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# RIGHT WING POPULISM AND THE WELFARE STATE: A FIVE COUNTRIES COMPARISON



*workingpaper*  
N.2/2019



## Gli Annali 2019

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ISBN 978-88-94960-13-6

Laboratorio di Politica Comparata  
e Filosofia Pubblica

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Centro Einaudi • Laboratorio di Politica Comparata e Filosofia Pubblica  
*With the support of Compagnia di San Paolo*

Working Paper-LPF n. 2 • 2019

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The underlying idea is that implementing forms of “civilized” politics is desirable as well as feasible. And, as far as the Italian political system is concerned, it is also urgently needed, since the system appears to be poorly prepared to deal with the challenges emerging in many policy areas: from welfare state reform to the governance of immigration, from the selection criteria in education and in public administration to the regulation of ethically sensitive issues.

In order to achieve this end, LPF adopts both a descriptive-explanatory approach and a normative one, aiming at a fruitful and meaningful combination of the two perspectives. Wishing to foster an informed public debate, it promotes theoretical research, empirical case studies, policy analyses and policy proposals.

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KEYWORDS

Populism, Radical Right, Welfare State, Party Manifesto

## ABSTRACT

**RIGHT WING POPULISM AND THE WELFARE STATE:  
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In recent years the increased electoral relevance of populist anti-establishment parties in several European democracies has steered scholar attention to these “new” parties’ positions on redistribution, the functioning of the economy and, last but not least, the welfare state. Nonetheless, with the exception of few recent studies on Radical Right parties, the programmatic options and welfare preferences of diverse “populist” right parties have remained largely under-researched.

This paper therefore analyses how the radical right parties' discourse on the welfare state developed over time in five Western countries: Germany, France, Italy, the UK, and the US. The analysis is based on the content of political manifestos in national elections since the 1990s and it looks at all the main social policy fields - from pensions, to health care and family policies.

The goal of the paper is to identify how much these parties differ from one another in relation to their approach to welfare state issues and whether there is a policy field effect. In particular, the paper tries to answer the following questions: What are the welfare preferences of new populist right parties? Do welfare state settings – i.e. universalistic vs occupational vs means-tested – and/or policy fields – health care, pensions, unemployment, education and anti-poverty fields - contribute shaping these parties’ welfare preferences?

## **RIGHT WING POPULISM AND THE WELFARE STATE: A FIVE COUNTRIES COMPARISON**

E. PAVOLINI, M. JESSOULA, M. NATILI, M.R. GERMINARIO

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Right wing parties both in the US and Western Europe have traditionally shown support for economic liberalism and limited enthusiasm for redistributive policies. More recently, however, something has changed. In many West European countries, traditional right wing parties are challenged by a ‘populist right wing’ discourse which also started to argue for redistributive welfare policies. Such discourse is frequently framed in a peculiar way, supporting social policies restricted exclusively to an ethnically defined community – what has been defined ‘exclusive solidarity’ (Kitschelt 1995, Lefkofridi and Michel 2014). In the US, the intra-party competition in the 2016 Republican Primaries apparently shows similar patterns: the winner, Donald Trump, mixed more than other Republican candidates an appeal to the traditional economic liberalism with support for social protection and redistributive measures. In both contexts, the aim appears to be the electoral “capture” of the (white) working class vote.

The paper assesses how strong similarities and differences across the Atlantic are, with respect to both welfare reform proposals and the emergence of an “*exclusive solidarity*” approach within the Right camp. It does so by comparing (mostly radical) right parties’ positions in France (Front National), Italy (Lega Nord, i.e Northern League), Germany (AFD), the UK (UKIP) and the United States (Republicans) with particular reference to six policy sectors: labour market, social assistance, health care, education, family policies and pension policies. The study relies on in-depth analysis of party manifestos from the 1990s to 2018, focusing in particular on those produced in the present decade.

### **2. RIGHT WING POPULISM AND THE WELFARE STATE**

Populist right parties have not a clearly identifiable ideology and/or a relatively clear set of facets (Mudde, 1996) for two main reasons. First, a populist right wing approach presents several fixed characteristics, but others have evolved in different directions over time. Second, after World War Two populist right wing ideologies have been significantly less at the forefront of the political debate compared to other Right wing ideologies – Neo-Liberalism, Conservatorism and/or Catholicism; therefore, their ideas on the welfare state are not so clear and

defined. Accordingly, there is a relevant debate regarding populist rightist stances when it comes to issues of economic redistribution and the welfare state (Sternhell 1983; Mudde 2000; Michel 2017).

However, some properties clearly define right wing populism. In particular, we refer to four facets, related to each other: a specific approach to society and institutions (including the welfare state); a view of the relationship between the party leader and the voters; specific socio-cultural ideas; and the strategic usage of the “rhetoric of fear”. This ideology is essentially populist, if we adopt Albertazzi and McDonnell’s definition (2008, p. 3): populism “pits a virtuous and homogeneous people against a set of elites and dangerous ‘others’ who are depicted as depriving (or attempting to deprive) the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity and voice”. Populism, therefore, entails an attempt to undermine the trust that the ‘people’ have in traditional liberal institutions, including the welfare state ones. Populist notions of ‘corrupted elites’ in welfare systems refer to welfare professionals (from doctors to teachers), managers and bureaucrats, but also to some private (non-profit) providers (Pavolini et al., 2018). All these actors are portrayed as exploiting their knowledge and position in order to gain more power and economic resources at the expenses of users - the ‘people’, providing them also with wrong ideas about how society should work (e.g. tolerance, etc.). In addition, populist discourse regarding entitlement and access to welfare provisions tend to be against so called ‘outsiders’ (e.g. migrants, black and minority ethnic groups, but also supra-national institutions such as the EU). The latter tend to be portrayed as individuals exploiting their access to welfare provision (i.e. not paying enough for the extensive use they make of it) and thereby making it more expensive to the general population, making harder for the “people” to access decent social provision.

This ideology is populist also given the fact that it is traditionally authoritarian in socio-political terms, recognising a strong role for the party leader, who acts directly on behalf and with the “people” – limiting the role of intermediating institutions. In other terms, it is in stark contrast with pluralism: while pluralism focuses on the importance of negotiation and bargain between different demands, stances and necessities across multiple groups, radical right ideology places importance on the notion of “the people” as unique entity (Eatwell, 2004). If we apply these definitions to welfare issues, it means an approach not interested in neo-corporatism or subsidiarity, denounced as forms of improper influence by third parties (from trade unions to other types of associations), but centred around decisions taken by the executive power. This ideology is gaining ground also a product of the dissatisfaction and mistrust towards representative democracy (Kriesi, 2015).

Though populism is not necessarily typical of right wing-ideologies only, there are specific properties that characterize it when it turns to the Right. In particular, in socio-cultural term it uses a “demarcation” idea of society, anchored around traditional values – law and order, strong limitation to immigration and abortion rights, and so on (Lefkofridi and Michel 2014), against “liberal cosmopolitanism”

and an “open society” (Kriesi and Pappas, 2015; Inglehart e Norris, 2016). There is an opposition towards cultural globalization, liberal permissiveness and tolerance of migrants, ethnic minorities, and other groups that are deemed to deviate from the ‘common man in the street’ standards (Koster et al., 2013, Kriesi et al. 2006, Rydgren, 2006). Relatedly, this ideology is nationalist – or at least embraces an ethnopluralist view of society (Rydgren 2006) - and xenophobic (Rydgren 2005). Last, the radical right ideology uses a political discourse based on a “rhetoric of fear” as one of the main tools to gain support (Wodak, 2015). Far-right ideologies’ political discourse is not only important because of the way it is structured, but also for its content: “[...] such (ideologies and) parties successfully construct fear and – related to the various real or imagined dangers – propose scapegoats that are blamed for threatening or actually damaging our societies, in Europe and Beyond” (Wodak, 2015). This mechanism is useful to construct the dichotomy between “us” and “them” and, consequentially, the aforementioned “politics of fear”.

Overall, a populist discourse in relation to the welfare state/system highlights the following ‘diagnosis’ and ‘policy solutions’ to social needs:

- the ‘diagnosis’: it is not simply an issue of how much a country allocates for welfare provision, but how the resources are spent and the role played by ‘corrupted elites’ and ‘outsiders’ (migrants, minorities and supra-national institutions) in distorting the allocation and use of scarce resources; it is crucial to cut resources spent inefficiently by and for elites and outsiders in order to improve welfare provision;
- the ‘policy proposal’: a mix of consumerism and empowerment, transferring more power to the ‘people’ and limiting the role of professionals (also on the base of what Wodak (2015) defines the “arrogance of ignorance” – appeals to common-sense and anti-intellectualism, marking a return to pre-modernist and pre-Enlightenment thinking), welfare bureaucracies and civil society organisations (including trade unions), coupled with ‘welfare chauvinism’ and limitations to ‘outsiders’ access to welfare provision; welfare chauvinism can be defined as a conception of the welfare state as a “social protection for those who belong to the ethnically defined community and who have contributed to it” (Kitschelt, 1995, Michel 2017).

If a populist approach such as the one described above is typical of a radical right perspective, the picture becomes more ambiguous when it comes to socio-economic and inequality issues. In particular, there seems to be an “old” ideological version of the radical right perspective which, in contrast with traditional social-democratic and leftist arguments, views inequality as part of the natural order and not something that should be subject to state intervention. According to Mudde (2007), the core of the radical right ideology is the desire to



create an authoritarian system which is strictly ordered according to the “natural” differences existing in society, as well as a law-and-order system that severely punishes deviant behaviour. This might be difficult to combine with an encompassing welfare state. This has led many parties embracing a radical right ideology to hold on neoliberal economic policies that favour market allocation over the political redistribution of economic resources, often manifesting campaign for radical tax cuts. In this sense, the “old” radical right ideology mixes neo-liberal policies in economic and redistribution policies with populist views on society and politics.

However, neoliberal economic policies are not a defining characteristic of the radical right approach (Mudde 2007). Indeed, from the 1990s on a “new” ideological version seems to have spread in several countries and contexts supporting more state intervention and redistribution. More precisely, this new version combines more redistribution and social protection with authoritarian arguments (Lefkofridi and Michel 2014), claiming to represent the interests of “the people” by maintaining welfare benefits and rights even in less favourable circumstances. Yet it promotes an exclusive conception of solidarity which derives from the authoritarian and nativist ideology, that is specifically directed against migrants who are deemed to usurp social benefits.

It is a question of debate whether this increased attention toward social provision (although with a “chauvinist” approach) represents a substantive shift in radical right ideology or rather a strategic and discursive move aimed to catch more votes from middle and working classes: in other terms, if the distinction between “old” and “new” radical right ideology is an important one. On the one hand, scholars like Rovny (2013) argue this shift is only a “minor” one within RRP: the main common point of radical right ideologies, rather than a left or right economic position, is the low salience of their position on this domain: even when they show an interest in redistribution, their attention is instrumental to the nativist core message and political goal. The reason for this low salience resides in the fact that RRP know that their capacity of attraction is related to socio-cultural issues more than socio-economic ones. For example, Oesch (2008) underlines that cultural factors play a more prominent role with respect to RRP voters’ preferences than economic ones: people are more concerned about the danger of losing their cultural identity than economic problems. The cultural grievance factor is a crucial determinant among the two class categories with the most disadvantaged position in the labour market, namely production and service workers. Along similar lines Ivarsflaten (2008) and Inglehart and Norris (2016) argue that it would be wrong to ascribe to economic insecurity the rise of populist parties across Europe: as a matter of fact, psychological and cultural factors, related also to the “unrestrained immigration crisis” were crucial in determining the voters’ preferences.

On the other hand, other scholars argue that the attention to more redistributive and generous social policies represents a “major” change in the platform of many RRP, especially in the aftermath of the global financial crisis and the Eurozone crisis (Lefkofridi and Michel, 2014; Afonso and Rennwald, 2018). This shift from

the neo-liberal-conservative stance has been concomitant to an increasing proletarianisation of radical right parties' electorate, with the part of the working class moving toward RRP's mostly made by those defined by Lefkofridi and Michel (2014) as "left-authoritarian workers" - namely those working class workers holding left-wing positions on socioeconomic issues (pro-welfare) and authoritarian positions on sociocultural issues (law and order, immigration, etc.).

Against this background, though the literature on radical right parties and the welfare state is growing, there are several unanswered questions. The present contribution focuses on two of them. First, has support for the expansion of a (chauvinist) welfare state become a substantive core of the populist right ideology, or it is rather a strategic and discursive move only? Second, is it possible to identify an overall coherent approach to welfare issues in the populist right wing camp, or there are different preferences and stances depending on the social policy field?

In order to answer these questions, this article analyses social policy proposals in the political party manifestos of five parties that have undergone, at least in recent years, the influence of a populist right ideology: the US Republicans, the British UKIP, the French National Front, the Italian (Northern) League and the German AfD. In particular, the analysis relies on an in-depth study of the manifestos of the present decade, but when possible we also compared them to those from the 1990s and 2000s.

The choice of the five parties has been determined by the role of these parties in the political debates of their respective countries and by the fact that they belong to at least three different welfare regimes (Corporatist-Conservative, Southern European and Liberal) or clusters of political economies (coordinated market economies, non-coordinated ones and mixed market ones).

The analysis of the manifestos is included in the next two sections: section 3 provides a general overview of how social policy is framed in party manifestos; section 4 focuses comparatively on how different social policies are treated within each manifesto. Section 3 helps answering the question on the salience of social policy in these parties' ideologies. Section 4 asks whether an overall coherent "welfare ideology" within these parties' approach to welfare state issues exist or there are different ideas depending on the single social policy field (does the social policy field matter?).

### **3. SOCIAL POLICIES: A SUBSTANTIVE ISSUE OR JUST A STRATEGIC AND DISCURSIVE MOVE?**

The salience of welfare state issues has been studied qualitatively by looking at two facets of the manifestos: how much detailed the analysis and the proposals on each social policy field were (how general or specific the proposals were, how much the proposals described the funding and the implementation of potential policy reforms); how the discourse on different social policies was framed within

the core messages of the overall manifesto, whether it maintained an internal coherence and a specific goal or it rather seemed a rhetorical device to address other policy issues (in particular migration and the role of supra-national institutions such as the EU).

The results of analysis of party manifestos, following the guidelines indicated above, show that the five parties under consideration assign a very different role to social policies. Table 1 reports a classification of the five parties studied over time by looking at the salience of social policy issues in their programs and the overall degree of ‘right wing populism’ in their programs.

Table 1. Right wing parties, degree of populism and the welfare state: the contents of party manifestos

	<i>Salience of social policy issues</i>	<i>Degree of right wing populism</i>	<i>Overall ideological profile</i>
<i>National Front (FR)</i> 1990s 2000s 2010s	Low* Medium High	High High High	From “old” radical right to the “new” one
<i>(Northern) League (IT)</i> 1990s 2000s-2013 2018	Low* Low* Medium-High	High High High	Partial transition from “old” radical right to the “new” one
<i>GOP (USA)</i> 1990s 2000s 2010s	Low* Low* Low*	Low Low High	From a traditional neo-liberal/conservative party to neo-liberal/conservative party with a populist touch
<i>UKIP (UK)</i> 1990s 2000s 2010s	Low* Low* Low*	Medium Medium High	“Single issue” right wing party becoming an “old” radical right one
<i>AFD (DE)</i> 2010s	Low*	High	“Single issue” right wing party becoming an “old” radical right one

\* discussing social policies for other policy goals

The five parties can be clustered around three ideal-types in terms of their ideological profile:

- a. right wing parties strengthening their “old” radical right ideology and only apparently showing a “new” radical right approach to welfare issues: the German AFD and the British UKIP;
- b. right wing parties mixing conservative and neo-liberal ideologies, adding in recent years a right wing populist “touch” to their social policy proposal, but without making social policy expansion a key element in their proposal: the US GOP especially in the 2016 presidential campaign;
- c. right wing parties which seem to have actually shifted from an “old” radical right ideology to a “new” one: the French National Front and, to a lesser extent, the Italian (Northern) League.

### ***3.1. Write “welfare state”, read “migrants” and the “EU”: the role of social policy in the party manifestos of AFD and the UKIP***

The diachronic analysis of both AFD and UKIP manifestos shows that the political origins of these two parties still constitute a significant ideological “imprint” when they address and develop their views on social policies. In fact, both parties were originally created as “single issue” right wing populist parties. AFD was founded in 2013 by Bernd Lucke, who conceived the party as merely “anti-Euro”. UKIP was founded in 1993 and, just like AFD, it was born as a Eurosceptic party. Recently, however, both parties started to change their ideological profile. In particular, in the last 5 years, AFD changed programmatic stances to a large extent, shifting significantly towards the far right. The party’s attitude towards issues like immigration has increasingly become aggressive and fierce: it has repeatedly scapegoated migrants, pointing at them as the main problem in Germany (along with the EU). As for the UKIP, it was not until the election of the new leader in 2010, Nigel Farage, that the party started to change its image by making it more credible, mixing conservative and neo-liberal ideologies with values closer to the radical right, especially in terms of populism focusing on migrants.

When analysing both parties’ electoral manifestos, it results clear that social policy issues play to a large extent an instrumental role in order to make the point of how dangerous the “outsiders” (migrants and the EU) are for their countries. Social policies are often vaguely described in terms of goals and sources of funding. Moreover, in these documents there is often (if not constantly) an association between the limitations and the present shortcomings of the national welfare state and the negative role of migrants and the EU.

#### *Alternative für Deutschland*

There is a significant difference between AFD’s 2013 and 2017 electoral programmes: the first one is much shorter and the main focus is on the so-called “Europapolitik”, which is fiercely criticised. The 2017 AFD political programme is

more organised, addressing more issues and, though maintaining its core ideology related to the Euroscepticism, it sharply shifts towards the far-right.

In relation to education policies, both the 2013 and the 2017 manifestos focus on improving access to and the quality of the education system. However, both documents fail to clearly specify how they intend to implement these policies, nor they indicate the source of funding. Significantly, the “core problems in education” are identified in the Bologna reform and the PISA system. This is complemented by a strong attack to incumbents, who are deemed guilty of having manipulated and exploited the educational system, making it EU-oriented. Furthermore, in both programs we find claims against Koran classes and more generally against foreign influences in the school programs.

Health care was not mentioned in the 2013 manifesto. In the 2017 manifesto, it is framed in a way similar to education policies. It shows a more in-depth analysis of potential problems in the German health care system - the coverage in rural and countryside areas of the country, the shortage of qualified personnel in hospitals and the problems of coordination between outpatient and hospital care. They claim for more resources for the German health care system or, at least, resources spent in a more effective way. The radical right populist rhetoric comes out when identifying the reasons for funding problem. Financing health has become a challenge over the last years because of the failing interest rate policies of the European Central Bank: due to these measures, there are no available funds for the health care system; moreover, the costs for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees are considered as unbearable burden for the state. They also dedicate a section to the importance of educating and training doctors in German: as health is a matter of trust, doctors, therapists and other workers of the health care system should have at least a C1 level on German. According to what they state, the employment of foreign personnel is not the solution for the shortage in the health care sector. Therefore, either doctors or therapists should study and train in German or they should be native speakers. They also state that they want to abolish the Turkish-German Social Security Agreement because it disadvantages German people in the health care system. The terminology employed is noteworthy as well: when they refer to their intention to guarantee full medical coverage, they use the term “Bürger”, that means “citizens”: therefore, we might infer that citizenship is an essential requirement to benefit from this ambiguous full coverage and that citizens can be included in the category of those who “deserve” this right.

In the 2013 electoral programme, the AfD did not mention social assistance either and labour policies at all. Differently, in 2017, the AfD gave prominence to the issues of unemployment, also emphasizing the importance of the minimum wage and a commitment to increase to 15% the legal limit of employees hired with temporary contracts. Again, however, the core message is a relatively odd one: AfD complained about the fact that the unemployment rate was somehow

manipulated, not taking into consideration hundreds of thousand unemployed people. Therefore, their main goal was to create jobs for all the “Mitbürger”. As far as the manipulation of “Arbeitslosenquote” (share of unemployed people), in 2017 the unemployment rate in Germany amounted to the 3,2%. Their strategy, here, aimed at constructing a problem that does not actually exist in order to instil insecurity and connect this issue to immigration.

In the 2013 Wahlprogramm, the AfD dedicated a small section to “Old-age insurance and Family”, in which they argue that the crisis in Europe threatened old-age provisions because of over-indebtedness and minimal interest rates. Furthermore, they state that children should be more considered in pension calculation. That was mainly it. In the 2017 electoral programme, the AfD dedicates a broader section to pensions and family policies. They argue that the German welfare state can be maintained if solidarity is offered only to a limited community. For family policies, the AfD wants to relieve families with children from the burden of taxes, which are currently too high for them. As far as pensions are concerned, the AfD plans to make the pension system stronger and sustainable: in order to do that, and because of the “particular demographic challenge of the coming decades”, they are committed to require “temporarily” a higher co-financing from general revenues. They also propose to strengthen occupational and private pension systems. Moreover, they argue they are committed to reward and safeguard women by taking into consideration the time spent in raising children and other care-taking activities.

Overall, the party “ethnicises” social policies shaping a cleavage between Germans and non-Germans, namely migrants. This concept is clearly summarised in the words of one of the party’s politicians, Björn Höcke: “The social question of the present is not primarily the distribution of national wealth from the top to the bottom, the bottom to the top, the young to the old or the old to the young. The new German social question of the 21st century is the question of the distribution of national wealth from the inside to the outside”.

#### *United Kingdom Independence Party*

Since 2015, UKIP’s social policy programme has become more prominent within the party lines. At the same time, it is questionable whether this change marks a deep transformation in terms of salience.

Overall, the 2010 manifesto tried to mix a neo-liberal consumerist approach to welfare issues with a touch of radical right populism. For example, in the fields of education and health care more freedom of choice was proposed, adopting a typical neo-liberal approach to welfare services: from “Health Credit Vouchers”, which should enable people to opt out of the NHS public healthcare system entirely if they so wish” to ‘school vouchers’ and ‘students vouchers’. In labour market policies, the suggestions were all in relation to demand-side support measures to enterprises in order to support their capacity to hire workers. At the

same time, the main recipe for improving welfare state provision was connected in very general terms with two phenomena: the excessive bureaucratization of the welfare state; the negative impact of the EU and migrants, creating financing problems to the British welfare state.

The 2015 and 2017 manifestos elaborate more on social policy issues, yet along the same lines of the 2010 manifesto: a certain degree of vagueness as for how to implement (and finance) reforms and a strong populist blame on the actors considered responsible for the British welfare state crisis: migrants and the EU . What it is interesting to point out is that only the field of education received a closer and more focused look compared to other policies with some innovative proposal.

In relation to health care, UKIP complained in 2015 and 2017 about the fact that the NHS was currently in danger, also because “the increase in the number of people suffering chronic diseases and the uncontrolled immigration favoured the significant worsening of the health care sphere”. Therefore, the party commit itself to “take better care of taxpayers’ money”, complaining that over £2 billion of taxpayers’ money were used to treat patients “ineligible for free care” - referring to foreign nationals who look for free medical treatment in Britain, “those who live here but do not qualify for free care” and illegal immigrants or those who stay longer than the period allowed by their visas. EU directives were also criticised, because they “prevent medical institutions from operating in the best interests of patients”. In order to fix this problem, they take the commitment to discard two of them, namely the EU Clinical Trial Directive and the EU Working Time Directive. Furthermore, they also criticize EU’s negotiation within the framework of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), arguing that TTIP might force Britain to privatise a large part of the NHS.

As far as pensions are concerned, the UKIP asserted in its 2015 manifesto that they should be made more flexible, following the example of Italy, Norway, Sweden and Finland: first of all, the party wanted to give some sort of decisional power to pensioners on their retirement age and introduce “a flexible state pension window” that would allow pensioners to receive “lower weekly state pension” before reaching the pensionable age. Apart from that, the issue of pensions is not really addressed in the last two manifestos.

In family policies, in order to cope with the shortage of places in childcare, they propose a typical neo-liberal solution: “to deregulate childcare, modify the voucher scheme to cut the costs for both parents and the state and scrap the norm according to which parents should rely on childminders registered to the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted): as a matter of fact, according to the UKIP, parents should be free to choose the right people to entrust their children and allowed to hire a nanny or share costs in group to do

that". The main goal for the UKIP is to combine deregulation measures and provisions to reduce costs for both parents and the state.

In relation to employment, same as in 2010, in the two most recent manifestos the core proposal is to introduce measures supporting the demand side (employers), adding that EU laws endanger the British labour market. Furthermore, they argue that mass immigration has worsened the labour market conditions causing "downward pressure on wages", also because migrants have more chances to work in Britain than Britons themselves. Therefore, UKIP is committed to "give back some hope" to Britons following the Australian system to restrict immigration, as British people should have priority.

No reference is made to social assistance in electoral programmes, whereas in relation to education, apart from general statements about the need to support both quality in education and families in their educational role, there are two main proposals. The first one is typically conservative, as the UKIP aims at involving parents in sex education during secondary school: parents should be made aware of the teaching materials and can decide whether to withdraw their children from sex-education classes or not. The second one is more innovative: secondary schools should be differentiated to better respond to students' several differences and aptitudes, by creating different types of schools, such as "grammar, technical, vocational, and specialist secondary schools". As a matter of fact, vocational education is paramount for the UKIP: it is explicitly stated that Britain should follow the German and Dutch models to let children develop practical skills. They suggest to replace the non-core General Certificates of Secondary Education (with core courses of English, science, mathematics, languages and humanities) with apprenticeship qualification: in short, their goal is to train pupils in a more practical way.

### ***3.2. Say something on social policies, write something else: the neo-liberal/conservative agenda with a populist touch of the "new" Trump-led GOP***

During the GOP primaries and the electoral campaign of 2016, Donald Trump repeatedly presented himself as the representative of the "forgotten men and women of America": he namely referred to those who felt endangered by the risks brought about by new social challenges and the change of moral and social values that has taken place over the last years, as well as by a widespread sense of economic insecurity. In debates and interviews, Trump presented agenda based on social policy expansion that could be partially framed within a "new" radical right ideology.

However, when comparing the GOP manifestos of 2012 and 2016 there are more lines of continuity than change. It can be thus argued that what Donald Trump said during the republican primaries and the presidential campaign was partially different from what it was stated in the 2016 party manifesto, written practically in



the same months: a good part of his right wing “populist” discourse got lost in the translation from his speeches into the party manifesto.

In education, the 2012 and 2016 manifestos are quite similar. They stress the role of families in raising and educating their children. Furthermore, they argue that even though the government invested in primary and secondary education, it was not enough to guarantee a high level of schooling to students for the subsequent study courses. Both documents state that they support innovation in the field of education: they take the commitment to start from the basics, namely from the STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and to foster the use of technology in schools. As far as the role of headmasters (principals) is concerned, they are committed to strengthen their positions as well as those of superintendents and locally elected school boards. As far as the choice of teachers is concerned, the Republicans assert that it should be done according to a merit-based approach and that they have the duty to grant the highest quality level in each study grade. Moreover, they want to avoid the “ideological bias”, that is widespread within universities: state institutions’ trustees should effectively prevent indoctrination and make universities “places of learning” and exchanging ideas, “not zones of intellectual intolerance favouring the Left”.

In relation to health care, in 2012 the Republicans starkly attacked of their main “enemies”: the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, also known as “Obamacare”. This is considered a mere tool employed by the previous administration “to control over one sixth of the American economy” and being an attack to the Constitution “by requiring that US citizens purchase health insurance”. The Republicans considered such reform an unbearable burden for the state and criticised it for promoting abortion, while they are committed to protect the “sanctity” of human life. Moreover, they insisted on the need to reform Medicare and Medicaid, transforming both programmes to a “fiscally sound defined contribution model”. More precisely, as far as Medicare is concerned, they want to move from a premium-support model with an income adjusted contribution towards a health plan of the enrollee's choice, which should include private health insurance plans to provide catastrophes protection and ensure the continuation of doctor-patient relationship. Furthermore, they argue that age eligibility should be “more realistic”, connecting it to the current higher life expectancy. These reforms should be financed through refundable tax credits or premium supports. Also in 2016, the criticism to the Obamacare is blatant: described as a “dishonestly named” act, that should be removed, as it is necessary to adopt an approach that favours “genuine competition, patient choice, excellent care, wellness and timely access to treatment”. In order to do that, Republicans propose to simplify the system by reducing expensive medical mandates and allow providers and insurers to cut costs and to block grant Medicare in order to assist all patients. Opposition to abortion is still present in the manifesto, which also supports the freedom of professionals in the healthcare sphere and faith-based groups active in the field; furthermore, they urge to create a legislation requiring

parental consent for abortion. Here, consistently with their traditional moral values, they argue that “American taxpayers should not be forced to fund abortion”: therefore, they consider necessary to ban any coverage to abortion.

In relation to labour policies, Republicans stated in 2012 their commitment to lower taxes and reduce regulations to foster economic growth, with the aim to “getting Americans back to work”. Most of their proposals were in line with a neo-liberal agenda and support demand (employers) in order to promote employment especially through tax cuts. Moreover, they stated they were in favour of Personal Reemployment Accounts, namely individually managed accounts (up to 3000\$) that unemployed people can use to purchase training services in order to get a job. Significantly, concerning migrants, the Republicans assert that strategic migration policies should be adopted to allow high skilled migrants and foreigners who studied in the US to contribute to the economic growth as they are “a too valuable resource to lose”. The labour policy field is one of the main bones of contention with respect to the tradition of the party in 2016: while in the 2012 electoral manifesto the Republicans state that “the best job programmes is economic growth” and that they are committed to grant “free market policies that are the surest way to boost employment and create job growth and economic prosperity for all”, Trump stands against a flourishing economic growth with “jobs left and factories closed” and promises the creation of 25 million new jobs through investment in infrastructures. What is noteworthy in this case is the apparent distance between the current US president and what is stated in the manifesto: while Trump adopted more “employee-friendly” positions, in the Republican electoral programme the traditional conservative goals of tax cuts and low regulation are predominant.

In relation to family policies and social assistance, the 2012 manifesto stated that family formation should be encouraged because families reduce government costs. For this reason, they take the commitment to support low-income families with benefit programmes as, for instance, food stamps. The main goal of the Republicans with regard to public assistance is work promotion and poverty elimination: they complain about the fact that the current system is ineffective as the already existing 80 programmes are badly coordinated and provide bad incentives to beneficiaries. In 2016, also they complain about the inefficiencies of these programmes, which should enhance the “personal independence of (their) participants”.

As far as retirement is concerned, the Republicans argued that young Americans do not trust the Social Security system, while they should have the chance to create their own personal investment account. Accordingly, they will create a sound financial basis to ensure workers to have a return on investment. In 2016, the Republicans complain about the fact that social security has long been considered the “third rail” of American politics, while retirees and those who are close to retirement should be reassured about their benefits. Thus, they stand against

raising taxes and assert their trust in the “power of markets to create wealth and to help secure the future of (their) security system”. In this respect the Republicans have always adopted an “ambivalent” approach in the pension field: on the one hand they argued that the power of markets is the only viable solution to the social security crisis many Americans are afraid of; on the other hand, they feel they have the duty to reassure Americans on their pension entitlements. This ambivalence is still evident in the 2016 political programme: while Trump reassured voters about their entitlements and states his willingness to keep the system unvaried for pensioners and old workers, the traditional idea of market solutions is still present in the manifesto.

Soon after the paragraph dedicated to pensions, the Republicans mention the issue of migration, somehow connecting it to the need of safeguarding American citizens. They argue that legal immigrants and those who contribute to the growth of the American economy are welcome. However, differently from the previous 2012 document, in the 2016 manifesto the Republicans explicitly state that the interests of American workers should prevail over those of “foreign nationals” who seek the same jobs. In the same paragraph, they refer to the need of building a wall along the Southern border to safeguard the ports of entry and enforcing tougher immigration laws.

In conclusion, what it is interesting about the analysis of the two 2012 and 2016 GOP manifestos is that they are quite similar. The 2016 reports a lot less innovation - also in terms of welfare chauvinism and expansion - compared to what Donald Trump was saying in the same months during its political campaign - i.e. an economic plan in which is clearly traceable Keynes influence. In particular, he said he would create 25 million new jobs through investments in new infra-structures, and in particular “our bridges, our roadways, our airports”. To further support the idea of a new discourse of the party, in the electoral campaign he frequently emphasized the relevance of increasing low wages, and sometimes - even though not consistently throughout its campaign - he even supported raising the minimum wage. Relevantly, these “pro-workers” positions regarding employment and labour policy did not find place in the Republican official program, which is more oriented towards traditional conservative goals of supply side tax cuts and less regulation.

Also his position concerning unemployment social security and social assistance benefits - even though not precisely consistent over time - appears more leftist oriented compared to his predecessors Republican candidates to the Presidency. During the electoral campaign he repeatedly argued that he would “save” Social Security - even joking about the fact that he is “probably the only Republican that doesn’t want to cut Social Security”. Also in relation to health care he declared several times he would support a more universalistic approach to health care. As he declared to the Washington Post in 2015: “I am going to take care of everybody. I don’t care if it costs me votes or not. Everybody’s going to be taken

care of much better than they're taken care of now". In several occasions during the Republican party primaries he was polemic with other Republican candidates, arguing that he was the first and only potential GOP candidate to support no cuts to Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid ("we're going to have insurance for everybody... There was a philosophy in some circles that if you can't pay for it, you don't get it. That's not going to happen with us").

### ***3.3. Taking "welfare chauvinism" seriously? The case of the French National Front and the Italian (Northern) League***

Among the five parties analyzed here, the French Front National in the current decade seems to have more seriously taken a "new" radical right approach to welfare issues, and the Italian (Northern) League seems to follow close, especially when looking at the 2018 party manifesto, though with significant differences.

#### *Front National*

The National Front (FN) made its appearance in the French political arena in the 1970s. In addition to its nationalistic, and sometimes racist, policy prescription, the FN originally advocated shrinking the public sector and minimizing state intervention (Camus 1996). In the 1980s, when the population became increasingly sensitive to the issue of migration and religious pluralism, and growing dissatisfaction spread concerning the intensity and duration of the post oil-shocks economic crises (Stockemer, 2016), the party stressed its image centred on immigration and security. In the following decade, the party made an important reformulation of its economic policy, developing an argument against global turbo-capitalism and in favour of forms of "popular" capitalism that placed more emphasis on social and anti-liberal economics (Kitschelt, 1995), emphasizing more the needs of the poor (French), therefore shifting to a sort of "economic nationalism" characterized by a focus on national preference and protectionism (Davies 1999). However, it is especially under the new leadership of Marine Le Pen at the beginning of the present decade, that the FN increasingly developed a "new" radical right ideology in relation to welfare state and redistributive issues.

In the field of *labour and employment policies*, the "dignity of work" – for sure, not a traditional right-wing claim – started to have already in the 2000s an important space in the party program, which was firmly against excessive de-regulation of the labour market. Conversely, in the party platforms we find arguments against the *precarisation de l'employ* and even proposals to re-launch a regime of job-property: "*It is desirable to revive the notion of "job ownership": to put in place a set of protections aimed at guaranteeing job continuity and its evolution. This will provide economic guarantees to companies and employees, and it would represent an effective and transferable valuation of professional experience and know-how*".

At the same time, the causes of unemployment were sought in migration trends: “*the origin of unemployment are less to be sought in "economic and technological developments", "oil shocks", "France's lack of international openness", than in deliberate political decisions: (and in particular) massive and uncontrolled immigration, which confiscates more than one million permanent jobs and penalizes our economy by imposing a burden of nearly 300 billion francs*”. A good example of such framing is the famous motto: “*One million unemployed, its one million immigrants too many*” (Michel 2017). Accordingly, the main policy proposal was to give French workers the so called “national preference” – i.e. priority with regard to job vacancies. Besides, FN proposed to include a special – and more expensive - contribution and taxation regimes for non-citizen workers, thus providing fiscal incentives to hire nationals. Therefore, for what concerns labor market policy, FN proposals consist in a combination of mildly liberal measures to limit state role in the market and strong recommendations to protect the French workers, supporting an increase of the minimum wage – to be calculated taking into consideration family burden, the so called “minimum family wage” – and arguing against the flexibilization of the labor market. Furthermore, it launched the proposals to introduce a “national preference” and to increase labor market contributions for non-national workers.

As for *social assistance and family policies*, FN proposals are built around three crucial pillars: first, they must be designed and targeted to protect and favor the development of “natural communities”, i.e. the French family; second, French citizens should have priority access compared to migrants; third, the “deserving beneficiaries” should have access to generous social policy and services when in need. More precisely, the “big proposal” in Jean Marie Le Pen’s program was the launch of a *nataliste* policy – i.e. a great family plan to support fertility rates. This proposal is called “Parental Education Allowance”. Beyond this generous child allowance, in the party platform there is room for many non-contributory income support measures. The peculiarity is that in all proposals eligibility requirements exclude non-nationals. In fact, similarly to labor market policy, the “national preference” is applied to social assistance benefits, and in particular to the minimum income scheme (*Revenu Minimum d'Insertion*, RMI), particularly criticized because half of the beneficiaries are (supposedly non-deserving) migrants. Moreover, the RMI is criticized because of the limited realization of activation principles, i.e. because its reintegration dimension is virtually non-existent. Therefore, in the platform it is proposed to substitute the RMI with the so called National Solidarity Allowance a new type of personalized and family social contract, “*periodically revisable*” which should allow “*to verify reintegration into the national fabric*”, because “*the aim is not to allow our poorest compatriots to settle in the welfare state but to ensure that they can find a full social, health and economic autonomy as soon as possible*”. Similarly, great emphasis is given to strengthen national priority in housing policies.

Therefore, already in the 2000s manifestos clearly enunciated the building pillars of the FN social policy program in the field of social assistance and labor market

policy: to support French workers and their families – as well as introduce and/or strengthen social policy benefits for those excluded or at the margin of the society, provided that they are not migrants. Absolute priority is given to family policy. To “revitalize” French birth rate – considered a national priority – it is relaunched the proposal to introduce a “Parental Educational Allowance”. This consists of an allowance equal to the minimum wage for three years for the first child, renewed for other three years in case of a second child and for ten years in case of a third child. All non-contributory benefits – including the RMI - should be reserved to nationals. As for contributory unemployment benefits, legal migrant workers are not excluded, but in the FN proposal they would face a 35% increase in employee and employer contributions.

These priorities will be further confirmed in the following elections, which will always stress – with minor changes – the importance of family allowances and child benefits, and the necessity to strengthen low wages and non-contributory benefits – but only for nationals. These priorities are confirmed also in the 2017 electoral platform which, however, seems to weaken the social dimension of its proposals. In particular, the implementation of a natalist policy reserved to French families is still a relevant component of the program, but the plan is much less costly than in the past, since it is not proposed the introduction of a new child allowance but rather to maintain the indexation on the cost of living of existing family allowances. Moreover, differently from the past, social assistance benefits are not included in the FN program, and the proposal to strengthen the *minima sociaux* disappeared from the party program.

*Health care* issues were important in the 2017 presidential campaign of the National Front (FN). M. Le Pen’s approach was based on the idea to reshape the French health care system in order to foster more universal coverage for each French citizen. The FN has mixed the issue of foreigners/migrants’ vs the French population within the healthcare system. On the one hand, in 2017 FN claimed for more universal coverage (including the introduction of a fifth pillar of social security dedicated to long term care) and no privatization whatsoever, accepting higher public expenditure as well as higher taxes in order to provide more and better health care (especially in those rural areas where the challenge of supply seems more acute). On the other, migrants and foreigners were seen as a problem for the French health care system, and the reduction of expenditure for them a way to make the system better equipped to help the “real” French people. The manifesto also promised to obtain savings thanks to: cuts in health care programs supporting illegal migrants (Aide Médicale d’Etat - AME); the reduction of the gratuity of access to health care services for those legal foreigners who have not lived long enough in France (potentially 2 years); more clauses in medical schools to avoid “massive resort” to foreign doctors and to allow the replacement of ageing physicians. The FN proposal since 2012 and especially for 2017 were different when compared with the party approach until the 2000s. The party manifestos in the 2000s were much more ideological and based mostly on ethical

issues (abortion, euthanasia, etc.). The 2017 FN campaign adopted a much more pragmatic and less explicitly ideologically oriented approach to improve French health care, arguing for more universalism, more public expenditure, less role for private actors and a fight against inappropriate expenditure (from frauds to costs related to migrants' health care needs). The only line of continuity over time is represented by the “welfare chauvinist” message which has remained central: more health care for the French, less for migrants and foreigners.

*Pensions* were extremely salient in M. Le Pen's agenda in the 2012 presidential elections. Actually, the increase of pensions (and salaries) in order to support purchasing power ranked 1<sup>st</sup> among the 12 commitments which both summarized and concluded her electoral manifesto. The pension issue is then addressed in various sections of the document from different perspectives, but the main message is clear (APF): pension policy must be steered towards expansion by both valorizing benefits in payment and lowering the pensionable age at 60 years. This also allows Le Pen to promote traditional values such as family support - suggesting that mothers who have taken care of disabled children should be allowed to retire earlier – and proposing anti-immigrant measures such as the exclusion of foreigners without at least 10 years of paid contributions from social assistance pensions (*minimum veilliesse*). Interestingly, the overall expansionary agenda relies on revenue increase via new ad hoc taxes, higher taxation on capital gains and incomes, and pro-natalist policies aimed at improving demographic trends. In the 2017 presidential campaign, the expansionary approach is confirmed, also proposing two key (re-)distributive mechanisms in favor of lower French social classes: first, increasing social pension levels while excluding foreigners with less than 20 years of residency in the country; second, introducing a pension supplement for those on low pension incomes, to be financed through an increase in import-tax.

*Education* is less considered in the FN manifestos, although present, and the indications reported are limited, compared to what expressed in other social policy fields. In particular, in the 2012 Manifesto there were only very general remarks on “knowledge transmission, meritocracy and discipline”, with an emphasis on the “reestablishment of teachers' authority” in schools. The only more specific focus was on the new introduction of apprenticeship from 14 years of age and the promotion of technical and professional upper secondary courses. The 2017 manifesto maintains the same (limited) issues on education, adding more emphasis on the development of more school-to-work programs (VET, apprenticeship, etc.).

*From the Northern League to the League: a territorial party goes national adopting a “new” radical right approach*

In 1991, resentment against the central Italian government contribute to explain the growth of a new political party, the Northern League (LN) (Ruzza and Falla, 2006). It was founded as a regionalist movement advocating the transformation of the country into a federal state, in favour of fiscal federalism and greater regional

autonomy. Since its origin the NL combined its “regionalist nature” with a communitarian approach which promoted the rediscovery and defence of local traditions and a strong rhetoric of exclusion of outsiders, and often did so by presenting outsiders as carriers of a ‘foreign’ (dishonest, corrupt) way of life, to be tackled by what the LN saw as the honest, civic values of Northern Italy (cfr. Tamboni 2001). Anti-migrants – and sometimes racist – appeals were part of the propaganda of the party since its origin and a strategic resource to mobilize political support (*Ibidem*). Finally, LN was also labelled also as a protest movement, since the attack on the nature of the Italian state and the way in which it drained the resources of the North was articulated through an innovative radical anti-establishment discourse (Segatti, 1992, Diamanti, 2003). After a series of scandals, the party went through a deep crisis in the 2013 national election, when votes for the LN halved -from 8% in 2008 to 4% in 2013. The traditional leadership of the party was replaced by a new one, which decided to shift its main ideological focus from right wing regionalism/federalism to nationalist radical right. The only line of continuity is the importance of the anti-immigration issue, matched by an even stronger refusal compared to the past of the EU. As expressed by its new leaders, the Northern League, which has become the League in 2018 (in order to gain more votes also in Southern Italy) looks at the French National Front as an ideological reference for its policy choices and priorities.

The 2018 party manifesto represents a turning point for the party in relation to social policy issues, revealing the intention (at least on paper) to shift from a mix of regionalism and “old” radical right ideology to a “new” radical right one. At the same time, compared to FN, the change has been so recent that only future elections and these years of national government will allow to say whether the change has been structural or it was more a camouflage – such as for the GOP in the US (so far). The fact that a crucial proposition in the 2018 League programme was to reduce drastically taxation with a system that resembles the one recently adopted by GOP in the US, which is quite distant from any redistributive goal, casts serious doubts on how much of the generous social policy programme of the party could be implemented in such conditions.

LN first electoral programs in the 1990s were soaked with an anti-state rhetoric, not hesitating to use neoliberal arguments. This is particularly evident looking at their *labour market policy proposals*, where LN demands to block assumptions in the public sector, the introduction of evaluation tools and the possibility to execute disciplinary measures including, in the most serious cases, dismissal. Furthermore, it advocated a strong decentralization of the national collective bargaining system, beyond a significant tax reduction for autonomous workers. The 2018 manifesto marks a partial departure from this approach, although less marked than in other social policy fields. It is a mix between the old neo-liberal approach and a more employee-friendly one. On the one hand, the manifesto calls for a minimum wage, ‘free of work’ Sundays (unless the worker prefers differently) and some form of ALMP (with the diffusion and funding of professional “tutors”, who are supposed



to help unemployed to find a new job). On the other, it insists on decentralization of collective bargaining, support to new start-ups, tax cuts to enterprises and reduction of labor costs as the main tools to foster employment and competition.

Originally, social assistance policies – and in particular disability benefits - were strongly criticized as the clearest example of the particularistic and clientelistic practices that end up wasting resources collected from the Northern tax burden to Southern regions. Both kept on not being discussed in the 2018 manifesto (since the League has not changed its position toward this issue). Conversely, family policies, health care and pensions are policy fields where a policy change is clearly visible. *Family policies* play a central role in the recent manifesto, compared to an almost absence of interest in the past. Similarly to the French FN proposal, this increasing relevance of family policies as two goals: first, to reaffirm that the family is central in everyday life and “the family” is only the one made up by heterosexual couples; second, to fight against the Italian low fertility rate. The “structural plan to support families and boost fertility” is quite detailed and ambitious: from fiscal incentives in favor of households with children (including the elimination of VAT for all early childhood products – e.g. milk, etc.), to cash transfers for new-born children (around 5000 euros per year for each new child), care services (for the elderly and especially free-of-charge early childcare for all children under 3 years of age, as long as both parents work), and more support for parental leave. The idea is to triple the level of public investment in this policy area. At the same time restrictions on the access to these benefits are proposed for foreigners: 20 years of residence for the access to the 5000 euros benefit for each new born and 5 years of residence for the access to free early childcare.

Also in *health care*, the party’s position in the 1990s was totally in favour of the NHS privatization, whereas in the last decade, and until 2013, it developed a position advocating for a federal public (and private contracted-out) health care system. There was practically no specific statement in 2013 concerning this field of policy, while the 2018 electoral manifesto represents an important turning point. A very detailed proposal is included in the document advocating for: a public NHS, universalistic and mostly tax-funded, in order to avoid its (hidden) privatization; the strengthening of home care and residential care in order to face the increasing burden for households coming from the spread of chronic diseases; the transformation of the health care system, making it less hospital-centered and more territorial-oriented; more investment on primary and secondary prevention; investments to limit waiting times and improve oncological care.

At its appearance on the national political stage in 1990, the 1991 NL electoral program in the field of *pensions* was rather neoliberal. It proposed the calculation of pensions based on contributions actually paid, with only a minimum flat rate compulsory contribution to the public system, and free choice between public and (then still non-existent in Italy) private pensions for additional retirement benefit provision. A similar approach was followed in the campaign for the 1996 general

elections: the main points were the introduction of fully funded individual accounts and the development of supplementary pillars. These combined with more traditional stances in favor of women that exit labor market in order to take care of family members, and an attack against the clientelistic usage of pensions (which was particularly widespread in the Southern part of the country).

Since the 2001 general elections, however, NL has always campaigned united with the other main center-right parties – Silvio Berlusconi’s party *Forza Italia* (then PDL, *Popolo della Libertà*) and *Alleanza Nazionale* led by the former post-fascist leader Gianfranco Fini). The 2006 elections came after a long phase of center-right government (2001-2006) which had substantially reformed the pension system. Therefore, the 2006-2008 electoral manifestos of the center-right coalition were drafted in order to capitalize on reforms adopted under the lead of the NL Ministry of Welfare in 2004-5 – thus it included references to adopted reforms rather than reforms proposals. However, the coalition also proposed the increase of minimum pension levels, the maintenance of pension purchasing power and further expansion of the (still underdeveloped) supplementary funded pillars.

Again, in the 2013 general elections, NL’s electoral program is rather laconic with respect to pensions, simply proposing to i) introduce a cap on so-called “golden pensions” (i.e. extremely high pension benefits paid by the public system) and ii) favor the expansion of supplementary funded pillars. The approach changes in 2018. What the GOP argued in 2012 and 2016 in relation to “Obamacare” is similar to what the League argues against the 2011 Pension reform. Substantially the idea is to repeal one of the most incisive pension reforms in the last three decades – the 2011 so-called Fornero-Monti reform, that drastically tightened eligibility conditions for retirement in the very short run (cf. Jessoula and Pavolini 2012; Jessoula and Raitano 2017). The manifesto thus calls for an expansionary intervention, which would favor a key constituency of the League: employees and blue-collar workers in the Northern part of the country. In particular, the manifesto proposes to reintroduce early retirement pensions after 40 years of contributions (independent from the worker’s age), old-age pensions with more favorable conditions for the workers. Some very general suggestions (from a simplification of the whole social security bureaucracy to cuts to several pension tax incentives) are provided in order to fund the extra-costs these changes would bring, but they do not seem able to cover the extra-costs

*Education* was not a salient policy for a long time in the LN manifestos. In the 1990s it was mainly used as a rhetorical tool to attack from a regionalist point of view those facets of the Italian education system that “threatened” Northern Italian students’ identity. Therefore, the main proposals concerned, on the one hand, to limit the presence of Southern Italian teachers in Northern Italian schools; on the other, to offer more space to lessons on regional and local culture (history, etc.). In the 2000s, as for other social policies, LN adopted a similar line as the rest of its center-right coalition, mainly focused in the strengthening of the

technical and educational courses in upper secondary education, as well as VET and school-to-work programs. Even in the 2013 elections limited attention was given to education issues, stressing: the need of increasing scholarships for students, to strengthen VET and school-to-work programs, more English courses in education, and more schools' autonomy and evaluation of students' performances. However, all these proposals were scarcely explained and developed. Education even received less attention in the 2018 manifesto, which means that many previous proposals were more detailed. What it is worthy to notice also in this case is that the most innovative part of the program is to repeal one the previous government reform: the so-called "Good School" Reform. In doing so, the 2018 manifesto goes against some of its main goals expressed in previous manifestos: more school autonomy and teachers' evaluation (two cornerstones of the 2014 reform).

#### **4. LOOKING FOR INTERNAL COHERENCE IN THE MANIFESTOS: POPULIST RIGHT WING PARTIES AND THE WELFARE STATE.**

The previous section has shown the existence of at least three different profiles of populist right wing parties. Indeed, the systematic comparison of the policy preferences of the 'populist' right parties here analysed allows to provide further information regarding their ideological profile and the influence of the 'new' right populist ideology in their electoral social policy offer. In terms of their preferences regarding the welfare state, both AFD and UKIP have maintained a profile very close to neo-liberalism, assigning very low relevance to the welfare state and to social policy proposals, which are mainly instrumental to denounce 'outsiders' (EU and migrants) or to propose neo-liberal receipts. The Republicans have maintained in the electoral programs their traditional approach, a mix between traditional conservatism and neo-liberal ideology, aimed at denouncing the bad incentives created by a comprehensive welfare state. The situation is quite different for both the Front National and The League, which have consistently adopted a pro-welfare state approach, yet declined in a 'welfare chauvinist' form.

Additional considerations regarding the internal congruence of populist right parties emerge when looking at the policy proposals in different social policy fields. Once again, heterogeneity seems to prevail, with one possible regularity: social assistance pro-poor programs, when they are not strongly criticized, tend to have very low relevance, with the partial exception of the Front National that supports a minimum income scheme if directed exclusively to the poor nationals. Similarly, in labour market policies populist right parties tend to maintain a 'neo-liberal' profile, with the exception of FN.

These results are consistent with the analysis developed by Jensen (2014) on the right and the welfare state, which emphasizes that right parties have different incentives to support social policy expansion in different social policy areas, since

right-wing voters are more exposed to life-course risks – e.g. old-age and health related risks - than to labour market risks.

Overall, this distinction between life-course and employment-related risks holds for populist right wing parties – with the above mentioned exception of the French Front National. Indeed, all the other four parties tend to address more carefully issues related to life-course risks, and they are even willing to support the maintenance if not the expansion of the public health care and/or old age systems. Regarding employment related risk, the neo-liberal heritage is apparent, as almost all of them frame labour market policies as measures where it is important to sustain the “demand-side” (employers), making it easier for them to hire workers and to innovate, also through tax incentives and cuts. Nevertheless, labour market deregulation has progressively disappeared in their party manifesto, while some of them advocate more labour market protection for the ‘insider’.

The picture becomes, however, more complex if we include policy fields not considered in Jensen’s analysis: family and education policies. The former seems to be supported by all new populist right parties – in particular FN and the LN - which, in order to sustain fertility, include in their programs both family allowances and reconciliation policies (e.g. through the expansion of early child care services), which, to a certain extent, are employment-related policies. As to education policies, they seem to attract populist right wing parties, even radical right ones, for several reasons. The first one was indicated above: it is considered as a tool to foster a better transition to the labour market and, if seen with the eyes of employers (a typical important constituency of right wing parties), as a way to produce needed skilled workers. It can be added that in education most of these parties support systems that stratify students either through a differentiated public education system (professional schools, technical ones and lycées) or through the choice to opt for market solutions (private schools vs public ones). Therefore, these parties are developing more nuanced approaches in relation to labour market issues (through family policies sustaining reconciliation and also vocational training and school-to-work transition), even if in general, they do not directly stress the importance of labour market policies (e.g. unemployment benefits, labour market regulation, etc.) – again, with the exception of the FN.

Jensen also underlines that traditional right parties’ solutions to welfare expansion are maintaining a large public sector in the area of ‘life-related’ risks, supplementing it with subsidized private options like private health insurances and pension savings accounts, since private options are generally of much greater value to voters of the Right (typically middle-to-high-income individuals) and constitute a way to contain redistribution from rich to poor, while maintaining a high level of life-course risk protection. This is the strategy of “marketization via layering”. Moreover, these parties try to limit the role of trade unions in welfare program management: “the primary target (of the Right) is not the social programs as such, but rather the institutional power base of the unions. Only after union power has

been weakened will social rights be curtailed. This is the strategy of erode and attack” (Jensen 2014, 7).

Based on the analysis above, our study finds less support to these strategies among populist parties. Indeed, they seem to be part of the strategy only of the two parties with a stronger neo-liberal tradition among the five parties under examination (UKIP and GOP), but not in the other three cases, especially in their most recent manifestos. On the contrary, AFD and especially FN and the LN recently claimed explicitly for increasing public intervention, going well beyond a simple welfare mix. As to their relation with the trade unions, in the recent party manifestos, no attack against the trade unions was detected- though neither a particular role in the social-policy making is envisaged. Further research, specifically devoted to this topic is needed, looking in particular at what these parties do once in government.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The article has emphasized that under the common label of ‘right-wing populism’ we may find political parties with substantially different social policy preferences and attitudes towards redistribution and the welfare state. Among the parties analysed here, the AFD in Germany and UKIP in United Kingdom assign very low relevance to the welfare state and social policy proposals, which are mainly instrumental to denounce ‘outsiders’ (EU and migrants), whereas the US Republicans maintained a traditional conservative approach, denouncing the bad incentives created by a large welfare state.

The findings were however quite different for both the Front National in France and The League in Italy, which have consistently adopted a pro-welfare approach, yet declined in a ‘welfare chauvinist’ form. Also, this contribution has shown that these parties have something in common with traditional right parties since they tend to support more protection against life-related risk – i.e. old age and health – than of labour-market risks.

Against such background, several questions remained unanswered. What drives radical right parties’ decisions to move towards a specific social policy agenda? Does this have an effect on ‘traditional’ right parties’ preferences? Finally, what do populist right wing parties do once in government?

Our study has the limitation of having mostly focused on party manifestos, which offer only a partial view about parties’ “real” priorities and actions once in government. Future research will have, on the one hand, to add new countries in the party manifesto analysis; on the other, to consider closely other sources of information on these parties’ positions on welfare issues, including in particular interviews with key informants, systematic analysis of relevant legislation,

parliamentary minutes, official government documents and political actors' publications.

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