

**Two Models for the Politicization of European Integration:
Postfunctionalism, Anti-Establishment Politics, and the Italian Case**

Erik Jones

Johns Hopkins SAIS

Version date: 17 April 2019

Abstract: This paper uses the development of Italy's relationship with the European Union (EU) over the past three decades to explore the difference between two models for the politicization identified by Hutter and Grande (2014). The paper draws the causal mechanism for one model from the postfunctionalist argument made by Hooghe and Marks (2009, 2018). It draws the causal mechanism for the other (anti-establishment) model from the writings of Stefano Bartolini (2005) and Peter Mair (2007, 2013). Although the two models can exist simultaneously, it is possible to test for predominance in a particular context. Moreover, the implications of the two models are very different. While it is possible to address a postfunctionalist politicization of Europe by improving the quality of pan-European political discourse and strengthening democracy at the European level, the only solution to anti-establishment politics is to improve the quality of domestic democratic governance. The evidence suggests that both mechanisms are present in Italy, but the anti-establishment mechanism is more important. By implication, the best way to strengthen Italian attitudes toward Europe is through political reform at the domestic level. Where Grande and Hutter (2016a, 2016b) succeed in demonstrating that there is variation in the politicization of Europe across national cases, this article demonstrates that this variation has important policy implications.

Keywords: democratic deficit, public opinion, euro membership, migration, populism.

Word count: 9372

Politicization, Postfunctionalism, and Anti-Establishment Politics

Europe is much more prominent in political conversation today. It is also more open to criticism. The question is why that is so and how such conversations should be managed. In addressing that question, this paper starts where Swen Hutter and Edgar Grande (2014) leave off. In their prize-winning analysis of how Europe is politicized in five West Europe countries, Hutter and Grande (2014: 1016) find that there are 'two different political paths towards a politicization of Europe. One of these paths is dominated by populist radical parties from the right, while the other path is shaped by the conflict between mainstream parties in government and opposition.' The difference between the pathways is important, they argue, because they could take Europe in very different directions, one of which would lead to greater constraints on new membership and the renationalization of power and authority, while the other would contingently depend on 'actor strategies and the strength of political coalitions'. Hence, they conclude, 'it would be important to examine these two paths in more detail in future research to better understand the political mechanisms that influence the politicization of European integration and its consequences.'

The purpose of this paper is to use two cornerstones in the literature as the basis for elaborating the different pathways Hutter and Grande (2014) identify. The argument builds on the seminal work by Hooghe and Marks (2009) to sketch the pathway Hutter and Grande characterize as dominated by populist radical parties from the right. That characterization is consistent with Hooghe and Marks's (2009) original 'postfunctionalist' argument and yet should be updated in light of what these authors (2018) reveal about the impact of migration and the financial crisis on their underlying causal mechanism. In that sense, this article departs slightly from the original specification of the first pathway in Hutter and Grande (2014) insofar as we see the politicization of Europe on other parts of the spectrum as well as the far right.

The second pathway is a potentially a more significant departure. This paper builds an alternative model for politicization from the works of Stefano Bartolini (2005) and Peter Mair (2007, 2013). That alternative pathway centers squarely on 'the conflict between mainstream parties in government and opposition' (Hutter and Grande 2014: 1016). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Hutter and Grande (2014) do not cite Mair's work and make only passing reference to Bartolini (2005). More important, the anti-establishment pathway starts with collusion rather than competition among the mainstream parties. The contention here is that this second pathway competes with Hooghe and Marks' (2009) postfunctionalist interpretation even if it is not exactly what Hutter and Grande (2014) had in mind.

This analytical distinction between the two pathways raises the following strategic question for European policymakers: should the goal in responding to the politicization of European integration be to bridle the extremists by strengthening political input at the European level, or should policymakers worry more about changing the way mainstream parties of government and opposition compete in the domestic context?

While there are many places in Europe where the answer to this question is pressing the Italian case is important because of the dramatic change that has taken place in the ways the population perceives European integration and politicians discuss European issues. The population shows less support for Europe; the politicians are more prone to mobilize against the European project and to provoke conflict

with representatives of European institutions. In substantive terms, the paper argues that the pathway for politicization assembled from the works of Bartolini (2005) and Mair (2007, 2013) predominates in the Italian case over that described by Hooghe and Marks (2009, 2018). Although there have been moments where right-wing extremist parties have dominated the conversation about Europe in Italy, the best explanation of the pattern of politicization derives from the (lack of) competition over Europe between government and opposition in the domestic context as sketched by Bartolini and Mair. Put another way, the politicization of Europe in Italy is more powerfully influenced by domestic patterns of government and opposition than by the mismatch between multilevel governance and the functional efficiency of policymaking.

The article develops in three sections. The first section sketches the two pathways to politicization suggested by Hutter and Grande (2014) using the seminal works by Hooghe and Marks (2009, 2018), Bartolini (2005), and Mair (2007, 2013). The purpose of that section is to deduce logical entailments from the two causal mechanisms that will make it possible to test for the predominance of one or the other in the Italian context. The second section provides the empirical application, telling the story of the politicization of European integration in Italy from the late 1980s to the present and then mapping that story against the tests that should indicate which mechanism predominates (and when). The third section draws the implications of the analysis in terms of the consequences for Italy and for the wider European project.

Two Paths to Politicization

The politicization of European integration is not a monolithic process. Instead it is a collection of processes that come together. The European project has to become more visible to the public, political actors have to exploit that visibility in order to attract attention to their larger programs, the audience for European discourse has to widen both in terms of the elites or groups trying to exploit the issue and in terms of the people mobilized around it, and the result has to be some kind of disagreement, conflict, or polarization as perspectives, interpretations or narratives of Europe differ and the gaps between competing conceptions widen and harden. Scholars of politicization may disagree about the order of operations in assembling these processes, the relative weight to give to different processes in the combination, the underlying motivations of the actors involved, or the strategies to use in operationalizing different elements for analysis. Most seem to agree, however, both on the composite nature of politicization as a phenomenon and the list of necessary components – salience, mobilization, polarization, conflict (Hutter and Grande 2014, Rauh 2018, Börzel and Risse 2018, De Wilde 2018).

A ‘pathway’ to politicization in the language of Hutter and Grande (2014) is a formula for weighing and assembling the various components. The metaphor they use – ‘pathway’ – implies both a sequence, one foot after another, and a direction of travel, from here to there. In turn, that direction implies some characterization of the motivations held by the different actors involved – called ‘driving forces’, but reflecting a reaction to authority, a perception of identity, and a strategy for engagement with politics. This notion of motivation is important because human agency is central to any causal account. The politicization of European integration is not something that happens to countries in a passive sense, it is something that political leaders and followers bring about (Grande and Hutter 2016b: 111).

Postfunctionalism

The mechanism set out by Hooghe and Marks (2009) is very precise. As a baseline condition, elites are more supportive of integration and the general public is more sceptical. This baseline condition does not need to change for politicization to take place. As Hooghe and Marks (2009: 9) underscore, their 'argument does not require that the public has to become more Eurosceptical The decisive change is that the elite has to make room for a more Eurosceptical public.'

The mechanism Hooghe and Marks (2009: 8) sketch involves a series of progressive steps. Both elites and the general population have to experience some kind of 'mismatch between functional efficiency and jurisdictional form'. In other words, the process starts with a change in jurisdictional form that creates a public policy problem that can be understood both in terms of what kinds of policies are being offered and where (or by whom). 'First,' Hooghe and Marks (2009: 13) argue, 'the tension must be salient.' 'Second, political entrepreneurs must mobilize the tension.' This means that political elites respond to the perception of mismatch between 'functional efficiency and jurisdictional form' as a policy problem by making a series of choices – about whether to promote a specific issue, and about whether to frame that issue as a matter for specialized interest groups or for the wider public. Hooghe and Marks (2009: 19) assume that 'party leaders seek to politicize an issue when they see electoral advantage in doing so.' And they suggest that party leaders can also choose to ignore issues insofar as '[whether] an issue enters mass politics depends not on its intrinsic merits, but on whether a political party picks it up' (Hooghe and Marks 2009: 18).

Of course, once a party leader decides to pick up an issue and promote it within a particular context – again, among special interest groups or before the wider public – 'they are constrained by *arena rules*' (Hooghe and Marks 2009: 8 – italics in original) concerning how issues are addressed and decisions are made. In turn, those rules influence the structure of conflict with other political parties as party leaders seek to reconcile their positions on the newly selected issue (or the newly emergent issue for those party leaders who did not select it) with the other commitments they have made or hope to make. As Hooghe and Marks (2009: 13) make clear, '[connections] between national identity, cultural and economic insecurity and issues such as EU enlargement cannot be induced directly from experience, but have to be constructed.' Hence, party leaders need to craft a narrative to mobilize their followers and perhaps also attract new supporters. This narrative may depart substantially from the underlying costs and benefits of the policy in question to engage with values that party leaders already know to be important for their constituents.

This is where communal identities become important in the argument (Hooghe and Marks 2009: 3). As Hooghe and Marks (2009: 23) admit, their theory rests on 'an incomplete account of the construction of identity'. They also do not provide a precise definition. That is not a problem for the argument. The context makes it clear that identity is a set of shared norms and values. The 'community' defines the boundaries within which those norms and values are shared. These communities do not have to be geographical, ethnic, or cultural: they just have to exist in the form of shared values that are potentially implicated in policymaking. Moreover, 'community identities' do not exist in a political sense until politicians step in to define them. 'Identity does not speak for itself in relation to most political objects, but must be politically constructed' (Hooghe and Marks 2009: 12). That does not mean these communities lack self-awareness. On the contrary, some are more self-aware about the breadth, depth, and importance of the values they share and others less. This variation is important in the argument

because '[the] more exclusively an individual identifies with an ingroup, the less that individual is predisposed to support a jurisdiction encompassing outgroups' (Hooghe and Marks 2009: 12).

Cleavage theory provides the structure for interpreting the competition that arises between these communities. The update that Hooghe and Marks (2018) provide is important to complete the argument. In their original analysis, they noted that new lines of tension emerging between political groups tended to correlate closely with the ability of the leaders of those groups to position themselves with respect to Europe without creating contradictions with other policy commitments. Attitudes toward European integration do not fall neatly into a left-right competition, not least because 'left' and 'right' at the European level mean something different than in the national context (Hooghe and Marks 2009: 16). More important, national competition has changed to reflect a new cleavage Hooghe and Marks identified between green, alternative, and libertarian parties at one end of the spectrum and traditionalist, authoritarian, and nationalist parties at the other. This pattern of competition helps to explain some of the unevenness in the incidence of Europeanization. It also helps to explain why Hutter and Grande (2014) describe this model as being dominated by right wing populism. Hooghe and Marks (2009) found initially that political leaders in traditionalist, authoritarian and nationalist parties had an easier time embedding European issues – mostly from a sceptical perspective – in their standard appeals; by contrast, green, alternative, and libertarian parties found it more difficult to explain opposition to Europe without creating contradiction or, presumably, to position themselves in favour of European policies in a way that would garner strategic advantage (Hooghe and Marks 2009: 17).

The update to this argument takes into account the impact of the euro crisis and the migration crisis on the pattern of party-political competition. Hooghe and Marks (2018: 126) argue that a new 'transnational cleavage' has developed 'over the past decade' pitting supporters of cross border movement in goods, services, capital and people, against those who feel threatened by such movements, both economically and culturally. Mainstream political parties have been slow to adapt to this new line of conflict. This has created tensions within such parties and has exposed them to competition from outsiders. The result has been to level the playing field for those who want to challenge the political mainstream by politicizing Europe. Where before it might have been true that right-wing populist parties had an advantage in deploying European issues as part of their mobilization strategies, now both '[traditionalist, authoritarian, nationalist] and [green, alternative, liberal] parties take more extreme positions on Europe and immigration than mainstream political parties; they tie these issues into a tightly coherent worldview; they consider them as intrinsic to their programs; and, correspondingly, they give these issues great salience' (Hooghe and Marks 2018: 123).

Within this updated version of the politicization argument, the difference between the new political groups is that 'transnationalism in the form of support for European co-operation and free movement is strongly consistent with the social libertarian, cosmopolitan and universalist values of green parties. Equally, but in the opposite camp, rejection of European integration and immigration lie at the core of the [traditionalist, authoritarian, nationalist] defence of the nation against external forces' (Hooghe and Marks 2018: 123). Hence, '[change] has come not because mainstream parties have shifted in response to voter preferences, but because voters have turned to parties with distinctive profiles on the new cleavage' (Hooghe and Marks 2018: 126).

Anti-Establishment Politics

Bartolini (2005) and Mair (2007, 2013) have a different account of politicization that centers more closely on government-opposition strategies than on the tension between policymaking jurisdictions and popular attitudes toward Europe as a political project.

The background condition in this model is a different form of permissive consensus. Where Hooghe and Marks (2009) argue that the public is naturally more skeptical of Europe than elites, Bartolini and Mair are non-committal about the structure of preferences in that regard. Instead, Mair (2007: 1) defines the 'permissive' consensus in terms of elite-follower relationships: 'there was a consensus in the sense that there was agreement across the political mainstream that European integration should be furthered and it was permissive in the sense that high levels of trust in the political elites during these years ensured that there was almost always popular deference to their commitments.' The distinction is important because any erosion of trust in elites is likely to whittle away at that deference irrespective of any change in popular attitudes toward Europe. If anything, the decline in support for Europe would derive from changing popular attitudes toward their elites (Mair 2013: 114).

The explanation for elite consensus on the virtues of European integration is the first step in the argument. Mair (2007: 8) claims that the promotion of Europe 'is part of a more or less deliberate policy by mainstream political elites who are reluctant to have their hands tied by the constraints of popular democracy.' He goes on to explain: 'The scale of the European construct may be unique and without precedent, but the rationale that underlies it conforms closely to current thinking about the role of non-majoritarian institutions, on the one hand, and about the putative drawbacks of popular democracy, on the other' (Mair 2013: 99). In other words, the logic behind elite support for European integration is much the same as the logic behind elite support for politically independent central banks. Some policies should be removed from democratic contestation; they should be 'depoliticized' (Mair 2013: 117).

Bartolini (2005: 321-326) and Mair (2007, 2013) agree that this depoliticization of policymaking changes the lines of conflict that remain in the domestic political space. Nevertheless, they argue that the result is an adaptation of existing cleavage lines rather than the emergence of new ones. The old territorial cleavage progressively lengthens and widens to include 'the institutionalization of a distinctive European political system' to 'the penetration of European rules, directives and norms into the domestic sphere' (Mair 2007: 9). Meanwhile, the 'functional' cleavage that runs from 'conflicts over the allocation of resources' at one end to more 'ideological oppositions' focused on "'conceptions of moral right and ... the interpretation of history and human destiny'" (Lipset and Rokkan 1967: 10) at the other end, 'take no position on the question of Europe as a polity, but are more concerned with the allocation of resources within whatever Europe happens to exist at the time' (Mair 2007: 10).

The problem, they argue, is that this evolution in the lines of political conflict does not match up with opportunities for political opposition to hold policymakers to account (Bartolini 2005: 325-326). The reason for this is four-fold. First, the EU is not itself a coherent territorial polity within which a single territorial cleavage structure can predominate, and consequently European political parties do not aggregate preferences across national boundaries in a coherent manner (Bartolini 2005: 325, 326-332). Second, elections to the European Parliament tend to focus on issues that are unrelated to the role that institution plays in the policymaking process (Mair 2007: 11). Third, national elections often focus on distributive policies that have been delegated by national politicians in whole or in part to non-majoritarian institutions – meaning '[t]hrough Europe, although crucially not only through Europe,

political competition, and hence political opposition, becomes increasingly eviscerated' (Mair 2007: 14). And fourth, mainstream politicians have no incentive to democratize Europe given that they rely on Europe – and other non-majoritarian institutions – to escape from the constraints of democratic politics. As Mair (2013: 99-100) explains: 'if the [European] Union could be democratized ... then it probably would not be needed in the first place.'

The implications of this argument for the politicization of Europe are stark. An attack on European integration becomes an easy ploy for any political actor who seeks to undermine the legitimacy of the establishment: 'the European issue has become a hammer with which to beat the establishment. This occurs not just on the right. The hammer is available to anti-establishment forces on both left and right, and both sides are happy to wield it' (Mair 2013: 114). Indeed, opposition to Europe may be the only point of congruence between competing anti-establishment forces: 'we should not exclude the possibility that there are some common elements in the strange amalgam of discontent across the traditional political spectrum for which the EU could indeed be a strong unifying catalyst' (Bartolini 2005: 319). Moreover, anti-establishment and anti-European positions may be the only remaining strategy for popular expression of opposition to government policy: 'anti-system opposition, or opposition of principle, is undermined when more scope is afforded to classical opposition [on an issue-by-issue basis]. Conversely, when classical opposition is limited or constrained, it then becomes more likely that critics will mobilize around an opposition of principle' (Mair 2007: 6). With the spread of non-majoritarian institutions – including those at the European level – voters face a choice: 'we either submit, and hence we accept the elimination of opposition, or we mobilize an opposition of principle and become intrinsically Eurosceptic' (Mair 2007: 7).

The crucial point to note in this argument is that neither anti-establishment nor anti-European attitudes are necessarily connected to the European project per se. Instead, they derive, at least in part, from popular frustration with the functioning of democratic politics (Bartolini 2005: 318, 320-321). As Mair (2007: 16) explains:

when we talk about Euroscepticism, and about opposition to Europe, we are also sometimes talking about scepticism and opposition to our own national institutions and modes of governance. This is a scepticism about how we are governed, and it is, in my view, a scepticism that is at least partially fostered by the increasingly limited scope for opposition within the system – whether that system be European or national, or both at the same time.

The only way to address the negative politicization of Europe according to this argument, is to improve the quality of governance – starting with domestic politics. Efforts to counter this negative politicization with the democratization of European institutions or the promotion of a more positive pan-European political discourse will not work.

Postfunctionalism versus Anti-Establishment Politics

These two different pathways to politicization have different characteristics. These differences are not always mutually exclusive in the sense that they vitiate one argument or the other by their presence. Hence, they do not constitute a falsifying test. Nevertheless, they are tied to different causal mechanisms and so provide an opportunity to assess the relative goodness of fit in a fair comparison of

the two causal mechanisms (Miller 1988). Six such differences can be extracted from the mechanisms sketched above.

Popular Preferences: The postfunctionalist account does not rely on a decline in popular support for integration. It relies instead on the existence of a gap between elite and popular views of the European project. If that gap does not exist, then it is hard to explain the emergence of Euroskeptical political movements. By contrast, the anti-establishment account does not require a gap to exist between popular and elite attitudes toward Europe. Instead, it requires a loss of trust in domestic political elites and it anticipates that popular support for integration will decline as frustration with the functioning of domestic political institutions (and loss of trust in the political establishment) increases.

Elite Motivations: The postfunctionalist account points primarily to the functional superiority of European public goods provision. The anti-establishment account points primarily to the inconvenience of democratic institutions. The distinction here is important insofar as the postfunctionalist account would be consistent with a political project to improve the functioning of European democracy; the anti-establishment account would not.

Cleavage Structure: Any changes in political cleavages are largely exogenous to the politicization of Europe in the postfunctionalist account, although the placement of parties within the new cleavage structure is indicative of the ease with which (or likelihood that) they will try to mobilize around European issues. By contrast, the change in political cleavages or lines of conflict is endogenous to the anti-establishment mechanism as domestic politicians delegate authority to non-majoritarian institutions – including European institutions – and an increasing array of issues emerge for which there is no viable forum or mechanism for voicing classical (or issue-by-issue based) opposition.

Triggering Mechanism: The postfunctionalist mechanism is triggered by a change in policymaking jurisdiction that creates a tension in the minds of the public and that can be exploited by political operatives. The anti-establishment mechanism is triggered whenever opposition to policies builds up that cannot be expressed meaningfully through existing political institutions and so manifests as principled opposition to the political system (including European institutions).

Political Strategy: Politicians in the postfunctionalist account raise European issues strategically where they know the public will be receptive and make a calculating choice about which arena (interest based or public) is best suited for mobilization around the arguments they seek to make. Politicians in the anti-establishment account raise European issues instrumentally in the public arena – whether or not those issues ultimately gain traction – as part of a broad assault on the establishment and an in-principle opposition to the use of non-majoritarian institutions for public policymaking.

Coalitional Opportunities: Political movements that exist on the traditionalist, authoritarian, nationalist end of the spectrum have been able to connect European issues with appeals to identity politics in the postfunctionalist account; in the aftermath of the financial crisis and the migration crisis, political movements on the green, alternative, libertarian end of the spectrum have been able to mobilize around European issues as well. Both groups mobilize voters against mainstream political parties in this modified form of the post-functional argument, but their mobilization strategies point in opposite directions and so they should not be expected to join forces. By contrast, the coalitional opportunities are broader in the anti-establishment mechanism insofar as ‘protest and anti-establishment stands,

however ideologically disparate, might find the anti-EU position a common denominator' (Bartolini 2005: 319).

Table 1 summarizes these differences in parallel lists of observable features. It is worth noting again that the presence of any one indicator does not deny the operation of the other causal mechanism; there is no reason both mechanisms could not be in play at the same time. The question is which of the two mechanisms is likely to predominate and so should be the first to be addressed by policymakers seeking to mitigate the impact of the politicization of Europe.

Table 1: Differences between Post-functionalist and Anti-establishment Mechanisms

Indicator	Post-functionalist	Anti-establishment
<i>Popular Preferences</i>	Gap between elites and public	Declining public support
<i>Elite Motivations</i>	Superior policy provision	Escape from democratic interference
<i>Cleavage Structure</i>	Exogenous change	Endogenous change
<i>Triggering Mechanism</i>	Jurisdictional change	Frustrated opposition
<i>Political Strategy</i>	Pick salient issues	Use any issue
<i>Coalitional Opportunities</i>	GAL or TAN (not both)	Strange combinations

The Politicization of European Integration in the Italian Context

A quick look at the Eurobarometer polling data for Italy makes it clear that neither account of politicization is a perfect fit – if only with respect to the background conditions. Italians have long expressed the view that membership in the EU and its predecessors is ‘a good thing’. From the start of polling in the 1970s through the early 1990s, the share of Italians who selected that characterization fluctuated between 70 and 80 percent; by contrast, the European aggregate – including Italy, and hence dragged up by Italians’ high regard for Europe – fluctuated between 50 and 70 percent. It is likely that Italian elites were even more supportive than the public during this period, but the gap between elite and popular opinion could not have been that great. Meanwhile, Italians showed considerable frustration with the functioning of their domestic institutions. That is understandable given the country’s turbulent history in the 1970s and 1980s. Indeed, it is possible that this frustration with national politics and Italian affection for Europe were two sides of the same coin (Panebianco 2018). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that a higher percentage of respondents express satisfaction with the functioning of Italian democracy today than they did in decades past.ⁱ In this sense, neither the permissive consensus described by Hooghe and Marks (2009) nor that described by Mair (2007) seems to appertain.

Whatever form of permissive consensus may have held in Italy seems to be collapsing. The reason most observers are concerned about the politicization of European integration in Italy is that both public opinion and elite attitudes have appeared to turn against Europe over the course of the last quarter century both in absolute terms and relative to their attitudes toward Italian democracy. More than 60 percent of Italian respondents now have a negative or neutral perception of the EU, up from just 30 percent at the turn of the 21st Century, and more than 50 percent of respondents say they feel unattached to the EU. Dissatisfaction with European democracy hovers around 50 percent; importantly, moreover, more Italians report being unsatisfied with democracy in Europe than with democracy in

their own country. Italians continue to trust European institutions more than they trust their own national government, but distrust of the EU has risen to around 50 percent of respondents and the gap in mistrust between the EU and the national government has fallen (see Online Appendix, Figures 1-3).

The impact of the economic crisis no doubt played an important role both in popular attitudes and in the conversation about European integration (Cramme and Hobolt 2015). Nevertheless, Italians started to lose faith in the benefits of integration much earlier (see Online Appendix, Figure 4). This timing fits very closely with the expansion of European institutions at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s as anticipated in Hooghe and Marks (2009). It also fits with a new strategy that Italian politicians deployed for relying on European institutions to constrain domestic politics – called the *vincolo esterno* in Italian – in a manner that resonates more closely with the arguments made by Mair (2007, 2013).

Vincolo Esterno

Historically, the external constraint on Italy took the form of United States interference in domestic Italian politics. That constraint existed by necessity and not design as a feature of the Cold War. Italians did not like having their politics dictated by Washington – particularly on the extremes of left and right – but they had little choice but to accept it (Jones 2006). The emergence of European integration as an external constraint was altogether different insofar as it was a matter of domestic political choice (Diodato 2014). Italian officials made that choice on four separate occasions: when they decided to move Italy into the ‘narrow bands’ of the exchange rate mechanism of the European Monetary System in January 1990 as part of a strategy to bind the central bank to disinflation (Molho 1990); when they decided to participate actively in the negotiation to form an economic and monetary union (Dyson and Featherstone 1996); when they decided to recommit to monetary integration after the 1992 exchange rate crisis (Della Sala 1997); and when they decided to redouble efforts to enter Europe’s economic and monetary union (Quaglia and Radaelli 2007). Not all of these decisions were equally successful in insulating public policy from democratic politics (Walsh 1999). Ultimately, however, Italian political elites did succeed in ‘hollowing out and hardening the state’ by using European commitments to shut down domestic political debate (Della Sala 1997).

This elite project was not secret (Della Sala 2015). On the contrary, the convergence of elite views on the political ‘advantages of tying one’s hands’ was something they openly promoted in popular political discourse (Quaglia and Radaelli 2007). In the 1990s, for example, center-left prime minister Romano Prodi justified his ambitious reform agenda as necessary for Italy to remain at the center of the European project (Sbragia 2001). When Prodi became President of the European Commission and Silvio Berlusconi won back the premiership from the centre-left, the tension between the two men did at times play out as a tension between ‘Italy’ and ‘Europe’. During the run-up to the 2006 election, for example, Berlusconi tried to mobilize anti-European sentiment around the costs associated with ‘Prodi’s euro’ (Jones 2006). The changeover to the single currency was an open source of complaint within the electorate, 96 percent of whom thought the single currency contributed to higher prices (European Commission 2006: 34). Moreover, between 2005 and 2006, the percentage of Italian polling respondents who thought the adoption of the euro was ‘advantageous overall’ fell from 43 percent to 41 percent (European Commission 2006a: 31); the percentage that realized participation in the euro implied a cross-country coordination of macroeconomic policies rose from 46 percent to 52 percent

(European Commission 2006a: 50); and yet the share of the population who believed that participation in the EU is ‘a good thing’ rose from 50 percent to 56 percent (European Commission 2006b: 19). In the end, Berlusconi’s efforts to tie Prodi to the euro fell flat. The electorate wanted to talk about domestic taxes instead (Giannetti and De Giorgi 2006; Campus 2006).

The elite consensus on the virtues of a European constraint did not trigger a populist backlash from further to the right either. The Lega Nord – which is in many ways ‘the “mother” of Italian populist movements that have arisen in the past three decades’ – started life as a pro-European political movement and only changed tack when it realized that European institutions threatened to frustrate the party’s secessionist designs. The strongly Euro-sceptical version of the party (now called the Lega) emerged much later, after Matteo Salvini wrestled control from Umberto Bossi in 2013 (Diamanti and Lazar 2018: 115-117). By 2013, however, the whole landscape of Italian politics had begun to change dramatically. Beppe Grillo’s Five Star Movement made its first major break-through in a national electoral contest. Matteo Renzi wrestled control of the center-left from Pierluigi Bersani. And Silvio Berlusconi, having done better than expected in the February 2013 elections, nevertheless began his long retreat from the national political spotlight.

Bipolarity and Technocracy

This is where it becomes useful to focus on the evolution of Italy’s political cleavage structure. The Italian political system collapsed at the end of the Cold War in a series of mafia-related and corruption scandals that brought down much of the country’s establishment (Rhodes 2015). In response to the crisis, many of Italy’s politicians banded together to introduce reforms to the electoral system that would restructure Italian politics on the left-right dimension. These reforms did not prevent the consolidation of populist movements like the Lega Nord and they also did not prevent the emergence of new forms of populism like that represented by Silvio Berlusconi and his center-right Forza Italia. In many ways, the Italian political system remained both volatile and divided, particularly on the center-left. Nevertheless, the new electoral law did usher in a period of relatively coherent left-right alternation that lasted until Berlusconi left office in November 2011 (Hopkin 2015).

When Berlusconi left office, the President of the Italian Republic, Giorgio Napolitano, replaced him with a technocratic government headed by two-time European Commissioner Mario Monti. The purpose of this government was to restore the confidence of the bond markets and to repair relations between Italy and the EU that had become frayed during Berlusconi’s final term in office, from 2008 to 2011. The popular reaction to this changeover was initially very positive (Merler 2018). Moreover, since the Monti government could draw support from across the center of Italian politics, it could also engage in an impressive set of reform efforts – most notably to the pension system. In turn, these reforms were explained as necessary to restore confidence in Italy with foreign investors and European institutions. That formula worked through the first half of 2012 but then quickly lost momentum. When Monti dissolved parliament in December to call for early elections the following February, popular support for his government all but vanished.

The Five Star Movement (M5S) emerged in 2012 and 2013 to fill the gap. That movement had been present in local elections since 2009. It made significant inroads at the regional level starting in 2012. By February 2013, it captured 25 percent of the vote for the Chamber of Deputies and 23 percent of the

vote for the Senate. The movement is difficult to locate on the left-right spectrum. Although many of its supporters come from the center-left, the movement tries not to bind itself to positions that will prevent it from drawing support on the right. Its defining feature is its rejection of Italy's political establishment and its denial of the legitimacy of technocratic government. In this sense, the M5S represents the polar opposite of the Monti government. This does not mean that the movement is genetically anti-European. It is 'no global'; its anti-European positions are a function of its rejection of globalization, technocracy and mainstream politicians (Corbetta and Gualmini 2013).

The success of the M5S in 2013 was not part of a larger wave of populism. The Lega Nord garnered only 4 percent of the vote; the more extremist 'brothers of Italy' got less than 2 percent. In that sense, the M5S was its own revolution. Nevertheless, that victory was large enough to force the center-left and center-right coalitions to come together in support of a grand-coalition government. In turn, the close and prolonged cooperation between the two mainstream coalitions put an end to Italy's history of left-right alternation and so opened up political competition on different cleavages (Hopkin 2015). Although this story has an anti-establishment theme, the pattern could fit either causal mechanism for the politicization of European issues. The cleavage change is both exogenous to Italy's relationship with Europe and endogenous to that relationship. Here it is useful to recall that it was only at this point that the Lega Nord under Salvini began to adopt its strongly anti-European rhetoric (Diamanti and Lazar 2018: 115-117).

Italy's Changing Relationship with Europe

The next three Italian governments – all led by the center-left Democratic Party with first explicit and then tacit support from the center-right – marked an important change in the country's relationship with the EU. To a large extent, that change emerged from an expansion of European competences over macroeconomic policymaking through the fiscal compact, and over banking supervision through the creation of a single supervisory mechanism and the adoption of a banking recovery and resolution directive. These new arrangements not only widened European jurisdictions into highly sensitive areas like redistributive politics and bank bailouts, but they also attracted considerable domestic attention. Italians had to participate in the controversial amendment of Article 81 of their constitution to require the government to balance the budget, and they also had to get used to the new pattern of fiscal legislation that starts with a report to the European Commission of the government's main macroeconomic estimates and culminates in the Commission's report on the viability of the government's budget. Finally, and most important, Italians had to watch the government struggle to deal with a series of bank failures scattered across the country but with an epicentre in the Democratic Party's heartland in Tuscany and the country's oldest financial institution, the Monte dei Paschi di Siena. This triggering mechanism fits neatly with the postfunctionalist account for politicizing Europe.

The principal architect of Italy's changed relationship, though, came from the mainstream Democratic Party (PD) and not from one of the populist political parties. Although the both M5S and the Lega Nord criticized Europe, they did not play a leading role in the conversation. Matteo Renzi did (Jones 2017). Renzi emerged as a young, anti-establishment candidate for the leadership of the PD promising to renew the center-left by getting rid of the old guard. When he took over the direction of the party in December 2013, his relationship with prime minister Enrico Letta was uneasy. Unlike Renzi, Letta was part of the establishment.

Within weeks, Renzi ousted Letta and replaced him in office. He then began a major effort to campaign for the May 2014 European elections on a platform of restoring Italy's voice in European institutions. Rather than accepting the role of Europe as an external constraint on policymaking in Italy, he promised to address Italian priorities in the wider context of Europe. His party won an unprecedented 40.8 percent of the vote. By contrast, the M5S garnered only 21 percent, underperforming both the previous national elections and a consistent run of public opinion polls. On the right of the spectrum, the Lega increased its vote share over the national elections to 6 percent, but that was only just over half as well as it did in the European contest five years earlier.ⁱⁱ

Renzi quickly capitalized on his victory in the elections to the European Parliament and characterized his 40 percent of support as a mandate to transform the country. He pushed through major reforms to the labor market and he also sought to reform the country's electoral institutions and constitutional structures in order to increase the effectiveness of decisionmaking. The labor market reforms were Renzi's own initiative. The Renzi government wanted not only to improve the functioning of the Italian economy but also to demonstrate its capacity to tackle big reforms in any effort to build capital with the rest of Europe. By contrast, the political reforms were an agenda that Renzi inherited. Those reforms were first commissioned by Giorgio Napolitano in the aftermath of the February 2013 elections; as Prime Minister, Letta had to commit to their completion in order to convince Napolitano to accept a second term in office. When Renzi ousted Letta, Napolitano reminded him of that commitment (Jones 2017).

This background is important because Renzi's political reform agenda competed for attention with his economic reform agenda and his agenda to change Italy's relationship with the rest of Europe. Over time, moreover, the three different projects became entangled both in the rhetoric of the government and in the minds of the public. Renzi argued that political reform is necessary to achieve economic reform, economic reform is necessary to strengthen Italy's voice in Europe, and a stronger voice in Europe is necessary for Italy to increase its flexibility and escape from unnecessary external constraints. Ultimately, this entanglement proved to be unfortunate for Renzi. Although he managed to pass his employment legislation, he struggled with the political reform agenda. Worse, his government had to manage the failure of four small banks along new European norms that required investors accept losses as part of any restructuring program. That restructuring proved wildly unpopular, with strong political implications both for Renzi and for Italian perceptions of Europe (Jones 2017).

The frustrated opposition to Renzi's reform agenda centred around the December 2016 referendum on constitutional reforms. Renzi's reform constitutional reform agenda lost popularity already by the beginning of the summer months. Toward the end of the summer, it was trailing significantly at the polls. The problem for pollsters, however, was to parse the large number of respondents who were undecided. Researchers at a London-based political risk firm called Macro Advisory Partners found a solution. They commissioned a poll in late September from the Italian firm SWG (2016) with 3000 respondents and they asked a battery of questions about intentions to vote in the referendum. Then they trained a support vector machine classifier to connect the responses on auxiliary questions to voting intentions in a wide variety of different combinations.ⁱⁱⁱ The most successful predictive model in training drew upon the responses to two different vectors: one focusing on attitudes toward Renzi, his minister for institutional reform, the government, and political parties more generally; the other focusing on attitudes toward Europe, migration, and banking. This model succeeded in predicting referendum voting intentions in just over 90 percent of cases. Once deployed on to parse the undecided

voters, moreover, the model predicted that they would skew to the ‘no’ side in the referendum – widening the gap between the Renzi government and its opposition (Macro Advisory Partners 2016). That very negative outcome was inconsistent with polls done by other organizations; it was consistent, however, with the referendum result. In turn, that referendum led to Renzi’s resignation from government and the fracturing of the PD. Although there are elements of postfunctionalist jurisdictional change, this triggering mechanism fits closely with the anti-establishment pattern.

Strategy and Choice

This missing piece in this story is the role of migration. That is an issue where it is important to separate out the conversation about Europe and the conversation about the migrants themselves. The critique of Europe is two-fold: first, Italy has been left to shoulder a disproportionate share of the burden of migration because of its geographic location on Europe’s southern border; second, European migration policy forces Italians to make uncomfortable moral compromises related to increasing the risks to migrants as a deterrent, negotiating with political actors in North Africa who have questionable regard for human rights, and working with non-governmental organizations that rescue migrants and that may be themselves in collaboration with human traffickers. Both sides of that critique are made across the Italian political spectrum.

Every Italian prime minister since the first post-Arab spring migrations started in 2011 has promised to stand up to Europe and demand more equal treatment and greater resources; every minister of the interior has wrestled with the challenge of managing the accumulated stock of migrants and expressed frustration at the slow pace of their redistribution to other Member States. Italian politicians can compete on valence issues related to the effectiveness of the tactics for managing the problem that they promise to deploy, but there is broad agreement on the substance of the critique. Hence despite the fact that migration is an issue where Europe is politicized in domestic Italian debates, migration is not a good issue to use in understanding how political actors choose topics related to Europe as part of a wider political strategy because virtually every choice on this issue apart from the valence dimension related to what tactics will succeed in getting Italy better treatment from the rest of Europe is the same.

The important differences across the Italian political spectrum on the migration issue relate to the moral compromises that have to be made. Europe is often implicated in these compromises, but the real debate is not about ‘Europe’ but about whether Italians should be more welcoming, whether they have a humanitarian duty to protect those at risk, and whether they should tolerate human rights abuses in neighbouring countries. Moreover, these lines of tension run across the political spectrum no matter what the prevailing European migration regime happens to be. In that sense, the polarized substantive debate about migration is orthogonal to the politicization of Europe.

The same is not true for the single currency. Whether Italy uses the euro cannot be separated from the debate about European integration. That makes the choice to raise participation in the euro as a political issue a good test of whether politicians are picking an issue they know to be salient and then opting to push it into the public arena or latching onto whatever they can to try and embarrass the establishment. The March 2018 elections provide a test case. During the run-up to those elections, both of the main anti-establishment parties – the M5S and the Lega Nord (renamed Lega to give it more of a national appeal) – announced their opposition to the euro and their desire to hold a popular referendum on

continued membership. That argument failed to gain traction. Indeed, much as in 2006, polling by SWG showed that Europe became less important for respondents the closer they got to the elections (Jones 2018).

This anecdote is important for two reasons. The first is that it illustrates the on-again, off-again nature of how issues related to Europe are used by the M5S and the Lega. That inconsistency hews closer to the patten of opposition anticipated in the anti-establishment model than in the postfunctionalist argument. The second reason is that this anecdote suggests a broader set of possibilities for coalition building in Italy. The M5S and the Lega are not natural allies; their constituencies are very different; so are many of their ideological commitments. Nevertheless, they have agreed to work together to overthrow the mainstream political parties and, hopefully, replace them.

Assessment and Implications

The evidence from Italy suggests that both mechanisms for the politicization of Europe are present. It also suggests that the anti-establishment mechanism predominates in the Italian case. Post-functionalism can account for the triggering of popular debate about the role of European institutions in constraining the Italian government's room for manoeuvre in fiscal policy and banking resolution. Post-functionalism also fits broadly with the evolution of political cleavage structures and it should be possible to identify some aspects of the elite motivations and the gap between elite and popular attitudes that constitute the original Italian permissive consensus. Nevertheless, the anti-establishment argument does better a building on Italian embrace of Europe as an external constraint in order to escape the inconveniences of democratic politics. It explains the decline in popular support for integration. It sheds complementary light on the way cleavage lines have evolved, and it has a compelling argument about the generalized frustration expressed by opposition to mainstream politicians that culminated during the Renzi government. The anti-establishment mechanism also fits better with the pattern of issue selection and coalitional opportunities. This does not deny the insights to be garnered from the postfunctionalist argument. Rather it suggests only that anti-establishment politics in Italy are more important.

If this argument is correct, the options for dealing with the current Italian government and for rekindling Italian enthusiasm for the European project are limited. The mainstream political elites in Italy are deeply implicated in their promotion of Europe as a *vincolo esterno*. Hence any effort to reinforce that external constraint will blow back against them and play into the hands of the governing coalition. Efforts to promote a more inclusive pan-European discourse or more representative European political institutions are unlikely to offer much relief either. Such projects may have virtues, but they cannot resolve the tangled mass of frustrations that many Italians have with their own political system – and those frustrations are more central to anti-establishment politics. Italians will have to work out these tensions themselves. Following this line of argument to its logical conclusion, anyone interested in encouraging greater Italian affection for the European project should try to give Italians the flexibility to reform their domestic institutions in order to restore the balance between government and opposition.

Whether this advice will be followed remains an open question. What this paper demonstrates more concretely is that Hutter and Grande (2014) were correct in insisting that we explore the different pathways for the politicization of European integration in greater detail. Such exploration reveals that

the pathways compete for predominance with important implications for anyone who hopes to challenge or channel the discussion that emerges around Europe. The anti-establishment mechanism predominates in the Italian case; the postfunctionalist mechanism is likely to play a more powerful role elsewhere. As Grande and Hutter (2016a, 2016b) make clear, there is variation across cases and over time. This paper demonstrates how and why such variation is important both for analysis and for policymakers.

References

- Bartolini, Stefano (2005). *Restructuring Europe: Centre Formation, System Building, and Political Structuring between the Nation State and the European Union*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Börzel, Tanja A., and Thomas Risse (2018). 'From the Euro to the Schengen Crises: European Integration Theories, Politicization, and Identity Politics.' *Journal of European Public Policy* 25:1, pp. 83-108.
- Campus, Donatella (2006). 'The 2006 Election: More than Ever a Berlusconi Centered Campaign.' *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 11:4, pp. 516-531.
- Corbetta, Piergiorgio, and Elisabetta Gulamini, eds. (2013). *Il Partito di Grillo*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Della Sala, Vincent (1997). 'Hollowing Out and Hardening the State: European Integration and the Italian Economy.' *West European Politics* 20:1, pp. 14-33.
- Della Sala, Vincent (2015). 'Gli Esami Non Finiscono Mai: Italy and the European Union.' In Erik Jones and Gianfranco Pasquino, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Italian Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199669745.013.54.
- De Wilde (2018)
- Diodato, Emidio (2014). *Il vincolo esterno: Le ragioni della debolezza italiana*. Milan: Mimesis.
- Dyson, Kenneth, and Kevin Featherstone (1996). 'Italy and EMU as a "Vincolo Esterno": Empowering the Technocrats, Transforming the State.' *South European Society and Politics* 1:2, pp. 272-299.
- European Commission (2006a). 'The Eurozone Five Years after the Introduction of Euro Coins and Banknotes, Analytical Report.' *Flash Eurobarometer 193*. Brussels: European Commission.
- European Commission (2006b). 'Rapport Nationale, Italia.' *Eurobarometro 65.2*. Brussels: European Commission.
- Giannetti, Daniela, and Elisabetta De Giorgi (2006). 'The 2006 Italian General Elections: Issues, Dimensions and Policy Positions of Political Parties.' *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 11:4, pp. 494-515.
- Grande, Edgar, and Swen Hutter (2016a). 'The Politicization of Europe in Public Debates on Major Integration Steps.' In Swen Hutter, Edgar Grande, and Hanspeter Kriesi, eds. *Politicising Europe: Integration and Mass Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 63-89.
- Grade, Edgar, and Swen Hutter (2016b). 'Is the Giant Still Asleep? The Politicization of Europe in the National Electoral Arena.' In Swen Hutter, Edgar Grande, and Hanspeter Kriesi, eds. *Politicising Europe: Integration and Mass Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 90-111.
- Hooghe, Liesbet, and Gary Marks (2009). 'A Postfunctionalist Theory of European Integration: From Permissive Consensus to Constraining Dissensus.' *British Journal of Political Science* 39:1, pp. 1-23.
- Hooghe, Liesbet, and Gary Marks (2018). 'Cleavage Theory Meets Europe's Crises: Lipset, Rokkan, and the Transnational Cleavage.' *Journal of European Public Policy* 25:1, pp. 109-135.

- Hopkin, Jonathan (2015). 'Bipolarity (and After).' In Erik Jones and Gianfranco Pasquino, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Italian Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199669745.013.25.
- Hutter, Swen, and Edgar Grande (2014). 'Politicizing Europe in the National Electoral Arena: A Comparative Analysis of Five West European Countries, 1970-2010.' *Journal of Common Market Studies* 52:5, pp. 1002-1018.
- Jones, Erik (2012).
- Jones, Erik (2006).
- Jones, Erik (2017).
- Jones, Erik (2008).
- Macro Advisory Partners (2016). 'Italy: Understanding Polling Signals.' *MAP Strategy Note*. London: Macro Advisory Partners.
- Mair, Peter (2007). 'Political Opposition and the European Union.' *Government and Opposition* 42:1, pp. 1-17.
- Mair, Peter (2013). *Ruling the Void: The Hollowing of Western Democracy*. London: Verso.
- Merler, Silvia (2018). 'Technocracy, Trust, and Democracy: Evidence from a Natural Experiment in Italy.' Paper presented at the 2018 annual meetings of the American Political Science Association.
- Miller, Richard (1988). *Fact and Method: Explanation, Confirmation, and Reality in the Natural and Social Sciences*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Molho, Lazaros E. (1990). 'The Italian Lira in the Narrow Exchange Rate Mechanism Band: The Challenge of Credibility.' *Giornali degli economisti e annali di economia, nuova serie* 49:11/12, pp. 501-525.
- Panebianco, Angelo (2018). 'Ma l'Italia è ancora con la UE.' *Corriere della Sera* (26 October 2018) pp. 1, 32.
- Quaglia, Lucia, and Claudio M. Radaelli (2007). 'Italian Politics and the European Union: A Tale of Two Research Designs.' *West European Politics* 30:4, 924-943.
- Rauh, Christian (2018). 'EU Politicization and Policy Initiatives of the European Commission: The Case of Consumer Policy.' *Journal of European Public Policy* (online publication 27 March 2018) <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2018.1453528>.
- Rhodes, Martin (2015). 'Tangentopoli – More than 20 Year on.' In Erik Jones and Gianfranco Pasquino, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Italian Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199669745.013.24.
- Sbragia, Alberta (2001). 'Italy Pays for Europe: Political Leadership, Political Choice, and Institutional Adaptation.' In James Caporaso, Maria Green Cowles, and Thomas Risse, eds. *Transforming Europe: Europeanization and Domestic Change*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 79-96.

SWG (2016). *The Political Climate in Italy and the Constitutional Referendum*. Trieste: SWG, 27 September.

Walsh, James I. (1999). 'Political Bases of Macroeconomic Adjustment: Evidence from the Italian Experience.' *Journal of European Public Policy* 6:1, pp. 66-84.

NOTES

ⁱ This data was surveyed on the interactive portal that the European Commission created to make it easier for researchers to access Eurobarometer data:

<http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Chart/index>.

ⁱⁱ These data are available from the website of the European Parliament:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/elections-press-kit/6/european-election-results-1979-2014>

ⁱⁱⁱ The lead researcher on this project was Robbie Ostrow. The original datafiles including the panel data for the SWG survey are available upon request.

**Two Models for the Politicization of European Integration:
Postfunctionalism, Anti-Establishment Politics, and the Italian Case**

On-line Data Annex

Figure 1: Italian Perception of or Attachment to the European Union

Figure 2: Percentage of Italians Unsatisfied with Democracy in ...

Figure 3: Percentage of Italians Who Tend Not to Trust ...

Figure 4: Italian Membership in the European Union Is a Good Thing or a Bad Thing?

Source: Eurobarometer Interactive

(<http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Chart/index>).

Figure 1: Italian Perception of or Attachment to the European Union

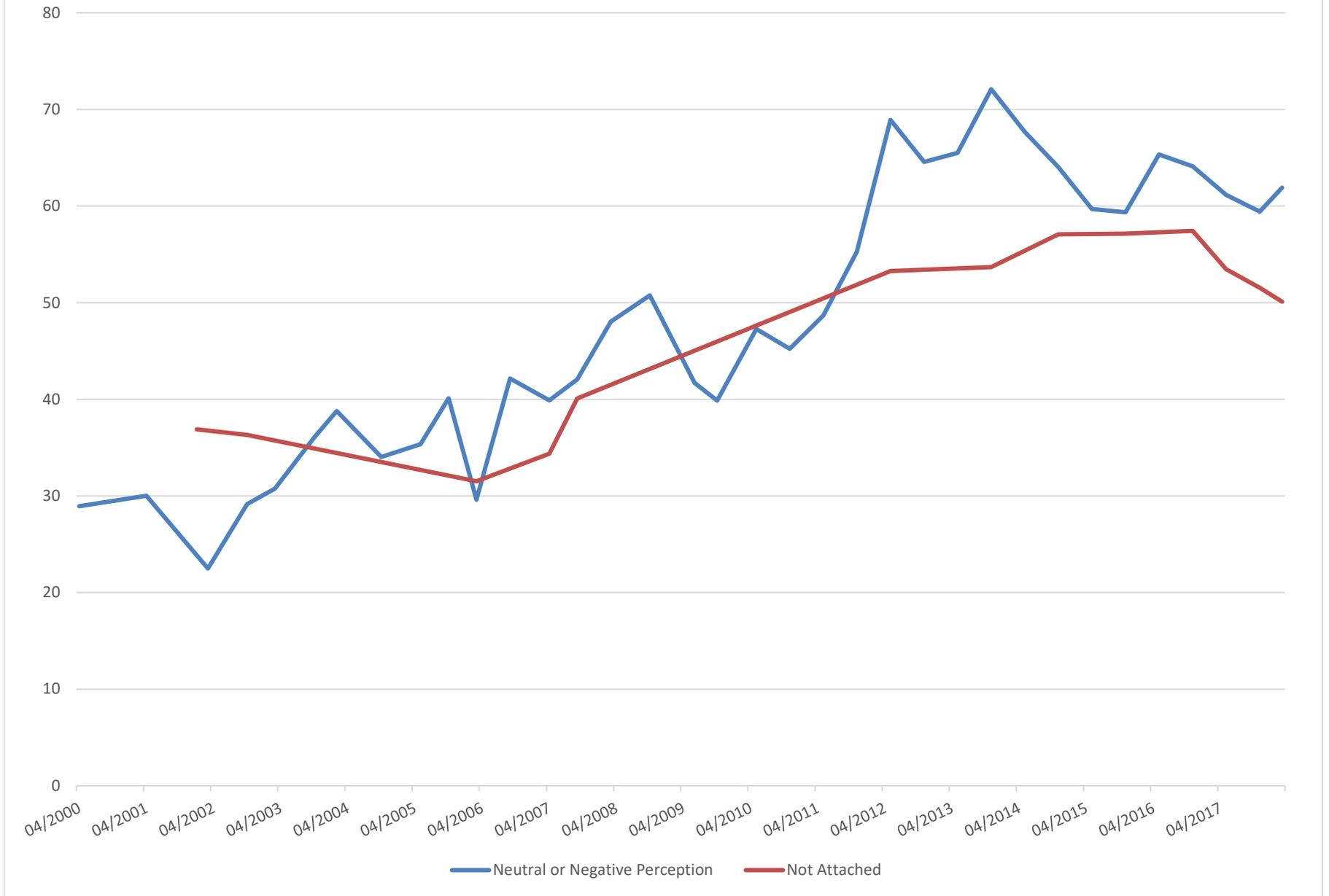


Figure 2: Percentage of Italians Unsatisfied with Democracy in ...

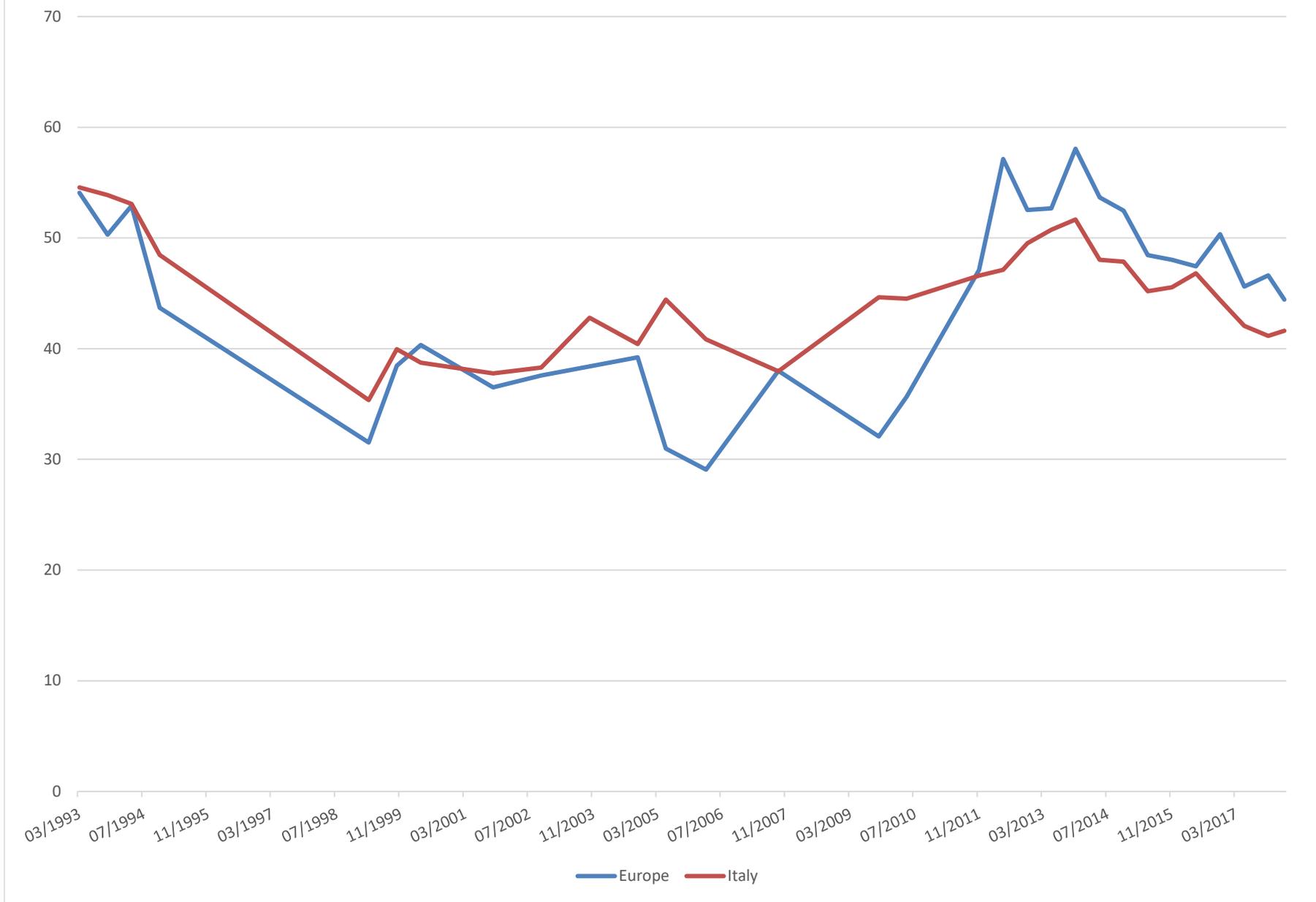


Figure 3: Percentage of Italians Who Tend Not to Trust ...

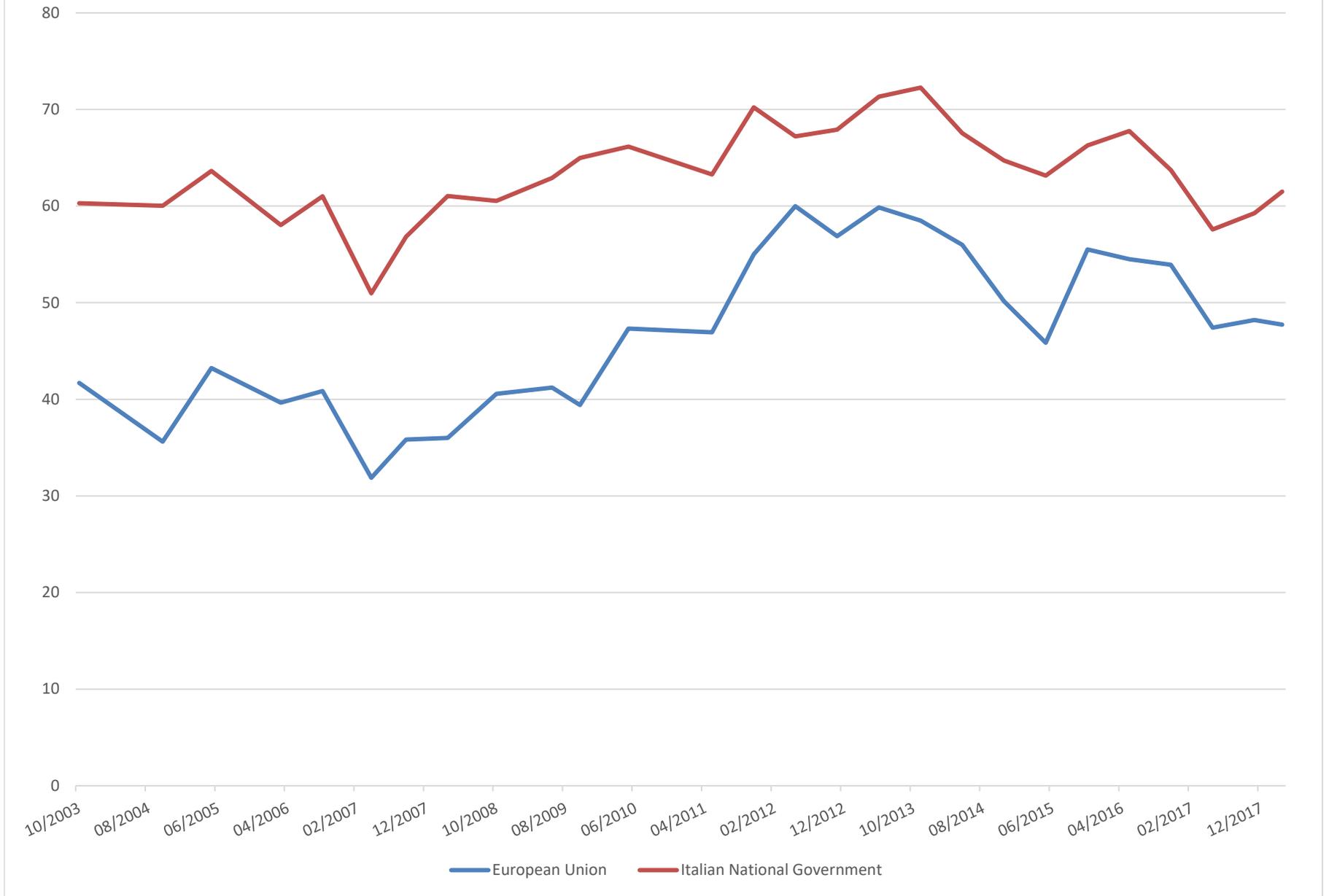


Figure 4: Italian Membership in the European Union Is a Good Thing or a Bad Thing?

