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# Between the Territory and the Legacies: The Politicization of Active Labour Market Policy in Southern Europe

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## Abstract

The literature concerning the development of Active Labour Market Policy (ALMP) in the advanced economies during the post-Fordist Age is very informative. Nevertheless, surprisingly we know little about ALMP politicization. By focusing on two archetypes of the Mediterranean countries, Italy and Spain, this study argues that the *geographical distribution of social stratification* affects ALMP politicization at the national level. Analysing the party manifestos of the main nationwide parties in the most recent electoral turnouts (2013-2019), the paper shows that while the issue is highly politicized in Spain, it is almost completely neglected in Italy. When outsidership is concentrated in a delimited geographical area, as in Italy, it hinders ALMP politicization on a national level, since it becomes a regional issue. On the contrary, when it is spread across the whole national territory, as in Spain, ALMP politicization is more likely, since the issue is nationally relevant. However, the study demonstrates that the concentration of outsiders is not sufficient to trigger a change in the electoral competition dynamic and that the intervening effect of policy legacy may enhance or constrain ALMP politicization.

## 1. Introduction

There is a very informative literature concerning the development of Active Labour Market Policy (ALMP) in the advanced economies during the post-Fordist Age (e.g., Weishaupt, 2011; van Berkel et al., 2012). The concept of ALMP gathers different policy tools that aim to promote labour market participation intervening on the causes of unemployment (Bonoli, 2013). The bulk of the work in this policy arena has mainly focused on analysing the national governments' policy programs, highlighting cross-country similarities and differences in terms of funding, governance arrangements, and policy contents (e.g., van Berkel et al., 2012).

Nevertheless, it is surprising how little we know about ALMP *politicization*. Politicization is defined as the salience attributed to a specific issue by political parties. A systemic comparative analysis of how political parties have positioned themselves concerning ALMP, and most prominently, *why*, is still lacking. Relying on the literature on the New Politics of the Welfare State (e.g., Rueda, 2007; Gingrich and Häusermann 2015; Häusermann et al., 2015; Häusermann and Palier, 2017), the work addresses a first research question: *What are the main variables accounting for the ALMP politicization and cross-country differences/similarities?*

Furthermore, Southern Europe countries have usually been depicted as latecomers since they implemented these policies later than the other European countries (Bonoli, 2013). During and after the economic and financial crisis ALMP broke through their governments' reform agendas but only to a limited extent (Lopez-Santana, 2020; OECD, 2019). It is not clear whether similar politicization trends can be identified among Mediterranean countries or whether divergent paths maybe observed. The present study endeavours to fill this theoretical and empirical vacuum and

investigates the ALMP politicization in two archetypes of the Southern countries: Italy and Spain. In doing so, it answers two additional research questions: *How and to what extent has ALMP been politicized in Italy and Spain in the last decade? Have the political parties of these countries taken similar or diverse positions regarding these policies?*

The article has two goals. On the one hand, it provides a detailed comparative analysis of ALMP politicization in Italy and Spain, mapping parties' preferences in the last decade. The article thus bridges the ALMP literature with that on comparative party politics, especially that focusing on party manifestos.

On the other hand, it aims *to explain* ALMP politicization in the two countries. The literature expounds on politicization mostly by looking at political-oriented variables, such as constituency composition (Häusermann et al., 2012), the insider-outsider divide (Rueda, 2007), political mobilisation of geographical cleavage (Vampa, 2016), and institutional legacies (Häusermann and Palier, 2017). In this regard, the work looks at two independent variables, the interaction of which has so far been disregarded.

Firstly, the *geography of social stratification*. The occupational reconfiguration of post-industrial labour markets deeply affects the relationship between social classes in the advanced economies (Oesch, 2006; Häusermann, 2018). The literature in this field introduced the concept of outsidership – i.e., the likelihood for specific social classes to be more vulnerable within the labour market – to describe the effects of labour market changes on the workforce. ALMP has generally been depicted as the best tool for tackling the new labour market inequalities (Rueda, 2007). We could thus expect ALMP politicization to be associated with a high presence of outsiders. However, we argue that, more than the *level* of outsidership, ALMP politicization is affected by its geographical distribution across the country. A heterogeneous distribution, with the phenomenon being concentrated in a specific area, is expected to impair ALMP politicization nationally, since outsidership will be perceived only as a regional issue. On the contrary, when outsidership is equally distributed across the country, parties are more likely to consider it as a national problem to be solved through a nationwide strategy. In the latter case, ALMP are expected to be included in the national parties' political agenda.

Secondly, the study stresses the importance of the welfare *policy legacy* of a country. The pre-existing institutional context conditions problems of perception and diagnosis and sets political priorities (Häusermann and Palier, 2017). In other words, policy legacies act as a filter for exogenous pressure and may reinforce or change the political perception of outsidership and the possible policy solutions that can be provided. More specifically, a legacy characterized by a hypertrophic development of what have been labelled as consumptive policies – pensions, first of all – is expected to jeopardise the expansion of other policy sectors, including ALMP, which will end up being not politically relevant (Bonoli, 2013). At the same time, it is possible that outsidership has been historically counteracted with social assistance – e.g., cash transfers – rather than activation, thus excluding ALMP as a policy alternative. It follows that ALMP is unlikely to show up on parties' policy agendas. We expect policy legacies to interact with the geography of social stratification in affecting the politicization of ALMP nationally.

The contribution of this explorative article is theoretical, empirical and methodological. From a theoretical perspective, the study discourses with the literature on dualization and post-Fordist social stratification (Oesch, 2006; Schwander, 2018), complementing it by introducing the *geographical* variable into the analysis. So far, social stratification and the resulting insider/outsider divide have been predominately analysed through a national perspective (Rueda, 2007; Schwander and

Häusermann, 2013; Burgisser and Kurer, 2019), while territorial differences have received scarce attention. The present study goes beyond such considerations and stresses the importance of outsidersness distribution *at the regional level*. In this regard, the article builds a bridge between the comparative literature on welfare state politics and the Subnational Research (SNR) in comparative politics (Vampa, 2016; Giraudy et al., 2019). By homing in on subnational units, our study demonstrates that national phenomena – i.e., ALMP politicization at the national level – are also shaped by subnational factors – i.e., outsidersness distribution at the regional level. The bottom-up theoretical perspective developed by the SNR thus informs the welfare state politics literature, unveiling casual mechanisms that so far have been neglected.

From an empirical perspective, the study provides detailed insights concerning ALMP politicization in the Southern countries, a topic which up to now has been poorly explored and under-theorized. Furthermore, comparing two most similar cases – Italy and Spain – it raises some issues regarding the Southern welfare regime’s homogeneity, thus entering and widening the current debate on its increasing internal differentiation (Leon and Pavolini, 2014; Leon et al., 2019).

From a methodological perspective, we have elaborated a more sophisticated content analysis of party manifestos, strictly connected with the theoretical insights provided by the literature on labour market policy. The coding scheme allows us to differentiate better the specific ALMP programs that parties endorse and to what extent. This affords an in-depth understanding of party positions regarding ALMP, hence avoiding a superficial analysis disconnected from the theory.

The article is organized as follows. The next section introduces the theoretical framework used for analysing and explaining ALMP politicization. Section three discusses ALMP policy tools and their utilisation within different models of activation. It also presents the main features of ALMP in Italy and Spain. Section four shows the comparative findings of the content analysis of the party manifestos in our two case studies. Section five displays the operationalisation and measurement of regional outsidersness. Section six discusses the multi-causal theoretical framework as applied to our case studies. The final section is devoted to the concluding remarks and further research suggestions.

## **2. The Politics of ALMP: Theoretical Consideration**

The politicization of policy issues has been widely investigated from both theoretical and empirical perspectives within the literature on comparative politics (e.g., Kriesi et al., 2008; Hutter and Kriesi, 2019). In our understanding, politicization refers to the growing importance of party competition around a specific issue (Green-Pedersen 2019), i.e., whether political actors address the issue and formulate particular positions. In this work, we conceptualize politicization in terms of the *salience* that policy issues receive in party manifestos (Robertson, 1976; Budge and Farlie, 1983; Green-Pedersen, 2019). We consider ALMP a *valence* issue, i.e., an issue valued positively by all the parties due to a broad consensus brought by the whole electorate. It follows that parties’ positions concerning valence issues may not be framed in terms of agreement/disagreement (Stokes, 1963). Recent comparative studies have demonstrated that – as a key component of the Social Investment strategy – ALMP expansion is widely supported by the whole electorate of the advanced economies (Busemeyer, 2017; Garritzmman et al., 2018). However, though an explicit opposition against valence issues is unlikely, European party systems differ with regard to the attention devoted to ALMP (Bonoli, 2013; Vlandas, 2013). As a result, it is important to analyse *to what extent* (low, medium, high) ALMP has been prioritized within the party system agenda at the national level.

To explain ALMP politicization and cross-country differences or similarities, we rely on the literature on the politics of the welfare state (Pierson, 2001; Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015; Garritzmann et al., 2018; Häusermann, 2018). In particular, Häusermann and Palier (2017) argue that politicization is affected by the interaction of the outsider/insider divide, on the one hand, and the specific policy legacies inherited from the past, on the other.

First of all, it is important to recall the key role played by the Left parties in promoting social and labour market policies. These parties, indeed, are considered closer to the interests of the outsiders (Bürgisser and Kurer, 2019), even if they are increasingly appealing to the middle class (Häusermann et al., 2015). ALMP politicization could be seen as a by-product of the Social-Democratic parties. However, the literature on dualization questions this driving role of the Left. In his seminal work, Rueda (2007) demonstrates that, given their diverse vulnerability, insiders and outsiders share different policy preferences. While the former prefer higher employment protection legislation – which insulated them from the risk of unemployment – and social insurance, what we previously labelled consumptive policies, outsiders tend to favour redistribution and activation policies (Schwander and Häusermann, 2013). That has significant consequences in terms of ALMP politicization. For Rueda (2007), both Social Democratic parties – which have an insider constituency – and Conservative parties – which oppose higher taxes and a more intrusive role for government in the economy – will be not interested in ALMP. It follows that ALMP politicization is unlikely.

Nevertheless, more recent studies on dualization question this finding. Firstly, where employment protection is very low, even the insiders are more exposed to unemployment and precariousness, and thus will be more inclined to support ALMP expansion (Häusermann et al., 2015). Secondly, centre-right parties may be interested in activation programs if their business-oriented constituency asks for a more skilled workforce (training) or for tax-rebate for hiring (job subsidies) (Bonoli, 2013). While it is true that an expansion of ALMP implies public financing, the recommodification goal of such a policy is likely to please the higher and middle classes, which tend to be more sceptical in cash-oriented measures (e.g., income support benefits). Third, the literature devoted to dualization has so far underestimated the number and the mobilization capacity of the outsiders (Bürgisser and Kurer, 2019). In several countries, the share of outsiders within the labour market has dramatically increased during the last few decades. While some categories of workers can be considered outsiders in one country but not in another, scholars comparing advanced democracies demonstrate that women, young people and low-skilled workers in the service sector are more likely to be outsiders. Besides, for some specific groups – for example, the blue collars – outsidership can be a novelty, since in the past they were considered as insiders. It follows that the group has become increasingly relevant from an electoral standpoint. Thus, it is feasible that Social Democratic parties can be motivated to include specific ALMP programs within their policy agenda (Vlandas, 2013).

However, the literature on comparative politics and policy has pointed out that the specific institutional context can incentivize or constrain parties' decisions (Häusermann and Palier, 2017). More specifically, the policy legacy inherited from the past “filters” the exogenous pressures and leads to diverse problems and solutions for different types of welfare regimes (Scharpf and Schmidt, 2000). It follows that in those countries where ALMP has a long tradition, and where the welfare state has been historically re-oriented toward the coverage of new social risks (Armingeon and Bonoli, 2006; Bonoli and Natali, 2012), ALMP has generated a group of *institutional* winners (Pierson, 2001) which advocate for their maintenance or expansion. In this case, political parties have an electoral incentive to politicize the issue. On the contrary, in those countries with a cash transfer-oriented

welfare state and where specific policy programs – first of all pension policy – have developed in a hypertrophic way – crowding out the expansion of other sectors (Bonoli, 2013) – the likelihood for parties to politicize ALMP scales down. Indeed, in this case, no ALMP *winner group* has emerged, and politicization would not be electorally convenient. At the same time, in consumptive-oriented welfare states, the insider/outsider divide can be (partially) mitigated by means of cash transfers, that is, assistance. Contrary to activation – the effects of which are less immediate, and with economic returns delayed over time – passive measures create tangible and immediate benefits (Häusermann and Palier, 2017). In this circumstance, ALMP is scarcely appealing at the electoral level and so is unlikely to be included in parties’ political agendas.

To summarize, in the post-Fordist era, both the centre-left and the centre-right potentially may have an electoral incentive to politicize ALMP due to the electoral relevance of the insider-outsider divide as mediated by the policy legacies inherited from the past. Starting from this assumption, in the following sections we elaborated on the importance of the territorial aspect of insider-outsider cleavage and its interactions with policy legacies.

### 3. ALMP in Italy and Spain

Unemployment benefits and active labour market policy are the core policy tools for tackling unemployment. While income support remains a fundamental function of the welfare state, ALMP aims to directly address the causes of unemployment (Bonoli, 2013). Four types of active policy can be distinguished. Firstly, unemployment could be addressed by the creation of job opportunities in the public and non-profit sectors. Secondly, employment support from the public employment service (PES) or private providers aims to remove the obstacles to matching labour demand and supply. Placement services, job-search support and counselling help unemployed and employers to come together. Thirdly, fiscal incentives reduce recruitment costs to employers in the form of tax credits and subsidies, also for the self-employed. The fourth type is training, which is aimed at the upskilling of the unemployed.

From the 1990s onwards, European countries have witnessed the ‘activation turn’ in employment policy (Weischaupt, 2011; Bonoli, 2013). Labour market policies have been redirected to resolve the causes of unemployment and income benefits’ dependency on the welfare state, as work is seen as the best form of welfare (Clasen and Clegg, 2012). The literature identifies two dichotomous ideal-typical approaches to activation (Lødemel and Trickey, 2001; Dingelday, 2007). On the one hand, the *workfare approach* focuses on entitlement conditionality and sanctions to encourage quick reintegration into the labour market regardless of the new working conditions and wage levels. On the other hand, the *enabling approach* promotes employability through investments in skills upgrading and adaptation to labour market demands. The UK epitomises the workfare approach due to the centrality attributed to conditionality and sanctions, and the role of the public employment service for job-search assistance (Weischaupt, 2011). At the same time, training is postponed until after recruitment. The Danish pathway is the benchmark of the enabling approach that combines job-search support activities and upskilling to offset the effect of labour market flexibilization (flexicurity) – even though this approach has progressively become more workfare-oriented in the last years (Larsen, 2013). Sweden and the Continental countries, i.e., France and Germany, followed afterwards in introducing activation during the 2000s. Although Sweden adopted ALMP early in the 1950s, Swedish governments slowly reoriented ALMP towards activation only from the mid-2000s

(Hollertz, 2016). Germany focuses on employment support and direct job creation – ‘mini-jobs’ –, while France is more committed to upskilling (Kriesi et al., 2019).

Southern European countries are considered as latecomers with regard to activation policies (Bonoli, 2013). The activation turn in Italy and Spain could be explained by referring to the European Commission’s European Employment Strategy (Jessoula and Alti, 2010; Moreno and Serrano, 2011). The advocacy of activation keywords and principles at the European level provided national political forces with cognitive resources and concepts that drove the political discourses about employment policy reforms towards ALMP and conditionality. In Spain, the centre-right government first introduced workfare activation into the Spanish legislation with the 2002 labour market reform (Aragón et al., 2007). The subsequent centre-left government expanded upskilling, employment support and job subsidies, mimicking the flexicurity approach. From then on, all the subsequent governments continued to be committed to activation (Lopez-Santana, 2020). In Italy, a workfare approach was clearly visible in the centre-right government’s 2003 labour market reform. However, it was only in the wake of the economic crisis (in 2012) that activation and ALMP were invoked by a technocratic government to reform the provision of income benefits. Then, from 2014 onwards, activation gained increasing attention in the Italian political debate, firstly due to a (failed) attempt to reform ALMP governance and secondly due to the introduction of the Citizenship Income (*Reddito di Cittadinanza*), a means-tested scheme directed towards the lower income citizens that includes activation elements (Pascucci, 2019).

Although changes in national legislations brought Italy and Spain closer to the other European countries, such changes did not translate into an effective system of activation policies. Two reasons could be put forward. Firstly, the scarce resources accompanying activation reforms negatively affected ALMP implementation in both countries (Sanz, 2016; OECD, 2019). Italy and Spain show lower levels of ALMP expenditure when weighted for the unemployment rate compared to the other EU countries (Kriesi et al., 2019). Secondly, Italy and Spain followed a similar pattern of ALMP governance reforms, where decentralisation is the key dimension to explain ALMP implementation (López-Santana and Moyer, 2012). While the national level is responsible for coordinating the regional systems and unemployment benefits provision, regional governments have legislative and implementation powers. They also regulate private providers’ involvement in ALMP implementation in autonomy, producing high fragmentation in terms of service provision and efficacy (Hernández-Moreno and Ramos Gallarín, 2017; OECD, 2019).

#### **4. ALMP politicization in Southern European party manifestos**

The present section shows the results of the content analysis of the Italian and Spanish main political parties’ manifestos. The study focuses on the two most recent national elections in Italy (2013 and 2018) and Spain (2015 and April 2019). The content analysis of party programs resembles that of León and colleagues (2019) (see also Hsieh and Shannon, 2005; Ferrera, 2014). We elaborated 8 categories to analyse parties’ positions on ALMP specific programs.<sup>1</sup> Each statement concerning ALMP-related initiatives was coded and counted to measure the extent to which ALMP is salient. Saliency ranges from “absent” (-) to “strong” (+++). The categorisation does not indicate whether parties support or oppose ALMP since we assume from the literature that it is a *valence issue*, but

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<sup>1</sup> See supplementary materials for each category definition.

provides a measure of the degree of saliency attributed to each category.<sup>2</sup> Table 1 reports the results of the analysis for the 8 categories.

= INSERT TABLE 1 HERE =

The first finding to note is the unequal importance of ALMP-related issues between Spain and Italy. ALMP-related issues in the Spanish parties' manifestos totalled 158 statements against 35 in the Italian manifestos.<sup>3</sup> Broadly speaking, we can state that in Spain ALMP represents a key electoral issue for all the political parties. On the contrary, in Italy, ALMP is almost completely neglected and when debated, its salience remains low.

The second finding that emerges from the content analysis is that partisan politics has a quite limited role in explaining differences in the ALMP politicization in the two countries. Preferences regarding ALMP-related issues differ only marginally among the party-blocs – Mainstream Left, Mainstream Right and the New Challengers – while parties belonging to the same party family behave in a very diverse way.

If we consider the Mainstream Left, in Spain the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) strongly emphasizes activation programs for disadvantaged groups – i.e., long-term unemployed, women, the young and people with disabilities – to include them in the labour market. That would seem to confirm the thesis that the Left is more oriented toward those ALMP programmes that have a social investment goal – that is, helping people to upskill and to (re)-enter the labour market – while being less concerned with promoting market-oriented ALMP, such as fiscal incentives, and punitive-oriented programs, i.e., conditionality (Vlandas, 2013). However, the analysis also shows that such a conclusion should not be exaggerated. First of all, the PSOE supports training only to a low degree, partially contradicting the alleged Left's strong support for upskilling measures. Second, fiscal incentives for employment enters the party agenda – though to a limited extent – demonstrating that such measures are not completely rejected by left-wing parties. Third, the PSOE does not oppose conditionality: in the 2015 manifestos the issue received medium positive salience, while in 2019 it continued to be on the party agenda, though it became less relevant. Shifting the attention to the Democratic Party (PD) – the Italian Mainstream Left party – it started to include ALMP only after the 2018 elections, promoting non-specific actions in PES reform, training, fiscal incentives and activation of specific groups. In the previous elections, the issue continued to be neglected. The PD therefore does not show more or less-marked preferences for SI or for market-oriented programs nor – contrary to the PSOE – does it show that it considers activation of the disadvantaged social groups to be a key political issue.

A symmetrical picture emerged when considering the Right pole. In Spain, both the People's Party (PP) and the PSOE debate ALMP quite amply in their manifestos. The main difference regards the higher salience within the PP programs of the fiscal incentives directed towards employees' recruitment and the self-employed. However, this does not mean that the main centre-right party clearly prefers market-oriented programs over SI-oriented ones, as suggested by the literature. Activation and training are debated in the 2015 and 2019 electoral programs and to the same extent recorded by the PSOE. Interestingly, punitive programmes (i.e., references to conditionality) do not represent a key issue in the PP's manifestos. Moving to the Italian centre-right, Go Italy (FI) behaves

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<sup>2</sup> See supplementary materials for details.

<sup>3</sup> See supplementary materials for specific examples (*quotes*) from the party manifestos.

differently by overshadowing ALMP in its programs. The issue is barely debated in 2013 (with few positive references to training and incentives) and then completely overlooked in 2018.

Finally, shifting the attention to the New Challengers, also in this case we do not observe a strong partisan effect. In Spain, *Ciudadanos* (Cs) – which locates itself in the central, liberal pole – emphasizes ALMP in the 2015 elections, focusing on PES reform and fiscal incentives, while conditionality remains poorly debated. However, in general terms, ALMP salience is in line with that of the two mainstream parties. Then, in 2019, the topic emerges as more marginal. Therefore, at least for the 2015 elections, Cs has embraced the *pro-ALMP consensus* appearing in the overall Spanish party system. The only exception to this *consensus* is represented by *Podemos*, which tends to give low salience to ALMP due to its commitment to basic income introduction in Spain (Noguera, 2019). Even in Italy, New Challengers seem to align their position to those of the mainstream parties: ALMP receives scarce attention both from the League, Italian Brothers (FdI) and the Five Star Movement (M5S). However, it is interesting to note that in the 2018 elections, issue salience slightly increases in their programs. The two Radical Right parties focus on PES reform and incentives – whereas conditionality does not appear on their agenda – while the M5S focus on training. However, the values do not differ from those of the PD.

The absence of a partisan politics effect on ALMP politicization is confirmed when looking at parties' electoral composition. We investigated the electoral behaviour of key outsiders' groups using the ESS round 9, i.e., low-skilled service professionals and socio-cultural professionals. The analysis shows that these classes' vote is distributed among the main parties in both countries.<sup>4</sup>

To summarize, the content analysis shows that in Spain a general *pro-ALMP consensus* has emerged, while in Italy the topic remains under-debated. In this regard, partisan politics plays a marginal role in explaining politicization in Italy and Spain. Left and Right act differently in the two countries and so do the new challengers. In Spain some ideological differences between the PP and PSOE can be detected. However, they remain limited.

## 5. Outsiderness at the Regional Level

Outsiders are those groups who are above-averagely exposed to the risks of vulnerable employment (Schwander, 2018). The risk-based perspective allows the analysis to consider social groups beyond their labour market status. While outsiderness is traditionally related to low-skill and the least-remunerated positions in the labour market (Rueda, 2007), it is no longer strictly correlated to the socio-economic status in terms of education, skill level, or income. Indeed, in parallel with the growth of the less-protected service sector, even specific categories of high-skilled workers can be affected.

Our measurement of outsiderness is based on the conceptualization and methodology proposed by Schwander and Häusermann (2013), integrated with some changes. We thus define outsiders as those individuals experiencing a higher probability of (a) being unemployed, and (b) being employed part-time or (c) with fixed-term contracts. We also decided to include those with a high probability of (d) being inactive and (e) working in the informal economy, since these are widespread both in Italy and Spain (Ferrera, 2005). We applied this operationalization to two national aggregated European Social

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix 3 in supplementary materials for details.

Survey Datasets (2010-2018)<sup>5</sup>. The number of respondents in the two datasets is sufficiently wide to measure the national and regional level of outsidersness<sup>6</sup>.

Table 2 shows the national and regional level of outsidersness in Spain and Italy. We calculated each occupational group deviation from the workforce average score of outsidersness. We highlighted as outsiders those groups displaying a higher than average score of outsidersness (positive values). The higher the score, the higher the level of outsidersness. On the contrary, those with a lower score are defined as insiders (negative values). The final degree of outsidersness is obtained by averaging the occupational groups' deviations displayed in the five social risks. We preferred to average rather than to sum the deviations, so as to evaluate better the combined effect of the social risks. We performed this operation at the national level and the regional level. For the regional analysis of outsidersness, we calculated the occupational groups' deviations from the *national* mean, employing NUTS 1 classification as a geocode standard to subdivide the Italian and Spanish regions. This allowed us to detect differences in the geographical concentration of the outsidersness, that is, to assess whether some social groups coded as insiders/outsideers at the national level display a different level of outsidersness at the regional level.

Focusing on the national data, outsidersness is by and large mostly concentrated in the same occupational groups, that is, socio-cultural professionals (SCPs), low-service functionaries (LSFs) and, to same extent, blue-collar workers (BCs). Furthermore, gender and age appear to strongly affect the likelihood of being outsiders. A high level of outsidersness is thus mostly experienced by women and young people. This result is consistent with the historical generational divide typical of the Southern countries as well as with the traditionally gendered distributions of tasks within the households, with women acting primarily as the main caregivers.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, while comparative literature agrees on coding SCPs and LSFs as outsiders, BCs are mostly considered *insiders* (e.g., Beramendi et al., 2015). On the contrary, the analysis of the Italian and Spanish social stratification shows that only *old male BCs* have a significant lower degree of outsidersness compared to the workforce mean. The data thus show that in the Southern countries, even the BCs, and more specifically women and young BCs, are outsiders.

Moving to the regional data, the results show that in Spain outsidersness is relatively homogeneously spread across the national territory. In other words, SCPs, LSFs and BCs – and more prominently women and young people – are classified as outsiders also in the six Spanish macro-regions. Clearly, this does not mean a complete overlapping between the national and regional level. The most interesting discrepancy is in the *Noroeste* region, where the BCs are insiders, except for the young male BCs. However, broadly speaking, cross-regional differences remain modest.

The results are very different when looking at the regional data from Italy. In three macro-regions – that is, *Nord-Ovest*, *Nord-Est* and *Centro* – the outsidersness level is quite aligned with the national one. The striking discrepancy is to be found in the *Sud* and *Isole* macro-region. Here, except for the CAs, *all* the occupational groups are outsiders, regardless of gender and age. Furthermore, the CAs' level of *insidersness* is much lower than the national average. Therefore, in Italy the long-lasting geographical cleavage strongly influences the spread of outsidersness across the country. While regional differences are modest in the Centre-North area of the country, they markedly increase proceeding towards the South of the peninsula.

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5 For Spain: Rounds 5-9. For Italy: Rounds 6,8, and 9.

6 For a detailed discussion of the variable operationalization, see the online supplement material.

7 Even though Spain has substantially speeded up its *de-familialization* process, compared to Italy (see, Leon and Pavolini, 2014).

< INSERT TABLE 2 HERE >

## 6. How to explain ALMP politicization in Italy and Spain

The data discussed in the previous section suggest that in Italy outsidership distribution has strong regional characterization, while in Spain it is a national problem. From a politics perspective, this is relevant. In Spain, political parties – both the mainstream and the new challengers – have strongly politicized ALMP since it is seen as a recipe for coping with a *nationwide* problem. On the contrary, in Italy, politically speaking, outsidership – even though it is a widespread problem too – has developed more as a *regional* or *southern* issue and has been treated as such.

The geographical concentration of outsidership interacts with national-level policy legacies in explaining the limited ALMP support shown by the Italian parties. The differences between Italy and Spain in ALMP politicization can be explained by considering the diverse way in which the evolution of other welfare provisions over time – in particular, pension and social assistance – has interacted with a more or less unbalanced geographical concentration of outsidership.

In this regard, Italy can be seen as an *adverse* environment for ALMP politicization, for two reasons. First, as already noted by Leon and Pavolini (2014), the bulk of the social policy expenditure has been historically devoted to the pension realm, which developed in a hypertrophic way during the Golden Age. This produced a large, very mobilized group of institutional winners (i.e., those benefiting from the very generous Italian pension system) that have strongly opposed any attempt at retrenching their rights (Fargion et al., 2012). Therefore, pension policy has *crowded out* the expansion of ALMP and, in terms of politics, its politicization, since this policy has not been perceived as electorally convenient.

Second, in Italy, the welfare state has generally favoured assistance rather than activation measures for dealing with the structural social risks affecting the Southern regions. The historically higher poverty and unemployment rates manifested in Southern Italy – compared to the Centre-North regions – have usually been countervailed with cash-transfer measures, such as the social pension or the disability pension, since they demonstrated to have high electoral returns in a macro-region where outsiders are concentrated (Ferrera, 2005). It follows that cash benefits are more difficult to re-size or trade-off with activation policies – the effects of which are very often perceived by the policy-takers less tangibly (Bonoli 2013). To summarize, the propagation of outsidership in the South together with a hypertrophic pension realm and a consolidated assistance policy legacy for managing structural issues would seem to constrain parties to prioritize assistance over activation to secure electoral votes, limiting the politicization of ALMP even in recent times. The introduction of the new Citizenship income confirms this trend. The policy does not qualify as an actual minimum income or as a labour market policy, but as a social assistance scheme that embodies activation elements. Due to its design, the Citizenship income is mainly directed towards the citizens living in the South, and has clear electoral purposes (OECD, 2019).

However, Italy is not a completely *frozen landscape*. As already mentioned, between 2014 and 2018, the predominately centre-left governments tried to enhance ALMP by reforming its governance. The establishment of a national agency with coordinating functions and the reorganisation of the responsibilities between the central state and the regions aimed to centralise the system of ALMP delivery. Although the reform was substantially suspended, and despite the fact that the regions still hold significant political autonomy, it represents an (incremental) change of the policy

path, at least in terms of priorities. However, such a change did not really affect politics. In the 2018 elections, the PD continued to give low salience to ALMP-related issues. In other words, the weak reforms implemented between 2014 and 2018 did not have the time to consolidate and thus to produce a new policy legacy that could have influenced parties' preferences. Furthermore, in 2018 the PD leadership changed, thus creating political discontinuity with the reforms supported by the previous government. The Italian case study shows that new policy legacies can occur, but a reasonable period of continuity in terms of policies and politics is necessary for them to affect parties' policy preferences.

The Spanish welfare state has proved to be much more inclined to change than the Italian one (Guillen, 2010; Del Pino, 2020). It has mostly developed since the 1980s, after the Democratic Transition, and thus has inherited a *lighter* policy legacy compared to Italy, whose welfare state, at that time, had already *grown to its limits*. Until the Great Recession, an expanding labour market – characterized by a high level of outsidership – favourable demographic developments, and the support of the European Social Funds, allowed the Spanish government to expand the welfare state. Taking the pension realm as an example, subsequent reforms expanded the system's generosity and inclusiveness (Chulía, 2011), while expenditure remained below the European average (León et al., 2015). Besides, this transformation was strictly connected with EU membership. Indeed, the EU pressured Spain to redesign its welfare system in terms of activation, and such amelioration and expansion of the social protection system were accomplished by Spaniards in a context synonymous with democratic modernization (Moreno and Serrano, 2011). Regarding unemployment policy, disability pensions functioned as an early retirement mechanism for the unemployed in depressed regions, as in the Italian case. Yet they were substituted by means-tested and contributory benefits as early as the end of the 1980s (García-Gómez et al., 2010). Activation thus has become a *policy recipe* that befits the whole country, with the ideological support of the European Employment Strategy (Moreno and Serrano, 2011).

All things considered, the reconfiguration of the Spanish state and of its social system has incentivized political parties to include ALMP in their policy agendas also in recent times. The PSOE governments in office from 2004 to 2011 expanded the efforts in passive and active policies, introducing activation in the political debate (Moreno and Serrano, 2011). The Great Recession was an opportunity to recalibrate both passive and active policies in categories that had not been adequately covered. The reaction to the economic crisis could be framed in two phases (Clasen et al., 2012). The first phase was expansionary from the period that employment incentives, a short-time work scheme and a new unemployment benefit were introduced between 2009 and 2010. In the second phase, both the socialist and the popular governments extended the previous measures and concentrated on labour market reforms (highly contested), while austerity-driven cuts hit other welfare arenas, such as pensions, healthcare and family policy. Regarding the PES, limiting regional spending was complemented by a centralization dynamic to increase controls over planning, evaluation and homogenization of ALMP provision at the regional level (López-Santana, 2020).

## 7. Conclusion

This article aims to explain ALMP politicization in Italy and Spain. We analysed ALMP-related issues in the Italian and Spanish national manifestos, and discovered that the differences in saliency are strident. ALMP is not a salient issue in Italy. Except for some references in the Mainstream Left party's programmes (the PD), the other parties almost wholly neglect the topic. On the contrary, in

Spain we noticed a pro-ALMP *consensus* characterising all political parties. Spanish parties extensively discuss ALMP, detailing which policy interventions to prioritize, what objectives to pursue and what social groups to target.

These findings contrast with the results that emerged in the studies of Vlandas (2013) and Bürgisser & Kurer (2019). Analysing a larger set of cases that comprised EU15 and Eastern European countries, these works reveal a strong partisan effect on national governments' policy outputs. However, our study scrutinized the stage of policy agenda formation, where parties are asked to express their policy preferences, while the other two research focused on the stage of policy-making, assessing concrete (coalition) governments' reforms. The two stages proved to be different in relation to the role of partisan politics. The present study finds that ideological differences regarding ALMP tend to be less relevant for policy agenda formation than for policy-making.

Furthermore, the comparative content analysis of party manifestos confirmed that in the policy agenda formation phase, ALMP is a *valence* and not a *position* issue, since no party took an "opposition" stance. Therefore, in this stage, country-specific differences appear to have a stronger effect. It follows that to understand politicization, partisan politics is not a sufficient explanatory variable. For this reason, we rely on the interaction between outsiders concentration and policy legacies.

The welfare politics literature stresses the importance of the insiders/outside divide and policy legacies to study the ALMP agenda (Häusermann and Palier, 2017; Schwander, 2018). We agree with Bürgisser and Kurer (2019) that the growing number of the outsiders have a potential effect in reconfiguring party interests, even in those countries where the policy legacies have created an *adverse environment* for ALMP politicization. The emergence of an insider-outsider divide affects parties' policy preferences by changing the constituencies' composition. However, the geographical feature of the divide and its implication on politics have been completely neglected by the literature.

Our point is that outsiders distribution within the country affects ALMP politicization at the national level. When outsiders are equally spread, all the regions will display levels of outsiders that come close to the national mean. Differences may be present, but they are not significant. Outsiders thus becomes a nationwide problem to cope with. Labour market vulnerability becomes a politically salient issue at the national level, and ALMP could be seen as a helpful tool to handle it. As a consequence, ALMP will have more possibilities of being politicized in national elections. On the contrary, when outsiders are concentrated in a delimited sub-area, a specific region (or a group of regions) could display a disproportionate level of outsiders compared to the national level, while the other territories have similar values. In such a case, outsiders becomes a *subnational* issue and will be less salient at the national level. In this case, the politicization of ALMP might not be electorally relevant.

However, we demonstrate that the concentration of outsiders is not sufficient to trigger a change in the electoral competition dynamics. The national policy legacy must be taken into account to explain the politicization of specific policy arenas, as ALMP. Consumption-related policy legacies, such as those characterizing the Italian Welfare State, tend to crowd ALMP out and trade them off with cash-transfer programs which are difficult to reverse. These legacies have thus made the ALMP politicization increasingly unlikely. On the contrary, where the policy legacy does not produce crowding-out effects, as in Spain, it is easier for ALMP to become a national issue. In other words, in Italy, policy legacies have reinforced the negative effect of the outsiders concentration on ALMP politicization. On the contrary, in Spain, policy legacies have combined with a homogeneous

spread of outsidership, thus incentivizing nationwide political parties to set ALMP as policy priorities.

The study has some limitations related to its explorative nature. Firstly, we analysed how the geographical concentration of outsidership interacts with policy legacies in affecting ALMP politicization without considering the policy coalition that gathers around labour market regulation. In particular, policy-makers are responsive to producer groups other than the electorate. Since the Southern Italian regions lack a strong labour market demand, especially of high- and medium-skilled workers (Kazepov and Ranci, 2017), it is possible that ALMP are deemed as ineffective in addressing outsidership by the national policy-makers. As a result, different interventions – e.g., industrial policies and social assistance policies – may be preferred over ALMP.

Secondly, we believe that another neglected mechanism influences the relationship between outsidership, policy legacies and politicization – especially in decentralised countries as Italy and Spain – namely, the *politicization of the centre-periphery cleavage* (Vampa, 2016). It is possible to assume that in decentralised countries, the existence of a centre-periphery cleavage constitutes a challenge for state-wide parties, especially when regionalist parties dispute not only the territorial distribution of welfare responsibilities but also the integrity of the nation-state, as in Spain. In such circumstances, ALMP may turn out to be a relevant issue in the struggle between nationwide and regionalist parties.

In conclusion, our article shows that it appears crucial to consider the territory, i.e., how outsidership regionally spreads and its interaction with the legacies inherited from the past, in order to explain cross-country differences in issue politicization, even between most similar cases. Future works should further expand the theoretical framework, looking at other contextual and politics explanatory factors which may affect ALMP politicization and how they interact with the geographical and policy legacy variables.

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**Table 1.** Saliency of ALMP-related issues in Spanish and Italian parties' manifestos.

	Spain								Italy								
Policy content	2015				2019*				2013				2018				
	PSOE	PP	We Can	Cs	PSOE	PP	We Can	Cs	FI+ The PD	League	FdI	M5S	PD	FI	The League	FdI	M5S
Activation	+++	+++	+	++	++	++	+	■	+	■	+	■	+	■	■	■	■
PES reform/empowerment	++	+	■	+++	+	++	■	+	■	■	■	■	+	■	+	+	+
Training	++	+	■	+	+	+	■	■	■	+	■	■	+	■	■	■	+
Fiscal incentives for employment	+	+	■	++	+	++	■	+	■	+	■	■	+	■	+	+	■
Fiscal incentives for self-employment	■	+	■	■	■	+	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	+	■
Direct job-creation	■	+	■	■	■	+	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	+	■	■
PLMP	++	+	+	+	+	+	++	+	■	■	+	+	+	■	■	+	■
Conditionality	++	-	■	+	+	+	■	■	■	■	■	■	+	■	■	■	■

Notes: (■): the policy is not mentioned in the manifesto; (+): the policy is mentioned between one to four times; (++): the policy is mentioned between five to nine times; moderate; (+++): the policy is mentioned more than ten times.

\* Data refers only to the party manifestos for the April 2019 Spanish general election.

Source: authors' elaboration.

**Table 2.** Level of Outsiderness

	<i>Spain</i>	<i>Noroeste</i>	<i>Noreste</i>	<i>Madrid</i>	<i>Centro</i>	<i>Este</i>	<i>Sur and Canarias</i>	<i>Italy</i>	<i>Nord-Ovest</i>	<i>Nord-Est</i>	<i>Centro</i>	<i>Sud e Isole</i>
CA	-6.08	-5.47	-7.52	-7.10	-5.01	-6.59	-4.17	-6.06	-7.26	-7.27	-6.79	-2.71
SCP old men	-8.63	-4.25	-5.41	-10.37	-10.01	-12.73	-6.64	-2.26	-6.60	-4.08	-2.32	<b>1.21</b>
SCP old women	-2.71	-1.8	-1.82	-3.12	-6.62	-1.05	-3.20	<b>0.53</b>	-2.20	<b>2.90</b>	<b>0.23</b>	<b>2.52</b>
SCP young men	<b>1.76</b>	-4.08	-3.76	<b>2.90</b>	<b>4.79</b>	<b>0.27</b>	<b>1.76</b>	<b>12.12</b>	<b>10.93</b>	<b>8.65</b>	<b>13.03</b>	<b>12.72</b>
SCP young women	<b>8.97</b>	<b>4.45</b>	<b>5.88</b>	<b>11.34</b>	<b>10.14</b>	<b>5.98</b>	<b>14.21</b>	<b>6.76</b>	<b>2.16</b>	<b>3.65</b>	<b>7.33</b>	<b>11.72</b>
MSF old men	-7.02	-8.34	-7.24	-6.54	-4.30	-8.50	-5.51	-6.43	-8.56	-6.43	-8.21	-2.99
MSF old women	-3.57	-5.27	-5.15	-5.64	-0.78	-3.37	-1.72	-0.78	-3.09	-2.54	-2.16	<b>5.96</b>
MSF young men	<b>1.00</b>	-6.90	<b>2.43</b>	-3.24	<b>5.22</b>	<b>1.36</b>	<b>3.78</b>	-1.66	-2.55	-8.37	<b>0.05</b>	<b>2.68</b>
MSF young women	<b>6.39</b>	<b>1.30</b>	<b>7.95</b>	<b>2.57</b>	<b>6.64</b>	<b>4.80</b>	<b>11.26</b>	<b>5.98</b>	<b>2.47</b>	<b>0.46</b>	<b>5.62</b>	<b>16.70</b>
LSF old men	-5.71	-11.15	-4.80	-5.11	-8.04	-4.96	-4.64	-0.74	-3.96	<b>1.10</b>	-1.64	<b>0.78</b>
LSF old women	<b>5.28</b>	<b>2.58</b>	<b>3.15</b>	<b>5.91</b>	<b>5.49</b>	<b>4.19</b>	<b>7.87</b>	<b>5.93</b>	<b>1.06</b>	<b>4.03</b>	<b>8.02</b>	<b>12.24</b>
LSF young men	<b>5.84</b>	<b>3.22</b>	<b>0.96</b>	<b>0.47</b>	<b>9.99</b>	<b>7.03</b>	<b>7.02</b>	<b>13.36</b>	<b>15.09</b>	<b>9.00</b>	<b>12.79</b>	<b>14.16</b>
LSF young women	<b>12.02</b>	<b>10.31</b>	<b>11.73</b>	<b>7.81</b>	<b>13.66</b>	<b>12.26</b>	<b>14.83</b>	<b>12.65</b>	<b>6.61</b>	<b>16.69</b>	<b>10.48</b>	<b>14.70</b>
BC old men	-2.84	-7.34	-9.25	-3.36	<b>0.87</b>	-4.91	<b>1.00</b>	-2.22	-6.29	-4.01	-3.01	<b>2.02</b>
BC old women	<b>2.78</b>	-0.27	<b>1.32</b>	-1.71	<b>4.77</b>	-2.33	<b>8.87</b>	-0.77	-6.20	-4.35	-0.67	<b>6.98</b>
BC young men	<b>6.49</b>	<b>1.04</b>	<b>5.53</b>	<b>0.67</b>	<b>7.34</b>	<b>4.92</b>	<b>11.56</b>	<b>4.52</b>	<b>1.79</b>	-1.99	<b>1.48</b>	<b>11.53</b>
BC young women	<b>13.23</b>	0.12	<b>10.85</b>	<b>12.54</b>	<b>14.52</b>	<b>12.55</b>	<b>15.43</b>	<b>5.94</b>	<b>3.62</b>	<b>1.14</b>	<b>6.64</b>	<b>9.42</b>

Source: authors' elaboration.