

Till Policy Do Us Part: What unites (and divides) the Five Star Movement and Lega electorates

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Abstract

Coalition governments are sometimes made up of parties with sharply differing priorities and policy preferences. This is the case of Italy's governing alliance between the Lega and the Five Star Movement, hailed by the media as populist. Relying upon pledges of change, and seemingly united by the sovereigntist claim to 'take back control', this unprecedented coalition has been called upon to address the promises to upend 'the system'. Whether this would be a doable task for the government or would, rather, turn into a likely loss of votes for the two parties, however, will largely depend on the extent to which the ideas of 'desired change' of the two different electorates might actually converge. On examining survey data, we find that M5S and Lega voters are likely to share anti-establishment, conspiracy rhetoric and sovereigntist attitudes, but have diverging views on domestic economic policies, migration, and cultural issues. These findings provide empirical grounds to advance, in the concluding remarks, some tentative scenarios for the likely developments of a governing coalition between different allies, whose direction would ultimately hinge upon the strategic options available to them.

1. Introduction

On 1 June 2018, the *Movimento 5 Stelle* (Five Star Movement, or M5S) and the Lega (the League) finally reached an agreement to form a coalition government, after weeks of tense negotiations. The event was hailed as a populist breakthrough, though populist parties are not new to governing roles (Kaltwasser 2016; De Lange 2012).

The Italian 'yellow-green' government features an alliance between two ideologically distinct actors, drawing on different electoral bases, apparently bound together just by their appeal to the 'popular will' and the anti-elite rhetoric.

But will such shared populist discourse be enough to ensure a stable governing coalition, despite the differences between the two allies? Will it be possible for these parties to reconcile their policy priorities without alienating their voters?

In this article, by analysing the attitudes and the policy preferences of the M5S and Lega electorates, we seek to assess whether and to what extent this coalition is called upon to respond to converging or conflicting demands from their respective supporters. This will allow us, in the concluding remarks, to formulate some speculations about the responsiveness, either supportive or hostile, of the two parties' voters to the policy choices undertaken by the governing coalition. We also explore the possible governing strategies,

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patterns of policy bargaining, and potential tensions that might emerge in Italy's populist government. In so doing, we draw on previous research (Bellucci 1991; Powell and Whitten 1993; Plescia 2016), which shows that, in highly complex coalition contexts, voters' rewards or punishments of governing parties in subsequent elections are likely to be related to the clarity of responsibility for different policy outputs.

2. So near, so far?

There is little doubt that the actors who signed the governing deal are profoundly different from one another. On the one hand, the M5S began as an anti-establishment party, based on a protest against the 'old parties' and the 'political class', and claiming a 'post-ideological' nature (Passarelli and Tuorto 2018; Vittori 2017; Gerbaudo and Screti 2017), which rejects any classification fitting the traditional left-right political divide (Isernia et al. 2018). On the other hand, the Lega is the oldest party in the Italian parliament, with a long experience of participation in national and regional governments, decidedly right-wing oriented, and standing out as a regionalist movement turned into a fully-fledged nationalist party (Albertazzi, Giovannini and Seddone 2018). This then begs the question: what might hold together such diverse actors? Do they appeal to values and promote policies that could be shared by both electorates? Or, on the contrary, do the two governing allies have to deal with irreconcilable, diverging policy priorities?

The affinity, or at least compatibility, of the policy priorities promoted by coalition parties is a crucial issue, since they have to achieve an equilibrium between their electoral pledges and likely intra-cabinet tensions (Klüver and Spoon 2017, 794). When affinities emerge, allies can easily coordinate in decision-making and comply with their electoral commitments. However, when policy priorities diverge, each actor is faced with the likely consequences of their strategic choices: on the one hand, failing to reach an agreement could be punished by the electorate, as both parties would not deliver on their policy promises; on the other hand, if one party succeeds in the intra-cabinet conflict by pushing ahead its policy, it would be rewarded by its electoral base, but would increase the likelihood of alienation of the other party's voters, with the consequent withdrawal of support. The strategy followed by actors in this chess-like game will also depend on the model of coalition government adopted, either *collegial* – i.e. when policies are the result of intra-party coordination and bargaining, or *ministerial* – i.e. when offices are allocated among coalition partners, who enjoy wide autonomy and independence in decision-making on those policies under their direct control (Ibidem).

2.1. The common populist framework of the 'government of change'

Despite their differences, the M5S and Lega leaders achieved a deal, whose title 'Contract for Italy's Government of Change', significantly epitomizes their common will to upend the Italian system. It is precisely their appeal to the people's will, their claims to radically change the rules and defy the establishment that have strengthened the ties between two otherwise strange bedfellows. The anti-elite rhetoric was present in the cabinet's inaugural speech pronounced by the Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte: 'If populism means the ruling class listening to people's needs ... (and) if anti-system means aiming at introducing a new system, able to remove old, encrusted privileges and power, then these political forces deserve both these epithets'. In a similar vein, the Lega's leader Matteo Salvini,

Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister, asserted that ‘there is no right and there is no left, there is only the people against the elites’;¹ similarly, his M5S counterpart Luigi Di Maio, serving as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economic Development, Labour and Social Policies, said that ‘it’s going to be a hot autumn: the powers are rallying against us!’²

The anti-elitist message of the Lega and the M5S is centred on the typical rhetorical construction used by all populist political actors: a simple binary framing which juxtaposes an ill-defined, homogenous group, i.e., ‘the innocent people’, with another equally vague category, i.e., the obscure holders of economic and political power, lumped together in a single, unified bloc (Kriesi 2014; Mudde 2016 and 2004; Absts and Rummens 2007). This narrative, in turn, rests upon a paranoid, conspiratorial reasoning that is inherent in the very (dualistic) logic of populism (Castanho Silva, Vegetti, and Littway 2017; Mueller 2016) and that also represents a useful strategic and political device. It allows the simplifying of the complexity of political and social problems, also favouring the intertwining of heterogenous issues (Ibid.) and consolidates the idea of the ‘we’, that is the ‘victims of the system’, against the ‘other’, the elites. Conspiracy thinking, in this respect, is closely related to the populist anti-elitist rhetoric, since the deterioration of the bond of trust between the represented (i.e. the citizen) and their representatives (i.e. the elite) incentivizes people to blame the current mechanisms of decision-making and advance claims for alternative solutions. This popular disenchantment, in turn, serves the populist parties’ purpose to hold people together around the shared belief that the truth has been kept secret by the liberal elites, while pledging to help them unveil the truth, to show ‘how the world really works’, against what the elites want people to believe.

Besides the ‘people vs. elites’ dichotomy or the conspiracy belief, however, populism is above all a matter of moral self-representation (Mueller 2016). By adopting such Manichean rhetoric, in fact, populist actors portray themselves as the only ones who are morally entitled to represent the will (and defend the interests) of the disempowered people. It is in their name that they promise to exert a change in the way things currently stand and to take back control from the deceptive elites (Ibid.). This perfectly applies to Italy’s two coalition partners, whose appeal to the regaining of the share of national sovereignty transferred to supranational elites is commonly framed as the only possible precondition for the real exercise of the people’s sovereign power to decide. The sovereignty claim has thus become the common nucleus for the ‘thin’ populist ideology of the Lega and the M5S and their ‘government of change’. This has definitely provided the two parties and their supporters with a fundamental *trait d’union*, and a common battlefield. At the same time, it has conferred political legitimation to a post-electoral alliance that was not directly sanctioned by the popular vote.

These considerations lead us to formulate the first hypothesis:

H1: Support for populist and conspiratorial arguments is higher among voters of Lega and M5S than of other parties. The two electorates converge in a ‘us vs.

¹ Available online at: <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/notizie/2018-05-24/salvini-maio-e-falso-mito-popolo-contro-elite-140704.shtml?uuid=AElnp4tE>.

² Available online at: <https://www.iltempo.it/politica/2018/08/26/news/di-maio-autunno-caldo-legge-bilancio-salvini-1082260/>.

them', Manichean rhetoric, hostility and widespread mistrust of the elites, and claims for reaffirming popular sovereignty.

2.2. What divides them?

Although both Lega and M5S converge in the sovereigntist 'take back control' claim and in hostility to elitism, their ideas of sovereignty do not always overlap. In particular, they are likely to diverge in the way they construct the so-called 'populist heartland' (Taggart 2004), namely that virtuous and idealised territory where the sovereign rule of the people should be realised.

On the one hand, the Lega's conception of the sovereign people has an evident nativist, exclusionary nature (Albertazzi, Giovannini, and Seddone 2018; Bulli and Soare 2018; Verbeek and Zaslove 2016). Indeed, under Salvini's leadership, the boundaries of the Lega's (until 2018 named '*Lega Nord*', Northern League) ideal territory definitely widened: from those of the wealthy northern regions (the area of the so-called 'Padania') to those of the Italian nation state (Albertazzi, Giovannini, and Seddone 2018). In line with the far-right ethnic conception of nationhood as a natural division between people, the Lega's heartland is now clearly inhabited by the Italians, the natives. The Lega has thus seized attention for its political agenda on migration, framed as a main threat to Italian cultural sovereignty and as a primary security issue, and advocated a hard-line immigration platform (Passarelli and Tuorto 2018).

On the other hand, M5S has adopted a rather fluctuating and ambiguous stance on cultural sovereigntism, and in particular regarding the migration issue (Bulli and Soare 2018; Pirro 2018), also probably because of its ideologically heterogeneous electoral support, which crosses the traditional left-right divide. Accordingly, we advance a second hypothesis:

H2: Feelings of exclusivist identity, and hostility to migration, will prevail more among Lega voters than other parties, including the M5S. Cultural sovereigntism will therefore mark a distance between the Lega and M5S electorates.

A different picture emerges when it comes to the economic dimension of these parties' sovereignty claims. Both the Lega and the M5S share the idea that Italy should regain its power to decide on economic policies (Pirro 2018, 10) and portray the EU as 'the locus of real power' (Albertazzi, Giovannini, and Seddone 2018, 649), a technocratic super-power that constrains nation states from using the necessary means to protect their own sovereign people (Ibid.; Passarelli and Tuorto 2018).

However, though both parties conceive the nation state as a common, economic heartland, they hold different visions of domestic economic policy. On the one hand, the Lega would stick to right-wing economic positions, based on economic liberalism and limited state intervention (Otjes et al. 2018). On the other hand, the M5S advocates redistributive policies and state intervention. The post-electoral deal offers some interesting clues as to the actual policy preferences of the two parties. In particular, two policy proposals stand out from the others, as they were the two parties' flagship policies during the electoral campaign: the 'citizens' income', promoted by the M5S, and a two-rates flat-tax, sponsored by the Lega. The former aims at redistributing wealth to the poorest sectors of the society, thus mostly impacting the impoverished southern regions, where the Movement gained more votes (Passarelli 2018). On the contrary, the Lega's flat tax is centred

on the expectation that the benefits generated for the wealthier people by tax reduction will ‘trickle down’ to the society at large, as they would encourage investments. This is clearly in line with both the Lega’s pro-market positions (Verbeek and Zaslove 2016) and the configuration of its traditional main pool of votes, namely the rich northern areas of small and medium-sized enterprises (Passarelli 2018). Hence, we formulate the following hypotheses on economic preferences:

H3a: In line with the anti-elitist perspective, Lega and M5S voters show greater hostility against EU authority over domestic economic policy than supporters of other parties, thus converging on economic sovereinism.

H3b: The Lega and M5S voters have divergent policy preferences on domestic economic policies, with the former being more oriented towards pro-market positions, and the latter more inclined towards redistributive measures.

3. From common ties to diverging interests: exploring the preferences of M5S and Lega voters

To test our hypotheses, we use data for Italian public opinion from the EUENGAGE panel survey,³ carried out between 2016 and 2017. It should be noted that, although the EUENGAGE sample slightly underestimates the actual votes won by the M5S and Lega at the General Elections held in March 4, 2018 (with 21% voting intentions for M5S and 13% for the Lega),⁴ this result is in line with other surveys conducted in the same period⁵ and captures an increasing voting trend for these two parties in the months that preceded the General Election.

In order to gauge similarities and differences in the preferences of the M5S and Lega voters, we first considered voting preferences as potentially exercising a cueing effect on policy preferences.

To this purpose, we identified three groups of survey items,⁶ according to the three dimensions we focus on in our hypotheses, namely: Populist and Conspiracy Arguments, Culture and Identity Issues, and Economic Issues. For comparability’s sake, we recoded all items into a 0-1 scale, where 0 corresponds to a more ‘sovereignist’, ‘exclusionary’ or ‘populist’ stance, and 1 otherwise. We then compared the mean scores of the answers provided by the M5S and Lega voters on each item. In order to provide comparisons also with other party groups not in government, we further recoded each variable into a categorical one, and cross tabulated them by vote preferences expressed for the main Italian parties.⁷

³ A two-wave survey was conducted on a panel of respondents in June-July 2016 and June-October 2017 in ten EU countries, interviewed using Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI). Respondents were selected from an online panel. A specific set of weights, based on internet usage, gender, age, region, and education, was used to correct any likely misbalance due to the online sampling design. The Italian panel sample used in this study (people responding to both 2016 and 2017 waves) includes 1,210 cases.

⁴ Results at General elections were instead: M5S 33%; Lega 17% (source: <https://elezionistorico.interno.gov.it/index.php?tpel=C&dtel=04/03/2018&tpa=I&tpc=A&levo=0&levsuto=0&eso=S&ms=S>).

⁵ See for instance the average of electoral surveys calculated by the website ‘Termometro politico’ (<https://www.termometropolitico.it/2018-11-17-sondaggi-politici-elettorali>).

⁶ See the Appendix for a full description of the survey items used.

⁷ Survey question: ‘If the General Election was tomorrow, which party would you be most likely to vote for?’ Parties were recoded according to coalition patterns at the 2018 elections, the only exception being the Lega, considered separately from the centre-right coalition, which it had joined before the elections

Statistically significant differences in both kinds of bivariate analyses were then examined by using appropriate post-hoc comparisons.⁸

3.1. The 'people' vs. the 'greedy, evil elites': populism and conspiracy thinking among M5S and Lega voters

The first hypothesis postulates a convergence between M5S and Lega supporters on populist and conspiracy claims. Populist claims typically feature two core issues: first, dissatisfaction with the current democratic institutions, both at EU and national level, perceived as unresponsive, untrustworthy, and systematically betraying the 'popular will'; and, second, the quest for more direct procedures of decision-making, as opposed to the traditional, liberal mechanisms of representative democracy, which is perceived as no longer effective and reliable. On the other hand, by 'conspiracy thinking', we refer to people's general perception that a hidden power of elites is secretly and opaquely ruling the world. This is measured through an index that combines respondents' answers to a set of statements concerning the allegedly closed and obscure nature of politics (Cronbach's alpha= 0.87).

Figure 1⁹ shows the average scores with standard deviations for the answers on populist and conspiratorial arguments, by focusing only on the M5S and Lega voters while Table 1 cross tabulates¹⁰ the same variables by all party groups.

Average scores and cross tabulations show that the supporters of the two coalition partners converge on all aspects considered, although with some distinctions. For instance, dissatisfaction with the way EU democracy works, which combines criticism towards liberal representative democracy with frustration with the EU project itself, is double among Lega voters (0.24), compared to the M5S group (0.12), although the latter is more spread out than the former. Post-hoc comparisons, however, reveal that the differences between the two groups under scrutiny are not statistically significant, while they are both markedly different from the other party groups, and especially from the centre-left. The M5S-Lega gap narrows on the lack of trust in government, while it widens between the two allies, on the one hand, and all the other party groups on the other, and, remarkably, with the Partito Democratico (PD)/Centre-left. However, since the survey was conducted when the PD was in government, it could be also possible that answers refer to a critical evaluation of that government's performance, rather than to a general lack of trust in a democratic institution.

(frequency in brackets): a) PD/Centre-left [223]: PD (208), Alternativa Popolare (which joined Civica Popolare: 4), Sudtirolo Volkspartei (1), Centro Democratico and Radicali Italiani (forming '+Europa': 9), Union Valdotaïne (1). Centre-right coalition [133]: Forza Italia (81), Fratelli d'Italia (39) Scelta Civica (5); Others/RA [331]; No vote [128].

⁸ For categorical variables, post-hoc comparisons were carried out after running the crosstabulation (e.g. analysis of residuals and partitioning) (Sharpe 2015). For continuous variables, post-hoc comparisons were carried out after running analysis of variance (ANOVA) comparing the means (e.g. Bonferroni, Tukey, Sidak).

⁹ To obtain these average scores, all continuous variables were recoded into a 0-1 scale, while categorical variables were recoded as dummies; in the latter case, data display the proportions. The same procedure applies also to Figures 2 and 3 for, respectively, cultural and economic issues.

¹⁰ To run cross-tabulations, continuous variables were recoded as categorical variables, by grouping values into three modalities, with 1 indicating a more populist attitude, 2 somewhat neutral, and 3 less populist. The same procedure applies to Tables 2 and 3 for, respectively, cultural and economic issues.

The voters of the two governing parties overlap on support for direct democracy and for conspiratorial arguments. Here again, post-hoc comparisons reveal that voters of M5S and Lega solidly align on these issues, together with the people with no party attachment, while they significantly differentiate from all other party groups.

Overall, these findings confirm our first hypothesis: the gloomy perception of the mechanisms of liberal and representative democracy, seen as opaquely managed by a small group of unresponsive elites, provides a common set of values and beliefs that unites two otherwise distinct electorates.

Figure 1. Average scores for answers on populist and conspiracy arguments, by voting preferences (M5S and Lega)

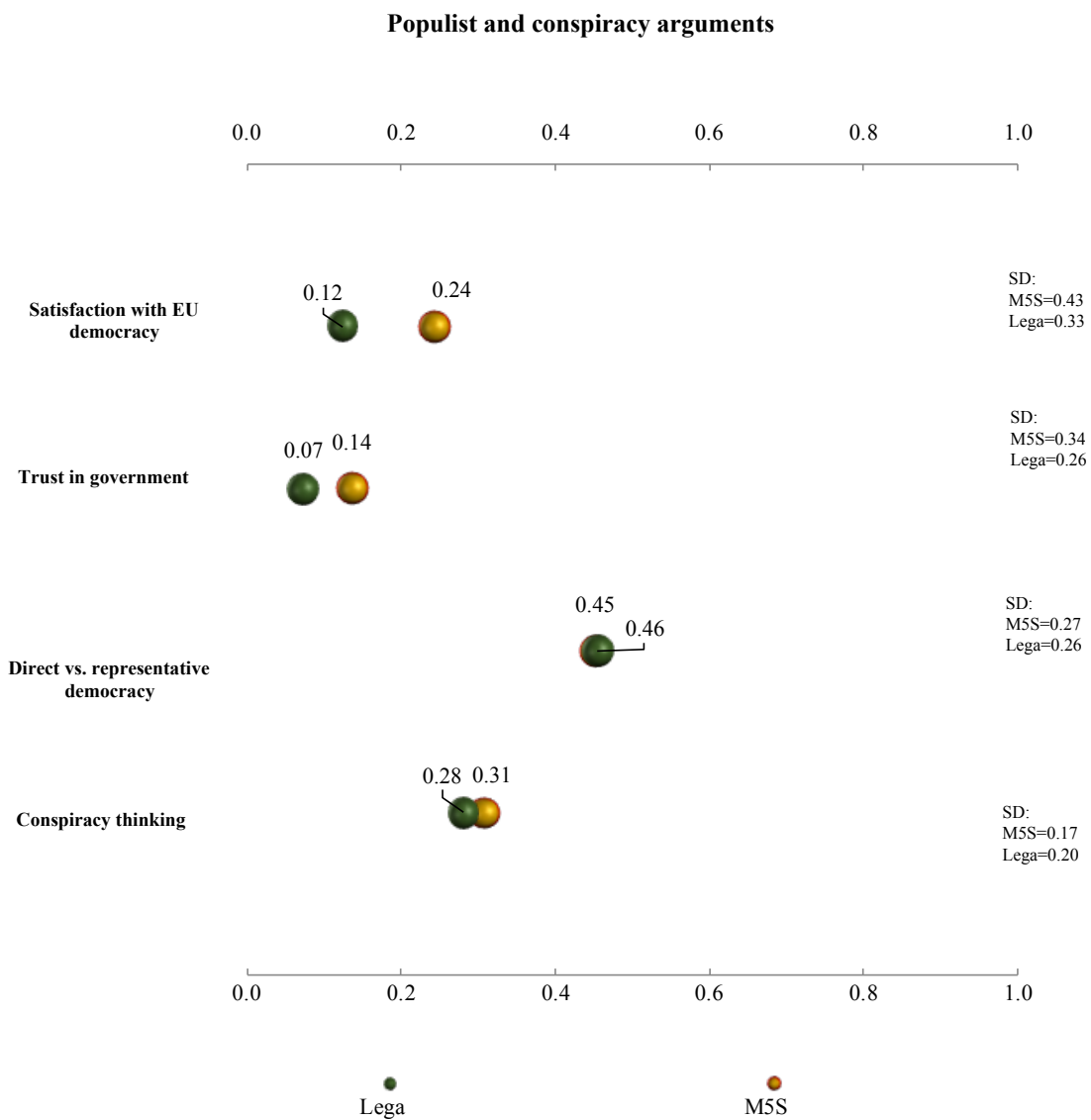


Table 1. Populist and conspiracy arguments, by voting preferences (% - weighted)

	M5S	Lega	PD/Centre-left coalition	Centre-right coalition	Other parties	No vote	Pearson's $\chi^2(6)$
Satisfaction with EU democracy % of 'Very/somewhat dissatisfied'	76	88	50	81	75	84	$\chi^2(5)=103.2915$, $p<0.001$
Trust in government: % of 'Never/Only Sometimes'	86	93	53	80	87	87	$\chi^2(5)=167.5130$, $p<0.001$
Preferences for direct vs. representative democracy: % Support for Direct democracy (values from 0 through 0.4 on a 0-1 scale).	36	32	13	22	27	35	$\chi^2(10)=65.1515$, $p<0.001$
Conspiracy thinking: - % of 'High conspiracy' (values from 0 through 0.4 on a 0-1 scale).	72	68	37	58	52	53	$\chi^2(10)= 115.3946$, $p<0.001$
N	267	128	223	133	331	128	
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	

3.2. Will culture tear them apart?

In the second hypothesis, we postulated a divergence between M5S and Lega on cultural and identity issues. In particular, we examine two core aspects of exclusionary feelings respectively: the support for restrictive policies on migration, and people's 'cultural sovereignty', which defines those attitudes aimed at protecting national identity and culture against any interference from outside.

As Figure 2 and Table 2 clearly show, both aspects mark relevant differences between the two political communities.

Majorities among M5S voters would support policies of assistance to people seeking a better standard of living (the so-called 'economic migrants'), as compared to 44% among Lega voters. Post-hoc comparisons confirm that M5S are significantly different from their coalition partners, while showing similarities with voters of other party groups, especially those leaning to the centre-left. On the other hand, the Lega group significantly aligns with the centre-right pole on migration policies. The picture remains almost the same when assistance is directed to people seeking international protection (i.e. refugees), although in this case support for assistance policies slightly increases among the Lega voters by 15 percentage points.

Moving to 'cultural sovereignty', we measured this through an index that combines items on the perception of migrants and attitudes towards the EU authority on migration (Cronbach's alpha = 0.79). Once again, the two groups show significant differences. The M5S voters have moderate stances on cultural sovereignty, although not as inclusionary as the centre-left supporters; their moderation, rather, gets close to that of the 'No vote' group. On the contrary, strong exclusionary attitudes clearly prevail among Lega supporters, showing the highest scores on the cultural sovereignty claim.

These findings therefore confirm our second hypothesis concerning divergence between M5S and Lega constituencies on cultural and identity issues.

Figure 2. Average scores for answers on Cultural and Identity items, by voting preferences (M5S and Lega)

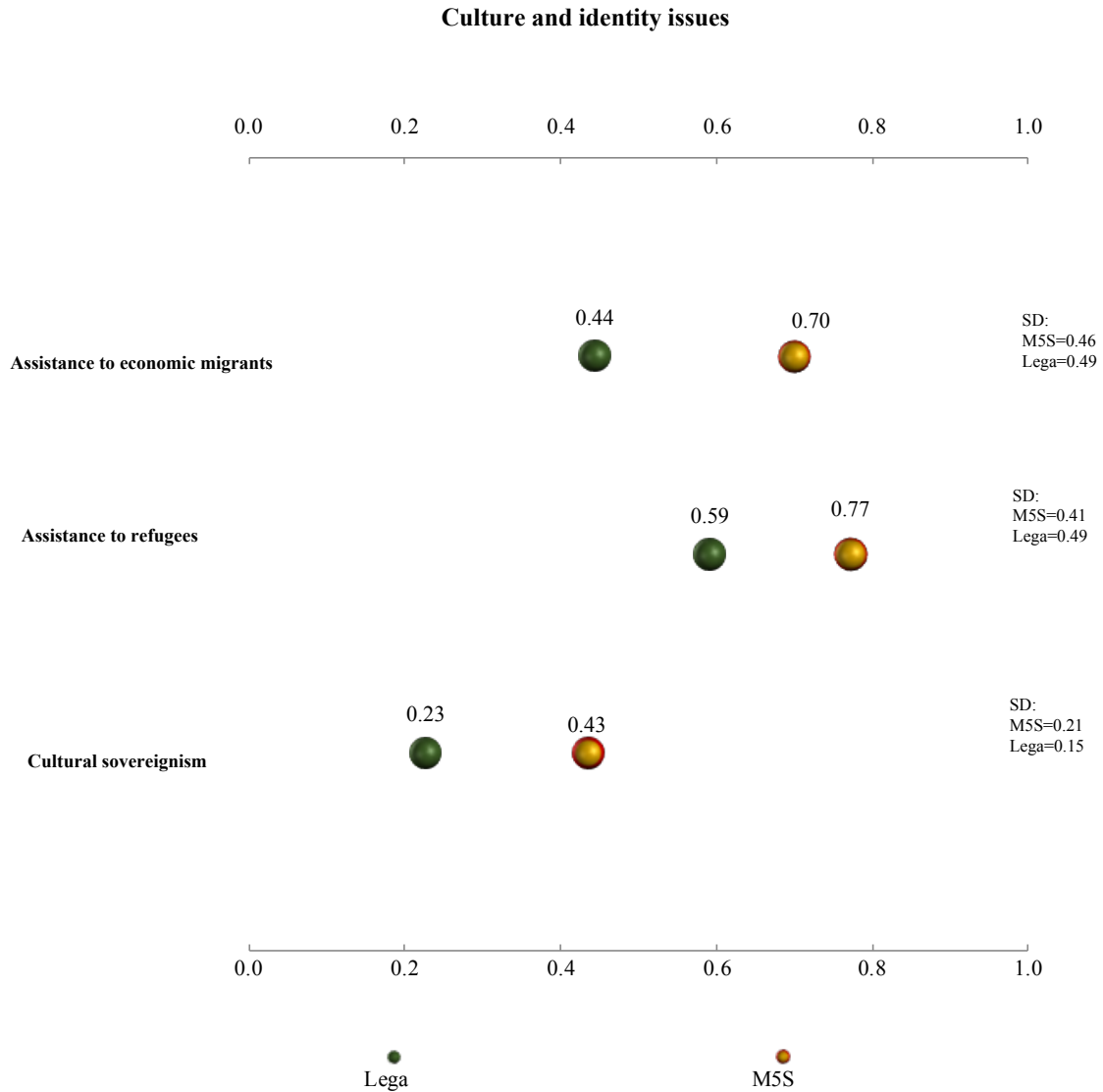


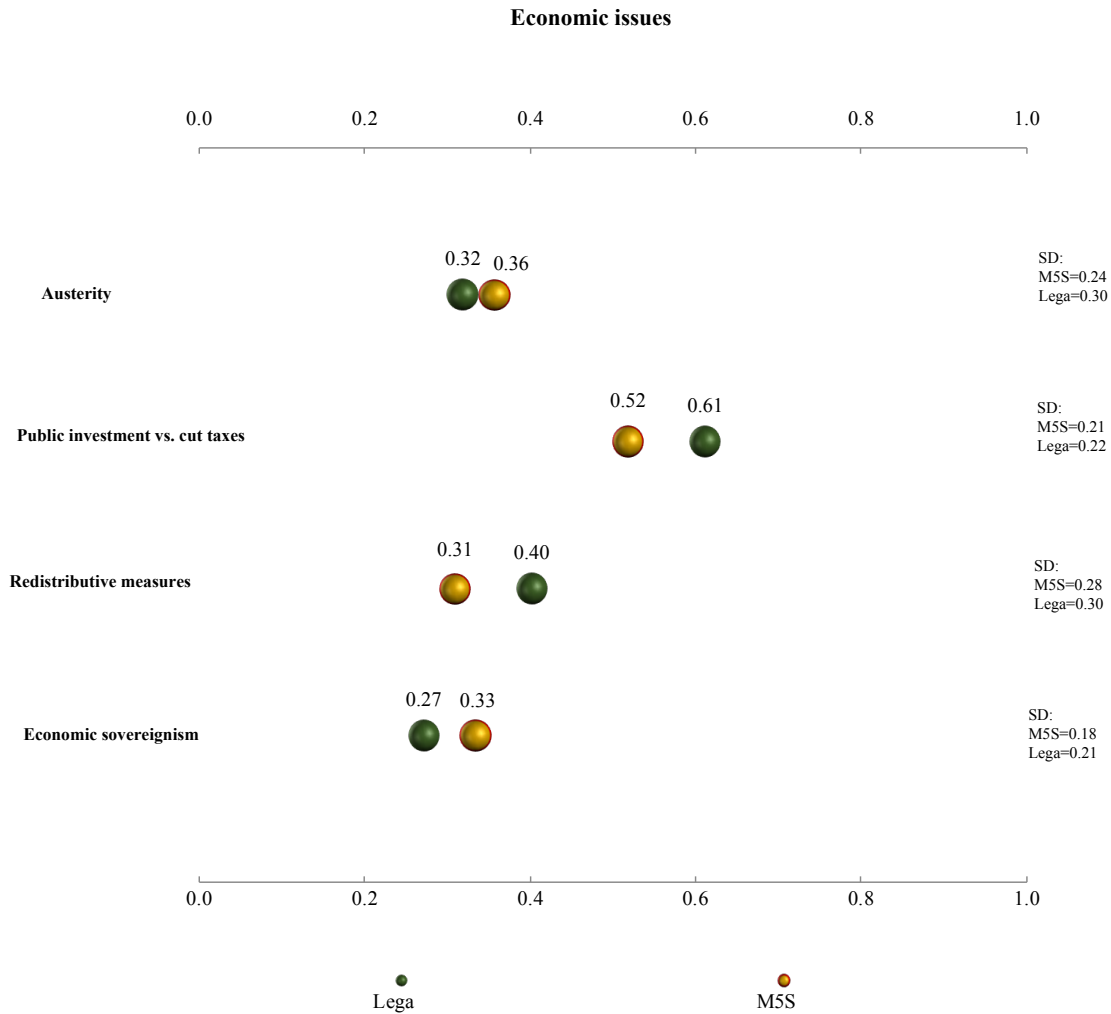
Table 2. Cultural and identity issues, by voting preferences (% - weighted)

	M5S	Lega	PD/Centre-left coalition	Centre-right coalition	Other parties	No vote	Pearson's $\chi^2(6)$
Assistance to economic migrants: % of 'Completely/tend to disagree'.	30	56	22	54	33	35	$\chi^2(5)=85.5008$ $p<0.001$
Assistance to refugees: % of 'Completely/tend to disagree'.	23	41	15	26	27	25	$\chi^2(5)=55.4266$ $p<0.001$
Cultural sovereignty: % of 'High cultural sovereignty' (values from 0 through 0.4 on a 0-1 scale).	42	84	14	62	35	47	$\chi^2(10)=212.8447$ $p<0.001$
N	267	128	223	133	331	128	
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	

3.3. Held together by the common EU-enemy, divided by economic policies

Finally, we test the economic hypotheses by focusing first on the role and nature of the state intervention on economy and, second, on the degree of the supranational authority over national economic policy (Figure 3 and Table 3).

Figure 3. Average scores for answers on Economy, by voting preferences (M5S and Lega)



On domestic economic policies, Lega and M5S voters seem to look at two alternative models. On the one hand, M5S voters stand out as strong supporters of redistributive policies to reduce income inequalities. Post-hoc comparisons reveal a significant difference with the Lega group on support for redistributive measures, like the ‘citizens’ income’, while getting close to the preferences of the centre-left camp. On the other hand, Lega voters neatly advocate traditional liberal, right-wing economic policies, like cutting public services to reduce tax, showing similarities with other centre-right supporters.

Table 3. Economic issues, by voting preferences (% - weighted)

	M5S	Lega	PD/Centre-left coalition	Centre-right coalition	Other parties	No vote	Pearson's $\chi^2(6)$
Redistribution: % of 'In favour of redistribution' (values from 0 through 0.4 on a 0-1 scale).	64	45	67	45	58	56	$\chi^2(10)=65.7156$, $p<0.001$
Public services vs. cut taxes: % of 'Public services increased' (values from 0 through 0.4 on a 0-1 scale).	26	17	30	21	39	15	$\chi^2(10)=43.1294$, $p<0.001$
Austerity: % of 'Increase public investments' (values from 0 through 0.4 on a 0-1 scale).	66	75	70	48	55	39	$\chi^2(10)=66.9842$, $p<0.001$
Economic sovereignty: % of 'High sovereignty' (values from 0 through 0.4 on a 0-1 scale).	67	83	26	64	39	59	$\chi^2(10)=191.7314$, $p<0.001$
N	267	128	223	133	331	128	
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	

However, when it comes to support for public investments, as opposed to austerity measures aimed at balancing the budget, the differences between the M5S and Lega electorates significantly narrow (although public investments seem popular also among voters of other parties, especially on the left). Actually, rather than measuring just preferences for domestic policies, this item seems to tap attitudes towards EU 'interferences' on national policy making, since the balance of budget closely recalls the EU-mandated tough austerity measures adopted in 2011.

This links to our findings deriving from a more accurate measure of 'economic sovereignty'. It combines items on EU authority over the country's economic and budgetary policies, people's perception of the EU as endangering the country's welfare system and economic growth, and attitudes towards globalisation (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.71$). Once again, this index shows a substantial agreement between Salvini's and Di Maio's supporters, although economic sovereignty significantly prevails among Lega voters, as compared to M5S voters. This dimension, however, marks a significant difference between the M5S-Lega electorates and the other parties' supporters, especially on the centre-left, where economic sovereignty is supported only by a minority.

According to these findings, hypotheses H3a and H3b are confirmed, since M5S and Lega voters diverge on the models of domestic economic policy, but largely converge on the need to shield the national economy from any outside interference.

4. United by the common enemy, divided over domestic and cultural policies

In order to provide further robustness to our empirical analysis, we regressed people's attitudes on populist, cultural, and economic issues, as well as left-right ideology, on the vote for M5S and Lega, with the vote for other parties as reference category, by using multinomial logistic regression. This analysis would allow us to test our hypotheses from a different perspective, namely, whether and to what extent the interplay of people's

preferences on economic, cultural, and populist issues is likely to orient people’s voting choices, here considered as dependent variable.

As argued above, all independent variables were recoded into a 0-1 scale, where 0 corresponds to ‘sovereignist’, ‘exclusionary’ or ‘populist’ positions, and 1 otherwise.¹¹ Accordingly, a negative coefficient in the regression means that a sovereignist/populist attitude increases the likelihood of a vote for Lega and/or M5S as compared to the other groups; on the contrary, a positive sign indicates that the Lega and M5S vote is explained by inclusionary or mainstream attitudes.

Table 2. Multinomial logistic regression of policy attitudes on vote for Lega and M5S

Other parties=reference category	M5S (1=Vote for M5S)		Lega (2=Vote for Lega)	
	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE
Populist and conspiracy issues				
Satisfied with the way the EU democracy works	0.14	(0.21)	-0.32	(0.26)
Direct vs. representative democracy	-1.15***	(0.23)	-0.38	(0.25)
Trust	-0.39	(0.31)	-0.38	(0.25)
Conspiracy	-1.37***	(0.36)	-1.04**	(0.36)
Culture and identity issues				
Assistance to economic migrants	0.33***	(0.08)	0.17	(0.14)
Assistance to refugees	-0.08	(0.13)	0.23	(0.17)
Cultural sovereignty	1.18*	(0.52)	-4.7***	(0.45)
Economic issues				
Economic sovereignty	-2.42***	(0.32)	-1.33**	(0.46)
Austerity (0=public investments; 1=austerity)	-1.29***	(0.29)	-2.47***	(0.42)
Public services vs. cut taxes	-0.18	(0.29)	0.85*	(0.38)
Redistribution	-0.46*	(0.23)	-0.07	(0.33)
Left-right (Centre = reference category)				
Left	-1.29*	(0.51)	-1.60*	(0.63)
Centre-left	-1.17***	(0.31)	-14.11***	(1.14)
Centre-right	-0.46	(0.66)	1.07	(0.71)
Right	0.09	(0.65)	1.557*	(0.62)
Constant	1.24	(1.17)	0.93	(1.05)

Notes: N=1170; * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Overall the multinomial findings (Figure 4 and Table 4) uphold the results obtained with the bivariate analyses, where voting preferences represented the main explanatory variable. Electoral support for M5S and Lega is more likely, as compared to other party groups, when the following attitudes and beliefs emerge among voters: hostility against EU-mandated austerity measures and economic sovereignty, and conspiracy thinking. This implies that both parties could increase their chances of keeping the support of

¹¹ Except for the variable on austerity measure, where 0 represents ‘Pursuing a policy to balance budget’ (i.e. austerity) and 1 ‘Increasing public investments’.

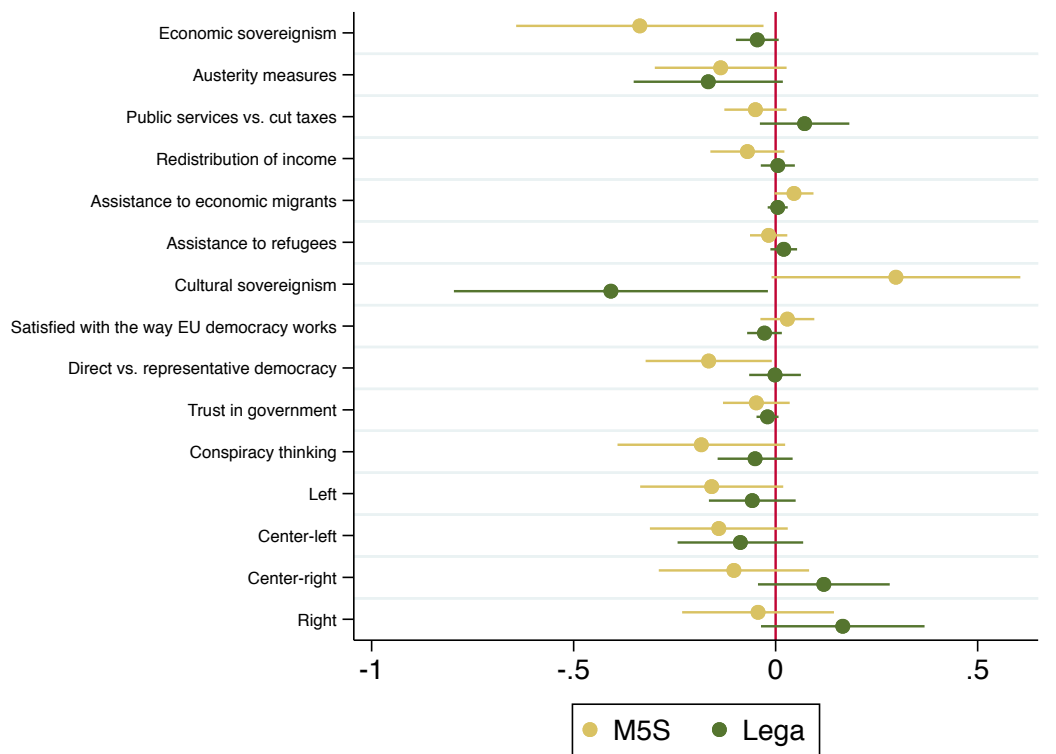
their electoral bases by fuelling people's mistrust of the elites, and especially of the technocratic elites interfering with the national economy from Brussels.

Other issues would represent a potential source of support for the M5S only: the promotion of forms of participation alternative to representative democracy, like direct democracy, and support for measures of assistance to economic migrants.

Likewise, liberal right-wing policies of tax reduction stand out as potentially feeding the Lega's electoral consensus, although not significantly opposed by the M5S electorate, while redistributive policies would reward the M5S. We note that, for each issue, coefficients are statistically significant for one party only, respectively the Lega and the M5S. This suggests that each group strongly supports only one of these issues, and moderately opposes (M5S) or neglects (Lega) the other's preferred solution.

Nonetheless, divisions become sharp and potentially influential on voting choices on cultural sovereignty, where exclusionary policies would appeal significantly to the Lega voters, but would alienate M5S supporters.

Figure 1. Multinomial logistic regression of policy attitudes on vote for Lega and M5S (Predicted probabilities)



5. Conclusions: the chess-like game of the M5S-Lega coalition

In this article, we tested three hypotheses to unveil the shared preferences and the areas of conflict between the M5S and Lega voters.

Empirical results clearly revealed that the strong, common baseline that unites the two electoral bases is not what people strive for, but rather, what or whom they fight against. The common enemy are the obscure elites, and especially those based in Brussels, who operate according to secretive and hidden practices that serve only the

interests of small interest groups, at the expenses of the citizens, who are the actual ‘victims’ of the system. Accordingly, a first scenario would be that the M5S-Lega coalition will seek to exploit the populist rhetoric of the contraposition between the (EU) elite and the people to further strengthen the electoral consensus of their electoral bases (*Scenario 1: The common [EU] enemy*). Indeed, this scenario has already emerged since the early, frantic days of the government’s formation, when a popular online blog leaked a first version of the contract outlining references to procedures to leave the common currency and questioning Italy’s membership in the Eurozone, if not the EU (Basile 2018). This raised many eyebrows in Brussels and among international investors about the potential of the new Italy’s ‘populist’ government to blatantly challenge, if not break, the EU rules. The final version of the government contract at least removed any openly Eurosceptic claim. Yet, the two coalition partners seem constantly eager to goad some EU reactions, for instance by defying the EU budget rules with the big-spending strategy envisaged in the draft budget plan for 2019.¹²

When it comes to divisive issues, however, the delights of the ‘honeymoon’ between the two allies seem to fade.

For instance, the redistributive measure of the ‘citizens’ basic income’, strongly advocated by the M5S, would potentially alienate the Lega electorate, especially the voters in the industrial areas of northern Italy, who would perceive it as an ‘incentive for unemployed people to stay at home on their sofa’,¹³ with likely revivals of South-North divides. On the other hand, a compromise solution¹⁴ to the implementing decrees on this policy, due to a collegial model, would likely cause a loss of votes for the M5S, for having failed to fulfil a flagship electoral promise (*Scenario 2a: inconclusive bargaining over redistributive policies*). On the contrary, if a ministerial model of government should prevail, then the M5S might have greater control over this kind of measure, since the Movement’s political chief Luigi Di Maio holds key competencies on social security measures within the government. This would ultimately reward the M5S, as its supporters would clearly identify it as the actor to whom to attribute the credit for the positive policy output. (*Scenario 2b: the M5S push for redistributive policies*).

Another area of potential conflict is that of migration issues. Lega’s leader Matteo Salvini, Ministry of the Interior with competences on migration policies, has often vowed a hard line against the influx of migrants, even by adopting blatant measures such as the block of migrant rescue ships from Italian ports. In this case, such a policy would serve the electoral purposes of the Lega, as cultural sovereignty represents a crucial issue for its voters, but it would most probably alienate part of the M5S electorate. Here again, while the collegial model, and the related lack of decision-making, would be harmful for Salvini’s party (*Scenario 3a: the moderating compromise over migration*), the ministerial model would likely be advantageous for the Lega, although at the expenses of M5S (*Scenario 3b: Lega’s hard line on migration policies*).

¹² In November 2018, since Italy’s government failed to fully address the EU’s concerns over the high deficit budget plans for 2019, the EU formally opened a disciplinary procedure against Italy, which was finally solved in December 2018 with an agreement to cut down expenses.

¹³ Available online at: <https://www.dw.com/en/italys-5-star-movement-defends-guaranteed-income-pledge/a-43323755>.

¹⁴ At the time of writing, the citizens’ income has already been approved by the Council of Ministers, although it is too early to evaluate the concrete implementation and effects of this measure.

Clearly, these are just some of the possible developments of an unprecedented coalition experiment, although predicting the future is beyond the purposes of this article, if not of the tasks of political science.

Nonetheless, these scenarios suggest that coalition governments look like a chess game, where each player carefully ponders the next move. Like the knight, the coalition partner's actions might be largely unpredictable, and suddenly change direction from the expected one to minimise detrimental consequences at the next elections.

Appendix.

Survey Items used in the analysis (EUENGAGE data)

Satisfaction with EU democracy: 'On the whole, how satisfied are you with how democracy works in the EU?' [1/2 (recoded as 1): Very/Somewhat Dissatisfied; 3/4 (recoded as 0): Very/Somewhat Dissatisfied].

Trust in government: 'How much of the time do you think you can trust the Italian government to do what is right?' [Always, Often, Sometimes, Never]

Preferences for direct vs. representative democracy: 'Which number from 0 to 10 best represents how you think the system of governing Europe should work? Ordinary people making all decisions on their own (0); elected politicians and officials making all decisions on their own (10, recoded as 1).'

Conspiracy thinking: 'To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?' Index based on 9 items:

- Q1:** 'We would be much better off now if our foreign affairs were conducted out in the open, for all to see, rather than secretly.'
- Q2:** 'Most of the news we get from the press and the radio is deliberately slanted to mislead us.'
- Q3:** 'I often feel that the really important matters are decided behind the scenes, by people we never even hear about.'
- Q4:** 'The people think they govern themselves, but they really don't.'
- Q5:** 'A secretive power elite with a globalist agenda is conspiring to eventually rule the world through an authoritarian world government, or New World Order.'
- Q6:** 'Actually, it is not the government that runs the country: we don't know who pulls the strings.'
- Q7:** 'Some people say officials of the European Union are gradually seeking to take over all law-making powers in this country.'
- Q8:** 'The US administration of President Trump/ Russian administration of President Putin is behind the migrant crisis because it is in its interest to create chaos in Europe and split the Union's 28 member states over the issue.'
- Q9:** 'The Italian government/EU institutions is/are deliberately hiding the truth about how many immigrants really live in this country.'

'For each of these statements, please indicate whether you completely agree, tend to agree, tend to disagree or completely disagree.' [Answers: 1/2: Completely/Tend to Agree (recoded as 1); 3/4: Completely/Tend to Disagree (recoded as 0)]

Assistance to economic migrants: 'Italy should offer assistance to people seeking a better standard of living'.

Assistance to refugees: ‘Italy should offer assistance to people seeking a better international protection’.

Cultural sovereignty: Index based on 6 items:

Q1: *Can you please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements about the general impact of immigration on [COUNTRY] and [NATIONALITY] people?* [Answer options: 1. Strongly agree, 2. Somewhat agree, 3. Somewhat disagree, 4. Strongly disagree] ‘Immigrants increase the likelihood of a terrorist attack in Italy’.
Q2: *Can you please indicate...* ‘Immigrants contribute more in taxes than they benefit from health and welfare services’ (answer order reversed).
Q3: *Can you please indicate...* ‘Immigration in general will improve our culture with new ideas and customs’ (answer order reversed).
Q4: *Can you please indicate...* ‘The religious practices of immigrants are a threat to the Italian way of life and its traditions’.
Q5: *Can you please indicate...* ‘Immigrants are a significant cause of crime in Italy’.
Q6: *For each of the following policy alternatives, please position yourself (...):* Italy should decide for itself how many immigrants to accept each year (9); The EU should decide how many immigrants should be accepted by each Member State each year. (10, recoded as 1).

Redistribution: ‘Redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor: fully in favour vs. fully opposed. Where would you place your views on this scale? Fully in favour of redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor (0) vs. fully opposed to redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor (1).’

Public services vs. cut taxes: ‘Public services should be increased by raising taxes (0) vs. public services should be cut in order to reduce taxes. Where would you place your views on this scale? Public services should be increased by raising taxes (0), public services should be cut in order to reduce taxes (1).’

Austerity: ‘For each of the following policy alternatives, please position yourself on a scale from 0 to 10, increasing public investment in the coming years (0) vs. pursuing a policy to balance the budget (1).’

Economic sovereignty: Index based on 4 items:

Q1: *For each of the following policy alternatives, please position yourself (...):* Giving the European Union more authority over Member States’ economic and budgetary policies (0) vs. Retaining full powers for economic decision-making in each Member State (10, recoded as 1).
Q2: *Some people say that the European Union might endanger some important aspects of the nation. For each of the following aspects, please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree that they are endangered by the European Union [Answers: Strongly/somewhat agree, strongly/somewhat disagree]:* ‘Achievements of the welfare system in Italy’. [Answer options: 1/2. Strongly/somewhat agree, 3/4. Strongly/Somewhat disagree].
Q3: *Some people say that the European Union might endanger (...):* ‘Economic growth in Italy’. [Answer options: 1/2. Strongly/somewhat agree, 3/4. Strongly/Somewhat disagree].
Q4: *Do you think that, overall, globalisation has a positive (0, recoded as 1) or negative effect (10, recoded as 0) on Italian citizens?*

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