

An Unexpected Helping Hand: Consequences of Redistribution on Personal Ideology

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Abstract : Literature on redistributive preferences has proliferated in past decades. A core assumption behind it is that variation in redistributive preferences can explain different levels of redistribution. In contrast, this paper considers the reverse. What if it is redistribution that changes redistributive preferences? The core assumption behind the argument is that if self-interest - which we label concrete preferences - and ideology - which we label abstract preferences - come into conflict, the former will prevail and lead to an adjustment of the latter. To test the hypothesis, data from a survey conducted in Switzerland during the first wave of the COVID-19 crisis is used. A significant portion of the workforce at the time unexpectedly received state money through the short-time working program. Short-time work was used as a proxy for self-interest and was tested (1) on the support given to hypothetical, ailing firms during the crisis and (2) on the prioritization of justice principles guiding state action. In a first step, several models using OLS-regressions on political orientation were estimated to test our hypothesis as well as to check for non-linear effects. We expected support for ailing firms to be the same regardless of ideology but only for people on short-time work. The results both confirm our hypothesis and suggest a non-linear effect. Far-right individuals on short-time work were disproportionately supportive compared to moderate ones. In a second step, ordered logit models were estimated to test the impact of short-time work and political orientation on the rankings of the distributive justice principles need, performance, entitlement, and equality. The results show that being on short-time work significantly alters the prioritization of justice principles. Right-wing individuals are much more likely to prioritize need and equality over performance and entitlement when they receive government assistance. No such effect is found among left-wing individuals. In conclusion, we provide moderate to strong evidence that unexpectedly finding oneself at the receiving end changes redistributive preferences if personal ideology is antithetical to redistribution. The implications of our findings on the study of populism, personal ideologies, and political change are discussed.

Keywords : COVID-19, ideology, redistribution, redistributive preferences, self-interest

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