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Welfare State Attitudes and the Opinion-Policy Link

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Introduction

The welfare state is a way of governing in which the state guarantees its citizens certain types of benefits aimed at promoting economic and social utility. Specifically, the welfare states should protect the citizens from economic and social risks, give security for an income and good living conditions, fight inequalities and poverty while promoting inclusion. Examples of everyday welfare states' benefits include healthcare, education or housing. Depending on which way the state provides such services (or if it does at all), we will have a different type of welfare regime.

Before the actual institution of the welfare state, there have been other solutions to social problems that paved the way for today's system. These actions regarded mainly the poor, as poverty has existed for many centuries, even if it started to be perceived as a social issue only during the sixteenth century (Marsh 1980). As a matter of fact, in 1531, the "British Act Concerning Punishment of Beggars and Vagabonds" marked the distinction between deserving and undeserving poor (a concept that will be broadly dealt with in this elaborate). In this time, poverty was administered locally until the first development of the nation-states. Hence starting from the 17th century, the issue was part of the national realm, but it was still the responsibility of the local authorities to implement the policies (Rimlinger 1971). The actual rethinking of the notion of welfare came during the nineteenth century due to the urbanization, the growth of the population, crushing poverty and industrialization.

This phase was characterized by strong ideals of liberalism, individual freedom and equality, however, it was imperial Germany the first to implement new policies such as Bismark's insurance programmes for sickness (1883), accident (1884), old age and invalidity (1889), even though the country was definitely not the most industrialized or democratic in Europe. This aspect is not a coincidence; as a matter of fact, the early introduction of social insurance was greater in the monarchies (such as Germany, Austria, Sweden or Denmark), probably because there was a greater need to pacify the labour movements as well as the general discontent given by the non-parliamentary regimes. This demonstrates that progress and industrialization are not enough to grant the development of the Welfare State, but there are many other factors to be considered.

The main innovation that such policies brought was that individuals had to be compulsorily insured and granted social benefits as rights. Nevertheless, Germany was not the first to introduce the concept of social insurance: Bismark's idea of social protection used to assure the workers' loyalty was actually derived from Napoleon III (Rimlinger 1971).

If Germany built the foundation for the welfare state, Britain was, without doubt, the forerunner of the Modern Welfare State. (Orloff and Skocpol 1984). In fact, by 1911 Britain had surpassed Germany as welfare state leader by instituting workers' compensation (1897), old age pensions (1908), health insurance (1911) and unemployment insurance (1911).

As the welfare state developed throughout Europe, it was inevitable that different approaches were adopted depending on the kind of government the single states had. For this reason, many researchers attempted to create different categories, each representing a welfare state regime.

According to Esping Andersen's "Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism" (1990) there are three main types of welfare state: The social democratic, the corporatist and the liberal.

Even though this classification was determinant to highlight a clear-cut differentiation among the three regimes, many scholars found it too simplistic and decided to expand it (Arts and Gelissen 2002).

As a matter of fact, he omits the Mediterranean welfare states from the classification. The inclusion of Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece in the corporatist welfare states category, has been at the centre of the debate, as many argued that these countries had to be included in another sub-category.

There are nowadays many different solutions to group the different regimes: the cluster-analysis, the qualitative comparative analysis, the factor analysis and many others. The solution that I prefer, since it is more specific sees the Nordic European countries (Norway, Finland, Sweden, Denmark) being labelled as "Socio-Democratic"; United States, UK, New Zealand, Australia, Japan as "liberal"; Austria, Belgium, France, Germany as conservative, Spain, Portugal, Greece and Italy as "Mediterranean", and Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Slovenia, Poland and Slovakia as "Post-communist European".

The Socio-Democratic or Scandinavian is based on universality and social inclusion. The supply of social services is of high quality and affordable. The employment rates are high as gender equality. Moreover, there are high minimum wages, high replacement rates and general minimum standards for pensions. The conservative or Continental model is characterized by a contributory social insurance system for pensions and unemployment, the redistribution is low, with low wealth taxation and high taxes on labour and consumption. The Liberal regime is centred around the market, the state has a minimal role. The level of social benefits is low, and they are usually means-tested, the health system and the schools are publicly financed. The social expenditure is low. The Mediterranean Welfare is founded on supportive family networks, and there are still traits of paternalistic society. The level of gender inequality is high, and the participation rates for young people and females are low.

Nevertheless, this elaborate is not strictly about The Welfare State. More specifically, It will first deal with welfare targeting, social legitimacy, deservingness attitudes. Namely, how people perceive who is more or less deserving in receiving support from the welfare policies. In particular, It will be stressed the importance of social benefits and investigated why some are deemed more acceptable than others by looking at their institutional components. Moreover, a crucial point to analyze will be

the social factors as the discrimination among target groups and their ranking from most to least deserving following the CARIN criteria. This first chapter will give us an idea of public opinion's strength and how much individual characteristics can shape the attitudes towards welfare schemes.

From this point, the aim will be to find out whether such strong public opinion can influence actual policymaking. This rises from the assumption that democracies, to function correctly, need to be responsive to their citizens. Therefore, what has to be discovered is if ultimately public opinion has the power to shape the implementation of policies. To do so, we are going to study how this relationship changes in different systems, from a political and governmental point of view, as well as from a “Welfare State regime” point of view. In addition, we will find out whether this relationship is also influenced by the typology of the policy domains, namely if they are aggregated or specific, to answer the question:” Do politicians respond to policy preferences by adapting government policies to the specific domains that are of interest to the public, or do they respond to mass preferences through the overall level of welfare output?”.

On my final chapter, the Italian case will be dealt with in the specific; hence, the numerous topics dealt with throughout the first and second chapter will be put together and adapted to the Mediterranean democracy. In particular, the opinion-policy link must be looked at to find out how responsive the Italian democracy really is. First, the focus will be on the Italian “policy mood”, namely the citizens’ policy preferences, then the process for which both the public and the government change their positions following the other will be analysed through a recent study of Bellucci and Pellegata, that also investigated the relationship between the policy mood and the change in the parties’ ideological positions. Finally, the issue of legislative representation will be addressed. Throughout this dissertation, the aim will be to shed light on a topic that is quite unexplored. First, starting from the welfare attitudes and the deservingness perception, an outlook on the cruciality of public opinion will be given, then the goal will be to verify whether there is a link between such public opinion and policy implementation. In this way, we will comprehend how vital the citizens' opinion and the government responsiveness is, for a functional democracy.

I Chapter

Welfare targeting and social legitimacy.

Most welfare systems do not offer universal support (available to everyone), but instead, they are selective, and only specific categories are allowed the benefits. This is called welfare targeting.

Selecting categories of needy people for the distribution of benefits is still a very current issue and debated even though it has a long history. In fact, in the US, it emerged during the 1820s following the provision for universal free education. Furthermore, in England, the means-tested Poor Law was criticized in favour of non-income tested insurance programs. (Mitchell, Natsem, Gruen 1994). The issue seemed to be solved during the 1960s and 70s, but with the 1979 oil crisis, the welfare state was rebuilt, and the discussion re-entered the scene. Indeed, the debate seems to have made a full circle as the question "who should get what, and why" that was dealt with at the dawn of the welfare is now once again back to the fore (Van Oorshot, 2013).

Naturally, the targeting of welfare implies the adoption of means tests to verify the recipient's entitlement to the support. This aspect is what the universalists base their position against targeting. Namely, the fact that, in order to establish the possibility of the individual to receive benefits, an intrusive inquiry is needed, which can often contribute to the stigmatization of the recipient. Moreover, this results in discrimination between those who are entitled to the support and those who are not, and ultimately, a social division is created.

The most basic way of delineating the categories of "needy people" is through "reference groups" (Van Lancker, Ghysels and Cantillon 2015), which are classified following general social needs or risks. Some examples are "unemployed", "old or sick people", "families with dependent children". When we have a more detailed classification, we talk about secondary targeting, in which criteria like age, gender, household and working contract are taken into consideration. The secondary targeting is crucial to understand to what degree a benefit is selective: at the primary level, we are not able to recognize if a benefit for the elderly is more selective than one dedicated to the unemployed; however, thanks to secondary targeting, we have a perspective from within the elderly and unemployed groups, that allows us to see how many segments of the specific group are excluded from the social benefit, making it more or less selective.

In order to understand which groups of citizens, part of specific reference groups, are considered deserving of social benefits, we should first look at the term "social legitimacy".

Social legitimacy is the degree to which the public supports certain benefits, services and welfare provisions dedicated to different groups of citizens. (This is measured through public opinion data). However, there are also other actors, such as politicians, policymakers, administrators, bureaucrats, who have their own opinions, and these are likely to influence the implementation of policies

(Schneider, Jacoby 2005). Nevertheless, there is not much literature about social legitimacy among figures with decision-making power; for this reason, I will focus mainly on social legitimacy among the public.

Social legitimacy cannot be measured in absolute terms as it depends on several variables. Indeed, the support can vary according to the type of benefit, the target group, the citizens' social category, and many other aspects. I am mainly interested in investigating whether the approval or disapproval of social benefits from the population is taken into consideration by policymakers. This could be possible if we consider that public opinion creates a cultural context on which policymakers partly base their decisions on welfare rights (Brooks and Manza 2006).

However, the direct effect of public opinion on policymaking is unlikely, and it is much more plausible the indirect effect given by the "median voter", the lobbying and the media (Manza, Cook and Page 2002).

As a matter of fact, this topic will be broadly investigated in the next chapter, where I will attempt to find out how much social legitimacy can influence actual policies. Naturally, we are prone to think that public opinion does not have such power, however, if those with a decision-making role adopt the same ideals, we might find a correlation.

In this chapter, I am interested in analyzing which are the factors that make certain social benefits more accepted than others and why specific welfare programmes generate more solidaristic attitudes. To do so, I will first look at the institutional components of social benefits; then, I will deal with the direct perception that people have of the target groups, setting the focus on public image issues, stigma, and stereotype. Successively, I will analyze the cruciality of deservingness perception, which ranks different target groups from most to least deserving, using specific criteria. In the end, I will address the issue of the mistargeting of benefits.

1.1 Institutional approach

In order to understand the support towards social benefits, one should look at their institutional characteristics. These, by deciding who pays and who benefits, influence the singular and collective interests and the trust towards other people and institutions. (...) The general idea (that will reoccur throughout this dissertation) is that people are most likely to accept those benefits that they also receive. For this reason, generally, universal benefits have more social legitimacy than targeted ones. (Goodin, Le Grand 1987). Therefore, old-age pensions and healthcare will be more supported than housing allowances, especially by the middle-high classes, who will need those benefits in the future. As I mentioned before, the welfare states are classified based on the government, the benefits they offer, the degree of decommmodification and defamiliarisation, and universalism. Do these differences

influence the support as well? Many studies have been conducted to find out if the institutional structure impacts welfare policies, mainly by using the International Social Survey Program. Regarding attitudes towards the policies directed to the unemployed and poor, the results show a pattern of highest support in social democratic regimes, followed by moderate support in the conservative one and low in the liberal welfare state. The first reason for this differentiation is most likely found in the degree of universalism. There is a substantial gap between those in need and those who are not in countries with selective policies. This creates a category that benefits from the welfare state and one who loses on it, stressing more the difference between "us" and "them" (Rothstein 1998).

On the other hand, in a universalistic system, there is no separation between the needy and non-needy, the "winners" and the "losers", and as Rothstein (1998) argues "the question becomes not "how shall we solve their problem?" but rather "how shall we solve our common problem?" " Therefore, not only the poor and unemployed will have to undergo much harder fulfilling criteria in the liberal regimes, but also the discrimination between categories does not create support. For this reason, we can argue that high support will occur in social democratic systems, while low support will appear in more liberal welfare regimes. Moreover, many American scholars and studies sustained another crucial aspect is the "homogeneity explanation". Namely, the idea that lower support in the liberal welfare state is due to a higher ethnic heterogeneity. This is especially true for the representative of the liberal regime, the USA. The presence of Native Americans and the importation of slaves has simply set the discussion on welfare on another level. We will look at the concept of "identity" later on, with the analysis of the CARIN criteria.

Now to continue the research for the link between institutional structure and support, the issue of trust has to be taken into consideration. Beyond the individualistic choice to support those benefits that interest the individual directly, another variable is the trust that one has in the institutions responsible for the redistribution of such benefits as well as in the citizens that take part in the process. As a matter of fact, the interest for a program needs to be paired with trust in those who administer it, otherwise the support decreases (Rothstein 1998). The support for a programme can vary according to one's perception that the fiscal burden is justly distributed among people. This follows the idea that people are conditional co-operators, and they will only contribute with their share if they know that others will pay theirs as well. (Rothstein 1998). For this reason, the support for selective schemes that rely on the contribution of the middle and higher classes to, however, support the lower social categories, is low because perceived as unfair.

Another frequent critique against the welfare state is the one regarding administrative costs and bureaucracy (Lindert 2004). Furthermore, in particular, selective benefits are more complex to

administer and tend to have a lower level of trust. Moreover, the mass media gives much more attention to the possible corruption and fraud of the selective benefits compared to the universal ones. The concept of social legitimacy is not only related only to single individuals but also to the welfare state. As I mentioned above, a crucial feature for this matter is whether a welfare state is universal or selective. The first is characteristic of the Social Democratic regime and (to some extent) Continental Europe, while the Liberal welfare state generally has a more selective approach. In a universal system, the provisions are not means-tested, and the social insurances are contributory; on the other hand, in the selective, the means-testing is the main actor.

More generous welfare states usually have higher levels of social trust (Gelissen et al. 2012). This can be again explained by the perception of corruption and cheating given by the means-tested benefits against the perception of opportunity given by universalism (Uslaner 2002). Moreover, the selective system creates a clear gap among the population and can also generate the so-called “selectivity trap” for which once only specific categories (for example, the poor) are seen as receivers of the benefit, the other part of the public will not be a supporter of the welfare, and this results in an impossibility to extend the actual welfare coverage, creating a vicious circle.

Differently, in the universal system, the support is higher as more people are involved first-hand in providing the benefits.

Therefore, people’s support of social benefits and services depends on their trust in a just and equal way of operating from the welfare state. Moreover, the trust in institutions like the police, healthcare, the social security system, and the government is determinant. However, as we will go on to analyze, this is not a mere institutional matter, but it is primarily a social one.

1.2 Public perception of target groups

The stereotype is an interesting phenomenon of social psychology. It is usually a fixed and general belief about a group or class of people. Fixed because it is tough to change and general because they are founded on the broadest characteristics. This is a topic that interests us as the way people see target groups naturally influence their support. One aspect that fuels the issue of discrimination due to stigmatization is means-testing. The reason for this is that the idea of self-responsibility is more and more valued, and asking for a means-tested benefit can only mean that the individual is not able to take care of him or herself. Moreover, as I already mentioned, means-testing is often associated with fraudulent mechanisms and the benefits with a form of charity.

Among the most stereotyped social categories are poor, black, immigrant and unemployed people. We are aware, thanks to the latest actuality news, that the USA is characterized by systematic racism, which can be found in their welfare. As a matter of fact, it seems that racism is embedded in the

American welfare programs that are designed to exclude racial minorities (Roosma 2016). This discrimination has its origins in the population: Americans tend to believe that black people are generally lazier and less autonomous than white people, therefore needing welfare more. It was proved how in areas where a large part of the inhabitants is composed of African Americans, the opposition against welfare is more vigorous. (Fullerton and Dixon, 2009). Now, what is another strongly discriminated category? Women, even more, if they are single (or/and teen) mothers. This social class is highly stereotyped by society who sees it as lazy, immature, addicted to substances. Not surprisingly, one of the most objected programs in the US is the "temporary assistance to needy family", which is mainly used by single mothers. In 1996 a welfare reform resulted in several cuts and in the introduction of sanctions to check on the possible sexual immorality and predilection of welfare instead of work of African American women (Neubeck and Cazenave, 2001). Therefore, racial stereotyping is not an end in itself but can result in sanctions. In fact, black and Latina women have a much greater risk of being sanctioned than white women (Monnat, 2010).

While the issue with racial stereotyping belongs mainly to the USA, Europe is not less guilty. The studies on social legitimacy were more focused on the perception of unemployed people and immigrants. Considering what we already said, it should not be hard to guess which are the pillars on which the stereotyping against the unemployed is founded: lack of will, laziness, improper use of benefits, lack of self-responsibility. Therefore, it is no surprise that the schemes directed to the unemployed do not receive much support. The same applies to immigrants. Many European states have developed in the last years a high level of "welfare chauvinism", namely, support for all those welfare policies aimed at "our" benefit and less support for those directed to "their" benefit (Reeskens and Van Oorschot, 2012).

As we are going to investigate now, it is evident that the stereotyping of target groups lowers the support towards all the welfare programs aimed at them and decreases the loyalty towards the welfare state in general.

1.3 Deservingness perception

To the literature on stereotypes and stigmatization of the target groups, the one on deserving perception comes in conjunction, however, there is a difference between these phenomena. The public perception of target groups is linked to their public image, which is founded on stereotypes that eclipse all the other characteristics. The deservingness approach, although starting from the same preconception, is more detailed, as it highlights specific attributes of the target group that are likely to influence the social legitimacy.

It is by now a known phenomenon that the public has clear preferences regarding the support for different groups of needy people. Many studies have been conducted that highlighted a specific pattern also among different states (especially in Europe) (Blekesaune & Quadagno, 2003; Pettersen, 1995; Ullrich, 2000; Van Oorschot, 2000, 2006): it seemed that four different categories could be ranked from most to least deserving of social protection, according to the public opinion. Starting from older people, followed by sick and disabled, unemployed and finally immigrants. Van Oorschot (2000) gave five possible explanations to motivate this classification. These deservingness criteria are going to be referred to as "CARIN". The first one, control over neediness, is referred to how much an individual is responsible for their neediness; the more they are responsible for it, the less deserving they are considered. This has been a crucial criterion in many work studies, where it appeared that during high unemployment crisis, people tended to support unemployment benefits more (Fridberg and Ploug, 2000; Jeene, Van Oorschot and Uunk, 2014). The second criterion is attitude: people who are compliant, likeable and grateful are 'more deserving'. Going on, reciprocity considers if that person has contributed to our group in the past or is likely to do it in the future. Hence, being willing to do something in return can help with how deserving you are perceived. The fourth criterion, identity, is most likely the most discriminatory: those who are "closer to us" are most deserving. This can be applied in many contexts, but it is especially used to explain the lower social legitimacy that immigrants suffer from. The final criterion, need, is relatively straightforward: people with greater need are seen as most deserving. Considering these criteria and the ranking shown above, we can draw some preliminary conclusions: the elderly are the firsts of the list as they are not responsible for their age and the possible hassles caused. Moreover, they are part of society, and they have earned their share of rights by working as part of the productive labour force. Immigrants are at the bottom of the scale as by most people, they are seen as responsible for their own struggle, they are not considered part of the society as much as the other compatriots, and they are not deemed to have contributed enough. For this reason, old unemployed people or disabled unemployed people may be perceived as more deserving than unemployed people in general, as they cannot be completely blamed for their neediness. In the same way, the wealthy elderly may score lower in the need criterion (Van Oorschot, 1998). This means that the deservingness perception is not a precise indicator, the variables can change, and the passage between deserving and underserving groups is not clear-cut but gradual. Therefore, if a group is not seen as "clearly deserving", it does not mean that it must necessarily be "clearly undeserving" (Koleman, 2010). Another aspect is whether some criteria are more important than others. Overall, it seems that control, or the lack thereof, is crucial. As soon as the responsibility for neediness is established, the rest of the criteria become irrelevant (De Swaan 1998).

Not much research has been carried out about the issue of conditionality, namely if, how and why people differentiate among deserving and undeserving groups. Starting from a Dutch study, where it emerged that older, less educated, right-wing people tend to be more conditional, Van Oorschot conducted a research to test whether the same results occurred in the rest of Europe. The most significant variables used were: attitudes towards immigrants, the more negative the attitude, the more conditionality will occur; the effect of trust, as I mentioned before, the least trust one has in the institutions, the democracy, other people, the higher level of conditionality is likely to be registered; religion, for example, Christian people have more solidarity for those in need as well as people that often go to church, therefore being less conditional; meritocracy, those who have a strong belief that only who has higher merits should be rewarded, are probably going to be more conditional.

Surprisingly, these variables did not strongly influence the level of conditionality, as the differences were not marked, but still, conditionality appeared to be slightly higher among women, older people, and people with less education. It seems that people who have a lower socioeconomic position tend to be more critical towards those who receive the benefits (Golding and Middleton 1982). Moreover, rightist individuals and people with a negative attitude towards the welfare state and low trust in democracy are found to be more conditional.

If the individual aspect did not show crucial changes in the degree of conditionality, there was a decisive difference among countries in the deservingness of disadvantaged groups. In general, the conditionality tends to be higher in poorer countries, where the unemployment is lower and the work ethic is strong. In these cases, a negative attitude towards immigrants occurs as well as a lower level of trust, which causes a higher conditionality.

As for the welfare regimes, in higher spending welfare states like the socio democratic ones, people have higher conditionality to relieve themselves from the fiscal burden. However, the welfare state characteristics are not considered seriously, as the differences are minimal if we only acknowledge Europe.

In the end, the research demonstrated that the public is more solidaristic towards older people, sick and disabled people, followed by unemployed and immigrants, as found in seventeen out of the twenty-three European countries examined. This not only shows that the deservingness phenomenon has deep roots, but it also unveils a cultural pattern among all of Europe.

1.3.1 The cruciality of deservingness perception

To recap, there are three approaches aimed at explaining the concept of social legitimacy. The “institutional” one investigates the correlation between the institutional composition of benefits and people’s trust in said institutions. The pattern found that universal benefits usually have more

legitimacy than selective ones, and specifically, means-tested benefits are the least trusted. In the approach dealing with “public perception of the target groups”, the differences in social legitimacy are linked to the image that the groups have according to the public, even though these images are broadly based on stereotypes. The “deservingness perception” approach finds a correlation between legitimacy and perception of deservingness of the target groups and identifies five criteria (need, control, reciprocity, attitude, identity) that influence people's choice of who is more or less “deserving”. Now, it is not easy to verify which of these three approaches is the most effective in investigating the concept of social legitimacy, also because they do not consider all the possible variables. Therefore, one could also rely on all three to have a broader view of the phenomenon. As a matter of fact, it should not be hard to understand how the deservingness approach and the public image can be interlined, considering they are pretty similar and both founded on the public’s opinion of the recipients. A negative image will most likely be accompanied by a low score in one of the deservingness criteria (Roosma 2016). For example, unemployed people are a group often stigmatized for their “laziness”, which results in low scores in the criteria of “control” and “responsibility”.

Another correlation can be made between the deservingness approach and the institutional one (Albrecht Larsen 2006). This can be explained because in highly selective schemes, for example, means-tested benefits aimed only at the poor, the social legitimacy is generally low. The reason for this is that, institutionally, there is a clear-cut division between those who contribute to the scheme, who at the same time will most likely never enjoy it, and those who receive the assistance. Apart from the social gap caused by means-testing, another aspect is the perception of fraud and corruption given by the highly complex bureaucratic system. Moreover, the policymakers might be influenced by the perceived undeservingness given to means-tested benefits groups, and this could result in further discrimination between the “deserving” and “undeserving” poor (or unemployed, or immigrants...). Naturally, due to this additional step, the bureaucracy will inevitably increase, leading to higher perceived misconduct and corruption. This “paradox of means-tested benefits” (Roosma 2016) highlights the general idea that schemes for the poor are not brilliantly done, as poverty relief is usually lower in welfare states that adopt a selective approach compared to the universal one (Korpi and Palme, 1998).

As we know, universal benefits have a higher social legitimacy, and we can still find a correlation between institutional and deservingness aspects. If before we took into consideration a highly selective benefit, in this case, we should do the opposite, namely, deal with a highly universal one. For example, the basic income for everyone. From an institutional point of view, it is quite clear to understand why the social legitimacy would be higher: there is almost no bureaucracy, it is a benefit

directed at everyone. Therefore it does not create division, and fraud and corruption are basically impossible. Nevertheless, it seems that through studies conducted in the Netherlands (Van Oorshoot, 1998), the majority of the surveyed is actually against this kind of benefit. The reason can be traced back to our deservingness criteria: first, the perception is that people do not need such benefit (criterion of need), second, having this kind of help will inevitably discourage people from working (criterion of control), and finally, people who do not want to work should not be entitled to the benefit (criterion of reciprocity) (Van Oorshot, 1998).

Even though we have established three main approaches to understanding the phenomenon of social legitimacy of benefits, deservingness perception is most likely the most crucial.

As we are going to see in-depth in the next chapter, deservingness perception can influence the institutional characteristics of the programs and can at times have a role in the actual implementation of policies (Brooks and Manza, 2007). We are going to analyze several studies that proved how public opinion influences politics. For example, in a study by Kahl (2005), it was stressed how in some European countries, the social legitimacy would change depending on if the country was Catholic or Calvinistic. In fact, in the first case, the poor are seen as "children of God", deserving of help and assistance, while in the second, they are usually perceived as lazy and undeserving. (Kahl, 2005)

Moreover, as I already mentioned, the fact that the ranking order "elderly, sick and disabled, unemployed and immigrants" is common to many different European countries might unveil a cultural pattern (Van Oorschot, 2006) that probably has very ancient origins. As a matter of fact, Bang Petersen (2012) argues that since the first societies, people learned to recognize those who contributed to common wellbeing and those who just took advantage of it. Therefore, the main actor when talking about deservingness perception seems to be "feelings". For example, compassion is crucial: if you are compassionate, then you will accept more easily the concept of "neediness". Also, anger is determinant, as it can force the cheaters to contribute (Bang Petersen, 2012).

For this reason, it should be reiterated that "control" and "reciprocity" are the two most important criteria as the fact that one is determined to get out of that difficult situation, contribute to society and does not appear as lazy, is highly recognized and awarded.

1.4 The mistargeting of Welfare Benefits

An aspect that has an impact on social legitimacy is the mistargeting of benefits, specifically the overuse and underuse of them. The first occurs when people who are not actually eligible for the scheme receive the benefits, while in the second case, the opposite situation occurs: those who would be entitled to the benefit do not receive it. (Van Oorschot, 2001). According to the public, the overuse of benefits is one of the most critical issues (Ervasti, 1998; Halvorsen, 2002). The attitudes towards

overuse and underuse of benefits are affected by several variables: people who are more right-wing tend to perceive higher overuse; a high education corresponds with a low perception of both underuse and overuse and this is probably due to the tendency of educated people to inform themselves more often on the government's actions to avoid abuse and fraud; moreover, a high income has generally a correlation with high overuse perception (Ervasti, 1998; Halvorsen, 2002; Van Oorshot and Meuleman, 2011). Therefore, once again, individual characteristics shape the attitudes towards welfare schemes. Generally, and according to the literature, people act either by following their self-interests (*homo economicus*), or the social interest (*homo sociologicus*) (Kangas, 1997). In the first case, those who have a lower social position, are often more supportive of welfare redistribution: on the one hand, since these individuals have more chances to need the welfare at some point, it is only rational for them to back it. They will also identify with the recipients and perceive more underuse. This is due to the fact that they understand the shame of accepting a benefit caused by the stigmatization and stereotyping of the recipients. On the other hand, individuals from higher classes do not consider underuse an issue and perceive more significant overuse. (Roosma; Van Oorshot; Gelissen, 2016)

In Southern and Eastern Europe, the perception of underuse is very high, like the perceived abuse and fraud, while the Anglo-Saxon countries have a very high perception of overuse. Considering what we pointed out until now, it is clear that overuse depends more often on political factors, and it is used in campaigns against welfare redistribution. Also, in highly selective welfare states where it is crucial to individualize the actual beneficiaries of the scheme, much importance is given to the possible abuse and misuse compared to welfare regimes that use more universal solutions.

On the other hand, underuse is more linked to the individual's personal experience: if a person has more probability of needing assistance from the welfare, they are more worried about the possible underuse of benefits (Roosma; Van Oorschot; Gelissen, 2016).

To conclude, the social legitimacy of targeted benefits is a crucial topic when dealing with welfare preferences and attitudes, and it is also very complicated, as it depends on different variables and actors. As we saw, the institutional characteristics of the benefit can influence the support. This, in fact, can depend on the type of benefit (means-tested vs universal), the trust that individuals have towards the institutions and the people who are in charge of administering the benefits (and the trust can once again vary with the selectiveness of the scheme) and the kind of welfare state. Moreover, the public image of target groups has inevitably an influence on the support, especially the negative stereotypes against the weakest groups of the society. In the same way, the perception of who is more or less deserving also has an impact. In the end, the mistargeting of benefits can shape the opinion of

the public. In the next chapter, I will investigate if and how such opinions can create change in the implementation of public policies.

II Chapter

Does Public opinion influence public policy?

Now I introduce the most crucial topic of the dissertation: considered all of the above, the social legitimacy, the target groups, the perception that certain groups are more or less deserving than others, how, what I want to investigate is if this merely social phenomenon influences politics.

The question of if public opinion influences public policy is at the same time largely debated and poorly analyzed, which makes it much more difficult to individualize a common strand of theories on the matter. We tend to believe (and hope) that in a democracy, the public has a saying on the policies implemented, and this is generally true, but to what extent? How much impact does public opinion have on public policy? Does this impact change according to how much the public cares about an issue? Are elites, political parties, interest groups able to influence policy despite public opinion? In a nutshell, is the effect that public opinion has on public policies strong or weak?

The answer to this question is not that easy. Since public opinion started to get polled around the 1930s and 40s, there were supporters of a “democratic theory” (Dahl 1971; Mayhew 1974, Stimson et al. 1995) who believed that democratic institutions gave the public the power to control the government, on the other hand, Marxists, elite and neopluralism adherents (Domhoff 2002, Manley 1983) believed that the public could not have such power (although they disagreed on who actually held it). The “strong effect” thesis has been favoured, following studies that found a correlation between opinion and policy (Erikson et al. 1993; Burstein 1998,2003). However, some critiques on the way such studies have been conducted were raised (Page 2002). As a matter of fact, most of the studies that found public opinion affecting policy were based on issues that deeply affected the public, making the research biased. This is a crucial aspect to take into consideration: obviously, people are not well informed on all the policies and issues, and consequentially they do not even have opinions on them. This is the main critique that Page (2002) posed to the “strong effect” thesis. He suggested that if we were to present the public with 60 policy proposals on the most disparate issues, the government would be less responsive on those issues that interest the public less. I find that this is a valid point representing the struggle in understanding how good the democratic political process is. However, even if people might not have an opinion on the specific issue, they most likely have one on the general direction in which the policy should go, depending on their political ideas, degree of conservatism, attitudes towards redistribution and many other factors. To shift the focus from the specific policy to the broad issue, there are three possible ways: the first is to pose questions about the political ideology; the second is Stimson’s “policy mood”, which measures whether the public

prefers a more liberal or conservative federal policy; the third approach aims at describing opinion, juggling between the very specific and very general.

As I mentioned already, issue salience is a crucial element when talking about democratic responsiveness as citizens who care about a specific issue are generally more likely to consider elected officials' actions on that issue on the day of the election (Jones 1994). For this reason, elected officials will tend to be highly responsive on topics that have higher salience. Therefore, salience affects policy, but how strongly? How much does the public's influence on policy increase as the salience to the public increases? (Burstein 2003).

To better understand the relationship between opinion and policy, Burstein (2003) put together several research and studies that dealt with the issue. He used data from sociology journals as the "American Sociological Review" and the "American Journal of Sociology", political ones as the "American Political Science Review" and the "American Journal of Political Science", as well as from the bibliographies of Burstein himself (1998) and Glynn et al. (1999). In the end, there were 30 studies. However, not many of these included salience in the impact that public opinion has on public policy. When salience was not taken into account, opinion was not related to policy a third of the time. But when salience was considered, the impact that public opinion had on policy was always present. Naturally, acknowledging the little data that we have on this topic, the result should be interpreted cautiously. A second aspect that needs to be recognized is whether public opinion and policy have a relationship, but rather, whether this relationship is spurious. Namely: if interest organizations, economic elites or political parties have the power to change the correlation between opinion and policy. In general, bivariate relationships tend to decrease as soon as other variables are added; we want to understand how much this relationship can be reduced. Surprisingly, it doesn't. As a matter of fact, opinion has a more significant impact on policy when more than one interest organization is involved (83%), a little less, but still powerful when only one organization is considered (78%), and it has the weakest impact when no organization participates (69%). The same is true for political parties: public opinion tends to be of substantial importance more often when the party variable is included, as well as with elite influence (Burstein 2003). These results show not only that the relationship between opinion and policy is not spurious but also stress the possibility that interest organizations, party and elites improve responsiveness rather than diminishing it.

There are different ways in which the relationship between opinion and policy is measured, mainly four (Weissberg 1976; Wlezien and Soroka 2012). The "majoritarian" approach occurs when the majority of the public is happy with the existing policy, therefore policy and opinion are in agreement, the issue with this method might be that people are not generally well informed on the current policies; the "policy consistency" approach, sees opinion and policy as consistent if when the majority of the

public calls for a policy change, this changes; the “covariation” approach can use different methods: the same policy is presented either to the public in one political group or to different ones in different political groups. If policy differences occur and are retraceable to changes in policy preferences, then the two variables “covary”. The last approach, “dynamic representation” deals with the reciprocal link between the two variables: if policy changes following opinion, can opinion vary again due to the policy changes and ultimately affect policy once again?

One of the most “classic” and recognized studies is that of Benjamin Page and Robert Shapiro (1983) that they conducted through the “covariation” model, analyzing how changes in opinion and policy are correlated in the United States (Page and Shapiro 1983). They used as Data hundreds of surveys of national samples of American citizens, conducted between 1935 and 1979; then they identified 357 instances where there was a significant change in policy preferences. The aim was to measure the congruence between policy and opinion within one year. In the end, they found a great degree of congruence between changes in opinion and policy, the 43%, which supposedly might seem like a pretty unimpressive number, however, we should stress that the 33% of cases in which policy did not change can be explained by the fact that 54% of them were policies that already reached floors and ceilings, therefore they were unable to respond to opinion, moreover, another 16% of the no policy change cases eventually saw a variation in policy, but simply after the year time. This was a groundbreaking study in the field that showed how there is a relationship between opinion and policy, However, as the two researchers pointed out the issues used in the survey were quite general and of high salience for the public. There are cases of non-congruence in which the policy goes in the opposite direction than the opinion, although these are way less frequent than the cases where congruence occurs. Finally, the covariation model presents us with a struggle: since we consider simply a movement in policy (in the direction of opinion) we have to recognize the possibility that policy moves only partly towards opinion, creating a bias.

2.1 The opinion-policy duo across different systems

A great part of the research on this topic is limited to the United States, or specific to a single country. However, to look at the differences between systems would be interesting, as electoral systems, institutions, and regimes most likely influence democratic responsiveness.

First of all, the way powers are shared in a government can influence the relationship between opinion and policy. When the division is horizontal, the power is shared among different governmental organs: the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary. No one has unlimited powers in this system, and the separation of powers permits a mechanism of checks and balances. On the other hand, the vertical division of powers sees a distribution among different levels of government from the higher

to the lower. This does not allow the check and balances phenomenon. It is realistic then, to assume that a horizontal division of powers would foster responsiveness, given its highly democratic structure. Let's see why that is plausible: in order to have an opinion on the policies and the issues people have to be informed about what are policymakers doing. This is inevitably harder in a vertical system, as a federation, because there are more levels of government making policies, and the public might have troubles understanding what is going on. However, federalism does not necessarily impair democratic responsiveness, it simply poses some obstacles to it (Wlezien and Soroka 2012).

With the horizontal division of powers, the public has more direct control over the government and its actions, which fosters indirect representation: as long as the election's outcome represents public opinion, the policymaking will also reflect it. However, a crucial aspect might change our expectations: the dominance that cabinets have over parliament. As a matter of fact, cabinets tend to have substantial discretion considering that they propose the legislation, leaving to the legislature not much control over the government's actions. Therefore in a way, presidential systems can be more responsive to public opinion.

Another aspect that is likely to influence the opinion-policy relationship is the electoral system. According to Lijphard (1984), there is a "consensual" democracy, in which the representation is proportional, the system is multi-party and there can be coalitional governments. Moreover, there is also a "majoritarian" system with a two-party system and single-party government. He suggests that the first allows for more representation and policy congruence than the second (Lijphard 1984). This can be explained by the direct participation of the constituencies and the high number and diversity of parties which is a factor that definitely promotes representation (Powell 2000, Blais and Bodet 2006). However, there is also reason to believe that majoritarian systems are more responsive; for example, it should be easier for a single party to respond to changes compared to a coalition, and in a majoritarian government, there is also a stronger incentive to do so (Soroka and Wlezien 2005, 2010). This shows that probably the electoral system is not a crucial variable in this research and also that there is little empirical work on the subject.

A work that is worth mentioning in this field is that of Wlezien and Soroka (2012) whose aim was to analyze the opinion-policy dependency in political-institutional environments. To do so, they investigated the public preferences for spending, using data from the International Social Survey Program (ISSP), which they then combined with government spending measures from the OECD spending dataset (Wlezien and Soroka 2012). What was innovative of their work, is the cross-country characteristic, namely the fact that a wide range of countries was involved. In the end, what the study showed is that as the public reacts to policy change, governments respond to changing public preferences. The first finding, to clear our doubts, is that federalized countries do have lower

responsiveness than unitary ones, in fact, as federalism increases, the thermostatic influence of spending declines. Moreover, the results also show that that the policy representation decreases with a proportional system. As a matter of fact, taking into consideration different degrees of proportionality, from low to high, made the representation disappear.

2.2 Policy preferences and the Welfare State

At this point, we have stressed that public opinion can (and often has) an influence on policymaking. How does this impact the difference among welfare states? It seems that in 2001 welfare spending in social democratic regimes was 59% higher than in liberal democracies and 80% greater than in the United States (Brooks and Manza 2008). It is hard not to wonder if mass opinion on policy preferences has a role in shaping this huge difference.

To confirm the relationship between mass policy preferences and the welfare state, Brooks and Manza (2008) created a dataset using the Organizations for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) combined with the International Social Survey Program (ISSP). The first is the main source of government spending data, and the second is distinguished from other cross-national opinion surveys as it also includes non-European democracies. The reason why spending is so important is that there a substantive body of work that shows how spending can influence the degree of poverty and inequality (Huber and Stephens 2001; Brady 2003; Moller et al. 2003). The measure that they took especially into consideration is the "welfare state effort", namely, the ratio of total social spending to Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

The Dataset considered sixteen developed democracies between 1986 and 1999. It classified them among liberal, Christian and social democracies (with Japan not belonging to a specific group but being put in proximity to a liberal democracy). The first step is to understand if and how policy preferences vary across welfare states, starting from welfare support. In European democracies, people have a high level of support, followed by liberal democracies, with the US having the lowest degree of preference for welfare provisions (Brooks and Manza 2008). This could prove welfare state differences are conditioned by mass opinion; however, this would not be enough, and other variables should also be considered, such as women's labour force participation, immigration, and political institutions. The latter is deemed to have a determinant influence on policy output (Swank and Duane 2002), especially when interest groups have the power to block social policy reforms. In general, partisan control is a crucial aspect for policy influence: when left parties influence policy this usually yields facilitation in the development of comprehensive benefits; instead, when a Christian-democratic party control occurs, there will be high levels of benefits accompanied by low levels of service delivery, in the end, the conservatist control gives more priority to private social provision

(Huber and Stephens 2001). Naturally, partisan government control is also determined by policy preferences as these can affect voters' behaviour and consequently the elections' outcome.

As a matter of fact, David Attewell (2020), through the 2016 European Social Survey, analyzed 15 Western European countries in order to understand whether the welfare attitudes are predictors of vote choice (Attewell 2020). He assumed that those who see more often recipients as undeserving vote more likely radical right parties. However, the contrary applies to voters of green parties. Moreover, voters for left or socio democratic parties support all those actions to limit inequality and more generous welfare states. In the end, the results of his research found that indeed positive perceptions of deservingness and welfare state support have the strongest relation with voting for green parties.

In the same way, negative perceptions of deservingness are linked with support for radical right parties, although at the same time, radical right voters are more positive towards the welfare state than conservatives. This result is not particularly surprising, considering how historically, left parties have always sustained the idea that recourse to social benefits is a result of structural inequality. In contrast, the right ones attribute the need of the welfare state assistance to individual failings. Moreover, voters of green and radical right parties are at the opposing poles of ideals and values, and this is also due to their social status: in fact, green voters are generally middle-class people, highly educated, urban, and socio-cultural professional, while radical right voters have lower education, and are most likely suburban or rural residents (Oesch and Rennwald 2018). Therefore, the positive perception of deservingness equals a vote to the left most of the time, which is generally supportive of a more generous welfare state.

In Brooks and Manza study (2008), it is shown how partisan composition mediates a good part of the effects of public policy preferences, however, mass policy preferences have an impact on their own. In fact, in their model, it is stressed how over a third of the difference (35%) in welfare state effort (social spending on GDP) between social and liberal governments is given by mass policy preferences. Even more astonishing is that policy preferences account for 60% of spending differences between Christian and liberal democracies.

In conclusion, Brooks and Manza found that, on a national level, the population's preferences influence aggregate welfare spending, especially when a left party government is present. Moreover, mass opinion is a crucial source of cross-national patterning when it comes to welfare states, and it depends partly on the partisan composition of the government, but it also occurs independently from it, through direct responsiveness.

2.2.1 The origins of Welfare State preference

Now that we have established how much policy preferences can be a great source of influence on policy and that they are very explicative of cross-national differences in social spending, what is left to analyze is what are the origins of citizens preferences when it comes to the welfare state.

One of the most prominent views is the 'economic' one, for which changes in the economic scenario cause voters to vary their policy preferences consequentially. Another method to investigate the origins of mass opinion is that of the 'embedded preferences'. In this case, social factors are taken into consideration, for example, one's place in the class and social structure, the participation in social institutions and the historical development of one's nation (Manza and Brooks 1999; Brooks 2006). These two approaches are most likely the foundation of mass preferences. However, they are incredibly different: the embedded preference solution is distinguished by highly social factors that change slowly over time, making the ultimate variation of opinion hard. On the other hand, the economic approach is founded on situations that are bound to adjust over time, and public opinion will most likely change with them.

The economic approach

To understand the economic approach, we have to embrace the idea that people are quite self-interested. They change their interests based on their government's economic and political activities, following their calculations of expected benefits (Downs 1957). This means that when negative economic scenarios occur, individuals are most likely to support the policy implementation by the government, while when positive financial expectations are present less support is going to be directed for provisions like social spending.

To understand the origins of redistribution preferences Neudorf and Soroka (2018) gave two hypotheses based on economic hardship: the first one, called "government protection hypothesis" argues that economic hardship results in support for redistributive policies as during periods of economic crisis, people feel more at risk of losing the job or their security and for this reason, they count on it more. The second one, luxury good hypothesis, presents the opposite dynamic: economic hardship results in people being less supportive of redistributive policies and more focused on themselves. This is explained by the fact that individuals may be less willing to spend resources on welfare programmes in times of money scarcity. This study starts from the presupposition that one's formative years and early socialization processes impact the individual, which will influence their type of support in the future (Hyman 1959). These factors can concern the family realm, the area one

is grown into, the school attended, the political situation and the state of the economy. The study, which was conducted considering the British Social Attitudes surveys from 1983 to 2010, grouped respondents in five-year birth cohorts from 1916 to 2005. The results show that both the hypothesis are valid: in fact, it seems that individuals who went through economic difficulties during the formative years have less support for redistributive policies. However, when the unemployment and economic hardship are current, the government-protection hypothesis takes place. This study helped stress how much individuals can change and update their preferences, and while doing so, they also put pressure on people with decision-making power. This was only an example of the economic approach, which represents a small part of research that has been conducted on this issue.

An interesting aspect to acknowledge when talking about the economic approach is how people form their opinion based on the economic scenario, considering that they are usually not well informed about it. One possibility is that people rely on “heuristic” decision-making, namely when the degree of economic information is low, people rely on past economic performance to shape their present or future opinions (Fiorina 1981). Another method is the ‘sociotropic’ evaluation in which individuals, rather than simply rely on their situation, focus on the national economic performance (Kiewiet 1983). However, whether individuals are informed or not, the particularity of this approach is its cyclicity. As we saw before, the opinion-policy link is a thermostatic relationship in which policies are influenced by the public’s behaviour, which is in turn influenced by the previous policy. Therefore, as the Wlezien and Soroka’s study confirms, when government spending rises the support for government policy is likely to decrease, and at the same time, when the spending levels are lower, the public requests more government involvement.

To conclude, with the economic approach, mass opinion is very malleable as it changes according to the different situations, however, there are also other factors behind the formation of mass policy preferences, and they can be much more fixated (Erikson et al, 2002).

The Embedded Preferences Approach

If the economic model is based on the idea that individuals modify their policy preferences according to changes in the economy or government policy, the 'embedded preferences approach' stresses how individuals’ place in society poses a limitation to their preferences’ malleability. As we saw in the first chapter, as stereotypes and stigma are very hard to unroot, so are embedded preferences.

These are caused by mainly three social factors: one’s interests towards social-structural placing, the participation in social communities as churches and schools, and individuals’ collective memories.

Lipset (1981) analyzed how the social-structure factors influence policy preferences, and he found that social cleavages, especially if extremely marked, can routinize ideological conflict (Lipset 1981). Moreover, Stouffer (1992) focused on civil liberties and how their support varies among different communities. The type of political environment can give such differentiation, the effects that liberalizing has on education and living in more versus less urban areas. In his research, he assumed that, considering the education progress, when younger generations would substitute the older ones, an increase in mass support for civil liberties had to occur (Stouffer 1992). The idea that individuals' preferences on policy are also a result of their social position as well as of their involvement in social institutions is at the foundation of all the studies on political behaviour. Indeed, participation in social institutions is likely to influence members' political ideals and cultures, especially in religious organizations known to spread religious doctrines with ideological content to their communities (Brooks 2002). However, this also happens in unions, political parties, schools and even in the household. Although we have stressed how the main characteristic of the embedded preferences is its stability over time, changes naturally occur, and when they do, they are drastic. Also, individuals usually take part in more than one social organization and tend to overlap; therefore, developments or changes in one of them could also spread to non-members. Hence, even though these institutionally based transformations are pretty rare, when they occur, they generally mark an essential social and political change.

What can also shape mass policy preferences are collective memories. In a nutshell, the historical past, especially the part related to policymaking, is considered by the public when forming its opinion. In particular, scholars have found among the most prominent contents past wars, political leaders, and episodes of political scandal. Moreover, it is logical that when people have to choose between public or private provisions, they go for what historically was proven more functional. The issue with collective memory is that it stays stable over time, mainly because historical narratives originate from an emotional identification that is generally hard to unroot (Olick 1999). However, there is a difference between collective memories of welfare development and policy feedback. In the second case, individuals respond instantaneously to specific policy implementation. Instead, when we deal with welfare state development, the policy feedback is much longer and goes well behind in time.

2.2.2 Empirical analysis of the two models Brook and Manza 2008

To sum up, there are three considerations to do when differentiating between these two methods: first, the economic approach is characterized by a short-term fluctuation versus the stability of the embedded preferences; secondly, in the economic approach, the shift of the economic variables are

recognized as the only cause for the change of policy preferences, while in the social model, many factors are kept into consideration; finally, in the economic model the assumption is that economic factors have a bigger influence over individual's preferences compared to social and institutional ones.

Brooks and Manza (2008) attempted to find out whether embedded preferences or economic factors are the leading cause of welfare state preferences. To do so they analyzed survey data for the United States, Sweden and Norway and the Netherlands. These countries were not chosen casually, they are all representative of a different welfare regime: liberal, social democratic and Christian democratic. The Data were drawn from surveys dealing with policy behaviour and policy attitudes. The independent variables employed were "sociotropic" evaluations, namely how respondents evaluate the national economy; "egocentric" evaluation, how they evaluate their economic situation; and several social-cleavage and institutional variables as class, religion, etc race, gender, education. To understand the magnitude that economic factors have over the creation of policy preferences, the study compared the effects of economic evaluations versus social factors regarding policy preference. Dealing with the US, Brooks and Manza compared the magnitude of racial and class cleavages with the corresponding magnitude of economic evaluations and discovered that the racial disparity was the most influential in shaping policy preferences, followed by sociotropic and egocentric evaluations. The same method was proposed substituting race cleavage with education, and in this case, as well the social factor had a larger effect than the economic one. Similar results were confirmed with Sweden, in which the effects of education were the most prominent. However, in the Netherlands, sociotropic evaluations have the most significant effect than any other variable (Brooks and Manza 2003).

Therefore, considering everything we have dealt with up to this point, we should be confident that mass policy preferences do have a crucial influence on government action, what was left to understand was the nature of such influence. Brooks and Manza's study found that overall, the embedded preferences approach better explains citizens' attitudes towards the welfare state. As a matter of fact, it seems that welfare preferences are specifically shaped by individuals' social and institutional positions as well as by their collective memories on welfare development. The main point of this model is the stillness and inertia of the general opinion, which allows the research to be extended cross-nationally. In the end, despite the level of support for social provisions, these attitudes tend to be rooted and difficult to change.

2.3 Aggregated versus specific policy domains

Throughout this chapter, we have stressed the importance of social spending for investigating the influence that welfare state has on stratification and inequality. This is an aggregate measure, as it takes into consideration cross-national differences. Domain-specific measures are likely to show a narrow and even shallow illustration of trends and cross-national differences. At the same time, the specificity allows for more observations regarding responsiveness.

Therefore, what is interesting to find out is if the opinion-policy link undergoes changes depending on whether the social policy domain is aggregated or specific (Brooks and Manza 2008).

We have at this point confirmed that there is a correspondence between public opinion and policymaking; policymakers tend to respond to public preferences and changes, even over time. We also pointed out how different types of government, electoral systems and degree of federalism impact this relationship. Now we should focus on whether representation changes across different domains. As we know, representation can happen indirectly, through the use of the vote, or directly, when those who were eventually elected use their power to respond to the public's will. Naturally, these two phases are one the result of the other, as elected politicians are usually motivated to respond to the public in order to ensure re-election. Moreover, people tend to have preferences among policies in different domains; therefore, it should be logical for policymakers to reflect these differences (Franklin and Wlezien 1997) and this is what happens when we give for granted that representation is specific. However, some scholars believe that representation is actually "global" (Stimson, Mackuen and Erikson 1995), namely people do not have preferences regarding specific policies, but rather they have opinions on the general characteristics of the government's activities, what Stimson calls "mood".

Global policy responsiveness

When we talk about global policy responsiveness, the main idea is that the link between opinion and policy is general, as it functions across different domains. The global method is quite easy as it requires a low level of information from both parts, citizens and policymakers. In fact, citizens are just interested broadly in welfare spending or welfare provision but not specifically to a particular program, and the same applies to government officials who are simply interested in voters' general policy preferences, namely, if welfare provisions are generous enough or too minimal. In this model, it is enough for politicians to know the general outlines of policy preference to respond adequately (Manza and Cook 2002).

Domain-specific Policy Responsiveness

When politicians attempt to respond to mass policy preferences by adapting government policy to the specific domains that are of interest to the public, we deal with domain-specific public responsiveness. A possible way to do so is to include information on domain-specific preferences, in the surveys for example. In fact, if one would like to investigate the preferences on family policy, for instance, instead of asking about the general view of the welfare provision, it should inquire on the specific preferences on childcare or parental leave (Soroka and Wlezien 2005).

A second way could be to incorporate the same information about voters' preferences but interpreting it differently depending on the domain. For example, spending for health might increase following attitudes toward health provisions, or it could increase more than unemployment insurance following public pressure for better social services as a whole (Brooks and Manza 2008).

2.3.1 Empirical analysis of global versus domain-specific policy

Wlezien aimed at investigating this difference and shedding light on the nature of the opinion-policy relationship. As a matter of fact, people in surveys are generally asked about their relative preferences "Are we spending too much, too little or about the right amount on [a specific domain]?" (Wlezien 2004). By consulting the General Social Survey (GSS), Wlezien found a pattern in which preferences for spending in categories as education, health, welfare, environment and cities, namely social categories, change together over time. While preferences for defence spending tend to move in the opposite direction. This can be explained by the fact that generally, preferences for defence spending change with the national security threat, while preferences for social spending depend more often on the economic situation. Therefore, these opinions do not reflect a single preference, but they change over time.

Now to understand whether these preferences are global or specific we should analyze how the public changes them: in the defence domain, the public adapt their preferences precisely following changes in the defence appropriations. Hence, it seems that defence preferences are specific, but the domain is also of great importance for the public. In fact, Wlezien found that when support for defence spending is high, the defence appropriations rise and vice-versa. On the other hand, for what concerns the social domains the answer is not that easy: if we deal with welfare, the phenomenon that occurs is the same as for defence, the public changes preferences according to variations in welfare appropriations. However, in the other social domains, this does not occur. Sometimes the public responds to budget policy, but in a more general way, namely more than to a specific program, to a set of social programs. This occurs as the public does not differentiate among policies, but they see them most likely as substitutable. Therefore, we can argue that non-welfare social spending domains

are essential to the public only in a general way. The same applies to politicians, who respond directly to welfare preferences and not to the global component. Still, in non-welfare domains, they react to the global social spending preference. The reason I have been using the word "importance" and not "salience" is because in this case the first is deemed more appropriate as in surveys people are usually asked about the "most important problem" rather than the most "salient" one.

In Brooks and Manza (2008) analysis, the global responsiveness thesis is more sustained as the connection between policy preferences and aggregate welfare output is larger than that between mass opinion and domain-specific policies. To reach this result, they used seven different policy domains and compared mass policy preferences for overall welfare effort with preferences for the specific domains. The first three specific domains were for sickness, pension and unemployed benefits, the following variable dealt with public health spending and the last specific variable was public sector employment. These five are compared to overall welfare state effort and benefits generosity, which are global variables (Brooks and Manza 2008). As I already mentioned, the study found a predominance in the mass preferences and global policy link, but the result is not so straightforward. As a matter of fact, the pension benefits and public employment domains pose an exception: the first presents an opinion-policy link even stronger than the aggregate welfare output one, however, the situation changes according to the type of government as it seems that in liberal democracies the linkage is much weaker; the same occurs for public employment where the opinion-policy link is not significant until it is put in a social-democratic scenario. This is quite interesting as it shows that there is not a clear-cut answer to the question "Do politicians respond to policy preferences by adapting government policies to the specific domains that are of interest to the public, or do they respond to mass preferences through the overall level of welfare output?". Indeed, context can be crucial for social policy responsiveness.

Although, there is definitely room for more investigation on the topic, we can argue that government officials are more likely to respond to mass preferences through the overall level of welfare provisions.

III Chapter

The opinion-policy link in Italy

A representative democracy should be based on two indispensable factors: the first is that people can choose their representatives, and the second is that such elected officials have to represent people's preferences by transforming them into policy decisions. Thus, we shall imagine a “cycle of representation” in which the policies enacted by the government change and have an impact on citizens preferences, which in turn must be taken into consideration by the officials in the implementation of other policies (Powell 2000). However, it is difficult to understand where the cycle originates, namely, are parties and elected officials the leaders or is it the public who sets the tone? On the one hand, enacted policies may affect people's political behaviour and their preferences, on the other, it can also occur that parties change their policy positions following a variation in mass policy preferences (Burstein 2003; Adams 2012).

However, the solution that seems to be most accurate is that proposed by Wlezien and Soroka (1995, 2004) for which public opinion is like a “thermostat” that reacts to changes in the status quo: for example, people tend to demand less of a policy when its supply is high and vice versa. Moreover, elected politicians are expected to be responsive to mass preferences because of the threat of electoral sanctions (Hobolt and Klemmensen, 2005). They should also consider citizens' issue priorities, namely, the issue salience (Jones and Baumgartner, 2004).

Until now, I have dealt with the opinion-policy link in a general way, and thanks to the many kinds of research that I have analyzed, I can affirm with confidence that a relationship between public opinion and government policies exist. This confirms our initial assumption on representative democracy, for which responsiveness is a crucial factor.

In this final chapter, I want to test one last time the opinion-policy nexus by investigating it in a single country, Italy. I chose specifically this country not only because I live there but mainly for two other reasons: first, the Italian governments have been highly criticized by the public, especially in the last twenty years or so; the second reason (which is a consequence of the first), is that the Italian public is very opinionated, and I want to see whether these opinions do have the power to make an actual change in the status quo. Therefore, my aim will be first to investigate the mass public opinion preferences in Italy, in order to identify the “policy mood” (Stimson 1999), then to understand the relationship between public and government by looking at their interactions and their reciprocal reactions to changes in policy preferences, and finally to evaluate how much policy preferences have an impact on the elections.

3.1 The Italian “policy mood”

As I already mentioned, it is a well-known fact that the Italian public is quite opinionated mainly because media and politics are very intrinsically related. However, an involved public can be found worldwide, especially in democratic regimes, but it is undoubtful that the media helped to foster the interest of the public. As a matter of fact, since World War I, the use of propaganda had a huge role in shaping the preferences of the public. For example, Woodrow Wilson created the Committee on Public Information (Creel Committee) that inflamed the public against Germany and allowed the US to enter the war, transforming its citizens from pacifists to warmongers. Therefore, starting from the first years of the '900, the power held by the press was strong, and this was evident especially with the advent of television in the '60s, during which the tv became the main source of information. In Italy, the peak was reached during the 90s where the television started to be used as a political instrument, especially by Berlusconi, who used it for promotional purposes. Since then, politics have always been very present in the media, and this contributed to creating a very opinionated public.

How can we discover the general Italian “policy mood”? The method usually adopted is to make citizens place themselves on the left-right spectrum. Although this might be the easiest way to understand the electorate's preferences, it is not necessarily the most accurate one. As a matter of fact, it presents some shortcomings (Bellucci and Pellegata 2017): first, the fact that citizens places themselves on a right-left scale does not give much information on policy preferences; second, there is a high chance that part of the electorate is not well-informed and does not understand properly what is behind the labels of “left” and “right” (Baldassarri 2007); finally, the concept of “left” and “right” is different across countries and can also change over time (Stimson 2004). Much more effective then would be to consider the citizens' preferences on specific policy issues. Generally, the citizen is presented with different alternatives and the question "what should the government do about this issue?". For example, disagreements might arise on state intervention in the economy compared to a free-market approach, or on abortion rights versus pro-life ideals (Stimson 1999). This is in a nutshell what “policy mood” means: a macro-level estimation of citizens’ preferences on different policy issues. However, it should be stressed, that individual preferences are not very reliable on, as they tend to be unstable and not very consistent, while aggregate public opinion is much more stable and predictable. Therefore using an aggregation of variables, it is possible to analyze the relationship between preferences and policies (Bertle, Dellepiane-Avellaneda and Stimson 2011).

This is the path undertaken by Bellucci and Pellagata (2017), who collected data from eight different survey programs: Eurobarometer (EB), European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS), European Social Survey (ESS), European Values Study (EVS), International Social Survey Program (ISSP), Italian

National Election Studies (ITANES), Pew Research Centre (PEW) and World Values Surveys (WVS). This is the only study that investigates with such precision and consistency the domestic policy mood in Italy, as a matter of fact, it adds up to 202 questions for 554 administrations over the 1981-2015 period, therefore, given the vastity of the variables as well as the span of time taken into consideration, I acknowledge this study as reliable on.

The questions administrated all dealt with domestic politics regarding different domains such as inflation, unemployment, immigration, social attitudes. The reason why international issues were excluded was that they were not deemed as factors affecting the policy mood, and at the same time also attitudes towards the EU were not included in the final dataset as such preferences do not clearly represent a division between left and right: those who are opposed to the EU and the Euro can generally be found in both the right and left spectrum (Bellucci and Pellagata 2017). I also find that analyzing such a long period (34 years) is an absolute necessity in these kinds of studies, as public preferences are known to change over time, especially in a country like Italy where the government changes very often, particularly throughout the last years. In this graph it is illustrated the proportion of people with "left-wing" preferences, where 0 represents the "right-wing" preferences and 100 the "left-wing" ones.



The Italian domestic policy mood (1981-2015) with election years (Bellucci and Pallagata 2017).

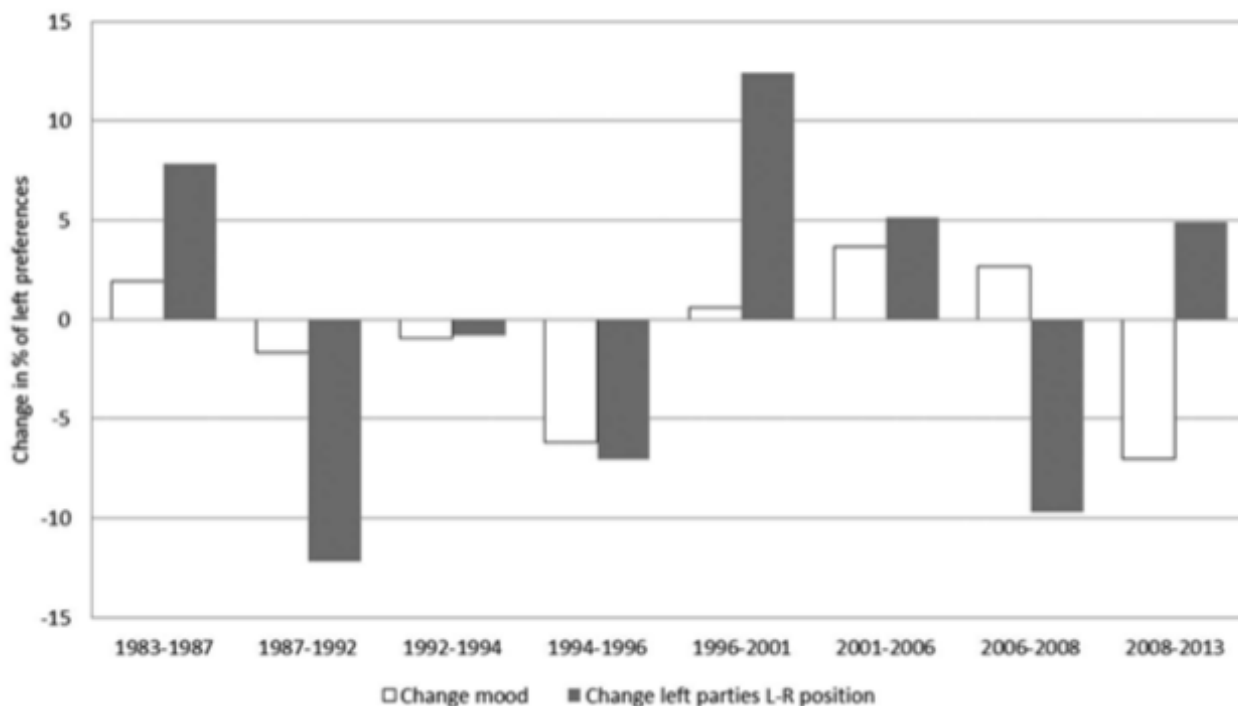
It is interesting to notice that there are not huge changes in policy mood, but they are rather “at the margin” (Stimson 1999), namely, they are small but aggregated, which is typical in a democracy.

However, as we can see, there are some bigger variations: for example, a shift towards rightist preferences can be observed from 1987 to 1992, and then again from '92 to '96. These were indeed crucial years for the history of our democracy, considering that the first Republic was going towards its end, accompanied by many corruption scandals. Moreover, the newborn “Forza Italia” party (centre-right) gained quite a lot of support, also thanks to its leader Silvio Berlusconi; another shift, this time towards the left, can be observed from the '96 to 2008 and it is not a case that four centre-left coalition governments characterized the period between 1996 and 2001; plus, the most decisive shift towards left occurred in 2008, which corresponded with the end of the Berlusconi government (the second mandate); finally we see a sharp shift, towards the right this time, starting from 2009, which was definitely due to the economic crisis and the consequent turning towards rightist-populist parties. This shows what huge impact can the context have on public preferences, and that although the embedded preferences approach (that we dealt with in the second chapter) is valid, we should still acknowledge the importance of the economic one, for which preferences can change with the economic or political scenario.

3.2 Public opinion, parties, and elections

Now that we have identified the citizens’ general preferences regarding domestic policies, we should find out whether these are taken into consideration by the government, and at the same time if the public tends to react to a change in policy preferences from parties or governments (Bellucci and Pellegata 2017).

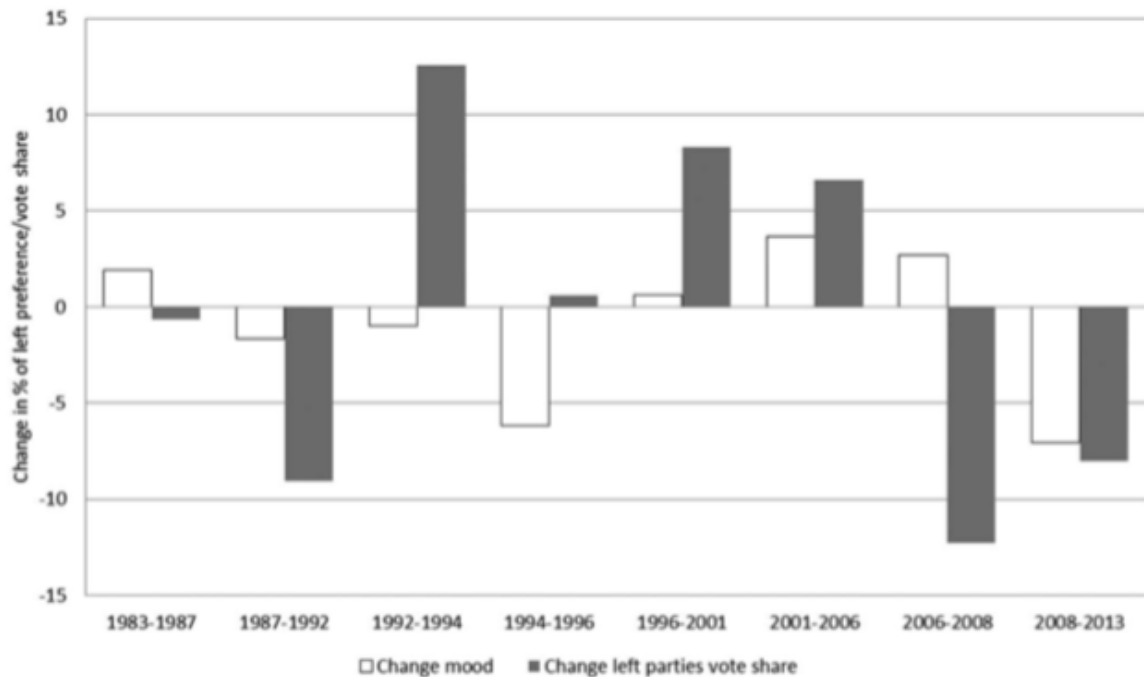
As I mentioned above there are different hypothesis regarding the relationship between public and government: according to Wlezien (1995), the public acts like a “thermostat” that adjusts its preferences asking for more or less of a said policy; according to Downs (1957), a political force to obtain the seats necessary to govern should converge on the median voter, and following this assumption, parties and governments should shift their positions in the same direction of public preferences. To understand whether the parties change following the public, one should observe the changes in policy mood compared to the changes in party’s position, in fact, Bellucci and Pellegata (2017) analyzed the congruence between these two variables using a bar-chart (below), in which, for each pair of elections during the 1983-2013 span of time, the white bars represent the changes in domestic policy mood, while the grey ones portray the variations in the left-right positions of left-wing parties. According to the graph, it seems that parties and public do move "in tandem" as in six out of eight couples, coherence can be found between the change in policy preferences and the variation of left-wing parties’ proposals.



Relationship between mood and left-wing parties' positions in left-right space for pairs of elections (1983-2015)
(Bellucci Pellegata 2017)

Source: Italian policy mood dataset; Comparative Manifesto Project dataset

As a matter of fact, only in the last two elections (2008 and 2013), the changes in policy mood do not follow the ideological positions of the party, however, all in all, we can argue that the party-responsiveness hypothesis is realistic. Moreover, does the domestic policy mood influences the voting choices of the population? In order to find this out; Bellucci and Pellegata (2017) analyzed eight pairs of elections (between 1983 and 2013) and highlighted the changes occurring in the domestic policy mood (white bars) and those occurring in the vote shares of the left-wing parties for the chamber of deputies (grey bars). In the graph (below), we observe a shift to the left correspondent to the positive values and one to the right for the negative values. Throughout the 30 years taken into consideration and among the eight pairs of elections, there was a congruence between the change of the policy mood and the parties' vote share in four cases. When, in 1992 and 2013 the Italians' policy preferences shifted to the right, the vote share of the left-wing parties decreased, and in the same way, when in 2001 and 2006 the policy mood drifted to the left, the left-wing parties increased in vote shares. Although indeed, a congruence found only in four out of eight cases is not enough to be consistent proof that there is a relationship between the policy mood and the voting choices, we still need to stress that there might be an institutional explanation for this phenomenon: the elections that



Relationship between policy mood and left-wing parties vote share for pairs of elections (1983-2013) (Bellucci and Pellegata 2017)

Source: Italian Policy mood dataset

were taken into consideration in this study had a different duration of legislature, some of them lasted for the whole term while others were shorter. As we might expect, in the four cases in which there is a congruence, the legislatures always reached the end of their term. This is due to the fact that when legislatures lasted their whole term and were composed of ideologically similar governments, citizens voted following their policy preferences, while in fragmented legislatures, being the voters often disoriented and unsure, they are most likely to vote following partisanship. In the end, policy mood appears to be an important factor that has an impact on voting choice.

3.3 Policy priorities and legislative representation

It is clear to this point that politicians tend to be responsive to the public, whether it is for the threat of electoral sanctions (Hobolt and Klemmensen 2005), or to follow the change of public demands (Erikson 2002, Wlezien 1996). Moreover, in the previous chapter, we introduced the concept of “issue salience” (Burstein 2003), for which different priority is given to various matters from both the citizens and the government. Bevan and Jennings (2014) dealt with the relationship between the public’s issue priorities and that of governments and parliaments and called this strand of research “dynamic agenda representation”. This literature investigates this correlation by analyzing political speeches and legislative activities (Jones and Baumgartner, 2004).

Visconti (2018), focused on the Italian dynamic agenda representation by looking at how the public's policy priorities are matched to the political system's legislative priorities. To do so, he looked into the parliament's and government's policy agendas, and to discover the public's priorities, he relied on Biannual data on the "Most Important Problem (MIP)" from the Eurobarometer polls.

The reason why I want to involve this study in my dissertation is that, if up to this point we have established how important responsiveness and representation is for a democracy, now we should take a step further and acknowledge the cruciality for a government to represent the main policy priorities of its citizens. As a matter of fact, citizens tend to be more satisfied when the policymakers' agendas better represent their priorities (Reher 2015). In the previous chapter, I analyzed the link between the public's preferences and the implementation of policy and at the aggregated level a correlation was found between these two variables, leaving us with the assumption that policy adjusts over time following changes in public opinion. In this chapter, I took into consideration the only study concerning the Italian government responsiveness, and also in this case I found that that the Italian government considers the citizens' policy mood (Bellucci and Pellegata 2017), confirming overall a thermostatic relationship (Soroka and Wlezine 2010) between the electorate and the representatives. We already saw that when salience is added to the equation the result changes, in fact even though policy is generally affected by opinion, when salience is considered, the substantial effect of public opinion is more frequent (Burstein 2003), and eventually, this interaction between salience and opinion increases policymaking. Therefore, if the general idea when dealing with political theory is that "Preferences x Institutions= Outcomes" (Plott 1991), meaning that political outcomes depend only on voters' preferences and the institutions that deal with them, given the new arguments concerning the importance of issue salience, the equation should be transformed in this way: Preferences x Priorities x Institutions= Outcomes (Visconti 2018). In this case, the fundamental assumption is that if priorities change, the outcome changes even if institutions and preferences stay constant. Hence, an investigation on how public opinion priorities influence the political agenda is needed, to understand the relevance of salience in policy implementation.

It is undoubtful that citizens, Members of Parliament and governments, in general, face many policy issues and do not have access to many resources to deal with them. In fact, the channelling of social programs into political agendas is complex, considering the frequent inability of political actors to engage with them and the increase in the number of issues that need to be dealt with throughout the last decade (Jones and Baumgartner 2005).

Therefore, given how important it is to prioritize and the limitedness of the resources, one strategy for political representatives could be to give precedence to all those issues most likely to bring them votes. This mechanism follows the promissory and anticipatory models of representation introduced

by Mansbridge (2003): on the one hand, voters delegate to governments according to their priorities, following the policy priorities exposed by parties in their manifest or during the electoral campaigns; on the other, political actors are incentivized to please the voters in the following election with “anticipated reasons” to avoid electoral punishment (Fiorina 1981)

3.3.1 Empirical research

In order to find out whether the issue priorities of the Italian public are taken into consideration by the government, Visconti (2018) analyzed first of all the bills introduced by MPs and the government between 2003 and 2013 as the legislative initiative is a fundamental parliamentary activity, through which governments and parties have the power of terminating, introducing or amending policies. Moreover, legislation can be introduced very easily in most democracies with almost any institutional obstacle. In Italy in particular, the MPs and the ministers are in the position of writing the great majority of the laws that are then presented and approved (Kreppel 2009), in fact, the bills proposed by the two main legislative actors of the Italian parliament (parties and government) are a significant number each legislature (Visconti 2018). However, of the enormous amount of bills proposed from 1987 to 2008 (around 2000), more or less one in three stayed at the committee level, and only 7% was approved (Borghetto and Giuliani 2012). It should also be stressed that most of the approved bills were proposed by governments (with a 50% success rate), while only 15% of approved bills were proposed by MPs (Visconti 2018). Why then there is such a great number of proposed bills, considering that less than a half reach the implementation? A possibility could be that they are a propagandistic mean; namely, even though the proponents of the bills are aware that these are unlikely to be enforced, they still introduce them to gain electoral points.

Apart from analyzing the bills introduced, four legislative agendas are considered: the government agenda, the parliament agenda, the majority one and the opposition one. In addition to these dependent variables, there is the main independent one which is the Public Agenda. This measures the policy issues to which the public attends (Jones and Baumgartner 2004) by asking the citizens to identify the two Most Important Problems that the country is facing.

Moreover, other variables are taken into consideration if they are deemed responsible for influencing this relationship. For example, the Mattarellum, an electoral system that is considered to have increased the propensity of the MPs to propose bills (Giuliani and Capano 2001). Also, the number of parties in parliament is a factor that has to be acknowledged as if the parliament is highly fragmented, there will be a wider range of policy areas to cover.

To test these variables, Visconti (2018) used a series of dynamic panel models, one for each of the four legislative agendas. In the end, the results show that public opinion is indeed positively related to the parliament's legislative agenda. A 1% increase in public opinion at time $t-1$ is generally followed by a 0.09% increase in the number of bills introduced in parliament at time t . In addition, when the model was studied using only bills proposed by the MPs of the majority, the relationship appeared to be even stronger. On the other hand, the agenda of the opposition group does not relate strongly to public opinion. This is interesting, as we might have expected a stronger relationship, given the lack of institutional and political constraints. For what regards the government's legislative agenda, a positive relation was found with the public's issue priorities.

3.4 Final considerations

In this chapter, I aimed at investigating the relationship between the public and the government in Italy. First, through the Bellucci and Pellegata's study, I focused on the policy preferences of the citizens and the responsiveness of the parties, moreover, I also looked at the policy mood in relation to the electoral behaviour in Italy between 1981 and 2015. Secondly, with the Visconti's research, I shifted my attention to another topic that still regards the relationship between the public and government, but in a more specific way.

In the end, what I wanted to find out was if the results obtained in the second chapter, for which there is overall a link between public opinion and policy were obtainable in Italy as well. In fact, in this country, many factors could challenge responsiveness or democratic representation like the continuous reforms of the electoral system, the division between two huge and very heterogeneous coalitions, the presence of party switching and non-partisan executives (Bellucci and Pellegata 2017). For this reason, the results that showed a good level of responsiveness were surprising. A strong congruence was found especially in the legislatures that lasted for the whole term, in which public-preference shifts and election results were highly connected. In the same way, a correlation was also observed between shifts in policy mood and the ideology of left-wing parties. In general, what emerged from the first study is that governments positions tend to converge towards citizens preferences, plus, there is a congruence between citizens' voting habits and their policy preferences. Therefore, the theory that sees public opinion acting as a thermostat is sustained by this research. Moreover, a correlation between legislative initiative and aggregated public opinion policy priorities was also found (Visconti 2018). As a matter of fact, the salience hypothesis, according to which all the issues that have high priority for the public are ultimately favoured by parliament and government, was supported by the findings.

In conclusion, these two studies both stress the idea that citizens delegate the responsibility to the government, hence, parties, keeping in consideration that they will be held accountable, try to give precedence to the issues most likely to bring them new voters and maintain the old ones. A factor that fostered this positive relationship between the legislative activities and the public priorities is the majoritarian system that characterizes Italy (Capano and Giuliani 2001), in fact, when parliamentary systems do not have majoritarian dynamics the correlation between policies and opinion tends to be weaker (Wlezien and Soroka 2007). Although these are the only two Italian studies that deal with this topic, they were able to provide a foundation for future research as well as to demonstrate that the Italian democracy is quite responsive to its citizens.

Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation, the aim was to evaluate whether the welfare attitudes have an influence on the opinion-policy-link. To do so, we first investigated the public opinion regarding the Welfare State, particularly the concept of social legitimacy. The main question was "Why are some social groups deemed more deserving than others?". This concept was what firstly inspired me to write this thesis, in fact, the idea that through public opinion, people are able to rank different social categories was fascinating. The power of public opinion is in fact strong, but can it be used for something more concrete?

Starting from the assumption that a functional democracy should be as responsive to its citizens as possible, the public's opinion must be an important actor. Many studies (although this issue is quite poorly investigated) were analyzed, and many of them confirmed the main assumption: public opinion is indeed a crucial factor in the functioning of a state, not only because politicians need to take it into account due to the threat of electoral sanctions, but also because it is a strong indicator of policy preferences. Naturally, the degree of issue salience can strengthen the relationship between opinion and policy, and although some researchers (like Page and Shapiro) believe that this creates a bias in the study of this subject, It is possible that one thing does not exclude the other. Understandably, the public is more involved in certain matters, but the power of their opinion should not be underestimated for this reason.

Throughout this research we learned that the opinion-policy link is influence by many variables, like the way powers are shared in a government, the electoral system, the political-institutional environments, and the different welfare regimes. This makes us understand that this topic is not an exact science, but there are many factors to take into consideration. Even the preferences of the public stem from different contexts, on the one hand there can be economic or political reasons, somebody who is going through an economic hardship, might feel intimidated by the competition for the Welfare assistance, and for this reason could discriminate more against the recipients, at the same time a sense of community and unification might pervade someone else. However, there is also who no matter the circumstances, has preferences that are embedded, namely, much harder to unroot.

In conclusion, in this dissertation we dealt with many different topics, and although it was challenging, each of them was a crucial element in order to get a more comprehensive idea of the relationship between public and government.

In the first chapter, the aim was to give a complete outlook of the welfare attitudes: through the analysis of social legitimacy, we understood the degree to which the public can support certain benefits, services, and welfare provisions, and we looked at the reasons why some benefits are more

accepted than others. We found out that there are institutional motives as well as social ones, like the public perception that individuals have of target groups (usually made of stereotypes and stigmatizations), and the deservingness perception. In the second chapter, we tested these opinions in a political scenario, and we discovered that overall, public opinion has an influence on public policy. As it was already stressed, many variables have the power to change this relationship, but the findings collected until now show a strong correlation. Finally, in the third chapter, the strength of the opinion-policy link in Italy was investigated. As I wrote in the introduction, the Mediterranean Welfare State has still a long way to go: the traits of paternalism are strong as the level of gender inequality and the inclusion of young people and women in the society is low. However, the results on democratic responsiveness were quite surprising.

This matter is still quite unexplored, but the results are relevant. Overall, we can conclude that governments and masses adapt their preferences one following the other, which, as I already argued, is the most crucial factor of a working democracy.

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Summary

Il Welfare State, Stato assistenziale o Stato sociale, è generalmente inteso come l'insieme di politiche pubbliche offerte da uno stato, con l'obiettivo di garantire ai suoi cittadini alcuni tipi di benefici, finalizzati alla promozione del benessere economico e sociale. Non tutti gli stati assistenziali agiscono nello stesso modo, infatti possiamo trovare diverse tipologie di welfare state, che si distinguono in base al grado di inclusione sociale, il tipo di benefici offerti, il livello di de-mercificazione e molto altro. L'aspetto su cui mi soffermo nel primo capitolo della mia tesi, è il "welfare targeting", ovvero "benessere mirato", che si presenta quando il welfare state non è universale, e quindi disponibile per tutti, ma selettivo. Ciò comporta la disponibilità dei benefici solo per determinate categorie di persone bisognose, le quali devono necessariamente sottoporsi ad indagini approfondite circa il loro reale bisogno di assistenza. Questo può spesso contribuire alla stigmatizzazione dei riceventi.

Per definire quali gruppi siano più o meno meritevoli dei benefici sociali, bisogna soffermarsi sul concetto di "legittimazione sociale", ovvero il grado in cui il pubblico sostiene e supporta determinati servizi e disposizioni diretti a diversi gruppi di cittadini. Tale sostegno, può dipendere da vari fattori: le caratteristiche istituzionali dei benefici, la percezione che il pubblico ha dei "target groups", e la cosiddetta "deservingness perception", ovvero chi è percepito dalla massa come meritevole dell'assistenza dello stato e chi no. Nel primo caso, sembra che in generale le persone siano inclini a sostenere benefici che li riguardano allo stato attuale o lo faranno nel futuro (come la pensione o l'assicurazione sanitaria). Per questo motivo, nei paesi caratterizzati da un'alta selettività, ci sarà un divario più netto tra bisognosi e non; tra "noi" e "loro". In più il sostegno per un programma può variare in base al livello di fiducia che il cittadino ripone nelle istituzioni responsabili. Generalmente, nei sistemi universali c'è un livello di fiducia sociale maggiore, dovuto soprattutto alla percezione di corruzione e frode che si ha dei sistemi selettivi e "means-tested". Il secondo aspetto riguarda la percezione pubblica dei "target groups" che si basa generalmente su stereotipi. Tra le categorie più stigmatizzate troviamo persone di bassa classe sociale, di minoranze razziali, immigrate e disoccupate. In particolare, in America è presente un fenomeno di razzismo sistematico che si nota anche al livello del welfare. Tale discriminazione origina dalle credenze sociali degli Americani, i quali individuano le minoranze come pigre e non autonome, tanto che nelle aree maggiormente abitate da Afroamericani l'opposizione al welfare è maggiore. Un'altra classe sociale estremamente stereotipata è quella delle donne, ed in particolare madri single, che vengono anche loro accusate di non impegnarsi abbastanza per raggiungere l'indipendenza dal welfare. Lo stesso vale per gli immigrati e per i disoccupati, ai quali viene imputata una mancanza di volontà e l'uso improprio dei Benefici che vengono dati loro. Di fatti, è evidente che la stigmatizzazione dei gruppi target abbassi il sostegno verso tutti i programmi

di welfare rivolti a loro, così come diminuisca la lealtà verso lo stato sociale in generale. La “deservingness perception”, la percezione di chi è più o meno meritevole dei benefici, non deve essere confusa con il punto precedente, poiché se da una parte l’opinione pubblica dei target groups si rifà agli stereotipi e all’immagine pubblica, l’approccio meritocratico va più nello specifico, mettendo in risalto caratteristiche definite che possono influenzare la legittimazione sociale (social legitimacy). Si parte dal presupposto che ci siano quattro categorie classificabili da più a meno meritevoli dell’assistenza del welfare: anziani, malati e disabili, disoccupati ed infine immigrati. Van Oorschot (2000) ha raggruppato cinque criteri per motivare questa distinzione: il primo riguarda quanto un individuo sia responsabile del proprio bisogno (control over neediness), più si è responsabili meno si è ritenuti meritevoli; il secondo criterio riguarda il comportamento (attitude): coloro che sono ben predisposti e grati sono ritenuti più meritevoli; successivamente il criterio della reciprocità (reciprocity), prevede che chi ha contribuito al “nostro” gruppo in passato o lo farà verosimilmente in futuro sia più ben visto e percepito come meritevole; in modo simile il quarto criterio presume che coloro che sono più vicini “ a noi” siano più meritevoli (identity); infine il quinto considera che le persone con bisogni maggiori siano generalmente percepite come più meritevoli (need). Quindi tutto considerato, è comprensibile che gli anziani siano in cima alla classifica, infatti la percezione generale di questa classe sociale è che non sia responsabile della sua necessità e si sia guadagnata i diritti lavorando come parte della forza lavoro produttiva. Allo stesso modo, gli immigrati si trovano in fondo poiché reputati non parte attiva della società, responsabili delle loro difficoltà, inoltre la percezione sociale è che non abbiano contribuito abbastanza per meritare un’assistenza vera e propria. In generale, le donne, le persone anziane e meno educate tendono a discriminare di più, un fenomeno che può essere spiegato da un fatto di competizione tra classi più deboli. Anche coloro che tendono ad avere un orientamento politico conservatore, o che hanno poca fiducia nel welfare state e nella democrazia fanno una differenziazione più marcata tra meritevoli e non.

Pertanto, la legittimazione sociale tende a diminuire con programmi molto selettivi che creano una netta divisione tra coloro che contribuiscono allo schema, senza necessariamente usufruirne, e coloro che ne godono. In più chi ha il compito di implementare le politiche sociali, potrebbe essere influenzato dal pubblico, e questo risulterebbe in un’ulteriore discriminazione tra “meritevoli” e “non meritevoli”. Per evitarlo, la burocrazia aumenterebbe causando una maggiore sensazione di corruzione e cattiva condotta da parte del pubblico: questo è il cosiddetto “paradox of means-tested benefits”.

La “deservingness perception” è senz’altro l’approccio migliore per comprendere il concetto di legittimazione sociale, poiché non solo può influenzare le caratteristiche istituzionali dei benefici ma

può addirittura avere un ruolo nell'effettiva implementazione delle politiche. Questo argomento viene trattato nel secondo capitolo.

Può l'opinione pubblica influenzare le politiche pubbliche? Considerato quanto sopra: la legittimazione sociale, i gruppi target, la percezione che certe classi sociali siano più o meno meritevoli di altre, in questo capitolo si indaga se questo fenomeno meramente sociale influenzi la politica. L'aspettativa è che in una democrazia il pubblico abbia voce in capitolo sulle politiche pubbliche, ma è realistico? Per quanto questo argomento non sia stato largamente studiato, ci sono state ricerche che hanno provato una correlazione tra queste due variabili. Un aspetto che sembra condizionare particolarmente l'impatto che l'opinione pubblica ha sulle politiche sociali è la rilevanza che determinati temi hanno per la massa (issue salience). Inoltre, è importante prendere in considerazione altri attori, come le élite economiche, i partiti politici o i gruppi di interesse. Infatti, secondo uno studio di Burstein (2003) l'opinione pubblica ha maggiore impatto quando un gruppo di interesse è coinvolto e ancora di più quando ne è coinvolto più di uno. Lo stesso vale per i partiti e le élite.

Uno degli studi più riconosciuti è quello di Benjamin Page e Robert Shapiro (1983) che utilizzando dati da centinaia di questionari somministrati tra il 1935 e il 1979 a cittadini americani, hanno riconosciuto una relazione frequente tra il cambio delle preferenze del pubblico e il cambio delle politiche pubbliche. Shapiro e Page, come molti altri, hanno condotto la loro ricerca basandosi solo sugli Stati Uniti, e questo ha causato una limitazione per lo studio di questo argomento. Di fatti, è possibile che la relazione tra pubblico e governo cambi a seconda del sistema che si investiga. Ad esempio, la divisione dei poteri è un fattore determinante, in un sistema dove c'è una divisione dei poteri orizzontale e non verticale, il pubblico ha un controllo più diretto sul governo e le sue azioni e questo permette una rappresentazione più fedele. Wlezien e Soroka (2012) hanno creato uno studio molto innovativo, ricercando le preferenze sulla spesa pubblica in vari paesi. Anche in questo caso, è stato provato come ad una reazione del pubblico per una nuova politica, seguiva una reazione del governo in risposta al cambiamento della preferenza.

Anche Brooks e Manza (2008) hanno preso in considerazione le preferenze circa la spesa pubblica ma le hanno messe in relazione a diversi tipi di welfare state, per sottolinearne le differenze.

Le preferenze pubbliche possono variare tra stati sociali, infatti si trova un maggiore sostegno da parte della massa nelle democrazie Europee, seguite da quelle liberali (gli Stati Uniti hanno un bassissimo grado di supporto per il welfare). In più la percezione che il pubblico ha dei riceventi dei benefici del welfare può avere un'influenza sul voto. Sembra infatti coloro che tendono a vedere le persone come "non meritevoli" votino ad estrema destra; in più i votanti dei partiti di sinistra o socialdemocratici supportano le azioni volte a limitare l'inuguaglianza e un welfare più generoso.

Dunque, a livello nazionale, le preferenze della popolazione influenzano la totale spesa del welfare, specialmente se un governo di sinistra è presente.

Ci sono due teorie circa l'origine delle preferenze dai cittadini; l'approccio "economico", e quello delle "preferenze radicate" (embedded preferences). Per capire l'approccio economico, dobbiamo partire da un'idea secondo cui gli individui sono volti ai propri interessi, e volubili in base alle attività economiche e politiche del loro governo, di modo da avere più benefici possibili. Per comprendere le origini delle preferenze redistributive Neudorf e Soroka (2018) hanno proposto due ipotesi: da un lato la "ipotesi della protezione del governo" per cui in periodi di crisi economica, le persone si sentono più vulnerabili e questo porta ad un maggiore supporto delle politiche di redistribuzione; dall'altro la "ipotesi dei beni di lusso", propone un ragionamento opposto per cui la crisi porta le persone a concentrarsi maggiormente su loro stesse, diminuendo il supporto per le politiche di redistribuzione. Entrambe le possibilità sono valide: coloro che hanno vissuto in passato crisi economiche tendono a supportare meno queste politiche, ma allo stesso tempo, quando la disoccupazione e le difficoltà economiche sono attuali l'ipotesi della protezione del governo si verifica. La caratteristica principale di questo approccio è la sua ciclicità, la relazione tra opinione e politica è come un termostato, dunque quando la spesa del governo aumenta, è probabile che il sostegno alle politiche del governo diminuisca, e allo stesso tempo, quando i livelli di spesa sono più bassi, il pubblico richiede un maggiore coinvolgimento dello stato. Se questo approccio tende ad essere malleabile e a cambiare con le circostanze, quello delle preferenze radicate è tutt'altro. Queste preferenze sono simili agli stereotipi e alla stigmatizzazione, difficili da sradicare, e sono causate da tre fattori sociologici: l'interesse verso il posizionamento socio-strutturale, la partecipazione nelle comunità sociali come chiese e scuole e le memorie collettive degli individui. Di fatti, l'idea che le preferenze sulla politica siano anche il risultato della loro posizione sociale e del loro coinvolgimento nelle istituzioni sociali è alla base di tutti gli studi sul comportamento politico. La partecipazione alle istituzioni sociali ha molte probabilità di influenzare gli ideali e le culture politiche dei membri. Ciò che può ulteriormente influenzare le preferenze sulle politiche sono le memorie collettive: il passato storico, specialmente se in relazione all'implementazione delle politiche è preso in considerazione dal pubblico quando forma la sua opinione. Ad esempio, nel caso in cui i cittadini si trovano a dover scegliere tra una disposizione pubblica o privata, ha senso che decidano in base a cosa storicamente sia stato più funzionale.

A questo punto, ciò che è interessante investigare è la relazione opinione-politiche, e se tale relazione cambia in base alla struttura del dominio della politica sociale che può essere specifico o aggregato. Nel caso di una rappresentazione globale delle politiche (global policy responsiveness), il collegamento tra opinioni e politiche è più generico, poiché riguarda diversi domini. In più questo

metodo richiede un basso livello di informazione sia da parte dei cittadini che dei *policymakers*, perché i primi sono solo interessati in modo generale alle disposizioni del welfare, e non ad un programma specifico, e i secondi devono preoccuparsi delle preferenze generiche dei votanti, ovvero se le disposizioni del welfare sono abbastanza generose. Quando invece parliamo di rappresentazione pubblica specifica ai domini (domain-specific public responsiveness), il governo deve trovare il modo (attraverso questionari per esempio) di scoprire le preferenze specifiche del pubblico su determinati programmi. Uno studio condotto da Brooks e Manza (2008) ha evidenziato una predominanza tra preferenze di massa e politiche generali piuttosto che specifiche.

A prescindere da quale sia il tipo di rappresentazione, questa è indispensabile in una democrazia. Infatti, due fattori non possono mancare in una democrazia rappresentativa: il primo è che i cittadini abbiano la libertà di scegliere i loro rappresentanti, e il secondo è che tali funzionari eletti rappresentino le preferenze degli individui trasformandole in decisioni politiche. Immaginiamo un "ciclo di rappresentazione" in cui le politiche promulgate dal governo cambiano e hanno un impatto sulle preferenze dei cittadini, che a loro volta devono essere prese in considerazione dai funzionari nell'attuazione di altre politiche.

Nel capitolo finale, voglio testare un'ultima volta il nesso opinione-politica (opinion-policy link) studiandolo in un solo paese, l'Italia. Ho scelto specificamente questo paese per due ragioni principali: in primo luogo, i governi italiani sono stati estremamente criticati dal pubblico, soprattutto negli ultimi venti anni circa; la seconda ragione (che è una conseguenza della prima), è che il pubblico italiano è particolarmente 'opinionato', e voglio verificare se tali opinioni hanno il potere di portare un effettivo cambiamento nello status quo. La prima cosa da fare è scoprire qual è il "policy mood" dei cittadini italiani, ovvero l'insieme delle preferenze pubbliche della massa. Il metodo più efficace per farlo è prendere in considerazione le preferenze dei cittadini su questioni specifiche utilizzando dei questionari in cui all'individuo sono proposte varie alternative e la domanda "cosa dovrebbe fare il governo su questo argomento?".

Bellucci e Pellegata (2017) hanno contribuito enormemente alla ricerca relativa all'Italia su questo tema. Attraverso lo studio di otto diversi programmi di indagine sociale, hanno creato un dataset comprensivo di 202 domande, corrispondenti a 554 amministrazioni lungo il periodo tra il 1981 e il 2015. Gli argomenti riguardavano tutti politica domestica ed in particolare temi come inflazione, disoccupazione, immigrazione e comportamenti sociali. È interessante notare come il *policy mood* abbia subito delle variazioni da destra a sinistra o viceversa in periodi cruciali della nostra repubblica, dimostrando ancora una volta quanto il contesto e la situazione politica ed economica abbiano un'enorme influenza sulle decisioni del pubblico. Ciò che mi interessa comunque, non è tanto individuare le preferenze del pubblico, quanto verificare che queste siano accolte da chi ha il compito

di redigere ed implementare le politiche, per farlo bisogna osservare i cambiamenti nelle preferenze del pubblico e metterli in relazione ai cambiamenti nelle posizioni dei partiti. Secondo lo studio di Bellucci e Pellegata sembra effettivamente che il pubblico e i partiti si muovano “in tandem”, ovvero il *policy mood* tende a seguire le posizioni ideologiche dei partiti. Possono inoltre le preferenze del pubblico avere un’influenza sulle scelte di voto della popolazione? Analizzando otto paia di elezioni tra il 1983 e il 2013 e portando l’attenzione sui cambiamenti avvenuti nel *policy mood* e quelli nella quantità di voti ottenuti dai partiti di sinistra, in 4 casi su 8 è stata individuata una congruenza: quando le preferenze degli italiani si spostavano a destra i voti della sinistra diminuivano e viceversa. Per quanto un riscontro presente solo nella metà dei casi non sia sufficiente a definire una vera e propria relazione tra *policy mood* e preferenza di voto, dobbiamo far notare che in tutti e quattro i casi in cui una congruenza non è stata trovata, le legislature furono molto brevi e non raggiunsero il termine.

Il secondo ed ultimo studio che analizzerò nel terzo capitolo è quello di Visconti (2018), il quale seguendo la scia di ricerche concernenti il rapporto tra opinione e politiche nonché la rappresentazione del pubblico nei governi democratici, ha voluto andare più nello specifico ed investigare come le priorità politiche del pubblico vengono rappresentate nella legislatura in Italia. Per compiere tale ricerca, ha esaminato le agende politiche del parlamento e del governo, mentre per scoprire le priorità del pubblico si è rifatto ai dati biennali dell’Eurobarometro sul “Most Important Problem”. Naturalmente, i cittadini tendono ad essere più soddisfatti quando le agende dei politici rappresentano al meglio le loro priorità, perciò questo studio è così cruciale.

Visconti ha analizzato tutti i disegni di legge proposti da membri del Parlamento e dai governi tra il 2003 e il 2013 (da notare che meno della metà hanno raggiunto l’implementazione), e le quattro agende legislative del parlamento, del governo, della maggioranza, e dell’opposizione. In conclusione, i risultati hanno dimostrato che l’opinione pubblica è positivamente correlata all’agenda legislativa del parlamento, in particolare quando le leggi proposte vengono dalla maggioranza.

Questo argomento è ancora piuttosto inesplorato, ma i risultati sono comunque estremamente rilevanti. Nel complesso, possiamo concludere che i governi e le masse adattano le loro preferenze uno seguendo i cambiamenti dell’altro, il che, come ho già sostenuto, è un fattore immancabile in una democrazia funzionale.