Globalization and the ‘New Localism’ in Northern Italy

LIVIANNA TOSSUTTI

The creation of 171 new territorial, ethnic and religious political parties in Italy and 20 other western democracies between 1945 and the end of 1999 has defied expectations that modernization would erode so-called ‘parochial’ sub-state loyalties. Globalist–localist theorists contend that intensified international economic, political, cultural and technological interdependence has contributed to the renaissance of these identities. This study explores whether there is evidence to support the proposed links between globalization, post-industrialization and the appeal of the Lega Nord Per l’Indipendenza della Padania. An analysis of original and secondary survey data on the sociological composition, issue orientations and lifestyles of Lega Nord–Piemont members and Italian voters reveals that Lega supporters are mobile, affluent and receptive to European Union institutions, international co-operation to resolve transnational problems, foreign investment and cultural products, and computerized technology. While they strongly oppose the increasingly polyethnic nature of Italy, they share these views with supporters of their centre-right and moderate left party competitors.

Between 1945 and the end of 1999, 171 new territorial, ethnic and religious political parties were formed to contest national elections in Italy and 20 other western democracies.¹ Secessionist or autonomist parties such as the Northern League for the Independence of Padania and the Catalan Convergence and Union, have thrived during an era when modernization forces were expected to undermine the appeal of ‘parochial’, sub-state loyalties [Bauman, 1990: 156]. While it was predicted that the spatial concentration of economic activities, the spread of mass communications, population mobility and the social welfare state would reinforce the popular legitimacy of central governments, the empirical evidence underlines the premature nature of convergence theories.

Sociologists and international relations experts who have observed the growth of separatist and devolutionist parties have attributed their

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resurgence to intensified international economic, political and cultural interdependence, and to post-industrial restructuring. They conclude that the ‘new localism’ – which encompasses the revival of ethnic and regional movements, the shift towards decentralized structures of economic production, demands for the devolution of competences to lower order governments, environmentalism and a renewed interest in living in smaller cities – represents a post-modern escape from the ‘anomie, alienation and identity loss’ engendered by domestic and international pressures towards standardization [Strassoldo, 1992: 39–44]. Rejecting depictions of earlier ethno-cultural revivals as ‘backward’ and reactionary, scholars in the globalist-localist school contend that autonomist impulses are consistent with cosmopolitan orientations (familiar with many countries; sophisticated; free from national prejudice) and globalization [Strassoldo, 1992: 46]. Through an analysis of original and secondary survey data on the sociological composition, issue orientations and lifestyles of the supporters of one of the most successful territorial parties in Europe – the Lega Nord Per l’Indipendenza della Padania – this article will assess whether sub-state political loyalties reflect the impact of increased international interdependence and post-industrial restructuring.

The growth and parliamentary institutionalization of the Lega Nord offers an ideal opportunity to assess the merits of the globalist-localist perspective, since the party’s appeal grew during a period when Italy became increasingly oriented towards Europe. The Lega, formally established in 1991 as a confederation of autonomist leagues based in northern Italy, has called for the secession of the north unless federal reforms to the unitary state are implemented. Its organizational origins can be traced to the 1970s, when cultural societies were formed in Piemonte, Veneto and Lombardia to promote popular consciousness of the historical and cultural specificities of these regions [Poggio, 1995: 41]. After a period of electoral stagnation in the 1980s, the league movement spread to north-western Italy under the charismatic leadership of Umberto Bossi. Bossi successfully harnessed historical antagonism in the north towards traditional parties and bureaucratic structures that were perceived as corrupt, inefficient and dominated by southern Italians. Along with the party’s calls to reform taxation and investment policies which were perceived to have penalized northern Italians, the Lega opposes the entry of a growing number of migrants from the Maghreb, the Middle East and eastern Europe [Ruzza and Schmidtke, 1991: 60–61, 71]. Bossi’s remarks about the undesirability of clandestine extra-Community immigrants prompted former prime minister Massimo D’Alema to describe the Lega leader as another Jörg Haider [http://www.leganord.org/frames/politica.html].
In the early 1990s, the party benefited from judicial investigations into the links between organized crime and the political parties that had formed Italy’s post-war coalition governments. In what has been referred to as the ‘earthquake’ election of 1992, the Lega won 8.7 per cent of the popular vote. Following the 1994 national election, the Lega participated in a short-lived, centre-right coalition government headed by Forza Italia. In the 1994 and 1996 Italian elections, the Lega’s national support increased and stabilized at about ten per cent. In many northern provinces, it captured between 20 and 40 per cent of the popular vote for the proportional quota of seats in the Chamber of Deputies [Messina, 1998: 474]. During the regional elections of April 2000, the Lega joined a centre-right alliance which captured eight out of 15 regional presidencies. With the centre-right forces leading the centre-left in public opinion polls conducted throughout 2000, the Lega was in a position to help form another government following the 2001 Italian elections.

The Globalist–Localist Perspective

There is a growing body of literature linking the late twentieth-century revival of ethnic nationalism and regionalism in Italy and other western democracies, to increased international interdependence and post-industrial economic restructuring. It is argued that the growth of supranational institutions such as the European Union, increased capital mobility, and the spread of new information and transportation technologies, have eroded the classic functions and legitimacy of the state and have reinforced citizen attachments to sub-state institutions and identities [Rosenau, 1990; Rosenau and DiMuccio, 1992].

The European Union and the ‘New Localism’

While many do not foresee the development of a ‘Europe of Regions’, where states will become redundant in a federal Europe, there is a consensus that globalization has reduced hierarchical political control by providing opportunities for policy negotiation at the meso-level of governance. Regions have emerged as arenas for the conduct of politics in a more complex global order [Hooghe and Marks, 1996; Loughlin, 1997; Keating, 1997: 27–8; 1998: 78]. New roles have been allocated to sub-national governments as a result of the Single European Act of 1987, the consolidation of the Single Market in 1993, the ratification of Maastricht and the increased proportion of the EU budget devoted to regional policy [Loughlin, 1997: 147–8]. Italy acknowledged these pressures towards decentralization in 1994, when a presidential decree specified that the regions could establish direct relations with European Union institutions on
matters that concerned them, without the consent of the national government [Desideri and Santantonio, 1997: 107–8].

There is evidence to support the claims of the globalist–localists that the resurgence of territorial and cultural identities is linked to the transfer of political power upwards to supranational institutions and to the growing number of economic and cultural interactions across borders. European Union institutions have become arenas where ethno-cultural groups lobby for the protection of minority languages and human rights, and where sub-state governments play consultative or active roles in economic development, public health, education and cultural policy-making [Hooghe and Marks, 1996]. The Bureau for Lesser Used Languages, the Committee of Regions and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities count among the institutions that minorities and sub-state governments have used to frame their demands at the European level of governance [Keating, 1998]. The expansion in the number of offices in Brussels opened by the regions and communes further demonstrates how globalization has mobilized sub-state lobbying activities and political identities [Hooghe and Marks, 1996].

Continental market integration and capital mobility have also provided new incentives for autonomist and separatist parties in Flanders, Catalonia, Scotland and Quebec to abandon economic protectionism and seek outright independence. These organizations have accepted neo-classical economic theory according to which free trade areas and capital mobility would reduce the economic costs of separation by allowing peripheral regions to 'exploit their comparative advantage of low costs to attract investment' [De Winter, 1998: 35; Keating, 1995: 7–8].

Technology and the 'New Localism'

In addition to the expansion of European governance structures and regional trading blocs, globalist–localist scholars argue that the 'new localism' has been advanced by the spread of computerized technology and faster modes of transportation which have demolished temporal and spatial barriers between people [Mlinar, 1992: 19–22]. Increased personal access to microcomputers, faxes, the Internet and cell phones facilitates instantaneous communication across state frontiers. These avenues for surmounting time and space permit individuals, firms and sub-state governments to bypass central governments and establish political and economic relations with their counterparts in other countries.

Faster modes of transportation and communication can also weaken attachments to the centre by increasing individual and corporate spatial mobility. It is increasingly common for people to be born in one location, but to work, study or live elsewhere. The new technology permits more
employees to work from home, and firms to relocate their activities to smaller centres that are situated further away from traditional transportation networks (roads, waterways) that service metropolitan areas.

The intensified international contact that accompanies increased spatial mobility can also highlight the importance of preserving local identities. Although advanced technology that is backed by English language software has the potential to threaten minority cultures, groups can use the very same technology to defend their interests. Ethnic and territorial political parties create multilingual websites for a global audience [http://www.leganord.org], while local and intermediate-level governments establish foreign trade offices to promote products unique to their regions. As Mlinar [1992: 19–22] observes, the same scientific breakthroughs that have compressed global spaces have also given individuals, as well as local and regional actors, the incentive and means to detach themselves from the centre and assert their political claims.

*Economic Localism and the ‘New Localism’*

Some contend that post-industrial and post-Fordist economic restructuring have renewed the saliency of sub-state political identities. Post-industrial transformations in economic production involve a shift away from the provision of raw materials and manufactured goods, towards tertiary employment, production and consumption modes requiring a skilled and specialized workforce [Bell, 1973]. Workers in manufacturing and processing industries operate in a hierarchical system requiring conformity to decisions made from above. In contrast, employees in the service and information economy work in relatively decentralized decision-structures that encourage innovation [Inglehart, 1997: 170]. The emergence of a highly educated workforce and a less hierarchical work environment have increased the likelihood that educated workers in tertiary activities will challenge centralized authority structures [McCann, 1998: 79–83; Gobbetti, 1996: 57–82; Diamanti, 1995].

The post-Fordist restructuring of Italian industry in the 1970s saw a shift away from mass production in the big plants of the northwest, to flexible production, specialization and small work units in the industrial districts of north-eastern and central Italy. This geographic dispersion of production was made possible by technological advances that made production less dependent on proximity to natural resources or transportation infrastructure [Keating, 1998: 126–39]. Large factories that were uncompetitive in the international economy were closed, as a growing number of export-oriented, small and medium-sized firms in the *Terza Italia* successfully inserted themselves in the global economy.¹

Writers in the post-Fordist school argue that the class and cultural
identities that structured support for the Christian Democrat and Communist political parties were partly undermined by the spread of this diffused economy [Bagnasco and Oberti, 1998: 152–4]. As post-Fordist restructuring eroded religious and working-class solidarity, the Lega exploited the new political themes of ‘differentiation, isolation and vulnerability’, claiming that patterns of small entrepreneurship were ‘the cultural inheritance of a regional (northern Italian) people’ [Gobbetti, 1996; McCann, 1998: 79–80; Bagnasco and Oberti, 1998: 160]. In his speeches, Bossi drew unflattering comparisons between the dynamism of globally-competitive northern Italian firms, and the stagnancy of a bureaucratic, inward-looking and corrupt Rome. He attacked Rome as the author of clientelistic regional development and public employment policies that had stifled economic growth and entrepreneurship across Italy. In order to distinguish a purportedly ‘cosmopolitan’ north from the ‘backward’ south, Bossi promoted the Lega as oriented ‘away from Rome and towards Europe’.

The voting literature supports contentions that post-Fordist restructuring underpins the Lega’s appeal. The party is most popular in areas where economic activities are based on small industries, and with the self-employed and employees in small firms [Diamanti, 1993; 1995]. Support for Lega candidates is strong in areas where there is widespread discontent with Rome, the burgeoning public debt and fiscal centralization [Diamanti, 1995; Ruzza and Schmidtke, 1991: 63–4; Gobbetti, 1996].

The Lega Nord and the ‘New Localism’

Since the Lega has already achieved one of Sartori’s criteria for political relevance – participation in government - it serves as an ideal starting point to explore the proposed links between globalization, post-industrialization and the ‘new localism’ [Sartori, 1976: 121–4]. The globalist–localist perspective suggests several expectations about the sociological composition, issue orientations and lifestyles of Lega supporters. If regional political identities reflect global and post-industrial processes, then the members should be young, affluent and highly-educated individuals. They would work in small, post-Fordist firms and would be employed in tertiary activities. They would also tend to live in the smaller communities whose appeal is part of the revival of the ‘new localism’. The behavioural literature offers several reasons for these expectations.

Ecological analyses of Lega support in Veneto and Lombardia between 1985 and 1989 found that the leagues developed in small and medium-sized towns dominated by small industry, as well as in provinces characterized by higher levels of disposable income and home ownership [Moioli, 1990; Diamanti, 1993: 35–40]. Mannheimer’s analysis of Lega voters and sympathizers in Lombardia found that its initial clientele was composed of
middle-aged males with a high school education, who were employed in
tertiary activities. By 1990, this expanded to include university-educated
professionals and self-employed business people [Mannheimer, 1991]. A
1995 survey comparing the socio-demographic characteristics of voters in
northern Italy showed that Lega electors tended to be young graduates of
middle or high school, who were students or employed as workers or business
people [Diamanti, 1995: 163–4]. Biorcio’s study of delegates to the Lega’s
Third Congress revealed that the party attracted professionals, business
people, sales people, artisans and office employees [1997, Biorcio: 224].

Similar patterns characterize the electoral base of other European
regional parties. Support for the Flemish nationalist Volksunie was
strongest in Belgian cantons where a high percentage of people work in
tertiary and upper income occupations. Individual level analyses of support
for the Volksunie and the Catalan Convergence and Union have revealed
that they appeal to the young, well-educated, managerial and professional
classes [Nielson, 1986; De Winter, 1998: 35; Marcet and Argelaguet, 1998:
79–80].

In addition to examining the demographic profile of Lega supporters, it
is important to explore their attitudes and lifestyles. Globalist–localist
theorists argue that while ancient empires and religions claimed to be
universal, it is only in the late twentieth century that reality has begun to
match universalistic values. As Strassoldo argues, two elements of post-war
globalization processes – the ecological world-view and aspirations for a
‘pluralist, non-hierarchical world-society’ – distinguish the current phase of
globalization from previous attempts to unite territories and communities
[Strassoldo, 1992: 35–9]. Thus, if the current phase of globalization is
marked by a concern with ‘one-world’ issues such as environmental
protection, then the Lega members would be expected to identify the
ecology as one of the most pressing issues in contemporary Italy.

As noted, post-war globalization is held to reject a conception of world
unity based on one set of values and the dominance of a core area, in favour
of the desirability of a pluralistic world [Strassoldo, 1992: 37–9]. In order
to measure the extent to which Lega members accept cultural diversity, the
respondents were asked to express their opinions on assimilating
immigrants and reducing immigration levels. An individual who supports
pluralism would be expected to oppose both assimilationist strategies and
lower immigration levels. Agreement with either of these propositions
would indicate a predisposition to the maintenance of cultural homogeneity,
and thus, a resistance to global diversity. Where people choose to reside is
another indicator of intense, daily exposure to cultural diversity. Therefore,
it is proposed that if the Lega members reflect cosmopolitan tendencies,
they will be more likely to live in culturally heterogeneous neighbourhoods.
The territorial attachments of the respondents were also probed in the survey. Rosenau and DiMaggio [1992] have argued that the coexistence of political integration (globalization) and fragmentation (secessionist and autonomist movements) is not paradoxical, but the expected product of rapid change in the international political environment. Where modernization and state-building were supposed to redirect citizen loyalties to countries, accelerated international interdependence, the relative decline of state power and the transfer of competences to lower order governments are held to promote dual attachments to local and international geographic areas. A 1992–93 survey conducted in four provinces of Lombardia and Veneto found that Lega sympathizers felt closer to their province-region, Europe and northern Italy (in that order), than supporters of non-autonomist parties, who cited the province-region and Italy as the areas they most closely identified with [Diamanti, 1995: 102]. Therefore, if the globalist–localist perspective has merit, then Lega members will be more likely to express strong attachments to both the local/regional and European political spaces.

Advances in computerized technology, transportation and educational attainment have helped individuals escape lifestyles that were once predetermined by geography and social class. The result has been an increase in inter-generational spatial and social mobility [Mlinar, 1992: 16]. Thus, if the Lega attracts individuals who have been subject to these transformations, then they should report having lived or attended schools outside their birth region. They would also be expected to belong to a different socio-economic class than their parents.

The interdependence of events and people in different locales is another feature of globalization. New technologies have destroyed temporal and spatial discontinuities: computers and fax machines link people in different time zones and allow them to conduct business around the clock [Mlinar, 1992: 20–22]. If the globalist–localist perspective on the nature of the ‘new localism’ is accurate, Lega members who are receptive to global influences should be connected to people and events around the world through frequent foreign travel, technology usage, a knowledge of several languages and a strong interest in international news.

Methodology

The merits of the perspective linking globalization and post-industrialization to the appeal of territorial parties like the Lega will be probed through an analysis of original survey data on Lega members, as well as a secondary analysis of the global orientations of all Italian voters. Given the paucity of Lega membership surveys and the fact that existing studies do not focus on globalization themes, a self-administered
questionnaire was developed to probe their issue orientations, lifestyle patterns, cultural interests and sociodemographic characteristics. The questionnaire was distributed to members of the Lega Nord in Piemonte, a region where the party wins some of its highest levels of support. Between 1992 and 1996, the Lega Nord-Piemonte won between 15 and 23 per cent of regional popular support in proportional elections to the Chamber. It won just under ten per cent of the vote in the 1995 regional elections, but slipped to 7.6 per cent in 2000 [Consiglio Regionale del Piemonte, 1995]. Understanding the nature of the Piemontese members is also crucial since existing empirical research has focused on Lega sympathizers and voters in Lombardia and Veneto.

Since party membership lists were confidential and incomplete, non-random, snowball sampling techniques were employed to locate the members. Due to the necessity of relying on non-probabilistic sampling, the results were cross-checked against previous literature and comparable items in two large-scale, random surveys of Italian voters: the 1993 Eurobarometer and 1995 International Social Science Program (ISSP) National Identity Survey [Reif and Melich, 1993; 1995]. As the following discussion will show, the original data generally confirm the patterns detected in random surveys of Lega members, sympathizers and voters.

The ISSP survey furnished valuable data on the territorial identities, mobility patterns, international orientations and socio-demographic characteristics of all Italian voters, permitting a comparative analysis of the global and post-industrial orientations of the Lega voters and supporters of its main competitors in the 1996 election – Forza Italia, the Partito Democratico della Sinistra (PDS), the Movimento Sociale Italiano-Alleanza Nazionale (MSI-AN) and the Rifondazione Comunista (RC). Consequently, we are able to conclude whether Lega voters are more or less open to global influences than the supporters of non-territorial parties.

The Lega Nord-Piemonte Membership

The 179 individuals who answered the territorial affinity item can be classified into three groups. Since only 11 individuals cited Italy as their prime source of identification, their responses are not analysed in this article. The ‘localists’ and ‘regionalists’, who together constituted about 69 per cent of the respondents, feel closest to their communes or to Piemonte, respectively. A quarter of the Leghiisti, who are here referred to as the ‘Europeanists’, cite the continent as the area they most closely identify with.

The localists are largely comprised of young males who are most attached to their town or city (see Table 1). They report middling levels of education, average annual household incomes (32.8 per cent earn between 25
and 36 million lire), and work as office employees or professionals in small firms. Almost half live in small communities with fewer than 10,000 people. While they are young and employed in small, tertiary businesses, their socio-economic status does not reflect post-industrial affluence. They are primarily concerned with domestic subjects such as the public debt, rather than the environment or other transnational issues such as foreign affairs. While their preoccupation with domestic problems may indicate a propensity for insularity, McCann has argued in this journal that the political saliency of Italy’s mounting national debt in the early 1990s was heightened by the perceived unsustainability of unrestrained public spending in an open international economic environment. It was the export-oriented economic sector based in the North, along with the Lega, that mounted a campaign against the debt burden and escalating taxation [McCann, 1998: 82–4]. In this sense, it could be argued that the increased preoccupation of northern Italians with the debt reflected a sensitivity to intensified global competition.

When compared to other Leghisti, the localists are less likely to have travelled abroad, to have used the new technology, or to have lived outside Piemonte. When they do leave the region, it is to complete their education. On other indicators, they show evidence of substantial socio-spatial mobility. For example, while 64 per cent of all Piemontesi described themselves as bilingual in 1990 [Minahan, 1996: 446], three quarters of the localists can speak and understand at least two languages. Likewise, about 40 per cent of the localists report membership in a different social class than that of their parents.

Their interests are generally rooted in their communities. A majority pay close attention to local news, but relatively few are interested in international news. Data that are not reported here reveal that only 28.3 per cent of the localists express ‘a lot of interest’ in computerized technology, compared to more than 86 per cent of the Europeanists.

While they have been exposed to cultural diversity, they do not embrace it. Nearly one in two of the localists live in multicultural neighbourhoods and only a minority support the assimilation of immigrants. These patterns support the globalist–localist contention that the ‘new localism’ is linked to a predilection for diversity. However, their rejection of assimilation must be interpreted within the context of their overwhelming support for reduced immigration levels. Their attitudes towards immigration and assimilation most likely reflect a preference for protecting the Piemontese culture from foreign influences, rather than merging it with other traditions.

Their physical proximity to global diversity and resistance to additional immigration raises the question of whether international migration has reinforced the importance of cultural preservation for the Piemontesi. While the subsequent analysis will show that the party is home to people from
across the socio-economic spectrum who report varying levels of exposure to globalization, one theme that links the localists, regionalists and Europeanists is their resistance to extra-Community migration. These findings confirm research showing that Lega sympathizers in Lombardia and Veneto are more likely to oppose migration from southern Italy and the developing world than other party sympathizers [Diamanti, 1995: 105]. Later studies of northern Italian voters also found that supporters of centre-right parties, including the Lega, the MSI-AN and to a lesser extent, Forza Italia, were more likely than leftist voters to feel that immigrants contribute to crime rates and that they should ‘return home’ [Biorcio, 1997: 158].

The localists defy a straightforward characterization as either ‘parochial and inward-looking’ or ‘cosmopolitan and global’. Since both tendencies are apparent in this group, it appears that the party is a catch-all reservoir of people from varied backgrounds, rather than a relic of pre-modernity or a harbinger of post-modernity.

The regionalists who identify most closely with Piemonte report lower levels of affluence and educational attainment than the localists, but are more mobile and less supportive of assimilationist policies (see Table 1). Just over two-thirds of the regionalists report household incomes of 36 million lire or less (data not shown). Their ranks are dominated by young males employed in offices or as professionals in small firms. As with the localists, they tend to live in smaller communities.

Their issue concerns differ from those of the localists. While a plurality also cited the public debt as the most pressing problem facing Italy, unemployment was the most frequently cited second priority issue. Subjects such as the environment, foreign affairs and immigration did not figure prominently in their chief concerns. On the diversity items, the regionalists echoed their localist counterparts in their opposition to higher immigration levels and the assimilation of the foreign-born. Unlike the localists, they tend to live in culturally homogeneous neighbourhoods.

Just over 52 per cent of the regionalists use computers more than three times a week and 60 per cent had travelled abroad at least once in the previous six months. They are slightly less interested in local news than the localists, and report similarly modest levels of interest in foreign events. There are considerable levels of second language proficiency and residential mobility, but other indicators do not demonstrate consistent evidence of socio-spatial mobility. About 70 per cent have not attended a school outside Piemonte and most of them have not achieved class mobility.

The regionalists do report traits that reflect an openness to foreign influences and post-industrialization; namely, their tertiary occupations, post-Fordist workplaces, bilingualism, usage of computerized technology, residential mobility and propensity to travel. However, they are neither
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Localists (n=64)</th>
<th>Regionalists (n=59)</th>
<th>Europeanists (n=45)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>58.7</td>
<td>67.8</td>
<td>47.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean age (in years)</td>
<td>39.2</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>41.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office employees/sales</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>20.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>37.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner of business with &lt; 10 employees</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual household income: &gt;50 million lira</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>65.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace size: 1-10 employees</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>45.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lives in multicultural neighbourhood</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community size:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;30,001</td>
<td>82.8</td>
<td>72.4</td>
<td>55.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most important issue</td>
<td>Debt</td>
<td>Debt</td>
<td>Debt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second important issue</td>
<td>Debt</td>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>Ecology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports reduced immigration</td>
<td>76.1</td>
<td>77.9</td>
<td>88.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports immigrant assimilation</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology use:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 3 times/week</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>90.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign travel:</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>one or more times in last six months</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>88.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express ‘a lot of interest’ in: local news international news</td>
<td>79.7</td>
<td>71.2</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilingual</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>84.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>72.9</td>
<td>34.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived outside birth region</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>37.7</td>
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<td>Studied outside birth region</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>33.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inter-generational class mobility</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>51.1</td>
</tr>
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Source: See note 4.
affluent nor socially mobile. Their issue orientations and interests are confined to domestic issues and local current events. Contrary to the globalist–localist perspective, their tendency to live in homogeneous neighbourhoods and their opposition to immigration suggest a stronger resistance to cultural pluralism, despite their rejection of assimilation.

The Europeanists represent about a quarter of the respondents who identify most closely with the continent (see Table 1). They are largely well-educated, affluent professionals and small business owners who are geographically and technologically mobile, and who express an intense interest in foreign current events. Interestingly, this is the only group where females constitute a slim majority. They reside in smaller communities, although a substantial proportion of them (41.9 per cent) live in medium-sized communities of between 30,000 and 100,000 inhabitants. Thus far, this group seems to confirm most of the expectations of the globalist–localist thesis.

The Europeanists distinguish themselves from their party cohorts in their identification of ecology as the second most important issue, after the public debt. This lends some support to the globalist–localist thesis that substate political identities may be linked to a ‘one-world’ awareness. With respect to an openness to technology, foreign travel and an interest in international affairs, this group emerges as very mobile and cosmopolitan. There is widespread usage of the new information technology and frequent foreign and inter-regional travel (the data are not shown, but all of the group had travelled outside Piemonte in the previous six months). The Europeanists are also distinguished by their overwhelming interest in foreign news and comparative indifference towards local news.

They exhibit considerable socio-spatial mobility, which places them somewhere between the localists and regionalists. Nearly four in ten have lived outside their region of birth, a third have studied outside Piemonte and more than half have achieved class mobility. Surprisingly, linguistic proficiency is one area where they indicated the least receptivity to multiculturalism. Further analysis reveals that only 27 per cent of the female Europeanists considered themselves bilingual, compared to between 79 and 84 per cent of the female localists and regionalists. Thus, the higher proportion of female continental identifiers depressed overall levels of linguistic proficiency for the third group.

When it comes to acceptance of ethnic pluralism, this group demonstrates through its residential choices and attitudes towards immigrants and assimilation that it prefers to remain insulated from cultural diversity rather than immersed in it. First, these members are more likely to live in Piemontese neighbourhoods than the regional and local identifiers. Second, they report the highest levels of opposition to immigration and are the most supportive of assimilation policies. It is surprising that the
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Europeanists, who are outward-oriented and cosmopolitan on many indicators, are the strongest opponents of immigration. Once again, this highlights the question of whether exposure to globalization reinforces intolerance of cultural diversity?

In sum, their socio-demographic characteristics, mobility patterns, technology usage, issue priorities and interest in foreign current events are consistent with post-industrial and global trends. However, as their relative lack of linguistic proficiency and negative attitudes towards the foreign-born demonstrate, they resist cultural pluralism at home. The Europeanists are distinct from their party cohorts on many items, and after all the evidence has been considered they provide the strongest evidence that global and post-industrial tendencies are linked to the 'new localism'.

This discussion has demonstrated that while the globalist–localist perspective only partly describes the nature of the Lega Nord–Piemonte's membership, convergence theorists underestimated the ability of territorial parties to survive, reflect and react to contemporary processes of intensified international interdependence and economic restructuring. Even the local and regional identifiers, who tend to be less affluent and spatially mobile than the Europeanists, are young, bilingual, frequent travellers who have embraced computerized technology, and support the preservation of cultural differences. In all three groups, the proportion of respondents reporting a university education exceeds the Italian average of 11.2 per cent. The thread linking the three groups is their concentration in the small firms that are characteristic of the post-Fordist economy, rather than the large industrial enterprises that fuelled Italy's post-war growth in the northwest.

The Voters

The secondary analysis of Italian voters reveals few statistically significant demographic differences between Lega voters and supporters of their main competitors. This casts doubt on modernization theories that sub-state identities would be inherently more 'backward' than loyalties to the state and its institutions. While Lega voters tend to be males (59.4 per cent) in their mid-forties with a high school education or less (90.6 per cent), the differences between them and supporters of parties located across the political spectrum are statistically insignificant. When they differ from Italians supporting the MSI-AN, Forza Italia, the PDS and RC, they exhibit characteristics that are consistent with post-industrial affluence and residence patterns. For instance, 27 per cent of Lega voters report household incomes in the top quartile (χ²=18.71, df 12; p=.10), and 70 per cent live in communities with 30,000 or fewer residents (χ²=49.38, df 20; p=.00).

Lega voters are not significantly different from other Italians in their
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MSI-AN (54)</th>
<th>Forza Italia (115)</th>
<th>Lega Nord (64)</th>
<th>PDS (121)</th>
<th>RC (19)</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How close do you feel to Italy?...not very close/not close at all</td>
<td>3.7 (2)</td>
<td>14.8 (17)</td>
<td>21.9 (14)</td>
<td>8.3 (10)</td>
<td>21.1 (4)</td>
<td>12.67b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I support my country even if it is wrong...SA/A</td>
<td>60 (27)</td>
<td>52.6 (51)</td>
<td>36.4 (20)</td>
<td>33.7 (34)</td>
<td>37.5 (6)</td>
<td>13.53b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parts of Italy should be allowed to separate...SA/A</td>
<td>9.3 (5)</td>
<td>16.7 (19)</td>
<td>58.3 (41)</td>
<td>6.0 (7)</td>
<td>21.1 (4)</td>
<td>96.44a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How long have you lived in other countries?...one or more years</td>
<td>3.7 (2)</td>
<td>1.7 (2)</td>
<td>9.4 (6)</td>
<td>5.8 (7)</td>
<td>15.8 (3)</td>
<td>9.41c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreigners should not be allowed to buy land...SA/A</td>
<td>37.5 (15)</td>
<td>44.8 (39)</td>
<td>27.5 (14)</td>
<td>23.7 (23)</td>
<td>28.6 (4)</td>
<td>10.59c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants increase crime rates...SA/A</td>
<td>87.5 (42)</td>
<td>82.9 (87)</td>
<td>88.5 (46)</td>
<td>60.2 (62)</td>
<td>50 (8)</td>
<td>30.29a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants are good for the economy...SA/A</td>
<td>27.7 (13)</td>
<td>8.7 (8)</td>
<td>17.0 (8)</td>
<td>38.3 (36)</td>
<td>33.3 (5)</td>
<td>24.84a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants take jobs from people...SA/A</td>
<td>52.1 (25)</td>
<td>55.9 (52)</td>
<td>46.2 (24)</td>
<td>26 (26)</td>
<td>23.5 (4)</td>
<td>22.61a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration should be increased ... SA/A</td>
<td>6.5 (3)</td>
<td>3.4 (3)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>11.4 (9)</td>
<td>21.4 (3)</td>
<td>14.00b</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SA/A = Strongly Agree/Agree

Source: International Social Science Program National Identity Survey (Italy); n=1094;
a) p=.00; b) p=.01; c) p=.05

Close psychological attachments to their neighbourhoods and their strong support for Europe: 72.1 per cent feel close to the continent and 82.8 per cent think Italy should unite fully with the European Union, rather than try to protect its independence. They are distinguished, however, by their relative coolness towards Italy – a sentiment shared by voters for the leftist Rifondazione Comunista (see Table 2). Both parties' supporters reject state nationalism in their refusal to support Italy if it is wrong. Not surprisingly, the Leghisti also differ from other party sympathizers in their overwhelming support for Italy's dissolution.

Both the RC and Lega voters have led more mobile lifestyles than other Italians, demonstrating their heightened exposure to foreign influences.
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Other survey items tapping into the international orientations of Italian voters shed light on their openness to foreign economic and cultural influences, as well as their attitudes towards international governance. All the respondents overwhelmingly favour limiting foreign imports. Although the differences between party supporters were not statistically significant, Forza Italia voters reported the strongest protectionist tendencies with 80.4 per cent of them supporting limits. On another item, Lega voters and supporters of the leftist PDS and RC were more amenable to allowing foreigners to purchase land than voters for the centre-right Forza Italia and MSI-AN (see Table 2).

Italians tend to support the principle of international intervention to solve problems such as environmental pollution. More than 98 per cent of the Lega voters expressed support for international involvement and all agreed that more foreign languages should be taught in schools (differences between party supporters were insignificant on both items). Finally, only a minority of Lega voters (46.2 per cent) feel that national television programming should give preference to Italian films and programmes, indicating their receptivity to foreign cultural products (party differences insignificant).

Thus far, the data show that supporters of the Lega and other leftist parties have led relatively mobile lives and are less predisposed towards economic protectionism and state nationalism than voters for their centrist and right-wing competitors. On the demographic indicators, the Lega voters are generally indistinguishable from Italians voting for parties that direct their appeals to a national electorate.

The data also show that receptivity to international political and economic integration, foreign investment, and foreign cultures does not necessarily entail an acceptance of a polyethnic Italy. Still, while Lega supporters express what can be considered 'parochial' attitudes towards immigrants, their orientations often do not differ significantly from those expressed by other Italians. For example, while 65 per cent of the Lega voters believe that ethnic minorities should be given government assistance to preserve their customs and traditions, 64 per cent feel that different racial and ethnic groups should assimilate into Italian society (party differences are insignificant for both items). These findings indicate two patterns: that Lega voters are no more or less cosmopolitan than other Italians, and that the traditions of the Piemontese, Friulan, South Tyrolean and Occitanian minorities and so on, are held to be more worthy of preservation than immigrant customs.

Although a majority of voters for the Lega and the two leftist parties disagree that immigrants take jobs from local people, between 94 and 100 per cent of voters for the PDS and the centre-right parties (including the
Lega), feel that Italy should take strong measures to exclude illegal
immigrants. While these patterns do not confirm expectations that the ‘new
localism’ is characterized by a cosmopolitan acceptance of ethnic diversity,
the attitudes of Lega voters are no more parochial on these matters than
those of most Italians.

Table 2 reveals that supporters of the Lega and the two centre-right
parties are more likely than leftist voters to feel that immigrants increase
crime rates. While few or no voters for the centre-right favoured additional
immigration, between 79 and 89 per cent of leftist voters also oppose
increases. Lega voters tend to disagree that immigrants are good for the
economy, although Forza Italia supporters express even more negative
evaluations of the material benefits of immigration.

As with the membership survey, Lega voters are wealthier than most and
are enthusiastic about the institutions, products and symbols of
globalization; yet, when it comes to ethnic diversity within Italian society,
their attitudes cannot be described as cosmopolitan.

The Globalist–Localist Perspective and the Lega Nord

This study has shown that post-industrial and post-Fordist economic
transformations, as well as bifurcated territorial loyalties, a resistance to
assimilationist policies and substantial levels of spatial and linguistic
mobility, characterize the Lega Nord–Piemonte membership. Three major
observations can be drawn from the survey of Italian voters. First, Lega
Nord voters are more affluent and mobile than the supporters of its main
competitors. Second, Lega voters support global institutions, international
capital and minority rights in their approval of the European Union, foreign
investment, foreign cultural products and languages, and the preservation of
minority cultures that are native to Italy. However, the final observation
weakens the explanatory power of the globalist–localist thesis: Lega Nord
voters, Lega Nord–Piemonte members, and supporters of other centre-right
parties, are dubious about the socio-economic impact of immigrants on
Italian society and strongly resist increased immigration.

This article has shown that the globalist–localist perspective illuminates
our understanding of the nature of the Lega’s appeal. Party adherents reflect
and embrace the political and economic implications of globalization and
post-industrialization, yet the cultural impact of these transformations – the
challenges which internal and extra-Community migration pose to the
preservation of northern Italian cultural traditions – is the subject of strong
opposition. To this end, the party reflects the impact of globalization and
post-industrialization, and as such, will likely persevere as long as these
forces shape Mediterranean and other western societies.
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NOTES


3. The 'Third Italy' includes Veneto, Trentino Alto-Adige, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Emilia-Romagna, Toscana, Umbria and Le Marche. In the first three regions, the Lega won between 15 and 35 per cent of popular support in elections to the Chamber of Deputies in 1996. Its support elsewhere is marginal.

4. The heads of all sections of the Lega Nord-Piemont distributed questionnaires to members in Torino, Cuneo, Varese, Verbania Casio-Ossola, and Ciriè between 27 November 1995 and 2 February 1996. 181 individuals responded to the survey. The results were cross-checked against the Eurobarometer 40.0 Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey and the 1995 International Social Science Program National Identity survey. Both the Eurobarometer voter and membership survey confirm that Lega supporters tend to be young males who are high school graduates living in communities with 10,000 or fewer people. The median annual household income of Lega supporters in the member and voter surveys falls in the 36–50 million lire range.

5. The 1991 Italian census, as cited in the documentation accompanying the ISSP 1995 National Identity survey, found that 11.2 percent of Italians held a university degree. 36.4 percent had graduated from high school.

6. The five parties which together won 70 per cent of popular support in the 1996 national elections were included in the analysis. They include: Forza Italia, the Partito Democratico della Sinistra (PDS), the Movimento Sociale Italiano-Alleanza Nazionale (MSI-AN), the Lega Nord and the Rifondazione Comunista (RC). Immigration should be increased: 35–65 year-olds; all sex, education and income categories; suburban and rural residents; communities with more than 10,000 residents and more than 100,000.

Gender, age, education, monthly income, community size and urban–rural controls were applied to the original relationships. These relationships hold for respondents in the following categories:

a) Closeness to Italy: males; 35–50 year-olds; high school education or less; household incomes below survey median of 2.7 million lire; urban residents; cities of 100,001 or more residents;

b) How long have you lived in another country?: 51–65 year-olds; incomes above survey median of 2.7 million lire; cities of 100,001 or more residents;

c) Foreigners should not be allowed to buy land: post-secondary education; incomes below survey median; cities of 100,001 or more;

d) One nation or separate state: holds for all statistical controls;

f) Immigrants increase crime rates: males and females; 18–50 year-olds; a minimum high school education; all incomes; suburban and rural residents; communities with fewer than 10,000 residents;

g) Immigrants are good for the economy: both sexes; 18–34 year-olds; 51–65 year-olds; all
education and income categories; communities with 10,001 or more residents;
h) Immigrants take jobs away: both sexes; 18–50 year-olds; all education and income
categories; urban and suburban; communities with 10,001 or more residents.

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