

# Fratelli d'Italia: for 'the people' and only for 'the people'

*A case study of Fratelli d'Italia to examine whether populist parties, that are the biggest in government coalitions are a threat to liberal democracy*

Wouter van Houting

S1045448

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Master in Political Science (MSc) Radboud University

Specialization: Comparative Politics

Supervisor: dr. A.S. Zaslove

Nijmegen School of Management

Radboud University, Nijmegen, The Netherlands

21-06-2024

Wordcount: 24.606

## *Abstract*

In this thesis the influence of populist parties, that are the biggest in government coalitions, on liberal democracy is analysed. This was done through a case study of Fratelli d'Italia, a populist radical-right party that is the biggest party in current Italian government. In the first part of this thesis the concepts of populism and liberal democracy were defined. There are multiple approaches to the concept of populism, in this thesis the ideational approach is chosen as the main approach. This approach looks at populism as a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately divided into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite,' and argues that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people. Following to this the term liberal democracy was split into eight categories to measure the concept. These categories are effective participation, voting equality, enlightened understanding, inclusion of all adults, constraining of executive power, the rule of law, representative representatives and control of the agenda and will serve as indicators for liberal democracy for the remainder of this thesis. Fratelli d'Italia. is a populist party because of their heritage from other populist parties and because their style and party programme fit within the frames of the ideational approach of populism. Parts of their popularity can be explained by the Italian context in which they operate, which can be seen as a fertile breeding place for populism. In the analysis of the actions of Fratelli d'Italia while in government, it can be concluded that on five of the eight indicators for liberal democracy, Fratelli d'Italia is influencing liberal democracy by threatening its core characteristics . These threats can mostly be explained because of actions that are typical for populist parties, therefore it can be concluded that populist parties, that are the biggest in government, influence liberal democracy in a negative way. However, some restraint to generalize these results is required, since the Italian political system allows for populist parties to 'occupy' the state more easily than other Western-European countries.

# Table of contents

Abstract.....	1
Introduction: a populist revolution in five years.....	3
Populism: a constantly contested concept.....	5
Populism as strategy.....	5
Populism as style.....	5
Populism as discourse.....	6
Populism as ideational approach.....	6
Everyone with common sense agrees.....	8
Liberal democracy: difficult to develop, easy to tear apart.....	9
Critique on liberal democracy.....	12
The tension between populism and liberal democracy.....	14
Populism in practice.....	16
Unveiling the mechanics: a methodological approach.....	19
The case: the same old strategy, or a new pathway?.....	19
Italy: the country of pasta, fashion, Campari and ... populism?.....	20
The (selective) brotherhood of Italy.....	22
Fratelli d'Italia and liberal democracy: a difficult relationship.....	28
1. Effective participation.....	28
2. Voting equality.....	30
3. Enlightened understanding.....	32
4. Inclusion of all adults.....	34
5. Constraining of executive power.....	36
6. The rule of law.....	38
7. Representative representatives.....	40
8. Control of the agenda.....	42
The link with Populism.....	43
Conclusion.....	46
Bibliography.....	48
Appendix 1: coding sheet.....	55
Appendix 2: the coding document.....	56

## *Introduction: a populist revolution in five years*

It is the summer of 2019 in Rome, when at the World Congress of Families a 158cm tall blonde woman in her late forties took the stage. Although this woman was at the time a pretty insignificant politician, from a pretty insignificant party, speaking at a pretty insignificant event, the speech she was about to give would end up reaching world fame over the following words that were shouted passionately to the audience consisting of old white men waving their Italian flags: ‘Io sono Giorgia, sono una donna, sono una madre, sono Italiana, sono Cristiana’ (I am Giorgia, I am a woman, a mother, an Italian, a Christian) (Meloni, 2022).

This woman, Giorgia Meloni from the party Fratelli d’Italia (FdI), was giving this speech about how traditional character traits are being taken away. The message of Meloni was that they (it does not really become clear who ‘they’ are) do no longer want the Italian people to have an identity and roots anymore. “And so they attack national identity, they attack religious identity, they attack gender identity, they attack family identity. I can’t define myself as Italian, Christian, woman, mother. No. I must be Citizen X, Gender X, Parent 1, Parent 2. I must be a number”, Meloni said right before the few words that made her world famous (Meloni, 2022).

It is now 2024. The same Giorgia Meloni has been elected prime minister of Italy in 2022 and is leading a conservative radical-right coalition. Not only is Meloni popular in Italy right now, but she is also popular amongst European leaders, being generally well-liked in a range from Viktor Orbán to Ursula van der Leyen in the European Union. Not only that, Meloni seems to be a shining example of how a populist radical right party can be popular with a more moderate part of the electorate. This has resulted in populist leaders all across Europe trying to follow her example. Wilders suddenly was willing to put some radical plans in ‘the refrigerator to be able to join the government, resulting in Dutch political commentators ironically calling him ‘Geert Milders’. The same goes for Le Pen in France who very openly closed the door to cooperation within the European faction with the more radical AFD from Germany, distancing her party from the far-right image of the AFD, to appear more moderate to the wider audience.

Critical voices see in Meloni and other populist leaders a wolf in sheep’s clothes, who are willing to destroy liberal democracy from within the system. However, others see it as a healthy correction of liberal democracy, in which citizens that had previously felt excluded from the democratic process get to be included once again. In this thesis I will try to find an answer to the question: *How do populist parties leading government coalitions influence liberal democracy?* This research question will be answered through a case study of how Fratelli d’Italia, the party of Giorgia Meloni, has operated during the first year and seven months of their period in the Italian government.

Since FdI is seen as a frontrunner on this new wave of populist parties in Western Europe, it is relevant to scientifically research what this means for the state of liberal democracy in Italy. There is some scientific research on how to define the party FdI politically, but very little on their actual actions while in government. This is probably because of the short time that their period in government has lasted, but I would suggest that within a year and seven months enough has happened to distinguish a distinctive course of action in government for this party.

The scientific relevance of this thesis is a contribution to the available knowledge on how populist parties operate within government and to contribute to the ongoing debate in political science on the question whether populism is a threat to democracy. The societal relevance of this research is more insight in what the effects are of a populist party dominating the government coalition. Furthermore, this thesis can hold a predictive function on what would happen if and when a populist party becomes the biggest party within a government coalition in other European countries.

This thesis will be structured as follows: in the theory section the concept of populism will be explained in more detail. The multiple different approaches towards the concept populism will be distinguished and explained. In this thesis the ideational approach will serve as the central approach and I will try to give arguments to support this choice. Furthermore, the concept of liberal democracy will be pulled apart into different categories that serve as crucial aspects of liberal democracy. The categories will be based on a combination of multiple influential authors on liberal democracy and primarily combines the theories of Larry Diamond and Robert Dahl. These categories will later be used as indicators on how the actions of FdI contribute to the strengthening or weakening of liberal democracy. Lastly, in the theory section the tension between liberal democracy and populism will be further examined on the basis of theories of multiple political theorists. Multiple theories offer distinctive views on whether or not populism is a healthy correction of democracy or a danger to the survival of liberal democracy. The diverse views will be explained.

Thereafter, in the methods section the case selection will be explained. This case will be examined to see how it fits in the greater picture of populist parties in Western-Europe. The case that is central in this thesis is a pathway case. This is a case that makes it possible to research a causal mechanism in a way that was not possible before. I will argue that the case of FdI is radically different from other populist parties in governments in Western-Europe and therefore allows for a different approach to the research question. Furthermore, the history of liberal democracy in Italy and a short history of the party FdI will be given. These overviews will give a better image of the context in which the case operates. Lastly, the methods of researching the main question of this thesis will be explained.

In the results section the main question will be answered through an overview of the actions of FdI. Not only will this thesis look at what the effect on liberal democracy is of these actions, but also on whether these actions can be seen as typical for populist parties. Although the popularity of FdI has not diminished with its voters, multiple actions from the party while in government can be seen as influencing liberal democracy in a negative way. Those actions can for a large part be explained by their populist heritage. In the conclusion a definite answer of the main question will be given and I will look at the shortcomings of this thesis and what could be possible recommendations for future research.

## *Populism: a constantly contested concept*

In this paragraph of the thesis the main concepts of the research question *How do populist parties leading government coalitions influence liberal democracy* will be explained in further detail. To be able to formulate a concrete answer to the research question it is crucial to gain a common understanding of what this question entails. After all, different definitions will lead to different results. The most important concepts of the research question are *populism* and *liberal democracy*. Both seem like common concepts that are used often in the media and within political science. However, coming to an unambiguous definition of the concepts is more difficult than one might think. By decomposing the concepts it becomes clear what the concepts mean and what they do not mean. Furthermore the research question assumes a relationship between the two questions. To understand the contents of this relation and to examine the potential tensions between populism and liberal democracy, there will be multiple insights that originate from the theory on this particular relationship. These theoretical insights should suffice to carry on with the rest of the thesis afterwards.

Populism is a buzzword in democracies worldwide, from Javier Milei in Argentina, Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines to FdI and the PVV in the Netherlands. You cannot escape hearing about it in the media. The term "populism" is so widely used that it's tough to pin down exactly what it means. There are multiple approaches in defining populism. In the following segment the most common approaches will be explained. Firstly the approaches that will not be used in this thesis will be shortly explained. Followed by a longer explanation of the 'populism as ideology' approach, which will be used in this thesis.

### *Populism as strategy*

Influential author Kurt Weyland who is specialized on populism in Latin-America gave the following definition of populism: "Populism is best defined as a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers" (Weyland, 2001). Weyland sees populism mainly as a strategy used by charismatic leaders. In this approach populists are seen as political figures or parties that are not driven by ideology but are driven by a goal to mobilize voters and obtain as much power as possible (Rovira Kaltwasser, Taggart, Ochoa Espejo, & Ostinguy, 2017). In this approach, populism is a political strategy that revolves around a charismatic individual politician, who mobilizes people through personalistic leadership (Rovira Kaltwasser et al., 2017). This populist leader will try to combat the established 'political class' and will distinguish itself from other 'corrupt' career politicians. By mobilizing as many people as possible, the populist strategy is to display un-mediated leadership. Whether it is during elections, referenda or during mass demonstrations. This approach however is more popular in Latin-America and non-Western countries and less in European countries (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017).

### *Populism as style*

This approach sees populism mostly as a style of behavior, where politicians (deliberately) act amateurish, unorganized and folkloric (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). In this approach populism is performative, however this does not mean that populist politicians are putting on a performance (Moffitt & Tormey, 2013).

Instead, populist politicians share a common set of characteristics and style choices that appeal to ‘the people’. This is for instance visible in language, a populist politician will try to speak ‘the tongue of the people’ by using simple understandable language, by using slang or swearwords and by presenting your plans as ‘common sense’ (Moffitt & Tormey, 2013). Part of the populist style can also be disregarding political correctness and disrespecting dress code manners (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). In short, politicians with a populist style, try to distinguish themselves from their opponents by looking, talking and behaving in a different manner. The goal is to be seen by ‘the people’ as ‘one of them’ (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017).

### *Populism as discourse*

This approach is radically different from the last two approaches and is based on the work of Ernesto Laclau and his wife Chantal Mouffe. They view populism not through the framework of liberal democracy as most approaches do, but from the framework of radical democracy. This means that they see democracy at its core as a conflict between different opinions. In liberal democracy, this conflict gets tempered by depoliticization and consensus-building, however radical democrats believe rather than tempering the conflict, it should be embraced as the correct form of democracy (Mouffe, 1993). In this view populism arises from conflict between ‘the people’ and ‘the establishment’. Furthermore, they see populism as a mean to mobilize excluded parts of society into politics to try and change the status quo of liberal democracy (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017).

### *Populism as ideational approach*

In the ideational approach populism gets defined as ‘a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite,” and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017)’.

Some of the core concepts in this definition require more explanation. The first concept is a ‘thin-centered ideology’. An ideology is ‘a body of normative ideas about the nature of man and society as well as the organization and purposes of society (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). In other words, it is a way of looking at the world and humanity and a set of ideas about how it should be. Populism differs from ‘thick-centered ideologies’ or ‘full ideologies’ such as socialism, liberalism or fascism, because populism in itself is not enough to form a full coherent set of political ideas about how the world should be. ‘By itself populism can offer neither complex nor comprehensive answers to the political questions that modern society generate (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017)’. This means that populism needs another ideology to attach itself to. As a result of this, populism can come in various shapes and sizes. Parties can for instance be populist-conservative or populist-socialist. What is similar between the parties is the second part of the given definition: the notion that considers society to be separated between the people and the elite and the idea that politics should follow the general will of the people.

So, who exactly are ‘the common people’ and who are ‘the elite’? The people is an inherently vague term that is difficult to explain since the people do not really exist. It is a construction, that at best is referring to a specific interpretation, even simplification, of reality (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). Some scholars argue that this

vagueness surrounding the concept makes the concept useless, however according to Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser the concept of ‘the people’ allows for three different meanings of ‘the people’.

The notion of *the people as sovereign* stems from the democratic ideal that defines ‘the people’ not only as the ultimate source of political power, but also as ‘the rulers’. Although the government can be seen as the political elite of a country, they are still in service of the sovereign people. When the people feel that they are not well represented by the political establishment they criticize or rebel against them (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). This paves the way for populist parties wanting to give the ‘government back to the people’.

The second notion of ‘the people’ views ‘the people’ as *the common people*. This refers to a broader class concept that combines socioeconomic status with specific cultural traditions and popular values (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). ‘The common people’ according to this view are the people that are being excluded from political power because of their sociocultural and socioeconomic status. It is a criticism of the dominant culture of ‘the elite’ that is in the minority, against the majority whose judgements, tastes and values are looked down on. This meaning of ‘the people’ tends to be both connecting the target audience with each other and dividing the population as a whole: it unites the angry and the silent majority, but it also mobilizes the majority against ‘the establishment’ (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017).

The third notion defines the people in terms of the ‘native’ population. It refers to ‘the people of Italy’ or ‘the people of the Netherlands’ as the national community that has the ‘native’ ethnicity of the given country. It creates a distinction between the ‘native’ people which implies that they are a community with common culture and shared values and the others who are not and never will be part of this group (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017).

Since it is vague to theorize who belongs to ‘the people’ according to the populists, it is also obviously difficult to then theorize who does not belong to ‘the people’ and who belongs to ‘the elite’. Like ‘the people’, ‘the elite’ can come in all shapes and sizes for example the political establishment, the economic elite, the media elite and cultural elite. All are portrayed as a homogenous group that works against the ‘general will’ of the people (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017).

Although you would assume from the definition of Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser that everyone who is not part of ‘the people’ automatically becomes part of ‘the elite’, this is not necessarily the case. For example, xenophobic populists in Europe often define ‘the people’ as a matter of ethnicity. ‘The people’ gets defined as the original or majoritarian ethnicity in the given country, the ‘aliens’ are immigrants or ethnic minorities but not ‘the elite’ (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). Instead they argue that the elite favors the interests of the immigrants or ethnic minorities over the interests of the ‘pure people’ (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017).

Firstly, the most important group is the people in power. This includes most people who hold leading positions in politics, the economy, corporate life, the media and the arts (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). However, the exception to this are the populists themselves and those people outside of politics with a position of power that are sympathetic towards the populists (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). For instance a populist party critiquing ‘the media’ as being elitist and against the people, except for the few newspapers or tv-shows that are actually sympathetic towards them.

The elite also gets linked to the economic class. Often the economic elite is used to ‘explain’ the lack of political success of populist parties (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). For example, they will claim that their inevitable political victory is sabotaged by the economic elite, who have a benefit in keeping the status quo.

Populist often argue that ‘the elite’ is not just ignoring the interests of the people, but even working against the interests of the country (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). They do this in the context of the European Union for example, where they accuse the political elite of putting the interests of the EU over those of the country. Even going as far as believing in conspiracy theories of some global elite trying to undermine interests of every citizen (Castanho Silva, Vegetti, & Littvay, 2017).

### *Everyone with common sense agrees*

The last concept of the definition that needs explanation is the notion of the general will or the *volonté générale*, first introduced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau saw the general will as the capacity of the people to join together into a community to form legislation that follows their common interests. For this reason freedom and authority are not contradictory since Rousseau argued that legitimate laws are based on the general will of the people (Rousseau, 2002). According to Rousseau every person is capable of taking the moral standpoint to aim at the common good and if they did so, they would reach a unanimous decision (Rousseau, 2002). So in an ideal state, laws express the general will.

Following this line of thought, the most important task for politicians is to produce legitimate laws by looking at the societal thermometer and expressing the general will of the people in parliament. However, politics is not that straightforward. The misuse of Rousseau’s general will is common amongst populist politicians. Instead of going out into the public sphere and deliberate as long as necessary with the public to come to some sort of general will, they rather rely on the use of ‘common sense’. Populist frame their viewpoints in a particular way that is useful for both collecting different demands and identifying a common enemy (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). By saying that their opinions are based on ‘common sense’ and what ‘the people’ want, every politician who does not agree with them automatically is acting against the general will of the people and does not use common sense.

The concept of a general will within society has led to criticism of a whole range of political thinkers. Friedrich Hayek claimed ‘there is all the difference in the world between treating people equally and attempting to make them equal. While the first is the condition of a free society, the second means as De Tocqueville describes it ‘a new form of servitude’ (Hayek, 2022). Latvian philosopher Isaiah Berlin also contested the views of Rousseau since it assumes there is the existence of a unique, ‘true’ public interest, a single set of laws, that is best for all citizens. Since this leaves no room for pluralist views, it opens the door for totalitarianism. He wrote ‘there is not a dictator in the West who in the years after Rousseau did not use this monstrous paradox in order to justify his behavior (Crowder, 2004)’. Populist actors and constituencies often share a conception of the political that is close to the one developed by the German political theorist Carl Schmitt (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). For Schmitt a homogenous population is a precondition of the legitimate applicability of law (Vinx, 2019). Following this logic a politician should strive towards a homogenous population and everyone who falls outside of this

homogenous group, forms a threat to the stability of society. Just like the general will is based on the unity of the people and on the clear demarcation of those who do not belong to ‘the people’ and are thus not treated as equals (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). In short, because populists claim that the general will is based on ‘common sense’ and therefore logically visible for everyone and that the general will is also absolute, it can legitimize authoritarianism and illiberal attacks on anyone who threatens the homogeneity of the people (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). This is exactly where the tension with liberal democracy lies. A tension that will be explained in more detail later on.

In this thesis the ideational approach will serve as the central approach for the definition of populism. This has multiple reasons. The ideational approach provides a clear and consistent definition of populism in which the contradictions of ‘the people’ versus ‘the elite’ serve as the core concepts. In this approach the usage of these definitions for distinguishing parts of the population, results in clarity in distinguishing populism from other political phenomena. Furthermore, the ideational approach treats populism as a thin-centered ideology, which makes it possible to examine populism in various settings from right-wing to left-wing parties and to compare populism, while accounting for differences between political and cultural factors in different countries. Lastly, this approach provides the best possible way to examine the essence of populist movements, because the ideational approach zooms in on the most fundamental characteristics of populism.

In this part of the theory, the concept of populism gets defined. Populism is an essentially contested concept. Since there is an ever ongoing debate on how to define the concept and whether it exists in the first place. The different approaches towards populism that are distinguished in *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* are explained, with a longer explanation of the ideational approach. The approach that will be used in the remainder of this thesis. The ideational approach, approaches populism as a (thin-centered) ideology, but if you define populism as a framework to look at the world and how it should be, you can also answer the question of how populists actively influence liberal democracy. But to actually answer this question, the other main concept of this question also needs some defining namely liberal democracy.

### *Liberal democracy: difficult to develop, easy to tear apart*

For this thesis the focus will be on liberal democracy. Liberalism and democracy are separate concepts, although they are closely related. Political liberalism can be defined as a rule of law that recognizes certain individual rights or freedom from control of the government (Fukuyama, 1992).

Luckily there have been countless authors that have come up with all sorts of theories about what democracy is and what it should be. According to American political scientist Robert Dahl there are five criteria that have to be met before it is possible for a state to satisfy the requirement that all of the inhabitants are equally entitled to participate in the country’s decisions about politics. Those are the following: Effective participation, voting equality, enlightened understanding, control of the agenda and inclusion of all adults.

According to Dahl no state has ever possessed a government that fully measured up to the criteria of a democratic

process and none likely ever will (Dahl, 1998). However the criteria must be seen as ideal standards. They provide standards to measure the performance of actual states that claim to be democratic (Dahl, 1998). They can also be used as guidelines for shaping and reshaping concrete arrangements, constitutions, practices and political institutions (Dahl, 1998).

Larry Diamond offers a more detailed definition for liberal democracy and in turn explains what cannot be classified as a liberal democracy. He makes the distinction between four types of democracies. The first he calls electoral democracy. He describes this as the lowest baseline for a country to be classified as a democracy. An electoral democracy can be classified as ‘a regime in which governmental offices are filled as a consequence of contested elections (Przeworski, 2004)’. Scholars do agree that for elections to actually be contested there needs to be some ground rules in place for the competition and public participation to be meaningful, such as minimum levels of freedom of press, speech, organization. An electoral democracy only works when opposition parties get a somewhat fair chance to contest the governing party (Diamond, 1999). Countries like Turkey or Hungary can be seen as electoral democracies, but they do not live up to the standards of a liberal democracy.

Diamond argues that electoral democracy can be split into two types of democracy, namely liberal democracy and illiberal democracy. Liberal democracy extends the basic concept of electoral democracy towards a more comprehensive set of guidelines that go hand in hand with democratic values. In addition to the elements of electoral democracy as previously described, it also requires the absence of reserved indirect or direct domains of power for the military or other actors not accountable to the electorate (Diamond, 1999). It also requires horizontal accountability of officeholders to one another, to ensure a system of checks and balances (Diamond, 1999). Within a liberal democracy there also must be the freedom to express political views and discontents outside of the regular elections. Individual and group freedoms must be protected to display civic pluralism (Diamond, 1999).

By combining the theories of Larry Diamond and Robert Dahl, a set of conditions for a well-functioning liberal democracy has been created. The indicators are: effective participation, voting equality, enlightened understanding, representative representatives, inclusion of all adults, constraining of executive power, the rule of law and control of the agenda. These conditions will serve as indicators to measure the extent to which populism is influencing liberal democracy. The indicators can be found in *table 1*.

*Table 1: indicators for liberal democracy*

<b>Effective participation</b>	Every person should get the chance to have equal and effective opportunities to make their views known to other people. This goes beyond parties and elections. Citizens should have access to various continuous platforms where they can express themselves and advocate for their interests and values. These platforms should encompass a range of diverse, autonomous organizations and movements, which individuals have the liberty to establish and participate in.
<b>Voting equality</b>	Every person must have an equal and effective opportunity to vote and all votes must be counted equal.
<b>Enlightened understanding</b>	Every person should get the freedom to request information regarding the actions of the government and should get ample time to learn about relevant alternative policies and their likely consequences. This also includes alternative (media) sources to which citizens should have unfettered access.
<b>Representative representatives</b>	Chosen representatives must adhere to the constitution and to the common laws. Representatives should not use their political position to gain personal benefits. They should behave respectfully towards their constituents and regard their political opponents as legitimate adversaries.
<b>Inclusion of all adults</b>	All adult members of state should have full political rights. This includes cultural, ethnic, religious and other minority groups that should not be prohibited (legally or in practice) from expressing their interests in the political process or practicing their culture.
<b>Constraining of executive power</b>	Executive power should be constrained, constitutionally and in fact, by the autonomous powers of parliament, an independent judicial system and other mechanisms of horizontal accountability. Individual and group liberties are effectively protected by an independent, non-discriminatory judiciary whose decisions are enforced and respected by other centres of power.
<b>The rule of law</b>	The rule of law protects citizens from unjustified detention, exile, terror, torture, and undue interference in their personal lives, not only by the state but also by organized nonstate or anti-state forces.
<b>Control of the agenda</b>	Members of state must have the exclusive opportunity to decide how and, if they choose, what matters are placed on the political agenda. Policies are never finished or closed and should always be open to change if the members of state choose to do so.

The indicators originated from a combination of the most influential theories on liberal democracy and can therefore be seen as a coherent set of dimensions that result in a comprehensive theoretical definition of liberal democracy. These indicators should entail the most important aspects of liberal democracy. The combination of indicators enable for a comprehensible evaluation of liberal democracy in a theoretical sense as well as a practical sense. Therefore these indicators will serve as a guideline for liberal democracy for the remainder of this thesis.

### *Critique on liberal democracy*

It is however unfair to portray liberal democracy as the undisputed end goal of human development in the political forms of government. To give a more complete overview of the concept of liberal democracy it is important to

also highlight some of the criticisms that have been expressed.

The Belgian author Chantal Mouffe argues that liberal democracy tends to depoliticize political discourse by emphasizing consensus and rational deliberation (Mouffe, 1993). By focusing on consensus, legitimate political conflict and antagonism get marginalized, components of democracy which she believes are essential to a vibrant democracy. Antagonism is the idea that there is a clear opponent or enemy within the political debate (Mouffe, 1993). According to Mouffe the consensus culture within liberal democracy goes at the expense of recognizing and addressing deep-seated conflicts and power struggles (Mouffe, 1993). This also explains why Mouffe believes that populist parties are actually healthy for democracy, since they possess the ability to mobilize groups of society that feel excluded or marginalized and since populists have less of a consensus-seeking attitude and more of a conflict-seeking attitude.

Francis Fukuyama published a famous book called *The End of history and the Last Man* on how the end of the cold war also meant the end of the ideological evolution, since men had found the ultimate form of politics: liberal democracy (Fukuyama, 1992). However thirty years later he also came to the conclusion that his analysis was premature and that there are still issues with liberal democracy. For instance from the progressive left, liberal democracy is associated with neoliberal economic policy, which dramatically increased economic inequality and brought on devastating financial crises that hurt ordinary people far more than the wealthy elites in many countries around the world (Fukuyama, 2022). Therefore economic problems are (unjustly, according to Fukuyama) blamed on principles of liberal democracy. At the same time conservatives see an exaggerated emphasis on personal autonomy within liberal democracy (Fukuyama, 2022). Which can be conceived as threatening the most deeply held religious or cultural beliefs of others.

Others claim that liberal democracy is not suited to deal with current societal problems which require more long-term vision, such as combatting climate change. Because in a liberal democracy leaders are mostly preoccupied with elections cycles and have a main goal to get re-elected again, they focus on short-term goals that are achievable within a near future, with the goal to not disappoint their electorate (Reybrouck, 2016). Therefore politicians within a liberal democracy shy away from making unpopular, but necessary decisions that will benefit the population in the long-term (Reybrouck, 2016)

Margaret Canovan has also critiqued modern liberal democracy stating that there is a paradox that democratic politics does not and cannot make sense to most of the people it aims to empower, because it is not transparent enough for most people (Canovan, 2002). This is a paradox since democracy should be the most inclusive and accessible form of politics ever achieved. She claims there is a contradiction between bringing the people into politics, by which she means, providing avenues and mechanisms to allow their concerns to make their way into the political process, and taking politics to the people, by allowing them to form an comprehensive mental picture of it (Canovan, 2002). For people it is important to be able to make a mental picture of where the power lies, like a face that represents the system. Under autocratic rule this is easy, since it is clear for everyone by which person or party the power lies. Democracy in contrary spreads the political arena to include the entire population. But the more inclusive the arena becomes, the more interests, opinions and backgrounds join there are, the harder it is to paint the mental picture of the location of power. Politics becomes a unfathomable maze. There is a trade-off

between transparency to ordinary citizens and properly functioning institutions that allow people access to politics (Canovan, 2002). Sure, we as political scientist make arguments for quotas, the Borda Count, the d'Hondt formula, mixed randomization and so on, but for the average voter this will only make it less transparent and less comprehensive. It makes voting results into a opaque mathematics problem. In the contrary a winner-takes-all system speaks very much to the imagination of the average voter, but might not be the best for making a function institution.

She claims that is ambiguity of representative democracy is also what feeds populism. Canovan makes a distinction between the ideal of democracy and the practice of doing politics. Canovan claims that democracy in itself is also an ideology and this ideology is full of populist themes (Canovan, 2002). This is the ideal picture that populists like to portray, democracy at its core, with power to the people and grassroots ideals of direct democracy, majority against minority and sovereignty against accommodation (Canovan, 2002). What does not fit in the ideal of democracy is untransparent backroom politics and difficult institutions, things populists are usually against. Think about the European Union or international migration policies, those are things populists are usually against, because they are not policies that the majority wants or ever agreed to. From this perspective, populist leaders and their followers interpret the contradiction between ideology and politics as a clash between the shining ideal of democracy and the corrupt practice of doing politics (Canovan, 2002). Canovan therefore argues that populists are not a danger to liberal democracy, but that the way in which liberal democracy is organized feeds populist sentiment.

### *The tension between populism and liberal democracy*

However most authors would not agree with Canovan, who calls populism a healthy correction of democracy. You can imagine the tension between populism and liberal democracy. Where liberal democracy is based on pluralism and the protection of minorities, populism aims to disregard contrary opinions and tries to aim at the majority groups of society.

Cas Mudde and Kristian Kaltwasser believe that populism benefits parts of democracy because populism can contribute to the mobilization of social groups who feel that their concerns are not being considered by the political establishment (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). However, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser do not see populism as an innocent correction of liberal democracy. In liberal democracy there is always a certain tension between the majority rule and minority rights. Populists exploit these inherent tensions. In liberal democracy there are important democratic institutions such as the judiciary system and the media that seek to protect fundamental individual rights, even when this goes against the wishes of 'the sovereign people'. Populists will claim that these unelected bodies are a breach of majority rules and go against the authority given by 'the people' (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). As a result of this populists tend to distrust any unelected institution that limits the power of 'the people', whether this is the media, scientists or NGO's. In essence, populism raises the question of who controls the controllers.

The more the majority rule wins form the protection of the minority rights, the more a state is steering away from

being a liberal democracy towards an illiberal democracy. This is called democratic backsliding. In the popular book *how democracies die* by Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt make a comparative and historical analysis to explain not just how and why democracies crises happen, but how democracies can disappear completely. They argue that in most cases the transition from democracy towards authoritarianism does not happen overnight because of a dramatic event featuring ‘men with guns’, but rather as a gradual process that happens without ordinary people even realizing until it is too late (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). They also claim that within a democracy it is not so much the formal institutions that make democracy survive and thrive, but rather the unwritten rules and practices of a democracy, the democratic norms (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). Because without a clear understanding of the democratic norms, the formal institutions can easily become another political weapon ‘wielded forcefully by those who control them against those who do not’ (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). What matters most for the defense of democratic institutions is not appeal of the mass public to anti-democratic parties, because as Ziblatt and Levitsky point out, when Hitler and Mussolini rose to power in the 1920s there was a high absence of support for authoritarianism in their respective countries and more recent when populist authoritarian leader Hugo Chavez rose to power in Venezuela there was also a very high support for democracy. What matters more is whether political elites, and especially parties serve as filters. According to Ziblatt and Levitsky there is not only a danger for democracy in the mere existence of anti-democratic parties, but there is just as much of a danger in other political parties, seeing their anti-democratic opponents as legitimate rivals (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). Because this makes those parties and their views on democracy seem as ‘just a different opinion’, making anti-democratic sentiments more socially acceptable to a wider audience.

They claim two norms are essential for a healthy functioning democracy. The first is mutual toleration, which is the expression that even though your political opponents might have different opinions from yours, you still recognize them as legitimate rivals and contenders for power (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). The second is institutional forbearance, the willingness of those in power to not utilize their institutional privileges to the full extent (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). That the constitutional system allows you to do something, does not mean you have to do it. The democratic parties that respect these norms should also bear the task of being democracies gatekeepers, to keep anti-democratic parties out of the institutional system. Whether populist parties are anti-democratic will be researched further on in this thesis, but judging from the theory, the norm of mutual toleration is definitely not always respected by populist parties. Since they present themselves as the party representing ‘the people’, making the other parties that choose to not represent ‘the people’ corrupt.

Theorist Nadia Urbinati has expanded on this norm of mutual toleration. According to her representative democracy is both the environment in which populism develops and simultaneously its target, the thing it most claims to be ruling power against (Urbinati, 2014). It is in the interest of populist leaders to compete with other political actors on who gets to represent ‘the people’. Electoral victory in their case means proving that ‘the people’ they represent are ‘the good people’ that deserve to rule their country. In literature it is often claimed that populism is opposed to representative democracy, but Nadia Urbinati claims that populism does not oppose representative democracy, but tries to change representative democracy from within by constructing its own representative people

and government (Urbinati, 2014). For her the only form of democracy is liberal democracy as she claims ‘liberal democracy is a pleonasm and illiberal democracy is a contradiction in terms, an oxymoron’ (Urbinati, 2014). She says democracy without the right of free speech and freedom of expression, or democracy with a political majority that is so big it will not allow for any other majority to gain power, is in fact not democracy.

For this argument to make sense it is important to understand the views of Nadia Urbinati on democracy. For her democracy is all about political conflict within the public sphere. Politics in her eyes is about what precedes the moments until you fill in your vote on a ballot (Urbinati, 2014). To do this you have to form an opinion on the matter. This happens by listening to a plurality of different arguments and views within the public sphere and using your own political judgement to cherry pick the arguments that suit you the best.

When a populist party is in power, they will not abolish the practice of elections, but rather transform elections into a celebration of the majority and its leader, and into a new form of governing strategy based on direct representation between the people and their leader (Urbinati, 2014). Within populist parties the leader and the people effectively merge, leaving little room for deliberation and moderation. Elections in this sense do not exist as a way of choosing the party that suits you the best, but rather as a way through which ‘the winners’ of the elections can show *ex ante* that they are the right winners. Because of this phenomenon Urbinati argues, populists do not fight against the elite, but against the current elite and they are keen to substitute ‘the elite’ by a group formerly known as ‘the people’ (Urbinati, 2014).

For Urbinati the danger of populism is in the fact that populists leave no room for a pluralistic views. The populist leader represents ‘the pure people’ and therefore their opinion is the correct one. For Urbinati the essence of politics is in the public sphere where pluralistic views are key for people to form their own opinion (Urbinati, 2014). Since populists destroy the public sphere by claiming there is only one right opinion, she sees great danger in populism.

### *Populism in practice*

This only explains why populists threaten democracy in a theoretical sense, however it is also important to look at what the theory says about how populists act once they are in government. To answer this question we turn to the works of Jan-Werner Müller. He claims that it is tempting to think that populists are setting themselves up for an inevitable failure. Since they claim to be representing a homogenous group of ‘the people’, their authority will crumble when the inevitable disagreement between ‘the people’ or within the party happens (Müller, 2016). And secondly since populist parties exist to protest ‘the elite’, they need to stay in the opposition, otherwise they become the political elite and there is nothing left to protest (Müller, 2016). Therefore populists will never be fit to rule.

However this line of thinking is an illusion according to Jan Werner-Müller. He claims that it is not contradictory to keep on protesting ‘the elite’ from a position of power, since populist can blame failures in government on elites operating behind the scenes (Müller, 2016), this could be forces from inside the country or abroad (think of within the European Union, or other transnational organizations). Populist parties can gain mayor electoral victories and still act as the victim. When those populist parties are in a constant struggle against ‘the elite’ even after winning the elections, the most important thing is to stick together and keep heading in the same direction. That is why disagreement within ‘the people’ will be kept to a minimum (Müller, 2016).

Müller claims there are three populist techniques for governing. The first is where the populist try to colonize or 'occupy' the state (Müller, 2016). This is for example what happened in Hungary and Poland, where Fidesz from Hungary immediately after gaining office in 2010 changed civil service law to enable the party to place party loyalists in high civil service positions that should belong to non-partisan bureaucrats (Müller, 2016). What also happened was that Fidesz in Hungary as well as the Law and Justice party (PiS) in Poland, immediately tried to restrict the independence of the judicial system (Müller, 2016). Loyal judges were appointed and critical ones put out of their jobs. Lastly the parties also opted to restrict freedom of press by reshaping the public broadcaster networks and threatening journalists to not report on news that undermines the interests of the nation (which are of course the interests of the governing parties) (Müller, 2016). They were able to make these interventions with popular support by claiming to take back the state from 'the elite' in the hands of 'the people' again. Since they claim to represent the general will of the people, and they actually do represent 'the people' because of their electoral victories, who are then journalists, civil servants or judges to obstruct the representatives of 'the people'? By using this kind of language a part of the population becomes actually in favor of these interventions that lead to democratic backsliding.

Secondly, populists tend to engage in mass clientelism when governing (Müller, 2016). Clientelism is the exchange of material and immaterial favors by elites for mass political support. This behavior is not exclusive to populists and is a political practice of all ages. However what distinguishes populists from other parties is that they can do it without shame, in the broad daylight. Since for them the only important people are the ones who they represent, since they are 'the real people' and therefore deserve extra support of what is rightfully their state (Müller, 2016). The civilians that fall outside of the description of 'the people', should just accept that 'the real people' get to have more privileges since it is essentially 'their' state. They justify this by giving the majority group in society the feeling that the minority group is favored in policymaking. Populist will say that laws and policies made to improve the socio-economic status of minority groups are actually oppressive to the majority group, or at least undemocratic (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). This can lead to resentment against the minority groups and an increase of discrimination and racism. Populists are definitely not the only politicians that profit from clientelism, but with other parties it happens very subtle or behind closed doors. However with rhetoric as previously described, populists can actually do this with apparent clean moral conscience (Müller, 2016). This also explain according to Müller why populist parties seem be way less damaged in reputation by cases of clientelism that are just blatant corruption (Müller, 2016).

Lastly populists in power tend to be especially harsh on NGO's that criticize them (Müller, 2016). Critique from organization such as Amnesty International undermines the claim to exclusive moral representation of the people (Müller, 2016). Therefore populist go out of their way to argue and prove that societal organizations do not serve civil society at all and rather serve a different agenda. In a sense, they try to silence and discredit the people that the NGO represents, with the end goal of excluding everyone that does not fit the construal of 'the people' from the public debate (Müller, 2016). This again leads to the earlier distinguished paradox. Instead of removing the so-called current elite, the old elite just gets replaced by a new elite.

Others have distinguished that populists tend to shift the battle with 'the elite' towards issues of social justice. Populists tend to downplay social issues as anti-racism, anti-sexism and pro-LGBTQ+ rights as social developments that have gone too far, or as a threat towards the traditional lifestyle of people. They tend to claim that these 'woke' ideas are only a thing the out of touch 'elite' keeps themselves busy with and that 'the normal people' do not have time for such nonsense (Cammaerts, 2022). This is what is visible in the speech of Meloni that was quoted in the introduction, where Meloni talked about how 'they' would not let her be a mother, woman, Italian and Christian anymore. With 'they' she means the 'woke elitists' that want to cancel her traditional identity, referring to 'cancel culture', which is the idea that people who do not get along with the social justice idea, get excluded from the societal and political debate (Cammaerts, 2022). This results in populists even degrading fighting for equal social rights as 'elitist' behavior, therefore everyone discussing social issues is seen as elitist and against traditional values of 'the people'. This also justifies reversing progress made in those areas by populist governments. A trend that is often visible with populist parties in government (Corrales & Kiryk, 2022).

Looking back at the indicators of liberal democracy, multiple possible problems with liberal democracy arise judging from the theory. *Effective participation* gets lowered because according to Urbinati the debate within the public sphere gets diminished by populism, since populists only leave room for the 'correct' opinion of 'the pure people' within the democratic process. Furthermore populist parties in government tend to want to control state institutions. By controlling the media they lower the possibility for *enlightened understanding*. And by controlling the judicial system, they lower *the rule of law*. These actions are part of what Levitsky and Ziblatt have distinguished as institutional forbearance, just because it is institutionally possible to influence the media and the judicial system, parties with good democratic ethos would not do this. Populist parties are not one of those parties and tend to bad with the *constraining of executive power*. The mass clientelism of populists who try to justify giving more privileges to 'the people' leads to exclusion of minorities and thus lowers the *Inclusion of all adults*. *The control of the agenda* falls in the hands of the populist parties, instead of in the hands of the electorate, since populist parties strive keep disagreement within 'the people' to a minimum, because it would benefit 'the elite'. This effectively ensures that every party supporter is keen to follow the party line. This also results in less *control of the agenda* since the electorate mostly follows their party. Lastly members of populist parties are usually not less affected in their popularity by corruption, therefore they have less incentive to behave like *representative representatives*.

Considering the theory that is gathered on the actions of populists once elected in government, the hypothesis of this thesis is that populist parties in government have a negative influence on the core aspects of liberal democracy. This is because populist parties see their political opponents as elitist, corrupt and not acting in the best interest of the common people. Therefore they delegitimize their political opponents as fair political adversaries. Furthermore populist parties tend to explore the edges of what is possible within the contents of the law, or even outside of it, to benefit their party and their supporters. This leads to mass clientelism and them occupying the state through for instance the media and the judicial system, but will also disadvantage those who do not fit in the picture of the 'common people'. My hypothesis is that populist parties therefore have a negative influence on most, if not all of

the indicators for liberal democracy that were named in this paragraph.

To test this hypothesis, this thesis will investigate the actions of FdI in their first year and seven months in government as the biggest party. Before this can be tested it is important to give the context of the party and Italian democracy as a whole. Furthermore it is necessary to construct a research design, to be able to actually test this hypothesis. This will be done in the following chapter.

## *Unveiling the mechanics: a methodological approach*

To answer the research question on how populist parties leading government coalitions influence liberal democracy, there has to be found a way to empirically test this. In this thesis this will be done through a case study of the party FdI (Brothers of Italy) during the first year and seven months after they formed a government together with the parties Lega Nord and Forza Italia. Their term started on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 2022, meaning this thesis will focus on the period up until the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May 2024. In the following segment I will explain why this specific case was chosen as the main case for this thesis. I will explain why the party FdI is an interesting case to answer the research question and I will explain why specifically a party from Italy is chosen to answer the research question. Furthermore I will try to place the case in a broader context, to make it (in some respects) representative of a larger population.

### *The case: the same old strategy, or a new pathway?*

For answering the main question of this thesis, the case of FdI was chosen because FdI is the first populist radical right party that has become the biggest party in government in all of Western-Europe. There have been other populist radical right parties that have been part of governments, such as the LPF in the Netherlands, FdI coalition partner, Lega Nord in Italy, FPÖ in Austria and the True Finns in Finland, but never in modern politics as the biggest and therefore the most influential party. This makes the case of FdI interesting since they can be seen as a precursor for other Western-European countries. By looking at the actions that have been made by this party while in government, we can look at what the influence of FdI has been on liberal democracy while in government. This allows for an evaluation of the state of democracy in Italy and allows for cautious predictions of what would happen in other Western-European countries if and when populist parties become the biggest party in government.

The goal of this thesis is to provide insight into a larger population by analyzing one particular case. The goal of this thesis is also to research the causal relation between populist parties partaking in government and liberal democracy. To solve this puzzle I have chosen a case, which I think is representative for a larger population. The case of FdI is purposively chosen to reflect relevant causal features of a larger universe. To further understand how the case of FdI can be understood within the broader context of populist parties in Western-Europe it is important to explain how the case of FdI relates to cases of other populist parties in Western-Europe. In the Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology, John Gerring has distinguished nine types of cases within the field of case selection (Gerring, 2008). I would argue that the case of FdI can be seen as a pathway case.

According to Gerring a pathway case is a case that uniquely penetrates insight into causal mechanisms (Gerring, 2008). Thus a case that makes it possible to research a causal mechanism, where this before was not possible. You can look at this from multiple directions. No, FdI is not the first populist party to enter a government in Western-Europe and not even in Italy. In Western-Europe the LPF in the Netherlands, the Dansk Folkeparti in Denmark, FPÖ in Austria and Perussuomalaiset in Finland preceded FdI and also in Italy coalition partner Lega Nord and M5S preceded FdI in forming a government. However what is different from those cases is that the case of FdI is the first time a populist radical right party became the biggest party in government in Western-Europe.

This shines a different light on the causal mechanism. The before mentioned cases of populist parties in government have been analyzed by others and the effects on liberal democracy have already been explained, but the situation in which FdI finds itself opens a new outlook on the causal mechanism. Because the context in which FdI operates is different from the other populist parties, it can offer a new relevant outlook on the effects of populism on liberal democracy. Therefore it is relevant to research this. Because of this new outlook on the causal mechanism, the central case of this thesis can be explained as a pathway case.

Apart from the methodological pathway this case offers, the way FdI acts as a party can also be seen as a pathway for Italian parties to approach the Italian electorate and as a pathway for other populist parties in Western-European countries. In the following part a short history of liberal democracy in Italy will be given, to outline the political contexts in which FdI operates. Afterwards the development of the party FdI will be explained up until the elections that resulted in them becoming the biggest party of Italy.

### *Italy: the country of pasta, fashion, Campari and ... populism?*

Since the nineties Italy is often called a fertile testing ground for populism by many social scientists. (Tarchi, 2015). Some would even go as far as to calling the country a populist ‘paradise’ (Tarchi, 2015). Looking at election results in the past thirty years these claims can hardly be called controversial. Before the nineties Italy actually had a relatively stable post-war political system, with the Democrazia Cristiana (Christian Democracy) winning the most seats in parliament every election since 1946. Since they found their biggest opponent in the Partito Comunista Italiano (Italian Communist Party), many Italians historically put their votes on the Christian Democrats out of fear for the communists. This all changed in the early 1990s because of two reasons.

The first is because of socio-economic changes impacting politics across all of Europe. In the 1980s post-material political values were on the rise, civil society secularized, gender and family relation changed as well as the main economic products (Zaslove, 2011). Factory production no longer dominated the economy and paved the way for knowledge-based economies built on flexible modes of production (Zaslove, 2011). This led to European integration and globalization, but also to the end Keynesianism, and an increase in government debt and spending (Zaslove, 2011). Furthermore the rise of knowledge-based economies also meant an end to the initial appeal to the Italian Communist Party, this led to the transformation of the communist party into a much milder centre-left social democratic party (Zaslove, 2011). This effectively led to the end of the ‘imperfect two-party system’ between the Christian Democrats and The Italian Communist Party (Valbruzzi, 2013). The combination of all these factors led to Italians changing their votes from the Christian Democrats to different parties, changing the status quo that was in place for almost fifty years.

The second reason Italians started turning towards populist parties is the grand scale of corruption that got discovered during investigations on local and national politicians from the Christian Democrats and other governing parties (Tarchi, 2015). Italians refer to these events Tangentopoli (‘bribesville’). The scale of the politicians who were involved in the circles of corruption and bribery was so vast that it led to the disintegration

of the Christian Democrats and their main coalition partner of the 1980s and 1990s, the Italian Socialist Party (Partito Socialista Italiano) (Zaslove, 2011).

You can imagine that how the political elite being actually corrupt is fuel for populists. From the period 1994 until now Italy has seen seven coalition governments dominated by parties that can be classified as populists. These include Silvio Berlusconi's Popolo della Libertà (The People of Freedom) which was previously named as Forza Italia, Lega Nord, Beppe Grillo's Movimento 5 Stelle (Five Star Movement) and of course Giorgia Meloni's FdI.

The man that benefitted the most from the widespread corruption in Italy was Silvio Berlusconi with his party Forza Italia. Forza Italia, emerged as a pro-market liberal party in the early 1990's which favored small and medium sized businesses (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2016). This market liberal, anti-left profile that was created for the party appealed to the target group of 'hard working, upstanding' people (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2016). But also the person Silvio Berlusconi was popular by his electorate, due to his previous detachment from political life and his success as an entrepreneur, he appeared believable when promising renewal from the old type of politician (Tarchi, 2015). When mentioning Forza Italia you should consequently also talk about Lega Nord, their populist partner in crime. Lega Nord exploits the regional differences between the North and the South. Under Umberto Bossi's leadership which started in 1989 the party gained clear populist characteristics, by making a clear distinction between the 'pure hardworking' people of the North and the 'lazy profiting' Southerners (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2016). After the fall of the Christian Democrats the Lega Nord become one of the most important parties in the North of Italy.

Lega Nord and Forza Italia both appeal to different voters. Although both can be classified as populist they both focus on a whole other niche of the populist spectrum. Berlusconi focusing on market-based populism, which was combined with anti-taxism, low state spending and hostility towards the judicial system (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2016). While Lega Nord focused on combining regionalism with radical right ideology (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2016). The two would combine forces, in combination with some other smaller parties, from 1994 to 1995, from 2001 to 2006 and from 2008 until 2011.

Later emerged the Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S) which features a complete different category of populism. Comedian Beppe Grillo actually created the movements as a reaction to the populists governments consisting of Lega Nord and Forza Italia, as well as a reaction to the technocratic government that followed after the fall of the Berlusconi government in 2011 (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2016). M5S found success by using their own channels on social media, instead of the mainstream media. M5S can be classified as populist left-libertarianism, although it is tricky to classify M5S into a ideological party family (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2016). Some party positions can be classified as right wing, while most of its stances are populist, anti-elitist, environmentalist with a preference of left-wing economics (Corbetta & Vignati, 2013). They ended up with 27% of the votes in 2013 which was the best electoral showing ever by any first-time party in Western-Europe (D'Alimonte, 2019). While many populist parties turn out to be unable to retain their ground in their second election, this was not the case for M5S, because in 2018

they won the elections becoming the largest party in Italy (D'Alimonte, 2019).

What can be taken away from these events is that the demand for populism is met with great supply in Italy. So why is Italy such an attractive market for populists? After the events of Tangentopoli logically there was a large anti-elite sentiment, or more specifically a large anti-political-elite sentiment. This mistrust against politicians, but also the government as a whole never really went away. The populists found a rhetoric in which the Italian 'common people' could distance themselves from any share of the responsibility for the degeneration of the political system (Tarchi, 2015). They were able to paint an image of the innocence of the 'common people' in contrast to the guilt of the corrupt and clientelist elites (Tarchi, 2015). These sentiments would keep coming back in every crisis that followed, whether it is the corrupt elite from the Christian Democrats or the European Union elite refusing to help Italy during the economic crisis and the migration crisis from 2016 and onwards (Bobba & McDonnell, 2015).

Although this segment seems to be quite negative about the state of politics in Italy, put in comparative perspective, Italy is still one of the better functioning democracies in the world. According to data of Freedom House which ranks countries on the basis of freedom and functioning of democracy, Italy scores ninety points. Which is for instance the same as Spain, one point more than France and three points short of Germany (Freedom House, 2023a). Points of improvement for Italy are political rights and electoral opportunities for minority groups, protection from forces that are external to the political sphere dominating people's political choices, the functioning of government and free and independent media (Freedom House, 2023b). These topics will all be touched upon in the analysis. Other comparative measuring instruments such as the V-Dem report and the measurements from the Economist Intelligence Unit also classify Italy as a liberal democracy that scores a little lower than most Western-European countries, but higher than most Eastern-European democracies (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2023; V-Dem Institute, 2024).

### *The (selective) brotherhood of Italy*

After the government led by M5S would collapse over disagreement on spending of the COVID recovery fund, a temporarily technocratic government led by the old president of the European Central Bank Mario Draghi was appointed. In the following elections of 2022 newcomers FdI led by Giorgia Meloni won the elections by 26% of the votes. Who are they? And why are they qualified as populists?

Multiple comparative political scientists have classified FdI as a populist radical right party (Taggart & Pirro, 2021; Zulianello, 2020). They are partly classified as radical right in comparative research because of their fraction in the European parliament, which is the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), which includes multiple populist radical right parties, such as VOX from Spain, the Sweden Democrats, Ja21 from the Netherlands and the Greek Solution (Taggart & Pirro, 2021). However it must be said that the European Fraction that a party joins within the European Parliament does not have that much explanatory value in itself. Since the populists radical right parties in the European Parliament are almost evenly split between the Identity and Democracy (ID) group and the ECR. There are also parties within the ECR that cannot be classified as populist and/or radical right such

as the SGP in the Netherlands and the New Flemish Alliance from Belgium (Taggart & Pirro, 2021). Because of this you could suggest that international/supranational party affiliations might serve poorly as ideological classifications (Mair & Mudde, 1998).

What is more relevant however is the heritage of the party and the contents of their political agenda. FdI was founded in 2012 as a splinter party of the previously mentioned People of Freedom party (P.d.L.) of Berlusconi. The People of Freedom party unified with the conservative right-wing party Alleanza Nazionale in 2007 in an attempt by Silvio Berlusconi to unify all forces of the centre-right (Donà, 2022). This merge was never really successful due to political disagreement and struggles about who should lead the new pact (Donà, 2022). After the government that included the P.d.L. resigned because of their inability to deal with the ongoing eurozone crisis in 2011, the technocratic Monti cabinet was installed in 2012, which was supported by amongst others the P.d.L. (Donà, 2022). However opposition against the Monti government was increasingly voiced by a group of members of parliament that used to be part of the conservative right-wing Alleanza Nazionale (Donà, 2022). This group, that was led by Giorgia Meloni, formed a new party on 21 December 2012, And thus FdI was born.

Because of a lot of merges and splits from different parties in the past, FdI has roots in multiple Italian parties. The latest being the populist centre-right People of Freedom, but the party before that the Alleanza Nazionale might be more important in explaining the roots of FdI. Alleanza Nazionale in their place emerged from the fascist party Movimento Sociale Italy (M.S.I.), this is why Alleanza Nazionale was often described as a neo-fascist or post-fascist party (Griffin, 1996). This is one of the reasons (but not exclusively the reason) FdI still holds a neo-fascist image (Pietrucci, 2023). FdI makes no secret of the fascist heritage within the party. For example the flame with the colors of the Italian flag that was in the logo of M.S.I. is also visible within the logo of FdI. Meloni says about this flame in an interview ‘This is a symbol that moves forward and beyond the previous Alleanza Nazionale. The flame remains to recall our genesis but with an eye on the future (Huffington Post, 2017)’.

In the 2013 general elections FdI registered 1,96 per cent of the votes in the general elections which resulted in eight deputies being elected in parliament. The party used this time mainly to properly organize itself as a solid structured party and to develop a core party ideology, through the introduction of a think tank aimed at unifying the dispersed and fragmented right in a shared cultural and political platform (Donà, 2022). Meloni reaffirms this by claiming that the decision to merge Alleanza Nazionale into People of Freedom was a betrayal of the history and values of right-wing politics and was a decision fueled by a longing for personal success (Donà, 2022). Furthermore Meloni defined the strive for a mainstream conservative right-wing party a failure and claimed that it was necessary for FdI to have a distinct political platform by returning to the early days of identity politics and nationalist ideology (Meloni, 2021). This newfound identity for the radical right in Italy led to an election result in 2018 of 4,35 per cent of the votes.

FdI stopped being a minor party after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, in which Italy was one of the hardest hit countries in Europe. Populists tend to take advantage of crisis situations, to exaggerate and dramatize

them for reasons of electoral performance (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). This is the strategy that FdI also chose to implement. Together with Lega Nord they criticized the Conte II government for the strict lockdowns and ineffective recovery policies, while also blaming the E.U. for the lack of solidarity during the first year of the pandemic (Caiani, Carlotti, & Padoan, 2021).

After the Conte II government fell, the technocratic government led by the ex-president of the European Central Bank Mario Draghi was installed as a temporary solution. This government was supported by among others the Five Star Movement and Lega Nord, with FdI staying in the opposition. This became an important selling point during the election campaign that would follow. FdI presented themselves as the only the viable alternative towards the Draghi government, distancing themselves from their populist allies (de Ghantuz Cubbe, 2022). This combined with the popularity of Giorgia Meloni led to a successful election campaign that resulted in a share of 26% of the votes, making FdI the biggest party in Italy (de Ghantuz Cubbe, 2022). A government with Lega Nord and Forza Italia was quickly formed and on 22 October 2022 Giorgia Meloni was installed as the prime minister of Italy. In the remainder of this thesis the actions of this government will be explained in more depth. But before this happens it is important to define FdI ideologically as a party.

We have established that FdI can be classified as a populist radical right party, because of their European fraction, based on comparative research with other European political parties and because of their roots, originating from parties that are populist, radical right or both. Now it is time to look at what parts of FdI fit with the definitions of populism as was described in the theory and why they are also classified as radical right based on their stances.

As is common with other populist parties, FdI revolves around the charismatic personalistic leadership of Giorgia Meloni. For a populist leader to become popular it must navigate the complicated trade-offs between extraordinariness that must be tempered with ordinariness (Moffitt, 2016). In other words a populist leader should remain approachable to the mass public, by acting and looking like you are part of ‘the people’, while still making clear that you are a extraordinary politician that people should follow. Navigating this thin rope is extra difficult as a woman, especially when you are speaking to a conservative electorate. The difficulty (exclusively) female leaders face was one described as the ‘double bind’ (Jamieson, 1995), which is the difficulty to manage expectations between two extremes. Women are for instance expected to be caring and devoted mothers, while also be an assertive political leader. They are expected to show their femininity, while also not appearing to act on emotions and be tough enough to lead a country (Baldini, Tronconi, & Angelucci, 2022). Meloni embraced her female identity while appealing to a conservative audience during what probably became her most famous speech. In this speech she took pride in her identity as woman, mother and Christian, while simultaneously claiming that this traditional identity is under attack because of progressive liberals.

Also from the ideational approach the party can be classified as populist. Ever since they were founded FdI has always tried to distance themselves from the ruling political class, claiming the Italian political elites failed and ‘it is time to retire them’ (Puleo & Piccolino, 2022). At the 2014 first FdI congress that was named ‘in the name of

the sovereign people', Meloni confirms their populist image saying 'some will call us populists, but we don't care. Better populists than slaves' (Puleo & Piccolino, 2022). What is central in their construction of 'the people' is that 'the people' are native Italians that have traditional (Christian) values and feel that there is no place for their values anymore in modern Italy. FdI aims at restoring the sense of national belonging and of national pride among Italians (Donà, 2022). FdI claims to be the antidote against the two main threats facing Italy, which they claim are culture homologation and the Islamification process (Donà, 2022). The first being the process of globalization, especially through the European Union that threatens traditional Italian culture. They describe cultural unification as 'an atomized society, in which community ties and bonds of belonging are scientifically broken to build a mass of citizen-consumers without history, without roots, without identity, without homeland, without community, without religion and without sex (Baldini et al., 2022)'. Hostility towards Islam and Islamic immigration is justified by the party, because they want to defend the Christian identity and because of a fear of Islamic terrorism (Donà, 2022). To sum up: FdI defines 'the people' as the nativist people of Italy, preferably with Christian values.

Economically the policy of FdI can be seen as a mix of neoliberal policies and protectionism for Italian companies, emphasizing the importance of the defense of Italian companies and trademarks from the threat of multinationals and other international competition that came from globalization (Baldini et al., 2022). Furthermore they aim to lower taxes for Italians. The economic stances of FdI appear to be very similar to other Radical Right Populist Parties, with much of their stances that can be explained in the context of its nativist, authoritarian and populist ideology (Otjes, Ivaldi, Jupskås, & Mazzoleni, 2018). Their economic stances seem to be mostly influenced by making the distinction between the natives and immigrants, deserving and non-deserving, 'the people' and 'the (economic) elites' (Baldini et al., 2022).

For Populist Radical Right Parties there is often a main emphasis on socio-cultural issues (Mudde, 2007). This is also the case for FdI As was said before, the party considers traditional Christian values of the utmost importance. This leads to FdI being against what they call 'gender ideology', which according to their words aims at 'erasing the difference between man and woman and imposes the absurd utopia of the gender-neutral' and being against same sex couples' parenting rights (Donà, 2022). For FdI, family, consisting of a marriage between a man and a woman, is the cornerstone of Italian society (Donà, 2022).

Lastly, the stance on the European Union has softened over the years. FdI is still very critical of the technocratic structure of the EU, that transfers relevant decisions beyond the control of the (national) sovereign people (Baldini et al., 2022). They are also very critical of the European Union on the cultural front, claiming they intend to take away their traditional Italian culture and products (Donà, 2022). However they do see the relevance of the European Union to compete in international markets to form a competitive adversary to the US and China (Baldini et al., 2022). They also see the added value of the EU when it comes to cooperation of European state in the fields of foreign and defense policy (Baldini et al., 2022).

To sum up, FdI can be seen as a populist party, because they claim to be protecting the traditional culture of the 'pure' Italian, with campaign slogans such as 'Italy and Italian people first!'. In contrast FdI is keen to resist the

‘the elite’, which is the established politicians, but also the cultural elite and influential people in the media. The party is populist in the way they act, their economic policies, their stances on the EU and the main emphasis on socio-cultural issues.

To test what the influence of populism on liberal democracy is, I have researched the actions of the government of Meloni from the day the government was sworn in on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 2022 to the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May 2024. The method through which the actions of the government were researched, is through analysing mainly secondary sources. The choice to review mainly secondary sources was made due to limitations of time and a lack of understanding of the Italian language. I have looked at several international as well as Italian, highly regarded newspapers or news sites on the reporting of the actions of the Meloni government. This was done by searching the websites on articles containing the words ‘Meloni’, ‘Italy’, ‘Fratelli d’Italia’ or ‘Brotherhood of Italy’. If these articles would have a relation to the dimensions of liberal democracy as described in the theory, I have included the article in my coding sheet. These dimensions can be found in the theory paragraph.

The purpose of finding these articles was to find a pattern in the actions of FdI in government, that relate to liberal democracy. Therefore I have included articles with similar contents from different sources that were written with different goals, reports, comments and essays were all included and factchecked. It is important to note that within this thesis almost exclusively secondary data was used. This can lead to results that would differ from studying solely primary data. To combat this, there were multiple different sources used, to gather a complete set of data that includes secondary resources. Therefore I have tried to include newspapers with different goals, backgrounds, target audiences and editorials styles.

Thereafter I have assessed whether the content of the article influences liberal democracy. Because this is a subjective process, I have included an argument for every decision on how it influences liberal democracy. For instance some actions can be seen as populist but not (necessarily) positively or negatively impacting liberal democracy. Others can definitely be seen as radical right, but are not a threat to liberal democracy. In these instances I have still coded the articles since they contribute to the complete image of the case FdI and give a more complete oversight to eventually assess the influence on liberal democracy this party poses. To add to this, I have also coded articles containing actions which I believe strengthen liberal democracy in Italy. These are also added in the document. Furthermore, I have summarized the contents of every article and included a relevant quote to give a more complete oversight of the contents of the article. In total there were 103 articles coded the content analysis. The coding sheet can be found in appendix 1 of this thesis. The coding document can be found in appendix 2 of this thesis. The results will be discussed in the analysis section.

In the results section, I have made coherent summary of the most common, important and impactful articles to try and form a complete oversight of the actions of FdI in their first year and seven months in government. This will create a complete picture of the actions of FdI in government per indicator, which then can be assessed as to how this impacts liberal democracy. At the end of every indicator, there will be a conclusion on if and how

liberal democracy is influenced by FdI. This section will first and foremost serve as a summary of the most important actions of FdI, furthermore it highlights its most influential, impactful or controversial actions, which will in the end give us a chance to assess how populist parties relate to liberal democracy. This will eventually enable me to answer the research question and test the hypothesis of this thesis.

It can be pretty difficult to assess whether an action of FdI can be explained through their populist or radical-right ideology or through other factors that cannot be explained by ideology. It is therefore crucial to actively search for ways in which FdI makes a clear distinction between ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’ and when they talk about a general will. For instance it can be seen as radical right policy to be willing to take in a minimal amount of asylum seekers, due to the high costs of supporting asylum seekers. However it would be populist to minimize the amount of asylum seekers in a country, because their Islamic culture is threatening traditional Italian culture. It is important to keep this (sometimes a little ambiguous) distinction in mind while analysing the data. Nevertheless the causal relation between populism and effect on liberal democracy can be difficult to assess through this research design. This lowers the internal validity of this thesis. Because FdI shares some typical characteristics of populist party, it seems that if a similar party in another country becomes the biggest party in a government coalition, the results will be relatively similar. Therefore the external validity of this thesis is higher. Although some observations within this thesis can be seen as subjective, I think based on the theory and research data a different researcher would come to more or less the same conclusions. Therefore the reliability of this thesis is high

## *Fratelli d'Italia and liberal democracy: a difficult relationship*

The central concepts of this thesis are now defined and the relationship between liberal democracy and populism is explained from different angles. The context of the selected case is given and the way this case relates to other cases is also explained. In this part of the thesis the actual actions of the government, where FdI is part of will be summarized in further detail. This entails only the actions from the moment FdI entered government and the 68<sup>th</sup> government of the Italian Republic was sworn in. This was on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 2022, the analysis ends at the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May 2024. After this date, no more data is collected. The actions of FdI that have an effect on the different indicators of liberal democracy will be checked for its effect on liberal democracy. The indicators are effective participation, voting equality, enlightened understanding, control of the agenda, inclusion of all adults, constraining of executive power, the rule of law and representative representatives. These indicators are explained in more detail in the theory paragraph. In the analysis, these indicators will be consecutively discussed. Some indicators will be more extensively discussed than others, because there have been more actions that fall within this indicator. At the end of the analysis paragraph the indicators on which a negative effect on liberal democracy is established, will be explained in further detail. By looking back at the theory, there will be an assessment on whether these actions are part of a radical right ideology or whether they fit within a populist agenda.

### *1. Effective participation*

After only being installed a couple of days, one of the first enacted laws by the Meloni government was legislation that allows for more severe punishment for organisers of illegal raves. This was a result of public commotion that followed from a three day long Halloween party in Modena, where four thousand young adults from all over Europe partied in an abandoned factory. This was not the first time an event like this took place in Italy (Giuffrida, 2022a). To stop nuisance for people in the neighbourhood from these parties and prevent illegal substance use during the raves, Meloni promised during her campaign to enforce laws on illegal raves to prevent Italy from becoming the go to party place in Europe. Sounds fair enough you would say. However the proposed laws encountered two main points of criticism from opposition parties. The first point entailed criticism on the severity of the punishment for the organisers of raves. The new law would allow judges to punish organisers or promoters, of gatherings of more than fifty people that put public order or safety at risk, with prison sentences of between three and six years and fines ranging from €1000 to €10.000 euros (Giuffrida, 2022a). In addition to this, in Italian law it is allowed to wiretap suspects from crimes that have a maximum prison sentence of five years or above. Meaning this law also allows the authorities to wiretap people that are suspects of organizing raves (Lania, 2022). Former premier Giuseppe Conte, the leader of the five star movement, criticised the law by describing it as 'horrificing' and a law that resembles one of a 'police state' (Giuffrida, 2022a).

However the second point of criticism is why this incident is included in this part of the thesis. Because, as opponents quickly pointed out that the formulation of the law as 'gatherings of people that arbitrarily invades other people's land or buildings', could in fact be used as a way to criminalize organising protests, demonstrations or large political rallies (Giuffrida, 2022a). Amnesty International opposed the law saying 'It risks having a discretionary and arbitrary application to the detriment of the right to peacefully protest' (Amnesty International,

2022). Angelo Bonelli of the Green party pointed the following out on the law ‘I have carefully studied the rave rule presented by Meloni and Piantedosi and I can say that raves have nothing to do with this provision, instead protest demonstrations that can range from university occupations, schools, mobilizations for environmental issues will be affected. It is a liberticidal and fascist law that even provides for a six-year sentence with the introduction of restrictive measures that normally apply to mafia members (Palazzo, 2022).’

Because of persistent criticism from parliament, the government ultimately decided to add to the draft that the aforementioned ‘gatherings’ should be for the purpose of ‘creating a musical gathering or having another entertainment purpose’ (Farruggia, 2022). The severe punishment for organizing raves stayed unchanged. You could say this is positive news since the coalition is willing to adjust their drafts after amendments of parliament, implying the democratic function of checks and balances within the system is working. However a more cynical analysis could be that this is precursory sign for how the Meloni government looks at fundamental democratic rights, such as the right to demonstrate.

However, the Meloni government also improved on effective participation in Italy. For instance, voters from the far right that felt as if they were excluded from politics, feel vindicated by Meloni’s ascent (Povoledo & Bubola, 2022). ‘As soon as you talked patriotism, sovereignism and borders they called you a fascist, now the word patriot is not going to be cancelled anymore’ said one voter to the New York Times after the elections (Povoledo & Bubola, 2022). What is also an improvement on effective participation is that the announced constitutional reforms, that will be touched upon in much more detail in the following categories, will not make it possible to appoint a technocratic prime-minister anymore (Amante & Fonte, 2023). Historically this was a solution to end political stalemate within a coalition, but this option will decay, because if and when the constitutional reform will be accepted, only elected politicians can become prime-minister. How this works and why this reform is not unilateral an improvement to liberal democracy will be explained later in this paragraph.

At this point there is no cause to assume not every person has the chance to have equal and effective opportunities to make their views known to other people in the legal sense. There has been no limitation on the law to demonstrate or the freedom of association. This however does not mean that in a societal sense, certain minority groups in Italy can feel as though the political environment does not leave any room for them to effectively participate in the political process. For instance LGBTQ+ couples who are feeling like second class citizens in Italy, due to the actions that are discussed under 5. Inclusion of all adults (Bettiza, 2023). While it is a tactic of populists to change sensibilities towards minority groups without necessarily changing the laws, the proof is not sufficient to claim that the Meloni government is negatively influencing effective participation (Povoledo & Horowitz, 2024). Therefore in this case there no sufficient evidence to proof populism is threatening this indicator of liberal democracy.

## 2. *Voting equality*

The proposed constitutional reforms touch upon multiple of the categories used in this thesis. Therefore it is difficult to code it in one specific dimension of liberal democracy. Because this proposed constitutional reform can turn out to be crucial for the future of Italian liberal democracy, it is important to bring it to the attention as quickly as possible. Therefore it is accommodated to voting equality. The aim of the reforms are clear. It aims to solve problems within the Italian political system that lowers constituents trust in the working of parliament and government, such as revolving door government constructions, the fact that the country has seen almost seventy governments in just over seventy five years and the fall back on technocratic government leaders to end a situation of political stalemate. Although the reform will probably end or at least reduce these issues, other concerns emerge.

On the third of November 2023, the government issued a press statement announcing their plans for a directly elected prime minister (Governo Italiano, 2023). Meloni later called it ‘the mother of all reforms’. The contents of this reforms consist of three key points: the prime minister would be directly elected by the people, the winning coalition party would get 55% of the seats in parliament and no more new appointments of senators ‘for life’ by the president (Governo Italiano, 2023).

Currently the prime minister is elected by a majority coalition in parliament, making Italy a pretty standard parliamentary system. Meloni would like to change this by introducing a presidential system in Italy, taking inspiration from the French presidential system, although the proposal is also different due to the changes on the parliamentary rules. So how would it work? During elections every party or coalition of parties nominate one person as their candidate prime-minister. Constituents then have to vote twice, once for the prime-minister and once for the preferred party or coalition of parties. The then elected prime minister will receive a mandate to lead the government for five years. If the elected prime-minister is unable to carry on, the president can only elect a new prime-minister that is a member of the leading party or coalition of parties (Amante & Fonte, 2023).

However, because of the second key point in the reform, you can see where the tension lies within this system. The party or coalition of parties that receives the most votes namely gets 55% of the seats in parliament (Amante & Fonte, 2023). This implies that the party with the highest percentage of votes, no matter how high this is, gets an absolute majority in parliament for the upcoming five years. This would for instance mean that in the 2013 elections, in which the votes were split between the Centre-Left Coalition, who won the election with 29,55% of the votes and the Centre-Right Coalition, who became runners-up with 29,18% of the votes, the Centre-Left Coalition would get the prime-minister post and 55% of the seats in parliament for the upcoming five years (Baccarini, 2023).

You could say that this system combines the ideas from a presidential and a parliamentary system in such a way that it mostly benefits the most popular party. In essence, this proposal treats Italy as a single constituency in a first-past-the-post election, where the winning party, however small the margins are, can claim control of the

parliament (Meyer-Resende & Tsereteli, 2023). Italy would get an extreme winner-takes-all system, with potentially massive disproportionality built in (Meyer-Resende & Tsereteli, 2023).

What will also change if this reform is adopted, is the role of the president. This is a function that has hardly received any attention in this thesis, because the president has a particularly small role in the Italian democracy. This however does not mean that the role of the president is insignificant. The president of Italy is elected in an opaque process in which members of parliament elect a suitable candidate and has as main task to represent the national unity and the integrity of the state. Furthermore the president formally appoints the Prime Minister and, on the Prime Minister's recommendation, the members of the Council of Ministers. Although those tasks are mostly purely formal, this changes when there is a political crisis. If a government is, for whatever reason, not able to carry on, it is up to the president to come up with a suitable (temporary) solution. For instance it was president Sergio Mattarella that installed the technocratic Draghi government after the second Conte government collapsed. Due to the ongoing COVID crisis, the president decided it was better to have a technocratic government tackle the biggest current problems, instead of having new elections straight away. In the Meloni system this crisis management role will completely disappear, since the prime-minister is elected for the upcoming five years. Furthermore since members of parliament will have a majority from the most popular party, it is almost certain that the elected president will be a loyalist to the reigning party (Baccarini, 2023). What is left is a president that is mostly put in place to sign legislatures and smile and wave on state banquets.

According to Meloni the stability of her government is the ideal starting point for these reforms, that in her words are long overdue. In a social media video in which she announced the reform she said 'We want to take advantage of the stability of this government to give Italians a reform that will allow them to choose who is going to govern them and allow the ones chosen by Italians to have five years to realise their programme' (Kazmin, 2024).

Critics have called the proposed 'demagogic' reforms a power grab from Meloni and cynically argue that she just wants to enhance on the popular momentum she has built (The Economist, 2023). Other compare it to the notorious Acerbo Law of Mussolini, that paved the way for a fascist dictatorship (Meyer-Resende & Tsereteli, 2023).

For this reform to actually go through it would need a two third of parliament to be in favour. This is unlikely to happen, since the leaders of the biggest opposition parties Schlein, from the centre-left Democratic Party and Conte from the 5-Star Movement have already spoken out against the plan (Amante & Fonte, 2023). However if the law does not go through parliament, there is a second option to put it to a referendum. If fifty percent of people vote yes in that referendum, the government has green light to go through with their reform (Kazmin, 2024).

To nuance this, it is not unusual for Italian governments to want to change the constitutional rules (The Economist, 2023). It is also definitely not without electoral risk. For instance prime minister Renzi proposed in 2016 a similar but less radical package of constitutional reforms (The Economist, 2023). He tied his political fate to the outcome of the referendum and promised to resign if the referendum did not pass (The Economist, 2023). After the result

he resigned the next day. Berlusconi also lost a referendum in 2006 that tried to give more autonomy to the regions, effectively aiming to change Italy into a federal republic. However constitutional referendums in 2001, for more regional autonomy and in 2020 to reduce the number of members of parliament from 630 to 400 were successful (Kazmin, 2024).

You could of course argue that more political stability and a secure prime minister that is able to construct a long term vision is good for democracy and therefore these reforms should be welcomed with open arms. However this system conflicts with some of the core dimensions of liberal democracy. In the first place in the context of voting equality. With the massive disproportionality that is built in this system, a vote on the winning party counts for more than a vote on the other parties. Making it so that votes do not hold equal weight anymore. Secondly, if this proposal goes through there is an increased change of the majority suppressing minority groups in Italy, which goes against the principal of inclusion of all adults and lastly this proposal smells like misuse of executive power, since the governing parties misuse their electoral position to strengthen their ruling position. Whether or not this goes through is yet to be determined, but once again it does provide an insight on how the ruling parties look at the basic principles of liberal democracy. If the reform does go through, the whole system of parliamentary checks and balances can be thrown out of the window, which is definitely negatively impacting liberal democracy.

### *3. Enlightened understanding*

Italy has never been the best behaving kid in class when it comes to government transparency (Transparency International, 2023). But it has made significant and necessary steps since the events of Tangentopoli, for instance with the Freedom of Information Act that was significantly expanded in 2016 (Civil Protection Department, 2016). The Meloni government has not made any adjustments that either increase or decrease the possibility of citizens to directly request information from government institutions.

Enlightened understanding goes beyond freedom of information laws. In other aspects of enlightened understanding there are more remarks that can be made about the Meloni government. There have been multiple instances in which Meloni, or members from her government have been spreading verifiable misinformation on multiple instances. For instance Meloni, talked during her campaign and in the beginning of her tenure of the pull-factor that sea rescue boats from NGO's have on illegal migration. The reasoning behind this is that migrants will be more willing to take the risk to cross the Mediterranean sea on rickety rubber boats, since they know that there is a chance they will be saved by NGO rescue ships if their boats sink (D'Haens, 2023). However this pull-factor effect does not exist and has long been debunked (Cusumano & Villa, 2019). Furthermore FDI agriculture minister Lollobrigida (who is also married to the sister of Meloni), spread the ethnic replacement theory by saying that Italy should not 'surrender to the idea of ethnic cleansing', which he described as 'Italians hare having fewer children, we replace them with someone else' (Cicarelli, 2023). The same Lollobrigida also spread conspiracy theories about euro commissioner Frans Timmermans, claiming he was using his role as climate commissioner to destroy Italian Agriculture to benefit the Dutch economy (Ford, 2023).

What is also distinctive for the Meloni government is the difficult understanding with the press. Meloni has always been avoidant of press interrogation. She prefers to use her own social media channels to communicate with her followers, so she can dodge critical questions (Giuffrida, 2023). Since her instalment Meloni has also attacked 'left-wing' state broadcaster RAI on multiple occasions. For instance, she and her party members have called for a boycott on a 'left-wing biased' tv host. His subsequent resignation was met with great exultation (Kington, 2023a). Other critical figures operating within RAI have been fired or pushed out and replaced by government loyalists (Hannah Roberts, 2023b). RAI's new CEO Giampaolo Rossi, who has defended Vladimir Putin and Viktor Orbán and blamed the U.S. for destabilizing Ukraine, claims these personal changes within the public broadcaster are a necessary evil to 'rebalance the media narratives', which means freeing the spaces in the media landscape that have been 'usurped by the left' (Messina, 2023; Hannah Roberts, 2023b).

It is important to mention that it is not unusual within Italian political culture to have some sort of influence on the RAI. Multiple Italian governments have changed the staffing managerial positions within the RAI to people in line with their political colour (Hannah Roberts, 2023b). However employees of the RAI have talked about the 'suffocating' government control on their work as more than ever before (Giesen, 2024).

This all came to a climax when popular Italian author Antonio Scurati, who became famous for his internationally acclaimed novel series about Benito Mussolini, was scheduled to appear on a talk show. Scurati, who is not shy to criticize Meloni and to draw parallels between the emergence of fascism in the time of Mussolini and the increasing control of FdI, was invited on April 25<sup>th</sup>, which is a national remembrance day in Italy to celebrate the liberation of fascism, to read out a monologue. The aim of this monologue was to criticize FdI and Meloni for not distancing themselves (according to Scurati) from their post-fascist history (Giesen, 2024). However shortly before the talkshow aired, Scurati's appearance was abruptly cancelled 'for editorial reasons' (Hanna Roberts, 2024). Although government officials and officials of the RAI have staid the cancellation had nothing to do with the contents of the monologue, and was because of disagreements about the financial compensation the author would receive. For the biggest journalist union of Italy Usigrai this incident was a cause to call for a strike. In a statement they released, they stated 'we strike to defend the autonomy and independence of the public radio and television service from the pervasive control of information spaces by politicians' (USIGRai, 2024). Journalists from RAI fear to become a mouthpiece for the government. Furthermore they protest against critical journalists being silenced by the government through the Italian defamation laws, an aspect that will be touched upon in a latter indicator.

Even the European Commission is urged to investigate alleged attempts by the Meloni government to turn the state-broadcaster into a 'megaphone' for the ruling parties (Giuffrida, 2024). This was appealed by the European Green Party after communications watchdog Agcom rejected an attempt by government politicians, to allow unrestricted airtime during the campaign period to discuss 'their institutional and government activity' (Giuffrida, 2024). Although this proposal was rejected, they will still be entitled to do so during limited slots reserved for

electioneering. Critics called this government propaganda and argued that by claiming airtime from opposition parties you are meddling with free and fair elections (Giuffrida, 2024).

What is clear is that FdI sees the free press mostly as an annoying obstacle that should be avoided or be altered to a useful channel that is in service of the ruling government. What might be even more worrisome is that a member of parliament of Lega Nord Antonio Angelucci, who already owns a couple of newspapers is trying to take over the AGI, Italy's second-largest press agency (Bonini, Foschini, & Pistilli, 2024). Meaning the governing coalition will not only control the state-broadcaster, but also a large part of the most read newspapers. President of the national federation of the Italian press and journalists' union, Vittorio di Trapini compared this to the actions of the Viktor Orbán government in Hungary, who also established a tight grip on (almost all) domestic media (Giuffrida, 2024).

It is common for populist parties to attack the free press and to try to exert influence on state broadcasters and other parts of the media, while simultaneously 'rewarding' the parts of the media that seem to be in favour of their party. FdI has proven to be exceptionally effective in this practice. These actions will influence the content of the information citizens will receive. It is not without reason that the free press is always named as a crucial aspect of liberal democracy. Therefore these actions can definitely be seen as a negatively impacting liberal democracy.

#### *4. Inclusion of all adults*

Ever since the Meloni government was installed, they have made subtle adjustments to certain laws or services to fit their Christian conservative agenda. As was said before the image of 'the pure people' that FdI outlines, is that of the Christian ethnic Italian. Therefore the Meloni government tries to make policy that fit their lifestyle, which goes at the expense of the lifestyle and liberties of those who do not fit within the category of the part of the population that is deemed to be 'the people'. This agenda can hardly be called subtle, since Giorgia Meloni is a self-declared enemy of what she calls 'gender ideology' and 'the LGBT lobby'(Armellini, 2023). Although most of the policies on this topic that the current coalition has implemented seem to be rather insignificant in the bigger picture, if you look at the whole package there are definitely changes on the front of inclusion of all adults. As political science professor emeritus at Bologna University Gianfranco Pasquino said, Meloni is subtly seeking to shift Italian and European sensibilities to the right without necessarily changing the laws, which makes her 'an excellent politician' (Povoledo & Horowitz, 2024).

Let's dive into some of examples of the Meloni government subtly or not so subtle changing the laws in this category. Halfway through 2023 the Italian parliament passed a bill that would make performing surrogacy abroad illegal (Armellini, 2023). Parenting through surrogacy, whereby a woman carries a baby for another individual or couple, was already illegal in Italy and could lead to prison sentences from three months to two years and fines from 600.000 euros to 1 million euros, however this did not stop couples from searching for alternatives abroad (Armellini, 2023). This would mean that Italian judges would be able to prosecute people for partaking in a surrogacy trajectory in a country where it is perfectly safe and legal. FdI claims these reforms are necessary to

protect women from becoming ‘baby-machines’ that are ‘renting out their wombs’ (Carlo, 2023). However as many critics have pointed out, this bill seems to be mostly created to stop same-sex couples from fulfilling their wish to have children (Carlo, 2023). The flaw in this plan however is that 90% of the surrogacy that is done abroad, is done by heterosexual couples that have difficulties making children themselves (Carlo, 2023). Those couples seem to have the advantage that their surrogacy is unlikely to raise red flags when returning home, since they would be able to show birth certificates listing parents of opposite sexes (Faiola & Pitrelli, 2024). Even the minister for the family Eugenia Maria Roccella acknowledged that a ban on international surrogacy would have a disproportionate impact on same-sex couples, although she suggested that the bill could serve as a deterrent for heterosexual couples (Faiola & Pitrelli, 2024).

A similar case happened when the Italian government ordered city councils to stop registering same-sex parents’ children birth certificates. Since 2016 same-sex civil unions have been legal in Italy. However because of opposition from Catholic and conservative groups, the civil unions did not come with adoption rights, out of fear that it would encourage surrogate pregnancies. Because this left an absence of clear legislation on how to handle when children were raised by same-sex couples, local courts and mayors of some cities have decided to register births to both partners from same-sex unions (Crispian Balmer & Piscioneri, 2023). This happened until they were urgently requested to stop this practice by the interior minister of the Meloni government. This leads to the weird situation where children that were born from surrogacy can only have one or no legal parents. Thus having the legal status of an orphan with no official rights as Italian citizen (Bettiza, 2023; Faiola & Pitrelli, 2024). Which makes children not entitled to go to public school, or have future rights to work or receive a pension (Faiola & Pitrelli, 2024).

It is not just people from the LGBTQ+ community that see their lives changed by the Meloni government, also women can notice a difference in their position in society. This is noticeable by some of the sexist comments made by Meloni’s male fellow party members, which will be touched upon later. But this is especially reflected by how this government thinks about the right to have an abortion. Meloni is staunchly against abortion, but promised during the election campaign that her government would not touch the right to have an abortion (Piscioneri & Fonte, 2024). While this technically has not happened, Meloni and other government members are trying to change the discourse about the topic. Minister for family Roccella even stated on television that abortion is ‘unfortunately’ a right (Hannah Roberts, 2023a). In April 2024 the Italian parliament passed a bill that will allow anti-abortion action groups to enter abortion clinics to try and change women’s minds (Povoledo & Horowitz, 2024). This will make the already impactful step to pursue an abortion even more difficult. Member of parliament from the democratic party, Francesco Boccia, compared the measure to ‘giving hospital management to no-vax people’ (Piscioneri & Fonte, 2024).

The Meloni government also interfered in the educational system by enforcing Christian culture on primary schools. For instance schools that have banned Christmas nativity plays to avoid offending non-Christian pupils can receive fines from the government through a new bill (Kington, 2023b). According to the government not

performing the Christmas story is ‘an attack on national values’ (Kington, 2023b). Furthermore the Meloni government has also banned Italian schools from closing on the last day of the Ramadan, which was sometimes done to cater to Muslim students and teachers. A member of parliament from Lega Nord stated about the necessity of this rule that ‘it’s no longer about Muslim students needing to assimilate our language and our traditions but Italian students being indoctrinated about ways which are contrary to our culture and values’ (Kington, 2024).

FdI conceals all of the above in a cloak of love, by saying they are protecting women from surrogacy, protecting unborn children from abortion and Italian Christians from Islamic culture. But after you remove the façade, you are left with a strong anti-LGBTQ+ agenda and a desire build Italy on conservative Christian values. This conservative policy is negatively impacting the freedom and quality of life of minority groups. These reforms do not impact the political rights of minority groups, however they do contribute to a changing discourse, in which the political leaders are no longer willing to defend vulnerable minorities. It is in line with expectations that FdI is not yet satisfied with pursuing their conservative agenda. The lack of protection for vulnerable minority groups can be seen as negatively impacting liberal democracy.

##### *5. Constraining of executive power*

To not be threatening the survival of liberal democracy, governing parties should constrain themselves to not utilize their institutional privileges to the full extent. Just because a law is technically possible to execute, that does not mean that this makes it immediately in line with liberal democracy. We have already seen examples of this in the case of the meddling within the RAI or the proposal for the constitutional reforms. The actions of the government within this category can be split within two categories. The first is cases in which the government or government officials are trying to silence critical citizens through mostly defamation lawsuits. The other is cases in which the Italian government interfered within the judicial system.

FdI has a long history of filing defamation lawsuits. These are lawsuits that are filed after an individual or organization has used communication that could damage the reputation of a third party. A more cynical definition of this term is a SLAPP-suit. In which SLAPP is an acronym for strategic lawsuit against public participation. This implies a lawsuit that is filed to intimidate or silence critical parties. It must be nuanced that filing defamation lawsuits against others is a more common practice as in most European countries. According to Ossigeno per l’informazione, the Italian press freedom organization, there are more than 5000 defamation lawsuits filed against journalists each year (Oltermann & Tondo, 2024). From those lawsuits ninety percent are eventually rejected because they are deemed groundless (Oltermann & Tondo, 2024). To add to this a study by the European parliament’s committee on civil liberties, justice and home affairs found that in 2023, the first year in which FdI was in power, Italy was the frontrunner in SLAPP cases in European countries (Borg-Barthet & Farrington, 2023).

Although it might be an Italian habit to drag critical journalists or political adversaries to court, FdI definitely contributes to this culture. A few noticeable cases were quite controversial and attracted a lot of media attention.

In a TV interview in December 2020, Italy's best-known anti-Mafia author and a human rights campaigner, Roberto Saviano called Meloni and Salvini 'bastardi' (bastards) (van Gool, 2023). The author said this in response to footage of a sunken migrant boat, where a six month old baby died. He blamed Meloni and Salvini for their campaigns against migrant rescue boats, which lead to migrants being unable to be rescued from the Mediterranean Sea (Armellini, 2022). Although Meloni filed the lawsuit before she became prime-minister, she could have withdrawn the charges after her position in power had changed. Meloni proceeded in spite of calls from amongst other international writers organisation PEN (van Gool, 2023). Saviano was eventually declared guilty and received a fine of 1.000 euros.

Some other defamation lawsuits that stood out are against the singer of the alternative rock band Placebo, who got sued for publicly calling Meloni a racist and fascist (Tondo, 2023b), historian Luciano Canfora for calling Meloni a 'neo-Nazi in her soul', (Redazione ANSA, 2024) and philosopher Donatella Di Cesara who got sued after she compared comments of minister of agriculture Lollobrigida who talked about 'ethnic replacement' to something that could have been written in Mein Kampf (Oltermann & Tondo, 2024). The latter stated 'in Italy, we have seen defamation cases against politicians and journalists, but this is different. Public intellectuals like Saviano, Canfora or me don't have the protection of a political party or a newspaper' (Oltermann & Tondo, 2024). She added to this 'the aim of defamation trials like mine is not just to intimidate, but to push left-wing intellectuals outside the public discourse. The exponents of a democratic government should respond to even harsh political criticism with words, not lawsuits' (Oltermann & Tondo, 2024).

The Constitutional Court of Italy and the European Court of Human Rights have been urging the Italian parliament to alter the defamation laws. Both found the penalty of imprisonment, which can lead up to a sentence of six years in severe cases, disproportional with the right of freedom of expression (Article 19, 2023). Early 2023 senator Alberto Balboni of Fratelli d'Italia proposed a bill that would decrease the maximum prison sentence on defamation, but introduced a mandate for courts to impose a temporary ban on working as a journalist. Such a sentence would violate jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights (Reporters Without Borders, 2024). Furthermore the maximum fines for defamation were increased in the proposed bill. But most importantly the recommendations of the European Commission to adjust the law to reduce the amount of SLAPP cases were not adopted (Reporters Without Borders, 2024). Apparently the filing of SLAPPs is to much of a powerful tool to give up on for FdI.

It is not just the media that are being reorganized to remove their 'left-wing bias', FdI is also clearing out the old leadership of cultural institutions (Hannah Roberts, 2023b). Cultural institutions find themselves in a political battle, risking their independence. The Meloni government has altered the leadership of some of Italy's most prestigious museums and cultural organizations and installed executives that are sympathetic with the government vision, at the top (Hannah Roberts, 2023b). Others could reckon on criticism and personal attacks from governing parties officials. The director of the Egyptian museum in Turin, who offered free entrance to Arabic speakers, was called 'racist against Italians and Christians' by the deputy leader of the League (Maccioni, 2023). Furthermore

culture minister Gennaro Sanguliano created obstacles to the appointment of international directors of Italy's top museums. Candidates now require European citizenship and Italian language skills to be appointed as international director (Povoledo, 2023).

The way FdI tries to silence individuals that express criticism on the government and her members and simultaneously work on raising suspicion on cornerstones of liberal democracies such as the cultural sector, journalism and the judiciary system, can definitely be regarded as threatening to liberal democracy. Furthermore the government exerting influence on sectors where most democratic politicians would stay as far away from as possible, suggests FdI is expanding their sphere of influence outside of the political arena. For instance by spreading their nationalist ideas on Italian Christian culture towards cultural institutions. By accusing journalists, judges and museum directors of having a 'left-wing' bias, the public opinion on their occupation will also shift. It does not matter if the frame of the 'left-wing' bias is correct or not.

### *6. The rule of law*

To prevent citizens from arbitrariness, protection under the rule of law in a liberal democracy is crucial. Persons should be protected from unjustified detention, exile, terror, torture, and undue interference in their personal lives by the state. Because Italy is part of the European Convention of Human Rights, this means that Italy should not just actively apply the rule of law to Italian citizens, but towards all humans. Whether FdI has always done this is up to debate.

This brings us to one of the biggest international crises that Giorgia Meloni and the government had to handle. During the election campaign Meloni promised that after she would come into power, she would immediately stop what she calls 'water taxis' from entering the Italian coast. The water taxis in question are actually rescue ships from international NGO's that save migrants from drowning during their crossing of the Mediterranean in rubber boats that are in no way adequate for the amount of people and the flowing of the water. These boats save migrants with rescue ships and drop them off at the nearest coastline. In most cases the Italian one. Shortly after installing the government, Meloni delivered on this campaign promise. Almost immediately after taking office, Italian authorities failed to assign a port of safety to rescue vessels operation in the Mediterranean Sea (Pianigiani, 2022). Italy did allow minors and women on the rescue boats safe access, but ordered the adult men to be sent back (Pianigiani, 2022). Even though this conflicted with international and national legal norms (Maccioni, 2022).

This led to a long lasting diplomatic row with France, since the NGO rescue ships that still carried the men that were not allowed to access the Italian coast, instead sailed on towards the French coast. This especially caused annoyance with French officials, since they had just promised to take in 3000 migrants from Italy already (Thomas & Fonte, 2022). The French government called the refusal to come to aid of the ship 'irresponsible' and 'inhumane' and French Junior minister for European Affairs Laurence Boone spoke about broken trust and how Italy had made a 'unilateral decision' that had put 'lives in danger' (Chrisafis, 2022). Meloni responded that these reactions were unjustified, since Italy had already taken in almost 90.000 migrants in 2022 (Thomas & Fonte, 2022).

Eventually in December 2022 tightened the rules for migrant rescue ships making it more difficult to carry out multiple rescues (Reuters, 2022b). A measure that will lead to the ‘increase of the risk of death for thousands of people’ according to Riccardo Gatti, who is in charge of a rescue ship run by the Doctors Without Borders (Ziniti, 2022).

Other questionable measures the Italian government took to combat migration include abolishing the ‘special protection’ exception for migrants who do not qualify for asylum, but who face humanitarian risk back home, for instance because of their religion or sexuality, or have family ties in Italy and the extension of the maximum time migrants awaiting repatriation can be detained from three months up to eighteen months (Amante, 2023; Cripian Balmer, 2023).

Lastly the Meloni government has been making deals on behalf of the European Union with the Northern-African countries Egypt, Tunisia and Mauritania. The idea is that by funding these countries financially in development aid, they can develop a more powerful anti-migration force that can track-down human smugglers and stop migrants at their borders before they can cross towards Europe (Sorgi, 2023). While a lot of questions can be asked about the effectivity of the agreements, human rights organisation have also raised questions about the human rights aspects of such deals. In the first place because concerns are raised about the state of democracy in these countries. Critics claim that the EU money will end up in the pockets of corrupt government leaders, instead of being used to actually stop migration flows or benefit local population (Amnesty International, 2024). Others raise concerns about the amount of human rights violations to the local population of Italy and Tunisia by their autocratic leaders (Walters & Roox, 2024). There have also been reports of refugees that have been stopped by the Tunisian border, who are systematically expelled towards the Tunisian dessert by the authorities (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

Of course these migrant deals are closed on behalf of all of the European Union and you could argue that the situation in Egypt or Tunisia says nothing about the state of liberal democracy in Italy. However Meloni was definitely the driving force in the creation of the agreements and liberal democracy does not only mean looking at the own population, but also playing an active role to improve human rights in other places. FDI is again and again exploring the border of international law, while not being afraid to cross those. This does not only raise question about the moral compass of the party, but also how far they are willing to go to protect one of the basic principles of liberal democracy.

To protect a righteous rule of law domestically the judiciary system should be protected. A new law that was implemented by the government decides that every judge and prosecutor should undergo a psychological test. This can be seen as a way to improve the Italian judiciary system, however others see it as a regulation intended to suggest to the public opinion that selection and assessment mechanisms for judges and prosecutors do not offer sufficient guarantees of psychological balance and therefore should be viewed with suspicion (Zorzetto, 2024).

It is noticeable that the sentiment towards the judiciary system is changing under the Meloni-government. For instance through Defence Minister Guido Crosetto, who publicly stated that the biggest threat the government faces are elements within the judiciary system. He stated ‘the only major danger is from those who have always felt they are an antagonistic faction and have always undermined centre-right governments is the judicial opposition (Di Caro, 2023)’. He based this on unconfirmed rumours about meetings of a faction within the judiciary in which they talked about how to stop the undemocratic forces of Meloni (Di Caro, 2023). Furthermore Justice Minister Carlo Nordio openly speculated about the possibility of setting up a ‘high court’ that would judge Italian judges performances (ANSA English Desk, 2024). These statements feed the Italian public with the idea that there are fundamental problems within the judiciary system and fits within a similar pattern visible against journalists and directors of cultural institutions. These claims hurt in the first place the public trust in institutions, but if the proposed ‘high court’ would actually find a passageway, that would mean political actors can exert influence on the functioning of the magistrates.

Italian citizens can definitely still expect to be protected under the rule of law. The question is whether non-Italian people and the persons that fall outside of the created definition of ‘the people’ that FdI has, can count on the same protection.

### *7. Representative representatives*

The first year and seven months of their governing period, the Meloni government has been tormented by a wide range of scandals surrounding ministers and party members of FdI. A governing party represents the state of liberal democracy and should therefore be aware that they function as role models. Therefore chosen representatives should adhere to the constitution and common laws and not use their position for personal gain. However this was definitely not the case for the current government, which led to a big shuffle in the allocation of ministerial posts. In the following section some of the most controversial incidents will be summed up.

The controversies started even before the government was installed, when just before the government was sworn in, coalition partner Silvio Berlusconi undercut the ‘unconditional support for Ukraine’ as was pledged by Meloni (Amante, 2022). Berlusconi, who said to be a long-time friend of Vladimir Putin, publicly confirmed his sympathy for the Russian president, by accusing Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy of triggering the war. Berlusconi also revealed he had been exchanging gifts and sweet letters with his old friend (Reuters, 2022a). Some analysts saw this as a conscious action to undercut Meloni, while others called it completely irrational and mostly damaging towards his own party (Amante, 2022).

Shortly after, controversy followed when Galeazzo Bignami, member of parliament from FdI, was appointed junior infrastructure minister. His appointment was controversial because in 2016 an Italian newspaper published an old picture of him wearing a nazi-armband, something he shrugged off as ‘light-hearted’ fun (Giuffrida, 2022b). Another controversial government appointment was Claudio Durigon as undersecretary at the labour ministry.

Durigon was forced to resign as undersecretary at the economy ministry a few months before, for a proposal about the naming of a park that currently is named after two assassinated anti-mafia judges. He proposed to rename the park after Arnaldo Mussolini, the brother of Benito Mussolini (Giuffrida, 2022b). Furthermore the new junior education minister, Paolo Frassinetti, was pictured in 2017 while attending a banned march honouring Italian SS volunteers (Roberts, 2022). Again another junior minister, of the ministry of university and research, was once pictured on a pilgrimage to Mussolini's birthplace, with a group that carried a black cross flag, which is symbolic for neo-nazi white supremacy groups (Roberts, 2022). So before these officials had even unpacked their new offices, there was already debate about their appointment. The last named minister Augusta Montaruli only enjoyed a short stay in office, because she stepped down after she was convicted of embezzling funds during her time in local government (Il Post, 2023).

But the controversies did not stop after the appointments. After visiting the site in Cutro Calabria, where over seventy dead migrants had washed up ashore, Meloni and Salvini stated that they unfortunately did not have time to pay homage to the coffins of the victims at the graveyard in Bologna (Redazione ANSA, 2023b). However, later videos leaked of them singing karaoke together that same night, to celebrate the fiftieth birthday of Salvini (Redazione ANSA, 2023b).

On a later moment junior minister Vittorio Sgarbi made a speech in which he used derogatory terms to reference to women and boasted about his relationship with women (1,500 sexual conquests, apparently) (Camut, 2023). This went on for forty five minutes. The same Sgarbi later stepped down in February 2024 from his function after the Italian Competition Authority found that his appearance at art conferences, for which he had received generous fees, were 'incompatible' with his role as minister (Imam, 2024). However at the same time he was also being investigated after he was accused of stealing a historic artwork to add to his personal collection (NOS Nieuws, 2024). This however did not stop FdI to nominate him as a candidate for upcoming elections in the Southern Italy district, which could see him becoming a MEP once again (Imam, 2024). This led to a parliamentarian of the Five Star Movement saying 'there is no limit to the shame and arrogance of this government ... in no other country would a party think of nominating a figure like this' (Imam, 2024).

Some other incidents of FdI politicians include the agriculture minister Lollobrigida forcing a high-speed train to make an unscheduled stop near Rome so he could disembark to not be late at an appointment (Tondo, 2023a), the senate speaker Ignazio La Russa defending his son who is facing allegation for rape, by questioning the victim's version of the events on the grounds she had taken cocaine (Redazione ANSA, 2023a), the minister of Tourism Daniela Santanchè being prosecuted for alleged benefit fraud during the COVID pandemic (Reuters, 2024) and lastly member of parliament Emanuele Pozzolo being suspended from FdI for accidentally shooting a man during a new years eve party, where multiple prominent members of FdI were present (Vock, 2024).

These, sometimes almost comical, incidents of course do not pose an obvious threat to liberal democracy in itself. But if you look at the total picture there is a worrying trend in Italy of prominent politicians not behaving up to the

standards that can be expected from politicians in Western-Europe. Of course you can argue that in Italian politics personal scandals are just more common, but if members of government act as though they stand above the law, it is obvious that citizens lose trust in the working of liberal democracy. However this seems to be more of a problem that lies within the core of FdI instead of being a characteristic of populist parties. Therefore this given does not contribute directly to the main question. However it does provide arguments to consider FdI to have a negative impact on Italian democracy.

#### 8. *Control of the agenda*

There is an inherent tension between representative democracy and control of the agenda by citizens. Therefore this becomes somewhat of an ambiguous dimension to test. Some groups have been able to influence government decision making, while others have tried but are left with empty hands. For instance trade unions have complained that the government is unwilling to listen to their complaints about the 2024 budget (Redazione ANSA, 2023d). On the other hand farmers that protested against EU-regulation and the withdrawal of diesel subsidies have seen a lot of their demands met by the government (Hannah Roberts & Ford, 2024). This might imply that the government is more willing to listen to people that fit their partly ideology.

Within this category there is some controversy on the way the money from the National Recovery and Resilience Plan is spent. Although most of the way the fund is set up, is done by predecessors Conte and Draghi, the Meloni government has done little to improve on their mistakes and mostly proceeds to work in the same line.

To tackle the economic problems that would follow from the aftermath of the COVID-19 virus, the EU had set up a fund that member states could use to economically recover from the economic damage the pandemic has left. Since Italy was one of the countries in Europe that suffered the most from the virus, it makes sense that they were entitled to a large share of the fund. In total they accounted for 190 billion euros in subsidies and loans from the European Union (Ministero dell'Economia e delle Finanze, 2021). Critics of the government say that when distributing this money, the national government have had little eye for the regional needs, that can differ significantly. They say the plan is written in closed rooms of ministries of Rome, without comparison of the available knowledge in regions (Viesti, 2022). For instance in the NRRP plans the government aims to invest 4,6 billion euros to create 265.000 extra spots for children in daycare centres and kindergartens (Roos, 2023). However this target is based on the percentage of children in Italy, but does not take into account that regions with a higher demand for daycare centres should get the priority (Roos, 2023). As a result of which fundamental economic inequalities will not be solved.

The Meloni government had the opportunity to critically evaluate the way the money is spent and potentially reallocate the funds. This however has not happened. Instead the Meloni government requested the EU for an expansion of the NRRP with the aim to, amongst other, renovate a football stadium in Florence and build a new one in Venice (Tamma, 2023). This sparked national and international outrage.

The government is very keen on the continuation of the NRRP plans. To ensure every plan can proceed as planned, the government has stripped financial magistrates of concomitant control of the NRRP spending (Redazione ANSA, 2023c). Meaning the function of checks and balances that the financial magistrates impose on the political system is removed.

What this proves is mostly that Italian politics can make significant steps in citizen participation. It however is too thin to claim that FdI is threatening liberal democracy by not letting citizens control the political agenda enough.

### *The link with Populism:*

We now have distinguished the most important actions of FdI during their first year and seven months in government. These actions have been classified on the basis of the eight indicators for liberal democracy that have been distinguished in the theory paragraph. On the basis of the results of the actions of FdI while in government that have been collected through various news outlets, there can be concluded that FdI is negatively influencing the strength of liberal democracy on multiple indicators. Those are: voting equality, enlightened understanding, inclusion of all adults, constraining of executive power and representative representatives. On the other indicators you can also definitely make arguments that liberal democracy is being threatened, however I would say that the actions that have been done thus far are not enough to actually speak of negatively impacting liberal democracy. On the other five indicators I do pose that there is enough evidence to speak of influencing the foundations of liberal democracy on these points. Since the (intended) actions of the Meloni government in the first year and seven months that fall within these indicators can be seen as such changing of the core fundamentals of Italian democracy, that you can actually speak of threatening the democratic order.

The question that remains is: is FdI a standalone case or are their actions typical for populist parties? To answer that we have to look back at the theory paragraph.

*Voting equality:* In the theory paragraph Margaret Canovan talked about how populists seek to simplify an inherently difficult political system of liberal democracy. People require a mental picture of where the power lies and within liberal democracy it can become quite complex and ambiguous to actually point to where the power lies. Populists know this, and exploit this paradox for electoral gains. This problem is exactly what FdI with their proposed government reforms. By opting to elect a president that also has the absolute majority in parliament, you create a very clear picture of where the power lies. This constitutional reform will definitely sound attractive to people that feel as though politics only happens in backroom chambers and difficult institutions and believe that democracy should be seen as sovereignty by the majority of the people. The downside however is that it also opens the door for autocratic leaders. This fits in the idea of Levitsky and Ziblatt of institutional forbearance, even if something is institutionally possible, that does not mean that it has to be done (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). As Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser said, it is typical for populists to exploit the inherent tensions between majority rules and minority rights (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). Meloni argues that the constitutional reforms are necessary to create more political stability and a more decisive government, but forgets government decision

making has be done careful to ensure that minority rights are protected within the process. By exploiting the idea of majority rules, FdI is doing typically populist actions.

*Enlightened understanding:* Within enlightened understanding, the freedom of press was included. As the theory has pointed out, populists usually have the urge to impeach the independence of the media and if they have the chance to change it from within. After all, if you assign the (traditional) media as being part of ‘the elite’ or at least as defender of the establishment, it becomes very easy to delegitimize their legitimate critique. According to Müller this fits in the populist tactic of colonizing or ‘occupying’ the state. FdI copied almost every chapter from this handbook by firstly slandering the RAI for having a left-wing bias and when in power replacing the most important executive functions within the RAI with party loyalists that want to ‘rebalance the media narrative’. At this point FdI has occupied the public broadcaster to such extent that critics see it as a government propaganda channel. If you take into account that a member of parliament of a coalition party is willing to take over some of the most read newspapers in Italy, you can see how comparisons to other populist leaders such as Orbán in Hungary or the PiS party in Poland are made.

*Inclusion of all adults:* The core of populism that we have discovered is to present a concept of ‘the people’. In the case of FdI, the concept of ‘the people’ are people with the Italian ethnicity that preferably hold on to Christian conservative values. Groups that fall outside this category, such as ethnic minorities or people that are part of the LGBT+ community, are seen as a threat to the traditional Italian culture and should therefore be met with caution. FdI did this for example by Meloni declaring herself to be an enemy of ‘gender ideology’ and ‘the LGBT lobby’. By impacting the discourse, the social sensibilities towards minority shift. For instance by talking about a ‘gender ideology’ Meloni feeds the conspiracy that there is some grand scheme going on that wants to take away the right to have a traditional gender. The same could be applied to claiming Italian students are indoctrinated with Muslim culture because schools choose to be closed during the last day of Ramadan. You could argue that this is just a radical-right way of thinking and not necessarily a characteristic for populism. However, it does feed into the idea ‘the Italian people’ are being suppressed by other minority groups who get to have all sorts of advantages above them. Therefore, I see the government actions as described under ‘inclusion of all adults’ as a form of mass clientelism as has been described by Müller. Therefore, not providing all adults with the same societal rights is part of the populist ideology.

*Constraining of executive power:* Once again the populist idea of occupying the state is applicable here. By using amongst others the defamation laws to silence critical opponents or other voices in the public debate, FdI is trying to intimidate influential people with an unwanted opinion. The same goes for museum directors, judges and people within the media with a ‘left-wing bias’. Urbinati would argue that this is typical for populist, since they try to silence the public debate to let the opinion of ‘the people’ prevail.

*Representative representatives:* As Jan Werner Müller has pointed out populist parties seem to be way less damaged in reputation after scandals or cases of corruption. This also seems to be the case with FdI. The first year and seven months of the first governing period for FdI hangs together of incidents and scandals. Although

multiple officials already had to clear the field because of an untenable position, this barely seems to hurt the overall reputation of FdI. So even in this sense, FdI is sharing the characteristics of a populist party in government. That these scandals do not seem to affect the parties popularity at all, makes it even more threatening to liberal democracy.

In the analysis the actions of FdI regarding the eight indicators for liberal democracy were discussed. On five of the eight indicators FdI is impacting liberal democracy to such extent, it can be called a threat to liberal democracy. In the last part of the analysis is explained why these threats to democracy can be explained through the populist ideology, which is part of FdI. This leads to the conclusion that judging from this case, a populist party being the biggest in a government coalition can be seen as a threat to liberal democracy.

## *Conclusion*

That insignificant politician, from an insignificant party, speaking at an insignificant event in 2019 that was described in the introduction, can definitely no longer be called insignificant. FdI has made their mark on Italian and European politics in the last two years, but whether that has a positive effect on liberal democracy is up to debate.

The goal of this thesis is to analyse the effects of a populist party being the biggest in a government coalition on liberal democracy. This was done through the case of FdI in Italy. In the first part of this thesis, the core concepts of liberal democracy and populism were explained. Furthermore, the tension between populism and liberal democracy was explored, by using literature from multiple political theorists. Subsequently the case that is central for this thesis is explained. This was done analysing what type of case we are dealing with, by analysing how Italy fits in the context of liberal democracy and how the party FdI can be explained in political terms. In the actual analysis of the government actions of FdI, the first period of their government tenure is analysed through using secondary sources. These actions were split into the eight indicators of liberal democracy.

The conclusion of this thesis is that on five of the eight indicators of liberal democracy, FdI has a demonstrable effect on liberal democracy. These are voting equality, enlightened understanding, inclusion of all adults, constraining of executive power and representative representatives. The biggest threats to liberal democracy in Italy since FdI has joined government are the proposed constitutional reforms, the urge of control in the media, the exclusion of minority groups from certain social rights, the silencing of individuals through defamation laws and party members not acting in accordance to how a responsible politician should behave.

The hypothesis of this thesis was that populist parties that lead government coalitions will have a negative impact on liberal democracy on most if not all indicators of liberal democracy. The conclusion is that on at least five of the eight indicators of liberal democracy FdI can be seen as threatening to liberal democracy. Therefore it can be concluded that the hypothesis can be accepted. Although I had expected FdI to use typical populist tactics such as occupying the state and delegitimizing political adversaries, I had not expected this process to happen as quick and extensively as has happened during the period that was researched. This might go beyond what was to be expected on the basis of the theory.

The question that remains is how generalizable these results are. What we have seen is that most of the actions that are described as threatening for liberal democracy emanate from the populist ideology as has been explained in the theory paragraph, or tend to be frequent with populist parties in government. However what must not be underestimated in this case is the Italian context. In the first place because of the government coalition partners of FdI who can also be described as populist radical right parties, therefore there is little of a natural corrective capacity within the government coalition. Something that is less likely to happen in other Western-European countries. This is what was described in the theory, democratic backsliding does not happen because of anti-democratic parties, but because of other parties recognizing anti-democratic parties as legitimate. Furthermore,

the Italian context allows for easier drastic interventions. For instance the way FdI relatively easy transforms the public broadcaster towards a personal propaganda channel, would be unthinkable in other Western-European countries. The same goes for such a radical constitutional reform, as FdI has proposed, that only requires a majority in a referendum to go through. A process that would require way more obstacles in other Western-European countries.

Therefore the conclusion is that it is possible to say that a populist party being the biggest party in government is negatively impacting the state of liberal democracy. However the Italian context allows for more negative impact on liberal democracy than other Western-European countries would. This is not to say that other Western-European countries are exempted from the threat populist parties pose to liberal democracy. In every country, there are inherent institutional weaknesses and no liberal democracy is immune to democratic backsliding.

This thesis only looked at the first year and seven months that FdI has been the biggest party in the Italian government. It can be reasonably predicted that FdI will remain a major party within Italian politics for the upcoming years. Therefore it is scientifically relevant to repeat this research after a few years, to evaluate what the effects of populism on liberal democracy have actually been. It is also relevant to repeat this research with another populist party that is or will be part of a government coalition, to test whether these results are also applicable in other cases.

The conclusion of this thesis begs the question of what is going to happen in other Western-European countries were populist parties such as the AFD, Vlaams Belang and Rassemblement National are also advancing in the national polls, with the PVV already in process of forming a government in the Netherlands after receiving the most votes in the latest election.

Although it might seem pretty bleak for the state of liberal democracy in Italy, only time will tell what the actual effect of FdI will be on liberal democracy. It is for instance still entirely possible that the referendum of the constitutional reform will be lost and that Meloni will suffer the same inglorious fate as her predecessor Matteo Renzi. Only time will tell.

## Bibliography

- Amante, A. (2022). Method or madness? Berlusconi's Russia stance hurts Meloni and Italy. Retrieved June 7, 2024, from Reuters website: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/method-or-madness-berlusconis-russia-stance-hurts-meloni-italy-2022-10-20/>
- Amante, A. (2023). Italy passes tougher measures to deter migrant arrivals. Retrieved June 7, 2024, from Reuters website: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-pass-tougher-measures-deter-migrant-arrivals-2023-09-18/>
- Amante, A., & Fonte, G. (2023). Italy's Meloni vows ban on technocrat government in proposed reform. Retrieved May 28, 2024, from Reuters website: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-weighs-ban-technocrat-led-government-proposed-constitution-reform-2023-11-03/>
- Amnesty International. (2022). "Decreto legge Rave": rischio di interpretazione discrezionale. Chiediamo l'abrogazione dell'articolo 5. Retrieved June 7, 2024, from Amnesty International Italia website: <https://www.amnesty.it/decreto-legge-rave-rischio-di-interpretazione-discrezionale-chiediamo-labrogazione-dellarticolo-5/>
- Amnesty International. (2024). Verdieping: De Risico's Van Migratiedeals. Retrieved June 7, 2024, from Amnesty International website: <https://www.amnesty.nl/wat-we-doen/themas/vluchtelingen-en-migranten/verdieping-de-riscos-van-migratie>
- ANSA English Desk. (2024). "High court" hypothesis in justice reform. Retrieved June 7, 2024, from ANSA English website: [https://ansabrazil.com.br/english/news/2024/05/03/high-court-hypothesis-in-justice-reform\\_2dc7f38b-1d25-4fd9-ba7e-8249c12e372f.html](https://ansabrazil.com.br/english/news/2024/05/03/high-court-hypothesis-in-justice-reform_2dc7f38b-1d25-4fd9-ba7e-8249c12e372f.html)
- Armellini, A. (2022). Anti-Mafia author Saviano on trial for calling Italy PM a "bastard." Retrieved June 6, 2024, from Reuters website: <https://www.reuters.com/world/anti-mafia-author-saviano-trial-calling-italy-pm-bastard-2022-11-15/>
- Armellini, A. (2023). Italy to debate bill that criminalises surrogacy done abroad. Retrieved June 4, 2024, from Reuters website: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-debate-bill-that-criminalises-surrogacy-done-abroad-2023-03-22/>
- Article 19. (2023). Italy: Half-baked defamation reforms will not protect journalists. Retrieved from <https://www.article19.org/resources/italy-half-baked-defamation-reforms-will-fail-to-protect-journalists/>
- Baccarini, R. (2023). Not for the first time, Italy embarks on constitutional reform. Retrieved May 29, 2024, from The Loop: ECPR's Political Science Blog website: <https://theloop.ecpr.eu/not-for-the-first-time-italy-embarks-on-constitutional-reform/https://theloop.ecpr.eu/not-for-the-first-time-italy-embarks-on-constitutional-reform/>
- Baldini, G., Tronconi, F., & Angelucci, D. (2022). Yet Another Populist Party? Understanding the Rise of Brothers of Italy. *South European Society and Politics*, 27(3), 385–405. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13608746.2022.2159625>
- Balmer, Cripian. (2023). Italy narrows asylum rights in new clampdown on immigration. Retrieved June 7, 2024, from Reuters website: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-narrows-asylum-rights-new-clampdown-immigration-2023-04-20/>
- Balmer, Cripian, & Piscioneri, F. (2023). Italian prosecutor demands cancellation of birth certificates for lesbian couples. Retrieved June 4, 2024, from Reuters website: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italian-prosecutor-demands-cancellation-birth-certificates-lesbian-couples-2023-06-20/>
- Bettiza, S. (2023). "The state says our kids don't exist" - how LGBT life is changing in Italy. Retrieved June 4, 2024, from BBC News website: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-66860266>
- Bobba, G., & McDonnell, D. (2015). Italy: a strong and enduring market for populism. In *European populism in the shadow of the great recession* (pp. 163–179).
- Bonini, C., Foschini, G., & Pistilli, C. (2024). L'uomo nero. Retrieved April 28, 2024, from La Repubblica website: [https://www.repubblica.it/podcast/le-inchieste/2024/04/29/news/luomo\\_nero-422772114/](https://www.repubblica.it/podcast/le-inchieste/2024/04/29/news/luomo_nero-422772114/)
- Borg-Barthet, J., & Farrington, F. (2023). *Open SLAPP Cases in 2022 and 2023*. Retrieved from [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/IPOL\\_STU\(2023\)756468](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/IPOL_STU(2023)756468)
- Bryce, V. (1921). *Modern Democracies, vol. 1*. Macmillan.
- Caiani, M., Carlotti, B., & Padoan, E. (2021). Online Hate Speech and the Radical Right in Times of Pandemic: The Italian and English Cases. *Javnost - The Public*, 28(2), 202–218. Retrieved from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13183222.2021.1922191>
- Cammaerts, B. (2022). The abnormalisation of social justice: The 'anti-woke culture war' discourse in the UK. *Discourse & Society*, 33(6), 730–743. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09579265221095407>

- Camut, N. (2023). Italian minister doubles down on sexist comments. Retrieved June 7, 2024, from Politico website: <https://www.politico.eu/article/vittorio-sgarbi-italy-junior-culture-minister-sexist-comments/>
- Canovan, M. (2002). Taking Politics to the People: Populism as the Ideology of Democracy. In Y. Mény & Y. Surel (Eds.), *Democracies and the Populist Challenge* (pp. 24–44). New York: PALGRAVE.
- Carlo, A. (2023). How Italy is using surrogacy to erode LGBTQ+ rights. Retrieved June 4, 2024, from Politico website: <https://www.politico.eu/article/italy-surrogacy-giorgia-meloni-erode-lgbtq-rights/>
- Castanho Silva, B., Vegetti, F., & Littvay, L. (2017). The Elite Is Up to Something: Exploring the Relation Between Populism and Belief in Conspiracy Theories. *Swiss Political Science Review*, 23(4), 423–443. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/spsr.12270>
- Chrisafis, A. (2022). France-Italy migration row escalates after rescue ship docks in Toulon. Retrieved June 7, 2024, from The Guardian website: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/nov/11/ship-carrying-230-asylum-seekers-docks-in-france-after-italy-refuses-entry>
- Ciccarelli, R. (2023). “Ethnic replacement” conspiracy theory finds its way into the Italian government. Retrieved May 30, 2024, from Il Manifesto website: <https://global.ilmanifesto.it/ethnic-replacement-conspiracy-theory-finds-its-way-into-the-italian-government/>
- Civil Protection Department. (2016). Civic access. Retrieved May 30, 2024, from Presidency of the Council of Ministers website: <https://www.protezionecivile.gov.it/en/department/transparent-administration/other-contents/civic-access/>
- Corbetta, P., & Vignati, R. (2013). Left or Right? The Complex Nature and Uncertain Future of the 5 Stars Movement. *Italian Politics and Society*, 72(73), 53–62. Retrieved from <http://web.apsanet.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2016/01/72-73-Spring-Fall-2013.pdf#page=53>
- Corrales, J., & Kiryk, J. (2022). Homophobic Populism. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.2080>
- Crowder, G. (2004). *Isaiah Berlin*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Cusumano, E., & Villa, M. (2019). Sea rescue NGOs : a pull factor of irregular migration? *Policy Briefs*, 22. <https://doi.org/10.2870/644458>
- D’Alimonte, R. (2019). How the Populists Won in Italy. *Journal of Democracy*, 30(1), 114–127. Retrieved from [https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/jnlodmcy30&div=13&g\\_sent=1&casa\\_token=&collection=journals#](https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/jnlodmcy30&div=13&g_sent=1&casa_token=&collection=journals#)
- D’Haens, H. (2023). Nieuwe wet Italië bemoeilijkt redden bootmigranten door hulporganisaties. Retrieved May 30, 2024, from NOS website: <https://nos.nl/artikel/2460236-nieuwe-wet-italie-bemoeilijkt-redden-bootmigranten-door-hulporganisaties>
- Dahl, R. A. (1998). *On Democracy*. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv18zhcs4>
- de Ghantuz Cubbe, G. (2022). A populist shift or business as usual? Explaining the outcome of the Italian general election. Retrieved from European Politics and Policy website: <https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/117015/>
- Di Caro, P. (2023). Crosetto: «Gruppi di magistrati contro il governo». Retrieved June 7, 2024, from Corriera Della Sera website: [https://www.corriere.it/politica/23\\_novembre\\_26/guido-crosetto-intervista2-de171344-8bc8-11ee-a024-cf804db2e6bb.shtml](https://www.corriere.it/politica/23_novembre_26/guido-crosetto-intervista2-de171344-8bc8-11ee-a024-cf804db2e6bb.shtml)
- Diamond, L. (1999). *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation*. John Hopkins University Press.
- Donà, A. (2022). The rise of the Radical Right in Italy: the case of FdI. *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 27(5), 775–794. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/1354571X.2022.2113216>
- Faiola, A., & Pitrelli, S. (2024). Two men wanted to start a family. Soon, they could be outlaws. Retrieved June 4, 2024, from The Washington Post website: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/02/05/surrogacy-italy-gay-parents/>
- Farruggia, A. (2022). Il governo riscrive le regole sui rave Ma conferma la pena di sei anni. Retrieved May 27, 2024, from Quotidiano Nazionale website: <https://www.quotidiano.net/cronaca/il-governo-riscrive-le-regole-sui-rave-ma-conferma-la-pena-di-sei-anni-dde9fe62>
- Ford, A. (2023). Frans Timmermans tried to destroy European farming says Italian agriculture minister. Retrieved May 30, 2024, from Politico website: <https://www.politico.eu/article/frans-timmermans-tried-to-destroy-european-farming-says-italian-agriculture-minister-francesco-lollobrigida/>
- Freedom House. (2023a). Freedom in the World 2023 - Countries. Retrieved May 21, 2024, from Freedom House website: <https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores>
- Freedom House. (2023b). Freedom in the World 2023 - Italy. Retrieved May 21, 2024, from Freedom House website: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/italy/freedom-world/2023>
- Fukuyama, F. (1992). *The End of History and the Last Man*. Free Press.
- Fukuyama, F. (2022). *Liberalism and Its Discontents*. Profile Books Ltd.
- Gerring, J. (2008). Case Selection for Case-Study Analysis: Qualitative and Quantitative Techniques. In *Oxford*

*Handbook of Political Methodology* (pp. 645–684). Oxford University Press.

- Giesen, P. (2024). Journalisten van Italiaanse staatsomroep Rai steken vanwege “verstikkende controle” regering. Retrieved April 27, 2024, from De Volkskrant website: <https://www.volkskrant.nl/buitenland/journalisten-van-italiaanse-staatsomroep-rai-steken-vanwege-verstikkende-controle-regering~b144af8b/>
- Giuffrida, A. (2022a). ‘Freedom-killing monster’: illegal rave crackdown in Italy draws criticism. Retrieved May 27, 2024, from The Guardian website: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/nov/02/freedom-killing-monster-italian-leader-giorgia-meloni-criticised-rave-laws>
- Giuffrida, A. (2022b). Giorgia Meloni appoints minister once pictured wearing Nazi armband. Retrieved November 1, 2022, from The Guardian website: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/nov/01/giorgia-meloni-galeazzo-bignami-nazi-swastika-armband>
- Giuffrida, A. (2023). “She plays the moderate but winks at those who are not”: the many faces of Giorgia Meloni. Retrieved May 30, 2024, from The Guardian website: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/sep/21/many-faces-of-giorgia-meloni-year-in-power-italy-prime-minister>
- Giuffrida, A. (2024). Meloni “turning Italian broadcaster into megaphone for the far right.” Retrieved June 3, 2024, from The Guardian website: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/apr/21/italy-antonio-scurati-rai-broadcaster-antifascist-monologue-cancellation>
- Governo Italiano. (2023). Comunicato stampa del Consiglio dei Ministri n. 57. Retrieved November 3, 2023, from <https://www.governo.it/it/articolo/comunicato-stampa-del-consiglio-dei-ministri-n-57/24163>
- Griffin, R. (1996). The “Post-Fascism” of the Alleanza Nazionale: A case study in ideological morphology. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 1(2), 123–145. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/13569319608420733>
- Hayek, F. A. (2022). *Individualism and the Economic Order*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Huffington Post. (2017). Giorgia Meloni presenta il nuovo simbolo di Fdi. E accoglie la Santanchè. Retrieved May 2, 2024, from Huffington Post website: [https://www.huffingtonpost.it/politica/2017/12/03/news/giorgia\\_meloni\\_presenta\\_il\\_nuovo\\_simbolo\\_di\\_fdi\\_e\\_accoglie\\_la\\_santanche\\_-5806706/](https://www.huffingtonpost.it/politica/2017/12/03/news/giorgia_meloni_presenta_il_nuovo_simbolo_di_fdi_e_accoglie_la_santanche_-5806706/)
- Human Rights Watch. (2023). Tunisia: Crisis as Black Africans Expelled to Libya Border. Retrieved June 7, 2024, from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/07/06/tunisia-crisis-black-africans-expelled-libya-border>
- Il Post. (2023). Augusta Montaruli, condannata in via definitiva per peculato, si è dimessa da sottosegretaria all’Università e alla Ricerca. Retrieved June 7, 2024, from Il Post website: <https://www.ilpost.it/2023/02/18/augusta-montaruli-peculato-dimissioni-sottosegretaria/>
- Imam, J. (2024). Storm as controversial art critic nominated to be Italian MEP. Retrieved June 7, 2024, from The Times website: <https://www.thetimes.com/world/europe/article/vittorio-sgarbi-controversial-art-critic-nominated-italy-mep-v9tb79kw2>
- Jamieson, K. H. (1995). *Beyond the double bind: Women and leadership* (O. U. Press, Ed.).
- Kazmin, A. (2024). Meloni’s radical plan: rewriting Italy’s post-fascist constitution. Retrieved May 29, 2024, from Financial Times website: <https://www.ft.com/content/b6af5da4-e40f-4df3-bcc3-c8001c41503d>
- Kingston, T. (2023a). Giorgia Meloni sets out to purge Italian TV of “left-wing bias.” Retrieved May 30, 2024, from The Times website: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/giorgia-meloni-italy-tv-left-wing-2023-0g50rghst>
- Kingston, T. (2023b). Giorgia Meloni vows to fine teachers who ban nativity plays. Retrieved June 4, 2024, from The Times website: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/giorgia-meloni-teachers-fine-ban-nativity-multiculturalism-59k7m5b0q>
- Kingston, T. (2024). Italian schools will no longer shut for Eid. Retrieved June 4, 2024, from The Times website: [https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/italian-schools-not-close-eid-ramadan-islam-f3cv06pwj?gad\\_source=5&gclid=EAIaIQobChMIIMzVhaHChgMVmpCDBx0vxg6CEAAAYASAAEgJDUPD\\_BwE](https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/italian-schools-not-close-eid-ramadan-islam-f3cv06pwj?gad_source=5&gclid=EAIaIQobChMIIMzVhaHChgMVmpCDBx0vxg6CEAAAYASAAEgJDUPD_BwE)
- Lania, C. (2022). Meloni wants to ban ‘raves,’ but the opposition sees an attack on protest. Retrieved May 27, 2024, from Il Manifesto website: <https://global.ilmanifesto.it/meloni-wants-to-ban-raves-but-the-opposition-sees-an-attack-on-protest/>
- Levitsky, S., & Ziblatt, D. (2018). *How Democracies Die: What History Reveals About Our Future*. Crown.
- Maccioni, F. (2022). Explainer: Italy’s new government challenges sea of maritime laws. Retrieved June 7, 2024, from Reuters website: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italys-new-government-challenges-sea-maritime-laws-2022-11-11/>
- Maccioni, F. (2023). Italy row over museum director fuels debate over Meloni’s grip on culture. Retrieved June 6, 2024, from Reuters website: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-row-over-museum-director->

fuels-debate-over-melonis-grip-culture-2023-09-21/

- Mair, P., & Mudde, C. (1998). The Party Family and its Study. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 1, 211–229. Retrieved from <https://www.annualreviews.org/content/journals/10.1146/annurev.polisci.1.1.211>
- Meloni, G. (2021). *Io sono Giorgia: Le mie radici, le mie idee*. Rizzoli.
- Meloni, G. (2022). *Giorgia Meloni: Italy's far-right wins election and vows to govern for all! I am Giorgia!!!* Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXocFMRtBQk>
- Messina, S. (2023). Giampaolo Rossi, the general director of the Melonian Rai who must “rebalance the narrative.” Retrieved May 30, 2023, from L’Espresso website: <https://lespresso.it/c/politica/2023/5/15/giampaolo-rossi-il-direttore-generale-della-rai-meloniana-che-deve-riequilibrare-la-narrazione/4141>
- Meyer-Resende, M., & Tsereteli, N. (2023). Meloni’s dangerous constitutional change in Italy. Retrieved May 29, 2024, from Politico website: <https://www.politico.eu/article/melonis-dangerous-constitutional-change-in-italy/>
- Ministero dell’Economia e delle Finanze. (2021). The National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP). Retrieved June 3, 2024, from <https://www.mef.gov.it/en/focus/The-National-Recovery-and-Resilience-Plan-NRRP/>
- Moffitt, B. (2016). *The global rise of populism: Performance, political style, and representation*. Stanford University Press.
- Moffitt, B., & Tormey, S. (2013). Rethinking Populism: Politics, Mediatisation and Political Style. *Political Studies*, 62(2), 381–397. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.12032>
- Mouffe, C. (1993). *The Return of the Political*. Verso.
- Mudde, C. (2007). *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge University Press.
- Mudde, C., & Rovira Kaltwasser, C. (2017). *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- Müller, J.-W. (2016). *What Is Populism?* University of Pennsylvania Press.
- NOS Nieuws. (2024). Kunstrel in Italië: onderminister zou gestolen schilderij uit 17de eeuw bezitten. Retrieved June 7, 2024, from NOS website: <https://nos.nl/artikel/2505125-kunstrel-in-italie-onderminister-zou-gestolen-schilderij-uit-17de-eeuw-bezitten>
- Oltermann, P., & Tondo, L. (2024). Italian government accused of using defamation law to silence intellectuals. Retrieved June 6, 2024, from The Guardian website: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/may/06/italian-government-accused-defamation-law-silence-intellectuals>
- Otjes, S., Ivaldi, G., Jupskås, A. R., & Mazzoleni, O. (2018). It’s not Economic Interventionism, Stupid! Reassessing the Political Economy of Radical Right-wing Populist Parties. *Swiss Political Science Review*, 24(3), 270–290. Retrieved from <https://www.webofscience.com/wos/woscc/full-record/WOS:000445203300003?SID=EUW1ED0FD3UyINnjNfq7vZli0T0eX>
- Palazzo, S. (2022). ARTICLE 434-BIS DOES RAVE APPLY TO EVERY GATHERING?/ Interior Ministry: “it does not infringe on any freedom.” Retrieved May 27, 2024, from Il Sussidiario website: <https://www.ilsussidiario.net/news/articolo-434-bis-rave-si-puo-applicare-a-ogni-raduno-intercettazioni-possibili/2432807/>
- Pianigiani, G. (2022). Italy Blocks Male Migrants From Leaving Rescue Ships. Retrieved June 7, 2024, from The New York Times website: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/07/world/europe/italy-immigrants-ship.html>
- Pietrucci, P. (2023). Neofascist “Thugs,” Pandemic Protests, Populisms: Giorgia Meloni’s Cerchiobottismo and the Rise of FdI During the Pandemic. *Journal of the European Institute for Communication and Culture*, 30(1), 51–66. Retrieved from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13183222.2023.2168444>
- Piscioneri, F., & Fonte, G. (2024). Italian ruling coalition plan would curb abortion rights, critics say. Retrieved June 4, 2024, from Reuters website: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italys-ruling-coalition-accused-attacking-abortion-rights-2024-04-17/>
- Povoledo, E. (2023). Italy Searches for Museum Leaders, With Nationalism in the Air. Retrieved June 6, 2024, from The New York Times website: <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/28/arts/design/italy-museum-leaders-uffizi-capodimonte-brera.html>
- Povoledo, E., & Bubola, E. (2022). Italy’s Hard Right Feels Vindicated by Giorgia Meloni’s Ascent. Retrieved May 28, 2024, from The New York Times website: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/28/world/europe/italy-hard-right-giorgia-meloni.html>
- Povoledo, E., & Horowitz, J. (2024). Italy’s New Abortion Law Is a Lesson in How Meloni Governs. Retrieved June 4, 2024, from The New York Times website: <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/23/world/europe/italy-abortion-law-meloni.html>

- Przeworski, A. (2004). Democracy and Economic Development. In E. D. Mansfield & R. Sisson (Eds.), *The Evolution of Political Knowledge* (pp. 300–324). Ohio State University.
- Puleo, L., & Piccolino, G. (2022). Back to the Post-Fascist Past or Landing in the Populist Radical Right? The Brothers of Italy Between Continuity and Change. *South European Society and Politics*, 27(3), 359–383. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13608746.2022.2126247>
- Redazione ANSA. (2023a). La Russa's son's phone seized in rape probe. Retrieved June 7, 2024, from ANSA English website: [https://www.ansa.it/english/news/politics/2023/07/15/la-russas-sons-phone-seized-in-rape-probe\\_10becc33-ee54-4a58-bce8-a748c651f7d4.html](https://www.ansa.it/english/news/politics/2023/07/15/la-russas-sons-phone-seized-in-rape-probe_10becc33-ee54-4a58-bce8-a748c651f7d4.html)
- Redazione ANSA. (2023b). Meloni-Salvini birthday karaoke row after Cutro visit. Retrieved June 7, 2024, from ANSA English website: [https://www.ansa.it/english/news/2023/03/11/meloni-salvini-birthday-karaoke-row-after-cutro-visit\\_695e2371-8da4-4329-9858-6c7181357a08.html](https://www.ansa.it/english/news/2023/03/11/meloni-salvini-birthday-karaoke-row-after-cutro-visit_695e2371-8da4-4329-9858-6c7181357a08.html)
- Redazione ANSA. (2023c). New relationship model with audit court says PM's office. Retrieved June 6, 2024, from ANSA English website: [https://www.ansa.it/english/news/politics/2023/06/01/new-relationship-model-with-audit-court-says-pms-office\\_18f865b5-b443-47ef-8385-68703cea09d4.html](https://www.ansa.it/english/news/politics/2023/06/01/new-relationship-model-with-audit-court-says-pms-office_18f865b5-b443-47ef-8385-68703cea09d4.html)
- Redazione ANSA. (2023d). Unions confirm opposition to budget after government talks. Retrieved June 3, 2024, from ANSA English website: [https://www.ansa.it/english/news/2023/11/28/unions-confirm-opposition-to-budget-after-govt-talks\\_1dcc2c26-3785-484d-8742-0d9ea323c52f.html](https://www.ansa.it/english/news/2023/11/28/unions-confirm-opposition-to-budget-after-govt-talks_1dcc2c26-3785-484d-8742-0d9ea323c52f.html)
- Redazione ANSA. (2024). Historian Canfore indicted for slandering Meloni. Retrieved June 6, 2024, from ANSA English website: [https://www.ansa.it/english/news/politics/2024/04/16/historian-canfora-indicted-for-slandering-meloni\\_d6a3fb8b-6604-422e-992b-c46bb3e9c2c8.html](https://www.ansa.it/english/news/politics/2024/04/16/historian-canfora-indicted-for-slandering-meloni_d6a3fb8b-6604-422e-992b-c46bb3e9c2c8.html)
- Reporters Without Borders. (2024). Italy must drop disproportionate ban on working as journalist from proposed defamation law reform. Retrieved June 6, 2024, from <https://rsf.org/en/italy-must-drop-disproportionate-ban-working-journalist-proposed-defamation-law-reform>
- Reuters. (2022a). Italy's Berlusconi says has exchanged “sweet letters” with Putin. Retrieved June 7, 2024, from Reuters website: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italys-berlusconi-says-has-exchanged-sweet-letters-with-putin-2022-10-18/>
- Reuters. (2022b). Italy's rightist government tightens rules for migrant rescues. Retrieved June 7, 2024, from Reuters website: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italys-rightist-government-tightens-rules-migrant-rescues-2022-12-29/>
- Reuters. (2024). Prosecutors seek trial for Italian minister over alleged fraud. Retrieved June 7, 2024, from Reuters website: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/prosecutors-seek-trial-italian-minister-over-alleged-fraud-2024-05-03/>
- Reybrouck, D. van. (2016). *Against Elections*. Random House UK.
- Roberts, Hannah. (2024). Journalists at Italian public media strike over Meloni government's influence. Retrieved June 3, 2024, from Politico website: <https://www.politico.eu/article/giorgia-meloni-italian-state-broadcaster-rai-press-freedom-journalists-on-strike-public-media/#:~:text=ROME—Journalists at Italy's state,a mouthpiece for the government.>
- Roberts, Hannah. (2022). Mussolini fans get jobs in Meloni's Italian government. Retrieved June 7, 2024, from Politico website: <https://www.politico.eu/article/mussolini-fans-get-jobs-giorgia-meloni-italy-government-galeazzo-bignami-paola-frassinetti-augusta-montaruli-claudio-durigon/>
- Roberts, Hannah. (2023a). Is Italy's Meloni failing to deliver for women? Retrieved June 4, 2024, from Politico website: <https://www.politico.eu/article/italy-giorgia-meloni-women-rights-feminism-motherhood-abortion-rights/>
- Roberts, Hannah. (2023b). The Purge: Meloni clears critics out of Italian culture. Retrieved May 30, 2024, from Politico website: <https://www.politico.eu/article/italy-culture-wars-style-giorgia-meloni/>
- Roberts, Hannah, & Ford, A. (2024). Italian farmers to cross the Rubicon with Rome blockade. Retrieved February 9, 2024, from Politico website: <https://www.politico.eu/article/italy-rome-giorgia-meloni-farmers-to-cross-the-rubicon-with-rome-blockade/>
- Roos, I. (2023). Tientallen EU-miljarden naar Italië, maar worden fundamentele problemen wel aangepakt. Retrieved June 3, 2024, from NRC website: <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2023/06/26/tientallen-eu-miljarden-naar-italie-maar-worden-fundamentele-problemen-wel-aangepakt-a4168258>
- Rousseau, J.-J. (2002). *The Social Contract and The First and Second Discourses*. Yale University Press.
- Rovira Kaltwasser, C., Taggart, P., Ochoa Espejo, P., & Otinguy, P. (2017). *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*. Oxford: OUP Oxford.
- Sorgi, G. (2023). Meloni, Rutte and von der Leyen head to Tunisia to unlock migrant deal. Retrieved June 7, 2024, from Politico website: <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-commission-chief-ursula-von-der-leyen-italian-giorgia-meloni-dutch-mark-rutte-travel-tunisia-on-sunday/>

- Taggart, P., & Pirro, A. L. P. (2021). European populism before the pandemic: ideology, Euroscepticism, electoral performance, and government participation of 63 parties in 30 countries. *Italian Political Science Review/Rivista Italiana Di Scienza Politica*, 51(3), 281–304. <https://doi.org/10.1017/ipo.2021.13>
- Tamma, P. (2023). Italy gets yellow card over funding stadiums with EU cash. Retrieved June 3, 2024, from Politico website: <https://www.politico.eu/article/italy-football-fiorentina-gets-yellow-card-over-funding-stadiums-with-eu-cash/>
- Tarchi, M. (2015). Italy: the promised land of populism? *Contemporary Italian Politics*, 7(3), 273–285. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23248823.2015.1094224>
- The Economist. (2023). Giorgia Meloni’s “mother of all reforms” is a power grab. Retrieved May 30, 2024, from <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2023/11/09/giorgia-melonis-mother-of-all-reforms-is-a-power-grab>
- The Economist Intelligence Unit. (2023). *Democracy Index 2023*. Retrieved from <https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2023/>
- Thomas, L., & Fonte, G. (2022). Migrant ship docks in France as row with Italy escalates. Retrieved June 7, 2024, from Reuters website: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/migrant-ship-spurned-by-italy-docks-france-2022-11-11/>
- Tondo, L. (2023a). Italian minister allegedly forced high-speed train to make unscheduled stop. Retrieved June 7, 2024, from The Guardian website: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/22/italys-agriculture-minister-accused-of-using-rail-service-as-personal-luxury-car>
- Tondo, L. (2023b). Italian PM Giorgia Meloni sues Placebo singer for calling her “fascist racist.” Retrieved June 6, 2024, from The Guardian website: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/aug/03/italian-pm-giorgia-melon-sues-placebo-singer-brian-molko-for-calling-her-fascist-racist-defamation>
- Transparency International. (2023). Italy transparency. Retrieved May 30, 2024, from [transparency.org/en/countries/italy](https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/italy)
- Urbinati, N. (2014). *Democracy Disfigured: Opinion, Truth and the People*. Harvard University Press.
- USIGRAi. (2024). Giornalisti Rai in Sciopero il 6 Maggio. Retrieved June 3, 2024, from <https://www.usigrai.it/giornalisti-rai-in-sciopero-il-6-maggio/>
- V-Dem Institute. (2024). *Democracy Report 2024*. Retrieved from [https://v-dem.net/documents/43/v-dem\\_dr2024\\_lowres.pdf](https://v-dem.net/documents/43/v-dem_dr2024_lowres.pdf)
- Valbruzzi, M. (2013). Not a Normal Country: Italy and its Party Systems. *Romanian Political Science Review*, 13(4), 617–640. Retrieved from <https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=144535>
- van Gool, R. (2023). Gomorra-auteur Roberto Saviano moet 1.000 euro boete betalen voor uitschelden premier Giorgia Meloni. Retrieved June 6, 2024, from De Volkskrant website: <https://www.volkskrant.nl/buitenland/gomorra-auteur-roberto-saviano-moet-1-000-euro-boete-betalen-voor-uitschelden-premier-giorgia-meloni~bb359cbe/>
- Verbeek, B., & Zaslove, A. (2016). Italy: a case of mutating populism? *Democratization*, 23(2), 304–323. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2015.1076213>
- Viesti, G. (2022). Riuscirà il PNRR a Rilanciare l’Italia? Retrieved June 3, 2024, from Il Mulino website: <https://www.rivistailmulino.it/a/riuscir-il-pnrr-a-rilanciare-l-italia>
- Vinx, L. (2019). Carl Schmitt. Retrieved February 22, 2024, from The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy website: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/schmitt/>
- Vock, I. (2024). Italian outcry as MP Pozzolo’s gun wounds man at New Year’s Eve party. Retrieved June 7, 2024, from BBC News website: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-67861486>
- Walters, D., & Roox, I. (2024). Met Meloni krijgt het migratiebeleid van Europa een zeer Italiaans stempel. Retrieved June 7, 2024, from NRC website: <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2024/03/15/met-meloni-krijgt-het-migratiebeleid-van-europa-een-zeer-italiaans-stempel-a4193270>
- Weyland, K. (2001). Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics. *Comparative Politics*, 34(1), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.2307/422412>
- Zaslove, A. (2011). *The Re-invention of the European Radical Right: Populism, Regionalism and the Italian Lega Nord*. McGill-Queen’s University Press.
- Ziniti, A. (2022). Medici senza frontiere: “Se l’Italia tiene le navi umanitarie lontane dal Mediterraneo, aumenta il rischio di morti in mare.” Retrieved June 7, 2024, from La Repubblica website: [https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2022/12/29/news/medici\\_senza\\_frontiere\\_governo\\_ong-381096958/](https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2022/12/29/news/medici_senza_frontiere_governo_ong-381096958/)
- Zorzetto, D. (2024). Psico-test per magistrati, la psichiatra Bondi: “Così porta a galla patologie nascoste.” Retrieved June 6, 2024, from La Repubblica website: [https://www.repubblica.it/salute/2024/03/29/news/test\\_magistrati\\_psicologia\\_psichiatria-422388621/](https://www.repubblica.it/salute/2024/03/29/news/test_magistrati_psicologia_psichiatria-422388621/)
- Zulianello, M. (2020). Varieties of Populist Parties and Party Systems in Europe: From State-of-the-Art to the

Application of a Novel Classification Scheme to 66 Parties in 33 Countries. *Government and Opposition*, 55(2), 327–347. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2019.21>

*Appendix 1: coding sheet*

<b>Effective participation</b>	Every person should get the chance to have equal and effective opportunities to make their views known to other people. This goes beyond parties and elections. Citizens should have access to various continuous platforms where they can express themselves and advocate for their interests and values. These platforms should encompass a range of diverse, autonomous organizations and movements, which individuals have the liberty to establish and participate in.
<b>Voting equality</b>	Every person must have an equal and effective opportunity to vote and all votes must be counted equal.
<b>Enlightened understanding</b>	Every person should get the freedom to request information regarding the actions of the government and should get ample time to learn about relevant alternative policies and their likely consequences. This also includes alternative (media) sources to which citizens should have unfettered access.
<b>Representative representatives</b>	Chosen representatives must adhere to the constitution and to the common laws. Representatives should not use their political position to gain personal benefits. They should behave respectfully towards their constituents and regard their political opponents as legitimate adversaries.
<b>Inclusion of all adults</b>	All adult members of state should have full political rights. This includes cultural, ethnic, religious and other minority groups that should not be prohibited (legally or in practice) from expressing their interests in the political process or practicing their culture.
<b>Constraining of executive power</b>	Executive power should be constrained, constitutionally and in fact, by the autonomous powers of parliament, an independent judicial system and other mechanisms of horizontal accountability. Individual and group liberties are effectively protected by an independent, non-discriminatory judiciary whose decisions are enforced and respected by other centres of power.
<b>The rule of law</b>	The rule of law protects citizens from unjustified detention, exile, terror, torture, and undue interference in their personal lives, not only by the state but also by organized nonstate or anti-state forces.
<b>Control of the agenda</b>	Members of state must have the exclusive opportunity to decide how and, if they choose, what matters are placed on the political agenda. Policies are never finished or closed and should always be open to change if the members of state choose to do so.



4. control of the agenda	01-06-2023	Yes	<a href="https://www.ansa.it/english/news/2023/06/01/news-constitution-modals-with-audit-court-says-gmcc-office-b6f69e90-7725-480a-8464-271876220f6.html">https://www.ansa.it/english/news/2023/06/01/news-constitution-modals-with-audit-court-says-gmcc-office-b6f69e90-7725-480a-8464-271876220f6.html</a>	ensions over the government's move to strip the financial magistrates of concomitant control of National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) spending, a note from the office of Premier Giorgia Meloni said after "cordial" talks between the government and the court Thursday.	At the meeting between the government and the Court of Auditors, "issues related to the implementation of the NRRP, the use of the Supplementary Fund, and the audit activity of the Court of Auditors were discussed," said the statement from the PM's office at Palazzo Chigi in Rome.
4. Control of the agenda	11-06-2023	No	<a href="https://nos.nl/artikel/2478518-eu-biedt-tunesie-honderden-miljoenen-in-nul-voor-terugdringen-migratie">https://nos.nl/artikel/2478518-eu-biedt-tunesie-honderden-miljoenen-in-nul-voor-terugdringen-migratie</a>	You could argue that those EU deals go against control of the agenda for citizens, since they do not have a say in these policies	
4. Control of the agenda	26-07-2023	No	<a href="https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2023/06/26/bientallen-eu-miljarde-naar-datie-maar-woorden-fundamentele-problemen-wel-aangepakt-41168258">https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2023/06/26/bientallen-eu-miljarde-naar-datie-maar-woorden-fundamentele-problemen-wel-aangepakt-41168258</a>	Article questioning whether the NRRP money is spend on the right things	Alleen politici, technici en journalisten lijken erme bezig. „Er vindt geen nationaal gesprek plaats over de enorme kans van dit plan voor Italië“, beaamt Gianfranco Viesti, hoogleraar economie aan de universiteit van het Zuid-Italiaanse Bari, en auteur van een pas verschenen boek dat twee jaar herstelplan in Italië evalueert. „Politici klagen dan weer dat het plan te omvangrijk is, dat sommige doelstellingen niet gehaald zullen worden, en ga zo voort.“
4. Control of the agenda	28-11-2023	No	<a href="https://www.ansa.it/english/news/2023/11/28/unions-confirm-opposition-to-budget-after-govt-takes-1dc2c2f6-3785-484d-8742-0d9ea323c52f.html">https://www.ansa.it/english/news/2023/11/28/unions-confirm-opposition-to-budget-after-govt-takes-1dc2c2f6-3785-484d-8742-0d9ea323c52f.html</a>	Biggest unions of Italy complaining government is unwilling to listen to their suggestions	"It confirms all the reasons for (last week's) strike because beyond listening, at the moment the government has changed nothing about the budget," s
4. control of the agenda	17-03-2024	No	<a href="https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-leaders-say-gvt-4b-economic-aid-migration-deal-italy-greece-belgium-wait-to-approve/">https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-leaders-say-gvt-4b-economic-aid-migration-deal-italy-greece-belgium-wait-to-approve/</a>	You could argue that those EU deals go against control of the agenda for citizens, since they do not have a say in these policies	
5. Inclusion of all adults	20-04-2023	Yes	<a href="https://www.politico.eu/article/foot-racist-italian-agriculture-minister-after-ethnic-substitution-comments-francesco-tolobogoda/">https://www.politico.eu/article/foot-racist-italian-agriculture-minister-after-ethnic-substitution-comments-francesco-tolobogoda/</a>	Minister suggesting there is an ethnic replacement happening in Italy	"We cannot surrender to the idea of ethnic substitution," which he defined as "Italians are having fewer children, we replace them with someone else."
5. Inclusion of all adults	31-10-2023	No	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-delays-eu-required-justice-reform-scraps-vaccine-mandate-medics-2023-10-31/">https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-delays-eu-required-justice-reform-scraps-vaccine-mandate-medics-2023-10-31/</a>	Reinstating anti-vaxxers in their work as health workers. Allowing them freedom of choice	Speaking at a news conference after cabinet approved the measures, Meloni accused her predecessors, Draghi and Giuseppe Conte, of taking an "ideological" approach to COVID and said she would do things differently.
5. Inclusion of all adults	26-01-2023	Yes	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/eu-search/queyrel-italy-offset-4260">https://www.reuters.com/eu-search/queyrel-italy-offset-4260</a>	Coalition party Lega Nord pleading for tax privileges for Northern states	A likely trigger for dissent is the League's push to give its northern bastions greater autonomy, including more say over how their taxes are spent. Such a reform is not appreciated by the Brothers of Italy, which fears it could hurt its voter heartlands in central and southern regions.
5. Inclusion of all adults	14-03-2023	Yes	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italian-government-tells-milan-stop-registering-same-sex-couples-children-2023-03-14/">https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italian-government-tells-milan-stop-registering-same-sex-couples-children-2023-03-14/</a>	Italian government tells Milan to stop registering same-sex couples' children	Fabrizio Marrazzo, a leading gay rights campaigner, called for Sala and other mayors to keep registering the birth certificates. "When a law is unjust and discriminatory those who engages in politics must have the courage to disobey it," he said in a statement.
5. Inclusion of all adults	22-03-2023	Yes	<a href="https://www.politico.eu/article/italy-debate-bill-that-criminalises-surrogacy-done-abroad-2023-03-22/">https://www.politico.eu/article/italy-debate-bill-that-criminalises-surrogacy-done-abroad-2023-03-22/</a>	Italy to debate bill that criminalises surrogacy done abroad	Alessia Crocini, head of Famiglie Arcobaleno (Rainbow Families), an association that represents same-sex parents, said on Wednesday that the reform would be "extremely difficult" to apply in practice. "To criminalise a practice that is perfectly legal and regulated by very strict laws in countries that cannot certainly be called rogue states would be problematic in terms of international law," she said at the Foreign Press Association.
5. Inclusion of all adults	18-04-2023	No	<a href="https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/giorgia-meloni-italian-women-work-migrants-will-7ga0p">https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/giorgia-meloni-italian-women-work-migrants-will-7ga0p</a>	Encourage companies to hire Italian women instead of migrants	"The way to resolve this is not migrants but that great, unused reserve which is the female workforce," she said.
5. Inclusion of all adults	20-06-2023	Yes	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italian-prosecutor-demands-cessation-birth-certificates-lesbian-couples-2023-06-20/">https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italian-prosecutor-demands-cessation-birth-certificates-lesbian-couples-2023-06-20/</a>	Prosecutor of Padua, backed by Italian government, demanding cancellation of birth certificates for lesbian couples. So the non-biological parent is no longer legally recognised as a mother	"These children are being orphaned by decree," said centre-left parliamentarian Alessandro Zan, who has pushed for gay rights in Italy. "This is a cruel, inhumane decision," he added.
5. Inclusion of all adults	09-09-2023	Yes	<a href="https://www.politico.eu/article/italy-ecoria-meloni-women-rights-feminism-motherhood-abortion-right/">https://www.politico.eu/article/italy-ecoria-meloni-women-rights-feminism-motherhood-abortion-right/</a>	Implementing policy that is discriminatory against women	, includes the axing of unemployment benefits for those theoretically able to work, of which women with young children were the main beneficiary, and tax breaks that the opposition argues incentivise low-earning women to stay at home. Meloni is opposed to a minimum wage, which would principally benefit women.
5. Inclusion of all adults	08-11-2023	No (they have not really made it better or worse)	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/09/world/europe/italy-meloni.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/09/world/europe/italy-meloni.html</a>	Government and Meloni not acting on chauvinistic Italian culture that creates unsafe environments for women	The problem is structural and steeped throughout all of society. And modifying cultural paths takes time and requires action on many fronts."
5. Inclusion of all adults	21-12-2023	Yes	<a href="https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/giorgia-meloni-teachers-fine-bans-nativity-multiculturalism-59k7m5b0n">https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/giorgia-meloni-teachers-fine-bans-nativity-multiculturalism-59k7m5b0n</a>	Giorgia Meloni vows to fine teachers who ban nativity plays	"For some years there have been embarrassing and unacceptable decisions by some schools to ban nativity scenes, or to turn Christmas into an improbable winter festival to avoid giving offence to practitioners of other religions."
5. Inclusion of all adults	15-04-2024	Yes	<a href="https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/italian-schools-not-close-aid-ramadan-islam-fa06paw">https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/italian-schools-not-close-aid-ramadan-islam-fa06paw</a>	Giorgia Meloni's government is to ban Italian schools from closing for a day to mark the end of Ramadan as it fights attempts by teachers to cater to Muslim students.	"It's no longer about Muslim students needing ways to assimilate our language and our traditions but Italian students being indoctrinated about ways which are contrary to our culture and values," said Isabella Togliavari, a member of Matteo Salvini's League party, part of Meloni's ruling coalition.
5. Inclusion of all adults	17-04-2024	Yes	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-calling-coalition-accused-attacking-abortion-rights-2024-04-17/">https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-calling-coalition-accused-attacking-abortion-rights-2024-04-17/</a>	Allowing anti-abortion activist groups in abortion clinics to speak with women that want to have an abortion	"Putting anti-abortionists in clinics is like giving hospital management to no-vax people," said Francesco Boccia, from the PD party.
5. Inclusion of all adults	23-04-2024	Yes	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/23/world/europe/italy-abortion-law-meloni.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/23/world/europe/italy-abortion-law-meloni.html</a>	New abortion laws allowing anti-abortion groups into clinics	Ana Redondo, the minister of equality in Spain, one of Europe's most progressive governments, called it shameful. "It is the strategy of the ultraright: to intimidate in order to reverse rights, to stop equality between women and men," she wrote on social media. "She's subtle," said Gianfranco Pasquino, professor emeritus of political science at Bologna University, adding that Ms. Meloni was seeking to shift Italian and European sensibilities to the right without necessarily changing laws. "She's an excellent politician."
6. Constraining of executive power	16-11-2022	Yes	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/anti-mafia-author-salvino-trial-calling-italy-pm-bastard-2022-11-15/">https://www.reuters.com/world/anti-mafia-author-salvino-trial-calling-italy-pm-bastard-2022-11-15/</a>	Author taken to court for calling Meloni a "bastard"	"All the bullshit [said about NGOs], sea taxis, cruises [for migrants]," he said. "All I can say is: bastards, how could you? Meloni, Salvini: bastards." "I'll defend the legitimacy of the critique of Power, even when it is harsh," the 43-year-old told Reuters in written remarks ahead of appearing before a Rome court.
6. Constraining of executive power	20-01-2023	Yes	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/italy-pm-meloni-faces-66k-vote-choice-over-key-treasury-role-2023-01-19/">https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/italy-pm-meloni-faces-66k-vote-choice-over-key-treasury-role-2023-01-19/</a>	Meloni appointing party loyalist as new Treasury Head	The move marks a victory for new Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, who was looking to remove Rivera and put her stamp on key positions within Italy's powerful state bureaucracy.
6. Constraining of executive power	08-05-2023	Yes	<a href="https://www.ansa.it/english/news/policy/2023/05/08/link-advoc-to-popular-support-says-meloni-aad0a9c-2b1d-4a57-8dc6-04023b0e717.html">https://www.ansa.it/english/news/policy/2023/05/08/link-advoc-to-popular-support-says-meloni-aad0a9c-2b1d-4a57-8dc6-04023b0e717.html</a>	Proposal for constitutional reform introducing a semi-presidential system with no checks and balances	"Tomorrow we have summoned the oppositions to talk about constitutional reforms. They say it is not a priority, no. I think it is a priority to say enough to governments built in laboratories inside palaces that pass over the skin of citizens and to bind who governs to popular consensus and give this nation stability, governments that last five years", Meloni said at a local-election rally in Ancona.
6. Constraining of executive power	09-05-2023	Yes	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/meloni-opens-talks-constitutional-reform-long-mirage-italy-2023-05-09/">https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/meloni-opens-talks-constitutional-reform-long-mirage-italy-2023-05-09/</a>	Trying to change the constitution to adopt a presidential system, with the direct election of a powerful head of state	"We consider this to be an important confrontation for our democracy to approve measures that cannot be put off," she said.
6. constraining of executive power	03-08-2023	Yes	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/aug/03/italian-pm-says-giorgia-meloni-says-its-abolishing-bans-molko-for-calling-her-fascist-racist-defamation">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/aug/03/italian-pm-says-giorgia-meloni-says-its-abolishing-bans-molko-for-calling-her-fascist-racist-defamation</a>	Suing artists for calling Meloni a fascist and racist	The International Press Institute has joined its Media Freedom Rapid Response partners in calling again on the Italian parliament to undertake comprehensive overhaul of Italy's defamation laws that brings them into line with international standards on freedom of expression.
6. Constraining of executive power	03-08-2023	No	<a href="https://www.euronews.com/2023/08/03/italy-meloni-government-cuts-welfare-benefits-to-thousands-of-families-by-mps-speaking-or">https://www.euronews.com/2023/08/03/italy-meloni-government-cuts-welfare-benefits-to-thousands-of-families-by-mps-speaking-or</a>	Giorgia Meloni's right-wing government is putting an end to benefits for thousands of families and individuals deemed 'fit to work'.	The suspension of the citizens' income has sparked a furious debate in the Italian parliament, with Conte accusing Meloni's Brothers of Italy and the coalition government of trying to "tear apart the country."
6. Constraining of executive power	14-08-2023	Yes (although it seems to be a sloppy mistake)	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-pm-meloni-takes-full-responsibility-bank-tax-2023-08-14/">https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-pm-meloni-takes-full-responsibility-bank-tax-2023-08-14/</a>	Meloni introducing a tax on banking without consulting with the rest of government first	Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni on Monday took "full responsibility" for last week's shock decision to impose a one-off bank tax that has been blamed for causing lasting damage to her government's credibility with financial markets.
6. Constraining of executive power	21-09-2023	No	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-crow-over-museum-director-fuels-debate-over-melonis-grip-culture-2023-09-21/">https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-crow-over-museum-director-fuels-debate-over-melonis-grip-culture-2023-09-21/</a>	Meloni government meddling in the cultural sector (where it arguably should have no place)	Greco said he was confident there would be transparency around future appointments, but said Italian politicians needed to stop interfering. "In Italy, political interference is excessive. It ruins certain equilibriums and is a problem that has always existed," he told La Stampa.
6. constraining of executive power	29-09-2023	Yes	<a href="https://www.politico.eu/article/italy-culture-wars-style-giorgia-meloni/">https://www.politico.eu/article/italy-culture-wars-style-giorgia-meloni/</a>	foremost cultural institutions — including those charged with safeguarding that national legacy — find themselves in a political battle, raising fears that their independence is at risk.	For Scheinin and Meloni's other critics, the latest bust-up fits a pattern in which Italy's right-wing coalition attempts to shut down independent voices. Meloni "has a mania for control," Scheinin claimed. The government holds "a proprietary perception of institutions and culture that we cannot accept," she added.
6. Constraining of executive power	7-11-2023	Arguably	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-migrant-deal-with-albania-faces-rights-challenges-red-tape-2023-11-07/">https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-migrant-deal-with-albania-faces-rights-challenges-red-tape-2023-11-07/</a>	Italy aiming to make a migrant immigrating centre in Albania where refugees can await their asylum process	Chiara Cardoletti, head of the U.N. Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in Italy, said the Albanian scheme might be acceptable as long as it fully respected the U.N. Refugee Convention and did not result in Italy shifting asylum responsibilities on to Albania. "The Guantanamo Made in Italy that Giorgia Meloni wants to build in Albania is just another cruel propaganda move," Magi said.
6. constraining of executive power	05-02-2024	Yes	<a href="https://www.ansa.it/english/news/2024/02/05/majority-finds-agreement-on-premiership-anti-reversal-rule-128443fa-26d0-4317-994c-846d1aa3c231.html">https://www.ansa.it/english/news/2024/02/05/majority-finds-agreement-on-premiership-anti-reversal-rule-128443fa-26d0-4317-994c-846d1aa3c231.html</a>	No-reversal rule on chosen president	Leading Constitutional experts Sabino Cassese and Antonio Baldassarre have called on the government to abandon its plans to introduce the direct election of the premier and begin a process of constitutional reform that is shared by the opposition.

6. Constraining of executive power	25-03-2024	No	<a href="https://www.ansa.it/english/news/2024/03/25/meloni-denies-bari-inspection-is-politically-motivated">https://www.ansa.it/english/news/2024/03/25/meloni-denies-bari-inspection-is-politically-motivated</a>	Inspection on Bari mayor for possible links with mafia - mayor claiming the inspection is politically motivated	"We would have gone too far if we had not ordered an inspection that would have been ordered in the same conditions for any other Italian municipality." - Meloni
6. Constraining of executive power	29-03-2024	Yes	<a href="https://www.repubblica.it/salute/2024/03/29/news/test_magistrato_piscolio_pastiche-42388621/">https://www.repubblica.it/salute/2024/03/29/news/test_magistrato_piscolio_pastiche-42388621/</a>	Introducing a psychological test for magistrates	Once again, the political parties are trying to discredit the judiciary by raising suspicions among citizens that the selection and assessment mechanisms for judges and prosecutors do not offer sufficient guarantees of psychological balance: in fact, the government is being urged to introduce psycho-academic tests for admission to the judiciary without clarifying what these tests should consist of and on what reliable scientific basis they should be based. The demagogic nature of this measure is all too obvious," reads a statement from the judges' unions.
6. Constraining of executive power	16-04-2024	Yes	<a href="https://www.ansa.it/english/news/politics/2024/04/16/historian-carfora-indicted-for-slandering-meloni">https://www.ansa.it/english/news/politics/2024/04/16/historian-carfora-indicted-for-slandering-meloni</a>	Historian sued for defamation	Carfora described Meloni, 47, who became Italy's first woman premier later that year, as "a neo-Nazi in her soul", a "poor wretch", and "an extremely dangerous beggar".
6. Constraining of executive power	06-05-2024	Yes	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/may/06/italian-government-accused-defamation-law-silence-intellectuals">https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/may/06/italian-government-accused-defamation-law-silence-intellectuals</a>	Philosopher Donatella Di Cesare getting sued for defamation over comments on agriculture minister Lollobrigida (and brother in law of Meloni). Comparing his speech to pages of Mein Kampf	"Italy not only failed to decriminalise libel, but its new coalition government gave its blessing to the use of judicial procedures to silence its critics."
6. Constraining of executive power	08-05-2024	Yes	<a href="https://www.ansa.it/english/news/2024/05/08/meloni-says-wont-give-ground-on-premiership-reform">https://www.ansa.it/english/news/2024/05/08/meloni-says-wont-give-ground-on-premiership-reform</a>	Meloni says won't give ground on premiership reform	"It would be a mistake on the part of politics to give ground and throw in the towel in the face of this attitude," said the premier. "The premiership reform is a risk for me but it must be grasped," she said. A biased interpretation of the Constitution must not privilege one side, she added.
6. The rule of law	14-11-2023	Yes	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-says-strikes-with-unions-over-planned-strike-mulls-curbs-2023-11-14/">https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-says-strikes-with-unions-over-planned-strike-mulls-curbs-2023-11-14/</a>	Constraining of right to have strikes organised by unions	"Meloni is humiliating workers," said Ely Schlein, the leader of the centre-left Democratic Party.
7. The rule of law	02-11-2023	Not really	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-meloni-proud-contested-rare-clamp-down-2022-11-02/">https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-meloni-proud-contested-rare-clamp-down-2022-11-02/</a>	Disproportionate penalty's for organizing or participating in illegal rallies	Under the decree, organisers of unauthorised, mass parties face a maximum six years in jail and fines of between 1,000 to 10,000 euros (\$990-\$9,900) for staging such events. Political opponents say the penalties are far too harsh, but Meloni appeared to rule out a change of heart.
7. The rule of law	07-11-2023	Yes	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/07/world/europe/italy-immigrants-ships.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/07/world/europe/italy-immigrants-ships.html</a>	Failing to commit to international law by refusing to assign a port of safety for migrant boats and after allowing boats to the port refusing to let adult men of the boats	Legal experts also say that national and international norms do not allow governments to those who gets to leave the ships.
7. The rule of law	11-11-2023	Yes	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-refuses-let-ngo-boats-rescued-refugees-from-mediterranean-sea-save-access-to-italian-ports">https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-refuses-let-ngo-boats-rescued-refugees-from-mediterranean-sea-save-access-to-italian-ports</a>	Italy refusing to let NGO boats that rescued refugees from the mediterranean sea save access to Italian ports. Effectively asking these boats to turn around to bring those refugees back to Northern Africa, breaking international law	The NGOs all rejected this interpretation of the law. Legal expert Cataldi said denying or delaying access to Italian waters by citing illegal immigration represented a violation of international law as it prevented boats from carrying out disembarkation operations in a timely fashion.
7. The rule of law	29-12-2023	No	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-tightens-rules-migrant-rescues-2023-12-29/">https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-tightens-rules-migrant-rescues-2023-12-29/</a>	Five charities who rescue migrants at sea and impound their ships if they break a new, tougher set of rules - a move that one campaign group said could threaten lives.	Riccardo Gatti, who is in charge of a rescue ship run by the Doctors Without Borders Charity, told daily la Repubblica on Thursday that the decree was part of a strategy that "increases the risk of death for thousands of people."
7. The rule of law	20-04-2023	Yes	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-critics-strikes-and-immigration-rights-new-clamp-down-immigration-2023-04-20/">https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-critics-strikes-and-immigration-rights-new-clamp-down-immigration-2023-04-20/</a>	Stricter migration laws, including tougher jail terms for human smugglers and the elimination of 'special protection'	Critics say the bill is repressive and will do nothing to halt the flow of migrants seeking a better life in Europe, but will instead force ever more newcomers into illegality. Among the most contested measures is a decision to eliminate "special protection" residency permits that authorities can offer migrants who don't qualify for asylum, but who face humanitarian risks back home, or have family ties in Italy.
7. The rule of law	12-05-2023	Yes	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-rights-watchdog-denounces-italy-immigration-law-inhumane-2023-05-12/">https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-rights-watchdog-denounces-italy-immigration-law-inhumane-2023-05-12/</a>	Inhumane/immigration laws	"The new law will have a devastating impact on migrants' rights, including their ability to seek protection, access fair asylum procedures, and enjoy freedom of movement," Human Rights Watch said in a statement.
7. The rule of law	03-06-2023	Yes	<a href="https://www.ansa.it/english/news/2023/06/03/alliance-without-would-be-out-of-place-m5s-conte">https://www.ansa.it/english/news/2023/06/03/alliance-without-would-be-out-of-place-m5s-conte</a>	Removal of court's powers to monitor projects falling under the NRRP. Leaving oversight once projects are already completed	The decree removes the court's powers to vet or monitor projects while they are being implemented, only leaving it with oversight powers once projects are completed.
7. The rule of law	15-06-2023	No beneficial	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-judges-berlusconi-legal-reform-bolster-rights-accused-2023-06-15/">https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-judges-berlusconi-legal-reform-bolster-rights-accused-2023-06-15/</a>	More protection as an accused person in lawsuits, protecting privacy and reducing arbitrariness	The bill, which Giorgio Meloni's rightist government dedicated to Berlusconi, curbs the use of wiretaps, complicates procedures for ordering arrests and scraps the crime of abuse of office, among a raft of steps to clip the wings of prosecutors.
7. The rule of law	18-09-2023	No	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-passes-tougher-measures-to-deter-migrant-arrivals">https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-passes-tougher-measures-to-deter-migrant-arrivals</a>	Italy passes tougher measures to deter migrant arrivals	The Italian Coalition for Civil Rights and Liberties (CILD) described the detention centres as "black holes" where serious violations of fundamental rights take place, adding that they are expensive and inefficient.
7. The rule of law	26-11-2023	Yes	<a href="https://www.ansa.it/english/news/2023/11/26/crosetto-warns-of-judicial-opposition-to-meloni-gov">https://www.ansa.it/english/news/2023/11/26/crosetto-warns-of-judicial-opposition-to-meloni-gov</a>	Defence minister saying he considers opposition from elements within the judiciary to be the main threat Premier Meloni government faces	"Otherwise, this government should stop making veiled threats and complaining of unfounded conspiracies in a bid to hide the difficulties of the (2024) budget (bill)".
7. The rule of law	30-11-2023	Yes	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-parliament-approves-crackdown-teenage-migrants-2023-11-30/">https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-parliament-approves-crackdown-teenage-migrants-2023-11-30/</a>	Allowing migrants that are aged 16 or 17 to be held in adult reception centres	Unicef, the U.N. agency for children, said in a paper sent to the Italian parliament that the decree might breach the Convention on the Rights of the Child and "could result in a compression of the fundamental rights of minors".
7. The rule of law	27-12-2023	Yes	<a href="https://www.ansa.it/english/news/politics/2023/12/27/m5s-to-deport-meloni-end-of-gov-crisis-come-esp-bill">https://www.ansa.it/english/news/politics/2023/12/27/m5s-to-deport-meloni-end-of-gov-crisis-come-esp-bill</a>	Introducing a bill that would ban the publication of the contents of preventative-detention warrants	"It is very dangerous not to know whether a person has been arrested or not," he said. "And it is not only dangerous for the freedom of the press, it is also dangerous for the recipient of the pre-trial detention order."
7. The rule of law	07-02-2024	No improvement	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/07/world/europe/italy-meloni-orban-ukraine-funding.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/07/world/europe/italy-meloni-orban-ukraine-funding.html</a>	Protecting democracy in Ukraine and all of Europe by convincing Orban to go along with EU protection plan for Ukraine	"She likes to act like a bridge," said Roberto D'Alimonte, a political scientist at Luiss-Guido Carli University in Rome.
7. The rule of law	12-02-2024	Improvement	<a href="https://www.politico.eu/article/meet-the-vatican-ai-mentor-diplomacy-fiar-paolo-benanti-egge-francis/">https://www.politico.eu/article/meet-the-vatican-ai-mentor-diplomacy-fiar-paolo-benanti-egge-francis/</a>	Protecting Italians to new possible threats to their everyday lives, by adopting laws on AI	That would eventually lead him to develop the concept of "algor-ethics" — a branch of ethics grappling with how human principles are implemented by machines and now routinely echoed by Meloni's speechwriters.
7. The rule of law	13-03-2024	Yes	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-plans-prison-crackdown-that-pushes-western-boundaries-2024-03-13/">https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-plans-prison-crackdown-that-pushes-western-boundaries-2024-03-13/</a>	Not realising a prison system up to standards and forbidding prisoners to (peacefully) protest	Giorgia Meloni's hard-right government has responded by threatening to make even peaceful protesting a criminal offence - a draconian crackdown that experts say has no parallel in any other Western democracy.
7. The rule of law	03-05-2024	Yes	<a href="https://www.ansa.it/english/news/politics/2024/05/03/high-court-by-the-road-to-justice-reform">https://www.ansa.it/english/news/politics/2024/05/03/high-court-by-the-road-to-justice-reform</a>	Meloni wanting to set up a 'high court' to judge Italy's judges.	There was also agreement on possibly splitting up the Supreme Council of Magistrates (CSM), the judiciary's self-governing body, into two and forging ahead with separate career paths for judges and prosecutors, a keystone of Nordio's proposed reforms.
8. Representatives	09-09-2023	No	<a href="https://www.politico.eu/article/italia-n-pm-giorgia-meloni-defends-husband-andrea-giambruno-convicted-rapist-remarks/">https://www.politico.eu/article/italia-n-pm-giorgia-meloni-defends-husband-andrea-giambruno-convicted-rapist-remarks/</a>	Meloni defending sexist remarks made by her husband	I think Andrea Giambruno hastily and assertively said something different from what has been interpreted by most," Meloni said. "In those words, I don't read 'if you walk around in a mini skirt they can rape you.'"
8. Representatives	22-10-2023	Yes	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-meloni-sworn-head-right-wing-government-2022-10-22/">https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-meloni-sworn-head-right-wing-government-2022-10-22/</a>	Berlusconi exchanging gifts with Putin	Berlusconi has repeatedly undercut her, earlier this week blaming Kyiv for the war and revealing he had exchanged gifts and "sweet letters" with his old friend, Russian President Vladimir Putin.
8. Representatives	31-10-2022	Yes	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-meloni-picks-nazi-armband-lawmaker-junior-minister-2022-10-31/">https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-meloni-picks-nazi-armband-lawmaker-junior-minister-2022-10-31/</a>	Minister wearing a Nazi armband in old pictures	Galeazzo Bignami, a lawmaker of the rightist Brothers of Italy party who sparked outrage in 2016 after a newspaper published a picture of him wearing a Nazi swastika on his left arm, was named junior infrastructure minister on Monday.
8. Representatives	02-11-2022	Yes	<a href="https://www.politico.eu/article/meloni-faces-get-jobs-giorgia-meloni-italy-government-galeazzo-bignami-paola-frassinetti-augusta-montaruli-claudio-durling/">https://www.politico.eu/article/meloni-faces-get-jobs-giorgia-meloni-italy-government-galeazzo-bignami-paola-frassinetti-augusta-montaruli-claudio-durling/</a>	Appointing multiple ministers or statesecretaries with fascist sympathies	Within Italy [these kinds of episodes] doesn't matter much. The vast majority of voters on the right assume that Mussolini is in the past and that these things are not going to be taken seriously and there is a forgiving approach. Theoretically, she has distanced herself from fascism."
8. Representatives	18-02-2023	Yes	<a href="https://www.bbc.com/news/health-61851850">https://www.bbc.com/news/health-61851850</a>	Resignation due to embezzling funds for council group of piedmont region between 2010 and 2014	
8. Representatives	06-03-2023	Yes	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/put-that-italy-ministers-tune-over-proposed-smoking-ban-2023-03-06/">https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/put-that-italy-ministers-tune-over-proposed-smoking-ban-2023-03-06/</a>	Calling policy proposals of opponents 'dictatorial'	"This is something typical of an authoritarian and dictatorial communist regime," Sgarbi told AdnKronos news agency.
8. Representatives	11-03-2023	No	<a href="https://www.ansa.it/english/news/2023/03/11/meloni-salvini-birthday-karaoke-row-after-cutro">https://www.ansa.it/english/news/2023/03/11/meloni-salvini-birthday-karaoke-row-after-cutro</a>	Doing karaoke on the day of Cutro visit without paying homage to the migrant victims	"They sing 'pietas' [the Roman solemn compassion for the dead] with the poet of the Last Ones [De André]. On the wrong day. In the wrong place."

8. Representatives	14-03-2023	Yes	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/eur-ope/italian-public-sector-boss-resigns-after-mussolini-email-2023-03-14/">https://www.reuters.com/world/eur-ope/italian-public-sector-boss-resigns-after-mussolini-email-2023-03-14/</a>	Boss of the Italian public sector that was appointed by Meloni gets fired resigns after quoting a speech of Mussolini in an Email	Anastasio had emailed board members quotes from the 1925 speech that Mussolini gave to parliament to claim political responsibility for the murder of opposition lawmaker Giacomo Matteotti, daily La Repubblica reported. "Well, I declare here before you, and before all the Italian government, that I assume, (I alone!), the (political) moral (historical) responsibility of 3-1-for everything that has happened," the manager wrote.
8. representatives	13-04-2023	Yes (but it is standard practice in Italy)	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/eur-ope/italys-meloni-chose-coalition-may-end-fast-over-company-chiefs-2023-04-13/">https://www.reuters.com/world/eur-ope/italys-meloni-chose-coalition-may-end-fast-over-company-chiefs-2023-04-13/</a>	Appointing state-controlled company leadership to party loyalists	Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni chose unity over getting her way when she realised that imposing her own candidates to lead state-controlled companies on her coalition partners would threaten government stability, politicians said.
8. Representatives	25-04-2023	No	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/eur-ope/italys-meloni-distances-herself-fascism-liberation-day-celebrations-2023-04-25/">https://www.reuters.com/world/eur-ope/italys-meloni-distances-herself-fascism-liberation-day-celebrations-2023-04-25/</a>	Meloni distancing herself from fascism on liberation day celebrations	"What she should do is have the courage to say clearly and definitively 'we are antifascist'", said Giuseppe Sala, the centre-left mayor of Milan.
8. representatives	03-07-2023	No	<a href="https://www.politico.eu/article/vittorio-sgarbi-italy-junior-culture-minister-sexist-comments/">https://www.politico.eu/article/vittorio-sgarbi-italy-junior-culture-minister-sexist-comments/</a>	Vulgar and sexist comments made by minister	"At a certain point, turning 67, the prostate appears and you have to deal with this fucking bitch whom you've never met in your life," Sgarbi said, quoting, he alleged, a conversation he had with French novelist Michel Houellebecq. "The cock goes away and the prostate comes."
8. representatives	15-07-2023	Yes	<a href="https://www.ansa.it/english/news/p-ops/2023/07/15/la-russa-difende-figlio-abuso-sexuale-ri-scopre-probe_10bec33-ee54-4a58-bce6-e748c654744.html">https://www.ansa.it/english/news/p-ops/2023/07/15/la-russa-difende-figlio-abuso-sexuale-ri-scopre-probe_10bec33-ee54-4a58-bce6-e748c654744.html</a>	La Russa defending rapist son	
8. Representatives	02-01-2024	No	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/eur-ope/italys-meloni-urged-discipline-lawmaker-over-new-years-gun-incident-2024-01-02/">https://www.reuters.com/world/eur-ope/italys-meloni-urged-discipline-lawmaker-over-new-years-gun-incident-2024-01-02/</a>	Fratelli MP accidentally shooting someone at a new years eve party	"These incompetents are a danger to the safety of those who meet them, let alone the interests of the country," said Ely Schlein, leader of the opposition centre-left Democratic Party.
8. Representatives	08-01-2024	Yes	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/eur-ope/fascist-rally-rome-sparks-italian-opposition-outrage-2024-01-08/">https://www.reuters.com/world/eur-ope/fascist-rally-rome-sparks-italian-opposition-outrage-2024-01-08/</a>	Not condemning fascist rally in Rome	Brothers of Italy made no immediate comment about the neo-fascist rally, while Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani, who leads the more moderate Forza Italia party, said any celebration of dictatorship should be condemned.
8. Representatives	16-01-2024	Yes	<a href="https://nos.nl/artikel/2505125-buistret-in-huis-onderminister-pau-estoleno-schilderij-uit-17de-ee-rij-besloten">https://nos.nl/artikel/2505125-buistret-in-huis-onderminister-pau-estoleno-schilderij-uit-17de-ee-rij-besloten</a>	Deputy minister accused of stealing historic artwork for private collection	Zelf spreekt de onderminister dat tegen: hij zegt dat hij het kunstwerk, met kaars, ruim twintig jaar geleden had gevonden toen hij een villa restaureerde die zijn moeder had gekocht.
8. Representatives	03-04-2024	No	<a href="https://www.ansa.it/english/news/2024/04/03/salvini-santanche-face-no-confidence-motions_3d626f54-0b0c-4748-9186-73d85a7be6f.html">https://www.ansa.it/english/news/2024/04/03/salvini-santanche-face-no-confidence-motions_3d626f54-0b0c-4748-9186-73d85a7be6f.html</a>	Vote of no-confidence on Salvini for alleged Russian links	"The war totally changed opinions and political relations with Russia, which, before the invasion, was an important interlocutor for all Italian governments," the League said.
8. Representatives	25-04-2024	No	<a href="https://www.politico.eu/article/matt-eo-salvini-last-hope-rests-building-bridge-sicily/">https://www.politico.eu/article/matt-eo-salvini-last-hope-rests-building-bridge-sicily/</a>	Salvini pushing a mega project of a bridge between Sicily and the Italian mainland to be able to connect his name to it and for electoral benefits	During a recent visit to Messina, leader of the opposition Democratic Party Ely Schlein said the project was "anachronistic, damaging and wrong" and was being rushed because of the vote in June. And it is unlikely to impress traditional League voters hundreds of miles away in the north, Albertazzi added.
8. Representatives	02-05-2024	Yes	<a href="https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/sylvia-heron-sarba-contraserial-art-critic-nominated-italy-mep-s9b793wz">https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/sylvia-heron-sarba-contraserial-art-critic-nominated-italy-mep-s9b793wz</a>	Resigned minister over the stealing of artwork being on the list to become MEP in the EU	The Five Star Movement parliamentarian Anna Laura Orrioco, a former junior culture minister, said: "There is no limit to the shame and arrogance of this government ... in no other country would a party think of nominating a figure like this."
8. Representatives	03-05-2024	Not really	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/eur-ope/prosecutors-seek-trial-italian-minister-over-alleged-fraud-2024-05-03/">https://www.reuters.com/world/eur-ope/prosecutors-seek-trial-italian-minister-over-alleged-fraud-2024-05-03/</a>	Fratelli Minister prosecuted for alleged benefit fraud at her former publishing company during the COVID pandemic.	Opposition parties have called for her resignation and last month easily won a motion-of-no-confidence brought against her in parliament.
8. Representatives	03-05-2024	Yes	<a href="https://www.ansa.it/english/news/2024/05/03/schlein-cant-get-one-right-speakerman_e4f9e29-76e7-466f-b048-8b067773d8a.html">https://www.ansa.it/english/news/2024/05/03/schlein-cant-get-one-right-speakerman_e4f9e29-76e7-466f-b048-8b067773d8a.html</a>	Tourism minister accused of fraud	Santanchè, 63, has said she will quit if indicted in this or a number of other alleged graft cases linked to her former Visibilia publishing empire's activities.
8. representatives	22-11-2023	Yes	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/22/italy-sarba-culture-minister-accused-of-using-rail-service-as-personal-luxury-car">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/22/italy-sarba-culture-minister-accused-of-using-rail-service-as-personal-luxury-car</a>	Minister forced high-speed train to make unscheduled stop to ensure he would not be late to an appointment	The incident has led to harsh criticism from opposition parties, with the former Italian prime minister and Italia Viva leader, Matteo Renzi, calling it an "unprecedented abuse of power". If the reports are proved true, Renzi said, Lollobrigida should resign.
8. Representatives	19-01-2024	Yes	<a href="https://www.politico.eu/article/italy-mussolini-66mep-rehabbing-fascism-after-army-calendar-outcry/">https://www.politico.eu/article/italy-mussolini-66mep-rehabbing-fascism-after-army-calendar-outcry/</a>	Defense ministry releasing a calendar rehabilitating fascism	"For Italy always ... before and after 8 September 1943," refers to the date of then-fascist Italy's surrender to the allies during World War II.

