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Citizens in the making:

Analysing Italy's first attempt to define what makes a citizen in the context of immigration

Victoria Donnalaja

Department of Social Policy
London School of Economics and
Political Science Houghton Street
London WC2A 2AE

Email: soc.pol.webteam@lse.ac.uk

Telephone: +44 (0)20 7955 6001

lse.ac.uk/social-policy



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Citizens in the making: analysing Italy's first attempt to define what makes a citizen in the context of immigration

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Abstract

Italy transitioned from a country of emigration to one of immigration in the early 1980s, but its citizenship policy does not reflect this demographic change. There are currently around 800,000 children residing and/or born in Italy who cannot be Italian citizens because citizenship is inherited through lineage, according to the principle of *ius sanguinis*. For the first time in 2013 the centre-left party Partito Democratico (PD) proposed a policy reform to grant the right to citizenship to children of immigrant parents. After a long debate and strong opposition from the right-wing party the Lega Nord, the reform was halted in 2017. In this study I analyse the first moment Italy consciously questioned its citizenship boundaries in the context of immigration, rather than emigration. I investigate how the growing number of non-citizen children has shifted the political discourse around what makes an Italian and what is the purpose of citizenship acquisition. Using an innovative corpus of data that includes YouTube videos, Facebook posts and website articles, I analyse the discourse of the two political parties at the centre of the debate, the PD and the Lega Nord. I find that, despite their diverging positions on the reform, both parties ascribe to traditional conceptions of citizenship. These reinforce the expectation that immigrants must conform to the majority in order to be accepted as insiders. I argue that in order to blur the boundary between natives and immigrants, government must first shift these narratives.

Key words: citizenship, discourse analysis, Italy, integration

Introduction

When in 2020 the 14-year old Great Nnachi made the highest ever pole-vaulting jump among under 16-year old girls in Italy, her record could not be registered. This is because she is one of around 800,000 children who have lived most of (if not all) their lives in Italy, but who are not Italian citizens (Istat 2016). To become Italian, children born to immigrant parents have to wait until they turn 18 and must actively register within a year. Italian citizenship is inherited through lineage, via the principle of *ius sanguinis*. Place of birth and residence are irrelevant. A proposed change to this principle was brought to parliament by the centre-left political party Partito Democratico (PD) in 2013. The proposal offered a tamed *ius soli*, whereby, given certain conditions, children born to immigrant parents would be entitled to citizenship. After five years of debate, strong opposition led by the Lega Nord party allowed the parliamentary crisis of 2017 to prevent the reform from making it to the last stage of the legislative process. In this paper I make use of the heated media debate that accompanied this attempt to change citizenship policy to investigate how the Left and the Right construct Italian citizenship in response to immigration. Scholars have devoted much attention to defining and categorising citizenship regimes. Political theorists and legal scholars have done so by identifying the origins of citizenship policies in their histories of migration and national identity (Brubaker 1994; Favell 1997; Vink and Bauböck 2013; Joppke 1999). Empiricists have studied the opinions of the general public to investigate whether they employ these theoretical frameworks defining what it takes to be a citizen (Janmaat 2006; Tilley, Exley, and Heath 2004). Research has drawn on immigrants' experiences to understand whether access to citizenship translates into social inclusion, for example in the labour market (Gathmann and Keller 2017).

In this paper I take a new perspective. By analysing the dialectic between the two main political parties that fought for and against the reform, I investigate how citizenship is socially and politically constructed. I ask: what do the Left and the Right do with and through citizenship? to expose their underlying ideas about what it means to be Italian in an age of migration (Béland 2016). I focus on the parties' discourse directed to the general public as a way into their underlying ideas about what it means to be Italian in an age of migration. To get a good grasp of the parties' positions and the ways they are communicated, I analyse their discourses in a variety of forms. I combine all posts from their official Facebook pages, videos from their official YouTube channels and articles from their official websites during 2017, the year the debate reached its peak.

My research contributes to the literature investigating the contours of citizenship in countries that are now coming to terms with having moved from being primarily sending, to primarily receiving immigrants. Italy, Greece, Finland and Denmark underwent this transition in the early 1980s, but have resisted updating their citizenship policy in response to this

demographic change (Okólski 2012; Tintori 2018; Pedersen and Smith 2005). The result is growing populations of non-citizen children who are nonetheless permanent residents (Istat 2018). As Central Eastern European states are now in the early stages of this migration transition, they too are likely to soon face similar pressures (Drbohlav 2012; Rovny 2014).

This is the first time Italy consciously reflected on what it means to be Italian in the context of immigration, rather than emigration. In countries with a history of emigration citizenship is a means to construct and maintain a solid national community, even when its members live outside national borders (Zincone 2006). However, citizenship policies based entirely on *ius sanguinis* represent a bright institutional boundary that separates the children of immigrants from the children of Italian lineage and hinders their opportunities for social inclusion (Alba 2005; Colombo, Leonini, and Rebughini 2009; Antonsich 2016). Citizenship grants key rights, legitimises belonging and enables participation in the governing of the nation-state (Bloemraad, Korteweg, and Yurdakul 2008). By studying the renegotiation of citizenship boundaries, I shed light on the extent to which changes in the composition of the population resulting from immigration have challenged traditional understandings of citizenship.

With my analysis I find that, despite their diverging positions on the reform, the two parties articulate their viewpoint around similar concerns. They both argue that whether someone is Italian depends on how similar they are to the native population; their stance on the reform hinges on whether it benefits Italy and its national security, rather than the children at the centre of the reform; both parties use the debate on the reform to communicate their core values to the electorate. My analysis shows that, although the PD wants to shift the institutional boundary of citizenship to make it more inclusive, it does not make the narrative around what it means to be an Italian citizen more inclusive. The PD expects minorities to adjust their behaviour to fit existing notions of citizenship in order to be accepted. I argue that, despite their apparently different framings of the reform, both the Lega Nord and the PD justify naturalisation with an exclusive conception of citizenship, which regards immigrant children as needing to be assimilated to a national norm.

Although the reform did not become law, the debate endures. News stories that have children of immigrants as protagonists are continuously brought up as proof for the need for this reform. For example, in 2019, after the 13-year old Ramy Shehata saved other passengers from the hijacking of the bus they were on, a big media debate around his lack of Italian citizenship brought back attention to the reform (Barone 2019). He was awarded citizenship based on merit after three months of discussion between the family, the Lega Nord interior minister at the time (Matteo Salvini), and other members of parliament. A year later the story of Great Nnachi continues to fuel the debate. The new leader of the PD, Enrico Letta, has mentioned the intention to put the reform back on the agenda (Mari 2021).

The paper is structured as follows. In the next section I review the literature on conceptions of citizenship and on how they relate to migration. I also outline the origins of current Italian citizenship policy, the proposed changes to the reform and their expected implications. In the third section, I describe my data and method. I then present the findings, structured around three key themes. I conclude the paper with a discussion section.

Background

I make sense of the current debate on the backdrop of two literatures. First, I draw on how citizenship regimes historically relate to different conceptions of citizenship, and how immigration may challenge them. Second, I contextualise the current debate within the Italian history of unification and immigration.

What makes a citizen and what is citizenship for?

By describing citizenship as ‘illusive and ubiquitous’, Staeheli (2010) clearly illustrates the difficulty with pinning down the exact purpose, meaning and boundaries of citizenship. Because of the historical overlap between nation and state in the West, citizen and national have typically been synonyms. Asking what makes a citizen has been equivalent to asking what makes a national. Identifying what characterises a national and therefore a citizen in different nation-states has always been challenging as testified by a long scholarly tradition on the subject. Brubaker (1994) famously juxtaposed citizenship regimes where citizenship status is regulated through the principle of *ius soli*, whereby citizenship status is a right those born on the national territory acquire at birth, and *ius sanguinis*, whereby citizenship status is inherited by ancestry. The former policies embrace civic nationalism, whereas the latter draw on an ethno-cultural conception of nationhood. Civic nationalism refers to the belief that a nation is made of people who want and are able to be part of a political nation-state and to participate in its civic and political life (Henrard 2018). In contrast, according to ethno-cultural nationalist ideologies what unites people in the same nation is belonging to the same ethno-cultural group; that is sharing common ancestry, language, religion and so on (Gellner 2006).

Many, including Brubaker himself (2010), have questioned how well nation-states fit into this categorisation and have deemed that most embrace elements of both traditions. Kymlicka (1999) has criticised the framework for not distinguishing between ‘ethnicity’ and ‘culture’. He argues that a form of nationalism that rests on sameness understood as ethnicity is very different from a form of nationalism that understands sameness as common culture: the former is innate, whereas the latter can be acquired. Modern scholars such as Shachar (2009) have also tried to move past the ethno-cultural vs. civic dichotomy. Shachar (2009) proposes the principle of *ius nexi* as grounds for legal membership, whereby

membership rights should be granted based on a person's meaningful connection to the society. Their interests, attachments and aspirations in the country should give people the right to membership, rather than only descent, *ius sanguinis*, or place of birth, *ius soli*.

Empirical research has also tried to identify whether the general public defines nationhood as ethno-cultural or civic. Evidence for both European and non-European countries suggests that citizens draw on both civic and ethno-cultural characteristics to define what makes a co-national (Jones and Smith 2001; Tilley, Exley, and Heath 2004; Janmaat 2006). Nonetheless, the civic vs. ethno-cultural framework is a useful analytical tool to identify the defining features of citizenship regimes today and the changes they are undergoing (Gans 2017).

Identifying what makes a national today is further complicated by the increased diversity within national boundaries resulting from colonisation and immigration (Castles 2018). We live in nation-states that have growing numbers of non-citizen permanent residents. There have always been people within nation-states who were either without citizenship status or had a citizenship status that did not ensure equality of rights, opportunities and welfare (Heater 2004). Yet, rising ethno-racial diversity arising from the growing volume of immigration exposes the inadequacy of current citizenship boundaries and leads to demands for their renegotiation. At the very minimum this has forced policy makers to revive the discussion over the qualifying characteristics for citizenship. Even in Germany, Brubaker's (1994) archetype of ethno-cultural nationhood, a new reform in 2000 introduced a *ius soli* component to allow children of immigrants to become German citizens.

Alba (2005) describes citizenship as a fundamental boundary between the majority and the immigrant minority. This is because citizenship grants important rights for inclusion, from the rights to vote, to freedom of movement, to protection from deportation, to the power to aid relatives to immigrate. Citizenship also legitimises belonging and entitles people to make claims from the state and from fellow citizens (Bloemraad 2018). Alba (2005) argues that the nature of the boundary of citizenship affects the nature of immigrants' integration. When this boundary is bright, immigrants must assimilate into the majority to bridge the social distance between them. In contrast, with a blurred boundary, immigrants and their offspring do not have to choose between the membership of the ethnic minority or of the mainstream. They can ascribe to identities and cultural practices that belong to both groups.

There is empirical research that has investigated the association between citizenship and social inclusion. Some, but not all evidence suggests citizenship acquisition may have a positive effect on labour market outcomes and national attachment (Helgertz, Bevelander, and Tegunimataka 2014; Donnalaja 2020; Bevelander and Pendakur 2011). Research has shown that national identification may grow before naturalisation (Donnalaja 2020). Although this evidence suggests that there is an association between citizenship acquisition and

integration, we should note that, historically, citizenship has not sufficed to guarantee full participation in society and in the democratic process (Yuval-Davis 1997; Hoxsey 2011). This has been the case for women, for the working class and indigenous groups. More recently this has also concerned the children of immigrants, who experience their national identity being contested, even where they have birthright citizenship (Beaman 2015). This suggests that an inclusive citizenship policy may not be enough to blur the boundary between those who belong and those who do not. A combination of institutional practices and norms constructs citizenship as a bright or blurred boundary. These range from the citizenship law itself, to norms related to what cultural practices are accepted, e.g. in relation to religion and language (Alba 2005).

Contextualising Italian citizenship policy

To understand Italian nationhood today we must learn what led up to it. Current Italian citizenship law reflects the tenuous nature of Italian nationhood and is the product of its fraught history of unification and high emigration flows. Italy is a recent nation-state and for this reason it is often thought to have been a nation first and a state second (Gans 2017). However, at the time of unification in 1861 Italy was hardly a nationhood to most people living on the territory who had strong local identities, rooted in the long history of city-states on the territory (Antonsich 2016). The attachment to the idea of a unified country was harboured mainly by the intellectual elites and urban population, rather than by the masses (Bedani and Haddock 2000). Once a nation-state, Italy was therefore composed of numerous people who spoke different languages and dialects, had very strong regional identities and historical memories, and little sense of belonging to a national Italian state. Bedani and Haddock's (2000) estimates suggest that only between 2.5% and 12% of the population spoke Italian at the time of unification. The opposition of the Catholic Church to the Italian state after the annexation of Rome in 1870 also contributed to weakening the development of an Italian national sentiment among the masses. Nowadays, most people speak Italian, but strong regional identities endure.

In addition to this weak and fragmented national identity, Italy has a long history of emigration. Italy was a country of emigration from 1876 to a century later in the 1970s, when it transitioned into a country of immigration (Bonifazi et al. 2009). This shift was partly due to the return of temporary migrants who had worked as guest workers in other European countries that were introducing more restrictive immigration policies. Nevertheless, from the early 1980s higher immigration than emigration flows are attributable to foreign migration (Tintori 2018). Over the first decade of the 2000s the inflow of migrants came as a response to push and pull factors. Important pull factors included the discontinuation of internal

migration from the south to the north, combined with a welfare system that was not fit to support the aging population and a substantial underground economy (Bonifazi et al. 2009).

Zincone (2006) claims that current citizenship law reflects the need for a more solid national identity and the emigration history of the country. The law currently in place, L. 92, dates back to 1992. Claims to Italian citizenship rest primarily on the principle of *ius sanguinis*, whereby nationality is inherited based on ancestry. This is a familialistic model that focusses on Italian emigrants and facilitates the maintenance of citizenship through the generations even if they live abroad. One can claim an Italian passport by virtue of having an Italian ancestor who has not voluntarily given up Italian citizenship. For immigrants, naturalisation is possible if certain conditions are fulfilled, including ten years of residence if non-European and four if European. Children born in Italy to non-citizen parents who are legal residents are entitled to request Italian citizenship within one year of having turned 18 if they have legally resided in Italy for their entire life.

Following Brubaker's (1994) theoretical framework, Italian citizenship law based on the principle of *ius sanguinis* was aimed at establishing an ethno-cultural rather than a civic community. However, *ius sanguinis*-based citizenship policy is also the product of a history of emigration, whereby there was little need to distinguish between nationals and non-nationals, if not for the offspring of those who had left the country. This explains why current citizenship policy neglects the growing population of children of immigrant parents born and/or living in Italy. The proportion of births to two foreign-parents out of total births grew from 1% in 1992 to 6.2% in 2002, to 14.9% in 2019 (Istat 2018). There are currently around 800,000 children who have only ever lived in Italy and who are not formally recognised as Italians (Istat 2016).

Proposed changes to the current citizenship policy

Although there have been several attempts by parliamentarians to change the 1992 citizenship law, the most successful one has been a citizens' initiative which brought the discussion of a reform of the law to parliament in 2013 (Sredanovic and Farina 2015). The proposed reform has a *ius soli* component. It proposed that a child born in Italy with at least one parent who has been residing legally in Italy for five years be granted citizenship if the parent requests it. This form of conditional *ius soli* law would align Italian citizenship policy with that of the UK, Ireland, Germany and Portugal (Vink and de Groot 2010). The reform also proposes a *ius culturae* component, whereby a child, either born in Italy or arrived before the age of 12, who has completed an entire stage of school for five years, is entitled to Italian citizenship if the parent requests it. Children arrived in Italy between the age of 12 and 18 would also have the same right if they attended school in Italy for at least six years as part of a full school cycle.

The reform was championed by the largest centre-left party, the Partito Democratico (PD) and opposed by the right, including the main opposition party at the time, the Lega Nord. The PD was founded in 2007 as a broadly centre-left party and was in power over the XXVIIth parliamentary term, from 2013 to 2018, albeit in coalition with right-wing parties. During this term, it ruled with three different prime ministers. By 2018 they were very unpopular as testified by the election that followed where they took home the worst result of the centre-left in the Republic's history (Emanuele 2018). The Lega was founded as Lega Nord in 1989 with the primary goal of achieving the autonomy of the Padana plane region. With new leader Matteo Salvini, in 2013 the party shifted its gaze to the entire country and later rebranded as Lega Nord. With the 2018 election they became the leading right-wing party. Although other right-wing parties were vocal in opposing the reform, as the biggest opposition party, the Lega Nord was the most influential and received most coverage in the public debate.

When the law was presented to parliament support appeared to be high. Istat reported that 72.1% of their respondents were in favour of an automatic *ius soli* at birth (Tintori 2018). The bill was passed in the chamber of deputies in October 2015. For a bill to become law it must be approved by the Senate as well. In order to delay and halt the legislative process, right-wing parties opposing the law, the Lega Nord and Fratelli D'Italia (FDI) in particular, presented thousands of amendments. The bill finally reached the senate in June 2017, just in time to be passed before the upcoming general election in 2018. On the one side, the leader of the FDI party collected 131,000 signatures for a petition asking for a referendum to repeal the law if it got approved. On the other side, many initiatives gained attention in solidarity with the law and with the population of children it was going to affect. Examples of these are the event Carnevale della Cittadinanza (carnival of citizenship) held in February in Rome, and the campaign 'l'Italia sono anch'io' (I too am Italy), in which many actors and intellectuals participated. The reform was finally shelved by the government because of the parliamentary crisis of December 2017. Today the *Ius soli* reform may be part of the agenda of the PD, as it is still widely debated (Mari 2021). Intellectuals, including actors and writers, continue to plead and to protest in favour of the law (Polchi and Rodari 2019).

How citizenship makes a difference to second-generation children

Research on the integration of the children of immigrants in Italy suggests that after only a few years most of them speak the language well, have Italian friends and develop a sense of belonging to the country (Gabielli, Paterno, and Dalla-Zuanna 2013). Yet, these children are not a homogenous group and differ in the extent to which they feel at home in Italy, identify as Italian and are well integrated within Italian society (Marchetti 2010). Interviewing children

of immigrant parents in Milan, Colombo, Leonini and Rebughini (2009) find that some children feel excluded and marginalised, others have a strong sense of belonging to both Italy and their parents' country, and others adopt a more cosmopolitan identity. Antonsich (2016) finds that the children of Italian immigrants mostly identify as Italian, but do not feel recognised as such by the majority.

With this reform second-generation children would acquire rights they currently do not hold. At present, all children in Italy, irrespective of legal status, have the same rights to education. All children have the right to emergency healthcare; but only legally residing children have full healthcare rights. Crucially, citizen children have a permanent right to stay in the country, whereas resident children do not. Citizens cannot be removed from their country of citizenship, except in highly unusual circumstances. In Italy the legal status of children is tied to that of their parents. This means that if the parent stops being a legal resident, the child does too. For example, in many cases permanent residence is secured through employment. It follows that job loss can lead to illegality. Other important rights associated with citizenship are the right of free movement within the European Union, the right to protection by the state in foreign countries, the opportunity to compete professionally in sports and to access many jobs in the public sector.

Although the *Ius soli* is about granting citizenship to people as children as opposed to as adults, by simplifying the naturalisation process, the reform would also increase the future number of adult citizens. In addition to the differences in rights between citizen and non-citizen children, the right that citizen adults enjoy, but immigrants do not, is the right to vote. Finally, the parent of a child who is an Italian citizen can request legal status if they cohabit with the child and the procedure for its attainment is simpler if they are the main carer.

Evidence based on interviews with some of these children suggests they want citizenship to be freed from the burden of having to prove their right to remain in the country and want to enjoy the opportunities opened up by citizenship, such as those related to free movement (Colombo, Domaneschi, and Marchetti 2011). Citizenship to them is also a matter of justice and equality, something they feel entitled to. Finally, it is the consolidation and recognition of their Italian identity (Colombo, Domaneschi, and Marchetti 2011)

Data

The corpus I analyse consists of anything the Lega Nord and the PD posted during 2017 on their official Facebook page, YouTube channel and website, that refers to the reform. This includes written text, articles, images and videos. In a multi-party political system I restrict the data corpus to the PD, the party that presented the reform and was in government at the time, and the Lega Nord which was the main opposition party. I further restrict the corpus to 2017. This is the year the debate took off because the vote on the reform preceded the

general election. The corpus of data is made of Facebook, YouTube and the parties' official website posts as these are the platforms used by political parties to communicate with the public. Compared to other media outlets, such as TV programmes or newspaper articles, the content on these pages is posted and therefore selected by the parties themselves. It therefore provides a window on what they want to communicate to their audiences. The variety of sources also has the potential to capture a wide range of parties' positions and arguments. I excluded Twitter because of the limitations with retrospective data mining on the platform.

I identified relevant documents by searching for text that mentions the name of the reform, which is always referred to by politicians as 'ius soli'. I also cross-checked that I had identified all documents by running alternative searches such as 'cittadinanza' (citizenship), 'ius culturae' (a specific part of the reform) and 'naturalizzazione' (naturalisation). Table 1 illustrates the number of items in each party's corpus, per source. There is an obvious difference between the Lega Nord's and the PD's means of communication. Firstly, the Lega Nord prefers visual media. Their YouTube channel and Facebook page are more curated and fuller of content. Although there are 11 relevant documents on their website, these are designed similarly to Facebook posts. They usually involve an image and short text, hashtags and slogans. In contrast, the PD does not fill its Facebook page or YouTube channel with much content and it dedicates much more attention to its website. The documents that I downloaded from their website are mostly newspaper articles where PD parliamentarians are interviewed on the topic by the main national newspapers, such as *Il Corriere della Sera* and *la Repubblica*.

The different means of communication employed by the two parties shape the content of the discourse itself. This is consistent with what has been found in other country contexts: populist political parties use social media to bypass classic news outlets and communicate directly with the voter (Engesser et al. 2017). The short populist message works well on social media and, compared to classic news outlets that are mediated by professional gatekeepers, it communicates to a more participating audience. It follows that the discourse of the Lega Nord lends itself to a simpler narrative made of short and clear affirmations. In contrast, the PD offers more complex argumentations.

Table 1: Data sources

Party	Facebook posts	Party Website	YouTube videos
The Lega	47	11	45
<u>Partito Democratico</u>	6	22	21

Method

I use discourse analysis, a method that aims at explicitly showing how meaning is constructed and communicated through texts. The term discourse refers to the fact that language has social meaning (Fairclough and Wodak 1997). The assumption is that text, understood as any type of language, is both the product and producer of social constructs. As such, language is political because it distributes power, acceptance and other social goods according to the rules established by the social context. Gee (2010) describes the function of language as three-fold: it is saying, being and doing. With language we give and receive information; we take on social identities, we can wear different 'hats' to give the same piece of information (e.g. advice as a lawyer or as a friend); we take action (e.g. we make promises, we pray). To fully understand the meaning of something it is therefore not enough to know what it is being said, but also who the person saying it is and wants to be, and what they are trying to do.

Following Gee's (2010) theory and methodological approach to discourse analysis, I aim to identify the saying, the being and the doing of text to fully grasp the meaning of the language in my data. Having gathered the data (as described in the Data section), I begin the analysis with a descriptive reading of the texts to identify recurring topics and nodal points that warrant closer analysis. I code the topics that emerge.

In parallel, I gather the relevant contextual knowledge that is needed for interpreting the text. This is a combination of local knowledge, such as awareness of key political events and current affairs that happened around the time of the debate; knowledge of the history of the formation of the Italian nation, of how the history of emigration has shaped Italian citizenship law and the discourse on national identity; broader theories of how experiences of migration shape citizenship and nationalism (as I have discussed in the Background section).

This begins an iterative process between the reading of the text and reference to the social context. The process involves moving from the initial overarching descriptive reading aimed at identifying recurring themes, to a closer reading of small portions of text. I implement this fine-grained analysis to the parts of text that I find to be most informative for

the aim of the research question. This part of the analysis changes according to the mode of communication, which ranges from TV interviews on YouTube, to parts of parliamentary debates on YouTube, to posters for rallies on Facebook, to newspaper articles or written interviews on the party's website. The analysis therefore ranges from observing and analysing the grammar and structure of sentences, interpreting images and noticing changes in tone of voice or the use of hand gestures.

This back and forth between text, portions of text and theory allows me to move beyond describing what is represented and to interpret the text in the context of broader structures of social meaning of which it is part (Dunn and Newmann 2016). I organise the codes for the topics identified around three themes: conceptions of national identity, the purpose of naturalisation, and the political salience of the reform. In Table 2 I illustrate how the three themes relate to each code, for which I give examples of text translated into English. My presentation of findings in the manuscript reflects the coding framework in Table 2. For each theme I include examples of text that I discuss in depth.

My position as an Italian citizen who follows Italian politics, but lives abroad is relevant in shaping the kind of knowledge I had access to. My personal interest and expertise on the subject may have made me more sensitive to the debate around which I formed strong opinions. However, this has also put me in an advantageous position to address the research question, to gather information and to contextualise my findings.

The analysis was carried out on the original text in Italian, but only the English translation is included in the main text. Original transcripts for these examples are to be found in the Appendix. The translation is not always literal in order to convey the same sense as the original text. When I report text transcribed from live speeches, I use capital letters and exclamation points to illustrate moments emphasised by the speaker.

Analysis

What makes a co-national?

Despite the overlap between citizenship and national identity, neither party offers an explanation of what constitutes a co-national. No politician explicitly attempts to justify the party's position on the reform by drawing on their idea of 'imagined community': what they think are, and should be, the defining features of an Italian national (Anderson 1991). However, a close analysis of the discourse of both parties uncovers how important their conceptions of nationhood are in framing the debate and driving their statements.

Figure 1: Lega nord Facebook post



Figure 2: PD video snapshot



Figure 1 is a snapshot of a post from Lega Nord's Facebook page displaying a frame of an interview of Salvini and the journalist Udo Gumpel on the popular daily news commentary programme 'Otto e mezzo' (La7) on June 20th 2017. Above the frame is the caption

I wouldn't want anyone from left-wing parties to plan a process of CRIB REPLACEMENT (Facebook 20/06/2017)

This is a quote from one of Salvini's replies during the debate. During the interview he adds that he is worried about *'importing children and gifting them citizenship because Italians no longer have children'*. In contrast, Figure 2 shows a frame taken from one of the videos on the PD's Youtube channel. The video shows a text that explains the details of the Ius soli reform on the backdrop of images that resonate with the explanations. The video ends with the frame in Figure 2, when the leader of the party at the time, Matteo Renzi, says

'A child, who was born in Italy, born in Italy and has, in any case, completed a full stage of school in Italy, primary school or middle school; they may be called Matteo, or they may be called Miriam, [pause] Leyla, [pause] Mohamed, they have the right, if they study in Italy, if they grow up with Italian values, to be an Italian citizen' M. Renzi (YouTube 16/06/2017)

These two images exemplify the way in which the two parties communicate their different conceptions of what makes someone Italian. In Figure 1 the use of capital letters in the short quote is used to underscore the gravity of the process Salvini is implying. This is one of the instances where the Lega Nord expresses fear of ethnic substitution. This particular post refers explicitly to 'replacement theory'. According to this conspiracy theory brought to fame by Renaud Camus in his 2012 book 'You will not replace us!', the low fertility rate of white

women will result in non-white people replacing white people (Camus 2018). This theory has recently caught on to justify the most horrific racist acts, such as the terrorist attack in Christchurch, New Zealand (Smith et al. 2019) The theory is new in its use of demographic concepts such as replacement-level fertility, the rate at which a population exactly replaces itself from one generation to the next. However, the message it sends is not.

Camus's thesis centres around non-whiteness as a marker of otherness. To Camus non-whiteness is an obvious indication of different culture, religion and values (Camus 2018). However, Lega Nord politicians do not mention race and whiteness explicitly. Their talk of ethnic replacement and invasion leaves 'the other' unnamed. They address the public in a way that assumes that who they are referring to is obvious and known. The context to this debate is important in this respect. Following the assassination of Gaddafi, Libya's dictator, the onset of the Arab Spring and the war in Syria in 2011, undocumented immigration to Italy intensified (Spindler 2015). These immigrants are mostly black African and reach the Italian shores on dinghies under desperate circumstances. Irregular immigration has therefore received wide coverage by the media and politicians. The fact that the *ius soli* reform is often discussed in conjunction with immigration on TV and news programmes has probably contributed to creating an association between the potential beneficiaries of the reform and recent irregular immigrants, most of them black (Sredanovic and Farina 2015). By not defining the 'other', by using all-encompassing fear-mongering terms such as 'invasion' and 'crib replacement', Lega Nord politicians give the public the space to make these associations. The lack of definition of the 'other' also indicates that race is not the only criterion for inclusion. Their form of ethno-nationalism is more demanding because anyone who is not ethnically Italian is 'othered'.

The Lega Nord further exploits the fear of 'the other' by associating the *ius soli* reform with the financial struggles of the Italian people. In their Facebook posts the hashtag #noiussoli is typically accompanied by the hashtags 'Italians first' (#primagliitaliani), 'fewer taxes more work' (#menotassepiùlavoro), 'enough with fiscal torture' (#bastaconlatorturafiscale). Since the 2008-11 financial crisis Italy has struggled with austerity and high rates of unemployment (Statista 2021). The Lega Nord exploits the fear of 'the other' in conjunction with the fear and experience of financial hardship for political gains. This juxtaposition between Italians and non-Italians relies on a conception of nationality according to which these children are categorised as 'them', rather than as 'us'. As is typical of populist parties, the Lega Nord ascribes to an ethno-exclusionary nationalism that pits 'the people' against immigrants (de Cleen 2017).

Nonetheless, the Lega Nord's contrary position to the *ius soli* reform may not rest entirely on an ethno-cultural nationalist account. A point often made by the Lega Nord is that children cannot rightfully express the will to become citizens because they are not eighteen.

In an interview on the programme Tagadà (La7) on 22nd June the senator Centinaio repeats the word 'to choose' ('scegliere') 6 times in the space of a minute and 52 seconds in reference to the reform. His argument is that only adults are capable of consenting to be citizens because citizenship is 'an important thing' ('una cosa importante'). At first sight this is an argument that is compatible with a civic notion of citizenship. Agreeing to become a member of the community is akin to signing a contract and agreeing to the rules of the community (Henrard 2018). Nonetheless, the ethno-cultural underpinning of the argument remains. The request that these children wait until they turn 18 to wilfully register as citizens puts them in a different category from native children. Native citizens agree by tacit consent and become citizens automatically at birth. By denying this reform they are not denying these children the right to become citizens, but to do so as native Italians. Instead, they have to do it as immigrants through a process of naturalisation.

Table 2: Coding for thematic analysis

Political Party	Code	Example	Organising Theme
The Lega	Fear of ethnic substitution	‘Stop to the invasion’; ‘we are living through an attempt at ethnic substitution’; ‘#IUSOLI is alright in a country that needs populating’	What makes a co-national?
	Competition between Italians and immigrants over resources	‘#Italians first’; ‘Ius soli...guarantees a favourable treatment to the foreigner’; ‘on the backs of Italians’	
	Adults only are capable of making the choice to acquire citizenship	‘#citizenship is not to be given away’; ‘you are capable of judgment at 18 years of age’; ‘citizenship is not acquired by birthright, but you choose it when you’re 18’	
The Partito Democratico (PD)	These children are already Italian	‘Young people who represent the future’; ‘these children are Italian, we recognise a reality that already exists’	
	Shared experience makes citizens	‘A child who studies, grows up with Italian values, has the right to be Italian’; ‘a Chinese or Senegalese child who goes to school with your children’; ‘wearing the same football shirts as everyone else’	

The PD’s understanding of nationality is in clear antithesis to the Lega Nord’s. The two lines at the end of the video captured in Figure 2 outline the PD’s core arguments for

supporting the reform: that the children in question are already Italian. In the video Renzi pauses a little after every name, foreign sounding or Italian, to highlight the irrelevance of this information. What matters, he implies are shared experiences: going to school in Italy and growing up with Italian values. As captured in this post, the reform would be acknowledging the reality that these children are Italian, are part of Italian society and will continue to be so in the future.

#the ius soli recognises a reality that already exists (Facebook 21/06/2017)

Yet, this argument is compatible with an ethno-cultural notion of nationalism. Their case rests on 'sameness': these children deserve Italian citizenship because their life experience and their values are akin to the average Italian child: they go to the same schools, they speak the same language, they even speak the local dialect, they like the same things and they support Italian football teams. The use of 'if' ('se') can be interpreted as 'as long as' to introduce a series of conditions the child must meet to be considered Italian. By highlighting these conditionalities they are demonstrating they too take seriously the integration and alignment of these children within Italian society. However, they do not call for any testing of these conditions, therefore suggesting that the experience of growing up in Italy suffices to meet these criteria. This notion of ethno-cultural nationalism is intuitively very different from the Lega Nord's. This is because it revolves around culture, rather than ethnicity. As Kymlicka (1999) notes this is an important distinction because culture can be acquired, whereas ethnicity cannot.

School attendance is central to the PD's argument that shared experiences make citizens. Completing a full stage of school is a core requirement of the proposed reform. This use of school as grounds for common nationality is also consistent with a civic notion of nationalism. School shapes people into citizens by creating a sense of community on the basis of shared values, rules of conduct, constitutional and social norms (Orgad 2017). The argument that these children should be recognised as Italian because they speak the language, go to school and live in Italy also fits with more modern theories that put people's experiences at the centre of membership claims, such as Shachar's *ius nexi* (2009). Going to school and doing the same things as other kids highlights not only these children's sameness, but also their connection to the country. The PD offers a conception of nationality that emphasises the linguistic and cultural integration of immigrants.

Both the Lega Nord and the PD rest their case on sameness. According to the Lega Nord the children who would benefit from the reform are not like other Italian children, whereas according to the PD they are. As found in other research that investigates popular conceptions of citizenship (e.g. Janmaat 2006), neither party's conception of nationhood

clearly fits in the civic vs. cultural-ethnic schema of citizenship, with both parties borrowing from both civic and ethno-cultural principles.

Citizenship acquisition: to the detriment or benefit of Italian society?

On June 15th Calderoli, one of the Lega Nord's most well-known parliamentarians, delivered a strong speech against the *Ius soli* reform in the senate. In this 5-minute speech he argues against the reform, touching on various arguments, including the danger they would be putting the country in if the reform passed.

*'...But what scares me [sigh] is the aspect not only of the selling off of our identity, but the aspect of security. I cannot forget that exactly the fact that in those countries there is a law like the *Ius soli*, the attackers, ALL OF THEM; I'm talking about the ones in Brussels, in London, in Manchester, anywhere in Europe where they have happened. They had a passport of the country against which this character made the attack, in their pockets [other Lega Nord senators clap and shout 'bravo!'] I will say more! You can protest, but it won't amount to anything! I will say more, the truth hurts, but in the meantime, deal with it! And go tell your citizen voters! I will say more, the man in Manchester, son of Libyans, who thanks to the *Ius soli*, i.e. with the law that today you want to pursue, got British citizenship and a passport, he made the terrorist attack in Manchester and, last but not least, he'd got a 7,500 euro scholarship and instead OF STUDYING, with that money he bought the bomb. Bravo! Well done!' R. Calderoli (YouTube 16/06/2017)*

Calderoli champions Lega Nord's rhetoric: he changes his tone of voice to the point of shouting to draw emphasis where he wants to rally up his colleagues. Party members follow him by applauding and murmuring in the background. His language is peppered with grammatical mistakes – such as lack of appropriate subordinating conjunctions to link sentences – and vernacular sayings, e.g. *'the truth hurts...but deal with it'* (*'la verità fa male... ma portatevela a casa'*). This choice of language and tone conveys urgency, as well as a detachment from the formalities of politics. This is the speech of someone who is angry, shocked and deeply concerned.

That citizenship should be given only to those who are fully integrated in Italian society is one of Lega Nord's core arguments against the reform. This is suggestive of an understanding of citizenship acquisition as official recognition of belonging. However, Calderoli's statement goes further. He insinuates that, had the terrorist in Manchester not been allowed to be a citizen and therefore to have access to scholarship funding, he could not have carried out the attack. The terrorist, according to Calderoli, used his citizenship status to harm his co-nationals. The selective granting of citizenship, he implies, is

necessary because citizenship grants privileges people can abuse of. This line of argument taps into the fear that Muslim immigrants may be terrorists. The Lega Nord's belief that citizenship should be given to immigrants who are integrated is widely shared. It is what has motivated several European countries to introduce civic integration requirements for naturalisation, whereby immigrants have to prove their level of integration in order to become citizens (Goodman 2010). There too political parties focus on integration as an acceptable way to express Islamophobic feelings (Kostakopoulou 2010).

Several inconsistencies confirm that greater integration is not Lega's true goal. For instance, they accuse the PD of using this reform to buy the children's loyalty and therefore their future votes. For example:

'The left insists on the ius soli propaganda to pockets the votes of MIGRANTS' (Facebook 04/12/2017)

However, if this were the case the reform would be conducive to increased integration. By arguing that children are more likely to vote if they are awarded citizenship, they are stating that citizenship fosters political participation, a key aspect of integration. If integration were their goal, incentivising voting would be a welcome outcome of this reform.

Consistently, the Lega Nord never attempts to define the concept, which becomes particularly obscure in the context of Italian naturalisation policy. Children born in Italy from foreign-born parents, are not required to fulfil any civic integration requirement. It follows that the Lega Nord's position to keep the current law in place because it ensures that people are given citizenship once they are integrated merely equates integration to length of residence. Moreover, for some children, the choice of becoming Italian requires losing the nationality they inherit from their parents. This is the case for the Chinese community, representing 8.6% of non-European immigrants in Italy, as China does not allow dual citizenship (Istat 2019). Surely, the decision to renounce another citizenship status to acquire the Italian one is a sign of integration of both the parent making the decision and their child.

Reference to national security is part of the PD's rhetoric too. In the year of the terrorist attacks in Manchester, London and Brussels, they choose not to ignore this theme. The PD tries to assuage the fear of the 'other' by arguing that citizenship benefits social cohesion. On the PD's YouTube channel show 'Ore Nove' where a presenter reads and comments on articles from several newspapers, there are a few episodes that touch on the ius soli reform. In one in particular, the current leader of the PD in the senate, Simona Malpezzi, lays out the PD's argument in relation to national security:

'Maybe one should read, read the law proposal that talks about a ius culturae that means more security because when YOU FEEL YOU ARE AN ITALIAN CITIZEN and you are part of that world because you have breathed that literature, that culture and that history and you are not illiterate of the symbols that surround you, at that point you feel part of a community. And if you feel part of a community, YOU WORK for that community, you have no intention of going against that community. So, citizenship and therefore ius soli, or rather ius culturae in order to recognise the right of those who live with us, study with us, sit with us at school desks, it's a right to civilisation that guarantees to the country that offers it more security because it creates more community, a term we often forget.' S. Malpezzi (YouTube 05/07/2017)

The central argument of this extract is that denying these children citizenship jeopardises social cohesion and national security. The PD's starting point is that refusing citizenship means marginalising and discriminating against people who are effectively part of the community. This argument appears to follow directly from the belief that these children are Italian. If we do think they are Italian, not recognising them will result in the frustration that creates dangers for the community and harms social cohesion. This suggests an understanding of citizenship as recognition and officialisation of national identity. Relatedly, according to the PD, citizenship seems almost to have a pedagogic function. By often underlying that citizenship grants duties, as well as rights, they imply that we can hold fellow citizens to a higher standard than immigrants.

The PD seems more concerned with social cohesion, than with what second-generation children would gain from the reform. They do not centre their argument around the benefits and opportunities the children in question would have access to as citizens. Instead, they argue that the failure to acknowledge these children as Italians hampers a shared sense of community. The protagonists of this narrative are not the beneficiaries of the reform, but voters. Despite the evidence that research has found that most children of immigrants see themselves as Italian (Antonsich 2016), but do not think others recognise them as such, PD politicians hardly discuss the children's feelings, opinions and experiences. Similarly, the opportunities that would arise from citizenship, including those related to the rights they would acquire, are seldom considered. It is plausible that the omission of these rights from the conversation is a strategic choice to avoid being accused of protecting undocumented immigrants from deportation. The strategy of both parties is therefore to target the fear of national security and failed integration that was at its height in 2017 all over Europe. The Lega Nord uses it to oppose the reform, the PD to support it.

The political salience of the reform

Figure 3 shows one of the several Facebook posts on the Lega Nord 's official page during the second half of 2017 that showcases a poster inviting people to a rally for Salvini as Prime Minister. Glancing at the poster our eye falls quickly to its centre. A bigger font size and different colours are used to draw attention to the main slogan of the poster: 'No ius soli because Italy is not for sale'. Like many others, this poster from Salvini's campaign offers only one point from his manifesto, fighting the ius soli reform. This is a testament to two things: to how much people cared about this reform and to how much the Lega Nord thought it could gain from fighting this battle.

Figure 3: Lega Nord campaign poster



In contrast, the PD did not have such a clear strategy. Although they supported the reform and debated in favour of it, they ended up losing control over its destiny. During the winter of 2017 the PD split between those who wanted the government to ask for a vote of confidence on the reform and those who believed the government did not have the support necessary to pass the law. The vote on the reform kept being postponed until the very end of the parliamentary term, when the quorum of senators necessary for a vote was not met. None of the M5S senators showed up.

It follows that we cannot ignore how politically loaded and consequential this debate over reforming citizenship law was in 2017. With the elections looming in the horizon, it is important to note that both the PD and the Lega Nord chose the reform on citizenship as an issue important enough to be put on the centre-stage of the political agenda (Béland 2016).

The uncompromising language used by both parties illustrates how invested they were in the outcome of the debate. In one of the videos on the Lega Nord's YouTube channel the senator Centinaio is interviewed outside the Senate chamber with an icepack on his right hand. The attention of the viewer is directed to the centre of the scene, where the hurt hand lies underneath an icepack. He gives no explanation for the hand until later when the interviewer finally asks about it. Centinaio replies:

'It happened because the moment they didn't let me speak, we occupied the benches in parliament and [he smiles] I was the last one to be taken away because I resisted until the end [he pauses and laughs] like at Fort Alamo [he laughs], let's put it that way' G. Centinaio (YouTube 15/06/2017)

What happened is that during a parliamentary discussion on the law proposal, a Lega Nord senator was given the right to speak later than he thought he was entitled to. From there a protest that involved all the Lega Nord senators ensued. After occupying the desks of the senators sitting in the front, and in the midst of getting kicked out by security, Centinaio hurt his hand. The Lega Nord senator uses the Fort Alamo metaphor, where Texan people were killed for refusing to surrender to the Mexican invader, to demonstrate the extent to which they are willing to fight. The fight seems to be both against what they routinely refer to as a 'mad law' ('legge folle') and against the political establishment. Like other right-wing populist parties in Europe they present themselves as the defenders of the Italian people and of their national identity (Noury and Roland 2020). This is the one instance where the fight over the reform got physical, but it was long-time coming. The Lega Nord had threatened and continued to threaten the PD with the use of physical obstruction to prevent the law from passing.

'We will do barricades here in the building, but outside they risk that angry citizens will come looking for them with pitchforks' R. Calderoli (website 8/11/2017)

The PD takes different, yet extreme, measures to fight for the reform. On October 4th tens of PD members of parliament joined a hunger strike initiated by 900 teachers in support of the *Ius soli* reform (Il Fatto Quotidiano 2017). The PD's investment in the success of the reform is evident throughout the debate. If the Lega Nord refers to the reform as 'mad', the

PD often calls it a 'law of civilisation' ('legge di civiltà'). They ground their position in a sense of justice, as in the following quotations taken from the PD's website:

'Ius soli, Zanda: How can Centrist politicians close to the Church say no?' A. Trocino, il Corriere della Sera (website, 18/07/2017)

'The ius soli expresses in the most authentic way the principles of our judicial civilisation, of our ancient cultural tradition of Greek and Roman inspiration' Senator Manconi, il Manifesto (website 24/12/2017)

As done in other periods of Italian history, such as during the Fascist era, the PD justify current policy by recalling an idealised glorious past (Bedani and Haddock 2000). They evoke a Greek and Roman tradition of justice and the Catholic value of hospitality as core underpinnings of Italian identity.

Both parties also draw comparisons with other European countries, namely France, Germany and the UK. The Lega Nord uses these countries as examples of the dangers of granting citizenship to children of immigrant parents (As in the extract in the above section). This attitude is suggestive of the Euroscepticism that is typical of populist parties (Noury and Roland 2020). Lega Nord politicians also point out that Italy holds the European record for number of naturalisations granted. The number of new Italian citizens has increased since 2004 as a result of family reunification, second-generation children coming of age and immigrants meeting the residence requirement for naturalisation (Finotelli, La Barbera, and Echeverría 2018). In contrast, the PD expresses the need to conform to the rest of Europe, as in the following extract from a Facebook post:

'We must instead work on integration like Germany' (Facebook 16/11/2017)

Among Western European countries, Italy's current citizenship policy is comparable to that of Greece, Austria, Denmark and Finland (Vink and de Groot 2010). Other Western European countries have either a form of *ius soli* at birth or more privileged *ius soli* provision after birth.

Although at the antipodes, the two parties approach the debate with the same urgency. The combination of strong language and action communicates not only their view on the reform, but also their core values. Similarly to other political events, such as the UK referendum to leave the EU, the attempt to redraw citizenship boundaries exposed deep-seated cleavages (Ford and Goodwin 2017; Hobolt 2016). As I have shown, the Lega Nord used the reform to express broader concerns around undocumented immigration, the financial struggles of the Italian people, national security and Europe. That is, they combine

populism and ethno-exclusionary nationalism to win over the electorate (de Cleen 2017). In response to that the PD appeals to progressive liberal values associated with their highly educated electorate (Piketty 2018). It is important to recognise the mobilising power of citizenship.

Discussion and conclusion

The two sides disagree on what characteristics qualify someone to be Italian and on what aspects of citizenship matter the most. However, they resorted to a similar logic to frame the debate. Both parties argue about whether the children of immigrants are similar or not to the Italian majority. Their positions on the matter differ because to the Lega Nord the common denominator is lineage, whereas to the PD it is behaviour and common experiences. Yet, they argue on the same grounds. Equally, both parties' arguments hinge on what is best for the majority. The Lega Nord chooses to discuss citizenship for the children of immigrants as a means to access rights and a privileged position, whereas the PD sees citizenship as an identity and as a form of recognition. Yet, for both parties the judgment of whether the children of immigrant parents are Italian or not is an external one, a decision to be made by current group members. Both sides are concerned with what is most beneficial to the country, especially for its security. Neither party gives agency to the children in question or to their parents. The children that would be affected by this reform remain silent. Their feelings of belonging or the opportunities that would arise from the acquisition of citizenship are not central to either party's position.

The narrative of the Lega Nord is clear. They want to maintain an unambiguous legal distinction, a bright boundary, between autochthonous Italians and second-generation children (Alba 2005). The PD's position is less obvious. On the one hand, by calling for the extension of citizenship rights, they want to shift the boundary of citizenship. This change in law would turn outsiders into insiders. On the other hand, their line of argument relies on the expectation that minorities must first individually cross the existing boundary that separates them from the majority (Alba 2005). Their notion of what makes an Italian focuses on behaviour, rather than lineage, but still relies on the assumption that minorities must subscribe to existing notions of citizenship in order to be accepted. What is missing is the idea that children of immigrants can be Italian citizens, whilst also maintaining more diverse and complex cultural practices and identities. The debate over whether the children of immigrant parents have a claim on Italian citizenship did not end in 2017. The new leader of the PD Enrico Letta has put the *Ius soli* reform back on the agenda as a priority (Mari 2021). Yet, a conception of Italian citizenship that is more inclusive seems a long way ahead.

Italy is only one of a few Western European countries that have a restrictive citizenship policy, but growing numbers of second-generation children (Okólski 2012; Pedersen and Smith 2005; Vink and de Groot 2010). Central Eastern European countries are also approaching positive net immigration and have citizenship policies that do not take into account this demographic change (Drbohlav 2012; Rovny 2014). Similarly to Italy, they will soon have to start grappling with immigrants staying long-term. Given how consequential citizenship acquisition is for integration, the introduction of more inclusive principles for the granting of citizenship seems inevitable.

However, my analysis shows that if political parties wish to incorporate immigrant populations that challenge current boundaries between native and second-generation children, calling for policy change is not enough. Alongside policy, they are likely to need to promote new conceptions of citizenship that are more attentive to minorities and that break away from path-dependencies. These are that sameness constitutes the grounds for making someone a citizen and that the purpose of citizenship acquisition is to protect or benefit the majority. Moreover, we cannot ignore that discussions around citizenship are a pretext for right-wing populist parties to express their nativist values in order to win elections. This provides a further challenge to the introduction of a *ius soli* principle in citizenship policy.

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