"*L'apocalisse della democrazia Italiana. All'origine di due terremoti elettorali* Hans Schadee, Paolo Segatti and Cristiano Vezzoni. Bologna: il Mulino, 2019. 170p. €16,00 (hardcover)"

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Abstract:	*L'apocalisse della democrazia italiana* by Hans Schadee, Paolo Segatti and Cristiano Vezzoni aims to provide a wide range of potential beneficiaries – students, journalists, and, of course, academics – with a deep analysis of the reasons behind the two electoral "earthquakes" that occurred in the last two Italian general elections (in 2013 and 2018).

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L'apocalisse della democrazia italiana by Hans Schadee, Paolo Segatti and Cristiano Vezzoni aims to provide a wide range of potential beneficiaries – students, journalists, and, of course, academics – with a deep analysis of the reasons behind the two electoral "earthquakes" that occurred in the last two Italian general elections (in 2013 and 2018). The authors – leading experts in electoral behaviour – consider the electoral turmoil that occurred in Italy between 2013 and 2018 not as a "normal" electoral change, but as a deep systemic crisis, which occurred in two steps during the 2013-2018 electoral cycle. In this regard, most studies have addressed two issues separately: the collapse of both pivotal mainstream parties of the political system of the so-called Second Republic – Democratic Party (Pd) and People of Freedom/Go Italy (Pdl/Forza Italia) – and the success of challenger parties such as the Five Star Movement (M5s) and the new League (Lega) of Matteo Salvini. This book, conversely, aims to jointly analyse the two issues, trying to understand how the electoral collapse of Pd and Pdl/Forza Italia translated into consensus for M5s and Lega. To explain the uncommon nature of the 2013 and 2018 elections, several possible explanations have been proposed in the literature. On the one hand, the reaction of voters to the epochal transformations of our times was invoked: first, the effects of the Great Recession, globalization or the migration crisis would have changed voters' positions on specific issues related to these socio-structural transformations; then, this attitudinal change would have changed their habitual voting choices. This perspective, widely shared in the Italian public debate, focuses on the reasons for the success of M5s and Lega, that is, on the "factors of attraction", to use the words of Schadee, Segatti and Vezzoni.

On the other hand, some accurate studies focused on very specific (albeit quite idiosyncratic) factors to explain the electoral collapse of both mainstream parties (Pd and Forza Italia) in the 2018 general election. In the case of Pd, for example, attention has been paid to the policies implemented by the government led by Matteo Renzi. In the case of Forza Italia, the collapse is attributed to senescence and the lack of replacement of Silvio Berlusconi's leadership in the centre-right camp.

Although recognizing the importance of both types of explanations, the authors show a feeling of dissatisfaction with them: indeed, the "global" perspective does not fully explain the specificity of the Italian political crisis and does not consider the role of those who exercise political authority, while "local" interpretations are generic in identifying what the authors call the "repulsive factors" that have led millions of voters to sanction both pivotal parties of the Second Republic. This book tries to overcome the limits of these perspectives by proposing an appealing framework based on longitudinal micro-level analyses to properly study the individual voting shifts and the reasons behind this electoral change, focusing on the contribution of both "attraction" and "repulsion" factors.

The thesis put forward in the book is that the decisive motivation for the choice of many Italians to change their vote is to be found in the sharp decline in the reputation of the entire traditional political class. Indeed, the book can be summarized in one sentence: "Italians have changed their vote because they have lost confidence in the ability of the entire traditional political class to solve problems, not because they have changed their orientations on various themes and issues" (pp. 14-15). A crisis of authority, therefore, which was in the making before the Great Recession and fuelled by the widespread belief that both pivotal mainstream parties of the Second Republic were incapable of equipping the country for the epochal challenges to be faced. Political actors such as M5s and Lega then allowed these resentments to express themselves in electoral terms. Unveiling this negative judgment towards the traditional political class, and understanding its repercussions on Italian democracy, is the ultimate goal of this work. This is indeed the true meaning of the title of the book "The apocalypse of Italian democracy": apocalypse not in the sense of catastrophe, but its original etymological sense of "revelation".

This broad goal is systematically pursued across 8 chapters, that give this book unique breadth and reveal its importance for our understanding of contemporary electoral developments in Italian politics.

This is an important book for various reasons, at least three. The first reason is that it adopts a broad temporal perspective, which enables the reader to identify the long-term political drivers of the 2013-2018 electoral turmoil. In this regard, the authors mentioned the extraordinary experience

1

of the entirely technocratic government led by Mario Monti between 2011 and 2013 when mainstream parties fled from their responsibilities rejecting either direct participation in the government or a popular legitimation stemming from early elections. This sort of surrender of politics in the aftermath of the Great Recession occurred in a context where anti-party sentiments were already widespread, thus triggering the reputation crisis of mainstream parties. Incidentally, chapter 7 shows that the demand for direct democracy (in particular from the M5s voters) did not entail a request of direct involvement in politics; rather, it concealed a rejection of representative democracy, a radical dissatisfaction with politics and a negative view of the political conflict (i.e. a non-pluralist vision of politics). Using the words of Hibbing and Theiss-Morse [Stealth democracy, 2002], the authors have called this conception of politics "stealth democracy", that is, a democracy that does not need electoral competition between parties or the compromises that follow it to arrive at decisions that would be uncontroversial if ordinary people, instead of politicians, could decide.

The electoral earthquake itself was then made possible by the appearance of a radically new, non-ideological political offer having the credibility to attract voters that were not able to pass the "wall" that continued to divide left and right. In this regard, chapter 3 reconstructs the representation of the political space by analysing the availability of electors to vote for one or more of the four main Italian parties (M5s, Pd, Lega and FI). Results show that voters took into account the signals received from these parties about their positioning in the political space. Indeed, despite the tripolar format of the political system, in the 2013-2018 electoral cycle there was still an underlying bipolar competitive dynamic based on the left-right dimension (in its symbolic or operational meaning), shown by the absence of significant voting shifts between centre-left and centre-right coalitions, which facilitated the success of M5s, a party credibly neither right nor left and therefore able to attract voters from both sides. Indeed, results from a correspondence analysis technique based on propensities to vote for one or more parties (measuring incompatibilities and overlaps between parties/electorates) show that the M5s was located in an intermediate position on the first dimension of competition (the left-right one), opening a second dimension – interpreted by the authors as an anti-political dimension – on which the M5s was distant from all the other parties.

This interpretation of the electoral change as mainly driven by political factors is convincing because it leverages a rigorous and innovative methodological choice based on individual longitudinal data from the ITANES-University of Milan online panel that covered the entire 2013-2018 electoral cycle. The first wave of the panel took place before the 2013 elections, with a Rolling Cross Session design, which allowed to carry out about 200 daily interviews throughout the electoral campaign. This sound research design is the second noteworthy merit of this book. Indeed, the employment of panel data is rare in the analysis of electoral behaviour in the Italian context. Nonetheless, only individual longitudinal data permit to both monitor the (eventual) change in voters' opinions on relevant issues and study why voters shift from one party to another over time. The finding that emerges from this innovative longitudinal analysis is very interesting, somehow sophisticated to grasp, but in reality extremely clear: the voting choices have radically changed, but the opinions of Italians about the European Union (as shown by chapter 4) and immigration (as shown by chapter 5) have not changed equally. Immigration has become, especially after 2015, for many Italians a highly salient issue. But the opinions of those who changed their vote, going from the Pd to the M5s or from the Pdl to the Lega, remained the same: they were already opposed to immigration when they voted for Pd and Pdl in 2013, albeit to a different extent in the two groups. Similar patterns can be observed as for the EU issue, although the latter was less salient compared to immigration: those who moved from the Pd to the M5s or from the Pdl to the Lega were already more suspicious towards the EU before 2018 than those who remained loyal to the Pd or the Pdl.

The mechanism that explains the changes in voting choices is instead what the authors call "sorting"– i.e. reallocation of voters. When some issues are not salient, many voters continue to vote for a given party even if they have opinions that are not congruent with the party's positions on those issues. However, when a priming effect occurs – i.e. these issues become salient – voters with opinions in disagreement with the voted party move towards other parties having positions more in

line with their preferences. This result is fascinating because it is the demand side of other approaches focused on the strategic behaviour of parties that usually emphasize the issues most favourable to them during the electoral campaigns [i.e. see the article by Lorenzo De Sio and Till Weber in West European Politics, 43(3), 2020].

Furthermore, the finding that voting changes are not due to anthropological or value-based transformations can talk with the literature on valence politics [see the classic work by Donald Stokes in American Political Science Review, 57(2), 1963]. According to the latter, political competition is not based only on positional issues– i.e. policies, but also on non-controversial, valence issues, appreciated regardless of the ideological positions of individuals. In this regard, the collapse of the reputation of mainstream parties and the emergence of the second dimension of party competition enabling the electoral credibility of the M5s can be interpreted in valence terms, in my view.

These results lead us to the third merit of this research: analyses based on longitudinal data permit to dispel common myths about public opinion, often widely disseminated in the media and sometimes also in the academic debate, such as: "the left-right dimension is dead", "Italians massively voted for M5s and Lega because they have become more hostile towards immigration and the EU". Similarly, empirical analyses (chapter 6) confuted widespread interpretations based on economic voting, according to which voters punished centre-left governments because they perceived a worsening of the economy close to the elections. This was not the case: in 2015-16 the economy was slightly improving and the view that the economy was continuously deteriorating had steadily declined since 2013, while most people believed that the state of the economy remained essentially the same. Thus, the thesis of the authors is that many voters abandoned the Pd for the M5s because throughout the electoral cycle they continued to think that nothing was changing and that all parties were equally responsible for the 2012 crisis. This long-term judgement also negatively affected the Pdl/FI, despite not being in government in 2018.

To conclude, this book is a unique contribution in the field of electoral studies in Italy, with an impressive wealth of data. What is lacking? Something that could have not been addressed because it is inevitably absent from a research perspective like this: the strategic role of political actors during the electoral campaigns and the effects of the media. The analysis of the interplay between the supply side and the demand side of politics in a highly mediatized electoral context could be a further fruitful line of research, once the data required for such an analysis are available. Furthermore, although the interpretation about the role played by the evaluations of the economy is quite convincing, it would be interesting to analyse also voters' preferences about economic positional issues linked to the traditional left-right dimension. This could help to understand whether individual changes in voting choices have been favoured by changes in opinions on divisive economic policy goals.

Apart from these aspects, which could be properly investigated in future researches, the book is highly recommended to all those who have an interest in Italian politics and electoral behaviour more broadly. Indeed, the originality, breadth and nuance of the findings in this book can stir many other enquiries about the evolution of voting patterns in Italy, and beyond Italy; and this, in an age characterized by radical electoral change, attests – even in a comparative perspective – the important value of *L'apocalisse della democrazia italiana*. Finally, I wish to add – and the reader will forgive me for this personal consideration – that it has been an honour for me to review this book because it represents the last great intellectual contribution of one of the authors, before his passing: Hans Schadee. In his memory.