

# 6. The 2018 Italian Generale Elections: Focus on Immigration

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## 1. Introduction

The previous report (ISMU Foundation, 2018) analysed the relationship between immigration and politics in light of the results of the political elections that took place in 2017 in a number of European states (France, Germany, Holland and the United Kingdom). Similarly, this chapter will present some results from the analysis of the electoral programmes of the main competing parties in the Italian elections of 4 March 2018. We will focus particularly on two issues: attitudes towards migration and the European Union. After presenting the electoral results, we shall analyse the same issues within the so-called “government contract” drafted and signed by the two political forces, the *MS5* (the Five Star Movement) and the *Lega* (the League) that, at the beginning of the legislature, formed a new and unprecedented majority.

## 2. Immigration in the electoral programmes of the parties and coalitions: where and how much?

What are the main political proposals on immigration and the European Union? We shall analyse the programmes of the main parties: *Partito Democratico*/the Democratic Party (*PD*), *+Europa*/More Europe, *Liberi e Uguali*/Free and Equal (*LeU*), the centre-right coalition (*Forza Italia*/Forward Italy, *Lega*/the League, *Fratelli d'Italia*/Brothers of Italy and *Noi con l'Italia*/Us with Italy) and the *Movimento 5 Stelle*/the Five Star Movement (*M5S*).

In its own electoral programme submitted to the Ministry of the Interior, the *PD* makes no mention of immigration except for a reference to “*ius culturae*” (p. 8), a call for Europe to “take responsibility of the issue of migration” and the warning that “without solidarity in how it manages migration, there can be no solidarity in the next European budget” (p. 9). It does, however, dedicate ample space to the European Union, recommending a development model leading to the establishment of a “United States of Europe”.

*+Europa* is the only party to have dedicated an entire paragraph to immigration. The party intends to radically alter the current Italian legislation on immigration (the “Bossi-Fini” law): “We must introduce various immigration-for-work mechanisms, starting with a temporary residence permit for the purpose of seeking employment” (p. 22). An improvement of the reception system is also proposed, with the exclusive adoption of the SPRAR (Protection System for Asylum and Refugee Seekers) model. At the European level, it recommends changing the Dublin Regulation to “introduce legal and secure channels of

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immigration for work purposes, including non-qualified labour.” (p. 22). The position of Emma Bonino’s party on European matters may be taken as given. Indeed, the electoral programme opens with the following statement: “Now is the time to say that in looking ahead to Italy’s future, we do not need less Europe. On the contrary. In order to see – including in Italy – more growth, more rights, more democracy, more freedom, more opportunities, more security, more respect for the environment, we need More Europe” (p. 2). The model of Europe is not, however, that of a “European super state”, but a light-weight federation.

*Liberi e Uguali* recommends the “rational management of migration, abolishing the “Bossi-Fini” law and introducing a jobseekers’ permit and mechanisms for legal immigration, promoting the creation of a single European system for seeking asylum that transcends the criteria of the country of initial arrival and includes humanitarian channels and rescue missions” (p. 12). The party also favours a model of widespread reception in the style of the SPRAR and *jus soli*. On the European Union, *Liberi e Uguali* takes a decidedly Europeanist standpoint, proposing to “fight the technocratic shift that has taken hold in Europe, restoring life to the vision of a single European people. (...) We must overcome the intergovernmental dimension that dictates duties and fails to guarantee rights in imposing policies of severe austerity. We want to give a greater role to the European Parliament, which elects a true government of the citizens of Europe, so that they can once again inhabit their home” (p. 2).

The parties of the centre-right coalition (*Forza Italia*, *Lega*, *Fratelli d’Italia* and *Noi con l’Italia*) submitted a common programme that recommends, with regard to immigration: “taking back control of our borders, intercepting disembarkations by facilitating returns, stipulating treaties and agreements with economic migrants’ countries of origin, (...) repatriating all illegal immigrants” (p. 6). On the European Union, they promised “fewer constraints from Europe, no to policies of austerity, no to excessive regulations that stand in the way of development, revision of the European treaties” (p. 4).

The *Movimento 5 Stelle* dedicates no.8 of its 20 points to “Stopping the business of immigration”, proposing the “immediate repatriation of illegal immigrants” and “10,000 new appointments in the territorial commissions so that, like other European countries, Italy can assess a migrant’s right or not to stay in Italy within one month” (p. 1). No stand is taken on the European Union.

When comparing the space each party dedicates to immigration and the European Union in their own political programmes, it is clear that these issues have different levels of importance for different parties. On this matter, the *Cattaneo Institute* has conducted a content analysis of the electoral programmes of the main political parties, adopting the guidelines of an international research programme, the Comparative Manifesto Project<sup>1</sup>. The Institute analysed and codified all the quasi-sentences (lexical units that express a single political concept) contained in the texts of the parties’ programmes, in order to survey the importance each party assigns to the various policy sectors. In general, the Cattaneo Institute analysis (Istituto Cattaneo, 2018a) found that 24.8% of all quasi-sentences refer to welfare and education, and 17.2% to the economy and taxation, whilst “in third place in terms of the importance of the various policy sectors, we find security and legality

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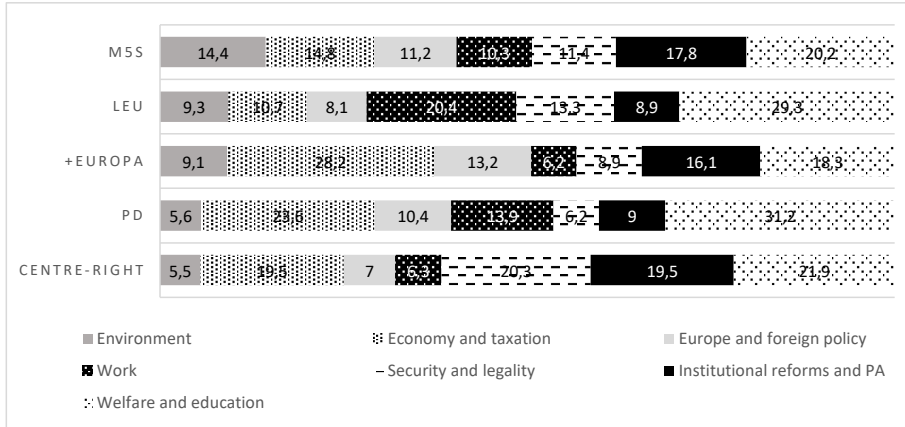
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<sup>1</sup> <https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu/>.

(13.7%), which also partly reflects the degree to which public opinion is focused on immigration and the migrant crisis of recent years” (p. 4). The European Union occupies the last place (10.4%), after institutional reform (11.9%), work (11.3%) and the environment (10.6%). This overlooking of the European Union could derive from the parties’ lack of interest in European matters, or reflect the weak cohesion of the pre-electoral alliances – especially the centre-right – which failed to find a common platform with regard to the EU. However, the Cattaneo Institute data (Graph 1) reveal significant differences with regard to the importance assigned to each policy sector by the programmes of the parties considered in the study. Whilst, on average, 13.7% of the quasi-sentences concern security and legality, this issue is allotted the most space by the centre-right coalition (20.3%). A different analysis by Cavallaro, Salza and Zanetti (2018) demonstrates that “of all the typical terms [in the *M5S* programme], the most frequent (11 occurrences) is immigration” (p. 74). The programmes also vary in their emphasis of European matters: at one extreme, the centre-right devotes no more than 7% of its quasi-sentences to the issue; at the other, the equivalent figure for *+Europa* is 13.2%. *M5S* came out in the middle with 11.2%, and 10.4% and 8.1% for *PD* and *LeU* respectively. However, according to the Cavallaro, Salza, Zanetti data (2018) the party giving the least weight to the European Union was *M5S* (the term “Europe” appears only six times).

Graph 1. Composition of the electoral programmes based on seven distinct policy sectors (percentage values)



Source: Cattaneo Institute data processed by the authors

### 3. The results of the vote on 4 March 2018: which proposals proved a success with voters?

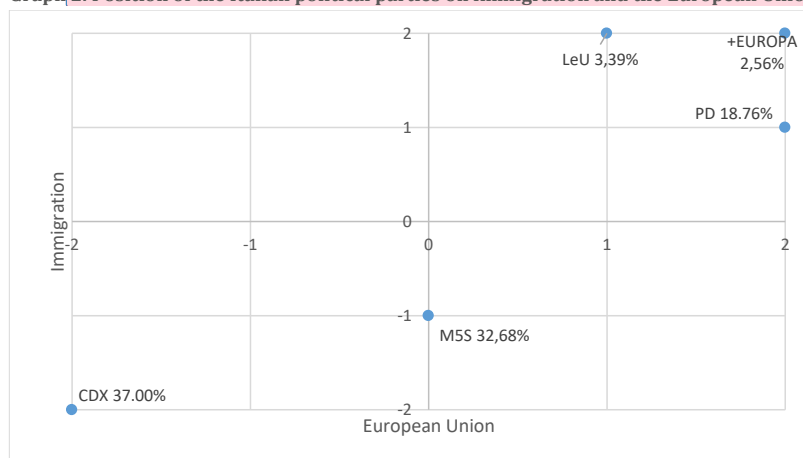
If we interpret the results in terms of attitudes to immigration and the European Union (Graph 2), we can see that only 24.7% of the votes were won by parties in favour of the European Union (*PD*, *+Europa* and *LeU*), with Eurosceptic parties winning a good 37% of

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the vote (the centre-right coalition). Finally, *M5S*, with its ambiguous position, won around one third of the votes. The situation is even more unbalanced in terms of immigration. 37% of the electorate voted for the strongly anti-immigration centre-right coalition and a further 32.7% for the moderately anti-immigration *M5S*, amounting to a total of almost 7/10 voters. Only 24.7%, represented by the pro-Europe parties, voted for parties with favourable positions towards immigration (*LeU*, *+Europa* and *PD*). So it seems that the winds blowing against immigration blew even more forcefully than those against the European Union.

Graph 2. Position of the Italian political parties on immigration and the European Union



Source: figures created by the authors based on the political manifestos of the respective parties

#### 4. The government contract between *Legha* and *Movimento 5 Stelle*: the migration issue

After almost three months of unsuccessful negotiation and failed attempts, an executive led by Giuseppe Conte and supported by *M5S* and *Legha* was installed on 1 June 2018. The agreement between the two parties became a “Contract for governing change” stipulated by the leaders of the two parties, Di Maio and Salvini. What does the agreement say on the topic of immigration? The contract addresses immigration in point 13 of 30, entitled “Immigration: repatriations and stopping the business”. As the title indicates, therefore, on the topic of immigration at least, the contract is more aligned to the *Legha*’s position than that of *M5S*. The introduction is unequivocal: “The current migration issue is unsustainable for Italy, given the costs and the associated business, fed by national public funds, often managed with little transparency and susceptible to infiltration by organised crime” (p. 26). To resolve the issue, “which goes as far as to put the Schengen system at risk” (p. 26), Italy must play a leading role in European negotiations on asylum and immigration policies to reduce migrant flows and revise the Dublin Regulations. The ultimate goal is for the objective of equal responsibility to be endorsed by the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU

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“with the mandatory dispersal of asylum seekers throughout the EU Member States” (p. 26). Like other European governments, the so-called “yellow-green” government intends to tighten up and expedite procedures for verifying or revoking asylum seeker status. In this regard, it states that “the assessment of admissibility of requests for international protection must take place in the countries of origin or transit, with the support of European agencies, in structures that guarantee full protection of human rights.” (p. 27). Finally, it calls for what it deems the necessary implementation “of bilateral agreements between Italy and the European Union with third countries, to clarify and expedite repatriation procedures” (p. 27), deemed non-deferrable and urgent. To this end, it recommends identifying temporary custody and repatriation centres (at least one per region) where illegal immigrants may be detained for a maximum of 18 months while procedures for their effective repatriation are completed. These initiatives must be funded using a portion of the resources allocated to receiving migrants. Proposals are made concerning security and public order, such as “defining specific crimes that, when committed by asylum seekers, result in immediate removal from national territory” (p. 27) or the necessity to “demolish the smuggling business and (...) dismantle international criminal organisations engaged in human trafficking” (p. 27), or, to “make it possible to investigate and immediately close all radical Islamic associations, including mosques and places of worship of any denomination found to be illegal” (p. 28). Several references are made to the current system for managing migrants, which is deemed non-transparent. The proposal is made to replace the current system run by private companies, and involve public institutions to a greater degree by entrusting the running of the centres to the Regions. [One An analysis by the Cattaneo Institute analysis](#) (Istituto Cattaneo, 2018b) found that “the most concrete political proposals in the “contract” between *M5S* and *Lega* relate to the sector defined as “law and order”, i.e. issues of security, immigration control and increasing the penalties for certain crimes. (...) The political contribution of the *Lega*’s positions on “security” is particularly evident here, the latter being transposed directly into the government contract, making it easier for voters to judge the degree to which promises are actually kept” (p. 2).

### 5. The immigration and security decree and the recommendations of the President of the Republic

On 24 September 2018, the Council of Ministers unanimously approved the so-called “Salvini Decree” on immigration and security. Under three headings, the decree addresses three issues: reforming the right to asylum and citizenship; public safety, and preventing and countering organised crime; administration and management of goods sequestered and confiscated from mafia organisations. President of the Republic Sergio Mattarella signed the decree on 4 October, whilst simultaneously sending a letter to the President of the Council, Giuseppe Conte, in which he advocated adhering to the Constitution on the rights of foreign nationals. Here is a summary of the provisions made on immigration. The first article of the decree contains new measures on political asylum and, in fact, revokes the provision of protection for humanitarian reasons introduced in Italy in 1998 under the *Testo Unico* (Consolidated Law) on immigration. The Salvini Decree doubles (from 90

to 180 days) the maximum term for which foreign nationals may be held in *centri di permanenza per il rimpatrio* (custody and repatriation centres) or *CPRs*, formerly known as *CIEs*. The decree also stipulates that asylum seekers may be detained for a maximum of 30 days in so-called “hotspots” for the purpose of ascertaining their identity and citizenship. The current standard reception managed by Italian municipalities – the system for receiving asylum seekers and refugees (*SPRAR*) – is limited to cases in which individuals are already beneficiaries of international protection or to unaccompanied foreign minors.

More funds are also being allocated to repatriation: 500,000 euros in 2018, 1.5 million euros in 2019 and a further 1.5 million in 2020. The decree also extends the list of crimes that result in the revocation of refugee status and subsidiary protection, to include, among others, production, possession and trafficking of drugs, theft, domestic burglary, armed robbery and extortion, threatening or assaulting a public official and sexual violence.

## 6. Conclusions. The development of the Italian party system: immigration and Europe, two connected issues

As the various analyses and interpretations of our Foundation in its studies on the relationship between immigration and politics have shown, we can, once again – in relation to the elections in Italy – reaffirm that the interwoven issues of Europe and immigration are strongly divisive, both in terms of electoral campaigns and governmental decisions. In relation to immigration and, consequently, the identity of the European Union as well, the challenge arises of sharing a common cultural horizon. As with the 2017 elections in many European countries, the outcome of Italy’s political elections on 4 March 2018 points to the strengthening of widespread opposition to immigration feeling, and a highly sceptical attitude towards Europe. This is more than a trend: Europe and immigration, seen with negative connotations, occupy the political stage with a highly significant electoral consensus. This has inevitably changed the current and even future political agenda of national and EU government. The 2019 European elections will surely serve as a testing ground for the robustness of the European political system.

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## References

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