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## MIGRATION-RELATED SECURITIZATION IN THE DISCOURSES OF THE LEFT AND THE RIGHT: ITALIAN GENERAL ELECTIONS — 2022

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### СЕКЬЮРИТИЗАЦИЯ ВОПРОСОВ МИГРАЦИИ В ДИСКУРСАХ ЛЕВЫХ И ПРАВЫХ НА ИТАЛЬЯНСКИХ ВСЕОБЩИХ ПАРЛАМЕНТСКИХ ВЫБОРАХ В 2022 ГОДУ

**Abstract.** This article is dedicated to the research question how public support of Italian parties correlate with the migration-related statistics and how this statistical relation could be affected by the securitization discourse of Italy or migrants. To assess the correlation linear regression models in Python are built with migration-related data as independent variables, economic statistics as control variables, and right and left parties' polls and elections results as dependent variable. To frame the securitization, discourse the manifestos for Italian general elections in 2022 were analyzed. As a result of the research migration-related statistics proved to be statistically significant and to correlate with right and left coalition polls share, with securitization discourse explaining the connection.

**Keywords:** linear regression analysis, securitization, Italian parliamentary elections 2022, Italian political parties, migration, discourse analysis, Italian migration-related and economic statistics.

**Аннотация.** Статья отвечает на вопрос, как общественная популярность итальянских партий соотносится с миграционной статистикой и как с этой статистической взаимосвязью соотносится дискурс секьюритизации Италии или мигрантов. Для оценки корреляции строятся линейные регрессионные модели в Python с использованием миграционных данных в качестве независимых переменных, экономической статистики в качестве контрольных показателей и опросов правых и левых партий и их результатов на выборах в качестве зависимой. Чтобы сформулировать дискурс секьюритизации, были проанализированы манифесты в Италии в 2022 году. В результате статистика, связанная с миграцией, оказалась репрезентативной источниковой базой, которая коррелировала с результатами опросов за правую и левую коалицию, а дискурс секьюритизации позволил объяснить эту связь.

**Ключевые слова:** линейный регрессионный анализ, секьюритизация, итальянские парламентские выборы в 2022 году, политические партии Италии, миграция, дискурс-анализ, итальянская миграционная и экономическая статистика.

## Introduction

This study is aimed at finding a correlation between party vote share or party public opinion share with migration-related statistics in Italy that is provided by the Eurostat and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) because this data is more accessible than official Italian statistics from Istat, and at explaining this connection with the securitization theory. Although there are important concerns regarding the quality of European statistical data on migration and miscalculations, especially as for illegal flows, it is impossible to rely on other sources of information because there is an obvious lack of them [1]. To provide evidence that it is possible to establish the link between party popularity and migration-related statistics, discourse analysis of electoral manifestos is provided under the template of the securitization theory. To calculate correlation the linear regression analysis in Python is employed.

Many political scholars pay attention to the issues which parties voters choose within party systems during electoral campaigns and why do they make these choices [2, p. 789]. And economic theory is only one dimension of societal divisions that were reflected by American political scientist A. Lijphart [3, p. 79], and among them is also the migration issue. In this paper the focus is on scrutinizing the rational choice model from the perspective that voters could change their party preferences from one electoral campaign to another and they could make decisions and analyze alternatives whether a party would match one's ideological preferences and political views on how to resolve relevant challenges and would address only those issues that considered to be necessary for a voter. The focus would be on Italian electoral processes because the Italian parliamentary elections occurred recently and little attention has so far been paid to this campaign and because the Italian case is quite typical in the EU from the point of that this country has accepted a lot legal and illegal immigrants, and it gained momentum to the right-wing parties in Italy.

## Analysis of securitization discourse

There is much academic research that reflect the problem of securitization of migration in the European Union and in Italy, but little attention has been paid to its impact on creating voting patterns [4, p. 168]. The securitization theory is employed regarding theoretical implications of the work of B. Buzan, O. Waever and J. de Wilde "Security: A New Framework for Analysis" [5] and the Copenhagen School theory. The point is that elections with regard to migration issues are generally studied by scholars without the securitization pattern [6].

Securitization is a sample of speeches and texts that are aimed at creating an image that something is in danger because of a novel serious threat, and the audience that is under pressure of these securitization acts should believe that this existential menace really exists [7, p. 439]. Migration issue from the point of this theory could

be regarded as a source for identity conflicts because migration affects social relations in the society and could replace dominant local culture, with immigration is growing. In fact, it is implied that right-wing bloc in Italy securitizes the migration issue to be elected and to hold power.

The Italian electoral agenda in 2022 was influenced by important divisions into establishment parties and anti-establishment parties and into left-wing parties and right-wing parties. This is only the second distribution that is presented in the table 1 since anti-establishment parties did not receive enough popular votes to enter the parliament. However, the point is that the first division reflects the fact that establishment parties and their adversaries facilitated different from each other political, socio-economic, and cultural cleavages for their different from each other voters. Establishment parties focused on issues such as family issues and post-materialist values, economic crisis and taxation system, energy crisis and possible energy sources, migration issues, and restrictions of personal freedom and privacy during pandemic [8]. Whereas anti-establishment parties unsuccessfully tried to break pan-European and Transatlantic consensus in the society and to distance themselves from the establishment parties in the foreign policy agenda [8].

*Table 1.*

*Italian main parties that are under scrutiny in this study*

<b>Party group</b>	<b>Parties in any order</b>		
Left establishment moderates	Greens and Left Alliance (left coalition) — AVS		
Left establishment centre	Democratic Party (left coalition) — PD	More Europe (left coalition) — +EU	Five Star Movement — M5S
Right establishment centre	Forza Italia (right coalition) — FI		
Right establishment moderates	Brothers of Italy (right coalition) — FdI	League (right coalition) — L	

That is why migration issue was not central point of anti-establishment party agenda; however, it is possible to say that migration crisis divided left and right establishment parties. With analyzing party manifestos as well as the right-wing coalition manifesto, different positions of left-wing and right-wing parties regarding the resolution of migration issue become clear. In the Table 2 the migration-related cues are united within four thematic groups.

Table 2.

*Party cues of Italian main parties concerning migration-related issues in their manifestos [8]*

	PD (left)	+EU (left)	AVS (left)	M5S (left ind.)	Fd'I (right)	L (right)	FI (right)
European integration	++	++	+	+	+	No	++
EU common foreign policy	++	++	++	No	-	--	++
Preventing migrant landings	--	--	--	-	++	+	+
Granting Italian citizenship	++	++	++	++	+	--	+

*Note: “++” — strongly support, “+” — support, “-” — oppose, “--” — strongly oppose, “No” — no opinion, “left ind.” — independent from the left coalition.*

Right-wing and left-wing parties agree generally that European integration process has positive consequences for Italy and children that were born in Italy to foreign nationals could receive Italian citizenship. However, there is a clear division in treatment of migrant landings and prospects of introducing of EU common foreign policy. Left-wing parties advocate for immigrant integration and assistance to those who are trying to enter Italy illegally by sea, whereas right-wing parties are striving to restrict immigration and remain the sphere of foreign policy and border control under the national competence. Information regarding party cues of the Five Star Movement is also included in the Table 2 since it is one of major Italian political parties; however, its political stance on migration and European integration issues coincides with the left one, though it is independent.

The right-wing bloc securitized a state or the Fatherland because illegal migration ostensibly threatens national culture and existence of the nation-state, and a government should be “serious” to accept this challenge and deal with it [9]. Thus, left parties also ostensibly threatens Italy because they assumably neglect this issue. Right-wing parties support possible naval blockade that could be regarded as a populist proposal [9]. Moreover, right-wing politicians apply to the concept of the interest of peoples to strengthen the image of threat both to Italy and Europe, and this way the migration issue is also united with the problem of European integration reform [10]. Additionally, uncontrolled immigration is perceived as a main issue that does not allow to resolve other important challenges [11].

On the other hand, the left-wing bloc securitized people who decided to migrate even illegally, with risking their lives. It aimed at mobilizing European-perceived resources and electorate, rather than Italian [12]. Left-wing parties address the threat that is posed by populist initiatives of right-wing opponents [13]. Moreover, they advocate for establishment of new European institutional solutions to the problem, rather than on the national level [13].

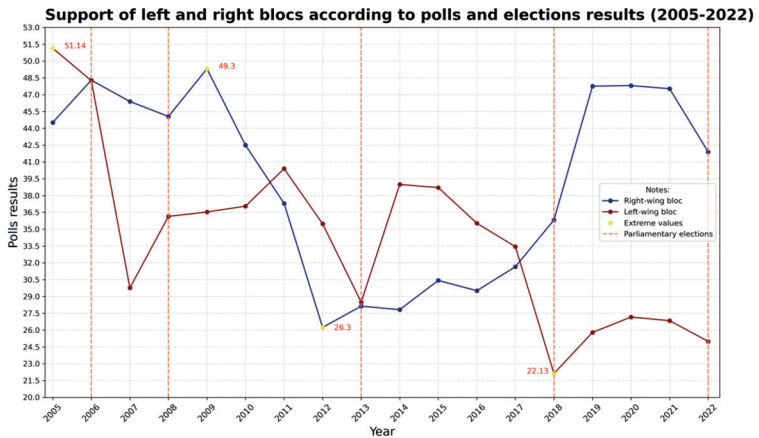
M5S is also fostering European and Transatlantic integration, but it agrees with right-wing parties that Italy should be an proactive and independent actor in these alliances [14]. As for the immigration issue, M5S suggests that national immigration reception system should be transformed in order to facilitate cultural integration of immigrants in Italy or their redistribution among the EU members; however, in the M5S electoral manifesto neither Italian nation nor miserable immigrants are securitized because the party strives to take more pragmatic stance in order to be considered as a technocratic one [14].

That is why right-wing and left-wing migration-related discourses are in contradiction. Right-wing parties oppose uncontrolled irregular immigration, whereas left-wing parties (with exclusion of M5S) are striving to save those who are suffering from the repercussions of armed conflicts or poverty in their countries of birth or citizenship outside the EU and to integrate immigrants in the Italian society. Interesting question is whether Italian citizens perceive migration issue as a threat or a necessity to express national gratitude and generally support right-wing parties in line of national interests or left-wing parties in line of European values.

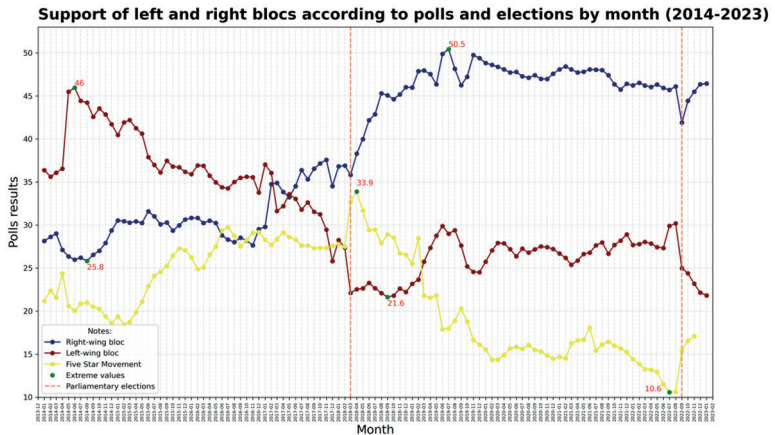
### **Regression analysis**

In this paper Italian voters are treated as rational players who deal with consequences of uncontrolled immigration flows that are registered by the statistical agencies and assess them. Linear regression analysis will demonstrate how strong the linear correlation between party vote share and migration-related statistics is. Dependent variables will be results of public polls and national parliamentary elections. Dependent variable is a variable that is potentially influenced by the independent variable. In the model it could be only one dependent variable.

Dependent variable comprises of aggregated results of all public opinion polls that is online accessible on an annual (Graph 1; for demonstration) or a monthly basis (Graph 2; for research), apart from years or months when the parliamentary elections were held. Although the research is focused on the national campaign in 2022, the method of regression analysis implies huge number of observations to demonstrate the strong correlation that could be potentially extrapolated to other cases. Actual sample and time of chosen polls and parliamentary elections is based on the accessibility of the migration-related and economic statistics that are employed as independent variables.



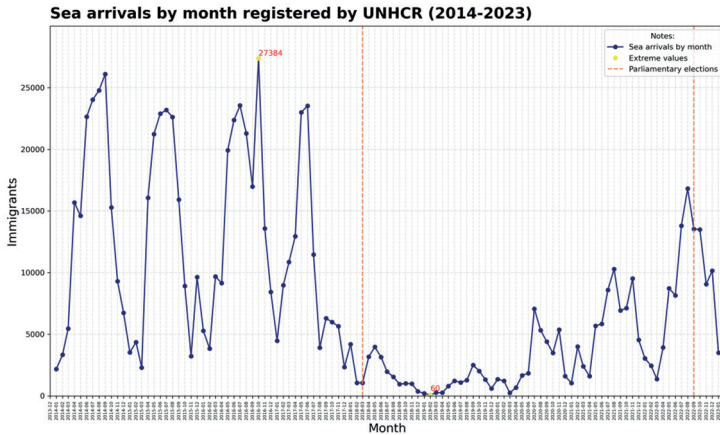
Graph 1. Results of parliamentary elections and aggregated polls from 2005 to 2022 for right-wing and left-wing blocs [15]



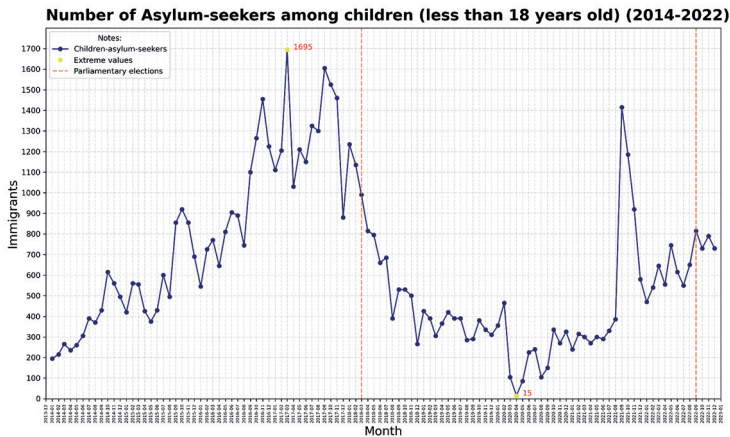
Graph 2. Results of parliamentary elections and aggregated polls for every month from January 2014 to January 2023 for right-wing and left-wing blocs (it is possible to increase the size of page to look through monthly data) [15]

The choice of independent variables was also based on the accessibility of data. It was hardly possible to analyze national Italian statistics on the official portal Istat, therefore, EU and UNHCR data was chosen. Important indicators that could reflect

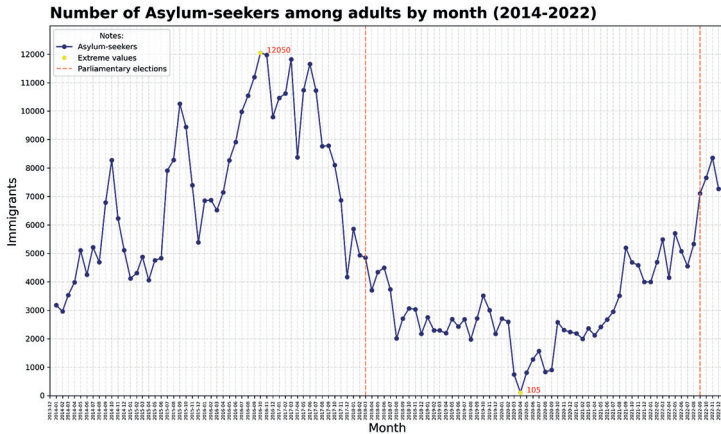
actual monthly migration flows to Italy are the number of registered sea arrivals (UNHCR), registered asylum-seekers among adults and children (below 18 years old). The data is presented in Graphs 3, 4, and 5. The number of children asylum-seekers was included separately because it could potentially reflect the number of families that enter the country.



Graph 3. Number of sea arrivals to Italy registered by UNHCR by month from January 2014 to January 2023 [18]



Graph 4. Number of registered asylum-applications to Italy from children, the EU data from January 2014 to December 2022 by month [19]



*Graph 5.* Number of registered asylum-applications to Italy from adults, the EU data from January 2014 to December 2022 by month [19]

Moreover, it is important to include control variables in the regression model because it will allow to avoid endogeneity and heteroscedasticity issues. It means that with omittance of important independent variables that exercise huge impact on a dependent variable this influence will be mathematically transferred to those independent variables that are presented in the model, and it will bias interpretation of the results. It means that, since the control variable is included, the model knows its weight, rather than it treats it as unobserved. Many economic voting theories give enough evidence to believe that economic factors affect electoral behaviour. That is why economic statistics in Italy was included as control variables. These indicators usually are unemployment rate, level of income, alterations in GDP level, and harmonized index of consumer prices (HICP). This data could be employed generally on annual basis, except for unemployment level [16] and HICP [17] that were included in the model as data on monthly basis, presented by Eurostat.

The results of regression analysis are included in the Table 3. This table presents three linear regression models with different dependent variables: poll shares of right-wing bloc, left-wing bloc and M5S. Coefficients are standardized in Python because every variable is presented on a different scale. Standardized coefficients can be treated in terms of direct comparison. The higher positive value is, or the lower negative value is, the stronger is correlation between this independent variable and the dependent variable. P-value demonstrates that a variable is statistically significant because it could explain more than 95% or close to 100% of observed cases of dependent variable with the coefficient of this variable. One or two stars demonstrate statistical significance.

R-squared coefficients (from 0 to 1) demonstrate how many observations the model could statistically explain. Low probability of F-statistic (less than 0.01) shows that the model is not useless to explain the dependent variable. Breusch-Pagan test in Python demonstrates that the model does not suffer from heteroscedasticity problem (arises from omitted variables) since the value is higher than 0.05. With interpreting Breusch-Pagan test results and R-squared values, the most beneficial model is the first one.

In the first model (right-wing bloc) statistically significant variables are registered asylum-seekers among adults and children, registered sea arrivals, and unemployment rate. The strongest negative coefficient among migration-related statistics is asylum-seekers among adults, and the strongest positive one is asylum-seekers among children. Then in the second model (left-wing bloc) statistically significant variables are the same. However, the strongest coefficients change their places. Moreover, although asylum-seekers coefficient is stronger than sea arrivals, the latter is more statistically significant. Finally, in the third model (M5S) statistically significant variables are asylum-seekers among children, sea arrivals, and unemployment rate. The strongest negative coefficient among migration-related statistics is sea arrivals, and the strongest positive one is asylum-seekers among children.

Table 3.

*Results of linear regression analysis. Dependent variables: poll shares of right-wing bloc (1), left-wing bloc (2), and M5S (3). Coefficients are standardized, standard errors (in brackets) are heteroscedasticity robust (Calculations were run in Python).*

	<b>Model 1 (right)</b>	<b>Model 2 (left)</b>	<b>Model 3 (M5S)</b>
Asylum-seekers	-0.3675** (0.069)	0.3029* (0.132)	0.1054 (0.163)
Children asylum-seekers	0.1164* (0.056)	-0.3362** (0.106)	0.4159** (0.151)
Sea arrivals	-0.1593** (0.047)	0.2765** (0.085)	-0.1967* (0.082)
Unemployment rate	-0.6911** (0.042)	0.5862** (0.070)	0.5476** (0.077)
HICP	-0.0521 (0.037)	0.0272 (0.059)	-0.0424 (0.068)
Constant	<0.01 (0.035)	<0.01 (0.056)	<0.01 (0.066)
R-squared	0.885	0.702	0.575
Adjusted R-squared	0.879	0.688	0.554
Prob (F-statistic)	<0.01	<0.01	<0.01
Breusch-Pagan test	0.38	0.15	0.012
Number of observations	108	108	108

Note: \* —  $p$ -value < 0.05; \*\* —  $p$ -value < 0.01.

## Conclusion

The interpretation of the first model results implies that public support for right-wing parties increase when unemployment rate decreases and number of registered asylum-seekers among children grows. However, with growth of registered asylum-seekers among adults and registered sea arrivals right-wing bloc loses its momentum. It has been already proved for European countries that generally, when unemployment rate rises, people tend to support left-wing parties (and other two models also demonstrate this notion).

As for the migration-related statistics, in this paper it was discovered that Italian voters are influenced by the left-wing securitization discourse of miserable immigrants. In fact, voters sympathize those immigrants who are risking their lives to enter the EU, and to help them Italian voters foster the traditional left-wing coalition that securitizes immigrants. It is supported by the interpretation of three presented linear regression models because number of registered sea arrivals positively correlates with the left-wing bloc popular support. This effect could be linked with heart-breaking media coverage of sea arrivals attempts.

Moreover, the variable of registered asylum-seekers among children demonstrates that voters support M5S because they worry that growing number of immigrants won't be redistributed otherwise, whereas they are dissatisfied with right-wing parties which promise to prevent migrant landings and fail. However, Italian voters believe that their nation is under threat from immigrants with other social and cultural background, and this challenge is addressed only by right-wing bloc. The variable of asylum-seekers among children shows that Italian citizens are presumably concerned with the oscillations in monthly arrivals to Italy of foreign families with their children who intend to stay under asylum status, and these voters support the right-wing coalition. That is why it was proved that migration-related statistics correlate with public support of right-wing and left-wing parties, and the results of securitization discourse analysis explain this connection.

With considering the results of general elections in 2022, it is crucial to conclude that securitization discourse of right-wing parties proved to be more successful since they gained almost 42% of popular vote and secured the absolute majority in the Chamber of Deputies, whereas left-wing parties (with exclusion of independent M5S — about 15%) obtained less than 25% of votes. Nevertheless, it does not necessarily mean that the immigration issue was essential in defining the winner of elections since included control variable of unemployment rate also proved to be statistically significant.

Further discussion concerning the elections results could include policy analysis of right-wing coalition, since it is important to scrutinize whether new prime-minister Giorgia Meloni is adhering to pre-electoral promises. It is believed that Italian immigration policy will be restricted, and new Italian government will defend its

competence to operate the external borders [20]. However, Meloni cabinet is also advocating for European investments in African failed states, and it resembles the left stance on the issue, and the government also suggests new relocation plan that resembles M5S proposals.

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