau 2005, 74).

On the one hand the discursive approach represents a milestone in the field of populism studies, but on the other hand, according to both Laclau and Mouffe populism itself provides a chance to shed the light on the true nature of representation and politics: “Populism is not just any political logic, however; Laclau argues that it is *the* logic of the political” (Moffit and Tormey 2013, 384). Indeed, for these authors populism and representation rely on the common idea that society and politics are based on social division and “agonistic” (not antagonistic) confrontation between social identities (Mouffe, 2018). Therefore, social division and politics are interconnected in Laclau’s vision in so far as politics should not reflect the state’s will but rather challenge it (Laclau, 2005b, p.48). Chantal Mouffe will bring these reflections further putting a distinction

⁷ Two logics play a crucial role in the discursive construction: the “logic of difference” and the “logic of equivalence” (Laclau, 2005, 78). The former addresses inclusivity and how multiple elements can coexist in a common space. However, the latter appeals to the exclusiveness and contrast among elements. The concept of identity itself is the result of a continuous tension between differences and equivalences (Laclau, 2005, 70).

⁸ As Laclau put it: “with empty signifiers we mean that there is a place, within the system of signification, which is constitutively irrepresentable; in that sense it remains empty, but this is an emptiness which I can signify, because we are dealing with a void within signification” (Laclau, 2005, 105). In other words, populist articulation relies on empty signifiers as “unifying” symbols of a chain of “heterogeneous” social demands (Anselmi, 2017, 32).

between dangerous forms of populism such as radical right-wing populism and left-wing populism. In particular she will reflect on the crucial role that left-wing populism play in order to achieve “a deepening of democratic ideals” (Mouffe, 2018, 86).

If for Ernesto Laclau and its “discursive approach” populism is the result of a discursive construction for Kurt Weyland and its “organizational approach”, populism corresponds to a “strategy” (Weyland, 2001). More specifically, Kurt Weyland defines populism as a “political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, institutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers” (Weyland 2001, 14). Therefore, populism is about how a leader succeeds in mobilizing people without the support of any mediating complex organizational structure and, in the capacity to maintain massive support through a direct relationship (Weyland 2001 2017, 55).

In Weyland’s framework, first, the populist leader takes advantage of people’s dissatisfaction towards economic and political elites, presenting him-or herself as the representative *par excellence* of people’s will (e.g., Perón or Chávez). Second, the political strategy of the populist leader concerns the way he or she, through the appeal to the “people” and the mobilization of the masses, acquires power according to a hierarchical model based on a direct link with voters (Weyland 2017, 59). The way populist leaders attract power, the “principal power capability” (Weyland 2017, 55) is fostered by “numbers” and thus by the electoral support at the polls (Weyland 2017, 57) that these leaders are able to reach. In other words, populist leaders claim to be entitled to govern and challenge the political institutional apparatus because, they claim, the majority is with them. This is also the reason why populist leaders call for approval ratings and elections very often (Weyland 2001, 2017). In particular, the continuous call for elections and surveys on the one hand strengthen populists’ position in front of other political competitors (Weyland 2017, 58) and, on the other, it reinforces the link between voters and populist leaders. An important consequence of the populist seek for large consensus is that populism tends to be ideologically chameleonic (Taggart, 2000) in order to take advantage

of any chance to expand its electorate. This ‘opportunistic’ attitude leads populist leaders to not stick to specific ideological and programmatic positions but rather to use politicized issues as temporary opportunities to gain more consensus and stay in power (Taggart, 2000; Weyland 2017, 60-63). On one hand, in contrast with this claim, Cas Mudde points out that it is too ambiguous to label populism as ideologically opportunistic all the time, because it is “unscientific” to assume that certain politicians lie all the time and others do not (Mudde 2017, 31). On the other hand, it is also important to note that the fact that the strategic approach focuses on temporary ideological opportunistic positions in order to survive leads this approach to exclude the study of right-wing extremists (Weyland 2017, 63) because of their radical ideological ties.

Often Weyland’s concept of ‘strategy’ has been related to the concept of ‘style’, but this should not be the case. Strategy and style are not synonymous in Weyland’s approach; rather, populists can make use of rhetoric to maximize their power, although they need more than this in order to stay in power as we have just discussed looking into Weyland’s approach. Both strategy and style have been used to define populism in the past as well as in the ongoing debates. For instance, Margaret Canovan defined “politicians’ populism” as a style characterized by a “short ideology, eclectic policies and willingness to accept all the comers” (Canovan 1981, 260). Similarly, also other researchers such as “Carlos de la Torre or Dani Filc” perceived populism as a style but they mainly focused on rhetorical features” (Moffitt 2013, 387).

Recently, Pippa Norris also referred to the concept of style by claiming that populism is “a form of rhetoric, a persuasive language, making symbolic claims about the source of legitimate authority and where the power should rightfully lie” (Norris 2020, 699). More specifically, according to Norris and Inglehart the populist rhetoric is distinguished in “first and second order” language where in the first order it is possible to find claims that address to “where power and legitimate authority” should rely whereas in the second order we can find claims related to specific programmatic positions that will create a spectrum of different populisms (Norris and Inglehart 2019; Norris 2020, 700)

Differently from this kind of approach, Benjamin Moffitt provided a new way to look at populism as “political style” going beyond the assumption that style equal rhetoric. For Moffitt political style is a “the repertoires of performance that are used to create political relations” (Moffitt and Tormey, 2013, 387; Moffitt, 2016). Therefore, Moffitt is not only interested in what populist claim but in the way (performance) these claims are made to the public (Ibidem). Moffitt’s reflection on the nature of populism as political style is strictly intertwined with the status of contemporary politics in which politics has become much more “mediatised” and “stylised” in every aspect of its system (Moffitt and Tormey, 2013, 388; Moffitt 2016). Three are the key aspects of Moffitt and Tormey’s approach on which the populist performance is built on: “the evocation and appeal to the People, the perception of a forthcoming crisis, and bad manners (namely the use of appropriate way of acting in the political realm)” (Moffitt and Tormey, 2013, 388- 392; Moffitt 2016).

According to this research all the above-mentioned approaches contribute in one way or another to shed light on specific sides of populism. However, especially if we look at the multifaced nature of populism over time and the different forms that this phenomenon still embodies, according to this analysis the ideological approach theorized by Cas Mudde represents the most flexible and fair way to present the essential characteristics of populism. In the next section, we will delve into the analysis of this approach.

1.3 *Cas Mudde and the Ideational Approach*

The ideational approach, theorized by Cas Mudde, can be considered the most popular definition of populism in European and non-European studies (Mudde 2017, 28). This author concluded that populism can be defined as “a (thin) ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people” (Mudde 2004, 543)”. There are three important aspects in this definition. First, the thinness of populist ideology does not provide a defined core of values; for this reason, populist ideology needs to

attach itself to other more consolidated ideologies. Second, the moral contraposition between the corrupt elite and the ‘pure’ people relies on the basic assumption that people are ‘authentic’ and thus the real representatives of the general will. Elites and the people are considered homogenous and, therefore, there is no possibility of contamination between them. Third, the people as a monolithic entity are the owner of the morally superior general will, so its opinion should shape politics directly and effectively. Mudde’s definition has four elements: ideology, people, elite and general will (Mudde 2017, 29).

First, concerning ideology, Mudde explains that “an ideology is a body of normative ideas about the nature of man and society as well as the organization and purposes of society” (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, 6). This definition is inspired by Michael Freeden’s theories on ideology and the difference between “thin” and “thick” ideology. Putting it simple, a thin ideology is characterized by a core of values that are unable to provide an answer to the political and social main questions, a task that instead thick ideologies are able to accomplish (Freeden in Aslanidis, 2015).

As discussed in the previous sections, ideology has played a central role in the study of populism since its onset (Shils 1957; Mac Rae 1969; Walicky 1969; Canovan 1981, 173). In particular, before Mudde, Margaret Canovan emphasized the importance of the concept of “ideology” in the study of populism. According to Canovan, populism is nurtured by a “neglected paradox at the heart of democracy (Canovan 2002, 28). Essentially, this paradox is created by the high degree of inclusiveness of democracy, which does not find an equal degree of transparency in the way political institutions work (Ibidem). Indeed, representative democracy provides everyone with the chance to participate. However, at the same time citizens cannot participate in the effective political decision process (e.g., coalitions bargaining) and thus have no clear idea on how the decision-making process works. A solution to this dilemma is represented by ideology which is “an indispensable bridge between people and politics (Canovan, 2002, 32) since it reduces the complexity of being included in the decision-making process for people. In particular, populist ideology seems

to solve such complexity by supporting both the principles of inclusiveness and transparency.

Moreover, according to Canovan, populism is not only an “empty shell” but a core of interconnected principles that characterize it. The first principle forms the backbone of populist ideology: the concept of ‘people’, that democracy should be run by the people (Canovan 2002, 33). ‘Democracy’, ‘sovereignty’ and ‘majority rule’ are the following interconnected concepts (Ibidem). Canovan points out that populist ideology is successful for two main reasons: on the one hand, it is based on a remarkably high degree of inclusion; on the other hand, it allows for transparent distinctions that clearly show the people where the political power should lie, namely in their hands. Despite the above contributions, ideology is still perceived as an ambiguous concept by a consistent group of researchers. One of these is Aslanidis, who believes that the ideational approach has both conceptual and methodological inconsistencies. From a conceptual viewpoint, the main problem is represented by the difficulties to define the boundaries of both *thick* and *thin* ideologies (Aslanidis 2015, 90). In reply to these criticisms, Mudde (2017, 31) claimed that this kind of issue mostly represents a minor problem compared to researchers’ main aims and that the concept of thin ideologies allows for a high degree of flexibility in comparative analyses of populism. Furthermore, regarding the concept of ‘people’, Mudde disagrees with the idea that ‘people’ is an “empty signifier” (Laclau, 2005) ready to assume any kind of content (Mudde 2017, 30).

‘People’ is a flexible concept which could be combined with “nationalism” (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017) but it always addresses a certain high degree of morality, honesty and sense of belonging (Taggart, 2000). This means that in the ideational approach, ‘people’ is always the group of the purest which represents the highest degree of virtuosity and morality and it is for this reason that the group is entitled to shape politics. Also, the concept of elites is always invested with a moral value within populism. The elite group addresses those that hold positions of power within society (usually political and economic, but also the media) or that represent an external threat for the ‘pure people’: in both cases,

these elites represent a threat to the people's power and right to exercise their sovereignty (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017, 12-14).

The last key concept of Cas Mudde's ideational approach, the General Will, builds on Rousseau's theories on representation (Rousseau, 2002). The Swiss philosopher argues that political representation is a *bête noire* of popular sovereignty because true democracy is in contradiction with representative democracy. Indeed, representation implies that a smaller group of people (representatives) take on the function of representing the people's interests and subsequently taking decisions on their behalf. Therefore, as Pitkin (2004) remarked, voters representation consists of a "being present and yet not be present" during the political decision making (Pitkin, 2004, 335). Rousseau framed this political representation paradox as the people - who, according to him are the only legitimate entity to govern the state - giving up on their sovereignty. In the "Social Contract", he claimed that "sovereignty cannot be represented for the same reason that it cannot be alienated... It consists essentially in the General Will, and the will cannot be represented" (Rousseau in Urbinati, 2011, 34, Rousseau, 2002, 201). The General Will is a "collective being" that naturally addresses the "public good" and has nothing to share with private individual interests (Rousseau, 2002, 172). Mudde's points out that Rousseau's idea of General Will is related to two key concepts in populism: common sense and special interest (Mudde 2017, 33). Putting it simply, populism is based on the idea that politics should act based on the common sense through prioritizing the needs of common people, not the special interests of the elite (Ibidem).

In conclusion, it is important to say that nowadays, the ideational approach theorized by Mudde is, directly or indirectly, the most used approach within the field of study on populism (Rooduijn, 2018). In particular, this framework presents three effective strengths compared to the other definitions discussed so far. First, it enables researchers to distinguish between populist and non-populist phenomenon thanks to a clear definition of what populism entails: a thin ideology composed by people centrism, ant elitism and moralized way of perceiving politics (General Will superiority). Second, in line with Canovan's

previous work on the subject (Canovan, 1981), it allows the building of a taxonomy of populism but, this time, starting from a clear definition of populism. Third, the ideational approach's flexibility enables major cross-sectional studies at both macro and micro level (Mudde 2017, 34-39). For these reasons, a considerable number of academics agree on the fairness of the ideational definition (Rooduijn 2019, 3) and in the same vein the present research will make use of this approach. Starting from the ideational approach of Mudde, the next chapter will discuss the classification of the varieties of populism as second important theoretical step for the aim of this research focused on populist influence in government.

CHAPTER II

The Classification of Populist Parties

Populism in power is no longer an “exceptional” event within Western Europe. Indeed, notwithstanding their anti-system character different new kinds of populist parties and movements joined government coalitions with old fashioned political parties or even with other populist parties. The aim of the present research is to investigate if, once in government, populist parties succeed in influencing their coalition partners or if, *viceversa* they are forced to moderate or jettison their populist attitude. As a starting point, in order to pursue this research interest, this project needs to establish some preliminary theoretical steps to deal with the ambiguous nature of the populist phenomenon. For this reason, chapter I provided an overview on different schools of thought for the study of populism and explained why the ideational approach of Cas Mudde (2004) can be considered as the fairest approach to define populism and why this research is going to rely on such a definition which is based on three main concepts “people centrism”, “anti-elitism” and (superiority of the) “General Will” (Mudde, 2004). Following this first conceptual choice, in order to take into consideration the differences that might occur between different populist actors, this chapter will focus on how to classify different populist players. In particular, it will be explained why the inclusionary – exclusionary framework represents the most exhaustive approach to classify populist actors but with some important changes introduced by this research. More specifically, this study updates the classic version of the inclusionary - exclusionary framework (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013) giving back the proper importance to the third concept present in the ideational approach (the superiority of the General Will) which up to now, according to this analysis, has been neglected by the academic field.

2.1 How to Classify Varieties of Populism According to the Ideational Approach

As previously outlined, according to the ideational approach, populism is a “thin ideology” and a moralized way of perceiving politics as a constant conflict between two homogenous groups: the ‘pure people’ and the ‘corrupt elite’. Only the former group is entitled to govern as the exclusive owner of the general will

(Mudde, 2004) and thus the opposite of populism is both pluralism and elitism (Mudde 2004; Müller 2016). In populism, “people” should be considered as a unique and homogenous entity with one morally superior will and not different groups’ interests as pluralism would claim (Mudde 2007, 152; Urbinati 2019). In the latter case, populism disagrees with elitism because elitists believe that “people are fundamentally dishonest” (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012b, 151-152) and are therefore unable to effectively govern the state.

Notwithstanding the boundaries put by Mudde’s definition, the label “populist” has too often been used improperly in and out of the academic field (Rooduijn, 2019, 4). Within debates on populism, it is quite common to confuse the core features of this thin ideology (“people-centrism”, “anti-elitism” and “moralized way of perceiving politics”, Mudde, 2004) with other ideological features that might go with the populist characteristics. Most of the time, this is due to boundaries between ideological typologies themselves being very thin (Mudde 2007, 2017; Rooduijn 2019). Indeed, populism is not “intrinsically tied to either left- or right-wing ideology” (Gidron and Bonikowski, 2013, 22) although it can be connected to thicker ideological features that make it possible to broadly distinguish between populist parties’ families.

The literature uses two main approaches to classify populist parties: the left-right wing scale or the inclusionary/exclusionary framework (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2013). The present section will firstly provide a brief description of categories of populist parties and movements based on the left-right scale and, secondly, on the inclusionary and exclusionary definition. However, as a starting point for our classification, it is important to stress two theoretical guidelines. First, populism should be considered a fluid phenomenon. As a significant number of studies have shown, populism should not be treated as a “dichotomous category but rather as a scale” (Rooduijn and Akkerman, 2015, 1), indicating that not all populist parties and movements present the same degree of populism. Second, populism is per se “chameleonic” (Taggart, 2000), and therefore the boundaries that define different subtypes of populism might be blurred and not entirely exclusive.

Many scholars agree on the fact that, in general, left-wing populism “identifies the people in socio-economic terms” (“people as a class”, Tronconi and Mosca 2019, 1262) and, in this vein, it looks to the construction of a more egalitarian society (Rooduijn and Akkerman, 2015). On the contrary, right-wing populism tends to support campaigns focusing on ethnicism and thus identifies “the people” in ethnic/xenophobic terms (“people as a nation”, Tronconi and Mosca 2019, 1262).

2.2 *Right-wing Populism*

The populist radical right family or radical right populist family⁹ (PRRPs or RRPP) is the most studied type of populism (Mudde, 2016, 23; Kaltwasser *et al.*, 2017). Interestingly, the concept of radicalism seems to be strictly correlated to the populist degree of a political party. As Rooduijn and Akkerman showed, populist parties with a higher degree of populism are those that also present clear radicalist features on both the left and right axis (Rooduijn and Akkerman, 2015). In this analysis, the label “radicalist” will address any political party or movement’s “opposition to some key features of liberal democracy” which, in the case of populist radical right parties, are pluralism and the protection of minorities” (Mudde, 2007, 25).

Since the end of the 1980s, the European scenario has experienced the affirmation of right-wing and radical right-wing populist parties (Von Beyme, 1988; Ignazi and Ysmal, 1992; Betz 1994; Mudde 2007, 2017). Most importantly, such extremism has come with populist features (Taggart 1995, 2000; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017; Rovira Kaltwasser *et al.* 2017; Taggart, 2017). According to Hans-Georg Betz, the ‘radical right pressure’ was “the most dynamic and disruptive political phenomenon of 1990s” (Betz, 1994, 3) whereas Ignazi argues that this emergence was a “silent-counter revolution” to the New Politics resulting from the shift from materialist to post-materialist

⁹ Mudde preferred to define this major populist party family as the populist radical right (Mudde, 2007, 26). However, the present research will mainly refer to it as radical right populist party.

values (Ignazi and Ysmal 1992, 6). In fact, some Western European countries had already faced isolated cases of radical right-wing parties after the end of the Second World War (e.g., the French *Poujadist* movement and the Italian Social Movement). However, since the 1990s, Western Europe has been characterized by the emergence of a radical right-wing rise as a “transnational phenomenon” which shares similar features across countries (Betz 1994, 22-23) and that has been able to gain a considerable number of votes in political elections.

The ideological portrait of this radical right wing populist party (RRPP) family is represented by a combination of “nativism, authoritarianism and populism” (Mudde, 2007; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2012a, 155). Nativism refers to the ‘xenophobic’ attitude of exclusion towards those groups or minorities that cannot be identified as originating inhabitants of the ‘nation’ and that represent a threat for the authentic inhabitants for cultural and/or economic reasons (Mudde, 2016). Xenophobia and nationalism are always present together within the nativist ideology, whereas the target group of ‘outsiders’ can vary across different manifestations of nativism (e.g., immigrants, refugees, or ethnic minorities) (Mudde, 2007). Only the nation and its group of ‘pure’ citizens matter and need to be protected from any external threat, including interference from supranational political institutions (e.g., the European Union). Current examples of nativism are clearly expressed by the Islamophobic and anti-immigrant campaigns of radical right populist parties such the German Alternative for Germany (AFD), the Italian League and the French *Front National* (Biard *et al.*, 2019).

On the other hand, authoritarianism in this context does not address totalitarian regimes primarily, but rather the idea of an “authoritarian personality” as theorized by Theodore Adorno (Mudde 2007, 22). Authoritarianism calls for the total compliance to a strict behaviour and respect of “values such as concern for order, tradition and deference to authority” (Donovan, 2019, p. 3). In this context, law of enforcement is entitled to “punish violations severely”, sometimes at the expense of the civil and human rights of those perceived by RRPP as a threat to the social moral order (Mudde 2007, 145, 2017).

However, notwithstanding this element of authoritarianism, the populist radical right should not be confused with extreme right parties (e.g., the Italian *Casapound*). If the core elements of radical right populist parties are “nativism, authoritarianism and populism”, the central features of the extreme right are “nativism, authoritarianism and antidemocracy” (Mudde 2007, 23). Populism challenges representative democracy claiming that “only populists are legitimate representatives” of the people’s will (Müller 2016, 80). However, despite this claim, populism demands a “democracy of people” whereas the extreme right despises democracy and political participation (Froio, 2020). As Mény and Surel also pointed out, “the parties of extreme right have a declared aversion to democracy and claim to combat its existence, but at the same time populist parties insist that they are the only democrats, because they want to restore the power of the people” (or power to the people (Mény and Surel 2002, 4).

Another populist variety that is close to the right-wing ideology and worthy of mention is ‘neoliberal populism’. This populism is characterized by neoliberal features, especially from an economic point of view, at times with nativist features (Mudde 2007, 27). As Guardino emphasized, neoliberalism pushes for “a political-economic project directed toward reconfiguring the intersection of state and market through policies that both derive from and support corporate power, while primarily advancing the interests of high-income people and the ultra-wealthy” (Guardino 2018, 2). In this vein, the ‘pure people’ depicted by neoliberal populism are those that call for “tax, spending and regulatory policies” shaped by the logic of the “free market” (Ibidem). The literature cites the Italian Go Italy party (*Forza Italia*¹⁰) led by the tycoon Silvio Berlusconi and the Dutch *List Pim Fortuyn* (Verbeek and Zaslove, 2014) as good examples of neoliberal populism.

¹⁰ The present research assumes that this populist character was prominent during Silvio Berlusconi’s past government experiences, although it is not evident at the moment of writing.

2.3 Left-wing Populism

Turning to left-wing populism, Latin America faced different episodes of radical left-wing populism from the end of the 1990s, when the ‘radical’¹¹ populist wave hit the area (De la Torre 2017, 195). This wave was characterized by socialist features and the presence of strong charismatic leaders; Hugo Chávez (the first to gain power) and his successor Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela, Evo Morales in Bolivia and Rafael Correa in Ecuador.

Latin American radical populism demanded a more effective direct exercise of people’s sovereignty (e.g., recurrent elections and referenda) at the expense of liberal democracy and, from a conceptual point of view, it relies on the use of the Manichean style “us vs them” (De la Torre 2007, 385). In this vein, radical populist leaders claim to personify the virtuous people against the enemies within the country (oligarchies and traditional political parties) and outside the country (imperialistic players, such as the USA). However, populist leaders’ use of direct democracy tools is a façade to apply their unilateral decisions. As Müller noted, “the referendum serves to ratify what the populist leader has already discerned to be the genuine popular interest as a matter of identity” (Müller, 2016, 29). Eventually, this attitude led radical populists to overcome liberal democracy dynamics by undermining its institutional system of checks and balances and by building up a “soft authoritarianism”, particularly in Venezuela and Ecuador (Riker 1982; Weyland 2013, 19; De La Torre 2017, 201). In a few words, radical populist leaders claimed to ‘embody’ the people, while also imposing their version of real people; those that were not included in such vision did not exist politically.

Compared to Latin America, left-wing populism can be considered as a relative recent phenomenon within the Western European scenario (March, 2011, Ivaldi *et al.*, 2017). According to Mudde and March, left-wing populism combines elements of “socialism and populism” and, broadly speaking, it calls for a more “egalitarian” society where the focus is on “the *demos* rather than on the *ethnos*” (Mudde and March, 2005; Mudde 2007, 30; March 2011, 160).

¹¹ The other two were “classic and neoliberal” (De La Torre 2017, 195).

March singled out two main types of left-wing populist parties within the entire European scenario: “social populist parties” and “populist socialist parties”. The former is similar to the radical Latin American populist party with an anti-establishment character, strong leadership, top-down weak organization, unclear programme and, in some cases, a combination of left-wing and right-wing features (March 2011, 156). The latter is characterized by a more defined socialist approach namely a “rejection of Marxist-Leninist authoritarianism, support of post-materialist values, promotion of a more egalitarian society from an economic and political point of view” but also, in some cases, emphasis on identitarian features (e.g., regionalism) (March 2011, 152). According to March, good examples of the social populist parties were the Association of Workers of Slovakia (Union of the Workers of Slovakia, ZRS) or the Latvian Unity Party (LVP), whereas the Scottish Socialist Party and the Dutch Socialist party could be used as examples of populist socialist parties (March 2011, 155-191). Nowadays, considerable numbers of scholars are drawing attention to more recent and successful examples of Southern Europe left-wing populism, such as the Spanish *Podemos* (Mouffe and Errejón 2016; Mudde 2016; Ivaldi *et al.*, 2017) and the Greek *Syryza* (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014).

Within the group of scholars that classify populist parties using the left-right wing scale, an interesting perspective comes from the work of Mattia Zulianello (Zulianello, 2019). His research resulted in a classification of 66 populist parties based on a combination of the ideational approach (*thin* and *thick* ideology, Mudde, 2004) and the way these populist parties interact within the party system (Zulianello, 2019). Based on their “positional” or “non positional” status Zulianello identifies three main groups of populist parties: “right-wing” (populist radical right, neoliberal populist and national conservative populists), “left-wing” (social populists and national social populism) and “valence populism” (Zulianello, 2019, 3). “Valence populism” is unique in that it cannot be labelled as positional populism, given that it seems not to be attached to any particular thicker ideology per se, nor does it push forward any specific idea of society other than the “fight against corruption, increased transparency, democratic reform, moral integrity and emphasis of anti-establishment motives”

(Ibidem). Considering the way populist parties interact within the party system, Zulianello singles out three main methods: non-integration, negative integration, positive integration. These three categories are based on the extent to which a populist party is likely to cooperate with the other parties (from “not at all” to “completely open”), and on its attitude towards the institutional status quo of the party system and the country (from “challenger” to in “symbiotic relationship”) (Zulianello 2019, 9).

Valence populism recalls what Ben Stanley defined as “centrist populism” or “anti-establishment parties” that are typical of Central and Eastern Europe (Stanley 2017, 149). On one hand, this populism is characterized by a “strong emphasis on the corrupt and incompetent attitude of the elite that run the country” (mostly mainstream political parties) and, on the other hand, by a “moderate or eclectic attitudes on political issues and refusal to be defined in accordance with traditional ideological dimensions” (Stanley 2017, 157). Therefore, centrist populism does not push forward any specific cause or issue apart from the urgency to eliminate the corrupt elite and restore people’s sovereignty. In this vein, centrist populist parties are particularly able to mobilize the general voters’ disappointment and detachment from old-school political parties by pushing anti-establishment and pro-transparency rhetoric. However, although this transversal cause can lead centrist populism to reach high levels of electoral support, the lack of a defined policy position and programmes could result in an incumbency struggle for centrist populist. Indeed, the paradox is clear: how can an anti-establishment populist party with no specific platform other than the fight against elite corruption survive once it becomes part of that elite? Further on in this study, centrist or eclectic populism will become particularly important for the aim of this research, especially when examining the importance of eclectic populism in power related to the Italian Five Star Movement.

2.4 Varieties of Populisms: The Inclusionary and Exclusionary Dimensions

Besides the left-right wing categories, an increasing number of scholars are studying varieties of populism through the inclusive and exclusive framework,

which is based on Filc's three main dimensions "material, political and symbolic" in his study on Jewish right-wing populism (Filc 2010; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012; Font *et al.* 2019). Thanks to this approach, it is possible to classify populist parties and movements as "inclusionary" or "exclusionary" forms of populism based on the instances and ideas they push on these dimensions. The material dimension addresses economic and material "state resources" (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013, 158). An inclusionary party would call for the most inclusive distribution of material resources in order to benefit the greatest number of people (including immigrants and minorities). Conversely, an exclusionary party would identify a specific group of people entitled to have access to such resources, leaving out the "outsiders" (e.g., immigrants, ethnic minorities or asylum seekers). Therefore, an inclusionary party will call for "mass welfare programs to include the poor" whereas exclusionary for "welfare chauvinism" (Font *et al.* 2019, 3). The political dimension addresses political participation, public contestation and "plebiscitary and direct forms of direct democracy" (Font *et al.* 2012, 9). An inclusive party would support a society where everyone can participate and protest actively through the traditional tools of representative democracy but also through plebiscitary forms of democracy. Instead, an exclusive party would limit this right to a specific group of people that possess specific (nativist) features.

The symbolic dimension identifies who is the 'people' and who is the 'elite'. Across different types of populisms, the *thin* ideological core of populism ("people centrism, anti-elitism and the moral superiority of the General Will") remain unchangeable, whereas who fulfils the 'pure people' and 'elite' groups might change (Ivaldi *et al.* 2017). The symbolic dimension focuses on the exclusive relationship between the two groups "people vs. elite": "when populists define 'the people', in their rhetoric and symbols without referring to the characteristics and values of certain groups, the latter are symbolically excluded... Similarly, when particular groups are linked to 'the elite', they are implicitly excluded from 'the people'" (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013, 164). An inclusionary party or movement would stress the respect due to the

“indigenous population” whereas exclusionary parties will aim to stress that only the indigenous population culture matters (Font *et al.* 2019, 3).

According to Font *et al.*, the novelty of the inclusionary-exclusionary approach is that it “captures the most relevant element of populism” in a more fruitful way compared to the left- right categories (Font *et al.* 2019, 19). Clearly, inclusionary features recall the characteristics of left-wing populism (or at least what March would call “populist social parties”, March 2011) whereas the exclusionary addresses to those of right-wing populism (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013, 158-167). In this vein, for a long time, inclusionary populism has been described as a Latin American phenomenon whereas exclusionary populism was thought of as European. However, this claim has been discredited with the rise of new successful European left-wing populist parties such as the Greek *Syriza* and the Spanish *Podemos* parties that match the examples of European inclusionary populism highlighted by Font *et al.* (2019). Both these populist parties pushed discourse aimed to implement equality “including outgroups such as workers, women, the unemployed, the poor, the young and the immigrants” (Font *et al.* 2019, 9). On the other hand, clear examples of exclusionary European populist parties that support an extremely strict “conception of the boundaries for full or “authentic” membership in the national community” (Roberts, 2017, 6.) are the Austrian *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (FPÖ), the French *Front National* (FN) or the Italian Northern League (LN).

However, there are also populist parties that the literature finds difficult to classify using either the left-right scale or the inclusionary-exclusionary framework. A case in point is represented by the Italian Five Star Movement (Roberts 2017; Zulianello 2019; Ivaldi *et al.* 2019; Font *et al.* 2019) which has been variously cited as a case of the “purest form of populism” (Tarchi, 2015; Lanucci and Amsler, 2017), “valence populism” (Zulianello, 2019), “eclectic populism” (Tronconi and Mosca, 2019), “left-libertarianism” based on a mix between populism, environmentalism and left-wing economics (Verbeek and Zaslove 2016, 307), “not clearly located on either the left or the right flank of the party system” (Roberts 2019, 643) or “contradictory and ambiguous in its

ideological positioning” (Tronconi and Mosca 2019, 1259). Thus far, the literature has not questioned the Five Star Movement’s populist character (Tarchi 2015a; Lanzone and Woods 2015; Caiani and Graziano 2016; Ivaldi *et al.* 2017; Vittori 2019; Font *et al.* 2019). However, its political positions seem to be so fluid and reflected in Stanley’s “centrist populism” that any attempt to classify it once and for all becomes very limiting.

2.5 Inclusionary–Exclusionary Populism: Do we Need a New Dimension?

The present study finds that the inclusionary-exclusionary framework has been the most effective approach of classifying different kinds of populism so far. Notwithstanding those cases where it is quite hard to categorize populist parties such as the *Five Star Movement*, this approach has provided the most extensive and flexible way of looking at populist types and this research will rely on such an approach. However, this study also aims to draw the readers’ attention to a gap present in such an approach and which could improve the study of varieties of populism greatly: the relationship between populism and representative democracy from an institutional point of view, or, in other words, what is the approach of populist parties with the constitution? Do they try to change it effectively?

In order to understand why this question is crucial for the study of populism per se it is necessary to return to the definition of ideational populism (Mudde, 2004) which has been previously discussed. The ideational approach relies on the idea that populism is “a (*thin*) ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *Volonté Générale* (General Will) of the people” (Mudde 2004, 543). Moreover, the two opposites of populism are: “elitism and pluralism” (Ibidem). The previous sections discussed how both the left-right scale and the inclusionary-exclusionary framework try to define varieties of populisms as a result of different combinations of the populist *thin* ideology (people vs. elite and prominence of the general will) with different *thicker* ideologies (mainly right- or left-wing). However, so far, when dealing with the *thin* ideological

elements of populism, researchers seem to have mainly focused “on people-centrism and anti-elitism”, excluding the crucial role that populism plays regarding the general will as a political and moral superior unique entity.

The populist creed concerning the moral superiority of the ‘general will’ comes directly from Jean Jacques Rousseau and has inspired the populist discourse since the onset of the debate on populism (e.g., Mac Rae, 1969). According to the Swiss philosopher, the people as a homogeneous and monolithic group owns the general will, which, in turn, always aims for the common good and thus is morally superior (Rousseau, 2002). Only the ‘people’ as a monolithic entity can express the general will and any kind of mediation of such an expression should be banned. Indeed, according to Rousseau, political representation causes the alienation of people’s sovereign power and only ‘delegation’ should be allowed in order to put the decisions of the general will in practice. This is because delegation does not involve any further decision-making dynamic but only concerns bringing the people’s decisions within the higher political institutions (Urbinati 2011, 33).

Therefore, inspired by Rousseauian theories on representation, it can be argued that a pure form of populism would despise representative democracy looking for an indirect way to express the general will as it is already morally perfect and cannot be subject to any mediation or institutional constraint. Moreover, it seems that populism believes that the homogenous nature of the general will cannot be split and fragmented because the ‘people’ has a unique voice. In a nutshell, populism ideally looks for a direct and unmediated way to express the monolithic and morally superior general will.

William Riker was already arguing in 1982 that in order to express such moral entity, populists were prone to avoiding or skipping the necessary institutional steps expected by the constitution. The “dictatorial executives” of Latin American populist regimes represented a case in point of such a populist trend (Riker 1982, 247; Weyland, 2013). Decades later in Western Europe, populism seems to present the same conflictual relationship with institutions. In 2004, Mudde himself stressed the ambiguous relationship that populist parties showed with the institutional asset of representative democracy: “Rather than

representative democracy, populism is inherently hostile to the idea and institutions of *liberal* democracy or *constitutional* democracy” (Mudde, 2004, 561). More recently, Jan-Werner Müller argued that the populist impatient and “antipluralist character” is what truly characterizes the nature of this phenomenon. Notwithstanding the fact that populism is always a “moralistic imagination of politics that sets people against corrupt elites”, Müller argues that “opposing the political or economic elites is not enough to become populists” (Müller 2017, 19-20). The real turning point is represented by “moralized antipluralism” that characterizes populism (Müller 2016, 3) which can be explained as the pretence of populists to speak for the people as a whole: “We are the people. Who are you?” (Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Müller 2016, 4). Yet, despite their conflictual relationship with institutions, populism seems to be “fine with representation” providing they can steer and shape representative democracy. In other words, once in power, populists will shape the constitution in order to disable pluralism (Müller 2016, 67).

The present analysis argues that “pure forms of populism” (Tarchib, 2015) would naturally try to overcome the mediation nature of representative democracy pushing forward legislative initiatives and policies aimed at changing the institutional asset of representative democracy, calling for a more plebiscitarian and direct form of democracy. As one main consequence, the *antagonistic approach populism has with representative democracy* and its constitution should be part of the way populism is studied and classified. For this reason, this research proposes the introduction of *antagonism to representative democracy*¹² (in short *institutional dimension*) as a fourth dimension to the inclusionary/exclusionary approach that will measure to what extent a populist party actively tries to reshape the constitutional asset of its country in order to reduce the degree of institutional mediation and introduce direct democracy. The ‘institutional dimension’ will be in addition to the other three dimensions (‘material’, ‘political’ and ‘symbolic’) in the inclusionary-exclusionary framework which, according to the present analysis, remains the most effective

¹² Italics have been added by this author.

approach in order to study and classify varieties of populism. However, this fourth dimension will not be examined purely based on the concept of inclusion or exclusion, because it would be totally useless (as also some recent studies proved, Lisi *et al.*, 2020), but rather on the logic of “challenger or symbiotic” (Zulianello, 2019) with the institutional asset (constitution) of representative democracy, in particular to the intermediated character of representative democracy.

As Lisi *et al.* (2020) pointed out “populist actors, from both the left and right of the ideological spectrum – demand radical reforms in order to improve the functioning of contemporary democracies...however, not all populist parties share the same view on how representative democracies should be reformed” (Lisi *et al.* 2020, 077-080). Introducing the institutional dimension, our interest focuses on those reforms that would implement people’s participation to the political decision making of the country. Bedock *et al.* (2012) distinguishes between “representative democracy” reforms and those “direct democracy mechanisms”. The former entails “the rules regulating the repartition of power, the process of selection of political elites and the modes of decision making and policy implementation” whereas the latter “alternative modes of democratic involvement in decision making and/or alternative tools of democratic participation in the “traditional” political process (Bedock *et al.* 2012, 3-8). The present research assumes that the purest form of populist will favour the latter type of reforms over the former. As some recent studies on this topic showed in general populist parties (inclusionary, exclusionary or post ideological) displayed a “strong predilection for direct democracy reforms” (Lisi *et al.* 2020, 089). However, it is crucial to stress that the assumption “populists always look for direct democracy” is misleading. Indeed, as different researchers have argued not all populists’ main final goal is to enable direct involvement of the people in politics (Canovan 2002; Mudde 2007; Paxton 2019). Some are merely interested in becoming the “embodiment” of the people's general will (Canovan, 2002). In particular, it seems that RRPPs tend to use the call for direct democracy in a strategical way. As Fred Paxton put it RRPPs call for direct democracy “to the extent that (it) facilitate the implementation of higher priority ideological

concerns, rather than citizen participation being an ideological concern in and of itself” (Paxton 2019, 4).

So, even if it is important to stress that populist parties are also very keen on pushing forward reform that change the “formal rules of political representation (eg. elections and parliamentary)” (Ibidem, 093) and thus limit or improve political representation, according to this research the purest form of populism is more concerned with overcoming representation rather than changing it. In a nutshell, in this analysis it is assumed that the purest form of populism not only wants to change representation (for example changing the number of MPs, but it wants to overcome representation totally, weakening the role, *in primis*, of political parties and higher political institutions such as the parliament. Thus, the purest form of populism will prefer direct democracy to representative democracy and for this reason it will push forward reforms that will enable direct democracy.

It should be noted that the present research is aware that the “political dimension” as demonstrated in the classic version of the inclusionary/exclusionary framework already partially encompasses the issue related to the request of “plebiscitarian and local forms of radical democracy”. However, this analysis argues that the classic political dimension includes too many key concepts and does not sufficiently define the populist creed in the superiority of the General Will and relative antagonism necessary to representative democracy.

Finally, it is also important to note that according to the present research the institutional dimension alone does not define a political actor as populist and it should not be defined as a sufficient condition in itself. The three elements “people-centrism”, “anti-elitism” and “superiority of the General Will” have always to be present at the same time in order to assess the populist character of an actor or an organization.

CHAPTER III

Populist influence in government: A New Perspective

In the last decades a growing number of different populist parties have succeeded in entering in government coalitions with mainstream political parties or even with other populist parties in Western Europe. This scenario provides fruitful conditions to investigate if populist actors in government can exert a certain degree of influence on their coalition partners or if, conversely, they have to quit their populist and anti-system character under the impact of their “experience in office”. These two main interests led this research to formulate respectively two main research questions: “To what extent did populist parties succeed in influencing their government coalition partners, leading them to adopt a populist rhetoric and change their policy positions?” and “Have populist parties been able to retain their populist “outside mainstream politics” identity, or have they been assimilated into mainstream parties?”. In order to answer these questions this project chose to focus on the “eclectic” populist Five Star Movement and its first two government experiences from 2018 to 2021.

As a necessary starting point, this research provides some theoretical grounds. First, taking into consideration the multi-faced nature of populism, it was crucial to define what this research entails in terms of populism and populist parties – movement. Following this first interest, the first chapter provided an overview of the main approaches to the study of populism explaining why this project chose to rely on the ideational approach theorized by Cas Mudde (2004) whose core can be identified in three main concepts: “people centrism”, “anti-elitism” and “superiority of General Will” (Chapter I). Then, as a next necessary theoretical step, the second chapter focused on how to distinguish or better classify populist parties. In particular, this research decided to rely on the inclusionary – exclusionary framework (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013) but according to an updated version of it proposed by this research (Chapter II, section 2.5). This research added a new (Institutional) dimension to the inclusionary – exclusionary framework which refers to the third main concept present in the ideational approach, the General Will. According to this research

most of the time this third key concept and its theoretical implications present in the ideational approach has been dismissed by researchers, especially in terms of operationalization (Chapter II, section 2.5).

This chapter can be considered the third milestone of the theoretical framework that structures this PhD project and that will guide the methodology and empirical analysis present in this research. In particular, the general goal of this chapter is to provide further theoretical tools to the study of populist influence in government. As a starting point, in section 3.1 “*Populism in Power: Episodic or contagious?*”, this analysis introduces the debate that has led researchers to focus their attention on populist influence in power in the first place. Then, in section 3.2 “*Populist contagiousness in government*”, the analysis delves into the debate on political influence in government illustrating the difference between direct and indirect influence, strategies and conditions that might play a major role within the process of “direct political influence” which is the focus of this research. In particular, this section focuses on both those conditions that might facilitate populist parties to influence their coalition partners but also those features that might bring populist actors themselves to tone down their anti-system character. In particular, the study of different cases of populist influence led this analysis to find out that being in government is not always equal to being more “influential” and that certain topics more than others have been more sensitive to the populist influence so far. The result of this overview is presented in section 3.3 *Populist policy contagion: on which issue do populists exert the most influence?* Then, in the last two sections, this chapter illustrates, first, why the rhetorical aspect should always be taken into consideration in studies on populist influence (section 3.4, *Rhetoric contagion: A key aspect in the study of direct populist influence*) and finally this research introduces a new definition of populist influence according to which “populist influence is the impact exerted by populist parties on their government coalition partners in terms of communication contagiousness (people centrism, anti-elitism and general will) and policy position change (depending on the populist ideological attachment). In the presence of pure populist parties or movements these will naturally try to push their coalition partners to embrace direct

democracy”. This new definition is important for two reasons. First, it fills an important theoretical gap present in the field of study of populist influence. Second, this definition together with the theoretical insights from chapter I (what is populism, “ideational approach”, Mudde 2004) and chapter II (updated version of the inclusionary – exclusionary framework) represents the theoretical backbone of this PhD project defining its research questions and driving its methodology and empirical analysis.

As previously illustrated, in its first section this chapter will introduce the topic of populist influence providing some context about how and why this topic has become salient today.

3.1 Populism in Power: Episodic or contagious?

From the beginning of the twenty-first century, a growing number of populist parties have achieved enough electoral success to enter the higher political institutions or to be asked to form coalitions or give support externally to the government. In the 1990s, academics were particularly interested in “radical right populist parties” (RPPP) given that, at that time, most of the populist parties that succeeded in entering higher political institutions shared a fundamental set of ideological features (Betz 1995; Taggart 2000, 2007; Mudde 2017). However, since then the Western European scenario has seen an increasing number of different types of populist parties in power and along with this phenomenon, the study of populism in power has grown considerably.

This debate has developed around two longstanding main topics. First, a large part of the literature has focused on the important basic question: is “populism compatible with representative democracy”? (Riker 1982; Mény and Surel 2002; Albertazzi and Mueller, 2013). A consistent group of academics has debated the effects of populism on democratic procedures, wondering whether it should be considered a “threat” or a “corrective” to democracy (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013; Rummens 2017). Populist parties tend to have a controversial relationship with the procedural structure of democracy which brings them to question or even try to overcome the necessary institutional steps

that are part of representative democracy (Riker 1982; Müller 2016). For this reason, a growing number of scholars argue that populism should be considered as a threat to democracy (e.g., Müller 2016; Rummens 2017; Urbinati 2020) due to its illiberal and anti-pluralist features. Conversely, a minority claim that, in some ways, populism might represent a “reminder of representative democracy’s flaws” and possibly a corrective for democracy (e.g., Mény and Surel 2002; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017; Mouffe 2018).

The second much-discussed topic on populism in power addresses the relationship between populists and democratic procedures (Müller 2016; Rummens 2017; Urbinati 2011) namely: can populists govern once in power? (Heinisch, 2003) Some academics have supported the idea that populism cannot remain in power because of its very structure. In this vein, in the 1990s, some of the most influential voices within the field of studies on populism claimed that populism is rather ‘episodic’ and not destined to last within the higher political institutions (Taggart, 2000, 2002). This is due to the protesting and anti-systemic character of populist parties which makes it difficult for them to remain different from the rest’ once entering higher political institutions (Betz 1995; Taggart 2000; Meny and Surel 2002).

Peter Mair argued that advanced democracies seem to be characterized by a ‘gap’ between those who “govern but no longer are perceived as representative by the voters” (mainstream parties) and those who “cannot govern but are felt as legitimate people’s representatives” (populist parties) (Mair, 2009, 17). However, in those few cases in which populist parties govern, they cannot avoid the difficulty of “squaring their original emphasis on representation and their original role as a voice of the people with the constraints imposed by governing and by compromising with coalition partners” (Mair 2009, 17). If mainstream parties in government show the tendency to behave ‘responsibly’ (e.g., taking unpopular but necessary decisions), populist parties must stick to their ‘responsive’ attitude towards people’s requests (Mair 2009, 17). Similarly, Heinisch argues that what makes populist parties successful when they are in opposition represents the main structural difficulty once populist parties enter coalition governments, because as ‘outsiders’, many populist parties have no

solid experience in policy agenda bargaining (Heinisch, 2003). Van Spanje (2011) pointed out that “anti-political-establishment” parties are particularly affected by their participation in coalition governments (“incumbency effects”, Akkerman, 2012) because their electorate will perceive their “cooperation with the establishment” as a betrayal and, in the long run, this would result in a cost of governing for them (Van Spanje 2011, 609). Meanwhile, Akkerman and De Lange stressed that, once in government, radical populist parties (left and right) “are particularly prone to the emergence of internal strife because they have to make policy compromises and shed some of their populist rhetoric when they enter government coalitions” (Akkerman and De Lange 2012, 581).

In contrast to these opinions, other researchers have rejected the idea that populism is episodic, and populist parties are unlikely to stay in power (Albertazzi and Mueller, 2013; Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015; Wolinetz and Zaslove, 2018; Albertazzi and Vampa, 2021). In reference to Mair’s argument, Albertazzi and McDonnell claimed that, once in power, populist parties behave according to a combination of “responsiveness and responsibility” (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015, 170; Biard *et al*, 2019). As a consequence of this choice, part of the populist electorate will feel betrayed, although in the long run, populist parties succeed (to different degrees) in maintaining their electorate. Some authors have also tried to explain the variation of such success; Akkerman and De Lange argued that post-incumbency electoral success of RRPP seemed to depend on three main factors: “policy achievements”, “the performance of RRPP ministers” and “party strategies to maintain internal coherence” (Akkerman and De Lange 2012, 578).

However, other than these specific variables that might explain how different populist parties succeed in staying in power, the overall reason that populism in power has become a major phenomenon within the political scenario is excellently explained by Albertazzi and McDonnell, defining populist parties in power as “builders of organizations, creators of communities, givers of identity, shapers of political agendas, and, increasingly, as parties in power” (Ibidem, p.180). In a nutshell, as the last twenty years and related growth of new populist parties (Graziano, 2018) within the Western European political scenario have

effectively shown, populism in power is more than an episodic phenomenon destined to fail. Populism in power is a “contagious” phenomenon (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2015) and once in power, populists are variously able to exert their “influence” directly or indirectly both on their own political scenario and on other political parties.

The idea of populism in power as a “contagious” phenomenon destined to “leave a mark” has led progressively more researchers to investigate the ways in which such an influence is exerted. A significant part of the academic field has shifted attention onto the demand side, investigating the reason for a considerable number of voters all across Europe supporting populist parties (Akkerman *et al.* 2013; Schulz *et al.* 2017; Spierings and Zaslove 2017; Geurkink *et al.* 2019, Marne 2020). However, a large part of academic research however has also kept its attention on the populist supply side. In this vein, some researchers have focused on how charismatic populist leaders have been able to exercise their influence on the government through a continuous and unmediated relationship with voters (Weyland, 2001). Others investigate to what extent populists in power affect different party systems (Mudde 2014; Wolinetz and Zaslove 2018; Albertazzi and Vampa, 2021). Finally, and most interestingly, in recent years a third group has emerged to analyze how populists in power, more specifically populists in government, succeed in influencing their coalition partners. This research intends to address this second main branch of studies and for this reason in the next section, we will delve into the analysis of studies on populist influence in government in order to understand what it entails according to the literature so far.

3.2 Populist contagiousness in government

The concept of populist influence or contagion¹³ cannot address an ultimate and unique definition of “influence” or “contagion” which definitely represents a theoretical limit and a difficulty within the field of study of populist influence. However, according to this research, an essential starting point is provided by

¹³ In this analysis influence and contagion are used as synonymously.

Robert Dahl's definition of influence as "a relation among actors in which one actor induces other actors to act in some way they would not otherwise act" (Robert Dahl 1973, in Biard *et al.* 2019, 5).

Broadly speaking the concept of "contagiosity" finds its roots in the field of electoral competition studies (Van Spanje, 2010) and it is strictly related to the strategies political parties might adopt towards their (new) competitors in order to attract more voters. In this sense different studies focused on the influence that populist or niche parties have on mainstream parties in terms of electoral competition (Minkenberg 2001; Meguid 2005; Bale *et al.* 2010; Akkerman and De Lange 2012; Meijers 2015). Within this debate, an important role is played by the strategies that mainstream parties adopt to face niche or populist actors (Meguid 2005; Bale *et al.*, 2009; Zobel and Minkenberg 2019). These strategies might lead new players to exert a certain influence on different sides of the political scenario. A considerable number of studies have focused on the communicative contagiousness exerted by populist parties on mainstream parties, pushing them to adopt a populist communication style (Mény and Surel 2002; Roodjuin 2013; Decadri and Bousaliss 2019; Schwörer 2021; Combei *et al.* 2019). Others have concentrated on the influence that populist or niche parties have on mainstream parties in terms of electoral competition (Minkenberg 2001; Meguid 2005; Bale *et al.* 2010; Akkerman and De Lange 2012; Meijers 2015, Albertazzi and Vampa 2021) or the policy positions and policy agendas of the government (Verbeeck and Zaslove 2017; Rooduijn *et al.* 2012; Combei *et al.* 2020; Norris 2019; Biard *et al.* 2019). In particular, this research is interested in the latter type of influence which focuses on the change in policy positions under populist influence. In this context, a useful definition is provided by Van Spanje which addresses "influence" as the capacity of a political party or movement to push the other political parties to change their policy positions (Van Spanje 2010, 564).

In order to face newcomers and populist influence, mainstream parties might decide to show an inclusive, exclusive or indifferent attitude. According to Anthony Downs (1957) "political parties are rational actors that will adjust their policy positions (which are positioned on a horizontal left-right scale) in

the attempt to attract more voters” (Van Spanje 2010, 565). This assumption has been further developed leading to distinguish different ways in which political parties might react to successful newcomers and niche parties. A clear summary of these theoretical developments is provided by Bonnie Meguid who argued that mainstream parties might face the electoral success of niche parties by imitating their policy positions (“accommodative strategy”) or stressing the distance between their policy positions (“adversarial strategy”) or opting for a ‘non-reaction’ towards the issues introduced by the competitors (“dismissive strategy”) (Meguid 2005, 346-349). Most importantly, Meguid argued that niche parties “can shape the importance of policy dimension” increasing the salience of specific issues they fight for (Meguid 2005, 349). Thus, populist parties prompt their competitors “to address issues that they might otherwise neglect” (Wolinetz and Zaslove, 2018, 13) forcing them to choose from one of the above-mentioned strategies. Overall, Meguid stresses, accommodative strategies rather than adversarial strategies are quite popular among mainstream parties because they offer voters the perception of ‘new wine in old bottles’, the novelty of new issues in combination with the expertise of mainstream parties (Meguid 2005, 349).

In the same vein as Meguid, Bale *et al.* (2009) argued that “when a new political issue emerges or a new political party takes the stage, an old party that might be disadvantaged as a result has, in essence, three options” and these are inspired by the theories of party competition defined respectively by Joseph Schumpeter, William Riker and Anthony Downs (Bale *et al.* 2009, 412). These options are “holding” the mainstream party traditional positions (Schumpeter), “defending” the mainstream party policy position with others in order to convince them to adopt the same positions (Riker), or “adopting” the new political party policy positions (Anthony Downs) (Ibidem). Zobel and Minkenberg pointed out that the mainstream parties might also react collectively to the challenge represented by successful populist actors through the adoption

of a collective *cordone sanitaire* set to ignore them¹⁴. Otherwise, they might individually or collectively choose to demarcate their positions from populist positions or decide to co-opt their topics and collaborate with them. The choice to co-opt (Zobel and Minkenberg, 2019), as well as the accommodative strategy (Meguid, 2005) or the adoption option (Bale *et al.*, 2009), are all examples of populist *contagion* (Zobel & Minkenberg 2019, 16) or influence.

This influence can be exerted in a more direct or indirect way. According to Enyedi and Róna indirect influence addresses those actions that do not take place directly within the institutional environment such as “using mass media”, whereas direct influence concerns “organizing demonstrations, submitting legislative proposals, calling press conferences, and giving speeches and interpellations in the parliament” (Enyedi and Róna 2018, 258). According to this analysis such a distinction is too broad and it does not take into consideration the institutional differences that being in the opposition rather than being in government would entail for the study of the populist influence. For this reason, this research prefers to address the distinction between direct and indirect influence defined by Martin Schain (2006): “political parties can exert a direct influence over policy-policy making is most direct when the party controls or is a coalition partner in national government” or this influence “can be felt indirectly, as government and other parties within the system attempt to reduce the influence of the upstart by adjusting their own strategies and issue agendas” (Schain 2006, 273). In other words, direct influence addresses “policy making capacities” (Biard and Bernard 2019, 4) namely those cases where a political player is part of the government coalition, whereas indirect influence addresses those cases where this influence might be exerted by, for example, pressures and lobbying activities on policy-makers (Zobel and Minkenberg 2019, 15).

In the first place it might be argued that being part of a coalition government might nurture the chances for a populist party to exert a more

¹⁴ Some studies pointed out that the adoption of a cordon sanitaire might also lead populist parties to radicalize their policy positions further however there is no consensus among researchers on this topic (Akkerman *et al.* 2016, 4).

effective influence on its coalition partners leading them to change their policy positions on specific matters. However, as Biard et al. have showed in their comparative work on the direct and indirect influence exerted by radical right populist parties (RRPPs) in power, being members of a coalition government is not equal to exerting a major degree of influence (Biard *et al.*, 2019). This is because, what does make the difference within the whole process of populist influence on the other political parties concerns the context of dependent factors (Biard *et al.*, 2019). Indeed, context matters greatly and the institutional arena in which political actors play affect considerably their strategies, actions and bargaining outcome but also the way a political actor might influence the other political parties (Laver and Schofield 1998; Strøm and Müller 1999; Tsebelis, 2002; Carvalho 2016).

Overall, the institutional environment “provides both constraints and opportunities” (Pridham, 1988, 5-6) and, as Christiansen et al. put it, what makes a populist party “influential” is the electoral support, organizational effectivity and parliamentary seats” (Christiansen *et al.* 2019, 91-92). In particular, “organizational effectivity” addresses the internal organization of the party and its ability to behave as a unanimous actor within the government coalition (Harmel and Janda, 1994; Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015; Akkerman *et al.* 2016). In other words, a populist actor that lacks internal cohesiveness, in terms of policy preferences and priorities, will have less chances to exert a major influence on its coalition partners. In the same vein, previous cabinet experience might also affect the capability of a populist party to exert a real influence on its coalition partners. More specifically, those populist parties that have never experienced government coalition before seem to be less influential on their coalition partners (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015; Christiansen *et al.* 2019; Biard *et al.*, 2019). Also, as Albertazzi and McDonnell have pointed out “going to the government for the first time for a (populist) party requires (a) the leadership finding sufficiently competent people to take up ministerial roles and (b) the party in office learning quickly how to communicate and justify its actions to the party on the ground – especially when faced with the inevitable compromises of coalition government” (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015, 8).

In addition to these factors, the “ideological proximity” among coalition partners might also play a major role within the whole process of populist influence (De Swaan, 1973; Bouillard 2019,). Different studies pointed out that mainstream parties that present ideological similarities to radical right populist parties, such as center-right parties, will be more prone to adopt radical right populist policy positions especially on topics such as immigration and integration (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015; Akkerman *et al.* 2016; Hafez and Heinisch 2019). However, it is important to stress that, even if “ideological proximity” might play a major role within the process of direct populist influence, there are important exceptions to this assumption. Indeed, some studies rejected the ideological proximity assumption demonstrating that left-wing mainstream parties might also be affected by radical right populist influence, especially on immigration (Van Spanje 2010; Froio 2021). As Rooduijn *et al.*, (2012) emphasized this demonstrates that “populism itself is neither left nor right” (Rooduijn *et al.*, 2012, 565) although this research argues that it makes a difference to single out on which topics both left- and right-wing mainstream parties seem to be affected the most by populist parties (and viceversa).

Finally, another important factor to take into consideration within the analysis of populist influence within government coalitions is the presence of “unexpected events”, exogenous shocks such as international conflicts or terroristic attacks that might either fuel (or not) the ability of a populist party to mobilize a certain sentiment, fear or frustration around such events leading them to exert a certain degree of (direct or indirect) influence on the other political parties.

All these factors do play a major role within the study of direct populist influence and, once again, notwithstanding the importance of “parliamentary seats”, it is important to bear in mind that it is not always the case that populist parties in government succeed in influencing their coalition partners more than populist parties in opposition. As Zobel and Minkeberg showed, a clear example of how a populist party might exert an effective indirect influence is represented by the radical right-wing populist *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) whose xenophobic discourse found a fertile ground within the German political

scenario especially around 2015 when the country housed a massive number of war refugees from Syria. In 2013 the AfD was only a minor party, but in a few years, thanks to its ability to mobilize fear against migrants, it achieved considerable electoral growth at the regional level. This electoral success led AfD to be able to exert an electoral pressure at the national level as well (“a blackmail potential” Sartori 1976, 123 in Zobel and Mickenberg 2019, 17). Over time this pressure led the Christian democrats’ government coalition to adopt stricter asylum measures (Zobel and Minkenberg, 2019, 26).

Conversely, turning to populist direct influence (Schain, 2006) from a comparative point of view, keeping in mind all the context factor previously mentioned, it seems that populist parties exert an influence on their coalition partners as long as they maintain a certain “blackmail power” (especially in terms of electoral pressure), for example, choosing to support the government externally as junior coalition partners (Blanc-Noël, 2019). This is the case of the RRPP Danish People’s Party which, notwithstanding the enormous electoral success at the beginning of the 21st century, chose not to become a major coalition partner because they disagreed with the policy positions of the liberal conservative parties on European integration (Blanc-Noël 2019, 59). Eventually the Danish People’s Party (DDP) decision paid off in terms of policy influence. On the one hand, the choice to support the central government externally made the DDP crucial for the survival of the government itself, pushing the other coalition partners to co-opt some of the DDP policy positions in terms of immigration. On the other hand, the decision to support the central government only externally enabled the DDP to maintain its anti-establishment character. Indeed, as a considerable number of studies on populism in power and populist influence have pointed out, the major risk for populist parties in government is that, under the pressure of the institutional background, they are forced to give up on their anti-establishment and protest characteristics in order to survive (Mair 2009; Akkerman *et al.* 2016; Albertazzi and McDonnel; Biard *et al.*, 2019).

This last assumption is particularly important, especially we consider that the concept of “political influence”, direct populist influence in this case, is a

two ways or bidirectional concept: on the one hand populist parties might be influential towards their coalition partners pushing them to change their policy positions, but, on the other hand, populist parties themselves might be influenced by the institutional background, coalition bargaining and electoral competition in which they have to take part. As Akkerman *et al.* (2016) argued, populist parties¹⁵ in government might actively push forward or passively be subject (to) a process of “mainstreaming”: (namely) “moderate policy positions on core issues, expand the issue agenda and show more respect for the rules of the game or try to overcome the extremist reputation” (Akkerman *et al.* 2016, 14). According to the literature, sometimes moving into the mainstream might be used by populist parties as a “strategy” especially in those cases where populist parties are perceived as too “extremist” by the other political parties in order to cooperate with them. However, most of the time populist parties might passively be forced to move into the “mainstream” as a tangible effect of the government coalition experience which “implies a commitment to a policy agreement, which is based on policy compromises” (“inclusion – moderation theory” Akkerman, 2016, 15). Conversely, when excluded and ostracized by the other political actors, populist and niche parties might move towards “radicalization” (“exclusion – radicalization” theory Akkerman 2016, 15)

To sum up, even if populist parties aim to reach higher institutional roles presenting themselves as *policy-driven* oriented actors, motivated only by the desire to push forward policies for the common good, they might turn into *office-seeking* oriented actors and thus be forced to tone down their policy priorities and related policy influence on their coalition partners (Strøm & Müller, 1999). When this moderation takes place (Akkerman *et al.*, 2016), populist parties certainly do not succeed in exerting a real influence on their coalition partners and, more extremely, they risk disappearing from the political scenario. A case in point is represented by the Finns Party who in 2015 entered into a center

¹⁵ Actually Akkerman *et al.*, 2016 address radical right populist parties in the comparative study from 2016. However, this research believes that their argumentation also holds for populist parties in general.

liberal coalition with the result of “a dramatic loss of popular support because it was not able to keep its promises” (Blanc-Noël 2019, 69).

The aim of this section was to provide an overview of the debate on populist influence in government and single out some of the main features and factors that play a crucial role in the study of this phenomenon. In the next section, this analysis provides an overview of both relevant cases of successful direct and indirect populist influence (mainly experienced by RRPP actors) but also cases where populist actors failed in exerting an effective influence and were not able to maintain their antisystem and populist character under the impact of the experience in government. Most importantly the following section will tell us on which topic populist actors in power have been most influential so far according to the literature.

3.3 Populist policy contagion: on which issue do populists exert the most influence?

So far, most of the debate on populist influence on other political parties has focused on the major role played by radical right-wing populism parties (RRPPs) in power (Akkerman *et al.* 2016; Carvalho 2016; Biard *et al.* 2019). As previously shown (see Chapter II) the radical right populist party “policy priorities are mainly in the field of immigration and integration policy” and rule of law (Minkenberg 2001; Zaslove 2004; Akkerman and De Lange 2012, 579; Mudde, 2007; Van Spanje, 2010; Bale *et al.* 2010; Biard *et al.*, 2019.). Some researchers have also tried to explain why radical right populist parties have attracted so much electoral consensus across Europe, and their main conclusion was that voters are merely attracted by its exclusionary positions on immigration rather than other policy dimensions that the RRPPs might take into consideration (Wolinetz & Zaslove, 2018, 10). In particular, researchers have drawn their attention to the “exclusionary effects” that the RRPPs direct and indirect influence might have on the national government and how these effects might lead the other political parties to adopt stricter immigration policies (Paxton, 2019, 125). To put it simply, bearing in mind the importance of context dependent factors, radical right populist parties become electorally successful

when they can increase the salience of the immigration issue. In particular, this might happen in the presence of “high unemployment, globalization and mistrust of political élites threatens the security, identity and employment opportunities of locals” (Zaslove, 2004, 100). As a consequence, the electoral success of RRPPs is likely to prompt the other parties to adopt accommodative strategies towards the RRPPS exclusionary immigration positions (Meijers, 2015, 3). Notwithstanding this principal trend, some studies have also tried to draw attention to other policy dimensions on which radical right populism might be particularly effective, such as “foreign policy” (Verbeeck and Zaslove 2017) or “federalism” (Bouillard, 2019) or Euroscepticism (Meijers, 2015; Bouillard, 2019). However, the main trend seems to remain attached to the issues of immigration, rule of law and integration policy.

In this vein, Biard *et al.* (2019) provided a comparative analysis on how radical right populist parties (RRPPs) in advanced liberal democracies “directly” or “indirectly” (Schain, 2006) influence their coalition partners when they are in government or when they are in opposition, especially on topics such as immigration and integration¹⁶, but also Euroscepticism and cultural policies. Interestingly, Biard *et al.* reached the conclusion that, according to the “context-dependent conditions”, some RRPP parties in opposition have been able to influence the political agenda of their countries more effectively compared to other RRPPs who were members of the cabinet and that the impact of this influence depends on the issue the RRPPs push forward (Veerbeck and Zaslove, 2017; Combei *et al.* 2020). Overall, it can be concluded that on integration issues, the RRPP are able to ‘make a difference’ even when they are not part of the government; the Danish People’s Party represents a case in point. Surprisingly, when RRPPs are part of the government, they do not succeed in affecting the policies as much as when they externally support right-wing coalitions or can only indirectly influence policies (Biard *et al.* 2019, 282). In

¹⁶ These authors focused on the Italian Northern League, the Swiss People’s Party, the French Front National, the Danish People’s Party, the Austrian Freedom Party and the Finnish Finns Party.

particular, the authors claim that although the RRPP influence on policies lead to minor changes, the RRPP's indirect influence is in any case quite 'pervasive'.

Compared to RRPPs that were able to join government coalitions, the number of left-wing populist parties or radical left-wing parties that joined government coalition within the Western political scene is small and thus not enough research has been devoted to this topic in terms of policy influence among coalition partners. However, an interesting case is represented by the Greek populist government between the radical left wing *Syriza* and the radical right-wing (*Anexartitoi Ellines*) ANEL. In their analysis on this government experience, the first of its kind within the Western European scenario, Aslanidis and Rovira Kaltwasser proved that both these populist actors were deeply influenced by internal and external factors that forced both of them to tone down their populist and anti-establishment character, especially in response to the external pressure represented by the troika (Aslanidis and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2016, 12). In the same vein, Cas Mudde stressed that *Syriza*, in particular, lost much of its original radical populist attitude during this coalition experience: "By not making a choice between returning SYRIZA to its radical left roots or transforming it into a 'responsible' centre-left party and instead muddling through with a mix of these two fundamentally opposed models, he (Alexīs Tsipras, leader of *Syriza*) remains politically isolated and therefore easily defeated, both at home, including by his own coalition partner, and abroad (Mudde, 2017 , 35). Similarly to the Greek case is the government experience faced by the populist left wing *Podemos*, which led this populist party to go through a radical change. Indeed, during its coalition government experience in 2016, *Podemos* proved not to be able to exert an effective influence on its coalition partners, but rather it struggled to remain credible to its voters because of its incapacity to "meet expectations" (Zarzalejos, 2016).

The aim of this section was first to provide an overview of relevant Western European cases where populists in power were able to influence their government coalition partners and, second, to show that in some cases "being in government" does not necessarily mean being able to exert such influence. Indeed, in some cases, being in opposition, thus exerting an indirect influence,

could actually represent an advantage. Moreover, this overview also pointed out that, overall, radical right populist parties were the most influential so far, especially on issues that were salient for them such as immigration, integration and rule of law. This trend is not a surprise if we consider that for a long time radical right populist parties represented the major trend in terms of populism in power. When radical right populist parties succeeded in exerting a direct or indirect influence it mostly happened because they were able to make a certain topic “salient” enough to trigger the other political parties to imitate and adopt their populist rhetoric and policy positions. Often, according to the literature, the rhetorical weapon represents the most effective tool to make a certain topic salient. This is the reason why, according to this research, populist rhetorical contagion represents an important first symptom of a more consolidated populist influence. The next section will discuss and develop this claim further, showing why it is not possible to speak about populist influence without taking into consideration also the rhetorical aspect.

3.4 Rhetoric contagion: A key aspect in the study of direct populist influence

Within the study field of populist influence a considerable number of studies have focused on the communicative contagion exerted by populist parties on mainstream parties, pushing them to adopt a populist communication style (Mény and Surel, 2002; Mudde 2004; Roodjuin *et al.* 2014; Manucci and Weber, 2017; Decadri and Bousaliss 2019; Combei *et al.* 2019; Norris 2019; Schwörer 2021). These studies pointed out that the communicative aspect is a useful indicator of populist contagiousness especially if it is considered that “communication style for populist parties, is crucial to exercise a permanent pressure” on the other political parties (Biar 2019, 180; Mudde 2004). In 2004 Cas Mudde claimed that the western political party scenario was considerably influenced by a *Populist Zeitgeist* and some researchers tried to test if this assumption was true through the application of different methodologies all focused primarily on the communication aspect (Mudde 2004, 542). Some researchers did not confirm Cas Mudde’s theory (Rooduijn *et al.*, 2014; Manucci and Weber 2017) whereas others did (Schwörer, 2021).

According to this analysis the communicative aspect is crucial within the study of populist influence. First, starting with the rhetoric they use, populist parties can frame politics as a continuous conflict between the “good people” and the “corrupt elite” promoting the moral superiority of the general will (Mudde, 2004); and second, through their communication style, populist parties are able to make certain topics “salient” for the public, forcing the other political parties to face this hot topic and decide whether to co-opt the populist policy priorities or not (Meguid, 2005). As a consequence, it is undeniable that some mainstream political parties might adopt a populist tone to mirror the electoral success of populist parties (Akkerman *et al.* 2012, 565-571). However, populist rhetoric *per se* should not be considered as a merely rhetorical weapon to win elections. Indeed, framing populist rhetoric only in these terms might be misleading because it would show only one side of the story. Conversely what this analysis is arguing is that besides looking at how a policy position might change (Van Spanje, 2010), the study of direct or indirect populist influence¹⁷ should always look also at how the language of populist and non-populist parties might change when they collaborate as coalition partners. This is for two main reasons. First, examining to what extent traditional political parties might be influenced by the populist rhetoric of their ruling coalition partners would support the assessment of whether there is actual populist influence over traditional parties or not. Second, tracing if the degree of populism of populist actors changes before and after they join a government coalition with mainstream parties (or even with other populist actors), would shed light on to what extent the institutional background and related factors (see section 3.2) at governmental level affects the use of populist discourse. Overall, as a guideline this analysis believes that especially mainstream parties which experience electoral loss will tend to adopt populist rhetoric in their discourse (Mudde,

¹⁷ As this analysis previously framed it, the impact that a populist party might have on its government coalition partners pushing them to change their policy positions (Van Spanje, 2010).

2004, 2019) whereas populist parties might tone down their populism in order to be accepted as coalition partners and keep their office (Akkerman *et al.*, 2016).

To sum up, this research argues that the study of direct (but also indirect) populist influence, namely pushing government coalition partners to change their policy position (Van Spanje, 2010), necessarily needs to be supported by the analysis of a change in communication style among coalition partners as well. It is true that populist rhetoric might be used only as a rhetorical weapon to win elections, however it is also true that this is not always the case. Indeed, the use of populist rhetoric might also represent the first step of a more effective populist influence in place. This is because looking at how the political rhetoric may change under populist impact would provide an initial but important insight in assessing the presence of populist contagion (Mudde, 2004, 2019). To be noted, that this analysis is not assuming that the use of populist rhetoric by non-populist parties automatically indicates an effective populist contagion from populist actors towards non populist actors. A populist rhetoric might still be used by non-populist actors as a temporary weapon to win elections. However, what this research is assuming is that even if the use of a populist rhetoric does not necessarily imply a consequent real populist contagion, an effective populist influence most likely starts or is combined to a rhetorical contagion in the first place. However, in order to assess whether mainstream parties adopt a populist communication style only as a temporary rhetorical election weapon or - instead - they are effectively affected by their populist coalition partners, the contagion has to be supported also by a real policy change in mainstream parties towards the policy position of their populist coalition partners.

Once again it is important to note that this research is interested in the study of populist influence as a “bidirectional process”, namely populist parties might exert their influence on their government coalition partners or, conversely, they might be forced to tone down their anti-system character under the pressure of the institutional and coalitional partner pressure. Thus, just as mainstream parties could be influenced by populist rhetoric either temporarily or in an effective and lasting way, in the same way the rhetoric and related political positions of populist parties could change under the institutional and coalition

partner pressure. So, it is necessary to assess whether the political discourse of the populist actors themselves changes during the government coalition with mainstream parties or other populist actors. If it does, it would be possible to argue that populist parties were not influential but rather they were affected by the impact of their “experience in office”.

The main goal of this section was to show why the rhetorical aspect plays such an important role within the study of populist influence. However, claiming that populist rhetorical contagion might be the symptom of an effective populist influence is misleading and insufficient for the study of populist influence. An important piece is still missing from our puzzle, namely a definition of populist influence. Indeed, it is not really clear what populist influence entails and what we should look for if our aim is to study such a phenomenon. The literature has not provided any consistent theoretical tool in this sense beyond some valuable, but still too general, definition of political influence (Dahl, 1973; Van Spanje 2010; Biard *et al.*, 2019). In the following section this analysis will fill this gap providing a specific definition of populist influence.

3.5 Populist influence: A new perspective

Up to now this analysis has delved into the literature on populist influence with the aim of narrowing down the focus to direct populist influence in government coalitions. The main interest of this chapter is providing the theoretical ground to analyse the influence that populist parties might have on their mainstream coalition partners pushing them to adopt both a populist rhetoric and to change their policy position under the impact of their populist influence. Equally important for this research is to assess if populist parties in a government coalition water down their populist attitude under the impact of the “experience in office”.

However, what has not been clarified enough so far is what does this populist influence entail once and for all. As previously explained this research frames populism according to the ideological approach (Mudde, 2004) according to which populism is a *thin* ideology that frames society as a long-lasting conflict between the pure people and the corrupt elite. More specifically according to this

approach, the pure people (as a monolithic entity) is the only owner of the general will which is morally superior in politics (Mudde, 2004). Thus, the key concepts of populism are “people centrism”, “anti-elitism” and “general will” (Chapter I).

The “thinness” of its ideology brings populism to be attached to thicker ideologies (e.g., left wing or right wing) and the classification of existing populist parties is based on this assumption. However, classifying populist parties only in terms of attachment to a left or right ideology oversimplifies the nature of some populist parties that do not present a clear ideological attachment. For this reason, this research prefers to refer to a “revised version of the inclusionary-exclusionary approach to classify populist parties” (Chapter II). In particular, the revised version of the inclusionary-exclusionary approach proposed by this research takes into consideration the third aspect of populism, the “superiority of the general will”, that up to now has been underestimated by the literature (at least in terms of operationalization).

In particular, as explained in Chapter II, the concept of general will addresses the populist idea that only the pure people own the general will which is morally superior to any other institution within the political scenario. This means that what the people (as monolithic entity) wants is morally superior to any other decision taken by a political institution. As main consequence, populist parties call for the direct participation of people in political decision making, and in a nutshell, prefer direct democracy to representative democracy. This reflection brought this research to argue that the pure form of populism will naturally try to overcome representative democracy proposing reforms that implement direct or plebiscitarian forms of democracy (Chapter II).

Having said that, according to this analysis it is possible to distinguish between the general idea of “policy influence” and a specific type of “populist influence”. As also the present chapter has shown in section 3.2, it is undeniable that, so far, not enough attention has been dedicated to setting such a distinction thus reaching a clearer and ultimate definition of “populist influence”. What is more important is that this theoretical gap creates difficulties at both the theoretical and methodological level. One of the main goals of the present

analysis is to fill this gap introducing a definition of populist influence that will, first, set the theoretical guidelines of this research and second, drive the empirical analysis of this project. Moreover, this new definition could be used as theoretical tool for further research on populist influence in power.

Before introducing the definition of populist influence, it is important to provide some further theoretical analysis and, in particular, discuss three key aspects related to this specific kind of influence, which, according to this research, define populist influence as such. First, the ideological attachment of the populist parties under attention does play a major role in indicating what policy positions the populist parties prefer and on which topic in particular they will try to exert their influence. For example, in the case of RRPPs topics such as immigration and rule of law are crucial and, on these issues, radical right populist parties tend to prefer exclusionary policy positions and thus strict immigration policies. Conversely, left wing populist parties will probably have quite opposite positions on these topics supporting more humanitarian and multicultural immigration positions. Clearly, according to the ideological attachment of the populist party the policy position under attention might change, for this reason when it comes to populist influence this first aspect is the only one that might vary from populist party to populist party. Second, it is fair to expect that under effective populist influence mainstream party rhetoric will be pushed to use expressions or words related to the three populist key concepts, namely people centrism, anti-elitism and the superiority of the general will (Mudde, 2004). Third, and most importantly, as explained in Chapter II (section 2.5), a pure populist party will certainly push forward initiatives aimed to implement direct democracy and because of this, pure populist parties will also try to push their coalition partners to embrace direct democracy over representative democracy.

To sum up, according to this research, direct populist influence can be defined as follows:

Populist influence is the impact exerted by populist parties on their government coalition partners in terms of communication contagiousness (people centrism, anti-elitism and general will) and policy position change (depending on the

populist ideological attachment). In the presence of pure populist parties or movements these will naturally try to push their coalition partners to embrace direct democracy.

The general aim of this PhD project is to study populist influence on government. Namely, starting from the general assumption that populism in power is a contagious phenomenon (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2015) this research is interested in finding out if populists in government succeed in influencing their coalition partners or if, conversely, they are victims of the “experience in office” themselves and thus have to tone down their populist and anti-system character. This double interest brought this research to, first, look for a theoretical analysis to find out how to define populism (Chapter I) and consequently classify populist parties (Chapter II). The third step, fulfilled by the present chapter, was to define what an effective populist influence entails when it takes place, namely, when populist parties succeed in influencing their government coalition partners. In particular, strengthened by the definition of populist influence provided by this chapter this project formulates its first research question as follows: “To what extent did populist parties succeed in influencing their government coalition partners, leading them to adopt a populist rhetoric and change their policy positions”.

Equally important for this research is to investigate if populist actors in government are forced retreat from their populist and anti-system attitude under the influence of their experience in office. This further research interest brought us to formulate the second research question of this project as follows: “Have populist parties been able to retain their populist “outside mainstream politics” identity, or have they been assimilated into mainstream parties?”. As previously mentioned, as a case selection for both these questions this project will focus on the Italian eclectic Five Star Movement and its first two government experiences from 2018 to 2020. The next two chapters (Chapter IV and Chapter V) will be dedicated to answering the first research question, whereas Chapter VI will aim to answer to the second research question.

IV CHAPTER

A double chance to investigate the populist influence in government:

The Five Star Movement

Who influenced¹⁸ whom? (First Part)

Populism in power is not an episodic phenomenon but a contagious one (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2015). In the last decades, European populist parties and movements have been able not only to enter the parliament but also to join government coalitions as junior or major partners. This scenario leads us to wonder if, besides being the protagonists of this trend, populists in government have also been able to be “contagious” for their government coalition partners or the other way round. According to the literature this influence might have affected the mainstream coalition partners in different ways. So far, the populist influence phenomenon has been investigated in different ways within the academic field but the concept of “populist influence” *per se* remained undefined ultimately. In order to overcome this theoretical gap, this research claims that populist influence takes place when populist parties are able to push their coalition partners to first adopt a populist rhetoric and second to change their policy position¹⁹. Following these reflections and our interest in investigating populist influence in government the aim of the present and next chapter is to investigate:

“To what extent did populist parties succeed in influencing their government coalition partners, leading them to adopt populist rhetoric and change their policy positions?”.

So far, the debate on “populist contagiosity” has mainly focused on radical right-wing parties and how they succeed in shaping the immigration policies of their countries (Bale *et al.* 2010; Akkerman and De Lange 2010; Biard *et al.* 2019). However, in the last decade, new kinds of populist parties (Graziano, 2018) and movements characterized by a left- or right-wing or “post-

¹⁸ Contagion and influence are used synonymously in this context.

¹⁹ In particular, in the presence of a pure form of populism to embrace direct democracy.

ideological” attitude have succeeded in entering higher political institutions. In particular, the 2018 Italian national elections led to the formation of an unexpected coalition between two different types of populist parties: the post-ideological Five Star Movement and the radical right-wing League. These two governed together for approximately a year, until the League caused the government to collapse, and the Five Star Movement formed a new coalition with the left-wing Democratic Party. Successively, due to a governmental collapse caused by the withdraw of support by Matteo Renzi’s *Italia Viva*, another government headed by the economist Mario Draghi took office at the beginning of 2021.

The Five Star Movement (5SM) can be considered as a case in point of a successful new populist movement (Graziano, 2018) that within a few years from its foundation in 2009 succeeded in entering into parliament (2013) and successively joined its first coalition government in 2018. Compared to other Western European populist parties, the 5SM represents an interesting combination of features that are quite uncommon within the populist field, namely: grassroots origins, post-ideological approach (with the exception of ecological issues), strong anti-establishment attitude, unconventional use of technology in order to promote direct democracy, fluid organizational structure and a (initial) refusal to join coalition with other political parties. What is more interesting is that through its recent government experiences, the 5SM had the chance to govern with vastly different ideological political players: first with the radical right-wing League of Salvini and then with the centre-left-wing Democratic Party (PD) (as major coalition partner). Both these governmental experiences can be considered significant from a scientific point of view for three main reasons. First, the Five Star Movement’s first coalition government provided the ground to explore if and how two different populist parties characterized by different ideological attachments, history and organizational structures influence each other and which one would dominate the other. Second, the fact that immediately after ruling with a radical right-wing populist actor, the 5SM joined a ruling coalition with a centre-left majority gives an opportunity to observe how the political positions of an eclectic populist actor may change (and

specifically, which positions change) based on the ideology of its governing partners and whether mainstream centre left-wing parties are affected by its populist contagiosity. Third, the different 5SM government experiences provide a fruitful scenario to investigate to what extent an eclectic populist actor in power succeed in staying different²⁰.

For all these reasons, the Five Star Movement and its first two government experiences represent the perfect case study to answer the research questions presented by this project. In particular the main aim of this and next chapter is to answer the first research question of this PhD research: “To what extent did populist parties succeed in influencing their government coalition partners, leading them to adopt populist rhetoric and change their policy positions?”.

To answer this question, first this chapter will depict a qualitative ideological profile of the Five Star Movement’s and its first two coalition partners before their coalition government experiences, making use of the current literature but also official documents and manifestos. This step is necessary in order to describe the context and political positioning of these political actors before describing their experience in government. Later these ideological profiles will provide a valid benchmark for the results reached through the empirical analysis. Then in the “theories” section, the present chapter will display the theoretical foundation on which this analysis relies addressing the literature on populism (Chapter I), populist classification (Chapter II) populist influence (Chapter III) and political representation. Next, the methodology will be presented. In particular, this chapter is based on qualitative data but also and mainly on quantitative methods and expert surveys. First, together with the current literature on the Five Star Movement and its coalition partners also official manifestos and statements were used to portray the ideological profile of these political actors. Second, through the use of expert surveys this chapter defines first, the degree of populism and populist rhetoric of the Five Star Movement, League and Democratic Party and, second, it

²⁰ This last point will be particularly important in Chapter VI.

investigates to what extent these actors might have changed their policy positions from 2014 to 2019. These results, combined with the analysis present in the next chapter²¹, which is also devoted to find an answer to the research question “To what extent did populist parties succeed in influencing their government coalition partners, leading them to adopt populist rhetoric and change their policy positions?”, will bring this analysis to a richer and consolidated answer.

As a starting point, in the next section a qualitative ideological portrait will be provided according to the revised inclusionary/exclusionary framework proposed by this research (Chapter II) of the Five Star Movement and its coalition partners (League and Democratic Party) before 2018. This is a necessary preliminary theoretical step in order to present the case study of this project concerning the Five Star Movement and its coalition partners but also to depict the inclusionary - exclusionary nature of these actors²² and later to investigate to what extent these might have changed under the impact of populist influence or *vice versa*.

It should be noted that the ideological portraits²³ of the Five Star Movements and its first two coalition partners will be depicted following the updated version

²¹ Based on different data and methods.

²² Even if in this analysis we are applying it to the Democratic Party we are not assuming that this party is populist, rather we are going to look at the positions of the Democratic Party according to the dimensions present within the revised inclusionary – exclusionary framework only for comparison reasons.

²³ It is important to stress that even if the updated inclusionary - exclusionary framework is applied also to the mainstream center left Democratic Party this choice has been made for comparative reasons taking into consideration that both the Five Star Movement and the League have been labeled as populist actors by the literature and this research, whereas the Democratic Party can be considered as an old-fashioned mainstream center left political party²³. In this first section, the ideological portrait of the Five Star Movement will first be addressed. Next, this analysis will provide an ideological portrait of the League and then the Democratic Party.

of the inclusionary-exclusionary framework (Chapter II). In a nutshell, according to this framework populist parties can be classified according to their inclusionary or exclusionary attitude on specific policy dimensions: material (economic redistribution), political (immigration, political and civil rights), symbolic (who is the “people” and who the “elite”) and institutional (relationship with representative democracy and direct democracy). This research decided to add also “environmentalism” (and resources aimed at environmental sustainability) to the material dimension because since the beginning of its political adventure the Five Star Movement has clearly promoted environmentalism²⁴ (Tronconi, 2015).

It is to be noted that this research is aware that the revised inclusionary - exclusionary framework is a theoretical tool aimed at the study of the nature of populism and that, in our analysis, only the Five Star Movement and League have been labelled as populist actors by the literature whereas the Democratic Party can be considered as a traditional center left party (Ignazi 2018; Froio 2021). However, this research will refer to the dimensions provided by the revised inclusionary - exclusionary framework in order to provide a term of comparison, keeping in mind that only the Five Star Movement and League are presented as populist actors²⁵ in this research.

4.1 *The Five Star Movement: Ideological Portrait*

The Five Star Movement was founded in 2009 by the comedian Beppe Grillo and the IT expert Gianroberto Casaleggio. Characterized by a very strong environmentalist attitude, undefined ideology, grassroots origins, strong local activism and massive use of new technologies and digital platforms²⁶ the Five

²⁴ Thus, looking at how the Five Star Movement and its coalition partners might have change on this issue represents a valuable benchmark to investigate if the Five Star Movement succeeded in influencing its coalition partners or viceversa.

²⁵ We will find out to what extent according to the standard we propose in this analysis

²⁶ In the next chapter the organization structure of the Movement will be discussed further.

Star Movement presented itself as an anti-political “outsider” (Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2013) of the Italian political system. The use of internet and digital platforms such as the “Blog of Beppe Grillo” was particularly important for what can be called the “embryo stage” (Lanzone and Tronconi 2015, 58; Napoletano, 2017) of the Five Star Movement, even before the official foundation of the Movement in 2009. As Grillo put it in 2006 “the tool we have for creating true democracy – a new form of democracy that has been called ‘direct democracy’. People can now keep themselves informed, at all times and from different sources, about the issues that concern them: energy, water, health care and the government; and they can express their opinions without going through the filters of the party mandarins and newspaper editors. We are moving away from giving the politician *carte blanche* and towards the participation of the citizen” (Grillo in Vignati 2015, 18). Over time, the Five Star Movement made an increasing use of digital platforms in order to promote direct democracy within the movement, for example giving the chance to its members to propose or elect the Five Star Movement delegates (representatives). Especially at the beginning of the Five Star Movement political experience, the Internet, local activism and also the influential figure of the comedian Beppe Grillo played a crucial role in mobilizing politically disappointed citizens under the flag of the Five Stars (“Public Water, Environment, Connectivity, Transportations and Innovation”, Tronconi 2015).

After having gained some electoral success at the local and regional level in 2010 (two regional councillors in Emilia Romagna) and 2012 (four mayors) in 2013 the Five Star Movement entered into the national parliament becoming the third main political actor within the Italian political arena (Tronconi, 2015) with 25,55% for the Chamber of Deputies and 23,79 % for the Senate. Interestingly, since the beginning of its entering within the higher political institutions the Five Star Movement always refused to form any kind of alliance with the other political parties.

On the 4 March 2018, the movement’s national electoral result reached even higher level, with 32,78 % for the Chamber of Deputies and 32, 22% for the Senate. After a few months the Five Star Movement and the League entered

into a coalition based on a “contract” between them. This government experience, informally called as “Conte I” (from the name of the prime minister Giuseppe Conte, now head leader of the Fiver Star Movement) lasted for one year and a few months. In august 2019 the League caused the collapse of Conte I. In September 2019, the Five Star Movement started a new Coalition with the Democratic party as the main coalition partner and this new government, labelled “Conte II” last one year and a few months.

The experiences of Conte I and Conte II offer the chance to investigate if during these government experiences the Five Star Movement influenced its coalition partners or viceversa pushing them to change their policy position on specific topics that the revised inclusionary – exclusionary framework display, namely material, political, symbolic and institutional (Chapter II).

According to the literature it is difficult to classify the Five Star Movement once for all according to both the inclusionary exclusionary framework but also the left-right scheme. Indeed, the Five Star Movement presents various ideological stances that are difficult to place (Graziano, 2018; Font *et al.*, 2019; Tronconi and Mosca, 2019; Vittori, 2019, 2020). As the one of the movement founders (comedian Beppe Grillo) often claimed, “The 5SM is not a rightist or a leftist phenomenon, it’s on the side of the citizens. Proudly populist” (Grillo in Font *et al.*, 2019,10). From a 2019 study on European Southern inclusionary populist parties, Font *et al.* claimed that compared to the Spanish *Podemos* and the Greek *Syriza*, the Five Star Movement seems “to be collocated between the inclusionary and the exclusionary continuum” for two main reasons (Font *et al.*, 2019, p. 16). First, the Five Star Movement does not show a clear position on the immigration issue (Graziano, 2018; Mosca and Tronconi, 2019; Vittori, 2020) and consequently its attitude towards the material and political dimensions is also inconsistent or in any case not fully inclusive (e.g., no explicit reference to women or immigrants). Moreover, on issues such as civil rights and, for example, homosexual marriage, the movement has also never taken defined positions (Vittori, 2020). In a few cases, the movement decided to “delegate the decision” to its activists and members though an online poll (Manucci and Amsler, 2017, p.112).

However, notwithstanding the difficulties in defining the ideological nature of the Five Star Movement once per all, it is still possible to claim that on the material dimension the Five Star Movement showed a less blurred position from the beginning of its political adventure. In their recent study on the ideological positioning of the Five Star Movement, Mosca and Tronconi claimed that from the economic point of view this populist actor shows left-wing features such as “welfare expansion, state intervention in the economy and universal basic income programme”²⁷ but also right-wing features such as “anti-tax discourse” (Mosca and Tronconi 2019, 1276). Notwithstanding the right - wing anti - tax discourse (that will take place clearly from 2018, Vittori, 2020) the Five Star Movement showed itself to be in favour of economic redistribution and against the financial interest of banks and multinationals since the onset of its political experience as Davide Vittori showed in his recent study based on the comparison of the Five Star Movement’s non-official and official documents and programmes (Vittori, 2020). Indeed, even if the “reddito di cittadinanza” (“guaranteed minimum income”) was clearly introduced by the Five Star Movement in its electoral programme from 2018, the movement showed to be disposed to state intervention measures in favour of citizens (especially concerning health, work and sustainability) since the programme of 2009²⁸ (Vittori, 2020). Not surprisingly, the electoral programme from 2013 based on seven main points “state and citizens, energy, information, economy, transportation, health and education” was also based on initiatives aimed to protect citizens from the economic interests of banks, multinationals and monopolies such as the Italian “Eni, Enel, Mediaset”²⁹. Moreover, this electoral

²⁷ However, concerning the inclusionary economic point of view of FSM, Font et al. stressed that even if the FSM has pushed for a redistributive use of material resources, this is subject to tight restrictions for non-Italian citizens

²⁸ Actually, Vittori finds the roots of such a political position in Beppe Grillo’s book from 2006 “Schiavi Moderni” (Vittori, 2020, 123-124).

²⁹ To be noted that Eni and Enel are institutions that manage gas and energy whereas Mediaset is the media group steered by Silvio Berlusconi’s family.

programme proposed the introduction of the “guaranteed unemployment subsidy” (Vittori, 2020, 124) but also, interestingly, called for the protection of local production³⁰ (Movimento 5 Stelle 2013). In particular this last point would be stressed further in the programme for the European elections in 2014, when the Five Star Movement clearly stated that “it is important to protect what is made in Italy (for example) from the invasion of South Africa oranges, Tunisian olive oil and from the threat of Asian rice” (Movimento 5 Stelle 2014). It should be noted that the importance of local production and “made in Italy” is one of the battle horses of the League too. Speaking of economic resources used to implement sustainable policies to protect the environment, officially the Five Star Movement can be considered as the most inclusive political actor within the Italian political scenario (Movimento 5 Stelle, 2013, 2014, 2018). Since the beginning of its political experience the Five Star Movement has become defender of environmental battles such as the opposition to the “the realization of the high-speed railway line linking Turin and Lyon (Treno ad alta velocità, TAV)” (Biancalana, 2020), the gas pipeline in Puglia (Tab) and strongly promoted the closure of the polluting steelmaker Ilva in Taranto (Puglia).

Turning to the political dimension, the Five Star Movement is hard to define as a merely inclusive or exclusive populist actor. As previously discussed in chapters II and III, the political dimension involves topics such as political participation and public protest (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012, 15) and, in particular, political participation represents a paradox issue within the Five Star Movement especially if we refer to immigration (Font *et al.* 2019; Vittori 2020). Indeed, if from a very general point of view it is possible to argue that the Five Star Movement was born to bring “people” back into politics, on the other hand the Five Star Movement tended to escape a definitive position on “who is the people”, namely who deserves to participate to the politics at the exception of the Italian citizens. This means that also in terms of immigration policies the Movement displayed behaviour which might be called unfocussed. Officially,

³⁰ This point was also present in the Carta di Firenze from 2009 (Movimento 5 Stelle, 2009a).

and for the first time in its programs, the Five Star Movement spoke openly about immigration from 2018³¹. Very shortly, in 2018, the movement called for the “stop to the business of immigration” and “immediate repatriation for illegal immigrants” and asked for economic resources to reinforce the territorial commission that sort migrants on Italian soil (Five Star Movement, 2018). Before 2018, the Movement was never too openly clear about immigration or specific topics related to immigration such as the introduction of the *ius soli*³². Even if, on some occasions before 2018, Beppe Grillo touched on the immigration topic showing empathy for migrants that were exploited illegally, he also claimed that “immigration seems to be a jolly topic overused by political parties for their electoral purposes” (Grillo 2010 in Vittori, 2020). Generally speaking, it is possible to argue that up to 2018 the movement never showed clear univocal signs of multiculturalism (Vittori, 2020; Font *et al*, 2019) and that, especially from 2018, in its electoral programs it referred to immigration more in terms of finding ways to “regulate it”³³ (Movimento 5 Stelle, 2014) rather than in terms of open integration and multiculturalism.

Speaking about the political dimension, in addition to the topic of immigration, it is also important to look at the right to protest and the protection of civil rights (e.g., LGBT and gender equality) as part of the political representation and participation dimension. Somehow the Five Star Movement was born as a “protest movement” itself and on this point, it never showed an exclusionary position calling for a reinforcement of law and order in this sense, at least up to (the) 2018. However, on the same note, the movement never showed clear homogenous inclusionary or exclusionary official positions on civil rights either (Vittori, 2020).

³¹ Although in the program for the European elections in 2014 it called for an European common redistribution of migrants.

³² Important to note that in 2017 Five Star Movement abstained from voting the law on *ius soli*.

³³ At the national, but also supra-national level calling for a major involvement of the European Union in the redistribution of migrants

Concerning the symbolic dimension, namely the definition of who are the people and who are the elite, as previously mentioned it is not “ideologically” clear who are the people (Manucci and Amsler, 2017). In general, it is possible to argue that the Five Star Movement seems to address (to the) Italian citizens mostly, and in this vein, the fact that since 2013 the movement exalted the product Made in Italy in its programmes might also contribute to this assumption. However, it is not possible to find a clearcut exclusionary position about immigration in the Five Star Movement discourse. Notwithstanding this, it is quite clear who is the elite (“The European Central Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the EU, other Italian parties, Germany, international financial actors, neoliberals”, Font *et al.*, 2019, 11) and Italian big monopolies such as “Eni, Enel, Mediaset, Benetton autostrade, Telecom” (Vittori 2020, 124).

Finally, looking at the “institutional dimension” it seems that the Five Star Movement has effectively called and pushed forward “programmatic initiatives” aimed to improve the tools of direct democracy (such as “prepositive referenda or referenda without quorum”) aimed to weaken the role of parliament (Vittori 2019, 147; Lisi and Gaio 2020) since 2013. In this vein, as Manucci and Amsler argued looking at the Five Star discourse, notwithstanding the blurred ideological character of this movement, it is possible to argue that “direct democracy” remained the core topic of the Five Star Movement” over time, or at least up to 2015 (Manucci and Amsler, 2017, 123).

The ideological portrait of the Five Star Movement according to the updated version of the inclusionary-exclusionary framework (Chapter II) ends here. In the next section, the profile of the radical right populist League will be presented.

4.2 *League: Ideological Portrait*

The League finds its roots at the end of the 80s when, under the influential (and authoritative) leadership of Umberto Bossi, the Lombard League presented itself as an outsider of the old-fashioned politics and its corrupted political parties (Ignazi, 2018). Robustly present at local level, characterized by strong

activism and organized according to the model of the mass party³⁴ (Ignazi 2018, Albertazzi *et al*, 2018), at the onset of its political experience the League was as an anti-party regionalist populist party (McDonnell 2006; Veerbeek and Zaslove, 2015; Ignazi 2018; Agnew and Shin, 2002). In particular the Northern League was an “anti-immigration and traditionally anti-southern party” party (Longo, 2016, p. 16) that pushed for “an administrative and fiscal independence” from “Roma Ladrona” (“Rome the thief”, Agnew and Shin, 2019; Ignazi 2018, 184-185). In this vein, the call for regional autonomy brought the Northern League of Umberto Bossi to promote constitutional reforms aimed to introduce federalism and decentralizing the institutional and administrative power of Rome, the so-called *devolution* (Ignazi 2018, 196 -197).

However, as Piero Ignazi stressed, notwithstanding these exclusionary features (except the devolution) at the onset of its political experience the League was “ideologically a *pot pourri*” because if, for example, on one hand it showed clearly antimigration and xenophobic positions, on the other hand it also “showed openness towards civil rights” (Ignazi, 2018, 187). However, this undefined ideological attachment would change dramatically during the second coalition government experience with Silvio Berlusconi (2001 – 2005), when the Northern League clearly moved towards “extreme right positions” on topics such as law and order, becoming, at the same time also “a staunch defender of Christianity” (Ignazi 2018, 199; Passarelli and Tuorto, 2018).

In 2012, after a series of scandals related to an improper use of the Northern League funds by Bossi and his family, the Northern League leadership changed and in 2013 Matteo Salvini became the new charismatic leader of the Northern League. This change of leadership also marked a change of direction for the past Northern League. Indeed, this change coincided with a shift on the definition of the category of “pure people” from the Northern League of Bossi to the Lega of

³⁴ Although, as Piero Ignazi stressed, even if the Northern League’s organizational structure at this point resembled the mass party model it was also very much affected by the hierarchical leadership of Umberto Bossi, especially in terms of epurations (Ignazi, 2018)

Salvini. Before 2012 for the Northern League the pure people (identified on ethnical basis) were those located in the North of Italy, after 2013 this framework changed progressively. Under Salvini's personalist leadership³⁵ (Albertazzi *et al.*, 2018, 3) and his new strategy of communication based on a massive, direct and "emotional" (Passarelli and Tuorto, 2018, 79) use of the social media, the pure people are still identified on an ethnical basis but now they are identified with all the "Italians", whereas the "others" are those that threaten the Italian identity from both a cultural and an economic point of view³⁶.

As a consequence of this assumption every aspect of society and political life must be interpreted according to the motto "Italian First" (Graziano, 2018, 25) which brought the League to push for a society where the state material resources, political representation and protest rights should be strictly regulated on a nativist basis. For all these reasons, according to the scholarship, the League headed by Matteo Salvini, is a clear example of a radical right populist party (Veerbeck and Zaslove, 2014; Ivaldi *et al.* 2017; Graziano 2018; Passarelli and Tuorto, 2018) and an exclusionary populist actor (Cervi *et al.*, 2020).

In particular, looking at the material dimension, the League "supports social market policies aimed to favour internal production" (Lega Nord, 2013). Moreover, it supports the 'flat tax' (Lega 2018) and, strongly opposes the austerity policies from EU (Lega Nord 2013 and 2018) (Ivaldi *et al.*, 2017). In addition to this, the League does not show clear environmentalist features neither is it available to support the costs for environmental policies: "facts show that the reduction of CO₂ is an expensive and useless effort, that shift the attention from the real problem: pollution!" (Lega, 2014). Despite these statements in the electoral program from 2018 the League displayed openness towards the green

³⁵ Even the name of the party changed from the Northern League to the League – Salvini premier.

³⁶ It is important to note that, compared to the past Northern League headed by Umberto Bossi, Salvini's new symbolic discourse led the League to conquer regions traditionally linked to the left and, for the first time, to gather consistent electoral support even in the southern regions (Albertazzi *et al.* 2018, 1; Passarelli and Tuorto 2018).

economy and measures aimed to promote the reduction of pollutants (Lega, 2018).

Besides the positions on economy, the exclusionary nativist point of view of League affects also how this populist party perceives political representation and the Motto “Italian First” set the boundaries for what political participation is and who deserve to be politically involved (Italian political sovereignty first). Indeed, according to the League (the Italian) citizens must be protected from two main threats: first, from “migrants” and second, from the selfish interests of other political parties and international actors such as the “European Union” (Ivaldi *et al.* 2017, 358; Graziano 2018) which, according to the League, want to repress the political sovereignty of Italian citizens. It is to be noted that the role previously held by “Rome thief” gave way completely to the European Union institutions (Albertazzi *et al.*, 2018; Passarelli and Tuorto, 2018). Not surprisingly the League of Matteo Salvini came to be one of the most Euroscepticist populist actors in Europe together with other leaders such as Marine Le Pen, Victor Orbán and Geert Wilders.

Overall, it is possible to argue that the League headed by Salvini seems to have dropped the economic and political battle of regional autonomy (Ignazi 2018; Albertazzi *et al.*, 2018). However, as Albertazzi *et al.* (2018) proved, if it is true that Salvini shifted the focus from the original regionalist battle for the autonomy of Padania in favour of issues such as the reinforcement of law and order and exclusionary immigration policies (Lega, 2013, 2014, 2018), it is also true that the call for independence remained very much felt by the League representatives at the regional level³⁷ (especially in Veneto and Lombardy) (Albertazzi *et al.* 2018, 16-17). Concerning to the right of public protest, the League defends an idea of society based on a strict law and order point of view in which protesting should also be limited. At the same time, as tenacious defender of the catholic religion and christian roots, the League of Salvini

³⁷ These regionalist calls for autonomy also led to a (consultive) referendum in Veneto in 2017 to ask for a greater degree of autonomy from Rome.

promotes and defends an idea of traditional family and does not support LGBT rights or gay marriage (Passarelli and Tuorto, 2018).

Finally, looking at the institutional dimension, it is possible to argue that the League has tried to push for the implementation of referenda and plebiscitarian forms of direct democracy on specific topics such as the campaign of 2014 “You decide” (“Tu decidi”) has proven. In particular this campaign called for five referenda: “abolition of Fornero’s Law (pensions), abolition of Merlin’s law (prostitution), abolition of Mancino’s law (which limits free expression), abolition of the law that enables foreign people to participate in public concours and abolition of prefectures” (Lega Nordb, 2014). Moreover, since 2013 the League asked for the “direct election of the president of the republic, reinforcement of government power, federal senate, halving of parliament members (and others elective representation) and abolition of provinces” (Lega Nord, 2013). In the same vein in 2014 the program for the European elections called for national referenda on the EU treaties (Lega 2014a). Most recently, in 2018, the League proposed the “direct election of the president of republic (which should also have the same competencies of the prime minister), reduction of parliamentary members, introduction of bond of mandate (“vincolo di mandato”) and abolition of the referenda quorum” (Lega, 2018). Interestingly it also proposed increasing the number of signatures for popular initiative bills to 200.000 (from 50.000) (Lega, 2018).

The ideological profile of the radical right populist League ends at this point. In the next section, this analysis will focus on the second Five Star Movement government experience or better on its main coalition partner, the centre-left mainstream Democratic Party. It is to be noted that this research is very well aware that the inclusionary – exclusionary framework is a theoretical tool to classify populist parties. This analysis is not assuming that the Democratic Party is “populist” rather, the ideological profile of this mainstream actor will be depicted according to the revised inclusionary – exclusionary framework only for comparison reasons.

4.3 Democratic Party: Ideological Portrait

Compared to the Five Star Movement and the League the Democratic Party (Partito Democratico, PD) can be considered as a non-populist, traditional³⁸ centre left political party³⁹, and differently from the League and the Five Star Movement, it took an active part in the governments from 2013 to 2018. Indeed, the prime ministers that run the governments from 2013 to 2018 (Enrico Letta 2013-2014, Matteo Renzi 2014-2016, Paolo Gentiloni 2016-2018) were all members of the Democratic Party. Concerning this point, it is important to emphasize that all these governments were not elected but rather institutional governments⁴⁰.

Nowadays the Democratic Party represents the main centre left party within the Italian political scenario and it can be considered as the result of the convergence which took place in 2007 between “the centrist party “Democracy and Freedom” – the Daisy (Democrazia e Libertà, La margherita) and the social democrats “Democrats of the Left” (Democratici di Sinistra – DS)” (Froio 2021, 252). The presence of these two currents within the party created different ideological difficulties over time, (Froio, 2021) as well as the influence of different secretaries/leaders led to continuous internal conflicts, especially under Matteo Renzi’s government (Ignazi, 2018). Besides these long-lasting internal structural problems, the Democratic Party also introduced important novelties from an organizational point of view. Indeed, it adopted important new measures of intra party politics in terms of “inclusive and unmediated nature of internal party decision making process” (Bernardi *et al.* 2017, 4), in particular it introduced the “open primaries” in order to elect the leader and institutional main roles within the party (Ibidem, 5). Interestingly, one of the founders of the Five

³⁸ With important changes from an organizational point of view (Bernardi *et al.* 2017)

³⁹ Although in terms of time the League was officially founded in 1991 and the Democratic Party in 2007.

⁴⁰ Special case is represented by the government of Enrico Letta. In 2013 regular elections took place but no coalition could reach the necessary majority in either of the parliamentary chambers.

Star Movement, Beppe Grillo, tried to participate in the Democratic Party primaries in 2009, but his candidacy was rejected (Vignati, 2015).

If from an economic point of view the two souls of the Democratic Party found a common denominator in a sort of “third way position on economy and social policy” (Froio, 2021, 252) and displayed a homogenous pro Europe sentiment (Partito Democratico, 2013), on other issues such as civil rights (for example) gay marriage, they continued to oppose each other (Ignazi 2018, 235).

From an economic point of view (material dimension), the Democratic party showed “soft” inclusionary economic policies (Partito Democratico, 2013, 2014, 2018) and “mixed calls for the budget to be balanced with a “third way”⁴¹ approach to economic matters” (Froio 2021, 257). In 2013 it officially called for “property tax and fiscal policies in support of female employment” and “reform of welfare aimed to support families” (Partito Democratico 2013). Similarly, in 2018, it proposed to reinforce the welfare measures for families, especially those in economic difficulty, and to introduce the “minimum wage” but, at the same time, stressing the importance of work: “whoever proposes an income for all regardless of work clashes with the principle of reality and common sense” (Partito Democratico, 2018). Looking at the environmental side, officially the Democratic Party steadily stated its favourable position for a green and circular economy and the respect of environment (Partito Democratico, 2018)

Turning to the political dimension (political participation and public protest) the Democratic Party does not show a real continuous and homogenous pattern which is solely inclusive or exclusive. From an official point of view, in its electoral program the from 2013 and 2018 this party displayed very inclusive positions on topics such as the *ius soli* (in 2014 it called for a European *Ius soli*, Partito Democratico, 2014), gender equality and LGBT rights (Partito Democratico, 2013, 2018). In particular, speaking about LGBT rights the Democratic Party promoted and obtained the recognition of same sex civil unions in 2016 (Cirinnà Law). However, on immigration, on one hand the

⁴¹ In particular this “third way approach” was evident under Matteo Renzi’s government.

Democratic Party tended to promote inclusive pro-immigration policies, on the other hand it also adopted ambiguous and severe immigration policies (Froio, 2021). In 2014, for the European elections, the Democratic party called for a “Europe of integration” based on a common European effort to rescue and redistribute migrants (Partito Democratico, 2014). In the same vein in 2018 the official program stated “Europe has a duty to welcome political refugees. It is an international right that it must not find any exceptions in Europe. This is exactly where the Union comes into play: let's go beyond the Dublin agreements - unfortunately approved by the Berlusconi government - which is the principle that asylum seekers are a problem of the country of first disembarkation” (Partito Democratico 2018, 26). However, in 2017, during Gentiloni’s government the Minniti - Orlando law was adopted which introduced restrictive, exclusionary, immigration measures (including strict rules for the NGOs) mainly based on a bilateral agreement with Lybia (Froio 2021, 260). In general, these measures were aimed at stopping immigration, to make repatriation faster and let Lybia “take care of the situation” ...even at the cost of neglecting compliance with humanitarian standards.

Finally, looking at the institutional point of view the Democratic Party showed itself to be quite symbiotic (Zulianello) with the Italian Constitution: “Constitution that remains among the most beautiful and advanced in the world” (Partito Democratico, 2013). However, in 2016, the prime minister Matteo Renzi strongly promoted a referendum to overcome the “perfect bicameralism” of the chambers of the parliament. Among other things, the most important changes that this referendum proposed was to modify the perfect bicameralism of the Italian parliament, to reduce the number of the parliament members and to change the division of legislative functions between state and regions (“Titolo V”) (Ministero dell’Interno, 2016)

As a conclusive important note on the Democratic party, it is important to emphasize that it openly claimed to want to fight populism. Indeed, in 2013 the Democratic party clearly stated that it wanted to challenge populism: “For us, populism is the main opponent of genuinely popular politics. In recent years it has been fueled by a financial liberalism that has left the less affluent classes at

the mercy of an unregulated market. The populist right has promised an illusory protection from the effects of financial liberalism by raising cultural, territorial and sometimes xenophobic barriers. The only real answer to populism is democratic participation. The crisis of democracy is not fought with “less” but with “more” democracy” (Partito Democratico, 2013).

The ideological analysis of the Five Star Movement, League and Democratic Party according to the revised inclusionary – exclusionary framework ends here. To sum up, the Five Star Movement showed clear inclusionary attitude on the material dimension, whereas on the political dimension it displayed an ambiguous behavior. On the symbolic dimension it referred to the pure people addressing to the Italian citizens mainly and labeling the mainstream Italian political parties, European Institutions, media and big financial companies as “corrupted” and not close to the people needs. Turning to the institutional dimension the 5SM clearly displayed a challenger attitude towards the Italian constitution calling for a considerable implementation of direct democracy. In a nutshell, it is not possible to define the Five Star Movement populist attitude as completely inclusionary or exclusionary once per all before 2018. Conversely, the radical right populist League showed clear exclusionary position on the material, political and symbolic dimensions. On the institutional dimension it is possible to claim that the League also promoted an implementation of direct democracy however, compared to the Five Star Movement its attitude was not fully challenging towards the constitution and direct democracy was not one of the key principle of its program. Finally, the mainstream centre-left Democratic Party displayed an inclusionary attitude on every dimension although once in government, it pursued quite strict policies in terms of immigration. From an institutional point of view this mainstream party did not promote direct democracy or showed an antagonist attitude towards the Italian constitution.

It was necessary to present the ideological portraits of the Five Star Movement and its two first two coalition partners for two main reasons. First, in order to investigate if the Five Star Movement influenced its coalition partners or if the influence took place the other way round it was necessary to portray the

ideological attitude and policy positions of these actors before their government coalition experiences. Later in this chapter, this step will be necessary for the empirical analysis aimed to find out if populist influence(s) took place or not during these government experiences. In particular, the focus will be on the possibility that the Five Star Movement influenced its coalition partners or that the influence happened the other way round. Second, this overview on the ideological priorities of the Five Star Movement and its first two coalition partners also introduced important insights into the political scenario in which these actors had to play before their government coalition experiences.

4.4 *Theories*

To answer its research question - “To what extent did populist parties succeed in influencing their government coalition partners, leading them to adopt a populist rhetoric and change their policy positions?” - this analysis will rely on the theoretical grounds depicted in the previous chapters. First of all, it is important to define the concept of populist influence. As previously explained (Chapter III) in this research populist influence in government or “direct populist influence” (Schain, 2006) is defined as “the impact exerted by populist parties on their government coalition partners in terms of communication contagiousness (people centrism, anti-elitism and general will) and policy position change (depending on the populist ideological attachment); moreover in the presence of pure populist parties or movements these will naturally try to push their coalition partners to embrace direct democracy”. This definition entails two key aspects which also define the research pathways of this and the next chapter.

First, according to our definition “political influence” addresses possible changes that political parties might enact in their rhetoric and policy positions under the impact of populist parties. More specifically, starting from the definition provided by Van Spanje on contagious effect (or influence) as “that pressure a political (populist) party might exert on other political parties, forcing them to change their own policy positions” (Van Spanje, 2010) this research argued that together with the study of policy position change it is also necessary

to take into consideration if populist parties exert an influence on their coalition partners from a rhetorical point of view. Indeed, as different studies have proved mainstream parties tend to adopt inclusive strategies towards newcomers and populist parties when these are particularly successful from an electoral point of view (Minkenberg 2001; Meguid 2005; Bale *et al.* 2010; Akkerman and De Lange 2012; Meijers 2015). In particular, Bonnie Meguid argued that niche parties can deeply change political competition because they are able to “shape the importance of policy dimension” (Meguid 2005, 349) exerting pressure on the other political parties. In this vein, the communicative aspect is particularly important because the “communication style for populist parties, is crucial to exercise a permanent pressure” on the other political parties (Biard *et al.* 2019, 180; Mudde 2004)”. It might be argued that populist discourse could be used by mainstream parties as a temporary strategical tool in order to gain electoral consensus (Mudde, 2004) and thus that it does not necessarily prove the presence of an effective populist influence. Notwithstanding this, populist contagion on mainstream parties’ discourse provides a first important insight for the analysis of populist influence in government. Indeed, according to this research, it is possible to assess the presence of an effective direct (or indirect) populist influence on mainstream parties when we note changes in both language and policy positions.

In order to assess the presence of such influence, this study will make use of both the “ideational” definition of populism (Mudde, 2004) to define the core characteristics of populism and of a revisited version of the inclusionary/exclusionary framework (Chapter II) in order to classify populist parties and choose which populist features to trace in political parties’ discourse and what policy positions to take into consideration for this analysis. As previously discussed, the classic version of this framework (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013) organizes populist parties into “inclusionary or exclusionary” categories depending on their attitude and positions on three main dimensions: material, political, and symbolic (see Chapter II). In a nutshell: i) the material dimension addresses the economy and material “state resources” and how these are distributed; ii) the political dimension concerns political participation and

public protest; and iii) the symbolic dimension singles out who are the “people” and who are the “elite” (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012, 15). In addition to these three dimensions, the fourth (institutional) dimension that this analysis proposes will look at the approach that a populist party has towards representative democracy and its constitution: does the populist party try to change its approach by pushing for direct democracy (“challenger of constitution”) or does it live with it (“symbiotic with the constitution”)? The present research argues that the purest form of populism would naturally try to change the constitution in order to set the basis for direct democracy. In other words, the purest form of populism will try to subvert representative democracy pushing forward reforms that implement direct democracy and weak the role of representative democracy institutions. To be noted, the inclusionary and exclusionary framework sets the boundaries of those topics expected to be important and related policy positions for the populist and non-populist parties under investigation: economic redistribution, immigration, political and civil rights, and constitutional change.

The “institutional dimension” present in the revised inclusionary exclusionary framework proposed in this research brings us to the second key aspect of our definition of populist influence. Indeed, the second main aspect of this definition states that “in the presence of pure populist parties or movements, these will naturally try to push their coalition partners to embrace direct democracy”. As previously argued, according to this analysis the pure form of populist parties are those that will effectively try to push forward direct democracy enabling citizens’ direct involvement in politics. Bearing this principle in mind, this research argues that in the presence of populist parties in their pure form these will naturally try to push their coalition partners to embrace direct democracy. In other words, this analysis expects that the material, political and symbolic dimensions depend on the ideological attachment of the populist party under study. However, we would expect that, especially in the presence of populist parties in their pure form, an effective populist influence on mainstream parties will bring these to push forwards discourse and/or reform in favour of direct democracy.

In the next section we will start to make use of quantitative methods in order to answer our first research question. In particular, this chapter makes use of expert survey data and spatial approach whereas the next chapter will make use of quantitative text analysis and parliamentary speeches in order to gain different insights which combined will arrive at an exhaustive answer to the research question “To what extent did populist parties succeed in influencing their government coalition partners, leading them to adopt populist rhetoric and change their policy positions”. In this chapter we will first rely on the data provided by the expert surveys Poppa Project of 2018 to display the populist or not populist nature of the Five Star Movement and its coalition partners. Then, we will address Pippa Norris’s Global Party Survey 2019 to find out to what extent the rhetoric used by the Five Star Movement and its coalition partners was labeled as populist or not. It should be noted that in the following chapter this last rhetorical point will be investigated further through the application of quantitative text analysis on parliamentary speeches (Chapter V). Finally, this chapter will make use of the spatial approach analysis in order to display, from a quantitative point of view, if the Five Star Movement pushed its coalition partners to change their position on the material, political and symbolic and institutional dimension or vice versa. In the next section, the methodology will be explained further.

4.5 Methods and Data

In order to answer the research question “To what extent did populist parties succeed in influencing their government coalition partners, leading them to adopt a populist rhetoric and change their policy positions” this research focuses on a case study (Gerring 2006, 20), namely the Italian populist actor Five Star Movement and its first two government coalition experiences from 2018 to 2020, with the League and the Democratic Party. From a methodological point of view this chapter makes use of quantitative methods and expert survey data. In particular, this analysis will make use of different kinds of expert surveys data in order to: first bolster the definition as “populist” or “non-populist” actors of the Five Star Movement and the League, second to investigate if the Five Star

Movement and its coalition partners made use of populist rhetoric and finally to analyze the policy positions of the Five Star Movement and its coalition partners tracing if these have changed over time.

Expert surveys are based on the judgement of specialists “to locate party policy positions, in the party systems of which they had expert knowledge, on a set of predefined policy dimensions” (Benoit and Laver 2006, 2). In this sense expert surveys have been applied in the study of “democracies, mandate and to rational choice models which show how the distribution of initial preferences interact with rules and structural constraints” (Budge 2001, 103). In a nutshell, expert surveys are particularly useful because they help us to display political party policy positions in a specific moment and how these might change over time with reference to specific policy dimensions. Besides measuring political party policy positions expert surveys have been also used for other purposes. In particular, some recent studies proposed new methods to measure populism entirely based on the use of expert surveys (Norris, 2020, Global Party Survey; Meijers and Zaslove, 2020, Poppa Project). In this vein, Pippa Norris proposed an expert survey database that, besides providing a global database for political party policy positions also offers the chance to investigate if political parties do or do not use populist rhetoric (Norris, 2020). Similarly, Meijers and Zaslove also built a database of expert surveys, the “Poppa project, aimed to measure populism in a “in a multi-dimensional and continuous manner” (Meijers and Zaslove 2020, 4). The present chapter will first refer to the expert surveys’ data provided by the Poppa Project (Zaslove and Meijers, 2020) and the Global Expert Survey of Pippa Norris in order to give us a deeper understanding of the populist character of our object of study and to tackle to what degree these populist actors also made use of populist rhetoric. More specifically, this research will choose those variables that reflect the key aspects of the ideational approach theorized by Cas Mudde: people centrism, anti-elitism and general will (Mudde, 2004).

It should be noted that (as previously discussed in Chapter II) Pippa Norris embraces a different definition of populism as “a form of rhetoric, a persuasive language, making symbolic claims about the source of legitimate

authority and where power should rightfully lie” (Norris 2020, 699). In particular she distinguishes between “first and second order” language. In the former it is pointed out “where power and legitimate authority” should lie whereas the latter indicates specific programmatic positions that provides a classification of different kinds of populism (Norris and Inglehart 2019; Norris 2020 700). This analysis will address mainly the data provided by Norris in order to investigate the populist rhetoric used by political parties in Italy in 2019. More specifically, this analysis will investigate the “type of populism” of the political parties which interest us. According to this database populist language “typically challenges the legitimacy of established political institutions and emphasizes that the will of the people should prevail” whereas pluralist rhetoric rejects these ideas, believing that elected leaders should govern, constrained by minority rights, bargaining and compromise, as well as checks and balances on executive power (Norris, 2020, Global Party Survey). Moreover, this analysis also takes into consideration specific features of populist rhetoric investigated by Norris which also match the key populist aspects of the ideational approach of Cas Mudde: “Will of the people” (General will) “people should decide” (people-centrism), “corrupt politicians” (antielitism) (Norris, 2020). In addition to these key features, this analysis also includes a fourth aspect not directly present in Mudde’s definition, “Strongman rule”, namely being in “favor or not of checks and balances on executive power” (Norris, 2020, Global Party Survey). In Appendix B it is possible to find the variables related to the Global Party Survey 2019.

Then, in order to analyse how the policy position of the Five Star movement and its coalition partners might have changed from 2013 to 2019 this research relies on the spatial approach (Benoit and Laver, 2006) and bidimensional analysis choosing the issues of interest according the inclusionary/exclusionary framework. The spatial approach allows to construct a policy space where it is possible to display political actors’ preferences on different issues and to measure how these preferences (position might change over time) might change over time and, thus, how the political actors compete. More specifically, in order to study political parties policy positions change this analysis relied on the expert

survey data provided by Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Chapel Hill Expert Survey Trend File, 1999-2019).

In particular, we select those policy dimensions⁴² that corresponds to the topics present within the revised inclusionary/exclusionary framework. For the material dimension we select “redistribution” (redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor) but also “environment” (position towards environmental sustainability). To be noted that the issue “environment” was not originally included within the revised inclusionary/exclusionary framework, however taking into consideration that since its onset the Five Star Movement has expressed strong pro-environment positions (Tronconi, 2015) environment was added to the material dimension. We select « immigrate » (immigration policy) and “social lifestyle” (position on social life style, e.g. rights for homosexuals, gender equality). For the symbolic dimension it was chose the EU position (overall orientation of the party leadership towards European integration) and immigrate⁴³ (immigration policy). To be noted that “immigration” is present in both political and symbolic dimensions. This analysis made this choice on purpose and for two main reasons. First, according to the revised inclusionary/exclusionary framework “immigration” points out who benefits of political participation rights, namely the major number of people possible (inclusionary attitude) or if this participation is restricted to a specific group of people (exclusionary attitude. Second, together with the “elite group” exclusionary populist parties tend to identify the “enemy” with the group of migrants. As such, including “immigration” in the analysis of the symbolic dimension might also clarify what kind of populism we are dealing with: exclusionary or inclusionary.

Unfortunately, Chapell Hill provides data only up to 2019 (first Five Star Movement government coalition with the League). This gap has been covered

⁴² See Appendix C.

⁴³ The position on immigration can also provide important insights into the symbolic dimension, especially if we take into consideration that exclusionary populist parties tend to identify migrants as part of the “others” that have to be excluded.

with a further qualitative analysis on a corpus of parliamentary speeches that goes from 2013 to 2020 (Chapter V).

Moreover, Chapel Hill does not provide data that might support the analysis of the institutional dimension present in the revised inclusionary exclusionary framework. Therefore, it was decided to use the dataset provided by the Manifesto Project Dataset (version 2021a) which, differently from the Chapel Hill expert surveys was based on content analysis of electoral manifestos and official documents Manifesto Project Dataset (version 2021a).

In particular, for the Manifesto project we use the category “Constitutionalism: Positive” (“Support for maintaining the status quo of the constitution”) and “Constitutionalism negative” (Calls for constitutional amendments or changes”) (Manifesto Project Dataset (version 2021a). These categories do not show if the political actor pushes for an implementation of direct democracy. However, they provide insights on the general attitude of the political actors towards the constitution. Qualitative analysis of official documents and parliamentary speeches bolstered the gaps of this analysis.

It is important to note that this research is aware of the difference between the Poppa Project 2018, Global Party Survey 2019, Chapel Hill Expert Survey and the Manifesto Project Database (Manifesto Project Dataset, version 2021a) in terms of data and methods to achieve them. However, keeping in mind this important difference, we believe that the combined use of these datasets will provide useful insights for the present research goals.

As previously mentioned, the aim of this chapter is to answer the first question proposed by this research project, namely “to what extent did populist parties succeed in influencing their government coalition partners, leading them to adopt populist rhetoric and change their policy positions?”. The focus is on the Five Star Movement and its first two government coalition experiences. However, it is important to emphasize that the results of this chapter cannot provide an exhaustive answer to this question without taking into consideration also the analysis and results provided in the next chapter. The present and next chapter make use of different data and methods to answer the same research question. According to this research, only the empirical results proposed by these

two chapters as a whole could provide a fair answer to the research question “To what extent did populist parties succeed in influencing their government coalition partners, leading them to adopt populist rhetoric and change their policy positions”.

Starting from the next section this analysis will make use of the data of various expert surveys in order to detect the degree of populism and use of populist rhetoric. First, the next section will make use of the Political Parties Expert Survey 2018 in order to trace the degree of populism of the Five Star Movement, League and Democratic Party. As discussed in detail in chapter I “populism” has a controversial nature and so acknowledging the degree of populism of the Five Star Movement, League and Democratic Party according to “experts” represents a useful preliminary empirical step for the present analysis.

4.6 Expert surveys to classify populist parties: “Political Parties Expert Survey” (POPPA Project) 2018

According to the literature both the Five Star Movement and its first coalition partner, the League, are populist parties (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2016; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017) whereas the Democratic Party is a center-left wing mainstream party (Ignazi, 2018; Froio, 2021). The present research agrees with such assumptions (Napoletano, 2017) but also believes that, due to the ambiguous nature of populism, it is important to bolster such statements with further data. For this reason, this analysis addresses the Political Parties Expert Survey (POPPA) dataset 2018 which through the use of expert surveys proposes a new method of measuring populism taking into consideration the multidimensionality that characterized the ideational approach (Mudde, 2004). In particular such an approach allows us to treat populism not as a dichotomous phenomenon, but rather as on a continuum, providing the chance to display different degrees of populism (Meijers and Zaslove, 2020).

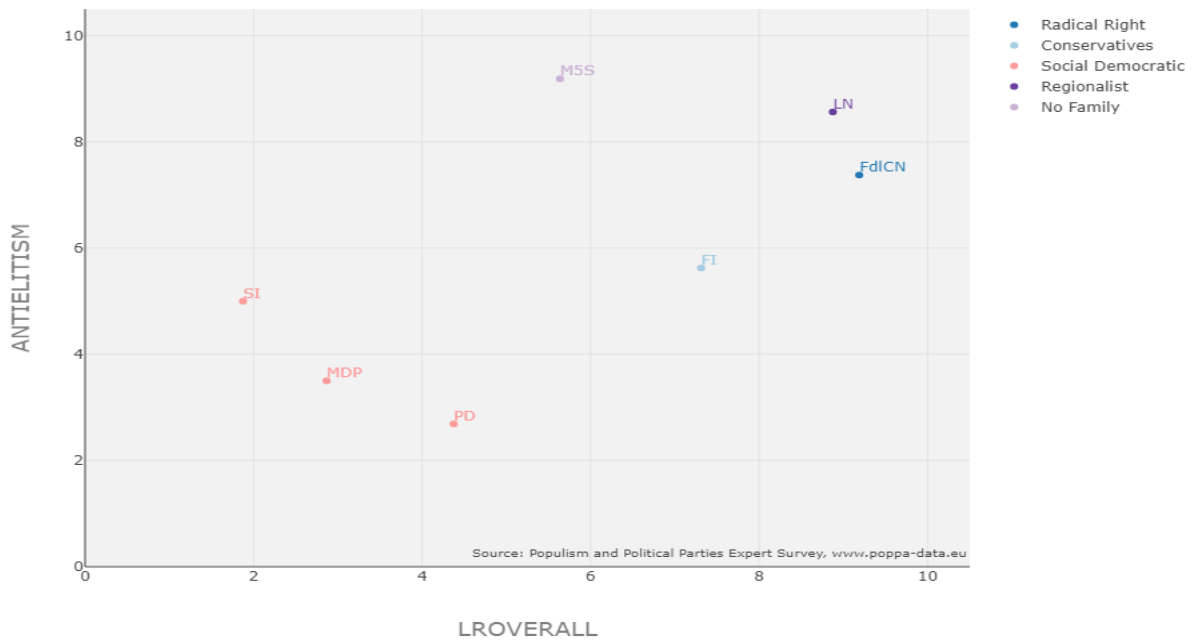
The Populism and Political Parties Expert Survey (POPPA) dataset of 2018, includes 250 parties from 28 EU countries and relies on the judgement of 294 experts. In particular, this analysis was interested in investigating to what extent

according to this dataset the Five Star Movement and its first two coalition partners (League and Democratic Party) were populist or not, addressing the key features present in the ideational approach: anti-elitism, people-centrism and General Will (Mudde, 2004). Through the interactive app of the Poppa dataset, it has been possible to display each of these key features⁴⁴. More specifically in the following plots it is possible to observe the “overall party ideology” of the Italian political parties on the X-axis whereas on the Y-axis we can find, in turn, anti-elitism (plot 1), people centrism (plot 2) and General Will (plot 3). Interestingly, according to the overall party ideology the Five Star Movement is labeled as not belonging to any family of parties, whereas the League is defined as a “regionalist” party and the Democratic Party as a “social democratic” party. It is important to note that, besides the three key features chosen by this analysis (anti-elitism, people-centrism and General Will), Poppa’s project offers more “dimensions” (e.g., “Manichean” and “indivisible” aspects⁴⁵) related to the concept of populism. However, this analysis consciously chooses to focus only on anti-elitism, people centrism and General Will, because, according to the theoretical analysis provided in Chapter I, they do reflect the key aspects of the ideational approach theorized by Cas Mudde (2004).

⁴⁴ See Appendix A

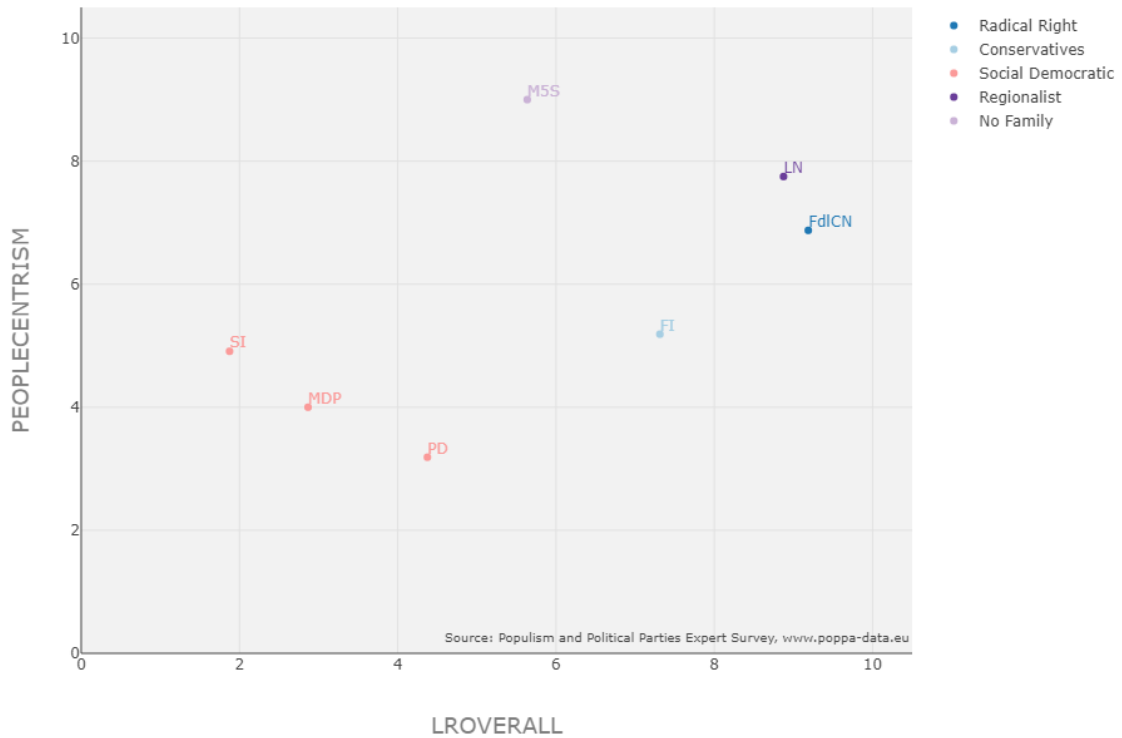
⁴⁵ The “Manichean” aspect refers to the “extent to which a party sees politics as a moral struggle between the good and the bad” whereas the “indivisible” aspect addresses the “extent to which a party considers the ordinary people to be indivisible” (Meijers and Zaslove, 2020).

Table 4.1. Populism and Political Parties Expert Survey – Antielitism 2018



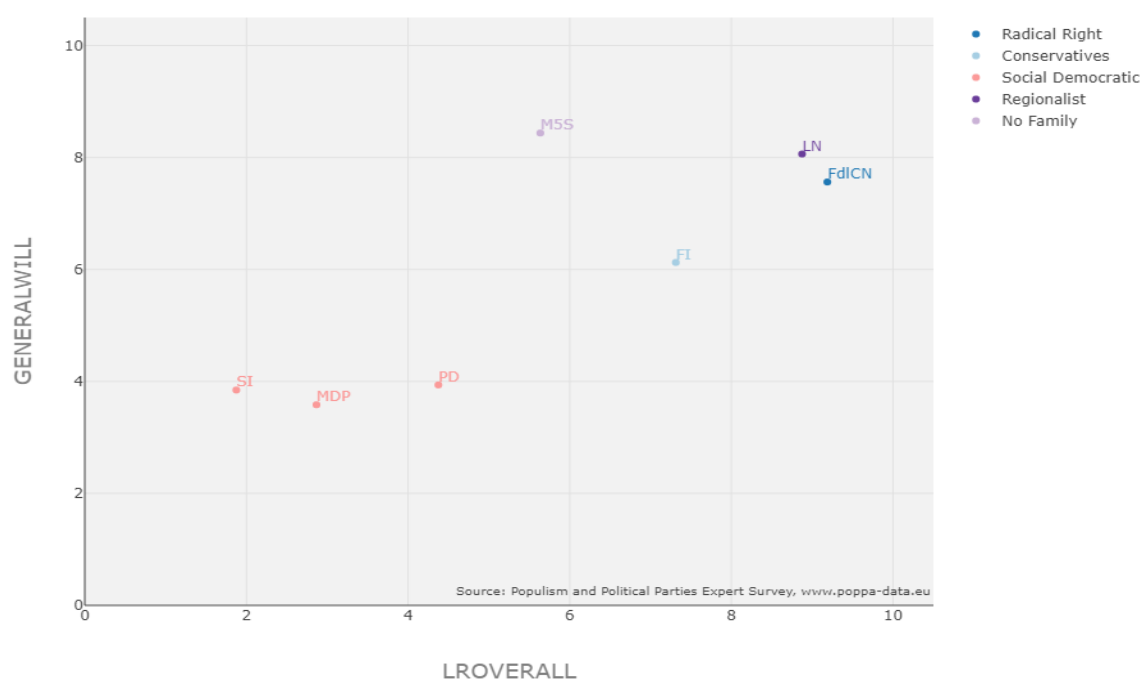
In this first “anti-elitism plot” it is possible to observe the positioning of the Italian Political Parties in 2018 according to their overall left- right ideological attachment (X axis) that goes from 0 (left) to 10 (right) and their anti-elitist character that goes from 0 (not anti-elitist) to 10 (anti-elitist). More specifically, in the Poppa Project dataset anti-elitism (Mudde, 2004) is labeled as the “extent to which a party can be characterized by its anti-elitism” (Meijers and Zaslove, 2020). From this first plot it is possible to see that the Five Star Movement (5,64) is positioned almost in the middle of the left-right scale although it tends slightly towards the right. Moreover, it presents the highest value of anti-elitism (9,19) compared to the other political parties. The League is clearly positioned in the extreme right corner of the ideological scale (9), and it also presents a considerable degree of anti-elitism (8,6). In the third position in terms of anti-elitism we find *Fratelli D’Italia* (FdI) (7,37) Brothers of Italy which is also the party positioned at the furthest right corner of the left-right scale (9,18). Conversely, the Democratic Party, located in the center left position of the ideological scale (4,37) presents the lowest point of anti-elitism (2,68).

Table 4.2. Populism and Political Parties Expert Survey - People-Centrism 2018



The “people centrism plot” reflects almost the same values as the “anti-elitism plot”. The concept of people centrism clearly addresses the ideational approach and it is labeled here as “the belief that sovereignty should lie exclusively with the ordinary people” (Meijers and Zaslove, 2020). Once again, the Five Star Movement is positioned almost in the middle of the left right scale slightly tending towards the right (5,64) and it displays the highest score of people centrism (9). The League remains stable in its ideological right corner and shows the second highest score of people centrism (7,8) whereas the radical right FdI presents the third highest score of people-centrism (6,9). On the opposite side, the Democratic Party is characterized by the lowest score of people-centrism (3,2).

Table 4.3. Populism and Political Parties Expert Survey – General Will 2018



In this final plot it is possible to observe the degree of the “General Will” attitude in the Italian political parties in 2018. In the Poppa project “General Will” is expressed as “the extent to which a party considers the ordinary people’s interest to be singular” (Meijers and Zaslove, 2020). As in the previous two plots also concerning the “General Will” key feature the Five Star Movement displays the highest score of “General Will” attitude (8,43) followed by the League (8,06) and FdI (7,56). Conversely, the Democratic party shows a very low degree of General Will attitude (3,4).

In conclusion, the expert surveys’ data provided by the Poppa Project confirmed the theoretical assumption according to which both the Five Star Movement and its first coalition partner, the League, are populist actors whereas the Democratic Party displayed a lack of populist features. Interestingly, the Five Star Movement showed the highest degree of populism compared to the League on every key component of the populist definition (Mudde, 2004): anti-elitism, people-centrism and General Will. From an ideological point of view, these data confirmed that the League was positioned at the rightmost corner on the left- right

scale, whereas the Democratic party on the center left spot. Interestingly the Five Star Movement was positioned at the center slightly moved towards the right corner. Moreover, it is important to note that, according to these data FdI can be considered the third main populist party within the Italian political scenario.

In the next section, this analysis will make use of the Global Party Survey 2019 by Pippa Norris in order to, first, provide a further tool to classify the degree of populism of the Five Star Movement and its coalition partners and second to offer a first analysis⁴⁶ of the populist rhetoric used by these populist and non-populist actors.

4.7 Expert Surveys to Classify Populist Parties and their Rhetoric: Global Party Survey 2019

In this section, this analysis relies on a different expert survey dataset, the Global Party Survey⁴⁷ (Norris, Pippa, 2020, “Global Party Survey, 2019”) in order to provide a further measurement and classification of the degree of populism of the Five Star Movement and its coalition partners but also to provide a first analysis of the populist rhetoric used by these political actors. A further analysis of this last aspect will be provided in the next chapter. It should be noted that this research is aware that Pippa Norris embraced a different definition of populism compared to the ideational approach of Cas Mudde. Indeed, Norris defined populism as a “form of rhetoric, a persuasive language, making symbolic claims about the source of legitimate authority and where power should rightfully lie” (Norris, 2020, 699). Even if this analysis chose to rely on the ideational approach by Mudde, the work of Norris is particularly important for two main reasons. First, it focuses on populist rhetoric which is a fundamental aspect of the present research into the populist influence in government (Chapter III). Second, Pippa Norris provides an interesting classification of populist parties which is important to take into consideration and compare with the previous results provided by the Poppa Project 2018 and with the further analysis

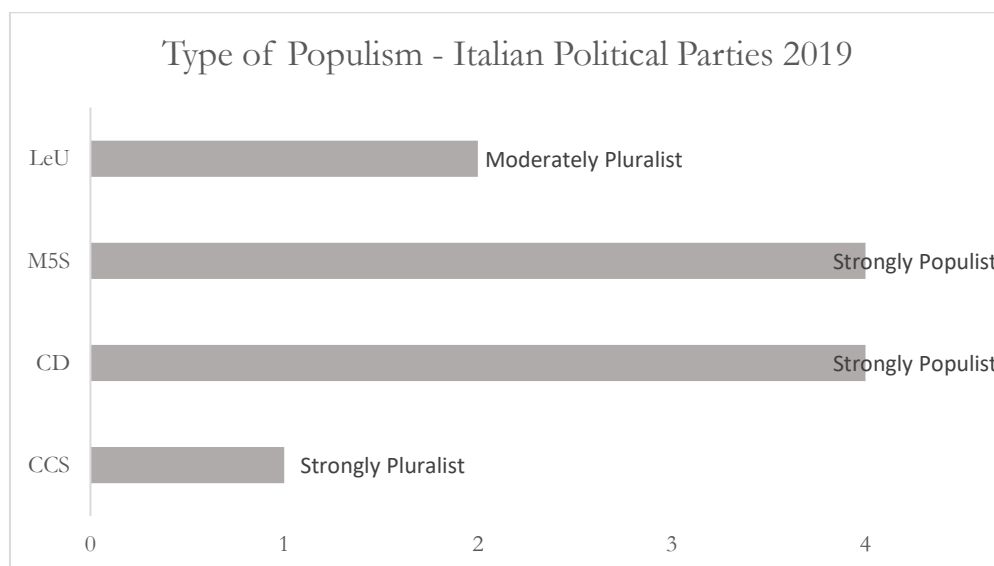
⁴⁶ In the next chapter, this research will investigate the rhetorical aspect further.

⁴⁷ See Appendix B

that this research will provide (Chapter V). Indeed, due to the ambiguous nature of populism, it is intriguing to investigate if different definitions of populism based on the same methods leads us to the same results or not.

In the following tables this analysis displays in turn, types of populism, types of populism values and the degree of populist rhetoric according to the Global Party Survey of 2019. Unfortunately, Pippa Norris’ dataset does not provide values for each political party individually. In particular, the League is displayed together with its Centre-Right Coalition (namely *Lea Nord*, *Forza Italia*, Brothers of Italy, Us with Italy) whereas the Democratic Party was lumped together with its Centre-Left coalition partners (namely Centre-Left Coalition Democratic Party, More Europe, Together, Popular Civic, SVP-PATT). Nonetheless, these data will provide useful insights on populist classification and populist rhetoric. Both these aspects are crucial for the purposes of this research.

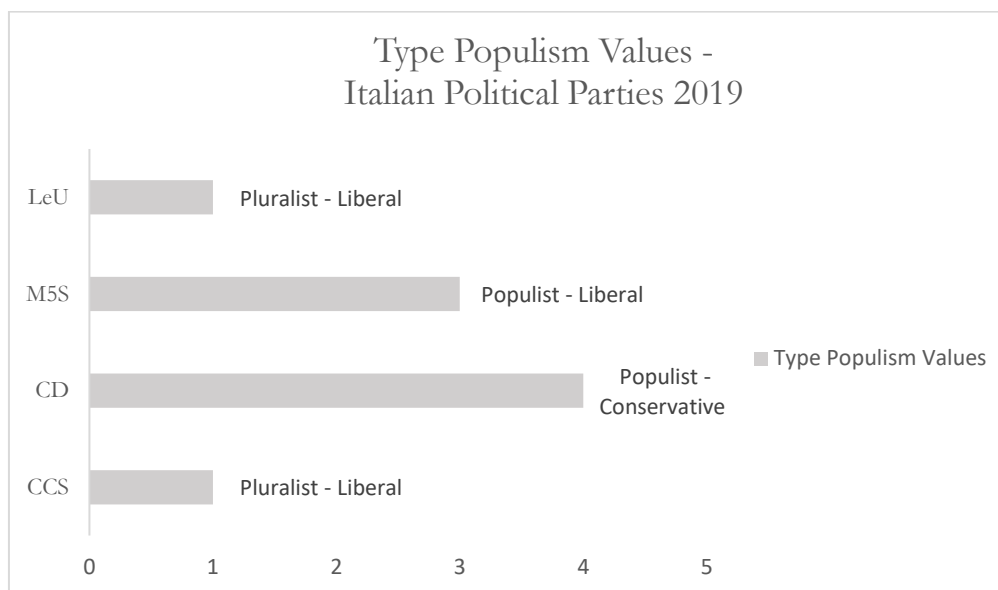
Table 4.4



This first table displays the degree of populism for the Italian political parties and coalitions in 2019. According to the Global Party Survey 2019 the concept “type of populism” addresses the use that political parties make of “pluralist” or “populist” rhetoric. In particular with the concept of “populist

rhetoric Norris indicates a language that “typically challenges the legitimacy of established political institutions and emphasizes that the will of the people should prevail” whereas “pluralist rhetoric” rejects these ideas, believing that elected leaders should govern, constrained by minority rights, bargaining and compromise, as well as checks and balances on executive power” (Norris 2020, 702). In this sense, political parties might be strongly pluralist (1), moderately pluralist (2), strongly populist (3) and moderately populist (4). According to this table both the Five Star Movement and the Centre Right coalition, CD, (where the League is included) are strongly populist. Conversely the Centre-Left coalition, CCS (where the Democratic Party is included) is strongly pluralist. Overall, even if it is not possible to analyse every political party individually these first results confirm the findings of the Poppa Project.

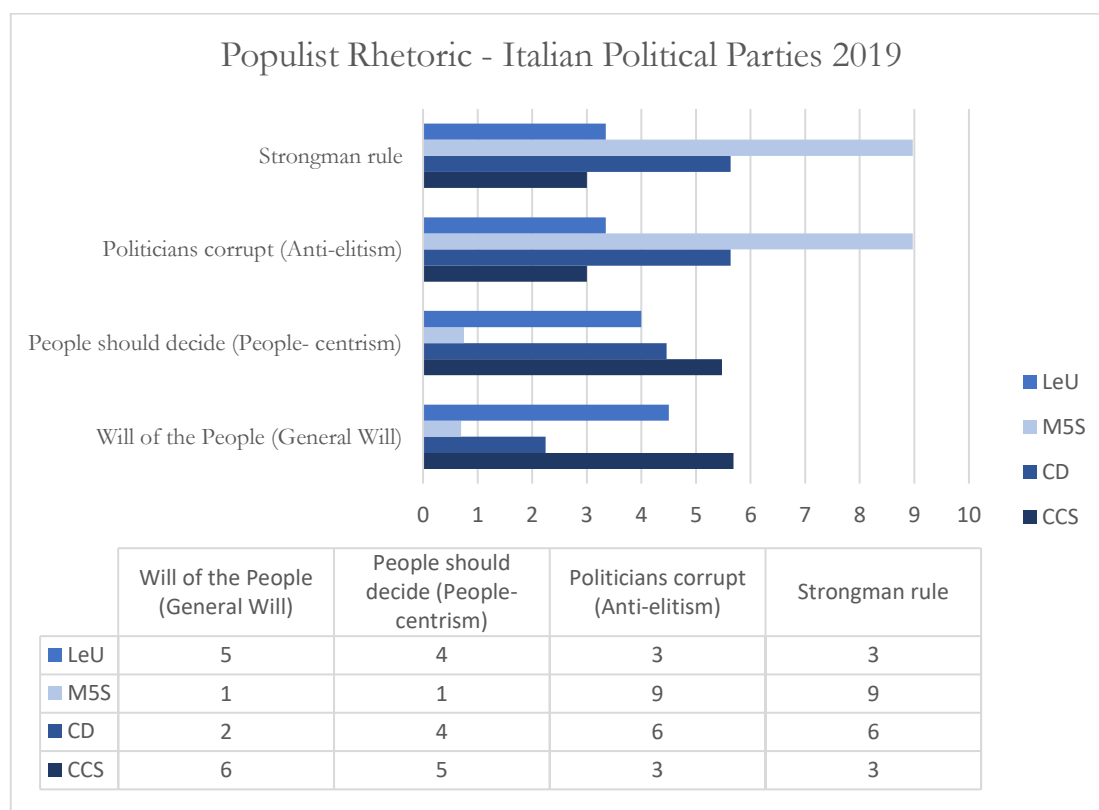
Table 4.5.



In this second table we can investigate what kind of values characterize populist or non- populist parties according to the Global Party Survey 2019 and Pippa Norris’s work. Indeed, “type populism values” refers to the combination of rhetoric (populist or pluralist) and social values. More specifically social values refer to the two categories “liberal” and “conservative”. The former stands for “expanding personal freedoms, for example, on abortion rights, same-sex marriage, and democratic participation” whereas the latter “reject these ideas in favor of order, tradition and stability, believing that the government should be

a firm moral authority on social and cultural issues” (Norris, 2020, Global Party Survey 2019, codebook, 13). Bearing in mind these definitions, it is possible to see that the Five Star Movement is labelled as a populist actor in favor of liberal values whereas the centre-right coalition (where the League is included) is defined as a populist actor in favor of conservative values. Conversely the centre-left coalition (where the Democratic Party is included) is labeled as a pluralist actor in favor of liberal values. Broadly speaking these results reflect the ideological portrait previously depicted of the Five Star Movement and its first two coalition partners. Although according to our analysis on social values the Five Star Movement tended to be ambiguous even before 2018. In the next table, we will present a closer analysis of the populist rhetoric used by the Five Star Movement and its coalition partners.

Table 4.6.



In this last table, a deeper analysis is presented of the degree of populist and non-populist rhetoric used by the Five Star Movement and its first two coalition partners, the League (2018 – 2019) and Democratic Party (2019 – 2020) in 2019, according to the Global Party Survey dataset (Norris, 2020). In particular, this

dataset offered the chance to analyse the presence of populist rhetoric according to three main aspects that also reflect the three key concepts of the ideational approach (Mudde, 2004): “corrupt politician” (anti-elitism), “People should decide” (people-centrism) and “Will of the people” (General Will). There is a fourth concept that is not present in the ideational approach but which, according to this analysis, might be interesting to take into consideration: “Strongman rule”. This concept addresses the rhetoric used “towards checks and balances on executive power” (favorable or not favorable).

According to this analysis, concerning the variable “corrupt politicians”, where 0 stands for “politicians are honest” and 10 “politicians are dishonest”, the Five Star Movement presents the highest score of “anti-elitism” (9) followed by the centre - right coalition CD (6). Conversely, the centre-left coalition presents a low score of anti-elitism (3). Turning to “people should decide”, where 0 stands for “ordinary people should decide important issues” and 10 for “leaders should decide important issues” it is clear that the Five Star Movement strongly supported the “people should decide” belief (1) whereas the CD (4) and CCS (5) did not show such sharp profiles. Concerning the “Will of the People”, where 0 stands for “politicians should follow the will of the people” whereas 10 stands for “politicians should lead public opinion”, once again the Five Star Movement presents the most populist character (1), followed by the centre-right coalition (2) whereas the centre-left coalition did not embrace this populist belief (6). Finally, looking at the “strongman rule” variable, where 0 stands for being in “favor of checks and balances on executive power” and 10 for not being in favor of such an attitude, it is possible to argue that the Five Star Movement strongly supported checks and balances on the executive power (9) followed by the centre-right coalition (6).

In conclusion, the analysis based on the Global Party Survey 2019 by Pippa Norris, which defines populism mainly in terms of a rhetorical tool (Norris, 2020), confirmed the populist nature of the Five Star Movement and the League (or at least of the coalition in which the League was located). Moreover, similarly to the previous results, this analysis pointed out that, in 2019, the Five Star Movement presented the highest score of populist rhetoric within the Italian

political scenario. Moreover, Pippa Norris' dataset pointed out that the coalition in which the League was located supported conservative values whereas the centre - left coalition, where the Democratic Party was located, supported liberal values. Broadly speaking, these two findings met the ideological portrait depicted in this analysis. Most interestingly, according to Norris' dataset, the Five Star Movement supported liberal values as well. According to this analysis this aspect has been always quite ambiguous for the Five Star Movement. Further analysis will confirm or disconfirm this populist classification.

The investigation of the degree of populism and use of populist discourse by the Five Star Movement and its first two coalition partners ends here. Starting from the next section this chapter will focus on policy position change. In particular, in the next section this analysis will make use of the data of expert surveys (Chapel Hill Expert Survey) and bidimensional analysis in order to display the Five Star Movement, League and Democratic party's policy positions according to the revised inclusionary – exclusionary framework and how these might have changed from 2014 to 2019.

4.8 Spatial Approach Analysis: Quantitative Analysis of Policy Position Shift

In this section we will present a spatial bidimensional analysis⁴⁸ based on Chapel Hill Expert Survey data from 2014 to 2019. In particular, this research picks up those policies⁴⁹ that cover the dimensions present in the inclusionary - exclusionary framework (material, political and symbolic). It should be noted that the institutional dimension cannot be displayed with the data provided by the Chapel Hill Survey. Instead, from a quantitative point of view this dimension will be later analyzed with the data provided by the Manifesto Project on the variable “constitutionalism”. Due to the time range in which these data were collected, these results might provide fruitful insights only for the first Five Star

⁴⁸ Different colors point out different degrees of extremism: red for left wing, yellow for center and blue for right wing.

⁴⁹ See Appendix A.

Movement government experience with the League (from June 2018 to August 2019). A further qualitative analysis will fill in the time gap.

Before delving into our analysis, it is important to note a caveat. Policy position change might take place for different reasons and factors (e.g. external events such as economic shocks) however, the Five Star Movement can be considered as a quite new, successful and unconventional actor within the Italian political scenario so we assume that its entering within the political competition might cause a clear response by the other political parties, leading them to change their policy positions under the influence of this new successful actor. In particular, taking into consideration that the 5SM presents a clear inclusionary position on economic redistribution and environmentalism we assume that the other political parties might change their original policy position especially on these issues. These tables display the major political parties present in those years and those that might be of interest for our research purposes. Especially Forza Italia (Go Italy) and Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy) are particularly interesting as allies of the League at a regional and local level. Within the table we included the score for the policy position provided by the dataset and the year of the national election. Labels = M5S: Five Star Movement; LN: League; FdI: Brothers of Italy; FI: Forza Italia; PD: Democratic Party. The x axis represents the left/right⁵⁰ spectrum, The x axis represents the left/right spectrum, namely the “overall ideological stance” (“Lrgen”) of the political parties indicated by the experts, whereas the y axis the policy dimension of our interest. Thus, the bidimensional analysis allow us to display the ideological position of political parties on certain specific policy issues pointed out by the inclusionary/exclusionary framework and observe how these might change over time.

⁵⁰ The Chapell Hill expert survey does not provide variables that clearly distinguish between inclusionary and exclusionary positions. For this reason, we decided to use the classic Left/right distinction. According to the present analysis which looks at a singular policy issue per time, this distinction is still reliable and fair also in reference to the main inclusionary/ exclusionary theoretical framework.

Table 4.7. Bidimensional analysis, Italy (2014 -2019)

Redistribution (material), Left/Right

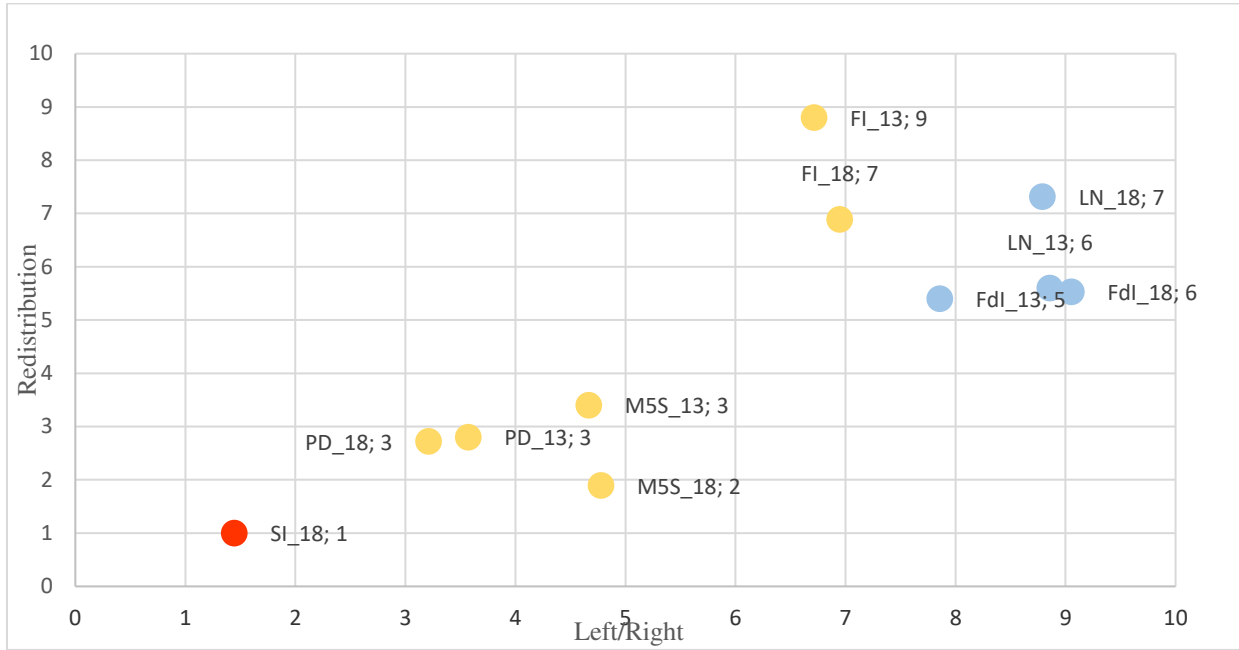
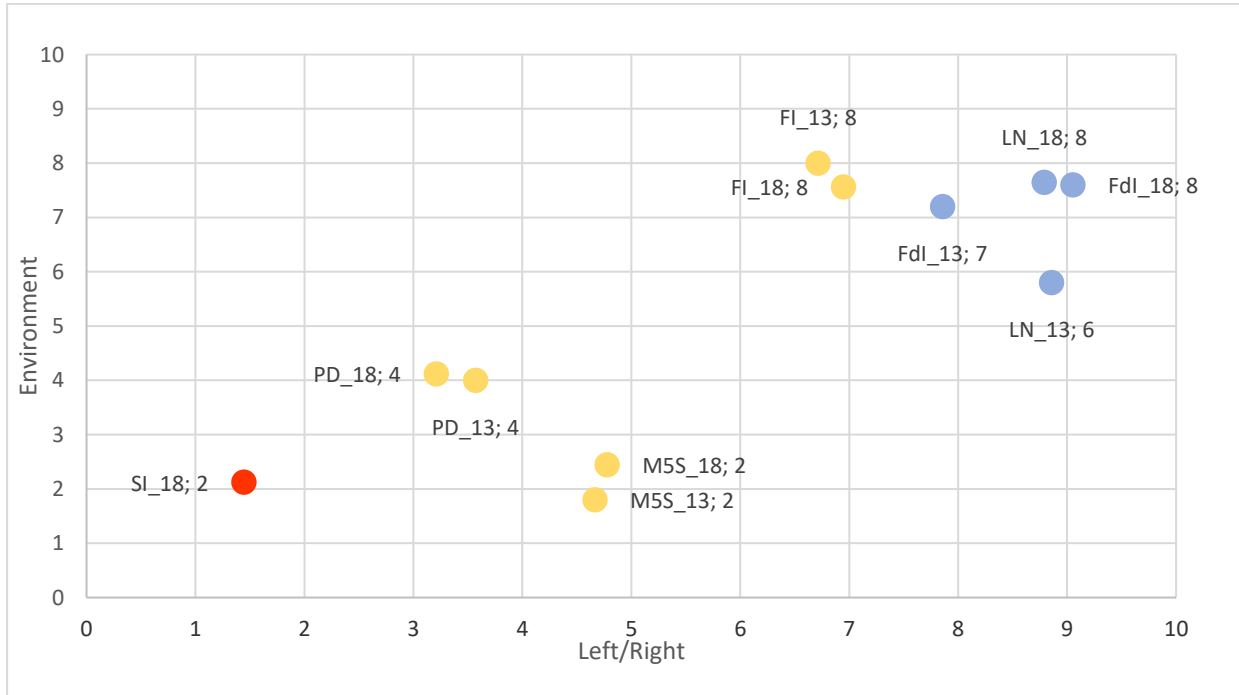


Table 4.8. Bidimensional analysis, Italy (2014 -2019)

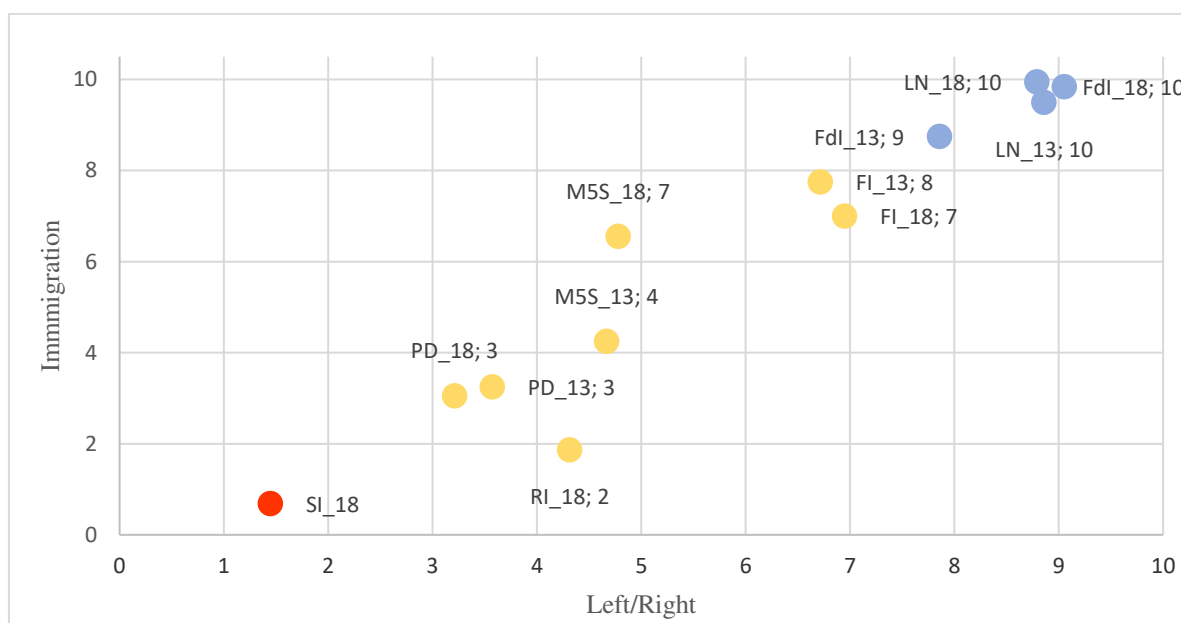
Environment (material), Left/Right



From a material point of view looking at “redistribution” there are no considerable shifts from 2014 to 2019 for 5SM⁵¹. On a scale from 0 (extremely favorable to redistribution) to 10 (strongly opposes redistribution) the 5SM remained quite favorable to redistribution passing from 3 (2014) to 2 (2019). The LN and FdI tended to oppose redistribution. LN shifted from a score of 6 (2014) to a score of 7 (2018) whereas FdI from a score of 5(2014) to 6 (2019). PD was the only one that remained stable on its position (3) quite favorable to redistribution over time.

Looking at “environment”, the most important results show that the 5SM remained quite open and inclusive towards the use of economic resources for the environment (score 2 from 2014 to 2019) whereas its coalition partner LN became even more strict and exclusive on this issue (from score 6 in 2014 to score 8 to 2019).

Table 4.9. Bidimensional analysis, Italy (2014 -2019)
Immigration (political and symbolic) – Left/Right

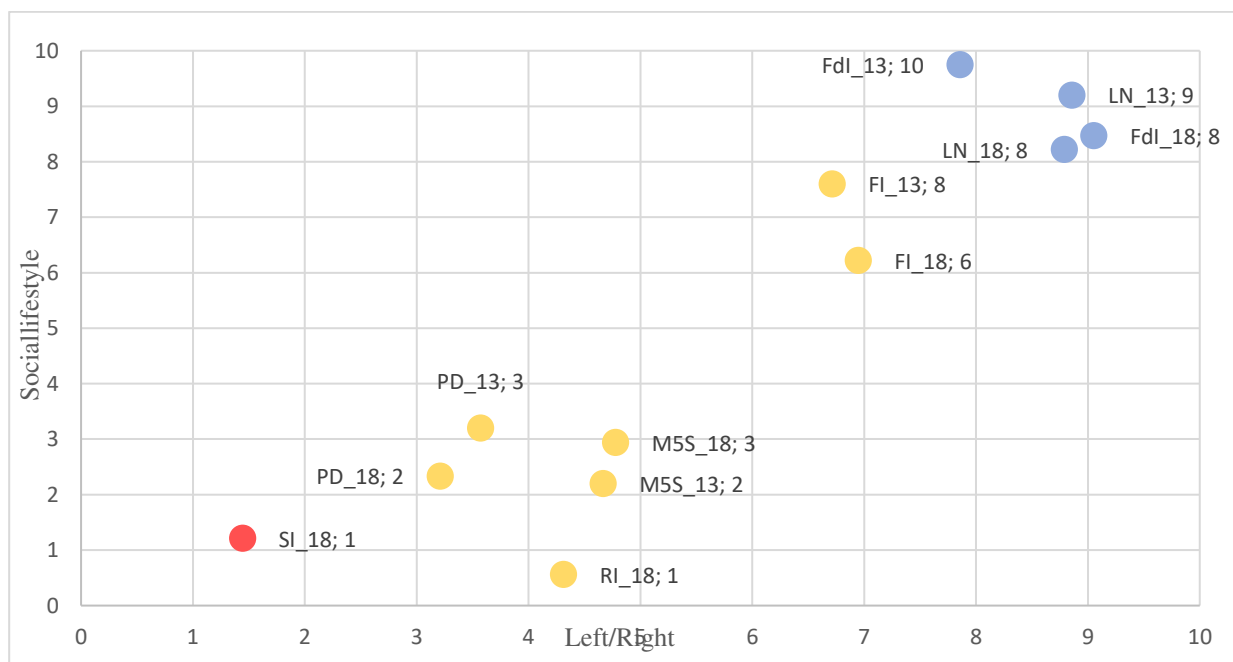


⁵¹ It is to be noted that these tables display the major political parties present in that moment, and that those political parties that disappeared in that period were not included. Within the table we included the score for the policy position and the year of the last national election. Labels = M5S: Five Star Movement; LN: League; FdI: Brothers of Italy; FI: Forza Italia; PD: Democratic Party.

Turning to the political dimension, it is possible to acknowledge an important policy shift on immigration for 5SM during its first coalition period with LN. On a scale from 0 (strongly favors a liberal policy on immigration) to 10 (strongly favors a restrictive policy on immigration) the

5SM passed from a less restrictive position 4 (2014) to a notably more restrictive position scoring 7 (2018). In contrast LN remained stable on its exclusionary position 10 from 2014 to 2019, and the PD did the same not moving at all from its (quite) inclusive position (3). The Democratic Party remained stable on its soft inclusionary position (3 in 2014 and 2019) Interestingly, FdI shifted towards an even more exclusionary position towards immigration going from 9 (2014) to 10 (2019).

Table 4.10. Bidimensional analysis, Italy (2014 -2019)
Social lifestyle (political), Left/Right

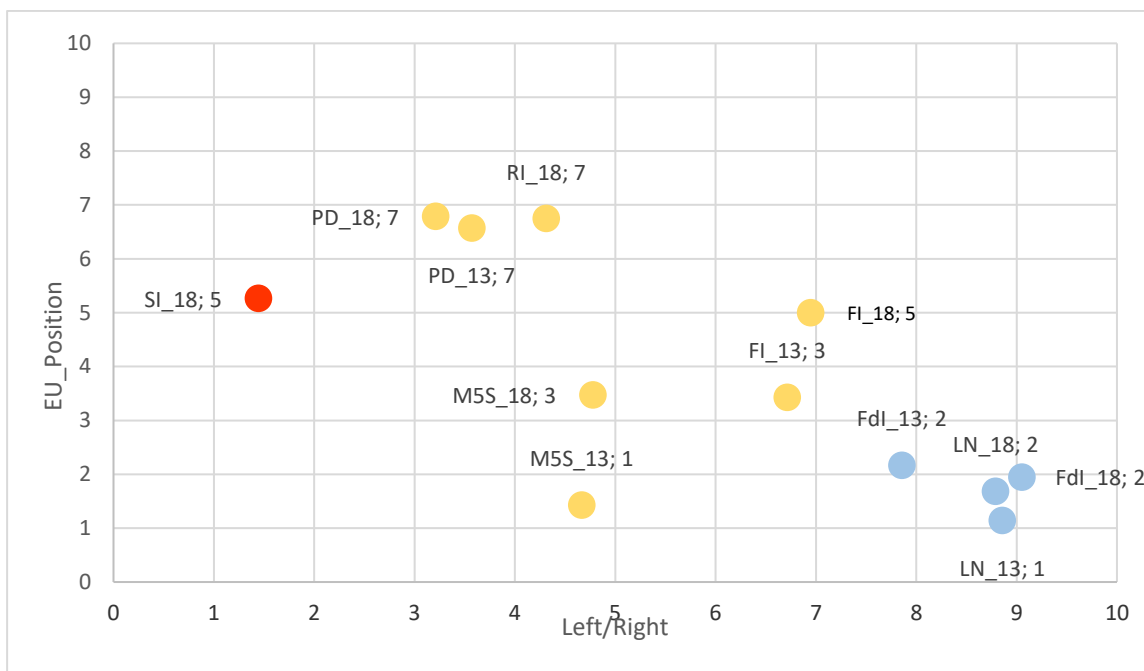


Concerning social lifestyle, the 5SM started with a quite inclusive position but this slightly shifted from a score of 2 (2014) to 3 (2019) which means that overall, it remained quite supportive (but not really open) towards topics such as

civil rights and gender equality. Between 2014 and 2019 the PD remained quite inclusive shifting from a score of 3 towards an even more inclusive position of 2. LN and FdI remained very exclusive on these topics, although FdI mildly toned down its position (from 10 to 8). An interesting result is related to Forza Italia (FI) which moved away from the exclusionary right-wing corner towards a more lenient position from 2014 to 2019.

Table 4.11. Bidimensional analysis, Italy (2014 -2019)

EU_Position (symbolic), Left/Right



Finally, looking at the position of the EU it is possible to observe that the 5SM became “softer” towards the EU integration shifting from a more exclusionary position towards a less strict view on EU, shifting from 1 (2014) to 3 (2019). This cannot be considered as a striking result but still quite relevant especially if we consider the original anti-EU character of the 5SM. By contrast LN and FdI remained quite loyal to their very exclusionary position towards the EU. Interestingly FI, which was already less exclusionary (score 3 in 2014) than its allies FdI and LN moved towards an even more open approach towards the EU (score 5 in 2019).

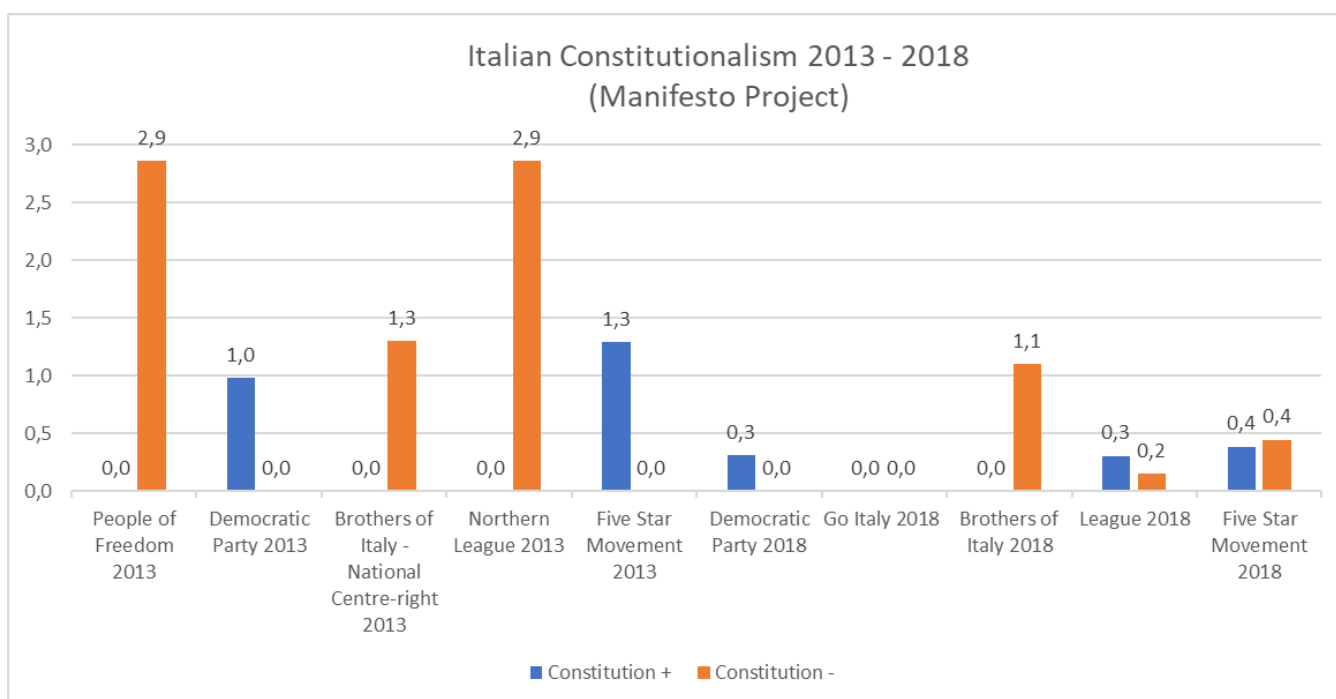
Overall, these first main results on the dimension of the inclusionary – exclusionary framework (only material, political and symbolic) suggest that only on the material dimension the Five Star Movement remained truly loyal to its initial positions. Especially on immigration and the EU integration the Five Star Movement changed its mind considerably. What is quite clear is that the 5SM shifted towards a more exclusionary view of immigration between 2014-2019. By contrast, it seems that the League did not change its exclusionary position on any dimension in any way because of having the Five Star Movement as a coalition partner. Indeed, especially on redistribution and the environment the League became even more extreme on its exclusionary positions on these topics, positioning itself farther from their coalition partner. What could be argued is that the League tended to follow its external coalition partner Brothers of Italy in its extreme positions. The PD did not show striking shifts on any of the policy issues presented. However, looking at this last point, it is important to note that even if according to these bidimensional analyses the PD remained stable on its soft inclusionary position on immigration, it also adopted some exclusionary positions on this topic between 2013 and 2019. In particular during the Gentiloni Government in 2017 the PD promoted the Minniti – Orlando law which introduced severe restrictions on immigration (Froio 2021, p.260). Overall, it can be argued that immigration remains a sensitive topic when it comes to populist influence (Biard et al., 2019) and that is, especially in presence of exclusionary populist parties within the political scenario.

We are aware that these results are not enough to argue that the policy shifts described are due to populist contamination. However, they provide a fruitful insight that a further quantitative and qualitative analysis might investigate further. For now, this analysis suggests that the Five Star Movement shifted towards more exclusionary position on immigration whereas on the European Union it showed a more open attitude. The League remained quite stable on its exclusionary positions becoming even more exclusionary on topics such as redistribution and environment. Topics that are actually very important for the Five Star Movement. Overall, looking at these data it might be argued that the Five Star Movement was influenced by its coalition partner League, whereas the

League wanted to stress the differences from the Five Star Movement shifting towards even more exclusionary positions together with Brothers of Italy. Turning to the Democratic Party, according to these bidimensional analyses, it remained quite stable on its policy position with the exception of “social life style” (e.g. gay marriage and LGTB rights) where it shifted towards an even more inclusionary position. In this vein it is important to note that the Democratic party promoted the Cirinnà law (recognition of same sex civil unions) in 2016. However, it is equally important to note that, even if in our bidimensional analysis the PD showed a quite open attitude towards immigration and did not show significant changes between 2013 and 2019, in reality it pushed forward exclusionary immigration policies in 2017 under the Gentiloni Government.

We also want to provide a first glance on the institutional dimension. Unfortunately, the Chapell Hill Survey dataset does not provide any data in this regard, so in order to give a first quantitative idea on the institutional dimension (or at least on the general political actor attitude towards constitution) from 2013 – 2018 we decided to rely on the Manifesto Project Dataset.

Table 4.12. *Institutional Dimension: Manifesto Project – Constitutionalism*



As previously explained, unfortunately, the Chapel Hill Expert Survey does not provide any information that might help us to analyze the institutional dimension from a quantitative point of view. This is the reason why we chose to use the Manifesto Project Dataset which is based on the content analysis of political parties' electoral manifestos (Manifesto Project Dataset, version 2021a). In particular this dataset provides an indicator of a political party's attitude towards the constitution in terms of "support for maintaining the status quo of the constitution" (positive) and "opposition to the entirety or specific aspects of the manifesto country's constitution" (negative) (Ibidem, version 2021a).

In 2013, As we can see the main actors that supported negative constitutionalism (and negative constitutionalism only) were the Northern League (2,9), the right-wing coalition People of Freedom (2,9) and Brothers of Italy (1,3). It is important to note that at this point in time the (Northern⁵²) League had just experienced an important change in its leadership from Umberto Bossi to Matteo Salvini. The Five Star Movement does not show any sign of negative constitutionalism but rather of positive constitutionalism (1,3). Finally, the Democratic party shows no negative constitutionalism but positive constitutionalism (1). In 2018 values change considerably. People of freedom disappeared and "Go Italy!" (Forza Italia from Silvio Berlusconi) shows no significant signs of positive or negative constitutionalism. The highest point of negative constitutionalism is represented by Brothers of Italy (1,1). The League considerably reduced its negative constitutionalism (0,3) and showed a minimum percentage of positive constitutionalism (0,2). Finally, the Five Star Movement showed a mixed soft trend in both senses, positive constitutionalism (0,4) and negative constitutionalism (0,4). Surprisingly according to these data, the Five Star Movement attitude towards positive constitutionalism is slightly higher than the Democratic Party percentage (0,3). As a caveat, it is important

⁵² Umberto Bossi had just left the leadership so it might be fair to still add the adjective "Northern".

to note that this specific result might be less reliable compared to the others due to the shortness of the electoral program presented. This might be the case for the Five Star Movement in 2013.

Overall, it seems that from 2013 to 2018 negative constitutionalism decreased radically. However, looking at our previous description of the institutional dimension positions (from section 4.1 to section 4.4) of the Five Star Movement, League and PD these results sound odd. Even if the League drastically reduced its discourse on federalism from 2013 to 2018, it still called for direct democracy initiatives such as the direct election of the president (Lega 2018). In the same vein the Five Star Movement clearly showed a predisposition for an implementation of direct democracy. Nonetheless it is important to take into consideration also these results, integrate them with the others in order to find an exhaustive answer.

4.9 Preliminary results

The aim of this chapter was to provide the theoretical tools and empirical analysis to answer the research question “to what extent do populist parties succeed in influencing their government coalition partners, leading them to adopt populist rhetoric and change their policy positions?”. In order to answer this question this research chose to focus on the Italian populist Five Star Movement and its first two government coalitions’ experiences, first with the radical right populist League and then with the centre-left mainstream Democratic Party. Relying on the ideational definition of populism theorized by Cas Mudde (“people-centrism”, “anti-elitism” and “General Will” Mudde, 2004) this analysis has first made use of two different expert surveys datasets in order to investigate the degree of populism of the Five Star Movement and its coalition partners in 2018 – 2019 (first coalition experience). This choice was motivated by the desire to investigate if different expert surveys’ datasets and definitions of populism led to the same results in the populist and non-populist nature of the Five Star Movement and its coalition partners. The analysis presented in this chapter based on two different expert survey datasets (Poppa Project 2018 and Global Party Survey 2019) led to the same results, namely that the Five Star

Movement presented the highest score of populist attitude within the Italian political scenario and that the radical right League can be defined as the second main populist actor. Clearly results do not answer the first research question yet, however they bolster the definition of the Five Star Movement and its first coalition partner the League as populist actors which both make use of populist rhetoric according to the Global Party Survey (4.6). This last point will be further investigated in the next chapter.

Next, this analysis made use of the Chapel Hill Expert Survey data and bidimensional analysis to investigate the Five Star Movement and its coalition partners' policy positions according to the revised inclusionary – exclusionary framework. The results of these analysis showed that, within the period from 2014 to 2019 the Five Star Movement remained quite loyal to its inclusionary position on economic redistribution and protection of the environment, whereas it showed a notable shift towards stricter immigration policies. In addition to this, it also showed a more open attitude on European Integration compared to the period before its first coalition experience. Conversely, the League seemed not to be affected by the Five Star Movement policies especially on economic redistribution and environment. Conversely it showed itself to deviate even more from its coalition partner during the first year of government. During these years the Democratic Party remained quite stable on its socio-economic liberal values. In a nutshell, even if the Five Star Movement showed the strongest degree of populism, according to this bidimensional analysis it seemed that it was affected by its first coalition partner most especially on immigration, whereas on European integration, differently by the League, it softened its original anti-EU positions showing to be affected, probably, by its “experience in office”.

However, further analysis is needed in order to answer the research question presented in this chapter “To what extent did populist parties succeed in influencing their government coalition partners, leading them to adopt a populist rhetoric and change their policy positions?”. For this reason, the next chapter will be also be devoted to answering this question. The focus will still be on the Five Star Movement and its first two coalition government experiences but in contrast to this chapter which made mainly use of expert survey and

bidimensional analysis the next chapter will make use of quantitative text analysis but, this time, in order to detect the degree of populism according to the ideational approach of Cas Mudde (Mudde, 2004) on parliamentary speeches from 2013 to 2019. In particular, the next chapter will apply a dictionary definition of populism based on the concepts of people centrism, anti-elitism and general will. Moreover, we will combine this quantitative method to a qualitative analysis of the parliamentary speeches collected in order to bolster our findings.

V CHAPTER

A double chance to investigate the populist influence in government:

The Five Star Movement

Who influenced⁵³ whom?: Second part

Populism in government has become a “constant” within the Western European political scenario (Akkerman and Lange 2012; Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015; Biard *et al.*, 2019). Most interestingly this trend has led to the formation of government coalitions composed of old fashioned political parties and different kinds of populist parties and movements. This scenario led the present research to wonder if, once in government, populist parties are able to exert their influence on their coalition partners, bringing them to adopt their populist discourse and policy positions or if, conversely, populist parties fail in influencing their coalition partner and rather are forced to tone down their populist attitude. Following these research interests, the present project formulated two research questions and the aim of the present chapter (like the previous one) is to answer the research question:

To what extent have populist parties in government succeeded in influencing their government coalition partners, leading them to adopt populist rhetoric and change their policy positions?

As a starting point, in order to answer this question, it was important to establish theoretical foundations as a backbone for the whole research. Due to the controversial nature of populism, first it was important to choose a definition and, in this sense, chapter I explained why the ideational approach theorized by Cas Mudde (2004) provides the fairest and most flexible definition for the study of populism. Then, in Chapter II, the focus turned to how to classify populist parties and, on this note, this research introduced an updated version⁵⁴ of the inclusionary – exclusionary framework. Then, in Chapter III, the analysis delved into the debate on populist influence in government providing a clear definition

⁵³ Contagion and influence are used synonymously in this context.

⁵⁴ Updated by this research (Chapter II, section 2.5)

of it and what it entails. Chapter IV and the present chapter are both devoted to answering the question “To what extent have populist parties in government succeeded in influencing their government coalition partners, leading them to adopt populist rhetoric and change their policy positions?”, focuses on the same case study, namely, the Five Star Movement and its first two government coalition experiences with the radical right populist League and the mainstream centre-left Democratic Party (2018-2021), but they are based on different methods. Chapter IV made use of expert surveys and a spatial approach whereas the present chapter will make use of parliamentary speeches and quantitative and qualitative text analysis. In particular quantitative and qualitative methods on parliamentary speeches will be used in order to provide a further analysis of the degree of populist rhetoric of the Five Star Movement and its coalition partners taking into consideration the insights already found in chapter IV. It is to be noted that in its quantitative text analysis this research provides an operationalization of the third key concept of the ideational approach (Mudde, 2004), the General Will (Chapter II), that up to now has been neglected by the academic field. Finally, this chapter will also provide a qualitative analysis of the parliamentary speeches collected in order to first, bolster the previous quantitative analysis and, second, to provide a further analysis on the policy positions of the Five Star Movement and its coalition partners and how these might have changed over the years. The findings of this analysis combined with the preliminary results of the previous chapter will finally offer an answer to the first research question of this project. In the same vein of the previous chapter, first the theories and then the methods on which this analysis relies will be presented. Then, the analysis and related empirical results will be displayed. Finally, in the conclusion this chapter will state and explain the final answer for the first research question.

Before delving into the theoretical section, it would be useful to recall the main insights of the ideological profiles⁵⁵ depicted in Chapter IV of our case

⁵⁵ According to the updated version of the inclusionary – exclusionary framework (Chapter III)

study of the Five Star Movement and its first two coalition partners, the League (2018-2019) and the Democratic Party. This step is necessary in order to define the political (populist or not populist) attitude and policy positions of the Five Star Movement, League and Democratic Party before their common government coalition experiences.

According to the ideological portraits illustrated, the Five Star Movement displayed an “eclectic” attitude difficult to define as merely inclusionary or exclusionary. Surely, the 5SM presented clear inclusionary positions on the material dimension and, from the start, it also displayed strong environmentalist attitudes, from an economical point of view as well. Turning to the political dimension, the 5SM showed an unclear attitude especially on immigration and relevant policies. A discourse on the 5SM’s attitude to civil rights might be modified (e.g. LGTB rights) even if also on this issue the Movement has never really showed clear-cut positions. Concerning the symbolic dimension, the Movement has mainly referred to the “people” addressing the “Italian citizens” mainly (which undoubtedly recalls an exclusionary attitude) whereas the group of “elite” included political parties, European institutions, financial groups and the media. Finally, on the institutional dimension this ideological overview shows that the Five Star Movement presented itself as a convinced promoter of direct democracy.

The ideological profile of the League met the expectations of its general exclusionary attitude as a radical right populist party (Chapter II). On both the material and political dimension this populist actor proposed exclusionary policies aimed to benefit the “Italian first” and to preserve Christian values. The symbolic dimension is also framed in this sense. According to the League (at least from the time of Salvini’s leadership on) the pure people are the Italians⁵⁶ so, besides the European Institutions and other European Countries such as Germany, migrants should also be included in the group of enemies.

⁵⁶ It is important to note that at regional level the League’s representatives did not drop the “people from the North Italy First” discourse.

Turning to the institutional dimension, similarly to the Five Star Movement the League also has promoted the implementation of “tools of direct democracy”. However, even if the League called for referenda on specific topics, differently from the Five Star Movement it did not present “direct democracy” as one of its core program principles.

Finally, overall, it can be argued that the Democratic Party tended to present a general inclusionary attitude on the material, political and symbolic dimension. Indeed, this mainstream center left party showed inclusionary positions on economic issues as well as on immigration and civil rights. However, it is undeniable that especially during Gentiloni’s government the Democratic Party adopted stricter immigration measures that made it considerably less inclusionary from a political point of view, so it is not possible to argue that the Democratic Party was completely inclusionary ultimately. On the institutional level the Democratic Party did not call for an implementation of direct democracy and did not present itself as a “challenger” of the Italian constitution.

These ideological profiles will be particularly useful when, in the last empirical section of the chapter, this analysis pursues a qualitative text analysis of the parliamentary speeches of the Five Star Movement, League and Democratic Party from 2017 to 2019 in order to investigate to what extent the policy positions of these actors might have changed during these years. Before that point, this analysis needs to illustrate its theoretical and methodological sections and then illustrate its empirical analysis. As a starting point, in the next section an overview of the theories that structures this chapter will be presented.

5.1 *Theories*

From a theoretical point of view this chapter will rely on the theories described in Chapter II – III and IV on populism and populist influence in government. However, as a guideline it is important to refresh those key concepts that will also set the conditions for the present chapter. First, the present research focuses on populist influence in government. More specifically, this analysis relies on the definition of populism theorized by Cas Mudde (2004) which addresses populism as “a (thin) ideology that considers society to be

ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people” (Mudde 2004, 543). In this vein, populism “has two opposites”: “elitism and pluralism” (Ibidem). In a nutshell the definition of populism relies on three key concepts: people- centrism, anti-elitism and General Will.

Second, in order to classify populist parties, this analysis addresses a novel revised version of the inclusionary – exclusionary framework (Chapter II) according to which populist parties can be characterized by an inclusionary or exclusionary attitude according to the positions they have on four main dimensions: material, political, symbolic⁵⁷ and institutional. It should be noted that, according to this research, the institutional dimension points out the extent to which a populist party seeks to overcome representative democracy enabling direct democracy. In this sense it does not indicate if a populist party is inclusionary or exclusionary, but if the populist party under investigation entertains a “challenger” or a “symbiotic relationship” with representative democracy (Zulianello, 2019, 9). According to the present research populist parties that actively try to overcome representative democracy pushing forward direct democracy should be considered as pure examples of populism (Chapter II).

Third, in order to investigate direct populist influence in government, this research relies on a novel definition proposed in chapter III according to which “direct populist influence is understood as the impact exerted by populist parties on their government coalition partners in terms of communication contagiousness (people centrism, anti-elitism and General will) and policy position change (depending on the populist ideological attachment); moreover in the presence of pure populist parties or movements these will naturally try to

⁵⁷ i) The material dimension addresses the economy and material “state resources” and how these are distributed; ii) the political dimension concerns political participation and public protest; and iii) the symbolic dimension singles out who are the “people” and who are the “elite” (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012, 15).

push their coalition partners to embrace direct democracy”. In a nutshell, under an effective populist influence in government the coalition partners should be influenced from both a rhetorical and policy position point of view. It is to be noted that, as previously explained in chapter III, populist influence should be considered as a “bidirectional phenomenon” which means that as populist parties might be able to influence their coalition partners in government, they might also fail in such a purpose and instead lose their populist character under the impact of their “experience in office” (Chapter III).

This research has in part already collected some preliminary findings in order to answer this research question (Chapter IV). However, further analysis is needed and the aim of this chapter is to provide more empirical insights that, combined with those found in chapter IV, might lead to an exhaustive answer to the research question: To what extent have populist parties in government succeeded in influencing their government coalition partners, bringing them to adopt populist rhetoric and change their policy positions? More specifically, taking into consideration the case selection choice of this research, looking at the Five Star Movement first two government coalition experiences, who influenced whom?

5.2 *Methods and Data*

In parallel to the bidimensional analysis of the policy positions change, this research also aims at analyzing if the degree of populism of the Five Star Movement and its coalition partners changed during their coalition experiences. For this reason, this project made use of quantitative text analysis, more specifically, of computer assisted text analysis applying a dictionary of populism with the software R (Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011; Decadri and Boussalis 2019, Combei *et al.* 2020). The reason why this research chose to use a dictionary in order to investigate the degree of populism is well described by Rooduijn and Pauwels (2011): “this measurement relies on the dictionary approach in which a computer counts the proportion of words that we consider to be indicators of populism (Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011, 1275). Indeed, the dictionary tool provides the possibility to identify specific words within a large amount of data

and depict pattern that show how populist an actor might have been over time. As Rooduijn and Pauwels emphasized “someone might argue that the same word can have different meanings depending on the context” however “it is mostly possible to code words unambiguously” (Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011, 1275).

In particular this research used the dictionary of populism of Decadri et Boussalis⁵⁸, (2019) which, inspired by a previous work from Rooduijn and Pauwels (2011) is based on the ideational approach of Cas Mudde. This dictionary is based on the two main group of concepts “people-centrism” and “anti-elitism”. This research added a new group of words that reflects the third key concept (General Will) of Cas Mudde’s definition of populism. This new category is labelled “institutional”. As validation for this novelty this research relies on a qualitative analysis of 33 interviews with Five Star Movement representatives at the local, regional and national level (see Chapter V) and on 20 interviews previously collected with Five Star Movement representatives at the local and regional level in 2017. According to these interviewees⁵⁹ the words “referendum”, “iniziativa popolare” (popular initiative), “democrazia diretta” (direct democracy), “democrazia partecipata” (participatory democracy), “partecipazione attiva” (active participation), “portavoce” (spokeperson) are all indicators of the Five Star Movement attitude which wishes to overcome representative democracy and enable direct democracy. It is to be noted that these concepts have been consistently used at every level (local, regional, national) in the interviews collected for the present research in order to emphasize the importance of implementing direct democracy within the Italian political scenario.

As the corpus for the dictionary, we put together 239 parliamentary speeches from 2013 to 2019. This research chose to apply a dictionary of populism on parliamentary speeches because they provide an “access to a wealth of information concerning the opinions and attitudes of politicians and their parties

⁵⁸ See Appendix D.

⁵⁹ In particular according to a survey we propose to our interviewees on the constitutional reforms proposed by the Five Star Movement.

towards arguably the most important topics facing societies and their citizens” (Abercrombie and Navarro 2020, 1-2). These speeches were retrieved from the official website of *Camera dei deputati* where these data are accessible to everyone and they were manually downloaded, choose and cleaned⁶⁰ before the actual quantitative text analysis. More specifically we choose to collect speeches given by deputies during votes of confidence for new governments in the chamber of deputies. Between 2013 and 2019 the Italian Political scenario faced five different governments: 2013- 2014 Letta; 2014-2016 Renzi; 2016-2018 Gentiloni; 2018-2019 Conte I (first Five Star Movement coalition government); 2019- 2020 (second coalition government). It is important to stress that this research decided to take into consideration speeches given during vote of confidence because they could provide a representative sample of the overall political party position, attitude and discourse. Moreover, we chose to take into consideration all the major political and populist parties of the Italian scenario⁶¹ keeping in mind that some changed their name or split over time. In those cases, we choose to aggregate them under the same label over years.

Through the tool of computer assisted text analysis we could obtain the aggregate level of populism per political party, but also the individual level of populism over time. Quantitative text analysis represents a fruitful tool in terms of time and management of large amount of data and the application of a dictionary of populism provided the chance to analyze the presence of populism and its different trends over time. However, it is important to stress that notwithstanding the potentiality of quantitative text analysis, this was integrated with qualitative validation. In this research a qualitative study of the parliamentary speeches collected, with a focus on those given by the Five Star Movement, League and Democratic Party representatives, is provided. It is

⁶⁰ These speeches were cleaned manually, more specifically interruptions and extra comments such as “clap s” were removed before the upload in R where they were cleaned and elaborated further.

⁶¹ For reasons of simplicity minorities such as “Italian abroad” and “mixed group” were not taken in consideration.

necessary for two main reasons, first it provided a validation of the previous quantitative findings and second it supported the analysis on how a possible influence(contagion) between the Five Star Movement and its coalition partners might have occurred.

As a last note, it is important to emphasize that this research is aware that the concept of “influence” involves the study of causality and causal mechanisms. Moreover, it is fair to assume that methods such as “process tracing” might provide a substantial support in this sense. However, at this stage this research could not make use of such a method, but this analysis will certainly make use of such a method in the future in order to improve the analysis presented. In part the qualitative analysis presented at the end of the chapter wishes to try to fill this important gap.

5.3 Quantitative Text Analysis: Populist Dictionary on Parliamentary Speeches From 2013 to 2019

In Chapter IV we provided a quantitative analysis of how the policy positions (according to the revised inclusionary exclusionary dimension, see chapter II) of the Five Star Movement, League and Democratic Party⁶² changed from 2013 to 2019. This first quantitative analysis gave us the chance to display the actual policy shifts of these political actors. Now, in this section, we also want to display their degree of rhetorical populism and analyse if this changed from 2013 to 2019. In order to accomplish this task, we performed quantitative text analysis through the application of a dictionary of populism⁶³ (Decadri and Boussalis, 2019) on 239 parliamentary speeches given by different political parties’ deputies during votes of confidence within the chamber of deputies in the period from 2013 to 2019. More specifically this analysis relies on the dictionary made by Silvia Decadri and Constantine Boussalis (Ibidem) which, in turn was inspired by the work of Rooduijn and Pauwels (2011). In addition to

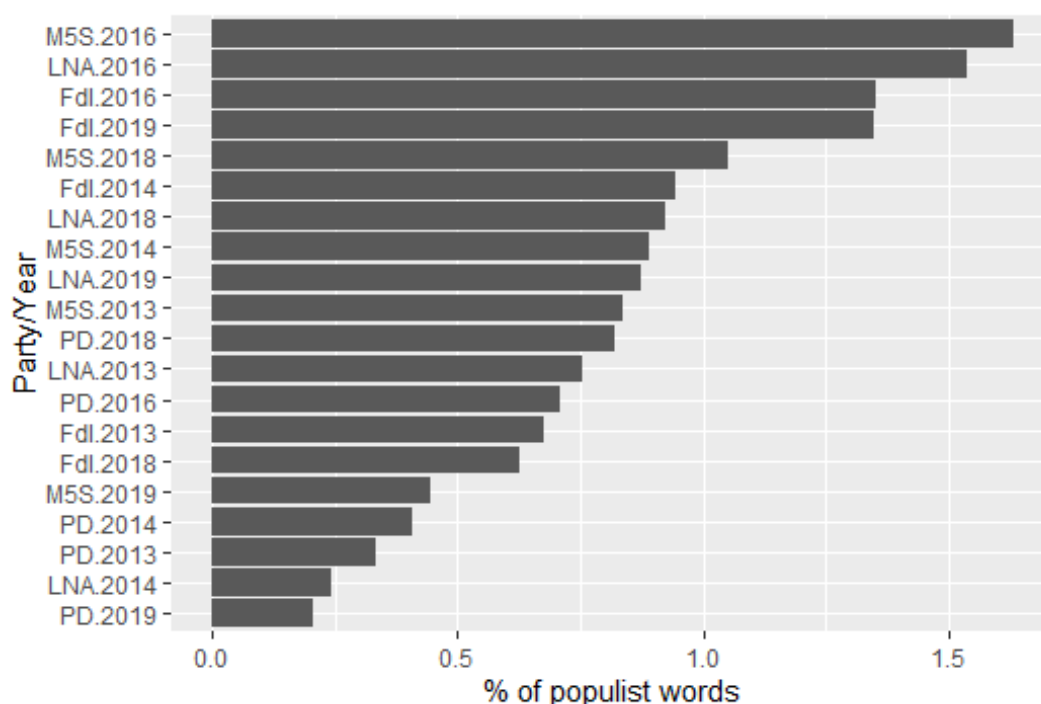
⁶² In addition to this we decided to display the League’s allies at regional and local level “Brothers of Italy” (Fratelli d’Italia) and “Go Italy” (Forza Italia).

⁶³ See Appendix D.

the words present in this dictionary related to the key concepts of “people – centrism” and “anti-elitism” (Mudde, 2014). It is important to note that a new category of words called “institutional” (which reflect the third key concept of the ideational approach) has been added.

First, we will provide two charts that will show the overall percentage of populism on the Italian main political actors from 2013 to 2019. Then, we will display individual charts that will show the percentage of populism for each key concept (group of words) present in the dictionary, thus in the ideational approach: people -centrism, anti-elitism and General Will. It should be noted that for reasons of simplicity only the main populist and political parties⁶⁴ present from the 2013 to 2019 will appear in this analysis and that the speeches of the prime ministers in charge during these years (Letta 2013, Renzi 2014, Gentiloni, 2016, Conte 2018, Conte II) are not present.

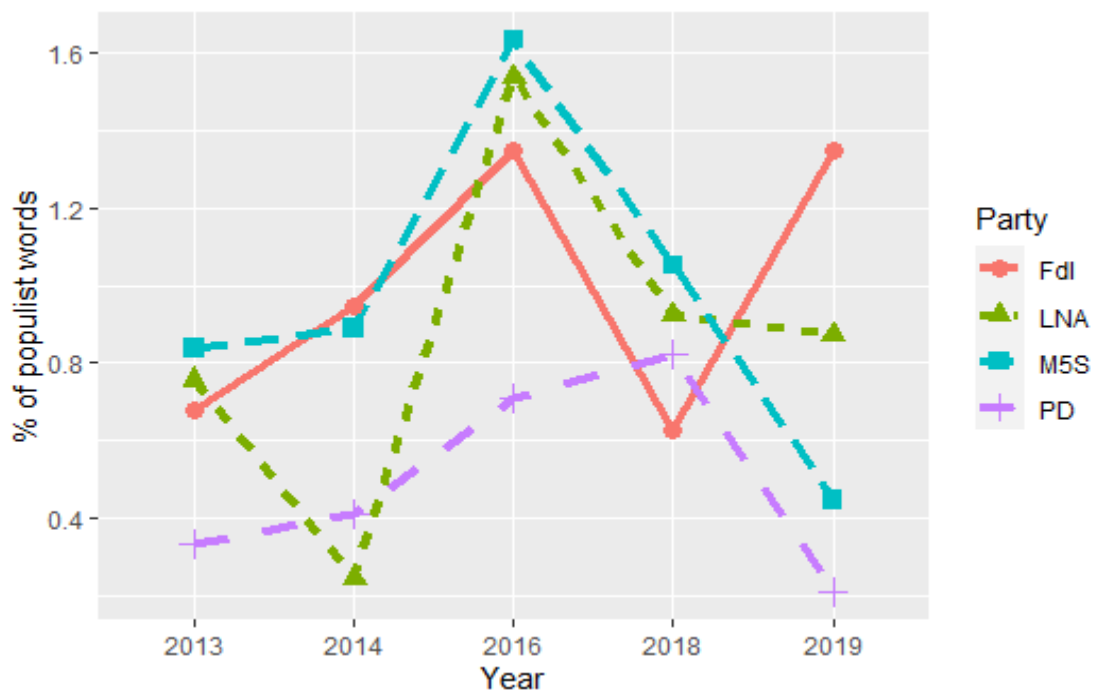
Table 5.1. *Aggregated degree of populism in Italian politics from 2013-2019*



⁶⁴ Besides the Five Star Movement, League and Democratic party we decided to keep the other main political actors present in the political arena in those years. For reason of simplicity, we decided to use the same label for those parties or groups that changed their name through the years.

Overall, from this bar chart it is possible to argue that the expectation of finding high level of populism in the Five Star Movement (first place) and the League (second place) are fully met as well as the expectation of finding a low degree of populism in the Democratic Party (Partito Democratico, PD). At the third place in terms of maximum degree of populism we find Brothers of Italy (Fratelli di Italia). This result is interesting but not surprising taking into consideration that Brothers of Italy has also been labeled as a “radical right populist” party (Bruno and Downes, 2020) and it does share many elements (such as nativist xenophobic discourse and strong Euroscepticism) of its ally League. Taking into consideration that our main focus remains on the Five Star Movement, the League and the Democratic Party, we decided to include only these actors plus Brothers of Italy in the next analysis that will show how the degree of populism of these actors spread over time from 2013 to 2019.

Table 5.2 *General degree of populism in Italian politics from 2013-2019*



Beginning with the Five Star Movement, it is possible to claim that, within the period 2013 – 2019, it reached the maximum degree of populism, more specifically in 2016. Together with the League it started as the most populist actor in 2013 (first year in the parliament for the 5SM) with a percentage of 0,8.

Then from 2014 to 2016 (during Renzi's Government) it rose dramatically reaching the peak of 1,6. After that notable peak the 5SM fell steadily up to 2019, when it scored slightly more than 0,4. Interestingly, the League followed a similar pathway but with significant differences. In 2013 the (Northern) League was, together with the Five Star Movement, the most populist actor. However, in one year, the League's degree of populism collapsed to almost 0,2 and then from 2014 it increased radically reaching almost 1,6. Then, again in parallel with 5SM, the League started to decrease its populist discourse. However, in contrast to its coalition partner, the League stopped its fall in 2018 (0,8 – 0,9) but then it remained stable, reaching a slightly higher point just above 0,8 from 2018 to 2019. Compared to the Five Star Movement and the League, Brothers of Italy never reached the peaks of 5SM or LN. From 2013 to 2016 Meloni's party went from 0,7 to almost 1,4, then from 2016 to 2018 it fell to 0,6 and finally rose steadily, reaching almost 1,4 in 2019. Not surprisingly the Democratic Party does not show a high point of populism and it is quite stable in its trend, which, in any case went up steadily from almost 0,4 in 2014 to 0,8 in 2018, then it decreased radically reaching the lowest point in 2019.

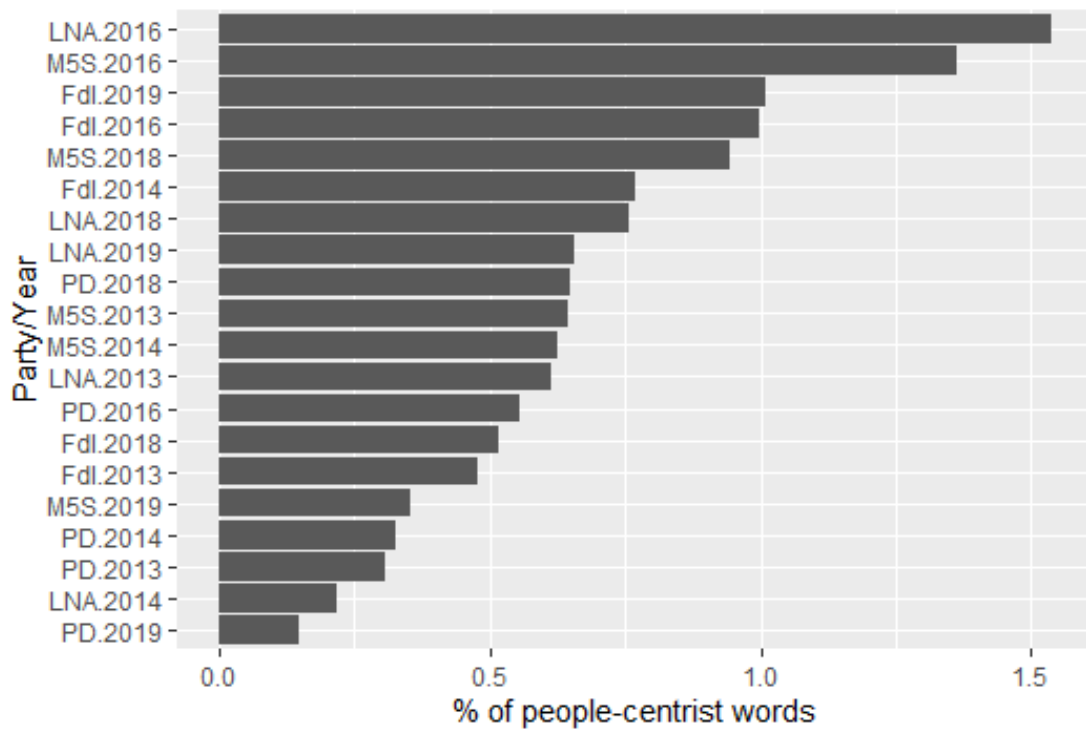
Overall, this chart shows more than one intriguing result. First, the period from 2014 to 2016, registered the highest moments of populism by both the Five Star Movement and the League. This period witnessed the designation of Matteo Renzi and Roberto Gentiloni as prime ministers. Interestingly, both these governments were not elected, and especially Gentiloni's government was considered a sort of "institutional" government. Another important contextual factor to stress is the constitutional referendum ("Renzi- Boschi") strongly promoted by the prime minister Renzi in 2016. The result of this reform became crucial for Renzi's government, as Ignazi wrote, "Renzi made reform a testing ground for his leadership" (Ignazi, 2018, 251). Even if this referendum shared some of the concerns of both the League and Five Star Movement (on the number of MPs for example) they did not support such (as did Brothers of Italy) this referendum. Whereas the Democratic party, characterized by serious internal fights at that moment, voted yes.

Second, 2018, the year of national election and the beginning of the yellow-green coalition also lead to interesting reflections. At that point the 5SM was the first populist party (almost 1,5) whereas the League was the second (0,9). Interestingly in that moment the Democratic Party was at its highest point of populism (0,8) whereas Brothers of Italy reached its lowest point (0,6). However, right after the beginning of the 5SM-LN government, the 5SM continued to tone down its populist discourse in parallel to the Democratic Party, whereas the League returns to a slightly stable populist discourse back following its external ally Brothers of Italy (the most populist actor during this government). Finally, it is interesting to note the drop that the (Northern) League experienced from 2013 to 2014 happened right after the change of leadership within the League from Umberto Bossi to Matteo Salvini.

In concluding this analysis of the overall degree of populism it is possible to argue that first, these results seem to confirm some of the findings found in the previous chapter. On the one hand the Five Star Movement confirmed itself to be the most populist actor within the Italian political scenario at least between 2014 and 2018. However, according to this analysis right after the beginning of its first government coalition experience it seemed to have toned down its populist rhetoric whereas the League seemed to have kept theirs stable. In this vein it is interesting to note that the spatial analysis results previously displayed in Chapter IV showed that if on the one hand the 5SM changed its policy positions (especially on immigration and EU), the League became even more exclusionary in its policy positions, preferring to follow the external ally Brothers of Italy. To sum up, this first overall analysis of degree of populism in combination with the results of the previous chapter suggest that more than influencing its coalition partners the Five Star Movement lost its populist attitude. However, further analysis is needed.

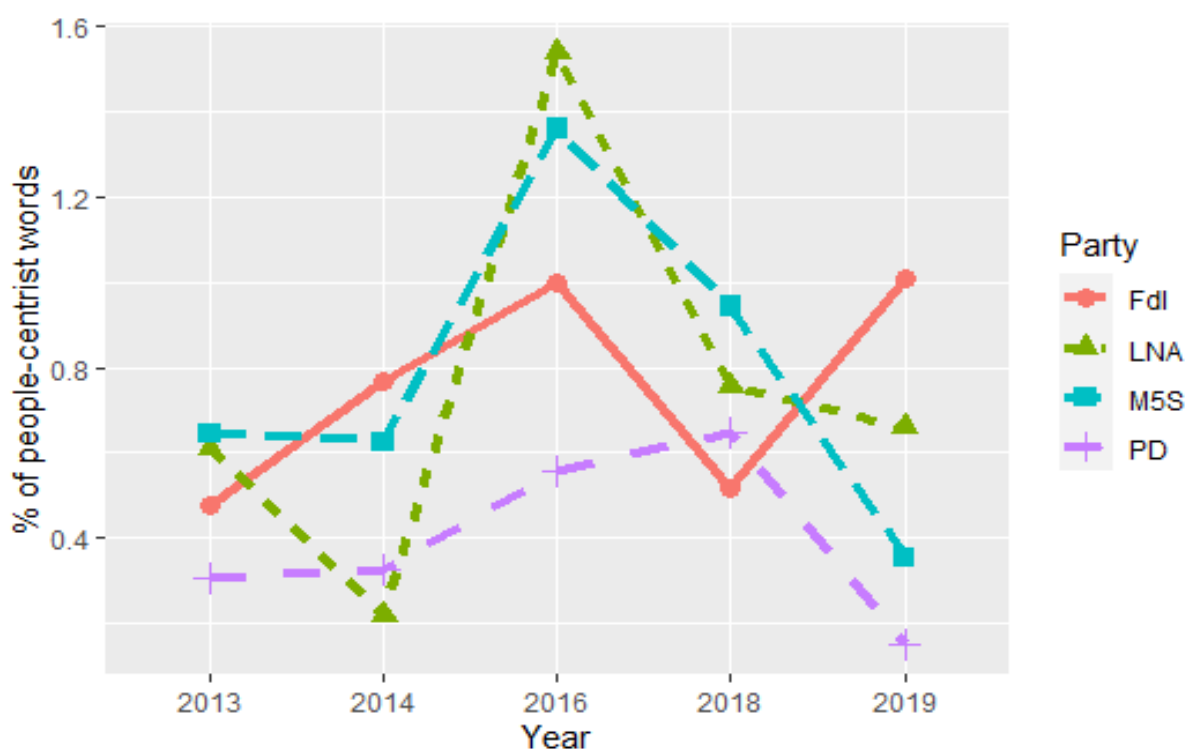
In the next section we will present charts that will display the percentage of populist words for each key concept present in the ideological approach and thus in the dictionary: “people centrism”, “anti-elitism”, “General Will”.

Table 5.3 *Individual degree of populism in Italian politics, first key concept:
people- centrist*



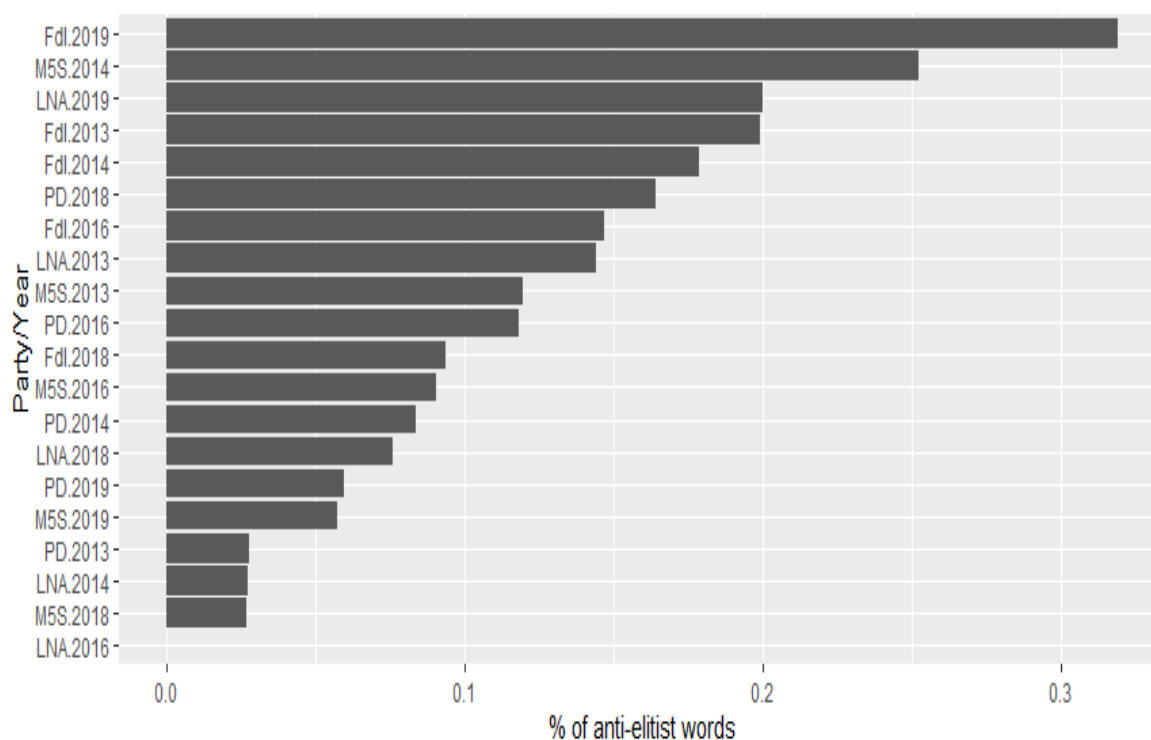
This bar chart shows the individual level of people – centrist words, namely words that emphasize or recall the people (see Appendix B). Overall, from an individual point of view the League scored the highest amount of people-centrist words in 2016 (slightly above 1,5) whereas the Five Star Movement gained the second place (1,3) and the third place is for Brothers of Italy in 2019. In 2016 and in 2018, the Five Star Movement representatives used the major amount of words related to people centrist. However, in 2019, Brothers of Italy scored the highest followed by the League whereas the Five Star Movement scored the smaller number. The Democratic Party (Partito Democratico, PD) remained quite stable in its non-populist rhetoric. In order to have a clearer idea, also from a visual point of view we will discuss these same data further in the next chart.

Table 5.4. Degree of populism in Italian politics, first key concept: people-centrism



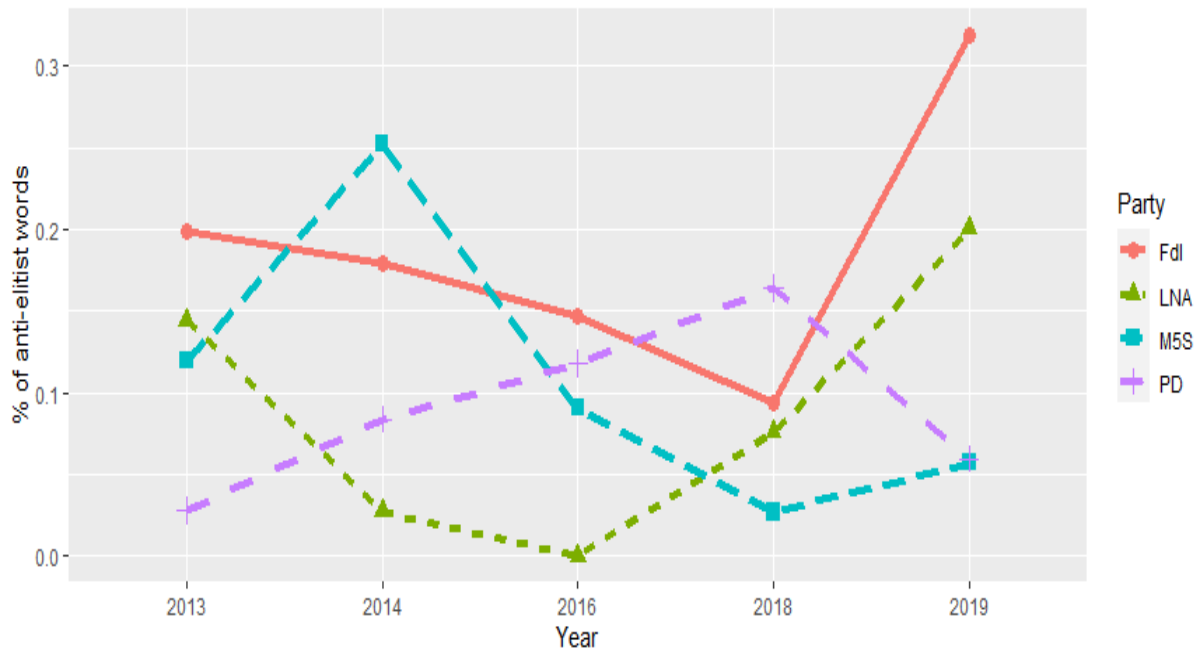
This second chart shows even more clearly the percentage of people-centrist words spread over the period from 2013 to 2019. It shows some similarities and differences compared to the chart on the overall degree of populism from 2013 to 2018. However, according to this second chart all the actors involved, especially Brothers of Italy, start from a much lower point compared to the previous chart. Moreover, in this second chart the League and not the Five Star Movement registered the highest point of people centrism and followed the same pattern as in the previous analysis. However, in contrast with the previous analysis, after 2018 the League slightly decreased its people centrism discourse, whereas Brothers of Italy remained the only actor that increased its people centrism discourse after 2018 (1).

Table 5.5. Individual degree of populism in Italian politics, second key concept: *antielitism*



This second bar chart shows the individual level of anti-elitist words, thus words related to the elite or that are related to it (see Appendix B). The highest point was reached by The Brothers of Italy in 2019 with a score of 0,4 whereas the second place is taken by the Five Star Movement in 2014. Surprisingly the lowest point is reached by the League in 2016 (0.0) and Five Star Movement in 2018. In order to have a clearer idea, also from a visual point of view we will discuss these same data further in the next chart.

Table 5.6 Degree of populism in Italian politics, second key concept: antielitism

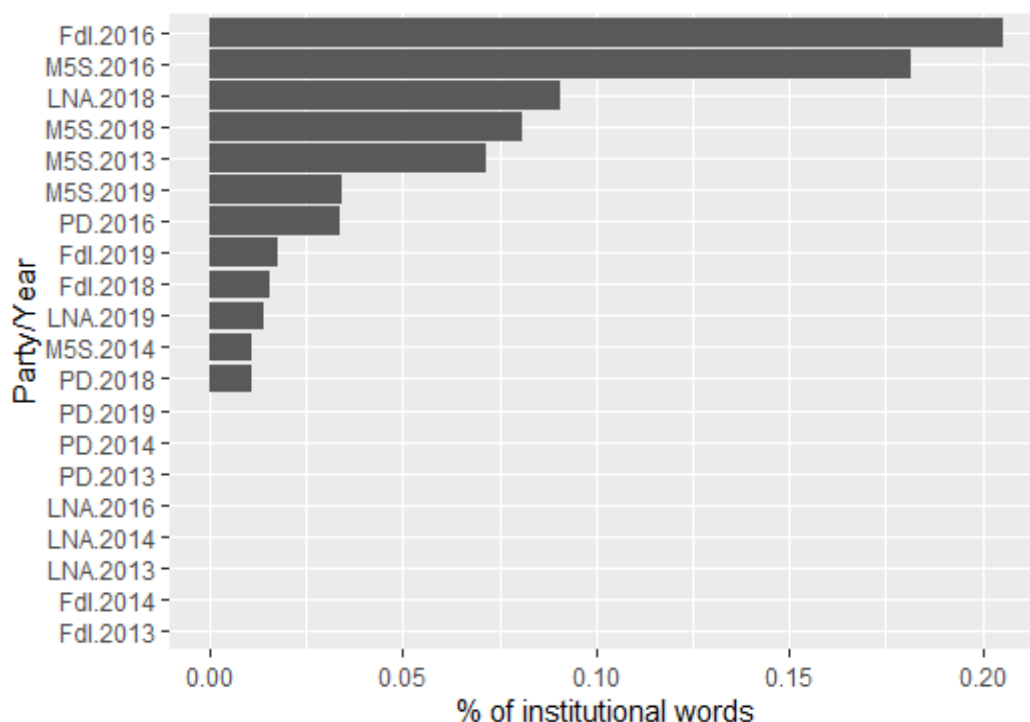


This second chart shows the individual level of anti-elitist words. This analysis displays different trends compared to the general degree of populism and the individual percentage of people centrism words from 2013 to 2019. Overall, with the exception of the Democratic party who follow the same pathway found in the previous charts, the other political actors show erratic behaviour. The Five Star Movement, started from a median position (just above 0,1) reached its peak in 2014 (European election, Matteo Renzi's government) but then, quite steadily, it decreased reaching its lowest point in 2018 (first coalition experience with League). Conversely the League started from a median position, just above the 5SM, but then it decreased until 2016 where it reached the lowest point of the whole analysis (0,0). Right after 2016, the League rose steadily reaching 0,2. Roughly speaking, Brothers of Italy followed the same pathway as the League (starting from a higher position, 0,2,) but with the significant difference that it reached the lowest point in 2018 and then dramatically rose reaching the highest point of the whole period (0,3) in 2019.

In conclusion, it is important to note that on anti-elitism the Five Star Movement and the League seem not to follow the same pathway and do not reach

the peak at the same time as they do in the other analysis. However, right after the beginning of the “yellow- green government” the League seems to follow once again its external ally, Brothers of Italy⁶⁵.

Table 5.7 *Individual degree of populism in Italian politics, third key concept: General Will (Institutional)*

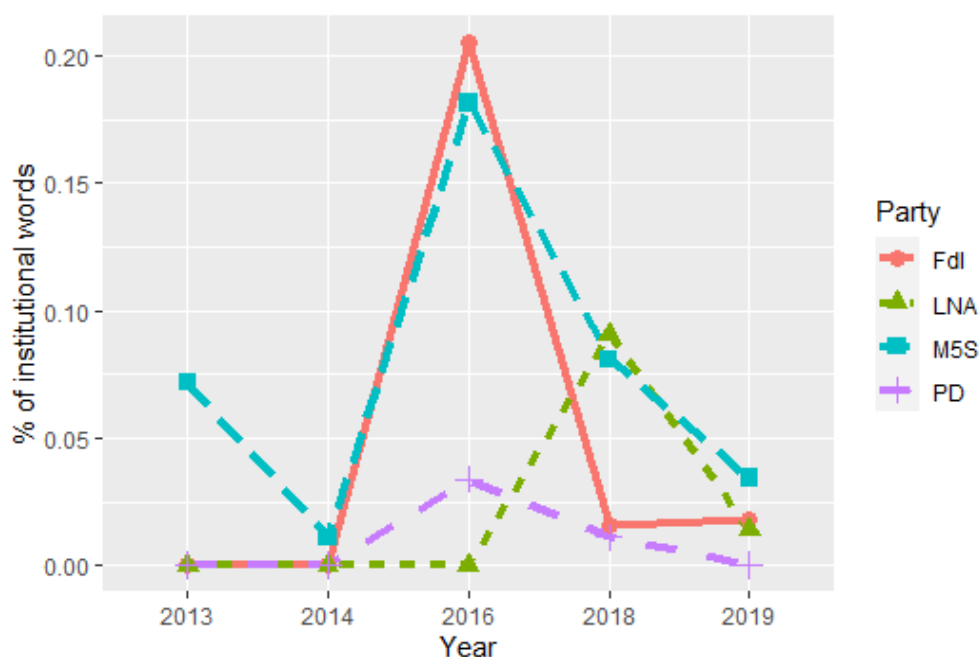


This chart displays the degree of words related to the institutional dimension (“General Will” third key concept of the ideational approach, Mudde, 2004) present in our dictionary. Interestingly, Brothers of Italy (Fratelli D’Italia, FdI) scored the highest percentage in 2016, followed by the Five Star Movement in the same percentage of institutional words year. Surprisingly, in 2018, first year of the 5SM- LN government coalition the League scored the highest score followed by the Five Star Movement. In 2019, the 5SM came back to first position although the is quite small. Once again, the Democratic Party remained

⁶⁵ We are convinced that a further analysis based on a more complex dictionary based on the inclusionary and exclusionary populism might shed the light on the difference that might occur in anti-elitism.

quite stable in its non populist attitude. In the next graph a clear analysis of the institutional dimension will be provided.

Table 5.8 *Degree of populism in Italian politics, third key concept: General Will (institutional)*



In this last graph it is possible to observe the degree of words related to the “institutional category” which, according to this analysis, reflects the third key concept present in the ideational approach (Mudde, 2004). This group of words was not present in the dictionary of Decadri and Boussalis (Decadri and Boussalis, 2019), in fact it is a conceptual and methodological novelty added to this research (see section 5.2). According to this graph the year 2016 registered the peak of institutional words and Brothers of Italy scored the highest position followed by the Five Star Movement in second position. The League registered a very low percentage in the same year whereas in 2018 it registered the highest score. In the period between 2018 – 2019 there were not significant percentages to mention (at exception of the League in 2018) and yet in general with the exception of a slight increase of Brothers of Italy, every party registered a

decrease. Once again, the Democratic Party did not show any significant percentage except for 2016 when it displayed a slight rise.

At the conclusion of this analysis on the use of institutional words by the Five Star Movement and its coalition partners it is important to make a methodological caveat that might influence this analysis which concerns the word “referendum” present in the group of words of the institutional category. In 2016 a constitutional referendum took place promoted by the prime minister of that time Matteo Renzi (Democratic Party). The Five Star Movement, League and Brothers of Italy clearly expressed disagreement towards this referendum which, as Ignazi pointed out, became a sort of “testing ground for the Renzi leadership” (Ignazi 2018, 251). Thus, looking at this last graph it is important to take into consideration that part of these results might be influenced by the presence of this referendum in 2016.

In order to bolster these quantitative results in the next section this chapter will also present a qualitative analysis of the parliamentary speeches collected from 2013 to 2019.

5.4 Qualitative Analysis of Parliamentary Speeches from 2013 to 2019

In order to add depth to the quantitative results found so far, this research also decided to provide a first qualitative analysis of some of the speeches present in the corpus previously used for the quantitative text analysis and the application of a dictionary of populism. In particular, in this section the focus is on the speeches given by the Five Star Movement, League and Democratic Party representatives in the period from 2016 to 2019. The aim of this qualitative analysis is twofold. First, to compare the results with the main trends found so far and, second, to investigate the inclusionary or exclusionary nature of these speeches. It should be noted that for reasons of simplicity and time, it was decided to limit the analysis to the speeches given from 2016 to 2019. In particular in 2016 the Five Star Movement was still in the opposition.

Starting with the League, we can affirm that it remained quite stable in its exclusionary positions in every dimension present in the revised exclusionary/inclusionary framework. In particular since the 2016, together with

strong people-centrism and anti-elitist tones (Mudde, 2004), the League showed clear exclusionary positions on immigration (political dimension). Indeed, from 2016 to 2019 the migrator phenomenon was always felt as an emergency that needed to be stopped through stricter immigration policies.

In the same vein, the analysis of these speeches points out that also as far as concerned material interests, the League representatives insisted on promoting exclusionary policies: federalism against welfarism and the introduction of fiscal measures such as the “flat tax”.

Turning to the symbolic dimension, it is possible to argue that, especially in 2016, the League clearly referred to the Democratic Party as part of the selfish and corrupt elite; however, according to this analysis the European union remains the main target of the League’s anti-elitist discourse. Indeed, from 2016 to 2019, the League steadily maintained harsh tones when talking of the European Union and other EU members (mainly Germany) depicting them as a threat to the interest of Italy and Italian sovereignty (the symbolic dimension).

Finally, looking at the institutional dimension, over these years we can see that the League mentioned the importance of direct democracy, but only in reference to the regional federalism that the League representatives were defending. Therefore, rather than an implementation of direct democracy as a substitution for representative democracy, it might be argued that the League’s main concern was not direct democracy as such but changing the constitution with the goal of obtaining more economic and political autonomy at the regional level.

Turning to the Five Star Movement, this political actor showed clear people-centrist and anti-elitist tones especially in opposition to the Gentiloni Government in 2016. Concerning this, it is interesting to note that some Five Star Movement representatives argued that the failure of the constitutional referendum promoted by the previous prime minister Matteo Renzi (also member of the Democratic Party) was a clear sign of citizens’ disappointment with the Democratic Party and in general towards the old politics. Not surprisingly, especially in 2016, the Five Star Movement used harsher tones against the other political parties (clearly identified as “elite”) compared to the

tones used by the League concerning the other political parties. It is to be noted that, this last insight reflects one of the results previously found, namely that the Five Star Movement's anti-elitist discourse was stronger than the League's discourse concerning the same aspects in 2016 (p.75).

Unfortunately, besides these very clear populist tones (Mudde, 2004) the 5SM speeches given in 2016 do not show clear inclusionary or exclusionary positions according to our framework. Conversely, in 2018 and 2019 the Five Star Movement representatives clearly often promoted and defended inclusive economic measures such as the "reddito di cittadinanza" ("guaranteed minimum income") and the "minimum wage". Moreover, the defense of environmental and related sustainable policies were the most mentioned by the 5SM in both 2018 and 2019.

Turning to the political dimension and in particular to the topic of immigration, the Five Star Movement does not seem to show clear inclusionary or exclusionary positions, however, especially in 2018 the 5SM representatives called for more efficient measures (e.g., faster repatriation) to contain the migratory flow. In the same vein, the European union was often brought into play on the migratory issue, especially in terms of the support that it should have provided to Italy in facing the migratory emergency. Although, compared to the League, the 5SM tones on immigration are slightly softer it is fair to argue that, especially in 2018, the Five Star Movement showed softer exclusionary positions on immigration. It should be noted that this trend seemed to change moderately in 2019 when some 5SM representatives explicitly mentioned the fact that the immigration measures (on immigration) adopted in 2018 needed to be reconsidered from a more humanitarian point of view.

Turning to the perception of the EU, in 2018, the 5SM continued to voice criticisms towards the European Institutions but in a different way compared to its coalition partner, the League. Indeed, the EU was depicted by the 5SM as not sufficiently democratic and unbalanced in terms of power among the EU members. However, compared to the harsh tones used by the League representatives in the same year, the Five Star Movement representatives showed a softer Euroscepticism towards the European Union. In particular, the

5SM called for the refoundation of the European Union on a more democratic and equal basis.

As a last interesting point on the Five Star Movement, looking at the institutional aspect, it is important to note that compared to 2016 and 2018, in 2019 the 5SM representatives never mentioned the concept of direct democracy at all. Conversely in both 2016 and 2018, the concept of direct democracy as the most democratic form of democracy was often mentioned by the 5SM representatives.

Finally, turning to the Democratic Party, we can affirm that, overall, the results previously obtained in the bidimensional analysis and quantitative text analysis are reflected also in these speeches. However, a few new insights emerged from the analysis of these speeches.

First, compared to the speeches of the 5SM and League representatives, the Democratic Party clearly presented itself as the defender of the parliamentary democracy and its institutions. Therefore, from an institutional point of view (see chapter II), the Democratic Party can be considered as “symbiotic” with representative democracy (Zulianello, 2019). In this vein it is important to note that the constitutional referendum promoted by the previous minister Matteo Renzi was not officially supported by the Democratic Party representatives from 2016 to 2019.

Concerning to the material aspect, overall, the Democratic Party shows inclusionary positions based, for example, on the importance of guaranteeing equality of salary. However, especially in 2018, some representatives stressed the important distinction between providing equal working conditions and a total welfarism⁶⁶ that might actually have detrimental results eventually.

Turning to the aspect of political participation, the Democratic Party showed a clear inclusionary position on both immigration and civil rights (e.g. LGBT rights). In particular, especially in 2018, the Democratic Party strongly criticized the severe immigration policy positions of the government, counterposing to it a

⁶⁶ Clear reference to measures such as the “reddito di cittadinanza” proposed by the Five Star Movement.

more open and humanitarian way of looking at the migratory phenomenon. It should be noted that this result reflects what was already found with the bidimensional analysis, however, it is also important to keep in mind that in 2016 the Democratic Party also adopted some severe policy measures on immigration (Chapter IV, section 4.8).

As a final note, concerning the European Union, the Democratic Party showed no significant signs of Euroscepticism, in fact the EU was most of time depicted as a resource and a cultural and political treasure for Italy.

5.5 Results and Conclusion on the First Research Question

Expert Surveys pointed out that the Five Star Movement presented the highest degree of populism according to two different expert survey datasets: the Poppa Project 2018 (Meijers and Zaslove, 2018) and Global Party Survey 2019 (Norris, 2020). From both these datasets this research chose to focus on those variables that reflected the key aspects present in Cas Mudde's ideational approach: people – centrism, anti-elitism and General Will. In particular, the Global Party Survey by Pippa Norris offered the chance to investigate if in 2019 the rhetoric used by the Five Star Movement and its coalition partners was populist and the results confirmed that the Five Star Movement was the most populist actor within the Italian political scenario in 2019 (Chapter IV). Due to the importance of the rhetorical tool for our investigation, this analysis decided to also provide a further analysis on the populist rhetoric used by the Five Star Movement and the other main political actors using quantitative text analysis on the Italian parliamentary speeches from 2013 to 2019. More specifically, this chapter made use of a dictionary of populism (Decradri and Boussalis, 2019) based on the ideational approach that focuses on the concepts of people-centrism and anti-elitism. To these two categories, this analysis added a third group of words under the label of the “institutional” category which, according to this analysis operationalizes the third key concept of the ideational approach, the General Will, that in general have been hardly operationalized so far. Interestingly, compared to the data of Pippa Norris which provided a “picture” of the Italian political scenario in 2019, the quantitative text analysis on the

Italian parliamentary speeches provided by this chapter showed that overall, the Five Star Movement was the most populist actor but only in the period between 2014 and 2017, with the peak located in 2016. In general, 2016 was a year that registered the high degree of populism also for the League and Brothers of Italy. This result should not surprise us taking into consideration that these three political actors shared a hostile attitude towards, firstly, Matteo Renzi's government (Democratic Party) and its constitutional referendum (2016) and then against his successor Paolo Gentiloni (Democratic Party). However right after 2016 the Five Star Movement populist rhetoric steadily decreased (although in 2018 it was still higher than the League's populist rhetoric). From 2018 to 2019 the Five Star Movement toned down its populist rhetoric whereas its coalition partner, the League, tended to keep it. Conversely the only political actor that strongly maintained a populist tone after 2018 is the radical right Brothers of Italy. Compared to these populist actors the Democratic Party showed a low degree of populist rhetoric although from 2014 to 2018 it also displayed a weak populist trend.

In a nutshell, from this analysis it might be argued that the Five Star Movement used a populist rhetoric mainly when it was in opposition, whereas once in government it toned it down. Conversely its first coalition partner the League, maintained a gentler populist rhetoric (similarly to its ally Brothers of Italy which showed a stronger populist rhetoric after 2018) whereas the Democratic Party did not make use of populist rhetoric after 2018. These findings suggest that between the Five Star Movement and the League, the former diminished its populist attitude whereas the latter somehow kept it. Moreover, the Democratic Party did not show relevant signs of populist rhetoric in the period taken into consideration.

It might be argued that these empirical results on the degree of populist rhetoric are mirrored also by the analysis made on the policy positions of the Five Star Movement, League and Democratic Party from 2014 to 2019 according to our revised inclusionary – exclusionary framework (Chapter IV). Indeed, according to the bidimensional analysis provided in chapter IV the Five Star Movement remained quite stable on its inclusionary position on economic

redistribution and environment from 2014 to 2019, however it also showed a significant change of position on immigration and Eu Integration. In particular, the Five Star Movement shifted towards more an exclusionary position on Immigration. Before 2018 the Five Star Movement had never showed a clear position on immigration, however, as also the qualitative analysis of the parliamentary speeches pointed out, it seems that, especially at the beginning of its first government coalition experience with the League, the Five Star Movement showed a soft exclusionary position on immigration in line with its radical right coalition partner. Conversely, in 2019, at the beginning of the government coalition with the Democratic Party, some 5SM representatives clearly stated that it was necessary to reconsider the immigration issue from a more “humanitarian point of view”.

The other matter on which the Five Star Movement showed relevant policy shift is Eu Integration. Indeed, compared to the past, once in government the 5SM representatives used more lenient tones, especially compared to the League which remained quite harsh towards the EU. Further insights on the position of the Five Star Movement on the European Union and its institutions will be provided in Chapter VI.

Compared to the Five Star Movement the League did not show any significant shift towards the policy positions of its coalition partner. Conversely, the League in the same line of its external ally, Brothers of Italy, deviated even more from the policies dear to the Five Star Movement, especially in terms of economic redistribution and environment (material dimension).

Compared to the Five Star Movement and the League, the Democratic Party did not show any relevant change in its policy positions, which, according to our bidimensional analysis remained quite inclusionary. However, it is important to note that, even if according to these results the Democratic Party can be labelled as an inclusionary actor in terms of immigration policies, during the Gentiloni Government in 2017 this party embraced quite strict and exclusionary immigration policies such as the Minniti – Orlando Law (Froio, 2020). Overall, these findings might suggest that, in the presence of successful exclusionary populist parties (the League) other populist actors (Five Star Movement) and

mainstream parties (Democratic Party) might be quite sensitive to their influence on immigration (Biard *et al.*, 2019). This analysis cannot count on enough elements to state that immigration should always be considered as a sensitive topic when it comes to populist influence however, according to this analysis it is undeniable that both the Democratic Party and the Five Star Movement were probably affected by the influence of the radical right populist League. It is to be noted that in the next chapter this topic will also be discussed further.

Besides these main findings concerning the analysis of the policy position and their shifts, it is important to look more closely at the institutional aspect. As previously mentioned in the ideological portrait of the Five Star Movement and its coalition partners, since the beginning of its political experience the Five Star Movement has clearly given preference to direct democracy over representative democracy, or in any case it has often claimed that it was necessary to implement citizens' direct involvement in politics (Chapter IV, section 4.1). However, according to our quantitative text analysis, within the parliament the Five Star Movement tended not to use words related to direct democracy especially right after the beginning of the first government coalition experience. As previously explained, this quantitative result might be biased (section 5.3) however, the qualitative analysis of the parliamentary speeches collected also showed that even if in 2016 and 2018 the Five Star Movement often mentioned the concept of direct democracy and the importance of democratic tools such as the "referendum" in order to enable citizens' direct involvement in democracy, in 2019 these concepts were never mentioned. Concerning the League, its representatives referred to direct democracy and the importance of referenda only to push forward regional autonomy at the regional level (section, 5.4).

Having said this, it is important to mention that during the Five Star Movement - Democratic Party coalition government, the latter supported the constitutional referendum pushed forward by the Five Star Movement whose main purpose was to cut the number of parliamentary deputies. It is not possible to claim that the main purpose of this referendum was to implement direct democracy (Chapter II), however it was an important institutional change that the Five Star Movement was able to realize also thanks to the support of its

mainstream coalition partner, the Democratic Party. This event is not enough to claim that the Five Star Movement was able to push the Democratic party to embrace direct democracy, especially if it is taken into consideration that at least within the parliament the Five Star Movement itself toned down its direct democracy discourse especially in 2019. However, it is an important element that should also be taken into consideration for a further analysis. The direct democracy topic will be further discussed in the next chapter.

As final note, taking into consideration all these elements, this analysis reached the conclusion that the Five Star Movement did not succeed in influencing its coalition partners from a rhetorical and policy position point of view, thus an effective direct populist influence did not take place. According to this research this assumption holds even if this populist party was able to influence the mainstream Democratic party to support its constitutional referendum in 2020. Conversely, it might be argued that during its first government coalition experience the Five Star Movement was affected by its first coalition partner the League, especially in terms of immigration policies. Moreover, according the analysis provided in the previous and present chapter the Five Star Movement cannot be considered as an example of pure populism (Chapter II) that actively try to enable citizens direct democracy. However, this last point deserves further and deeper analysis that the next chapter will certainly provide. To be noted that the next chapter will also offer more elements (e.g. “organizational effectivity” Chapter III) that might explain why the Five Star Movement did not succeed in influencing its coalition partners.

VI Chapter

The Five Star Movement in Government: Outsider or Mainstream Politics?

The last decades have witnessed the rise of new forms of populisms in Western Europe which can be considered as a reaction to the increasing mistrust towards political parties and in general to the “democratic fatigue syndrome” experienced by representative democracy (Van Reybrouck, 2016, para.10). Most importantly, this growth led populist parties to acquire a considerable electoral weight which brought them to become “desirable” government coalition partners for mainstream or even for other populist parties all over Europe. Often, populist actors frame mainstream parties as those that have betrayed voters with their corrupt and self-interested behaviour. However, once in government, populist actors are forced to cooperate with the “old fashioned politics” (Rovira Kaltwasser *et al.*, 2017) they wanted to fight and maybe accept compromises they would never have accepted before (Akkerman and Lange, 2012). The whole “experience in office” itself might lead populist parties to get rid of their “rebel” populist character and acquire a more institutionalized, old fashioned politics attitude. In a nutshell, as Rooduijn *et al.* (2012) clearly put it, “in an attempt to become an acceptable coalition partner to mainstream parties a populist party (might) tones down its populism” and thus struggles to stay different once in power (Rooduijn *et al.* 2012, 571). This research believes that the rise of different new populist parties (Graziano, 2018) able to join government coalition as major or junior partners offer the opportunity to discover to what extent populist actors have remained faithful to their original principles as populist and anti-party actors or have themselves been victims of the influence of other parties and the institutional environment. Following this interest, the second research question that this PhD project will tackle in the present chapter is:

Have populist parties been able to retain their populist “outside mainstream politics” identity, or have they been assimilated to mainstream parties?

According to this research a case in point that would provide important insights to answer this question is represented by the Italian populist Five Star Movement (5SM). Since its onset in 2009, this “eclectic” populist actor (Mosca and Tronconi, 2019) has promoted the idea of a movement composed of simple citizens, organized according to a fluid model based on direct democracy, where every opinion counts and the idea of “one counts one” holds sway (Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2016). The main aim of the Five Star Movement was to bring people’s voices back within the higher political institutions in order to fight the selfish behaviour of mainstream parties (Napoletano 2017). Most interestingly, for a long time this successful populist movement proudly claimed to refuse any alliance with other political actors. However, despite their original intent, the Five Star Movement has experienced three different government coalitions so far. First, from 2018 to 2019 the 5SM governed in coalition with the radical right wing populist League. Then, from 2019 to 2020 the 5SM joined the mainstream left-wing Democratic Party and finally, in February 2021 the 5SM joined the Draghi government. According to this research, 5SM's experiences not only have been a fruitful case study to answer the first research question proposed by this project in Chapter IV and Chapter V, offer the opportunity to investigate to what extent the 5SM has remained faithful to its original populist character and fluid organization characterized by horizontal internal democracy or if, on the contrary, it has assimilated itself to the old-fashioned politics under the impact of its “experience in office”.

Some important studies have already tackled this topic. For example, Filippo Tronconi claimed that “in order to survive” the movement had to “normalize (to some extent at least) the party, giving up the utopian promises of radical renewal of political participation and representation” (Tronconi, 2018, 177). In the same vein, Manucci and Amsler argued that from a discursive point of view the Five Star Movement initial “five pillars” (public water, environment, sustainable mobility, development, and connectivity) became marginal around 2017 (Manucci and Amsler 2017, 127). Meanwhile, Biorcio and Sampugnaro (2019) stressed the important organizational change that has occurred within the movement since it entered the higher political institutions (Biorcio and

Sampugnaro, 2019). Apparently, this change has led the movement to be subject to a “process of institutionalization whose result is not yet defined” (Biorcio and Sampugnaro, 2019, 9). Certainly, the present chapter’s aim is to give a contribution to this ongoing debate bringing new insights through the use of new original data.

In particular, through the use of semi-structured interviews with 5SM representatives at local, regional and national level, this analysis aims to investigate to what extent this populist actor has remained faithful to its original populist character and horizontal internal democracy or if, conversely under the influence of its experience in office it toned its populist attitude down affecting the Movement internal horizontal democracy as well. It has to be noted that, in order to bolster the comparison between the Five Star Movement’s attitude before and after its government coalition experience this research can rely on a previous personal qualitative analysis based on semi-structured interviews collected in 2017 (Napoletano, 2017) with Five Star Movement representatives (especially at the regional and local level). Now, this chapter proposes to compare those data with new semi-structured interviews collected in 2021 with Five Star Movement representatives at the national, regional and local level. Additionally, this project will also make use of factor analysis on the semi-structured interviews collected in 2017 and 2021 in order to investigate to what extent 5SM representatives might have changed their position on specific topics. More specifically these topics are inspired by the dimensions present in the updated inclusionary – exclusionary framework (Chapter II). The combination of these analyses, will shed light on to what extent the Five Star Movement has been able to retain its populist “outside mainstream politics” identity or to what extent it has been assimilated into mainstream politics

In the same vein as the previous chapters, in this chapter we will first introduce the Five Star Movement through an overview of its “new democratic formula” (Napoletano, 2017) and organizational structure. Secondly, the theories section on which this analysis relies will be presented. Third, it will be illustrated the methodology and data used in this chapter. Then the empirical analysis and main findings will be displayed. Finally, in the conclusive section,

this chapter will provide an answer to the second research question of this project.

6.1 *The Five Star Movement new democratic formula: principles and organization*

The Five Star Movement was officially created in 2009 by the Italian comedian Beppe Grillo and the IT expert Gianroberto Casaleggio. Since the beginning of its political experience this populist actor emphasized its desire to be labelled as a “movement” and not as a party, rejected the idea of being framed as a left- or right-wing movement and presented itself as a very environmentalist political actor⁶⁷ (Tronconi 2015). Most interestingly, since its onset, the Five Star Movement has proposed a “new democratic formula” (Napoletano, 2017) ready to challenge corruption in politics and bring citizens back to it through the use of the Internet⁶⁸. This new democratic formula includes some key principles that ultimately affected the Five Star Movement’s organizational structure. First this section will tackle the 5SM democratic formula briefly looking at its key principles, second an overview of the main features of the 5SM organization will be provided, especially in terms of the use of the Internet and regulations.

From a theoretical point of view, the Five Star Movement’s “democratic formula” included various key concepts namely “direct, participatory, deliberative and transparent democracy” (Floridia and Vignati 2014; Napoletano, 2017) which, taken as a whole, were aimed to implement direct democracy within and outside the Movement (Napoletano 2017, 31). Internally, the Five Star Movement’s original democratic project was based on the internal active participation of its members which are directly called to discuss,

⁶⁷ The five stars stood for Public Water, Environment, Sustainable mobility, Development and Connectivity.

⁶⁸ Actually, Internet was already an important tool used by Grillo and Gianroberto Casaleggio even before the official foundation of the movement in 2009. The “Blog of Beppe Grillo”, founded in 2006, can be considered the original source of ideas of the Five Star Movement that followed.

deliberate and vote on the initiatives of the Movement under the backbone principle “one counts one” (Napoletano, 2017). In this sense, the Movement has always presented itself as totally different from other parties, as it is strongly animated by a principle of honesty and transparency towards its members and voters⁶⁹ that is difficult to find in the mainstream parties. In particular, concerning this aspect, since the onset of its political experience the Five Star Movement introduced two important internal rules for its representatives: the limit of two electoral mandates and financial transparency⁷⁰.

Outside the Movement, the 5SM’s democratic formula translated into a different kind of political representation. Indeed, this Movement rejects the classic model of political representation preferring to it the “delegation”⁷¹ model proposed by *Rousseau* (Urbinati, 2011, 33). Therefore, since the beginning the Five Star Movement has promoted the idea of “*portavoce*” (literally “who bring the voice”) rather than the classic concept of political representative. More specifically, the *portavoce* had to bring people’s voice within the political institutions without interfering with personal ideas against the collective decisions made. This conceptual choice is the result of the Rousseauian idea that, theoretically, only citizens can decide what is for the better. In the same way within the Five Star Movement only the “base” (the base of enrolled Five Star Movement members) can decide what the Movement should do. In other words, the Five Star Movement organizational model, in contrast to the other party models acknowledged by the academic field so far (Krouwel, 2005; Gerbaudo

⁶⁹ This aspect is also the reason of the Five Star Movement rule to publish the FSM representatives’ financial records and returning a consistent part of the 5SM salary.

⁷⁰ The Five Star Movement members of parliament had to return a consistent part of their salary. This money was deposited in a fund managed by the Ministry of Economy and were aimed to support businesses in difficulty.

⁷¹ For Rousseau delegation stood for literally “bring the people’s voice”. Therefore, for Rousseau a delegate had only to bring citizens’ opinions within the institution without interfering with his/her own opinion.

2020), was conceived according to a strong horizontal democracy (Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2014) enabled by the use of Internet and digital platforms.

Especially at the beginning of the 5SM political experience Beppe Grillo and Gianroberto Casaleggio were strongly convinced of the importance of the Internet as a new way of making politics: (Internet is) “the tool we have for creating true democracy – a new form of democracy that has been called ‘direct democracy’. People can now keep themselves informed, at all times and from different sources, about the issues that concern them: energy, water, health care and the government; and they can express their opinions without going through the filters of the party mandarins and newspaper editors. We are moving away from giving the politician *carte blanche* and towards the participation of the citizen” (Grillo in Vignati 2015, 18). The strong conviction on the potentiality of the use of Internet to mobilize people and improve democracy was reflected in the whole structure of the Five Star Movement since the beginning. From an organizational point of view, especially in the first attempts to enter within the political institutions, this Movement was characterized by strong local activism all over Italy enabled by the use of Internet. Often inspired by Beppe Grillo’s speeches, posts, live shows (Vignati, 2015) but also public protest events such as the “V days” in 2007 and 2008 (V from the swear word “Vaffanculo” Fuck off” Days Tronconi 2015, 21), people were invited to meet and discuss first digitally and then physically. In this sense, the use of the digital platform called “meetup.com” played a crucial role providing solid ground at the local level for the “civic lists of 2007 which were the first real attempts of the (not yet born) Five Star Movement⁷² to enter within the institutions⁷³. In particular, Casaleggio⁷⁴ and his company (Casaleggio and Associati) have always played an important role in giving IT support for the Movement, creating also a specific

⁷² Still not officially created at this point in time.

⁷³ Another important attempt took place in 2006 with the experience of “citizens primaries” (Napoletano, 2017)

⁷⁴ Gianroberto Casaleggio died in 2016 and since then his son Davide Casaleggio took his place at the head of the company.

digital platform for it in 2016 called “Rousseau”. *Rousseau* was thought as a tool to enable direct and “web democracy” (Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2016) within and outside the movement. First, it enabled the Five Star Movement members to present themselves as candidates, better, “portavoce” (literally “who bring the voice”⁷⁵ spokesperson) and to vote their own candidates for different institutional levels. Second, it was conceived as a tool to stimulate common discussion among the members of the movement, suppressing any institutional obstacle between voters and elected. In this sense, one of the main aims of *Rousseau* was to provide the Five Star members the chance to propose laws⁷⁶ or initiatives or to express their opinions on their delegates’ work⁷⁷. Theoretically, from this point of view it might be fair to assume that *Rousseau* was thought of, on the one hand as a tool of control of the elected and, on the other, as a way to steer the Five Star Movement delegates’ (representatives’) decisions. Finally, *Rousseau* also provided its followers of an E-learning section where they could learn more about politics and institutions but also of a section where the members could share different kind of proposals that might be useful at municipal and regional level (Napoletano, 2017, 28).

In order to have an exhaustive overview of the 5SM organizational profile before its government experience it is important to look also at the internal regulation that this populist actor embraced up to 2018. First as imperative rule, since 2007, the “Blog of Beppe Grillo” asked those who wanted to sign up for an institutional role “to not have received criminal convictions, even if not definitive, nor have any criminal proceedings pending at the time of his candidacy” (Grillo 2007). Over time, these prerequisites will become a leitmotif of the Five Star Movement’s further regulations. In 2009, year of the official

⁷⁵ From now on we are going to use the term delegate and representative as synonymous for the Five Star Movement representatives.

⁷⁶ In *Rousseau* this function was called “Lex subscribed” (“lex iscritti”) (Napoletano, 2017, p. 27).

⁷⁷ More specifically, in *Rousseau* these functions were called “National lex” (*lex nazionale*), “Regional lex”, “Europa lex” (Napoletano, 2017, 27)

creation of the Five Star Movement, the first official rules of the Movement were also written through a short document called *Non-Statuto* ,“No New Statute” (Movimento 5 Stelle, 2009b). At the beginning of this document, it was clearly stated “The Five Star Movement is not an association (“NonAssociazione”) The aim is not to form a political party (neither does it want to become a political party in the future) this movement promotes a democratic exchange of opinions without representative mediation and it recognizes the role of government to the network users (Movimento 5 Stelle, 2009b)⁷⁸.

The real first electoral breakthrough came with the entrance of the Five Star Movement into the Italian parliament in 2013 (Tronconi 2015, Napolitano 2017). At that point the Five Star Movement was the third main political actor within the Italian scenario (Tronconi, 2015). From 2013 to 2017 the Five Star Movement maintained its fluid organizational structure, mainly based on the use of digital platforms and local activism. However, over time, the Movement has introduced some new rules and internal committees. In 2016 the *Non-Statuto* was updated together with the introduction of a Regolamento (Regulation). Among the most important changes, these new documents defined roughly the role of the leader (a figure previously never officially mentioned), defined standards to become Five Star Movement delegates and set the conditions for the online voting⁷⁹. Moreover, these documents also regulated cases of misbehaviour and banishment introducing new committees.

In addition to the documents a sort of “moral code” for the Five Star Movement members and delegates called “Codice Etico” (Ethical Code) was also released. Among the other rules, the most relevant stressed that the Five Star Movement delegates “could remain in office for two elective terms maximum, cannot propose their candidacy if they have criminal proceedings pending or if it starts during their mandate and they have to ensure full financial

⁷⁸ This first version will be later updated.

⁷⁹ “At that time was mainly decided by the leader or when 20% of the Five Star members require it” (Napolitano, 2017, 29)

transparency⁸⁰” (Codice Etico, 2016). Last but not least, since the Non Statuto of 2009, the Five Star Movement “does not apply any membership payment, but donation can be made on a voluntary basis” (Non Statuto, 2009, 4). In the same vein, the Five Star Movement clearly stated that it was against public funding for political parties.

Another important change happened in December 2017 when, right before the beginning of the electoral campaign for the parliamentary election of 2018, the Five Star Movement voted for a New Statuto which officially introduced and defined the role of the “political leader” and his/her election. In December 2017, after an internal online election, Luigi Di Maio was elected as first official political leader of the Five Star Movement. Up to that point this role remained quite ambiguous within the 5SM. In the previous years, sometimes Beppe Grillo unofficially defined himself as “political leader”, however this was never the official position that Grillo or the Movement clearly stated. Grillo, was rather defined as “guarantor”, namely a figure that represents and monitors the values of the movement (Movimento 5 Stelle, Nuovo Statuto, December 2017, Art. 8) and that has the last word on the movement’s political life and on its representatives. Moreover, the role of guarantor became elective, although as guarantor Grillo will remain in office indefinitely.

In addition to these important changes, new organs were introduced. Indeed, according the New Statute of December 2017, the Movement included an “Assemblea degli iscritti” (Assembly of Members), namely “all members with valid registration at the time of the call” was, plus a “Comitato direttivo” (The directive committee), the “Garante” (the Guarantor), the “Comitato di Garanzia” (the Guarantee Committee), the “Collegio dei Probiviri” (Probiviri Collegium) and il Tesoriere (the Treasury). In particular the “Comitato direttivo” (5 members, Art.7) “owns the necessary powers of ordinary administration” whereas the “Comitato di Garanzia” “supervises the correct application of the Statute rules” (3 members, Art. 9) and, finally, the “Tesoriere” “is responsible

⁸⁰ And to return part of their income.

for the administrative management and financial policy of the Five Star Movement” (Art.12) (Nuovo Statuto, December 2017).

The description of the Five Star Movement’s democratic formula and its related fluid organizational nature, before its first government experiences started in 2018, ends here. This overview was necessary in order to introduce the unconventional way this populist party conducted its political activities and later to understand to what extent the 5SM might have toned down its populist and unconventional character embracing a more institutionalized model after its first two government coalitions. First, it is necessary to illustrate on what theoretical basis this chapter is going to structure its analysis, and this will be done in the next section.

6.2 Theories

According to Schattschneider, “political parties created democracy and modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of the political parties” (Schattschneider, 1942, 1). In the same vein, Müller and Strøm claimed that “democracy may be conceived as a process by which voters delegate policy-making authority to a set of representatives, and political parties are the main organizational vehicle by which such delegation takes place” (Müller and Strøm, 1999, 1). Besides their organizational role, political parties make pluralism possible because “they unify and differentiate citizens according to political projects” (Urbinati, 2019, 1073). However, in the last decades, the degree of mistrust towards political parties has grown exponentially (Dalton *et al.*, 2011). The old-fashioned political parties have been accused by voters of being too self-interested, corrupt and detached from the interests of real citizens (Dalton and Weldon, 2005). This has led populist parties and movements which presented themselves as “guardians” of people’s authentic interests to grow considerably as a reaction to the mistrust towards mainstream politics and to join government coalitions with mainstream parties. However, different studies argued that once in power populist parties might be subject to a process of moderation and “mainstreaming” which brings these anti-establishment actors to tone down their protesting character and become similar to mainstream political parties

(Akkerman, 2016). In particular this process, that brings populist actors to “moderate policy positions on core issues, expand the issue agenda and show more respect for the rules of the game or try to overcome the extremist reputation” (Akkerman, 2016, 14), might occur for two main reasons. On the one hand populist parties might moderate their populist attitude strategically in order to survive within the higher political institutions. On the other hand, populist actors in power might be forced to get rid of their protest character as a consequence of their “experience in office” (Chapter III).

In particular, according to the literature, “organizational effectivity” plays a crucial role within the process of populist parties’ normalization (Harmel and Janda, 1994; Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015; Akkerman *et al.*, 2016). Generally speaking, intra party politics and in particular “party cohesiveness” plays a crucial role in the influence that a party exert within a coalition government (Giannetti and Benoit, 2009). In the same vein, populist actors that do not rely on an effective organizational structure and present inconsistencies in their policy preferences have less chance to, first, be influential towards their government coalition partners and, second, to retain their protest character once they entered government. In this sense, as Albertazzi and McDonnell have shown also previous “office experience” plays a major role for populist parties in government coalition. As these researchers put it: “going to the government for the first time for a (populist) party requires (a) the leadership finding sufficiently competent people to take up ministerial roles and (b) the party in office learning quickly how to communicate and justify its actions to the party on the ground – especially when faced with the inevitable compromises of coalition government” (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2015, 8).

In particular, speaking about “organizational effectiveness”, those movements that have been built according to a strong ideal of horizontal internal democracy deserve a special attention. According to Katz “a party cannot be managed by its voters but it does need a selected group of people that manage it” (Katz, 2006, 36; Napolitano 2017, 38). This means that in order to guarantee the correct functioning of the party it is necessary to have a structure where specific roles hold major decision-making power. In this sense also

Schattschneider pointed out that direct democracy is not feasible within a political party, because “internal democracy is incompatible with external cohesion” (Katz, 2006, 36; Napolitano 2017, 38), namely internal horizontal democracy is not compatible with organizational effectiveness.

Facing this dilemma, Robert Michels would argue that even democratic organization are destined to be characterized by a hierarchical structure eventually, especially when these are characterized by the presence of a charismatic leader (Michels 1968). In particular, this necessary change would happen as a direct consequence of the growth of the democratic organization itself, which, at that point would not be able to guarantee fair condition for a direct participation and deliberation among its members (Cohen 1997, 75; Napolitano 2017). In a nutshell, according to Michels and its “iron law oligarchy” theory, the more a democratic organization (with an influential leader) grows the sooner it will lose its horizontal democracy in favor of a hierarchical structure (Napolitano, 2017).

The present chapter’s aim is to contribute to the ongoing debate on to what extent the Five Star Movement has remained loyal to its original attitude this study conducted a qualitative analysis on official documents, statements and semi-structured interviews with 5SM representatives in order to clarify if the Five Star Movement has assimilated itself to the other political parties toning down its populist discourse or not. In particular this research took into consideration the period 2017 – 2021 and focuses on the key concepts singled out by Mudde’s definition of populism (Chapter II), namely “people centrism” (specifying who are the ‘pure people’), “anti-elitism” (specifying who are the ‘corrupt elite’) plus the institutional dimension introduced by this study (Chapter III) in order to investigate if the Five Star Movement discourse is still populist. Moreover, in order to analyse if the Five Star Movement has radically changed, assimilating itself to the other political parties, this research investigates if the Five Star Movement is still loyal to its democratic formula (Napolitano, 2017), its organizational effectiveness and if it is still characterized by an internal horizontal democracy or if, as Michels theorized, considering the electoral

success of 2018 and related government experiences, it has quit its horizontal internal democracy in order to adopt a hierarchical structure.

Following these theoretical reflections, in the next section this analysis will illustrate its methodology which is mainly based on qualitative analysis and semi-structured interviews with 5SM representatives.

6.3 *Methods and Data*

As a second research question this project wanted to investigate if populist parties have been able to retain their populist character removed from the identity of “mainstream politics” or have been assimilated by mainstream parties. In particular, this research focuses on a case study, the Five Star Movement and its government coalition experiences. Taking into consideration the *iron law of oligarchy* of Michels we might assume that the Five Star Movement has changed over time, loosing its populist tone and becoming an institutionalized political party characterized by a hierarchical structure. However, we could not assume this once per all. The only way to find fairly results was to dig within the world of the Five Star Movement and look for an “untold story” (Gerring, 2006). This is the reason way this research made use of a deep qualitative analysis through the tool of semi-structured interviews (Bray 2008, 298) with Five Star Movement representatives at local, regional and national level.

In particular, semi-structured interviews are, on one hand a fruitful tool in order to collect opinions on specific topics proposed by the researcher, and on the other hand, an effective way for the interviewees to bring new insights to the analysis (Leech, 2002). Moreover, the semi structured interviews provided a research tool that can be replicate for further research. This was a very important principle for this project, taking into consideration that in 2017 this researcher collected 20 interviews with Five Star Movement representatives at regional and local level for the master thesis project⁸¹ (Napoletano 2017). It is important to stress that this research chose to interview representatives at every institutional level because the Five Star Movement is a movement characterized by grassroots

⁸¹ Master thesis at Radboud University.

origins which, especially at the beginning of its political rise, was strongly supported by local activism and electoral support at local level (Tronconi, 2015). This means that in order to investigate if it has changed effectively since it entered the government every institutional level has to be taken into consideration in order to obtain a fair overview.

The questionnaire⁸² proposed by this project reflects the main points of the Five Star Movement “democratic formula” previously depicted and it was the same used in 2017 (Napoletano, 2017). First, in order to provide the general perception that the Five Star Movement representatives had of democracy and the role of citizens in it we asked questions on “satisfaction with democracy in the country and the role of citizens in democracy” (we call this the “democracy dimension”). Then, in order to investigate the opinions of the Five Star Movement representatives on the key principles and tools introduced by the Movement in order to revolutionize politics and implement direct democracy, we asked opinions mainly on i) the difference between the Five Star Movement and the other political parties, ii) the motto “one counts one”, and iii) the use of Internet and the digital platform “Rousseau” (we call this the “Five Star democratic formula”). Moreover, in order to shed the light on the Five Star Movement’s call for direct democracy in political representation we investigated the concept of political representation within the Five Star Movement system. In this sense we asked questions on political representation and political betrayal for the Five Star Movement representatives in addition to an opinion on the overall Five Star Movement representatives’ performance (we call this “Five Star Movement’s representation” dimension). Finally, the questionnaire from 2017 also included questions on the European Institutions⁸³ and the concept of “populism”. These questions were inspired by the fact that, first, the Five Star Movement often showed signs of Euroscepticism especially at the onset of its

⁸² See Appendix D.

⁸³ According to the literature, and also our previous research (Napoletano 2017) the European Institution belongs to the group of the corrupt elites for the Five Star Movement (Tronconi, 2015).

political experience (Tronconi, 2015) and, second, in 2017 the Five Star Movement was already labeled as a populist actor within the European scenario (Manucci and Amsler, 2017; Graziano, 2018).

It is important to say that the questionnaire from 2017 has been chosen for the present project for two main reasons. First, the broad but powerful nature of those questions focused on democracy, political representation and the Internet provide useful and fair material to investigate to what extent the Five Star Movement has been able to remain different or has assimilated itself to mainstream parties, especially taking into consideration that, since 2017, the Five Star Movement has been through two coalition governments and is now experiencing its third government coalition. Second, in 2017 it was possible to collect 20 interviews with representatives and ex-representatives of the Five Star Movement at both the regional and local level. Comparing the answers of the past interviews with the news interviews would definitely provide a measure to calibrate to what extent the Five Star Movement has changed since 2017⁸⁴.

However, a few new questions were added to the previous questionnaire. First, taking into consideration the fact that the Five Star Movement has often claimed to want to implement direct democracy within the institutions, this analysis proposed to its interviewees to express their preference on some of the main constitutional reforms proposed by the Five Star Movement in recent years. The importance of this question is twofold: on one hand, it would provide useful information for the analysis of the institutional dimension present in the revised inclusionary-exclusionary dimension (Chapter II), on the other hand, it would help to understand if the Five Star Movement represents a pure populist actor or not (Chapter III).

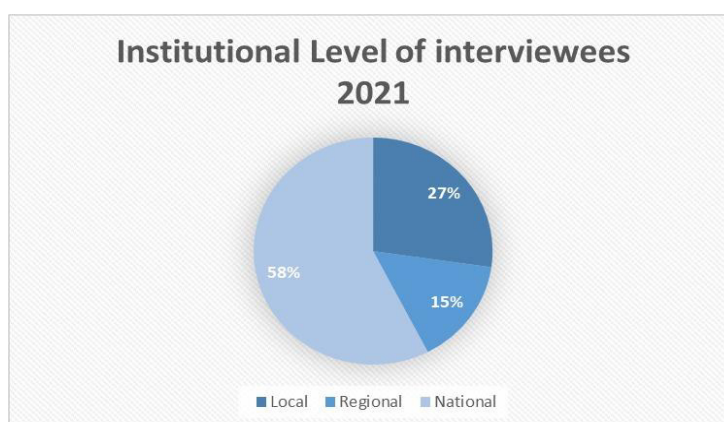
Second, taking into consideration the relevant role played by Giuseppe Conte within the Five Star Movement in recent years, first as prime minister and recently as official leader of the Movement, this research believed that it was

⁸⁴ The sampling includes some of the same interviewee from 2017, or at least those that accepted to be interviewed again.

important to ask an opinion on the figure of Conte in order to investigate the internal balance of power further.

For this new research 33 new semi-structured interviews were collected. This new sample included some interviewees from the previous research⁸⁵ (Napoletano, 2017) plus a considerable new number of interviewees. In particular, compared to 2017 this research was able to reach also representatives at national level besides the regional and local level. It is important to stress that our sample includes former representatives who are still members of the movement, former representatives who left the movement voluntarily or who were expelled⁸⁶ and current representatives of the movement⁸⁷. Two interviewees included in this sample were not representative of the Five Star Movement but they are (or were) rather part of the technical staff of the Five Star Movement.

Table 6.1



Taking into consideration the number of interviews collected this research needed to choose carefully how to organize them. Notwithstanding the important

⁸⁵ Some of the previous interviewees from 2017 accepted to be interviewed again whereas others did not.

⁸⁶ From now on we will refer to these with the label of “ex members”.

⁸⁷ For reasons of simplicity, we will label the Five Star Movement “portavoce” with the label “representatives” sometimes, but we do have the Five Star Movement distinction very clearly in mind.

methodological example provided by studies on party organization such as the one theorized by Katz and Mair (1994) which divides party branches into “party in public office” (members of the government and parliament), “party on the ground” (activists) and “party in the central office” (party leadership,) this study decided to divide its interviewees differently (Katz and Mair 1994, 594). This study could not rely on Katz and Mair model because some of the categories present in it are missing in the present research⁸⁸ For reasons of simplicity the present research will divide the interviews according to the institutional level of the Five Star Movement representative interviewed, so they are divided according to the local (representatives at municipal level), regional (representatives at the regional level) and national levels (member of the parliament or the government and staff)⁸⁹. This means that the data will be displayed according to the role that the interviewees performed when they were interviewed or that they used to perform when they were still in the Movement. In other words, the interviewees will be divided according to institutional territorial aggregation. This choice will give the opportunity to find out () if different trends take place at different institutional levels. This analysis is truly convinced that this “institutional” comparison will provide important insights in finding out not only if the Five Star Movement has changed at different levels but also in explaining why such change might have happened.

In the final section these results will be compared to the results of 2017. This means that also the data will be divided Some interviewees directly answered to the invitation sent through different channels such as email but also social media platforms such as Facebook. Often new interviewees were added through the use of “snowball sampling” (Corbetta, 2003), namely some interviewees asked to their colleagues (also at different level) if they were available for this interview. When this research was introduced by a colleague the Five Star Movement

⁸⁸ In particular, “party on the ground” in terms of activists and “party in central office” in terms of central leadership.

⁸⁹ The two interviewees that were not representatives will be included in the national group.

representative showed to be more open to participate to this research. To be noted that this method could also lead to a very biased sample (made out of very similar interviewees) and for this reason this project tried to include more not related representatives.

The interviews were collected between May 2021 and August 2021. Due to the current pandemic crisis, they were all conducted on the phone or on digital platforms such as Zoom. For reasons of time two interviewees preferred the written form. Before every interview it was asked if the interviewees preferred anonymity and in case of positive answer how they wanted to be defined within the research. Moreover, to every interviewee it was asked the authorization to quote some of their sentences if they were particularly relevant for the analysis. These authorizations were recorded at exception of two cases where they were written. Every interview was recorded and notes were taken⁹⁰.

Once the collection of interviewees was done, it was necessary to relisten all the interviews (on average an interview lasted 45 minutes) and transcribe the answers. An automated transcription software called “Sonix” was also used in order to support (and not replace) the transcription task. At that point, this research could compare the answers gathering them according the dimensions present in democratic formula previously depicted.

The analysis that this research provides is the result of an in-depth comparison among the local, regional and national group of Five Star Movement representatives. In particular, this research looked for similarities but also differences among our interviewees. Moreover, much focus was on the opinions on the internal structure and democracy status within the Five Star Movement. In addition to this, these results were compared with the main results of the interviews collected in 2017.

Finally, in order to aid the comparison between the interviews of 2017 and those collected in 2021, this study performed Factor Analysis on these data. As Fabrigar and Wegener put it “factor analysis is used to determine the number of distinct constructs assessed by a set of measures” (Fabrigar and Wegner, 2012,

⁹⁰ Every interviewee gave his or her consensus first.

3). In other words, this method is aimed at singling out “underlying factors” that explain “variability among a certain number of observations” (Giannetti *et al.* 2016, 29). In the present research the observations correspond to the positions that the interviewees displayed on specific topics during their interviews. Then, this research selected topics or better variables that correspond to the main dimensions present in the updated version of the inclusionary-exclusionary framework (material, political, symbolic and institutional, Chapter II) plus other three topics related to the 5SM original democratic formula: environmentalism in relation to the use of economic resources to implement sustainability, diversity of 5SM from the old politics and Beppe Grillo’s leadership). In total this research formulated 9 variables which can be framed as the opinions that these interviewees displayed on specific topics: 1) Opinion of the “Reddito di cittadinanza”(minimum salary); 2) Opinion on the use of economic resources to implement sustainability; 3) Opinion on an “inclusionary” immigration policy; 4) Opinion on an implementation of civil rights (e.g. Gender equality and LGTB rights); 5) Opinion on the current European institutions; 6) Opinion on the need to implement direct democracy; 7) Opinion on Beppe Grillo; 8) Opinion on the media as part of the “elite”; 9) Opinion on the Five Star Movement as different from the old politics. The interviewees’ opinions on these topics were scored by this analysis as -1 (unfavorable), 0 (neither favorable nor unfavorable) and 1 (favorable). As a result, the Factor Analysis will illustrate first what the main trends were in terms of positions of the interviewees in both 2017 and 2021 on the topics selected by this research and second, it will also show how these trends were correlated according to underlying factors.

Starting from the next section this analysis will begin to present the main findings of its interviews with 5SM representatives. More specifically, the analysis will start from the interviews collected at the local level, then the regional group will be analyzed and finally the national group. It should be noted that every group of interviews will be presented first according to the level of the institutional role performed by the interviewees (municipal representative, regional representative and national namely member of the parliament or of the government) and second according to the position of the question present in the

questionnaire. The questionnaire used by this research can be divided into four main dimensions: Democracy (questions on the status of democracy and role of citizens), 5SM's democratic formula (questions on the 5SM's principles and organizational peculiarities), representation (questions on political representation) and finally Europe, Populism and Leadership (questions on the European Institutions, the meaning of populism and the 5SM leadership).

6.4. *The Five Star Movement Local Group 2021: Questions on Democracy*

In this section it will be presented an analysis of the Five Star Movement representatives⁹¹ belonging to the local, namely municipal level. First, what perception these interviewees had of democracy will be analyzed. Overall, the municipal representatives pointed out that there is democracy in Italy but that there are also different democratic fallacies. For example, Stefano Guagnetti⁹² stated “technically democracy works but there is a complete disconnection between citizens and politics” whereas for Sara Montrasio⁹³ “often citizens do not know their own rights or to what extent they can intervene in democratic mechanisms”. Speaking about democratic mechanisms some interviewees directly mention the importance of the implementation of direct democracy. Marco Piazza⁹⁴ pointed out that “maybe we cannot shift towards a completely different model but we could give an edge (...) and recover people's trust in the political system”. The important role of the Five Star Movement in trying to implement direct democracy in Italy has been often mentioned and commented on by some interviewees who also stressed how this call, has led, especially at the municipal level, to an implementation of popular initiatives. “Also at the

⁹¹ From now the word “portavoce” will be used as synonymous of representatives. However, it is important to keep in mind that according to the movement someone who represents the Five Star Movement members in the institution is a “portavoce”.

⁹² Municipal portavoce from Varedo (MB).

⁹³ Municipal portavoce from Desio (MB)

⁹⁴ Municipal portavoce of Bologna (BO)

national level”, Alessandra Giannotti⁹⁵ emphasized “the Five Star Movement tried to implement direct democracy through the designation of the Minister Riccardo Fraccaro” (Alessandra Gianotti). “However”, she added, this first important initiative “has been dismissed during Conte II and what we can see now (especially now with a parliament that includes all the main political forces and no longer has a real opposition) is a further centralization of powers” (Alessandra Giannotti).

Turning to the question on the role of citizens within democracy all our interviewees agreed on the precious role that “informed” citizens play within democracy and that should be implemented even more through the active participation of citizens. In this vein, Sara Montrasio⁹⁶ made a distinction between the role that citizens have now (in representative democracy) and what role the Five Star Movement would like to give to citizens: “for the Five Star Movement the idea is to involve citizens actively, while in the representative democracy a person is chosen in order to choose for us... the role we would like with direct democracy is a more active role” (Sara Montrasio).

Interestingly, more than one of these interviewees emphasized how effective citizens’ participation is feasible at the municipal level more than at other higher institutional levels through different initiatives such as the “citizens’ assembly”: (citizens might) “try to participate in political life actively; but this is perhaps possible at the municipal level; at a regional or national level it is much more complex (Marco Fossati).

6.4.1. *The Five Star Movement Local Group 2021: Questions on the “5SM Democratic Formula”*

In this section we will address the Five Star Movement Democratic formula dimensions, namely those questions that are related to specific features, principles and tools of the Five Star Movement that mark a difference with the other political parties. From a general point of view every interviewee pointed

⁹⁵ Municipal portavoce Milano (MI)

⁹⁶ “Facilitatore regionale” (regional facilitator) Lombardy.

out that, differently from the other political parties, the Five Star Movement enabled citizens to participate actively and directly in politics without being a “filter” between citizens and politics (Stefano Guagnetti). In this sense different interviewees stressed the difference between representative and direct democracy, and the fact that the Five Star Movement was founded on the latter: “At the beginning the fundamental principle of the Five Star Movement was the model of direct democracy, also through the use of Internet which made active participation possible”. As other main differences, many interviewees pointed out the internal candidacy rules of the Movement (such as the clean criminal record for candidates and the limit of two electoral terms) which were based on the simple principle that political representation should be based on honesty and not pursued with the aim of moving up. However, notwithstanding these original differences, it looks like difficulties came up over time, especially after the Five Star Movement entered in the government: “when we had the opportunity to govern not only in Rome but also in the municipalities, we always came up hard against reality...when you go to make electoral promises, everything is always very nice, but once you sit around a table, not everything is always possible” (Stefano Guagnetti). In addition to this “practical” concern, some interviewees mentioned other things that, over time, started to change within the movement, making it less different from the other parties. For example concerning the possible abolishment of the limit of the two electoral terms, Alessandra Giannotti commented: “the concept (of the limit of two electoral terms) was that they were “citizens on loan to institutions”...but for a regional or a parliamentary representative the institutional activity becomes a job, and then, naturally (without the limit of two electoral terms) the goal would become to get elected again and get the consensus whatever it takes”(Alessandra Giannotti). In addition to this she also pointed out other original differences that are vanishing over time: “we used Internet to avoid a top-down management of the Movement and in the last years we had a sort of hybrid management...also now the idea of

removing “Rousseau”⁹⁷ would demolish the chance to elect candidates from below...so in this sense we are going towards a management similar to the other political parties, a centralized structure” (Alessandra Giannotti). On a similar note, Marco Piazza pointed out that some organizational changes seem to be necessary due to the considerable amount of Five Star Movement representatives: “now, given the large size of the party, it seems that closer coordination will be needed.”⁹⁸ (Marco Piazza).

Turning to the question in “what order would you put the concepts transparency, deliberation and participation” the majority preferred the order “transparency, participation, deliberation”. Transparency is needed in the first place because people have to be aware of facts even before they participate in a discussion. Moreover, transparency is also connected to the idea that every political process has to be the most transparent possible. At this point, informed citizens can participate “without constraints and filters” to the collective debate, and only at that point is an aware deliberation is possible.

Concerning the Five Star Movement’s motto “one counts for one” (“uno vale uno”), all the interviewees agreed on the idea that one counts for one means that every person has the right to participate and vote and every vote has the same weight, one. However, “one counts for one” does not mean that “one is as good as the other” (“uno vale l’altro”) for every institutional position. Moreover, several interviewees stressed that the motto “one counts for one” created misunderstandings within the movement.

Concerning the use of the Internet in order to improve democracy, some key topics were clearly identifiable. First, Internet is a precious tool to stay informed and make “long distance politics” possible, second it increases the potential for political participation exponentially. In this vein, Marco Piazza claimed that the “Internet could improve existing democratic institutions but also created new

⁹⁷ For internal contrast and different points of view since June 2021 the digital platform *Rousseau* is no longer the official platform of the Five Star Movement.

⁹⁸ To be noted that some of these interviews were collected during the internal crisis between Beppe Grillo and Giuseppe Conte in June 2021.

democratic institutions and *Rousseau* was doing it for the first time; this platform was aimed to overcome (institutional) mediation” (Marco Piazza). Speaking about the power of the Internet, Alessandra Giannotti emphasized that the whole Five Star Movement structure was based on the potential of the Web as Gianroberto Casaleggio taught: “Creating a political force based on the use of Internet, to propose its ideas to society gives a structure itself to that political force, a structure that is different from the classical model (of a political party)” (Alessandra Gianotti). Notwithstanding these enthusiastic positions, at least two interviewees specified that the Internet should not be considered as the exclusive pathway to enhance political participation, rather it should be used as a parallel tool with face to face discussion.

Speaking about the *Rousseau* platform in detail, all the interviewees acknowledged the important role that this platform has played within the Movement (“it was the basis of our Statute”) especially in order to enable direct democracy. In addition to this general aim, some interviewees emphasized also some specific functions of *Rousseau* that enhanced its value especially at the municipal level, in particular the e-learning and sharing functions. First *Rousseau* provided online courses on different topics related to politics and institutions which apparently were particularly useful for the municipal level. Second *Rousseau* gave the possibility to share documents such as municipal projects and initiatives that could be used also in other cities (Pier Marco Fossati). However, our interviews also stressed different problems related to the *Rousseau* platform. In the first place some technical problems (e.g. server crash) that sometimes came up especially during massive online voting. Second, more than one interviewee expressed some doubts on *Rousseau* in terms of its completeness as a tool for democratic participation. Others stressed some conceptual doubts, in particular, a few interviewees pointed out that the platform was unfairly blamed for submitting biased questions: “some questions were biased somehow, they were already suggesting the answer or, in any case, allowed little space for discussion” (anonymous spokesperson). Moreover, at least two of our interviewees pointed out that, notwithstanding the many useful functions of *Rousseau*, what was missing was a section entirely aimed to open

discussion (besides the chat space): “when we had the meet-ups, there was this platform (meetup.com) where we discussed and proposed topics and then we met face to face. On the *Rousseau* platform, this virtual space for discussion, present in the previous meet-up platform, was missing”.

At this point in our questionnaire the section related to the “Five Star Movement democratic formula” ends. In the following section we will approach the questions related to political representation (“Five Star Movement’s representation dimension”).

6.4.2 *The Five Star Movement’s Local Group 2021: Questions on Representation*

In the first place, in order to delve into the Five Star Movement perspective on political representation it was asked “What does it mean to represent people and what should the role of a Five Star Movement representative entail then?”.

Overall, these interviews pointed out “listening to the citizens’ needs”, “maintain a solid relationship with citizens” and “bring the citizens voice within the institutions” as main goals for a Five Star Movement “portavoce”: “Representing means never saying me but us” (anonymous municipal *portavoce*). On the same note some interviewees also emphasized the original label that the Five Star Movement chose for its representative, “*portavoce*”. Thus, ideally, citizens’ initiatives had to be collected, then brought to the Five Star Movement local group that elaborated them and then the “portavoce” had to bring them into the institution. “However,” Montrasio added, “this process clashed with reality, which is made of people that have many other commitments, maybe no time or had difficulties in facing bureaucracy, so on certain topics it was easier to comply to the process I described, at other times no” (Sara Montrasio).

Together with bringing the citizens’ initiatives inside the institutions, also “respecting the program” was mentioned a few times as a main goal for Five Star representatives. In this sense Alessandra Giannotti pointed out “In every choice made within the institutions it was important to respect some limits set by the Movement for example on topics such as the Environment” (Alessandra

Gianotti). However, sometimes it appeared particularly difficult to comply with this principle: “There are also ethical issues on which it is more difficult to put aside one's opinion, and this is the reason why at the beginning of the Five Star Movement, together with the refusal of the labels “right” and “left”, we took the choice not to make definitive choices on ethical and ideological matters but rather to call for a general discussion time after time” (Alessandra Giannotti). Afterwards we also asked to *portavoce* Giannotti if the Five Star Movement could be labelled as a left or right wing political actor in the beginning of its political experience: “There is no clear cut answer” (Alessandra Gianotti).

At this point in our interviews, we asked a general comment on the other five Star Movement representatives from the top to the bottom. In general, our interviewees pointed out that in some cases the Five Star “*portavoce*” fulfilled their role very well, whereas in some other cases they “unplugged themselves” from the citizens. It was also clearly pointed out by different interviewees out that this might happen more at the higher institutional level: “It is very difficult to lose the connection with citizens at the local level, because people know you closely and they can come directly to speak to you and complain” (Marco Piazza). Turning to higher level of representation within the Five Star Movement, another interviewee clearly stated that the “Five Star parliament members seem to have fulfilled their role more during the first 5 years in the parliament, then it seems that they got distracted...”.

Some also openly spoke of “adulteration” of the Five Star Movement especially in reference to higher institutional Five Star Movement representatives. As the main reasons for this distortion within the Movement there is the abolishment of the principle “no alliance” with other political parties, the ongoing discussion on the limit of the two electoral terms and the crisis which occurred with the platform *Rousseau* between April and June 2021⁹⁹. In addition to this, some interviewees emphasized that also on some specific topics dear to the Movement such as the environment (for example on public water) there were too many tradeoffs within the higher political institutions: “Our representatives

⁹⁹ Some of these interviews were collected in the middle of that period.

agreed to share government roles but gave up a lot on what were the original battles, to the point that now we have the proposal of a political leader who has never joined our party but who has always stated to have preferences for another one... this is not the evolution of the same reality, it is a new reality” (Alessandra Gianotti).

Concerning what is the main challenge for Five Star Movement representatives, roughly it might be argued that the main answer is to “continue to work for citizens” although this opinion has been used with different nuances. Interestingly, one of our interviewees stated how, especially now, due to the different internal conflicts within the movement, it is important to continue to work for citizens no matter what (Fossati).

Turning to the question of betrayal as Five Star representatives, the answers share a common ground which is those who “do not respect the electoral program” and “putting one’s personal political opinion first”. Speaking about betrayal within the movement, several interviewees also made a reference to those ex-members of the Five Star Movement that left the Movement and joined other parties: “It is possible to change your mind but then you have to resign” (Stefano Guagnetti). Someone else spoke about other types of betrayal that are difficult to detect: “There are also those who, while remaining inside, pursue their personal interest, perhaps with choices of greater visibility...but they are difficult to evaluate”.

As a “common element that characterizes the Five Star Movement’s members”, the main trend seems to indicate that especially at the outset of the Five Star Movement its members shared the “dream” of changing things for the better and honesty as the main common trait among the Movement’s members. However, some interviewees, with a certain degree of sadness, emphasized that this was the original “dream” but that, over time, things have started to change. For example, at the local level there has been a progressive “breaking up”, also because “resources” have been gradually focused at the national level. As a final important note, more than one interviewee made a distinction between the original and the current Five Star Movement. In particular one interviewee claimed that “the Movement has many souls...but in the past we were able to

speak all together and find a common point of view...but then “prime donne” (leading ladies) came up and they wanted to decide for the others...this started to happen around 2016-2017”.

The last question of the “Five Star Movement democratic formula” section asked the interviewees if they always followed what citizens propose. In the first place, these interviewees answered that they always listen to the citizens and maintain a relationship with them but not all the initiatives are automatically carried out within the institution. This is because, it is important to distinguish between fair and unfair initiatives and what seems to be more important, the initiatives have to be compatible with the Five Star Movement program.

The “Five Star Movement representation dimension” ends here. In the next section we will analyse the position of these interviewees on European Union, Populism and leadership.

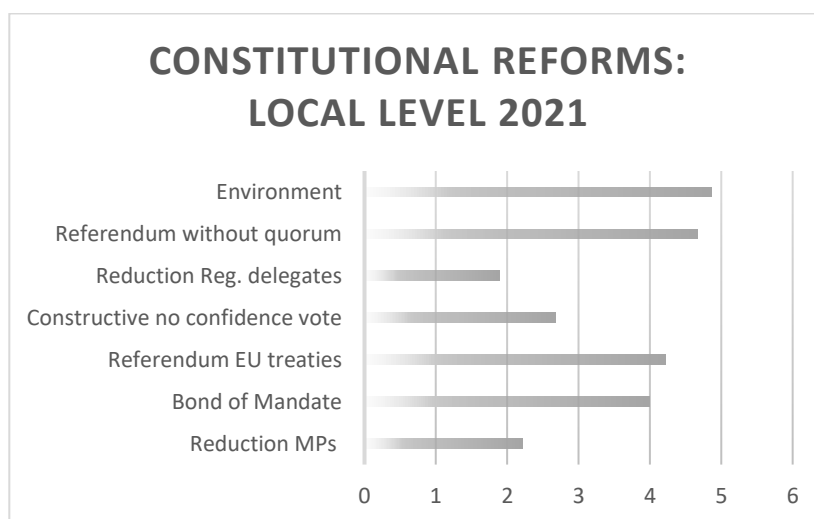
6.4.3 The Five Star Movement Local Group 2021: Questions on “Europe, Populism and Leadership”

In order to investigate if the Five Star Movement maintained its original Euroscepticism, we asked to our interviewees for an opinion on the European Institutions. In general, nobody expressed a full refusal of the European Union and nobody expressed themselves in favour of leaving the European Union or its currency. However, almost everyone expressed the conviction that the European Union needs some dramatic changes which involve being closer to the European citizens and not to the financial interests of the market. In particular, speaking about the positive aspects of the European Union more than one interviewee spoke positively about the role that this has played during the Pandemic acknowledging that the European Union made a change towards a more supportive attitude (Marco Piazza). However, turning to the negative aspects, the European Union is sometimes depicted as an “ungenerous stepmother” (the reference is to Greece) that wants to influence the internal policies of its members too much. Moreover, Europe seems to be steered by a few stronger countries, such as Germany and France.

At this point, we asked our interviewees what did they thought when, in the Europe the Five Star Movement was labelled as populist and we asked what was populism for them. The answers show that there is a clear common attitude towards the word populism. First, populism can be framed in two ways, one positive and one negative. If with the term “populist” we mean those political parties and movements that are on the side of people and want to make their voice heard, then for these interviewees the Five Star Movement is proudly populist. Conversely, if the term populist is used in the negative way such as “what moves people’s minds negatively, to exploit them to their advantage” or such as “looking for facile solutions to people's real problems” or “talking to people's bellies” then the Five Star Movement is not populist. Interestingly as example of negative populism the Lega of Salvini (but also Brothers of Italy) were mentioned more than once.

Turning to the preference on the main constitutional reforms proposed by the Five Star Movement, it might be useful to display the average of these interviewees answers and comment them.

Table 6.2



Looking at these data it can be argued that the “Introduction of environmental protection among the principles of the constitution”, the “prepositive referendum without quorum” and the “referendum on the European treaties” gained the major consensus among these interviewees. Overall, on the one hand the referendum as a democratic tool is much appreciated in order to

provide citizens the right to express their opinions, whereas on the other hand the environment is strongly felt to be a priority for these interviewees. On the fourth place we find the “bond of mandate” (vincolo di mandato) which is felt by the majority as quite important (only two interviewees gave 0 labelling it as against the constitution) but also as a delicate matter that has to be discussed further. The reduction of the parliamentary members is not felt as a priority by the majority and or, in any case, it should be followed by a proper electoral reform. Two interviewees gave 0 to this reform and two clearly stated that “they had to cut the parliamentary benefits not the number of the parliamentary members”. “Constructive no confidence to the government” (“Sfiducia costruttiva al governo”) and “reduction of the regional delegates” are not felt as particularly important at the moment.

The last question concerned the role of Giuseppe Conte within the Movement. Generally speaking, Giuseppe Conte as past prime minister and the new leader ¹⁰⁰ of the Five Star Movement is welcomed by the majority of our interviewees. In particular it was emphasized how he succeeded in managing a very delicate moment during Conte I and Conte II, especially at the beginning of the pandemic. Stefano Guagnetti pointed out that even if it seems a contradiction Conte is exactly what the Movement was looking for: “expertise within politics”. For someone he represents the unique chance for the Movement to get back on the right path (Pier Marco Fossati). However, together with these positive opinions at least three interviewees expressed criticisms or in any case a doubtful position on the idea of Giuseppe Conte as leader of the Five Star Movement: “I have some doubts on Conte as Leader of the Five Star Movement because he never wanted to enroll him as an official member and he is now proposing changes to the Movement” (Alessandra Giannotti). Another interviewee expressed even more criticism: “Conte has relevant skills but he has forgotten who allowed him to become Giuseppe Conte¹⁰¹”. A very critical point of view

¹⁰⁰ It is important to note that when some of these interviews were collected Giuseppe Conte was not officially the new leader of the Five Star Movement yet.

¹⁰¹ The reference here was in part to Beppe Grillo.

came from the municipal *portavoce* of Naples, Matteo Brambilla who, speaking about the alliance between the Five Star Movement and the Democratic Party for the election of the mayor of Naples, pointed out the presence of heavy interference from “above” on what was the real will of the local Five Star Movement group for this election.

The analysis of the interviews with local representatives ends here. Next, we will analysis the regional level.

6.5. *The Five Star Movement Regional Group 2021: Questions on Democracy*

In this section we will present an analysis based on the interviews with Five Star Movement representatives at the regional level. Compared to the other groups of interviews (local and national) present in this research, the regional group includes only five interviewees three of which are ex-members of the Five Star Movement¹⁰². Notwithstanding this important numerical difference, this research is convinced that it might be interesting to provide insights that might emerge even from such a small number of interviews. More specifically, in this first section we will discuss of the perception that the Five Star Movement regional “portavoce” (representatives) have of democracy and the role of citizens within democracy.

Generally speaking, the perception that these interviewees have of the degree of democracy in Italy is not very positive. Indeed, almost every interviewee expressed serious concern on the present state of democracy in Italy and two main reasons were indicated. First, it was pointed out that “our democracy is not really representative right now” (Gianluca Sassi¹⁰³) for example the electoral law does not really allow citizens to choose their candidates. Second, several interviewees complained about the disregard for the results of the democratic mechanisms such as referenda and popular initiatives in Italy.

¹⁰² Two of them left the Five Star Movement whereas one of them was expelled.

¹⁰³ Ex regional Five Star Movement representative (Emilia Romagna).

Turning to the role of citizens, all these interviewees agreed on the idea that citizens should be the protagonists in a democracy but, eventually in fact, citizens are only involved during elections and sometimes not even in those occasions: “We cannot vote our representatives at provincial level” (anonymous representative). Interestingly an ex-regional representative noticed how citizens found the way to participate actively thanks to the Five Star Movement’s efforts although things were changing again: “Today, unfortunately, we are going back. There is again a strong distancing of citizens from political life, this is also one of the failures of the Movement”.

The question related to the democratic dimension ends at this point. In the next section we will delve into the Five Star Movement democratic formula questions, namely questions related to some key principle and organizational tools applied by the Five Star Movement.

6.5.1 *The Five Star Movement Regional Group 2021: Questions on the “5SM Democratic Formula”*

Speaking about the main differences between the Five Star Movement and the other political parties, overall, these interviews pointed out the “will to bring people closer to politics”, “breaking with the old-fashioned self-interested politics” and “organizational structured based on direct democracy” as key features. What differs among our interviewees is the opinion about to what extent the Five Star Movement has retained these particular characteristics over time. A few interviewees stressed that the Five Star Movement has remained loyal to its original principles and organizational structure. An exception was represented by the regional *portavoce* Maria Muscarà¹⁰⁴, who has difficulty in depicting the differences between the Five Star Movement and the other political parties, because especially in the last three years a sort of “homogenization” with the other parties has taken place: “It is certainly not the fault of the Five Star Movement which continues to be an absolutely different party from all the others

¹⁰⁴ Five Star Movement regional representative (Campania). She left the Movement in January 2022.

but the fault is of the men who have occupied spaces of power within the Five Star Movement” (Maria Muscarà). In the same vein as Muscarà the sub-group of ex-members claimed that the Five Star Movement has changed: “over the years the differences between the other parties and the Movement have smoothed out a bit, however some cornerstones, such as not having condemned people among the elected remain”. In particular according to the ex-member Alice Salvatore¹⁰⁵ this change has started officially on 31 December 2017 when the New Statuto was published and the figure of the political leader, “who would practically have decision-making power on all relevant organizational and political issues of the Five Star Movement” was officially introduced (Alice Salvatore).

Turning to the question concerning what should be the right order among the words deliberation participation and transparency, there is a clear majority that chooses the order transparency, participation and deliberation, mostly for the same reasons already pointed out by the local group. Speaking about similarities with local group interviews, also the regional group showed itself to have a common general opinion on the Five Star Movement motto “one counts as one”. In its original meaning it referred to the idea that every vote counts as one and thus the weight of every single vote is the same. Moreover, this motto also recalls the idea that everyone is allowed to participate, express his or her own opinion and propose his or her own candidacy. However, all our interviewees stated that more responsibilities require a major degree of expertise and so it is important to have specific competencies for certain roles.

Finally, concerning the use of Internet in order to improve democracy, overall, all our interviewee emphasized the importance that this resource had for the Five Star Movement goals and organization since the beginning of its political experience. However, several interviewees stressed also that Internet remains a tool that might hide also dangers such as fake news and that it is important to maintain face to face communication and personal relationship in politics.

¹⁰⁵ Ex regional Five Star Movement representative (Liguria).

Turning to the digital platform *Rousseau*, these interviewees acknowledged its important role in providing the Five Star Movement members a channel where they can participate actively in the internal decision making of the Five Star Movement: “Rousseau also provided a useful resource of e-learning and support to share projects and initiatives among Five Star representatives” (Maria Muscarà). However, it was also stressed that it was a platform in “evolution” and because of this it also show some technical problems that sometimes made the online voting difficult. Moreover, some doubts on the transparency of the platform were mentioned: “it was a platform managed by a private individual which is fine and I have nothing against Casaleggio and company, but it was not clear who managed the platform and its internal regulation was never posted” (Gianluca Sassi).

Shifting to the question what is the main “challenge” for a Five Star Movement representative these interviewees pointed out “accomplishing our task with dedication” and “remaining loyal to ourselves and the original principles” as the main challenges. Speaking about remaining loyal to the original principles of the Movement the *ex-portavoce* of Emilia Romagna, Gianluca Sassi complained: “Too bad the limit of the two terms will probably be questioned” (Gianluca Sassi).

Turning to the question about betraying as a Five Star Movement representative, these interviewees agreed on the idea that the worst form of betrayal would be “stopping being people’s *portavoce* (working for the collective common good)” and “starting to act for one’s personal interest”. Consistently with this major trend, our interviewees also claimed to follow citizens indications or in any case to try to be aware of the needs of the locals maintaining a personal relationship with them.

As a last question we asked the interviewees to indicate a common element that the Five Star Movement members share. There is no majority concerning this point. What can be affirmed is that roughly one half of our interviewees pointed out “honesty” and “the will to change politics for the better” as the main common traits. Conversely other interviewees could not see a common element or, in any case, they could just state that what used to bond them had vanished

over time: “I do not know a trait that is only ours, I no longer recognize it especially with the fact of the third term, fourth term, now it is even more complicated to find the difference” (Maria Muscarà).

6.5.2 *The Five Star Movement’s Regional Group 2021: Questions on Representation*

In this section we will address to the questions on political representation within the Five Star Movement. Overall, all the interviewees gave similar answers that emphasized three main aspects that might explain political representation in the Five Star Movement: “listening to people needs and bringing people’s voice within the institutions”, “maintain a personal relationship at local level” “keep in mind the distinction between a representative and Five Star Movement *portavoce*”. In particular, the concept of *portavoce* was emphasized often also by the ex-members of the movement.

Then we asked for a general opinion on the Five Star Movement’s performance as *portavoce* of citizens. The majority expressed a fairly positive opinion; however, some clear criticisms also arose. Clear disappointment was expressed by the regional *portavoce* of Campania Maria Muscarà: “With the aim of staying in government it does not matter that we lost a lot...of course we also reached important legislative goals but we also neglected important battles such as the one on public water which was our first battle” (Maria Muscarà). In addition to this, Muscarà also pointed out that the Five Star Movement seems to have lost its “strong environmental push” during its government experiences. In the same vein also Alice Salvatore pointed out that the Five Star Movement gave up on important environmental battles such as those related to the Tav and Tab: “The Guarantor Beppe Grillo or the “Comitato di Garanzia”, which was in conflict of interest (within the Comitato di garanzia they were all government representatives with important institutional positions) had to intervene on these topics...but it did not work at all and environment was perhaps the first of the betrayals...So until about January 2019 with the Conte I government there was still adherence to principles and themes. From then on they began to give

exaggerated importance to the electoral results of the European elections and in general to the electoral results of the regional elections” (Alice Salvatore).

This section on the Five Star Movement representation ends here. In the next section we will address topics such as the European institutions, populism and leadership within the movement.

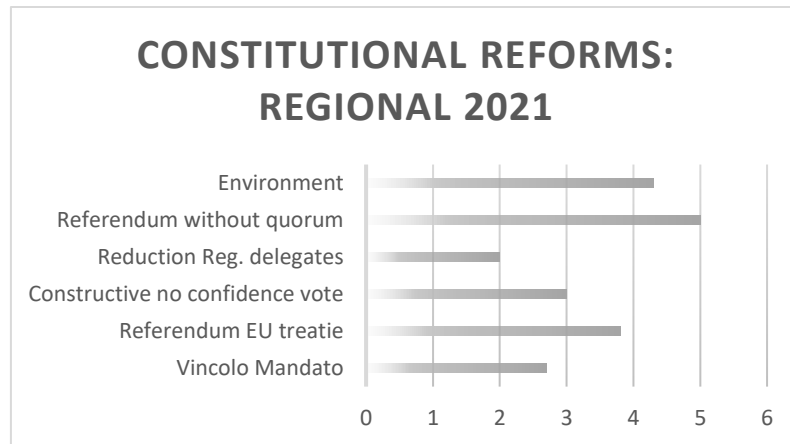
6.5.3 The Five Star Movement Regional Group 2021: Questions on “Europe, Populism and Leadership”

Starting with the opinion concerning the European Institutions the majority of our interviewees believed that Europe should be reformed somehow, because at the moment it is mainly based on financial interests and there is no real political and cultural European cooperation. In particular, the European Union seems to be quite detached from the real needs of its citizens and the only elective institution, the European Parliament, appears powerless compared to the other European Institutions.

Turning to the perception that these regional representatives have of populism it is possible to argue that the majority did not consider this label as an insult. Interestingly, the majority of our interviewees believed in the positive meaning of populism (“it would have been great to remain populist!” Maria Muscarà), whereas at least two interviewees pointed out that there is also a negative meaning related to this word: “Today a political actor such as the League can be defined as the most populist of all if we want to use the word populism as a negative term, because the League spreads certain concepts that, it knows very well, it will not be able to implement. Probably this has also been done by the Five Star Movement sometimes, but because of inexperience” (ex regional representative).

At this point in our questionnaire, we asked to our interviewees to express a preference over the main Five Star Movement constitutional reforms proposed over time. In order to have an overview of their answers we will use a graph.

Table 6.3



According to this chart it is possible to assess that the Five Star Movement regional group gave great importance to the introduction of (in order) “referendum without quorum”, “the introduction of the protection of environment in the Italian constitution” and “referendum on the EU treaties”. So, overall, it is possible to assess that on average the regional group prefers tools of direct democracy and the protection of environment above all. Interestingly in fourth place we find the introduction of the “imperative mandate” whereas the reduction of MPs is not felt as a priority.

Finally, we asked an opinion about Giuseppe Conte. On average the majority acknowledged that he was able to face a very difficult period as prime minister especially during the beginning of the pandemic. However, the majority expressed doubts or criticisms. A soft criticism came from an ex regional representative which claimed that Conte should have had more courage in reforming the Five Star Movement: “he let the different currents within the Movement influence him too much”. The regional representative from Campania, Maria Muscarà gave a harsher opinion: “I think he is not my representative, my *portavoce*, absolutely. He is a person who during the Covid period handled a very difficult crisis that few would probably have been able to manage... but he is the man who came to Naples to impose a mayor of the Democratic Party as a candidate of the Five Star Movement despite having no

role within the Five Star Movement¹⁰⁶ or in the government in that moment, so he used his popularity to usurp some roles that he does not cover now” (Maria Muscarà).

The analysis of the interviews with regional Five Star Movement *portavoce* (representatives) ends here. In the next sections we will analyse interviews collected with national Five Star Movement *portavoce* (representatives).

6.6 *The Five Star Movement National Group: Questions on Democracy*

In this section we will analyze the interviews of national Five Star Movement “*portavoce*” (representatives). In particular in this section, we will present interviews collected with previous and current Five Star Movement members of parliament and the government. Moreover, we will also present interviews with ex¹⁰⁷ Five Star Movement representatives at the national level. It is to be noted that within this group are also present two interviewees that were not “*portavoce*” (representatives) but that played other roles within the movement.

As in the previous sections we will start with the democratic dimension, namely those questions related to the degree of democracy in Italy. It is not possible to provide a homogenous overall answer on this topic. Except for the president of the deputies’ chamber Roberto Fico, the minister of the relationship with the parliament, Federico D’Incà, and another interviewee the others expressed some doubts on the current degree of democracy in Italy. Starting from the most positive point of view, Roberto Fico claimed that, especially in the last challenging years the Italian democracy has shown its strength and value: “Italy, like all the countries of the world, has experienced and is experiencing a very hard period. However, in my opinion this sort of “stress test”, has been largely passed. In fact, in the stormy sea, it was precisely the democratic institutions that represented a beacon, an anchor for citizens” (Roberto Fico). On the same note,

¹⁰⁶ At this point in time Conte was not the official leader of the Five Star Movement yet.

¹⁰⁷ These interviewees were already out of the Movement when the interview took place. These interviewees left the Movement on voluntary basis or were expelled.

the minister D’Incà commented that “the degree of democracy is good...I believe that democracy is a value that has to be preserved and for this reason it is essential to transmit the importance of our constitution, which contains the country’s democratic principles, to the new generations as well” (Federico D’Incà).

The rest of the Five Star Movement representatives expressed different degrees of criticism that we will list from the mild to the harshest. According to some interviewees there are democratic problems in terms of citizens political participation (senator Laura Bottici), for others it is the degree of misinformation, but also the current electoral law that do not allow citizens to express their preferences (deputy Sergio Battelli). Some other interviewees expressed concern on what has appeared to be a clear weakening of parliament for the benefit of the government. Speaking about the weak role of the parliament the deputy Cristian Romaniello stated that even the Draghi’s government is not an expression of the parliamentary majority and so of the citizens’ will, “rather, it responds to needs that are determined in other environments” (Cristian Romaniello). On the same note several ex Five Star Movement representatives expressed concern on this disequilibrium of powers between the parliament and the government. In particular the senators Paola Nugnes, Elena Fattori (now in “Sinistra Italiana”, “The Italian Left”), Alessandra Riccardi (now in the League) and the ex-minister of defense Elisabetta Trenta (Conte I) all expressed concern on the progressive weaking of the parliament. In particular Elena Fattori claimed “More and more legislation has been made by decree, there is no real parliamentary debate but decisions are taken elsewhere” (Elena Fattori). Similarly, the ex-minister for the South, Barbara Lezzi¹⁰⁸ (Conte I) claimed to be very worried about the lack of pluralism within the higher institutions: “I believe this sort of single thought that has been established with this “government of all” is creating a barrier that does not allow the discussion of

¹⁰⁸ In February 2021 Barbara Lezzi, along with other Five Star Movement members of Parliament, was expelled after voting “no” in a vote of confidence in the Draghi government

relevant reforms for the country” whereas the ex-deputy Alessandro Di Battista remarked that “the state of democracy is very, very poor, especially now that there is no opposition”(Alessandro di Battista).

Overall, it looks like the main role that Italian citizens play right now is to elect its representatives also because there are not so many ways in which citizens can influence the national politics. Conversely, as the IT expert Davide Casaleggio emphasized, “citizens should be the foundation (of democracy)... in any democratic context, at least in the papers, in democracy, in the sense that *Rousseau* (but also any other philosopher of democracy) pointed out, the management of power is always based on citizens which should be the ultimate depository of power” (Davide Casaleggio). In a nutshell, the overall sentiment that these interviewees expressed is that citizens should participate more in politics nowadays.

However, several interviewees pointed out that citizens are not entirely aware or in any case they do not use enough the tools of popular participation (e.g. popular initiatives) nowadays. In this vein a positive note is sounded by the president of the chamber of deputies, Fico “Our system provides different institutions of participatory democracy that allow an enrichment of the public debate and a growth of civic awareness. With this in mind, we must look favorably on innovations such as the collection of digital signatures for popular consultations” (Roberto Fico). In addition to the need to participate more much emphasis was given to the importance of being well informed (“through unbiased media”, Elisabetta Trenta).

Moreover, all the ex-Five Star representatives pointed out that citizens seem to be left out from politics right after the elections’ end, and this situation leads to a continuous “lack of public debate” (Barbara Lezzi). Conversely, citizens “should continue to monitor” their elected after the elections (Alessandra Riccardi). Especially in this period where “the Five Star Movement is in crisis, we experience an increasingly withdrawal of the direct democracy, so the citizen is relegated to being a voter and this is it... Voting every 5 years and this is it, this is not democracy, it is an oligarchy” (Alessandro Di Battista). Speaking about the important role that the Five Star Movement has played in

implementing direct democracy, the ex-minister Elisabetta Trenta commented that “With the Five Star Movement, especially at the beginning, there was a real awakening...but then there was a great disappointment that brought us back even further than the starting point” (Elisabetta Trenta).

6.6.1 *The Five Star Movement National Group 2021: Questions on the “5SM Democratic Formula”*

Turning to what are the main differences between the Five Star Movement and the other political parties, all our interviewees pointed to the reasons why the Five Star Movement was founded out and how because of these reasons this Movement was different from the other political parties. These differences are mainly located in the goals and the organizational structure of the Movement. First, as senator Laura Bottici emphasized, the Five Star Movement was born as a “project of direct democracy” giving the chance to simple citizens to apply for institutional roles without having hierarchies (typical of classic political parties) above them. Together with the main aim of implementing direct democracy, the second main difference between the Five Star Movement and the other political parties was “bringing a certain degree of honesty” in the higher political institutions: “(The five Star Movement was characterized by) A strong appeal to public ethics and a series of behaviors related to this concept. I believe it is now (a) common opinion that the Movement's entry into the institutions has triggered a series of changes, more or less profound, also in the institutional culture” (Roberto Fico).

From an organizational point of view the whole fluid, locally spread, and digital structure of the Five Star Movement was specifically aimed to support the Five Star Movement's specific features: “it was founded as a movement, something that is profoundly different from the concept of party because the movement is also based, as I said before, on the people who make it up and not on a delegation system typical of parties, with the twentieth-century organization” (Davide Casaleggio).

Besides proposing the “representation of people” through the concept of “*portavoce*”, the whole Five Star Movement “direction, objectives and defined

political choices are made through consultations with members (of the Five Star Movement)” (Federico D’Incà). It is interesting to note that, speaking about the key features of the Five Star Movement also some references to its main battles were made: “environmental awareness, sustainability, renewable energy, but also social and work issues”. In particular the senator Pesco pointed out that together with the environment the Five Star Movement was particularly focused on “poor people or people in difficulties” (Pesco). Another parliamentary representative pointed out that one of the distinctive features of The Five Star Movement was the fact that it proposed a “program that came directly from citizens” and that could not be positioned on the left or right sides... they were projects for the country” (current parliament representative).

However, notwithstanding the fact that overall, all the interviewees seemed to agree on these main general features, it was also pointed out that nowadays, the Movement seems to have lost or in any case softened some of its key characteristics that distinguished it from the other political parties. Some pointed out that some of these key features have been softened but the Movement still carries on its original spirit (Sergio Battelli): “the movement is no longer seen as an anti-system force but as a force that still manages to coexist and pursue issues while remaining within the perspective of Europeanism and on this we have stabilized, so now the Movement does not say to quit the euro but that we need to change Europe starting from, for example, the fiscal compact...” (Sergio Battelli). Others expressed a major criticism towards the current Five Star Movement in terms of to what extent it is different from the other parties. Among the others Davide Casaleggio expressed concern “I am no longer recognize this founding idea and I am seeing a deviation from the Five Star Movement towards the established model of political party in the last months” (Davide Casaleggio). In particular, as the deputy Romaniello stressed, it seems that the Five Star Movement has lost some of its main peculiarities: “The movement was characterized by coherence, the desire to achieve objectives without mediating and it wanted to avoid allowing “politics to become a job”... these things are gone” (Cristian Romaniello). However, the major criticisms on this point came from the group of the ex-representatives which pointed out that the original

differences between the Five Star Movement and the other political parties have vanished totally. In particular Di Battista stated “since the Five Star Movement has joined the Draghi’s government, it has become part of the establishment. Many exponents of the Five Star Movement have settled for a few seats” (Alessandro Di Battista). However, even if, according to this subgroup of interviewees, the Five Star Movement has become a political party, it lacks of an internal defined structure that political parties generally speaking have and that would ensure a certain degree of internal democracy and coherence on the topics (Alessandra Riccardi): “(the Five Star Movement) lacks of a structure and above all lacks internal competitiveness...there are no ways in which one can aspire to become a councilor or can manage a provincial group, there is no fair contest for the internal positions within the Five Star Movement, so compared to a political party perhaps it looks more like a monarchy in some way or an oligarchy... a small oligarchy where there is no organizational and democratic structure in some way” (Elena Fattori). So, according to more than one ex Five Star representatives the undefined structure of the Five Star Movement brought the Movement to be less democratic itself once it had to deal with government experiences. According to the former minister of defense, Trenta, the Five Star Movement should have worked more on its internal organization since its entering in the first government coalition: “If you do not create an organization that allows you to maintain the connection with citizens who were supposed to be the protagonists of politics and you just rely on the already existing organization, then with communication strategies you will pretend to still be what you were...At a certain point, communication took the place of organization within the Movement. But it was a communication that chased immediate consensus, it was a communication that chased the advance of Salvini and the League, it was therefore aimed at having results day by day” (Elisabetta Trenta).

Turning to the question on the right order for the concepts of transparency, participation and deliberation, the main trend shows that “transparency, participation and deliberation” is the preferred order among the interviewees that are still members of the Five Star Movement. Conversely, there is no clear

majority within the subgroup of ex representatives although together with the order “transparency participation and deliberation” the other main trend within this subgroup is “participation transparency deliberation”. An interesting comment about the meaning of the word transparency came from the former minister of defense Trenta: “At a certain point for someone “transparency” meant “I make a bilateral agreement with a foreign country” and I do it in streaming” (Elisabetta Trenta).

Turning to the Five Star Movement backbone principle “one counts as one” (uno vale uno), in the first place, every interviewee pointed out what it does not mean: “one is not worth the other” (che uno non vale l’altro). In its essential meaning “one counts as one” corresponds to the basic assumption that everyone can participate and his vote is worth one, no more and no less than anyone else. However, apparently this motto called for much more within the movement. For example, the ex-Five Star Movement minister Barbara Lezzi recalled the breakthrough that this motto represented for the movement and politics in general: “Until the moment the Five Star Movement introduced this principle, inspired by Gianroberto Casaleggio, politics was almost elitist, there was a sort of exclusion of the so-called common citizens” (Barbara Lezzi). In the same vein according to the president of the deputy chamber Fico: “This principle has subverted the classic scheme, allowing many citizens who asked for a different representation to become their own representatives, this could not happen through traditional parties” (Roberto Fico). So, the “one counts as one” slogan meant more than the simple “one head one vote”. According to some of our interviewees it means “that everyone must have the opportunity to participate in the political, social, economic life of the country without exclusions, all starting from the same starting conditions” (current deputy) whereas for someone else that “everyone can propose, exhibit and bring projects, ideas and there is no difference between them”. For the minister D’Inca it means that “there is no difference between the political representative and the citizen: whoever

exercises an institutional function, in Parliament or in the Government, is a citizens' delegate¹⁰⁹” (Federico D’Incà).

Shifting to the subgroup of ex representatives, the “everyone is worth one” motto also meant something more than the simple one head one vote. For Elena Fattori “it meant being able to contribute your own experience and skills” whereas for Alessandro Di Battista it meant that “everyone must have the same right to compete and to propose their own candidacy, to be able to express their ideas and to be able to vote for the ideas of the others”. What is interesting is that many interviewees (ex and not ex members) pointed out that this motto has been often mistaken within the movement. The most frequent deviation brought to the idea that “everyone is worth one” means that “everyone is the same” nullifying concepts such as meritocracy and expertise. Overall, all the interviewees (ex and no ex-member of the Movement) pointed out this important difference.

In addition to this, some criticisms (from current deputies) were expressed over the fact that this motto seemed not to be functional during some internal voting “only someone within the Movement could decide which questions to vote”. In this sense also some ex-representatives argued how the “one counts as one” was sometimes misused within the movement: “I declared myself in favor of environment and social equity, you cannot come to me and deviate from this direction telling me that now the need is “to close the ports”¹¹⁰ if this was not in our previous direction...the great contradiction was that the movement was supposed to not have a leader instead the leaders were the only ones who determined the political line” (Paola Nugnes). In the same vein Elisabetta Trenta claimed: “At a certain point the Movement also forgot that we were talking about meritocracy...If being born in Pomigliano d'Arco and having attended a certain high school becomes a reason to make choices within the movement...”.

¹⁰⁹ Delegate here stands for the Five Star Movement label “*portavoce*” (who carries the voice).

¹¹⁰ The reference is to the immigration policies of the leader of the League Matteo Salvini.

Concerning the use of the Internet to improve democracy, these interviews show a common ground based on the fact that the Internet is a very useful “tool” that enables active participation, new possibilities of knowledge and the exchange of information, but it remains a tool, that needs to be used properly. For the Five Star Movement Internet has represented a precious resource in order to make direct democracy possible. In this vein the IT expert and head of Casaleggio and Associati Davide Casaleggio emphasized that Internet in politics will lead to a new form of political representation: “In the past we had all the evolutions of democracy in history, these were always linked to a moment of general crisis, a transition of the previous system but also to a new technology, a technology of participation or in any case of involvement (...) In the last two years we have experienced a crisis linked to the pandemic that will probably generate a new model of participation which I imagine it could be the “platform society” based on the idea of waging single battles and not necessarily various concepts included in a single political formation, I think that this will be the next step for the evolution of political participation”(Davide Casaleggio).

Conversely, speaking about the problems related to Internet the main problems pointed out were the fact that Internet is not completely free and, as a massive source of information it might also hide fake news or “communication bias” (Paola Nugnes). Speaking about rules related to the use of the Internet, Elisabetta Trenta mentioned: “when I tried to distinguish between the position of the League from our positions on immigration, I became the target of a very harsh attack by the “beast”¹¹¹ of Salvini” (Elisabetta Trenta).

Turning to the opinions on the *Rousseau* platform, first it might be important to start with a very general comment from Davide Casaleggio, one of the founders of this platform: “The *Rousseau* project is something we have been carrying out for years. It embraces services and features that we have built over the last 12,13,14 years and therefore it is a constantly evolving project. I imagine it will continue to evolve perhaps in other directions but always with the common thread of participation (...) it is an excellent example of how it is possible to

¹¹¹ As the communication team of Matteo Salvini is informally called.

participate directly in choosing, for example, candidates rather than laws, actions and political directions. In recent years we have achieved several important milestones ... for example, concerning the vote related to the governments that the Five Star Movement supported, we reached and maintained the world record for participation in a binding vote in a single day” (Davide Casaleggio). In addition to this, we also asked for a general comment on how the platform was used by the Five Star Movement members: “I think that some potentialities of the *Rousseau* platform remained unexpressed, because there are 19 functions on the platform. The most known were those related to the voting, the candidacy (also at the municipal level) and maybe the e-learning (...) Not everyone has known or had the opportunity to appreciate all the services of the *Rousseau* platform and we were working on this. The whole organization, not only *Rousseau*, but also the political organization side probably should have worked harder in order to emphasize all the good benefits that could come from this participatory model” (Davide Casaleggio). It is important to mention that at the time in which these interviews were collected there were ongoing conflicts between the Casaleggio and Associati and the Five Star Movement that were resolved with the end of the bond between the Five Star Movement and the Casaleggio and Associati.

Turning to the other interviewees, on the *Rousseau* platform Roberto Fico commented: “It represented a meaningful experience ..., However, over time, some critical issues have arisen, and this awareness led to a strong internal debate that led to continuing in the same vein as the *Rousseau* experience but with a new tool” (Roberto Fico). Similarly, to Fico, overall, the majority of the interviewees ¹¹²acknowledged the great importance of this platform which enabled active collective participation and direct democracy and e-learning. However, some interviewees stressed the fact that “*Rousseau* was a tool” (former government representative) within the Movement, not the movement itself.

Within the subgroup of ex Five Star Movement representatives, there is more criticism towards some of the modalities used in the *Rousseau* platform,

¹¹² Including some well-known ex representatives such as Di Battista and Lezzi

especially during the voting. In particular some ex-representatives complained about how the questions to vote on were written and presented: “Conditioning the parliamentarians of the Five Star Movement to a vote on a private platform with a rhetorical question that was decided only by the political leader (no one else could choose to ask a question) ...moreover these questions were clearly biased questions that indicated what was the position of the leaders” (Paola Nugnes). Besides that, speaking about transparency the former minister of defence, Trenta, complained about the presence of some “private profiles” that represented a clear lack of transparency within the Movement.

6.6.2 *The Five Star Movement National Group 2021: Questions on Representation*

In this section we will present an analysis of those questions that are aimed at investigating political representation for the Five Star Movement. Starting with the question “what does it mean to represent people for the Five Star Movement representatives”, it is not really possible to depict a single common main answer but rather similar features related to the concept of representation were pointed out by our interviewees.

First, the concept of representation is related to the idea that the Five Star Movement “*portavoce*” had to bring the citizens’ requests within the institution, which also means that they have to be open and maintain a solid and continuous connection with their electors and, more specifically, with the local areas. Consequently, as a second main point, representation mean to remain faithful to the electoral program. Some interviewees also stressed that political representation means to “go beyond the representation of your own movement or party and be the representative of everyone” (Sergio Battelli). In this sense, Roberto Fico claimed “I don't think that a Five Star representative should represent their role any differently from others. Representation, in general, for me means service, listening, connection” (Roberto Fico). What is interesting is that even if almost everyone emphasized how important it is for a “*portavoce*” to put personal ideas aside in favor of the citizens ideas, this does not mean that the Five Star Movement representative can or has to push forward every citizen’s

request, but rather these requests have to reflect the principles of the electoral program. However, sometimes not everything is possible and tradeoffs are necessary: “the important thing is to not move from mediation (necessary tradeoffs) to a total reversal of what was said during the election campaign” (Cristian Romaniello).

Speaking about the label Five Star Movement “*portavoce*”¹¹³ (literally “who brings the voice”), different problems were indicated by our interviewees especially among the ex-Five Star representatives. In particular some of these interviewees pointed out that the idea of “*portavoce*” was sometimes misused within the movement: “For the Five Stars the *portavoce* had to be thoughtless, which means you are not allowed to have your own idea, but you will be told, probably from an online platform where you vote - which never happened - then you will get the input “you vote this way because the base has decided this” and you are simply the little finger that presses in the end for the thing that we are all accepting” (anonymous Five Star Movement technician).

Besides the ambiguities related to the concept of “*portavoce*”, several interviewees¹¹⁴ pointed out how difficult it was to respect the principle of “bringing the people’s voice directly within the institutions” at the higher institutional level. In this sense the ex-representative senator Alessandra Riccardi claimed: “the higher you climbed the more difficult it was to be able to convey information quickly. The mythological figure of the “*portavoce*” who carries out what the base says has never been realized and is hardly achievable because to study all the necessary documentation of the parliamentary work was already a demanding and complex job...”. In addition to this Elena Fattori stressed that, when the equilibrium changed within the Movement “the person who was in the government started to be more important than the person who was in parliament” and “the whole idea of being a “*portavoce*” vanished...when we were in the opposition it was easier, but when we entered the government,

¹¹³ According to the Five Star Movement the label “*portavoce*” (not “*rappresentative*”) better reflects the Five-star Movement ideal of political representation.

¹¹⁴ Including a few interviewees that are members of the Five Star Movement.

we gave up on everything that was related to the environment, for example” (Elena Fattori).

Turning to the question on the Five Star Movement representatives performance from the top to the bottom it is possible to argue that there are two clear patterns: a positive pattern which expresses satisfaction with the whole Five Star Representative performance (although a few criticisms were also mentioned by current representatives) and a negative pattern which expressed a clear dissatisfaction with the Five Star Movement representative performance, starting from the first Five Star Movement coalition government experience. Roughly, the former pattern corresponds with the group of national Five Star Movement representatives who are still within the movement, whereas the latter corresponds with the group of ex-representatives. For the former pattern we choose to propose the answer from the current minister of relations with the parliament Federico D’Incà: “I think that all the *portavoce*, in every position held, have given their utmost to fulfill their duty. There have been certainly imperfections, errors and there have been those who have preferred to take different paths, but those who have remained faithful to the principles of the Movement - which has clearly changed and has faced a path of evolution over time - has done the best in their roles”. For the latter pattern which expressed dissatisfaction with the work of the Five Star Movement we choose to quote the ex-minister for the South, Barbara Lezzi: “For a long time this role was fulfilled but then, especially since the Five Star Movement entered the government, a detachment (between the Five Star Movement representatives and the local areas) has started to take place...however this was not a general trend and I think that it was caused by a mis-communication between the members of the government and the members of the parliament, which means that consequentially the member of the parliament had to face local groups without clear information and indication” (Barbara Lezzi). This lack of communication among different Five Star Movement institutional levels was pointed out also by other ex-representatives (but also current representatives) as the main cause of the progressive separation between the upper side (Five Star Movement members of the government/parliament) and the lower part (local groups) of the

Movement. Finally, it is interestingly to note that even Davide Casaleggio noticed a more general detachment but related to the fact that the “base” (the Five Star Movement enrolled members) were not involved enough in the decision making on certain topics: “The concept of representation is something that should be limited to the concept of *portavoce* and therefore this means that in all contexts in which it is possible to consult, or discuss with members, this should be done. This has not always happened, lately it almost never happens and even when it happens the choices are then made regardless of the results of this consultation” (Davide Casaleggio).

As the main challenge(s) for a Five Star Movement representative, overall, our interviewees pointed out to two main principles: “respect the electoral program and achieve its goals” and “remain loyal to the values of the original Five Star Movement”. In particular this second principle was described by our interviewees giving different examples such as “remain in contact with people at the local level”, “remember that the citizens’ common good is more important”, “do not forget the initial pathway”. Interestingly some interviewees made a reference to the change and internal conflicts that the Movement have experienced, especially in 2021. More specifically an interviewee claimed that the main challenge for the Five Star Movement now is to “to understand what is going on within the movement and survive” whereas the IT expert Casaleggio claimed: “The biggest challenge today is figuring out where the Movement is and in what organization it is in. Personally, as I have already said publicly, I no longer recognize the Five Star Movement (the one that I helped to found) at least for how it has been behaving in the last year and a half” (Davide Casaleggio).

Turning to the question on betraying as a Five Star Movement representative it can be argued that overall, on the one hand, for the group of previous and current representatives “betraying” corresponds mainly to leaving the Movement, to not respecting its values and to not respecting the electoral program, whereas, on the other hand, for the group of ex-members of the Movement it mainly corresponds to deviating from the original values (but also battles) of the Five Star Movement.

As an example of the second pattern, we choose to quote the ex-minister of the South, Barbara Lezzi, who spoke about the reason behind her expulsion from the movement: “So I will tell you about our example, namely who was expelled for saying no to Draghi. On that occasion, we betrayed the commitment “to not leave our group” and “not vote in disagreement with our group” but our group betrayed some original principles which were, for example, to participate in a “government of all” (“governo di tutti”) because in this kind of government there is the mortification of politics, there is a deterioration of the quality of politics (...) In addition to the fact that the movement presented itself as an extremely legalistic force and in this sense it has always said “no” to a party that is founded by a convicted for Mafia¹¹⁵ such as Forza Italia (“Go Italy”). So, who betrayed who?” (Barbara Lezzi). Similarly, the senator Paola Nugnes pointed out that the real betrayal was to change the perspective of the Five Star Movement: “If you make an immigration program that is open on immigration ... then, two months after being elected, you cannot vote in favor of the Salvini decrees” (Paola Nugnes).

Then, keeping in mind that for the Five Star Movement it is important to bring the citizens’ voice within the institutions we asked ‘to’ these interviewees if they always follow what people propose. From a very general point of view the majority answered ‘yes’ but taking into consideration that “not every request is feasible”, or that some “requests do not meet the electoral program of the Five Star Movement” or that even if “we present some bills, it is very difficult for these bills to become real laws” (Sergio Corbetta). What seems to be a common feature is an open attitude to listening to citizens and collecting their proposals. Interestingly, in some interviews this question also brought some reflections on the ideological positioning: “I thought we were on the left but this was not just in my fantasy, because the proposals we made at the beginning were going in that direction...but the Movement has absolutely become a center party, center left, center right, according to the need, it wants to become the tip of the balance to be probably always at the government” (Paola Nugnes).

¹¹⁵ The reference is to the leader of Forza Italia Silvio Berlusconi.

Turning to the last question on the common element that the Five Star Movement members share” there is no a clear majority on this point. The most frequent answer pointed out “the will to change our country and its politics for the better” as the main reason, otherwise “honesty and transparency”, the “will to discuss about the problems related to the local territories” and “sustainability, justice and social inclusion” are the common elements that were mentioned most frequently. Interestingly, some interviews also stressed the difference between the original and current movement. In this sense also Davide Casaleggio pointed out: “In the past it was certainly the fact that the members recognized themselves in the founding values of the Five Star Movement, which were those of participation from below, of choices from below and the fact that this organization believed in the distribution of power and not in the centralization of power...” (Davide Casaleggio).

In the next section we will analyze what our interviewees think on topics such as the European Institutions, Populism and Five Star Movement leadership.

6.6.3 The Five Star Movement National Group 2021: Questions on “Europe, Populism and Leadership”

Concerning the European union and European institutions, overall, none of our interviewees clearly expressed strong anti-EU positions and Euroscepticism but many of them pointed out that the European union should be “reformed” especially in terms of the balance of political power (for example between the European parliament and the Commission) but also among the interests of European members itself.

Moreover, many interviewees emphasized that the European Union should try to be less financially oriented and more “humanitarian” and closer to the European citizens. In this sense in different interviews, it was pointed out that the support of the European Union during the pandemic showed some signs in this direction. Somehow many of these features are well expressed in Roberto Fico’s answer: “I believe, and personally I have always believed, in the value of European institutions, I am a pro-European...However, being pro-European does not mean adhering to the way in which the European Union has interpreted

and carried out its role for many years. In that European Union with a low political content and a high level of financial rigor, little solidarity, little farsightedness, I practically never recognized myself... I am not worried at all that each of us gives up a piece of his sovereignty in the name of something bigger, for strong supranational institutions that are increasingly necessary in an open world, in a world in which we know that alone we are nothing, (especially) if we take into consideration the reality from the pandemic to the complex dynamics of geopolitical competition” (Roberto Fico). In addition to this the president of the chamber of deputies also emphasized that the European Union more than any other political organization is “kept together by ancient values and democratic principles” (Roberto Fico).

Notwithstanding this overall positive attitude towards the EU, among our interviewees there are also stronger critical positions towards it. One of the most critical ones is represented by the ex-representative Alessandro Di Battista who claimed: “Currently they do not represent the will of European citizens and they are not truly democratic institutions. The most democratic institution, that is the only elective one, the European parliament, does not have decision-making power in the end” (Alessandro Di Battista). Notwithstanding this criticism, Di Battista stressed that his current position on the EU has actually become softer compared to his previous position. Indeed, he added, he realized that “we need the European Union in order to face international competitors such as China and other powerful international actors” (Alessandro Di Battista).

Speaking about the original Five Star Movement Euroscepticism positions some interviewees emphasized that within the movement strong Euroscepticism was only one of the different schools of thought. As Elena Fattori claimed: “within the movement there were currents (someone denied this fact, but they existed). So, there was the more populist conspiracy current...the no-Europe current represented a minority at that time, but different Five Star Movement representatives were not against Europe”.

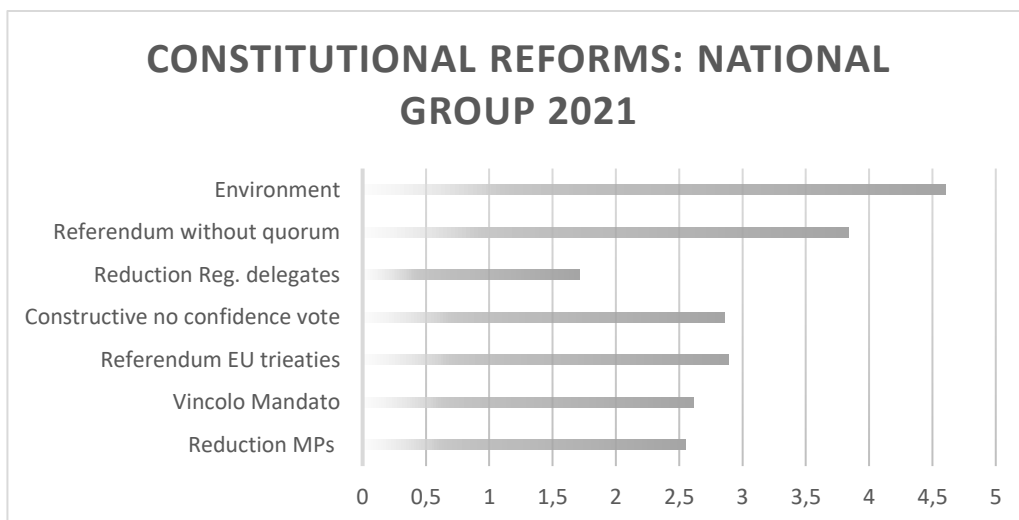
Shifting to the question on populism, a general analysis of these interviews suggests that, as already happened with the Five Star Movement representatives at the local and regional level, also these representatives tend to distinguish

between two types of populism: the positive and negative kinds. Overall, positive populism indicates the attitude which leads representatives to put citizens first and to fight for citizens' interests and their active participation in politics. In this sense the answer of Alessandro Di Battista very well sums up this school of thought: "Populism is an absolutely respectable political doctrine that places at the center of political action, of a political force and the interests of the community, the general interest of the people for which populism for me is the most democratic political current that exists" (Alessandro Di Battista). Conversely, negative populism is described mainly as that tendency of "talking to people's bellies, "pretending to think only of people needs, but acting for other interests" or to respond to "peoples' fear and their needs with fast solutions which are proposed only as a façade in order to get consensus".

Overall, several interviewees connected the negative populism to the League of Salvini. In this sense only the ex-Five Star Movement member, Alessandra Riccardi, who is now a member of the League of Salvini, proposed a different meaning for the concept "populism": "There was a decrease of the (importance) of some Italian peculiarities, the quality of the products and of "made in Italy". Indeed, we are moving towards a homogenization, a homologation for which everything must be the same and everything must taste and feel in the same way. No. Enhancing and showing the differences within a unit can be the right thing to do. In my opinion, if this idea is understood as sovereignty and as a populism (there is nothing wrong, and there is nothing wrong) with defending one's differences from others while respecting others" (Riccardi).

Concerning the preferences on the main constitutional reforms proposed by the Five Star Movement, once again, we decided to display a graph with the national group preferences.

Table 6.4



Looking at this data it is possible to argue that the “Introduction of environmental protection among the principles of the constitution”, the “prepositive referendum without quorum” and the “referendum on the European treaties” were on average the most preferred by all these interviewees whereas the “reduction of members of parliament” and the “reduction of regional delegates for the election for the President of Republic” were the reforms that scored the minimum. Overall, it is possible to claim that first, environment is a priority for these interviewees and second, they call for an implementation of direct democracy through the referendum tool above all.

In order to give some further fruitful insights on this question we decided to pick some answers in particular that might provide a representative example of the different interviewees present in the national group. According to both Roberto Fico and Federico D’Inca, the environment and the reduction of parliament members were among the most important reforms proposed by the Five Star Movement: “(The reduction of MPs) was an epochal reform not only for what it achieved but also because the previous legislatures also tried without success. In this too, the important role of the Movement emerged” (Roberto Fico). Speaking about an “bond of mandate” (vincolo di mandato parlamentare) both these interviewees gave a low score to this initiative: “On the vincolo di mandato (bond of mandate) I have strong doubts. It is true that the phenomenon

of “defectors” (“*transfughi*”) has reached considerable proportions, inconceivable for many citizens, and it is therefore a phenomenon that, under the current Constitution, must be addressed. The solution is to act on the rules that regulate the parliamentary groups in the reform of the regulation of the Chamber (in sede di riforma del regolamento della Camera.)” (Roberto Fico). On the introduction of the prepositive referendum without quorum the minister D’Incà indicated 3 whereas president Fico 4: “The introduction of the referendum without quorum, embodies great significance and would further bring citizens closer to the institutions, but it is also important to take into account that there are significant implications on the legislative procedure and on the role of the Chambers which should be further investigated”.

Conversely, turning to the group of ex representatives, Alessandro Di Battista (in the same vein as Barbara Lezzi) commented that the “*vincolo di mandato*” is a very important tool in order to remain loyal to the program. In particular, it is interesting to note that within the group of ex representatives Di Battista and Lezzi both emphasized the importance of both the reduction of MPs and the *vincolo di mandato* whereas the rest of the ex-members of the Movement disagreed on this point.

As a final question we asked our interviewees for an opinion on the former prime minister and current leader of the Five Star Movement Giuseppe Conte. It should be noted that when these interviews were collected Giuseppe Conte was not the official leader of the Five Star Movement yet. After an online election within the Five Star Movement, he became the official leader in August 2021.

In general, the majority of our interviewees expressed a positive opinion of Giuseppe Conte, or in any case almost everyone acknowledged that he was able to face a very difficult political and historical moment (due to the pandemic emergency) as prime minister from 2018 to 2021¹¹⁶. Besides his high profile role as prime minister during the pandemic also his talent as an “able mediator”

¹¹⁶ Namely as prime minister of the first Five Star Movement coalition experience with the League and the second Five Star Movement coalition experience with the Democratic Party.

between very different coalition partners was often mentioned among our interviewees. On the same note, the president of the chamber of deputies Fico claimed: “I appreciated the strongest, most courageous decisions, and I would also say that he has the ability to establish a dialogue with a sense of responsibility and a sincere connection with citizens (...) Then there is the Giuseppe Conte who recently became a political leader. I believe that Giuseppe Conte not only has a political vision, an idea of where to go, but also the right qualities to favor a synthesis within the Movement” (Roberto Fico).

There also some differing opinions on the new leader of the Five Star Movement and overall, they came from the subgroup of ex-representatives mainly. As Elena Fattori claimed: “Giuseppe Conte is a good lawyer who has nothing to do with the 5 Star Movement. In my opinion he should start his own party to be intellectually honest” (Elena Fattori). In the same vein Paola Nugnes claimed that Conte seems to be a “man who is good for all seasons”...The Conte II¹¹⁷ was a discreet government, which had to face the most serious phase of the pandemic and he did it discreetly given the enormous, sudden and very difficult difficulties to manage. However, the Conte II government cannot make us forget the Count I¹¹⁸ with the “closed ports” slogan and a 32-tooth printed grin, and Salvini's defense for the ignoble operations of “Diciotti ship” (Paola Nugnes). Moreover, speaking about the Five Star Movement alliances, Barbara Lezzi acknowledged the integrity and good quality of Giuseppe Conte but also expressed doubts on the choice to “make structural (long lasting) alliances”: “making an alliance to govern is one thing, another is making this big “pole” with everyone inside” (Barbara Lezzi). In the same vein Alessandro Di Battista, who expressed great respect for Conte (“we have a very good relationship”) claimed to be ready to cooperate politically with him but on one condition: “If he wants a political relationship with me, if he wants me to sit at his same table he must get out of this unworthy government and he must have the courage to

¹¹⁷ Second Five Star Movement government experience with the Democratic Party.

¹¹⁸ First Five Star Movement government experience with the League.

do so because in politics whoever has the courage wins” (Alessandro Di Battista).

The analysis of the interviews collected in 2021 with 5SM representatives at local, regional and national level ends here. In the next section, it will be provided an overview of the main findings of the interviews collected with 5SM representatives at local and regional level mainly in 2017.

6.7 Main Insights from Interviews with 5SM Representatives 2017

In this section a general overview will be provided of the 20 interviews collected in 2017 mainly with regional and municipal Five Star Movement representatives (Napoletano, 2017). It is to be noted that some former Five Star Movement members were also present in this sample.

Concerning the questions related to the “democratic dimension”, overall, the majority expressed a negative opinion concerning the degree of democracy in Italy. In particular, several interviewees pointed out that “people’s inability to express their preferences”, “low turnout” and “lack of transparent and independent information and media” are the main indicators of a democracy in difficulty in which citizens show a high level of political dissatisfaction (Napoletano 2017). It is to be noted that only a minority of those interviewees, all former members of the Five Star Movement, expressed a milder criticism towards the state of health of democracy in Italy.

Turning to the Five Star Movement’s democratic formula, namely those questions that asked an opinion on specific distinctive features of the Five Star Movement, overall, as main differences the Five Star Movement *portavoce* from 2017 pointed out four main elements: “Five Star Movement representatives are simple citizens lent to politics”, “the Five Star Movement wants to implement participative and direct democracy”, “the Five Star Movement does not have a hierarchical structure” and “the Five Star Movement is a post-ideological movement” (Napoletano 2017). It is to be noted that some interviewees (ex-members of the Five Star Movement) also claimed not to see many differences with the other political parties, especially because of the progressive decline of local activism (meetups) and the introduction of a hierarchical leadership.

Concerning the motto “one counts as one” the interviewees from 2017 agreed on the idea that it meant that “every vote counts as one” and everyone is allowed to participate and express his or her own opinion. However, this principle does mean that meritocracy should be abolished within the Movement. It is interesting to note that at that time, several interviewees pointed out that this motto created different misunderstandings within the Five Star Movement.

Turning to the use of Internet in order to improve democracy, overall, these interviews expressed a positive opinion, although it was often claimed that the Internet is a tool that has to be used properly. However, several interviewees also stressed how important it was to maintain the face-to-face contact in order to have debates and continue with political participation.

Shifting to the *Rousseau* topic, those interviewees that were still members of the Movement in 2017 expressed a very good opinion of this platform which enabled direct political participation within the Movement. However, some criticism, especially among the ex-members, was also mentioned, in particular in terms of the transparency of the online voting and internal regulation of the *Rousseau* system.

Concerning the questions on political representation, several interviewees from 2017 explained that the Five Star Movement wanted to go beyond political representation and implement direct democracy in order to be closer to people’s needs. This was the reason why the Five Star Movement introduced the figure of “portavoce” (literally who brings the voice”) within political institutions. However, many interviewees also stressed how important it was to distinguish among people’s initiatives because within the institutions “it is not really possible to bring every single opinion” or to consult the base for every decision that has to be taken (Napoletano 2017).

Speaking about the overall performance of the Five Star Movement representatives, some criticism was raised especially at the local level. In particular some interviewees, mostly belonging to the sub group of former members, complained about the lack of internal communication within the movement especially between the local and upper level of the movement. In particular, some former local representatives (or aspiring representatives)

pointed out that they struggled to manage some internal conflicts and that, when they looked for support from the higher institutional level of the movement, they were left alone (Napoletano 2017). As a final interesting note, “not respecting the electoral program” and “adopting a self-interested behavior” were indicated as the main forms of betrayals within the movement.

Finally in 2017 we asked our interviewees for an opinion on the European Institutions and a comment on the label “populist”. The majority of our interviewees from 2017 pointed out that the European Union was mainly based on economic interests rather than political purposes and that there was too much “discrepancy” among the European Union members (Napoletano 2017). Interestingly, some interviewees at the local level clearly pointed out that they were confused by the chaotic behavior of the Five Star Movement on the European Union (Napoletano 2017). Conversely, a minority (mainly all former members) showed a more positive opinion on the European institutions.

Shifting to the question on the label “populist” a considerable number of interviewees pointed out that it should not be understood as a negative but rather as a positive label especially if, like the Five Star Movement did, it was used for those who want to defend citizens’ interests and implement citizens’ participation in politics.

The overview on the main insights from the interviews collected with 5SM representatives in 2017 ends here. In the next section this analysis will make use of factor analysis in order to bolster the comparison between the main trends in 2017 and 2021 and investigate to what extent the 5SM representatives might have changed their positions on specific topics.

6.8 *Factor Analysis on the interviews with 5SM representatives 2017-2021*

In this section this analysis will make use of explorative factor analysis¹¹⁹ “as a statistical data reduction technique” (Giannetti *et al.* 2016, 29). Thanks to this method it is possible to find out on what latent factor the variables selected by this research correlate the most. More specifically, inspired by the policies

¹¹⁹ It was applied the varimax rotation.

present in the updated version of the inclusionary and exclusionary framework (Chapter II) plus some other important features related to the Five Star Movement’s new democratic formula (environment, leadership, contrast to old politics) this analysis formulated 9 variables. These variables correspond to the topics this chapter wants to focus on looking at the interviews collected in 2017 and 2021. Every variable corresponds to a topic on which the interview might have or have not expressed his or her own opinion. Every opinion has been taken into account according to a score that goes from -1(negative), (o neutral) to 1 (positive). Every variable (“d”) has been labelled according to a number: d1.) “Reddito di cittadinanza” (minimum salary); d2.) Economic resources for environment; d3.) Inclusionary immigration; d4.) Civil rights (e.g. LGBT); d5.) European institutions; d6.) Direct democracy; d7.) Beppe Grillo; d8.) Media as “elite”; d9.) 5SM diversity from old politics¹²⁰.

Table 6.5 Factor Analysis Interviews 2017-2021

| Variable | Factor1 | Factor2 | Factor3 | Factor4 | Uniqueness |
|----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|------------|
| d1 | | 0.7983 | | | 0.3480 |
| d2 | | 0.5338 | | | 0.5796 |
| d3 | 0.6938 | | | | 0.3833 |
| d4 | | | | | 0.4184 |
| d5 | | | 0.8215 | | 0.2329 |
| d6 | | | -0.6581 | | 0.3553 |
| d7 | -0.7196 | | | | 0.2854 |
| d8 | | | | -0.8915 | 0.1932 |
| d9 | -0.7893 | | | | 0.3411 |

(blanks represent $abs(\text{loading}) < .5$)

Overall, taking into account those factors that reached and went beyond the eigenvalue of 1, on 52 observations¹²¹, four main factors were singled out. Factor 1 presents a correlation between variable d3 (“inclusionary immigration”), d7 (the “opinion about Beppe Grillo”) and d9 (the “claim according to which “the

¹²⁰ See codebook in Appendix F.

¹²¹ Overall, this research could rely on 53 interviews. However, one of this could not provide enough insights for this analysis.

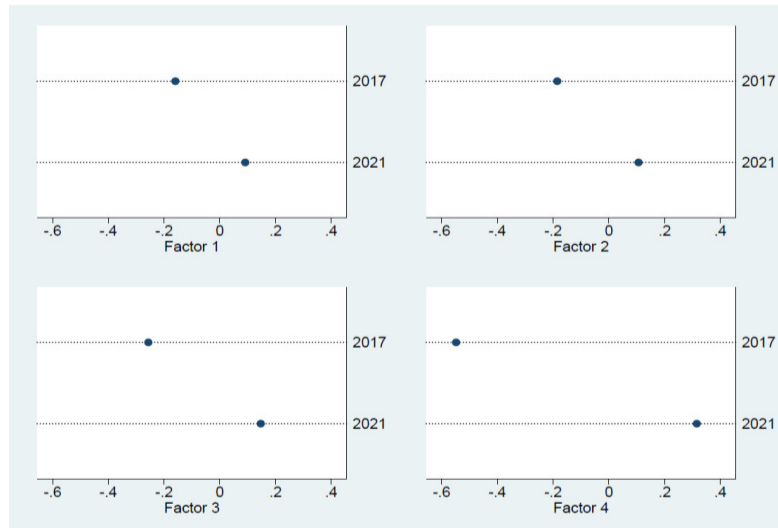
Five Star Movement is different from the old politics”). Factor 2 between d1 (“reddito di cittadinanza”, minimum salary) and d2 (the use of economic resources for the environment). Factor 3 between d5 (the opinion on the current European Institutions) and d6 (direct democracy) and Factor 4 is only represented by d8 (“media are part of the “elite”).

Having said that this analysis also shows something more on how these main trends are correlated on every factor in the overall period 2017-2021. Factor 1 points out that those that are in favor of inclusive immigration are also critical towards the figure of Beppe Grillo and disagree with the idea that the Five Star Movement is different from the old politics. Factor 2 clearly shows that someone who is in favor of the minimum salarium is also in favor of the use of economic resources to protect the environment. Conversely Factor 3 indicated that those who do not express strong criticisms of the European Institution¹²² do not ask for an implementation of direct democracy either. Finally, Factor 4 shows that, in general, 5SM representatives do not perceive media as part of the evil elite.

In the next two graphs how this trend changed from 2017 to 2021 will be illustrated (table 6.6) and how it is possible to differentiate these trends looking at different 5SM institutional roles (table 6.7).

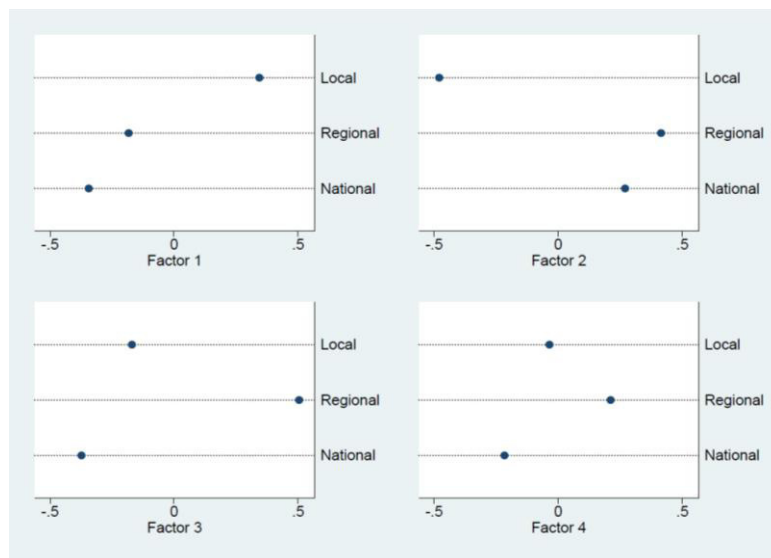
¹²² It is important to note that all the interviews presented some sort of criticism towards the current European institutions. For this reason, this research considered the positive opinions on the EU institutions (score 1) as the softest kind of criticism towards the EU institutions.

Table 6.6 Factor Analysis, shifts from 2017 to 2021



Overall, this graph shows that from 2017 to 2021 Factor 1 and Factor 2 shifted from -2 to 0.5. This means that from 2017 to 2021 there has been an increase of those that embraced an inclusionary view on immigration but also expressed criticisms towards Grillo and the idea that the 5SM is different from the old politics (Factor 1), and at the same time, there was an increase in those who appreciated the introduction of the “reddito di cittadinanza” (minimum salary) and that were positive concerning the use of economic resources to protect environment (Factor 2). However, the most striking changes refer to Factor 3 and Factor 4. Factor 3 indicates that those that do not call for an implement of direct democracy have also a better consideration of the current European institutions. According to this analysis in 2017 this tendency was smaller compared to 2021 (from -2 to almost .2). Thus in 2021 the trend shows that the call for direct democracy was lower and the perception of the current European Institution was more positive. Finally, looking at Factor 4 it is possible to claim that in 2017 the attitude according which media were not perceived as part of the elite was very small (almost -6) whereas this trend grows considerably in 2021 (almost .4)

Table 6.7 Factor Analysis – difference at the institutional level



This graph shows the four factors singled out by the explorative factor analysis displayed according to the different institutional level of the 5SM representatives interviewed in 2017 and 2021. Overall, it is possible to claim that the 5SM local representatives are those that embraced inclusionary immigration the most and presented a major degree of criticism towards Grillo and the idea that the Movement is different from the old politics (Factor1). Moreover, among the different levels, especially the regional and national level presented a positive opinion on the “reddito di cittadinanza” (minimum salary) and the use of economic resources to protect environment. Turning to Factor 3, namely those that had a fairly positive opinion of the current EU institutions and did not require an implementation of direct democracy, the highest score was presented again by the regional 5SM representatives. Finally on Factor 4, namely the rejection of the idea that “media are part of the “elite” (Mudde, 2004) the regional group scored the highest positive value and the national group the lowest. So according this last result, especially the 5SM representatives at national level still frame media as corrupt and part of the “elite”

In conclusion it is possible to claim that the results reached by this explorative factor analysis met the results previously found in Chapter IV and V with the analysis of the policy positions through bidimensional analysis (Chapter

IV) but also the qualitative analysis of the parliamentary speeches collected from 2017 to 2019. Overall, the main trends show that from 2017 to 2021 the 5SM representatives tended to have a more inclusive view of immigration and to present more criticisms of Grillo and the idea that the Movement was still different from the “old politics” (this especially at the local level). Moreover, from an economic point of view these representatives confirmed the 5SM’s inclusionary positions on economic redistribution and use of economic resources to protect the environment. Interestingly, together with a softer opinion of the current European Institutions the request to implement direct democracy decreased from 2017 to 2021 (especially at regional level). Finally, the perception that these representatives had of the media also changed. Indeed comparing 2017 and 2021 it is possible to claim that the hostile attitude towards the media, perceived as part of the elite, was toned down.

As a final reflection it is important to stress that this final analysis might contain some flaws in respect to its coding and sampling. First, this analysis is the result of the single work of the author of this PhD project, which means that in terms of “intercode reliability” the results reached might be biased. Moreover, the sampling used might also lead to inconsistencies. Indeed, the interviews collected in 2017 were mainly with 5SM representatives at the local and regional level whereas in 2021 the regional group was smaller and many new interviews were collected at the national level. In addition to this, even if some of the interviewees from 2017 accepted to be interviewed again in 2021 not all of them are present in the sample from 2021. Finally, it is important to stress that on some topics (especially on civil rights) these interviewees did not express a clearcut opinion.

6.9 Results

In order to answer the second research question, “Have populist parties been able to retain their populist “outside mainstream politics” identity, or have they been assimilated into mainstream parties?”, this PhD project focused on the 5SM and its government experiences. In particular, this analysis performed a qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews with 5SM representatives

(at local, regional and national level) in 2017 and 2021 and a further statistical analysis (factor analysis) on these data to aid the comparison between these two periods. As a starting point in this section, the focus will be on the qualitative analysis of the semi-structured interviews looking at the commonalities among the answers provided by 5SM representatives at municipal (local), regional and national (parliament and government) level.

Comparing the three groups of interviews from 2021, it is possible to identify that over the three dimensions “democracy”, “Five Star Movement democratic formula” and “Five Star Movement representation” there are undeniable similarities. First, overall, the perception that these interviewees have of democracy and the role of citizens seem to be the same, namely democracy is not fully expressed in Italy. In particular, our interviewees stated that citizens are actively politically involved only during elections, when they have to “delegate” someone else to represent their interests within the higher political institutions. Moreover, even if the constitution provides tools of direct democracy these seem to be neglected by the higher political institutions. This trend was also present in the interviews from 2017, although in comparison it is possible to assess that some interviewees from 2017 showed an even more critical position towards the degree of democracy in Italy.

Other important commonalities among the interviews of 2021 concern specific points of the Five Star Movement democratic formula, such as the meaning of the motto “one counts one” and the use of “Internet in order to improve democracy”. Generally speaking, the motto “one counts as one” is translated as “one head, one vote” and it indicates the fact that every opinion and vote counts. Moreover, this motto refers to the idea that everyone should be allowed to participate and express his or her own position within the movement. However, almost every interviewee pointed out that “one counts as one” does not mean that the principle of meritocracy should not be respected within the movement and that everyone is not the same in terms of knowledge and expertise on specific topics.

Turning to the use of the Internet, this resource is appreciated by most of our interviewees as a tool to enable direct democracy and sharing knowledge.

However, several interviewees also emphasized that the Internet remains a tool with positive and negative sides and that it is important to maintain personal direct contacts among people in the real world. Overall, it is possible to assess that these trends reflect the opinion of the interviews from 2017.

Looking closely at the digital platform *Rousseau*, most of our interviewees from 2021 acknowledged its importance in enabling the direct participation of Five Star Movement members to the internal decision making of the Movement. Moreover, this platform represented an important resource for e-learning and project sharing (especially at the local level). However, some criticisms on *Rousseau* arose and they mainly referred to the technical problems of the platform that occurred during some voting sessions. In addition to this, several interviewees (both current and former representatives) expressed concern about the nature of some questions that the Five Star members had to vote on in *Rousseau*. In particular, it was pointed out that sometimes the questions were clearly biased in their formulation. On this note, none of our interviewees expressed a clear position on the divergences between the Casaleggio and Associati and the Five Star Movement which occurred in summer 2021. However, it is important to say that a considerable number of interviewees demonstrated themselves to be quite affectionate towards the *Rousseau* project, which along with the Five Star Movement was a project in evolution.

Other important commonalities among all our interviewees from 2021 concerned the opinion on the European Institutions, the meaning of the label populism and the preferences on the Five Star Movement constitutional reforms. What is interesting to note is that somehow, they reflect the positions of the interviewees from 2017¹²³.

First on the European Institutions, the majority of the interviewees from 2021 showed a milder attitude towards the European Institutions. Indeed, most of them claimed not to be against it but that the European Institutions needed to be refounded on the base of equal political cooperation closer to the European

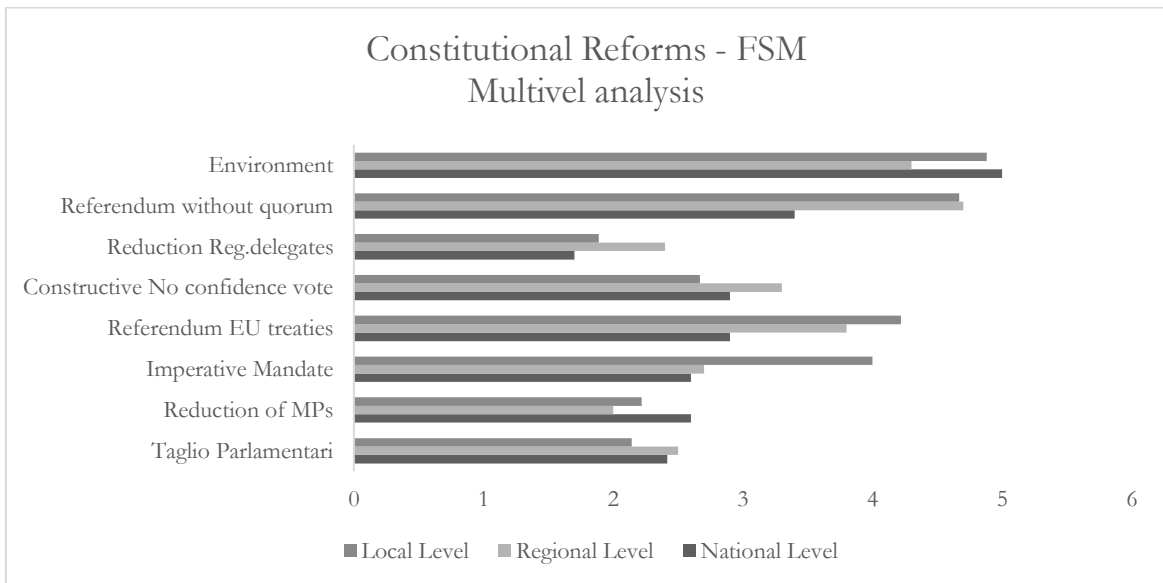
¹²³ With the exception of the preference concerning the Five Star Movement constitutional reforms which was not asked in 2017.

citizens' needs, beyond the economic interests. In this sense it is important to note, that none of our interviewees from 2021 stated that Italy should leave the European Union.

Turning to the meaning of the word “populism”, just as in 2017, also these interviewees claimed not to be offended by this label. Moreover, they affirmed that they are populist if we refer to the positive meaning of this word, namely, that they are defending people’s interests and bringing their voice within the higher political institutions. Conversely many interviewees from 2021 at every level pointed out that there is also a negative sense related to the word populism and it mainly refers to those that try to mobilize people’s fear promising easy solutions in order to gain electoral consensus. Interestingly, the League of Matteo Salvini was often indicated as a clear example of “negative populism”.

Another important common trait among the Five Star Movement interviewees from 2021 concerns their preferences on the Five Star Movement proposals of constitutional reforms.

Table 6.8



From this multilevel analysis it is possible to see that on average the interviewees from 2021 gave great importance to the “introduction of the referendum without quorum” the “referendum on the EU treaties” and “the introduction of the defense of the Environment” within the Italian constitution.

It is interesting to note that the “reduction of the parliamentary members” was not felt as a priority by the majority of our interviewees from 2021. In this sense several representatives pointed out that it would have been better to cut the salary of the members of Parliament rather than reduce the number of members of Parliament.

According to the present analysis, the aforementioned commonalities are important for two reasons. First, they show what can be considered to be the common ground among the Five Star Movement members at different institutional levels. Second, these elements could already say something about the capacity of the Five Star Movement to remain different from other political parties. Indeed, according to the present analysis these commonalities, which were mostly present in 2017 seem to indicate that the Five Star Movement has been able to “stay different” since 2017. Moreover, if we look at the positions that these interviewees expressed on democracy (and the role of citizens) but also on the other political parties, it might be argued that the Five Star Movement is still characterized by a strong people-centrist and anti-elitist discourse (Mudde, 2014). In addition to this, also the overall major preference that these interviewees show towards mechanisms of direct democracy (“General Will”, institutional dimension) might also suggest that the Five Star Movement is still a (pure) populist party different from the other political parties. In this sense, even the interpretation that our interviewees provided of the term ‘populism’, as the mission to bring people’s interests within the higher political institutions, would also confirm this result.

However, the rest of the collected answers, especially those present in the Five Star Movement’s representation dimension, provided important insights that tell another story. In particular, looking at some of the original features of the Five Star Movement such as fluid organization, horizontal internal democracy, absence of hierarchies but also strong environmentalism, it might be argued that the Five Star Movement has changed considerably in the last years. Not surprisingly a considerable number of interviewees (at every level) spoke about an original Five Star Movement and a new Five Star Movement. It should be noted that this distinction arose especially when it was asked “what is a

common element that the Five Star Movement members share” and “to what extent have the M5S representatives from (the top to the bottom) fulfilled their role as Five Star Movement *portavoce*” and “what would betraying as a Five Star Movement representative mean”. Taking into consideration especially the answers to these questions, a brief analysis will be provided of the main changes that occurred in the last year according to our interviewees.

First, some current Five Star Movement representatives acknowledged some progressive changes that the Five Star Movement had to make in order to acquire a more defined structure and thus to be able to better manage its many representatives and institutional tasks. Second, the group of former members of the Five Star Movement pointed out that, especially at the government level, some decisions were taken following a top-down model and that there was no real collective debate on these decisions with the rest of the members. Concerning this last point, a fair number of interviewees (also current members) pointed out that even the questions to vote on in *Rousseau* were biased in this sense. In addition to this, especially at the local and regional levels, a progressive “separation” between on one side the national and on the other side the regional or local level was often mentioned.

The most critical opinions came from the group of former members (also former ministers and deputies) which openly spoke about an ongoing gradual centralization of the decision-making power at the national level. According to some more critical interviewees this process started around the introduction of the New Statute in December 2017 when the figure of the political leader was officially introduced. Others, more lenient but still critical, pointed out that the Five Star Movement remained fairly loyal to its key principles and historical battles up to the beginning of the coalition experience with the League. Later, also because of competition with the League, the Five Star Movement has started to give up on many of its ethical principles and battles in order to gain consensus and stay in power.

Moreover, speaking about structural change within the movement many interviewees at different levels expressed concern about the possibility that the limit of two electoral mandates will be abolished. The main reason behind this

concern is that, according to these interviewees, abolishing this backbone principle of the Five Star Movement would eliminate any substantial difference from the other political parties definitely.

As a final important note on the difference between the Five Star Movement and the other political parties, it is necessary to mention also some significant deviation (Napoletano 2017) that the Five Star Movement seems to have taken in some of its “historical battles”. Indeed, several interviewees pointed out that since it entered government, the Five Star Movement made different trade-offs on the environment. In particular, some of the former members mentioned specific pro-environment battles (public water, Tav, Tab, Ilva from Taranto) that the Five Star Movement had waged for years, especially before its entrance in government, and that were eventually neglected by the movement. This insight does not invalidate what was previously found with our survey on the Five Star movement constitutional reforms proposal. The environment is still a priority at the individual level among the Five Star Movement representatives, however, according to what many interviewees (especially former members) suggested, it is the leading Five Star Movement group that seem to have betrayed the original principles from this point of view.

Some interviewees, mainly former members of the movement (e.g. former minister Elisabetta Trenta) also mentioned immigration as a topic on which the Five Star Movement seemed to have deviated from its original political line especially during the first government experience with the radical right populist League. Speaking about policy preferences, it is interesting to note that our interviewees did not mention the European Union as one of these topics on which the Five Star Movement seemed to have changed its mind. However, according to our analysis and also in comparison with the interviews collected in 2017, overall, the Five Star Movement representatives from 2021 show a softer tone and attitude towards the European Institutions.

Turning to the factor analysis performed on the semi-structured interviews collected in 2017 and 2021, the results reached matched both some insights found through the bidimensional analysis on expert surveys in Chapter IV and some results singled out through the qualitative analysis of the parliamentary

speeches in Chapter V, especially in terms of economic redistribution, environment and European institutions. Indeed, according to the factor analysis first performed on the interviews collected by this research, the 5SM confirmed its inclusionary position on economic redistribution but also on the use of economic resources to protect the environment. Second, since 2017, the Five Star Movement representatives softened their negative attitude against the current European Institutions. Overall, they still perceived these institutions as far from meeting the citizens' needs, however, compared to 2017, a major group of interviewees presented themselves as convinced supporters of the European Union. Moreover, the factor analysis performed also pointed out that especially at the local level, the 5SM representatives embraced an inclusionary view of immigration¹²⁴ but also started to be more critical towards the figure of Beppe Grillo and the idea that the Movement is different from the "old politics". Taking into consideration that in 2018 the Five Star Movement started its government coalition experiences, it is possible to claim that this trend indicates how the local level perceived the performance of the Movement in government as "distant" from the original 5SM mission. This result matches one of the main insights found through the qualitative analysis of the interviews performed in this chapter: the local level perceived a detachment in the upper echelons of the Five Star Movement and its leading figure Grillo. Finally, the factor analysis also says something important about the relationship that the Five Star Movement had with the media which, especially at the origins, were framed as corrupt and biased by the Movement (Napoletano 2017): from 2017 to 2021 there was a striking increase of representatives that did not frame the media as part of the elite.

Taking into consideration the combination of all these results, the next section will provide a final answer to the research question "Have populist

¹²⁴ Somehow this tendency met one of the main results reached through the qualitative analysis of the parliamentary speeches in Chapter V according which in 2019 (Conte II government in coalition with the Democratic Party) the Five Star Movement moved towards a more inclusionary view of immigration.

parties been able to retain their populist “outside mainstream politics” identity, or have they been assimilated into mainstream parties?” in particular, with a focus on the Five Star Movement and its first two government experiences.

6.9.1 *Conclusions on the second research question*

Considering the results collected, according to this analysis the Five Star Movement has changed considerably after its first two government experiences. In particular, this research reached the conclusion that this change happened for two main reasons related to, first, the Movement’s intra party politics characterized by strong internal conflicts and, second, a lack of “organizational effectivity” (Harmel and Janda, 1994; Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015; Akkerman *et al.*, 2016). First this section will tackle the subject of intra party politics and then the lack of organizational structure.

Speaking about change and internal conflict within the Five Star Movement, according to our analysis it is possible to distinguish between two main schools of thought which embody the extremes of the Five Star Movement at that moment¹²⁵; one can be labelled as “Institutional” whereas the other as “Conservative”. More specifically, more than one interviewee distinguished between “Jacobins” and “Taliban” within the Five Star Movement. The former label was addressed to those that were more open to substantial changes for example in terms of alliances with other political parties”, whereas the Taliban were described as the “intransigent” of the Movement or in any case more attached to the original principles and rules of the Movement. The former believes that the Five Star Movement has not changed essentially and if it did, these were structural changes necessary in order to carry on the Five Star Movement democratic mission and battles. Generally speaking, many of the current members of Parliament and government might be part of this group that represents the “pro- government” 5SM team. Conversely, in the latter group it is

¹²⁵ It is important to note that the present analysis has been written before May 2022 and thus before the further evolution experienced by the Five Star Movement starting from June 2022.

possible to find those that do not recognize the current Five Star Movement's political choices and attitude at all, and that, for example, would prefer to see it in opposition rather than in the current "government of all" of Mario Draghi. For example, this second school of thought is represented by ex-members such as Alessandro Di Battista and Barbara Lezzi.

According to this research, the intra party politics of the Movement played a crucial role in the ability of this political actor to remain faithful to its original democratic formula and populist character. Indeed, because of its internal conflicts (which also led a considerable number of representatives to leave the Movement on a voluntary basis) the Five Star Movement presented itself as not a unitary actor in its preferences and political line within the government coalition. This is because, even if, at the beginning of its political experience, the Five Star Movement presented itself as a "policy seeking" actor, entering into government acted as a "watershed" and laid the foundations for the distinction of two groups animated by different goals within the Movement: the "vote and "office seeking" group ("institutional" team) and the "policy seeking" group (the conservative) (Müller and Strøm, 1999).

Turning to the organizational aspect, different interviewees referred to the hierarchical top-down structure that the Movement seems to have adopted over time giving up on the original fluid model based on internal horizontal democracy. However, it is not possible to affirm that the Five Star Movement structure has been defined once and for all yet. Conversely it seems that, notwithstanding this top-down structure, the Movement still needs to clarify its internal structure, especially concerning the communication among different institutional levels. In this sense and considering all the insights collected, this research argues that the Five Star Movement definitely lacked "organizational effectivity". This is also the reason why, as this research has previously shown in Chapter IV and V, the Five Star Movement was not able to exert an effective direct populist influence on its coalition partners. In particular, a crucial role was played by the internal communication problems between different institutional levels within the Movement, also in indicating a solid guideline on important political matters. More specifically the communication deficiencies internal to

the 5SM might also be attributable to the lack of previous experience in government. Indeed, as Albertazzi and McDonnell have argued, one of the main problems of populist parties without previous experience is “to learn quickly how to communicate and justify its actions to the party on the ground – especially when faced with the inevitable compromises of coalition government” (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2015, 8). In particular, looking at the first government coalition between 5SM and the League, it might be argued that the latter dominated the former because it could count on a more structured organization (Passarelli and Tuorto, 2018) and previous experience in government. Moreover, the lack of efficient communication, besides being a sign of organizational deficiency could also be interpreted as a symptom of a systematic lack of transparency especially between the top and the bottom levels of the Movement. This trend can also be interpreted as a Five Star Movement deviation from its original democratic formula which was characterized by a strong call for transparency inside and outside the Movement.

In a nutshell, the lack of political cohesiveness and “organizational effectivity” in addition to different political tradeoffs that the Movement has made (especially on immigration and environment) since it entered in government suggest that the Five Star Movement has certainly toned down its anti-system character, taking positions that are closer to those of the other political parties. Certainly, these findings met the results found in Chapter IV and V as well.

However, the present analysis believes that this overall result will be definitively confirmed only if the limit of two terms is abolished. Indeed, notwithstanding the elements mentioned, the Five Star Movement can be still considered as different from the old-fashioned parties because of this condition. If the limits of the two terms were to be removed definitively, then the Five Star Movement would be officially a traditional old-fashioned party.

In the light of the findings that have emerged with the new original data presented in this analysis, which also offered the chance of a comparison between the 5SM representatives’ opinions between 2017 and 2021, a further reflection on the nature of the Five Star Movement as an example of pure

populism is due. In chapter V, this research argued that it seemed that the importance of “direct democracy” vanished for the Five Star Movement especially from 2019 on. However, this chapter has proven that at every institutional level the Five Star Movement representatives truly believed in the implementation of the use of referendum and citizens’ direct involvement in politics. Most importantly, this preference won in importance over other constitutional reforms, such as the reduction in the number of MP’s. Thus, it might be argued that the Five Star Movement really represents a form of pure populism. However, once again, it is the organizational change of the Five Star Movement that casts shadows on this conclusion. Indeed, especially looking at the progressive decrease in internal horizontal democracy which many interviewees have pointed out, and the use of the online voting tool (e.g., unbiased nature of the questions), it is difficult to believe that the Five Star Movement still represents a pure form of populism. It might be argued that even the purest forms of populism are destined to lose their purity in exchange for “office seeking” goals (Müller and Strøm, 1999). Certainly, further research is needed on this last point.

Conclusions

As the last decades have shown, populism (Mudde, 2004) in power is not an “episodic” but rather a “contagious” phenomenon (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2015) which might bring populists in power to exert a certain degree of influence on the other political actors. Moreover, nowadays a new kind of populist party, not only attached to the radical right-wing ideology, had the chance to enter and steer governments in coalition with other political parties or even with other populist actors. According to this research, this scenario presents fertile grounds to investigate populist influence in government as a “bidirectional” process. Indeed, on the one hand, once in government, populist actors might be able to exert a direct “populist influence” on their coalition partners. More specifically, as argued by this research with the introduction of a new definition of populist influence, populists might exert their influence in terms of communication contagiousness¹²⁶ and policy position change¹²⁷ and, in particular, push their coalition partners to embrace direct democracy” (Chapter III). On the other hand, populists in government might be influenced themselves by the “experience in office” and be forced to tone down their populist and anti-system character in order to survive.

First, the former interest led this project to formulate its first research question as follows: “to what extent did populist parties succeed in influencing their government coalition partners, leading them to adopt a populist rhetoric and change their policy positions? Second, the latter interest, brought this study to formulate a second further research question: “have populist parties been able to retain their populist “outside mainstream politics” identity, or have they been assimilated into mainstream parties?”.

In order to find answers to these questions the present research chose to focus on the Italian Five Star Movement. This is a populist actor characterized by grassroots origins, an undefined ideology and fluid organization which, since

¹²⁶ According the ideational approach theorized by Cas Mudde (Mudde, 2004).

¹²⁷ Depending on the populist ideological attachment (Mudde, 2004).

the beginning of its political experience, made a major use of digital platforms in order to promote an unconventional way of practising politics based on direct democracy. Besides being an intriguing case of unconventional politics *per se*, this Movement was able in a few years to, first, enter parliament (2013) and, second, form two coalition governments with very different political actors: the radical right populist League (2018) and the center left mainstream Democratic Party (2019)¹²⁸.

According to this research the Five Star Movement government coalition experiences provide a double chance to investigate “direct populist influence” from two different, equally important perspectives. First, taking into consideration the inclusionary or exclusionary nature of the political actors involved in these government experiences, the first two 5SM governments give us the opportunity of studying if the Five Star Movement, a populist actor characterized by an undefined ideology (at least on immigration and civil rights, Chapter IV), was able to influence its coalition partners or vice versa. In particular, the first Five Star Movement government with the League, can be considered as an interesting case of cooperation between two different populist actors, which also provide the right conditions to find out which populist actor influenced the other eventually.

The aim of both Chapter IV and Chapter V was to offer a different analysis which combined provides an answer to the first research question proposed by this study. First, this research evaluated if the Five Star Movement and its coalition partners were using populist rhetoric before and during their coalition experience. Second, if the 5SM and its first two coalition partners changed their policy position according to the dimensions indicated in the inclusionary – exclusionary framework (material, political and symbolic) which this project also updated adding a novelty, the institutional dimension (Chapter III) which focus on the relationship that populist actors have with representative and direct democracy.

¹²⁸ At the time of the writing the Five Star Movement was a coalition partner of the Draghi’s government.

In Chapter IV this research made use of expert survey datasets (Poppa Project 2018, Global Expert Survey 2019) to trace the degree of populism and related use of populist rhetoric mainly in the Five Star Movement, League and Democratic Party. In the same vein, in Chapter V, this research provides a quantitative and qualitative text analysis on a corpus of 239 Italian parliamentary speeches to bolster the analysis on the rhetorical populist language but also to offer further insights on the policy priorities brought into parliament by the Five Star Movement, League and Democratic Party from 2016 to 2019. Results show that in both 2018 and 2019, the Five Star Movement could be labelled as the main populist actor within the Italian political scenario (Poppa Project 2018 and Global Expert Survey 2019) and also made the most use of populist rhetoric (Global Expert Survey 2019). However, the quantitative and qualitative text analysis performed in Chapter V mainly suggested that the Five Star Movement toned down its populist tone after the beginning of its first government coalition experience, whereas the League kept a soft populist tone and the Democratic Party did not show signs of rhetorical populist influence. Interestingly, another radical right populist actor, Brothers of Italy scored the highest value of populist rhetoric during the government coalition between the two populist actors Five Star Movement and League. These results were in part reached by the analysis of the policy positions and their change according to the revised inclusionary – exclusionary framework. In particular, it looks that more than being able to influence its coalition partners the Five Star Movement was influenced by the League, especially in terms of immigration policies (this result will be further confirmed in Chapter VI). Conversely the League did not embrace any of the Five Star Movement policy positions but rather came closer to its external ally, Brothers of Italy, during its government coalition experience with the Five Star Movement.

Taking into consideration these main insights, the overall main answer to the first research question is that the Five Star Movement was not able to exert a real direct populist influence on its first two coalition partners. In particular, even if according to the expert survey data analyzed in Chapter IV the Five Star Movement made use of populist discourse in Chapter V, through quantitative

text analysis on parliamentary speeches, this study observed that this discourse was considerably higher when the Five Star Movement was in opposition especially around 2016, but the Movement toned it down right after the beginning of the first coalition experience with the League in 2018. This finding was further confirmed by the qualitative analysis of the speeches collected from 2017 to 2019 (Chapter V). In addition to this, turning to the analysis of its policy position, the results collected in both Chapter IV and V indicated that the Five Star Movement stood firm on its position on economic redistribution and protection of the environment. However, especially on immigration and European Integration it has changed its initial attitude. In particular, on immigration the Movement came close to the League's positions (Chapter IV) and used an exclusionary discourse to frame this topic in parliament (Chapter V). Interestingly, at the beginning of the government coalition experience with the Democratic Party this tone was softened and a more inclusionary discourse was used.

Concerning the European Institutions, it is not possible to claim that on this matter the Five Star Movement was influenced by the League because this radical right populist party (in the same way as Brothers of Italy) continued to use quite an exclusionary tone towards the European Institutions. Rather, this analysis would argue that the Five Star movement mitigated its exclusionary positions towards Europe in order to become a more reliable political actor at the international level. Moreover, the Democratic Party has always presented itself as pro Europe so, it might be argued that also the government coalition with this mainstream center left wing party might have played a crucial role in the Five Star Movement's policy shift on the European Institutions. However, on this last aspect, not enough insights were collected by this project and further research might be needed.

Finally, in order to answer the first research question, this study firmly claims that the Five Star Movement was not able to exert an effective populist influence on its coalition partners with regard to the Five Star Movement's attitude towards direct democracy and how this changed over time, especially after the 5SM entrance in government. Indeed, taking into consideration that

according to the definition introduced by this research in Chapter III, in the presence of purely populist actors, “populist influence” means to be able to push the coalition partners to embrace direct democracy, it is difficult to speak about a real populist influence exerted by the Five Star Movement towards its coalition partners. This is because the Five Star Movement mitigated its call for direct democracy over time. Indeed, looking at the main findings from Chapter V, it seemed that in general the Five Star Movement representatives were stressing less the importance of implementing direct democracy, especially starting from 2019.

This result is confirmed further by the analysis performed to answer the second research question tackled by this project (referring directly to our case) “Has the Five Star Movement been able to retain its populist character (which also strongly supported direct democracy) or has it been assimilated into mainstream parties”? In particular, the intra-party politics (internal conflicts) and internal organizational structure of the Movement played a major role in answering this question, especially if it is taken into consideration that since the onset of its political experience the Five Star Movement was profoundly attached to the aim of enabling citizens’ direct democracy. This attitude (pure populism) has been reflected in the horizontal democracy that characterized the Movement. In order to provide a fair answer to the second research question, this project conducted an in-depth qualitative analysis based on 33 semi-structured interviews with 5SM at local, regional and national level collected in 2021. In addition to this, our analysis could count on previous 20 semi – structured interviews collected, with the same questionnaire, in 2017 with 5SM representatives at the local and regional level. Finally, in order to aid the comparison between the interviews collected in 2017 and those collected in 2021, this study performed explorative factor analysis on these data¹²⁹.

First, in order to have an initial idea of how the Five Star Movement changed on some of its political priorities, it is useful to start with the insights provided

¹²⁹ To be noted that one of the interviews collected could not be used for methodological reason, so the factor analysis is based on 52 observations.

by the factor analysis. This method offered the chance to push forward a further analysis (in addition to the bidimensional analysis performed in chapter IV) of how the policy positions of the 5SM representatives might have changed from 2017 to 2021. In particular, the factors analysis applied to the semi-structured interviews collected focused on specific topics related to the 5SM's policy priorities and organizational peculiarities. The result pointed out some main trends among the 5SM representatives interviewed from 2017 (before the government) to 2021 (after two government experiences). First (especially at the local level) the 5SM embraced a more inclusionary attitude towards immigration but also a stronger criticism of Beppe Grillo and the idea according to which the Five Star Movement is different from the "old politics". Second, the 5SM representatives maintain inclusionary positions on economic redistribution and green sustainability. Third, over time, the tendency according to which there is a fairly positive opinion of the European institutions¹³⁰ and a minor request to implement direct democracy grew from 2017 to 2021. Fourth, the media, which since the onset of the 5SM political experience were labelled by this populist movement as corrupt, are not strongly perceived as part of the elite in 2021. These main findings, together with the insights reached through the qualitative analysis of the interviews collected, led this research to the conclusion that the Five Star Movement has struggled to remain faithful to its populist character and democratic formula aimed to implement direct democracy.

More specifically, according to the qualitative analysis performed in Chapter VI, this happened because of two main reasons: intra-party politics (internal conflicts) and lack of "organizational effectivity". On the one hand, it is possible to detect an internal conflict within the Movement between those that wanted to remain loyal to the original Five Star Movement principles and organization structure ("conservative group") and those that embraced the idea that some changes in the organization and political line of the Movement aimed to carry on the government experience were necessary (pro-government group). Over time, these internal conflicts led to a lack of a single political line within

¹³⁰ Although they still need to be rebalanced from a democratic point of view.

and outside the Movement, which ultimately undermined the stability of the 5SM within the government coalitions.

From an organizational point of view, it is clear that the Movement changed radically acquiring a top - down structure. Most interestingly, even if the Five Star Movement organizational structure changed in a hierarchical sense, it did not adopt a clear and efficient organizational structure. Taking into consideration the growth that the Five Star Movement has experienced after the 2018 national election, this lack of structured organization caused major communication problems among the different institutional levels present in the Movement (local, regional and national). It has to be noted that according to this research, the 5SM organizational structure problem is also the cause of the Movement's inability to exert an effective direct influence on its coalition partners (lack of "organizational effectivity" Christiansen *et al.* 2019, 91-92). However, notwithstanding the findings collected that brought this study to acknowledge the important organizational changes the Movement has undergone, this populist actor cannot be defined as totally similar to the other political parties yet. Indeed, according to this analysis, it will be possible to identify the Five Star Movement with old fashioned politics only when the limit of two mandates is abolished. In fact, this specific rule still marks a particular difference between the Five Star Movement and the other mainstream parties.

Turning to the Five Star Movement's original creed aimed to apply direct democracy, it is hard to define if the Five Star Movement has totally lost its pure populism or not (Chapter II). In particular, Chapter V suggested that the Movement reduced this attitude, whereas among our interviews direct democracy seems to represent a priority at every level. However, according to the factor analysis performed there is a clear major trend (Factor 1) according to which those that had a less critical opinion on the European institution also request less implementation of direct democracy. It is undeniable that at the moment the horizontal internal democracy which characterized the Movement is also unstable, if not completely absent, taking into consideration the last events which were internal to the Movement. However, this result fuels the assumption according to which the Five Star Movement cannot be defined as an example of

pure populism anymore. Doubts remain on the question if it can still be considered populist at all. Certainly, taking into consideration the different insights collected in every empirical chapter this study can argue that the Five Star Movement toned down its populist discourse, however further analysis to find out if it can still be considered populist is needed.

Before concluding this final overview, it is important to stress that besides trying to provide an answer to both its research questions, this research has also actively introduced some relevant theoretical and methodological novelties which, together with the main research goals, represents the “forte” of this project. First, this research filled a gap present in most of the literature when it comes to the ideational approach (Mudde, 2004): operationalize the “General Will” concept. For this reason, this research added a novelty namely a fourth dimension to the inclusionary – exclusionary framework to classify populist parties (Chapter II). Starting from the definition of populism theorized by Cas Mudde (2004) populism can be defined according to three main principles: “people-centrism”, “anti-elitism” and (superiority of the) “General Will” (Mudde, 2004). However, so far, researchers have focused on “people-centrism” and “anti-elitism” mostly, not paying enough attention to the third main concept “General Will” and how to operationalize it. According to this third key principle, populists acknowledge the existence of a morally superior General Will owned by the “people”. This means that, in politics, only the people should “decide” what has to be done and, consequently, this imperative brings populists to prefer direct democracy to representative democracy ultimately (Mudde, 2004, Chapter II). Starting from this reflection, this study argues that, in its authentic form, populism will naturally challenge representative democracy and look for an effective implementation of direct democracy (Chapter II). Thus, in introducing this fourth institutional dimension within the inclusionary – exclusionary framework, this research aims to provide a further theoretical tool to classify populist parties looking at their relationship with representative democracy. Following this reflection, this research also added a new category of words (“institutional” category) in the Decadri and Boussalis (2019) dictionary of populism.

Second, in stressing the inclusionary – exclusionary nature of populist parties, this research aimed to emphasize the important role that ideological attachment might play within the process of populist influence, especially in the presence of populist actors who present undefined ideological positions. Third, due to the ambiguous nature of the concept of “influence” and “populist influence”, in order to fill another important gap within the field of study on populist influence, this research provided a sharper definition of populist influence which also indicates what should be taken into consideration from a methodological point of view (language and policy positions) in this field of study. Fourth, in 2021 this research was able to collect a large number of interviews with 5SM representatives at every level. Thanks to the broad and multifaceted nature of the questionnaire used these interviews represented a precious source of information, but they could also provide useful insights for further research on populism in government. Fifth, with the question “what does populism mean for you”, this research provided important insights for the field of study that focuses on how to define populism.

Having said this, the present research is also aware of all those aspects that have weakened this project and which need improvement. First, the conceptualization of pure populism and populist influence should be further defined. In particular, the former concept needs a more extensive theoretical discussion and clearer operationalization. Second, the use of different expert survey datasets might lead to methodological inconsistencies, especially we take into consideration that they might consider conceptual definitions differently, use different methods or different ways of grouping political parties. Third, the concept of influence refers to causality and thus to casual mechanisms. In this vein, process tracing might have been a fruitful method to answer the first research question, but this project could not make use of such methodological tool at the moment. It will certainly be applied in the future in order to bolster the present analysis. Fourth, this research could rely on a large number of interviews that were analyzed by only one researcher (in this sense also the factor analysis performed might be biased). However, individual interpretation might be biased. A way to avoid bias could be to make use of a digital software such

as MAXQDA. Fifth, due to the large number of interviews presented in Chapter VI, this chapter ends up being too long. In order to improve a flowing comprehension of that analysis further work will be needed in order to reduce it.

In conclusion, this project has tried to tackle an interesting contemporary phenomenon, namely populist influence in government coalition, on the one hand, and the influence that the “experience in office” might have on populist parties in government coalition. According this study these two phenomena can be summed up under the label “bidirectional populist influence”. In particular, this study chose the eclectic populist Five Star Movement and its first government coalition experiences as a case study for both its two research questions, namely “to what extent did populist parties succeed in influencing their government coalition partners, leading them to adopt a populist rhetoric and change their policy positions?” (first research question) and “have populist parties been able to retain their populist “outside mainstream politics” identity, or have they been assimilated into mainstream parties?” (second research question). In order to find answers to these questions, this project first defined theoretically what populism is (Chapter I), how to classify populist parties (Chapter II) and how to define and study populist influence in government (Chapter III). Then, in Chapter IV, V (first research question) and VI (second research question) through the use of different methods (bidimensional analysis, quantitative and qualitative text analysis, qualitative analysis of interviews and factor analysis) and data (expert surveys, parliamentary speeches, semi structured interviews) this study collected findings that combined brought this study to answer its questions as follows.

First, according to this research the Five Star Movement did not exert populist influence on its coalition partners. More specifically, even if this populist party presented itself as a promoter of direct democracy, it toned down both its populist tone and calls for direct democracy; consequently, it also did not push its coalition partners to embrace direct democracy. Rather it might be argued that (especially) the League first and the Democratic Party later influenced the Five Star Movement on the immigration topic. Secondly, following some insights already found for the previous question and through a

deep analysis performed in Chapter VI this study reached the conclusion that the Five Star Movement toned down its populist attitude considerably after it entered in government for the first time in 2018. Moreover, it deviated from its original key principles giving up on the internal horizontal democracy that characterized the ideals of the Movement in its beginnings. More specifically, the Five Star Movement was not able to remain faithful to its original character because of internal conflicts and lack of organizational effectivity. It is important to note that these conditions also played a crucial role in the incapability of the Movement to exert a real populist influence on its coalition partners (first research question). However, notwithstanding this conclusion, this study also believes that only when the limit of the two mandates is finally removed, will it be possible to claim that, formally, no differences exist between the Five Star Movement and the other political parties.

In conclusion it is important to emphasize that notwithstanding the important insights collected by this research further work is needed in order to bolster both the analysis presented but also the novelties introduced, from both a theoretical and methodological point of view. However, the hope of the present analysis is to have inspired the curiosity of the reader on the topics faced in this research and maybe push more researchers to follow the same path contributing with other conceptual and methodological novelties. In particular this research truly believes that the populist influence topic deserves major attention within the academic field especially taking into consideration the different ideological attachment that populists in coalition government might have. Indeed, besides the importance of the organizational structure, further research on how the ideological aspect might also play a crucial role within the whole process of populist influence in government, which could lead to shedding its own light on the causality behind populist influence. In this vein, this research confirmed that the immigration topic remains the most sensitive matter when it come to populist influence (even between two different populist parties) whereas, for example, economic redistribution is not. Further research on this topic might be dedicated to explain this trend more extensively. This step will also certainly bring a further

important contribution to the topic “why voters chose populism in the first place”.

Speaking about ideological attachment and immigration, this research truly believes that Italy remains an intriguing and fruitful case to focus on populist influence in government. Indeed, at the moment of writing¹³¹ Italy is about to experience a new government coalition steered by different kinds of populism all related to the right-wing spectrum: Brothers of Italy, League and Forza Italia. In particular Brothers of Italy and the League, which in turn present some important differences, can be labelled as forms of radical right-wing populism. At the moment Brothers of Italy, which has never experienced government coalition before, is the leading member of this coalition. However, taking into consideration the presence of other populist actors in this coalition it might be interesting to investigate if Brothers of Italy will be able to influence (and dominate) its coalition partners or the other way round.

Finally, this research is strongly convinced that, besides being fruitful topics for the study of populist influence in government, the study of cases such as the Five Star Movement as an example of unconventional politics which effectively tried to apply direct democracy within and outside the party can breach important questions such as “is it possible to bring direct democracy in national governments or is direct democracy possible only at local level”? According to this research, the study of the Five Star Movement brings to claim that the application of direct democracy seems to be incompatible with higher institutional levels or between different institutional levels (from the top to the bottom) but it seems to work (or in any case bring to some positive results) at local level. This is not a negligible finding. Clearly the main aim of this project remains to investigate populist influence in government as bidirectional analysis however, together with the study of populist influence in government it is important to keep in mind that the Five Star Movement is also an experiment in direct democracy within the higher political institutions. Further comparative research on this topic might confirm or disconfirm this claim and bring new

¹³¹ September 2022

important insights to the study of the relationship between direct and representative democracy.

Appendix A

Populism and Political Parties Expert Survey 2018 – Variables

LRoverall: A party's overall ideology on a scale ranging from 0 (left) to 10 (right) (i.e. the general left-right scale)

Peoplecentrism: Extent which a party believes that sovereignty should lie exclusively with the ordinary people (i.e. the ordinary people, not the elites, should have the final say in politics)

Antielitism: Extent to which a party can be characterized by its anti-elitism.

Appendix B

Global Party Survey 2020 – Variables

TYPE POPULISM: The Party Populism typology categorizes whether parties favor the use of pluralism or populist rhetoric categorized into four groups. See below for the variable question (V8) and coding.

1. Strongly Pluralist
2. Moderately Pluralist
3. Moderately Populist
4. Strongly Populist

TYPE_POPULIST_VALUES: The Populist Values typology combines the categories of rhetoric (V8_Bin) and the social values (B6_Bin) for each party. See below for the variable questions and coding.

1. Pluralist-Liberal
2. Pluralist-Conservative
3. Populist-Liberal
4. Populist-Conservative

POPULIST RHETORIC: Parties can also be classified by their current use of Populist or Pluralistic rhetoric. Populist language typically challenges the legitimacy of established political institutions and emphasizes that the will of the people should prevail. By contrast, Pluralist rhetoric rejects these ideas, believing that elected leaders should govern, constrained by minority rights, bargaining and compromise, as well as checks and balances on

executive power. Where would you place each party on the following scale

- 0. Strongly favors pluralist rhetoric
- 10. Strongly favors populist rhetoric

POPULIST RHETORIC: WILL OF THE PEOPLE

We seek to understand the type of rhetoric commonly used by each party, such as in their leadership speeches, rallies, press releases, party platforms, and campaign communications. Where would you place each party on the following scale?

- 0. Strongly emphasizes that politicians should follow the will of the people
- 10. Strongly emphasizes that politicians should lead public opinion

POPULIST RHETORIC: PEOPLE SHOULD DECIDE

How would you characterize the rhetoric commonly used by various parties on whether the people or leaders should decide important issues? Where would you place each party on the following scale?

- 0. Strongly emphasizes that ordinary people should decide important issues
- 10. Strongly emphasizes that leaders should decide important issues

POPULIST RHETORIC: POLITICIANS CORRUPT

How would you characterize the rhetoric commonly used by various parties on whether most politicians are honest or corrupt? Where would you place each party on the

following scale?

0 Strongly emphasizes
that most politicians are
honest and trustworthy
10. Strongly emphasizes
that most politicians are
dishonest and corrupt

STRONGMAN RULE: How would you characterize the rhetoric commonly used by various parties towards checks and balances on executive power? Where would you place each party on the following scale?

0 Strongly favors checks
and balances on
executive power
10. Strongly opposes
checks and balances on
executive power

Appendix C

Chapell Hill Expert Survey trend file 1999-2019 – Questions

Material dimension

REDISTRIBUTION = position on redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor. 0 = Strongly favors redistribution ; 10 = Strongly opposes redistribution

ENVIRONMENT = position towards environmental sustainability
0 = Strongly supports environmental protection even at the cost of economic growth; 10 = Strongly supports economic growth even at the cost of environmental protection

Political and symbolic dimension

IMMIGRATE_POLICY = position on immigration policy.
0 = Strongly favors a liberal policy on immigration; 10: Strongly favors a restrictive policy on immigration

Political dimension

SOCIALLIFESTYLE = position on social lifestyle (e.g. rights for homosexuals, gender equality). 0 = Strongly supports liberal policies ; 10 = Strongly opposes liberal policies

Symbolic dimension

EU_POSITION = overall orientation of the party leadership towards European integration in YEAR.

1 = Strongly opposed

2 = Opposed

3 = Somewhat opposed

4 = Neutral

5 = Somewhat in favor

6 = In favor

7 = Strongly in favor 25

Appendix D

Dictionary of populism (Decadri and Boussalis, 2019, p.7):

Antielitism: antidemocratic*, consens*, corrot*, disonest*, elit*, establishment, ingann*, mentir*, menzogn*, partitocrazia, propagand*, scandal*, tradim*, tradir*, tradit*, vergogn*, verita',

People-centrism: cittadin*, consumator*, contribuent*, elettore*, gente, popol*.

Institutional (General Will): iniziativa popo*, democrazia_dir*, democrazia_part* , partecipazione_att* , referendum , portavoce.

Appendix E

Questionnaire for interviews 2017, 2021

What is your opinion about the degree of democracy in our country?

- 2) What is the role of citizens within a democracy?
- 3) What is the difference between the Five Star Movement and any other Italian political party?
- 4) Could you please rank deliberation, transparency and participation?
- 5) What does “one counts as one” mean in your opinion?
- 6) What do you think of Internet as a tool to improve democracy?
- 7) What do you think of the Five Star Movement platform “Rousseau”?
- 8) What does it mean to represent people? What should the role of a Five Star Movement representative entail then?
- 9) In your opinion, to what extent have the M5S representatives from (the top to bottom) fulfilled this role?
- 10) Tell me, what would betraying as a Five Star Movement representative mean?
- 11) What would you say is the main challenge of your mission as M5S?
- 12) Do you always follow what people propose to you and then follow these proposals?
- 13) Could you please indicate a common element that characterizes the Five Star Movement’s members?
- 14) What do you think about the European Institutions? What do you think when, in the European field, the Five Star Movement is labelled as populist? (Asked in 2017, 2021) What is populism for you? (Asked only in 2021)
- 15) Could you please rank with a number from 0 (not important) to 5 (very important) the following ideas of constitutional change pushed forward by the Five Star Movement: Reduction of MPs, Vincolo di mandato (bond of mandate), Referendum on the European Treaties, Reduction of Regional Delegates (for the election of the President of Republic), Referendum without quorum,

Constructive No confidence vote, Introduction of the defence of environment among the principle of the Constitution? (Asked only in 2021)

17) What do you think of Giuseppe Conte? (Asked only in 2021)

Appendix F – Factor Analysis (codebook)

D1: Are you or are you not in favour of the reddito di cittadinanza (minimum salary). In particular, do you think that it has worked well or it should be reworked?

D2: Are you in favour of the use of the state economic resources to improve environmental sustainability?

D3: Are you or are you not in favour of an inclusionary immigration policy?

D4: Are you or are you not in favour of an implementation of civil rights (e.g. Gender equality, LGBT rights)

D5: Are you or are you not in favour of the current European Institutions?

D6: Are you or are you not in favour of an implementation of direct democracy over representative democracy.

D7: Do you have a positive opinion of Beppe Grillo?

D8: The media are part of the (corrupt) elite. Do you agree?

D9: The Five Star Movement is different from the old politics (and thus the other political parties).

Score = -1 (not in favour), 0 (neither favorable nor unfavorable), 1(favourable)

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