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***“Ride the Tiger”*: analysis of the counter-terrorism policies' impact on
the far-right rise to power in Italy**

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Abstract: This research explores the impact of counter-terrorism policies on the rise of the modern-day far-right's rise to power in Italy. Starting from della Porta, Caiani and Wagemann's framing of the extreme right as a social movement, the article reviews the complexity of the Italian extreme right landscape, delving into its extra-parliamentary and parliamentary dimensions, its main actors and repertoire of actions. After having outlined the fundamental institutions and legislation of the Italian criminal justice approach to counter-terrorism, the analysis asserts that the impact of the counter-terrorist framework on the extreme right is rather limited. The progressive abandonment of terrorist tactics to focus on influencing Radical Right Parties from within makes the Italian far-right extremism predominantly a political challenge.

The rise of the far-right is certainly not a new trend within the democratic world. A large body of research has documented this dangerous phenomenon in Italy and a wide array of European and non-European countries.¹ While Forza Nuova's assault against the national headquarters of the *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro* (Italian General Confederation of Work; CGIL) in October 2021 vividly recalled fascist *squadracce* violence against workers' unions,² September 2022 legislative elections have officially ushered in a sliding to the right of the Italian political arena. In particular, the recognition of 26% of votes and allocation of roughly one-third of MPs to *Fratelli d'Italia* (FdI, Brothers of Italy) accomplished an almost seven-fold increase from 2018, making the radical right party³ (RRP) the winner of the electoral competition (see Fig 1).⁴

Notwithstanding the far right's evident rise in Europe and North America, partly due to different historical experiences, contextual peculiarities, and heterogeneity of far-right organisations, there is still little consensus on the exact meaning of the expression. Whereas the presence of transnational far-right networks is undeniable, individual groups hold specificities in their origin, repertoire of actions, mobilising frames and political projects that challenge any definitory attempt.

Despite these divergences, some shared features persist. In general terms, the centrality of authority, sovereignism (e.g. economic, territorial, etc.), frames that justify and uphold the rightfulness of inequality (i.e. *ideologies of inequality*), and an authoritarian approach to law and order are four paramount and complementary aspects.⁵ Conversely, the approach toward democracy

¹ Vice, "L'ascesa Dell'estrema Destra in Italia | Decade of Hate", [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBR4AxCZbt0), May 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBR4AxCZbt0>; Claudio Bonini, "'Fuori Dalle Fogne', Il Documentario Sulla Destra Fascista Romana Di Carlo Bonini," [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KFYMoP_b4Mc), 2008, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KFYMoP_b4Mc; Maik Fielitz and Laura Lotte Laloire, *Trouble on the Far Right: Contemporary Right-Wing Strategies and Practices in Europe* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2016); Matteo Albanese, "CasaPound Italia and Forza Nuova. Back to the Future," essay, in *Rethinking Fascism*, ed. Andrea di Michele and Filippo Focardi (De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2022).

² Il Post, "Gli Scontri a Roma, Dall'inizio," *Il Post*, October 11, 2021, <https://www.ilpost.it/2021/10/11/scontri-roma-arresti-chat/>.

³ Alessia Donà, "The Rise of the Radical Right in Italy: The Case of Fratelli D'Italia," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 27, no. 5 (August 31, 2022): 778-779, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1354571X.2022.2113216>.

⁴ Corriere Della Sera, "Elezioni Politiche 2022: News E Risultati | Corriere.it," *Corriere della Sera*, September 2022, <https://www.corriere.it/elezioni/>.

⁵ Caiani, Della Porta, and Wagemann, *Mobilizing on the Extreme Right*, 5; Alessia Donà, "The Rise of the Radical Right in Italy: The Case of Fratelli D'Italia," 778.

is not a strictly defining characteristic insofar as this umbrella term encompasses both anti-democratic (i.e. extreme right) and formally democratic (i.e. radical right) entities.⁶ Common frames of the far-right are racism, islamophobia, anti-semitism, anti-immigration, anti-modernism, anti-system populism, transphobia and misogyny.⁷

Although some experts have predicted a right-wing fifth wave of terrorism, empirical evidence contradicts this.⁸ As evidenced by Europol data, right-wing terrorism remains a marginal phenomenon across the continent, and it would be incorrect to claim an upward trend.⁹

Even if the Italian neo-fascist actors do not engage in terrorism to a significant degree, this form of violence does remain a related issue on the peninsula. The Italian far-right has a vast toolbox of violent and non-violent forms of protest, namely an ample repertoire of actions.¹⁰ For instance, a surge of hate crimes, and the growing influence of the Italian far-right on political matters are worrisome trends. Nevertheless, the scope of counter-terrorism policies in the region remains limited.¹¹

After briefly delineating a working meaning of far-right, the paper will present the Italian far-right landscape and its main actors. Subsequently, the research will analyse counter-terroristic Italian legislation and institutions. Finally, the essay will debate the impact of these policies on the far-right's rise to power, concluding with a reflection on future concerns in this area.

⁶ Tore Bjørgo and Jacob Aasland Ravndal, "Extreme-Right Violence and Terrorism: Concepts, Patterns, and Responses," (The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2019), 3, <https://www.icct.nl/index.php/publication/extreme-right-violence-and-terrorism-concepts-patterns-and-responses>.

⁷ Caiani, Della Porta, and Wagemann, *Mobilizing on the Extreme Right*, 5-6.

⁸ Jessie Blackbourn, Nicola McGarrity, and Kent Roach, "Understanding and Responding to Right Wing Terrorism," *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* 14, no. 3 (September 2, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1080/18335330.2019.1667014>; Tobias Hof, "The Rise of the Right: Terrorism in the US and Europe," in *Terrorism and Transatlantic Relations, Threats and Challenges*, ed. Tobias Hof and Klaus Larres (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

⁹ Europol, rep., *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (Te-Sat) 2022* (Europol, 2022), https://www.europol.europa.eu/cms/sites/default/files/documents/Tesat_Report_2022_0.pdf.

¹⁰ Manuela Caiani, Donatella Della Porta, and Claudius Wagemann, *Mobilizing on the Extreme Right : Germany, Italy, and the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 79-80; Teun van Dongen, "Normalisation, Party Politics and Vigilantism: Why the next Terrorist Wave Will Not Be Right-Wing Extremist," *The Hague (ICCT) Evolutions in Counter-Terrorism* 2 (2020), <https://www.icct.nl/sites/default/files/import/publication/Special-Edition-2-5.pdf>.

¹¹ Fanpage, "'Abbiamo Le Lavatrici per Fare Il Black': Così Il Big Di Fdi Vuole Finanziare La Campagna Elettorale," [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5kToJIMiDnE), 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5kToJIMiDnE>.

Fratelli d'Italia, national elections outcomes

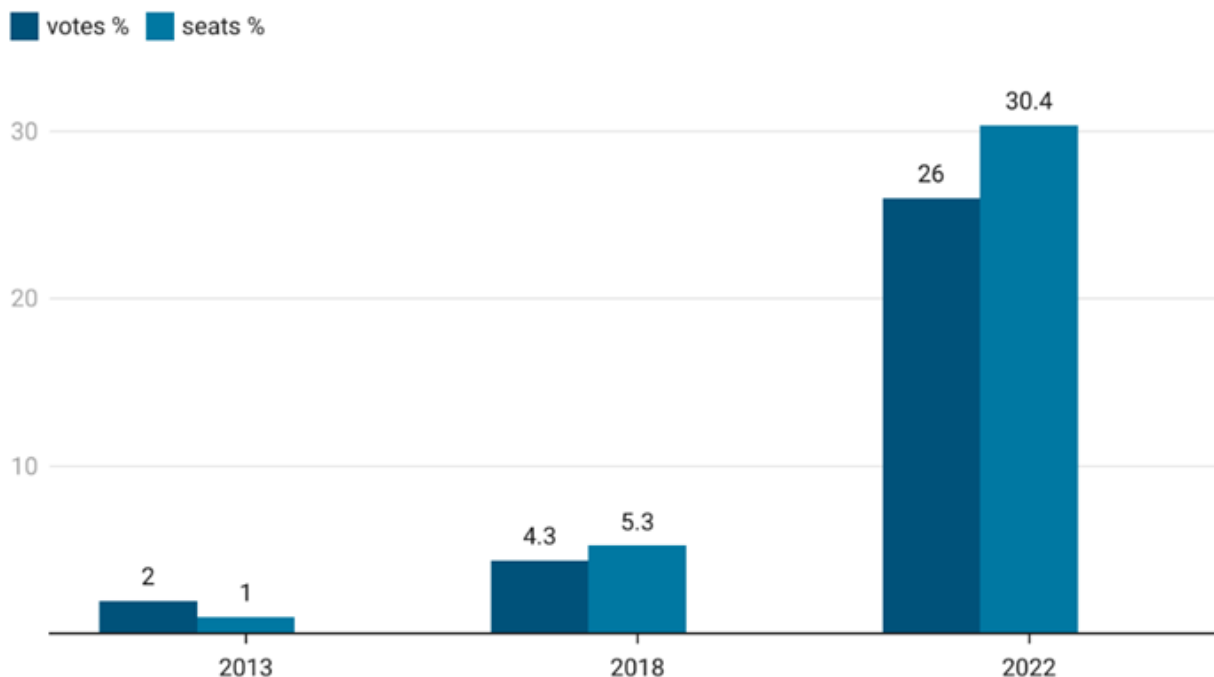


Chart: Samuele Minelli • Source: Italian Interior Ministry • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 1, FdI electoral growth (Author's elaboration)

The far-right in Italy

The Italian far-right is comprised of several actors interacting amidst an ever-changing balance of power. Numerous studies have dedicated their efforts to comprehending distinct organisations while struggling to depict their intricate network of relationships consisting of institutional and non-institutional actors at national and international levels.¹²

However, della Porta, Caiani and Wagemann's *Mobilizing on the Extreme Right* is a valuable exception.¹³ According to the authors, the extreme right can be considered a social movement, insofar as rational “networks of informal interaction between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organisations, engaged in a political and/or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared

¹² Piero Ignazi, *Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Fielitz and Laloire, *Trouble on the Far Right*.

¹³ Caiani, Della Porta, and Wagemann, *Mobilizing on the Extreme Right*.

collective identity”¹⁴ with their own organisational resources, frames of meaning, and repertoire of actions.¹⁵

In their comparative research, the authors identify four organisational levels: political parties, political movements, subcultural groups, and a residual category. In brief, while the first category encompasses bureaucratised groups publicly engaging in the political arena and competing for power, political movements do not require the same level of institutionalisation and refrain from direct electoral competition.

Finally, the “subcultural groups” category comprises a non-hierarchical ensemble of people sharing cognitive and behavioural codes concerning culture and politics.¹⁶ Although this categorisation has undoubtedly helped to better understand the repertoire of actions by these different entities, boundaries remain blurred.

In this respect, CasaPound Italia (CPI) is a stark example. In fact, if followed closely, their typology would include CPI simultaneously in the political party (between 2008 and 2019), political movement and subcultural group (i.e. squatted social centre) categories. This overlap shows, at the same time, the fluidity of the Italian far-right nexus and the analytical shortcomings of this classification. Therefore, to mitigate this issue, this research will adopt a division between the extra-parliamentary and the parliamentary dimensions, focusing only on political entities that have reached significant national outreach.

Extra-parliamentary dimension

Before delving into the Italian counter-terrorist approach and structure, it is essential to understand the main protagonists and features of the Italian far-right landscape. This micro and meso-level analysis will present vital insights into the genesis and current status of the extra-parliamentary far-right. Within the extra-parliamentary Italian far-right environment, three groups significantly stand out. In the last decades, Forza Nuova (FN), Casapound Italia (CPI) and

¹⁴ Mario Diani, “The Concept of Social Movement,” *The Sociological Review* 40, no. 1 (February 1992): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954x.1992.tb02943.x>.

¹⁵ Caiani, Della Porta, and Wagemann, *Mobilizing on the Extreme Right*, 10.

¹⁶ See note above, 89.

Lealtà e Azione (LA) were particularly successful in electing its members in the local institutions, achieving particular national influence within the Radical Right Party, and weaving international connections. At the same time, the abandonment of terrorist tactics renders these groups less vulnerable to the Italian counter-terrorist framework.

Forza Nuova (New Force, FN)

In 1997, Forza Nuova was founded in Rome by Roberto Fiore, a far-right Italian terrorist formerly belonging to Terza Posizione (Third Position), active at the turn of the eighties.¹⁷ The group originated as a splinter group of the *Movimento Sociale Italiano - Fiamma Tricolore* (MSI-FT), an openly neo-fascist party initially led by Pino Rauti. At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, FN was able to effectively infiltrate the Italian anti-vaccination (anti-vax) movement.¹⁸ During a national gathering in October 2021, FN leaders provoked the crowd to carry out an act of vandalism on the national headquarters of the *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro* (Italian General Confederation of Labour, CGIL), one of the principal trade unions.¹⁹ FN is also part of the Alliance for Peace and Freedom (APF), a European network of various ultra-nationalist movements which gained a seat in the last European elections.²⁰

Casapound Italia (CPI)

By the turn of the twenty-first century, Gianluca Iannone and other far-right activists had founded Casapound Italia in Rome, squatting in a building in the city centre. After a brief alliance with MSI-FT, the movement later went out on its own, forming an independent party that would achieve some success at the local level and open several offices all over the peninsula. In the 2018 general elections, FN and CPI obtained almost half a million votes, more than tripling the electoral

¹⁷ Albanese, *CasaPound Italia and Forza Nuova. Back to the Future*, 317.

¹⁸ Fanpage, “Forza NuoVax - ‘Restituiamo Il Potere al Popolo’: Così I Fascisti Hanno Fregato I No Vax,” [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z2IVwTOEv0Q), October 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z2IVwTOEv0Q>.

¹⁹ Il Post, “Gli Scontri a Roma, Dall’inizio.”

²⁰ Alliance for Peace and Freedom, “Homepage,” Alliance for Peace and Freedom, Accessed January 15, 2023, <https://apfeurope.eu/>.

outcome over five years. In 2019, increasing amounts of violent propaganda led Meta to shut down CPI's Facebook pages and its most known exponents' profiles because of incitement to hatred.²¹

Like Forza Nuova, the movement is part of Zentropa. This loose international network of far-right groups owes its name to the 1991 von Trier's psychological drama and identifies itself as "revolutionary nationalist," finding its ideological references in "social catholicism, conservative revolution, Italian fascism and the critiques of technique and productive liberalism."²² Finally, mainly thanks to the proliferation of related associations and activities, essentially functioning as a set of "Russian nesting dolls" in which CPI is at the centre, CPI penetrates different societal facets, establishing proximity with local causes and fostering civil roots (e.g. neighbourhood committees, civil protection groups, disability associations etc.). Also for this reason, CPI is currently considered the most vibrant element of the Italian far-right extra-parliamentary group.²³

Lealtà e azione (Loyalty and Action, LA)

Although widely understudied, Lealtà e Azione is one of Italy's fastest-growing far-right organisations. Following its establishment in Milan in 2010 by Giacomo Pedrazzoli and Stefano Del Miglio,²⁴ LA opened seven offices and successfully built a national network of like-minded organisations (FEDerAZIONE), collecting memberships from fourteen organisations in eleven regions (see Fig 2).²⁵

Moreover, similarly to CPI, LA consists of a wide range of offshoot associations which create excellent roots in a given territory, while conducting far-right proselytism in apparently non-political environments. For instance, this includes "*i lupi danno la zampa*" (wolves give the

²¹ Valerio Berra, "Facebook Vince in Tribunale Contro CasaPound, Può Chiudere La Pagina Perché 'Istiga All'odio,'" *Innovazione Fanpage*, December 23, 2022, <https://www.fanpage.it/innovazione/tecnologia/facebook-vince-in-tribunale-contro-casapound-puo-chiudere-la-pagina-perche-istiga-allodio/>.

²² Fielitz and Laloire, *Trouble on the Far Right*, 83; Le Cercle Futur, "Cercle Futur: Zentropa : L'esprit Du Clan," *Cercle Futur*, August 21, 2011, <https://cercle-futur.blogspot.com/2011/08/zentropa-lesprit-du-clan.html>.

²³ Gruppo di lavoro Patria su neofascismo e web, "Le Scatole Cinesi Di CasaPound," *Patria Indipendente*, June 13, 2019, <https://www.patriaindipendente.it/persona-e-luoghi/inchieste/le-scatole-cinesi-di-casapound/>; Stefano Nazzi, "Com'è Fatta l'Estrema Destra in Italia," *Il Post*, October 14, 2021, <https://www.ilpost.it/2021/10/14/gruppi-partiti-organizzazioni-neofascisti-estrema-destra-italia/>.

²⁴ Simone Alliva, "Così I Neofascisti Raccolgono Il 5 per Mille Degli Italiani," *l'espresso.it*, June 29, 2023, <https://l'espresso.it/c/politica/2023/6/29/cosi-i-neofascisti-raccolgono-il-5-per-mille-degli-italiani/4213>.

²⁵ Lealtà e Azione, "FEDerAZIONE | Il Sito Ufficiale Di Lealtà Azione," Lealtà Azione | Sito Ufficiale, Accessed January 15, 2023, <https://www.lealta-azione.it/federazione/>.

paw), an animalist and ambientalist group directly affiliated to LA.²⁶ The group also has international connections, such as with the US-based Hammerskin Nation,²⁷ described by the U.S. Department of Justice as “the best organised, most widely dispersed, and most dangerous Skinhead group known.”²⁸ As the case of Stefano Pavesi will show, LA assisted with electing militants into local institutions and influencing from the inside of the Italian Radical Right Parties.²⁹



Figure 2, FEDerAZIONE, LA network in Italy (LA website)

²⁶ I Lupi Danno La Zampa, “Facebook,” [www.facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com/people/I-Lupi-Danno-la-Zampa/100064492488153/), Accessed January 15, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/people/I-Lupi-Danno-la-Zampa/100064492488153/>.

²⁷ Simone Marcer, “Ritratto Del Movimento ‘Lealtà E Azione’ - Osservatorio Antisemitismo,” *Osservatorio Antisemitismo*, November 10, 2017, <https://www.osservatorioantisemitismo.it/articoli/ritratto-del-movimento-lealta-e-azione/>.

²⁸ US Department of Justice, “Hammerskin Nation | Office of Justice Programs,” US Department of Justice, 1999, <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/hammerskin-nation>.

²⁹ Fanpage, “Il Barone Jonghi E La Valigetta Piena Di Soldi per Finanziare I Politici Della Lobby Nera,” [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IeN4-Dtk81A&t=87s), October 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IeN4-Dtk81A&t=87s>.

Repertoire of actions

Despite the growing force of these groups, Italy has not experienced a rise in neo-fascist terrorist attacks. In fact, during the last decade, only two incidents have been labelled terrorist acts, both perpetrated by “lone wolves” against immigrants.³⁰

This trend can be traced to the progressive opening of the Italian political space.³¹ In other words, the *convention ad excludendum* (“the agreement to exclude”) pact that prevented extremists (i.e. communists and neo-fascist parties) from participating in the Italian government progressively faded after the Cold War’s ending.³² Therefore, this led to the de-demonisation of radical political forces and allowed them to hold executive offices.

This shift partially transformed the attitude of the extra-parliamentary far right towards the Radical Right Parties. Whereas during the Years of Lead (1969-1988), the extra-parliamentary far-right systematically resorted to terrorist activities such as the 1974 Brescia massacre and the Italicus Express bombing, the current repertoire of actions has strayed from this tactic, focusing on influencing parliamentary entities.³³

Instead, the possibility of competing in elections and influencing parliamentary parties has encouraged neo-fascists to enter into the institutional arena. However, this has not precluded expressions of far-right violence and extremism across the peninsula. These extremists indeed perform a varied repertoire of actions, including non-violent and violent means, neither of which can fully fall under the category of terrorism. As della Porta, Caiani and Wagemann brilliantly state, “extreme right groups do not mobilise in a vacuum, but are part of wider organisational fields that include a variety of institutional and non-institutional actors using disruptive and routine forms of action, both against and in defence of extreme right claims and interests.”³⁴

³⁰ Quentin Liger and Mirja Gutheil, “Right-Wing Extremism in the EU,” (Brussels: Think Tank European Parliament, 2022), [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/IPOL_STU\(2021\)700953](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/IPOL_STU(2021)700953).

³¹ Caiani, Della Porta and Wagemann, *Mobilizing on the Extreme Right*, 77.

³² Salvatore Vassallo, “Italia. La Repubblica Dei Vetri Incrociati,” in *Sistemi Politici Comparati*, ed. Salvatore Vassallo, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2016).

³³ Mirco Dondi, *L'eco Del Boato* (Editori Laterza, 2015), 348-392; van Dongen, “Normalisation, Party Politics and Vigilantism,” 109-111.

³⁴ Caiani, della Porta, Wagemann, *Mobilizing on the extreme right*, 98.

Parliamentary dimension

Whereas the Lega Nord has historically been a favoured institutional partner, FdI's rise has made it the principal reference point for the extra-parliamentary far-right. However, collaboration between the far-right and political parties is far from new. These connections were particularly evident between 1965 and 1974, a period that would become known as the *Strategia della Tensione* (Strategy of Tension).³⁵



Figure 3, Ignazio La Russa's (current president of the Italian Senate) nostalgic Instagram post about MSI's foundation anniversary, 26 December 2022

In these years, the neo-fascist nostalgic party, the *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI, Italian Social Movement), interacted on several occasions with far-right terrorist elements, substantially attempting to “destabilise the public order to stabilise the political order.”³⁶ As demonstrated by the 1969 attack in Piazza Fontana in Milan, the modus operandi was to execute false flag terrorist attacks blaming far-left and anarchist elements. This tactic, alongside media amplification, aimed to induce a conservative shift in public opinion and potentially even to the political system.³⁷

³⁵ Mirco Dondi, *L'eco Del Boato*, 4-6.

³⁶ Sergio Zavoli and Vincenzo Vinciguerra, “Diario Di Un Cronista - Terrorismo Nero - Parte 2,” [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SHhlAvZ3qtc), 2001, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SHhlAvZ3qtc>.

³⁷ Dondi, *L'eco Del Boato*, 70-75.

In this regard, Pino Rauti was one of the most prominent figures: founder of the terrorist group Ordine Nuovo, he was well-integrated into a vast national and international network of far-right organisations.³⁸ After the 1995 Fiuggi Congress, the party's majority decided to detach from Mussolini's heritage partially, funding *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN, National Alliance) and declaring loyalty to liberal democracy.

In 2009, AN and Silvio Berlusconi's party, *Forza Italia* (FI, Forward Italy), created the *Popolo della Libertà* (PdL, People of Freedom), further integrating into the liberal political arena. After three years, some members of PdL's right-wing splintered off and established *Fratelli d'Italia* (FdI, Brothers of Italy). In 2017, with the report publication of the second national congress held in Trieste, Meloni's party consecrated this "radical ideological rebranding"³⁹ by including nativism, sovereignty, authoritarianism and, to some degree, euro-scepticism in its agenda.

This progressive shift to the right, combined with the proud nostalgic references to the MSI heritage (see Fig 3) and the impressive electoral growth over only three elections, has made FdI particularly attractive to far-right extremists (see Fig 4). For instance, ongoing investigations in Lombardy accuse Roberto Jonghi Lavarini of managing the relations between LA and FdI and aiming to provide a solid electoral base to specific candidates (e.g. Carlo Fidanza and Chiara Valcepina) while lobbying for nominees from the neo-fascist ranks, such as Stefano Pavesi.⁴⁰

³⁸ See note above, 35-36.

³⁹ Leonardo Puleo and Gianluca Piccolino, "Back to the Post-Fascist Past or Landing in the Populist Radical Right? The Brothers of Italy between Continuity and Change," *South European Society and Politics* 27, no. 3 (2022): 12, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13608746.2022.2126247>.

⁴⁰ Fanpage, "Il Barone Jonghi E La Valigetta Piena Di Soldi per Finanziare I Politici Della Lobby Nera," [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IeN4-Dtk81A&t=87s), October 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IeN4-Dtk81A&t=87s>.



Figure 4, 2018 LA and FdI joint conference for a comic presentation dedicated to Sergio Ramelli (LA website)

The Italian Counter-terrorism approach

Italy has a long history of political violence. Notably, just in the first half of the twentieth century, the Red Biennium (1919-1920), the fascist dictatorship (1922-43), and the Italian resistance (1943-45) are amongst the most intense periods. However, apart from the anarchist tradition,⁴¹ the systematic use of terrorism as a tool gained momentum after the establishment of the Republic, with particular severity during the Years of Lead. In reaction to these challenging decades, Italy started laying the first pillars of its counter-terrorism architecture, which still constitutes the core of today's policy. Therefore the analysis has to start from the beginning of these developments in the mid 1970s.

While the Italian counter-terrorism approach is increasingly comprehensive, the criminal justice dimension remains predominant. From this perspective, terrorism is considered a criminal offence sanctioned by an articulated set of laws and implemented by a complex bureaucratic and law enforcement apparatus.⁴² Legislation and institutions are the two principal intertwined components of the Italian arrangement. The development of Italy's counter-terrorism policy is

⁴¹ Francesco Benigno, *Terrore E Terrorismo: Saggio Storico Sulla Violenza Politica* (Torino: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 2018), 53-55.

⁴² Ronald Crelinsten, "Conceptualising Counterterrorism," in *Routledge Handbook of Terrorism and Counterterrorism*, ed. Andrew Silke (London: Routledge, 2019), 18.

predominantly non-linear and reactive, given that it alternates between periods of inactivity and intensive expansion phases, usually following major terrorist events.

Legislation

The first responses to terrorism were the Bartolomei Law of 1974 and the 1975 Reale Law. These constituted significant preliminary steps insofar as they increased police powers. Nevertheless, the establishment of a counter-terrorism structure started only in response to Aldo Moro's kidnapping and assassination by the Red Brigades.

In fact, a few days after the tragic and seminal event, Law No. 191 of 1978 (191/1978) entered into force, distinguishing and enhancing the penalties for abduction with terrorist aims. Law 15/1980, also known as Cossiga law, strictly followed by extending custody -de facto prohibiting release on bail- including membership to a terrorist organisation as an offence, and raising punishments. At the same time, the law introduced the first incentives for terrorists to cooperate with the state.⁴³ Due to the outstanding results from the former Red Brigades member and *collaboratore di giustizia* (justice collaborator) Patrizio Peci's confessions, the Pentiti Law (304/1982) further developed a collaborative dimension, exchanging penalty reduction for relevant information and pragmatically deconstructing the terrorist threat's bulk.⁴⁴

The second fundamental juncture of legislative development corresponds with the surge in jihadist terrorism in North America and Europe in the current century. In particular, in December 2001, the parliament amended Penal Code article 270-*bis*, internationalising the definition of “association with the purpose of terrorism” by including those that attack foreign states, an international organisation or institution by adopting Law No. 438.⁴⁵

Only twenty days after the 2005 London bombings, Law No. 155 was approved to combat homegrown terrorism and further internationalise the legislation. The principal innovations were the

⁴³ Beatrice de Graaf, *Evaluating Counterterrorism Performance* (Routledge, 2011), 107.

⁴⁴ Francesco Marone, “The Italian Way of Counterterrorism: From a Consolidated Experience to an Integrated Approach,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Counterterrorism Policy*, ed. Stewart Webb et al. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 485; Luigi Maria Perotti, “L’INFAME E SUO FRATELLO,” [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XJqK-PNCNV4), 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XJqK-PNCNV4>.

⁴⁵ Ministero dell'Interno, “Antiterrorismo,” Ministero dell'interno, 2017, <https://www.interno.gov.it/it/temi/sicurezza/antiterrorismo>.

introduction of expulsion and deportation as a counter-terrorism tool, the detention's extension to obtain identification and the introduction of criminal code articles 270-*quarter*, *quinqueis* and *sexies*, which punish enrolment and training while broadening the definition of terrorism.⁴⁶ Finally, in the aftermath of the 2015 Paris attacks, the parliament adopted Law No. 43, aiming to pursue the participants involved in different levels of a terrorist organisation, increasing law enforcement investigative powers while sanctioning foreign fighters.⁴⁷

Institutions

Italy has four national law enforcement institutions sitting in four different Ministries: the State Police (Ministry of the Interior), the National Corp of Carabinieri (Ministry of Defence), the Financial Guard (Ministry of Economics and Finance) and the Penitentiary Police (Ministry of Justice). The latter has an investigation unit to monitor and prevent prison radicalisation. Instead, the first three possess investigative and special tactic units trained to operate in high-risk environments such as Carabinieri's Special Intervention Group.⁴⁸

Law 124/2007 has deeply reformed the Information System for the Security of the Republic. It overcame the traditional divide between civil and military service, shifting towards a domestic-international division by establishing the Agency for Intelligence and External Security (AISE) and the Agency for Intelligence and Internal Security (AISI). In addition, the regulation created the Department of Security Information (DIS) to coordinate functions between the two agencies.

The intelligence architecture of the Italian state is completed by the Interministerial Committee for the Security of the Republic (CISR) and the Prime Minister. The former deliberates on the budget and identifies the relevant research areas, while the latter is charged with the top

⁴⁶ Sabrina Praduroux, "Italy," in *Comparative Counter-Terrorism Law*, ed. Kent Roach (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 276
<https://www-cambridge-org.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/core/books/comparative-counterterrorism-law/B5DAC3C76A943BD74D7354344BD6EA0>.

⁴⁷ Salvo Licciardello, "Nuove Norme Antiterrorismo in Italia," 2016,
<https://www.sicurezza.gov.it/sisr.nsf/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Norme-antiterrorismo-Italia-Licciardello.pdf>

⁴⁸ Maria Luisa Maniscalco, "Italy and the Preventing Radicalisation and Terrorism Policy," in *Preventing Radicalisation and Terrorism in Europe*, ed. Valeria Rosato and Maria Luisa Maniscalco (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019).

management and general responsibility for the Information system.⁴⁹ Lastly, the Italian counter-terrorism apparatus is characterised by several inter-agency bodies to foster communication and coordination. For instance, Law 431/2001 established the Committee for Financial Security (CSF) to oversee and hamper money laundering and terrorist financing sources.⁵⁰

Moreover, the Committee for Strategic Anti-terrorism Analysis (CASA) was formed in 2004 to constitute a “common platform” to “centralise information and intelligence from different sources” and coordinate the activities of the Intelligence community and law enforcement.⁵¹ Finally, in 2015, the Anti-Mafia Directorate's competencies were enlarged to include the terrorist issue. This body synchronises the activities of the twenty-six district directorates, bolstering the cooperation between law enforcement and the judiciary powers.⁵² The chart elaborated by D’Amato clearly shows the complex relationship in the Italian counter-terrorism architecture (see Fig 5).⁵³

⁴⁹ Silvia D’Amato, “From BR to ISIS. The Italian Domestic and International Response to Terrorism,” *European Politics and Society* 19, no. 4 (March 13, 2018): 424, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2018.1447763>. ; Sistema d'informazione per la sicurezza della Repubblica, “Sistema Di Informazione per La Sicurezza Della Repubblica - a Protezione Degli Interessi Politici, Militari, Economici, Scientifici Ed Industriali Dell’Italia,” www.sicurezzanazionale.gov.it, 2022, <https://www.sicurezzanazionale.gov.it/sisr.nsf/index.html>.

⁵⁰ Silvia D’Amato, “From BR to ISIS. The Italian Domestic and International Response to Terrorism,” 424.

⁵¹ Andrea Beccaro and Stefano Bonino, “Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Italian Exceptionalism and Its Limits,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 45, no. 9 (December 9, 2019): 800, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610x.2019.1700027>.

⁵² Maniscalco, “Italy and the Preventing Radicalisation,” 78-80.

⁵³ Silvia D’Amato, “From BR to ISIS. The Italian Domestic and International Response to Terrorism,” 420.

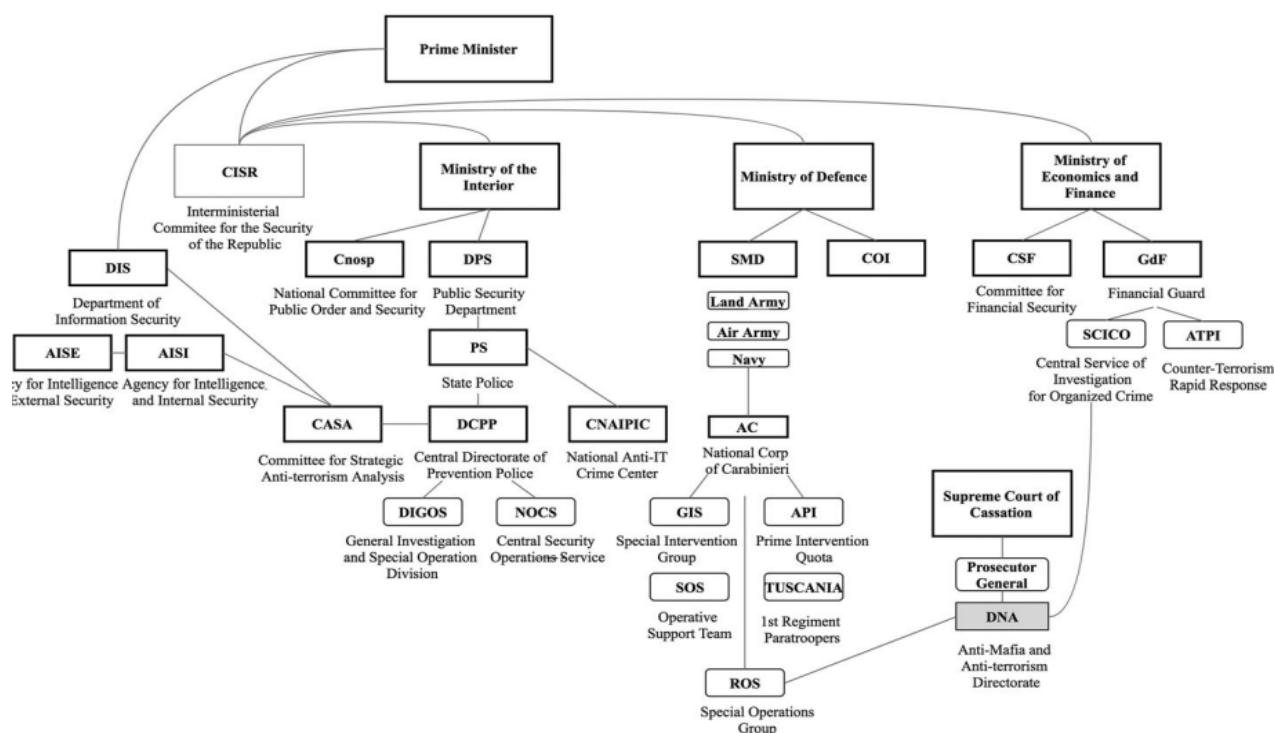


Figure 5, Italian CT architecture (D'Amato, 2018, p.422)

Consequences for the far-right and future perspectives

Notwithstanding the expanded criminal justice framework, the rise of far-right extremism cannot be addressed only by legislation. In contrast to the Years of Lead, the current Italian neo-fascist issue is not terroristic in nature, but mainly political. Therefore, counter-terrorism structures and strategies are not the right tools to combat the phenomenon. Now, far-right extremists are not excluded from the political arena, but instead well-integrated into institutions, gaining increasing approval from the population while influencing Radical Right Parties.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, the counter-terrorism domain is not completely extraneous from neo-fascist issues since there are at least three relevant points of contact. First, the defence of fascism constitutes a grave crime against the Republic insofar as it poses a direct conflict with its core values. Apart from Art. 3 of the Constitution that enshrines the principle of equality and intolerance

⁵⁴ Fanpage, “*Il Barone Jonghi E La Valigetta*”; Corriere Della Sera, “*Elezioni Politiche 2022*”.

of discriminatory practices, the legislative framework is composed of two other laws. Firstly, the law Scelba (645/1952) prohibits the reconstitution of the fascist party (art.1-2), sanctions apologetic behaviours toward fascism (art.4) and punishes fascist demonstrations (art.5).⁵⁵ Secondly, the Mancino law (205/1993) punishes discrimination for “racial, ethnic and religious” rationales, thus introducing 604-bis and 604-ter in the penal code.⁵⁶

In particular, the Scelba law indeed foresees two dissolution mechanisms. On the one hand, after a judgement that ascertains the re-establishment of a fascist party, the Ministry of the Interior may order the dissolution of the organisation (art. 3.1). Alternatively, in cases of “extreme urgency and necessity,” the government can dissolve the group with a decree of immediate enactment (art. 3.2).⁵⁷ Despite the clarity of these laws, the implementation remains latent due to procedural difficulties and a substantial lack of political will. For instance, the inconclusiveness of both the 2020 trial in Bari against CPI and the 2021 dissolution motion against FN, respectively, represent the slowness of this framework and the partial complicity of the right-wing parties which abstained from the dissolution request.⁵⁸

Thus, the manipulative attempts of the constitutional principle of expression freedom (art. 21),⁵⁹ combined with the absence of political will and the increasing insensitivity of Italian public opinion to discriminatory issues has led to pernicious deficiencies that favour the proliferation and normalisation of neo-fascist and racist narratives, even in inside institutional parties such as FdI.⁶⁰

Secondly, neo-fascist groups often resort to other forms of violence as part of their repertoire of actions. The exponential rise of hate crimes since 2009, namely “criminal acts motivated by bias

⁵⁵ Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, “LEGGE 20 Giugno 1952, N. 645,” www.gazzettaufficiale.it, 1952, <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/1952/06/23/052U0645/sg>.

⁵⁶ Roberto Garofoli and Fabio Di Lorenzo, *Codice Penale Ragionato* (Nel Diritto Editore, 2020), 792-793.

⁵⁷ Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, “LEGGE 20 Giugno 1952, N. 645.”

⁵⁸ Pagella Politica, “Che Cosa Ha Deciso Il Parlamento Sullo Scioglimento Di Forza Nuova,” *Pagella Politica*, October 22, 2021, <https://pagellapolitica.it/articoli/che-cosa-ha-deciso-il-parlamento-sullo-scioglimento-di-forza-nuova>

⁵⁹ Casapound, “Facebook, CasaPound Annuncia l’Appello: ‘Sentenza Che Mina Libertà Di Espressione,’” CasaPound Italia, December 27, 2022, <https://www.casapounditalia.org/facebook-casapound-annuncia-lappello-sentenza-che-mina-liberta-di-espressione-2/>.

⁶⁰ Piero Ignazi, “La Camerata Meloni Conferma Che in Italia La Destra Non Sa Essere Liberale,” *Domani*, December 2022, <https://www.editorialedomani.it/idee/commenti/la-camerata-meloni-conferma-che-in-italia-la-destra-non-sa-essere-liberale-pa099009>.

or prejudice towards particular groups of people”⁶¹ well represents this dynamic (see Fig 6).⁶²

Evidently, the law enforcement apparatus plays a vital role in the individuation and prosecution of these actions. Moreover, the Italian neo-fascist nexus has pursued a progressive digitalisation of its means of communication, shifting toward social networks.

In particular, Telegram is the most used platform in these environments, mainly for internal coordination and propaganda.⁶³ In this respect, the role of the Postal Police is essential. For example, in 2021, they monitored more than 115,000 extremist websites, resulting in the shutdown of almost 500 pages, thus achieving an impressive three-fold increase compared to the previous year.⁶⁴ Ultimately, careful monitoring is essential to prevent the rise of online radicalisation and the potential intensification of lone-actor attacks.⁶⁵

Hate Crimes in Italy recorded by police 2009-2021

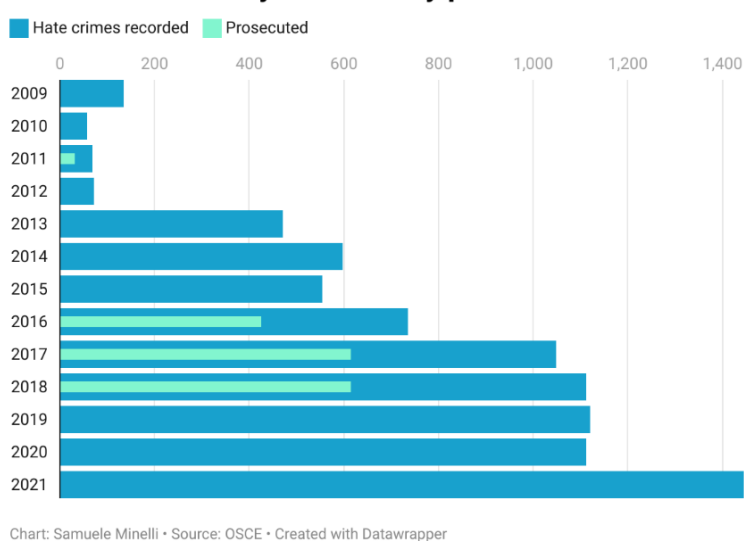


Figure 6, Hate crimes' rise since 2011 (Author's elaboration)

⁶¹ OSCE ODIHR, “OSCE - ODIHR | Hate Crime Reporting,” Osce.org, Accessed January 15, 2023, <https://hatecrime.osce.org/>.

⁶² OSCE ODIHR, “Italy | HCRW,” hatecrime.osce.org, accessed January 15, 2023, <https://hatecrime.osce.org/index.php/italy>.

⁶³ Gruppo di lavoro Patria su neofascismo e web, “La Galassia Nera Su Telegram,” *Patria Indipendente*, November 3, 2022, <https://www.patriaindipendente.it/persona-e-luoghi/inchieste/la-galassia-nera-su-telegram/>.

⁶⁴ Polizia Postale, “I Dati 2021 Della Polizia Postale,” Polizia di Stato, January 2022, <https://www.poliziadistato.it/articolo/i-dati-2021-della-polizia-postale>.

⁶⁵ Stefan Goertz, *Right-Wing Terrorism in Europe*, (Vienna: European Institute for Counterterrorism and Conflict Prevention, 2022), 18-24, https://neu.eictp.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/FINAL_RightWingTerrorismEurope.pdf.

Conclusion

Despite difficult beginnings, the Italian criminal justice model has gradually established a successful blueprint for countering terrorism. This counter-terrorism framework has substantially contributed to overcoming the bloodshed of Years of Lead and mafia-related terrorism in the 1990s. The Italian counter-terrorism framework has also maintained a fair degree of elasticity, adapting to international developments.

However, due to the far-right's rise in mainstream politics and minimal use of terrorist tactics, it would be unreasonable to expect a high impact from the counter-terrorism framework. On the contrary, this trend has been predominantly lawful and supported, or at least tolerated, by a growing part of the population. After some failed independent electoral attempts, neo-fascist extra-parliamentary groups have shifted to influencing Radical Right Parties from the inside.

Despite this, the issue maintains a security dimension that can be tackled through juridical and law enforcement means. First, the defence of fascism remains a crime. Furthermore, the neo-fascist repertoire of violence, such as hate crimes, can be prosecuted through police and juridical means, such as the Mancino law. Finally, neo-fascist online spaces can be monitored to decrease radicalisation, thus diminishing the likelihood of lone-wolf attacks.

In conclusion, as Tuen van Dongen states, "right-wing extremism is not only a security threat but also, and perhaps even more so, a political challenge."⁶⁶ Without a doubt, 2022's electoral support of FdI and growing disaffection toward politics⁶⁷ do not create an encouraging point of departure.

⁶⁶ van Dongen, "Normalisation, Party Politics and Vigilantism," 114.

⁶⁷ Salvatore Vassallo, "Elezioni 2022. Partecipazione, Geografia Del Voto, Flussi," Istituto Cattaneo, September 27, 2022, <https://www.cattaneo.org/elezioni-2022-le-prime-analisi/>.

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