Re-inventing the Italian Right

Territorial politics, populism and 'post-fascism'

Carlo Ruzza and **Stefano Fella**

Routledge

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Following his third election victory in 2008, the Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi was the most controversial head of government in the EU. This is a cogent examination of the Berlusconi phenomenon, exploring the success and development of the new populist right-wing coalition in Italy since the collapse of the post-war party system in the early 1990s.

Carlo Ruzza and Stefano Fella provide a comprehensive discussion of the three main parties of the Italian right: Berlusconi's Forza Italia, the xenophobic and regionalist populist Northern League and the post-fascist National Alliance. The book assesses the implications of this controversial right for the Italian democratic system and examines how the social and political peculiarities of Italy have allowed such political formations to emerge and enjoy repeated electoral success.

Framed in a comparative perspective, the authors:

- explore the nature of the Italian right in the context of right-wing parties and populist phenomena elsewhere in other advanced democracies, drawing comparisons and providing broader explanations.
- locate the parties of the Italian right within the existing theoretical conceptions of right-wing and populist parties, utilising a multi-method approach, including a content analysis of party programmes.
- highlight the importance of political and discursive opportunities in explaining the success of the Italian right, and the agency role of a political leadership that has skilfully shaped and communicated an ideological package to exploit these opportunities.

Giving an excellent insight into a key European nation, this work provides a thoughtful and stimulating contribution to the research on the Italian right, and its implications for democratic politics.

Carlo Ruzza is Professor of Sociology at the University of Leicester and has previously taught at the Universities of Surrey, Essex and Trento.

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From Carlo to Lina and Carletto
From Stefano to Simon and the Howden family

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Series Editors' Preface

For much of the 'short twentieth century', history was characterized by the clash of great ideologies, internal violence and major wars. Although most catastrophic events took place outside the Western world, Europe and the USA were not immune from the turmoil. Two world wars and a series of lesser conflicts led to countless horrors and losses. Moreover, for long periods Western democracy – especially in its European form – seemed in danger of eclipse by a series of radical forces, most notably communist and fascist.

Yet by the turn of the 1990s, liberal democracy appeared destined to become the universal governmental norm. Dictatorial Soviet communism had collapsed, to be replaced in most successor states by multi-party electoral politics. Chinese communism remained autocratic, but in the economic sphere it was moving rapidly towards greater freedoms and marketization. The main manifestations of fascism had gone down to catastrophic defeat in war. Neo-fascist parties were damned by omnipresent images of brutality and genocide, and exerted little appeal outside a fringe of ageing nostalgics and alienated youths.

In the Western World, political violence had disappeared, or was of minimal importance in terms of system stability. Where it lingered on as a regularly murderous phenomenon, for instance in Northern Ireland or Spain, it seemed a hangover from the past – a final flicker of the embers of old nationalist passions. It was easy to conclude that such tribal atavism was doomed in an increasingly interconnected 'capitalist' world, characterized by growing forms of multi-level governance that were transcending the antagonism and parochialism of old borders.

However, as we move into the new millennium there are growing signs that extremism even in the West is far from dead – that we celebrated prematurely the universal victory of democracy. Perhaps the turn of the twenty-first century was an interregnum, rather than a turning point? In Western Europe there has been the rise of 'extreme right' and 'populist' parties such as Jean-Marie Le Pen's Front National, which pose a radical challenge to existing elites – even to the liberal political system. In the USA, the 1995 Oklahoma mass-bombing has not been followed by another major extreme right attack, but there is simmering resentment towards the allegedly over-powerful state

among a miscellany of discontents, who appear even more dangerous than the militias which emerged in the 1990s. More generally across the West, new forms of green politics, often linked by a growing hostility to globalization-Americanization, are taking on more violent forms (the issue of animal rights is also growing in importance in this context).

In the former Soviet space, there are clear signs of the revival of 'communist' parties (which often masquerade as 'socialists' or 'social democrats'), whose allegiance to democracy is (in varying degrees) debatable. In Latin America, there remain notable extremist movements on the left, though these tend not to be communist. This trend may well grow both in response to globalization-Americanization and to the (partly-linked) crises of many of these countries, such as Argentina. This in turn increases the threat to democracy from the extreme right, ranging in form from paramilitary groups to agro-military conspiracies.

The rise of Islamic fundamentalism has been an even more notable feature of recent years. This is not simply a facet of Middle Eastern politics. It has had an impact within some former Soviet republics, where the old nomenklatura have used the Islamic threat to maintain autocratic rule. In countries such as Indonesia and India, Muslims and other ethnic groups have literally cut each other to pieces. More Al-Qaeda bombings of the 2002 Bali type threaten economic ruin to Islamic countries which attract many Western tourists.

It is also important to note that growing Islamic Fundamentalism has had an impact within some Western countries. The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and elsewhere in the USA on September 11, 2001 are perhaps the most graphic illustration of this impact. But in democracies generally, the rise of religious and other forms of extremism pose vital questions about the limits of freedom, multiculturalism, and tolerance. This is especially the case in countries which have experienced notable Islamic immigration and/or which face the greatest threat of further terrorist attack.

Democracy may have become a near-universal shibboleth, but its exact connotations are being increasingly challenged and debated. As long as the 'evil empire' of communism existed, Western democracy could in an important sense define itself by the 'Other' – by what it was not. It did not have overt dictatorial rule, censorship, the gulags, and so on. But with the collapse of its great external foe, the spotlight has turned inward (although Islam is in some ways replacing communism as the 'Other'). Is (liberal-Western) democracy truly democratic? Can it defend itself against terrorism and new threats without undermining the very nature of democracy?

These general opening comments provide the rationale for the *Routledge Series on Extremism and Democracy*. In particular, there are three issues which we seek to probe in this series:

- Conceptions of democracy and extremism
- Forms of the new extremism in both the West and the wider world
- How democracies are responding to the new extremism

Given all the commotion following the installation of the Austrian ÖVP-FPÖ government in 2000, it is often forgotten that the first postwar government in Europe that included a populist radical right party was constituted in Italy in 1994. It consisted of an odd mix of new and old parties, most notably Silvio Berlusconi's brand new *Forza Italia* (FI), Umberto Bossi's relatively new *Lega Nord* (LN), and Gianfranco Fini's old *Movimento Sociale Italiano/Alleanza Nazionale* (MSI/AN).

Maybe part of the lack of outrage can be explained by the difficulties that many commentators had with categorizing the parties. FI was so new and based upon the personality of its leader that it was almost impossible to determine whether it stood for anything other than Berlusconi's corporate and personal self-interest. The LN was notorious for its leader's antics and volatile programmatic positions, which initially included the breakaway of the prosperous north of Italy ('Padania') from the rest. And the MSI/AN was in the process of transformation from a clearly neo-fascist party into a yet to be defined new party.

While the government was short-lived, the three parties would come together again in 2001, and this time their coalition government would survive for a full term (a unique accomplishment in postwar Italian politics). But while the parties became better known and established, debate remained within and outside academia about their ideological profiles. This book is the first to systematically analyze the ideologies of all three parties and compare and contrast them. It shows that much remains vague and uncertain, given the parties' dependency on their highly idiosyncratic leaders (though less so for the AN, which in 2009 merged into the People of Freedom (PdL), which had emerged from FI in 2008). They are all right-wing, that much is clear. All are also populist, although in the case of the AN, this seems to have been a matter of strategy rather than ideology.

In addition to analyzing the parties' ideologies and categorizing them within broader party and political families, this book also provides a clear and concise overview of the fundamental political changes that have taken place in Italy since the period of scandals and transformations in the early 1990s. Drawing upon a wealth of mostly secondary sources the authors show how the right-wing parties, mostly for their own motives but also as a result of a form of competitive cooperation, used clever and sometimes cynical strategies to fill the political void left by the implosion of the main parties of the Italian 'First Republic', most notably the *Democrazia Christiana* (DC). It is no surprise that their new identity, even if more constructed than real, and populist rhetoric were so successful at a time that almost half of the members of the lower house of parliament were under criminal investigation for fraud and other crimes.

But the book also provides lessons for the study and understanding of populism in other countries. Among the most important points it makes are that the populist (radical) right (1) is not simply a successor of the traditional right and (2) is an active actor in its own success. Moreover, it provides

findings that go against some of the main theories in the literature on the populist radical right. For example, contrary to the broadly held belief that populist parties fare badly under majoritarian electoral systems, the Italian Right actually profited from a change away from proportionality and towards a more majoritarian electoral system. A possible explanation for this atypical finding is that most literature on the populist (radical) right assumes that it is shunned by other political parties. However, as has also been the case in various countries in postcommunist Eastern Europe (e.g. Poland, Romania, and Slovakia), when the populist (radical) right is part of larger political block, often in a two-block-party system, it can profit from electoral majoritarianism and political polarization.

In short, *Reinventing the Italian Right* is, first and foremost, the ultimate study of the three main contemporary parties of the Right in Italy. It provides an original ideological analysis and a broad overview of the history and explanations of their electoral and political successes. As such, it is a must read for all students of contemporary Italian politics. However, scholars with an interest in general populist politics will find much to reflect on too. This will hopefully help make the remarkable Italian case a more central part of comparative studies on populist (radical) right parties in Europe.

Roger Eatwell and Cas Mudde

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Abbreviations

AD	*Alleanza Democratica*
	Democratic Alliance
AN	*Alleanza Nazionale*
	National Alliance
AS	*Alternativa Sociale*
	Social Alternative
CCD	*Centro Cristiano Democratico*
	Christian Democratic Centre
CdL	*Casa delle Libertà*
	House of Freedoms
CISNAL	*Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Nazionali dei Lavoratori*
	Italian Confederation of National Unions of Workers
CNEL	*Consiglio Nazionale dell'Economia e del Lavoro*
	National Council for the Economy and Labour
CDU	*Cristiani Democratici Uniti*
	United Christian Democrats
DC	*Democrazia Cristiana*
	Christian Democracy
DE	*Democrazia Europea*
	European Democracy
DS	*Democratici di Sinistra*
	Left Democrats
FdG	*Fronte della Gioventù*
	Youth Front (MSI)
FI	*Forza Italia*
	Come on Italy!
FN	*Front National*
	National Front (France)
FPO	*Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*
	Austrian Freedom Party
FUAN	*Fronte Universitario d'Azione Nazional*e
	University Front of National Action (MSI)
IDV	*Italia dei Valori*
	Italy of Values

LN	*Lega Nord*	
	Northern League	
MPA	*Movimento per l'Autonomia*	
	Movement for Autonomy	
MSI-DN	*Movimento Sociale Italiano – Destra Nazionale*	
	Italian Social Movement – National Right	
ON	*Ordine Nuovo*	
	New Order	
PD	*Partito Democratico*	
	Democratic Party	
PDCI	*Partito dei Comunisti Italiani*	
	Party of Italian Communists	
PDS	*Partito Democratico della Sinistra*	
	Democratic Left Party	
PLI	*Partito Liberale Italiano*	
	Italian Liberal Party	
PPI	*Partito Popolare Italiano*	
	Italian Popular Party	
PRI	*Partito Repubblicano Italiano*	
	Italian Republican Party	
PSDI	*Partito Socialista Democratico Italiano*	
	Italian Social Democratic Party	
PSI	*Partito Socialista Italiano*	
	Italian Socialist Party	
RC	*Rifondazione Comunista*	
	Communist Refoundation	
REP	*Die Republikaner*	
	The Republicans (Germany)	
RI	*Rinnovamento Italiano*	
	Italian Renovation	
RRP	Radical Right Party	
RSI	*Repubblica Sociale Italiana*	
	Italian Social Republic	
SDI	Socialisti Democratici Italiani, Italian Democratic Socialists	
SVP	*Südtiroler Volkspartei*	
	South Tyrol Peoples Party	
Udeur	*Unione Democratici per l'Europa*	
	Union of Democrats for Europe	
UEN	Union for Europe of the Nations	
UGL	*Unione Generale del Lavoro*	
	General Union of Labour	
UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party	
UPE	Union for Europe	
UQ	*Fronte dell'Uomo Qualunque*	
	Common Man's Front	

1   Introduction

The charismatic and controversial leadership of Silvio Berlusconi and the pasts and presents of his government coalition partners have placed the Italian political system, particularly following Berlusconi's electoral successes in 2001 and 2008, in the international spotlight. The centre-right government over which Berlusconi presided between 2001 and 2006 could lay claim to the considerable achievement (in Italian terms) of managing to remain in office for a full parliamentary term, and indeed in the meantime, setting a record for longevity in office for a post-war Italian government. It also did considerably better than the short-lived government led by Berlusconi in 1994, which lasted eight months. Although the centre right was defeated by the narrowest of margins in the 2006 general election, the collapse of the centre-left government in early 2008 paved the way for Berlusconi's third general election victory and return as prime minister in April.

The success of the centre-right coalition over this period was all the more remarkable when one considers the history and nature of the political forces that constituted it. In 2008, Berlusconi headed the Popolo della Libertà (PdL, People of Freedom) electoral list, which brought together his own Forza Italia (FI) party, the post-fascist National Alliance (Alleanza Nazionale, AN) and other disparate centre-right and right-wing groupings. FI was a party founded from scratch by Berlusconi in the early 1990s, when he was better known as a successful entrepreneur who owned Italy's three main private TV stations as well as its leading football club, AC Milan. It was a party whose leadership and policy direction was dominated by Berlusconi and viewed by many as his personal vehicle. The AN emerged out of the MSI (Movimento Sociale Italiano, Italian Social Movement), which presented itself until the early 1990s as the unashamed guardian of Italy's fascist legacy. In 2008, the PdL list was allied with the Northern League (Lega Nord, LN), a regionalist populist party that has at times advocated the break-up of Italy and is often categorised as part of the family of new xenophobic radical right-wing populist parties (RRP) or extreme right populists in Europe. The PdL–LN alliance in essence reproduced the House of Freedoms (CdL, Casa delle Libertà) coalition, through which the AN, the LN and FI together fought the 2001 and 2006 elections. The difference in 2008 was that the fourth party of the CdL

coalition, the centrist Christian Democrat UDC, this time ran separately, having refused to join the PdL list. This accentuated the right-wing character of the coalition which, in contrast to 2001–6, would not contain this prominent moderating centrist element. Although the PdL also included some smaller Christian Democrat groupings, it also included a group of unreconstructed fascists led by Alessandra Mussolini (grand-daughter of Italy's fascist dictator) who had previously quit the AN in protest at its leader Gianfranco Fini's disavowal of aspects of the fascist regime.

The nature of this coalition and its success over a number of Italian elections raises a number of broader questions for observers of party change, party systems and representative democracy. The degree to which Berlusconi, his party and coalition partners have benefited from his ownership and control of a swathe of the Italian mass media raises general questions regarding the relationship between the media and politics and the potential conflict of interests that can arise in this regard. In addition, the political style of Berlusconi lends itself to interpretations based on the importance of communications and personal image in politics. More broadly, the three main parties of the coalition provide excellent examples of the role of leadership in politics, the increasing personalisation of politics and the tendency towards leadership centralisation in parties, both in Italy and more globally. Moreover, the LN and FI, in particular, provide interesting examples of the global phenomenon of populism and rare European examples of how new populist movements behave in government and reconcile their anti-establishment and anti-political discourse with the trappings of office. Furthermore, AN provides a remarkable case of how a political force that was until recently associated with Europe's old neo-fascist right has been able to re-invent itself as a legitimate political actor, viewed across the political spectrum in Italy as a democratic force, albeit one with authoritarian conservative tendencies.

These phenomena need to be understood in the wider context of party system change, in relation to which Italy also presents itself as an extreme case, at least in the western European context. Between 1992 and 1994, the major governing parties in Italy imploded, notably the Christian Democrat (DC), which had been present in government as the largest party continuously since 1947, and its main coalition partner, the Italian Socialist Party (PSI). This collapse was precipitated by the *mani pulite* (clean hands) investigations, which implicated a large number of parliamentarians and sections of the leadership of both parties in a complicated web of corruption: the so-called *tangentopoli* (kickback city) scandal. Some of the minor parties, such as the PSDI (Social Democrats) and PLI (Liberal party), that had frequently been present in the DC-led coalitions were also brought down by the scandal. A new centre-left coalition led by the reformed former communist Democratic Left party (PDS) – previously excluded from government because of its association with Soviet communism – appeared likely to profit from the political vacuum created by the collapse of the DC and its allies, and win government office in 1994. This was until the decision by Silvio Berlusconi to enter the

fray at the head of his newly created Forza Italia party, knitting together a coalition that also included the AN and the LN. Making full use of the media and financial resources at Berlusconi's disposal, the new coalition achieved a stunning election victory. The government formed in 1994 was viewed by many observers as a break with Italy's anti-fascist consensus (a principle around which the post-war republican constitution was organised), given that it included a number of ministers from the MSI–AN. Although differences within the coalition meant that the government was short-lived (collapsing at the end of 1994 after the withdrawal of the LN), the three parties have since remained the principal players on the centre right in Italy, returning to government in coalition again in 2001 and this time remaining in office for the full parliamentary term, only to lose office by the narrowest of margins in 2006, before returning to government again in 2008. Following this latest election victory, the leaderships of both FI and the AN signalled their intention to dissolve their parties into a new PdL party.

The success of the centre-right coalition in remaining in power for the length of the 2001–6 parliamentary term and returning to government again in 2008 needs to be considered in a number of contexts, notably the history of the post-war Italian republic in which government executives were marked by a seemingly congenital fragility, as demonstrated by the impressively large number of governments that came and went since the end of the second world war (fifty-eight from 1945 to 2001). However, the maintenance of this alliance was all the more remarkable when one considers the history and nature of the political forces that constituted it and, moreover, when one considers the apparent irreconcilability of some of the key constituent parties, straddling as they do a number of the key cleavages that shape Italian political culture, including those relating to the north–south divide, the secular–catholic division in politics and conflicting interpretations regarding the role of the state and the free market (see Pasquino 2003a).

In order to understand the rapid rise of these parties, a broader understanding of the remarkable political changes that have taken place in Italy since the 1990s is required. In essence, a whole new electoral marketplace has been created in Italy, creating new political opportunities for innovative political parties and imaginative party leaders.

Although the opportunity to carve out new political space was created by the collapse of the DC and its allies, the adoption of a new set of rules to govern the electoral marketplace, i.e. a new predominantly majoritarian electoral system, was also central to the development of the new party system. This meant that, while carving out different political spaces for themselves, these parties had to co-operate if they wished to achieve electoral success and enter government. The nature of this coalition has been highly controversial, not least because of the personal political style and 'conflict of interests' of its leader, Berlusconi, and because of the nature of its leading party, Forza Italia – the personal creation of Berlusconi. However, the participation of both the LN and the AN raised concerns for differing reasons, the AN

because of its recent past as the neo-fascist MSI, in which all of its key leaders received their political formation, and the LN because of a populist exclusionist discourse often labelled as xenophobic.

The principal aim of this book is to provide an understanding of the nature of these new and re-invented political forces on the Italian right, explaining their growth and development and exploring how the social and political peculiarities of Italy have allowed such controversial political formations to emerge and conquer the electorates of an advanced European democracy.

The book seeks to explain the success of the right with reference to a combination of factors. In relation to these, it must be stressed – as explained in the next chapter – that the success of the right has taken place in a state of continuing political turmoil – the transition to the much trumpeted 'second Italian republic' has never quite reached its destination. The unsettling effects on political institutions, on the economic performance of the country and on the efficiency of the state have contributed to a continuing popular dissatisfaction with the conduct of politics. We posit that the right has been better able to govern this continuing state of transition and the turmoil that has ensued.

To explain the superior performance of the right, we will emphasise ideological factors, the changing structural characteristics of Italian society and the resources at the disposal of political actors. We will posit that, following the traumatic events of *tangentopoli*, the right could re-invent itself in a fashion that was more suited to the changes that Italian society was undergoing, while the left remained fragmented and anchored to old ideological schemes. Conversely, the right has been able to innovate ideologically and to an extent find common ideological elements to mask persisting divisions. The book will document the process of re-invention of the Italian right through an empirical analysis of its ideology. It will stress in particular the accord between the socially conservative values of a dominant institution such as the catholic church in Italy and the right, and the success of the right in interpreting a variety of anti-political sentiments through ideological statements but also through markers such as a distinctive use of the language of politics and political symbolism. In terms of its better ability to respond to societal changes, we will emphasise the impact of de-industrialisation and the necessity of responding to the interests of the self-employed and young job-seekers thorough promises such as reduction of the tax burden and more flexibility in the job market, which were crucial in distinguishing the right from the left and contributed significantly to its success at several points in time. In terms of resources, we will point to those that Silvio Berlusconi has had at his disposal through a never resolved conflict of interest resulting in synergies between his dual role of wealthy entrepreneur and powerful political actor. His media skills and his control of the private television networks have been particularly relevant.

To these variables, we should add the role of personal charisma – or rather, the various ways in which charismatic domination can be achieved and utilised. The leaders of these three parties, Gianfranco Fini of the AN, Umberto Bossi of the LN and Silvio Berlusconi of FI, have proved particularly skilful

and adept in using distinctive leadership styles to exploit the opportunities provided by the changing political circumstances of Italy since the early 1990s. Hence this book will pay special attention to the leadership of these three key figures. Through a process of ideological re-invention and fine tuning that differed among the three parties and required distinctive leadership styles, these parties have moved to carve out particular niches and broader spaces within the new Italian political landscape.

In order to assess the success, continuing appeal and long-term prospects of the Italian right, while placing it in a broader global context, an understanding is required of the nature, strategies and constituencies of its component parties. Just a cursory examination of the political cultures and agendas of two of these political forces, the AN and the LN, suggests a lack of compatibility which points to a future of instability and division and difficulties in maintaining a united centre-right pole, either in government or in opposition. The AN has a centralising, statist tradition, places a priority on the maintenance of the values and integrity of the Italian nation-state and draws its support mainly from the south. The LN favours autonomy for the north of the country (and has occasionally threatened northern secession from the rest of the Italy) and, as the name suggests, its constituency lies almost exclusively in the north. One could argue that a lack of compatibility in terms of constituencies, values, programmatic goals and broader strategies threatens the continuing viability of these parties as an electoral and governing coalition. Alternatively, one could argue that, particularly in a bipolar political system, the distinctiveness of these political forces is an advantage, in that each can reach a part of the electorate that its competitors–allies cannot, thus contributing to the construction of the broad church representing diverse political interests and constituencies that is essential to conquer power in an advanced liberal democracy.

The experience of the second Berlusconi government of 2001–6 also provides an opportunity to assess the ability of these parties to deliver in office, as they sought to combine a continuing appeal to their political constituencies with their institutional role. Both the LN and the FI leaderships have been characterised by the use of a populist discourse which juxtaposes a pure honest common people against a corrupt self-serving political elite, characterised by cynical political parties, led and staffed by 'professional' politicians. Thus, Berlusconi has made great play of his background as a political outsider, Italy's most successful entrepreneur who reluctantly entered politics in the midst of the political crisis in the early 1990s to save Italy from the peril represented by the recycled former communists and professional politicians of the centre left. Bossi, as leader first of the Lombard League in the 1980s, and then of the Northern League, broke the mould of Italian politics with his populist attacks on the Italian state, Rome and the south in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The LN's political discourse has also taken on an ethno-populist form that was also unprecedented in the history of the Italian republic, in which first southern Italian migrants were scapegoated for bringing social and economic problems to the north of Italy, and then later (when the LN's participation in

a national electoral coalition required it to moderate this discourse) the non-EU migrant became the 'other' against which the LN's imagined community of honest hard-working northern Italians was juxtaposed. The AN, given its fascist antecedents, has had to tread a more careful path. In seeking to reassure sections of the Italian population, and the international community, of its new democratic credentials, the use of populist demagoguery would have been counter-productive. Thus its leader, Gianfranco Fini, has presented a more moderate and prudent political image. Nevertheless, the MSI–AN benefited in the early 1990s from its exclusion from the governing system and the constitutional arch of potential governing parties, as well as its previous critique of Italy's corrupt *partitocrazia* (rule by parties) and advocacy of institutional reforms (such as direct presidential elections). Moreover, this anti-party ethos was combined with continued references to the Italian national community, tough (although recently moderated) positions on immigration control and a valorisation of traditional catholic conceptions of family life and morality, which also sometimes lend themselves to populist interpretations.

Thus, one may ask, how did these new and recycled parties, which had no experience of government prior to 1994 (and in 2001 only the short and abruptly ended period of office in 1994 to refer back to) cope with the demands of government office? How were populist and anti-political positions reconciled with the assumption of government responsibility? Moreover, how were the distinct political identities and different electoral constituencies that these parties were elected to represent reconciled in government office?

One other grouping on the centre right should also be mentioned here: the UDC is a catholic centrist grouping that developed out of conservative splinters from the former DC. However, given these antecedents, its involvement in government between 2001 and 2006 was far less controversial. In this period, it sought to distance itself from the other centre-right forces, particularly FI and the LN, and the 'populist' nature of the coalition in general. Following the defeat of the coalition in 2006, the UDC took a number of positions independent of the rest of the CdL, before leaving the alliance and finally deciding to run separately from the PdL in 2008. It is notable in this context that the UDC refuses to don the centre-right label. Like the DC before it, it insists on presenting itself as a centrist political force. Given these various considerations, the focus of this book will be on the FI, LN and AN, i.e. the new and re-invented right and the interactions within it, rather than the UDC, although the UDC will often be discussed in terms of the relationship of these parties to it.

Structure and general approach of book

The next chapter will examine in more detail the nature of the political system of the post-war republic and the reasons for its collapse, exploring the way in which right and centre right found expression within the post-war party system and seized the initiative following its collapse in the early 1990s.

The interaction between the three parties and their behaviour from the first Berlusconi government to the third will be assessed in order to provide the background for the more detailed interpretations and analysis of each of the parties that will come in Chapters 4–6. Following on from this, Chapter 3 will provide a broader conceptual framework for the book, by examining the social, cultural and political processes that have led to the emergence of new populist movements throughout Europe and shaped the trajectory and successes of the right, explaining their relevance for Italy. Chapters 4–6 will then examine the nature, political culture, strategy, programme and constituency of the LN, FI and AN within the context of the discussion and conceptual framework presented in Chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 7 will present conclusions as to the reasons for the success of the Italian right, drawing from the findings of the party chapters and seeking to answer the questions posited by these introductory comments as to the appeal of the Italian right and the nature of the new political styles it has heralded. The final chapter will seek to place the Italian right within the broader literature on right-wing and populist political parties, examining its success in comparison with other European polities and its implications for democratic politics in general. It will stress the role of political and cultural opportunities in explaining the differing levels of success of the right in Europe.

Throughout this book, specific reference will be made to the ideology of the different political forces on the Italian right and the role played by the party leaders in shaping their ideological trajectories. This will draw from analysis of party programmes. While a variety of studies of Italian politics, or some of its parties, in the 1990s have examined aspects of the trajectory of the right and often included in their examination references to the communication strategies of the coalition and of its parties, these references often consist of marginal notations supported by examples usually focusing on one or other party. At other times, the centrality and innovative character of the political discourse of this coalition is asserted but without systematic study of its features and changing traits. We posit that effective political communication has been a central element of the success of the right and that the creation of new and persuasive ideological frames represents one of the successful accomplishments of the centre-right coalition. For this reason, the role of ideology in the different parties is studied in detail. The production and diffusion of ideological frames is examined through a variety of methods and constitutes a central element of the analysis. We will return to the technical aspects of our methodology in more detail in Chapter 3. But here some introductory comments are useful.

Different authors give varying attention to ideology and often define it differently. For some, ideology mainly consists of rhetorical window-dressing. Others conceptualise it as the narrative that justifies specific policy preferences and relates them to one another. For some, it merely reflects an elaboration of underlying economic interests. For others, ideologies are part of a long and complex process of continuous definitions and re-definitions of interests and related policy preferences that is substantially influenced by interpersonal