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Belief in Equality of Opportunities and attitudes Towards Immigrants in Italy: The Mediator Effect of Institutional Trust

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Master in Psychology of Intercultural Relations

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Abstract

The thematic area of the research is the populist narrative in Italy and the analysis of the phenomenon through the perception of equality of opportunities, the trust on institutions and the attitudes towards immigrants. In Italy with the growing of national populism there have been witnessed some intolerant attitudes towards immigrants. The differences between majority group and minority group and a discriminating narrative have been observed among the population. We therefore wanted to research the influences and the connections among these constructs. Based on literature review, we found that the relation between equality of opportunities and attitudes towards immigrants has not been deeply studied.

The data used in the study are part of the database of European Social Survey (ESS) Round 9. The study includes the analysis of the responses given by two thousand, seven hundred forty-five Italian people to the constructs that constituted the objects of the research.

The results showed positive and significant correlations among equality of opportunities beliefs, attitudes towards immigrants and trust in institutions. A simple mediation model was tested and revealed an indirect effect of equality of opportunities beliefs and attitudes towards immigrants through trust in institutions.

The implications of the results for the improvements of intergroup contact are discussed.

Keywords: equality of opportunities, attitudes towards immigrants, intergroup relations, institutional trust, Italy.

PsycINFO Classification Categories and Codes:

2900 Social Processes & Social Issues

3000 Social Psychology

Resumo

A área temática da pesquisa é a narrativa populista na Itália e a análise do fenômeno através da percepção da igualdade de oportunidades, da confiança nas instituições e das atitudes em relação aos imigrantes. Na Itália, com o crescimento do populismo nacional, testemunharam-se algumas atitudes intolerantes em relação aos imigrantes. As diferenças entre o grupo majoritário e o grupo minoritário e uma narrativa discriminatória foram observadas entre a população. Portanto, queríamos pesquisar as influências e as conexões entre esses enunciados. Com base na revisão da literatura, descobrimos que a relação entre igualdade de oportunidades e atitudes em relação aos imigrantes não foi profundamente estudada.

Os dados utilizados no estudo fazem parte da base de dados do European Social Survey (ESS) Round 9. O estudo inclui a análise das respostas dadas por dois mil setecentos e quarenta e cinco italianos as perguntas que constituíram os objetos do pesquisa.

Os resultados mostraram correlações positivas e significativas entre crenças de igualdade de oportunidades, atitudes em relação aos imigrantes e confiança nas instituições. Um modelo de mediação simples foi testado e revelou um efeito indireto de crenças de igualdade de oportunidades e atitudes em relação aos imigrantes através da confiança nas instituições.

As implicações dos resultados são discutidas.

Palavras-chave: igualdade de oportunidades, atitudes em relação aos imigrantes, relações intergrupais, confiança institucional, Itália.

Categorias e códigos de classificação PsycINFO:

    2900 Social Processes & Social Issues

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

On 23 June 2016, British people participated in a referendum in regards to ending their membership in the European Union (EU), (Goodwin & Heath, 2016). Overall, 51.9% of people voted to Leave the EU, leading the country to activate the Brexit process.

The Leave campaign for the referendum was led by the UK Independence Party (UKIP), a right-wing populist party (Morillas, 2017).

UKIP focused on Eurosceptic and anti-migration sentiments and supported a more authoritarian and nativist response (Goodwin & Heath, 2016), criticizing the establishment, and claiming to "take back control", which was the slogan of Brexit campaign (Morillas, 2017).

According to many authors' perspective (Corbett, 2016; Goodwin & Heath, 2016; Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Morillas, 2017) Brexit is a clear example of Populist ideology and a direct response to globalization.

Furthermore, Brexit is not the only case of Populism in western countries. In fact, it is possible to trace other phenomena during that period of time, such as the elections of Donald Trump in United States (US), and the rise of national populism in Europe, like Marine Le Pen in France, *Il Movimento 5 Stelle* and *La Lega* of Matteo Salvini in Italy, and Viktor Orban in Hungary (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018).

1.1 Populism

The rise of populism in contemporary democracies is nowadays observed as a worldwide phenomenon, which assumes different shapes and nuances according to the societal and political environment of each country (Taggart, 2002).

Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017) state that populism emerged in the 19th century in Russia and US, and it is linked to the expansion of democracy.

Nowadays populism can be traced in Europe, Asia and the Americas, being more present in North America, Latin America and Europe.

Depending on the national contexts, populist ideology accompanies other ideologies, the so called "host ideologies". For instance, left- wing parties tend to match populism with socialism, while right-wing parties link populism with nationalism.

This happens because, following Stanley (2008), the conceptualization of populism is conceived as a thin-centred ideology: a pathway whose morphology is restricted to core concepts that alone are unable to provide comprehensive answers to all the political questions generated by society. Therefore, populism needs to be attached to the so called thick-centred, or full ideologies, such as liberalism, nationalism, or socialism, in order to provide a resolutive view of the world: how it is and how it should be.

Even if populism can assume different frames and interpretations, there are some common elements that are shared among its realities. According to Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017) the three core aspects of populism are:

– *The people*

This is quite a broad concept, which adapts according to the different interpretations of populism. The various shapes of this construct can generate shared identity among different groups, unified by a common cause.

In their book, Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017) articulate the construct of "the people" in 3 core meanings: "the people" as sovereign, "the people" as the nation and "the common people".

The 3 concepts have in common their antagonism against the elite, from which they differ in political power, socio-economic status and nationality.

More specifically, the notion of "people as sovereign" is linked to the democratic idea of giving the political power to "the people", as a common body which should have the ultimate political decision.

The "common people" refer to a group of citizens with same socio-economic status and same cultural traditions. They are commonly seen as the "silent majority" (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017), excluded from power positions due to the categories stated previously. They are characterized by a shared anti-elitism and anti-establishment sentiment, which lead to a critique of institutions.

The concept of "people as a nation", unlike the previous two terms, is connected with the idea of the native community, defined by common ethnic and cultural aspects.

– *The elite*

This term is used to define the enemy of "the people". Populists interpret the elite often as corrupt, and distant from the "common people". The main characteristics used to identify the elite are: morality, culture, economics, media and arts.

The reason why populist ideology is against the elite is that this group is accused of not taking into consideration the general will of the people.

The elite is therefore formed by people that are in privileged positions of economic power, political power and cultural dominance. This group is seen as a threat not only for ignoring common people's voices, but even going against their will in order to further benefit themselves (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017).

– The general will

We can define this concept as an abstract parameter that intervenes in the decisions taken by the establishment, and that aims to defend the common interests of the general public, usually appealing to common sense (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017).

Under this perspective, the general will can be defined as what the national community wants. The populist actor must therefore mediate the needs of the people and bridge the gap between the public and the governing institutions, defying elitist exclusivism.

The "general will" leads the community of people to feel represented in government, and actually it is notable that populist politicians tend to refer more often to direct democratic tools as plebiscites and referenda (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017).

1.2 National populism

As we stated previously, populist ideology accompanies thick ideologies which are politically grounded and lines up with left-wing or right-wing structures. Thanks to Mudde and Kalwasser 's analysis (2017), we can observe that left-wing populism is more present in Latin America, while right-wing populism is traceable in western countries like Europe and the US.

Another name to call the latter combination of right-wing political spectrum and populism ideology is National populism (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018). According to Papadopoulos (2000), the social root of this particular political movement can be found in the discontent towards capitalist democracies and their lack of efficiency in distributive functions and thus, comprehensive social rights.

This explains the revolutionary impulse against the system and the capitalist elite.

Regarding social rights, Papadopoulos (2000) comments on the "national preference" of solidarity and empowerment, arguing that national populism "circumscribes the circle of those who are entitled to receive social benefits because they deserve them" (p.8).

Following the theory, solidarity and social benefits are based on trust, which in turn seems most likely to be given to native people that have shared culture and values (Papadopoulos, 2000).

Linked to this idea is the concept of nationalism, which is explained by Finlayson (1998) as a phenomenon that include various points of view, such as economic, political and social. Finlayson (1998) adds to this conception of nationalism a socio-psychological element, arguing that nationalism is very much related to the feelings of attachment and loyalty to a nation by the individuals. These feelings are caused by the perception that people have about their own country and other states, and therefore the values they add to the country with which they identify themselves.

The feeling of attachment and belonging to a nation is relevant in the understanding of right-wing populist politics. In fact, Greven (2016) argues that National Populism includes another aspect to the already existing structure of general populism. Using the dual antagonist explanation of "us" versus "them", National Populism identifies "us" with the native people of the country, which share culture and traditions and therefore have common interests and a common identity. In the term "them", the national populist actors recognize the "others", which are usually members of minority groups, such as immigrants, that differ from the native community in terms of culture and interests.

The target "others" is dependent upon the country's history, influence, culture and geographic area. For instance, in the US the "others" will be Mexicans and Latin Americans, while in European countries, given islamophobia and the threat of terrorism, the salient antagonistic group would be the Muslim immigrants (Greven, 2016).

Thus, even if the anti-elitism, the "us" versus "them", and the sovereignty of the people are shared in every populist ideology, each country models them in more specific forms according to history, values and social-political situation of the nation (Greven, 2016).

In this research, we will analyse more in detail the features of Italian populism and the economic, political, and social implications on society.

We will therefore focus on the structure of Italian national populism and its narrative, and then we will analyse how the phenomenon influences the citizens' perception of inequalities, their trust in the establishment and institutions, and their further attitudes towards immigrants.

The discussion holds a fundamental observation of intergroup relations in Italy and the analysis of the psychological processes behind their behaviours and perceptions of the society. More in detail, we will refer to the belief in equality of opportunities and its reference to the reality of the society and the perception of inequalities analysed from a psycho-social point of view. Afterwards we connect the latter concept with the other phenomena observed in Italian society: trust in institutions and attitudes towards immigrants, which we assume are connected to each

other and overall, they represent different facets in the populist environment, being the main arguments discussed within the populist debate.

Eatwell and Goodwin (2018) in their book support the theory that attributes the popularity of national populism to the so called "four Ds", or rather the four societal changes accused of generating agitation among western communities.

The "four Ds" theory is articulated in:

– *distrust*: it refers to the overall discontent of the people caused by elitist democracies. Due to a feeling of being neglected, together with a sense of disgust for political corruption, citizens manifest frustration towards the establishment, including institutions as well as politicians themselves (Eatwell & Godwin, 2018). The people are disappointed because of the lack of representativeness in the political system, and this lack of voice, together with the elements stated before, enhances populist sentiments (Canovan, 1999)

– *destruction*: the term alludes to the common fear of the national community of losing its identity, threatened by the cultural change that the immigration flow might cause (Eatwell & Godwin, 2018). National populist actors' narrative strongly refers to the cultural threat of the ongoing changes in the population. Furthermore, national populism itself is moved by xenophobic sentiments towards the minority groups and the attempt to protect the native facets of the nation (Mudde, 2010).

- *deprivation*: inspired by the Relative Deprivation Theory by Stouffer et al. (1949), it is the feeling of loss in comparison to others. The sentiment shared by many national people with blame directed towards the incoming "other", rather than other nationals. This sentiment is caused by the effective rise of social and economic inequalities in Europe, especially when talking about resources such as wealth, income and education. The term of comparison is put between the native people and the "others", who are seen as a threat to national resources.

As Eatwell and Goodwin (2018), highlight in their book, a sense of nationalism would therefore favour the perception that the native community deserves access to national resources more than the hosted community. This psychological process foments differentiations and often discrimination towards the outgroup.

This particular perception of how resources are distributed within a society enhance individual and groups inequalities regarding the economic, political and social level.

The inequalities found in the reality of societal world collide with the ideal belief in equality of opportunities, or the vision of how the world should function. The discrepancy of what it is and what should be in an ideal world finds its explanation in the group relations and the sense of deprivation felt by the ingroup (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018).

– *de-alignment*: the last point enunciates the dissatisfaction caused by the fragmentation of political orders and the instability and unpredictability of politics (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018). Following this framework, we will investigate the theories behind the beliefs of equality of opportunities and the explanation that may lead to inequalities in reality, the trust in institutions and the consequent attitudes towards immigrants. Afterwards we will apply them to the current Italian context.

As such we will explore the connections between the three concepts through empirical data.

CHAPTER II

Literature review

2.1 Populism in Italy

The populist phenomenon grew exponentially in Italy in the last decades.

Donà (2020) describes the 2018's elections as a "populist hurricane". In that circumstance, a great number of seats in the Parliament were taken by the Five Stars Movement (FSM) and the *Lega*, led by Matteo Salvini.

Italian populism is characterized by a peculiar narrative that uses a popular linguistic style to underline the anti-establishment position as well as justifying exclusionist policies (Ruzza & Fella, 2011).

This style is strongly appealing to the historical moment of the nation, characterized by insecurity in the fields of institutions, state service, workplace, societal changes and the migratory phenomenon. Under these circumstances, right-wing populist actors appeal to the society by highlighting core arguments such as the distribution of resources, the ethnic identity of the nation, the security of the citizens, and the threat of immigration (Ruzza & Fella, 2011).

The two principal populist parties in Italy are The Five Star Movement (*Movimento 5 Stelle*) and the Northern League *(Lega Nord)*.

The Five Stars Movement (FSM) was founded in 2009 by Beppe Grillo, a famous Italian comedian, and it grew rapidly. In fact, in 2013 the FSM was the party which gained the most votes in Italy (Franzosi, Marone, & Salvati, 2015).

The party's characteristics are traceable in the populist ideals. In fact, as a movement it declares itself as eurosceptical, against the Italian elite and establishment, accounting for the sovereignty of the people.

Its position towards the European Union (EU) is quite controversial, for instance, while resisting the incoming flow of immigrants, the FSM in fact engaged with the EU, asking for support to countries like Italy, which were deeply involved because of their geographical position.

The movement doesn't want to position itself as right or left wing, which is considered by many authors a strategic move, like the movement's position towards the EU (Franzosi, Marone, & Salvati, 2015).

The strategy would consist in creating an opposition movement driven by sentiments like distrust, dissatisfaction, and frustration, which are common among the Italian voters (Franzosi, Marone, & Salvati, 2015).

The *Lega* was born as a regional party claiming regional identity and the further independence of the northern region of *Padania* from the rest of Italy (Ivaldi, Lanzone, & Woods, 2017). With Matteo Salvini leading it and shaping the party according to the new political tendencies, it then became a national party in 2013 (Donà, 2020).

This right-wing nationalist populist party finds its strengths in the defence of Italian identity, Christian values and the consequent strong opposition to anything or anybody that could threaten the national culture and traditions (Donà, 2020).

As Ruzza and Fella (2011) notice, *Lega Nord* claims itself as anti-establishment and anti-centralized Italian government, it stresses the direct contact with "the people" and foment anti-immigration sentiments, appealing to a desired homogeneous community which goes against any different ideological elements.

These are two examples of populism in Italy, even though its style is popular in other right-wing parties, such as Brothers of Italy (*Fratelli d'Italia*) and *Forza Nuova* (Caiani & Kröll, 2017).

The rise of right-wing populist parties in Italy has been enhanced by the immigration flow of refugees to Europe in 2015 (Schmuck & Matthes, 2017). In response to this phenomenon, national populist parties took action asking for more rigorous border controls and more severe regulation rules towards immigrants (Sheets, Bos, & Boomgaarden, 2016).

2.2 Attitudes towards immigrants

The historical and political vicissitudes within the Italian context denote a strong discontent towards immigration. This is explained with many concerns in the economic sphere and ethnic identity fear (Ruzza, & Fella, 2011).

These concerns reflect the core elements of populism. In fact, Italian people developed the tendency to identify themselves as the "us" term of the binomial, adding a positive connotation to the category ("the good people"). On the contrary, immigrants are seen as the negative part of the binomial, "the others", and are perceived as a threat (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007).

This particular phenomenon can find its explanation in the social binomial between ingroup and outgroup, and the way in which people perceive themselves as part of an ingroup by excluding the members of the outgroup.

When talking about groups, we refer to "a collection of individuals who perceive themselves to be members of the same social category, share some emotional involvement in this common definition of themselves, and achieve some degree of social consensus about the evaluation of their group and of their membership of it" (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p.283).

The connotation of groups only makes sense when it is related with other groups that are perceived as different.

As Tajfel (1974) states: "A group becomes a group in the sense of being perceived as having common characteristics or a common fate only because other groups are present in the environment. Thus, the psychological aspects and consequences of the membership of a group are susceptible of definition only because of their insertion into a multigroup structure" (p.72). When somebody identifies themself in a specific group, that means that they are sharing a common identity with the other members of the group. This is what social psychology identifies as the ingroup.

In the case of Italy, the identification of the ingroup is among Italian population that speaks Italian language, follows Italian culture, and shares the same religion. Therefore, they can be defined as the "us" of Italy.

The way in which Italian population recognizes as an outgroup any other group that does not share the same values as them goes accordingly to Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Immigrants, for instance, differ from Italians because of their place of origin, they practice another religion that is not shared among Italian community, and they also speak another language than Italian. It is for their identity and the differences with Italian identity that they are considered the "them" of Italy.

It is interesting to see how, by classifying "the other", societies recognize their identity and empower its feeling. In other words, people identify themselves as belonging to an ingroup by recognizing that there is another portion of society that does not belong to the identified own ingroup.

The social construct of identity has a public definition when referring to intergroup relations.

"Social identity is understood as an intervening causal mechanism in situations of social change observed, anticipated, feared, desired, or prepared by the individuals involved; and the effects of these changes on their subsequent intergroup behaviour and attitudes (Tajfel,1974, p.76)."

The theory has three main steps that describe how intergroup relations can be conflictual. The processes are therefore three: social categorization, social identification and social comparison.

The first step for people is to classify everybody into different groups following the strategy of looking at people's common characteristics. During social identification people are in the process of accepting the characteristics that are related to the ingroup and stating how compatible they are within the group. The last one is the process of social comparison, that is to evaluate and recognize the own ingroup by comparing and evaluate the outgroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Once we have two separate groups on the social level, we need to observe how they interact between each other and what attitudes and behaviors do they develop.

Depending on history, ideologies, values and other sociocultural factors, the perception of the ingroup over the outgroup can change, as well as the attitudes and the outcome behavior towards the outgroup.

According to Ward and Masgoret (2006) salience of group category, national identity, stereotypes and political ideology play a significant role in shaping the attitudes towards immigrants.

Attitudes towards immigrants are traceable in everyday life in a multicultural community where native people have negative vision towards people that display other worldviews. Some examples of these attitudes are: perception of threat, opposition to immigration, the belief that there is criminal increase due to immigration, and the fear that immigrants can steal the jobs of the national community (Ward & Masgoret, 2006).

Stephan and Stephan in 2000 formulated a theory to search an explanation of the negative attitudes towards migrants.

The Integrated Threat Theory (ITT) (2000) was conceived to predict the attitudes among social groups, more specifically perceived by an ingroup towards an outgroup. The theory proposes four types of threats that may lead to prejudice against the outgroup, which are:

- *Realistic threats*

These are conceived as threats to the existence of the ingroup, including ingroup's power position in the political and economic spheres, as well as to the physical or mental health of the members of the ingroup. Realistic threats find its origins in the Realistic Group Conflict Theory (RGCT) by Sherif and Sherif (1969). The latter theory analyses how hostilities can emerge from competition for scarce resources, such as territory, nature and wealth. An interesting point of the theory is that Sherif and Sherif (1969) postulate that at the base of conflict there are group goals: if the goals of the two groups are compatible, the outcome is a positive relation between groups. On the other hand, when the goals of the two groups are conflicting, the outcome is intergroup hostility (Riek, Mania, & Gaertner, 2006). The theory by Stephan and Stephan

(2000) differs from the realistic group conflict theory because it considers also the threat of welfare and because it's focused also on subjective perceived intergroup threat.

- Symbolic threats

They involve differences between groups and the way they are perceived. These threats arise mainly for the perceived rightness of the ingroup's system values.

Stephan and Stephan (2000), with their ITT theory, argue that symbolic threats might cause prejudice. Esses, Zanna and Haddock (1993) noticed that the more the ingroup values are occluded by the outgroup, the more negative the attitudes towards the outgroup will be. This theory is strongly related to the sense of identity of the groups (Tajfel 1974). Accordingly, in the optic of Social Identity Theory, values are important in the definition of who we are as persons and as groups, and in turn, the belonging groups are a source of self-esteem. Therefore, in creating categories, the members of an ingroup generally tend to exaggerate the negative aspects of the out-group, in order to benefit more from the sense of belonging to the considered "right" group.

Thus, ingroup members display hostility towards groups that have different values. Consequently, the ingroup would perceive the threat as coming from the out-group and its different belief system.

A concrete example of the present study, in the case of Italian society is the group of immigrants who are perceived to undermine Italian's cultural heritage.

- Intergroup anxiety

The member of the ingroup feels threatened by the intergroup interactions because he or she is concerned about negative outcomes such as embarrassment, rejection or ridiculization. Members of the ingroup may also experience intergroup anxiety because they feel hostility and resentment, or because they feel guilty (Stephan and Stephan, 2000). Voci and Hewstone (2003), in a study on intergroup contact and prejudice towards immigrants, found that intergroup anxiety plays a strong mediating role in the perception of immigrants and in the consequent contact with them.

- Negative stereotypes

This other factor refers to the very notion of stereotype. According to Dovidio, Hewstone, Glick, and Esses (2010, p.8), stereotypes are conceived as "associations and beliefs about the characteristics and attributes of a group and its members that shape how people think about and respond to the group".

This is related to the cognitive processes of categorization of the outgroup. In this light, negative stereotypes are understood as negative assumptions related to the characteristics and behaviours of the members of the outgroup.

Given that, conflictual or unpleasant interaction are likely to be anticipated. The essence of threat is the fear for negative consequences, and that's exactly what negative stereotypes create (Stephan and Stephan, 2000).

The threats described above are perceived as challenging the country, that has to face a rapid change caused by the flow of immigrants coming to Italy (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018). The relations between groups are therefore exasperated by the perception of the native community in regards of culture, economy, and society.

In the following paragraphs we will overview how the perception of equality of opportunities and its implications in reality give an additional explanation of intergroup relations and outgroup discrimination.

2.3 Equality of opportunities

The concept of equality of opportunities looks at individuals at a societal level, and is connected to the idea of non-discrimination accounting ethnicity, religion, sex, and sexual orientation (Arneson, 2002).

It proposes the consideration by which, in an ideal world, everybody has fair opportunities to access at the same resources as well as getting the same rewards, based on fair competition between parts sharing same talents and ambitions (Rawls, 1971).

In this optic is important to highlight that equality of opportunities differs from merit, as they are parts of two distinct dimensional levels: merit refers to the distribution of resource based on competence, talent and effort, while equality of opportunities is included in the conditions that allow the distribution of resources (Mijs, 2016).

In contradiction to this ideal concept, the observation of reality suggests that the perception of inequality tends to be commonly accepted and even justified by individuals (Costa-Lopes, Dovidio, Pereira, & Jost, 2013).

Roemer (2015) in fact argues that, even though there has been an evolution in the equalization of opportunities during time, some forms of inequality of opportunities still remain in society, and specifically regarding gender, ethnicity and race.

The divergence between ideal and real opportunities in the society may be influenced by the perception of actual group differences and their access to available resources. Under the

observation of actual allocation of goods, equality of opportunities beliefs may be influenced by the justification of social inequalities.

Under this structure the System Justification Theory by Jost and Banaji (1994) constitutes a strong link between equality of opportunities beliefs and the inequalities observed in the reality. According to System Justification Theory (Jost, & Banaji, 1994), people are motivated to accept and justify an existing system on the social, economic and political level, based on the rationalization of advantages and disadvantages due to the organizational scheme in which they live. Individuals would therefore feel triggered to legitimate the political and social arrangements apported by the system, motivated by the desire of maintaining their status quo (ellipsis from the Latin expression "in status quo ante", it refers to the social, political, economic actual situation of affairs), and with the aim of avoiding the anxiety and the feeling of threat caused by having to cope with a new order of system that they do not control (Kay et al., 2009).

For these reasons, individuals would cling to the observed system of social and economic inequalities, and then construct their perception of ideal level of equality (Willis et al., 2015).

The legitimation of the status quo of the system help people to maintain an ideological set of interactions between social groups, within a social pattern considered as fair and just, and therefore explicable and justifiable (Costa-Lopes, Dovidio, Pereira, & Jost, 2013).

In the frame of this research, we want to analyse the beliefs that everybody can get ahead in life from the perspective of Italian citizens, and the further intergroup relations that help justifying the discrepancy between equality of opportunities beliefs and actual social inequalities.

2.3.1 Intergroup relations and equality of opportunities beliefs

The analysis of justification of social inequalities in the frame of equality of opportunities beliefs is strongly connected to intergroup relations and social hierarchies.

Taking into account the Italian context, the nationalist community would have strong interest in defending their status quo.

As Miller (1995) theorised, the members of a community hold stronger feelings of duties towards their own national community than towards others. At the same time, they expect to have more rights in getting rewards compared to the non- nationals. Following this point of view, the distribution of resources should be shaped considering the ethical element of nationality.

The national community can therefore feel sentiments of dissatisfaction due to the comparison between their given opportunities and other's ones.

This concept is explained with Relative Deprivation Theory (RDT) (Stouffer et al., 1949), which analyse the perception of allocation of resources within personal terms of reference.

Crosby (1976) defines the phenomenon as follows: "The emotion of relative deprivation is one type of anger, denned by Webster's dictionary as "a strong feeling of displeasure and usually of antagonism." The emotion of relative deprivation can be called "a sense of grievance" or of resentment, the latter of which Webster's identifies as "a feeling of indignant displeasure at something regarded as a wrong, insult, or injury." Relative deprivation is the feeling that one has been unjustly deprived of some desired thing." (p.88)

At the centre of the theory there is the subjective perception of being deprived of something, compared to others. This is important because it explains how people look at the political system and at society. In fact, people can have the feeling that governments are giving priority to immigrants providing them unusual treatments at the expenses of the native community (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018). From this, the latter group can grow a sense of having losing out compared to the group of new commers.

In the deprivation frame, we not only include the economic aspect, but the hierarchical group position as well.

Following the social dominance theory (SDT) by Sidanius and Pratto, (2001), social hierarchies are a stable characteristic within society. The social dominant class is entitled of the benefit of more privileges and greater opportunities of access to resources in comparison to the non-dominant group.

"Within SDT, social dominance orientation not only affects in-group favouritism and outgroup discrimination but also a whole host of other behaviours toward out-groups and their members. These include negative stereotyping of out-groups, internal and negative attributions for out-group failures, and active discrimination and willingness to use violence against out-group members (Sidanius, Pratto, & Mitchell, 1994)".

Applying the theories to the Italian context, the dominant group of the native community would feel displaced from their power position and even deprived of economic resources and rewards, and would blame immigrants for this sense of loss.

The theories stated before, together with the concept of ingroup identification and the perceived realistic threat, explain the differentiation of equalities of opportunities beliefs between the Italians and the immigrants, and provide a possible reason for the opposition to immigration shared among Italians.

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2.5 Trust in institutions

Equality of opportunities beliefs and the implications in the society are expected to affect also the consideration that people have about public institutions and governments, often accused of giving priority to rich and powerful classes within the nation, or treating differently the immigrants by providing special resources (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018). The effect of these policies on the "common people" may influence their opinion about the trust they have towards institutions, as a matter of representativeness and of protection of the nation and its people.

Newton (2001) comments the following: "trust is defined here as the actor's belief that, at worst, others will not knowingly or willingly do him harm, and at best, that they will act in his interests." (p.202)

He also defines the concept as an evaluation of the world around us and a consequent reaction of the individuals, and not a personal identity trait of a person. To say it with Newton's (2001) words: "Responses to the trust question tell us not about the disposition of people to be trusters or distrusters but about how they evaluate the trustworthiness of the world they live in." (p.203) In addition to this, Hardin (1993), looks at trust as the result of cumulative experiences and reformation of ideas.

In society, we distinguish trust directed to two main groups: social trust, and political trust. They are independent from each other; in fact, a person can have high political trust but complete distrust towards his or her peers.

Social trust is included in the spectrum of society and its structure. The factors that can predict social trust are therefore related to socio-economic status (Newton, 2001). Instead, political trust is most of the times predicted by: "interest in politics, pride in the national political system, a belief in open government, a low priority given to social order and the left-right scale" (Newton,2001, p. 204).

Newton (2001) argues that, compared to social trust, which is learned by direct experience and contact between people, political trust is indirectly learned, and mainly through the media.

Political trust is conceptualized by Jamil and Askvik (2015). They delineate the process of political trust starting from the system of rules of a country. The latter ones are expected to be implemented and respected by the institutions, such as police, civil servants, politicians and all the people performing official roles within a country. Trust comes when individuals evaluate the behaviours of the public servants, by observation and interaction. If people notice that the rules are applied and followed by the people in the institutions, the level of trust would be high. On the contrary, if officials do not act according to the rules the outcome will be a lack of trust towards the institutions (Jamil & Askvik, 2015).

Concerning the Italian situation, Ruzza and Fella (2011) stated that: "The long-term legacy of *Tangentopoli*[1] was to further undermine trust in the political system, a level of trust that was already endemically low, due to the legacy of the processes of formation of the Italian state. Anti-political sentiments were thus widely distributed across the electorate. Italy is positioned on several indicators among the countries where politicians and political institutions are less trusted, and where political activity is less understood by the population." (p.172)

Some authors have argued that complete trust towards institutions would be somehow dangerous, and that a sort of distrust enhanced by a genuine scepticism is good for democracy (Clearly & Stokes, 2009). However, in a state structured by rules, its official perpetrators are expected to be trustworthy. The behaviours of the politicians and civil servants is therefore crucial for the trust and the confidence that the rest of society have (Newton, 2001).

2.6 State of arts of the research

The phenomenon of populism is been analysed from a political point of view, however there is very poor literature about the behaviours, attitudes and ideologies shared among the society, which is influenced by the characteristics of populism ideology.

Previous studies observed some of the relations among the variables included in the present study.

Regarding the attitudes towards immigrants for instance, the European Social Survey (2015) Round 7, explored the attitudes towards immigrants in European countries. The results of the study contributed to find some predictors of the attitudes, and some of the following are: perception of economic threat, intergroup contact, subjective feeling of social distance, racism, nationalism, and fraternal relative deprivation.

Following the populist ideology, Schmuck and Matthes (2017) run a study about factors that influence attitudes towards immigrants in the European countries. They found that symbolic threat leads to greater opposition to immigration than realistic threat does. This is due to the perceived threat to the native cultural system.

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[1] *Tangentopoli*, a term created in the early 1990s in order to designate the system of illicit financing, corruption and extortion that characterized Italian politics and institutions. *Tangentopoli* period was distinguished by judicial investigations encompassing the whole national territory and the subsequent identification of illegal public affairs and episodes. The investigations carried in the period of *Tangentopoli* contributed to change both the public opinion, which sided against politicians, and the Italian politics (Sciarrone, 2017).

The study conducted by Halapuu, Paas, Tammaru and Schütz, (2013) aims to find a relationship between trust in institutions and attitudes towards immigrants. The researchers used the European Social Survey round 5 of 2010 and they took into consideration 25 countries. The results of this study show that there is a positive association between trust in institutions and attitudes towards immigrants, and that higher levels of trust in institutions are associated with more positive attitudes towards immigrants. One of the conclusions of the authors is the following: "people need to know that politics and other political institutions operate fairly and honestly and act for their well-being in order to be willing to face the risks that associate with living in a culturally diverse society" (Halapuu, Paas, Tammaru and Schutz, 2013, p.582).

Concerning the relation between inequality and political trust, Anderson and Singer (2008) examined the level of income inequalities among population in 20 European countries, and the effect of inequality on the trust on institutions. Their results indicate that in countries with higher levels of income inequality the trust of people toward institutions was more negative.

To the best of our knowledge, the relation between equalities of opportunities and attitudes towards immigrants has not been addressed yet.

In the frame of our literature review, the concept of ideal equality of opportunities collides with the inequalities of the population in Italian reality. The justification of these inequalities, explained by intergroup relation theories, opens the room for the perception of allocation of opportunities as fair and just.

A practical example of the justification of inequalities can be traced in the slogan "*prima gli italiani*" of Salvini's campaign (Lega, 2020), and the description of the slogan as a "principle of civilization", that we can find in an interview of Salvini (Salvini, 2019).

Referring to the latter statements and the observation of political discourse in Italian society, together with the review of literature on the perception of equality of opportunities and ingroup relations, we consider to have the basis for assuming that the belief in equality of opportunities may influence the attitudes towards immigrants.

2.7 Research question and hypothesis

The thematic area of the study is the populist narrative in Italy and the relations of the phenomenon through the perception of equality of opportunities, the trust on institutions and the attitudes towards migrants.

The studies analyzed and the literature overview suggest that the growth of national populism in Italy has fomented anti- immigrants' ideologies. The differences between majority

group and minority group and a discriminating narrative have been observed among the population. We therefore want to research the influences and the connections among these constructs in order to better understand the situation cited above.

The research question of the study is: how does the impact of perceived equality of opportunities mediated by the degree of trust in institutions affect the attitudes towards immigrants?

Given this research question, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 1: equality of opportunities beliefs is positively related with attitudes towards immigrants.

Hypothesis 2: equality of opportunities beliefs is positively related with institutional trust.

Hypothesis 3: institutional trust is positively related with attitudes towards immigrants.

Hypothesis 4: equality of opportunities beliefs is indirectly related with attitudes towards immigrants, through trust in institutions.
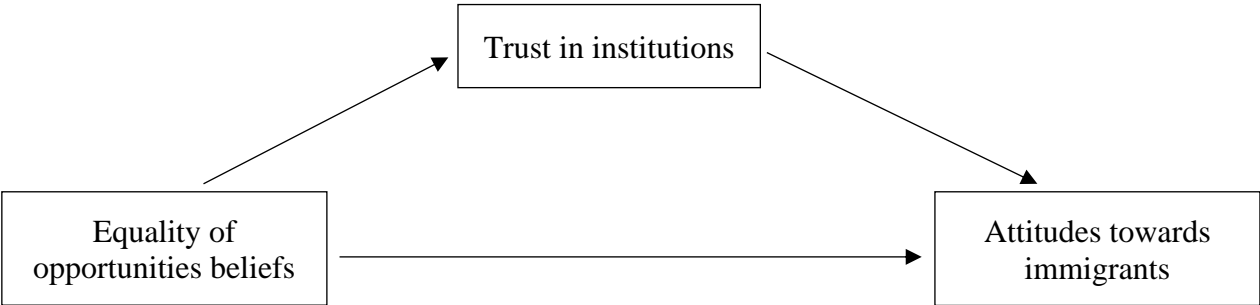

Figure 1. The hypothezised model

<center>**Chapter III**</center>

<center>**Method**</center>

3.1 Study design, Procedure, and data collection

The data we used for the study are from the ESS (European Social Survey) round 9 (2018), thus this is a cross-sectional quantitative study. The European Social Survey (ESS) is an academically driven and international survey (European Social Survey, 2019). The ESS has been conducted every two years from 2001, and it follows the most precise methodologies in order to achieve high quality, cross-national comparability and national standardization of the data. The ninth round of the survey has been proposed to 30 countries around Europe, but we will take into consideration just the Italian survey, which has been funded by the Istituto Nazionale per l'Analisi delle Politiche Pubbliche (Inapp).

The Italian survey was proposed between the 17/12/2018 and the 10/03/2019 and it was made following rigorous translation protocols including pre-test interviews made also with the purpose to check the translations (European Social Survey, 2019). ESS round 9 Italy includes a random probability sampling, framed by the Italian Public Register of Individuals (Liste Anagrafiche Comunali- LAC), using a two-domain sampling design. Respondents were rewarded with vouchers with a value of 15 Euros for the completion of the interviews.

The data were collected with the computer assisted personal interview methodology. The main topics of the ESS round 9 are trust, political interest, orientation and participation, timing of life, fairness and justice, social attitudes, human values, socioeconomic and demographic information.

3.2 Participants

Two thousand, seven hundred forty-five people participated at the ESS Survey Round 9 in Italy and 93.6% were Italian citizens. From the 4.9% of citizens of other countries (n= 135), the 1.3% was Romanian, 0.6% was from Albania, 0.4 % was from Morocco. The majority were women (52.7%). The age ranged from 16 to 90 years old ($M = 51.32$, $SD = 19.41$). Years of education completed varied from 0 to 37 ($M = 11.51$, $SD = 4.336$) with 22.2% with 13 years of education, while 18.5% did 8 years of full-time education and 8.7% completed 5 years of education. The majority declared to belong to a particular religion or denomination (77.9%) and to have voted for last political elections (72.0%). Concerning the political preference approximately 73%

answered in a in a scale from 0 (left) to 10 (right). Detailed sample characteristics are presented in Appendix A.

3.3 Measures

Equality of Opportunities Beliefs

As stated by García-Sánchez et al. (2019), equality of opportunities beliefs alludes to the belief that "people have equal access to opportunities to get ahead in life, regardless of systematic group-based bias". According to this statement, we operationalised the concept of equality of opportunities considering education system and job opportunities evaluation, in the reflexive and non-reflexive perspective. We therefore analysed the following three items of the survey: "Compared to other people in Italy, I would have a fair chance of getting the job I was seeking", "Overall, everyone in Italy has a fair chance of achieving the level of education they seek", and "Overall, everyone in Italy has a fair chance of getting the jobs they seek", ($\alpha = 0.71$). The response scale for the three items goes from 0 (does not apply at all) to 10 (applies completely). In this setting, higher values correspond to stronger credence of equal opportunities among people.

Trust in Institutions

To measure trust in institutions were used 7 items. Each item measured the level of trust for a different part of the national and international political system "… Italian's parliament?", "…the legal system?", "…the police?", "…politicians?", "…political parties?", "…the European Parliament?", "…the United Nations?" with a very good reliability ($\alpha = 0.90$, Kline, 2011). The scale goes from 0 (not trust at all) to 10 (complete trust).

Attitudes towards Immigrants

We took into account the attitudes that concern the opposition to people of different ethnic groups and economic conditions: **"**to what extent do you think Italy should allow people of a different race or ethnic group from most Italian people?" and "people from the poorer countries outside Europe?" The scale ranged from 1 (allow none) to 4 (allow many to come and live here), and the scales were reversed. We also considered the attitudes coming from the evaluations of the impact on the economic system: "Would you say it is generally bad or good for Italy's economy that people come to live here from other countries?", the impact on cultural life (symbolic threat): "would you say that Italy's cultural life is generally undermined or

enriched by people coming to live here from other countries?", and the overall level of opposition to migration: "Is Italy made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries?" (α = 0.90). The scale ranged from 0 (total opposition) to 10 (complete acceptance).

Control variables

The control variables included in the study were demographic characteristic of population such as age, gender and citizenship.

Moreover, we decided to include other factors as control variables for further explanations of the model. The control variables include political attitudes and beliefs, such as political preference (right-left scale) and last political alignment (vote in the last political elections). The political explanation finds its ground in the Italian actual political situation (National Populism) and its narrative (Ruzza & Fella, 2011).

The variable "years of education completed" is connected to the educational explanation, according to which the higher the level of education, the more the tolerance towards immigration. According to Mayda (2006), this is due to the economic security that people with higher education acquire and the subsequent absence of competition with immigrants in the field of labour market.

We also decided to include the variable religion as a salient component of Italian culture, and the further salient victim of symbolic threat. According to Helbling and Traunmüller (2016), citizens look at newcomers practicing different religions as a threat to their culture and values. This might be particularly salient taking into account Christian Italians receiving Muslims.

3.4 Data analysis

Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation), internal consistency, and correlations were analysed for the variables under study.

Data analysis was performed with the software SPSS (version 27.0). The hypotheses were tested using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2019). To assess the significance of the indirect effect a confidence interval with 5000 bootstrap samples was defined. If the confident interval does not contain 0 the hypothesis of indirect effect is supported.

Chapter IV

Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics, reliabilities, and correlations of study variables.

As presented in Table 1, Italian people reported medium beliefs in equality of opportunities, while the mean of trust in Institutions is around the mid-point of the scale. As for Attitudes towards Immigrants, the results show a slight negative distribution. This means the attitudes towards immigrants tend to be on average more negative. Overall, the results showed that the attitudes towards immigrants were rather negative than positive.

The correlation between all the variables of the study is shown in the Table 1. We observed that the correlation between equality of opportunity beliefs and attitudes towards immigrants is positive and medium (Cohen, 1992). This means that the more the levels of equality of opportunity beliefs increase, the better should be the attitudes towards immigrants. Trust in institutions also showed to increase when the equality of opportunities increases, the correlation is therefore significant, positive, and moderate. Between trust in institutions and attitudes towards immigrants there is a positive and moderate correlation. The latter is, between the correlations analysed, the strongest one, which means that the higher the trust in institution, the better attitudes towards immigrants the participants have.

4.2 The Relation between Equality of Opportunity Beliefs and Attitudes Towards Immigrants: the mediating effect of Trust in Institutions

Table 2 presents the tests of the hypothesized mediation model, after controlling as age, gender and citizenship, years of education, religion, vote and placement on left-right scale. The results showed that equality of opportunities beliefs was positively related with attitudes towards immigrants (B = 0.130, $t = 8.167$, $p < .001$), provided support for hypothesis 1. The equality of opportunities beliefs and trust in institutions were positively related (B = 0.247, $t = 11.402$, $p < .001$), thus hypothesis 2 was supported. The trust in institutions had a positive and significant effect on attitudes towards immigrants (B = 0.206, $t = 12.415$, $p < .001$), which means that the higher the institutional trust is the better are attitudes towards immigrants, sustaining the hypothesis 3. A 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect of equality of opportunities on attitudes towards immigrants through trust in institutions was found and did not include 0 (0.039, 0.064), suggesting a significant indirect effect (estimate = 0.051). The results supported

the proposed indirect effect hypothesis (H4). The direct effect remains significant (B = 0.079, t = 5.002, $p < 0,001$), which means that the mediation was partial.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, reliabilities, and correlations of study variables

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Citizen of Italy	1.06	0.24										
2. Gender [a]	0.53	-	-0.04									
3. Age	51.32	19.41	-0.14***	0.07***								
4. Years of education	11.51	4.34	-0.04*	-0.06**	-0.41***							
5. Religion	1.21	0.41	-0.02	-0.06**	-0.17***	0.18***						
6. Vote [b]	0.20	-	0.27***	0.04*	0.03	-0.19***	0.03					
7. Placement on left-right scale	5.27	2.33	-0.02	-0.04	-0.03	-0.08***	-0.07**	-0.02				
8.Equality of opportunities beliefs	4.42	1.95	0.02	-0.06**	-0.18***	0.22***	0.05*	-0.09***	-0.02	(0.70)		
9. Trust in institutions	4.51	1.93	0.05*	-0.02	-0.10	0.15***	0.01	-0.12***	-0.12***	0.30***	(0.89)	
10. Attitudes towards immigrants	3.54	1.54	0.25***	-0.02	-0.21***	0.29***	0.13***	-0.02	-0.37***	0.25***	0.35***	(0.90)

* $p < 0.05$

** $p < 0.01$

*** $p < 0.001$

[a] 0 = male, 1 = female. Reported the proportion of female.

[b] 0 = yes, 1 = no. Reported the proportion of yes.

Table 2. Regression results for mediation

					R²
Model 1: predictor variable	Outcome: Attitudes towards immigrants				0.257
	Coef.	*SE*	*t*	*p*	
Equality of opportunities beliefs	0.130	0.016	8.167	< 0.001	
Model 2: mediator variable	Outcome: Trust in institutions				0.107
	Coef.	*SE*	*t*	*p*	
Equality of opportunities beliefs	0.247	0.022	11.402	< 0.001	
Model 3: outcome variable	Outcome: Attitudes towards immigrants				0.323
	Coef.	*SE*	*t*	*p*	
Equality of opportunities beliefs	0.079	0.016	5.002	< 0.001	
Trust in institutions	0.206	0.017	12.415	< 0.001	
	Bootstrapping for indirect effect				
	Coef.	*SE*	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI	
Indirect effect of equality of opportunities beliefs on attitudes towards immigrants via trust in institutions	0.051	0.006	0.039	0.064	

N = 1819. Models controlled for gender, age, years of education, Italian citizenship, religion, placement on left right scale, and the vote in the last political elections. Standardized coefficients are reported. Bootstrap sample size = 5000; LL – Lower limit; UL – Upper limit; CI – Confidence Interval.

Source: ESS (2018). Own calculations.

Chapter V

Discussion

The present study generally aimed to explore the insights of Italian society under the populist narrative. It focused particularly on the association between equality of opportunities beliefs and the attitudes towards immigrants, accounting the mediation effect of trust in institutions, with the purpose of discovering the relations among the three variables.

Among the control variables and the variables of the model, results show that the placement on right-left scale was negatively correlated with the three variables, showing high significance in the relation with trust in institutions and attitudes towards immigrants. This means that the more people place themselves in the right part of the scale, the worst are the attitudes towards immigrants and the less trust in institutions they have, the decreasing trend is also observable for equality of opportunities.

Through the results obtained in the analysis, we responded to our research question and to our four hypotheses.

The results on the analysis show that equality of opportunities beliefs have a positive relation with attitudes towards immigrants, thus confirming the first hypothesis of the study. These results are of particular importance as the aim of the study was to explore this particular relation and implement the spectrum of attitudes towards immigrants.

Previous studies focused on factors that might influence attitudes towards immigrants, however they took into consideration just realistic threat and symbolic threat (Schmuck and Matthes, 2017).

With the present study, we now know that there is statistical evidence for assuming that the more people believe in equal opportunities, the better are their attitudes towards immigrants.

Equality of opportunities beliefs was also found to be positively connected to trust in institutions, supporting the second hypothesis of the study. The data showed that if the perception of equality of opportunities is high, the level of trust in institutions will also increase. Our study also explores the relation between trust in institutions and attitudes towards immigrants. The results showed that the higher the institutional trust among population the more positive are the attitudes towards immigrants, supporting hypothesis 3 with the strongest correlation among the three variables. The results are in line with the research conducted by Halapuu, Pass, Tammaru and Schutz (2013), supporting their theory that people need to know

that political institutions act in a fair and trustworthy way and their aim is to assure a co-living environment according to the well-being of society.

Hypothesis 4 was also confirmed, sustaining the existence of an indirect effect between equality of opportunities and attitudes towards immigrants, through trust in institutions. This means the equality of opportunities was related with attitudes towards immigrants and this relationship was explained by trust in institutions.

The trend of the results is therefore in line with the theory of the "four Ds" of Eatwell and Goodwin (2018), and their observation of national populism and the strong points of its narrative.

5.1 Limitations and further studies

The exploratory research was conducted based on ESS round 9 data (ESS,2019). The big sample therefore provides an accurate picture of the individual tendencies related to the items taken into analysis. However, this study aimed to analyse the correlations between the three variables. Given this, the conclusion we extrapolated cannot provide insights about the causal relations among variables, but only address the positive relations between equality of opportunities beliefs, trust in institutions and attitudes towards immigrants.

Considering the political frame, and particularly our analysis of right-wing national populism as the most popular political influence among society, the degree of accordance with populism was not measured because in the ESS questionnaire there was not such a specific question. Instead, the participant's placement was measured within the left-right scale (0=left, 10=right), which anyways provided a clear understanding of the political preferences of Italians.

Besides, for a deeper understanding of equality of opportunities beliefs, it would have been valuable to address, using data, the actual proportions of social and economic inequalities in the Italian environment and explore the discrepancies between the real situation and the ideal beliefs regarding allocation of resources.

Political background is thus cardinal in our research, which impacts the perceptions and mind-sets of the participants analysed in the research. It would therefore be of particular interest to propose a link between the degree of commitment to populist political movements to the model of the present research, and explore the further changes that different degrees of political commitment can possibly bring to the variables taken in consideration. For further understanding of the specific Italian situation, it would be also appealing to propose the same

study in a different time-frame, and therefore analyse for instance the data of the Italian population from before the flow of immigrants into Europe, as well as observe the populism development and the consequent interaction between its narrative and the attitudes towards immigrants across time.

In the current environment we are facing an increasing right-wing populism discourse at a European level (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018), and the subsequent aversion against immigrants, perpetrated by politicians' narratives. A deep understanding of the perceptions of inequalities, the degree of trust in institutions and the common attitudes towards migrants among European countries can lead to a broader idea about the populist phenomenon, as well as a conceptualization of differences and similarities between countries. The enlargement of the study would offer new insights that could serve to address further adjustments and solutions for the intergroup relations and the co-living assurance.

Moreover, given the fact that populist expression exists also among left-wing parties, it would be appealing to compare the two different discourses and the output they have among the populations. This might be of interest considering the variables analysed in the present research and the possible different results that can be obtained by running the same survey in a different environment.

5.2 Practical implications

From a practical point of view, the identification of beliefs in equality of opportunities as determinants of attitudes towards immigrants, influencing the degree of trust that Italian people have in institutions, points out the need for a restructuring of the political discourse and the further implementation of intergroup relations.

The political discourse often stresses the phenomenon of immigration, describing it as a threat for the native community in terms of access to economic and health resources and to the national culture that Italians identify with. Hence, people's perception of immigrants and their access to national resources might be influenced by the populist narrative. In this frame the intergroup relations are exacerbated and spaced apart.

In order to improve intergroup relations and reduce hostility towards the outgroup, Contact Theory (Allport, Clark, & Pettigrew, 1954) has been considered as a very strong strategy for the promotion of intergroup relations (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kawakami, 2003). The theory is based on positive contacts between groups, and it has been proved as effective not only in

changing the attitudes towards groups (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), but also to mitigate perceptions about intergroup inequality (Saguy, Tausch, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2009).

Together with the positive contact between groups, a change of political narrative is needed. Hence the suggestion of implementing the awareness among Italian citizens of the real numbers of immigrants coming to Italy, and using a non-discriminative narrative, free from any xenophobic and racist sentiments. Under these conditions, the perception of threat should diminish and consequently also their perception of inequalities, which may be a first step towards the positive intergroup relations.

Conclusions

The present study adds to the existing literature concerning equality of opportunities beliefs, trust in institutions and attitudes towards immigrants, the exploratory association between equality of opportunities beliefs and the attitudes towards immigrants, mediated by trust in institutions. The relations resulted positively, suggesting an impact of people's egalitarian beliefs on their attitudes towards migrants, with the effect of trust in institutions . The study analyses the reasons underneath the justification of real inequalities and the further motives that enhance opposition to immigration and reveals the relation between the two concepts. The association is explored in the literature by individual perceptions and intergroup relations that lead to the observed attitudes towards immigrants.

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Appendix A. Participants' Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Variables	Descriptives
Gender	
Female	1447 (52.7%)
Male	1298 (47.3%)
Citizenship	
Italy	2570 (93.6%)
Romania	37 (1.3%)
Albania	18 (0.6%)
Morocco	11 (0.4%)
Other	69 (2.6%)
Age	
Mean (SD)	51.32 (19.41)
Minimum- Maximum	16-90
Years of Education	
Mean (SD)	11.51 (4.336)
Minimum- Maximum	0- 37
Religion	
Belonging to a religion	2138 (77.9%)
Not belonging to a religion	566 (20.6%)

Vote

Voted in last political elections	1976 (72%)
Did not vote in last political elections	506 (18.4%)

Political preferences

Mean (SD)	5.27 (2.335)
Minimum- Maximum	0-10