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Different Types of Right-Wing Populist Discourse in Government and Opposition: The Case of Italy

Giuliano Bobba and Duncan McDonnell

ABSTRACT
Does right-wing populist discourse change when parties move from opposition to government? How do different ideological types of right-wing populist parties express this discourse? Through an analysis of the Lega Nord and Forza Italia/Popolo della Libertà between 2006 and 2013, we find that while the switch to office does bring some changes, the main elements of their populist discourse remain largely the same. We also show how their respective emphases on 'elites' and 'others' distinguish the parties: FI/PDL focuses overwhelmingly on 'elites' while the LN places similar emphasis on both 'elites' and 'others'.

KEYWORDS
Populism; radical right; populist discourse; Forza Italia; Lega Nord

Until recent decades, right-wing populism was not an important feature of party politics in Western Europe. In many countries, no such parties existed while, in others, those that were present either received little support and/or were excluded by other parties. They certainly were not parties of government. With the very particular exception of Italy in 1994, when Forza Italia (FI – Come on Italy) and the Lega Nord (LN – Northern League) governed with other parties in a coalition for just over six months, right-wing populism remained outside power throughout the 1990s. This began to change in the early years of the twenty-first century. First, the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ – Austrian Freedom Party) entered government in 2000 alongside the centre-right. The following year, a four-party government, again containing FI and the LN, was formed in Italy. Then, in 2003, the Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF – Pim Fortuyn List) served in coalition in the Netherlands. This trend has continued. Since 2008, right-wing populists have returned once more to government in Italy, joined coalition governments for the first time in Finland, Greece and Norway and provided essential parliamentary support for minority governments in Denmark and the Netherlands.

While there have been studies examining how right-wing populists in government have fared in terms of electoral results, policy achievements and inter- and intra-party relationships (e.g. Akkerman & De Lange 2012; Albertazzi & McDonnell 2015; Luther 2011), we know very little about the effects that taking office has on how they express their populism (Akkerman, de Lange & Rooduijn 2016).[1] This gives rise to our first research question: What happens to the key elements of right-wing populist discourse – 'the people', 'elites', 'others' and 'democracy' – when these parties move between opposition and government? To answer it, we will analyse the discourses of FI/Popolo della Libertà (People of Freedom – PDL) and the LN over a period of seven years in and out of power between 2006 and 2013.[2] Italy

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offers a particularly interesting case for this purpose. Not only were FI/PDL and the LN together as the major parties of government from 2008 to 2011, but they represent different ideological types of right-wing populism (Albertazzi & McDonnell 2015; Ruzza & Fella 2009). While FI has been defined as 'neoliberal populist' (Mudde 2007; Taguieff 2003), the LN has been classified as 'ethnoregionalist populist' (Spektorowski 2003) or, more commonly, 'radical right populist' (Norris 2005; Mudde 2007). Consequently, our case selection allows us to answer a second, related, question: How are the key elements of right-wing populist discourse stressed by *different types* of right-wing populist parties? Are they in fact so different?

In the next section, we present and discuss the four key elements of right-wing populist discourse that will form the basis of our analysis: 'the people', 'elites', 'the others' and 'democracy'. We then provide background information on our parties and the three main phases of the seven-year period in which we examine their discourses. Thereafter we outline the methodology used in the study. The remainder of the article focuses on the results of our analysis of speeches and online messages by leaders, press releases, election manifestos and media interviews from 2006 to 2013.

We find that while there are some changes in the emphases placed on the different elements of right-wing populist discourse between opposition and government (for example, the LN reduces its criticisms of elites when in office), the main features of the parties' populist discourse remain broadly the same. Certainly, we do not see evidence that entry into government brings clear moderation of populist discourse as might be expected (Akkerman et al. 2016, pp. 3–4). Our analysis also shows how FI/PDL has a single main block of 'enemies of the people' ('elites') which it focuses on unrelentingly throughout the period while the LN is more balanced as regards its enemies, with 'elites' and 'others' equally present across our sample for the party. Moreover, the LN devotes far less attention to 'the left' within its discourse on 'elites' than FI/PDL does. We conclude that this partial division of roles is important to understanding why the two populist parties were able to remain allied so long.

The four key elements of right-wing populism

While there has been a lengthy debate about how to define 'populism' (Taggart 2000; Mudde 2004; Moffitt & Tormey 2014), there are several core elements that most scholars agree are ever-present in populist discourse. First and foremost: populists juxtapose a 'good people' with a set of 'bad elites'. As Margaret Canovan (1981, p. 294) observes: 'all forms of populism without exception involve some kind of exaltation of and appeal to "the people" and all are in one sense or another anti-elitist'. This moral division between 'the people' and 'elites' is the basis for Cas Mudde's widely cited definition of populism as 'an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "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 2004, p. 544). Of course, the specific identity of 'the people' and 'elites' may vary for different populists. Right-wing populists propose a more exclusionary and nativist conception of 'the people' or 'the nation' than left-wing populists do (Mudde 2007; Kriesi 2014). Likewise, left-wing populists usually view the people as 'a class' in ways that are anathema to right-wing populists. However, what does not change for any ideological type of populist is the central claim that a set of elites is oppressing the people and seeking to undermine their rights and voice.

This brings us to a third key element of contemporary populist discourse that Mudde's definition underlines: 'democracy'. While, as we have noted above, the importance of 'class' and 'nation' can shift according to the ideological type of populist, 'the people as sovereign' is the always present key feature of populism in democracies (Mény & Surel 2004, pp. 173–196). Populists of both right and left present themselves as the 'real' democrats who will restore sovereignty to its true owner, the people. As Hanspeter Kriesi (2014, p. 363) puts it: 'The central populist message is that politics has escaped popular control and that popular control has to be restored.' Politics, as Mudde (2004, p. 544) says, should be 'an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people'. Hence, Yves Mény and Yves Surel (2002, p. 9) argue that 'populist movements speak and behave as if democracy meant the power of the people and *only* the power of the people' (emphasis in original). While not undemocratic per se, contemporary populism challenges the checks and balances of liberal democracy (e.g. unelected judges or minority rights) as producing distortions of the people's will. In this sense, populism is as Takis Pappas (2014, pp. 2–3) has defined it: democratic illiberalism.

While the above key elements – the people, elites and democracy – are firmly present in both right- and left-wing populist discourse, there is a fourth element that is found in right-wing populism: 'others'. For right-wing populists, 'the people' are not only oppressed by elites, but are also under threat from the presence of 'others' within society who are said not to share the identity or values of 'the people' (and are favoured by the elites over the people). Like 'the people' and 'elites', the composition of the 'others' differs from case to case. In recent decades, the key 'others' for most Western European right-wing populists have been immigrants (especially Muslims after the September 11 attacks in 2001), but they can also be homosexuals, welfare recipients, members of the Roma community or any group within society whose identity or behaviour is said by populists to place them outside 'the people'. Of course, given their focus on nativism, it is likely that radical right populists will emphasise 'others' – and immigrants in particular – to a greater extent than more ideologically moderate types of right-wing populists.

Cases and context

In this study, we examine two ideologically different right-wing populist parties from Italy: FI/PDL and the LN. Mudde (2007, p. 47) classifies FI as 'neoliberal populist'. What distinguishes these parties from those of the populist radical right for Mudde is that neoliberalism rather than nativism is central to their ideology (Mudde 2007, p. 30). Pierre-André Taguieff (2003, p. 104) views FI in broadly comparable terms, referring to Berlusconi's 'liberal-populism' as being akin to that of leaders in North and South America such as Ross Perot and Alberto Fujimori. Carlo Ruzza and Stefano Fella (2009, p. 128) note that, if we leave the party's populism to one side, we can see the 'neo-liberal conservative platform of FI' as resembling that of 'the mainstream European centre right'. Similarly, Bertjan Verbeek and Andrej Zaslove (2016, p. 306) refer to 'Berlusconi's centre-right market-based populism'. Echoing these analyses, Francesco Raniolo (2006, p. 443) reported that, from the questionnaires distributed to delegates at FI's congress in 2004, 'there emerges an ideological profile of the FI cadres as liberal-conservatives, if not really neo-conservatives'.[3]

Forza Italia/PDL is thus a rare European case of a successful populist party that is on the right, but not on the radical right. This ideological position is reflected by the fact that, in the European Parliament, Berlusconi's parties have consistently sat with the centre-right

European People's Party (in the same way as another European right-wing populist party that is not – yet – on the radical right: Fidesz from Hungary). Like Fidesz, Berlusconi's parties also differ from those on the radical right in that they have been founded with the explicit aim of entering government quickly (Poli 2001). In fact, FI and the PDL have been Italy's most electorally successful parties to date in the twenty-first century: FI in 2001 and the PDL in 2008 were the main components of victorious right-wing coalitions that governed Italy from 2001 to 2006 and from 2008 to 2011.

The history of the LN is very different. It was founded as a northern Italian regionalist party to protest and mobilise against the centre in Rome. In fact, for most of the second half of the 1990s, it advocated secession for the north and refused alliances with any other 'Italian' party (Cento Bull & Gilbert 2001). Although it reverted to a federalist stance in 2000 when it joined a pre-electoral coalition with FI and two other parties ahead of the 2001 general election, the LN continued to appeal to a homogeneous, distinct and virtuous northern 'people', conceived of as 'a single entity, ethnos and demos together' (Tarchi 2003, p. 151). After greater northern autonomy, the main issue for the LN (particularly since 2000) has been immigration. Ideologically, the party has therefore been defined as 'ethnoregionalist populist' (Spektorowski 2003). Given its nativist and authoritarian positions, it has also been labelled 'radical right populist' (Mudde 2007; Norris 2005). Whichever definition one prefers, we can safely say that scholars see the LN as a significantly more radical type of right-wing populist party than FI/PDL. As Verbeek and Zaslove (2016, p. 309) put it, FI established an identity as 'a liberal populist party, whereas the LN embraced its niche as a regionalist but also populist radical right party'. In line with this, Gianluca Passarelli (2013, p. 65) finds that LN voter attitudes over time 'have moved towards the extreme right end of the left–right continuum'. As was the case with FI/PDL, the LN's ideological position is reflected in its European Parliament group membership. During the last four years of the period covered in our study (2009–13), the party was a member of the EFD (Europe of Freedom and Democracy) alongside other radical right populist parties. Although the LN occupies a different ideological space to FI/DPL, it was able to maintain a firm alliance with Berlusconi's parties for many years, not only in government from 2001 to 2006 and 2008 to 2011, but also in opposition from 2006 to 2008 (Albertazzi & McDonnell 2015).

As Table 1 illustrates, we have divided the 2006–13 period into three phases for our analysis: (1) May 2006 to April 2008; (2) May 2008 to mid-November 2011; (3) mid-November 2011 to February 2013. Phases 1 and 2 correspond directly to periods when both parties were in opposition and then in government. Having governed together within a four-party coalition from 2001 to 2006, FI and the LN narrowly lost the 2006 general election to Romano Prodi's centre-left coalition. They remained allies in opposition until the fall of Prodi's

Table 1. Main elections and governments in Italy, April 2006 to February 2013.

2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
General election		General election	European election	Regional elections			General election
Prodi centre-left government (May 2006 to May 2008)			*Berlusconi government* (May 2008 to November 2011)			*Monti government* (November 2011 to April 2013)	
FI/PDL and LN: Opposition			PDL and LN: Government			PDL: Majority LN: Opposition	

Note: The PDL was part of a cross-partisan majority from November 2011 to December 2012 which provided parliamentary support for the Monti technocratic government.

government triggered an early general election in 2008, which a right-wing coalition consisting just of Berlusconi's new party, the PDL, and the LN won comfortably with 47 per cent of the vote. Although that result gave the coalition a large majority, an internal split within the PDL in 2010 diminished the alliance's parliamentary strength. This was compounded by the loss of more deputies amidst a serious financial crisis that hit Italy from mid-2011 onwards. Without the numbers to govern, and under strong pressure from the European Union (EU), Berlusconi resigned in November 2011. Rather than holding new elections, Italy's president Giorgio Napolitano announced that Mario Monti would lead a technocratic government in order to introduce key reforms demanded by the EU (Bosco & McDonnell 2012). The PDL very reluctantly provided parliamentary support for Monti, along with the centre and centre-left (who were more enthusiastic). The LN refused to do so and became the strongest parliamentary opponent of the new government. This provoked a suspension of the PDL–LN alliance at national level. It was, however, resumed at the beginning of 2013 in the run-up to the February general election (after Berlusconi withdrew support for Monti's government in December 2012).

Methodology

A growing body of literature (Hawkins 2009; Rooduijn & Pauwels 2011) operationalises populism as 'a discourse, invoking the supremacy of popular sovereignty to claim that corrupt elites are defrauding "the People"' (Aslanidis 2015, p. 9). As Kriesi (2014, p. 364) explains:

> populist ideology manifests itself in the political communication strategies of populist leaders … As an expression of the populist ideology, populist communication strategies may be used to identify the populist ideology empirically, i.e. the operationalisation of the populist ideology may be based on an analysis of populist communication strategies.

In line with the above, one of the main approaches to analysing populist communication strategies is that proposed by Jan Jagers and Stefaan Walgrave (2007). This requires looking for populist references in audio or written texts and only considering manifest content. In other words, sentences are only measured when populist contents are explicitly expressed in the text (coherently with a given definition/conceptualisation of populism). This approach relies on content analysis as 'a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context' (Krippendorff 1989, p. 403). In order to assess whether the four key elements of right-wing populist discourse change between government and opposition and how different ideological types of right-wing populists emphasise those key elements, we therefore constructed and analysed a sample of party-controlled political communications.[4] Our research consisted of the following three interrelated steps:

(1) *Selection of all communications containing a reference to at least one of the four key elements of populism*. It is important to note from the beginning that we are interested neither in measuring populism overall within the Italian political system nor in building an index to assess 'how populist' parties are. Rather, our aim is to analyse how right-wing populist discourse is composed in the cases of our two parties and whether it changes between government and opposition. We therefore only selected communications that contain at least one reference to one of our four key elements. Our primary sources for these materials were the official websites of FI/PDL and LN.[5]

In total, the sample consists of 252 documents for the period April 2006 to February 2013 (see the online Appendix for more details). It consists of two main blocks: campaign period materials/messages and routine non-campaign period materials/messages. For national campaign periods (i.e. general and European Parliament elections) we analysed 42 documents: (a) leaders' speeches at closing rallies; (b) election manifestos; (c) election posters. In non-campaign periods, we examined 210 documents: (d) press releases, quotes from media interviews, online leader messages; (e) leaders' speeches and press conferences. Since political actors usually shape the content of their messages according to the type of media outlets in which will they appear, we decided to differentiate as much as possible the sources analysed. At the same time, all available sources have been considered simultaneously in order to get a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon. The range of our sources thus goes beyond those analyses of populist discourse based solely on party manifestos (Rooduijn et al. 2014).

As regards the above categories (a), (d) and (e) for FI/PDL, we focused on communications by Berlusconi, given his domination of the party and its communications (Raniolo 2006; McDonnell 2013; Vaccari 2015). Constructing the LN sample was less straightforward. First of all, the party founder and leader, Umberto Bossi, suffered a stroke in 2004 which reduced his public presence very significantly for several years and also his subsequent ability to communicate as frequently as he had done before. Second, Bossi resigned as LN leader in April 2012 following an expenses scandal and was replaced by the former interior minister and long-time number two in the party, Roberto Maroni. For the categories (a), (d) and (e), we therefore considered communications by the three leading LN figures during the 2006–13 period: Bossi, Maroni and Roberto Calderoli (another high-profile representative and minister from these years). Since we are interested in the public discourse of political parties at national level, for our purposes the communication produced by the three LN leaders is a functional equivalent of the communication produced by Silvio Berlusconi, because they were those who set the public party line over the period of our analysis.

(2) *Coding and quantitative analysis of the selected communications in order to assess the weight of each key element within a party's populist discourse*. The single document is the unit of analysis here. The presence of a key element was operationalised in a dichotomous variable (yes/no). Each document could therefore contain from a minimum of one to a maximum of four elements. We focused on the quantity of key elements in order to establish their presence in percentage terms within the overall sample of populist discourse for each party. We used a dedicated mixed methods software package, Dedoose, to investigate the material collected. This allowed us to measure the exact balance of each key element over time. In order to assess the reliability of the coding, an intercoder reliability test was conducted on a subsample of 30 documents. Krippendorff's Alpha were calculated for each key element and yielded satisfactory results.[6]

In the online Appendix, we present and discuss a series of examples of how we coded passages for each key element. To take just one example here, a piece of text such as the following statement by Berlusconi about the Partito Democratico (PD – Democratic Party) leader Pierluigi Bersani would be coded as 'elites': 'Bersani is repeating Monti's horrible mistake by thinking about his own interests and salvation and not about the interests and salvation of the country.' This excerpt clearly casts Bersani (like Monti) as a member of a 'bad', self-interested elite acting against Italy – which in turn requires 'salvation'. A piece of text

simply mentioning Bersani (i.e. without the type of denunciation above) would not be coded in the same way.

(3) *Sub-coding and quantitative/qualitative analysis of excerpts within single key elements.* The aim of this step was to enrich the overall analysis through the identification of sub-codes within each of the four key elements. In all documents, we therefore firstly identified excerpts corresponding to the four key elements of right-wing populism and, secondly, assigned descriptive sub-codes based on their contents and the type of argument deployed (see Table II in the online Appendix for details of these sub-codes). To return to the example of Berlusconi's comment about Bersani cited above, that excerpt would be sub-coded within 'elites' as 'the left'. Had Berlusconi been talking about the president of the European Commission in similarly anti-elite terms, it would have been sub-coded as 'EU institutions'.

In sum, we have used a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods to analyse our sample within an overall strategy of 'concurrent procedures' (Creswell 2003, p. 16). This envisages collecting different forms of data and then integrating information in the interpretation of the overall results. The research strategy has also been chosen taking into account two limitations. The first relates to the size of our sample: for a more in-depth content analysis (e.g. including frames, topics, actors) the total *N* would need to be large enough to allow statistical processing. In our case, the size of *N* (252) made it sensible to supplement the analysis using qualitative methods. The second limitation is rather inherent to the technique of content analysis. As noted by Krippendorff (1989), p. 407), 'if categories are obtained from the very material being analysed, findings are not generalisable much beyond the given data. If they are derived from a general theory, findings tend to ignore much of the symbolic richness and uniqueness of the data in hand.' Combining quantitative and qualitative analysis allows us to overcome this limitation to some degree. Our final database thus includes quantitative data showing shifts such as the attention given to specific key elements of right-wing populist discourse over time along with qualitative data like selected quotations that can shed greater light on how those changes were manifested.

Right-wing populist discourse in and out of power

In this section, we present our analysis of LN and FI/PDL populist discourse between 2006 and 2013. We firstly consider the parties separately over phases 1 and 2 to look for changes between opposition and government. These phases directly correspond to periods of opposition and government for both parties and so are more fruitful for comparison. We then examine the two parties in phase 3, when the LN was back in opposition but the PDL found itself reluctantly supporting the Monti government (without having any direct role in it).

FI/PDL from opposition to government (2006–11)

Figure 1 shows the FI/PDL's emphasis on the four key elements of right-wing populist discourse during its time in opposition from 2006 to 2008 and in government from 2008 to 2011. The first obvious conclusion is that FI/PDL focuses strongly on criticising 'elites'. This is stressed far more than any other element both in opposition and in government. Although 'elites' declines in phase 2, there is no significant decrease overall in the recourse made to

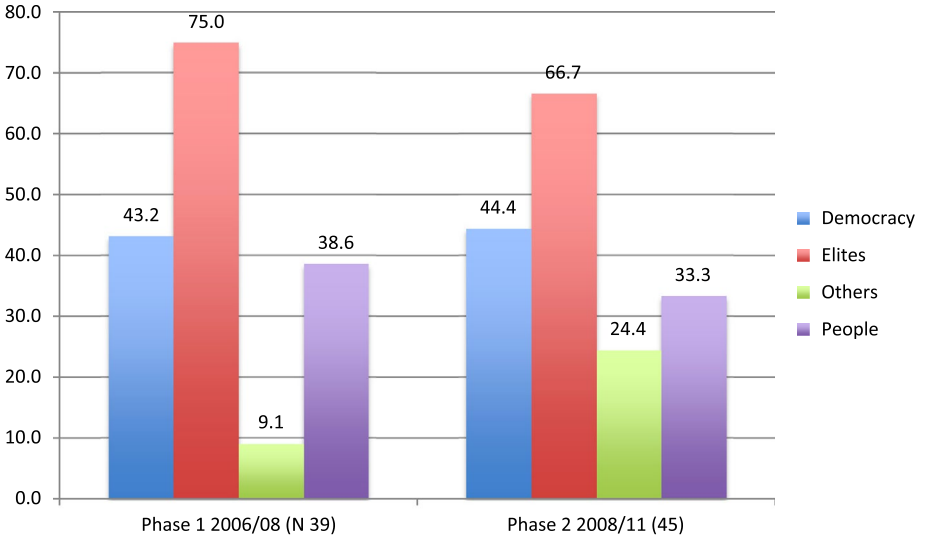

Figure 1. Presence of key elements within the FI/PDL sample in phases 1 and 2 (per cent). Source: Authors' own elaboration based on original database of FI/PDL-controlled political communication retrieved from official party websites and audio archives on: www.radioradicale.it.

the four key elements. The second-most present element 'democracy' is more or less as frequently found in phase 2 as it is in phase 1, while 'the people' reduces very slightly. By contrast, 'the others' increases considerably.

The three most prevalent elements therefore remain the same for FI/PDL in and out of office: first and foremost, 'elites' (75 per cent in phase 1; 66.7 per cent in phase 2); second, 'democracy' (43.2 per cent in phase 1; 44.4 per cent in phase 2); third, the 'people' (38.6 per cent in phase 1; 33.3 per cent in phase 2). The only element that increases markedly between the two phases is 'the others': we find it in just 9.1 per cent of FI/PDL documents while the party is in opposition, but in 24.4 per cent after it goes into power. However, we believe this large rise in references to 'the others' is primarily due to the fact that the PDL was in government alongside the LN and, as we discuss later, the LN significantly increased its emphasis on 'the others' when in office (in part, because it held the Interior Ministry and introduced a number of repressive anti-immigration measures). Hence, we find that many of the PDL's references to 'the others' in phase 2 are related to discussions of what the government as a whole (i.e. including the LN) has done on immigration.

By far the main element of right-wing populist discourse in our sample for FI/PDL's time in opposition from 2006 to 2008 and its years in government from 2008 to 2011 is 'elites'. The elites criticised are overwhelmingly 'the left' in each period, but particularly so while FI/PDL is in opposition. Indeed, there is not a single document for the party in our 2006–08 sample containing a reference to 'elites' that does not include at least one mention of 'the left' (of course, these documents sometimes include references to other elites too). Berlusconi constantly depicts the Prodi government as a communist-dominated, anti-liberal administration and claims it is threatening the freedom of 'the people'. As he says in a November 2006 speech: 'we must realise we are living in a crucial moment of our democracy's life and we need to do something to avert the future that these gentlemen [i.e. the left] want

to give us'. Typical of populist appeals, FI/PDL's adversaries are portrayed as being distant from 'the people' and close to 'the powers-that-be'. Hence, in a party newsletter in December 2007, Berlusconi tells readers, 'the Left is holed up in its palaces defending a power that is evermore worn and illegitimate, while we are listening to the heart of the country'.

Although the emphasis on 'the left' decreases when the PDL is in government, it remains the main 'elite' (present in around half of all PDL documents for the 2008–11 period). We find, however, that 'the left' tends to be paired more with other elite enemies after 2008, in particular the media and the judiciary (who remained a thorn in Berlusconi's side throughout his time in office). Typical of populist critiques of the checks and balances of liberal democracy, Berlusconi defends himself against the 'bad leftist elites' of the judiciary by pointing out that – unlike him – they have not received the support of 'the people'. His legal problems are thus a symptom of Italy's democratic malaise (caused by the left elites who cannot accept that the people have supported Berlusconi). Hence, in January 2011, he asserts, 'a country in which judges conduct political battles using their powers illegally against those who have been democratically called to public office is not a free one' (16 January 2011, Forzasilvio.it). It is no surprise to find that when the PDL is in government the main component of the 'democracy' element in our sample is the urgent need for reform of the justice system (present in just over a quarter of all documents).

The moral denunciation of 'the left' as evil – unlike the 'good' people led by Berlusconi – continues to be central to the PDL's discourse after taking office. This is evident in the following passage, taken from the party's 'Charter of Values', published in 2009:

> the Left has only ever given Italy uncertainty, divisions, social hatred and poverty. The Left makes policies that destroy the family and do not respect the moral values of the Italian people, the values of our tradition. Given what it has been and still is deep-down, the Left wants to divide workers and employers, men and women, fathers and sons, young and old, northern and southern Italians. (Popolo della Libertà 2009, p. 15)

By contrast, these disparate groups within Italian society can come together thanks to the PDL. The party's 2009 Charter tells us that 'secular people and Catholics, workers and employers, young and old identify with the PDL. And so do women and men from the North, Centre and South' (2009, p. 14). Unlike the divisive left elites, the PDL announces that its goal is to 'unite Italian society and lead it, all together, towards a better future' (2009, p. 14). This heralding of a bright and harmonious future for 'the people' is typical of the salvation promised by populists. Good will eventually triumph over evil thanks to the PDL. As Berlusconi says in his speech to the PDL congress in March 2009: 'we are the party of Italians with common sense and good intentions. We are the party of Italians who love freedom and want to remain free.' The key message from Berlusconi, both before and after entering government, therefore, is that he and his party will protect the good people's freedoms and sovereignty from the rapacious and undemocratic elites of the left.

The LN from opposition to government (2006–11)

The overall presence of the key elements of right-wing populism is lower in our sample for the LN in government between 2008 and 2011 than when the party was in opposition between 2006 and 2008. As Figure 2 shows, 'democracy', 'elites' and 'the people' are all significantly less during the LN's years in power. While we are only talking in pure numerical terms, it does seem that being in office may have had some kind of effect on the *frequency*

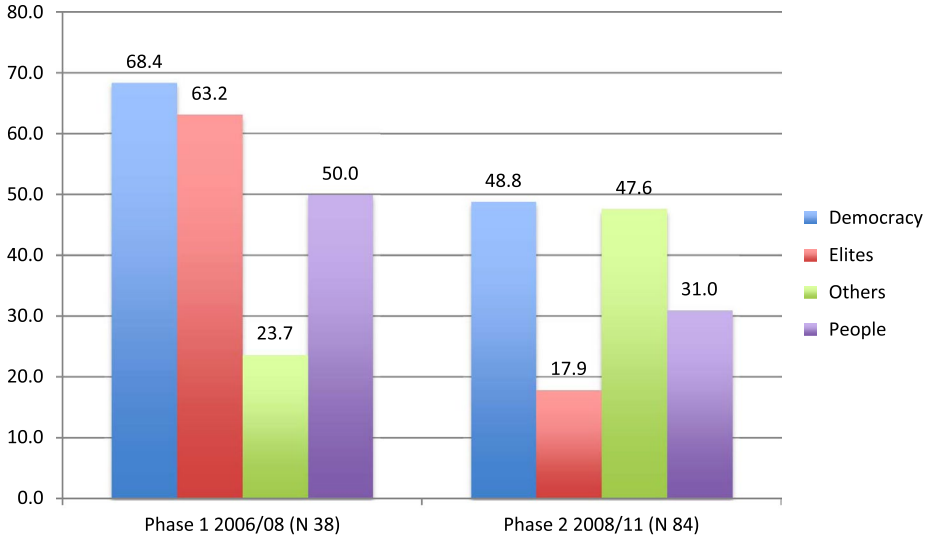

Figure 2. Presence of key elements within the LN sample in phases 1 and 2 (per cent). Source: Authors' own elaboration based on original database of LN-controlled political communication retrieved from official party websites and audio archives on: www.radioradicale.it.

with which the party made recourse to the four key elements of right-wing populist discourse. We can also see from Figure 2 that there are differences from FI/PDL in the emphases the LN places on the four elements when in power. Most noticeably, the LN does not stress 'elites' as much as FI/PDL when both parties are in opposition and, especially, when they are in government (in fact, this is the least stressed element for the LN in office). By contrast, as we would expect from an ethnoregionalist/radical right populist party, the LN focuses more in each phase on 'the others' than FI/PDL does. This is particularly the case when the LN is in government, 'others' being present in almost half of our documents for the party in phase 2 (47.6 per cent).

In both opposition and government, 'democracy' is the element most frequently stressed by the LN. We find it in 68.4 per cent of documents in phase 1 and, although it declines considerably when the party is in power, it remains just ahead of 'the others' in phase 2 with 48.8 per cent. The emphasis on 'democracy' reflects the party's regionalist positions. For the LN, the 'good' northern citizens of the periphery have had their sovereignty and well-being undermined by the 'bad' elites of the centre. We can see this in the following statement by Bossi taken from an August 2007 press release: 'Rather than talking so much, those gentlemen in Rome should listen to the honest people who cannot take any more taxes. I know we cannot have a tax revolt using weapons, but the people are pissed off.' The use of expletives and veiled threats of violence distinguishes Bossi clearly from Berlusconi and is used to underline, firstly, how the LN speaks the language of the average person and, secondly, the level of anger at how wronged 'the people' of the north have been by malfunctioning Italian democracy and its elites. What is interesting is that we find these features in Bossi's speeches not only when the LN is in opposition, but also when it is in government (when we might expect some moderation of tones, especially since Bossi was a member of the cabinet). For example, during the party's time in opposition in October 2006, Bossi tells an LN event that,

'in Lombardy and Veneto, people have had their balls broken by being robbed [by the state]'. Similarly, however, when a government minister in July 2008, he says, 'either we get reforms or there will be a battle and we will capture our liberty. We have to fight against this Fascist state. It is time, brothers, to finish this.' In the same period while he was a minister, Bossi called a political opponent an 'asshole', raised his middle finger when the national anthem was played, and used swear words on various occasions.[7]

Like FI/PDL, the principal 'elites' for the LN in each phase are 'the Left'. References to 'the left' are present in 55.3 per cent of all LN documents for phase 1. These tend to involve accusations that the Prodi government is betraying the people. For example, in a June 2007 newspaper interview (*Giornale della Libertà*, 15 June 2007), Bossi accuses the government of being 'too far from what the people are asking for', of being indifferent to the needs of the north and of wanting to 'throw open the borders' to immigrants. However, the LN attributes a much less significant role to 'the left' (and 'elites' generally) once it is in power, 'the left' being present in just over ten per cent of LN documents during phase 2. Rather, when in government, the party focuses on its key issues through its emphasis on 'democracy' and 'the others'. As Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell (2010, p. 1319) argue, the LN in these years sought to reinforce its 'issue ownership' of federal reform and 'security' (encompassing both immigration and law-and-order). It did so, firstly, through legislative initiatives on fiscal federalism and security which it was able to sell to voters and party members as major successes. Secondly, it established ownership through focusing overwhelming on these two issues in its communications and leaving discussion of more thorny issues, such as the economy, to the PDL.

Although the LN makes occasional references to homosexuals and southern Italians as 'others' (for example, by complaining about northern children having southern teachers), the main 'other' for the party in our sample is 'immigrants', especially those from Islamic countries. The latter are cast both as a security threat – whether due to their supposed links to terrorism or to their involvement in crime – and as a threat to the cultural homogeneity of 'the people'. For that reason, a number of high-profile LN representatives in the 2006–08 period call for selective immigration from countries whose inhabitants will fit in better. As Bossi comments in September 2007, it may be 'necessary to choose immigrants, accepting only those who come from countries where they commit less crimes and where they have an acceptable culture that can be integrated with ours' (online message, 9 September 2007). Other LN representatives in this period explain that a logical consequence of such a policy is to favour immigration from Catholic countries like those in South America.

The presence of 'others' in our LN sample increases significantly after the party enters government. This reflects both the LN's desire to establish issue ownership of the 'security' theme and the punitive measures introduced by Maroni as interior minister. While the actual effectiveness of Maroni's laws was debatable, the party was able to position itself as being tough on immigration and achieving results (Albertazzi & McDonnell 2015, pp. 108–110). In particular, it took credit for having stopped the arrival in 2009 and 2010 of immigrants by boat from North Africa. For example, referring to the supposedly luxury conditions in the immigrant holding centre on the Sicilian island of Lampedusa, Bossi boasted at the LN's annual Pontida rally on 20 June 2010 that 'now we have been able to block new arrivals, the centre will be handed over to the children of Lampedusa so that they can go there and have the same benefits that the illegal immigrants had before'. Hence, through its actions in government, the LN claims to be redressing the distorted situation by which 'others' get

better treatment than 'the people'. Even when in office, the party casts itself as being alone in its drive to stop illegal immigrants arriving in Italy and claims it has all the powers-that-be against it. For example, at the Pontida rally on 19 June 2011, Maroni discussed the difficulties posed by the new wave of arrivals from Libya, complaining that 'we have them all against us, we have NATO against us … we have Europe against us, we have the judiciary against us, all of them are on the side of the illegal immigrants'. The implication is that only the LN is standing beside the 'people' and defending them from a range of 'elites' and 'others'.

The LN and PDL after government (2011–13)

Our third phase begins with the fall of the PDL/LN government in November 2011 and its replacement by Monti's technocratic executive. While we can treat the LN's time in phase 3 as one of opposition, the PDL is more ambiguous due to its parliamentary backing for Monti (which, it said, was only given in the national interest). In addition, for most of this period, Berlusconi stepped back from the spotlight for the first time in his political career, making very few statements and letting the former justice minister, Angelino Alfano, be the main institutional face of the party. Berlusconi only returned to prominence when the PDL withdrew its support for Monti in December 2012 and began preparing for the 2013 general election. As for the LN, it initially continued to do well in the opinion polls after Monti's government took office (unlike the PDL). However, the party saw a steep slide in support after Bossi's scandal-enforced resignation in April 2012 and his replacement as leader several months later by Maroni. For both the LN and the PDL, phase 3 thus presented significant communication difficulties, especially since their charismatic founder-leaders did not participate in public debate for most of the time. These difficulties were compounded by the extraordinary rise in the same period of a new populist challenger, the Movimento Cinque Stelle (M5S – Five Star Movement), led by the firebrand Beppe Grillo. Campaigning on a rejection of the entire Italian political class and strong criticism of European elites (held partly responsible for the crisis in Italy), the M5S surged from around five per cent in the polls in April 2012 to achieve just over a quarter of the vote at the February 2013 general election (Bordignon & Ceccarini 2013).

Figure 3 shows the presence of the four key elements in our sample for the LN and PDL in the November 2011 to February 2013 period. In the case of the PDL, the order of the four key elements is the same as in the earlier phases (see Figures 1 and 2). The key difference is that the emphasis now placed on 'elites' is not only more than in previous phases, but it is vastly more than any of the other elements in phase 3. The PDL thus appears to double down on the criticism of elites as its winning populist card. The LN likewise increases its emphasis on 'elites' when back in opposition, this element returning to a similar frequency (65 per cent) as we found in phase 1 (63.2 per cent). The same is true of 'democracy', but not of 'the others', which reduces noticeably under Maroni.

While the PDL focuses overwhelming on 'elites' in its populist discourse in phase 3, we find that the identity of these elites is more heterogeneous than before. The left continues to be the PDL's most significant elite (present in 45 per cent of our documents), but EU institutions (40 per cent) and 'Germany/Merkel' (35 per cent) are close behind, followed by the Monti government (25 per cent). These three new 'bad elites' in the PDL discourse are interlinked, Monti being depicted as the puppet of the EU, which is in turn largely under the control of Germany and, more specifically, Angela Merkel. This narrative was the cornerstone

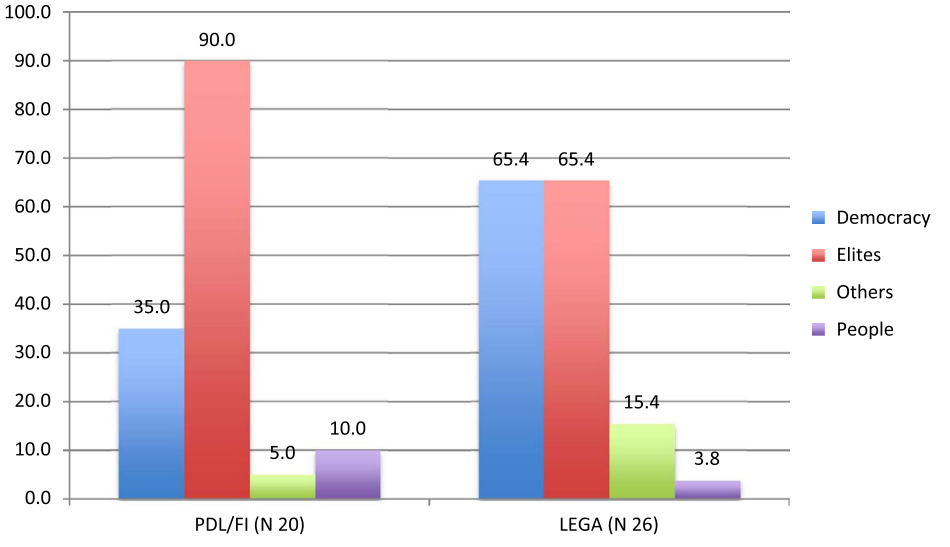

Figure 3. Presence of key elements within the FI/PDL and LN sample in phase 3 (per cent). Source: Authors' own elaboration based on original database of FI/PDL- and LN-controlled political communication retrieved from official party websites and audio archives on: www.radioradicale.it.

of the blame-shifting strategy of the PDL on its handling of the financial crisis that had hit Italy in mid-2011 (Jones 2012). For example, in the party's 2013 election manifesto, we read that Monti's government has been 'following the austerity policy imposed by a German-centric Europe' (PDL 2013). Likewise, in his speech at the closing rally of the PDL's 2013 election campaign, Berlusconi asked the crowd, 'Do you want a Europe led by Germans that orders us to do our homework like we were schoolchildren?'

The LN also focuses more on 'elites' during phase 3 than it had previously, especially compared with when it was in government. Since the party was the only parliamentary opposition for the vast majority of this period, it is no surprise that most of the LN's criticisms of elites are directed towards the Monti government (present in almost half the LN documents in our phase 3 sample). Maroni and others repeatedly depict Monti as a servant of the banks rather than the Italian people. According to Roberto Calderoli, this situation meant that 'we must resist, resist and resist since we are faced not only with an economic crisis, but a democratic one'. Continuing the LN's tendency to denounce its adversaries in extreme terms, Calderoli then suggested that Monti give his next press conference 'directly from the balcony in piazza Venezia' (i.e. where Benito Mussolini used to speak from).

One element that surprisingly decreases in this phase for the LN is its emphasis on 'others', which appears in just over 15 per cent of documents. We attribute this to Maroni's short-lived and electorally unprofitable attempt to re-position the LN as a more moderate right-wing party after the Bossi years. As part of this strategy, Maroni set as the LN's main issue the creation of what he termed a northern Italian 'Euro-region' – an ill-defined notion that failed to gain traction among the electorate, but which is present in half of our phase 3 LN sample as the solution to the problems of the north. This also reflects the fact that the party's main focus electorally in February 2013 was not in fact at the national level but at the regional one in Lombardy, where Maroni was running for regional president. In the campaign for

both the general and regional elections (held on the same day), Maroni focused on his own skills and record, on criticism of Monti, and on the LN's new regional reform plans. Combating illegal immigration was usually therefore listed simply as another of his ministerial successes alongside others such as the fight against the Mafia.

We can now therefore return to our initial question: what happens to right-wing populist discourse when these parties move between opposition and government? Overall, this is a story of some change, but within a wider picture of continuity. Both the emphasis on, and the composition of, the four elements do change over time for each party. We see this most clearly in the case of 'elites'. There is a difference in the weight of 'elites' in both FI/PDL's and the LN's populist discourse according to whether the parties are in or out of government – rising when out and diminishing when in. The specific identities of these elites also change to some degree, albeit far more for the LN than for FI/PDL. While 'the left' is the main elite for the LN in phase 1, its weight declines considerably over time. It remains the main 'public enemy' for FI/PDL in all phases, although it is steadily joined by other elites, as the EU and Germany/Merkel become almost as important in phase 3. However, amidst these changes, there is also an underlying series of continuities in the parties' right-wing populist discourses. The order of importance of the respective elements never alters for FI/PDL over the three phases. Although it shifts more for the LN, the party retains its focus on 'democracy'. We also find that the sheer numerical presence of the four key elements does not reduce noticeably for FI/PDL when in government compared with when it is in opposition. While it does decrease for the LN, our examples of what actually was said indicate that the party may have toned down the frequency, but not the vehemence and tone of its populist discourse when in office. In conclusion, therefore, we can say that while some elements of their populist discourse may change, our two right-wing populist parties certainly do not abandon their recourse to these elements when in power.

Different types of right-wing populist discourse

We can also now return to our second question in this study: How are the key elements of right-wing populist discourse stressed by different ideological types of parties? It is useful here to look at the features of our whole sample. Figure 4 shows us the four key elements ('democracy', 'elites', 'others' and 'the people') for FI/PDL and the LN over the whole 2006–13 period.

As we can see, the two parties present a number of clear similarities and differences in their recourse to the four elements of right-wing populist discourse. As we would expect, 'democracy' – a cornerstone in populist discourses of all ideological types – is important for both parties, although more so for the LN. We find it in 44.2 per cent of FI/PDL documents and 56.8 per cent of LN ones. Likewise, another constant element in populist discourse – 'the people' – is present in a similar number of documents for each party: 32.7 per cent for FI/PDL and 31.1 per cent for LN. Rather, it is their respective emphases on 'elites' and 'the others' that really differentiates the parties. We find 'elites' in 77.9 per cent of FI/PDL documents, far more than in the LN ones (37.8 per cent). By contrast, we find 'the others' in 35.8 per cent of LN documents, but in just 15.4 per cent of FI/PDL ones.

These results confirm that the populist discourse of Berlusconi's parties is indeed different in its composition compared with those further to the right like the LN. The casting of 'others' as a danger to the people and/or democracy is less relevant for FI/PDL than it is for the LN.

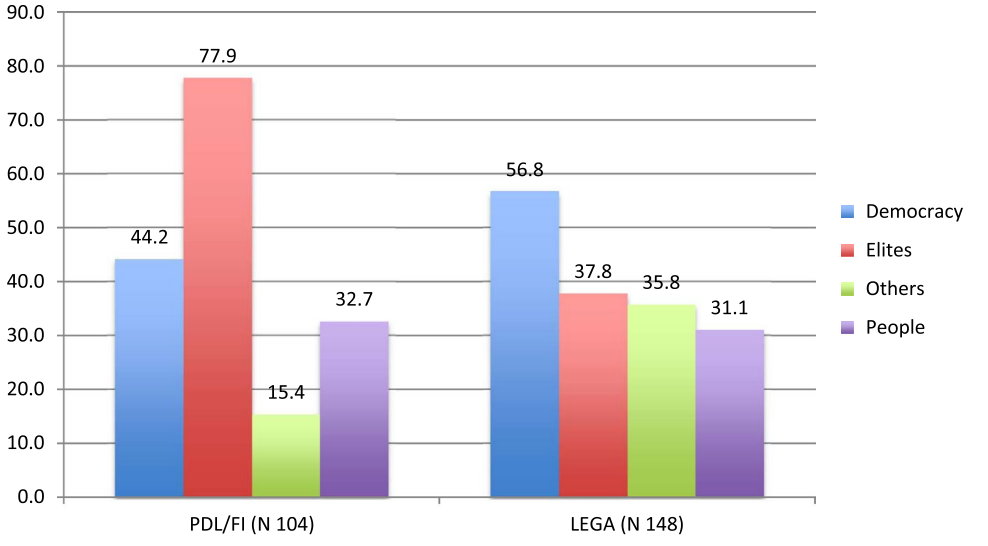

Figure 4. Presence of key elements within the entire sample (per cent). Source: Authors' own elaboration based on original database of FI/PDL- and LN-controlled political communication retrieved from official party websites and audio archives on: www.radioradicale.it.

Forza Italia/PDL has a main block of 'enemies of the people' ('elites') while the LN has two more balanced ones ('elites' and 'others'), which are present almost equally across our sample for the LN. As we also saw, the LN paid far less attention to 'the left' than FI/PDL did within its references to 'elites'. This is not so surprising if we recall that Berlusconi entered politics in 1994 in order to 'save Italy' from the left and has continued claiming he must save the country from them in almost every election campaign since then. Part of the explanation for the FI/PDL results may be that when a right-wing populist party is not of the radical right, it will inevitably focus overwhelmingly on the criticism of 'elites' (and hence, in large part, its main political opponents) given a reluctance to be seen as too harsh towards more controversial enemies of the people like immigrants, those of different religions, homosexuals, etc. This hypothesis would certainly be worth testing in other countries containing ideologically different right-wing populist parties.

Another explanation for the disparity in the results for 'elites' and 'others' between FI/PDL and the LN is that they engaged in a 'division of roles' within their alliance, with the larger right-wing populist party taking the main responsibility for denigrating the left and the smaller more radical one dedicating greater attention to its more niche core issues. Given that the LN at the time of writing (May 2016) has been slightly ahead of Berlusconi's party in opinion polls since early 2015, we may have an opportunity to test whether – if it consolidates its position as the largest right-wing populist party in Italy – the LN continues to devote less attention to its critique of 'elites' than FI/PDL. Likewise, we should be able to see whether there is a reduction in the vulgarity of the language used by LN leaders when their party is aspiring to be the main party of government (rather than the rebellious junior partner).

Conclusion

In one of the key works to date on populism, Mény and Surel (2002, p. 18) argued that 'populist parties are by nature neither durable nor sustainable parties of government. Their fate is to be integrated into the mainstream, to disappear, or to remain permanently in opposition.' The first of these three fates is of course in line with the inclusion–moderation thesis, which holds that 'participation in democratic institutions and procedures will amend the radical nature and ideology of political parties' (Akkerman et al. 2016, p. 3). Mény and Surel's claim was bolstered by what little empirical evidence was available at the time. In particular, studies of the FPÖ in coalition government in Austria in the early years of the twenty-first century suggested that leading figures from such parties would be forced to moderate their tones once they took up cabinet positions (Heinisch 2003).

Our study of FI/PDL and the LN runs counter to this thesis. As we have shown, at least in the particular Italian case of two right-wing populist parties governing alongside one another, these parties maintained their recourse to populist discourse in and out of office over many years. Having set out the four key elements of right-wing populist discourse (the people, elites, democracy and others), we found that neither the FI/PDL nor the LN significantly altered the main features of their populism during the years they were in office. To be sure, there were differences in the emphases they placed on particular elements over the three phases along with the specific composition of these elements. This is not surprising, since populism is notoriously chameleonic (Taggart 2000). It reacts quickly to new opportunity structures and new enemies of the people (as we saw especially in phase 3 of our study). However, the stress placed on the different key elements of right-wing populist discourse by both parties also showed a considerable degree of stability throughout the seven years covered by our research. The main 'enemies of the people' for FI/PDL were always 'elites' (especially 'the left'), while the LN's emphases were much more balanced between 'elites' and 'others' (and did not share FI/PDL's degree of emphasis on the left). These differences reflected, as we noted, the different right-wing ideologies of the two parties. Moreover, they may be part of the reason why FI/PDL and the LN were able to remain allied for so many years: although both used right-wing populist discourses, they did not excessively step on one another's toes in doing so.

It would be very worthwhile in our view to repeat this study in Italy in the coming years if the LN maintains its current position as the principal right-wing populist force in the country. This would help us not only to understand whether radical right populists change when they are no longer the junior partners in an alliance but also how the (currently) more moderate right-wing populists of FI react to their declining support. It also would be useful to compare the cases discussed in this article with other right-wing populists that have entered government in recent years such as the Independent Greeks (Ανεξάρτητοι Έλληνες – ANEL) and the Finns Party. Indeed, the Greek case appears particularly interesting given that ANEL has been in coalition government since 2015 alongside a larger left-wing populist party, SYRIZA (Συνασπισμός Ριζοσπαστικής Αριστεράς – Coalition of the Radical Left) (Aslanidis & Kaltwasser 2016). Certainly, with the continuing electoral rise of populists across Western Europe over the past two decades and their increasing acceptability as parties of government, we are likely to see many new examples of right-wing populist discourse in power. Understanding how it does and does not change will be key to helping us explain the evolution and success of these parties in the twenty-first century.

Notes

1. Based on a study of party programmes (i.e. manifestos) in five cases, Rooduijn et al. (2014, p. 571) conclude that 'if populist parties have gained seats during previous elections, a populist party tones down its populism, probably in an attempt to become an acceptable coalition partner to mainstream parties'. However, as the authors themselves acknowledge, 'a study of party programmes has its limitations. One could argue that populist statements are not always included in party programmes, because the appeal of these programmes is not particularly great and voters are often not aware of their content' (2014, p. 571). As explained later, our study examines a wider range of sources to assess changes in right-wing populist discourse.
2. Berlusconi launched the PDL in late 2007, without engaging in any prior formal consultation process via the governing structures of FI (underlining the degree to which this was his personal party). By the 2008 general election, the PDL comprised FI, the former far-right (but by 2008 more 'conservative right') Alleanza Nazionale (AN – National Alliance) and several minor parties. Despite its different composition, the PDL was another personal party for Berlusconi (McDonnell 2013). In late 2013, the PDL split, a minority remaining in Enrico Letta's centre-left/centre-right coalition and the majority siding with Berlusconi, who wanted to return to opposition. At this point, Berlusconi decided to change his party's name back to Forza Italia (this remains its name at the time of writing).
3. The ideological position of FI/PDL on the right, but not the radical right, is also confirmed by data from the large-scale international Party Manifesto project relevant to the period we are studying. This placed FI in 2006 and the PDL in 2008 clearly to the right of centre. See Lehmann et al. (2015).
4. By 'party-controlled communications', we mean messages that do not require mediation but are directly produced by the party or an individual within the party (i.e. press conferences, speeches, interviews in which responses are directly reported rather than summarised, etc.).
5. See the discussion of sources in the online Appendix.
6. In detail: 'democracy' 0.869; 'people' 0.738; 'elites' 0.737; 'others' 0.764.
7. See the compilation of some of Bossi's ruder actions and statements during his years as a minister at: http://video.repubblica.it/politica/bossi-ministro-tre-anni-di-insulti-e-pernacchie-videoblob/72501/70785 (accessed 30 May 2016).

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Appendix

An online Appendix is available for this article which can be accessed via the online version of this journal at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13608746.2016.1211239