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## **The Unholy Trinity of Demagogic Politics: A Case Study on the Career of Matteo Salvini**

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The Unholy Trinity of Demagogic Politics:  
A Case Study on the Career of Matteo Salvini

An Honors Thesis

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Fall 2019

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## Abstract

This thesis aims to analyze demagogic politics and its reinforcing premises--Fear, Prejudice, Ignorance--through a case study involving the Italian politician, Matteo Salvini. This political practice that can be traced back to Ancient Athens, nevertheless, remains a potent force and an important explanation for contemporary political phenomena. By exploiting the emotions of the common people, rational analysis gives way to ill-considered passion, enabling the demagogue to secure popular support. At a time when right-wing populism has surged in Western Democracy, many have conflated the terms 'demagogue' and 'populist'. However, in order to maintain the order and stability of democracy, it is imperative to maintain and comprehend the distinction between these terms.

Specifically, the thesis will provide an extensive analysis of demagoguery, including its historical origins and its reliance upon the unholy trinity--Fear, Prejudice, Ignorance-- . The political career of Matteo Salvini under Lega will be offered as a demonstrative paradigm of the modern demagogue.

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**Introduction: Democracy as a Distortion**

Democracy is considered one of the best indicators for measuring progress of a nation-state, especially in the ‘Western World’. Indeed, one of the foundational principles of the United States’ foreign policy has always been promoting democracy. However, the concept of democracy is no longer bound by its definition. In fact, it has developed an extended meaning based on the assumption that it directly translates to the principle of absolute popular sovereignty (Robson 41). In this way, the concept has transformed from a means to an end, into an end in itself. To emphasize, democracy quite literally means a form of government that enables constituents to elect their governing legislation. Although this facilitates civic participation, it does not guarantee that the opinions of citizens will have direct authority over government decisions.

At a time where right-wing populism and nationalism have surged in Western Democracies, distorted meanings have become ubiquitous. Part of the explanation for this can be attributed to “unchecked” democracy and its ability to produce demagogic distortions that effectively corrupts the true meaning of this form of government. In doing so, the demagogue violates the reality of human knowledge as being permanently imperfect. Democracy is not advanced as a mere set of procedures distinct from an end in itself, but instead affirms, “the constructivist-rationalist error that equates democracy with notions of popular sovereignty” (Robson 41).

Moreover, democracy, in this sense, focuses on human society, the order we observe, as a constructed order or what the Austrian economist, Friedrich Hyack, refers to as *taxis* (Robson 41). In order to understand the authentic value of polity, one must accept the imperfections of political organization. Otherwise, one would have to assume the objective of polity is to

manufacture a utopia. Not only does this contradict the imperfections of human knowledge, but it would require “one or more individuals [to] possess complete knowledge of the end desires of all individuals, the means available to them, and all other relevant facts in all conceivable particular situations” (Robson 42). None of these necessary capabilities can legitimately be taken as characteristics of human nature.

Therefore, due to this lack of human knowledge, order in human societies cannot be constructed, but instead, must be spontaneous or grown, and is what Hyack refers to as the *kosmos* (Robson 42). Inevitably, human decision will never be completely rational due to the incapacity to obtain universal knowledge. Instead, human knowledge is based on situational facts, which will always prove to be incomplete, especially in the realm of politics. Provided this, it is imperative that individuals are guaranteed the freedom to reach their capabilities until coercion becomes necessary. Because the capabilities obtained by one individual may be different for another, it is specific situational fact that can contribute to the greater ‘good’ and ‘truth’ of society.

In order for this to fully transpire, the corrupted meaning of democracy cannot be proliferated due to its disregard of the *kosmos* principle. When this corrupted meaning becomes normalized, so does the threat of a rising demagogue. In other words, if the *taxis* is reinforced, then the demagogue’s ‘savior’ rhetoric that implies he/she knows the true “will of the people” may be accepted as fact. Not only does this become dangerous for the growth of the greater ‘good’ and ‘truth’ of human knowledge, but to the fabric of democracy itself. Such a leader does not promote the plurality of interests that contend in a free and democratic society, but instead manipulates and even disregards individual facts.

Certainly, demagogic politics is not a modern concept. Rather, it reflects a dynamism inherent in democracy from its beginning in classical antiquity. Therefore, in order to deepen our understanding of demagoguery, continuous research is necessary. In an attempt to provide evidence for this, my research was conducted through a case study: the career of Italian far-right leader, Matteo Salvini. Specifically, my project argues that the emerging impact of globalization, with its tendency to homogenize ethnic and cultural distinctions, has promoted a political environment conducive to far-right demagoguery.

Take, for example, the term “Italian”. This one word can have many, yet very definitive meanings. One might think of history, culture, art, or even fashion. The word has positive connotations around the world and as such affords a degree of honor and pride to anyone self-identifying as “Italian”. However, as international relationships advance and as traditional cultural distinctions become less distinct and less meaningful, parochial anxieties are easily inflamed by those promoting ethno-cultural nationalism. All of which represents a rare opportunity for the likes of a demagogue such as Matteo Salvini.

### **Historical Origins: Ancient Athens, Cleon**

First, in order to fully approach this understanding of demagogic politics, the premise of the word “demagogue” must be well-established. Naturally, one must look to the genesis of democracy, being it is a prerequisite for this political trend to take place. More specifically, one must look to the 5th century BCE in Ancient Athens. At this time, the Athenians had become frustrated with their oligarchic government due to the corruption of power and underrepresentation of the people. That being said, they began to develop revolutionary

principles that would allow civic participation to take place in the political sector, creating the first form of democracy. Nonetheless, the name democracy was provided because it quite literally translates to “rule by the people”.

However, even though this new form of government was groundbreaking, it was not exempt from error. In fact, in 380 BCE Plato critiques Athenian democracy in his book, *The Republic*, due to the increased ability for uneducated citizens to make decisions that required advanced knowledge. By extension, Plato did not agree with Athenian direct democracy, but argued a government should embody the best governing principles through a meritocracy. Elected representation would be able to filter the uneducated commoners from knowledgeable politicians that would be able to best fulfill the job on behalf of the people. Even though he was contesting direct democracy, Plato wanted to clearly separate his idea from the type of representatives in the previous Athenian oligarchy. As Plato was a philosopher, he believed that those in power should be leading the people by way of truth and reasoning, not based on class, status, or numbers.

Notably, Plato’s idea of a republic did not just develop in response to the creation of democracy, but to a movement that was advanced by it: sophistry. Because the structure of a direct democracy allows citizens to have equal participation, it also awards their rhetoric equal legitimacy. Therefore, as democracy grew stronger, the appreciation for sophistry did as well. Such appreciation that the sophists were the first to receive payment for their so called “intellectual” conversations. Sophists, however, were not remarkable for their extensive knowledge, but for the way in which they were able to communicate or convince the legitimacy of their claims. This popular way of teaching “instantly created a market for a new form of

education emphasizing the power of words” (Soupios 270). To elaborate, the sophist was one who developed his public speaking into a *techne*, allowing him to become a master of rhetoric. This *techne* not only enabled the sophist to disguise the lack of rationale supporting his teachings, it also suggested that “truth, understood as an abiding, universal body of insight did not exist” (Soupios 283).

Despite an absence of a common logic among sophists, there was one overarching premise for the the sophistical teachings: truth is deeply rooted in human opinion. The epistemology of the sophists was entirely built on human experiences through the senses, resulting in an inconsistent truth. In other words, the subjective knower will almost always vary with his perspective in comparison to another, so an abiding universal truth is not even plausible. In fact, Gorgias, one of the most famous sophists of this time period, addressed this directly when he said, “it is impossible, if anything exists, for it to be known and, if it is known, no one could reveal it to another”. Here, Gorgias, like many other sophists, demonstrates a strong skepticism on the ability to discover a real meaning to life, reflecting a moral nihilistic view. Moral nihilism suggests a fundamental incapacity to arrive at any universal system of truth and value.

Moreover, ancient Athenian democracy found itself vulnerable to people who could appeal to the public with their words, whether their motives were genuine or designed to gain political power. Because sophists were not qualified to provide proper answers to complex problems, they began to oversimplify them and their solutions. Naturally, this appealed to the public by making more people feel closer to politics than before, being that they could now conceptualize what they couldn’t before. In addition, it placed current philosophers and other

intellectuals in an unfavorable light, given their elitist connotations. That being said, in the 4th century BCE, this created the first favorable environment for demagoguery.

In 429 BCE, due to the popularity of rhetoric, an Athenian general became the leader of the established democracy. Thanks to a lack of primary sources, there are contested arguments on the portrayal of Cleon and the leader he may have been in actuality. However, of these few sources is one that is considered the “first true historian” due to his consistently accurate recordings: Thucydides. Therefore, it is through his writings that Cleon’s career is portrayed, and although it may not be very generous, it can be rendered credible. Thus, who was Cleon? Thucydides records Cleon as a unique figure to enter into a political leadership position. Unique because of the way in which he portrayed himself as an outsider to the professional politicians—a man of the common people. Although he appealed to many people for this reason, Thucydides criticised him for legitimizing himself as a political leader through hollow rhetoric.

Notably, Cleon was the son of a wealthy leather merchant and tanner, providing for him a very plentiful life since birth. Once he was elected general, he advanced very aggressive procedures. More specifically, the Peloponnesian War was taking place while Cleon rose to power, and during this time, he made his views very apparent. Perhaps one of the most well-known speeches by Cleon was during the Mytilenean Debate. In 427 BCE, the Mytileneans had just surrendered after revolting against their alliance with the Athenians. Due to their revolt, there was a proposition that all the Mytilenean men should be put to death, while the women and children enslaved as punishment. However, due to the severity of the punishment and historical alliance, it was reconsidered, encouraging a public debate between Cleon and another Athenian political figure, Diodotus.

To begin, Thucydides introduces Cleon and his position as the one who advanced “the motion of putting the Mitylenians to death, the most violent man at Athens, and at that time by far the most powerful with the commons” (Thucydides 151). That being said, Cleon was clearly seen as a powerful figure, and in a way that could potentially harm the people of Athens. In this debate, Cleon attests to his superior credibility by insisting that “ordinary men usually manage public affairs better than their more gifted fellows”, referring to the more established political leaders (Thucydides 152). By saying this, he is not even speaking on the actual issue being debated, but focusing on delegitimizing his opposition in order to persuade his audience. This tactic is specific to demagoguery because of its deviation from providing facts, and instead evoking emotion.

After Cleon was finished, Diodotus followed with his reasons for sparing the lives of the Mytileneans. In his speech, there was more emphasis on the actual interests of the city-state. In fact, he emphasized how there was no benefit for the Athenians to commit such a killing, since many of the Mytileneans were not directly involved in the revolt and death does not translate into justice. Fortunately, this logical stance resonated with the people, and the outcome of the decision reflected Diodotus’ position. Notably, this ancient debate on the justification of the death penalty is both incredible and revealing. Certainly, Diodotus’ more comprehensive knowledge disproved “Cleon's idea that in punishment the claims of justice and expediency can both be satisfied” (Thucydides 158). It is from such records, Cleon’s reliance on emotional prompts instead of analytical reasoning reveals his demagogic nature.

**Theory: Establishing the Unholy Trinity--Fear, Prejudice, Ignorance**

That being said It is important to note that the meaning of the word, demagogue, literally translates to “leader of the people”, but the connotations that have been attached to it overtime have transformed it into something much stronger. Today, a demagogue is considered a leader who arises through the reliance on three main pillars: Fear, Prejudice, and Ignorance. Just as in the case of Cleon, the title is not simply given based on his identity as a man of the commons, but because of the need to appeal to specific emotions, despite validity. Thus, the use of rhetoric is extremely relevant, if not the most fundamental tool for the demagogue. However, just as J. Justin Gustainis indicates in his research surrounding this subject, it is important to make a distinction between demagoguery and agitation (155). Because both, agitation and demagoguery, may result in similar effects by criticizing what is considered status quo, the two terms become closely related in many circumstances.

However, a distinction must be made clear, being that “although the agitator may resort to demagoguery, agitative rhetoric is not, in itself, demagogic” (Gustainis 155). As mentioned, agitators seek to challenge the current state of affairs, but it is the way in which they do so that allows them to be categorized as a demagogue or not. Demagoguery is specific due to the leader’s tactics in achieving public support. More specifically, the trajectory of appealing to public emotions that are rooted in fear, prejudice, and ignorance. The heavy reliance on these three pillars is what distinguishes the demagogue from being an agitator.

Nevertheless, the premise of demagoguery may not be obvious due to the pre-existing emotional aspects of political debate. Although, with attentive examination, it is quite apparent that emotional manipulation can be held responsible for gaining unusual popular support. Since

the first pillar (fear) must be understood to reinforce the other two pillars, the importance of prejudice will be explained first. Provided this, it is imperative to understand that the environment in which a demagogue rises to power is during a period of turmoil or unrest. In this way, the development of an identifiable “enemy” becomes necessary for oversimplified solutions to be referenced in public rhetoric. In other words, targeting a scapegoat for the people to find emotional unity is very easy at a time of instability.

In order to do this, the selection of the “enemy” is not done randomly, but tactically in the sense that it is chosen based on existing hatreds and fears. This is where the aspect of prejudice becomes relevant, being that the targeted enemies are conjured from deep-rooted hatred. For instance, during the early 1950s in the United States, Senator Joseph McCarthy capitalized on prejudice against communists by accusing and charging citizens of conspiring with the Communist Party. Senator McCarthy was very successful at creating this hysteria of growing communism and “legitimizing” it into a national threat, so much that it allowed him to unfairly try and convict citizens based on his own accusations. However, this was only possible because of the prevailing turmoil of the containment period following WWII. To elaborate, when people find themselves overcome with powerful prejudicial emotions, their rationality often diminishes alarmingly.

With a political environment vulnerable to hatred at the cost of rationality, the pillar of ignorance can be understood. Now that the demagogue has distracted the people from logical-reasoning, he/she does not have to be overly concerned with the actual facts or truth of the issues being discussed. Therefore, oversimplifying rhetoric targets the vulnerable scapegoat and will not be criticized by the average person. In fact, the demagogue will be praised instead

for their ability to “say it how it is”. This reveals not only the cunning nature of the leader, but of the necessary ignorance of the common people. Being that their support derives from the masses, the crowd to which they appeal is of the largest majority, the common person or middle-class.

Moreover, the demagogue will ignite an opposition movement against more educated individuals, whom one could classify as “elites” or “professionals”. Unfortunately, their common status only works to the leader’s advantage because it unites the common people even more, creating a feeling of “us” against “them” once again. Therefore, when confronted with an argument regarding the actual facts of a subject, the demagogue will survive through the use of “pseudo-reasoning”. In this way, the “facts” can be acknowledged and may sound good “to the untutored reader, [but] are in fact logically fallacious” (Gustainis 159). This is also revealed when there is a reference to evidence, done in a brief and careless manner. Although they may insist it supports their argument, it is not discussed in detail because it will not in fact be “proof” of anything. Just as Senator McCarthy used stacks of “lists” as evidence for his communist accusations, they were really no more than just names on pieces of paper.

Clearly, the demagogue is cunning for the way he manipulates the ignorance of average citizens. The emphasis on pathos over logos, specifically surrounding feelings of hate, have enabled this process to unfold. However, the third pillar is ultimately foundational, being that fear is what makes people vulnerable to being ignorant in the presence of prejudice. What this means is that fear is the ultimate driving force in achieving the support of the people. Going back to the prerequisites of demagoguery, there must be some sort of turmoil present. Indeed, the establishment of an “enemy”, as mentioned, is the immediate tactic of the demagogue. What is it that makes him so successful? The answer is fear.

To elaborate, even though there may be strong existing prejudice, it is fear that mobilizes this prejudice into something that is acted upon. Prejudice is not uniquely present due to demagoguery, but is uniquely acted upon due to the existing fear that the demagogue is claiming to eradicate. With reference to the McCarthyism era, U.S. citizens did loathe communists, but they were not afraid of them. What people were actually afraid of was communism eventually infiltrating the U.S. government. Even though there was never a real threat of this on U.S. soil, Senator McCarthy identified this fear as an opportunity to mobilize the existing prejudice into an entire movement.

Provided this, it is when the people are feeling most weak that they look to a strong leader to guide them out of hardship. However, whether the turmoil is in fact real or constructed such as during McCarthyism, the demagogue is able to portray the notion of being the audience's savior. In other words, once the people are convinced of the proclaimed crisis, the demagogue will instill the idea that drastic action must occur in order to eradicate the threat. Interestingly, this call for action usually results in the audience giving him/her political power (Gustainis 158). This is extremely detrimental because it transforms the demagogue into the solution and, simultaneously, a movement. Now, not only are people united by the establishment of fear instilled by the demagogue, they are also afraid of his/her potential capabilities. Therefore, fear could be recognized as the most important pillar of a demagogue because without it, one could argue, the other two could not properly develop.

With this, there is a different political ideology that must be made distinct from demagoguery: populism. At a time when populism has become a global trend in the Western world, in the media, and throughout literature, these two terms get used interchangeably.

However, it is important to note, especially in the case of Italy, the difference that distinguishes a demagogue from just a populist. One may recognize the similarities: each develops in a period of unrest, identifies a common enemy, and claims to be a political outsider representing the common people. These are all in fact true for both ideologies, so why should we not conflate populist and demagogue leaders?

Distinctly, populism is an ideology that is based on the notion of dividing the regime into two parts: the 'pure people' and the 'corrupt elite' (Mudde 7). In this way, the populist always aligns himself with the majority and in doing so, attempts to unite them by targeting the powerful elite. Although this identification of a common enemy resonates with demagoguery, the common enemy for populism remains constant. In other words, a demagogue may also target the elite, but this specific notion is not fundamental to its definition. Along with this, populism is more of a movement in itself and does not highlight the role of a particular leader. Whereas, demagoguery places more emphasis on the political figure, emphasizing the role of a "savior".

Although it may seem as if populist ideology might be challenging mainstream ideas of western democracy, it is imperative to understand that it is not. When closely examined, populism is actually well-connected to mainstream ideas and opinions. For this reason, it is the degree to which it holds the same values as western democracy that differs. To elaborate, populism doesn't oppose mainstream ideas, but radicalizes them (Mudde 9). By doing this, the movement is able to utilize consistent political concerns.

The populist ideology centers around anti-establishment sentiments, claiming to fight for the 'will of the people' against undemocratic institutional constraints that protect the minorities (Mudde 7). That being said, populism classifies 'the people' into one homogenous group that

shares the same common sense and morality. Anything that does not align with these sentiments is seen as unrepresentative of the people. This is problematic because it denies the plurality of interests within society. To elucidate, elitism and pluralism can be classified as the opposite of populism. Elitism divides society by the same groups, however, it distinguishes the pure elite from the corrupt people. Along with this, the pluralist ideology recognize diverse groups with interests and opinions that must come to a consensus. Both of these contradict the entire premise of populism.

Rejecting any notion of diversity among the interest of ‘the people’ as legitimate might be considered ironically undemocratic. However, this is not necessarily true. Populism is democratic in the sense that it is supporting mainstream views held by the people, but illiberal in the sense that it excludes issues concerning the elites, who are still apart of society. Therefore, populism is an “illiberal democratic response to undemocratic liberalism” (Mudde 58). Whether in the form of far-right or far-left populism, both exclude the elite. Although, it is their classification of the elite that may differ.

In the case of far-right wing populism, the main issues that are made apparent are immigration, corruption, and security. In doing so, they demand a repoliticization, that will in turn, leave society more polarized than before. Throughout Europe, far-right populist movements have begun to disrupt long-established governments. Due to deep historical roots, attitudes of nativism have remained among European countries. Although this does not necessarily have to translate into racism, it does provide a specific view on immigration. In fact, according to the Eurobarometer 47.1 (1997), “some 20 percent [of EU-15] supported wholesale repatriation’ (Mudde 8). In other words, even if they were born in a given European state and were considered

legal citizens, non-immigrant citizens believed immigrants should be sent back to their country of origin.

Therefore, it may seem as if the radical right-wing populist ideology might be challenging mainstream ideas of western democracy, it is imperative to understand that this is not the case. When closely examined, right-wing populism is actually well-connected to mainstream ideas and opinions. Instead, it is the degree to which it holds the same values as western democracy that differs. To elaborate, radical right-wing populism doesn't oppose mainstream ideas, but radicalizes them (Mudde 9). By doing so, the movement is able to exploit well-established political concerns to advance their campaign, enabling an environment for a demagogue to emerge.

### **Case Study: Italy, the Career of Matteo Salvini**

Given the underlying passions of populist movements, they invariably represent fertile opportunity for demagogues. Fear, Prejudice, Ignorance can be identified as the unholy trinity of a demagogue, and all three can utilize populism to strengthen support even more. In other words, through strategic emotional manipulation, the demagogue can then develop the movement into his own beast. It is specifically this process of demagogue configuration that will be traced a hereby way of a case study involving the contemporary Italian demagogue, Matteo Salvini.

To begin, it is imperative to understand the political trends from the end of a historical turning point in Italian politics: the dictatorship of Mussolini. On "July 25, 1943, Italy's Fascist regime ended, when Benito Mussolini was arrested on the order of the king, Victor Emmanuel III" (Foot 9). Finally, Italy was liberated from the strict regime that embedded right-wing

nationalism into the country's core for decades. However, although the importance of establishing checks and balances within the government was made apparent after the reign of Mussolini, there weren't any reports of Italians being prosecuted for war crimes. Instead, there was more of an emphasis on the process of forgetting. Therefore, "Fascism was gone, but many Fascists were still around" (Foot 10).

Moreover, the process of forgetting took place through democratization when a referendum was held in 1946 and resulted in the creation of a Republic. Following this, a constitution was drafted and established to ensure that Italy would not be vulnerable to a dictatorship ever again. By 1948, the first elections were held, ushering in a new political dominance that would remain until 1994, directly resembling the Cold War conflict (Foot 10). After WWII, and Mussolini's Fascist regime, there was a large push for socialism to succeed. Thus, Italian politics quickly became a playground for the U.S. and the Soviet Union to demonstrate power. During this period, the Christian Democratic Party gained large support in opposition to the other popular political party, "Partito Comunista" (the Communist Party).

As expected, both parties were funded externally by the countries that supported each ideology during this time period. To elaborate, the United States and the Vatican strongly funded the Christian Democratic party, while Russia gave money to the Communist Party platform. However, in 1994, it was revealed that these parties were receiving such significant funding from these actors along with others, that it was nationally broadcasted. Even though Italy maintained an anti-fascist movement for an extensive period of time, "with the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the mass party system,... things began to change" (Foot 10). In fact, most of the members of these parties were prosecuted or even attacked by radicals from each side. For

instance, in 1978, the President of the Christian Democratic party was abducted and killed by revolutionists.

Therefore, the political environment in Italy was once again broken. Only this time, the Italian people had no trust in any established party or organization running the government. This made Italy vulnerable to a new populist leader: Silvio Berlusconi. In 1994, he appealed to Italians with his lack of political background and strong business success. Along with this, he endeared himself to the middle-class with his conservative populist rhetoric that called for lower taxes and anti-communist principles. Not long after, he was elected as Prime Minister due to his independent party origins. In this way, Berlusconi gained support from both the left and the right, including those still holding views of neo-fascism. Therefore, it can be deduced that it was “Berlusconi who brought back neo-fascists into the political fold..., making an agreement with the National Alliance and with another populist grouping..., Lega Nord” (Foot 11).

Although, during this term, Italians did not find any new and positive initiatives taking place like they were promised. Instead, there was little to nothing being done in favor of the Italian middle-class because Silvio Berlusconi displayed more favoritism towards his own social class.. After long periods of inaction, in 2008, the global financial crisis devastated the economy. This crisis, at a time when Italy’s economy had already been declining due to an inability to compete in global markets, compounded the decline even further.

In fact, it would eventually lead “the Italian economy to experience a triple-dip recession... leaving the country's gross domestic product (GDP) at around 6 percent below its 2008 pre-crisis peak” (Lachman). Naturally, Italian citizens assumed that their unfortunate reality would provoke a long awaited response from Berlusconi, being that his political campaign

ran off the idea of providing economic stability. Instead, the Prime Minister responded with reassurances that the crisis was not as bad as people perceive it to be. Finally, after many different scandals, and a lack of governmental action during the crisis, he was forced out of office in 2011.

Along with the financial crisis, there was another global threat to Italy's national stability that was to follow only a couple years later. In 2011, the Syrian Civil War erupted, when pro-democracy demonstrations broke out, but were attacked by the existing government militia. From that point on, the unrest spread throughout and the safety of civilians was compromised. Inevitably, in 2015, conditions became unbearable for millions of families and resulted in "the largest annual flow of asylum seekers to Europe since 1985" (Connor). Therefore, it is Europe who defines their current immigration status as a "refugee crisis". A refugee, according to the 1951 Geneva Convention, is "someone forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster". Notably, tensions have been rising throughout the EU "because of the disproportionate burden faced by some countries, particularly where the majority of migrants have been arriving: Greece, Italy and Hungary" ("Migrant Crisis").

Due to its geographical location on the Mediterranean, Italy was not only an entry point for illegal immigration, but now, for asylum seekers. However, given the existing economic disruptions and widespread unemployment plus the need for national reconstruction following 2008, Italy did not respond well to the immigrant influx. In fact, regions and provinces that had been consistently left-wing, quickly switched their political identity. An example of this, is the province of Cascina, which had been a loyal bastion to the Communist ideology since the end of the dictatorship of Mussolini. Specializing in fine household furniture, the economic crisis and

monopoly of global companies destroyed the local economy. That being said, Cascina citizens were angered in 2014, when a few hundred refugees “who made it across the Mediterranean attempt[ed] to eke out a living, waiting in vain for something to turn up” (Coman).

Regions all over the nation were developing very similar experiences and responses. By 2014, about 600,000 refugees would have entered the borders of Italy, relying upon a social infrastructure unable to provide for circumstances forthcoming (Coman). To emphasize this growing resistance to immigration, Gianfranco Baldini of the University of Bologna makes an important point:

You have to go back to 2011. That’s when western governments decided to bring down [Muammar] Gaddafi. Libya was of course a dictatorship, but you had someone to deal with. It was inconceivable that Gaddafi would ever have allowed huge numbers of people to travel through Libya to cross to Italy as a means to get to Europe from Africa and the Middle East. So the immigration crisis began there. (Coman)

Therefore, with an already established history with unregulated migration flows, Italians developed a common intolerance for opening their borders. Not because it was based on the premise of discrimination, but as a natural result to the government failing to provide for existing citizens during the constant state of economic downturn. In other words, “Italy’s national debt was huge” following 2008, and President Giorgio Napolitano decided to “appoint unelected officials... [such as] the former European Commissioner Mario Monti” to restore the economy (Coman). However, the plan to raise taxes and cut government spending only resulted in high unemployment during a recession. Moreover, such an influx of refugees in this particularly

unstable economy did not prove to be beneficial for Italian citizens nor the migrants seeking asylum.

With this, it is important to fully understand the role of the nation-state and how this immigration status increases the number of conflicting nations within it. First, a distinction must be made apparent between the two terms. The nation can be defined as any “social group linked through common descent, culture, language, or territorial contiguity” (Ritzer 108). Whereas, the term nation-state includes the aspects of a nation, but also the political structure of a state. In other words, a nation-state can be made up of many different nations (sub-groups), but are identified as one because they are citizens of the same overarching government.

However, since the refugees are coming from the Middle East, their culture and values are very distinct from that of Western culture. Provided this, even though they may legally immigrate into the nation-state, they will identify as their own nation and never fully assimilate unless extreme social programs are put into place. This conflict in the relationship of nations and the nation-state is very critical for the political attitude of the citizens of the host country. Moreover, the extreme diversity can be seen as a threat to the conventional culture.

Quickly, the Syrian war became a global crisis, which meant that European states directly facing border control problems looked to organizations like the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN) to assist. Geographically, Italy’s location on the Mediterranean and their EU membership has made them one of the most vulnerable to asylum seekers. Moreover, the government needed assistance not only with border security, but with accommodating incoming refugees because “EU member states have made long-term legal commitments under international human rights and refugee law” (Metcalf-Hough 3). However, because the crisis

erupted so quickly and at such a rate, there was a lack of response by the EU governments. In addition, the EU attempted to release pressure from main destination countries, but “the core issue – the number admitted – is a national decision, and there are stark differences among member states in the regulation and level of compliance with EU Directives on asylum” (Metcalf-Hough 4). Given this, many EU countries had the privilege of closing their borders due to their geographical location away from the Mediterranean, shaking Italy’s confidence in the EU’s equitable treatment of a founding member.

Even though the European Union members enjoy profound benefits, supranational governance is not an easy task because of the limitations of sovereignty. When nation-states bring different leaders and interests to the bargaining table, it is inevitable that compromise will be necessary. Notably, euroscepticism has recently become a trend all over Europe after global crises have erupted, exposing the effects of globalism and allowing nationalism to erupt in various forms. The objective of the European Union is not to fulfil the specific interests of each member state, but to provide them benefits including, but not limited to: a common market, international peace, and political progress. However, in order for this to occur, the EU must respect the boundaries of each member state.

Along with this, for member states to resolve issues through this global governance system, Europe needs to remain a priority for their agenda, being it is a union that requires cooperation. This is important in understanding how euroscepticism has become a phenomenon because national political parties, specifically right-wing populist, have gained support using anti-European Union rhetoric, transitioning their national agendas away from a European perspective. Although Italy, a founding member, has an existing controversy in regards to their

economic infrastructure and border control, it has been highlighted due to the recent years of global turmoil, enabling the right-wing populist party, Lega, to rise through an anti-globalization platform.

As a prerequisite, it is necessary to define what it means to be European before one can understand the degree to which it is rejected. There are many different ways to measure how a European considers himself such as European integration, sense of European community, or European identity. However, it can be argued that European identity is the best indicator for Europeanism because of its ability to measure the correlation between Euro-consciousness and fundamental personal identities. Moreover, in order to analyze trends of Europeanism, one can observe the Moreno question that has been included in the eurobarometer since 1992 (Serricchio 116).

Even though this question has been adjusted overtime, its premise remains valid with regard to whether people only feel attached to their national identity, if they claim both, or solely a European identity. In this respect, there has been a declining trend for Italy as seen from data collected by the eurobarometer “between 1992 (when 73 percent of respondents showed some form of European identity) and 2006 (65 percent)” (Serricchio 116). Clearly, Italians have felt more of an emphasis on their nationality and less of one on their Europeanism. This trend only becomes more negative in the following years after the 2008 Great Recession and Migration Crisis in 2015. In fact, Italians cannot be counted as being among the “most Euroenthusiastic; on the contrary, they are located towards the bottom of the classification” (Serricchio 117). Therefore, Italy has become an interesting case study for the rise of euroscepticism.

In order to fully explore this notion, one must establish what euroscepticism exactly refers to, being it is often conceptualized as an umbrella that encompasses many different emotions and sentiments against the EU. Therefore, it has developed the broad meaning of “questioning European integration and it is this usage that has also become established in political science” (Verney 4). By way of expansion, this does not just refer to one position against EU politics, but a range of antagonisms to the EU integration process. However, authors such as Kopecky & Mudde (2002) have suggested a more narrow definition that does not include those that reject the EU entirely; they consider that to be an entirely different category (Verney 4). For research purposes, the first and more broad definition is most sufficient in accounting for all degrees of contestation toward European integration, whether it is to an extreme or not.

Ushering in the contemporary political climate, global threats of financial downturn and immigration resulted in Italy’s trust in the European Union to greatly diminish. Although, Euroscepticism was not a foreign term before these global crises erupted; it first became apparent in 1991, when the Maastricht Treaty officially created the European Union. This treaty became very controversial for the member states due to its attempt to create something much greater than the European Economic Community (EEC). To elaborate, the treaty was seen as a supranational constitution that could challenge national sovereignty with “its economic prescriptions... for national redistributive policies, and... an erosion of national identity aggravated by the project for European citizenship” (Verney 1).

Due to the success of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) transitioning into the EEC in 1957, neo-functionalists predicted that the integration into the European Union wouldn’t be any different. Ernst Haas developed the neo-functionalist theory based on the notion

that member states would continue to subside their sovereignty for the greater benefits obtained through cooperation. In this way, the benefits of one interest would eventually integrate others until full European integration could be reached. Clearly, this theory, however, did not account for the contestation that would take place among member states in 1991.

Therefore, after much criticism of the Maastricht Treaty, 'Post-Functionalist' theory was developed by Hooghe and Marks to address relevant factors that may actually hinder European integration. In this new theory, they argued that public opinion was ignored initially because it was the elite representatives at the integration bargaining table. However, it is eurosceptic public protests that have now created "a limited zone of acquiescence for policy choice" (Verney 2). Adapting to the flux of public interest and demands, Hooghe and Marks acknowledge that the integration process is not always a forward moving cycle, and new political actors may become relevant as a response. In this case, they have identified the growing relevance of public consensus on European integration as an obstruction to the EU decision makers.

Provided this, there has also been a particular rising phenomenon of skepticism associated with the European Union: elite skepticism. On this notion, there is an identification of 'politics of fear' being used by the elites. Although fear mongering may be considered one of the fundamental principles of politics, Mudde acknowledges the type of fear the European elites have reinforced. Specifically, the EU elite have continually warned "against alleged threats from so-called 'anti-Europeans', by which they mostly mean eurosceptics" (Mudde 79). By instilling this fear of anyone exhibiting Eurosceptic tendencies, they attempt to de-legitimize these anti-EU sentiments by 'othering' them.

In other words, traditional mechanisms, where the opponents are homogenized and an apocalyptic future is presented by which the elites' policies can only solve, are then made apparent (Mudde 79). Although 'opponents' may in fact be perpetuating nationalistic tendencies, it is common for all critics of the EU to be characterized as "anti-European populists that are 'nationalist' or even 'anti-democratic', while the future is one of political crises, or worse, war" (Mudde 79). By "othering" this opposition group, support against eurosceptics may increase, but it will also intensify the opposition by acknowledging them as a legitimate political identity group. In this way, Hooghe and Marks' Post-Functionalist theory proves verifiable because with increasing pressure on the EU by public disapproval, integration may not progress as expected.

Thus, as distrust in the elite grew, along with the supranational powers ratified in the Maastricht Treaty, Italian trust in the European Union remained inconsistent. In 1999, public support dropped even further, "with specific reference to the single currency, which represented a landmark in the process of European integration" (Quaglia 44). Not only was removing the Italian national currency a symbolic devastation, but the implications of the transition period resulted in a long-lasting effect on the economy. Furthermore, the effect of low economic growth since joining and "the rather sharp increase in consumer prices can generally be held to account for public disaffection vis-a`-vis the euro" (Quaglia 45). In this way, the euroscepticism at this time was deeply-rooted in an economic premise.

By 2008, when the Great Recession transpired, Italy was heavily impacted due to their already weakened economy. For this reason, the turmoil resulting from this global crisis was often connected to familiar discontent with the European Union's previous financial impact. Along with this, the ruling party, Forza Italia, and their close partner, Lega Nord, were both

center-right political parties, “characterised by the use of a populist discourse which juxtaposes a pure honest common people against a corrupt self-serving political elite” (Ruzza and Fella, 5).

Although, their focus on a liberal economy and nationalistic sentiments were not directly addressing the European Union, they were certainly not conditioning Italians to be ‘Euroenthusiastic’.

Due to the nature of populism, the European Union can easily find itself as a target or scapegoat, being it is often regarded as institutions made up of the ‘European elite’. In this ideology and its use of rhetoric, it is “the virtues of ‘the people’ [that] are asserted in opposition to a corrupt political class to which the right presents itself as the main opponent” (Ruzza and Fella, 8). Therefore, right-wing populist claims revolve around an anti-establishment premise, which radicalize mainstream ideas of Western democracy. Even though this government could not sustain itself much longer due to a series of political scandals, the remnants of populist agendas did not diminish. In fact, they intensified as the effects of global turmoil infiltrated more aspects of Italian society.

That being said, the country became vulnerable to right-wing populism once again. Only this time, it was in the form of two parties: Beppe Grillo’s “Five Star Movement” (M5S) and Matteo Salvini’s “Lega”. From March 2018 until September 2019, the coalition between the two held a majority in parliament with Salvini serving as Deputy Premier and Interior Minister. Although they both rose to power from similar political factors, what makes Lega so distinct is how it has transformed under its new leader. For M5S, it was developed by Grillo, a comedian, in 2009 as a direct result of the current political climate; a traditional populist party foundation.

Whereas, Salvini became the face of this established party by changing its objectives to fit a far right-wing populist agenda.

The origin of the party was actually founded by Umberto Bossi in 1991, making it the oldest one in the Italian Parliament (Edwards). It was founded under the name “Lega Nord”, which directly translates to “The Northern League”. At this time, this name was deemed appropriate given the party was only focused on defending “the interests and prejudices of small businesses in Italy’s North” (Coman). During this phase under Bossi’s leadership, he advocated what is known as “fiscal federalism”. In other words, he believed specific political regions of the North should be able to keep more of their tax revenues and capitalize on free market success.

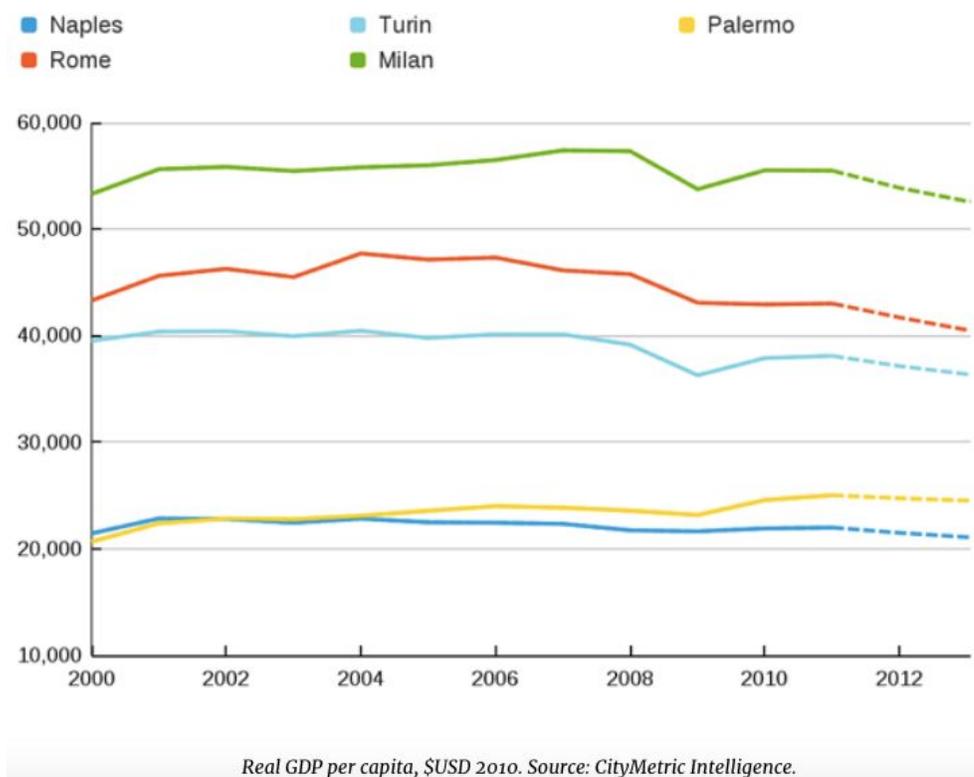
Specifically, the geographical area that the regionalist party was referring to is called “Padania”, which refers to the Po Valley in Northern Italy. Moreover, the geographical area is not a politically recognized region, but an area that encompasses where most of Italy’s GDP is produced. Due to the unitary system that the government exhibits, the people in this area became upset with their contributions to the economy being allocated through public services, mainly ending up in the South. Because the nation’s North and South divide has developed into not only an educational and economic division, but a cultural one, Lega Nord gained much support in trying to gain independence for this wealthy ‘region’.

To emphasize how great the difference in GDP per capita between the Northern regions and the South, Figure 1 compares the main cities of Milan, Rome, Turin, Naples, and Palermo. Clearly, Milan produces the most GDP overall, which is more than twice as much as the two main cities in the South, Naples and Palermo. In fact, this comparison in terms of national economies would mean “Milan is richer than Sweden [and] Naples is poorer than the Czech

Republic” (Gillet). Although Rome is not a part of the “Padania” region, it is the nation’s capital.

Turin is not traditionally referred to as apart of Lega Nord’s ‘exclusive’ region either, but it is located in the Northwest of Italy, where economic prosperity is much higher.

Figure 1:



Source: Gillet (2010)

Therefore, there is an evident line between the North and South that Lega Nord tried to strengthen in the political world through independence. Naturally, however, the derogatory rhetoric about the South also added to the stereotypes linked to the economic social gap between the two. Provided this, the North began to develop a reputation of contempt as they circulated this negative rhetoric about the ‘other group’ in the South. Negative terms such as “terroni” became traditional ways to refer to the South that excluded them from the party’s constituency.

Both, Umberto Bossi and Matteo Salvini, had sustained negative rhetoric about the South, reinforcing stereotypes and prejudice.

In addition, something that was in contrast to the leaders of the “political parties that had dominated post World War II Italian politics [was that] Bossi presented himself as a man of the people in his appearance and speech” (Zaslove 3). This was fundamental to the party’s success, and remains prevalent through the reign of Salvini. In doing so, a much larger audience can be reached, being that the leaders portray themselves as relatable citizens. Moreover, the party maintained much success and following until April of 2012. It was in this year that Umberto Bossi was forced to resign due to scandals of embezzlement (Albertazzi). After nearly twenty-one years, his leadership of the regionalist party had come to an abrupt end, prompting the 2013 election of Matteo Salvini.

At first, forty-year-old Matteo Salvini fulfilled the position appealing to the same political rhetoric as his predecessor. However, he soon realized the fault in doing so. Due to the political climate he was elected into, he realized the current upsets were no longer unique to a specific region, but had become ubiquitous throughout the nation. Therefore, he re-established an anti-globalization platform that could appeal to all Italians. In fact, after his first speech, Salvini, apologized to Southerners claiming that “either Italy saves itself as a nation, or else all of its regions, without exception, will face ruin” (Albertazzi). Breaking down this well-established division among the party’s support, surprisingly, did not take long. Currently, Lega has been gaining great support in the central regions of Italy “that had once been dominated by the left, and also managing to establish a presence in the South – a ‘no-go area’ for the Lega under Bossi” (Albertazzi).

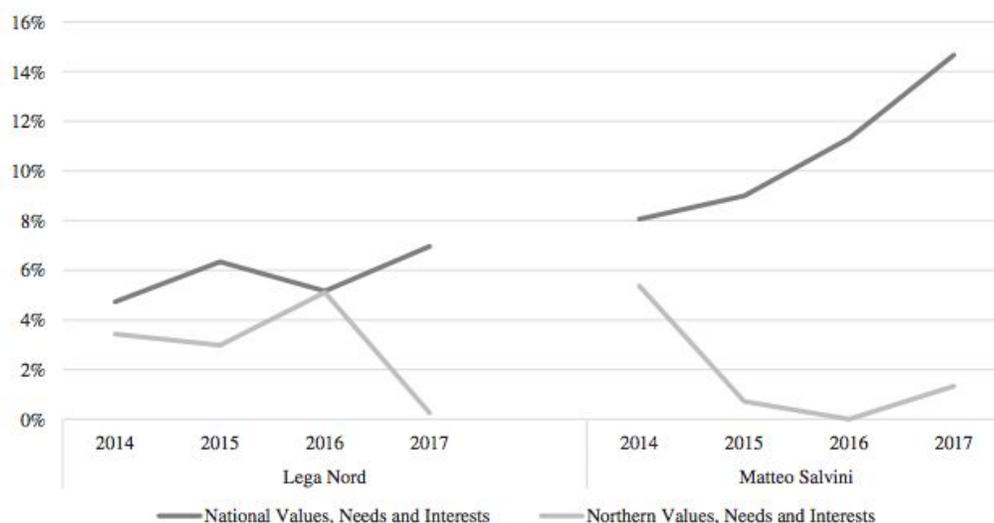
Moreover, the stress of the “Nord” was dropped from the original name, unifying the different regions under the new “Lega”. With this, Salvini’s popularity quickly grew from his very blunt stances on the immigration crisis. For instance, at his first big rally in Rome there was a banner reading, “Stop the Invasion” (Stille). Clearly provoking xenophobia around the issue, he gained a media spotlight from both pro and anti stances. Using this to his advantage, Salvini embraced a Facebook-centered communication to the public, making him a social media sensation. In the latter half of 2015, alone, he “tripled his Facebook following: capitalising on the refugee crisis and growing discontent with Matteo Renzi’s centrist government” (Stille). As a slightly younger politician, Salvini has been able to effectively transform the entire formality of politics into the social media commons.

Clearly, the political tone had changed and Italians resonated with it. Due to the party’s established presence in government, the new and extreme rhetoric of Salvini “managed to also attract new media attention”, extending his platform across the nation in various forms (Camus and Leebourg 183). Even if mainstream media was covering Salvini’s remarks and speeches in a negative way, it enabled his party’s new leadership to be apart of common political discussion. Given his audience, the claims he makes can have an immense effect, which is why his anti-immigration and even xenophobic remarks such as “the Africanization of Europe” can provoke nativism (Camus and Leebourg 183).

More specifically, Lega and their new leader, Matteo Salvini, changed the direction of their party’s agenda in order to address this current state of turmoil. There was a shift away from regional autonomy and towards opposition against immigration, the EU, and refugees arriving in Southern Italy. By doing this, Salvini’s party began to systematically delegitimize the EU, which

became evident in the publication of the 2014 Manifesto. Direct remarks highlighted the “EU’s democratic deficit, whereby the sovereign people of individual member states were considered to have lost out from the EU’s lack of accountability” (Pirro and van Kessel 332). By including this in the document, Lega proved their long standing ‘soft’ euroscepticism was transitioning to a more ‘hard’ stance.

As Figure 3 displays, the ideological shift can be observed from the Facebook posts of Lega Nord and Matteo Salvini. Although both experience a decrease of promoting Northern values, needs and interests, it is evident that these posts had declined since 2014 for Salvini, whereas, they did not begin to decline until 2016 for the official party account. Along with this, both have increased their posts for national values, needs, and interests since 2014, but Salvini’s at a much more consistent and faster rate.



**Figure 3.** Lega Nord’s and Matteo Salvini’s posts on Facebook: National and Northern Values, Needs and Interests (January 2014–May 2017).

Source: Albertazzi (2018)

As the 2018 general elections were approaching, his main campaign was not only on immigration, but improving Italy's financial reality. In order to do so, he adamantly advocated for two proposals. First, a flat tax that would successfully reduce "rates to 15% or 20%, a huge cut from Italy's comparatively high taxes" (Stille). Secondly, Salvini hoped to abolish the law that established a new retirement age at sixty-six. Both of these proposals strongly embody enticing rhetoric to the Italian middle-class' finances, but also appear quite hollow. The first in terms of a collapsing social infrastructure, and the last due to the very high life expectancy of Italians. In fact, Italy is recorded to have "the highest life expectancy in Europe (83 years); [therefore], lowering the retirement age seems to most economists pure folly" (Stille).

Thus, the main premise of Salvini's Lega has been focused on addressing the economic and immigration crises. It has allowed him to emphasize the threat of globalization as a whole, transforming it into a critique on Italy's role in the international community and, more specifically, the European Union. Moreover, as a result of the consensus surrounding these global issues, Italians have found themselves struggling to understand what the relationship between the nation-state and intergovernmental institutions should be. Interestingly, this power struggle is not unique to just the current state of Italy, but to countries throughout Europe experiencing similar impacts of globalization. As one can observe from "Brexit", there is a common political scapegoat that right-wing populists have identified: the European Union.

Considered to be one of the most evident indicators of the party's transition to a hard euroscepticism was Salvini's attack on the Euro. Understanding the global connection that could be made to the economic recession, he accused Italy's eurozone membership as a main component in destabilizing the nation's economic prosperity. In doing so, one of his renowned

slogans became “Out of the Euro. Now!”, which gained support for its criticism of the specific beneficiaries of the one currency (Pirro and van Kessel 332). To elaborate, Salvini consistently states that Italy is being forced to use “a currency allegedly set up to advantage the German economy” (Albertazzi).

Naturally, Italian citizens became unsettled by this idea of being a tool used to advantage another country’s economic prosperity, transforming support for the party from “4 percent in the legislative elections of 2013 to 13 percent in the regional elections of 2015” (Camus and Leebourg 183). However, it does not take into consideration the enormous public debt and lack of development that makes abandoning the euro so unrealistic. Moreover, even though there is heavy criticism and threats to pull away from the EU, it is very unlikely to occur. Although, Salvini can be successful in pressuring the decisions and policies that are implemented by the EU through his national government influence.

Particularly, in understanding the case of euroscepticism in Italy, the growing support of far-right wing parties has become extremely relevant. Although it did not seem this way before the turn of the decade in 2011, when Verney assumed that “euroscepticism [would] remain, as it always has been, relatively marginal in South European public opinion, with hard euroscepticism representing a small group” (Verney 26). Clearly, there has been an unpredicted and dramatic shift in public opinion that has enabled these parties to even succeed in influencing government, which could then directly impact European integration.

Moreover, as the support for far right-wing populism grows in Europe, there can be an assumption that it will produce a positive relationship with euroscepticism. Trust in national governments must remain strong in order for that support to translate into the EU because the

“most important decisions... are made via the intergovernmental route” (Boomgaarden et al. 252). In other words, if there is a positive attitude and trust towards the national government, then citizens can trust that they are being represented on a European level. However, as one can observe in the populist nature of attacking the current government, they will successfully deteriorate that trust, which can then, in turn, erode into European trust.

Although this research is specific to Italian euroscepticism, it is not particularly unique to this case study. In fact, a very current and more radical example of increased euroscepticism can be observed in the recent events surrounding Brexit. Even though the United Kingdom was never considered as ‘Euroenthusiastic’ as Italy, the timeline of events that propelled right-wing populism to put forth a legitimate notion of euroscepticism reveals a similar trend. Through both, the UK and Italy, one can emphasize the importance of national politics, since most “citizens lack the basic information to make up their minds about the EU and therefore resort to proxies from national politics” (Boomgaarden et al. 251).

In the earlier years, Lega Nord was regarded to have been “successful where others failed by balancing political power with its populist identity” (Zaslove 158). For many years, Umberto Bossi had a good relationship with Silvio Berlusconi, the Prime Minister at the time. That being said, this relationship allowed Lega Nord to be critical of the ruling party, yet still maintain its political influence. In fact, under Bossi, Lega had “structure and agency, which gave them strength in areas that most right-wing populist parties lack” (Zaslove 159). Provided this, previously established supporters from Bossi’s original Lega, enabled Matteo Salvini’s rise of populism to occur with startling rapidity.

Although the party's aim was changed drastically, by speaking out on the current fears circulating throughout Italy, voters remained loyal alongside new ones, effectively transitioning the regionalist party of the North into a nationally supported movement. As the results in table 2 display, electoral support for Lega by region from 2013 and 2018, experienced an overall increase throughout the entire peninsula. Notably, in 2013 the only regions with outlying electoral support were Lombardy (12.9%) and Veneto (10.5%). However, by 2018, Salvini was able to obtain votes in twelve regions where his percentage of votes were not even 1%. For instance, Umbria nearly experienced a 20% increase from .6%, while Lombardy and Veneto remain the strongest support with close to around 30%.

**Table 2.** LN's electoral performance in the General elections 2013 and 2018, by region (Chamber of Deputies) – %.

Region	2013	2018
Aosta Valley	3.29	17.5
Piedmont	4.8	22.6
Lombardy	12.9	28
Liguria	2.3	19.9
Veneto	10.5	32.2
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	6.7	25.8
Trentino-Alto Adige	4.2	19.2
Emilia-Romagna	2.6	19.2
Tuscany	0.7	17.4
Umbria	0.6	20.2
Marche	0.7	17.3
Lazio	0.2	13.4
Abruzzo	0.2	13.8
Sardinia	0.1	10.8
Molise	0.2	8.7
Campania	0.3	4.3
Basilicata	0.1	6.3
Apulia	0.1	6.2
Calabria	0.3	5.6
Sicily	0.2	5.2

Source: Elaboration from Vampa (2018)

Source: Albertazzi (2018)

Clearly, Salvini has made his political presence well-known throughout Italy and even “come to dominate the entire right of Italian politics” (Johnson). Even though it was their coalition partner, the Five Star Movement, who received the largest percentage of votes in 2018, it was Salvini who became the main face of their movement. Because M5S was a newly evolved populist party, they did not have much practical government experience. Whereas, Lega, the oldest party in parliament, presented significant capabilities within the government. Along with this, Salvini was appointed Interior Minister, which allowed him to carry out measures addressing his most popular campaign issue: immigration. Therefore, Salvini was able to continue his anti-globalization platform and actually act on those claims politically. Italian citizens recognized this and began to feel as though Matteo Salvini was their ‘savior’ out of this continuing state of turmoil.

That being said, in just one year, the majority of votes began to switch in favor of Salvini instead of the M5S, with Lega polling “at 34 percent... , and double the level of his nearest rival, the centre-left Democratic party” (Johnson). Knowing this, Salvini began to challenge Prime Minister, Giuseppe Conte, and the M5S on numerous accounts in hopes to force a snap elections. In other words, if the coalition ended, the majority in Parliament would no longer exist, making an election necessary for a functioning government. With such significant poll numbers, Salvini was confident that the vote would be in favor of his party and lead to his appointment as Prime Minister. Therefore, Salvini formally ended the alliance by early August of 2019; a strategy that seemed promising, but that did not deliver.

On August 20th, Giuseppe Conte issued his official resignation as Prime Minister with a statement claiming Matteo Salvini to be “an ‘opportunist’ for triggering a government crisis that

could have ‘serious consequences’ for Italy” (Giuffrida). Despite the derogatory claims about Lega and their leadership, Salvini saw his plan as beginning to unfold. In fact, it was predicted that “Mr. Salvini would not only easily become Prime Minister, but that a coalition of the League, the post-fascist Brothers of Italy and the remainder of Mr Berlusconi’s Forza Italia would command an absolute majority in parliament” (Johnson). The support for this new “Italian right” seemed to be inevitable for the new government.

Moreover, the Five Star Movement had announced their new coalition partner only a week later to be the center-left Democratic Party, re-appointing Giuseppe Conte as Prime Minister. A turn of events that no one had predicted due to the established contestation between the two opposing parties. Provided this, the newly formed coalition did not seem reliable in producing an alliance conducive for Italy’s future. Thus, it became clear that the newly formed government had developed solely based on an attempt to block Salvini from gaining ultimate power. However, although Salvini was unprepared for such a turn of events, he still cannot be discounted as a factor in Italy’s political calculus.

There is still much promise with his growing support and the clear vulnerability of the ruling coalition. For this reason, Salvini has changed his strategy to focus on upcoming regional elections, which, since October 2019, have reinforced his capabilities. By way of expansion, Lega has targeted historically ‘Left’ regions such as Umbria and Emilia Romagna by appealing to the financial stagnation of these areas. Emilia Romagna is considered to be the “Heartland of the Italian Left”, so if Salvini can secure a vote in the regional government, it would be the “catalyst to bring down the government and force fresh national elections” (Johnson). With overarching regional support for Salvini, the new coalitional government could not be justified as

a representative government, providing more impetus for snap elections to occur. Therefore, Matteo Salvini has found an alternative and viable trajectory to becoming Prime Minister.

### **Analysis: Salvini, a True Demagogue**

Throughout his rise to power, Salvini has been heavily criticized by respected individuals for the real consequences that come from “inciting hatred and legitimising facism”, alluding to periods of Mussolini (Albertazzi). However, Salvini and his movement are not concerned about these remarks as he reassures Italy’s democracy is not a target. Whereas, he argues that right-wing nationalism is a necessary response in order to protect the nation-state from current threats of globalization. In this case, the current political climate could foreshadow the nationalism Italy wants to re-enforce as European integration progresses.

Supporting a Post-Functionalist perspective, it could be the limitations of public interests that are finally challenging the established political systems reinforced by the elite. Although, the prejudice against supranational institutions that is mobilized by this ‘politics of fear’ does not prove genuine by most leaders of these populist parties. Instead, it is evident these leaders are utilizing current fears as their means to an end of ultimate political power. In order to fully understand and support this argument, a thorough analysis of the specific mechanisms employed by the political leader must be carried out. Therefore, for this case study of the contemporary career of Matteo Salvini, in order to authentically define him as a demagogue, his technique must affirm and reinforce the underlying principles of the unholy trinity--Fear, Prejudice, Ignorance.

As previously established, sophistry is a fundamental tool for the demagogue to justify himself as an authentic politician. However, for that to occur, the social and political conditions

must be conducive for his anti-establishment rhetoric. In 2013, the beginning of Salvini's career as a political leader, the growing distrust of government transformed his vision of Lega Nord into a right-wing populist. When a constituency is not reassured that their interests are being served by a "political establishment that purports to represent it fairly, a lying demagogue can appear as a distinctively authentic champion of its interests" (Hahl et al. 3). Therefore, the aftermath of the Great Recession and the Migration Crisis, had left Italian citizens upset with the lack of government initiative to protect their interests.

With this pre-existing political climate, the instability of Italian trust became relevant for Salvini's movement. Identifying that the dissatisfaction with the Italian government remained consistent throughout, he no longer focused on regional autonomy, but, instead, on what could render him the most support. Provided this, immigration, the European Union, and the political elite became necessary targets to extend his support across the whole peninsula. By establishing these three scapegoats, Salvini convinced his constituency that the current government surrendered to these pro-globalization agents at the cost of national interests. In other words, national interests needed to be reinforced and protected from global threats, implying that national and European interests directly conflict with one another.

In a nation-state with very established history and culture, inciting nationalistic and even nativist emotions can be easier than in a country without. Therefore, using these deep-rooted emotions, Matteo Salvini emphasized the threat of immigrants and the EU in order to manipulate the existing prejudice. Although most Italians may not feel it to the extent of Salvini's emphasis, his oratory has the potential to radicalize their feelings on these issues, given the period of instability. Provided this, his decision to completely dismantle the party's objective clearly

identified an opportunity to manipulate the current political upset, giving birth to the new “Lega”.

In addition, the eurosceptic trend Italy had been clearly experiencing was another vulnerability that reinforced the nationalistic rhetoric of Matteo Salvini. In some form or another, Italians were experiencing similar opinions that resonated with his campaign strategy. Even though Salvini could be heavily criticized for explicit phrases, it also made many people perceive him “as bravely speaking a deep and otherwise suppressed truth” (Hahl et al. 3). Salvini dedicated his political identity to appeal to traditional sentiments of Italians because it was exactly what his audience wanted to hear. However, this does not necessarily mean he genuinely believes in the claims he insists upon.

Authenticity is in fact a paradox characteristic of the demagogue. Although Salvini portrays himself as ‘a man of the people’, he not only excludes the views that he claims don’t align with “the people”, but also exploits the emotions of those he is “genuinely representing”. To emphasize, his strong stance on immigration, and even xenophobic remarks do acknowledge the mainstream issue of immigration, but in a way that does not accurately represent the reality of the average Italian citizen. Instead, he transforms their opinion into a more radical version by appealing to the emotional aspects of the issue. Therefore, when analyzing the authenticity of Matteo Salvini, it cannot be made clear where his true judgement lies.

However, what can be made apparent is the fundamental premise of deep-rooted prejudice surrounding nationalistic tendencies that enabled the success of the party’s transformation under Salvini, affirming the first stage of demagoguery. With such emotion-provoking campaigns, his charisma began to strengthen pathetic reasoning for all

political discussion, instilling the necessary state of ignorance conducive to his rising platform. To elaborate, the growing support for the claims made by Salvini such as his overspeclatory claims on immigration and economic tendencies, reveal the lack of research and logical reasoning.

Although both the North and South of Italy provided a condition of ignorance, they differed, to some degree, in respect to why. To emphasize, Lega Nord began as a party fighting for regional autonomy, characterized by derogatory rhetoric towards the South. Although Salvini did not follow this agenda for very long, he had made his sentiments clear about the South in the years prior to the party's transition. In other words, Salvini, who had regularly used terms such as "terrioni", has now appealed to the South as if he could appropriately represent them. Due to the very established crisis of immigration especially in that region, Southerners only focused on his hard anti-immigration stance, and not at all on Salvini's abrupt abandonment of judgement. Moreover, despite his reputation, he had successfully convinced the South of his patronage to them.

As for the North, the support was not as unexpected due to his party's platform that had already been established. However, it was unusual that the anti-EU rhetoric had become so popular and accepted in places that owe their political and economic prosperity to the Union's common market and its regulations. Without taking this into account, the hard eurosceptic approach taken by Salvini appealed to these areas based on the nationalistic prejudice against global threats of an overarching supranational government. The appeal of his oratory derived from the feelings surrounding this prejudice, which then resonated with the anti-immigration stance that took hold of the South.

After almost two decades, the entire nation had experienced great socio-economic downturn. Therefore, when Salvini addressed complex issues of immigration and economic stagnation with a straightforward solution, Italians became hopeful. Using nationalistic sentiments, Salvini was able to convince both the North and South that globalization was at fault. While specifically targeting the South with anti-immigration views and the North with anti-EU rhetoric, the anti-globalization prejudice became self-reinforcing. In other words, Salvini's plan to strengthen Italy's policy making from the discretion of the European Union coincided with the ability to secure its borders from mass immigration.

Notably, distancing Italy from the European Union became the main solution, even though the EU does not have authority over Italy's border control and provides significant benefits to their economy. Salvini and his party have been prompt in blaming the intergovernmental institution for its role, yet unable to acknowledge the responsibility that Italy has for itself. For instance, the European Union Dublin Regulation has been most commonly criticized for its disproportionate impact on main EU-entry countries for migrants seeking asylum. The fact that it is a European regulation is publicized, but when it was updated and signed in 2003, Lega Nord and Forza Italia were apart of the ruling majority is not mentioned.

Because Salvini obtained much of his support from average citizens with his populist appeal, the complexities of politics are most likely not understood. Therefore, the inability of most people to understand the logistics of the EU is exploited by Salvini, making it easy to use as a scapegoat. In fact, most members of the "mass audience are neither sophisticated nor well-educated", so Salvini could only successfully unite them based on emotion (Gustainis 159). In this case, the emotion exploited was prejudice against the EU and immigrants, which became

mobilized through Salvini's use of 'politics of fear'. Especially in the aftermath of the Great Recession, arguably one of the hardest economic crisis in history, and the current migrant crisis, a phenomenon that assumed global dimensions, the vulnerability of Italians to the fear of globalization became nearly inevitable.

As mentioned, Lega Nord always had elements of populism, but it wasn't until Salvini's leadership that it became the main identity for the party. Utilizing populist tendencies, Salvini was able to capture the mass audience he needed. Along with this, one area of "public concern especially vulnerable to exploitation...is racial and class hatred" (Gustainis 157). Since immigration is most threatening to those of a lower or middle class due to the type of job skills required, anti-immigration promises will appeal to both class and race contestation. Particularly in the South, where unemployment is high and education is declining, Italians will be least favorable towards lenient immigration policies. However, when Salvini makes xenophobic remarks such as the "Africanization of Europe", the possible threats of immigration begin to develop into something much larger (Camus and Leebourg 183).

To elaborate, remarks as such would create more than just a fear of job insecurity to those of the middle or lower class. Instead, Salvini's attitude would construct a fear that implies Italian identity, culture, and economic stability are significantly at risk for all citizens. Criticizing the established government for allowing the European Union to take advantage of Italian interests, Salvini enforced a strong and hard-lined stance that would not surrender to any opposition. In addition, being a 'man of the people', Salvini's character relies on the appearance of a 'true Italian', meaning he exhibits traditional Italian values relatable for his audience.

This appearance combined with his rhetoric made Italians feel as though their interests were important at a time that they seemed to be compromised, reinforcing the notion of a ‘savior’. In other words, Salvini, himself, became the movement and solution. Therefore, once his campaign had obtained enough support to reach this point, Salvini became the most powerful political figure in Italy. Even though the explicit remarks he made would still be condemned by scholars, any media attention at all would contribute to his dominant identity. In fact, because most media sources are independent, news coverage is based on what generates the maximum amount of viewers. Thus, Salvini’s challenge to the political norm attracted most, if not all, media outlets to reinforce the legitimacy of his influence as a political leader.

Manifesting this role as the ‘challenger to political norms’, Salvini does not contest with mainstream ideas, but instead, radicalizes them through deep-rooted emotions and then mobilizes them through fear. At a time of turmoil, Matteo Salvini was elected as the leader of Lega Nord. Recognizing the state of Italian politics, he cleverly identified the vulnerabilities of the common people that could be exploited. Furthermore, Salvini explicitly targeted the European Union and immigrants to conjure a fear that would threaten the nationalistic tendencies rooted in Italian culture and society. Instituting globalization as the greatest threat to the contemporary stability of the nation-state, this fear developed into a unifying agent for middle-class Italians, who then looked to a strong leader to protect them.

### **Conclusion:**

In analyzing my research conducted in the case study of Matteo Salvini, the fundamental premise of demagogic politics was identified--Fear, Prejudice, Ignorance. This unholy trinity can

efficiently demonstrate the stages that are necessary in the establishment of an authentic demagogue. Although the context of contemporary politics is in constant flux, the opportunity that arises within specific contexts can still be identified through these three elements. Along with this, it was made evident that populism is a main proponent of constructing an environment vulnerable to demagogic politics due to its anti-establishment and illiberal democratic nature.

The first pillar, prejudice, is necessary for the demagogue to generate deep-rooted antagonisms around the identified enemy. Next, this deep-rooted prejudice enables his constituency to suspend their logical reasoning, ignorance now becomes the coin of the realm. In this way, the demagogue can now advance his deceitful message both in terms of ethos and pathos. Lastly, the most foundational principle of the demagogue, fear. This third pillar reinforces both prejudice and ignorance because of its ability to mobilize these into a political movement. Whether the fear is constructed or legitimate, its implementation will persuade the audience of the demagogue's absolute necessity in obtaining power.

My analysis of the career of Matteo Salvini affirms his classification as an authentic demagogue according to the definitional standards of the unholy trinity. Evidently, Salvini has employed each stage: fear, prejudice, and ignorance. In this study, the consequences of globalization can be identified as the target of right-wing populism due to the remaining effects of global crises that have previously erupted. This surge of right-wing populism has sanctioned the use of explicit, xenophobic rhetoric by Salvini, an ascending demagogue. His proliferation of these sentiments have then, in turn, provoked nativist repercussions among the population.

Although my research is solely a case study on the career of Matteo Salvini, its limited parameters should not suggest Italy is an isolated case. Currently, right-wing populism has

developed into an expansive trend throughout Western Europe and the United States. In addition, the rhetoric promoted by these anti-establishment parties have all reinforced an anti-globalization stance. Not only is this significant with regard to the research on demagoguery, it also speaks to the long-term order and stability of Western Democracy. As in the case of Salvini, right-wing populism is conducive for demagogic politics to be employed, especially at a time when many countries are recovering from the negative impact of certain global trends. Without expanding our understanding of demagogic politics through contemporary manifestations, a sufficient understanding of this politically dangerous phenomenon cannot be established.

Provided this, the limitation of my case study to develop a universal and applicable theory for demagogic politics exposes an external validity problem. Even though my research provides an extensive analysis of Italy's demagogic politics, it is specific to that country alone and disregards any potential comparison cases. Moreover, my conclusion may prove relevant and contributive to the research of demagogic politics, but it cannot be used independently to formulate a universal theory. In order to obtain this objective, a comparative analysis study or multi-case study would need to be performed.

In addition, there is an internal validity problem with the fact that Italy's right-wing political theatre is an on-going drama. Without the ability to know the outcome of the subject being analyzed, the literature will require consistent updates that may nullify initial conclusions. The inability to determine the outcome of Matteo Salvini's career ensures an incomplete analysis of his conduct as an authentic demagogue. For this reason, my case study cannot claim to be fully comprehensive.

In conclusion, my extensive assessment of Matteo Salvini has verified his status as a demagogue. By displaying the three pillars of the unholy trinity--Fear, Prejudice, Ignorance--the political portrait reveals itself as being naturally demagogic. However, although this research provides a sense of definition and identification, it does not propose a solution. Consequently, my case study can only offer a tentative suggestion for preventing a demagogue from becoming a palpable threat to contemporary democracy.

The heavy emotional reliance needed to operationalize all three pillars of the unholy trinity seems to suggest that a reinforcement of education could function as an antidote to such phenomenon. Specifically, in terms of individuals' approaches to knowledge: a critical standard must be implanted. If in fact "the truth will set you free", then the attempted deceit by a politician may be deterred through a legitimately enlightened manifestation of the logos (John 8:31-32), ie, a critical ability to decode the counterfeit words of politicians. Although, the potentials to abuse ethos and pathos cannot be completely subdued, we must strive to enhance both the integrity of the message and character of those conveying it. In the absence of this, democracy will indefinitely be threatened by the dangerous rhetoric of demagogues.

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