

# From the Streets to the Voting Booth: the Electoral Effect of Grassroots Mobilization Against the Far-Right

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## Abstract

Far-right scholars have focused extensively on the causes and consequences of far-right success, while not much attention has been directed towards what citizens and the civil society can do to tackle this phenomenon. Focusing on the surge of an anti-far-right social movement—the Sardine—during the 2020 Italian regional elections, we test whether grassroots mobilization is an effective tool to curb far-right parties' electoral performance. Employing municipality-level data on electoral results, Sardine rallies and far-right events, we exploit a difference-in-differences design to identify the effect of local exposure to Sardine mobilization on the municipal electoral performance of far-right parties. The results suggest that local exposure to a Sardine event has a strong negative effect on far-right electoral results.

**Keywords:** Far-right parties; Social movements; Voting behaviour; Causal inference; Electoral campaign

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Far-right success has been a central theme in the political behaviour literature over the last three decades. The bulk of this research focuses on the determinants of far-right success (Gidron and Hall, 2020; Gidron and Mijs, 2019; Hochschild, 2016; Jackman and Volpert, 1996; Rydgren and Ruth, 2013; Colantone and Stanig, 2018; Dippel et al., 2015; Kitschelt and McGann, 1997; Kurer, 2020; Norris and Inglehart, 2019; Ivarsflaten, 2008; Ziblatt et al., 2020), as well as its consequences on the ideological stances of other party families (Abou-Chadi and Krause, 2020; Van Spanje, 2010) and on public opinion perceptions about what constitutes stigmatized views (Bursztyn et al., 2020) or behaviour (Valentim, 2020). A common pattern that emerges from these studies is a shared understanding that the presence of far-right actors can have negative normative or policy implications for party systems (Folke, 2014), if not democracy as a whole (Bischof and Wagner, 2019; Bursztyn et al., 2020; Abou-Chadi and Krause, 2020). A natural question that emerges, then, is how can support for the far-right be curbed?

Most studies trying to address this question point to the role of political elites. For example, Meguid (2005) considers three strategies available to mainstream party competitors as a way of responding against the presence of far-right: policy convergence (accommodative strategy); policy divergence (adversarial strategy); or non-action (missive strategy). By the same token, Van Spanje and Van der Brug (2009) consider whether including or excluding the far-right from government coalitions is electorally beneficial for mainstream parties in the mid-term. The empirical evidence suggests that, at least in the mid-term, participation of the radical-right in electoral coalitions may moderate their ideological profile and prove particularly costly for their electoral appeal (Van Spanje, 2011), while ostracization can strengthen their extreme ideological outlook (Van Spanje and Van Der Brug, 2007).

This study enters the fray by shifting attention from elite reactions to grassroots mobilization against the far-right. As recent episodes of protest against the far-right

have aptly demonstrated (e.g. anti-racist protests during and after the Chemnitz riots in August 2018), opposition against far-right ideas and actors has often “taken the streets”, embracing the less conventional modes of participation typically adopted by social movements. This tendency poses an interesting challenge for researchers in political behaviour, because social movements and the far-right tend to share scepticism towards the political establishment. Existing work has shown that grassroots mobilization can lead public opinion to lose faith in the political status quo (Valentim, 2019). Protest events may also function as signals of disaffection, which diffuses anti-establishment preferences and channels discontent (Bremer et al., 2020; Madestam et al., 2013). These effects may be long-lasting: Mazumder (2018) shows how local experiences of mobilization for the civil right movements still affect today’s support for affirmative action, party identification and electoral outcomes. However, protest might also backfire: Frye and Borisova (2019) find that in Russia the authoritarian government’s decision to allow post-electoral protest resulted in an increased trust for the government, especially among opposition supporters.

Building on this literature, we ask whether bottom-up mobilization against the far-right can undermine or boost support for the far-right. What happens when citizens mobilize in grassroots rallies against far-right political actors? Does this mode of action diffuse opposition against the far-right or does it, instead, promote far-right politics by priming anti-systemic repertoires of political action? We tackle the question by looking at the “Sardine Movement” (Sardines), which emerged at the beginning of the electoral campaign for the 2020 Italian regional elections in response to the increased electoral salience of the League (*Lega*), a far-right party polling high throughout that period. Sardine emerged as a movement in Emilia-Romagna, targetting the League’s leader Matteo Salvini. They engaged into a series of rallies across Italy and mostly in the region of Emilia-Romagna, one of the two regions holding the 2020 elections. Combining detailed information about Sardine events with municipality-level electoral results, we employ a

difference-in-differences design to estimate the local electoral effect of grassroots mobilization against the far-right. We find that Sardine events decreased support for the League, pointing to the role of social movements as a bottom-up vehicle against the rise of the far-right.

Our study contributes to two strands of research. First, we contribute to a voluminous literature on the success of the far-right, so far agnostic about the ways in which such success can be moderated. Most existing work tackling this question points to the role of political elites. We present a case study of successful opposition to the far-right coming from grassroots mobilization rather than strategic elite behaviour. Our study thus highlights the potential for non-elite actors to combat far-right diffusion. Second, our work speaks to an ever-increasing literature on social movements, showing how their presence can have important spill-over effects on conventional politics. Finally, from a policy point of view, the results reported here indicate that grassroots mobilization against the far-right can actually fulfil its aim, thereby mitigating fears of potential backlash. In the following sections, we present the Sardine case in more detail to then derive our theoretical expectations about its potential electoral effects. We then describe the data and the analytical strategy of the study. The penultimate section reports the results, while the last section concludes.

## The Sardine and the 2020 Regional Elections

On the 26th of January 2020 two Italian regions, Emilia-Romagna and Calabria, held their regional elections after a very heated electoral campaign. The campaign started, at the peak of Italy's far-right momentum. The main Italian far-right party—the League—had obtained 34.3% of votes in the 2019 European elections, which together with the votes of the Brothers of Italy (*Fratelli d' Italia*, FdI)—another far-right party—resulted in more than 40% of the total preferences. Matteo Salvini, the leader of the largest

party and the strongest coalition at the European elections, was undoubtedly the most prominent politician in Italy when the regional electoral campaign began.

The political and economic conditions in the two regions differed significantly. Emilia-Romagna was traditionally a stronghold of the left, historically governed by the Italian Communist Party. However, the League performed well in the region both in the 2018 National elections and the 2019 European elections, making the upcoming regional election competitive. In the 2020 regional election, the centre-left was running with the incumbent governor Stefano Bonaccini, a member of the Democratic Party (PD), supported by the main centre-left parties. He was competing against a coalition led by the League and composed of the FdI and Forza Italia (Berlusconi's centre-right party). Even if support for the centre-left was plummeting in the region, Bonaccini could count on positive economic results during its term in office.<sup>1</sup>

Calabria's political identity has been historically more mixed, governed by both centre-right and centre-left coalitions. In 2020, the centre-left incumbent coalition was led by an independent, Filippo Calipo. The centre-right coalition was led by a candidate from Forza Italia, Jole Santelli, supported by the same coalition as in Emilia-Romagna. In Calabria, the incumbent centre-left coalition could not count on a positive performance of the economy.<sup>2</sup>

Just before the beginning of the electoral campaign, a group of friends organised a flash mob via Facebook against the first League event, called “6000 sardines against Salvini”<sup>3</sup>, to show that the League’s momentum was not unchallenged and that they could gather more people than Salvini’s event. The flash mob ended up becoming the first of several demonstrations against the far-right, where the organisers spoke against

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<sup>1</sup>In Emilia-Romagna unemployment declined from 8.4% in 2014 to 5.6% in 2019, 4.4 percentage points below the national average; while economic growth in 2018 (+1.9%) was 1 percentage point above the national average.

<sup>2</sup>In Calabria unemployment declined from 23.5% in 2014 to 21% in 2019, but was 11 percentage points above the national average. Economic growth had always been negative and below the national average with the exception 2015.

<sup>3</sup>See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sardines\\_movement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sardines_movement)

Salvini and his supporters. The sardine held “anti-fascist, pro-equality, *anti-intolerance*, and *anti-homophobic*” views, they denounced a political communication based on racism, fascism, sexism and discrimination, standing their ground against it (Tondo, 2019). The movement organized rallies in 32 municipalities across Calabria and Emilia-Romagna, although their presence in the second was much greater than in the first (4 events in Calabria and 28 Emilia-Romagna). These protest events took place between the 14th of November and the 26th of January. The elections ended with a close victory at the first round of the incumbent centre-left president in Emilia-Romagna and a clear defeat of the incumbent centre-left coalition in Calabria.

## Expectations

To formulate hypotheses on the effect of exposure to *Sardine* events on electoral outcomes we turn to signalling theories of mass action. As suggested by Lohmann (1993, 1994a,b) the decision of individuals to take political action can operate as a signalling device, resulting in informational cascades that provide relevant cues to participants and bystanders. There are at least three paths through which such signalling can generate an anti-far-right shift in our context. First, it could have a social pressure effect (Bursztyn et al., 2020), signalling and reinforcing the stigmatization of far-right politics. To be sure, voting is a private act and thus norm compliance is less likely to play out unless the norm itself is strong enough to become internalized (Bursztyn et al., 2020). Second, Sardine events are a moment of political campaign, where organisers and participants inform bystanders and participants of the threats and risks of what they stand against (Branton et al., 2015)—in this case the far-right. Their voices can echo in the media and reach numerous people resulting in a more or less successful instrument of persuasion (Wouters, 2019). Thirdly, rallies could reveal individual private information—one’s voting intention—making the likely results of collective action—electoral results—public

(Lohmann, 1994b). Even without being in position to isolate each mechanism, taken together they all converge on the expectation that Sardine events reduced support for the League.

However, theory could also predict a backlash effect. The movement was not intended to replace mainstream parties nor was it linked to any of them. Its strict anti-Salvini profile could potentially have counter effects for two reasons. First, it could operate as negative campaigning, which can prove counter-productive (Skaperdas and Grofman, 1995). Second, combined with its reluctance to be linked with any of the existing parties in parliament, the non-mainstream profile of Sardine could prevent its message from travelling from the streets to the voting booth. A non-mainstream organization, often itself referred to as populist, could simply legitimate populist alternatives and hence increase support for the the League or abstention by those who would otherwise opt for mainstream alternatives to Salvini (Bremer et al., 2020).

## Data and identification strategy

We use electoral data from the the Italian Ministry of Interior to compute the vote share obtained by far-right parties in the municipalities of Calabria and Emilia-Romagna.<sup>4</sup> We cover 6 elections, from 1995 to 2020, the elections where the president was elected directly. Our data is a complete panel for 399 municipalities in the region of Calabria and 308 in the region of Emilia-Romagna.

In the main specification of our analyses, municipalities in the treatment group are those that hosted a Sardine event between November 14th, 2019 and January 26th, 2020. The location and date of the Sardine event was retrieved from the Facebook page of the Sardine called “6000 Sardine”<sup>5</sup>. There were a total of 32 municipalities that hosted

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<sup>4</sup>For detailed information on the coding of far-right parties, see Table A.1 in Appendix A.

<sup>5</sup><https://www.facebook.com/6000sardine>

Sardine events, of which 28 were in Emilia-Romagna and 4 in Calabria<sup>6</sup>.

To estimate the impact of anti-far-right grassroots mobilization we employ a DiD design. We estimate the following equation:

$$far-right_{me} = \alpha_m + \theta_e + \beta sardine_{m \times 2020_e} + \epsilon_{me} \quad (1)$$

Where  $far-right_{me}$  is the vote share obtained by the far-right parties in the municipality  $m$  at election  $e$ ,  $\alpha_m$  are municipality-fixed effects, and  $\theta_e$  election-fixed effects.  $sardine_{me}$  is the treatment variable indicating municipalities that hosted a Sardine event in the 2020 elections. Our quantity of interest is  $\beta$ , which identifies the Average Treatment Effect on the Treated (ATT) of the Sardine events on far-right electoral outcomes.

The key assumption to yield causal estimates is that trends in electoral outcomes would be the same in treatment and control groups in the absence of treatment (i.e. they are parallel). We assess whether this assumption holds by showing, in Figure B.2 in Appendix B, the trends of far-right regional performance for treatment and control groups in Calabria and Emilia-Romagna. In Emilia-Romagna trends run parallel before 2020, confirming the validity of our identification strategy, while the trends in Calabria fails to support our design.

In addition to fitting the main DiD model presented above, we run a number of additional analyses and robustness checks. First, we assess the robustness of our parallel trends assumption by fitting a model including municipality-specific linear and quadratic trends. Second, we perform a placebo test, employing lagged outcome variables as the main outcome. Third, we test for spillover effects and covariates balance between treatment and control group focusing on the municipalities in close proximity to the cities where a Sardine event was hosted. Finally, we use an alternative specification of the

<sup>6</sup>The first panel of Table B.1 in Appendix B reports the number and share of municipalities that belonged to the treatment and control groups in each region. The geographical distribution is presented in Figure B.1 in Appendix B.

treatment variable to account for possible interactions with far-right events.

## Results

Table 1: ATT on far-right vote share.

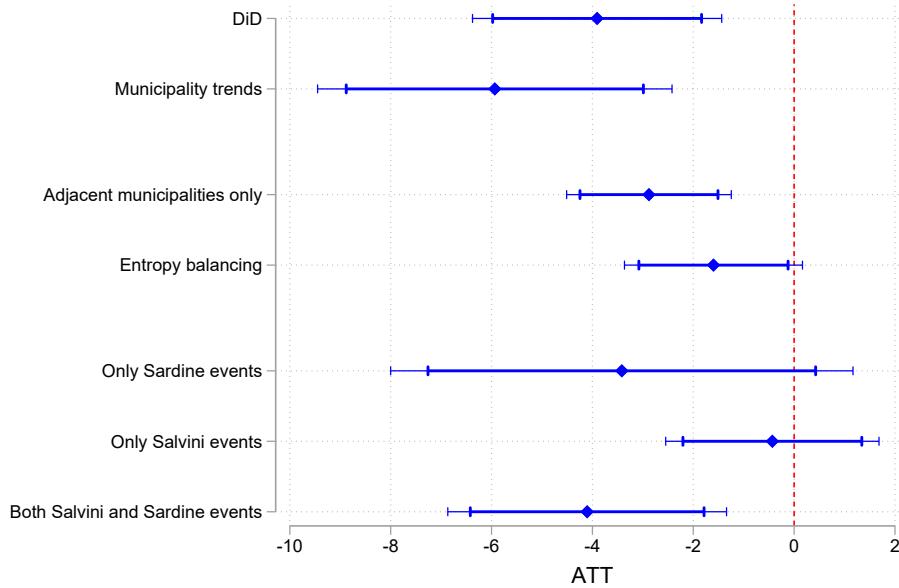
	Emilia Romagna				Calabria			
	(1) Y(t)	(2) Y(t)	(3) Y(t-1)	(4) Y(t-1)	(5) Y(t)	(6) Y(t)	(7) Y(t-1)	(8) Y(t-1)
ATT	-3.906** (1.256)	-5.935*** (1.786)	1.005 (0.859)	3.417 (1.854)	-4.155 (3.711)	-3.054 (4.568)	-2.906* (1.466)	0.838 (3.912)
Avg. FRPs vote share in the control group	45.75	45.75	21.86	21.86	22.02	22.02	2.347	2.347
Municipality FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Election FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Municipality trends	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
R-squared	0.763	0.0462	0.279	0.0544	0.565	0.0307	0.419	0.00162
Elections	6	6	5	5	6	6	5	5
Clusters	308	308	308	308	399	399	399	399
Observations	1842	1842	1535	1535	2394	2394	1995	1995

*Standard errors in parentheses \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001*

Table 1 shows that hosting a Sardine event resulted in a reduction of almost 4 percentage points of far-right support for Emilia-Romagna (model 1). This result is substantively large, since it represents a decrease of about 8% from the control group far-right average vote share (around 46%). The result is robust to the inclusion of municipality trends (model 2) and the placebo tests with the lagged outcome are not statistically significant (models 3 and 4). Results are not significant for municipalities in Calabria. As shown in Figure B.3, the online salience of the Sardine mobilization during the campaign was radically different. While Emilia-Romagna seems to have been the core of the phenomenon, leading the trend of google searches for the keyword Sardine, Calabria was at the end of the ranking. We present the remaining robustness checks only for Emilia-Romagna, since results for Calabria were not statistically significant and the parallel

trends assumption is not supported.

Figure 1: ATT on far-right vote share in Emilia Romagna



Sardine events were not organized at random and, while this issue does not represent a major threat for our identification strategy, we attempt to account for selection bias. First, we fit a model where the treatment group includes only the municipalities neighbouring cities hosting a Sardine event and exclude directly treated municipalities. The test relies on the assumption that adjacent municipalities will still be affected by the event because of spatial proximity and spillover effects, but do not self-select into the treatment. They can more realistically be considered as treated at random. Results presented in Figure 1 suggest that the effect on adjacent municipalities is also statistically significant and similar in magnitude.

Second, we take into account observable differences across treatment and control groups. Since treated municipalities were significantly more populous, there is no common support to balance treatment and control groups. Therefore, we resort to the adjacent municipalities again. Dropping the directly treated units, we employ the neighbouring

towns as treatment group and, by means of the non-parametric entropy balancing method proposed by Hainmueller (2012), we re-weight treatment and control groups to balance covariates. This exercise should provide us with conservative estimates (see Appendix C for the model specification). The results presented in Figure 1 show that the effect remains large in magnitude and statistically significant at the 10% level.

Finally, since many of the Sardine mobilizations were a direct response to League events<sup>7</sup>, our treatment condition may be interpreted as a combination of municipalities hosting either or both a Sardine and a League event. To address this concern we attempt to decompose our treatment effects: we estimate the effect of hosting a Sardine event, the effects of hosting a Salvini rally, and the effect of hosting both<sup>8</sup>. The estimates presented in Figure 1 suggest that the greatest effects were measured when Sardine events occurred as a response to League events. Sardine events had a similar effect in magnitude when no League events took place, but the estimate is not precise due to the small sample size. The results are encouraging, since we also find that League events independently had no effect on electoral outcomes.

## Conclusion

This research note investigated whether citizens grassroots mobilization, outside of the realm of party politics and party competition, is an effective tool to influence far-right electoral performance. We studied the emergence of an anti-far-right movement during the electoral campaign for the 2020 Italian regional elections. Employing municipality-level data and a difference-in-differences design, we estimated the causal effect of anti-far-right mobilization on far-right performance. The results suggest that grassroots mobilization can decrease the appeal of far-right competitors. Counter-mobilization in response to far-

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<sup>7</sup>See Table B.1 in Appendix B

<sup>8</sup>The model specification can be found in Appendix C.

right campaigning may be a particularly effective tool to prevent radical anti-democratic drifts. We presented causal evidence of a negative and sizeable effect of direct local exposure to Sardine events: a decrease of around 8% of the average support obtained by far-right parties in the control group. However, the effect seems to hold only where the salience of the movement was high. We suggest that the effect could be caused by a signalling mechanism of citizens participation, which triggers information cascades resulting in a decrease in far-right parties' appeal. Further research should investigate the mechanism behind that effect, identifying what type of information affect individual choices.

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## **A Online Appendix: Coding of electoral outcome variables**

Table A.1: Party classification.

Party	Party family	Radical or extremist party	Right-wing party	Left-wing party
+EUROPA - PSI - PRI	lib	0	0	0
ALL.IT.PENS.	civic	0	0	0
ALLEANZA NAZIONALE	RR	1	1	0
ALLEANZA PER LA CALABRIA	SD	0	0	1
ALTERNATIVA SOCIALE MUSSOLINI	RR	1	1	0
AUTONOMIA E DIRITTI	civic	0	0	1
AZIONE POPOLARE	CD	0	1	0
BONACCINI PRESIDENTE	civic	0	0	1
CALABRIA IN RETE - CAMPODEMOCRATICO	civic	0	0	1
CALABRIA LIBERA CON CARLO TANSI	civic	0	0	0
CALABRIA LIBERTAS UNIONE DI CENTRO	CD	0	1	0
CALABRIA PULITA CON CARLO TANSI	civic	0	0	0
CASA DELLE LIBERTÀ	lib/cons	0	1	0
CDU	CD	0	1	0
CENTRO CRIST.DEM.	CD	0	1	0
CENTRO DEMOCRATICO	CD	0	1	0
CENTRO DEMOCRATICO-DEMOCRAZIA SOLIDALE	CD	0	1	0
COMUNISTI ITALIANI	RL	1	0	1
CON ABRAMO	civic	0	1	0
CPA	civic	0	0	0
DC	CD	0	1	0
DEM.CRIST. ECOLOGISTI	CD	0	1	0
DEM.PROL	RL	1	0	1
DEMOCRATICI PROGRESSISTI	SD	0	0	1
DEMOCRATICI PROGRESSISTI CALABRIA	SD	0	0	1
DEMOCRATICI SINISTRA	SD	0	0	1
DI PIETRO ITALIA DEI VALORI	lib	0	1	0
DIRITTI CIVILI	lib	0	1	0
DL.LA MARGHERITA	lib	0	1	0
EMILIA ROMAGNA CIVICA	civic	0	0	1
EMILIA-ROMAGNA CORAGGIOSA ECOLOGISTA PROGRESSISTA	green	0	0	1
EUROPA VERDE	green	0	0	1
FED. DEI VERDI	green	0	0	1
FIAMMA TRICOLORE - DESTRA SOCIALE	RR	1	1	0
FORZA IT.-POLO POP.	cons	0	1	0
FORZA ITALIA	lib/cons	0	1	0
FRATELLI D'ITALIA	RR	1	1	0

Table A.2: Party classification.

Party		Party family	Radical party	Right-wing party	Left-wing party
FRATELLI D'ITALIA - ALLEANZA NAZIONALE	RR	1	1	0	0
GIORGIA MELONI FRATELLI D'ITALIA	RR	1	1	0	0
GIOVANI PER L'AMBIENTE	green	0	1	0	0
GOVERNARE EM.ROMAGNA	civic	0	1	0	0
I DEMOCRATICI	SD	0	0	1	1
I LIBERAL SGARBI	lib	0	1	0	0
IL POPOLO DELLA FAMIGLIA - CAMBIAMO!	cons	0	1	0	0
IL POPOLO DELLA LIBERTA'	lib/cons	0	1	0	0
IO RESTO IN CALABRIA CON CALLIPO	civic	0	1	0	0
JOLE SANTELLI PRESIDENTE	civic	0	1	0	0
L'ALTRA CALABRIA	civic	0	0	0	0
L'ALTRA EMILIA ROMAGNA	civic	0	0	1	1
L'ITALIA DEI VALORI	lib	0	1	0	0
L.ANTIPROIB.DROGA	lib	0	1	0	0
L.VEN.-ALL.I.P.	lib	0	1	0	0
LA DESTRA-AUTONOMIA PER L'EMILIA ROMAGNA	RR	1	1	0	0
LA SINISTRA	RL	1	0	1	0
LEGA	RR	1	1	0	0
LEGA ITALIA FEDERALE	RR	1	1	0	0
LEGA LOMBARDA	RR	1	1	0	0
LEGA NORD	RR	1	1	0	0
LEGA SALVINI CALABRIA	RR	1	1	0	0
LIBERI CITTADINI	civic	0	0	0	0
LIBERI DI CAMBIARE CALABRIA CIVICA AIELL	civic	0	0	0	0
LIBERTA' E AUTONOMIA NOI SUD	CD	0	1	0	0
LISTA CONSUMATORI	civic	0	0	1	0
LISTA ECOLOGICA	civic	0	0	0	0
LISTA LOCALE	civic	0	0	0	0
LISTA MARCO PANNELLA - EMMA BONINO	lib	0	1	0	0
LISTA PENS.	civic	0	0	0	0
LISTA PER TRIESTE	reg	0	0	0	0
LISTA VERDE	civic	0	0	0	0
M.S.TRICOLORE-FR.NAZ	RR	1	1	0	0
MOV.IDEA SOC. RAUTI	RR	1	1	0	0
MOV.SOC.TRICOLORE	RR	1	1	0	0
MOVIMENTO 3V VACCINI VOGLIAMO VERITA'	civic	0	0	0	0

Party	Party family	Radical party	Right-wing party	Left-wing party
MOVIMENTO 5 STELLE	pop	0	0	0
MOVIMENTO 5 STELLE BEPPEGRILLO. IT	pop	0	0	0
MOVIMENTO 5 STELLE ILBLOGDELLESTELLE. IT	pop	0	0	0
MSI	RR	1	1	0
MSI-DN	RR	1	1	0
NCD - UDC - EMILIA-ROMAGNA POPOLARE	CD	0	1	0
NUOVO CDU	CD	0	1	0
NUOVO CENTRO DESTRA	CD	0	1	0
NUOVO PSI	lib	0	1	0
OLIVERIO PRESIDENTE	civic	0	0	1
P.SOC.RIFORMISTA	SD	0	0	1
PANNELLA-BONINO	lib	0	1	0
PANNELLA-RIFORMATORI	lib	0	1	0
PART NAZ.PENS.	civic	0	0	0
PARTITO COMUNISTA	RL	1	0	1
PARTITO DEMOCRATICO	SD	0	0	1
PARTITO PENSIONATI	civic	0	0	0
PATTO DEMOCRATICI	SD/CD	0	0	1
PATTO SEGNI	CD	0	1	0
PC(MARX-LEN)IT	RL	1	0	1
PCI	RL	1	0	1
PDIUM	cons	0	1	0
PDS	SD	0	0	1
PDUP	RL	1	0	1
PLI	lib	0	1	0
POPOLARI	CD	0	1	0
POTERE AL POPOLO!	RL	1	0	1
PPI (POP)	CD	0	1	0
PPI-DINI-UPR	CD	0	1	0
PRI	lib	0	1	0
PRI - NUOVO PSI - UDEUR	lib/CD	0	1	0
PRI-CENTRO POP.	lib/CD	0	1	0
PRI-FED.LABURISTA	lib	0	1	0
PROGETTO CALABRIE	civic	0	0	1
PROGETTO EMILIA-ROMAGNA RETE CIVICA BORGONZONI PRESIDENTE	civic	1	1	0
PROGRESSISTI	SD	0	0	1

Party	Party family	Radical party	Right-wing party	Left-wing party
PSDI	SD	0	0	1
PSE MANCINI	SD	0	0	1
PSI	SD	0	0	1
PSI - SINISTRA CON VENDOLA	RL	1	0	1
PSIUP	SD	0	0	1
PSU	SD	0	0	1
REP.EUR.-ALTRI	lib	0	1	0
RIFOND.COM. - SIN.EUROPEA - COM.ITALIANI	RL	1	0	1
RIFONDAZIONE COMUNISTA	RL	1	0	1
RINNOVAMENTO IT-DINI	lib/cons	0	1	0
SCOPPELLITI PRESIDENTE	civic	0	1	0
SDI	SD	0	0	1
SDI-ALTRI	SD	0	0	1
SINISTRA ECOLOGIA LIBERTÀ'	RL	1	0	1
SINISTRA ECOLOGIA LIBERTÀ'-FED. VERDI	RL	1	0	1
SLEGA LA CALABRIA	civic	0	0	1
SOCIALDEMOCRASIA	SD	0	0	1
SOCIALISTA-SOCIALDEM	lib	0	1	0
SOCIALISTI UNITI PSI	lib	0	1	0
TESORO CALABRIA CARLO TANSI PRESIDENTE	civic	0	0	0
U.D.EUR	CD	0	1	0
U.D.EUR POPOLARI	CD	0	1	0
UNIONE DI CENTRO	CD	0	1	0
UNITI NELL'ULIVO	SD	0	0	1
UNITI PER CALABRIA	SD	0	0	1
UV-PD-UPAP-ECOL.	reg	0	0	0
VERDI ARCOBALENO	green	0	0	1
VOLT EMILIA-ROMAGNA	lib	0	1	0

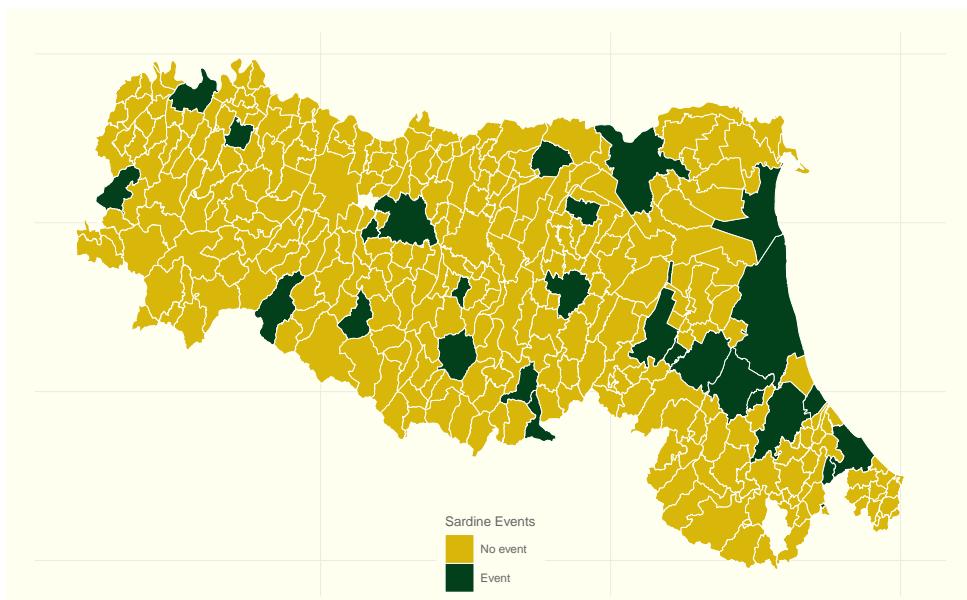
## B Online Appendix: Additional Tables and Figures

Table B.1: Description of treatment and control groups

	Region					
	Calabria		Emilia		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Group</b>						
Control	395	99.0	279	90.9	674	95.5
Treated	4	1.0	28	9.1	32	4.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>399</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>706</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Event</b>						
Neither	387	97.0	215	70.0	602	85.3
League	8	2.0	64	20.8	72	10.2
Sardine	1	0.3	4	1.3	5	0.7
Both	3	0.8	24	7.8	27	3.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>399</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>706</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Sardine event</b>						
Sardine only	1	25.0	4	14.3	5	15.6
Sardine and League	3	75.0	24	85.7	27	84.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Figure B.1: Municipalities where Sardine events took place during the 2020 electoral campaign.

(a) Emilia-Romagna



(b) Calabria

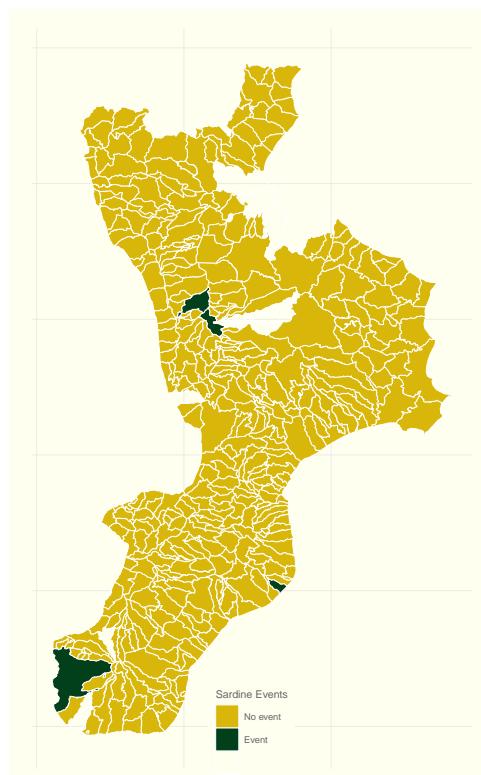


Figure B.2: Parallel trends of far-right parties vote shares

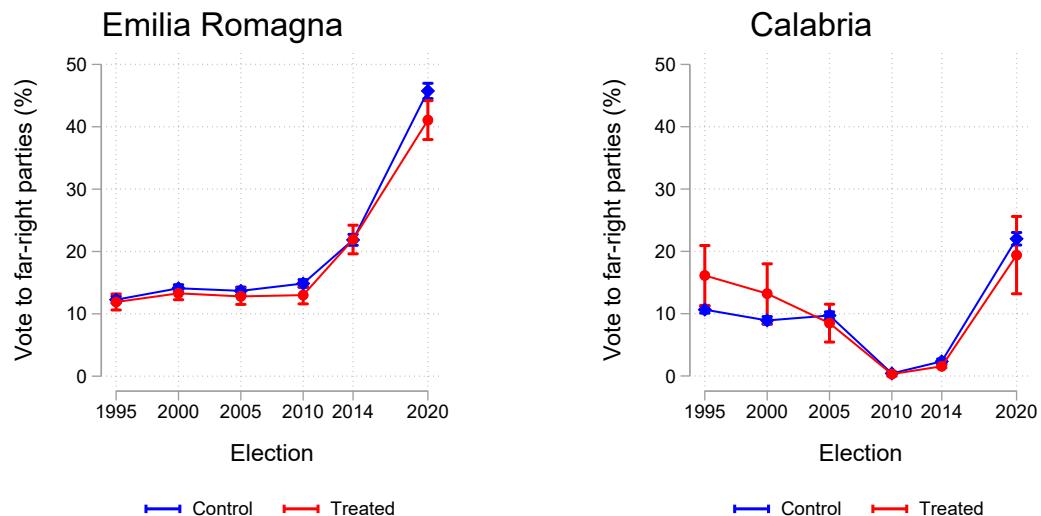
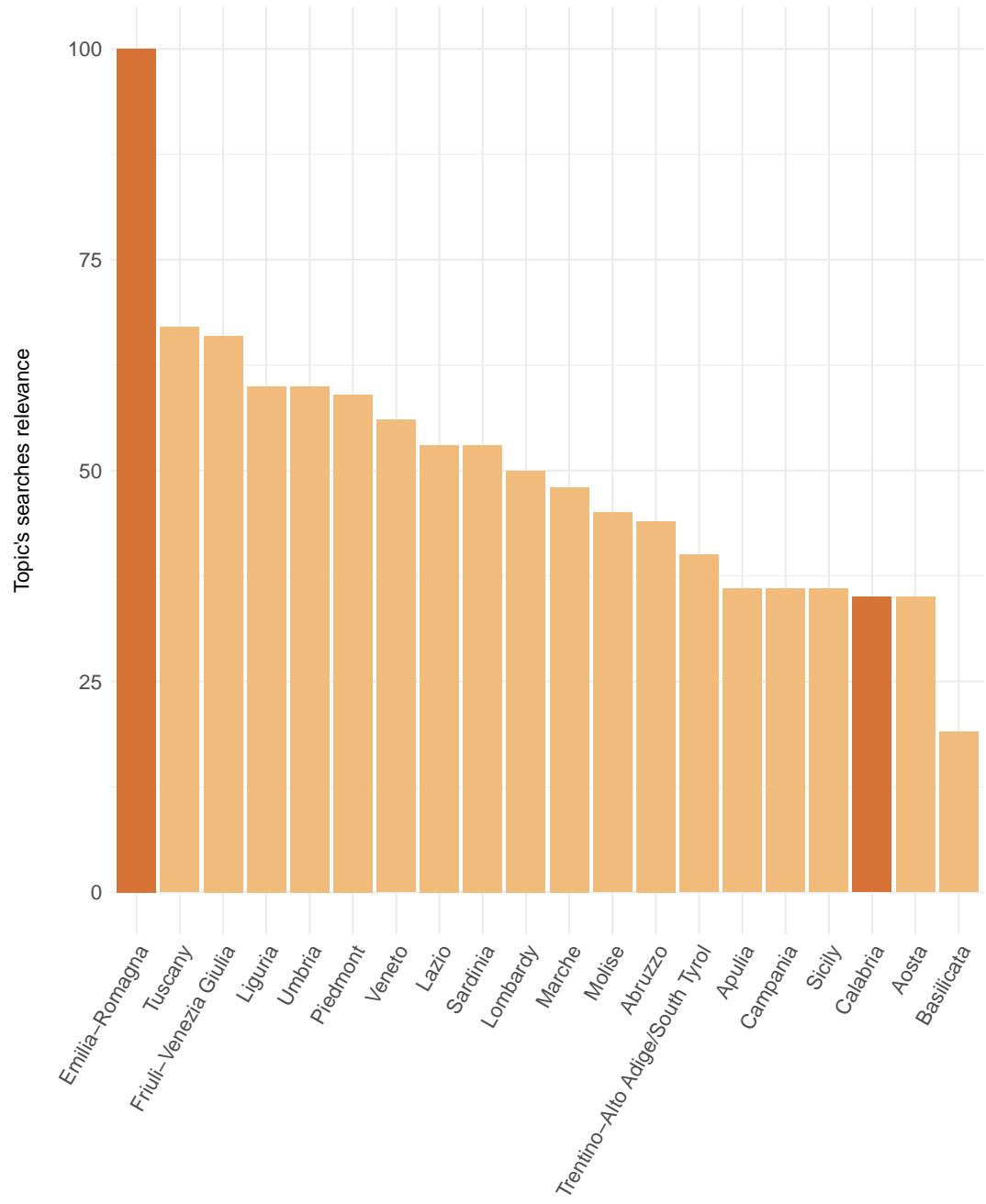


Figure B.3: Google trends by region in the period between the 15th of November 2019 and the 26th of January of 2020



## C Online Appendix: Additional Specification

To balance covariates we employ the non-parametric weighting method introduced by Hainmueller (2012). The coavariates we employ are the number of people involved in volunteers per 1000 inhabitants and the number of non-profit organizations per 1000 inhabitants, both from the 2011 census, to account for different civic cultures and social capital levels. The proportion of inhabitants over 60 years old and the proportion of inhabitants aged 20 to 40, to account for different age stratification. Finally we include 2011 unemployment rate and youth unemployment rate, from the 2011 census, to account for different economic conditions.

We estimate the effect of the Sardine event as well as the effects of Salvini rallies and both together in the following model:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{far right}_{me} = & \alpha_m + \theta_e + \beta_1 sardine_m \times \text{election2020}_e + \beta_2 league_m \times \text{election2020}_e + \\ & \beta_3 sardine_m \times league_m \times \text{election2020}_e + \epsilon_{mv} \end{aligned} \tag{2}$$

Where the fixed effects are identical to equation 1, but the treatment conditions are now  $sardine_m$  (hosting a Sardine event),  $league_m$  (hosting a League event), and their interaction  $league_m \times sardine_m$  (hosting both events).