



Department of Political Science

Chair of Political Science

VOTING HEURISTICS.

THE CASE OF THE ITALIAN CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM

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*A nonna Anna,
che mi ha insegnato a non arrendermi e a perdonare.
Sei la persona più forte che conosca.*

*A nonna Rossana,
che avrebbe gioito più di me per questo traguardo.
Manchi come l'aria, però ti porto dentro.*

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INTRODUCTION

Post Second World War democracies rest on representative government. However, direct democracy's tools are regarded to with a significant interest nowadays. In particular, at the beginning of the third millennium, we counted more than a hundred national referendums yearly in the world (Linder, 2007).

On December 4, 2016 Italian citizens were called to vote on a constitutional referendum. The constitutional reform, presented by the Renzi government, aroused public interest among the electorate as it was not the case since the 1993 referendum, when a set of eight abrogative referenda was held and turnout was over 75%. In fact, on December 4 more than 65% of those having the right to vote went to the polls to have a say. To be precise, out of 50.773.284 having the right to vote, 33.244.258 did it (i.e.: 65.47%) – of them 54.12% voted against the proposed reform, which therefore did not enter into force. (Ministero dell'Interno, Elezioni 2016).

Why might it have been the case? What could be the reason for such turnout?

The very fact that it was a constitutional referendum might be thought as a plausible reason for Italian citizens to be willing to get more involved than they usually do. Especially in Italy, where the Constitution is regarded by many as the watershed between the dark Fascist era and the light democratic one. Moreover, this constitutional referendum, if passed, would have implied, among other things, the abolition of the Italian peculiar perfect bicameralism (i.e. *bicameralismo paritario*), bringing significant changes to the composition and the competences of the Senate. Notice that this might be said for the 2006 constitutional referendum, too. Yet, in that case the turnout did not even reach 55%. Therefore, one should suppose that this referendum must have represented for the Italian

electorate something that ten years ago was not on the table. What is, then, this new element that brought many Italians to express their opinion at the polls? What is that made this specific referendum different from all the previous ones, also from those who might have been considered similar to it from the point of view of their contents?

According to behavioral science, when there is the general idea that something important is at stake, people are willing to undertake even a cognitively-demanding decision-making process. Gathering information towards an upcoming necessary choice that must be done in the next future is, in fact, an example of cognitively-demanding decision-making process (Kahneman, 2011). This may include reading the long text of a reform aiming at modifying a Constitution, in order to decide whether or not to agree with the potential changes stated in the text. Is this the reason behind that relatively high turnout rate we were mentioning above? Or at least, is the fact that something of great political, historical, and cultural value was at stake the only reason why many Italians went out of their houses to go to the closest school to cast their vote?

On the other hand, behavioral scientists tell us that when our brains feel the need to go for cost-effective decision-making processes – which actually is what happens most of the times – then they rely on heuristics, or cognitive shortcuts, that avoid us the costly effort to gather proper information before we take a sound decision (Kahneman, 2011). It may sound quite an inappropriate behavior, especially if related to the action of voting, as we would expect that people – including ourselves – would do the most responsible use of such a powerful instrument, no matter how much energy is required to do so. Unfortunately, it seems that our brains are lazy by default and that makes them not always conform to the social and cultural rules that we try to impose to ourselves. This may definitely include not being willing to read the long text of a reform, before

deciding whether or not to agree with it; and instead, looking for shortcuts that will help us taking that decision anyway – provided that it is a short way.

Assuming that many voters voted on something else than the reform *per se* – for instance, on the future of the Renzi government, that had been announced by himself as tied to the outcome of the referendum (we will come back to this in the fifth paragraph of this chapter) – this thesis tackles the question of which kind of heuristics Italians relied on while casting their vote on December 4, 2016.

The thesis is structured as follows: chapter one will illustrate the main contents of the constitutional reform and its historical background, so as to highlight the main steps that led to its drafting and subsequently to the referendum; chapter two will focus on the literature on political behavior and more specifically on how heuristics work, outlining the reference theories; chapter three will develop some hypotheses, introduce the data and the methodology used, and show the main findings through some duly commented tables and graphs; finally, a conclusion will sum up the results, suggesting potential questions for future research.

Chronicle of a Reform Foretold

1. Contents of the reform

The constitutional bill C.2613–D (Senate reform and Title V), better known as ‘Boschi bill’ or ‘Boschi–Renzi constitutional reform’, was approved by Parliament and published on the *Gazzetta Ufficiale* n. 88 on April 15, 2016. If passed, it would have affected the Second Part of the Italian Constitution, namely that dealing with the institutional structure of the Italian Republic. It would have left the First Part – dedicated to the twelve Fundamental Principles plus the set of rights and duties of Italian citizens – almost untouched, the only exception being a consequential adjustment of art. 48, paragraph 3, where it would have been stated that the abroad constituency would elect a certain number of deputies, instead of parliamentarians in both the Houses.

We may identify within the text of the reform a dichotomy represented by a *pars destruens*, consisting with the removal of the perfect bicameralism as long as issuing legislation and giving confidence to the government are concerned – and another part built on five main pillars (Olivetti, 2016).

The first pillar was the new Senate of the Republic. It was conceived as a Chamber of the local autonomies and not meant to be directly elected. In fact, besides the downsizing of its task we have just mentioned, the Senate would have also changed in terms of composition. It was thought as composed by 100 members, not including the senators for life (see below). Among the 100 members of the Senate, 5 would have been appointed by the President of the Republic for a term of 7 years, while the other 95 would have been either regional councilors

(74) or mayors (21). As we were introducing, among these senators there were not included those who have to be considered as senators by right, namely all the former Presidents of the Republic still alive, plus those who had already been appointed as senators for life and would have had the right to maintain such status.

As for the distribution across the twenty Italian Regions, the idea was that each Region should have had at least two representatives (i.e. one regional councilor plus one mayor), plus an additional proportional number of senators according to the population of each Region.

The political goal that this aspect of the reform was meant to reach was the creation of an institutional connecting point between the national Parliament and the local autonomies, so to give them space (and a say) in the legislation-issuing process. With this regard, critics were moved with respect to the number of extra senators attributed to the most populated Regions, which would have created a significant disequilibrium. On the other hand, others suggested that as an attempt to give local autonomies representation in the Senate it was still too moderate and vague (Olivetti, 2016).

The second pillar was the legislative competence of the Senate. Unlike the actual system – which allows equal codecision power for any kind of law in both the Houses – the reform (art. 70) envisaged a distinction between those laws for which the equal-codecision-power formula was to be maintained and those for which the legislative procedure could only be started in the Chamber of Deputies. Hence, the Senate of the Republic would still have been in power to initiate the legislative procedure, but only for laws concerning: constitutional revision; the approval of treaties dealing with the European Union; referenda and other forms of popular consultation; relationships between the State and the local autonomies; and linguistic minorities. In any other cases than the above mentioned, it would

have been up to the Chamber of Deputies to initiate the legislative procedure and to approve the law (Camera dei Deputati, 2016). In this last case, the Senate – if one third of its members would do so – could only ask for a reexamination of the draft already approved in the Chamber and eventually pass some modification proposals. However, the proposals coming from the Senate would not be binding for the Chamber, which could potentially pass the original text already approved without applying any of the suggestions. For the budget laws, the Chamber would have been obliged to ask the Senate to examine the text, but it still could take the final decision notwithstanding the response of the Senate (Olivetti, 2016). Therefore, the Senate would have turned into a more consultative House (RaiNews, 2016).

The third pillar was the reform of the Title V of the Part II of the Constitution. Here the spotlight was on art. 117, regulating the distribution of powers between the State and the Regions. In the reformulation of that article, three main modifications need to be highlighted. First, the suppression of concurring legislative competences, implying their consequent transformation into either exclusive competences of the State or residual competences of the Regions. Second, the inclusion of twenty first new subjects to the list of exclusive competences of the State. Third, the possibility for the State to adopt laws falling even outside its competence (the so called ‘supremacy clause’), whenever it is needed for judicial reasons, economic reasons, or protection of the national interest. At this point, space was left to some criticism, especially for what concerned the new not in-depth explained twenty-one subjects of exclusive competence of the State, and the fact that the centralization aim which lied behind this pillar did not seem to include the special administrative areas – namely, Sicily, Sardinia, Valle D’Aosta, Friuli Venezia Giulia, and the two provinces of Trent and Bolzano (Olivetti, 2016).

The fourth pillar was a set of measures whose aim was to counterbalance the majority government system (Olivetti, 2016). Among them, we can identify the *ex-ante* constitutional review of legislation for electoral laws; the strengthening of the institutions of direct democracy, namely the various types of referendum; the recognition of a statute of rights for the minorities and the oppositions in Parliament; and the change in the procedure to elect the President of the Republic, who would have only been elected either with the two thirds of the votes until the first three rounds, or with the three fifths of the votes in the following ones (Camera dei Deputati, 2016).

Finally, the fifth pillar consisted in cutting the costs of politics. An example for that is the reduction of the number of senators from 315 to 100 (see above); however, even more than that, the provision according to which the members of the Senate would have taken no further salary than those already acquired in quality of mayors or regional councilors; in addition to that, we shall mention the suppression of CNEL (the National Council for Economy and Labour) and the abolition of Provinces (Olivetti, 2016).

After this cursory presentation of the reform's contents, needed in order to have a better understanding of why and how this constitutional reform was conceived, we need to outline the main steps of the political journey that ultimately led Italians to cast their vote – or not – at the referendum held on December 4, 2016.

2. Historical background

The idea that a constitutional reform was needed, was not a recent one. Actually twelve laws of constitutional revisions have passed since 1948. Yet the structure of Parliament and the so called perfect bicameralism have been a sword of Damocles pending on the Italian political elites for decades. The reasons behind it

lay first of all in the necessity to grant stability to the national government by means of strong majority; secondly, in the need for speed in the decision-making process; last but not least, in the desire to build a complete autonomist system, one of the two Chambers being clear expression of the territorial voices (Fusaro, 2016).

For practical purposes, we can divide this debate into three main phases. Technically speaking, the idea of overcoming the presence of two directly elected chambers having the same powers entered the Italian political agenda at the beginning of the 1980s, when the first committee was created in order to discuss about this and other questions. So the first phase could be said to have started around those years and to have ended with the 1994 legislative elections (Olivetti, 2016). In fact, on April 14, 1983 both the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies issued one document each, establishing the necessity to create a first bilateral Committee – whose members would be twenty deputies plus twenty senators, and whose task would later on be stated as that of preparing drafts of constitutional and legislative reforms. In 1985, the so called Bozzi Committee (IX Legislature) issued a report with the basic idea of a different balance of power in Parliament: the Chamber of Deputies would have had more legislative power, whereas the Senate would have had a control function (Camera dei Deputati, Senato della Repubblica, 1985). After this, many other attempts have been made in order to revise the constitution in this sense. Among them, the project of constitutional revision laid down by the Committee for Constitutional Affairs of the Chamber of Deputies, in 1990 (X Legislature) and the De Mita–Iotti bicameral Committee in 1992 (XI Legislature). In this first phase the central theme was the necessity to rationalize the structure of the Parliament, to foster its efficiency and stability, by looking at the form of government – and at the electoral law as the main tool to achieve the above mentioned goal.

The second phase started in 1994 and its protagonists were the winners of the legislative elections held that year, namely Silvio Berlusconi, Gianfranco Fini, and Umberto Bossi. On April 1, 1994 they announced their willingness to revise the Constitution, putting it into a more federal perspective. As to the attempts done during this phase to pass a constitutional reform, we shall remember the Speroni Committee in 1994 (XII Legislature); the D'Alema Committee in 1997 (XIII Legislature); and, of course, the event which concluded this period, during Berlusconi's second government: in 2005 (XIV Legislature), a constitutional revision project was proposed which provided, among other things, for an elected Senate which did not have to give confidence to the government. This reform was approved in the two Houses, but not with a strong enough majority to skip the popular scrutiny. In fact, in the confirmative referendum held on the following June 25 and 26, it was rejected by 61% of the Italians who went to the polls (De Luca, 2016).

Hence we arrive to the third phase, that includes the XV, XVI, and XVII Legislatures (from 2006 to today). During this period the debate has gone back to the form of government, the necessity to rationalize the Parliament and fix the flaw of the perfect bicameralism. To this period belongs the reform draft presented by a group of center-left parliamentarians headed by Luciano Violante, during Prodi's second government. At the basis of this draft laid the idea of a Senate which was indirectly elected. However, when the Prodi government fell down, the reform proposal did the same (De Luca, 2016). Furthermore, on June 11, 2013 a Committee for the constitutional reform was created by the Letta government and chaired by the Minister Gaetano Quagliariello. On September 17, 2013 the Committee issued a final report to be sent to the Prime Minister. It was a unanimous opinion in favor of overcoming the perfect bicameralism and introducing a differentiated bicameralism rather than a one-Chamber system (Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, 2013). Finally, the Renzi-Boschi

constitutional reform, whose *iter* we are going to see more in depth in the next paragraph.

However, if something is crystal clear today, it is that the attempts to modify the Constitution and overcome the perfect bicameralism in Italy have not been few so far – and that they have not been successful either.

3. The birth of the Renzi–Boschi reform

On January 18, 2014 Matteo Renzi met the center-right leader Silvio Berlusconi in the Democratic Party headquarters in Largo del Nazareno in Rome. In his post-meeting statements, he declared to have reached an agreement with the leader of Forza Italia concerning three main delicate points: modifying the Title V of the Italian Constitution; reforming the bicameralism turning the Senate into a ‘Chamber of autonomies’; and changing the electoral law (Scacchioli, 2014).

Less than one month after the so called ‘Nazareno agreement’, the Prime Minister Enrico Letta resigned. Few days later, the President of the Republic Giorgio Napolitano did not call for elections, but rather gave Matteo Renzi, leader of the Democratic Party, the task to form a government (Sappino, 2014).

On February 24, the neo-appointed Prime Minister delivered a speech before the Senate, where he announced his intention to change that House soon, telling to the senators that he hoped to be the last Prime Minister needing to ask for their confidence in order to govern (De Luca 2016; Senato della Repubblica 2014).

On April 4, less than one month after having said that, the first version of the reform text was approved by the Council of Ministers. It was a reform laid down by expert functionaries, by looking at some of the above mentioned texts, like the Violante draft. From the moment it entered Parliament for the very first time (i.e. April 8, 2014) as the ‘Boschi bill’, named after the Minister of Reforms Maria

Elena Boschi, to the day it was finally approved (i.e. April 12, 2016), two years passed, during which the text was read and modified by both Houses more than once, as indicated by article 138 of the Italian Constitution, which regulates the exceptional legislative procedure to be followed in case of laws of constitutional revision. In fact, according to art. 138 (It. Const.):

Laws amending the Constitution and other constitutional laws shall be adopted by each House after two successive debates at intervals of not less than three months, and shall be approved by an absolute majority of the members of each House in the second voting. Said laws are submitted to a popular referendum when, within three months of their publication, such request is made by one-fifth of the members of a House or five hundred thousand voters or five Regional Councils. The law submitted to referendum shall not be promulgated if not approved by a majority of valid votes. A referendum shall not be held if the law has been approved in the second voting by each of the Houses by a majority of two-thirds of the members.

Here the idea of the ‘constituent fathers’ (i.e. members of the Constituent Assembly who were given the task to write down the Italian Constitution on June 2, 1946) was probably that of imposing a longer process so to guarantee a proper in-depth discussion before taking the final decision to modify the text of the Constitution (Calzaretti, n.d.).

As for the Renzi–Boschi constitutional reform, it did undertake a long debate, spending 731 days in Parliament – to be more precise, 346 days in the Senate of the Republic, and 389 in the Chamber of Deputies (“L’iter della riforma”, 2016).

The first three rounds were the longest ones: the first reading in the Senate and in the Chamber took respectively 122 and 214 days; the second reading in the Senate, lasted 216 days. Then, starting with the following discussion in the Chamber of Deputies, the time spent debating decreased, and the draft took 89 days to get from the second reading at the Chamber to the third in the Senate, and then only eight days to go to the last stop – the third and last reading in the Chamber, that took 82 days (“L’iter della riforma”, 2016)).

One can easily imagine how amended the original draft came out of this long process. It was significantly changed in the Senate, especially thank to the work done by the relators, Sen. Anna Finocchiaro from the Democratic Party and Sen. Roberto Calderoli from the Northern League. The Senate modified 27 out of 43 articles touched by the reform draft proposed by the Renzi government. Then, the Chamber of Deputies modified 18 articles from the text approved by the Senate. Then again, the Senate changed other four articles, in some cases restoring its own previous proposals (Fusaro, 2016).

The final text was approved first by the Senate in its second reading; then by the Chamber in its second reading too, on January 11, 2016. Then again, as required by the Constitution, the draft was passed for a second time in both the Houses, in their third reading: on January 20 in the Senate, and on April 12 in the Chamber of Deputies (Fusaro, 2016).

The members of the opposition adopted different strategies, and in various occasions they preferred to leave the floor rather than to cast their vote. As a matter of fact, it often happened to have a higher number of absent deputies or senators rather than of contrary parliamentarians opposing to the reform using their vote – what has been called ‘passive resistance’ (“Riforme, Senato approva art. 10”, 2015). For instance, the first time the proposal was submitted to the vote by the members of the Senate on August 2014, it did not even get one vote

against; but 118 members were absent. Again, in the last passage in the Chamber of Deputies on April 2016 the situation was quite similar, with only seven votes against the reform, yet 231 absent members – more than 35% of the entire House (“L’iter della riforma”, 2016).

4. Campaigning in favor, campaigning against

Inside and outside the Parliament, the opposition was headed by the Five–Star Movement, the Northern League with Matteo Salvini, Forza Italia with Stefano Parisi and Silvio Berlusconi, and Fratelli d’Italia with Giorgia Meloni. To these, we shall add Massimo D’Alema, the former Prime Minister Mario Monti, Gianfranco Fini, Nichi Vendola, and Giuseppe Civati (Micocci, 2016).

It is worth pointing out that Forza Italia had not always been on the opposition side. In fact, in an initial phase the center-right political party was standing in favor of the reform and of the project presented by the government (see par. 3: ‘Nazareno agreement’). Apparently, the agreement happened to be broken after the election of the new President of the Republic, Sergio Mattarella, clearly unwanted by Silvio Berlusconi’s party (“Si rompe il patto del Nazareno”, 2015).

On the other hand, among those who campaigned in favor of the constitutional reform, it is worth mentioning the former President of the Republic Giorgio Napolitano, Angelino Alfano from the New Centre-Right; Denis Verdini from Forza Italia; the mayor of Verona Flavio Tosi, previously member of the Northern League; the former President of the Chamber of Deputies Pier Ferdinando Casini, and the former Prime Minister and former President of the European Commission Romano Prodi.

As to Romano Prodi, he declared that even if the proposed reform was not clear as it should have been, still it was necessary for the country to take that step; yet, in his words “many would take their decision on the basis of mere political factors, since the debate on the referendum has shifted from a quite modest constitutional reform to a challenge in favor or against the Renzi government” (Micocci, 2016) (“Referendum, Prodi”, 2016). “The decision on the contents of the reform” he went on “should have been wisely separated from the future of the government” (“Referendum, Prodi”, 2016).

A further parenthesis should be open as to Renzi’s political party, the PD, which did not stand united for any of the two factions. Indeed, it was deeply split into those who were in favor and those who would campaign against. So that on November 26, the PD member Dario Franceschini declared that the upcoming referendum should not be the occasion to fight against Renzi, but rather a vote on a constitutional reform. He went on making an appeal to those within the party to cast their vote in favor of the reform, instead of against the Prime Minister: “There will be room for those within the Democratic Party to challenge and try to defeat Renzi at the primary election”. Then he called on also the members of other parties, with the same purpose, saying that they could still compete against Renzi to lead the country in the following national elections: “Please, do not use the occasion of this referendum. Italy has been waiting for years for this reform”. He went on adding “We would like this referendum to really be about the Constitution. Such an important fight will have implications for the future Italian generations, and it cannot be reduced to a political fight against the government and against Renzi” (“Referendum, Franceschini”, 2016).

5. It is spelt referendum; it is pronounced *renzerendum*

We have been repeatedly saying so far that the outcome of the referendum was tied to the future of the Renzi government. What does this sentence really mean? And how did it happen?

To answer to the first question, we may give a look at the results of the data gathered on the web by Catchy for La Stampa during the electoral campaign. Since it was a campaign toward a referendum, we would expect these data to reveal that the decision (or the invitation) to vote yes and that to vote no were the preponderant themes collecting most citations on the web. Actually, this is not the case. In fact, according to the article released on December 4 on La Stampa (Riotta, 2016), what data revealed was that the most popular citation on the web during the electoral campaign was neither *yes* nor *no*, but rather the word *Renzi* – with 77.564 citations. And as a matter of fact, if we add to them the 2.455 citations for *matteorenzi* and the 1.536 for *matteorisponde* (i.e. Matteo answers), we end up with a total amount of 81.555 citations, which definitely make the Prime Minister Matteo Renzi the protagonist of that electoral campaign.

Yet, it must be said, that the *no* faction was only one step down on the podium, with a total amount of 34.353 citations. Precisely, 25.574 citations have been gathered for *io votono* (i.e. I vote no), plus 5.617 *iodicono* (i.e. I say no) and 3.162 simple *no* (Riotta, 2016).

A safe deduction is that the spotlight was on the figure of Matteo Renzi. A further question then might be whether or not this spotlight was shared with any other political figure, maybe with a potential competitor. Even in this case, the answer would be no. With this regard, Riotta (2016) outlined how Matteo Salvini, Silvio Berlusconi, and Beppe Grillo together did not even reach the amount 5.500 citations – it is interesting to notice that Silvio Berlusconi got the highest number of citation (2.353) whereas Beppe Grillo the lowest one (901).

It has been repeatedly argued that the outcome of the referendum and the future of the Renzi government were intertwined, because *de facto* people were aware of the opportunity they had to ask the Prime Minister either to stay or to leave, precisely by voting in favor or against the constitutional reform. The reason why these two *per se* unconnected things (opinion on the Renzi government and opinion on the contents of the reform) would have led anyway to the same result, lied in the unequivocal personalization of the debate enacted by Matteo Renzi from the very beginning.

In fact, on January 12, 2016, during an interview, the Prime Minister declared that if he were to lose the referendum on the reform, he would have left politics (Berti, 2016). He then repeated it in front of the Senate (“Se perdo vado a casa”, 2016), and again stated the same thing in different occasions on January 22 and 25, on February 7, on March 25; he said that on May 4, at the radio ‘Rtl 102.5’; on May 8, at the TV program ‘Che tempo che fa’; on May 11, at ‘Radio Capital’; on May 12, at the TV program ‘Porta a Porta’; on May 22, during an interview for ‘Il Messaggero’; on June 2, during an interview for ‘Il Foglio’ (“Se perdo vado a casa”, 2016).

As he would repeat again and again the same concept, newspapers started using the word ‘personalization’ referring to the way the electoral campaign was being conducted, then he reacted saying, during an interview for ‘La Repubblica’ on July 31, that personalizing the referendum was not any strategy of his; “what is at stake is not Matteo Renzi’s future, but rather Italy’s destiny. Personalizing this referendum against me is what the opposition wants, not me” (“Se perdo vado a casa”, 2016)

On October 22, he declared it had been his fault to push that much on the referendum. On November 21, in a live video on his Facebook page, he clarified that with his declarations about his resignation in case of loss at the referendum, the message he wanted to convey was that he was not there to add any special working experience on his resume, nor to occupy the seat of Prime Minister at Palazzo Chigi. “I am not the one at stake. I can even resign tomorrow morning”, he said on December 2 (Lauria, 2016). And he was quite right, as he did resign few days later, after the result of the referendum put an end to the project of the constitutional reform.

CHAPTER TWO

« What you see is all there is »

1. Who takes our decisions

Where is that I who decides to do one thing instead of another, and to do it in a certain way? Where does the intention of our choices come from? Is such I placed in a specific and concrete zone in our brain? The answer to the last question is, of course, no (Martinez, Marie, & Gómez, 2014). Yet, where is the conjunction point between brain and mind, between our physical and tangible body and the actions it performs?

Iacoboni (2009) made an experiment in which cerebral activity was analyzed by means of images. The subjects had just to look at someone's eyes and try to imitate the expression they would see. What emerged was that when we look at someone else expressing a certain feeling, we activate our mirror-neuron system, which in turn activates another part of our brain called limbic system, which in fact makes us *feel* the emotion we have just *seen*. This would explain how we perceive and feel other people's emotions without the need to analytically and rationally process it. We do it, somehow by intuition. When we see someone in pain, we do not need to stop and stare at their expression to analyze it in order to understand whether they are feeling good or bad. Our reaction is something far more immediate, instantaneous (and spontaneous), and it comes before any kind of rational process of reflection on what we are looking at. Mirror neurons immediately reflect what we see into our brains, making us be part of that emotion as if it were us feeling it first, creating what we nowadays use to call empathy.

Iacoboni's findings (2009) break with the western mentality where the I is separated from the others, and our perception of ourselves is generated independently from people around us. It reveals that in the creation of our own identity, not only we do not act 100% rationally, but also we are inevitably influenced by what we happen to experience, to feel, and to perceive thank to all the people we jump into during our lifetime (Martinez et al., 2014).

It recalls the idea of symbolic interactionism. (Blumer, 1986). In order to understand how we as human beings behave, it is necessary to start from the meaning we attribute to the things around us by looking at how the people we interact with act towards us and towards those things (Blumer 1986). The underlying idea here is that our behavior is rooted in our perception of things, which is in turn rooted in interaction. This is because in deciding anything, we consider not only our own perception, but also the perception that we think other people have of that decision and of ourselves in relation to that decision. In other words, "one has to *fit* one's own line of activity in some manner to the actions of others" (Blumer, 1986: 8).

In the end, that is who decides. It is an I which is only one side of the coin, the other one being other people we have so far empathized with.

2. One brain, two minds

In the previous paragraph, we implicitly mentioned two possible ways of thinking and taking decisions.

On the one hand, we have the slow analytical and rational way, that is typical of human beings; on the other, there is a more instinctive one, that human beings have in common with animals, and which acts way faster than the former and knows no logic. It seems like we have two different minds within the same brain. However, this is not even the most interesting aspect. According to researchers in

thinking and reasoning, in fact, these two minds would also be competing for holding control over our actions (Evans, 2013).

This may remind someone of the theory of the dissection of psychical personality elaborated by Freud (1933). Indeed, there are things he wrote to that regard that we can consider as a first general idea of the dichotomy between an animal side (which he called the *Id*) and a rational one (the *Ego*). Plus, he wrote about a third component, the *Super-Ego*, representing the social norms that individuals have internalized and that, from that moment on, will tend to influence their behavior (Freud, 1933).

Yet, to refer to these two minds in a more technical way, we will from now on use the terms first introduced by Keith Stanovich and Richard West (2000): System 1 and System 2. Actually, in some texts it may happen to encounter a different terminology, such as a distinction between Explicit and Implicit system, which would allude to differences in nature, which has been argued to be too far from neutral an approach (Evans, 2013). The 'System 1 and System 2' choice, on the other hand, has been widely accepted and used in the literature on the topic and psychology (Kahneman, 2011).

System 1 corresponds to the instinctive mind, which “operates automatically and quickly, with little or no effort and no sense of voluntary control” (Kahneman, 2011: 20); whereas System 2 refers to the rational mind, which “allocates attention to the effortful mental activities that demand it, including complex computations” (Kahneman, 2011: 21).

The curious thing is that we tend to conceive ourselves as rational beings – after all that is claimed to be the main difference between mankind and animals, as well as the instrument used to increasingly widen the gap between the two as centuries went by. Interestingly enough, although it is true that System 2 sets a division line that distinguishes people from animals, giving us an added value

they lack, yet we use System 2 way less than we may think. We are truly convinced that every step we take, every choice we make and thing we say, is a product of our thinking capacity and ability to rationalize. And in fact, many of them are; but not at all as many as we believe. To be honest, there is plenty of actions we do in our everyday life that require very small efforts, if any: recognizing someone's voice, and knowing where it comes from as soon as we hear it; driving a car when there is not much traffic (especially if we have gone that way a million times); knowing that the capital of France is Paris and that $2 + 2$ makes 4. None of these things requires too much effort to be realized, and indeed can be performed also when our 'autopilot mode' is set. Moreover, if it should be the case, some of them can also be performed simultaneously; it does not seem too hard to imagine someone driving while recognizing the sound of an ambulance coming, or a singer's voice at the radio, and still being able to answer 'Paris' or 'four' when asked what is the capital of France or the result of two plus two.

To be clear, all the just mentioned actions are performed by System 1. When is it, then, that we ask to System 2 to enter the field? Precisely when attention is required and energy needs to be spent on something, as we are going to make a real effort in order to achieve a result. All those expressions we are all familiar with such as 'Pay attention', 'Mind the gap', 'Watch your step', 'Be careful', are nothing but the proof that we are only given a limited budget of attention that we can spend on what we do. For someone who has never driven in the United Kingdom or in Malta, it would certainly require some effort to get used to drive right-side – and vice versa, of course. The same can be said for trying to make more complicate computations, or to focus on a particular voice in a situation of general noise in a crowded space.

All these actions, performed by our System 2, require concentration, make our pupils dilate, and – unlike System 1's tasks – can hardly be performed

simultaneously. “You could not compute the product of 17×24 while making a left turn into dense traffic, and you certainly should not try. You can do several things at once, but only if they are easy and undemanding. You are probably safe carrying on a conversation with a passenger while driving on an empty highway, and many parents have discovered, perhaps with some guilt, that they can read a story to a child while thinking of something else” (Kahneman, 2011: 23).

3. Why rational theory does not explain political choices

Rational theory has often been used as an explanation for the choices we make, especially in the fields of economics and politics. Yet, behavioral scientists have proved that this cannot be the case, neither for economic choices nor for political ones, because the cornerstones of rational theory cannot be proved to be maintained in these contexts, for several and different reasons. We are going to see throughout this paragraph why it is so.

The linchpin of the rational theory of choice is the expectation principle, that is quantitatively translated into the expected utility model. According to this model, the decision makers would always take their decisions with one and only one goal in their mind: maximization. Therefore, they will easily opt for the alternative with the highest expected utility (namely, the total sum of utilities each weighted by its probability). So far so good.

The inconsistency arises as soon as we realize that we do not assign the same weight to options that in expected utility terms would have exactly the same value. Quattrone and Tversky (1988) wrote about an example which illustrates it perfectly. Imagine you are taking part to a game of Russian roulette and you are presented with the option to pay a certain amount for the removal of one bullet. How much would you be willing to pay for the removal of one out of four bullets? Would it be the same amount as if the situation were different, and the bullet to be

removed were the only one present in the roulette? Of course, no. Most people would be willing to spend much more in the second option than in the first. The thing is, they are quantitatively the same. Therefore, the rational theory would not expect us to be so massively determined to pay much more for the option two, when it had the same value as option one. That is why we need a different model that explains the way we take decisions, which possibly includes weights being subjectively assigned to each of them. To answer to this need, the prospect theory has been outlined where outcomes, instead of being multiplied by their probability, are “multiplied by the decision weight, that is a monotonic but nonlinear function of its probability” (Quattrone & Tversky, 1988: 730).

Another keystone of rational theory is the principle of invariance, according to which the preference order among prospects should not depend on how they are described. Saying that in a firm with 1000 employees, 100 will be fired is the same as saying that 900 will keep their job. From the point of view of the contents it is, in fact, the same thing; it has just been formulated differently. This is exactly the point, though. The different frames are the key for the reader to decide whether she is in favor or against that given measure. “These alternate formulations of the problems convey the same information, and the problems differ from each other in no other way” (Quattrone & Tversky, 1988: 735). However, “these alternate frames led to predictable reversals in preference” (Quattrone & Tversky, 1988: 735).

This is not to say that people are unintelligent or irrational. The message that these findings aim to convey is simply that our choices are prone to distortion. Our perception, as well as our memory, is not completely reliable in terms of compliance with reality; and our judgment is not flawless or value-free.

4. Heuristics and their accuracy

Finally, the dogmatic approach of the rational theory was (almost) abandoned and the idea of a correct reasoning was replaced by new ideas on how we think, thanks to new discoveries that came out from research conducted in the field of behavioral science. First and foremost, Tversky and Kahneman's research project on heuristics and biases (1974). What first emerged from their program – and was confirmed later on by other researchers who studied the topic – is what has been introduced in the previous paragraph. We tend to use heuristics (i.e.: cognitive shortcuts) and to trust our intuition when it comes to take decisions. And the reason why we do so is that it helps us simplify the problem we are facing, solve the puzzle and untangle the complex situation in the easiest way we can afford – even if this way of thinking does not always lead us to the best result. In fact, rather than the best decision, it will most of the times make us take the most satisfactory one (Baldassarri, 2005).

Moreover, they found out through some experiments that we do not just enact this possibly mistake-leading intuitive process randomly; indeed, we all tend to make some errors systematically. To explain this systematism, they introduced three main heuristics: representativeness, availability, and anchoring.

The representativeness heuristic highlights our propensity to estimate the probability of something belonging to a certain category, based on how similar it is to the representation of that category in our mind. We tend to fit what we see into our own categories, trying to match the new and unknown with the old and well known, and we do not hesitate too much in associating the former to the latter as soon as we perceive the match as successful. The more it is representative of a category we already know, the more we are inclined to associate it to that category. It does not matter what the real probability is, or the dimension of the sample, or the presence of other indicators. Statistics is not taken into account at

all. We base our judgment of objective probability on our own subjective perception of likelihood.

The availability heuristic underlines our tendency to estimate the probability that an event may happen, based on how easily that event comes to our mind. We may think that the number of victims of shark attacks is greater than the number of people hit by falling parts of an airplane, but that is not the case. Yet this information will probably leave us incredulous – and the media coverage of the former being way higher than the latter’s is one of the reasons behind our astonishment (Read, 1995). Similarly, we are more willing to believe that a terroristic attack is likely to happen in the upcoming future immediately after a terroristic attack takes place in some part of the world – by the way, the closer the better, as we are more sensitive to tragic events when they do not occur far from us. On the other hand, after a while, we unconsciously tend to forget what happened, and even if dramatic events usually need more time to be set aside, eventually they will leave room for something else to be more available in our mind – and therefore more likely to happen, according to our personal point of view.

Finally, the anchoring heuristic is probably the most discouraging one for those who appreciated the rational theory. In fact, it illustrates that by just giving a random number of reference while formulating a question, people will tend to feel somehow tied to that number (i.e.: the anchor) by an invisible line, which will inevitably affect their answer. This holds even if the anchors given are clearly wrong. So that during an experiment conducted with a group of students (Strack & Mussweiler, 1997), those who were asked the question “Did Gandhi die before or after the age of 9?” answered on average that he had died when he was around 50; while those who were asked the question “Did Gandhi die before or after the

age of 140?” would stick around the average age of 67. Their guesses were in both cases anchored to a clearly wrong number randomly assigned.

Nevertheless, although some heuristics tend to make our judgment biased and often wrong or irrational in terms of optimization of the result, there exist some typologies of heuristics that may lead, in fact, to the most rational choice even through non-rational way of reasoning. It is the case of *fast and frugal* heuristics, that are strategies of decision-making, which are characterized by simple stopping processes that guarantee velocity, and require few and frugal information (Baldassarri, 2005). Three are the fast and frugal heuristics that Gigerenzer and Goldstein (1999) proved to have a high percentage of accuracy: the Minimalist heuristic, the Take The Last heuristic, and the Take The Best heuristic.

Let us suppose we were asked whether city A is more or less populated than city B. Unless we already know the correct answer, Minimalist heuristic would make us immediately look for any potential cue, which may help us answer to that question. It does not matter whether the cue we identify first is relevant or not, as this type of heuristic looks up cues in random order. As soon as it comes to our mind, for instance, that city A has a football team, while city B does not, we may answer that the former is more populated than the latter. It shall be pointed out that this applies only if we know both the cities considered but we do not know how populous they are. In fact, as Gigerenzer and Goldstein (1999) pointed out, if only one of the two is recognized, we tend to attribute to that one the highest level of population (i.e. Recognition heuristic). If none of them is recognized, we will guess.

Take The Last is the heuristic based on the strategy known as *Einstellung*. It applies when people face several problems at the same time and it simply consists in using the strategy that worked for the last problem when facing a new similar

one. In the case the strategy used on the last problem were not to work, the second option would be the strategy used for solving the immediately previous problem. And so it goes, proceeding backwards from the most recent strategy enacted to the oldest one, until a satisfactory solution is found.

Last but definitely not least – indeed, it is the most accurate of the three – we have the Take The Best heuristic, where it is assumed that the decision maker is aware of the most relevant cues and elements to make the final choice. Therefore, she is supposed to take them into account on the basis of a consequential order, that is to say from the most relevant one to that which counts the least.

Thus, not all heuristics happen to be wrong in nature, since it has been proved that they may lead to the same result as a proper rational reasoning – exactly as following our intuition could take us to the same outcome as stopping by and thinking over for a while. We could conclude, at this point, that our rationality does not consists in optimizing the result or in choosing something on the basis of consistency, but rather in having the ability to “Take the Best; ignore the Rest” (Baldassarri, 2005: 55). Identifying the useful cues is exactly as important as ignoring the irrelevant ones.

5. Political expertise

Once the limits of rationality had been demonstrated, the necessity to justify human choices arose, to explain why people behaved the way they did. Hence, in the last decades, researchers in the field of political cognition have been trying to understand “how people's modest level of political information, plus their similarly modest abilities to process it” conditioned “how they reason about political choices” (Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1991:1).

One of the first interesting findings was the lack of interest in voters, which calls for attention, as it seems to be in contrast with the figure of the democratic citizen, who is supposed to be well informed about politics to take decisions responsibly. Yet the point is that not all citizens have the same level of political expertise, and those who are not politically sophisticated are not willing to become it, because of the reasons we have mentioned in the previous paragraphs – namely, the cost of this choice. In other words, gathering new information on political affairs would certainly imply some costs but also produce some advantages: the problem is that the advantages hardly ever exceed the costs (Downs, 1947).

The question is how can voters who are not politically sophisticated take their decision when it comes to voting? And the answer can easily be deduced, again, by the notions we have introduced in the first paragraphs of this chapter: by using heuristics.

One may argue that the errors made by the uninformed voters could be balanced by the decision taken by those who are informed, or that in the process of aggregation all the individual errors are going to be erased. Yet, this might have been the case if the errors committed were to be random and different one from another. The truth is they are not random at all; indeed, they are quite systematic – and therefore predictable – precisely because they are determined by heuristics. Henceforth, since voters face the same cognitive problem and are given the same instrument to solve it, we may safely suppose that they will resort to the same tools (Kiklinski & Quirk, 2000; Baldassarri, 2005), depending on the level of knowledge they have.

One potential shortcut is represented by inference (Baldassarri, 2005). Voters may judge a candidate on the basis of her demographic background; or get an opinion on a given issue by looking at the position taken by certain groups or figures of reference. They may deduce what they want to vote, on the basis of judgments or

decisions they have already taken in the past, so to save energies (i.e.: Take The Last). Another option is that the lack of information is to be compensated by affection (Sniderman et al, 1991). Here it comes the idea of “sophistication interaction” (Sniderman et al, 1991: 20), according to which political expertise would influence the decision-making process and also determine the way affection does it. The point is that political expertise is not accessible to everybody, whereas feelings do not require any kind of competence or skill that nature has not given us yet. Thus, we can expect that non-sophisticated voters resort to affective reasoning, inasmuch we cannot expect that those who are interested in politics base their reasoning solely on logic.

6. Not all voters are equal

According to the principle of ecological rationality, we as human beings are naturally conceived to use the environment as a canvas, whose patterns help us depict what surrounds us and make inferences (Navarrete & Santamaría, 2011). As for the political environment, the patterns we can easily think it provides us are parties, leaders, coalitions, and issues. These are the main cues voters are likely to use in order to define their political preferences. Yet not every voter will look at every political party, or leader. It would be, then, more realistic to affirm that the voter, unless particularly interested in political events, will hardly remember the names and faces of minor politicians or the symbols of those political parties which get very low percentages at elections. That is precisely coherent with the idea of the ecological rationality, as it is the environment – in this case the political environment – the one that chooses the major leaders and parties (Baldassarri, 2005). With this regard, zooming out the picture, and moving for one second from Italy to the United States, it would be interesting to find out how many American voters are really aware of the existence of other parties and candidates than the Democrats and the Republicans.

To this principle we shall add another one, namely the principle of psychological plausibility, according to which it is necessary to verify that people really have available those cognitive capacities that have been ascribed to them. Henceforth, we can conclude that voters do use heuristics to disentangle the complex decisions they face when they have to choose how to cast their vote; that these heuristics are based on the political environment which practice the action of first filtering the objects and information that can reach the single voter; that the extent to which voters employ heuristics varies at different levels of political expertise; and that not all objects in the political environment will have the same influence on the whole electorate: the same element will influence some voters more than others, and some elements will be more influencing than others on the same voter (Baldassarri, 2005). Thus, in the realm of political behavior, the systematism of errors caused by the employment of heuristics (see above), cannot be said to be disproved, but is surely challenged.

The ongoing Italian scientific tradition, with this regard, is oriented towards a classificatory interpretation, which presents the electorate as basically heterogeneous. In other words, one cannot talk of the average (Italian) voter, since not all voters are guided by the same heuristic and even those who are, are not biased to the same extent. One of the possible classification is that outlined by Baldassarri (2005) based on three possible ways of interpreting the political debate. That scheme envisages the *Utilius* voter, who resorts to the left-right dimension in order to decide how to vote; the *Amicus* voter, who tends to see the political arena as a contraposition between two coalitions, or two parties, or two leaders; and the *Aliens* voter, who rejects politics and does not engage in any political debate. Finally, a fourth profile shall be added, that of the *Medians* voter – the residual category – that may fall in between *Utilius* or *Amicus*, and *Aliens*, and contains all voters who do not match any of the three. In the next paragraph we are going to deepen our level of knowledge of these four paradigms, by

looking at a research conducted by Delia Baldassarri and Hans Schadee (2006) using data collected by ITANES (Italian National Election Studies) in 1996 and 2001.

7. *Utilius, Amicus, Aliens, and Medians*

Firstly, *Utilius*. This “Downsian model” (Baldassarri & Schadee, 2006: 5) maximizes the utility coming from the act of voting, as she can place herself and the parties on the left-right axis, and vote accordingly – that is to say, vote the closest party or leader to her own position. Her voting logic demands high level of specialization of cognitive capacities, as she needs to mentally draw a detailed map of the political space. That’s why we imagine *Utilius* to be interested in politics, highly responsive to information flows, and having a high level of education (Baldassarri, 2005; Baldassarri & Schadee, 2006). It will be quite evident that being *Utilius* calls for more complex requirements to be met than any of the following categories.

Secondly, *Amicus*. Here the picture of the political spectrum is zoomed out, and the details are not clear anymore as they were in *Utilius*’ mind; in fact, *Amicus* reduces everything to a general dichotomy, where there are two main factions competing – most likely center-left versus center-right. Therefore, she is interested in politics and has an idea of how the political scenario is organized. This way of conceiving the public debate demands her to be aware of the composition of the coalitions; on the other hand, though, she does not need to manage the same amount of information as *Utilius*, who needed to gather them for each subject separately. *Amicus* follows an “*amicus/hostis* (friend/enemy) attitude” (Baldassarri & Schadee, 2006: 5) in judging the leaders, and her vote preference tends to reflect the opinion she has of them. In other words, she “rates the leaders that belong to his or her favorite coalition better than the leaders of the

opposite coalition and votes for the preferred coalition” (Baldassarri & Schadee, 2006: 5). Therefore, we could define her voting logic to be driven more by affective rather than by cognitive reasons, which would decrease the importance of her level of education.

Thirdly, *Aliens*. She does not map the political space into ideological patterns at all, either because she consciously rejects politics – and therefore she does not want to engage in it – or because she cannot do it, as she does not have the capacity to manage that amount and/or typology of information. Placing *Aliens* in the context of the research conducted by Baldassarri and Schadee, she would place on the left-right axis neither herself nor the main Italian parties at that time, like Rifondazione Comunista, Left Democrats, Forza Italia and National Alliance. It follows that *Aliens* might face greater problems in deciding upon a vote, that she may not be ideologically coherent over time and decide how to cast her vote not so early – sometimes even while voting.

Finally, we have *Medians*, which is expected to have a level of education laying in between that of *Utilius* and *Amicus*, and *Aliens*, given the heterogeneity of this category. And the same can be said for what concerns their interest towards political affairs, and the moment when they decide how to vote.

Tables 1 and 2 confirm what has just been said. In particular, by looking at both tables, in the section about the moment of decision, it emerges clearly, both in 1996 and in 2001, that it is quite unreal for both *Utilius* and *Amicus* to decide how to vote in the very moment of voting. Indeed, around 70% of both use to take this decision way before the election, probably even before the beginning of the electoral campaign, which should make us conclude that the attention they pay to the information flowing in the months preceding the vote, is aimed at looking for confirmation to their ideas rather than at formulating them.

On the other hand, if we look at *Aliens*, we immediately notice how crucial the way of campaigning may be in order to catch their vote – which make them the ideal target for those politicians aiming at widening their electoral basis – if they know how to be persuasive.

		<i>Utilius</i>	<i>Amicus</i>	<i>Aliens</i>	<i>Medians</i>	All
Education	Obligatory	20.9	33.9	69.1	37.8	38.3
	Higher secondary	54.5	49.3	34.4	49.2	47.5
	University degree	24.6	16.8	3.6	13	14.2
		100	100	100	100	100
Interest in politics	Not interested	40.6	41.8	84.6	56.6	57.1
	Interested	59.4	58.2	15.4	43.4	42.9
		100	100	100	100	100
Moment of decisión	While voting	1.6	3.5	23.7	9.9	9.2
	A week before	13.4	9.2	26.8	22.8	18.5
	A few weeks before	13.5	13.3	15.4	17.4	15.4
	Much earlier	71.5	74	34.1	49.9	56.9
		100	100	100	100	100

Table 1. Distribution by type of education, interest in politics and the moment of decision, percentages (Itanes 1996) (Baldassarri & Schadee, 2006).

		<i>Utilius</i>	<i>Amicus</i>	<i>Aliens</i>	<i>Medians</i>	All
Education	Obligatory	43.3	58.3	72.9	53.9	59
	Higher secondary	42.7	31.1	22	36.4	32
	University degree	14	10.6	5.1	9.7	9
		100	100	100	100	100
Interest in politics	Not interested	50.9	62.4	94.1	74	75.2
	Interested	49.1	37.6	5.9	26	24.8
		100	100	100	100	100
Moment of decisión	While voting	1.4	1.8	12	6.3	6.4
	A week before	4.8	5.6	20.5	13.7	13
	A few weeks before	15.4	14.4	22.4	20.2	19.1
	Much earlier	78.5	78.1	45.1	59.8	61.6
		100	100	100	100	100

Table 2. Distribution by type of education, interest in politics and the moment of decision, percentages (Itanes 2001) (Baldassarri & Schadee, 2006).

However, even more interesting for us is to look at the tables on a comparative perspective, so to have an idea of how the Italian electorate shifted on these dimensions in five years, from 1996 to 2001. An overall dramatic decrease in interest in politics has been registered, even in the case of *Utilius* and *Amicus*.

As for the moment of decision, it seems like electoral campaigning in Italy moved towards an even less determinant role, as the percentages of those who decided how to vote much earlier increased in all the four categories. Either their ideology is so firm that it never needs to be put into question, or maybe the heuristics at work are so strong that they do not feel the need to look for other answers than those already found – especially if it means to spend energies in gathering new information.

To conclude, we can say that voting heuristics are various for different voters having different degrees of political expertise. The Italian electorate cannot be conceived as homogeneous, but rather has to be thought of as heterogeneous, at least when thinking of the variables determining voting choices (Bentivegna & Ceccarini, 2013; Gasperoni, 2013; De Sio & Cataldi, 2013; Maraffi, Pedrazzani, & Pinto, 2013). The traditional way of explaining voting behavior through a set of fixed determinants should be put aside, as people tend to follow a wide range of strategies. “Parties, leaders, coalitions and media affect voter behavior, but they have different leverage on different voters” (Baldassarri & Schadee, 2006: 5: 17). So the real question is: in the occasion of the Italian referendum of December 4, 2016, which voter has been influenced by what? And to what extent?

In the next chapter we are going to investigate the shortcuts that influenced voters’ decisions, and we will try to figure out whether different categories of voters were biased because of different heuristics.

CHAPTER THREE

How Italians made up their mind

Not all voters use the same heuristics, and not all heuristics are always used by the same voter. Voters who have not already decided, may simply go for the position taken by the party they feel closest to; or, on the contrary, they may opt for the opposite position to that taken by the party they feel most distant from. Another possibility might be for them to look at leaders' image or traits, and follow the instruction of those they prefer; or even to use trust in government as the parameter to approve or reject what it proposes (Kriesi, 2005). What is for sure is that voting is a tool in the hands of voters, who can use it – whether they are aware of it or not – as a retrospective instrument, giving a negative/positive feedback to governments about their work (Tovar Landa, 2016). And we can hardly imagine a better scenario for Italians to clearly ask Renzi to step back, after the personalization of the referendum took place (see chapter one), which irreversibly tied the destiny of the potential constitutional reform to the future the Italian electorate actually wanted for the Prime Minister and his Cabinet (Ciriaco, 2016).

Unfortunately, heuristics can only be verified by means of experiments, which we cannot carry out in this venue. What we can do, though, is to conduct a secondary analysis of existing data, by looking at those gathered right before December 4 by the CISE (Italian Center for Electoral Studies), through a questionnaire enquiring into Italian voters' opinions and evaluations of certain political leaders, parties, issues, and especially the contents of the reform. Then, by matching them with their vote intention, we can endeavor to investigate which heuristics Italians used in that occasion, and therefore inspect which category is the most frequent among

the profiles of *Utilius*, *Amicus*, *Aliens*, and *Medians* amongst Italians – updated to those days.

1. Research question and hypotheses

Along this line of reasoning, a first expectation would be that a main heuristic used by voters in this context was the approval rating of the government, and more specifically the approval rating of the Head of Government, in both positive and negative direction. That is to say, in casting their votes, voters might be expected to have relied on heuristics such as the dispositional heuristic, focusing on the leader's main traits and supporting or opposing him accordingly, or the similarity heuristic, supporting the leader if they perceive him as similar to their persons and opposing him if perceived as different and distant (Vecchione & Caprara, 2011). Hence, our first hypothesis is that, regardless their positions on the contents of the reform, voters who supported Renzi and wanted him to maintain his position as Prime Minister, tended to vote yes to the reform; voters who opposed Renzi and wanted him to resign from his position as Prime Minister, tended to vote no to the reform.

Proceeding on this line of reasoning, we might expect that those voters who appreciated the traits of leaders who campaigned against the constitutional reform, such as Matteo Salvini of the Northern League or Luigi Di Maio of the Five-Star Movement, were likely to take their stand voting against the reform, and vice versa. And on the other hand, those judging positively a leader like Angelino Alfano – who defined the reform as a chance to change that it would be silly to lose – might be well expected to side with him, and vice versa. Therefore, our second hypothesis is that voters who judged positively leaders or parties supporting the reform tended to vote yes, and vice versa; and voters who judged positively leaders or parties opposing the reform tended to vote no.

Then we might expect some effects of the socio-demographic characteristics and of the geographical area where people live. We are going to investigate the changes in vote intention as the level of education changes, and even more as the type of occupation varies. With this regard we can expect elderly voters, generally supporting the PD, to support this reform as well.

With regard to geography, there are some Italian regions that have historically stood for the left and center-left, and especially Tuscany represents a fertile ground for the Tuscan Prime Minister Matteo Renzi. Therefore, we would expect vote intention to change accordingly, with a higher tendency to favor the reform in those regions.

Finally, a further expectation might be that of a decision dictated by a general feeling of (dis)trust towards system institutions and powers, rather than towards the single leaders; the perception that whatever those from establishment propose, will hardly be in the interest of the whole community, rather than for their own sake; the idea that there is something behind the curtain that common people will never be able to find out, because it is in the interest of the powerful few to frame the powerless many who have no other tool than to vote against them to safeguard themselves. Henceforth, our last hypothesis is that the last shortcut used was related to trust towards institutions and 'high power' (in this specific case, we will look at the European Union). We expect those trusting them, to be more willing to vote yes; and those who do not, to be more willing to vote no.

As a matter of fact, what we are going to do is – rather than directly testing heuristics through experiments – to indirectly test them, by assessing the importance of several factors that have no relationship with the actual content of the reform, and precisely for this reason can be regarded as heuristics.

2. Data and Methodology

For the above hypotheses to be either confirmed or rejected, a survey dataset is needed. As already introduced at the beginning of this chapter, the data used will be those gathered by the CISE, in the lapse of time between October 27 and November 7, 2016, by means of a questionnaire administered to a quota sample of the Italian voting age population composed of roughly 1,500 respondents interviewed through CATI and CAMI (respectively, Computer-Assisted Telephone Interview and Computer-Assisted Mobile Interview).

These data include opinions about several prominent political actors who took a clear stand during the electoral campaign rather than remaining neutral. Furthermore, data revealing how voters answered to some questions are aimed at tracking the levels of trust towards national and supranational institutions and powerful entities. As such, this dataset is particularly apt to conduct our empirical investigation of the outlined hypotheses.

The data analysis will be conducted through the use of cross-tabulations of the vote intention variable with several other variables aimed at identifying the characteristics of those who tended to vote yes and those who tended to vote no at the referendum, ranging from the approval rating of the Renzi government on a scale from *very positive* to *very negative*, to voters' evaluation of some specific statements.

3. Findings

3.1 Vote intention

First and foremost, by just looking at what the vote intention was one month before the day of the referendum, we could form a first opinion about the outline of the Italian electorate. Undoubtedly, data reveal a non-negligible portion of the electorate that could fall either in the category of *Utilius* – or most likely in that of *Amicus*, as we are going to explain more deeply later on in the paragraph. In fact, as the graph below illustrates (Figure 1), 63% of the respondents had already decided what to do on the following December 4. To be more precise, 29% of the respondents declared to be willing to vote yes, against 34% willing to vote no. This would manifest a level of involvement that at least overcome that of an *Aliens* voter.

On the other hand, we can expect the remaining 37% under heading “don’t know/don’t vote” to be representative of a potential *Aliens* section of the Italian electorate, with low or no interest at all in politics, or even consciously rejecting a political reality that does not reflect their values or does not measure up to their expectations.

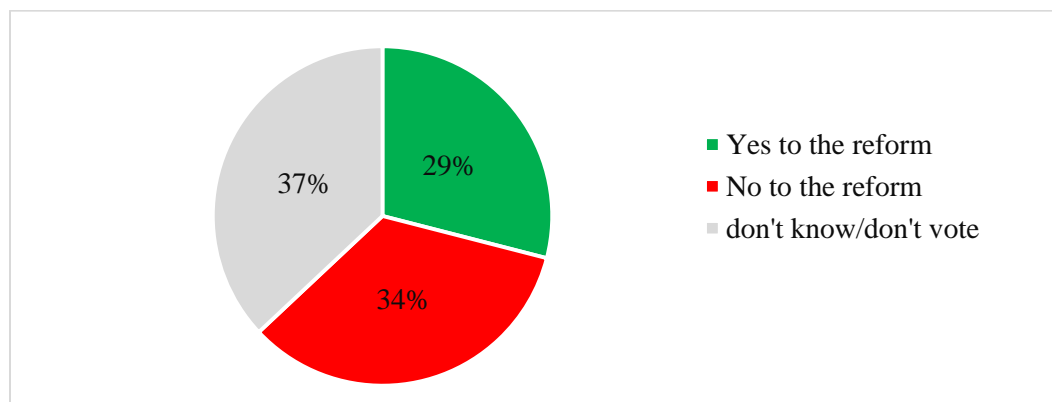


Fig. 1 – Vote intention for the referendum to be held on December 4 (CISE, 2016).

Why did we state that it is more likely for that 63% to be consistent with the *Amicus* paradigm rather than to *Utilius*'? The answer lies in the level of information that the respondents admitted to have. We dwelt at length on the description of those profiles, and pointed out how the decision of *Utilius* is quite a mechanical one, simply consisting in placing people and parties on the left-right axis, and then voting accordingly. It is, in fact, a matter of information.

Conversely, *Amicus* does not need the same amount of expertise, as her choice is only between two competitors and subject to the influence coming from a completely different sphere, which is affection. In other words, it may be enough for *Amicus* to know someone else's position on the issue to establish her own response – given that 'someone' is perceived as either considerably close or significantly distant from her.

3.2 Level of knowledge of the reform

Along this line of reasoning, if we analyze our data, Figure 2 will tell us that 59% of the respondents considered themselves as not at all/not very informed on the contents of the constitutional reform – the same reform that was going to be the object of the referendum. Yet, it is worth reiterating it, 63% of the same sample declared to know how to vote. This means that, best-case scenario, 22% of the respondents formed their opinion on the reform, without knowing the reform (i.e.: percentage of those who knew how to vote [63%] minus that of those affirmed to be informed about the contents of the reform [41%]).

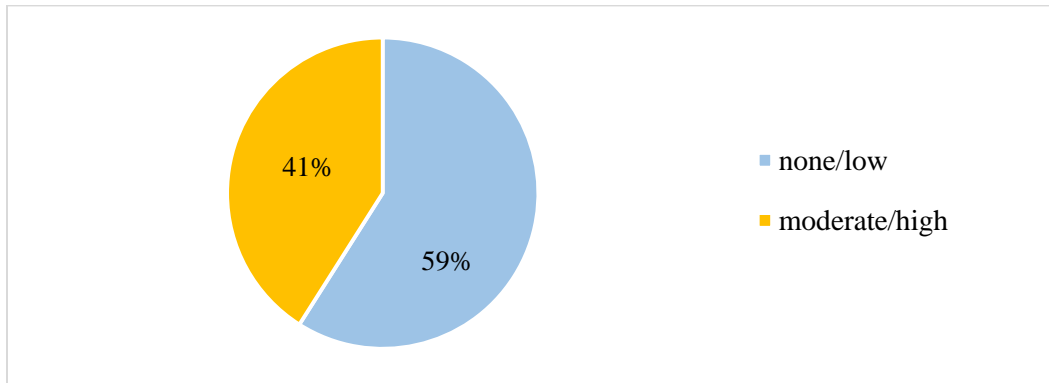


Fig. 2 – Level of knowledge of the constitutional reform (CISE, 2016).

It is the ‘best-case scenario’ for it is not to take for granted that those who declared themselves to be uncertain on how to vote, or decided to abstain, were not actually informed on the contents of the law of constitutional revision. Indeed, it would be absolutely legit to hypothesize that the reason behind that uncertainty or abstention was precisely the knowledge of the text that, by providing for various measures, could comprehend welcome changes as well as unwelcome ones.

It is clear that if that were to be the case, then the percentage of voters who decided how to cast their vote without or before knowing the contents of the reform – if they ever did – would have been even higher than 22%. This would drive us to abandon the idea of a prevalence of *Utilius* voters, and rather head towards the less sophisticated profile of *Amicus* (we will come back to this later).

3.3 Voters’ opinion on the contents of the reform

In this respect, it is interesting to see which was the respondents’ general feedback on the constitutional reform, and that on the individual provisions that the text of the reform envisaged. Starting from the latter, Figure 3 proves that the overall opinion of the respondents over the single provisions *per se* is generally slightly

more positive than negative. In fact, out of seven crucial points of the reform that have been reported to the respondents, only one got a negative judgment, and another one was assessed by half of them as positive and half of them as negative. Respondents disliked the centralization process allowing some important competences to go in the hands of the State rather than of the Regions, and they were perfectly divided on the issue concerning the abolition of Provinces.

As to all the rest, the overall judgment is positive. In particular, the two most appreciated measures, among the remaining five, proved to be those most clearly aiming at accelerating the legislative process. To express it in percentage terms, 57% welcomed the fact that most laws would have been approved by the Chamber of Deputies, without the necessary approval of the Senate as well. And, what is even more resounding, 83% positively judged the provision that would have allowed the government to fix a deadline for the discussion in Parliament for all those provisions considered as a priority in order for its program to be implemented.

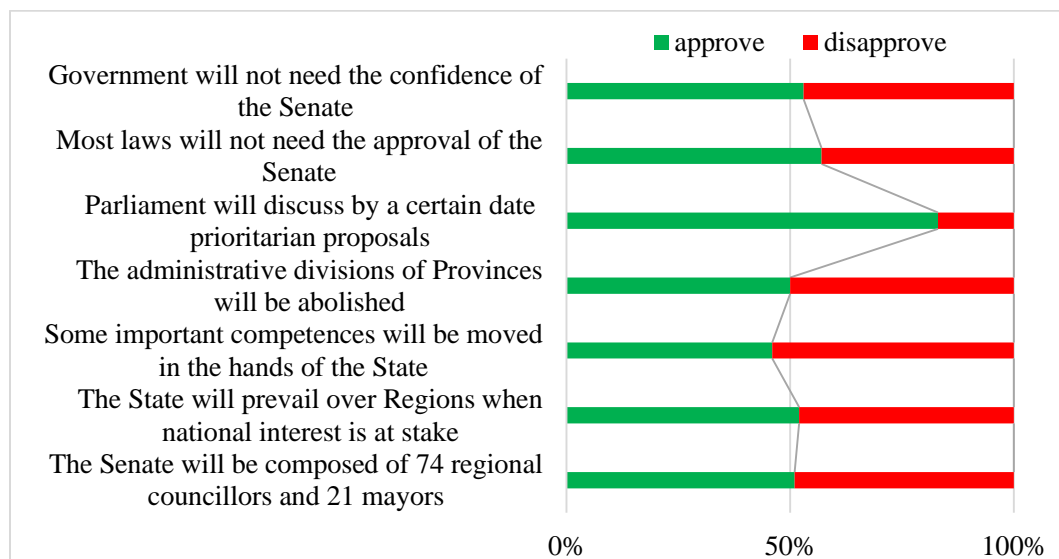


Fig. 3 – Evaluation of seven political measures contained in the reform (CISE, 2016).

3.4 Voters' opinion on the reform as a whole

Now it comes the interesting part – the evaluation of the reform as a whole. For one may expect, after having looked at Figure 3, that the respondents who affirmed to like the constitutional reform were more than those who denied it. Again, it is not the case, as lucidly showed by Figure 4. As a matter of fact, the percentage of those who negatively evaluated the reform as a whole was higher than that of those who positively did it (i.e.: 52% the former, 48% the latter).

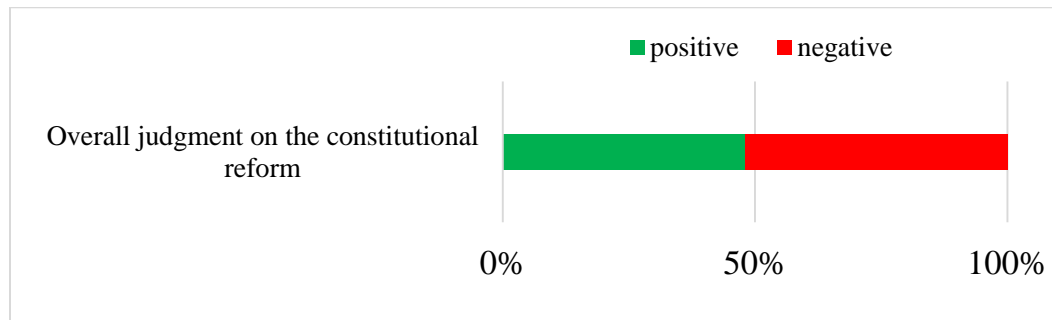


Fig. 4 – Evaluation of the constitutional reform as a whole (CISE, 2016).

What these data tell us is that the negative opinion that many voters formed about the constitutional reform was either entirely based on those one or two elements of the reform they disliked and to which they gave a higher weight with respect to the rest, or it was based on something completely different from the internal provisions, that is an external determinant influencing their judgment independently from the contents they might have agreed with – again, if that they ever read it. Which would definitely explain and justify Matteo Renzi's insistence on reiterating and repeating the contents of the reform – strategy that did not work anyway with more than half of the electorate, at least until one month before the day of the referendum (D'Alimonte, 2016).

3.5 Voters' opinion on the Renzi government

Thus, which were the cognitive shortcuts voters took in order to form a personal opinion and take a stand with regard to the reform? Firstly, their opinion of Matteo Renzi and his Cabinet. Only 1% of the respondents said to have a *very positive* opinion of the government, but 34% rated it as *quite positive*. On the other side though, percentages are higher: 36% judged it as *quite negative* and 25% as *very negative* (Fig. 5). To sum up, an overall positive judgment only for 35% of the respondents, against an overall negative opinion for 61%. Moreover, the last two percentages are not that far from the final result of the referendum (see chapter one).

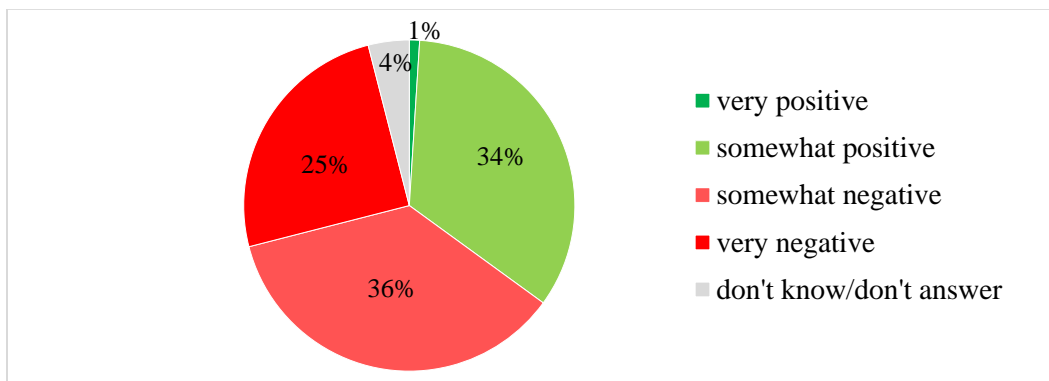


Fig. 5 – Evaluation of the Renzi government. Answer to the question: “After almost three years of its activity, how is your opinion on the government?” (CISE, 2016).

3.6 Vote intention for future political elections

Secondly, their opinion of other political leaders and the parties they represent. As we can see from Figure 6, the effect of an opposition campaigning against the reform is as clear as that of those who campaigned in favor. Of those who mentioned the PD (Renzi's party) as the political party they would most likely vote for in the future elections, 76% would also vote in favor of the reform. As to

the NCD-UDC, the percentage of yes is still over 70%; here the political referent to have in mind is Angelino Alfano (see chapter one, par. 4).

On the opposition side, we have to look at percentages of respondents willing to vote no. We notice that the percentages are a little less significant than the previous ones, but still high. The highest is that reached by the Five-Star Movement (63%). Next are Giorgia Meloni's party, FDI (59%), the left-parties SI-SEL (58%), and the Northern League of Matteo Salvini (54%).

As to Berlusconi's party, Forza Italia, data reflect a significant amount of voters who said to be still uncertain or willing to abstain, perhaps mirroring a perceived indecisiveness or vacillation in Berlusconi's change of position over time.

However, these data make it evident the role parties played in the decision-making process of voters, towards the referendum (D'Alimonte, 2016).

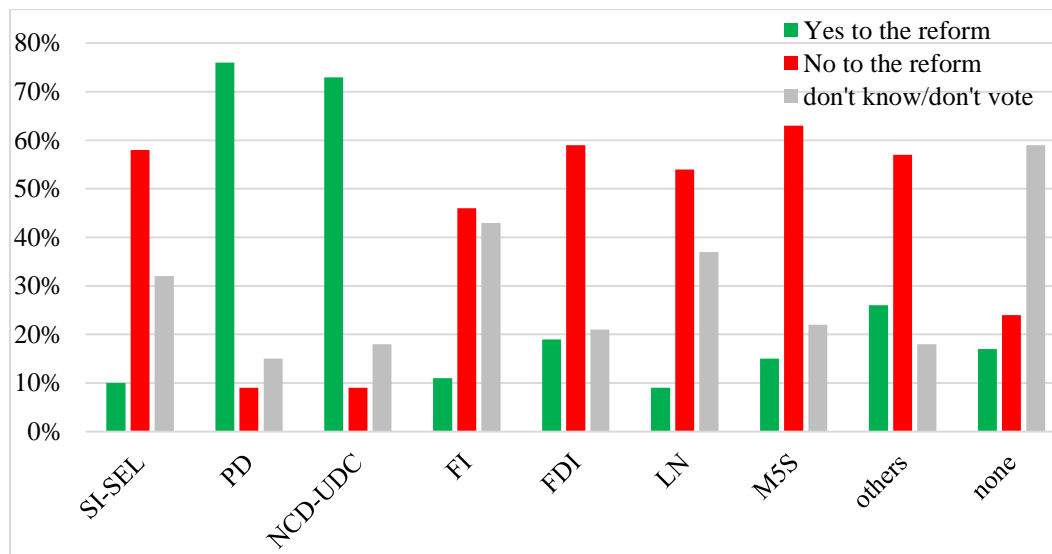


Fig. 6 – Vote intention for the referendum for voters of different parties (CISE, 2016).

So far we might say to have found support to our hypotheses concerning the influence of voters' opinion on the Renzi government and other political actors.

Actually, we are neither using an experimental design, nor including an appropriate set of control variables, which makes these effects we are outlining potentially spurious. However, our findings are clearly indicative of the relevance of non-content factor; also, later on in the chapter we will perform more rigorous tests based on regression analysis.

What about voters' socio-demographic characteristics? Did they affect their decision? We will start by looking at their age; then we will move to their level of education and their occupation; finally, we will take a look at the geography, that has always played a crucial role in Italian history of politics, and we will see that this case is no exception.

3.7 Age

As illustrated by the Figure 7, the tendency to vote yes increases as the age goes up. In fact, the lowest percentage for those willing to vote in favor of the reform is that registered among young voters, whose age is between 18 and 29 years. Only 19% of them declared to be willing to go to the polls to vote yes. The percentage increases up to 24% for those falling in the category of 30–44 years old; to 27% for the 45–54 years old; and 28% for those being from 55 to 64 years old. Among these last three mentioned categories, there is not much difference.

The remarkable rise is the one registered for the oldest section of the electorate, namely voters who are 65 or more years old; which was not a negative element for the Prime Minister, as this is exactly the section of voters who more often turn out to vote; on the other hand, though, it means that Matteo Renzi's plan for generational change did not guarantee that he would get the vote from the youngest generations (D'Alimonte, 2016). Therefore, the older the voter, the higher the tendency to vote yes.

Au contraire, when it comes to voting no, the elderly manifest the lowest percentage, that is 25%. As we move towards younger voters, the percentage rises; 32% for the category 55–64 and 34% for the 45–54 – these two being quite similar to one another, as in the previous case.

However, the most determined voters in contrasting the reform with a negative vote are adults between 30 and 44 years old, for whom we have a percentage of 44%. In this case the youngest voters buck the trend, registering a lower percentage (36%).

It is worth noticing that it is precisely this young category (18–29) the one which collected the highest amount of uncertain and willing-to-abstain voters (45%).

Henceforth we can conclude that the younger the voter, the higher the tendency to vote no at the referendum, the only exception being the youngest voters, who still registered the second-highest percentage in this sense.

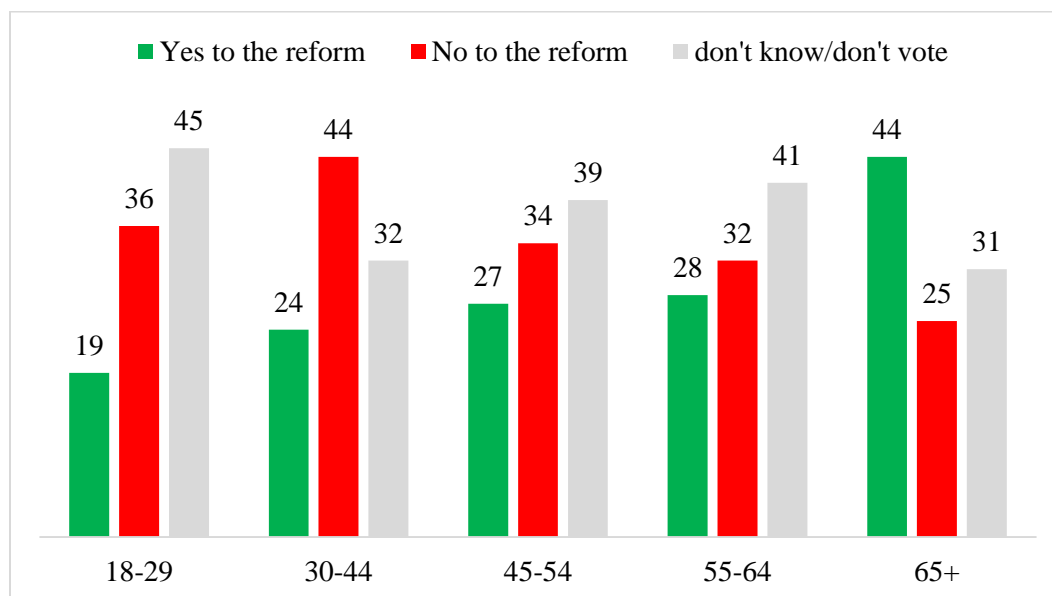


Fig. 7 – Vote intention for voters of different age (CISE, 2016).

3.8 Level of education

With regard to their level of education, Figure 8 reveals a certain trend, which is manifested far more clearly among those willing to vote no rather than yes. As the percentages demonstrate, the highest willingness to vote no is placed at the highest levels of education: 41% of voters who graduated at university and 39% of voters holding a degree from a high school program of four or five years, respectively with an 11 and 10-point lead on the yes faction, for the same categories (Cataldi, 2016).

As we shift towards lower levels of education, the percentage of those willing to vote against the constitutional reform decreases, up to 24% for those voters having no qualification at all or an elementary school diploma. As to voters falling into this category, 35% of them declared to be willing to vote in favor. This may reflect, to some extent, the vote intention of at least a portion of the very oldest Italian voters, part of which can easily be imagined to be born in a historical period when education was not as accessible as it happened to be in the last few decades.

As to the most uncertain voters and those most willing to abstain, we have those voters only holding a secondary school diploma (44%), immediately followed by those with an elementary school qualification or no qualification at all (40%).

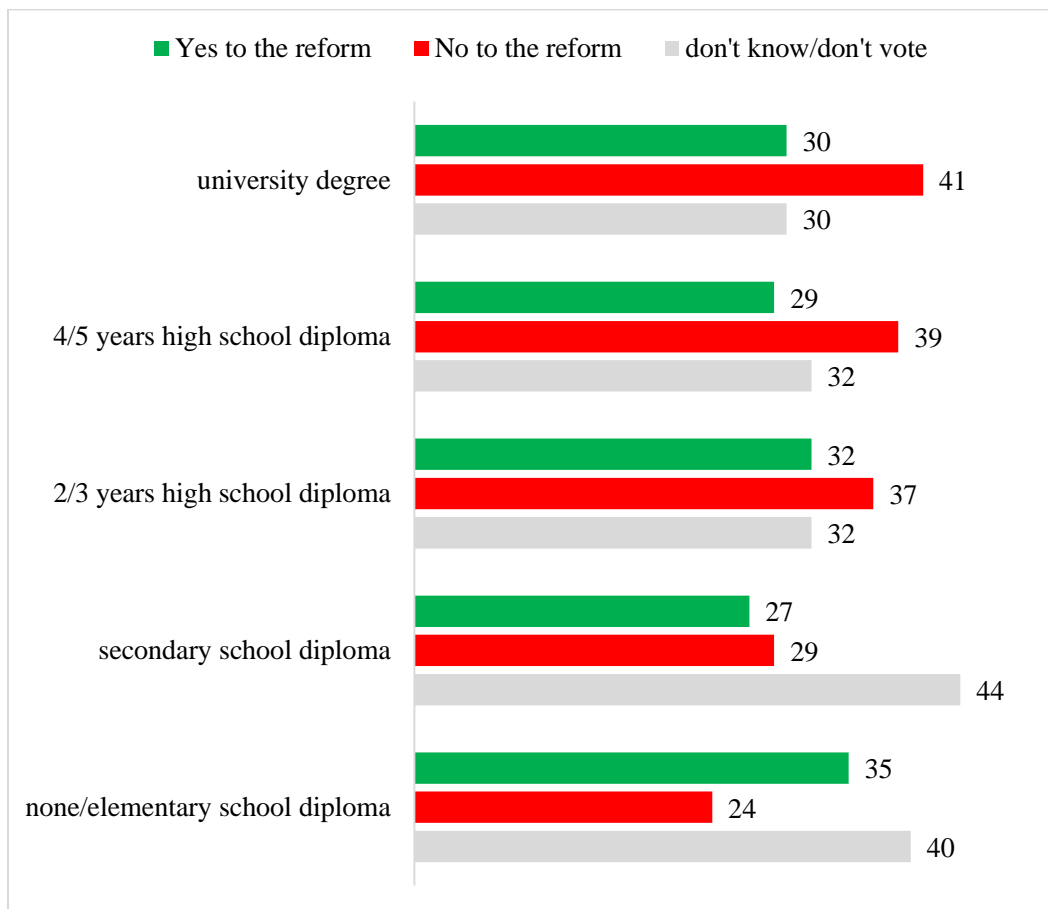


Fig. 8 – Vote intention for voters with different levels of education (CISE, 2016).

3.9 Type of occupation

Before looking at how different occupations tended to lead to different voting behavior, a brief introduction needs to be done with respect to the transformation of Italian voters' preferences based on their occupation. During the First Republic the cleavage was clear between workers and bourgeoisie, the first voting for left-wing parties (PCI and PSI, namely Italian Communist and Socialist Parties), the second for right-wing parties (PLI and MSI, namely Italian Liberal Party and Italian Social Movement). During the Second Republic the working class started voting for right-wing parties, and the clear difference started fading; until Berlusconi's rise, that turned it into something new: a new division between

employees, who tended to vote for left-wing parties, and the petite bourgeoisie (small entrepreneurs and independent traders), voting for the center-right (Emanuele, 2016).

In 2013 though, we assisted to the rise of the Five-Star Movement, a crosscutting party that happened to be the most voted in all the categories, from workers to bourgeoisie, both in the public and in the private sector. The new – ongoing – division seems to be that between voters with an active occupation, voting for M5S, and voters without it, voting for PD (retired people, housewives, and students), center-right parties – especially Berlusconi's FI (housewives), and eventually M5S (students) (Emanuele & Maggini, 2015; Emanuele, 2016).

Now we can examine Figure 9. It maps the vote intention based on the type of occupation. The highest points in the graph we see are those representing the amount of uncertain and willing-to-abstain voters among workers and housewives (52%), to which we shall add 38% of students. It may be interpreted as a process of alienation, although, on the other side of the coin, it might have represented for those campaigning the occasion to try to mobilize them, gain their votes and maybe determine the outcome of the referendum.

Immediately after that, we notice that almost half of the unemployed (49%) was willing to vote no, against only 14% willing to vote yes – they are the least willing category to support the reform project. Unemployed people are usually those most thirsty for change, and although the constitutional reform would have brought some significant change in Italy, probably the only desired renovation for them at that point in history was the removal of the men who had been governing for three years and could be regarded as the cause – or at least the missed solution – to their problems.

Among those opposing to the reform we have, then, 46% of the bourgeoisie, 42% of employees in the public sector, and 41% of employees in the private-sector.

As to the yes faction, the only outstanding percentage is – as expected – that of the retired section of the population, with a good 45%.

Therefore, it is clear the scheme introduced in 2013. And it shall not be surprising, as notwithstanding the particular nature of this vote (it is a referendum, not an ordinary election), this is a further proof of the fact that it was perceived as a vote in favor or against the Prime Minister Matteo Renzi and his Cabinet. (Emanuele, 2016).

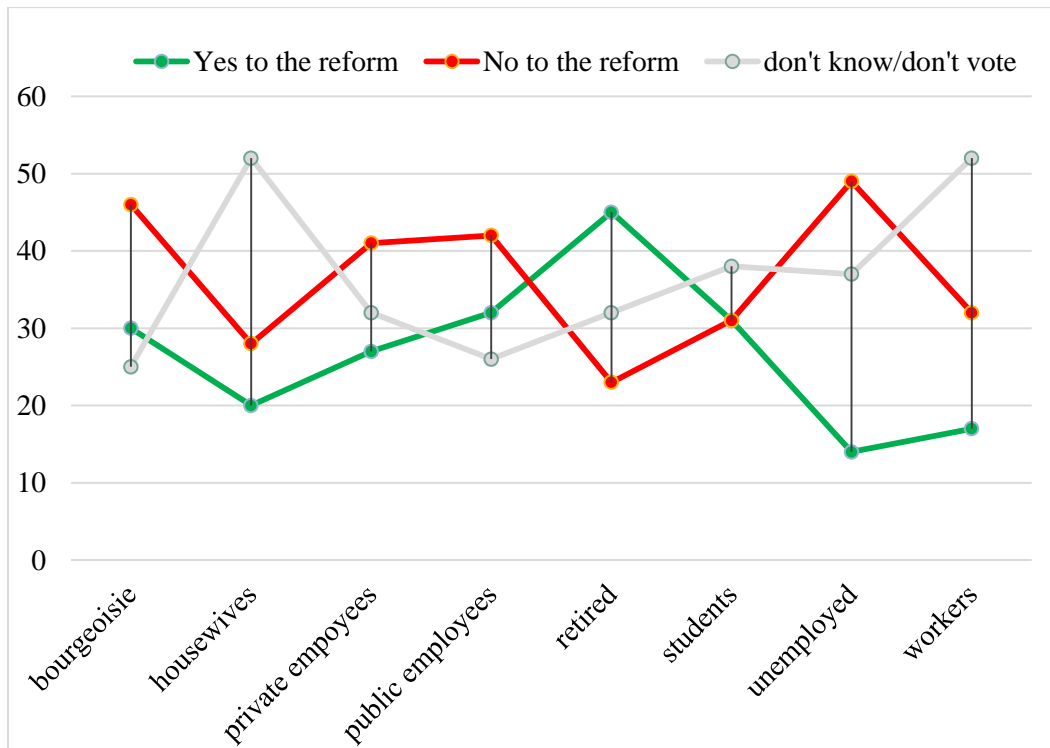


Fig. 9 – Vote intention for voters with different occupation (CISE, 2016).

3.10 Geopolitical zone

Given these trends, a potential (and good) question might be whether they are maintained across the country, or they tend to change as we move from one area to another. To this respect, we are going to divide Italy into three parts, which for

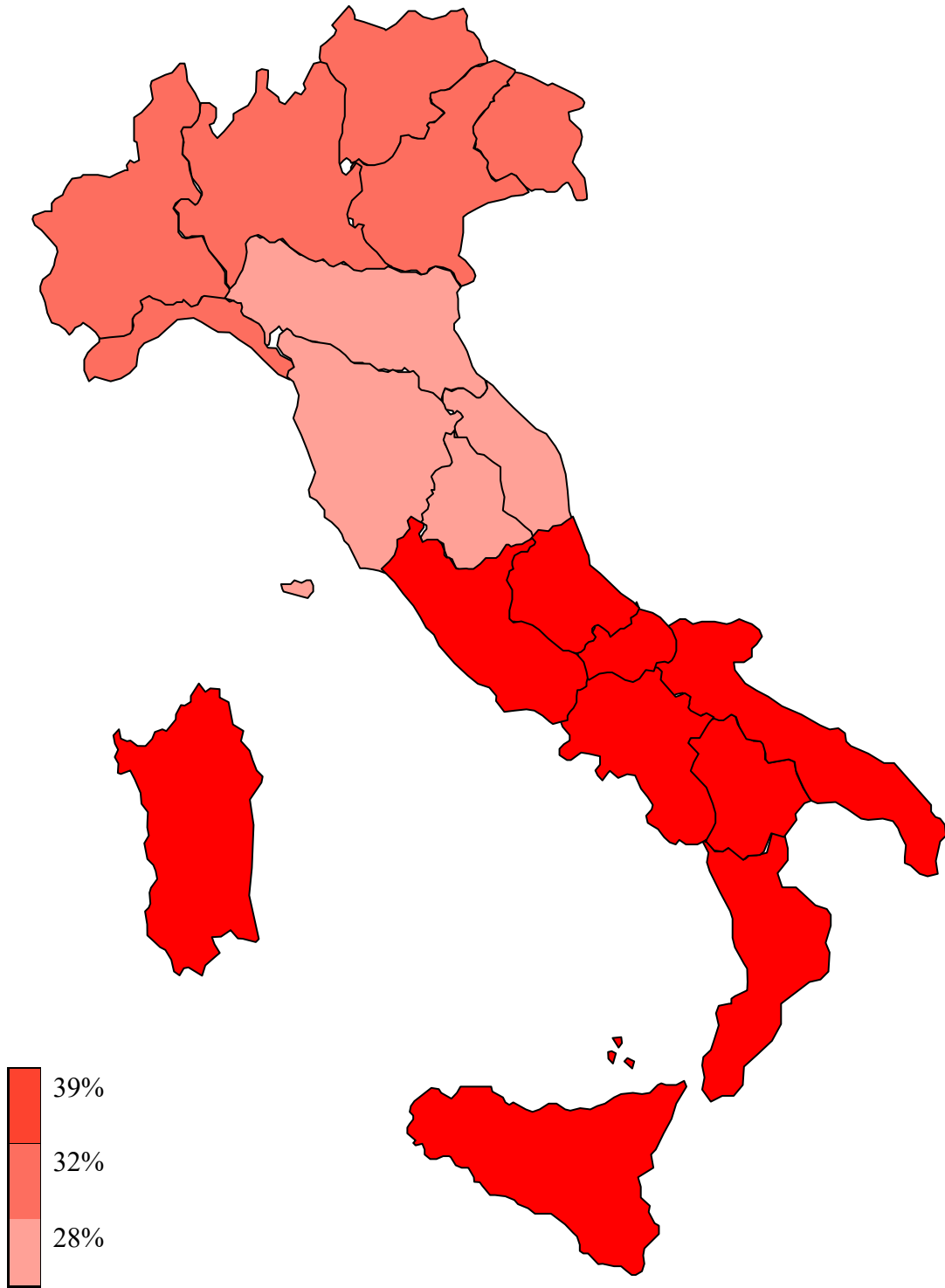
reasons of political significance are not going to be North, Centre and South, but something slightly different – namely, North, Red Zone, and South.

The Red Zone includes four regions: Emilia-Romagna, Marche, Tuscany, and Umbria; the North, seven regions: Aosta Valley, Piedmont, Liguria, Lombardy, South Tyrol Trentino, Veneto, and Friuli Venezia Giulia; the South nine regions: Lazio, Abruzzo, Molise, Campania, Apulia, Basilicata, Calabria, Sicily, and Sardinia.

As Figure 10.1 illustrates, the highest concentration of votes in favor of the reform is in the Red Zone. Here we have 36%, followed by a 32% in the North and 25% in the South. As to the intention to vote no (Fig. 10.2), the North stays with the percentage of 32%, while the Red Zone and the South change significantly: 28% for the former, against 39% for the latter. In other words, the ‘No’ was ahead in the South more than the ‘Yes’ was in the Red Zone. Figure 10.3 maps all voters who were still uncertain at the moment of asking, or who had already decided to abstain, more concentrated in the North than in the South of Italy.



Tab. 10.1 – Voters willing to vote yes to the reform by the geopolitical zone they live in (CISE, 2016).



Tab. 10.2 – Voters willing to vote no to the reform by the geopolitical zone they live in (CISE, 2016).



Tab. 10.3 – Voters who were uncertain or willing to abstain by the geopolitical zone they live in (CISE, 2016).

Given the level of politicization of the Red Zone, it is not surprising that they were more willing to vote yes than any other geopolitical zone in Italy. However, it is worth investigating more on the different stands taken in the North and in the South, and examine more in depth the behavior of southern voters in comparison to those in the North.

To this purpose, we may look at Table 3, mapping the vote intention of voters belonging to six relevant categories, both in the North and in the South. Starting with the first category, we have the electorate of M5S. If in the North 26% of them is willing to vote yes, in the South they are only 12%; for the no, instead, this percentage increases dramatically up to 66% in the South, while in the North it lays around 53%.

Another remarkable category is the last one, referring to employees in the private sector. In the North we have 34% of them willing to favor the reform, against 27% willing to oppose it. As to the South, the situation is more radicalized, with only 22% willing to vote yes and 56% willing to vote no.

Also in the other five categories, the pattern is quite similar. The difference between the South and the North for both the vote intentions is of 12 percentage points on average, the only outliers being a difference of only 7 percentage points among the employees in the public sector who wanted to vote no, and – what is even more interesting – a difference of 21 percentage points among students willing to vote yes in the North (47%) and students willing to do it in the South (26%).

In brief, living in the Red Zone and in the North rather than in the South led to an increase in the probability to vote yes. On the contrary, living in the South implied a general tendency to prefer the opposite alternative.

	M5S voters		18–29		students		housewives		public employees		private employees	
	North	South	North	South	North	South	North	South	North	South	North	South
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	26	12	28	17	47	26	25	17	39	45	34	22
No	53	66	30	43	26	36	25	34	38	45	27	56
None	21	22	42	40	28	39	49	50	22	30	39	22
Tot	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Tab. 3 – Vote intention in the North and in the South for some categories of voters (CISE, 2016; Paparo, 2016). “None” indicates those who declared to be willing to abstain or who were still uncertain on how to vote.

3.11 Voters’ opinion on Italian membership in the European Union

The last variable we wanted to introduce is the perception of institutions. One of the questions present in the questionnaire was related to the European Union. More specifically, the respondents were asked to give an opinion about the Italy being a member of the Union. As Figure 12 illustrate, the anti-Europeanism is a clear ingredient for a component of the electorate opposing the reform. In fact, data reveals that only 11% of respondents willing to vote yes also affirmed that being part of the European Union was bad for Italy. Instead, 52% of those willing to vote no made this statement. Among those who were not sure whether it was a good or a bad thing, still those willing to vote no were the majority. Whereas the trend is completely inverted if we look at those who consider the membership of Italy in the European Union as a positive thing for the country. Here, only 24% declared to be willing to oppose the reform, while 43% said to be willing to go casting their vote in favor.

The reason why we wanted to open this parenthesis is the situation that Western democracies have been recently going through. The anti-establishment atmosphere that has been concretized through the victory of Brexit in the United Kingdom and of Trump in the United States, occurred in Italy, too – although in disguise. The anti-Europeanism present in more than half of the respondents opposed to the reform is a sign of an anti-establishment sentiment that might have guided their decision towards a vote of protest (Maggini, 2016). This is interesting, as it shows the spectacular effect of a variable that definitely has nothing to do with the contents of the reform.

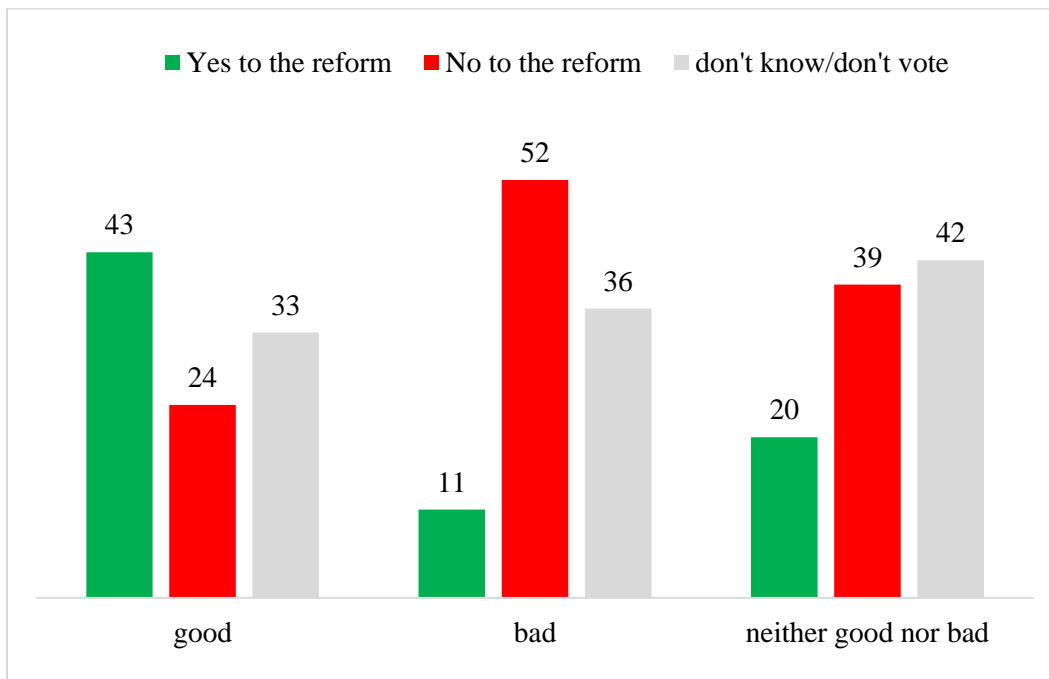


Fig. 11 – Vote intention based on judgment on Italian membership in EU (i.e.: whether respondents considered it a good thing, a bad thing, or neither a good nor a bad thing) (CISE, 2016).

3.12 Binary logistic regression

So far, we have proved that all those factors that we considered as potentially determinant did affect the vote decision, although to different extent. Now, the best way to understand what that extent was is by means of a regression (Tab. 4).

In fact, since the analysis conducted so far allowed us to take into consideration generally one or two variables at time, that was useful to see the effect of those variables in absolute terms, that is, taken out of context and without any causal interpretation.

What we are now going to do is to take the variables we have been using in this chapter all at once, to see what are those most affecting the vote choice of millions of Italians for the constitutional referendum.

Looking at Table 4, what this regression reveals is that among the determinants we identified, those who are actually the most influencing are: voters' judgment of Matteo Renzi; voters' inclination in terms of vote choice with respect to future elections; their collocation in the Italian peninsula; and their position in the debate on Euroscepticism.

		β coefficient	p-value
Gender:	Male	0	(.)
	Female	0.226	(0.314)
Positive judgment of the leader Matteo Renzi		-3.256***	(0.000)
Vote choice in future election:	PD	0	(.)
	SEL-SI	2.849***	(0.000)
	NCD-UDC	2.021*	(0.016)
	FI	2.008***	(0.000)
	FDI	1.437*	(0.023)
	LN	1.969***	(0.000)
	Other parties	2.681**	(0.003)
	Abstain	1.574***	(0.000)
Age		0.0138	(0.203)
Level of education:	None/elementary school	0	(.)
	Secondary school	0.811	(0.187)
	2-3 years high school	-0.209	(0.764)
	4-5 years high school	0.292	(0.617)
	University degree	0.619	(0.303)
	Retired	0	(.)
	Workers	0.541	(0.284)
	Private employees	0.370	(0.403)
	Public employees	0.0331	(0.938)
	Unemployed	0.149	(0.774)
	Students	0.379	(0.555)
Geopolitical zone:	North	-0.639**	(0.006)
	Red Zone	-0.669*	(0.023)
	South	0	(.)
Italian membership in the EU is a good thing		-1.166***	(0.000)
Constant		-0.505	(0.622)
Observations		1003	
Pseudo R^2		0.532	

p-values in parentheses; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Tab. 4 – Patterns of the vote at the referendum: binary logistic regression with vote intention as dependent variable (No to the reform = 1) (CISE, 2016).

Here we see the effects of the heuristics we were looking for. It is not surprising that the most significant one is the opinion that voters had of the Prime Minister Matteo Renzi. We have discussed this option at length in the previous chapters.

3.13 Concluding remarks

What we have not discussed yet – and it is interesting to see it now, with all the information absorbed throughout this chapter – is if there was an embryonic difference between the intention to vote yes and the intention to vote no. Particularly, if those who wanted to vote yes tended to take less into account their opinion of the Prime Minister and looked more at the contents of the reform; or, vice versa, if those who wanted to vote no behaved like that.

What we want to demonstrate with the help of these two last Figures (Fig. 12 and Fig. 13) is that there was actually no such difference.

Figure 12 clearly shows how in both cases – among those willing to vote yes and among those willing to vote no – the gap between those who were informed about the contents of the reform and those who were not sticks around 5 percentage points. A completely different thing might be said for those willing to abstain or uncertain on how to vote, whose amount dramatically increases as the level of knowledge of the reform decreases. Here, either they preferred not to take a stand without a sound and proper amount of information, or they shall be regarded simply as *Aliens* voters, as disinterested in going to vote as they are in collecting information about political affairs.

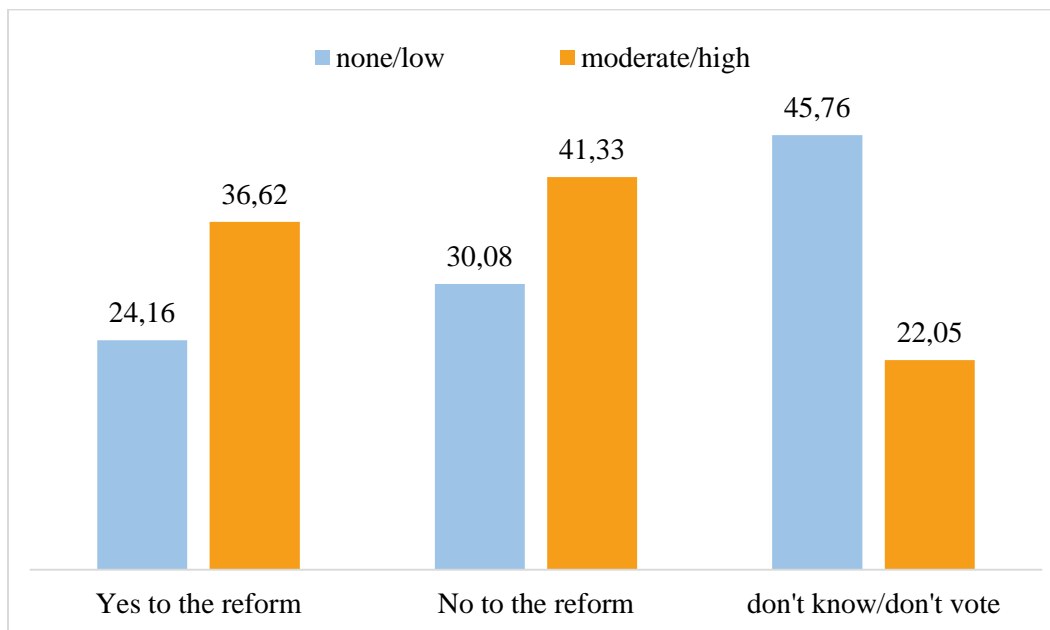


Fig. 12 – Vote intention based on the level of knowledge of the constitutional reform (CISE 2016).

Finally, Figure 13 gives us a further proof to what we have been dealing with from the very beginning of this research. It confirms that those who called this referendum “*renzerendum*” were right across the board.

If it is true – as we think it is – that many of those who planned to vote against the reform wanted to use their vote as a vote of protest, yet one may argue that those who planned to vote yes voted in favor of the contents of the reform rather than in favor of the man who was behind it.

Well, Figure 13 is placed here to show that it can hardly be the case, and indeed claim that most voters on both sides derived their vote intention from the personal opinion they already had of Matteo Renzi; and, as a consequence, that those who had a positive opinion of him, tended to be more willing to vote yes rather than no to the reform, while those who had a negative opinion of him, tended to be more incline to vote no rather than yes.

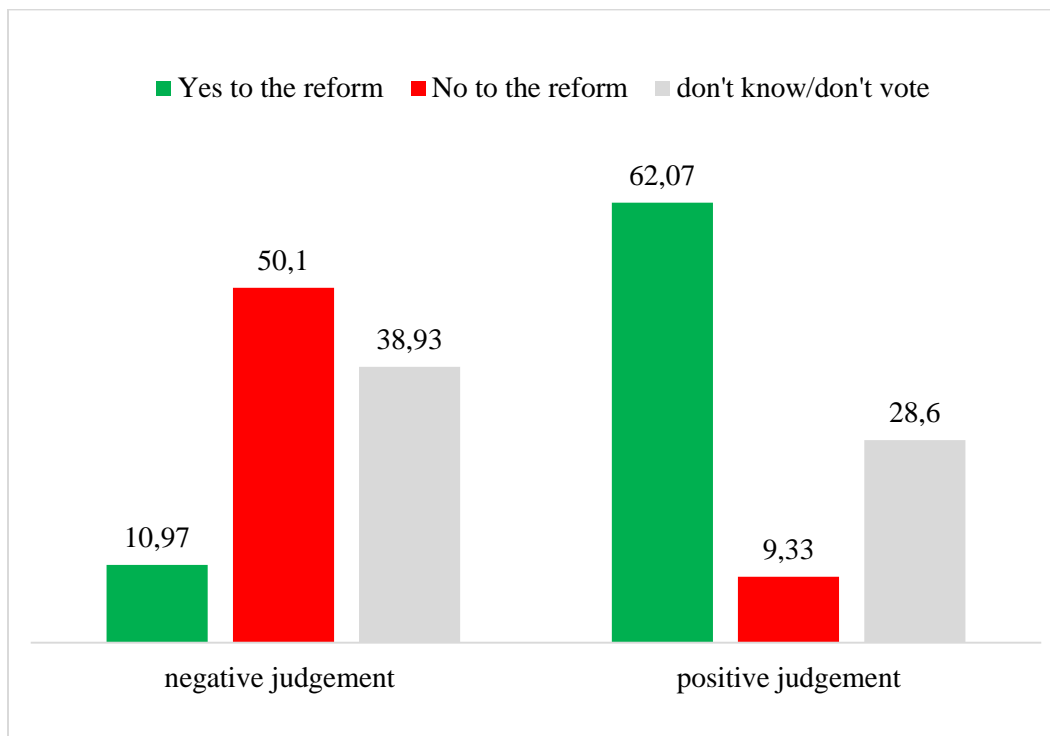


Fig. 13 – Vote intention based on the judgment on the Renzi government (CISE 2016).

CONCLUSION

Social psychologists have shown that when it comes to decision-making our brain works out a solution in the most efficient way (Kahneman, 2011). Empirical research on voting behavior has clearly proved that, even if there is something at stake so important that deciding without gathering the proper amount of information would be too risky, voters often happen to decide out of cognitive shortcuts (Kahneman, 2011). Heuristics help us take decisions when we would not know which path to choose, or when we just want to avoid choosing because we fear to end up in cognitive dissonances or affecting discomfort in the case we were to contrast with the vision of a leader or a party or a friend, whose ideas and positions tended to be similar to ours and we do not want to detach too much from (Baldassarri, 2005). Inconvenient as it might sound, the objects of our voting choices are not exception to this rule.

That leaders' personality and perception represent one of the main voting shortcuts for voters, is true worldwide, from the United States to India (Jacobson, 2007; Garzia & Viotti, 2012; Vaishnav, 2015). What was new in the 2016 Italian constitutional referendum was the strong personalization of a national event of that magnitude, that legitimized the decision of voters to choose not necessarily according to their position towards the reform – if they ever had any – but eventually basing their decision on the opinion they already had of the man who was proposing it – or of other political actors who campaign in favor or against it.

It was not System 2 driving voters to decision of rejecting the reform proposed by the Renzi government. System 1 was the one who led the majority of voter to use

the vote at the referendum as a tool to answer something that the referendum question did not ask, making someone turn their vote into a sanctioning tool.

If we put this into a framework of general trust or distrust towards the establishment and the political elite, we might have enough elements to understand the choice of both the many Italian voters who voted yes as well as the many (more) others who voted no.

What might be interesting to further investigation is the level of similarity or discrepancy between these data and those gathered after December 4, where vote intention is replaced by vote decision. Both in case of absolute similarity as in case of huge discrepancies between the two datasets, interesting analysis could be conducted on the way the electoral campaign was managed during the last few weeks before December 4, and the level of involvement of voters as the decision date was closer.

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ABSTRACT

CAPITOLO UNO

Cronaca di una riforma annunciata

Le democrazie del periodo successivo alla seconda guerra mondiale sono fondate sulla democrazia rappresentativa. Tuttavia, gli strumenti della democrazia diretta sono oggi guardati con interesse notevole, tanto che agli inizi del terzo millennio si è raggiunta una quota annuale media superiore ai cento referendum nazionali nel mondo (Linder, 2007).

Il 4 dicembre 2016, gli italiani sono stati chiamati a votare in occasione di un referendum costituzionale. La riforma costituzionale, presentata dal governo Renzi, ha mobilitato gli italiani come non succedeva dal referendum del 1993, quando l'affluenza superò addirittura il 75%. Infatti, lo scorso dicembre, più del 65% degli italiani aventi diritto al voto si è recato alle urne. Per essere precisi, di 50.773.284 elettori, 33.244.258 hanno votato (il 65.47%). Di loro, il 54.12% ha votato contro la proposta di revisione costituzionale, che di conseguenza non è entrata in vigore (Ministero dell'Interno, Elezioni 2016).

Quale ragione si cela dietro ad una così alta affluenza?

Il fatto stesso che si trattasse di un referendum costituzionale potrebbe essere considerato una spiegazione plausibile al fatto che gli elettori si siano sentiti più coinvolti del solito. Specialmente in un paese come l'Italia, in cui la Costituzione è vista da molti come lo spartiacque tra il periodo nero del fascismo e l'era luminosa della democrazia. D'altra parte, la stessa osservazione potrebbe essere fatta relativamente al referendum costituzionale del 2006, quando l'affluenza, però, non raggiunse neanche il 55%.

Dobbiamo, dunque, supporre che questo referendum abbia rappresentato per l'elettorato italiano qualcosa che dieci anni fa non era in gioco. Qual è il valore aggiunto che ha reso questo specifico referendum diverso da tutti i precedenti, finanche quelli che si sarebbero potuti ritenere simili dal punto di vista contenutistico?

Secondo le scienze comportamentali, quando in ballo c'è qualcosa di importante, l'essere umano è disposto ad intraprendere anche faticosi processi decisionali. Raccogliere informazioni in vista di una scelta da fare in un futuro prossimo è un esempio di processo decisionale faticoso (Kahneman, 2011). Dall'altro lato, quando il nostro cervello sente il bisogno di optare per l'alternativa meno faticosa, si affida alle euristiche, altresì note come scorciatoie cognitive, che ci evitano il lavoro di ricerca delle informazioni mirato ad una scelta sicura (Kahneman, 2011). Potrebbe sembrare un comportamento quantomeno inappropriato, specialmente se visto in relazione all'atto di votare; ci aspetteremmo che gli elettori – inclusi noi stessi – facessero del voto un uso responsabile, indipendentemente dall'energia richiesta perché questo avvenga. Sfortunatamente le scelte di voto non sono l'eccezione che conferma la regola.

La tesi è strutturata come segue: il primo capitolo illustrerà i contenuti principali della riforma e il contesto storico in cui è calata, delineando le fasi che hanno portato al referendum; il secondo capitolo si dedicherà alla letteratura sul comportamento politico e più specificamente sul funzionamento delle euristiche; nel terzo capitolo svilupperemo alcune ipotesi, introdurremo i dati e la metodologia usata ed esporremo i risultati principali della nostra ricerca. Infine, una conclusione riassumerà i risultati, suggerendo eventuali quesiti per la ricerca futura.

Il disegno di legge costituzionale C.2613–D (riforma del Senato e Titolo V), meglio noto come ‘ddl Boschi’ o ‘riforma Renzi-Boschi’, è stato approvato dal Parlamento e pubblicato sulla Gazzetta Ufficiale n. 88 il 15 aprile 2016. Nel testo della riforma possiamo rilevare una dicotomia, rappresentata da una *pars destruens*, consistente nel superamento del bicameralismo paritario, e una seconda parte fondata su cinque pilastri principali (Olivetti, 2016).

Il primo pilastro è il nuovo Senato, concepito come una camera delle autonomie, composto da 74 consiglieri regionali, 21 sindaci e 5 senatori nominati dal Presidente della Repubblica (più eventuali senatori a vita). Il secondo pilastro è la competenza legislativa del nuovo Senato, che sarebbe rimasto in possesso della capacità di avviare il processo legislativo solo per alcune tipologie di leggi e in tutti gli altri casi si sarebbe trasformato più in una classica *Upper House* dalla natura consultiva. Il terzo pilastro è la riforma del Titolo V, consistente in una redistribuzione delle competenze tra Stato e Regioni. Il quarto consiste in una serie di misure atte a rafforzare il governo e garantirgli una maggiore stabilità. Il quinto pilastro, infine, consiste nel taglio ai costi della politica.

La necessità di una riforma costituzionale non è recente. Dal 1948 ben dodici leggi di revisione costituzionale sono passate e la struttura del Parlamento è stata una spada di Damocle sulle teste dei politici italiani per decenni. Entrata nell’agenda politica all’inizio degli anni ‘80, innumerevoli commissioni si sono succedute nel corso delle Legislature (dalla IX alla XVII), ognuna corrispondente ad un nuovo tentativo di modificare la Costituzione non andato a buon fine (Fusaro, 2016).

L’ultimo di questi tentativi è proprio la riforma Renzi-Boschi, il cui concepimento può essere datato 18 gennaio 2014, giorno del patto del Nazareno. Altre tappe importanti sono l’8 aprile 2014, data in cui il ddl Boschi è entrato in Parlamento, e il 12 aprile 2016, data in cui è stato finalmente approvato dopo un processo durato

due anni: Come era prevedibile, il testo ne è uscito emendato e le opposizioni hanno spesso preferito uscire dalle rispettive aule piuttosto che restare e votare (“L’iter della riforma”, 2016).

Tra le figure più note (e presumibilmente più influenti) dell’opposizione, ricordiamo il Movimento 5 Stelle, la Lega Nord con Salvini, Forza Italia con Parisi e Berlusconi – anche se non da subito (“Si rompe il patto del Nazareno”, 2015), Fratelli d’Italia con la Meloni; e poi ancora Massimo D’Alema, Mario Monti, Gianfranco Fini, Nichi Vendola e Giuseppe Civati. A combattere sul versante opposto, oltre al Partito Democratico (in una formazione tutt’altro che compatta), Giorgio Napolitano, Il Nuovo Centrodestra con Angelino Alfano, Pier Ferdinando Casini, Romano Prodi; ma anche Denis Verdini e Flavio Tosi (Micocci, 2016). In particolare Prodi, a pochi giorni dal voto, ha invitato gli italiani a riportare l’attenzione all’oggetto del referendum e votare la riforma anziché il futuro del governo Renzi (“Referendum, Prodi”, 2016).

Non è un caso, infatti, che questo referendum sia stato rinominato *renzerendum*. L’impostazione della campagna elettorale condotta dall’ex Premier ha, infatti, fatto sì che il focus degli elettori non fosse tanto sui contenuti della proposta di revisione costituzionale, quanto sul destino del governo in carica. Come rivelato da analisi condotte su piattaforme online, le citazioni legate alla persona di Renzi (ad esempio: *matteorenzi* o *matteorisponde*) sono decisamente più numerose di quelle legate alla scelta di voto (*io votono*, *io votosi*) (Riotta, 2016). Da gennaio 2016, Matteo Renzi ha ripetuto dinanzi a senatori, telespettatori, radioascoltatori e giornalisti almeno dodici volte che se al referendum avesse vinto il no, si sarebbe dimesso (Berti, 2016; “Se perdo vado a casa”, 2016), rendendo inattaccabili le constatazioni di quanti gli attribuiscono la responsabilità di aver personalizzato il referendum. Una personalizzazione che, come vedremo nel terzo capitolo, gli è costata cara.

CAPITOLO DUE

«Quello che vedi è tutto quello che c'è»

All'origine delle nostre decisioni non c'è una specifica area cerebrale (Martinez, Marie, & Gómez, 2014). Tuttavia, quando guardiamo il viso di qualcuno che esprime una certa emozione, si attivano i nostri neuroni-specchio che, come per intuizione, fanno sì che anche noi possiamo immediatamente sentire quell'emozione come se fosse nostra, pur avendola solamente vista (Iacoboni, 2009). Questo romperebbe drasticamente con la tradizione occidentale che ci descrive come esseri al 100% razionali; al contrario, i nostri comportamenti e le nostre scelte sono profondamente radicate nella percezione che abbiamo di noi stessi, delle cose che ci circondano, e degli altri (Blumer, 1986).

Sembrerebbe che, pur avendo un solo cervello, abbiamo in realtà due menti diverse (una più istintiva e simile a quella animale, l'altra razionale), peraltro in competizione l'una con l'altra per avere il controllo delle nostre azioni (Evans, 2013). A qualcuno potrebbe ricordare la scomposizione della personalità psichica di Freud, con un *Es* istintivo, un *Io* razionale ed un *SuperIo* derivante dalle norme sociali interiorizzate dall'individuo (Freud, 1933). Tuttavia, ci riferiremo a queste due menti con i nomi tecnici introdotti da Keith Stanovich e Richard West (2000): Sistema 1 e Sistema 2. Il primo opera in modo automatico e veloce, senza troppi sforzi e senza il minimo controllo volontario; il secondo distribuisce l'attenzione a quelle attività che ne richiedono, come il calcolo di operazioni complesse o la guida a destra per chi è abituato a guidare a sinistra (Kahneman, 2011).

Dopo aver dimostrato che la teoria della razionalità non può essere utilizzata per spiegare scelte di natura politica o economica (Quattrone & Tversky, 1988), gli scienziati comportamentali hanno indagato le possibili alternative, elaborando delle ipotesi di processi decisionali guidati dalle cosiddette euristiche (Tversky &

Kahneman, 1974). Secondo i risultati di tali ricerche, l'essere umano tende a seguire l'istinto dettato dalle scorciatoie cognitive ogni qual volta si trova davanti ad un problema complesso, semplificabile tramite il loro utilizzo. Non sempre il risultato di tale processo decisionale è accurato come lo sarebbe se l'approccio fosse di tipo razionale, ma il punto è proprio questo: quello di cui siamo in cerca non è la decisione migliore, bensì la più soddisfacente (Baldassarri, 2005).

Siamo portati a pensare che gli squali generino in media più vittime di oggetti che precipitano dagli aerei, quando non è così. E questa informazione ci lascerà basiti, perché probabilmente è più facile riportare alla mente episodi riconducibili al primo piuttosto che al secondo caso (Read, 1995). Se ci chiedessero quale tra due città sia la più popolosa e noi conoscessimo solo una delle due, probabilmente risponderemo col nome dell'unica che conosciamo; e qualora non ne conoscessimo nessuna, ma sapessimo che una delle due ha una squadra di calcio che gioca in serie B, probabilmente quella città sarebbe la nostra risposta (Gigerenzer & Goldstein, 1999). Infine, se ci trovassimo davanti ad un problema di cui non conosciamo la soluzione, verosimilmente proveremo a risolverlo con lo stesso metodo utilizzato l'ultima volta che abbiamo affrontato un problema analogo. Questi sono solo quattro degli innumerevoli esempi di euristiche che sono state individuate in anni di ricerca e si tratta rispettivamente di: euristica della disponibilità, euristica del riconoscimento, euristica *Minimalist* ed euristica *Take The Last* (Baldassarri, 2005).

Quanto all'elettore, potrebbe scegliere di votare un attore politico basandosi su diverse euristiche, la cui influenza, però, tende ad essere inversamente proporzionale al livello di sofisticazione politica dell'elettore stesso (Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1991). Ne consegue l'impossibilità di guardare all'elettorato come ad un insieme omogeneo di intenzioni e comportamenti di voto (Baldassarri, 2005; Bentivegna & Ceccarini, 2013; Gasperoni, 2013; De Sio &

Cataldi, 2013; Maraffi, Pedrazzani, & Pinto, 2013), e la necessità di delineare, al contrario, dei diversi profili che ne permettano quantomeno la categorizzazione, là dove possibile. A tal proposito, interessante è la classificazione proposta da Baldassarri e Schadee (2006). *Utilius* è un richiamo al modello di elettore downsiano, che si interessa alla realtà politica e la trasla su una dimensione destra-sinistra; sa collocare su tale asse sé stesso e gli altri, dopo aver raccolto le necessarie informazioni; e sceglie di conseguenza. *Amicus* si informa meno, in quanto tende a percepire sempre solo due grosse fazioni, e si schiera sempre in base ad un atteggiamento *amicus/hostis*, a favore del leader di cui ha un'opinione positiva o contro quello di cui ha una considerazione negativa. *Aliens* è l'elettore disinteressato o che volutamente si estrania e rifiuta il modo politico; ciò non implica una conseguente astensione, quanto più un comportamento di voto ideologicamente incoerente. *Medians*, infine, rappresenta la categoria in cui rientrano tutti gli elettori inadatti alle altre tre.

CAPITOLO TRE

Come hanno scelto gli italiani

Non tutti gli elettori usano le stesse euristiche né le stesse euristiche sono sempre usate dallo stesso elettore. Nel caso del referendum del 4 dicembre, ipotizziamo che un'euristica molto utilizzata sia stata l'opinione che gli elettori avevano di Matteo Renzi. In secondo luogo, possiamo immaginare che siano stati influenti anche gli esponenti di alcuni principali partiti; che il tipo di occupazione e la posizione geografica possano aver inciso; e che anche il senso di fiducia o sfiducia nei confronti delle istituzioni e della classe politica possa aver contribuito all'elaborazione della scelta di voto.

I dati utilizzati sono quelli raccolti dal CISE (Centro Italiano Studi Elettorali) nel periodo di tempo compreso tra il 27 ottobre e il 7 novembre 2016. Il campione superava di poco i 1,500 intervistati tramite CATI e CAMI. L'analisi è svolta principalmente tramite l'utilizzo di crosstabulation e si conclude con una regressione.

Procedendo per ordine, i risultati rivelano innanzitutto un basso livello di conoscenza del testo costituzionale (il 59% dichiara di conoscerlo poco o affatto). Questo spiegherebbe in una certa misura il fatto che su sette misure adottate nella riforma, gli intervistati si dichiarino a favore di cinque, ma quando viene chiesto loro di dare un giudizio complessivo sulla riforma, più della metà dia un giudizio negativo. Troviamo una correlazione tra l'intenzione di voto al referendum e l'intenzione di voto alle prossime elezioni: a parte gli elettori di PD e di NCD-UDC, tutti gli altri tendono a voler votare no al referendum. Quanto alle variabili socio-demografiche possiamo dire che i pensionati si rivelano la categoria più favorevole al referendum, i disoccupati quella più ostile. Al Sud una massiccia tendenza a votare no, nella Zona Rossa una propensione verso il sì. Inoltre, gli elettori animati da sentimenti anti-europei si dicono intenzionati a votare no, più di quanto gli europeisti lo siano a votare sì. Infine, com'era facilmente intuibile, i sostenitori di Renzi vogliono sostenerlo anche al referendum, mentre coloro che lo giudicano negativamente intendono punirlo votando no al referendum. Per l'appunto, non emerge nessuna particolare tendenza ad essere più o meno informati sui contenuti della riforma in nessuno dei due schieramenti: in entrambi i casi, i disinformati superano gli informati di circa 5 punti percentuali.

CONCLUSIONE

La scienza comportamentale ha dimostrato come, di fronte a problemi di qualsiasi genere, la nostra mente cerchi di elaborare soluzioni nel modo più efficiente possibile (Kahneman, 2011). Le euristiche giocano un ruolo importante in questo, spingendoci verso una scorciatoia quando non sappiamo quale strada prendere. Che la percezione e la personalità dei leader politici costituisca una delle scorciatoie di voto più utilizzate dagli elettori, non è una novità (Jacobson, 2007; Garzia & Viotti, 2012; Vaishnav, 2015). Quello che di nuovo c'era in questo referendum è la forte personalizzazione di un evento nazionale di quelle dimensioni, che ha legittimato la decisione degli elettori di scegliere non per forza in base alla loro posizione in merito ai contenuti della riforma, ma eventualmente sulla base dell'opinione che già avevano, nitida nella loro mente, dell'uomo che la proponeva o di coloro che hanno fatto campagna elettorale a favore o contro di essa. Il pensiero periferico ha portato la maggior parte degli italiani a dare un voto di supporto a Renzi, o un voto di protesta contro l'establishment che rappresenta.

Quello che sarebbe interessante studiare è il livello di eventuali incongruenze tra i dati utilizzati in questa sede e quelli raccolti, ad esempio da ITANES, dopo il 4 dicembre, per analizzare le modalità con cui si è conclusa la campagna elettorale nell'ultimo mese e scoprire se e quanto il livello di coinvolgimento degli elettori sia variato all'avvicinarsi del giorno del voto.