The London School of Economics and Political Science

Essays on the Political Economy of Preferences for Redistribution and Deservingness in the Age of Realignments and New Cleavages

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Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the MPhil/PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work.

I declare that my thesis consists of 60,788 words.

Abstract

Amidst the emergence of new cleavages, realignments, and the success of populist and radical right parties across Europe, the pivotal role of preferences for redistribution in defining political conflict has been called into question.

My research aims to shed light on the importance of preferences for redistribution in today's European political context considering shifts in the electorate, the trajectories and development of the welfare state, and new party forms and strategies. Specifically, my research is developed along three directions, which combine different perspectives and methods offering a timely and original picture over redistributive politics and political competition.

First, I study how candidates for legislative offices represent their voters' preferences for redistribution, analysing congruence levels and determinants across fifteen European countries over a decade. By providing evidence that congruence on redistribution is still significant, the study suggests that parties' seemingly unorthodox positions on redistribution are reflected in mainstream electorates, and that cultural and redistribution issues tend to be interconnected.

Second, I study how Italian political parties politicise welfare policies in relation to the deservingness of recipients. In doing so, I capture which target groups are deemed as worthy or unworthy of receiving welfare by political parties by deploying content analysis of their Facebook posts. Findings suggest that parties' messaging about the deservingness of welfare for target groups varies not only depending on their anti-system vis-à-vis mainstream status and ideological leaning, but also on the electoral cycle.

Last, I analyse how the mainstream left develops and politicises welfare and redistribution policies. Scholars are currently debating whether the mainstream left has abandoned its traditional focus on redistribution as a result of shifts in its electorate. To study these questions I adopt an elite-interview approach by directly involving the Italian mainstream left's leadership. The paper offers relevant insights into the role of redistribution in shaping party's campaigns, the nature of welfare and redistributive priorities, and the historical evolution of the Italian welfare state.

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As is customary, all errors are mine.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Political competition and changing dimensions

What is the role of redistribution in today's European political competition? Do parties still politicise redistribution and, if so, how?

In *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, Esping-Andersen conveyed a fundamental political science tenet—in a democracy, labour unions support left parties to decommodify labour, in turn increasing the strength of the working class (Esping-Andersen, 1990). The more the latter's relative political power increases, the more its representatives will be influential in the political arena, generating a self-reinforcing feedback loop. It follows that class struggles can reshape capitalism increasing the size of the welfare state and redistributing income and wealth, hence eventually shielding the weakest strata from social risks and countervailing their lower resource endowment (Döring and Schwander, 2015; Iversen and Soskice, 2001).

Redistribution has indeed been the pivotal issue of class politics in Europe since the end of WWII (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Mair, 2013). In stable party systems

structured along the L-R dimension, parties used to compete on different views about the role of the state in the economy and market liberalism, the scope of redistribution, the nature of workers' protection, and the size and configuration of the welfare state. As the L-R spectrum was articulated along economic platforms, parties in office contributed to shape the welfare state depending on their colour. Left parties had a significant impact on the reduction of poverty and inequality, increasing social spending and benefits, and promoting active employment programmes, whereas right parties, representing the net payers of social policies, promoted a more market-oriented state outlook, law and order, internal security, and the expansion of private entrepreneurship (Allan and Scruggs, 2004; De Vries, Hakhverdian, and Lancee, 2013; Imbeau, Pétry, and Lamari, 2001; Iversen and Soskice, 2009; Klingemann et al., 2006; Walgrave, Lefevere, and Tresch, 2012). But regardless of the party in office, the 'Golden Age' of the welfare state (1945-1975) consolidated universal social rights as the basis of social policy, and laid the duty of guaranteeing social protection, social justice, and equity on the shoulders of the state (Esping-Andersen, 1994; Nullmeier and Kaufmann, 2010).

1.1.1 *The first wave of modernisation (1970s-1980s)*

When Esping-Andersen wrote *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* in 1990, European advanced democracies had already embarked on a deep process of transformation. The expansion of the welfare state had halted around the beginning of the 1980s to make space for deregulations, privatisations, and retrenchments. This neoliberal turn, commonly referred to as 'the new politics of welfare retrenchment,' coincided with a reduction in the size and scope of the welfare state (Pierson, 1996). Universal social policies became selective and conditional, welfare was increasingly means-tested and labour-funded, and individuals' responsibility became preponderant over social

protection schemes (Van Oorschot, 2000).

The 'new politics of welfare' also marked the eclipse of partisanship in determining the size and nature of the welfare state. When retrenchments became the norm over welfare expansion, the policymaking of social policies transformed into an exercise of blame avoidance rather than credit attribution (Döring and Schwander, 2015; Pierson, 1996; Pierson, 2001). In this context, the positions of left and right on welfare began to converge, because there was less space for the former to expand, and less for the latter to cut (E. Huber and Stephens, 2010). As a consequence, some scholars talked about a 'neoliberal consensus' reached by both factions (Streeck, 2009).[1]

Alongside the welfare state, society and political competition were changing too. Since the early 1970s, social class, considered as the primary source of political mobilisation, significantly decreased in size because of deindustrialisation (Clark and Lipset, 1991; Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015). With the fracturing of the working class going in tandem with tertiarisation, rising economic prosperity and the reconciliation in industrial relations between owners and workers, political parties found traditional economic platforms to be no longer aligned with societal divisions considered in a traditional Rokkanian fashion. Traditional class borders were indeed increasingly crosscut by new social groups (Häusermann and Kriesi, 2015; Oesch, 2006).

In this post-industrial context, some scholars began talking about dealignment—with rising electoral volatility and issue-oriented voting increasing in relevance, voters seemed no longer aligned with distinct political parties (Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015; Katz and Mair, 1995; Katz and Mair, 2009). The declining role of parties as political institutions and the progressive individualisation of society (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) went in tandem with the twilight of partisanship, 'the glue that binds together diverse

[1]However, the 'neoliberal consensus' theory has been challenged by several scholars who claimed that the positions of the left and right on macroeconomic policies have been diverging rather than converging (Allan and Scruggs, 2004; Kitschelt, Lange, et al., 1999).

political beliefs, guides behaviour, and serves as a stabilizing force within political systems' (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2002:37). But other scholars noted that the decline of economic-oriented partisanship was being increasingly replaced by the politicisation of other issues, a process called the 'first wave' of political modernisation that transformed political dimensions (Döring and Schwander, 2015; Hutter and Kriesi, 2013). Its focus was on the opposition between traditional and post-materialist values.

Traditional class struggles and the L-R economic dimension were revolving around materialist grievances, with the aim to improve personal physical subsistence and safety. But with rising economic prosperity, individuals could take the latter for granted and focus on belonging, 'self-expression' and the quality of life (Inglehart, 1981:880). These cultural preferences gave substance to a second dimension that contrasts libertarianism and authoritarianism (Flanagan and Lee, 2003).[2] The latter are the two extreme poles of a spectrum where cosmopolitanism, gender equality and the inclusion of minorities faces nationalism, traditional gender norms, and cultural homogeneity (Inglehart and Rabier, 1986). This second dimension is normally believed to be orthogonal to the L-R divide, generating a quadrant in which the economic and the cultural dimensions are intersected (Evans, 1999).

This cultural revolution overshadowed both clericalism and secularism in favour of an individual-centred zeitgeist based on self-actualisation (Häusermann and Kriesi, 2015). As a result, since the 1980s new social movements and parties began to emerge. On the one hand, green parties embraced the post-materialist turn politicising the protection of the environment, the fight for civil liberties and social justice, pacifism,

[2]It should be noted that political conflict has never been strictly monodimensional, i.e. structured along the economic dimension only. Even before the post-industrial transformations, a second cultural dimension was represented by religion, well-exemplified by Christian democratic parties which generated a conundrum for the comparative political economy literature, as they were voted by the working class too instead of the left (De La O and Rodden, 2008; Häusermann and Kriesi, 2015; Van Kersbergen and Manow, 2009). But this second dimension was in a subordinate position compared to the L-R axis, and could not be considered as orthogonal to the latter.

and the emancipation of women, hence representing the archetypical post-materialist parties. On the other hand, radical right parties, such as the French National Front, represented an 'ultra-materialist' reaction to post-materialism, advocating for the safeguard of traditional values.

1.1.2 *The second wave (1990s-2000s)*

With the turn of the century, these developments were exacerbated even further, triggering a 'second wave' of political modernisation. Globalisation split societies into those who benefitted more than proportionally from open economies, and those who were damaged more than proportionally (Kriesi, Grande, et al., 2006). The impact of technology on production through skill-biased and routine-biased technological change processes polarised the distribution of income, progressively hollowing out the middle class (Moretti, 2012). This compounded the jobs-replacement effect of automation and robotisation, and the clustering pull of highly-skilled hubs in the knowledge economy vis-à-vis rural, formerly industrial areas (Acemoglu and Autor, 2011; Autor and Dorn, 2013; Frey and Osborne, 2017). Moreover, austerity and liberalisations left wide segments of society exposed to the negative effects of globalisation, and were increasingly politicised as associated with denationalisation and supranational institutions such as the EU. When the crisis hit in 2008, the grievances that had been boiling up in the previous decades were ready to explode.[3]

[3]It should be noted, however, that these trends pertain to the West. In the Global South, since the 1980s, the middle class grew at the expense of Western working class due to globalisation. This is well represented by the Lakner-Milanovic graph, the 'Elephant Curve' (Lakner and Milanovic, 2013). Considering the 1988-2008 period, the graph shows how the world's destitute had virtually no gain in incomes from globalisation, held back by the poor development of Sub-Saharan African countries (the tail of the elephant). The developing world's middle class grew significantly, pulled by India and China (the body). Western middle class, on the contrary, was characterised by a decline of incomes, the latter harmed by globalisation (the initial part of the trunk). Last, the final trunk's tip, which points upward, represents the income growth of the global elites, that concentrated more and more income contributing to the detachment of the 1% from the rest of the distribution.

In this context, scholars have reflected upon the structure of contemporary political competition (De Vries, 2018; Hooghe and Marks, 2018; Kriesi, Grande, et al., 2006; Kriesi, Grande, et al., 2008). While agreeing with the dealignment hypothesis concerning the great destabilisation that followed the end of class politics, these scholars consider political conflict not as completely lacking any equilibrium, but as re-organised along a new dimension. Hooghe and Marks (2018) indeed talked of a 'transnational cleavage,' a new fracture structured around European integration and immigration, on top of the traditional cleavages theorised by Lipset and Rokkan (1967). This cleavage is mobilised by linking sovereignty motives to the protection of national cultural values, as well as negative views of immigration and international trade (Hooghe and Marks, 2018).

Kriesi, Grande, et al. (2006) similarly argued that party systems have realigned on a new cleavage that opposes 'the low-skilled, nationalistic losers of globalisation,' who are targeted by radical right populist parties (RRPPs), to the 'high-skilled, cosmopolitan winners of globalisation,' mobilised by liberal, centre-left, and green parties (Hernández and Kriesi, 2016:207).

Last, De Vries (2018) introduced the concept of the 'cosmopolitan-parochial' divide, which opposes cosmopolitan parties and voters supporting inclusion and international openness to parochial parties and voters that advocate for sovereignty and close borders (De Vries, 2018). Both extremes can be politicised by parties on both the left and right.

1.1.3 *New actors*

These theories have two major aspects in common. First, all explanations imply that the role of mainstream parties in organizing political mobilisation has been dramati-

cally scaled down. From 2000 to 2017, the average vote share of conservatives, social democrats, Christian democrats and liberals in Europe fell from 75% to 64% (Hooghe and Marks, 2018). On the contrary, 'new' party forms and families emerged politicising issues along the second dimension. In particular, RRPPs have enjoyed increasing success across Europe, campaigning on nationalist and authoritarian platforms, such as the safeguard of sovereignty against European integration and international immigration (Akkerman, De Lange, and Rooduijn, 2016; Castelli Gattinara and Froio, 2022; Castelli Gattinara, Froio, and Pirro, 2021; Kaltwasser and Taggart, 2016; McDonnell and Werner, 2019). Many have exploited their challenger and rejectionist status against established parties (Hobolt and De Vries, 2016; Hobolt and Tilley, 2016).

Populist and anti-system parties have been on the rise since the turn of the century, with a great leap forward after the 2008 Financial Crisis. Populism is a contested concept, normally considered to be a set of ideas based on three ingredients: the people, the elite, and the leader (Mudde, 2004; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2012). The charismatic leader mobilises the 'people,' a vague and morally loaded rhetorical construct that emphasises the honesty of the common citizens' *volonté générale* as opposed to the greediness and corruptness of the elites, the latter responsible of impoverishing the citizenship for their own interest, and commonly identified in the European Union, mainstream politicians, or big banks and corporations (Rooduijn, 2019). More generally, anti-system parties reject the 'set of institutions and practices' proper of neoliberalist democracies and their establishment (Hopkin, 2020:8). These parties, whether from the radical right or left, tend to build their success on issue entrepreneurship, i.e. by politicising issues that were previously ignored and are different from the mean position of the party system (Grande, Schwarzbözl, and Fatke, 2019; Hobolt and De Vries, 2015).

The second aspect is that while in the era of class politics electoral behaviour could

be predicted by voters' social structure, namely occupation, geographical location, and religion (De Vries, Hakhverdian, and Lancee, 2013), with the emergence of new cleavages the most relevant predictors of vote choice became the education level, rural/urban residence, gender, and age (Bornschier and Kriesi, 2012; Dolezal, 2010; Hooghe and Marks, 2018). In this regard, RRPPs' electorate is composed of older voters, who possess lower education levels, and feel economically insecure, perceiving themselves as competing with non-native workers for jobs (Afonso and Rennwald, 2018). This is particularly evident in its clear geographical demarcation—RRPPs' supporters tend to be rural or suburban residents, excluded from high-skilled urban employment opportunities (Iversen and Soskice, 2019), living in areas that Rodríguez-Pose called the 'places that don't matter' (Rodriguez-Pose, 2018). On the contrary, the electorate of left-wing populist parties is normally composed of young, urban, well-educated, progressive voters, who feel threatened by globalisation (Santana and Rama, 2018). These voters identify political and economic elites, in particular within the European Union, as responsible for sovereign debt crises, austerity, and increasing levels of inequality (Rico and Anduiza, 2019).

Therefore, by politicising issues on the second dimension, these anti-system parties have been able to shape new identities that have replaced traditional partisan lines. This appears evident considering, as an example, the Brexit vote. 'Leave' and 'Remain' have replaced the Conservative-Labour identities, and the outcome of the referendum depended mostly on spatial location, age, and education level—voting for Leave was more common among older voters, with lower education levels, who felt threatened by multiculturalism, and possessed a stronger national identity and weaker European identity (Hobolt, 2016). These identities can also trigger affective polarisation between in-groups and out-groups beyond partisanship, thus having a significant impact on polarisation and the quality of the democratic process (Hobolt, Leeper, and Tilley,

2021).

1.2 Preferences for redistribution amidst turbulent times

The rise of the second, cultural dimension and the shift of emphasis on issues related to European integration and immigration have attracted most of the scholarship's attention. But amidst the transition to a post-industrial society and the new politics of welfare, the economic dimension has evolved too. The room for manoeuvre of both the left and right to increase or decrease the size of the welfare state has been increasingly limited, and the possibilities to compete on the economic dimension politicising different platforms have been constrained by the nature of the welfare regime (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Pierson, 1996; Pierson, 2001). It is thus no more the size and generosity of the welfare state that define the economic dimension, but the design of its distributive profile—in the words of Van Oorschot, 'who should get what, and why' (Van Oorschot, 2000).

Instead of a contrast between a 'more state/more welfare' left and a 'more market/less welfare' right, the contemporary economic dimension is structured along new conflicts that pit *social insurance* against *redistribution* demands, and *social protection* against *social investment* (Häusermann and Kriesi, 2015). Concerning the contrast between social insurance and redistribution, the crux of the conflict is that increasing the size of the welfare state does not necessarily result in more redistribution anymore. This appears clear observing the vast social insurance conservative regimes in continental Europe, that are based on earnings-related benefits funded through payroll taxes. These tend to freeze social strata by disproportionately favouring older, male

breadwinners over women and young citizens, preventing effective redistribution of income and wealth and exacerbating the conflict between insiders and outsiders (Bradley et al., 2003; Esping-Andersen, 1990). While the former (highly skilled workers) prefer social insurance schemes to compensate for investment in human capital, the latter (low-skilled, low-income workers) are worse-off in the income distribution and thus demand higher redistribution (Häusermann and Kriesi, 2015). The opposition between the two groups was less marked in the Golden Age, when more welfare generosity used to mean an expansion of both the social insurance and the redistributive profiles. But in the age of austerity these two facets are mutually exclusive—benefits are 'dualised,' because higher social insurance for insiders results in lower benefits for outsiders, and vice versa (Häusermann and Kriesi, 2015; Palier, 2010).

The second conflict is between social protection and social investment. Insiders tend to prefer protection policies to safeguard jobs and complement income through earnings-related subsidies, whereas outsiders demand activation policies to access the job market (Rueda, 2005). In this regard, the range of groups who privilege activation policies is increasingly wider, as it includes 'new social risks groups' composed of young people and single/working parents (Bonoli, 2005), as well as autonomous and atypical workers, the working poor, and women (Abou-Chadi and Hix, 2021; Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015). Rather than income insurance, as it was the case for industrial workers, these new categories of voters demand social investments in the form of services, which have increased in importance beyond Northern Europe in both the conservative and liberal regimes to foster labour market participation (Häusermann and Kriesi, 2015).

The two conflicts between social insurance/redistribution, and social protection/social investment cut across the working class considered in a twentieth-century industrial vein, which was compact in advocating for more welfare. But with the rise of the sec-

ond dimension and the resulting multidimensionality of political conflict, distributional demands are also intertwined with cultural preferences. Redistribution today entails the fight for gender equality, the deservingness of non-native social policy recipients, and universalist versus particularist conceptions of welfare (Häusermann and Kriesi, 2015; Van Kersbergen and Manow, 2009).

This is particularly evident observing RRPPs' attitudes towards the welfare state. Their focus is not so much on actual economic positions, which have been observed to be rather blurred (Rovny, 2012; Rovny, 2013; Rovny and Polk, 2020). On the contrary, RRPPs politicise the deservingness of social policy recipients—who should get access to welfare—contrasting natives and non-natives. This behaviour is known as welfare chauvinism, a strategy that aims to depict natives as deserving of benefits and services, but also as unfairly deprived of the latter by undeserving non-natives (Emmenegger and Klemmensen, 2013; Kitschelt and McGann, 1997; Magni, 2021). The logic therefore is one of entitlement as opposed to the size of the welfare state, and is deeply linked to cultural considerations. Traditional values and racial prejudices filter attitudes towards social affinity and deviance and result in the narratives of the 'undeserving poor' and 'welfare scroungers' (Achterberg, Veen, and Raven, 2014; Andersen, 1992; Gilens, 1995). This is especially true among individuals with lower education levels—the lower the education level, the more welfare chauvinism will seem appealing. Indeed, when cultural diversity increases, people with lower education tend to develop a sense of suspicion and anxiety towards 'foreign' cultures and lifestyles that, in their eyes, might unfairly appropriate welfare benefits (Eger, 2010; Häusermann and Kriesi, 2015). RRPP voters are thus incited by the supply side to feel concerned with defending their welfare rights against immigrants and 'welfare fraudsters,' and to perceive themselves as status insecure wanting to avoid being considered among the lowest ranks of the social status hierarchy, i.e. being last place averse (Attewell, 2021;

Gidron and P. Hall, 2017; Hochschild, 2018; Kuziemko et al., 2014).

But in a context of retrenchment and cost-containment, considerations of deservingness not only target immigrants, but also a vast array of individuals being hierarchically ordered in their perceived entitlement to access welfare. As argued by Van Oorschot (2000), the perceived deservingness of citizens depends on five dimensions: *control*, how much control/responsibility people have over their condition; *need*, how needy potential recipients are; *identity*, whether recipients are perceived as 'pleasant' or as close to taxpayers; *attitude*, how docile or grateful recipients are; and *reciprocity*, how much recipients have earned the support. The combination of these factors generates a hierarchy of deservingness which has been observed to remain stable across time and welfare regimes—elderly citizens are considered to be the most deserving, followed by sick and disabled individuals, then by the unemployed, and last by immigrants (Van Oorschot, 2006).[4]

Political competition has clearly changed significantly. New actors politicise new issues and position themselves in a political quadrant that is less dependent on economic platforms. Therefore, reading *Three World of Welfare Capitalism* today raises questions linked to the future of the welfare state and the role of preferences for redistribution in structuring political competition. Contrary to what Esping-Andersen predicted, it might indeed seem hopeless to change capitalism in a context where class

[4]It should be clarified that, recently, elderly citizens in Western democracies have been increasingly perceived as less deserving, due to the skewness of the distribution of welfare benefits in their favour (Bristow, 2015). Baby Boomers are accused of having unfairly and excessively drawn on public welfare in the form of 'gold-plated pensions' at the expense of young people. This generated inter-generational grievances that encompass cultural and political conflicts, the so-called 'Boomer Blaming.' These are well exemplified by the Brexit vote, when older citizens were blamed for the referendum's result (Bristow, 2021). Nonetheless, this clash had little to no impact on the composition of welfare expenditure, which is still largely skewed towards the elderly. In all European countries, old age benefits and pensions are by far the largest components of welfare expenditure (source: Eurostat, 'government expenditure on social protection'). Elderly citizens are still considered as more deserving by policymakers, because of them possessing higher political power, a topic that will be better analysed in the rest of the dissertation. As a consequence, Van Oorschot's categorisation still holds.

struggles are relics of the past. Similarly, the future of the welfare state looks dire given that parties and voters have realigned on non-economic issues and cleavages. Last, the place of preferences for redistribution in today's political context appears unclear. This dissertation addresses these topics.

1.3 Essays on the political economy of preferences for redistribution and deservingness in the age of realignments and new cleavages

This dissertation analyses the supply side of preferences for redistribution from both a comparative perspective and a focus on Italy, considered as a particularly relevant case study to analyse the evolution of distributive struggles and the welfare state. It does so through three complementary essays that investigate distinct perspectives over the role of preferences for redistribution in today's political conflict. Given the increased complexity of attitudes towards welfare and redistribution, studying how political parties politicise preferences for redistribution is more relevant today than ever.

The scholarship has however been focusing primarily on the demand side. A consolidated line of research has analysed the determinants of voters' preferences for redistribution (Alesina and Giuliano, 2011; Alesina, Stantcheva, and Teso, 2018; Guillaud, 2013; Klor and Shayo, 2010; Olivera, 2015), often in connection with immigration and ethnic diversity (Alesina, Murard, and Rapoport, 2021; Dahlberg, Edmark, and Lundqvist, 2012; Finseraas, 2008; Mau and Burkhardt, 2009), or concerning their impact on electoral behaviour (Attewell, 2021; Cavaillé and Trump, 2015; Evans and Tilley, 2012). One stream has explored the future of the welfare state after deindus-

trialisation and the fracturing of the working class, with a focus on left voters and the new social groups in post-industrial societies, as well as their support for redistribution, using survey data at the voters' level (Abou-Chadi and Hix, 2021; Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015; Häusermann and Kriesi, 2015; Häusermann, Picot, and Geering, 2013; Oesch, 2008; Rueda, 2007). The literature on deservingness has similarly used survey data to assess the determinants of entitlement hierarchies, the dynamics linked to the formation of deservingness heuristics, and how the latter impact on voting behaviour (Aarøe and Petersen, 2014; Petersen et al., 2011; Petersen, 2012; Van Oorschot, 2000; Van Oorschot, 2006; Van Oorschot, 2008).

On the other hand, the literature on the supply side has mainly focused on RRPPs' welfare chauvinism, making use of manifesto and expert survey data (Achterberg, Veen, and Raven, 2014; Andersen, 1992; Emmenegger and Klemmensen, 2013; Gilens, 1995; Kitschelt and McGann, 1997; Magni, 2021). There has also been an extensive interest in the issues that RRPPs emphasise, comparing the economic and cultural dimensions (Rovny, 2012; Rovny, 2013; Rovny and Polk, 2020). In terms of mainstream parties, scholars have focused on the impact of left parties' policies when in office on the size of the welfare state (Döring and Schwander, 2015; Herwartz and Theilen, 2017; Iversen and Soskice, 2009; Jensen and Seeberg, 2015; Pribble and E. Huber, 2010; Ross, 2000; Schumacher, 2015), and their attitudes towards economic positions such as the role of the state versus the market (Bakker, Edwards, et al., 2014; Bakker, Jolly, and Polk, 2012; Rovny, 2012).

This dissertation on the contrary aims to expand the scholarship on the supply side in three ways. First, assessing whether political elites reflect their voters' preferences on redistribution (Chapter 2). Second, by analysing parties' everyday communication about the deservingness of social welfare recipients (Chapter 3). Third, by involving the mainstream left's leadership into an in-depth analysis of its strategies, goals

and constraints when it comes to redistributive policymaking (Chapter 4). And, last, by concluding with some reflections on the challenges ahead related to redistributive policymaking (Chapter 5).

1.3.1 *Candidates-voters congruence: do political elites represent their voters on redistribution?*

The first essay investigates whether political elites represent their voters on preferences for redistribution. European political elites have been observed to adopt increasingly unorthodox positions on redistribution, with the left supporting neoliberal stances and the right showing favourable attitudes towards redistribution. This has resulted in the claim that congruence with voters' preferences on redistribution has declined because of realignments over cultural cleavages, exogenous factors that constrain parties' ability to represent their voters, and the diminished dependence of parties on their voters for political and economic resources. Assessing whether political elites still represent their voters on redistribution is an important task, as it relates to the quality of democratic representation and to the place of redistribution in today's political competition.

Adopting a comparative European approach, the study aims to comprehend the dynamics related to congruence between candidates for legislative offices and their voters on preferences for redistribution, its determinants, and its evolution over time. Congruence is thus operationalised as the distance between individual candidates' preferences for redistribution and their party voters' average positions, and studied across fifteen European countries over a decade (2006-2017).

The study makes use of an original dataset that combines surveys at the candidate's level (Comparative Candidates Survey) with several surveys at the voter's level (EES, ESS, EVS, etc.). Candidates represent the units of analysis, and their individual

preferences are matched to their voters' preferences averaged at the party level. The essay also distinguishes between ideological families, populist attitudes, and mainstream vis-à-vis niche outlooks. It also considers the L-R and cultural dimensions alongside preferences for redistribution, to assess whether and how they are intertwined and influence each other in modulating congruence. Last, it examines the determinants of (in)congruence making use of predictors at the candidate, party, and elections level.

The focus on candidates is motivated by the increasingly relevant role that the latter play in structuring European political competition. However, despite their importance, candidates-focused literature is more developed concerning the United States, where parties have historically been weaker than their European counterparts and electoral systems are uninominal (Miller and Stokes, 1963; Pedrazzani and Segatti, 2020). But with the end of mass parties and the individualisation of society, in Europe too parties have lost much of their mobilisation and structuring power (Rahat and Kenig, 2018). Political communication has become more personalised and centred around the figure of the leader, a dynamic further exacerbated by the rise of populism (Adam and Maier, 2010; Lobo and Curtice, 2014; McAllister, 2007). The role of parties as principal channels of socialisation has likewise been eroded, as confirmed by the dramatic drop in party membership and political participation (Van Biezen, Mair, and Poguntke, 2012). In this context, campaigns have been increasingly centred on candidates' personality, and the latter themselves have progressively taken more space in relation to the party's lines to define and emphasise specific issues, increasing the heterogeneity of positions within parties (Shugart, Valdini, and Suominen, 2005; Van Aelst, Sheafer, and Hubé, 2016).

The study's findings suggest that congruence on redistribution is significant, especially for moderate candidates. Candidates with left-wing and culturally progressive positions show favourable views of redistribution and higher congruence. This dis-

proves the claims that political elites would not represent their voters on redistribution anymore as a result of unorthodox positions (Kriesi, Grande, et al., 2008). On the contrary, they have adapted their platforms to represent changing electorates (Abou-Chadi and Hix, 2021). However, radical left candidates tend to favour redistribution more than their voters, while the opposite is true for radical right candidates. Congruence is generally low for radical and niche parties, which show limited salience on redistribution overall (Costello, Toshkov, et al., 2021; Rovny and Polk, 2020). Therefore, despite their recent decline in electoral success, mainstream parties are still able to represent their voters and do so more consistently than their competitors (Ibenskas and Polk, 2022).

Candidates are observed to possess different preferences for redistribution within parties, confirming the increasing personalisation of platforms within parties. Within-party variation on preferences for redistribution is relatively lower for candidates from social democrat and socialist parties but increases significantly for all other party families.

Furthermore, congruence on redistribution has recently declined over time for social democrat and socialist candidates, while it has increased for mainstream right party families, such as conservative, Christian democrat, and liberal candidates. Candidates seem to be overall better aligned on redistribution rather than on the cultural dimension, even though the recent decline in representation on redistribution for some ideological families has been followed by higher congruence on the second dimension.

Regarding the determinants of congruence, candidates' positions along the L-R and cultural dimensions determine the direction of incongruence—candidates who identify as right-wing tend to be more against redistribution than their voters, whereas more progressive cultural values result in candidates being more in favour of redistribution than voters. This suggests that the cultural dimension and preferences for redistri-

bution tend to be connected and confirms the multidimensionality of political conflict (Bakker, Jolly, and Polk, 2020; De Vries, 2018). Last, increasing income inequality predicts lower levels of congruence, as voters are less in favour of redistribution than their candidates. This is in line with the claim that with higher inequality demands for redistribution will decrease (Kelly and Enns, 2010).

1.3.2 *Italy: political context and welfare state*

The next two essays are focused on Italy as a case study. The country is an interesting laboratory to analyse the transformations of political competition, and the role of welfare and redistribution in structuring the latter.

Italy is characterised by a strong presence of anti-system parties since the beginning of the 'Second Republic' (1992-present), which marked the end of the Christian Democracy's political supremacy (Cavalieri and Froio, 2021). But the institutional context has been relatively stable since then nonetheless (Hopkin, 2020). Except for a short parenthesis represented by the League/Five Star Movement (5SM) government in 2018-2019, the centre-left and centre-right have alternated in government in the last three decades. The initially populist Berlusconi's Forward Italy (*Forza Italia*) has been gradually normalised and today shows 'pro-system' platforms only, advocating for typically conservative market- and growth-oriented platforms (Hopkin and Paolucci, 1999; Taguieff, 2003). The party has seen its electoral support decrease significantly though—between 2008 and 2018, Forward Italy moved from 37% of votes to 14%.[5] The Democratic Party (*Partito Democratico*), the major centre-left party, has been in government with only few interruptions since its foundation in 2007. Similarly to other centre-left parties across Europe it has gradually moved towards less industrial-era left-

[5]Data concern the Chamber of Deputies. Source: Ministero dell'Interno.

wing platforms in favour of 'unorthodox' economic positions, progressively embracing culturally-oriented struggles such as LGBT rights and climate change at the cost of social rights (Hopkin, 2020). The party has lost ground too, passing from 33% of votes in 2008 to 18% in 2018.

Despite the substantial stability of the institutional rule, RRPPs have gained increasingly more traction since 2013 when the Northern League (*Lega Nord*), a regionalist party focused on economic grievances between the relatively more developed Northern regions vis-à-vis the central government and the South, was transformed by Matteo Salvini into an archetypical RRPP focusing on sovereignty, the opposition to immigration, and the safeguard of traditional values (Albertazzi, Giovannini, and Seddone, 2018). This strategy allowed the party to double its electoral support from 8% in 2008 to 17% in 2018. More recently, Brothers of Italy (*Fratelli d'Italia*) has been gaining success on similar positions, despite different origins linked to post-fascist movements such as the *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (Basile and Borri, 2022; Borri and Verzichelli, 2021). These parties' success well represents the shift of political competition towards the second dimension characterised by a value-based opposition to immigration, cosmopolitanism, and European integration (Rovny and Polk, 2020; Taggart and Pirro, 2021; Zulianello, 2020). In terms of distributive politics, both the League and Brothers of Italy have fully embraced welfare chauvinist narratives, politicising an increase of welfare benefits for Italians, in line with the social right tradition, but opposing the inclusion of immigrants within the range of recipients (Landini et al., 2021).

Italy is also characterised by the presence of a quasi-left-wing populist party, the 5SM (*Movimento 5 Stelle*). Despite being ideologically ambiguous at the onset, combining traditional populist elements such as the opposition to corrupt elites with environmentalism and a form of proto-direct democracy, the party has gradually evolved to espouse left-wing redistributive platforms and opposition to European austerity (Della

Porta et al., 2017; Gerbaudo, 2019; Mosca and Tronconi, 2019). The 5SM today presents many aspects in common with other European anti-establishment left-wing parties such as Podemos and Syriza (Gerbaudo, 2021; Gerbaudo and Screti, 2017; Sedda, 2020; Segatti and Capuzzi, 2016). These commonalities include an ideological placement in the left-hand side of the spectrum (very marked for Podemos, less for 5SM and Syriza); a similar voters' profile, composed of young people, with high education levels, not religious, and unemployed or precarious; a considerable distrust towards European institutions; and negative perceptions concerning the state of the economy and the ability of governments to provide economic safeguards (Segatti and Capuzzi, 2016). Despite their different origins, all of them experienced a rapid electoral growth and had a profound impact on their respective countries' party systems. In this regard, the 5SM is currently leading as the first party in the Italian parliament in terms of seats, having gained 32% of votes in 2018.

Therefore, from a political perspective, Italy is an interesting laboratory to analyse the role of redistribution in a political context that shows a wide array of party forms and ideologies. The country allows indeed to observe many supply-side conceptions of redistribution, and the effect of their interactions. At the same time, Italy is a country in which the characteristics of the welfare state, in line with the conservative welfare regime, exposed several social strata to inequality and poverty and therefore made distributive platforms particularly needed and discussed, especially after Covid-19.

The Italian welfare state indeed belongs to the conservative regime (Esping-Andersen, 1999). Since the golden age and, even more so, after the retrenchment transformations, its insurance model has been based on earnings-related benefits funded through payroll taxes (Esping-Andersen and Myles, 2011). As it happened in most countries belonging to the conservative model, the focus on social insurance caused several negative consequences. The contrast between insiders and outsiders generated a pronounced

dualism, which was exacerbated even further by deindustrialisation on the one hand, and austerity on the other. Second, since benefits are mainly earnings-related, this resulted in a strong bias in favour of older, male breadwinners at the cost of women and young people.

But more specifically, Italian welfare system can be ascribed to the Southern variant (Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece), which possesses some peculiarities compared to continental countries (France, Germany, Austria). First, Southern countries are characterised by an overreliance on family- and kin-based welfare solidarity (Saraceno, 2016). This 'familialistic' approach stems from the weak role of the welfare state in providing care services and family subsidies (Naldini and Jurado, 2013), devolving on the contrary significant responsibilities to the family. Male breadwinners have to provide not only for their nuclear household, but also for their relatives. Within the kinship, women are segregated to the role of care providers. Young adults tend therefore to leave parental home later than in other welfare regimes, being this strategy a substitute for intergenerational economic transfers in a context where getting a permanent job is more difficult than elsewhere and supports for the youth are limited (Mencarini and Tanturri, 2006). In turn, the offspring reciprocates by taking care of the elderly in lieu of the state (Albertini, Kohli, and Vogel, 2007).[6]

Italy can be considered a relevant case study to analyse dynamics related to welfare and redistribution for a number of reasons. First, it possesses several characteristics that make it a representative case of the conservative regime—the insiders/outsiders dualism; a social insurance system that solidifies social stratification rather than stim-

[6]The regime type, structure, and characteristics of welfare states are conditional on path-dependent dynamics (Kiess et al., 2017; Nakabayashi, 2019; Pontusson and Raess, 2012; Van Kersbergen, Vis, and Hemerijck, 2014). Historical legacies of specific policy sets, cultural traits, and social architectures at a given moment in time have long repercussions for the way European welfare states have developed into distinct welfare regimes, as well as for their subsequent responses to external shocks (Lallement, 2011; Van Hooren, Kaasch, and Starke, 2014). For a review of path dependence and its impact on the way institutions evolve see Thelen (2004).

ulate mobility; the stronger role of male breadwinners; the skewness towards benefits rather than services; and, finally, the reliance on non-state actors when it comes to deliver and implement social policy (Lynch, 2004; Van Kersbergen, 2003). Similarly to other Southern regime countries, Italy shows a strong preference for a 'state corporatist model in pensions, unemployment and labour market policies,' a universalistic approach when it comes to education and healthcare, but particularistic supports regarding social care and assistance (Pavolini et al., 2015:61).

At the same time, however, it possesses some specificities. Despite a slow transition towards dual-earner families, if compared to similar countries such as Spain, Italy is showing a higher level of inertia in surpassing the familialistic model (Naldini and Jurado, 2013). Second, Italy has been characterised for a long time by a clientelistic welfare system, in particular in the 'First Republic' (1948-1992), when the Christian Democracy established a system of welfare benefits in exchange of political support (Hopkin, 2020; Lynch, 2004).

This was particularly evident in the South, a factor that contributed to the lower economic development of those regions causing strong geographical disparities with the North. Such dynamics have been famously linked to cultural factors by scholars such as Banfield and Putnam. In *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*, Banfield described the fictitious village of Montegrano as the locus of 'amoral familism' (Banfield, 1967). Montegrano inhabitants' political culture would lack the sense of public good, the 'social capital,' hence sacrificing public welfare and investment in favour of nepotistic exchanges to support the immediate kinship. Along similar lines, Putnam (1992) links the stratification of social capital to long-term historical and cultural developments dating back to the Middle Age. Nothern regions would today present higher levels of social capital because of historically consolidated democratic order and horizontal governing structures, whereas the South was characterised by feudal societies and ver-

tical political structures that prevented the creation of mutual trust among citizens. Political, economic, and historical factors combined into the *Questione Meridionale* ('Southern Matter'), a complex set of intertwined issues that relegate Southern regions to lower levels of economic growth, socioeconomic development, infrastructural organisation, and quality of life. The marked divergence vis-à-vis the North contributed to the polarisation of political conflict and the sharpening of distortions within the welfare state.

1.3.3 *Recipients' deservingness in parties' everyday communication: how politicians talk about target groups*

Analysing the Italian context, the second essay studies how political parties politicise the deservingness of social policies' recipients in their everyday communication. Amidst austerity and retrenchments, European welfare states have become highly conditional. Social policies in relation to the deservingness of recipients have been increasingly politicised by parties hoping to gain politically by increasing welfare provisions for some target groups while preventing access to other groups (Ingram and Schneider, 1991; Schneider and Ingram, 1993; Schneider and Ingram, 2017). The study analyses Italian parties' everyday communication by deploying content analysis of their Facebook (FB) posts about the deservingness of welfare for target groups.

Policymakers, in their communication, contribute to the shaping of social constructions of welfare recipients, the 'emotional, value-based images and stereotypes associated with people,' strategically manipulated by politicians to gain an electoral advantage in relation to recipients' political power (Schneider and Ingram, 2017: 321). Taking inspiration from the work of Anne Schneider and Helen Ingram (Ingram and Schneider, 1991; Schneider and Ingram, 1993; Schneider and Ingram, 2017), social

constructions can thus be operationalised into four target groups—target groups that are deserving and possess high political power (*advantaged*), such as the middle class, entrepreneurs, soldiers and the elderly; those who have low political power but a deserving status (*dependent*), such as women, young citizens, families and disabled; groups with high political power but an undeserving connotation (*contenders*), such as big banks and corporations; and, finally, target groups with low political power and an undeserving status (*deviants*), such as immigrants, welfare fraudsters and criminals. These social constructions have a tangible impact on the design and generosity of social policies, as well as on individuals' experiences as citizens.

The goal of the study is to identify the categories of people deemed as deserving or undeserving in party political messaging, and assess whether the strategic choice of emphasising the (un)deservingness of specific groups depends on parties' institutional role.

To analyse parties' communication on FB about the deservingness of target groups, I made use of an original FB dataset which includes all the posts published by the official accounts of the Democratic Party, 5SM, League, Forward Italy, and Brothers of Italy between December 2012 and March 2019. The dataset allows to observe parties across two parliamentary elections and five different governments. Facebook data have been preferred over traditional media outlets as they allow to observe unfiltered, direct messaging by parties in what is today the most important communication tool for parties (Gibson and McAllister, 2015; Spierings and Jacobs, 2019). This is particularly true for populist parties, that exploit social media to create direct links with their base while accusing traditional outlets and journalists of being aligned with the elites (Kriesi, 2014; Stanyer, Salgado, and Strömbäck, 2016). But mainstream parties had to increase their presence on FB too (Engesser et al., 2017), which today is the most used

social media, especially in Italy where it covers 65% of internet users.[7] Despite scholars have mostly focused on Twitter, in particular in the US, FB has several advantages, such as no word limits and a wider demographic reach (Barberá et al., 2019; Ernst et al., 2019; Muller and Schwarz, 2021; Stolee and Caton, 2018). After having defined a coding scheme, parties' FB posts have been analysed through content analysis to identify the target groups they were referring to.

Findings suggest that anti-system parties are more focused on negative social constructions of *deviant* target groups, such as immigrants, welfare cheaters, and criminals in the case of RRPPs, and of *contenders* in the case of the 5SM. They also talk about increasing welfare for vulnerable target groups belonging to the *dependent* category. However, they alter their rhetorical strategy when in government to signal competency around platforms in favour of *advantaged* recipients. This is an important finding within the scholarly debate concerning issue attention, as it confirms that populists emphasise the deservingness of groups with high political power—the same elites they strongly criticise while in opposition—to signal competency (Cavalieri and Froio, 2021; Froio, Bevan, and Jennings, 2017; Green-Pedersen, 2019; B. Jones and Baumgartner, 2005). On the contrary, when they are in opposition they exploit their challenger status to blame mainstream parties of unfairly allocating welfare resources to undeserving target groups.

Mainstream parties conform to their traditional ideological leaning, but left-wing parties have exhibited a detachment, since their universalistic messaging about welfare does not match their actual social policies, which tend to be more particularistic. The left had indeed to adapt to new electorates and is more constrained than populist parties by government responsibilities (Abou-Chadi and Hix, 2021; Häusermann and Kriesi, 2015).

[7] Agcom 2019 data.

Overall, some target groups tend to receive scarce attention from all political parties, such as women, the disabled, and young adults. This has serious consequences on target groups' lives—social constructions and the attention that policymakers devote to specific groups not only result in more or less generous or universal social policies, but also in long lasting stigma and discrimination (Ingram and Schneider, 1991; Schneider and Ingram, 1993).

1.3.4 *The mainstream left and redistribution: strategies, aims, and constraints*

The third essay analyses the strategies, constraints, and internal struggles of the left in designing and implementing its redistributive policies. In a political competition characterised by the rise of radical right populist parties and the increasing relevance of the second dimension, left parties have adopted increasingly regressive stances since the 1990s, and some scholars have argued that the 'divorce' with the working class has resulted in reneging on their redistributive tradition (Abou-Chadi and Wagner, 2019; Cooper and Burchardt, 2022; Hopkin, 2020; Kitschelt, 2001; Pierson, 2001; Ross, 2000).

The scholarship is indeed debating whether redistribution still matters for the contemporary left. On the one hand, scholars such as Piketty claim that today the left would be voted by the *Brahmins*, people with high income and education levels, who are not interested in welfare and redistribution but in issues belonging to the second dimension only (Piketty, 2020). On the other hand, a different stream of research argues that the left is trying to redefine its distributive platforms to target the *new middle class*, a heterogenous social group composed of individuals who demand new welfare and redistribution tools as opposed to the old working class (Abou-Chadi and Hix, 2021; Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015).

This study analyses these arguments through in-depth interviews with the Italian Democratic Party's policymakers. The PD is Italy's major centre-left party. It was founded in 2007 after more than a decade of incubation in the form of several alliances that merged minor social democratic, socialist, Christian democratic, and liberal democratic formations to face the new challenges of post-communist political competition, Silvio Berlusconi *in primis*. The Democratic Party can be seen as representative of several left and centre-left parties across Europe, such as the German SPD, the British Labour, and the French Socialist Party. Similarly to these counterparts, the PD is going through a process of redefinition of its character, being weakened by several internal ideological factions and trying to address the needs of new electorates.

To analyse the dynamics related to redistributive policymaking within the PD, this study has adopted an original approach by interviewing the party's leadership. Specifically, the sample frame was compiled to include party leaders specialised in economic issues. Thirty-two MPs, members of regional parliaments, and high cadres within the party have been interviewed between October 2021 and March 2022, a period in which the party was in government supporting the large coalition led by Mario Draghi. Following Covid, platforms of welfare and redistribution have become highly salient in the public debate and interviewees were directly involved in the design of many of those.

Findings reveal that the party has adapted its redistributive targets to the needs of the 'new' middle class—autonomous and atypical workers, the working poor, women and youth. This confirms that the mainstream left has not completely reneged on its redistributive mandates as claimed by Piketty (2020). On the contrary, the left tries to intercept the needs of new social groups that demand different policies if compared to the industrial working class (Abou-Chadi and Hix, 2021; Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015).

But in doing so it has fed a strong internal ideological divide that has prevented its redistributive platforms from effectively tackling structural inequalities. A more redistributive political faction is struggling to emerge and resents the outdated views of the party's leadership on redistribution and welfare, which show the typical misperceptions towards policies such as wealth taxes or universal basic incomes that are normally attributed to voters (Glennerster, 2012; Rowlingson and McKay, 2005). The party's leadership is also accused of devoting too much emphasis to cultural over economic issues, as the former are easier to communicate. The party's base also appears more redistributive than the leadership, and has overcome the conflict between a traditional labour-centred perspective of the social democratic faction and a residual view of social welfare of the liberal democratic stream.

1.4 Discussion

The lessons learned from, and the contributions of, this dissertation will be thoroughly discussed in the following chapters and in the final conclusion. However, some macro takeaways are worthy of mention in this introduction.

First, these essays depict a political conflict in which, as expected, cultural struggles are deeply intertwined with the economic dimension. More traditional cultural values decrease the level of representation on preferences for redistribution, generate higher conditionality concerning the deservingness of social policy recipients, and are increasingly politicised at the cost of economic platforms. This is in line with the literature on new cleavages and realignments. This dissertation however reveals that although changed with respect to the industrial era, redistributive struggles are still relevant in structuring political conflict. In this regard, the L-R divide still defines the direction of congruence on redistribution. Similarly, parties on the left and right

still present different strategies in politicising deservingness, and still perceive themselves as diametrically opposite. Although increasingly defined by cultural attitudes or by 'new' electorates, parties, be them left/right or mainstream/populist, adopt well defined strategies on redistribution. The latter need to be studied more thoroughly by the scholarship, going beyond the claims that representation on redistribution has disappeared (Häusermann and Geering, 2011), or that no political actor today politicises them as a consequence of the cultural nature of the clash between *Brahmins* and *Merchants* (Piketty, 2020).

Second, this dissertation reveals the dynamics that underpin the everchanging relationships between political elites and voters on redistribution. These relationships are articulated in three ways. One concerns representation, as candidates from the left have been less able to represent their voters on redistribution over time, whereas right-wing candidates have been doing better. Another one relates to the social constructions of target groups—groups with little political power are overlooked in parties' communication and policy design. And finally, a distance in terms of distributive preferences between the mainstream left's base and leadership. The latter shows outdated views fueled by the inertia of twentieth century social democratic and liberal democratic ideologies, while the base and some more redistributive factions are struggling to propose more contemporary conceptions of redistribution and the use of policy tools such as wealth taxes and universal basic incomes.

Third, the dissertation suggests that there might be a future for the welfare state. Despite the fragmentation of the working class, there might still be support for pro-welfare attitudes indeed. The mainstream left needs to respond to the needs of the 'new' middle class that demands different distributive politics. On the other hand, populist parties, despite being less salient on the economic dimension, are increasingly pro welfare (Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015; Hellwig and Samuels, 2007; Kitschelt

and Rehm, 2015; Mair, 2013), at least from a welfare chauvinist or anti-establishment perspectives. It is debatable how much of these parties' rhetoric translates into actual social policy when they are in government, but it seems that their electorates are preoccupied with receiving state support.

This dissertation thus offers several insights contributing to the scholarly discussion and the public policy debate on how to deal with redistribution and social policy in a fluid political and welfare context. It adopts a mixed-methods approach and considers both comparative and case study perspectives. There is obviously ample space to improve and expand in this direction. One line of research could indeed put representation in relation to actual distributive policies, analysing responsiveness rather than congruence and studying how the latter changes from a time series perspective vis-à-vis the electoral cycle or opinion polls. This could be done concerning deservingness messaging too. The focus on Italy could be widened to include comparative approaches in studying the mainstream left's attitudes towards redistribution, also opening up to other political formations and to recent developments linked to the Covid-19 crisis and climate change. Contrary to being relics of the past, redistributive struggles might become more pivotal than ever.

Chapter 2

Do They Both Want to Redistribute? A Study of Congruence Between Candidates and Voters on Preferences for Redistribution

2.1 Introduction

Do European parties' candidates reflect their voters' preferences for redistribution? And if not, what determines the incongruence? These questions are non-trivial because they pertain to the quality of democratic representation and to the role of preferences for redistribution in today's political competition.

A close alignment between the views of voters and political elites is a fundamental

feature of democratic representation (Costello, Thomassen, and Rosema, 2012; Dalton, 2017; J. Huber and Powell, 1994; Thomassen and Schmitt, 1999). If politicians and voters share aligned goals, the odds that representatives will act in voters' interest increase (Giger and Lefkofridi, 2014; Mansbridge, 2009; Pitkin, 1967). High levels of congruence also have a positive effect on citizens' satisfaction with their representatives and democracy in general (Ezrow and Xezonakis, 2011; Stecker and Tausendpfund, 2016).

The scholarship has mainly studied how well parties reflect their voters' preferences along the left-right (L-R) divide (Dolezal et al., 2013; Dolny and Baboš, 2015). In stable party systems populated by mass parties, as used to be the case in Europe, high ideological congruence on the L-R continuum normally meant high representation overall (Mair, 1997; McDonald and Budge, 2005; Thomassen and Schmitt, 1997). However, we need to observe congruence along different dimensions because of the emergence of new party forms (De Vries and Hobolt, 2020; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017), new cleavages (Hooghe and Marks, 2018), and ideological realignments (Kriesi, Grande, et al., 2008).

In this sense, congruence on preferences for redistribution is especially relevant. The distinction between a 'high redistribution-high taxes' left, and a 'low redistribution-low taxes' right might be obsolete. The increased complexity of welfare systems and distributive policies and the interconnection of economic and cultural factors in shaping preferences of redistribution result in less certain ideological boundaries. However, despite the importance of congruence on these issues, we currently lack a deep understanding of its magnitude and determinants, particularly from a comparative perspective.

I address this omission by studying congruence on preferences for redistribution in fifteen European countries between 2006 and 2017. Instead of focusing on the alignment

between parties and voters, I position individual candidates as units of analysis. In doing so, this paper expands on a recent line of research that has analysed congruence on the L-R divide from the point of view of individual candidates, on the grounds that European political conflict has become more personalised, and the representational role of parties has waned (Pedrazzani and Segatti, 2020). Focusing on the distance between the preferences for redistribution of individual candidates and the average preferences of their party voters, I first analyse congruence, assessing its magnitude and evolution over time. I then analyse its determinants in a multidimensional setting; I study preferences for redistribution and their congruence alongside other relevant issues in today's political competition—the L-R divide, immigration, and European integration.

Findings show that, overall, the level of congruence between candidates and electorates on redistribution issues is significant, in particular for moderate candidates, such as those from Christian democrat, liberal, and social democrat party families, even though the latter show some very recent declines in congruence. Alignment decreases for candidates belonging to radical and niche parties—on the left, candidates view redistribution more favourably than their voters, whereas alignment on the right follows the opposite trend. Candidates' opinions on redistribution seem to be associated with L-R and cultural dimensions: more traditional values and right-wing positions are associated with lower candidate support for redistribution and lower congruence with voters. Finally, higher levels of income inequality result in candidates viewing redistribution more favourably than their voters.

This study represents a relevant contribution to the scholarship. By providing evidence that candidates are still congruent with their voters on redistribution, findings disprove the claims that political elites would not represent anymore their voters on redistribution issues (Kriesi, Grande, et al., 2008). On the contrary, this study confirms

that political elites have adapted their platforms to represent 'new' electorates (Abou-Chadi and Hix, 2021). Findings also corroborate recent research by Ibenskas and Polk (2022), suggesting that although European mainstream political elites have seen their electoral success fall in the last decades, they are still able to represent their voters' preferences. They seem to do so more consistently than niche candidates, that present blurred positions on redistribution and devote lower salience to this topic, resulting in lower congruence (Costello, Toshkov, et al., 2021; Rovny and Polk, 2020). Last, the study provides evidence that cultural values and preferences for redistribution are connected, confirming the multidimensionality of congruence and, more generally, political conflict (Bakker, Jolly, and Polk, 2020; De Vries, 2018).

2.2 Beyond the left-right dimension

In studying congruence, scholars have focused on the alignment between parties and their voters through the act of democratic delegation (Belchior and Freire, 2013; Dalton, 1985). In this light, the responsible party model states that if distinct party positions are aligned with their voters' views, democratic representation will be high because governments will represent the preferences of the majority of voters (Rosset and Stecker, 2019). Other scholars have studied congruence between voters and their representatives in parliament or government, comparing mean preferences (J. Huber and Powell, 1994; Powell, 2000), or comparing all distributions of preferences (Golder and Stramski, 2010).

Nonetheless, the European political landscape has changed significantly in the last decade as a consequence of the impact of globalisation, financial crises, austerity, and economic inequality (Autor, Dorn, and Hanson, 2016; Collier, 2018; Fetzer, 2019; Rodrik, 2018). But there has also been a cultural backlash contrasting traditional

and post-materialist values (Inglehart and Norris, 2016; Norris and Inglehart, 2019) exacerbated by migratory waves (Hochschild, 2018). This has meant moving from a L-R unidimensionality to multidimensionality with the emergence of new party forms that have reshaped cleavages, party alignments, and the relative importance of issues, such as immigration, law and order, redistribution, and European integration (De Vries, 2018; De Vries and Giger, 2014; Hooghe and Marks, 2018; Kriesi, Grande, et al., 2006; Kriesi, Grande, et al., 2008).

Scholars have observed that parties and voters are often incongruent on these policy issues. Indeed, when political competition is not structured along a single overarching dimension, voters will support some issues but oppose others, making it difficult for parties to represent their voters' preferences across all policies (Dalton, 2017). In particular, parties have been observed to be more in favour of European integration than their electorate, to possess more progressive cultural views, and to be less in favour of the state intervening in the economy (Rosset, 2016; Rosset and Stecker, 2019). Within this theoretical framework, this study focuses on congruence on preferences for redistribution.

2.3 Candidates-voters congruence on preferences for redistribution

Most of the studies about congruence on redistribution have recently argued that the alignment between voters and political elites on this issue would be low (Häusermann and Geering, 2011). This claim originated from the empirical consideration that politicians have increasingly adopted unorthodox positions—those belonging to the mainstream left favouring neoliberal pro-market positions, and the right advocating more

generous welfare provisions (Hopkin, 2020; Kitschelt, 2001; Kriesi, Grande, et al., 2008). Drawing upon Häusermann and Geering (2011), three different theoretical explanations can be found in the literature.

The first, labelled *globalisation* literature (Hellwig and Samuels, 2007; E. Huber and Stephens, 2010), argues that because of exogenous factors, such as financial crises, fiscal austerity, and the globalisation of economies and societies, political elites could no longer pursue the preferences of their traditional constituencies.

The second explanation, from *cartel parties* literature (Katz and Mair, 1995; Mair, 2013), claims that with the end of mass parties, elections no longer translate voters' preferences into party policies. Political elites have become disjoined from their voters, turning to the state for support and resources; and because they would no longer depend on the electorate for support, they do not necessarily represent their voters' redistribution preferences.

The last explanation focuses on *realignments* claiming that recent European party competition is structured around a 'second,' cultural dimension focused on immigration and European integration and no longer on redistribution (Kitschelt and Rehm, 2015; Kriesi, Grande, et al., 2008). Because voters would then not be defined by their preferences for redistribution, there would be low congruence.

The advocates of the globalisation and cartel parties explanations, however, neglect possible changes on the demand side, still assuming traditional class structures and voting behaviours—pro-redistribution blue-collar workers for the left, and pro-market white-collar workers for the right. In contrast, the realignment literature assumes a trade-off between redistribution vis-à-vis cultural congruence, despite evidence that cultural and economic factors are interconnected and not mutually exclusive (Cavaillé and Trump, 2015; Lachat and Dolezal, 2008). As a consequence, all three

explanations might result in an underestimation of the congruence on redistribution.

Instead, I argue that if political elites adopt unorthodox redistribution positions, it does not necessarily translate into low levels of congruence. Changes in the demand side and more nuanced welfare systems might still account for significant congruence and a pivotal role of redistribution in shaping political competition. This argument is tested by going beyond the prior research in two important ways: using individual party candidates as units of analysis, and adopting a broad European perspective.

While in the US a consolidated scholarship exists studying congruence from the perspective of individual candidates (Miller and Stokes, 1963), in Europe congruence studies have been mainly centred on aggregate analyses at the party level because of the different electoral and party systems—uninominal in the US, proportional in Europe, where parties had a more prominent role in structuring representation (Pedrazzani and Segatti, 2020). Nonetheless, the attention to candidates in Europe has been recently renewed thanks to the Comparative Candidates Survey (CCS), and in particular by Pedrazzani and Segatti (2020) who have analysed L-R congruence in Europe focusing on candidates for parliamentary elections. Indeed, in a European context in which the importance of parties in addressing political conflict and favouring socialisation has shrunk (Rahat and Kenig, 2018; Van Biezen, Mair, and Poguntke, 2012), individual candidates have become more directly connected to their voters, as confirmed by the increased relevance of leaders' personality and candidate-centred campaigns (Cutler, 2002; Lobo and Curtice, 2014; Pedrazzani and Segatti, 2020).

Along these lines, this study analyses whether candidates are aligned with their voters on redistribution. Focusing on candidates for national legislative offices allows the study of both absolute and directional congruence, i.e. whether candidates are more in favour of redistribution than their voters or the other way around, and the

determinants of such, hence also considering the demand side.[1] This analysis occurred without making use of aggregate data, expert surveys, or manifesto data, which would have risked losing granularity and reliability (Adams, Ezrow, and Somer-Topcu, 2011).

Furthermore, a comparative perspective made it possible to consider factors at the party, election, and country levels, as well as the candidates' characteristics. It also allowed the study of the interplay between the economic and cultural dimensions across countries and time. Previous studies on congruence have adopted a geographically and temporally limited perspective, obtaining inconclusive findings (Dalton, 2017). Instead of a simple description of congruence, this study sought to identify the determinants of incongruence.

2.3.1 *Theoretical expectations*

Most studies belonging to the three strands of literature cited above suggest that alignment between political elites and voters on preferences for redistribution no longer exists. I was interested in observing whether this null hypothesis could be rejected or, in other words, whether there is some degree of alignment between candidates and voters on redistribution issues.

This first hypothesis builds on the several observations. First, economic crises, austerity, and globalisation have returned these issues to the forefront of political debate (Van Kessel, 2015). In this regard, Chwieroth and Walter (2019) provided evidence that in the era of 'great expectations' that followed the 2008 crisis, voters became more prone to electorally punish politicians that fail to properly address banking and

[1]Two caveats are necessary here. First, I will not try to identify the direction of causal mechanisms—whether voters shape candidates' preferences for redistribution, or vice versa. Instead, the aim of the study is to analyse levels of congruence between the two, and the factors that are associated with higher or lower congruence levels. Second, a common issue of congruence studies has been to observe preferences during election campaigns, but those might change when parties or candidates are in office, which represents a source of possible imprecision (Häusermann and Geering, 2011).

financial crises. Contrary to the *globalisation* literature, political elites became more, rather than less, responsive to the needs of the middle class, the latter being more financialised compared to the past and demanding government policy to 'protect and promote' its wealth in the face of rising financial anxiety (Chwieroth and Walter, 2019).

Second, welfare policies are more nuanced and complex than they used to be, encompassing pension systems, labour markets, the school system, taxes, and healthcare (Häusermann and Geering, 2011; Häusermann and Kriesi, 2015). Platforms in relation to these policies still represent a key factor for electoral success (Armingeon and Giger, 2008). Third, changes in European societal structures might account for nontraditional positions on redistribution: candidates might have repositioned their redistributive platforms to be congruent with 'new' voters. Indeed, following deindustrialisation and the fracturing of the working class, many of today's mainstream left supporters are highly skilled, educated, urban professionals who require different redistributive policies compared to the old working class (Hernández and Kriesi, 2016). Conversely, blue-collar workers have become increasingly attracted to the positions of the radical right (Afonso and Rennwald, 2018). Last, considerations about the amount and nature of welfare and redistribution policies are strongly linked to social affinity and empathy towards recipients (Cavaillé and Trump, 2015), as confirmed by the chauvinism of welfare platforms of radical right populist parties (Betz and Meret, 2012; Van Oorschot, 2006). In this sense, mainstream candidates are expected to be more in line with their voters, given that niche candidates are more oriented towards the second dimension or chauvinist considerations linked to deservingness and cultural aspects rather than economic and redistributive policies (Rovny and Polk, 2020).

In addition, I was interested in whether views on redistribution and congruence with voters varied depending on candidates' positioning along the L-R and cultural dimensions. Left-wing candidates should possess more favourable views of redistribution

and be more congruent with their voters on redistribution than right-wing candidates. Indeed, they can be expected to own redistribution issues, that should be more salient in their platforms, and should cater to the new middle class offering redistributive platforms to face the new anxieties of today's globalised economies (E. Huber and Stephens, 2014). On the other hand, right-wing candidates have been progressively shifting to noneconomic issues, such as immigration and security. Similarly, candidates with more traditional cultural values are expected to show more negative views of redistribution, and to be less aligned with their voters. A more conservative culture might indeed blur the economic dimension and shift the focus away from redistribution. Based on the discussion above, I articulated the following hypotheses:

H1 Congruence can be observed between candidates and voters on preferences for redistribution, in particular for mainstream candidates.

H2 More left-wing and culturally progressive candidates will be more in favour of redistribution and more aligned with their voters.

2.4 Data and methodology

2.4.1 *Dataset construction*

The dataset used in this study is a comparative cross section covering fifteen European countries across twenty-four elections between 2006 and 2017. The units of analysis are individual candidates. The first step was selecting appropriate survey data that contained information about candidates' preferences for redistribution. The optimal choice was the CCS, which collects information on candidates' attitudes, preferences, and beliefs using the same questionnaire in over thirty countries in correspondence with

general elections.[2] Limiting the focus to Europe, I have identified waves and countries containing questions on preferences for redistribution. I eliminated candidates with missing responses to this issue or that did not indicate the party they were representing.

I then selected several well-known voter-level datasets to link and match CCS countries and elections—the European Social Survey (ESS), the European Election Studies (EES), the European Values Study (EVS), and several single country surveys.[3] Even though matching questions from different surveys can be risky because of different wording and scales, I tried to overcome potential limitations taking all possible precautions, drawing chiefly upon Rosset and Stecker (2019). I believe the original contribution and depth of the study outweighs commonly unavoidable data limitations.

Accordingly, I checked the fieldwork periods and selected only those countries and rounds in which the fieldwork had been conducted during the year in which elections took place. This is relevant, because voters' surveys are often conducted much later than the declared survey round (Stecker and Tausendpfund, 2016). In selecting countries and elections, I focused on the availability and similarity of the questions about preferences for redistribution—both with respect to CCS and to other voter-based datasets. My objective was obtaining a pool of closely similar survey questions, thus keeping only those that tapped into the same concept—preferences for redistributing income and wealth, expressed using similar wording and measured using Likert scales. I then excluded respondents that failed to answer redistribution or party affiliation

[2]It should be noted that the dataset includes both successful and unsuccessful candidates, as surveys are carried out before the elections and there is no way to ascertain the candidates' electoral outcomes. While on the one hand this represents a limitation, because only elected candidates will represent voters' policy preferences in legislative offices, a high level of congruence with unsuccessful candidates is relevant for representation too, especially in a context of rising niche and radical politicians and parties. The latter have lower probabilities of being elected, but their impact on the public debate is significant, even in PR systems, given the general high connection between politicians and their supporters through social media (Gibson and McAllister, 2015).

[3]A full list of countries and elections and their respective datasets, and the exact wording of questions are provided in the Online Appendix.

questions.

After having selected countries and election rounds, I focused on parties, keeping only those appearing in both candidates' and voters' datasets. For party affiliation at the voters' level, I used the *party voted for* question, which minimised the number of missing answers.[4] To increase the accuracy of the analysis, I kept only parties with at least five respondents among candidates and thirty among voters (Costello, Thomassen, and Rosema, 2012).[5] I then collapsed voters' variables at the party level, generating mean positions on redistribution and other dimensions, such as immigration, EU integration, and self-identification along the L-R continuum. I then recoded, if necessary, all voters' scales into CCS polarity, rescaled variables into a 1 to 5 scale as in CCS, and standardised both candidates' and voters' variables into a 0 to 1 scale (Rosset and Stecker, 2019; Welzel, 2013). I then matched voters' variables to individual candidates according to their parties.

The final dataset was thus a cross section of individual candidates identified by their party and the country/election combination for a total of 13,046 observations.[6] This dataset allows to study congruence on redistribution in two complementary steps. First, gauging the magnitude and direction of congruence on preferences for redistribution, and testing whether they vary across party families, over time, and in relation to other issues in political competition. Second, employing regression models to study how the direction of congruence varies according to factors at the candidate, party, and election levels.

[4]In a few cases, I selected the *party would vote for in the next general elections* question, when the survey was in the same year as elections, but before the election took place.

[5]This threshold is actually slightly more generous than the one suggested by Costello, Thomassen, and Rosema (2012), who set the boundary at forty voters, because I was interested in including as many niche parties as possible.

[6]The sample size will be smaller in regression models because of missing values in some control variables.

2.4.2 *Measures of congruence*

The empirical analysis is based on two measures of congruence. The first is the absolute distance between candidates' preferences for redistribution and their party voters' mean preferences for redistribution. It ranges from an overall minimum of .001 for a candidate showing almost perfect congruence, to an overall maximum of .91, the highest incongruence registered in the dataset. This measure allowed to gauge the magnitude of (in)congruence, its evolution over time, and the differences across party families.

The second measure is the difference between individual candidates' preferences for redistribution and their parties' voters mean preferences for redistribution (Budge and McDonald, 2007). Because they are both on a 0 to 1 scale, I obtained a measure of congruence ranging from -1, meaning that candidates want to redistribute more than their voters, then passing through 0, meaning perfect congruence, to +1, meaning that voters want to redistribute more than their candidates. This 'directional' measure thus allowed a consideration of the direction of incongruence—whether candidates were more pro-redistribution than their voters, or vice versa.

Figure 2.1 presents a violin plot describing this second directional measure, averaged at the country/election level. Overall congruence is high, with the average equal to 0.02, meaning almost perfect congruence. At the extremes, Greece in 2012 and 2015 shows candidates decisively more pro-redistribution than their voters, representing a significant change with respect to 2009, when the effects of the financial crisis were still developing. In contrast, several countries from Northern Europe—Finland, Sweden, Netherlands, and Belgium—show that voters supported redistribution more than their chosen candidates.

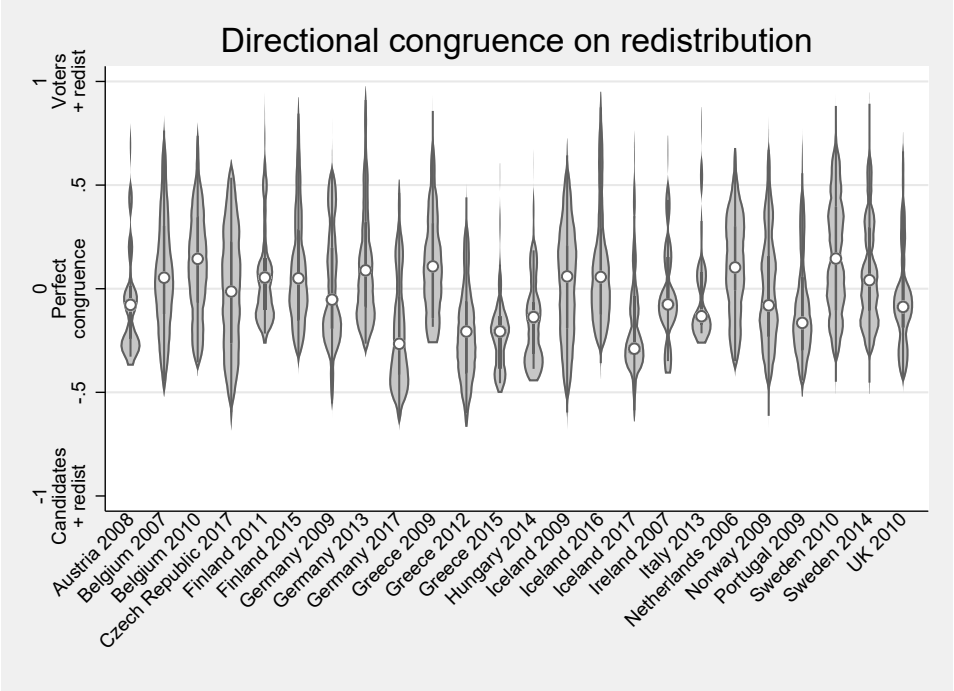

Figure 2.1. Distribution of the directional measure of candidates-voters congruence on redistribution, by country and election year. Note: positive values on the y-axis mean that voters are more in favour of redistribution than candidates; negative values mean that candidates are more pro-redistribution than voters.

2.4.3 *Regression models: independent variables*

After the descriptive analysis, to provide a more nuanced view of congruence on redistribution and the determinants of its direction, I set up several regression models. All models use individual candidates as units of analysis, and encompass three dimensions: candidates, parties, and country/elections. I estimated multilevel linear regression models with random intercepts at the party and country/election levels. The dependent variable is the directional measure of congruence.

As to the independent variables, at the candidate level I operationalised candidates' position along the L-R axis making use of the CCS question *Left-right self-placement*, standardising it to a 0 to 1 scale. Similarly, I used the question *Immigrants should be required to adjust to the customs of [country]* to capture candidates' cultural

dimension, also in this case standardised. This question represents the optimal choice because it links immigration to cultural considerations, as opposed to questions about the impact of immigrants on the economy.

In terms of control variables, at the candidate level, I included two demographic control variables—gender and age—given the potential impact of personal characteristics on congruence. Unfortunately, the question on education was missing in several CCS surveys and was thus excluded to avoid a significant reduction of sample size.

At the party level, I included a measure of party age, since candidates belonging to older parties might be more aligned with their voters, because they might have had longer exposure to the preferences of the base and their electoral responses (Pedrazzani and Segatti, 2020).[7] Furthermore, candidates from larger parties might be less aligned with their voters, because they tend to propose catch-all platforms encompassing many different issues (Mattila and Raunio, 2006). Heterogeneity in a party's positions on redistribution might also reduce congruence: when candidates within a party are less definitive about preferences for redistribution they would attract voters with disparate positions on the issue (Kitschelt and Rehm, 2015). Last, I included an indicator for candidates from niche parties to capture the different representational abilities vis-à-vis mainstream candidates.

At the country/election level, I included two controls for the economic conditions which might impact on congruence. As conditions worsen and income inequality increases, social affinity and representation among most affected individuals worsen, and political elites tend to become less able to align with voters (Traber, Giger, and Häusermann, 2018). I therefore included the Gini index, to capture inequality, and the rate of unemployment. Moreover, candidates competing in more polarised systems might be more aligned with their voters, because voters would have more clearly defined

[7]See the Online Appendix for control variables' construction and further robustness checks.

positions by which to identify a representative with similar views (Dalton, 2017; Van der Eijk, Schmitt, and Binder, 2005). I also included a measure of the age of the particular democracy, to account for the effect of long-established democratic institutions, which tend to increase congruence.

2.4.4 *Robustness checks*

As part of the descriptive analyses, I generated 'many-to-many' congruence measures of redistribution (Golder and Stramski, 2010; Schakel and Hakhverdian, 2018). The latter compared entire distributions of candidates' and voters' preferences. This methodology was inspired by Andeweg and Thomassen (2011). While many-to-many congruence could not be adopted as a main measure, given that it is not compatible with an analysis at the candidate level, it is a useful robustness check, because it accounts for the entire distribution without reductions to central tendencies.

In terms of regressions, I estimated models with variables from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) pertaining to parties' redistributive policy positions, L-R ideological placement, and cultural attitudes. Specifically, I included CHES measures of parties' orientation along the L-R and second dimension to gauge the robustness of individual candidates' preferences. I also made use of the CHES variable about the salience of redistribution to account for the impact of salience on congruence—as evidenced by Costello, Toshkov, et al. (2021), congruence tends to be higher for those issues that are more salient, and thus more emphasised in campaigns. This variable will be used in the descriptive analyses but not in regressions given the high number of missing observations.

I also estimated additional models including a variable representing candidates' political experience. More experienced candidates might be more aligned with their

voters and better able to gauge voters' policy preferences. I also included the positions of candidates on EU integration to complement the cultural dimension. In doing so, I made use of the CCS question *Opinion on European unification: too far vs. should be pushed further*, standardising it to the usual 0 to 1 scale. Unfortunately, there were many missing responses by candidates, and thus these data were confined to robustness checks. Last, I included a dummy to capture whether the candidate's party was incumbent in the election. More constrained by external factors and governmental responsibilities, incumbents might present lower congruence.

2.5 Findings

2.5.1 *Magnitude, direction, and evolution of congruence on redistribution*

Before presenting findings, a preliminary consideration is worth mentioning. An analysis of congruence from the perspective of candidates is justified if candidates possess distinct preferences for redistribution within parties. If, on the contrary, candidates had identical positions within parties, an analysis at the party level would be more appropriate. In this sense, the strip plots provided in the Online Appendix confirm a significant level of within-party variation on preferences for redistribution. Social democrat and socialist parties present relatively lower levels of heterogeneity, but the standard deviation is significantly higher for all other party families.[8]

To get a first sense of the alignment between candidates and voters on redistribution, I correlated their respective mean positions. Figure 2.2 shows that, overall,

[8]On average, socialist present SD = .66 on the 1-5 scale of redistributive preferences. Except for ecologist and social democrat that show SD equal to .85 and .87 respectively, all other party families show SD above 1.

there is a positive association between candidates' and voters' mean positions. When candidates want to redistribute more, their voters agree. However, when candidates oppose redistribution, their voters do too. As per the magnitude of correlation, there is no obvious benchmark to determine what constitutes a strong candidate-voter congruence, and what constitutes weak congruence. However, a comparison can be traced with respect to the second dimension of political competition, which has supposedly eroded the alignment on redistribution. In this regard, the correlation coefficient between candidates' and voters' preferences for redistribution (r = .57, p-value = 0.0000) is significantly higher than that for the cultural dimension (r = .35, p-value = 0.0000).

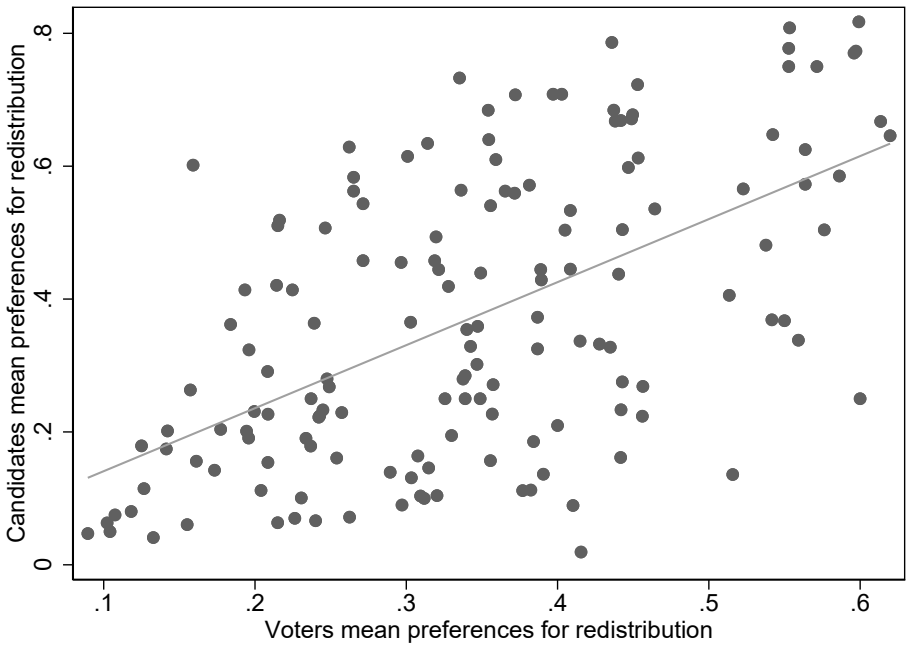

Figure 2.2. Candidates' and voters' preferences for redistribution, averaged at the party level (r = .57, p-value = 0.0000). Increasing values on both axes mean more negative views on redistribution.

The exercise can be repeated according to the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) party families, as shown in Figure 2.3. The positive association between candidates' and voters' mean positions on redistribution issues holds for candidates belonging to moderate party families, specifically Christian democrat, liberal, social democrat,

and socialist families. There is no association for candidates from more radical party families, such as ethnic-regional or nationalist, or for niche families, such as agrarian or special issue. Interestingly, socialist parties show a positive correlation, although candidates are on average significantly more pro-redistribution than their voters.

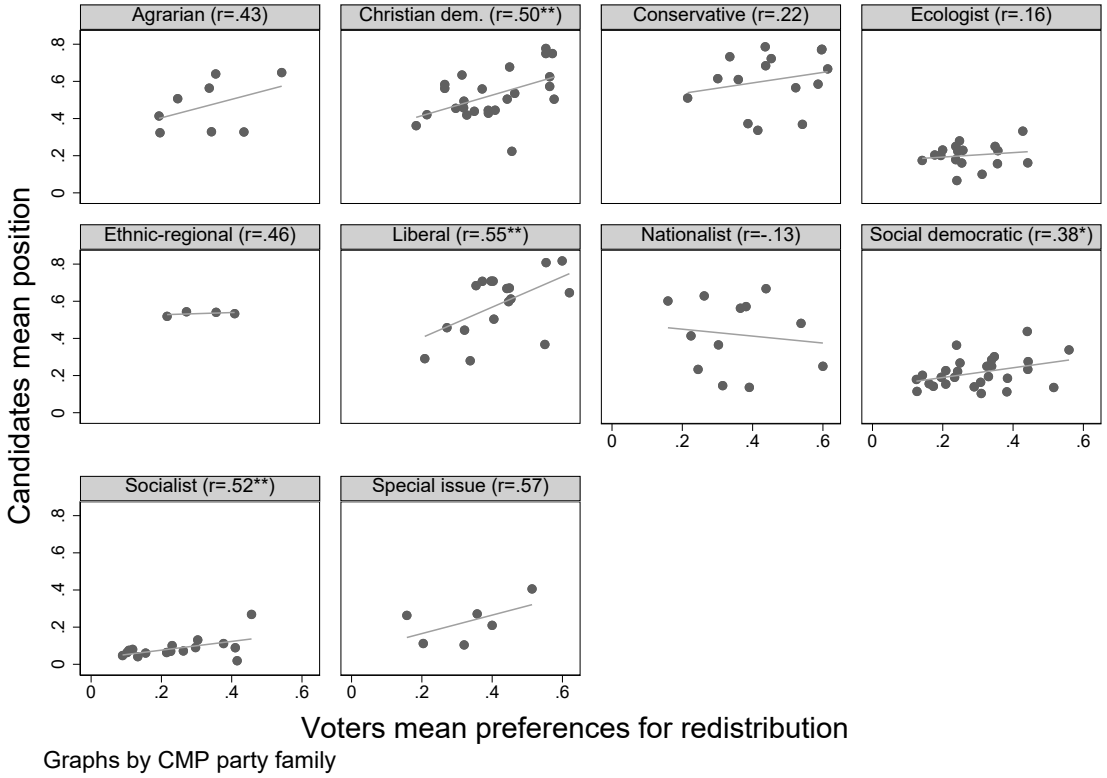

Figure 2.3. Candidates' and voters' preferences for redistribution, averaged at the party level and presented by CMP party family, with correlation coefficients in parentheses. Note: ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Increasing values on both axes mean more negative views on redistribution.

Figure 2.4 describes the magnitude and direction of congruence. Party families belonging to the right wing of the L-R dimension, such as agrarian, Christian democrat, conservative, ethnic-regional, liberal, and nationalist, show higher incongruence—voters seem to be more in favour of redistribution than their candidates. Party families belonging to the left wing, such as ecologist, socialist, or social democrat, show higher levels of congruence, although looking at the direction it seems that candidates

are slightly more pro-redistribution than their voters. Also in this case, candidates from all party families are more congruent with their voters on redistribution rather than on migration, even those from niche and far-right party families.[9]

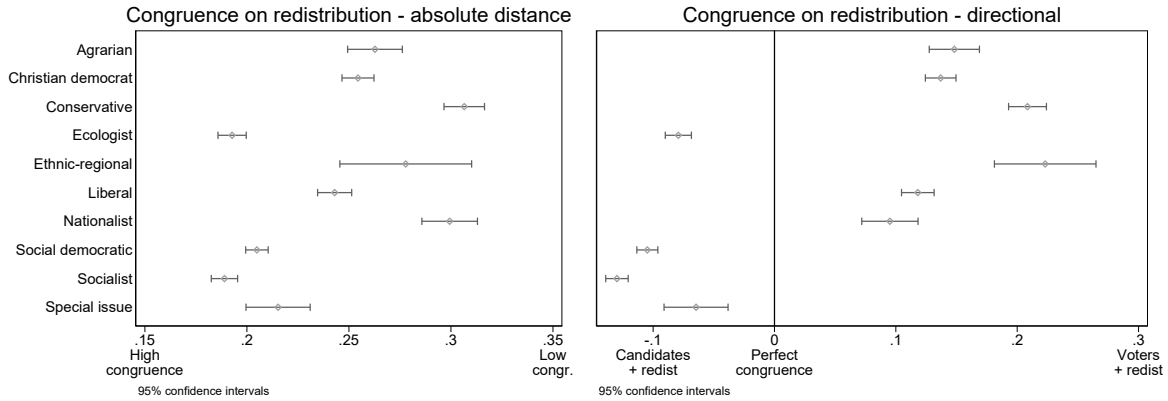

Figure 2.4. Average measures (absolute and directional) of candidates-voters congruence on preferences for redistribution by CMP party family, with 95% confidence intervals. Note: in the left-hand graph, higher values mean lower levels of congruence; in the right-hand graph, positive values mean that voters are more in favour of redistribution that candidates, and the opposite for negative values.

Further tests, comparing mainstream candidates with niche candidates on the one hand, and far-right/left candidates on the other, confirm these preliminary results.[10] The association between candidates' and voters' mean positions holds for moderate candidates, who also tend to be closer to perfect congruence. In contrast, niche candidates want to redistribute more than their voters and show lower levels of congruence. Similarly, candidates of far left parties are significantly more pro-redistribution than their voters, while candidates belonging to parties on the far right show lower levels of alignment and more support for redistribution on the demand side.

The reason for the higher disconnection between niche candidates, in particular on

[9]Average absolute distance on redistribution is equal to .23, vis-à-vis .28 on the second dimension. Candidates better represent voters on redistribution than migration in all party families, in particular conservative (.31 v. .33), ethnic-regional (.28 v. .36), liberal (.24 v. .28), social democrat (.2 v. .25), and socialist (.19 v. .31). For what concerns the directional measure, average congruence on redistribution (.02) is closer to perfect alignment than migration (.11).

[10]See the Online Appendix for additional plots.

the far-right, and their voters can be attributed to the different levels of salience that redistribution has for these party families, as suggested by Costello, Toshkov, et al. (2021). According to CHES data indeed, ethnic-regional, nationalist, and special issue party families present the lowest salience regarding redistribution. On the contrary, mainstream party families present higher salience, in particular conservative, liberal and social democrat. Socialist party family shows the highest salience, as expected.

Looking at trends over time (Figure 2.5), we can see a very recent decline in congruence for social democrat and socialist candidates, while it has increased for mainstream right party families, such as conservative, Christian democrat, and liberal. Comparing the evolution of congruence on redistribution and migration over time (plot in the Online Appendix), candidates are generally more aligned with their voters on redistribution for the entire period here considered. However, the recent decline in representation on redistribution for some party families goes in tandem with a higher congruence on the second dimension. Figure 2.5 also shows how conservative candidates have recently become more in favour of redistribution, while the opposite is true for their voters.[11] Furthermore, liberal candidates and voters have evolved towards less favourable views of redistribution in the last years. Similarly, recently social democrat and socialist voters seem to be less in favour of redistribution, increasing the gap with their candidates.

To confirm the different representational abilities of candidates belonging to different party families, Table 2.1 reports results of independent-samples t-tests about

[11] Caution is needed in interpreting these 'dynamic' results given that a limited number of election cycles is available for each country. Nonetheless, I believe analysing trends at the party family level still provides an interesting snapshot of how congruence evolved, assuming that party families are uniform enough across countries to be compared over time.

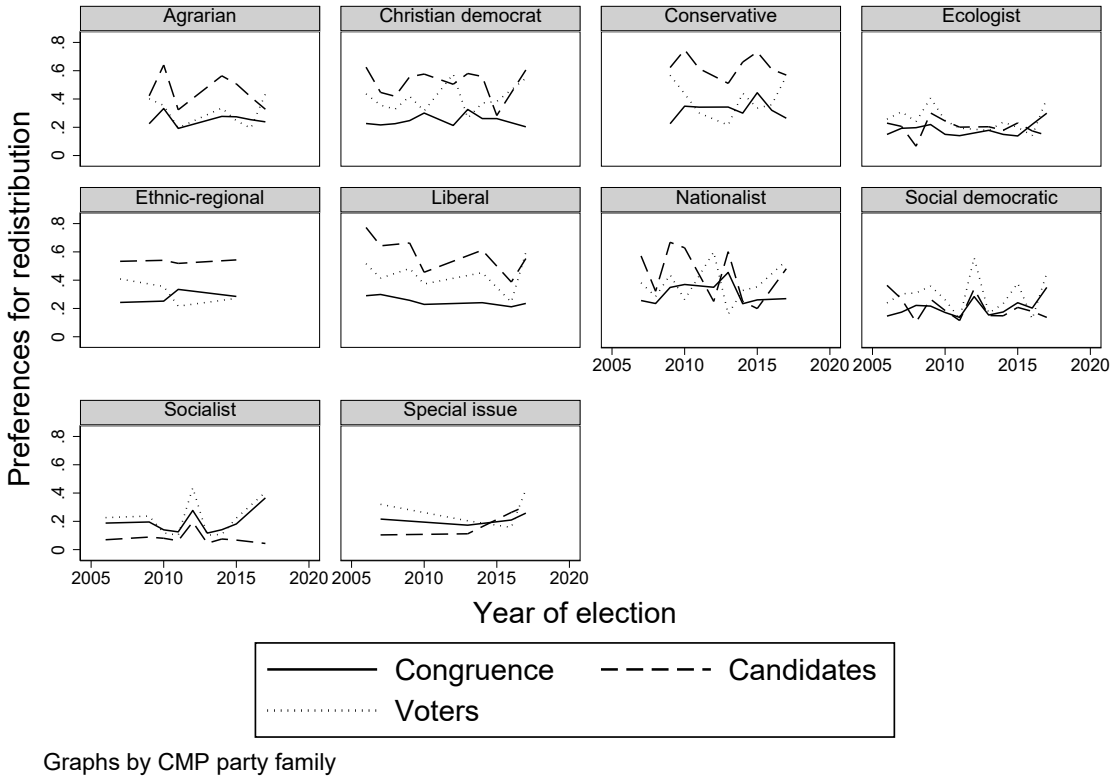

Figure 2.5. Evolution of mean candidates-voters congruence on preferences for redistribution (absolute distance), alongside candidates' and voters' mean preferences for redistribution over time by CMP party family. Note: increasing values on the y-axis mean lower congruence and less favourable views of redistribution.

difference in means across party families for the absolute congruence measure.[12] As seen in previous findings, left and centre-left candidates are better at representing their voters on redistribution than right and centre-right candidates, showing higher mean congruence. The same can be said for far-left candidates compared to far-right.

Analysing other dimensions in the picture is useful to gauge how congruence on redistribution varies alongside the L-R and cultural dimensions (Figure 2.6). A significant level of correlation is identified between preferences for redistribution and L-R

[12]Further tests also confirm that parties provide distinct policy alternatives on redistribution issues. Given that preferences for redistribution are ordinal, a Kruskal-Wallis H test was performed. The test confirms a statistically significant difference in preferences for redistribution (mean ranks) across parties, $\chi^2(149) = 6777.853$, p-value $= 0.0001$.

Table 2.1: Difference in means across party families about absolute measures of congruence on redistribution

Independent-samples t-tests (H0: diff=0)					
	Mean	StDev	t	df	p-value
Left	.2	.14	-24.84	12,591	0.0000
Right	.27	.18			
Centre-left	.2	.14	-19.43	7,258	0.0000
Centre-right	.27	.18			
Far-left	.19	.14	-14.98	2,358	0.0000
Far-right	.3	.21			

Note: left = CMP socialist, social democratic, ecologist; right = CMP agrarian, Christian democrat, conservative, ethnic regional, liberal, nationalist. Centre-left = CMP social democratic, socialist; centre-right = CMP conservative, liberal. Far-left and far-right = according to PopuList. Higher mean values represent lower congruence.

positions at the candidate level. Left-wing candidates show more favourable views over redistribution, and those who are more left-wing than their voters are also more in favour of redistribution. Similarly, pro-redistribution candidates tend to be pro-immigration, and the same correlation is identified between congruence on the two dimensions (Figure 2.7). The strong correlation between redistribution and cultural dimensions suggests there is no trade-off between the two. On the contrary, they seem to be intertwined. There is no correlation, however, between congruence on redistribution and congruence on European integration at the candidate level.

To sum up, candidates and voters show significant alignment on their preferences for redistribution. Congruence does vary across party families, and mainstream candidates are more congruent with their voters than niche candidates. Congruence also follows the L-R axis and the cultural dimension: more left-wing positions and more progressive values are associated with pro-redistribution preferences, while candidates characterised by more conservative cultural values are less aligned with their voters on

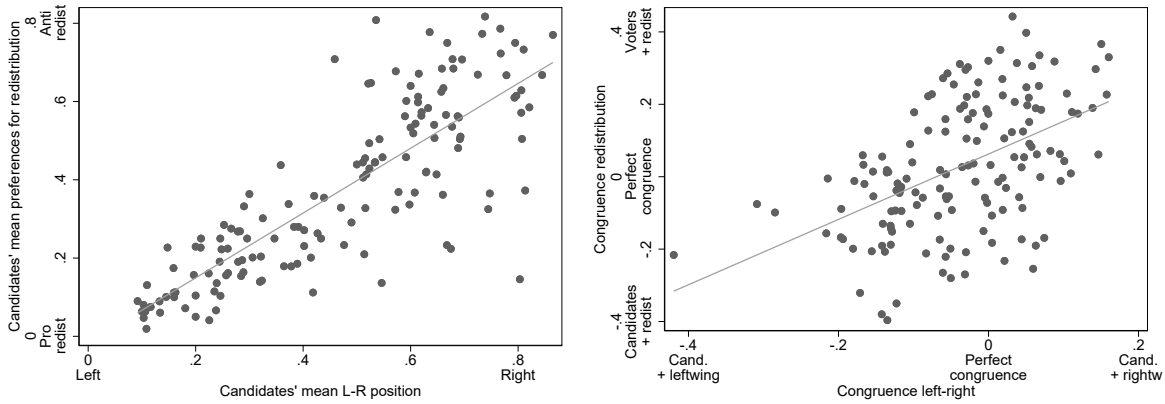

Figure 2.6. Average candidates' preferences for redistribution and candidates' positions on L-R (left-hand graph, r = 0.82, p-value = 0.0000) and average congruence on redistribution and average congruence on L-R (right-hand, r = .5, p-value = 0.0000). Note: each dot is a party observed in a given election. Higher values on y-axis mean that candidates are less in favour of redistribution (left) and that voters are more in favour of redistribution than candidates (right). Higher values in the x-axis mean that candidates are more right-wing (left), and that candidates are more right-wing than their voters (right).

redistribution.[13]

Findings have so far confirmed that candidates from radical and niche party families present blurred positions on redistribution. This is compatible with Rovny and Polk (2020), who argue that the latter present blurred positions on the economic dimension. However, findings indicate that the argument that the nontraditional redistribution positions of mainstream parties conceal low congruence should be rejected; on the contrary, even though slightly declining, congruence is still highest for mainstream left candidates and has increased for mainstream right candidates.

[13]Candidates from nationalist and ethnic-regionalist parties present average preferences for forcing migrants to adapt to the customs of their country equal to 4.5 and 3.96, respectively, where 1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*, as opposed to 2.8 for social democrat, 2.5 for socialist, and 3.7 for Christian democrat and conservative candidates. Additional plots can be found in the Online Appendix.

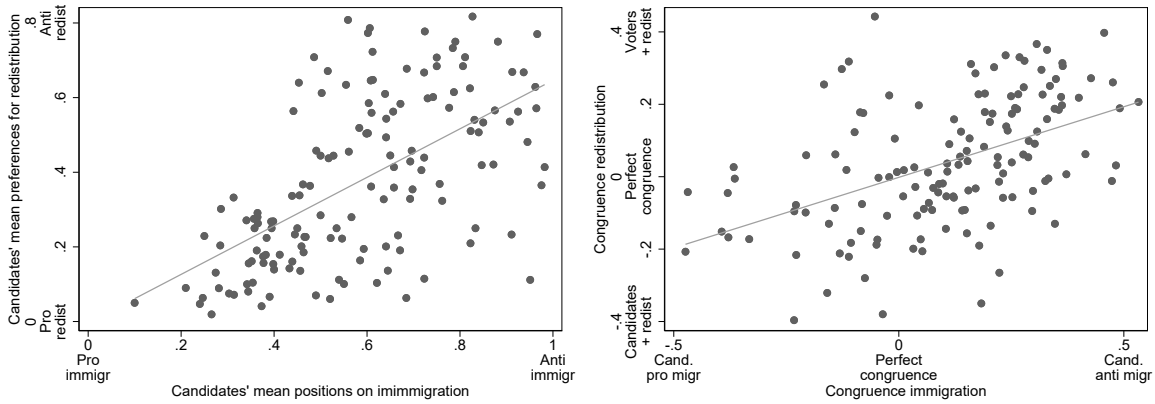

Figure 2.7. Average candidates' preferences for redistribution and candidates' positions on immigration (left-hand graph, r = 0.5948, p-value = 0.0000) and average congruence on redistribution and average congruence on immigration (right-hand graph, r = .48, p-value = 0.0000). Note: each dot is a party observed in a given election. Higher values on y-axis mean that candidates are less in favour of redistribution (left) and that voters are more in favour of redistribution than candidates (right). Higher values in the x-axis mean that candidates are more anti-immigration (left), and that candidates are more opposed to immigration than their voters (right).

2.5.2 *The determinants of congruence*

Table 2.2 presents the first set of models aimed at analysing the determinants of the direction of congruence, which were generated progressively, including variables at the candidate, party, and election levels. As a general interpretation rule, a coefficient's positive sign means that candidates are more against redistribution than voters, and vice versa for negative signs.[14]

Regarding the predictors of interest, candidates' self-positioning on the L-R axis systematically impacts on congruence: when candidates self-identify as right-wing, they will be more against redistribution than their voters, confirming previous descriptive results. The cultural dimension captured by preferences for immigration is also associated with the direction of congruence: more culturally conservative candidates tend to oppose redistribution more.

As per control variables, higher income inequality measured by the Gini index

[14]Candidates' L-R and immigration positions have been included separately because of collinearity.

results in lower congruence, making voters less oriented towards redistribution than candidates. The same effect can be identified for unemployment. This is compatible with a longstanding line of research that observes that with rising inequality the public's demand for redistribution decreases (Alesina and Glaeser, 2004; Kelly and Enns, 2010; Moene and Wallerstein, 2001). Heterogeneity of redistributive preferences at the party level also increases incongruence, making candidates more against redistribution. Similarly, there seems to be some effect with the same sign for the age of democracy. Demographic characteristics and other control variables do not seem to have any impact.

The descriptive analysis and regression models provide a complex picture. Congruence on redistribution appears to be significant, and more evident for mainstream candidates, thus confirming *H1*. Moreover, right-wing and culturally conservative candidates tend to be systematically less aligned with and more opposed to redistribution than their voters. This is compatible with *H2*. Last, higher income inequality seems to increase incongruence and results in candidates being more pro-redistribution than their voters.

2.5.3 *Robustness checks*

The first robustness check is represented by many-to-many congruence, which compares all distributions of candidates' and voters' preferences for redistribution. Distinguishing by party family (Figure 2.8), it is possible to observe a significant overlap (congruence) for Christian democrat, ecologist, liberal, nationalist, and social democrat parties. Furthermore, right-wing party families tend to show more favourable preferences among voters rather than candidates, while the opposite is true for social democrat and socialist party families. Radical and niche families behave as already observed—showing

Table 2.2: Regression results: main models

VARIABLES	(I) Candidate 1	(II) Candidate 2	(III) Party 1	(IV) Party 2	(V) Election 1	(VI) Election 2
Gender	0.006	0.003	0.006	0.003	0.006	0.002
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Age	-0.001	-0.006*	-0.001	-0.006*	-0.001	-0.006*
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Left-right (candidate)	0.384***		0.364***		0.366***	
	(0.027)		(0.030)		(0.030)	
Immigration (candidate)		0.037***		0.034***		0.034***
		(0.009)		(0.009)		(0.009)
Party size			-0.000	0.000	-0.000	0.001
			(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Party age			0.000	0.001	0.000	0.001
			(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.001)
Party heterogeneity			0.926***	1.981***	0.814***	1.795***
			(0.190)	(0.241)	(0.211)	(0.263)
Niche v. mainstream			-0.041**	-0.045	-0.045**	-0.050*
			(0.020)	(0.027)	(0.020)	(0.026)
Inequality					-1.628**	-1.563**
					(0.654)	(0.683)
Unemployment					-0.195**	-0.308***
					(0.087)	(0.109)
Polarisation					-0.000	-0.001
					(0.001)	(0.001)
Democracy age					0.002***	0.001
					(0.000)	(0.001)
Constant	-0.048***	0.099***	-0.216***	-0.296***	-0.217**	-0.116
	(0.014)	(0.006)	(0.027)	(0.041)	(0.100)	(0.132)
Variance: election	-2.673***	-3.296***	-2.770***	-3.201***	-3.509***	-11.024
	(0.213)	(0.895)	(0.194)	(0.338)	(0.333)	(58.407)
Variance: party	-2.511***	-1.937***	-2.661***	-2.276***	-2.668***	-2.283***
	(0.086)	(0.061)	(0.089)	(0.083)	(0.086)	(0.415)
Variance: residual	-1.519***	-1.498***	-1.520***	-1.498***	-1.520***	-1.498***
	(0.022)	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.041)
N	11,538	11,532	11,521	11,511	11,521	11,511
AIC	-1290.454	-1329.592	-1964.09	-1411.786	-1978.559	-1418.995
BIC	-1789.092	-1197.24	-1802.348	-1250.063	-1787.409	-1227.867

Note: Multilevel linear regression models. DV: directional congruence. Random errors at the party and election levels. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Year FEs included in all models. ***p < 0.01, **p < 0.05, *p < 0.1

lower congruence, their voters favouring redistribution more than candidates for the far right, while the opposite is shown for the far left. Main findings are thus confirmed.

Additional robustness checks in the form of regression models are reported in the Online Appendix. Instead of individual candidates' preferences for redistribution and position along the L-R dimension, the models employ variables from CHES at the party level. Confirming previous results, candidates' belonging to more right-wing parties tend to be less in favour of redistribution. Similarly, candidates from more

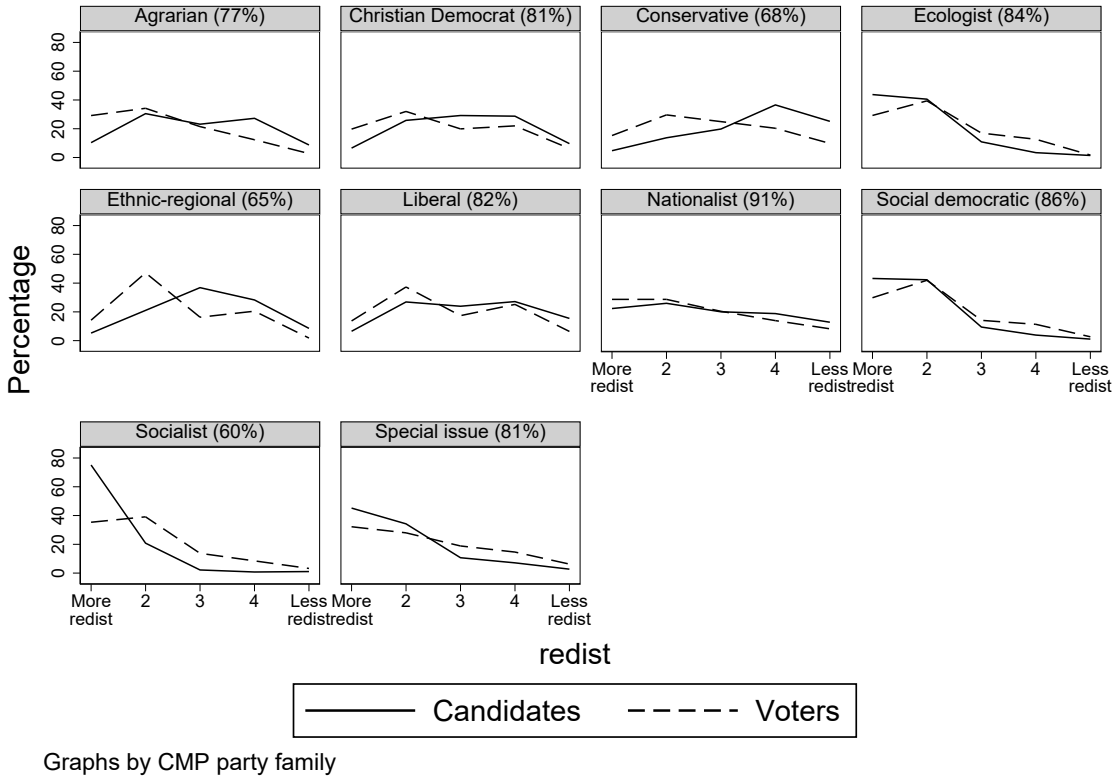

Figure 2.8. Many-to-many measure of candidates-voters congruence on redistribution, by CMP party family. Note: overlaps in parentheses. Greater overlaps mean higher congruence. Higher values on the x-axes mean less favourable views of redistribution.

culturally conservative parties as measured by the 'multiculturalism' and GALTAN indicators are more opposed to redistribution. Last, candidates belonging to parties which are less oriented towards redistribution possess more negative views over redistributive policies. Further models including other control variables do not appear to be significant—congruence is not affected by the experience of candidates or the incumbent dummy, and the inclusion of European integration is also not significant.

2.6 Conclusion

Contrary to previous theoretical explanations in the literature (globalisation, cartel parties, and realignment) that all see lower congruence on redistributive preferences, the alignment between candidates and voters on this issue appears to be significant. This study provides evidence that instead of being blurred by cultural issues, mainstream candidates still represent their voters' struggles over redistribution.

Nonetheless, the analysis confirms some of the predictions of the realignment explanation (Kitschelt and Rehm, 2015; Kriesi, Grande, et al., 2008). A stronger focus on culture and less salience on redistribution, as shown by radical right candidates, do result in more pronounced detachment with voters on redistribution. Furthermore, congruence has declined over time for left-wing candidates, while it has increased for right-wing candidates. At the same time, congruence on the second dimension has been increasing.

Although in many respects surpassed, the L-R axis still defines the direction of congruence on redistribution. Today's right-wing candidates tend to be less aligned with and more opposed to redistribution than their voters, who are increasingly working-class and can gain from redistribution. In contrast, left-wing candidates are often more in favour of redistribution than their voters but are more aligned with them overall. This suggests that while parties have adapted to the changing socioeconomic situation, the heritage of pro-market positions for right-wing candidates, and the importance of redistribution for the electoral success of the left is still noticeable on the supply side.

This study represents the first attempt, as far as I am aware, to study congruence on preferences for redistribution at the candidate level, not only by providing a descriptive view of how alignment changes across party families and different dimensions, but also by analysing the determinants of incongruence using a comparative multilevel

dataset. I believe the broad scope and depth of this analysis represent a significant addition to the existing scholarship on democratic representation and the changing levels of congruence between candidates and voters on preferences for redistribution, inequality, and welfare.

One interesting aspect is the connection between congruence on redistribution and economic inequality. Findings suggest that when income inequality increases, voters appear to be less in favour of redistribution than candidates, which is compatible with the 'Robin Hood' paradox (Iversen and Soskice, 2006). On the demand side, this has been explained with the underestimation of the actual levels of inequality by the public, or increased social segregation, or misbeliefs about meritocracy (Gimpelson and Treisman, 2018; Mijs, 2021; Trump, 2018). It could also be that candidates see the potential payoff increasing and are therefore more in favour of redistribution. This is a promising line of research that would require further investigation.

Further research could also expand this study by adopting a more nuanced view of redistribution, considering aspects such as attitudes towards potential beneficiaries and different redistribution policies. Moreover, when more recent data become available, it would be interesting to gauge the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has certainly affected both candidates' and voters' preferences for redistribution—if anything, redistribution has become even more relevant.

Chapter 3

'They Should Not Get It' — How Italian Parties Politicise Deservingness Preferences

3.1 Introduction

Since the 1970s, welfare states across Europe have embarked on a process of reconstruction and redefinition, which reversed postwar welfare expansion into the 'new politics' of welfare retrenchment (Pierson, 1996). Not only have social expenditures been cut, but the idea of universal access to social programmes has also been challenged. Protection schemes have become increasingly limited to 'deserving' categories, accompanied by means testing, welfare-to-work plans, and a general emphasis on individual responsibility (George and Taylor-Gooby, 1996; Van Oorschot, 2000).

Many years have passed since the 1970s, but questions of deservingness have recently been brought back to central stage. Financial crises and subsequent fiscal auster-

ity exacerbated European welfare retrenchment, while transformations, such as trade shocks, skill-biased technological change, and migratory waves, made it even more difficult for many categories of citizens to be considered as deserving (Autor, Dorn, and Hanson, 2016; Collier, 2018; Hochschild, 2018; Rodrik, 2018).

Consequently, attitudes towards different categories of social welfare recipients have received increasing attention in the scholarship. On the demand side, deservingness criteria include the recipients' level of need, identity traits, and individuals' control over their conditions (Van Oorschot, 2000; Van Oorschot, 2006; Van Oorschot, 2008). On the supply side, scholars have described how radical right populist parties promoted more generous welfare entitlements but limited these benefits to natives (Betz and Meret, 2012).

This paper takes a novel approach by observing party messaging on social media about the deservingness of different categories of recipients. Except for the welfare chauvinism of RRPPs, we know little about which recipients are deemed as worthy or unworthy of receiving welfare by political parties. In times of new cleavages and realignments, asking these questions is pivotal—the old ideological divide between a more universalist, unconditional left and a selectivist, conditional right has faded (De Vries, 2018; Hooghe and Marks, 2018; Kriesi, Grande, et al., 2006; Kriesi, Grande, et al., 2008). Looking at how parties address deservingness is important, because it helps to better understand how different parties and party families conceive conditionalities and social hierarchies and how they translate these views into actual policy proposals.

To do so, the paper adopts two original perspectives. First, it deploys an original dataset consisting of more than 20,000 Facebook posts by Italian parties between 2013 and 2019. Content analysis of posts allows to capture how parties talk about welfare recipients, identify the exact categories of recipients, and distinguish positive and negative social constructions, in order to provide a composite picture of parties' social

welfare platforms. The study also makes use of the issue-attention approach (Cavalieri and Froio, 2021; Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2010; B. Jones and Baumgartner, 2005) to analyse whether parties adjust their discursive attention to the deservingness of target groups depending on whether they are in government or in opposition, and on whether they are populist or mainstream. This allows to assess how the emphasis on deservingness in parties' policy agendas changes strategically, and which specific target groups are politicised to gain electoral advantages.

Second, the choice of Italy as a case study is motivated by several considerations. Like in other Southern European countries, pressures on the welfare system and decades of retrenchments have resulted in strong debates about deservingness. In this context, anti-system parties flourished, and today it is possible to observe a broad spectrum of right-wing and left-wing mainstream and anti-system parties. Investigating this dynamic in Italy can reveal generalizable insights on deservingness and the trajectory of the welfare state and the conservative welfare regime across Southern Europe and beyond.

Findings show that populist parties are more focused on negative messaging about particular social groups—RRPPs advocate for increased conditions of deservingness for immigrants and criminals, whereas the Five Star Movement messaging attacks political and economic elites. The 5SM supports increased welfare provisions for those groups with little political and economic power, but in government the party is more favourable towards business and the middle class. Similarly, when in government the League, an RRPP, decreases its attacks on immigrants. The mainstream centre left in its messaging is coherent with the left's ideological traditions, supporting universal welfare and fewer conditions for the needy, but their actual policies retrace the historical neoliberal turn of the Italian left, exposing them to other parties' criticism. The mainstream centre right, as expected, adopts favourable tones for target groups with more political power

and for Southern Italy. Finally, some social groups tend to receive scarce attention across the political spectrum: women, the disabled, and young adults.

This study contributes to the scholarship and public policy discussion in several ways. Identifying the categories that are considered deserving or undeserving of receiving social welfare by parties has important implications, because social constructions of target groups shape the latter's lives and experiences as citizens (Ingram and Schneider, 1991; Schneider and Ingram, 1993). The systematic overlooking of some categories, such as women or the youth, in parties' everyday communication or the constant attacks towards immigrants and other outsiders contribute to these target groups being further marginalised (Schneider and Ingram, 2017). Parties' politicisation of the deservingness of target groups also impacts on the policymaking of social platforms, determining whether support will be universal or means-tested (A. Campbell, 2012; Mettler and Soss, 2004; Soss, 1999). By calling attention on these dynamics, the design of social policies can be better oriented to stimulate inclusion and emancipation (Soss, 2005). Furthermore, this study contributes to the literature on the evolution of the welfare state and retrenchments, investigating how parties politicise social policies in the 'new politics' of welfare, and in particular the differences between mainstream and populist parties (Aarøe and Petersen, 2014; Korpi and Palme, 1998; Pierson, 1996; Van Oorschot, 2000). While the former had to adapt to deindustrialisation and the fracturing of the working class developing social policies for new categories of voters (Abou-Chadi and Hix, 2021; Häusermann and Kriesi, 2015), the latter could adjust their emphasis on deservingness more freely. In this regard, this study contributes to the literature on issue attention, showing how populist parties increase their attention to the deservingness of groups with significant political power, when in government, in order to signal competency (Cavalieri and Froio, 2021; Froio, Bevan, and Jennings, 2017; Green-Pedersen, 2019; B. Jones and Baumgartner, 2005).

But when in opposition they primarily target undeserving groups, composed of either economic and political elites or *deviant* citizens, to bolster their challenger status and blame mainstream parties.

3.2 Social constructions of (un)deserving recipients

In the 'new politics' of welfare retrenchment, the policymaking of social programmes often consists in rationing welfare rather than developing new schemes (Van Oorschot, 2000). Many of the retrenchment strategies adopted across Europe in recent decades, such as recommodification, cost-containment, recalibration, and needs testing (Larsen, 2008; Pierson, 2002), entail identifying welfare recipients as deserving and undeserving.

In truth, categorising recipients' deservingness has influenced the design of welfare policies well before the arrival of new politics. Nineteenth-century British and Dutch poor laws differentiated between the deserving and undeserving poor, contrasting the elderly and sick with the unemployed (Golding and Middleton, 1982; Van Oorschot, 2000). However, these deservingness preferences were believed to be dependent on persistent assumptions and ideological beliefs over which politics had little influence. Recently, the scholarship has focused on how these categorisations can be modified in the short term by policymakers' messaging (Esmark and Schoop, 2017), strategically influencing perceptions of recipients' deservingness (Petersen et al., 2011).

One such mechanism is represented by social constructions attached to groups (Ingram and Schneider, 1991; Schneider and Ingram, 1993; Schneider and Ingram, 2017). Social constructions are the 'emotional, value-based images and stereotypes associated with people,' manipulated by politicians so that 'political capital can be gained by "doing good things for good people" and "punishing bad people"' (Schneider and Ingram, 2017: 321). The social constructions associated with target groups involve

creating narratives, plots, characters, and objectives that become embedded in social policies. Social constructions in turn condition behaviour, for instance, by further isolating those depicted as undeserving.

Social constructions associated with (un)deserving target groups depend on the groups' political power as determined by their economic resources, size, voting capacity, authority, and organisational possibilities (Schneider and Ingram, 2017). Recipients with more political power tend to be liked, viewed as deserving, and usually receive disproportionate amounts of benefits if compared to groups with little political power.

Figure 3.1 presents an overview of socially constructed target groups, inspired by Schneider and Ingram (2017). Policymakers choose from among this inventory which groups to benefit with social policies and which to burden depending on perceived political gain. Target groups with deserving social constructions (left half of the graph) are considered as diligent, capable, and trustworthy. On the contrary, groups with negative social constructions (right half of the graph) are viewed as sinful, deceivers, greedy, loathsome, and dull.

Advantaged target groups, such as the middle class, businesses, or the elderly enjoy significant political power and are generally viewed favourably. Allocating resources to this group, such as interest tax deductions on mortgage rates, tax cuts for the rich, or subsidies to businesses, does not generally raise significant opposition from the public and provides sizable political gain with small political cost because their accomplishments are considered as meritocratic rather than ascribed (Mijs and Savage, 2020). A clear example in this sense is represented by the systematic tax cuts for the rich across all advanced democracies, which had a significant impact on the rise of income inequality (Hope and Limberg, 2022). When it comes to policies for *advantaged* groups, policymakers frame them as convenient for everybody thanks to trickle down mechanisms, the creation of jobs, or consequent economic growth. Policies are thus

	Positive (deserving)	Negative (undeserving)
High political power	***Advantaged***	***Contenders***
	Middle class	
	Homeowners	Economic elites
	Business	Political elites
	Elderly	
	Soldiers/police	
	Healthcare professionals	
Low political power	Sick	
	Women	Drug users
	Young/students	
	Disabled	Sex offenders
	Homeless	
	Families in need	Welfare cheats
	Children	
	People on social assistance	Undocumented immigrants
	Unemployed	
	Dependents	***Deviants***

Figure 3.1. Socially constructed target groups

universal and with no means testing.

Dependent groups, for instance women, young citizens, or the disabled also experience deserving social constructions but limited political power. Policymakers tend to show empathy for this needy group, but they do not usually allocate large funds as political returns are low. Allowances to *dependents* tend to be highly advertised by policymakers who strive to appear compassionate, while retrenchments are justified as eventually favourable to this group. But contrary to *advantaged* groups, social policies for *dependents* are normally means-tested and the duty to prove the need falls on recipients, who are constantly suspected of being fraudulent.

Generous welfare provisions to *contenders*, such as big banks or political elites would cause public backlash, because the public generally views big corporations and politicians as corrupt and unfairly privileged. For instance, voters tend to punish

governments that promote bank bailouts that are perceived as unfair, i.e. 'asymmetrically benefiting large financial institutions' rather than deserving savers and citizens (Chwieroth and Walter, 2019:67). *Contenders*, however, possess significant political power, and policymakers have to devise hidden or little publicised tax cuts or deregulations, because they depend on this target group for funding and support. An example is represented by policymakers turning a blind eye to tax loopholes, offshore accounts or tax havens, which contribute significantly to the accumulation of wealth in favour of those at the top of the distribution (Johannesen et al., 2020).

Last, *deviants* possess no political power and are characterised by negative social constructions. Undocumented immigrants, sex offenders and drug users thus represent an opportunity for political gains, because penalizing them is viewed favourably by the public and poses limited risk in terms of electoral retribution, as turnout rates of *deviants* are normally low, assuming they do enjoy voting rights in the first place. Policymakers seek to appear tough on these groups, contributing to the stigma and marginalisation. Examples of policies in this sense are the criminalisation of undocumented immigrants and disenfranchisement laws for criminals.

The aim of this paper is to identify the categories of people deemed as deserving or undeserving in party political messaging. This might have been considered a trivial task a few decades ago when European party systems were relatively stable along a left-right (L-R) dimension. The left supported welfare policies for blue collar workers, favouring the (native) working class and other groups in the *dependents* category. The right endorsed pro-white collar worker policies, overall benefitting groups in the *advantaged* and *contenders* categories, and strongly punished groups in the deviant category (Mair, 1997; McDonald and Budge, 2005; Thomassen and Schmitt, 1997).

Nonetheless, the emergence of new cleavages and realignments over the second dimension, represented by European integration and immigration, and more acute pres-

sures on welfare systems have changed political competition and the role of deservingness preferences (De Vries and Hobolt, 2020; Hooghe and Marks, 2018; Kriesi, Grande, et al., 2008). New categories of potential welfare recipients have emerged consisting of non-natives and vulnerable workers—gig workers, NEETs, working poor—while the traditional industrial working class has been significantly downsized (Häusermann and Kriesi, 2015). The *contenders* category might have increased its relative weight in party political communication as a backlash to fiscal austerity and Euroscepticism. Parties have also increasingly adopted counterintuitive positions—the left supporting some neoliberal policies, the right advocating more generous welfare programmes (Hopkin, 2020; Kitschelt, 2001). It is now less clear which demographic parties are targeting in their policy designs and who they consider as deserving or undeserving in their everyday messaging. This paper aims to study these questions in relation to Italy.

3.3 Context: Italian welfare state and political actors

The Italian welfare state belongs to the conservative regime. Its current insurance model is funded primarily via payroll taxes, and it relies on earnings-related benefits and transfers but is lean on services. The model employs a preference for horizontal rather than vertical redistribution (Esping-Andersen and Myles, 2011). Similar to welfare policies throughout Southern Europe, it prioritizes the family as fundamental economic unit, and focuses on the elderly, the destitute, and those with low social mobility through subsidiarity rather than empowering platforms (Saraceno, 2016).

The path of development of the Italian welfare system exemplifies the 'new politics' of welfare retrenchment. The initial expansion of welfare spending after WWII,

inflated by clientelism and corruption (Hopkin, 2020), came to an abrupt end during the 1990s because of corruption scandals that ended the First Republic. The ensuing reconfiguration of the party system went in tandem with rising public debt, the necessity to comply with EU monetary requirements, and pressures from markets. These factors forced the welfare state towards the path of retrenchment and conditionality. Governments imposed austerity, ended automatic wage hikes, and cut public spending, pension benefits, and civil servants' wages (Hopkin, 2020; OECD, 1997).

While right-wing governments opted for financial deregulation and entrepreneur-friendly fiscal policies, centre-left coalitions called for fiscal austerity, higher taxes, privatisation, and flexible job markets that provided temporary jobs (Balassone et al., 2002). As in Spain and Greece, when the sovereign debt crisis hit Italy, further austerity was imposed along with strong pressures from European institutions. Subsequent 'technical' and centre-left-led coalitions increased the conditionality and regressivity of welfare policies. While employment became more precarious, these coalitions increased taxes on consumption and cut funds for local development (Culpepper, 2014).

Italy came out of the crisis with a stagnant economy and higher income inequality. This combined with the Southern European nature of welfare based on familialism skewed deservingness towards pensioners and male breadwinners, with special emphasis on the self-employed and public-sector workers (Meardi and Guardiancich, 2022; Saraceno, 2016). These categories have become favoured by a system of acquired pension rights and better access to financial assets (Brandolini, 2014). Meanwhile, 'outsider' target groups—women, young adults, and non-natives—were left behind, causing intergenerational disparity, low social mobility, and the progressive exclusion from welfare provisions and employment protection schemes (Corbetta and Colloca, 2013). Italy is also characterised by an unstable and deeply precarious job market, in which the dualism between insiders and outsiders is particularly significant—the rate of transfor-

mation of atypical and precarious contracts into permanent contracts is lower than in the rest of Europe (Eichhorst and Marx, 2021), which aggravates the relevance of deservingness considerations in the political conflict. These developments certainly had electoral consequences: established parties lost support in the 2013 and 2018 general elections in favour of anti-system, radical parties.

3.3.1 *The Italian party system and hypotheses*

This paper focuses on the five major Italian parties of the last decade—Five Star Movement, League, Brothers of Italy, Democratic Party, and Forward Italy.[1] It first analyses these parties' everyday communication concerning the deservingness of target groups, and then captures how the latter changes depending on whether they are in government or in opposition.

Taking advantage of popular dissatisfaction with the ruling elites, the 5SM emerged in 2009 as a flexible, catch-all party characterised by ideological ambiguity and anti-elite narratives combined with environmentalism and direct democracy (Gerbaudo, 2019; Hopkin, 2020). Its electoral success peaked in the 2018 elections—it won the largest amount of seats in parliament and formed a government with the League (2018-2019). While there is usually no doubt about its populist characterisation,[2] the party shies away from classifications along the L-R dimension, although on economic policies it shares more with the left than the right.

The 5SM's economic platforms have indeed gradually converged with those of

[1]To select the parties, I applied a 2% electoral threshold in the 2018 parliamentary elections. Nevertheless, only parties standing in both 2013 and 2018 were retained to ensure consistency over time (source of elections' results: https://elezionistorico.interno.gov.it/). Information on each party's ideological leanings was retrieved from the PopuList, the Comparative Manifesto Project, and CHES data.

[2]Drawing on Van Kessel (2015), populist parties in this article are defined as those advocating for 'popular sovereignty,' contrasting 'the people,' considered a homogeneous and righteous entity, to the corrupted elites.

other left-wing anti-establishment parties such as Podemos or Syriza (Gerbaudo, 2021; Gerbaudo and Screti, 2017; Sedda, 2020; Segatti and Capuzzi, 2016). The party has strong anti-elite rhetoric, proposing tighter regulations for banks and brokers and aggressively attacking European institutions. It also endorsed more expansive welfare platforms. The 5SM attracts young, urban, well-educated progressive voters mostly residing in the South (Mosca and Tronconi, 2019), who feel threatened by globalisation and are particularly critical of fiscal austerity and increasing levels of inequality (Rico and Anduiza, 2019; Santana and Rama, 2018). The 5SM will thus devote more attention in its everyday communication to deserving *dependent* target groups, such as young adults, families, the unemployed, and other vulnerable recipients, while offering strong support for penalising economic and political elites.

In contrast, the League and Brothers of Italy are RRPPs. Although they have different origins, their policy positions have recently converged.

The League evolved from the Northern League, reborn when Matteo Salvini became its leader in 2013. While the Northern League, founded in 1989, was a regionalist party advocating for lower taxes in favour of the Northern business class, Salvini maneuvered a transition to a nationwide party. He widened the League's appeal to Southern Italy and opened it to the weakest strata, moving the party's platforms towards the radical right (Albertazzi, Giovannini, and Seddone, 2018; D'Alimonte, 2019).

Brothers of Italy finds its roots in postwar fascist formations. Once a minor party, it has recently expanded its electoral base beyond its traditional stronghold in Rome and the South. The party's platforms can be inscribed into the Italian social right tradition—Christian values and identity, support for poor, native Italians, and the endorsement of pro-market, liberal views of the state and the economy.

Both parties' electorate has become more working class, less educated, and eco-

nomically insecure, forced to compete with non-native workers for jobs. This is particularly evident in its clear geographical demarcation: their supporters tend to be rural or suburban 'left-behind' excluded from high-skilled, urban employment opportunities, and thus vulnerable to rhetoric attacking urban, inclusion-oriented spending (Afonso and Rennwald, 2018; Ipsos, 2018). Their voters are particularly concerned with defending their social status against immigrants and welfare cheats, perceiving themselves as status insecure and wanting to avoid being considered among the lowest ranks of society (Attewell, 2021; Hochschild, 2018). As a result, these RRPPs will message about undeserving *deviant* target groups and deserving *dependent* groups, on top of *advantaged* groups, especially in the case of the League given its wealthier Northern base.

The Democratic Party was born in 2007 as the merger of social democratic and Christian democratic formations. The party has governed without interruption from 2013 to 2018, despite relying on weak coalitions. While originally representing blue-collar workers, the PD, as the other European mainstream left parties, is today composed of highly educated, cosmopolitan, white-collar workers—the 'winners' of globalisation (Hernández and Kriesi, 2016). The mainstream left, however, has also adapted its platforms to intercept the needs of new social groups, increasingly represented by the weakest strata such as atypical workers, women, and young citizens, who demand social investments (Abou-Chadi and Hix, 2021; Abou-Chadi and Immergut, 2019; Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015). The PD will thus focus on both *advantaged* groups—the middle class, businesses, and professionals—and *dependent* deserving target groups.

Last, Forward Italy was born in 1994 as a business-firm party with a strong emphasis on Silvio Berlusconi's leadership and personal interests (Hopkin and Paolucci, 1999). Despite being described as liberal-populist during the 1990s, Forward Italy has since abandoned its populist leanings without changing its socially conservative, eco-

nomically liberal stances, being today representative of the mainstream right (Taguieff, 2003). Indeed, Forward Italy has historically promoted the market economy and growth-oriented policies, favoring deregulation and lower taxes for high-income, economically secure individuals and corporations. The party, however, has also emphasised law-and-order rhetoric and the centrality of Christian values and identity, while taking negative positions on immigration and cultural integration. In its everyday communication, Forward Italy will thus focus on deserving *advantaged* groups and, to a minor extent, on undeserving *deviant* groups.

The next set of expectations relates to the emphasis that parties devote to social policies recipients' deservingness. A broad literature exists about the dynamics linked to agenda setting processes of parties in office, in particular concerning the behaviour of mainstream parties (Greene, 2016; Mair, 2013). These parties, according to salience and issue ownership theories, tend to act strategically emphasising the issues they own, and consequently on which they are advantaged, compared to their rivals (Budge and Farlie, 1983; Petrocik, 1996).

More recently, scholars have started focusing on issue attention, in order to assess the impact of governing parties' behaviour on policy agendas (Cavalieri and Froio, 2021; Green-Pedersen, 2019; B. Jones and Baumgartner, 2005). In this sense, the *attention-based model* of party mandate considers issue attention as 'a particular type of information that parties want to signal to their voters, as they struggle to control the content of the policy agenda' (Cavalieri and Froio, 2021:3). Parties thus act as 'information processor,' filtering the information and developments from the political enviroment into their agendas in a continuous, dynamic process of adaptation (Froio, Bevan, and Jennings, 2017). Therefore, political parties in government tend to strategically emphasise issues aiming to get the highest electoral payoff through an issue attention mechanism.

Here too, the framework has been mainly applied to study the behaviour of mainstream parties, even though populist and RRPPs have recently received more attention (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2015; Carvalho, 2013). In this regard, Cavalieri and Froio (2021), analysing parliamentary debates in Italy, provide evidence that populist parties in office behave similarly to mainstream parties, but when in the opposition they emphasise a more limited set of issues to distinguish themselves from established parties. Italy is a particularly interesting case in this sense, given that, on the one hand, the presence of populist parties is marked and varied in their ideological leanings. On the other hand, these parties, contrary to what happened in other countries were they have often been relegated to minor opposition roles, have had government experiences in the last decades. This makes the country a proper laboratory to analyse how mainstream and populist parties' behaviour changes depending on their instititutional status (Cavalieri and Froio, 2021).

This study adapts the attention-based model to parties' deservingness discourses. Following from the discussion above, populist parties such as the 5SM and the League, when in the opposition, will focus their attention towards undeserving target groups.[3] The 5SM will devote greater emphasis to *contenders*, whereas the League to *deviants*. This strategy should allow them to maximise their electoral benefits, as a negative depiction of undeserving categories fits with their challenger status (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2012), and allows to attribute blame towards established parties (Skonieczny, 2018). By stressing the undeservingness of the target groups most despised by their potential voters, these parties will distinguish themselves from elite parties, which supposedly favour economic/political elites or non-natives/criminals over natives and 'normal people' in their policymaking of welfare policies.

[3]It should be noted that, in the time period here considered, only the Democratic Party (2013-2018), the 5SM and the League (2018-2019) have been in government. Therefore, Forward Italy and Brothers of Italy are not considered in this discussion.

But when in government, these parties will increase their emphasis on deserving target groups, in particular the *advantaged*. Indeed, drawing on the literature on populism and issue attention, populist parties will struggle to appear as competent and will be more constrained by external factors and governing responsibilities (Klüver and Spoon, 2016; Mair, 2014). They will be forced to widen their agenda and include platforms to gain the support of voters with high political power, hence dispelling the allegations of being unqualified and inexperienced in managing the economy (Steenbergen and Siczek, 2017). Last, the discursive emphasis on deservingness of a mainstream left party such as the PD should remain constant, regardless of its institutional role. Indeed, its responsible government party status allows less space for incongruity. Based on the discussion above, I articulated the following hypotheses:

H1 The 5SM politicises the deservingness of *dependent* target groups, and the undeservingness of *contenders*.

H2 RRPPs stress the undeservingness of *deviant* target groups and the deservingness of *dependent* and *advantaged* groups.

H3 The Democratic Party politicises the deservingness of both *advantaged* and *dependent* target groups.

H4 Forward Italy focuses on deserving *advantaged* groups and undeserving *deviant* groups.

H5 Populist parties (5SM and League) will emphasise undeserving target groups when in the opposition, and deserving groups when in government.

H6 Mainstream parties (PD) will show no difference in their emphasis on target groups' deservingness whatever their institutional role is.

3.4 Data and Methodology

The dataset I collected, using Netvizz, consists of 20,192 FB posts covering the period from 31st December 2012 to 31st March 2019.[4] Data include all the posts published on each of the five parties' official FB pages—PD, 5SM, League, Forward Italy, and Brothers of Italy. Official party pages have been preferred to candidates' pages to ensure comparability, as candidates are not consistent across the period.

The choice of the 2012–2019 period was convenient for two reasons. First, it covers two general elections and five different governments, allowing me to account for electoral dynamics and capture variation in party messaging depending on whether they were in government or not. Second, before 2013 the 5SM did not put forward candidates for election, and the (Northern) League was still a regional party with scarce appeal outside the North. Starting observations at the end of 2012 ensured consistency and uniformity across a relatively stable party system.

The choice of FB data was motivated by several considerations. During this period, social media have increasingly become the preferred communication tool of political parties (Gibson and McAllister, 2015; Spierings and Jacobs, 2019). Populists, in particular, have campaigned effectively through FB using aggressive messaging that appeals to voters' emotions (Kriesi, 2014; Stanyer, Salgado, and Strömbäck, 2016). In response, mainstream parties have also increased their use of social media (Engesser et al., 2017). On FB it is possible to observe parties' direct, unfiltered messaging to their supporters, with clear-cut units of meaning (posts) and comparability across different parties (Kalsnes, 2016). And although Twitter has received more attention from the scholarship because it is easily accessible through its API (Barberá et al., 2019; Stolee and Caton, 2018), FB presents several advantages: there is no strict word

[4]See the Appendix for more details about data and methodology.

limit as on Twitter, and its demographic reach is wider (Ernst et al., 2019; Muller and Schwarz, 2021). Moreover, FB is the most popular social media in Italy: 35.7 million users representing 65% of Internet users.[5] In terms of engagement, more people follow the FB pages of the parties here considered than their Twitter feeds, with 530,243 FB followers in May 2019 against 242,000 on Twitter.

3.4.1 *Content analysis*

To capture the specific target groups that parties consider as deserving or undeserving in their FB messaging, I performed content analysis through manual coding. First, I developed a coding scheme. For a post to be coded as pertaining to one target group, it had to satisfy two requirements: reference to a specific target group defined as deserving and undeserving (positively or negatively), and reference to a welfare policy. These requirements were necessary to discard posts about welfare policies without engaging in narratives of deservingness, or talking about categories of people without reference to welfare policies (e.g., criticising immigrants for cultural rather than economic reasons).

Regarding (un)deserving citizens, I included the target groups identified by Schneider and Ingram (2017), as shown in Figure 3.1. Following Esping-Andersen (1990), I considered the welfare state as covering the following areas: social protection, education and training, health, social services, and housing. In terms of policy tools, I included social benefits, such as cash benefits, subsidies and transfers (pensions, income support during maternity leave, social assistance payments), social services (childcare, infrastructure), fiscal policies (wealth tax), public expenditures for the job market (recommodification policies), minimum/universal incomes and wage policies, and public support of employers (subsidies, tax breaks). While target groups were defined a

[5] Agcom 2019 and YouTrend-Infosfera 2018 data.

priori, the tone, i.e. whether the target group was considered as deserving or undeserving, was assessed directly while coding. This means that even though, for instance, immigrants are categorised as among undeserving target groups in Figure 3.1, they might still be coded as deserving if that is the case in parties' communication.

Armed with this preliminary scheme, an independent coder and I randomly sampled and coded 10% of the posts from each party. This is common practice to evaluate intercoder reliability (ICR) and the quality of the coding scheme (J. Campbell et al., 2013; O'Connor and Joffe, 2020). Most of the codes presented no ambiguity, but some improvements to the coding scheme were necessary. First, I realised that some of the target groups needed to be combined, such as the unemployed and precarious workers, or the disabled and the sick. The aim was to reduce the complexity of the coding scheme, because simpler coding schemes are more reliable (Garrison et al., 2006). In addition, some categories were logically combined from policy and social construction perspectives. Second, some codes needed to be refined. For instance, posts rarely mentioned healthcare providers, while there were many concerning teachers or researchers. Last, I created a new code for Southern Italy in the *dependent* category. It is well known that Northern Italy is generally much wealthier than Southern Italy. I noticed posts from different parties often referred to the South as a target group, per se. The final coding scheme led to high ICR, and was used to code the rest of the posts.[6]

After coding, to account for the variance of the absolute number of posts across parties and time and adopting individual posts as units of measurement, I weighted target group counts based on the party's total number of posts, either monthly or yearly, obtaining frequencies (%) of posts focused on each social construction.[7] To

[6] Average overall Krippendorff's alpha coefficient equal to .82. See the Appendix for the full coding scheme.

[7] For instance, if the Democratic Party posted twenty posts about the deservingness of the *advantaged* target group out of 100 total posts in month t, the frequency of posts in month t for that specific category would equal 20%.

test whether parties' emphasis on specific target groups changed whether they were in government or in the opposition, I performed independent-samples t-tests.

3.5 Findings

Social constructions of target groups adopted by parties reveal a composite picture. Figure 3.2 presents an overview of the results of content analysis. Social constructions of *advantaged* deserving categories, as expected given their greater political power and consequent political gain for parties, show favourable tones only, with categories such as the middle class—which includes references to employees, savers, and home-owners—and business—business owners, employers, SMEs—showing high salience in absolute terms.

Figure 3.2. Weighted frequencies of target groups' social constructions

Dependents, who possess little political power, also show favourable tones but relatively less attention. In particular, some demographic subcategories are discussed less consistently: women, the disabled, youth, and the unemployed.

The relatively lower attention to young people and women confirms the historical distortions of conservative welfare regimes in favour of the elderly and pensioners. Most welfare benefits are indeed payroll-funded and tend to be skewed towards male breadwinners. Young generations are characterised by high levels of unemployment, a high percentage of NEETs, and tend to be hired through precarious and atypical contracts.[8] Moreover, as in most other European countries, young people vote less frequently than the elderly, are generally less involved in politics, and are less organised to press for their cause, hence representing a lower electoral payoff from parties' standpoint.[9] Regarding women, the familialistic element makes Southern European welfare systems less responsive to changes in society, in which women are today earners as much as men are, on top of having caretaking responsibilities on their shoulders. However, women are significantly underrepresented in parliament (35,11% in the Senate and 36,06% in the Chamber of Deputies), in particular among young women (below 30% for MPs under 40), hence confirming the presence of intersectional disadvantages.[10] Connected to this, women in Italy also tend to participate less in political life, presenting low electoral turnout, in particular in Southern regions.[11]

Negative social constructions of *deviants* present lower levels of agreement between parties, which are divided along a L-R divide, whereas *contenders* receive reproach throughout the political spectrum.

Looking at total trends in deservingness posts (Figure 3.3), conditionality discourses have increased for most parties over time. In particular the 5SM, since it started governing in 2018, doubled its deservingness frequency, while the League shows the opposite trend.

[8]Source: Istat 2021 data.
[9]Source: YouTrend 2020 data.
[10]Source: UN Women-Il Sole 24 Ore 2019 data.
[11]Source: Quorum-YouTrend 2019 data.

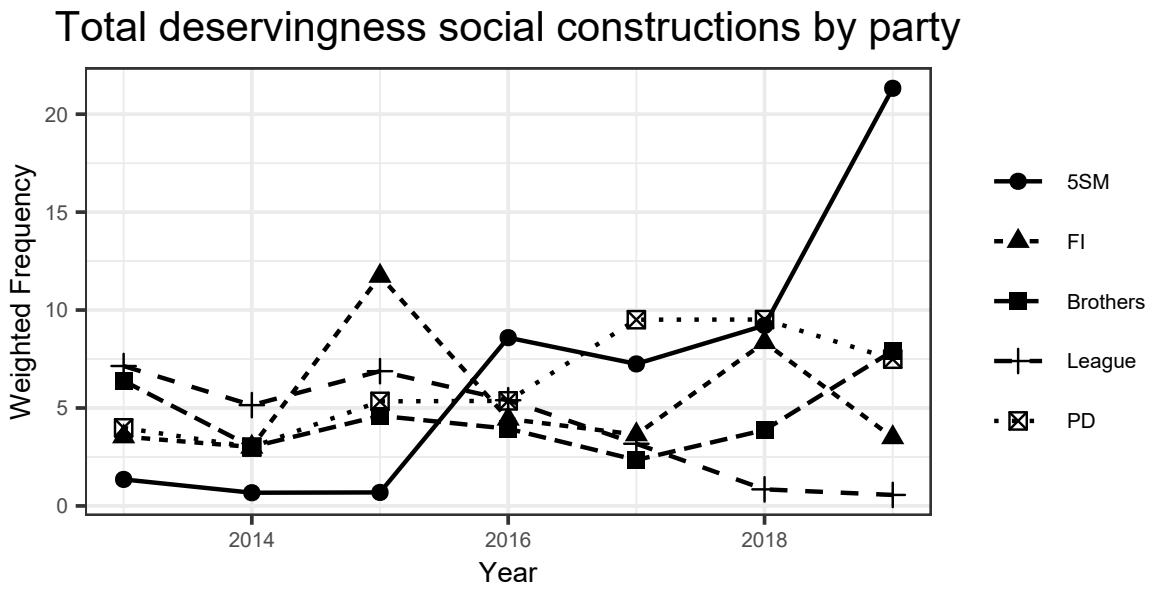

Figure 3.3. Yearly total deservingness social constructions of target groups, by party

3.5.1 *Single party analysis: Five Star Movement*

The 5SM strongly condemns *contenders*, showing the highest frequency of posts about undeserving political elites compared to other parties, and a relatively lower frequency for economic elites. This is in line with the party's strong anti-system nature, blaming the '*casta*' (caste) of politicians and all their 'privileges' that need to be given back to 'Italian citizens' and accusing them of corruption and malfeasance. They consistently stress their honesty and that they give back their MP salary and refuse all benefits. The party often adopts rhetoric that pits MPs and party supporters against a power system controlled by politicians and economic elites (*partitocrazia*), and against the media and journalists that conspire with the elites. They message that other parties are puppets of the lobbies that use them to make laws in their favour: 'We don't have the support of speculators and lobbyists, and we are proud of that!' (5SM, 9/11/2018).

Equally expected was the party's attention to *dependents*. The 5SM shows high frequencies for this target group in absolute terms, and the highest frequency overall

for the needy (*bisognosi*), a target group that includes the weak (*deboli*), poor, and homeless. They also present the second highest frequency for the youth, their supporters' main demographic group (Ipsos, 2018), and some attention to the unemployed. Frequencies are surprisingly low for the South, women, families, and disabled. The party clearly preferred a more general approach favouring the needy over more specific deserving categories, and did not directly target the South, although their proposals resonated more there than in other parts of the country.

In terms of policy designs, they opposed PD's Inclusion Income measure (*Reddito di Inclusione*), a means-tested programme introduced in 2017 by the PD government to alleviate poverty by providing a minimum basic income for up to 18 months to the destitute. One 5SM post stated, 'The Democratic Party . . . has changed the name of another electoral tip to pretend they are fighting poverty. Do you know what they called it? Inclusion Income!' (5SM, 14/07/2016). The 5SM criticises this policy as inadequate and 'welfarist' (*assistenzialista*), because it would not create job opportunities. The idea of welfarism is often mentioned by all parties, accusing opposing parties' welfare provisions of being passive, providing subsidies or favouring helicopter-money measures instead of active job market policies. However, the 5SM proposes minimum hourly wages and the 'citizenship income,' their most important welfare policy implemented in 2019 when in government. It is a means-tested basic income provision for the unemployed or for people living in severe poverty, with some job search support schemes.

The 5SM has negative views of other parties' welfare proposals, in particular the mainstream, centre-left PD, which they accuse of having favoured austerity and precariousness, and of the European Union and the Euro, also reproached for post-crisis austerity: 'Italian politicians sold their soul to the Teutonic demon in exchange of their survival, but at the cost of the people who have paid with austerity and deflation' (5SM,

23/07/2013).

More surprising is the party's attention to *advantaged* groups, showing the highest frequency among all parties for the middle class and businesses, and the second highest for the elderly and healthcare/school professionals, although the latter had the lowest frequency in absolute terms. It should be noted that contrary to the *dependent* category, attention to the *advantaged* rose only after the 5SM formed a government coalition with the League after the 2018 elections.[12] When in government, the party had to change its strategy. It reassured business leaders and the middle class and softened its anti-system tone. As evident in their 2018 programmatic documents, the party promoted investments for corporations, in particular to support 'made in Italy' brands abroad, and lower taxes for small and medium enterprises. However, government responsibilities and consequent 'institutionalisation' resulted in losing some support from their historical constituencies in the polls.[13]

Finally, the 5SM shows scarce attention to *deviants*, with the lowest frequency of posts mentioning welfare cheats and no mention of criminals. Clearly, the target of their negative messaging about undeserving categories is instead oriented towards the elites. The party describes immigrants as deserving, and defends them against the RRPP's attacks. For instance, the 5SM debunked the idea that they would bring diseases or would be profiting from public welfare: 'The "famous" 35€ per day doesn't go to asylum seekers . . . they receive daily pocket money of only 2.5€' (5SM, 22/07/2017). They attack smugglers who would profit from undocumented immigrants, and the EU for its failure to distribute immigrants more fairly across Europe. Immigrants, however, are seldomly mentioned in their welfare policies, such as in their posts about citizenship income or minimum wages.

[12]Yearly frequencies for each macro target group are provided in the Appendix for all parties.
[13]Polls figures are provided in the Appendix.

The 5SM thus makes a relevant use of both deserving and undeserving social constructions, with a relatively higher focus on *dependents* (deserving) and *contenders* (undeserving), thus confirming *H1*. When in government though, the party has significantly increased its narratives about deserving *advantaged* target groups, in particular those with more political power, such as businesses and the middle class. This is confirmed by Table 3.1, that reports independent-samples t-tests comparing mean monthly frequencies of 5SM's FB posts when in the opposition and when in goverment, distinguishing by macro target group.

Clearly, the party's messaging about both *advantaged* and *dependent* target groups increases significantly when the party is in government, especially in the case of the latter group. This confirms how the 5SM needs to 'normalise' its strategy when in office, having to propose actual social policies for deserving target groups (Mudde, 2019). But as claimed by Schneider and Ingram (2017), the political return of policies in favour of the *advantaged* target group is much higher than that of *dependents*, which explains why the party increases its messaging about the former relatively more. On the contrary, the attention to undeserving target groups, specifically to *contenders*, decreases significantly when the party is in office. As expected, the payoff of anti-system rhetoric is lower when the party needs the support of economic and political elites with large political power.

3.5.2 *RRPPs: League and Brothers of Italy*

Both parties show similar social constructions, although with some nuanced differences likely attributable to their experiences in government: the League governed between 2018 and 2019, whereas the Brothers of Italy have always been in opposition.

When compared to other parties, they pay relatively scarce attention to *advan-*

Table 3.1: Difference in means across 5SM's monthly frequencies, by target group

5SM: Independent-samples t-tests (H0: diff=0)					
	Mean	StDev	t	df	p-value
Advantaged: opposition	1.34	3.05	-6.06	70	0.0000
Advantaged: government	8.88	6.36			
Dependent: opposition	1.4	3.06	-4.13	70	0.0001
Dependent: government	5.96	4.28			
Contenders: opposition	4.87	4.12	4.51	70	0.0000
Contenders: government	1.03	2.15			
Deviants: opposition	0.04	0.29	-2.46	70	0.1163
Deviants: government	1.2	3.79			

taged target groups, presenting the lowest frequencies for the middle class and among the lowest for business. More specific groups, such as the elderly and healthcare and school professionals, do not attract much attention either. The only exception is the police—both parties propose to increase salaries, benefits, and pensions, thus confirming the right's traditional focus on law and order narratives. One post stated, 'In the Budget Law the government has cut the funds for police forces. Shame!' (League, 26/11/2015). In absolute terms, however, the salience of *advantaged* groups is significant, especially for business and the middle class. Both the League and Brothers support a 15% flat tax on income to favour SMEs, a leaner bureaucracy for entrepreneurs, and less stringent tax evasion rules. A relevant topic for the League is reforming the Fornero pension law, introduced by the Monti government in 2011 under the post-crisis spending review effort: '#Salvini: I would even support a proposal by the Democratic Party. The only important thing is that we ABOLISH #Fornero [Law]' (League, 16/09/2015). In turn, the League proposes Quota 100, which would reduce the retirement age.

In addition, *dependent* target groups received relatively less attention, especially

young adults, women, and the needy, although the latter shows significantly higher frequencies in absolute terms. The Brothers of Italy pay significant attention to families and the disabled, in line with the social right tradition. They are strongly anchored to traditional Italian far-right motifs: God, fatherland, and family (*Dio*, *patria*, *famiglia*). The party consistently stresses the need to fight demographic decline supporting birthrates through means-tested subsidies (the Baby Bonus voucher), free nurseries, and housing policies, but limiting these provisions to 'traditional' families, opposing 'gender ideology,' defending 'human life,' and adopting familialistic rhetoric as the foundation of their vision for the welfare state and mutual assistance.

Like the 5SM, RRPPs oppose the welfare policies of previous governments, such as the Bonus Renzi,[14] described as mere 'electoral tips' (*mance*), and stress the need of more meritocracy and pro-growth policies rather than welfarism: 'Brothers of Italy wants to defend labour whereas [the left] wants to defend meaningless welfarism' (Brothers of Italy, 14/01/2018).[15]

Moving to negative social constructions, in line with expectations, *deviants* show the highest frequencies. Immigrants present an overall record high for the League, followed by the Brothers: '#Italians first: 280€ as a state subsidy for disabled people is an insult! They have forgotten the disabled to devote themselves to illegal immigrants' (League, 10/12/2017). The League's mantras are 'Italians first' (*prima gli Italiani*) and 'help them in their own homes' (*aiutiamoli a casa loro*), implying that immigrants should not be allowed in Italy in the first place, as implemented by the League's Safety Decree.[16] In the event that immigrants do arrive, they should not have access to welfare. The League also directly targets the Romani community as undeserving,

[14] An 80€ monthly bonus for people with income below a given threshold, introduced in 2014.

[15] To be noted, the League, when it was still the Northern League, considered the South as undeserving, accusing it of draining welfare resources from the North.

[16] A decree implemented by Salvini when in government in 2018 to abolish forms of protection of immigrants.

infamously proposing to bulldoze Romani camps.

Furthermore, the most frequent posts from the Brothers attack criminals and welfare cheats, but the latter are never mentioned by the League, and both categories show relatively low frequencies in absolute terms. In this regard, Brothers strongly oppose the citizenship income because it is welfarist and would go to criminals and immigrants: 'I say no to the citizenship income given to criminals. As of today the citizenship income will go to assassins, rapists, and thieves. Those are categories that should not get it' (Brothers of Italy, 10/03/2019). However, the League does not criticize it as they are in a coalition with the 5SM.

About *contenders*, RRPPs present higher salience towards economic elites than political elites. Both parties strongly oppose the EU of 'banks and oligarchs' and propose to rediscuss the European Fiscal Compact, which would be too restrictive on deficit limits. They also reproach bankers who have been accused of unfair appropriation of collective resources, referencing the instances of bail-ins, which should have gone to 'the people.' Also in this case, the PD was the target of attacks. When some Tuscany and Veneto banks defaulted in 2017, critics complained that the PD, then in control of the central government, deployed funds to save the banks rather than savers and citizens.

As evidenced by their social constructions of target groups, the focus of RRPP posts, in comparison to other parties, is not so much on the deserving, but on the undeserving. In contrast to 5SM, which caters to disadvantaged regions with promises of more generous welfare for *dependents*, RRPPs, in line with their welfare chauvinism, mainly ground their deservingness discourses on negative constructions of *deviants*: immigrants and criminals. Undeserving constructions prevail over deserving ones: these parties' view on welfare is more oriented towards increasing conditions and retrenchment at the cost of undeserving immigrants rather than introducing new protection

schemes. Some *advantaged* groups, however, receive high salience, in particular those with greater political power, as well as *dependents*, in particular the needy. *H2* is therefore confirmed.

It should be stressed that the League's focus on undeserving immigrants is higher when in the opposition than when in government, as confirmed by Table 3.2. The League indeed decreases significantly its attention to *deviants* when it is in office. *Mutatis mutandis* with respect to the 5SM, the payoff of welfare chauvinism decreases when the party is responsible for policies and can be blamed for their shortcomings. *H5* can be therefore confirmed—populist parties, when in office, increase their attention to deserving target groups, while decreasing their messaging about undeserving groups.

Table 3.2: Difference in means across League's monthly frequencies, by target group

League: Independent-samples t-tests (H0: diff=0)					
	Mean	StDev	t	df	p-value
Advantaged: opposition	2.78	4.67	1.38	51	0.19
Advantaged: government	0.2	0.32			
Dependent: opposition	1.71	2.62	1.47	51	0.15
Dependent: government	0.12	0.3			
Contenders: opposition	0.43	1.57	0.72	51	0.48
Contenders: government	0	0			
Deviants: opposition	1.49	2.43	1.6	51	0.0167
Deviants: government	0.2	0.04			

3.5.3 *Mainstream parties*

When compared to other parties, the Democratic Party devotes significant attention to some *advantaged* target groups, in particular to the middle class and healthcare professionals, while teachers also receive significant attention. The latter category

is particularly relevant in Italy—education is public administration's largest branch counting 914,839 teachers, out of which 23.1% are precarious and thus particularly receptive to welfare policies.[17] On the contrary, soldiers, the elderly, and business do not receive much attention.

The party adopts decisively favourable constructions towards *dependent* target groups, especially in their last two years of government, between 2016 and 2018, showing the highest frequencies for youth, women, the unemployed, and families, and second highest for the South, the needy, and the disabled. They message about the need for provisions to increase social mobility for youth and ease their access to the job market. For women, they pledge to reduce gender gaps through 'equal pay, support for female entrepreneurship, and access to education for all women' (PD, 3/11/2017). Furthermore, the PD is the only party explicitly addressing conditionalities in their messaging, advocating universal access to welfare provisions, from which youth, women, and the South would have been excluded: 'The real weapon against inequality is labour, not subsidies. . . . I would allocate 9 billion to universal child allowances, extended also to autonomous workers and the destitute' (PD, 17/02/2019).

The PD's narratives are strongly focused on employment and active labour market policies: 'What is the left today? We are the party of labour, whilst others want welfarism and subsidies' (PD, 13/06/2017). In their 2013 programme, they claim labour is at the core of their platforms, but not in the sense of the 'classic antagonism between workers and employers.' Instead, they take into account the new categories that require more 'dignified and stable' jobs: small entrepreneurs, artisans, public-sector employees, teachers, and researchers. In practice, however, when in government the party adopted a flex-security approach with Matteo Renzi's 2014 Jobs Act, which increased labour market flexibility and the number of temporary contracts, causing

[17]Source: ANIEF 2022 data.

strong bipartisan opposition.

In government for most of the period here considered, the PD tends to stress the positive results of their policies, such as higher economic growth, lower taxes, subsidies for enterprises, and reduced unemployment and precariousness. The PD describes itself as the 'responsible' party as opposed to populists: 'The Brexit disaster demonstrates that there is no future in the wreckage proposed by nationalists and populists. The only way is union and cooperation' (PD, 15/01/2019).

The PD strongly criticizes the 5SM for their citizenship income, considered a populist imitation of the Inclusion Income, and a welfarist rather than an active, meritocratic policy. They also oppose the right wing's flat tax proposal, called an 'upside-down Robin Hood policy' because it would favour high income earners.

In their messaging about undeserving *contenders*, they single out political elites more than right-wing parties. However, the PD messages very infrequently about economic elites, and both constructions receive relatively low attention in absolute terms. Their focus on *deviants* is also limited: immigrants are considered deserving but show a low frequency in absolute terms, while there is no mention of undeserving criminals and only limited focus on undeserving welfare cheats. But as expected, the Democratic Party does not alter its discursive strategy about the deservingness of welfare recipients depending on its institutional role (Table 3.3). Except for a slightly higher frequency of *deviants*-related posts—the PD talks more about the deservingness of immigrants when in the opposition to the 5SM-League government—all the other target groups show no difference. *H6* can thus be confirmed.

Overall, deserving social constructions are prevalent over undeserving. The stress is not on blaming specific categories, but on advocating an expansion of welfare for *dependent* and *advantaged* target groups. *H3* is also confirmed.

Table 3.3: Difference in means across Democratic Party's monthly frequencies, by target group

PD: Independent-samples t-tests (H0: diff=0)					
	Mean	StDev	t	df	p-value
Advantaged: opposition	3.84	3.52	1.32	73	0.1902
Advantaged: government	2.33	3.33			
Dependent: opposition	4.3	2.66	0.59	73	0.5569
Dependent: government	3.4	4.67			
Contenders: opposition	0.27	0.49	-0.11	73	0.9134
Contenders: government	0.32	1.28			
Deviants: opposition	.73	1.06	2.25	73	0.0272
Deviants: government	.18	0.63			

Thus, in terms of messaging, the party is in line with egalitarian and humanitarian left-wing traditions. In practice, however, the party's posts do not always translate into a real expansion of universal welfare: the Inclusion Income, the Bonus Renzi, and the Jobs Act have been strongly criticised because they retrace the neoliberalist policies of Italian mainstream centre-left parties in previous decades. And the party failed to tackle systemic conditionalities and retrenchment. Combining that with their 'responsible' party status makes the PD the target of other parties' attacks, which criticise the perceived detachment of the PD's messaging from actual welfare provisions for the needy that actually favour the winners of globalisation: 'The Democratic Party is not the party of the wealthy? They could start proving this by voting for the citizenship income' (5SM, 22/03/2019).

Last, Forward Italy is a mainstream centre-right party that has been in the opposition for the entire period here covered. As expected, the main focus of the party in absolute terms is on *advantaged* target groups, in particular those with greater political power, such as business, the middle class, and the elderly, the latter being their most

supportive electoral group (Ipsos, 2018).

They specifically support lower taxes for enterprises and small companies instead of subsidies, and support deregulation and lean bureaucracy. Around 2018, they started supporting the League's flat tax proposal and lower taxes for homeowners, in particular the tax on principal residences. In addition, they strongly oppose wealth taxes (*patrimoniale*) and campaign for higher pensions. Their approach is grounded in individualism and pro-market growth. Their focus is not so much on inequality but on poverty, and economic growth is seen as the solution rather than redistribution: 'The difference between the 5SM and us is that for them existing wealth is more than enough. They do not want to increase it, they only want to redistribute it. They want to take from the wealthy to give to the poor. On the contrary, we want Italy to become wealthier' (Forward Italy, 15/03/2019). In comparison to other parties, they devote significant attention to soldiers and the police, but never mention healthcare and education professionals.

Dependents do not receive much attention, with the exception of Southern Italy, the party having been historically successful there. While normally opposing an expansion of the welfare state, they attack other parties for limiting welfare at the cost of the South, and mention the need to invest in infrastructure and reduce socioeconomic inequalities between the North and South. Other target groups, such as young adults, the unemployed, families, and the disabled receive low attention with few mentions about the need to provide welfare for infants, the disabled, and traditional families as the core focus of Italian welfare.

Their messaging about undeserving *contenders* or *deviants* is limited, except for some opposition to immigrants, in particular with reference to the 5SM's citizenship income, which they argue should benefit other categories such as the police. *H4* is therefore confirmed.

3.6 Conclusion

This paper contributes to the scholarship on the political economy of welfare, deservingness, and redistribution by analysing the FB messaging of five Italian parties on the deservingness of aforementioned socially constructed target groups. This is relevant because it helps to explain the trajectory of contemporary welfare states in relation to retrenchment and conditionalities. Moreover, even though a party's messaging on social media may not translate into actual policies, social constructions affect the politics and views of people and voters reading the posts.

As evidenced by the findings, *advantaged* groups receive support across the political spectrum and their provisions are described as broad and universal, thus reinforcing their privileged status. In contrast, welfare policies for *dependents* are means-tested, subject to several requirements, and recipients are depicted as helpless and responsible for their condition. The 'usual suspects' of the new politics of welfare systematically receive less attention: women, young adults, and the disabled. Despite not surprising considering the characteristics of conservative welfare regimes, the fact that these categories of citizens are still consistently disregarded by parties in their communication about welfare benefits is telling of a profound inertia in adapting to contemporary challenges and changes in society. *Deviants* are disenfranchised, because there can be great political gain in limiting their access to welfare, fostering marginalisation and eventually deviance itself. Last, *contenders* are highly criticised by populist parties, but their political support is fundamental when those parties are in government, resulting in under-the-radar welfare benefits.

This study also reveals important dynamics about policy agendas and issue attention. Making use of actual parties' communication, findings provide evidence that parties strategically adapt their issue emphasis to maximise its electoral payoff. Specifi-

cally, populist parties normalise their status and communication when they are in office aiming to signal competency in social welfare policymaking. The attacks to undeserving categories decrease, whereas constructive proposals increase significantly. Even a left-wing oriented populist party like the 5SM, which campaigned in favour of economic degrowth, starts alluring the *advantaged* when in office, proposing tax cuts and pro-business policies. On the contrary, a mainstream party like the PD seems immune from these mechanisms, but this puts even more strain on the incongruity between its universalist communication and selectivist policymaking.

The Italian party system can be considered peculiar given the wide variety and success of populist parties and the high volatility of elections. But in terms of the welfare state, Italy is typically conservative and, more specifically, Southern European. The findings highlighted by this case study paint a picture of more conditionalities and lowered protection of vulnerable target groups now being experienced across the conservative regime type, and the consequent politicisation of the deservingness of target groups by political parties.

To my knowledge, this study is the first attempt to analyse parties' everyday communications about the deservingness of groups of recipients of social policies and welfare. Further research can expand the scope of the study by introducing a comparative element and analysing party communications in different countries and welfare regimes. It could also include developments following the Covid-19 crisis, which has increased the role of, and expectations from, welfare states across Europe.

Chapter 4

What Is the Left Today? The Role of Preferences for Redistribution in the Contemporary Italian Left

4.1 Introduction

'What is the left today?' This question is found in a Facebook post by the Italian Democratic Party (PD), published on 13th December 2017, while it was in government. The post continues with 'we are the party of labour, whilst others want welfarism and subsidies.'

This self-analysis by one of the major European mainstream left parties is telling of a profound identity crisis that crosscuts social democratic and socialist parties across the Continent. What the left is, and what it represents, cannot be taken for granted anymore. Since the 1990s, amidst the increasing success of radical right populist parties and the decline of the economic divide, the left has been observed to adopt non-

traditional economic positions, favouring regressive redistributive policies (Kitschelt, 2001; Kriesi, Grande, et al., 2008; Ross, 2000). As a consequence, the left's attention to redistribution, once its most important stronghold, is now disputed—do welfare and preferences for redistribution still matter for the mainstream left? What are the strategies, considerations, and constraints that motivate the left's formulation of redistributive and social welfare policies?

To answer these questions, this study focuses on the two major theoretical streams linking the left and redistribution in today's political context—the *Brahmin Left* explanation, which sees the left as completely detached from redistribution and welfare considerations; and the *new middle class* explanation, which claims that the left still advocates for redistribution, even though with new tools and means compared to its traditional policies in order to cater to a new electorate composed of atypical and precarious workers, and public sector professionals.

The object of the study is the Italian Democratic Party. After decades of stagnant growth, declining incomes, and increasing inequality, the PD has governed Italy for nine years since its foundation in 2007, providing four PMs as the major mainstream left party. Its relationship with welfare and redistribution however has been controversial, and it has been often accused of having embraced neoliberal stances and reneged on redistribution (Hopkin, 2020). This is in line with a general trajectory at the country level—while after WWII Italy was characterised by a fierce class conflict based on redistributive struggles (Della Porta, 2006), the political scene evolved to represent the whole array of anti-system parties and political entrepreneurs, less interested in welfare and redistribution (Rovny and Polk, 2020).

In investigating the role of welfare and redistributive policies for PD, this paper adopts an elite-interview approach, providing a thick description by directly involving its leadership. Political elites can offer significant insights into the importance of

redistribution in shaping their parties' campaigns and policies, the nature of welfare and redistributive priorities, the characteristics of potential voters targeted, and the historical evolution of welfare policies within the party's strategies. I thus conducted in-depth interviews with PD's national, regional, and local policymakers.

Findings provide a complex picture of PD's stances on redistribution. The party has evolved its conception of redistribution and welfare to adapt to the new middle class demands—its policies and proposals are meant to benefit autonomous and atypical workers, such as the self-employed, sole practitioners and freelance workers; but also the working poor represented by riders for food delivery services, and seasonal workers in construction, farming and hospitality industry; the lower middle class; and, finally, women and youth through an intersectional approach. Nevertheless, the PD is characterised by a fierce internal struggle between ideological factions, that combined with its majoritarian vocation undermined the party's incisiveness in promoting redistributive issues. As a result, the party's base is highly critical towards the leadership when it comes to redistribution. A clear detachment is identified between the leaders' outdated views, be them social democratic or liberal democratic, and the base's more radical redistributive demands. This is particularly evident concerning the internal debate, or absence of it, about a wealth tax or a universal basic income. A 'third,' more redistributive class of MPs and administrators supporting these platforms is struggling to rise within the party, and there are fears that a generational change might not be enough to shift the party towards more decisive views. Finally, dualism is identified regarding social and civil rights. Issues on the second dimension, such as immigration, LGBT rights, European integration and gender equality are more easily communicated and thus increasingly politicised by the PD, and as a consequence the party's base is unsatisfied about the relative weight of redistributive platforms over cultural issues.

This study contributes to the scholarship in several ways. The thick description of

the supply side confirms that the mainstream left is still oriented towards redistribution, and that it has adapted its targets in favour of the 'new' middle class as claimed by Abou-Chadi and Hix (2021) and Häusermann and Kriesi (2015). This confirms that redistributive struggles have not disappeared from political competition as suggested by Piketty (2020). The latter's argument is appealing because it reduces political competition into a clash between a Brahmin left and a Merchant Right. But this study corroborates the call by Abou-Chadi and Hix (2021) to exercise caution when considering such interpretations, as unorthodox redistributive policies by the left are on the contrary the result of different demands compared to those of the old working class (Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015). Furthermore, the party's base is developing a strong demand for redistribution, overcoming the internal conflict between a labour-centred, defensive view of old social rights, and a pro-market, residual view of welfare. Combined with the recent increasing support on the demand side for the redistribution of wealth (Rowlingson, Sood, and Tu, 2021), this confirms that there is hope for welfare expansion even after the 'divorce' between the working class and the left (Abou-Chadi and Wagner, 2019; Cooper and Burchardt, 2022). While redistribution is normally assumed to be opposed by the demand side because of framing issues that generate misperceptions about the costs and benefits of redistributive platforms (Glennerster, 2012; Rowlingson and McKay, 2005), the base and the electorate appear in this case more courageous than the party's leadership, which on the contrary presents outdated views of redistribution and framing misperceptions. The left thus needs to break the path dependency that prevents a new class of leaders from emerging, in order to update the framing of its economic policies and be more redistributive in its stances.

4.2 Is it really over with redistribution?

In the traditional twentieth century configuration of European political competition, left-wing political parties advocated for the interests of the industrial working class in order to decommodify labour (Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015). Upon these grounds, the welfare state grew significantly after WWII, bolstered by a self-sustaining feedback mechanism between a sizeable industrial class, organised labour unions, and electorally successful left parties (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Empirical evidence demonstrates that the left, when in government in the postwar period, has significantly expanded the welfare state (Jensen and Seeberg, 2015), increased redistribution and public spending (Bradley et al., 2003; Castles, 2004; Korpi, 2018; E. Huber and Stephens, 2010), and reduced poverty and inequality (Bradley et al., 2003; Iversen and Soskice, 2006).

With the turn of the century, however, the tide had changed. Advanced western democracies went through deep transformations: deindustrialisation, automation, digitisation, the educational revolution, globalisation of labour and capital, and demographic changes (Abou-Chadi and Hix, 2021; Beramendi et al., 2015). These dynamics dramatically reduced the size of the working class, progressively outweighed by service sector workers (Dalton, 2008; Oesch, 2006). In this context, electoral volatility increased to the point where classic predictors of electoral behaviour had to be rethought (Franklin, Mackie, and Valen, 2009). Scholars began talking about dealignment—with the end of class voting, voters seemed no longer aligned with parties (Evans and Tilley, 2012; Katz and Mair, 1995).

This post-industrial turn brought two major changes. First, welfare states across Europe reversed post-war expansion into retrenchment and conditionalities, a process that Paul Pierson called the 'new politics' of welfare retrenchment (Pierson, 1996). In practical terms, welfare policies became increasingly limited to specific categories,

means-tested provisions increased in importance, as well as recommodification, welfare-to-work plans, and recalibration (Pierson, 2002). In the new politics of welfare, policymaking of social policies became an effort to avoid blame from retrenchments rather than claim credit from expansive social programmes (Pierson, 1996; Pierson, 2002).

Second, and connected to the previous point, deindustrialisation, tertiarisation and the fracturing of the working class impacted on the structure of political competition. The predominance of the L-R economic dimension, related to redistribution, started being challenged by a second, cultural dimension based on the contrast between traditional/post-materialist, or authoritarian/libertarian, values (De Vries, 2018; Hooghe and Marks, 2018; Inglehart, 1984; Kitschelt, 1994; Kriesi, Grande, et al., 2006). Along this second dimension, new issues manifested such as immigration, European integration, climate change, gender equality, and LGBT rights. These issues are diagonal to old classes and boundaries.

With the rise of the knowledge economy, the old working class increasingly turned to radical right and populist parties. These are usually voters with lower education levels living in less urbanised areas, generally defined as the 'losers' of globalisation, or as 'outsiders,' i.e. excluded from secure employment (Afonso and Rennwald, 2018; Kriesi, Grande, et al., 2006; Rueda, 2007). RRPPs do not primarily leverage traditional economic platforms. Indeed, they present rather blurred positions on economic and redistribution stances (Rovny, 2013; Rovny and Polk, 2020), and tend to adopt chauvinist tones rather than propose actual social policies (Betz and Meret, 2012). These parties, on the contrary, are salient on the second dimension, campaigning on 'ultramaterialist' and authoritarian positions.

4.2.1 *The left and redistribution*

With the transformations of the electorates and the rise of the second dimension, the role of redistribution in the left has been called into question. Left parties have been observed, since the 1990s, to support an increasingly more market-oriented welfare state (Schumacher, 2015), to tax regressively rather than progressively (Andersson, 2022), or to promote less generous welfare provisions when inequality increased (Barth, Finseraas, and Moene, 2015). An example is represented by the historical shift of New Labour towards the centre, moving away from its traditional working-class constituency and becoming a catch-all party, increasingly favouring retrenchments and opposing public spending (Evans and Tilley, 2012; Ross, 2000). But this is not limited to the United Kingdom. With most left leaders in power in the 1990s, such as Prodi, Schröder, Kok, Jospin and Clinton, inequality either increased or did not decline (Abou-Chadi and Hix, 2021). Hopkin (2020) claimed that mainstream left parties have come to represent austerity and neoliberal positions, reneging on the traditional ideological stronghold of the left, thus bolstering a surge of anti-system parties and movements across Europe.

To account for these counterintuitive trends, the scholarship has offered two explanations. The first, here labelled *Brahmin left*, is the crux of Capital and Ideology, part IV, in which Thomas Piketty analyses the dimensions of contemporary political competition (Piketty, 2020). He claims that, as opposed to the second half of twentieth century when political conflict was based on class-driven redistributive struggles—with the working class supporting the left—today, left's electorate is represented by highly educated and wealthy individuals (Abou-Chadi and Hix, 2021). Indeed, the mainstream left today relies on the educated, cosmopolitan middle class for electoral support (Kriesi, Grande, et al., 2008). Mainstream left parties tend to be success-

ful in large urban areas among high-skilled interpersonal service sector workers, who possess libertarian/post-materialist cultural values (Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015). Piketty describes political conflict as an identity clash between the 'Brahmin Left' and the 'Merchant Right,' contending along an education-based conflict and none of them advocating for the interests of the working class (Abou-Chadi and Hix, 2021). As a consequence, the mainstream left would not be focused on redistribution anymore. This argument is compatible with the rise of the second dimension: as party competition is structured around the cultural dimension, mainly focused on immigration and European integration, voters are no longer defined by their preferences for redistribution (Kitschelt and Rehm, 2015; Kriesi, Grande, et al., 2008). According to this explanation, the observed pro-market orientation is the result of the left shifting away from redistribution, as the Brahmins do not demand it.

The second explanation is here labelled as the *new middle class*. According to this explanation, the fact that the left is supported by the middle class rather than blue collars does not necessarily translate into the desertion of redistributive struggles. Contrary to Piketty who sees the Brahmins as uninterested in redistribution, this second explanation argues that the new middle class, although salient on the cultural dimension, does demand redistribution and welfare policies (Abou-Chadi and Hix, 2021). These pro-welfare attitudes have been explained as linked to the culturally liberal values, which promote egalitarianism (Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015; Kitschelt and Rehm, 2014). Furthermore, this new middle class is not only composed of wealthy individuals, but also by atypical workers and the new precariat, often women, younger citizens or ethnic minorities, as well as by public sector workers such as healthcare or education professionals (Abou-Chadi and Hix, 2021; Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015).

Before proceeding, a terminological clarification is needed. It appears evident how this social group is composed of individuals belonging to different social back-

grounds and occupations. Thinking in a twentieth-century fashion, it would be absurd to label such a patchy group as 'class,' a term that used to identify strictly defined social hierarchies, whose members were homogeneous in terms of upbringing, professional possibilities, role in society, and income. However, the term 'new middle class' is utilised on purpose in a society in which, because of deindustrialisation and the decentring of class, and consequently the transformation of political competition, 'diverse social movements are mobilised around cross-cutting axes of difference' (Fraser, 2020:70). Economic platforms are today intertwined with demands for cultural change, and identity-based conflicts often prevail over partisan lines (Hobolt, Leeper, and Tilley, 2021). In this context, the new middle class is no longer a rigid layer, but a fluid conglomerate of individuals sharing a preference for some policies, either for ideological or self-interest reasons.

These categories indeed would still demand an expansion rather than a reduction of the welfare state (Häusermann, Picot, and Geering, 2013). But the kind of redistribution this new middle class demands is different if compared to the old left's electorates (Abou-Chadi and Hix, 2021; Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015; Häusermann and Kriesi, 2015). New left-wing voters indeed demand 'new' social policies (Bonoli, 2005)—social investments and activation policies, to bolster labour market participation, rather than labour decommodification policies and income insurance (Abou-Chadi and Immergut, 2019; Gingrich and Ansell, 2015; Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015). Instead of traditional welfare transfers, these new social policies would be centred on human capital investments, education policies and childcare (Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015). Therefore, according to this explanation, the observed unorthodox stances of the left indicate a shift in redistribution objectives rather than the abandonment of these struggles. These new social policies are indeed commodifying rather than decommodifying, and depart from traditional unemployment transfers and income redistribution tradi-

tionally demanded by blue collars (Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015).

To sum up, the *Brahmin left* explanation argues that the observed unhortodox economic positions of the left are to be linked with a complete detachment of the left from redistributive issues. The *new middle class* explanation argues that the left is still focused on redistribution, but with different means and priorities.

These two explanations should not be considered as rigidly mutually exclusive. The behaviour of left parties concerning social and redistributive policies likely varies cross-nationally and over time depending on the characteristics of the institutional context, such as the party system, the presence of challengers and competitors, as well as available coalition options (Döring and Schwander, 2015). In particular, the nature of welfare regime might impact on the type and amount of redistribution politicised by the left—while in liberal regimes the policymaking of welfare tends to be structured around activation policies and cost containment, in continental Europe insider-outsider contrasts are more prominent in the political debate (Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015; Häusermann and Kriesi, 2015).

Therefore, this paper does not consider the two explanations as if they were competing hypotheses, but as ideal poles of a continuum in which left parties structure their redistributive strategies. Instead of analysing the demand side, the focus of the analysis is indeed the supply side. The demand side of the link between the left and redistribution has received more attention in the scholarship, which has analysed the political support for redistribution and the welfare state along old and new class divides (Abou-Chadi and Hix, 2021; Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015; Häusermann, Picot, and Geering, 2013), the changes in the left's electoral base (Rueda, 2007), and its electoral behaviour (Oesch, 2008). More generally, how individuals vote, the determinants of electoral behaviour, the dimensions of political competition on the voters' side—these aspects have been extensively investigated, in particular, recently, with reference to

radical right and populist parties, or with regards to historical junctures such as Brexit vote or Trump elections (Hobolt, Leeper, and Tilley, 2021; Hochschild, 2018).

In terms of supply-side studies, the literature has focused on whether the left in government increases or decreases the size of the welfare state (Herwartz and Theilen, 2017; Iversen and Soskice, 2009; Pribble and E. Huber, 2010), taking into account the partisan profile of governments and its impact on welfare spending (Döring and Schwander, 2015; Ross, 2000), or the factors associated with party position changes, such as whether the left parties in government are activist-dominated or leadership-dominated (Schumacher, 2015). Furthermore, Jensen and Seeberg (2015) have analysed whether the left in opposition is able to constrain welfare state policies when the right is in government. Most of these studies utilised party manifestoes or expert surveys to assess the salience of redistribution for left parties, their position along the L-R dimension, and their attitudes towards fundamental economic principles such as the role of the state vis-à-vis the market in the economy (Bakker, Edwards, et al., 2014; Bakker, Jolly, and Polk, 2012; Rovny, 2012).

On the contrary, this paper aims to contribute to the scholarship by directly involving the left's leadership in a thick description of its redistributive stances, strategies, and constraints. This aspect has received scarce attention, and we possess only a limited knowledge about how today's left parties politicise redistribution. Adopting a qualitative approach by in-depth interviewing of left's policymakers allows not only to retrace the evolution of the left's focus on redistribution over time, but also to understand what priorities and constraints dictate the design of its welfare and redistributive policies, and which electorates are targeted when doing so. These questions are studied with reference to an interesting subject, the Democratic Party of Italy.

4.3 The Democratic Party in context: from the First Republic to the aftermath of the financial crisis

When in 1994 the 'First Republic' ended after a judicial turmoil, *Tangentopoli*, exposed a widespread system of political corruption, the party system fell into pieces (Waters, 1994). The traditional postwar order dominated by the Christian Democracy opposed to the Communist Party and, later, the Socialist Party, was finally open to new actors. On the left side, a myriad of formations belonging to different ideological factions were struggling to find a new identity in the post-communist era.

The first attempt to systematise the centre-left came under the lead of Romano Prodi. In 1994, the newcomer Silvio Berlusconi stood in the general elections with the support of another challenger party, the Northern League. The Alliance of Progressives, which reunited a number of small left and centre-left parties, faced a staggering loss against Berlusconi by approximately ten percentage points in both the Chamber and Senate, highlighting the crisis of the left and the need of a new political actor. As a consequence, Prodi worked to merge the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS), the major social democratic party and evolution of the old Communist Party, with other smaller parties such as the Greens and the Italian Socialists, founding the Olive Tree (*L'Ulivo*). This was the first attempt to overcome ideological differences, creating a large coalition to face the new challenges of the post-communist era. The experiment paid off—allied with the smaller Communist Refoundation Party, the Olive Tree won the 1996 elections.

In government, the left gradually moved away from the social democratic traditions of the PDS towards economic orthodoxy and fiscal austerity. With Prodi as PM

and Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, former Bank of Italy governor and future Head of State, as Treasury Minister, the development of a competitive market economy was favoured over egalitarianism (Hopkin, 2020; Kostoris Padoa Schioppa, 1993). The Olive Tree had indeed to face unstable economic conditions due to the weakness of the lira in the currency market, a burdensome public debt, and low growth rates, exacerbated by the requirements to join the euro (Fratianni and Artis, 1996; E. Jones, 2009). The government passed several tax increases, such as the *Eurotax*, and began a large privatisation programme of state-owned companies, as well as the Treu reform of labour, that encouraged more flexibility and temporary contracts (De Cecco, 1998).

The euro project further contributed to align the centre-left with neoliberal economic stances. The European Union was viewed by the left as a way out of domestic corruption and short-term political clientelism that obstructed economic policies. On the contrary, being part of a common project alongside more scrupulous neighbours was regarded as a step further towards growth and financial rectitude (Dyson and Featherstone, 1996).

In the meantime, the Democratic Party project advanced when the PDS merged with the Labour Federation and the Social Christians in 1998, creating the Democrats of the Left (DS), with an evident social democratic inspiration. In parallel, the Italian People's Party, Italian Renewal, and The Democrats, belonging to social Christian and Christian Democrat ideologies, merged into The Daisy (*La Margherita*) in 2002. These two allied formations won the elections in 2006—interrupting the five-year long Berlusconi's government (2001-2006)—and Prodi became PM for the second time.

The government lasted only two years and Berlusconi won the elections again in 2008. However, the necessity to mobilise a large coalition on the left to face Berlusconi determined time was mature for the creation of the Democratic Party. The DS and The Daisy were indeed meant to become the two main souls of the nascent party. With

the participation of other minor centrist, social democrat, and social liberal parties, they merged in 2007 to create the Democratic Party, under the leadership of Walter Veltroni, elected by open primaries.

Soon after, however, the impact of the sovereign debt crisis materialised. Berlusconi's government failed to stabilise the economy and reassure markets, with debt-to-GDP ratio and interest rates skyrocketing and default becoming a concrete possibility (Armingeon and Baccaro, 2012). Eventually, Berlusconi resigned in favour of a technocratic government led by Mario Monti, former European Commissioner, with the support of the PD. Monti's government impressed a decisive pro-austerity turn following ECB's directives. Taxes increased significantly, in particular VAT, whereas public spending and investment were reduced, and pension rules became tighter, causing further recession and drops in aggregate demand and growth (Culpepper, 2014; Moschella, 2017).

This did not fail to produce electoral consequences. In 2013, the first elections after Monti's technocratic government, established parties were crushed by populists. In particular, the Five Star Movement emerged as the first party, a catch-all anti-elite formation that combined elements of direct democracy with environmentalism (D'Alimonte, 2019). It was only thanks to coalition arithmetic and cross-vetoes that the PD was able to form a government, supported by various small formations and a splinter of *Forza Italia*, Berlusconi's party.

Since its foundation, the Democratic Party has been the major Italian left/centre left party. In all the elections it contested (2008, 2013, 2018), it was the most successful left party by a great margin, gaining between approximately 33% in 2008 to 18% in 2018, whereas other left parties never got more than 3% in the same period. On top of the 2006-2008 legislature, the PD governed with three different PMs (Letta, Renzi, Gentiloni) for the entire 2013-2018 legislature. Even after 2018 elections, when once

again the populist 5SM and League prevailed over established formations, the PD has been in government twice, first in coalition with the 5SM (2019-2021), and then supporting another technocratic government, led by Mario Draghi (since February 2021).

For these reasons, the PD was chosen as a case study, being representative of the contemporary Italian left. But the Democratic Party, even though with some specificities that will be better analysed in the rest of this study, can be considered in many aspects as representative of its European counterparts, such as the German SPD, the French Socialist Party, the Spanish PSOE, and the Labour Party from the UK. More generally, its historical and ideological trajectories were very similar to those of most parties belonging to the Party of European Socialists at the European Parliament level. After a process of transformation through post-communism, these parties had to reorient their strategies towards the centre, to find new electorates after deindustrialisation and the fracture of the working class. They also had to find a new synthesis between their internal ideological streams—mainly social democracy and social liberalism—and new external pressures from challenger parties.

4.4 An elite-interview approach

To analyse the role of redistribution in the Democratic Party's political strategy, I adopted an elite-interview approach interviewing its leaders. The bulk of this study consists indeed of thirty-two in-depth interviews with PD's MPs, members of regional parliaments (MRPs), and high cadres within the party's organisation.

The sample frame was defined as PD's policymakers specialised in economic issues. Interviewing policymakers working on other topics would have reduced the clarity and depth of the study, and would have resulted in limited comparability across respon-

dents. It is indeed a well-known issue when interviewing political elites that the latter provide reliable and detailed accounts only about the policymaking elements they are expert about and could directly affect through their actual behaviours in the recent past (Beckmann and R. Hall, 2013). In this sense, within the party, its members' specialisations and interests are easily identifiable through the parliamentary commissions they belong to, either at national or regional level, the within-party thematic committees, or the offices they hold. To ensure uniformity in the sample frame, I focused on members holding positions and offices at the time of the interviews.

Because of the nature of the research questions, the sample frame was purposive rather than random. It was indeed selected within the larger population, represented by all Democratic Party politicians, according to one specific characteristic, i.e. the specialisation on economic policies. Purposive sampling is normally used for interviews with policymakers as it ensures a good level of representativeness (Lynch, 2013; Mosley, 2013a).

In order to provide a complex and comprehensive understanding of the party's strategies, constraints, and views over redistribution, I included MPs, who are obviously directly involved in policymaking at the national level; high party cadres, who set the party's strategies and design policies; MRPs and local administrators, who represent the link between the national leadership and the grassroot base and implement economic policies at the local level; and representatives of the Young Democrats (*Giovani Democratici*), the section of the party reserved to young members, which is very active in discussing topics of redistribution and in providing proposals to the central party. In compiling the sample frame, I tried to represent all country's macro areas (approximately 30% for each North, Centre and South) and to balance different roles (depending on each group's relative size).

The sample frame included 105 names, to whom I sent out interview invites in

October 2021 and again in January 2022 to those who did not reply the first time. Overall, I received 44 replies (42% response rate), out of which 18 declined. The response rate was in line with expectations for elite interviews (Bleich and Pekkanen, 2013; Goldstein, 2002). Analysing non-response rates, I did not identify any specific bias in terms of geography, role within the party, or personal characteristic, suggesting that response rates were not biased by any specific endogenous factor. Similarly, there were no systematic differences between respondents and nonrespondents.

A small portion of respondents (six) was further gathered through snowballing. The proportion of interviewees reached through snowballing is low (19%) and should not bias the sample. Snowballed respondents indeed do not present specific characteristics that might suggest the inclusion of biases in the sample. Contacts were provided by several different sources to avoid excessive network uniformity (Beckmann and R. Hall, 2013). The quest for additional respondents was interrupted when the sample reached the point of saturation—when additional interviews were not adding significant information (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson, 2006).

The final sample was composed of thirty-two interviewees: nine are currently MPs (three from the Senate and six from the Chamber), six are MRPs (among which one is a former MP), five are high party cadres, eight are mayors and local administrators, and four are members of the Young Democrats. On top of their institutional roles, two interviewees are members of the party's national central committee (*segreteria nazionale*); six are members of the national directorate (*direzione nazionale*); and three are PD regional secretaries. In terms of gender balance, the sample was composed of 18 men and 14 women.[1]

I believe this sample offers a good representation of party's policymakers spe-

[1]Anonymity was explicitly requested by several interviewees who wished to express more critical positions, but had been established as a rule since the research ethics approval phase. To fully safeguard anonymity, I have not included a table with interviewees' characteristics.

cialised in redistribution and welfare. MPs, MRPs, and party cadres present a uniform geographical distribution across the country, although the latter are characterised by a slight overrepresentation of Northern regions. Young democrats are equally distributed across geographical areas. Mayors and local administrators show an overrepresentation in favour of the North, although several MPs and MRPs from Centre and South previously held local roles and were able to comment in that sense too.

Interviews took place between October 2021 and March 2022 mostly online, with only few happening in person when explicitly requested by interviewees. This was an interesting period to conduct interviews with PD's policymakers—after Covid, redistribution became a relevant issue within the national political agenda. Furthermore, the party was in government supporting the wide Mario Draghi's coalition, and was preparing for the next general elections in 2023.[2] Interviews lasted between one and two hours. In conducting the interviews, I used a series of open-ended questions as a structuring guide, but I prioritised a semi-structured discussion to let respondents describe their opinions and experiences in depth. I took notes during the interviews and recorded the audio, but I kept all interviews anonymous to increase the level of confidentiality hence allowing them to express also negative opinions.[3]

Questions were aiming to retrace the party's attention to redistribution and social welfare over time; the challenges and constraints in developing social policies both within the party and with respect to other political forces; the internal struggles between ideological factions; and the trade-off in redistributive policymaking with respect to issues belonging to the second dimension.

[2]It should be noted that just before the submission of this dissertation, Mario Draghi resigned as PM after a government crisis sparked by the 5SM (21/07/2022). The next general elections will probably be moved up to September 2022.

[3]The interviews were held in Italian. The excerpts presented in the rest of this study have been translated by the author. Interviewees were provided with a consent form before the interviews took place, detailing the nature and scope of the study, the description of the project, their rights as interviewees, and the ethics code.

4.5 The Democratic Party through changing times: redistribution, welfare, and social policies

4.5.1 *A tale of streams*

When studying the role of redistribution within PD's political strategy, a critical factor all interviewees agreed on is the relevance of the internal struggles between different factions. Policymaking, for the Democratic Party, is a matter of compromise between the different *correnti* (ideological streams).

There is a pivotal common point on which all factions converge. An interviewee, who was one of the masterminds of the first hour PD, explains that 'the principle of equality represents PD's fundamental element, both from an ethical point of view, and from the standpoint that promoting equality fosters growth.' Regardless of the faction indeed, all respondents agreed on the idea that the PD was founded on the opposition to Thatcherism and Reaganism, hence considering equality and redistribution as necessary for growth and for preventing the formation of extreme socioeconomic inequalities, and opposing the idea that equality is detrimental to growth.

Within the PD however, a constant internal fight contrasts different conceptions of how to put the value of equality into practice, and how to translate it feasibly and effectively into concrete redistributive policies.[4] Since its inception, four major ideological streams could be identified within the Democratic Party: social democracy,

[4]One clarification is due here. The concept of redistribution has for some scholars and policymakers a 'post-tax and benefits' connotation, and is contrasted with 'predistribution' to highlight, in the latter case, the interventions to increase equality in market outcomes before tax and benefits, hence altering ex ante the possibility of having access to income (Lansley, 2014). This is in line with what Samuel Bowles called 'asset redistribution' as opposed to 'income redistribution' (Bowles, 2012). In this context, what the interviewees and I referred to using the Italian word *redistribuzione* was the broad sense concept linked to reducing inequalities, unless explicitly addressing specific ex ante or post-tax policies as it will be made clear each time.

declined as either democratic socialism or Third Way; Christian Left, with several connotations such as reformism, centrist Christian democracy, and Christian socialism; social liberalism; and green politics. From a practical perspective though, when it comes to welfare and redistributive policymaking, two major poles have effectively competed, the social democracy and the liberal democracy.

The history of PD is characterised by a pendular movement between the two. At the party's onset in 2007, the liberal democrat pole was dominant. Veltroni's PD was indeed inspired by the New Labour and modern American liberalism to represent a clear cut with respect to classic social democratic traditions. However, after disappointing results in regional elections, Veltroni resigned in 2009. The social democrat area took the wheel with Bersani, who led the party until 2013 elections. Then, the liberal democrat area came back in the person of Matteo Renzi, who became both the party's secretary and PM between 2013 and 2016.[5] After Renzi, control went back to the social democrat area led by Nicola Zingaretti, but internal struggles were so harsh he declared he was 'ashamed of PD' and left the leadership in 2021 to Enrico Letta, who represents a centrist, Christian democratic mediation.

The central tenet of the liberal democrat area in terms of welfare and redistribution is the discrepancy between the size of social expenditure, considered too large, and its unsatisfying results. 'We have a very expensive welfare state in terms of mobilisation of resources, close to 50% of GDP,' one liberal democrat MP explained, 'but the results in terms of tackling inequality are mediocre.' The reason of this discrepancy is the excessive weight of pensions, the largest component of social welfare. But the same MP added, 'this is a system that exacerbates inequalities, because those who enjoy generous pensions today are the same who had a privileged working life. On the

[5]It shold be noted that Matteo Renzi left the PD in September 2019 to found a new party, Italy Alive (*Italia Viva*) together with 45 MPs (30 from the Chamber, 15 from the Senate).

contrary, those who had low incomes and precarious jobs will get low pensions.' This is particularly evident regarding intergenerational inequalities. The Italian welfare state, like other countries belonging to the conservative regime, and in particular to its Southern European variation, has historically favoured male, older breadwinners over women and the young (Esping-Andersen and Myles, 2011). The country suffers from an ageing population combined with a demographic crisis, hence increasing the significance of pension spending.

The goal of social policies according to the liberal democrats, on the contrary, should be to fight inequality fostering economic growth and promoting healthy public finances. 'I'm convinced you cannot do redistribution without competitiveness, we have seen it in the Soviet Union'—one party cadre added, clearly highlighting the distance of the liberal democrats from the twentieth century landmarks of the left—'a society with little to share is poor and sad.' Importantly, public expenditure should not be increased, but 'rectified and reformed.'

The highest moment of this faction was represented by Matteo Renzi's era. Similarly to Veltroni, Renzi took explicit inspiration from Tony Blair, but combined an energetic and youthful style with anti-system rhetorical elements targeting political elites, often from the PD itself, and labour unions (Bordignon, 2014). Renzi's economic stances revolved around the idea that boosting market competition and deregulating job markets would have tackled systemic corruption and inefficiencies. As confirmed by one party cadre, 'in that period, we strongly believed we could defend the weakest and tackle poverty by boosting the positive effects of globalisation and promoting growth and efficiency, while managing through welfare the residual aspects such as education and healthcare.' This strategy however resulted in both a major internal fracture and high public criticism towards the PD, accused of having reneged on the ideological traditions of the left and of representing solely the interests of the wealthy, an argument

that condenses the *Brahmin left* explanation described above.

The social democratic faction, on the contrary, supports the idea that acquired rights cannot be discussed, otherwise the left risks to become 'subordinate to the right,' in the words of an interviewee. This stream rejects the idea that public spending in Italy is excessive. According to one MP, 'the welfare state is very weak . . . since the 1990s, actual social welfare has been privatised and public expenditure has been cut in a logic of retrenchment . . . we would need more spending, not less.' The problem of Italian welfare, according to this faction, lies in competition and individualism, as well as the idea of excellence. 'What we cannot endorse of the liberal side, and in particular of Matteo Renzi's policies, is mythologising excellence. All the funds went to those places and individuals that were already excellent and could better compete in the market,' one social democrat MRP argued, 'but we think funds should go where there is no excellence, otherwise inequality will increase.' Hence, welfare should not be a residual element of growth, but should be the priority of economic policies in an egalitarian logic.

One Milanese local administrator well explains the party's internal fight on redistribution between the two ideological poles. 'Once I was in a PD's congress and I was arguing that the party only cares about white collars and it only focuses on excellence and good things, but in this way the people who are struggling feel they are not involved and that it's their fault they are struggling . . . and the other PD member I was debating with replied "what should we do, tell them they are about to die?" . . . you see, that's why populists are winning, because at least they realised there is a problem. Perhaps their answers are wrong, but at least they understood the question.'

The struggle between factions, as will be made clearer in the rest of this study, is lamented by all respondents as one of PD's biggest limit in the definition and implementation of redistributive policies. It would indeed prevent the party from taking

'courageous' positions, as many interviewees from both factions argued, since policies and strategies are the result of a compromise. Most respondents agreed this is a 'genetic flaw' that has afflicted the party since its foundation—the two souls, the social democratic DS and the Catholic-liberal Daisy still resent each other and often feel they don't belong together. This is jokingly referred to as the 'cold marriage' by interviewees.

4.5.2 *Who should benefit?*

'The left used to be the party of the working class, but today that is not the case anymore,' one MP argued. 'The PD should represent those who need the state most . . . you can talk to entrepreneurs too, but first to those who need us.' But who needs redistribution most according to the Democratic Party?

The same categories were identified by all interviewees, regardless of the ideological faction: women, younger citizens, atypical and autonomous workers, the working poor, the lower middle class. In other words, the 'new middle class' defined above—'if there is an area the left should care about is the middle class . . . the 2008 financial crisis and then the Covid crisis have polarised the distribution of income, and the middle class has no representation today . . . if we don't talk to them, fear might bring them to populists . . . we should remember the old Christian Democracy's slogan *nobody will be left to fend for themselves*,' one MP argued.

In line with the *new middle class* literature, respondents agreed that the middle class has changed significantly—self-employed and sole practitioners, such as lawyers, accountants, or other freelance workers, are recognised as increasingly more precarious, as well as those with atypical contracts, i.e. flexible contracts based on temporary collaboration or jobs on call. Food delivery services' riders and seasonal workers in

agriculture, construction and hospitality industries are regarded by PD policymakers as working poor. Many of these categories tend to cluster in big cities working at the margins of knowledge-intensive sectors, thus being excluded from opportunities and facing higher costs, a dynamic well analysed in the literature and often recognised to be conducive to anti-system voting (Iversen and Soskice, 2019; Moretti, 2012). This is particularly evident In Italy, where the size of the 'new middle class,' and in particular its weakest components, such as atypical and precarious workers, is particularly significant. The rate of transition from precarious and temporary jobs to permanent contracts is among the lowest in Europe, and considering the relatively lower share of public spending allocated to the youth, the new middle class is more substantial in Italy than in the rest of Europe (Eichhorst and Marx, 2021). It is not a coincidence then that in Italy a party like the 5SM was able to gain such traction. The 5SM indeed catered specifically to the educated, young outsiders, possessing precarious contracts and limited professional prospects, who were previously left-wing voters (Ipsos, 2018). The concentration of this electorate is higher in the South, where the job market's dualism is particularly significant. In this regard, the success of the 5SM was, according to all interviewees, important for PD to redefine its redistribution targets and to win back those voters who had felt left behind.

In this sense, four categories are worth further analysis. The first is women. Unsurprisingly, this is a topic particularly felt by the female interviewees I have talked to, who advocated for a reduction of the gender wage gap and higher gender equity from an intersectional perspective that combines the inequalities associated with both gender and youth. This internal push represents a way to overcome the conservative welfare model based on male breadwinners, which has several negative effects—'gender inequalities are detrimental to the economy,' one MP explained, 'when a woman does not have a job or that job is underpaid, it means that the entire community pays a

price.' But also, 'we have a low birthrate problem, the "demographic winter"'—another MP added—'this relates to the oppression of women and to their extremely low employment rate, and this in turn depends on a very poor welfare state.' In this regard, the PD has recently (October 2021) passed a bill to foster equal pay between genders.

The second is represented by young people between approximately 18 and 35 years old, especially those with scarce job perspectives. This category is mentioned, again unsurprisingly, by younger interviewees, in particular from the Young Democrats. The main policies supported revolve around the abolition of unpaid internships and the development of mental health supports, but also the topic of housing policies—'this is one of the biggest issues for those between 18 and 40 years old,' one local administrator explained, 'in Italy the possibility of having independence through housing policies does not exist, this is a problem of redistribution, specifically of intergenerational redistribution.'

The third is the centrality of the family, a tenet of PD's Catholic members. The idea is that the party should abandon a vision of welfare centred on individuals in favour of a family-centred view of inequalities and redistributive policies. One MP explained that 'families can become poor when they have a child, a child is a factor that exacerbates inequalities, families with children need more support,' while another MP added that 'a lower income of an individual belonging to a wealthy family is different from an average income on which several household members rely.' One example of a PD's policy in this sense is the 2016 *Dopo di Noi* ('After Us'), which provides support to people affected by severe disabilities, especially when their relatives or caregivers pass away. But there is also the equivalence of maternity and paternity leaves, which is meant to reduce inequalities in the workplace. A last and relevant example is the recent single birth allowance (*Assegno Unico*), a measure passed by PD in 2021 that provides families with 250 euro each month, for each child, until the latter is twenty-one years

old. This opposition between a more individualistic and a more family-centred views of welfare is one of the issues that characterise the second, now minor cleavage along which the PD is divided. On top of the ideological factions which oppose different conceptions of redistribution indeed, a second cleavage is the clerical/secular divide (Hanretty and Wilson, 2010). This cleavage is orthogonal to the economic divide, and both clericalist and secularist positions can be identified in both the social democratic and liberal democratic ideological factions.

The last is the disparity between North and South, with the latter being characterised by lower socioeconomic development. As one MP from a Southern region explained, 'the problem in the South is the lack of infrastructure . . . Welfare in the South has been for a long time clientelist, using social policies as an approval tool. But that went in tandem with objective conditions of weakness and fragility, and social policies became a way to support income. However, if a politician thinks that today we can support income with pensions or subsidies, it means they don't understand that we don't have any money anymore. We have to create jobs, and services, infrastructures.'

4.5.3 *Visions of redistribution*

While there is substantial agreement within the party regarding the categories that need welfare and redistribution most, the scenario is less definite when it comes to concrete, actual policies. All interviewees argue against 'welfarism' (*assistenzialismo*), i.e. merely providing subsidies and bonuses. As explained by one MP, 'we have to distinguish between assistance and social security: assistance is paid by all citizens, while social security is earnings-related . . . so the value the latter creates is much higher.' The interesting aspect is that all factions accuse the others of being welfarist—the social democrats consider the liberal democrats as bonus-oriented, citing for instance the

Bonus Renzi,[6] but are in turn accused of only wanting to increase public spending in a welfarist fashion without boosting growth and productivity. In truth, regardless of the political colour, welfarism is the key characteristic of the Italian welfare regime. Its insurance model is funded through payroll taxes resulting in heavy transfers and lean services, thus being more solidaristic than structural (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

Nevertheless, PD members are divided along three views of redistributive policies, which are in some cases intertwined and in other cases mutually exclusive. These views are centred on either labour, income, or services. The first view supports a labour-centred perspective which puts labour policies at the heart of the welfare system. Labour is viewed in this sense an enforceable right and the pillar of PD's strategy. This approach can be found in both the social democrat and the liberal democrat factions, but with different nuances. Social democrats focus on unemployment and on jobs' stability. Liberal democrats on flexsecurity.

A notable example of flexsecurity is represented by Renzi's Jobs Act, which amended the Workers' Statute (art. 18) to boost flexibility in the job market. According to the liberal democrat faction indeed, following deindustrialisation and the decline of the manufacturing sector, the old negotiations between workers and owners and a factory-centred perspective had to be revised. An MP who supported this measure and was involved in its design explained that 'the goal was to make jobs' safeguards more flexible, to protect workers in the job market instead of workers' jobs.' 'In a dynamic and flexible job market where everything changes at a speed that was unknown in the previous century,' the MP added, 'we have to accept that workers have to change jobs and skills profile many times in their life . . . protecting jobs is anachronistic.' Unsurprisingly, this policy caused a strong opposition by labour unions (in particular by the Italian General Confederation of Labour, *CGIL*) and the

[6] 80 euro bonus that the Renzi's government devolved to employees with salaries below 1,500 euro.

social democratic faction within the PD, resulting in many, including the former leader Bersani, leaving the party. But even the MPs supporting the measure admitted it was somehow flawed, as it lacked activation policies and industrial plans to compensate for the increased precarity. 'The drawback of that reform was that it eased the rules to fire workers,' one MP explained, 'but it did not introduce concrete active measures to help workers who lost their job, for instance through training and reskilling . . . so it resulted in disappointing results.'

A second view of redistribution focuses instead on income as an enforceable right. This is usually found among younger and more redistributive PD members, who represent a third, emerging faction within the party. They reject both the social democratic labour-centred perspective, and the individualist and market-oriented approach of liberal democrats. This third stream will be referred to as the 'redistributive' faction, to highlight its strong focus on redistribution and its rejection of the other approaches to redistribution and welfare within the party, considered as outdated and not incisive enough.

'The communist tradition within PD is strongly anchored to the idea that dignity comes only from labour, and thus that if you don't have a job, you have no dignity,' one MP belonging to this faction explained, 'but the state does not have to guarantee jobs, it should guarantee dignity providing a basic income to all citizens.' The same MP argued that 'the problem of the left is that they did not distinguish between the right to have an income and the right to have a job. This created a prejudice, that only labour makes you free . . . labour is important, but it is more important to live the life you want, and that comes from income. The state should guarantee a universal basic income.' This will become even more pressing as more older workers who cannot be easily repositioned or retrained will be replaced by automation, limiting the efficacy of activation policies and sparking a demand for basic incomes.

In this sense, the discussion systematically ends up on 5SM's Citizenship Income—a means-tested basic income (approximately 800 euro) granted to individuals who are either unemployed or destitute, passed by the 5SM-League government in 2019. The Citizenship Income was 5SM's flagship proposal in 2018 elections campaign and is considered the platform that guaranteed the party's success, especially in the relatively less developed Southern regions (Petrini, 2018). The policy was initially opposed by the PD as welfarist, unable to stimulate growth or to activate jobs—'the Citizenship Income should be reformed so as to make it a temporary support,' one MP argues, 'you cannot spend your entire life doing nothing, you have to do something.' This in turn caused yet further criticism and accusations of hypocrisy, as it was framed by the 5SM as a 'left-wing' measure. But even one of PD's high cadres admitted that 'the 5SM was able to intercept an appetite for change and to address a growing social need that the ruling class was not addressing, not even from the left.' One representative of the Young Democrats explained that 'the problem of the PD is that it opposed the Citizenship Income claiming that people would have stopped working . . . always this idea of individual responsibility . . . but the task of a left party is not to say "if you want, you can", that's neoliberalism . . . even the concept of merit, the party did nothing to deconstruct it . . . there is no awareness of disparities, and to do redistribution you need that awareness.' Nonetheless, the Citizenship Income was recognised by most interviewees as a fundamental measure after the Covid crisis hit. One MP argued that 'it's welfarist . . . but it is very useful . . . it saved so many families.' Another MP claimed that 'if only we had been brave enough to create the Citizenship Income right after the 2008 crisis . . . but we were obsessed with austerity, with deficit rules, and eventually we have impoverished an already weak welfare state.'

But the Democratic Party had introduced a form of basic income earlier than the 5SM, under the push of its solidarity-oriented Catholic stream. The Inclusion Income

(REI) indeed was a means-tested basic income to contrast poverty, approved by the PD in 2017. The REI however was equipped with only one third of Citizenship Income total funding and was strongly criticised by other political forces for its inadequacy. Even some social democratic interviewees argued that 'the REI was an easy policy, quick, it helped people immediately and generated immediate approval . . . but it was not linked to a structural intervention.' Another MP claimed that 'the PD arrived very late and the 5SM screwed us, because we had made the REI, but we allocated only 2 billion euro. As the Citizenship Income did, we should have allocated seven or eight billion euro . . . even ten.'

The minority redistributive faction clearly clashes with more traditional views of redistribution. This is even more evident considering two additional issues. One is the minimum wage proposal. The latter is particularly opposed by the social democratic faction, which is closer to labour unions. But a representative of the Young Democrats explained that 'labour unions are essentially composed of pensioners today, they oppose a minimum wage because it would mean overriding collective bargaining, but younger people are not included anyway as most are atypical workers.' Labour unions are often criticised by the party's base as safeguarding those who already enjoy significant rights, such as stable employment and generous pensions, while disregarding the other, more contemporary, situations of exploitation. Currently, in Italy there are almost 1,000 collective contracts, but 37.5% of those are signed by minor unions and are often criticised for being just a legal gimmick for exploitative salaries (Pogliotti, 2021). According to INPS data, 4.5 million workers get less than 9 euro per hour.

The other issue is the wealth tax. A wealth tax is considered a taboo in Italy, where house ownership is widespread and inheritance represents a relevant source of subsistence. The PD's leadership has never endorsed a wealth tax, but the minority redistributive faction presented a wealth tax proposal as an amendment to the 2020

Budget Law, which was supposed to be a 0.2% tax on net wealth greater than 500,000 euro increasing up to 2% on net wealth greater than one billion euro. This tax was supposed to be followed by the abolition of taxes on current accounts and on the primary residence.[7] The amendment was rejected by most PD's MPs. The problem seems to lie in the party leadership's framing of wealth taxes—the framing issues that are normally identified on the demand side, i.e. misperceptions about their costs and benefits. The social democratic faction sees the wealth tax as a threat to the working class, pensioners, and homeowners, even though this tax would only interest the super rich. On the other hand, the liberal democrats consider the wealth tax as detrimental to the interests of the wealthy middle class, even though it would be lower than current income taxes and following the abolition of other levies the net outcome would be neutral or even beneficial for them. But as confirmed by one representative of the Young Democrats, 'in this way, both factions are only protecting those who are already guaranteed: pensioners and the wealthy.' 'Preventing any debate on this is the biggest flaw of the party's leadership on redistribution,' the representative added, 'it's something strongly felt within the base, and even though it makes perfectly sense from both an economic and social justice standpoint to tax wealth rather than income, the PD's leadership always rejected the idea. But we would need to change the framing, we might have a much greater impact with a small tax on the wealth of the super rich rather than with taxes on income.' This is felt also among the party's base as explained by this mayor: 'the PD progressively moved away from redistribution, this is clear looking at the wealth tax, it's clear that if you want to redistribute resources . . . it shouldn't be how Bertinotti [leader of the Communist Refoundation Party] used to say, that "the wealthy should cry" . . . it's not a guilt to be rich . . . I'm not proposing proletarian expropriations, but we need more progressivity and you get that

[7]See La Repubblica 29/11/2020: 'Orfini: "il PD non può essere contrario alla patrimoniale. Ne discuta."'

with a wealth tax.'

Speaking of taxes, another important element was the management of the revenue office. In the original Veltroni's view, the tax agency should have been 'friend of growth,' hence moving away from a punitive system that preemptively considers entrepreneurs as tax evaders in favour of an 'anglosaxon system.' The tax system should have been simplified to help the self-employed and entrepreneurs fulfilling their tax duties, but at the same time made stricter on evasion. Renzi tried to go into this direction imposing the 'electronic invoicing' but found a strong opposition from conservative formations. However, the more redistributive interviewees, as explained by one party cadre, claimed that 'with this strategy, over the years the PD has done nothing to improve the progressivity of the tax system, thus increasing inequalities.' And indeed, Letta's government in 2013 increased the VAT, hindering even more the progressivity of taxation.

The last policy tool is represented by services. This approach is more diagonal and is intertwined with both the labour-centred and income-centred views. It is also more critical of the traditional Italian conservative welfare regime based on transfers and is thus closer to Nordic-style welfare, proposing more services such as nurseries, retirement homes, services for the disabled, and infrastructures. However, what the more redistributive interviewees argue is that 'often the PD has claimed it was creating services, but in reality it was still giving transfers to pay for services. But real redistribution does not mean giving money to people so that they can individually pay for services, with that money the state should directly provide services . . . in this sense we should take from a very small share of population, the super rich, and we could provide all basic services for free.' One positive example in this sense, often cited by interviewees, is the city of Milan, which has been administered by the PD for the last ten years. All interviewees agree the party has done a great job in providing services

such as social housing, supports to the disabled and families with children.

But at the local level, in small towns, the situation is not always as advanced. One PD mayor of a small town in Northern Italy well represents the local administrators I have interviewed: 'welfare needs in small towns are different than in big cities. Unfortunately, with the lack of resources, we end up with community welfare models, in which people help each other, and a lot is based on the elderly because the average age is higher than in cities . . . but we are really struggling because we get no resources and no visibility, and even the PD when in government has done nothing to increase the resources for small towns, so we are a bit disoriented when it comes to design welfare services at the local level.'

4.5.4 *The role of redistribution within PD's political strategy*

Considering the categories of citizens the PD targets and its visions of redistribution, the party's approach seems to be well described by the *middle class* explanation. No PD member would endorse the *Brahmin Left* argument that the left has reneged on its attention to redistribution. As argued by one MP and former minister, 'the PD still cares about redistribution . . . but in a different way compared to the previous phase . . . not only in a logic of assistance for the poor, but also to transform services into high-skilled job opportunities.' Certainly, the various factions propose different views of redistribution and consequently policies, and the attention of the party has been fluctuating depending on the predominant faction. However, considering the role of redistribution within PD's overall strategy, one aspect needs attention, the party's *vocazione maggioritaria* (majoritarian vocation).

Since its foundation, the PD was thought as an umbrella party that could unify the left and centre-left in order to govern the country (Salvati, 2008). But the *vo-*

cazione maggioritaria was not only an electoral strategy. Borrowing the words of one MP, it was also the party's effort to 'represent the motions of both workers and owners, employed and unemployed, doctors and patients, students and teachers . . . providing a comprehensive vision for society.' This strategy however, combined with the internal struggles between factions, made it difficult to effectively address redistributive issues in a political context that was increasingly more polarised and characterised by new issues and political challengers. Additionally, the PD came to represent the responsible government party—'the Democratic Party has never won an election since its foundation, but it is in government since then,' one MP argued, 'this means that for sure it has represented responsibility, skills . . . but it has never been immersed in society, it never offered a real economic vision . . . I think the party has never communicated an idea of redistribution.' One local administrator added that 'the problem in Italy was that we lacked a moderate, European, liberal centre-right. So, the burden of responsibility and of safeguarding the system was entirely on the PD, which became the party of the system, of austerity. But in a context of great inequalities, a left party should represent change, fracture . . . it should be brave enough to talk about some taboos, such as the redistribution of income.' As explained by one MRP, this resulted in 'completely overlooking the cry for help from people who needed help and wanted a stronger and braver rhetoric.'

And indeed, many interviewees, in particular from the 'third' redistributive faction, were quite critical regarding the role that redistribution plays within the party's strategy. One member of the national central committee confessed that 'I think one of the errors was that too often the PD talked about that [redistribution] in conventions, but did not do much in practical terms . . . the truth is that most PD's leaders are not familiar with what's going on in the real world.' This tepid approach from the party's leadership is strongly criticised, in particular from the party's base. 'It's a problem of

outdated mindset,' one party cadre claimed, 'our leadership is not used to this society, which has significantly evolved on redistributive issues.' One local administrator added that 'I don't think the PD has ever had a great elaboration on redistribution . . . within the party, I don't see many with a strategic thinking on redistribution, at least to the best of my knowledge . . . the wealth tax is a clear example in this sense.' This is particular evident talking with representatives of the Young Democrats, who identify a generational problem—younger members experience inequalities firsthand and thus feel redistribution as a more pressing issue. This representative of the Young Democrats well exemplifies what is felt through the base: 'I'm in crisis with my party [PD] because I keep asking: what is the socioeconomic model you are proposing? The problem is that there is no model . . . I am not saying we should take Piketty ['s research] and use it to make policies . . . actually, perhaps we should, that's what we are lacking.' And the detachment of the party's leadership is confirmed also concerning the party's electorate, as explained by one local administrator: 'when we asked voters [in 2021] which proposals they had, which policies they would have liked to see implemented, at the first place there was redistribution, social rights, minimum wages . . . but that does not filter up to the leadership.'

This opposition between the national leadership and the base represents yet another internal divide within the party, that is the clash between the centre and periphery. The periphery is in this case generally more redistributive than the centre. Specifically, the redistributive minority and the party's base are afraid there might be a process of path dependency through which the current party's leadership selects future leaders among those who possess similarly not-so-decisive redistributive stances. In this sense, a generational change might not be enough to move the PD towards more redistribution. 'The fervour we have from the base about these topics [redistribution and welfare] . . . that does not arrive to the leadership, it's stopped before it can ar-

rive there,' one local administrator claimed, 'so I'm afraid a mere generational change can't change things, there will just be young people in a suit saying the same things the old leaders were saying.' As confirmed by several from the base, intergenerational conflict is a relevant problem within PD's internal structure, as younger members are seen 'as a foreign body by the party's leaders at best, or as an outright problem at worst, and those who climb up the hierarchy often align with leaders' views,' one local administrator explained. 'At the local level and in the base I see visionary leaders everyday, but magically they never get to the top.' One MRP added that 'a problem is that there is nobody who can impress a direction, there is no plan for the long term . . . you can't take a random person and ask to draft a welfare programme for that year, because the next year everything will change anyway. What is PD's goal? To redistribute wealth? Then we need a programme. But I'm a very optimistic person, otherwise I couldn't be a member of PD.'

But in a more positive vein, all interviewees agreed on how the Covid crisis reinstated the topics of inequality and redistribution both in the public debate and within the party's strategy and priorities. Covid has indeed brought back the great debates started after WWII centred around the expansion of the welfare state. One party cadre argued that 'three crises have undermined the neoliberal model: environmental crisis, Covid, and the war in Ukraine . . . and the PD is trying to update its vision, and I think it can do that, it just needs to rediscover its roots . . . those are crises the market cannot solve . . . and now the party is beginning to understand that we need, for instance, more stable jobs, it's not true that permanent jobs don't exist anymore.' In this sense, there was a consensus on the positive role that funds from the EU will play, and in particular the significant resources provided by the Recovery Plan for Europe (191.5 billion euro).

4.5.5 *How many dimensions?*

Discussing redistribution, the elephant in the room was often the second, cultural dimension. All interviewees firmly claimed that in PD's strategy, these two dimensions are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, in PD's intentions civil and social rights need to proceed together because the struggles for civil rights pertain to people who live at the margins, and thus also have fewer social rights, for instance being unemployed or not having access to welfare. One MRP argued: 'I don't believe that the PD has an exclusive interest on civil rights . . . it is true that the party increased its focus on these topics but that's also due to the fact that other political forces did not care at all.' Historically, the 'competition' between civil and social rights within the party originated by the fact that social democrats identified redistribution as deriving from labour, but the progressive affirmation of the second dimension and the shift towards middle-class electorates opened the debate to civil rights. 'The critique that the PD cares more about civil rights rather than social rights comes also from the left,' one MP argued, 'but I think they should go together . . . civil rights are not a luxury for better times, a society that grants rights is also more dynamic and wealthier, and birthrates are higher.'

However, some degree of dualism within PD's strategy appears evident. One party cadre confirmed that 'the current leader, Letta, had to defend in party debates the idea that we should keep both civil and social right battles together . . . some [PD members] think we should fight more for economic themes, for social rights . . . personally, I think we should do both, but if we don't guarantee economic equity, than civil rights have no meaning . . . for instance, if we fight to extend inheritance laws to homosexual couples, but those couples have nothing to inherit . . . well that does not make much sense.' According to one MP, 'many people ask us why we don't

talk more about welfare, labour, industrial policies . . . perhaps we should have a more appropriate communication to bring outside what we discuss in parliamentary committees . . . it's easier to be on the news when you talk of euthanasia or LGBT rights rather than the Budget Law . . . rainbow issues are more attractive than red issues.'

The issue of communication emerges several times. Civil rights create a distinction between parties, are easily communicated, generate a sense of belonging and group identity and are thus increasingly more politicised over economic issues. According to one MRP, 'the left *can* easily care about both civil and social rights . . . but it *must* care about social rights. I think that we haven't fought enough on social rights, not as we did for civil rights. The 5SM was able to do that with the Citizenship Income, they were able to force it into the debate and then to transform it into a policy. We were not able to do the same, we did not find clear topics.' The interviewee continued: 'we need to find symbols: if you say gay marriages, or child adoptions, that's clear. The new regulation on labour, that's not clear.'

Another topic that emerges is the difficulty to harmonise the two dimensions in practical policies, in particular the struggle for environmental protection and social rights, especially from a local level. As one mayor of a Northern Italy city explained, the centre/periphery clash is evident also in this case—'the national leadership thinks in terms of electoral slogans, but then it's up to us local administrators . . . for instance, there were huge pressures from the [PD] leadership to close quarries for environmental reasons, but when one quarry in my town was about to be closed workers came to my office, they were about to lose their jobs . . . those were the workers, not the managers . . . so what is more left-wing? I decided to fight to keep the quarry open . . . the problem is that this is a global issue, but it ends up being managed at the local level. But our local economic resources have diminished dramatically over time, so we don't

have the ability to design policies . . . but at the end of the day we have to decide what's more important. We can't impoverish our people.'

A final note regards a limitation linked to this study's sample, which is composed of policymakers specialised in redistribution and welfare. The opinions expressed above thus come from a specific perspective, that is of party members who work on the economic side of policies and are thus not representative of the entire party when it comes to the contrast between the economic and the second dimension. It is plausible to expect that policymakers who work specifically on civil rights, ecology, and immigration are perfectly comfortable with the relative weights of the two dimensions and are therefore less critical towards the party. While interviewing the entirety of party's components was outside of this study's scope, this section still revealed interesting insights about the uneasiness of economy-focused policymakers within the party, as well as behind-the-scenes internal debates concerning the definition and implementation of policymaking.

4.5.6 *Challengers, populists, and the (radical) right*

Finally, few words are needed concerning the party system the PD is immersed in. In the Italian political landscape the presence of populist parties has been significant since the 1990s (Cavalieri and Froio, 2021), and even the major conservative party, Berlusconi's Forza Italia, is generally considered as the herald of populism in the country, although it has recently normalised (Fella and Ruzza, 2013). Therefore, as already argued above, the Democratic Party has played the role of the responsible government party since its foundation. This has significantly limited its ability to lead the debate. The party indeed, according to many interviewees, has always struggled to set the political agenda, finding itself to react to other parties', often populist, agenda setting.

As explained by one party cadre, 'the PD tends to play defensively, they [League and 5SM] periodically come up with unfeasible or unconstitutional proposals, and then we react by debunking their platforms . . . but that happens always too late, the public's perception is that populists are setting the priorities . . . we struggle to lead the debate, even though we are often in government.'

The fiercest attacks came from Salvini's League, the nationalist evolution of Northern League, which has strongly politicised welfare chauvinist platforms contrasting immigrants and natives, the latter supposedly worse off because of PD's platforms that would have favoured immigrants over Italians (D'Alimonte, 2019); as well as Eurosceptic platforms, such as the *Basta euro!* ('No more euro!') campaign (Brunazzo and Gilbert, 2017); and a liberal economic agenda focused in particular on laxer and more generous pensions in opposition to Mario Monti's (and thus, indirectly, PD's) Fornero Law, which in 2011 increased the retirement age and was thus highly vexed (Meardi and Guardiancich, 2022). But also the 5SM, which has forced the party to debate platforms on its left, such as the Citizenship Income and the adoption of a minimum wage, and has based much of its platforms on redistribution narratives.

It was natural then for most interviewees, when describing PD's stance on redistribution, to utilise a contrast with other political forces. In particular, many brought up the criticism that is often made towards European left parties, i.e. that they converged with right parties on neoliberal positions. All interviewees rejected this notion, although acknowledging some degree of convergence since the 1990s. But the left and the right according to PD are still well distinguishable on economic stances: 'the left, concerning redistribution, considers emancipation as a priority,' one MP explained, 'the right is either welfarist or leaves citizens alone.' Another MP argued that 'the left looks at people in need, the poor, workers, immigrants trying to solve their issues and give them opportunities . . . it looks also at firms because without firms, workers

cannot work . . . but the left looks first at workers and then at firms, the right does the opposite.' And again, another MP: 'the PD's welfare culture is based on intervening to help people being autonomous and emancipated . . . the right tends to monetise, to give a cheque . . . we prefer to provide services.'

RRPPs and the social right are accused of favouring passive spending such as subsidies that do not bolster emancipation or development, whereas the left redistributes to emancipate and support. PD's 'responsible campaigns' often clash with the welfare chauvinism from the right. In this sense, one MP argued that 'it is difficult for the left to be in tune with people on the topic of immigration, because there is a certain part of the left for which everything is good. If you live in the centre of Rome it's easy to say that we should welcome all immigrants, they go to the peripheries not the centre . . . the left never wanted to face this problem and it did so with an unbelievable delay . . . we have to communicate the idea that if I integrate migrants it is better for Italians in the first place, even from an economic perspective.' But interviewees were unanimous in condemning RRPPs' welfare chauvinism: 'the strategy of RRPPs, welfare chauvinism . . . that is not a recipe, it is just propaganda,' one MRP explained, 'they see a problem, and they exploit it with propaganda, but they won't solve that problem because otherwise they won't be able to electorally exploit it anymore.'

Management of globalisation over the years is, as expected, a topic many interviewees consider pivotal in defining political competition. All interviewees recognised significant flaws in framing and managing globalisation, which caused the 'losers' of globalisation to turn to RRPPs. 'We have not been able to manage globalisation, we wanted to abandon traditional productions because of the new international labour division in China,' one MP explained, 'whereas the League wanted to introduce tariffs . . . we promoted globalisation without understanding its consequences . . . they addressed a sentiment that I call fear of modernisation, as they are doing today with

the fear of immigration.'

In line with the theory of the winners and losers of globalisation (Kriesi, Grande, et al., 2008), one party cadre explained that 'I think the problem with respect to RRPPs voting is the feeling of being peripheric, marginal . . . it's not about earning a lower income, but it's about feeling that you don't speak the same language of those who are included, and thus urban peripheries, provinces, today are depressed because of globalisation . . . those people vote the right because they want to defend themselves.' The same party cadre concluded that 'the first thing we must do as PD is to stop preaching globalisation without focusing on redistribution . . . so for instance we can't think only about high speed trains but also about commuters' trains, we can't make people buy biological food without supporting them.'

A last element that contrasts the Democratic Party with contender parties is their relationship with the European Union. While stances on European integration and Euroscepticism would have required a study on its own, I have focused specifically on how the EU is perceived concerning redistribution and welfare. An interesting aspect is that all interviewees have seldomly mentioned 'European constraints,' as they are called in the public debate (*vincoli europei*). An investigation in that sense revealed that all respondents, regardless of the ideological faction, agreed that financing spending through public debt should be avoided. They were indeed aware that EU rules do not limit public spending per se—several Nordic countries show high levels of public spending[8]—but only if funded through deficit. The PD in this sense aims to finance spending through growth and healthier public finances. On the contrary, RRPPs and the 5SM have strongly politicised the idea that European constraints should be bypassed when it comes to public debt, and specifically the 3% restriction on

[8] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-xplained/index.php?title=Government_expenditure_on_general_public_services

deficit imposed by the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, as 'European technocrats' austerity' would limit the country's welfare spending (Magnani, 2019). The PD has been often associated with European austerity by other parties, given the relevant role of the Prodi European Commission (1999-2004) in establishing the euro, and the PD's responsible government party status which has tended to coincide in policymaking with precepts from the EU (Hopkin, 2020). This, combined with the other elements identified in this study, has contributed to the party's vacillating focus on redistribution.

4.6 Conclusion

The Democratic Party is a composite party, in which different cleavages intersect: the ideological L-R divide, the clerical/secular divide, the centre-periphery divide, and the intergenerational clash. The interaction of these different cleavages results in the difficulty of presenting an idea of redistribution that is clear, radical, and steady over time.

But it would be wrong to argue, as the *Brahmin Left* explanation does, that being the party of the wealthy, the PD has completely reneged on redistributive issues. Although there's great merit in Piketty (2020), political science understanding of the transformations of political conflict reveals a more nuanced and detailed picture, as Abou-Chadi and Hix (2021) suggest. It is indeed clear across all PD levels that the fight for equality is what keeps the party together. As one MP argued, equality is the PD's 'genetic code.' The party is compact in identifying those who need redistribution: women, young people, atypical and autonomous workers, the lower middle class, the working poor. These are the 'new middle class' categories, that demand new forms of redistribution and welfare and the party, at least in its intentions, has shifted away from the industrial working class to expand these categories' range of rights. This is

testified by the several policies the PD has made in the last years: to mention a few, supports for families with children (*Assegno Unico*), a basic income for the destitute (REI), bonuses to support low incomes (*Bonus Renzi*), bills to tackle the gender wage gap, reforms to support workers in a more flexible market (Jobs Act).

Nonetheless, what emerges from my in-depth interviews is a general sense of dissatisfaction among a more redistributive faction, that is composed by great parts of the base and a minority of MPs, for two main reasons. First, because even though they recognise the efforts, most of the policies listed above have not been funded enough, or have not been implemented in a way that could effectively tackle systemic disparities in a country in which economic inequality has been only increasing and situations of disadvantage have become more widespread and worrying than ever. Most policies are indeed characterised by either a solidaristic/bonus element, which does not alter the structural elements of disparities and represents only a residual welfare component; or a labour-centred perspective, which appears anachronistic in a job market that is increasingly automated and less industrial. Second, because the party's central leadership appears inadequate to endorse a change of paradigm in redistribution. The redistributive minority is striving to introduce new elements in the debate, such as a wealth tax or universal basic incomes, and clashes against views that are either anchored to the great struggles of the twentieth century but result in defending those who today are privileged disregarding the new needs; or linked to a neoliberal paradigm that has showed its limits in fostering both growth and equality. This has resulted in the party losing ground to formations such as the Five Star Movement, that intercepted the need for extended welfare through the Citizenship Income, and the RRPPs, who identify immigrants as the enemy and fan the flames with welfare chauvinist rhetoric.

The PD and the Italian institutional context present, as in any other country, many peculiarities. The Italian welfare system tends to leave behind some vulnerable

categories of citizens, such as precarious workers and the youth, and the combination of the various ingredients of the Italian 'model' produces a dualism between outsiders and insiders that is more pronounced than in other countries in Europe. Furthemore, the presence of the 5SM has forced the PD to reassess its strategy on redistribution and welfare, and to reevaluate its narratives to address the South and the more exposed parts of the 'new middle class.' But the Democratic Party is not alone in this. This study speaks about transformations and struggles common to other mainstream left parties around Europe. The French Socialist party is undergoing a deep crisis and is struggling to find unity across different factions and to propose a comprehensive view of welfare and society at large. In France too, La France Insoumise, an actor further to the left, is forcing the centre-left to address questions of redistribution and inequality, in particular among the youth and ethnic minorities. The Labour Party in the UK has recently faced a contrast between different views of redistribution, such as the more radical one of the former leader Jeremy Corbyn and a more moderate one of the current leader, Keir Starmer. The SPD in Germany is also struggling to find its identity among new allies and new crises. Overall, like the PD, these are all parties with competing ideological factions, a majoritarian vocation, and leaderships often anchored to nineteenth century politics. The European mainstream left is trying to adapt to a changed electorate, which is often more redistributive than its leadership. The future of the welfare state depends on the ability of the latter to revise its framing and views over redistribution to face the new demands. This is however limited, as Abou-Chadi and Hix (2021) argue, by the fact that these parties are struggling to govern as dominant forces because of party systems' fragmentation, and have thus to find a compromise with other allies.

This study represents a first attempt to analyse the mainstream left supply side and its stances on redistribution more in detail. The scholarship has lately shifted its

attention to radical right populist parties, but mainstream left parties have been in government in the last decades across Europe and have implemented actual redistributive policies. Despite that, they have been understudied from a supply side perspective. Manifestoes can go only so far in explaining parties' strategies, constraints, and internal struggles. On the contrary, involving policymakers offers a more complex view, in particular if this approach will be extended to a comparative perspective.

As one interviewee claimed, 'the Democratic Party was never born, it is still fixed at the twentieth century fight between the Christian Democracy and the Communist Party.' Perhaps going back to the left's origins and rethinking its redistributive stances, a new left can be reborn to face the challenges ahead.

Chapter 5

Conclusion: Welfare, Redistribution, and the Challenges Ahead

Economic inequality has been defined by Barack Obama as the 'defining challenge of our time.'[1] In 2011, the Occupy Movement brought inequality back to the forefront of public debate in relation to the 99% vs. 1% struggles and the distortions of global financial capitalism. Since then, inequality has been receiving increasing attention in the scholarship—just to mention a few, the work of Thomas Piketty, Anthony Atkinson, Tomila Lankina, Branko Milanovic, Joseph Stiglitz, and Arlie Hochschild has sparked a great debate in the academia (Atkinson, 2015; Hochschild, 2018; Lankina, 2021; Milanovic, 2016; Piketty, 2014; Stiglitz, 2012). The public debate too has focused more on socio-economic disparities, as surging populist parties have based much of their narratives on the contrast between the wealthy elites and the relatively deprived

[1] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/04/obama-income-inequality-minimum-wage-live

masses. Nonetheless, both income and wealth inequality have only increased since Occupy, and have today reached dramatic levels. According to Oxfam, eight individuals own as much wealth as half of world population (Oxfam, 2017).

The crux of the problem is that in advanced democracies concentration of income in the top half of the distribution has risen consistently since the 1980s.[2] Around the same time, wealth inequality started being accumulated at the top too and became an even more fundamental driver of inequality dynamics. Such levels of concentration of capital translate into processes of state capture by wealth plutocrats and reinforce the significance and danger of gender and racial disparities (Savage, 2015).

Many of these dynamics are linked with exogenous economic factors. The concentration of income and wealth increases in periods of high economic growth, when capital income increases, or when rent seeking by top executives becomes more widespread. But, crucially, much depends on politics. Redistributive policies, the progressivity of tax systems, labour market institutions—these are the factors that can halt the dramatic rise of inequality and reverse its direction. As argued by Hacker and Pierson (2010), politics must tranform from being an 'electoral spectacle' to an 'organised combat' if it wants to tackle the winner-takes-all bias. Instead of overemphasising the role of the median voter, governments should address the influence of organised interests in policymaking and increase the size of redistributive welfare state, even before the effect of tax and transfers (Hacker and Pierson, 2010).

This dissertation is situated within this context. On the one hand, it delivers a message of optimism. Parties are still representing their voters on redistribution, especially mainstream parties. This finding deviates from a number of literature streams that argued that political elites today cannot, or have no interest in, representing their voters on preferences for redistribution (Hellwig and Samuels, 2007; Kitschelt

[2]Source: World Inequality Database.

and Rehm, 2015; Mair, 2013). Indeed, despite a recent decline in congruence, it seems that redistribution is still a topic political elites care to align with their voters on, especially given that it is intertwined with the cultural dimension. This suggests that if some of this policy congruence translates into responsiveness when in office, there might be space for more distributive policies. At the same time, it looks like the left, although it went through a long period of neoliberal hegemony, contains a 'resistance' in itself which is striving to shift the focus towards redistribution, in particular in the form of wealth taxes. If this younger class of policymakers will succeed in breaking the path dependency that keeps it at the margins, there might be space for a new type of redistribution. The latter could find a strong support among the left's base and the public sphere too. For instance, wealth taxes are increasingly supported across Europe (Rowlingson, Sood, and Tu, 2021), even by groups of super rich individuals (Oxfam, 2022). This corroborates the call from political scientists to avoid oversimplifications of political competition, such as the idea of Brahmins vs. Merchants (Piketty, 2020), and to consider the shifts in the electorates and the new social groups' needs, which are still revolving around redistribution although through more contemporary tools (Abou-Chadi and Hix, 2021; Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015).

On the other hand though, populist and radical parties are less salient on redistribution regardless of their position on the L-R dimension and are thus less interested in representing their voters on this topic. Moreover, they seem to follow highly strategical dynamics of issue emphasis when it comes to the politicisation of social policy recipients, which result in them being more preoccupied with the immediate electoral benefits rather than the actual policies. But it's not only populist parties. Overall, groups with lower political power receive scarce attention when it comes to designing welfare policies, as the electoral return is lower. This means that the *advantaged* target groups get the most out of the welfare state and, on the other hand, *deviants* and

dependents are further marginalised, as social constructions impact on their experience as citizens (Schneider and Ingram, 2017). Finally, the left leadership appears sheltered in its comfort zone made of old ideologies and slogans which have little say in today's society, but are useful to secure the vote of those with larger political power.

This is even more frightening considering that the Western value system as a whole is being challenged by autocracies and phenomena of democratic backsliding (Haggard and Kaufman, 2021). The war in Ukraine is opening cleavages across advanced Western democracies, with parts of both the left and right taking sides in favour of more traditional cultural values, now represented by the Russian leadership, and fuelled by anti-Americanism (Dutkiewicz, 2022). Together with the economic recession, these dynamics are putting democracies under strain. At the time of writing the last amendments to this dissertation in July 2022, both UK's and Italy's governments crumbled. Concerning the latter case, most commentators foresee a success of RRPPs, and in particular of Brothers of Italy, in the next elections.[3] In this sense, the future of the welfare state appears less certain.

Nevertheless, two elements are to be taken into account when it comes to the future of the welfare state and distributive politics. The first is the impact of Covid-19. As claimed by many commentators and policymakers alike, the pandemic has unveiled the failure of the neoliberal consensus (L. Jones and Hameiri, 2021; Tooze, 2021). Those places that had been more impacted by privatisations and deregulations in the last decades were the ones paying the highest price of the crisis. This was evident in its clear geographical demarcation in Italy—regions which had been governed by the right for decades, such as Lombardy, were completely unprepared in terms of healthcare, welfare safety nets, and the general architecture of social policy (Odone et al., 2020).

[3]See La Repubblica 21/07/2022. 'Sondaggi politici, verso il voto anticipato: ecco gli ultimi dati prima della crisi.'

But more generally, Covid made it clear that advanced democracies cannot survive on the market alone. When the crisis hit, the same economic actors that had been demanding less state and more deregulation were the first to beg for more state and public bailouts. The welfare state came back to the front of the economy and politics, not as a burden, but as the only way out of the crisis.

The second element is climate change. The latter is a reality deeply linked with the crisis of the welfare state. Climatic crises increase dramatically the intensity of international migrations, which have not been fully internalised into a real reform of European welfare systems (Gough, 2010). Economic growth is also negatively affected by climate change, meaning more retrenchments and conditionalities might be implemented. Overall, the environmental crisis is creating a whole new class of social risks which will increasingly demand answers in terms of social policy and redistribution (Johansson, Khan, and Hildingsson, 2016). Last, climate change raises questions of social justice as its impact is deeply unequal, and it imposes whole new constraints and challenges to policymakers, who struggle to harmonise the imperative to decarbonise production, consumption and transportation with voters' demands for employment, prices' control, and purchasing power (Falkner, 2021; Schoyen and Hvinden, 2017).

If we want to face the challenges ahead and increase social and economic equity, a second 'golden age' of the welfare state is needed. An age based on a new type of decommodification of economic relations and new paradigms to take into account the environment, contemporary cultural imperatives, and a changed societal structure.

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Appendix A

Do They Both Want to Redistribute? A Study of Congruence Between Candidates and Voters on Preferences for Redistribution

A.1 Candidates and voters data

Table A.1: Datasets used for candidates and voters with additional information

Country	Election year	No. candidates	CCS wave	Voter dataset	Nr parties matching
Austria	2008	932	CCS 1	EVS 2008	5
Belgium	2007	509	CCS 1	Belgian General Election Study 2007	12
Belgium	2010	556	CCS 1	ESS 5	10
Czech Republic	2017	261	CCS 2	EVS 2017	6
Finland	2011	698	CCS 1	Finnish Election Study 2011	7
Finland	2015	318	CCS 2	Finnish Election Study 2015	8
Germany	2009	789	CCS 1	EES 2009	6
Germany	2013	1137	CCS 2	GLES 2013	6
Germany	2017	803	CCS 2	EVS 2017	7
Greece	2009	192	CCS 1	ESS 4	2
Greece	2012	335	CCS 1	Hellenic Election Study 2012	5
Greece	2015	520	CCS 2	Hellenic Election Study 2015	5
Hungary	2014	311	CCS 2	EES 2014	5
Iceland	2009	496	CCS 1	EVS 2008	4
Iceland	2016	567	CCS 2	ESS 8	7
Iceland	2017	478	CCS 2	EVS 2017	8
Ireland	2007	175	CCS 1	Irish National Election Study 2007	7
Italy	2013	633	CCS 1	ESS 6	4
Netherlands	2006	157	CCS 1	ESS 3	7
Norway	2009	1006	CCS 1	Norway Election Study 2009	7
Portugal	2009	202	CCS 1	EES 2009	5
Sweden	2010	1740	CCS 1	ESS 5	7
Sweden	2014	1872	CCS 2	ESS 7	9
United Kingdom	2010	943	CCS 1	ESS 5	3

Table A.2: Redistribution questions in candidates' and voters' datasets

Candidates		
CCS 1		Income and wealth should be redistributed towards ordinary people (1-5)
CCS 2		The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels (1-5)
Voters		
Austria	2008	Equalize incomes-incentives for individual effort (1-10)
Belgium	2007	Government to reduce income differentials (1-5)
Belgium	2010	Government should reduce differences in income levels (1-5)
Czech Republic	2017	Equalize incomes-incentives for individual effort (1-10)
Finland	2011	Diminishing income disparities (0-10)
Finland	2015	Diminishing income disparities (0-10)
Germany	2009	Income and wealth should be redistributed towards ordinary people (1-5)
Germany	2013	State should take measures to reduce diff. in income (1-5)
Germany	2017	Equalize incomes-incentives for individual effort (1-10)
Greece	2009	Government should reduce differences in income levels (1-5)
Greece	2012	The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels (1-5)
Greece	2015	The government should take measures to reduce income inequalities (1-5)
Hungary	2014	You are in favour of the redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor (0-10)
Iceland	2009	Equalize incomes-incentives for individual effort (1-10)
Iceland	2016	Government should reduce differences in income levels (1-5)
Iceland	2017	Equalize incomes-incentives for individual effort (1-10)
Ireland	2007	Income & wealth-redistributed to ord people (1-5)
Italy	2013	Government should reduce differences in income levels (1-5)
Netherlands	2006	Government should reduce differences in income levels (1-5)
Norway	2009	Reduce economic differences (1-5)
Portugal	2009	Income and wealth should be redistributed towards ordinary people (1-5)
Sweden	2010	Government should reduce differences in income levels (1-5)
Sweden	2014	Government should reduce differences in income levels (1-5)
United Kingdom	2010	Government should reduce differences in income levels (1-5)

A.2 Dataset description

Table A.3: Descriptive statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	StDev	Min	Max
Congruence redistribution (absolute)	13,046	.2339575	.1681571	.0009158	.9104938
Congruence redistribution (directional)	13,046	.0217059	.2873081	-.6198347	.9104938
Preferences redistribution (candidate)	13,046	.3536525	.3197262	0	1
Preferences redistribution (voter)	13,046	.3319466	.1321415	.0895062	.6198347
L-R (candidate)	12,689	.449074	.2553852	0	1
Congruence L-R (directional)	12,689	-.0398911	.1571418	-.7591195	.8060976
Immigration (candidate)	12,781	.5500743	.3000003	0	1
Congruence immigration (directional)	12,295	.1074003	.3189803	-.7954545	.8675
Gender	12,857	.3807265	.4855843	0	1
Age (classes)	11,807	1.86237	.8307241	1	3
Party size	13,046	16.20336	10.65934	1.964	44.63
Party age	13,022	40.48441	24.22761	0	97
Party heterogeneity	13,046	.2188459	.048921	.066875	.3489338
Niche v. mainstream	13,046	.2416066	.4280735	0	1
Inequality	13,046	-.0020011	.0270381	-.0756358	.0587465
Unemployment	13,046	.0050486	.2653989	-.4030517	.858656
Polarisation	13,046	66.25117	29.27087	11.573	144.2085
Democracy age	13,046	86.01042	18.87395	34	108
Redistribution CHES	10,767	4.203115	2.124606	.1666667	8.8
L-R CHES	10,455	4.978367	2.304899	.6666666	9.857142
Multiculturalism CHES	10,767	4.423909	2.431823	.4444444	10
GALTAN CHES	10,567	4.317243	2.298884	.1666666	9.6
EU (candidate)	10,693	.3967175	.3097425	0	1
Congruence EU (directional)	5,260	-.1272373	.2831459	-.8140814	.6969697
Party experience	11,345	14.44601	12.10565	0	64
Incumbent	13,046	.3982063	.4895472	0	1

A.3 Control variables

- I calculated party age as the years since the party's first election after WWII up to the elections considered.

- Party size was operationalised as the share of votes won by the candidates' party.

- I measured the heterogeneity of party positions on redistribution as the standard deviation of candidates' preferences for redistribution at the party level.

- I generated the mainstream vs. niche indicator as niche = 1 if a party belongs to the ecologist, nationalist, ethnic-regional, or special issue party families from the Manifesto Project, and 0 otherwise. Adapted from Traber et al. (2018).

- Gini index and unemployment rate: these variables represent the change between the year before the election took place (since elections often took place at the beginning of the year), and an average of the previous four years: $\frac{(X_{t-1} - \frac{1}{4}\sum X_i)}{\frac{1}{4}\sum X_i}$, where t is the election year, and i=t-2, t-3, t-4, t-5.

- According to Van der Eijk et al. (2005), the measure of polarisation is: $\sum(|3 - r_i| * s_i)$, where r_i is party i's position on preferences for redistribution, proxied by its voters' average position; 3 is the centre of the 1-5 redistribution scale; and s_i is party i's share of votes in the election considered.

- Age of democracy has been obtained calculating the number of years between the first elections since the advent of democracy in each country and the elections considered.

- The measures of polarisation and age of democracy have been adapted from Pedrazzani and Segatti (2020).

- Many-to-many measures of congruence have been obtained following Andeweg (2011): 'We compare the percentage of voters positioning themselves at that point with the percentage of MPs positioning themselves at that same point, and we take the lower of these two percentages. If we sum the resulting (...) percentages, we have a measure for the overlap between the two distributions' (Andeweg 2011:43).

- Candidates' political experience is operationalised as the number of years since the candidate joined the party.

A.4 Strip plots: within-party distributions of candidates' preferences for redistribution

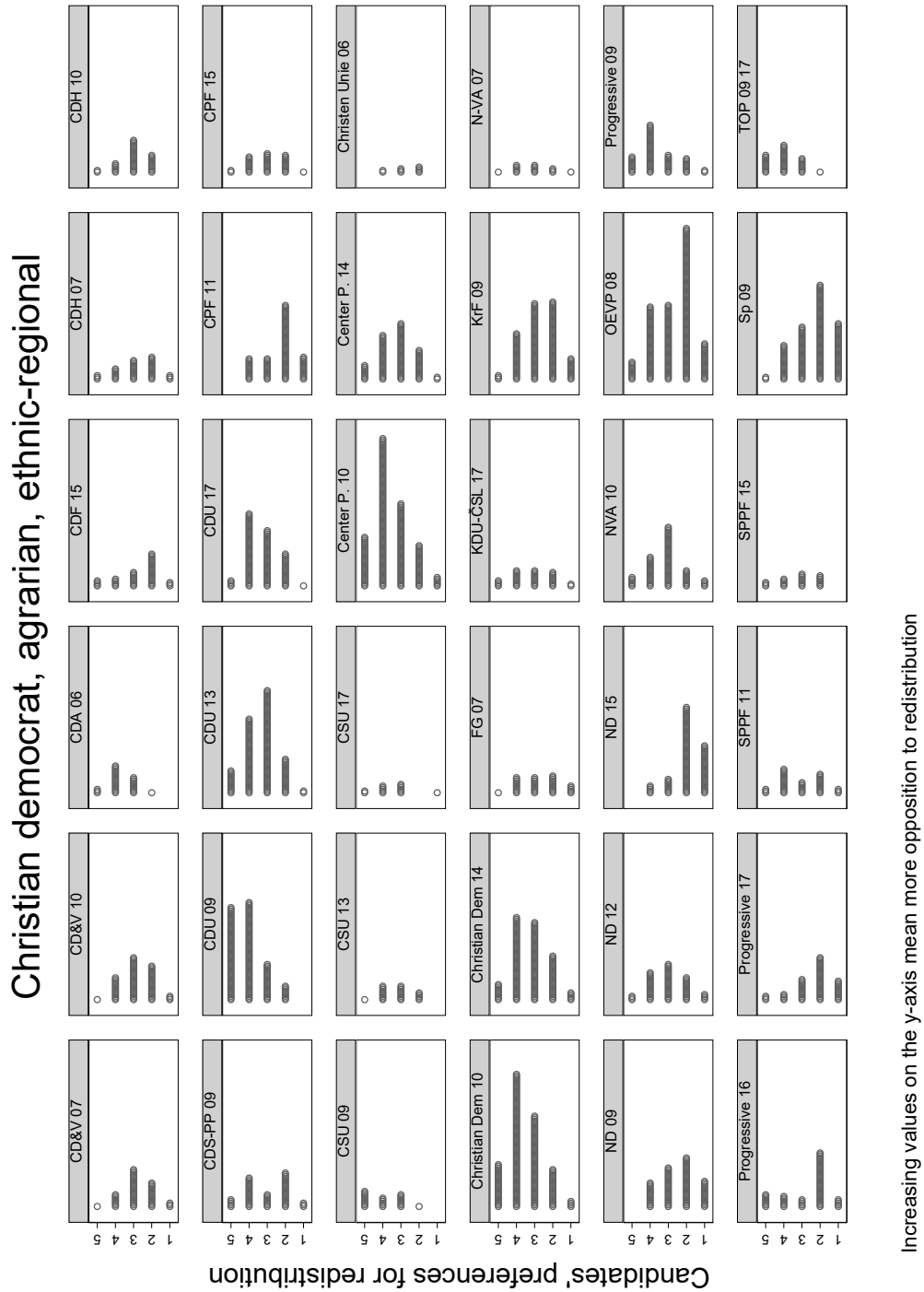

Figure A.1. Distribution of preferences for redistribution: Christian democrat, agrarian, ethnic-regional

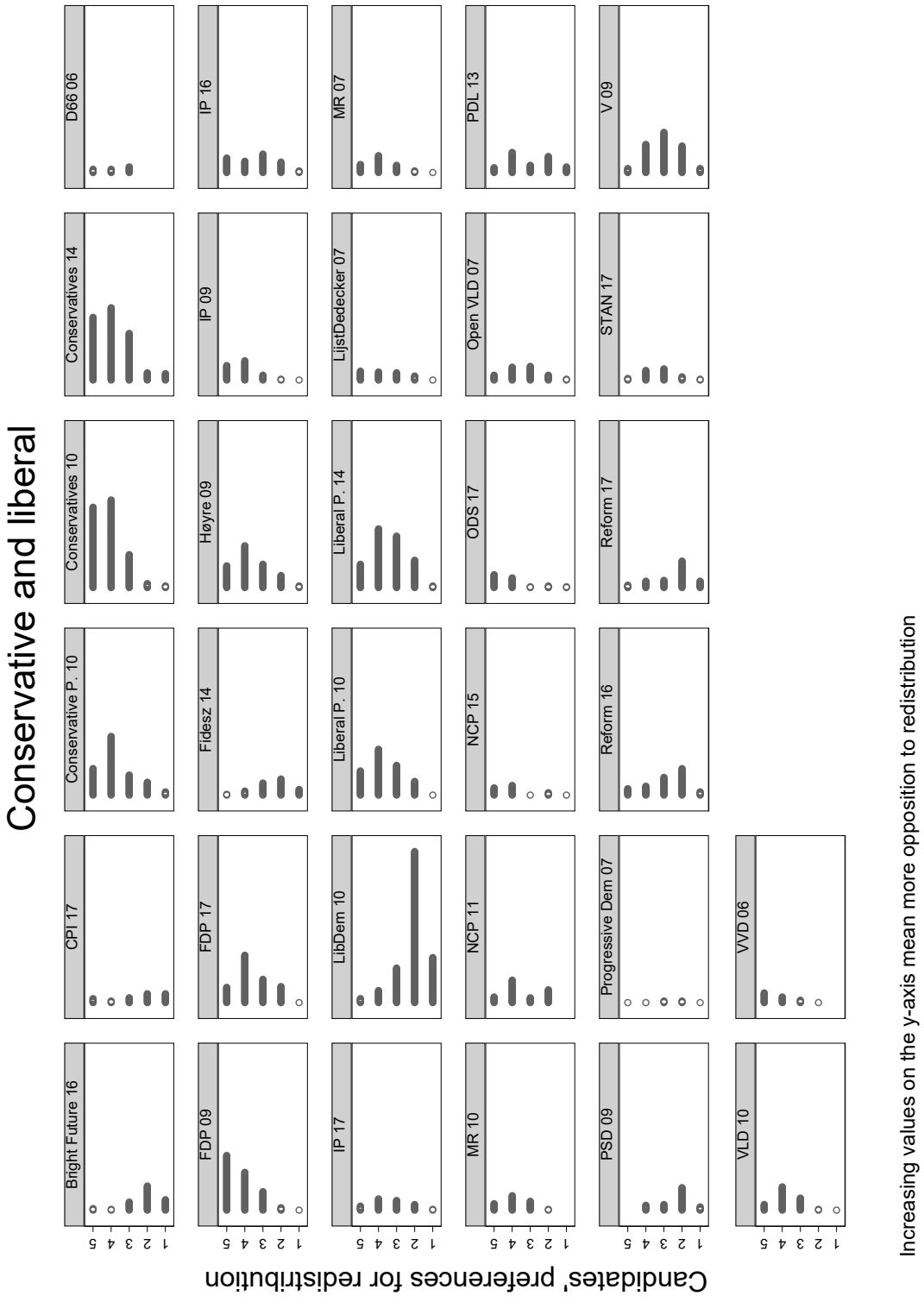

Figure A.2. Distribution of preferences for redistribution: conservative and liberal

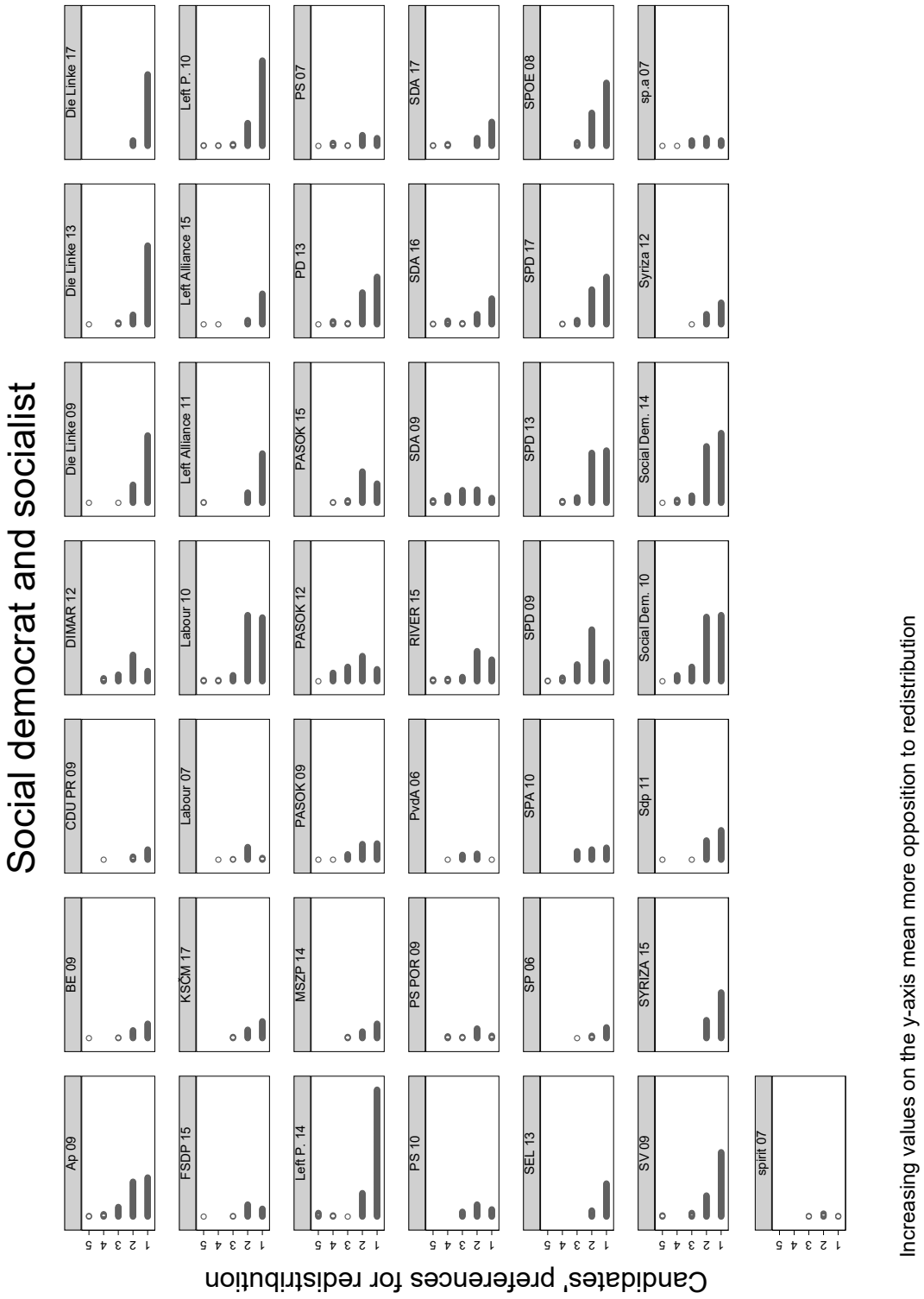

Figure A.3. Distribution of preferences for redistribution: social democrat and socialist

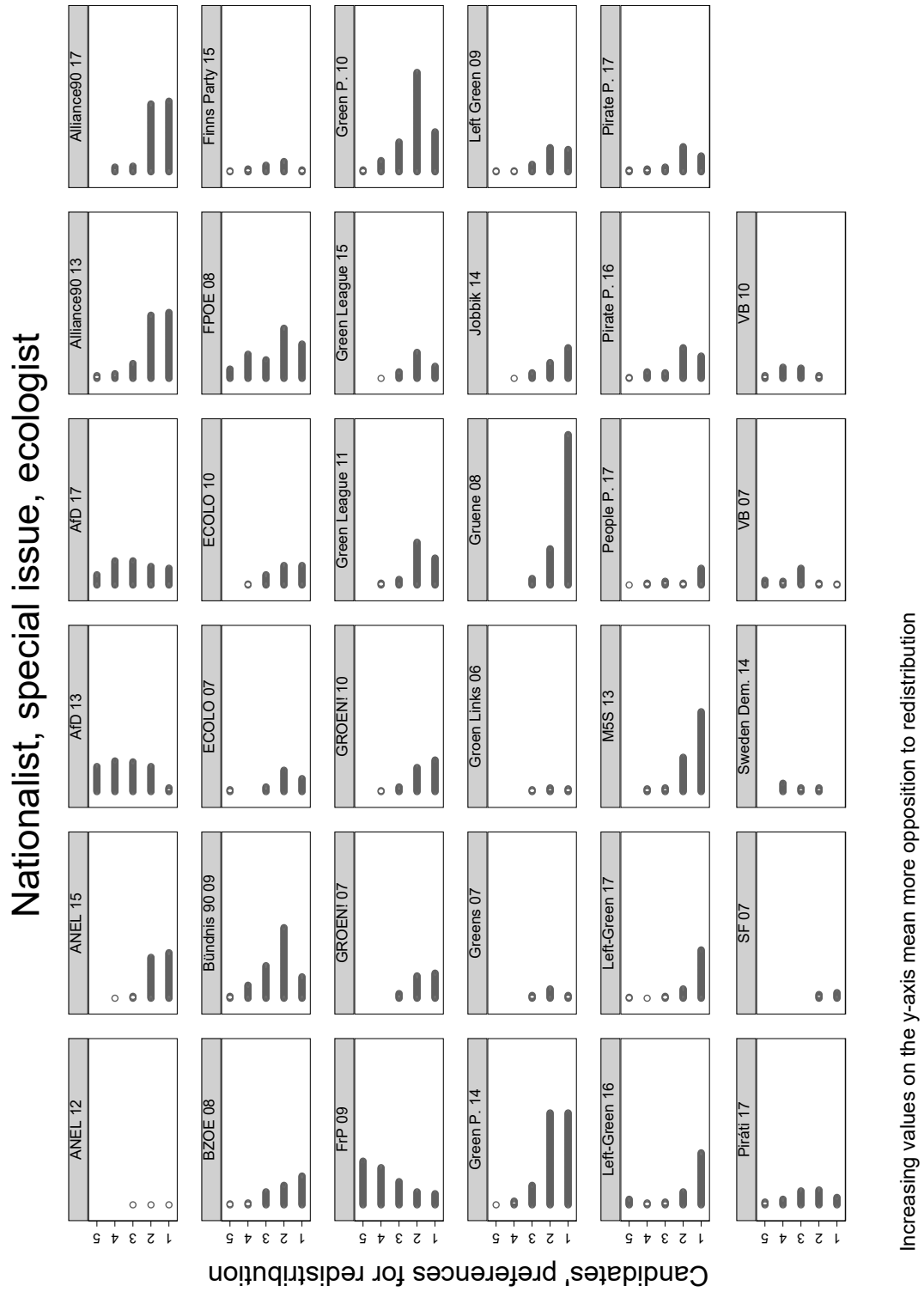

Figure A.4. Distribution of preferences for redistribution: nationalist, special issue, ecologist

A.5 Findings: additional plots and tables

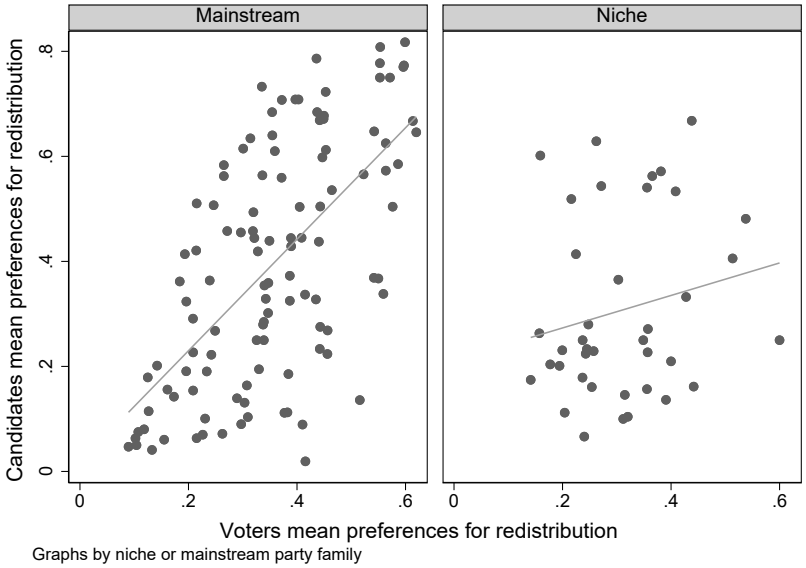

Figure A.5. Candidates' and voters' mean preferences for redistribution, by niche v. mainstream indicator. Note: each dot is a party observed in a given election. Increasing values on both axes mean more negative views on redistribution.

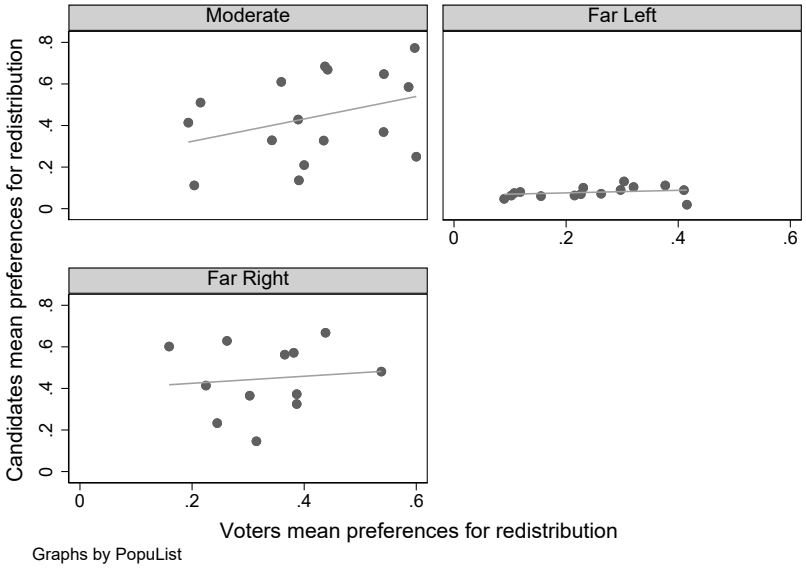

Figure A.6. Candidates' and voters' mean preferences for redistribution, by PopuList far right and far left indicator. Note: each dot is a party observed in a given election. Increasing values on both axes mean more negative views on redistribution.

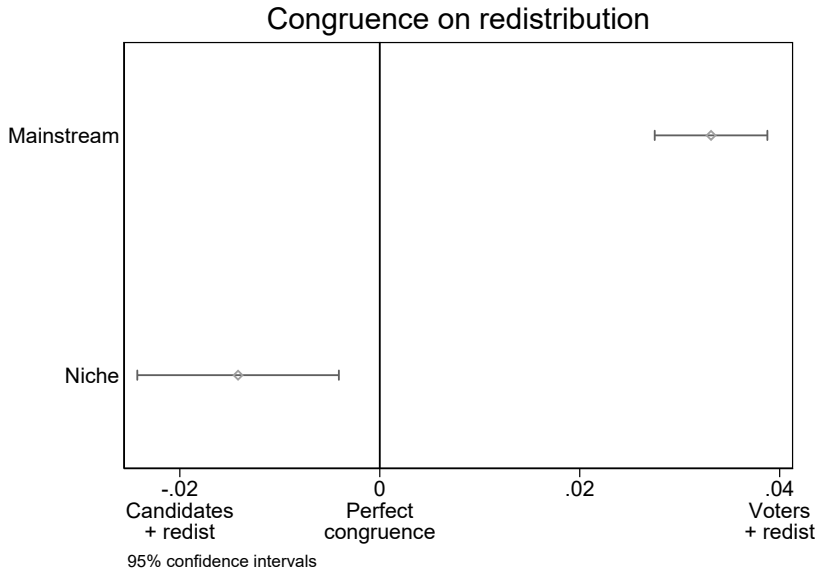

Figure A.7. Average candidates-voters congruence on redistribution (directional), by niche v.mainstream indicator, with 95% confidence intervals. Note: positive values mean that voters are more in favour of redistribution than their candidates, negative values mean the opposite.

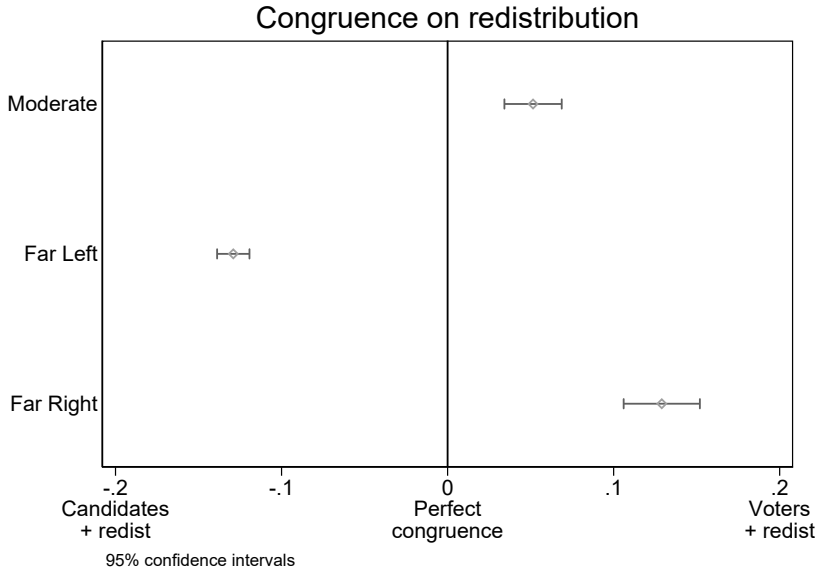

Figure A.8. Average candidates-voters congruence on redistribution (directional), by PopuList far right and far left indicator, with 95% confidence intervals. Note: positive values mean that voters are more in favour of redistribution than their candidates, negative values mean the opposite.

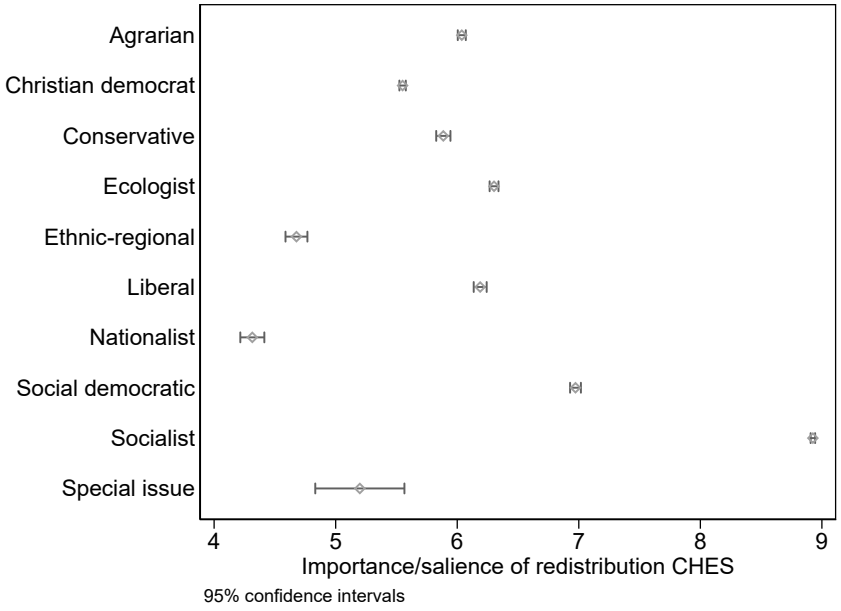

Figure A.9. Average salience of redistribution at the party family level by CHES, with 95% confidence intervals. Note: higher values mean that redistribution is more salient.

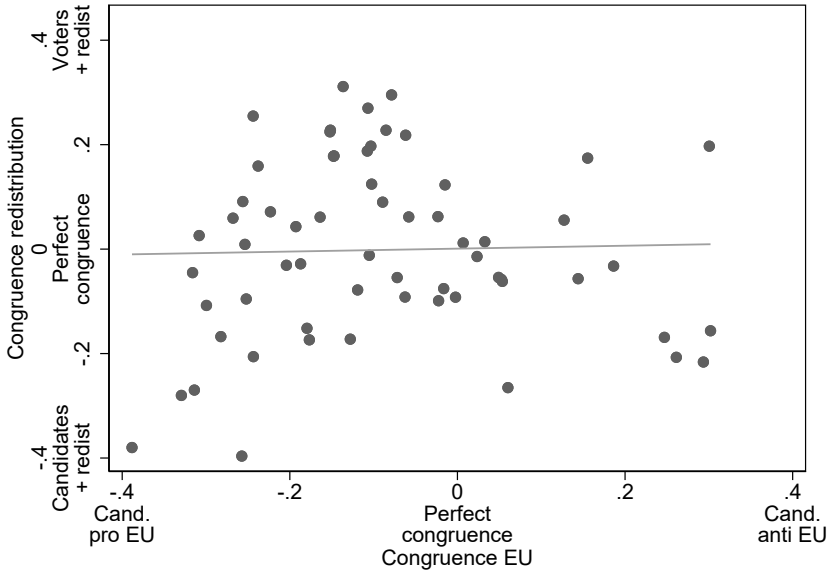

Figure A.10. Average directional congruence on redistribution (y-axis), and average congruence on European integration (x-axis. r = .03, p-value=0.8277). Note: each dot is a party observed in a given election. Positive values on y-axis mean voters are more in favour of redistribution than candidates, and the opposite for negative values. Positive values in the x-axis mean that candidates oppose European integration more than their voters do.

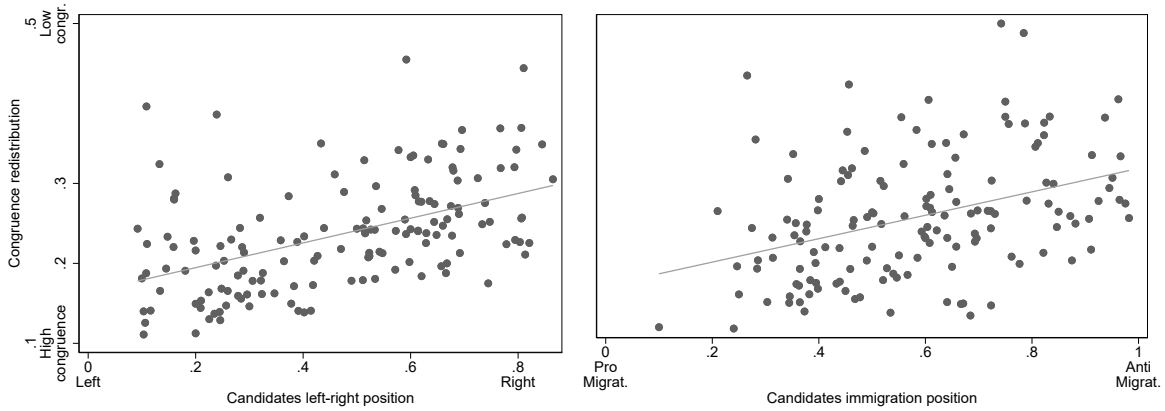

Figure A.11. Average absolute congruence on redistribution (y-axis), average L-R candidates' self-positioning (x-axis left-hand graph, r = .49, p-value=0.0000), and average candidates' preferences on immigration (x-axis right-hand graph, r = .38, p-value=0.0000). Note: each dot is a party observed in a given election. Increasing values on y-axis mean candidates are less in favour of redistribution. Positive values in the x-axis, left-hand graph mean candidates are more right-wing. Positive values in the x-axis, right-hand graph mean candidates are more opposed to immigration.

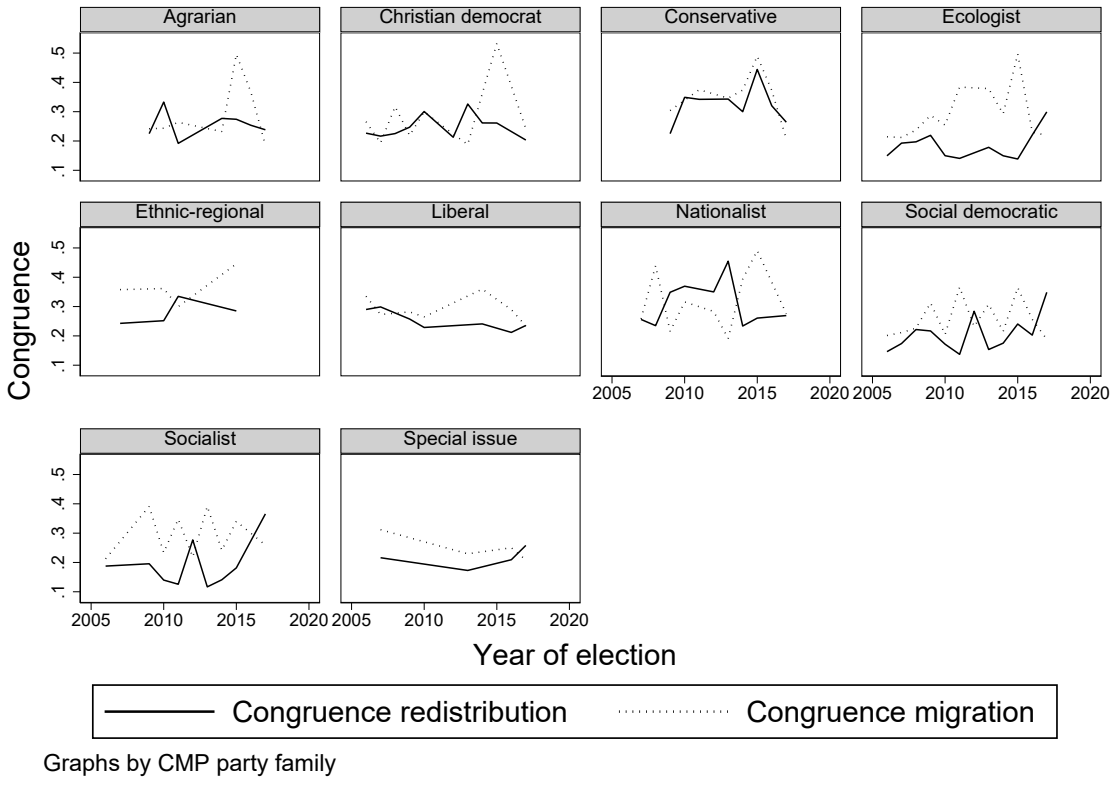

Figure A.12. Evolution of congruence on redistribution and on migration (absolute distances) over time by CMP party family. Note: increasing values on the y-axis mean lower congruence.

Table A.4: Regression results: robustness checks CHES

VARIABLES	(I) Redistribution 1	(II) Redistribution 2	(III) L-R	(IV) Multiculturalism	(V) GALTAN
Gender	0.006	0.004	0.004	0.003	0.002
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Age	0.000	-0.004	-0.002	-0.003	-0.004
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Left-right (candidate)	0.336***				
	(0.035)				
Immigration (candidate)		0.034***			
		(0.010)			
Redistribution CHES	0.031***	0.056***			
	(0.006)	(0.007)			
Left-right CHES			0.046***		
			(0.010)		
Multiculturalism CHES				0.016**	
				(0.007)	
GALTAN CHES					0.011**
					(0.005)
Party size	-0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Party age	0.000	-0.000	0.001*	0.001	0.001
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.001)
Party heterogeneity	-0.072	0.192	0.340	1.680***	1.754***
	(0.185)	(0.203)	(0.325)	(0.185)	(0.180)
Inequality	-3.502***	-3.576***	-4.319***	-3.402***	-3.206***
	(0.517)	(0.329)	(0.489)	(0.632)	(0.645)
Unemployment	-0.213***	-0.260***	-0.267***	-0.249***	-0.269***
	(0.042)	(0.038)	(0.048)	(0.056)	(0.062)
Polarisation	-0.002***	-0.002***	-0.004***	-0.003***	-0.003***
	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Democracy age	0.003***	0.003***	0.004***	0.003***	0.003***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Constant	-0.154***	-0.128***	-0.074	-0.226***	-0.190***
	(0.053)	(0.034)	(0.056)	(0.081)	(0.070)
Variance: election	-17.267***	-13.257***	-15.723***	-13.906	-15.179***
	(1.291)	(0.493)	(0.902)	(0.000)	(0.930)
Variance: party	-2.796***	-2.748***	-2.577***	-2.337***	-2.309***
	(0.099)	(0.075)	(0.081)	(0.074)	(0.080)
Variance: residual	-1.559***	-1.538***	-1.536***	-1.538***	-1.541***
	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)
N	9,502	9,494	9,400	9,698	9,528
AIC	-2412.155	-1999.874	-1919.837	-1962.969	-1978.159
BIC	-2233.173	-1820.913	-1748.274	-1797.837	-1806.271

*Note: Multilevel linear regression models. DV: directional congruence. Random errors at the party and election levels. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Year FEs included in all models. ***p < 0.01, **p < 0.05, *p < 0.1*

Table A.5: Regression results: further robustness checks

VARIABLES	(I) EU 1	(II) EU 2	(III) Experience 1	(IV) Experience 2	(V) Incumbent 1	(VI) Incumbent 2
Gender	0.006	0.003	0.009	0.006	0.006	0.002
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Age	-0.000	-0.005	-0.001	-0.006*	-0.001	-0.006*
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Left-right (candidate)	0.358***		0.385***		0.366***	
	(0.036)		(0.025)		(0.030)	
Immigration (candidate)		0.034***		0.033***		0.034***
		(0.010)		(0.010)		(0.009)
EU (candidate)	0.008	0.009				
	(0.014)	(0.018)				
Party size	-0.001	0.001	-0.000	0.001	-0.000	0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Party age	-0.000	-0.000	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.001
	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.001)
Party heterogeneity	1.014***	2.143***	0.771***	1.836***	0.810***	1.769***
	(0.150)	(0.234)	(0.236)	(0.292)	(0.206)	(0.252)
Inequality	-2.398***	-1.728***	-1.621**	-1.570**	-1.625**	-1.549**
	(0.644)	(0.604)	(0.635)	(0.669)	(0.653)	(0.691)
Unemployment	-0.212***	-0.292***	-0.191**	-0.314***	-0.195**	-0.307***
	(0.060)	(0.071)	(0.084)	(0.110)	(0.088)	(0.109)
Polarisation	-0.001	-0.001	0.000	-0.001	-0.000	-0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Democracy age	0.003***	0.002***	0.002***	0.001	0.002***	0.001
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.001)
Niche v. mainstream	-0.071***	-0.073**	-0.044**	-0.054**	-0.044**	-0.046*
	(0.015)	(0.029)	(0.021)	(0.028)	(0.020)	(0.027)
Party experience			0.000	0.000		
			(0.000)	(0.000)		
Incumbent					0.003	0.016
					(0.017)	(0.031)
Constant	-0.268***	-0.274***	-0.229**	-0.125	-0.217**	-0.117
	(0.080)	(0.088)	(0.099)	(0.134)	(0.100)	(0.134)
Variance: election	-14.463	-13.406	-3.518***	-10.641	-3.509***	-5.776
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.345)	(12.674)	(0.332)	(18.772)
Variance: party	-2.681***	-2.338***	-2.658***	-2.257***	-2.667***	-2.285***
	(0.078)	(0.075)	(0.089)	(0.243)	(0.087)	(0.274)
Variance: residual	-1.558***	-1.536***	-1.530***	-1.507***	-1.520***	-1.498***
	(0.013)	(0.011)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.022)	(0.029)
N	9,431	9,397	10,100	10,059	11,521	11,511
AIC	-2341.822	-1859.139	-1922.872	-1370.152	-1976.585	-1417.499
BIC	-2163.028	-1860.435	-1735.145	-1182.531	-1778.083	-1219.021

*Note: Multilevel linear regression models. DV: directional congruence. Random errors at the party and election levels. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Year FEs included in all models. ***p < 0.01, **p < 0.05, *p < 0.1*

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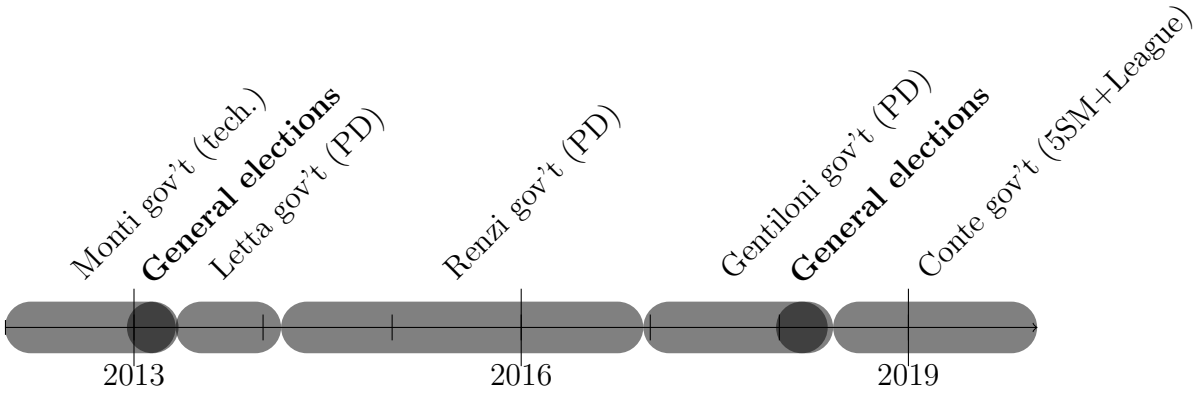
Appendix B

'They Should Not Get It' — How Italian Parties Politicise Deservingness Preferences

B.1 Dataset description

B.1.1 2012-2019 Timeline



B.1.2 Notes on posts

- Posts have been first cleaned keeping only those containing actual text messages. Empty posts, or those merely registering a change of profile picture, have been dropped.

B.1.3 Dataset

Table B.1: Dataset composition

Party	**No. of posts**	**No. of posts after cleansing**	**No. of FB followers (May 2019)**
5SM	3,837	3,372	1,451,683
Forward Italy	3,709	3,469	202,388
Brothers of Italy	4,063	2,824	193,291
League	4,512	4,409	500,382
Democratic Party	4,071	3,783	303,471

B.2 Content analysis

B.2.1 Coding

Table B.2: Coding scheme

Code's name	Categories included	Example
Elderly	Elderly; pensioners	*The citizenship income increases minimum pensions to 780euro per month. We give a [...] better present to the elderly. 5SM 02/05/2017*
Disabled	People with disabilities; sick	*Our promise is to [...] double the disability allowance and support all disabled. FI 17/02/2018*
Families	Families in need; couples; widows; single parents; divorced couples; children; motherhood/birthrate	*We want to support the real poor: [...] families with children. Brothers 24/01/2019*
Women	Women; gender/salary gap; glass ceiling; 'quote rosa'	*Still today women earn less than men [...] the fight for wage equity between genders must encompass all parties. PD 31/01/2018*
Unemployed	Unemployed; precarious workers	*We have an unemployment rate equal to 12%. As a mayor my priority is to give a job to these people. League 07/03/2017*
Soldiers	Soldiers; military; police; law enforcement	*Police and Carabinieri must unite against the wage cap imposed by Renzi on law enforcement. League 05/09/2014*
Needy	Needy ('bisognosi'); weak ('deboli'); poor ('poveri'); people on social assistance; homeless	*Social policies must benefit the weak. Brothers 20/05/2016*
Immigrants	Immigrants; non-natives	*Salvatore, 44 years old, has lost his job and lives in a tent while illegal immigrants live comfortably in hotels. League 17/09/2015*
Middle class	Middle class; employees ('lavoratori'); savers ('risparmiatori'); homeowners	*Forza Italia voted yes for the Carige bill to help more than 4,000 employees. FI 13/02/2019*
Business	Businesses; business owners; employers; autonomous workers ('partite iva'); SMEs	*Let's lower taxes for businesses, employment costs should be half a billion lower. [...] We want to give tangible support to businesses. 5SM 28/02/2019*
Healthcare/school	Healthcare workers; scientists/researchers; teachers/professors	*Between August and November 2015: 96,270 precarious school teachers have been hired. Another commitment maintained. PD 11/11/2015*
Young	Young; students	*The Jobs Act has positive effect also for schools [...] almost 12,000 internships for students. PD 12/07/2017*
Economic elites	Brokers; banks; lenders; corporations	*Renzi and Boschi gave money to banks but massacred savers. Brothers 10/01/2019*
Political elites	Parties; politicians; big unions	*We have cut politicians' privileges and pensions [...] to save 780 million to increase employment, invest in healthcare, infrastructures [...] 5SM 06/02/2019*
Criminals	Criminals; drug users; sex offenders	*As of today the citizenship income will go to assassins, rapists, and thieves. Those are categories that should not get it. Brothers 10/03/2019*
Welfare cheats	Welfare cheats; tax evaders	*Citizenship income will not go to the poor but to the sly and tax evaders. Brothers 24/01/2019*
South	Southern Italy ('Sud', 'Meridione', 'Mezzogiorno')	*Southern Italy is not a priority of this government. [...] We need to have growth policies for the South. FI 02/12/2015*

Note: Each target group can be coded as deserving or undeserving depending on whether the tone of the message is positive or negative.

B.2.2 Intercoder reliability

Table B.3: Overall ICR by party

Party	Overall Krippendorff's alpha
Forward Italy	0.81
Brothers of Italy	0.82
League	0.81
Five Star Movement	0.83
Democratic Party	0.85

B.3 Additional plots

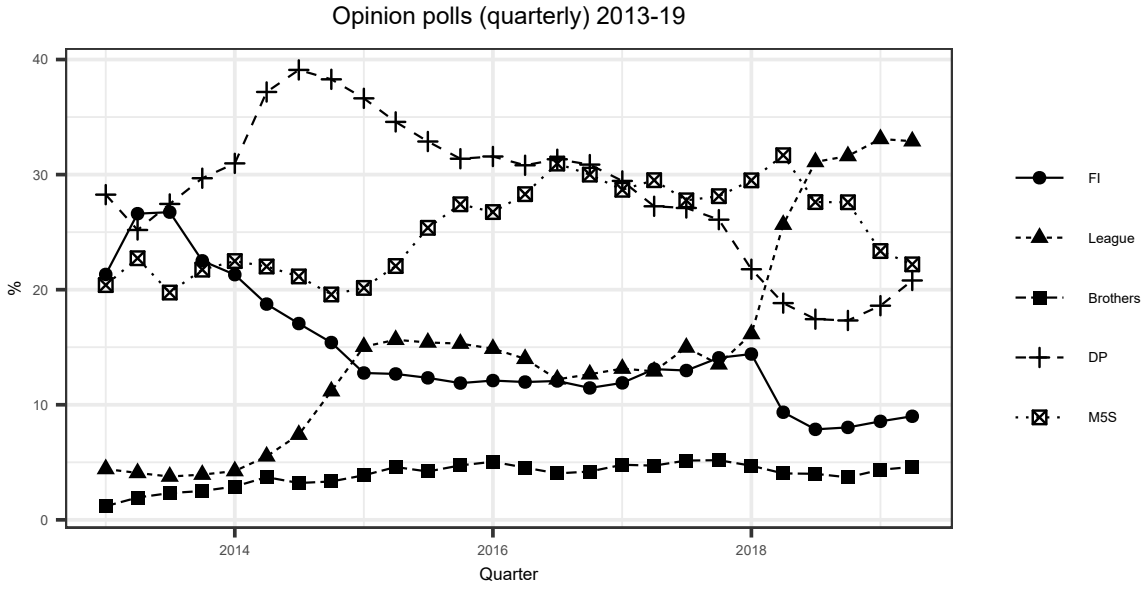


Figure B.1. Opinion polls over time, quarterly, by party

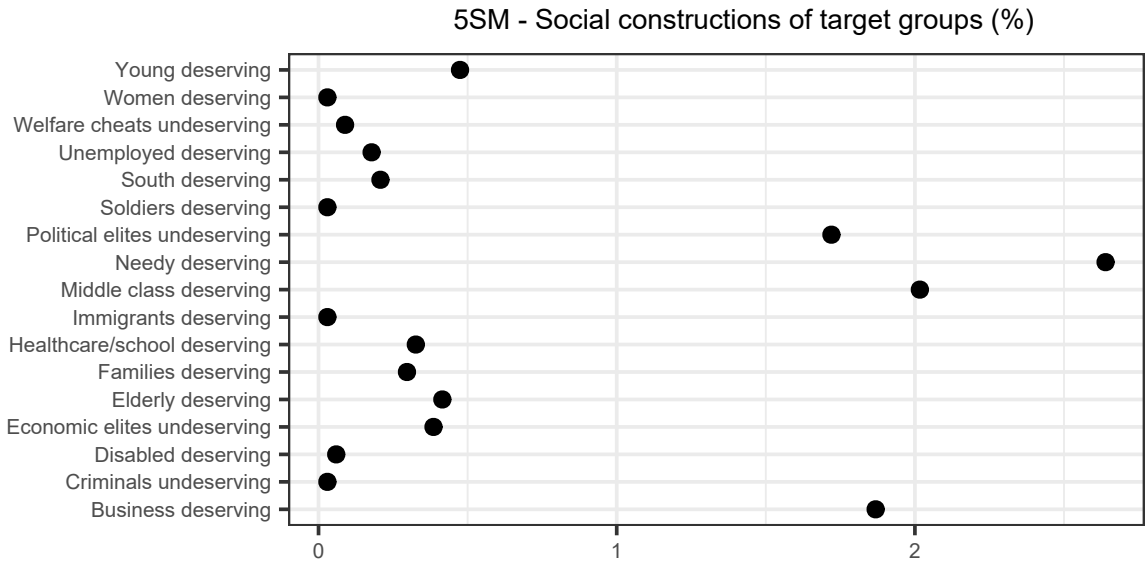


Figure B.2. Weighted frequencies of target groups' social constructions, 5SM

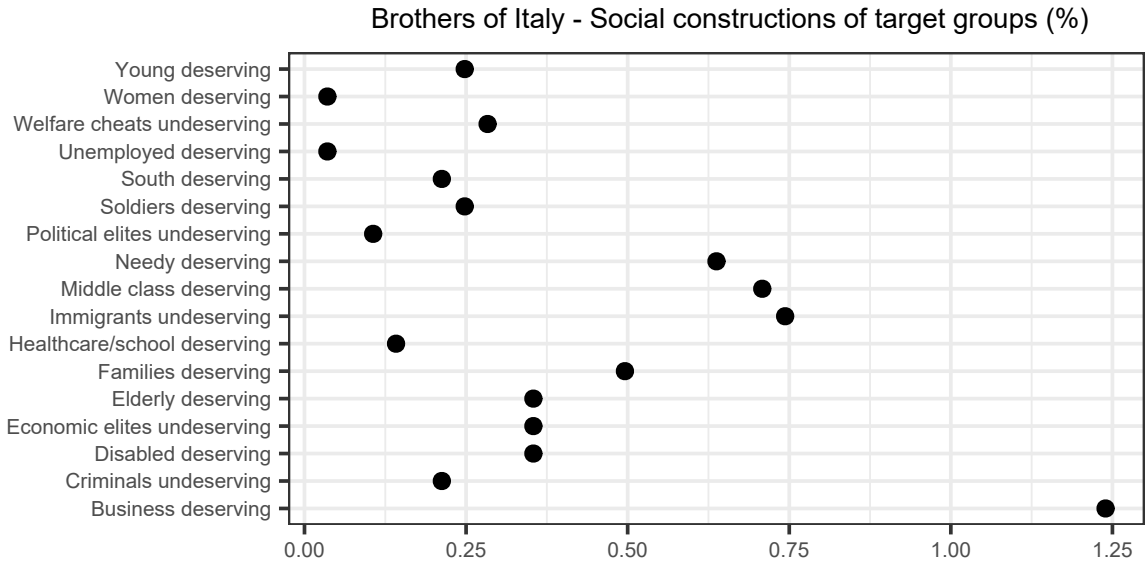


Figure B.3. Weighted frequencies of target groups' social constructions, Brothers of Italy

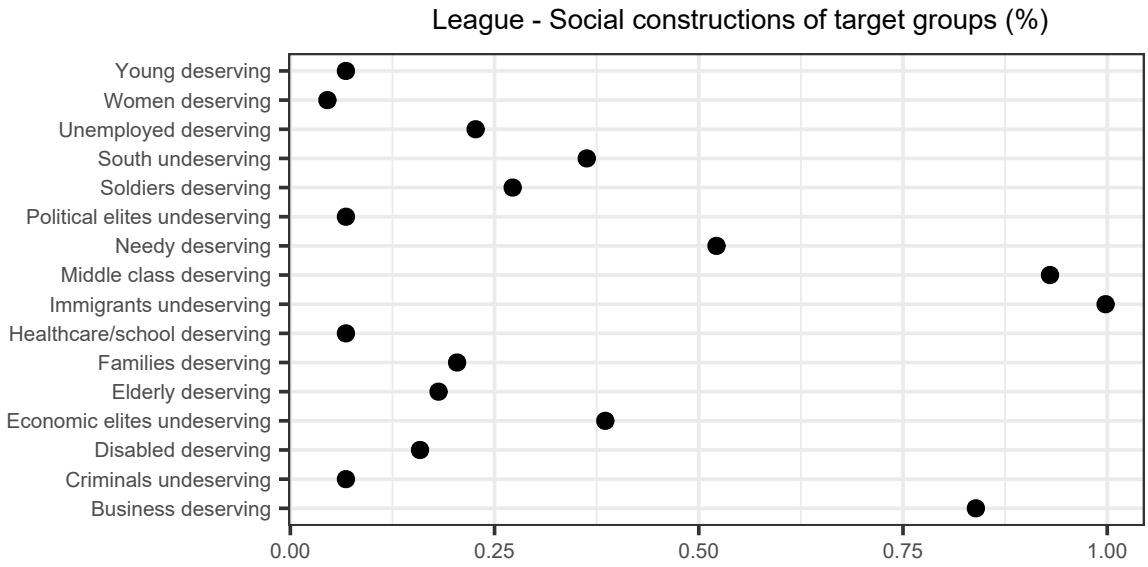


Figure B.4. Weighted frequencies of target groups' social constructions, League

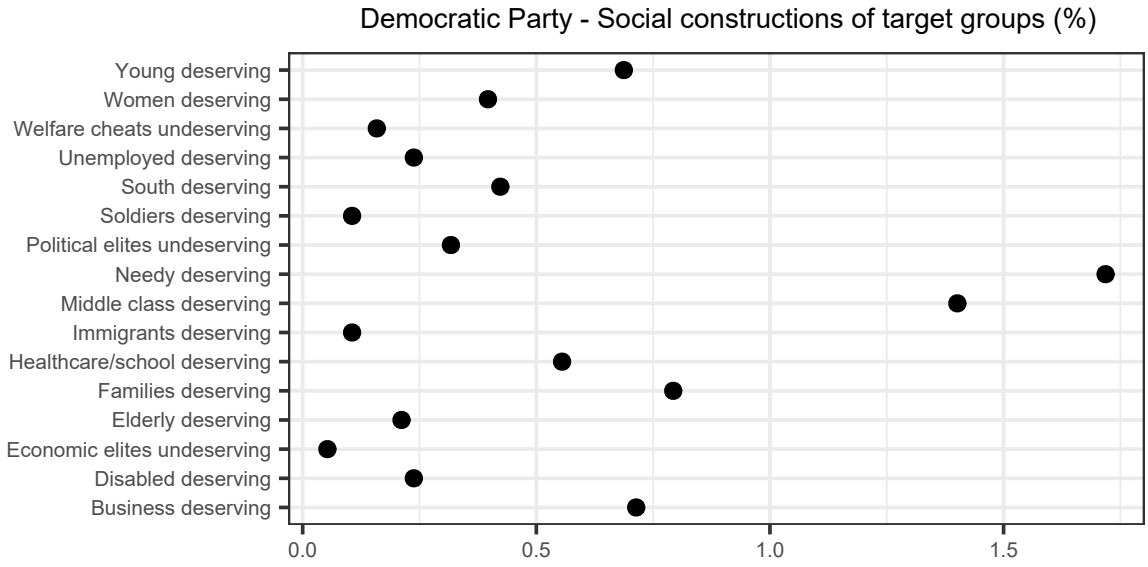


Figure B.5. Weighted frequencies of target groups' social constructions, Democratic Party

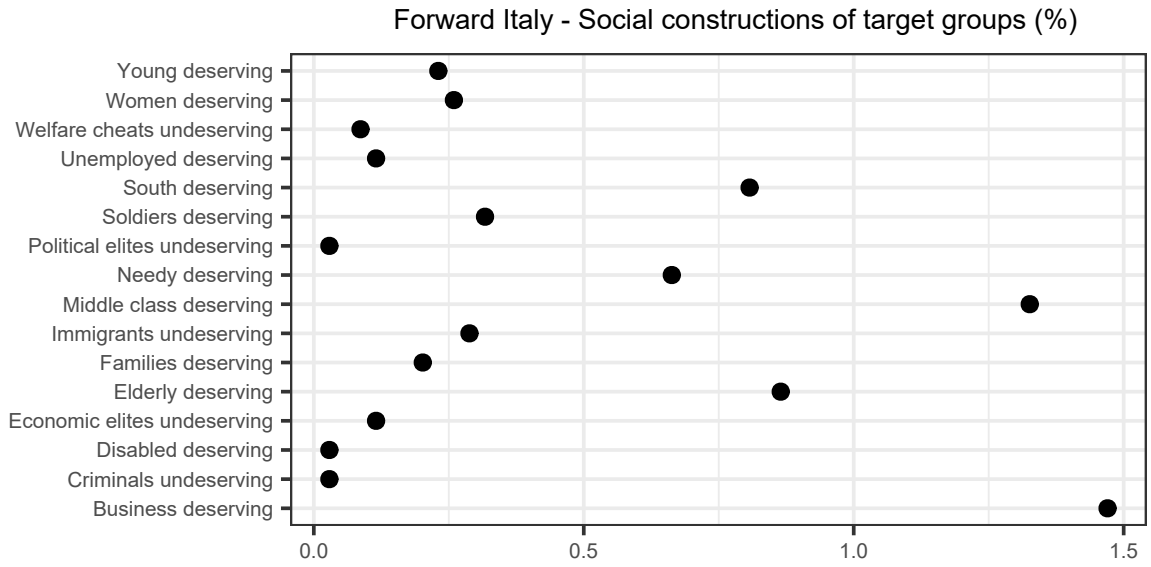


Figure B.6. Weighted frequencies of target groups' social constructions, Forward Italy

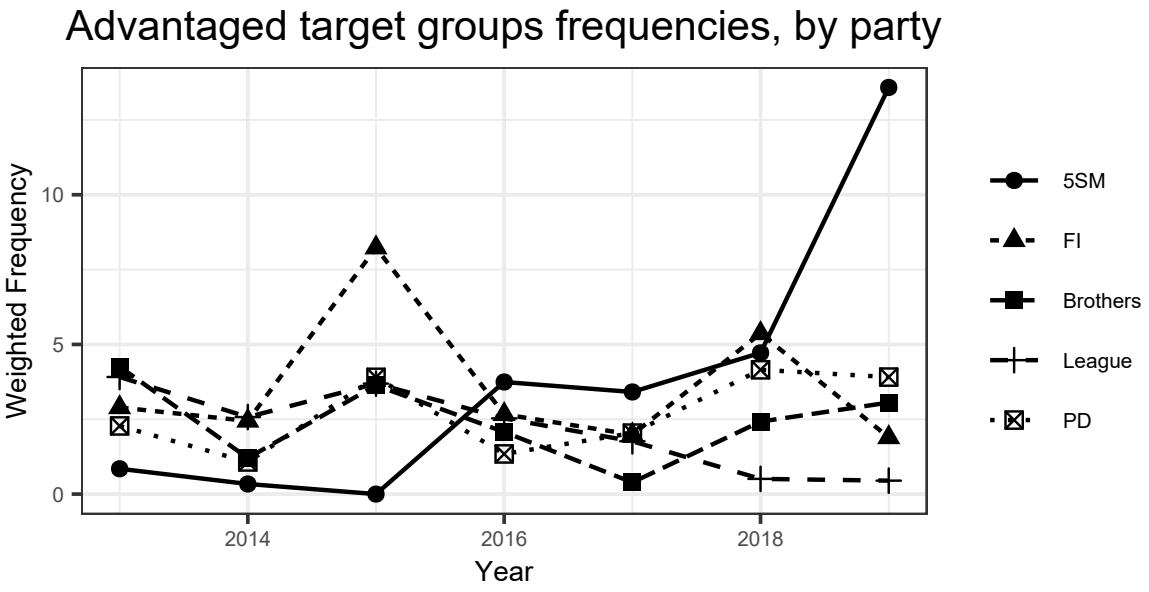


Figure B.7. Weighted frequencies of advantaged target groups, by party

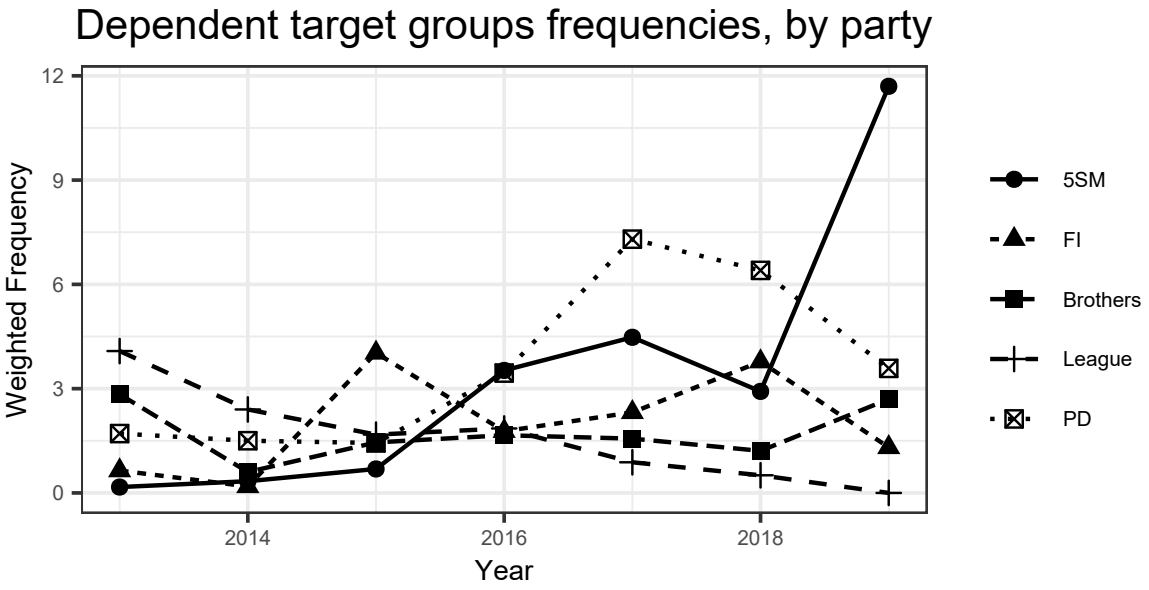


Figure B.8. Weighted frequencies of dependent target groups, by party

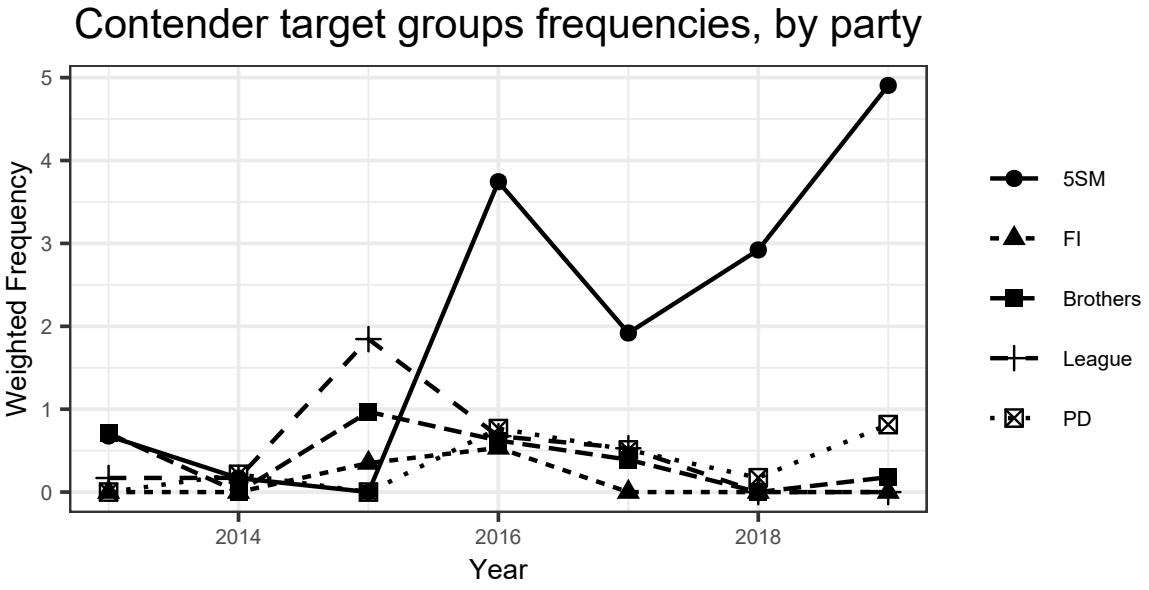


Figure B.9. Weighted frequencies of contender target groups, by party

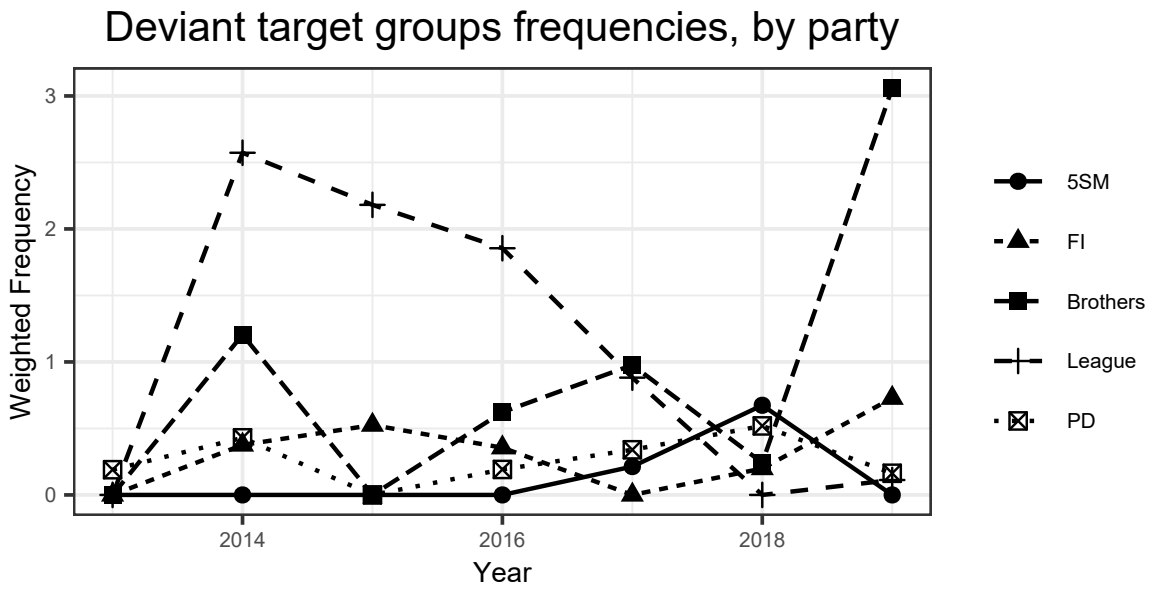


Figure B.10. Weighted frequencies of deviant target groups, by party

B.4 Data references

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