

OPEN ACCESS

ISSN 2280-4056

*E-Journal of
International and Comparative*

LABOUR STUDIES

Volume 8, No. 2, May-June 2019



ADAPT
www.adapt.it
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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*E-Journal of
International and Comparative*

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Volume 8, No. 2 May-June 2019

@ 2019 ADAPT University Press

Online Publication of the ADAPT Series
Registration No. 1609, 11 November 2001, Court of Modena
www.adaptbulletin.eu

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When Labour Goes Populist: How Italian Populist Leaders Framed the Labour Market and Industrial Relations on Social Media

Francesco Nespoli ¹

Abstract

Purpose – this article aims to describe how leaders identified as populist frame the specific issue of the labour market and industrial relations on social media in Italy.

Design/methodology/approach – two datasets of Instagram posts and tweets from Luigi Di Maio and Matteo Salvini are provided. The field of labour and industrial relations include income support policies, welfare, and taxation. Data are interpreted from a rhetorical-framing perspective.

Findings – Labour and industrial relations issues appear to be fully functional to pit “people” or “citizens” against political or economic elites. Representation of work issues by Italian populism falls short of novelty in terms of framing, even when regarding gig-workers and the platform economy.

Research limitations/implications – The datasets of Instagram posts and tweets from Luigi Di Maio and Matteo Salvini are limited to data from January the 1st to November the 13th. A rhetorical-framing analysis is conducted only on Instagram data.

Originality/value – the paper argues that work should be taken into account as a fundamental dimension of citizenship, thus connecting political discourse and the representative democracy that builds on it. A specific theoretical framework is formulated integrating framing theory and new rhetoric. The framing theory recalled by George Lakoff is interpreted as a modern version of Aristotelian topics integrating emotional connotations.

Paper type – Research paper

Keywords – *Social media, communication, populism*

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1. Introduction

1.1. Why Populism and Labour Issues?

Populism has drawn unprecedented attention following the appointment of Donald Trump as the US President in November 2016². Despite this increasing interest, the notion of “populism” still lacks uniformity in the academic community. Furthermore, “Definition of populism” is the most searched, populism-related query by lay users, according to Google Trends³. Anti-elitism (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008: 3, Kaltwasser and Taggart 2016: 204, Voss 2018) and the exploitation of electoral frustration (Voss 2018) have so far been regarded as peculiarities of populism. However, by looking at the meaning of “populism” as a steady and semantic form of negotiation, this research starts from the assumption that the main characteristic of “populism” is anti-pluralism, as proposed by the political theorist Jan-Werner Muller in his book *What is Populism?* (2016: 3). Looking for determinants triggering the emergence of populism, a series of studies published before the election of Donald Trump had linked economic crisis with populists’ electoral success (Dornbusch and Edwards 1990; Acemoglu et al. 2011, Pappas T. & Kriesi H. 2015). In particular, Pappas Takis and Hannspeter Kriesi (2015) found that populism had grown in those countries most significantly affected by crisis, where crises were measured in terms of growth rate, unemployment rate and public debt on the economic side, and trust in institutions, satisfaction with democracy, and electoral volatility on the political side (Kriesi H. Pappas T., 2015).

Yet there is significant research disproving or revising this correlation, concluding that the crisis explanation for the growth of populist support does not have the same bearing across countries and concurs with cultural variables (Inglehart and Norris 2016). Moreover, Kübler and Kriesi (2017) have argued that migrant flows and growing income inequalities are eventually driven by globalization. This point has been recently corroborated by Mols F. and Jetten J. (2018) who considered that populism thrived also during times of economic prosperity, thus supporting the existence of a “wealth paradox”. It is not inequalities *per se* that drive consensus towards populism, but the rising discontent of “globalization’s losers”.

Notwithstanding the disputed idea of a correlation between economic crises and populism, scholars on both sides frequently share the following

² See Interest over time on Google Trends for populism - Worldwide, 2004 - present - <https://g.co/trends/5jrzY>

³ See Related queries on Google Trends for populism - Worldwide, 2004 - present - <https://g.co/trends/DBBpT>

consideration: whether decisive or not, growing income and wealth inequality push voting members, especially those from depressed areas, to choose populist parties. One can find research specifically focused on the relations between the labour market and populism considering different countries. Carl Benedikt Frey, Chinchih Chen and Thor Berger (2018), concluded that support for the Republicans between 2012 and 2016 increased more in areas where automation threatened to destroy jobs. In Europe, Sirus Håfström Dehdari (2018) affirmed that layoff notifications among low-skilled, native-born workers were responsible of the 31-percent increase in the vote share for the Swedish far-right. Finally, Dustin Voss (2018) compared Germany and Spain, arguing that the roots of populism sink into perceived labour market inequalities, also because of labour market reforms.

Assuming this perspective, populism challenges not only social-democratic parties but trade unions as well. This is a phenomenon that has become clearer after the last US elections, when several exit-polls revealed that many teachers, steelworkers and autoworkers affiliated to trade unions voted for Donald Trump. The same dynamic was also observed by unreleased polls⁴ in Italy, after the last general elections that led to the formation of a left-wing and right wing populist coalition. Data revealed that 33% of voters affiliated to the largest unions (CGIL) voted for the Five Star Movement (left-wing populists), only 2% less than the consensus gained by the social democratic party (*Partito Democratico*). The penetration of right-wing populism into factories had been documented many years before in Europe. In 2005, for example, a study from the *Freie Universität* of Berlin conducted between 2003 and 2004 concluded that 34% of low-skilled members had a far-right orientation, compared to 18% of non-members.

The decrease of trade union influence in the voting preference is a further contested phenomenon. In their recent article *The Radical Right, the Labour Movement and the Competition for the Workers' Vote* Mosimann, N., Rennwald, L. and Zimmermann (2018) argued that unionized voters still refrain from voting for the radical right better more than non-unionized voters. But they also concluded that unionization no longer prevents working-class voters from supporting the radical right in certain contexts. The difference between contexts is also addressed by Arndt C. and Rennwald, L (2016) who affirm that the effect of union membership on voting choice is conditioned by the structure of the trade union movement.

⁴ <https://www.dirittiglobali.it/2018/04/98330/>

1.2. Populist, Communication and Labour

It should therefore be clear that the way populist leaders frame the labour market and labour relations in general may deserve special attention. Many early studies focus on populism as an expression of political communication. In particular, De Vreese, Esser, Aalberg, Reinemann, and Stanyer (2017, 2018) explicitly regard “populism as an expression of political communication”. Salgado and Stavrakakis (2018) held a symposium on *Populist Discourses and Political Communication in Southern Europe* and Engesser, S., Fawzi, N., & Larsson, A. (2017) edited a special issue about “Populist online communication” noting that “there has been relatively little research on populism on the Internet” (p. 1280). Engesse, Fawzi and Larsson identify the concept of “online opportunity structure, which refers to factors inherent to the online media system” (p. 1280) which was particularly relevant for the present study.

Yet little research has been conducted in order to compare populists’ agenda on the specific topics of work and labour. Even if not adopting political communication categories, an important contribution comes from the authors of *The EEAG Report on the European Economy* who took stock of the populists’ economic agenda across countries, thus identifying many common features. According to the EEAG, labour mainly plays a role in immigration, claiming that immigrants compete with natives in the labour market and lower wages while benefiting from the welfare state. Moreover, job losses are conceived as an outcome of international economic integration, then accusing foreign companies of unfair competition (Andersen, T. M., Bertola, G., Driffill, J., Fuest, C., James, H., Sturm, J. E., & UroÅ, B. (2017). *Economic Policy and the Rise of Populism– It’s Not So Simple*. EEAG Report on the European Economy, 50-66. EEAG, 2017).

However, at this stage populists’ rhetoric on work and labour relations is still being framed by scholars just as one component of the parties’ communication strategy and one of the reasons for populism success. Based on the view expressed by Alan Bogg and Mark Freedland (2018), who have examined recent examples of what they call “populism in labour law” (Bogg and Freedland 2018: 1), I argue that work should be taken into account as a fundamental dimension of citizenship, thus connecting political discourse and the representative democracy that builds on it. Indeed, Bogg and Friedman claim that “sustainable democratic institutions in the polity are dependent upon sustainable democratic institutions in the sphere of work and work relations” (Bogg and Freedland 2018: 1). I also proposed this paradigm in my first book on communication of the Italian Jobs Act (Nespoli 2018 a) noting that the first article of the Italian Constitution explicitly defines Italy as a “democratic republic founded on labour”. Moreover, Bogg and Mike Friedland

welcome the essential description given by Jan-Werner Muller of populism as “anti-pluralism” (Bogg and Friedland 2018: 17).

Taking into account all of the above, this article aims to describe how leaders identified as populist frame the specific issue of the labour market on social media in Italy. I analyzed how the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Labour and Economic Development, Luigi Di Maio (Five Star Movement) and the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior Affairs, Matteo Salvini (Northern League) used Twitter and Instagram for communicating labour market and industrial relations issues from the beginning of the electoral campaign to the most recent days. I took the day following the speech given by the President of the Republic Sergio Mattarella on the evening of 31 December 2017, as the date of the beginning of the last electoral campaign. On that occasion, Mattarella turned to the parties that would have been involved in the electoral campaign, asking them to “make the upcoming season more just and sustainable”. In so doing, this article wants to give a contribution in answering the same question posed by Acemoglu when looking at populists’ economic policies in general (2011) yet reformulating it from a rhetorical point of view. In other words, the question is not *why* politicians who adopt populist labour market and industrial relations policies receive electoral support – even if these policies fall short of documentable positive results – but *how* they manage to receive that consensus.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Framework as Rhetoric, Framework as Loci

This research needs a specific theoretical framework in order to pursue its objective. In this sense, I will repeatedly make reference to the notion of a ‘frame’, a word widely employed in a number of social science disciplines⁵. In his famous 1993 article *Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm* Robert Entman argued that “a literature review suggests that framing is often defined casually, with much left to an assumed tacit understanding of reader and researcher” (Entman 1993: 52). One might also note that the word ‘frame’ is used loosely in English as a metaphor to denote a vague concept, which can

⁵ This is the case when framing theory is adopted for media representation analysis, in that it is argued that the way the news is reported can influence the way the audience interprets it. This theory then moves away from some approaches, among others agenda setting and priming theory, in that frame analysis prioritises *the way* discourse is represented. In other words, the main question no longer is: “Which topics are we led to believe in?” but “How are we encouraged to interpret a given question?” and “How should we think of a certain topic?”. This point was made by McQuail (1983 [2005]).

be summarised as follows: the definition of a situation considering a number of relevant aspects.

Framing theory was mainly construed in the field of sociology starting from the 1974 book, *Frame Analysis. An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, by Erving Goffman that suggested that individuals would be able to constantly understand the world only thanks to interpretation schemes, which the author defines as ‘primary frameworks’ (Goffman 1974: 24). The notion soon developed so as to gain a cognitive dimension and it has been employed in behavioral economics, and finally defined as an elementary pre-linguistic tool, a ‘conceptual metaphor’, by George Lakoff, who invented cognitive linguistics (1980).

When integrated into embodied, cognition-related theories, the framing theory sees cognition as consisting of a limited number of universal faculties and experiences. Human memory records perception and motorial experiences along with their emotional effects, to make it possible to compare them with similar experiences, establishing commonality and identifying chronological dimensions. In terms of cognition, narration, framing as a metaphor, and blending theory are all the result of analogical activities combining recorded experiences and feelings across space and time⁶.

One might already have noticed that “metaphor”, “metonymy”, “narration”, “emotions” – which are now employed to denote realities in textual and cognitive terms – are part of rhetoric terminology. Yet, as Jim Kuypers wrote in his article about *Framing Analysis from a Rhetorical Perspective* (2010), the literature rarely associates “framing theory” with rhetoric. According to him, “since the mid-1990s the majority of framing research has derived from a social scientific orientation” (2010: 286).

Rhetoric was given fresh momentum in social and political settings following World War II. As for Europe⁷, new rhetoric drew on Chaim Perelman’s and Lucye Olbrechts-Tyteca’s research, which aimed to develop argumentation theory, describing how human beings apply reasoning to all those knowledge domains where judgments involve values rather than algebra (Perelman, Olbrechts-Tyteca 1958 [2001]). In their essay entitled *Act and Person in Argument* (1951) the authors already argued that the link between man and action is the most important relation of coexistence that drives the interpretation of discourse in domains where values are at stake, such as politics and law. The

⁶ For a more detailed examination of the authors who contributed to defining the notion of a “frame”, see Nespoli 2018, 4-21.

⁷ In the US, it was Kenneth Burke who favoured this revival, as it made use of rhetoric in a broader semiotic sense, considering the former as an element of human communication and describing signification and communication as interactive elements aimed at forming meaning, a sort of a persuasive continuum.

orator thus becomes the vehicle for a “logic of preference”. Values commonly attributed to an act transfer to the orator, while values already associated with the orator’s *ethos* can conversely be applied to an act. Of course, reputation is defined by the tension between the orator’s character and his/her acts.

Even if criticized for the postulation of the ideal concept of a universal audience, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca did not neglect the connection between personal preferences and emotions. That is the link stressed almost 30 years later by cognitive linguistics studies inaugurated by George Lakoff, who began to integrate the concept of a rationality of argumentation with the principle of an inseparable emotional experience, which found the perception of what is preferable and what is not (2004, 2008).

As I argued in my book (Nespoli 2018a), and as I summarised in a recent article (2018b), the framing theory recalled by Lakoff can then be interpreted as a modern version of Aristotelian topics integrating emotional connotations. Prospects, analogy and psychological conditions are all elements forming part of framing. If considered through a rhetoric perspective, framing has a meaning similar to that of “topic” in rhetoric. Simply put, a frame can be regarded as a set of argumentative premises, hence the framing process is similar to classic *inventio*, that is the methodical search for commonplaces, premises, fundamental values and their hierarchies (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1958 [2001, 90])⁸.

In consideration of the above, proper academic research entails employing framing to refer to an inferential structure inherent to language that is part of speakers’ culture and personal experience. Therefore, in Kuypers’ words, “framing is the process whereby communicators act to construct a particular point of view that encourages the facts of a given situation to be viewed in a particular manner, with some facts made more noticeable than others” (2010: 300). Frames can then be discussed even after the limitations of investigation on mental reality are taken into account. As Hank Johnston pointed out in 1995 “while we cannot see the brain synapses firing, we can approximate an organization of concepts and experience that indicates how a situation is to be interpreted” (234). Then we must be aware that “there are no shared criteria about how to do this, nor are there rules to ascertain whether a frame has been correctly interpreted” (235).

⁸ Although without acknowledging a degree of continuity with new rhetoric, this is the trend that is being currently reported and that is nurturing a research field attempting to bring together rhetoric and cognitive sciences (cfr. Jack J. (2010), What are Neurorhetorics?, in *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, vol. 40, n. 5, 405-410; Calabrese S. (2013), *Retorica e scienze neurocognitive*, Carocci). As summarised by Venier, place-related discourse is important in that it “suggests how to speculate on the omnipresence nature of a modern topic (which is yet to be elaborated). This would give reflections on rhetoric new momentum” (Venier 2013, 654).

In so doing, Johnston reminds us of another feature of cognitive models that, from a rhetorical point of view, brings together frames and rhetoric. Indeed, they are both part of reasoning and argumentation: “all models of cognitive processes share some form of hierarchical organization.” (235). One can then describe what I call “basic” or “fundamental” frames as commonly shared premises and values on which more specific scenarios progressively build on. The concept of a “frame” therefore gains its heuristic potential both by its synthetic power and its descriptive quality.

It should now be clear that, although there is no direct scientific relationship between Perelman and Lakoff, the integration of their theories becomes useful when applied to the analysis of contemporary political communication. The question about how we apply reasoning to values, adjusted by the cognitive perspective of an “emotional rationality” is suitable to deal with the observed ineffectiveness of plain argumentation that gained the attention of the scientific community after the affirmation of “post-truth”, closely linked to Donald Trump’s win and the so-called Brexit vote⁹. The *ethos* of the strong leader against elites and the decadence of the authority card can be interpreted as rhetorical features reflecting the characteristics of populism mentioned above (anti-elitism, anti-pluralism, and recurrent simplification).

This framework, when applied to the study of populist communication, has much in common with the perspective adopted by De Vreese, C. H., Esser, F., Aalberg, T., Reinemann, C., & Staney, J. (2018). First of all, by considering populism from the communication perspective, populism is a matter of degrees rather than a matter of ideological families (see also Bogg and Friedland 2018: 17). Moreover, one cannot “look at the effects of populist communication in isolation, but consideration should be given to the individual and contextual conditions that render some individuals more susceptible to populist messages than others” (De Vreese, Esser, Aalberg, Reinemann, Staney 2018: 11). That is a fundamental assumption of rhetoric. I also agree that populism is not only focused on the underlying “set of basic assumptions about the world” but in particular on “the language that unwittingly expresses them” (Hawkins, Riding, and Mudde 2012: 3 quoted in De Vreese, Esser, Aalberg, Reinemann, Staney 2018: 3). Yet focusing on frames as rhetorical loci, I always link expressions with the basic assumption about what is preferable and what is not. Indeed, from a new rhetorical perspective, it is hard to separate concepts and linguistic expressions. Following Perelman, I also argue that it is complicated to distinguish between leader characteristics and discourse itself, as De Vreese et al. and Engesser, S.,

⁹ See Interest over time on Google Trends for populism, post truth - Worldwide, 2004 - present - <https://g.co/trends/tuH3T>

Fawzi, N., & Larsson, A. do. (1280). The emotions spurred by language are incorporated into concepts and what the orator says and does directly transfer values to the orator or, vice versa, to his acts.

2.2 Why Social Media?

In this study I have chosen to focus on social media communication. The main reason for this is that social media allow one to quantitatively analyse frame usage and ways of self-reference on a large set of texts. Indeed, social media enable one to keep the integrity of a text while analysing it (see also Hank Johnston 1995: 200). Moreover, I underlined aspects of populist communication that are made evident by social media communication. These aspects stand at the crossroads between three aspects of the “online opportunity structure” described by Engesser, Fawzi and Larsson. The first aspect is disintermediation: the “circumvention of traditional opinion leaders” that the online environment frequently allows for (one-step flow of communication, Bennett & Manheim, 2006; Vaccari & Valeriani, 2015, quoted in Engesser, Fawzi and Larsson 2017). The second aspect is the homophily Internet is supposed to enhance, according to Colleoni, Rozza, & Arvidsson, 2014, p. 318, quoted in Engesser, Fawzi and Larsson 2017: 1284). The last and most important aspect regards the populist actors and their charismatic character. According to Engesser, Fawzi and Larsson, Internet “provides the populist actor with opportunities for personalized communication” (1285) and, in particular, as Lee and Jang (2013, quoted in Engesser, Fawzi and Larsson 2017: 1285) demonstrated, people perceive stronger interpersonal contact on social media rather than on news websites.

3. Methodology

3.1. Overview

After having collected social media data, I have defined a set of keywords and topics suitable for circumscribing the topic of labour and industrial relations. I deliberately set the labour and industrial relations issues perimeter as a broad field, including aspects regarding income, income support policies, welfare, taxation on enterprises and workers and regulation. As a preliminary frame analysis, I read all the posts collected and manually tagged those concerning labour issues. The following step consisted of data analysis aimed to lay the foundations for the following rhetorical-framing analysis, providing the general context for the use of the two social media tools by the two leaders. I elaborated the data in order to draw various visualizations for number of posts, engagement and timeline trends. In consideration of the results of this first

analysis I chose to focus on Instagram when conducting my rhetorical-framing analysis.

3.2. Data Collection and Processing

Thanks to the collaboration with the Italian start-up Catchy Big Data, I was provided with two datasets of Instagram posts and tweets from Luigi Di Maio and Matteo Salvini, from January the 1st to November the 13th. Data were collected using Instagram and Twitter API. The collection process resulted in two separate datasets for the two social media. Retweets made by the leaders were excluded in order to focus on messages directly attributable to them. I found 311 RTs made by Di Maio and 100 RTs made by Salvini. The two datasets are composed as follows:

Table 1. Overview of collected data by dataset: number of leader's posts by social media.

	Twitter		Instagram	
	User	Posts	User	Posts
Di Maio	@luigidimaio	229	@luigi.di.maio	644
Salvini	@matteosalvinimi	3947	@matteosalviniofficial	1123

Table 2. Sample from Twitter dataset

created_at	user.screen_name	Text	retweet_count
1/1/2018	Matteosalvinimi	Sala strapiena con la Lega stasera a Bormio. Dai che è la volta buona, ho incontrato una marea di gente che non votava più e il #4marzovotaLega. Anche #Gino!	135
2/1/2018	Luigidimaio	Grande tristezza per la scomparsa di Ferdinando Imposimato, magistrato simbolo della lotta alle mafie e alla corruzione, uomo che ha sempre combattuto per la	815

		giustizia. Ci mancherà tanto. Alla sua famiglia va tutta la mia vicinanza. https://t.co/sfrAqIpG6Z	
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Table 3. Sample from Instagram dataset.

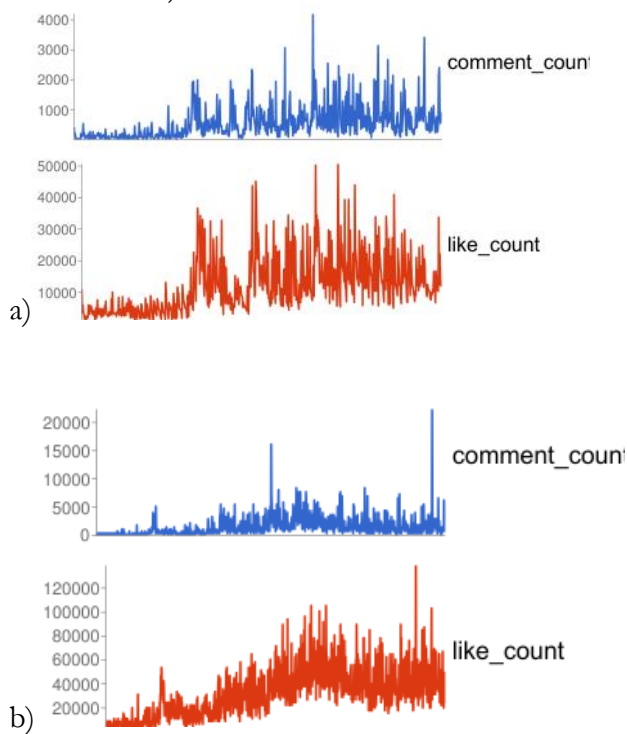
take n_at	Tim e	user_user name	caption_te xt	tags	commen t_count	like_c ount
1/1/ 2018	19:3 1:14	matteosalvi niofficial	Sala strapiena stasera a #Bormio! Dai che è la volta buona, ho incontrato una marea di gente che non votava più ma il #4marzov otaLega Anche #Gino	['Bormio', 4marzovotaLega', Gino']	375	6544
1/1/ 2018	4:03: 55	luigi.di.mai o	Al #circoma ssimo con un vigile d'eccezion e 😊👏 #BuonAn no #giancarl omagalli #Roma	['circomassimo','BuonAnno','gi ancarlomagalli','Roma']	129	3627

In consideration of the more similar quantitative use of Instagram by the two leaders, and taking into account the fact that the texts in Instagram posts are

longer than those on Twitter, I opted for the rhetorical-framing analysis of Instagram posts.

With regards to reactions obtained by social media posts, during a preliminary data analysis I noticed that the positive relationship between the number of likes and the number of comments on Instagram was not always verified. This observation suggested treating the two kinds of reactions separately.

Figure 3. Comments and reactions to Instagram posts published by Di Maio a) and Salvini b)



3.3 Preliminary Frame Analysis

According to the definition of a “frame” I provided in the theoretical framework, every time the presence of a frame is assumed, we must therefore be able to describe it as a set of entities placed in an ideal space and linked by interaction, even if those entities, spaces and relationships are not explicitly mentioned. In my analysis I focused only on fundamental frames, trying to identify those commonplaces and values explicitly mentioned or implied by the text. Obviously, the first step of my analysis had to deal with the identification of text related to work and labour issues, which meant conducting a qualitative

analysis to detect texts relevant to the research question. I thus went through all the Instagram and Twitter posts I collected, selecting those making reference to the world of work and labour. As mentioned above, I deliberately set the labour and industrial relations issues perimeter as a broad field, including aspects regarding income, income support policies, welfare, taxation and regulation for enterprises and workers. As Johnston affirmed in his 1995 work: “An understanding of the texts as a whole is necessary to place the micro-analysis into context” (221). The texts concerned various types of political actions and policies. Moreover, I took into account texts where a single word or a sentence referred to labour and industrial issues. In so doing, I identified the following macro-frames:

- visits to workers or entrepreneurs in plants or workplaces;
- measures for expenditure cuts;
- expressions of the mission or vision of the party;
- forms of income support;
- retirement-age-adjusting policies;
- prohibitions concerning technical aspects in the employment contract or specific working time;
- repeal of previous deregulation measures regarding employment contracts;
- conditioning of incentives granted to employers/companies;
- provisions for less red tape;
- tax cuts;
- the budget package;
- restoration or implementation of public employment services;
- industrial relations for crisis management;
- institutional forums involving stakeholders from certain productive sectors;
- international summits/visits where Italian firms or industries are involved;
- measures for contrasting counterfeiting;
- measures for tackling corruption;
- trade agreements;
- public investments;
- hires in public employment;
- public funding for local services;
- politician and technician teaming;
- social welfare measures;
- education reforms concerning school-work alternance;
- labour inspection provisions;

- establishment of new institutions;
- international cooperation for foreign local development;

In those texts, labour and production issues are not necessarily addressed by specific policies: in many cases, the author frames an area of intervention and a political purpose. I then tagged selected texts where specific policies or missions were named, identifying the following:

- “Dignity Decree”: this is the name given to the labour market reform conditioning entrepreneurs’ incentives and setting advertising prohibition for the gambling industry.
- Moving beyond the “Fornero law” (more recently “Quota 100”): it identifies the intention of amending the pension reform on the part of the former Minister of Labour Elsa Fornero in 2012. The Fornero Law raised the retirement age and repealed old-age pensions. People’s age and years of contributions should total 100, allowing them to retire earlier.
- Repeal of annuities: the proposed repeal of the annuity for members of parliament.
- “Gold-plated pension” cut: a reduction of the so-called 'gold-plated pensions' (over €5,000 per month).
- Basic income: a proposed scheme for a universal basic income including a reform of public job centers (funding included in the 2019 Budget Law).
- “Basic pension”: a proposed scheme for raising minimum pensions (funding included in the 2019 Budget Law).
- “People's budget package”: this expression is included in the 2019 Budget Law and refers to the basic income and so-called Quota 100 as pillars.
- “Expense meter” and “income meter”: the proposed repeal of the so-called “spesometro” (literally “expense meter”) and so-called “redditometro” (literally “income meter”) considered to be oppressive tools for monitoring enterprises and the self-employed.
- “#Italiansfirst”: the hashtag used during Salvini’s electoral campaign and repeatedly over the first months of the populist government in order to stress the need to give priority to Italian workers and firms.
- Flat tax: a proposed system applying a single tax rate for all the income levels (more recently a dual tax with rates ranging from 15% to 20%).
- Self-employed flat-tax: 15% single tax rate for the self-employed, included in the 2019 Budget Law.

- Bolkstein directive revision: the intention of defending seaside businesses from the effect of the so-called Bolkstein directive, which regulates services within the EU internal market.
- “Sunday closing”: a proposed ban on Sunday shopping in major commercial centers.
- Blockchain Partnership Initiative: Italy taking part in a 27 States cooperation for the establishment of a European Blockchain Services Infrastructure.
- Bekaert negotiations: consultation round at the Ministry of Economic Development aimed to solve the Bekaert industrial crisis.
- Alitalia consultation round: a meeting at the Ministry of Economic Development aimed to solve Alitalia’s industrial crisis.
- Whirlpool consultation round: a meeting at the Ministry of Economic Development aimed to solve Whirlpool’s industrial crisis.
- Consultation on Riders: consultation at the Ministry of Economic Development to promote the dialogue between on-demand economy workers and food delivery companies.
- Talks on Ilva: regular meetings at the Ministry of Economic Development aimed to solve Ilva’s industrial crisis.
- Wage Guarantee Fund: restoration of the Extraordinary Wage Guarantee Fund (“Cassa integrazione guadagni straordinaria”) in case of a business shutdown (a case abolished by the previous labour market reform, the so-called jobs Act).
- “5G Italy” table: consultation round to liberalize the fifth-generation mobile spectrum.
- Ethical code for school-work alternance: a proposed revision of the school-work alternance scheme included in the previous reform of education, the so-called “Buona Scuola” (literally “the Good School”) by defining an ethical code for enterprises involved in this scheme.
- Observatory on disability: establishment of a public observatory on disability, in order to integrate people with disability into the labour market.
- Public banks: proposed establishment of a public funding institute aimed to fund business and start-ups in strategic industries.
- “Contract for families”: a package of measures to support families by social welfare.
- “Corruption wipe out”: draft law, also translated as “bribe destroyer”¹⁰ into English, aimed to ban people convicted for corruption from

¹⁰ Italy moves against corruption with 'bribe destroyer' bill, www.reuters.com, September 6th 2018.

holding public office. It was used to point out corruption as one of the main factors preventing foreign investments.

I then associated macro frames with policy names, as indicated below, in order to assess how many texts were linked to the various policies. Afterwards, I matched quantitative data about policy/actions macro-frames with quantitative data for texts explicitly mentioning a specific policy.

Policy/ action type	Policy names
Visit	
Expenditure cut	Abolition of annuities and reduction of gold-plated pensions
Mission/vision	#italiansfirst
Income support	basic income, basic pension, wage Guarantee Fund
Retirement age adjusting	overcoming the Fornero law, #italiansfirst
Prohibition	dignity decree, Sunday closing
Deregulation repeal	dignity decree
Incentives conditioning	dignity decree
Less red tape	“Expense meter” and “income meter” abolishment, Bolkstein directive revision
industrial relations	Alitalia table, Bekaert table, riders table, Whirlpool table, Ilva table
Tax cut	flat tax, self-employed flat tax
Budget package	people's budget package
Public employment services	basic income
International summit/visit	
Investments	Blockchain Partnership Initiative
Social welfare	people's budget package, contract for families
Funding	public bank

Education reform	ethical code for school-work alternance scheme
Institutional forum	Blockchain Partnership Initiative, 5G Italy
Trade agreement	
Public employment	
Contrasting corruption	corrupted wipe out
Labour inspection	
Contrasting counterfeiting	
New institutions	observatory on disability
International cooperation	

During the last stage of the analysis I read all the tagged Instagram posts once again, focusing on the fundamental frames underpinning the rhetoric of the text and interpreting the preferred nature of proposed policies/action. I finally grouped the rhetorical frames as follows:

People’s interest vs privileges, waste of resources, or the powers that be:

in this frame “people” or “citizens” are pitted against political or financial elites, also depicted as the powers that be. Elites are privileged and responsible for wasting financial resources. This frame applies to: expenditure cuts, mission/vision, income support, retirement age adjusting.

Example: “Now the State doesn’t care about protecting those who have privileges and thinks about protecting the weakest. You can cry and rattle as much as you want, but we will not go back. We repeal your annuities” (Luigi Di Maio, 6/29/2018).

Job stability/employment: in this frame people live in uncertainty because of unemployment and precariousness. Unemployment and precariousness undermine opportunities to foresee the future. Hence, unemployment and precariousness also account as the main causes for low fertility rates among Italian people. This frame applies to: prohibition, deregulation repeal, incentives conditioning, industrial relations, tax cuts, the budget package, public employment services, public employment.

Example: “The Decree Dignity tackles precariousness to allow Italians, especially the younger ones, to start planning a future. That is, it allows you to

create those conditions that are the basis for doing business, to boost consumption and to create a virtuous circle” (Luigi Di Maio, 7/18/2018).

Made in Italy/entrepreneurship: in this frame Italian workers, the self-employed, entrepreneurs and firms as a whole produce goods of higher quality. Italian entrepreneurs are courageous and their activity must be protected on international trade, by bureaucracy and taxation. This frame applies to: less red tape, tax cuts, international summits/visits, investments, trade agreements, contrasting counterfeit.

Example: “Our entrepreneurs, artisans and farmers must be defended to the bitter end. I leave to others Cambodian rice and South American meat. I want to eat and drink ITALIAN!” (Matteo Salvini, 8/13/2018).

Simplicity: in this frame, the everyday life of Italian firms is hampered by European or national regulations and high taxation. Less red tape and tax rate cuts are good. This frame applies to: less red tape, tax cuts, the budget package.

Example: “Here at #ConfCommercio2018, with those who produce and resist! Traders, the self-employed, and businesses need fiscal peace, a flat tax, the elimination of the expense meter, the income meter, less bureaucracy. This will be our commitment” (Matteo Salvini, 6/7/2018).

Dignity vs poverty: in this frame the dignity of the human being and quality of life is a matter of income. Income has to be supported by the State regardless of one’s working conditions. This frame applies to: prohibition, incentives conditioning, industrial relations, tax cuts, the budget package, social welfare, income support.

Example: “The goal of the future 5 Star Movement government is to give a "basic pension" to those who are below the poverty line. Restoring dignity among the weak in our society is a top priority” (Luigi Di Maio, 1/19/2018).

Exploitation/profit: in this frame companies, in particular non-national ones, exploit Italian workers by delocalizing their plant and enforcing collective dismissals or pursuing profits. Companies also generate negative externalities that impoverish people. This frame applies to: visits, income support, prohibitions, deregulation repeal, incentives conditioning, industrial relations, labour inspections.

Example: “It’s time to say ‘enough’ to those ‘grabber’ that exploit our young people. We will no longer be overwhelmed by those companies that take incentives in Italy and then relocate their headquarters to other nations by firing their workers” (Luigi Di Maio, 7/17/2018).

Right to pension: in this frame people who have worked a certain number of years or have reached a certain age have the right to retire. The right to retire is a matter of social justice and generational equity and is linked to the right to work of younger people. People have social roles: old-age people have the right to live as grandparents, young people have the right to work building their future securely. This frame applies to: retirement age adjusting.

Example: “We promised you a State where young people can find work and grandparents act as grandparents. The Fornero law is passé: with the #Peoplesbudgetpackage at the age of 62, after decades of work, one can finally retire” (Luigi Di Maio, 10/31/218).

Generational turnover: in this frame there is a strong correlation between retirements and job openings for young people. Turnover in jobs is a matter of age. This frame is then frequently linked to the ‘right to pension’ frame and to the ‘job stability/employment’ frame. This frame applies to: retirement age adjusting.

Example: “#STOPFORNERO. With Quota 100, we will give back the right to retirement and life to 400 thousand people, freeing up those jobs for young people. We do not have a magic wand but, as promised, we will dismount the injustices committed against Italians by those who preceded us” (Matteo Salvini, 19/15/2018).

Innovation: in this frame scientific and technological development is in itself good and is related to future prosperity. This frame applies to: visits, investments.

Example: “These #Rallies across Italy are making me discover the extraordinary excellence of this country. Small companies that deal with artificial intelligence, which have very high standards of technological innovation, hand-drawing the future of this country” (Luigi Di Maio, 1/3/2018).

Nationality: in this frame Italians always have priority in benefiting from politics and economics. Rights are linked to citizenship. Immigration and Europe hampered Italians’ interests. This frame applies to: less red tape.

Example: “The Europe of bankers, the one based on mass immigration and precariousness, continues to threaten and insult the Italians and their government? Don’t worry, in six months they will be fired by 500 million voters! We go ahead. #Italiansfirst” (Matteo Salvini, 10/6/2018).

Activity: in this frame being active and looking for a job is good. People must work or look for a job. The State is the only mentioned subject entitled to

nudge and guide people on the labour market. This frame applies to: income support, public employment services.

Example: “Basic income is aimed first and foremost to reorganize employment centers. [...] Because when one of these young (or less young) people looking for a job enters an employment center, he must be able to find an employee who shakes his hand and tells him: "together we will find a way to re-enter the labour market so you can smile and be happy again"” (Luigi Di Maio, 9/12/2018).

Welfare state: in this frame the State must support families financially. The State is the main actor when granting people’s welfare. This frame applies to: expenditure cuts, income support, social welfare, public employment, new institutions.

Example: “We need to go back to over 6.5% of GDP in public health spending, increase investment in prevention and digitization, increase the fund for those who are not self-sufficient and invest in staff (just think about nurses: the ratio is 6.1 per one thousand inhabitants, against the EU average of 8.4). It's time to say enough, the state must take care of people.” (Luigi Di Maio 2/15/2018)

Common interest: in this frame workers and entrepreneurs work side by side pursuing a common goal that is quality of production. The agreement between workers and entrepreneurs increases Italy’s local production, which is then regarded as an excellence in the world. This frames applies to: visit, prohibition, industrial relations.

Example: “I certainly wanted to do something by merging the Ministry of Economic Development and the Ministry of Labour. I wanted to put companies and those who work for them together [...] because they do not have to stand against each other, but today they team up and brought the #madeinItaly into the world.” (Luigi Di Maio, 6/21/2018)

Meritocracy: in this frame people who succeed in achieving best results deserve more opportunities. This frame applies to: social welfare, funding.

Example: “the female employment rate is still too low compared to that of men (in Southern Italy 21.9% of women do not work) and there are still profound differences in terms of pay and career opportunities compared to male colleagues. The road to a true equality at work is still a long one and depends on one aspect: meritocracy” (Luigi Di Maio, 3/8/2018).

Sustainability: in this frame, production and jobs creations must be carried out taking into account the consequences on the environment. Production can

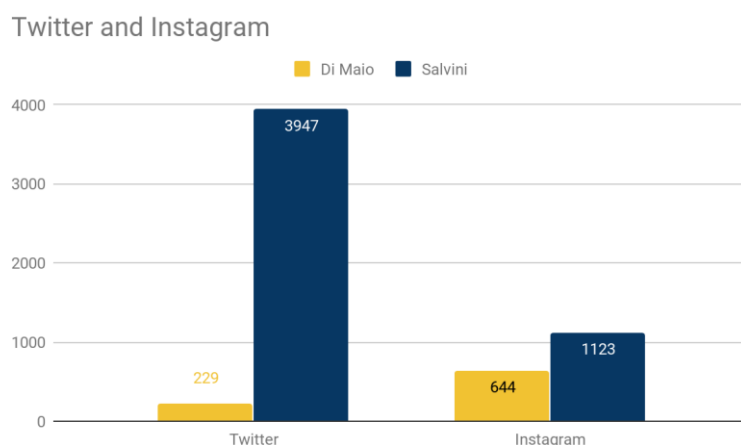
and must preserve the environment. The State can invest in the green economy in order to create green jobs. This frames applies to: visits, investments, public employment.

Example: “The governments that in recent years have encouraged overbuilding, that have not moved a finger against hydrogeological instability, or have not started a serious renovation program, are not only responsible for the environmental destruction, but also for the enormous economic loss. [...] We will show them that we can create hundreds of thousands of jobs by focusing on renewable sources, energy redevelopment, waste recycling, as well as on tackling against hydrogeological instability and land reclamation”. (Luigi Di Maio, 2/21/2018)

4. Data Analysis

4.1. Volumes and Trends

Figure 1. Overview of collected data by dataset: number of leader’s posts by social media



Different strategies in the use of the two social media emerged when comparing the volumes of the posts published by the two leaders. For 17 times, Salvini published more tweets than Di Maio and twice as many Instagram posts as the Five Star Movement leader (fig.1). The situation is even clearer when social media posts are looked at over time, resulting in Di Maio sometimes overcoming Salvini only by the number of posts published daily on Instagram (fig. 2, fig. 3). One may also note the increasing use of Instagram by Salvini over time.

As mentioned above, in consideration of the more similar quantitative use of Instagram by the two leaders and taking into account that the texts on Instagram posts are longer than those on Twitter, I have chosen to proceed with a rhetorical-framing analysis only on Instagram data.

Figure 2. Leaders' number of tweets by date

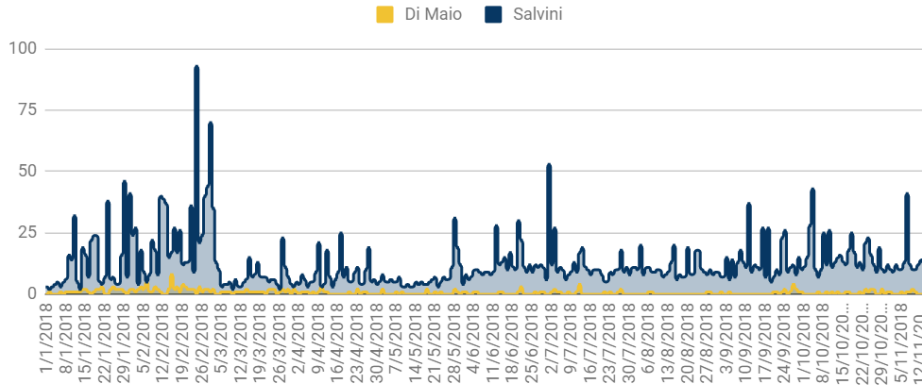
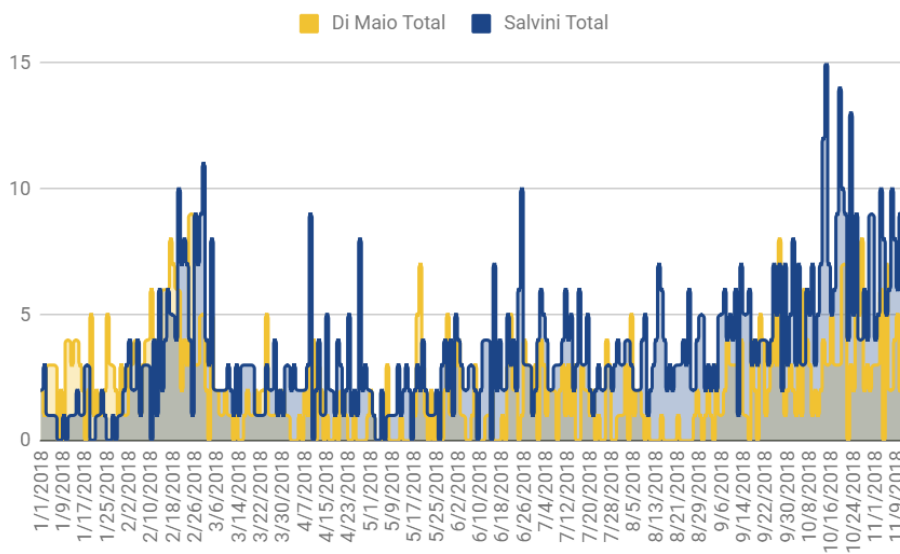


Figure 3. Leaders' number of posts on Instagram by date



Taking into account only the posts related to labour and industrial issues, Salvini tweeted 354 times, while Di Maio made only 36 tweets. The reverse is true on Instagram, where Di Maio posted 185 messages and Salvini just 60. However, in percentage terms, Di Maio still shows a higher percentage of

tweets and posts compared to Salvini. This trend might confirm one's expectation, as Di Maio officially acts as the Minister of Labour and Industry, while Salvini is the Interior Minister.

Figure 5. Total number of posts on Twitter a) and Instagram b) by leader.

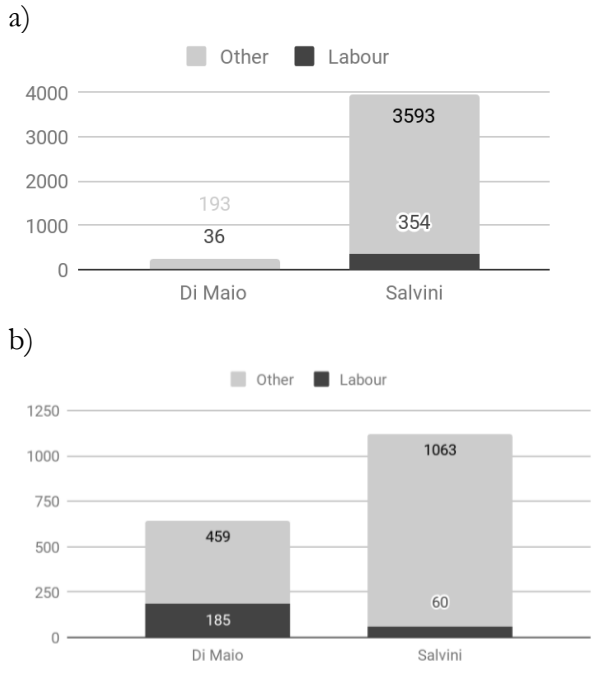


Figure 6. Percentage of tweets by Di Maio (a) and Salvini (b)

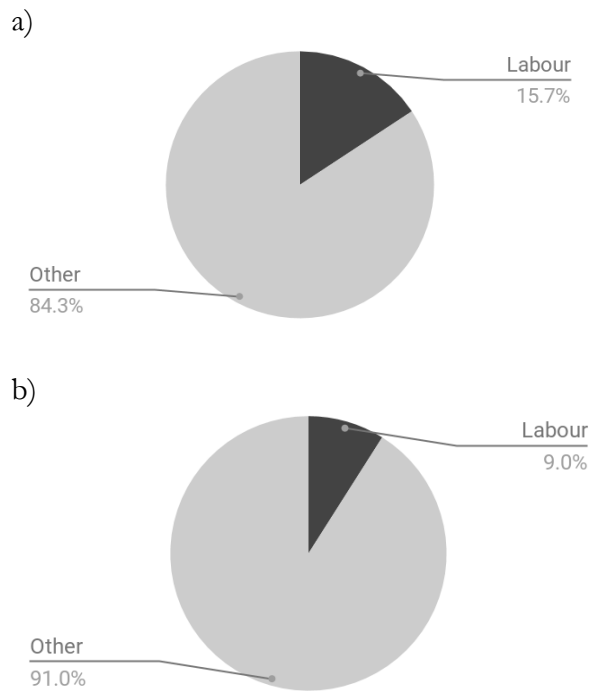


Figure 7. Percentage of posts on Instagram by Di Maio (a) and Salvini (b)



As regards the distribution of labour and industrial topic over time, the visits show that Salvini tweeted more intensively during the first two months of the electoral campaign and in autumn 2018 (fig.8). This trend follows that of non-labour-related posts by Salvini (fig. 9). As for Di Maio, this correlation is not as clear as in Salvini's case, due to a low number of tweets (fig.10).

Figure 8. Daily number of labour-related tweets by leader

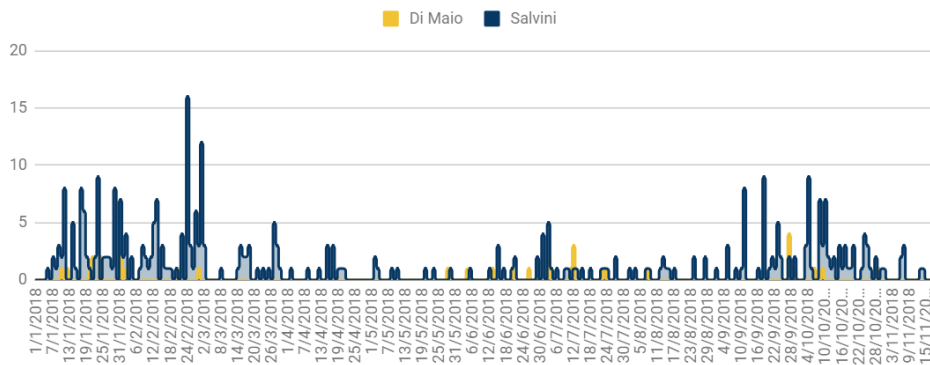
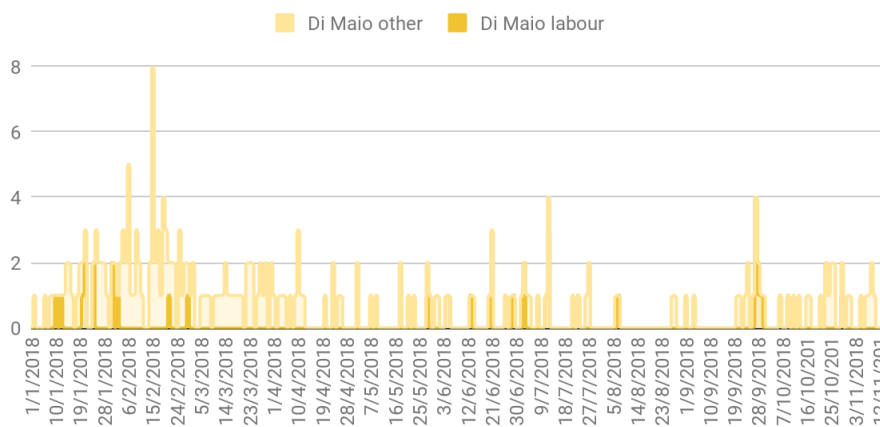


Figure 9. Daily number of Salvini's tweets by topic.



Figure 10. Daily number of Di Maio's tweets by topic.



On Instagram, the opposite trend takes place. Di Maio posted more on labour and industrial issues not only during the first two months of the electoral campaign and in autumn 2018, but also following the approval of the so-called “Dignity Decree” (June and July 2018, fig.11). This trend does not clearly overlap with that of non-labour related posts from Di Maio (fig. 12), an aspect which is clearer in the case of Salvini (fig.13).

Figure 11. Daily number of labour-related Instagram posts by leader.

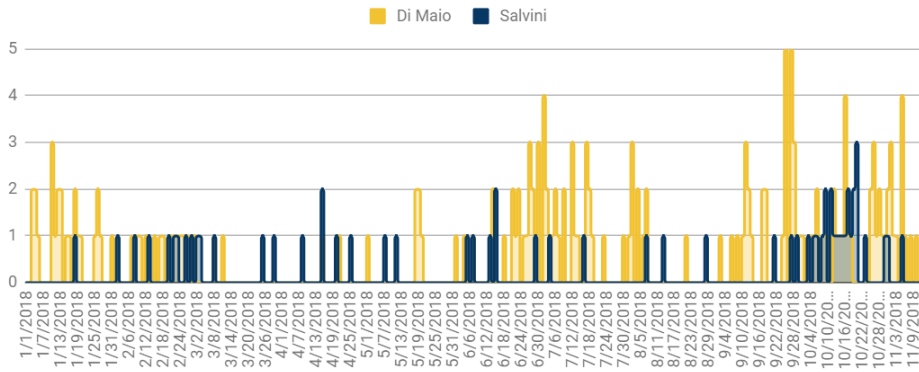


Figure 12. Daily number of Di Maio's Instagram posts by topic

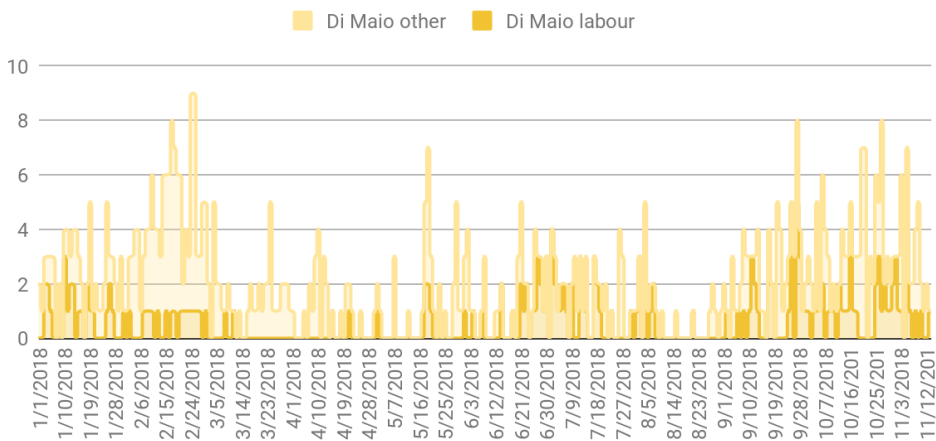
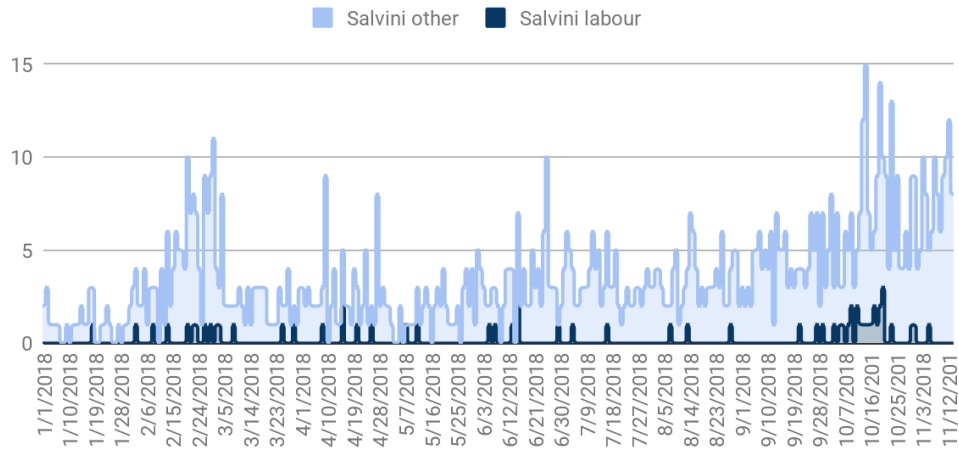


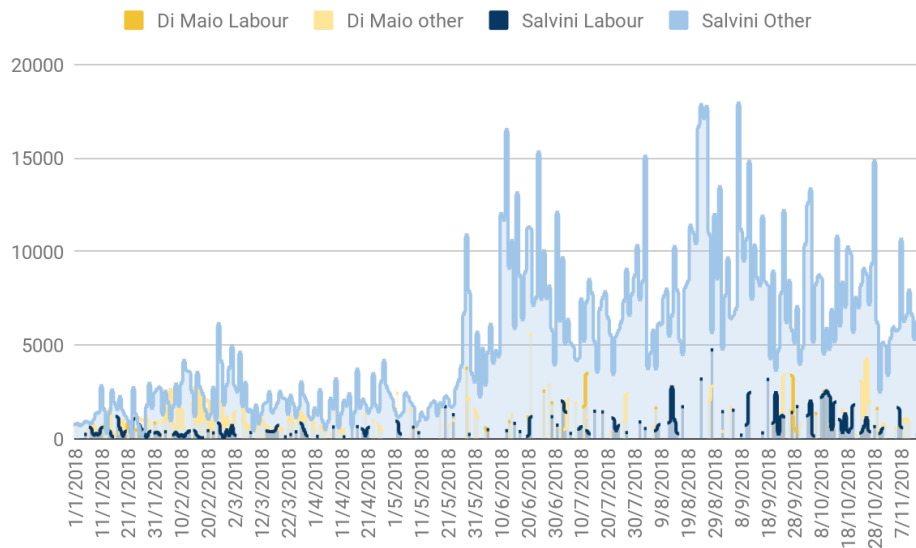
Figure 13. Daily number of Salvini's Instagram posts by topic.



4.2. Engagement and Reactions

As for Twitter, the number of visits over time reveals that, due to the higher number of daily tweets, Salvini received far more retweets (RT) than Di Maio for tweets not related to labour and industrial issues (fig. 15).

Figure 14. Daily RT by leader and topic



Despite the fact that reactions for labour related tweets seem to be quite the same for the two leaders (fig. 16), the average number of retweets (RT) per

tweet shows an opposite trend for the two leaders. Even if he had tweeted less, Di Maio would have collected on average a higher number of RT per tweet. In particular, his tweets related to labour and industrial issues show on average a slightly higher number of RT than those dedicated to other themes (+27%). Conversely, Salvini tweeted far more frequently, but his tweets show a lower number of RTs. In particular, his tweets related to labour and industrial issues indicate a 49% decrease in the number of RT as compared to tweets on other themes (fig. 16).

Figure 15. Daily RT by leader and topic

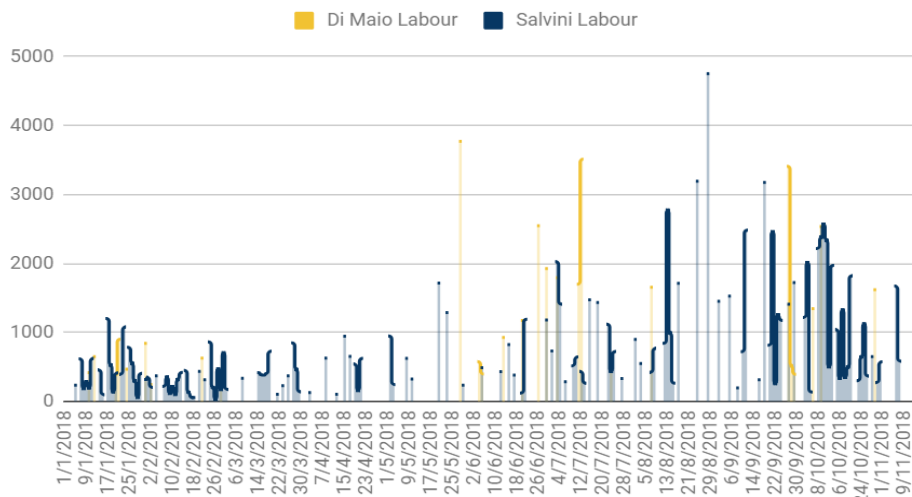
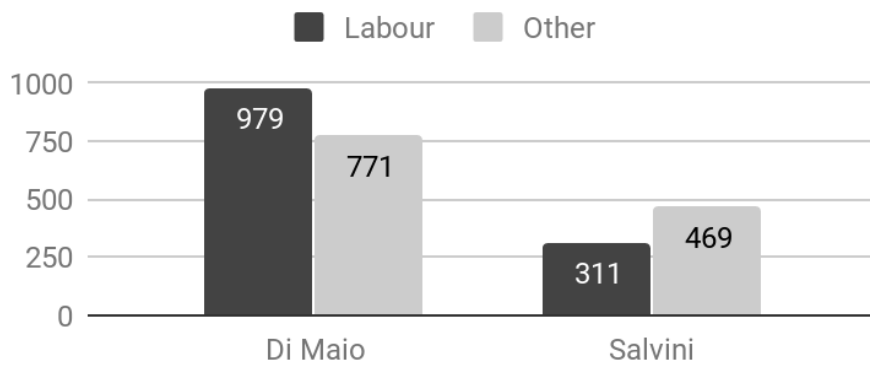


Figure 16. Average RT per tweet by leader and topic.



This state of affairs becomes clearer when comparing the reactions organised by topic over time. While Salvini receives many reactions for posts unrelated to labour and industrial issues (fig. 17), Di Maio sometimes is given more attention for tweets related to labour issues (fig. 18).

Figure 17. Daily RT by leader and topic.

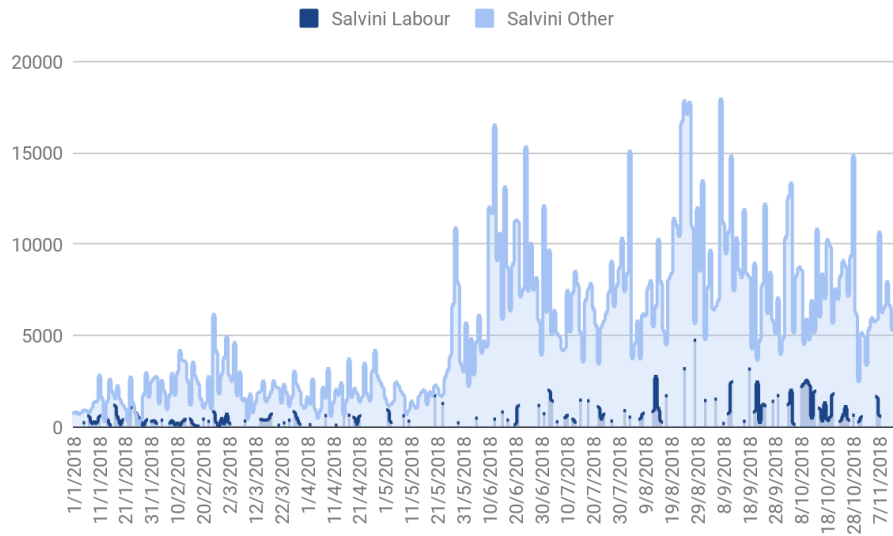
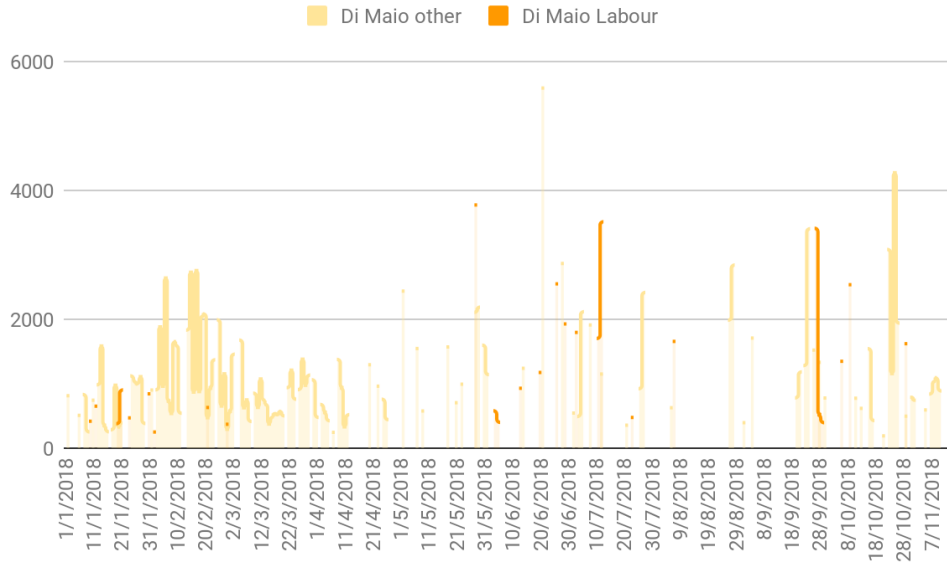
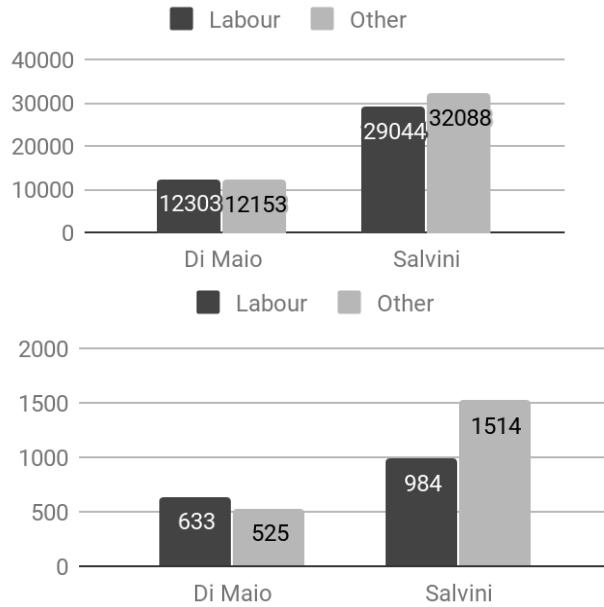


Figure 18. Daily RT by leader and topic



As mentioned in the methodology section, I treated Instagram reactions (comments and likes) separately. Instagram posts are much more liked than commented on. Salvini dominates in terms of average reactions on posts, whether or not related to labour and industrial issues (fig. 19). Conversely, Di Maio receives more comments and likes for posts on labour and industrial issues. Salvini receives fewer likes, reporting a 46% decrease in the number of comments on labour issues.

Figure 19. Average reactions per Instagram post: likes (sx) and comments (dx)



The views over time reveal that Salvini always receives more daily reactions than Di Maio for posts not related to labour and industrial issues, both in terms of likes (fig. 20) and comments (fig. 21). However, reactions for labour related posts report similar values both in terms of likes (fig. 20) and comments (fig. 21) for Di Maio and Salvini. Conversely, Di Maio reports the same number of reactions, both for posts related to labour issues and others and in relation to likes (fig.22) and comments (fig.23).

Figure 20. Daily likes on Instagram posts by leader and topic.

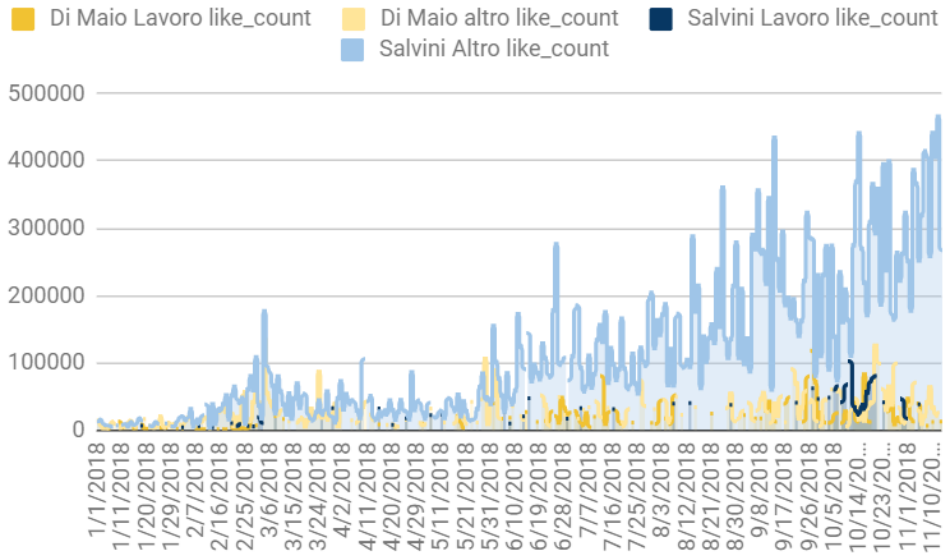


Figure 21. Daily comments on Instagram posts by leader and topic.

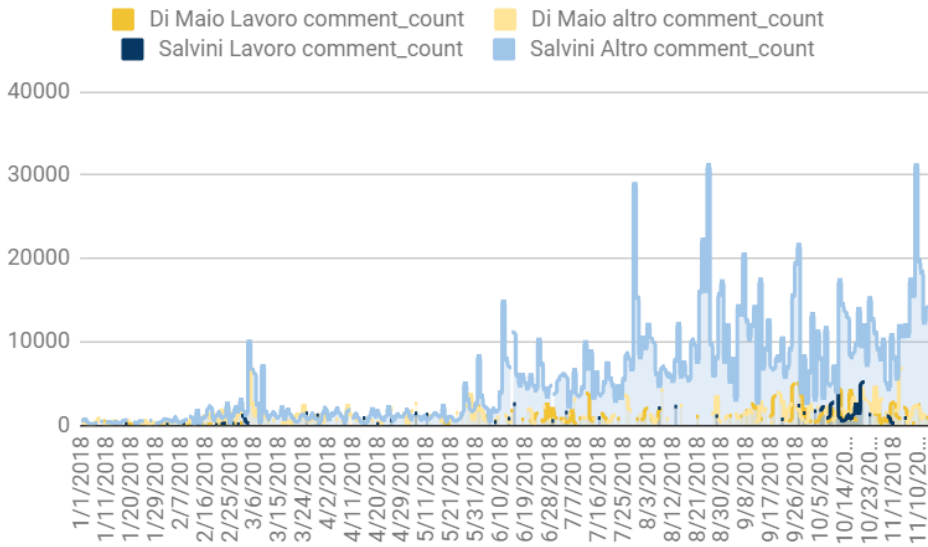


Figure 22. Daily likes on Di Maio's Instagram posts by topic.

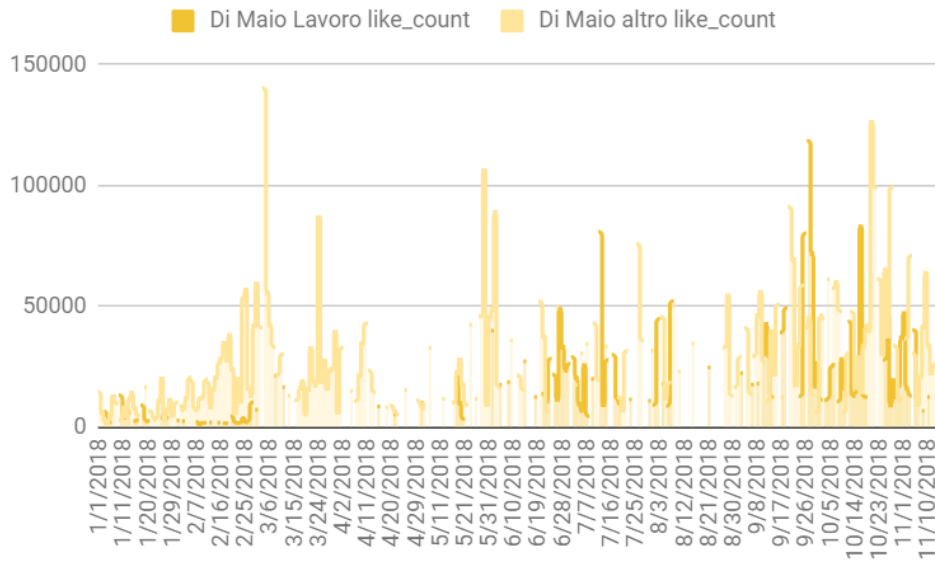
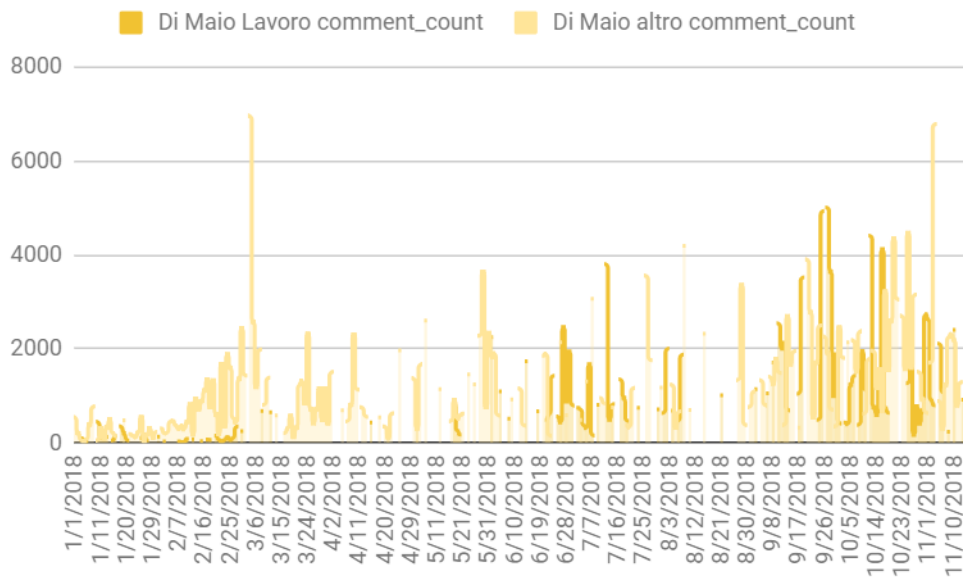


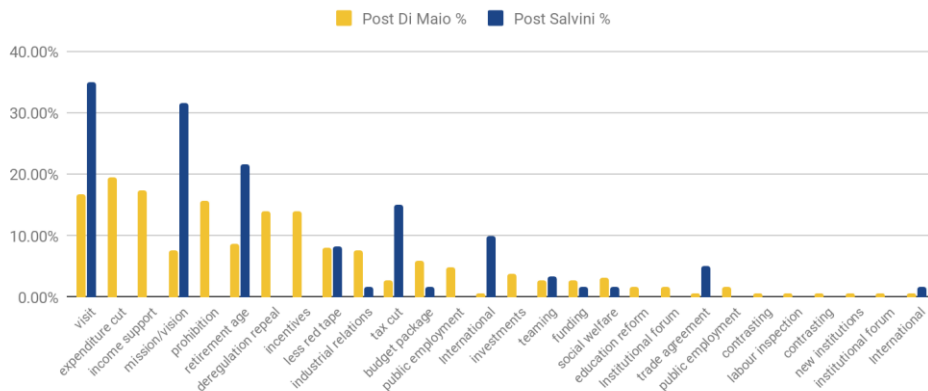
Figure 23. Daily comments on Di Maio's Instagram posts by topic



4.3. Rhetorical Framing Analysis

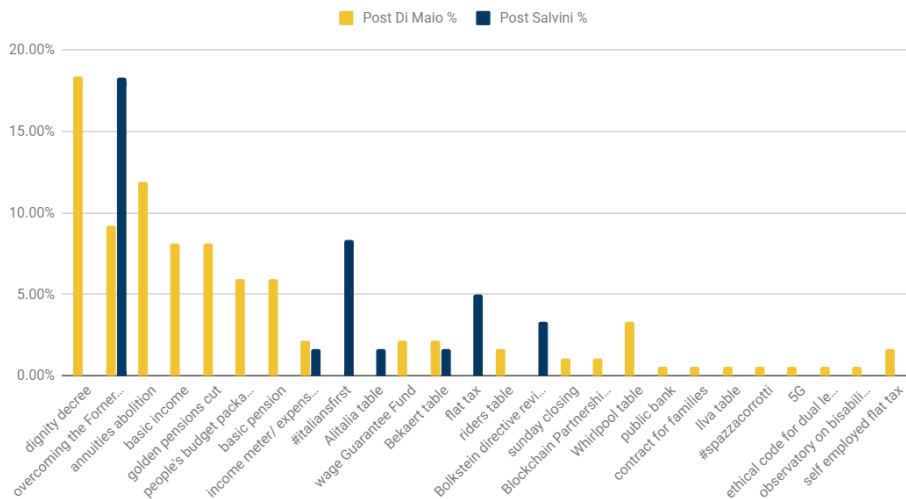
The analysis of macro frames for the texts selected from Instagram posts allowed me to assess the distribution of macro-frames organised by leader, as shown in Figure 24. The most frequent macro-frames for policies and political actions used by Salvini on Instagram was “visit”, “mission or vision”, “retirement age”, “tax cut” and “less red tape”. “Visit” and “retirement age” are the most shared macro-frames by the two leaders. However, Di Maio used them almost 50% less than Salvini. In general, and as one might expect, Di Maio used more macro-frames due to his institutional role as Minister of Labour and Industry. Di Maio’s most used macro frames were “expenditure cut” referring to “golden-plate pensions” and “annuities”. In particular, the following macro-frames are used only by Di Maio: “expenditure cut”, “income support”, “prohibition”, “deregulation”, “incentives conditioning”, “public employment services”, “public employment hirings”, “Investments”, “education reform”, “institutional forum”, “contrasting corruption”, “labour inspection”, “contrasting counterfeit”, “new institutions”.

Figure 24. Percentage of Instagram posts using macro-frames for political actions and policies by leader.



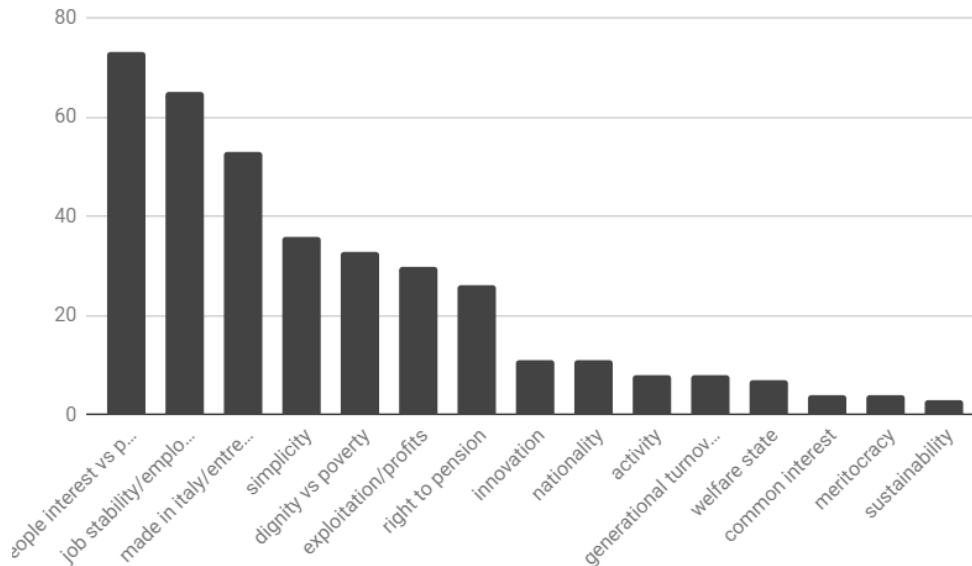
As mentioned in the methodology section, labour and industrial relations issues were not always addressed by policies explicitly mentioned in selected texts. Texts where specific policies or actions are named are distributed by leader, as shown in Figure 25. As one can note, the Dignity Decree and the move away from the Fornero Law account for the same percentage for the two leaders. Di Maio mentioned the repeal of the Fornero Law half the number of times Salvini did, who only referred to “income meter/ expense meter abolishment”, “#italianfirst”, “Bekaert table”, “flat tax” and “Bolkstein directive revision”.

Figure 25. Percentage of Instagram posts naming specific policies or actions by leader.



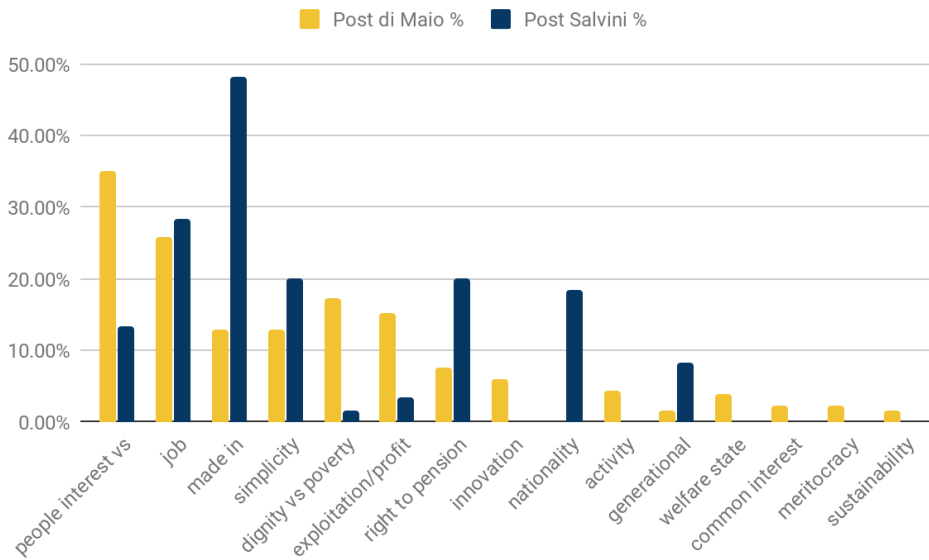
Finally, in the last stage of analysis I found that fundamental frames underpinning the rhetoric of the post and implying the preferability of the proposed policy/action were employed, as shown in Figure 25. This aspect can be regarded as a picture of the rhetorical composition of the populist discourse on labour and industrial relations in Italy. The most employed frame is the “people vs elites” frame, then comes the “job stability and employment” frame. The Made in Italy/entrepreneurship frame comes third, while “innovation”, “activity”, “welfare state”, “common interest”, “meritocracy” and “sustainability” are used less. The low number of occurrences for “nationality” and “generational turnover” may be surprising, but it has to be taken into account that in the dataset made up of posts on labour and industry, the former always combines with the “people vs elites” frame, while the latter is always used along with the “right to pension” frame.

Figure 26. Instagram posts employing fundamental frames.



The examination of the frame distribution by leader allows one to note that rhetorical frames are more frequently shared than references to macro-frames and policies/actions. In particular, only “innovation”, “activity”, “welfare State”, “common interest”, “meritocracy” and “sustainability” were used by Di Maio on an exclusive basis. Yet the share of texts employing fundamental frames reveals significant differences in their rhetoric. In particular, Salvini used the “people” frame in 13% of his posts, while Di Maio did so in 35% of cases. Conversely, 48% of Salvini’s posts employ the “Made in Italy/entrepreneurship” frame, while Di Maio just employed the latter in 13% of cases.

Figure 27. Instagram posts employing fundamental frames by leader.



5. Conclusions

This study has started from two assumptions. The first one is that many recent studies have investigated the relations between labour market and populism, concluding that growing income and wealth inequalities prompted voters – especially those from depressed areas – to vote for populist parties. Secondly, little research has been conducted in order to compare populists’ agenda on the specific topics of work and labour. This article then aimed to describe how leaders identified as populists frame the issue of the labour market on social media in Italy. In order to carry out this analysis, an *ad hoc* theoretical framework was set. Through it, I interpreted the framing analysis from the perspective of the new rhetoric, concluding that fundamental frames – which I also call rhetorical frames – can be assimilated to rhetorical loci (“commonplaces, premises, fundamental values and their hierarchies”. Perelman, Olbrechts-Tyteca 1958 [2001, 90]).

The social media data collected thanks to Catchy Big Data were subsequently analysed in terms of volumes, trends, reactions, then combined with rhetorical-frame analysis. Different strategies in the use of these two social media emerged at first, as well as different results in terms of engagement regarding labour-related posts. On 17 occasions, Salvini published more tweets than Di

Maio and twice as many Instagram posts as the Five Star Movement leader (fig.1). Salvini also used Instagram more frequently over time. Due to the higher number of tweets and Instagram posts, Salvini always receives more daily reactions than Di Maio for tweets not related to labour and industrial issues. However, the average number of retweets (RTs) per tweet shows an opposite trend for the two leaders. For tweets on labour and industrial issues, Di Maio reports a slightly higher number of RTs than for tweets on other themes (27% more). Conversely, Salvini's tweets related to labour and industrial issues report a 49% decrease in the average number of RTs, when compared to tweets on other themes (fig. 17). On Instagram we observe the same dynamic, even if the gap is different. Di Maio receives more comments and likes for labour and industrial related posts. Conversely, Salvini receives a lower number of likes and reports a 46% decrease in comments to labour related posts. My analysis suggests that labour can be regarded as a core issue, engaging people more than other topics only when leaders have chosen labour as their main field of discussion (Di Maio's case).

Rhetorical-framing analysis revealed more evident differences in the rhetoric expressed by the two leaders. In terms of rhetorical frames, Salvini used the "people" frame in 13% of his posts, while Di Maio did so in 35% of his comments. Conversely, 48% of Salvini's posts employed the "Made in Italy/entrepreneurship" frame, while Di Maio employed it in 13% of cases. I then argue that, taking into account the purpose of this research, it is difficult to operate within a framework that wants to treat actors and language separately as De Vreese, Esser, Aalberg, Reinemann and Stanyer suggested (2018).

Nevertheless, it is worth underlining some evidence that applies to both leaders, enabling one to draw a picture of labour and industrial relations issues as framed by Italian populism. First of all, both leaders use Instagram intensively for promoting themselves through posts about their visits to workers, entrepreneurs and social bodies. "Visit" is the most communicated action by Salvini and it almost ranks first among Di Maio's most used macro-frames. "Made in Italy", "simplicity" and "right to pension" are the most commonly used frames. Moreover, "job stability" is employed by the two leaders. Finally, the "people vs. elites" is the most employed frame of all. Labour and industrial relations issues then appear to be fully functional to feed the traditional populist rhetoric that pit "people" or "citizens" against political or economic elites. I argue that this conclusion supports the need to take into account labour as a fundamental dimension of citizenship, thus connecting political discourse and the representative democracy that builds on it. Representation of work issues by Italian populism falls short of novelty in terms of framing, even when Di Maio communicates the issue of gig-workers

and the platform economy. Limited effort is made by Di Maio and Salvini to draw an alternative vision of the relation between work and capital. Only on another occasion did Di Maio try to reassert unity and common interest between workers and entrepreneurs. Steady jobs as a value is promoted by Di Maio much more than the need to reform and implement active policies for the labour market. Limited attention was given to the communication of policies regarding public investments and incentives to scientific and technological innovation.

Based upon these findings, further research could be conducted both on these two datasets and on others, comparing the former with new data. With regard to the two current datasets, there are several hypotheses to verify. Firstly, by reading the posts, one can observe the recurring contradiction in Di Maio's framing praising Italian producers on the one hand, and blaming big enterprises for pursuing profits at any cost, on the other hand. Sometimes this happens within the same text, where Di Maio tries to distinguish between proper entrepreneurship and profit exploitation. These posts could be counted and analysed in more detail.

Moreover, in Di Maio's posts the monopoly of the State appears to be frequently implied. No private action allowed for active policies and welfare at all. Texts containing this message could be measured and analysed deeply in their rhetoric.

Furthermore, Salvini focused on national interest and made mention of employment and immigration issues in the same text. Even if the two issues are not logically linked, a correlation may be inferred by the readers. Moreover, in Salvini's texts, labour is linked to Made in Italy, with no reference to profits and exploitation. The elite addressed by Salvini is not an economic but a political or a financial one, especially with regards to European institutions and banks. The measurement of the recurrence of these frames in Di Maio's and Salvini's posts can be used to assess what Abts & Rummens argued in 2007 (418), namely that while right-wing populism tends to define people as a nation, left-wing populism rather conceive them as a class.

In relation to the possible comparisons to be carried out between the two datasets and others, Di Maio appears to be less emphatic than his speeches do, as far as media messages are concerned. Statements where Di Maio compares banks to Mafia, private work agencies to gangmasters or where he links precariousness with the consumption of antidepressant drugs do not find corresponding posts on Instagram. Speeches on labour by Di Maio could then be analysed from this perspective.

Moreover, many aspects of the rhetoric of Di Maio on labour and industrial relations can signal a continuity with the discourse from the former premier Matteo Renzi about the so-called Jobs Act. "Scraping" and "the Government

of change”, the choice of employment as a field to approve their first reform, the value of Job stability, weak promotion of active policies, polarization with enemies are all features that could be compared with data from Renzi’s addresses.

Looking for an opposite trend, in the Italian case one could also find signs of what Kriesi and Pappas argued in 2015: the effect of government experience on populist parties leads to “a moderation of their discourse, leading these parties to behave in a more similar way to mainstream political parties” (Kriesi H. 2015 p.). Another important aspect concerns trade unions, directly challenged by Renzi during his government, but almost ignored by Di Maio and Salvini (only 4 mentions in the two datasets examined). The simplified representation of “The people” prompted by populist parties threatened especially those unions aiming at representing labour as a general issue, a matter of class (namely CGIL) rather than as sectors or trades. Indeed, as the political theorist Jan-Werner Muller pointed out (2016: 27), populism conceives ‘The people’ as a “mystical ‘substance’ or ‘spirit’, rather than as a genuinely plural or aggregative concept”. Besides those published on social media, the Italian, “bi-populist” government also launched contradictory messages towards trade unions, by praising them on the one hand, and by attacking CGIL on the other hand. More generally, the Italian case raises the question as to whether the Italian pluralist movement can push trade unions to act in unity in order to defend pluralism itself from populist simplifications and disintermediation.

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