Desperately seeking politics: political attitudes of participants in three demonstrations for workers’ rights in Italy

by Donatella della Porta and Herbert Reiter, European University Institute

(with the collaboration of Massimiliano Andretta, Stefania Milan and Federico M. Rossi)
The empirical research we report upon was funded by the Research Council of the European University Institute. Donatella della Porta also acknowledge the support of an Advanced Grant of the European Research Council.

Abstract
Social conflicts tend to take different forms. This article compares three demonstrations on issues of social justice in Italy: a traditional Labour Day demonstration, a march supporting a general strike called by the largest trade union CGIL and the EuroMayDay parade, representing a “new” type of movement. Focusing on conceptions of democracy among activists, the article stresses that the economic crisis is a crisis of representative democracy as well. Protestors on social justice and labour rights expressed extremely low levels of trust in government, parliament and political parties; the lowest were found among younger participants. At the same time, this lack of trust is coupled with confidence in the capacity of the citizens—especially if organized at the international level—to take the world in their hands. Despite high levels of distrust demonstrators believe that to address social inequality, one must strengthen all levels of government—politics must regain control over the market.
Desperately seeking politics: political attitudes of participants in three demonstrations for workers’ rights in Italy

Since the 1970s, social movement studies have developed on the (more or less explicit) assumption that, while the Old labour movement became institutionalized, new movements were rapidly developing in societies defined as post-industrial or post-materialist. In particular, attention focused on the ways in which advanced capitalist societies produced new, non-material conflicts. In this type of literature, new conflicts address not the material production but the production of meaning, moving from the factory to the personal sphere, from economic power to control of knowledge (Touraine 1981; Melucci 1989, 1999; Eder 1993). Environmental and women’s movement have been seen as the carriers of these new conflicts. In Herbert Kitschelt’s (1993) conceptualization, these movements have been characterized as left-libertarian, coupling a traditional interest with equality with a new concern with liberty (see also della Porta and Rucht 1995).

While these contributions pointed at macro, epochal transformations, other research addressed the socio-graphic characteristics of the activists of these movements (e.g. Kriesi 1993). In particular, it has been observed that social transformations have produced a new middle class, which is overrepresented in the new social movements. This new middle class is not only particularly well-educated, but also mainly employed in the service sector (della Porta and Diani 2006: 55). The overrepresentation of this new middle class could, in fact, depend not on class interest
but rather reflect a higher tendency of the intellectual middle class to mobilize in conventional and unconventional forms.

Even though rarely theorized, empirical research tended to distinguish old and new movements also in terms of their forms. Old (labour) movement demonstrations were considered as more traditionally structured, and activists as tendentially more moderate in their critique of the political system, more trustful of their parties and unions. New social movements were, instead, said to move a fundamental critique of conventional politics, thus shifting their endeavors from politics itself to meta-politics (Offe 1985). From this point of view, new social movements were said to propose alternatives to parliamentary democracy, criticizing both liberal democracy and the organized democracy of the political parties: “The stakes and the struggle of the left and libertarian social movements thus invoke an ancient element of democratic theory that calls for an organization of collective decision making referred to in varying ways as classical, populist, communitarian, strong, grass-roots, or direct democracy against a democratic practice in contemporary democracies labeled as realist, liberal, elite, republican, or representative democracy” (Kitschelt 1993: 15). Consequently, new social movements are said to prefer more horizontal organizational formats, which are reflected in a more spontaneous appearance of marches and other protests.

New social movements have also been theorized as more cosmopolitan. Whereas the old labour movements has been seen as more centered around the nation state, the environmental and women’s movement have been said instead to “think globally”. All the more so for the global justice movement, that has been seen as yet another step away from national concerns and in the direction of the construction of supra-national identities.
Hypotheses of an institutionalization of an old class cleavage and the emergence of a new one have been much discussed since (della Porta and Diani 2006, chap. 3, for a review). Especially, the emergence of a global justice movement has brought about serious doubts about the dominance of “post-materialist” concerns: “By extending to (or in some cases starting from) the world’s South, the global justice movement involves the poorest classes like the Brazilian *Sem Terra* or the Argentine *piqueteros*; but also, in the world’s North, it seems to mobilize—at least in some countries—groups described as poor in collective resources (like the unemployed or precariously employed) or lacking the most basic rights (like migrants). Even there, the end of the ‘mid-century compromise’ between capitalism and the welfare state brought to center stage the conflicts on social rights underlined in the definition ‘movement for a globalization of rights’—albeit not without attention to new themes (like environmental sustainability or gender) that had emerged with the ‘new social movements’.” (della Porta 2007: 21).

More recently, the emergence of the Indignados movement in Spain and Greece as well as the Occupying campaign, which spread from in the US Wall Street to the world, testify of the centrality of social issues, that the financial crisis has made all the more dramatic. From Spain to Greece and the United States, what the media called “very new” movements contested growing social injustice at the country and global level. Beyond their calls for different policies than austerity in order to deal with the financial crises, recent protests have also forcefully criticized the corruption of representative democracy, calling for a “democracia real ya!”.

The traditional distinction between the new social movements, focusing on post-material issues, and the old ones, linked to class politics, seems therefore (more
and more) misleading. Rather, we can observe that social claims are raised now by different constellations of organizations, some of them more traditional and some of them “newer”. In what follows, we want indeed to investigate if the specific characteristics assigned to the “old versus new” movements are reflected in contemporary mobilization on social rights. In particular, we are interested in looking at differences and similarities as they are reflected in the political attitudes of the participants to different types of demonstrations on democracy.

With these questions in mind, we shall in this article compare three demonstrations, all three on similar issues of worker’s rights and social justice, whose promoters differed however. In what follows, we will look in fact at some characteristics of participants at three demonstrations on social rights that took place in Italy in May 2011. The three marches we have surveyed are: the Euromayday parade on precarity issues in Milan on May 1; the labour day union march in Florence on the same day; and the national general strike against austerity policies, which we surveyed in Florence on May 6. The decision to keep constant country, period and aim of the demonstration followed our expectation that quite different types of mobilization contexts can be singled out even within events addressing similar issues. These three cases represent in fact different types of marches. The first involves young people that face conditions of job precarity mobilizing into a “parade”. The organizer groups have their roots in the global justice movement and squatted youth centers, locating themselves under several aspects on the new social movement side. The second belongs to the long tradition of May Day celebration, organized jointly by the three main Italian trade union confederations. The third is the march accompanying a general strike against austerity measures, called for by the main
Italian trade union, the CGIL (traditionally communist-socialist), but joined also by activists of other social movement organizations. The last two marches are therefore rooted in so-called “old social movements”.\(^1\) Marches differ from each other also because participants differ. Beyond comparing demonstrations, using individual data such as survey data, we also want to investigate if some specific characteristics of protestors, which vary by demonstration, have an impact on the main dimensions of political attitudes we are going to analyse. In particular, the composition of the three marches vary in terms of two variables which have indeed emerged in previous research as most important in explaining various dimensions of political participation: age and self-location on the left-right axis (see, e.g., della Porta 2010: 136).

Participants to the labour day are older, with 61% born up to 1956 and an additional 26% born before 1967; on the other pole, only less than 16% of EuroMayDay paraders are born before 1967 and 60% from 1977 on. More balance is the age distribution among participants at the general strike demonstration, with 38% born up to 1956, 25% between 57 and 1966; 20% between 1967 and 1976 and 17% 1977 and on (see table A in appendix). The participants in all three demonstrations covered have a clearly left political identity. Their responses to the question to place themselves on a left – right scale are surprisingly similar: 48.6% of the respondents at the first of May demonstration, 45.8% of those at the Euromayday parade and 44.4% of those at the march in occasion of the general strike (‘missing’ and ‘do not know’ excluded) placed themselves in the category most to the left. Roughly 20% each located themselves in the next two categories on the 10 point scale. Only among Euromayday participants – among whom those opting for ‘do not know’ were also most numerous (5.6% vs. 2.3% for the general strike and 1.8% for the first of May) –
a significant number (ca. 10%) chose one of the center categories. As we will develop below, these variables are expected to impact, in various ways, on the political attitudes of our activists.

In what follows, we will therefore compare the three demonstrations with each other on different indicators of positions on the “meta” democratic question. A first aim is descriptive: to understand what protestors criticize and what they claim about existing institutions. A second aim is to look at similarities and differences between the three marches, as well as, at the individual level, at correlations between the characteristics of the protestors in terms of age and political location and some political attitudes such as trust in political institutions and collective actors and confidence in effects of citizens’ mobilization (part 3), and then the assessment by protestors of the causes and potential solutions for their claims (part 4).

**Mistrustful, but confident?**

Traditionally, research on political participation has addressed different attitudes towards politics. Two of the most important ones are political trust and sense of efficacy. While social trust emerged as (weakly) related to social status, political trust has been explained especially by political values as well as the contingent proximity to those in power (Newton 2007: 352). Sense of efficacy, on its side, has been considered as growing with personal resources, such as material and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1979). Recent research has also indicated that, face to the many challenges addressed to representative democracy, young people tend to be more and more distrustful of representative institutions (Dalton 2004: 93-4).
As for our demonstrations, the organizers of the Euromayday Parade are the least “central” from the political point of view, being grass-roots social movement organizations and critical trade unions, with more critical views of existing institutions in general. Differently, the Labour Day march is a traditional celebration, endorsed by political institution, and the general strike focuses on more specific claims for policy changes by actors which are recognized at institutional levels, such as the largest trade union organization in the country. We might therefore expect the activists of the three demonstrations to reflect the different attitudes of those who called for the three demonstrations. We expect therefore participants to the Euromayday to be more mistrustful of existing political institutions than participants at the other two demonstrations. At the individual level, the younger and more to the left the activists, the more we expect them to mistrust existing institutions.

The distribution by march on the first set of battery on trust in institutions tend to confirm our hypothesis, but with some caveats. EuroMayDay participants are indeed the most mistrustful, but with some differences between different institutions. Additionally, trust in representative institutions tend to be very low also among participants at the marches called for by the more traditional, old left organizations. In Table 1, we can indeed observe that the degree of trust is at the lowest for the national government, growing only very slightly when looking at the national parliament. Extremely low is also trust in political parties, with the judiciary enjoying the highest level of trust. While participants to all three demonstrations equally mistrust the national government, for all other institutions and collective actors the trust declines from the Labour day, to the general strike, to the Euromayday participants (as t-test indicate, it is especially the Labor Day March and the
Euromayday Parade that differ from each other). This is all the more true for political parties and unions. The average trust in political parties is extremely low for Euromayday parade, and higher instead for the Labour Day march; but even the general strike participants, traditionally considered as supporters for the Old Left, present minimal trust in parties. Trust in unions is higher, but still low for demonstrations that are called for by the unions. Here as well the three demonstrations present different images, with trust in unions declining quite significantly when going from the Labour day march to general strike and Euromayday. Trust is higher instead in the judiciary (that in Italy has been perceived as a sort of last protection against the corruption of the political class) and the European Union (also often perceived as a lesser evil face to a very low quality in the functioning of democracy in Italy.

Table 1 about here

The next battery of questions confirms the low confidence in parties and the political class. Politicians are considered as not fulfilling their promises, and voting in elections as (much) less useful than unconventional forms of participation. There is in fact much agreement that “most politicians make a lot of promises but do not actually do anything”. If the confidence in politicians is extremely low, there is nevertheless confidence in the capacity of citizens to have an impact on political decisions, especially if citizens organize themselves and if they do it transnationally. Differently than for the previous questions, degrees of confidence emerge as fairly homogeneous across the three demonstrations, with Euromayday participants however showing the least confidence in the working of representative democracy.
If we move from the marches as aggregate to individual level data, we can also confirm that age is negatively correlated with trust in political institutions. With the exception of trust in national government (at minimal levels in all three demonstrations), year of birth is negatively related with trust for all institutions for which it was measured, be it trade unions (Pearson -.29***), political parties (-.28***), the judicial system (-.25***), national parliament (-.23***), the United Nations (-.15***) or the European Union (-.14**). A weaker positive correlation exists for the statement that voting is useless (.13**). Confidence in one’s own capacity to affect politics from below is instead not affected by age.

Turning from age to political position, self-location of participants on a left–right scale is expected to impact on trust, which is expected to decline with more radical positions. Trust in national government (Pearson .21***), in the UN (.18***) and in the EU (.15**) (but not trust in parties or unions) declines indeed with people moving towards the left extreme of the continuum. As far as political confidence is concerned, the more to the left, the more the interviewees agree with the statements that one’s own mobilization, organized groups, or international cooperation will have a positive impact (Pearson -.13**).

Summarizing, the participants at the demonstration on social rights we have surveyed emerge therefore as mistrusting institutions, while nevertheless trusting their own capacity to affect politics, especially when active collectively and transnationally. We see however also some differences (individually and at the level of the demonstration) with a moderate left position retaining some trust in political
institutions and confidence in the possibility to exert influence by mobilizing and/or voting, but increasingly incapable of attracting the younger generations. These younger generations seem to continue to mobilize notwithstanding declining trust in institutions and waning confidence in their possibilities to influence the course of events, as they keep trust in their own capacity to produce effective mobilization.

**Desperately seeking (multilevel) politics**

Very mistrustful of, especially, parties, governments and parliaments, participants at all three marches are a little bit less so when looking at supranational institutions. Especially in times of financial crises, the belief that national level institutions are unable to tackle global problems might increases the perception of a need for global governance. Other batteries of questions in our survey aimed in fact at understanding the general assessment on globalization and the European Union by activists of the three demonstrations, also looking at the institutional solutions protesters singled out to address their concerns.

Comparing the three demonstrations, as expressed in the very name the organizers choose for the events, we expect to find more cosmopolitan views at the EuroMayDay parade than in the more traditional, old left demonstrations, called for by national organizations, with long-lasting roots in the national political system. At the individual level, we also expect younger people to express more cosmopolitan views, being socialized in a more global context. As for the location on the left-right spectrum, we expect more cosmopolitan views on the left than on the right, that has traditionally promoted more nationalist views.
All in all, our marchers do not see neo-liberal globalization as an opportunity for economic growth, but rather as a main cause of increased inequalities, that requires the building of institutions of global governance to control it. On this dimension, the demonstrators of the three marches show very little differences among each other (see table 3). Only an average of 1.7 see globalization as (also) an opportunity against almost twice as much stating that globalization increases inequalities and that it requires institutional control through the building of institutions of global governance.

Table 3 about here

Looking at the individual level, age is correlated with opinion about globalization. The older participants tend to believe a bit more more that globalization makes the building of institutions of global governance necessary (Pearson .16***), the younger more that neoliberal globalization is an opportunity for economic growth (Pearson -.17***). The connection between opinions about globalization and political position seems stronger and shows a different pattern. Participants locating themselves more to the right of the left – right scale subscribe more to the opinion that globalization is an opportunity for economic growth (Pearson .34***), those that locate themselves more to the left tend to consider more often that globalization increases social inequalities (Pearson -.22***).

Turning to opinions about the EU (see table 4), there is skepticism that it safeguards an alternative model to neoliberalism or mitigates the most negative effects of neo-liberal globalization. Rather, the EU is seen as an institution that promotes
neo-liberalism. The Euromayday protesters emerge here as the most critical. The average support for the statement that the EU strengthens neoliberalism is higher than those for the other two statements (even more among the Euromayday protestors). Differently from opinions on globalization in general, regarding the role of the EU the participants in the Euromayday parade take the more negative position, and the Labour Day demonstrators a more positive one, while the general strike marchers show an intermediate position.

Table 4 about here

Opinions on the EU are influenced by the age of participants in our three demonstrations. The more recent their year of birth, the more participants see the EU as strengthening neo-liberal globalization (Pearson .10*), while older demonstrators more often believe that the EU mitigates the most negative effects of globalization (Pearson -.14**) and attempts to safeguard a social model different from the neo-liberal one (Pearson -.21***). Also ideological position shows a significant correlation. Participants locating themselves more to the left of the left – right scale more than average see the EU as an agent of neoliberal globalization (Pearson -.14**); those locating themselves more to the right more than average see it as mitigating globalization’s negative effects (Pearson .14**) and safeguarding a different social model (Pearson .17***).

While extremely critical of the working of existing institutions, our interviewees express however a very strong search for politics—to the point of demanding the strengthening of the power of the very institutions they mistrust. When
moving from the assessment of responsibility to potential solutions (table 5), our activists agree that it is necessary to strengthen all levels of governance. The national one is the only level that sees virtually no difference between the three demonstrations. For the other institutional levels, instead, participants to the general strike closely mirrors the total results, with Euromayday participant scoring a bit below and Labour Day participants a bit above. On average among the three demonstrations in 2011, we find highest support for the strengthening of the EU and of the local level of government, with a lower, but still important, support for the strengthening of the national level and the building of institutions of world governance. Differently from the participants in the other two demonstrations, Labour Day marchers favour local government over the EU and world governance over national government.

Table 5 about here

Controlling for the influence of age, support for a strengthening of the EU and the global level increases with age (\(\cdot .191***\) and \(\cdot .102^*\), respectively). Younger demonstrators, to the contrary, show less support for a strengthening of government particularly at the international level. If we divide participants in age categories, those born after 1977 score just about average for the local and the national level, but remain below for the EU and the global level. For all territorial levels except the national one (n.s.), protesters collocating themselves more to the right on the left–right scale favour a strengthening of government, be it the local (Pearson \(\cdot .12^*\)), the EU \(\cdot .12^*\) or the global level \(\cdot .13^*\). It is therefore the older participants identifying
with moderate institutional parties are more favorable towards a strengthening of government institutions on all levels.

Finally, we note a significant degree of identification as Europeans. At the three demonstrations in Italy in 2011, 5.6% felt not attached to the EU and 29% weak attachment, but 44.5% quite strong and 20.9% very strong attachment. Euromayday demonstrators show less attachment to the EU (55.4% have quite or very strong attachment). They have a very low attachment to the regional level (27.6% against 70.4% for the three demonstration together), but a higher-than-average one for the global level (89.4% against 81.4%).

The Euromayday marchers seem less fearful of globalization than the other demonstrators. Their identification with the highest territorial level is near to the average. As we have seen, however, the high emotional attachment to the globe of Euromayday demonstrators does not translate into equally high demands for building institutions of world governance. In addition, they show the weakest identification as Europeans and emerge as the most critical of the EU, perceived as a channel for the implementation of neoliberal policies, but they favour the strengthening of the EU over the strengthening of local or national government or the building of institutions for world governance.

_Euroskeptic or Europeanists?_

In sum, protestors address in fact a multilevel system of governance and, they indeed ask for a strengthening, at all geographic levels, of politics over markets. All in all, institutions are therefore mistrusted, but, at the same time, there is a strong request of strengthening political governance at multiple levels. The apparent tension between
mistrust for existing institutions and demands for their strengthening can be explained by the type of criticism which emerges towards globalization as source of increasing inequalities and economic crises. Consequently, the demonstrators stated in fact a need for an institutional control of globalization. As we have seen, the EU is the most trusted (or better, less distrusted) institution, and also the one the highest percentage of activists would like to see strengthened. In general, there is therefore a “critical Europeanism”, made of strong criticism of today EU policies, but also a perception that solutions to the growing injustice and the economic troubles can only come from an institutional strengthening at EU level. In comparison with the beginning of the last decade, mistrust in the EU declined, while the demand for its strengthening increased (della Porta and Caiani 2009).

If this is true for the demonstrations overall, a more nuanced picture emerges if we build a typology by crossing trust in the EU and demands for its strengthening (Table 6). Leaving aside the small percentage of the “satisfied Europeanists”, who trust the EU and do not want to strengthen it, we have about one third of the activists who are “expanding Europeanists”, who trust the EU and want to strengthen it. Almost the same percentage, however, is made of “critical Europeanists,” who want to strengthen the EU even though they do not trust it. A fifth are the “EU-critics”, who neither trust the EU nor want to strengthen it. As for differences between the three demonstrations (Cramer’s V = .153**), even among Euromayday participants we find a majority of critical or expanding Europeanists (33.3% and 32.5%), with however a strong minority (30%) of EU critics. More than half (55.1%) of the First of May demonstrators are instead expanding Europeanists and another quarter (25.8%) critical
Europeanists, while among general strike marchers we find less expanding (40.4%) and more critical (33.7%) Europeanists.

Table 6 about here

Euro-critics are especially numerous among the younger cohorts (Pearson - .18***), expanding Europeanists instead among the older (Pearson .141**). If we cross-tabulate our typology with age categories (Cramer’s V = .156**), we find that among young marchers, born from 1977 on, 34.2% are EU-critics, against 33.3% expanding Europeanists and 26.1% critical Europeanists. Demonstrators born between 1967 and 1977 show a dominance of critical Europeanists (45.3%), while almost half of the older age cohorts (born up to 1956 or between 1957 and 1966) are expanding Europeanists (49.4% and 48%). Therefore, if the demand for a strengthening of the EU persists, criticism augments and becomes more radical among the younger participants.

The left – right scale gives similar results, showing a higher presence of EU-critics among those who self-locate more to the left (Pearson .14**) and of expanding Europeanists among those who are instead self-located more to the right (Pearson - .15**). These results are confirmed by the strong correlation between party identification and our typology (Cramer’s V = .25***).

Focusing on the position towards the strengthening of political institutions, in general it does not seems that protestors perceive a trade-off between the strengthening of one level of governance and those of others. Supports for the strengthening of local, national, EU and global level of governance are all above 50%,
even if only about half of the participants want to strengthen the national and the
global level, while almost two thirds want to strengthen the local level and the EU.
Rather than a competition between different levels of governance, activists seem to
perceive instead a trade-off between political institutions and the market.

A more nuanced view comes if we cross the position towards the
strengthening of the national government with that towards the strengthening of the
EU (Table 7). Nationalists, who are only in favour of the strengthening of the national
government, are a very small minority; and also modest is the support for “anti-
institutional” positions, of those who do not want to strengthen either of the two.
More support have cosmopolitan Europeanists, who want to strengthen only the EU
(27%) and, even more, multi-level institutionalists, who want to strengthen both
(almost half of the sample).

Controlling for differences between our three demonstrations (Cramer’s V =
.14*), a first significant result seems the dominance of multi-institutionalists in all of
them, with 46.2% in the Euromayday parade, 45.8% in the general strike march and
41.7% in the Labour Day demonstration. Among participants in the Euromayday
parade we find 28.6% anti-institutionalists. Among Labour Day demonstrators,
cosmopolitan Europeanists with 38.1% are instead almost as numerous as multi-level
institutionalists. General strike marchers instead closely mirror overall results.

Table 7 about here

Controlling for age, we find no correlation between year born and multilevel
institutionalists. Cosmopolitan Europeanists can be found more among older
demonstrators (Pearson .11*), Anti-institutionalists (Pearson -.10*) and especially nationalists (Pearson -.17**) more among younger ones. Looking at age categories, multi-level institutionalists show in fact the same strength (48%) for those born up to 1956, those born between 1957 and 1966, and those born between 1967 and 1976. In these three age categories, cosmopolitan Europeanists are the second most numerous group, however slightly decreasing with age. Also among younger demonstrators (born from 1977 on) multi-level institutionalists arrive at 38.7% and cosmopolitan Europeanists at 20.7%. The latter however surpassed by anti-institutionalists (27%) and also nationalists score above average with 13.5%. Those born from 1977 on are, in fact, 40% of the anti-institutionalists and 50% of the nationalists. As for the political position, it is above all anti-institutionalists that collocate themselves more to the left of the left – right scale (Pearson .15**), with only minor differences for the other types.

**Desperately seeking politics: some conclusions**

This article started with the observation that, not only social conflicts are back (or, maybe, never gone), but they tend to take different forms as well. We have compared surveys on three demonstrations on issues of social justice in Italy: a traditional Labour Day demonstration, a march for a general strike called by the largest, leftwing trade union CGIL and the EuroMayDay parade, that instead represented a “new” type of movement, Some common trends and some differences have emerged.

First, protestors on social justice and labour rights expressed extremely low levels of trust in government, parliament and political parties. Even trust in the unions
was surprisingly low, especially if we consider that union activists were largely present in these protests, and that unions had participated in calling the protests. More trust was instead expressed in the judiciary, as well as in international institutions such as the EU and (less) the UN. Confirming the expectation that more traditional (“old”) marches tend to express a more positive vision of political institutions, on all dimensions, degree of trust was lower going from Labour Day, to the general strike, to the Euromayday. At the individual level, we also noted that age tends indeed to have an impact, with younger people being more mistrustful than older ones: The younger participants expressed in fact the highest levels of mistrust in representative institutions, parties and unions.

Differences were however relatively small: all in all, our interviews reveal a convergence towards very low degrees of trust in political institutions, especially in parliament and the political parties. We recognize here that Italy is an extreme case in terms of mistrust in institutions, even though this is by no means homogeneous, as Italian respondents tend to be very mistrustful of parties and parliaments, but much less of, e.g. the EU and the judiciary. Further comparative research would be needed to locate the Italian case in a cross national perspective. We can say, however, that the widespread mistrust in institutions of representative democracy looks similar to the one expressed by the Indignados, especially in countries that, like Spain and Greece, have been more hit by the financial crisis.

Opinions on politicians were consistent with this mistrust, as the activists seemed to agree with the Indignados’ slogan “They do not represent us”. As Colin Crouch (2004) had noted, in contemporary “post-democracies” (characterized by increasing influence of economic lobbies and decreasing capacity of political
institutions to reduce social inequalities) governments’ support for neoliberal policies goes hand in hand with an exclusive, minimalistic vision of democracy, with the closing down of channels of participation beyond elections. As representative institutions loose—or give up—their capacity to influence the market, the visions spread of political institutions as captured by strong economic interest (the “1%”, according to the demonstrators), and no longer representing what the activists define as the “99%” of the citizens, in the slogan of the Occupying campaign). Trust in parties and parliaments falls accordingly. Not only institutions however are mistrusted: the traditional actors of mediation in institutional politics (the parties) and functional representation (the unions) are less and less trusted—with only about 1 demonstrator upon 20 having some or much trust in them. In line with our expectations, we have seen that critical attitudes are even more widespread among EuroMayDay Paraders, young activists and those more to the left.

Mistrust can bring about a sense of disempowerment towards a low-quality (or no-quality) democracy, and therefore apathy. How are citizens to influence corrupt politicians, who are sold out to the financial capital? Nevertheless, there is also another, very different reaction, which we found widespread among the activists we interviewed: a belief that, notwithstanding the lack of capacity of elected politicians to “represent us”, there is nevertheless the possibility to influence policies from below. Lack of trust in the actors of traditional institutional politics is in fact coupled by our interviewees with confidence instead in the capacity of the citizens—especially if organized at the international level—to take the world in their hands (“we don’t need Wall Street and politicians to build a better society” is what we read on the website of Occupy Wall Street; http://occupywallstr.org/, accessed November 9 2011). Optimism
about the capacity to produce changed through action from below was widespread across demonstration, age and political positions.

In opinion polls, some scholars try to assess the consistency of respondents attitudes. No doubt that the demonstrators we have interviewed showed some apparent degrees of inconsistency, or at least tensions, at various levels. First and foremost, while not trusting political institutions, our demonstrators are however in favour of strengthening all the various levels of governance. They believe that in order to reduce social inequalities and other dangerous consequences of neoliberal globalization it is imperative that politics re-gain control over the market. Also, the challenge being global, various levels of governance have to be strengthened—with particular attention to the EU and the local level.

One shouldn’t however expect an univocal trend towards “de—nationalization”: our protestors ask in fact the strengthening of national institutions as well. In comparison with the activists of the first European Social Forum in Florence in 2001 (della Porta et al. 2006), the percentage of those who believe in the need to strengthen the national government more than doubled. Comparison across events, age and political positions showed here a more complex picture than we expected. In particular, EuroMayDay paraders showed a stronger belief in the positive aspects of globalization, stronger belief that the EU increases inequalities, and were less keen in strengthen it or even institutions of global governance—even though their degrees of emotional attachment to supranational levels was higher. The more to the Left they locate themselves, the less activists asked for a strengthening of the existing institutions.
Facing the complex challenges of a financial crisis, which is global but with specific national consequences, the activists seem to develop solutions based on an integrated, multilevel governance. As our first typology indicated, even many of those who mistrust the EU, believe nevertheless that is necessary to strengthen it in order to reduce inequalities. Also, as our second typology indicated, while a few actors tend indeed to prefer the strengthening of the national level over the one of the EU, and some (especially the younger) are skeptical toward both, most of them prefer supranational and/or multilevel solutions. More interested in the strengthening of the national level of government than the activists of the European Social Forum of 2002 (della Porta 2009; della Porta and Caiani 2009), the participants in the three demonstrations on social justice we have surveyed in 2011 are still cosmopolitan and look at “another Europe” as necessary to control neoliberal globalization, but are more concerned with the national level of politics as well.
Notes

1 About 1000 questionnaires each were distributed at the Euromayday and the general strike; 500 at the Labour day demonstration by teams of about 12 interviewers and four pointers. Response rate has been of about 20% for the postal survey, 100% for the face to face interviews. A comparison between face to face and postal survey indicate that women and organized activists are slightly more likely to return the questionnaire. No difference emerge on the other dimensions we controlled for (della Porta and Reiter 2012). See van Stekelenburg et al. in this issue for more methodological details.
References


Appendix

Table A: Generational variance among participants in the three demonstrations (Cramer’s 40***).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Generation</th>
<th>EuroMayDay</th>
<th>Labour Day</th>
<th>General Strike</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Born up to 1956</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within demonstration</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957-66</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within demonstration</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967-76</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within demonstration</td>
<td></td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977 on</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within demonstration</td>
<td></td>
<td>60.3%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within demonstration</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1. Political trust by demonstration; Means and standard deviations\(^a\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Labour day</th>
<th>General strike</th>
<th>Euromayday</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Eta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National government</td>
<td>1.3 (.69)</td>
<td>1.2 (.55)</td>
<td>1.3 (.59)</td>
<td>1.2 (.60)</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National parliament(^b)</td>
<td>2.3 (.96)</td>
<td>2.0 (.90)</td>
<td>1.7 (.84)</td>
<td>2.0 (.92)</td>
<td>.21***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Union(^c)</td>
<td>3.5 (.98)</td>
<td>3.3 (1.01)</td>
<td>3.1 (1.00)</td>
<td>3.2 (1.01)</td>
<td>.13*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN(^d)</td>
<td>3.1 (.93)</td>
<td>2.8 (1.06)</td>
<td>2.6 (1.06)</td>
<td>2.8 (1.04)</td>
<td>.15**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political parties(^e)</td>
<td>2.5 (.97)</td>
<td>2.3 (.84)</td>
<td>1.9 (.74)</td>
<td>2.2 (.88)</td>
<td>.27***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade unions(^f)</td>
<td>3.5 (.88)</td>
<td>3.2 (.90)</td>
<td>2.7 (93)</td>
<td>3.1 (.95)</td>
<td>.31***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judicial system(^g)</td>
<td>3.8 (.79)</td>
<td>3.6 (.90)</td>
<td>3.2 (1.06)</td>
<td>3.5 (.95)</td>
<td>.24***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of cases.</td>
<td>103-7</td>
<td>224-28</td>
<td>126-7</td>
<td>456-61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes

\(^a\) Give means and standard deviation (within parentheses) Likert Scales 1 ‘no trust at all’ to 5 ‘trust very much
\(^b\) In order to better appreciate if the differences in the means found are significantly different from one another, we performed an independent samples test (t-test) for each couple of means. The independent t-test is more appropriate for our analysis since the means are calculated on different individuals. The t-test has been applied whenever the differences between the three means produced a significant ETA. For this variable, the t-test between the means calculated for the labor day (hereafter LD) and the general strike (hereafter GS) (Equal Variances-EV- assumed) is 2.671***; the t-test between the GS and the Euromayday (hereafter Eur) (EV assumed) is -2.564***; and between the LD and the Eur (EV assumed) is -4.584***.
\(^c\) The t-test for LD and GS is not significant; for the GS and the Eur is not significant, while for LD and Eur (EV assumed) is -2.907***.
\(^d\) T-test for LD and GS (EV assumed) is 2.538***; for GS and Eur is not significant; and for LD and Eur (EV assumed) is -3.314***.
\(^e\) For this variable the t-test for LD and GS (EV not assumed) is 2.459***; for GS and Eur (EV not assumed) is -4.385***; and for LD and Eur (EV not assumed) is -5.640***.
\(^f\) T-test for LD and GS (EV assumed) is 2.806***; for GS and Eur (EV assumed) is -5.211***; and for LD and Eur (EV assumed) is -6.841***.
\(^g\) T-test for LD and GS (EV not assumed) is 2.164*; for GS and Eur (EV not assumed) is -3.582***; and for LD and Eur (EV not assumed) is -5.030***.
Table 2. Political confidence in the three demonstrations (Likert scale 1-5; average) see comments Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Labour day</th>
<th>General strike</th>
<th>Euromayday</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Eta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most politicians make a lot of promises but do not actually do anything⁠ a⁠.</td>
<td>4.4 (.69)</td>
<td>4.6 (.66)</td>
<td>4.7 (.53)</td>
<td>4.6 (.64)</td>
<td>.18***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t see the use of voting, parties do whatever they want anyway⁠ b⁠.</td>
<td>2.0 (1.26)</td>
<td>2.4 (1.26)</td>
<td>2.6 (1.37)</td>
<td>2.4 (1.31)</td>
<td>.16**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My participation can have an impact on public policy in this country.</td>
<td>3.8 (.82)</td>
<td>3.7 (.92)</td>
<td>3.7 (.99)</td>
<td>3.7 (.92)</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized groups of citizens can have a lot of impact on public policies in this country.</td>
<td>4.0 (.87)</td>
<td>3.9 (.76)</td>
<td>4.0 (.86)</td>
<td>3.9 (.81)</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If citizens from different countries join forces, they can have a lot of impact on international politics.</td>
<td>4.0 (.75)</td>
<td>4.1 (.75)</td>
<td>4.1 (.79)</td>
<td>4.1 (.76)</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I consider everybody’s side of an argument before making a decision.</td>
<td>4.0 (.78)</td>
<td>3.9 (.79)</td>
<td>4.0 (.74)</td>
<td>4.0 (.77)</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of cases.</td>
<td>104-6</td>
<td>226-9</td>
<td>126-7</td>
<td>456-61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes

⁠ a⁠ T-test for Ld and GS (EV assumed) is -2.018*; for GS and Eur (EV not assumed) is 2.510**; and for LD and Eur (EV not assumed) is 3.910***.

⁠ b⁠ T-test for LD and GS (EV not assumed) is 2.804**; for GS and Eur is not significant; and for LD and Eur (EV not assumed) is 3.298***.
Table 3. Opinion about globalization by demonstrations (average) see earlier comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Labour day</th>
<th>General strike</th>
<th>Euromayday</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Eta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neoliberal globalization is an</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>.13*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>opportunity for economic growth(^a)</td>
<td>(.73)</td>
<td>(.71)</td>
<td>(.88)</td>
<td>(.77)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Globalization increases social</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inequalities</td>
<td>(.95)</td>
<td>(.80)</td>
<td>(.86)</td>
<td>(.85)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Globalization makes the building of</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>.13*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the building of institutions of global</td>
<td>(.84)</td>
<td>(.77)</td>
<td>(.82)</td>
<td>(.80)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>governance necessary(^b)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of cases</td>
<td>102-6</td>
<td>220-3</td>
<td>123-26</td>
<td>449-51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes

\(^a\) T-test for GS and Eur (EV not assumed) is 2.482**; for LD and Eur (EV not assumed) is 1.927*;  
\(^b\) T-test for GS and Eur (EV assumed) is -2.695**; and for LD and Eur (EV assumed) is -1.938*.
Table 4. How much do you agree with the following statements? (average; likert 1-4)

Table: How much do you agree with the following statements? (average; likert 1-4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Euromayday</th>
<th>Labour day</th>
<th>General strike</th>
<th>total.</th>
<th>ETA square d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The European Union attempts to safeguard a social model that is different from the neo-liberal one</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.9 (.73)</td>
<td>2.3 (.88)</td>
<td>2.2 (.85)</td>
<td>2.2 (.84)</td>
<td>.21***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The European Union mitigates the most negative effects of neo-liberal globalization</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.1 (.79)</td>
<td>2.3 (.81)</td>
<td>2.3 (.71)</td>
<td>2.2 (.75)</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The European Union strengthens neo-liberal globalization</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.9 (.79)</td>
<td>2.6 (.85)</td>
<td>2.6 (.78)</td>
<td>2.7 (.81)</td>
<td>.20***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>116-9</td>
<td>95-8</td>
<td>210-1</td>
<td>422-5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes

* T-test for Eur and LD (EV not assumed) is -4.073***; for LD and GS is not significant and for Eur and GS (EV not assumed) is -4.092***.
* T-test for Eur and LD (EV not assumed) is 3.133***; for Eur and GS (EV not assumed) is 4.006***; and for LD and GS is not significant.
Table 5. Opinion about which institutions should be strengthen to achieve global social movement’s goals by demonstrations (average; likert 1-4) see earlier comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Euromayday</th>
<th>Labour day</th>
<th>General strike</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Eta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strengthen local governments&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>2.7 (.03)</td>
<td>3.1 (.81)</td>
<td>2.9 (.89)</td>
<td>2.9 (.92)</td>
<td>.14*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthen national governments</td>
<td>2.5 (1.12)</td>
<td>2.5 (1.08)</td>
<td>2.6 (1.13)</td>
<td>2.6 (1.12)</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthen European Union&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>2.7 (1.06)</td>
<td>3.0 (.84)</td>
<td>3.0 (.93)</td>
<td>2.9 (.96)</td>
<td>.12*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building institutions of world governance</td>
<td>2.3 (1.12)</td>
<td>2.6 (1.02)</td>
<td>2.5 (1.02)</td>
<td>2.5 (1.05)</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes

<sup>a</sup>T-test for Eur and LD (EV not assumed) is -2.845***; for LD and GS is not significant; and for Eur and GS is not significant.

<sup>b</sup>T-test for Eur and LD (EV not assumed) is -1.987*; for LD and GS is not significant; and for Eur and GS (EV not assumed) is -2.060*.
Table 6. Attitudes towards the EU: crossing trust and desire to strengthen the institution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does not want to strengthen EU</th>
<th>Does not trust EU</th>
<th>Trust EU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Euro-critics: 22.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Satisfied Europeanists: 4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wants to strengthen EU</td>
<td>Critical Europeanists: 31.6</td>
<td>Expanding Europeanists: 41.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7. Attitudes towards strengthening of EU and national institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Does not want to strengthen national government</th>
<th>Wants to strengthen national government</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does not want to strengthen EU</td>
<td>Anti-institutionalists: 20.1</td>
<td>Nationalists: 7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wants to strengthen EU</td>
<td>Cosmopolitan Europeanists: 28.6</td>
<td>Multi-level institutionalists: 43.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>