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ISSUE VOTING IN COMPETITIVE ELECTIONS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN ITALY AND NORWAY

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INTRODUCTION

Voting behavior has been one of the most studied branches of political sciences. Empirical studies have been conducted on the matter since the 1940s in order to fully understand what determines how people make their choices in the electoral ballot. Over time, the research on voting behavior has developed to mirror the evolution of the political sphere and the gradual sophistication of voters in Western democracies. The technological improvements have had a crucial impact not only on political communication, that is how parties and politicians communicate their messages, but also on how citizens collect the information required for their decision-making process: new theoretical frameworks have hence developed.

In its initial stages, the research on voting behavior mainly dealt with individuals' socio-economic background and its impact on voters' electoral preferences: a groundbreaking publication of this opening phase was *The People's Choice* by Paul Lazarsfeld published in 1948. In the following years, challenging interpretations have however been proposed: *The American Voter* published in 1960 suggested a different understanding of voting behavior. In their research, Angus Campbell and his colleagues from the Michigan Survey Center argued that the socio-economic elements identified by Lazarsfeld were a mere consequence of three psychological mechanisms: personal identification with political parties, concerns related to national governmental policies, and attraction to presidential candidates. Moreover, Angus Campbell argued that partisan identification meant that individuals perceived political events and the political sphere in a distorted manner.

In 1967, Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan published a study on national party system genesis based on the idea that socio-economic features are indeed the main explanatory variables behind people's voting choices and on the concept of social cleavages. Social cleavages are ideological, cultural, and religious conflicts within societies that become politically relevant once activated: as political entrepreneurs form parties around these societal disputes, national party systems are shaped and altered. Lipset and Rokkan, on the basis of their empirical findings, theorized the *freezing-hypothesis*: despite radical social, historical, and cultural changes between the 1920s and the 1960s, party systems seemed to remain unaltered across Western Europe. This hypothesis was questioned since the 1970s, as new social cleavages seemed to have emerged as new political issues became important: the term *dealignment* hence refers to the apparent disappearance of older social cleavages and social identities that shaped the political competition up until the 1960s. The term *realignment* was subsequently used to explain the shift of traditional party support by social groups: this phenomenon was not due to the disappearance of cleavages per se but rather to the emergence of new ones, around which new social groups formed.

The term *issue voting* refers to the electoral mechanism according to which individuals express their vote according to their opinion on a political issue that they deem to be relevant: this term has gained popularity in recent years as a tool to better understand how modern and more sophisticated voters make their choices. Considering partisan identification and loyalty might nevertheless be necessary to properly assess the relevance of issue voting in determining people voting behavior: voters might change their issue positions to agree with their traditionally preferred party.

Michael Alvarez and Jonathan Nagler studied observed a positive relationship between party polarization and issue voting: the more parties converge on a common position related to a relevant issue, the fewer voters are inclined to base their voting choice on said political topic. On the other hand, non-compact issues allow voters to see the policy differences among parties and make them more inclined to choose on these bases. Romain Lachat expanded on Alvarez and Nagler's studies and theorized a positive relationship between electoral competitiveness and issue voting. He defined electoral competitiveness as composed of three elements: party polarization, party system fragmentation, and electoral system proportionality.

This thesis departs from Lachat's empirical findings and seeks to outline a comparative analysis between Norway and Italy: by comparing the degree of party polarization, political system fragmentation, and proportionality of the electoral system, I will predict on the strength of issue voting in determining individuals' voting choices in the 2018 Italian general elections and the 2017 Norwegian elections. I will then verify the accuracy of my prediction through the empirical data collected during the elections.

CHAPTER I

Issue voting

1.1 PREVIOUS ELECTORAL RESEARCH AND ISSUE VOTING

From a traditional perspective, electoral competition in democratic environments has been regarded as competition among rival social groups and political parties. In democratic settings, individuals are free to collect information, shape their ideas, express their opinion, and cast their ballot and their voting choices shape partisan power relations and competition among political parties. Thorough research has been conducted to better understand what influences voting behavior since the 1940s and attributes such as income, social class, religious beliefs, and area of residence were at first believed to be the main explanatory variables behind patterns of vote across different demographic, political and geographical contexts.

Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet were pioneers in this area of research as *The People's Choice* was published in 1948 and soon became a landmark book that shaped political studies for decades to come. The scholars from the Columbia University collected data during the 1940 and the 1944 US presidential elections in the State of New York in order to understand what influenced voters in their political decision-making process. The authors carried out their research on a sample of 600 people across two elections to observe changes in voting choices: their focus was indeed not on exploring the roots of well-established opinions of voters but rather on understanding what induced individuals to change their partisan preference from one election to another. Their research showed a fundamental linkage between individuals' vote in elections and their social, economic, and geographical context: socio-economic status, occupation, rural or urban area of residence, age, and religious beliefs were found to have a great impact on people's electoral choices. Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet believed that individuals' political opinion is developed primarily during private conversations in social surroundings (such as discussions within families, social groups, and religious meetings) and that the aforementioned variables determine in which social setting people interact with each other.

Angus Campbell and the Michigan Survey Research Center proposed a different explanation for mass electoral behaviors that became known as the Michigan model: their research put a greater emphasis on the social-psychological aspects that resulted in the social variables underlined by Lazarsfeld and his colleagues. Angus Campbell, Philip Converse, Warren Miller, and Donald Stokes collected data during the 1952 US presidential elections and published *The American Voter* in 1960. Their research highlighted three fundamental psychological variables that determined electoral choices: individuals' personal identification with political parties, concerns related to national governmental policies, and attraction to presidential candidates. According to the empirical research

conducted during their studies, personal identification was found to be the most important one of the three. According to Campbell, the variables that Lazarsfeld and his colleagues identified were a mere consequence of the psychological aspects he shed light on: people perceive political and social phenomena in a distorted manner depending on their degree of psychological partisan identification, which was found to be a usually inherited trait.

Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan agreed on the importance of the cultural as social attributes underlined in *The People's Choice* as the main explanatory variables influencing individual voting choices and argued that not only do those traits determine who people vote for in elections, but that they also have a significant impact on how national party systems are structured and how partisan competition is shaped to be. In their *Cleavage structures, party systems, and voter alignments: an introduction* published in 1967, Lipset and Rokkan presented a historical-comparative analysis of the genesis of national party systems as a consequence of the creation and crystallization of social cleavages. Social cleavages are ideological, cultural, and religious conflicts within societies that are activated by political entrepreneurs and become politically relevant: parties have, in this sense, an instrumental and representative role in crystallizing and making explicit latent conflicts among social groups within the national community, as voters align behind each political party according to their social position, cultural background, and so on. Moreover, parties also have an expressive function as they develop and shape the rhetoric used for the translation of societal conflicts into the framework of competitive electoral politics. Lipset and Rokkan aimed at shedding light on the origins and the evolution of different party systems as a consequence of societal disputes and the first part of their analysis was focused on the historical development of social cleavages in different national contexts: which cleavages arose at the very beginning, which arose later, and which became politicized and crystallized, determining the structure of national party systems. The two researchers believed that a large share of the political history of Western Europe could be better understood as the interaction between the national revolution that started in France and the industrial revolution that started in England. These two revolutions gave birth to four social cleavages that emerged and translated into partisan alignment in most European countries: the national revolution triggered the conflict between the central nation-building culture and the resistance of the distinct population of the peripheries and the conflict between the new-born Nation-State and the preexisting and privileged Church, whereas the industrial revolution triggered the conflict between the interests of landowners and the ones of industrial entrepreneurs and the conflict between employers and workers. These social cleavages, as widespread and impactful as they were on the European political environment, did not translate into electoral politics in all Western countries and had heterogeneous effects in the nations in which they arose: for example, the Nation-State versus Church cleavage created Christian parties in Germany and Italy, evangelist parties opposed to the Lutheran Church in the Scandinavian States

and did not emerge in Britain, where the Church was controlled by the State. The only social cleavage that emerged and became politically crystallized in all countries taken into consideration was the cleavage between workers and employers, which created socialist parties that defended the proletariat's interests against the right-wing parties of the wealthier classes of society.

Lipset and Rokkan then investigated how social and cultural disputes get translated into partisan politics. Their analysis took into account a few variables that concerned the political and the public sphere of each national political system: the freedom and the channels for the expression of protests, the conditions for the representation of interests, the general tradition of decision-making, the advantage or disadvantage of partisan alliances and the implications of the electoral system all have a significant role in determining how difficult it is for new social movements to meet the four thresholds required to influence the structure of a given party system and people's partisan alignment. The four thresholds identified by Lipset and Rokkan were: legitimation, i.e., whether protests are rejected and belittled or accepted and heard, incorporation, i.e., whether protestors are excluded from the political life or they are given political rights, representation, i.e., whether new movements have to join preexisting forces to be represented in Parliament or they can gain representation on their own and majority power, i.e., whether new movements could gain majority power and make actual changes. Once all these requirements are met, the political entrepreneurs that guide social movements, defending a social group's interests, politically activate the ideological and cultural disputes and alter the party system, hence shaping voters' alignment. Moreover, in 1990 Stefano Bartolini and Peter Mair provided a conceptualization of social cleavages as a compound phenomenon: all cleavages have a social-structural element (related to class, culture, religion, and so on), an element of collective identity of the social groups involved and an organizational structure. Social divisions become durable cleavages that shape the political system of a State when all three elements are featured.

Following their research on the genesis of party systems in Europe, Lipset and Rokkan proposed the so-called *freezing-hypothesis* based on empirical observations: despite radical social, historical, and cultural changes between the 1920s and the 1960s, party systems seemed to remain unaltered across Western Europe. Different interpretations have been presented to explain such phenomenon and the interaction between voters' alignment and partisan competition: some have argued that the mechanical alignment between social groups supporting the political parties defending their interests within national party systems remained unchanged. This idea was based on the assumption that social and cultural features such as class, religion, income, the urban or rural residence (in short, the long-term social identities resulting from the emergence of social cleavages) indeed determine voting behavior and that the stability of party systems can be traced back to the stability of these individual attributes over a long period of time. A second and more convincing explanation was based on the conception that party divisions survived beyond the societal disputes

that generated them as a consequence of the collective political identity and organizational loyalty entailed in the phenomenon of social cleavages. The emergence of new societal disputes and new issues on political agendas across Europe following the 1970s have led some scholars to question the freezing-hypothesis (Dalton, Flanagan, Beck 1984): the ties between social groups and political parties must have weakened for voters to become sensitive and responsive to new political entrepreneurs' activism. The term *dealignment* hence refers to the apparent disappearance of older social cleavages and social identities that shaped the political competition up until the 1960s, as social groups electorally abandoned the parties that they have historically been supporting. The term *realignment* was subsequently used to explain the shift of traditional party support by social groups (Evans & Langsæther 2021): this phenomenon was not due to the disappearance of cleavages per se but rather to the emergence of new ones, around which new social groups formed. As issues such as environmentalism (Evans & Langsæther 2021), globalization (Helbling & Jungkunz 2020), LGBTQ+ rights, and immigration have gained importance in the political debate of Western Europe, political entrepreneurs have exploited the formation of new social identities and new social groups to politically activate societal disputes, hence creating new cleavages. Bornschier however argued that an emphasis must be put on the interactions between the aforementioned modern issues of political conflict and the traditional issues that created the cleavages that Lipset and Rokkan spotted.

The term *issue voting* refers to the electoral mechanism according to which individuals express their vote according to their opinion on a political issue that they deem to be relevant. This concept was introduced as early as 1948 when Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet investigated it in *The People's Choice*. The data collected during the 1940 and 1944 US presidential elections in the State of New York however seemed to dismiss the hypothesis that political issues could have pushed voters away from their party loyalties. Issue voting was mentioned in Campbell's *The American Voter* in 1960 as well, as he identified three requirements that voters need to meet to make their voting choice based on an issue important to them: first, individuals should have a preferred policy position on a given political matter; second, individuals should be informed on parties' positions on said issue; and last, individuals should compare parties' positions and choose the party nearest to their preferred policy positions. These three steps entail a high degree of political awareness and sophistication and hence, in the elections investigated by Campbell and his colleagues, just a few voters could be considered issue voters. The evidence of a rising importance of issue voting in determining individuals' voting behavior in American and European elections started to be reported in the early 1970s. This phenomenon was welcomed as a breath of fresh air for old democracies as it showed the active involvement of the new postwar voter generations in the political sphere, as they introduced modern values and issues to the discussion. Later research also showed a high degree of issue-related voting behavior in individuals that did not meet Campbell's strict requirements, hence questioning

previous empirical findings. This happened because different kinds of issues coexist in the political debate: issues such as policies' goals, means or side effects have an impact on the decision-making process of the most involved and informed citizens, while some voters who are unable to see the "bigger picture" due to a lower degree of political sophistication join the issue debate only when the positive or negative nature of a policy area is being discussed.

In his *Issue voting: an introduction*, Ole Borre proposed a consistency model of issue voting that required at the very least a three-way relationship between voters, parties, and political goals or issues: voters and parties have an orientation on a given issue, and voters have in turn an orientation towards parties that translates in the likelihood of voting for them. Individuals tend to be motivated to build positive orientations both towards issues and parties: in short, the greater consistency there is between a voter's and a party's position on a relevant political issue, the more likely that voter is to choose that party in the electoral ballot. This is an intuitive statement, but it reveals the psychological shortcuts, called heuristics, that people exploit to orient themselves in the wide variety of political information that is presented to them daily, especially before elections. Considering partisan identification and loyalty might however be necessary to properly assess the relevance of issue voting in determining people voting behavior: voters might change their issue positions to agree with their traditionally preferred party, hence inverting the relationship proposed by the consistency model. The tendency to maintain their voting choice election after election needs to be taken into account as a heuristic used by voters to solve the "election problem" according to the loyalty granted to a given political party. This psychological approach was argued by the Michigan model and entails that partisan orientation has an influence both on party choice and on issue orientation, hence lessening the importance of issue voting.

So far, I have discussed only what Stokes described in 1963 as position issues, that is issues involving conflicts over policies' goals. Stokes also outlined what he called valence issues, i.e., issues on matters over which virtually all parties and voters agree: everyone desires economic growth, low levels of unemployment, environmental sustainability, low inflation, and so on. The choice of issue voters is hence based on the importance attributed to a political goal or issue, the credibility of a party to handle said goal or issue, and the political means used to attain it. Russel J. Dalton (2020) provided a more comprehensive categorization of issue voting based on the kind of issue involved and the time frame used by voters to make their decision: retrospective judgements are used to evaluate politicians based on their past performance, whereas prospective judgements are made on the basis on the expectations of their future actions. Relying on retrospective judgements entails a firmer base for decisions, since they are made based on experience. On the other hand, prospective judgements are based on forecasts and hence more complicated for voters. Dalton presents different kinds of issue voting:

- I. Policy appraisal is related to position issues and retrospective judgements: voters evaluate parties' positions concerning past political controversies.
- II. Policy mandate is related to position issues and prospective judgements: voters decide to vote for the party closer to their position on a given issue to undertake the desired policies to tackle said issue.
- III. Performance evaluation is related to valence issues and retrospective judgements: voters evaluate the past performance of each party in attaining a widely accepted goal and make their subsequent choice.
- IV. Anticipatory judgements are related to valence issues and prospective judgements: voters make their choice based on the means that politicians promise to use to attain a widely accepted goal.

Issue voting has gained importance over the last 50 years as a consequence of the process of cognitive mobilization in stable and older democracies: the increasing amount of politically sophisticated and informed voters who lack ties to traditional parties is what led to the dealignment (or realignment) between social groups and parties in the first place and has since been shaping electoral politics. Nevertheless, some long-standing political discussions still survive to this very day and influence voting behavior. Moreover, research has also shown that voters retain broad political orientations (as they tend to cluster the issues important to them into broader political dimensions, such as the left-right self-identification) that they use to orient themselves when more specific issues emerge. This is because issues are often interrelated and interconnected and because such a mechanism saves voters a significant amount of time and energy that would be required to keep track of the party positions on each issue. Dalton also underlines the importance of candidate-based voting as a less sophisticated kind of voting behavior. All things considered, research has shown two main interconnected trends in electoral politics since World War II: a decline in long-term determinants of voting and a growing importance of short-term factors influencing voting. These trends could be better understood by conceiving the electorate as divided into separate categories, called *sub-publics*: some voters might still rely on partisan identification, some might be completely disengaged from a political perspective, some might have a strong attachment to a few issues and cleavages and some others might focus entirely on candidates' image, and the share of each sub-public might have varied over time.

1.2 ISSUE VOTING AND COMPETITIVE ELECTIONS

Anthony Downs presented in 1957 the spatial modelling of partisan competition: this framework examines political parties (and hence also the aligned voters) on an ideological left-to-right continuum, and it is a useful theoretical tool to understand political elections and voting

behavior. Parties are assumed to be vote maximizers, i.e., their proposed policies are put forward to gain as many votes as possible, and voters are expected to vote for the closest party in the political space (proximity voting). The Downsian model soon became the benchmark for research on party systems and electoral competition as it could be used not only to count parties and depict them along one single axis, but also because it described the ideological differences among political forces. Giovanni Sartori (1976) used this oversimplified spatial framework for his research on party systems: he described party systems as constellations of parties in the national political environment and underlined the importance of understanding the interactions among political factions. He developed two theoretical criteria to fractionalize party systems, as he believed that the number of forces in each party system shapes the interactions among them: to be politically relevant, parties must have either governing/coalition potential or blackmailing potential, i.e., being able to affect the tactics and the direction of political competition. Sartori also considered the concept of ideological polarization in his research on party systems: he found that multiparty systems entail a centrifugal competition that results in a greater degree of polarization, whereas two-party systems are generally characterized by a centripetal competition (in which the two parties tend to converge to the center of the spectrum) that results in a lower degree of polarization. Later research was based on the assumption that the number of parties determined the degree of polarization and hence influences partisan competition, political alliances, and political stability (Lijphart 1999, Norris 2004).

Russel Dalton (2008) however argued that it is more important to know the ideological distribution of parties rather than their number in each party system, as he believed that the former can be independent of the latter. Whereas the number of parties in a party system can be computed thanks to Sartori's criteria or through more complex mathematical indexes, such as the Herfindal index and the Laasko–Taagepera index, the ideological polarization is far more difficult to measure: Powell (1982) used the number of parties and the electoral share of extremist and governing parties to determine the degree of polarization of a party system, whereas Budge, Robertson, and Hearl (1987) compared political parties' manifestos to estimate the ideological position.

These computations however used indirect indicators to determine polarization, and Dalton sought to compute it directly by using the perceptions of the electorate in his *Comparative Study of Electoral Systems*. Voters' perceptions were measured by asking survey participants where they would place themselves on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means the Left and 10 means the Right, and where they would place up to six national parties in the spectrum. The oversimplified framework of the Downsian Left-Right spatial model was used since Dalton found that most citizens across different nations were able to place themselves on this spectrum, as their placement summarized their opinions on the basic issues and cleavages relevant at the national level, and that the Left-Right

dimension was a useful indicator for cross-national comparisons. Dalton hence developed his own Polarization index:

$$PI = \text{SQRT} \left\{ \sum (\text{party vote share}_i) * ([\text{party L/R score}_i - \text{party system average L/R score}] / 5)^2 \right\},$$

where i stands for individual parties. His statistical findings were summarized in the following table, which comprises the first two modules of CSES and hence also considers a change in polarization between the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s:

Party Polarization Index by Nation			
Nation	Time 1	Time 2	Change
Australia	2.04	1.96	-.08
Belgium	2.46	—	
Brazil	—	2.00	
Bulgaria	—	4.37	
Canada	1.83	2.06	.23
Czech Republic	5.44	5.43	-.01
Denmark	3.84	3.57	.27
Finland	—	2.85	
France	—	3.29	
Germany	2.51	2.70	.29
Hungary	3.40	5.85	2.45
Iceland	4.49	4.08	-.41
Ireland	—	2.20	
Israel	3.99	3.87	-.12
Japan	3.30	3.30	.00
Korea (S.)	0.70	3.55	2.85
Lithuania	3.41	—	
Mexico	1.29	2.10	.81
Netherlands	2.89	3.64	.75
New Zealand	3.81	3.35	-.46
Norway	3.42	3.75	.27
Peru	0.84	—	
Philippines	1.33	0.46	-.87
Poland	5.18	4.92	-.26
Portugal	3.62	3.44	-.12
Romania	2.13	—	
Russia	4.01	—	
Slovenia	2.15	—	
Spain	4.02	4.33	.29
Sweden	5.19	4.07	-1.08
Switzerland	3.19	4.01	.82
Taiwan	1.18	1.14	-.04
United Kingdom	2.82	2.37	-.45
United States	—	2.43	
Total N	29	28	

Source: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems; available from www.cses.org.

Figure 1 (Dalton 2008)

If parties do not offer a wide range of choices to voters, then voters' subpublics will not differ across parties. This idea can be explained in terms of the number of parties as Downs did in 1957, in terms of class voting as Powell did in 1982 (the greater the ideological difference between political parties, the more social groups identify with and support their representative parties) but also in terms of polarization: in his first ECSC module, Dalton observed a strong ($r = .63$) relationship between polarization and the correlation between Left–Right self-placement and party preference.

**The Impact of Left-Right Attitudes on Vote Preferences
as a Function of Party Polarization**

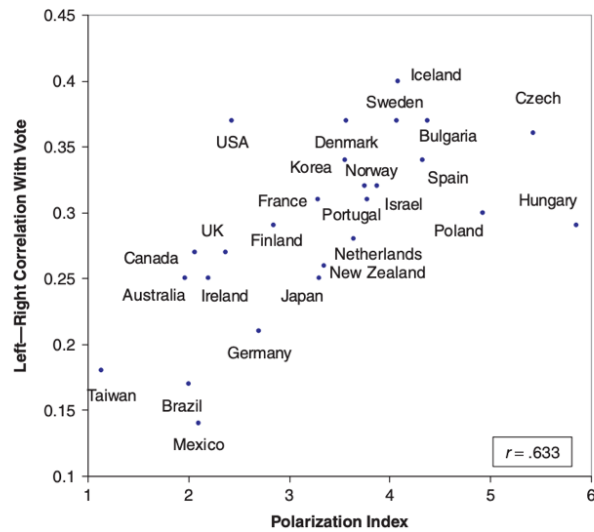


Figure 2 (Dalton 2008)

Moreover, Michael Alvarez and Jonathan Nagler (2004) studied how party polarization affects issue voting. The more parties converge on a common position related to a relevant issue, the fewer voters are inclined to base their voting choice on the said political topic: a high degree of issue compactness determines a low degree of issue voting, since voting for one party or another will result in the same policy carried out. Subsequently, empirical research has shown that noncompact issues allow voters to clearly see the policy differences among parties and make them more inclined to choose on these bases.

Romain Lachat (2011) developed a more nuanced theoretical framework linking polarization and issue voting by adopting a broader definition of electoral competitiveness, that takes into account a larger number of characteristics of the electoral context, and by distinguishing two different kinds of issue voting: proximity voting and single-issue voting, i.e., individuals vote for the party that they deem to be the best at handling the most relevant political issue. Research has undoubtedly shown that people use heuristics to orient themselves in the overwhelming amount of political information that is provided to them (Chaiken 1990), but the electoral context in which individuals make their voting choice has an impact on their decision-making process: low issue compactness, for example, discourages individuals from using "psychological shortcuts" such as the tendency to maintain their vote from one election to the other. Lachat however used a more comprehensive approach based on a compound definition of electoral competitiveness that combines three aspects: party polarization, party system fragmentation and electoral system proportionality. These two latter characteristics were not included in Dalton's and Alvarez and Nagler's accounts. As mentioned before, there is a positive relationship between polarization and issue voting. The same goes for party system fragmentation: a

larger number of subsequently smaller parties means that their electorate is smaller and more heterogeneous from a social standpoint. A party's voters will have more in common ideologically, and hence issue voting will be more relevant in determining voting choices. Finally, a majoritarian electoral system will require parties to mobilize a large number of voters by focusing on valence issues rather than on policy positions. Therefore, Lachat's hypothesis was that both kinds of issue voting would be strengthened in an environment in which there is a high degree of party polarization, a high degree of party system fragmentation, and a highly proportional electoral system: in short, issue voting would be stronger in competitive elections. The empirical data collected during the 2007 Swiss elections confirm this hypothesis: the variation of the strength of issue voting (and the opposite variation of the strength of party identification and other heuristics) across different cantons is indeed related to electoral competitiveness.

Based on these empirical findings, in the next chapters I will analyze the degree of party polarization, political system fragmentation, and electoral system proportionality to establish the level of electoral competitiveness in Italy in 2018 and Norway in 2017 to subsequently predict the strength of issue voting (intended both as proximity voting and as simple-issue voting) in determining people's party choice in general elections.

CHAPTER 2

Italy and Norway

2.1 THE ITALIAN PARTY SYSTEM

The Italian republican era began following a referendum held on June 2nd, 1946, that determined the end of the monarchy and gave birth to the Republic, whose Constitution was approved on January 1st, 1948. The first general elections were held in April 1948 and their results were undeniably influenced by the fascist period, the end of the German occupation and the outcomes of the Second World War and the Italian *Resistenza*. The Christian Democracy (*Democrazia Cristiana*) emerged as the party at the center of the political spectrum that perfectly embodied the Western ideas of freedom and democracy that prevailed over Nazism and the horrors of dictatorship. On the contrary, Christian democrats' main political competitor represented the other winning faction of the Second World War and the resistance against the German occupation of the Italian peninsula: the Italian Communist Party (*Partito Comunista Italiano*). These two parties collaborated in the drafting of the Republican Constitution in the Italian Constituent Assembly alongside a few other organizations, but their dualistic rivalry would dominate and shape Italian politics for decades to come. The Italian party system was characterized by significant stability from 1948 to 1992, during the so-called First Republic: seven parties maintained a steady and constant electoral support and a few smaller parties appeared and disappeared throughout this period. Since the Christian Democracy rarely managed to gain enough votes to obtain the stable majority that would have allowed it to govern on its own according to the Italian proportional representation system, it often needed to form governmental coalitions with smaller parties at the center of the political spectrum. The Italian Communist Party did manage to reach electoral success, but it was systematically excluded from the coalition game that was often played after the elections. The same happened to the much smaller extreme-right Italian Social Movement Party (*Movimento Sociale Italiano*). Sartori (1976) defined the Italian party system during the First Republic as a form of polarized multipartism.

Before 1992, however, the entire political system started to show signs of deterioration: a slow but steady decrease in electoral support for the Christian Democracy and the Italian Communist Party was experienced, the constant governance of the center coalition prevented the right-wing and left-wing parties of opposition from being judged on the basis of their governmental performance (Cotta 1996) and the decrease of organizational strength of traditional parties widened the distance between political actors and citizens (De Giorgi 2018). The "*Mani pulite*" judicial investigation erupted between 1992 and 1993 and generated a mediatic earthquake that involved almost all traditional parties: a systemic framework of corruption and illicit founding deeply ingrained in the local, regional, and national political system was brought to light and led to the disappearance of all the

main political actors that shaped the Italian political arena during the First Republic. Amid the scandal, two referenda were held in 1993 to abolish the vote preference for the *Camera dei Deputati* and to abrogate the proportional representation system of the Senate: through these referenda the Italian people, profoundly shook by the disgrace that was unfolding in the judicial courts of Milano, expressed their wish for a new piece of legislation regulating elections. The electoral law 277/1993, called *Mattarellum*, was hereafter approved and combined both majoritarian and proportional characteristics: 75% of seats were to be allocated through a British-like first-past-the-post system and the remaining 25% was to be allocated proportionally. The 1994 general elections were hence held in a completely new setting, both from a political and an electoral standpoint, as traditional center parties, such as the Christian Democracy, and more extremist parties, such as the Italian Communist Party and the Italian Social Movement, were forced either to disappear or to undergo a process of deep reformation: none of the seven parties that met the electoral threshold in 1994 had taken part in the 1987 general election. The so-called Second Republic thus began in a completely renovated political scenario: a center-right coalition competed against a center-left coalition in a distinctly bipolar political system. These two coalitions alternated in government following 1994, 1996, and 2001 general elections, until a new electoral law changed once again the rules of the political game in Italy: the *Porcellum* law 270/2005, based on a majority bonus system, was introduced in 2005. Nevertheless, the 2008 general election seemed to confirm the stability of the bipolar equilibrium, as the main center-right party People of Freedom (*Popolo della Libertà*), and the main center-left party Democratic Party (*Partito Democratico*) obtained the 78.2% of the votes. The Democratic Party was born to gather several center-left parties in the early 2000s: the former Prime Minister Romano Prodi was the first to propose a common list of center-left parties for the 2004 European elections, and his idea proved to be successful as the United under the olive tree (*Uniti sotto l'ulivo*) list obtained 31.1% of preferences. Given its impressive start, the common list also took part in the 2005 regional elections and won the 2006 general elections, when Romano Prodi was appointed Prime Minister. The creation of a new political organization uniting all center-left moderate parties thus seemed to be the natural development of this successful experiment started in 2004: the Democratic Party was officially born on 27 October 2007.

As the 2008 economic crisis erupted, though, the Italian political system showed its undeniable limits in terms of stability: internal divergences emerged both in the People of Freedom and in the Democratic Party, and several new smaller parties surfaced as a growing number of members of Parliament left the aforementioned parties. Additionally, between 2008 and 2013 a sentiment of distrust spread across the Italian peninsula, as the political class seemed incapable of efficiently tackling the economic crisis and as an increasing amount of corruption scandals kept involving political figures across all parties (Vannucci 2009): the new-born 5 Star Movement

(*Movimento Cinque Stelle*) managed to capitalize on this common feeling and obtain a startling 25.6% of votes in its first electoral participation. The former comedian Beppe Grillo and the entrepreneur Gianroberto Casaleggio founded the Five Star Movement in 2009 as an anti-establishment populist political organization that found in Grillo a capable, charismatic, and irreverent leader. The main targets of his impertinent criticism were "traditional" politicians, journalists, and financial and economic personalities (De Giorgi 2016), and his ability to identify and exploit the issues that were ignored by traditional parties allowed his movement to reach an unforeseen political success in a short period of time. The result of the 2013 general elections is even more staggering when the territorial distribution of votes is considered: whereas preexisting parties obtained uneven percentages in northern, central, and southern Italy, the M5S obtained unprecedented widespread support all across the country (D'Alimonte 2013). The sudden emergence of an alternative to the old-fashioned parties profoundly transformed the Italian political scenario and turned what once was a bipolar system into a tripolar one, as three parties were now able to get more than 20% of votes each and the bipolar index dropped from 99.1% in 2006 to 58.7% in 2013 (Chiaramonte and Emanuele 2013). The center-left coalition did however manage to win by obtaining a clear majority in the lower chamber, while the Senate was much more divided. The government retained the confidence of the Parliament even when Berlusconi denied its support due to a split in the center-right camp, and Matteo Renzi was appointed Prime Minister as the Democratic Party's leader. The entire system was nonetheless rather fluid as splits, mergers, and betrayals kept on happening.

The tripolar system, which emerged in the 2013 general elections, was confirmed in the 2018 elections, although the distribution of votes changed across the poles: the 5 Star Movement obtained the 33% of preferences, the Democratic Party the 23% of votes, and the remaining 37% went to the right-wing coalition, guided by Matteo Salvini's League (*Lega*). The League was originally born in 1991 under the name "Northern League" as a federation of six regional autonomist movements active in Northern Italy and led by its historical federal president Umberto Bossi. Bossi's party played a fundamental role in the reconstruction of the party system following the corruption scandal of the beginning of the 1990s: the League ran alone during its first years as a result of Bossi's secessionist stance, but its isolation from center-left and center-right prompted the party to leave its hope for the independence of the regions of Northern Italy and to serve in Berlusconi's center-right coalition government for eight years between 2001 and 2011 (Vampa and McDonnel 2016). Bossi resigned in 2012 and, after Roberto Maroni's brief parenthesis as federal president, the new leader Matteo Salvini emerged in 2013. Salvini led its party to a radical ideological transformation that rebranded the League from a regionalist populist movement to a full-fledged right-wing populist party. This transformation is well summarized by the change in League's motto: during Bossi's years, the motto was *North first*, which became *Italians first* as Salvini became federal president. The party leader's

strong charismatic aura allowed him to obtain widespread support across the country that would have been unconceivable under Bossi due to the regional nature of the organization. The League hence became a personal party as it completely lost its regional character (Albertazzi, Giovannini, and Seddone 2018).

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Romain Lachat's research will be used as the theoretical basis on which a prediction of the strength is issue voting in the Italian and the Norwegian general elections will be based, as he observed a positive correlation between electoral competitiveness and issue voting's relevance. He provided a compound definition of electoral competitiveness, according to which three elements are to be considered: the degree of party polarization, the degree of party system fragmentation and the proportionality of the electoral system.

Russel J. Dalton and his colleagues collected data on the degree of polarization of the Italian party system in 2006, during the empirical research conducted for the second module of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems. Dalton's polarization index ranges from 0, when all parties are placed in the same position on the Left-Right scale, to 10, when all parties are located at opposite positions on the scale, and the value observed in the Italian party system was equal to 3,89. As this chapter has illustrated, however, the instability of the political system and the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis have resulted in a radical change in the nature of the Italian party system: in 2006 two large coalitions of center-right and center-left parties faced each other, while in 2018 the anti-establishment party 5 Star Movement, the traditional center-left Democratic Party, and the right-wing nationalist populist League competed against one another in a tripolar system. The accuracy of the polarization index observed in the CSES module in 2006 might consequently not be high enough to properly assess and evaluate the degree of electoral competitiveness for the 2018 general elections. It is nevertheless possible to compute the polarization index of the Italian party system in 2018 by using Dalton's formula and the data on Parliaments and governments collected in the Parliaments and governments database (ParlGov 2022). The polarization index computed for 2018 is equal to 4,0 on the scale from 0 to 10. Therefore, despite the changes in the composition and structure of the Italian party system between 2013 and 2018, polarization has remained almost unaffected.

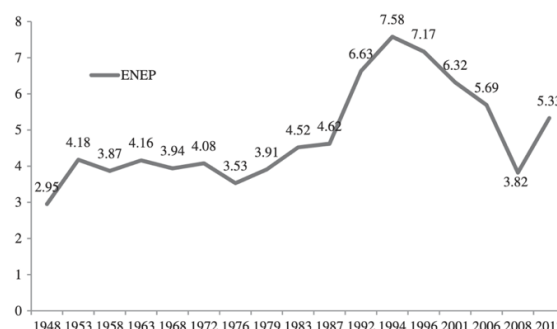


Figure 3 (Emanuele 2015)

Vincenzo Emanuele focused on the development of the Italian party system across the two Republics between 1948 and 2013 and observed the changes in parliamentary party system fragmentation as shown in Figure 3. The abrupt end of the First Republic led to a sharp increase in the fragmentation as new parties emerged in a fundamentally transformed political environment, while the stabilization of the party system around the two broad center-right and center-left coalitions inverted the trend, as it became increasingly difficult for small new parties to gain political relevance in such a strongly bipolar framework. As mentioned before, the political environment changed once again in 2013, when the 5 Star Movement emerged as an anti-establishment party challenging the traditional *status quo*. This resulted in an increase in party system fragmentation up to 5,33. Moreover, the Party Systems & Governments Observatory (Casal Bértoa 2022) recorded the fragmentation of the Italian party system to be equal to 4,3 in 2018. This value is in line with the average fragmentation observed between 1848 and 2021 as shown in Figure 4:

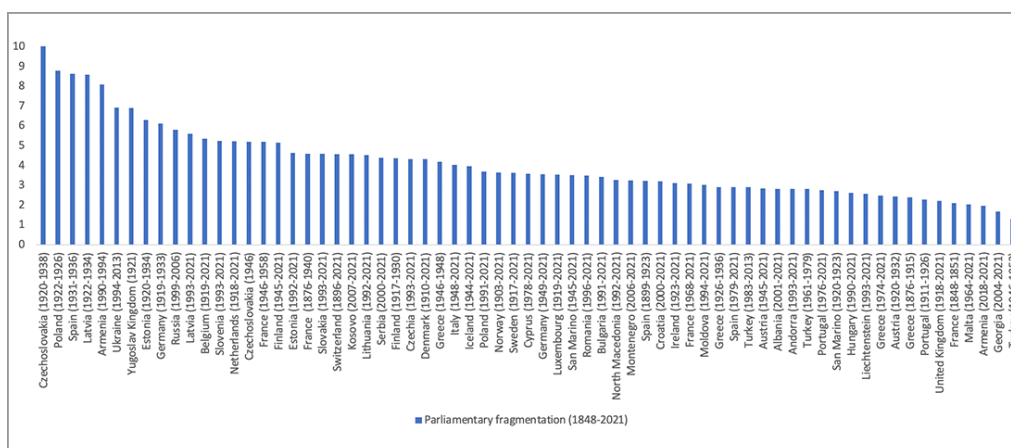


Figure 4 (Casal Bértoa 2022)

The last element in Lachat's composite definition of electoral competitiveness is the proportionality of the electoral system. The electoral law in force for the 2018 general elections was Law 165/2013, referred to in political jargon as *Rosatellum*, which provided for a mixed system: 63% of seats in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate were to be allocated using a proportional system and the remaining 37% of seats was given according to a first-past-the-post system.

The Italian party system is therefore characterized by a medium-to-low party system polarization, an average level of party system fragmentation, and a highly proportional electoral system: subsequently, the electoral competitiveness of the Italian party system can be regarded as rather modest. Lachat's empirical findings linking electoral competitiveness and issue voting allow for a prediction to be made: the expectation for the 2018 general elections is for issue voting to have moderate effects on Italians' party preferences, which might therefore be more significantly determined by other forms of voting behavior.

2.1 THE NORWEGIAN PARTY SYSTEM

Norway has suffered extensive periods of foreign domination and this historical feature has shaped its institutional development and the electoral competition. The Oldenburg Monarchy exercised political control over Norway until 1814, when Napoleon and his aggressive approach to foreign affairs shook European politics to its foundations and the Dano-Norwegian Realm suffered brutal defeats. In the political confusion that followed the Napoleonic Wars, the Norwegian Kingdom gave mandate to a Constitutional Assembly to draft a constitutional document in the attempt of obtaining full independence from the Oldenburg Monarchy while at the same time preempting Sweden's aspirations of expansion. The Constitution was approved on May 17th, 1814 and was evidently inspired by democratic values, transforming Norway from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional one: the King held executive powers together with his government, a new-born single-chamber Parliament, called *Storting*, could propose legislation and national courts held judicial power. An early form of separation of powers was implemented.

In the period following 1814 the political struggle between the King, who wished to retain his power, and the Parliament, which demanded an increasing amount of control to counterbalance the royal prerogatives, dominated the Norwegian political debate. The Constitution provided for a suspensory veto that could be exercised by the King on the Storting's legislative bills, and that could be lifted only when a proposal was approved by three different Parliaments: this cumbersome mechanism led to several political disputes between the actors involved. Moreover, the King also appointed his Cabinet, and the Parliament could not contest his choices. The Storting could (and did) however have the ministers prosecuted and sentenced for giving bad advice. The perpetual struggle between parliamentarism and monarchy was solved about 70 years later: the Parliament passed a bill to force all Cabinet members to take part in all parliamentary activities to increase its control over the executive, but King Oscar exercised its suspensory veto once again to limit parliamentary powers. This political gridlock was overcome after three different Parliaments attempted to pass the legislative proposals and all the ministries supporting the monarchy were brought before court: King Oscar gave in at last and appointed the progressive representative Johan Sverdrup as Prime Minister in 1884. The royal appointment of government was retained as a merely formal act, but a constitutional custom was established and required all Prime Ministers to receive the vote of confidence from the Parliament: parliamentarism prevailed. The political *push and pull* were therefore translated into the framework of electoral competition, as King's supporters and those advocating for democratic reforms faced each other in a two-party system. Sverdrup himself gave birth to the left-wing Liberal Party (*Venstre*) that enforced a set of progressive reforms while in government: the universal male suffrage was granted in 1898 and the universal suffrage was reached in 1913. On the other hand,

those who supported the King and the monarchical nature of the Norwegian State gathered in the right-wing Conservative Party (*Høyre*) initially guided by Emil Stang.

The majoritarian electoral legislation in force at the time ensured the stability of the two-party system as it allowed for a continuous alternation of forces in government and constituted a significant electoral barrier for new parties that wished to gain political relevance. The Norwegian Labor Party (*Arbeiderpartiet*) did nevertheless manage to obtain enough votes to enter the Parliament regardless of the disadvantageous electoral legislation and gradually gained political relevance throughout the 1910s and the 1920s, hence altering the structure of the party system. The introduction of a new proportional electoral law before the 1921 general elections further transformed the political environment and allowed for numerous small new parties to enter Parliament: the Norwegian one subsequently became a multiparty system in which the Liberal, the Conservative, and the Labor Party obtained most votes. In addition to the softer electoral barriers for newborn parties, the increasing number of social cleavages that were activated by political entrepreneurs contributed to the rise in the party system fragmentation between 1884 and the 1930s (Strøm & Leipart, 1989). The process of gradual fragmentation came to a stop between the 1930s and 1960s, a period during which the party system remained unaltered (Powell & Bingham 1982). This is in line with the freezing-hypothesis proposed by Lipset and Rokkan in 1967 and mentioned in the first chapter: despite radical social, historical, and cultural changes between the 1920s and the 1960s, party systems across Western Europe seemed to remain frozen. Strøm and Leipart (1989) argued that the post-war political competition in Norway can be divided into three different periods:

- I. The Labor Party dominated between 1945 and 1961 as it won four consecutive elections and managed to form four governments on its own.
- II. The emergence of the Socialist People's Party (*Sosialistisk Folkeparti*) contributed to the decrease in support for the Labor Party, which lost its dominant position. Between 1961 and 1973 the Norwegian party system became a moderate multiparty system primarily structured around the left-right (Powell & Bingham 1982).
- III. The referendum on the European Community membership held in 1973 shook the Norwegian political sphere and the period between 1973 and 1985 was characterized by increasing polarization and fractionalization of the party system, as new extreme left-wing and right-wing parties arose and gained political relevance.

The Labor Party managed to regain electoral success once again under the charismatic leader Gro Brundtland's guidance: she served as Prime Minister for nine years between 1985 and 2000. Norwegian politics in the new millennium were characterized by the rivalry between the coalition composed of the Liberals, the Conservatives, and Christian Democrats and the coalition formed by the Labor Party, the Centre Party, and the Socialists.

Russel J. Dalton and his colleagues collected data on the degree of polarization of the Norwegian party system in 2013, as they recorded a polarization index equal to 4,12 during the empirical research conducted for the fourth module of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems. However, to ensure the consistency of the data used for my prediction on the strength of issue voting, I computed the parliamentary party polarization for 2017 by using Dalton's formula and the data published in the Parliaments and Government database (ParlGov 2022): the party polarization index of the Norwegian party system in 2017 is equal to 5.38 on the scale from 0 to 10.

The Party Systems & Governments Observatory (Casal Bértoa 2022) recorded the fragmentation of the Norwegian party system to be equal to 5 in 2017. This value is higher than the average fragmentation observed between 1948 and 2021 in Norway, as shown in Figure 4. The last variable required to determine Norway's electoral competitiveness is the proportionality of the electoral system: the current electoral legislation in Norway for general elections is based on the direct election of the representatives of each of the 19 constituencies and the principle of proportional representation, which is, therefore, a fundamental feature of the electoral system.

The Norwegian party system in 2017 is hence characterized by a greater degree of electoral competitiveness compared to the Italian party system in 2018, due to the greater polarization, fragmentation, and the more proportional electoral system. Issue voting is thus expected to be more relevant in determining people's party choice in the 2017 Norwegian general elections than it is expected to be in the 2018 Italian general elections.

In the next chapter, I will seek to verify the accuracy of this expectation.

CHAPTER 3

Issue voting in general elections

3.1 THE ITALIAN 2018 GENERAL ELECTIONS

The Italian general elections held in 2013 were a crucial turning point in the Italian political history, as described in the second chapter: the electoral success of the anti-establishment populist Five Star Movement, under the guidance of its magnetic leader Beppe Grillo, shook the Italian political arena to its foundations and posed a significant menace to the well-established center-left and center-right coalitions, that had dominated the scene since the birth of the Second Republic in 1994. The party system moved from a bipolar to a tripolar structure and featured a greater political instability following 2013: for the first time in almost 20 years no clear majority emerged. The Democratic Party ultimately formed a heterogeneous majority in Parliament and Enrico Letta, Matteo Renzi, and Paolo Gentiloni headed three short-lived governments that succeeded each other between 2013 and 2018.

A decisive moment in the 17th Italian Legislature was the constitutional referendum held in December 2016, that essentially proposed to repeal the bicameral configuration of Parliament, reduce the overall number of deputies, and cut the costs of politics. Matteo Renzi, who was the Prime Minister at the time, was a strong promoter of this reform and vowed to resign were it not to pass the scrutiny of the Italian people. The referendum campaign soon developed to be a practice ground for the general elections that were to be held just two years later: the parties in government could consolidate their position and gain the political momentum necessary to win in 2018, while for opposition parties this was the perfect opportunity to present themselves as the alternative and to remove the center-left government.

The *No* side obtained 59% of the votes and the referendum did not pass: Matteo Renzi thus resigned alongside his ministers and Paolo Gentiloni became Prime Minister. The Democratic Party lost the political upper hand that it had enjoyed until then and the populist opposition parties League and Five Star Movement arrived at the 2018 general elections in a position of advantage: the establishment vs. anti-establishment dispute would once again determine a large share of Italians' party preferences, as it happened in 2013 (Chiaramonte, Emanuele, Maggini, Paparo 2018). The three main factions of the electoral campaign were:

- I. The center-right coalition, featuring the right-wing party Brothers of Italy (*Fratelli d'Italia*), the Christian-influenced parties Us with Italy (Noi con l'Italia) and Union of the center (*Unione di centro*), the free-market party Come on Italy (*Forza Italia*) and the populist right-wing League.

- II. The center-left coalition was weakened by the dividedness of the left-wing camp due to Renzi's polarizing leadership and due to the crisis in popular support that leftist parties suffered after the 2016 referendum. Nonetheless, the Democratic Party formed a coalition with the Popular Civic List (*Lista Civica Popolare*), formed of small centrist parties, the pro-EU and pro-civil rights party +Europe (*+Europa*) and Together (*Insieme*), a list that gathered greens, socialists, and long-time center-left coalition supporters.
- III. The Five Star Movement, that run on its own as an alternative to the traditional parties (Conti & Memoli 2015) and did not form any coalition before the elections.

The anti-establishment side obtained a landslide triumph: the nationalist and populist League gained 13% of votes compared to 2013 and obtained 17.3% of preferences, becoming the leading force of the center-right coalition, while the Five Star Movement became the single most voted-for faction as it obtained a staggering 32.7% of votes. The increase in preferences obtained by Grillo's movement in two consecutive elections is an utterly unparalleled success for a debutant party and demonstrates the ability of the Five Star Movement in adapting to the changing circumstances that the Italian political sphere went through during the legislature (Paparo 2018). The traditional parties, instead, suffered unprecedented defeats, as the Democratic Party and Come on Italy dropped respectively below 20% and below 15% of votes in both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. Since no clear majority emerged, the formation of a new government was subject to post-election negotiations among parties: both the League and the Five Star Movement demanded governmental powers, while the Democratic Party refused to sign any agreement with either organization, hence moving to the opposition. After almost three months of negotiations, the Five Star Movement and the League signed a government contract and formed a rather surprising coalition based on a clear policy program.

Vincenzo Emanuele, Nicola Magini, and Aldo Paparo (2020) sought to examine political parties' campaign strategies as a mean to investigate and shed light on the considerable electoral change that occurred before and after 2013. Between 1958 and 2013 Italian politics and electoral competition could be interpreted as structured in a single left-right dimension along which parties and voters aligned (Sani & Sartori 1978). Still, in recent years socio-economic, and political developments' emergence has allowed for new issues to arise and gain relevance for the electorate: from the parties' perspective, these issues represented fresh opportunities that could be activated and used to achieve electoral success. Emanuele, Magini, and Paparo conducted a survey among voters before the electoral campaign to detect which new opportunities could be exploited. This assessment showed that the Italian electorate is rather inconsistent from an ideological perspective: for example, Five Star Movement voters showed to be left-leaning on economic matters and right-leaning on issues such as immigration and European Union. The empirical data collected from said survey also shows

that most voters agree on many controversial policy goals related to social-democratic objectives and social rights: differences emerge when it comes to the salience that people confer on these matters. The most divisive issues are instead cultural ones. The second data source for the Italian scholars' research is an examination of the Twitter messages that seven running parties' official accounts posted during the campaign in order to determine how much emphasis political actors put on each issue. The principle entailed in this analysis is that issues indeed represent electoral opportunities for parties, but also entail risks. The risks increase as a political actor's electorate does not share a widespread opinion on a given issue and when the political actors itself does not have the credibility to effectively tackle the matter in the eyes of voters: it is therefore in the interest of the political entrepreneurs to emphasize and focus their campaign on the issues that represent the biggest opportunities and carry the least amount of risks (De Sio, De Angelis & Emanuele 2018). The data collected shows that parties have been ideologically consistent with their placement in the left-right dimension when tackling new issues, with two exceptions: the League has focused its campaign on cultural right-wing positions and economic left-wing goals, while the Five Star Movement chose a non-ideological approach and put a greater emphasis on valence issues. In general, most Italian parties have hence focused on Stokes' position issues, that is issues involving conflicts over different policies' goals. The Five Star Movement, instead, focused on valence issues, that issues on matters over which virtually all parties and voters agree: this strategy is consistent with the nature of the Movement itself, which was born as an alternative to traditional parties and capitalized on the low credibility that traditional parties enjoyed in the eyes of the detached individuals that vote for anti-establishment parties.

3.2 THE NORWEGIAN 2017 GENERAL ELECTIONS

The general elections held in 2013 took place in a changing political environment, in which new tools such as social media had become more influential and electoral campaigns were based on a wide range of political issues, while a couple of relevant topics dominated the political debate in previous elections (Allern & Karlsen 2014). The dissatisfaction in the Labor government caused a significant voter turnout, determined the defeat of the governing faction, and led to the electoral success of opposition parties: the Conservative Party gained almost 10% of the votes compared to the 2009 elections and won with 26.8% of preferences. Erna Solberg's center-right coalition government elected in 2013 managed to maintain stable popular support during its mandate, at least according to the polls, and arrived at the national general elections in 2017 in a political position of advantage (Aardal & Bergh 2018). The government was composed of the traditional Conservative Party and the populist right-wing Progress Party (*Fremskrittspartiet*), and it successfully dealt with the modest rise in the unemployment rate, caused by the fall in the oil price in 2015, and with the immigration crisis, that led to a sharp increase in the number of asylum seekers and refugees coming to Norway. Despite

the stability of the government, the social-democratic Norwegian Labor Party represented a strong electoral contender, perhaps even able to form a new left-wing coalition government according to pre-election polls. Prime Minister Erna Solberg sought to maintain her position and extend the governmental coalition by including two other parties: the Liberal Party and the Christian Democratic Party (*Kristelig Folkeparti*). She wished to form a four-party coalition in 2013 as well, but her plan collapsed during post-electoral negotiations due to major political differences. Despite these disagreements, the four parties signed a political agreement that ensured continuous support to the government during the 2013-2017 period. After the 2017 elections, Erna Solberg did manage to include the Liberal Party to form a new three-party coalition, while the negotiations with the Christian Democrats crumbled due to the presence of the populist right-wing Progress Party: in 2019, however, the Christian Democratic Party joined the government after long internal discussions.

	2013	2017
Health care	23	17
Schools and education	22	21
Transportation/infrastructure	15	7
The environment	14	20
Taxes	14	23
Eldercare	13	12
Immigration	12	28
Children and family policy	8	5
Employment and the economy	7	18
Rural policy	7	9
Left-right economic issues	5	4
Economic inequality	3	6
N	1772	4943

Figure 5 (Aardal & Bergh 2018)

The Norwegian National Election Study (NNES) asked voters "Can you name one or two issues which had a particular influence on the way you voted?" in a survey conducted to determine the most relevant political issues to voters and compared the findings with the ones obtained during the 2013 general elections. The results are shown in Figure 5. The most relevant issue for voters was immigration, which became popular especially due to the immigration crisis that occurred in 2015 that involved even Scandinavian countries.

CONCLUSION

The empirical discoveries illustrated in the previous chapter seem to dismiss the expectation that issue voting would be stronger in the Norwegian general elections in 2017 compared to the Italian general elections in 2018.

As mentioned before, this hypothesis was grounded on the theoretical positive relationship between electoral competitiveness and issue voting. The Italian party system in 2018 featured a modest amount of polarization, an average partisan representation, and a high proportionality of the electoral system: all things considered, the Italian political system seemed to show lower electoral competitiveness compared to the Norwegian one, which was more polarized, more fragmented and characterized by an even more proportional electoral system. The research conducted by Chiamonte, Emanuele, Maggini, and Paparo however portrayed a different Italian political scenario. The extreme electoral volatility at the time led to an unparalleled number of voters to be on the political market: the abundant share of the electorate that was free from traditional partisan represented an unprecedented occasion for political entrepreneurs. The electoral competition hence became all about evaluating opportunities and implied risks in the different strategies employed to attract the wide plethora of undecided voters, and in this sense issue voting was a crucial resource. The ability of Salvini's league to mirror the ideological inconsistency of the electorate by focusing its campaign on cultural right-wing positions and economic left-wing goals contributed to its electoral success, as it did the ability of the Five Star Movement to capitalize on the low credibility of traditional parties. The common denominator of these strategies was the emphasis put on political issues, in particular position issues, in the case of the League, and valence issues, in the case of the Five Star Movement. It can hence be argued that issue voting has determined a significant share of voting preferences in the 2018 Italian elections and has led to the electoral fortunes of the abovementioned parties. Chiamonte, Emanuele, Maggini, and Paparo themselves have however underlined that further research is required to better understand the interactions between issue voting and non-policy elements in influencing people's voting behaviour and parties' electoral performances. Issue voting does seem to have played a relevant role also in the 2017 Norwegian general elections, but to a lower extent compared to the Italian one, at least on the basis of the available data. The Progress Party focused its campaign particularly on the issue of immigration, which became a dominant media narrative of the campaign, while the Conservative Party devoted a large share of its electoral endeavours to issues regarding national taxation, which were the second most relevant issue according to the NNES survey. These two parties managed to maintain their governmental position, but the Labour Party became the single most voted party. Further research is nevertheless required to

properly assess the influence of issue voting on individual voting choices in the 2017 Norwegian general elections.

The apparent inaccuracy of the prediction might be due to the rather limited conception of party system polarization: Dalton's formula takes into account the ideological differences among parties on the left-right dimension. This approach entails an evident oversimplification of the ideological structure of parties and voters, and even more so in recent years, as the so-called second dimension issues have gained significant importance. The formula was nonetheless used since most citizens across different nations can place themselves on this spectrum and their placement summarizes their opinions on the basic issues and cleavages relevant at national level.

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RIASSUNTO

RICERCA ELETTORALE E ISSUE VOTING

La competizione elettorale nei contesti democratici è tradizionalmente interpretata come la competizione tra gruppi sociali e partiti politici rivali. Fin dagli anni Quaranta sono state condotte ricerche approfondite per comprendere a fondo cosa influenza il comportamento di voto degli elettori. Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet della Columbia University hanno raccolto dati durante le elezioni presidenziali americane del 1940 e del 1944 nello Stato di New York per determinare cosa influenzasse gli elettori nel loro processo decisionale politico, pubblicando i risultati dei loro studi in *The People's Choice* nel 1948. La loro ricerca ha evidenziato un legame fondamentale tra il comportamento voto degli individui e il contesto sociale, economico e geografico nel quale interagiscono: lo status socioeconomico, l'occupazione, l'area rurale o urbana di residenza, l'età e il credo religioso hanno avuto un grande impatto sulle scelte politiche degli elettori nel corso delle elezioni osservate da Lazarsfeld e i suoi colleghi. Seymour Martin Lipset e Stein Rokkan hanno pubblicato *Cleavage structures, party systems, and voter alignments: an introduction* nel 1967, sostenendo che le variabili individuate da Lazarsfeld non solo determinano le preferenze elettorali degli elettori, ma hanno anche un impatto significativo su come sono strutturati i sistemi partitici nazionali e su come si configura la competizione partitica stessa. Le social cleavage sono conflitti ideologici, culturali e religiosi tra membri della società che vengono attivate dagli imprenditori politici e diventano politicamente rilevanti. Conseguentemente, gli elettori sostengono i partiti politici in base alla loro posizione sociale e al loro retroterra culturale in relazione ad una social cleavage. Secondo i due ricercatori, gran parte della storia della politica dell'Europa occidentale può essere interpretata nell'ottica della interazione tra la rivoluzione nazionale iniziata in Francia e la rivoluzione industriale iniziata in Inghilterra. Queste due rivoluzioni hanno dato vita a quattro social cleavage che sono emerse e si sono tradotte nei sistemi partitici nella maggior parte dei Paesi europei. In seguito alle loro ricerche sulla genesi dei sistemi di partito in Europa e alla luce delle loro osservazioni empiriche, Lipset e Rokkan hanno proposto la cosiddetta *freezing-hypothesis*: nonostante i radicali cambiamenti sociali, storici e culturali che hanno avuto luogo tra gli anni Venti e gli anni Sessanta, i sistemi partitici occidentali sono rimasti inalterati nel corso di questo periodo. L'emergere di nuove controversie sociali e di nuovi temi nell'agenda politica europea dopo gli anni Settanta ha portato alcuni studiosi a mettere in discussione l'ipotesi portata avanti da Lipset e Rokkan: i legami tra gruppi sociali e partiti politici devono essersi indeboliti perché gli elettori diventino sensibili e reattivi all'attivismo dei nuovi imprenditori politici. Il termine *dealignment* si riferisce quindi all'apparente scomparsa delle social cleavage tradizionali e delle identità sociali che hanno caratterizzato la competizione politica fino agli anni Sessanta. Il termine *realignment* è stato successivamente

utilizzato per spiegare lo spostamento del supporto elettorale da parte dei gruppi sociali verso nuovi partiti diversi da quelli tradizionalmente sostenuti: questo fenomeno non sembra essere stato dovuto alla scomparsa delle social cleavage in sé, ma piuttosto all'emergere di nuovi conflitti, attorno ai quali si sono formati nuovi gruppi sociali.

Il termine *issue voting* si riferisce al meccanismo elettorale secondo il quale gli individui esprimono il loro voto in base alla loro opinione su una questione politica che ritengono rilevante. L'evidenza di una crescente importanza dell'*issue voting* nel determinare il comportamento di voto degli individui nelle elezioni americane ed europee ha iniziato ad essere riportata nei primi anni Settanta. L'*issue voting* ha acquisito rilevanza negli ultimi 50 anni conseguentemente al processo di mobilitazione cognitiva che ha avuto luogo nella maggior parte delle democrazie occidentali: il crescente numero di elettori politicamente sofisticati e informati, che non hanno legami con i partiti tradizionali, ha portato al *dealignment* (o al *realignment*) tra gruppi sociali e partiti e sta da allora plasmando lo scenario politico europeo. Gli studi condotti a riguardo hanno evidenziato due principali tendenze interconnesse nella competizione elettorale dal secondo dopoguerra: un declino della importanza delle variabili che influenzano il voto a lungo termine e una crescente importanza dei fattori che influenzano il voto nel breve termine. Queste tendenze potrebbero essere meglio comprese considerando l'elettorato come suddiviso in categorie distinte, chiamate *sub-publics*: alcuni elettori potrebbero ancora basarsi sull'identificazione partitica, altri potrebbero essere completamente disinteressati alla politica, alcuni potrebbero avere un forte attaccamento a poche questioni politiche e altri potrebbero concentrarsi interamente sull'immagine dei candidati, e la quota di ciascun *sub-public* potrebbe variare nel tempo.

Russel J. Dalton ha studiato a lungo il concetto di polarizzazione partitica, sostenendo che è più importante conoscere la distribuzione ideologica dei partiti piuttosto che il loro numero e ritenendo che la prima possa essere indipendente dalla seconda. Lo studioso americano ha dunque sviluppato un indice di polarizzazione basandosi sulla percezione che gli elettori hanno della distribuzione ideologica dei partiti sulla scala Destra-Sinistra: maggiore la differenza ideologica tra i partiti politici, maggiore è il grado di identificazione dei gruppi sociali nei partiti che li rappresentano e li sostengono. Michael Alvarez e Jonathan Nagler hanno inoltre studiato come la polarizzazione dei partiti influisca sull'*issue voting*: maggiore è il numero di partiti che convergono su una posizione comune riguardante un tema politico rilevante, minore è la propensione degli elettori a basare la loro scelta di voto sul suddetto tema. Romain Lachat ha studiato la relazione tra polarizzazione e *issue voting*, adottando tuttavia una definizione più ampia di competitività elettorale basata su due elementi aggiuntivi: la frammentazione del sistema partitico e il grado di proporzionalità del sistema elettorale. Secondo Lachat, l'importanza dell'*issue voting* aumenta in un ambiente politico altamente polarizzato e frammentato con un sistema elettorale altamente proporzionale: l'*issue voting* è in sostanza più

determinante in elezioni competitive. Sulla base del grado di competitività delle elezioni generali del 2017 in Norvegia e del 2018 in Italia, farò una supposizione sulla rilevanza dell'*issue voting* nel determinare le preferenze di voto, che verrà verificata alla luce di dati empirici.

ITALIA E NORVEGIA

L'era repubblicana italiana ebbe inizio in seguito al referendum del 2 giugno 1946, che determinò la fine della monarchia e diede vita alla Repubblica, la cui Costituzione fu approvata il 1° gennaio 1948. Le prime elezioni politiche si tennero nell'aprile del 1948 e i loro risultati furono innegabilmente influenzati dal periodo fascista, dalla fine dell'occupazione tedesca e dagli esiti della Seconda Guerra Mondiale e della Resistenza italiana. La Democrazia Cristiana e il Partito Comunista Italiano dominarono la scena politica italiana per tutta la Prima Repubblica, nel corso della quale la DC fece stabilmente parte dei governi che si succedettero e il PCI fu sistematicamente escluso dalle coalizioni di governo. Secondo Sartori, il sistema partitico italiano durante la Prima Repubblica era una forma di multipartitismo polarizzato. Nel 1992 lo scoppio dello scandalo di Mani Pulite pose fine alla Prima Repubblica e una nuova legge elettorale mista venne approvata nel 1993. Le elezioni politiche del 1994 si svolsero dunque in un contesto completamente nuovo, nel quale i partiti tradizionali scomparirono o subirono un processo di profonda riforma: nessuno dei sette partiti che hanno raggiunto la soglia elettorale nel 1994 aveva partecipato alle elezioni politiche del 1987. Due nuove coalizioni di centro-destra e di centro-sinistra comparirono sulla scena politica, alternandosi al governo nelle elezioni politiche del 1994, del 1996 e del 2001. Anche le elezioni politiche del 2008 sembrano confermare la stabilità della nuova struttura bipolare. Con lo scoppio della crisi economica del 2008, tuttavia, divergenze interne emersero sia nel Popolo della Libertà che nel Partito Democratico e diversi nuovi partiti minori vennero creati conseguentemente. Inoltre, tra il 2008 e il 2013 un sentimento di sfiducia nei confronti della classe politica si diffuse in tutta la penisola italiana: il neonato Movimento 5 Stelle riuscì a capitalizzare questo sentimento comune e a ottenere un sorprendente 25,6% di voti alla sua prima partecipazione elettorale. L'improvviso emergere di un'alternativa ai partiti tradizionali ha trasformato il sistema partitico bipolare in un sistema chiaramente tripolare.

Utilizzando la formula dell'indice di polarizzazione del sistema partitico sviluppata da Dalton e i dati raccolti nella banca dati *Parlamenti e governi*, l'indice di polarizzazione calcolato per il 2018 è pari a 4,0 su una scala da 0 a 10. Il *Party Systems & Governments Observatory* ha inoltre registrato una frammentazione del sistema partitico italiano pari a 4,3 nel 2018. Infine, la legge elettorale in vigore per le elezioni politiche del 2018 prevedeva un sistema misto nel quale due terzi dei seggi erano da allocare proporzionalmente. Il sistema partitico italiano nel 2018 era quindi caratterizzato da una polarizzazione medio-bassa, da un livello medio di frammentazione del sistema partitico e da un sistema elettorale altamente proporzionale: di conseguenza, la competitività elettorale del sistema

partitico italiano può essere considerata piuttosto modesta. Sulla base delle ricerche di Lachat, si può dunque presumere che l'*issue voting* abbia effetti moderati sulle preferenze partitiche degli italiani nelle elezioni politiche del 2018.

La Costituzione norvegese fu approvata il 17 maggio 1814 e fu chiaramente ispirata dai valori democratici, rendendo la Norvegia una monarchia costituzionale. Il Re deteneva il potere esecutivo insieme al governo da lui nominato, il neonato Parlamento monocamerale aveva la facoltà proporre leggi e le corti detenevano il potere giudiziario. La tensione tra il Parlamento, che spingeva per un maggiore controllo sul governo e sulla Corona, e il Re, che desiderava mantenere il suo potere esecutivo, si tradussero nel contesto della competizione elettorale quando il parlamentare liberale Johan Sverdrup fu nominato Primo Ministro nel 1884: i monarchici e i democratici diedero dunque vita ad un sistema bipartitico. Il Partito Laburista Norvegese riuscì ad ottenere un numero di voti sufficiente per entrare in Parlamento, nonostante la svantaggiosa legislazione elettorale, e guadagnò gradualmente rilevanza politica nel corso degli anni Dieci e Venti, modificando così la struttura del sistema partitico. L'introduzione di una nuova legge elettorale proporzionale prima delle elezioni generali del 1921 trasformò ulteriormente l'ambiente politico e permise a numerosi piccoli nuovi partiti di entrare in Parlamento: quello norvegese divenne dunque un sistema multipartitico nel quale il Partito Liberale, il Partito Conservatore e il Partito Laburista si spartivano la maggior parte dei voti. La politica norvegese del nuovo millennio è stata caratterizzata dalla rivalità tra la coalizione composta dai liberali, dai conservatori e dai cristiano-democratici e quella formata dal Partito del Lavoro, dal Partito di Centro e dai socialisti. Utilizzando la formula dell'indice di polarizzazione del sistema partitico di Dalton e i dati raccolti nella banca dati *Parlamenti e governi*, l'indice di polarizzazione calcolato per il 2017 è pari a 5,38 su una scala da 0 a 10. Il *Party Systems & Governments Observatory* ha inoltre registrato che la frammentazione del sistema partitico norvegese è pari a 5,0 nel 2017. L'ultima variabile necessaria per determinare la competitività elettorale secondo Lachat è la proporzionalità del sistema elettorale: l'attuale legislazione elettorale norvegese per le elezioni generali si basa sull'elezione diretta dei rappresentanti di ciascuna delle 19 circoscrizioni e sul principio della rappresentanza proporzionale, che è quindi una caratteristica fondamentale del sistema elettorale. Il sistema partitico norvegese nel 2017 è quindi caratterizzato da un maggior grado di competitività elettorale rispetto al sistema partitico italiano nel 2018, per via della maggiore polarizzazione e frammentazione, in aggiunta alla maggiore proporzionalità del sistema elettorale. È dunque possibile presumere che l'*issue voting* sia stato più rilevante nel determinare le scelte elettorali nelle elezioni generali norvegesi del 2017 di quanto non lo sia nelle elezioni generali italiane del 2018.

ISSUE VOTING NELLE ELEZIONI GENERALI

Lo schieramento anti-establishment ha ottenuto un trionfo schiacciante nelle elezioni italiane del 2018: la Lega, partito nazionalista e populista, ha guadagnato il 13% dei voti rispetto al 2013 e ha ottenuto il 17,3% delle preferenze, diventando la forza trainante della coalizione di centro-destra, mentre il Movimento Cinque Stelle è diventato il partito più votato, ottenendo un sorprendente 32,7% dei voti. I dati raccolti da Emanuele, Magini e Paparo mostrano che in generale, a differenza degli elettori, i partiti sono stati ideologicamente coerenti con la loro collocazione sulla dimensione Sinistra-Destra in relazione a nuovi temi politici, con due eccezioni: la Lega ha incentrato la sua campagna su posizioni di destra culturale e obiettivi di sinistra economica, mentre il Movimento Cinque Stelle ha scelto un approccio non ideologico e ha posto maggiore enfasi sui *valence issues*. Questa strategia è coerente con la natura stessa del Movimento, che è nato come alternativa ai partiti tradizionali e ha sfruttato la scarsa credibilità di cui godevano i partiti tradizionali agli occhi degli elettori disillusi. La capacità della Lega di Salvini di rispecchiare l'incoerenza ideologica dell'elettorato, concentrando la sua campagna su posizioni di destra culturale e obiettivi di sinistra economica, sembra aver contribuito al suo successo elettorale, così come la strategia adottata dal Movimento.

Il governo di coalizione di centro-destra di Erna Solberg, eletto nel 2013, è riuscito a mantenere stabile il sostegno popolare durante il suo mandato, almeno secondo i sondaggi, e si è presentato alle elezioni generali nazionali del 2017 in una posizione politica di vantaggio. Il governo era composto dal tradizionale Partito Conservatore e dal Partito del Progresso e ha affrontato con successo il modesto aumento del tasso di disoccupazione e la crisi dell'immigrazione, che ha portato a un forte aumento del numero di richiedenti asilo e rifugiati che arrivano in Norvegia. Nonostante la stabilità del governo, il Partito Laburista Norvegese ha rappresentato un forte concorrente elettorale, forse persino in grado di formare un nuovo governo di coalizione di sinistra secondo i sondaggi preelettorali. Il Primo Ministro Erna Solberg, nel tentativo di mantenere il suo ruolo, ha cercato di ampliare la coalizione di governo includendo altri due partiti in vista delle nuove elezioni: il Partito Liberale e il Partito Cristiano Democratico. Il Norwegian National Election Study (NNES) ha condotto un sondaggio al fine di determinare quali questioni politiche fossero le più rilevanti per gli elettori e ha confrontato i risultati con quelli ottenuti durante le elezioni generali del 2013. Il tema più rilevante per gli elettori è stato quello dell'immigrazione, diventato popolare soprattutto a causa della crisi migratoria del 2015.

CONCLUSIONI

I dati empirici illustrate nel capitolo precedente sembrano sconfiggere l'ipotesi che l'*issue voting* sia stato più determinante nelle elezioni generali norvegesi del 2017 rispetto alle elezioni generali italiane del 2018. Il sistema partitico italiano nel 2018 presentava una modesta

polarizzazione, una media rappresentanza partitica e un'elevata proporzionalità del sistema elettorale: tutto sommato, il sistema politico italiano sembrava mostrare una minore competitività elettorale rispetto a quello norvegese, più polarizzato, più frammentato e caratterizzato da un sistema elettorale ancora più proporzionale. La ricerca condotta da Chiaramonte, Emanuele, Maggini e Paparo ha però delineato un diverso scenario politico italiano. L'estrema volatilità elettorale dell'epoca portò un numero di elettori senza precedenti ad affacciarsi sul mercato politico: l'abbondante quota di elettorato svincolata dai partiti tradizionali rappresentava un'occasione senza precedenti per gli imprenditori politici. Gli stessi Chiaramonte, Emanuele, Maggini e Paparo hanno tuttavia sottolineato che sono necessarie ulteriori ricerche per comprendere meglio le interazioni tra *issue voting* e gli elementi non politici nell'influenzare il comportamento di voto dei cittadini e le performance elettorali dei partiti. L'*issue voting* sembra aver giocato un ruolo rilevante anche nelle elezioni generali norvegesi del 2017, ma in misura minore rispetto a quelle italiane, almeno sulla base dei dati disponibili. Il Partito del Progresso ha incentrato la sua campagna elettorale in particolare sulla questione dell'immigrazione, mentre il Partito Conservatore ha dedicato gran parte dei suoi sforzi elettorali sulle questioni relative alla tassazione nazionale, che sono state il secondo tema più rilevante secondo il sondaggio NNES. Questi due partiti sono riusciti a mantenere la loro posizione di governo, ma il Partito Laburista è diventato il partito più votato. Sono comunque necessarie ulteriori ricerche per valutare correttamente l'influenza del voto per temi sulle scelte di voto individuali nelle elezioni generali norvegesi del 2017.

L'apparente imprecisione della previsione potrebbe essere dovuta alla concezione piuttosto limitata della polarizzazione del sistema partitico: La formula di Dalton prende in considerazione le differenze ideologiche tra i partiti sulla dimensione sinistra-destra. Questo approccio comporta un'evidente semplificazione eccessiva della struttura ideologica dei partiti e degli elettori, a maggior ragione negli ultimi anni, quando le questioni della cosiddetta seconda dimensione hanno acquisito una notevole importanza.