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# Embedded liberalism, economic nationalism, or Welfare Chauvinism? Experimental evidence on policy preferences in tough times

Leonardo Baccini<sup>a</sup>, Mattia Guidi<sup>b</sup> and Arlo Poletti<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of Political Science, McGill University & CIREQ, Montréal, Canada; <sup>b</sup>Department of Social, Political, and Cognitive Sciences, University of Siena, Siena, Italy; <sup>c</sup>Department of Sociology and Social Research, University of Trento, Trento, Italy

## ABSTRACT

Three policy paradigms have emerged to address globalisation-induced economic vulnerabilities: (1) Embedded Liberalism (EL), (2) Economic Nationalism (EN), and (3) Welfare Chauvinism (WC). We investigate which of these policy paradigms is better equipped to address citizens' concerns in times of economic crises, by assessing which policies citizens prefer in response to negative economic shocks: (1) social expenditure and redistribution via taxation, (2) closing domestic markets to foreign products and people, or (3) social expenditure and redistribution via taxation and strict migration policies. Our key tests involve vignette experiments in the three largest EU economies: France, Germany, and Italy ( $N = 11,000$ ). We find that voters are more likely to support politicians who increase welfare spending. Follow-up conjoint experiments, which investigate specific attributes of social expenditure and redistribution, indicate strong support for social investment, progressive taxation, and extending social expenditure to both natives and foreigners. However, we show that right-wing respondents are significantly less likely to favour social expenditure for foreigners compared to centrist and left-wing ones. Our micro-foundational evidence suggests that, while politicians who advocate redistribution in tough times will enjoy a significant political advantage, citizens are ideologically divided as to whether welfare spending should come with an exclusionary component or not.


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## Introduction

While there is a general consensus that globalisation fosters economic efficiency, there is also ample evidence that its distributional consequences

**CONTACT** Arlo Poletti  [arlo.poletti@unitn.it](mailto:arlo.poletti@unitn.it)  Department of Sociology and Social Research, Via Verdi 26, 38122 Trento, Italy

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are starkly uneven. Losers from globalisation represent a pressing issue for politicians in advanced democracies, as the recent surge of anti-system parties and candidates testifies (Hopkin, 2020). Faced with negative economic shocks, politicians' positions on policies that address economic vulnerability affect individual preferences and, ultimately, voting behaviour. As a consequence, three policy paradigms to address economic vulnerability have emerged: (1) Embedded Liberalism (EL), (2) Economic Nationalism (EN), and (3) Welfare Chauvinism (WC). Policies inspired by the so-called Embedded Liberalism paradigm have historically proved effective in dealing with the potential political problems associated with market opening. The political formula underpinning such a paradigm was quite straightforward: promote redistribution via higher taxation to ensure that the individuals who are most exposed to global market integration are shielded from its negative consequences – and keep supporting it. Many empirical works have provided evidence that is consistent with the micro-level mechanisms postulated by this paradigm (Alt & Iversen, 2017; Baccini et al., 2022; Rehm, 2011; Thewissen & Rueda, 2019; Walter, 2010).

In recent years, however, this policy paradigm has been challenged by two alternatives, which have acquired increasing electoral strength: the Economic Nationalism (EN) and the Welfare Chauvinism (WC) policy paradigms. Political parties adhering to the EN paradigm propose to remove the root causes of negative economic shocks induced by globalisation by closing domestic markets to foreign products and people, as well as by lowering taxes (Ausserladscheider, 2019; Colantone & Stanig, 2018; Fenger, 2018). Again, there is ample microlevel evidence supporting the logic underlying the EN paradigm. For instance, individuals who bear the negative economic consequences of market opening tend to favour protectionism (Hays *et al.*, 2005; Mayda & Rodrik, 2005; Owen, 2017; Owen & Johnston, 2017; Schaffer & Spilker, 2019; Scheve & Slaughter, 2001) and strict migration policies (Ballard-Rosa *et al.*, 2022; Gamez-Djokic & Waytz, 2020; Gennaioli & Tabellini, 2019; Margalit, 2019; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Moreover, recent works have produced empirical results showing that individuals' exposure to globalisation-related shocks – such as trade, offshoring, and technological change – correlate with support for (mostly right-wing) political parties supporting the EN paradigm across Western democracies (Anelli *et al.*, 2019; Baccini & Weymouth, 2021; Colantone & Stanig, 2018; Flaherty & Rogowski, 2021; Milner, 2021).

Furthermore, the political formula of the WC paradigm combines elements of the previous two, with a linkage between redistribution and anti-immigration policies. The political parties that advocate this policy paradigm contributed to the emergence of strong appeals for exclusionary politics advocating restricted access to redistribution only for individuals considered to bear a right to belong to the 'nation' (Bohle & Greskovits, 2019; Careja & Harris, 2022; Churi, 2021; Keskinen *et al.*, 2016; Rathgeb, 2024). In short, the WC

paradigm advocates welfare support for native citizens with the exclusion of immigrants from government assistance. Empirical research provides support for this view too, showing that socio-economic vulnerability makes individuals prone to favour redistribution only insofar as immigrants are excluded from it (Alesina *et al.*, 2023; de Koster *et al.*, 2013; Hjorth, 2016; Magni, 2021; Stadelmann-Steffen & Dermont, 2020).

However, despite the abundance and rigour of these empirical works, the evidence on the question of which policy paradigm is better equipped to address the concerns of citizens in times of globalisation-induced economic hardship remains far from conclusive. For instance, individuals who are exposed to the vagaries of globalisation may simultaneously increase their support for redistribution, protectionism, and anti-immigration policies, making it difficult to discriminate which policy paradigm is likely to produce larger electoral dividends. Furthermore, because the policy platforms of the parties combine key aspects of these paradigms, it is difficult to disentangle with precision which policy dimension drives their support. In addition, studies that rely largely on observational data have struggled to uncover the exact mechanisms driving voters to support specific politicians or parties.

To cast light on this important question, we develop original experimental designs that allow us to identify the causal effect of different policy dimensions on citizens' support for policy-makers. More specifically, with our experimental approach we can assess how politicians' positions on a different set of policies, which are our key independent variables, drive voters' support, which is our main outcome variable, when a negative economic shock has occurred. Following previous studies (Brutger & Guisinger, 2024; Di Tella & Rodrik, 2020), we leverage a large plant closure and related mass layoffs. Our experimental setup thus allows us to account for socio-tropic considerations in preferring one policy paradigm over the other and to isolate the effect of policies' preferences over (perceived) politicians' competence. We conduct vignette, split-ballot and conjoint experiments in France, Germany, and Italy, surveying about 11,000 voters.

The first vignette experiment suggests a pronounced political advantage for politicians who advocate redistribution: after an economic shock, voters are significantly more likely to support politicians who implemented redistribution policies and increased welfare expenditure. This support for redistribution holds for both left- and right-wing political leaders. This first experiment thus suggests that parties embracing the EN paradigm are not well positioned to address citizens' concerns in times of economic hardship. At the same time, it leaves open the question of which of the two paradigms in which redistribution features prominently, namely the EL paradigm or the WC paradigm, is better equipped to address such concerns.

To clarify this issue, we run a second experiment (a conjoint experiment focussed on social expenditure and taxation) to better understand what type of redistribution policies voters favour. In particular, we ask respondents to select their preferred proposal to raise social expenditure in the case of mass layoffs. We present respondents with five attributes: (1) type of social expenditure, (2) nationality of the beneficiaries, (3) work history of the beneficiaries, (4) reason for layoffs, and (5) taxation.

The results of the conjoint experiment indicate a strong preference for social investment (e.g. retraining) over consumption investment (e.g. unemployment benefits and universal income) and strong support for progressive taxation: the large majority of respondents want high-income people to pay for an increase in social expenditure. Moreover, we find no evidence that respondents generally prefer to discriminate between natives and foreigners with respect to social expenditure. However, we find evidence of support for WC among right-wing respondents, and for EL among centrist and left-wing respondent. Indeed, the former are significantly less likely to favour social expenditure for foreigners compared to the latter. In short, our micro-foundational evidence suggests a pronounced political advantage for politicians who advocate social expenditure and redistribution in tough times, but it indicates an ideology-based split between citizens advocating a nativist, identity-based forms of social expenditure and citizens who do not support such forms of exclusionary welfare policies.

## Theoretical framework and hypotheses

One of the key consequences of globalisation is that increased economic interdependence (via growing trade and financial flows) and acceleration of technological progress boost competition among firms and workers worldwide. However, as George Orwell notes in his review of Hayek, ‘the trouble with competitions is that someone wins them’ (Orwell, 1944). The question of how to address the concerns of the losers of globalisation is an increasingly pressing economic and political problem. Indeed, advanced economies, which are very globalised and have faced increasing competition, have been repeatedly and routinely hit by negative economic shocks that generate (more or less concentrated) losses for particular segments of the population. For instance, a large literature documents the economic and political costs of the China trade shock and of offshoring and automation. Anxious about the increasing incidence of negative economic shocks, the public in advanced (globalized) economies demands political solutions. Three policy paradigms to address economic vulnerability have emerged: *embedded liberalism*, *economic nationalism*, and *welfare chauvinism*.

The EL paradigm gained prominence when political economists started hypothesising about the existence of a systematic relationship between

globalisation and government spending on redistribution. For many, the consistent trend toward welfare state expansion across Western countries in the post-WWII period was the byproduct of these countries' growing integration into global markets. As these countries deepened their ties with global markets, governments started striving to compensate globalisation losers for the risks associated with increased international competition and volatility (Cameron, 1978; Katzenstein, 1985; Rodrik, 1998; Ruggie, 1982). Hence, globalisation led to greater welfare state spending (Bernauer & Achini, 2000; Hicks & Swank, 1992; Rodrik, 1998).

In a nutshell, the EL paradigm advocates government intervention to tame the socially disruptive effects of markets *without eliminating their efficiency gains*. As Walter (2010, p. 404) explains, this argument has two components. On the demand side, it holds that globalisation increases voters' demands for social protection; on the supply side, it posits that governments satisfy this demand by supplying a more generous welfare state. The demand-side component of the argument highlights the three micro-level causal mechanisms postulated by the EL paradigm. First, individuals in countries affected by globalisation should feel more economically insecure than those in less globalised countries – especially where they are exposed to globalisation-induced economic shocks. Under the second mechanism, individuals' economic insecurity should translate into support for welfare state expansion, i.e. for government-sponsored mechanisms of insurance against such economic distress. Third, individual-level preferences for redistribution should translate into votes for parties that advocate expanding the welfare state.

Many empirical works have lent plausibility to these micro-level mechanisms. For instance, many comparative political economy studies show that exposure to globalisation-related economic insecurity tends to increase citizens' support for redistribution (Alt & Iversen, 2017; Rehm, 2011; Thewissen & Rueda, 2019). Walter (2010) carried out a comprehensive empirical assessment of the three causal chains, and demonstrated that individuals who were more exposed to globalisation are more economically insecure and have stronger preferences for redistribution – and tend to vote for parties that promise to expand the welfare state.

Yet, more recent political economy studies cast doubt on this view. One of the most consistent findings of numerous empirical studies is that individuals exposed to the uncertainties of globalisation tend to support parties advocating the EN paradigm, i.e. those proposing to lower taxes and close the domestic market off to foreign products and people (Colantone & Stanig, 2018). Rising import competition from China, offshoring, and automation have all been found to correlate with growing popular support for parties promising to provide protection through higher tariffs and stricter immigration policies rather than through redistribution (Anelli *et al.*, 2019; Autor *et al.*, 2013; Baccini & Weymouth, 2021; Flaherty & Rogowski, 2021; Milner, 2021).

Proponents of the EN paradigm seek to gain citizens' support by promising to protect them from the insecurity generated by globalisation-related economic shocks. However, this policy formula flips the scenario: rather than providing protection through redistribution, it shields the domestic market from foreign goods and people.

The rise of parties and leaders embracing the EN paradigm (and the concomitant decline of parties advocating the EL paradigm) across many Western democracies has been interpreted as a byproduct of a shift in citizens' preferences that has made them prefer policies of closure to trade and migration over policies of redistribution as means to protect them from the risks they face in the current stage of globalisation. A number of factors may have contributed to such a shift. For example, the higher taxes required to finance a renewed welfare state might not be appealing to middle-class constituencies, which have thus become more attracted by the political formula advocated by the parties supporting the EN paradigm (Colantone & Stanig, 2018). Moreover, economic distress tends to increase authoritarianism, ethnocentrism, and anti-minority sentiments (Ballard-Rosa *et al.*, 2022; Margalit, 2019; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). As individuals exposed to the vulnerabilities generated by globalisation perceive that their socio-economic status is worsening, they are more likely to change the social group with which they identify and switch from a class-based to a cultural and national social identification (Baccini & Weymouth, 2021; Bonomi *et al.*, 2021).

However, another important strand of literature challenges the EL and the EN paradigms. Starting from the observation that many far-right populist parties have developed policy agendas in which redistribution features prominently (de Koster *et al.*, 2013; Enggist & Pinggera, 2022; Rovny & Polk, 2020; Van Der Waal *et al.*, 2013), WC has emerged as a key conceptual tool to grasp how these parties appeal to redistribution in an exclusionary way (Bohle & Greskovits, 2019; Careja & Harris, 2022; Chueri, 2021; Keskinen *et al.*, 2016; Lendvai-Bainton & Szelewa, 2021; Magni, 2021; Rathgeb, 2024). The WC paradigm combines elements of the EL and the EN paradigms, advocating welfare policies but, at the same time, proposing to draw a distinction between deserving, native citizens and non-deserving, non-native ones. A variety of works provides micro-level support to the logic underpinning the WC paradigm, showing that individuals, even progressive, economically secure, and highly educated ones, are prone to penalise immigrants in the politics of welfare (Alesina *et al.*, 2023; Magni, 2024; Stadelmann-Steffen & Dermont, 2020).

We therefore derive and test hypotheses drawn from the EL, EN, and WC paradigms using an experimental design that isolates the causal effects of different policy dimensions. Three key policy areas shape citizens' support in response to globalisation-induced economic shocks: (1) social expenditure via redistribution, (2) trade policy, and (3) migration policy. The EL paradigm suggests that citizens are inclined to support leaders who favor social

expenditure and redistribution while keeping borders open to goods and people; conversely, according to the EN paradigm, citizens are more likely to support leaders who implement protectionism, strict immigration policies, and cut taxes. Finally, the WC policy paradigm suggests that citizens should be inclined to support politicians social expenditure and redistribution and strict migration policies. We use this framework to generate three competing hypotheses about the relationship between parties' platforms and citizens' support in advanced (globalized) economies hit by negative economic shocks:

**H1a** (*EL policy paradigm*): If there is a negative economic shock, citizens are more likely to support a politician who increases social expenditure and redistribution while promoting free trade policies.

**H1b** (*EN policy paradigm*): If there is a negative economic shock, citizens are more likely to support a politician who implements protectionist policies and strict migration policies.

**H1c** (*WC policy paradigm*): If there is a negative economic shock, citizens are more likely to support a politician who increases social expenditure and redistribution via taxation, while promoting strict migration policies.

## Data and case selection

We test the above hypotheses using two sets of survey experiments conducted in Italy, France, and Germany. We selected this diverse set of countries to enhance the external validity of our analysis based on three criteria. First, they are the three largest economies in the European Union (EU). Second, they have had different economic performances over the past three decades. Germany has grown steadily since reunification, whereas Italy and, to a lesser extent, France, have experienced sluggish economic growth.<sup>1</sup> Third, the three countries have different political systems and represent distinct growth models (Baccaro & Hadziabdic, 2024; Baccaro & Pontusson, 2016), which leads to significant variation in socio-economic policies, allowing us to examine the extent to which our results depend on country-specific circumstances.

The first set of survey experiments is a vignette experiment. The Italian data were collected by *GfK Italy* in the fourth wave of the DISPOC-GfK panel survey, on a sample of the Italian population aged 14 or older ( $N \approx 3,000$ ) between September 2 and September 24, 2021.<sup>2</sup> The French and German data were collected in two opt-in surveys conducted by *Respondi* on a sample of French and German citizens aged 18–75 ( $N \approx 2,500$  in each survey) between December 13, 2021 and January 8, 2022. All surveys are representative of the population by age, gender, education, and region of residence.<sup>3</sup>

The second set of experiments is a conjoint experiment. We administered original surveys in Italy ( $N \approx 1,100$ ), Germany ( $N \approx 1,100$ ), and France ( $N \approx 1,100$ ) in the summer of 2022. The samples come from opt-in panels



administered by the company *Respondi*. Each sample is representative of the population with respect to age, gender, employment status, and location of residence.

## Testing the three paradigms (vignette experiment)

### *Experimental design*

In each country, we conducted a vignette experiment. In the vignette experiment, four politician's attributes were randomly ordered to form a description of his past political choices regarding taxation and welfare, migration, and trade policy, as well as his ideological position (left or right).

We chose a fictitious name for the politician in question to make the description of the experimental scenario more vivid and realistic. We made sure the politician had a common name and surname, and avoided surnames that could remind respondents of real (past or present) politicians. The experimental scenario was set in a rather distant future to separate it as much as possible from current political considerations. The politician's role was adapted to each political system: in Italy and Germany he is the head of government ('president of the council' in Italy, 'chancellor' in Germany), while in France he is the head of state ('president'). For the Italian survey, we named the president of the council 'Francesco Ferrari'; for the French survey, the president's name was 'Jean Dubois'; the fictitious German chancellor was named 'Andreas Müller'.

The vignette experiment described a future scenario and the politician's profile. To allow us to describe the politician's stances as *actual policies that he had already implemented*, rather than as pledges or promises, we explicitly stated so and informed respondents that he had been in power for two years. Thus, we avoided potential bias in the form of an unobserved independent variable – the extent to which respondents believed the politician would carry out his promises.

Respondents were first presented with the following text:

We now describe a scenario that [Italy / France / Germany] could face in the future. It's 2031. [Name] has been [president of the council / president / chancellor] for two years. A well-known company has announced the closure of its biggest plant in [Italy / France / Germany]. 10,000 workers are at risk of losing their job. The issue is highly salient in the country.<sup>4</sup>

The vignette did not specify that the plant closure was due to globalisation-related factors in an effort to minimise the potential to introduce confounding factors and, therefore, decrease construct validity. We were concerned that specifying the cause of the plant closure, i.e. import competition or offshoring, could trigger different feelings, beliefs, or frames among participants. Previous research shows that the level of experimental control and the degree of construct validity do not necessarily decrease with higher levels of abstraction,

**Table 1.** Attributes and formulations of the vignette experiment.

Attribute	Formulations	
1. <i>Taxation, redistribution, and social expenditure</i>	(A) '[Name] has raised taxes for the rich and reduced them for the poor, increasing social expenditure'	(B) '[Name] has lowered taxes for both the rich and the poor, reducing social expenditure'
2. <i>Migration and inclusion of migrants</i>	(A) '[Name] has avoided pushing back migrants and has increased the funding for integration policies'	(B) '[Name] has pushed back migrants and has reduced the funding for integration policies'
3. <i>Trade policy</i>	(A) '[Name] has supported the new trade agreements that the European Union is negotiating, arguing that they represent a big opportunity for [Italian / French / German] firms and workers'	(B) '[Name] has opposed the new trade agreements that the European Union is negotiating, arguing that they are a threat for the interests of [Italian / French / German] firms and workers'
4. <i>Political affiliation</i>	(A) '[Name] is a left-wing politician'	(B) '[Name] is a right-wing politician'

since participants tend to 'fill in the blank' (Brutger et al., 2022). Given that participants live in countries with an all-time high degree of global market integration, and that the closure of a plant employing 10,000 workers is unlikely to be caused by ordinary mismanagement, it is eminently plausible that respondents assumed the plant closure was linked to globalisation.

Each respondent was then presented with a paragraph of text in which the attributes in Table 1 were randomly ordered, and the formulations (A or B) randomly assigned.

After this treatment, respondents were asked to declare the level of agreement (or disagreement) with three statements (before each of these questions, the description of the politician was repeated):

- (1) [Name] is the right person to deal with the plant's closure successfully.
- (2) [Name] defends the rights of the [Italians / French / Germans].
- (3) [Name] defends the rights of the workers.

The three separate outcomes allow us to test the main effect of various policies on support for the politician, and two potential mechanisms. The first outcome captures the level of trust in a political leader's ability to deal with a severe economic shock. The two other ones unpack political support in two dimensions: national identity and class identity. Our goal is to explore whether different policies have a differential effect on these two dimensions.

### Statistical analysis

Our model specification is the following:

$$Y_i = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 \text{Redistribution}_i + \beta_2 \text{Migration}_i + \beta_3 \text{Trade}_i + \beta_4 \text{Ideology}_i + \mathbf{X}_i \boldsymbol{\gamma} + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

where  $Y_i$  are the outcome variables listed above;  $\text{Redistribution}_i$ ,  $\text{Migration}_i$ ,

Trade<sub>*i*</sub> and Ideology<sub>*i*</sub> are the randomised treatments;  $\alpha_0$  is the constant;  $\beta_1 \dots \beta_4$  are the coefficients of interest;  $\mathbf{X}_i \boldsymbol{\gamma}$  is a matrix of control variables with their coefficients; and  $\varepsilon_i$  are the residuals. Note that *i* refers to respondents.

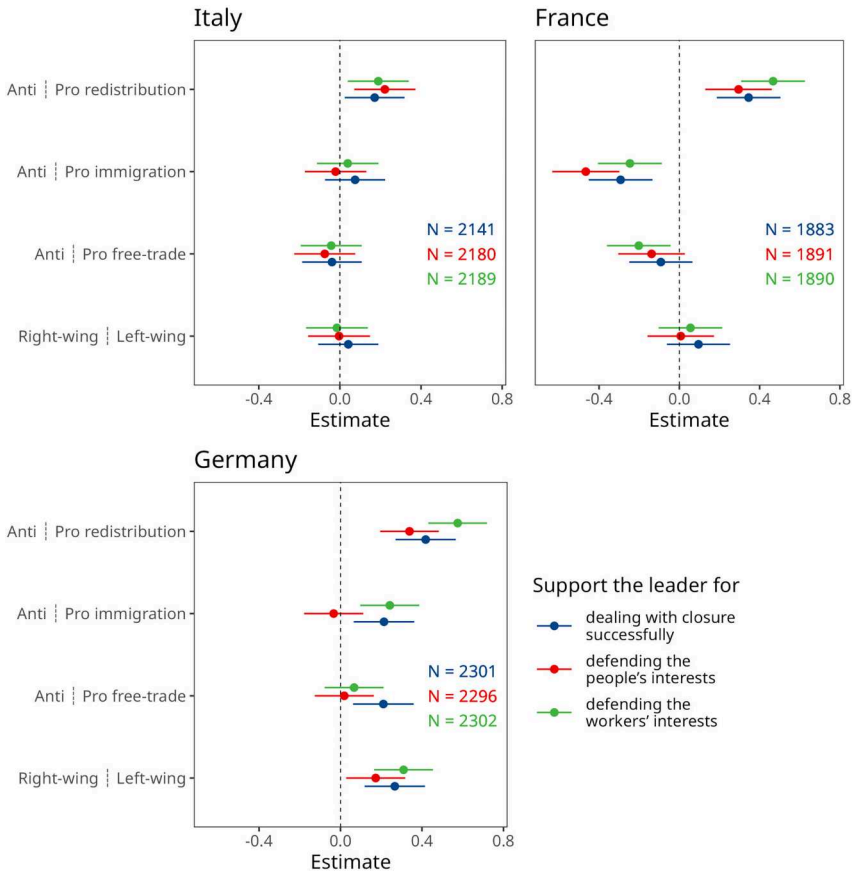
Our models are weighted by age, gender, education, and region of residence to compensate for the (mostly minor) deviations from the aforementioned quotas. All model specifications include the following control variables (in the matrix  $\mathbf{X}_i$ ): age, gender, employment status,<sup>5</sup> ideology,<sup>6</sup> and education level (having or not having a university degree). As expected, the correlation between each control and each treatment is very low, given the randomisation implemented in the vignette experiment.<sup>7</sup>

## Results

Results of the first experiment are showed in [Figure 1](#). For each country, the colour of the dots corresponds to the results for the three questions asked after the description of the politician's characteristics (see Section 4.1). The coefficients refer to the effect of formulation A of each treatment. Therefore, a positive coefficient means that formulation A boosted support for the politician, and a negative coefficient means that formulation B boosted support for the politician.<sup>8</sup>

The figure indicates that the only treatment that has a consistent effect for all the response questions in all three countries is the one referring to social expenditure and redistribution via taxation: Voters tend to support a politician who 'has raised taxes for the rich and reduced them for the poor, increasing social expenditure'. In Italy, this is the only attribute that increases support for the politician overall.

The effect of the other treatments is more context-dependent. For instance, French voters have more trust in a president who 'has pushed back migrants and has reduced the funding for integration policies', while German voters think a pro-immigration chancellor is the right person to handle the crisis and defend workers' rights. French respondents reported that a president who 'has opposed the new trade agreements that the European Union is negotiating, arguing that they are a threat for the interests of French firms and workers' defends workers' interests. German voters instead believe that a chancellor who has adopted a pro-free-trade stance is the right person to handle the crisis, which is consistent with previous works showing how Germany's export-led growth model of coordinated market economy makes individuals less wary of policies of trade opening (Baccini et al., 2022). Ideological orientation does not have a significant effect in Italy or France, while the German electorate looks more favourably upon a left-wing politician. The effect sizes with the predicted values for all combinations of the experimental treatments in the three countries are reported in Section B.3 in the Online Appendix.



**Figure 1.** Results of the regression analysis (Vignette experiment, baseline model).

Notes: 95% confidence intervals based on robust standard errors. The dependent variable is the level of agreement with the statement '[Name Surname] is the right person to deal with the plant's closure successfully'. All models are weighted and include controls for age, gender, employment status, ideology, and education. Full results are reported in Table B.16 in the Online Appendix.

While there is some heterogeneity across the three countries, these results show that there is a consistent support for politicians who advocate redistribution in times of economic hardship. French results suggest that the WC paradigm (i.e. a combination of redistribution and anti-migration policies) has appeal among voters when presented with the occurrence of major layoffs. On the contrary, the EL paradigm (i.e. a combination of openness and redistribution) is the winner among German voters in the case of negative economic shocks. All in all, there is no strong evidence in support of a paradigm that prioritises protectionism (from goods and people) at the expense of a reduction of redistribution. While the EN paradigm may have the support of a part of the population, the average French, German, and Italian voter does not appear to support this paradigm when confronted with economic hardship.

### **Additional evidence**

First, we test conditional models by interacting the treatments. Specifically, we estimate, for all respondents who received a particular attribute from one treatment (say redistribution), the effect of the other treatment on the response variable (say trade). The model specifications and results are reported in Section B.4 of the Online Appendix. These conditional models do not show any systematic and consistent patterns. Note that there are concerns about statistical power in these model specifications.

Second, we run a split-ballot experiment in which we randomise whether the politician was successful in handling the plant closure. We then run the same models as in Equation (1). The model specifications and results are reported in Section C of the Online Appendix. Results indicate that support for politicians who successfully avoid the plant closure is higher than support for politicians who *fail* to do so. This is not surprising. More interesting is the finding that redistribution is the most preferred policy in both scenarios (the successful and the unsuccessful one).

We also implemented a large number of heterogeneous effects to shed light on which segment of the population is driving the results of the vignette experiments. We interacted each treatment with education, gender, ideology, national identity, income, as well as attitudes toward welfare, migration, and trade. Section B.5 of the Online Appendix reports the details of the intervening variables and this analysis. Our results indicate that support for redistribution holds across different parts of our sample, *regardless* of respondents' political attitudes or demographic and socio-economic conditions. This is true in all countries. On the contrary, support for open or restricted migration policies, and to a lesser extent trade openness, depends on political attitudes, especially in France and Italy.

In addition, our results are not driven by regions that experience large import penetration from China, which has proved to have a negative effect on employment and wages in manufacturing. In other words, it does not seem the case that respondents living in areas struggling economically have different preferences compared to respondents living in areas less affected by foreign competition. We report this further analysis in Section B.8 of the Online Appendix.

### **Preferences over social expenditure (conjoint experiment)**

To shed further light on the merit of each policy paradigm, we turn to our conjoint experiment. In particular, the goal of this experiment is to explain how the support of EL and WC policy paradigms, which appear to be popular in the case of negative economic shocks, varies across attributes of redistributive policies. Given the great deal of heterogeneity among

redistribution policies, the conjoint assesses: (1) which type of social expenditure citizens prefer in the case of negative economic shocks; (2) who should benefit from an increase in social expenditure; and (3) who should pay for an increase in social expenditure. We are also interested in how the support for different redistributive policies varies across different citizens. Below, we detail the conjoint experiment, which helps answer these questions.

### *Experimental design*

We embedded conjoint experiments in each survey, which asked respondents to choose among pairs of welfare policies whose multiple attributes were randomised. These policies were motivated by a major plant closure. Thus, both the vignette experiments and the conjoint experiments have a similar background scenario – a negative economic shock.<sup>9</sup> Since the proposed welfare reforms were to be implemented in response to a mass layoff event, all welfare reforms involved an increase in social expenditure. We randomly varied five characteristics of the welfare reforms: (1) type of social expenditure to protect displaced workers, (2) nationality of the beneficiaries, (3) work history, (4) cause of layoffs, and (5) taxation. Table 2 summarises the attributes and their formulations.<sup>10</sup>

The attribute ‘type of social expenditure’ allows us to understand which welfare policy voters prefer to finance. We selected four policies that can be considered possible responses to the event leading up to mass layoffs, which we describe in our background scenario. These policies differ in their scope (universal vs. more targeted), in the profile of beneficiaries (workers, old-age workers, everybody), in the time frame of the increase in social expenditure (limited time vs. permanent), and in their ambition (purely compensatory vs. investing in displaced workers’ future employability). Including this attribute allows us to estimate which type of expenditure policy voters prefer.

‘Nationality of beneficiaries’ allows us to test whether respondents prefer to restrict the pool of beneficiaries of the increase in social expenditure on the basis of their nationality.<sup>11</sup>

We use ‘work history’ to explore the ‘deservingness’ dimension. This attribute allows us to understand if, and to what extent, voters perceive social expenditure as being linked to social contributions. In other words, do respondents believe that people who have worked longer and contributed more (through taxation and social contributions) should benefit more from the increase in social expenditure?

‘Reasons for layoff’ helps us discriminate between respondents who would only like to spend public money on workers who lost their jobs for a particular reason and voters who are happy to give the proposed social benefit to all

**Table 2.** Attributes and formulations of the conjoint experiment.

Attribute	Formulations
	<i>The plan increases social expenditure</i>
Type of social expenditure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– to finance a universal basic income*</li><li>– to finance unemployment benefits</li><li>– to provide training for those who lost their jobs</li><li>– to finance early retirement</li></ul>
Nationality of beneficiaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– for both [Italian / French / German] and foreign citizens*</li><li>– only for [Italian / French / German] citizens</li></ul>
Work history	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– for all people, regardless of their work history*</li><li>– for people who have worked at least 3 years</li><li>– for people who have worked at least 10 years</li></ul>
Reason for layoffs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– for all layoffs, regardless of the reason*</li><li>– for layoffs due to offshoring (companies moving their production abroad)</li><li>– for layoffs due to automation</li></ul> <p><i>To finance this increase in social expenditure, the plan raises taxes</i></p>
Taxation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– for all people, regardless of their income*</li><li>– for all people progressively (the higher the income, the higher the increase in taxation)</li><li>– for high-income people</li><li>– for high-income people, reducing taxation on low-income people</li></ul>

Note: \* denotes the reference category.

workers who have lost their jobs. We list two specific reasons: (1) offshoring, which is specifically linked to globalisation and (2) automation, which relates more generally to technological progress. Respondents who prefer to link social expenditure to a globalisation-related shock may do so based on an ‘embedded liberalism’ logic – i.e. protection in exchange for economic openness.

‘Taxation’ lists four combinations of tax increases that could be used to finance the increase in social expenditure, which cover the full range of policy options, from no progressivity to full progressivity.<sup>12</sup> The reference category is a non-progressive increase in taxation (i.e. the same increase for every taxpayer), while the other three formulations are all progressive, but in different ways: (1) increase taxes on everyone progressively (the higher the income, the greater the increase), (2) increase taxes for high-income people only, and (3) readjust the tax burden more progressively (increase taxes for high-income people and reduce taxes for low-income people).

## Outcomes

After respondents saw each pair of plans, they were first asked if they liked Proposal 1 and then if they liked Proposal 2. These two questions gave respondents the opportunity to like one of the two proposals, both, or neither. The ‘neither’ category is particularly important, since some respondents may be generally against an increase in social expenditure (Miller & Ziegler, 2024).

We then asked a forced-choice question: *'If you had to choose, which proposal would you prefer, Proposal 1 or Proposal 2?'* Comparing the results of the first two questions with those of the forced choice allows us to understand how much bias is introduced by not giving people the option to 'abstain' or like both proposals.

To better understand *how much* respondents liked the proposals, we also asked them to score them from 1 to 7 using the following question:

*On a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 means 'I don't like Proposal 1 at all' and 7 means 'I like Proposal 1 a lot', how would you assess Proposal 1?*

This question was repeated for Proposal 2. Finally, we asked the following question:

*On a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 means 'very unlikely' and 7 means 'very likely', how likely are you to sign a petition in favour of Proposal 1?*

This question was repeated for Proposal 2. These last two questions seek to measure if the preference for one or both proposals translates into some kind of mobilisation, based on the rationale that voters will only be motivated to mobilise for proposals that are particularly relevant to them. Each respondent evaluated four pairs of proposals. Since we are interested in analysing support for individual proposals, we obtain eight observations per respondent.

## Estimation

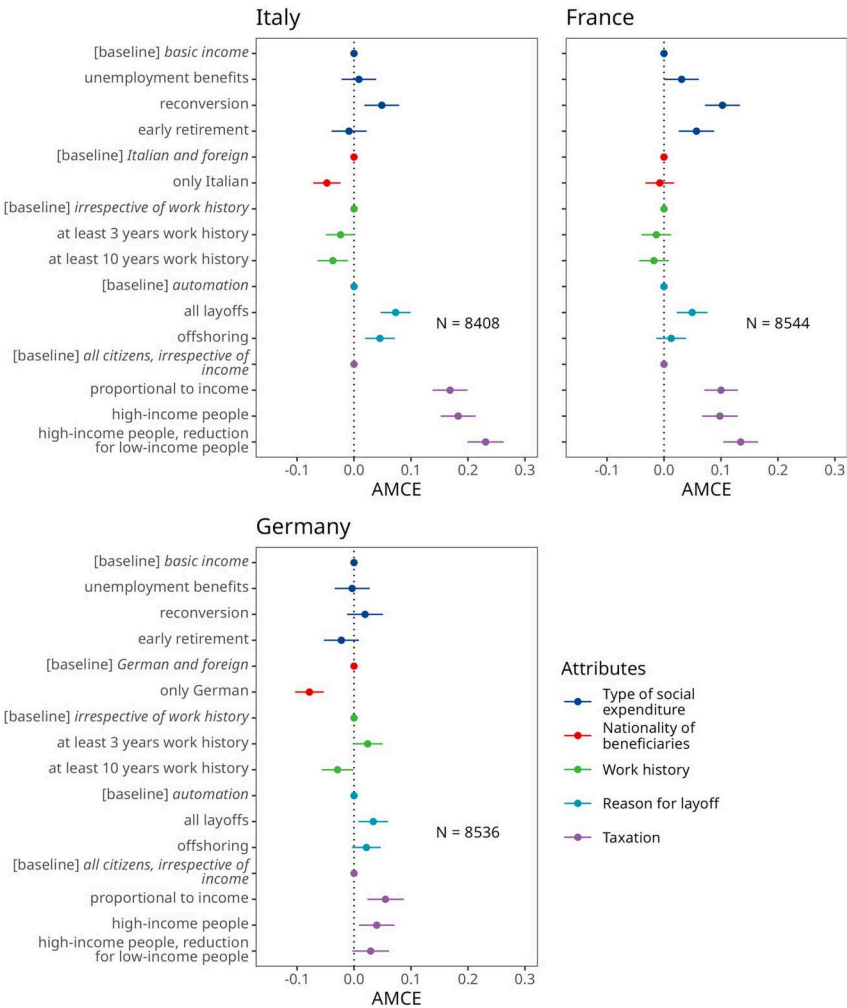
We analyse the data estimating average marginal component effects (AMCEs) obtained through ordinary least square regressions with standard errors clustered for each respondent (Hainmueller *et al.*, 2014; Horiuchi *et al.*, 2018). In the regressions, the dependent variables are the 'like/don't like' choice indicator, the intensity of the preference, and the behavioural outcome. The independent variables are the set of dummy variables for the attribute levels. No other covariate is present in the models. Because coefficient sizes in conjoint analyses are directly comparable, the results also reveal the relative importance of each attribute as a determinant of welfare preferences.

## Results

Figure 2 presents the results of the conjoint experiment based on the 'like/don't like' outcome for all respondents in all three countries. AMCEs in these figures reveal four main findings.<sup>13</sup> First, respondents display a strong preference for social investment (e.g. re-training) over consumption investment (e.g. unemployment benefits and universal income). The effect is slightly weaker in Germany than in the two other countries, though it is



significant when the outcome is the rating (see Table D.9 in the Online Appendix). On the one hand, this finding runs counter previous empirical works showing that support for social investment policies drops considerably when citizens are reminded that such spending would need to be financed via higher taxes (Busemeyer & Garritzmann, 2017).<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, this result aligns with the findings of previous works showing that active labour market spending makes individuals less anxious about globalisation (Schaffer & Spilker, 2016).



**Figure 2.** Results of the conjoint experiment.

Notes: The outcome variable is a dummy that scores 1 if respondents liked the proposal. Confidence intervals are clustered by respondents. Full results in Tables D.4, D.5 and D.6 in the Online Appendix.

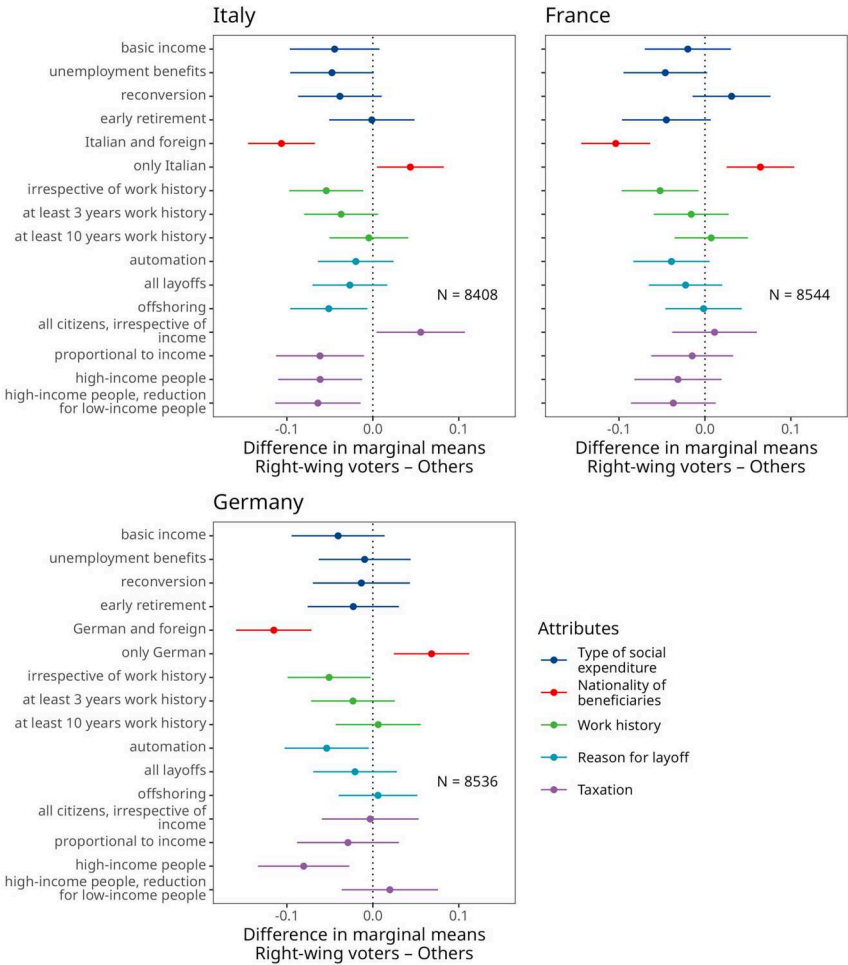
Second, we find strong support for progressive taxation: the large majority of respondents ask high-income people to bear the burden of an increase in social expenditure. This is in line with existing works showing that citizens are generally supportive of higher progressive taxes to pay for more government spending (Bremer & Bürgisser, 2023). These effects are particularly large in France and Italy.

Third, there is some evidence that respondents are more likely to favour social expenditure when layoffs are caused by globalisation (proxied by offshoring) than when they are caused by automation. This result is in line with the EL policy paradigm. However, there is also support for expanding social expenditure for all layoffs, regardless of their cause. This result seems to suggest that the average respondents is in favour of generous redistribution in the current era of globalisation in which negative economic shocks are frequent and their causes are difficult to understand.

Fourth, our findings indicate that respondents preferred extending social expenditure to both natives and foreigners. We find no evidence of welfare chauvinism, at least in its most extreme form, in the samples taken in their entirety. While this finding seems to be at odd with the WC paradigm, it is probably the case that support for a nativist form of social expenditure is stronger among right-wing voters than it is among centrist or left-wing voters.

To further assess this point, we split the samples according to ideological orientation, distinguishing between respondents who place themselves on the right of the political spectrum and voters who place themselves in the centre or on the left. Then, following Leeper *et al.* (2020), we compare the results of the experiment across these subgroups by calculating differences in marginal means. Results are shown in Figure 3. We find strong evidence that right-wing respondents are significantly less likely than centrist and left-wing respondents to favour social expenditure for foreigners, while they are significantly more likely than other voters to approve social expenditure when it benefits nationals only. Strikingly, the nationality of the beneficiaries is the only attribute that differs between right-wing and non right-wing voters in all three countries. For all the other attributes there are no clear and consistent differences based on ideology. It is important to highlight this because previous analyses suggest that radical right parties tend to favour consumption policies, such as old-age pensions, over social investment, in accordance with their voters' preferences (Enggist & Pinggera, 2022). In contrast, our findings suggest that preferences for social investment policies is consistent across the ideological spectrum.

The findings of these models confirm that redistribution is the most favoured policy in the case of negative economic shock. However, policy details matter a great deal. In an open economy (like France, Germany, and



**Figure 3.** Difference between marginal means among right-wing voters vs. rest of the voters.

Notes: The plot displays estimates and 95% confidence intervals. Standard errors are clustered by respondents. Respondents are split based on how they position themselves on a 1 to 7 scale, where 1 means 'Left' and 7 means 'Right'. Values from 1 to 4 were recoded to 'Centre and left', values from 5 to 7 were recoded to 'Right'. Full results in Tables D.14, D.19 and D.24 in the Online Appendix.

Italy), centrist and left-wing voters see redistribution as the best policy tool to compensate the losers from globalisation, all of them. This preference is consistent with the EL paradigm in which redistribution targets displaced workers regardless of their identity. On the contrary, right-wing voters favour the WC paradigm, in which redistribution comes with an exclusionary component. This observation is consistent with previous studies (Busemeyer *et al.*, 2022) and runs counter to other works showing that citizens' support for policy schemes restricting access to welfare spending for foreigners and

non-natives (Alesina *et al.*, 2023; Magni, 2024; Stadelmann-Steffen & Dermont, 2020) irrespective of their political ideology.

### **Additional evidence**

We perform three additional tests to corroborate our findings. First, our results are similar if we use marginal means rather than AMCEs (see Section D.2 of the Online Appendix).

Second, our main findings are similar if we use the rating outcome rather than the ‘like/don’t like’ outcome and if we use the petition outcome rather than the ‘like/don’t like’ outcome (see Sections D.3.1 and D.3.2 of the Online Appendix). In sum, the results are *not* sensitive to how we measure preferences in the conjoint experiment. Also, results are similar (though generally weaker) if we rely on a behavioural outcome, i.e. the probability of signing a petition (see Section D.3.3 of the Online Appendix).

Third, Section D.4 of the Online Appendix reports other heterogeneous effects, many of which leave our main results unchanged. Perhaps surprisingly, support for progressive taxation is also found among high-income respondents. Furthermore, pre-treatment attitudes toward social expenditure do not appear to affect our findings in any defining way. This is evidence that our treatment moves respondents’ preferences and does not only captures or reinforces pre-existing attitudes.

### **Conclusions**

We surveyed more than 11,000 respondents and ran three sets of original survey experiments. Our empirical analysis explored what drives citizens’ support for politicians dealing with globalisation-induced economic distress. Our original experimental design evaluated whether leaders who embrace the EL, the EN, or the WC policy paradigm are better positioned to gain voters’ support when handling negative economic shocks. The vignette and conjoint experiments highlight a significant uniformity in policy preferences across the three countries in which they were conducted (Italy, France, and Germany), which is particularly surprising if we consider the significant differences that these countries display in terms of both characteristics of their political systems and growth models.

First, the vignette experiments show that the only feature that consistently has a positive effect for all the response questions across the three countries is more redistribution and more welfare: voters are more likely to support politicians who increase social expenditure via welfare state policies, and who shift the tax burden from the poor to the rich. This is an important finding which suggests that, contrary to what the rise of parties embracing EN policy paradigm have led some scholars to believe (Colantone & Stanig,

2018), citizens continue to perceive redistribution as a key tool to provide social protection against the uncertainties of globalisation.

Given that the vignette experiments' findings were potentially consistent with both the EL and WC policy paradigms, we designed a conjoint experiment with the aim of assessing citizens' preferences regarding different types of redistribution schemes. The results of these experiments indicate three important findings: (1) a strong preference for social investment (e.g. re-training) over consumption investment (e.g. unemployment benefits and universal income); (2) strong support for progressive taxation; and (3) no overall evidence of welfare chauvinism. With respect to the last point, however, we find that there are significant differences across individuals with different ideological backgrounds: right-wing respondents are significantly less likely to favour social expenditure for foreigners compared to centrist and left-wing respondents, who are in favour of extending welfare protection also to foreigners. Interestingly, citizens' ideology matters only with regards to this specific policy attribute in all the three countries. Thus, our second set of experiments clearly suggest that there is an ideology-based split within these countries about how citizens assess the relative merits of the EL and the WC policy paradigms in addressing globalisation-induced economic distress: centrists and left-wing ones are likely to prefer the former while right-wing ones are likely to prefer the latter.

We note that our experimental findings align with prior observational studies indicating that rightward movements of social democratic parties on the economic dimension contributed to reducing their vote share (Polacko, 2022) and, symmetrically, how the more pro-welfare stance of right-wing parties proves electorally rewarding (Enggist & Pinggera, 2022). Overall, our results suggest that if political parties want to remain central in the electoral marketplace, they cannot disregard social welfare policies. Given that the salience of economic issues increases during economically hard times, this is likely to be increasingly true in a period in which geopolitical tensions are hitting hard on the European economy. At the same time, our results suggest that much of the political confrontation on socio-economic issues between political parties will centre around the question of what the boundaries of solidarity should be.

Our findings suggest two avenues for further research. First, since the credibility of parties' redistributive promises may shape vote choices, and globalisation increases the need for compensation while constraining governments' ability to raise tax revenues, insufficient compensation for losers may discredit redistribution-based policy paradigms, pushing voters toward parties offering alternative protections. Future studies could explore this dynamic through experimental designs assessing how voters respond to redistribution promises.

Second, context-specific factors may explain cross-national differences. Institutional setups shape how globalisation's benefits and costs are distributed, influencing policy preferences (Baccini et al., 2022). Countries' responses may also depend on the growth model (Baccaro & Hadziabdic, 2024; Baccaro & Pontusson, 2016) they adopt. Export-led economies, for instance, may resist shifts toward consumption-led models. Further research is needed to cast light on the causal mechanisms that link domestic institutional characteristics, the distributive consequences of market opening, and citizens' preferences over the policies that are needed to cope with economic crises.

## Notes

1. We present some graphs detailing divergent economic and trade performance of the three countries in Figures A.3, A.4 and A.5 in the Online Appendix.
2. Survey participants were selected from a probability-based panel managed by *GfK Italy*.
3. Further information on how we conducted surveys experiments is provided in Section E of the Online Appendix.
4. The experiment focussed on mass layoffs, a salient political issue in the three countries. This should increase the likelihood that respondents will consider the topic plausible and relevant, an important precondition to satisfy the assumption that decision-makers in experimental analyses use the information provided (Yegoryan et al., 2020).
5. This variable contained the following categories: 'working now', 'unemployed', 'retired', 'permanently disabled', 'temporarily laid off', 'homemaker', and 'student'.
6. Left-right position on a 1 to 7 scale. Recoded to a categorical variable with values 'left' (1–3), 'centre' (4), or 'right' (5–7). The Italian survey also contained the option 'I don't recognise myself on this scale'.
7. Tables B.1–B.15 in the Online Appendix report the results of the balance tests for the randomised part of this experiment.
8. In the main analysis, all combinations of the politician's position are included. As one combination – a right-wing politician implementing open migration policies – can be considered as less plausible than others, we ran the analysis after excluding such combination. The results (shown in Figure B.1 in the Online Appendix) are not significantly different from the ones presented in Figure 1. As an additional robustness check, we ran the analysis excluding respondents who failed attention checks for the Italian experiment and manipulation checks for the French and German experiments. Also in this case, the results (shown in Figure B.2 in the Online Appendix) are in line with the main analysis presented in this section.
9. Section D.1 of the Online Appendix includes the specific text of the background scenario. Since mass layoffs are a salient political issue in all three countries, this increases the probability that respondents will rely on the information provided, a crucial assumption in conjoint experiments.
10. Recent work shows that respondents' stated choices remain fairly stable regardless of the number of attributes and profiles in the conjoint table (Jenke et al., 2021).
11. We acknowledge that excluding (some or all) foreign citizens could be legally problematic, but we choose to ignore the technical and legal feasibility of the options we present, since they form part of a future hypothetical scenario.

12. We do not allow a free-meal option in this attribute.
13. Roughly 20% of respondents liked neither proposal in each country. Disliking both proposals strongly correlates with having negative attitudes about social expenditure and redistribution via taxation, which we measure with pre-treatment questions.
14. It may be that the average respondent, whose job is not at risk, prefers retraining, whereas respondents who are economically vulnerable, favour compensation. We do not have pre-treatment questions that directly capture economical vulnerability and we are therefore unable to test this heterogenous effect.

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## Notes on contributors

**Leonardo Baccini** is a Professor of International Political Economy at the Department of Political Sciences of McGill University.

**Mattia Guidi** is an Associate Professor of Political Science at the Department of Social, Political and Cognitive Sciences of the University of Siena.

**Arlo Poletti** is a Professor of Political Science at the Department of Sociology and Social Research of the University of Trento.

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