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## European Solidarity among the Italian Diaspora

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# EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY AMONG THE ITALIAN DIASPORA

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## **Abstract**

European solidarity as a fundamental value of the EU assumed even more relevance in the last decades in the context of the various crises that hit the European continent. The impact of these crises affected public opinion on European solidarity and led to increased politicisation of the issue in national political arenas. The influence of EU issues on national politics has been explored concerning different aspects, especially their role in determining citizens' voting behaviour. Nevertheless, despite its relevance, European solidarity has been disregarded as a voting factor in national elections. This research aims to fill this gap by exploring how people's perceptions of European solidarity might affect their national vote. It focuses on the last 2022 Italian national elections and investigates the Italian diaspora's voting behaviour. It relies on brand-new data collected through a post-electoral survey designed to capture the attitudes towards European solidarity of Italians living in France, Belgium, and Germany. The survey results are put in relation to the parties' stances on European solidarity emerging from their electoral manifestos. The findings show that European solidarity plays a role in shaping the sample's voting behaviour. In particular, they indicate that showing high support for the issue increases the odds of voting for parties that engage more with European solidarity and explicitly support it. Therefore, this research helps to elucidate better the influence of EU issues on national political arenas.

**Keywords:** European solidarity, Italian diaspora, voting behaviour, politicisation, transnationalism.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

Azione-IV	Azione-Italia Viva-Calenda
EU	European Union
FdI	Fratelli d'Italia
FI	Forza Italia
IC	Impegno Civico Luigi di Maio - Centro Democratico
Lega	Lega per Salvini Premier
MdL	Movimento delle Libertà
M5S	Movimento 5 Stelle
NGEU	NextGenerationEU
PD	Partito Democratico - Italia Democratica e Progressista
SURE	Temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency
Verdi/SI	Alleanza Verdi e Sinistra
+EU	+Europa





## **1. Introduction**

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**E**uropean solidarity is one of the fundamental values of the European Union (EU). Since the beginning, it guided the integration process and is incorporated in the EU Treaties (European Union, 2020a; European Union, 2020b; European Union, 2023). European solidarity has been under strain in recent years since it had to undergo a series of stress tests and is still under pressure (Gerhards et al., 2018; Lahusen, 2020b). These challenges mainly correspond to the EU's significant crises of the last decades, namely the economic crisis, the so-called migration crisis, Brexit, and the more recent pandemic and energy crisis prompted by the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. These crises triggered tensions among member states and undermined the cohesion among them, as they had an uneven impact on countries and thus made the disparities among them in terms of resources more evident. These situations also prompted reciprocal blaming attitudes among member states and the rise of nationalist sentiments within them (Cotta, 2017; Genschel & Hemerijck, 2018; McWilliams et al., 2022; Zakeri et al., 2022). Therefore, the current state of the Union begs the question: to what extent is the EU “a community of solidarity” in which member states and citizens can expect and provide help to others in situations like those described (Gerhards et al., 2018, p. 6). The issue's relevance relies on the fact that the perceived absence of European solidarity represents a threat to the existence of the EU, as it creates a problem of trust that could potentially lead to the disintegration of the European project (Sommermann, 2022). The fact that European solidarity represents a “safety net” against European disintegration shows why it is relevant to engage in a kind of study like the one of this thesis (Thym & Tsourdi, 2017, p. 606).

The multiple European crises also impacted public attitudes and political stances on EU-related issues (Bobba, 2021). Therefore, the European dimension gained salience in political discourses as it has been increasingly politicised in national arenas, sparking an interest in how EU-related issues shape political preferences and behaviour, such as vote choice (Capati et al., 2022). The relevant literature on the topic mainly focuses on attitudes towards issues such as European integration and EU membership and their relative influence on the vote in national elections, whereas despite its highlighted current relevance, little attention has been dedicated to European solidarity (Carrieri, 2020; Conti et al., 2021; Costa Lobo & Lewis-Beck, 2012; Dehousse, 2013). Research so far has focused on how attitudes towards European solidarity affect voting behaviour

in European elections, while research on the national level is lacking (Pellegata & Visconti, 2021; Pellegata & Visconti, 2022). This study contributes to this gap by answering the research question: **“How does the European solidarity perception of the Italian diaspora influence their vote in national elections?”**. Therefore, this research investigates how an EU issue and, thus, a supranational matter might affect vote choice in national elections by shedding light on a previously neglected but highly relevant matter like European solidarity to assess if this might be considered a voting factor.

This study focuses on the Italian case due to its peculiar position as one of the hardest-hit countries in all the aforementioned crises. These events caused a rise in Eurosceptic sentiments in a country traditionally supporting the EU, being among its founders, which entailed, at the same time, an increased politicisation of EU issues, with parties increasingly expressing their opinion on these issues (Bobba, 2021; Conti et al., 2022). The salience of European solidarity in the Italian political arena was particularly visible during the electoral campaign for the last Italian national elections, which were held in September 2022. The relevance of this electoral tournament is also due to the many peculiarities that have characterised it. It was the first time that parliamentary elections occurred in the second half of the year, with a concise electoral campaign held over the summer due to an anticipated call for elections after Mario Draghi's resignation in July 2022 (Garzia, 2023; Improta et al., 2022). They were also the first elections to occur after modifying two constitutional provisions, which reduced the number of parliamentarians and expanded the right to vote for the Senate to everyone over eighteen (Italian Republic, 2020; Italian Republic, 2021). These elections registered the lowest participation ever, and finally, in terms of results, they determined the return to power of the centre-right after fourteen years with the support of a clear majority, showing an unprecedented decisiveness of the electorate (Pasquino & Valbruzzi, 2023). This led to the appointment of a female Prime Minister for the first time, coming from a party which has never held government responsibility before, *Fratelli d'Italia* (FdI) (Garzia, 2023; Improta et al., 2022).

By focusing on European solidarity, this study contributes to the ongoing debate concerning whether attitudes towards EU issues affect Italians' voting behaviour, particularly that of Italians abroad (Conti et al., 2021; Maggini & Chiaramonte, 2019). Citizens living outside of Italy have been granted the right to vote from their country of residence via post since 2001. According to the electoral rules, the Italian diaspora is represented not by their hometown constituencies, but by twelve parliamentarians, representing four voting colleges: Europe, South America, Central and North America, and Africa-Asia-Oceania-Antarctica. Italians living abroad can also return to Italy to exercise their right to vote there if they decide to do so (Mascitelli & Battiston, 2008; Senate of

the Republic, 2022). A particular trend can be noted concerning the electoral results of this share of the electorate, as “patterns of continuity (diverging from domestic voting trends) as well as of change (converging with domestic voting trends)” are identified (Battiston & Luconi, 2020, p. 63). Despite this, not much literature is available on the factors influencing the voting behaviour of the Italian diaspora, especially concerning EU issues (Battiston & Luconi, 2020). By focusing on European solidarity, this study represents a contribution in this regard. The choice of the sample is also justified by the greater closeness that people living abroad, and therefore subjected to transnational interactions, should present towards European solidarity. This effect is even more pronounced when these interactions occur among EU member states, which explains why this research focuses on the Italian diaspora in France, Belgium, and Germany (Ciornei & Recchi, 2017).

The thesis starts with a [literature review](#) of the primary debates concerning European solidarity, the polarisation and politicisation of EU issues, and transnationalism. [Chapter 3](#) illustrates the research design involving the parties’ electoral manifestos and a survey, the methodological approach, and the data collection and analysis. [Chapter 4](#) presents the analysis results of the parties’ manifestos, and [Chapter 5](#) presents those of the survey responses. The themes identified in both chapters are then put in relation in [Chapter 6](#) to see if parallels between respondents’ perceptions of European solidarity and the stances expressed by the voted parties can be identified. The conclusions drawn from the discussion of the findings are summarised in [Chapter 7](#), where an answer to the research question is provided, limitations are discussed, and the agenda for future research is set.

## **2. Literature Review**

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**T**o answer the research question, this research relies on the literature on European solidarity, the polarisation of public opinion and party competition, the politicisation of EU issues, and the concept of transnationalism. This chapter reviews the main works on these topics by identifying the primary debates around them and, therefore, the existing gaps the thesis aims to fill. Particular attention is paid to the Italian case, which is the focus of this work.

### **2.1 European Solidarity**

Different understandings of solidarity are explored in the literature, particularly concerning the question of to whom a solidaristic attitude is shown. On the one hand, the universal understanding sees solidarity as the “preparedness to share resources with others through [...] contributions to those who are struggling” (Stjernø, 2005, p. 326). Therefore, solidarity is shown to those deemed in need; their condition implies that people show a solidaristic attitude to them without expecting something in return. Hence, solidarity in universal terms is viewed as a shared value by all humans that does not entail any conditionality feature; there are no mutual expectations (Bayertz, 1999; Lahusen & Federico, 2018). On the other hand, another strand of literature claims that solidarity is tied to belongingness to a group and, therefore, to the members’ identification with the community (Hunt & Benford, 2004; Lahusen, 2020b). The identification process is relevant because the closer people feel to the members of the group they identify with, the higher the probability they will show solidarity to them (van Oorschot, 2006; Hilpold, 2015). Belongingness also entails that inside the group, there are expectations that everyone acts according to the principles of reciprocity and mutual support (Genschel & Hemerijck, 2018; Lahusen & Grasso, 2018b). As synthesised by Hilpold (2015), “solidarity expects solidarity” (p. 262). For this reason, many scholars distinguish this categorisation of solidarity, referred to by Lahusen & Grasso (2018b) as social and civic solidarity, from altruism, help, and care, since actions are guided by “shared norms, rights, [and] obligations” (Lahusen & Federico, 2018, p. 16) that ensure the “cohesiveness of the group as a whole” (Genschel & Hemerijck, 2018, p. 2).

European solidarity is understood here following the last categorisation as solidarity tied to specific groups, which entails reciprocity dynamics among their members. However, this raises the question of who considers the EU a community or a place of solidarity (Wincott, 2020). Some scholars recognise the relevant group as European citizens. Hence, this group comprises citizens of EU member states who have different nationalities but identify as a community sharing the same values and belonging to the EU (Fligstein, 2009). Inside this community, it is expected that every citizen, irrespective of their country of origin, shows solidarity with nationals from different member states, and everyone can expect the same back (Gerhards et al., 2018). Instead, other studies claim that European solidarity primarily occurs among member states, understood as governments, in terms of sharing risks and obligations to address “situations of economic, social, political, or environmental adversity” (Ciornei & Ross, 2021, p. 210; Dziedzic, 2022; Mariotto & Pellegata, 2023). Nevertheless, rather than considering them as opposing views, this study embraces the idea advanced by a third strand of literature that sees European solidarity as a “multifaceted” phenomenon and, therefore, solidarity among European citizens and member states as two distinct but interrelated dimensions of the same phenomenon (Lahusen, 2020b, p. 4; Ciornei & Recchi, 2017; Donati et al., 2019; Lahusen & Grasso, 2018b; Lahusen & Theiss, 2019; Nowicka et al., 2019).

Concerning solidarity among member states, Lahusen (2020b) refers to it as either interstate or intergovernmental solidarity, whereas most studies call it “cross-national solidarity” (Pellegata & Visconti, 2022, p. 82; Donati et al., 2019; Mariotto & Pellegata, 2023). The latter denomination does not simply entail a solidaristic attitude but explicitly assumes a redistributive connotation, a central aspect of solidarity among countries (Pellegata & Visconti, 2021; Wincott, 2020). Redistribution might concern financial resources, thus what is addressed as international solidarity, financial solidarity, or fiscal solidarity, the latter being a more specific definition that considers the “financial support” of member states in need from wealthier countries (Gerhards et al., 2018, p. 6; Ciornei & Recchi, 2017; Morgese, 2014). Nonetheless, it might also concern non-financial aspects like the redistribution of migrants (Pellegata & Visconti, 2022), which Di Napoli & Russo (2018) categorise as personal or humanitarian solidarity. Instead, Gerhards et al. (2018) and Morgese (2014) address it as European refugee solidarity, particularly the internal dimension of European refugee solidarity, which is a more specific conceptualisation as it is distinguished from the external dimension that concerns the willingness to accept refugees from third countries. Therefore, fiscal and European refugee solidarity appear as forms of expression of cross-national solidarity. The support shown by public opinion towards forms of solidarity among member states is considered an expression of vertical solidarity (Federico & Maggini, 2018; Lahusen, 2020b).

Concerning solidarity among European citizens, different dimensions are also identified, connected to redistribution and social protection principles (Wincott, 2022). One refers to the willingness to provide help to citizens in need, defined as interpersonal European solidarity, transnational solidarity, or European welfare state solidarity (Ciornei & Recchi, 2017; Gerhards et al., 2018; Lahusen, 2020b; Lahusen & Theiss, 2019). The first conceptualisation by Lahusen & Theiss (2019) appears to be the most specific, since it explicitly refers to European solidarity and the support by citizens of people living in other EU countries. Another dimension concerns “European citizens’ right to exercise the free movement principle and entitlement to cross-border welfare rights”, which is categorised by Pellegata & Visconti (2022) as “European social citizenship” (p. 82). Instead, Gerhards et al. (2018) still categorise this aspect as European welfare state solidarity. Therefore, European welfare state solidarity appears to be an umbrella term indicating solidaristic attitudes among EU citizens, which entails different dimensions like interpersonal European solidarity and European social citizenship. People’s support of solidaristic actions benefitting other European citizens is considered an expression of horizontal solidarity (Federico & Maggini, 2018; Lahusen, 2020b).

European solidarity and its several dimensions highlighted had to face many challenges in the last decades, namely the various crises that hit the European continent, e.g., the economic crisis, the so-called migration crisis, Brexit, the pandemic, and the energy crisis prompted by the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. The relevance of these crises led scholars to talk about the “age of crises” (Moffitt, 2015, p. 189). Indeed, the EU had to face a series of other critical moments since its foundation. However, it is argued that these crises assumed the character of European crises, specifically European integration crises (Cotta, 2017). Schimmelfennig (2017) defines this type of crisis as “a situation with a manifest threat and perceived significant probability of disintegration” (p. 316), meaning that it entails a reduction in the level and scope of European integration. Nevertheless, whether crises trigger disintegration or further integration is still highly debated. The two main theories in this sense are neo-functionalism and post-functionalism, which agree that crises are catalysts of change and represent feedback mechanisms on integration. However, neo-functionalists perceive crises as situations enhancing the current level of integration, whereas post-functionalists argue that they undermine it and can cause its disintegration (Schimmelfennig, 2017).

There are also ongoing debates on whether the mentioned crises might be considered solidarity crises that have shown the need for greater European solidarity and what consequences this might trigger (Lahusen & Grasso, 2018b). Empirical evidence from several studies shows that, even in times of crisis, European citizens and member states still show solidaristic attitudes towards each other and that, during the aforementioned crises, several redistributive and burden-sharing

measures aiming to help those most in need were implemented (Gerhards et al., 2018; Mier, 2022; Schelkle, 2018; Wallaschek & Eigmüller, 2020). Nevertheless, a significant amount of literature increasingly argues that these events exacerbated the existing disparities among EU countries and citizens, thus creating tensions, triggering blaming attitudes, and undermining cohesion among them (Bremer et al., 2021; Cotta, 2017; Gerlagh et al., 2022; Goldthau & Sitter, 2022; Gros, 2022; McWilliams et al., 2022; Nam, 2022; Osička & Černoch, 2022; Samadashvili, 2020; Zakeri et al., 2022). The result is that crises might jeopardise European solidarity, which, in turn, can also lead to the potential disintegration of the EU, thus showing the central role of European solidarity in keeping the EU alive (Baglioni et al., 2019; Edmiston, 2020; Lahusen, 2020b; Lahusen & Theiss, 2019; Sommermann, 2022; Vollaard, 2014; Wallaschek & Eigmüller, 2020).

## **2.2 Polarisation and Politicisation of EU Issues**

Among the consequences of the crises that hit the EU, there is an alleged increase in the polarisation of public opinion over EU issues, including European solidarity (Bobba, 2021; Donati et al., 2019). This phenomenon thus raises concerns, especially regarding the level of solidarity among European citizens, as polarisation entails the rise of nationalist sentiments that could be detrimental to it. It is easy to profess solidarity in times of growth and prosperity, whereas it becomes harder to think of others when crises occur (Lahusen, 2020b). Nevertheless, it has been seen that even when facing challenges like the ones posed by the mentioned crises, most EU citizens still present solidaristic attitudes concerning solidarity among EU member states and citizens (Gerhards et al., 2018). Different patterns, though, can be observed depending on the nature of the crises, as exogenous or endogenous shocks trigger different reactions, and on the countries, as public opinion on European solidarity is highly influenced by the national context (Kriesi, 2007; Genschel & Hemerijck, 2018; Seddone & Bobba, 2020). Concerning Italians, it has been widely assessed that the many crises Italy had to face caused a surge of Eurosceptic sentiments within the citizenry in a country traditionally very supportive of the European project, being among the founders (Bobba, 2021; Conti et al., 2020; Conti et al., 2022). The rise of anti-EU positions is connected to the feeling shared by most that Italy was not treated fairly by other member states during these situations and that it was left alone to deal with them, thus pointing out that the level of solidarity among EU countries is judged as insufficient by Italians (Fontana, 2020; Scazzieri, 2020; Vicentini & Galanti, 2021). Nevertheless, it is seen that, even in times of crisis, Italians still present solidaristic attitudes towards other European citizens and are in favour of solidaristic measures among member states, deemed the best solution to crises (Donati et al., 2019; Seddone & Bobba, 2020).



Another consequence of the mentioned crises is the increased politicisation of European solidarity and other EU issues in national political arenas, meaning they have become salient in political parties' agendas (Green-Pedersen, 2012; Hutter & Grande, 2014; Zürn, 2019). This increased emphasis on the EU dimension leads to questions about the consequences of politicisation, particularly if it strengthens or weakens the European project (Bobba, 2021). Neofunctionalist and post-functionalist theories are also helpful in this regard. The first theorises a positive relationship between politicisation and further cohesion, thus arguing that “crisis-induced politicisation leads to a moderation of party competition over European integration, fostering a renewed pro-EU consensus” (Capati et al., 2022, p. 5). In contrast, post-functionalists see increased politicisation as undermining positive attitudes towards the EU, thus fostering party polarisation over European issues (Hooghe & Marks, 2009). This debate on the consequences of politicisation is deepened by van der Eijk & Franklin (2004), who argue that the politicisation of EU issues can potentially affect European integration. However, parties lack the agency to politicise these issues to the extent that it can be considered a threat to European integration. Therefore, the authors refer to the phenomenon as a “sleeping giant” (p. 35). An opposite view is advanced by Hooghe & Marks (2009), who claim that there has been a shift from a “permissive consensus” to what can now be defined as an era of “constraining dissensus” that affects the European project (p. 5). These studies were published before most of the aforementioned crises occurred; therefore, it can be assumed that they served as catalysts leading to increased politicisation of EU issues at the national level, which in turn affects the EU level, thus aligning more with the constraining dissensus scenario (Capati et al., 2022; Conti et al., 2020).

Several scholars argue that this scenario is evident in the Italian case since Italy is among the “most exposed” member states to the majority of crises that hit the EU, and this triggered divisions in the Italian political arena between parties with pro- or anti-EU stances, leading to a significant politicisation of European issues (Conti et al., 2022, p. 26; Bobba, 2021; Capati et al., 2022; Conti et al., 2020; Conti et al., 2021; Maggini, 2018). The economic and the so-called migration crises had a significant impact, and the same is argued about COVID-19, which boosted the saliency of EU issues on parties' agendas and the polarisation of parties along these issues. However, many other scholars noticed how already during the 2018 national elections, Italian parties' competition presented the lowest level of polarisation, a trend confirmed during the last general elections of September 2022, which were the first ones to take place after the outburst of the pandemic and energy crisis (Capati et al., 2022). A traditional divide between left- and right-wing parties was visible during the last electoral campaign (De Sio et al., 2022). However, this divide

did not concern EU issues, as even the party with the largest vote share, FdI, toned down its previous Euroscepticism (Bruno, 2022; Piccolino & Puleo, 2022).

The relevant literature on the politicisation of EU issues focuses on various dimensions; for example, it investigates how this phenomenon affects citizens' voting behaviour. The influence of European integration, even specific aspects such as economic integration and integration of migrants, or EU membership, is widely studied. Some studies conclude that these issues do not play a significant role in structuring citizens' voting preferences (Carrieri, 2020; Green-Pedersen, 2012; Maggini & Chiaramonte, 2019; Miklin, 2014), while a significant number of scholars argue that they do determine people's vote choices (Angelucci & Carrieri, 2023; Costa Lobo & Lewis-Beck, 2012; Conti et al., 2021; Conti et al., 2022; Hooghe & Marks, 2009). The latter argument also applies to European solidarity, even though the only study available is that of Pellegata and Visconti (2022). Through a survey, they investigate how people's opinions towards different European solidarity dimensions—e.g., cross-national solidarity, European social citizenship, and interpersonal solidarity—have affected their vote choice in the 2019 European elections, showing a connection between the two aspects. However, they provide only a quantitative evaluation of the correlation between perceptions of European solidarity and voted parties. They also fail to precisely estimate the parties' positioning on the three European solidarity dimensions. In setting the agenda for future research, they highlight the need for further investigation at the national level to see if the same findings are applicable. This gap, however, has not been filled yet.

### **2.3 Transnationalism**

The present study focuses on the voting behaviour of the Italian diaspora since it has been seen that it is affected by transnationalism, a concept increasingly associated with that of the diaspora, which increases the chances of showing positive attitudes towards European solidarity (Battiston & Luconi, 2018; Brubaker, 2005; Ciornei & Recchi, 2017). First, a distinction should be made between transnationalism from above, which refers to transnational interactions at the macro-level, and transnationalism from below, concerning the individual level (Guarnizo & Smith, 1998). The latter is the categorisation applying here since the attitudes and behaviours under study are those of a highly transnational group, the so-called intra-European migrants, and not those of an entire population (Kuhn, 2015; Roeder, 2011). Different conceptualisations of individual transnationalism are also present. Mau et al. (2008) define transnationalism as the “extent to which individuals are involved in cross-border interaction and mobility” (p. 2). Therefore, they measure a person's level of transnationalism based on short or long stays abroad and personal cross-border relationships. Instead, Kuhn's (2015) approach is more suitable for this investigation, as it considers

individual transnationalism along three dimensions: transnational background, practices, and human capital. Therefore, this conceptualisation goes further than that of Mau et al.'s (2008) by considering whether someone was born in a foreign country or holds dual citizenship and how many languages they speak. Ciornei & Recchi (2017) have further distinguished between direct and indirect individual transnationalism by focusing on intra-European interactions. These dimensions help distinguish between those who have lived, worked, or studied in another EU country for a protracted period and, therefore, can be considered highly transnational individuals and those who still interact across borders since they travel or communicate with foreign people but have continuously resided in their home country. Donati et al. (2019) build upon the concept of direct transnationalism in what they term “European transnationalism”, that is, the “interactions with peoples and cultures of other EU member states” (p. 59), which foster positive perceptions of European solidarity.

This literature review has highlighted the relevance of European solidarity in the current public debate. This multifaceted phenomenon has become central to preventing the EU structure from collapsing following the many crises that hit Europe in the last decades. These crises caused an increased politicisation of EU-related issues in national public arenas and thus affected public opinion and party competition. Despite the relevance of European solidarity, whether its politicisation affects voting behaviour in national elections is still yet to be explored. The thesis addresses this gap by focusing on the Italian case, which is emblematic for what concerns the increased saliency of the European dimension within the public and political domains. Based on the literature, it is expected that, concerning European solidarity, the findings of this research will show a positive attitude of public opinion towards the issue, given that the focus is on a highly transnational group, even though it is expected that the levels of solidarity in times of crisis will be judged negatively. Therefore, a low level of polarisation of public opinion is expected, as well as of the party system, as already seen by other scholars. Nevertheless, European solidarity will probably still be highly politicised. Regarding the influence of European solidarity over the national vote, different results from those of Pellegata and Visconti (2022) are expected since the focus is on two different kinds of elections, and the methodological concerns regarding their work were addressed in developing the research design for this study, which is explained in the next chapter.

## **3. Research Design and Methodology**

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**T**he present chapter sets out the research design by addressing the methodological issues raised in the literature. It shows how the design provides new insights concerning the study of how European solidarity affects voting behaviour in national elections. The sampling, data collection, and analysis of the brand-new data on which the research relies are also explained.

### **3.1 Research Design: Party Manifestos and Surveying**

I decided to follow the example of Pellegata and Visconti (2022), who focus on the influence of European solidarity on voting behaviour, as it is the only study that explores such a topic. Their way of investigating the issue proves to be helpful in the case of this thesis, even if my focus is on national elections rather than European ones as in their study. This is the case because parties competing over EU issues and, consequently, affecting citizens' vote choice is a phenomenon occurring both in the case of national and European elections (van Spanje & de Vreese, 2011). To uncover possible relations between people's attitudes towards European solidarity and the parties they choose to vote for, Pellegata and Visconti (2022) consider the positions expressed by parties in their manifestos.

Electoral manifestos are deemed reliable data sources to estimate party positions and what issues they emphasise, as they are representative of parties' stances (Dolezal et al., 2014; Dolezal et al., 2018; Donà, 2022). They play a central role in electoral campaigns and are the only regularly released documents formally or informally enacted by representative or executive party bodies (Dancygier & Margalit, 2020; Dolezal et al., 2012). Despite their relevance, there are some concerns regarding the study of manifestos, namely that they are not the only instruments through which parties appeal to voters and that voters barely consider parties' statements made during the electoral campaign, implying that manifestos do not help structure voting preferences (Adams et al., 2011). The latter argument has been countered by further research, which demonstrates that electoral manifestos matter as they shape parties' images and therefore have the power to determine vote choice (Fernandez-Vazquez, 2014).

The issue with Pellegata and Visconti's (2022) analysis is that they do not estimate party positioning along the three dimensions of European solidarity they consider. They rely on data from secondary sources to understand the different parties' stances on the social dimension of European integration. Thus, they fail to deeply assess voters' likelihood to vote for parties closer to their preferences regarding European solidarity. Here, parties' manifestos for the September 2022 Italian general elections are analysed to understand their positioning concerning European solidarity, their level of engagement with the issue, and whether they address it explicitly or not. This analysis also helps to understand the level of politicisation of European solidarity ([Chapter 2](#)). On the concern raised by scholars regarding the fact that parties also use means other than manifestos to communicate their positions, it was not possible for this thesis to conduct a comparative study between the manifestos and other sources like social media posts or press releases due to time and resource constraints.

By closely reading the manifestos, different dimensions of European solidarity were identified on which the parties' discourses are focused. Therefore, following Pellegata and Visconti's (2022) example, I designed a survey to study people's perceptions of European solidarity, with questions aiming to capture people's opinions on the same dimensions detected in the manifestos. Survey research is prevalent in public opinion studies, especially concerning opinions on the EU and related issues (Lomazzi & Vezzoni, 2018). Nevertheless, it is not free from criticism. There is an ongoing debate on the limitations of surveys when investigating opinions on EU matters due to the claimed distance and lack of relevance of these issues in citizens' minds (Bobba, 2021). Therefore, capturing the genuine opinion of citizens might be challenging, as they may provide distorted responses (Zaller, 1992). Questions may ask for an opinion on issues that people never thought about or do not have a strong opinion on, but they could still provide an answer pushed by the fact that no justification is asked (Gaxie, 1990; Hurrelmann et al., 2015).

The survey designed for this research tries to prevent the collection of distorted responses by including either a "Neither agree nor disagree", "I do not know", or "Prefer not to say" option for closed questions (see Bryman, 2012). For one response concerning the level of closeness among European citizens, respondents are also asked to explain their answer to understand the reasons behind it better (see Bobba, 2021). Moreover, some questions concerning specific measures are preceded by a filter question so that only those declaring to be knowledgeable about them can proceed to answer. Then, on the dimensions identified, multiple questions are asked on different aspects to check for different responses on the same topic and ensure more reliable data collection (see Bryman, 2012).

### **3.2 Methodological Approach: Thematic Analysis**

The data collected from the manifestos and the survey are analysed according to a thematic approach, a qualitative analysis method. This approach differs from Pellegata and Visconti's (2022) analysis since they conducted a quantitative study. Conducting a quantitative analysis of survey data is a common approach. Nevertheless, a qualitative approach can provide new insights, and specifically, thematic analysis has already been employed in similar research, such as Capati et al.'s (2022) paper. Thematic analysis is a "method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning ('themes')" (Clarke & Braun, 2017, p. 297). It combines the description and interpretation of the data. It is characterised by great flexibility regarding the type and quantity of data analysed, how the analysis is conducted, and the research questions to answer (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Scholars argue that thematic analysis is particularly suitable for studies that aim to make sense of people's experiences and perceptions and how these affect their behaviour (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Therefore, it is an appropriate method for my study. The study's framework is critical since the investigation focuses on themes with social meaning on a specific topic and their implications (Clarke & Braun, 2017). The themes are both deductively and inductively derived: deductively because there is a good synergy with the literature, and the different European solidarity dimensions are used in the analysis as categories; inductively because the patterns identified between the different categories are data-driven (see Varpio et al., 2020).

### **3.3 Survey: Choosing the Sample**

The concerns raised in the literature on using surveys to investigate public opinion on EU issues might not be relevant in the context of this thesis since the focus is on the Italian diaspora. It has already been seen that transnational individuals present a higher level of proximity to the EU and related matters. This effect is even more pronounced when transnational interactions occur within the borders of the EU, and this is why the focus is on the Italian diaspora in EU countries, which comprises Italians who moved abroad or people who hold Italian citizenship but were born in another place. Both conditions are indicators of individual transnationalism ([Chapter 2](#)) (Kuhn, 2015). Initially, the idea was to survey the diaspora in all 27 member states; however, due to resource constraints, this was not possible. Therefore, I decided to focus on three countries: Germany, France, and Belgium. These countries were selected because over half of the Italian citizens living in a different member state are concentrated there, specifically 813.5650 people in Germany, 457.138 in France, and 277.342 in Belgium (Licata, 2022). Hence, people who hold Italian citizenship, voted in the last Italian general elections, and lived in one of these three countries for at least three months at

the time of the elections compose the survey sample. The restriction of the sample to those who have lived in these countries for at least three months is dictated by the fact that the possibility to vote from abroad is also granted to Italian citizens who temporarily reside in a foreign country to work, study, or for medical reasons for a minimum of three months (Italian Republic, 2015). Therefore, the aim was also to include temporary and permanent residents in the sample, as they equally determine the results of the voting college, and temporary residents are usually quite a significant number (see Battiston & Luconi, 2021). The choice to focus on these countries presents some limitations, which will be addressed more extensively in the conclusion of the thesis ([Chapter 7](#)).

### **3.4 Survey: The Questions Asked**

The survey features 25 questions, including asking for respondents' informed consent after explaining the research and two filter questions to ensure that respondents would fit in the sample, one concerning whether people voted in the last elections and if they were living in the countries under study at the time. The questions are both closed and open-ended. There are more closed questions since open-ended questions are more demanding for respondents and decrease the chances of completing the questionnaire (see Bryman, 2012). For several questions, I took inspiration from Pellegata and Visconti's (2022) survey since, as Bryman (2012) suggested, using existing questions means that they were already tested, and it allows for comparisons. The questions are divided into four sections. The first explores people's perceptions of different dimensions of European solidarity based on the ones detected in the manifestos. The second concerns questions on specific measures inaugurated following COVID-19 and the energy crisis. Only respondents who declare to be aware of the measures implemented by the EU can complete the section. The third section is about the vote choice in the last national elections, and the last one concerns demographic data. The survey required around ten minutes for its completion (the full survey is available in the [Appendix](#)).

One European solidarity dimension concerns respondents' support of cross-national solidarity. It is assessed through three questions, one concerning European refugee solidarity, specifically its internal aspect, and two concerning fiscal solidarity. Therefore, European refugee and fiscal solidarity are treated as subdimensions of cross-national solidarity, measuring the support for financial and non-financial solidarity expressions among member states ([Chapter 2](#)). The questions all concern redistributive measures, deemed the best indicator to assess the support for solidarity initiatives, particularly institutionalised ones, as in the case of EU member states (Lahusen, 2020b;

Zürn, 2000). On European refugee solidarity, respondents are asked to say to what extent they are in favour of establishing a binding system of equal redistribution of migrants. On fiscal solidarity, one question was: “To what extent would you be in favour of establishing a common EU fund, to which EU member states contribute based on their wealth, to help any EU member state potentially facing severe economic and financial difficulties in times of crisis?”. This question includes an element of cost to reduce the social desirability bias that might affect questions on redistributive measures (Pellegata & Visconti, 2022). The other question on the same subdimension concerns a specific measure implemented by the EU due to the pandemic, the NextGenerationEU (NGEU). It aims to help those member states more hit by the crisis during the recovery phase through grants and loans. For this reason, it is considered a measure of cross-national and, specifically, fiscal solidarity (Bremer et al., 2021; Pellegata & Visconti, 2022). This question also serves to detect any possible differences between support for European solidarity when addressed in general terms and when specific measures are considered since it is argued that the latter usually tend to gather lower levels of support (Lahusen, 2020b).

Still concerning solidarity among member states, some questions ask how people perceived solidarity among EU countries during the pandemic and the energy crisis, two central topics in the manifestos. Pellegata and Visconti’s (2022) survey did not consider this aspect. However, due to the crises’ impact on public opinion on the EU and European solidarity ([Chapter 2](#)), I decided to include these questions on the two most recent crises to see how people judge the level of solidarity in these circumstances. Therefore, the survey provides additional insight into solidarity among member states by considering an additional and relevant aspect. These questions are helpful to see if the answers diverge from the general attitudes that respondents express towards European solidarity, if their perception differs from the actual level of solidarity among member states, if there has been a change over time, and if the two crises had a different impact on public opinion (see Samadashvili, 2020). Concerning the energy crisis, a question on a specific measure is also asked, specifically on the proposal for a Council Regulation on an emergency intervention to address high energy prices, which entails that member states should employ surplus profits generated by activities in the energy sector as temporary solidarity contributions. These contributions could be used for various purposes and voluntarily to finance shared measures at the EU level to face the crisis (European Commission, 2022). It is asked if respondents would favour turning this into a mandatory mechanism to see the degree of support towards an increased institutionalisation of solidarity among member states and of EU measures. This question also serves to see if there are differences between how solidarity during crises is perceived and how specific measures to counter these situations are perceived by comparing it with the ones concerning COVID-19 measures to see if different levels of support are gathered.



The other dimension of European solidarity considered is European welfare state solidarity, measured here through questions concerning two subdimensions: European social citizenship and interpersonal European solidarity. These two aspects allow to assess people's solidaristic attitudes towards different groups of citizens, as the question of to whom solidarity is shown is crucial ([Chapter 2](#)). Since people rarely have the opportunity to engage directly in acts of solidarity towards other European citizens, these questions investigate the degree of favour of institutionalised forms of solidarity (see Gerhards et al., 2017). The question on European social citizenship concerns the level of agreement of respondents—transnational individuals—regarding their entitlement as European citizens to the same social security benefits as the nationals of their country of residence. Social security benefits are interpreted as health assistance and family, disability, and retirement benefits. It can be argued that this answer would collect many favourable responses because it directly concerns the respondents' conditions. However, it is instrumental in comparing their level of favour with that of other measures targeting two different groups: the poor and the unemployed. Concerning the first, the question is: "To what extent do you agree that the EU should help all European citizens in a situation of poverty, even if this would mean that EU member states would have to pay more in terms of contribution to the EU?". The question includes an element of cost to reduce the social desirability bias (Pellegata & Visconti, 2022). Regarding the unemployed, a question on the specific measure of temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE) is asked, which also serves to control the level of support towards specific measures and specifically those inaugurated consequently to crises.

A question where respondents have to express how close they feel to other European citizens considering the current state of the EU is also included. This helps better interpret the degree of European welfare state solidarity expressed through the abovementioned questions. This aspect was not explored by Pellegata and Visconti (2022). However, it provides relevant insight since the closer people feel to the group members they identify with, the higher the chances they will show a solidaristic attitude towards them ([Chapter 2](#)) (Hilpold, 2015). It also helps to assess the impact crises might have had on this feeling since respondents must also explain their answers. To better elucidate the emerging European solidarity perceptions, respondents also have to indicate the first word that comes to their mind when thinking about European solidarity. This answer allows participants to express the meaning they attribute to the object and, therefore, to obtain more reliable data on the honest opinion of citizens (see Bobba, 2021).

Concerning the third section, respondents are asked to self-place on a scale from one to seven to measure their left-right preferences and therefore get a better picture of the sample preferences regarding political positioning (Pellegata & Visconti, 2022). Then, since the votes are

cast separately, they have to state for which party or coalition they voted, both for the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate of the Republic. The options available correspond only to those parties that ran for the European voting college during the last electoral campaign. However, an “other” option is also present in case respondents decided to go back to Italy to vote there, and, therefore, more voting options were available ([Chapter 1](#)). Finally, they have to answer questions concerning demographic data, specifically gender, age, education level, and employment status, which allow to control for possible differences and influences of these data on the opinions expressed (Pellegata & Visconti, 2022). Additionally, due to the character of the sample, people are asked to indicate how long they have been living in the country they indicated as their residence and if they have ever lived in another foreign country for at least three months. These questions aim to measure respondents’ level of transnationalism ([Chapter 2](#)).

### **3.5 Data Collection**

The research relies on brand-new data. For the parties’ manifestos, only those of the parties or coalitions that ran for the European voting college in the last general elections are considered. These are the manifestos of: *Alleanza Verdi e Sinistra* (Verdi/SI), *Azione-Italia Viva-Calenda* (Azione-IV), *Impegno Civico Luigi di Maio-Centro Democratico* (IC), *Lega per Salvini Premier-Forza Italia-Fratelli d’Italia* (Lega-FI-FdI), *Movimento delle Libertà* (MdL), *Movimento 5 Stelle* (M5S), *Partito Democratico-Italia Progressista* (PD), and *+Europa* (+EU). The manifestos were taken from the official website of the Italian Ministry of Home Affairs, where they must be published for transparency reasons. However, the ones from M5S and MdL were taken from the respective parties’ websites because the one from MdL was unavailable, and the one from M5S was available only in a shortened version. Concerning Lega-FI-FdI coalition, the manifesto on the Ministry website was the joint version of the coalition’s three parties: Lega, FI, and FdI. On the websites of the single parties, though, each had its extended version, which differed from the others. Therefore, these manifestos are also analysed together with the joint manifesto. The manifestos were not wholly coded but only those statements concerning European solidarity either implicitly or explicitly. In total, these are 220 coded segments (8086 words).

The survey was a post-electoral online self-administered survey that collected 210 valid responses. It was distributed using a snowball technique, meaning contact was made with people fitting the sample, who were then asked to share it with others (Bryman, 2012). These were mainly correspondents of Italian embassies and representations in the selected countries, representatives of associations of Italians abroad, and administrators of websites and social media pages dedicated to the Italian diaspora. Facebook groups of Italians abroad were also used to distribute the survey.

The survey was opened on November 14, 2022, more or less one month and a half after the elections, and it remained open for one month until December 14, 2022. It was made available to respondents in two languages: English and Italian. The master survey was in English and then translated into Italian by the author. Due to the transnational character of the sample, it was necessary to offer both versions to allow for better coverage and increase the chances of collecting more responses. It is argued that translations can alter survey results, as there may be slight linguistic nuances, meaning that concepts might be interpreted differently (van der Vijver & Tanzer, 2004). Nevertheless, despite not being a professional translator, I am an Italian native speaker and a fluent English speaker. Therefore, I carefully considered the language used in both versions to ensure that the words used would directly reflect each other and that respondents could interpret the questions in the same way.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

The European solidarity dimensions mentioned earlier were used to categorise the data from the manifestos and the survey responses. These are (1) cross-national solidarity, divided into (1.2) European refugee solidarity and (1.2) fiscal solidarity; and (2) European welfare state solidarity, including (2.1) European social citizenship and (2.2) interpersonal European solidarity. An additional category of (3) European solidarity during crisis was also considered. All statements concerning European solidarity that did not belong to these categories were coded as “additional themes” with a series of subcodes for the manifestos. Another code was elaborated to identify those manifestos’ statements that explicitly refer to European solidarity. Concerning the survey, both closed- and open-ended responses were coded based on whether they expressed a positive, negative, or neutral stance towards the different European solidarity categories (see Dancygier & Margalit, 2020). Those responses coded as neutral have not been considered for the analysis, as all the responses like “I do not know”, “Prefer not to say”, or “Other”, even though it is stated when these were representing a substantial share of responses. Concerning open-ended questions, additional inductively formulated codes were applied to identify the main themes emerging. The analysis resulted in a series of themes identified for the manifestos and the survey, respectively, which were then put in relation to identify parallels between the respondents’ perceptions of European solidarity and the stances expressed by the voted parties along the same categories.

This chapter has explained the motivations behind the research design, the methodology chosen, and how the data on which the research is based were collected and analysed. The following chapter expands on the latter point by presenting the analysis results of the different parties' manifestos.

## **4. European Solidarity in the Electoral Campaign: Analysis of Parties' Manifestos**

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**A**s mentioned in the previous chapter, only the manifestos of Verdi/SI, Azione-IV, IC, Lega-FI-FdI, MdL, M5S, PD, and +EU are analysed; that is, the parties and coalitions that ran for the European voting college during the last Italian general elections. The manifestos are relevant sources that allow inferring the different parties' stances on European solidarity, the way they engage or do not engage with the issue, and therefore identifying the main themes concerning the topic to categorise the parties on this basis, which are presented and discussed in this chapter.

### **4.1 Context: Parties' Positioning on the Political Spectrum**

Concerning the results of the European voting college, PD was the most-voted party, obtaining a seat in the Chamber of Deputies and the only seat available in the Senate (Eligendo, 2022). This party is traditionally considered to belong to the centre-left of the political spectrum, even if, under the leadership of Enrico Letta during the last electoral campaign, a more leftist connotation of the party's stances was noticed (Bruno, 2022). Verdi/SI, +EU, and IC also belong to the centre-left, with some nuances (Pierri, 2023). Verdi/SI is collocated more at the spectrum's left fringe (De Sio et al., 2022). It is an alliance forged for the last elections, including *Europa Verde*, *Sinistra Italiana*, and other minor parties. It declares itself to be a leftist, environmentalist and solidaristic project born to provide answers to the most vulnerable people (Europa Verde, 2022). +EU is also a party founded relatively recently, as its foundation dates back to the 2018 Italian national elections. It promotes human rights, the rule of law, democracy, gender equality, freedom, sustainable development, and the secular state. It has federalist aspirations for how the EU should look (+Europa, 2023). IC was formed in 2022 due to a split of the M5S following the decision to leave the party by Luigi di Maio, who disagreed with the critical position assumed by the new M5S leader Giuseppe Conte towards the former Prime Minister Draghi's agenda, mainly on the supply of arms to Ukraine and the role of Italy in the international arena (Bruno, 2022; Improta et al., 2022). Therefore, di Maio decided to create his own party, gathering other former M5S members,

which ran alone for the electoral campaign abroad; in contrast, it was part of a broader centre-left coalition for what concerns domestic ballots.

M5S was the third most-voted party in the European voting college and obtained a seat in the Chamber of Deputies (Eligendo, 2022). It is usually defined as a “polyvalent”, neither left- nor right-wing party, characterised by somewhat ambiguous stances (Pirro, 2018, p. 445). Its primary portrayal is that of an anti-establishment party promoting a populist and Eurosceptic discourse (Mosca & Tronconi, 2019; Palano, 2022). However, this holds to be valid until the 2018 parliamentary elections, when the start of a slight shift could already be noticed, confirmed during this last tournament. It was seen that the party has been leaning towards a leftist agenda entailing pro-EU, moderate, and liberal stances, turning its back to some of its past statements (Bruno & Cozzolino, 2022; Conti et al., 2020; De Sio et al., 2022). Nevertheless, its positioning on the political spectrum remains ambivalent and difficult to determine. Therefore, Bruno’s (2022) and Pierri’s (2023) approach to treating the M5S as separate from the other parties is adopted in this study. *Azione-IV* is a coalition of parties not belonging to the fringes of the political spectrum but instead to the centre, which is why it is often referred to as the third pole. It is a newly formed alliance between two parties led by two former PD members, Carlo Calenda for *Azione* and Matteo Renzi for *Italia Viva*, respectively. They were among the utmost supporters of Draghi’s agenda, mainly concerning the strong alignment with the EU and NATO stances on the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. They gathered many members from the incumbent government (Bruno, 2022).

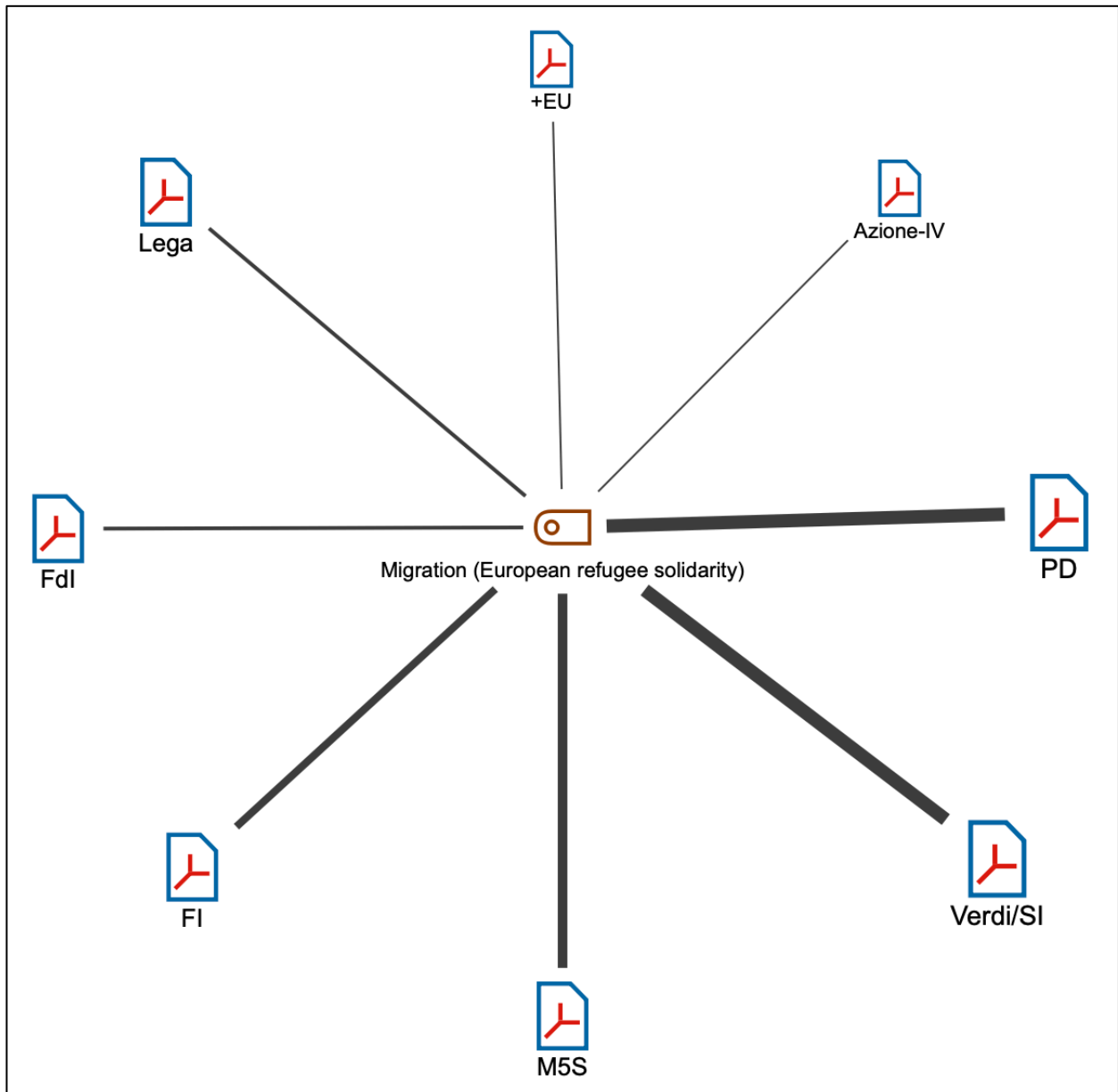
Categorised as belonging to the centre-right of the political spectrum are the coalition Lega-FdI and MdL. The first is a coalition formed for the electoral campaign, and it was the second most voted by Italians living in Europe. It obtained a seat in the Chamber of Deputies (Eligendo, 2022). It reunites Lega, which is led by Matteo Salvini, FI by Silvio Berlusconi at the time, and FdI by Giorgia Meloni, the current prime minister. These parties present different characters: Lega and FdI are usually perceived as populist radical right parties, therefore falling under the umbrella of far-right parties, even though FdI is argued to be placed more towards the extreme right as it is considered a post-fascist party (Caiani et al., 2021; Donà, 2022; Pasquino & Valbruzzi, 2023). Nevertheless, the coalition is referred to as belonging to the centre-right of the political spectrum since it includes FI, which expresses more moderate stances and portrays itself as liberal and pro-EU (Bruno, 2022). Concerning MdL, this party was running only for the European voting college and was therefore focused on the issues of Italians living abroad. On its website, it declares itself to be part of the centre-right (Ufficio Stampa MdL, 2022).

#### **4.1 Migration – European Refugee Solidarity**

A central theme identified around European solidarity is the migration issue (fig. 1). Several parties, e.g., M5S, PD, Verdi/SI, Azione-IV, and +EU, talk about the need for a revision of the Dublin Regulation, an EU Regulation that establishes that it is the country of arrival that has to take care of asylum claims. The importance of emergency solidarity measures to welcome migrants during crises, as in the case of Ukrainian refugees, is also highlighted. Most of all, though, they promote a mandatory and binding redistribution of incoming refugees based on quotas so that all member states would bear the management of inflows, the welcoming procedures, and the relative responsibilities, effectively enacting the principle of solidarity contained in the EU Treaties. Even the proposal to establish sanctions for those not complying was advanced. This shows that the mentioned parties favour European refugee solidarity ([Chapter 2](#)).

Nevertheless, it can be noticed that PD, M5S, and Verdi/SI are those engaging with the migration issue in more explicit, solidaristic terms. PD talks about establishing an inclusive network for integrating migrants based on solidarity and the need for a proper European policy for migration (Partito Democratico, 2022). The same can be found in M5S and Verdi/SI manifestos, which call for a Europe of solidarity welcoming towards those who are running away from wars and detrimental situations, a Union that, instead of criminalising acts of solidarity and help, aims to achieve a complete solidaristic attitude among member states, and which would reform its migration and asylum policies according to the solidarity principle (Alleanza Verdi e Sinistra, 2022; Movimento 5 Stelle, 2022).

Concerning the centre-right coalition, when analysing their joint manifesto, it can be seen that they mention the migration issue (Forza Italia, 2022b). Still, they simply discuss the necessity of protecting borders and stopping arrivals. However, when looking at their single political programmes, some differences emerge in this sense. For example, FI supports European refugee solidarity as it emphasises the need for a mandatory redistribution of migrants among member states and calls for a new asylum and migration pact at the European level (Forza Italia, 2022a). FdI is also in favour of refugees' redistribution. Still, it states that this should concern only those entitled to stay in the EU, thus highlighting its firm opposition to irregular migration (Fratelli d'Italia, 2022). Lastly, Lega shows the lowest degree of solidarity, as it did not refer to European refugee solidarity but instead praised the importance of protecting borders and repatriations. It only mentions that those escaping from wars should be welcomed, but this is explicitly linked to solidarity towards Ukrainian refugees (Lega per Salvini Premier, 2022). As for MdL, no reference is made to the migration issue.



*Figure 1. Frequency of European refugee solidarity coded segments in the manifestos.<sup>1</sup>*

**Note:** The lines' thickness mirrors the code's frequency in the documents.

<sup>1</sup> Note that from this moment on, all representations are the author's own.

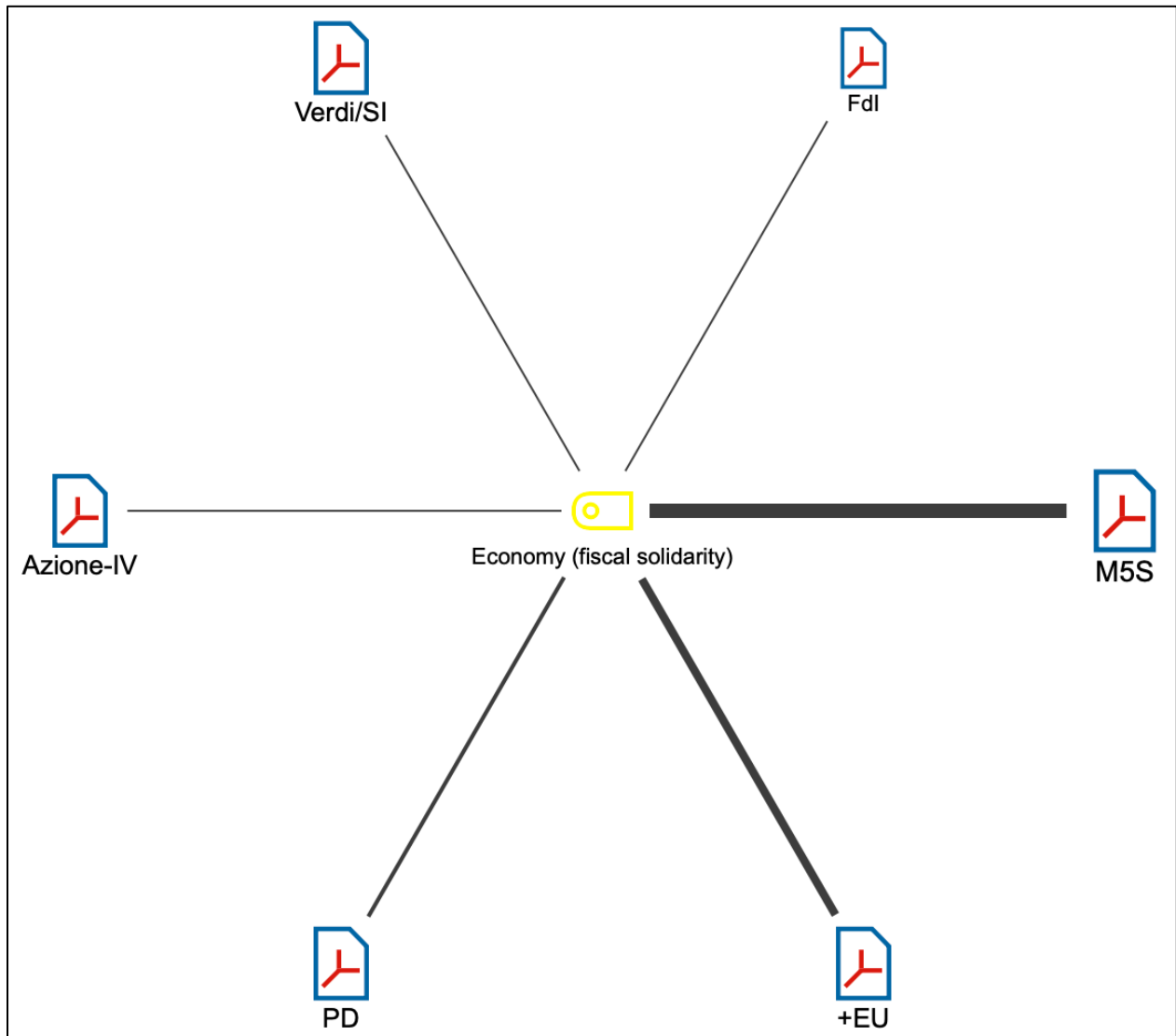


## **4.2 Economy – Fiscal Solidarity**

Economic issues are also present in most political programmes (fig. 2). Plenty of references are made to the NGEU by all parties except MdL, IC, Lega, and FI. FdI refers to the measure but only mentions that it needs to be revised. PD, M5S, Verdi/SI, Azione-IV, and +EU instead supported fiscal solidarity, as the support for the NGEU is considered a measure of this European solidarity dimension ([Chapter 3](#)). They perceive the instrument to be a crucial aid from the EU to mitigate the adverse effects of the pandemic and a necessary instrument to inaugurate the recovery phase. Nevertheless, even among them, some parties stand out for their higher engagement with fiscal solidarity. PD explicitly connects the NGEU to European solidarity by saying it marked the shift “from a Europe of austerity to a Europe of solidarity”<sup>2</sup> (Partito Democratico, 2022, p. 10). M5S highlights the need to transform the NGEU from an emergency to a permanent measure. However, it goes beyond by speaking about the importance of a solidaristic economy at the European level that would improve the coordination between deficit and surplus countries, favouring redistribution among them through macroeconomic instruments. It is also in favour of establishing shared European debt and redistributive instruments of risk among member states, all clear signs of its support for fiscal solidarity (Movimento 5 Stelle, 2022). The same themes can be found in Verdi/SI and +EU discourses, particularly concerning the shared debt instruments that, in their opinion, should be established following a logic of solidarity, and they are in favour of implementing fiscal tools aiming at evening economic differences among member states (Alleanza Verdi e Sinistra, 2022; +Europa, 2022). PD, Verdi/SI and M5S also more explicitly engaged with European refugee solidarity. Thus, a pattern concerning these two dimensions of cross-national solidarity is identified.

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<sup>2</sup> Note that from this moment on, all translations are the author’s own.

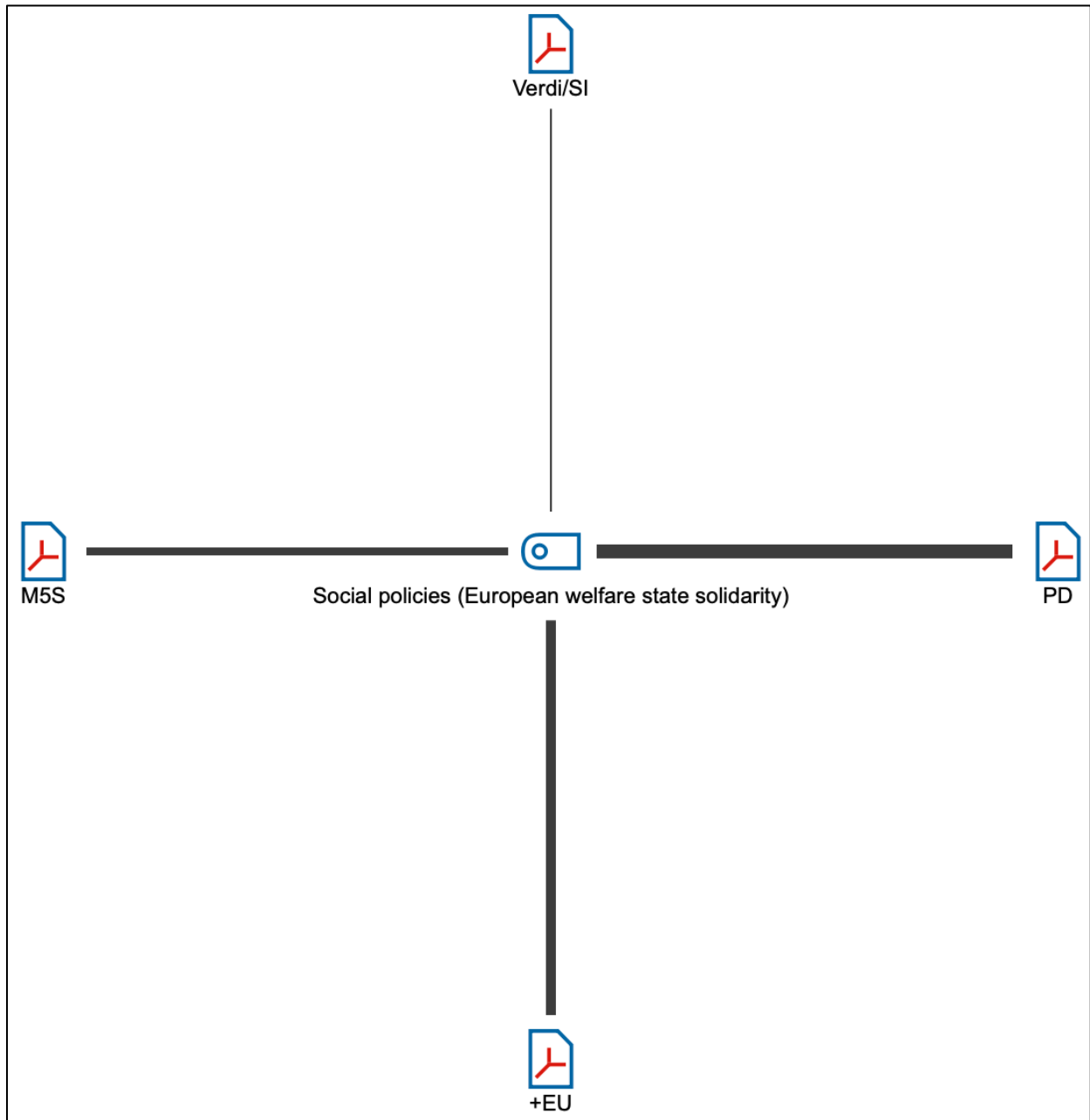


*Figure 2. Frequency of fiscal solidarity coded segments in the manifestos.*

### **4.3 Social Policies – European Welfare State Solidarity**

A third aspect connected to European solidarity is that of social policies. More precisely, the idea of a social Europe is connected to that of a Europe of solidarity in four manifestos, those of PD, +EU, M5S, and Verdi/SI (fig. 3). The main subject of the discourse on social policies at the EU level is the European Pillar of Social Rights, a corpus of social norms at the EU level that promotes equal rights and opportunities for everyone, particularly in terms of assistance and social security. It also aims to fight against poverty and unemployment and support those dealing with these issues (European Commission, 2017). The European Pillar of Social Rights is a redistributive measure driven by solidarity (Wincott, 2020). Therefore, by expressing their support for this measure, the parties are in favour of what has been addressed as European welfare state solidarity ([Chapter 2](#)), as it entails forms of help towards those citizens in a disadvantaged situation and

promotes the entitlement of all EU citizens to enjoy the same benefits. The support for this European solidarity dimension is particularly visible in how the European Pillar of Social Rights is addressed in the manifestos, as it is seen as a means to improve citizens' life and working conditions by generating employment, a cohesion policy that would ensure equality among European citizens.

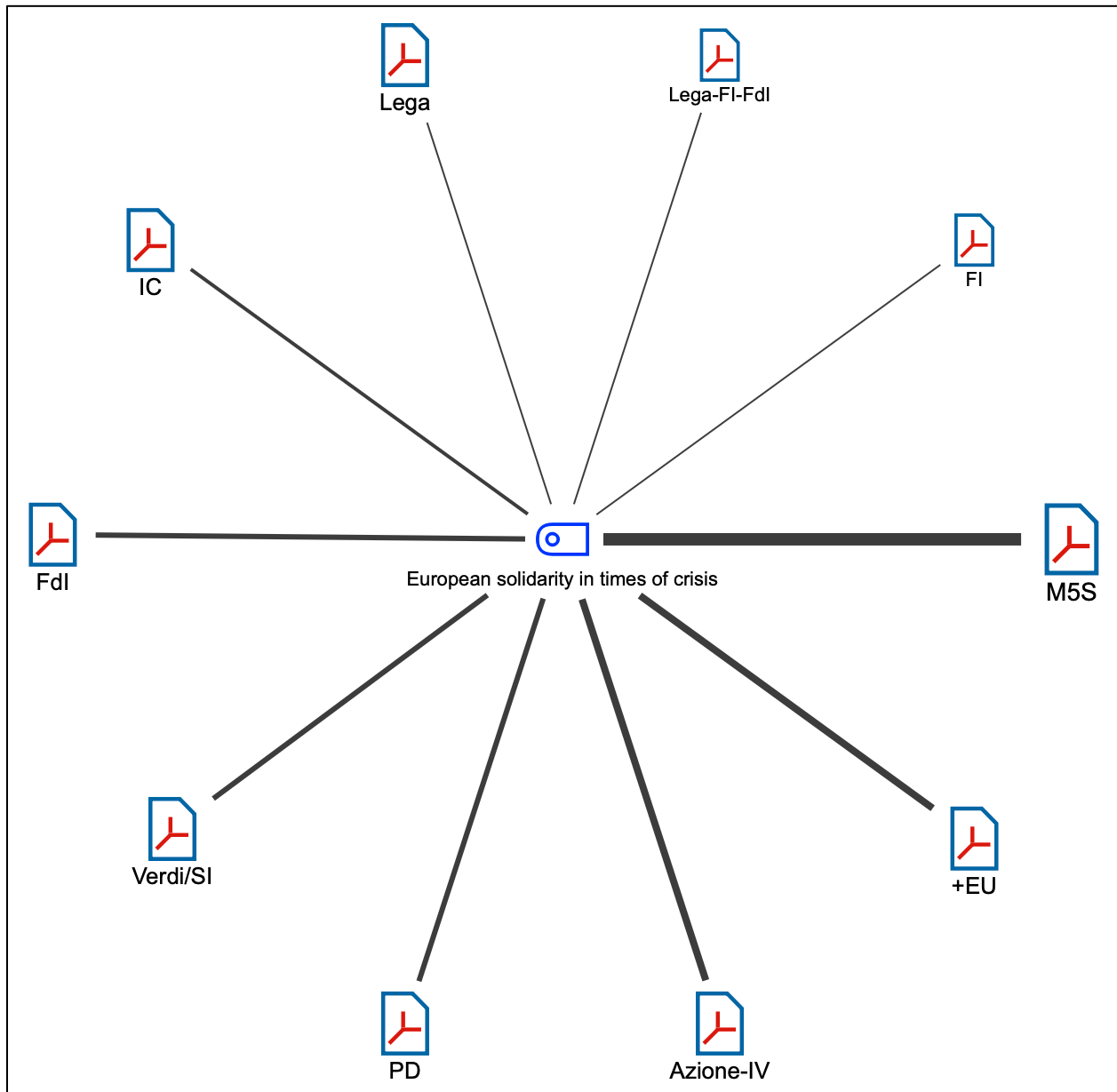


*Figure 3. Frequency of European welfare state solidarity coded segments in the manifestos.*

#### **4.4 Crises – European Solidarity in Times of Crisis**

The recent crises that have hit Italy and Europe represent a central aspect in all manifestos except that of MdL, especially COVID-19 and the energy crisis triggered by the re-escalation of the conflict in Ukraine (fig. 4). The first prompted the desire for more competencies conferred to the EU to manage health crises like the pandemic, culminating in the wish for the institution of a “European Union of Health” (+Europa, 2022, p. 22). In the parties’ opinion, the pandemic also showed the need for differentiated economic policies based on the specific needs of each country and that, as mentioned before, the instruments inaugurated to face the crisis, such as the NGEU, must be turned into mandatory tools. However, different nuances in how parties talk about the pandemic experience and how the EU reacted to it can be detected, as in whether they link European solidarity to it. PD states that COVID-19 marked the shift to a Europe of solidarity, as the EU faced the situation and did not leave Italy, the first hit country in Europe, alone (Partito Democratico, 2022). The same can be found in IC manifestos, where it is reported that “during the COVID-19 crisis, we were not alone, Europe has demonstrated solidarity and helped us overcome those tragic moments” (Impegno Civico Luigi di Maio, 2022, p. 1).

Verdi/SI is also among those parties more explicitly connecting the crisis experience to European solidarity. However, it mostly talks about the most recent energy crisis. It promotes a shared European “gas policy based on solidarity mechanisms” that would entail shared goals relating to savings, reserve access, and pipeline optimisation (Alleanza Verdi e Sinistra, 2022, p. 6). All parties, except MdL, include their stances on the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in their manifestos. They state that this crisis showed the need for a shared EU foreign and defence policy as security concerns were raised. FI and FdI also support implementing shared policies in these fields (Forza Italia, 2022b; Fratelli d’Italia, 2022). In contrast, Lega only refers to increased cooperation among European armies. It claims the EU provided an inadequate response to the crises “threatening peace, stability, and security in member states” (Lega per Salvini Premier, 2022, p. 194). Thus, these differences show that despite the joint manifesto, the stances inside the centre-right coalition are different when looking at the single manifestos.



*Figure 4. Frequency of European solidarity in times of crisis coded segments in the manifestos.*

#### **4.5 Additional Themes**

In the end, other themes that parties engage with are identified (tab. 1). These mainly correspond to European values, with which European solidarity, a fundamental value itself, is associated. It is mentioned that Italy must continue “to be attached to the Union and its values” (Partito Democratico, 2022, p. 4). In the parties’ opinion, to achieve full solidarity in the EU, there is a need for a strong, cohesive Union that relies on full democracy and integration among citizens, who are considered the core of the European democratic life. The idea of a Europe of solidarity is also linked to that of a Europe of freedoms, an inclusive, welcoming Europe that strives to bring everyone closer to overcome existing differences. Therefore, it is acknowledged, on the one hand,

that there are existing differences among member states. Still, these are not perceived as obstacles but rather as something manageable that can and should be overcome to reach this idea of a Europe of solidarity. On the other hand, diversity among European citizens is perceived as an added value to a Europe promoting freedom and rights for everyone, and everyone is responsible for protecting this value. Two other themes emerge here: rights and responsibility. The respect and promotion of rights at the European level are central, and they are also connected to the previous theme of social policies, as a Europe of rights stands at the basis of the idea of a social, free, and solidaristic Europe. Only a Europe that ensures the respect of human and civil rights can claim a position as a democratic international actor that protects freedom and peace and praises solidarity among people, the parties say. Any obstacle preventing European citizens from thoroughly enjoying these rights should be eliminated. This is connected to the theme of migration, as the reform of EU migration policy, to be fully solidaristic, should ensure that refugees' rights are respected, and every member state is responsible for this. The redistribution of responsibility raises another point: sharing among countries. Redistribution and sharing are at the basis of solidarity acts. As highlighted before, this theme emerges in the manifestos mainly concerning migration and economic issues, so European refugee and fiscal solidarity.

Much value is also attributed to the sense of unity in the EU among member states and citizens and the cooperation, coordination, and interaction among them, which are fundamental to fostering a solidarity-based Europe and, therefore, should be strengthened. This is relevant as Europe is addressed as “our common home, our protection, our opportunity” (Partito Democratico, 2022, p. 10), and “belonging to the European family is an essential value” (Impegno Civico Luigi di Maio, 2022, p. 1). This idea of the EU as a “home” and “family” shows that it is perceived as a space of unity where everyone is tied together. This perception is enhanced by the feeling that regardless of the member state where they live, people share the same identity as Europeans, the same condition as European citizens, and the same roots, which must be protected. The last additional theme identified reunites different political matters. This is not to say that, for example, economic and migration issues are not political. Still, this theme reunites different stances talking about European institutions and Treaties, support for a federalist turn of the EU, the role of the Union in the international arena, and the issue of bureaucracy.

The parties engaging more with the themes highlighted by explicitly linking them to European solidarity are PD, M5S, and Verdi/SI, together with +EU, Azione-IV and IC. Those engaging to a lesser degree are Lega-FI-FdI, which in their joint manifesto only refer to the importance of protecting the Christian roots of EU citizens and their adherence to the integration process but, at the same time, wish to make the EU less democratic and advocate for national

interests to be prioritized over communitarian ones. Nevertheless, in their single political manifestos, the importance of protecting and enhancing European solidarity as a fundamental EU value emerges in both Lega and FdI discourses. Similarly, MdL calls for revising the EU Treaties to make the Union less bureaucratic and to make the Italian Constitution prevail over EU law.

	Values	Sharing	Identity	Unity	Differences	Rights	Political aspect	SUM
<b>M5S</b>	6	3	4	7	2	4	4	30
<b>PD</b>	11	0	0	6	2	2	5	26
<b>+EU</b>	2	0	1	6	1	6	5	21
<b>Verdi/SI</b>	6	1	0	0	1	8	2	18
<b>Azione-IV</b>	2	1	3	4	0	1	2	13
<b>Lega</b>	2	0	0	3	0	0	5	10
<b>FdI</b>	3	0	1	1	0	0	5	10
<b>Lega-FI-FdI</b>	0	0	1	2	0	0	4	7
<b>FI</b>	2	0	1	0	0	0	2	5
<b>IC</b>	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	3
<b>MdL</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2

*Table 1. Number of coded segments for each theme in the different manifestos.*

## 4.6 Conclusions

The results show that, as expected, European solidarity was significantly politicised during the last Italian electoral campaign, as the issue is present in most of the parties' manifestos analysed and connected to several different identified themes. This substantial politicisation might be explained by the fact that these were the first elections to be held after two major crises that hit Italy and the EU, namely the pandemic and the energy crisis. These situations, mainly dictated by exogenous causes, increase the salience of EU issues in national political arenas, and it has been seen here that this is true concerning European solidarity ([Chapter 2](#)) (Capati et al., 2022). This also explains why the theme of European solidarity in crisis times was more present than the others. Even when looking at the singular manifestos, it is the most prominent in most of them, thus confirming what De Sio et al. (2022) found in their analysis of the political programmes, as they claim that in all different programmes, except that of M5S, economic issues were deemed less prominent than others. Also concerning European solidarity, it has been seen here that economic matters and, therefore, what has been referred to as fiscal solidarity, is the central theme in the M5S manifesto, but also in that of +EU.

The differences in themes' saliency also highlight what was previously stated, namely that different degrees of engagement of parties with the issue of European solidarity could be detected, not only concerning the themes but also whether they explicitly or implicitly connected them to the matter. From the analysis, it can be argued that the parties more explicitly supporting European solidarity in their manifestos are PD and Verdi/SI, as they engage with every theme detected in the most solidaristic terms. M5S also presented a great deal of engagement with most of the European solidarity dimensions considered, and the same can be said for +EU and Azione-IV. The parties engaging to a lesser degree are IC and Lega-FI-FdI. IC recognises the importance of European solidarity as an EU value, particularly during crises. The same is found in FI and FdI manifestos, thus denoting a difference inside the centre-right coalition. The joint manifesto does not refer to European solidarity, but this changes when looking at the single manifestos. Lega also states that European solidarity must be protected, but less solidaristic stances emerge concerning the other themes. Thus, it can be said that it is the party inside the coalition engaging less with the issue. Lastly, it has been highlighted how the MdL manifesto does not refer to European solidarity. This might be explained by the fact that it is the shortest programme—just a couple of pages—and only focuses on the issues concerning Italians living abroad. Therefore, it barely engages with domestic or European matters.

In conclusion, as expected, European solidarity did not significantly polarise the Italian party system. It did not create a clear divide between left and right-wing parties or between parties in favour or against, as instead seen in other studies concerning the politicisation of EU issues in the Italian political arena (De Sio et al., 2022; Giannetti et al., 2017). Here, it can be argued that no party openly opposed European solidarity, and they can just be differentiated following the different degrees of engagement with the issue. On the one hand, those engaging to a greater extent are PD, Verdi/SI, M5S, +EU, and Azione-IV, so this category includes parties belonging to the centre and centre-left of the political spectrum and even the antisystem M5S. On the other hand, IC, belonging to the centre-left, and Lega-FI-FdI and MdL, belonging to the centre-right, are not against European solidarity but are engaging to a lesser extent than the other parties, expressing their support for fewer dimensions analysed or, as in the case of MdL, not referring to European solidarity at all.



This chapter highlighted the main themes concerning European solidarity on which parties focused during the last electoral campaign. It established that no party expressed an open negative stance. However, different degrees of engagement with the different themes were detected, thus showing that some parties more explicitly and consistently support European solidarity in their manifestos. The same categories of European solidarity found in the manifestos are then applied to the survey responses in the next chapter.

## **5. Italian Diaspora's Perceptions of European Solidarity: Insights from Survey Responses**

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**T**he previous chapter presented the analysis of the manifestos of the different parties that ran in the September 2022 Italian national elections and that the Italian diaspora could vote for in Europe. Some conclusions have been reached concerning the level of engagement of the parties with the issue of European solidarity during their electoral campaign and, therefore, its politicisation and the different stances expressed around the topic. In this chapter, the findings from the analysis of the survey responses collected for this research are presented and discussed to understand the attitudes of the Italian diaspora towards European solidarity along the same dimensions identified in the manifestos.

The survey collected 210 valid responses, of which 77 were from people living in Germany, 71 in France, and 62 in Belgium. The sample is evenly distributed concerning: i) gender, as responses came equally from men and women (seven respondents preferred not to say); ii) three quarters of respondents were under 50; iii) almost all respondents reported a bachelor's or higher degree. In terms of employment status: the more significant majority corresponds to full-time positions, followed by retirees, students, self-employed, part-time jobs, unemployed, and homemakers; four did not answer.

To measure the level of transnationalism, respondents had to indicate how long they had lived in the country where they were residing during the elections and if they had ever lived in another country apart from Italy. Transnationalism is significant because it seems to be correlated with the responses later analysed, and there is the possibility that their attitudes have been affected by the national context in their new home (Kriesi, 2007; Lahusen, 2020b). The largest group is those who have lived in their country of residence for more than a decade, followed by those who have been there for at least six years, and lastly, those who moved less than a year ago. The majority also lived in another country abroad before moving to the one they were residing in; one respondent did not answer. From this overview (tab. 2), it can be seen that the sample is mainly composed of highly educated people under 50 who have stable jobs and are highly transnational since most have lived abroad for more than a decade and in multiple countries. The overrepresentation of these

profiles can be explained by the fact that intra-European transnational individuals are usually young people with access to higher education levels and therefore are high-skilled workers with more socioeconomic resources at their disposal (Favell & Recchi, 2011; Kuhn, 2015). This overview is also helpful in highlighting the limitations of the data under examination and the conclusions drawn as a consequence of their analysis.

	<b>Germany</b>	<b>France</b>	<b>Belgium</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Gender</b>				
Men	35	29	40	104
Women	39	41	19	99
<b>Age</b>				
<35 years old	27	31	16	74
35-49 years old	34	30	15	79
50-65 years old	7	5	12	24
>65 years old	9	5	19	33
<b>Education</b>				
Bachelor's degree or higher	63	65	49	177
High school diploma or equivalent	12	4	10	26
Middle school diploma or equivalent	/	1	3	4
<b>Employment</b>				
Full-time worker	41	41	34	116
Part-time worker	9	2	1	12
Self-employed	6	5	2	13
Student	6	11	5	22
Retiree	9	5	18	32
Homemaker	1	1	1	3
Unemployed	2	5	1	8
<b>Years of residence</b>				
<1 year	4	6	7	17
1-5 years	18	27	12	57
6-10 years	26	19	11	56
>10 years	29	18	32	79
<b>Life in another country</b>				
Yes	40	39	41	120
No	37	32	20	89

*Table 2. Redistribution of respondents per country.*

## **5.1 Cross-National Solidarity**

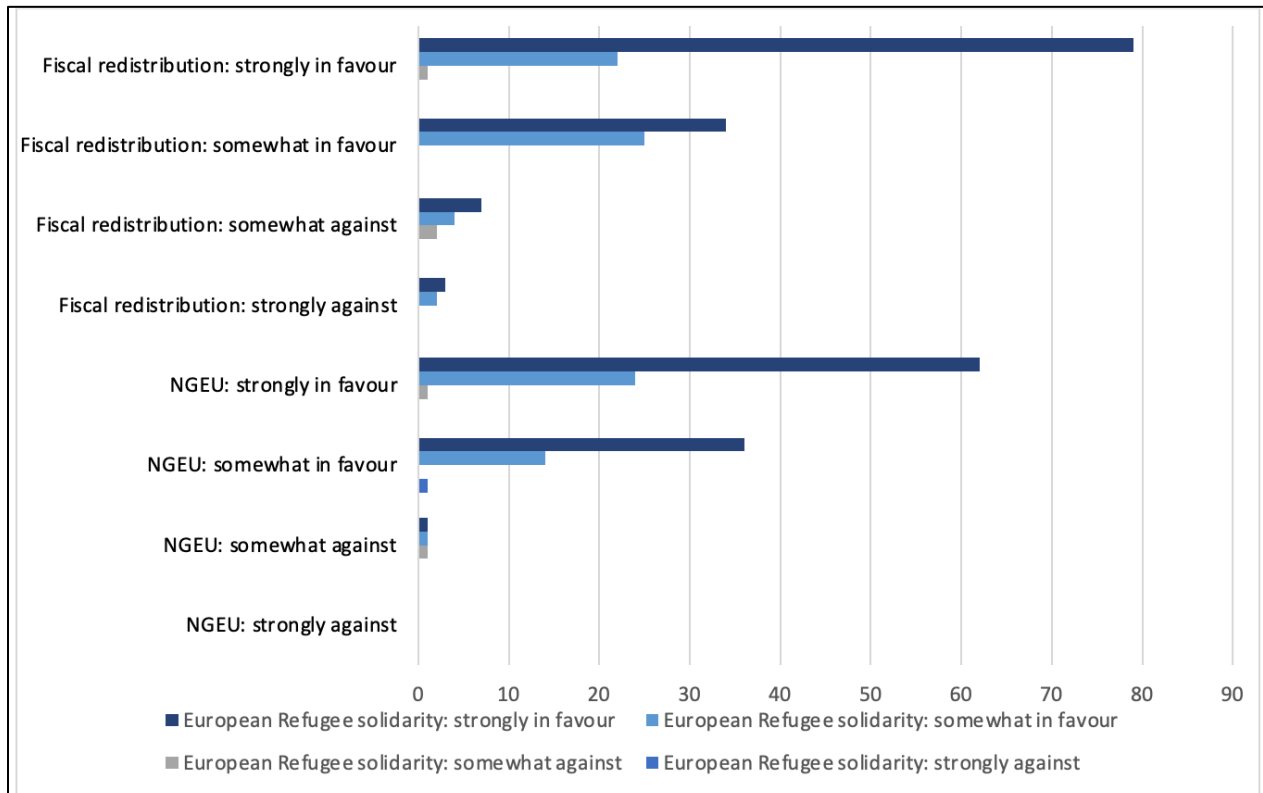
Cross-national solidarity is measured through non-financial and financial dimensions, the internal aspect of European refugee solidarity and fiscal solidarity. The patterns identified show that those who express positive opinions concerning European refugee solidarity also favour fiscal solidarity (fig. 5). Therefore, those supporting the non-financial dimension also tend to highly favour the financial one, as Mariotto & Pellegata (2023) claim. European refugee solidarity, concerning the system of equal redistribution of migrants, is the redistributive measure towards which most support is shown. Almost all respondents are in favour regardless of their country of residence and background, which is different from what other studies on Italian public opinion found (Maggini, 2018). Just a handful say they are somewhat or strongly against it. The results concerning fiscal solidarity show that the vast majority is also in favour of creating a common EU fund to help member states in distress in times of crisis, to which countries contribute based on their wealth. Most respondents are highly in favour, but a few more negative responses were collected compared to European refugee solidarity. The survey also assesses fiscal solidarity by detecting respondents' opinions of the NGEU, a temporary fund of around 750 billion euros. The measure's purpose is to help member states face the recovery phase after the pandemic, with the most considerable amounts of money in the form of grants and loans given to the countries hardest hit by the consequences of COVID-19 (Bremer et al., 2021). To this question, only those wholly or somewhat aware of the measures taken by the EU to tackle the most recent crises could answer. Most say they are aware to some extent of these measures; a fourth did not complete the section. Concerning the NGEU, the majority is firmly in favour; just a handful expresses negative opinions.

The main reason behind the vast support for cross-national solidarity might be the transnational character of the sample, as those with the most positive attitudes belong to the group of people who have lived in their country of residence for more than ten years and in at least another country before. These findings align with what Donati et al. (2019) found, as they argue that the higher the level of transnationalism, the higher the odds of supporting these kinds of redistributive measures. This connection is especially significant concerning European refugee solidarity since respondents, being migrants themselves, can empathise more and do not perceive the presence of foreigners as a threat to them or their national identity. They are generally more focused on the supranational level and, therefore, also present a higher disposition to support measures aiming to help others and other member states (Roeder, 2011).

The other main explanation is linked to the high dependence of Italians on European solidarity to manage both the refugee and economic crises due to the significant impact that these had on their country. This condition explains the high support for European refugee solidarity, as

nationals of countries whose external borders are crossed by migrants generally present higher levels of solidarity towards refugees, even in times of crisis. It is also connected to the support for the redistribution of wealth to help those countries most in need, even if it means that some countries have to pay more than others. Italians consistently show positive attitudes towards these measures, especially those not entailing conditionality features (Bremer et al., 2021; Donati et al., 2019; Mariotto & Pellegata, 2023; Trenz et al., 2020).

The slight difference in the level of support for the two different European solidarity dimensions might be explained by the fact that inflows of asylum-seekers are seen as exogenous shocks, which gather more support. In contrast, economic issues might be perceived more as endogenous and therefore gather less favour due to the type of assistance they require ([Chapter 2](#)) (Genschel & Hemerijck, 2018; Lahusen & Grasso, 2018b). A difference is also present between the two measurements of fiscal solidarity, as the NGEU generated more positive responses than the assessment of fiscal solidarity in more abstract terms. This finding goes against what Lahusen (2020b) theorise since the author argues that when European solidarity is assessed concerning specific measures, responses tend to be more negative, while when addressed in more general terms, European solidarity gathers a broader consensus ([Chapter 3](#)). Partially, this might be explained by the fact that the NGEU was inaugurated consequently to the pandemic, and Italians highly support it since it is judged as a demonstration of solidarity by the EU (Nelli Feroci, 2021). It might also be because it is linked to the pandemic and is therefore perceived as a response to an exogenous shock. Hence, it elicits higher levels of solidarity than national economic issues (Genschel & Hemerijck, 2018).



*Figure 5. Redistribution of European refugee solidarity responses to fiscal solidarity responses.*

**Note:** Total number of responses on European refugee solidarity: strongly in favour 131; somewhat in favour 56; somewhat against 4; strongly against 1; neither in favour nor against 18 (not included in the figure).

## 5.2 European Welfare State Solidarity

Questions on European welfare state solidarity ask about two subdimensions: the entitlement to cross-border social benefits, European social citizenship, and help towards those most in need, that is, interpersonal European solidarity. The pattern identified shows that displaying a positive attitude towards European social citizenship goes hand in hand with the support of interpersonal European solidarity, even if this effect is more substantial in the case of specific measures and helping the unemployed rather than poorer people (fig. 6).

European social citizenship, as expected, gathers an incredible amount of support; just one respondent strongly disagrees with the statement. Respondents are asked if they believe that in their country of residence, they should receive the same social security benefits as the nationals of that country, given that they are all European citizens. The great wave of positive responses might partly be explained by the social desirability effect, given the respondents' situation as expatriates and their position as beneficiaries concerning the object of the question. Nevertheless, this result, together with the attitudes expressed before towards migrants, might show that the sample is characterised by a cosmopolitan mindset connected to the support for extending rights to people

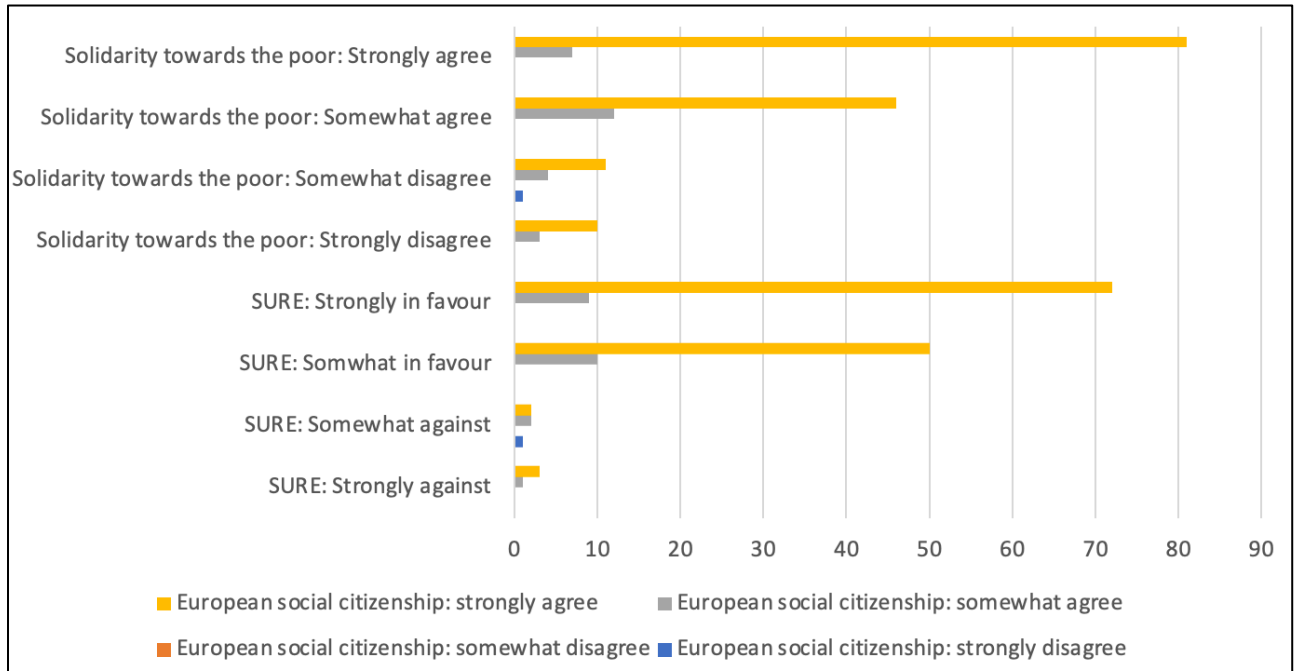
from other countries. The sample corresponds to the typical description of people with this attitude, as they generally possess higher education levels, stable job positions, and interact transnationally (Gerhards et al., 2018).

The results from the previous question prove to be instrumental for comparison with interpersonal European solidarity questions because, as explained, people tend to show solidarity towards those groups that they deem more deserving, more in need, and to which they feel close ([Chapter 2](#)) (Grasso & Lahusen, 2020; van Oorschot, 2006). Respondents are asked if impoverished European citizens should receive help from the EU, even if this means that member states should pay more contributions. The vast majority still agree that poor people should be helped. However, many people express no position, and an equal number have a negative opinion. In this case, the number of negative responses is higher than the ones recorded for the previously analysed solidarity dimensions. A more limited solidaristic attitude towards this social group might be explained by the fact that respondents may feel less responsible for these people's situation, as they might believe help could be first provided to them by the member state where they reside or their fellow nationals (Lahusen, 2020a). Nevertheless, previous studies show that most Europeans still think that inequalities in income and wealth among European citizens should be reduced, and action at the EU level should be taken to face this issue (Gerhards et al., 2018). The survey responses show this is true for the Italian diaspora in the studied countries.

Interpersonal European solidarity is also measured concerning another social group, the unemployed, by assessing the SURE's support level, another specific measure. It is an instrument implemented to handle the consequences of the pandemic, involving around 100 billion euros granted as loans to those member states that had to face exceptional expenses to prevent mass unemployment (Samadashvili, 2020). The SURE also gathers high support across the whole sample; just ten people are against this measure. Respondents show more significant support for the specific measure than for the general assessment of interpersonal European solidarity analysed before. Scholars deem age and education factors influencing Italians' tendency to support the unemployed, but no considerable pattern is found here. In his study, Maggini (2018) states that "being male increases the odds of supporting the unemployed" (p. 151); however, the opposite is found here, as among the few pessimistic respondents, men are slightly preponderant. The fact that the majority of the sample expresses a solidaristic attitude is in line with what Gerhards et al. (2018) found, as they saw that the majority of European citizens, especially nationals of Mediterranean countries, are in favour of measures providing help to unemployed people and think that the EU should be responsible for this. A higher level of dissent could have been expected since the unemployment problem is usually perceived as determined by endogenous causes, entailing greater



risk and the need for burden sharing; however, the question concerns a specific measure inaugurated as a consequence of the pandemic and, therefore this might entail that it deals with an exogenous shock (Genschel & Hemerijck, 2018; Nelli Feroci, 2021).



*Figure 6. Redistribution of European social citizenship to interpersonal European solidarity responses.*

**Note:** Total number of responses on European social citizenship: strongly agree 168; somewhat agree 36; somewhat disagree 0; strongly disagree 1; neither agree nor disagree 5 (not included in the figure).

### **5.3 Connotations of European Solidarity**

Solidaristic attitudes shown by European citizens are influenced by the degree of closeness they perceive to others, which impacts their predisposition to support and enact solidarity actions aiming to help other member states or fellow nationals ([Chapter 2](#)) (Hilpold, 2015; Lahusen & Grasso, 2018a). That is why the survey asks respondents to indicate how close they feel to other European citizens and provide motivation for their answers. The majority feel close to other European citizens; forty respondents feel distant. The high levels of closeness expressed might explain the high support for the different dimensions of European solidarity discussed earlier. Despite this result, a more divisive picture emerges regarding the motivations behind the perceived closeness to other citizens. A positive connotation characterises most responses, although negative ones balance them. Several themes connected to both stances are identified.

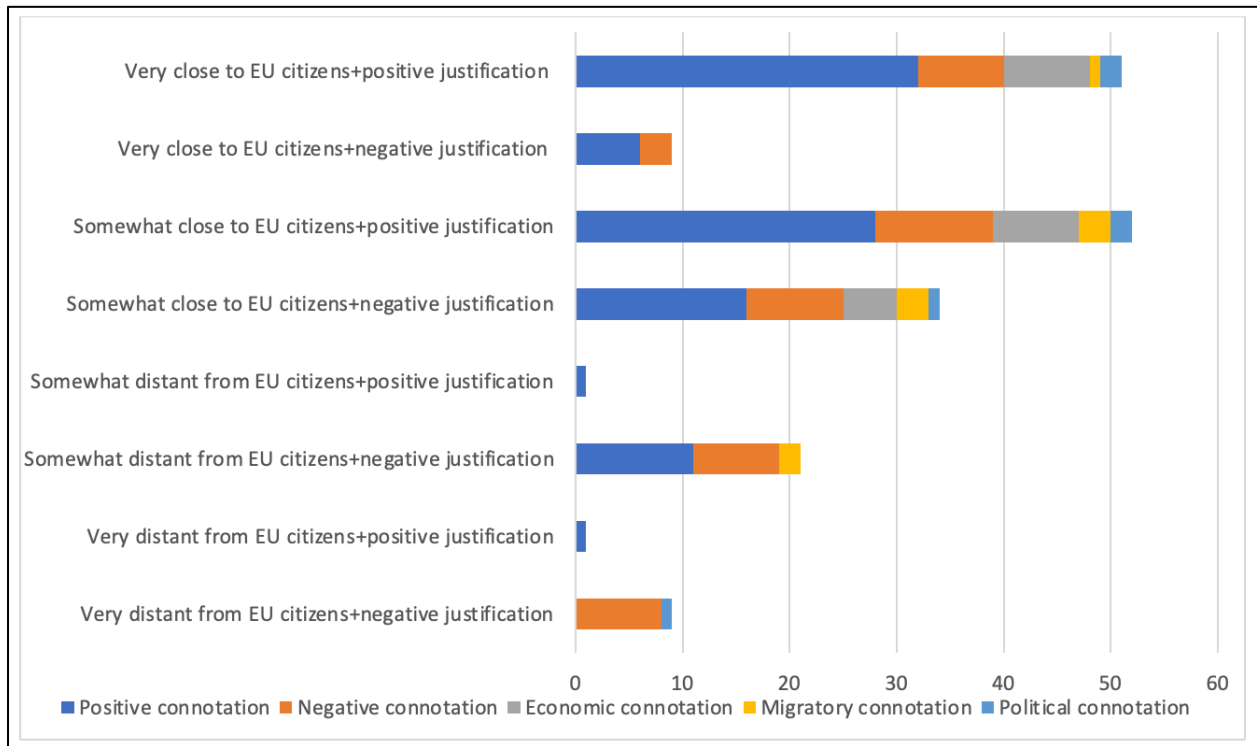
Positive arguments appear based on the perceived unity and solidarity among citizens due to sharing the same current situation, values, culture, and identity, a perception enhanced by being part of the diaspora. This pattern is noticeable with those feeling “very close to citizens in other EU countries”, where the transnational justification emerges strongly, and with most stating to feel somewhat close, who particularly stress the sharing aspect. The sharing by all Europeans of the same condition is the most recurring theme, encompassing several aspects, like a shared sense of belonging to the EU, origins, and fate. In particular, what is stressed is the sharing of common challenges and problems in the current geopolitical situation. Italians living in the countries under study feel close to each other due to their empathy; they understand that the current circumstances are difficult for everyone. Multiple respondents use the expression “we are all in the same boat”, which summarises this aspect of the theme well. They agree that, at the moment, all Europeans have the same needs and face the same issues. The perception of this shared situation that affects everyone is partly conditioned by the experience of the various crises that citizens had to go through. It appears that these had a relatively positive impact as respondents perceive that member states are aligned in terms of interests and present a good level of interconnection while sharing responsibilities and helping one another. This perception is connected to the theme of unity among citizens that often emerges in the responses. A fairly good level of unity and solidarity is perceived, mainly explained by the sharing by all Europeans of the same culture and values. Europe is the “common house” of all EU citizens, who are seen as one community, one big family with the same origins despite the many differences characterising the member states. This image of the common house and Italians’ support for it has already emerged in previous studies (Donati et al., 2019). The unity among citizens and the Union itself are considered part of this shared values and cultural background, along with democracy, the rule of law, respect for rights, peace, and most of all, solidarity. The perception of being part of the same community and sharing the same condition with its members is also linked to an identitarian factor. Many respondents say they are nationals of their member states and European citizens simultaneously or just feel European. This shared identity is enhanced by transnational interactions, confirming what other scholars found concerning transnational individuals and the increased likeliness to value the European identity (Kuhn, 2015). Having moved to another country and being well integrated, working with internationals, or participating in educational experiences such as the Erasmus programme makes people realise how more similarities than differences exist among people from different member states in their everyday lives.

The more negative responses contradict the ones just discussed. It emerges that the discrepancies between European citizens and member states encompass many fields. They contribute to creating a situation of instability, which is also enhanced by the individualistic attitudes of the different countries. They then lead to the rise of a feeling of distance that stands at the basis of the negative judgements concerning the closeness among Europeans. This pattern is identified among the responses of those feeling not very close to citizens in other EU countries or not close at all, with the latter category particularly stressing the aspect of economic disparities. The central theme linking these responses mainly refers to the many differences between European citizens and member states. In the case of more negative justifications, these differences are seen as divisive and affect the feeling of closeness to other Europeans. Respondents state that European citizens have divergent visions concerning EU institutions, measures, values, and the level of unity among people from different member states. This perception makes many of them feel distant from citizens of other countries. Some do not approve of policies implemented by other member states. They mention that countries are just thinking about their interests instead of common ones, often at the expense of others. This feeling creates a divide between the countries respondents feel closer to, Western European countries, and those they feel more distant from, mainly Eastern European ones. In the respondents' minds, individualistic attitudes create an unstable environment where cohesion, solidarity, and shared goals are missing. Again, contributing to this idea of instability are the many differences among member states regarding wealth, lifestyle, cultural background, social security benefits, political orientations, labour market, opportunities, needs, and the impact of the different crises. Additionally, it was mentioned here that national identities still prevail over the European one.

Respondents are also asked to associate European solidarity with a word to understand what connotation it assumes in their minds. The results show different themes with which European solidarity is associated. What emerges is that European solidarity is mainly considered a value connected to other European values and various expressions of solidarity among citizens and member states. Still, a fourth expresses a more critical vision, especially of the current level of solidarity, which is judged negatively. Many responses are related to the economy, migration, and political matters. As for the manifestos ([Chapter 4](#)), this differentiation does not entail that economic and migration issues are not considered political. Still, this theme reunites all other aspects of the political sphere that do not fall into either category, like mentions of political leaders. Among the positive responses, the concepts of sharing and values are preponderant, as people either mention specific values like “democracy”, “peace”, “freedom”, and “equality” or refer to related concepts like “cooperation”, “support”, “help” or “cohesion”. The Union and unity are also recurring in

this case, associated with the ideas of “community”, “fraternity”, and “house”, as seen earlier. Other respondents have mentioned thinking about rights or terms with a hopeful meaning, like “future” or “possibility”, which can also be categorised as having a positive connotation. In contrast, those who negatively perceive European solidarity talk about it as “fake”, just a façade that, in reality, entails double standards, a “joke”. Many address it as “weak”, “insufficient”, or even “missing” and “inexistent”; a “utopia” or illusion that cannot be reached, a “failure”. Other respondents have also mentioned words that might be interpreted as having a negative connotation, like “inequality” or “poverty”. Concerning the sphere of economy, several respondents have referred to fiscal measures, even specific ones like the “NextGenerationEu”, institutions such as the “ECB”, and more general terms like “euro”, “debt”, or “taxes”. Some responses also concern migration, specifically the Dublin Regulation, and others concern politics, like mentions of particular leaders.

Looking at the graph (fig. 7), it appears clear that the tendency to think positively about solidarity is predominant over all other connotations, regardless of the level of closeness to other European citizens the respondents perceive or the justification behind this feeling. This trend might be partly explained by the fact that solidarity generally tends to have a positive connotation (Gerhards et al., 2018). Therefore, the identified pattern shows that how close Italians living abroad feel towards other European citizens does not necessarily affect how they perceive and think about European solidarity. The only exception is represented by those who feel not close at all to European citizens due to the distance and many differences they perceive in their regard.



**Figure 7.** *Redistribution of European solidarity connotations to feelings of closeness to other EU citizens.*

**Note:** Total number of responses on European solidarity connotations: positive connotation 103; negative connotation 57; economic connotation 25; migratory connotation 13; political connotation 6; no response 6 (not included in the figure).

### 5.4 European Solidarity in Times of Crisis

To better understand the current state of solidarity and provide a comprehensive picture, the survey also includes questions to assess the respondents’ perceptions of the level of solidarity among member states during the pandemic and the energy crisis. A pattern can be noticed in the graph (fig. 8): although expressing a more critical stance on solidarity among member states, the majority is highly in favour of specific measures countering the crisis.

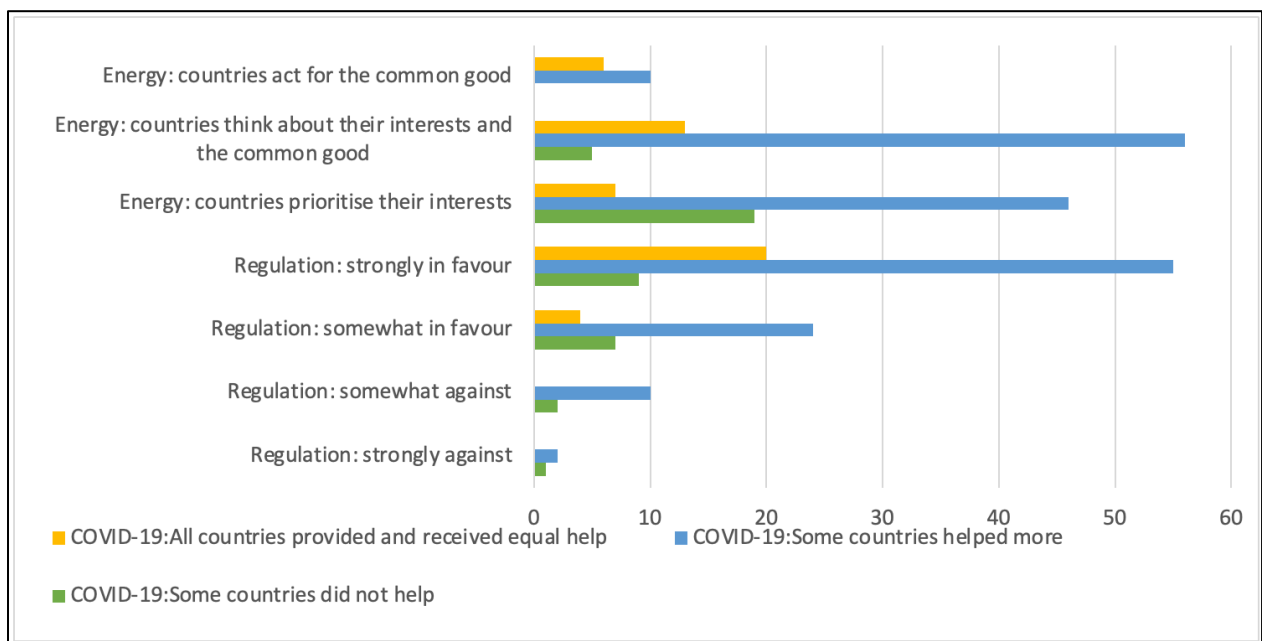
While it has been seen above that the sample is greatly in favour of those measures inaugurated by the EU to manage the consequences of the pandemic, different results emerge concerning the help among member states during the first year of the crisis in terms of sharing medical supplies and treating patients from other countries. More than half of the sample agrees that some member states provided more help than others, revealing a relatively pessimistic view of solidarity during crises. An equal share of respondents says that all EU member states provided and received equal help or the opposite, stating that some did not help. Nevertheless, it must be noted that many selected the “I do not know” option. In 2020, most Europeans judged the level of solidarity among member states in response to the crisis unsatisfying. Most Italians agreed that EU

countries did not show a solidaristic attitude towards each other (European Commission, 2020). There was a widespread feeling of abandonment and a perceived absence of European solidarity, mainly dictated by the initial failure of other member states to reply to the Italian calls for help and to activate the emergency mechanisms at their disposal (Scazzieri, 2020). This feeling was probably also due to the mismatch between citizens' expectations, their perceived level of solidarity, and the lack of public information (Beaucillon, 2020). Nevertheless, from the survey responses, it can be seen that Italians abroad at least acknowledge that some member states engaged in solidarity activities. The high support shown for recovery measures suggests that there has been a change of opinion over time.

An even more pessimistic picture emerges when assessing the level of solidarity during the energy crisis. A slight majority states that member states prioritise their national interests in this situation. Still, a substantial share says EU countries defend their national interests while simultaneously advocating for the common good; only a few respondents think that member states are cooperating for the common good of everyone. It appears that what respondents perceive is a widespread "energy nationalism" among member states, which consists of a rush to protect one's national businesses and households and to guarantee resources to accommodate their energy demand (Gerlagh et al., 2022, p. 11). This reaction also entails that countries with more means at their disposal can probably secure more resources at the expense of those who find themselves in a more disadvantaged position and, therefore, have been hit harder by the crisis. Indeed, member states reacted uncoordinatedly in the initial stages of the situation (McWilliams et al., 2022). Still, this pessimistic view might have been reinforced by the fact that respondents, apart from being Italians, live in countries dependent on Russian oil imports. Therefore, the crisis greatly shocked them (Zakeri et al., 2022).

Despite the initial shock, member states eventually took joint action. Another survey question concerns the proposal for a Council Regulation to address high energy prices, which was adopted by member states energy ministers and entered into force in December 2022. It entails three main measures to reduce prices: reducing electricity use, capping the revenues of electricity producers, and securing a solidarity contribution from fossil fuel businesses (European Council, 2023). Therefore, solidarity is deemed central to overcoming the crisis, specifically regarding the last measure, since it was decided that surplus profits "shall be subject to a temporary solidarity contribution" (European Commission, 2022, p. 39). Different purposes for which the solidarity contribution can be used have been stated, among which there is the possibility that, in a spirit of solidarity, member states can allocate part of it to finance shared measures against the adverse effects of the crisis (European Commission, 2022). The question asks for the degree of favour of

respondents to turn this into a mandatory mechanism so that every member state would contribute to a certain degree to prevent the consequences of a crisis affecting the whole EU. The question is also instrumental in capturing support for increased institutionalisation of European solidarity, as it refers to a situation when a third actor, the EU, gathers funds from member states to redistribute them in a second step to finance measures such as those protecting employment or investing in renewable resources. A substantial majority is in favour, as in the case of the previously assessed specific EU measures. The measure's high support might be justified by its purpose being to counter a crisis that significantly impacted European citizens.



**Figure 8.** Redistribution of responses concerning the two crises: solidarity during COVID-19 to solidarity in the energy crisis.

**Note:** Total number of responses concerning solidarity during COVID-19: all EU member states provided and received equal help 27; some EU member states provided more help than others 115; some EU member states provided help while others did not help at all 24; I do not know 44 (not included in the figure).

## 5.5 Conclusions

From the responses analysed, it can be deduced that the Italian diaspora in the countries under study values the concept of European solidarity and is highly in favour of solidaristic actions and further institutionalisation of European solidarity, as expected. High levels of support for cross-national solidarity are detected among the Italian diaspora, with most respondents expressing highly positive opinions concerning redistributive measures aiming to help other member states in need, confirming that transnational individuals usually favour cross-national redistribution (Donati

et al., 2019). European refugee and fiscal solidarity record very positive response rates from almost the totality of the sample. Apart from the aforementioned reasons, the great favour of cross-national solidarity might be linked to the idea that redistributive measures can improve the current level of solidarity among member states, which, as expected, is perceived as low or insufficient, especially after the most recent crises. This perception also explains the wave of support shown by respondents towards those measures like the NGEU, the SURE, or the more recent Council Regulation to address high energy prices, seen as ways to counter the situation and help those most in need.

European welfare state solidarity is also highly valued by the Italian diaspora in the countries under study. Both subdimensions, European social citizenship and interpersonal European solidarity, gather high support, with the majority of the sample being in favour of extending social security benefits to expatriates and providing help to people in a situation of poverty and those without a job. The first social group is the one towards which greater solidarity is shown, whereas the one deemed less deserving corresponds to poor people. The positive attitudes shown towards solidarity actions aiming at helping citizens of other countries can be explained by the level of closeness to other European citizens the Italian diaspora expresses, which is mainly motivated by the perception of being part of the same community and sharing the same condition. A similar picture emerges from the characterisation of European solidarity, as most respondents associate the concept with terms having a positive connotation connected to the ideas of values, sharing, and unity.

The sample's characteristics help explain the widespread support for European solidarity. It is a highly transnational group subjected to interactions among EU countries, which increases the chances of supporting European solidarity (Ciornei & Recchi, 2017). It mainly comprises people with high education levels, who are therefore generally more likely to show solidaristic attitudes, as seen in the Italian case (Maggini, 2018). The same is true for people with stable job positions, especially for what concerns cross-national solidarity, a trend confirmed here as well (Ciornei & Recchi, 2017). Instead, no significant differences have been noticed concerning respondents' gender or country of residence.

The patterns identified here have additionally been juxtaposed with those emerging from the different parties' manifestos analysed in [Chapter 4](#) and form the basis of the analysis in [Chapter 6](#).



## **6. European Solidarity Voting**

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In this chapter, the findings from the parties' manifestos are put in relation to those emerging from the analysis of the survey responses collected for this research to reach broader conclusions regarding the degree of influence of European solidarity on the Italian diaspora voting behaviour in the last elections and its possible consideration as a voting factor.

Survey respondents are asked to indicate their vote choice during the last national elections for the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate of the Republic. Only those parties running in the European voting college have been considered. An "other" option is made available if they decided to vote from Italy, where more parties were running, but these responses are not considered in the analysis. A significant share of respondents voted for PD; the skewing of the sample in this sense might be explained by the fact that this was the most-voted party by Italians in the European voting college ([Chapter 4](#)). This was the case also in the countries under study here, except for Germany, where for the election of the representative for the Senate of the Republic, PD was second to the centre-right coalition (Eligendo, 2022). The skewing of the sample towards this main vote choice might also be linked to the fact that the majority said to align with the centre-left in terms of political preferences (fig. 9). Table 3 provides a general overview of the redistribution following respondents' vote choices, which varies depending on the party. It thus highlights the possible shortcomings of the conclusions drawn.

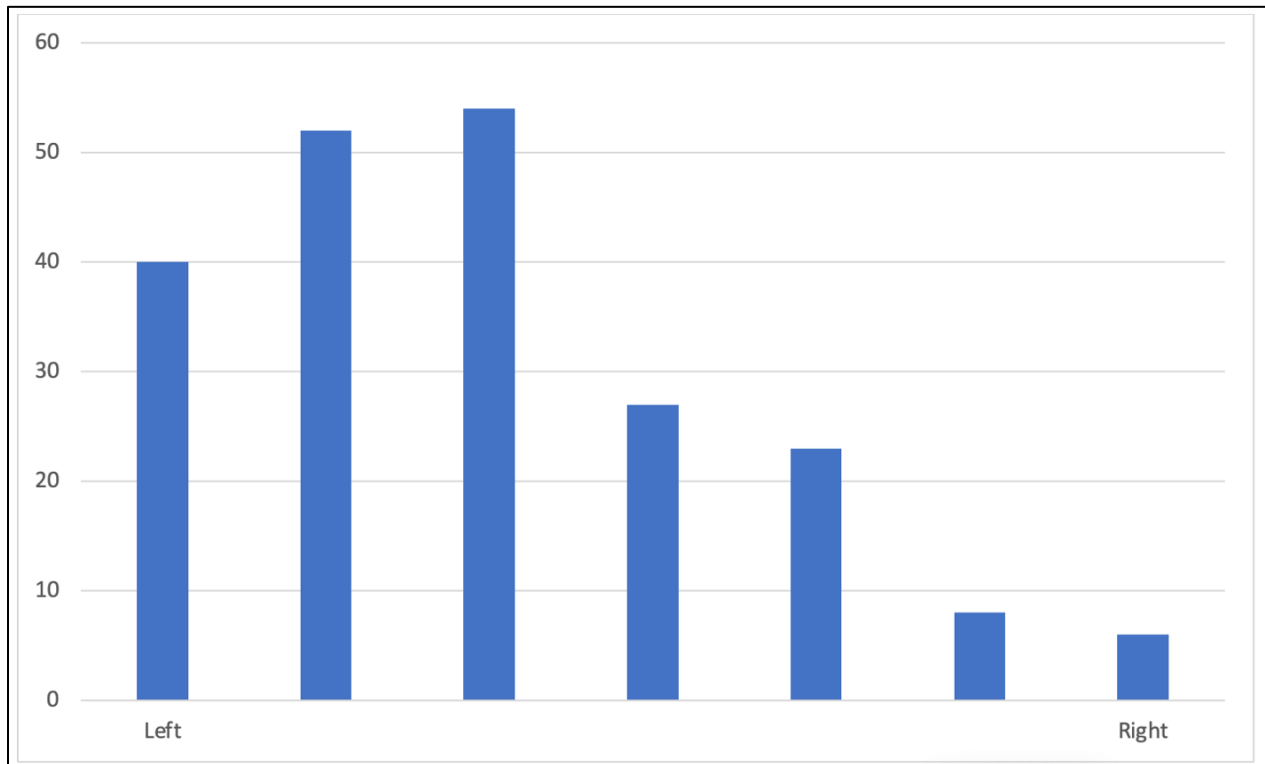


Figure 9. Respondents' political positioning along the left-right dimension.

	Chamber of Deputies	Senate of the Republic
<b>Alleanza Verdi e Sinistra</b>	28	(Not available)
<b>Azione–Italia Viva–Calenda</b>	19	24
<b>Impegno Civico Luigi di Maio–Centro Democratico</b>	3	3
<b>Lega per Salvini Premier–Forza Italia–Fratelli d’Italia</b>	24	23
<b>Movimento delle Libertà</b>	1	2
<b>Movimento 5 Stelle</b>	20	19
<b>Partito Democratico – Italia Democratica e Progressista</b>	77	112
<b>+Europa</b>	22	(Not available)

Table 3. Redistribution of votes for each party.

Note: Not available means the party was not running for the Senate of the Republic.

## 6.1 Parallels between European Solidarity Perceptions and Parties' Stances

Similar themes identified in the manifestos are also found in the survey responses regarding the connotation of European solidarity. In this regard, parallels are found between the connotations expressed by voters in the survey and the main stances expressed by the voted parties, or better to say, their level of engagement with the topic (fig. 10). A similar pattern was already noticed in the study of Pellegata and Visconti (2022). Here, voters of centre-right parties, which engage with European solidarity to a lesser degree, or in the case of MdL, do not refer to it, express more negative views. Those voting for centre-left parties, the third pole, and M5S, present more positive perceptions, though with some variations. PD voters indeed show a very solidaristic attitude, as those of Verdi/SI, who nevertheless greatly associate European solidarity with migration issues. This association might be explained by the fact that these issues represent a crucial point in Verdi/SI manifesto, and it is among the parties addressing them in the most solidaristic way. Azione-IV voters primarily link European solidarity to economic terms, an association which, even in this case, might be explained by the party's great focus on economic issues related to European solidarity ([Chapter 4](#)).

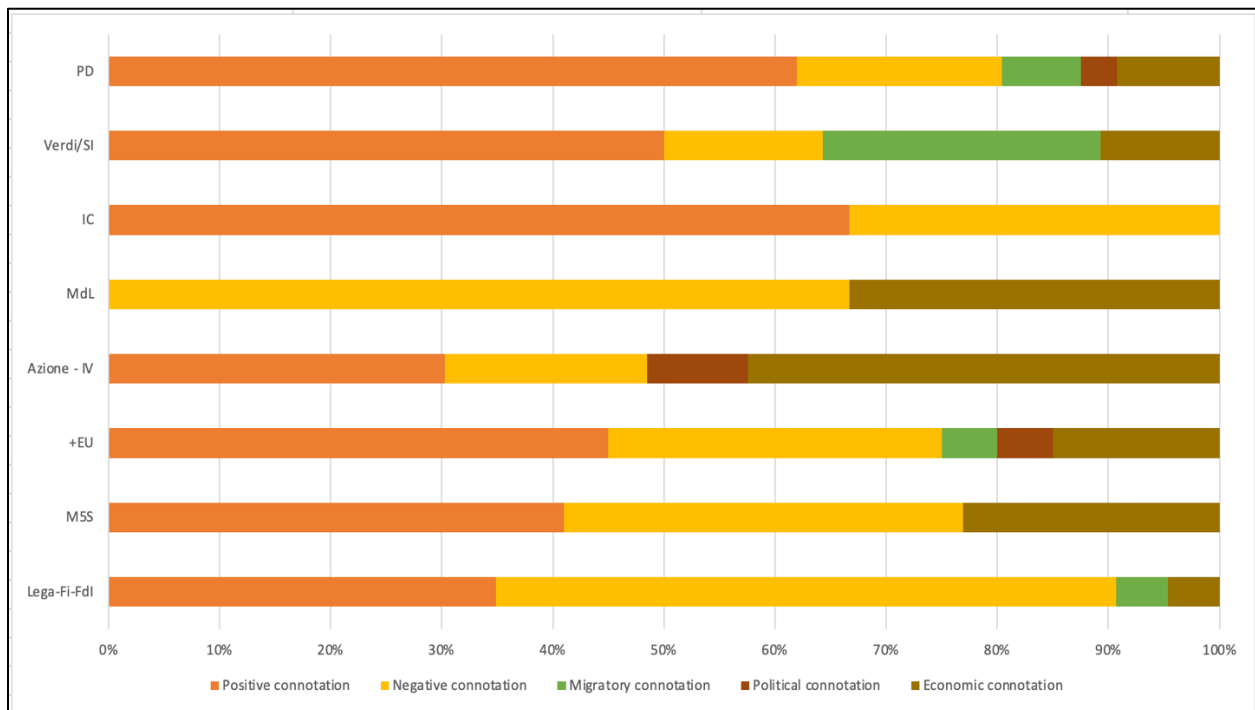


Figure 10. Redistribution of European solidarity connotations per voted party.

From the analysis of the manifestos, a pattern concerning cross-national solidarity emerges, involving those parties which are in favour of the redistribution of migrants and that also support redistributive financial measures ([Chapter 4](#)). On the one hand, no difference among different party voters can be detected regarding European refugee solidarity, as the majority of each group is highly supportive; this goes against what Maggini (2018) argues, as he finds that differences concerning the attitude of Italians towards refugees can be detected based on their voting preferences. Thus, the internal aspect of European refugee solidarity is not a divisive issue within the Italian diaspora. On the other hand, also concerning fiscal solidarity, the picture is overall positive, but some voters show a more significant solidaristic attitude than others. The specific responses indicate that most voters of all parties, apart from those of the centre-right coalition and M5S, highly support the NGEU. In contrast, as for establishing a common fund to help member states in case of need, only the voters of PD, M5S, and Verdi/SI are highly in favour of it. Therefore, the emerging pattern shows that the share of the sample more in favour of cross-national solidarity tends to vote either for PD or Verdi/SI, part of those mentioned parties engaging more with the issue (fig. 11). This result is in line with the findings of previous studies, which saw that voters of centre-left parties are those expressing more positive attitudes towards refugees, as well as more significant support for policies aiming at redistributing risk and resources among member states based on need, especially recovery funds (Bremer et al., 2021; Pellegata & Visconti, 2022). Nevertheless, it must be noted that even if centre-right parties do not openly support fiscal solidarity, right-wing voters are still in favour of these measures, although to a lesser degree than other voters. The fact that centre-right voters do not oppose these redistributive measures is a trend already noticed concerning nationals of southern European countries, mainly Italians (Mariotto & Pellegata, 2023).

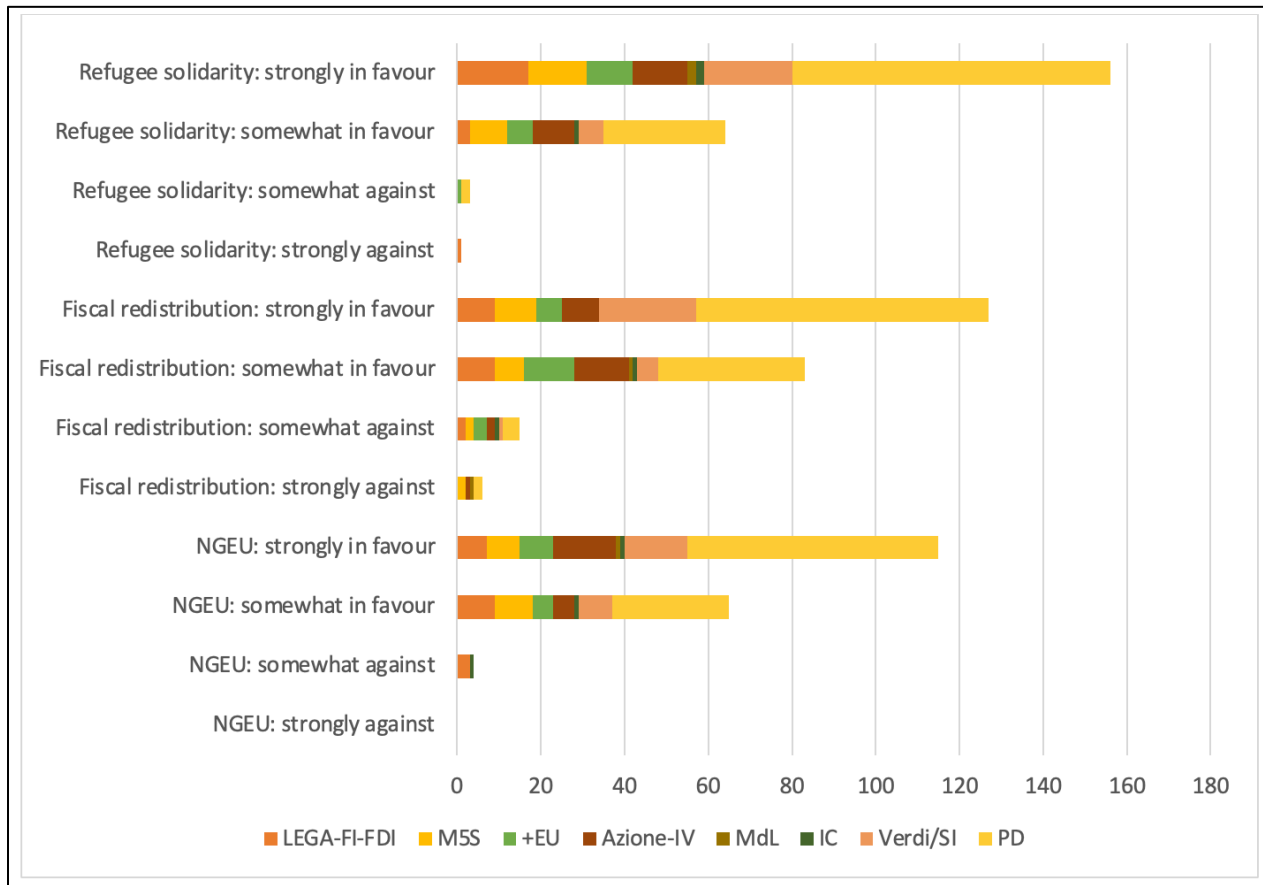
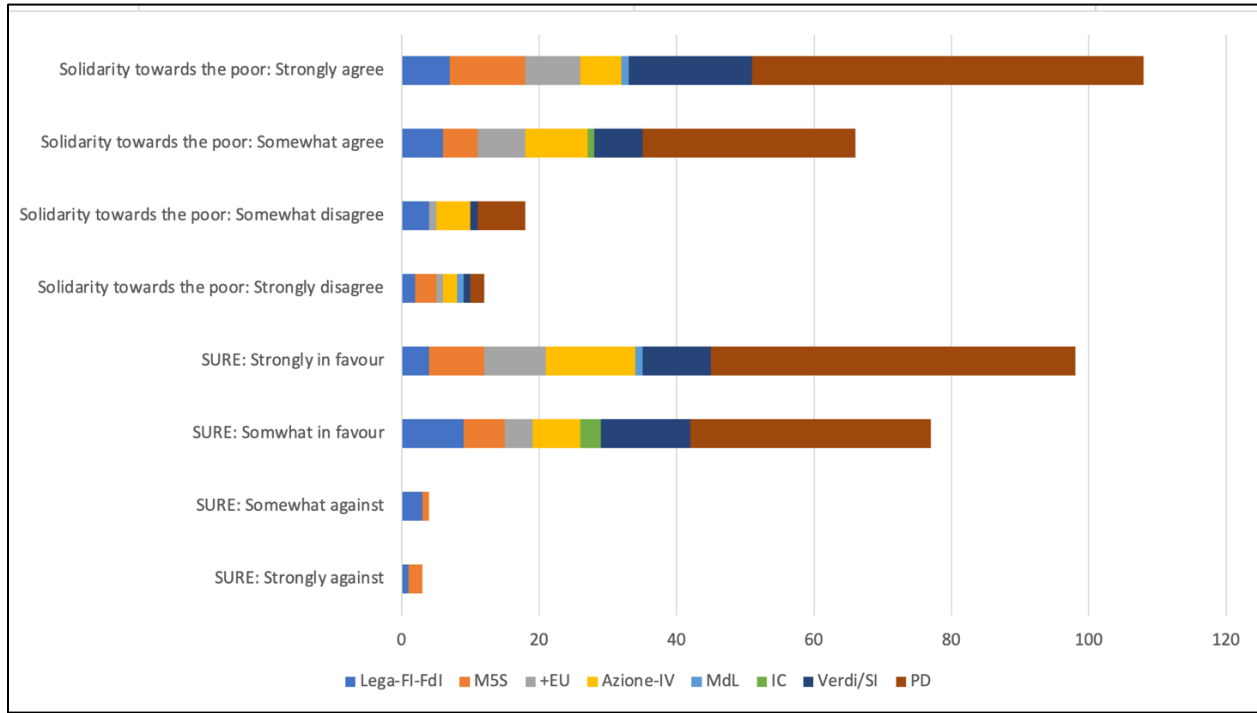


Figure 11. Redistribution of cross-national solidarity preferences per voted party.

Concerning European welfare state solidarity, it has been noticed that some parties refer to social policies in more solidaristic terms than others. A pattern can be identified showing that most of those expressing highly favourable stances on European welfare state solidarity tend to vote either for M5S, PD, or +EU, which are among those parties engaging more with this European solidarity dimension by supporting the European Pillar of Social Rights (fig. 12) (Chapter 4). Concerning the preferences expressed by voters, again, no main difference can be detected regarding the level of agreement that transnational individuals should be granted the same social security benefits as the nationals of the country where they reside. Conversely, more nuanced positions emerge concerning the help given to impoverished or unemployed European citizens. On the one hand, measures to help people in a poverty situation gather high support from most respondents except most of those voting for Azione-IV and IC. On the other hand, the propensity to help the unemployed, measured through support for the SURE, is more moderate among those voting for Lega-FI-FdI, Verdi/SI, and IC. This trend, therefore, shows that the left-right divide does not significantly impact the Italian diaspora support for the unemployed, as not only centre-right voters but also centre-left ones

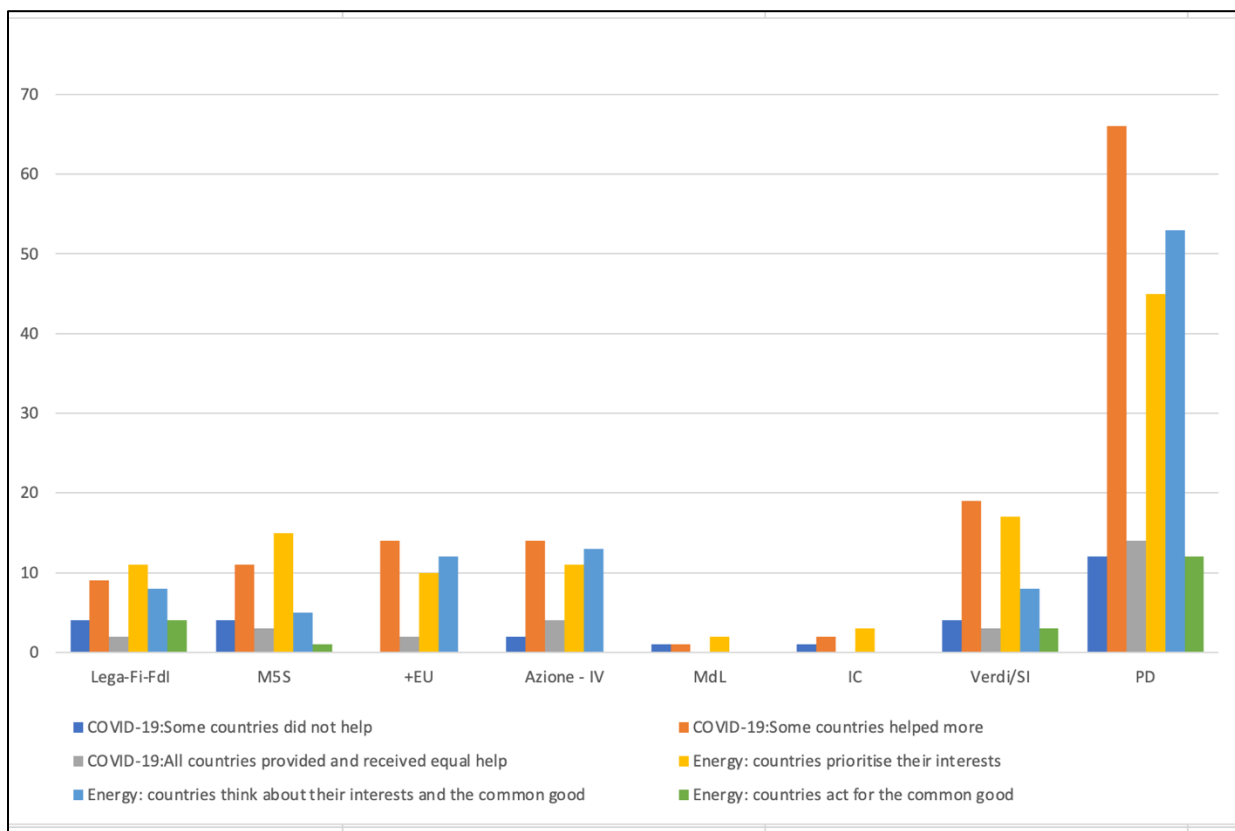
tend to be more cautious in this regard, even though still mainly in favour. This finding contradicts what was found in previous research on Italians (Maggini, 2018).



*Figure 12. Redistribution of interpersonal European solidarity preferences per voted party.*

Crises are a central theme in the different manifestos, especially the pandemic and energy crisis (Chapter 4). In some cases, they are referred to as examples or turning points for solidarity, and references to the level of solidarity among member states at the European level are also made. A pattern is identified concerning voters with a more positive perception of solidarity in times of crisis and who highly value those EU measures aiming to help countries and citizens face the consequences of these situations. They tend to vote either for Azione-IV, PD, or +EU (fig. 13). Survey respondents' overall satisfaction with solidarity among member states during these crises is relatively low. Most respondents agree that some member states provided more help than others during the first year of COVID-19 (Chapter 5). The majority of voters of all parties agree with this stance, therefore revealing no significant differences regarding the left-right divide detected in the pandemic's early stages, as seen at the time (Fontana, 2020). Concerning the energy crisis, the perception of the majority of the sample that EU countries are just thinking about their national interests is reflected in most party voters' opinions, except those voting for +EU, PD, and Azione-IV. Their voters have a slightly more optimistic view, as most argue that member states are

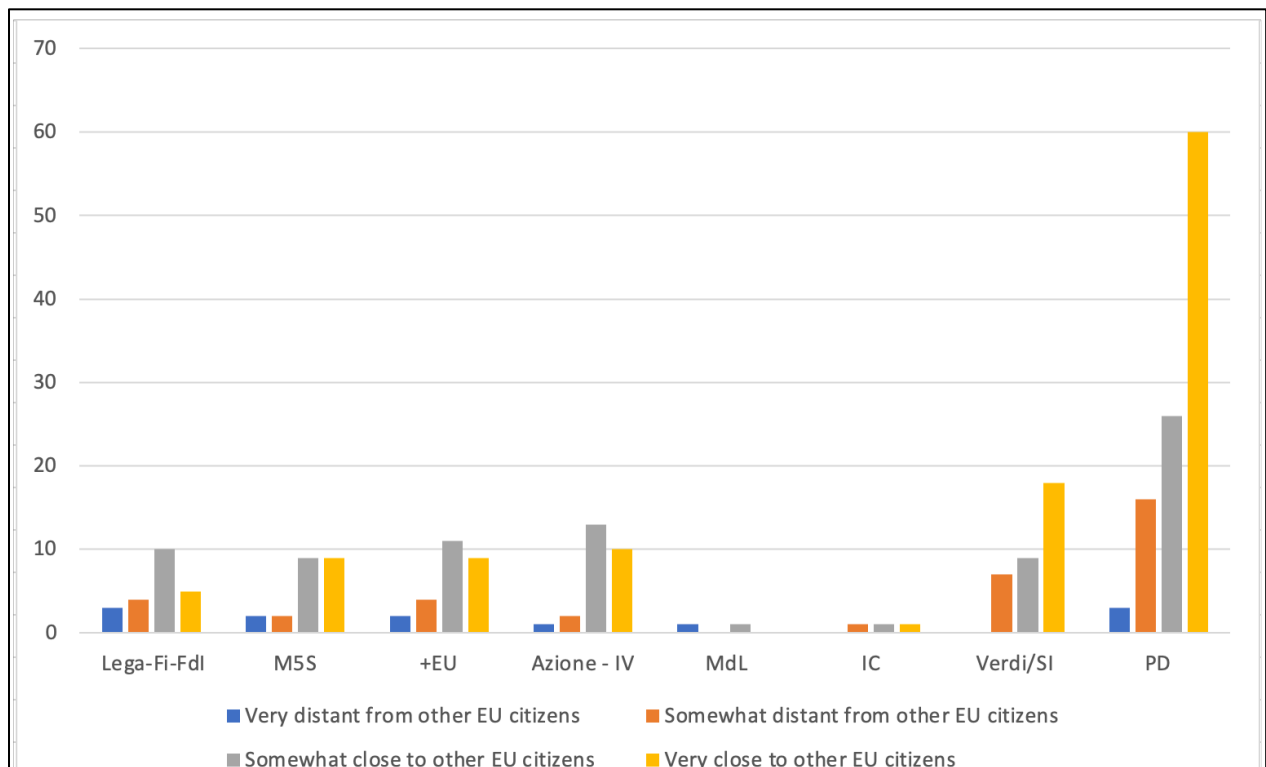
defending their national interests while advocating for the common good. Concerning the specific measures implemented to counter the mentioned crises, it has been illustrated earlier that the NGEU gathers a wide range of highly favourable voters, apart from those of the coalition Lega-FI-FdI and M5S. The same goes for the SURE, as most party voters highly support it except those of the centre-right coalition, Verdi/SI, and IC. The proposal for a Council Regulation to tackle the issue of high energy prices also gathers high levels of consensus, with no noticeable differences among the different party voters except those of Lega-FI-FdI, which tend to express more moderate support.



**Figure 13.** Redistribution of responses concerning solidarity in times of crisis per voted party.

Concerning the closeness among European citizens, it can be seen that only the majority of Verdi/SI and PD voters feel very close to other Europeans (fig. 14). These parties are among those engaging more with European solidarity, solidaristic Europe, and Europe of solidarity as concepts in their manifestos. The analysis of the manifestos ([Chapter 4](#)) also detects additional themes among the different parties' stances, similar to those emerging from the responses justifying the closeness to other EU citizens. Namely, these refer to several European values and rights, the sharing of these

with other Europeans and the sharing with them of the same condition as EU citizens. The concepts of union and unity and the issue of differences also emerge. The latter is predominant only among Lega-FI-FdI voters; in the case of all the other parties, their voters are among those respondents who primarily justify their closeness to other citizens through the claim that they perceive a unitarian sentiment within the European citizenry, with which they share the same origins, needs, challenges, cultures, values, and rights.



*Figure 14. Levels of closeness to other European citizens expressed by voters of each party.*

## 6.2 Conclusions

Drawing from the results, I argue that Italians living abroad with a more positive perception of European solidarity tend to vote for parties that engage more explicitly with European solidarity during their electoral campaign. The majority of the sample express positive attitudes and high levels of support, confirming that Italians are in favour of European solidarity regardless of their vote choice, even though different levels of favour are detected (Mariotto & Pellegata, 2023). This result aligns with the findings from the parties' manifestos, as it has been seen that no party directly opposes European solidarity. However, different levels of engagement are detected.



The argument is visible in the case of PD; it is among those parties more openly praising European solidarity in its manifesto along all dimensions analysed. Its voters, who are overrepresented in the sample, also show the most positive attitudes towards all the dimensions of European solidarity measured. The same can be said concerning +EU, another party belonging to the centre-left whose voters present highly positive attitudes towards all dimensions of European solidarity except redistributing financial resources among member states, which gather slightly lower support. Also, Verdi/SI and Azione-IV are among those parties engaging with European solidarity to a greater extent, though the first more and more explicitly than the second. Their voters are also among the ones expressing more positive perceptions of the issue, as voters of M5S. However, in the case of M5S, these perceptions vary more depending on the European solidarity dimension under study, even though the party expresses a high degree of support for European solidarity in its manifestos. The voters of those parties that engage with European solidarity to a limited extent, that is, IC, Lega- FI-FdI, and MdL, even though still expressing mainly positive attitudes, are those who tend to be more moderate supporters of the measures analysed or critical of the level of solidarity among citizens and member states. In particular, the results concerning IC are more ambiguous. It refers to European solidarity in its manifesto but not as extensively as others. The issue appears to be divisive for its electorate. However, it is worth noting that the lack of data concerning the party's voters may dictate this result.

The findings of this study differ from previous ones concerning European solidarity voting, namely the ones of Pellegata & Visconti (2022) on the 2019 European elections. They noticed that, concerning Italians, European solidarity positively influenced voting for M5S and FI. In contrast, it was negatively associated with the vote choice for Lega and the Left—a coalition including *Sinistra Italiana*, now Verdi/SI—and did not impact voting for +EU, PD, or FdI. In contrast, here I argue that in the case of national elections, specifically the 2022 Italian general elections, European solidarity highly increased the chances of voting for PD above all, as well as +EU, Verdi/SI, Azione-IV, and M5S, and decreased the odds of voting for Lega-FI-FdI and MdL. It probably did not influence choosing to vote for IC, even though this is difficult to determine due to the scarcity of data available. Different factors might explain the differences with the study of Pellegata and Visconti (2022). First of all, these might be dictated by the sample, as the survey responses show that the Italian diaspora under study presents very high levels of favour towards all different European solidarity dimensions analysed ([Chapter 5](#)). Additionally, survey respondents are people who voted in the last elections and therefore are at least to some extent politically engaged, and the majority is left-wing, all elements that predict a higher endorsement of solidarity stances (Ciornei & Recchi, 2017; Grasso & Lahusen, 2020). A second factor might be the changes in the Italian

political landscape, as different parties are now present compared to 2019 ([Chapter 4](#)). Thirdly, there is a difference between national and European elections; European elections are second order and therefore considered less relevant (Hix & Marsh, 2011). The difference between the types of elections is also visible in how parties run; for instance, Lega, FI, and FdI presented as a single coalition in this last electoral tournament with a joint short manifesto. Still, they run separately in European elections as they are affiliated with different political groups in the European Parliament, promoting different stances (European Parliament, 2023). This difference might also explain why, in Pellegata & Visconti's (2022) findings, they saw that voting for FI, the more moderate party within the right-wing coalition, was positively associated with support for European solidarity. In contrast, here, the results are different as the party is considered together with the others of the coalition.

To conclude, I argue that European solidarity did play a role in the vote choice of the Italian diaspora in the countries under study in the last Italian national elections. Parallels between the voters' views on European solidarity and those expressed by the running parties in their manifestos have been detected, consistent with findings from the extant literature on the Italian elections concerning other EU issues (Dehousse, 2013). On the one hand, these patterns specifically concern people expressing highly positive perceptions and the parties significantly engaging with the issue. On the other hand, those voters who are more critical, even if still in favour of solidarity, tended to prefer parties for which European solidarity is less salient. To the latter category belong parties classified as part of the centre-right of the political spectrum and IC, part of the centre-left, for which a deep estimation of its voters' positioning in terms of solidarity was not possible. Voters highly supporting European solidarity preferred centre-left parties and others, such as the third pole and M5S. Therefore, rather than arguing that European solidarity structured vote preferences along the classic left-right divide, which is deemed relevant in the case of other European voters but less concerning Italians (Mariotto & Pellegata, 2023), I argue that it affected voting behaviour by dividing between parties that highly and more explicitly engage with the issue and those that do not oppose European solidarity but engage with it to a lesser extent. These conclusions are resumed in the next chapter, where their limitations are also discussed, and the agenda for future research is set.

## **7. Conclusion**

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**T**he thesis has investigated the European solidarity perception of the Italian diaspora in the EU. The aim is to understand how this affects voting behaviour in national elections of Italians living abroad and whether European solidarity can be considered a voting factor. This study contributes to understanding how an EU issue and, therefore, a supranational matter affects voting behaviour in national elections, specifically, the role played by European solidarity, which has not been addressed in this context yet. It offers a relevant contribution as it highlights that previous studies' results concerning the vote choice of Italians in the European elections and the relative influence of European solidarity differ from the ones obtained here (Pellegata & Visconti, 2022). Further research could engage more in-depth with the issue to better understand the possible explanatory factors behind this divergence and consider other voting factors to assess better the degree of European solidarity's influence on the vote, which was not done here. The thesis also contributes to filling the gaps in the literature on the voting behaviour of Italians abroad by focusing on the last Italian general elections of September 2022, the ones after the two constitutional modifications were implemented, and investigating a possible factor explaining this behaviour, particularly an EU issue, by arguing that European solidarity affected their vote choice in the mentioned elections. It also confirms what was previously theorised concerning transnational individuals and their higher propensity to support European solidarity (Ciornei & Recchi, 2017).

This study considers Italians living either in France, Belgium, or Germany when the elections were held. A post-electoral survey was designed and distributed to understand their perception of European solidarity. As expected, the findings generally show a significant solidaristic attitude of the Italian diaspora under study towards all European solidarity dimensions considered: cross-national solidarity, entailing the internal aspect of European refugee solidarity and fiscal solidarity; European welfare state solidarity including European social citizenship and interpersonal European solidarity; and finally, European solidarity in times of crisis. This great wave of support might be explained by the sample's composition, especially by the transnational characterisation of the respondents. No significant differences among the countries under study were detected ([Chapter 5](#)).

Through the survey, brand-new data could be collected, which gave valuable insights into the topic and allowed the research to make a relevant academic contribution. Nevertheless, this research is not free from limitations. First of all, as highlighted in [Chapter 5](#), the sample is skewed in representativeness, as most respondents have a high level of education, a stable job position, and present left-wing political orientations (mostly voting for PD). Therefore, the results on which the argument is based could be dictated by this skewing and could be different if another sample is considered. Future research could try to ensure more rigorous data collection to obtain results representative of the Italian diaspora, at least regarding voting preferences. Second, the focus is on Italians living in France, Belgium, and Germany. The reasons behind the choice are explained in [Chapter 3](#); however, these are only Western European countries. Therefore, despite the size of the diaspora residing in these countries, it is hard to argue that the results obtained concerning these countries can also be valid for the Italian diaspora in other EU member states. This research could be expanded by considering Italians residing, for example, in Eastern European countries to see if differences can be detected concerning the influence of European solidarity. The same kind of research could then be conducted concerning other diasporas in the EU.

The survey results have then been juxtaposed with those from the parties' manifestos to see if common patterns between Italians abroad perceptions of European solidarity and the voted parties could be detected and, therefore, if these could justify their vote choice. The manifestos analysed are those of the parties or coalitions running for the European voting college. From the analysis, as expected, it emerges that European solidarity is highly politicised, and no party openly opposes it. Still, different degrees of engagement with the topic along the different dimensions analysed emerge. Those engaging more and in a more explicit way are PD, Verdi/SI, M5S, +EU, and Azione-IV. These mainly belong to the centre-left but also include the third pole and M5S. IC, part of the centre-left, and the centre-right coalition, still mention European solidarity but do not engage with the issue significantly. MdL barely refers to it ([Chapter 4](#)). The main themes identified around the topic match the ones detected in the survey.

When putting these themes in relation to the ones from the survey responses, the patterns identified reveal that European solidarity did play a role in the voting behaviour of Italians living in France, Belgium, and Germany during the last Italian general elections. To formulate an answer to the research question, **“How does the European solidarity perception of the Italian diaspora influence their vote in national elections?”** I argue that preferences for European solidarity structure the vote choice of the Italian diaspora following the degree of engagement of parties with European solidarity during their electoral campaign rather than between left-right wing parties. It is true that overall, the entirety of the sample expresses positive attitudes concerning

European solidarity, but some nuances can be detected depending on the voted party. Those mostly in favour of European solidarity vote above all for PD. Voters of +EU, Verdi/SI, Azione-IV, and M5S tend to be positive. Even though voters of Lega-FI-FdI and MdL still express mainly positive attitudes, they tend to be more moderate supporters of the measures analysed or critical of the level of solidarity among citizens and member states. The results concerning IC are inconclusive.

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## Appendix

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### **Italians Living Abroad: A Post-Electoral Opinion Survey**

#### **1. Purpose of the survey**

The purpose of the following survey is to inquire about the perception of Italians living abroad over some EU-related issues and their participation in the last Italian parliamentary elections (September 2022). This survey is a data collection instrument for realising Nicole Molinari's master's thesis at Leiden University. The research will investigate the perception of European solidarity of Italians abroad and the possible influence it might have had on the national vote.

#### **2. Who can take part in the survey?**

This survey is directed towards people with Italian citizenship who voted in the last Italian parliamentary elections (September 2022) while living abroad in France, Belgium, or Germany. If you do not meet all the mentioned criteria, please do not complete this survey.

#### **3. Structure of the survey**

To provide your answer, select the box of the answer you deem correct or fill in the blanks. It will take around 10 minutes to complete the survey, which includes 25 questions. The survey features four different sections:

- The first section features some questions on your opinion on some issues concerning the European Union and its current situation;
- The second part further inquire by asking how you perceive the measures implemented by the EU concerning COVID-19 and the energy crisis;
- Another set of questions is focused on your participation in the last Italian parliamentary elections (September 2022);
- The last section asks you to provide some personal information.

#### **4. Usage and storage of the data**

Nicole Molinari will be the only person responsible for the data collection, storage, management, and analysis. The survey is anonymous; the data collected will be used only for the aforementioned purpose, stored just for the time necessary for the research purposes, and protected by technological means until their deletion. The data will be presented in the thesis in an aggregated way without possible identification of the respondents.

#### **5. Informed consent**

By ticking the box on the first question, you voluntarily accept to participate in the survey and consent to the treatment of your data. Therefore, you declare that: you have read the explanation relative to the study, been informed about the scope of the research, and have been reassured about the confidentiality of the personal data collected throughout the survey.

Thank you in advance for participating and taking the time to complete the survey! In case of any doubts or questions, you can reach out to Nicole Molinari at [n.molinari@umail.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:n.molinari@umail.leidenuniv.nl).

**1. Do you voluntarily accept participating in the survey based on what was declared above?**

- I do accept participating in the survey.
- I do not accept participating in the survey → please do not complete this survey.
- 

**2. Did you vote in the Italian parliamentary elections of September 2022?**

- Yes, I did vote.
- No, I did not vote → please do not complete this survey.
- I do not remember → please do not complete this survey.
- I do not have the right to vote → please do not complete this survey.
- 

**3. At the time of the elections, in what country were you residing?**

*This refers to people who have lived in one of these countries for at least three months.*

- Belgium
- France
- Germany
- Other → please do not complete this survey.
- 

**4. What is the first word that comes to your mind if you think of European solidarity?**

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**5. To what extent would you be in favour of establishing a binding system of equal redistribution of migrants among all EU member states?**

- Strongly in favour.
- Somewhat in favour.
- Neither in favour nor against.
- Somewhat against.
- Strongly against.

**6. To what extent would you be in favour of establishing a common EU fund, to which EU member states contribute based on their wealth, to help any EU member state potentially facing severe economic and financial difficulties in times of crisis?**

- Strongly in favour.
- Somewhat in favour.
- Neither in favour nor against.
- Somewhat against.
- Strongly against.

**7. To what extent do you agree that the EU should help all European citizens in a situation of poverty, even if this would mean that EU member states would have to pay more in terms of contribution to the EU?**

- Strongly agree.
- Somewhat agree.
- Neither agree nor disagree.
- Somewhat disagree.
- Strongly disagree.

**8. To what extent do you agree that, in the country you indicated as your residence, you, as a European citizen, should receive the same social security benefits as the nationals of that country?**

*Social security benefits include health assistance, family, disability, and retirement benefits.*

- Strongly agree.
- Somewhat agree.
- Neither agree nor disagree.
- Somewhat disagree.
- Strongly disagree.

**9. Considering the current situation in the European Union, do you feel...**

- Very close to citizens in other EU countries.
- To some extent close to citizens in other EU countries.
- Not very close to citizens in other EU countries.
- Not at all close to citizens in other EU countries.
- I do not know.

**10. Can you express the main reason motivating your last answer?**

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**11. Especially in the first year of the pandemic, EU member states have helped each other by sharing medical supplies and treating patients from other countries. In your opinion, would you say that...**

- All EU member states received and provided equal help.
- Some EU member states provided more help than others.
- Some EU member states provided help, while others did not help at all.
- I do not know.

**12. By referring to the current energy crisis, would you say that, to tackle it at the EU level, EU member states are...**

- Acting jointly for the common good of all EU member states.
- Defending their national interests and advocating for the common good at the same time.
- Prioritising their national interests.
- I do not know.

**13. The next set of questions will ask you to provide your opinion on some measures taken by the EU to tackle the COVID-19 and energy crises. In general, would you say that you are...**

- Fully aware of these measures.
- Aware to some extent of these measures.
- Not really aware of these measures → please skip to question 17.
- Totally not aware of these measures → please skip to question 17.

End of section 1

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**14. The EU has designed a recovery plan of more than 800 billion euros, NextGenerationEU, to support the economy of EU member states through grants and loans. The largest share is available for those countries hit the hardest by the pandemic and that present a weaker economic situation. What is your opinion of such a plan? Are you...**

- Strongly in favour.
- Somewhat in favour.
- Somewhat against.
- Strongly against.

**15. The temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency is an instrument through which the EU provides loans to those EU member states that must spend more because of the pandemic to prevent mass unemployment. What is your opinion of such an instrument? Are you...**

- Strongly in favour.
- Somewhat in favour.
- Somewhat against.
- Strongly against.

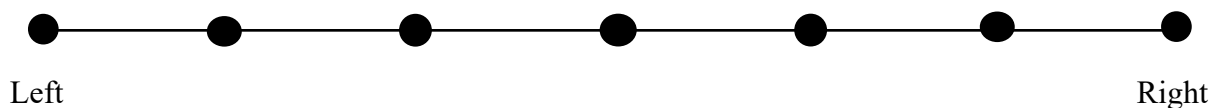
**16. In the proposal of the Council of the EU to address high energy prices, it is foreseen that member states can voluntarily decide to employ part of surplus profits made by energy companies to contribute to common EU measures against the crisis. To what extent would you be in favour of turning this into a mandatory contribution?**

- Strongly in favour.
- Somewhat in favour.
- Somewhat against.
- Strongly against.

End of section 2

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**17. People talk of "the left" and "the right" in political matters. On a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 stands for "left" and 7 for "right", which number best describes your position?**





**18. In the September 2022 Italian parliamentary elections, which party or coalition did you vote for the Chamber of Deputies?**

- Alleanza Verdi e Sinistra.
- Azione-Italia Viva-Calenda.
- Impegno Civico Luigi di Maio-Centro Democratico.
- Lega per Salvini Premier-Forza Italia-Fratelli d'Italia.
- Movimento delle Libertà.
- Movimento 5 Stelle.
- Partito Democratico-Italia Democratica e Progressista.
- +Europa.
- Other.

**19. In the September 2022 Italian parliamentary elections, which party or coalition did you vote for the Senate of the Republic?**

- Azione-Italia Viva-Calenda.
- Impegno Civico Luigi di Maio-Centro Democratico.
- Lega per Salvini Premier-Forza Italia-Fratelli d'Italia.
- Movimento delle Libertà.
- Movimento 5 Stelle.
- Partito Democratico - Italia Democratica e Progressista.
- Other.

End of section 3

**20. What gender do you identify with?**

- Female.
- Male.
- Prefer not to say.

**21. What is your age?**

*Please write only the number (e.g. "27")*

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**22. What is the highest degree you have acquired?**

- Middle school diploma or equivalent.
- High school diploma or equivalent.
- Bachelor's degree or higher.
- Prefer not to say.

**23. What is your current employment status?**

- Full-time worker.
- Part-time worker.
- Self-employed.
- Student.
- Retiree.
- Homemaker.
- Unemployed.
- Prefer not to say.

**24. How long have you lived in the country you indicated as your residence?**

*Please indicate the number of months (e.g. “3 months”) or years (e.g. “5 years”)*

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**25. Have you ever lived in another country (different from Italy and the one you indicated as your residence) for at least three months?**

Yes, I have.

No, I have not.

Prefer not to say.

End of section 4

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Thank you for participating and taking the time to complete the survey! In case of any doubts or questions, you can reach out to Nicole Molinari at [n.molinari@umail.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:n.molinari@umail.leidenuniv.nl).