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Populist polarization in Italian politics, 1994-2016 : an assessment from a Latin American analytical perspective

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Chapter 3

The First Wave of Populism: Italy from 1994-2011 and the Emergence of the Populist Pole

Even before the results of the 1994 Italian election were revealed, it was clear that the country's political history had changed. Completely new party brands competed for the first time since the formation of the Republic. Moreover, many parliamentary candidates were also new, since many experienced politicians of the First Republic had been convicted or were under investigation following the Mani Pulite trials.

This chapter covers the period after the collapse of the party system in Italy until the breakdown of the fourth Berlusconi government in 2011 and the inauguration of Mario Monti's technocratic government. After the collapse, a different party system structure began to emerge, one with different incentives for coalition formation, even if instability and fragmentation, especially on the left, characterized the whole period.

The main argument of this chapter relates to the structure of the party system and the patterns of coalition formation that emerged after the party system collapse. While instability and fragmentation are the main subject of academic research (D'Alimonte and Bartolini, 1997; Morlino, 1996), one cannot forget that a pattern of electoral coalitions, though sometimes very fragile, emerged after the collapse. Moreover, an important peculiarity of the Italian case is that one of the two coalitions, the relatively more successful center-right coalition, can be conceived as populist.

This means that even though one could expect a "stabilization period" after an event so devastating as the collapse of the party system, the consequences of Italy's collapse were not only political instability and fragmentation, but also a restructuration of the party system around two axes of competition: left-right and populism/anti-populism.

The chapter is organized as follows.

After a brief account of major events during the 1994-2011 period, I examine the characteristics of the new parties and alliances in terms of ideology, policies and mobilization strategies. The first party I analyze in this section is the Lega Nord (LN), a populist regionalist party (McDonnell 2006), and its shift to a populist radical right party type (Zaslave, 2007; 2009). Then I will examine Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia (FI) and People of Freedom (PdL), characterized by what I define as neoliberal populism (Pauwels, 2010; Akkerman, Mudde and

Zaslave, 2014). With respect to the organization and mobilization strategies used by these parties, I observe that while the LN adopted a mixed mobilization strategy with both a well-organized party and strong leaders, FI is clear-cut example of pure personal party where the leader has full discretion.

Moreover, I also analyze the position of the National Alliance (AN), which, since 1995, can be labelled as a national conservative right party. Its position is peculiar because it cannot be classified as populist but has been an important component of populist governments (1994-1996; 2001-2006; 2008-2011).

With respect to the other parties in the system, I also address the discourses and organizational strategies of the parties on the left. The main objective is to determine their political configurations and clarify whether an anti-populist pole emerged during this first period.

As a reminder, one of the aims of this dissertation is to analyze how the populism/anti-populism cleavage structures the party system. To that end, it is important to study the parties in the system from the ideological *and* organizational point of view. With respect to the former, I differentiate the parties in the system on the basis of their thin ideology, whether they are populist, anti-populist or non-populist, and of their thick ideology, i.e. the main host ideology to which they adhere. With respect to the organizational features of the parties, as I pointed out in chapter one, even though I provide a characterization of the main parties in the system, my main concern is examining the degree organizational density of both the populist and non-populist parties. This is relevant because it allows me to make inferences on the stability and the duration of the political cleavage.

The second part of the chapter is dedicated to the analysis of the populists the Lega Nord and Forza Italia (and The PdL) in government and in the opposition. For this analysis, it is necessary to observe the interactions between the actors within the populist pole and explain how this pole became more relevant. In the same section, to fully understand the characteristics of the party system in this period, I focus on the discourse of the actors that did not adopt a populist ideology, namely the non-populist parties (Partito Democratico, Scelta Civica and Alleanza Nazionale).

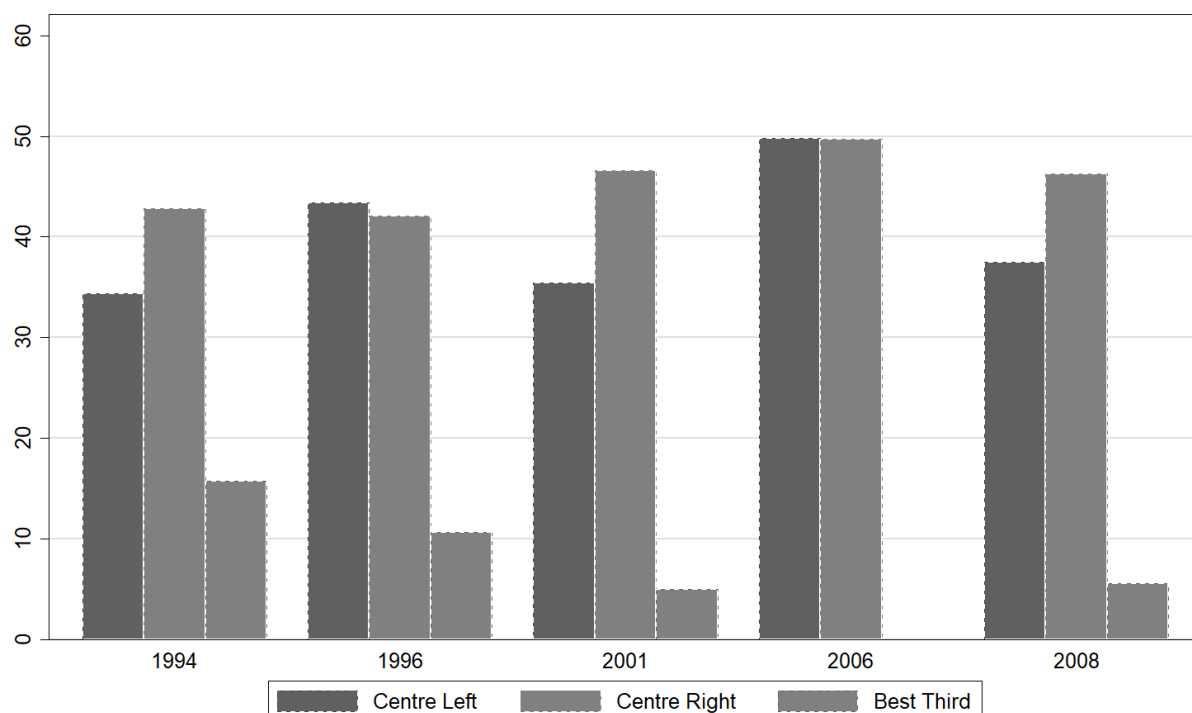
The main findings of this chapter are essentially two. First, as noted above, after the “chaos” produced by the collapse, a pattern of coalition formation emerged. Although the governing coalitions was unstable, a clear pattern is identifiable: a populist right-wing coalition lead by Berlusconi’s Forza Italia, and later by the PdL, opposing a non-populist center-left coalition, characterized by high fragmentation until the emerged of the Democratic Party in 2007, as the

collation strove to keep the progressive and Catholic wings together. The second relevant finding is that, at least during the 1994-2011 period, the anti-populist pole fails to emerge. In fact, while the emergence of the populist pole is patent, with the populist parties that became electorally relevant, non-populist parties did not develop an anti-populist discourse. On the contrary, those parties' discourse mainly attacks the Berlusconi government's policies, perceiving them to be *ad hoc*. It could be said that instead of an anti-populist discourse, non-populist parties responded with an anti-Berlusconi discourse. In sum, the Italian case seems to suggest that the cleavage may need time to fully develop. During the period analyzed in this chapter, the anti-populist pole did not fully emerge.

3.1. Italian elections outlook: 1994-2011

Right after the collapse, Italian politics experienced a profound change. Between 1994 and 2011, there were five general elections and only two legislatures finished their terms without major government reshuffling and without prime minister turnover. The following chart represents the party coalitions that alternate during this period and their vote share.

Graph 3.1: Percentage of the electoral coalition between 1994 and 2008¹⁶



Source: Governo Italiano, Ministero dell'Interno, Archivio Elettorale.

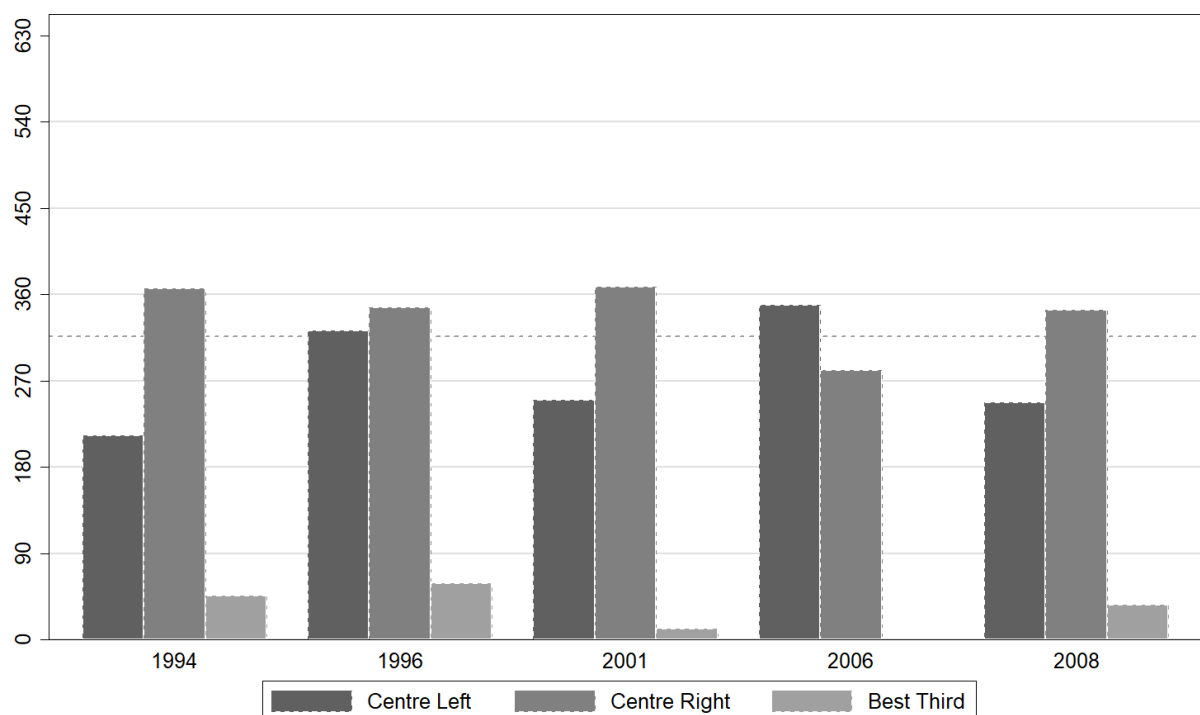
Despite the period's political instability, a regular pattern of coalition emerged, albeit with some significant deviations. First, to fully grasp the main features of this period, it is important to understand what the rules of the game were. The 1994 general election was the first to be held under the mixed electoral law adopted in 1993.

This new electoral law was approved with the aim of replacing Italy's extremely proportional (hyper representative) system with a relatively majoritarian variant of a mixed member electoral system. Despite numerous proposals for electoral reforms to cure factionalism and instability through moderate bipolarity and regular alternation in office (Pasquino, 1992), the idea of the electoral reform did not become relevant on the political agenda until 1991 (Katz, in Wattemberg and Shugart, 2001). In 1991, Italians voted for the first time in a referendum on the electoral system. The aim of the referendum's initiator, Mario Segni, was to reduce the massive corruption that was associated with preference voting. The

¹⁶ In 1994, 1996, 2001 and 2008 elections the LN enjoyed a pre-electoral alliance with the centre-right coalition. In 1994 election the third opponent was Mario Segni Patto per l'Italia (15,75 %); in 2001 Rifondazione Comunista (5,03%); in 2006 the totality of the parties joined one of the two major alliances (Casa delle Libertà and Unione). Lastly in 2008, the third major force was represented by the Unione di Centro (UdC) that obtained the 5,62 percent of the total vote.

success of the “yes” vote was overwhelming and mostly motivated by dissatisfaction with the performance of the previous political system (McCarthy 1992, p. 11). The most mentioned objective was to have governments with secure parliamentary majorities that would lead to greater stability and capacity to govern. Besides this, there were some side objectives such as a more transparent connection between the votes cast and the cabinets formed, simplification of the party system and the replacement of what Sartori (1976; 2005) called “polarized pluralism” with a sort of bipolar pluralism (Katz 2001, p. 103). As described in chapter one, Sartori gave Italy in the mid-1970s as an example of a pluralist polarized party system, i.e. there was high ideological distance between the party associated with a high number of relevant parties. Given that this kind of party system was believed to have dangerous effects on the stability of the system and on the regime, mostly due to high fragmentation, one of the aims of the new electoral law was to limit the number of the relevant parties or, at least, contain them in two competing coalition.

Graph 3.2: Seats in the Chamber of Deputies in the five national elections between 1994 and 2008

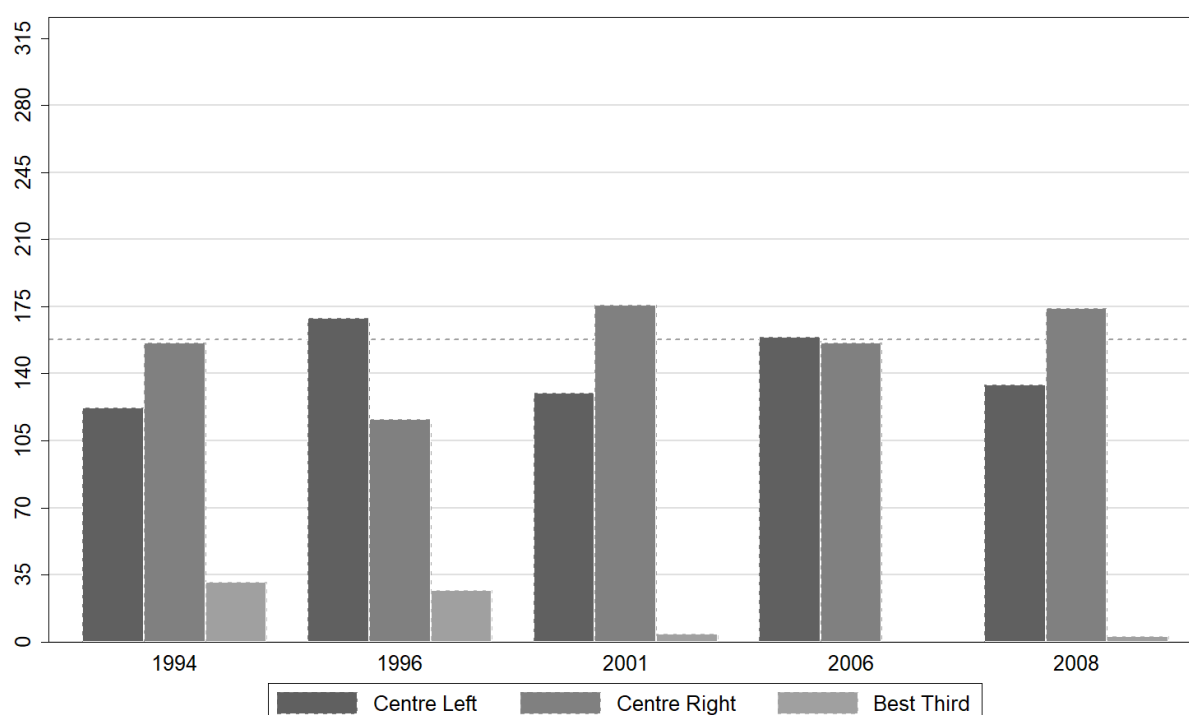


Source: Governo Italiano, Ministero dell'Interno, Archivio Elettorale.

Graph 3.2 and 3.3 help to understand that the instability of Italian politics in those years stems not only from the small vote spread between the center-left and center-right coalitions but also

has institutional origins. The charts represent the allocation of seats in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate.

Graph 3.3: Seats in the Senate in the five national elections between 1994 and 2008



Source: Governo Italiano, Ministero dell'Interno, Archivio Elettorale.

The first patent observation is that the electoral systems implemented during this period, especially the majoritarian system with proportional corrections of 1993, neither granted the numbers the winning coalition needed to implement its own agenda nor to implement those structural reforms the country needed. In the Senate, where the abstention equals a vote against, the parliamentary majorities have been very thin. In the 2006 election, for instance, the center-left coalition had only three more seats than the center-right in the Senate. Additionally, the picture was complicated by another classical feature of the Italian party system: party-switching. By party-switching, I mean any change in political party affiliation of a partisan public figure, usually one currently holding elected office. This practice is particularly problematic when majorities are thin, and a few seats may mean the survival of the executive as in the 1994-2011 period.

A second objective of the electoral reform arose from a desire to increase the vertical accountability of elected parliament members. In other words, “there was a desire to free the electorate from the confines of party labels and ideologies, and to allow the electors to take

into account the character, qualifications, and performance in office of individual candidates when casting their votes” (Katz, 2001, p. 103).

In the 1994 elections, the first under the new mixed electoral law, Berlusconi’s brand-new Forza Italia managed to obtain the highest vote share and formed a government coalition with the populist regionalist Lega Nord (LN) (McDonnell, 2006), the formerly fascist Italian Social Movement (MSI), the Unione di Centro (UdC) and the Centro Cristiano Democratico (CCD). As Diamanti (2007) observed, Forza Italia was the result of applying marketing to politics by identifying orphan voters of the governing parties of the First Republic, aggregating their values and opinions and creating a political message that could capture them, then using the media to communicate and “sell” his political project as a “product”. When Berlusconi entered the competition, he occupied and expanded the right, a political space that had previously been politically narrow and fragmented and drew together two completely different political forces: the post-fascist right-wing National Alliance and the Northern League (LN), which supported the independence of the north and radical political change (Diamanti, 2007, p.736).

In the 1994 election, the alliance seemed pretty pragmatic in terms of electoral evaluations. In fact, since Forza Italia was a new party, Berlusconi counted on the alliance with the Lega Nord (LN) to win northern regions and on the alliance with MSI/AN to compete in the south. Only the presence of Forza Italia could bind together such a heterogeneous coalition of political actors which also included the Centro Cristiano Democratico (CCD), led by Pierferdinando Casini and with quite different goals and interests from AN and the LN (Diamanti, 2007, p. 736). Eventually, the government broke down in 1995, after only eight months, demonstrating that these pragmatic electoral considerations, without consensus on policies, were not enough to carry a legislature to its end. Despite the victory, the rightist coalition had difficulties its actions and, in January 1995, the Lega Nord left the government, costing it a parliamentary majority.

Given the 1993 mixed electoral system’s preponderantly majoritarian features, parties needed to form pre-electoral coalitions. Paradoxically enough, the less politically uniform rightist coalition beat the leftist one, whose parties were almost direct heirs of the leftwing parties of the First Republic (Lo Verso and McLean 1994). They included descendants of the dissolved Communist Party, the Partito dei Democratici di Sinistra (PDS) and the more radical Rifondazione Comunista (PRC), the Greens, the Partito Socialista Italiano (PSI) and other minor parties. The result was surprising also for its proportions: the rightist coalition won an absolute majority of seats in the Chamber of Deputies while in the Senate it only fell nine seats short (Lo Verso and McLean, 1994).

In the second election held under the mixed electoral system, the two competing coalitions were the same as in 1994 election, with some changes. On the right, under the brand of Casa delle Libertà (House of Freedoms), were Forza Italia, Alleanza Nazionale (formerly MSI, which rejected fascist ideology at its Fiuggi convention in 1995) and the Catholic center. On the left, l'Ulivo (the Olive Tree) emerged, which represented a coalition in which the PDS was the major force. Nevertheless, there were two relevant differences from the 1994 elections. The Lega Nord, which had exited the center-right coalition few months earlier, decided to run alone. Likewise, l'Ulivo did not enjoy the support of Rifondazione Comunista, though the latter agreed not to field candidates against the coalition in certain constituencies. In the 1996 election, the left coalition successfully formed a government with the Greens and other minor parties and received external support from the PRC. The coalition achieved an absolute majority in both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. This was mainly due to the wider geographical appeal of the coalition compared with the center-right PdL, which was significantly undermined in the north without the Lega, which ran alone. L'Ulivo, however, depended heavily upon the support of the *progressisti* and the PRC's Deputies and Senators (Warner and Varese, 1996). Also, Prime Minister Prodi lacked a power base in any party of the coalition. Therefore, just like the rightist coalition in 1996, the leftist one failed keep a majority in Parliament when the PRC's leader Fausto Bertinotti decided to withdraw support from the government. Prodi was ousted. Unlike 1996, in this case the leftwing parties managed to carry the legislature through to the end of term, with administrations led by D'Alema (leader of the PDS) then a technocratic one led by Giuliano Amato. These two government breakdowns in a row proved that the electoral system had its downsides. In particular, this system encouraged Italian parties to form all-encompassing coalitions to win single-member constituency seats at the expense of the homogeneity within the coalition and thus at the expense not only of governmental stability, but also of policy-making (Pasquino, 2007, p. 86).

The 2001 election was the only one in this period in which the legislature lasted its entire term without any executive breakdown. This election saw another victory of the center-right Casa delle Libertà formed by Forza Italia, the Lega Nord, Alleanza Nazionale and the Centro Cristiano Democratico (CCD). This time the coalition was based not merely on electoral pragmatism, which had proved insufficient to keep the 1994 governing coalition together, but also by greater ideological convergence around issues such as immigration, law and order, devolution, tax cuts and social security (Parker and Natale, 2001). At the same time, on the center-left, the parties failed to build a coalition large enough to match the opposition considering that RC and di Pietro's Italy of Values (IdV) decided not to participate.

The April 2006 general election was the first with a new electoral system introduced by the 2005 Calderoli Law and approved in 2006 by the center-right. Just months before the 2006 general election, the ruling coalition decided to reform the electoral law. The most important reason for the reform was, “the attempt to unearth a law capable of limiting and possibly reducing the dimension of what at the time seemed the very likely centre-left victory and, at the same time, of containing the size of the equally likely centre-right defeat” (Pasquino, 2007, p. 81). Naturally, the new law had to be justified “by pointing to the alleged superior fairness of a proportional system in the allocation of seats and in the representation of the ‘true’ will and preferences of the electorate” (Pasquino, 2007, p. 81).

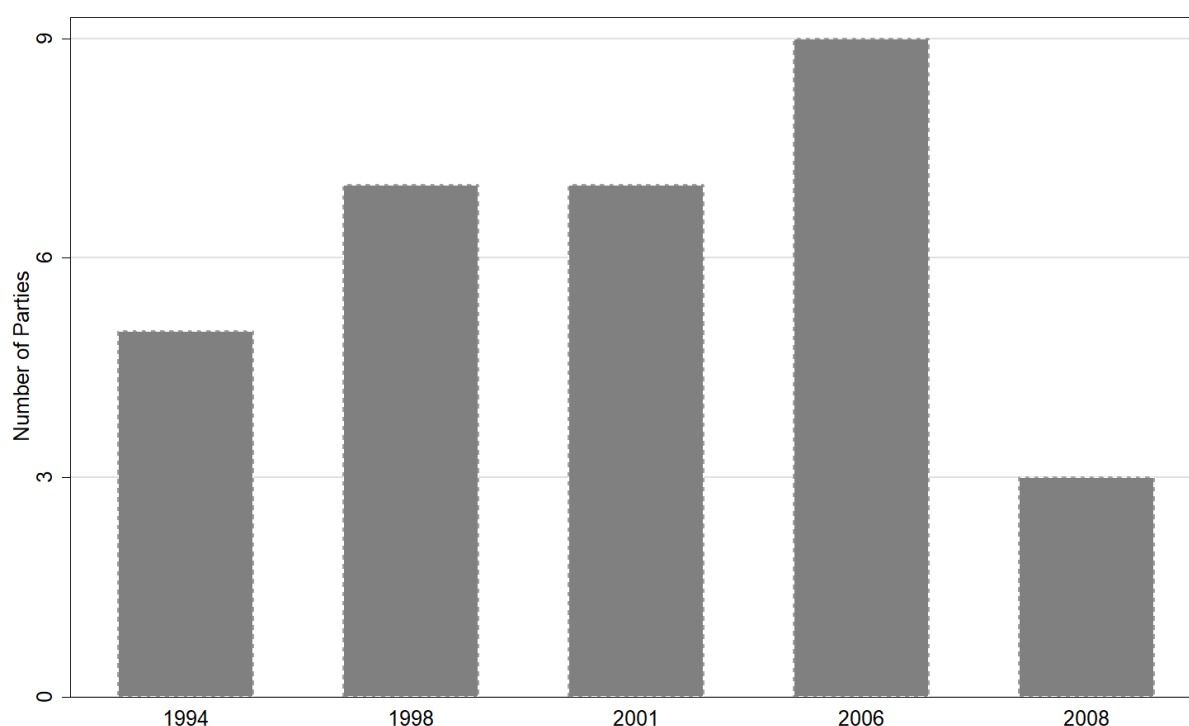
In fact, the new law transformed the mixed system in a proportional system with closed lists where seats were distributed between parties receiving at least four percent of the vote on a national base if independent or ten percent if part of a coalition. Moreover, the electoral law prescribed a majority premium (*premio di maggioranza*) when the initial proportional distribution of seats results in the largest party or coalition receiving less than 340 seats, in order to secure an overall majority. For the Senate, the mechanism was the same, but the majority premium was regionally assigned with a higher threshold than that in the Chamber of Deputies (Bull and Newell, 2009, p. 337).

As Pasquino points out, the majority bonus has served well its major purpose, providing the winning coalition with a sizable parliamentary majority in the Chamber of Deputies. Moreover, it contributed to the preservation of bipolar competition and to the possibility of alternation in government (2009, p. 83). The price was the extreme heterogeneity of the two coalitions. In fact, this reform drew the two main coalitions to incorporate as many parties as they could, incentivizing a further fragmentation of the system (Renwick, Hanrett and Hine, 2009; Pasquino, 2015).

As a consequence, the center-left coalition, formed by 9 parties, named l’Unione (the Union) and led by l’Ulivo, with Romano Prodi as candidate for prime minister, was characterized by high political heterogeneity. The performances of the parties in the coalition were unimpressive. L’Ulivo obtained 31.1 percent of the vote in the Chamber of Deputies, but it underperformed in the Senate, where the parties stood in separate lists (Bellucci, 2008, p. 190). Electoral turnout was 83.6 percent, more than two points higher than in the 2001 election, probably influenced by the factor that this was the first time that Italians living abroad had the right to vote. On the right, within the Casa delle Libertà, Forza Italia was confirmed as the first-ranked party notwithstanding heavy losses (Bellucci, 2008, p. 190) but AN, the other major coalition partner, performed below expectations (12.3%). The campaign opened with the

center-left managing to keep the focus on Berlusconi's trials but towards the end the subject moved to taxation issues and the economy and, to a lesser extent, bio-ethical and foreign policy issues, with the center-left on the defensive (Bellucci 2008). In the end, the Union obtained a slim victory, with 49.81 percent versus the 49.74 of the Casa delle Libertà, with dim prospects of surviving the entire legislative term. The instability of the governing coalition can be seen first in the increase in the number of appointed ministries and junior ministries (*sottosegretari*), due to the necessity to try to accommodate the many parties of the coalition. Also, the marked heterogeneity of the coalition and the slim majority in the Senate affected policy making, forcing the Prime Minister to take great pains to form agreements about every important policy decision (Bellucci 2008, p. 190). Graph 3.4 shows the number of parties and movements within or externally supporting the two governing coalitions.

Graph 3.4: Number of the parties forming and externally supporting the governing coalitions¹⁷



Source: Governo Italiano, Ministero dell'Interno, Archivio Elettorale.

¹⁷ In 1994 five parties were part of the parliamentary coalition that supported the government (FI, LN, AN, Lista Pannella, CCD), in 1996 seven parties (PDS, Popolari per Prodi, RI, FdV, RL, UAL, Psd'AZ), in 2001 seven (FI, AN, LN, Biancofiore, NPSI, RS, NS), in 2006 nine parties (Uniti nell'Ulivo, RC, Rosa nel Pugno, IdV, Comunisti Italiani, FdV, Udeur, Südtiroler Volkspartei, Autonomie Liberté Démocratie), and in 2008 3 parties (PdL, LN, Movimento per L'Autonomia).

Even though both coalitions are highly fragmented, we can observe that the center-right coalitions on average are composed of and externally supported by a greater number of parties or movements.

In February 2007, there were mutual vetoes within the coalition on the proposal of the legal recognition of unmarried people (opposed by Catholics) and on the country's participation in NATO's Afghanistan mission (opposed by the radical left), which failed in the Senate and caused Prodi to submit his resignation. The President asked him to remain and the cabinet voted a confidence vote on a 12-points program presented as "take it or leave it" by Prodi (Bellucci, 2008, p. 190). Just like the 1996 coalition, this one failed to finish out the legislature, as the leader of the tiny Union of Democrats for Europe (UDEUR), Justice Minister Clemente Mastella, left the cabinet and eventually, withdrew his party's support, causing the government to break down.

This led to the 2008 election, the last one analyzed in this chapter. This election was the first to be held under the 2005 electoral law. The new electoral law was introduced and approved by the center-right coalition. As Pasquino observes, the most contingent reason was containing the size of the likely center-left victory in 2006 elections (2007, p. 81). Moreover, Berlusconi had repeatedly declared that the 1993 electoral Mattarellum law "put his party and his now single unified coalition at a disadvantage because they were doing better in terms of votes for their individual parties, but still losing in single-member constituencies" (2007, 81). Second, Berlusconi's leadership had been challenged by his junior coalition partners, which advocated holding primaries in the center-right coalition (Pasquino, 2007).

The Calderoli Law, adopted by the right-wing coalition, was a proportional law with a bonus to be attributed to the winning coalition and closed lists (Pasquino, 2007). This electoral law was used for the election of deputies and senators in three elections in 2006, 2008 and 2013. In January 2014, the Constitutional Court declared the law partially unconstitutional because the bonus was not linked to a certain vote threshold. Moreover, the law did not allow voters to express a preference vote.

The contenders were the Democratic Party (Partito Democratico), a center-left party founded in 2007 and heir of the Union. The Democratic Party at the time of its foundation had announced that it would stand independently at the election regardless of the electoral system but in the end, it allied with di Pietro's populist Italy of Values (IdV). To this new formation, Berlusconi responded with the so-called People of Freedoms (Popolo della Libertà, PdL) a new version of the precedent Casa delle Libertà, with the merge of Forza Italia and Alleanza Nazionale, that allied with the Lega Nord and the Movimento per l'Autonomia, a smaller

southern autonomist party. The centrist Union of Christian Democrats (UDC) chose to run alone, as did the New Socialist Party confirming its split from the former center-right coalition.

To the left of the PD was Sinistra Arcobaleno (SA), a single list comprising Communist Refoundation (RC), the Party of Italian Communists (PdCI) and the Greens (Verdi) (Bull and Newell 2009, 338). In 2006, Berlusconi's government could claim the considerable achievement (in Italian terms) of managing to remain in office for a full parliamentary term, setting a record for longevity in office for a post-war Italian government. Although the center-right was defeated by the narrowest of margins in the 2006 general election, the breakdown of the center-left government in early 2008 paved the way for Berlusconi's third general election victory and return as prime minister in April (Fella and Ruzza, 2009). The PdL won 37.4 percent and the Lega Nord 8.3 percent, permitting the center-right coalition to surpass the center-left by more than 9 percent of the vote and secure a solid parliamentary majority (Tarchi, 2018). The poor performance of both the extreme left and the extreme right significantly reduced parliamentary fragmentation (Tarchi, 2018, p. 148). Despite the electoral success, this government followed its predecessors in collapsing before the end of the legislative term, but for different reasons. First, the relationship between Berlusconi and the AN leader Gianfranco Fini became increasingly problematic, with the latter trying to abandon the coalition, denouncing its inability to face the most pressing issues of the period (Tarchi, 2018, p. 148).

However, the sudden end of the Prodi government and the tight timing of the electoral campaign forced Fini to join Silvio Berlusconi in forming the PdL. The relationship between the two leaders, however, was not fully restored. The procedure chosen to form the lists in both chambers — 70 percent by FI and 30 percent by AN — provoked discontent in the minority element. The context was surely different, with the eruption of the international financial crisis and its fallout as well as allegations about Berlusconi's private life contributing to alienating previously supportive social actors, such as the northern entrepreneurial bourgeoisie and the Catholic Church (Fella and Ruzza, 2013). At the same time, the creation of the PdL out of previously separate political parties made it more difficult for Berlusconi to manage tensions within the coalition and led to greater questioning of his leadership, especially by Fini. The former leader of the post-fascist AN withdrew support from the coalition and, together with a number of his loyalists, joined the ranks of opposition, seeking (unsuccessfully) to bring Berlusconi down in a parliamentary vote of confidence in December (Fella and Ruzza 2011, p. 158). The secession of some PdL Deputies and Senators resulted in a new party called FLI (Futuro e Libertà per l'Italia) with the former AN secretary, Fini, as a leader. The party unsuccessfully tried to construct a third pole of competition in the system, positioning itself

toward the political center. This was the result of the contradiction within the PdL. Forza Italia and AN were built upon very different organizational models. On the one hand, AN had diffuse territorial structures which, following Tarchi (1997), “maintained the footprint of the old party of mass integration”. On the other hand, FI resembled a personal party, whose organizational structure never achieved a full institutionalization and was based primarily upon the leader (Calise, 2000; McDonnell, 2013).

What can we learn from this short analysis of the five national elections and numerous administrations that were formed in Italy between 1994 and 2011? First, during the entire period, Italy was undergoing important institutional reforms, namely the two electoral reforms of 1993 and 2005. Even if both electoral reforms aimed to enhance government stability, neither fully reached their objective. Second, there was “life after the collapse”, i.e. a pattern of coalition making emerged even if it was not stable. While the collapse surely represents a devastating occurrence for a party system, its aftermath does not necessarily entail instability. In Italy after the collapse and partially due to the electoral law of 1993, a new pattern of electoral competition emerged with a bipolar dynamic. Third, the rightist populist coalition was the most successful, at least during those years. As mentioned above, the populist coalition — formed by Forza Italia and PdL and the Lega Nord — won three national elections in 1994-1996, 2001-2006 and 2008-2011.

The last aspect to consider is that the Italian party system achieved alternation in government, which was absent during the First Republic, when the DC was always in power. In the next section, I analyze the ideology of Italian parties from 1994 to 2011. The aim is first to determine whether they employed a populist ideology. This, in turn is relevant to answering questions around the emergence of the anti-populist pole. With respect to the parties forming the populist pole, analyzing both their thin and thick ideology over this period of time is important to determine whether they changed in their sub-type of populism. In sum, through this analysis, it is possible to map the political space and define the axes of competition in the system, the configuration of the poles and the way they interact.

3.2 The new actors in the political system: analysis of the ideology and organization

As I argued in the precedent subchapter, after the collapse of the party system in 1994 in Italy, new parties entered the system. Those parties contributed to changing the party system configuration in place during the years of the First Republic (1948-1994). In this subchapter, I analyze those parties with a special attention to their discourse. Because I employ the ideational

definition of populism, only by analyzing the discourse of political actors is it possible to classify them as populists. To be classified as populist, a party or a movement needs to develop simultaneously an anti-elitist and a pro-people discourse (Mudde, 2007; Hawkins, 2009). If, for instance, the party representatives only speak in favor of the people without developing an anti-elite discourse, or vice versa, the party cannot be classified as populist.

The parties studied in this chapter are the Lega Nord, Forza Italia, Alleanza Nazionale and the Italian left, with a special focus on the role of the PDS/DS (Left Democrats Party), l'Ulivo (later the Union and Democratic Party) and the Italia dei Valori (IdV).

3.2.1 The Lega Nord: from regionalist populism to populist radical right

The Lega Nord made its first appearance in the Italian political system before the collapse of the party system. The party emerged in 1991 from the union of six regionalist leagues from Italy's north and center, most of which had arisen in the 1980s. As Ignazi observes, the choice of the name "leagues" rather than "parties" signaled the existence of local specific characteristics in radical conflict with the mainstream parties (2005, p. 344).

In the 1987 election, one of these leagues gained prominence when its leader, Umberto Bossi, was elected to the Senate; previously, in 1983, the Liga Veneta elected a deputy and a senator. The two parties and other regionalist lists ran as Alleanza Nord in the European parliamentary elections in 1989, gaining 1.8 percent of the vote. In the 1992 national election, held during the Tangentopoli scandal, the LN won 8.6 percent of the vote in the Chamber of Deputies and 8.2 percent in the Senate, obtaining 55 and 25 seats respectively.

The further radicalization of the LN was favored by the collapse of the party system following the corruption scandals known as Tangentopoli. In this circumstance the LN had the chance to present itself as the representative of the "honest and laborious" northern people (Ignazi, 2005). Agitating for secession required employing a rhetorical "Padanian identity" to build a community of people belonging to the same motherland. The construction of an imagined identity shared by inhabitants of the Po Valley meant building ethnic commonality while simultaneously providing the basis for the exclusion of the others: first, Italian southerners and later, immigrants. In the 1994 election the party participated in an electoral coalition with Silvio Berlusconi's brand-new party, Forza Italia and with the MSI, the formerly fascist party. On this occasion, the party gained over 8 percent of the vote, nearly the same vote share it obtained in the 1992 election (Ignazi, 1995). The number of deputies this time was considerably higher thanks to the presence of Lega Nord candidates in single-member

constituencies as representatives of the entire center-right coalition. This way the LN became the largest parliamentary group. The LN also obtained five ministries and the presidency of the Chamber of Deputies.

However, there were tensions from the beginning between the allies and, eventually, the alliance shattered, mainly as a consequence of disagreements on policies between the Lega and Forza Italia and on a personal level between the two leaders, Bossi and Berlusconi (Bartlett, Birdwell and McDonnell 2012). As Tarchi points out, “just only in the federal reform of the state, the Lega’s key issue, did it manage to obtain full agreement from its allies, but the party’s blackmail potential...has remained on the whole very limited” (2008, p. 90).

On the ideological plane, the LN has been unanimously defined as a populist party (Zaslave, 2012; Bartlett, Birdwell and McDonnell, 2012; Fella and Ruzza, 2013; Rooduijn and Pauwels, 2011).

First, let us see whether the defining elements of populism can be found in the Lega’s ideology. As I claimed in chapter one, I adopt the definition of populism as a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous, antagonistic groups, “the pure people” and “the corrupt elite,” and argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people (Mudde, 2004). Therefore, in order to categorize the discourse of the Lega as populist, we need to analyze if the two main features of this definition apply to the party’s discourse. With reference to the first feature, the Lega constructed a framework of interpretation in which the virtuous and homogeneous “us” referred to the honest, hard-working and simple-living northern Italians, strongly linked to their traditions, creating what Tambini called “a new source of self-respect for northerners” (2001, p. 105). On the other side of the coin, corrupt politicians who misused the revenues of the north in an unproductive south and center were identified as the “corrupt” elite. With respect to the “others” category, it has been depicted differently during the history of the party. At the beginning and during the party’s first years in parliament, the “others” were the southerners, but starting in the 2000 and more decisively in the late 2000, the “others” became the immigrants, especially Muslims, and the party depicted itself as a savior of the Western values. Indeed, the xenophobia of the LN, while rather folkloric when aimed at Italian southerners, acquired a different, much harder meaning in its new phase (Ignazi 2005, p. 346).

The second characteristic of this definition of populism is the emphasis on a certain type of democracy, which is linked to the assumption that politics should be the expression of the general will of the people. This is translated to a preference for direct, unmediated types of democracy. The emphasis on democracy reflects the party’s regionalist position. The

hardworking citizens of the north, in fact, have lost their sovereignty and wealth to the “bad” elites of the center (Bobba and McDonnell, 2016). A clear example is a statement by the party’s leader, Bossi, in a press release in August 2007: “rather than talking so much, those gentlemen in Rome should listen to the honest people who cannot take any more taxes. I know we cannot have a tax revolt using weapons, but the people are pissed off.” (see Bobba and McDonnell, 2016 p. 290).

With respect to the “thick” or full ideology associated with the populism of the Lega Nord, the consensus view of at least its first 10 years of activity is that it is a “clear-cut case of regionalist populism” (McDonnell, 2006, p. 23). From its foundation until the 2000s, when describing the Lega’s discourse, it is impossible to overlook its regionalist character. Since the emergence of the regionally based leagues that eventually merged, the party aimed to achieve greater autonomy for the northern regions of Italy; after the breakdown of the first Berlusconi government, they even advocated for secession and the creation of a Padania state. Since its emergence, “the Lega reopened a centre-periphery cleavage which the formation of the unitary state had never completely sealed” (Tarchi, in McDonnell and Albertazzi, 2015, p. 87). This was possible in the context of the erosion of some of the traditional cleavages in Europe which provided the political space for the mobilization of new conflicts (Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro, 2000). The Lega, then, was able to reshape the economic, political and historical points of references of the north and create a community of values and interests in opposition to those of the south, constructing a common identity for all northerners (Bartlett, Birdwell and McDonnell, 2012). Through its discourse, the party told northerners that they were not responsible for the country’s problems and therefore should not be held accountable for the corruption and the misuse of the public funds. The solution to this problem led to the defense of fiscal federalism in the form of devolution, which allowed a significant share of the taxes collected in the northern regions to remain in the north instead of being invested in the center and the south by corrupt politicians.

After a six-year period, during which the party refused alliances in the 2000 election, the relationship between the two parties rekindled and the LN entered the center-right coalition that succeeded in the 2001 elections. However, the party underperformed and got only the 3.9 percent of the vote share, while in the 1996 general election, running alone, it had reached the 10.1 percent. The alliance continued in the 2008 election, where the party obtained an 8.3 percent vote share. As claimed above, after greater northern autonomy, the main issue for the LN (particularly since 2000) has been immigration. Ideologically, the party has therefore been defined as “ethnoregionalist populist” (Spektorowski, 2003). Given its nativist and

authoritarian positions, I believe that the most appropriate definition of the LN after 2010 is “populist radical right party” (Mudde, 2007; Norris 2005; Albertazzi, Giovannini and Seddone, 2018).

We can safely say that scholars see the LN as a significantly more radical type of “classic” right-wing populist party than FI/PdL and it is patent that “the LN embraced its niche as a regionalist but also populist radical right party” (Bobba and McDonnell, 2016, p. 284). I maintain that even though regionalism prevailed in the LN discourse until the mid-2000s, since then, the LN can be without a doubt classified as a populist radical right party. Following Mudde (2007), populist radical right parties combine populism, authoritarianism and nativism. It is important to stress that the combination of *all three* these elements is necessary for a party to be categorized in populist radical right family. More specifically, Zaslove maintained that “the radical right mobilizes voters who fear that immigration, especially within the context of high unemployment, globalization and mistrust of political elites, threatens the security, identity and employment opportunities of locals” (2004, p. 100).

To sum up the argument, the important aspect to underline is that even though the party can be classified as populist from the 1990s until present, the Lega’s thick ideology transitioned from regionalism nativism and authoritarianism in the late 2000s. Consequently, even if the party have stuck to its populist ideology throughout its entire history, the host ideology has changed over time. In other words, the policies at the heart of the party’s interests are different than when it formed. Under Bossi’s leadership, the main issue was regionalism, while since the late 2000s, and more markedly after Matteo Salvini became secretary, immigration and security became the main issues.

With respect to the organizational structure of the party and its mobilization techniques, the figure of the leader is surely important and in some cases the leader, Umberto Bossi during the period analyzed, has been the means through which the voters identified with the party. However, the party itself has a consistent organization, with councils on the territory distributed in capillary form mainly in the northern and central regions.

When first Maroni in 2012 and then Matteo Salvini in December of 2013 became leader of the Lega Nord, the party was put under stress by the resignation of the charismatic founder-leader (McDonnell, 2013, p. 223). On the ideological plane, I have already mentioned the shift of the party toward the populist radical right type. Organizationally, this change and the survival of the party through the departure of the founder-leader demonstrate that the party cannot be classified as a “personal party,” like Forza Italia and the PdL, since the party’s expected lifespan has proven less dependent on the political lifespan of its founder-leader.

Moreover, the Lega Nord also managed to construct a constant type of organization at the local level (McDonnell, 2013, p. 222).

Instead, the Lega Nord has been defined as a “personalist party” (McDonnell, 2013). A personalist party features a strong concentration of formal or informal power in the hands of the founder-leader, but its fate is not completely tied to the founder-leader, i.e. the party has good chance of survival even when the leader leaves the party or dies. Moreover, in personalist parties, the party’s image and campaign strategy are centered on the founder-leader. In the case of the LN, in fact, Umberto Bossi even after his departure remained the Federal President and still is a strong presence in the party supporters’ imaginary. Therefore, in terms of organizational density, the LN has proven not fully dependent on the charismatic founder-leader and that there are internal checks and balances that put boundaries to the actions of the leader. The party was therefore the first of Italy’s “organic populist parties,” having adopted the populist ideology and a structured organization.

3.2.2 Forza Italia/PdL: a case of neoliberal populism

Forza Italia was created by the businessman Silvio Berlusconi just a few months before the general election of 1994. Berlusconi used the resources at his disposal and his abilities in communication to deliver his political message directly to the Italian people. Unlike the Lega Nord, which has a stronger organization and ideology, Forza Italia and, since 2009, the Popolo della Libertà (PdL) seemed decisively linked to their founder Silvio Berlusconi on two levels. On an ideological plane, Forza Italia/PdL are almost unanimously defined as a populist party (Mudde, 2004; Edwards, 2005; McDonnell, 2013; Fella and Ruzza, 2013; Rooduijn and Pawels, 2011). Lying on the center-right of the spectrum, the party is a rare case of successful populist party that cannot truly be defined as radical (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017; Bobba and McDonnell, 2016). First, the party’s ideology is not radical: it advocates neoliberal policies like lower taxes and freer trade combined with strong populist critiques of the political system and elites¹⁸ (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 35). However, the party lacks the two essential components of populist radical right parties, nativism and authoritarianism (Mudde, 2007). Forza Italia also differs from populist radical right parties because it was founded with the explicit aim of entering government quickly, i.e. with a strong catch-all

¹⁸ Berlusconi’s Forza Italia differs from the European populist radical right and has more similarities with examples of neoliberal populism in Latin America, such as Menem in Argentina or Fujimori in Peru (Weyland, 1999; Conniff *et al.*, 1999).

component (Bobba and McDonnell, 2016). Since Berlusconi's debut in Italian politics 1994, or as he calls it, "entered the soccer pitch", he has used confrontational rhetoric of "us" versus "them": the Italy that produces versus the Italy that wastes, the Italy that saves versus the Italy that steals and the Italy of the people versus the old parties. In the populist logic, the category of the "others" then is represented by the constructed category of "the Communists" that is used to define all parties and voters that do not share FI's political views.

Even though FI is almost unanimously classified as populist, the LN can be defined as the only populist *party* in Italy. FI's anti-political populism is entirely expressed through its leader, who has made it a trademark of his political style, but not a source of ideological inspiration (Tarchi 2008, p. 86). However, as the leader is such an important element in the formation and success of Forza Italia, his populist ideology can be extended to the whole party (Tarchi, 2008).

Emerging right after the collapse of the Italian party system, the newly formed party needed to attract as many voters as possible, so adopted a catch-all strategy (Ruzza and Fella, 2011). Ideologically, the party was characterized first by a strong opposition to the "Communists" and their allies. An important point to make is that the party rhetoric against the Communist "danger" was not only directed toward militants or voters that had a communist past but also against those who disagreed with the leader's ideals. The anti-communist sentiment was used as a cognitive shortcut for dislike by relatively uninformed voters (Brusattin, 2007). The political setting of 1994, with its absence of an incumbent and long shadows over the national economy, favored the adoption of a cognitive shortcut by most moderate centrist voters ready to support anybody but the Communists. FI gave the orphan voters an anti-communist discourse and organizational credibility. Most of its voters converged on FI because the other rightist parties like the LN and the Italian Popular Party (Partito Popolare Italiano) did not take advantage of the anti-communist discourse (Brusattin, 2007). Also, Forza Italia differentiated itself from each of the major parties of the Italian right such as the AN and its corporate nationalism and the LN and its racist liberalism (Edwards 2005). While decidedly different from these rightist parties, FI offered itself as a bridge between them. Even if, at some points, FI and the LN were ideologically close, Berlusconi represented a sort of "government populism" as opposed to Bossi's protest populism (Edwards, 2005, p. 238). Despite differences in the populisms of FI and the Lega, it can be also noted how Berlusconi built on the rise and success of the Lega Nord (Verbreek and Zaslove, 2015).

The political language used by Berlusconi also reflects a core populist trait – speaking the language of the ordinary man on the street, rather than the *politichese* of the traditional parties (Ruzza and Fella, 2011). This has been easier with the help of the appeal of the television that

reached public of all classes across Italy. While FI's populism has a catch-all component, it also attached to a laissez faire, neo-liberal "thick ideology", given the leader's entrepreneurial interests. This ideology, consequently, has more appeal for certain sectors of Italian society, such as the self-employed, large and small business, and those sections of the middle class employed in those sectors (Ruzza and Fella, 2011, p. 166). This analysis sheds light on a paradox of Berlusconi's: despite his image as an entrepreneur and the long-running court cases arising out of his links with the old establishment and his consequent campaign against "judicial persecution", he has from the outset sought to differentiate himself from the very same establishment. The link with the "establishment" can be also seen in Berlusconi's political debut that "was not only the result of a straightforward business decision...but [also of] the mounting debt of his Fininvest group, [which] led the entrepreneur to conclude that he would not be able to survive the extinction of the political class" (Edwards, 2005, p. 237). Despite the strong connection with the country's political and economic elites, the discourse of the FI/PdL focuses on a strong critique of the elites. Regarding the subtype of populism, the scholars' classification of FI varies from patrimonial populism (Edwards 2005) to neoliberal populism (Verbeek and Zaslove, 2016, p. 309; see also Ignazi, 2005). Following Verbeek and Zaslove (2016), I classify Forza Italia as a type of neoliberal populism. In fact, while Berlusconi's ideology is clearly populist, FI can be defined as a traditional center-right European party. In other words, the "thick ideology" of FI is not that different from neoliberal rightist European parties such as the The Republican French party or Nea Demokratia in Greece. The policies and ideology that played a role in constructing the electoral appeal included lowering taxes, investment in public works and reform of the public administration suffused with visceral anti-communism.

With respect to the organizational strategies and mobilization techniques, as stated before, FI and the PdL were characterized by hyper-personalization. As I previously maintained, both parties were strongly connected to their leader, businessman Silvio Berlusconi. Forza Italia appears to be a textbook example of one type of populist mobilization: personalist leadership.

As Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser point out, this type of mobilization is that of an individual (Berlusconi) who campaigns and gathers support on the basis of his personal appeal (2017, p. 42). As in most such cases, the leader built a political party to successfully contest elections. Crucial to Berlusconi's success was the use of television. His own networks allow the businessman to "tell his truth" to Italians without the need of institutional intermediation.

Organizationally, this direct and immediate contact with the people and the sudden electoral success of the party in the 1994 elections, only three months after its formation, has not allowed

the formation of a party organization, given that the elements who occupied the high ranks of the party were the ones close to the leader. Following McDonnell (2013), Forza Italia and the PdL are both “personal parties”. Indeed, both parties were ideologically and organizationally “whatever type of party Berlusconi wanted [them] to be” (McDonnell, 2013, p. 221).

McDonnell identifies four essential characteristics of a personal party (2013, p. 222). First, the party’s expected lifespan is dependent on the political lifespan of its founder-leader. Second, the organization at the local level is neither constantly manifest nor permanent. Third, there is a strong concentration of formal and informal power in the hands of the founder-leader. With respect to this, as Maraffi (2008) pointed out, the fact that Berlusconi “owned” the electoral machine allowed him to dedicate little time to its supervision. Fourth, the party’s image and campaign strategy in both first and second order elections are centered on the founder-leader.

With respect to the typology explained in chapter one, the strong dependence of both FI and the PdL on the founder-leader and the lack of formal organization and internal checks and balances enable the founder-leader to exercise his absolute and unrestricted will on the party. Both parties then fit in the personalist populist party typology (see figure 3.1).

3.2.3 Alleanza Nazionale (National Alliance)

Alleanza Nazionale (National Alliance), was officially created in 1995 as an electoral façade for the fascist movement Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI). The evolution of the party can be divided into two phases. The first was centered on MSI’s need to respond to the political opportunities of the Tangentopoli scandal and the collapse of the party system in 1994. During the second phase, the party distanced itself from its former fascist ideology after its 1995 Fiuggi convention and dissolved in favor of the new National Alliance. Gianfranco Fini was the leader of the party from its foundation till 2008, when he stepped down to become the President of the Chamber of Deputies. After Fiuggi, the party became a key player in the Italian party system that joined the center-right coalition in 1994, 1994, 2001 and 2006. Until its dissolution into the PdL in 2009, the AN remained troubled by an identity torn between a desire to exploit the opportunities provided by the ongoing transition of the Italian party system and an attachment to traditional certainties. In fact, the party was divided into factions, one headed by Fini and advocating a liberal stance and another more sympathetic to Berlusconi’s neoliberal populism (Ruzza and Fella, 2011).

From the ideological point of view, the National Alliance program emphasized traditional

Catholic values, law and order – especially toward the limitation of the immigration – support for Israel, European integration and the United States, and the prohibition of all drugs, including soft drugs. The emphasis on family as the pillar of the society, on traditional sexual mores, on Catholicism and on animosity towards the “libertarian pseudo culture of 1968 signal[ed] the party’s anchorage to the conservative tradition” (Ignazi 2005, p. 338). Although the party approved of the market economy and held favorable views on liberalizations and the privatization of state industries, AN was to the left of Forza Italia on economic issues and sometimes supported statist policies. Moreover, as Ignazi pointed out, the call for social provisions for the underprivileged distanced the party from the New Right agenda and pushed the party towards a compassionate national-conservatism vein of statecraft (2005, p. 338-39). Moreover, AN presented itself as a party promoting national cohesion, national identity and patriotism. In general, the examination of the party documents reveals a set of positions close to the European center-right mainstream. The preponderance of traditional themes such as the emphasis on family, the need for strong executive leadership, and strong law and order and immigrant control policies is notable (Ruzza and Fella 2011, p. 168).

Unlike the Lega Nord and Forza Italia, there is agreement that Alleanza Nazionale cannot be categorized as populist. Analyzing the party discourse, Tarchi points out that among the triad of concepts most dear to neo-fascist culture in the domain of collective life – state, *popolo*, nation – it is the nation which has best survived the turning point which gave life to the Alleanza Nazionale (2010, p. 145). The “people” are mentioned rarely, first out of fear of being accused of populism and to avoid confusion with the LN (Tarchi, 2010, p. 145). In general, it can be said that the AN cannot be categorized as populist because its discourse privilege the concepts of nation and state over the concept of people. After the 1995 Fiuggi convention, the party adopted the position and the discourse of the classic conservative Western political right, characterized by a conservative stance on moral issues and a liberal stance on economic issues. While it can be said that the ideology of AN changed during the period, the organizational structure, and membership, of the old MSI remained intact. Moreover, the majority of AN candidates previously stood as MSI candidates (Ignazi, 2005).

From the organizational point of view, the party enjoyed a capillary presence across the territory with an organ in every region and various youth associations, since it inherited precedent MSI structures. With the new party statute of 1995, the traditional “mass party” structure was altered by introducing a new basic unit parallel to the local branch: the “environmental” circle which functioned to gather members in the social, cultural and economic spheres who shared a common interest beyond territorial divisions (Ignazi, 2005, p.

337). In other words, the party transitioned from a territorial to a functional logic. At the leadership level, the party president continued to be elected directly by the congress even if he was no longer responsible to the national collective bodies, acquiring a Caesarean profile (Ignazi 2005, p. 338). Despite increasing party centralization, the partial persistence of the old MSI structure counterbalanced the power of the new leadership, maintaining different factions within the party. In fact, as Tarchi pointed out, the party maintained the footprint of the old party of mass integration (1997; 2008). These organizational structure differences to the light organization of FI, as underlined below, caused problems within the PdL and were partially responsible for the abrupt end of this political experiment in 2013 (Tarchi, 2018). In sum, even if there is a tendency towards an accumulation of power in the hands of the leader, AN can be classified as a non-populist organic party.

3.2.4 The Italian Left: between Catholicism and Reformism

The history of the left in Italy after the collapse of the party system and the reshuffling of Italian politics is mainly a history of fragmentation, instability and absence of leadership. The leftwing parties inherited very deep political, cultural and organizational divisions. Moreover, two other factors contribute to maintaining these inheritances. First is the electoral law, which has been either proportional or, such as the law of 1993, majoritarian with proportional corrections. As pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, the main objective of the electoral reform of 1993 was reducing the fragmentation and factionalism that were the main characteristics of the Italian party system during the First Republic (Katz, 2001). Not only did party fragmentation actually increase as a consequence of the electoral reform, but the Italian electoral system used in 1994, 1996 and 2001 “does not give a decisive incentive for politically coherent party aggregation of a national character” (D’Alimonte and Chiaramonte, 1993, p. 545). In other words, one of the consequences of this electoral law was the formation of “spurious coalitions” (D’Alimonte, 1994). The center-right coalition was less affected by the consequences of the new electoral law since FI, the main coalition partner, was characterized by a personal organization (see below), which helped, at least partially, keep coalition discipline. On the contrary, the left was more affected by the ideological differences and a more collegial internal organization. While these features helped dialogue and dissent both within parties, the “spurious coalitions” did more harm to the left, since it lacked a strong leader to incentivize the party and maintain coalition discipline.

The second, related factor that influenced the fragmentation of the left after the party system

collapse is the absence of a strong enough leader to keep the different factions together. The center-left coalition has been depicted as the “loser coalition” in this period mainly because the main actor, the antecedents of the current Democratic Party, failed to keep the coalition united and to deal with political blackmail by electorally small parties. As a consequence, leftwing actors during the 1994-2011 period had a hard time keeping parliamentary coalitions together. Since 2007, the center-left part of the axis has been occupied by the Democratic Party (PD), which emerged from the merger of various center-left parties formerly of l’Ulivo’s list and the Union coalition in the 2006 general election. They notably included: the social-democratic Democrats of the Left (DS), successors of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), which in 1998 became the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS) after merging with several social-democratic parties (Labour Federation, Social Christians, etc.); the largely Catholic-inspired Margherita (Daisy), merger of the Italian People’s Party (heir of the defunct Christian Democracy party’s left wing), the Democrats and Italian Renewal in 2002 (Slomp, 2011, p. 406).

As I claimed in the first chapter, the electoral system introduced by the electoral laws of 1993 and 2005 had the effect of facilitating the creation two coalitions but, in order to do that, the main parties on the left and right needed small parties to remain competitive, giving the latter the power to blackmail the whole coalition with threat of government breakdown. This and the absence of a charismatic leader like the center-right’s Berlusconi, who could have been the “glue” that kept the different parties together, made the center-left coalition much more fragmented than the center-right. As Diamanti (2007) observes, Romano Prodi, the key figure on the center-left, was not a “new” politician, had no party of his own and lacked the resources to create a party or create a broad political coalition *à la* Berlusconi. His political and personal background is the complete opposite of Berlusconi’s. Moreover, Prodi did not belong to the traditional political class, but was perceived as a “technocrat” (Diamanti, 2007, p. 738)

In this sense, Prodi’s candidacy reflected the weakness of the center-left coalition: they were too divided, could not impose their own leaders on the entire coalition and lacked the necessary legitimacy to govern due to their communist past (Diamanti, 2007, p. 738).

With the formation of the PD as a new party that tried to cohere the majority of the parties on the left side of the political spectrum, the problem of fragmentation was partially tackled, but not totally resolved because, as Bordignon (2014) points out, the PD’s DNA contains the colors and the bodies of the great parties of the twentieth century which were so often at odds with each other. The colors are white and red, which symbolize the two more relevant “ideologies” of Italian politics during the last century: Communism and Catholicism (p. 2). So,

it can be said that factionalism remained a problem even after the creation of the Democratic Party.

The center-left's other main problem before the emergence of the PD, the lack of strong leadership, was not taken care of since "this party model was designed to represent a society rigidly divided into classes, in which the individual dimension was always subordinated to the collective one" (Bordignon, 2014, p. 2).

On the ideological level, given to the different factions within the Italian left and the two souls (the Catholics and the former Communists) within the PD, it is difficult to say which was the main discourse of the coalition, if one existed. It can be said that the opposition to the center-right has strengthened the left's support for state intervention and suspicion of federalism (Diamanti, 2007, p. 743). The ideological differences, first between the left parties and later within the PD, are mainly about religion, with the Daisy faction close to the Catholic Church, and about international affairs, with the radical left opposed to U.S. foreign policy. As Bordanini, Virgilio and Raniolo expected, religious issues and ethical themes hindered the building of a shared party identity and political culture (2008, p. 303). With respect to the populist ideology, the left's discourse, with the exception of di Pietro's *Italia dei Valori*, during this period presented no features of the populist discourse. In this period, neither references to the "pure" people nor to the "corrupt elites" were present in the center-left discourse.

Organizationally, what kind of party is the PD? Looking at the organizational choices during the constitutional process of the party in 2007, the party model is still open for at least two reasons. First, it would be pointless to look for an anachronistic cohesion typical of the mass parties and, even now after 10 years since its formation, the process of institutionalization of the PD is an uncertain and open process (Bordanini, Virgilio and Raniolo, 2008, p. 316). For these reasons the party, on the, organizational grounds, has been defined as "franchise party" or "stratarchic party" (Katz and Mair 1995; Carty, 2004). As such, it has to face the stratarchic imperative (Carty, 2004), i.e. to balance thrusts towards autonomy coming from the different faces of the party and the need for integration and coordination. This balance is crucial, above all, in three areas: institutions, (central) organization and territory (Bordanini, Virgilio and Raniolo, 2008, p. 317). It has relatively more capillary diffusion on the territory and less dependence on a leader compared with other parties. Instead, the PD seems to have the opposite problem: the absence of a recognized leader has on many occasions affected the effectiveness of the party. Since the PD does not adhere to the populist ideology and does not rely on a charismatic leader but can count on many internal checks and balances both at a national and subnational level, it fits in the non-populist organic party type.

3.2.5 Italia dei Valori (IdV)

The IdV (Italy of Values) is an Italian center-left political party founded on March 21, 1998 by Antonio di Pietro, former magistrate during the Mani Pulite (Clean Hands) trial, which brought to light a system of national political power founded on corruption.

Following solitary participation in the 2001 general election, it joined the center-left alliance, participating in the elections in the Union of Romano Prodi's coalition in 2005 and 2006 and in the 2008 election in coalition with the Democratic Party.

In 2006, disagreements arose between the Union (the antecedents of the PD) and the IdV. In July 2006, a controversy emerged within the ruling coalition: IdV and its leader, di Pietro, opposed the adoption of an indictment law supported, conversely, by legislators from both coalitions. Di Pietro's rejected proposal was to exclude financial, corporate and corruption offenses from the indictment. The law would affect approximately 12,000 prisoners. Regarding the ideology and discourse, the IdV is labelled as populist by some scholars (Caiani and Graziano, 2016; Braghiroli and Verzichelli, 2011). There is no doubt, analyzing some of its leader's public discourse, that the main elements of the populist discourse are present. Di Pietro appeared in front the Senate before the vote, alongside the Lega Nord, which was also opposed. Following the protest, di Pietro claimed:

It is disconcerting, really disconcerting, to see the Union abandon the platform it presented citizens and for which it was elected. The citizen counts for less than nothing; he can neither choose his representative [due to lack of preferential voting] nor see the government's platform respected. What use is the parliament today? How estranged is it from the voters? This is a question we politicians must ask ourselves and which must soon be answered (Giangrande, 2016 p. 471).

Here emerges the idea that politics that should be an expression of the will of the people yet is not. In fact, the parliamentary institution mediates the will of the people and distorts it. Consequently, the people have their voice taken away from them. Moreover, the manifesto for the 2001 election stated, "we address all those who, regarding the moral issue have seen the differences between right and left disappear because both sides intended politics as pure management of power" (Italia dei Valori, *Si Riparte dai Cittadini*, 2001, p. 2). The differences between left and right are blurred because both options are morally corrupt. In other words, the element that in the first place differentiates the IdV from other political forces is not the policies they propose but the fact that they are morally pure while the others are not.

From the organization point of view, IdV has been defined a personal party on the model of Berlusconi's FI and PdL (Musella, 2014; 2015). The party depended almost entirely on the

charismatic appeal of its founder-leader: until 2010, it was the only party, apart from Forza Italia, to reserve for the founder-leader the unchecked power to decide candidacies for national and European elections (Di Virgilio and Giannetti, 2011; McDonnell, 2013). As a consequence, the party fits in the personalist populist type.

In the last section, I examine the populist in government and the opposition and, the reaction of the non-populist parties. The section is divided into sub-sections which analyze the four populist governments, Berlusconi I-II-III-IV. The objective is twofold. The first is to analyze the characteristics of the populist pole. Second, analyzing the reactions of the non-populist parties may reveal whether an anti-populist discourse emerged in the system. In this way, it is possible to infer whether the populism/anti-populism cleavage fully emerged and structured the party system throughout the period under analysis.

3.3 The populist pole

As shown in the precedent sections, in the 1994-2011 period, the populist pole emerged with a certain configuration. On the populist side, essentially on the right side of the political spectrum, there were the regionalist – then populist radical right – Lega Nord and, later, the center-right neoliberal populism of Berlusconi's Forza Italia. The parties that did not adopt a populist discourse were the center-left coalition and some extreme left forces. A peculiar case is Alleanza Nazionale, which is not a populist party but has been an ally in all five populist administrations.

In the following sub-chapter, I describe populists in government. As I mentioned above, between 1994 and 2011, the populist parties presented themselves in a coalition together four times (1994, 2001, 2006, 2008), winning in three (1994, 2001 and 2008), but they were only able to finish an entire legislative term once, in 2001. In order to analyze the populist pole, I study the populist parties in government. Moreover, analyzing the discourse of the non-populist parties, I assess the emergence of an anti-populist pole.

3.3.1 The populists in government

The aim of this sub-chapter is to study the features of the populist pole in power. This is important for at least two reasons. First, analyzing the changes in the discourse of the populists in power and in opposition clarifies the relation between the elements within the populist pole and its changes during the period. Moreover, the changing of the discourse within the populist

pole may help understand the emergence, or absence, of the anti-populist pole.

The first populist government in Italy began in 1994 with the alliance between Berlusconi's Forza Italia and the Lega Nord. During this legislature, three other parties were part of the electoral coalition: the MSI (later AN), the Unione di Centro (UdC) and the Centro Cristiano Democratico (CCD). In general terms, the 1994 populist alliance was quite distinct from the others because it was only based on electoral (numerical) evaluations. The core of the coalition, Berlusconi's brand-new Forza Italia, needed to form a coalition with parties with more solid organizations and greater presence in the territory, such as the Lega in the north and MSI/AN in the south. Rounding out the coalition were the Cristian Democratic Centre (CCD) and the UdC, both formed by former Christian Democrats. The governing coalition broke down just eight months after the election, in January 1995, for two primary reasons. First, there were no agreements on policy, regarding federalism in particular. Federalism was a main issue at that time for the LN, which advocated the formation of a federal state and even for the secession of the northern regions, so-called Padania. According to the Lega's leader, Umberto Bossi, Forza Italia and other coalition partners failed to keep commitments made before the 1994 election.

Moreover, Bossi did not agree on the reforms of the pension system and broadcast systems, mainly of television, and on the Biondi justice reform. One of the most controversial points of this reform concerned the judicial resolution of Tangentopoli, the massive 1990s political corruption scandal. According to Bossi, the plea bargains and the sentence reductions for those who cooperated with the Mafia contributed to "mak[ing] the society unsafe" (*Repubblica*).¹⁹

Given that the LN at first espoused an anti-corruption discourse (Hopkin, 2004; McDonnell, 2006), it is not surprising that its leaders were not prone to condone these "privileges" to representatives of the "old" and "corrupt" political class. With the last pillar of the governing collation, Alleanza Nazionale, joining in protest, the decree was withdrawn.

After the government breakdown, the confrontation between the two leaders assumed strong tones. During his resignation statement in the parliament, FI's leader described his former ally as a "disillusioned man", a "political corpse" and someone with whom with whom he "will never sit down at the table [with] again" (*Il Fatto Quotidiano*).²⁰

The LN's leader used no softer tones and in a September 1995 interview with the *Corriere della Sera*, a popular Italian newspaper, warned Berlusconi "you will have to escape from the North at night with your wife and your children and suitcases. They understand you're a

¹⁹ <https://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/1994/07/08/maroni-boccia-la-riforma-biondi.html>

²⁰ <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2012/01/26/bozza-insulti-bossi-berlusconi/186654/>

Mafioso.” Bossi’s statement compares Berlusconi to the LN’s enemies, southerners who in the LN’s ideology are linked with the Mafia (15 September 1995, p.9).

In general, Bossi’s and the LN’s discourse between 1995 and 2001 compared Berlusconi’s party to the old traditional parties. During the 2005 annual Lega meeting in Pontida, Bossi asserted that “the media are supporting the idea that only two poles exist: the left and the right...like in the old times Communists and Fascists. And they do that to avoid the contraposition centralism vs. federalism which pushes toward the overcoming of the old system” (Bossi, Raduno Annuale Lega Nord di Pontida, 1995). Even after the success of the populist coalition in 1994, Bossi claimed in an interview that the FI lacked an *idem sentire*, a common ideal that rises after years of fighting. The falling-out between the two parties reflects the difficulty regional populists have participating in national government coalitions. As Albertazzi and McDonnell note, the key was to choose the “right” friends and enemies within a government (2005, p. 952). This peculiarity differentiated the 1994 government from the successive populist alliance during Berlusconi’s second government (2001-2006). During this legislature, the LN was Berlusconi’s most faithful ally while often at odds with the other elements of the coalition, the AN and the Catholics of the UdC. Despite having lasted less than a year in the first Berlusconi-led coalition in 1994, the Lega managed to stay in government for the entire legislative period (through the second and third Berlusconi governments).

Moreover, it succeeded in presenting itself simultaneously as both “the opposition within government” and as a driving force behind high-profile areas of government policy (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2005, p. 953). How did it manage that? While in 1994, Bossi focused on Berlusconi as his main enemy within the coalition, from 2001 on, Bossi sensibly allied himself with his fellow Lombard politician in a “northern axis” against the pro-southern “old professional politicians” of the Lega’s junior coalition partners, the post-Fascist Alleanza Nazionale (AN) and the former Christian Democrats of the Unione dei Democratici Cristiani e Democratici di Centro (UdC). These forces had moved closer together over the last years, clearly with an eye towards a post-Berlusconi future center-right (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2005, p. 954). Berlusconi then in the LN’s imaginary and discourse changed his image from a representative of the old politics and the traditional left-right cleavage to a new politician of the northern axis opposed to the “old professional politicians” such as the AN and UDC parliamentarians. Following the electoral victory in 2001, it was evident that the coalition was different in aspects to the one of 1994. First, the LN was electorally weaker in 2001 and losing representatives in the parliament from 1994. The second difference was the special relationship that Bossi enjoyed with Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and with Finance Minister Tremonti.

As Diamanti and Lello (2005) note, the government seemed to be divided into two groups: the inner circle of the “new northern pro-business politicians” from Lombardy – Bossi, Berlusconi and Tremonti and the other faction of pro-south, public-sector sympathizing old politicians. On the policy level, in return his support for devolution,²¹ Berlusconi received backing from the LN on personal issues such as the reform of the justice system and media regulation. Still, the LN played “opposition within government” along with the other parties of the coalition, “guilty” of plotting a post-Berlusconi era organized on First Republic lines.

The first and second Berlusconi administrations differed also on the plan of the policies implemented. Analysis of the policies implemented during the populist government is relevant because some authors maintain that holding office often produces a taming effect. In other words, the radicalism that wins populists votes is counterbalanced by the concessions that need to be made to moderate forces in order to stay in government (Minkenberg, 2001, p. 2; Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2005; Akkermann and Rooduijn, 2015). Furthermore, it is worth noting that even when populists are the majority force in a governmental coalition but still lack the capacity to initiate far-reaching institutional reforms, such in Italy, “courts often play [] an important role in taming populist actors and striking down some of their policy changes” (Taggart and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2016, p. 358). In a similar vein, Albertazzi and McDonnell (2005) indeed observe that “the impact of the populist in government tends to be felt more in terms of a changing political culture than actual public policies” (p. 960).

While there was little agreement on policy during the short-lived first Berlusconi administration, during the second “in order to reassure voters that the [Casa delle Libertà] and the Lega were serious about governing Bossi and Berlusconi signed an agreement which supposedly guaranteed rapidly approval of devolution in return for solid and enduring Lega support for Berlusconi and his policies” (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2005, p. 956). Consequently, in March 2005 the Senate approved legislation on the so-called devolution after LN ministers threatened to resign and Bossi partially returned to political life after a serious illness. The Lega considered the devolution of some powers to the regions as a first necessary step toward the creation of a federal state. The taming effect partially occurred with respect to the other issue close to the party’s interests: immigration. The 2002 Bossi-Fini law on immigration was one of the toughest in Europe, at least on paper (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2005). The law was seen as an answer to the “soft” policies previously adopted by the center-

²¹ Devolution is one of the terms (e.g. federalism, regionalism, secession) used by the Lega Nord to frame the issue of Northern authority that underpinned their narrative of territorial distinctiveness (see Albertazzi Giovannini and Seddone 2018, p. 663).

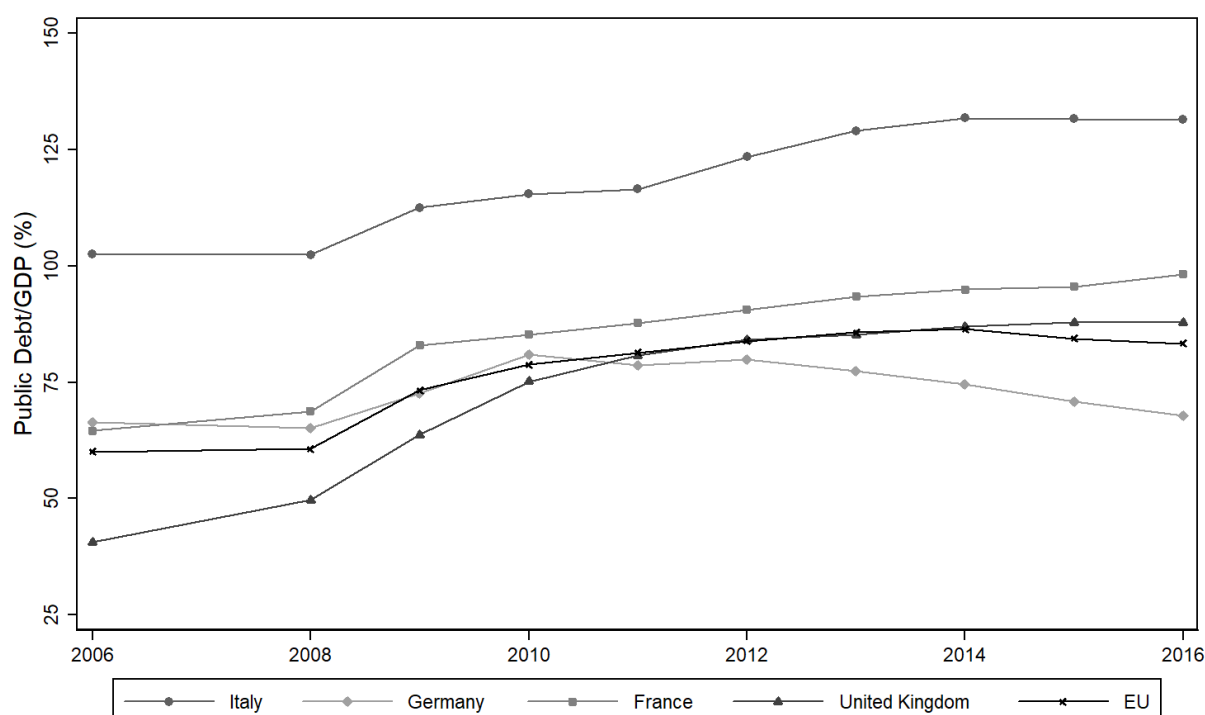
left, like the 1998 Turco-Napolitano Law. The new law introduced criminal sanctions for persons caught illegally entering the country or returning after being expelled. Under the new law, an immigrant stopped without a residence permit would be accompanied to the border and expelled immediately. Immigrants were also subject to arrest and detention of six to twelve months, to be followed by immediate deportation, if caught attempting to re-enter Italy before the expiration of a re-entry ban. A second offence is punishable by up to four years' imprisonment. The permit for residence of immigrants has been strictly linked to a work contract. Furthermore, under the new law, the time limit for confinement in detention centers whilst waiting for extradition was extended from thirty to sixty days and asylum seekers were placed in detention while awaiting asylum review. Also, the new law required fingerprint registration of all foreigners applying for residence. Although the law was seen internally and abroad as very strict, the actual results were mixed. A crucial point was *sanatoria* (amnesty), that despite the Lega's position, was granted to about 700,000 irregular immigrants, far surpassing the number of amnesties granted by the Dini government in 1995 and Prodi government in 1998 combined (Colombo and Sciortino, 2003). In return of his support for devolution and the immigration law, Berlusconi received the backing of the LN on issues of personal interest to him, such as the reform of the justice system and media regulation (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2005, p. 956). This arrangement produced, for example, the 2002 Cirami Law which permitted legitimate suspicion (*legittimo sospetto*) of the impartiality of the judges to serve as a basis for recusal and removal of suits. As for media regulation, in 2003, Parliament passed a decree creating an exception for Rete 4, one of Berlusconi's networks, to permit it to continue analog broadcasting.

The populist parties remained in the opposition after the victory of the center-left coalition in 2006 election and during the second Prodi government, which broke down in May of 2008. However, only two days later, populist parties in Italy had another chance to be in government in 2008 when the center-right coalition formed by the PdL and Lega Nord succeeded in the general election. Nonetheless, after almost 20 years of electoral success, the center-right populist coalition seemed to have unraveled by the end of 2011, when the debt crisis precipitated by the Great Recession hit Italy.

Indeed, the financial crisis played a major role in the breakdown of the fourth Berlusconi government, which enjoyed strong numbers upon its inauguration and achieved several election promises, like the abolition of taxes on one's first house, the "save banks decree" (*decreto salva banche*) in December 2008 and fiscal federalism, sponsored by the Lega, in May 2009. In return Parliament approved in August 2009 a tax amnesty (*scudo fiscale*) for

undeclared offshore assets with the Lega's support. This law allows taxpayers to disclose financial activities and properties illegally held abroad and unknown to the tax administration, subject to payment of a forfeit tax but without being subject to certain tax assessments or criminal charges (Mastellone, 2010). However, the international situation started to affect Italy in early 2010. The relationship between the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister, Tremonti, started to crumble because of the massive cuts needed to respond to the crisis. The Italian situation was even more delicate because of the country's high public debt: always quite high, by 2015 it had reached 130 percent of GDP (OECD data).²² In chart 3.2 it is possible to observe the public debt/ GDP ratio for Italy, Germany, France UK and the mean for EU countries.

Graph 3.5. Percentage of public debt/GDP in Italy, Germany, France, UK and the mean of EU countries



Source: OECD data.

On several occasions the Prime Minister tried to reassure the country and the financial markets that the economic and political situation was solid. In November 2011 at the G-20 in Cannes, Berlusconi claimed “it seems to me that there is no strong crisis in Italy. Consumption has not diminished, it is hard to book a seat on planes, and restaurants are full of people.” However,

²² <https://data.oecd.org/gga/general-government-debt.htm>

the economic and financial reality of the country was degrading, with the spread between the Italian and the German bonds reaching very high levels, gross domestic product falling and rising unemployment, mostly among the young people, reaching 29 percent in 2011 (Istat, 2011). Small companies, industrialized regions and production were the worst affected. The combined effect of the international crisis and domestic problems, such as the numerous trials involving the Prime Minister, weakened further his position, leading him to resign in November 2011.

To summarize the first part of this chapter, as described above, it can be said that the so-called populist pole between 1994 and 2011 was composed mainly of right and center-wing parties, namely the populist regionalist Lega Nord and Berlusconi's neoliberal populist Forza Italia. The only exception is Italy of Values, the political party founded by former Mani Pulite judge Antonio di Pietro in 1998.

As we can see below (table 3.1.), from the point of view of the parties' organizational features we can observe that both FI (and the Casa delle Libertà) and di Pietro's IdV can be described as personal political parties (McDonnell, 2013). As described in chapter one, personal parties are those in which the party's expected lifespan is dependent on the political lifespan of its founder-leader (Kefford and McDonnell, 2018). On the contrary, though its secretary, Umberto Bossi, is a strong leader, the Lega Nord managed to build a denser organizational network containing checks and balances that limit the strength of the leader. As mentioned in chapter one, following Sartori (2005a) a party's organizational density can be described as "the power of penetration of a given party, both in terms of intensity and reach" (p. 8). The main parties of the right-wing populist government then, having developed poor organizational density, seems to cast doubts on the consistency not only of the political right in Italy but also on possibility of crystallization of the populism/anti-populism political cleavage (see figure 3.2).

Table 3.2. *Main parties in the Italian party system (1994-2008) on the bases of the presence/absence of populist ideology and organizational density*

Organizational Density Populist Ideology	High	Low
	Yes	No
Yes	Forza Italia – M5S - IdV	Lega (Nord)
No	PD – AN	

After having observed the emergence a populist pole in the Italian party system and its characteristics on both the ideological and organizational point of view during the period between the collapse of the system and the breakdown of the fourth Berlusconi government in 2011, there is another issue we need to address before the end of this chapter. This issue is related to the emergence of the other pole of the cleavage: the anti-populist pole. To demonstrate whether the cleavage fully emerged, we need to answer the following question: has the anti-populist pole emerged in the 1994-2011 period? This is a relevant question because for a cleavage to structure a party system, both poles need to have emerged. In the following section I address this question by analyzing the responses of non-populist parties to the emergence of the populist pole.

3.4 The anti-populist pole: elitism, pluralism or neither of them?

To determine whether an anti-populist pole emerged, “anti-populist pole” needs definition. How we know that an anti-populist discourse has developed? First, to recognize the development of an anti-populist discourse, we need to remember that the conceptual opposites of populism are elitism and pluralism. Elitists believe that “the people” are dangerous, dishonest and vulgar and that “the elites” are superior not only in moral, but also in cultural and intellectual terms. As Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser put it, “elitists want politics to be exclusively or predominantly an elite affair in which the people do not have a say; they either reject democracy altogether or support a limited model of democracy” (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 7). Following Stravakakis, elitist anti-populism “reduces politics to an administrative enterprise, stripped from the elements of participation and open democratic

deliberation, offering no real choice between different alternatives, leaving it prey to the supposedly objective instructions of experts and technocrats — such as independent central bankers — who *always know better*” (2014, p. 506).

But elitism is not the only opposite pole of populism. Pluralism is the opposite of the dualistic perspective (pure people vs. corrupt elite) of populism *and* elitism. From a pluralist point of view, society is divided into a broad variety of partly overlapping social groups with different ideas and interests and, in this sense, diversity is seen a strength rather than a weakness (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 7). Taking those descriptions of the anti-populist pole, I try to answer two further questions in this section. First, how do we know whether an anti-populist ideology or discourse has emerged? As in the case of the populism, we need to analyze the discourse of non-populist parties. I believe that anti-populism can manifest itself in two ways. First anti-populism may imply a further moralization of the public discourse. In fact, it can be the case that non-populist political actors develop a discourse similar to the populist ones, presenting a different definition of the “people.” As Mudde (2018) points out, since the people are a constructed entity defining them “is a big part of the political struggle for populists and vice versa.”²³ Often the response to populism is reclaiming “the people,” which in some cases turns into anti-populism. In this scenario, anti-populism is based on the same moral distinction of populism. The only difference lies in the construction of the category of “the people.” This is the more basic manifestation of anti-populism. An example of this kind of anti-populism is represented by Hillary Clinton speaking about the “deplorables” who would vote for Trump (Mudde, 2018). This kind of anti-populism is elitist in the sense that conceives of society as divided into groups: populists, who are bad by definition, and anti-populists, who are good since they oppose populists.

On the other hand, anti-populists can develop a pluralistic discourse. This more sophisticated type of discourse avoids describing the people singularly. Anti-populists in this case do not need to reclaim the people, at least not as a unified category. Pluralist anti-populists, indeed, deny that society is divided into two homogeneous groups. Instead, society needs to be conceived of as formed by different groups. The difference between groups is moral. People are not “bad” or “good” depending on political alignment.

I will address the last question: did an anti-populist pole, with pluralist or elitist features, emerge in Italy in the 1994-2011 period? While there was major backlash against the *ad*

²³ <https://icds.ee/mudde-populism-is-based-on-morals/>

personam law Berlusconi introduced, an anti-populist discourse and ideology did not develop, at least during that period. It seems more like an anti-Berlusconi, not anti-populist, discourse developed in Italy during this period. This anti-Berlusconism opposes essentially two aspects of Berlusconi government. First, it opposes certain policies that the populist right-wing coalition implemented, chiefly those that benefitted Berlusconi and the people close to him.

Opponents rallied against the populist pole on the basis on their aversion toward certain policies which were perceived to be mainly designed to solve some of the leader's private issues, such as the so called Tremonti bis, the abolition of tax on inheritance and donations for large assets in 2001 or Law 61/2001, by which false accounting was decriminalized. This law allowed the Prime Minister to be fully acquitted in two trials, the "All-Iberian 2" and "Sme-Ariosto 2." The second reason for anti-Berlusconism relates to Berlusconi's career-long leadership style. Throughout his political career, Berlusconi wielded an enormous concentration of formal and informal power. His influence was such that he wrought changes in Italian politics not only in its inter-party competition but also in its discourse. The Italian left, first the PDS and from 2007 onwards the PD, was heavily "influenced by an anti-Berlusconi rhetoric" (Anselmi and De Nardi, 2018). On the same note, Bosco and McDonnell maintain that the Italian party system has been dominated since 1994 by a "pro-anti Berlusconi cleavage" that seemed to experience some changes only in 2011 as the effects of the financial crisis hit Italy (2012, p. 37).

Although certain policies promoted by FI, the PdL and the Lega Nord were opposed by the non-populist parties, a clear anti-populist discourse did not emerge in this period. The non-populist oppositions did not develop an anti-populist discourse, either pluralist or elitist, on a large scale. Occasionally opposition parties, mainly the mainstream left, accuse Berlusconi of being a populist and the leader of FI/PdL responds by calling these forces elitist, but a clearly anti-populist discourse does not seem to have emerged, at least before the breakdown of the fourth Berlusconi government.

3.5 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to analyze the emergence of populism/anti-populism cleavage in the Italian party system from after the party system collapse to the breakdown of the fourth Berlusconi government. Through the analysis of secondary literature, party manifestos, public speeches and television programs, I maintained that a populist pole emerged, formed by the Lega Nord, a regionalist populist party that changed into a populist RRP, Forza Italia/ Popolo

delle Libertà led by Silvio Berlusconi, defined as neoliberal populist party, and the anti-corruption Italia dei Valori (IdV) led by former Mani Pulite judge Antonio di Pietro. However, for a cleavage to emerge, both poles must form.

It does not look like in the period analyzed an anti-populist pole emerged, even if the populist forces were in power for almost nine years. Rather, the populists have been opposed mainly on the basis of their policy choices rather than on their populist ideology. Even if on some occasion there have been “accusations” of populism, a clear anti-populist discourse, whether elitist or pluralist, did not fully develop. Instead, an anti-Berlusconi discourse emerged, especially from within the Democratic Party and previously the Left Democrats (Anselmi and de Nardis, 2018).

Moreover, I have analyzed the organizational features of the parties in the system since that can shed light on the possibility of crystallization and duration of the populism/anti-populism political cleavage. I categorized parties according to both the presence/absence of a populist set of ideas in their discourse and by high/low level of organizational density (see table 3.1). With respect to the so-called populist pole, Forza Italia and IdV, a dominant and junior partner in the right-wing coalition, respectively, showed strong dependence on their respective founder-leaders without organisms that can effectively counterbalance their power. For this reason, both FI (and the PdL) and the IdV are cases of personal populist parties. Conversely, the LN, despite the relevance of the founder-leader, developed a more capillary organization and does not seem to depend only on the founder-leader.