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Climate change in Italy: Towards the politicization of an issue

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Abstract

Climate change has emerged as a critical global challenge, recognized for its significant impact on the environment and societies worldwide. Nonetheless, for a long time, the Italian political system has devoted limited attention to climate change issues. Within such a framework, this article aims to answer the main research question addressed in the contributions of this special issue: is the politicization of climate change taking place in contemporary Italy? We answer this question by analyzing the three dimensions of politicization – salience, actors' expansion, and polarization - in light of the contributions to the special issue. These studies investigate whether climate change is becoming a politicized issue by analyzing Italian parties, media, social movements, interest groups, and public opinion. Overall, the findings suggest that we are observing a partial politicization of the climate change issue in Italy. Indeed, there is evidence of an increase in salience over time in the spheres analyzed and an expansion of actors involved. Also, there are some signals of polarization, and consistent with previous research, the climate change issue largely appears positional. Nonetheless, the number of protests has substantially decreased in comparison with 2019, the approach of some actors tends to depoliticize the issue, and patterns of polarization are not unanimously detected.

1. Introduction

Given its growing impact on both the environment and societies, climate change has emerged as one of the most urgent global crises that the world must address. The scientific community agrees on the existence and severity of climate change, with numerous studies confirming the rise in global temperatures caused by human activity and the acceleration of extreme weather events (IPCC 2022). Consequently, after years of debate around climate change mitigation dominated by science, market mechanisms, technical solutions and, in general, a de-politicized understanding of it (Swyngedouw 2011), climate issues have gradually gained prominence also in political and public debates. Alongside their salience, the level of polarization on climate action has also increased (Marquardt and Lederer 2022).

Against this backdrop, the Italian political system long exhibited a notable lack of attention to climate change issues, both at the political level and within public discourse and socio-political research. Italy lacked a strong Green party, and mainstream parties, with few exceptions, did not invest significantly in topics like the environment and climate change when competing for election. When the media confronted this issue, they discussed it substantially less than in other European countries. At the same time, and

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due to the lack of salience among the media and political elites, the issue was not particularly prominent in Italian public opinion (Biancalana and Ladini 2022).

However, a series of events in recent years may have impinged upon the perception of climate change and its role in public discourse, increasing its salience and making it more polarized. Extreme weather events like the floods that took place in Marche, Emilia-Romagna, and Tuscany between 2022 and 2023, the approval of the Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza (National Recovery and Resilience Plan, PNRR) funded by the Next Generation EU program – whose second mission deals with the green revolution and ecological transition – and the emergence of new and widely-supported social movements like Fridays for Future, may have influenced the context of the climate change debate, opening up spaces for greater awareness and action. Relatedly, how to address the climate crisis was among the issues discussed in 2024 Italian electoral campaign to renew the European Parliament (EP).

At the European Union (EU) level, this election showed a significant setback for the parliamentary group of the Greens/European Free Alliance (EFA), who retrenched from 72 to 54 Members of the EP (MEPs) mainly due to the vote losses of German and French contributors to the Greens EP group (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen and Les Écologistes – Europe Écologie Les Verts). In contrast, the Italian electoral list Alleanza Verdi Sinistra, including the green party Europa Verde and Sinistra Italiana performed rather well, obtaining 6.8% of the votes in a context of low participation (the turnout was 48.3%). Thanks to this result, which was probably driven by civil liberties issues due to the candidacy of Ilaria Salis[1], the number of Italian MEPs attached to the Greens/EFA (3) remained unchanged compared to the previous EP legislature.

What is important to emphasize for the purpose of this special issue is that, compared to the past, all electoral manifestos for the 2024 EP elections mentioned climate issues and did not question the existence of climate change. Additionally, it is noteworthy that the positions taken by parties on this issue aligned with their left-right ideological stance. On one side, Italian right-wing parties in government campaigned for a revision of the EU Green Deal, the plan by which the EU set the goal to become the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. Giorgia Meloni's Fratelli d'Italia linked the issue of climate change to the protection of the agricultural sector and promised to radically change the "greenhouse" directive of the EU ban on the production of petrol and diesel cars from 2035. Similarly, also the Lega of Matteo Salvini campaigned for a significant revision of the EU Green Deal, while Forza Italia maintained a more nuanced position, asking for more realistic and non-ideologically-driven green policies to protect the industrial sector. On the other side, opposition parties of the left – Partito Democratico, Movimento 5 Stelle, and Alleanza Verdi Sinistra – explicitly defended the Green Deal and called for the adoption of even more ambitious climate action and goals[2].

In light of this, the special issue aims to investigate whether an environmental divide capable of (re-)structuring Italian politics is emerging. Is politicization – the process through which issues are framed as controversial topics and become subjects of political

[1] Ilaria Salis is an Italian activist arrested in Budapest in February 2023 on charges of assaulting neo-Nazi activists. In the 2024 European elections Salis was elected, thus gaining release and parliamentary immunity.

[2] For a first analysis on the climate change issues in the electoral manifestos see https://eccoclimate.org/it/elezioni-europee-clima-e-energia-nei-programmi-elettorali/ (last access on June 24, 2024).

confrontation among parties and citizens – taking place on climate change? How do political parties and voters approach climate change and the green transition? What is the role played by new environmental social movements, and what are their repertoires of action? Has the media coverage of climate change evolved? Do policy proposals for a green and just transition reinforce existing divides or create new conflicts? Is climate change related to voting behavior?

Answering these questions is particularly relevant because Italy has been facing significant challenges regarding climate change[3]. Data from Legambiente show a growing incidence of extreme weather events in our country. Nevertheless, the Italian political framework presents significant gaps, such as the absence of a comprehensive climate law and delay in adopting a climate change adaptation plan, approved only in December 2023. These factors highlight the need for an in-depth analysis of Italian politics and society on climate change, not only to understand the dynamics, but also to identify the opportunities and challenges in addressing it.

This introductory article is structured as follows. After providing a definition of politicization, the next section introduces the contributions included in this collection. The definition will be adopted in the third section to interpret the results of single papers and to provide an overall picture. The final section concludes by highlighting limitations and future research avenues.

2. Why and how to study the politicization of climate change in Italy

As anticipated, in this special issue we aim to address a central question that has yet to find an answer in the existing literature: is politicization taking place with respect to climate change issues in Italy? This question will guide the articles featured in this collection.

Politicization, in general, refers to the process of bringing an issue into the political sphere, involving decision making and conflict over differing views on potential solutions (De Wilde and Zürn 2012). Although various definitions exist, the literature generally agrees on three key dimensions: the salience of the issue, meaning its importance and visibility in public debate, the expansion of actors involved in the issue, and the polarization of actors with differing orientations on the issue, i.e., the increase in distance between their positions. When all three dimensions are present, we can assert that an issue is politicized. However, it can also happen that only some of these analytical components are present, resulting in partial or moderate politicization (Kriesi 2016).

We can also investigate if the issue is undergoing depoliticization, for instance by being relegated to the realm of scientific expertise or fate. Depoliticization is understood as "the process of removing the political character of decision-making processes" (Burnham 2001, 128). This involves closing down debates and avoiding controversies, often by promoting the idea that "there is no alternative" to professionalization, technocratization, or delegation to agencies (Feindt, Schwindenhammer and Tosun 2021, 5).

[3] See for instance: https://www.legambiente.it/comunicati-stampa/2023-anno-da-bollino-rosso-per-il-clima/ (Accessed on the 29th of August 2024)

Using Italy as a case study, this special issue explores how social and political scientists approach the politics of climate change in Italy, focusing on the dynamics of politicization and depoliticization. To achieve this, the special issue covers a wide range of approaches and methods. It gathers eight articles on the politics of climate change in Italy, incorporating original evidence from multiple actors, including political parties (Campolongo, Citroni and Tarditi 2023; Cotta et al. 2023; Padoan 2023), social movements (Zamponi, Ferro and Cugnata 2023), interest groups (Arrigoni 2023), the media (Imperatore and Frazzetta 2023) and public opinion (Bordignon et al. 2023; Cabeza, Ronchi and Sallabera 2023). We believe that an integrated approach, both in terms of actors and methods, will provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, as certain research questions can be more effectively addressed from multiple perspectives.

Furthermore, besides the issue of politicization or depoliticization, we are interested in how the context of multiple crises has influenced climate change issues. For instance, contributions also explore how other crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and the energy crisis, have impacted the discourse and actions related to climate change.

In this special issue readers will encounter various actors. First, we address the role and position of political parties. In this respect, we consider both the national party system (e.g., Campolongo, Citroni and Tarditi's article analyzes the evolution of party platforms on energy, and Padoan examines the evolution of environmental positions within the Movimento 5 Stelle) and the European level (Cotta and colleagues discuss the vote for the Social Climate Fund in the European Parliament). Secondly, regarding social movements, Zamponi, Ferro and Cugnata's article examines the new wave of climate mobilization that took place in Italy following Greta Thunberg's strikes. Additionally, we tackle topics that are less explored in the literature, such as the role of intermediate actors like organized philanthropy in the strategic depoliticization of climate issues (see Arrigoni's article).

The special issue also covers the demand side (see Cabeza, Ronchi and Sallabera's article), focusing on public opinion and attitudes towards climate policies, and includes a paper on the propensity to vote for green parties (Bordignon and colleagues). Finally, all these discussions occur within a public sphere where the debate on these issues is evolving. On this topic, readers will find a paper analyzing how the media has covered extreme climate events and the issue of climate change in general (see Imperatore and Frazzetta's article).

3. Towards the politicization of a controversial issue?

What can the evidence gathered in this special issue tell us about the politicization of climate change issues in Italy? In the following paragraphs, we will do this by analyzing the three dimensions of politicization separately: salience, actor expansion, and polarization.

3.1. Salience

The first dimension of the concept of politicization is salience. We can refer to salience as the political importance of issues (Burden and Sanberg 2003), or the measure of how important a given issue is from the viewpoint of members of a given social unit

(Oehl, Schaffer and Bernauer 2017). Salience can pertain to public opinion, media, and political parties.

Three points warrant attention with respect to salience. First, the fact that an issue is visible, discussed, present on the public opinion agenda, and considered important in public debate, civil society, or the political system, is a *precondition* for its politicization. For instance, it has been demonstrated that a higher salience of climate policy is associated with a more contested debate on the issue (Oehl, Schaffer and Bernauer 2017), and that the polarization on energy and environmental issues and the salience of these issues, both at the mass and elite levels, tends to go hand in hand (Lüth and Schaffer 2022).

Second, the various actors discussed in this special issue – parties, movements, citizens, and the media – are *interconnected* in the dynamics of salience. Previous research has shown that a variation in elite cues and social movement efforts impact media attention which, in turn, influences public attitudes toward climate change (Carmichael and Brulle 2017). Similarly, the salience of environmental issues among the public and the pressure from the movements for climate justice were found to positively influence the emphasis that political parties place on it (Schwörer 2024; Spoon, Hobolt and De Vries 2014).

Third, salience can be driven by *events*. As anticipated, in recent years certain events in Italy may have potentially increased the salience of climate change issues. The growing global relevance of climate change, coupled with the approval of international agreements aimed at mitigating its effects, including the ratification of the European Green Deal (2019) and the Social Climate Fund (see Cotta and colleagues' article), the enactment of the PNRR and the energy crisis (see Campolongo, Citroni and Tarditi), along with the increasing number of extreme climate events (see Imperatore and Frazzetta), might have caused a shift in salience. Additionally, the new wave of mobilizations led by figures such as Greta Thunberg (see Zamponi, Ferro and Cugnata) has also played a significant role.

What do we know about the salience of the issue in Italy? In their literature review article, Biancalana and Ladini (2022) indicate that the issue has long been, until very recent years, of low salience for the media, political parties, and public opinion in our country. Against this backdrop, what do the articles in this special issue tell us about the dynamics of the salience of climate change issues in Italy? The articles cover various actors and themes, by particularly focusing on the role of extreme weather events, mobilizations, and the energy crisis.

Extreme weather events can impact the salience of the issue. Not only can the experience of an extreme weather event help reduce the spatial and temporal distance from the consequences of climate change, leading to greater willingness to support policies (Spence et al. 2011; Demski et al. 2017), but such events are also highly appealing to the media, which tend to cover them extensively (Djerf-Pierre 2012; Schmidt, Ivanova and Schäfer 2013). In turn, media coverage can prompt politicians to take positions on the issue. However, for this to happen, the media must establish a link between extreme weather events and climate change.

In the contribution by Imperatore and Frazzetta (2023), we see that the discourse surrounding two extreme weather events (the floods in Marche and Emilia-Romagna) witnessed an unprecedented inclusion of climate change, while in the past, when

discussing extreme events, the Italian media referred not to climate change but to apocalyptic scenarios. A study by the Osservatorio di Pavia indicates that, among the 522 news reports on extreme weather events broadcast by Italian TV news between July and August 2022, only 24% made an explicit connection to climate change, and often the cause-effect relationship was only hinted at (Azzalini and Marchese 2023). However, there are signs of change. The findings of Imperatore and Frazzetta's article suggest increased media coverage of extreme weather events and a shift in the narrative paradigm regarding global warming, compared to similar events that occurred in the past.

The two authors also suggest that the cycle of climate protests may have influenced the level of media attention to extreme weather events, a hypothesis that needs further research to verify. Although we do not have direct evidence in this regard, we can say, together with Zamponi, Ferro and Cugnata (2023: 257), that "the years since 2018 have seen an unprecedented wave of mobilization around climate change in Europe". The emergence of this new wave of climate mobilizations in 2019, following Greta Thunberg's school strikes, represented a significant step forward also for the history of the Italian climate movement, and have undoubtedly increased the salience of the issue. It is also particularly relevant to note that Zamponi and colleagues' article highlights that most of the criteria used by groups to choose their repertoires of action are based on the media relevance of the protest.

The level of salience of the climate change issue can be observed from the number of protests reported by the media. Zamponi, Ferro and Cugnata's article analyzes protest events from 2018 to 2023. The period indeed seems to be characterized by heightened conflict, with an average of 12.5 protest events per month during the period considered. However, the distribution of protest events across time on a monthly basis shows three distinct phases: first, a massive eruption of collective action, between March 2019 and January 2020, corresponding to the first global climate strikes organized under the label "Fridays For Future"; then the pandemic, with low levels of mobilization, from February 2020 to February 2021; finally, a renewed phase of post-pandemic contention, characterized by smaller peaks but also by the persistent presence of climate-related protest.

While the pandemic contributed to a decrease in the salience of environmental and climate change issues, it is worth analyzing the impact of another crisis: that of energy, which began in 2022 following the war in Ukraine. On the one hand, this crisis could potentially foster the development of new climate and energy policies in Europe (Steffen and Patt 2022; Natili and Visconti 2023). On the other hand, it could be seen as a potential obstacle in the fight against climate change, with the risk of neglecting ecological transition, for example, by emphasizing the use of fossil fuels during the emergency (Zakeri et al. 2022; Biancalana and Loreti 2024).

In this regard, Campolongo, Citroni and Tarditi (2023) analyze the 2022 election manifestos and indicate an overall increase in the relevance given to the energy issue compared to the past. Furthermore, on the left, the framing of energy issues has increasingly shifted towards sustainability, which becomes a more frequently used frame, indirectly indicating greater salience of the climate change issue. This does not come as a surprise, and as we will see in the section on polarization, there is a left-right divide both in public opinion and within parties, with the left more inclined than the right to take ownership of the issue (Lakoff 2010, McCright et al. 2016).

But what space would there be for a party prioritizing sustainability and environmental protection in the Italian political system? Would it be limited to the left-wing area? Indirectly, this is also a measure of salience. Bordignon and colleagues (2023) ask a sample of the Italian population about the likelihood of supporting a hypothetical political party that prioritizes sustainability and environmental protection in its agenda. Despite the potential shortcomings of the measure, which could overestimate the green vote, the size of the Propensity for Green Voting (PGV) area is large and intersects the potential electorate of all parties, including non-voters.

It seems, therefore, that the issue is becoming more and more salient among parties, voters, and in the public debate in Italy.

3.2. Actor expansion

The second dimension characterizing the politicization of an issue is actor expansion. The process of politicization requires not only an increase in the salience of an issue but also that political entrepreneurs invest in it by acting as polarizing agents capable of mobilizing interests and voters along social and cultural divides. This would imply an increase in actors – including individual citizens, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), political parties, interest groups, and governmental bodies – who contribute to public contestation. Furthermore, actor expansion should be understood not only as the inclusion in public debates of new participants alongside traditionally dominant actors but also as "audience expansion", reflected in public opinion figures (Hutter and Kerscher 2016) and in attempts to engage "inactive" actors.

As they increasingly entail broader socio-economic consequences and transformations, discourses and policies relating to climate change have, in the last decade, left the exclusive realm of the expert community and niche parties, and are beginning to be shaped by a wider range of actors (Marquardt and Lederer 2022). Discussions on climate change have attracted the attention of a growing number of new and old political actors at the local, national, and international levels, making it a more prominent arena of public conflict (Hulme 2009; Ćetković and Hagemann 2020; Marquardt and Lederer 2022). On one side, along with traditional left and green parties and associations, the emergence of social movements like climate justice groups, Fridays for Future (FFF) and Extinction Rebellion (XR) initiated a struggle for the introduction of just and fair mitigation policies through protests, disruptive action, and demands for systemic change (Marquardt 2020). On the other side (and in reaction to this), radical right political actors started to challenge the narrative of climate change as a global challenge (Marquardt and Lederer 2022). Leaders like Donald Trump in the United States, Duterte in the Philippines, Bolsonaro in Brazil, and Milei in Argentina, as well as parties that experienced electoral success in the 2024 EP elections like the Rassemblement National in France, Alternative für Deutschland in Germany, and the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs in Austria all embraced positions ranging from questioning anthropogenic climate change to the rejection of the Green Deal and other policy mitigation strategies.

Contributions in this special issue help us to understand whether the Italian political arena has experienced an expansion of political actors participating in public contestations on climate change and its related consequences and policies. Looking at organized interests, the articles of Arrigoni (2023), and Zamponi, Ferro and Cugnata

(2023) emphasize an increasing political role played by organized philanthropy and social movements on climate issues, but with contrasting practices of politicization and depoliticization.

Regarding social movements, we know that in the last two decades traditional actors that "owned the issue" like Legambiente, WWF Italia, and Italia Nostra, have lost their centrality in favor of more informal groups, like citizens' committees and social centers involved in Locally Unwanted Land Use (LULU) campaigns (Andretta and Imperatore 2023). In their article, Zamponi, Ferro and Cugnata, through a mixed-methods design combining Protest Event Analysis (PEA) and interviews with climate activists, identify FFF, XR, and Ultima Generazione (UG) as the main political actors of Italian climate protests. Alongside these groups, they noted the presence of a plurality of other actors not primarily focusing on ecological claims, such as student organizations, parties, social centers and other movement groups. They often join strikes and demonstrations, proving an expansion of actors (with different levels of institutionalization) interested in climate change issues.

A complementary component of actor expansion consists in the broadening of protest recipients. Zamponi, Ferro and Cugnata show that in Italy in the pre-COVID phase, the main targets of social movements' actions were government institutions and the public at large, with attempts to expand the audience through global strikes. During the 2022 electoral campaign to renew the Italian parliament, mainstream political parties also became the target of protests. Private interests have been targeted as well, with a particular focus on fossil fuel companies like *ENI*. Instead, while the media have been used by activists to gauge the efficacy of their repertoire of action, they have not been explicitly targeted. Based on the results of their protests and their ability to expand the debate on climate change, the new organizations have also re-articulated their actions in an attempt to become more effective in enhancing their environmental stances. They have also started a discussion on the merits of conventional participation, envisaging the potential institutionalization of Italian green social movements.

While these actors, particularly the new movements like FFF, XR, and UG, have adopted a "critical debate perspective" focusing on the politicization of climate change to revive democratic debate and contestation on sustainable futures by linking it to issues of justice, societal struggles, and political order (Pepermans and Maeseele 2016), the spread to other actors may have been constrained by efforts to actively depoliticize environmental issues through the adoption of science-based trajectories and technological solutions (Marquardt and Lederer 2022). In her contribution, Arrigoni focuses on the depoliticizing role played by climate-related networks of Italian organized philanthropy, i.e., foundations or associations that make strategic use of their financial assets for the public good. Philanthropic organizations have grown significantly in recent decades and have become increasingly involved in shaping discourses and policies to combat climate change. For instance, they acted as key allies and intermediaries between the government and civil society during the 2015 Paris Agreement and were able to influence its outcome by emphasizing specific discourses and strategies like sustainable development, green economy and the belief that the market can solve the climate crisis (Morena 2016).

Based on an analysis of official documents and interviews with representatives of Italian climate networks, Arrigoni scrutinizes the role of the four main networks of Italian foundations (Asvis, Itasif, Assifero and F-20), to show how they have contributed to shifting decision-making responsibility to non-political actors. The discursive depoliticization of public action on climate change has developed in parallel to the politicization of philanthropic networks. They act as policy entrepreneurs promoting specific policy solutions and as field-builders, mobilizing to construct discourses that permeate the institutional policy environment. These networks and associations take on a political role by commissioning studies on climate policymaking and by disseminating them to leading political and economic actors. Like their international counterparts, Italian networks support a techno-optimist paradigm to green transition that tends to depoliticize the issues at stake and reinforce the role of private actors and financial instruments. Therefore, the political actions of movements such as FFF, XR, or UG risk being stifled by this contrasting dynamic.

Lastly, this special issue informs us about actor expansion concerning political supply. We know that Green parties and issues have always played a marginal role in the Italian political arena. The main Green party, the former Federazione dei Verdi now Europa Verde, was established in the early 1990s and always scored about three per cent of the votes in national legislative elections. However, in the last EP elections Greens joined forces with another party (Sinistra Italiana) and formed the Alleanza Verdi Sinistra federation. Alleanza Verdi Sinistra obtained slightly less than seven per cent of the votes, roughly the sum of the share of votes for the two parties: a result that does not testify to an "electoral green turn". More interesting changes are those related to mainstream political parties that in the past did not consider environmental issues worth electoral investment (Biancalana and Ladini 2022). As discussed above, all major parties mentioned green issues in their electoral manifesto for the 2024 EP elections, signaling attempts to mobilize the electorate on climate change and, therefore, actors' expansion.

Previously, the only major party that, albeit for a short time span, represented environmental issues in the Italian political system is the Movimento 5 Stelle. At its origins, this party was characterized by an environmentalist agenda (Mosca and Tronconi 2021), and its emergence has been linked to environmentalist movements (Biancalana 2020). Padoan's article focuses on the evolution of the discourses and practices of the Movimento 5 Stelle on environmental issues. Using a mixed method design (analyzing manifestos, official documents, and interviews), Padoan evaluates the Movimento 5 Stelle's environmental trajectory and whether it can be considered a "true" green party. Findings confirm that environmental protection was a key value for the Movimento 5 Stelle in shaping its original identity and gathering the first core of party members. However, over time the party undertook a process of institutionalization (Tronconi 2018) and moderation during its period in power (Biancalana 2020) and forgot about its green origins. Consistently, Padoan shows that environmentalism was not the reason behind the electoral success of the Movimento 5 Stelle, which was due instead to its anti-system/populist agenda. Thus it cannot be considered as belonging to the Green party family.

Still, concerning actors' expansion at the institutional level, it is worth noting that the Movimento 5 Stelle decision to join the technocratic Draghi government was

justified by party leaders also as the opportunity to create a Ministry for Ecological Transition as a replacement for the previous Ministry of the Environment[4]. This is a rhetorical innovation useful to the Movimento 5 Stelle leadership, to "justify" to the party base, participation in a technocratic government coalition with mainstream parties. It was no coincidence that, before the government confidence vote in February 2021, Mario Draghi dedicated a relatively large part of his speech to discussing climate change, global warming, and the green transition[5].

On the whole, the empirical evidence collected in the papers supports the idea that a growing number of new (especially social movements) and old actors (organized philanthropy and parties) are engaging with public action and discussions on the environment and climate change, to politicize (in the case of FFF and XR) or (in organized philanthropy) to de-politicize it.

3.3. Polarization

The third dimension of the politicization of an issue is polarization. Polarization of an issue consists of divergent positions among parties, media, and the public. Following Di Maggio, Evans and Bryson (1996, 693), polarization can be defined as "both a state and a process". Thus, it is crucial to highlight the two meanings of polarization, namely societies (as well as media and party systems) that are polarized and societies (as well as media and party systems) that are polarizing over an issue. For instance, in the US context, we can talk about the polarization of climate change both in terms of a state and a process (Egan and Mullin 2017).

Regarding the Italian case, recent research shows that parties employ different frames when referring to environmental issues and citizens' attitudes toward climate change and that such frames vary by political orientation (Bertolotti and Catellani 2023; Biancalana and Ladini 2024). Nonetheless, at the public opinion level, there is no clear evidence of an increasing gap in climate attitudes between people holding different political orientations (Biancalana and Ladini 2024). Of course, it becomes hard to investigate the process of polarization among the public, given the rare availability of repeated measures on climate change attitudes in national and international surveys. Moreover, the absence of measurement of climate issues in projects like the Comparative Manifesto Project (Farstad 2018; Schworer 2024) is a barrier to research aimed at exploring the dynamics of climate change issues in the party system.

Several articles in the special issue provide original and updated evidence on the possible polarization of climate change in Italy. In this regard, what conclusions can we derive by integrating multiple pieces of evidence? First of all, we should acknowledge that, with the exception of Campolongo, Citroni and Tarditi's contribution, the articles on the issue of polarization are more focused on the idea of polarization as a state rather than a process. The empirical evidence reported in the special issue offers limited signals of polarization, as not all the findings point into such a direction.

[4] See for instance: www.ilsole24ore.com/art/il-m5s-caos-governisti-sperano-un-segnale-draghi-far-vincere-si-ADQ1K6IB (Accessed on the 11th of June 2024).

[5] See for instance: Il discorso di Draghi al Senato: Ha preceduto il dibattito e il voto sulla fiducia, che sarà votata da quasi tutti i partiti. Il Post, 17th February 2021: www.ilpost.it/2021/02/17/draghi-discorso-fiducia-senato/ (accessed on the 11th of June 2024).

Bordignon and colleagues (2023) indeed show that the electoral potential of a hypothetical party focusing on environmental protection and sustainability cross cuts party preferences. Although the electoral demand is stronger among supporters of center-left parties (especially Alleanza Verdi Sinistra and Movimento 5 Stelle), the authors show that the green electoral demand finds a fragmented representation, partially including also supporters of right-wing parties. These results could suggest high consensus toward environmental issues and, accordingly, low polarization. Nonetheless, such consensus could depend on the frame employed by the authors in presenting the hypothetical green parties. Indeed, environmental protection tends to be intended as a valence issue, and even far-right parties often promote it (Forchtner and Lubarda 2023). Moreover, when referring to environmental issues the frame of environmental protection is relatively more common among right-wing parties also in Italy (Biancalana and Ladini 2024).

Nonetheless, several studies argue that climate change should be intended as a positional issue since it implies "the combination of the fundamental restructuring of the economy and human behavior together with the altruistic imperative" (Farstad 2018, 699). Indeed, right-wing parties tend not to promote actions for the mitigation of climate change, as argued in the previous section. Therefore, while Bordignon and colleagues' results indicate that there is significant potential demand for green parties among the Italian electorate, this does not necessarily mean that there is cross-cutting demand for a party prioritizing climate change and its mitigation. Moreover, as the climate change question is becoming more and more crucial among environmental issues, the latter are gradually shifting from valence to positional issues. Padoan's (2023) article contributes to this literature, by reporting the change in the narrative of the environmental discourse of the Movimento 5 Stelle, from valence to positional issues.

Climate change issues can be considered positional also because the ecological transition, devised in order to mitigate its effects, does not come without costs, and has consequences at the economic and societal levels. Therefore, policymakers may design compensatory instruments for supporting those categories of people bearing the costs of decarbonization (Gaikwad, Genovese and Tingley 2022). Within the broader program of the European Green Deal, the Social Climate Fund, approved by the European Parliament in the spring of 2023, goes in this direction. By analyzing Italian MEP votes for the Social Climate Fund, Cotta and colleagues (2023) report high consensus among Italian parties, even among Lega and Fratelli d'Italia, contrary to the authors' expectations. The votes did not strictly pertain to climate policies, but rather compensation measures for vulnerable people. Given that the process of ecological transition is ongoing, even parties not supporting the ecological transition supported those social measures. The authors indeed suggest the possible existence of a social coalition on the ecological transition.

Moreover, previous research analyzing politicians' speeches in the Italian parliament (2013-2018, Ghinoi and Steiner 2020) and the Emilia-Romagna regional council (2014-2020, Ghinoi, De Vita and Silvestri 2023) argues that large coalitions can emerge on the climate change issue. Nonetheless, Cotta and colleagues report divergence – between center-left parties, including Movimento 5 Stelle, and other parties – in the voting patterns on amendments strictly concerning climate policies, such as linking economic support for countries and small enterprises with more ambiguous targets on the ecological transition, such as reducing carbon emissions.

When we look at the dynamics of party competition over the energy issue, polarization on climate change – both as a state and a process – emerges. By analyzing Italian parties' manifestos in the period 2018-2022, Campolongo, Citroni and Tarditi (2023) argue that political parties employed different frames, and that these frames have changed over time, especially after the beginning of the Ukrainian war and the consequent energy crisis. Parties' positions on energy issues show a left-right alignment. In 2022, the authors show that Alleanza Verdi Sinistra, Movimento 5 Stelle, and the Partito Democratico adopted a sustainability frame when referring to the energetic transition, Forza Italia an eco-modernist frame, while Lega and Fratelli d'Italia an eco-nationalist one. As regards the process of polarization, Campolongo, Citroni and Tarditi point out that the Partito Democratico has moved over time from an eco-modernist position to a sustainability one, and a similar dynamic was observed for the Movimento 5 Stelle. Nonetheless, the analysis suggests that no party explicitly opposed the energy and ecological transition in the party manifesto: thus, there are no explicit signs of climate change denial.

While Campolongo, Citroni and Tarditi point out that external shocks such as the Ukrainian war can impact on party polarization over energy transition, Imperatore and Frazzetta (2023) focus on the impact of extreme weather events as a driver of the polarization of climate change. Their article reports signs of polarization of the climate change issue on occasion of the floods that hit the Marche and Emilia-Romagna regions respectively in September 2022 – during the national electoral campaign – and May 2023. By looking at the media system, they analyze how different newspapers employed different frames in representing the floods. By analyzing articles on the floods appearing in three Italian newspapers aligned with different political areas (*Il Foglio,* aligned with the liberal-conservative area; *Il Fatto Quotidiano* aligned with the Movimento 5 Stelle, and *La Repubblica*, aligned with the center-left) the authors show a substantial gap in the use of the "climate change" term when referring to the floods, depending on the political orientation of the newspaper.

Moreover, they report substantial differences in the politicians' attributions of the causes of the floods. In particular, left-wing parties were more likely to explain the floods in *Emilia-Romagna* through climate change, while right-wing parties assign higher relevance to prevention and land management. These results are consistent with other findings showing the differentiated attribution of the main cause of the Emilia-Romagna floods in public opinion, depending on ideology and party preferences (Biancalana and Ladini 2024). In other words, there are signs of polarization over climate change in the causes of the floods.

Finally, by analyzing public opinion, Cabeza, Ronchi and Sallabera (2023) respond to a recent call for research on public support for climate policies (Fairbrother 2022), by providing unique evidence on Italians' preferences toward a set of policies. In line with extant international research (Rhodes, Axsen and Jaccard 2017), they show that the carbon tax is the least preferred policy, and in general tax policies are the least favored among the public while subsidies are by far the most popular instruments. This paper also provides original evidence on the role of political orientation in influencing attitudes toward climate policies in the Italian context. Nonetheless, there is no evidence of polarization among the public, as differences between people with different ideological

orientations are limited and unremarkable for certain policies, such as subsidies. This is not true only for support for investment in nuclear power plants, a traditionally polarizing issue. However, as the authors argue, the nuclear issue was highly politicized in the Italian public and political area long before the climate crisis gained relevance.

These findings indirectly suggest a low level of politicization of climate policies in Italy. Nonetheless, Cabeza, Ronchi and Sallabera show the remarkable role of the economic dimension of political ideology, namely citizens' positions on state intervention in the economy, in explaining public support for climate policies, outweighing the role of the cultural dimension of political ideology. Moreover, perceived economic conditions and geographical factors are less relevant than political attitudes in explaining public support for climate policies.

As we have argued, the overall picture shows limited signals of polarization in the Italian context, but the empirical evidence is variegated. Of course, there are no findings supporting convergence on the climate change issue between different actors.

4. Conclusions: A partial politicization of climate change in an evolving context

Previous research has found substantial heterogeneity in the politicization of climate change across European countries (Fisher 2022). This special issue aims to focus on a single context, the Italian one, in order to understand whether we can talk about a politicization of climate change. We already know that, differently from the US (McCright and Dunlap 2010, 2011), and other Anglo-Saxon countries (McKie 2018), the Italian context is not characterized by the presence of an organized denial countermovement. Moreover, Italy does not stand out in Europe for environmental and climate policies (Cotta and Domorenok 2022). However, in answering the question many pieces of the puzzle are missing.

In a previous contribution, Biancalana and Ladini (2022) proposed a research agenda for studying the climate change issue in Italy from the perspective of social and political research. The articles appearing in this special issue significantly contribute to the pursuit of such a research agenda, by showing original evidence regarding the climate change issue across several actors of the political system.

The empirical evidence from this special issue tends to support the conclusions recently drawn by Biancalana and Ladini (2024), who argue that we are observing a partial politicization of the climate change issue in Italy. Of course, there is rather consistent evidence of an increase in salience over time in the several spheres analyzed, and an expansion of actors involved. Also, there are some signals of polarization and, consistent with previous research, the climate change issue largely appears as positional. Nonetheless, the number of protests has substantially decreased in comparison with 2019, the approach of some actors tends to depoliticize the issue, and patterns of polarization are not unanimously detected. However, in light of the increasing manifest consequences of climate change, we can expect that the picture could evolve rapidly. Some signals in this direction could derive from increasing exposure to more intense extreme weather events, which can contribute to enhancing the level of politicization of climate change (Biancalana and Ladini 2024; Imperatore and Frazzetta in this special issue).

Although the special issue allows us to tackle several topics regarding different actors, there are some relevant aspects which are not sufficiently covered. For instance, a comprehensive study on the evolution of the coverage of climate change in various media outlets could contribute to the assessment of the politicization of the climate change issue at the media level. Also, while there is empirical evidence of an alignment between climate attitudes and party preferences (Bertolotti and Catellani 2023), future research should explore to what extent climate attitudes matter in explaining voting behavior. Recent research has found that the issue yield of the mitigation of climate change was not among the highest for any Italian party in the 2022 elections (De Sio, Maggini and Mannoni 2024). This result could affect party strategy in emphasizing climate change, and accordingly the role of climate attitudes in vote choice.

All in all, we can conclude that the climate change issue is partially politicized, but the evolving political, societal and environmental context points toward increasing politicization. Future research will allow for the consolidation and updating of evidence on the politicization of the climate issue, by accounting for the interplay of all the involved actors.

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The politics of the European Green and Fair Transition: Italian parties' voting behaviour in the European Parliament

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Abstract

The consequences of increasing temperatures and of weather-related environmental disasters have become globally evident, including in the European Union (EU), where countries such as Italy have been recognized as being particularly vulnerable to climate change. As a response to these threats, the European Commission (EC) launched the European Green Deal in 2019 with the ambition of transforming the EU into a 'fair and prosperous society with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy' through a 'socially just ecological transition' by 2050 (EC 2019: 2). New policy instruments have been discussed and adopted at the European level to attain a Green and Fair Transition (GFT), such as the Social Climate Fund (SCF) created to support member states' reduction of carbon emissions in the transport and building sectors. Despite a growing academic interest in the SCF in assessing the EC's proposal and its environmental and social features, knowledge on the politics of the SCF remains limited. Building on research analysing the structure of party competition in the European Parliament (EP), this article investigates inter-party competition and coalition making on the adoption of the SCF. It does so by analysing voting behaviour on the SCF (draft and adopted) regulation, as discussed and voted for in the plenary sessions of the EP. The empirical focus is placed on Italian political parties, Italy being one of the major beneficiaries of the SCF but at the same time having recognised climate-related weaknesses and a lack of reform ambition on climate policies. Providing novel data on the politics behind the SCF, the article sheds light on the supporting coalitions as well as on the conflicts and synergies between Italian and other European political parties on green and fair transition matters.

1. Introduction

The Green Transition (GT) – the transition to a climate-neutral economy – is increasingly at the centre of the agenda in both national and European Union (EU) politics. In the last few years there has been considerable debate about the need for effective policies to reduce emissions while protecting vulnerable groups. This has led to talk of a Green and Fair Transition (GFT) (EC 2019). While much has been written about the EU strategy to address climate change and the transition to a zero-emission economy, much less is known about the politics of the GFT itself. The present article addresses this issue with the aim of contributing to the systematisation of

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empirical evidence on the EU politics of the green and just transition while investigating the complex interaction between national and European political dynamics. We do this by focusing our analysis on the most recent and, to some extent, ambitious programme passed by the EU as part of the implementation of the European Green Deal (EGD), the Social Climate Fund (SCF), supporting member states' reduction of carbon emissions in the transport and building sectors. We look at the European Parliament (EP) where the different political groups debated and voted on the regulation of the SCF. The research question at the core of the article is about the type of political coalition that supported or opposed the adoption of the SCF, with a focus on the voting behaviour of the Italian Members of the European Parliament (MEPs).

The analysis of the Italian MEPs is of relevance, given that Italy is one of the major beneficiaries of the SCF, with a 10.8% share of the total member states' allocation (EP 2023b: Annex II). At the same time, Italy is considered to be among the EU laggards in adopting environmental policies at a national level, with Italian governments showing little ambition with regard to green reforms (Cotta and Domorenok 2022).

To better understand the coalitions of political parties voting for the adoption of the SCF in the EP, the article reviews the literature on the politics of the GFT in two ways. On the one hand, we look at the main hypotheses developed by authors who have analysed the political dynamics of the green transition, which assume that green parties and parties on the left of the political spectrum are the main promoters of GFT policies. On the other, we refer to the main contributions on EU politics and multilevel governance, which assume interrelations between EU and national politics with parties and their coalition strategies resulting from a mix of different goals at different governance levels. The SCF and its approval in the EP provide us with the opportunity to analyse the alignment between different political groups in the EP on the policies to fight climate change and uncover the complexity and the conflicts that the definition of GFT policies entails. This alignment challenges some of the main hypotheses proposed in the literature. By analysing the voting behaviour of European political parties, and providing a text analysis of the amendments discussed in the EP's plenary sessions when the SCF draft regulation was debated, we show that together with the mainstream parties supporting the Commission's EGD agenda, namely the group of the European People's Party (EPP), Renew Europe (RE) and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D), parties on the right of the policy spectrum have also played a key role in the adoption of the SCF. This is particularly the case for the Italian delegations of *Fratelli d'Italia* (Brothers of Italy, FdI) and the *Lega*, who voted for the regulation and contributed to the approval of the SCF.[1]

The article is structured as follows: Section 2 provides a brief review of the literature on the coalition strategies of parties and the complex interaction of EU and national party politics. It also sheds light on the politics of the GFT. Section 3 provides key information on the SCF, its set up and approval through a long legislative process. Section 4 analyses the plenary votes on the SCF between 2022 and 2023 to provide

[1] We acknowledge the scholarly debate on the ideological position of FdI, a party which is labelled by some authors as 'national-conservative' rather than 'radical right' or 'far-right' (see Vassallo & Vignati 2024). Given the focus of this article, we do not enter into this debate, but use the label 'most right-wing' or 'far-right' to simply identify those groups or parties spatially placed on the right of the policy spectrum (and on the right of the EPP) in the EP.

evidence of the voting behaviour of the parliamentary groups, their cohesion and defections, and the winning coalitions. Section 5 provides concluding reflections on the SCF supporting coalitions, the multilevel politics of GFT policies and the voting behaviour of Italian parties.

2. The politics of Green and Fair Transition

In December 2019, the European Commission led by Ursula von der Leyen presented the EGD as an economic growth strategy that aimed to transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society, becoming the first carbon-neutral continent by 2050. Early studies on this policy document have highlighted its explicit recognition of a synergic integration between environmental and social policy goals and its attention to the potential trade-offs that may arise from this integration (Sabato and Fronteddu 2020; Mandelli 2022). Such policy has been complemented with additional instruments such as, for example, the Just Transition Fund (JTF) and the SCF. Existing research has provided a historical excursus on the development of these GFT policies stressing the political conflicts between political actors and the contentious discussions on their adoption. Recent studies have shown how the EGD has provided the grounds for gaining the support of the EP and legitimising Ursula von der Leyen as President of the EC (Graziano 2024), while at the same time inter-institutional debates have shaped the adoption of JTF and the SCF (Crespy and Munta 2023; Sabato and Mandelli 2023). Among the studies on the SCF, contributions have particularly highlighted how conflicts emerged as confrontations between EU institutions, and mostly between the co-legislators, i.e., the EP and the Council (Kyriazi and Miró 2022; Crespy and Munta 2023), as well as struggles on the amounts of resources allocated to the EU member states and between EU net-budget contributors and recipients (Crespy and Munta 2023; Sabato and Mandelli 2023).

The politicisation of environmental and welfare policies has characterised ideological conflicts along the left/right political spectrum. The research on public opinion policy orientation documents a correlation between individuals' pro-welfare positions and egalitarian ideology, beliefs about social justice and social mobility (e.g., Calzada *et al.* 2014). Other research explores the salience of environmental issues in public opinion with pro-environmental positions leaning towards the left side of the political spectrum (e.g., McCright *et al.* 2016). Among those studies addressing the GFT, contributions have focused on public opinion on synergies and trade-offs between environmental and social policies (e.g., Jackobsson *et al.* 2018; Armingeon and Bürgisser 2021; Emilsson 2022) and identified several attitudinal groups that supported or opposed these policies (e.g., Otto and Gugushvili 2020). Recently, research has also begun to investigate questions about social and environmental attitudes, values, practices, and policy preferences to better understand individuals' dispositions on these policies (e.g., Fritz and Eversberg 2024). Only a few contributions have analysed the political preferences and ideological orientations of political parties on GFT policies. With the aim of determining the logic of action of political parties, Mandelli (2023) reviews contributions that point to left-wing political parties as promoters of welfare interests, together with trade unions, and to single-issue green parties (e.g., Folke 2014)

and left-libertarian parties (e.g., Huber *et al.* 2021), together with environmental movements (e.g., Carter and Little 2021), as promoters of environmental reforms.

Recent research has pointed also to the ideological conflicts riddling the adoption of the SCF. Crespy and Munta (2023) offer a contextual account of the divisions within the EP on the adoption of the SCF, stressing how far-right parties were initially sceptical of this initiative but also how the text was in the end adopted by an 'overwhelming majority' of MEPs (Crespy and Munta 2023:246). Building upon this analysis, in this article we seek to understand the coalition strategies of political parties supporting the SCF. Following Strom (1990) and Natali and Rhodes (2004), we thus see parties as: *vote-seekers*, in trying to gain votes and control government, o*ffice-seekers*, in expanding their control over political office in their quest for benefits and private goods, and *policy-seekers*, in their quest to represent groups and their demands, in line with social or other kinds of cleavage.

The complexity of the political strategies of parties and their representatives is further increased in the context of the EU. The latter is in fact a multilevel governance system where political parties organise themselves at two different political levels: the domestic and the EU level (for an overview, see Wolfs and Bressanelli 2023). Political groups in the EP are composed of national delegations (or national parties), maintaining significant autonomy in their political choices. In fact, while internal coordination between the national delegations within the major political groups has strengthened over time – although there is little comparable to the party whips in parliamentary systems – the smaller groups, particularly on the right of the policy spectrum, have a very decentralised decision-making system. This is confirmed by analyses of the voting cohesion of the groups, showing the (remarkably) lower cohesion of the more extreme groups on the left and especially on the right (see further below). Within the EP, therefore, to pursue their policy and vote-seeking goals, national parties do not necessarily align with their own political group, as the costs of defection are low and the sanctions weak or non-existent (Bressanelli 2022). This explains our choice, in what follows, to focus both on the EP groups and the national (Italian) delegations.

Another aspect which is worth emphasising concerns the behaviour of the political groups (and member parties) placed at the (far) right of the political spectrum. Normally, the EP – i.e., its mainstream groups – applies a *cordon sanitaire* vis-à-vis the most Eurosceptic groups, excluding them from internal decision making and office appointments (Ripoll-Servent 2019). Yet there are different types of Euroscepticism and opposition within the EP (Brack & Behm 2022). In an institutional context where different majorities feature in different policy areas, political groups and national parties to the right of the EPP should not be expected to necessarily oppose but could be part of the *ad hoc* coalitions supporting specific policies.

3. The Social Climate Fund

Since the launch of the EGD, an increase in the number of EU initiatives tackling a nexus between environmental and social policy goals is clearly perceivable (Sabato *et al.* 2023). As noted by eminent observers (Crespy and Munta, 2023; Mandelli *et al.* 2023), the SCF is a flagship policy of the EU strategy for a green and fair transition. The novelty of the SCF is the direct link between a carbon-tax instrument (the recast Emission Trading

System directive – ETS2) and measures to compensate affected low-incomers. Indeed, the SCF has a redistributive aim, i.e., promoting a rebalancing of the 'transition burden' between higher polluters (i.e., the 'polluter pays' principle) and disadvantaged social sectors. In the SCF, the environmental and social nexus is also pursued, on the one hand, via measures aimed at directly reducing emissions through technological upgrading and the reduction of pollutant mobility (i.e., the ecological goal). On the other hand, the SCF provides direct support, incentives and mobility solutions in order to accompany vulnerable consumers towards a zero-emission society, preventing the transition from impacting predominantly on them (i.e., the social goal) (European Commission 2021). The operative link between climate and social objectives is also demonstrated by the fact that the SCF will enter into force in 2027, together with the ETS2, and will be financed by the revenues obtained from the ETS2 allowances. Lastly, the innovative feature of this instrument is also due to its greater financial equipment in comparison with other GFT initiatives by the EU. Indeed, the SCF budget will be up to €65 billion (for the period 2027-2032), almost double the latter. Moreover, member states will have to formulate National Social Climate Plans and co-finance them by 25 percent, with the total amount of mobilised funds for all member states amounting to €86 billion.[2]

3.1. The legislative process: from proposal to adoption

Due to its innovative features and unprecedented financial equipment, the legislative process which led to the approval of the final regulation was far from simple. The EC launched a legislative proposal in July 2021. In the autumn, the EP assigned this file jointly to the Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) and the Committee for Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL). The appointed co-rapporteurs were David Casa (from Malta) for the EMPL committee and Esther De Lange (from the Netherlands) for the ENVI committee, both members of the EPP. They published a joint draft report in February 2022 (European Parliament 2023a). The joint report was subject to a very high number of amendments, (more than a thousand – precisely 1115). In May 2022, 75 compromised amendments were finally approved. In the end, after intensive revision, the co-rapporteurs drew up the final committee report for the plenary session.

In the plenary session of 8 June 2022, 172 other amendments were put to vote, 34 of these by roll-call. Nine of these 34 amendments were rejected, while overall, 161 amendments were adopted. The final vote on the amended text was scheduled for the subsequent plenary session of 22 June 2022, when it was adopted at first reading. The text was then referred back to the responsible Committees for the inter-institutional negotiations with the Council. Trilogue negotiations were concluded on 18 December 2022 with a provisional agreement, which was formally endorsed by the EP on 18 April 2023 in its plenary session (European Parliament 2023b) and by the Council on 24 April of that same year.

[2] Note that the Commission's original proposal of 2021 would have allocated a total of €72.2 billion with the Multiannual Financial Framework and the direct contribution of 50 percent provided by member states (European Commission 2021).

4. Empirical analysis

The legislative process points to the complexity and political importance of the SCF, observable both in terms of MEPs' activism (e.g., the number of amendments presented), and the involvement of two Committees on equal footing, with the appointment of two co-rapporteurs (interestingly, from the same political group). In what follows, we delve deeper into the analysis of the voting behaviour of MEPs – looking first at political groups, then at the Italian party delegations – based on the roll-call votes cast in the two EP plenaries of 8 June 2022 (providing the mandate for the inter-institutional negotiations) and of 18 April 2023 (voting on the final text). We observe the position taken by each political group and the Italian parties, with the aim of highlighting both the level of consensus on the SCF, and the degree of political conflict both within groups and across political parties. The focus on plenary votes – collected from the official website of the EP which makes them available in two separate files ('results of votes' and 'roll-call votes') – is necessary to capture the position of all Italian parties: i.e., not all of them are represented at Committee level, or are represented by one MEP only.

4.1. A super-grand coalition supporting the Social Climate Fund

In the first instance, the configuration of the voting behaviour of the EP groups on the whole text of the regulation (see Table 1) shows a large consensus regarding the SCF, with a super-grand coalition supporting it. This is far from being an exceptional outcome – politics in the EP is often based on oversized majorities (e.g., Hix *et al.* 2007) – but it is well worth noting that the SCF does not seem to defy the usual patterns.

In the first vote on the whole text of the regulation, the winning coalition is the same one supporting the von der Leyen Commission i.e., EPP, S&D and RE, *plus* the groups expected to be the most committed to GFT initiatives, like the Greens – European Free Alliance (G-EFA) and The Left. Moreover, there was also additional support from MEPs from the non-attached members (NI) and the European Conservative and Reformists (ECR) group. These were MEPs from *Fratelli d'Italia* (Brothers of Italy, FdI) in the ECR group, together with MEPs from the Italian *Movimento Cinque Stelle* (Five Star Movement, M5S), the Spanish *Junts per Catalunya* (JC) and the Hungarian *Fidesz* in the NI group.

In the final vote on the regulation of 18 April 2023 – following inter-institutional negotiations – the groups' positions display some adjustments. While the super-grand coalition supporting the regulation remains broadly the same, several other opposition parties converge towards supporting it. In particular, the Czech Civic Democratic Party (ODS) in the ECR group, and the Italian *Lega* in the ID group vote with the supporting majority. In sum, these votes show a large basis of support for the SCF.

Table 1: Roll-call votes on the Social Climate Fund (whole text)

	First reading: 22 June 2022			Final regulation: 18 April 2023		
	Approve	**Reject**	**Abstain**	**Approve**	**Reject**	**Abstain**
EPP	154	0	6	151	2	4
S&D	129	0	5	133	1	0
RE	80	11	6	80	11	6
G-EFA	67	0	0	67	0	0
The Left	31	4	1	31	2	1
NI	16	10	1	24	11	2
ECR	6	42	8	15	13	30
ID	0	36	21	21	35	0
Total	483	103	48	522	75	43

Source: own elaboration. Note: EPP = European People's Party; S&D = Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats; RE = Renew Europe; G-EFA = Greens – European Free Alliance; NI = Not-attached members; ECR = European Conservative and Reformists; ID = Identity and Democracy.

Moving the focus to intra-group dynamics, Table 2 shows that only the EPP, the S&D, and especially the G-EFA display a strong internal cohesion, as measured by the Agreement Index (Hix *et al.* 2007: 91).[3] Cohesion levels are lower for The Left, and especially for RE where some important national delegations – the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) from the Netherlands and the Freedom Democratic Party (FDP) from Germany – did not follow the group line. On the opposite side, as already mentioned, both within the ECR and the ID groups some national delegations split and decided to side with the majority.

Table 2: Voting cohesion (Agreement Index) of the political groups (whole text).

	First reading: 22 June 2022	**Final regulation: 18 April 2023**	**Overall cohesion: (2019-2022)**
G-EFA	1	1	0.97
EPP	0.94	0.94	0.92
S&D	0.94	0.98	0.96
The Left	0.79	0.86	0.81
RE	0.73	0.73	0.92
ECR	0.62	0.27	0.76
ID	0.44	0.43	0.64

Source: own elaboration. Note: G-EFA = Greens – European Free Alliance; EPP = European People's Party; S&D = Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats; RE = Renew Europe; ECR = European Conservative and Reformists; ID = Identity and Democracy. The Overall cohesion scores (on final votes) are from Bressanelli & De Candia 2023, 19.

Zooming in on the behaviour of the Italian MEPs and parties (Table 3), the most surprising finding is the convergence with the majority of both FdI and *Lega*, the former in both votes, the latter only on the final agreement. All Italian parties supported the

[3] The index is equal to 1 if all the members of the group vote the same way and 0 if MEPs are equally divided among the three voting options.

final regulation, with all MEPs casting their vote without a single exception and approving the regulation in the plenary vote of 18 April 2023.

Table 3: Italian party delegations: roll-call votes on the Social Climate Fund (whole text)

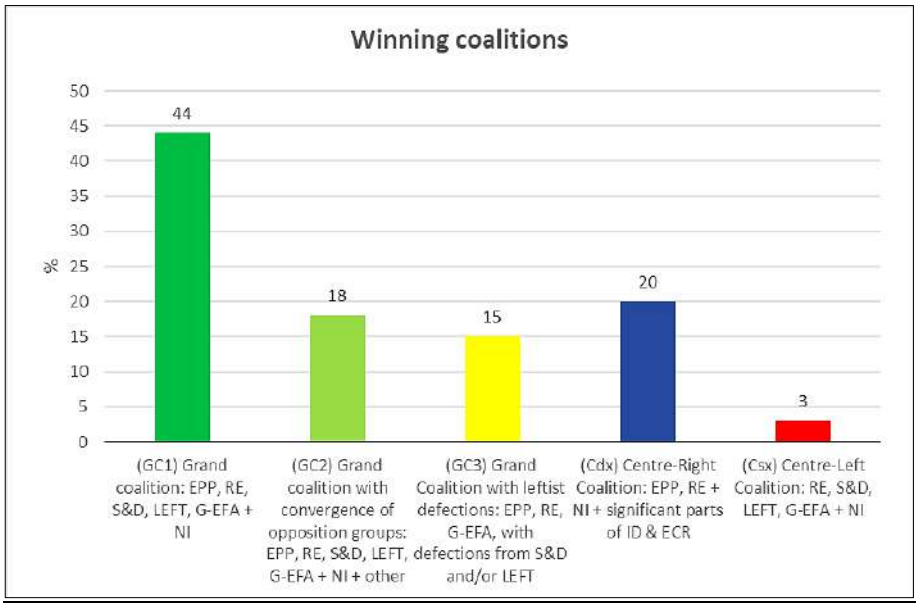
	First reading: 22 June 2022			Final regulation: 18 April 2023		
	Approve	Reject	Abstain	Approve	Reject	Abstain
PD (S&D)	15	0	0	17	0	0
FI (EPP)	9	0	0	8	0	0
FdI (ECR)	6	0	2	8	0	0
M5S (NI)	6	0	0	6	0	0
Az (RE)	1	0	0	1	0	0
IV (RE)	1	0	0	1	0	0
Ver (G-EFA)	1	0	0	0	0	0
Lega (ID)	0	0	21	21	0	0
Total	39	0	23	62	0	0

Source: own elaboration. Note: PD = Democratic Party; FI = Forza Italia; FdI = Brothers of Italy; M5S = Five Star Movement; Az = Azione/Action; IV = Italia Viva; Ver = Verdi/Greens.

4.2. Analysing amendments: winning coalitions and defections.

Beyond the votes on the whole text, we have deepened our analysis by observing how the EP's political groups positioned themselves on the 34 amendments votes – by roll-call – taking place in the plenary of 8 June 2022. Figure 1 shows that the most frequent winning majorities (44 percent of votes) are represented by a super-grand coalition (GC1) that includes EPP, S&D, RE, and left-wing groups (G-EFA and The Left), with the additional support of some other delegations sitting among the NI (usually the Italian M5S and the Spanish JC). The second most frequent configuration is a coalition of all centre-right parties (Cdx), namely EPP and RE, supported by several delegations of the ECR and ID, occurring in 20 percent of the votes and, particularly, for cases of rejection of amendments proposed by leftist and green MEPs. Another frequent configuration is a super-grand coalition (GC2) occurring in 18 percent of the votes and comprising all GC1 parties with the convergence of consistent parties from the right side of the political spectrum, mainly from the ECR group. Another configuration is the grand coalition occurring in 15 percent of the votes and comprising all groups with sizeable leftist defections (GC3), namely from S&D and/or The Left. A winning coalition of centre-left parties (Csx) comprising S&D, RE, The Left and G-EFA groups (with NI members) has occurred only once (3 percent of votes), in the case of a rejection of an amendment proposed by the two co-rapporteurs from the EPP group.

Figure 1: Winning coalitions in the plenary of 08 June 2022 (amendments)



Source: own elaboration. Note: EPP = European People's Party; S&D = Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats; RE = Renew Europe; G-EFA = Greens – European Free Alliance; = Not-attached members; ECR = European Conservative and Reformists; ID = Identity and Democracy.

Table 4: Political groups: participation in the winning coalition majority

	Winning	Losing	% Winning
RE	34	0	100
EPP	33	1	97
G-EFA	28	6	82
S&D	24	10	70.5
The Left	24	10	70.5
NI	15	18	44
ECR	13	21	38
ID	11	23	32

Source: own elaboration. Note: EPP = European People's Party; S&D = Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats; RE = Renew Europe; G-EFA = Greens – European Free Alliance; NI = Not-attached members; ECR = European Conservative and Reformists; ID = Identity and Democracy.

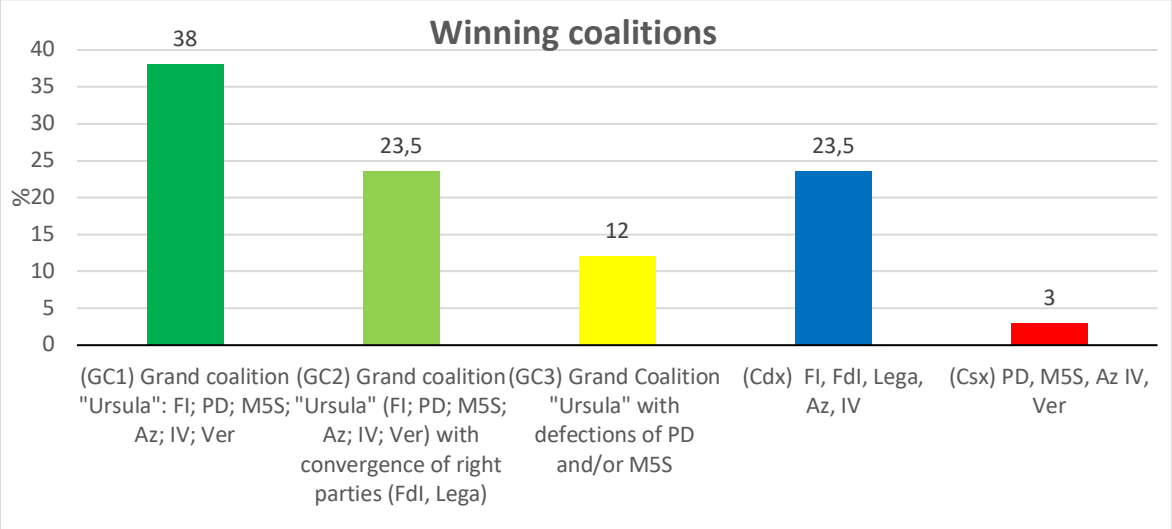
Table 4 counts the number of votes in which each group was part of the winning coalition majority, showing the key role played by the more centrist groups (the EPP and RE), while centre-left political groups (S&D and The Left) were relatively less decisive.

In Figure 2, we replicated the same analysis on the amendments for the EP groups but this time focusing on Italian parties. The identified winning coalitions show a very similar pattern to that observed for the EP groups in Figure 1. The most frequent coalition is again the grand coalition supporting the von der Leyen Commission (in Italian called *Maggioranza Ursula*), which represents the 38 percent of votes (GC1) comprising FI (EPP), PD (S&D), Az and IV (RE), Ver (G-EFA) with the M5S (NI). Compared to the broader coalition configurations displayed above (cf. Figure 1), the

Italian most right-wing parties converged more frequently with the majority, as shown by the bars for GC2, which comprises all parties in GC1 'enlarged' to include FdI and *Lega,* and the right-wing coalition (Cdx) with 23.5 percent of votes in both cases.

As regards participation of the Italian party delegations in the winning majority in Table 5, there are only a couple of notable deviations from the patterns displayed for the political groups (cf. Tb. 4). First, the *Lega* demonstrates more collaborative behaviour than the ID group, being part of the winning majority in 13 votes (compared to 11 for the ID group). Second, the M5S often votes with the majority (70.5 percent of the time) showing its commitment to the *Maggioranza Ursula*.

Figure 2: Italian parties and winning coalitions in the plenary of 08 June 2022 (amendments)



Source: own elaboration. Note: PD = Democratic Party; FI = Forza Italia; FdI = Brothers of Italy; M5S = Five Star Movement; Az = Azione/Action; IV = Italia Viva; Ver = Greens.

Table 5: Italian party delegations: participation in the winning coalition majority

	Winning	Losing	% Winning
Az	34	0	100
IV	34	0	100
FI	33	1	97
Ver	28	6	82
PD	24	10	70.5
M5S	24	10	70.5
FdI	13	21	38
Lega	13	21	38

Source: own elaboration. Note: PD = Democratic Party; FI = Forza Italia; FdI = Brothers of Italy; M5S = Five Star Movement; Az = Azione/Action; IV = Italia Viva; Ver = Verdi/Greens.

4.3. In-depth analysis: observing coalitions in key amendments.

The in-depth analysis of some politically important amendments voted in the plenary session provides further insights into the logic behind coalition making in the EP. To

start with, Table 6 shows how Italian parties behaved in the eight votes where parties in the *Maggioranza Ursula* converge with the more right-wing parties i.e., FdI and *Lega* (GC2 in Fig. 2). If some amendments are strictly technical (i.e., 102/1, 158D and 159D), others show a more significant political content. Amendment (AM) 15/1 is about the possibility to introduce further fiscal or stimulus measures to support vulnerable households, while AM 54 is about the definition of energy poverty. Together with AM 125/1 – including a reference to the 'impact of the transition towards climate neutrality' – they generally demonstrate the political commitment of the Italian centre-right parties (FdI, FI and *Lega*) to tackle the impact of the green transition on the most vulnerable groups.

Table 6: Voting behaviour of Italian parties in the *Maggioranza Ursula* with convergence of the more right-wing parties

ID	Amendment content	FdI	FI	Lega	PD	M5S	Az	IV	Ver
AM 15/1	Possibility to introduce further fiscal or stimulus measures to support vulnerable households.	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W
AM 28/1	Setting the necessity to connect direct income support with long-lasting structural investment measures targeting the same beneficiaries.	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W
AM 40/2	Members must co-finance the measures included in their Plans to at least 60 % for temporary direct income support and at least 50 % for targeted structural measures and investments.	W	W	L	W	L	W	W	W
AM 54	Definition of energy poverty.	L	W	W	W	W	W	W	W
AM 102/1	Link to the already established rules about the use of revenues.	W	W	L	W	W	W	W	W
AM 125/1	Inclusion of the reference 'impact of the transition towards climate neutrality'	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W
AM 158D AM 159D	Deleting an annex on the methodology of calculation of the amount of financial resources for each Member.	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W

Source: own elaboration. Note: W = Winning side; L = Losing side. For Italian parties: PD = Democratic Party; FI = Forza Italia; FdI = Brothers of Italy; M5S = Five Star Movement; Az = Azione/Action; IV = Italia Viva; Ver = Verdi/Greens.

Furthermore, Table 7 displays the voting behaviour of the Italian centre-right coalition of parties comprising FI, FdI, *Lega*, Az and IV (i.e., Cdx in Fig. 2) which in three cases supported the amendments while in five cases – when the proposal came from the G-EFA and The Left groups – rejected them. Among the rejected amendments, amendments 161, 162 and 164 are purely technical, but the others have relevant political content. Amendment 160,

proposed by the G-EFA, attempts to link the support for small enterprises with the decoupling of their activities from the use of fossil fuels. It was rejected by a centre-right majority composed of the EPP and RE with convergence of the ECR and the majority of NI. Interestingly, in this case FdI voted (jointly with Az and IV) in line with the ECR and the EPP while on the losing side the *Lega* voted with the ID together with the M5S, the PD and the *Verdi*. At the same time, the rejection of Amendment 163 – linking member state funding to their legislative commitment to reach net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 – shows that right-wing parties are wary of introducing 'conditions' that are too harsh and push the green agenda too far. Lastly, with the rejection of Amendment 169, the centre-right majority also shows little inclination to encourage participation, and thus democratisation, in the construction phase of the National Social Climate Plans.

Table 7: Voting behaviour of Italian centre-right coalition of parties

ID	Amendment content	FdI	FI	Lega	PD	M5S	Az	IV	Ver
AM 15/2	Excluding 'small enterprises' from the possibility to be beneficiaries of 'further fiscal or stimulus measures'.	L	W	W	L	W	W	W	L
AM 28/2	Direct income support for vulnerable households provisions and % limits.	W	W	W	L	L	W	W	W
AM 40/3	(Clause of % share of Members co-financing the total costs of their National Plans). Amendment on the possibility that direct income support could NOT only be temporary.	L	W	W	L	L	W	W	W
AM 160 (rejected)	Other Union and Member State sources of funding should be mobilised to support vulnerable small enterprises and mitigate the impact of the increase in the price of fossil fuels by providing long lasting solutions to cut their dependence on fossil fuels.	W	W	L	L	L	W	W	L
AM 161-162 (both rejected)	(In order to ensure consistency and synergies with other sources of Union funding) measures excluded from the scope of Regulation of Just Transition Fund should not be supported by the SCF.	W	W	W	L	L	W	W	L
AM 163 (rejected)	Member States shall only be eligible to receive funding if they have enshrined into law an objective of economy-wide net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.	W	W	W	L	L	W	W	L
AM 164 (rejected)	Access permission to public actors to review procedures related to the National Plans and possibility for court of law or other independent bodies to challenge the substantive or procedural legality of decisions, acts or omissions.	W	W	W	L	W	W	W	L
AM 169 (rejected)	Member States should ensure that the public is given early and effective opportunities to participate in and to be consulted on the preparation of the Plans.	W	W	W	L	L	W	W	L

Source: own elaboration. Note: W = Winning side; L = Losing side. For Italian parties: PD = Democratic Party; FI = Forza Italia; FdI = Brothers of Italy; M5S = Five Star Movement; Az = Azione/Action; IV = Italia Viva; Ver = Verdi/Greens.

Table 8: Split votes on sub-amendment AM 28/3: voting behaviour of EP groups and Italian parties

EP group	Winning or losing side?	Italian party	Winning or losing side?
ECR	L	FdI	L
ID	L	Lega	L
EPP	W	FI	W
S&D	L	PD	L
NI	L	M5S	L
RE	W	Az	W
		IV	W
G-EFA	W	Ver	W
The Left	L	-	-

Source: own elaboration. Note: W = Winning side; L = Losing side. For EP groups: EPP = European People's Party; S&D = Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats; RE = Renew Europe; G-EFA = Greens – European Free Alliance; NI = Not-attached members; ECR = European Conservative and Reformists; ID = Identity and Democracy. For Italian parties: PD = Democratic Party; FI = Forza Italia; FdI = Brothers of Italy; M5S = Five Star Movement; Az = Azione/Action; IV = Italia Viva; Ver = Verdi/Greens.

An analysis of the dynamics behind the request for separate votes ('split votes') on specific parts of the amendments shows other interesting patterns. Amendment 28 specifies the possibility to provide direct income support measures for vulnerable households (see Table 1 in the Appendix). The S&D and The Left groups asked to split the vote in three parts (AM 28/1-2-3). The most relevant in understanding the split vote between groups and Italian parties is the third part (AM 28/3) shown in Table 8. With this sub-amendment, the EP's left-wing groups aimed to remove the limits on the percentage share of the total costs that can be allocated with direct support in the member states' National Social Climate Plans ('*Such direct income support should be limited to up to 40% of the total estimated cost of each Plan*'). This sub-amendment was approved by a centrist majority that included EPP (for Italy, FI), RE (Az and IV) and G-EFA (Ver), showing by contrast how EP groups (ECR, ID, The Left, S&D and NI) and Italian parties (FdI, Lega, PD and M5S) both on the left and the right of the policy spectrum supported a more ambitious measure in terms of social protection.

5. Conclusions

In the literature on the politics of GFT, the more common coalition that promotes policies for the GFT is that between left-wing and green parties. Yet the analysis of the main votes on the SCF in the EP between 2022 and 2023 shows that the behaviour of different parliamentary groups in the EP is peculiar in many respects. While it is not surprising to find a large majority in the EP supporting the SCF, the composition of the majority coalitions have seen the addition of both left- and right-wing MEPs (especially from NI, The Left, G-EFA, ECR, and ID groups) to the more usual 'Ursula' grand coalition (i.e., EPP, S&D, RE) that shaped EU politics and policies in this legislature. Particularly surprising is the frequent vote of far-right parties in the SCF's first reading votes and amendments (Tb. 1 and Fig. 1), while left-wing and green parties have been less decisive, albeit with a strong internal cohesion (cf. Tb 2).

The empirical analysis of the votes supports the hypothesis that these peculiar coalitions behind GFT policies could be the result of *policy-* and *vote-seeking* strategies: centre and right-wing parties support the SCF with the aim of protecting those social and

electoral constituencies that represent an interesting electoral target like the potential losers of the green transition, e.g., small and medium size enterprises, workers of the brown energy sectors and citizens who may suffer from the increased costs of public transportation and fuel. Consequently, the far-right parties challenged the more traditional supporters of the GFT, namely the green parties and the left, which conventionally represented the interests of environmental organisations and the working class. This confirms that the policies to achieve carbon neutrality in Europe are not the exclusive domain of left and green parties.

The voting behaviour of Italian MEPs on the SCF has shown some convergence of the most right-wing parties (FdI and *Lega*) with the coalitions supporting the SCF (cf. Tb 3 and Tb. 5). While supporting or rejecting specific amendments to the SCF text, the voting behaviour of FdI and *Lega* has revealed the commitment of these parties to tackling the negative consequences of the green transition together with milder positions on pro-climate measures and the protection of the interests of enterprises (cf. Tb 7). This may point to the existence of a social coalition bringing together quite different electoral targets, such as transition losers, vulnerable groups and enterprises, that might entail conflicts or at least trade-offs between electoral demands and have repercussions on the policy-seeking and vote-seeking strategies of these parties. For instance, speaking in the EP plenary on behalf of the ID group, a member of the *Lega* called for a 'new legislative proposal by the Commission, endorsing the climate targets, but also supporting enterprises with a better time management and accompanying them in this transition' (European Parliament, 2023d). While one of the rapporteurs acknowledged that the SCF 'had one of the weirdest majorities possible [...] the idea to really focus the spending more on investment measures rather than general income support [...] was something that was supported in particular by the EPP, the Greens and ID, and not the parties in between' (European Parliament, 2023c).

Of course, this article has focused on a single, albeit important, case. We only analysed the plenary votes, rather than the process – both inside the EP (i.e., at committee level) and across institutions (i.e., the negotiations between the EP and the Council) – leading to the agreement on the SCF. Further research on the GFT is much needed, on the one hand, to 'solidify' our conclusions and make them more generalisable, and on the other, to explain how party coalitions have come to support the SCF and the GFT more broadly.

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6. Appendix

Table A. Recital 17 of the SCF Regulation: original and amended version

Original text	Amended text
Pending the impact of those investments on reducing costs and emissions, well targeted direct income support for **the most** vulnerable would **help** the just transition. Such support should be understood to be a temporary measure accompanying the decarbonisation of the housing and transport sectors. It would not be permanent as it does not address the root causes of energy and **transport** poverty. **Such support should only concern direct impacts of the inclusion of building and road transport into the scope of Directive 2003/87/EC, not electricity or heating costs related to the inclusion of power and heat production in the scope of that Directive.** **Eligibility for** such direct income support should be limited **in time**.	**Direct income support when combined with long-lasting structural investment measures targeting the same beneficiaries, will contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the Fund.** Pending the impact of those investments on reducing costs and emissions, well targeted direct income support for vulnerable **households in energy poverty or mobility poverty** would **contribute to reduce energy and mobility costs and support** the just transition **while waiting for more structural investments to take place**. Such support should be understood to be a temporary measure accompanying the decarbonisation of the housing and transport sectors. It would not be permanent as it does not address the root causes of energy and **mobility** poverty. *Such direct income support should be limited* ***to up to 40% of the total estimated cost of each Plan for the period 2024-2027 and should be set for the 2028-2032 period in accordance with a country-by country assessment by the Commission of the efficiency, added value, continued relevance and required level of direct income support in light of the progress and effect of the implementation of structural investments and measures, with a view to phasing out such support by the end of 2032.***

Source: European Parliament (2022). Note: in bold the amended parts. In italics the parts subject to sub-amendments 28/2-3

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What, when, how?
The framing of energy transition by Italian parties

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Abstract

The climate crisis is a stress factor for democracies and a relevant issue within inter-party conflict. Besides environmental aspects, it involves the economic and national security dimensions of energy policy, as well as a wide range of social and political consequences of policy choices. This article analyses the framing of the energy transition by political parties, i.e., how they define the problem, propose and legitimise solutions, and identify and qualify the actors involved. Parties are central to the institutional system and the formation of the policy agenda, competing in the construction and transmission of frames while shaping conflict and policy solutions. The research questions of this article regard the articulation of frames along the left-right axis and the impact of the crisis triggered by the war in Ukraine. This work draws on the literature on energy policies and the framing of climate change and energy transition in order to first outline three main multidimensional frames: sustainability, eco-modernist and eco-nationalist. The empirical research consists in a qualitative analysis of Italian political party manifestos in the 2018 and 2022 (national) and 2019 (European) elections. Results confirm that parties frame the energy transition on the basis of their underlying ideology. External shocks, such as the Ukrainian crisis, lead to a rearticulation of frames, but the left-right alignment still holds as politicisation is reinforced.

1. Introduction

Scholars and commentators have used the term 'polycrisis' to describe the present state of constant challenge to political, social, institutional and economic equilibrium. The economic crisis of 2008-2011, the pandemic crisis of 2020-2021 and its economic and social consequences, and then, in 2022, the invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent energy crisis, have all contributed to an uncertain and volatile context. The climate crisis, described as the *super-wicked problem* of our times, has become one among many, and attempts to find solutions to it must now compete for priority within the policy agenda.

This article deals with a central pillar of ecological transition that has been particularly challenged by the polycrisis: the energy transition. This appeared to be underway and gathering increasing momentum, but was directly affected by the war in Ukraine and the halt to Russian gas supplies with long-term consequences that are still hard to gauge. A push to invest further in renewables, a pull to diversify to alternative gas and nuclear, and the constant pressure posed by increasing inequalities and the risks of poverty are all at play and significantly influence the pursuit of climate goals.

The article looks at how political parties define and make sense of the energy transition problem in these uncertain times. Within the given complexity, the way they

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frame the issue may vary widely and determine the content, as well as the success or failure, of future climate and energy policies. Drawing on established literature that connects climate policy and politics (Jensen e Spoon 2011; Thonig et al. 2021), we adopt the method of framing analysis (cfr. Brondi et al. 2015). Our aim is to test a hypothesis on the alignment of discursive frames on the energy transition along the left-right axis, through an empirical analysis of Italian political party manifestos between 2018 and 2022, as well as to explore the impact of the war in Ukraine.

The article first discusses the concept of framing in reference to the energy transition (section 2), then presents the research hypothesis (section 3). The cases and method are then presented (section 4 and 5) and the findings are described (sections 6 and 8). The conclusions drawn in section 8 point to a significant alignment of discursive frames along the left-right political continuum and an equally meaningful reinforcement of this alignment after the Ukraine crisis.

2. Framing the energy transition

The energy transition, understood as a transformation of the energy system based on the shift away from climate-changing fossil fuels towards renewable and non-polluting sources, is the object of regulation, research projects and EU and national programmes of great significance in terms of economic investment and organisational commitment.

As in any agenda setting and policy formulation process, the communicative dimension and symbolic representations are not neutral, and contribute to the construction of social reality and the definition of possible solutions. The concept of framing (van Hulst and Yanow 2016) describes the processes by which actors 'select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation' (Entman 1993, 52). The framing process is strategically orientated: actors compete for hegemony over problem interpretation and solution articulation (Boin et al. 2009). In particular, political parties aim to build consensus and consolidate their competitive positions and have the means to orientate, select and aggregate demands, which makes them central actors in the formation of public opinion. Reacting to shocks with discursive turning points (Buschman and Oels 2019), parties 'make sense' of the complexity of social reality through framing and reframing activities and, for this reason, an analysis of the communicative dynamics established between parties during policy problem definition also entails examining their competitive logic in the light of pre-existing identity constraints and external influences.

These discursive dynamics appear particularly relevant when looking at the energy transition, a wicked problem that mixes technical complexities and uncertainties on one hand and conflicts of interests and values on the other (Alford and Head 2017). Fossil fuels continue to enjoy a structural advantage over alternative energy sources due to a technological, institutional and social 'carbon lock-in' (Unruh 2000) as well as a 'discursive' one made up of the dominant discourses that constitute and justify the status quo (Buschman and Oels 2019).

This complexity is further compounded by the fact that energy policy, and thus energy transition policy, is itself multilevel (spanning across international, EU, national

and local policy) and cross-sectoral (intersecting energy policy *strictu sensu* and other policies that affect – and are affected by – the energy sector) (McGowan 1996).

The further multi-dimensionality of energy policy is expressed in the 'trilemma' (Khan et al. 2022) that includes:

- energy security: an ambiguous concept (Sovacool 2011) that, in industrialised countries with limited fossil resources, generally concerns the security of supply and international and geopolitical strategies;
- the economic dimension, which includes the impact of energy prices on economic growth and competitiveness, as well as strategic choices in industrial policy;
- environmental sustainability and, most importantly, green-house gas emissions, pollution and the environmental risks posed by different technologies.

A further, cross-cutting scientific and political debate concerns the distribution of costs and benefits deriving from the energy transition, the democratic governance of transition processes and the different socio-technical power structures embodied in different technologies. For example, several authors see the transition as a paradigm shift towards more widely distributed and democratic economic and industrial systems (Imperatore and Leonardi 2023; Singh Garha et al. 2022).

Such complexity implies that the interpretive frames constructed by political actors may vary widely, and lead to diverse policy decisions and outcomes. These frames may change over time, depending on the technological and socio-economic context, sudden shocks and actor agency (Prontera 2018). Political parties have a pivotal role in the framing and re-framing processes in this field. They exercise great influence on the level of politicisation of environmental and energy issues (Carmichael and Brulle 2017), can foster or hinder support for an ecological transition based on the energy transition (Birch 2020; Carter et al. 2018; Schulze 2014; Jensen and Spoon 2011) and can influence the polarisation of public opinion on the issue (Birch 2020; Egan and Mullin 2017).

This essay aims to investigate how parties frame energy transition issues. More specifically, our research questions are: how is the energy transition framed in party manifestos? To what extent do the frames depend on given ideological orientations and how stable is this alignment in the face of critical shocks?

To answer these questions, we analyse the frames constructed by Italian political parties between 2018 and 2022, a timeframe which saw significant progress in the transition to renewables, but also a significant increase in the complexity of the energy issue due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict (Steffen and Patt 2022; Natili and Visconti 2023).

3. Research hypothesis: energy transition frames across the left/right divide

Starting from these premises, our first expectation is that the energy trilemma will translate into three frames centred on the environmental, economic and security dimensions. Based on the definition of framing proposed by Entman (1993), it is possible to identify a logical sequence of problem definition and moral evaluations on the one

hand, which constitute the problem-setting dimensions of the frame, and the subsequent identification of its content, actors and solutions on the other, which constitute the problem-solving dimensions of the frame. We use these dimensions of framing to conceptualise the articulation of the three frames – sustainability, eco-modernist and eco-nationalist.

Table 1. Framing the energy transition

	Sustainability frame	**Eco-modernist frame**	**Eco-nationalist frame**
Dominant dimension of energy policy	Environmental dimension	Economic dimension	National security dimension
Problem definition	Transition as a necessity	Transition as an opportunity	Transition as a strategic option
Moral evaluations	Equity in the distribution of costs and benefits	Market efficiency for growth	Safeguarding national sovereignty
Content of the transition	Rapid decarbonisation through renewables	Pragmatic and incremental energy mix	Capitalising on national strategic resources
Actors and solutions	Grassroots innovation and catalytic state (Critical) EU cooperation International cooperation	Market regulation by the state EU cooperation International competition	Political authority EU competition International competition

Source: own elaboration.

As summarised in Table 1, the sustainability frame rests on a definition of energy policy as an environmental issue and therefore sees transition as a necessity to counteract the effects of the climate crisis. The proposed transition is based on renewable energy sources, the spread of which must be promoted and accelerated for rapid decarbonisation. Consistent with the Sustainable Development approach (Magnani 2012), great attention is paid to the distributive effects of the transition, which may involve inequalities between social classes, generations and territories, and must be governed to ensure a just transition. The protagonists of the transition are territorial communities, grassroots innovation and new decentralised, cooperative, multi-stakeholder models in which the state plays a 'catalytic' role, helping to coordinate, support and direct non-state actors (Wright and Kurian 2010; Prontera and Quitzow 2022). European and international cooperation is viewed positively, but with possible criticism for its market approach, which is insufficiently attentive to inequalities (Buzogany and Mohamad-Klotzbach 2022).

The 'eco-modernist', or 'ecological modernisation' frame (Magnani 2012; Wright and Kurian 2010) defines energy policy as an economic problem and thus sees the transition predominantly as an opportunity for growth within the existing capitalist model. The focus on equity issues is minimal, consistent with a trust in the market and economic growth to benefit the system as a whole. The transition process must ensure continuity of supply and is therefore incremental, pragmatic and closely linked to technological innovation: a mix of sources is proposed that guarantees security and stability in availability and prices. The state is entrusted with the role of regulator of competitive markets (Wright and Kurian 2010) and European cooperation is embodied in the single energy market concept. On the other hand, relations with global powers, again in a logic of economic policy, may be more competitive than collaborative.

The eco-nationalist frame (Aronczyk 2023) primarily poses the energy issue as a national security problem and thus defines transition as a potential obstacle or a strategic option to be exploited if and when it supports national interests. Rather than equity or market growth, it sets itself the primary and morally legitimising goal of protecting the sovereignty and self-determination of the nation. Hence it may breed distrust in private – and especially multinational – energy companies, EU and international organisations and any actor that threatens local resources or to take control of them away from the native population (Okpadah 2022). The transition will thus be pragmatically (or opportunistically) shaped around locally available resources over which sovereignty is claimed (de-Shalit 2006). Political authorities recognised as the legitimate expression of the nation/people are the designated agents of transformation.

As energy policy and energy transition have gained relevance in the debate on climate change over recent years, political parties have been under pressure to adopt them as a new political issue. We expect ideological orientation to be a central factor among the several that may influence how parties frame issues: strategic or ideological considerations, internal organisational equilibria or external influences. As Marks et al. (2002, 585) noted with reference to EU integration, political parties' pre-existing agendas influence their reaction to new challenges and induce them to incorporate and interpret new issues on the basis of their respective ideological orientations. The literature also confirms that the left/right divide influences the degree of party concern with climate change and with environmental transition policies (Birch 2020; Huber et al. 2021; Berker and Pollex 2021; Carter et al. 2018). Right-wing parties, and especially the populist right ones, generally minimise or even deny climate change, leading to very limited support for energy transition policies. This is also often the result of Eurosceptic attitudes that induce a "reluctance to 'sacrifice' national sovereignty for the benefit of international agreements and cross-country collaboration" (Gottenhuber and Mulholland 2019, 12). Sovereigntist and securitarian orientations help explain the adoption of more ambivalent stances by some of these parties (Huber et al. 2021; Lockwood 2018) in which climate scepticism is not necessarily accompanied by an outright rejection of renewable energy.

The left is generally more concerned with climate change and is particularly sensitive to the alarming messages of the scientific community (Neumayer 2004). It therefore generally proposes radical goals that become all the more ambitious with the populist left (Huber et al. 2021), which stresses the need for mitigation policies and point to specific elites as the culprits of climate change. They often criticise the neoliberal and market-oriented logic of the mainstream discourse on environmental transition as shown in its 'techno-managerial framing of the process' (Bouzarovski 2022, 1004) and its concern with the interests of large corporations rather than social issues and energy democracy (Riexinger et al. 2021). Proposed solutions include the strengthening of international cooperation, citizen participation (Lockwood 2018; Huber et al. 2021) and redistributive policies that compensate social groups who are the most vulnerable in transition processes.

Our first set of hypotheses is therefore that:

H1) a direct relationship exists between parties' ideological positioning and the frame adopted;

H1a) right-wing parties will tend to adopt the eco-nationalist frame;

H1b) centre parties will tend to adopt the eco-modernist frame;

H1c) left-wing parties will tend to adopt the sustainability frame.

What is more, the framing activity of parties is not immutable. Ample literature shows that external shocks can act as stimuli or focusing events (Kingdon 2003) which may alter dominant narratives, encourage discursive turning points and even act as catalysts for policy change. Focusing events draw attention to pre-existing but weakly politicised problems, opening windows of opportunity for political actors to advocate one or more explanations of the problem, its causes and solutions (Boin et al. 2009). However, the perceived complexity of the event often prevents the establishment of a dominant discourse (Hurka and Nebel 2013) to the point of generating competition between frames and counter-frames supported by opposing discursive coalitions (Hajer 1993).

With reference to climate and energy issues, a series of transformations and contextual factors have recently increased their centrality in the public debate: environmentalist mobilisations have multiplied nationally and internationally, sudden catastrophic climate events have occurred more frequently and the pandemic has fostered aspirations towards sustainable energy models, while there has also been a self-protective reaction of the fossil fuel industry and state support for it in a more general attempt at economic recovery (Zakeri et al. 2022). The Russian-Ukraine war is the latest shock to open a new phase of destabilisation, strengthening and expanding the polycrisis (Zeitlin et al. 2019). European democracies that were traditionally dependent on Russian gas supplies have been deeply affected (von Hoymer et al. 2021) and the EU approved the RePowerEU initiative in March 2022 to rapidly 'eliminate' its dependency on Russian fossil fuels (Prontera 2023). The various components of this initiative, as well as the specific measures of member states, are inconsistent when it comes to the previously established ambitious energy and climate goals because, while some of them aim to accelerate energy transition, others go in the opposite direction, i.e., they look for alternative fossil fuel suppliers and allocate funds to additional import infrastructure such as liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals (Siddi 2023).

This incoherence demonstrates how the energy crisis triggered by the conflict constitutes a policy puzzle, given the need to balance the conflicting exigencies of the 'energy trilemma' (Natili and Visconti 2023; Wiertz et al. 2023). Acceleration of the transition and the difficulties of the rapid realisation of large-scale renewable energy infrastructures conflict with an immediate reduction in energy costs, so affecting the desirability of the transition in the eyes of at least part of the public (Steffen and Patt 2022; Dennison 2022). Based on these premises, we formulate a second hypothesis:

H2) the war and the energy crisis have increased the politicisation of energy issues among conflicting discursive coalitions, leading to a consolidation of the ideological anchorage and alignment of the parties' frames.

4. Case selection

There is still limited understanding of the conceptualisation of the energy transition in Italian political debate. Until a few years ago, the social construction of sustainable energy by policy makers and stakeholders in Italy was orientated to preclude public engagement (Brondi et al. 2015). Since then, however, much has changed, both domestically and internationally and, with reference to the Italian case, scholars have analysed transition processes at the local level (Magnani and Carrosio 2021), the social implications of transition-related change and aspects of policy design and capacity (Barroco Fontes-Cunha et al. 2021; Magnani and Carrosio 2021; Prontera 2021). However, the dynamics of political competition and power logics involved in the energy transition process, as well as in the forms of discursive legitimation of its advances or, on the contrary, its interruptions, still appear understudied.

Two further factors make analysis of the Italian case particularly relevant. First, just like other southern European democracies, the Italian political system has never included a significant Green party such as those that emerged as single-issue parties in northern European democracies in the 1980s and challenged other parties to adopt environmental and energy issues. This allows for analysis of the role of the left/right ideological variable by minimising the impact of contagion from single-issue parties (Marks et al. 2008), and may allow considerations to be extended to similar cases which are equally understudied. Secondly, Italy is among those industrialised democracies that have been most affected by the conflict in Ukraine, due to its longstanding dependence on Russian energy supplies. Fast diversification strategies have been a short-term buffer, but have also opened a debate on long-term changes of the energy system (Prontera 2023). This is expected to make the analysis of the possible impact of the international crisis on political debate particularly visible.

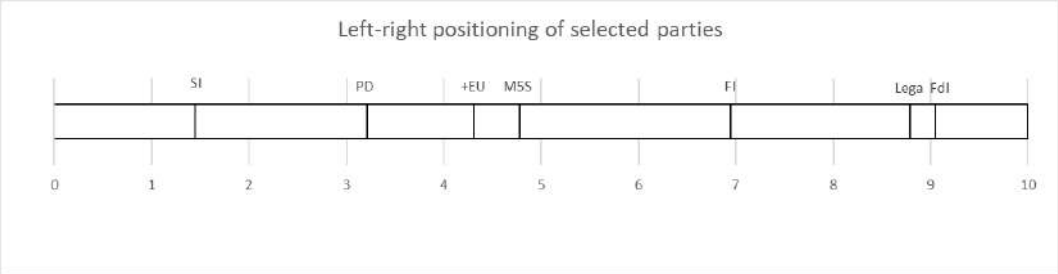
The empirical investigation of party framing of the energy transition is performed through the analysis of party manifestos for the national elections of 2018 and 2022 and the EU election of 2019. The decision to analyse electoral manifestos poses some analytical issues as they present less articulate communicative and discursive registers than other sources, such as parliamentary or public speeches, and the audience is more limited. While these limitations are acknowledged, as previous studies show (Kiratli 2016; Chaney 2014), the analysis of frames through manifestos has some advantages stemming, on the one hand, from the nature of the text as a basis for the strategic construction of identities and underlying values (a significant theme for framing studies) and, secondly, the possibility to investigate solutions and policy proposals – a fundamental element of any frame.

The chosen time-frame allows for analysis of the impact of the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. The parties selected for analysis include all those parties that won representation in both national elections of 2018 and 2022, and cover the full left-right ideological spectrum (Fig. 1).

Towards the left end lies Sinistra Italiana (SI), a democratic socialist party established in 2017 after various mergers and divisions among the radical left (Chiocchetti 2023). In 2018, it ran in a coalition called LEU (Liberi e Uguali) with other smaller groups whereas it was part of a new coalition called La Sinistra in the 2019 EU election and it formed a two-party alliance with the small Green Party in 2022. The main

party on the centre-left is the Partito Democratico (PD), established in 2007 from the merger of DS – Democratici di Sinistra and DL – La Margherita, which brought together parts of the post-communist and Catholic traditions into a new political project targeted at the 'reformist' electorate (Bobba and Seddone 2016, 68). Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S), a hybrid populist, anti-establishment protest party which came to the fore nationally in 2013, is located at the centre in the latest available data from Chapel Hill (Fig. 1), but has since developed a clearer, more leftist ideology (Russo and Valbruzzi 2022, 184); more consistently at the centre of the spectrum across elections is +Europa, a small liberal, pro-EU formation with its origins in the Radical party. On the right lie Forza Italia (FI), the liberal-conservative 'personal party' (Calise 2010) founded by Berlusconi in 1994, Lega per Salvini Premier, a radical right-wing populist party heir to the regionalist Lega Nord, and Fratelli d'Italia (FdI) a radical right-wing party with populist elements (Donà 2022) that has its origins in the post-fascist MSI.

Figure 1 - Left/Right ideological positioning of parties included in the study



Source: Chapel Hill Expert survey 2019.

5. Research method

The party manifestos for each selected party at each of the three elections were collected. Every party must legally file an official manifesto, but whenever this was different from the one used for electoral communication, the latter was used in our study. A full list of the documents used and the direct web links to them is included in the Appendix (see Table A).

The initial phase of the empirical analysis consisted in identifying every section which contained references to energy, energy transition, and environmental transition. While only 3 out of 7 parties had a specific section on energy in 2018 and none did in the EU elections of 2019, 5 out of 7 did in 2022. Other parties included the energy issue in sections on the environment (SI, M5S, FdI) or on economic development, competitiveness and employment (PD and FI).

In a second phase, all the references to the energy transition were coded according to the frames described in section 3. The coding was done through the identification of 'units of meaning' consisting in segments of texts (sentences, parts of sentences, or small groups of sentences) that conveyed an idea or concept about energy transition (Kuckartz and Rädiker 2023, 46; Oswald, Fromm and Broda 2021). The resulting 495 units were classified as referring univocally to one of the categories of the five components of the various frames described in Table 1:

- dominant dimension of the energy issue: text units are included which directly connect energy policy with 1) environmental issues (e.g. climate change,

environmental catastrophes, the preservation of the planet or the landscape), 2) economic issues (e.g. economic development), 3) national security (e.g. energy independence, international conflict);

- problem definition: text units are included which explicitly refer to energy transition and justify its pursuit either 1) as a necessity (e.g. to stop environmental disasters), 2) as an opportunity (e.g. for employment or growth) or 3) as a strategic option (e.g. to be pursued only insofar as it protects national or local firms);
- moral evaluation: text units are included which express the ultimate values that energy transition should pursue and identify them as 1) equity, justice and democracy, 2) market competition and growth, or 3) national autonomy and sovereignty;
- content of the transition: text units are included which refer to the pace of energy transition and the energy mix it requires, varying from 1) rapid decarbonisation through renewables (e.g. excluding all 'bridge' solutions, to 2) a pragmatic mix (e.g. including nuclear and gas), or 3) capitalising on national resources (e.g. launching new mining and drilling programmes);
- actors and solutions: text units are included in which actors are identified that ought to decide on the energy transition (e.g. the international community, the EU, the sovereign state) with different levels of competition/collaboration; references to policy tools ranging from community to market to authority are also included in this component.

The rules for segmentation and classification were defined in advance of coding, and two of the authors proceeded collectively to code a number of texts until they agreed on a common standard for applying the rules. They then continued individually and compared and discussed outputs at regular intervals (Schreier 2012). Finally, they discussed results with the third author. Having adopted a consensual approach to coding, we did not calculate an intercoder agreement coefficient (Kuckartz and Rädiker 2023, 201). In a last phase, the three authors collectively proceeded to the organic analysis of emerging frames, which is required in order to understand the intrinsic complexity and consistency of frames (Entman 1993).

In the following paragraphs, a summary presentation of the results of the coding is given in tables, and the overall emerging frames are discussed. In order to highlight similarities and differences within our sample, we proceed in two steps of comparative analysis: we first compare how parties across the political spectrum have framed energy transition in the problem-setting dimensions (dominant dimension of energy policy, problem definition and moral evaluation). We then compare how they framed it in the problem-solving dimensions (content of transition, actors and solutions).

6. The energy transition in party manifestos: 2018-2019

The framing of energy transition in the manifestos of Italian parties for the elections of 2018 and 2019 are aligned along the three frames – sustainability, eco-modernist and eco-nationalist – reflecting each party's positioning from left to right. Specifically, SI is the only party that adopts a consistent 'sustainability frame' which systematically covers all the

dimensions. The centre-left PD, centrist +Europa and centre-right FI all employ an eco-modernist frame. The eco-nationalist frame is adopted by right-wing parties, Lega and Fdi, but lacks full articulation and coherence. M5S, consistently with its hybrid-populist positioning of the time, does not articulate the issue fully and adopts elements of both the eco-modernist and sustainability frames.

As can be seen in Table 2, with reference to the problem-setting components of the frame, SI mostly stresses the environmental dimension, proposing a 'big green plan' aimed at 'total decarbonisation' (SI 2018, 6) and based on full coordination – which was considered non-existent at the time – between the national energy strategy (SEN) and climate strategy. This is intended to guarantee an equitable distribution of costs and benefits, according to an energy democracy model (see below).

The economic dimension prevails instead for PD, +Europa and FI, although environmental concerns are also mentioned. In the PD 2018 programme, the topic of environmental and energy transition is discussed in two sections: one devoted to labour policy and the green economy and the other to European cooperation. In the former, environmental protection is related to 'beauty and quality' (PD 2018, 10), which are identified as assets of the Italian economy. Climate change is mentioned, but is an ancillary factor to economic necessity. In this sense, energy transition is an opportunity for economic stimulus, leading to the equation 'Energy: sustainability equals competitiveness' (PD 2018, 11).

In +Europa's manifestos the fight against climate change is supported, but is subordinate to the economic dimension and the transition is expected to ensure 'economic efficiency, energy independence, security of supply', and lastly 'environmental protection' (+Europa 2018, 26).

FI does not discuss energy extensively. It ties energy policy to the economic dimension by stating the goal of greater efficiency of networks and production in order to ensure 'security of supply' (FI 2018, 11). Consistently with its centre-right positioning, it describes the energy transition as an economic issue functional to national security and, only subordinately, an environmental issue 'because economic development, industrial competitiveness and climate policies are complementary' (FI 2019, 18).

Table 2. Classification of text units related to problem-setting dimensions of the frames

	2018 Problem-setting			2019 Problem-setting		
	Sustainability	Eco-modernist	Eco-nationalist	Sustainability	Eco-modernist	Eco-nationalist
SI	5	2	0	6	0	0
PD	6	15	0	1	1	0
+EU	3	6	1	2	3	0
M5S	0	2	0	0	0	0
FI	0	2	1	0	3	0
Lega	5	1	5	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
FDI	0	0	1	1	0	1

Source: electoral manifestos of selected parties, own analysis.

M5S, then a hybrid populist party, hardly articulates any discourse in its manifesto and positions itself between the sustainability and the eco-modernist frames.

Finally, the right-wing parties emphasise the national security dimension, although they vary widely in the extent to which they discuss the energy issue: Lega is an exception among Italian right-wing parties since the energy issue is given much more relevance in its manifestos, while for FdI, the energy issue is marginal. In the Lega 2018 manifesto, the need to strengthen action against climate change is accompanied by the promotion of 'an entirely Made in Italy supply chain' of renewables to stop incentives flowing 'into the pockets of Chinese companies' (Lega 2018, 47). For FdI environmental concerns are subordinate to national pride: 'one cannot be a patriot without also being a defender of nature and the environment. Because homeland, fatherland, and environment are very closely related words and we strongly claim this identity of ours' (FDI 2019, 11).

Turning to the content, actors and solutions of the transition (Table 3), the manifestos of Lega and FdI lack full articulation and coherence. The eco-nationalist references to energy autonomy and to international competition found in the problem-setting dimensions of the frame are not consistently matched by fully developed proposals in the problem-solving dimensions.

Table 3. Classification of text units related to problem-solving dimensions of the frames

	2018 Problem-solving			2019 Problem-solving		
	Sustainability	Eco-modernist	Eco-nationalist	Sustainability	Eco-modernist	Eco-nationalist
SI	7	0	0	6	0	0
PD	4	7	0	1	3	0
+EU	2	8	0	1	9	0
M5S	2	0	0	1	1	0
FI	0	2	0	0	2	0
Lega	3	6	7	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
FDI	0	0	0	0	0	1

Source: electoral manifestos of selected parties, own analysis.

More specifically, Lega presents generic, but rhetorically ambitious targets (such as the end of internal combustion engines by 2030). To protect national sovereignty in energy production and renewables, it proposes a mix of market and public instruments, such as 'national planning' to improve energy efficiency and 'the establishment of a national energy transition fund to support concrete changes through reward mechanisms and incentives' (Lega 2018, 37). Lega proposes tax relief and energy production through waste disposal processes (waste-to-energy and biofuel production) for the reduction of energy costs.

FdI's proposals are even more vague: they combine generic support for renewables with the goal of taking Italy as close as possible to energy autonomy, calling for an environmentally-committed Europe through a generic 'promotion of clean and renewable energy' (FDI 2019, 11) without ever mentioning the fight against climate change.

FI, +Europa and PD are again consistent with the eco-modernist frame, but differ in the level of articulation of their proposals.

In the case of FI, the content of the transition clearly conveys a pragmatic approach, expressed in acknowledging the centrality of the fight against climate change in EU policy but 'without useless extremism' and 'by coupling development and the preservation of the planet' (FI 2019, 16). Very few, rather general solutions are proposed, including support for renewables and innovation and the need to coordinate with other southern European countries.

+Europa advocates a need for a 'market transition in the energy sector', as pollution and poverty are closely linked, and the solution for both problems is seen as 'development, growth and technological innovation' (+Europa 2018, 13). The whole transition discourse in the manifesto revolves around increasing the efficiency of market instruments to make the economy more sustainable and achieve ambitious decarbonisation targets. The energy mix and targets are in line with EU policy: the total phasing-out of coal by 2025 and zero net emissions by 2050, to be achieved through a mix of renewables and gas (+Europa 2019, 5). To achieve these goals, +Europa proposes 'liberalisation of the internal energy market and strengthening of the trans-European network' (+Europa 2019, 10).

Finally, PD claims merit for the drafting, in the 2013-2018 legislature, of the SEN (national energy strategy), which aims to have 55% of electricity produced from renewable sources by 2030 and achieve overall decarbonisation by 2050 (PD 2018, 11). Gas, however, is mentioned as a key resource in the transition phase, hence the need to improve the interconnection infrastructure, guaranteeing security of supply (PD 2018, 11). In the European election programme, the link between economic recovery and energy transition appears further strengthened and is accompanied by a proposal for an extraordinary investment plan (EUR 290 billion) through the issuing of European debt (Eurobonds) to achieve 'ambitious' targets and the decoupling of green investment from national deficit limits set in Brussels (PD 2019, 7). As early as 2018, energy was mentioned as the first sector for completion of the internal European market (PD 2018, 13). The role of market instruments is emphasised among the proposed solutions to ease the energy transition, and the party proposes more incisive liberalisation of the national and European energy market (PD 2018, 11).

M5S, consistently with its vague and ambiguous framing of the problem-setting dimensions, proposes a few ambitious and generic programmatic points or short slogans: energy production based exclusively on renewables and 'exit from oil by 2050', and the positive impact of investment in renewables on the economy and employment (M5S 2018, 3).

A much more articulated development of problem-solving dimension is offered by SI, which holds true to the sustainability frame. The party outlines a project of 'energy democracy' (SI 2018, 6) that guarantees equity through the convergence of state economic intervention and the protagonism of communities and citizens as producers and distributors of energy to reduce the power of 'oligopolists' (SI 2018, 6). The energy goals are also ambitious at the European level and the elections are seen as an opportunity to build a common space receptive to the demands of social and environmentalist movements to build a Europe based on 'social, environmental and fiscal justice' (SI 2019, no page numbers). With a view to strengthening democratic decision-making processes, an incisive role of the EU Parliament is also advocated in

facilitating 'public intervention in the economy, in order to steer it towards conversion' (SI 2019).

7. The energy transition in party manifestos: 2018-2019

The 2022 election manifestos (Table 4) indicate an overall increase in the relevance given to the energy issue. Election manifestos present significant changes in content too, which partially reflect the tactical choices of individual parties, but also a shift in overall discursive strategies. Most significantly, the eco-nationalist frame develops to a level of articulation that parallels the other two: references are made by both Lega and FdI to all the relevant dimensions of the frame: national security, opportunities for national advancement, defence and use of national resources, and the safeguarding of national sovereignty in a context of international competition.

There is also significant change on the left, where SI is joined by M5S and PD, which, however, maintains some elements of its former eco-modernist frame. The eco-modernist frame is still adopted by +Europa and FI; the latter, however, makes some concessions to the eco-nationalist frame as far as the energy mix is concerned.

More specifically, and again comparing first the problem-setting dimensions of the framing, SI, in coalition with the Greens, further stresses the emergency posed by climate change and the need for swift solutions (SI 2022 - no page numbers). The Ukrainian crisis is indicated as a further element demanding rapid decarbonisation. As in the past, the moral evaluation at the base of this conception is the achievement of energy democracy, that is, the affordable and stable access to energy for all citizens without financial speculation and negative environmental consequences.

The party that comes closest to SI is M5S which, as was mentioned earlier, has evolved over the years to a more leftist identity, following the governing coalition with PD in 2020-2021, the new leadership under Giuseppe Conte and the departure of some of the more right-wing members. This ideological change is reflected also in its full adherence to the sustainability frame: energy policy is defined as an environmental priority (M5s 2022, 208) and the Ukraine crisis and its effects on prices is described as a stimulus to pursue rapid decarbonization at the European level (M5S 2022, 204).

With reference to the problem-setting dimensions of the frame, PD moves away from the eco-modernist frame towards the sustainability frame. This partial shift is in line with a more general strategy by the party leadership to radicalise conflict with the right wing, proposing a dichotomy between its 'determination to make the fight against climate change a great engine for the relaunching of the country' and the short-sightedness of the right that 'continues to choose the black of fossil fuels and thus condemn us to disaster' (PD 2022, 5). The justification for the energy transition is expressed in all three aspects of the trilemma, but greater attention to the environmental drive is now discernible: environmental disasters are repeatedly mentioned and the transition is no longer just an economic opportunity but a necessity, and must take social sustainability into account especially in light of the increase in energy prices following the war in Ukraine (PD 2022, 6).

In the centre, +Europa emphasises the economic dimension by linking the transition to the achievement of a 'fair and efficient' society (+Europa 2022, 12).

Within the centre-right coalition, FI grants the least space to the energy issue and confirms the adoption of the economic frame, although with increased emphasis on security aspects. National security is rather the characterising feature of the manifestos of Lega and FdI.

Table 4. Classification of text units related to problem-solving dimensions of the frames

	2022 Problem-setting			2022 Problem-solving		
	Sustainability	Eco-modernist	Eco-nationalist	Sustainability	Eco-modernist	Eco-nationalist
SI	10	2	0	32	1	1
PD	16	10	1	10	7	0
+EU	1	2	0	2	18	1
M5S	19	4	2	47	0	0
FI	1	0	1	3	7	4
Lega	4	5	54	5	27	32
FDI	1	1	3	2	3	10

Source: electoral manifestos of selected parties, own analysis.

The former claims that energy policies must guarantee 'the security of the energy system' and the supply of energy 'in necessary quantities and accessible to households and businesses in a continuous and stable manner' (Lega 2022, 45). Moreover, interweaving national and territorial dimensions which are relevant to the party's identity, it claims that energy policies must 'return value to the inhabitants of the territories' (Lega 2022, 43). While not denying the need to combat climate change, it states that a transition should not be pursued 'with the environmentalist ideologism' of EU policies, 'but gradually, with a pragmatic approach' to ensure its economic and social sustainability, avoiding dependence on producers of renewables technology external to Italy and Europe (Lega 2022, 45).

FdI presents a more articulated manifesto than in the past, strengthening its adhesion to the eco-nationalist frame. FdI, like Lega, believes that the impact of the energy transition as envisaged by the EU must be further investigated through a commission to design a sustainable strategy for 'our production system' and to 'prevent possible crises' (FdI 2022, 26-27). The symbolic adherence to the eco-nationalist frame is reinforced by references to relevant figures in Italian history: 'the homeland of Alessandro Volta, of Enrico Mattei and of innovation, must once again play a leading role in the energy field, promoting environmental sustainability and simultaneously lowering energy costs for companies, local governments and households' (FdI 2022, 26).

Turning to the problem-solving dimensions of the framing, the full internal consistency of the frames elaborated by the more radical parties – Lega and FdI on the right, SI on the left – is evident.

Lega advocates the development of a national supply chain for the production of renewable energy and the extraction of raw materials (Lega 2022, 52). A mix of state and market instruments is envisaged: on the one hand, entrusting the exploration for and extraction of critical minerals to state-owned companies (Lega 2022, 61) while, on the other, increasing market competition through further liberalisation (Lega 2022, 48). As a consequence of the war, the hasty, massive development of renewables and the EU-

imposed ban on endothermic engines in 2035 are stigmatised as they would facilitate Italian and European dependence on China. Therefore, the emphasising of the eco-nationalist frame leads to a radical change of position on electric cars compared to previous manifestos (Lega 2022, 44). The party indicates nuclear power as the long-term solution to combine environmental goals and national sovereignty (Lega 2022, 44).

According to FdI, energy policies must pursue 'maximum diversification of foreign supply sources' (FDI 2022, 27) to ensure greater national energy security. In addition, the construction of an 'Italian and European production chain for renewables, grids and storage' must be promoted (FDI 2022, 27). The proposed energy mix includes renewables, the exploitation of Italian fossil resources and nuclear power. Very few, rather general solutions are formulated but, in order to ensure greater independence from Russia, the party expresses consensus for the strengthening of RepowerEU (FDI 2022, 27).

On the opposite side of the political spectrum, SI claims that Italy must 'triple' its efforts to reduce GHG emissions and reach carbon-neutrality by 2045 (SI 2022, no page numbers). The realization of energy democracy requires convergence between top-down policy and bottom-up prosumerism and a resilient system free from fossils. A temporary price-cap on gas is proposed, but no investment in oil or gas extraction or nuclear plants is envisaged. European and international cooperation is promoted through partnership in the 'Beyond Oil & Gas Alliance'.

Internal coherence also characterises the frames of M5S and +Europa. For M5S, the Ukrainian crisis contributed to the development of a discourse on energy fully consistent with the redefinition of its ideological profile and of its competitive strategy. Its 2022 manifesto indeed includes proposals similar to those of SI and the Greens: the realisation of the transition through renewables, excluding both gas and nuclear power as bridging solutions, decentralised energy production by communities coupled with expansive state support for renewables and a review of environmentally harmful subsidies (M5S 2022, 83-87), and a European Green Deal to promote decarbonisation, as well as an Energy Recovery Fund based on EU-bond (M5S 2022, 204).

For +Europa, the interpretation of energy policy within a classic neoliberal economic approach is further legitimised: according to their manifesto, indeed, 'a fair and efficient transition must be achieved by making the market work better' (+Europa 2022, 12). Therefore, the 'variety of instruments' needed constantly refers to market efficiency, whether to incentivise the use of renewables or to fight energy poverty. The time targets for the transition are in line with European proposals, and the party's energy mix includes nuclear power (+Europa 2022, 13). The European dimension is particularly relevant: proposals include greater integration of the European grid, the adoption of a European cap on gas prices and the strengthening of the energy partnership with Africa to prevent the growing influence of China and Russia (+Europa 2022, 23).

Some inconsistencies are found in the frames adopted by PD and FI.

The former, while adhering to the sustainability frame in the problem-setting dimensions analysed above, is more cautious with reference to the problem-solving dimensions, and especially concerning the timing of the transition which – following a more centrist economic outlook – is anchored to a pragmatic energy mix. A partial shift towards the sustainability frame is signalled by the exclusion of slowing down the

transition and by the proposal of a national plan for energy efficiency and decentralised production through renewables and energy communities. Like SI and M5S, PD refuses nuclear power, but, unlike the two other parties, it promotes LNG terminals and proposes an 'anti-NIMBY fund' (PD 2022, 14) to counter local opposition. The EU's role is seen as central and positive for the transition, but a reform of treaties is envisaged to reduce veto power by individual member states (PD 2022, 11).

FI on the other hand, faced with the energy crisis after the invasion of Ukraine, maintains the eco-modernist frame but emphasises national security significantly more than in the past. Such positioning reflects the attempt to balance its liberal ideological stand with the competitive pressure coming from its allies on the right. It emphasises that environmental protection is exclusively achieved through 'support for research and innovation' (FI 2022, 24). Coherently, the proposed energy mix is varied and includes 'clean' nuclear power, biofuels, renewables and the doubling of domestic gas production to compensate for reduced imports from Russia. FI advocates market instruments and simplified bureaucracy for the implementation of renewables and, unlike the other right-wing parties, proposes a windfall tax on energy companies.

8. Concluding remarks

Our analysis demonstrates that the left-right divide was decisive in determining the frame adopted by political parties and that each of the frames we have identified is consistently associated with a specific segment of the political spectrum. Since the energy issue gained salience in 2022 and new problems arose, all parties have been forced to articulate a full, consistent discourse that once again fits the expected frames.

Energy transition is today a relevant issue in the Italian party debate. In recent years and, in particular, since the start of the Russian-Ukrainian war, it has become the object of a discursive clash, assuming increasing space in parties' proposals. The analysis shows that there is no single hegemonic frame, but that the conflicting aspects of the energy trilemma underpin competing frames centred on environmental, economic or security priorities. This diachronic comparison shows that the energy issue has been progressively integrated within proposals reflecting each party's position and ideological profile (H1). This issue is not external to the classic left-right conflict, but touches upon the value structure of society (the environment, the economy, security), the distribution of costs and benefits between social groups, and the role of the state and EU and international institutions.

No party, even on the far right, opposes energy transition as such, but each defines its urgency and desirability by placing it within a broader political project inspired by different principles. The ideological anchoring of the frames proposed by the parties, already discernible in the first two elections, was consolidated in 2022, when the external shock of the war increased the complexity of the problem, forcing parties to further articulate and define their frames, which, in turn, led to ever greater coherence between the various internal dimensions. The energy crisis thus constitutes an impulse to politicisation by encouraging the greater ideological aggregation of conflicting discursive coalitions (H2).

The analysis presented here contributes to the increasing of knowledge about a case in which the discursive dynamics and symbolic representation of energy issues have

hardly been looked at. The proposed reflections may provide the basis for future comparisons with other southern European democracies with similar political and energy policy characteristics.

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9. Appendix

Table A. List of party manifestos used in the research

Party	Election year	Title of the political manifesto and web link
Sinistra Italiana (SI)	2018	Programma Liberi e Uguali https://dait.interno.gov.it/documenti/trasparenza/politiche2018/Doc/47/47_Prog_Elettorale.pdf
	2019	Programma elettorale della lista 'La Sinistra' https://web.archive.org/web/20190524090234/https://www.sinistraeuropea.eu/index.php/manifesto/
	2022	Programma alleanza Verdi e Sinistra https://verdisinistra.it/programma-alleanza-verdi-e-sinistra/ https://web.archive.org/web/20220920143906/https://verdisinistra.it/programma-alleanza-verdi-e-sinistra/
Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S)	2018	Programma elettorale Movimento 5 Stelle https://dait.interno.gov.it/documenti/trasparenza/politiche2018/Doc/4/4_Prog_Elettorale.pdf
	2019	Continuare X Cambiare. Anche in Europa https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/ilblogdellestelle/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/02120249/contxcambiare.pdf https://web.archive.org/web/20190504193523/https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/ilblogdellestelle/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/02120249/contxcambiare.pdf
	2022	Dalla parte giusta. La persona al centro. Programma per un nuovo Umanesimo https://www.movimento5stelle.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Programma-M5S-completo-2022-09-12.pdf https://web.archive.org/web/20220915143745/https://www.movimento5stelle.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Programma-M5S-completo-2022-09-12.pdf
Partito Democratico (PD)	2018	Più forte, più giusta. L'Italia. https://web.archive.org/web/20180226011329/http://ftp.partitodemocratico.it/programma2018/PD2018-programmaA4_5feb.pdf
	2019	Una nuova Europa. Per un'Italia migliore, che cresce, che cambia, più giusta, più forte e più verde https://web.archive.org/web/20190524045910/http://europa.partitodemocratico.it/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/programma_corto_PD_Europa_2019-1.pdf
	2022	Insieme per un'Italia democratica e progressista https://partitodemocratico.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/AGGIORNAMENTO-PROGRAMMA_INSIEMEPERUNITALIADEMOCRATICAEPROGRESSISTA_250822-1.pdf https://web.archive.org/web/20240516144548/https://partitodemocratico.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/AGGIORNAMENTO-PROGRAMMA_INSIEMEPERUNITALIADEMOCRATICAEPROGRESSISTA_250822-1.pdf
+Europa	2018	Programma elettorale di '+Europa con Emma Bonino - Centro Democratico' https://dait.interno.gov.it/documenti/trasparenza/politiche2018/Doc/63/63_Prog_Elettorale.pdf
	2019	Un'altra Italia c'è. Più coraggiosa, più libera, più europea

		https://web.archive.org/web/20190524080625/https://piueuropa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/PROGRAMMA-EUROPA-2019-1.pdf
	2022	Una generazione avanti. Il programma di +Europa dei prossimi 5 anni per i prossimi 30 anni https://assets.nationbuilder.com/piueuropa/pages/1728/attachments/original/1661536519/PROGRAMMA__EUROPA_2022_%284%29.pdf?1661536519
Forza Italia (FI)	2018	Un programma per l'Italia. Per la crescita, la sicurezza, le famiglie e la piena occupazione https://dait.interno.gov.it/documenti/trasparenza/politiche2018/Doc/52/52_Prog_Elettorale.pdf
	2019	Una nuova Europa con Berlusconi Forza Italia per cambiare l'Europa https://web.archive.org/web/20190418080050/https://italiasvegliati.it/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Vademecum-Europee-2019.pdf
	2022	Oggi più che mai una scelta di campo https://web.archive.org/web/20220923001540/https://forzaitalia.it/speciali/Programma_Elettorale_Forza_Italia.pdf
Lega	2018	Salvini premier. La rivoluzione del buonsenso https://www.leganord.org/component/phocadownload/category/5-elezioni?download=1514 https://web.archive.org/web/20220616122259/https://www.leganord.org/component/phocadownload/category/5-elezioni?download=1514
	2019	MENL Programma politico https://web.archive.org/web/20190505104612/https://www.leganord.org/europee-2019/217-notizie/16540-menl-programma-politico
	2022	Programma di governo Lega Salvini premier https://static.legaonline.it/files/Programma_Lega_2022.pdf https://web.archive.org/web/20220922114804/https://static.legaonline.it/files/Programma_Lega_2022.pdf
Fratelli d'Italia (FdI)	2018	Il voto che unisce l'Italia. Il programma. Le priorità in 15 punti https://web.archive.org/web/20180226021828/http://www.fratelli-italia.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/PROGRAMMA_A4_REV2.pdf
	2019	Programma elezioni europee https://web.archive.org/web/20190508163900/https://europee.fratelli-italia.it/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/programma_europee.pdf
	2022	Il programma. Pronti a risollevare l'Italia https://web.archive.org/web/20220906234822/https://www.fratelli-italia.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Brochure_programma_FdI_qr_def.pdf

Source: (1) dait.interno.gov.it (Ministry of the Interior): available for national elections only; this link was used when the manifesto officially deposited with the Ministry was used for electoral communication; (2) party websites were used when still available when the manifesto used for electoral communication was different from the one deposited with the Ministry; (3) web.archive.org links are provided for all non-institutional websites, and are the only option available when the page on the party website is no longer online.

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A Populist Green Party? Discourses and Practices on Green Transition by the Five Stars Movement (2009-2023)

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Abstract

While unanimous in its categorization as 'populist', scholars have little analysed M5S discourse and practices on environmental issues (so central to the very identity of the party since its foundation); nor have they adopted them as the primary lens through which to categorize it and interpret its evolution over time. This paper aims to start to fill this gap. By relying on in-depth interviews with party representatives collected in the past few years, and on a focused analysis of manifestos and key party documents, this paper argues that M5S's discourses over environmental issues mirror the (ideological, strategic, in terms of leadership) transformations of the party. Once inspired by technological utopianism and mobilizing through both forms of pre-figurative politics and ownership of LULU conflicts, the party, particularly under Luigi Di Maio's leadership, for a while downplayed the priority assigned to the green transition and the challenges brought by climate change. In recent years, the M5S has been consistently framing green transition-related policies as tools for stimulating state-led economic growth. In this way, the M5S has gradually combined its environmentalist platform (previously branded as a valence issue and mostly stated in terms of 'good practices') with its 'economic populist' (Dornbusch and Edwards, 1991), inward-oriented, and highly divisive (in the Italian context) proposals, thus actively contributing to further politicizing the issues of green transition and climate change. While M5S's recent 'progressive' turn has increased its similarities to the European Green parties, the party's ongoing populist features discourage its inclusion within the Green party family.

1. Introduction

While unanimous in its categorization as 'populist', scholars have attached many different labels to the Five Stars Movement (M5S), also because of its ideological, strategic and organizational evolution over time. Scholars more attentive to tracing its ideological foundations have defined the M5S as 'polyvalent' (Pirro, 2018), 'syncretic' (Vittori, 2020a), but also 'inclusionary' (Hutter and Kriesi, 2019) and 'antineoliberal' (Padoan, 2020). Scholars emphasizing the centrality of M5S's anti-establishment and anti-corruption stances and its promises of democratic regeneration have defined it as 'web-populist' (Biorcio and Natale, 2013) and 'techno-populist' (Bickerton and Invernizzi, 2018), as well as a pure example of 'valence-issue populism' (Zulianello, 2020). Quite surprisingly, experts have little analysed M5S discourses and practices on environmental issues (so central to the very identity of the party since its foundation), nor have they adopted them as the primary lens through which to categorize it and interpret its evolution over time.

This paper aims to start to fill this gap. By relying on in-depth interviews with party representatives collected in the past few years, and on a focused analysis of manifestos

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and key party documents, this paper argues that M5S discourses over environmental issues have mirrored the (ideological, strategic, in terms of leadership) transformations of the party. Once inspired by technological utopianism and mobilizing through both forms of pre-figurative politics (Leach, 2016) and ownership of LULU conflicts (*Locally Unwanted Land Use*: Biancalana, 2020; Imperatore, 2023), the party, particularly under Luigi Di Maio's leadership, for a while downplayed the priority assigned to the green transition and the challenges brought by climate change. In recent years, the M5S has been consistently framing green transition-related policies not only as goals *per se,* but also as tools for stimulating state-led economic growth. In this way, the M5S has gradually combined its environmentalist platform (once branded as a valence issue and mostly stated in terms of 'good practices') with its 'economic populist' (Dornbusch and Edwards, 1991), inward-oriented, and highly divisive (in the Italian context) proposals, thus actively contributing to further politicizing the issues of green transition and climate change. While M5S's recent 'progressive' turn has increased similarities to the European Green parties, the party's ongoing populist features discourage its inclusion within the Green party family.

The article is divided into five different sections. The first section offers a review of the relevant literature on the issues of the progressive politicization of environmental issues, and the main studies on the Green party family and on the relationship between populism and positions on the environment. Some considerations are also offered on the specific category of populism in which the M5S can be pigeonholed and on its 'eligibility' to be classified as a Green party. The second section presents the methodological strategies of this article. The third section briefly traces the three main phases of the organizational evolution of the M5S. This is useful for grasping the resulting strategic, ideological and leadership evolutions, with important consequences in terms of the salience and positions taken by the party on environmental issues, as detailed in the fourth section. Some brief conclusions and points for further reflection close the article.

2. The politicization of environmental issues in populist times

The M5S is quite famous for its populist rhetoric, which found fertile terrain in a country that has been repeatedly defined as 'the promised land of populism' or a 'populist heaven' (Tarchi, 2015). However, since its origins, the party has also strongly focused on environmentalism, which apparently finds less promising structural conditions in Italy. Environmental concerns have traditionally been, and still are, much lower in Southern Europe (and in Italy in particular) than in the rest of the continent, both at the demand-side (van Haute, 2016) and at the supply-side levels, as measured by party manifestos (e.g., Schworer, 2023). Studies focusing on the specific 'green' policy proposals advanced by different party families underline the role of ideology. According to Batstrand (2014), both the 'new' and 'old' left tend to praise the role of the state (through bans, regulations, or public ownership) for driving the ecology transition (and only the 'new left' places emphasis on reducing consumption), while the 'old' right (but also both 'new' and 'old' left) tends to insist on policy tools such as quotas and market incentives. In turn, what Batstrand defines as the 'new right' – i.e., the populist radical right – is the only party family explicitly rejecting pro-environment measures and/or insisting on climate change scepticism.

To understand the extent to which environmental issues have become politicized, it is thus important to look, from a supply-side perspective, at both saliency and positioning (Carter and Little, 2021). Farstad (2017) rightly argues that environment, nowadays, can no longer be considered a valence issue (Stokes, 1963). Gemenis et al. (2012) found that the understanding of environmental issues as valence or positional issues is highly affected by framing, and that issue positionality becomes clear when they are framed in terms of the green transition vs economic growth/job protection dilemmas. Pollex and Berker (2022) have highlighted that parties differ both in terms of saliency assigned to environmental issues but also, and more crucially, in terms of 'simple' or 'complex' understandings of the environmental question (i.e., the connection of environmental proposals to several political issues, thus going beyond greenwashing rhetoric). Recent surveys confirm the increasing positionality of environmental issues. According to a survey by the European Investment Bank, in the whole of Southern Europe, recognition of the green transition as an economic opportunity is much higher than the rest of the continent (Italy vs the EU-27 average: 76 percent vs 56 percent). On the one hand, this would suggest the resilience of environmental issues as valence issues in Southern Europe; on the other hand, the fear of losing jobs because of the green transition is higher than the EU-27 average (34 percent in both Italy and Spain vs 25 percent), and particularly higher amongst younger people (56 percent amongst 15-29 years old, 44 percent amongst 30-49 years old), and this can be interpreted as a sign of increasing positionality. This paper will detail how such a broad shift of environmental issues (from valence to positional) has been reflected in the M5S's environmental discourse over the years.

The growing literature on party polarization on climate change (e.g. Dunlap et al. 2016; Tranter, 2013) and, crucially, on populism and climate change, also reports this trend. Since populism in Europe is mostly, albeit not entirely, a right-wing phenomenon, much literature focuses more broadly on the connections between populist right-wing / far-right politics and ACC (Anthropogenic Climate Change) denial as part of environmental politics (Forchtner, 2019; Lamb et al., 2020). (Right-wing) populism and ACC scepticism correlate because of the 'top-down nature of environmental politics', and its 'transnational nature' (Boehmelt, 2021), as well as the threat that climate policies may imply to traditional lifestyles and existing forms of production (e.g. Frischlich et al., 2023; Ofstehage et al., 2022). Rarer studies focusing (also) on European left-wing populisms (mostly concentrated in Southern Europe – the M5S is *de facto* increasingly included in this category [e.g. Hutter and Kriesi, 2019]) found that left-wing populists, when in government, are particularly likely to push forward strong pro-environment agendas (Jahn, 2021). Chazel and Dain (2023) have recently coined the term 'green populism' to capture how the left-wing populist party *La France Insoumise* has combined its eco-socialist ideology with anti-elitism and people-centrism to blame the environmental crisis on the 'oligarchy' and to promote a 'popular' green transition.

The 'green populism' concept is quite different from the concept of 'eco(logical)-populisms' as independently coined by Koutnik ('[a set of] broad appeals to everyday people to assert themselves against developmentalist elites, norms, and institutions that threaten their environs with destruction'; 2021: 49) and Escobar-Fernández and Hart, who define it as 'socio-environmental movements that have scaled up their struggle and have employed both universal rhetoric and approach to inscribe their demands' (2023:

8). Both definitions point to the populist articulation of local-level, 'home-based' struggles: as this paper will detail, 'eco-populism' partially fits with the very genesis of the M5S and some of its early strategies, while the ongoing phase of M5S's evolution – ideologically inspired by statist visions – shares some elements with Chazel and Dain's 'green populism' label.

Since, as we have seen, the literature emphasizes the key role of party ideology to explain the saliency of environmental issues and their positioning at the supply-side level, focusing on the M5S's environmental platform(s) may contribute to better capturing and portraying the (highly debated) ideological leaning(s) that the party has been assuming since 2009. The party has merged positions which are typical of the 'new Left' (e.g., emphasis on waste reduction, forms of pre-figurative politics, support for LULU campaigns), prevailing in its early phase, with more recent positions that are closely connected to a specific declination of populism, echoing some features of Latin American 'classic populism'. Collier and Collier (1991: 788) defined them as 'political movements [...] typically of a personalistic and/or charismatic character and [with] an anti-status-quo, nationalist [in the case of the M5S, "sovereigntist": Basile and Mazzoleni, 2021] ideology and program' consisting in 'a reformist set of policies tailored to promote development without explosive class conflict' (Drake, 1982). Such 'reformist policies' have been (polemically) defined as 'economic populism' by neoliberal economists Rudi Dornbusch and Sebastian Edwards (1992: 9) in the following terms: 'an approach to economics that emphasizes growth and income redistribution and deemphasizes the risks of inflation and deficit finance, external constraints, and the reaction of economic agents to aggressive nonmarket policies'. As the empirical sections will show, the M5S has increasingly and consistently endorsed such an 'approach to economics' (implying both a clear statist vision and a rejection of class conflict while, instead, aiming to create cross-class coalitions of social actors benefitting from inward-looking economic growth), *particularly* in order to define its platform on the green transition.

As we will further discuss in the concluding sections, the centrality of such populist components of the M5S throughout its history also becomes relevant when discussing the relationship between the party and the Green party family, both in analytical (can the M5S be classified as a Green party?) and organizational terms. Party families are commonly identified by their origins and social bases, transnational links, policy and ideology, and party name (Essner, 2010; Mair and Mudde, 1998). Despite being younger than other party families, the Greens in Europe have increasingly become a homogenous party family according to all the dimensions considered (Dietz, 2000; Carter, 2013). Despite a few exceptions, Green parties are characterized by 'strong environmental, libertarian and left-wing policy positions' (Carter, 2023: 74). Mostly originating in the 'new social movements' of the seventies, Green parties have increasingly 'professionalized' (in Panebianco's terms), while also 'standing (very) close to the amateur/activist ideal-type' (Rihoux and Frankland, 2008: 266). Their electorate, according to Dolezal's study on 12 European countries (2010), tended and tends to be young, highly-educated, overrepresented amongst socio-cultural specialists or students, urban, and not very religious. Most parties classifiable as 'Greens' include in their party name terms such as 'Green' or 'Ecolog*', and, although they are often reluctant to position themselves on a left-right scale (van Haute, 2016), only a small number of them are currently positioned

in the centre/centre-right of the spectrum (Carter, 2023). Cross-country cohesion is also reflected in the importance of umbrella organizations, such as the Global Greens and the European Green Party (EGP), as well as in the very high cohesion shown by the Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament (van Haute, 2016). In contrast to the past, pro-EU stances are the norm nowadays, and tend to be even stronger where competition for recognition by the EGP is fierce (van Haute, 2016).

The M5S has passed through quite different organizational, strategic and ideological phases throughout its history (Vittori, 2020b; Padoan, 2022; see below). As we will detail and discuss, the M5S has, in some respects, moved close to the Green party family; however, the party has at the same time distanced itself from it over time. Some genetic characteristics (origins and social bases, some aspects of its policy platform) could be associated with the Greens, while others were at odds with this party family. Some aspects of the M5S evolution, particularly in recent years, further contributed to an eventual rapprochement, while other features still mark strong differences. In sum, this analysis can contribute to the discussion on the fittest categories in which to classify the M5S as a political party.

3. Data and methods

This paper uses a mixed-method strategy to reconstruct the evolution of the discourses and practices pursued by the M5S on environmental issues throughout its history, mostly from a supply-side perspective. In terms of data collection, this study focuses primarily on the electoral manifestos drawn up by the M5S in view of the parliamentary elections (at national and European level) from 2009 to the present (parliamentary elections in 2013, 2018 and 2022; European elections in 2014 and 2019). A series of official documents considered particularly relevant for grasping the evolution of the M5S political discourse were also considered, always with particular attention to the salience and declination of environmental issues. Thus, the following were considered: i) the main book written by Beppe Grillo in the embryonic phase of the M5S (Grillo, 2007); ii) the so-called 'Government Contract' signed by the M5S and Lega (M5S and League, 2018) in view of the creation of the coalition government led by Conte in 2018 (a useful document for understanding the possible compromises, as well as the 'non-negotiable' points of the M5S in the environmental sphere); iii) the internal document *After the Coronavirus. The political culture of the M5S* (M5S, 2020), produced with the collaboration of the sociologist Domenico De Masi, which collects the considerations of a dozen of the party's senior figures regarding the (past and potential future) evolution of the party's political culture.

All these documents were analysed, in the first instance, on the basis of the principles of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The analysis started by identifying meaning units (MUs), (i.e., a portion of the text that is relevant to the research questions and that carries meaning that can be coded), firstly selected by a word search based on specific keywords (*environment*, clim*, sustainab*, ecology*, transition*). The goal was to identify 'themes', i.e. 'something important about the data in relation to the research question, and [representing] some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set' (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 82). This preliminary phase was therefore useful in identifying the main frames and policy proposals of the M5S on the topics of interest. In the overall analysis, the relative salience assigned to environmental issues was taken

into account, as well as the main characterizing themes in each document, also in order to better contextualize the 'themes' emerging from the thematic analysis.

To complement the analysis of the manifestos, the transcripts of 27 interviews (quoted here as 'INT#': see the Online Appendix) of national and regional party figures collected by the author in two different phases (in 2016-2017, when the M5S was in opposition, and in 2018-2019, during the experience of government in coalition with the League) were also considered. These semi-structured interviews, initially collected for the purposes of other research (Padoan, 2020; Caiani and Padoan, 2021), included, within the questionnaires, several questions that focused on the early membership recruitment phase and on the principles and values that characterized the party in the opinions of the interviewees, in two rather different phases of M5S history. These data were therefore very useful for capturing the importance of environmental issues in defining the positive identity of the party, but also in understanding the way in which, as will be seen, these themes have been differently expressed and emphasized over time.

Survey data collected by ITANES (Italian Elections Studies) through a representative sample of the Italian population were also used to integrate a demand-side perspective of our reflection. Since ITANES data referring to the 2022 elections are still embargoed, this research relies on data collected for the 2013 and 2018 elections (post-electoral questionnaires: N=1465 [2013] and N=2573 [2018]). These data offered the possibility of confirming the low salience of environmental issues among Italian voters in the two elections considered, but also the relative importance of the same issues among Five-Star voters and (especially) militants.

4. The trajectory of the M5S: Organization and Leadership

The literature on the M5S is already vast and covers many aspects of the party, also in diachronic and comparative perspective. Several books (e.g., Biorcio and Natale, 2013; Tronconi, 2015; Vittori, 2020a; Padoan, 2022) provide comprehensive analyses of the party, sometimes in a comparative perspective (Della Porta et al., 2017; Padoan, 2020).

After some local level electoral appearances under the *Amici di Beppe Grillo* ('Beppe Grillo's friends') umbrella, the M5S was officially founded on 4 October 2009, when its statute was also circulated. The first M5S statute excluded any party role apart from the leader (Beppe Grillo, also the legal owner of the party's name and logo) and celebrated direct and digital democracy. The latter was conceived as the only mechanism able to avoid any bureaucratization and the full adherence of the party in public office (Katz and Mair, 1995) to the will of the digital membership. While emphasis on grassroots democracy and control over the party in public office (PPO) are also typical organizational traits of Green parties (van Haute, 2016), M5S's practical functioning has always been clearly plebiscitarian. Overall, from 2009 until at least 2017 (when, in view of the 2018 elections, Luigi Di Maio was elected as the 'political leader' [*capo politico*] of the party), the M5S had a dual and cohesive leadership, with Beppe Grillo as the charismatic political and media leader, and with Gianroberto (later Davide) Casaleggio in charge of the internal organization of the party web platform Rousseau (where internal referendums and candidate selection processes were held: Biancalana and Vittori, 2023) and of the party's communication. The party in the central office (PCO, namely Grillo and Casaleggio) acted, thus, as a whip imposing strong discipline on the party in public office, with the

party on the ground (organized in informal local circles) mostly reduced to ratifying predetermined political decisions (Caiani et al., 2022).

On the one hand, therefore, the M5S saw a (consciously pursued) disempowerment of the party on the ground. But, on the other hand, the PPO (especially those at the parliamentary level first, and then at the governmental level) gradually assumed stronger autonomy *vis à vis* the PCO.

While Grillo exploited his role as father-founder and 'guarantor' to endorse all political decisions of the utmost importance[1], Casaleggio was *de facto* forced to exit, thus sealing: *i*) the abandonment of the ideal of democratic regeneration through digital democracy; *ii*) the end of 'anti-systemic' positioning (Zulianello, 2019) and of its equidistance with respect to centre-left and centre-right coalitions (Padoan, 2022).

Di Maio's leadership, however, was heavily affected by the difficulties faced by the M5S in government, also reflected in the very disappointing electoral results in the 2019 European and local elections. In January 2020, Di Maio resigned as political leader, opening up to the weak interim leadership of Vito Crimi. Following the break with Matteo Salvini's League (August 2019), and even more so following the outbreak of the pandemic emergency (March 2020), Giuseppe Conte acquired enormous political weight within the M5S (Saccà and Selva, 2023).

Conte served as PM in both governments in which the M5S enjoyed the status of major partner: Conte I (June 2018-August 2019: M5S and League) and Conte II (September 2019-January 2021: M5S, Democratic Party and other minor centrist or left-wing parties). After the fall of the Conte II government, the 'guarantor', Grillo, commissioned Giuseppe Conte to prepare a new party statute and to assume also *de iure* leadership of the party. The new statute incorporated a comprehensive 'Charter of Principles and Values' (M5S, 2021) oriented towards a 'progressive' political culture (see also the internal document M5S, 2020), no longer hard-Eurosceptic, and centred on social justice issues. The '5 Stars' of the party changed: from 'public water, environment, sustainable mobility, development and connectivity' they now stand for 'common good, integral ecology, social justice, technological innovation and the eco-social market economy'. In organizational terms, the extremely vertical character of the party was not changed. Beppe Grillo was confirmed in the role of guarantor, and thus the ultimate interpreter of the statute itself.

5. The Ideological Evolution – and the Declinations of Environmental Politics in the M5S

To each of these distinct phases in the history of the M5S in terms of organization and leadership, it is possible to associate certain specific characteristics in ideological terms. Although the M5S largely continues to define itself as a 'post-ideological' movement, the party has adopted quite different meta-political discourses and narratives at different stages of its trajectory. Recently, the party has been consistently defining itself as part of the Italian 'progressive camp' (to use the formula conceived by Conte himself). Quite coherently with these ideological evolutions, the way the M5S has approached

[1] First and foremost, the choice of forming several parliamentary alliances (in 2018, 2019 and 2021) to enter and remain in government.

environmental issues has also transformed over time, as summarized in Table 1 and explained in detail in the following subsections.

Table 1. Ideological and Organizational Evolution of the M5S (2009-onwards) and Declination of Environmental Issues

	Early Phase (2009-2013)	**Antagonist Phase (2014-2019)**	**In the 'Progressive Camp' (2019-)**
Leadership	Grillo (Casaleggio)	Casaleggio (Grillo); growing Role for PPO: Di Maio (since 2017)	Conte (Grillo)
Core Issues	Anti-Establishment; Digital Democracy; Environment	Anti-Austerity/Euroscepticism; Sovereignty; Digital Economy; Safety-Net Policies	Social Justice; State-led economic growth; Green transition
Environment Declined as…	Good Practices (e.g. Circular Economy, waste reduction); Support for LULU struggles	Support for LULU struggles (when in opposition); Green Economy (economic growth and job creation); Soil Protection and Circular Economy	Key Issue for State-led, inward-oriented economic model

Source: own elaboration.

5.1. Early phase (2009-2013)

The (typically populist: Mudde, 2004) opposition between a 'virtuous' people and a 'corrupt' elite was at the core of the original political discourse of the M5S, pitting the 'Citizens' against the 'Caste'. The very first public demonstrations convoked by Grillo, in 2007 and 2008, were called 'V-Days', against the 'caste of politicians' and the 'caste of journalists'. The struggle against politicians' 'privileges' was put forward through bill proposals and through performative practices. Overall, the struggle against 'corruption' was the first, and strongest, flagship of the party (Zulianello, 2020).

However, and since the beginning, the elites targeted by the M5S in its original discourse were more variegated than the political class or the media system. For sure, there have been several public positions of the party targeting some 'cultural elites' – positions that justified conservative stances on migratory or civil right issues (e.g. Pirro, 2018; Caiani and Padoan, 2023). However, these stances have not formed the core discourse of the party (Caiani and Padoan, 2021), which also refuses (as one of the party's flagships, the 'citizens' income', testifies) producerist views typical of the populist Right (Ivaldi and Mazzoleni, 2019). Instead, it is noticeable that one of the most famous of Grillo's books (2007) was divided into six sections: 'Clean Parliament – No to High-Speed Trains – *Unipol* – *Telecom* – Incinerators – Stock Exchange'. The second (referring to Grillo's support for the struggle of a local community against a mega-project in its valley) and the fifth section focused on environmental issues, while the remaining sections focused on political-financial scandals denouncing revolving doors between the political and the financial spheres.

While emphasis on political-financial scandals, 'revolving doors' and corruption, along with attacks on political and media establishments, marked the negative identity of the party and its bases, their positive identity was developed around environmental sensibilities, together with the appropriation of the so-called 'moral question' and with

the techno-utopian celebration (inspired by Casaleggio) of forms of disintermediated democracy (Tronconi, 2015). In the 'pre-genetic phase' (2006-2009), i.e., when the local 'Five-Stars lists' began appearing, environmental issues were clearly dominant. The *Carta di Firenze*[2] (published in Grillo's blog on March 2009) included twelve programmatic requisites for a municipality to be symbolically awarded as a 'Five-Stars Municipality'. Eight points focused on green measures (e.g., public water, urban greenery/stop with land use, sustainable local transport/bike lanes, energy efficiency…), two on connectivity, one on architectural barriers and one on 'local production'. At the same time, such a document full of (valence) environmental sensibilities was accompanied by Grillo's emphatic anti-establishment tones:

> 'these insane mayors gambled with us, invested in hedge funds instead of administering people's money. And it's clear that now they don't have a dime, they have to look for money. How? By selling off citizens' land, by proposing improbable bridges - all improbable things. With our lists, if we get in, we will nip this little game in the bud!'[3]

In sum, the coexistence of valence issues and of anti-establishment rhetoric formed a coherent narrative: the 'caste' prevented the 'citizens' from achieving and enjoying unquestionably positive goals, such as 'honesty' and environmental protection. Anti-establishment tones were particularly important in ensuring the rapid and spectacular growth of the M5S electorate. Indeed, the environment was far from being one of the issues Italians felt most strongly about in the run-up to the 2013 elections (Table 2; see also Giannetti et al. 2022). M5S voters, however, were particularly sensitive to the environment, at least in terms of lifestyle choices (Table 3a).

Table 2. Most important issues according to Italian electorate, per party voted, by percentage (ITANES post-electoral questionnaire, 2013 Elections).

	Unemployment	Economic Development	Corruption	Taxes	Environment
M5S	80.23	22.98	30.49	13.51	0.87
Radical Left	92.92	26.30	25.18	8.31	0.00
Democratic Party	84.47	25.85	27.74	12.80	0.34
People of Freedom (Centre-Right)	79.74	16.17	22.30	28.55	0.00
Civic Choice (Centre)	83.61	32.08	26.70	9.36	0.00
Abstention	81.27	25.23	30.70	17.06	0.00
Total	82.89	25.25	29.54	15.13	0.29

Source: Author's elaboration of ITANES Data (2013). Maximum two issues per respondent. Exact question wording: 'In your opinion, what is the most important problem facing the government in Italy today? And the second most important problem?'

[2] Retrieved from: www.trentino5stelle.it/carta-di-firenze/

[3] Retrieved from: https://beppegrillo.it/beppe-grillo-e-la-carta-di-firenze/

Table 3. Percentage of voters (a) considering political, ethical or environmental reasons for their consumption choices and (b) members of environmental organizations, per party voted (ITANES post-electoral questionnaire, 2013 Elections).

	(a) % Refused Purchase for Ethical/Environmental Reasons (last two years)	(b) % Participate in Environmental Associations
M5S	17.87	7.23
Radical Left	35.48	8.06
Democratic Party	13.15	5.20
People of Freedom (Centre-Right)	5.16	3.87
Civic Choice (Centre)	9.21	3.95
Abstention	6.17	2.47
Total	11.6	4.85

Source: Author's elaboration of ITANES Data (2013). Exact questions wording: 'Tell me whether you have bought or refused to buy a product in the last two years for political, ethical or environmental reasons'; 'tell me whether you are affiliated with, or you are a member of, or you participate in environmental associations".

Crucially, and as also suggested by ITANES data (Table 3b), the positive identity imagery linked to environmental issues was central to recruiting the first nuclei of activists and in general to fixing the main issues debated locally and to some extent nationally[4], at least during the phase of extra-parliamentary and parliamentary opposition (2009-2018). Several interviews with MPs and former MPs of the M5S collected between 2016 and 2017, and tracing the early phase of building the party on the ground, underline both how often activists approached the M5S because of environmentalist battles or sensibilities, and how close the relationship with local environmental committees was in those years[5]:

> In 2005 we all heard about the events in Venaus (Susa Valley), when for the first time [No TAV] demonstrators were beaten by the police. Then I started to read Grillo's blog; it became my obsession [laughs], so since 2007 [being a M5S activist and a No Tav activist] have gone hand in hand. Then I started to delve into environmental and health-related issues (INT1).
>
> To date, I have never found the party members and the committees consulted, e.g. the water committees, to be in conflict (INT3; similarly, INT12).
>
> We did not want to be avatars, we wanted to be visible people and to help give the M5S logo credibility. Many felt this need because they had a background of activism in associations: local committees, Red Cross, environmental groups (INT5; similarly, INT11).
>
> On social policies and especially on labour issues we were weak, it is true: we came from the environmental sphere (INT6).
>
> The first [M5S groups] were formed by citizens who were interested in defending public assets first and foremost. They therefore participated alongside

[4] Local environmental conflicts in Val di Susa, in Puglia (over the gas pipeline TAP and the conversion of a major steelworks), and in Sicily, as well as the *no-incinerators* policy in Rome, all became nationally debated issues.

[5] Critics referred to the M5S 'issue-ownership' strategy, which ended up 'cannibalizing the issue' advanced by the movements (INT2; INT4).

> committees, public water for example, to defend the common good (INT7; similarly, INT13).

The articulation of local environmental struggles occurred in a very consonant way with the concept of 'eco-populism' recalled in the second section (e.g. Escobar-Fernández and Hart, 2023). The 'populist', anti-establishment component is self-evident in many interviews, (e.g. INT3; INT7; INT13) in which the 'establishment' is *always* identified with 'political parties', prone to be captured by economic interests (unlike the M5S, which is 'proudly *ab-solutus*': INT13). Environmental and public health issues appeared, moreover, particularly suitable – in the eyes of the activists themselves – for confirming the M5S's supposed adherence to 'common sense' (INT1) and their mission to defend 'the common good', as well as the party's distance from 'old [and divisive] categories', such as 'left and right', thus increasing the possibilities of reaching citizens of different ideological tendencies. However, as the following subsection will further explore, even environmentalist battles were later wielded with the aim of asserting the antagonistic and sovereignist image that the M5S steadily decided to assume, particularly when assuming the role of parliamentary opposition:

> At the local level, regarding the battle against the MUOS [a US military infrastructure in Sicily], the M5S initially adopted transversal arguments – environment, health – also because it has a transversal electorate. However, in a second phase, the M5S in the Europarliament turned, and began to include the MUOS issue within the anti-NATO frame (INT4).

5.2. 'Antagonist Phase' (2014-2019)

The M5S transition from the 'early' to the 'antagonist' phase (Table 1), with strong sovereigntist characteristics, is clearly captured by an analysis of the party manifestos produced by the M5S in view of different elections (parliamentary elections in 2013 and 2018; European elections in 2014 and 2019).

In the rather narrow manifesto for the 2013 general election, prepared by Grillo and divided into seven sections, environmental issues recur mainly (but not exclusively) when dealing with transport (fifth section) and energy (second section). The opening section focuses on the relationship between 'state and citizens' (mainly, cutting public funding for political activities and, secondarily, envisaging tools to encourage participation and transparency). As far as energy policies were concerned, the M5S focused on the goal of reducing industrial and domestic consumption (explicitly citing the energy labelling system in force in South Tyrol as 'good practice'), possibly to be incentivized by general taxation, as well as a general emphasis on waste reduction. This was, after all, not only compatible with the 'happy degrowth' inspiration that had imbued the party's discourse and aesthetics (Caiani and Padoan, 2023) until very recently (see M5S, 2020), but also had the goal of reducing the waste of public money – perfectly fitting the anti-corruption frame. The M5S also emphasized decarbonization as a primary goal. As for transport policy, the M5S again insisted on 'good practices', adopting a vocabulary that was innovative at the time (bike lanes, but also *car sharing* [in English]). Even within the section on the economy, 'good practices' to protect the environment were advocated[6].

[6] E.g., 'disincentives to companies that generate social harm (e.g. bottled water distributors)'.

Positional framing of environmental issues was limited to a clear rejection of wasteful 'megaprojects' such as the High-Speed Train (Tav) in the Susa Valley and the Sicilian-Calabrian bridge.

Already in view of the 2014 European elections, the situation looked different. In the very short manifesto officially circulated – just seven points – the environment was barely mentioned. Six of the seven points were dedicated to the restructuring of the EU economic-financial architecture (e.g., abolition of the Fiscal Compact, adoption of Eurobonds, referendum on Italian permanence in the Eurozone and creation of a common alliance between Southern European countries). Only the fifth point vaguely touched environmental issues, again within a sovereigntist frame ('funding agricultural and livestock breeding activities aimed at domestic consumption'). In a book (2014) written by the M5S activist Di Cori Modigliani (with foreword by Grillo and Casaleggio) to explain in detail the 2014 manifesto, the emphasis on a 'cultural battle' for the restoration of 'the people's sovereignty' against the establishment (mostly identified, again, with the 'old parties') is even clearer. Environmental problems are barely mentioned as a by-product of the political parties' and EU-bureaucracy's control over society. The sovereigntist/Eurosceptic turn was in fact confirmed in 2017 by Roberto Fico, the main exponent of the 'progressive' wing of the party, and therefore potentially less close to sovereigntist *mots d'ordre*:

> Sovereignty is central, including energy and food sovereignty, also because then you are no longer dependent on foreign countries and the outside world, and that means a strengthening. This concept is very strong (INT8).

This sovereignist shift was also confirmed by the party's choices in terms of alliance at the EU parliament level. One month after the European elections, M5S leaders pushed for allying with pro-Brexit UKIP in the EP. This strategy was ratified by the membership through an online vote excluding the possibility of joining the Greens/EFA group which, according to a prominent party cadre, 'refused any dialogue'[7]. In early 2017, the M5S attempted an unexpected move to 'apply for accreditation as a governing party' (INT27) and, while breaking with the UKIP, asked to enter the Lib-Dem ALDE group, which rejected M5S's application on the basis of 'fundamental differences on key European issues'[8]. In view of the 2019 European elections, the M5S again found itself isolated: the Greens/EFA blocked any dialogue because of the M5S-League alliance at the national level and because of 'the non-democratic features of M5S organization'[9]. The M5S then opted to build its own alliance composed of four minor anti-establishment conservative parties (from Poland, Greece, Croatia and Finland, all of them failing to win any seat at the European elections)[10].

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[7] See: M5S, blog Grillo: si vota su alleanze Ue. (2014). *La Repubblica*, June 12. Retrieved from https://shorturl.at/joxN2

[8] See: Grillo tentato di lasciare EFDD. Sul blog si vota su futuro in Ue. (2017). *ANSA*, January 10. Retrieved from https://shorturl.at/izKLO

[9] See: Il M5S è incompatibile con noi. Parla il leader dei Verdi in Europa. (2018). *Il Foglio*, October 16. Retrieved from https://shorturl.at/krtW1

[10] See: Elezioni europee: chi sono gli alleati del Movimento 5 Stelle. (2019). *Wired Italia*, February 15. Retrieved from https://shorturl.at/bdpG7

In the run-up to the 2018 national parliamentary elections, the party launched, via the Rousseau platform, a series of online polls to invite members to ratify each of the 18 chapters (drafted by the PPO) which should have formed the final version of the manifesto. The outcome was a document of 540 pages: 244 concerning energy-related issues, and 140 focusing on 'Environment'. All the chapters were accompanied by a vast amount of quantitative data – almost an 'engineering' approach, demonstrating the PPO's high level of attention to these issues (in this sense, Mosca and Vittori, 2023). In terms of proposals, the emphasis was put on the centrality of the state (once protected from the influence of corporations) as a decisive actor in implementing new sustainable economic models. The manifesto advocated, as a principle, the transition from a linear economy to a circular economy; it emphasized the importance of introducing economic incentives (e.g., the provision of an 'A+++ tax' [referring to the classification of household appliances in energy classes] for less polluting activities) and penalizations (against fuel-based private mobility). The document emphatically stated that 'the state is the sovereign people' (p. 87), since 'the sovereign right of countries to control essential services, water, food, education, health, transport, communications and energy is superordinate to any form of commerce' (p. 81), and 'the state is the main protagonist in achieving the programmatic objectives set for the country's economic, social and environmental vision' (p. 91).

This 'long' manifesto, however, was not widely circulated, and did not become the official version, which was instead a much shorter document (three pages) personally signed by Di Maio and listing '20 points to change Italy'. Environmental issues were mentioned in just two of these 20 points: the sixth point concerning 'support [through funding of up to 50 billion euro] for strategic sectors for "productive investments"' (e.g., renewable energy production, incentives for electric mobility, fight against hydrogeological instability); the sixteenth point promising a 'Green Economy: Italy 100% Renewable', with particular emphasis on job creation. The first five points of the manifesto aimed at the de-bureaucratization and digitalization of the country, the introduction of the *Reddito di Cittadinanza*, substantial (both corporate and income) tax cuts and 'cutting the cost of politics'.

The emphasis was therefore primarily on economic development – by resorting to deficit spending instead of tax increases – and thus job creation, as well as on 'anti-caste' policies – in line with voters' priorities (Table 4). One could clearly see the ambition to build a social coalition based on small and medium-sized enterprises[11] and workers, as well as on those excluded from the welfare system (Padoan 2020, 2022). Environmental issues were substantially downplayed.

The salience of environmental issues, however, was immediately re-affirmed following the outcome of the 2018 elections. In particular, the start of negotiations for a coalition government with Matteo Salvini's League, as well as the subsequent changes in the balance of power between the two parties, as certified by the 2019 European elections (when the League reached 34 per cent and the M5S collapsed to 17 per cent), convinced the M5S to insist more on issues defining its positive identity.

[11] See also the thirteenth point, announcing the creation of a 'public investment bank for small enterprises, farmers and families'.

Table 4. Most important issues according to Italian electorate, per coalition voted, by percentage (ITANES post-electoral questionnaire, 2018 Elections).

	Unemployment	Tax Evasion	Taxation	Public Debt	Corruption	Immigration	Environment
M5S	52.25	15.63	25.92	11.55	34.37	18.31	4.65
Centre-Left Coalition	50.78	30.81	19.19	18.80	27.13	9.50	4.84
Centre-Right Coalition	43.99	6.35	35.15	9.98	15.19	45.58	1.36
Abstention	41.20	14.40	22.00	14.00	27.20	22.80	4.80
Total	48.51	17.42	25.72	13.46	27.07	22.80	3.96

Source: own elaboration of ITANES Data (2018). Maximum two issues per respondent. Exact question wording: 'In your opinion, what is the most important problem facing the country today? And the second most important problem?'

Already within the 'Government Contract' signed by the M5S and the League in May 2018, the party led by Di Maio attempted to assure the saliency of environmental issues: 'There is a need for greater involvement and knowledge of environmental issues that can [...] bring the ecological issue to the centre of politics' (M5S and League, 2019: 10). The chapter dedicated to 'Environment, Green Economy and Zero Waste' was the longest and most detailed chapter of the 'Contract'[12]. The M5S did obtain from the League the inclusion of 'decarbonization' as a key goal: 'our task is to support the "green-economy", research, innovation and training for the development of green jobs and the revival of the competitiveness of our industrial system, with the aim of "decarbonizing" production and finance and promoting the circular economy'. [...] 'It is therefore crucial to [...] combat climate change' (M5S and League, 2019: 10-13). However, the emphasis was immediately placed on the (less controversial) goal of reducing waste, to be tackled through performative initiatives implemented by Public Administration so as to 'become a reference for the adoption of good practices, best techniques and standards [...] as already happens in Treviso [a League-led municipality]' (M5S and League, 2019: 11). The Government Contract also anticipated important public resources for the energy requalification of buildings (see below about the so-called 'Superbonus 110%') and for the fight against hydrogeological instability ('combining virtuous spending and job creation').

As far as the electoral manifesto for the 2019 European elections is concerned, among the (few) results claimed by M5S action in the Europarliament from 2014 to 2019, environmental issues stood out (reduction of CO_2 emissions for new vans and cars; ban on single-use plastic). The manifesto was divided into six macro-areas: environmental issues were mainly (and strongly) discussed within the second ('stop austerity: full employment and sustainable development') and third macro-area ('protection of people, health and the environment'). Within the second macro-area, there are again proposals for business incentives ('especially small and micro') for sustainable transition, with an emphasis on 'job creation, especially at the local level' (pp. 16-18). Decarbonization policies were included in sections dedicated to transport and energy, and to the protection of citizens' health (clean mobility; no incinerators; strict application of the

[12] See also the chapter on 'Public Water', and the provision for tightening sanctions for environmental crimes.

precautionary principle with regard to GMOs). Nationalist rhetoric is often used ('let's defend our seas from drilling'), in part also echoing the typical language of Salvini's League ('let's produce energy at home!'). The protection of the environment was also included within the traditional frame of the fight against 'politician's privileges' (see the proposal to close the European offices in Strasbourg, also because of the high emissions produced), as well as associated with the protection of 'Made in Italy' products – here, 'Salvini-esque' vocabulary abounds ('the invasion of South African oranges', 'the new threat: Asian rice').

In short, the M5S, during the 'yellow-green' government, aimed to emphasize the political relevance of environmental goals while clearly defending its political-strategic choices (i.e., alliance with the League) and thus adapting its register accordingly. Both party cadres and rank-and-file, however, tended to reject an increasingly costly alliance in electoral terms, leading the M5S to give in on 'identity battles'. This is how the then President of the Chamber of Deputies Roberto Fico expressed himself on the Tav project[13], to which Giuseppe Conte gave a substantial green light[14]. Several M5S representatives at municipal and parliamentary level, interviewed in the first half of 2019, unanimously (INT9-10-14-15) tried to mark their distance from Salvini's agenda, by emphasizing the salience of environmental issues and downplaying the centrality of migratory issues:

> 'Eco-feminism and eco-pacifism have been the fundamental core of M5S thinking from the very beginning [...]Migrations have always existed. It is not true that it is a recent issue, they are not episodic, they are part of the movements of peoples on earth [...] Nowadays humanity is cannibalizing itself through economic, environmental wars. Migrations are the consequence' (INT9);

> 'Immigration is an issue, but it is a symptom, not a priority. If we continue with policies that are extremely irresponsible from the point of view of the exploitation of territories and resources, we will be moving towards huge migrations. But this is not a matter of cultural clashes: it is a matter of distribution of resources' (INT10).

5.3. 'In the Progressive Camp' (2019-)

The two Conte governments were characterized by other elements of continuity (apart from the same PM), such as the Minister of Environment, i.e. Sergio Costa (M5S), a former State Forestry Corps officer previously known for his prosecutions on environmental crimes committed by the mafia in Campania. In both of his speeches at the opening of his terms in office[15], Costa started by emphasizing the climate emergency and the need to decisively pursue the path of green transition, at both national and international levels, as well as the fight against environmental crimes.

However, the main environmental measure of M5S governmental action was not the 'Climate Decree', designed by Costa and aimed at strengthening local public

[13] See: Tav, Fico: "Il nostro no non è ideologico" ma "una battaglia identitaria del M5S". (2019). *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, March 9. Retrieved from shorturl.at/joxN2

[14] See: Conte: "Sulla Tav il governo è per il sì". (2019). *La Repubblica*, July 23. Retrieved from shorturl.at/izKLO

[15] See: Ambiente: le linee programmatiche del Ministro dell'Ambiente Sergio Costa. (2018). *Ministero dell'Ambiente e della Sicurezza Energetica*, November 14. Retrieved from shorturl.at/krtW1

transport and rewarding 'plastic free' consumption choices. The real flagship of the M5S on environmental issues was instead the 'Recovery Decree' (DL 34/2020, May 2020). Approved in the middle of the lockdown, the decree introduced the so-called '110 per cent Superbonus', a system of transferable tax credits to upgrade the energy efficiency of public and (in fact, mostly) private properties. The Superbonus was not the responsibility of Costa (who, on the contrary, on some occasions criticized it[16]): it was instead supported, first and foremost, by the then Minister for Economic Development (Stefano Patuanelli, very close to Conte). According to the current Minister of the Economy, the Superbonus will cost over 200 billion euro[17]; Draghi's government increasingly restricted the transferability of tax credits, thus hugely affecting the Superbonus's cardinal principle, while Meloni's government has recently (January 2024) abrogated the policy.

The main accusations addressed to the Superbonus focus on its impact on public accounts, on the fraud and irregularities detected, on its regressive impact (as it mainly benefited middle-income families) and on the increase in raw material costs linked to the boom in the construction sector (Papi, 2022). Defenders of the measure tend to emphasize its positive impact on GDP growth, the revitalization of the economy in the post-pandemic period, and environmental benefits.

Agostino Santillo, one of the M5S MPs who has most closely followed the Superbonus story, even dedicated a book (edited by a publishing house owned by a former senator of the party) to the policy. The Superbonus is described as the 'green measure that made the economy fly and revived the construction sector in Italy'. In Santillo's reconstruction, the Superbonus was conceived in the context of the economic crisis linked to the pandemic. The main frame of Santillo's defence is much more economic than environmental: more than 75 percent of the book is dedicated to celebrating the Superbonus benefits from the point of view of economic and employment growth and to circumscribing the impact on the public budget, while extolling the positivity of state intervention in the economy. The book closes with a collection of testimonies of entrepreneurs and workers damaged by the restrictions imposed by Draghi and Meloni on the transferability of tax credits.

Particularly interesting is the description of the constituencies targeted by the M5S through the Superbonus: 'technicians [architects, engineers, surveyors and geologists], together with the entire entrepreneurial and personnel world, and then [...] carpenters, bricklayers, electricians, plumbers, painters, tilers, carpenters, blacksmiths, glaziers and other skilled artisans with which our country is particularly endowed' (Santillo, 2023: 15). All these categories would have benefited from 'expansive economic policies [...] scaring the banking and political system imposed by the lords of austerity' (Santillo, 2023: 140).

These are central categories in the socio-economic discourse of the M5S, particularly in recent years, as is also evident from the aforementioned internal programmatic document drafted in 2020 (M5S, 2020). There, the M5S proclaimed itself as the spokesperson for 'low-middle income working classes (state employees, private employees, small and micro-enterprises)', while an economic inspiration defined as '*planned*

[16] Retrieved from shorturl.at/xGKS2

[17] See: Superbonus, costi 200 miliardi. Giorgetti: "Paese assuefatto, chiudere rubinetti". (2024). *Corriere della Sera*, March 28. Retrieved from shorturl.at/vDFQS

degrowth' (M5S, 2020: 29) would rediscover the centrality of the 'old craft trades' (M5S, 2020: 12). Grafted onto ideological positions that clearly reject any capital-labour opposition, state interventionism in the economy nevertheless appears central: the party strives for political-economic action centred on a peculiar 'third way [overcoming American neo-liberalism and Chinese statism] in which citizens will have a central role; the state will have the power to direct and coordinate all activities; the tension towards the collective good will not exclude the private production of goods' (M5S, 2020: 18). Not coincidentally, in the same document, environmental policy guidelines are included within the chapter on the economy, where the key words are, in order, 'State - Social Market Economy - Welfare - Universal Income – Green'.

The centrality of economic and social proposals is also evident in the electoral manifesto for the 2022 parliamentary elections, again published in a 'short' (thirteen pages, divided into twenty-two bullet points) and in a 'long' form (246 pages) – both 'official' versions. In the 'short' manifesto, the word *environment** appears only four times, the word *ecolog** just two (in contrast, the word *work** occurs 25 times and the single word Superbonus, elected as a model to be implemented in other areas, five times). However, the attention paid to environmental issues, almost always linked to proposals for far-reaching socio-economic reforms, is very high. In addition to the specifically dedicated points (point 7: 'for energy and ecology transitions, for the defence of biodiversity'; point 8: 'for a circular economy'; point 12, 'for sustainable mobility'; point 16, 'for the common good', with focus on public water; point 17, 'against hunting' and for tax incentives for veterinary expenses; point 19, 'for agriculture and defence of our traditions'), environmental issues are also dealt with in the chapters dedicated to taxation (incentives to companies 'on the Superbonus model' to support the costs of the green transition); corporations' policies (incentives dedicated to favouring the transition of 'energy-intensive' companies); housing (to upgrade social housing's energy efficiency); anti-mafia (repression of environmental crimes); EU policies (creation of an 'Energy Recovery Fund' and revision of the Stability Pact to exclude 'green' investments from the deficit calculation).

The 'long' version of the manifesto proposes a 'new social model', centred on three words: 'People', 'Environment' and 'Development', to which special sections are devoted. The M5S advocates a 'new Humanism... an effective ecological transition, which can gradually orient the entire production system towards a culture of sustainability, and must inspire and integrate a new growth model' (M5S, 2022: 6). A further fourth section is devoted to 'Foreign Policy', in which the first two chapters, dedicated to EU policies, recall the need to pursue a 'Europe centred on the eco-social market economy" (as opposed to 'rigid neoclassical liberal theories') and 'integral ecology and energy transition'. The word *environment** recurs 87 times in the document, in a much less unbalanced ratio to the word *work** (332 times) than in the 'short' version. *Ecolog** (33 times), *clim** (29 times), and also *transition* (68 times, also associated with 'digitalization') are also central. The three most recurring adjectives are *public* (68 times), *social* (52 times) and *national* (51 times), testifying to the redistributive, statist and 'sovereignist' inspiration of the current M5S – still extremely careful to avoid pitting capital and labour against each other: 'Enterprises that produce economic value and that, at the same time, are attentive to the values of the person and the wellbeing of workers, that consider the

environment a primary good and sustainability a "non-negotiable" prerequisite of any prospect of economic growth, are truly the enterprises of the future' (M5S, 2022: 8).

It is important to highlight how the resilient sovereignist inspiration of the party makes its relationship with the Green party family very complicated, even nowadays. Although the M5S has officially abandoned its hard-Euroscepticism, by defining the EU as one of the 'traditional pillars' of the 'Italian foreign policy' with which the M5S is 'coherent' (M5S, 2021), its position on international questions (with particular reference to the war in Ukraine, as put by both Greens/EFA and M5S representatives[18]) remains a major factor preventing the inclusion of the party within the Green parliamentary group at the European level.

6. Concluding Remarks

The literature has shown how environmental issues have become increasingly politicized, moving from being valence to positional (divisive) issues. The M5S has reflected this more general trend in the evolution of its political discourse and proposals.

In the 'early phase', the original 'five-stars' created a utopian, techno-optimist image of advances in the production and circulation of information and technologies to build environmentally sustainable societies. Such an image conveyed the idea that the M5S proposals were not only successful, but inescapable (and thus 'post-ideological'), and motivated the party's narrative against an establishment that resisted change.

This narrative was also nourished by performative practices that were not limited to the appropriation of 'honesty', but also applied to environmental issues. It took the form of proposals and actions typical of the 'new left' (e.g., calls for 'degrowth', as well as the focus on 'good practices' to be implemented by political actors and public institutions in the first place: Batstrand, 2014). The sovereigntist inspiration has ended up, especially in the current era in which environmental issues have clearly become positional, by emphasizing – according to a perspective partially similar to the 'old left', in Batstrand's scheme – the centrality of the state as a key actor in guiding the ecological transition, also combining economic development and social justice.

The M5S environmental discourse is thus informed, at least in its current phase, by the 'anti-status-quo, [sovereignist] ideology' described by Ruth and David Collier (i.e. their very definition of populism), to be pursued through what has been termed 'economic populism' (Dornbusch and Edwards, 1992). The M5S positions and proposals on green transition-related issues represent an important application of these doctrines, strongly contributing to the politicization of the same issues. It is not surprising, therefore, that the M5S has been interpreted as populism in its 'pure' form (Coticchia and Vignoli, 2020): this is, this paper suggests, *precisely because* the M5S moves away from the ideological radicalism with which populism is often (analytically and empirically) equated (e.g. Huber et al., 2022). As Drake (1992: 40) argued, focusing on the Latin American context: 'Rightist groups lashed populists as demagogues who spurred excessive mass expectations and inflation. At the same time, leftists denounced populists as

[18] See: Nessuno sviluppo nell'alleanza tra Verdi Ue e Movimento 5 Stelle. (2024). *ANSA*, March 1. Retrieved from shorturl.at/b62549; M5S: sull'Ucraina i Verdi più vicini a Meloni che a noi. (2024). *ANSA*, April 4. Retrieved from shorturl.at/7e8c98

charlatans who duped the workers [i.e., the "people"] into settling for reform instead of [nurturing class conflict]'. Are these not considerations that perfectly capture how political competitors target the M5S within the contemporary Italian party system?

Such fundamental, even 'genetic', populist features of the M5S also explain why this party departs from the Green party family, despite clear congruencies in terms of policies (Bressanelli and De Candia, 2019). In terms of constituencies, the M5S, only in the very early phase (i.e., before its national expansion following the 2012 Sicilian elections), when it was mostly rooted in Northern and Central Italy, shared some characteristics with the typical (left-oriented, more educated than average and libertarian) Green voter (Biorcio and Natale, 2013). The party since 2013 has tended to attract labour market outsiders (Padoan, 2020) and, since 2018, has found its stronghold in Southern regions and in highly unequal areas, coherently with its social policy platform (Bloise et al., 2023). In terms of organization, M5S effectively shares the 'amateur/activist' militancy typical of Green parties, and for a long time also flaunted the primacy of the party on the ground (since manifestos are always ratified by 'the Web') over the PPO, named 'spokespersons' in M5S jargon. However, the (still evident) plebiscitarian traits of the party contradict such rhetoric. The non-democratic features of internal party organization, as well as the sovereignist positions (and former national alliances) of Conte's party, have contributed to the rejection of M5S's application to jointhe Greens/EFA group.

Our analysis highlights how environmentalism is a key value for the M5S. It is part of the genetic positive identity of the party and of its rank-and-file. It cannot be merely considered 'ancillary' to the anti-establishment component: the M5S has always been able to make environmentalism fit the populist strategy – and *vice versa*. From the early 'eco-populist' strategy, i.e., the adoption of populist strategies of articulation of local environmental struggles, the M5S has gradually evolved into a *diminished* type of 'green populism' trying to reconcile green transition and social justice. It is *diminished* – if compared to *La France Insoumise*, for which the term was coined (Chazel and Dain, 2023) – because of the clear refusal of political visions involving class conflict, both visible in the party rhetoric and in the party's flagship policy (the *Superbonus*). The M5S, in any case, demonstrates what Pollex and Berker (2022) has named a 'complex understanding' of environmental questions, and thus a strong connection between environmental and other key economic issues, which is typical of Green parties.

At the same time, environmentalism is a necessary but non-sufficient condition to belong to the Green party family (Carter, 2023). Indeed, the electoral success of the M5S owes little to its environmental platform, while being much more linked to its 'incorporating' (via social policy) ambition (typical of Latin American populisms: Collier and Collier, 1991), to its moralizing view of politics (typical of populisms *tout court*: Mudde, 2004), and perhaps to its sovereignist positions (also empirically associated with populism: Basile and Mazzoleni, 2021). All of the above fit well with the party's positions on foreign policy issues (praise for a multipolar world; opening to China) and much less so with the current Greens/EFA alignments, thus increasing the party's isolation at the international level. If the Greens, as a party family, are internally homogeneous in comparative perspective (Ensser, 2010), the M5S is too much a *rara avis* to be part of it.

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7. Appendix

Table A. List of Quoted Interviews

ID	Affiliation	Role	Date
IT1	M5S	Regional Councillor in Piedmont	4 November 2016
IT2	Former M5S	MP Lazio	10 November 2016
IT3	M5S	Regional Councillor in Puglia	15 November 2016
IT4	No Muos social movement	Activist in Sicily	15 November 2016 (online interview)
IT5	M5S	Municipal Councillor in Pomezia (Rome)	10 December 2016
IT6	M5S	Regional Councillor in Lombardy	10 October 2016
IT7	M5S	MP Umbria	28 December 2016 and 24 April 2017
IT8	M5S	Member of the 'Committee of Guarantee' former President of the Italian Lower Chamber	2 March 2017
IT9	M5S	MP Veneto	27 September 2018
IT10	M5S	MP Veneto	18 June 2019
IT11	M5S	Regional Councillor in Sicily	1 February 2017
IT12	M5S	Regional Councillor in Puglia	8 November 2016
IT13	M5S	MP Veneto	2 November 2016
IT14	M5S	Local Activist, Veneto	28 September 2018
IT15	M5S	Local Activist, Piedmont	28 October 2018
IT27	Former M5S	MEP Lombardy	9 March 2017

Table B. List of Unquoted Interviews

ID	Affiliation	Role	Date
IT16	M5S	Regional Councillor in Lombardy	18 October 2016
IT17	M5S	Regional Councillor in Liguria	7 December 2016
IT18	M5S	Regional Councillor in Lazio	11 January 2017
IT19		Former Casaleggio Associati employee	27 November 2017
IT20	M5S	Regional Councillor in Friuli Venezia Giulia	15 November 2016
IT21	M5S	Local Activist, Campania	29 April 2020
IT22	M5S	MP Veneto	18 June 2019
IT23		Government Adviser, Conte II government	26-27 April 2021
IT24	M5S	Former MP, Campania	26 February 2021
IT25	M5S	Local Activist, Veneto	25 September 2018
IT26	M5S	Municipal Councillor, Veneto	20 April 2020

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Strikes, assemblies and blockades: The dynamics of repertoire change in grassroots climate action in Italy (2018-2023)

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Abstract

The years since 2018 have seen an unprecedented wave of mobilisation around climate change in Europe, particularly among young people. Within this context, the Italian case has been characterised by a sudden explosion of participation, triggered by the first Global Climate Strike of 15 March 2019, followed by massive politicisation, with a generation of young people taking to the streets, often for the first time. Climate school strikes have been this movement's main form of action, although other patterns have also emerged, based on civil disobedience and disruptive forms of action. Our article aims to reconstruct the trajectory of this wave of climate action in Italy, focusing on the evolution of the movement, and in particular of its constituent actors and their main tactics. Which forms of action has the climate movement adopted? How do climate activists evaluate and adjust their tactics according to the opportunities arising from the Italian political space? Our article aims to answer these questions by relying on a wide variety of data sources, including a protest event analysis and qualitative interviews with activists from three main organisations: Fridays for Future, Extinction Rebellion, and Ultima Generazione.

1. Introduction

The years since 2018 have seen an unprecedented wave of mobilisation around climate change in Europe, particularly among young people. The massive participation in climate action of a previously not politicised youth has transformed the landscape of environmental campaigning, bringing new and diverse actors to the fore (Fisher 2019). Together, these actors have helped transform the framing of climate change into one of climate emergency (Almeida 2019) while envisioning alternative, post-carbon ways of life. Such processes have taken place in a political context in which, on the one hand, the issue of climate change has been increasingly discussed in national and global governance arenas and on the other, grassroots alternative ecological practices have developed in a variety of fields and economic sectors. Such a significant and widespread movement, of international characteristics, with a specific generational character and a clear focus on the issue of climate change, is an exceptional and exciting case for scholars interested in collective action. Research has shown the emergence of a new generation of climate activists and the possible development of a broader, grassroots movement, with a strong female presence and reliance on social media and peer networks (de Moor et al. 2021), highlighting limited commitment to established

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environmental organisations, with varying interpretations of the importance of lifestyle politics (Zamponi et al. 2022), and a hopeful attitude towards the future (Stuart 2020).

Within this context, our article focuses empirically on the Italian case and theoretically on the dynamics of the repertoire of action. Our goal is twofold: first, relying on a protest event analysis (PEA) conducted on the digital archive of the Italian news agency ANSA, we reconstruct the dynamics of climate protest in Italy from 2018 to 2023, focusing in particular on the evolution of actors, targets and forms of action across time; then, using qualitative interviews conducted with representatives of the main actors identified in the PEA, we aim to make sense of the evolution of the repertoire of action, explaining it through the strategies of collective actors vis-à-vis representative institutions.

The literature has already pointed out the extent to which this cycle of protest has been characterised by claim-making addressed to national governments (de Moor et al. 2021). Our analysis confirms this observation in the Italian case, while adding two elements: on the one hand, addressing the government has consequences for the repertoire of action, in particular when the government is far from responsive; on the other hand, the continuity of target does not imply continuity in the forms of action. Rather, we show how the lack of responsiveness of the Italian government has pushed the movement to change and adapt its repertoire of action, with climate strikes and other demonstrative forms of action remaining dominant but declining in time, while forms of civil disobedience such as street blockades and art 'pseudo-vandalism'[1] have increasingly gained ground. Furthermore, our article shows how the temporal rhythm of the different forms of action and their reliance on media coverage as a measure of success have played a very relevant role in the strategic elaboration of activists.

2. Theoretical framework: climate protest and repertoire change

This wave of climate action is a significant innovation in a long trajectory of activism, rooted in the emergence of the 'climate justice' framework within different contexts, from radical environmentalist milieus (Schlosberg and Collins 2014) to protest events on the occasion of global climate summits like the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in 2009 (Wahlström, Wennerhag, and Rootes 2013; Chatterton, Featherstone, and Routledge 2012), to the spill-over from the Global Justice Movements (Hadden 2014). Within a tradition that was long characterised by visible cleavages between claim making and direct action, reform and radicalism, politicisation and post-politics (Saunders 2012; Kenis 2019), the last five years have seen the emergence of actors such as Fridays For Future (Wahlström et al. 2019; de Moor et al. 2020), Extinction Rebellion (Doherty, Saunders, and Hayes 2020) and the A22 Network (Kinyon, Dolšak, and Prakash 2023). Not only have these actors been innovating the tactics of climate activism but they have also reclaimed centrality for the state in climate matters, reshaping the discourse of climate activism within a context characterised by the long shadow of

[1] We use this concept to identify a form of action, often adopted by Ultima Generazione, that gives the appearance of damaging a piece of art or a monument but in reality, thanks to the use of specific materials (washable paint and non-permanent glue), does not cause any material damage.

the Great Recession. This new wave of climate action has already caught the attention of scholarly research, focusing on the relationship with past episodes of climate protest (de Moor et al. 2021), framing (von Zabern and Tulloch 2021; Svensson and Wahlström 2021; Buzogány and Scherhaufer 2022), the determinants of participation (Cologna, Hoogendoorn, and Brick 2021), the relationship with the party system (Berker and Pollex 2021), the use of social media (Martí, Ferrer-Fons, and Terren 2020), and politicisation (Kenis 2021), among others.

Much of the literature on the current climate protest cycle has shown that a peculiar relationship between the movement and the government exists (de Moor et al. 2021). While contentious politics is generally aimed at negotiating with the government or other actors to obtain a certain right or realise a certain claim (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001), in the case of the climate movement, especially in its earlier phase, the main objective was to force the government to publicly acknowledge the climate emergency and adopt the solutions proposed by science (Rödder and Pavenstädt 2023; Evensen 2019). As has been observed (Imperatore and Leonardi 2023), from this point of view Greta Thunberg's speech at the COP in Katowice in 2018 marks a turning point: demands and claims were put forward with the goal of influencing policy, but this did not entail a negotiation. Rather, claims and demands, in that phase, were seen as almost automatically deriving from climate science, and politicians were asked to execute them without questioning.

Many things have changed since then: the centrality of 'science' and 'emergency' in the framing proposed respectively by Fridays For Future and Extinction Rebellion has declined, while climate actors have increasingly advanced partial claims, related to specific local issues or policy proposals. Still, in 2021 Thunberg commented on the COP26 negotiations, demanding 'no more 'blah blah blah', [...] no more whatever the fuck they're doing in there' and the slogan was vastly reproduced by the movement. The lack of faith in governmental negotiations, while still considering governments the main actors of decarbonisation, seems to be a structural characteristic of the movement, and movement actors have, over time, proposed different ways to address this paradox, from demands for a citizens' assembly to lists of non-negotiable proposals addressed to governments. The paradox seems to persist, and it has, evidently, consequences for the perception of political opportunities by the actors in the movement.

The aim of this research is to understand how the forms of action adopted by the climate movement in Italy have varied as the cycle of protest progresses, in relation to the perceived lack of responsiveness by the government. This research question lies at the intersection of different strands of research, tackling two conceptual nexuses: what happens when cycles of protest decline, and how the political opportunity structure (POS) influences the repertoire of action.

Interestingly enough, while focusing significantly on the forms of action (Taylor and Van Dyke 2004; Doherty and Hayes 2018), research on contentious politics has not often analysed how and why the repertoire of action of a social movement changes. A significant exception is the literature on tactical innovation (McAdam 1983; McCammon 2012; Morris 1984, 1993; Soule 1997, 1999; Tarrow 1993, 1994; Tilly 1993). However, its ambiguous definition, pointed out by Wang and Soule (2016), between the invention of new tactics and their re-emergence, in a different context and with different

characteristics, makes it more difficult to apply this concept to a case like ours, in which some of the tactics used are strongly rooted in the history of social movements (demonstration, blockades) while others are actually innovative ('pseudo-vandalism' of art and monuments). Still, coherently with what we argue in this article, tactical innovation has been shown to take place within two contexts: on the one hand, in the early phase of a cycle of protest, especially if the characteristics of the innovative forms of action facilitate their modularisation (Tarrow 1993a)[2]; on the other hand, in later stages of a cycle, as a response to the behaviour of authorities, or as a reaction to political defeat (McAdam 1983; McCammon 2003).

Based on the seminal works by Tarrow (1989), Koopmans (1993) and Kriesi et al. (1995), Taylor and Van Dyke (2004) summarise the cycle of protest thesis as the observation that 'as a protest wave develops, interaction between protestors and authorities stimulates the use of increasingly disruptive tactics' (Taylor and Van Dyke 2004: 273) and 'frustration with the limited effectiveness of routine tactics, as well as competition for members and media attention between different movement organizations, leads to the increasing use of disruptive tactics and even violence over the course of a protest cycle' (Taylor and Van Dyke 2004: 274). Examining the cycle of protest in Italy between 1966 and 1973, della Porta and Tarrow (1986) theorise an evolutionary model of the cycle according to which, after reaching the peak of the protest, two mechanisms are activated: on the one hand, institutionalisation, which means that a segment of the movement comes into contact with established actors and enters the institutional arena, and on the other, radicalisation – that is, the more rebellious groups radicalise their repertoires of action and violent actions intensify. Protesters who do not fit into these two poles move away and the movement generally loses weight. Della Porta and Tarrow observe that radicalisation occurs mainly in cases where there is a lack of space to negotiate the demands of the movement. Alimi, Bosi, and Demetriou (2015), through a relational approach, show how the dynamics of radicalisation depend on the interaction between movement actors and other actors in the field, in particular the state. Radicalisation, in this view, can be attributed to the decline of the organisation and the evolving position of the other actors in the field. Yet other studies show how the decline of the cycle of protest does not necessarily lead to radicalisation. Portos (2019) focuses on the case of the 15M movement protests in Spain between 2011 and 2015, arguing that the traditional institutionalisation-radicalisation dichotomy did not occur. In particular, radicalisation did not take place, and instead protesters increasingly moved to the peripheries (decentralisation), focused on more specific issues than the general struggle against austerity (compartmentalisation), and created coalitions with established actors. What these examples of research have in common is a focus on radicalisation, meant as the emergence

[2] The concept of modularity, building on Charles Tilly's conceptualization of repertoire of contention (Tilly 1977; 1979), was theorised by Sidney Tarrow (1993a; 1993b; 1994) to address how the flexibility of tactics made them easy to adopt by different groups in a variety of settings. The concept is central to the study of protest diffusion, in particular within a cycle of protest (Soule 1997; McAdam 1995). More recently, Wada (2012) has proposed an operationalisation of modularity through four dimensions (transferability across actors, targets, issues, and locations). Though some of the tactics analysed in this article, in particular the climate strike, are characterised by the flexibility and replicability that often identify modular forms of action, and though different sets of actors took part in the climate strike within our timeframe, we chose not to use this concept, based on the fact that climate strikes remained mainly linked to one specific actor (FFF) and were not transferred to others.

or intensification of violent forms of action as the change of repertoire on which the analysis focuses. Can the same be tried for the analysis of repertoire changes that do not involve violence[3]? Do the dynamics of the cycle of protest affect repertoire change outside the realm of violent radicalisation?

The choice of forms of action is not understood by the literature as entirely strategic: they cannot be interpreted without referring to movement ideas, cultures, and traditions (Doherty and Hayes 2012; Doherty and Hayes 2014). Often, they are expressive of identity claims (Smithey 2009; Taylor and Van Dyke 2004) and their choice becomes a metonymy for the actors' identity (Polletta 2006; Zamponi 2018). Still, most of the scholarship has focused on the contextual factors shaping tactical choices, and this article is placed in the latter debate. In particular, the literature based on the concept of POS and, more in general, on the political process model, tends to stress the relation between the political context and movement strategies, with open contexts inviting moderate strategies on the part of movement actors and closed contexts fostering radicalisation (Kriesi et al. 1995; Kitschelt 1986). How this relation takes place is far from clear, since 'conceptualisations of political opportunities vary greatly, and scholars disagree on basic theories of how political opportunities affect movements' (Meyer 2004: 125).

We are particularly interested in research that has used the POS dynamically, throughout a cycle of protest, as in the case of the literature on radicalisation, which highlights how the closure of political opportunities favours the shift from nonviolent to violent repertoires of action (della Porta 1995; Bosi, della Porta, and Malthaner 2019). Many of these studies identify the closure of political opportunities with protest-policing and protest-control strategies. In other cases, the POS is identified not so much in 'objective' conditions of dialogue or closure with institutions, but in the perception that actors have opportunities for success or failure within the political space. Diani (1996) outlines a framework for understanding how the perception of openness or closure of POS generates different 'masterframes'. In particular, starting from the combination of two dimensions of the POS, namely the 'opportunities created by the crisis of dominant cleavages' and the 'opportunities for autonomous action within the polity', Bosi (2006) applies the framework introduced by Diani to the case of the Civil Rights Movement (CRM) in Northern Ireland between 1960 and 1969 and broadens the reflection from the POS to masterframes and consequently to forms of action. Bosi shows how the closure of the POS changed the masterframes and consequently generated a radicalisation of the forms adopted by the movement. The central argument is that political immobility in the face of the reformist demands brought about by the CRM generated a closure of the POS for the movement's autonomous actions within the system. The movement decided to abandon conventional forms (petitions, public letters, assemblies) and implement

[3] We follow Alimi, Bosi, and Demetriou (2015) in their definitions of radicalisation as 'the process through which a social movement organization (SMO) shifts from predominantly nonviolent tactics of contention to tactics that include violent means, as well as the subsequent process of contention maintaining and possibly intensifying the newly introduced violence' and political violence as 'the infliction of physical harm to individuals or damage to property in connection to political claims' (Alimi, Bosi, and Demetriou 2015: 11). None of the acts of civil disobedience we have coded would fall within the latter category, since no physical harm ever occurred, and no property was ever permanently damaged by activists. This is why we call 'pseudo-vandalism' the tactic, developed by Ultima Generazione, of appearing to damage art and monuments, while using materials that cause no permanent harm. This tactic was long discussed by activists who explicitly exclude violence from their repertoire (UG1, UG2).

first non-conventional nonviolent forms (street protests, marches) and then, following repression, violent forms.

This analysis suggests that, indeed, the tenets of this literature might be applied also to repertoire shifts that do not always include violence. In its study of the role of social movement organisations within new social movements in Western Europe, Kriesi (1996) identifies four different pathways, adding to institutionalisation and radicalisation also commercialisation and involution, pointing out how movement actors, reacting to both internal and external dynamics, can move towards the direction of service provision or volunteering, switching from an orientation towards authorities to one addressing their own social constituencies. Remaining within the realm of contentious claim making, Kriesi points out the role of the political context in the 'transformation of action repertoires' (Kriesi 1996: 179). Still, this strand of research tends to understand the POS as a series of structural characteristics of the political context (and, in fact, often consists of a comparison of national cases), while our goal is different.

As McAdam has suggested, researchers should be 'explicit about which dependent variable we are seeking to explain and which dimensions of political opportunity are germane to that explanation' (McAdam 1996: 31). For the purposes of this article, we are mostly interested in the role of political responsiveness, or lack thereof, by public authorities, in the transformation of action repertoires. Research has often focused on the policy outcomes of movements (Giugni, McAdam, and Tilly 1999; Bosi, Giugni, and Uba 2016) and on their role in fostering or thwarting further mobilisation (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996; McAdam and Su 2002; McAdam 1995), although rarely focusing on repertoire change. This is true also of the recent research on contentious episodes (Kriesi, Hutter, and Bojar 2019), which adopts a processual and relational approach to the study of movement-government dynamics, going beyond the static conceptualisations of the POS, but mostly focusing on interactions started by governmental policy proposals while not yet addressing the effect of frustrated movement demands (Bojar et al. 2021). This is particularly relevant for our case which, as we have described above, focuses on a movement that does not react to a specific policy proposal but rather poses general and radical demands. Furthermore, we are focusing on a case in which the movement has a plural and coalitional structure, in which, according to the literature on so-called 'radical flank effect', the differentiation of protest strategies that follows internal conflict vis-à-vis closing political opportunities might foster political success (McCammon, Bergner, and Arch 2015).

Added to this, the most recent literature on the issue has pointed out the role of perceptions and narratives in mediating between the POS and social movement strategies. In particular, de Moor and Wahlström (2019) argue that social movements gain knowledge of threats and opportunities through interactions with the political context. This generates experience which, in a second stage, is stored in the collective memory of the movement in the form of narrated experience. Movements then draw on these previous, narrated experiences to make their strategic choices. Therefore, although there is evidence that perceived POS influences the strategic choices of actors (especially those who have already experienced defeat), how perceived POS determines the adoption of a specific repertoire remains an understudied issue.

Building on attempts to analyse repertoire changes, and the impact that the dynamics of a protest cycle and the perceived closure of political opportunities has on them (Bosi 2006, Portos 2019, de Moor and Wahlström 2019), our article analyses the changes in the repertoire of action that have taken place within the climate protest cycle in Italy between 2018 and 2023. This is an ideal ground for testing these questions, as the cycle of protest seems to have already passed its peak and its demands have faced increasing non-response from the state. Unlike the studies we have examined (mostly conducted when mobilisation was already over, sometimes even decades later), our investigation examines a cycle of protest that has not definitively ended. Although this entails the disadvantage of not knowing how future events will unfold, observing the actors in the very act in which they make decisions on strategic and tactical choices allows us to finely grasp certain features of the decision-making process; for instance: how do the actors make decisions on the repertoires to be adopted? To what extent does the dynamic of the cycle of protest and perceived POS influence these choices? Are there moments of hesitation? How are forms of action adopted in the past evaluated?

3. Case study: the Italian climate movement

Building on a history of political ecology rooted in the 1970s and 1980s (Diani 1988), environmental protest in Italy witnessed a significant change around the turn of the century. The last two decades have seen the gradual loss of centrality of traditional actors (including Legambiente, WWF, Italia Nostra), while the greatest contribution to mobilisation has come from informal groups, citizens' committees, and self-managed social centres (Andretta and Imperatore 2023), often involved in LULU campaigns against the construction of large infrastructures resulting in the exploitation and devastation of territories and natural areas (della Porta and Piazza 2007). Territorial mobilisation formed the backbone of the Italian environmental movement in the 2010s. The number of conflicts against contested infrastructures increased from 130 in 2004 to 359 in 2017 (Imperatore 2018). Partially breaking with a tradition that in previous decades marginalised the repertoire of protest (della Porta and Diani 2004), environmental protest actions in Italy at the beginning of the twenty-first century have been predominantly local, demonstrative and on average more disruptive than other types of protest, while suffering higher repression (Andretta and Imperatore 2023).

The emergence of the new wave[4] of climate mobilization in 2019, following Greta Thunberg's school strikes, represented a significant step forward in the history of the

[4] The emergence of a 'wave' or 'cycle' of climate mobilisation following Greta Thunberg's school strike in 2018 has already been acknowledged by the extant literature at an international level (de Moor et al. 2021; Svensson and Wahlström 2021; de Moor and Wahlström 2022; Nulman 2022; Buzogány and Scherhaufer 2022; Jasny and Fisher 2023; della Porta and Portos 2023) and our data, as the following section will illustrate, confirms the presence of 'a phase of heightened conflict and contention across the social system' (Tarrow 1994: 153). Ruud Koopmans (2004) mentions three features of waves of mobilisation: expansion, transformation and contraction. While expansion and transformation will be described in the following section, our data does not show contraction yet, and thus we consider the wave of mobilisation ongoing. The break characterised by the COVID-19 pandemic makes this wave of mobilisation definitely peculiar, due to the long interruption. Still, continuities in terms of issue, actors, claims, targets and forms of action between the pre-pandemic and the post-pandemic phases are such as to convince us to treat them as one wave. Nevertheless, in the following section, we also address differences between the different phases.

Italian climate movement. New groups emerged in the Italian ecological sphere with the aim of putting pressure on politicians owing to climate inaction (Wahlström et al. 2019). The main leading actor in the early phase of the new cycle of protest was Fridays for Future Italia (FFF)[5]. Born as a convergence of local groups that organised the first Italian climate strike on 15 March 2019, FFF was characterised by a horizontal structure and by a universalistic frame which was adopted and adapted to the different contexts. These characteristics allowed it to become a broad umbrella for different types of participants, both individual and collective, including newcomers with no prior experience, student unions and social centres. Massive participation in the global strikes of March and September 2019 (de Moor et al. 2020) and the first visible campaigns of civil disobedience organised by Extinction Rebellion Italia (XR) were followed by an unavoidable decline of visible protest during the COVID-19 pandemic (Priano 2021). The movement regained momentum on the occasion of the pre-COP counter-summit in Milan in October 2021 (Cugnata et al. 2024). Since 2021 FFF has significantly invested in convergence with other movement actors, including the feminist movement, local committees and the factory collective of GKN, culminating in the demonstration against the G20 in Rome in October 2021, in the joint FFF-GKN strike of March 2022 in Florence, in a march in Bologna in October 2022, and in the climate and feminist strikes of March 2023. Meanwhile, in December 2021, a campaign called Ultima Generazione ('Last Generation', UG) was launched by XR activists, structured as a permanent civil disobedience campaign. UG split from XR in May 2022, became the Italian chapter of the A22 network, and has been, since then, the protagonist of a series of very visible civil disobedience actions, including street blockades and 'pseudo-vandalism' with washable paint on monuments such as Palazzo Vecchio in Florence and the Senate building in Rome.

This development took place in a political context characterised by frequent changes of the parliamentary majority and government. In the 2018-2022 parliamentary term, an alliance between populist Five Star Movement (M5S) and the radical right League was first followed by an alliance between the same M5S and the centre-left Democratic Party (PD) (Cotta 2020) and finally by a grand-coalition government led by former ECB president Mario Draghi (Marangoni and Kreppel 2022). The only actor to remain in government was the M5S, the largest party in the 2018-2022 parliament, and traditionally characterised by an environmentalist agenda (Mosca and Tronconi 2021). While both the preeminent role of the M5S and the plural character of governmental coalitions would suggest open political opportunities for climate protest, research has pointed out the gradual moderation of the M5S's stances on environmental issues during their stay in power (Biancalana 2020). In particular, the decision by the M5S to join the technocrat-led grand-coalition Draghi cabinet was justified by the party's founder Beppe Grillo by Draghi's decision to create a new 'Ministry Of Ecological Transition'. Nevertheless, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan passed by the Draghi cabinet was prepared under the significant influence of fossil fuel companies' interests (Lizzi and Prontera 2024). As will be shown in the empirical analysis, the lack of responsiveness to climate issues by the different governments was interpreted by activists as a significant

[5] The acronym 'FFF' does not refer to the global organisation spread over several countries, but only to the Italian level named Fridays for Future Italia. The same applies also to XR.

shift in terms of political opportunities, a perception that, as we will see, was strengthened by the victory in the September 2022 general elections of the right-wing coalition led by radical-right leader Giorgia Meloni.

4. Data and methods

The study is based on a mixed-methods design, combining Protest Event Analysis (PEA) and in-depth semi-structured interviews with climate activists. PEA is a type of quantitative content analysis that helps to systematically map, assess the amount, occurrence, and features of protest performances cross-spatially, over time and across issues, and claims put forward by challengers (Koopmans and Rucht 2002; Hutter 2014). In social movement studies, PEA has been widely used to study cycles of protest and the rhythms of contentious actions, using as the unit of analysis single protest events reported from news sources. We considered climate protest events that took place in Italy between November 2018 and October 2023, reported in the digital archive of the Italian news agency ANSA (further details on the building of the PEA dataset are presented in the Appendix). A total of 749 protest events were identified. The characteristics of each event (including date, place, number of participants, repertoires of contention, claims) were then coded as variables (see Table A1 in the Appendix). Some protest events (e.g. climate strikes) took place on the same day in several locations and were often reported by a single article. Therefore, following Fillieule and Jiménez (2003), we coded them as separate protest events.

We also conducted six semi-structured in-depth interviews (Blee and Taylor 2002) with representatives of the three organisations that appeared most in the protest events: Fridays for Future Italia, Extinction Rebellion Italia and Ultima Generazione. The interviews lasted, on average, one hour. Interviewees were selected as representatives of their own organisation: the three interviewees belonging to FFF hold, or have held the office of national spokesperson, while the interviewees participating in XR and UG take part in the national bodies of the organisations and were indicated by the respective organisations as representative (additional details can be found in the Appendix). At the outset of each interview, the nature and purpose of the study were explained and respondents were given the opportunity to ask questions about the research. We then asked a series of broad and open questions aimed at reconstructing the dynamics of the cycle of protest through their own experience. In particular, interviewees were asked to elaborate on the following: the initial decision to join the movement; different phases of mobilisation; forms of protest used at different stages; the strategic logic behind the choice of forms of action; relationship with institutional politics; organisational structure of the actor. Two out of six interviews were conducted online. All the transcripts and notes were stored in password-security devices. Anonymity was granted to individual activists, while acknowledging the role of collective actors. The timeframe of processes discussed in the interviews was from the beginning of the cycle of protest (late 2018/early 2019) to the date of the interview. Furthermore, the interviews were supplemented with documentary sources (print and digital material produced by the actors), providing background material that informed the analysis.

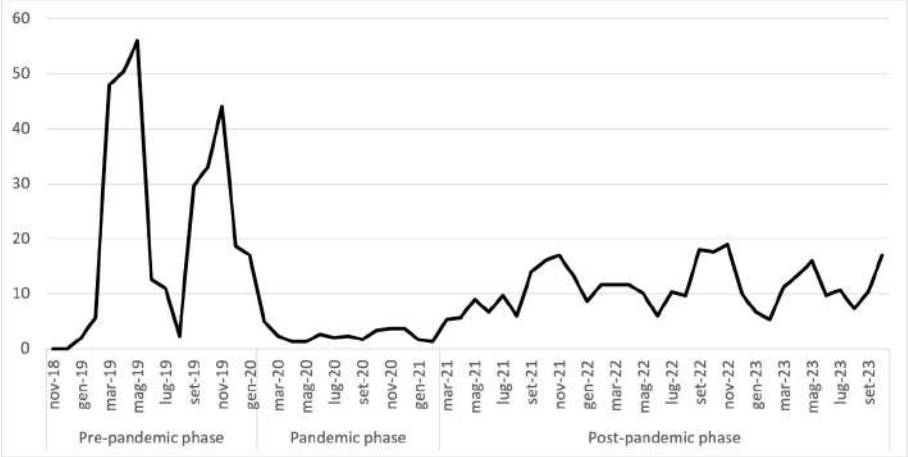
5. The dynamics of climate protest in Italy (2018-2023)

The cycle of climate protest we are analysing is still ongoing and far from being exhausted. Nevertheless, there are already visible trends and dynamics that emerge clearly from the PEA. First of all, the cycle seems, indeed, to be characterised by heightened conflict, with an average of 12.5 protest events a month in the period we considered, including the COVID-19 pandemic. A first look at the distribution of protest events across time on a monthly basis clearly shows three phases (Figure 1). First, there was a massive eruption of collective action between March 2019 and January 2020, corresponding to the first global climate strikes organised under the label 'Fridays For Future' (in particular, the global strikes of March and September 2019 managed to catalyse 132 and 84 protest events respectively). Then came the pandemic, with low levels of mobilisation, from February 2020 to February 2021 and finally, a renewed phase of post-pandemic contention, characterised by smaller peaks but also by the persistent presence of climate-related protest.

The characteristics of these three phases are quite interesting to analyse: in the pre-pandemic eruption phase we witness the highest average of protest events per month (27.8), a number that declines in the pandemic phase (2.2) and increases without ever going back to the previous peaks after the pandemic (11.9). Still, while in the first phase only 6 months out of 12 saw at least 10 protest events (50%), (and these never occurred in the pandemic period), the post-pandemic phase saw at least 10 protest events in 17 months out of 32 (53%). After the pandemic, there was less intense mobilisation with the capacity to produce massive peaks of protest on the occasion of the global climate strikes, but even more capacity than before in generating frequent protest events every month. This change of rhythm strongly resonates with some of the reflections we propose in the qualitative section.

It should also be noted that mobilisation evolved with a certain level of rituality in the post-pandemic phase, with a higher frequency of protest events in March and September each year, corresponding to the dates of the FFF global strikes. Some of these peaks also correspond to relevant sequences in international and Italian politics (the September 2021 peak coincides with the pre-COP negotiations in Milan, and the September 2022 peak with the Italian legislative elections).

Figure 1 – Protest events across time with three-month moving average



Source: ANSA. Own elaboration.

Table 1 – Forms of action

Repertoires	Pre-pandemic phase		Pandemic phase		Post-pandemic phase		Total	
	Freq.	Col. %	Freq.	Col. %	Freq.	Col. %	Freq.	Col. %
Conventional								
Petitions/Public letter	1	0.29	1	3.85	4	1.05	6	0.80
Leafleting	2	0.59	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	0.27
Legal action	2	0.59	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	0.27
Mail or tweet-bombing	2	0.59	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	0.27
Total conventional	7	2.06	1	3.85	4	1.05	12	1.61
Demonstrative								
Public Assembly, Press Conference, etc.	21	6.18	0	0.00	17	4.46	38	5.09
Symbolic Action	38	11.18	4	15.38	53	13.91	95	12.72
Rally	6	1.76	0	0.00	8	2.10	14	1.87
Demonstration, march	13	3.82	2	7.69	40	10.50	55	7.36
Strike	230	67.65	13	50.00	125	32.81	368	49.26
Sit-in	6	1.76	2	7.69	19	4.99	27	3.61
Teach-in	1	0.29	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.13
Total Demonstrative	315	92.65	21	80.77	262	68.77	598	80.05
Civil Disobedience								
Hunger Strike	2	0.59	0	0.00	5	1.31	7	0.94
Critical mass	2	0.59	0	0.00	1	0.26	3	0.40
Public events interruption/disturb/blitz	3	0.88	1	3.85	4	1.05	8	1.07
Occupation of buildings or similar	8	2.35	3	11.54	16	4.20	27	3.61
Occupation of squares	2	0.59	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	0.27
Street blockade	0	0.00	0	0.00	59	15.49	59	7.90
Attacking art without damaging	0	0.00	0	0.00	23	6.04	23	3.08
Total Civil Disobedience	17	5.00	4	15.38	108	28.35	129	17.27
Violent								
Violent actions against things	1	0.29	0	0.00	4	1.05	5	0.67
Violent actions against people	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Total Violent	1	0.29	0	0.00	4	1.05	5	0.67
Other	0	0.00	0	0.00	3	0.79	3	0.40
Total	340	100.00	26	100.00	381	100.00	747	100.00

Source: ANSA. Own elaboration.

Regarding the repertoires of action, as shown in Table 1, the climate protest wave is, as expected, mainly demonstrative, with a significant presence of civil disobedience

action (17.3%) and a marginal presence of both conventional (1.6%) and violent forms of action (0.7%). The results are coherent with the findings of the research by Andretta and Imperatore (2023) conducted with a similar method of analysis on environmentalist protest events in Italy in a previous phase (1994-2020). The predominant demonstrative repertoires are school strikes, usually associated with other secondary demonstrative repertoires such as demonstrations and marches or, less often, rallies, symbolic actions, sit-ins. The civil disobedience actions adopted most are street blockades, mostly not associated with other secondary repertoires.

Particularly interesting for the purposes of this article are the dynamics of protest events across time. As shown in Figure 2, while demonstrative forms of action tend to prevail throughout the cycle, there is a visible increase in civil disobedience, which emerges in the autumn of 2019 (with the first 'rebellion' organised by XR in Italy) and gains consistently more ground after the pandemic, especially after the emergence of UG in December 2021. Once again, the rhythm of civil disobedience seems to be different from the one characterising demonstrative protest: less prone to high peaks, more focused on frequent and consistent mobilisation.

However, it should be noted that a change also occurred with regard to civil disobedience actions. Leaving aside the pandemic phase, civil disobedience actions between October 2018 and January 2020 and then between March 2021 and November 2021 were characterised by a very volatile trend (with peaks in October 2019, June and September 2021). After December 2021, with the launch of the 'Ultima Generazione' campaign (initially promoted by XR and then becoming a separate organisation), the frequency of civil disobedience actions became more constant over time (with slight fluctuations and steady growth).

If we take a step back and look at the composition of the repertoire of action on a yearly basis (Figure 3A), the trend is clear. Between November 2018 and October 2019 demonstrative forms accounted for 94.1% of the coded events while between October 2022 and November 2023 they represented 60.8%, while the relative significance of civil disobedience went from 5% in 2018-2019 to 37.8% in 2022-23: a steady and regular decline vis-à-vis a steady and regular increase.

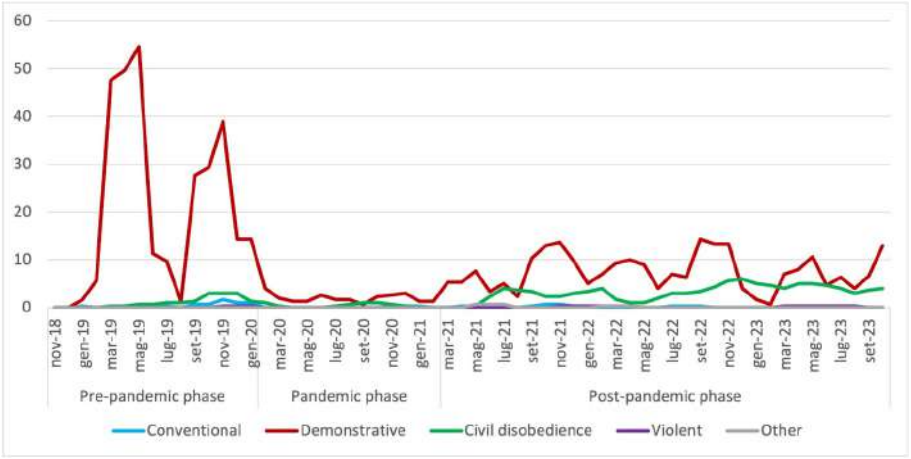
This trend confirms several findings in the literature: on the one hand, there is a 'radicalisation' of the movement over time, in the sense of an increasing use of disruptive and high-risk repertoires, in accordance with the theories that observe a correspondence between the passing of the peak of the protest wave and radicalisation (della Porta and Tarrow 1986); on the other hand, however, this process still takes place within a nonviolent framework (Portos 2019). These findings also echo Andretta and Imperatore's study on the cycle of environmental protest in Italy between 1994 and 2020, according to which environmental protest events have gradually become more disruptive over the years. Furthermore, the findings confirm the shift within the Italian environmental milieu: from an institutionalisation dynamic of the late '90s and early 2000s (della Porta and Diani, 2004) to the current disruptive protest one.

The repertoire of action of the movement evolves vis-à-vis the emergence of new actors. As Figure 4 shows, the main protagonists of Italian climate protest are three actors that emerged after 2019: FFF, XR and UG. FFF was the central actor in the first phase of mobilisation (in 2019 it was involved in more than 70% of the protest events).

Afterwards, its presence gradually decreased, although it still remains the most present actor in the events that were coded. XR was the second most prominent actor between 2020 and 2021, after being overtaken by UG in November 2022. Participation in the protest cycle by environmental organisations (including Legambiente, Greenpeace Italia, WWF Italia and other local organisations) and territorial committees (i.e., No TAV, no TAP) is not prominent. Furthermore, we note the presence of other actors not primarily focusing on ecological claims, such as student organisations, political parties, self-managed social centres and other movement groups that often join strikes and demonstrations and have participated in FFF.

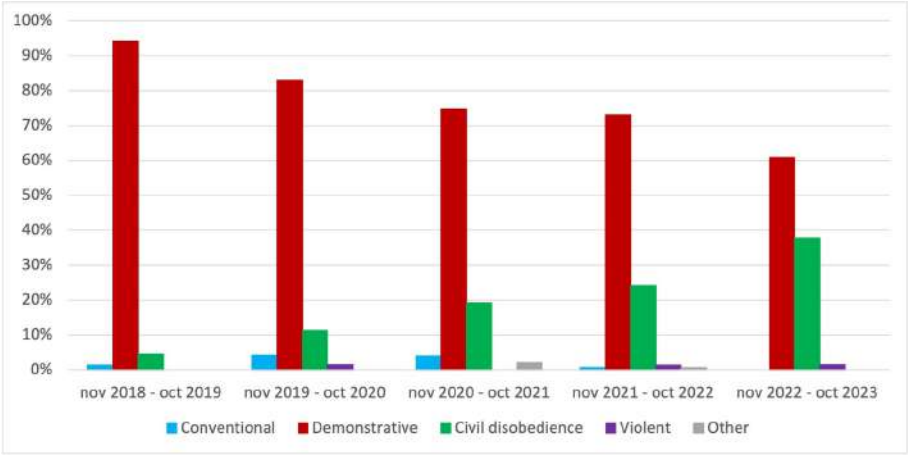
As Table 2 shows, the prevalence of demonstrative action is associated with the prevailing role of FFF, which is present in 419 out of the 749 coded protest events. FFF mainly participates in demonstrative actions (95.2%), often in alliance with environmental organisations, student organisations, territorial committees, parties and social centres and other movement groups. XR, which has participated in 93 of the total events, is involved in both civil disobedience (50.6%) actions and demonstrative actions (47.3%), while UG is almost exclusively involved in civil disobedience actions (88%). Conventional and violent actions are marginal for all the actors involved in the cycle of protest.

Figure 2. Forms of protest across time with three-month moving average

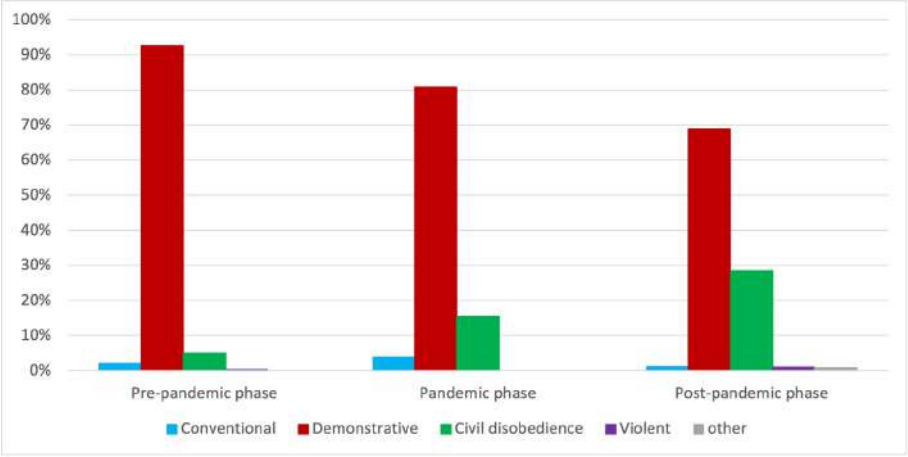


Source: ANSA. Own elaboration.

Figures 3A and 3B. Forms of protest across time: 2018-2023



Source: ANSA. Own elaboration.



Source: ANSA. Own elaboration.

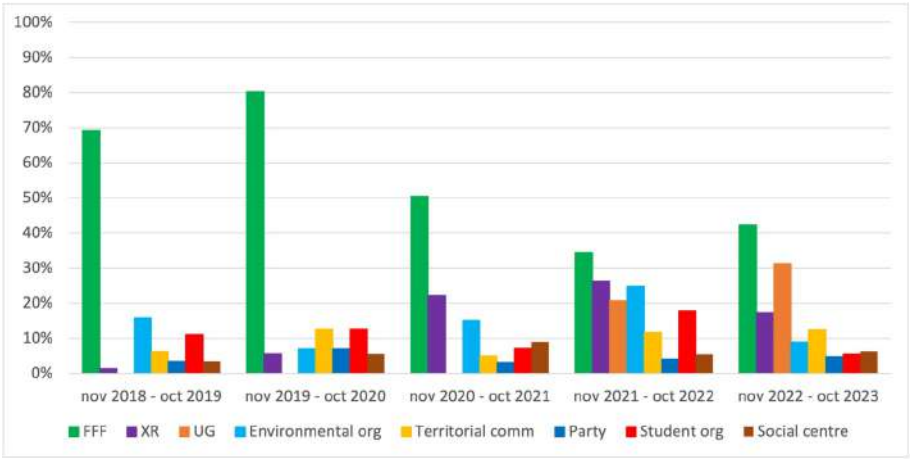
These descriptive statistics show us a change in the repertoire of action of the movement, which becomes gradually more internally diverse, hand in hand with the increasing diversity of actors within the movement. As the qualitative section will illustrate, this change of composition takes place at the meso level, with the emergence of new collective actors such as FFF, XR and later UG, while at the micro level there are clear continuities: the same individuals are joining new collectives. This process of diversification of the repertoire of action, correspond, as we point out above, to a decline in the number of protest events, even after the pandemic and, as Figure 5 shows, to a decline in the number of participants reported in the protest events. While in 2019 more than half of the protest events saw the participation of at least 1000 people , these numbers would never resurface after the pandemic, with large and average-sized demonstrations declining and small demonstrations steadily increasing.

Table 2. Actors' participation in protest events and actors' repertoire of action

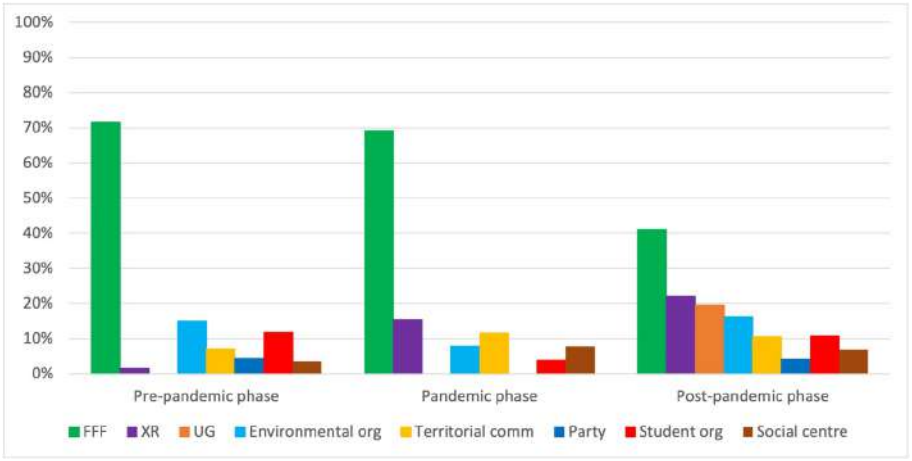
Actions	Conventional		Demonstrative		Civil disobedience		Violent		Other		Total	
Actors	**F**	**R %**	**F**	**R %**	**F**	**R %**	**F**	**R %**	**F**	**R %**	**F**	**R %**
Friday For Future	4	0.95	399	95.23	15	3.58	0	0.00	1	0.24	419	100
Extinction Rebellion	0	0.00	44	47.31	47	50.54	1	1.08	1	1.08	93	100
Ultima Generazione	0	0.00	8	10.67	66	88.00	1	1.33	0	0.00	75	100
Envir. organisationn	3	2.61	105	91.30	5	4.35	1	0.87	1	0,87	115	100
Territorial committees	1	1.49	60	89.55	5	7.46	1	1.49	0	0.00	67	100
Parties	2	6.67	27	90	1	3.33	0	0.00	0	0.00	30	100
Student organisations	2	2.44	79	96.34	1	1.22	0	0.00	0	0.00	82	100
Social centres/movements	0	0.00	36	90.00	4	10.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	40	100

Source: ANSA. Own elaboration. Note: F=Frequencies; R %= Row percentage

Figures 4A and 4B. Actors across forms of action

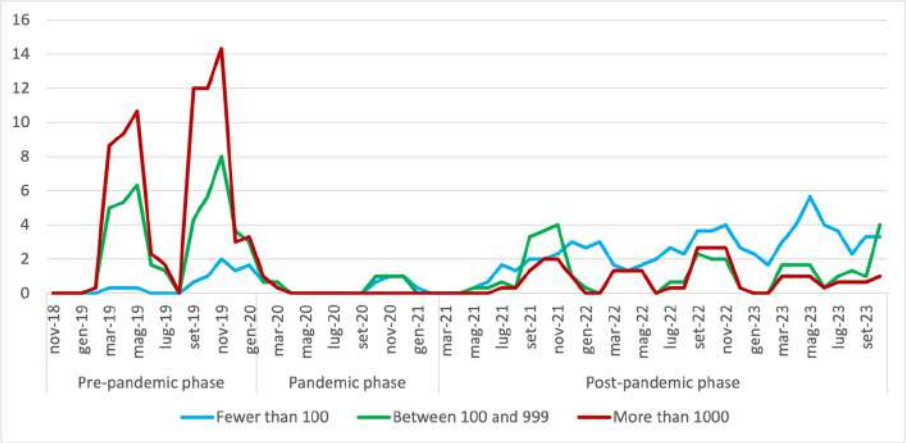


Source: ANSA. Own elaboration.



Source: ANSA.. Own elaboration.

Figure 5. Size of event across time with three-month moving average



Source: ANSA. Own elaboration.

The number of participants is also linked to the different forms of action, with almost half of demonstrative events seeing the participation of at least 1000 people and no civil disobedience action ever reaching this threshold. As Table 3 shows, the large majority of civil disobedience actions involved fewer than 100 people (in more than half of the cases there were actually fewer than 10), while demonstrative actions mobilised a varying number of participants.

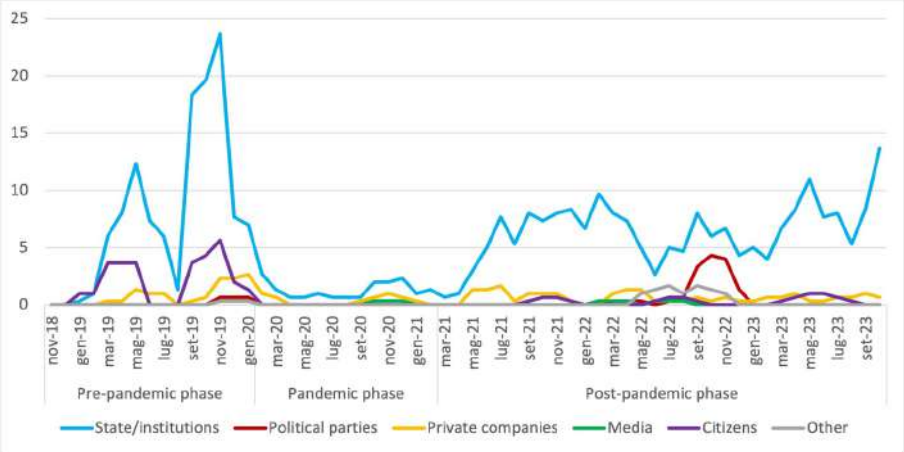
Despite the variety of forms of action, the plurality of actors involved and the different dimensions of protest, the protest cycle has one main goal: to push the state and institutions to act against climate collapse. As Figure 6 shows, institutional actors are the main target of the protest, regardless of the time period, and among them the state emerges as the first target in half of the cases. This result is congruent with the literature on the 'statalisation' of the demands of new climate activism after COP21 (de Moor et al. 2021). Putting pressure on the state is therefore the main strategic goal of all actors in the movement. However, Figure 6 shows the presence of other secondary goals that fluctuate over time: citizens were considered a relevant goal in the first phase, mainly characterised by global strikes, but lost importance after the first few months. Private companies also appear among the secondary targets. The most frequently mentioned is ENI, Italy's (partially state-owned) largest hydrocarbon company. Political parties emerge as secondary targets in coincidence with the legislative elections in September 2022. Finally, the media are hardly ever recognised as targets of protest. This last result is interesting because, as we will see in the next qualitative section, most of the criteria used by groups to assess their repertoires of action are based on the media relevance of the protest.

Table 3. Size of event across forms of action

	Fewer than 100		Between 100 and 999		1000 or more		Total	
Actions	Freq.	Row %	Freq.	Row %	Freq.	Row %	Freq.	Row %
Conventional	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	100.00	1	100.00
Demonstrative	33	14.73	85	37.95	106	47.32	224	100.00
Civil disobedience	59	85.51	10	14.49	0	0.00	69	100.00
Violent	2	100	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	100.00

Source: ANSA. Own elaboration.

Figure 6. Object/target across time with three-month moving average



Source: ANSA. Own elaboration.

6. Strategies and rhythms: articulating the repertoire

In this section, relying on qualitative interviews, we analyse the dynamics of the cycle of protest described in the previous section, revealing the explanations proposed by the actors for the changes in the repertoire of action, and in particular the relevance of the lack of political responsiveness in these changes. The analysis is developed combining a chronological and a logical order. First, we focus on the emergence of the climate strike as the prevailing form of action within the Italian climate movement, and on its peak. Secondly, we reconstruct the emergence of civil disobedience within the movement's repertoire, by initiative of XR, and the difficulties it met. Thirdly, we assess the role of the COVID-19 pandemic in reshaping the movement's tactics. Fourthly, we describe and analyse a second phase of civil disobedience, promoted by UG. We then address the recent state of the movement and the ongoing discussions around participation in elections vis-à-vis a further growth of civil disobedience tactics. Finally, we point out the peculiar role of media coverage and of the temporal rhythm of protest.

6.1. Emergence and peak of the climate strike

The months preceding the first global climate strike opened the protest cycle and were characterised by the diffusion process of FFF. Initially, the label identified the protest events, while later it was taken up as a name by the newly formed grassroots groups. The widespread feeling among early activists was that of 'one of those things you felt was historical, it was mounting, it was growing, it was impossible to stay out' (FFF1). What was

spreading as much as the repertoire of protest was the news. In fact, Greta Thunberg's protest action was as resonating for its message as it was easy to reproduce as a form of climate action. Local groups emerged, scaling up together with the form of action:

> In many cities there were already some local groups that were blossoming, then they started networking and then they merged into the national and international strike, into the first global strike. (FFF2)

The main goal, at this stage, was to 'throw the climate issue into the agenda' (FFF2), to 'impose the topic on the public debate' (FFF1). Soon after, the global climate strikes focused specifically on political institutions. As we have seen through the PEA, the four global strikes of 2019 (corresponding to the March, May, September and November peaks in Figure 2) constituted the apex of mobilisation, during which the movement addressed political institutions with a stepwise tactic:

> We had had the popular reaction, but the popular reaction had to then stimulate a political response. And the political response initially was not one of policy, but of declarations. (FFF1)

Thus, at the beginning of the cycle, FFF focused on 'climate emergency declarations' as symbolic acts of political responsiveness by institutions. Such declarations were framed as instruments to directly impact the policy process, pushing local and national institutions to recognise not only the scientific reality of climate change, but also its nature of emergency and the need to act accordingly. The actors' perception of an opening of the political institutions to their claims favoured the adoption of a strategy that addressed political institutions directly. Following the example of Greta Thunberg's 2018 Katowice speech, the movement pressured public authorities but did not negotiate with them, demanding, instead, they take on the whole package that went with acknowledging the scientific reality of the climate emergency:

> It was in the form of a motion in the city council that commits the mayor and the council to consider the consequences for the climate and the environment in the city in every action that this administration does, with a series of points and commitments to make [...] therefore, by accepting and voting on this motion the council would not only commit to doing these practical things, but would also recognise the – let's say 'ideological' – package. (FFF1)

In retrospect, the political goal was evaluated as an ambition coming from 'that mentality of wanting to change everything with a single action, a single strike, a single election' (FFF3). In hindsight, activists reported a misperception of the declaration's impact in shaping policy outcomes (FF2. FF3).

6.2. Experiments with civil disobedience

The first year of the protest cycle was further characterised by the emergence of XR as an international social movement organisation with national and local chapters. Since the beginning, its focus on the climate emergency was accompanied by a specific organisational structure and culture, thus resulting in a sort of 'package' for mobilisation. Differently from FFF, in fact, XR emerged from the beginning as a structured organisation with specific goals and tactics, not permeable to pre-existing groups or political cultures:

> I was fascinated by this very structured movement [...] They have what is called a very clear mandate in which they describe quite precisely what the long-term objective of the group is and what the different responsibilities are, and so the group within its mandate has full autonomy. (XR1)

The 'package' also comprised the strategic reasoning concerning mass civil disobedience, the main and foundational repertoire of action of the organisation: 'hundreds of thousands of people who get out and sit in the middle of a street. At that point clearly you've won'. (XR1) Reasoning on the diffusion of the 'package' in the Italian context, XR activists recall the importance as well as the constraints that the context provided. The difficulties mainly concerned the repertoire of action. The adoption of civil disobedience in the form developed by the British founders clashed both with the widespread political culture among Italian protesters and with the domestic judiciary system:

> And what we did at the beginning was to apply what we saw the English doing and then little by little, clashing with the Italian reality, we understood that that strategy obviously doesn't work in Italy for a series of reasons and that there is a need to develop our own. [...] The thousands of arrests they have had in London - not only have we not had them but we cannot even imagine having them - because there is a lot of fear and because the situation is very different anyway. We have done two or three things that are a little close to disobedience. [...] There is a whole legal context in which it was more difficult to act. (XR1)

These comments are consistent with what emerged in the previous quantitative section concerning a significant fluctuation in the frequency of civil disobedience actions during the first phase of the protest cycle.

6.3. The impact of the pandemic

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown measures led FFF and XR to move the protest online and dedicate time to maintaining their organisations. FFF's actions kept targeting the political institution and public opinion using ICT tools, transposing the actions carried out during 2019 within the online sphere, while maintaining a strategic reasoning focused on pursuing a logic of mass participation (FFF1, FFF2). Similarly, XR carried out its protest and recruitment actions by means of digital communication tools, reporting different evaluations of their effectiveness. The prolonged effects of the pandemic are identified by activists mainly in terms of recruitment:

> Little by little people got a little tired, forgot a little about the environmental issue, so some people that we had gathered during the pandemic, and who were becoming active in the groups, at a certain point they gave up. (FFF2)

Once the pandemic phase was over and mobilisation was at its lowest in terms of volume, the two movement organisations went through two distinct phases. FFF regained momentum through the protest on the occasion of the pre-COP in Milan and started investing in the creation of coalitions with other actors, something activists appreciated politically but that did not mobilise vast numbers of people (FFF2). In general, a clear politicisation process was occurring, which also comprised the development of policy proposals, collected in the so-called 'Climate Agenda':

> A document of a series of points which are also very structured, very studied, very scientifically accurate, made with a number of people from the scientific world

> who also gave us a hand in making sense of the finances and finding, in short, a series of policies that would be nice, that I would like to be carried out by a government. (FFF1)

The organisation further stressed that political institutions and parties were the main target of their actions, which was strictly connected to the perceived window of opportunity on the occasion of an electoral cycle.

6.4. Civil disobedience strikes back

XR, instead, went through an internal discussion which led to the emergence of a new organisation, Ultima Generazione. UG activists recall, as the main reason for starting something new, 'the frustration of many people in XR who really felt the need to return to the original idea with which XR was born in England' (UG2). There was the feeling that the original idea of XR had not been pursued completely: a strategy focusing on raising awareness had been privileged instead of one based entirely on civil disobedience. The main difference, in concrete terms, was the idea of organising small but radical – and, above all, continuous in time – civil disobedience actions, instead of waiting to be strong enough for mass civil disobedience. For UG the mass character of an action is less relevant than the frequency of the action:

> UG, starting with small numbers, said 'well, we are few, we start by doing actions of a certain type, they also bring us a certain visibility and instead of aiming to be many and then doing one thing, we do many smaller actions, but daily'. (UG1)

The flows of activists between one organization and another were not limited to XR and UG. In fact, most activists involved in civil disobedience had participated in FFF before, and when feeling frustrated by the type of action pursued, began to look to other tactics and organisations. They joined XR, and later UG, mainly looking for a way to raise the intensity of protest:

> I did two years of activism in FFF [...] I saw the horizontal structure of FFF and I saw the climate crisis go deeper and deeper, and this affected me the most. [...] At a certain point in 2021 [...], I was starting to feel frustration with the methods that were being carried out, because I felt it wasn't possible to have a real political impact. (UG2)

The sense of frustration combined with strategic reasoning on the importance of keeping multiple modes of protest active:

> Obviously mass demonstrations are something that have always been crucial, fundamental to historical changes but not sufficient. And as far as the fight for the climate and the environment, for ecology was concerned, a movement that brought civil disobedience, that raised the bar to a different level of conflict with the current system, was completely missing. And so XR was born from this, right? [...] And UG actually doesn't deviate that much from the initial XR theory, but applies it more faithfully in Italy. (UG2)

The split from XR that generated UG was part of a broader international process, based on the assessment of the efficacy of the specific type of civil disobedience that XR had been conducting:

> These people (those who started UG) were speaking with Roger Hallam, who was one of the founders of XR in 2018 and that had left XR to develop his own

> projects, because also in England and elsewhere the same stuff was happening. [...] Roger Hallam in that period was creating Insulate Britain. [...] So, in many countries these campaigns emerged, each with a name in their own language and addressing their own government. [...] This thing was formalised in April 2022 with the birth of the A22 network: these campaigns left XR and started their own international coordination. (UG2)

Interestingly enough, although this split took place within an international context, relying on the international networks in which activists are placed, political opportunities were mostly discussed at the national level. Furthermore, the XR-UG shift was also described as a further move from the international to the national context, as testified by the choice to avoid using English in the campaign's name.

The repertoire developed and adopted by UG has specific criteria that are seen as strategically important: visibility, non-excessive risk for participants, and a level of disruptiveness that does not antagonise public opinion (UG1). In concrete terms, two main forms of action have been used: the street blockade and the (temporary) smearing of monuments and works of art. These forms follow different strategic logics:

> We distinguish between horizontal and vertical conflict. [...] Street blockades are horizontal conflict. It is a conflict that we act out within our own social class. We act indiscriminately with ordinary people like us, and this allows us to get out of the bubble and to make clear the existing conflict between the daily interest of arriving at work on time and the existential interest of doing something for the climate crisis and for the ongoing social crisis. [...] Vertical conflict is against power, against institutions or in any case against their symbols. Therefore, a typical vertical conflict is the smearing of the Ministry of Economy or the Senate. A variation on the theme is the smearing of works of art. [...] There you have a slight mix between horizontal and vertical conflict, because you are striking a symbol of the Italian artistic heritage. And this creates outrage and conversations. But, it also creates very strong emotional reactions from people. I mean, I did the action where we jumped into the Trevi fountain and it was worse than being in a blockade. (UG2)

In the strategic reasoning of UG activists, civil disobedience actions are, furthermore, characterised by nonviolence. The use of nonviolence is a tactical choice aimed at searching for and maintaining the popular consensus, in particular vis-à-vis state repression. The logic they pursue is that when repression is used against nonviolent actions, public opinion is more likely to support mobilisation.

> Nonviolence, so the concept of doing actions that can be read in a certain way, not in that extreme way of the terrorist, of the vandal who wants to destroy everything [...] the intent is to create this, a type, a model of action that has good visibility, has a certain margin of risk which is not excessive for those who carry it out, and can perhaps be read not so destructively by those who observe it directly. [...] In our opinion, there is another tactical reason, which is that it can mobilise more, because it creates much more of a rift between power and the citizens who rebel. [...] I think you see it much more if you see nonviolent people getting arrested, getting taken away than if you see a group of people who have torches in their hands and start setting fire to the city. (UG1)

The tactical choices on repertoires therefore play on the ambivalence of relations with institutions: on the one hand, actions must not totally close off the possibilities of

dialogue with institutions, on the other hand, they must generate a vigorous response from the state in order to gain public sympathy.

6.5. Political institutions' non-responsiveness and repertoire change

The logic of the activists' repertoire is intrinsically relational: the adoption of civil disobedience is consequent upon the lack of responsiveness by the national political institutions.

> It was immediately clear how absurd it was, wasn't it? That people would have to make complaints, take to the streets, create inconvenience for people, for what is fundamentally a failure of our country's media and political apparatus to communicate the climate crisis and act accordingly. (UG2)

The need to raise the level of conflict, through civil disobedience, is justified by the lack of action of the state. For the activist the fact that the state is not respecting the social contract allows the citizen in turn to withdraw from presumed obedient behaviour:

> There is a state that, in addition to violating any existing international agreement on climate, is actually violating the social pact with its citizens and this has really made me realise how much we actually don't owe our obedience to anyone. [...] But these laws are subordinate to the fact that we give up a piece of freedom to receive some protection of assistance from the state. This is not there and the future is completely mortgaged by the government's actions, but the present is also completely ignored. (UG2)

The (in)action of the current national government is seen to be a continuation of the governments who were in power during the previous parliamentary term, which coincides with most of the years under investigation. For the activists, governmental discontinuity is not followed by a discontinuity of institutional action regarding the climate crisis: 'it was hard even when there was no centre-right (in power) (FFF1). From the perspective of activists involved in civil disobedience, the lack of political responsiveness is structural. The sense of frustration and the need to raise the level of conflict are framed as continuities with previous environmental mobilisations. Widening the considered time span of mobilisation gives the activists further motivation to adopt civil disobedience: not only is the state ignoring the current wave's protesters, but it has been doing it for a long time.

> We have been asking for something for 20 years: politicians are not listening to us, we will continue to ask for something. Yes, maybe after twenty years of a person ignoring you, it's also appropriate to start saying 'Well, I'm not asking you now. Now I'm going to go and get it'. [...] And it is not that I have to be the perfect one to find solutions, me as a citizen. It is the state that has to give me the solutions because otherwise there is no point in it being there. (UG2)

Therefore, along with the diagnosis of the state not currently respecting the social contract, the perception of growing anger and dissatisfaction motivates a willingness to 'go and get it' using more radical repertoires. The opposing views of the national government are perceived not only as opportunities for keeping the climate strike as the repertoire to be adopted (FFF 2), but even for the adoption of 'civil disobedience [...] especially at a time where there is a centre-right government and a certain narrative, a certain media and social approach' (FFF 1). According to activists that chose to shift

from demonstrative protest to civil disobedience, the goal is to achieve the political impact that climate strikes did not produce.

> The strategy is to create enough disruption [...] which, either because the police don't manage to handle the situation anymore, or because the situation becomes embarrassing for the government, you are called to negotiate. This is the first step, because [...] you achieve a partial victory and this, in theory, galvanises the movement and increases its numbers. And then you have the numbers to produce systemic changes of a wider scope. (UG2)

UG activists were not particularly impressed by the meetings they were able to get with ministers Roberto Cingolani in 2022 and Gilberto Pichetto Fratin in 2023 (UG2), ending up reporting the same feeling of 'frustration' (FFF1) that characterises institutional contacts attempted by FFF.

6.6. What is to be done? Pseudo-institutionalisation and pseudo-radicalisation

The same lack of response by political institutions, translating into a sense of low efficacy of mass demonstrative protest, is also shared by FFF activists. The main difference is that for FFF the relationship with large masses of people is still central to its own identity (FFF1), as is the international nature of mobilisation (FFF2). Thus, FFF activists discuss the need to change strategies and tactics, including civil disobedience, but without renouncing the grassroots characterisation of the movement:

> It is important to continue to carry out strikes but always see them as a moment of building from below that leads you to maintain political pressure for longer and longer. Which perhaps may lead to mass civil disobedience. Maybe that would already be an interesting thing to elaborate on, we are still very far away in my opinion, in Italy there isn't really the cultural background to do what they are doing in the Netherlands. (FFF2)

The idea of mass civil disobedience is a new element within FFF. This gives an indication of the process that we could call 'pseudo-radicalisation' of a part of the Italian climate movement; that is, the idea that demonstrative repertoires are unable to push the government to act and that therefore new strategies are needed without escalating into violence. Interestingly enough, while the sense of urgency triggered by the climate emergency and fostered by frustration with the lack of policy response justifies, in some, the move towards civil disobedience, it pushes others to entertain the idea of an electoral strategy:

> A segment of FFF, frustrated by inaction, frustrated by the fact of being there, doing things with the same method for more or less four years, proposes civil disobedience – doing things against the law, that defy the law, that challenge people's perception that stimulate, that provoke people's reactions. It is frustration, the urgency to do something different that has not yet been attempted, in people who in four years have given everything following FFF's strategy [...] There is a significant part of the movement which instead wants to give a lot of importance to institutional dynamics and wants to think about how to occupy that political space that up until now we have tried to occupy by influencing it. [...] They want to replace the people we have so far tried to influence and who have not listened to us, or at least not with the necessary speed or urgency. (FFF1)

This discussion is not abstract. In the last few years, well-known FFF activists have been elected in the city councils of Turin[6], Genoa[7], Brescia[8] and Taranto, among others. And in the summer of 2023, the Left-Green Alliance (AVS) published an article in the leftist newspaper Il Manifesto[9] in which they proposed to 'movements, associations, and the best civic organizations, as well as to the interested individual, [...] the building of a new agreement, an eco-social Alliance for climate, democracy, and equality', looking towards the European Elections of 2024.

FFF spokespersons engaged in the discussion declared: 'After more than four years of climate strikes, it is right for political parties to look to our movement. There are multiple ways to do politics. There are those who want to keep pushing from below and those who want to enter institutional dynamics, aiming to change them from within and change the parties. [...] We do not want to be affiliated with, or take positions toward an individual political force. The political forces must be open to our issue and translate this openness into our involvement in the electoral lists. [...] AVS's openness towards social movements is positive. It is an interesting process that we hope other parties will do'[10].

Again, as in the case of pseudo-radicalisation, it is not possible to refer to an accomplished institutionalisation process, since the electoral path remains confined to individual activists rather than groups, as was decided by the FFF national assembly in Bari in 2023 (personally witnessed by one of the authors). Still, the 'pseudo-institutionalisation' of a sector of the movement, which aims to open the doors of the political opportunity structure from within, is taking place, as is testified by the choice of two former FFF national spokespersons to run in the 2024 European elections, one in the AVS[11] list and another in the M5S list[12].

Pseudo-institutionalisation and pseudo-radicalisation are considered to be in opposition to each other. Even if FFF activists acknowledge the legitimacy of small-group civil disobediences just as UG activists respect the choice to engage in electoral action, each actor feels rather strongly about their own path. On the one hand, for the FFF activists, protest and political actions that are not within the boundaries of the organisation's repertoire need to be individually pursued, protecting FFF's name (FFF2). In general, FFF activists reject the metonymy between disruptive repertoire and radical politics,

[6] See: www.sinistraecologista.it/sara-diena/

[7] See: www.fivedabliu.it/2022/04/30/amministrative-2022-la-prima-volta-dei-fridays-for-futureamministrative-2022-la-prima-volta-dei-friday-for-future/

[8] Colucci, G. (2023). Il consiglio comunale è uno strumento, ma Fridays non diventa un partito politico: parla l'ecoattivista eletta a Brescia col centrosinistra. *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, May 30. Retrieved from www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2023/05/30/il-consiglio-comunale-e-uno-strumento-ma-fridays-non-diventa-un-partito-politico-parla-lecoattivista-eletta-a-brescia-col-centrosinistra/7174677/

[9] Bonelli, A. and Fratoianni, N. (2023). Venite con noi, l'invito ai giovani movimenti di Alleanza Verdi Sinistra. Il Manifesto. Retrieved from https://ilmanifesto.it/venite-con-noi-linvito-ai-giovani-movimenti-di-alleanza-verdi-sinistra

[10] Merli, G. (2023). I Fridays for Future rispondono all'appello dei rosso-verdi. *Il Manifesto*. Retrieved from https://ilmanifesto.it/i-fridays-for-future-rispondono-allappello-dei-rosso-verdi

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reporting that 'MAPA[13] activists from Mexico said that being radical means going to the roots of things, so not necessarily blowing up oil pipelines or things like that, but first of all to be radical in the way of seeing things, of positioning ourselves, of going to the root of the problems and, yes, going deeper' (FFF3). On the other hand, the UG activists' view of an electoral strategy is 'super critical', because 'there is little time left and therefore if I start from the idea that I will form a party, run for election, people will then vote for me, then I will make the legislative proposals... Maybe we don't have all this time anymore' (UG1).

6.7. Protest efficacy: between media coverage, social roots and temporality

We have seen that activists justify the choice of their repertoire of action in terms of efficacy, theoretically presented as the capacity to influence policy choices. Still, when they concretely measure the efficacy of their action, they refer to other criteria. Some of them are shared: media coverage and visibility are used as an index of the success of both climate strikes and civil disobedience:

> It was a demonstration that really shook the city because it had never been seen before, even in the newspapers, such gigantic resonance and pages, and throughout Italy and throughout the world in the media there was only talk of FFF. (FFF1)

> We are in a period in which the traditional FFF phase is waning, in any case in terms of mass participation, in terms of impact, in terms of media attention. (FFF1)

> In reality the street blockade is losing some effectiveness in terms of media coverage. It doesn't matter much lately, from what we've noticed. But it still causes the most sensation, because it actually creates enormous inconvenience for those who are there and well, perhaps it is mentioned less than the smearing on TV, but it is a topic that then creates debate, because whoever gets stuck there, then talks about it, even if only badly, saying, 'yesterday I got stuck, the damned people who made me waste half an hour', and so it becomes a topic of discussion. And then you always find that minimal percentage of people who have a bit of a voice that support you. And so then this creates debate, conflict... and then it goes on TV. (UG1)

The reasoning concerning the inconvenience that the street blockade creates for the public is particularly interesting. This inconvenience is acknowledged, but it is considered secondary to media exposure because it creates a debate.

While actors agree on seeing media coverage as an index of efficacy, their analyses differ on their direct relationship with people. For actors engaging in civil disobedience, a direct relationship with the public exists only in the moment of action:

> Even though we are criminalised and the narrative in the national media is of a certain type, for the people who actually see the action it's different. It doesn't make much sense to them that I act like a corpse and I am taken away by the police [...], so for those who see, yes, it works. (UG1)

Climate strikes, instead, are seen as a moment that shows the capillarity of the FFF social presence, an indicator of the persistence of collective action in spite of decreasing

[13] Most Affected People and Areas

media coverage. There is the idea of building long-term change through the development of deep roots in Italian society:

> In reality FFF still has very large numbers within local groups and in the number of local groups that are present in the areas. Last time we held strikes in 40 cities, and only the CGIL[14] [...] did better than us, mobilising in 58 cities [...]. We are demonstrating in 40 cities, we are university boys and girls, a few years of organisation, no funds, everything self-managed, self-financed, that's what we're talking about. So in my opinion FFF is still very present, it still has important numbers. (FFF2)

Behind this, there is probably a different temporality of protest and of the political process necessary to address climate change. For UG activists, the rhythm of mobilisation in itself provides a sense of efficacy:

> These campaigns are based on disturbing the public in a serial, repeated way, with periods in which you stay in the same city for an entire month or two months and create discomfort in that city, generally the capital. (UG2)

For FFF activists, instead, the rhythm of mobilisation follows a medium- to long-term perspective, while still being influenced by the time pressure of the 'doomsday clock' of the climate emergency:

> In five years it will be 2028, in a further five years, more or less, we'll have run out of time for the bigger things to do, and therefore we need five years more in which new people are gathered. Whoever's there already does different things to support the movement, continues in some way to be in the movement – the movement changes and also integrates new people, further committees, networks, movements, but there are also just more collaborations with things that are already there. [...] We must continue to carry out strikes, they are important for involving collectives, students, [...] it is always important to carry out demonstrations, to build mobilisation in the area and with all the pieces of student protest together, and committees, networks and territorial problems and we are trying do focus more on workers. (FFF2)

As the PEA has already shown, different forms of action have a different rhythm of frequency and intensity, corresponding to a different logic of action and a different idea of the temporality of the change pursued by actors. This qualitative section has highlighted how the adoption of a specific repertoire and the changes that have been made during the cycle have been significantly affected by the activists' perception of the closing of political opportunities due to a lack of political responsiveness.

7. Discussion and conclusions

The combination of the PEA and the qualitative interviews allows us to reconstruct the development of the latest (and ongoing) wave of climate protest in Italy. We have identified the main actors, their targets (mainly, state institutions), their forms of action (mostly demonstrative and almost exclusively nonviolent), and the ebbs and flows of mobilisation, focusing in particular on the gradual change within the movement's repertoire of protest. The two different methodologies converge in proposing a possible periodisation of this wave. A first phase of explosion, with the emergence of the climate

[14] Largest trade union confederation in Italy.

strike as the main form of action and of its characteristic peaks of mobilisation, was followed by the pandemic, with the obvious ellipsis of most forms of action. Then came the post-2020 phase, with a lower-intensity but more frequent rhythm of mobilisation, and the relative decline of the climate strike, which remains, however, the prevailing form of action (as much as FFF remains the prevailing actor) vis-à-vis the emergence of significant episodes of civil disobedience and possible attempts at electoral participation. In this section we propose six reflections based on this analysis.

First, we observe a change in the repertoire of action in response to a perceived closure in political opportunities, determined by the non-response of the state to the claims put forward. Nevertheless, this change, at least for the moment, is partial and relative, concerning only a minority (though a significant minority) of the protest events. Climate strikes are still the most frequent form of action, though with lower participation than in the previous phase, while at the same time civil disobedience actions occur and intensify, and electoral opportunities are considered. We do not witness, at the moment, the institutionalisation-radicalisation dichotomy (the choice to run for office is still limited to individuals and no significant violent action is visible), but we do witness a rearticulation of the repertoire of action of the movement, including both more radical (though nonviolent) forms of action and a discussion on the merits of participating in institutional representation.

Secondly, we should never forget that movements are, more often than not, internally plural and coalition-based. We do observe a case of strategic adaptation, but the agency of this strategic adaptation is far from unitary. Instead, different trajectories develop within the movement, with different strategic logics and different ways to respond to political opportunities. In the case of the climate movement, all the actors share the same objective of pushing against public inaction. However, they differ when it comes to choosing the strategies for achieving the objective.

Our third point regards political opportunities. While the literature has pointed out that it is the presence or absence of opportunities for mobilisation that affects collective action, rather than the concrete implementation of policy responses to movement claims, movement actors can interpret the latter as a case of the former. Our interviewees engaged in civil disobedience have clearly pointed out that the necessity to raise the level of conflict, and the justification for doing so in forms that go beyond the limits of the law, derive in their eyes from the state's inaction on climate. This has an impact also on the discussion on the extent to which the climate movement is pursuing, in practice, a reformist strategy: our analysis shows that, even if the movement does not negotiate with the government, instead demanding that the government implements the changes dictated by science and by the movement itself, the choice by the government to respond or not significantly affects the trajectory of the cycle of protest and the movement's strategic choices.

Furthermore, our analysis shows that the motivations of repertoire change are both internal and external to actors. Movement actors do plan strategically how to respond to the closure of political opportunities, but they are also motivated individually by the necessity to 'do something more' in order to feel at ease with their conscience vis-à-vis the threat of climate catastrophe, and collectively by the need to propose forms of action that fulfil individual activists' moral urge. Interestingly, individual motivations also limit the

adoption of certain actions that are too risky or cross moral boundaries. This contributes to keeping tactical choices within the framework of nonviolence. Particularly in the case of civil disobedience actions, the interviews revealed that there is significant attention to psychological support from other group members when performing certain actions.

Our fifth point concerns forms of action. Building on Portos (2019), we question the alternatives of institutionalisation and radicalisation as a response to the closure of political opportunities in the declining phase of a cycle of protest. Though we do witness a transformation of the repertoire towards the inclusion of more radical forms, this process takes place well within the limits of nonviolence. Although a significant number of political and media actors try to represent civil disobedience as something bordering terrorism, with clear consequences in terms of repression (and the recent legislation introduced by Parliament goes in this direction)[15], there is no violent radicalisation taking place in Italy on the issue of climate, at the moment. Interestingly enough, we also witness cases of the two alternatives to radicalisation Portos observed within the Spanish 15M (decentralisation and compartmentalisation). While 'pseudo-radicalisation' takes place without the emergence of armed violence, 'pseudo-institutionalisation' is also developing through the crescent tendency of FFF activists to participate in electoral processes, while the organisation remains adamant in refusing to collectively choose this strategic path.

Finally, we point out that, indeed, strategic adaptation is influenced by the perception of political opportunities by movement actors but, in turn, such perception is affected by the long-term strategic logics of movement actors (that pre-exist strategic choices and partially shape them, just as they shape the perception of opportunities) and by the eventual dealignment between the outcome they claim to pursue (in our case, affecting state policy) and how to effectively measure success or failure (in our case, almost always media coverage and visibility).

All in all, we have illustrated the Italian climate movement's extraordinary trajectory, in a cycle of protest that has no precedent in the history of Italian environmentalism, and its capacity to change and adapt, through the interaction of a plurality of actors, goals and motivations, in response to changing contexts and opportunities.

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8. Appendix

Table A1. The PEA Dataset: codebook and description

Varname	Description	Measurement
ID	Identification Number	Progressive number starting from 1
DATE	Date of report	Range: 01/11/2018 - 31/10/2023
DESCR	Description of the protest event in a row	String
TIMEVEN	Duration of the protest event	Categories: 1=One day; 2= Multiday; 3= Other
LEVEVEN	Level of the protest event	Categories: 1= District; 2= Town; 3= Province; 4= Region; 5= Country; 6= EU; 7= International; 99= Other
PLACE	Place of the protest event	Nominal (ex. Rome)
POSITPRO	Type of protest in relation to climate change	Categories: 1= To stop climate change; 2= Neutral/ambivalent; 3= Climate denialist; 99= Other
PARTICIPREP	Whether the number of participants in the protest event is reported or not	Dummy: 0= Not reported; 1= Reported
PARTICIPPOL	The exact number of participants taking part in the event, as reported or estimated by the police	Continuous
PARTICIPNEWS	The exact number of participants taking part in the event, as reported or estimated by the newspaper	Continuous
PARTICIPORG	The exact number of participants taking part in the event, as reported or estimated by the organisers	Continuous
NORMORG	The names of the organisations staging the protest event	Nominal (ex. Legambiente)
FFF	Was 'Fridays for Future' among the organisers?	Dummy: 0= No; 1= Yes
XR	Was 'Extinction Rebellion' among the organisers?	Dummy: 0= No; 1= Yes
UG	Was 'Ultima Generazione' among the organisers?	Dummy: 0= No; 1= Yes
ENVORG	Were environmental organisations among the organisers?	Dummy: 0= No; 1= Yes
TERRCOM	Were territorial committees among the organisers?	Dummy: 0= No; 1= Yes
PARTY	Were political parties among the organisers?	Dummy: 0= No; 1= Yes
STUDORG	Were student organisations among the organisers?	Dummy: 0= No; 1= Yes
SOCCENT	Were social centres among the organisers?	Dummy: 0= No; 1= Yes
PROTFORM1-PROTFORM3	The repertoire(s) of action adopted during the protest event (1 to 3 repertoires selected)	Categories: 1= Petitions/Public letter; 2= Leafleting; 3= Legal action; 4= Mail or tweet-bombing; 5= Public Assembly, Press Conference or other Meetings; 6= Symbolic Action (street theatre, masks, other performances etc.); 7= Rally; 8= Demonstration, march; 9= Strike; 10= Hunger Strike; 11= Sit-in; 12= Teach-in; 13= Critical mass; 14= Public events interruption/disturb/ blitz; 15= Occupation of buildings or similar; 16= Occupation of squares; 17= Street blockade; 18= Attacking art without damaging; 19= Violent action against things; 20= Violent action against people; 99= Other
DEMANDS	Description of the demands of the protest	String
DEMANDSCOPE	The scope of the demands	Categories: 1= District; 2= Town; 3= Province; 4= Region; 5= Country; 6= EU; 7= International; 99= Other
OBJECT1 - OBJECT3	The objects or targets of the protest (1 to 3 objects selected)	Categories: 1= State/Institutions; 2= Political parties; 3= Private companies; 4= Media; 5= Citizens; 99=Other
OBJECTSCOPE1 - OBJECTSCOPE3	The scope of the objects or targets of the protest	Categories: 1= District; 2= Town; 3= Province; 4= Region; 5= Country; 6= EU; 7= International; 99= Other
POLINT	Did the police intervene during the protest event?	Dummy: 0= No; 1= Yes
INSTSUPPORT	Was the protest event supported by any institution?	Categories: 1= International institutions; 2= State institutions; 3= Local institutions; 4= Political parties; 5= Schools/Universities; 6= Social organisations; 7= Media figures, celebrities; 8= Private companies; 99= Other
TITLE	Title of the article reporting the protest event	string
LINK	Link to the article reporting the protest event	string
COMMENTS	Any other comment on the protest event	string

Source: own elaboration.

To build the PEA dataset, we decided to use ANSA's archives. ANSA is the leading Italian news agency. We accessed the archives through the media aggregator Factiva. We selected two archives, the 'General News' and the 'Regional News' archives. The timeframe we analysed was from 2 November 2018 (three months before the first Italian climate strike in February 2019) and 31 October 2023. We searched for articles

containing any variation of the word 'clima' (climate) appearing together with any variations of the words 'protesta' (protest), 'manifestazione' (demonstration), 'corteo' (march), 'sciopero' (strike), 'blocco' (blockade), 'sit-in', 'die-in', 'disobbedienza' (disobedience), 'blitz', 'marcia' (march) and 'strike'. The keywords were chosen based on the most common forms of climate protest according to previous research on the topic. Our choice of keywords, like any such choice, may have produced a bias in the sample (i.e., the non-appearance of protest events that used other forms of action). Still, the word 'protest' covers such a wide area that it was used in the past as a lone keyword in works similar to ours (Andretta 2017; Andretta and Pavan 2018; Andretta and Imperatore 2023). In our view, adding other keywords reduced the risk of missing events.

The search generated a total of 7738 news articles. The same word search in major Italian newspapers generated fewer articles (*Il Corriere della Sera*, 4233 articles; *La Repubblica*, 7111 articles; *La Stampa*, 2009 articles). Moreover, among the aforementioned archives, only the archive of *La Repubblica* includes local editions, but only for the cities of Bari, Bologna, Florence, Genoa, Milan, Naples, Palermo, and Rome. ANSA's regional archives, instead, cover all Italian regional editions. We therefore chose ANSA in order to have the widest possible news coverage throughout the whole of Italy.

To select protest events, we started from the definition offered by Fillieule and Jiménez (2003, 273), who define an Environmental Protest Event as 'a collective, public action regarding issues in which explicit concerns about the environment are expressed as a central dimension, organized by non-state instigators with the explicit purpose of critique or dissent together with societal and/or political demands'. Therefore, purely informative or cultural events were excluded from the selection. We more narrowly focused on events that regarded climate issues. We systematically analysed all 7738 news articles, removing those that did not contain any reference to protest actions. A total of 749 protest events were identified. We manually coded each event using the codebook presented in Table A1. Following other studies (Fillieule and Jiménez 2003; Hutter 2014; Oliver, Hanna, and Lim 2023), in the case of multicity coordinated protests we created separate events for each city[16]. In the case of information about the same event scattered across multiple articles, we systematically coded all information and reported the different sources in the form.

[16] The choice to code multicity events into single protest events was derived from what we found in the literature. In addition to the aforementioned work by Fillieule and Jiménez (2003), Hutter (2014: 347) argues that: 'the standard solution is to code the duration of an event as a separate variable, as well as taking the timing and the locality of events as basic criteria for delimitation. For example, our updated Kriesi et al. data is based on the instruction to treat each action of a series of actions as a single event if we know that they are separated in time (different days or clearly separated periods of one day) and/or space (different cities or clearly separated parts of one city). Similarly, the US dynamics of collective mobilization project's brief event guide (available on their website) states, "An event is coded as one event if (a) it includes action that is mostly continuous—no gaps of more than 24 hours in time (. . .), (b) it is located within the same city or same part of the city, and (c) it includes the same (or a subset of the same) participants, whose goals are the same"'. While it is true that in some cases Kriesi and colleagues coded events in multiple cities as one single event, this was done only in exceptional circumstances where the article reported no information other than the name of the city. In all other cases, events that took place on the same day in multiple cities were coded as separate events from each other. Finally, Oliver et al. (2023), after pointing out that: 'Deciding whether and how to parse these complex gatherings into distinct events is one of the difficult parts of coding protest events, and there are no universally agreed-upon rules', then affirm that: 'Reports of multicity coordinated protests typically state that there were protests in, for example, twenty-five cities, but name only a few cities. We create separate events for each named city plus an aggregate for the unnamed cities and link them all via an umbrella'. Therefore, also Oliver and colleagues suggest coding separate events for each city that is explicitly mentioned in an article. Overall, there is no agreed rule, but coding multicity events into individual protest events for each city mentioned seemed to us the method closest to other studies in the literature. Furthermore, we consider the capacity of a movement to organise tens of local events throughout the country on the same day as a relevant variable, which would have been lost if climate strikes were coded as one national event.

Table A2. Size of protest events across repertoires

		Size of protest events			
	Repertoires	**Fewer than 100**	**Between 100 and 999**	**More than 1000**	**Total**
Conventional	Petitions/Public letter	0	0	1	1
		0.00	0.00	0.93	0.34
	Leafleting	0	0	0	0
		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Legal action	0	0	0	0
		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Mail or tweet-bombing	0	0	0	0
		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Total conventional	0	0	1	1
		0.00	0.00	0.93	0.34
Demonstrative	Public Assembly, Press Conference or other Meetings	0	3	0	0
		0.00	3.16	0.00	0.00
	Symbolic Action (street theatre, masks, other performances)	18	0	0	18
		19.15	0.00	0.00	6.08
	Rally	3	0	1	4
		3.19	0.00	0.93	1.35
	Demonstration, march	2	6	12	20
		2.13	6.32	11.21	6.76
	Strike	7	74	93	174
		7.45	77.89	86.92	58.78
	Sit-in	3	2	0	5
		3.19	2.11	0.00	1.69
	Teach-in	0	0	0	0
		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Total Demonstrative	33	85	106	224
		35.11	89.47	99.07	75.68
Civil Disobedience	Hunger Strike	5	0	0	5
		5.32	0.00	0.00	1.69
	Critical mass	0	1	0	1
		0.00	1.05	0.00	0.34
	Public events interruption/disturb/ blitz	2	0	0	2
		2.13	0.00	0.00	0.68
	Occupation of buildings or similar	7	6	0	13
		7.45	6.32	0.00	4.39
	Occupation of squares	1	1	0	2
		1.06	1.06	0.00	0.68
	Street blockade	30	2	0	32
		31.91	2.11	0.00	10.81
	Attacking art without damaging	14	0	0	14
		14.89	0.00	0.00	4.73
	Total Civil Disobedience	59	10	0	69
		62.77	10.54	0.00	23.31
Violent	Violent actions against things	2	0	0	2
		2.13	0.00	0.00	0.68
	Violent actions against people	0	0	0	0
		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Total Violent	2	0	0	2
		2.13	0.00	0.00	0.68
Other		0	0	0	0
		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total		94	95	107	296
		100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: own elaboration.

Table A3. List of interviews and sample description

ID	Interviewee	Modalities	Date
FFF1	Fridays for Future activist	Conducted in person	16 November 2023
FFF2	Fridays for Future activist	Conducted online (via Google Meet)	17 November 2023
FFF3	Fridays for Future activist	Conducted in person	3 December 2023
XR1	Extinction Rebellion activist	Conducted online (via Google Meet)	8 April 2021
UG1	Ultima Generazione activists	Conducted in person	2 December 2023
UG2	Ultima Generazione activists	Conducted in person	11 December 2023

Source: own elaboration.

Furthermore, we conducted six in-depth semi-structured interviews with activists from three organisations (three activists from Fridays for Future, one activist from Extinction Rebellion, two activists from Ultima Generazione). Due to the fact that the organisational structure of the three actors is far from homogeneous, with FFF acting more as a network of local groups and XR and UG being characterised by a high level of centralisation, we used different strategies to select interviewees. With XR and UG we contacted the national organisations and were directed by them to activists that could be interviewed, while with FFF we selected, on our own, activists that had a representative role at the national level and were representative of different socio-geographic areas and political strands within the network. Four interviewees were men and two were women. The youngest was 22 and the oldest 50, with an average age of 30. Two activists came from the north-west of Italy, one from the north-east, two from the centre, and one from the south. The average length of the interviews was one and a half hours and all were conducted between 16 November and 11 December 2023, except for the Extinction Rebellion activist interview conducted on 8 April 2021. Two interviews were conducted online via Google Meet, while the others were conducted on-site.

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Climate change and its politicization by and within Italian organized philanthropy

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Abstract

The international research community has yet to thoroughly examine the role of organized philanthropy in climate transition policymaking, while no studies have investigated the positioning of Italian climate philanthropy. I address this knowledge gap by analysing the main climate-related networks that include Italian foundations and their justificatory grammars, using the conceptual pairing depoliticization/politicization as a heuristic key. My research hypothesis is that the involvement of philanthropic networks in climate policymaking contributes to shifting political responsibility from governments to non-political actors, and that this entails both a discursive depoliticization of public action and a governmental and social politicization in the practices of non-political actors. Drawing on a large corpus of official documents and a set of semi-structured interviews, I explore this hypothesis at two levels: the form and role assumed by Italian climate networks (social and governmental politicization) and the values and ideas they convey in the context of national and international climate governance (discursive depoliticization). My analysis appears to confirm the initial hypothesis: these networks function as political entrepreneurs and field-builders and as such they foster the depoliticization of public action at the discursive level, similarly to international philanthropy. Furthermore, at least at the network level, Italian philanthropy is internally in agreement on how to tackle climate change.

1. Introduction

"Although we should be careful not to overstate our role, it is important to recognize that the climate philanthropy community's activities prior to and at the [Paris] COP helped to lay the basis for the outcome" (ECF 2016, p.2). In this statement, the ECF (European Climate Foundation) credits philanthropists with helping to shape the 2015 Paris Climate Accords. The ECF was set up in 2008 to help address the climate crisis by fostering the attainment of a net-zero emissions society at the national, European and global levels. It is the most prominent of the European pass-through foundations which specialize in redistributing funds from other foundations. Specifically, the ECF pools monies from some of the world's largest climate foundations, including the Swiss-based Oak Foundation and the US-based Hewlett Foundation and ClimateWorks, another American pass-through foundation, whose funders include the foundations of billionaires Bezos, Gates, Zuckerberg, Bloomberg and Ford.

Although the role of organized philanthropy[1] in climate change policymaking has grown significantly over the past decade, few scholars have investigated the phenomenon

[1] This term refers to organizations endowed with their own financial resources, which are independently governed, make strategic use of their assets for the public good and are mostly foundations and more rarely associations (European Foundation Centre, 2016).

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(Betsill et al. 2022; Monier, 2023). Furthermore, these few have mainly focused on the North American or international context, while the positioning of Italian organized philanthropy remains unexplored.

I set out here to address this knowledge gap by analyzing the main climate-related networks that include Italian foundations and their justificatory grammars – namely, the values and motives that actors evoke to legitimize their conduct (Mills, 1940) – using the conceptual pairing depoliticization/politicization as a heuristic key. My working hypothesis is that the involvement of philanthropic networks in climate policymaking shifts political responsibilities from governments to non-political actors, causing both a discursive depoliticization of public action and governmental and social politicization of the actions of these non-political actors.

The depoliticization of public action is known to be intrinsically political in nature. Indeed, as Burnham (2017) has noted, it is structurally associated with the complementary processes of politicization of non-political actors' actions. Burnham himself has offered a compelling definition of depoliticization as "the process of removing the political character of decision-making processes" (Burnham 2001, p. 128). This formulation reflects the fact that the political dimension of the decision-making process is sidelined as opposed to disappearing altogether. Indeed, depoliticization is actually a political strategy (Jessop 2014): shifting decision-making responsibilities from governments to non-political actors can boost the political control wielded by the latter, generating a system of governance in which political decisions are made without appearing to be such (De Leonardis 2013). Thus, the depoliticization of public action is structurally coupled with the corresponding politicization of a diverse range of social practices. Together, these two concepts can "serve as a valuable key to deciphering and understanding the evolving relations between society, politics and the economy" (Moini, 2019, p.219).

In this paper, I draw on the conceptual framework developed by Giulio Moini and Ernesto d'Albergo (2017, 2019) to examine the dual dynamics of depoliticization of public action and politicization of social practices, in relation to the involvement of Italian climate philanthropy in policymaking. Moini (2019) has clarified the key difference between public action and social practices: specifically, the former is action by various actors that inevitably produces structures for regulating social organization, while the latter comprises actions and values that are shared by various actors, making it possible to select some types of actions and exclude others without necessarily producing regulatory frameworks.

Moini and d'Albergo (2017, 2019) have proposed an analytical-interpretive schema of the three levels at which the twin concepts of depoliticization and politicization play out: 1) at the discursive level, when defining courses of action is portrayed as inevitable and when a framework put forward by nonpolitical actors (not legitimized via democratic-electoral processes) is assigned a central, if not dominant, role in identifying possible courses of action, with the approval of political actors; 2) at the governmental level, when power and responsibility are transferred from political institutions legitimated by elections to more technical agencies, or to bodies that are not democratically elected and that steer clear of contentious politics; 3) at the social level, when responsibility for collective problems is assumed by social actors, either without the involvement of public actors or in partnership with them.

Key to this line of reasoning is the political dimension acquired by organized philanthropy in recent decades and by extension philanthropy's relationship with the state and democracy. While organized philanthropy has often been accused of a lack of accountability or legitimization throughout its history (Hall 2006), such criticism has intensified in recent years given philanthropy's increasingly important role in orienting public policy. Theda Skocpol stated during the 2016 Opening Congress of the American Political Science Association: "Studies of rising inequality, declining democratic accountability and asymmetric partisan polarization .... none of these transformations can be fully understood without bringing organized philanthropy into the analysis" (Skocpol 2016, 435). Similar critiques are also beginning to emerge in Europe. From a French perspective, Sylvain A. Lefèvre and Anne Monier (2021) have questioned whether philanthropists are legitimized to manage matters of general interest, especially considering the recent rise in inequality and the erosion of trust in institutions and elites. Nevertheless, in Italy too, philanthropical foundations, especially banking foundations (Fob), have increasingly taken on political functions in recent decades, replacing the mechanisms of representation legitimized by democratic elections with the mechanisms of philanthrocapitalism (Arrigoni 2021, 2024).

Drawing on a large corpus of official documents[2], complemented by a smaller corpus of semi-structured interviews with representatives of climate networks[3], and using the concepts of depoliticization/politicization, I explore the hypothesis that political responsibilities are shifting from governments to non-political actors at two different levels: the form and role assumed by Italian climate networks (social and governmental politicization) and the values and ideas these networks convey in the context of national and international climate governance (discursive depoliticization).

I have chosen networks as my unit of analysis for three reasons. First, the literature on the role of foundations in policymaking suggests that, because they have more limited resources to invest than governments, foundations strategically seek to maximise their impact by directing resources towards their policy priorities (Depecker et al., 2018). These priorities include – alongside producing and disseminating knowledge to inform policymaking and channelling funding to organisations with the potential to become key players in the field – mediating between public and private actors via the creation of networks, think tanks and research institutes. Second, Italian foundations, like their European counterparts (Monier, 2023), have been extremely active on the networking front in recent years. Third, from an analytical viewpoint, focusing on network documents enables us to identify the shared, and therefore dominant, justification regime, without prejudice to possible differences between the outlooks of individual foundations.

The paper is organized as follows. In the first section, I introduce the theme of the relationship between organized philanthropy and climate action by reviewing the existing literature on the foundations' contribution to policymaking and reconstructing philanthropic involvement in international climate governance from a socio-historical perspective. In the second section, I outline the salient features of four Italian networks. In the third section and in the conclusions respectively, I discuss this case study from a

[2] For a list of the documents consulted, as well as the details of how they were selected and how information was extracted from them, see Appendix Table A.

[3] Specifically, between December 2022 and November 2023, I conducted seven interviews with managers at Assifero (2), Cariplo (2), FCmessina (1), Banca Etica (1) and Fondazione del Monte di Bologna e Ravenna (1).

politicization/depoliticization perspective and outline my main research findings and their implications.

2. Organized philanthropy and climate policymaking

Since the 1990s, organized philanthropy has been on the rise everywhere. Such is the extent of the phenomenon that some analysts view it as a new golden age of philanthropy[4]. It has also been referred to as the new philanthropy, given its combination of grantmaking and investment logics (Frumkin, 2003). While multiple terms have been used to describe this phenomenon, its shared core lies in its manifest intertwining of benevolence and business. Bishop (2011) coined the expression "philanthrocapitalism", arguing that this offers the most comprehensive label, because it reflects the nexus between capitalism and the new trends in philanthropy. Operationally, this translates into a greater focus on the impact of interventions, while normatively, it expresses the notion that entrepreneurial and economic logics (e.g., measurability, risk-taking, innovativeness) may be virtuously wedded to the logics of gift and the common good (Arrigoni et al., 2020).

While organized philanthropy has historically gained more traction in English-speaking countries, the number of foundations in Europe, including Italy, has grown exponentially over the last two decades (Pierri, 2019). In 2015, there were 129,000 foundations in Europe, which distributed monies exceeding €53 billion; by 2020, this number had risen to 147,000, with allocations of around €60 billion. In Italy, the number of foundations almost tripled in under twenty years, growing from 3,077 in 2001 to 8,065 in 2019. These figures go hand in hand with greater public visibility of philanthropic actors, especially through the third (EU) and second level (nation states) associations that represent them and the various thematic networks to which they belong together with other foundations and public and private bodies. At the European level, foundations have been represented by Philea (Philanthropy Europe Association) since the merger in 2022 of the EFC (European Foundation Centre) and Dafne (Donors and Foundations Networks in Europe). In Italy, Acri represents the 86 foundations of banking origin, while Assifero represents the family, community and corporate foundations.

Multiple factors have underpinned the rapid growth in organized philanthropy. First, we have the emergence of new economic sectors and the relative accumulation of massive fortunes by some entrepreneurs, be they financial investors in the 1980s (Guillhot, 2006) or the founders of the new IT and internet multinationals since the 1990s (Abélès, 2002). Equally salient is the reorganization and outsourcing of the public sector since the neoliberal turn (King, Le Galès, 2017). The state has spread not only upwards and downwards towards supranational and local institutions, but also sideways towards the market and so-called civil society, fostering the entry of new private actors into policymaking (Mastropaolo et al. 2022). In this context, the dynamism of philanthropic organizations has been boosted by the introduction of favorable legal frameworks, such as tax benefits for donations or simplifications of the legal framework for setting up foundations (Duvoux, 2015). Finally, we may also cite the stark rise in inequality seen in many countries since the 1980s, which has been facilitated by government policies incentivizing the accumulation of capital (Depecker et al. 2018).

[4] Lane, R. (2013). A golden age of philanthropy. *Forbes,* December 1.

Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that philanthropic foundations globally have become involved in the fight against climate change. But what direction has climate philanthropy taken and with what outcomes? So far, with few – albeit significant – exceptions, scholars have not devoted much scrutiny to foundations as actors with the power to influence environmental governance systems (Morena 2021, Betsill et al. 2021, Mornier 2023)[5]. Existing studies have mainly focused on US-based foundations or international climate philanthropy, which, again, is primarily led by the US foundations.

Furthermore, scholars of climate philanthropy have generally homed in on the foundations' efforts to shape policy via funding and, only more recently, on their role as organizational field-builders[6] (Monier, 2023; Betsil, 2021). Researchers who analyze foundations as field-builders have explored their political role, which is based on the deployment of relational and cognitive resources in tandem with financial resources. More specifically, the latter group of scholars investigates the practices of advocacy, brokering, knowledge generation, goal setting, monitoring and reporting, and formal and informal diplomacy leveraged by foundations to gain political influence over environmental policy. The networking that is our key focus here undoubtedly falls within this second domain of inquiry. Let us therefore review the work of the few scholars who have addressed this domain to date.

Edward Morena (2016, 2021, 2023) stands out as the most active scholar in this area, having conducted in-depth research on the field-building role of foundations in the UN climate negotiations. In his book "The Price of Climate Action" (2016), Morena describes how a handful of liberal foundations (mostly US-based) helped to establish and drive the international climate regime and the United Nations Climate Change Convention (UNCCC) system. Using a socio-historical approach, he reconstructed the foundations' field-building activities, and how they placed themselves at the forefront of the climate debate by spreading ideas and repertoires of action. According to Morena, foundations were key allies and intermediaries between governments and civil society during the Paris Agreement negotiations. They were supported in this role by the International Policies and Politics Initiative (IPPC), a platform created in 2012 to coordinate foundations and "catalyze greater ambition on climate change by working at the intersection of national and international decision-making processes" (EFC, 2013, p. 26). Brulle et al. (2021), on the other hand, studied foundations as sources of funding for the Climate Change Counter Movement (CCCM), a complex network of organizations that work to obstruct climate action. These authors established that a small group of foundations provide the bulk of the financial support received by the CCCM. Between 2003 and 2018, the top 1% of grant makers accounted for 67% of allocated grants. The top grant-making positions have consistently been occupied by two Donor Advised Funds (DAF), "with a central role in coordinating donations to CCCM while keeping their core donors anonymous" (ibidem, p. 3), followed by the Scaife, Bradley, Koch and DeVos family foundations. Also active in this field of research is Anne Monier (2023), a scholar who has observed the climate-related work of the philanthropic sector from an environmentalist perspective. Her research focus is on the political role of

[5] In a 2021 review, Betsil et al. identified only 23 academic publications on the role of philanthropic foundations in environmental governance.

[6] DiMaggio and Powell define the organizational field as "those organizations which, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resources and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products" (1983, p.148).

philanthropy in environmental policy, especially the coalitions of foundations that have been set up in multiple countries since 2019. These are pioneering studies, but much remains to be done. Aware that a knowledge gap persists, Betsill et al. (2021) called for systematic research into philanthropic foundations as agents of environmental governance, especially in relation to three hitherto underrepresented themes: the foundations' role in environmental governance, their achievements and their sources of legitimacy.

Among the leading scholars in climate philanthropy, Edouard Morena also stands out for having convincingly reconstructed the genealogy of philanthropic intervention from the 1960s to the present. It is useful to read this account – together with the work of Pellizzoni et al. (2022) – in relation to the evolution of international climate governance and its discursive regimes.

The story begins in the 1960s and 1970s when, due to pressure from social movements and scientific communities, ecological issues came to the fore within national and supranational political agendas (Sinibaldi, 1992)[7]. According to Pellizzoni et al. (2022), during this phase and until the late 1980s, global climate governance discursively pitted economic growth in opposition to environmental protection. It viewed environmental protection as hindering capital accumulation, but also as a necessary "evil" that public actors were called on to regulate. Philanthropy also engaged in environmental protection but this only concerned a small group of foundations, mostly from the US (e.g., Rockefeller and Ford). Following in the liberal philanthropic tradition, the foundations were convinced that economic growth and environmental protection were compatible and confident that the ecological crisis could be overcome by applying a scientific approach (Morena, 2016). Consequently, seeing the ecological groups of the 1960s and 1970s as being too radical, they tended to fund more politically moderate groups promoting reformist agendas (ibid.).

The situation changed in the late 1980s, with the end of the stand-off between the Western-NATO and Eastern-Communist blocs and the rise of neo-liberal politics. Global climate governance moved closer to the logic of liberal philanthropy. With the emergence of the concept of sustainable development (Bruntland Report 1987), the previous opposition of growth and environment no longer applied. The leading view now became that climate change, although a historical failure of the market, could only be solved by the market, in terms of following the prescriptions of orthodox Western economics (Schöneberg and Ziai, 2020). This discourse took deeper root from the 1990s onwards, when the term "green economy" rose to prominence. The ecological question went from a crisis of capitalism to a crisis for capitalism: environmental limits were no longer seen as an evil to be borne but rather as an opportunity for the market to make new profits (Pellizzoni et al., 2022).

This change in discursive regimes was echoed in the parallel emergence of international climate governance based on the COP (Conference of the Parties) system. Provided for under the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change), COP is based on market mechanisms. Emblematic of the COP system is the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which inaugurated trading in carbon permits and credits. In this new phase, several US foundations contributed to the establishment of the UN-led global climate regime, while also boosting the formation of a global climate civil society (Morena, 2016). A new generation of philanthropists linked to the tech industry in Silicon Valley and cities such as London and New York also came to the fore and several foundations – old and new –

[7] "Ecologisti, Movimenti" in Enciclopedia Trecanni (1992).

adopted a strategic approach that reflected the dictates of the emergent philanthrocapitalism (Frumkin, 2003). This approach, in addition to paying more attention to how grants were allocated, included the building of formal and informal networks for coordinating foundations' efforts to maximize their impact (Morena, 2021).

As the international climate change negotiations proceeded, the role of philanthropic foundations became stronger. As mentioned earlier, Morena (2016) shows that foundations acted as key allies and intermediaries between government and civil society during the 2015 Paris Agreement negotiations, relying particularly on the coordinating efforts of the IPPC (International Policies and Politics Initiative) to do so. Numerous European foundations joined the IPPC, as well as the leading international philanthropic climate networks. However, these networks have mainly been built and financed by US philanthropy, often via pass-through foundations. The latter, as illustrated in Parmar's (2014) studies on the involvement of the Ford, Rockefeller and Carnegie foundations in US foreign affairs, seem instrumental to the exercise of soft power designed to maintain the United States' hegemonic role in guiding international climate governance. Morena (2016) offers a detailed account of how, through the IPPC and its initiatives – including much informal diplomacy – the foundations influenced the outcome of the Paris Agreement. The new agenda revolved around the concepts of sustainable development, the green economy and the belief that the market can solve the climate crisis produced by its negative externalities. This logic has guided global climate governance from the late 1980s to the present. It is reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda adopted in 2015 by the United Nations. In light of the discursive convergence between the Paris Agreement and the SDGs, it is not surprising that SDGs – indicators that emphasize measuring growth rather than enhancing environmental protections – have since provided the main framework of reference for foundations promoting sustainable development, including sustainable climate-related development objectives. The SDG framework has held sway despite being contested from the outset (Munro, 2023). The main critiques see SDGs variously as: a way to promote and consolidate a neo-liberal variant of capitalist development (Gabay and Ilcan, 2017), the latest phase in the deep marketization of development (Carrol and Jarvis, 2015), or a means of undermining political aspirations to more socially just and ecological approaches to development (Weber, 2017).

Criticism has also been voiced by those who see sustainable development goals as at least potentially valid instruments. A 2022 report by an international team of 61 researchers coordinated by Utrecht University assessed the political impact of the SDGs (Biermann, Hickmann and Sénit, 2022). Drawing on over 3,000 scientific studies, the report indicated that the political impact of the SDGs on global governance has been essentially discursive, without translating into transformative processes. On the contrary, the framework has been used by some governments to legitimize their previous policies, while some entrepreneurs, banks and investors have leveraged it to camouflage business as usual.

However, according to Pellizzoni et al. (2022), Greta's "blah blah discourse"[8] put an end – at least symbolically – to the UNFCCC as the main driver of the UN-led governance process. These authors argue that, from the 1990s until Paris 2015, the UNFCC process, by

[8] "'Green economy' blah blah blah ... 'Net zero by 2050' blah blah blah.... 'Net zero' blah blah blah. ..." (Greta Thunberg to the Youth4Climate delegates gathered in Milan in advance of the upcoming Pre-COP 26, 2021).

ostracizing deniers, attracted radical imaginations linked to climate justice movements, helping to legitimize international climate governance. After Paris, however, the relationship between ecological issues and transnational governance changed due to the mass movements (Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion) inspired by Greta Thunberg. By denouncing the failure of the current system, these movements influenced not only the more radical actors within the climate justice movement, but also some of the largest environmental NGOs who had previously supported this system, even while advancing some criticisms of it.

Despite Greta, eight years after the Paris Agreement and the endorsement of the 2030 Agenda, efforts to tackle climate change have largely failed. The 2030 emissions target for limiting global warming to 1.5-2° remains elusive. This has been confirmed by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in its latest report (2023): global emissions between 2010 and 2019 were higher than in any other decade in human history.

Given this situation, how will the actors who have hitherto supported the UN system and its technocratic and market-oriented approach react? And, above all, how will organized philanthropy, which seems to have played a major part in the creation of this system, position itself? So far, the 2015 Paris Agreement and the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda continue to be the benchmark for global climate policies. In line with the UN system, the justificatory grammars of mainstream climate philanthropy mostly support the idea of a new elite-led green capitalism, rooted in the belief that market-based solutions, innovation, technology and financial investments can resolve the crisis. Indeed, international climate philanthropy's support for green capitalism should not come as a surprise. As outlined by Morena, green capitalism is itself guided by some of the largest foundations owned by US billionaires, while philanthropic-capitalist logics drive most of contemporary organized philanthropy.

3. The "Italian" networks outside and within the international climate philanthropy ecosystem

As in international climate philanthropy, networking is one (if not the main) way that Italian foundations position themselves and influence public decision makers. This was recently reaffirmed by Carola Carazzone (General Secretary of Assifero and Vice-President of Philea) in her keynote speech to the 2021 F20 Climate Solutions Forum:

"Local dimensions today are more than ever directly intertwined with global ones. It is exactly at this intertwining of local and global (...) that lies a new horizon of power and impact for philanthropy networks. Today we know that to face the systemic challenges in front of us we need collective action. (...). If we want to enable influence on public policies, we need to intentionally and strategically invest in philanthropy networks."

Indeed, Italian foundations have been highly active on the networking front in recent years. If we omit climate networks with a more specialized focus (e.g., cities or agriculture), there are four main networks involving Italian foundations (Table 1).

Nationally, the leading networks are the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development (ASviS), and, the Forum for Sustainable Finance (ItaSIF). These deal with climate change, although it is not their exclusive focus, and also include non-philanthropic actors. Notably however, ASviS is led by two representatives of the philanthropic sector: Pierluigi Stefanini,

president of the Unipolis Foundation[9] and Marcella Mallen, president of the Prioritalia Foundation[10]. Meanwhile, ItaSIF includes, through Acri, all the Italian foundations of banking origin (Fobs). Internationally, the two leading climate networks for Italian foundations are the F20 Forum for Climate Solutions and the #PhilanthropyForClimate network, which also encompasses the national (Assifero) and European (EPCC and ECFI) scales. Both comprise mainly philanthropic actors.

To demonstrate the extent to which the networks contribute to shifting decision-making responsibility to nonpolitical actors, we must identify their salient features, including when, by whom and for what purposes they were set up, what they do, and how they interact among themselves and with other international networks.

ASviS was founded in February 2016 by the Unipolis Foundation and the University of Roma Tor Vergata. It is the brainchild of Enrico Giovannini, a professor of economic statistics at the university, who is currently ASviS's scientific director. The concept – which came to Giovannini while he was contributing to the formulation of the 2030 Agenda – was to federate in a single organization all private sector and civil society actors working to attain at least one of the 17 SDGs[11]. The stated goal of the alliance is "to raise awareness that Agenda 2030 is important (...) and to mobilize with a view to achieving the SDGs"[12]. It is an impressive cartel in terms of the size and variety of its membership: over 300 civil society affiliates, including around 80 foundations, plus a further 300 private organizations, cooperatives, associations and companies[13]. In keeping with its mission, ASviS formulates policy proposals to be submitted to public decision makers, conducts research and disseminates its positions through publications, conferences and webinars. It has stipulated two Memoranda of Understanding with the Italian Ministry of Education and Research (2016-2018, 2019-2021) on fostering the dissemination of a culture of sustainability. It has set up 13 working groups on specific SDGs and six working groups on crosscutting issues. The foundations in the network, in addition to participating in the working groups on individual goals, have set up their own transversal working group to strengthen their commitment to the SDGs. This includes Assifero, 34 foundations including Unipolis and Con il Sud which are in charge of coordinating the group's activities, three Fobs (CSP, Cariplo, MPS), the Sodalitas foundation linked to Assolombarda[14]. The other ASviS foundations – not in the working group – are mainly corporate or family ones. Such a "parterre", as a whole, represents a significant chunk of the Italian economy. Furthermore, ASviS has three partnerships with European networks involved in promoting and monitoring the SDGs: Europe Ambition 2030 and SDG Watch Europe, which are both networks of civil society actors, and ESDN-European Sustainable Development Network, which comprises institutional actors, associations and experts. At the global level, meanwhile, ASviS belongs to the multi-stakeholder UN-Partnership for SDGs, whose mission is to share knowledge concerning the SDGs.

[9] A foundation of the UnipolSai Italian insurance group.
[10] A foundation set up by Manageritalia and CIDA, two organizations representing Italian management executives.
[11] In "Cinque anni di ASviS. Storia di un'alleanza per l'Italia del 2030", ASviS, 2021.
[12] ASviS website, accessed 16 March 2023.
[13] Ibidem.
[14] Ibidem.

Table 1. Italian foundations & climate transition networks

	Asvis	**Itasif Forum Finanza sostenibile**	**Assifero #PhilantropyForClimate**	**F-20 Climate Solutions Forum**
Level	National	National	International	International
Italian foundations in the network that are also connected to at least one of the other three networks	Unipolis (founder); Assifero; Itasif; Cariplo; CSP, Compagnia di San Paolo; Con il Sud; MPS Foundation; FC Messina; Sodalitas; Global Thinking	ACRI; Cariplo; CSP; Unipolis via Unipol; MPS Foundation and Con il Sud via ACRI; Sodalitas; Global Thinking	Unipolis; FC Messina; two CSP agencies: Uffici Pio and Fondazione 1563 per l'arte e la cultura	Cariplo; CSP; Unipolis; FC Messina
Main affiliations to European climate (or SDG-related) networks	Europe Ambition 2030 SDG Watch Europe ESDN, European Sustainable Development Network	Eurosif, European Sustanaible Investment Forum	EPCC, European Philanthropy Coalition for Climate PHILEA ECFI, European Community Foundation Initiative	F20 includes over 80 foundations and philanthropic organizations with diverse backgrounds from all over the globe.
Main affiliations to international climate (or SDG-related) networks	F-20 through Cariplo; CSP; Unipolis Foundation, FC Messina UN-Partnership for SDG	Global Sustainable Investment Alliance F-20 through Cariplo; CSP	#PhilanthropyforClimate-PHILEA and WINGS F-20 through CSP; Unipolis, FC Messina	These include the two 'pass-through' foundations; Climate Works and ECF, European Climate Foundation

Source: own elaboration.

ItaSIF was founded in 2001 to encourage the incorporation of Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) criteria into financial products and processes. This involves including environmental, social and governance factors in risk and opportunity analyses and targeting impact investing or SRI (Sustainable and Responsible Investment). The latter form of investment mainly allocates capital to organizations whose business plans prioritize SDGs. ItaSIF has over 140 members, mainly Italian finance players, including banks (e.g., Intesa San Paolo), insurance companies (e.g., Unipol), consultancy companies (e.g., Goldman Sachs), asset management companies and pension funds, trade associations, trade unions, some NGOs (e.g., WWF, UNICEF) and BlackRock, one of the world's leading investment companies. The partners from organized philanthropy are almost exclusively foundations of banking origin – including Acri, their representative association – plus Sodalitas and Global Thinking, other foundations that are also members of ASviS. ItaSIF is one of the founding members of the Eurosif (European Sustainable Investment Forum) network, whose mission is to foster socially responsible investment within European financial markets. About a fifth of Eurosif's members are foundations, NGOs and consumer associations, while the remainder are mainly financial services companies (investment managers, pension funds, banks, financial advisors) from the participating countries (UK, France, Switzerland, Finland, Germany, Austria, Luxembourg, Spain, Belgium and Ireland). Eurosif is a founding member of the *Global Sustainable Investment Alliance*, which draws together the world's seven largest sustainable investment organizations. Today, ItaSIF is committed, like these other networks, to lobbying public decision makers on climate-related issues.

Foundations Platform F20 is an international network established in 2017 within the G20. It unites over 70 foundations including four Italian foundations: Unipolis, Cariplo, CSP and FCMessina. Notably, it includes some of the main foundations attributed with a dominant role in shaping global climate philanthropy and influencing international climate agreements (Morena, 2016). These are "only" a handful of foundations: the Swiss-based Oak, the Swedish IKEA group, British billionaire Anthony Hohn's Children's Investment Fund, the American Ford, Rockefeller Brothers and Bloomberg foundations, as well as the pass-through foundations ClimateWorks and the European Climate Foundation, whose supporters include billionaires Bezos, Gates, Zuckerberg and Hewlett. The network promotes the implementation of sustainable development under the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Climate Agreement through advocacy to the G7, G20, COP15 (biodiversity) and COP26 (climate change). It submits recommendations to governments and dialogues with G20 heads of state, finance ministers and central bank presidents. It supports the crucial role of civil society and non-state actors in climate policy by acting as a bridge between the public and private sector and civil society. In addition to collaborating with other G20 groups, F20 organizes the annual Climate Solutions Forum in the G20 host country, an international event where it delivers analyses and appeals to the G20 Heads of State.

The climate change network is represented globally by the #PhilanthropyForClimate movement. It is supported at the European level by Philea (along with EPCC, the European Philanthropy Coalition for Climate, and the ECFI, European Community Foundation Initiative) and at the Italian level by Assifero. Founded in the UK in 2019 at the initiative of the ESF (the association representing UK foundations), the network launched a declaration on climate change by foundations and philanthropic organizations. In 2021, Dafne (now

Philea), the association representing foundations at the European level, invited all European second-level associations to join the network and to launch "national" declarations modelled on that adopted in 2019 in the UK.

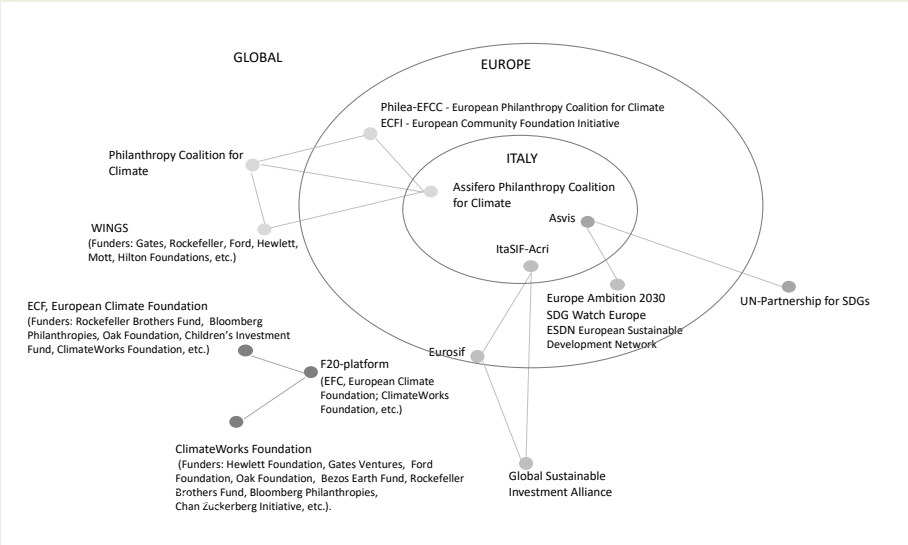
Simultaneously, in 2021, Philea and WINGS – a "community of thought leaders and changemakers who are committed to ensuring philanthropy reaches its fullest potential as a catalyst for social progress"[15] – launched #PhilanthropyForClimate. This initiative, which embraces, in addition to the various national philanthropic commitments, the International Philanthropy Commitment on Climate Change, is aimed at foundations that do not have a national representative organization such as Assifero or ESF. Today, it numbers 79 foundations[16]. The movement espouses similar principles to the national declarations, which "are partially different in language and manner, but share the idea of integrating the climate lens into their organization"[17]. In 2021, Assifero in Italy responded to Philea's appeal by launching a national declaration based on six principles, whose broad nature was likely intended to enlist maximum support: 1) promote and create opportunities for training and exchange; 2) allocate financial, intellectual, relational and material resources; 3) foster a new interpretative perspective through the lens of climate; 4) promote responsible investment choices; 5) decrease the environmental impact of the organization; 6) disseminate the changes and results achieved.

Today, the declaration has 71 signatories, including the banking foundations Cariplo and CSP and 17 of the 37 community foundations. However, Assifero also promotes alignment with the SDGs both directly among its members and through the ECFI (European Community Foundation Initiative), a collaborative project aimed at strengthening and promoting the community foundation movement in Europe. Assifero is also a member of the two international promoters of #PhilanthropyForClimate – Philea and WINGS – which have long been committed to promoting the SDGs.

The four "Italian" networks are interconnected via cross-affiliations. For instance, the F20 and ASviS foundations both include Unipolis, FCmessina (via Assifero), Cariplo and CSP. The three latter foundations have signed Assifero's climate declaration. The Fobs, with Acri, are also part of ItaSIF. There are entanglements between philanthropic and financial actors, which is most evident in the case of ItaSIF but is also a feature of the other networks. The links between the four networks also prompt joint initiatives, such as the position paper "Foundations for Sustainable Development" with shared policy recommendations for the Italian government, G20, G7, COP15 and COP26 that was drafted for the 2021 G20 chaired by Italy. The networks are also connected to other international networks. Through these, they have ties with the larger, mainly US-based foundations that have contributed to shaping global climate governance, including by supporting the major European pass-through foundations (ClimateWorks and ECF) that specialize in climate. In other words, the networks under study are connected to an impressive number of other networks, comprising philanthropic and other actors, both Italian and foreign (Figs. 1 & 2).

[15] It receives funding from, among others, the Gates, Rockefeller, Ford, Hewlett, Mott, Aga Khan and Hilton Foundations.
[16] Website accessed 30 July 2024.
[17] Interview with Assifero manager, January 2023.

Figure 1. The "Italian" networks within the international climate philanthropy ecosystem



Source: own elaboration. Note: this is my own account of the organizations committed to climate change action that are associated with the four networks under scrutiny. I aim to show that through these networks, the Italian foundations are connected to many of the leading international business, financial and philanthropic organizations and billionaires.

4. Networks in between depoliticization and politicization

Within the theoretical frame of politicization/depoliticization processes, the hypothesis advanced here is that the networks identified above and the Italian foundations that belong to them – along with other international networks and national (especially US) foundations – have gained a political role by taking collective responsibility for climate issues (social politization), but also by crucially contributing to the global climate policy agenda from the UN System to the Paris agreement (governmental politization). In practice, this is achieved by generating, supporting and legitimizing ideas, values and practices that help to elide the political nature of the issues at stake, thereby fostering the emergence of a conventional epistemic horizon of meaning that is difficult to challenge (discursive depoliticization). It is the ability of foundations and networks to construct and disseminate knowledge, reinforced by their international connections, that has earned them a prominent place in the shaping of international agendas and, via a trickle-down effect, of national and local agendas.

The discursive depoliticization of public action develops in parallel with the politicization of the philanthropic networks. This is most undeniably evident at the social level but may also be observed at the governmental level. The contours of the four main climate networks indicate that they act both as policy entrepreneurs promoting specific policy solutions and as field-builders, mobilizing in various ways to construct systems of meaning and discourses that permeate the institutional policy environment.

Both networks and individual foundations may be said to have taken on a political role at different levels. First, the networks and the Italian foundations themselves commission or curate in-house studies and position papers on climate policymaking. Furthermore, they have the capacity to disseminate their shared ideas, values and practices both globally and nationally by leveraging their convening, brokering and advocacy power to engage leading

political and economic actors. For an example, we need look no further than the F20's organization of the annual Climate Solution Forum in the G20 host country. The networks also offer webinars for public and private actors. For instance, Assifero organizes webinars on the climate crisis as part of its #PhilanthropyForClimate initiative, while Itasif runs webinars on sustainable finance and sustainable financial tools. Furthermore, the networks and their member foundations fund projects that are aligned with their policy perspectives, not only via the grant schemes of individual foundations, but also under the auspices of broader programs. For example, F20 and Assifero help organized philanthropy actors to identify opportunities for cooperation at the international and national levels, with the goal of fostering a shared vision and strategies and aligning members' grantmaking targets to achieve greater impact. ASviS pursues similar aims. It is led by a foundation, and its members include large corporate foundations such as Eni, Enel and A2A, which bear great responsibility surrounding climate-related issues. The networks and foundations can also partner with public actors at the national level. For instance, in addition to the two ASVIS-MIUR memoranda mentioned above, Acri (the association representing the Fob and an ItaSIF member) has publicly committed to deploying its resources and network connections at all levels "to ensure that the opportunity afforded by the Recovery Fund is not wasted" (Francesco Profumo, president of Acri, *Corriere della sera*, 30 August 2020) and has backed up its words with deeds.

In addition to the plans implemented by individual foundations, many Fobs have taken steps "to provide the necessary expertise" to local authorities lacking "adequate resources for managing the planning phase for applying for PNRR grants"[18]. Between 2021 and 2022, Fobs implemented multiple schemes with small municipalities and third sector organizations. They provided assistance and training during the planning stage of the grant allocation process and the drafting of preliminary project proposals, dispensing over €30 million. These initiatives were flanked by two systemic actions involving the entire Acri membership. In late 2021, the "Fund for the Digital Republic" was set up under the PNRR to bring Italians' digital skills in line with those of their European counterparts[19]. Although this project is not directly related to the green transition, it will impact it indirectly via the digital transition (e.g., in the agricultural sector). In 2022-2026, the Fobs are expected to contribute €350 million to the fund, in return for a special tax break. Finally, in May 2022, Acri signed a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry for Regional Affairs that envisaged collaboration between regional authorities and foundations during the implementation of the PNRR (Acri Report, 2022).

The data thus far also appears to support the theory that there is a highly connected global philanthropic system based on networks led by a handful of mostly US-based foundations. It is plausible to hypothesize that Italian philanthropy is also aligned with the narratives supported by this system, even before we analyze its documents. In other words, Italian philanthropic actors foreseeably contribute to upholding the discursive depoliticization fostered by the global philanthropic system. However, it is worth illustrating how this looks in practice by analyzing key documents emanating from the "Italian" networks.

The interweaving and overlapping of the organizations in the various networks, the joint drafting of many documents and the explicit commitment to emphasizing points of

[18] Acri website, accessed 15 November 2023.
[19] Law No. 233 of 29 December 2021.

agreement while omitting points of difference, help us to identify the main discursive stances of Italian climate philanthropy.

One principle recognized in the documents is that of a "just transition" as per the European Green Deal: this implies "combining environmental objectives – mitigation and adaptation to climate change, but also the protection of biodiversity and the circular economy – with social objectives – the reduction of inequalities, decent work, social cohesion"[20].

The most striking position, however, is the alignment of Italian (and international) organized philanthropy with the SDGs framework and the associated concept of sustainable development. These are mostly regarded as neoliberal variants of capitalist development, given their emphasis on growth rather than on environmental protection. Yet the documents invariably claim that "the direction identified in 2015 with the adoption of the UN 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement is still useful and appropriate"[21]. Assifero is part of "the national alliance to meet the Agenda 2030 objectives"[22] and organizes workshops on the SDGs for local community foundations. Since it was set up in 2017, Platform F20 has been "calling and actively advocating for the implementation of the SDGs and for climate action by the G20 member states"[23]. Even for specifically climate-related policies, SDGs remain the leading framework of reference. ASviS recommends policymakers "ensure the consistency of all climate policies (...) by adopting the required systemic outlook, as entailed in the mainstreaming of the 2030 Agenda (...)."[24]. The SDGs have been adopted by ItaSIF as its reference framework for investment because they enable the use of internationally disseminated parameters as well as ex-ante identification and ex-post measurement of the outcomes achieved. ItaSIF has even published a handbook for "the finance industry, foundations and third-sector organizations to further explore impact investing's contribution to financing activities aligned with the SDGs that also offer a financial return"[25]. This policy was confirmed by an interviewee: "in promoting environmental sustainability at the local level our projects contribute to the pursuit of the SDGs .... we have also assimilated the SDGs internally, for example with our suppliers. We have a huge handbook of practices."[26].

A second hallmark of the networks' rhetoric is the framing of the climate change problem as solvable via a pragmatic, strategic, focused, nonpartisan and science-driven strategy. This is a classic approach for organized philanthropy, in keeping with a liberal tradition stretching back to the nineteenth century (Mitsushima, 2017). A targeted approach is seen as crucial given the high stakes and the scarcity of available resources. Such an approach is expected to maximize the impact of climate philanthropy and potentially allow it to be measured. Beneficiaries thus require close monitoring. Formal and informal platforms must coordinate their efforts (i.e., networking). Mobilization, including investment in research and communications, aimed at steering the public debate and signaling to businesses and investors to commit, is a further component of the strategy[27]. This perspective may explain why the networks overemphasize problem solving to the detriment of

[20] ItaSIF (2022), p.2.
[21] ASviS (2022), p.5.
[22] Făgăraș (2023), European community foundations and SDGs, p.27.
[23] F20 (2023), p.2.
[24] ASviS (2023b), p.4.
[25] ItaSIF (2017), p.1.
[26] Interview with Cariplo executive, December 2022.
[27] ASviS (2021), position paper; Assifero (2023), Bilancio sociale.

problem setting. It also prompts a superficial reading of the problems that fails to question the capitalist logics responsible for generating them. In addition, the networks' countless policy proposals tend to list issues without establishing any clear order of priority and are vague when it comes to specifying how the stated objectives are to be attained.

Emphasis is also placed on the need for sustainable finance, again with a view to attaining the SDGs[28]. However, rhetoric aside, how much pressure can foundations put on banks and financial actors to adopt sustainable finance? Consider ItaSIF. Its members, together with Acri, include the country's major financial players, such as the two largest Italian banks Unicredit and Intesa Sanpaolo (ISP). The latter bank is genetically linked to Acri. "Banking on Climate Chaos" (2023), a study conducted by a coalition of NGOs on the financing of the fossil fuel industry by the world's largest banks, shows that the 60 largest private banks have financed fossil fuels to the tune of $5.5 trillion. The Italian banks Unicredit and Intesa Sanpaolo have respectively lent money to and underwritten fossil fuel companies to the tune of $43 billion and $22 billion since 2016 and are among the world's top 40 banking institutions financing the fossil fuel multinationals. ItaSIF's weakness was borne out in an interview with an executive at Banca Etica: "While the Forum was originally driven by good intentions, over time – with the inclusion of a growing number of actors, particularly finance ones – it has somewhat lost sight of its mission. And the current president seems to intend widening the 'parterre' even more (...). Now many organizations wear the sustainability hat even though their activities do not always reflect this"[29]. Furthermore, as noted earlier, ItaSIF supports the inclusion of Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) criteria in financial products and processes. However, ESGs, as Mariana Mazzucato and Rosie Collington (2023) have argued, lack a shared universal standard, leaving companies to choose, among the many ESG measurement systems, that most favorable to their practices and/or least detrimental to their other goals, such as profitability. Not to mention that even if universal metrics were adopted, "the climate crisis is so complicated (...) it is unlikely that criteria assessment methods would provide accurate information about the risks companies face in different markets" (ibid., p.223).

In sum, the Italian networks, like international philanthropy and the broader international regime, support an agenda based on selected devices within the mainstream neoliberal paradigm. This is guided by the market episteme (McMichael, 2009), which tends to depoliticize the issues at stake and to reinforce the role of private actors and finance instruments in development. The ecological crisis is presented as an apolitical problem requiring techno-managerial solutions, while market logics remain paramount. Defense of the environment and the liberal economic order mutually reinforce one another according to this agenda: the dominant economic order is seen as part of the solution and not the main perpetrator behind the worsening climate crisis. Philanthrocapitalism, far from breaking with contemporary financial capitalism, intervenes in climate policymaking to get a return on investment, leaving problems unresolved because it fails to question the underlying categories of the crisis (Mitchell and Sparke, 2016).

Overall, a uniform discursive stance on climate change response emerges from the network documents. This is due in part to the need to summarize the views of different foundations and in part to the Italian networks' close connections with international

[28] ASviS (2023a).
[29] Interview with Banca Etica executive, November 2023.

climate philanthropy. This does not mean that individual foundations or individual Italian climate philanthropy interventions cannot or do not take a less mainstream and more transformative direction in discourse or practice. However, the prevailing uniformity in the networks' discourses and modes of action and, to some extent, among foundations clearly indicates how internally homogeneous the field generally is. In Italy, there is not even a hard core of denialist foundations. This stands in contrast with the US, where several denialist nonprofits receive funding from charitable funds such as the Donors Capital Fund and the Donors Trust[30]; and where, even more notably, the Climate Change Counter Movement (CCCM) is financed by large conservative foundations working across multiple political fields (e.g., the Heritage Foundation) and mid-sized climate and energy think tanks (Brulle, 2020; Brulle et al. 2021).

Beyond agreements and international commitments, the evolution of the climate crisis is not reassuring, as recent IPCC reports certify. If, indeed, international organized philanthropy has played such a decisive role in directing policies to counter climate change, we might borrow the words of well-known American columnist Mark Gunther: "If philanthropy is to be judged by its outcomes – and how else should it be judged? – climate philanthropy has failed".[31]

In light of these criticisms and the disappointing outcomes of climate policies, there have been some signs of openness in climate philanthropy towards non-mainstream practices.

A virtuous international example is the EDGE Funders Alliance commission to Edward Morena (2023) to draft a guideline document for philanthropic organizations on how to move away from mainstream climate philanthropy and towards climate justice philanthropy. EDGE Funders Alliance is a community of 320 donors, foundation officers, trustees and advisors from over 30 countries, who share the belief that equity and justice are critical to furthering environmental policies. This is reflected in the introduction to Morena's report by Sofia Arroyo, executive director of EDGE:

"We realize that, even though philanthropy has long been involved in the climate space, there is a need to reflect on the role it has played and, more importantly, on the role it needs to play in light of the multiple crises we are currently facing. We invite those funders who have been working for a long time in this space to think differently about their portfolios and approach [...]. Philanthropy can play a critical role in supporting a just transition towards alternative systems that support people and planet, but to do this, the sector needs to challenge itself and shift its approach. We hope this report sparks conversations that will ignite our collective power for change so together we can stand for climate justice everywhere".

At the European level, a recent report by Philea (2023) reviewed environmental funding by European foundations, identifying their main strategies. Hands-on conservation remained the most popular line of action, as in 2018; advocacy, community work and research occupied the next three positions. However, only €2.2 million had been earmarked to support activists and just under €6 million to support youth-led climate movements such

[30] Usuelli, M. (2021). I negazionisti della crisi climatica e le inserzioni milionarie su Facebook. *Altreconomia*. Retrieved from https://altreconomia.it/i-negazionisti-della-crisi-climatica-e-le-inserzioni-milionarie-su-facebook/.

[31] Gunther, Mark (2018), "The Failure of Climate Philanthropy", Nonprofit Chronicles, accessed 17 March 2022.

as Fridays for the Future, a paltry 0.37 percent of the total funding available. Of interest is how the report interpreted the lack of philanthropic support for activism and grassroots activities, which also include climate mitigation grants:

> "we wonder whether foundations are missing an opportunity by providing so little support to youth-led movements and activism. Both have been essential ingredients in social change all over the world, [...] The youth-led climate protests of 2018/19 moved the political dial and contributed directly to groundbreaking legislation and corporate commitments around the world, despite receiving a tiny amount of foundation funding. Imagine what could be achieved with more philanthropic support" (ibidem, p. 25).

The report observed that between 2018 and 2021, the tiny share of philanthropic grant funding spent on supporting radical discourses fell from 4.5% to 3.6%. Hence, after suggesting that social movements may be ahead of philanthropic foundations in terms of their values and discourses, with a greater focus on social justice in addressing environmental challenges, the report asks some questions: "Is this an optimal allocation of philanthropic capital? Has the time come for foundations to be bolder in the kinds of work they support with a view to accelerating system change? Should philanthropic foundations be stepping up more to fund work that actively challenges the status quo?" (ibidem, p. 30).

In Italy, some foundations and individuals within them have displayed openness to more transformative practices and sensitivity to ecological movements and climate justice: "We should move towards climate justice, beyond this sustainable development which is so market-oriented"[32]. At least this does not invalidate the hegemonic discourse underpinning understandings of environmental problems that justify market-based solutions. It remains to be seen whether and how these positive signals will encounter suitable conditions and resources in order to prosper within international and Italian climate philanthropy and governance.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to investigate how the involvement of philanthropic networks in climate policymaking contributes to shifting responsibilities from governments to non-political actors, causing both a discursive depoliticization of public action and a governmental and social politicization of the actions of non-political actors. To this end, we have examined the contours, ideas, and values of Italian climate philanthropy networks.

In our case study, depoliticization is reflected in the discourses with which Italian organized philanthropy interprets and proposes solutions for the climate crisis, which in turn serve to discriminate between effective and ineffective courses of action. Politicization on the other hand is reflected in the emergence of philanthropic actors as new policy entrepreneurs and field-builders. Finally, at least at the network level, Italian philanthropy appears to be relatively homogeneous in terms of its discursive positions and modus operandi.

Furthermore, Italian philanthropy – and indeed the entire international philanthropic movement – displays a degree of dependence – especially at the discursive level – on a handful of the largest foundations in the world, mostly led by US millionaires. These

[32] Interview with Fob executive, April 2023.

foundations seem instrumental to the soft power that is applied by the United States to retain its hegemonic role in guiding international climate governance. These are actors of major economic-financial weight, with strong technical expertise, the capability to build wide-reaching action networks, and impressive planning capabilities. This set of features enables these foundations to build the climate policy field and play an influential role within it. Foundations use their discursive power to generate an organizational field with shared meanings. They play a convening role via partnerships and networks, conferences and policy platforms, also using their contacts to encourage stakeholders to work together (Delfin and Tang 2006, Morena 2016). Given the significant role played by science and expertise in legitimizing environmental policies (Lidskog and Berg, 2022; Pellizoni, 2015), as well as the active involvement of climate philanthropy in producing knowledge for policymaking, there is a need for further investigation into the specific types of expertise, experts and policy instruments that are financed and mobilized by philanthropic actors. With regard to the Fobs, which are often deeply rooted in their local communities, it would be valuable to explore whether they follow the international trend or whether they behave differently in some respects, for example by funding initiatives that are less market driven.

Overall, the justificatory grammars of Italian philanthropic networks are aligned with the mainstream intellectual and normative framework of international climate governance and philanthropy, which does not question the growth-environmental protection conceptual pairing. In addition to this current, the international philanthropic movement also includes a nationalistic-regressive current that is not mainstream at the discursive level but does not lack financial and positional resources. This second current denies climate change and will not forgo fossil fuels, a position that is entirely absent from Italian climate philanthropy discourses.

The transformative practices of the movements that have come forward to challenge both of these frameworks – which generally spring from political ecology and which have mainly been championed by global movements such as Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion – risk being stifled by the two more dominant currents. Who knows if the philanthropic sector will come to their rescue by shifting to more radical approaches? If not, the reason will surely not be a lack of resources.

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6. Appendix

Table A. List of documents analysed

1. Assifero Philea, Wings, WE ACT #PhilanthropyForClimate, Guida pratica di attuazione della dichiarazione d'impegno delle fondazioni e degli enti filantropici italiani per il clima, marzo 2023.
2. Assifero, Bilancio sociale 2022, 2023
3. Assifero, Dichiarazione d'impegno delle fondazioni e degli enti filantropici italiani per il clima, settembre 2021.
4. ASviS-gruppo di lavoro finanza, Finanza per lo sviluppo sostenibile. Un tema strategico per l'Agenda 2030, position paper, settembre 2020.
5. ASviS-gruppo di lavoro finanza, Finanza per lo sviluppo sostenibile, position paper, gennaio 2023.
6. ASviS-gruppo di lavoro fondazioni, Fondazioni per lo sviluppo sostenibile, position paper, settembre 2021.
7. ASviS, Cinque anni di ASviS. Storia di un'alleanza per l'Italia del 2030, febbraio 2021.
8. ASviS, Dieci proposte sul piano nazionale di adattamento ai cambiamenti climatici, policy brief, marzo 2023.
9. ASviS, La transizione ecologica giusta, quaderno 7, Ottobre 2022.
10. ECFI (con Assifero), The SDGs are good for us, report on workshop, 28-29 June, London
11. EPCC, Philea, Climate philanthropy networks, 2022.
12. F20, Annual Report 2022, June 2023.
13. F20, Becoming Part of the Solution, F20 Recommendations 2021 for the G20 and the G7 as part of the G20, June 2021.
14. F20, Global Cooperation and Responsibility - G7/G20 Becoming Part of the Solution, F20 Recommendations 2022 to the G20 and the G7 as part of the G20, June 2022.
15. Forum per la Finanza Sostenibile (con ABI e ANIA), Finanza sostenibile per il rilancio dell'economia, ottobre 2016.
16. Forum per la finanza sostenibile (con Social Impact Agenda per l'Italia), Impact Investing: la finanza a supporto dell'impatto socio-ambientale, dicembre 2017.
17. Forum per la Finanza Sostenibile, Appello ai partiti per uno sviluppo sostenibile, equo e inclusivo dell'Italia, settembre 2022.
18. Forum per la Finanza Sostenibile, Lettera al governo con otto proposte sull'utilizzo di strumenti di finanza sostenibile per indirizzare Next Generation EU verso obiettivi di decarbonizzazione e inclusione sociale, ottobre 2020.

Note: For the purposes of this research, I analyzed eighteen key documents produced by the networks to which Italian foundations belong from among the most recent available at the time of study. The majority of these were from the 2020-2023 period. The discursive analysis involved identifying how the categories most widely used to frame climate policymaking (climate change, just transition, sustainable development, sustainable finance, SDGs) were articulated across the documents. These texts, along with the institutional websites of the networks, also helped me to define the contours of the networks, their national and international interconnections, and their endeavors to influence political agendas.

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Narratives of extreme weather events as a field of conflict:

a media comparison between the Emilia Romagna and Marche floods

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the state of the climate change debate in Italy by conducting a frame analysis (Diani and della Porta 2006) of two specific extreme weather events. Given the increasing frequency of such events related to climate change and their rapid impact on the daily lives of numerous regions and populations worldwide (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction 2020), including Italy (Legambiente 2020), an academic debate on the connection between extreme weather events, climate change, and political processes has emerged. However, this debate has had limited influence within the field of Italian political science.

Our paper aims to analyse the state and politicization of the climate change debate by focusing on the narratives that evolved around the floods that hit Emilia Romagna in May 2023 and Marche in September 2022. Using Political Claim Analysis (Koopmans and Statham 1999; Bosi and Zamponi 2019) – a method designed to explore public discourse on a specific topic – conducted on three Italian newspapers with different political identities (Il Fatto Quotidiano, La Repubblica, and Il Foglio), we aim to investigate several key dimensions concerning the level and the actors of the debate around the extreme climate events, and the frames developed by various newspapers and political actors (e. g. parties, social movements) to capture a) their connection with climate change and environmental instances, or, on contrary, with denialist narratives; b) the strategic use of climate change issue depending by the political opportunity structure (right-wing vs. left-wing/local vs. national); c) the different approach to the climate change within the same right-wing coalition.

1. Introduction

Extreme weather events are an increasingly recurring phenomenon, impacting the daily lives of people and territories around the world. The United Nations has highlighted the rapid rise in these types of events, which have doubled in the last 20 years compared to the previous 20 years. The main cause is attributed to climate change (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction 2020).

The Italian context is not exempt from this global phenomenon, exhibiting a significant surge in extreme weather events – nearly a thousand in number – during the period 2010-2020, a trend that has intensified notably since 2016 (Legambiente 2020). This trend appears to be escalating dramatically, given that in the initial five months of 2023 alone, 123 extreme weather events were documented, marking a 134% increase

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compared to the same period in 2022 (Legambiente 2023). In 2020, 12.2 million individuals in Italy were exposed to hydrogeological risks, accounting for more than one-fifth of the population (ISPRA 2021). In 2021, the economic impact of climate events was the highest recorded in the last 10 years, soaring to 56.5 billion euro (a 354% increase compared to the previous year), of which approximately 43 billion were related to extreme hydrogeological events (Ibidem). This damage was primarily caused by flood events, which are more destructive when there is a combination of a higher intensity of rainfall and pre-existing vulnerabilities (Lahsen and Ribot 2021).

The global spread of these events has sparked a sociological debate on the relationship between extreme weather events, climate change, and sociopolitical processes. However, this debate has had scarce influence on the political debate in Italy. From our perspective, investigating the debate surrounding specific extreme weather events can provide an opportunity to analyse the state of the discussion on climate change, which still exhibits a significant gap (Biancalana and Ladini 2022).

How much space is dedicated to extreme weather events in the Italian media? What frames are adopted? What role do political parties play in this debate? How much coverage is given to the climate justice movements that have emerged since 2018? What political strategies do the adopted narrative patterns respond to? These are the research questions we aim to answer with this study, attempting to partially bridge the existing gap through the investigation of the media debate surrounding the floods that struck Emilia Romagna in May 2023 and the Marche in September 2022.

Adopting an inductive and explorative approach, we carry out a *Political Claim Analysis* in three national newspapers (*La Repubblica*, *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, and *Il Foglio*), with the aim of exploring the narratives developed by both media actors (editorial teams, journalists) and political actors (parties, social movements, etc.) concerning the floods and how they are connected to climate change, environmental concerns, territory management policies, or, conversely, framed through denialist and anti-environmental narratives. In exploring these narrative patterns, we aim to highlight the identities, worldviews, and strategies that drive the narrative of these extreme weather events.
This paper is organized as follows: we will begin by presenting the state of the art concerning the analysis of interactions between the media, climate change and extreme weather events; we will then provide an introduction to the case studies and to the methods and data collected, before moving on to the discussion of these data and the conclusion, in which we present our main results and hypothesise about the political debate on climate change and extreme weather events in Italy.

2. Extreme weather events, climate change and the media: a theoretical framework

A body of literature has emerged around extreme weather events that, from various disciplinary perspectives, seeks to investigate the broader phenomenon. From disaster sociology to the so-called 'sociology of Katrina' (which refers to the sociological debate that emerged in the aftermath of the hurricane that struck New Orleans in 2005), and up to studies on climate change and the financialization of risk (Keucheyan 2019), there have been numerous reflections that have highlighted the inherently social dimension of extreme weather events and their subsequent management.

The focus of our research is directed towards deepening the analysis of the relationship between extreme weather events and the media, with an awareness that their representation in the media arena plays a crucial role due to the potential it has to influence public policies and efforts to address the climate crisis (Broadbent et al. 2016).

While political science literature in the United States (Bolsen and Shapiro 2016; Park 2018) and Europe (Schmidt et al. 2013; Tavares et al. 2020; Tuitjer and Dirksmeier 2021) has produced numerous studies on the media, public opinion, and climate change, according to Biancalana and Ladini (2022, p.459) research analysing media coverage of climate change in the Italian context is relatively rare (among the few studies, see the one by Ferrucci and Petersen 2018). This gap is even more significant when considering the investigation of media coverage and the framing of extreme weather events, which serve as some of the most dramatic and emphatic evidence of climate change. The narrative patterns used to frame these events require deeper investigation, as the manner in which the media presents the issue 'can influence public opinion and the actions of policymakers' (Biancalana and Ladini 2022, p.459). At the same time, an analysis of specific extreme weather events also provides a unique and delimited space in which to monitor the state of the climate change debate.

The media can be understood as the main place in which representations of political and social phenomena are structured. Indeed, the media arena is the battleground where multiple parties with different symbolic, political, and economic resources compete to 'endorse' their own interpretation of events in the media and serves as the 'primary site of contestation on meaning' (Gamson 2004, p.243).

Shifting the focus to environmental issues, Mazur and Lee (1993) argue that the level of public interest in these topics tends to align with the attention afforded to them by the media: the more content the mass media provides on the subject, the greater the awareness of the causes and effects of global warming as well as the solutions. Undoubtedly, the media play a key role in influencing the debate on climate change, which can be presented using multiple frames (Biancalana and Ladini 2022). By comparing national newspapers from 17 countries, Broadbent et al. (2016) highlight the fact that 'media framing is a key component of the cultural politics of climate change that may reinforce policy orientation and mitigation performance' (p.13). From their research it would appear that where media framing is oriented towards a cosmopolitan perspective, supports scientific consensus and provides visibility to pro-mitigation policies, successful climate action is more likely. On the contrary, media framings that provide space for scientific scepticism and climate denialism have negative implications in terms of climate action. In general terms, political polarization in relation to climate change has been found to be increasing over time (Hughes et al. 2020; McCright and Dunlap 2011), in particular as a consequence of elite polarization along the right/left cleavage (Birch 2020).

However, this theoretical framework needs to be problematized, acknowledging that even within the same country there may exist divergent and competing narratives concerning global warming, not all of which receive equal projection within the media arena. First and foremost, it is essential to acknowledge that the media arena is not a neutral ground. On the contrary, it is characterized by significant asymmetry between the actors seeking access to the media. This asymmetry is closely tied to the varying availability of economic and organizational resources between those with professional staff,

paid personnel, and credibility conferred on them by prominent journalists and intellectuals on the one hand, and actors with limited economic and organizational resources on the other hand (Gamson 2004). In addition to being a battleground, the media also acts as a player that chooses to what and whom to give media coverage, based on their political orientation (Rucht 2004) and their degree of dependence on political and economic actors (Blumer and Gurevitch 1975; Hallin and Mancini 2004), on the basis of the 'issue-attention cycle' (Downs 1972).

Secondly, the *framing* of climate change and extreme weather events should be examined in relation to the values and strategies of each actor. Framing patterns are connected with the identity of the political actors that attempt 'to align their views on climate change with preexisting ideological or party identities, or cultural worldviews' (Hughes et al. 2020, p.725). The frame, understood as an interpretive framework that allows for the identification and organization of individual and group experiences (Goffman 1974, p.21), is deeply rooted in the culture, whether individual or collective, and in the experiences of actors, and is therefore relatively stable. However, the frame does not only play a fundamental role in the perception of the world: it also plays a strategic role insofar as it organizes this world by identifying the problems and those responsible (diagnosis), as well as the solutions (prognosis) (Snow and Benford 1988; Caiani 2023).

Climate change can be framed as 'real' or 'illusionary'; it can be presented as a problem that must be addressed or one where there is no urgency to act (Broadbent et al. 2016; Carvalho 2007), and it can be discussed through different lenses (e.g., the economic impact, technological innovation, climate governance or social justice). In any case, when we deal with extreme weather events, the debate around climate change becomes even more complex. While climate denialism is a genuine risk that needs to be taken seriously, other scholars have highlighted the risk associated with climate reductionism (Hulme 2011). The key argument is that, although climate change undoubtedly increases the frequency of extreme weather events, its impact on communities is heavily influenced by pre-existing vulnerabilities (Lahsen and Ribot 2021). While extreme weather events may provide an opportunity to draw public attention to climate change, Lahsen and Ribot (2019, p.2) contend that a climate-centric communication strategy diverts 'attention from other important and treatable causes […] with implication for social and political understanding of potential responses and for responsibility'. As demonstrated by Lahsen et al. (2020) regarding the floods that occurred in Brazil in 2008 and 2011, environmental leaders consistently refrained from adopting the climate frame, whereas Brazilian decision makers attributed the disaster to climate change. This phenomenon is explained in terms of political opportunity: shifting the focus entirely to climate change is a strategy aimed at diverting attention from the decision-making processes of local and national actors and the processes that render the community more vulnerable (Lahsen and Ribot 2021). The framing pattern chosen by each actor reveals their specific values, interests, and strategies: indeed, 'climate change can be used by parties and leaders to promote different political agendas or alliances' (Biancalana and Ladini 2022, p.460).

In accordance with a multi-causal analysis of extreme weather disasters, framing these events could encompass both climate change and the pre-existing vulnerabilities

that empirically contribute to the losses and damages inflicted by such events (Ibidem, p.3). This approach seeks to formulate policies that address both prevention and mitigation simultaneously. However, this presents a significant challenge as the framing of extreme weather events influences the strategies devised for their prevention and management.

Therefore, the examination of narratives surrounding such events holds both academic and political significance. The voices given to actors, the identified causes and culprits, as well as the proposed solutions, have the potential to influence the political handling of extreme events, which are becoming increasingly prominent on the political agenda and subsequently shaping the societal relationship with nature. With this objective, our work aims to investigate the narrative patterns of extreme weather events based on the case studies of the floods that took place in the regions of the Marche (September 2022) and Emilia-Romagna (May 2023), which will be presented in the following section.

3. Case studies

Our work focuses on the narratives – and their political implications – that emerged around two extreme weather events, namely the floods that hit the Marche region on 15 and 16 September 2022, and Emilia-Romagna on 16 and 17 May 2023. Both floods had a dramatic impact on people (with 13 deaths in the Marche region and 15 in Emilia-Romagna, along with a significant number of evacuees) and on the socioeconomic context.

Causes. The main cause of these events is related to the fact that the level of rain that fell in some areas of these two regions in just a few hours amounted to what would typically occur over several months.[1] The exceptional and intense rainfall, juxtaposed with a preceding period of drought that had compromised the ground's capacity to absorb water (Il Post, 17/9/22), is attributable to climate change.[2] However, other structural conditions of hydrogeological instability resulting from intensive land use, illegal construction, inadequate river maintenance and cleaning, and the confinement of watercourses within narrow limits exacerbated the consequences of the heavy rains. The combination of these global and local factors led to the sudden flooding of cities and rural areas, endangering the lives of thousands of people as well as their economic livelihoods.

[1] According to the data from ARPAE, in Emilia-Romagna up to 254.8mm of rain fell within 48 hours, while in the Marche region, according to data from Civil Protection, it reached 400mm (Protezione Civile 2022), compared to an annual average of 769mm (taking the decade 2011-2021 as a reference, ISTAT data https://www.istat.it/it/files//2023/05/Dati-meteoclimatici-Anni-1971-2021.pdf.). Furthermore, the Marche had already been affected by a flood in 2014, which caused much damage and three deaths. However, inadequate post-flood management allowed the problem to occur again.

[2] A recent study by the World Weather Attribution (WWA) acknowledges the potential link between climate change and extreme weather events but contends that it did not detect a statistically significant connection in the Emilia-Romagna flood. Nonetheless, other scholars, including climatologists, meteorologists, physicists, and environmental engineers, have identified several structural limitations in the study. These limitations are associated with the utilized data (limited to post-1960 instead of utilizing more extensive historical datasets), temporal distribution (measuring precipitation in millimetres over a 21-day period without accounting for the fact that such quantities may not have accumulated evenly across that timeframe but rather over 24/48 hours), and the methodology of rapid assessment (which, while replicable on a global scale, operates at a relatively low resolution)(Climaternanti.it, 3/6/23).

Sanitary and socio-economic impact. In addition to the numerous deaths, the floods produced further problems. They triggered landslides and mudslides and dramatically compromised the land, leading to the emergence on the ground surface of pathogens from fertilizers and animal waste, as well as toxic substances near industrial sites and landfills. This has had an impact on human health that is difficult to quantify today, as thousands of people came into contact with these materials both during the cleaning of streets and homes and through the infiltration of these agents into the water infrastructure and sewerage systems. Exposure to these risk factors can result in infectious diseases that can affect various parts of the body, the effects of which only become visible in the medium to long term (Michelozzi and De Donato 2014). Furthermore, the impact on the mental health of the residents of losing loved ones, their homes, and their livelihoods should not be underestimated.

Looking at the socioeconomic impact of the floods, the estimated losses amount to over 3 billion euro for the Marche region (Il Messaggero, 21/9/22) and nearly 9 billion euro for Emilia-Romagna (Repubblica, 3/8/23). The sectors that were most severely affected were agriculture, livestock farming, and tourism. The rains damaged crops and, at least for a period, arable land, greatly affecting the supply chain. The destruction of a number of historical town centres and the contamination of beaches where water from the rivers drains into the sea impacted, among other things, the flow of tourists.

It is worth noting that intensive livestock farming, land exploitation through monocultures, and mass tourism are among the causes of ecological degradation and global warming. In this sense, precisely because of their extractive and intensive management logic, the very sectors that have been affected are part of the problem.

Political context and flood management. To provide an overview of the political context in which the two floods occurred, we believe it is important to focus on two dimensions: the distribution of power at different levels (regional/national) and the choices made regarding the appointment of a special commissioner. With regard to the first dimension, during the period in which the floods occurred, there were different political actors involved:

a) Emilia-Romagna (where there is a deeply rooted left-wing or red subculture) was, at the time of the floods, led by the centre-left Democratic Party, with Stefano Bonaccini as the regional leader (who would go on to become the President of the Democratic Party in 2023). Meanwhile, the national government was led by a far-right coalition (*Fratelli d'Italia*, *Lega*, and *Forza Italia*) represented by Giorgia Meloni.

b) The Marche region, at the time of the flood, was led by a radical right-wing party, *Fratelli d'Italia*, with Francesco Acquaroli as the regional leader. The national government, on the other hand, was led by a broad coalition of parties ranging from the centre-left to the centre-right and was represented by a technocrat, Mario Draghi, the former head of the European Central Bank.

Concerning flood management and subsequent reconstruction efforts, alongside aid packages, bonuses, and extensions, the national government decreed the appointment of a special commissioner to oversee emergency management and reconstruction – a practice that has become progressively prevalent in addressing events deemed as emergencies. In the case of Emilia-Romagna, at the end of June 2023, following a heated

political debate, the Meloni government identified General Francesco Paolo Figliuolo as the person best suited to fulfilling this role. General Figliuolo had previously served as a special commissioner chosen by the Draghi government to manage the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. A novel aspect of this appointment is that a military figure was chosen for a 5-year term, the longest mandate ever recorded for such a role.

In the case of the Marche, there was no immediate appointment of a special commissioner, and there was no debate regarding reconstruction. However, nearly a year later, and after the events in Emilia-Romagna, General Figliuolo was designated as the commissioner for the reconstruction not only in Emilia-Romagna but also in the Marche.

Throughout this paper, we will seek to highlight, in various dimensions, the relationship between the political context and the narrative patterns that emerged around the floods.

4. Methodology and data

In this contribution, we focus on the analysis of narratives related to extreme climate events in the cases of the Marche and Emilia-Romagna, through an inductive and exploratory approach. We adopt a case-oriented comparative design (della Porta 2008), combining a Most Different System Design (MDSD) and Most Similar System Design (MSSD) (Przeworski and Teune 1970). In fact, as outlined in the previous paragraph, we compare two cases with some similarities (mostly related to the causes, and the socio-economic and sanitary impact), but also with some differences (political context and flood management). By doing so, we believe that the differences identified can help explain the varying narratives associated with the two events. We employ the Political Claim Analysis (PCA) method, which makes it possible to explore the dimension of public discourse surrounding a particular object of study (Bosi and Zamponi 2019, p.17). Our analysis encompasses the plurality of actors who, through conventional or unconventional means, expressed a political claim regarding a specific issue (Koopmans and Statham 1999, p.203). The unit under examination is the claim, understood as intentional and strategic communicative action, both verbal and non-verbal, utilized in the public sphere on behalf of a group or community (de Wilde et al. 2014, p.7).

For this work, we have chosen to examine three national newspapers representing three different perspectives: *La Repubblica* (aligned with the centre-left parties), *Il Fatto Quotidiano* (aligned with the Five Star Movement), and *Il Foglio* (aligned with the liberal-conservative right). The decision to examine the press is linked to both the need to narrow the scope of the investigation within the entire media sphere and the strategic importance that the national mass media continues to have in producing narratives capable of influencing public opinion, while determining the visibility they may choose to offer to different actors. Indeed, although the use of the internet has profoundly changed communicative processes, it has not diminished the importance of the mass media as an arena where information deemed credible and noteworthy is preselected, and communication actors are considered serious and competent (Rucht 2004, p.26). The mass media remains central to the processes of shaping public opinion, to which protests attempt to appeal. The arena of mass media is thus confirmed as the 'primary site of

contestation over meaning' (Gamson 2004, p.243), the analysis of which remains crucial to the study of political phenomena in general, although it is not exhaustive.

The data collection was conducted by selecting all articles containing the keyword '*alluvione*'[3] (flood) published between 15 September and 24 October 2022, for the Marche region, and between 17 May and 25 June 2023, for the Emilia-Romagna region. The chosen time frame allowed us to include the initial debates in the aftermath of the floods and cover the two city demos organized exactly one month after the flood by various local actors in both cases.

We collected a total of 263 claims, with 58 related to the floods in the Marche and 205 related to the floods in Emilia-Romagna. While we used a semi-structured codebook for data collection, following an exploratory phase, we inductively coded the macro-frames to which the collected claims referred. This approach allowed us to establish macro-categories that represented general expressions of the themes emerging from the claims. The following table outlines the distinction of macro-frames resulting from this process.

Table 1. Empirical analysis: operationalization

Macro-frame label	Description (it refers to…)
Economic	economic dimensions related to (insufficient or lacking) investment in land management, economic losses, and funds for reconstruction.
Environmental	environmental dimensions related to climate change (affirmed or denied), (the lack of) land management, or more generally the connection between environmental perspectives and extreme climatic events.
Political-procedural	political and/or procedural dimensions, related to political responsibilities and/or procedures for managing the extreme climatic event.
Solidaristic	statements of solidarity with the people affected by the extreme climate event.
Identitarian	representations of the population affected by the extreme climatic event.

Source: own elaboration.

In the following paragraphs, we will analyse the collected data, highlighting the political strategies behind the choice of certain actors to shape their discourse in one way rather than another.

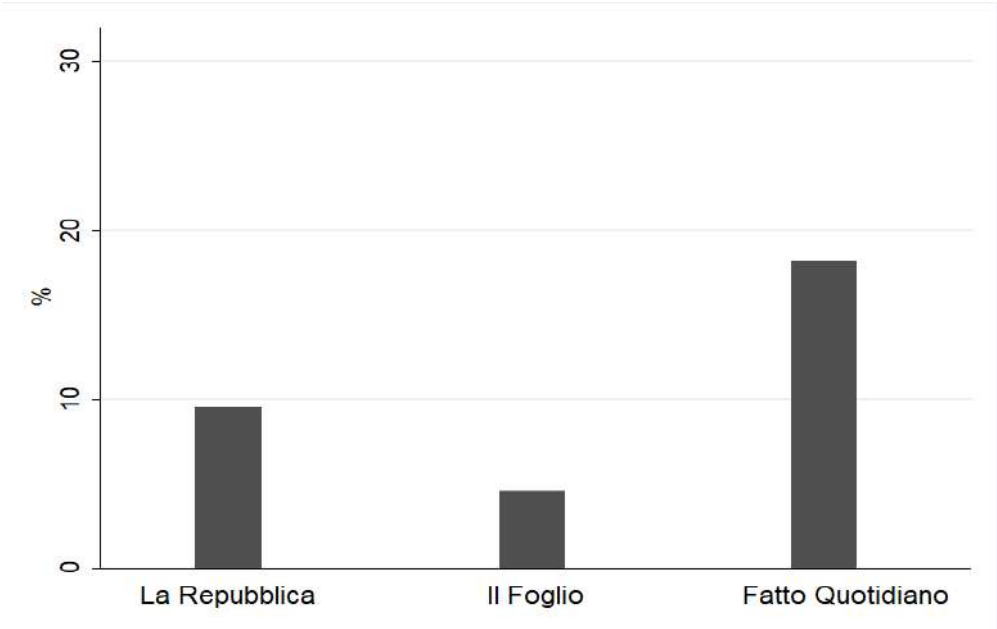
[3] The research does not encompass all the articles that report meteorological bulletins, but includes editorials published in the three newspapers as a data source because we consider the media as actors positioned within the public debate.

5. Extreme weathers events and the media in Italy: discussion

As mentioned above, the media coverage of the two events differs significantly, with 205 claims collected in relation to the events in Emilia-Romagna compared to 58 collected for the Marche floods. The case of Emilia-Romagna would appear to have significantly ignited the political debate on the prevention and management of extreme climate events.

Moreover, the extent of coverage allocated to the debate varies significantly between newspapers: *Il Foglio* devotes less space to extreme climate events compared to *La Repubblica* and *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, both of which offer similar levels of coverage (refer to Appendix, Table A1). However, disparities not only exist in the level of coverage but also in the space dedicated to the theme of climate change and, consequently, the association between extreme climate events and global warming.

Figure 1. Climate change citation by journals (%)



Source: own elaboration.

Looking at the overview of the two cases, climate change is referenced in nearly a third of the articles (32.3%). Generally, discussions surrounding climate change aim to recognize its correlation with extreme climate events, as observed in the context of the floods in this instance. Most rarely, in 12.9% of instances, climate change is mentioned to deny its existence. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the decision to circumvent discussions on climate change can, in certain instances, serve as a means to implicitly deny its existence or diminish its significance (Zerubavel 2006).

A significant difference exists between the three newspapers, and while climate change is still far from being adequately addressed, *Il Fatto Quotidiano* allocates the most space to these issues, while the topic proves to be marginal in *Il Foglio* (Figure 1). This initial data suggests that the attention given by different newspapers to climate change

is connected to the value system and political positions that they adhere to, confirming the political nature of the media. Media outlets can make strategic choices related to the topics they cover, the actors they give space to, and how they approach these issues. Shifting our focus to the actors present in the media arena, the comparison of the two cases reveals interesting results.

Table 2. Claims' actors by events (%)

	Marche flood (September 2022)	Emilia-Romagna flood (May 2023)
Civil society actors	12.1	7.8
Political Parties	20.7	23.9
Trade unions	/	0.5
Businesses	1.7	7.8
National government	8.6	14.2
Regional governments	/	8.3
Local governments	8.6	4,9
Media/Journalists	10.3	22.9
Intellectuals	1.7	2
Experts	12.1	10.2
Political Parties	20.7	23.9

Source: own elaboration. Note: multiple responses were possible.

A notable distinction emerges in the prominence of government actors across all levels. As depicted in Table 2, concerning the Emilia-Romagna case, government actors – particularly at the national and regional levels – are notably present in the discourse, encompassing more than 27% of the discussion. Conversely, in the case of the Marche region, assertions made by the regional government are absent, while national and local government involvement in the debate is notably diminished, accounting for just over 17% of the discourse. From our perspective, this data correlates with the divergent political contexts surrounding the two floods and underscores the strategic role assumed by right-wing actors. The flood in the Marche region occurred within a political landscape where the region was governed by a right-wing coalition, while the national technocratic government enjoyed support from a broad coalition consisting of various political factions, including the right (excluding FdI). Conversely, the flood in Emilia-Romagna unfolded within a markedly different context, with a national government led by the right-wing coalition and the regional government governed by the PD, thus exacerbating political tensions. In the case of the Marche, the conflict between the region and the technocratic government is relatively low in polarization, and the right demonstrates little interest in criticizing either the region governed by its representatives or the government in which it participates. In contrast, in Emilia-Romagna, the political landscape is characterized by intense competition between the PD-led region and the FdI- and Lega-led government, fostering a heightened level of polarization in the debate. This polarization would appear to be connected to the greater presence of the right in the media arena,

which is both linked to the strategic role of government actors in the debate (more than a 5-percentage point difference between the two events) and the different exposure of right-wing parties. While in the case of the Marche they are present in 5% of cases, their presence in the debate multiplies in the case of Emilia-Romagna, where they occupy a significant space (almost 21%) (Table 2).
While the different presence of these parties in the two cases can be explained by the different political-institutional contexts, analysing the themes of the debate allows us to understand the effects of this presence.

Table 3. Claims' macro-frames (%)

	Marche flood (September 2022)	Emilia-Romagna flood (May 2023)
Economy	17.2	11.2
Environmental	55.2	40.5
Politics	37.9	45.9
Solidaristic	25.9	8.8
Identitarian	3.4	7.3

Source: own elaboration. Note: multiple responses were possible.

The most common macro-frame in the debate surrounding the floods is the environmental frame, which is particularly the case in the Marche (55.2%) compared to Emilia-Romagna (40.5%). In the Marche, the environment topic is brought into the media debate by the three main actors, namely experts (18%), environmental organizations and movements (15%) and left-wing parties (12.5%). Management of the territory, whether linked to the climate question or not, is the most common interpretation for the cause of the floods, and there is recognition of the fact that the region is particularly exposed to such events due to the action of humans (such as an overexploitation of the land, an increase in concreted surfaces and a reduction in the management of river banks and river beds), the most devastating effects of which emerge in the wake of these types of flooding events. The most common diagnostic frame is that of a lack of territorial management aimed at tackling these types of problems, aside from in response to emergency situations, with reference to the previous floods that took place ten years earlier and that affected the same areas.
In the case of Emilia-Romagna, the environmental frame assumes a significant role; nevertheless, the emerging interpretations are characterized by a greater degree of variability and contradiction. Numerous frames adopt a denialist or obstructionist narrative, accounting for about a third of the claims (34.9%), compared to the Marche case where this narrative is marginal (5.4%). The right attributes primary responsibility for the devastating effects of the floods to environmental organizations and movements (17.50%) and left-wing parties, primarily the PD (27.5%). The 'salon environmentalists' are portrayed as the cause of the floods because, as asserted by Salvini, they 'think more about nutrias than humans', while Prime Minister Meloni argued for the need to 'shift the paradigm' and put an end to environmentalism. Various accusations against environmentalism or scepticism towards climate change are evident in these excerpts:

> "Environmentalists sitting in their lofts are objecting to projects: some projects need to be carried out. Our problem is the culture of 'no'."[4] (Fratin, Minister of the Environment).
>
> "The activists of *Ultima Generazione* should go shovel mud to show their interest in the environment."[5] (La Russa, President of the Senate)
>
> "Climate change should not be a dogma; there are no definitive truths. Research must continue."[6] (Lucio Malan, FDI)

The obstructionist campaign of the right also benefits from the support and active contribution of some journalists affiliated with the same political spectrum, thus doubling their presence in the Emilia-Romagna debate (22.9%) compared to the Marche case (Table 2), with statements like:

> 'We needed more concrete; when nature decides, it decides. This can happen, and it has always happened.'[7] (Sallusti, right-wing journalist)
>
> 'First they cry because it doesn't rain, then because it rains too much.'[8] (Feltri, right-wing journalist)

Although they are nearly equally represented in both cases (Table 2), left-wing actors more frequently resort to an environmentalist narrative in the case of Emilia-Romagna (31.1%) than in that of the Marche (12.5%).

In the case of Emilia-Romagna, left-wing party actors, especially the PD, strongly emphasize the role of climate change in bringing about the floods, simultaneously accusing the right of its 'offensive' and 'denialist' positions, aimed at 'defending fossil fuel lobbies' (Schlein, PD). The main target of left-wing parties, particularly the PD, is the right-wing government (73.3%), as it is argued that 'the government does not talk about climate and is denialist' (Schlein), engaging in 'scavenging' and 'insulting science'. At the same time, while emphasizing the role of global warming in elucidating the floods and advocating 'financial resources and streamlined procedures to safeguard the territory from climate-related crises' (Schlein)[9], efforts are made to divert attention from other land management factors – overseen by the PD – that contributed to significant

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[4] 'Gli ambientalisti dei loft si oppongono ai progetti: alcuni progetti devo essere realizzati. Il nostro problema è la cultura del no.' Ruccia, G. (2023). Disastro in Emilia Romagna, il ministro Pichetto Fratin se la prende con gli ambientalisti: 'Vivono nei loft e dicono sempre di no alle opere', *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 9 June.

[5] 'Gli attivisti di Ultima Generazione dovrebbero andare a spalare il fango per dimostrare il loro interesse per l'ambiente.' F.Q. (2023). La Russa provoca: 'I ragazzi di Ultima generazione vadano a spalare il fango'. Ma ci sono già: 'Noi non cerchiamo visibilità', *Il Fatto quotidiano*, 9 June.

[6] 'Il cambiamento climatico non deve essere un dogma: non ci sono verità definitive. La ricerca deve continuare.' F.Q. (2023). Il capogruppo FdI Malan sostiene che in Romagna non c'entra il cambio climatico. È polemica: 'Negazionista'. Il centrodestra tace, *Il Fatto quotidiano*, 9 June.

[7] 'Avevamo bisogno di più cemento; quando la natura decide, decide. Questo può succedere, ed è sempre successo.' Pietrobelli, G. (2023). 'Cemento? Ce n'è troppo poco': la sparata di Sallusti a La7. Che cita (male) anche il Vajont: ecco perché ha scelto l'esempio più sbagliato, *Il Fatto quotidiano*, 9 June.

[8] 'Prima piangono perché non piove, poi piangono perché piove troppo.' F.Q. (2023). Vittorio Feltri choc sull'alluvione in Emilia Romagna: 'Prima piangono perché non piove, poi perché piove troppo...'. Scoppia la polemica, *Il Fatto quotidiano*, 9 June.

[9] 'Risorse Finanziarie e procedure snelle per salvaguardare il territorio dalle crisi legate al clima.' F.Q. (2023). Alluvione, Schlein chiede di usare più soldi del Pnrr contro il dissesto. Ma il problema sono le risorse stanziate e non spese, *Il Fatto quotidiano*, 9 June.

damage: one of the statements made by Bonaccini is that 'there is no concrete here; we are the most heavily wooded region. It is drought that cracks the ground.'[10]

Given the vast amount of space occupied by institutions and political parties in the media, our research reveals the underrepresentation of the point of view of associations and social movements (both organized and unorganized). These representatives of civil society had shown interest and expertise on ecological issues through various forms of collective action. Although this presence is marginal in both cases, it is slightly higher for the Marche floods, just over four percentage points more than in Emilia-Romagna (Table 2). In both cases, these are mainly social movements, such as Fridays for Future, *Ultima Generazione* and Extinction Rebellion, followed by environmental associations like the WWF or *Legambiente*. More media attention seems to have been directed towards climate movements like Fridays for Future, *Ultima Generazione*, and Extinction Rebellion, which entered the debate by leveraging the structural dimension of the climate crisis, pointing out both culprits (politicians and the wealthiest parts of the planet) and solutions (the abandonment of fossil fuels):

> 'The climate crisis increases extreme climatic events such as droughts and floods. A structural political intervention is necessary, not emergency measures.'[11] (Legambiente)

> 'It's not just rain or bad weather; it is a climate crisis. The emergency is here, and we must act immediately.'[12] (Fridays for Future)

> 'We are experiencing an unprecedented eco-climatic crisis; politics procrastinates, but there is no more time.'[13] (Extinction Rebellion)

At the same time, there is a risk of sliding towards climate reductionism, which does not adequately consider the variables contributing to such disastrous situations.

The second most prevalent macro-frame observed is the political-procedural frame (refer to Table 3), a theme in which both right-wing and left-wing parties are notably engaged in the discourse across both cases. Notably, there is a discernible shift in the right-wing's strategy: from being relatively absent in the discourse surrounding the Marche floods, it emerges as a central actor in the debate regarding the Emilia-Romagna floods, with 57.5% of assertions linked to a political frame. Much of the political contention revolved around the appointment of the commissioner for reconstruction. This discourse not only highlighted a significant conflict between the government and the opposition but also led to internal division within the right along the regional/national axis. This element of tension did not concern the idea of appointing a commissioner, but rather the

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[10] 'Non c'è cemento qui; siamo la regione più boscosa. È la siccità che spacca il terreno.' F.Q. (2023). Emilia-Romagna, Mattarella sorvola le zone dell'alluvione insieme a Bonaccini: il video, *Il Fatto quotidiano*, 9 June.

[11] 'La crisi climatica aumenta gli eventi climatici estremi come siccità e alluvioni. È necessario un intervento politico strutturale, non misure emergenziali.' Colombo, G., (2023). Dalla siccità alle alluvioni, oltre 70 eventi estremi nel 2023. Ecco le regioni più colpite e i danni | mappe e grafici, *Il Fatto quotidiano*, 9 June.

[12] 'Non è solo pioggia o cattivo tempo, è la crisi climatica. L'emergenza è qui e dobbiamo agire immediatamente', Colucci, G. (2023). Fridays for Future in piazza per l'Emilia Romagna: 'Non è pioggia, è crisi climatica', *Il Fatto quotidiano*, 9 June.

[13] 'Stiamo vivendo una crisi eco-climatica senza precedenti; la politica procrastina, ma non c'è più tempo'. Barabino, P. (2023). 'Il sonno della Regione genera morti', gli attivisti climatici protestano in Emilia-Romagna: l'azione durante l'assemblea legislativa, *Il Fatto quotidiano*, 9 June.

person who should fill the role: the possible appointment of a commissioner for reconstruction who was not also the regional governor was perceived as a threat to the powers of regional governors, leading some right-wing/centre-right governors to support the appointment of the centre-left president of Emilia-Romagna, Bonaccini. Part of this debate also concerns the process by which emergency decrees are passed: on the one hand we can observe both criticism and praise from right-wing parties with regard to a government they consider capable of responding promptly to the emergency; on the other we can observe criticism in the other direction, especially from left-wing parties, for the sluggish response from the government with regard to the emergency and subsequent phases. In the case of Emilia-Romagna, we see an increase in political-procedural frames (64.4%) from left-wing parties compared to the Marche case (22.4%).

In the Marche, the political debate focused on different aspects. The river that overflowed in September 2022 is the same one that overflowed less than ten years before, in 2014, causing extensive damage and casualties. Following that flooding event, funds were allocated by the government, which, aside from not being entirely used, were employed for other projects and works unrelated to those considered essential for repairing and reinforcing the affected area. Claims related to political-procedural frames predominantly addressed bureaucratic sluggishness, the responsibility of the parties in power from 2014 onwards, and the failure to implement a territory security project, which has existed since 2018. The region also figures among the targets identified by actors adopting this frame, and is accused of not issuing timely and effective weather alerts for the area, leaving the population unprepared for the event and therefore at risk. Such data confirms how most of the media attention in Italy is for internal-political dynamics, cutting space for more in-depth information on the policies and arguments in support for (or in contrast to) them (Bobbio and Roncarolo 2015)

The economic frame exhibits significantly less prevalence, accounting for 17.7% in the Marche case and 11.2% in Emilia-Romagna, respectively. This narrative framework predominantly centres on the adverse economic consequences of the floods for the affected regions, a theme more prominently featured in the Emilia-Romagna case than in the Marche. It also addresses the funds required for social reconstruction and territorial security. While in the Emilia-Romagna case the debate mainly revolves around the management of funds from the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), in the Marche case, a significant part of the debate focuses on the use of funds from the Casa Italia project (initiated under the Renzi government), with post-flood funds allocated in 2014.

The subsequent macro-frame is the solidarity frame. In this instance, the disparity extends beyond mere frequency, as it emerges as a theme in nearly 26% of claims in the Marche case, contrasting with its occurrence in only 8.8% of claims in Emilia-Romagna. Regarding the Marche, these are expressions of solidarity with the people affected by the floods, mainly voiced by national and local political figures. In the Emilia-Romagna case, declarations of solidarity, complemented by donations from prominent sports and entertainment figures or companies, have greater prominence. Although still marginal in the Marche case (1.7%), they garner more media attention in Emilia-Romagna (7.8%) (refer to Table 2), where the economic infrastructure is more robust. In both cases, there is no trace of grassroots solidarity initiatives or spontaneous support from individuals

rushing to the flooded areas to offer assistance. This confirms the growing trend to personalize communication (Bracciale and Rega 2018) and focus attention on prominent figures or charismatic leaders.

Finally, the identitarian frame is present in 3.4% of cases for the Marche and 7.3% for Emilia-Romagna, respectively. In the Marche case, the population is portrayed as resilient amid significant adversity. Conversely, in Emilia-Romagna, this macro-frame is not just more frequent, but it primarily manifests as a populist representation emphasizing the courageous and industrious nature of the affected populations, who have responded actively and 'without complaining'. One can't help noticing a very different narrative for the inhabitants of the two territories, which may depend on the socio-economic characteristics of the two regions. In both cases, however, we believe that this narrative minimizes the traumatic effects of events of such magnitude (indirectly stigmatizing those who reacted differently in a negative light). On the other hand, it conveys the image of a population incapable of, or disinterested in understanding the causes and effects of the flood itself. In some way, this narrative relegates the population to a position of passivity, removing its agency capacity. As evidence of this, there is the fact that the protest events that occurred around the theme of the floods and the accompanying claims were almost completely ignored, rendering virtually invisible those grassroots actors who did not fit into the narrative of the industrious and uncritical population in reacting to the effects of the flood.

6. Between reductionism and obstructionism: some provisional conclusions

The first relevant aspect of this contribution concerns the level of media attention afforded to extreme weather events in Italy, that is, *how much* they are talked about. Our study unveils that the discourse surrounding these two extreme weather events witnessed an unprecedented inclusion of the issue of climate change. To contextualize this finding, one merely needs to undertake similar research pertaining to previous floods that transpired just a decade ago, resulting in comparable numbers of victims and damages to those witnessed in Emilia-Romagna and Marche. Despite a study conducted between 2004 and 2007 (Beltrame et al. 2012) showing a growing level of media attention to the topic of climate change (which during that period entered the debate on the occasion of international institutional summits), the same keyword research conducted in relation to the 2009 Messina flood (37 victims) and the 2011 Liguria flood (13 victims) yields very few results, none of which mentions the climate crisis, preferring terms such as 'apocalypse' and 'downpour' among others. While this study does not intend to systematically compare the evolution of narrative patterns over time, these preliminary findings already appear to indicate increased media coverage of extreme weather events and a shift in the narrative paradigm regarding the issue of global warming, in comparison to similar events that occurred at earlier points in time.

While the media coverage of such events is higher than before, it is essential to highlight that the two floods, although similar in terms of the damage caused and the historical phase in which they occurred, received different levels of media coverage. On the one hand, both floods occurred in a phase that followed the rise of climate movements, which have diligently endeavoured to establish connections between global

warming and extreme weather events, and they also took place in proximity to elections (national elections took place shortly after the Marche floods, and local elections were held a few weeks after the Emilia Romagna floods). While the cycle of climate protests may have influenced the level of media attention to extreme weather events (a hypothesis that needs to be verified with further studies), the proximity to electoral rounds is considered a key factor in understanding the level of conflict between partisan actors, which tends to intensify strategically in close proximity to a vote (Chadwick 2013).

Although these two variables may have influenced the level of the debate, causing it to intensify, the significant differences observed in the comparison between the two cases require further attention. In our view, these differences can be attributed to a number of key factors:

1) The level of tension between local government and national government;
2) The strategic position held by climate change denialist parties;
3) The strategic position of the region along the centre-periphery axis.

In fact, it emerges that concurrently with the floods that hit Emilia-Romagna, which remained in the spotlight for weeks, there was the presence within the regional and national governments of the two main political forces competing for consensus (with radically antithetical positions on climate change), as well as the presence of a national government led by climate change denialist right-wing parties that polarized the debate. It is noteworthy that obstructionist claims in the presence of the right-wing government increased significantly, from 5.2% in the case of Marche to 34.9% in the case of Emilia-Romagna. This undoubtedly intensified the debate and heightened the tone, triggering chain reactions among political actors. Finally, we see that the centre-periphery relationship may have contributed to the different media coverage afforded to the two extreme weather events. In fact, counterbalancing the centrality in economic terms of Emilia-Romagna, the third most important Italian region in terms of GDP is the Marche, an area in central Italy that is often considered peripheral in socioeconomic terms. Looking at the contribution of the two regions in terms of national GDP, we observe very different figures: 8.8% for Emilia-Romagna (ART 2023), one of the regions considered to be a driving force for the industrial development of the country (La Stampa, 8/5/23), compared to 2.4% for Marche (Regione Marche 2022). Such a difference may have contributed to generating different outcomes in the two cases, and projecting socioeconomic dynamics into the media arena: where the productive fabric is stronger and there is greater economic development and contribution to the national GDP, there is also greater attention to the damage caused by the floods and concern for the consequences this might have on the productive sectors that drive the Italian economy.

The second dimension we aim to highlight concerns the actors who, through their representation in the media, are present in the debate, i.e., *who* is talking about it. Despite varying frequencies for each of the two cases and differing (if not conflicting) narratives and objectives between them, some actors are predominant in the debate, such as actors from institutional politics, journalists, and experts (the latter albeit to a lesser extent). The notable absentees are the climate movements, ecological collectives, and environmental associations which, despite raising the issue more than anyone else, are marginally present in both cases and mostly find media space in *Il Fatto Quotidiano*. Additionally, social movements are identified as targets in the speeches made by

government representatives (on the Right) and journalists: all claims that find more space in *Il Foglio*. This confirms a fact highlighted by Gamson (2004, p.251): if some groups are treated as 'agents' with a recognized voice on a particular issue, others are treated as mere 'objects' of discussion that others can talk about, without the direct parties having the right to intervene in the same context.

The most relevant data, in our opinion, is that in the media arena, other social parties, and generally the community, are excluded from the discussion around climate change and the management of extreme weather events, despite being subjects, such as associations and social movements, with significant expertise in the matter, or subjects, such as residents, who have a greater ability to monitor and observe changes and risks in the territory. A democratic governance of the climate crisis, in our opinion, requires the recognition of, and dialogue with such actors.

Lastly, shifting our attention to narrative patterns, i.e., the content of the debate, or *how* it is discussed, two trends appear to be particularly relevant. Firstly, the research shows that, although still far from becoming central and universally recognized as a triggering or multiplying factor of extreme weather events, today, no political, social, or media actor can evade the issue. Taking both cases into consideration, about one-third of the claims invoke climate change. It is important to highlight this data: it is now impossible to discuss flooding without referencing climate change, whether affirmed or denied. Indeed, in the press analysed here, we observed a notable emphasis (compared to the past) on the theme of climate change to explain the intensity and impact of the floods. Simultaneously, there are shrewd attempts by right-wing parties to deny its causal relationship or avoid addressing the issue, a strategy that has intensified the debate, prompting other actors to comment on the obstructionist statements of right-wing political leaders. Although, according to some studies (Beltrame et al. 2012), as recently as a decade ago the debate on the climate crisis seemed settled and resolved by identifying techno-scientific innovation and the transformation of daily lifestyles as responses to the problem, today we seem to be witnessing the opposite process. There is a multiplication of political interpretations of the phenomenon and political polarization around climate change that is emerging as a positional issue in Italy, as has been seen elsewhere (McCright and Dunlap 2011; Hughes et al. 2020), especially due to the narrative strategies of the right, which is capable – as observed on the immigration issue (Andretta and Imperatore 2022) – of launching concerted media campaigns that polarize the debate. This research confirms a clear growth in polarization around the topic of climate change, 'driven by growing right-wing activity' (Falkenberg et al. 2022, p.1114).

As this research seeks to highlight, the narrative patterns of the climate crisis adopted by various political actors are diverse and influenced both by political identity and strategies. On the one hand, our study confirms what other authors have already emphasized (Birch 2020; Biancalana and Ladini 2022) regarding the fact that 'one of the most relevant factors in explaining attitudes toward climate change is political orientation' (Ibidem, p.458). Thus, political orientation of parties along the left/right axis and their strategic positioning in relation to the extreme events (government vs. opposition and local vs. national) emerge as relevant variables capable of influencing frames and political strategies related to climate issue. On the other hand, it is useful to underscore the strategic role of these narrative patterns.

Left-wing parties assigned great importance to the issue of climate change to explain the floods in Emilia-Romagna. However, particularly in the case of the PD, they downplayed their own responsibilities in land management, which, as stated in the presentation of the case studies, was a decisive variable that contributed to the dramatic outcome. The focus on global warming attempted to shift attention from the regional government led by the PD and its role in the processes of altering the territory to the broader and uncontrollable phenomenon of climate change, confirming the arguments of Hulme (2011) and Lahsen and Ribot (2021) regarding the risks of a reductionist climate approach. Indeed, various statements by Bonaccini, simplifying the issue, claimed that 'after months of drought, the soil does not absorb water', omitting the fact that Emilia-Romagna is the leading Italian region in terms of soil consumption, a responsibility that lies with the region. On the other hand, right-wing parties emphasized the latter aspect of land management and denied any responsibility for climate change to support their accusations against the regional government and, in general, against left-wing parties. Through a process of mystification based on accusing 'ideological environmentalism' the 'climate Taliban', and the 'No-front', the right displayed a proudly anti-environmentalist rhetoric.

However, there are some nuances within the right-wing perspective regarding the interpretation of climate change, especially in relation to the floods in Emilia-Romagna, where the right-wing political actors were most present in the debate. While some figures within the right, such as deputies, journalists, opinion makers, etc., denied the existence of climate change and tended to downplay its scale, those in more prominent government roles, such as Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, Giovanni Toti, Nello Musumeci, along with others, adopted an obstructionist narrative aimed at instrumentalizing the potential impacts of environmental policies on businesses to slow down their implementation. They talked about combining 'economic sustainability' (Meloni) and 'development needs with the defence of the territory' (Toti), attempting to mask their anti-environmental views through narrative sleights of hand in order to present themselves as reliable interlocutors with other institutions. This variety of narratives within the right highlights the manner in which denialism is increasingly accompanied, if not replaced, by obstructionist narrative strategies that 'include all those calls which do not deny the human-induced nature of the climate crisis (science), but nevertheless delay or forestall meaningful climate action' (Ekberg et al. 2023, p.13) or that tend to 'misrepresent rather than clarify, raise adversity rather than consensus' (Lamb et al. 2020).

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7. Appendix

Table A1 - claims about Marche and Emilia Romagna floods by journals, (n and %)

	Marche flood (September 2022)		Emilia-Romagna flood (May 2023)		Both flood events	
Journals	n	%	n	%	n	%
Il Foglio	20	34.5	43	21	63	24
La Repubblica	23	39.7	83	40.5	106	40.3
Il Fatto Quotidiano	15	25.9	79	38.5	94	35.7
Total	58	100	205	100	263	100

Source: own elaboration.

Table A2 - claims by political parties, by flood events (%)

	Marche flood (September 2022)	Emilia-Romagna flood (May 2023)
Fratelli d'Italia	3.4	13.7
Lega	1.7	4.9
Forza Italia	/	2
Partito Democratico	15.5	17.6
Sinistra Italiana/Verdi	5.2	4.9

Source: own elaboration. Note: multiple responses were possible.

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Public Support for Climate Policies in a Context of Low Politicisation: Evidence from Italy

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Abstract

Climate change is a major political challenge worldwide. However, political efforts to address it do not always receive support from the population. Drawing on data from a novel survey, this paper examines the determinants of public support for eight different types of climate policy. We focus on Italy, a country in which the issue of climate change has so far received limited attention on the political agenda. We analyse three key explanatory factors: what citizens think (political ideology), what they have (economic situation), and where they live (rural or urban areas, and perceived exposure to climate-related risks in their neighbourhood). Our results suggest that all three factors are relevant in explaining Italians' support for climate policies. Most importantly, their relevance varies depending on the specific type of policy under consideration and its level of politicisation.

1. Introduction

Public opinion on climate change is generally considered an umbrella concept encompassing at least four dimensions: belief in climate change, personal concern, pro-environmental behaviour and support for climate policy (Shwom et al., 2015). The factors influencing the first three dimensions have been extensively studied, often from a psychological perspective. Surprisingly, however, much less is known about public attitudes towards government action and climate policy preferences (Fairbrother, 2022). Understanding citizens' policy preferences on climate change is crucial for at least two reasons. First, public support for climate policies is essential for their successful implementation, as they aim to induce behavioural change among various actors, including companies and individuals. Second, unpopular green policies may deter politicians from proposing or adopting them, especially when re-election or voter backlash is a concern.

This article aims to identify the factors that influence public support for different climate policies in Italy. While previous research has mostly been restricted to a small number of policy instruments, or to a specific type of policy (usually carbon taxes: Rhodes, 2017), we look at eight different climate policies, including taxes, subsidies,

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bans/regulations and public investments. We thus add to the existing literature by examining the kinds of climate policy people prefer and whether the socio-political factors that correlate with public support (or opposition) depend on the specific type of policy under consideration.

After reviewing the explanatory factors commonly cited in the literature, we propose three fundamental sets of determinants of climate policy preferences: what people think (political ideology), what citizens have (economic situation), and where they live (urban or rural areas, and perceived exposure to climate-related risks in their neighbourhood). We rely on public opinion data from a survey on 'Climate Change and Eco-Social-Growth Divides', administered by YouGov in December 2022 (Ferrera et al. 2023). The analysis focuses on Italy, which stands out as a particularly well-suited case for studying climate policy preferences. Contrary to what happens in other broadly studied countries like the US, climate change and environmental issues in Italy show relatively low salience and have been scarcely politicised until recently (Ladini and Biancalana, 2022). In other words, in the Italian context, climate change is likely perceived as a valence rather than a positional issue. Therefore, factors other than ideological ones may also influence public opinion towards climate policies, which is exactly what this paper investigates.
The article is structured as follows. In section 2 we discuss and classify different types of policy to tackle climate change. Section 3 reviews previous literature on the determinants of public support for climate policies, highlighting the three fundamental socio-political divides on the basis of which we develop our hypotheses. Section 4 introduces the data and method. Section 5 presents the empirical results, while section 6 concludes and proposes avenues for future research.

2. Climate policy proposals: taxes, subsidies, regulations and bans

This article analyses climate policy preferences in Italy and explores the underlying determinants driving support or opposition towards different policy measures. To do this, it is crucial to first develop an analytical framework for categorising climate policies. We draw upon existing typologies of public policy instruments to effectively differentiate between distinct types of climate policy and lay the groundwork for a comprehensive analysis of public attitudes towards them. The first typology distinguishes between 'price-type' and 'quantity-type' policy instruments (Sivonen, 2023). Price-type instruments, such as subsidies and taxes, try to incentivize or disincentivize certain behaviours by affecting prices, while quantity-type mechanisms, such as regulations and bans, are designed to control quantities of pollution or production. Price-type policies usually prompt more support or opposition than quantity-type instruments because the effects of the former, in the form of economic costs or gains, tend to be more visible for citizens (Sivonen, 2023). Another method of categorising climate policy proposals is to consider their degree of coercion, as suggested by Drews and van den Bergh (2016). This framework differentiates between 'pull' and 'push' measures. Pull (or rewarding) instruments (for example subsidies) are less coercive and aim to foster specific actions, whereas push (or punishing) instruments such as taxes are more coercive and try to discourage certain behaviours. The former are considered a more effective way to change

people's behaviour than the latter, which impose more restrictions on individual freedom and tend to be less popular.

Borrowing from these typologies, we can classify the different policy proposals included in our analysis as shown in Table 1 (for more details on the survey items see section 4).

Table 1. Classification of climate policy proposals

Policy proposal	Type	Degree of coercion
Tax on flying	Price-type	Push
Subsidies for renewable energy	Price-type	Pull
Tax on fossil fuels	Price-type	Push
Vehicle efficiency regulation	Quantity-type	Pull
Banning energy-inefficient appliances	Quantity-type	Push
Aid for clean energy in low-income countries	Price-type	Pull
Subsidies for energy efficiency of private dwellings	Price-type	Pull
Nuclear power plants	Quantity-type	Pull

Source: own elaboration.

We have two main expectations regarding climate policy preferences. First, we anticipate finding variations in public support, depending on the type of policy and its degree of coercion. We predict that price-type measures will arouse more support or opposition than quantity-type proposals, and that pull instruments will be preferred over push instruments. More specifically:

> H1: We expect that, on a scale from less to more support, the different policy proposals will rank in the following order: taxation (price-type push), bans (quantity-type push), regulations (quantity-type pull), and subsidies (price-type pull).

Moreover, we expect the drivers of public support for climate policies to vary depending on the specific type of policy at stake. In the next section, we delve deeper into the primary factors influencing climate policy preferences and discuss how we expect their effect to change based on the type of policy.

3. Socio-political divides and support for climate policies

Previous research has considered a wide range of factors in explaining public support for climate policy. For an overview of the key predictors used in the literature, see McCright et al. (2016). We propose to organise the determinants of climate policy preferences into three fundamental socio-political divides arising from three essential questions: what people *think*, what people *have* and where people *live*.

3.1. What people think: political ideology

By 'what people think', we refer to their political ideology, which plays a pivotal role in shaping citizens' policy preferences. Ideology is one of the most widely used predictors in explaining public attitudes to climate change (McCright et al., 2016). Previous research shows that individuals with leftist ideology (or that identify with a left-wing party) report stronger environmentalist attitudes than those on the right (Dunlap and McCright, 2008). For example, compared to right-wingers, left-leaning individuals express more concern about the environment (Fairbrother, 2016) and show lower levels of climate change scepticism (Häkkinen and Akrami, 2014).

Previous research on the relationship between political ideology and climate change attitudes faces two main limitations: a US-centric focus and a primary emphasis on environmental attitudes rather than policy preferences. While the US demonstrates a significant ideological divide on climate change views (Dunlap and McCright, 2008), recent studies question the generalizability of these findings (Fairbrother, 2022). Cross-national research shows varying levels of politicisation of climate change, with stronger ideological effects in the US compared to 24 other countries (Hornsey et al., 2018). In Europe, while ideology influences attitudes towards climate change in Western nations, its impact is weaker or non-existent in Central and Eastern Europe (McCright et al., 2016). Overall, the correlation between left-leaning ideology and pro-environment attitudes varies globally (Fairbrother, 2016).

In the Italian political arena, climate change is a relatively low-salience, unpolarised issue (Biancalana and Ladini, 2022). The literature acknowledges that the effect of political ideology on public attitudes towards climate change is less pronounced in Italy compared to the United States and other Anglo-Saxon countries (Biancalana and Ladini, 2022). However, previous studies have found that climate change concern in Italy is strongly influenced by political ideology (Lewis et al., 2019). Therefore, it is pertinent to investigate whether ideological inclinations, which appear to shape environmental attitudes, also inform environmental policy preferences. Consequently, we posit the following hypothesis:

> H2a: Individuals on the political left show greater support for climate policies compared to individuals on the political right.

Previous research on climate policy preferences indicates that ideology exerts an indirect influence on public support for climate policies through individuals' values and worldviews (Dietz et al., 2007). It is widely assumed that political ideology encompasses a wide range of more specific beliefs and values. Two different dimensions underlying ideological positions on the left-right spectrum are commonly identified in the literature (see for example de Vries et al., 2013): an economic dimension that structures citizens' opinions on the role of the state in the economy (free market economy vs state intervention), and a (socio-)cultural dimension rooted in value-based and identitarian issues (liberal vs conservative attitudes towards immigration, civil liberties and societal values). Individuals' positions on both the economic and the cultural ideological dimensions have been shown to have an independent impact on support for government action on climate change (Crawley, 2021).

Regarding the economic dimension, numerous studies have linked support for a free-market economy with lower concern for environmental risks (Lewandowsky et al., 2013) or less support for ambitious climate change measures (Dreyer and Walker, 2013). For instance, Dreyer and Walker (2013) found that economically liberal individuals were less inclined to endorse carbon pricing policies proposed by the Australian federal government. This association is intuitive: proponents of laissez-faire economic policies typically oppose government intervention, including climate change action.

With regard to the cultural dimension, previous research has found that conservative individuals are less likely to support environmental action compared to those expressing liberal attitudes on socio-cultural issues. For instance, authoritarianism and exclusionary views towards particular groups such as minorities or women are associated with higher climate scepticism and lower levels of support for environmental policy (Crawley, 2023).

Based on these considerations, we put forward the following expectations regarding the economic and cultural dimensions of political ideology:

> H2b: Individuals who favour state intervention in the economy show greater support for climate policies compared to proponents of market liberalism.
>
> H2c: Individuals with liberal attitudes on the cultural dimension show greater support for climate policies compared to culturally conservative individuals.

Given the enduring influence of ideology on individuals' political views, we anticipate that its effect will be consistent across all climate policy proposals, irrespective of the specific type of instrument. Instead, the effect of ideology is likely to vary depending on the degree of politicisation of each proposal. Therefore, *we expect political ideology to be particularly relevant in predicting preferences for policies that have gained salience in the Italian political arena*, such as fuel taxes (given the increase in fuel prices after the outbreak of the Ukrainian war); subsidies for energy efficiency in private dwellings (given the politicisation of 'Superbonus 110', a generous tax incentive for energy-efficient house renovations launched as a flagship measure by Movimento 5 Stelle, strongly opposed and then repealed by the current right-wing government); vehicle efficiency regulation (given the domestic politicisation of the recent EU ban on the sale of new petrol and diesel cars from 2035); or nuclear power, which has been a polarising issue in the Italian political debate ever since the 1980s (Ceri, 1988). Economic and cultural dimensions of ideology, as tested in hypotheses H2b and H2c, are expected to exhibit similar patterns, as they underlie ideological positions along the left-right spectrum (de Vries et al., 2013).

3.2. What people have: economic situation

Material resources and self-interest are recognised as pivotal factors shaping public opinion on policies involving the redistribution of resources. Approaches emphasising self-interest often portray individuals as utility-maximising rational actors that prioritise individual cost-benefit analyses, along the lines of classic *homo economicus* theory (Kangas, 1997).

Material resources and self-interest are also considered an important factor in explaining variation in public attitudes towards climate change. Previous studies have

linked wealth and support for environmental protection both at the macro-level (countries) and at the micro-level (individuals). At the macro-level, a large number of cross-national studies have detected a strong positive correlation between economic development and environmental concern (Franzen and Vogl, 2013; Kemmelmeier et al., 2002). Enhanced public support for environmental protection in affluent nations aligns with Inglehart's thesis on postmaterialism (Inglehart, 1995). This thesis posits that the rise of pro-environmentalism in economically advanced societies stems from a shift from material to 'post-material' concerns among individuals who have fulfilled their primary basic needs. However, the post-materialism thesis has faced criticism from researchers who question the validity of studies associating pro-environmentalism with national wealth (Clark and Carlisle, 2020). Indeed, in contrast to the so-called 'affluence hypothesis', research has found that public concern and people's willingness to pay for fighting climate change are actually higher in less affluent nations (Fairbrother, 2013; André et al., 2024).

At the individual level, findings regarding the relationship between income and views on climate change have demonstrated greater consistency. Most empirical studies indicate that higher income correlates with increased concern about climate change (Franzen and Vogl, 2013), a greater willingness to incur costs to protect the environment (Kemmelmeier et al., 2002), and stronger support for government environmental spending (Clark and Carlisle, 2020). Additionally, individuals with higher incomes tend to hold more favourable attitudes towards climate policy (Dietz et al., 2007).

The literature proposes two mechanisms to explain why individuals with higher incomes tend to be more supportive of climate policy. First, consistently with the post-materialism argument, affluent individuals may have fewer concerns about their economic situation, allowing them more time and resources to focus on issues such as environmental protection. Second, certain climate policies, such as increases in fuel taxes, can have adverse effects on personal finances. This is likely to activate utilitarian cost-benefit reasoning, particularly among economically vulnerable social groups. In relative terms, fuel taxes imply lower costs for wealthier individuals, who are likely to be less concerned about bearing higher petrol prices in exchange for the anticipated future intangible benefits of green policies. Conversely, low-income individuals may simply perceive that they cannot afford the additional expenses (Rhodes, 2017). We therefore formulate the following hypothesis:

> H3: Individuals with higher income show greater support for climate policies compared to individuals with lower income.

Since people are more likely to recognize their own economic self-interest when the personal costs and benefits of the policy are more evident (Chong et al., 2001), *we expect individuals' economic status to be especially relevant in predicting support or opposition to price-type policy instruments (taxes and subsidies)*; that is, policies with a direct impact on personal finances. Economic conditions are likely to have a weaker or no influence on support for policies that do not impose direct economic burdens on households, such as government investments in nuclear power plants or certain regulations primarily affecting businesses. Additionally, the anticipated effects may fluctuate depending on the degree of visibility of the associated costs and benefits, as well as the distributive implications of these policies in the specific Italian context.

3.3. Where people live: rural-urban divide and perceived risk exposure

The area of residence is another key factor in the literature on environmental attitudes, notably the rural-urban divide. Rural residents often have a utilitarian view of nature (Armstrong and Stedman, 2019). Economic ties to extractive industry, agriculture or farming typically align with limited concern for environmental degradation, and with the prioritisation of shorter-term tangible benefits such as income and employment. In contrast, urban residents tend to hold more pro-environmental attitudes due to their idealisation of nature as leisure spaces or to exposure to air pollution in large cities (Armstrong and Stedman, 2019).

The latter argument is also present in previous research on support for specific climate policies. Urban residents consistently show higher support for carbon taxes than their suburban or rural counterparts. This support aligns with their greater exposure to road transport pollution (Muhammad et al., 2021). Conversely, rural residents tend to oppose fiscal measures impacting fuel prices due to reliance on private transportation (Rhodes et al., 2017). Therefore, we expect that:

> H4a**:** Individuals living in urban areas show greater support for climate policies compared to individuals living in rural areas.

More specifically, *we expect this relationship to be especially strong for policies that directly affect petrol prices, as in the case of fossil fuel tax* (Rhodes et al., 2017). We also anticipate a less consistent effect of the rural-urban divide on all other policies, based on findings from empirical research that included measures beyond the carbon tax (Kitt et al., 2021).

Living in air-polluted areas such as cities is not the only geographical factor influencing environmental attitudes and support for certain climate measures. Together with poor air quality, the literature has highlighted the importance of exposure to other risks associated with climate change. Notably, experiencing extreme weather events has been widely cited as a determinant in attitudes towards climate change (Konisky et al., 2016). For example, the seminal study by Konisky et al. (2016) demonstrated that populations in the USA who had experienced events such as extreme heat, droughts or floods were more likely to express concern about climate change.

Studies examining the influence of risk exposure on support for specific climate policies are scarcer than those analysing its impact on general attitudes towards climate change. Furthermore, the results of these studies are inconclusive (Drews et al., 2016). Nonetheless, a positive association between experiencing floods and support for climate change mitigation has been observed. For instance, Demski et al. (2017) investigated a major flood in the UK and found that direct experience of the disaster not only heightened the salience of climate change and perceived risk but also increased support for mitigation policies. Taking these findings into account, we propose the following hypothesis regarding the impact of exposure to air pollution and extreme weather events:

> H4b: Individuals reporting to live in neighbourhoods affected by air pollution or extreme weather events show greater support for climate policies compared to individuals not affected by these circumstances.

Overall, *we expect these two factors to have a cross-cutting impact on all policies*. However, regarding poor air quality, we anticipate that it will be particularly relevant for

support of fossil fuel taxes. This type of pollution is primarily attributed to cars (Muhammad et al., 2021), and measures discouraging the use of combustion engine vehicles could therefore be viewed favourably by urban residents.

As discussed in each of the three preceding subsections, we expect to find variation in the effect of the different explanatory factors depending on the type of climate policy. Some factors, such as ideology, potentially shape people's general predispositions, and are thus susceptible to having a cross-cutting effect on all policy proposals. Factors related to economic conditions, by contrast, are likely to be more important in the case of policies implying direct costs or gains, that is, price-type instruments, while plausibly having a weaker or no effect in the case of regulatory policies with less obvious distributive implications, i.e., quantity-type instruments (Chong et al., 2001). Our main expectations in this regard are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Expected variation in the effect of the predictors based on the type of policy

Predictor	Type of policy	More support
Ideology	All; greater effect on salient, divisive policies	Left
Ideology (Economic)	All; greater effect on salient, divisive policies	Pro-State intervention
Ideology (Cultural)	All; greater effect on salient, divisive policies	Liberal
Income	Price-type policies, especially push instruments	Higher income
Urban-rural	All; greater effect on push/price-type policies, especially fossil fuel taxes	Urban
Air pollution	All; greater effect on push/price-type policies, especially fossil fuel taxes	Exposed

Source: own elaboration.

4. Data and Methods

To inspect the determinants of preferences for climate change policies in Italy we use data from an original survey on 'Climate Change and Eco-Social-Growth Divides', which was administered by YouGov on behalf of a research team from the University of Milan (Ferrera et al., 2023). The interviews were conducted between 1st and 9th December, 2022, via CAWI methodology (computer-assisted web interviews) across seven European countries: France, Germany, Italy, Poland, United Kingdom, Spain, Sweden. Each national sample included approximately 1,500 respondents, who were selected using a quota sample design so as to be representative of each country's population in terms of gender, age (18–34, 35–54, 55+), education (lower secondary or less, upper secondary, tertiary), and macro-area of residence (NUTS-1). Given the scope of this article, the empirical analyses presented below are based on the Italian sample.

The dependent variable in the statistical models comes from a survey question that focused on preferences for eight different types of climate change policy. The wording of the question is as follows:

> How much are you in favour or against each of the following policy proposals to fight climate change?

1. A tax on flying (increasing ticket prices)

2. Subsidies for renewable energy
3. A national tax on fossil fuels, such as oil, gas and coal (increasing gasoline prices)
4. A vehicle efficiency regulation that requires vehicles to be significantly more fuel efficient by the year 2035
5. Banning the sale of cheap but energy-inefficient household appliances
6. A contribution to a global climate fund to finance clean energy in low-income countries
7. Subsidies to increase the energy efficiency of private dwellings
8. Investing in nuclear power plants

Responses are given on a scale ranging from 0 ('strongly against') to 10 ('strongly in favour'). The number of missing answers in the Italian sample varies from 63 (subsidies for renewable energy) to 166 (nuclear power) out of a total of 1,524 respondents.

The analyses include three sets of independent variables corresponding to the socio-political divides outlined in the previous section. Political orientations ('what people think') are gauged through three variables. The first assesses respondents' ideological stance on a left-right scale from 0 to 10, categorised into six groups: left (0-1), centre-left (2-4), centre (5), centre-right (6-8) and right (9-10), with a residual category for those not placing themselves on the scale. Positions on the economic dimension are operationalized by averaging responses to two questions, both scaled 0-10: 'To what extent are you in favour or against State intervention in the economy?' and 'To what extent are you in favour or against wealth redistribution?', and creating categories of 'pro-market' (0-4.5), 'neutral' (5), and 'pro-State' (5.5-10), with missing values grouped separately. Similarly, cultural orientations are approximated using attitudes towards same-sex marriage (To what extent are you in favour or against same-sex marriage?) and immigration (To what extent are you in favour or against restrictive policies on immigration?). In the latter case we reverse the scale so as to have those fully in favour of a restrictive policy on immigration at '0' and those fully against at '10'. We then create categories of 'conservative-nationalist' (0-4.5), 'neutral' (5), and 'liberal-cosmopolitan' (5.5-10), with missing values again grouped separately.

Second, we measure 'what people have' (economic conditions) through a question on subjective perception of the economic situation. The responses are those commonly used in cross-national surveys such as the European Social Survey. Based on these, we construct a categorical variable distinguishing between those who 'find it (very) difficult on present income', those 'coping on present income' and those 'living comfortably on present income'; we group 'prefer not to say' and 'don't know' answers in a separate residual category. The survey does not include any objective measure of respondents' income.

Third, the last set of independent variables relating to 'where people live' includes proxies for geographical factors possibly influencing preferences towards climate policies. The first variable distinguishes between respondents who declared they lived in a 'large town', in a 'small or mid-size town' or in a 'rural area or village'. We also use two binary variables that directly gauge people's perceived exposure to risks associated with climate change: the first takes value 1 for respondents who reported that their neighbourhood was 'very much' or 'extremely' affected by air pollution over the last 12

months; the second equals 1 for those living in areas they perceived as having been 'very much' or 'extremely' affected by extreme weather (floods, droughts, wildfires, etc.).

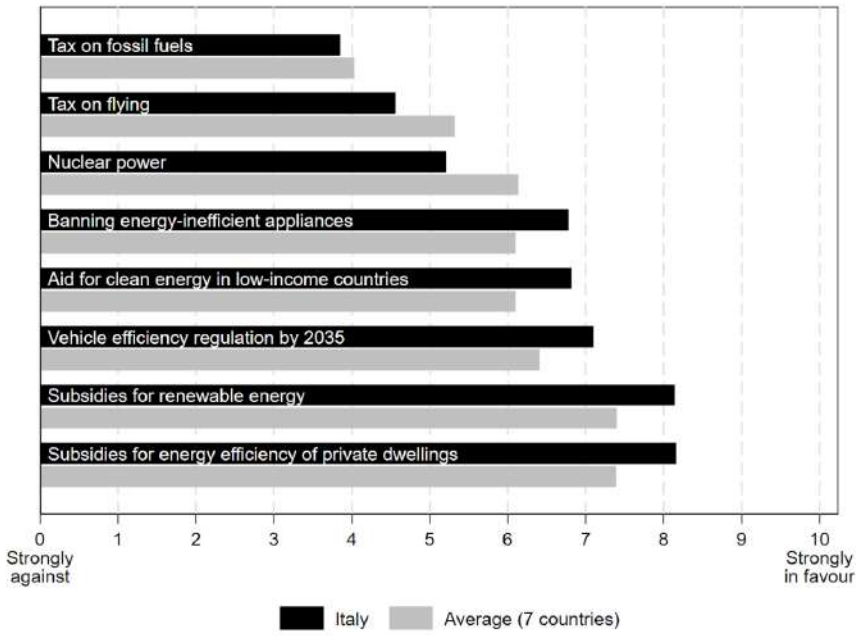
We analyse the impact of the above-mentioned determinants of climate policy preferences using eight linear regression models, one for each policy considered. These models sequentially include controls and the three sets of independent variables, both separately and together (results from stepwise regressions are reported in the Appendix). In the following section, we present results from full models encompassing all independent variables. Due to the high collinearity between political determinants ('what people think'), we conduct two separate regressions: one incorporating general ideological self-placement and another including economic and cultural political orientations. All models control for gender, age and education level, and a dummy that equals 1 for respondents who live in a household with at least one child, as having children translates into more support for climate policies (Muhammad et al., 2021). As well as socio-demographic characteristics, we also control for political factors that are known to have a positive influence on policy preferences: interest in politics (a dummy taking value 1 for those who declared they were 'very much' or 'quite' interested in politics), and trust in politicians (0-10 scale)[1]. Moreover, we run sensitivity checks by including fixed effects for Italian macro-regions (North-West, North-East, Centre, South and islands) to account for unobserved heterogeneity linked to socio-economic disparities and administrative capacity across regions. Table A1 in the Appendix displays the summary statistics of all variables included in the analyses.

5. Empirical results

We begin by examining respondents' preferences for the eight different climate policies. Figure 1 illustrates average support in Italy (represented by black bars) compared to the mean across all seven countries surveyed (grey bars). Consistent with Hypothesis 1, policies imposing higher costs on citizens – such as tax policies – are generally the least favoured across the board, scoring less than 5 on the 0-10 scale in Italy. Conversely, pull/price-type policies – namely subsidies – are overwhelmingly the most popular instruments. Other policies fall somewhere in between. Notably, the disparity between support for taxes and subsidies is more pronounced in Italy compared to the average across the seven countries: Italians exhibit below-average support for tax policies (and investments in nuclear power plants), while displaying above-average support for all other policy proposals.

[1] We consider 'trust in politicians' as a control variable because we believe its influence on support for climate policies has already been extensively analysed (Fairbrother, 2016; Kitt et al., 2021). Additionally, while the literature strongly establishes that trust in policymakers increases the acceptance of their legislative work, this finding provides limited insight into how this trust is formed. Therefore, we prefer to focus on other variables that underlie the foundations of policy preferences, such as ideology or economic and geographic factors, which may also determine the level of trust in politicians (Algan et al., 2017; Foster and Frieden, 2017).

Figure 1. Support for climate policy proposals in Italy and on average across the seven countries included in the survey



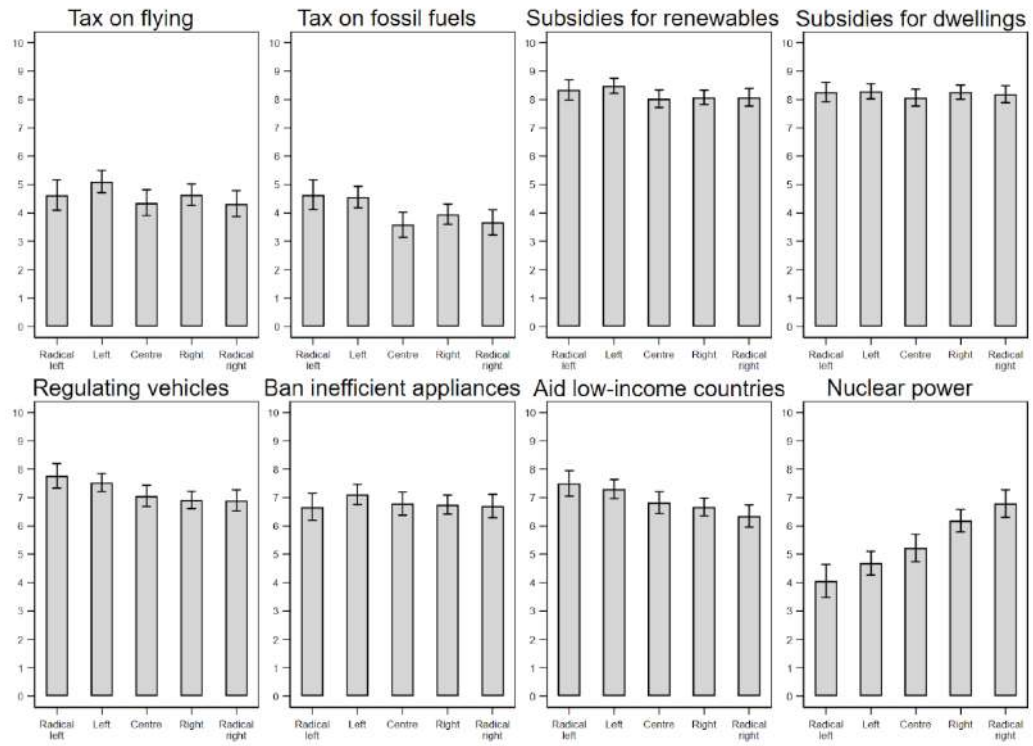
Source: own elaboration.

Next, we shift our focus to examining the factors influencing climate change policy preferences in Italy. The complete regression models can be found in Tables A2 and A3 in the Appendix. Tables A4-A11 present, for each of the eight dependent variables under consideration, the models in which we incrementally added sets of independent variables. To facilitate interpretation, we offer a graphical representation of the results by plotting the linear prediction of support for the eight policies across various categories of the main independent variables of interest (Figures 2-5, based on the full regression models).

Overall, all three sets of drivers outlined in the third section – political ideology, economic conditions, and geographic factors – matter in explaining Italians' support for climate policies. However, most relevant to the scope of this article, they matter to varying degrees depending on the specific type of policy under consideration. In other words, both the relative importance and the direction of the effects of these explanatory factors fluctuate based on the characteristics of different climate change policies.

To begin with, ideology seems to be relevant only for more contentious policy proposals, as depicted in Figure 2 and detailed in Table A2. Instead of finding a positive association between leftist ideological self-placement and support for climate policies across all types of policy instruments (as postulated in H2a), we observe that left-leaning individuals show greater support than centrist and right-leaning respondents for some specific policies. Notably, the effect of ideology is evident regarding push/price-type policies (especially fossil fuels tax), aids to finance clean energy in low-income countries, and vehicle efficiency regulation.

Figure 2. Predicted support for eight different climate policy proposals (0-10 scale) depending on respondents' self-placement on the left-right ideological scale (95% confidence intervals)

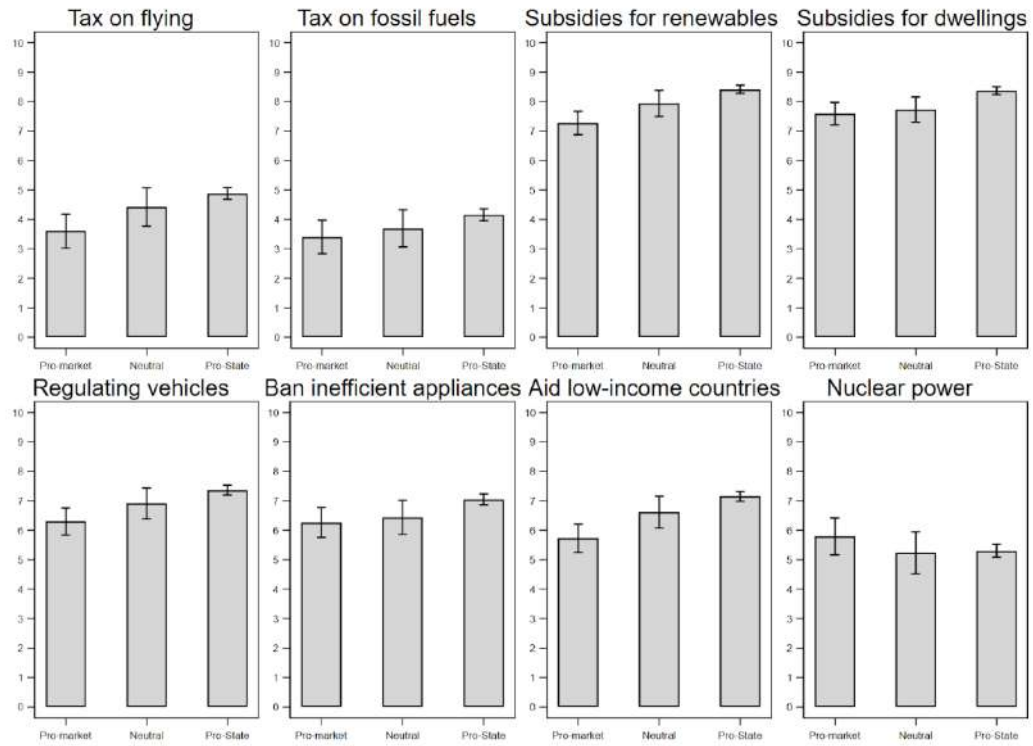


Source: own elaboration. Note: Linear predictions based on regression models shown in Table A2 (Appendix).

As anticipated in section 3, the latter association is plausibly contingent upon the domestic politicisation of the European Commission's recent proposal to ensure that all new cars and vans registered in Europe will be zero-emission by 2035. Italian centrist and centre-left parties, together with the *Movimento 5 Stelle*, endorsed the proposed regulation in the European Parliament. Conversely, right-wing parties (*Lega*, *Forza Italia* and *Fratelli d'Italia*) voted against it and opposed the proposal, as evidenced by statements made by Minister of Infrastructures Matteo Salvini (*Lega*), which refer to the regulation as 'yet another folly in the name of green fanaticism', and by Minister of Enterprises and Made in Italy Adolfo Urso, who, alongside Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni (*Fratelli d'Italia*), expressed concerns about potential harm to the automotive industry due to the regulation.

Ideology exhibits the strongest explanatory power concerning investments in nuclear plants, whose support increases considerably from left to right. Once again, this may be idiosyncratic to the Italian context. Nuclear power plants in Italy were effectively halted after a referendum held in 1987, shortly after the Chernobyl disaster (Ceri, 1988), and since then they have faced opposition from (radical) left parties and the Greens. In more recent times, however, right-wing parties and governments (including the current government led by Meloni) have committed to restarting nuclear energy production (Standish, 2009).

Figure 3. Predicted support for eight different climate policy proposals (0-10 scale) depending on respondents' economic political orientation (95% confidence intervals)

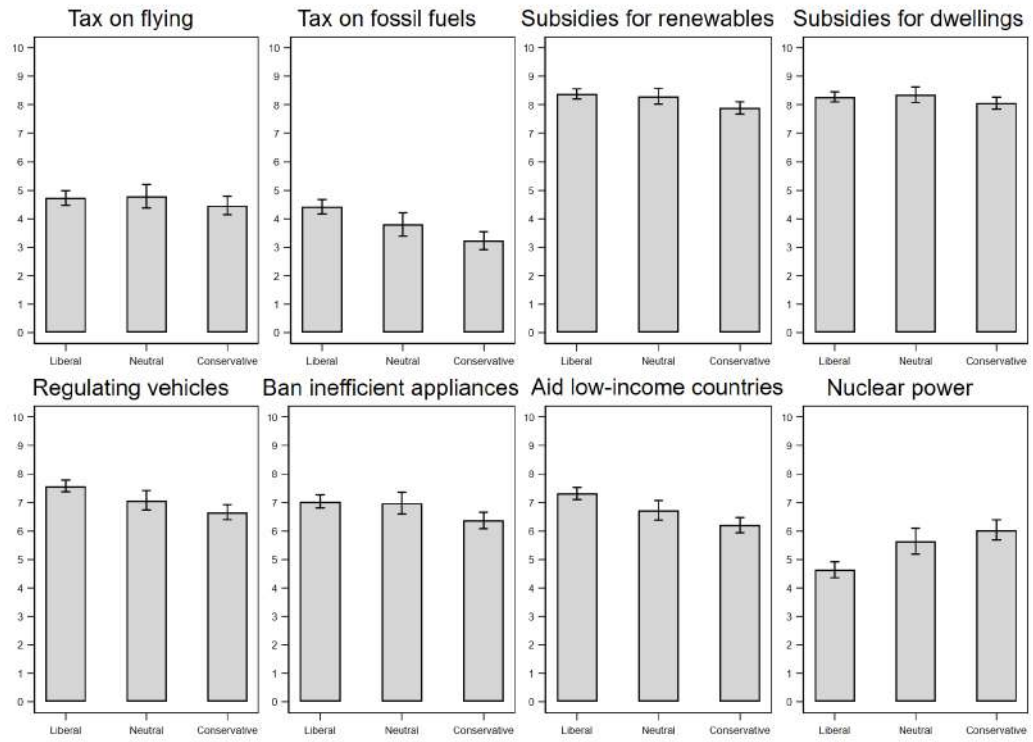


Source: own elaboration. Note: Linear predictions based on regression models shown in Table A3 (Appendix).

As shown in Figures 3 and 4 (also depicted in Table A3 in the Appendix), respondents' economic and cultural political orientations seem to matter more than the general left-right ideological position in explaining Italians' support for climate policies. Individuals with liberal inclinations on the cultural dimension (Figure 4) and, in particular, those who are in favour of State intervention in the economy (Figure 3) are generally more supportive of climate policies of all types (H2b, H2c). The clearest exception is, once again, nuclear power. It emerges as the only policy not polarised along the economic dimension; instead, it garners favour among culturally conservative individuals.

Respondents' economic situation (Figure 5) appears to be most relevant for price-type policies: individuals with lower incomes tend to be more averse to taxes and more supportive of subsidies compared to wealthier respondents. Those facing difficult or very difficult financial circumstances also exhibit significantly less support for nuclear power compared to their more affluent counterparts. The observed pattern for tax policies – where support increases alongside individuals' economic security – is actually the only one that aligns clearly with the expectations of H3. This social gradient is plausibly the result of different cost-benefit calculations among less affluent and more affluent individuals. The former are those who have more to lose, especially in the case of taxes on fossil fuels.

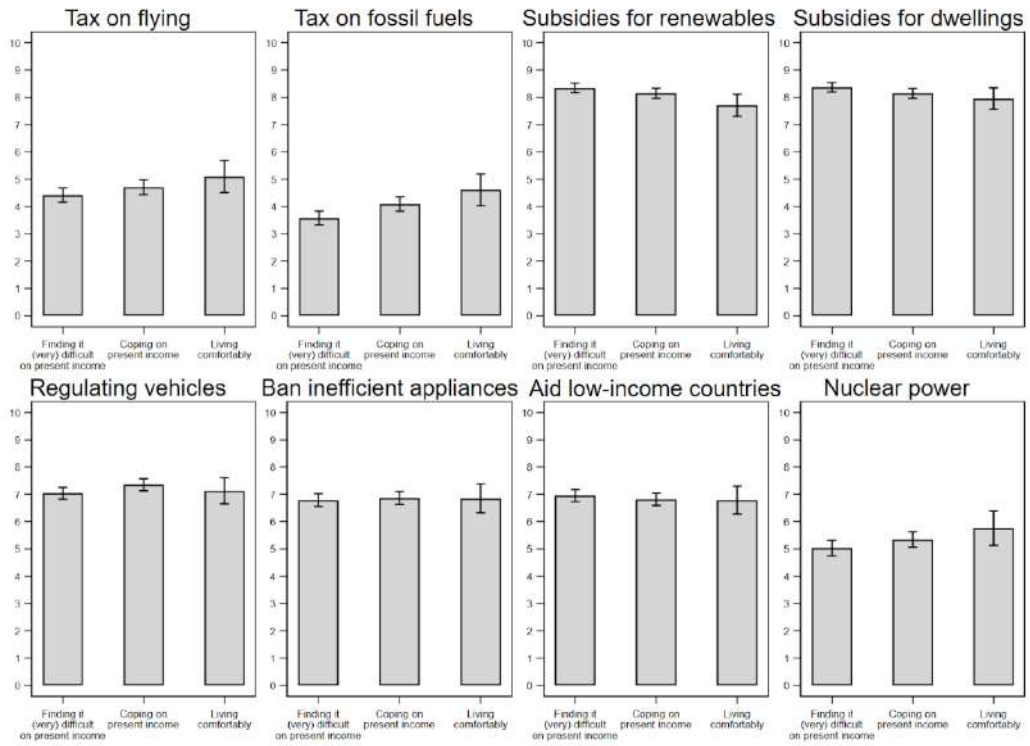
Figure 4. Predicted support for eight different climate policy proposals (0-10 scale) depending on respondents' cultural political orientation (95% confidence intervals)



Source: own elaboration. Note: Linear predictions based on regression models shown in Table A3 (Appendix).

The pattern observed for subsidies – higher support among financially disadvantaged respondents – may seem counter-intuitive, particularly regarding subsidies aimed at increasing the energy efficiency of private dwellings (although the coefficient is only marginally significant: Table A2). Such a policy has recently gained salience in the Italian public debate. During its time in government, the *Movimento 5 Stelle* introduced the so-called 'Superbonus 110', a highly generous tax incentive offering a 110 percent deduction for all expenses incurred by individuals making improvements to the energy efficiency of their private dwelling. Although generally well-received by the public, as is often the case with tax incentives of this nature, the measure turned out to be fiscally regressive. Therefore, one might have expected financially well-off respondents (e.g., homeowners who could potentially benefit the most from the Superbonus) to show higher support for this type of policy instrument. However, given the broad framing of the survey question and considering the potential benefits associated with 'subsidies', economically vulnerable respondents may have attributed greater value to these benefits, irrespective of the regressive distributional implications hidden in the technicalities of policy design.

Figure 5. Predicted support for eight different climate policy proposals (0-10 scale) depending on respondents' perceived economic situation (95% confidence intervals)



Source: own elaboration. Note: Linear predictions based on regression models shown in Table A2 (Appendix).

Finally, we examine the results concerning geographical factors – the 'where people live' question. We refer to the regression coefficients presented in Tables A2 and A3. Contrary to the expectation put forth in H4a, individuals residing in urban areas do not exhibit significantly higher support for climate policies compared to those living in rural areas. On the contrary, residents of rural areas or small-to-mid-sized towns show greater support for pull/price-type instruments (subsidies) than those living in large towns. This could be partly attributed to the fact that individuals in less urbanised areas may have benefited (or anticipate future benefits) from tax incentives like the Superbonus or from the installation of solar panels, which are more feasible in rural homes than in urban apartment buildings.

Findings regarding exposure to air pollution and, to a lesser extent, extreme weather events are much clearer, largely corroborating H4b. Residing in a neighbourhood heavily affected by air pollution consistently boosts support for all types of policies, except for investments in nuclear power, as shown in Figure 6. The same holds true for residents of areas affected by extreme weather events, particularly in the case of taxes on fuels, aids to finance clean energy in low-income countries, and taxes on flying (albeit only marginally significant).

The significant impact of perceived air pollution exposure on policy support deserves further elaboration. This variable is not merely a proxy for urban living, as the regression models incorporate an urban/rural variable. Furthermore, we control for ideology and political orientations, thus ruling out the notion that subjective perceptions of

air pollution depend solely on individuals' political stances. This constitutes a novel finding that contradicts the conclusions of Mayer et al. (2017), who did not find risk exposure to be significant. This discrepancy might be partly attributed to their inclusion of only one type of policy as a dependent variable, whereas our study encompasses eight different environmental measures.

Additionally, it is also noteworthy that the only regression model in which air pollution's coefficient is not statistically significant pertains to support for nuclear energy. This could be attributed to the controversial nature of nuclear energy in Italy (Ceri, 1988; Standish, 2009) and its lack of direct association with emissions reduction. Upon examining the eight regression models, it can be observed that the two measures where air pollution exhibits the least effect (manifested through smaller coefficients), after nuclear energy, are the two types of subsidies. What these three measures have in common is their nature as non-coercive instruments (they are pull and not push or punishing), which may lead to their being perceived as less effective in maintaining good air quality.

Lastly, among the control variables, 'trust in politicians' exhibits the most significant positive impact on support for the majority of policies, aligning with the findings of Rhodes et al. (2017). Age also shows a relatively consistent positive effect on policy support (except in the case of nuclear power). Male respondents exhibit higher support than females for tax policies and investments in nuclear power, and lower support for subsidies. Having children increases support for green taxes, while interest in politics correlates positively with support for subsidies, prohibition of polluting household appliances, and contribution to a global fund to finance clean energy in low-income countries.

The main findings remain robust even with the addition of macro-area fixed effects (see Tables A12 and A13 in the Appendix).

6. Conclusions

This article has explored various determinants of support for climate policy in Italy, focusing on three sets of drivers: what people *think* (political ideology), what they *have* (economic situation), and where they *live* (urban or rural areas, and perceived exposure to climate-related risks in their neighbourhood). Italy serves as a notable case for comparing the impact of diverse determinants on preferences for green policies: climate change and environmental issues have not (yet) been heavily politicised, suggesting that factors beyond political orientations are likely to shape people's views on climate policy. Indeed, this is what our empirical analyses have brought to light.

Overall, all three sets of determinants contribute to explaining Italians' support for climate policies. Most importantly, they matter to varying degrees depending on the specific type of policy under consideration, and on its level of politicisation. Most notably, the issue of nuclear power has polarised public debate in Italy since the 1980s (Ceri, 1988), with leftist political actors opposing it while right-wing forces (including the incumbent government) advocating its reintroduction. This ideological alignment is clearly reflected in our findings. While ideology is not relevant or plays a modest role in shaping public support for most of the climate policies analysed here, it has a strong explanatory power in the case of investments in nuclear power plants, whose support increases considerably from left to right.

Our findings show that preferences regarding the role of the State in the economy matter more than general left-right self-placement. Favouring a free market economy emerges as the most influential factor in explaining opposition to the majority of climate policies examined, followed by conservative values on the cultural dimension. The debate on which of the two ideological dimensions – economic or cultural – is the most influential is open in the literature (Crawley, 2021). Our findings lean the balance towards the economic dimension, suggesting that citizens' positions on state intervention in the economy matter more than cultural dispositions in the formation of preferences towards environmental policies.

Albeit to a lesser extent than economic and cultural political orientations, perceived economic conditions also contribute to explaining support for climate policy in Italy. This is mostly the case for 'push/price-type' policies. Green taxes are the least popular measure among people with greater economic difficulties, which is consistent with previous literature (Rhodes, 2017; Chong et al., 2001). This, together with the fact that fossil fuel taxation is the climate policy with the least social acceptance, should serve as a clear warning to policymakers: they should consider implementing economic compensation or methods to mitigate social unfairness when designing these kinds of policy (the Yellow Vest movement in France, which started as a political backlash to a carbon tax, in perhaps the most telling in this respect). On the other hand, those who experience economic hardship are more supportive of subsidies for renewable energy. This may be interpreted as a silver lining, suggesting that, overall, the energy transition is seen as an opportunity rather than a risk to economic wellbeing, even among the most disadvantaged.

Regarding geographical factors (urban-rural divide and risk exposure), we find that living in rural areas has little or no effect compared to living in cities. This finding adds to the mixed evidence provided by the literature (Kitt et al., 2021). Living in rural areas exhibits a significant and positive effect only for renewable energy subsidies. This potentially represents a second silver lining. One of the challenges of the energy transition is the impact that large renewable projects may have on the landscape or agriculture. Some radical right-wing populist parties are beginning to exploit the grievances stemming from this impact (Buzogány and Mohamad-Klotzbach, 2021). However, this does not seem to apply to the Italian case: our results suggest that more ambitious deployment of renewable energy technologies could find a favourable socio-political context in the country.

Finally, we highlight the positive impact of climate change risk exposure on policy support, contrasting previous findings by Mayer et al (2017). Specifically, we found that exposure to air pollution significantly predicts support for climate policies, particularly those directly limiting emissions like fuel taxes, compared to measures related to efficiency or changes in energy sources. The stronger influence of perceived air pollution on policy support compared to extreme weather events, may be due to its constant and widespread impact on daily life, as opposed to less frequent extreme weather events like floods or wildfires. The daily experience of poor air quality may lead individuals to perceive it as a pressing concern, thereby influencing their support for climate policies. These may also be seen as more effective in mitigating air pollution than in avoiding extreme weather events, increasing support for climate policies. Additionally, people may

not attribute extreme weather events to climate change unless depicted as such by traditional media (Berglez and Al-Saqaf, 2021). In any case, further research is needed to confirm these extremes.

This study has some limitations that should be addressed in future research. Firstly, some of our findings, particularly those that appear to challenge prior studies, could in fact be unique to the Italian context and may require further investigation through cross-national research or in countries other than Italy. Secondly, since the survey does not include any objective measure of income, we relied solely on subjective measures of respondents' economic conditions. Further research should incorporate objective income measures, as well as exploring alternative proxies for material self-interest. The same is true for risk perception. Directly asking respondents about perceived air pollution or extreme weather events may not be the best way to measure the objective impact of these factors. The perception of risks and their salience may be conditioned by individual values, worldviews and political orientations. Using objective data on exposure to climate change risks in future research could help to validate the reliability of our results. Last, we did not directly test for party-cueing mechanisms. The survey we used only includes a question about vote intention, which we omitted because it is a rather poor measure of enduring party identification or attachment. Therefore, further work could complement our findings on the (lack of) politicisation of climate policy preferences in Italy by incorporating in the analysis more fine-grained measures of partisanship, either alongside or as an alternative to ideology.

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7. Appendix

Table A1. Summary statistics

	Mean	Min.	Max.	N.
Dependent variables				
Tax on flying	4.63	0	10	1364
Tax on fuels	3.9	0	10	1364
Subsidies for renewables	8.16	0	10	1401
Subsidies for dwellings	8.19	0	10	1400
Ban polluting vehicles	7.14	0	10	1354
Ban polluting appliances	6.81	0	10	1385
Aid low-income countries	6.86	0	10	1361
Nuclear power	5.23	0	10	1307
Independent variables				
Income: Finding it (very) difficult on present income	.452	0	1	637
Income: Coping on present income	.408	0	1	575
Income: Living comfortably on present income	.0859	0	1	121
Income: N.A./D.K.	.0539	0	1	76
Ideology: Radical left	.111	0	1	156
Ideology: Left	.195	0	1	275
Ideology: Centre	.14	0	1	197
Ideology: Right	.211	0	1	298
Ideology: Radical right	.14	0	1	197
Ideology: NA/DK	.203	0	1	286
Economic political orientations: Pro-market	.0859	0	1	121
Economic political orientations: Neutral	.0667	0	1	94
Economic political orientations: Pro-State	.68	0	1	958
Economic political orientations: DK	.167	0	1	236
Cultural political orientations: Conservative	.293	0	1	413
Cultural political orientations: Neutral	.169	0	1	238
Cultural political orientations: Liberal	.452	0	1	637
Cultural political orientations: DK	.0859	0	1	121
Area of residence: Rural area or villa	.276	0	1	387
Area of residence: Small or middle size town	.492	0	1	689
Area of residence: Large town	.232	0	1	325
Air pollution	.407	0	1	1409
Extreme weather	.369	0	1	1409
Male	.495	0	1	1409
Age	49.4	18	75	1409
Education: Lower education	.37	0	1	522
Education: Medium education	.443	0	1	624
Education: Higher education	.187	0	1	263
Children in the household	.293	0	1	1409
Interested in politics	.598	0	1	1409
Trust in politicians	2.48	0	10	1409
Independent variables (sensitivity check)				
Macro-area: North-West	.264	0	1	372
Macro-area: North-East	.195	0	1	275
Macro-area: Centre	.2	0	1	282
Macro-area: South & Islands	.341	0	1	480

Source: own elaboration.

Table A2. Results from linear regressions of determinants of individual preferences for eight climate change policies (including *self-placement on left-right ideological scale*).

Dependent variable:	Tax on flying	Tax on fuels	Subsidies for renewables	Subsidies for dwellings	Regulating vehicle efficiency	Ban polluting appliances	Aid low-income countries	Nuclear power
Perceived economic situation (Ref.: Living comfortably)								
Finding it (very) difficult	-0.677*	-1.032**	0.635**	0.413†	-0.087	-0.0634	0.166	-0.727*
Coping on present in-	-0.389	-0.515	0.437†	0.189	0.224	0.0174	0.027	-0.414
N.A./D.K.	-0.459	-0.683	0.144	-0.235	-0.721†	-0.294	-0.641	-0.577
Ideology self-placement (ref.: Centre)								
Radical left	0.270	1.049**	0.314	0.190	0.712*	-0.117	0.675*	-1.166**
Left	0.743*	0.970**	0.452*	0.220	0.477†	0.321	0.478†	-0.537
Right	0.284	0.365	0.0490	0.192	-0.136	-0.036	-0.151	0.962**
Radical right	-0.036	0.074	0.0474	0.119	-0.156	-0.082	-0.470†	1.567***
NA/DK	0.414	0.036	-0.090	0.008	-0.01	0.097	-0.104	-0.558†
Area of residence (ref.: Large town)								
Rural area or village	0.374	-0.075	0.463**	0.275†	0.281	0.395†	0.167	-0.060
Small or middle size	-0.0302	-0.168	0.422**	0.327*	0.283	0.227	0.326†	-0.337
Air pollution	0.579**	0.705***	0.366**	0.311*	0.593***	0.643***	0.595***	-0.257
Extreme weather	0.342†	0.584**	0.214	0.146	0.025	0.050	0.364*	-0.010
Male	0.512**	0.515**	-0.310*	-0.197†	-0.081	0.038	0.010	0.889***
Age	0.0298***	0.001	0.011**	0.0183***	0.011*	0.025***	0.003	-0.013*
Education (ref.: Lower education)								
Medium education	-0.322	-0.188	-0.017	-0.0978	-0.00653	0.063	-0.101	-0.121
Higher education	-0.299	0.202	-0.148	-0.119	0.104	0.137	0.122	0.008
Children	0.446*	0.498*	0.011	0.107	0.115	0.145	-0.041	-0.460*
Interested in politics	0.289	-0.070	0.424**	0.483***	0.239	0.432*	0.504**	0.280
Trust in politicians	0.223***	0.295***	-0.055*	-0.0636**	0.038	0.005	0.054†	0.195***
Constant	1.929***	2.706***	6.515***	6.492***	5.745***	4.626***	5.572***	5.652***
Observations	1364	1364	1401	1400	1354	1385	1361	1307
R^2	0.085	0.129	0.059	0.057	0.049	0.041	0.064	0.140

*† p < 0.10, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001*

Table A3. Results from linear regressions of determinants of individual preferences for eight climate change policies (including *economic* and *cultural political orientations*).

Dependent variable:	Tax on flying	Tax on fuels	Subsidies for renewables	Subsidies for dwellings	Regulating vehicle efficiency	Ban polluting appliances	Aid low-income countries	Nuclear power
Perceived economic situation (Ref.: Living comfortably on present income)								
Finding it (very) difficult	-0.859**	-1.220***	0.469*	0.274	-0.206	-0.214	-0.0270	-0.771*
Coping on present income	-0.534	-0.678*	0.297	0.080	0.107	-0.0929	-0.139	-0.369
N.A./D.K.	-0.469	-0.812+	0.0748	-0.281	-0.726+	-0.284	-0.669	-0.676
Economic political orientations (ref.: Pro-market)								
Neutral	0.817+	0.289	0.667*	0.140	0.614+	0.178	0.888*	-0.558
Pro-State	1.279***	0.752*	1.139***	0.779***	1.064***	0.784**	1.423***	-0.487
D.K.	0.849*	0.128	0.500*	0.483+	0.732*	0.054	0.569+	-0.690
Cultural political orientations								
Neutral	0.321	0.568*	0.405*	0.300+	0.418+	0.605*	0.513*	-0.395
Liberal	0.269	1.184***	0.490***	0.219	0.921***	0.665***	1.109***	-1.394***
D.K.	-0.292	0.806*	0.0371	-0.0924	0.0357	0.655*	0.819**	-0.978*
Area of residence (ref.: Large								
Rural area or village	0.354	-0.078	0.459**	0.268	0.255	0.406+	0.153	0.098
Small or middle size town	-0.031	-0.140	0.429**	0.332*	0.266	0.257	0.333+	-0.281
Air pollution	0.562**	0.673***	0.341**	0.282*	0.567***	0.590***	0.555***	-0.350
Extreme weather	0.326+	0.543**	0.175	0.127	0.004	0.026	0.325*	0.019
Male	0.487**	0.580***	-0.306*	-0.197+	-0.053	0.0623	0.022	0.902***
Age	0.029***	0.005	0.012**	0.018***	0.0148**	0.028***	0.007	-0.019**
Education (ref.: Lower educa-								
Medium education	-0.299	-0.219	-0.014	-0.099	-0.019	0.008	-0.131	-0.118
Higher education	-0.242	0.201	-0.136	-0.118	0.091	0.078	0.092	0.013
Children in the household	0.386+	0.483*	-0.037	0.081	0.080	0.121	-0.082	-0.368
Interested in politics	0.213	-0.0452	0.385**	0.462***	0.226	0.334+	0.482**	0.241
Trust in politicians	0.203***	0.292***	-0.065**	-0.067**	0.0286	-0.004	0.033	0.247***
Constant	1.276*	1.759**	5.600***	5.984***	4.455***	3.783***	3.923***	7.082***
Observations	1364	1364	1401	1400	1354	1385	1361	1307
R2	0.096	0.145	0.092	0.074	0.077	0.061	0.107	0.113

*† p < 0.10, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001*

Table A4. Linear regression models of *tax on flying*; independent variables added stepwise.

DV: Tax on flying	Controls	What people have	Where people live	What people think (1)	What people think (2)	What people think (3)	All
Male	0.449*	0.427*	0.527**	0.465**	0.452*	0.448*	0.482**
Age	0.0249***	0.0254***	0.0280***	0.0264***	0.0267***	0.0270***	0.0301***
Education (ref.: Lower)							
Medium education	-0.229	-0.274	-0.247	-0.259	-0.237	-0.234	-0.299
Higher education	-0.110	-0.201	-0.124	-0.210	-0.135	-0.178	-0.279
Children in the household	0.453*	0.435*	0.419*	0.502*	0.434*	0.462*	0.412*
Interested in politics	0.374*	0.355+	0.311	0.368+	0.278	0.301	0.237
Trust in politicians	0.226***	0.214***	0.228***	0.235***	0.218***	0.225***	0.209***
Perceived economic situa-							
Finding it (very) difficult		-0.707*					-0.821*
Coping on present in-		-0.427					-0.505
N.A./D.K.		-0.493					-0.480
Area of residence (ref.:							
Rural area or village			0.321				0.355
Small or middle size			-0.0474				-0.0468
Air pollution			0.602**				0.542**
Extreme weather			0.322+				0.326+
Ideological self-placement							
Radical left				0.352		0.245	0.171
Left				0.823**		0.727*	0.637*
Right				0.292		0.316	0.288
Radical right				0.00924		0.0372	-0.0350
NA/DK				0.492		0.609+	0.514
Economic political orienta-				0.465**			
Neutral				0.0264***	0.810+	0.844+	0.846+
Pro-State					1.223***	1.201***	1.257***
DK					0.833*	0.728+	0.756*
Cultural political orienta-							
Neutral					0.395	0.356	0.283
Liberal					0.351	0.217	0.148
DK					-0.305	-0.411	-0.382
Constant	2.333***	2.926***	1.770***	1.890***	1.109*	0.805	1.023
Observations	1371	1371	1364	1371	1371	1371	1364
Adj. R^2	0.055	0.056	0.067	0.059	0.068	0.071	0.084

*† p < 0.10, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001*

Table A5. Linear regression models of *tax on fossil fuels*; independent variables added stepwise.

DV: Tax on fossil fuels	Controls	What people have	Where people live	What people think (1)	What people think (2)	What people think (3)	All
Male	0.485**	0.433*	0.558**	0.504**	0.574**	0.564**	0.567**
Age	-0.00477	-0.00456	-0.00172	-0.00270	0.00276	0.00247	0.00561
Education (ref.: Lower)							
Medium education	0.0139	-0.0825	0.000548	-0.101	-0.130	-0.163	-0.248
Higher education	0.657**	0.478+	0.558*	0.423+	0.439+	0.351	0.126
Children in the household	0.486*	0.442*	0.449*	0.574**	0.561**	0.580**	0.501*
Interested in politics	0.259	0.215	0.109	0.0901	0.0977	0.0341	-0.101
Trust in politicians	0.303***	0.281***	0.311***	0.308***	0.308***	0.302***	0.286***
Perceived economic situation (ref.: Living comfortably)							
Finding it (very) difficult on present income		-1.124***					-1.134***
Coping on present income		-0.578+					-0.604+
N.A./D.K.		-1.023*					-0.693
Area of residence (ref.: Large town)							
Rural area or village			-0.180				-0.0858
Small or middle size town			-0.224				-0.142
Air pollution			0.732***				0.666***
Extreme weather			0.539**				0.555**
Ideological self-placement (ref.: Centre)							
Radical left				1.190***		0.843*	0.730*
Left				1.044***		0.778*	0.712*
Right				0.364		0.553+	0.534+
Radical right				0.0956		0.417	0.374
NA/DK				0.0613		0.179	0.128
Economic political orientation (ref.: Pro-market)							
Neutral					0.388	0.493	0.387
Pro-State					0.768*	0.763*	0.741*
DK					0.107	0.178	0.194
Cultural political orientation (ref.: Conservative)							
Neutral					0.565*	0.595*	0.597*
Liberal					1.285***	1.162***	1.085***
DK					0.754*	0.800*	0.854*
Constant	2.678***	3.661***	2.279***	2.289***	1.123*	0.797	1.387*
Observations	1372	1372	1364	1372	1372	1372	1364
Adj. R^2	0.073	0.081	0.097	0.086	0.104	0.107	0.135

*† p < 0.10, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001*

Table A6. Linear regression models of *subsidies for renewable energy*, independent variables added stepwise.

DV: Subsidies for renewables	Controls	What people have	Where people live	What people think (1)	What people think (2)	What people think (3)	All
Male	-0.354**	-0.333**	-0.322**	-0.355**	-0.351**	-0.356**	-0.316**
Age	0.00946*	0.00827+	0.0113**	0.0105*	0.0113**	0.0115**	0.0127**
Education (ref.: Lower)							
Medium education	0.000600	0.0280	0.0143	-0.0472	-0.0464	-0.0552	-0.0272
Higher education	-0.196	-0.130	-0.0978	-0.292	-0.280	-0.308+	-0.170
Children in the household	-0.0382	-0.0392	-0.0247	-0.00352	-0.0561	-0.0465	-0.0256
Interested in politics	0.551***	0.548***	0.506***	0.481***	0.426**	0.408**	0.362**
Trust in politicians	-0.0689**	-0.0592*	-0.0639**	-0.0675**	-0.0767**	-0.0774**	-0.0671**
Perceived economic situation (ref.: Living comfortably)							
Finding it (very) difficult on present income		0.671**					0.505*
Coping on present income		0.476*					0.324
N.A./D.K.		0.166					0.128
Area of residence (ref.: Large town)							
Rural area or village			0.506**				0.454**
Small or middle size town			0.459**				0.425**
Air pollution			0.393**				0.335*
Extreme weather			0.212				0.182
Ideological self-placement (ref.: Centre)							
Radical left				0.342		0.171	0.168
Left				0.428*		0.270	0.297
Right				0.0406		0.0823	0.0974
Radical right				0.0695		0.145	0.136
NA/DK				-0.0220		0.0754	0.0228
Economic political orientation (ref.: Pro-market)							
Neutral					0.648*	0.664*	0.685*
Pro-State					1.238***	1.228***	1.127***
DK					0.558*	0.561*	0.515*
Cultural political orientation (ref.: Conservative)							
Neutral					0.412*	0.416*	0.410*
Liberal					0.497***	0.457**	0.446**
DK					0.130	0.130	0.0449
Constant	7.758***	7.253***	7.039***	7.639***	6.516***	6.428***	5.494***
Observations	1409	1409	1401	1409	1409	1409	1401
Adj. R^2	0.024	0.030	0.038	0.027	0.066	0.064	0.078

*† p < 0.10, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001*

Table A7. Linear regression models of subsidies for *energy efficiency of private dwellings*; independent variables added stepwise.

DV: Subsidies for private dwellings	Controls	What people have	Where people live	What people think (1)	What people think (2)	What people think (3)	All
Male	-0.234*	-0.209+	-0.211+	-0.240*	-0.239*	-0.241*	-0.201+
Age	0.0176***	0.0165***	0.0193***	0.0178***	0.0181***	0.0180***	0.0189***
Education (ref.: Lower)							
Medium education	-0.105	-0.0844	-0.0940	-0.124	-0.126	-0.127	-0.102
Higher education	-0.193	-0.141	-0.120	-0.231	-0.228	-0.232	-0.124
Children in the household	0.0926	0.0852	0.111	0.0994	0.0703	0.0658	0.0753
Interested in politics	0.561***	0.552***	0.522***	0.530***	0.500***	0.497***	0.460***
Trust in politicians	-0.0663**	-0.0583*	-0.0656**	-0.0692**	-0.0718**	-0.0747**	-0.0705**
Perceived economic situation (ref.: Living comfortably)							
Finding it (very) difficult on present income		0.479*					0.286
Coping on present income		0.256					0.0881
N.A./D.K.		-0.132					-0.265
Area of residence (ref.: Large town)							
Rural area or village			0.319+				0.261
Small or middle size town			0.358*				0.331*
Air pollution			0.327*				0.285*
Extreme weather			0.143				0.129
Ideological self-placement (ref.: Centre)							
Radical left				0.240		0.113	0.0873
Left				0.222		0.0930	0.0985
Right				0.180		0.163	0.185
Radical right				0.126		0.138	0.145
NA/DK				0.0296		0.0490	0.0356
Economic political orientation (ref.: Pro-market)							
Neutral					0.103	0.129	0.171
Pro-State					0.841***	0.841***	0.779***
DK					0.480+	0.500*	0.509*
Cultural political orientation (ref.: Conservative)							
Neutral					0.281	0.301+	0.323+
Liberal					0.236+	0.257	0.249
DK					-0.0243	0.000580	-0.0610
Constant	7.314***	7.014***	6.772***	7.219***	6.557***	6.460***	5.871***
Observations	1408	1408	1400	1408	1408	1408	1400
Adj. R^2	0.033	0.038	0.041	0.031	0.052	0.049	0.05

*† p < 0.10, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001*

Table A8. Linear regression models of *vehicle efficiency regulation*; independent variables added stepwise.

DV: Vehicle efficiency regulation	Controls	What people have	Where people live	What people think (1)	What people think (2)	What people think (3)	All
Male	-0.129	-0.157	-0.0821	-0.0962	-0.0619	-0.0531	-0.0446
Age	0.00901^{+}	0.00737	0.0109*	0.0105*	0.0140**	0.0137**	0.0144**
Education (ref.: Lower)							
Medium education	0.0973	0.0450	0.111	0.0279	0.0162	0.00669	-0.0286
Higher education	0.277	0.191	0.310	0.136	0.135	0.106	0.0685
Children in the household	0.108	0.0616	0.0841	0.179	0.139	0.160	0.101
Interested in politics	0.478**	0.416**	0.399*	0.368*	0.339*	0.302^{+}	0.191
Trust in politicians	0.0214	0.0131	0.0320	0.0362	0.0282	0.0340	0.0347
Perceived economic situation (ref.: Living comfortably)							
Finding it (very) difficult on present income		-0.128					-0.195
Coping on present income		0.182					0.127
N.A./D.K.		-0.828*					-0.699^{+}
Area of residence (ref.: Large town)							
Rural area or village			0.245				0.268
Small or middle size town			0.273				0.280
Air pollution			0.639***				0.553***
Extreme weather			0.0197				0.000454
Ideological self-placement (ref.: Centre)							
Radical left				0.716*		0.404	0.423
Left				0.503*		0.234	0.216
Right				-0.139		-0.0494	-0.0394
Radical right				-0.144		0.0343	0.0342
NA/DK				-0.0135		0.0616	0.0575
Economic political orientation (ref.: Pro-market)							
Neutral					0.629^{+}	0.628^{+}	0.612^{+}
Pro-State					1.159***	1.147***	1.051***
DK					0.789*	0.780*	0.722*
Cultural political orientation (ref.: Conservative)							
Neutral					0.418^{+}	0.397^{+}	0.401^{+}
Liberal					0.938***	0.818***	0.807***
DK					0.0478	0.00684	-0.00152
Constant	6.274***	6.507***	5.708***	6.125***	4.651***	4.647***	4.434***
Observations	1363	1363	1354	1363	1363	1363	1354
Adj. R^2	0.010	0.015	0.021	0.019	0.051	0.050	0.062

*† p < 0.10, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001*

Table A9. Linear regression models of *banning energy-inefficient household appliances*; independent variables added stepwise.

DV: Ban inefficient appliances	Controls	What people have	Where people live	What people think (1)	What people think (2)	What people think (3)	All
Male	0.00245	-0.00329	0.0517	0.00164	0.0337	0.0218	0.0507
Age	0.0227***	0.0222***	0.0251***	0.0238***	0.0260***	0.0266***	0.0287***
Education (ref.: Lower)							
Medium education	0.0905	0.0771	0.0985	0.0745	0.0180	0.0336	0.0234
Higher education	0.129	0.109	0.215	0.0766	0.0235	0.0331	0.0872
Children in the household	0.149	0.137	0.139	0.173	0.142	0.143	0.119
Interested in politics	0.511**	0.498**	0.448**	0.512**	0.401*	0.440*	0.372*
Trust in politicians	0.00203	0.000277	0.00591	0.00670	-0.00249	-0.00296	-0.00553
Perceived economic situation (ref.: Living comfortably)							
Finding it (very) difficult on present income		-0.0106					-0.211
Coping on present income		0.0640					-0.105
N.A./D.K.		-0.178					-0.311
Area of residence (ref.: Large town)							
Rural area or village			0.394+				0.396+
Small or middle size town			0.242				0.244
Air pollution			0.655***				0.596***
Extreme weather			0.0414				0.0211
Ideological self-placement (ref.: Centre)							
Radical left				-0.0628		-0.311	-0.338
Left				0.354		0.153	0.124
Right				-0.0409		0.0262	0.0290
Radical right				-0.0686		0.0870	0.0759
NA/DK				0.148		0.235	0.198
Economic political orientation (ref.: Pro-market)							
Neutral					0.177	0.162	0.163
Pro-State					0.832**	0.820**	0.771**
DK					0.0753	0.0128	0.000779
Cultural political orientation (ref.: Conservative)							
Neutral					0.613*	0.613*	0.609*
Liberal					0.703***	0.747***	0.716***
DK					0.753*	0.730*	0.641+
Constant	5.251***	5.291***	4.613***	5.123***	4.126***	4.011***	3.696***
Observations	1394	1394	1385	1394	1394	1394	1385
Adj. R^2	0.019	0.017	0.030	0.018	0.040	0.039	0.046

*† p < 0.10, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001*

Table A10. Linear regression models of *aid to finance clean energy in low-income countries*; independent variables added stepwise.

DV: Aid to low-income countries	Controls	What people have	Where people live	What people think (1)	What people think (2)	What people think (3)	All
Male	-0.112	-0.0854	-0.0520	-0.0607	-0.0499	-0.0349	0.0304
Age	-0.000710	-0.00203	0.00239	0.00124	0.00490	0.00445	0.00651
Education (ref.: Lower)							
Medium education	-0.0115	-0.0185	-0.00261	-0.106	-0.136	-0.153	-0.150
Higher education	0.314	0.316	0.278	0.136	0.119	0.0785	0.0543
Children in the household	-0.0911	-0.118	-0.102	-0.00631	-0.0537	-0.0283	-0.0598
Interested in politics	0.725***	0.691***	0.646***	0.602***	0.555***	0.523**	0.454**
Trust in politicians	0.0288	0.0307	0.0361	0.0488	0.0278	0.0366	0.0403
Perceived economic situation (ref.: Living comfortably)							
Finding it (very) difficult on present income		0.123					-0.00832
Coping on present income		-0.0250					-0.112
N.A./D.K.		-0.770+					-0.655
Area of residence (ref.: Large town)							
Rural area or village			0.143				0.173
Small or middle size town			0.337+				0.339+
Air pollution			0.650***				0.539***
Extreme weather			0.357*				0.330*
Ideological self-placement (ref.: Centre)							
Radical left				0.783*		0.436	0.359
Left				0.499+		0.217	0.198
Right				-0.173		-0.0327	-0.00777
Radical right				-0.457		-0.223	-0.229
NA/DK				-0.0621		0.0703	0.0246
Economic political orientation (ref.: Pro-market)							
Neutral					0.874*	0.885*	0.900*
Pro-State					1.513***	1.514***	1.425***
DK					0.606+	0.591+	0.564+
Cultural political orientation (ref.: Conservative)							
Neutral					0.525*	0.474*	0.468*
Liberal					1.152***	0.974***	0.953***
DK					0.803**	0.725*	0.760*
Constant	6.376***	6.449***	5.628***	6.259***	4.382***	4.433***	3.960***
Observations	1370	1370	1361	1370	1370	1370	1361
Adj. R^2	0.016	0.019	0.037	0.030	0.079	0.079	0.093

*† p < 0.10, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001*

Table A11. Linear regression models of *investing in nuclear power plants*; independent variables added stepwise.

DV: Nuclear power	Controls	What people have	Where people live	What people think (1)	What people think (2)	What people think (3)	All
Male	1.084***	1.051***	1.086***	0.899***	0.931***	0.859***	0.844***
Age	-0.00879	-0.00881	-0.0106	-0.0128+	-0.0168*	-0.0154*	-
Education (ref.: Lower)							
Medium education	-0.162	-0.222	-0.168	-0.0748	-0.0623	-0.0455	-
Higher education	-0.0692	-0.187	-0.0576	0.112	0.101	0.156	0.0617
Children in the household	-0.244	-0.279	-0.243	-0.435*	-0.335	-0.450*	-0.479*
Interested in politics	0.194	0.156	0.239	0.260	0.220	0.263	0.286
Trust in politicians	0.292***	0.278***	0.288***	0.211***	0.266***	0.211***	0.195***
Perceived economic situation (ref.: Living comfortably)							
Finding it (very) difficult on present income		-0.712*					-0.720*
Coping on present income		-0.330					-0.389
N.A./D.K.		-0.709					-0.570
Area of residence (ref.: Large town)							
Rural area or village			0.0223				-
Small or middle size town			-0.304				-0.331
Air pollution			-0.423+				-0.245
Extreme weather			-0.0328				0.0101
Ideological self-placement (ref.: Centre)							
Radical left				-1.146**		-0.899*	-0.918*
Left				-0.498		-0.321	-0.355
Right				0.979**		0.885**	0.853**
Radical right				1.583***		1.420***	1.377***
NA/DK				-0.625+		-0.588+	-0.554
Economic political orientation (ref.: Pro-market)							
Neutral					-0.557	-0.403	-0.401
Pro-State					-0.581+	-0.534	-0.437
DK					-0.788+	-0.448	-0.356
Cultural political orientation (ref.: Conservative)							
Neutral					-0.407	-0.0765	-
Liberal					-1.354***	-0.627*	-0.677**
DK					-1.110**	-0.551	-0.466
Constant	4.393***	5.018***	4.790***	4.728***	6.194***	5.640***	6.502***
Observations	1316	1316	1307	1316	1316	1316	1307
Adj. R^2	0.069	0.071	0.072	0.124	0.094	0.127	0.130

*† p < 0.10, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001*

Table A12. Results from linear regressions of determinants of individual preferences for eight climate change policies. Sensitivity check adding *fixed effects for Italian macro-areas*.

Dependent variable:	Tax on flying	Tax on fuels	Subsidies for renewables	Subsidies for dwellings	Regulating vehicle efficiency	Ban polluting appliances	Aid low-income countries	Nuclear power
Perceived economic situation (ref.: living comfortably)								
Finding it (very) difficult on pre-	-0.643^{+}	-1.071**	0.655**	0.430^{+}	-0.111	-0.0944	0.108	-0.699^{+}
Coping on present income	-0.376	-0.506	0.445*	0.191	0.224	0.00884	0.0179	-0.415
N.A./D.K.	-0.433	-0.718	0.161	-0.220	-0.739^{+}	-0.316	-0.694	-0.543
Ideological self-placement (ref.: Centre)								
Radical left	0.270	1.028**	0.315	0.193	0.707*	-0.123	0.661*	-1.164**
Left	0.739*	0.975**	0.449*	0.216	0.482^{+}	0.323	0.488^{+}	-0.548^{+}
Right	0.282	0.348	0.0460	0.192	-0.137	-0.0341	-0.155	0.961**
Radical right	-0.0328	0.0748	0.0442	0.113	-0.151	-0.0831	-0.463^{+}	1.553***
NA/DK	0.429	0.00963	-0.0828	0.0167	-0.0333	0.0870	-0.123	-0.552
Area of residence (ref.: Large town)								
Rural area or village	0.337	-0.0834	0.446**	0.279^{+}	0.284	0.430^{+}	0.183	-0.0466
Small or middle size town	-0.0568	-0.205	0.413**	0.338*	0.271	0.248	0.311	-0.302
Air pollution	0.555**	0.745***	0.345*	0.288*	0.617***	0.665***	0.645***	-0.300
Extreme weather	0.360^{+}	0.544**	0.227^{+}	0.162	0.00398	0.0324	0.320^{+}	0.0209
Male	0.523**	0.515**	-0.304*	-0.197^{+}	-0.0842	0.0257	0.00527	0.880***
Age	0.0298***	0.00170	0.0112**	0.0180***	0.0112*	0.0256***	0.00378	-0.0141*
Education (ref.: Lower)								
Medium education	-0.326	-0.182	-0.0136	-0.0932	-0.00235	0.0688	-0.0900	-0.101
Higher education	-0.287	0.198	-0.136	-0.109	0.0986	0.127	0.110	0.0333
Children in the household	0.462*	0.478*	0.0186	0.114	0.103	0.132	-0.0655	-0.451*
Interested in politics	0.297	-0.0885	0.429**	0.491***	0.232	0.428*	0.491**	0.295
Trust in politicians	0.224***	0.295***	-0.0556*	-0.0638**	0.0385	0.00463	0.0544^{+}	0.194***
Macro-area (ref.: North-West)								
North-East	0.209	-0.129	-0.00672	-0.0826	-0.0317	-0.204	-0.0958	-0.243
Centre	-0.132	-0.165	-0.154	-0.0687	0.0211	0.112	0.0792	-0.126
South & Islands	-0.111	0.391^{+}	-0.103	-0.171	0.201	0.112	0.415*	-0.340
Constant	1.936***	2.649***	6.576***	6.575***	5.687***	4.622***	5.452***	5.830***
Observations	1364	1364	1401	1400	1354	1385	1361	1307
R^2	0.086	0.134	0.060	0.058	0.050	0.042	0.069	0.141

*† p < 0.10, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001*

Table A13. Results from linear regressions of determinants of individual preferences for eight climate change policies. Sensitivity check adding *fixed effects for Italian macro-areas*.

Dependent variable:	Tax on flying	Tax on fuels	Subsidies for renewables	Subsidies for dwellings	Regulating vehicle efficiency	Ban polluting appliances	Aid low-income countries	Nuclear power
Perceived economic situation (ref.: living comfortably)								
Finding it (very) difficult on pre-	-0.826*	-1.254***	0.489*	0.293	-0.229	-0.242	-0.0843	-0.736*
Coping on present income	-0.523	-0.664*	0.304	0.0828	0.109	-0.0994	-0.146	-0.369
N.A./D.K.	-0.443	-0.850+	0.0924	-0.263	-0.748+	-0.305	-0.725+	-0.633
Economic political orientations (ref.: Pro-market)								
Neutral	0.808+	0.288	0.661*	0.141	0.625+	0.190	0.903*	-0.568
Pro-State	1.291***	0.727*	1.143***	0.785***	1.059***	0.777**	1.410***	-0.483
DK	0.860*	0.121	0.506*	0.489+	0.730*	0.0467	0.552+	-0.677
Cultural political orientations (ref.:								
Neutral	0.331	0.578*	0.407*	0.295+	0.421+	0.598*	0.516*	-0.412
Liberal	0.268	1.201***	0.489***	0.216	0.927***	0.665***	1.122***	-1.400***
DK	-0.271	0.800*	0.0490	-0.0858	0.0288	0.642*	0.819**	-0.975*
Area of residence (ref.: Large town)								
Rural area or village	0.315	-0.0898	0.441**	0.269	0.256	0.438+	0.167	0.111
Small or middle size town	-0.0606	-0.179	0.419**	0.341*	0.253	0.276	0.316+	-0.243
Air pollution	0.538**	0.711***	0.320*	0.258*	0.594***	0.614***	0.605***	-0.403+
Extreme weather	0.344+	0.503**	0.189	0.145	-0.0197	0.00756	0.280+	0.0585
Male	0.499**	0.587***	-0.300*	-0.198+	-0.0529	0.0516	0.0215	0.890***
Age	0.0300***	0.00664	0.0123**	0.0185***	0.0151**	0.0281***	0.00769	-0.0193**
Education (ref.: Lower education)								
Medium education	-0.307	-0.212	-0.0128	-0.0966	-0.0162	0.0125	-0.120	-0.0943
Higher education	-0.234	0.202	-0.127	-0.110	0.0864	0.0685	0.0827	0.0409
Children in the household	0.400*	0.465*	-0.0299	0.0885	0.0690	0.110	-0.105	-0.355
Interested in politics	0.220	-0.0601	0.391**	0.470***	0.220	0.330+	0.469**	0.260
Trust in politicians	0.203***	0.295***	-0.0656**	-0.0672**	0.0295	-0.00457	0.0346	0.245***
Macro-area (ref.: North-West)								
North-East	0.242	-0.106	0.0172	-0.0633	-0.00137	-0.169	-0.0820	-0.283
Centre	-0.112	-0.184	-0.140	-0.0697	0.0342	0.113	0.0575	-0.169
South & Islands	-0.104	0.387+	-0.105	-0.177	0.220	0.119	0.427*	-0.400
Constant	1.267*	1.688**	5.653***	6.066***	4.376***	3.768***	3.792***	7.296***
Observations	1364	1364	1401	1400	1354	1385	1361	1307
R^2	0.097	0.150	0.093	0.075	0.079	0.062	0.113	0.115

*+ p < 0.10, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001*

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The Warming Ballot:
Demand and Supply in the Green Electoral Market

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Abstract

As global warming intensifies, ballot boxes become more heated, with various parties potentially targeting the green electoral market. In this article, we analyse how, in Italy, the political supply side aligns with the electorate's environmental demand. To this end, we introduce the Propensity for Green Voting (PGV) measure, representing an individual's likelihood of voting for a party with environmental protection at the core of its agenda. Using survey data, we detect the area of potential green voting in the Italian electoral market, exploring its overlaps with the potential electorate of the major political parties. Our analysis revolves around three hypotheses concerning the nature of green issue representation in Italian politics: monopolistic, fragmented, or absent. Our findings reveal no single-party monopoly over environmental issues in Italy. Instead, a spectrum of parties within the divided centre-left opposition shows varying degrees of success in appealing to pro-environmental voters, indicating a fragmented green demand as well as a potential unifying theme in the environment for the centre-left camp. Additionally, a segment of the green-oriented electorate remains politically unrepresented in the existing party system, potentially increasing non-voter ranks. A final investigation projects the impact on the current electoral space of a hypothetical new Green party.

1. Introduction

As global warming intensifies, environmental issues can be expected to increasingly influence electoral politics (Hoffmann et al., 2022). Ballot boxes become more 'heated', with various parties targeting the pro-environmental electorate. Themes related to environmental protection and sustainability represent a battleground for parties competing in the elections, even beyond traditional cleavages. Such competition can also be comparatively pronounced in the Italian electoral context, where green issues have historically struggled to gain salience in policy and media attention (Biancalana & Ladini, 2022; De Blasio & Sorice, 2013) and where we can note the absence of a Green party identified as such and competing as a ballot choice.

When asked about the primary concern for the government to address, Italians predominantly cite economic issues (Bentivegna et al., 2023). Conversely, Italian public opinion widely acknowledges the changing climate and its danger to humanity (Vlasceanu et al., 2024), its anthropogenic nature, and its visible effects being experienced today

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(Bertolotti & Catellani, 2023), while environmental concerns seem to be gaining more traction in public discourse. As the salience of green issues is expected to rise in the coming years, covering these themes becomes an opportunity or necessity for political parties. For these reasons and this conflicting landscape, Italy is a puzzling case study for investigating the relationship between the green electoral demand and its political representation.

Our study contributes to pro-environmental political behaviour, party competition, and voter orientations literature, especially but not limited to the Italian political landscape. Additionally, as the existing literature is predominately centred on green electoral behaviour focusing on Green parties nominally identified as such (Abou-Chadi & Kamphorst, 2023; Clegg & Galindo-Gutierrez, 2023; Gourley & Khamis, 2023; Hoffmann et al., 2022; Lichtin et al., 2023), we attempt to go beyond these boundaries, analysing the electoral space from the point of view of pro-environmental demand and supply in a context, i.e., the Italian one, without electorally significant Green parties. To this end, we provide a methodological contribution introducing the Propensity for Green Voting scale (PGV). This scale assesses individuals' likelihood of voting for parties prioritizing environmental protection and sustainability. While we acknowledge that PGV may not directly translate into actual voting behaviour, following the existing literature on the Propensities to Vote (Maggini & Vezzoni, 2022; van der Eijk et al., 2006), we propose it as a valuable tool for the analysis of the electoral space of party competition.

How does voters' demand for green policies reflect in the electoral space? We first hypothesize that a single party captures entirely the green electoral demand in the electorate, gaining a significantly higher propensity to vote in the pro-environmental electorate. In Italy, the party holding a monopoly over green issues could be identified as either the joint electoral list AVS (Alleanza Verdi e Sinistra – Green and Left Alliance) or the M5S (Movimento 5 Stelle – 5-Star Movement). Alternatively, instead of single-party representation, we hypothesize a fragmented representation of green demand. Given this outcome, we can expect that, in Italy, the heterogeneous centre-left opposition attracts the most significant portion of the green electorate. Finally, we also consider that, due to the current configuration of the electoral supply and the progressive lowering of electoral turnout, the green electorate may still seek representation, resulting in electoral abstention.

To test these hypotheses, we utilize the survey 'Italians and the State' (*Gli Italiani e lo Stato*), conducted in December 2023 by LaPolis – University of Urbino Carlo Bo. Through an empirical analysis using this original data, we aim to enhance the current understanding of what we term the *green electoral market* by investigating the match between demand and supply. In the following section (2), we focus on our hypotheses, framed by a discussion of the extant literature. We delineate the research design intended to test such hypotheses in section 3, and we discuss the results of the empirical analysis in section 4. Finally, in section 5, we present the conclusions of our study.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

An ongoing debate in political science and related disciplines regards the relationship between people's environmental concerns and political parties' representation. The latter could be receptive to growing environmental concerns if the threat of losing consensus

over environmental issues arises (Matsumoto & Laver, 2015). A premise to this is that environmentalism can be an independent dimension of political preferences (Kenny & Langsæther, 2022), not entirely subsumed under other established political cleavages. In addition, contrary to the perception of climate change as solely a valence issue, where political parties contend the green electorate through perceived competence, Farstad and Aasen (2023) argue that it also functions as a positional issue. This perspective challenges the notion of a competitive consensus, revealing potential disagreements between parties, especially during electoral campaigns, even amidst a general agreement on the supply side on climate goals (Farstad & Aasen, 2023) and policies (Ghinoi & Steiner, 2020). Moreover, environmental issues and climate change can be included among the science-related themes that fuel contemporary political polarisation (McCright & Dunlap, 2016).

In Italy, the political debate has historically overshadowed environmental issues (Biancalana & Ladini, 2022; De Blasio & Sorice, 2013). Despite the growing visibility of global warming's impact on daily life, which suggests a possible traction gained by environmentalism in the oncoming years, climate change was not a primary concern for voters in the 2022 general election. Economic issues took precedence, with only 6% of the electorate prioritizing climate change for the incoming government, compared to, for example, the 29% who focused on inflation (Bentivegna et al., 2023). However, when not being asked about specific issues, and directly questioned on a trade-off between environmental protection and economic growth, most Italians prioritize the former over the latter (Improta et al., 2022). Further, most Italians acknowledge the reality of climate change and recognize its present-day consequences (Vlasceanu et al., 2024; Bertolotti & Catellani, 2023). For this, we expect the area of Propensity for Green Voting to be larger than the potential electorate of other parties.

To explore the political representation of environmental concerns in voting behaviour, we consider three competitive hypotheses. While the latter are tailored to the Italian electoral context, they are articulated in a manner that allows for application to other multi-party parliamentary democracies.

Following the literature on parties' issue ownership and its stability over time (Seeberg, 2017), the question arises as to which party might be expected to play this role in the Italian electoral landscape. On examining the intersection of populism and greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), Jahn (2021) finds a significant correlation between escalating GHG levels and the ascent of populist parties in European governments. However, this pattern inverts for left-wing populist parties in Southern Europe, suggesting a regional alignment of left-wing populism with climate change mitigation efforts, in contrast to its counterparts in North-Western and Eastern Europe. While the analysis ends at 2018, applying this perspective to today's Italy suggests that the M5S can capture a substantial portion of the green electoral demand.

Since its emergence on Italy's political landscape, the M5S has kept environmental issues as one of its central tenets (Bordignon & Ceccarini, 2013; Mosca, 2014). Such a commitment is symbolically represented in its party logo, in which one of the five stars is dedicated to the environment. This focus was accompanied by a critical stance towards large industrial groups, leading to M5S's active participation in the 2011 referendums which opposed the privatization of water services and the revival of nuclear energy in

Italy. Reflecting these principles, in its early legislative period (2013-2014), the M5S, as an opposition party, proposed more environment-centric legislation than the rest of parliament (Bordignon & Ceccarini, 2015). This environmental alignment is corroborated by data from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Jolly et al., 2022) and the Manifesto Project (Lehmann et al., 2023), identifying M5S as a leading force in environmental sustainability. Notably, in the 2019 CHES dataset, the M5S scored highest among Italian parties for its commitment to environmental sustainability; similarly, in MARPOR, it achieved top scores for policies aimed at environmental protection, combating climate change, and other related green initiatives, significantly outperforming other parties (see Tables A1 and A2 in the Appendix).

Among the reasons for which the M5S might be able to occupy the political space on green issues, it must be noted that the Italian electoral context is lacking an electorally significant Green party termed as such. The party that directly referred to green issues in its name was the FdV party (Federazione dei Verdi – Greens' Federation), established as a national list in 1986, but which failed to achieve significant electoral success at the national level even when actively participating in national governments (e.g., Prodi I & II; D'Alema; Amato) (Biorcio, 2002). Additionally, other Italian parties have historically shown reluctance to address environmental issues. This was accompanied by a certain degree of consensus on climate change-related strategies between 2013 and 2018 (Ghinoi & Steiner, 2020). In a shift towards a more pronounced EU-oriented stance, FdV rebranded itself as Europa Verde (EV – Green Europe) in 2021. During the national elections in September 2023, EV joined forces with Sinistra Italiana (SI – Italian Left)[1], serving as a minority partner to form the Alleanza Verdi e Sinistra (AVS – Green and Left Alliance). The AVS list secured 3.6% of the vote[2], translating into fourteen out of six hundred parliamentary seats. Despite these modest results, it could be reasonable to assume that the green vote predominantly gravitates towards the party that most explicitly champions environmental issues. This assumption gains further traction in an analysis of the communication strategies of political leaders during the last national election campaign. As reported by ITANES (Bentivegna et al., 2023), the theme of 'climate change emergency' featured in 5.5% of Giuseppe Conte's Facebook posts, the second highest among main party leaders. Nicola Fratoianni, the leader of AVS, topped this list, with 10.4% of his posts dedicated to this issue.

Because of these reasons, our initial hypothesis focuses on a possible single-party representation in the green electoral market:

> H1: The green electoral demand is mostly captured by a single party, identified as holding the monopoly over green issues and policies.

[1] It is important to underline that Sinistra Italiana (SI), established in 2017, is the political successor to Sinistra Ecologia Libertà (SEL – Left Ecology Freedom). Along with the Federazione dei Verdi (FdV), SEL has been one of the few parties in Italy explicitly incorporating environmental issues into its name. Data from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) and the Manifesto Project (MARPOR) confirm that SEL's commitment to green issues extends beyond its name, indicating an alignment with environmental priorities (see: Tables A1 and A2 in the Appendix).

[2] In the Lower Chamber (Camera dei Deputati), excluding the Valle d'Aosta region and the vote abroad (source: Ministry of Interior).

Moving beyond such considerations of the monopolistic nature of environmental issues in the electoral space, we note how the effect of issue salience on party preferences has been found to be very limited; on the contrary, issue salience plays an indirect role through ideology (van der Brug, 2004). Therefore, we consider the possibility of fragmented issue ownership, grouped by common ideological stances. Scholarly research frequently integrates environmentalism into existing political dichotomies – such as the traditional left vs. right, materialist vs. post-materialist, and the more recent green, alternative, libertarian (GAL) vs. traditional, authoritarian, nationalist (TAN). In particular, the emergence of environmentalism, together with other new values, was the basis for developing new left parties (Damiani & Viviani, 2015; Poguntke, 1987; Kitschelt, 1988, 1994). Without necessarily subsuming environmentalism under these cleavages (Kenny & Langsæther, 2022), it is plausible to expect that leftist, liberal, and cosmopolitan parties might predominantly address the demand for green policies or that voters recognize those parties to be better equipped to address such a demand.

This tendency could stem from an ideological alignment, where the collective interest (e.g., environmental protection) is prioritized over individual or national interests, which are more often associated with the right of the political spectrum, typically characterized by a nationalist orientation. In this vein, Kulin et al. (2021) note that nationalist ideology significantly predicts climate change scepticism. Nationalism, broadly defined as the antithesis of cosmopolitanism – i.e., the perception of humanity as a single community – contrasts with a global perspective, the most common viewpoint through which climate change related issues are addressed. In terms of policies or voters' perception, right-wing parties may lean towards prioritizing national interests over global issues such as climate change, with right-leaning individuals often exhibiting more scepticism and less consistent beliefs about climate change compared to their left-leaning counterparts (Bertolotti & Catellani, 2023; Jenkins-Smith et al., 2020; Levi, 2021). With the gradual decline of class-based voting, left-leaning parties appear to have shifted their focus towards post-materialist issues (Abou-Chadi & Kayser, 2017; Fisher et al., 2022; Taniguchi & Marshall, 2018), among which environmentalism is often included. Extensive research highlights how a liberal orientation or left-wing partisanship positively influences green attitudes and behaviours, both electorally and non-electorally (Bornstein & Thalmann, 2008; Conroy & Emerson, 2014; Franklin & Rüdig, 1992; Franzen & Vogl, 2013; Kenny & Langsæther, 2022; Soni & Mistur, 2022; Taniguchi & Marshall, 2018).

Based on the presented theoretical background, in a scenario characterised by the absence of single-party green representation we hypothesize the following:

> H2: The green electoral demand finds fragmented representation, and is captured by the parties positioning on the centre-left of the political spectrum.

Adapting this hypothesis to the Italian political landscape, we observe that the opposition to Meloni's government (2022-), despite its high degree of heterogeneity and division, could be categorized within a centre-left domain. This classification is based on various factors: historical roots, together with the current political positioning, also at the European level, for parties like AVS and PD; the personal political trajectory of party leaders, for Az (Azione – Action) and IV (Italia Viva – Italy Alive), and a distinct emphasis on traditional left-wing themes such as redistribution, particularly evident in the 2018 and

2022 electoral campaigns of the M5S, which, however, started from an alleged post-ideological 'neither left nor right' position (Bordignon & Ceccarini, 2013).

The Italian scenario also presents a relatively high degree of polarisation on environmental concerns[3], where such concerns are significantly greater among individuals reporting a left-wing political orientation, compared to their right-wing counterparts (Bertolotti & Catellani, 2023). Coherently, the study by Bentivegna et al. (2023) on the prioritization of climate change by Italian voters, based on their electoral preferences, reveals a significant underestimation of this issue among the electorate of FdI. Only 1% of this electorate identifies climate change as the top issue for the incoming government to address. This percentage slightly increases to 2% among League voters. Moving away from the radical right of the political spectrum, 4% of Forza Italia (FI) and Azione-Italia Viva (Az-IV) voters prioritize climate change, with this figure rising to 6% for M5S and 9% for PD voters, illustrating a discernible divide between the electorates of the current parliamentary majority and the opposition.

In addition to the first two hypotheses, another possibility is that environmental concerns find no significant representation in the political supply. While some argue that non-voters are less concerned about climate change (Fisher et al., 2022; Torgler & García-Valiñas, 2007), in a context lacking a strong Green party that resonates with the electorate, it is plausible that many potential 'green votes' are lost to abstention. This might also intertwine with a lack of confidence in democratic institutions, as the latter might be considered unresponsive or ineffective in addressing environmental concerns, leading to individual pro-environmental inaction (Kulin & Johansson Sevä, 2021). These considerations could be particularly relevant in Italy, where the September 2022 national elections witnessed the highest share of non-voters in the history of the Italian Republic (approximately 36%). This group encompasses a significant portion of the electorate who perceive themselves to be unrepresented by the current political supply (Bordignon & Salvarani, 2023). As, in current scholarship, the dimension of environmentalism is often dropped or subsumed into a different or broader dimension of party competition, representation gaps related to environmental issues could be lost along those lines (Kenny & Langsæther, 2022). Thus, there is a need to test the relationship between electoral abstention and environmentalism as a separate dimension. These observations lead to our third hypothesis:

> H3: The green electoral demand finds no political representation, raising the probability of abstention.

In the following section, we outline our research design, structured to evaluate the relationship between green demand and its representation within the Italian political landscape, particularly focusing on the hypotheses regarding the monopolistic, fragmented, or absent political representation of green issues.

[3] According to the analysis by Bertolotti & Catellani (2023), the degree of polarisation of environmentalism is lower than that of issues such as immigration and same-sex marriage, while it is higher than that of issues such as sending military aid to Ukraine, women's representation in politics, and the State's intervention in the economy.

3. Data and method

To address the research questions and test the related hypotheses presented in the previous section, this article uses original survey data from the 'Italians and the State' project, conducted by LaPolis – University of Urbino Carlo Bo (XXVI Annual edition). A mixed-mode (CATI-CAMI-CAWI) survey was carried out in December 2023 (field: 4-7 December) on a sample of the Italian voting age population (over 18 years old) of 1,298 cases. The cases were selected to reproduce the quotas for the main socio-demographic variables: gender, age group, geographical area, and city size.

The primary measure we introduce to study the potential area of voting driven by environmental motivations is the Propensity for Green Voting (PGV). This measure is based upon the theoretical assumption and analytical strategy of the Propensity to Vote (PTV) for political parties, which political scientists use to study voter preferences (Van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996; Van der Eijk et al., 2006). PTVs have been employed by Maggini and Vezzoni (2022) to study the configuration of political space in Italy and its evolution during the pandemic phase.

PTVs are regularly measured in the European Election Study (EES) by asking respondents how likely they are to 'ever vote' for some parties in the future.[4] Going beyond the 'ipsative' nature of the traditional question on voting intentions, which implies a 'forced choice', PTVs have proven to be a powerful tool for studying the structure of electoral competition (Maggini & Vezzoni, 2023). PGV uses the same logic, assessing the respondents' willingness to vote for a party prioritising environmental protection and sustainability issues. The question wording is the following:

> Suppose there is a party in the future that places sustainability and environmental protection at the core of its agenda. How probable is it that you would vote for it?[5]

It is important to stress that, in the questionnaire, the PGV question immediately followed the PTV battery, suggesting the same response mechanism and the same semantic space to respondents.[6] Like PTV, PGV is measured on an 11-point scale ranging from 0 (not at all likely) to 10 (very likely). Moreover, PGV was designed to evoke two different scenarios in the respondent's mind: a potential *new* party prioritising environmental issues, and the attempt by an *existing* party to emphasise environmental issues in its platform.

It is important to acknowledge that this approach risks introducing social desirability bias, potentially overestimating the green vote.[7] However, employing the same

[4] The standard formulation of the question is: 'We have a number of parties in [country], each of which would like to get your vote. How probable is it that you will ever vote for the following parties? Please answer on a scale where 0 means not at all probable and 10 means very probable' (Schmitt et al., 2022).

[5] In the questionnaire, the original wording in Italian and full sentence recites as follows: 'Immagini che in futuro ci sia un partito che metta al centro del proprio programma i temi della sostenibilità e della difesa dell'ambiente. Quanto è probabile che lei possa votarlo? Utilizzi sempre una scala che va da 0 a 10, dove 0 significa *per niente probabile* e 10 significa *molto probabile*.'

[6] This tool was first introduced and tested, with a slightly different question wording, in a survey conducted by the University of Urbino Carlo Bo's Department of Economics, Society, Politics, as part of the 'Sustainability and Food (In)security' project (2021).

[7] However, it should be stressed that this bias can be limited by choosing a higher cut point – another advantage of having an 11-point scale.

conceptual framework and methodological approach as PTVs, PGV enables the study of the utility of the green vote option: its weight and role in the electoral choice process. Following this strategy, the green electoral demand is placed in the *existing* space of party competition. It is possible to examine whether parties are able to intercept it, to what extent it does not match the existing political supply, suggesting a problem of political representation, and to what extent a potential redefinition of the environmental political supply may alter the configuration of the electoral market.

The analysis we developed is structured in three stages.

First, following the analytical strategy used by Maggini and Vezzoni (2023), a Venn diagram is used to illustrate the structure of the Italian political space at the end of 2023 and identify the 'place' of a potential green vote within it.[8] In this representation, the PTV for each party is plotted on a two-dimensional space. The circles represent the potential electorate of each party; their overlaps represent the areas of competition between the main political forces. The configuration of the political space was estimated by jointly considering the PTVs and the PGV, using 6 as cut point. The seven parties estimated to be above 3% by Politico's Poll of Polls in early December 2023 were included in the analysis.[9]

Second, in order to test the hypotheses put forward in this article, the central part of the analysis provides a series of nested multivariate multiple regression models, in which PGV serves as a predictor for PTVs. In the equations of each model, PTVs are used as dependent variables.[10] Since the conceptual framework of this article includes abstention, an eighth equation uses the Propensity to Abstain (PTA) as the dependent variable. The latter is based on a question asking about the respondent's likelihood of abstaining in the future. This question also comes after PTVs in the questionnaire and uses the same scale. Three different models will be presented:

Model 1. The relationship between PGV and PTVs-PTA is controlled for three socio-demographic variables.

- *Gender*. This is a dichotomous variable with 'men' as the reference category.
- *Age*. This is a categorical variable with five groups: 18-29 years (reference category), 30-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65 and over.
- *Education*. This is a categorical (ordinal) variable on three levels: low (reference category: up to lower secondary education); medium (up to upper secondary education); high (tertiary education).

Model 2. Together with Model 1, we also test our hypotheses through a less parsimonious model, through which we check whether the (possible) effect of PGV maintains its

[8] This diagram was generated using the algorithm developed by Ben Frederickson in Javascript (https://github.com/benfred/venn.js) applying Constrained Multidimensional Scaling (MDS). See Maggini and Vezzoni (2023) for a discussion on this technique, its methodological implications and possible limitations.

[9] https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/italy/ Given that Carlo Calenda's Az (Azione – Action) and Matteo Renzi's IV (Italia Viva – Italy Alive) formed a joint list in 2022, only the first party (estimated at 4%) was used in the analysis to achieve a configuration comparable to that of the last General Election.

[10] In this technique, the coefficients and standard errors are the same as those estimated by single OLS regression models (one for each party), but it enables the coefficient to be tested across equations. STATA's mvreg command was used to fit the models.

significance when other determinants of the vote choice and the choice (not) to vote are controlled for. Studies on the General election of 2022 showed that the results of voting as well as turnout were influenced by social, cultural, and political malaises connected to different factors: the lingering effects of the economic crisis, fears related to international migration, and widespread dissatisfaction regarding the functioning of state institutions and the role of political elites (Azzollini et al., 2023; Bellucci, 2023; Bordignon & Salvarani, 2023; Cavazza & Roccato, 2023). To test the adjusted effect of PGV, net of these 'malaises' that are reasonably expected to be confounding factors in our relationship of interest, three indicators were considered:

- *Egotropic economic satisfaction*. The question asked respondents to indicate their satisfaction with their household's economic circumstances on a scale of 1 to 10.
- *Xenophobic attitude*. The question asked respondents how much they agree with the sentence 'Immigrants pose a threat to public order and people's safety' using a 4-level scale (not at all = 1; a little = 2; quite a lot = 3; very much = 4).
- *Institutional trust*. This is an additive index constructed using four items measuring individual trust in four institutions: the EU, the state, parliament, political parties. These four items were originally measured on a 4-level scale.[11]

Model 3. Since pro-environmental attitudes have been seen as originating from post-materialist values, which can also confound the studied effect on the propensity (not) to vote, Model 3 includes an alternative indicator for post-materialist orientations as a final control. A survey question asked respondents about their agreement on the possible implementation of a law enabling 'same-sex adoption', measured on a 10-point scale ranging from 1 ('totally disagree') to 10 ('totally agree'). The predictive margins exhibited (Figures 2-4) are built from this model.

Model 4. This final model aims to test whether the studied relationship still stands, even controlling for individual self-placement on a left/right axis, which we add as a control variable to the structure of Model 2. If this is the case, we will have empirical evidence of PGV not being subsumed by the left vs right cleavage. The variable we use for individual self-placement on a left/right axis is divided into seven categories: left; centre-left; centre; centre-right; right; external; no answer.

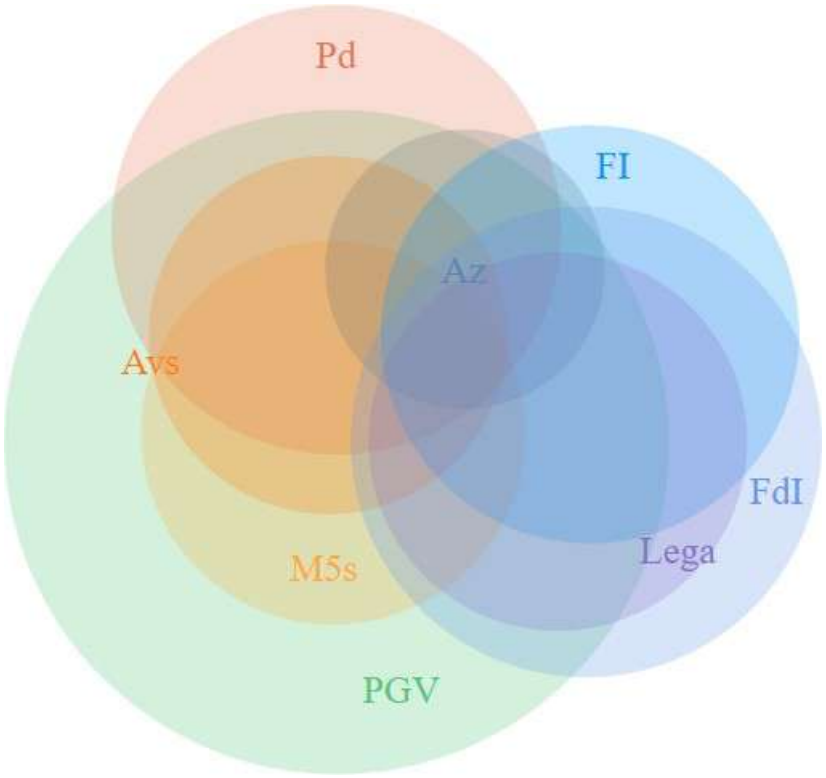
Logit models are presented in the Appendix (Table A3) as a robustness check to test the internal validity of the results, utilising a different distributional assumption, with PGV, PTVs, and PTA dichotomised (having 6 as a cut point of the 0-10 scale).

Earlier in this section, we suggested that the PGV may (also) be conceived by the respondent as the propensity to vote for a new Green party. In the third and final part of the analysis, we push this counterfactual logic further. What if a new environmental party enters the electoral market? A two-step strategy was designed to attempt to provide an answer to this question. First, PTVs and PTA were used to generate a segmentation of the Italian electoral market, which identifies the exclusive potential electorates of each party, the different areas of inter-party competition and the group(s) of potential abstainers.

[11] The resulting additive scale appear to be satisfactory with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.784.

The resulting typology was then intersected with PGV to estimate the (potential) outflows from each area towards the hypothetical new Green party.

Figure 1. Venn diagram – PTV (6-10) and PGV (6-10).



Source: LaPolis - University of Urbino Carlo Bo, *Italians and the State* (N=1,298; Dec. 2023).

4. Results and discussion

4.1. The environmental political space

The Venn Diagram in Figure 1 displays the configuration of the political space estimated using Ben Frederickson's algorithm with the PGV and the PTVs for the seven main Italian parties. Examining the graphical configuration, two preliminary considerations are straightforward. First, the size of the PGV area is much larger than the circles representing the parties' potential electorate. Using 6 as the cut point of the 0-10 PGV scale, 63% of the sample falls into this area. Second, even if PGV is introduced in the analysis, the overall configuration of the political space does not significantly differ from the pattern observed by Maggini and Vezzoni (2023) for the 2022 General election. The centre-right parties have largely overlapping potential electorates, revealing a high degree of competition within the area (but also relevant coalition potential). In contrast, the opposition parties overlap less, retaining significant portions of exclusive electorates. This is true in particular for the largest two among the potential allies, the M5S and the PD, while AVS bridges the two and Azione predictably bridges the centre-left and the centre-right.

The most important aspect to be analysed, however, concerns the location of the PGV area in this space. The large green circle intersects the potential electorate of all

parties, but it extends more to the left, towards the opposition forces. For them, this highlights the potential bridging effect of environmental issues regarding each electorate's exclusive areas. Further, the PGV area covers a large part of the propensity to vote for the PD, while, in this representation, it entirely includes the circles representing the potential electorate of both the M5S and AVS.

This does not necessarily mean that there is a complete overlap between these two components of the sample: the size of PGV and the relatively high number of parties included in the analysis generate a high number of constraints that the algorithm must respect, in its attempt to optimize the graphical solution. In our case, this leads to the partial violation of some of these constraints. Nevertheless, this result seems to suggest a strong correspondence between an environmentalist electoral orientation and the voting propensity for these parties, which needs to be further explored in the analyses that will be presented in the next section. At the same time, the graph indicates that at least part of the potential green demand is not matched by the political supply of the main Italian parties. This might suggest that part of it remains unrepresented, enlarging the area of potential abstention.

Table 1. PGV means analyzed by PTVs (Propensity to vote for parties, scores ≥ 6, ≥ 7, ≥ 8).

Propensity to vote	PGV (PTV ≥ 6)	PGV (PTV ≥ 7)	PGV (PTV ≥ 8)
Alleanza Verdi e Sinistra	7.55	7.70	8.02
Partito Democratico	7.22	7.52	7.69
Movimento 5 Stelle	7.34	7.41	7.31
Azione	7.33	7.42	7.47
Forza Italia	6.47	6.51	6.51
Lega	6.24	6.24	6.17
Fratelli d'Italia	6.05	6.16	5.78
Propensity to abstain (PTA ≥ 6, ≥ 7, ≥ 8)	6.38	6.46	6.42

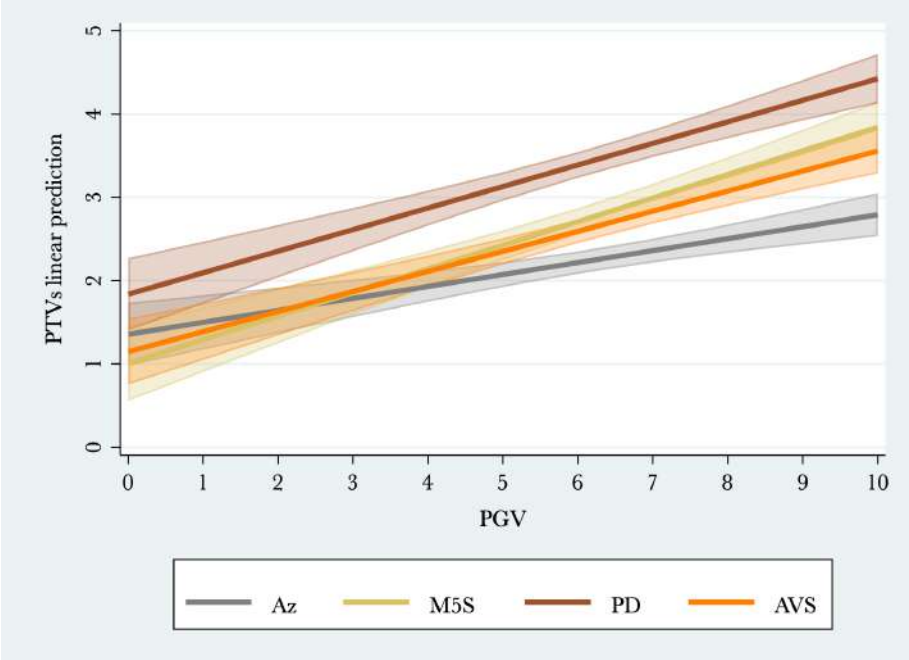
Source: LaPolis - University of Urbino Carlo Bo, *Italians and the State* (N=1,298; Dec. 2023). Mean PGV all=6.21.

4.2. Matching demand and supply

The bivariate relationship between PTVs and PGV (Table 1) confirms the insights suggested by the Venn diagram. The highest average value of PGV is observed in the potential electorate (defined using 6 as the cut point) of AVS (7.6), followed by M5S (7.3), Az (7.3), and PD (7.2). Significantly lower values are observed for FI (6.5), the League (6.2), and FdI (6.1). Raising the cut point to 7 or 8 does not substantially change the overall configuration. However, these relationships need to be investigated in the context of a multivariate model to test the hypotheses formulated in this article.

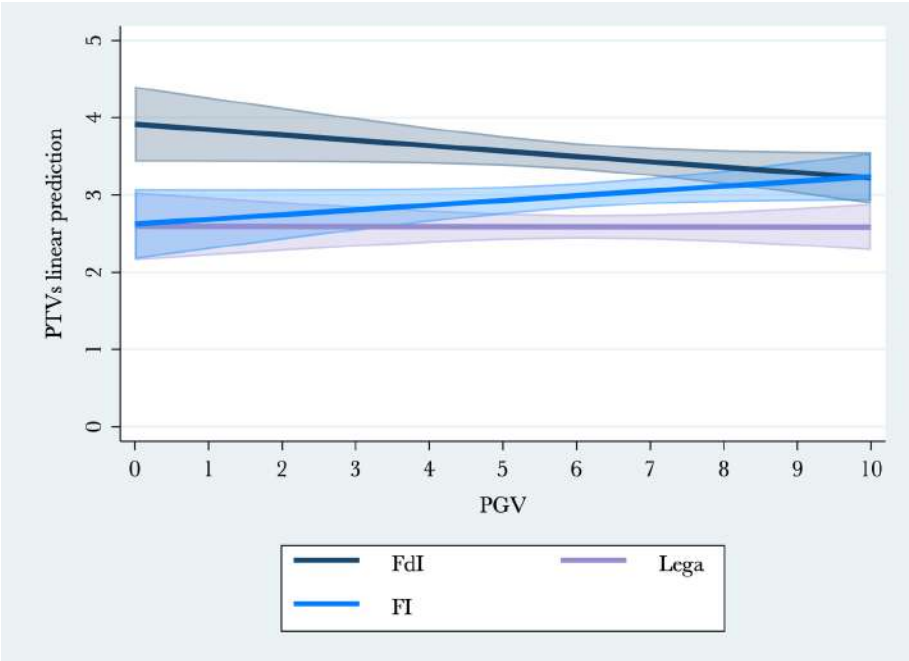
Table 2 reports the parameters of PGV and their significance for the different equations of the multivariate multiple regression models presented in section 3. Figures 2, 3, and 4 provide the estimated values of PTVs and PTA at different levels of PGV (using Model 3). Both the parameters and the graphs suggest that there is not a single-party capture of the green electoral demand and that all parties belonging to the (enlarged) centre-left area seem to attract some of it.

Figure 2. Linear PTVs predictions at different PGV levels with 95% CIs, Multivariate multiple regression. Model 3 (opposition parties).



Source: LaPolis - University of Urbino Carlo Bo *Italians and the State* (N=1,298; Dec. 2023).

Figure 3. Linear PTVs predictions at different PGV levels with 95% CIs, Multivariate multiple regression. Model 3 (right-wing coalition parties).

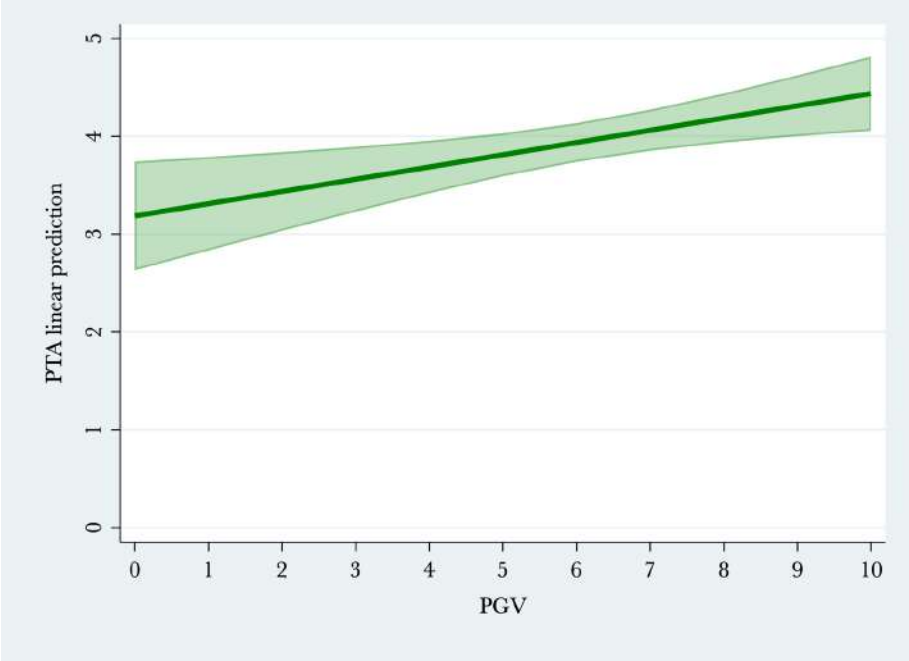


Source: LaPolis - University of Urbino Carlo Bo, *Italians and the State* (N=1,298; Dec. 2023).

Interestingly, the internal ranking seems to change from Model 1 to Models 2-3. When only the socio-demographic variables are controlled for, the PD and AVS have the highest values. Nevertheless, the M5S takes the 'lead' of the environmental vote once other predictors of the vote choice are taken into account. This suggests that the effect of pro-environment attitudes tends to be partially absorbed by other factors in the case of more traditionally centre-left parties, while it more distinctly impacts the vote choice for the M5S. Consequently, the relative weight of environmentalism, among the factors of the propensity to vote, is higher for the M5S, compared to the other centre-left parties.

In the less parsimonious models, the equation parameter for PTA also becomes positive and significant. This last finding portrays a picture of a green electoral market in which the green demand is partially unmet by the current supply, if the match between demand and supply is cleaned by the effects of confounding factors.

Figure 4. Linear PTA predictions at different PGV levels with 95% CIs, Multivariate multiple regression. Model 3 (abstention).



Source: LaPolis - University of Urbino Carlo Bo, *Italians and the State* (N=1,298; Dec. 2023).

Limiting the analysis to a comparison of the parameters' absolute values is insufficient to conclude that the effect on one dependent variable is significantly greater than on another. Multivariate multiple regression enables coefficients to be tested across equations. In particular, Stata's post-estimation command *test* was used to test that the difference between the values for the parameter of PGV in different equations was significantly different from zero. Table 3 provides the F statistic and its significance for such differences across pairwise comparisons between the parameters of PGV. Analysing the overall pattern, we cannot conclude that the effect of PGV on PTV for a specific party is significantly higher than the effect on PTV for any other party (or on PTA).

For these reasons, the results reject H1 and support H2, as the effect of the PGV on the PTV for each centre-left party is significantly higher than the effect on PTV for each

centre-right party. It is also worth noting that while the PTV parameter for Az is significantly higher than the corresponding parameter for the right-wing parties, it is always significantly lower than the corresponding parameter for the other centre-left parties. This signals the specific role of the centrist Az with respect to the potential centre-left coalition.

At the same time, our findings weakly support H3, as the parameter for PTA is positive and significant in Model 2, 3 and 4. In Table 3, the parameter of PGV for PTA is significantly higher than the corresponding value for right-wing parties (Lega and FdI) but significantly lower than the corresponding parameter for left-wing parties (AVS, PD and M5S), while the difference between the parameters is not significant for FI and Az. As environmental concerns predominantly find representation in centre-left parties, these findings about PTA push the interpretation forward, suggesting that: either environmentalism is insufficiently addressed by current political parties, or that the latter hold other undesirable characteristics unrelated to environmental issues that prevail in at least some voters' eyes.[12]

Given these insights, in the subsequent paragraph we will deepen the investigation of the political space and the electoral market, addressing the potential consequences of introducing a new Green party into the political landscape. While it is anticipated that such a party would attract votes from the current pool of non-voters, it is also expected to 'steal' green votes from existing parties. The extent and implications of this vote redistribution will be analysed and discussed.

Table 2. PGV coefficients of multivariate multiple regression models.

Propensity to vote[a]	**Model 1**[c]	**Model 2**[d]	**Model 3**[e]	**Model 4**[f]
Alleanza Verdi e Sinistra	0.354***	0.258***	0.241***	0.214***
Partito Democratico	0.397***	0.280***	0.258***	0.205***
Movimento 5 Stelle	0.343***	0.305***	0.283***	0.268***
Azione	0.210***	0.139***	0.143***	0.138***
Forza Italia	0.059	0.033	0.061	0.112***
Lega	-0.017	-0.030	-0.001	0.054
Fratelli d'Italia	-0.086*	-0.110**	-0.069	0.005
Propensity to abstain[b]	0.078	0.138**	0.125**	0.155***

Source: LaPolis - University of Urbino Carlo Bo, *Italians and the State* (N=1,298; Dec. 2023). Note: * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001. [a] Dependent variable: Propensity to vote for each party on a 0-10 scale; [b] Dependent variable: Propensity to abstain on a 0-10 scale. [c] Controls: gender, age, education. [d] Controls: gender, age, education, egotropic economic satisfaction, migrants seen as a security issue, institutional trust index. [e] Controls: gender, age, education, egotropic economic satisfaction, migrants seen as a security issue, institutional trust index, position on same-sex adoption (post-materialist orientation). [f] Controls: gender, age, education, egotropic economic satisfaction, migrants seen as a security issue, institutional trust index, self-placement on the left-right axis.

[12] For PTVs and PTA, similar results are presented in the Appendix, in Table 3A, after a series of logit models, which mostly confirm the previous analysis. The only notable difference is the effect of PGV on the propensity to vote for Forza Italia, once the relationship is cleaned by self-placement on the left/right axis.

Table 3. F Statistic and significance across pairwise comparisons between the parameters of PGV.

–	AVS	PD	M5S	Az	FI	Lega	FdI	PTA
AVS		0.29	1.33	8.69	15.94	30.40	41.47	5.12
PD	0.29		0.37	9.80	16.31	26.61	36.52	6.06
M5S	1.33	0.37		12.56	20.75	35.44	45.00	8.39
Az	8.69	9.80	12.56		4.68	14.20	25.76	0.13
FI	15.94	16.31	20.75	4.68		4.56	17.02	1.36
Lega	34.40	26.61	35.44	14.20	4.56		5.46	5.51
FdI	41.47	36.52	45.00	25.76	17.02	5.46		12.12
PTA	5.12	6.06	8.39	0.13	1.36	5.51	12.12	

Legend: sign and significance

(+) $p < 0.001$	(+) $p < 0.01$	(+) $p < 0.05$	Not significant	(-) $p < 0.05$	(-) $p < 0.01$	(-) $p < 0.001$

Source: LaPolis - University of Urbino Carlo Bo, *Italians and the State* (N=1,298; Dec. 2023).

4.3. Propensity to Vote for a new Green party

In this final part of the analysis, we further stretch the counterfactual meaning of the PGV, conceiving it as the propensity to vote for a newly established party prioritising environmental protection. What if a new competitor enters the green electoral market?

Before attempting to respond to this question, the inherently abstract nature of PGV must be further emphasised. Intentionally, no information about the ideological characterisation of this hypothetical party was provided in the question. This implies that each respondent should conceive of it independently of ideological alignment. However – also in light of the results presented earlier in this section – it is worth noting that the respondent may still attach a specific ideological connotation to his or her 'idea' of a Green party.

To perform this analysis, we first generated a segmentation of the electoral market by combining PTVs and PTA. Using three different cut points (no cut point; 5; 6), the resulting typology identifies:

1. The *exclusive components* of likely voters for each of the seven major parties. These are the respondents who give the party the highest score of the PTVs;
2. The uncertain voters between two or more parties, assigning the highest value of the PTVs to all of them. Different types of uncertain voters have been detected. Using a more restrictive definition of the possible areas based on the left-right political spectrum, some of them have been labelled uncertain between left-wing parties (PD, AVS, M5S – *Uncertain left*) or right-wing parties (FdI, Lega, FI – *Uncertain*

Right). In view of the specific position of Az in the configuration of the political space (Figure 1 and Table 2), we decided to distinguish uncertain voters between this party and other left-wing parties (*Uncertain centre-left*) or right-wing parties (*Uncertain centre-right*). Then, we identified the *Totally Uncertain voters*, who include among their (best) options both left-wing and right-wing parties.

3. Finally, the typology isolates the groups of *Likely Abstainers* and *Very Likely Abstainers*. For the former, the value of the PTA equals the maximum value of PTVs; for the latter, PTA is higher than all PTVs.

Different possible distributions of this typology are reported in Table A3 in the Appendix. The final solution, including PTA and using 6 as cut point, is quite reliable if taken as an estimate of the vote choice and related to the traditional direct question on the respondent's voting intentions, focusing on the percentage of correct predictions.[13]

A second typology was generated by combining PGV, PTVs and PTA. Considering the possible combinations, three areas of the green election market have been identified:

1. The area of *No Green Competition*, when the value of PGV is lower than the highest value of PTVs and PTA.
2. The area of *Green Competition*, when the value of PGV equals the highest value of PTVs and PTA.
3. The area of *Potential Green Vote*, when the value of PGV is higher than the highest value of PTVs and PTA.

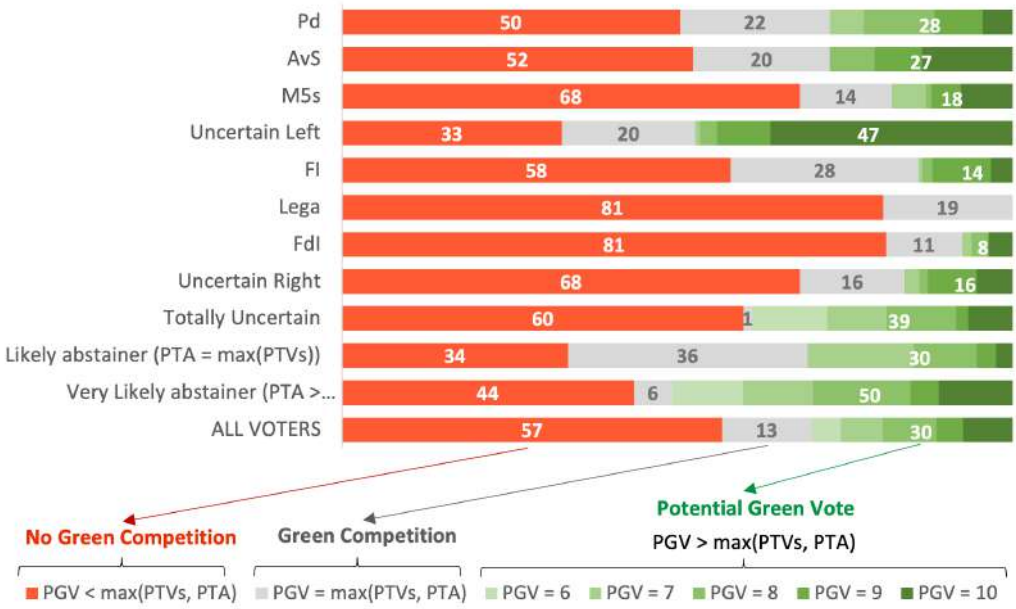
Figure 5 illustrates the cross tabulation between the two typologies. The size of the area of *Potential Green Vote* within each segment of the electoral market can be taken as an estimate of the potential outflows towards a new Green party. The initial observation is that it is a sizable component, perhaps too large to be considered truly reliable. Approximately 30% of the whole sample would be willing to leave their segment to vote for this new party. It arguably reflects the hypothetical nature of PGV and the acknowledged issue of social desirability.

Nevertheless, it is interesting to examine which segments of the electorate would be most affected by these hypothetical outflows. The shades of green in the graph, based on different levels of PGV, provide additional information about the strength of this green 'attraction' – also enabling the effects of using more demanding cut points to be evaluated.

Again, the potential green vote is higher in the exclusive electorates of left-wing parties. The strongest attraction involves the PD (28%) and AVS (27%) much more than the M5S (18%). But this is consistent with the results of *Model 1* analysed earlier in this section, before other potential factors of the vote choice entered the analysis. The attraction is even stronger in the area of uncertainty among left-wing parties (47%) and in the area of totally uncertain voters (39%). Finally, the attraction is very high among likely abstainers (30%) and particularly among very likely abstainers (50%). Even taking into account the effect of social desirability, these values confirm that a credible green electoral supply might bring a significant proportion of non-voters back into the electoral arena.

[13] Table A4 in the Appendix provides different indices of reliability based on the voting intentions for the seven major parties.

Figure 5. Appeal of a Green party in different components of the electorate defined by PTV voteestimates.



Source: LaPolis - University of Urbino Carlo Bo, *Italians and the State* (N=1,298; Dec. 2023). Note: Only data for groups with more than 40 available cases are shown in the graph.

5. Conclusions

Expecting a progressively higher salience of environmental issues, paralleled by the increasingly visible effects of climate change, we aimed to analyse what we termed the *green electoral market* in Italy. To this end, we introduced a methodological innovation: the Propensity for Green Voting (PGV). This tool, inspired by the theoretical background of PTVs, measures the individual likelihood of voting for a hypothetical party focusing on environmental protection and sustainability. In different sections of this article, we have acknowledged this measure's possible limitations, abstractness, and social desirability bias. The latter notwithstanding, the PGV emerged as a valuable tool for examining the electorate's environmental demand in party politics, allowing us to explore the electoral space through the lens of this dimension, independently of other political cleavages and across individual voting orientations for existing parties.

Using a Venn diagram, we graphically projected the PGV area on the space of the Italian electoral competition at the end of 2023. The Venn diagram exhibits the potential green electorate overlapping with all the main parties in the Italian electoral market. However, such overlap is stronger for the opposition parties than for the governing coalition, with the PGV area entirely including the potential M5S and AVS electorate.

Investigating the green electoral market, we tested three hypotheses: a monopolistic (H1), fragmented (H2), or absent (H3) political representation of green issues. Multivariate multiple regression models, with PGV as an independent variable across models, having PTVs for the seven main parties and PTA as dependent variables, led to the rejection of H1 and support of H2. While assuming environmentalism as an independent dimension in the political space, the analysis indicates that, in the context studied, the

green electoral demand finds fragmented representation. Further, in this fragmented context, the green demand of Italian voters mostly leans towards parties that, albeit heterogeneous, gravitate toward the centre-left of the political spectrum. AVS, PD, and M5S seem particularly able to capture green votes, with the latter gaining more traction once other predicting factors clean the studied relationship. This last consideration could be taken as a further clue to the premise that other cleavages cannot entirely subsume the dimension of environmentalism. As shown in the Venn diagram, the centre-left opposition, although divided and highly heterogeneous, could find a unifying theme in the environment, bridging electorates that appear much more exclusive than those forming the right-wing coalition.

The analyses weakly support H3. Once cleaned of confounding factors (such as economic satisfaction and institutional trust), the results suggest that a portion of the green electoral demand still needs to be addressed. In the Italian political landscape, then, environmental concerns only find partial representation. Further, we extended our analysis to the hypothetical impact of a new Green party capable of encompassing the entire spectrum of existing environmental demand. This projection permits us to study how such a political party could reshape electoral dynamics, potentially redefining the political space. The results attest that the left area of the current political configuration, and its uncertain components in particular, would be most affected by this change. This exploratory analysis also confirms the potential for re-engaging a portion of non-voters should a Green party emerge on the political scene.

Future research might apply this article's theoretical and methodological framework – and the novelty of the PGV in particular – to other contexts, overcoming the inherent limitations of a single-country study. Our hypotheses were specifically tailored to allow their replication beyond the Italian context. As they might be applied both to countries with and without distinct (nominal) green parties, we do not necessarily expect similar results from analyses focusing on other electoral contexts. Moreover, future studies adopting a different representation of the electoral space might address the acknowledged limitations of a bi-dimensional graphical representation of PTVs, PTA, and PGV. Hopefully, in this vein, our study could serve as a reference point for understanding how always-evolving environmental concerns shape party competition over 'warming' ballot boxes.

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6. Appendix

Table A1. CHES scores on Italian parties for salience of environmental sustainability (2010, 2019) and prioritization of the environment versus economics (2010, 2014, 2019).

Party	2010 Salience[a]	2010 Env./eco. [b]	2014 Env./eco.	2019 Salience	2019 Env./eco.
Rifondazione Comunista	7.00	8.38	7.00	-	-
Sinistra Italiana	-	-	-	7.27	7.88
SEL (2014), Sinistra e Libertà (2010)	8.20	8.83	8.40	-	-
Partito Democratico	5.87	6.00	6.00	6.53	5.88
Radicali Italiani	-	-	-	4.31	5.33
Italia dei Valori	5.00	7.00	-	-	-
Movimento 5 Stelle	-	-	8.20	7.47	7.56
Südtiroler Volkspartei	6.80	6.20	6.00	4.50	5.43
Scelta Civica	-	-	4.00	-	-
Unione di Centro	3.00	4.00	3.50	-	-
Forza Italia	-	-	2.00	2.37	2.44
Il Popolo della Libertà	2.12	1.13	-	-	-
Fratelli d'Italia	-	-	2.80	2.06	2.40
Alleanza Nazionale	4.57	3.14	-	-	-
Lega (2019), Lega Nord (2014, 2010)	3.00	2.00	4.20	1.88	2.35

Source: Jolly et al., 2022. a Importance/salience of environmental sustainability. Scale: 0-10. 0=Not important at all; [...] 10=Extremely important. b Position towards environmental sustainability. Scale: 0-10, recoded: 0=Strongly supports economic growth even at the cost of environmental protection; [...] 10=Strongly supports environmental protection even at the cost of economic growth.

Table A2. Manifesto Project: Environmental protection, positive (2018).

	2013	2018
Rivoluzione Civile	7.00	–
Liberi e Uguali	–	11.19
Sinistra Ecologia Libertà	13.90	–
Partito Democratico	0	3.20
+ Europa	–	5.3
Movimento 5 Stelle	25.81	22.84
Südtiroler Volkspartei	4.92	0
Scelta Civica	4.17	–
Unione di Centro	1.67	–
Forza Italia	–	3.12
Fratelli d'Italia	7.59	6.59
Lega	6.19	10.61

Source: Lehmann et al., 2024. Index: General policies in favour of protecting the environment, fighting climate change, and other "green" policies. For instance: General preservation of natural resources; Preservation of countryside, forests, etc.; Protection of national parks; Animal rights. May include a great variance of policies that have the unified goal of environmental protection. The higher the score the more positive the party's position on environmental protection.

Table A3. 6.1. Table A3: PGV (dichotomous, cut-off=6) coefficients, logit regression models.

	Model 1[c]	Model 2[d]	Model 3[e]	Model 4[f]
Propensity to vote[a]				
Alleanza Verdi e Sinistra	0.326***	0.281***	0.267***	0.260***
Partito Democratico	0.253***	0.206***	0.199***	0.181***
Movimento 5 Stelle	0.321***	0.306***	0.293***	0.300***
Azione	0.231***	0.192***	0.176***	0.201***
Forza Italia	0.062*	0.040	0.056	0.122***
Lega	0.024	0.012	0.022	0.095*
Fratelli d'Italia	-0.025	-0.046	-0.031	0.041
Propensity to abstain[b]	0.040	0.065*	0.061*	0.072**

Source: LaPolis - University of Urbino Carlo Bo, *Italians and the State* (N=1,298; Dec. 2023). Note: * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001. [a] Dependent variable: Propensity to vote for each party in the next national elections (dichotomous, cut-off=6). [b] Dependent variable: Propensity to abstain in the next national elections on a 0-10 scale. [c] Controls: gender, age, education. [d] Controls: gender, age, education, egotropic economic satisfaction, migrants seen as a security issue, institutional trust index. [e] Controls: gender, age, education, egotropic economic satisfaction, migrants seen as a security issue, institutional trust index, position on same-sex adoption (post-materialist orientation). [f] Controls: gender, age, education, egotropic economic satisfaction, migrants seen as a security issue, institutional trust index, self-placement on the left-right axis.

Table A4. Segmentation of the electorate combining PTVs (7 main parties) and PTA (Probability to Abstain).

	Without PTA						**With PTA**					
	Without cut-point		Cut-point=5		Cut-point=6		Without cut-point		Cut-point=5		Cut-point=6	
PD	17.6	21.2	16.5	22.1	14.7	22.3	14.4	23.3	13.8	23.4	13.0	23.9
AVS	6.6	8.0	5.2	7.0	4.9	7.4	4.9	7.9	4.2	7.1	3.9	7.2
M5S	11.0	13.2	9.7	13.0	8.2	12.5	7.0	11.4	6.9	11.7	6.5	11.9
Uncertain Left	5.7	6.8	5.0	6.6	4.1	6.2	4.1	6.6	4.0	6.8	3.3	6.1
Az-IV	3.0	3.6	2.7	3.6	2.1	3.2	2.0	3.3	1.9	3.3	1.8	3.3
Uncertain Centre-Left	2.4	2.9	1.7	2.3	1.1	1.7	1.7	2.8	1.4	2.4	0.9	1.7
Uncertain Centre-Right	1.3	1.6	1.0	1.3	0.6	1.0	0.7	1.1	0.6	1.0	0.5	0.9
FI	6.0	7.2	5.8	7.7	5.4	8.1	4.8	7.8	4.7	8.0	4.3	7.9
Lega	4.6	5.5	4.3	5.8	3.9	5.9	3.6	5.8	3.4	5.9	3.2	5.9
FdI	16.8	20.3	15.7	20.9	14.8	22.4	13.1	21.2	12.7	21.5	12.4	22.7
Uncertain Right	8.0	9.6	7.3	9.8	6.2	9.4	5.4	8.7	5.3	9.0	4.7	8.6
% Correct predictions (7 main parties)												
Exact[a]	63.3	68.4	61.0	69.6	57.3	71.0	52.0	70.8	51.2	71.6	50.3	73.1
Exact + Unc Area[b]	77.4	84.5	74.5	85.1	69.1	85.5	63.1	86.1	62.0	86.4	60.4	86.9
Exact + Unc Area + Other Area[c]	84.7	91.5	81.7	92.1	76.0	92.8	68.9	92.4	67.8	92.7	65.9	93.2

Source: LaPolis - University of Urbino Carlo Bo, *Italians and the State* [a] Based on the voting intentions for the seven major parties, the percentage of correct predictions is calculated considering only the cases exactlyattributed to each party. [b] In this version, the cases attributed to the area of uncertainty between parties of the same political area are also considered correct. [c] In this version, the cases attributed to other parties of the same political area are also considered correct.

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