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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Opposite universes. A focus on the ideological polarisation of the Italian electorate

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**ABSTRACT:** The morphological character of ideologies is closely related to the context in which they manifest themselves (Freeden, 2008). Furthermore, political polarisation is the tendency for the concentration of political supply mainly around two opposing poles (McCarty, Poole, Rosenthal, 2006). These poles are characterised by high levels of ideological distance and high homogeneity within them, resulting in a lower propensity of voters to move from one side to the other (Fiorina, Abrams, 2008; Druckman, Peterson, Slothuus, 2013). This paper analyses the ideological polarisation in Italy, focusing on the results of the 2022 general elections. The research moves from a combined and comparative analysis of the structural contexts of the territories and the forms of electoral behaviour in the different territorial investigated contexts. The results show how the economic, demographic, and social structure influences voting choices, and it can be considered a valuable tool for identifying the forms of ideological polarisation in the current Italian political scene. The 2022 general election returns a picture of an Italy divided into two blocs characterised by different forms of electoral competition: the Centro-Nord, wherein the political clash is between the heirs of the traditional ideologies of right (Lega, FdI) and left (Democratic Party); the Mezzogiorno is the arena of the electoral competition between the so-called hybrid-tactical forces (5-Star Movement and FI), that stand outside the system of traditional political forces. These empirical findings allow us to reflect on the nature of the opposite universes of Italian ideological polarisation.

**KEYWORDS:** Italian general election, electoral behaviour, political ideologies, political polarisation, social and economic inequalities.

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## 1. Ideology And Polarisation. A Brief Introduction to the Field of Investigation

This article illustrates the results of a study on the ideological polarisation of the Italian electorate based on the 2022 political elections.

Before delving into the concept of polarisation, it is worth presenting some ideas regarding the ideological field. Ideology is intended to reflect every historical and social context (Mannheim, 1957).

After the debate on the so-called *ending of ideologies* - that has characterised the phase between the ending of the XX Century and the beginning of the XXI century - we have chosen to deploy the *morphological approach*, according to which the ideologies are dynamic objects, a social form of thought given by the complex combination of political concepts, that are heavily influenced by the context in which they manifest themselves (Freeden, 1998). These ideological forms are: a) situated in a specific time, place, and space; b) characterised by a complex reconfiguration of preexisting political ideas; such reconfiguration depends on the fragmentation of traditional macro-ideologies that a specific social group deploys to modify the status quo; c) transitory, unstructured, subjected to continuous social changes, and to the different contexts in which they operate (Anselmi, 2023). These novel ideological configurations no longer create an ideal model of society to be followed and do not offer solutions to the most important sociopolitical issues. However, these continue producing identities and are still useful tools for understanding the world and society. In other words, although ideologies no longer possess their original features, these are still maps of symbols able to create identity and organise social reality (Geertz, 1973).

After establishing the situational nature of ideologies, we delve into the idea of polarisation, taking the categories of *right* and *left as a reference point*. These are thought of as: a) conceptual constructions that intensely depend on the reference context; these constructions take on changeable meanings and positions (Rémond, 1993); b) spatial images that do not have a semantic anchorage, that are empty containers which are filled with contents that differ every time according to the historical time, and space in which they are located (Sartori, 1982).

Due to this contraposition between opposing poles—which take on different meanings depending on the context of reference—we consider polarisation the conflict between two polarities. These polarities are internally homogenous and mutually exclusive, differing in value systems, interests, and principles (Fittipaldi, Rullo, 2022). Notwithstanding the substantial review of comparative studies—on par with other phenomena, such as populism, for example—polarisation is considered a changing and polysemic object of study whose concept and operationalisation are not unanimously and commonly defined (Schmitt, 2016).

We chose to deploy the definition of polarisation, which sees it as the political offer's tendency to focus mainly on two opposite poles. These are characterised by significant ideological differences and a low proneness of the electors to move from one pole to the other (McCarty, Poole, Rosenthal, 2006; Fiorina, Abrams, 2008; Druckman, Peterson, Slothuus, 2013).

For work purposes—due to society's dynamic character—it is worth considering how polarisation is confronted from time to time with the emergence of new cleavages and fractures. These translate the distance that separates relevant political organisations posed on the extreme poles (Sartori, 1976). Thus, they translate the degree of ideological differentiation that distinguishes the political parties within a certain system (Dalton, 2008). Contrary to a rich tradition in American studies that considers polarisation a mainly vertical phenomenon—according to which political parties and élites determine the polarisation of the electors—this article takes on the point of view of the so-called polarisation from below. It is characterised by a horizontal trend that measures the ideological distance between political forces, starting from the position of the electors on a certain ideological *continuum* (Fiorina, 2005).

## 2. The Dimensions of Electoral Polarisation in Italy

This article aims to study electoral polarisation from a sociological perspective, taking electoral behaviour as an epiphenomenon of deeper value dimensions that give rise to a geographically connotated ideological and electoral placement. This research is based on the comparative analysis of the demographic and socioeconomic profile of the Italian territory and the analysis of the forms that electoral behaviour takes on in different plurinominal electoral colleges.

In this sense, voting behaviour is the outcome of cognitive mobilisation strongly dependent on the socio-demographic characteristics of the territories. In this perspective, the systems of political forces followed are read in the light of the individual territorial contexts through which they acquire meaning. In other words, different territorial socio-economic contexts give rise to different morphologically characterised ideological forms. According to our interpretation, it is, therefore, not the ideological and value structure of the parties that directs the individual's electoral choice. Still, it is the territories (through the politicisation of old and new cleavages) that direct voting behaviour. Finally, it should be noted that party leadership is not considered when categorising political forces.

The choice of studying the electoral polarisation based on the geographical context is due to the decision to investigate the structural conditions that influenced the electoral results of the political elections of 2022, and that gave the image of Italy as divided into two opposing blocks, in which forms of different electoral competition are needed (Mongiardo, Palmieri, 2023).

The first block consists of the “Centro-Nord”, which includes all the most developed parts of the country, characterised by greater economic well-being and an elevated level of social inclusion. The second area is named “Mezzogiorno” and includes Southern Italy, Sicilia, and Sardegna. This block features the less developed regions of the Country, where disadvantaged economic conditions correspond to a low level of social inclusion. These two blocks are characterised by the prevalence of two different systems of political forces: the first block is the theatre of so-called *system forces*, and the second is the place of so-called *hybrid-tactical forces*.

In the Centro-Nord, the *system forces* are still the centre of the political and electoral conflict. These political forces are the heirs of traditional macro-ideologies. Although they no longer have a structured conceptual articulation and are incapable of building new models of society, they are located around two opposing polarities, respectively inspired by the right and left values, that can still exert some sort of appeal on the electorate.

The most radical electoral clashes occur in these territories' metropolitan areas, as a higher level of economic and social inclusion corresponds to a more heated conflict between the two opposing ideological configurations. Although the dogmatic nucleus that characterised the original ideologies has been dismantled, these forces are rooted in the party-dominated system of the so-called Prima Repubblica. Taking the political elections of 2022 as a reference point, the parties that respond to this definition are Partito Democratico (Pd), Fratelli d'Italia (FdI), and Lega per Salvini Premier (Lsp, below Lega).

The Pd is considered a new party (Ignazi, 2018), which was born to simplify the Italian party system by aggregating what pre-existed in the field of centre-left forces. The Pd synthesises the legacy of two resilient historical parties (*ibid.*): the Italian Communist Party (Pci) and the Christian Democracy (Dc), and their respective evolutions. It takes up the experience of L'Ulivo - a coalition of centre-left reformist forces, born in 1995 and present for the first time at the 1996 elections - by merging the two largest parties of the coalition in 2007: La Margherita (heir of the Italian People's Party) and the Democrats of the Left (heirs of the Democratic Party of the Left, former heir of the Pci). It is, therefore, not a post-ideological party but a political force that makes ideology a dynamic object that recombines aspects and concepts of the social democratic, progressive and reformist traditions.

FdI is the party of the national-conservative right, the direct heir of the Movimento Sociale Italiano (Msi) and Alleanza Nazionale (An), also resilient historical parties whose symbol still preserves the

tricolour flame. According to leader Giorgia Meloni's words at the first congress in March 2014<sup>1</sup>, FdI is a party made up of 'men and women who run from one era to another, from one generation to another, carrying a flame that has never been completely extinguished'. FdI is the so-called third party of the flame (Vassallo, Vignati, 2022), with a national-conservative structure capable of activating a broader electoral base, different from the nostalgic electorate of Msi and An.

The Lega is the longest-lived political party in Italy today. Born in 1987 from the fusion of the regional autonomist parties of northern Italy, it took its first steps in the early 1980s when the centre-periphery divide was rekindled, and movements in defence of territories developed, giving rise to the first ethno-regionalist parties (Ignazi, 2018). The Lega borrows the structure of the mass party, places the value of militancy at the centre and introduces essential innovations in terms of traditions, themes and language (Biorcio, 1999). While the birth of this party undermines the other parties of the First Republic, it is equally true that from the 1992 elections onwards, the Lega is firmly established within the Italian party system, in fact representing the only political party that has been continuously present in all political elections to date. An element that makes it a system party. Over the years, regarding its ideological and value structure, the Lega has undergone a significant strategic and identity change: it abandoned its autonomist and independenceist matrix to assume a more markedly nationalist and sovereignist attitude (Ignazi, 2018).

Moreover, minor forces still pertain to the field of system forces, although they have adopted apparently novel structures, as they were born out of internal divisions of other parties. These are: Azione-Italia Viva (Az-Iv), Alleanza Verdi Sinistra (Avs).

It is in this area that the *cleavages* (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967) capital/work (from which the very distinction between right and left comes), and centre/outskirts are objects of a new attribution of meaning: as the vote of class fades, the electors polarise themselves along these two continuums: the urban centres - in which the forces that inherited from the liberal tradition constitute the majority - are opposed to the outskirts, that become the bulwark of the conservative vote. Although ideologies have been deconstructed and morphologically situated, these offer a polarisation that is still embedded in traditional value dimensions.

As we said, the Mezzogiorno is the theatre of the clash between *hybrid-tactical* forces, which signals the definite shift from the non-populist politics of the Prima Repubblica to the populist politics of the Seconda Repubblica (Biorcio, 2010).

Regarding the label of *hybrid-tactical* forces that has been previously set forth, it is necessary to clarify how the two dimensions are interconnected: a) these are forces that were born outside of the system of traditional politics; b) they are characterised by their blurred edges, that are *hybridised* with doctrinal elements, and ideas that pertain to different ideological traditions; c) due to their ideological patchwork, they allow a *tactical* positioning in the field of the political offer, that is functional to keeping electoral consent. These are thin-centred ideologies (Mudde, Kaltwasser, 2017). These operate in a social context which is heavily de-politicised and devalues the dimension of collective participation in favour of a more individualistic behaviour: "In the relationship between citizen and the democratic system, delegation, and representation mechanisms are replaced by mechanisms of protection, and of individual identification" (Anselmi, 2023, p. 74). Analysing the election of 2022, we specifically refer to Forza Italia (FI) and Movimento 5 stelle (M5s), which are characterised by political, identity-making, and organisation strategies that profoundly differ from those of the parties still dependent on the political traditions of the XX century. These are polarised political forces, and they have diverse origins. They share common elements, such as forms of organising the party that are very different from those of the mass party, which has been overcome. These forms have a populist matrix: FI and M5s.

FI is the personal party par excellence (Calise, 2020): a) at first it was possible to assimilate it to the so-called authoritarian populism (Hall, 1985) – in light of Thatcherism – as it encouraged de-politicization, it

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fratelli-italia.it/il-testo-integrale-del-mio-discorso-di-replica-al-congresso-di-fratelli-ditalia-alleanza-nazionale/>

exalted a privatised, individualistic model, and it paved the way for the earliest phenomena of neopopulism; b) it later incarnated the model of Silvio Berlusconi's telepopulism (Taguieff, 2006).

FI is the product of a marketing operation promoted through the Publitalia network; its positioning in the electoral market is, naturally, tactical. FI debuts on the political scene with *“a programme with unprecedented features. For the first time, authentically liberal-liberal accents with strong neo-conservative overtones resound in the Italian political debate. It is a break with the dominant political culture of solidarism tinged with welfarism in its Catholic, socialist and communist variants. It is what vast middle-class sectors want to hear from a credible interpreter (...). The success ingredients lie in the combination of the liberalist reference and the entrepreneurialist mythology, with the anti-political and anti-party sentiment of civil society”* (Ignazi, 2028, pp. 217, 218).

M5s is a digital party (Gerbaudo, 2020) and represents one of the first cases of web populism (Biorcio, 2015). It is a party deconstructed in its bureaucratic and top-down dimension that makes the value of disintermediation offered by the network (Chadwick, 2013) its strong point. The M5s: a) transcends the ideological dimensions of left and right, combines the dimension of mobilisation with that of malaise towards the political offer and the other parties in the field, offering an alternative to representative democracy (Diamanti, Lazar, 2018); b) It addresses *“a public opinion disgusted by scandals and corruption (...). It offered a voice to a constituency of voters tempted to throw away their ballots once and for all or to scream their dissatisfaction by rewarding the most extreme offers. The M5s keeps populist and anti-systemic impulses in the democratic fold (...)”* (Ignazi, 2018, p.317).

Both parties are characterised by a clear break with the previous political-organisational system and tradition in different ways, representing two unique models at the European level. Because of their tactical positioning in the electoral market geared to a diverse audience, both parties can be described as catch-all parties (Kirchheimer, 1966).

Finally, since these two political forces have different organisational dimensions, it is worth remembering how a patrimonial dimension characterises both parties. The two leaders, Silvio Berlusconi and Beppe Grillo, have played a key role in generating polarising effects on the electorate by exercising their leadership skills (Bordignon, 2020). On these matters, the authors of this article argue that territorial contexts are decisive for electoral behaviour and that this interaction offers a scenario made of ideological configurations that are territorially situated, which give place to a double degree of polarisation: a) the first, between systems of opposing forces that distinguish two different areas of the country; b) the second, which sends back to the polarisation between ideological, and value systems that are proper of a certain place.

The following paragraphs present the conceptual and operative tools that have been deployed in the analysis of territorial contexts (cfr. Par. 3), the study of the electoral results within the categories created through territorial analysis (cfr. Parr. 4, 5), and the reflection upon the latent causes which attain to the different forms of ideological polarisation of the Italian electorate (cfr. Par. 6).

### 3. The Socioeconomic Features of Electoral Colleges

To reach the research objectives in the previous paragraph, we created a conceptual system that can differentiate the electoral colleges based on their demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. The aim is to create homogenous areas of Italian territory. The homogeneity is not to be established through geographic or spatial continuity criteria but based on their similar sociological profile. The empirical base that has been deployed consists of twelve indicators made available by the National Institute of Statistics (Istat) that have been elaborated based on the data of the 2011 census<sup>2</sup>. It is known the population density (number of inhabitants for km<sup>2</sup>), the employment rate, and the percentage ratio of the employment rate of men and women, which shows the degree of gender equality in the job market. The predominant economic sector in reference

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<sup>2</sup> More recent public data are not available.

is given by the number of employees in the public sector per thousand inhabitants, the percentage of employees in manufacturing, and the percentage of employees in the services sector. The attractiveness of an area is shown by the number of foreigners per thousand residents and the percentage of the population born outside the region of residency. The degree of superior instruction is signalled by three indicators: the percentage of the population that is 18-24 years old who only has a middle school diploma, the rate of analphabetism among those who are older than 15, and the percentage of people who are older than 19 who have a university degree out of the whole population. Moreover, the index of material and social vulnerability is available. It estimates the housing, economic, and welfare fragility of an area by summing up information about the incidence of families who live in heavily crowded housing situations, single-parent families who are young or exclusively made of people over 80 years old, people between the ages 15-64 who do not have any study degree, Neet (young people who do not study, do not work, and who are not enrolled in any training course), families who do not get an income, as they do not work, and do not receive a pension<sup>3</sup> (Istat, 2020).

These indicators are taken under principal component analysis (PCA) to identify synthetic conceptual and operative dimensions that can account for most of the available information (Marradi, Di Franco, 2003). The result of the multidimensional analysis is shown in the tab. 1, which shows the correlations between each variable and the first two components, reproducing 70% of the variation shared by the whole variables. The first factor is called “degree of inclusion in the job market and education”, as the conceptual dimension recalls an area’s inclination to offer women and men equal job opportunities. This makes it attractive both for foreigners and for Italians who come from other regions. This dimension is not limited to the job market. Still, it is extended to education, differentiating areas where inclusion in the work and education field is high from those in which heavily disadvantaged conditions are observed. The second factor is called “degree of urbanisation and tertiarisation”, as the conceptual dimension refers to the tendency of the population to settle in densely urbanised areas that are inhabited by well-educated people, who are drawn to the economic context, as it is mainly focused in the services sector and public employment. This factor distinguishes the densely inhabited areas, whose economy is tertiary, and the more rural areas, which have low population density and whose economy is centred around manufacturing.

These factors (factorial indexes) are deployed as criteria for aggregating areas included in electoral colleges. Six territorial clusters have been created through an analysis of the groups, which uses an explorative hierarchic approach and a non-hierarchic confirmative phase (Biorcio, 1993). These have a specific demographic and socioeconomic profile. The mean values of the Istat indicators have been calculated within each cluster and written down in the tab. 2.

**Industrial Centro-Nord.** This group features 65 electoral colleges, representing a significant part of the towns of the centre and the north of the Country, with low population density. There is widespread economic well-being (due to the high occupational rate), and the job market mainly revolves around manufacturing. We are referring to the industrial areas of Emilia Romagna, Liguria, Lazio, Lombardia, Marche, Piemonte, Toscana, Umbria, Trentino Alto-Adige, and Veneto. These are among the less urbanised areas of the Country, where industrial development creates well-being that is extended to most of the residents. Logically, the material and social vulnerability index is the lowest in Italy.

**Urban Centro-Nord.** This group includes 21 electoral colleges situated in urbanised areas of Central and Northern Italy, where a demographic density greater than in the rural areas is registered. The occupational rate and material and social vulnerability index do not significantly differ from the previous groups. The urban areas of Centro-Nord are characterised by the inclusion of women in the job market, which mainly offers opportunities in the public sector and the services sector, luring many foreigners and Italians born in other regions who decide to move here. This group features most of the medium-sized urban areas of Centro-Nord;

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<sup>3</sup> The values over 100 indicate levels of material and social vulnerability of an area that are higher than the national average.

among these, we can find cities such as Bergamo, Bolzano, Brescia, Genova, Monza, Padova, Parma, Perugia, Pisa, Venezia, Verona, and Trento.

Table 1 - Factor loadings on the first two components (territorial dimensions)

	Components	
	1	2
The ratio between the occupational rate of females and males	+ ,933	+ ,121
Occupational rate	+ ,891	- ,397
Number of foreigners per thousand residents	+ ,818	- ,181
% of the population born outside the region of residence	+ ,786	+ ,002
% of the population aged between 18-24 with only the middle school diploma	- ,598	- ,071
Index of material and social vulnerability	- ,694	+ ,326
Analphabetism rate > 15 years old	- ,822	+ ,134
% of employees in manufacturing	+ ,331	- ,752
Number of employees in the public sector per thousand inhabitants	+ ,438	+ ,616
% of employees in the services sector	+ ,574	+ ,648
% of college graduates > 19 years old in the whole population	+ ,578	+ ,725
Population density	+ ,330	+ ,727

Tertiary urban Centro-Nord. This group features 10 electoral colleges in the main urban areas of Centro-Nord. The profile for this cluster is similar to that of the previous one; however, it emphasises some aspects of the demographic, economic, and educational composition. These cities register a high demographic density, the highest occupational rate, and the lowest differences between men and women in the job market. Professional opportunities are mainly found in the public sector and the services sector. The percentage of the population with a college degree is the highest in Italy. Hence, the metropolitan cities in Centro-Nord are the most attractive areas of the Country. Here, the immigrant population (Italian and foreign) reaches levels never seen elsewhere. This group pertains to the metropolitan areas of Bologna, Firenze, Roma, Milano, and Torino.

Extended Mezzogiorno. The cluster groups 30 electoral colleges of the towns of the South and the islands, with the lowest population density among the compared areas. These areas register the lowest occupational rate in the Country, and the most significant gender inequality in the job market is observable here. Logically, the material and social vulnerability index is higher than the national average. Due to the low degree of tertiarisation and industrialisation of the local economy, these areas are the least attractive in the Country, both

for foreigners and Italians: the rate of the population born outside of the region of residency is the lowest in Italy. In the rural areas of the South, economic and educational distress are linked: the alphabetism rate is largely above the national average, and the percentage of college graduates in the totality of the resident population is the lowest. We are referring to the rural areas in Abruzzo, Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Molise, Puglia, Sardegna, and Sicilia.

**Urban Mezzogiorno.** The cluster features 15 electoral colleges of the urbanised towns of the South and the islands, such as Acerra, Cagliari, Caserta, Catania, Catanzaro, Cosenza, Foggia, Lecce, Messina, Reggio Calabria, Salerno, and Torre del Greco. The urban Mezzogiorno areas are differentiated from the rural areas because of their greater population density and even more fragile economy. The resident population suffers from high material and social distress. Here, the material and social vulnerability index reaches high levels, indicating low collective well-being and severe exposure to material and immaterial deprivation factors.

**Tertiary urban Mezzogiorno.** The last cluster groups 5 electoral colleges that refer to the metropolitan cities of Napoli, Bari, and Palermo. Their socioeconomic profile is similar to that drawn for the urban Mezzogiorno, although it has some peculiar features. The population density is the highest in Italy. Although it is centred in the public and services sectors, the economic composition is extremely frail. It does not offer decent living conditions to most of the resident population. This is proven by the material and social vulnerability index, which reaches the highest level in Italy in the metropolitan centres of the Mezzogiorno. Hence, the economic and educational distress that generally characterises the Mezzogiorno is intensified in the most urbanised areas, where the living conditions are extremely challenging. This condition keeps foreigners and Italians from moving here. It is worth noticing how, in terms of polarisation, the wealthiest area of the Country, the tertiary urban Centro-Nord, is counterpointed to the poorest region of the country, the tertiary urban Mezzogiorno.

Table 2 - Mean Values of the Socioeconomic Indexes in the Six Territorial Clusters

	industrial Centro- Nord	urban Centro- Nord	tertiary urban Centro- Nord	extended Mezzo- giorno	urban Mezzo- giorno	tertiary urban Mezzo- giorno
Occupational rate	64,5	64,9	66,5	44,8	45,8	46,7
The ratio occupational rate of women and men	76,5	81,6	87,5	57,1	59,7	66,6
N. foreigners (1.000 inhabitants)	85,6	100,2	112,2	23,8	24,8	43,6
% population born outside the residency's region	17,3	22,3	27,7	5,7	4,6	4,4
% pop. (18-24 years) with the middle degree	27,2	25,1	19,6	30,6	30,3	29,7
Index of social and material vulnerability	96,5	98,6	98,8	105,9	109,9	113,0
Analphabetism rate > 15 years old	3,1	2,5	1,7	8,1	5,7	4,3
% employees in manufacturing	24,5	14,2	8,8	12,5	10,5	7,5
N. employees in public sector (1.000 inhabitants)	57,3	80,2	166,3	52,7	70,9	146,3
Population density	441,1	2.567,4	7.735,5	393,1	1.656,1	9.223,3
% employees in the services sector	25,5	33,6	40,7	22,3	28,7	32,5
% college graduates > 19 years old	10,8	16,5	31,1	10,1	13,3	21,1

## 4. The Electoral Behaviour: The Tools of Analysis

Several scholars view ideological polarisation as a vertical and macro-structural phenomenon. According to this approach, ideology and its forms in society are due to the actions exerted by parties and their leaders on citizens; in this sense, ideological polarisation is a phenomenon of elites (Layman, Carsey, Horowitz, 2006; McCarty, Poole, Rosenthal, 2006); Hetherington, 2008). Our study questions this conceptualisation. On the contrary, the authors believe that ideological polarisation is a micro-social phenomenon that proceeds from the bottom up (Fiorina, 2005; Fiorina, Abrams, 2008), has cultural connotations (Wuthnow, 1989; Hunter, 2006), involves specific value worldviews (Baker, 2005), takes on a territorially defined profile (DiMaggio, Evans, Bryson, 1996; Nunn, Evans, 2006; Galbraith, Hale, 2006), and is characterised by morphologically connoted ideologies (Freedman, 2008).

In the methodological literature, ideological polarisation is investigated by two research designs and techniques geared toward constructing two different databases. The first is the structured questionnaires administered in a standardised form to detect the ideological orientation of citizens through self-reports, that is, respondents' answers to questions formulated to investigate the attitudes that make up the ideological horizon. Alternatively, other studies base their research design on so-called secondary data that, disregarding the cognitive or emotional dimension of the individual (detected by standard research techniques), operationalise the conative (behavioural) dimension of the phenomenon in a collective form, using election results as expressions of aggregate behaviour (Schadee, Corbetta, 1984; Cartocci, 1990; Di Franco, 1992, 1996; Diamanti, 2003). It is in this second research perspective that our contribution lies<sup>4</sup>. The authors of this study regard voting behaviour as a manifestation of the ideological phenomenon, an empirical trace with which to investigate ideological polarisation using the polarisation of electoral behaviour. So, the analysis we present is the outcome of a strategy of operationalising the concept of "voting behaviour in favour of system parties vs hybrid-tactical parties", with which to empirically detect the actual tendency of voters to vote for system political forces or hybrid-tactical political forces.

The construction of the empirical material necessary to answer the aim of the research has required the analysis of the socioeconomic profile of the areas included in the electoral colleges and a second principal components analysis (PCA) on the electoral results obtained by the main political forces in the plurinominal colleges at Camera dei Deputati during the political elections of 2022. We have decided to analyse the electoral results of the parties that passed the threshold of 3% required by the electoral law: FdI 26%; Pd 19%; M5s 15,4%; Lega 8,8%; FI 8,1%; Az-Iv 7,8%, Avs 3,6%.

The result of the multidimensional analysis is shown in tab. 3, which presents the correlations between each variable and the two main components: the first component reproduces 48 % of the common variance to the whole of the variables; the second component reproduces 29%. The first factor is called "Voting for system parties vs hybrid-tactical parties". The positive pole of the axis recalls the inclination of the electoral body to give trust to the system parties that are rooted in traditional political ideologies and that undoubtedly pose themselves on the continuum right/left: FdI, Lega, Az-Iv, Pd, Avs. The negative pole of the axis shows the electoral behaviour in favour of hybrid-tactical parties, which pose themselves outside the system of traditional

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<sup>4</sup> It is well known in the sociological literature the cognitive, emotional and conative classification of the concept of attitude (Pavsic, Pitrone, 2003), which highlights the weak correspondence between the three dimensions (Ajzen, Fishbein, 2005; Huffman et al., 2014). This is attributable to some limitations of questionnaire survey techniques, which collect responses distorted by the excessive standardisation and structuring of the question-answer process (Pitrone, Palmieri, Liani, 2018). In addition, intervening factors (perceptions of social norms, control over the future context of action) between the intention-to-action statement and the actual action (Itzchakov, Uziel, Wood, 2018) are also to be considered as an element of weakness.

political forces: M5s, and FI. As previously argued, the system parties evoke a vote that calls back to values and normative horizons which recall the muted political traditions of the XX century. On the other hand, the vote for hybrid-tactical parties depends on a more rational and utilitarian choice: the positioning of the hybrid-tactical forces on the electoral scene is functional to satisfy the requests of the electors who aim at satisfying particularistic and individualist needs, at the expense of collective interests (Anselmi, 2023).

The second factor is called “Voting for right vs left parties”. The axis’s positive pole refers to the electors’ propensity to vote for the right forces, such as FdI and Lega. The axis’s negative pole relates to the electors’ propensity to vote left forces, such as Pd and Avs. In the middle of the continuum, equally distant from the right and the left pole, a liberal area is occupied by Az-Iv, which takes the progressive area of Pd as a basis, and FI which is located next to it on moderate and liberal positions. In the same way, M5s poses itself in the middle of the continuum, leaning into the left areas at the defence of the most socially and economically disadvantaged groups. As hybrid-tactical forces, FI and M5s are strategically located on right or left positions to accommodate the requests of their electorate and, thus, to maximise the result of the vote.

Table 3 - Factor Loadings on the First Two Components (Electoral Dimensions)

	Components	
	1	2
% Az-Iv	+ ,788	- ,075
% Pd	+ ,688	- ,484
% Avs	+ ,664	- ,648
% FdI	+ ,518	+ ,731
% Lega	+ ,451	+ ,809
% FI	- ,771	+ ,323
% M5s	- ,869	- ,348

## 5. The Polarisation of the Electoral Behaviour: Territories and Electorates

This study aims to empirically test the hypothesis that the set of specific territorial characteristics, such as the degree of inclusion in the job market and in the educational sphere (whose indicators are the male and female employment rate, the presence of foreign and Italian residents born in another region, the rate of graduates, material and social vulnerability index) and the degree of urbanisation and tertiarization (whose indicators are the employment rate in the manufacturing sector, the employment rate in public services, and population density) are factors capable of influencing voting choices. This generates polarised electoral contexts, which allow us to read the electoral phenomenon sociologically. In terms of matrix analysis, the set of independent variables comprises those mentioned above demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the territories, with which the six territorial clusters already presented are constructed. The dependent variable

is the percentage of votes in the 2022 political elections in plurinomial electoral colleges for the Camera dei Deputati in favour of political forces categorised as *system parties* and *hybrid-tactical parties*. It was hypothesised that sociologically different territorial contexts could stratify voting behaviour, promoting polarised electoral behaviours favouring system or hybrid-tactical political forces.

These two factors (factorial indexes) are related to the category implant built through the multidimensional analysis of the territorial data. The aim is to observe the behaviour of the electors during the political elections in 2022 within the different macro areas taken into analysis: industrial Centro-Nord, urban Centro-Nord, tertiary urban Centro-Nord, extended Mezzogiorno, urban Mezzogiorno, tertiary urban Mezzogiorno. The hypothesis is that the demographic, educational, and economic profile of the areas featured in the different electoral colleges has influenced the electoral behaviour of those who went voting, partaking in the polarisation of the choices. To empirically study this hypothesis, it has been observed how the distributions of the two indexes “Voting for system parties vs hybrid-tactical parties<sup>5</sup>” (see figure 1) and “Voting for right parties vs left parties<sup>6</sup>” (see figure 2) change in the six territorial macro areas.

In the industrial Centro-Nord, the electors vote for system parties (median on the first index = +0,47) of right-wing (median on the second index = +0,58). In the 65 colleges of the industrial Centro-Nord located in the rural areas of the regions of the Center and of the North, the right-wing parties registered the best electoral results. Their percentages of votes are higher than the national average: in these areas, FdI was voted by 30% of the electors (+4%), and Lega by 11,3% (+2,5%). FdI surpassed 30% in all the electoral colleges in rural areas of Veneto 1 and Veneto 2. Still, it got its most significant results in the electoral area Lazio 1 (35,5% in Guidonia and 37% in Viterbo) and Lazio 2 (35,2% in Rieti). Lega obtained 15% in the colleges of the less urbanised areas of Lombardia 2, Lombardia 3, Lombardia 4, Veneto 1, and Veneto 2, reaching 20% in Sondrio, Treviglio, and Castelfranco Veneto. Overall, in the political elections of 2022, the electors living in the industrial Centro-Nord have adopted an electoral behaviour that gave trust to system parties, showing a propensity to the right-wing parties and expressing a stark refusal of hybrid-tactical forces that in these areas of the Country registered percentages below the national average: M5s is voted by 9% (-6,4%), and FI by 7,4% (-0,7%).

In urban Centro-Nord, the electoral behaviour favoured system parties (median on the first index = + 0,76), thus revealing light support for the left parties (median on the second index = - 0,32). In the 21 colleges of urban Centro-Nord, the left-wing parties gathered more votes than the national average: Pd was voted by 22% of the electors (+3%), Avs by 4,6% (+1%). The results obtained by Pd in the two colleges in Genova (26%), in the college in Pisa (26,1%), and in Grosseto (26,7%) are significant. Avs reached 7% in Bolzano. In the political elections of 2022, the electors of the cities of Centro-Nord have shown electoral behaviour inclined towards the system parties, favouring left positions and remarking the stark opposition to hybrid-tactical parties, which did not succeed in convincing the electorate that lives in the cities of Centro-Nord: here M5s was voted by 10,3% (- 5,1%), and FI by 5,9% (- 2,2%).

In the tertiary urban Centro-Nord, the electoral behaviour favoured the system parties (median on the first index = +1,36) of the left wing (median on the second index = - 1,66). In the 10 electoral colleges located in the metropolitan areas of Bologna, Firenze, Roma, Milano, and Torino, the traditional left-wing parties build consensus way higher than the national average: Pd was voted by 26,5% of the electors (+7,5%), Avs by 6,2% (+2,6%). Pd got its best results in the colleges of Firenze and Bologna, where it gathered more than 30%. The vote of Firenze and Bologna was significant for Avs as well, which was voted here by 8% of the electors. In

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<sup>5</sup> The positive values show an electoral orientation towards the system parties. On the other hand, the negative values express a tendency to vote for hybrid-tactical parties.

<sup>6</sup> The positive values of the index show an electoral orientation towards right parties. On the other hand, the negative values show a tendency to vote for the left parties.

the central colleges of Milano and Roma, a remarkable result was obtained by Az-Iv as well, especially in the college of Milano Buenos Aires (23%) and in the college of Rome Municipio I (16,7%). In the political elections of 2022, the electorate of the metropolitan cities of Centro-Nord has shown itself as disposed to vote for system parties of left-wing and scarcely attracted by the right-wing parties and by the hybrid-tactical parties that gain a similar result to that obtained in the urban Centro-Nord.

In the extended Mezzogiorno, the electoral behaviour rewarded the two major hybrid-tactical forces (median on the first index = - 1,17) without expressing a preference (median on the second index = - 0,06). In the 30 colleges that make up the extended Mezzogiorno, these forces got far more votes than those gathered in the rest of the country: M5s was chosen by 26,4% of the electors (+11%), and FI by 12,1% (+4%). The success of these two forces was homogenous in all the rural areas of the South and of the islands. On the other hand, in these areas, the system parties of right and left registered modest consensus. The electorate of the extended Mezzogiorno - that lives in the areas that are disadvantaged with regards to opportunities in the job market and education - is a disenchanted electorate whose electoral behaviour is free of the influence that the ideological political tradition still exerts in different modes in the Centro-Nord. It is possible to observe a firm electoral orientation towards hybrid-tactical parties that set forth solutions of various sorts to face the material and social vulnerability conditions that affect most families residing in Mezzogiorno.

In the urban Mezzogiorno, the electoral behaviour favoured hybrid-tactical forces (median on the first index = - 1,26), especially M5s (median on the second index = - 0,44). In the 15 colleges in the urban centres in the South, M5s gathered 30,9% of the votes, almost doubling the national average, and FI 10,3% (+ 2,2%). M5s came close to the absolute majority in the towns of the Neapolitan hinterland (47,2% in Casoria, 43,6% in Acerra, 42,5% in Giugliano in Campania), and in Foggia (41,3%). The electoral behaviour of those who live in the urban centres of the South is similar to the electoral choices of those who live in rural areas. The difference is in the greater intensity it gets in the urban areas in rejecting the ideologies that underlay the system parties and in embracing the ideas and proposals set forth by M5s. This is due to the material and social vulnerability conditions that affect the families residing in the urban centres of Mezzogiorno, where life contexts are more challenging than those in rural towns.

In tertiary urban Mezzogiorno the electoral behaviour confirmed that the South is the electoral field of the hybrid-tactical forces (median on the first index = - 1,29). In the most urbanised areas in Mezzogiorno, the vote was polarised in favour of M5s (median on the second index = - 1,11). In the colleges of Napoli, Palermo, and Bari, the electoral result of M5S reached 36,7%; in the college of Napoli San Carlo all'Arena, M5s gathered 45,5%. System parties had residual electoral consensus; FI was in line with its national performance. In the major urban centres of the South, the conditions of economic and educational disadvantage influence the electoral behaviour in favour of hybrid-tactical forces and, especially, in favour of M5s, which was the first electoral force in the political elections of 2022 in the most urbanised areas of the South.

The results show the contraposition between the citizens' electoral behaviour of the Centro-Nord and the electoral choices of the voters of the Mezzogiorno. In the most economically developed areas of the country, where the level of social and educational inclusion is high, the electorate voted for the system parties. In non-urbanized and industrial areas, people made electoral choices favouring the right-wing parties; those who benefited from this were FdI and Lega. Meanwhile, in the cities, the electorate favoured the left-wing parties; those who benefited from this were Pd and Avs.

Fig.1 - Voting for system parties vs hybrid-tactical parties in the industrial Centro-Nord, urban Centro-Nord, tertiary urban Centro-Nord, extended Mezzogiorno, urban Mezzogiorno, tertiary urban Mezzogiorno (eta squared = 0,822)

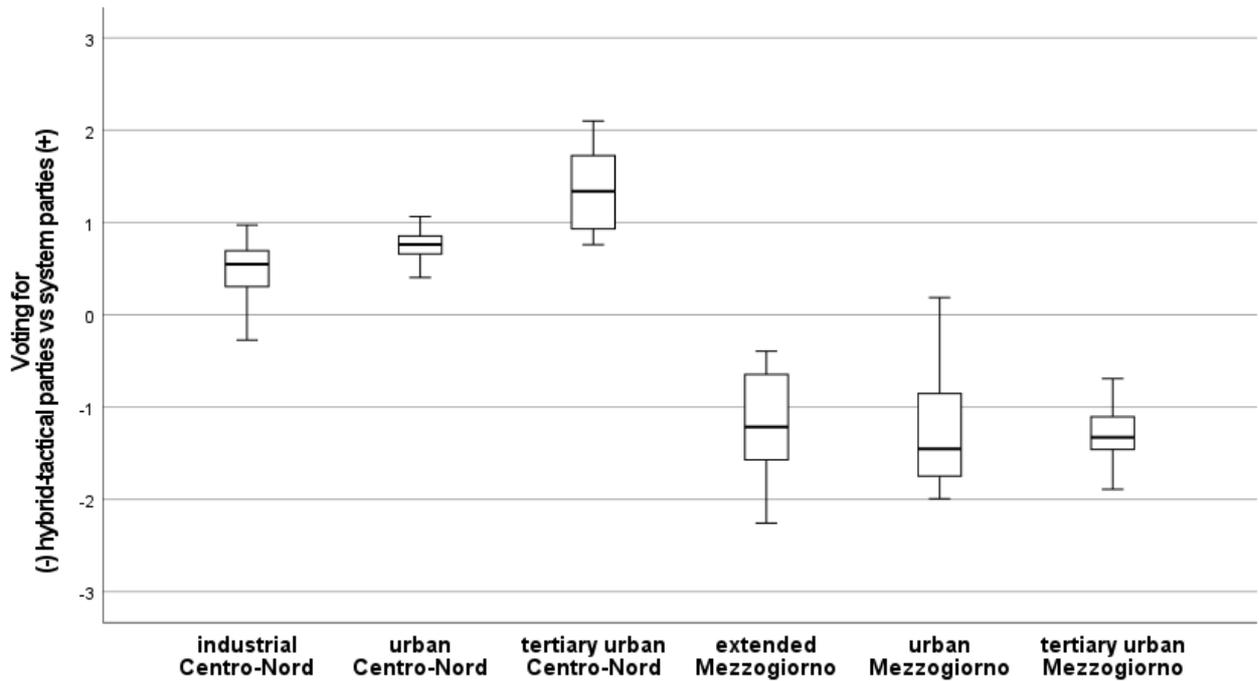
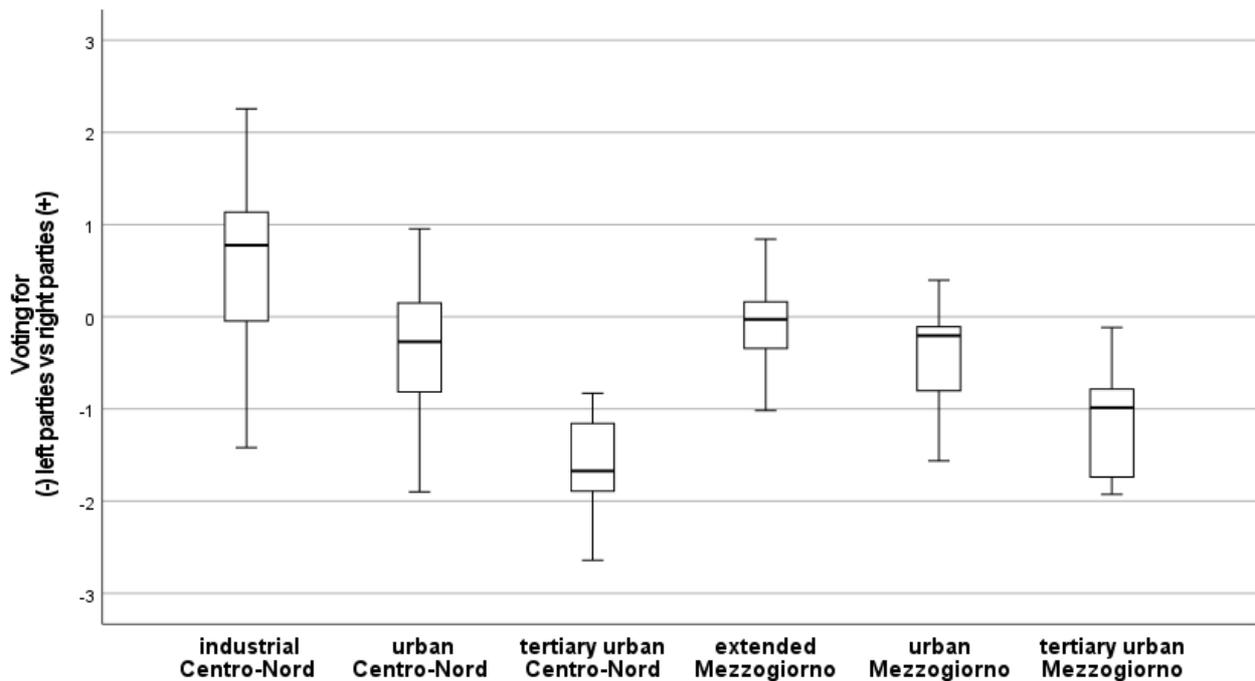


Fig. 2 - Voting for right parties vs left parties in the industrial Centro-Nord, urban Centro-Nord, tertiary urban Centro-Nord, extended Mezzogiorno, urban Mezzogiorno, tertiary urban Mezzogiorno (eta squared = 0,484)



On the other hand, the electoral behaviour favoured hybrid-tactic parties in the economically disadvantaged areas of the Country, where the degree of social and educational inclusion is low. In the rural areas of the South

and the islands, the consensus was given to M5s and FI. In the cities, where the conditions of poverty and vulnerability are even more accentuated than in less inhabited areas, the electoral polarisation increased the support for M5S, which affirmed itself as a regional electoral force that takes the initiative to help those living in deprivation and poverty.

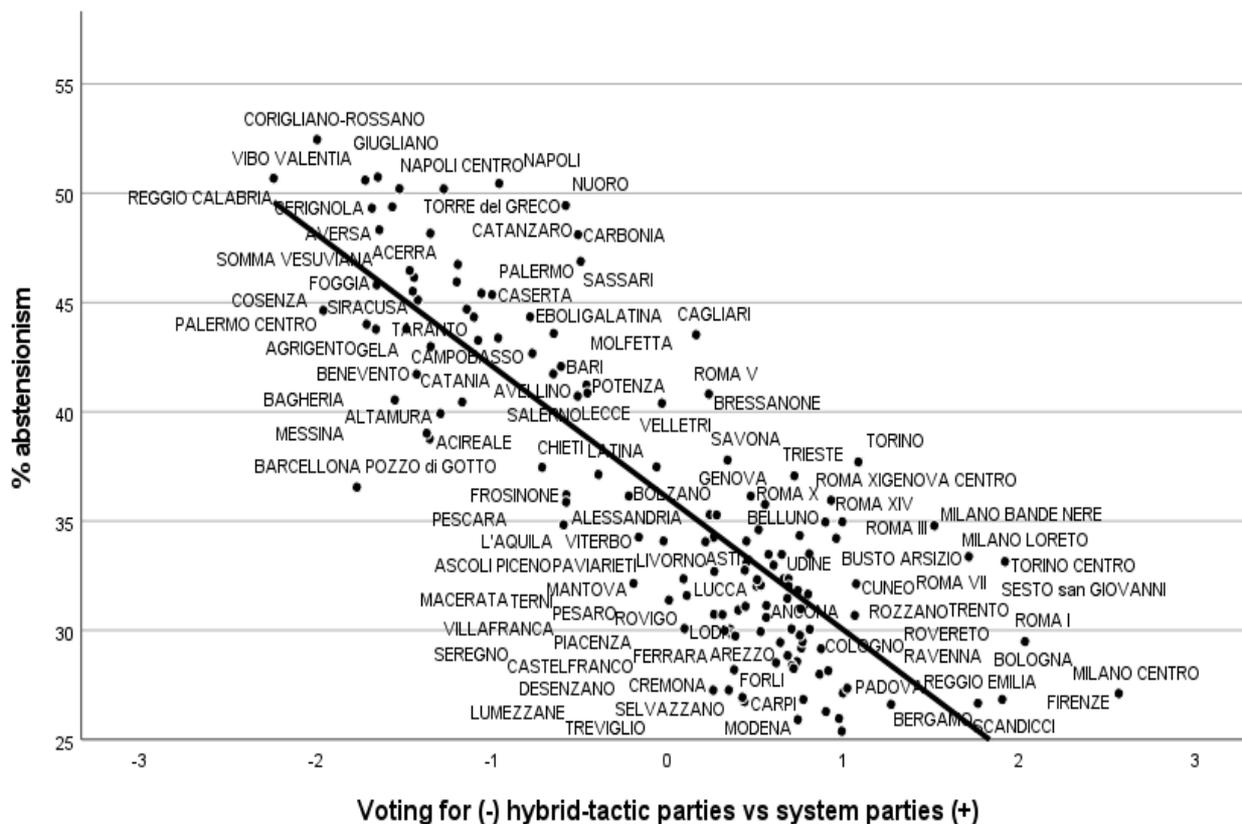
The phenomenon of abstentionism shows a fracture between Centro-Nord and Mezzogiorno, corresponding to the electoral behaviour we already discussed. The percentage of people who in September 2022 decided not to vote was an average of 31% in the colleges in the Centro-Nord. The rate of abstentions in the industrial Centro-Nord is coherent with the percentage of abstentions in the urban Centro-Nord and the tertiary Centro-Nord, as tab. 4 shows. The phenomenon of abstentionism is far different in the Mezzogiorno, where it amounts to 44% in the extended Mezzogiorno, 45% in the urban Mezzogiorno, and 46,5% in metropolitan centres.

Tab. 4 - Percentage of abstentionism in the industrial Centro-Nord, urban Centro-Nord, tertiary urban Centro-Nord, extended Mezzogiorno, urban Mezzogiorno, tertiary urban Mezzogiorno

	Mean	Standard deviation
Industrial Centro-Nord	31,6	3,3
Urban Centro-Nord	31,6	4,1
Tertiary urban Centro-Nord	31,3	3,5
Extended Mezzogiorno	44,0	4,1
Urban Mezzogiorno	45,0	4,5
Tertiary urban Mezzogiorno	46,5	3,7

Thus, we interrogated the relationship between abstentionism and the principal dimension of electoral behaviour analysed in this paper. Suppose we pose the index of voting for system parties vs hybrid-tactical parties as the independent variable and the percentage of abstentionism as the dependent variable. In that case, it is possible to observe a robust negative relationship: as the voting for system parties increases, the percentage of abstentions in electoral colleges decreases ( $r = -0,875$ ). More precisely, as one standard point of the index of voting for system parties increases, the percentage of abstentionism in the political elections of 2022 decreases by 6,3% ( $b = -6,31$ ). Furthermore, the relationship is almost linear ( $R^2 = 0,76$ ): 76% of the variation of the variable abstentionism is reproduced by the variable voting for system parties vs hybrid-tactical parties. The scatter diagram (figure 3) shows the closeness of the points to the regression line. The electoral colleges of Centro-Nord are situated in the lower part of the plan and shifted to the right, where the vote is inclined to system parties. It is carried by ideologies and values inherited from traditional political cultures; here, the percentages of abstentionism are low. The electoral colleges of Mezzogiorno are located in the higher part of the plan and shifted to the left, where the electoral behaviour favours hybrid-tactical forces; here, voting increases abstentionism and renders it a widespread, large-scale phenomenon.

Fig. 3 – Relationship between voting for system parties vs hybrid-tactical parties and abstentionism

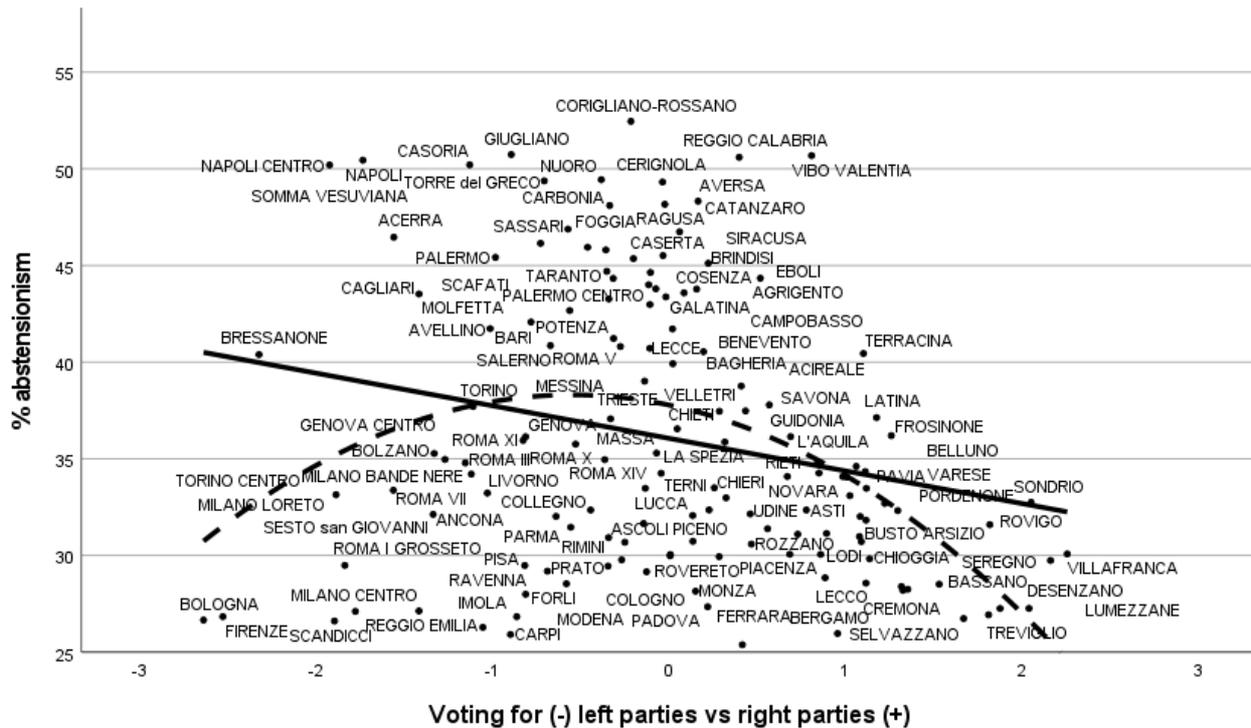


On the other hand, the relationship between abstentionism and the second dimension of electoral behaviour analysed in this paper is weak. Suppose we pose the index of voting for right parties vs left parties as the independent variable and the percentage of abstentionism as the dependent variable. In that case, we observe a modest negative correlation<sup>7</sup>. It is important to note that this correlation is not linear ( $R^2 = 0,04$ ): merely the 4% of the variance of the variable abstentionism is reproduced by the variable voting for right parties vs left parties. The distance between the points and the regression line suggests that a curve can best approximate the relationship between the two variables, which reminds of a curvilinear relationship like a U<sup>8</sup>. Notwithstanding this, the curvilinear relationship does not significantly better adapt the model to the data: 17% of the variance of the variable abstentionism is reproduced by the variable voting for right parties vs left parties ( $R^2 = 0,17$ ). This is shown by the scattered diagram (figure 4). The colleges are situated at a distance from the curve: the colleges of the Centro-Nord are located in the lower part of the plan, under the curve, where the level of abstentionism is low as the result of the effect of voting for system parties; the colleges of the Mezzogiorno are situated in the higher part of the diagram, above the curve, where the percentages of abstentionism are high because the electoral body vote for hybrid-tactical parties.

<sup>7</sup> As the disposition of the electoral body to vote for right parties increases, the percentage of abstained in a certain electoral college decreases ( $r = -0,234$ ). As one standard point of the index of voting for right parties in the political elections of 2022 increases, abstentionism decreases of 1,68% ( $b = -1,68$ ).

<sup>8</sup> The curvilinear relationship is produced by the function with two parameters ( $b = -1,91$ ;  $c = -1,74$ ).

Fig. 4 – Relationship between voting for right parties vs left parties and abstentionism



## 6. The underlying causes of polarisation

After presenting the empirical results, this work's final aim is to reflect upon the latent causes of the different forms of electoral polarisation. As previously noted, the contraposition between the two geographical areas corresponds to the rooting of two systems of antithetical political forces that convey opposed value impositions and ideological patchworks.

The Centro-Nord area—where the consensus of the forces heir to the tradition still resides—is characterised by greater social inclusion and more widespread socioeconomic welfare that aims to pursue and protect common interests, notwithstanding the different value polarities.

The Mezzogiorno area characterises low social inclusion and disadvantaged socioeconomic conditions. It leans towards political forces that tactically aim to maintain the electorate by focusing on satisfying the needs of the individual at the cost of a dimension that considers the community's interests. Here, the contraposition between the two systems is made more evident. This is translated into a different request for social protection from the electors to the political forces.

It is worth recalling: a) the nature of ideologies as dynamic objects strongly linked to the context within which they manifest themselves; b) the strongly depoliticised context that discourages collective mobilisation by favouring a more individualist dimension that promotes mechanisms of individual protection and identification (Anselmi, 2023).

In this perspective, the morphological approach prompts us to consider the affirmation of the two different systems of forces as the outcome of the parties' ability to know how to interpret the fractures occurring in the territories. As recalled in the Centro-Nord, where there are no new social fractures, the socioeconomic structure helps to reproduce a scenario in which voters still reward those forces that interpret traditional fractures, drawing a line of continuity with the past.

On the contrary, in the Mezzogiorno, which is mainly characterised by individual-based ideologies, hybrid-tactical forces prove capable of translating old and new social fractures into political fractures, offering strategic solutions and using deconstructed ideological constructs to invest in a targeted manner in specific segments of the electoral market.

In other words, political elites manage to operate a cognitive mobilisation capable of intercepting and translating the demands of a particular segment of the electorate by riding the signals of “*voice/exit*” towards the traditional parties and constructing political proposals capable of generating “*loyalty*” mechanisms (Hirschman, 1970).

As the analysis confirms, it is in the most socio-economically disadvantaged territories that, thanks to their original characterisation, FI and the 5 Star Movement are naturally more adept than other political forces at intercepting voters' demands that give shape to new social fractures. In this perspective, the two parties are facilitated: a) by their original characterisation that places them outside the perimeter of the systemic forces; b) by the absence of binding ideological apparatuses; c) by the leading role played by communication; d) by the visibility and the respective leaders who act as a sounding board for the politicisation of fractures, imposing themselves at the centre of the political debate. In other words, in a context characterised by distrust towards politics, strong leaders and weak parties (Calise, 2016), the game plan is *leader - interest - citizen* capable of generating feelings of *patronage*, regulated by trust mechanisms (Di Gregorio, 2016).

Considering the decisive role played by territorial contexts in orienting voting choices, there is a polarisation between general interests and particular interests that brings into play a different nature of the Institutions that rule the areas and regulate the relationships between the political system and the socioeconomic sphere (North, 1990).

It is, then, necessary to consider the dichotomy that contraposes the so-called inclusive institutions (1), and the extractive institutions (2) (Acemoglu, Robinson, 2006). These are respectively intended as systems that: 1. Offer the same access to the system of exchange and negotiation to everyone; 2. are expressions of the interests of a closed elite that rules and regulates the society at the expense of general interests.

The Centro-Nord is characterised by the presence of inclusive, horizontal institutions that are collectively oriented. These aim to improve the economic well-being of the Country. They guarantee: “the respect of private property, an impartial justice system, and an amount of services that offer equal opportunities to access the system of exchanges, and trading to everyone; moreover, the ability of opening new activities, and to freely choose an occupation must be guaranteed” (Acemoglu, Robinson, 2013, p.86).

On the other hand, in the Mezzogiorno, there is a dysfunctional interpenetration between the political and economic systems. Our analysis proves that this area is characterised by abstentionism, de-politicization, and disaffection towards traditional political representatives.

Here, the Institutions take on an extractive form that has inhibited the activation of extensive processes of development and that has structured an inefficient model of political capitalism, which depends on elements that characterise the territory and the Institutions, as: a) an elite controlling the channels of political representation, that fuels the machine of consensus by systematically resorting to patronage exchange; b) the strength of the criminal economy, of extorsive practices, the limitation of competition in the economic field; c) corruption, and inefficiency of a bureaucracy that is mainly recruited through patronage logics (Russo, 2015). Here, the amoral familism that puts the good of the individual and their close-knit nucleus first, aimed at maximising only material benefits in the short term to the detriment of the community (Banfield, 1958), still holds sway. What is the cause of this? It is crucial to note how “patronage constitutes the relational dynamic on which the extractive institutions of Mezzogiorno are built. It preserves the power of the elites, and it projects its constraints within both the political and economic system” (Russo, 2015, p. 282). The patronage scheme makes social relationships asymmetrical (Eisenstadt and Roniger, 1974), and it is embodied by a relationship between a patron – who retains access to and control over the resources – and a client – who asks to access

those resources partially. Thus, a purely instrumental relationship is activated (Pitrone, 1994; Caciagli, 2009). When the patronage phenomenon is intense, the society is based “on the inseparability of affiliations, and exchange interests, and the weakness of the law, of identity, and values in general” (Fantozzi, 1993, p. 123). The patronage relationship cannot be contractualised, and it, thus, is informal. However, it is mandatory, binding, and based on loyalty. It is the concern of the patron and client to honour the commitment made in the patronage exchange. It follows that political relationships governed by patronage are a-ideological utilitarian. These are not founded on collective solidarity; they are regulated by particular interests and the ability to organise consensus (Caciagli, 2009). As evidence for this, studies on patronage in Italy show that, since the end of the XIX century, political elites in the South secured electoral support for themselves by turning public resources into patronage favours (Graziano, 1980). In the same way, to emphasise how these phenomena are deeply rooted in the territory, the studies on patronage in Sicilia show that there was a patronage system that controlled and administered the territory, policymakers, and the social structure during the years of Democrazia Cristiana (Caciagli, 1977; Muhlmann, Llaroya, 1982; Schneider, Schneider, 1989). As the Prima Repubblica disappeared, Alleanza Nazionale inherited this system and FI in 1994 (Caciagli, 2009).

As has happened in the past, vote trading is the instrument that substantiates political patronage and allows the maintenance of consensus. This vote is devoid of its democratic value, and it is turned into an instrument of bargaining within the patronage relationships that allows to obtain benefits that are not earned through merit but through sentiments of loyalty and of affiliation (Russo, 2015). In this context, which is characterised by disaffection with collectivity and distortion of the institutional system, the hybrid-tactical forces locate themselves at the centre of the political offer in a strategic position. In this sense, the action of M5s is particularly successful, as it re-enacts the political patronage phenomenon in the Mezzogiorno with an aggregate form of patronage exchange, the so-called categorial patronage (Pizzorno, 1974). The politician, better if he is the leader, “establishes stable relationships of trust with associations, union, and categorial groups, civil or religious organisations, by exchanging protection, and benefits for the group with electoral consensus from the members of the various associations, and categories” (Fantozzi, Raniolo, 2018, p. 24). The electorate is, thus, seen as a set of different categories. The patronage relationship – as the trading vote – creates a relationship which is not dyadic between two individual actors but that involves groups and categories of clusters (the party and the clusters of electors), within which the relational mechanisms between patron (or, politician), and client are replayed in aggregated form.

In fact, *reddito di cittadinanza* is a redistributive policy subject to an overly electoralist narrative (Vittoria, 2020). It depends on the party's control of public resources, and it takes the form of a consensus tool capable of activating selective support from certain segments of the population (Ignazi, 2012). The feeling is that the roots of the two Italies described by Putnam (1993), where the Centro-Nord is the theatre of civic life and the South, the place of clientelist politics, still make sense.

Finally, according to our idea, the opposite universes created by electoral polarisation strictly depend on factors intrinsically linked to territories. The nature of the institutions, the need for social protection, the ability of political parties to interpret social cleavages, and the subsequent inclination towards a pluralist or individualist value dimension have to be read within a broader framework of meaning. The same can be argued about ideological patchworks, which give meaning to the political ideas that make them up. These patchworks acquire significance merely in the light of the institutional, political, and economic system they manifest themselves in.

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