Gendered Framing and Public Support for Redistribution Policies during Crises: a Survey Experiment

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Foreword

Writing a master thesis is a long and tough process, not only because it is the most advanced piece of work that a student has to produce, but especially because it represents the culmination of many years of learning and the final step toward an exciting, sometimes uncertain, future. Although in essence an individual performance, this milestone remains a collective accomplishment, as it could only with difficulty be reached alone. I would therefore like to acknowledge and thank my incredible support system without which this work would never have seen the light of day: my supervisor and boss, Prof. Dr. Fritz sager, for his expertise of course, but above all for his trust and support; my family and friends for their unconditional love; the frauenstat.ch team for leading me toward overcoming a quite strong imposter syndrome; my psychotherapist for helping me understand that no project, job or cause is worth losing your sanity and that a master thesis is nothing more than what it is: a master thesis; and finally every single individual who was there for me in any kind of way, whether by giving me a wise piece of advice or by taking my mind off things over a beer.

Abstract

Although the gender data gap is an acknowledged problem denounced repeatedly by both academics and activists, little is done by governments to close it. At all times but even more during crises, they are reluctant to collect and communicate disaggregated data, especially about redistribution policies. This phenomenon was observed during the economic crisis of 2008 and is being witnessed again during the Covid-19 crisis that started at the beginning of 2020. This research tests the interactions of gender, crisis, and public support for redistribution policies, hypothesizing that a crisis setting would counteract the lower levels of public support generated by a gendered framing, with the underlying motivation that the validation of these hypotheses would provide an argument in favor of systematic monitoring and greater use of gender-related data for redistribution policies issued in times of crisis. The analysis of the data collected through a survey experiment conducted in Switzerland during summer 2021 allowed establishing that gender does not influence public support for redistribution policies in Switzerland, in times of crisis as much as in normal times. While refuting the hypotheses, these results remain interesting because they do not invalidate the motivation behind this research, which is to try to understand better why so little is done to systematically collect and communicate gendered data, especially in times of crisis, and to provide an argument for better data disaggregation, thus working towards reducing the gender data gap.

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1. Introduction

Gender issues during crises are of utmost relevance. Indeed, not only are gender issues put asides in times of emergency, but injustices and inequalities are amplified and women are all too often the first casualties - invisible and silent – of crises, as governments refrain to include gender in policy designs and impact assessments (Walby, 2009). Research shows that many policies implemented in response to the 2008 worldwide financial crisis disadvantaged women and even led to stepbacks regarding gender equality (e.g. Elson, 2016; Karamessini, 2014; Seguino, 2010). Wealth redistribution and resources allocation during and after crises is a deeply gendered issue in that "[t]*he reform of the financial architecture, the impact of financial and economic crisis and policy responses are gendered in both their causes and consequences*" (Walby, 2009, p. 26). This related strongly to what is known as the gender data gap, which can be understood as the lack of gender-disaggregated data invisibilizing the negative consequences of policies on women and preventing the elaboration of gender-sensitive policies, in this context during and after crises.

The disaggregation of data by gender is indeed still far from systematic. This is evident in times of crisis, and especially in the context of the Covid-19 crisis. If reports concerning the spread of the virus and the health of the population present partially disaggregated data, data concerning policies implemented to mitigate the economic shock do not differentiate between genders at all, or very little, which makes its analysis and the following results of little use, as denounced by Mira and Capua (2021). This situation has been exposed by international organizations such as the UN Women, the International Labor Organization (ILO), and academic researchers (e.g. E. Brady et al., 2021; Mira & Capua, 2021). Yet, little is done by governments to close this gap and the question as of why arises, also because, unlike the 2008 crisis, which mainly affected male-dominated sectors, the Covid-19 crisis had a major impact on professions primarily employing women, such as hospitality and consumer services (Alon et al., 2020). Furthermore, the closure of schools and childcare facilities added to the domestic workload carried by women (Refle et al., 2020).

Of course, many factors can explain the reluctance to gather disaggregated data, whether it is a lack of knowledge on the part of politicians and governments on gender issues or a lack of state capacity. However, in the context of a crisis, such as that of Covid-19, where the means invested are important and public and media pressure is

high, the notion of maximizing public support appears to be an interesting lead. Indeed, crises end only when the issue no longer dominates the public, political and policy agenda, and public support is in this context considered a condition "*sine qua non for crisis management effectiveness*" (Boin et al., 2021, p. 58). As it appears that public support for redistribution policies depends on the perceived deservingness of the target groups (e.g. van Oorschot, 2000), and that target groups are perceived as more deserving when framed as universal rather than particular (e.g. Lawrence et al., 2013), it can be assumed that the reluctance of governments to openly present gender-related data and frame public policies considering their gender impact can be attributed to their desire to maintain a sense of togetherness and universality and thus maximize public support for the redistributive policies implemented in response to the crisis. Based on these considerations, the following research question can be formulated :

Does framing gender impact public support for redistribution policies during crises?

The main hypotheses are that while a gendered framing may reduce the degree of support in normal times, a crisis context, which increases the degree of perceived deservingness, would neutralize this effect. Validation of these hypotheses would provide a strong empirical argument for advocating in favor of the collection of disaggregated data in times of crisis and thus contribute to closing the gender data gap. To test these hypotheses, a survey experiment framing gender and crisis was conducted in the German-speaking part of Switzerland.

After introducing the overall theoretical framework, I discuss the hypotheses concerning the framing of policies with regard to gender and crises in relation to public support. The theoretical framework is followed by the presentation of the empirical model consisting of the description of the experiment, the variables as well as the context of the experiment's implementation. On this basis, I then present my descriptive and analytical results. A discussion of the significance of the results, their implications for policymaking, as well as their limitations, concludes this paper.

2. Theoretical Framework

Citizen's opinions – understood here as the *level of public support* – can influence policymaking, as politics and governments are responsive to public preferences. Public preferences may be reflected in either the designing of new policies or in the evolution of already existing ones (Enns, 2015; Kelly & Enns, 2010; Manza & Cook, 2002; Page & Shapiro, 1983). Whether small or big, the effect of public opinion on how politics and policymakers navigate the policymaking process is always of great interest. This is attributable to the fact that public support and its impact on the evolution of public policies over time are closely linked to policy implementation and policy success. A policy is indeed more likely to be continued when it is considered successful and "*achieves the goals that proponents set out to achieve attracts no criticism of any significance and/or support is virtually universal*" (McConnell, 2010, p. 351). Public support may also translate in the voting polls as well as in the implementation of policies, among other things when looking at the compliance of the target groups (Sager et al., 2018). On a political as well as on a programmatic level, public support and general acceptance of policies represent important factors in the reaching of policy goals and accordingly for the success or failure of policies.

As crises strategically end only when the issue no longer dominates the public, political and policy agenda (Boin et al., 2017), it is of even greater importance for governments to seek public support and legitimacy during those times. Crisis management can either boost or harm the legitimacy of governments, depending on whether it was considered successful or not (Christensen & Aars, 2019; Olson & Gawronski, 2010). To be perceived as in control of the situation can also improve the leadership capital of a government (van Delden, 2018). Indeed, in times of crisis, governments are expected to act and stand up for their citizen and will be held accountable when unable to bring satisfying solutions (Boin et al., 2017). This is also because, during unexpected crises, governments need to come up with shock-driven solutions and policies that sometimes, as it happened at the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis, break with the path-dependence logic, as developed notably by Pierson (2000). Indeed, in a path-dependence perspective, and because these policies are new and financially less retrenched, they are more vulnerable politically than long-established and anchored policies (Pierson, 1997). Essentially, public support is considered a condition "*sine qua non for crisis management effectiveness*" (Boin et al., 2021, p. 58).

It is therefore in the interest of politics and policymakers to seek public acceptance and support when designing policies, at all times but even more during crises. Political scientists, and among them public policy researchers, are hence deeply interested in public opinion when it comes to endorsing, supporting, or rejecting public policies as it represents an interesting indicator of the level of success of a policy, helping understand how politics and policymakers shape policies over time.

As recalled by Watkins-Hayes and Kovalsky, "[p]*olitics rely on storytelling*" (2016, p. 193). From a global perspective, public support relies indeed on what the public *knows* about a policy, which informations they receive as well as their understanding of the societal problem that the policy intends to solve (Porumbescu et al., 2017). Public support does not exist *per se* as an absolute and pure representation of an objective and immutable opinion on a said policy. Instead, public opinion depends on the available information about the policy, its costs, its structure, and its impacts, as well as the sometimes-irrational beliefs surrounding it. It depends on what people *know* and what they *think they know*, as a "*single social problem can be characterized and discussed in several different ways*" (Jacoby, 2000, p. 750). It is hence to assume that, globally but even more in times of crisis, as they are aiming for policy success, politics and policymakers frame issues and policies in ways that can be expected to maximize policy support and acceptance, or at least minimize hostility.

This finding holds also when assessing public support for redistribution policies, which, as recalled by Streeck, "*calls for a sacrifice from the winner in the great lottery of the market to reduce the distance between them and the losers*" (2001, p. 136). The classical median voter approach relying on a rational actor model where actual inequalities shape support for redistribution has indeed been rejected many times as it appears that other factors than factual inequality are shaping public opinion about redistribution policies. Rationality regarding inequality is hence not what drives support for redistribution policies, as "*assuming a direct impact of inequality is too simple, and instead a wider understanding of the social forces determining the degree of redistribution people want and are willing to pay for by taxes and contributions would be more appropriate*" (Dallinger, 2010, p. 346). In the continuity of this reflection, framing has been seen as a possible influence on support for redistribution policies in many pieces of research, sometimes without concluding evidence (e.g. Lachapelle et al., 2021; Rodriguez et al., 2010), and sometimes observing a strong effect on

individual-level opinions (e.g. Jacoby, 2000), depending on what is being framed and how it relates to social constructs and cultural beliefs.

Closely linked to the concepts of framing of redistribution policies and public support is the notion of *deservingness* in the sense that policy preferences depend also on the perception of the deservingness of target groups (Bell, 2019), which also relates to the question "*who should get what, and why*" (van Oorschot, 2000, p. 33) (see also Lasswell & Kaplan, 1950). It emerges in particular that support for redistributive measures depends on different factors, such as demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the target groups, perceptions of the welfare state, as well as personal values (van Oorschot, 2000). Research hypothesizes that in individual-centered western societies, the global high commitment to individual responsibility enters in contradiction with the concept of the welfare state in itself (Fine, 1992). Many researchers investigate the link between the type of welfare regime and the level of public support for redistribution policies, assuming that a liberal regime would suffer a less supportive public opinion regarding redistribution policies than for example the Nordic, social democracies (Dallinger, 2010; Fine, 1992). It can be understood that welfare regime, and more importantly the perception that people have about the role and the responsibilities of the welfare state, which itself depend on cultural and social perceptions and constructions regarding the role of the state in the redistribution of wealth, have an impact on public support for redistribution policies. In addition, the social constructions about target groups, that is the cultural characterizations assigned to the said group, have an impact on public support for redistribution policies. Those social constructs about target populations rely on the recognition of common characteristics that distinguish the group from the rest of the population and on the assignation of moral and symbolic values – positive or negative – to these characteristics (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). Public support varies depending on how politics and policymakers frame policies with respect to those various factors and characteristics regarding welfare regime as well as target groups and personal values, as it appears that the way politics and policymakers frame deservingness has an impact on public support for redistribution policies and policies related to the welfare state (Slothuus, 2007).

2.1.   Hypothesis 1: Public Support and Gendered Framing

This study aims to understand the links between framing gender as a characteristic of target groups and public support for redistribution policies during crises, as it has been observed that gender has been missing from the policies designed as an answer to the Covid-19 crisis, may it be in the formulation, the implementation, or the monitoring and reporting of its output, outcome, and impact (Mira & Capua, 2021). Assuming that politics and policymakers are seeking public support and acceptance as they frame and design policies, the possibility that a framing including gender would attract less support and acceptance from the population than a non-specific and universal one could explain their reluctance to gather and expose gendered data. This hypothesis holds as it has been demonstrated repeatedly that policies framed universally and inclusively are more likely to be endorsed by the general public (Lawrence et al., 2013). The other way around, the more specific the target group, the less support the policy will attract, and this is particularly true when negative social constructions are associated with the target group in question (Sniderman et al., 1996). Furthermore, "*political elites strategically design policies such as social security in inclusive and universal ways that build larger constituencies and shift the focus from redistribution to common market insecurities that affect both the working and middle class*" (Bell, 2019, p. 3). Indeed, it has also been found that policies and issues linked to specific target groups generate group-centric reactions, meaning that is is "*strongly influenced by the attitudes citizens possess toward the social groups perceived as the beneficiaries of the policy*", and that the level of group-centrism increases when beneficiaries stand in the focus of the policy-framing (Nelson & Kinder, 1996, p. 1055). In the further development of this reflection, a very unspecified, universal policy-framing makes it possible to come as close as possible to an image of fairness and thus public acceptance and support in the sense that - a priori - each individual can benefit from it based on the same equal, supposedly non-discriminatory, criteria, as all beneficiaries from the redistribution policy are considered equally deserving.

Based on these considerations, it is possible to formulate the following hypothesis:

H1: Framing gender as an integrated component of redistribution policies draws lower levels of public support than a neutral, universal framing.

The validation of this hypothesis would allow a better understanding of why governments are so reluctant to consider gender as an integrated and systematical component of redistribution policies.

2.2.　　　Hypothesis 2: Public Support in Times of Crisis

Resource distribution as a response to crisis impacts the way governments will be perceived by citizens (Garrett & Sobel, 2003) and might be linked with following election or votation outcomes (Bechtel & Hainmueller, 2011; Healy & Malhotra, 2009). Recent research on deservingness and public support in times of crisis, carried out within the context of the Covid-19 crisis, shows that financial relief is associated with broad public support, and that cash transfers in an emergency setting receive more support than during normal times (Bridgman et al., 2021). Another study shows that the framing of a redistribution policy within the context of a crisis, in that case, a new tax as a response to the Covid-19 crisis, did not have a relevant impact on the level of public support for the said policy (Lachapelle et al., 2021). Research finds indeed that the perceived level of *control* over a situation leading to requiring help and support is a central factor for perceived deservingness. In other words, the fewer control beneficiaries have over their situation, the more deserving they are of help and support (van Oorschot, 2000). This notion of control over one's situation and deservingness of public help resonates well with the concept of individual responsibility strongly present in Western societies.

Another factor influencing deservingness and related public support is the perceived level of *need*, as it appears that higher levels of need are associated with greater deservingness (van Oorschot, 2000). Deservingness based on need is also linked with perceived fairness and equity and it emerges that, at all times (e.g. DeScioli et al., 2014), but even more within the context of crisis and disaster (e.g. Mazepus & van Leeuwen, 2020) perceived fairness and equity in redistribution represent fundamental factors for government's legitimacy and public support. Consistent with these findings, it appears that when clear indications of deservingness, such as a lower level of control over own's situation or high level of need, are framed in a policy, individual values and other opinions related to social constructs are set aside, thereby allowing broad public support (Petersen et al., 2011).

As crisis and disaster may increase the need for state assistance, whether it is housing assistance during a natural disaster or economic relief, and lowers the degree

of control that people have over their own situation, it is possible to formulate the following hypotheses:

H2.1: Public support for redistribution policies is higher for measures related to a crisis than for measures implemented in a non-crisis setting.

And

H2.2: Framing a crisis neutralizes the lower degrees of public support associated with a gendered framing.

The validation of these hypotheses would help motivate systematic monitoring and greater use of gender-related data for redistribution policies issued in times of crisis.

3. Empirical Design

Testing the hypotheses regarding public support, gender and crises requires the use of an experimental research design. This enables the isolation and estimation of the variables by differencing between different conditions, allowing then the analysis of the impact of framing on public support. The experiment is conducted using a population-based survey, which allows assessing the level of public support according to different framings. The survey is implemented in Switzerland, an ideal context to test the hypotheses related to the public support and framing of redistribution policies in times of crisis with regard to gender. The following subchapters detail the design of the experiment, the variables, the implementation context, and the policies considered for the experiment.

3.1.   Survey Experiment

Survey experiments are the "*deliberate manipulation of the form or placement of items in a survey instrument, for purpose of inferring how public opinion works in the real world*" (Gaines et al., 2007, p. 3). They more often differentiate between two conditions, a control group and at least one treatment group, who participate in an alternate survey, so that researchers can then estimate the differences between the conditions. *Surveys* allow assessing the level of public support for a public policy.

Survey experiments help determining whether a modification – may it be in the type of given information or the framing of the policy – may lead to a change in public support regarding the said policy.

To test the hypotheses presented in chapters 2.1 and 2.2, we assess public support with regard to two different treatment conditions: gender and crisis. To measure public support for a policy, we present participants with a text containing two sets of information about the said policy. First, they receive a short introduction giving a global explanation about the policy and its goals. Second, they read a set of empirical facts about the policy, such as when the policy was implemented or the estimated number of beneficiaries. In a third step, we ask them to indicate their level of support for the policy.

To assess whether a gendered framing influences the degree of public support for a policy, the respondents are divided into two groups. Both receive the same short introduction, but the set of empirical facts vary between the two groups. One group receives information framing the policy in a universal way, the other one reads specific information about the gendered impact of the policy on the population before indicating the level of support. Because not only the framing of the policy but also the quality and density of information about a policy influences the perception of government, institutions, and public policies (Cook et al., 2010), we harmonize both sets of information to make them comparable in terms of complexity and density. Policy support may also vary according to policy understanding. As both objective and perceived understanding of information related to policy support are maximized when information is presented in a segmented way (Porumbescu et al., 2017), the empirical facts are listed with bullet points and each information set contains the same amount of bullet points, whose contained information is approximately of same length and complexity. This allows avoiding different levels of policy understanding between the two conditions, which would lead to a biased estimation of public support.

To assess the extent to which crisis influences the degree of public support for a policy, respondents indicate their level of support for the policy twice. First, we ask them to indicate their level of support for the policy knowing that its implementation is limited in time and will be terminated once the crisis ends. Second, we ask them to indicate their level of support if the policy were to be extended indefinitely and thus permanently integrated into the range of redistribution policies in Switzerland.

Because the evaluation of one policy would allow a validation or a refutation of the hypotheses for the said policy only, we ask each respondent to indicate its level of support for two different policies. This approach allows a global understanding of the dynamics of public support, gender, and crisis when it comes to policymaking. Assessing variation in public support for different policies enables relevant conclusions, not focused on the policy itself, but on whether gender and crisis are framed or not and reduces the possibility of results biased by variables endogenous to the instrument itself.

Each respondent indicates their level of support for both policies and is for each policy randomly assigned to the gendered or the universal information set. The order of presentation of the policies is randomized too, meaning that half of the respondents will see the one policy first and the other second, and the other half the other way around. The item-randomization of information sets makes it possible to neutralize any possible spillover-effect in the causal analysis, and hence to isolate causal relationships between access to a certain type of information and level of policy support, as there is otherwise no reason to assume that the order of presentation of the items does not influence respondents' answers.

For more clarity, the structure of the experiment is illustrated in figure 3-1.
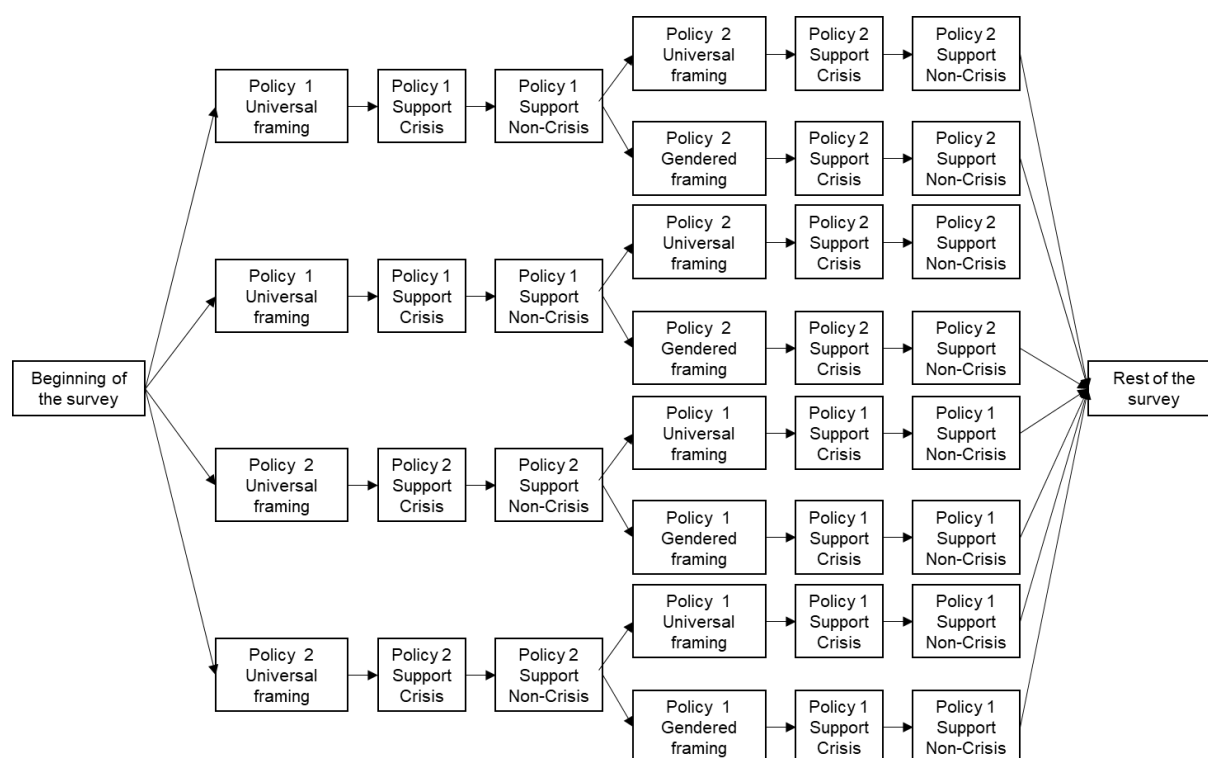

Figure 3-1 Experimental design

In addition to indicating their level of support for each policy, respondents answer various sets of questions regarding their demographics, their personal experience with the administration and the Covid-19 policies, as well as their political orientation. Before beginning the survey, we ensure that participants agree to participate by shortly presenting the study and asking them whether they consent to take part in the experiment.

3.2. Context of implementation

The Covid-19 crisis in Switzerland represents an ideal research field to test the hypotheses regarding the interactions of gender and crisis in the framing of redistribution policies and their impact on public support.

Switzerland is a neo-corporatist, conservative and liberal country. Its social system relies above all on the principle of individual responsibility (Knöpfel, 2015). The government operates on a principle of minimum interventionism and individual responsibility, which is why on an international scale Switzerland rarely positions itself as a leader in the field of social policies and wealth redistribution. This is true for redistribution policies in general, as well as more specific social policies such as family policies and policies fostering gender equality. This can be illustrated by the recent case of paternity leave, introduced in the country as of January 1, 2021. Before that, Switzerland was one of the last countries in the OECD without paid paternity or shared parental leave (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2016).

Not only relies Switzerland culturally on a very individualistic and meritocratic social system, but the institutions building the Swiss system in themselves can act as brakes in the implementation of new policies or in the integration of social paradigm shifts into existing policies (Sager et al., 2018). Indeed, direct democracy, federalism, and the principle of concordance, the three core institutions of the Swiss political system, force the inclusion of a large number of interests from the outset in the political process, notably the many veto players such as the politically strong representatives of the economy, to avoid any political backlash, for instance through a referendum. This structure represents a strength because it guarantees a high level of acceptance of political decisions as well as political stability, but is a disadvantage too because it means that the system can be unfit to respond quickly to shocks. In essence, the Swiss

political process is time-consuming and quite unresponsive but guarantees high levels of acceptance and broad support for public policies as well as political stability.

The Covid-19 crisis shook the system to its core. As the Covid-19 started to spread within the borders at the beginning of 2020, the government had to react quickly and implement a massive amount of new measures in a short amount of time, first in public health, and shortly after to mitigate the economic impact of the first set of measures on the population and the economy. To be able to do so, the Federal Council, the highest executive instance of the country, had to declare an "extraordinary situation" in terms of the Swiss Epidemic act, allowing itself to take action in fields normally outside its competence and without going through the usual and legal decision-making process (Swiss Federal Council, 2020).

The Federal Council had to take a large number of unprecedented measures, breaking with the logic of path dependence, in the area of wealth redistribution and financial assistance in response to the closure of non-essential businesses and institutions, which aimed at protecting the health of the population but put the economy as a whole on hold. Furthermore, this crisis pushed the federal council to act outside the usual political processes and thus to make decisions without a vote in parliament, without having first consulted and taken into account the many veto players, notably the representatives of the economic sectors, and without having consulted the population. The institutional processes that usually guarantee public acceptance and support were therefore not respected, and the measures taken in the area of wealth redistribution were at odds with the logic of Swiss social welfare, which is based on individual responsibility.

This is particularly interesting because this specific context did not relieve the Federal Council of its responsibilities in terms of acceptance and public support. On the contrary, the Federal Council quickly had to reintegrate various economic actors into the consultation process, such as representatives of the restaurant and the tourism industry (e.g. Sager & Mavrot, 2020). Moreover, as the extraordinary situation was limited in time, the federal council exposed itself to the democratic tools as soon as the extraordinary situation was revoked. Thus, the decisions taken during the crisis had to go through a parliamentary vote in the form of the Covid-19 Act, which itself was submitted to a popular vote after the number of signatures required for a referendum had been reached. While the population rejected the referendum by nearly 60% on June 13, 2021, the referendum committee submitted a second referendum to counter

the Covid-19 Act on July 8, 2021. This second referendum was signed by more than 180'000 people, far more than the 50'000 required (SRF News, 2021). Opposition to the covid-19 measure is thus well present in Switzerland, and although the polls showed a high level of public support in the first wave (Bosshardt et al., 2020), 40% of the population voted in favor of the first referendum on June 13. This timing and global political situation make the Swiss context particularly interesting for the purpose of this research. Indeed, this experiment takes place in a context where the population is divided regarding the measures implemented by the federal council and then validated by the parliament, as shown by the votation results and the submission of a second referendum. The possibility of making use of democratic tools at any time, notably by referendum, forces the government to act in a way that maximizes the support of the population.

The analysis of the relationships between public support, crisis, and the framing of redistribution policies in Switzerland in relation to gender is in this dynamic context therefore particularly interesting and can lead to some relevant insight with regard to the research question and the hypotheses.

3.3. Covid-19 Redistribution Policies

Among all the policies implemented in Switzerland in answer to the Covid-19 crisis, two instruments are particularly suitable for the purpose of the study, namely because their gendered impact can be assessed empirically and because both their conditions positively benefit women by making them the target of direct cash payments.

Policy (1) is the *increase of the short-time work compensation* to 100% for people whose monthly income does not exceed CHF 3470, and to a maximum of CHF 3470 for every person with a monthly income ranging between CHF 3470 and CHF 4340. This measure was put in place after the federal council decided to close all non-essential businesses in March 2020 and hundreds of thousands of people were unable to work overnight. As many of the people affected by short-time work in this crisis are people with low incomes and precarious jobs, such as in the hospitality industry, it was quickly decided to increase the compensation for people with low incomes. Official statistics show that 16% of women working full-time against 5,6% of men, and 73,5% of women working part-time (>90%), against 63,5% of men earn less than CHF 4000 per month, meaning that women are much more likely to be affected by this measure.

Policy (2) is the *allowance for loss of income for parents* who need to interrupt their economic activity to take care of their children because of other Covid-measures, such as an ordered quarantine or the shutdown of the care or educational institution. Early studies and conducted polls show that women are disproportionately disadvantaged by the measures taken in the working world in response to the crisis and were more impacted by school closures as the burden of work and childcare fell more brutally on working women than on working men (Federal Office for Gender Equality [FOGE], 2020). On a more global level, it also appears that already existing inequalities regarding the number of paid and unpaid working hours have been reinforced since women have tended to reduce their number of paid work hours more than men and, by extension, increase the number of hours devoted to housework and, in particular, care (Refle et al., 2020). As women are still the main caregiver and bear the responsibility of the household, it is to expect that they will be more likely to interrupt their economic activity to take care of their children if external care can no longer be provided for any reason related to further Covid-measures. Because of this, it can be assumed that women are more likely to make use of this policy.

These policies were both implemented in direct response to the economic crisis and were initially limited to June 2021. They were both extended to December 2021 by the parliament in the June session, 2021. It should also be noted that despite their undeniably gendered implications, data on their allocation and impact are not recorded in a disaggregated way and that only universal and neutral statistics are available. Not only are gendered data not available on the platforms of the administrative departments in charge of these policies, nor on the website of the Federal Statistical Office (FSO), but it also appears that the administration does not provide these data at all. Indeed, after having written directly to the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) in charge of the measures concerning short-time work to ask them to make available disaggregated figures, which would have been of great interest for this study, it appears that until now these data are not recorded at all (State Secretariat for Economic Affairs, personal communication, July 19, 2021)

3.4.   Variables

The dependent variable is the *level of public support* for the two different redistribution policies implemented within the Covid-19 crisis. This variable is

measured using an ordinal scale, also known as a Likert scale, ranging from one, not supporting at all, to seven, extremely supporting.

Two explanatory variables are identified and allow identifying variations in terms of public support audience as a function of framing in terms of gender and crisis. The first explanatory variable is the *framing of the policies with regard to gender* and is given by whether respondents evaluated public support based on the information about the policies presented with a gendered or a universal framing. This information is coded using a dummy variable indicating to which framing respondents were assigned. The second explanatory variable is the *framing of the policies with regard to the crisis*. This variable is estimated by asking participants to indicate their level of support for the policies within the context of the crisis as well as their level of support for the same policies if they were to be extended indefinitely once the crisis is over. This information is coded using a dummy variable indicating whether the respondents answered the question indicating a crisis setting or not.

Control variables include *gender*, *political orientation*, *self-identification as feminist*, whether the respondents were *affected by the Covid-19 measures*, if yes, whether they *benefited from redistributive policies*, and whether they had a *positive experience with the administration* in this context. Regarding the three variables related to the personal experience with the administration, participants were given the option of not indicating whether or not they had received government assistance during the covid crisis and whether or not they were happy with their experience with the administration in this context. Having no indication is not interesting for the analysis, because it leaves no analytical scope, their responses are therefore not included in the analysis. Participants also indicated their political orientation on a scale from 1, far left, to 7, far-right. For ease of analysis, political orientations are combined into three categories: left, right, and center.

3.5.   Data Collection

Ethical clearance for the survey experiment was provided by The Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Business Administration, Economics and Social Sciences of the University of Bern on April 14, 2021. A total of 1083 respondents gave their consent to participate, submitted valid responses, and met the quotas criteria. Invalid responses consist of questionnaires not completed in their entirety or completed too

quickly in relation to the median time for the respondent to have had time to read and understand the information and questions correctly.

The survey was designed and coded using the Qualtrics-software. The survey was population-based and conducted online by Qualtrics[xm] in the German-speaking part of Switzerland between July 8 and August 4, 2021, among people aged 18 and more. Quotas were fixed regarding age and gender to ensure a representative sample. Because gender quotas were fixed only for men and women, non-binary people or people who did not wish to indicate their gender are, at less than 1% of the total panel, significantly underrepresented. In order not to create an unrepresentative and disproportionate effect in the analysis, their responses are not included in the analysis. After excluding observations related to respondents who indicated a gender other than male or female and who did not wish to provide any indication of their experience with the administration within the covid-19 crisis, 1001 observations remain for the statistical analysis.

4. Results and Analysis

A first look at the distribution of the ratings of public support with regard to a gendered framing and a crisis situation seems to indicate that the degree of public support does not vary a lot between a gendered and a universal framing, and this in times of crisis as much as in normal times.
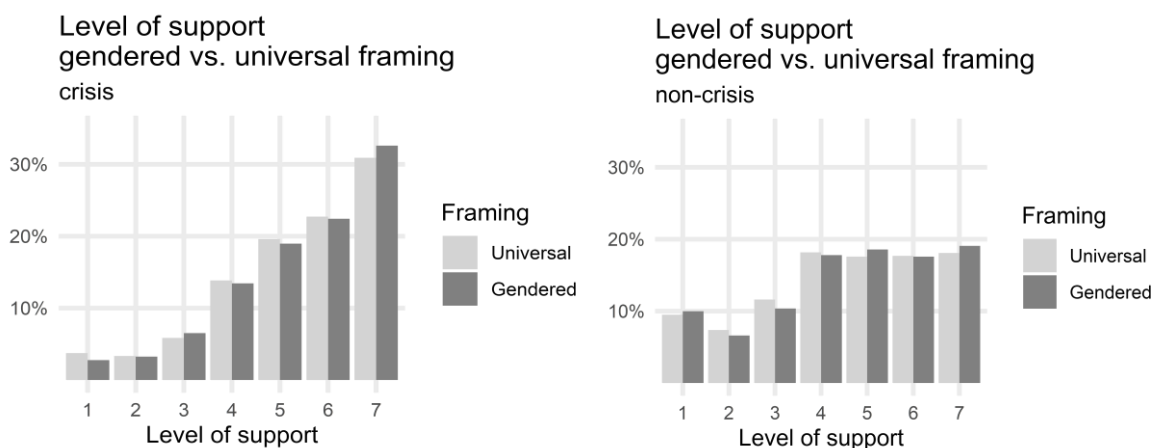

Figure 4-1 Level of public support by framing

Figure 4-2 shows indeed very similar levels of public support for policies framed in a gendered and in a universal way, and this both in both crisis and non-crisis situations. The level of public support based on whether or not a crisis situation prevails seems to promise better results. Indeed, the distribution of ratings differs fundamentally between

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the two situations, regardless of whether the framing of the policies is gendered or not. The crisis framing seems to lead to a much higher level of public support compared to a non-crisis framing. While for policies related to non-crisis situations a little less than 20% of the population indicates a very strong support (=7), this percentage rises to over 30% in times of crisis. In contrast, almost 10% of the population indicates that they do not support the policies at all (=1) in a non-crisis framing compared to about 3% in a crisis.

A preliminary logistical ordinal regression with the level of support in all settings as a dependent variable confirms this first impression. Among all the variables, explanatory and control, framing gender is the only one that does not have a significant p-value and thus does not have a significant impact on the level of public support, as shown in table 4-1. On the other hand, framing crisis shows a significant impact and, since the regression coefficient is positive, leads to increased odds of higher public support than a non-crisis framing. This finding validates the hypothesis that public support for redistribution policies is higher for measures related to a crisis than for

	Model 1			
Variables	Coef	Std. Error	t value	p value[1]
Gendered framing	0.0681199	0.05618458	1.212431	0.225
Crisis framing	0.8617418	0.05733067	15.031079	0.000 ***
Male	-0.3594150	0.05874300	-6.118430	0.000 ***
Politically left	0.2335304	0.07023699	3.324892	0.001 ***
Politically right	-0.1529367	0.07041438	-2.171952	0.030 **
Not feminist	-0.3680511	0.07403316	-4.971436	0.000 ***
Doesn't know if feminist	-0.4295091	0.10677520	-4.022555	0.000 ***
Affected by the Covid-19 measures	-0.4418915	0.11683979	-3.782029	0.000 ***
Received financial compensation	0.3171904	0.13207859	2.401528	0.016 **
Positive experience with the administration	0.5285000	0.12828940	4.119592	0.000 ***
Policy 2	-0.4951705	0.05648755	-8.766011	0.000 ***

[1] * p < .1; ** p < .05; *** p < .01.

Table 4-1 Output of logistic ordinal regression 1 with gender & crisis as explanatory variables

measures implemented in a non-crisis setting. Based on the regression outputs, it is also possible to confirm that the control variables all have a significant effect on the level of support for redistribution policies. So does being politically left-oriented, being a feminist, identifying as a woman, having benefitted from financial redistribution

policies, and having had a positive experience with the administration, both within the context of the Covid-19 crisis imply increased odds of higher levels of public support for public policies. Interestingly, the type of policy also has a significant impact on the level of public support. It appears indeed that the allowance for the loss of incomes for parents who need to interrupt their financial activity because of school or childcare facility closure receive significantly less public support than the increase of the short-time work compensation.

A second set of two distinct ordinal logistic regressions, taking this time once the level of support for policies in times of crisis and once the level of support during non-crisis as dependent variables allows to further investigate these results.

	Models 2 & 3			
	Crisis		Non-crisis	
Variables	Coef [1]		Coef [1]	
Gendered framing	0.06519295		0.07125139	
Male	-0.29492058	***	-0.42620986	***
Not feminist	-0.22349344	**	-0.50140875	***
Doesn't know if feminist	-0.44878314	***	-0.40395573	***
Politically left	0.25658705	**	0.20606298	**
Politically right	-0.12995842		-0.17278371	*
Affected by the Covid-19 measures	-0.44988396	***	-0.44149449	***
Positive experience with the administration	0.50990526	***	0.54857494	***
Received financial compensation	0.08205233		0.53964245	***
Policy 2	-0.43441786	***	-0.55205559	***

[1] * $p < .1$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$.

Table 4-2 Output of logistic ordinal regression 2&3 with dependents variables differentiating between a crisis and a non-crisis situation

The intuition triggered by the visualization in figure 4-1 is undoubtedly validated by the results shown in table 4-2. Framing gender in public policy does not significantly impact the level of public support for redistribution policies, regardless of whether it is associated with a crisis situation or not. These findings refute two of the hypotheses, implying that, in general, a gendered framing would lead to lower levels of public support for redistribution policies than a universal framing, but that a crisis framing would counteract this phenomenon. Indeed, it appears that framing gender does not influence public support for redistribution policies at all; meaning that in this regard

there is no existing – negative nor positive – effect that a crisis framing could possibly neutralize. The reasons as of why gender does not impact public support for redistribution policies are undeniably worth investigating, as this finding is quite unintuitive and not in line with the current state of the research. Moreover, even if an opposite effect to the one hypothesized, i.e. a positive impact on the level of public support, would have been surprising, it would have been easier to explain, especially with the support of further literature concerning the dynamics around the notions of deservingness and public support. In particular, the issue of the perception of vulnerability and powerlessness, more easily attributed to women and which may attract public sympathy when it comes to redistributive measures, could have been addressed. Although good news for policymaking and advocacy, the fact that no effect in this regard is observed is a major surprise.

Although refuting the main hypotheses of this study, these results remain of great interest and lead to further valuable considerations regarding the framing of crises and the level of public support for redistribution policies. If many of the variables that are significant in model one are showing a similar effect in models two and three, some variations between models two and three are worth considering.
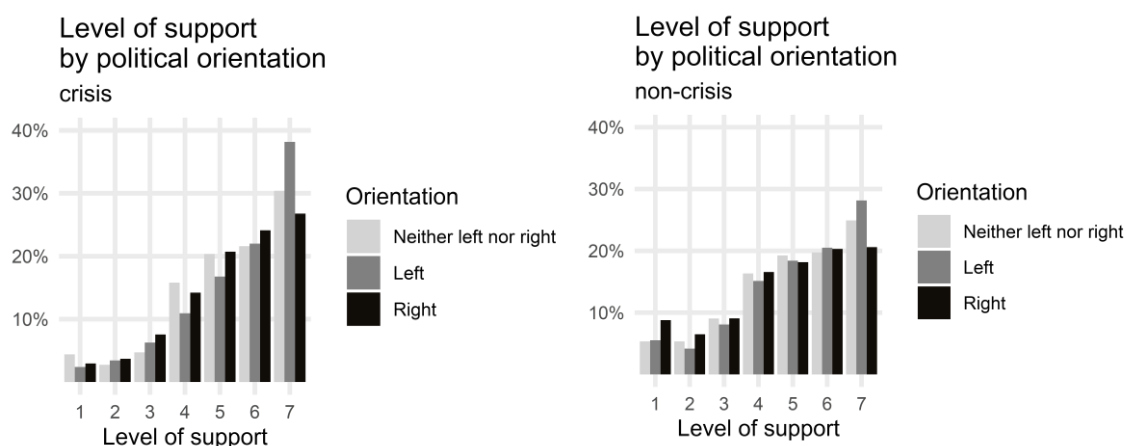

Figure 4-2 Level of support by political orientation during crisis and non-crisis

First, it appears that being politically right-oriented has a significant impact in model three (non-crisis) but not in model two (crisis). This is interesting because it means that the odds of indicating a lower level of support for redistribution policies are not significant in times of crisis when model three shows that people right-oriented have significant odds of showing less support for these policies when there is no crisis. This phenomenon is better illustrated in figure 4-2, where the percentages of the population indicating that they do not support the measures at all are significantly lower in the

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model framing the crisis. This result suggests that framing a crisis neutralizes to some extent personal political opinions, in this case when they are right-wing. The fact that this result is not very significant is interesting and is also illustrated in figure 4-2. Indeed, if an adjustment in the distribution of the level of support can be observed, as it is also the case in Figure 4-1, the degree of support for redistribution policies seems much less responsive to a gendered framing than it was observed in Figure 4-1, where levels of support were assessed by gendered framing during crises and non-crises, meaning that political opinions are moderated by a crisis, but probably only to a restrained extent. This result is consistent with studies showing that higher levels of need and lower levels of control by target groups, that can be induced by crisis, tend to limit the influence of personal opinions on the level of support for redistributive policies (Petersen et al., 2011). In light of the results of this study, it can be hypothesized that this phenomenon applies mainly to individuals with political opinions that are potentially less favorable to the implementation of redistribution policies. The effect on the level of support of identifying as non-feminist also echoes this hypothesis: while very relevant in times of non-crisis (model three), it is only relatively relevant in times of crisis (model two), implying that crisis framing can act as a moderator, but only to a certain extent.

A second interesting thought can be derived from the results presented in models two and three about personal benefit in terms of redistribution policies. Indeed, it appears that those who received financial compensation under the Covid-19 measures are more likely to indicate a higher level of support for redistribution policies than those who didn't receive financial compensation but were nevertheless impacted by them, but that this pattern is only relevant in non-crisis times. Hypothetically, it can be argued that this result is due to the fact that people who have been confronted with the crisis and the Covid-19 policies, even if they did not benefit from financial compensation, are anyway inclined to support the measure because they perceive the great degree of need created by this situation, implying a high level of support regardless of personal benefit. The fact that those who benefited financially from the measures are more likely to indicate a higher level of support for the measures in non-crisis times may be attributed to the fact that support for public policies and the perception of their legitimacy is strongly aligned with self-interest (e.g. DeScioli et al., 2014), as they might

better see how they could also benefit from such policies in non-crisis times. This reflection remains purely speculative and is worth testing.

A third interesting result relates to the type of policy being evaluated. Indeed, it appears that in all models, the allowance for loss of income for parents has a greater
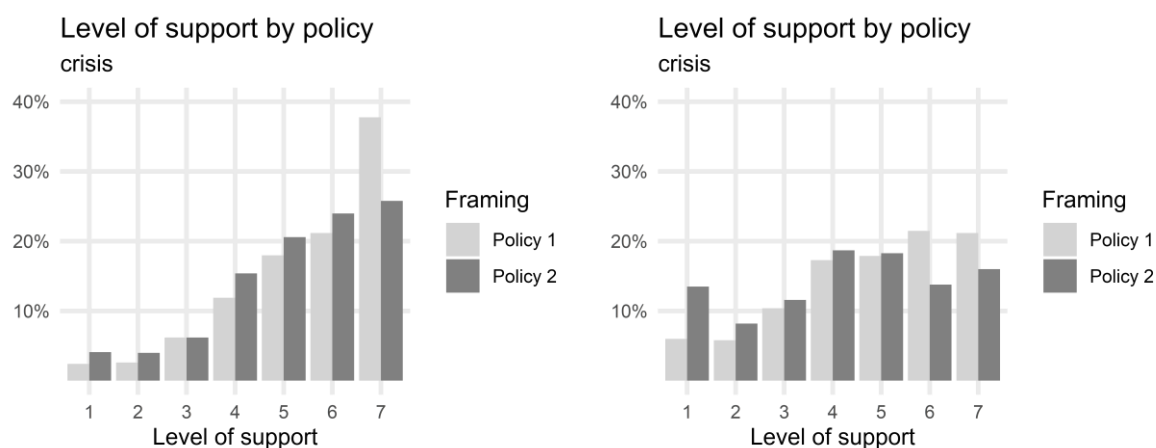

Figure 4-3 Level of support by policy in crisis & non-crisis

probability of attracting a lower level of support than the increase of the short-time work compensation. This result is important because it demonstrates the utility of combining the level of support for two policies in order to obtain a more comprehensive view of public support dynamics in times of crisis. Figure 4-3 gives a good indication that although both redistribution policies suffer globally different degrees of public support, the crisis vs. non-crisis dynamics observed remain. In any case, it appears that the increase of the short-time work compensation received immense support in times of crisis. This phenomenon could be attributed to the great media attention around short-time work during this crisis, but also to the fact that short-time work affected an insanely large number of people, hundreds of thousands, during the crisis.

5. Discussion

Several limitations and considerations to this study are worth mentioning. First, I link the lack of disaggregated data and the overall gender data gap, observed in society in general, but particularly glaring and with catastrophic consequences in times of crisis, to a political will to maximize public support. However, until now, this link has been little to not at all considered by academic research, and many other factors could explain this phenomenon, such as the lack of state capacity, or simply a lack of knowledge about this issue on a political level. While this limitation does not undermine the validity and strength of the results, it can potentially weaken the main argument derived from

the findings regarding the integration of gender issues and gendered data into the policymaking process, and thus reduce the underlying rationale for why this research matters in the first place. This limitation, although valid, can be nuanced, at least in the Swiss context, which has a large state capacity and a Federal Statistical Office whose main job is to collect data, analyze it and make it available to the public and any other entity, public or not. Moreover, the question of whether data should be collected in a disaggregated way has already been discussed many times and is considered part of the standards of the FSO. In addition, the Federal Council responded to a motion submitted in June 2020 by the socialist State Councillor Eva Herzog to improve the collection of gender data by arguing that legal provisions exist in Switzerland to guarantee comprehensive gender data, which shows that the problem is known in Switzerland and supposedly dealt with, at least in theory. Other factors than state capacity and awareness of the issue may explain the persistence of this data gap. However, the possibility of a political and governmental will to maximize public support cannot be excluded and represent, on the contrary, a very interesting approach.

The lack of significant results regarding framing gender and public support represents a second concern, mainly because it cannot be explained based on the current state of mainstream academic research. It is not unlikely that this is due to an inconsistency in the study design, even though the overall design is supported by the literature. Further testing of the robustness of the empirical and statistical model may be useful and may allow this result to be better anchored as a breakthrough in this niche area of academic research. A larger number of explanatory variables and controls could also be included in the overall model in order to achieve a more complex and comprehensive statistical design and provide more refined insights regarding the dynamics between gender, crisis, and public support.

Despite its possible and acknowledged weaknesses, this study provides interesting insights concerning the links between the framing of gender, a crisis context, and public support for redistributive policies, mainly by providing a concrete argument on the non-impact of gender framing on the level of public support for redistribution policies. This is important because, in the context of the current health and economic crisis, where data is still too often collected with little attention to gender issues, leading to dramatic consequences for women, knowing that informing and communicating about gendered issues does not influence public support helps to advocate and motivate for systematically gendered data collection. It also allows to

point out certain inconsistencies at the political and state level and to denounce them, namely, in the Swiss context as much as everywhere, by asking why so little gendered data exist concerning the granting of financial aid, which is sometimes a matter of life and death, and the global allocation of resources regarding the Covid-19 crisis. As a gendered framing appears to not matter not only in times of crisis, but at all times, the argument in favor of more systematic monitoring of gender-related data holds for every redistribution policy issued in any kind of setting, crisis or not.

Furthermore, this research provides interesting insight regarding public support for redistribution policies from a more global perspective. Indeed, some of the results concerning the neutralizing effect of the crisis context on possible hostile reactions to redistribution policies, specifically among people potentially more reluctant to the implementation of redistribution policies, are particularly interesting and in concordance with the results reported in the current literature. As Switzerland is a particularly individualistic and meritocratic country, where it remains difficult to implement reforms in terms of the welfare state, this result may indicate that a crisis, although representing a dramatic context, may represent an opportunity to make notable advances in terms of redistribution policies while maximizing public support and acceptance, this obviously if the measures implemented are done with knowledge and awareness of all the parameters necessary for real progress. And this includes necessarily closing the gender data gap.

6. Conclusion

The goal of this master thesis was to test the interactions of gender, crisis, and public support for redistribution policies, hypothesizing that a crisis setting would counteract the lower levels of public support generated by a gendered framing, with the underlying motivation that the validation of these hypotheses would provide an argument in favor of systematic monitoring and greater use of gender-related data for redistribution policies issued in times of crisis. The implementation of a survey experiment in Switzerland during the covid-19 crisis provided data to test these hypotheses. The analysis of the collected data allowed us to establish that gender does not impact the level of support for redistribution policies in Switzerland, in times of crisis as much as in normal times. While refuting the hypotheses, these results remain interesting because they do not invalidate the motivation behind this research, which is to try to understand better why so little is done to systematically collect and

communicate gendered data, especially in times of crisis, and to provide an argument for better data disaggregation, and thus working towards reducing the gender data gap.

Other interesting results emerged concerning public support in general in times of crisis, and in particular about the neutralization of hostile attitudes toward redistribution policies through a crisis and emergency framing.

Public support for redistributive measures is an extremely interesting and important issue in the context of political polarization and the extreme emphasis on and amplitude of individual opinions, among other things through social media, which are sometimes, if not often, uninformed and deserve further study. Indeed, public opinion influences politics and overall the policymaking process, and understanding how these variables feed each other and interact is crucial to deconstructing both political discourses and public policy structures. It is only through a growing understanding of what makes redistributive policies and how they can be constructed to best fulfill their role, which also requires global acceptance and a good level of public support, that issues such as the gender data gap can be addressed and hopefully someday close

Selbstständigkeitserklärung

Ich erkläre hiermit, dass ich diese Arbeit selbstständig verfasst und keine anderen als die angegebenen Hilfsmittel benutzt habe. Alle Stellen, die wörtlich oder sinngemäss aus Quellen entnommen wurden, habe ich als solche kenntlich gemacht. Mir ist bekannt, dass andernfalls der Senat gemäss dem Gesetz über die Universität zum Entzug des auf Grund dieser Arbeit verliehenen Titels berechtigt ist.

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