The Political Construction of Immigration in Italy: opportunities, mobilisation and outcomes

Paul Statham

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Abstract

This article applies insights from social movement research to analyse the empirical case of the political construction of immigration in Italy (1985-1995). A model is developed for linking the field of mobilisation over ethnic difference to the context of opportunities which define the potential for social movements to impact on immigration. A key theoretical point is that political opportunities are constituted by combinations of discursive and institutional contexts that vary over time. Our comparison of three political responses to immigration (1986; 1990; 1995), shows that the politicisation of immigration has resulted in an increasingly more restrictive policy approach. Important in understanding this process was the collapse of the First Republic and with it the relative stability and political control provided by the established ‘centrist’ parties. This opened up a space for new cultural definitions for politics. A xenophobic social movement, the Northern League, was able to profit from this unusual situation and achieve some success in stigmatising immigrants in the public domain as a ‘cause’ of national problems.

Zusammenfassung

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1. Introduction

In the 1990s, the related topics of immigration and the presence of ethnic minority
groups have become the subject of political controversy across Western Europe. The
collapse of Communism brought new east/west migration flows, adding to the
south/north flows from the underdeveloped world. Most Northern European states had
already implemented restrictive immigration regimes in the 1970s, a strategy which
became reinforced in the collective construction of a ‘Fortress Europe’ in the 1990s. The
experience of Southern European countries has been somewhat different. Traditionally,
countries of emigration, they were late starters in establishing effective immigration
regimes. Indeed pressure from European Institutions has been an important factor in
initiating the national responses of most Southern European countries. In an era of
increasing European integration and common policies, Southern Europe has been
portrayed as the weak underbelly of the new Europe, through which ‘illegal immigrants’
enter European borders.

Political conflicts over the migration of people from one country have been the focus
of much research. However, there have been very few attempts to analyse cases of the
Southern European experience of political responses to immigration. This is surprising
when one considers the importance that such outcomes have for the European context,

1 This paper has been written within the context of the theoretical development of a comparative
European research project directed from the Department of the Public Sphere and Social Movements
at the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin (WZB). The author acknowledges the contribution of his
collaboration with Ruud Koopmans in this project to the theoretical approach. An earlier version of
this paper has benefited from a departmental discussion, and in particular, the written comments of
Friedhelm Neidhardt.

2 Joppke (1995) refers to ‘immigration regimes’ as the set of policies, actors and institutions that
regulate both the admission and the integration of foreign migrants into the host society. The term
‘regime’ thus extends beyond the limited notion of ‘policy’ to include modes of acculturating or
assimilating migrants.
and that in most cases ‘immigration politics’ has emerged within the last two decades. In this paper, we shall give a detailed analysis of the emergence and transformation of immigration politics in Italy by focusing comparatively on three major policy initiatives (1986; 1990; 1995).

Scholars have recently pointed out the relative lack of collective action and social movements perspectives in this field relative to the wealth of research on the structural, demographic and policy aspects of immigration and ethnic minorities (Rex 1994; Solomos and Back 1995). Considering the importance of the topic, it is also surprising that little attention has been paid to the interaction between ethnic minority groups, anti-racist movements and the extreme right, and the impact of mobilisation on the political formation of a country’s immigration regime.

In this paper, we adopt a theoretical perspective that builds on the insights of social movement research. More specifically, we give a cultural twist to the opportunity structure approach to mobilisation (e.g., Kriesi 1991, Tarrow 1994), and argue that ‘political opportunities’ should be seen as a combination of institutional and discursive contexts which vary over time. The empirical analysis compares three phases of political mobilisation over immigration, and assesses the impact of ethnic, anti-racist and xenophobic mobilisation on institutional outcomes. We present a theoretical model for linking mobilisation to a state’s political decisions on immigration. On one side, we ask to what extent the immigration policy decisions are a response to mobilisation and public reactions. And on the other, we look at the field of mobilisation over ethnic difference, and ask to what extent mobilisation contributes to the formation of a particular type of immigration regime. The major political decisions on immigration are considered as ‘outcomes’ of the interaction between the state elite and political parties, on one side, and social movements, on the other.

In the next two sections, we outline our theoretical approach to political opportunities and mobilisation over ethnic difference. This is followed by a section with historical background on the national specificity of the Italian case, by three sections on the empirical cases of political responses to immigration, and finally by a conclusion on the comparative findings.
2.1 Political opportunities for mobilisation: combining institutional and discursive approaches

In social movement research, the concept of 'political opportunity structure' (POS) (Eisinger 1973; Tarrow 1982, 1989 and 1994; Kriesi 1991; Kriesi et al. 1995) has been used for the constraining and facilitating role of institutional structures and power configurations in relation to the potential for mobilisation by social movements. Kriesi (1991), for example, identifies three broad sets of properties that constitute an opportunity structure for social movements to challenge a political system: a formal institutional structure; informal procedures and prevailing strategies for dealing with 'challengers'; and a power configuration that is relevant for confrontation with 'challengers' - a party system. Tarrow (1994) defines four dimensions: stability of political alignments; formal channels of access to the political system; availability of allies in the polity; and intra-elite conflict. The political opportunity structure perspective draws from the historical analyses of states and social revolutions (Skocpol 1979; Tilly et al. 1975) to focus on how the wider political context of a state facilitates or constrains levels of collective action. This contextual emphasis was also in part a reaction to the dominance of the resource mobilisation approach (Zald and McCarthy 1977), which using a rational choice paradigm focused on the 'internal' strategic use of resources by movements as the explanatory variable for collective action.

As an analytic model the political opportunity structure approach has been applied for comparing cross-national cases (Kitschelt 1986; Kriesi et al. 1995) and longitudinal cases of single countries (Tarrow 1989; Koopmans 1995). The strength of this approach lies in the attempt to relate collective action to the changing alignments within the institutional structures of political power, as the basis for testing 'causal' hypotheses. The impact, 'effects' and 'outcomes' of mobilisation by social movements may be explained by differences in the structural power alignments of the state and political system, either over time or between different national cases. A weakness of the political opportunity structure approach, however, lies in an overemphasis on institutional politics (in the narrow sense) at the expense of the public discourse, as the medium for the mobilisation of 'challenges' to the dominant perceptions of political reality. The political opportunity model has difficulty in including the 'collective identity' of a movement as a variable factor. This makes it difficult to explain, for example, why
when facing a similar set of structural conditions for mobilisation, one movement’s ‘collective identity’ may have more success in constituency building than another.

In contrast, the frame alignment model (Snow et al 1986; Snow and Benford 1988) emphasises the creative role that is played by movement organisations in constructing social problems. Here the ideational elements or ‘interpretative frames’3 which are mobilised by social movements introduce a process of identity formation and consensus building, whereby social problems become defined and the boundaries of conflict become drawn between the opposed collective actors in the public sphere. Relative to the political opportunity and resource mobilisation models, this discursive approach has the merit of taking the ‘collective identity’ that is mobilised by a social movement as a variable that can influence its chances for ‘success’. However, the framing perspective is deficient in other respects. It is unable to account for why some frames are successful in convincing the public, whereas other frames which at least hypothetically might be successful, are not. Moreover, some uses of frame analysis as a method have mistakenly given the impression that the ‘outcomes’ of frame mobilisation may be controlled by the social movements themselves.4 Such limitations have pointed to the need for a perspective which considers the interaction of movement frames with the wider dominant perception of political reality. This was provided by an extension of the model to the concept of ‘masterframes’5 (Snow and Benford 1992) and by the political discourse approach (Gamson 1988, Donati 1992). However, the attempt to explain the political outcomes of mobilisation solely on the basis of the type of frame mobilised,

3 ‘Frames’ are the conceptual tools which actors use to convey, interpret and evaluate information. Snow et al. (1986) draw the notion of cognitive ‘frames’ from Goffman (1972), who refers to ‘schemata of interpretations’ that enable individuals ‘to locate, perceive, identify and label’ occurrences within their life space and the world at large. By rendering events meaningful, frames function to organise experience and to guide action, whether individual or collective.

4 Diani (1996) call this the problem of ‘indeterminancy’ in the framing approach. ‘Ad hoc’ or even ‘post hoc’ descriptions of particular incidents may be given where movements happened to be successful, and the ‘causality’ of ‘success’ is then simply attributed to the ‘frame’ without taking into account the other variables.

5 Snow and Benford (1992) define the notion of ‘masterframe’ as a cultural contextual variable for what might be loosely termed the ‘emergent protest culture in a phase of protest action’. The basic thesis is that the frames which are mobilised by a social movement have more chances of succeeding in being taken up by a public constituency, when they conform to the overall ‘masterframe’ which carries the campaign into the public domain. Movement frames are thus linked and carried as a challenge to the dominant public perception of reality by a ‘masterframe’, which gives a cognitive ordering to the challenge. This concept of masterframe has also been applied empirically for analysing the structure of the protest culture for a specific protest campaign (Gerhards and Rucht 1992).
still suffers from a neglect of the importance of structural constraints and resources in determining outcomes.

Recently, there has been a convergence of perspectives within social movement research, so that political opportunities (contextual factors), mobilising structures (organisational resources), and framing processes (cultural resources), are now all considered important variables for studying the impact of collective action. Here we wish to continue in this tradition for linking collective action to political contexts, however we also advocate the utility of considering not only the institutional but also the cultural constraining and facilitating dimensions that operate as part of the 'opportunities' that are available for actors to construct collective action. In the following, we present a theoretical model that links the mobilisation by collective actors in the public sphere to their potential for impacting upon a state's politics.

The similar components for a 'political opportunity structure' given by Tarrow (1994) and Kriesi (1991), indicate that this may be considered an established concept for the constraining and facilitating dimensions of institutional structures and power configurations. Here we take the definition of Tarrow (1994) as our contextual variables for the structural dimension of 'political opportunities', namely: the stability of political alignments; formal channels of access to the political system; availability of allies in the polity; and intra-elite conflict. In addition to this and following our earlier critique of the conventional POS model, we wish to add a contextual variable for the cultural dimension of 'political opportunities', that we shall refer to as a 'discursive opportunities'. We shall now offer some remarks on this concept for a discursive dimension to 'political opportunities'.

For developing a discursive approach to social movements, the notion of culture as a 'tool-kit' for collective action (Swidler 1986) becomes pertinent in two ways. Firstly, Swidler's (1986: p.273) thesis that, 'culture's causal significance (is) not in defining ends of action, but in providing cultural components that are used to construct strategies of action', underlines that the framing approach to social movements should be embedded in a strategic understanding of collective action. This emphasises the constructionist perspective where frames are taken as symbols and abstract forms of

6 See McAdam, McCarthy and Zald (1996), who combine these three dimensions to provide the integrating structure for a volume by leading scholars in the social movements field. Internal debates
rhetoric rather than as grounded belief systems (Donati 1992). Secondly, Swidler makes
the distinction between ‘settled culture’ (traditions, common sense) and ‘unsettled
culture’ (ideology), which are identified as two types of combinations of ‘culture and
agency’ which impact differently upon social structure. She states (1986: 284), ‘Settled
cultures constrain action over time because of the high costs of cultural retooling to
adopt new patterns of action. In unsettled periods, in contrast, cultural meanings are
more highly articulated and explicit, because they model patterns of action that do not
‘come naturally’. Belief and ritual practice directly shape action for the community that
adheres to a given ideology. Such ideologies are, however, in competition with other
sets of cultural assumptions. Ultimately, structural and historical opportunities
determine which strategies, and thus which cultural systems, succeed.’

The distinction between ‘settled culture’ and ‘unsettled culture’ indicates that the
ability for actors to construct collective action is dependent on the stability of the
cultural context, which is itself variable over time. At times of ‘settled culture’ it is more
difficult for actors to construct ideological cultural challenges than at times of ‘unsettled
culture’, because ‘settled culture’ reinforces dominant existing modes of action.7
Applying this insight to the framing perspective, the mobilisation of a particular type of
frame is likely to have a different impact dependent on whether the dominant cultural
representation of reality is stable, a ‘settled culture’, or whether it is unstable, an
‘unsettled culture’. The ‘opportunities’ for the construction of an ‘effective’ collective
action frame are more likely to be favourable when the dominant cultural representation
of that political topic is ‘unsettled’ than when it is ‘settled’. This means that new frames
are most likely to emerge and become ‘effective’ in periods when a society has an
‘unsettled’ culture. This might be at times of general ‘uncertainty’ when ‘traditions’ and
‘common sense’ are challenged, or when a specific topic becomes the subject of intense
public debate leading to the emergence of a ‘new’ ideological cleavage in the dominant
culture. For example, the challenge presented to the dominant cultural model of ‘faith in
technology’ by the wave of uncertainty surrounding the unknown consequences of the
Chernobyl accident in 1986, provided an unprecedented opportunity for the

within the social movements field have shifted to disputes about the relative importance of these
dimensions.

7 Swidler puts this in the following terms (1986: p.281), ‘(S)ettled cultures constrain action by
providing a limited set of resources out of which individuals and groups construct strategies of
action.’.
environmental movement to mobilise its message into the public mainstream. At such
times the actors with the cultural tools to provide new meaning to uncertain situations
have a chance to challenge the tradition, but as Swidler points out, even successful
challenges become embedded over time into defining the new structural context of
opportunities. After a cycle of cultural innovation and testing in the public discourse,
they became the new tradition and common sense and normatively embedded into
institutional outcomes.

The point regarding the existence of cultural contextual variables has been relatively
neglected so far in social movement research. In the framing model, the idea of culture
as a ‘tool-kit’ has been combined with the resource mobilization approach to show how
movement organisations use culture as a resource for strategic action. However there
have been few attempts to show how structural and cultural variables combine
differentially over time at the macro-level, to define the ‘opportunities’ which are
available for ‘effective’ collective action. We propose to fill this gap by defining the
‘opportunities’ for collective action by combining the two sets of contextual variables,
‘political opportunities’ and ‘discursive opportunities’.

By introducing the concept of ‘discursive opportunities’8, we apply a cognitive twist
to the conventional notion of political opportunity structure, to denote the symbolic and
discursive field where certain ‘frames’ achieve legitimacy as being ‘sensible’
constructions of political reality within the public sphere. Frames are mobilised by
collective action as a ‘challenge’ to the dominant representation of political reality in a
culture. When successful, they become lodged in the public discourse, where they
compete with other frames to shape the dominant culture.9 We define the public
discourse as more than a process of intertextual activities, it is a cultural field that some
actors are able to use to dominate others. In societies where politics is based on

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8 The analytic concept of ‘discursive opportunities’ is an attempt to bring a systematic treatment to the
discursive dimension of collective action. It draws in part from the theoretical work of Klaus Eder
(see esp. 1996: III), who points out the tendency of social movement research to refer to the
‘discursive’ dimension of collective action as a ‘catch phrase’ instead of applying careful analytic
treatment. His own public discourse perspective moves considerably beyond this by looking at the
‘institutionalisation’ of social movements as a normative process whereby they start to interact with
other collective actors in an interorganisational field. Hence movement organisations may continue to
exist beyond their initial protest function by being active in the public discourse and are not always
‘swallowed up’ by political institutions which incorporate their issue as another ‘interest’.

9 As stated, our notion of discursive opportunities draws on ‘public discourse analysis’ (Eder 1996)
(Statham 1996) and the understanding that ‘political opportunities’ are themselves cognitive
con structs (Gamson and Meyer 1996).
mediated information, the role of the public discourse of the mass media is essential in linking the political actors who hold power, to the collective actors who support and challenge them, and the public constituencies who provide them with legitimacy. The mass media constitute for the 'discursive opportunities' in a society, what the political institutions are for 'political opportunities'.

From a structural perspective, it is possible to give an explanation for the impact of collective action on the basis of cleavages in the institutional structures and power configurations, i.e. the structural dimension of 'opportunities'. From a cultural perspective, it is possible to give an explanation for the impact of collective action on the basis of cleavages within dominant representation of political reality in the public culture, i.e. the discursive dimension of 'opportunities'. We argue that the most fruitful approach is to analyse the combinations of structural cleavages and cultural cleavages that define the contextual potential for collective action to have an impact on the direction of social change at a given time. 10

Political opportunities (dominant power configurations embedded in the political institutions) and discursive opportunities (dominant 'masterframes' in the public culture) may be seen as relatively autonomous sets of variables that may be different over time, sometimes combining more dependently, and sometimes more independently. From this perspective, the contextual potential for collective action to have an impact on social change may be determined by the different combinations of 'political opportunities' and 'discursive opportunities' that are available for constructing collective action over time. 11 At any given time, the state and political institutions may be more or less receptive to collective action by a specific actor, but at the same time the public discourse may also be more or less receptive to the same actor's collective action frames. However, as in a liberal democracy the dominant culture provides legitimacy to political institutions, the relation between the contextual variables for political opportunities and discursive opportunities cannot be entirely independent. At some

10 A similar theoretical perspective to ours is presented by Margaret Archer (1988) who argues for the utility of analytic separation of the structural domain and cultural domain as the basis for a model explaining the dynamics of cycles of social change over time. She states (p.305), 'social organization and cultural organization are analytically separable. Once this is done it becomes possible to assert that discursive struggles are socially organized and that social struggles are culturally conditioned.'

11 Recent attempts in social movement research to define the context for collective action by a combination of political-structural variables and political-cultural variables, are those by Diani on the Lega Nord (1996) and by Koopmans and Statham on the extreme right in Italy and Germany (1998).
times, however, liberal democratic states have a capacity to resist high levels of public dissent or a 'legitimacy' gap. This was the case, for example, in the survival of the Italian First Republic for more than forty years with one of the weakest civic cultures in Europe. This indicates that the relation between political opportunities and discursive opportunities cannot be entirely dependent either.

We argue that the contextual potential for constructing 'effective' collective action will be dependent on the interplay between these political institutional and public discourse variables over time. This will define the 'political opportunities' for collective action. Whether or not social movements are able to take advantage of such 'opportunities', will also depend however on their organisational capacity for mobilising 'internal' structural and cultural resources to construct 'effective' challenges to the state.

The different possible combinations of political opportunities and discursive opportunities define the different contextual 'scenarios' which face a challenging actor. By combining the contexts when political opportunities are more or less favourable with the contexts when discursive opportunities are more or less settled, we arrive at a four fold typology of 'opportunities' for mobilisation. These four different ideal type 'scenarios' of political opportunities are represented in Figure 1.

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12 For an interesting discussion on this, see Morlino and Tarchi (1996).
Figure 1: Four ‘Scenarios’ of Opportunities for Challengers in the Public Sphere

Political Opportunities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>favourable</th>
<th>unfavourable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘full response’</td>
<td>‘ideological challenge’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>defines ‘masterframe’</td>
<td>mobilises ideological challenge as cleavage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unsettled culture as new basis for politics</td>
<td>into public sphere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>settled culture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discursive Opportunities

| ‘interest mediation’         | ‘survival at margins’                             |
| represents ‘interest’         | attempts to sustain ‘internal’ resources          |
| as a lobby group to political institutions | for marginal collectivity |

For example, when the dominant political representation of a topic is relatively stable (‘settled culture’), then it is likely that structural cleavages within the polity will define the context of ‘opportunities’ for the movement challenge. During times of ‘settled culture’, a first ‘scenario’ is when the political institutions are receptive to a type of collective action. In such cases, a movement is likely to be incorporated as an ‘interest group’ into the political system, because its frames are not ideologically opposed to the dominant representation of the topic and present few difficulties for being included within the dominant political culture. This situation is represented in the bottom left hand corner of figure one.

Another ‘scenario’ occurs when there is a ‘settled culture’, but the political institutions are unreceptive to collective action. In such cases, the political institutions may simply resist the movement by refusing to take up an issue as a new ‘interest’ despite not being challenged with an opposed ideology by the actor’s frame. This might describe the position of a relatively impotent lobby group or alternatively a marginalised collective group that is only able to mobilise sufficient internal resources to maintain its existence. This situation is represented in the bottom right hand corner of figure one. It
is likely that facing such problems in the long term, the group would either cease to exist or change its strategy. For example, it might elect to mobilise a frame that does ideologically challenge the dominant representation of the topic, and which is difficult to include within the dominant representation of political culture. This strategy would constitute the attempt to build a public constituency for a challenger frame, and if successful, it might lead to a destabilisation of the dominant representation of topic, and a condition of ‘unsettled culture’ for the political culture with respect to the particular issue.

When the dominant representation of a topic is relatively unstable and the subject of ideological disputes (unsettled culture), this presents another context for collective action. At times of ‘unsettled culture’ for a topic, it is likely that cleavages in the dominant political culture become a relatively more important factor in defining the ‘opportunities’ facing social movements. A third ‘scenario’ is when the political institutions are unreceptive to collective action despite the condition of an ‘unsettled culture’. This situation is represented in the top right hand corner of figure one. At such times the collective actor attempts to mobilise a challenge by using an ideological frame for the topic which draws on a counter-culture which is opposed by the dominant political culture. This is the case of a social movement which attempts to mobilise further dissent against the dominant political culture for the topic and build a public constituency that is sizeable enough to ‘pressurise’ the political institutions into becoming more receptive. Even when they succeed in building large public constituencies, however, such movement strategies are not always successful in translating public dissent into an opportunity for introducing political change. As mentioned earlier, liberal democratic political systems have a capacity to resist mobilised public dissent, either by repression, or alternatively by excluding certain groups or issues on a relatively permanent basis.

On the contrary, our fourth ‘scenario’ is at times of ‘unsettled culture’ for a topic, when political institutions do become receptive to the challenge of collective action. In such cases, the ideological frame mobilised by a challenger becomes the basis for a ‘re-alignment’ in the dominant political culture for representing a topic, and this ‘new consensus’ inheres in a transformation of the dominant ‘masterframe’ and the power relationships within political institutions. This situation is represented in the top left hand corner of figure one. Gamson’s (1990) discussion of movement ‘outcomes’ refers
to this as a situation of 'full response' to a social movement. It represents one of the rare occasions, when due perhaps to regime collapse or social revolution, the dominant political culture for a topic is transformed to incorporate a former challenger ideological frame. The former challenger ideology becomes the 'new' tradition and common sense within the political culture and structurally embedded as the new basis for legitimacy within the political system. The example cited in the research by T.H. Marshall (1950), regarding the incorporation of the working class movement into the state by the establishment of a social welfare system, is a case of such a combined realignment of political culture and structural change.

It should be clear that the four 'scenarios' which we have briefly outlined are 'ideal types' of combinations of political and discursive opportunities that may confront a challenger. The 'scenarios' are macro-contextual variables that are defined in relation to the particular identity and structural resources that constitute the 'internalised' properties of an actor. This means that when several different challengers are mobilising 'competitively' over a particular topic, the 'scenario' facing them will be different dependent on their 'internal' properties, although they may be mobilising simultaneously and within the same field for collective action.13

2.2 Challenging immigration politics: ethnic, anti-racist and xenophobic mobilisation

Following the theoretical model developed above, the empirical case studied will attempt look at the extent to which political opportunities and discursive opportunities combined to define the national context in which different types of collective actors (state bureaucracies and political parties versus social movements) were able to influence the national process of defining an institutional action strategy (embedded in a policy statement) for dealing with immigration. We apply our theoretical model to a historical study of the emergence of political controversies over immigration in Italy, from the early eighties to recent times. We compare the three major transformations of immigration policy, the 1986 law, the Martelli law 1990, and the Dini decree 1995, to

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13 For example, when the extreme right and anti-racist movements mobilise at the same time challenging a state's immigration politics, the 'scenarios' for the two movements will be different because of their different 'internal' properties in relation to the macro-contextual variables for opportunities which are present.
look at the different combinations of opportunities that have defined the context for mobilisation by collective actors and impacted upon the development of the Italian immigration regime.

We have outlined that the potential for mobilisation over the issue is defined by the interplay of two factors: firstly, political opportunities, the level and type of access to the political elite and state institutions; and second, discursive opportunities, the level and type of public debate on the topic, and the dominant ‘masterframe’ in the political culture. We analyze the political opportunities for mobilisation ‘success’, by looking at the relative degree of access of the mobilising actors to the political system and institutional decision-making processes. This requires looking at conventional POS factors, such as the sponsorship by elites and political parties, the degree of access to policy makers, the level of state repression (especially for the extreme right), and inclusion within the party system. For the impact of the discursive opportunities on the chances for mobilisation ‘success’, we look at the cultural cleavages within the political culture and national identity. Particular attention is given to the cleavage over ‘ethnic difference’ for defining the relationship of who ‘belongs’ to the national political community, namely the process of self/other definition that defines the collective identity. For this we refer to the level and style of the dominant public thematisation of the immigration issue in the mass media, as well as opinion poll data, and the public claims of actors.

As the focus of our research is the potential impact of mobilisation a key variable will be the level of collective action in the public domain. It should also be noted that cleavage structures within the dominant political culture and political system that occur independently of the immigration topic, for example due to the collapse of the political system, can also produce unexpected ‘opportunities’ for mobilisation and shape resultant ‘outcomes’.

One factor which somewhat complicates our model is that the cultural cleavage that is constructed over immigration politics exists as a ‘field of mobilisation’. By this we mean that immigration politics is a contested issue field where several different types of collective actors mobilise competing versions of political reality, each attempting to provide the dominant interpretation for institutional action. This means that when the national context of ‘opportunities’ for mobilisation changes, then there will be a period of competition between the collective actors, and most likely phases of mobilisation and
counter-mobilisation. In the attempt to bring a systematic basis to our analysis, we define three ‘ideal type’ strategic orientations of mobilisation that together constitute a ‘mobilisation field over immigration politics’ in the public sphere: ethnic mobilisation; anti-racist mobilisation and xenophobic mobilisation. These three types of mobilisation compete to define the relationship of immigrants within the national community. The distinction enables us to differentiate between the types of mobilisation which on the basis of the strategic orientation of their action within the immigration issue field. The categories are broad and may include different actors. Thus, for example, by xenophobic mobilisation, we refer not only to waves of racist attacks, but the political campaigns of extreme right parties, and racist statements by leading public figures. Before moving on to the empirical analysis, we attempt to sharpen this distinction between ethnic, xenophobic and anti-racist mobilisation.

By *ethnic mobilisation*, we refer to autonomous collective action by foreign migrants and ethnic minorities. This type of collective action uses a ‘collective identity’ frame for ‘ethnicity’ as the basis for making demands on the state. In this type of mobilisation, the group defines itself as a collectivity by using a shared construction of ‘ethnicity’, for example as ‘immigrants’, ‘blacks’, ‘Africans’, that positions it strategically in relation to the national culture. Typically these demands will request greater measures of social and political equality, and/or cultural recognition for ‘non-nationals’ and the ‘culturally distinct’. By definition the mobilisation of such demands into the public discourse defines a set of ‘minority interests’ within the dominant national culture. In the case of ethnic mobilisation, groups construct a collective action frame which redefines the relationship of their group within the national community, by demanding a revision of political or social rights, or a redefinition of the basis of cultural belonging to the nation.

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14 The use of the term ‘ethnic’ sometimes wrongly gives the impression that these are ‘primordial’ culturally homogeneous groups that have simply been transported from one society to another. On the contrary, many diverse cultural groupings may exist within an ‘ethnic community’, and although kinship and familial ties may be carried in some cases from the country of origin to the country of destination, many ‘communities’ of ethnic minorities are formed and shaped by common experiences in the receiving country. The use of ‘ethnicity’ as the basis for a collective identity is a strategic dimension of collective action, thus the term ‘black’ is used by some British organisations to enable Asian and Afro-caribbeans to mobilise jointly. For an excellent study on the strategic use of ethnic labels in collective action by different sections of the Pakistani community in British local politics, see Werbner (1991).

15 Here we take ‘collective identity’ in the sense of a resource which is constructed by the process of ‘self’ and ‘other’ definition between the ethnic group and dominant culture. Thus the formation of a collective identity constitutes part of a strategy for collective action that has rational objectives. For a similar perspective on collective identity, see Eisenstadt and Giesen (1995).
In many cases, ethnic mobilisation constructs an ‘inclusionist’ frame in relation to the dominant culture of the nation state, as the actors are demanding some form of social integration within the society.

By *anti-racist mobilisation*, we refer to collective action by groups from the dominant culture that campaign for foreign migrants and ethnic minorities. This type of collective action uses a collective identity that is defined from *within* the dominant national culture, but which refers to the presence of foreign migrants and ethnic minorities in a ‘protective’ way, by asserting a basis for their inclusion within the national community. Typically anti-racist mobilisation invokes the universal and civil rights that are part of a national identity in a liberal democracy, and demands ‘solidarity’, ‘tolerance’ and ‘humanitarianism’ as the basis for a public response toward the presence of foreign migrants and ethnic minorities. Another important dimension of anti-racist mobilisation is an intolerance toward racist and xenophobic actors, and demands may be made on the state to uphold its civic code by repressing such organisations and mobilisations. In this sense, anti-racist mobilisation is an umbrella category for a wide range of actors which may include the Catholic Church, trade unions, Green parties, the voluntary sector, and anti-fascist activists. Anti-racist mobilisation constructs collective action frames that operate from *within* the dominant culture of a society, and which redefine the relationship of foreign migrants and ethnic minorities to the nation, by demanding that the state upholds its obligation to universal and civil rights and the need for mutual tolerance. In many cases anti-racist mobilisation attempts to bring a re-alignment of the dominant political culture toward a more ‘inclusionist’ frame for minorities.

The third type of mobilisation we refer to is *xenophobic mobilisation.* This is collective action by groups from the dominant culture that campaign against the presence of foreign migrants and ethnic minorities. Xenophobic mobilisation challenges the liberal democratic notion of ‘pluralism’ by demanding a more restrictive basis for membership to the political community, one that is based on an exclusionary definition of the ‘ethnic majority’ within the national culture. Xenophobic mobilisation constructs a collective identity based on ‘ethnic belonging’ to the nation that challenges the civic

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16 Our use of the term ‘xenophobic’ here is not limited to the psychological fear of foreigners, but includes all racist action forms in the public sphere. Such reactions may range from demands for
culture of the state. Hence extreme right parties and racist groups often use an ideology of ‘ultra-nationalism’, that constructs membership to the nation as an attribute of cultural heritage rather than as a given set of civil and social rights. Xenophobic mobilisation, like its anti-racist opposite, makes demands from within the dominant culture of a society. In contrast, however, xenophobic mobilisation constructs a collective action frame which redefines the relationship of ethnic minorities and foreign migrants to the nation, by attempting to make ‘ethnic difference’ a criterion for excluding minority groups from the rights and acceptance, which the ‘ethnic majority’ achieve as full members of the nation. In many cases xenophobic mobilisation attempts to bring a re-alignment of the dominant political culture toward a more ‘exclusionist’ frame for minorities.

Clearly, these three types of strategic mobilisation occur within the same issue field of political conflict. They are also interrelated. Anti-racist and ethnic mobilisation are linked by common aims and overlapping constituencies, whereas xenophobic mobilisation is related to ethnic and anti-racist mobilisation by the process of movement-countermovement dynamics. All three types of mobilisation that we have identified strategically attempt to redefine the relationship of ethnic minorities and foreign migrants to the nation state. They do this by constructing collective action frames which attempt to introduce a process of frame alignment into the collective identity of the nation state. Anti-racist and ethnic mobilisation usually seeks to extend the existing basis for membership within the national community, by mobilising ‘inclusionist’ frames which challenge the dominant ‘masterframe’ that is embodied in the state’s policies for immigration and treating minorities. On the contrary, xenophobic mobilisation challenges the state’s dominant ‘masterframe’ with ‘exclusionist’ frames that define foreign migrants and ethnic minorities outside the national community. These types of mobilisation compete in the public sphere to challenge the established way of dealing with foreign migrants and ethnic minorities. At some times they will have greater chances of success than others. We now turn to the emergence of immigration politics in Italy, in the attempt to see under what conditions

expulsion, physical attacks, and racial and cultural abuse, to racial discrimination resulting in minorities having less rights than full citizens.

17 Obviously this is not always the case, for example, with Islamic fundamentalism that is a case of ethnic mobilisation which is not strategically oriented toward greater social integration within the nation.
the different types of mobilisation are likely to succeed in influencing the way that a society defines itself, by defining the criteria by which it includes or excludes ‘others’. Before comparing the three periods of immigration policy formation, we offer some background comments on the national characteristics of cultural cleavages and migration flows in Italy.

3. The Italian case of cleavages over ‘cultural difference’ and migration patterns: historical background

The geographical and political location of Italy, as a Mediterranean peninsula at the Southern border between Europe and Africa and at the border of the West with the Communist bloc, has characterised a country that has been ‘made’ of contrasting cultures and conflicting identities. This cultural diversity is expressed in the continuing national conflict between North and South, and communal rivalries between regions, localities and even neighbourhoods. A historical legacy of the relatively late formation of the nation state, has been the persistence of loyalties to the family and locality which have militated against the establishment of a ‘modern’ civic national culture. For our present discussion, these factors are important as defining characteristics for the model of national identity and citizenship that forms a ‘tradition’ for the reception of ‘culturally different’ migrants.

Italy was founded on the basis of a compromise between many different regional territorial ‘political communities’ rather than a belief in the descent of a single ‘political community’. It presents a case where membership to the ‘political community’ constitutes a formal definition for national belonging, but where ‘primordial’ definitions of the community, such as the family and the locality, remain a strong focus of cultural ‘belonging’. The attempt to find a way of integrating these ‘internal’ conflicts over cultural cleavages and enforcing unity, has shaped the history of Italian politics to the present day.18

In the post-war First republic, religious affinity to Catholicism and attachment to the family as the natural order of society became a dominant focus for national identity.

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18 Roger Griffin (1996:1) notes that the statement by Massimo d’Azeglio ‘We have made Italy; now we must make Italians’ is still as pertinent today as when it was made 135 years ago.
This was embodied in the centrist ideology of Christian Democracy, which dominated
the state for 45 years, by excluding the extremist and secular sub-cultures of
communism and neo-fascism from political power. In the cultural sphere, civic beliefs
remained weak in contrast to cultural attachments that were defined in party political
allegiance. Patron-client relationships defined within party political affiliation
monopolised the state. This relationship was structurally embedded in the practice of
_lottizzazzone_, where the leading political parties of the centre, the Christian Democrats
(DC) and the Socialists (PSI), divided the resources of state patronage between their
respective clienteles. Partycratic control of the state produced a ‘centrist’ ideology that
promoted national unity by shifting from anti-communism to anti-fascism as the
extremist ‘threats to democracy’. That allegiance was defined within party political
allegiance rather than national identity, helps to explain the paradox of why, despite
registering the highest levels of dissatisfaction with democracy compared to other
European member states\(^{19}\), successive electorates continued to supply sufficient
‘legitimacy’ to the practices of the political system for it to survive intact until the early
1990s.

The flow of migrants to and from Italy has followed a pattern that is typical of
Southern Europe. Traditionally, Italy was a country of net emigration supplying labour
to the industrial centres of Northern Europe. There was also a considerable amount of
migration within Italy from the rural South to the urban North. When most Northern
European countries restricted labour recruitment from the Mediterranean after the
seventies oil crisis, Italy became a country of net immigration.\(^{20}\) Immigration is thus a
relatively ‘new’ phenomenon and was also ‘unplanned’ in that the state did not
strategically recruit foreign labour to fuel a period of economic expansion. Immigrants
came from nearby countries (ex-Yugoslavia, Albania) and former colonies (Libya,
Eritrea, Somalia), but also from sub-Saharan African and East Asian regions, which
until then had supplied few migrants to Europe. During the 1980s alone the legally
‘regular’ foreign population in Italy increased sixfold. According to official statistics,

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\(^{19}\) Between 1973 and 1993 the percentage of Italians who were rather dissatisfied or very dissatisfied
with the working of democracy was always more than 24 % higher than the percentage of other EC
countries (Morlino and Tarchi 1996:p.47). In the 1987 Eurobarometer no.27 poll, 30.7 % of Italians
responded that they were very or fairly satisfied with the functioning of democracy in their country,
which was the lowest ranking of the twelve member states (Flickinger and Studlar 1992: p.9).

\(^{20}\) Descriptions of recent migration patterns to Italy can be found in Barsotti and Lecchini (1994), Vasta
however, the level of foreign population in Italy remains relatively small, comprising
1.4 percent of the population in 1990, compared to 8.2 percent in Germany, 6.4 per cent
in France, and the 3.3 per cent in the United Kingdom (SOPEMI 1992 p.131). Although
Italy became a country of ‘net’ immigration at a time of increasing domestic
unemployment (Veuglers 1994), economic ‘pull’ factors were also a factor for
immigrants. After the economic crisis of 1974-5, Italy’s GDP grew by more than 50
percent in fourteen years, six percentage points above the average of the European
member states (Ginsborg 1996: p.21).

As it emerged as a nation from the attempt to integrate ‘internal’ cultural differences,
it might be expected that the Italian notion of national membership would experience
less difficulty for incorporating foreign immigrants and ethnic minorities than other
countries. Unlike many Northern European states, the strong cultural dimension of
Italian national identity was defined in a territorial notion of locality, producing internal
conflicts between North and South, rather than defining the national community in
opposition to other countries. However, the control of the centrist parties made it
difficult for the state to deal with group interests that were outside the boundaries of
centre-party belonging. With respect to foreign immigrants, the state did not embody a
national ideology which excluded immigrants on the basis of ‘ethnicity’, but neither did
it have a way of dealing with people who had no voting rights and offered few resources
as a clientele. The resultant outcome was that there was little rationale for politicians to
take up immigration as an issue, until it became an issue for their clienteles within the
national community. Italian national identity was not especially ‘exclusionary’ in the
sense of being overtly hostile to foreign immigrants on the basis of their ‘ethnic
difference’. Yet the political culture was resistant to recognising the presence of foreign
migrants who were ‘culturally different’ as a national political concern. Hence the
particratic Italian state literally ‘ignored’ immigration and the issue of rights for
immigrants, until forced by the external pressures of international obligations, and in
particular membership of the European Union, to respond to the structural fact that new
waves of immigrants were entering Europe by Italian borders.
4.1 Political mobilisation and the 1986 Law: Immigration as a 'hidden' issue

Prior to 1986, Italian immigration law was an anachronistic collection of international agreements and constitutional obligations. Some statutes dated from the Fascist era, failed to conform to the European Parliament's recommendation 990 in 1984, and even contradicted the Italian Constitution which upholds the right of asylum, and equal civil and social rights for foreign residents.21

The period of the 1986 legislation was characterised by a combination of general cultural stability with a stability of alignments within the political system. This 'settled culture' was embodied within the Italian 'particratic' political system, where the Christian Democrats (DC) and Socialists (PSI) provided the dominant ideologies and controlled the resources of patronage within the state. This raises the question of what rationale was there for initiating any form of policy response to the immigration issue, if it was not a contested part of the political culture? One event which made the ruling political parties take account of immigration politics, however, was the preliminary discussion over a common initiative for the control of borders held in June 1985 with other European Union countries. The pressure to be a full member of the 'European Union' project exerts a considerable influence on Italian domestic policy.

Although it was given some attention by the state bureaucracy, immigration had not yet become a issue over which there was an ideological cleavage within the public sphere. Public opinion focused little on the plight of immigrants. Italians saw the presence of immigrants as temporary and unrelated to national affairs. Even when Socialist Prime Minister Craxi related the terrorist attacks of August and December 1985 to the presence of immigrants, the debate in the mass media focused on the numbers of immigrants present, and not on their social conditions, questions of rights, or their 'threat' to society. The relationship of foreign immigrants to national community was thus only thematised in a way that established the presence of immigrants as a 'social fact'. There was little normative debate about the consequences of this new 'fact'. In a country where 'cultural difference' becomes the basis of internal communal conflicts between North and South, and different regions, localities, cities, towns and neighbourhoods, immigrants were not defined as a public issue as they were

21 For details of Italian immigration policy before and after 1986, see Veuglers (1994); Campani (1993); Vasta (1993); Caritas (1995); and ISMU (1995).
not considered part of the public.22 Regarding public reactions to immigrants, the findings of the European Parliament report (1985: 46) that, 'Italy is certainly one of the countries of Europe with the lowest number of racialist (sic) incidents' (p. 46), is probably accurate in asserting that there was a low level of racist intolerance against foreigners. This apparent tolerance of immigrants was backed up by an official myth that as a country which had a long tradition of emigration, Italians had a special empathy for immigrants. However, this myth of 'tolerant' or 'pre-racist' Italy (Balbo and Manconi 1992) becomes significantly relativized, when one considers the long standing tradition of xenophobia and racist discrimination by Northern Italians against migrants from Southern Italy, as recently as 1989, a southerner was beaten to death by northerners (Ford 1991: p.67). The point to make for our analysis, is that at this stage there was little public attention paid to foreign immigrants, and even then it was not defined on the basis of their 'ethnic difference'. Cultural cleavages over 'ethnic difference' remained defined within internal communal politics.

Following our analytic model, this relative absence of discursive opportunities, meant that the opportunities for mobilisation over the relationship of foreign immigrants to the national community, were defined by factors relating to the political institutional setting. Opportunities for ethnic, anti-racist and xenophobic mobilisation were defined by the access of their sponsors to political institutional and state resources, and in particular their relationship with the two dominant political parties.

In the case of ethnic mobilisation, unfavourable political opportunities combined with a low level of 'internal' cultural and institutional resources to make the construction of collective action, and even the formation of 'ethnic' organisations, extremely difficult. At this stage, attempts at ethnic mobilisation were restricted within a 'survival at the margins' challenger strategy (figure 1), whereby immigrants had difficulty in establishing a collective identity in the public sphere and were unrecognised by political institutions. Immigrant labour was mainly absorbed into the large 'informal' sector of the Italian economy, and employed illegally. This 'illegality'

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22 Even the 1987 Eurobarometer opinion data shows that in contrast to France, Germany and Britain where 'cultural otherness' is defined in relation to the largest indigenous 'ethnic' immigrant community, Italians followed the pattern of other Southern countries by referring to Northern European countries. Although such data is rather crude, it supports the thesis that 'ethnic' immigration was a relatively non-thematised topic in Italy. For a discussion on this topic see Gerhard, Fuchs and Roller (1995).
of immigrant labour was more an outcome of the incapacity of the state to ‘formally’ regulate the labour needs of the economy, than the individual choice of the immigrants to break the law.\textsuperscript{23} However, the absence of legal status for many immigrant workers, meant that they had no formal basis on which to demand political recognition from the state. Attempts at mobilisation might result in deportation, which created high disincentives for autonomous political organisation. Structural factors also limited the potential for the collective organisation by immigrants: their relatively low numbers, the wide variety of their cultural backgrounds, their uneven regional dispersal across the country, their poverty, and their insecure type of labour in the ‘informal’ and ‘seasonal’ economies. Ethnic mobilisation was apolitical and limited to a survival strategy of establishing of community support networks at the local level.

Regarding anti-racist mobilisation, the opportunities for sponsoring the case of foreign immigrants were defined within the ideological framework and political power of the dominant parties. The demand for a ‘legalisation’ of the status of immigrant workers was taken up on the political backstage by an alliance of organisations from the dominant culture. What we refer to as anti-racist mobilisation was constituted by a plethora of Catholic organisations, secular organisations that had previously served Italian emigrants, and trade unions. Catholic organisations such as Caritas and Comunita di Sant’Edigio provided social assistance, charity, meeting places and shelter for immigrants. Organisations such as the Fernando Santi Institute and FILEF (federation of emigrant workers) started to concern themselves with the question of immigrants rights, and trade unions made limited attempts to offer social provision and raise the issue of immigrant workers rights (Campani 1994). The emergence of the immigration bill on the political agenda provided an institutional opportunity for galvanising this diverse set of organisations into a latent political movement. The Comitato per una legge guista (committee for a just law) served as an umbrella organisation to integrate these different ideological factions into a loose collective group, which campaigned for a ‘legalisation drive’ and attempted to raise public awareness towards the difficult social conditions of immigrants (Veuglers 1994). The relationship of foreign immigrants to the national community was placed within an ‘inclusionist’ frame by drawing on the established

\textsuperscript{23} According to official estimates about 10 million people are employed in the ‘informal’ sector of the economy in Italy (SOPEMI 1995: p.9). Informal law breaking was a widespread and tolerated feature of the ‘particratic’ state, and indeed helped the state to function.
traditions of Catholic charity and socialist solidarity within the dominant culture. These organisations were able to campaign on behalf of immigrants by using internal channels of access to the ruling Christian Democratic and Socialist parties. However, the collective identity of the ‘pro-immigrant lobby’ did not present an ideological challenge to the parties but merely served to emphasise their moral obligations within their respective party ideologies. In this way, anti-racist mobilisation represented foreign immigrants by using a challenger strategy of ‘interest mediation’ (figure 1) whereby the diverse organisations ‘unified’ to lobby their different patrons in the partycratic system. This had the important effect of making immigration a cross-party but relatively non-thematised political issue.

At this stage there was relatively little potential for xenophobic mobilisation. Immigration had not been thematised as an issue of ‘ethnicity’ in the public domain. Thus there were few discursive opportunities for collective actors to mobilise popular support by highlighting the ‘cultural difference’ between immigrants and the national community. In any case, the collective identity of the neo-fascist Movimento Sociale Italiano - Destra Nazionale (MSI-DN) was based on a fascist heritage that was fervently anti-communist and anti-systemic. The MSI mobilised a challenge to the Italian political system on the basis of an ideological cleavage that was deeply embedded in the political culture of the First Republic. This ‘nostalgia for fascism’ was defined in the historic struggle against the Communist party (PCI), and the partycratic system where the other ‘resistance’ party, the Christian Democrats, permanently excluded the MSI from power. Consequently, there was little ideological space for the MSI to integrate a xenophobic position on immigrants within its worldview. At this stage, the MSI did not mobilise an ‘exclusionist’ collective action frame for immigration. However, the party did make use of their institutional presence in the legislature to object to the immigration bill at the early committee stage. The three dissenting MSI deputies on the committee eventually agreed to abstain on the vote in exchange for union representation on the new advisory board on immigrant affairs (Veuglers 1994: p.37). This political opposition should be interpreted as part of the ongoing challenge by the MSI to the partycratic system and an

24 On the ideological position of the neo-fascist MSI in the First republic, see Cinquant’anni di nostalgia - la destra italiana dopo il fascismo - ‘fifty years of nostalgia - the Italian right after fascism’ (Tarchi 1995). For the definitive work on the MSI see Il polo escluso - ‘the excluded pole’ (Ignazi 1989).
attempt to gain institutional resources within the process of party power brokerage. The neo-fascists did not thematise the issue of immigration itself.

In 1986, the immigration bill was carried on the ‘political backstage’ through the parliamentary committee process. It became Law 943 with cross-party support and the abstention of the MSI. By positioning their demands and the interests of immigrants in an ‘inclusionist’ frame defined by the notions of Catholic charity and socialist solidarity, the pro-immigrant lobby were able to prevent competition between the major parties over the issue and achieve a limited impact on the resultant legislation. However, the main rationale for the new law stemmed from a bureaucratic necessity to monitor the changes that had taken place and bring the country into line with European and International agreements. It initiated the first ‘regularisation’ drive for immigrants. Its policy measures applied specifically to non-EU immigrants, giving them the same formal labour rights as Italian workers (in accordance with ILO 143. 1975), and entitlement to social, health and education services, family reunion, and the right to maintain cultural identity. The law also outlined the obligations of employers and public agencies and linked further immigration flows to labour market demand. However, all these rights were dependent on the ‘regularisation’ of immigrants to legal status.

The measures defined in the emergent Italian immigration regime represented some gains for immigrants, and provide evidence for the successful impact of anti-racist mobilisation. Such a notion is qualified though by the fact that the policy norms indicate little more resolve than an attempt to meet minimum international requirements. The absence of a ‘masterframe’ in the public sphere on the topic of immigration meant that the political parties had little impetus other than bureaucratic necessity for ensuring that the policy was implemented. Hence although the policy had an ‘inclusionist’ orientation on paper that was defined within the dominant cultural norms, there was an absence of political will by the parties to take up an issue for which public attention was low.

4.2 Political mobilisation and the Martelli law 1990: Immigration as a ‘politicised’ issue field

As a first half-hearted attempt, the 1986 policy failed to provide a rational and coherent immigration regime. It lacked an integrated approach to immigration, a provision for
asylum, and a realistic appreciation of the social conditions of immigrants. The inefficiency of the state bureaucracy in implementing measures which required the cooperation of local administrations, the police and regional labour offices was also a factor. About a hundred thousand immigrants used the amnesty to 'regularise' their status, but at least twice as many did not. The limitations of the new immigration regime were acknowledged when Prime Minister De Mita instructed the Minister for Social Affairs to draw up a new bill for immigration in December 1988. However, when faced by other competing domestic issues, the political parties of government and their ministries lacked the commitment to act on the immigration issue.

The impetus for stirring the politicians into action was provided by an unprecedented mobilisation of public opinion on the issue of immigration. In August 1989, a black immigrant Jerry Masslo was murdered by a group of local youths, in Villa Laterno, Calabria. This incident became the focus of national media attention which carried the story and thematised the presence of immigrants within the national community for the first time. Newspaper editorials and commentaries from a broad range of the political spectrum advocated social tolerance towards immigrants, pointing to the Italian experience of emigration. Racism was presented as uncivilised and a tradition that was alien to Italy. This media construction of public outrage led to a unanimous public condemnation of the murder by all the major political parties. Within the governing coalition, the Socialist party (PSI) showed the political will to act in deed as well as by words, and was instrumental in pushing through an 'emergency' decree. Decree Law 416 on immigration was introduced in December 1989. This type of emergency legislation lasts for sixty days, it was then passed in amended form (see below) as the so-called Martelli Law n.39, taking the name of the Socialist Minister who was its main instigator, in February 1990.

Following our theoretical framework, the interesting feature of this period was that whilst the alignments within the political institutions remained similar to the earlier period, providing a context of general political stability, the focus of media attention on the presence of immigrants within a normative framework of condemning racism, constituted the first public thematisation of the relationship between 'ethnic' immigrants and the national community. The symbolic construction of the 'good' ethnic immigrants, who were simply exercising their right to do what many Italian emigrants had done before, was contrasted with the 'bad' racist perpetrators, an undesirable
minority from the national community. This was the first time that an ideological cleavage over the position of foreign migrants within Italian society had been raised within the public culture as a topic related to ‘ethnic difference’. The media attention provided a brief phase of instability within the immigration issue field, whereby the relationship of Italian society to these culturally different ‘others’ was redefined in the public discourse. Immigration became an ‘unsettled’ dimension of a generally ‘settled’ culture, as the tradition and common sense of ‘tolerant Italy’ was challenged by the social fact of ‘racist attacks’. This media-driven public attention provided a phase of discursive opportunities for extra-parliamentary collective actors to mobilise political demands relating to this new ideological cleavage. In this sense, social movements had a chance to carry their demands into the mainstream of public culture, and ‘politicise’ the immigration issue. From the perspective of the political elite, the issue of immigration did not offer a threat to the authority of the partycratic system of government, hence the major political parties attempted to incorporate this ‘new’ public issue within their existing normative frameworks. Within the limitations of the political context, the discursive opportunities for mobilisation were enhanced. The question was how far could mobilisation, firstly, push the politicians into action, and secondly, challenge their normative framework for the issue?

In 1990, the potential for ethnic mobilisation had only marginally improved relative to the earlier period. The scope for improvement arose from the limited gains of resources from the earlier legislation. The amnesty on legal status and state provision of limited social assistance, had facilitated the internal mobilisation of organisational resources that was necessary for the formation of autonomous ‘ethnic community’ organisations. The question was whether these new ethnic organisations were sufficiently organised to take advantage of the new context of opportunities for political mobilisation that were facing them? In 1989, there were 70 associations for an ethnic or national group, 26 foreigner associations, and 13 Italian and foreigner associations. By 1991, this had risen to 266 ethnic group associations and 196 associations of both Italian and ethnic groups. These figures indicate that the formation of ‘ethnic’ organisations had started before the Martelli legislation but really took off after this period. It is also worth noting that in the post-Martelli period that there were a higher proportion of groups with a
'mixed' collective identity between the non-national and the Italian community. This indicates the importance of the role of anti-racist mobilisation in sponsoring the collective organisation of ethnic communities. In the pre-Martelli phase, however, the character of these organisations was largely 'apolitical' and they were largely 'self help' community networks, designed to provide information and meeting places for people facing a similar set of hardships. Concerning political recognition, about two thirds of the immigrants in the country remained 'illegal'\(^{25}\), and so formally detached from the national community. Hence all of the structural disincentives for collective action that were described for the 1986 case, still applied for a large percentage of foreign immigrants. Even the 'official' representatives of the ethnic communities were unable to mobilise a collective identity based on their shared position as immigrants. The 1986 Law had made provision for a consultative committee to the Minister of Labour and Social Security, which was intended to include six representatives of non-EC immigrant organisations, four union representatives, three employers' associations and four state experts (Zincone 1995: p.139). However, the inability of the different ethnic community leaders to express a common group cause meant that the number of represented organisations was increased to the unworkable figure of sixty, and that even this extremely limited opportunity for involvement in political affairs was wasted. The challenge of ethnic mobilisation remained a 'survival at the margins' strategy (figure 1), and although a latent network of organisations was emerging, these were unable to act collectively in making political demands on the Italian state. For the Martelli phase, ethnic organisations remained dependent on anti-racist mobilisation in the attempt to translate the discursive opportunity of favourable media attention into a political strategy for incorporating the promotion of immigrant interests into the institutional framework of Italian politics.

To what extent was anti-racist mobilisation able to utilise the discursive opportunity of the emergence of immigration as a public issue for constructing political action? At the peak of media attention for the racist murder, a huge mass solidarity march was organised in Rome in October, 1989, where demands were raised 'against racism, and

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25 The figure for 1989 is from an IREF study and the figure for 1991 from Census, both are cited by (Campani 1994:145).

26 After 'regularising' immigrants became more expensive to employers in the labour market than their 'illegal' competitors, since they achieved labour rights. This was a failing of the 1986 law which created a disincentive factor for 'regularisation', after which many immigrant workers would lose their jobs.
for immigrant rights and equality' (Campani 1993: p.518, 1994: p.147). The discursive opportunity provided by the media event, enabled a politicised sector of the pro-immigrant lobby to push their claims onto the public agenda for the first time. After the 1986 law, a new set of organisations formed, such as Italia-Razzismo in 1987, which politicized the relationship of immigrants within the national community and challenged the state with an ‘injustice’ frame demanding rights and recognition for immigrants. Moving beyond the calls for Catholic empathy and socialist solidarity of the voluntary sector, these new organisations demanded a non-racist Italian culture. Political rhetoric advocating ‘multi-culturalism’ and ‘solidarity with the Third World’ positioned the national community within a transnational context of moral obligations, whilst defining a special role for the Italian state as a Southern European country which could ‘bridge’ the North/South divide in prosperity. Although the size of this movement sector was relatively small, it was more autonomous from affiliation with the party system than the pro-immigrant lobby had been in 1986. This meant that it was able to provide the ‘cultural tools’ for politicising ‘ethnicity’ within an ‘inclusionist’ frame for the social integration of immigrants into Italian society.

When the media spotlight focused on the Masslo event, the immigration issue briefly became an unsettled dimension of the public culture. The anti-racist movement took this opportunity to use a strategy of ‘ideological challenge’ (figure 1), whereby it mobilised its ‘injustice’ frame into the public sphere. This radical frame had only minority support within the broadly defined pro-immigrant movement, however, it facilitated a process of frame alignment within the sector of the movement that was more closely related to the political mainstream. The resultant frame that was supported by Catholic, trade union, voluntary organisations was more moderate but nonetheless offered a political interpretation of the relationship of immigrants to the national community. Moreover, the apparent presence of an ‘inclusionist’ masterframe in the public sphere that was relatively unchallenged, appeared to offer a resource of public consensus for action by the political parties. When the Socialist party (PSI) sought to capitalise on this apparent public consensus for state action within an ‘inclusionist’ normative framework, the more moderate organisations within the pro-immigrant movement were able to use a strategy of ‘interest mediation’ (figure one) through their insider institutional channels to the major political parties. As ‘inclusionist’ norms had become momentarily the new common sense and ‘settled culture’, Catholic organisations, trade unions and the
voluntary sector were able to present themselves as experts on the plight of immigrants and gain insider access to the policy community. In this sense, radical anti-racist mobilisation was instrumental in establishing the issue field of immigration as a ‘contested culture’ (Gamson and Modigliani 1998) in Italian politics. In response to the political opportunities that emerged, moderate anti-racist mobilisation was able to define and mediate the ‘interests’ of immigrants and became incorporated into the political institutional framework, even administrating state funded provision.

Regarding the potential for xenophobic mobilisation, the ‘unsettled culture’ on immigration during the media attention for the Masslo event created a discursive opportunity that was paradoxically both favourable and unfavourable for the political expression of racist sentiments. The establishment of an ideological cleavage on the relationship between immigrants and the national community created an opportunity for the thematisation of immigrants, however, the mass media advocacy of tolerance toward migrants offered little news space for the expression of a racist counter-discourse. News reporting established a normative bias for the thematisation of immigrants that was unfavourable to xenophobic mobilisation. However, in contrast to the news coverage, it appears that public opinion on the presence of immigrants was less one sided. The opinion poll data shown in Table 1 shows that in both 1987 and 1989, a greater percentage of the population ‘who had noticed immigrants in their area’ thought that immigrants were disadvantageous rather than advantageous, 49.3 % versus 13.3% in 1987, and 43.1% versus 13.1% in 1989. These figures considerably relativise the notion of a media driven ‘pro-immigrant’ consensus among the general public, and indicate a latent potential for mobilisation by appealing to anti-immigrant sentiments. Once immigration was a public issue, the question was would the discursive opportunity presented by this cultural cleavage be utilised? Which actor had the ideological resources and political rationale for thematising anti-immigrant sentiments, and would such an actor be able to challenge the bias in the news reporting and cross the threshold for entering public debate?

27 It should be noted that the Italian newspaper and broadcasting media tend to direct their attention to elite debates and are not populist. There is no ‘tabloid’ newspaper journalism. Newspaper circulation and television news viewing figures are relatively lower in Italy than in most other European countries, which is indicative of this ‘opinion-leading’ as opposed to ‘popular’ orientation. See Statham (1996), Mazzoleni (1995). For our present purposes, the point is that news discourse tends thus to be somewhat elitist and ‘unrepresentative’ of general public opinion. However, the news agenda does have an important impact on the political agenda.
The introduction of the emergency Decree by Vice Premier Martelli was enacted on the political frontstage, defining a set of reforms that would constitute a more 'inclusionist' immigration regime. However, emergency decrees have to pass into law within sixty days. This presents an opportunity for party competition and political bargaining over amendments. Two small right wing parties, the MSI and the Republicans (PRI), attempted to use this institutional opportunity to gain resources within the process of party competition. Together they tabled over 60 restrictive amendments and threatened to 'filibuster' the successful passage of the legislation (Woods 1992; Veuglers 1994: 42). These political events were covered in the national news, which created news space for public statements by these two parties.

The strict proportionality of the electoral system meant that relatively small parties were sometimes able to exert disproportional influence when they held a ‘balance of power’ between the major parties (DC, PSI) in a governing coalition. This was the case for the Republican party. La Malfa, the Republican leader, embarked on a political strategy for testing the potential for gaining electoral support on an anti-immigrant stance. He made public speeches against the Martelli proposals describing apocalyptic scenarios of the ‘cultural threat’ of immigrants to the social order. He argued that the Martelli law was an invitation for Third World immigrants which would cause an increase in crime and social unrest in Italy. In response to this thematisation of the relationship between immigrants and the national community which was reported in the national media, a spontaneous wave of xenophobic mobilisation occurred in the form of racist attacks against immigrants. The most notable event was in Florence, where local traders violently attacked North African street-sellers. La Malfa gave public support justifying the actions of the Florentines, and other waves of violence followed by local people against the presence of immigrants on their ‘turf’. Although reported unfavourably, it appears that La Malfa’s challenge to the elite consensus for ‘inclusionist’ policy action exposed a potential for popular mobilisation against immigrants. He was able to make an appeal to racist sentiments that had remained excluded from the news agenda in the wake of the Masslo murder. The public thematisation of the relationship of immigrants to the national community, which had made the immigration issue field an ‘unsettled’ culture and provided discursive opportunities for anti-racist mobilisation, had evidently not established a new ‘tolerant’ tradition. The emergency decree had been shaped in an ephemeral moment of apparent
public consensus, that had been projected by the media and utilised by the political elite. On the contrary, the wave of violence against immigrants exposed the ‘myth’ of ‘tolerant Italy’ as false. Although the public expression of racist sentiments was restricted by the normative bias of the media, the outbreak of violence showed that the public were able to respond to this ‘unsettling of the culture’ on immigration. When legitimated by a member of the governing coalition, extra-parliamentary xenophobic mobilisation in the form of public reactions forced itself into the public sphere. Immigrants who were visibly different because of skin colour became the target of attacks as an ‘exclusionist’ counter-position was mobilised to the dominant ‘inclusionist’ masterframe. Official data shows 1990 as a peak for incidents of violence and intolerance against foreigners, recording more than twice as many as any other year from 1989 to 1994.28 The sporadic series of racist attacks against foreigners demonstrated to the politicians the potential for the existence of public dissent for a policy for the social integration of migrants. Clearly, this public intolerance would impact upon the future political will of mainstream parties to act decisively on immigration, the question was whether any of the institutional actors would attempt to organise this popular reaction into a political movement?

Facing the unfavourable institutional context of majoritarian party support for a significant amount of the Martelli legislative package, xenophobic mobilisation constituted only an emergent ‘ideological challenge’ (see figure 1) at this stage. By qualifying the ‘ideological challenge’ as emergent, we argue that the statements by La Malfa did not bond public reaction into a new xenophobic ‘collective identity’ of ‘ethnic Italians’, although they did create a political space for a xenophobic interpretation of the relationship of immigrants to the community. The public reaction to immigrants that was sponsored by La Malfa was an opposition to the ‘inclusionist’ norms of the Martelli decree, and a reaction to the apparent impact of the ‘injustice’ frame mobilised by the anti-racist movement. At the local level, age-old communal hostility to ‘outsiders’ became focused on ‘ethnic’ immigrants with a public presence, for example, African street vendors. However, La Malfa’s rationale for thematising immigration was defined within the strategic interest of power brokerage within the party system and an attempt

28 These figures are provided by the Ministry of the Interior based on in police records, for details see Caritas (1995:p.165). As such they cannot be considered as accurate total figures (data starting in
at populist electioneering. The PRI did not possess the 'cultural tools' to define a party identity based primarily on an anti-immigrant stance, it was too locked into the partycratic system and the cultural framework of the First Republic. The neo-fascist MSI, on the other hand, was experiencing an internal ideological crisis due to the collapse of Communism which made its anti-communism an anachronism. However, in spite of the apparent political gains made by the Front National with this strategy in France, after an internal discussion about the Le Penist model, the MSI leaders had taken a decision not play the 'race card'. The MSI had retreated to their traditional ideological ghetto of a 'nostalgia for fascism'. As in 1986, their opposition to the immigration bill was a form of anti-systemic opposition. The MSI even refrained from publicly thematising racist anti-immigrant sentiments, although studies at the local level indicate that such a position may have fitted the values of their activists.29

In the passage from decree to statute, the Martelli 'inclusionist' norms were pushed toward a more restrictive and 'public order' stance. This was an outcome of two factors: firstly, the state bureaucracy pressed politicians for a more restrictive immigration regime knowing that Italy would not meet the criteria for an agreement on common border controls with the EU Schengen countries later that year; and secondly, the small right wing parties used their bargaining and delaying resources within the parliamentary process. At this stage, the impact of the xenophobic reactions was restricted. The majoritarian political consensus was more disposed to upholding the principles of liberal democracy than bowing to this 'illiberal' type of public reaction. Hence the 1990 legislation was still defined by policy norms that were defined within the context of an 'inclusionist' masterframe in the public discourse. It granted a second amnesty for 'regularisation', on terms more sensitive to the working conditions of immigrants than 1986, and established the right to asylum. An attempt was made to develop an 'integrated' policy approach. Ministries would try to regulate immigration with labour demand, and provide social services for immigrants. Substantial budgets were set aside for processing refugee applications and immigrant and refugee support centres. Local

1992 and collected from newspaper reports by the Osservatorio Nazionale contro la Xenofobia give much higher figures), but are indicative of the longitudinal pattern of change.

29 See the interesting biographical research by Famiglietti and Farro (1997) on the sentiments of youths in Ostia near Rome.
and regional authorities were given discretionary powers to implement centrally funded housing schemes for immigrants.\textsuperscript{30}

During the amnesty, 234,841 immigrants became ‘legal’, more than twice the total of the first amnesty (Caritas 1996:111). However, the Martelli law did not establish the intended immigration regime of ‘closed borders and open rights’. It was undermined by continuing large scale ‘clandestine’ entry, in part organised by the Mafia, and by the failure of the ‘inefficient’ state bureaucracies to provide systemic support for implementing the policy measures for border control and the social integration of immigrants. The event which highlighted the inadequacy of the immigration regime was the state response to the Albanian crisis in 1990 and 1991 (Woods 1992). After the collapse of the communism, Albanian refugees arrived in Southern Italy in waves of thousands claiming asylum. This event was keenly followed by the national and international media, which criticised the government and state handling of the emergency and, at least initially, expressed sympathy with the plight of the refugees. Initial waves of refugees were admitted after considerable indecision, but when a further 15,000 people landed in August 1991, the Government implemented a policy of repatriation and made it clear that asylum would no longer be granted. There is not space here to go into detail about the Albania crisis, other than to state that it was a significant event which occurred in the public domain prior to the next immigration policy initiative.

It is indicative of the decline of the ‘inclusionist’ masterframe of the Martelli norms, that the political elite did not respond to the Albanian crisis with a new round of systematic policy action. After the Albanian crisis, the immigration issue presented a paradox for the major political parties: immigration could no longer be ignored as a public issue, however, it was an issue on which it would be difficult to form a consensus. A renewed political initiative on immigration might provide an opportunity for a ‘racist politics’ by one of the minority parties and threaten the alliances within the governing parties. This was an unnecessary risk to take on behalf of a group which did not even have a vote to offer in exchange. The hardening of public opinion against immigrants shortly after the Martelli law is indisputable. According to Eurobarometer data, between 1988 and 1992 the percentage of Italians thinking that there were ‘too

\textsuperscript{30} For details on the Martelli legislation, see Veuglers (1994), ISMU (1995), Zincone (1995), and
many’ people of another nationality in their country increased from 34 to 65 percent, and that the rights of immigrants in the EC should be extended decreased from 68 to 38 percent. This is confirmed by the Doxa poll on ‘persons who have noticed immigrants in their area’, where between 1989 and 1991, the number of Italians thinking that immigrants provide ‘only disadvantages’ increased from 23.3% to 38%, which signifies a strong anti-immigrant tendency (see table one). The myths of Catholic tolerance or solidarity based on human or workers rights were no longer a sufficient basis for politicians to claim public legitimacy for their actions. Immigration was emerging as a cross-party issue in a new sense, whereby the responses of public actors no longer followed the established traditions for party political alignment. For example, in 1991 a group of working class bus drivers in Milan went on strike against the presence of a immigrant hostel near their depot, which they claimed was soiling the area (Campani 1993: p.519). Previously, the ‘left’ would have been expected to show solidarity with the plight of the immigrants. In the face of this uncertainty, the major political parties attempted to manage immigration on the political backstage within a minimalist strategy of damage limitation, taking few initiatives that were not ‘ad hoc’ single issue additions to the statute book. Thus the Nationality Law 1992 (n.91) simply followed the EU line on naturalisation, the Ministry for Social Affairs 1993 commission on the legal status of foreigners tidied up existing loopholes rather than advocating a new normative approach, and anti-discrimination legislation (Law n.305 1993) provided the state with repressive measures against activism by ‘Nazi-skin’ youths, but did not address systemic discrimination and xenophobia in the public mainstream. Immigration politics constituted an ‘unsettled dimension of the national culture’, and although at this stage such sentiments were largely blocked out from mainstream politics, there was a latent discursive opportunity for a xenophobic political thematisation of the ‘ethnic difference’ between Italians and immigrants. This explains why despite the considerable increase in media coverage for topics relating to immigration and racist responses31, the political elite sought to keep the immigration issue from the policy agenda, and immigration policy from the public agenda. From 1992 onwards, however, the issue of immigration

became submerged beneath media attention for the major political crisis which resulted in the collapse of the political system of the First republic.

Table 1: public opinions on immigration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Out of 100 Persons Who Have Noticed Immigrants in Their Area</th>
<th>1987 (%)</th>
<th>1989 (%)</th>
<th>1991 (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants provide:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only advantages</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More advantages than disadvantages</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advantages and disadvantages</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More disadvantages than advantages</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>23.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only disadvantages</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>38.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


4.3 Political mobilisation and the Dini decree 1995: Immigration as a ‘ethnicised’ issue field

Following our theoretical perspective, the interesting feature about the next political initiative on immigration is that it took place within a context of combined general cultural and political instability. The end of the political era of the First Republic was signalled by the exposure of corruption endemic to the system by a set of Milan magistrates, in the so-called ‘Tangentopoli’ trials. By mid 1993, 447 members of Parliament were being investigated for bribes totalling 620 billion lire, ninety per cent of which was allegedly paid to the ruling Christian Democratic and Socialist parties.32

32 The collapse of the ‘partycratic’ system after years of enduring a ‘legitimacy deficit’ was in part due to the structural inability of a state formed on a logic of patronage and internal division of resources to find a long term basis for regulating conflicts over social redistribution (Statham 1996a).
There is little space for discussing the implosion of the political system, beyond the impact which it had on transforming the context for collective action within the immigration issue field. A key factor is that the whole field of national politics became an ‘unsettled culture’. As the political cultural traditions of the First Republic were exposed as being based on corrupt exchange, ‘Tangentopoli’ became the focus of national media attention. Particularly, important in this respect was the ‘symbolic’ dimension of the trials for the process of self re-evaluation within the national culture (Giglioli 1996; Giglioli, Cavicchioli and Fele 1997). The Catholic hegemony over political life lost legitimacy. The media asserted their independence from the political parties and played an increasingly important role in focusing public attention on the corrupt basis of the partycratic political system. At the same as attention for public affairs increased steadily, the Italian public sphere started to show the tendencies of a more active civil society, following the breakdown of elite control. The established party political alignments were broken by the demise of the Christian Democrats (DC) and Socialists (PSI), who had controlled the distribution of state resources within the partycratic system. For a period of years, a new set of parties were in a phase of intense competition in the public arena, in the attempt to establish new coalitions and alignments, gain access to state resources, and find a new ideological basis for gaining public support. In 1995, Italy was governed by Dini’s technocratic administration, supported primarily by the votes of the heir to the communist party, the democratic party of the left (PDS), and opposed by a right wing coalition The Freedom Pole (il Polo), comprising Berlusconi’s Forza Italia and a party that was principally the neo-fascist MSI calling itself the ‘post fascist’ Alleanza Nazionale (AN). The defection of the Northern League from Berlusconi’s governing coalition of the right in 1994, produced a period of intense political competition, during which the President Scalfaro brought in the technocratic government as a short term measure to bring in emergency reforms before a return to the ballot box. It was in this politically charged atmosphere

33 This fits with the Swidler thesis that periods where traditions and ‘common sense’ break down are characterised by rituals and symbolic production whereby actors attempt to define a new cultural basis for their action strategies.

34 For example, the viewing figures of television news programmes for all public and private stations increased significantly from 1993 to 1994. For a discussion on the emergence of the public sphere in Italy, see Statham 1996b.
and intense competition between the parties in the public domain, that the issue of immigration was forced onto the political agenda.

Despite the Martelli intentions, the Italian state had failed to close borders or concede substantive social and political rights to immigrants. The state administration was under constant pressure from internal failings and external commitments to implement a more effective immigration regime. In March 1995, Italy failed to meet the criteria to join the Accord for common borders with other EU countries. Between 1990 and 1994, the number of expulsion orders served by the state increased from 10,000 p.a. to 57,000 p.a., the number of immigrants arrested from 11,000 p.a. to 23,000 p.a., and those detained in prison from 9,000 to 26,000. By 1994 twenty six per cent of the prison population in Italy were foreigners. However this restrictive public order approach to ‘illegal’ immigrants combined with an administrative ineffectiveness with the result that the immigration regime simply did not work. Despite the high level of arrests and imprisonment only between 3,000 p.a. to 6,000 p.a. immigrants were expelled in this period (SOPEMI 1995: 54; 57). At the same time, the arbitrary actions of the police and lack of social provision to immigrants contributed to an increase in social problems, particularly in inner urban areas. The administrative rationale for political action was ever-present, between April 1994 and June 1995, there were eight aborted attempts to establish a project for immigration reform. However the capacity for political action had stagnated under the intense pressure of party competition and the legitimacy crisis of politics. Faced by this difficulty, the technocratic government reverted to the method of using emergency decrees to introduce piece-meal legislation on single issues, such as that on expulsion (Law n.58 1995) and on the rights of relatives (Law n.28 1995).

The initial stimulus for a new policy initiative on immigration, came after the publication of an Anti-Mafia report (Direzione Antimafia), in early September 1995, that outlined the role of organised crime in facilitating clandestine immigration. This linking of ‘illegal’ immigrants with Italian organised crime, created a debate within the political circles of right that was significant enough to establish the need for another attempt at political action. Prime Minister Dini followed the advice of the left coalition (principally the Partito Democratico della Sinistra35 - PDS), and established an

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35 The PDS was the majority and centrist remnant of the old communist party (PCI), which was taking a leading role in the emergent coalition of the centre-left. In the emergent bi-polar system of coalitions, the centre left coalition led by the PDS, was opposed by a coalition on the right, composed of
institutional framework that would seek to find a majoritarian political consensus to enact a fundamental immigration reform. The Commission for Constitutional Affairs set up a committee comprising 26 members of the right coalition (primarily the centre-right Forza Italia and Alleanza Nazionale\textsuperscript{36} AN), 26 members of the centre-left (primarily PDS), and six members of the regionalist movement, the Northern League.\textsuperscript{37}

Although the necessity for policy action in the immigration field had been evident for some time, it is not merely coincidental that national politics became focused on immigration at a time of deep political crisis. On the contrary, it is significant that a country should undertake to redefine its relationship to immigrants at a time when the traditional basis of its own political culture had been exposed as 'illegitimate'. As the hypocrisy of leading politicians was ritually exposed as a systemic feature, it was clear that the old traditions would no longer serve as a basis for social cohesion within the new political order. New political myths would have to be invented to define the a set of criteria for belonging to the national community, and these ideals would have to have 'clean hands'. There was a need to find a new 'significant other' for the national identity, replacing opposition to the 'extremes' of fascism and communism as a basis for a political consensus. In the wake of the anti-corruption drive, the founding myth for the new republic would define a modern Italy within the European Union in opposition to corrupt political exchange and in particular 'organised crime' as the 'significant other'. For our current topic, it is important to note that the issue of 'illegal' immigration was raised initially within the context of its association with organised crime and that this specific thematisation was initiated by politicians on the right. Foreigners are obvious candidates as the 'significant others' for establishing national identities\textsuperscript{38}, however, this new attempt to define the relationship of foreign immigrants within the national community was clearly part of the general process of redefinition of the new political culture. The profound phase of cultural instability combined with the

\textsuperscript{36} The Alleanza Nazionale was basically the neo-fascist MSI which had stated its commitment to liberal democracy under the label of the National Alliance, and had declared an era of 'postfascism'.

\textsuperscript{37} L'Epresso 26/11/95, p. 57.

\textsuperscript{38} This is well established in the classic theories of nationalism, e.g. Anderson (1983). For an attempt to empirically prove the point see Gerhards, Fuchs and Roller (1995).
weakness of political institutions created unprecedented discursive and political opportunities for collective actors to make new political claims, such as the League's demand for regional autonomy. The legitimacy crisis within the dominant culture brought a new era of symbolic boundary marking and an opportunity for thematising the relationship of immigrants as the 'significant others' within the national community. An important factor in facilitating these discursive opportunities was the unprecedented level of media attention for politics, and the freedom of editorial positions, following the corruption scandals.

As the political agenda focused on immigration, the media agenda focused on this parliamentary conflict and the position of immigrants in Italian society. The definitive media event came in early October, when an Italian woman was raped in a public park by two illegal immigrants in Milan. Although news reporting was also critical of the fact that no local people came to the assistance of the woman, the presence of immigrants and their 'illegality' became causally linked to the conditions of social destitution and criminal activities in the poorest inner-urban quarters. The symbolic roles between actors from the dominant culture and immigrants were reversed relative to the Masslo killing. The presence of clandestine immigrants was represented as a threat to Italian society and for which immediate action was necessary. Media attention for the parliamentary conflicts over immigration switched to media attention for 'illegal immigrants' and nomads, whose presence became defined as a 'social emergency'. Over the next three months, reports linked the presence of immigrants to prostitution rackets, drug related crime, and the degeneration of historic inner city quarters. Unlike the response to the Masslo killing, the mass media discourse did not provide a single interpretative masterframe for the event. The presence of immigrants was represented as a contested issue field, with different sections of the mass media offering competing frames. The media were more prepared to give news space to the popular belief that 'foreigners' could be defined as 'criminals', not least because this stance was being advocated by some leading politicians. This built on a cultural cleavage that was already present in popular conceptions but which had remained largely absent from the media agenda. For example an opinion poll in 1994 already shows a significant public perception of immigrants as 'criminals', 53 % responded that they thought gypsies (zingari) could be defined as 'criminals' and 9.8 % that non-EU citizens
(extracomunitari) could be defined as ‘criminals’. What is interesting from our perspective is that this indicates a potential for politicising the relationship of immigrants to the national community, as an issue of ethnic difference. Within the framework of a general redefinition of the national culture, there was a space for political entrepreneurs to mobilise a cultural cleavage based on ethnic difference, between those who had a right to belong to ‘modern European Italy’ and those who were its ‘enemies’. To what extent would the competing collective actors be able to use this context of opportunities in the attempt to define the new immigration policy norms?

The collapse of the First Republic presented a favourable institutional framework and new ideological space for two right-wing parties that had been excluded from the partycratic system, the Alleanza Nazionale and regionalist Northern League. Within the emergent Second Republic, the opportunities for the League and the Alleanza Nazionale (AN) were greatly enhanced. The regionalist separatism of the League and anti-systemic ultra-nationalism of the MSI had left them excluded from the partycratic system, but meant that both movements could claim to have kept ‘clean hands’ and profit from the discursive opportunity of ‘Tangentopoli’. The political institutional framework was also more accommodating. In the 1994, the League gained 8.4 per cent and the AN per cent of the national vote, profiting from electoral pacts with the new centre-right party Forza Italia (21%). Both consolidated their position within the political institutions by serving as minor partners in Berlusconi’s coalition government. After defecting from the governing pact, however, the League became bitter rivals and competitors with the AN for the new ideological space right of the political centre. In addition, a significant hardening of public attitudes to immigrants, had created the potential for an ideological cleavage over the relationship of immigrants to the national community. It is worth noting, that neither the AN nor the League pursued a strategy for politicising the immigration issue during their eight months in power. However, when displaced from office by the technocratic government, the Northern League and the Alleanza Nazionale were competing for votes for the vital forthcoming elections, and the question became whether they would utilise the apparent resource of public xenophobic sentiments as the basis for constructing a political strategy? Did these actors possess the ‘cultural tools’ to play the ‘race card’?

Regionalist protest movements, such as the Liga Veneta, had mobilised since the mid-eighties in Northern Italy, drawing on the strong tradition for localism and demanding autonomy from the economic power of a ‘corrupt’ centralised state. Interestingly from our perspective, their collective identity for demanding economic autonomy attributed an ‘ethnic’ basis to the territorial idea of belonging (Diamanti 1993, D’Amato and Scheider 1995). These relatively autonomous local protest movements became loosely organised under a more strategic political identity where the ‘region’ was defined as a ‘community of interests’. This process was completed in 1990 with the formation of the ‘Northern League’, when the territorial boundaries for inclusion in the ‘ethnic’ political community were extended to the whole of the North. The League’s anti-systemic challenge was defined in opposition to the central state, but its territorial definition of ‘ethnicity’ drew on the Northern tradition for racist discrimination against Southerners, who were branded as ‘lazy, dependent and corrupt’ terrone. The ‘localisation’ of conflicts over the presence of migrants in the urban peripheries and historical centres of major cities, presented a discursive opportunity for the League to take up the issue of immigration in the attempt to mobilise popular support. Under the leadership of Umberto Bossi, the rhetoric of the League increasingly referred to the visible ‘ethnic difference’ of immigrants as a ‘cultural threat’ to the autonomy of ‘ethnic’ Northerners over their local ‘territory’. Using imagery similar to that of La Malfa, Bossi made speeches where the visible ethnic difference of immigrants was defined as a ‘cultural threat’ to the local ‘territorial’ rights of ‘ethnic’ Northerners. In this way, the League extended their ‘ethnic’ cultural frame of opposition into the immigration issue field, whereby the symbolic boundary marker that was constructed between North and South was extended to the distinction between local people and ‘Third World’ immigrants. Although immigration is secondary to the regionalist issue for the League, the emerging political power of the movement seriously diminished the opportunities for ethnic groups in the Northern cities where social needs were often greatest.

The League was a movement that had established a tradition for using unconventional protest tactics to exert influence within the political mainstream, and aimed to flout the political norms of the Italian state, even if this meant appealing to voters by anti-immigrant sentiments. The League’s attempt to strategically politicise the immigration issue field within national politics occurred at time when the cultural
instability of the Second Republic was at its peak, and the democratic process had been partially suspended. Following the publication of the Anti-Mafia report linking organised crime with clandestine immigration, the League demanded political action by appealing to the popular conception that ‘clandestine immigrants’ were ‘criminals’. Within the parliamentary committee for reforming the Martelli law, the six members of the League held the balance of power between the coalitions of the right (Forza Italia and the AN) and the centre-left. Crucially, this presented a highly favourable political opportunity structure, as the opposed coalitions of left and right needed to negotiate a deal with the League to make new legislation. In the context of the political crisis, this process of negotiation was a vital forerunner for the establishment of political alignments that would most likely be carried into the next Parliament. The League used a strategy of focusing public attention on immigration in order to exacerbate the political crisis and increase the chances for a breakdown of the nation state.

In late September, the League aligned with sections of the coalition of the right to advocate a restrictive immigration policy whereby clandestine entry and the illegal presence of immigrants would be considered as ‘criminal offences’. This unconstitutional stance was clearly unacceptable to the technocratic government and the PDS, however, it had the intended impact of making immigration the central conflictual issue within the political crisis. In an opinion poll taken on the 19th September, 76.6 per cent responded that the immigration of non-EU citizens was ‘very important’. In addition, 33.4 per cent stated that the response of political parties to this question of immigration was a ‘strong indicator’ for their faith in the respective parties, whereas 7.2 percent considered it a ‘fair’, 25.8 per cent a ‘weak’, and 22.0 per cent ‘not at all’ an indicator. In the same poll, 11.3 per cent thought that all the estimated one million ‘clandestine’ immigrants should be expelled to their country of origin, whereas an additional 56.8 per cent thought that those without a job should be expelled. These findings give evidence, firstly, that the political conflict over immigration had for a significant section of the population (about a third) become a interpretative key to the general political crisis, and secondly, that although the ‘extreme’ position of the League was a minority position, the politicisation of immigration had produced a significant majority in favour of a much more restrictive approach to illegal immigrants. As media
attention focused on immigration, the League turned to the public arena declaring that it was a point of principle that the ‘illegal’ status of migrants considered a ‘criminal offence’. When in early October public outrage against the rape incident in Milan became a media event, the League used this violent act by migrants against a woman in their heartland territory to stigmatise immigrants as ‘criminals’, demanding immediate expulsions and the removal of social assistance. Taking advantage of the apparent ‘exclusionist’ masterframe in the public discourse, the League attempted to organise a public referendum on the expulsion of ‘clandestine’ migrants, precisely at a time when they were involved in political negotiations over the terms of the Dini legislation. This dual strategy of the League combined elements of an ‘ideological challenge’ to the norms for an immigration regime by ‘criminalising’ ethnic immigrants, and of ‘interest mediation’ by using the balance of power within the committee for making highly restrictive policy demands. The movement made use of discursive opportunities for negatively thematising immigrants in order to exacerbate the general political crisis. This the League achieved, when on November 9th, it refused to vote through the emergency budget amendments of the Dini government bringing the state close to collapse. In exchange for passing the budget, the League demanded a restrictive immigration politics. The political demands of the League were deliberately extreme, and intended to challenge the power of centrist political consensus in the state. They demanded: immediate expulsion for illegal entrance or presence without recourse to an appeal; refusal of entrance to foreigners with a criminal record of more than 30 days without exemption for refugees fleeing persecution; prison sentences of up to three years for immigrants re-entering after expulsion, and of up to six months for immigrants failing to produce documentation; and overseas aid to keep immigrants from leaving their country of origin. Such restrictive proposals contravened international agreements and in effect the League was forcing the state into an unconstitutional stance and demonstrating its political power to the public.

The actions of the League extended the context of opportunities for defining immigrants as a problem in Italian society. Public demonstrations and xenophobic reactions against migrant quarters and camps of nomads followed in localities of Florence, Rome, Turin and Milan. This gave public legitimacy to an ‘exclusionist’
frame against immigrants. Until then, the Alleanza Nazionale had largely resisted from thematising the ethnic difference of immigrants. The movement’s declaration of a period of ‘post-fascism’ highlighted that its major strategy was to use an ideology that would facilitate an alliance as a political party with the centre-right Forza Italia, and not provoke opposition from former Christian democratic supporters. Once immigrant conflict began, however, some sections of the Alleanza Nazionale became actively involved in xenophobic mobilisation whilst the national leadership kept a distance and remained closer to the centre-right stance. Taking advantage of the favourable context provided by the media attention for the Milan rape, local AN politicians demanded that social provision be withheld from immigrants, unless they could prove their ‘legality’. In addition AN politicians and MSI youth-related organisations were involved in violent public attacks on the camps of nomads in Florence and Rome, and immigrant quarters in Turin. This movement strategy for ‘ideological challenge’ against the presence of immigrants remained ‘localised’ or confined to maverick politicians, however, because the leadership defined the opportunities for the organisation within the political context of an alliance with the centre-right. For the first time, there was political competition on the right for restrictive measures against immigrants which resulted in a spiral of stigmatisation. Some AN politicians suggested that health tests would be a requirement before any form of minimal political rights could be conceded to ‘legal’ migrants. The League meanwhile highlighted conflicts between the police and immigrants in Turin as evidence of the ‘threat’ of immigrants. In this context, even PDS controlled councils became reluctant to take up a progressive stance fearing a public backlash. Local politicians advocating ‘inclusionist’ measures were open to the charge of siding with ethnic groups against the ‘white’ local community. The regional autonomy over administrative provision for housing and social services, meant that it was difficult for local institutions to take progressive initiatives in areas where xenophobic sentiments were mobilised by a political actor.

Regarding the potential for anti-racist mobilisation, the new context of opportunities were unfavourable. The traditional power basis of the pro-immigrant lobby had been swept away with the demise of Christian Democracy and the Socialist Party. With this ‘centrist’ political consensus on immigration undermined, the channels for ‘interest

L’Espresso 1/10/95:p.50.
mediation’ by the Catholic Charities, Trade Unions and voluntary sector in the political process were severely damaged. Particularly, important in this respect was the new context of party competition between left and right over the issue of immigration, and the stance of the new dominant party on the left the PDS. The decline of centrist co-operation meant that cross party initiatives by the pro-immigrant lobby, such as ‘Patto per un Parlamento antirazzista’ (Alliance for an anti-racist Parliament) which had sponsored parliamentary candidates at elections since 1992, became redundant. The destabilisation and politicisation of the immigration issue field meant that the PDS were less prepared to make an unequivocal stance and constitute themselves as the new political ‘sponsors’ of immigrants, and risk losing votes at a crucial time to the right. Anti-racist mobilisation lost its political voice within the emergent political system, and at the same time immigration could no longer be dealt with as an issue hidden on the ‘political backstage’, due to the highly politicised nature of the public discourse in an atmosphere of intense bi-polar party competition. During the debates for the Dini decree, the PDS were criticised by the re-founded Communist party (Rifondazione) and Greens for accepting a political compromise with the right that produced a highly restrictive immigration regime. When faced by a significant exclusionist frame in the public discourse at the time of the rape of the Italian woman, the PDS were less prepared to make a moral stand for a group without voting rights, than horse-trade with the right in political power. The politicised wing of the anti-racist movement that had emerged prior to Martelli, remained largely detached from the political parties. Prior to the controversy over the Dini decree, the anti-racist movement had some success in galvanising a political response to extremist Neo-Nazi organisations.41 However, once the immigration issue field became a central dimension of the unsettled political culture and the subject of party competition, anti-racist mobilisation could only provide a weak ‘ideological challenge’ as a response to restrictive immigration measures. Unable to find significant ideological space within the new political framework, anti-racist mobilisation was to a large extent shunted into a reactive and defensive role in the public domain. After the Dini decree, a mass demonstration of 40,000 in Turin expressed solidarity with immigrants and protested against the harsh measures.

41 Following the thematisation of the ‘Nazi-skin’ phenomenon in the mass media, as an explanation for the emergence of racist activism, a political consensus was found for introducing repressive measures
Interestingly, the rally was attended by representatives of all national political parties except for the National Alliance (AN) and the League. In addition, the Pope made a public call for tolerance to all immigrants, nomads and gypsies, and in particular women. In the face of a relatively short-lived phase of media reporting that negatively represented immigrants, the discursive opportunities for anti-racist mobilisation had been restricted. Anti-racist mobilisation had lost the ideological conflict. It was only after the legislation that anti-racist mobilisation was able to get its ‘inclusionist’ message across. However this belated ‘ideological challenge’ relativised the apparent dominance of the ‘exclusionist’ frame embodied in the Dini Decree, and sustained an ‘inclusionist’ ‘ideological challenge’ at a difficult time. This meant that if and when political institutional stability resumed in the Second Republic, the anti-racist lobby would still be in the game and maintain the potential to adopt a strategy of ‘interest mediation’ under a more favourable context of opportunities.

Another ‘side-effect’ of the collapse of the First Republic was a very unfavourable set of opportunities for ethnic mobilisation. The social provision which had filtered through to immigrant organisations as a result of the Martelli response meant that they had relatively more resources than in the early nineties. However, there is also significant evidence to suggest the emergence of an alienated and impoverished ‘clandestine’ immigrant population who lived detached from the limited support networks that had been established. These people effectively had no rights, were subject to arbitrary and in some cases illegal treatment by the police, and forced by desperation and hunger to resort to whatever means possible to survive. Biographical research has shown not only that these immigrants were extremely marginalised from society, but that those who partook in crime usually did so because of the extreme conditions which confronted them in Italian society and not because of criminal connections that predated their entry. Of all the groups present in society, immigrants were the least well positioned to benefit from the new political context. Possessing no voting rights, they had no resources to offer when parties were establishing clienteles and public constituencies. Their main sponsors the Socialists (PSI) and Christian Democrats (DC) had ceased to exist, and the Communists (PCI) had split and ideologically transformed.

Against the extreme right (Law n.305 1993). However, this legislation did not address xenophobic sentiments as an element of mainstream society.

Corriere della Sera, 20/11/95, p.3.
This meant that the catholic charities, voluntary organisations and trade union sponsors of immigrant rights had their privileged channels of access to the state seriously weakened. In addition, the cultural transformation triggered by the collapse of the First republic involved a redefinition of the national identity, whereby the myths of catholic virtue and worker solidarity, the basis of the ‘inclusionist’ frame of the political centre, were seriously discredited. Not only were the ideological bonds which linked ‘immigrants’ to the political community broken, but there was also a new potential for a stigmatisation of non-European immigrants as ‘criminals’ on the basis of their ethnic difference. Facing these unfavourable contextual opportunities, ethnic mobilisation lacked the basic resources for constructing collective action and mobilising an ‘ideological challenge’ within the ‘unsettled’ public discourse on immigration. The organised wing of the immigrant community retained a ‘survival at the margins’ strategy, whereas many immigrants, and particularly ‘clandestine’ ones, were pushed beyond the margins of ‘civil society’ into destitution.

To sum up for 1995, the League and to a lesser extent some members of the Alleanza Nazionale, used opposition to the cultural ‘otherness’ of migrants in the attempt to galvanise different sections of the domestic voters. Migrants were an easy target to blame for the problems in Italy, without demanding that the domestic population question their own involvement and responsibility for the endemic corruption of the paritocratic system. The strategy of the right-wing parties, and in particular the League, was to stigmatise the presence of illegal migrants as a symbol for all the political ills in Italian society. At a time when the cultural basis for consensus that had preserved the First republic had been discredited, the distinction between the ‘good’ modern EU-Italians and the ‘bad’ criminal, backward *extracomunitari*, defined a new set of ‘cultural outsiders’, who would be excluded from the modern future of the state formation. As parties attempted to find a new definition for a legitimate civic culture, a new definition for national ‘belonging’ was constructed in opposition to non-European migrants. The resultant stigmatisation of immigrants as ‘criminals’ focused on their assumed cultural qualities and on this basis excluded them from membership in the new community. For immigration politics in 1995, the League came close to a situation of ‘full response’ (figure 1) where the movement’s challenger frame became the dominant

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43 See the interesting research by Colombo (1997) on Algerian immigrants in Italy.
masterframe for the state policy decision. Politically, the League benefited from a unique bargaining position of holding the balance of political power between the centre-left and centre-right. They strategically used the sensitive political issue of immigration to test their powers of brokerage over the two centrist coalitions as a pre-cursor to the imminent elections. Importantly, the League possessed the 'cultural tools' to give an ethnic definition to the criteria for belonging to the political community as an anti-systemic critique and they were able to make immigration into a key interpretative symbol for the failure of First Republic. This 'ethnicisation' of immigration politics was carried into the cultural mainstream where 'extracomunitari' (non-EU citizens) became a pejorative term for those who unlike Italians did not belong to the modern European community.

The combined cultural and political instability and xenophobic mobilisation influenced the norms of the Dini Decree. The 'exclusionist' frame for the expulsion of irregular immigrants as 'criminals', sponsored by the League, competed with a weakened 'inclusionist' frame of tolerance for the 'good' legal immigrants, who 'worked' and contributed to society, that was sponsored by the PDS. A compromise was struck between the League and the PDS, and the Dini decree (n.489) was made as an emergency measure on the 18th November. The Dini decree (n.489) 1995, combines highly restrictive measures for expulsion with some limited measures for provision for immigrants relating to health, temporary work, family reunion and a new 'amnesty' for regularisation. At the time of passage of the decree there was a public debate about whether the measures were unconstitutional or not. Indeed when elected to power, Romano Prodi's il Ulivo centre-left coalition government in 1996, changed the measures for expulsion without recourse for appeal.

5. Conclusion: The Lessons of the Italian Case

Over the last decade, Italy has changed from a traditional country of emigration without a policy on immigration, to a country where political competition over the cultural characteristics of immigrants had a considerable impact in defining a restrictive immigration regime. We have argued that this transformation was due not only to

44 Corriere della Sera 20/11/95, p.2.
'internal' factors within the immigration topic, but was the outcome of 'external' factors, and in particular the new context of opportunities for mobilisation that were created by the collapse of the First Republic. The empirical analysis has shown that cultural and political cleavage structures are important contextual variables in accounting for 'when' and 'how' mobilisation is able to push immigration onto the political agenda. Political outcomes are dependent on the ability of collective actors for utilising these opportunities for defining the relationship of immigrants to the national community. Social movements play an important role in this process by offering new definitions for the problematic, which mainstream politicians may at different times chose to resist or adopt as part of a normative framework for a policy initiative. What conclusions can we draw about the impact of mobilisation, and the relative potentials of ethnic, anti-racist and xenophobic mobilisation for shaping policy outcomes? Some comparative features from the Italian case are summarised in Table 2.
Table 2: political and discursive cleavages, mobilisation and policy outcomes

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<td>cleavages in mass</td>
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<td>high media attention: editorial consensus for inclusionist masterframe</td>
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The first general point to make is that mobilisation makes a difference. Once an ideological cleavage over immigration has been politicised in the public discourse, then the context of the issue field becomes irreversibly transformed. When one compares the 1986 policy to the later initiatives, it appears that the more mobilisation there is in the public sphere either 'for' or 'against' immigrants, then the less chance there is for the state elite to continue to use a technocratic rationale for policy initiatives on the 'political backstage'. Mobilisation pushes the immigration field onto the public agenda, and when it becomes defined by high profile interpretative events in the mass media (1990 and 1995, in contrast to 1986), then politicians are forced to seek a public consensus for their solutions to the problem. If at such times, one type of mobilisation is dominant (anti-racist mobilisation in 1990; and xenophobic mobilisation in 1995), then
political parties are likely to react to this apparent masterframe in the public discourse with a quick policy initiative. During this relatively short time span, media attention for the claims that are mobilised can impact disproportionately on policy outcomes by creating the atmosphere of a ‘social emergency’. Also the mass media thematisation of the immigration issue opens up new opportunities, and further waves of mobilisation and counter-mobilisation are likely to follow. This process of mobilisation and counter-mobilisation exposes, constructs and can even exaggerate the lack of a public consensus on immigration, by focusing media attention on ‘extreme’ events and opinions that are unrepresentative of the norm. The volatility of the issue itself can force the mainstream political parties to respond and re-define their own positions, even between the drafting and enacting of legislation. Over the longer term, however, when the media attention dies down but there is still not a clear public consensus in favour of either ‘inclusionist’ or ‘exclusionist’ norms, then political parties are likely to try to shift attention towards other domestic issues, where the cleavage structures are clear-cut, and which are less threatening to the cohesion of parties and coalitions (the position of the DC and PSI after Martelli). At such times, minimalist technocratic responses to immigration may resume, until the next wave of public mobilisation. The important point to make is that when mobilisation has established an ideological cleavage structure for immigration that cross-cuts party allegiances, politics has difficulty in finding solutions to the problem, and this then opens up the issue field to further mobilisation in the public domain. Immigration becomes part of a contested culture. It is in this context that the competition between ethnic and antiracist versus xenophobic mobilisation becomes important in shaping policy outcomes. However as the comparison between 1990 and 1995 outlines, the potential for impact by social movements is dependent on a country’s general political and cultural stability.

In 1990, anti-racist mobilisation made immigration into an ‘unsettled’ dimension of the public culture within a context of political stability. Although this anti-racist challenge was contested to some extent by xenophobic mobilisation, the ideological cleavage over immigration could be fitted into the interpretative framework of the political establishment, who sponsored an inclusionist policy initiative by invoking ‘centrist’ notions of Catholic Charity and socialist solidarity in opposition to the anti-liberal ‘extremism’ of the xenophobes. The dominant rationale for the policy initiative was political because the government responded to a public consensus on the issue. In
this way, political parties were able to 'manage' the impact of the thematisation of immigration by social movements in 1990. Regarding anti-racist mobilisation, the radical anti-racist movement had very little influence on the policy outcomes relative to the pro-immigrant lobby. It is also worth pointing out that the Republican party's attempt to give a political voice to xenophobic mobilisation was not part of a systematic challenge to established norms of the political system, but a single-issue strategy for attracting votes. In 1990, conflict over the immigration issue did not threaten the basis of political consensus.

In 1995, on the other hand, immigration was pushed onto the public agenda by xenophobic mobilisation and became an 'unsettled' dimension of an uncertain culture within a context of general political instability. Political institutions were in the unusual position for a liberal democratic state of being unable to resist the challenge of a xenophobic social movement. Why was the Northern League successful in shifting the terms of the elite debate away from questions of immigrant rights and onto their 'cultural properties' as a criterion for inclusion within the Italian community? We have argued that the breakdown of the civic code of the political culture of the First Republic, created discursive opportunities for actors to sponsor new cultural definitions for political ideologies. Clearly, the politics of the Northern League remained a significant but minority interpretation. Importantly, however, their negative interpretation of immigrants fitted into the general 'clean hands' masterframe for exposing 'illegality' that was emerging as a basis for political consensus. It therefore had a wider resonance within an uncertain national culture than appealing to supporters of the League. For a significant number of people the conflict over immigration became integrally linked to the general political crisis. The League's position on immigration impacted upon the cultural mainstream and the way for defining the 'new tradition' for the national political culture. ' Ethnicity' became an important symbol for defining who had a right to belong to the emergent 'clean hands' political community, and who did not. 'Extracomunitari' (non-EU citizens) became a widespread pejorative term for symbolically demarcating those who unlike Italians did not belong to the modern European political community. The illegal status of many immigrants, an outcome of the dysfunctioning of the state, became translated into a cultural characteristic of immigrants. This shows that opposition to the 'cultural otherness' of foreign immigrants remains a potent ideology for bringing cohesion to a political community in situations
of uncertainty. In the Swidler sense, popular sentiments toward the difference of foreign immigrants became part of the emergent 'common sense' for politics.

Regarding xenophobic mobilisation itself, a unique opportunity was presented to a social movement that thematised ‘ethnicity’ as part of its cultural ‘tool-kit’ and which did offer a systematic challenge the established norms of the political system (in contrast to the Republicans in 1990). The Northern League used the immigration issue in a strategic attempt to destabilise the Italian state and improve the prospects for regional autonomy. Their stigmatisation of the cultural difference of immigrants as ‘criminals’ gave a new cultural interpretation to the ideological cleavage over immigration. This ideological challenge used ‘illegal immigrants’ as a symbol for the political failure of the First Republic. At a time when the new ‘clean hands’ basis for political consensus in the Second Republic was extremely weak, the centre-left and centre-right could not absorb this xenophobic challenge, and were themselves forced into competition over the immigration issue. In an acute phase of political instability and cultural uncertainty, centrist party politics could no longer ‘manage’ the impact of mobilisation over immigration. In contrast to 1990, the rationale for a policy initiative was not a political response to public consensus, but was shaped by a widespread cultural response to the lack of a political consensus. We argue that the dominant rationale for the 1995 policy initiative was cultural. The 1995 Dini decree shows that at times of political crisis, governments are less able to restrain the impact and much more susceptible to frame alignment processes brought about by the challenge of xenophobic social movements. As a result, for the 1995 Dini decree, the Northern League came close to a situation of ‘full response’ (Gamson 1990) to their xenophobic demands. The policy norms of the new immigration regime were so restrictive that they were most probably unconstitutional. Indeed some of the more restrictive elements were removed in 1996 by the Prodi government after the elections had brought a resumption of political stability.

A final point to draw from the Italian experience is that the absence of political recognition and rights for immigrants has constituted considerable barriers to ethnic mobilisation. Ethnic mobilisation has been unable to establish a significant political foothold, and thus the field of mobilisation over ethnic difference in Italy has been defined by the competition between anti-racist and xenophobic mobilisation. Importantly, this has meant that immigration has been mobilised as an ideological
conflict between collective actors from the dominant culture, and immigrants have been unable to raise political demands. In 1990, the favourable opportunities for anti-racist mobilisation contributed to an inclusionist response, whereas in 1995 the favourable opportunities for xenophobic mobilisation contributed to an exclusionist response. However, there was little change in the structural position of immigrants between these two very different responses. This indicates that the unfavourable reaction of Italian society to immigrants in 1995 had more to do with its internal problems than the objective factors of the immigration problematic. When immigrants do not have an autonomous voice within a political culture, they are more vulnerable to processes of stigmatisation and being defined as the 'causes' for a society's problems.
References


