POPULISM IN CONTEMPORARY ITALIAN POLITICS

Actors and processes in time of crisis

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"Kick them off": debating the immigration issue in the 2018 Italian national election campaign

Massimiliano Andretta and Paola Imperatore

1. Immigration, media and electoral campaigns: an introduction

Immigration has become one the most intensely debated issues in contemporary western democracies (Hepburn and Zapata-Barrero 2014), shaping political communication during election campaigns in most of the cases (Shemer 2012; Kriesi and Pappas 2015). The refugee crisis had a huge impact on the European political landscape (della Porta 2018). At the crossroads between solidarity manifestations and harsh oppositions, flows of refugees and asylum seekers across the European territory have rapidly become a controversial issue, especially in those countries most affected by this phenomenon (Zamponi 2018; Andretta and Pavan 2018).

The issue is at the centre of the propaganda put forward by new or renewed populist or far-right parties and leaders, as it has become the main tool for them to gain media attention and electoral consensus (Mudde 2007). Though voters' preferences are also shaped by political discourses (Dunleavy and Ward 1981), and by the media[1], those political actors try to exploit people's hostile attitudes towards immigrants, harshened by

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[1] Specifically, on the immigration issue, the media impact on public opinion has been recently tested by Kosho (2016).

the economic crisis and the more recent refugee crisis, and actually widespread among European citizens (Esipova et al. 2015). Moreover, both anti-immigrant and pro-immigrant attitudes are increasingly expressed in grassroots protests (della Porta 2018; Andretta and Pavan 2018).

The 2018 elections in Italy have shown once again how the debate on immigration shapes the electoral campaign, polarizes the public opinion, gets access to media coverage and impacts on electoral results. In Italy, the issue of immigration and security has become pivotal in the political arena, due in particular to the role of populist extreme-right parties such as the Salvini League, *Casa Pound* and *Forza Nuova* (Andretta and Pavan 2018, Castelli Gattinara 2018), but also to the role of the new post-ideological party, the *Movimento 5 Stelle* (Five Star Movement-M5S), in public discussion. The last elections were held in a context of violence and tension after the two fascist attacks against immigrants, in Macerata and in Florence[2], which polarized even more the debate in the electoral campaign. The formidable electoral rise of the nationalized Northern League, now under the name of Salvini League, crafted by its leader Matteo Salvini (Passarelli and Tuorto 2018; Ignazi 2018), can be explained by the strong anti-immigrant position taken in the electoral campaign (Valbruzzi 2019b; Milazzo 2019). The Salvini League rose from a mere 4% of votes in 2013 to more than 17% in 2018 and recent polls estimate that it would obtain more than 20% of votes today, after an estimated peak of over 30% in the recent past and 34% of votes in the 2019 European elections. It is also important to mention Giorgia Meloni and her *Fratelli d'Italia* (Brothers of Italy, FdI), an extreme right-wing party whose roots can be found in the former fascist *Movimento Sociale Italiano*, and competing with the Salvini League on the anti-immigrant issue. FdI rose from 2% in the 2013 national elections to more than 4% in 2018, and over 6% in the 2019 European elections. Recent polls estimate that it would obtain more than 20% today[3].

[2]   The shooting of Macerata, in which Luca Traini, a fascist militant and former Salvini League candidate, opened fire against seven black people with the aim to kill them, elicited a strong reaction of antifascists people all over Italy, who started to mobilize against the perceived widespread racism in the country.

[3]   For polls trends of these two parties compared with other Italian parties it is useful to consult the YOU TREND report (https://www.youtrend.it/2021/06/25/super-media-dei-sondaggi-politici-mezzo-punto-separa-lega-e-fdi).

This chapter aims at mapping arguments related to the immigration issue during the last electoral campaign in Italy by integrating traditional media, social media, and protest event analysis. In particular, we will reconstruct the actors, frames, dynamics and structure of the three separate (social media, protest, and traditional media) arenas and contrast the results in terms of engagement in and representation of the issue. Is there any connection between protest, traditional media, and social media framing? What are the similarities and the differences? What kind of impact does the framing of the issue have on media coverage and public engagement?

In this article, we will seek to answer those research questions by looking at parties and leaders' tweet contents, press representation of the immigration issue and both anti- and pro-immigrant protest events during the latest Italian national electoral campaign from a communication perspective. In section 2, we will justify our approach, reconstruct the literature, and formulate our hypotheses. After illustrating our methodology and our operational data collection (section 3), we will analyse the structure of the three channels of communication in section 4 and analyse their impact in section 5. In section 6 we will provide our conclusions and make some remarks.

2. The integration of different systems of communication in the new hybrid media system

Structurally speaking, social media content, a statement reported on or produced by a traditional media, a social network or a protest event do not differ if we consider their political communicative function: an actor sends a message to someone in public. To be sure, they can all be considered political claims (Koopmans and Statham 2010).

Of course, what matters is the type of actor making a claim, the means used to make it, what the message is about and how it is framed, who or what is the target, and finally the type and amount of audience mobilized. True, the mediatization of politics, especially in the election campaign, has given mainstream media a dominant gatekeeping function in determining what messages and information are worth to be broadcast (Mazzoleni 1999), but the extraordinary entry of ICTs, Internet-based and social media communication in the media system has provoked important

changes in the news media (Norris 2000: 137), by somehow transforming power relations amongst the different means of communication (Chadwick 2013). In this sense, "the news media system is fragmenting into a more complex and incoherent environment of multiple channels, outlets, and levels" (Norris 2000: 140), where mainstream media compete, integrate with and adapt to new media in a complex system of communication by creating new opportunities for political elites to get their messages and frames more easily overcome the traditional barriers of communication (Cepernich 2017). This new hybrid media system is reported to also give ordinary citizens new opportunities to directly participate in electoral campaigns as "the new channels of communication potentially allow greater interactivity between voters and politicians" (Norris 2000: 140). Besides, "citizens organize to politicize media and communication and to move [the] debate away from economic interests towards […] a citizen-centred perspective", by campaigning on specific issues and mobilizing to influence the media system (Mattoni and Ceccobelli 2018: 9).

Protest produces its own communication dynamic interacting with media logics. The pivotal study by Gamson and Wosfeld (1993) analysing traditional media and movements as "interacting systems" needs of course to be updated in the context of the "new hybrid forms of mediality" (Chadwick 2013), but the basic interactional dynamic remains structurally equivalent, being based on the logic of the political information cycle.

2.1. Bad news for immigrants?

Although the television has prevailed in the mediatized political communication (Mazzoleni 1999), the press remains an important source of information for both political elites and politically engaged citizens (Norris 2000). Though certainly less performing in shaping public opinion, the press has always been an important source for political talks, debates and information channelled by television, especially during electoral campaigns. Besides, most of the press adapted to the new hybrid media system by implementing news web platforms (Mattoni and Ceccobelli 2018). The relation between the press and immigration is widely discussed in critical academic studies that highlighted the role of media in eliciting feelings of fear and alert in the public opinion by often framing immigrants in a negative way (Philo, Briant, and Donald 2018; Farris and

Silber 2018). This seems to be particularly evident during political campaigns (Schemer 2012).

In Italy, the way in which the media deal with the immigration issue is monitored by the NGO Carta di Roma. In its 6th Annual Report on the matter, the tendency emerged to picture immigration in negative and alarmist ways in five national Italian newspapers (*L'Avvenire*, *Il Giornale, Il Corriere della Sera*, *La Stampa* and *La Repubblica*), in the period between 2015 and 2018. If the right-wing *Il Giornale* is mentioned as the most alarmistic paper when treating the immigration issue, even in the most liberal (and moderately left-wing) *La Repubblica*, in 2018, 15% of articles/headlines on the subject represent immigration in an alarmist way, against 8% dealing with the issue reassuringly; while the Catholic *L'Avvenire* is the least alarmist newspaper (Milazzo 2019, Part 1). Since the 2015 refugee crisis, Italian media, channelling also anti-immigrant claims made by right-wing political leaders, have contributed to arousing a feeling of "imagined invasion" in the public opinion (De Cesaris 2018). As reported by a recent opinion poll analysis comparing Eurobarometer data across EU member states: "interviewed Italians are those showing a greater gap between the percentage of actual non-EU immigrants in their country (7%) and the percentage of immigrants perceived (25%)" (Valbruzzi 2019b). Since the refugee crisis, in fact, terms depicting a purported invasion from the sea in Italian newspapers are found quite frequently, as is the case with *Il Giornale*. "Newspapers titles often emphasize the threat and the emergence of an out-of-control phenomenon with terms such as 'immigration chaos', 'immigration bomb', 'immigration emergence', 'limitless invasion', 'security alarm', etc." (Milazzo 2019: 26).

Newspapers also channel political leaders' claims, by reporting interviews, declarations, and even social media contents. Due to the increasingly widespread newspapers expedient to separate news from editorial or journalistic comments (Hallin and Mancini 2004), the way in which newspapers cover certain issues is also shaped by how such issues are represented by those who make claims about them. In the case of immigration, then, the most active political claim makers should be those who put it at the centre of their political manifestos and discourse, usually negatively connoting that issue.

Based on the insights deriving from what we have so far discussed, with regard to the claim structure of the immigration issue in Italian news-

papers during the electoral campaign, the following hypotheses will be tested:

H1: The press reports more claims supporting a negative view of the immigration issue.

H2: Right-wing parties, leaders and newspapers produce more claims than other parties and leaders on the immigration issue.

A third hypothesis needs to be specified for the Five Star Movement (M5S). Although often included among the populist parties recently emerged in contemporary western democracies, the M5S has peculiar traits that need to be discussed, especially with regard to the immigration issue. On the one hand, authors fail to classify the M5S in a typology of populist parties based on their 'thin ideology' because it does not emphasize the 'people' as 'working class' or 'weak class', as is typical of social populist parties; but neither does it target immigrants as a threat, as is typical of the far-right populist parties (Zulianello 2017). On the other hand, the immigration issue proved to be divisive among M5S supporters, representatives, and leaders, as was demonstrated by the result of the Internet consultation of the constituency on the abrogation of the law introducing the crime of 'illegal immigration', and the subsequent voting behaviour of the M5S members of the parliament, as well as other contradictory positions[4].

Thus,

H3: The M5S and its leaders produce fewer claims on the immigration issue.

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[4]   On January 13th, 2014, the M5S leaders Beppe Grillo and Gianroberto Casaleggio promoted an online consultation of the constituency to instruct the M5S senators on how they should vote on a bill abrogating the part of the Bossi-Fini law on immigration, which introduced the crime of illegal immigration (since then an administrative offense). While the leaders' intent was to force them to vote against the abrogation, surprisingly, 63% of those voting online supported the abrogation (Castigliani 2014). But while all the M5S senators voted accordingly, when the bill was discussed in the Chamber, the deputies voted against the abrogation (RQuotidiano 2014). On more recent occasions, the M5S proved to be totally unable to show a specific position on the matter as a former M5S activist and parliamentary assistant once admitted (Andraghetti 2017).

2.2. Twitting on immigration

The hybridization of the media system opened up new opportunities for political actors to gain media attention through the use of social media: one tweet, one post, one video, if it gets viral, can gain public attention because it is shared, reproduced, mentioned, re-published or simply reported in traditional media (Paulussen and Harder 2014). The use of social media allows political leaders to control, manipulate or influence the media. By using them, politicians can go public directly, bypassing media gatekeeping, and try to (re)gain the trust of voters (Mosca and Vaccari 2011; Enli 2016; Andretta and Bracciale 2018). Moreover, the level of influence of their social media contents in the media debate, especially during electoral campaigns, largely depends on their ability to activate their publics in spreading, reproducing and supporting their messages. On the other hand, voters can follow their candidates on social media platforms, replicate and reproduce their contents and make them viral, or, on the contrary, subvert, disempower or delegitimize the meaning of the contents produced by them. In other words, ordinary citizens following politicians' social media platforms can, on the one hand, check, monitor and filter their communication; and, on the other, trigger political discussions with other citizens out on their messages (Bekkers, Edwards and Kool 2013; Stieglitz 2013).

Amongst the several social media platforms that can be used by political leaders and parties during electoral campaigns, Twitter appears to be used to describe and comment events and media events in real time, and it constitutes a formidable tool specifically in today's fast and furious electoral campaigns (Wang et al. 2012; Conway, Kenski and Di Wang 2015; Larsson and Moe 2016). More than with other social media, the political use of Twitter during electoral campaigns has been found to be much more closely related to events and news reported in traditional media, especially newspapers and television (Highfield and Bruns 2016; Rossi and Orefice 2016). Moreover, traditional media launch thematic hashtags to gather tweets commenting on events, and political leaders use those hashtags to get more audience (Christensen 2013). Consequently, social media, and Twitter in particular, are used by political actors for their power to influence and frame issues in political campaigns (Kreiss 2016). Actually, in a longitudinal original experiment, participants exposed to social media have been found to give more importance to the issues shared.

Moreover, this effect seems to be more marked among participants with low interest in politics (Feezell 2018). Although mainstream parties and leaders too have learned how to adapt to and adopt social media practices for electoral purposes (Chadwick and Stromer-Galley 2016), "social media give the populist actors the freedom to articulate their ideology and spread their messages", and right-wing populists have been found the most active in using social media to spread messages "ostracizing others", mostly immigrants (Engesser et al. 2016: 1109).

From this literature review we can then formulate, and test, the following hypotheses:

H4: Right-wing parties and leaders and especially far-right populist ones are more actively involved in producing tweets on the immigration issue.

Additionally, for the same reasons supporting H3:

H5: the M5S and its leaders are the least involved in producing tweets on the immigration issue.

Finally, as Twitter is especially used to shape the traditional media agenda, and the latter launches hashtags to report on the Twittersphere debate especially during electoral campaigns:

H6: Right-wing parties and leaders, especially far-right populist ones, are more actively involved in the use of hashtags launched by traditional media when they tweet on the immigration issue.

2.3. Protesting on immigration

Protest looks different from the other systems of communication, since it needs to be filtered by media to get public visibility and reach a broader audience (Gitlin 1980; Gamson and Wosfeld 1993; Bennett and Segerberg 2013; Karpf 2018). Within the hybrid media system, one of the fundamental changes is the opportunity provided for political actors to get their claims covered and spread. As exemplified by Chadwick (2013: 55) reporting on the Occupy movement: "Occupy activists hybridized real-space physical presence with their own instantaneous social media resources and publishing channels—flows of information that they knew would

be monitored and reassembled by professional journalists eager to create authentic representations of their protest camps". Social movement studies have emphasized the role of social media in creating opportunity structures, organizational infrastructures, and spaces for the formation of counter-publics (Bennett and Segerberg 2013; della Porta 2013). In the case of the Macerata protest against the racist attack reported in the introduction, for instance, it would be difficult to imagine the immediate organization of the demonstration without the instant information circulated through social and traditional media alike.

Like other political communicative acts, protest is a means to enter the public debate with a specific frame. And like other communicative acts, protest produces a field, that is a "constructed mesolevel social order in which actors (who can be individual or collective) are attuned to and interact with one another on the basis of shared (which is not to say consensual) understandings about the purposes of the field, relationships to others in the field (including who has power and why), and the rules governing legitimate action in the field" (Fligstein and McAdam 2012: 9). A protest field is composed by the organizations and the social actors who enter this space, the claims they make, their framing, their action repertoire, their targets and both their cooperative and competitive interactions (della Porta and Diani 2006).

While protest is meant to provoke political and social changes and gain support from the public opinion by also getting media coverage (Lipsky 1968), the political and media environments affect its dynamic. On the one hand, the political configuration of the government and government-opposition relations may create specific opportunities for protest actors (della Porta and Diani 1996; Tarrow 1994; Kriesi et al. 1995); on the other hand, public media discourse endows protest initiatives with different discursive opportunities (Koopmans 2004; Ferree et al. 2004). The long wave of protests following the economic crisis in Italy has been found to be affected by parties and trade union relationships with the government (Andretta 2018). If the immigration issue was marginal in the Italian protest field in the period between 2009-2014 (Andretta 2017), after the refugee crisis, Italy has been characterized by an exacerbation of anti-immigrant protests catalysed by far right subjects – such as *Lega Nord*, *Forza Nuova*, a renowned Italian far right political movement, or *Casa Pound*, another Italian extreme right political movement –, but also

fuelled by the rapid multiplication of informal local groups opposing the reception of refugees in local facilities and claiming a priority for Italian citizens' rights, which was, however counterbalanced by pro-refugee and pro-immigrant protests carried out by leftist informal networks and organizations (Andretta and Pavan 2018). The anti-immigrant protest has been nurtured by specific political opportunities that gave informal actors the support of well-established national parties and organizations, and a prevalent media discourse voiced in alarmist tones. The following hypotheses will then be tested:

H7: Discursive and political opportunities lead to more anti-immigration protests.

H8: Anti-immigrant protests get more national press coverage controlled for by other factors.

2.4. Getting public: the effect on media coverage and public engagement of how immigration is framed

In the context of a hybridized media system, the three communication systems will be analysed here to see how they operated during the latest Italian national campaign on the immigration issue. For each communication system we will describe the prevalent structure of the claims made on such issue: Who are the dominant actors more often making claims about immigration; what kinds of arguments they present, how do they frame immigration and what kinds of public reaction and media attention they get. On the other hand, we want to test what factors in the claims structure trigger most media coverage and public attention. Given that the Italian public opinion was seriously warned and became alarmed about the 'imagined' invasion of migrants and refugees, our main hypothesis is that claims framing the immigration issue in a negative way get more widespread media coverage and are, therefore, more likely to obtain the support of the public.

In our research we can try to deal with these aspects in two ways. First, we can operationalize the media coverage degree by distinguishing between local and national press coverage of the news on the immigration issue; and, secondly, we can operationalize the public activation in the spreading of the political message by referring to the number of 'shares'

obtained by immigration-related tweets. According to what has been so far reported in the literature review, we can formulate the following, concluding, hypotheses:

H9: Controlled for by other factors, claims with a negative frame of the immigration issue get more national coverage.

H10: Controlled for by other factors, tweets negatively framing the immigration issues will be shared more by the audiences.

3. Method and Data Collection

In order to analyse the debate on the immigration issue during the Italian electoral campaign, we collected data from Google News and Twitter. Google News (GN) is a news aggregator that collects and constantly updates web contents of both professional and non-professional news media. This option presents advantages and limits at the same time (Andretta and Pavan 2018). On the one hand, it allows to overcome the problem of selective coverage in newspapers by giving the possibility to search more than one source at a time (Maney and Oliver 2001). At the same time, compared to a general research on the web, GN allows to collect data that is pertinent to our queries in terms of issues and timeframe of investigation (Andretta and Pavan 2018). On the other hand, GN does not cover every content in relation to a given issue and, consequently, does not allow for a correct estimation of the number of newspaper articles about a certain topic. Moreover, GN allows to gather articles only from online newspapers thus excluding media that are not present on the web. Finally, GN works in a highly personalized way (Roger 2013), by changing the results of the research depending on users' habits.

To avoid the effects of service personalisation, we accessed GN through a clear research browser and logged out from any Google account (DMI 2015). We set the period of investigation from February 1st to March 3rd, 2018, the day before the election held on March 4th, while Google News was searched through a "generic event descriptor" (Maney and Oliver 2001: 138) in the form of a Boolean search by setting the following keywords: *migrant OR refugee* (Rifugiat*) *OR immigr** (Immigr*) *OR illegal* (Clandestin*) *OR security* (Sicurezza) *OR racis** (Razzis*) in Italian.

All GN extracted news was downloaded and used to manually code political claims and protest events. A claim consists of any expression of a political opinion by some form of physical or verbal action, regardless of the form this expression takes (declaration, interview, protest, document, decision, court sentences, etc.) and regardless of the nature of the actor (governments, political leaders and parties, civil society organizations, journalists, etc.) (Koopmans and Statham 2010). For each claim we coded any related information (date, newspaper source, level of the news, type of claimers, message, frame of the issue, types of argumentations, form of the claim, target and so on). Protests were coded both as political claims and, in a separate dataset, as protest events through a different codebook with additional variables (such as the forms of protest, the number of participants, the location, the level of coordination, the interaction with the police, and others) (Hutter 2015)[5].

On the other hand, the data on Twitter were extracted by using the Twitter REST API, which allows for the automatic storage of all tweet contents and related data (such as favourites, retweets, URLs, hashtags, photos, etc.) of a given Twitter account. All tweets produced by national party organizations and their leaders were then collected in the period between January 1st and March 3rd, 2018 via multiple queries to the Twitter public APIs during the monitored period. To analyse the tweets on the immigration issue we automatically recoded tweet texts containing the keywords immigration, immigrate*, security, fugitive, Macerata, refugee* and clandestine in as many dummy variables.

4. The structure of the three communication systems on the immigration issue

The discussion on the immigration issue followed three different paths depending on the channel used by claimers, though peaks of claims were reached around the Macerata facts and the following antifascist demonstration that exacerbated the conflict between antifascist activists and

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[5]   While we agree that protest events can be integrated in a more general political claim analysis (Koopmans and Statham 1999), we nevertheless believe that a traditional protest event analysis is better fit to analyse the specific field produced by protests (Andretta and Pavan 2018).

extreme right groups and in general between right-wing and left-wing parties and leaders (Figure 6.1). Tweets on immigration by leaders and parties intensified in the last month of the electoral campaign: tweets containing at least one of the keywords on immigration went from 141 in January to 453 since February 1st (Table 6.2). In this final period of the campaign, we identified 127 claims and 44 protest events in newspapers (Table 6.1). The data on protest events are particularly interesting if we consider that in the period following the refugee crisis, a research using the same method of data collection identified an average of 41 protest events per month (Andretta and Pavan 2018).
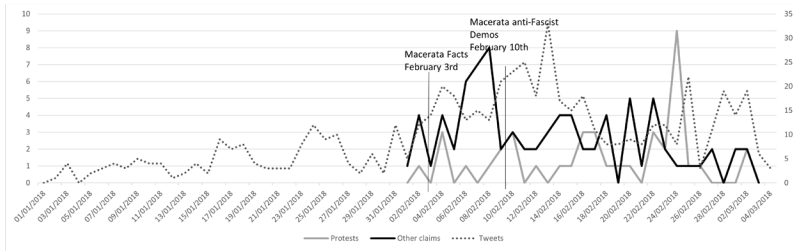

Fig. 6.1. Claims, protests and tweets on the immigration issue in the 2018 Italian election campaign.

Getting into the details of claims appeared in the press, Table 6.1 shows the main characteristics of the structure of this communication field. In the period considered we identified 127 claims on the immigration issue (Table 6.1). Fifty-two claims (41% of the collected claims) were made by either parties and leaders or institutions, 32 (25%) by the media themselves, 28 (22%) by civil society organizations and 11 (12%) by minority/migrant groups. Claims were made in the form of a declaration, interview, public statement or similar in 58 cases (45%), reported in the press by social media contents in 9 cases (7%), through the presentation of documents in 16 cases (13%), and by means of protest mobilization in 44 cases (35%).

Parties and institutions made their claims in the form of a declaration in about 70% of cases, social media contents in about 10% and protest events in about 17%. The media did so mostly through declarations (53%), documents (34%), but also by commenting protest events (13%). Unsurprisingly, civil society organizations and minority groups made their

claims mostly through protest mobilization (61% and as much as 95% respectively).

It is interesting to notice that most of the claims were supported by a rational style of communication through the use of some kind of arguments (71%), while only 24% of all claims on immigration were emotionally framed. Even more interesting, though not surprising, is the fact that 67% of the 'rational' claims are pro-minority, while emotions are almost equally distributed amongst pro- and anti-immigrant claims.

Table 6.1. Main features of traditional media and protest event communication on the immigration issue (February 1st –March 3rd).						
CASES PERCENTAGE	COLUMN		ROW			
Claimer	All Claims	Protest	Anti	Neutral	Pro	TOT.
Parties and Institutions	41%	14%	40%	20%	40%	52
Civil society	22%	53%	4%	NONE	96%	28
Media	25%	NONE	40%	22%	38%	32
Minorities	9%	21%	NONE	NONE	100%	11
Claim						
Declaration	45%		42%	21%	37%	57
Protest	35%		27%	2%	71%	44
Document	13%		19%	25%	56%	16
Social	7%		22%	NONE	78%	7
Communication Style						
Rational	71%	66%	19%	14%	67%	90
Emotional	24%	7%	42%	NONE	58%	31
National coverage	80%	56%	37%	16%	47%	101
TOTAL	128	44	32%	13%	55%	128

It is also worth noticing that most of the claims reported in newspapers are pro-minority (55%) and a distinct negative position against immigrants characterizes only 32% of newspapers reported claims. Moreover, if civil society organizations and minority groups are obviously more prone to adopt a pro-immigrant rights frame, a negative frame is reported in 40% of both media and parties/institutions claims. Although right-wing parties depict the immigration issue almost exclusively in negative terms (in 94% of their claims) and never with a pro-rights frame, it does not seem that they have been over-exposed in the newspaper debate on the immigration issue: if parties and institutions made more claims than other actors, only 15 of them were made by right-wing parties including the Salvini League and even the fascist *Forza Nuova* and *Casa Pound*, against 24 claims made by centre-left and leftist parties, including the radical leftist *Potere al Popolo* (Power to the People). Moreover, out of the 32 claims made by the media, only 14 were made by right-wing newspapers (86% of the contents in newspapers like *Il Giornale* and *Libero* are anti-immigrants). We can then reject H1 and H2 as most of the claims found in newspapers through Google News were pro-minority (55%), and right-wing parties did not make more immigration-related claims than other parties.

However, the silence of the M5S and its leaders on the immigration issues (H3) seems to be confirmed: only 4 claims out of 128. Obviously if we look only at anti-immigrant claims, things radically change with 19 out of 21 claims by right-wing parties and leaders being classified as anti-minority or xenophobic, against 15 out of 24 claims by centre-leftist or leftist parties or leaders being classified as pro-minority or anti-racist. Moreover, right-wing newspapers framed the immigration issue in a negative way 12 times out of 14. Together, right-wing parties/leaders and affiliated newspapers made about 65% of the total anti-minority claims, only 17% of the total neutral ones and no pro-minority or anti-racist claim.

If we operationalize an index of framing of the immigration issue in an index ranging from -1 (negative) to +1 (positive), the mean associated with right-wing parties/leaders or newspapers is as low as -0.8, scoring 1.4 on average[6].

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[6]   The ETA coefficient of the association scores .68 and it is significant at .001 level.

It is to be noticed, however, that amongst the centre-leftist field the then PD (*Partito Democratico*) leader Renzi especially framed the issue either in a neutral (7 out of 12 claims) or in a negative way (3). Finally, the M5S and its leaders equally distributed the few claims (4) they made on immigration between the anti-minority (1), neutral (2) and pro-minority (1) frames. And this reinforces even more the reasons behind H3.

Table 6.2. Main features of new media communication (Twitter) on the immigration issue.		
Actors	N	%
Centre-left	188	31%
Parties	155	26%
Leaders	33	5%
Centre-right	403	68%
Parties	160	27%
Leaders	243	41%
Salvini League	156	26%
Matteo Salvini	128	22%
FdI	73	12%
Giorgia Meloni	23	4%
M5S-Di Maio	3	1%
FI	4	1%
Berlusconi	92	16%
PD	9	2%
Matteo Renzi	12	2%

Though only 9 out of the 128 immigration-related claims reported in the newspapers come from social media, the latter can reach the public opinion by overcoming the traditional mainstream media gates (Eldrige, García-Carretero and Broesma 2019). The Twittersphere is however strictly integrated in the broader hybrid media system, and it is used especially to set the traditional media agenda. It is, then, not surprising that the number of tweets per day on the immigration issue peaks when the whole media attention focuses on the racist assassination in Macerata and the following anti-racist mobilization (Figure 6.1). To testify the intensification of immigration-related tweets in the last period of the electoral campaign, suffice it to mention that out of the about 600 tweets on the issue extracted in the whole period (January 1st - March 3rd, 2018) more than 450 (76%) were made in the last month of the campaign; the ratio between

immigration-related tweets and the total tweets produced by all selected leaders and parties went from 6% in January to about 9% since February. Table 6.2 shows that if centre-right parties and leaders are for sure the most active in producing tweets on immigration, centre-left parties, but not leaders, have not been silent. If we look at party Twitter accounts, the most active one is that of the Salvini League, with Matteo Salvini who was by far the most productive amongst leaders. H4 is then confirmed, but only partially because if the right-wing populist party FdI produced more tweets than the 'moderate' *Forza Italia*, Silvio Berlusconi was much more active than Giorgia Meloni. As hypothesized (H5), the M5S and its leaders have been virtually absent in the Twitter-channelled immigration debate. But it is worth noticing the very small number of immigration-related tweets by both the PD and Matteo Renzi in this respect. The absence of the main subject of the left from the immigration debate comes as a surprise, if not an alarm, in a campaign characterized by racist attacks toward immigrants.

To be sure, all the leaders commented on the Macerata facts somehow:

Salvini sent the following tweet to #Macerata: "Violence is never a solution. Violence is always to be condemned. And those who do wrong must pay. Uncontrolled immigration brings chaos, anger, and social conflict. Uncontrolled immigration brings drug dealing, thefts, robberies and violence" (Sent to #Macerata on February 3rd, 2018, 2966 favourites, 1021 retweets).

In this tweet Salvini uses the classic logical contradiction such as "I'm not a racist, but". The tweet is structured as a kind of syllogism in which the premise is no longer true, once we get to the conclusion: "violence is never a solution" and "uncontrolled immigrants bring social conflict and violence". Logically, the blame attribution shifts from the Italian killer to immigrants themselves.

Salvini never mentions the killer neither does he refer directly to what really happened (an unsuccessful League candidate and a fascist[7], Luca Traini, shooting six black African people from a car). He always uses the generic reference to violence, and in the following tweet on the same topic

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[7]   https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/03/italian-extremist-given-12-year-sentence-after-shooting-at-migrants.

he confirms the diagnosis of the problem (violence) and adds the prognosis dimension (solution):

"Violence is always to be condemned. I have nevertheless the duty to tell Italians HOW to avoid facts such as those of Macerata. An example? By repatriating illegal immigrants (clandestini)" (sent to #Nonelarena – a TV talk show – February 4th, 2018, 395 favourites, 101 retweets).

On the other hand, and camp, Matteo Renzi did not provide a structured or meaningful frame to contrast Salvini's argument. If in one tweet sent to #Macerata on February 6th he writes, "We are on the civil line and we don't move from there", in another, the reader gets confused about what he really means: "Macerata was about a racist act, but gunfighters cannot bring justice. The recruitment of 10,000 policemen (both Carabinieri and police officers) is the right answer: common sense, not cuts to the police" (sent to #videoforumrepubblica, February 4th, 2018, 1517 favourites, 399 retweets).

Having said this, it is quite clear that centre-right parties and leaders have framed the immigration issues in a very negative way by an intensive use of social media. The data on the correlations between the terms used to tweet on immigration shown in Table 6.3 demonstrate how often right-wing leaders and parties link the immigration issue with the terms 'illegal' and 'security', while the less coherent discourse on the issue by other leaders and parties produced no correlation between terms.

Moreover, if we look at the way political leaders and parties tried to spread their messages about the immigration issue in other media, we notice that right-wing parties and leaders, and Salvini in particular, made every effort to 'advertise' their coherent anti-immigrant discourse.

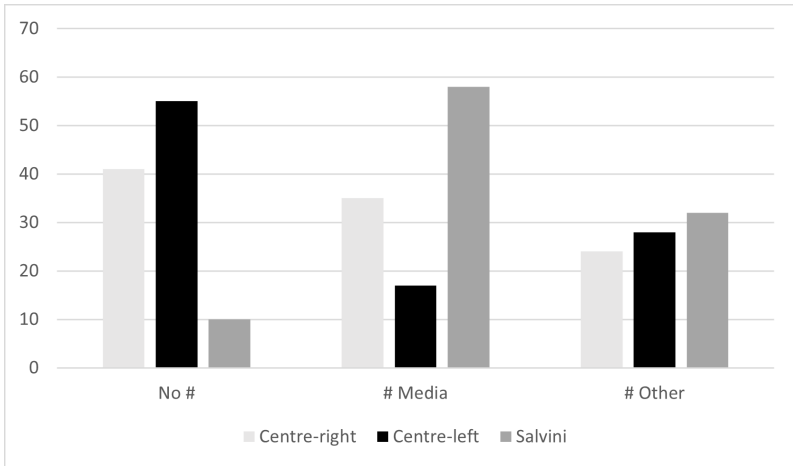| Table 6.3. Binary correlations between terms in right-wing leaders' tweets (Spearman).						
Leaders/ Parties	TERMS	Illegal	Security	Fugitive	Refugees	Mace-rata
All right-wing	Immigrat*	.25***	.10***	.09***	N.S.	N.S
	Macerata	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.	.13***	-----
	Illegal		.08***	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.
Salvini and LS	Immigrat*	.26***	N.S.	.09***	N.S.	.10***
	Macerata	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.	-----
		Illegal	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.

Fig. 6.2. Percentages of immigration-related tweets by political actors and hashtag use.

Figure 6.2 clearly shows the differences between centre-right and centre-left parties and leaders in sending their tweets on immigration to media-related hashtags and strongly confirms H6.

In the protest field of communication, things change radically. Protest events do not intensify with the Macerata facts (Figure 6.1), they were used by radically different actors and, more importantly, have a radically different structure (Table 6.1): 71% of the protest events collected are pro-minority and 53% were staged by pro-minority groups such as antagonistic groups, associations, radical leftist groups and parties and informal social movements. It is important to notice that in about 65% of cases, protests were supported with rational arguments and only in 7% they were presented emotionally. Both institutions and civil society took part in pro-minority protests but with different intensity: the institutions and/or mainstream political parties participated in protest actions in 14% of cases, while antagonistic groups and social movements had a pivotal role (44%) in the organization of anti-racist events. Moreover, migrants' communities and organizations were present in about 29% of protest events. However, while 80% of all claims were reported in national newspapers, about half of protest events had only local coverage. If the hypothesis (H7) of more discursive opportunities for anti-immigrant protest seem to be rejected in this case, the hypothesis (H8) of a wider national coverage

for anti-immigrant protest is still to be properly tested. True, 63% (17) of the protests reported at the national level have a pro-immigrant frame, but the percentage of pro-immigrant protests raises to 80 when we look at the local level.

5. Does Immigration get public?

Many of the hypotheses derived from the scientific literature on the immigration issue have been found incorrect or in need of further specification, while others, more focused on electoral campaigning through social media, seem to be verified by our data. However, the last two hypotheses to be tested are crucial to determine whether the immigration issue and a certain way to communicate it get the public opinion's attention.

We tried to assess this, by looking at the impact of the negative frame of the immigration issue on national press coverage and on audience reaction (engagement) on social media platforms.

The first model based on claim analyses represents a binary logistic regression with a dummy variable as a dependent variable indicating whether the claim had national or only local press coverage. By summarizing the main results of this model, Table 6.4 shows that together with the scope of the actor (national) and the form of the claim (declaration), an anti-immigrant frame has been found to be significantly relevant as to get national media attention. Whether the claim was justified by a rational argument or supported by some type of emotion had no impact.

Table 6.4. Binary Logistic regression of nationally covered claims on the immigration issue.	
	National coverage (0-1)
Factors	BETA
Leader (0-1)	N.S.
Actors Scope (0-2)	1.16**
Declaration (0-1)	1.30*
Arguments (01)	N.S.
Emotions (0-1)	N.S.
Anti Immigration (0-2)	0.74*
Constant	-0.73*
Pseudo R Square	0.30
*Sig. at 0.05 level; ** Sig. at 0.01 level; *** Sig. at 0.001 level.	

If we now turn to the analysis of the Twittersphere, we find similar results. The model of a linear regression analysis with the number of shares as dependent variable shows that tweets with more immigration-related keywords, including media-related hashtags by centre-right actors, are more likely to involve the audience in sharing the messages.

Table 6.5. Linear regression model of tweets shares of Italian parties and leaders.	
	Number of TW shares
Ind. Variables	Stand. Beta
Photo (0-1)	N.S.
#media (0-1)	0.38***
Immigration issue (add.)	0.12***
Right-wing (0-1, M5S excluded)	0.13***
Constant	N.S.
Adj. R Square	0.17
*Sig. at 0.05 level; ** Sig. at 0.01 level; *** Sig. at 0.001 level.	

In our interpretation, this means that tweets with a negative frame of immigration get much more support by Twitter audiences in sharing and then 'viralizing' the political messages. In fact, not only do they get more shares when the tweet's issue is on immigration, but also when they are sent by right-wing parties or leaders, which have been proved to frame immigrants in a very negative way in both the Twittersphere and the press and to hybridize (including hashtags launched by traditional media) their immigration-related tweets much more than the others. The data showed in Table 6.4 and Table 6.5 seem, then, to support both Hypotheses 9 (claims with negative frames get more national press coverage) and 10 (tweets with a negative frame get more audience support).

6. Campaigning on the immigration issue in Italy: some conclusive remarks

Political communication during electoral campaigns intensifies in terms of density and speed especially in times of hybridised media systems (Chadwick 2013), in which different channels of communication tend to interact with each other and new media allows political actors to set the traditional media agenda by eluding their past gatekeeping function. This

offers a tremendous opportunity for new challengers of traditional political parties to put their 'challenging' issue at the centre of the electoral debate. As reported in the introduction to this chapter, and in other chapters of this book, the focus on the immigration issue in many electoral campaigns conducted in Western democracies is to be explained, together with other populist contents, precisely by the combination of the transformation in the technologies of communication and the presence of political actors trying to challenge traditional parties and leaders with 'explosive' issues (Farris and Silber 2018; Kriesi and Pappas 2015). In the 2018 Italian electoral campaign, the issue of immigration became even more 'explosive' after the barbaric, racist, gun attack against several immigrants in the city of Macerata. Though obviously all parties and leaders condemned the attack, some leaders downgraded it to the action of a mad person, who was actually a candidate of the Northern League in 2017. It could be said, however, that such attack manifests the exacerbation of the debate on the immigration issue that occurred in the last few years, and was further intensified in the final months of the 2018 electoral campaign. It is probably no coincidence that the day after the elections, a Senegalese man was killed in Florence by another 'mad' Italian man. In this chapter we sought to reconstruct the debate on the immigration issue in the last Italian national electoral campaign by looking at three channels of communication through which political and social actors try to make their political claims and reach a wide audience: the traditional media (the press), the new media (Twitter) and the protest arena. The elements of the structure of the communication in these three channels are basically the same – the claimer, the claim and its content and a target such as the public opinion – can then be compared through their operational media logic. Moreover, their impact on public opinion may differ. By relying on an extensive and differentiated literature review, we formulated 10 hypotheses that we sought to test by resorting to social media big data, press claims and protest events analysis. All hypotheses point to the supposed overrepresentation of right-wing and populist anti-immigrant claims in the hybrid media system. Most of them have been, however, rejected by our data. First of all, it does not seem true that traditional media (the press) tend to give more space to claims with a negative framing of immigration (H1). Actually, pro-immigrant rights views seem to prevail in the press. It is certainly true that centre and extreme right-wing par-

ties and leaders focus on immigration more than centre-left parties and institutions (H2), but it is also true that even civil society actors, social movements and leftist organizations can use the protest arena to make their anti-racist claims public. However, when we move our attention to the analysis of social media (Twitter), things change radically. Here the immigration issue is mostly taken by its 'owners'. The Salvini League, Salvini, and even Berlusconi, depicted as 'moderate' in the 2018 electoral campaign, produced lots of tweets on the immigration issue by framing it in a rather negative way (H4). Moreover, the relative silence of centre-left leaders on the issue and the total indifference of the M5S and its leaders (H3 and H5) made the anti-immigrant frame in the Twittersphere hegemonic. Twitter is the social media platform used by political actors especially to set the media agenda (Andretta and Bracciale 2017; Conway, Kenski and Wang 2015) and, in fact, Salvini, Berlusconi and all right-wing parties often included hashtags referred to TV talk shows, newspapers and radio events much more than other political actors and much more when dealing with immigration (H5). Rather than studying the immigration debate in the educated communication space of newspapers, it would be better to analyse the debate in TV talk shows, which are much more hybridized and sensitive to new media communication than other traditional media, although the readers of newspapers such as *Il Giornale*, *Libero* or *La Verità* would be more exposed to hate speech on immigration than any other. It is very likely that these readers are among the followers of right-wing parties and leaders (Roncarolo and Mancini 2018: 9) who are found to be much more active in spreading their anti-immigrant tweets abroad (H10). The only communicative space where a prominent pro-immigrant rights frame prevails seems to be the protest arena, where civil society organizations, anti-racist groups, minorities, and social movements articulate their 'rational' discourse on immigration more easily (H7 and H8). Unfortunately, protest gets national attention only sometimes and, in the press, other forms of claims prevail, such as declarations, interviews and the like. Moreover, whatever the form of the claims, when they support a negative view of immigration, no matter if emotionally or 'rationally', they are more likely to receive national coverage (H9). It is for these reasons that, at the end of the 'electoral' day, the prevailing mood makes anyone think that the public opinion is screaming, "Kick them off!".

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