

**The Two Faces of ‘Gray Power’:
Elderly Voters and Elderly Lobbies in Italy and the US**

Andrea Louise Campbell and Julia Lynch

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ABSTRACT

The literatures on welfare states, corporatism, and interest groups all predict that the elderly should have a strong effect on the politics of social policy. However, the mechanisms by which the elderly exert their influence are unclear. Theory fails to distinguish rigorously between elderly voters and organized elderly lobbies as causal forces in welfare state politics. This distinction matters because our research in Italy and the US shows that along with many shared priorities, elderly voters and elderly advocacy groups have some distinct preferences regarding welfare reform: while elderly voters hold opinions consonant with their personal self-interest, elderly advocacy groups are more moderate, defending senior programs but also adopting other-regarding positions on welfare spending issues.

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As populations age, pensions and other benefits for the elderly make up an increasing share of the budgets of the advanced industrial nations. In the United States, where Social Security and Medicare already comprise 35 percent of the federal budget, recent actions and proposals will further increase spending for the elderly: in 2000 the Social Security earnings penalty was eliminated and the amount of Social Security income subject to taxation was reduced; various proposals would provide prescription drug coverage for the aged. The share of welfare spending devoted to the elderly is even greater in Western European nations, with their more generous social programs and older populations. In Italy in 1999, for example, public pensions account for 62 percent of total social expenditures, and 15 percent of the GDP (European Union 2002).

While we would expect entitlement spending to grow as populations age (Wilensky 1975), the persistence of generous benefits for the elderly despite welfare state cutbacks in other areas suggests that the elderly exert not just demographic but also political pressure. Understanding the politics of age-related policymaking is crucial as populations continue to gray, yet existing theories provide little guidance. The comparative welfare state literature tells us that the elderly influence both how welfare states grow (Wilensky 1990; Pampel and Williamson 1989) and how they shrink (Pierson 1994). However, the precise nature of elderly influence is unclear. Theories often fail to distinguish rigorously between elderly voters and organized elderly lobbies as a causal force in welfare state development. The literature on interest groups – both the pluralist and neo-corporatist variants – reflects a similar lack of clarity about the likely preferences and behavior of latent versus organized groups.

This distinction between elderly voters and elderly interest groups is important because policy-makers may receive different messages about the preferences of “the elderly” depending on who pressures them, and who they listen to. We expect elderly individuals to hold opinions consonant with their self-interest and to express those opinions through political participation. Given elderly individuals’ reliance on public pensions and other programs, they are likely to both oppose cuts to their own programs, and express relatively low levels of support for state benefits for the nonelderly. In contrast, elderly interest groups, with their interest in the long-term sustainability of the welfare state, may adopt other-regarding positions on welfare reform issues. Compared to elderly individuals, these groups are likely to recognize the fiscal and political necessity of trimming the growth of elder programs while championing benefits for the nonelderly.

These different preferences of elderly voters and elderly advocacy groups have the potential, then, to affect the politics and policy outputs of welfare reform in important ways. Welfare reform may be more intergenerationally “equitable” if policy-makers listen to elderly advocacy groups rather than elderly voters. The share of social spending devoted to the elderly, and the outcomes of pension system reform efforts, may depend on whether elderly voters or interest groups enjoy greater access to the political system. Indeed, attempts by policy-makers to expedite reform efforts by excluding elderly advocacy groups from the process may backfire if it is actually these groups, rather than elderly voters, that are more likely to support some trimming of benefits for the elderly. Thus studying possible differences between elderly voters’ and elderly advocacy groups’

preferences and policymaking roles is crucial to understanding future welfare state policy outcomes.

Elderly Voters and Elderly Interest Groups in the Literature

Both the standard welfare state literature and scholarship regarding interest group representation predict that the elderly should have a strong effect on the politics of social policy. However, it is not clear which manifestations of ‘gray power’ are the most influential: is it elderly voters, unorganized political actors who happen to have common interests; or elderly advocacy groups, whose capacity to apply pressure on policymakers springs from their status as organized interest groups? The established literatures also give contradictory clues as to how interest groups form preferences regarding social policy issues, and how similar these preferences are likely to be to those of elderly voters.

The Welfare State Literature

Wilensky (1975) argued that elderly populations influence levels of welfare state spending cross-nationally, but offered no mechanism to explain how this influence worked. More recent studies (Pampel and Williamson 1989; Thomson 1989) have attempted to elaborate on this basic hypothesis of gray power, but these studies too fall short of providing a clear distinction between the expected roles and preferences of elderly voters versus elderly advocacy groups. Institutional, interest group-based explanations are confounded with electorally-based arguments, so that it is unclear whether elderly voters or elderly advocacy groups are responsible for “capturing” the

welfare state and “[remodeling] it over time in step with their own aging priorities” (Thomson 1989, 36).

Pierson (1994) focuses on the impact of the elderly on welfare state retrenchment. He argues that the politics of retrenchment do not mirror those of welfare state development; policy legacies shape the interests and capacities of welfare state constituencies, constraining subsequent policymaking. But here too, the roles of elderly voters versus elderly advocacy groups are unclear. On the one hand, Pierson argues that voters exhibit a powerful “negativity bias,” fighting retrenchment of “their” programs at almost any cost, and politicians use strategies of “blame avoidance” to get around this resistance. These micro-foundations suggest that the preferences of individual voters lie at the heart of welfare reform politics. On the other hand, Pierson’s case studies of pension reform efforts in Britain and the US suggest that the “activation” of opposition occurs mainly through interest groups. As with previous studies, Pierson’s work leaves us wondering whether the threat to reform efforts posed by elderly welfare constituencies is primarily an electoral one; whether that electoral threat is a result of individual decisions to oppose retrenchment or of voter mobilization by organized interest groups; and whether interest groups exercise influence primarily at the ballot box or through other means.

The Interest Group Literature

The confusion about the role of individuals versus interest groups in the welfare state literature is hardly surprising given that similar confusions mark the interest group literature. Interest groups studies arising from the pluralist tradition have trouble

specifying how interest groups wield power and influence policy outcomes. Authors working in the area of neo-corporatist interest group representation in Europe agree on the mechanisms of interest group influence, but disagree about the policy outcomes that result from direct involvement of interest groups in policy-making.

Cigler (1991, 100) points out that far more is known about mobilization, leadership, recruitment and maintenance of interest groups than about their power and influence on policy outcomes. One reason for this lacuna is the difficulty in measuring influence (Baumgartner and Leech 1998). Lobbying is often hidden, occurring during committee work or even earlier, during the agenda-setting period, and is often indirect, aimed at encouraging legislators to convince their fellow lawmakers to support or defeat a bill. Furthermore, lobbying is but one avenue through which interest groups may work. Researchers cite influencing public opinion or activating group members as important strategies for interest groups (e.g. Berry 1984; Kollman 1998), but few quantify the impact of these activities on agenda-setting, roll call voting, and so on. Academic studies of elderly lobbies (e.g. Pratt 1976, Day 1990) also reflect this ambiguity about mechanisms and the magnitude of their influence. While lobbying and mobilization are both potential sources of strength, it is important to know which mechanism operates at what times, particularly if the messages sent are different in each case.

In neo-corporatist settings, this lack of clarity about the pathways of influence disappears, since organized interest groups participate directly in social policy-making. But the literature on neo-corporatist interest representation makes two different predictions about the outcomes of groups' participation. On the one hand, optimists (e.g. Katzenstein 1985; Visser and Hemerijck 1997; Wallerstein 1997) view positively the

capacity of corporatism to result in policies that are in the general interest; because neo-corporatist policy-making processes enhance possibilities for trust, long-term engagement and positive-sum games, the social policies that emerge will be other-regarding, promoting equity across wide segments of the population and compensating societal losers. Other analysts (e.g. Offe 1981; Olson 1982; Esping-Andersen 1996) express more pessimism. For these authors, corporatism perniciously links the inherent rent-seeking behavior of organized interests to policy-making. The resulting public policies protect labor's, employers', or welfare constituencies' interests narrowly defined, but do little to advance equity, competitiveness, or long-term economic performance. This viewpoint clearly suggests that corporatism will enhance the capacity of powerful elderly groups to pursue their own aging policy agendas, to the detriment of other age groups.

Elderly Interest Groups

If the welfare state and interest group literatures are unclear about the relative roles of elderly voters and elderly advocacy groups in welfare state development and reform, most casual observers in the popular press and in academia place the “blame” for the pronounced elderly-orientation of the American and Italian welfare states squarely on the shoulders of elderly interest groups.

While careful scholars caution that the senior lobby in the United States is not omnipotent – senior groups tend to be more influential in blocking policy change than in successfully lobbying for new programs (Pratt 1983; Day 1990) – many other observers are not so circumspect. During the 1980s in particular, groups critical of elderly entitlements arose, often condemning the influence of senior advocacy groups.

Americans for Generational Equity (AGE), formed in 1984, issued a generational justice argument critical of senior program spending (Quadagno 1989). The popular press picked up the anti-entitlement message, and articles vilifying the AARP (which counts half of all American seniors as members) as “the most powerful lobby in America” and the “800-lb gorilla” of Capitol Hill began to appear (Hornblower 1988, 36-37). The growth of fringe organizations engaged in direct mail fright campaigns helped tarnish the gray lobby’s image. In many eyes, a powerful senior lobby was driving the elder-orientation of US welfare state spending.

In Italy, as in the US, organized groups representing seniors have come to be seen as the driving force behind the country’s elderly-oriented welfare state. The largest membership organizations of any kind in Italy are the pensioners’ unions, which together organize over 57 per cent of the elderly population (SPI-Cgil 1996, 17)¹. Pensioners’ unions are functionally equivalent to American elderly advocacy groups in that membership is not mandatory and the pensioners’ unions do not themselves administer the pensions. With the increasing visibility of pensioners in Italian unions -- by 1997 pensioners made up 54 per cent of the membership of the three largest union confederations -- observers have begun to identify pensioners’ unions as the main source of opposition to badly needed pension system reform.

The pensioners’ unions have grown in tandem with an enormous and highly complex pension system. The Italian pension system is a public, occupational system (private, supplementary pensions are rare in Italy, due largely to regulations designed to prevent their development and encourage full participation in the public system). The system is funded on a pay-as-you-go basis by a combination of legally mandated

contributions from employers and workers and ad hoc state contributions to cover deficits in particular funds. Benefit levels vary by economic sector due to different contribution rates, indexation policies, retirement ages, etc. Before the reform of 1992, the Italian public pension system boasted 47 separate funds for different segments of the population (Baccaro 1999, 128). Each of these regimes was managed by a public agency governed jointly by representatives of the state, employers, and labor unions. The complexity and differentiation of the Italian public pension system has resulted in a generalized perception that the system is inefficient, costly, and unfair. At the same time, while virtually all observers agree that the system is in desperate need of a cure, if only to bring Italian public consumption in line with the criteria governing European monetary union, analysts disagree about the precise cause of the system's maladies.

The dominant theory among Italian academics holds that the pension system's maladies are the result of electoral gaming by politicians, not interest groups. A number of scholars (among them Maestri 1994; Ferrera 1984) draw on Pizzorno's (1974) notion of a party system oriented around capturing the votes of subgroups not already affiliated with organized interest groups, and identify electoral clientelism as the key to explaining the proliferation of pension provisions for micro-segments of the population. Other analysts, however (see Regonini 1990 and 1996; Baldissera 1996b), argue that elected officials, even those sitting on the parliamentary committees in charge of labor and social policy, have minimal influence over the shape of the pension system. Rather, pension legislation is overwhelmingly the product of negotiations among organized labor, organized capital, and government agencies and ministries. Thus it is the interest groups,

and in particular the unions, whose demands and concessions in the area of social policy have determined the shape of the Italian pension system.

This second view, which implies that interest groups bear prime responsibility for the pathologies of the pension system, has gained currency in recent years, especially since the dramatic collapse in 1992 of the two parties most heavily implicated in clientelist practices, the Christian Democrats and the Socialists. Unions have indeed defended many of the “earned rights” of various constituencies, and played a major role in organizing the national strike and public demonstrations that scuttled Prime Minister Berlusconi’s pension reform plan in 1994. Labor unions in general, and the pensioners’ unions in particular, have borne the brunt of public criticism for a welfare system increasingly characterized as benefiting pensioners unfairly at the expense of the young.² For example, social security expert Giovanni Cazzola, who recently ran for public office in the city of Bologna, argues that the pensioners’ unions are to blame for the union confederations’ “voracious” pensions policy (Cazzola 1994), and pensioners’ union officials complain of public discourse that “demonizes” the pensioners’ unions and “accuses them of an ‘assistentialism’ damaging to younger generations”³ (Acoccella 1999, 58).

A New Perspective on Elderly Advocacy Groups vs. Elderly Voters

Popular accounts thus hold elderly lobbies – represented by the AARP and other interest groups in the US, by the pensioners’ unions in Italy – responsible for stalling pension system reform and advocating levels of welfare state spending on the elderly that

crowd out programs for other needy groups. Specialized academic accounts, on the other hand, do not “blame” elderly advocacy groups per se. Rather, one might say that the welfare state literature refuses to take a stand: it elides the policy preferences and behaviors of organized interest groups, their members, and the population from which their members are drawn. We hypothesize that neither of these perspectives is entirely accurate. We posit that while the preferences of elderly voters and elderly advocacy groups often overlap substantially, it is important to recognize that they are two distinct kinds of political actors, with distinct policy positions and distinctive ways of influencing the policy-making process.

Elderly voters might be expected to hold rationally self-interested preferences on welfare state issues, opposing cuts to their own programs and expressing those preferences through their political behavior. Often individuals do not express opinions consonant with their self-interest (see Sears and Funk 1990). Self-interested behavior is somewhat more common (e.g. Green and Cowden 1992; Tedin et al. 1977). But often individuals fail even to act in their self-interest because of altruism or ignorance (Sen 1977; Simon 1983; Stoker 1992). For the elderly, however, the stakes associated with welfare state benefits are “visible, “large,” “certain,” “tangible,” and “transparently obvious” (Citrin and Green 1990, 18; Lipset 1981 [1959], 196-7). American elders, for example, get nearly half their income from Social Security (Moon and Mulvey 1996, 29). As with farmers and government employees, their well-being is tied to government policy in significant and obvious ways that may be reflected in their political participation (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980).

Elderly advocacy groups, too, defend elderly programs, but we might expect their stands to be marked by nuance, political sophistication and an appreciation for fiscal and political tradeoffs. (By “elderly advocacy groups,” we mean the behavior and publicized preferences of groups themselves, as determined by group leaders and staff, which we contrast with elderly voters.) Rather than reflexively opposing cuts to elderly benefits and exhibiting indifference to welfare programs for other age groups, elderly advocacy groups might take policy stands supportive of other groups and even support cuts in elderly programs on occasion.

There are several reasons why the elderly advocacy groups might take such stands. First, it may be that the leadership is more supportive than the membership of government spending in general. In the US it has been suggested that the liberal predilections of AARP staffers and executives, many of whom are former teachers and government employees, may drive the group’s advocacy of programs for nonseniors (Morris 1996). Second, Olson’s (1965) interest group theory predicts a fundamental divide between leadership and membership because the former is preoccupied with preservation and maintenance. Welfare programs for the elderly provide the *raison d’etre* for these groups; should the welfare state collapse under the weight of these programs, the elderly organizations would face possible extinction. Thus group leaders may support cuts in elderly programs because they have a stake in the long-term preservation of the welfare state and recognize when such cuts are necessary for fiscal or political reasons. Finally, group leaders are likely to be better informed than members about the political feasibility of various policy alternatives and about the political, fiscal and economic tradeoffs associated with different proposals. Participation in national-level policy

debates compels group leaders to understand the need for compromise (see Mansbridge 1992).⁴ While elderly voters focus on their own benefits, their advocacy groups realize that the sustainability of elderly benefits in the long term may require reform as well as support for programs for other age groups.

In this analysis we will refer to these politically sophisticated group stances as “other-regarding,” using this term as a shorthand for policy views that advocate programs for other age groups, support cuts in elderly programs on occasion, and acknowledge tradeoffs inherent in welfare policy. If the preferences of elderly voters are marked by self-interest, those of elderly advocacy groups might be characterized as self-interest “properly understood.”⁵

Data and Methods

In this article, we demonstrate empirically that elderly advocacy groups and elderly voters have different preferences with regard to social policy. We also show that they influence policy-makers in different ways. Both of these differences, we argue, may have important implications for the kinds of social policy reforms that are eventually championed by elected officials.

To assess the preferences of elderly voters compared to elderly advocacy groups, we examine two case studies: the United States and Italy. We selected these two countries because both the American and Italian policy-making systems are regarded as unusually permeable to pressure from interest groups, particularly elderly interest groups, which are perceived as politically powerful and selfish advocates of elder programs (on

the permeability of the U.S. system see Truman 1951; Freeman 1965; McConnell 1966; Schattschneider 1960; Lowi 1969; and Hecló 1978; for the Italian case, see LaPalombara 1964; Pizzorno 1977; Baldissera 1996a). Since elderly interest groups are often blamed for stalling pension system reform in these two welfare states, they are key cases in which to evaluate whether elderly interest groups in fact are responsible for the elderly-oriented policies.

We are interested in the policy preferences and the means of political influence of both elderly voters and elderly advocacy groups. Survey data reveal the preferences and behaviors of older voters. Preferences of American seniors come from the 1992 American National Election Studies; the 1992 Eurobarometer survey provides data on older Italians' preferences. Behavioral data on turnout rates, party identification and vote choice come from the American and Italian National Election Studies. Additional participation data showing American seniors' focus on their welfare programs comes from the Roper Social and Political Trends Archive (Brady et al. 2000), which is comprised of approximately 200 national cross-sectional surveys conducted ten times per year from September 1973 through October 1994. An item asking respondents whether they wrote to their Congressman or Senator in the past year shows seniors' reactions to specific policy events.

For our analysis of the preferences and behavior of elderly advocacy groups, we focus on the AARP and the Italian pensioners' unions. In Italy, the elderly advocacy groups chiefly concerned with welfare state policy are the pensioners' unions. In the U.S. there are many elderly advocacy groups in the U.S., and their diversity complicates the picture somewhat, but we focus on the AARP (formerly the American Association of

Retired Persons) for two reasons. First, to separate the influence of elderly advocacy groups from that of elderly voters, we must examine groups that lobby policymakers rather than those that chiefly exert influence through grassroots mobilization of voters. Two groups in the U.S. have notable lobbying presences – the AARP and the National Council of Senior Citizens (NCSC). Other groups appear at hearings and lobby behind the scenes less regularly; these groups -- the Gray Panthers and National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare (NCPSSM) are two examples -- concentrate more on grassroots activity and direct mail campaigns, and so exert their influence indirectly through elderly voters.

Second, while the NCSC and AARP both lobby, we focus on the latter group because it dwarfs the NCSC in size and apparent relevance to policy debates. Most critiques of the senior lobby like those cited above focus on the AARP, which has six times the membership and over ten times the national staff of the NCSC (Van Tassel and Meyer 1992, 17, 146). Furthermore, in a content analysis of *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* articles on Social Security and Medicare from 1981 to 1989, the AARP was mentioned 57 times compared to 13 times for the NCSC; similarly the AARP was mentioned in 88 articles in the *New York Times* from 1990 to August 2000 compared to just 16 mentions for the NCSC.⁶

Policy positions of the AARP and the pensioners' unions come from content analyses of organization publications. For the US, these publications include the annual AARP Public Policy Agenda and the *AARP Bulletin*, the organization's monthly policy newsletter. For Italy, publications include *LiberEta'*, a monthly publication for the membership of the largest pensioners' union, *Oggidomani Anziani* and other internal

publications of the three largest pensioners' unions, and policy statements and documents of these unions. Information on AARP and pensioners' union political activities come from journalistic and scholarly sources.

Policy Preferences of Elderly Advocacy Groups

United States: AARP

The AARP is notable for the number of other-regarding policy preferences it puts forth, favoring rights and benefits for children as well as other non-elderly groups. The AARP was a founding member of the Generations United coalition, which was formed in 1986 to “counter the charge that older people are benefiting from government programs at the expense of children and other groups” (Day 1990, 109). In 1992, the new president of the AARP listed “intergenerational action” as her top priority, and the AARP joined the Coalition for America’s Children to promote health care and education for young people (“Seniors and Juniors,” p. A24). The AARP also endorsed the 1996 “Stand for Children” rally at the Lincoln Memorial, organized by the Children’s Defense Fund to focus attention on the lack of social provision for Americans under 18 (Pear 1996).

The AARP’s annual Public Policy Agenda contains a long list of policies for non-seniors of all ages. The 2000 Agenda endorses expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit; addressing the “marriage penalty;” enhancing food stamp benefits, indexing them to inflation and restoring benefits to legal immigrants; encouraging alternative work schedules, flextime, and job-sharing; extending rent control and other rent protections for low-income people; increasing outreach and low-income assistance programs to migrant and seasonal farm workers; ensuring competition for local and long-distance phone

service, cable service, and Internet service; preserving the environment with particular attention to environmental justice; and passing stricter gun control measures. Of course seniors may benefit directly or indirectly from these measures aimed at low-income people or at families. The policy agenda is an extensive “wish list” that few AARP staffers believe will pass any time soon (Morris 1996). And some of these positions, particularly those on children that were issued after the intergenerational equity debate emerged in the 1980s (Quadagno 1989), may have been adopted out of political expediency. Nonetheless, the degree of other-regardingness is marked.

Even stronger evidence of the AARP’s moderation is the group’s positions on aging policy, which at crucial moments have been more moderate than those of elderly voters. For example, the AARP opposed fixing the “notch” (the “notch babies” are seven million people born between 1917 and 1921 who did not share in a windfall created by a 1972 legislative miscalculation that over-indexed Social Security benefits for inflation). The organization supported the 1983 Social Security Amendments (after initial opposition); the new law raised the retirement age from 65 to 67 by 2027, delayed the 1983 cost of living adjustment for six months, and increased payroll taxes (Light 1985). The group recognized that some change was inevitable and approved the bill because it spread the pain of reform among current recipients, future recipients and taxpayers.⁷ This generationally moderate position stands in contrast to seniors themselves, who tend to oppose program changes of any type, even those affecting future beneficiaries (Derthick 1979).

Another notable example of AARP moderation is the 1988 Medicare Catastrophic Coverage Act, the first major expansion of Medicare since its inception in 1965. The act

protected Medicare beneficiaries from financial ruin by capping the amount they could be required to pay for hospital care, doctors' bills and other acute-care services. The Act also provided for the first time Medicare coverage for all prescription drugs (after a large annual deductible), mammograms, and respite care for those tending severely disabled Medicare beneficiaries at home. The Medicare expansion was financed not with a payroll tax increase, but rather with a modest increase in seniors' monthly Medicare premiums and a surtax on the wealthiest 40 percent of seniors that ranged up to \$800 for the most affluent 5 percent. The AARP supported the Act and continued to do so even as strong senior opposition emerged. Wealthier seniors were angered at having to pay for benefits they already had through former employers or private insurance, and less affluent seniors were frightened by fringe groups' misinformation campaigns claiming that all aged would be subject to the maximum \$800 premium. In 1989 Congress repealed the Act. Many observers cite this episode as evidence that the AARP's size is a hindrance and that the group cannot claim to speak for 33 million people (Day 1990). But the AARP's support of the Act is further evidence of the group's moderation and willingness in an era of fiscal austerity to consider alternatives to taxpayer financing.

Italy: Pensioners' unions

In Italy as well, the pensioners' unions display a remarkable degree of other-regardingness in their policy positions. Pensioners' unions were formed to advance the interests of former workers, and through the mid-1970s their demands were focused almost entirely on improving pension provisions and health care for the elderly (until the early 1970s, most pensioners received quite limited pensions, and no public health-care

coverage). However, by the mid-1970s the basic goals of linking pensions to the cost of living, providing a non-contributory “social pension” for elderly people with no other means of support, and health coverage equivalent to that of current workers, had been achieved.

The early 1970s marked the beginning of close cooperation among the three largest pensioners’ unions, and the inauguration of the pensioners’ unions’ role as independent actors making claims on the government. The April 1975 government-union agreement indexing pensions to the growth in contracted wages was signed by the Secretary General of the Federation of the three largest pensioners’ unions, rather than by the leaders of the confederal unions, as had always been the case previously (FNP 1992, 11). As the pensioners’ unions gained experience and independence, they gradually became a leading source of social policy expertise for the union confederations. But rather than using their new role to push solely for policies in the short-term self-interest of current pensioners, the pensioners’ unions began increasingly to adopt a broader role as defenders of the welfare state. For example, in 1976, well before the union confederations or political parties had taken up the call for pension reform, the FNP warned of eventual collapse unless the pension system were reformed substantially (FNP 1992, 12). At the 1977 national congress of the FNP, which took place under a banner announcing “Not for pensions or pensioners, but pensioners for a new way of development,” the main focus of social policy proposals was “resolving the problem of the quality of benefits for the least privileged,” which included not just pensioners but also Southerners, agricultural workers, and the unemployed and disabled (FNP 1992, 13). As one high-ranking official of the FNP recently reflected, “The activities of the FNP to

bring the problem of defending welfare to the center of general union debates” reflects a decision “to adopt goals and interests that are more for future generations than for those that are represented today as pensioners” (Acoccella 1999, 62).

More recent policy proposals by the pensioners’ unions, in the midst of major societal debates over pension reform, have demonstrated similar other-regardingness and willingness to advocate pension reform. The yearly unified policy documents put forth by the three largest pensioners’ unions in the 1990s express consistent support for proposals that would increase equity by limiting so-called “seniority pensions,” early retirement pensions, and raises for the highest public old-age pensions. Despite the pensioners’ unions’ active role in constructing the most generous provisions of the pension system in the late 1960s-early 1970s, pensioners’ unions supported the failed pension reforms of 1978-9, and the successful ones of 1992, 1995, and 1996. In a referendum called by the confederations to solicit members’ opinions of the proposed 1995 reform, 91 per cent voted in favor (Baccaro 1999, 150)⁸.

At the same time, the pensioners’ unions’ policy documents and public statements express support for programs that would help other age groups. This other-regardingness of course has a self-serving component. Pensioners’ union leadership is well aware that high labor force participation rates are the key to the survival of the pension system in an ageing society (see Muscolini 1999). Yet many of the policy priorities cited in the unions’ joint policy documents from the 1990s – a framework law regulating social service provision by local governments, rent control, tax reform, education reform, improvements in child care and maternity leave arrangements, tax subsidies for underdeveloped areas in the South, and most especially programs geared towards poverty

alleviation, such as the proposed minimum income – would benefit the young far more than the old.

The widely circulated pensioners' unions' periodicals also promote healthy relations between the elderly and other generations.⁹ The May 1997 issue of *LiberEta*' adopted the theme "Reinventing Intergenerational Solidarity," but this issue was not by any means unique in broaching the subject. Intergenerational relations was an important theme throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and union publications ran material posing pensioners and pensions as a serious problem for intergenerational equity. For example, the SPI's professional journal printed a letter from an economics professor at the University of Rome entitled "Welfare and Unemployment: The Fault of the Elderly," which prompted a several-month-long debate in the pages of the journal (Saba 1997).

In sum, elderly organizations in both Italy and the US naturally fight for the interests of their elderly constituents, but they do more than that. They also look out for the interests of other clients of the welfare state, and support cuts to programs benefiting the elderly when they fear that continued growth of these programs will jeopardize the long-term sustainability of the welfare state.

Policy Preferences of Elderly Voters

Both the AARP and the Italian pensioners' unions are highly encompassing organizations, organizing more than half of the elderly voters in their respective polities. Both carry out extensive educational outreach programs, as we have seen, attempting to convince their memberships of the benefits of other-regarding positions on welfare policy

issues. Since an important function of interest groups is to send cues to members, we would expect that the large numbers of elderly voters who are members would share the policy preferences of the elderly advocacy groups. Instead, we find that the policy preferences of most elderly voters on welfare reform issues are distinctly different, and less other-regarding, than the positions taken by elderly organizations.

United States

While the AARP holds a significant number of other-regarding policy stands, senior individuals are less other-regarding, particularly when it comes to programs benefiting children. The 1992 American National Election Study asked a number of questions about spending and benefits in social policy areas. As shown in Table 1, the level of support for senior programs is very high among both seniors and nonseniors; around 87 percent of all age groups oppose taxes on Social Security benefits and nearly as many respondents in all groups favor expanding Medicare to cover nursing home care. Indeed, *nonseniors* are more likely to say that Social Security benefits are too low (67 percent of 18-34-year-olds thought so, compared to just 47 percent of seniors; the modal answer among seniors is that benefits are about right).

While younger people are very supportive of senior benefits, seniors are much less likely to reciprocate. While 73 percent of 18- to 34-year-olds thought that the government should provide child care assistance to low and middle income parents, only 49 percent of seniors agreed. This pronounced senior – youth difference in support of programs particularly for the young is also reflected in questions about federal spending (Table 2). Compared to 18- to 34-year-olds, seniors are 20 to 23 percent less likely to say

that federal spending on public schools, student financial aid or child care should be increased.

In some countries, elderly advocacy groups try to expand seniors' notions of self-interest by arguing that they have a stake in the education and training of younger citizens whose taxes support their benefits. This argument is undermined in the US, however, by the apparently self-contributory nature of Social Security. Many people believe their benefits are funded by their own past contributions rather than by current taxpayers, and so they do not see a connection between an investment in young people and their benefits or the solvency of the system.¹⁰

Italy

Elderly voters in Italy resemble their American counterparts in favoring positions consonant with their individual self-interest. As in the US, public support for seniors' programs is high among both elderly and non-elderly populations, but programs geared towards children and working-aged adults receive less support from the elderly. A 1992 Eurobarometer survey revealed near universal agreement on the desirability of extensive social provisions for Italian elders. Eighty-nine percent of people under the age of 55, and 90 per cent of people aged 55 and above, agreed that "those who are now working have a duty to ensure, through the contributions or taxes they pay, that elderly people have a decent standard of living." Similar levels of agreement in both age groups were found for three separate statements about the inadequacy of current provisions for the elderly (see Table 3). Even in 1996 and 1997, after several years of sustained societal debate about the need to reform Italy's pension system, younger age groups continued to

support the pension status quo.¹¹ Prime-age wage earners (aged 25-54) were the subgroup most supportive of the current pension system (Baldissera 1996a; 1997).

But while younger groups show high levels of support for social welfare benefits for the elderly, in Italy as in the US elderly respondents are much less supportive of such benefits for the non-elderly. In the 1992 Eurobarometer survey, the elderly were more likely than respondents under the age of 55 to agree that the unemployed and the non-elderly poor were well protected in society, and less likely to support benefits for single parents. They were also more likely to support restrictions on unemployment benefits (see Table 4). Despite the popular belief that the persistence of multi-generational families leads to solidarity between the generations, in Italy as elsewhere¹² elderly voters demonstrate less “solidarity” downwards toward the young than the young direct upwards toward the elderly.

Political Behavior of Elderly Voters

The distinctive policy preferences of the elderly on welfare spending issues is of no consequence if those preferences are not heard by the government, or if they are altered by a mediating agent with different preferences. We turn now to the political behavior of the elderly, showing how they communicate their preferences directly to politicians through their participatory activity. In the US, the transmission of a pro-elderly spending message occurs because of the disproportionate political participation of the elderly and their highly focused participation during periods of policy threat. In Italy, elderly voters communicate their message of support for the pension system’s continued

generosity by building ties to parties opposed to pension reform even during a major realignment of the party system beginning in 1992.

United States

The distinctive preferences of elderly voters with regard to welfare state spending matter because the elderly are disproportionately active in politics. Senior citizens in the US participate at higher rates than nonseniors, and among all age groups, seniors are distinctly focused on Social Security.

In 1996, American seniors were 7% more likely than 35-64 year olds and 27% more likely than 18-34 year olds to vote, according to the American National Election Study. Seniors were much more likely to contribute to campaigns than younger groups: over 12 percent of seniors did so, compared to 8.6 percent of 35- to 64-year-olds and less than 3 percent of the youth group. Even in campaign work, a more physically demanding activity, seniors participated at about the same rates as younger citizens (2 to 2.5%). Seniors now are disproportionately active in politics; while they comprised 16.5 percent of the 1996 ANES sample, they were 17.1 percent of campaign workers, 19.3 percent of voters and nearly 28 percent of all contributors.

The pattern of senior activity shows that seniors not only participate at high rates but also are vigilant about age-related policy. During the 1980s when a series of threats were posed against Social Security and Medicare, seniors reacted with surges in letter writing to Congress. Two of the events are discrete enough to allow separate analysis of seniors' participatory reaction: the Reagan proposals to cut benefits in 1981 and the 1988-89 Medicare Catastrophic Coverage Act episode.

Decades of Social Security expansion came to an abrupt end on May 12, 1981, when the Reagan administration proposed cutting Social Security benefits for the first time since the program's enactment in 1935. The plan included a reduction in benefits for early retirees, a tightening of disability requirements, a delay in the scheduled cost of living adjustment (COLA), and a reduction in benefit growth for future retirees. The ensuing political storm forced the Reagan administration to back off the proposal. But senior ire continued until the signing of the 1983 Social Security Amendments, which signaled the end of that initial threat. Before the May 1981 threat, about 13 percent of seniors reported having written a letter to their Congressman or Senator in the past year. Between May 1981 and July 1983, when the Amendments were signed, senior contacting surged 7.3 percent, to 20 percent. Younger groups reacted much more modestly, the contacting rising just 2.7 percent for 30 to 59-year-olds and 1.9 percent for 18 to 29-year-olds.¹³

The July 1988 passage of the Medicare Catastrophic Coverage Act inaugurated another major period of threat that lasted until its November 1989 repeal. During this period, senior contacting rose 7.9 percent, compared to 2.4 percent for 18- to 29-year-olds and 2.2 percent for 30- to 59-year-olds. Thus seniors demonstrated with their participatory surges that they are vigilant about age-related policy.

The fact that the policy preferences of elderly voters differ from those of elderly advocacy groups matters because with their overrepresentation in participatory activity, seniors have a channel of communication and influence with politicians separate from that of their advocacy groups. Politicians see the surges in senior participation in reaction to policy events and come to interpret high participation by seniors in general as focused

on their welfare state programs, an indication that to propose program changes or cuts is to invite electoral retribution. We know that some portion of senior activity, including response to the threats of the 1980s, is inspired by interest groups.¹⁴ But much senior participatory activity is not group-sponsored. As Table 5 shows, the majority of all senior activity is performed by non-AARP members. For example, 68 percent of seniors who voted were non-AARP members. And regardless of whether senior activity is spontaneous or the product of group mobilization, seniors sent a forceful message to Congress with their participatory reaction to policy threats.

Italy

As in the US, elderly voters in Italy make up a disproportionate share of the electorate, prompting politicians to pay particularly close attention to their distinctive policy preferences. Because of compulsory voting, turnout rates vary only modestly across age groups. According to Italian National Election Study data, those aged 55 and over are about five percent less likely to vote than the middle aged (93 versus 98 per cent in 1996) – which we should expect given the greater likelihood of impaired mobility in this group. But the high share of seniors in the population more than counteracts this small difference in participation rates. In 1996, the elderly represented fully 33 per cent of the electorate.

Senior voters in Italy are also important politically because of their strong ties to political parties supportive of the pension status quo. Indeed, during a period of tremendous upheaval in the party system, Italian elders consistently voted for the parties most supportive of the pension status quo and most opposed to reform, even as the

identity of those parties changed. In 1990, before the 1992 collapse of the post-war Italian party system centered on the Christian Democratic party, elderly voters were strongly over-represented in both the DC and the centrist Socialist Party (PSI), which had opposed pension reforms proposed by the unions in the late 1970s and 1980s. In addition, these parties, more than any others, were masters of the “*leggine*,” highly specific pension laws proposed by individual legislators and designed to benefit micro-sectoral interests in exchange for votes (Maestri 1994). Survey evidence also shows the particularly strong ties elderly citizens had to the pro-pension parties; in 1990 older voters were more likely than younger ones to be party members, to always vote for the same party, and to have never missed voting in an election (Table 6).

In 1992 the old party system disintegrated in the wake of corruption scandals, the emergence of a new regionalist party (the Northern League), and the ideological depolarization following the fall of the Berlin Wall. Elderly voters were left without their traditional party affiliations. Not only had the DC ceased to exist, but the splinter groupings that survived could not provide the government patronage that had bound many voters to the DC in the first place. Beginning in 1992, there was no possibility of further extension of the pension system through *leggine*, and the movement for reform was gaining momentum (as evidenced by the first successful reform in 1992). Attention thus shifted to the battle between parties supporting pension reform and those opposing it, which included the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS), the Communist Refoundation (RC), and the National Alliance (AN), successor to Italy’s old fascist party, the Italian Social Movement (MSI). The PDS supported reforms to reduce the complexity and inequity of the old system but rejected major retrenchment, while the RC and AN/MSI

opposed reforms of any kind. In 1992, elderly voters were over-represented in all three of these parties (see Table 7).

In 1994, voters over the retirement age of 55 were over-represented in both the old pro-pensioner parties – the resurrected PSI and the Popular Party (PPI), which presented itself as a new version of the old DC –, and the new pro-pension parties – the RC, AN/MSI, and the PDS. Conversely, elderly voters were under-represented in the Northern League and Forza Italia, two economically neo-liberal parties that most strongly advocated cuts in government spending and in particular cuts in the social security system (Table 7).

Unfortunately the survey sample for 1996 included too few elderly voters to allow for a reliable reconstruction of the distribution of the elderly vote in the elections following the major pension reform of 1995. However, the 1990-94 trend shows that even during a period of rapid party system realignment, elderly voters remained unusually interested in and tightly connected to the parties most strongly opposed to pension reform – significantly, parties that held crucial positions in the governing majorities. Furthermore, according to the Italian National Election Survey, seniors were by far the age group most interested in the 1996 campaign, which fell in the midst of important societal debates over welfare reform. Older people in 1996 were also more than twice as likely as those under 30 to have signed a petition for a candidate to appear on a party list. Since seniors had lost their traditional party affiliations, they were least likely in 1996 to be members of a party. However, they remained most likely to express an attachment to a particular party and most likely to feel “very close” (Table 6). This remarkably had remained the case since 1990, before the parties they had been most

likely to belong to – the DC and PSI—had collapsed. Thus Italian elders continued to be actively engaged in the campaign, a testament to their interest in the main issue of the 1996 campaigns, pension reform. While none of the 15 pensioners' parties that have contested elections in the post-war period has ever gained more than about 2 per cent of the vote,¹⁵ elderly voters have successfully pressed their claims through the electoral system by supporting mainstream parties committed to the maintenance of the pension system.

Discussion and Conclusion

While many observers agree that the elderly have an influence on welfare state spending, there is a great deal of ambiguity and confusion within the applicable literatures about the nature of that influence. It is unclear whether influence is exerted only by the organized elderly through their advocacy groups, or by the great mass of elderly voters, who, while unorganized, recognize their large stake in welfare programs and exert political pressure to defend them.

The relative influence of elderly groups and elderly voters matters because their policy preferences are not completely congruent. In both the US and Italy, elderly advocacy groups hold nuanced welfare policy positions, advocating spending for younger age groups and reform of elderly programs. These positions probably derive from a long-term interest in the preservation of the welfare state and a politically sophisticated understanding of fiscal and political tradeoffs. Elderly voters, on the other hand, appear more resolutely self-interested in their welfare state preferences. Indeed, we find evidence of an attitudinal asymmetry in which non-seniors support senior programs but

seniors do not reciprocate to the same degree. That both seniors and non-seniors support senior programs helps explain both the elderly-orientation of welfare spending in these countries and the virtual absence of backlash.

Furthermore, in both the US and Italy, elderly individuals not only hold positions supportive of social spending on the elderly, but they also act on those positions. American seniors responded to threats to Social Security and Medicare with surges in letter-writing to Congress. Italian seniors flocked to parties that opposed pension reform as the party system realigned. Seniors' participatory behavior sent an unequivocally pro-elderly-spending message to politicians in both countries, a message communicated separately from that of elderly advocacy groups. In neither country can politicians afford to ignore this very large constituency's preferences.

This separate channel of communication is significant precisely because the policy positions of the elderly and the organized interest groups that claim to represent them are not congruent. To be sure, elderly advocacy groups push for the defense and expansion of age-related programs, as do elderly voters. But they also have more other-regarding positions. To the extent that politicians react to elderly voters directly, these calls of support for programs for other age groups are not heard. Popular perceptions that elderly advocacy groups are responsible for the pronounced elderly-orientation of the American and Italian welfare states are misguided. Indeed, efforts by policymakers to minimize the role of elderly advocacy groups in the policymaking process would diminish a moderate voice.

Our finding that elderly voters are more extreme than elderly group leaders contrasts with many models of interest group advocacy that posit that group leadership is

more extreme than membership. It may be that leaders are attracted to their positions by an ideological belief in the welfare state writ large (a selection effect). Alternatively, group leaders may come to adopt pragmatic strategies through their experience with national policy making processes (a learning effect). Exploration of the reasons for leadership moderation is a promising area for further research.

In this paper, we have shown that there is a problem in the welfare state and interest group literatures, which inaccurately elide the policy positions and effects of organized and unorganized interest groups. We have also shown that distinguishing between the influence of elderly groups and elderly individuals is crucial because their preferences differ. Future research should consider whether these different policy positions have an impact on welfare reform. Would reforms in the US and Italy have been different without the input from either elderly voters or elderly advocacy groups? And more broadly, does cross-national variation in the outcomes of welfare reform debates depend on the relative responsiveness of political systems to elderly voters versus elderly advocacy groups?

¹ Italian labor unions are organized into three main confederations, in which a national-level leadership coordinates the activities of local-level and category unions. Each of the three major union confederations in Italy, and many of the smaller so-called “autonomous unions,” have their own pensioners’ unions. While these groups occupy a position within the union confederations analogous to other category unions like metal workers or public sector employees, by the mid-1990s, pensioners outnumbered active workers in the main confederations.

² See for example opinion pieces in major news outlets by Manghi (1994), Ferrera (1996), Massarenti (1997), Rossi (1997), Cazzola (1998).

³ In the Italian debate “assistenzialismo” refers to unearned privileges, as opposed to earned rights.

⁴ Thanks to Frank Baumgartner for this observation.

⁵ Thanks to Paul Pierson for this observation.

⁶ We compiled all the articles listed under the “Social Security” and “Medicare” listings in the *CQ Weekly Report* index from 1981 to 1989 (this was a period when those programs were threatened, as described below, and the number of grassroots elderly groups increased dramatically). We then counted the number of mentions of the AARP, NCSC and other elderly advocacy groups. The AARP was mentioned 57 times, more often than all other groups combined (a total of 50 mentions), and this at a time when the number of grassroots elderly groups proliferated. The NCSC was mentioned 13 times and Save Our Security (SOS), a consortium of 150 groups opposing cuts to Social Security, including the AARP, was mentioned 11 times. The main grassroots group that

emerged to oppose threatened program cuts was the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare (NCPSSM), which received 13 mentions; all other grassroots groups received 4 mentions or fewer. Using Lexis-Nexis, we searched the *New York Times* for mentions of elderly groups; from 1990 through August 2000, the AARP was mentioned in 88 articles, the NCSC in 16, the Gray Panthers in 27 and the NCPSSM in 2.

⁷ Indeed, the 1983 Amendments resulted in significant reductions in long term benefits, reducing replacement rates (benefits as a percentage of pre-retirement earnings) from 41 percent to 36 percent for average earners and from 64 percent to 51 percent for low earners between 1985 and 2030 (Pierson 1994, 67).

⁸ Some have claimed that the pensioner's unions only supported these reforms because they spared current pensioners while placing most of the cost of reform on future pensioners. Indeed, the end result of the negotiated reforms placed the heaviest burdens on future pensioners with less than eighteen years of work experience. However, many reform provisions did affect current pensioners, most notably women who were recipients of pensions upgraded by state contributions to the "minimum" level, and public servants about to retire on special seniority pensions. Additionally, the pensioners unions had little to gain and a great deal to lose, from the standpoint of their organizational survival, from policies that hurt their future membership.

⁹ *LiberEta*, the monthly magazine of the SPI, alone had 195,680 subscribers in 1998 (data from SPI files). Many other publications, including the monthly magazine of the FNP, are distributed to, if not actually read by, all of the union's members.

¹⁰ Senior citizens in the U.S. apparently used to see a connection between the education of the young and their own well-being. Economists have shown that while today the proportion of elderly residents in a location is associated with a significant reduction in per-child educational spending (the effect is particularly large where the senior residents and the school-age children are of different racial groups) (Poterba 1997), this was not always the case. In the early 1900s there was a positive effect of elderly population share on school spending (Goldin and Katz 1997; Hoxby 1997).

¹¹ STATUSQUO index: Disagree with raising pension age, despite longer life expectancy; agree with general strike should government decide to raise pension age; agree that pension system crisis can be resolved by cracking down on firms and people who do not pay their contributions.

¹² Borre and Goul Andersen (1997) report a similar finding for Denmark in 1994.

¹³¹³ The changes in contacting rates were calculated with a Multiple Interrupted Time Series (MITS) analysis (see Lewis-Beck and Alford 1980), which reveals how much participation changed for each age group in each time period. The MITS analysis shows how the slope of contacting (the time series) changes as a result of policy events (the interruptions); see Campbell 2000 for details of this analysis. The change in contacting rates were calculated for five time periods: from the beginning of the time series until the May 1981 threat; from May 1981 to the July 1983 signing of the Social Security amendments; from July 1983 to the July 1988 passage of the Medicare Catastrophic Care Act; from July 1988 to the November 1989 repeal of the Medicare Catastrophic Care Act; and from November 1989 to the end of the time series. The change in contacting for each age group during each period:

	9/73- 5/81	5/81- 7/83	7/83- 7/88	7/88- 11/89	11/89- 10/94
18- 29	-4.1%	1.9%	-2.3%	2.4	-1.4%
30- 59	-3.5	2.7	-1.4	2.2	-2.4
60+	-2.1	7.3	-2.0	7.9	-4.5

Source: Roper Social and Political Trends Archive

¹⁴ For example, in January 1995, senior lobbying groups orchestrated a national call-in day to Capitol Hill to protest GOP lawmakers' attempts to cut elderly programs (Rosenstiel 1995). The AARP has "telephone trees" by which volunteers mobilize grass-roots members to contact lawmakers (Morris 1996).

¹⁵ Data from Rizzo (1996).

Table 2 U.S. Opinion on Federal Spending by Age

Program	Percent Wishing to Increase Federal Spending			
	18-34	35-64	65+	Difference Seniors-Youth
Child care	62%	47%	39%	-23%
Student financial aid	70	58	48	-22
Public schools	76	63	56	-20
AIDS	68	62	50	-18
The homeless	81	71	63	-18
Environment	67	59	57	-10
Science and technology	42	45	35	-7
Welfare	20	16	13	-7
The poor	58	54	52	-6
Blacks	27	25	22	-5
Social Security	49	50	44	-5
Aid to former USSR	15	20	10	-5
Crime	74	68	70	-4
Food stamps	18	18	16	-2
Unemployment	40	39	41	1
Cities	19	20	24	5

Source: 1992 American National Election Study

Table 3 Italy: Opinion on social provisions for the elderly by age

Item	% agree or strongly agree					
	16-54	55+	% difference	Not retired	Retired ¹⁶	% difference
Elderly people should stand up more actively for their own rights	91%	89%	-3	90%	90%	0
Those who are now working have a duty to ensure, through the contributions or taxes they pay, that elderly people have a decent standard of living	89	90	1	89	91	2
In Italy the old are not sufficiently well protected	88	86	-2	88	85	-3
The authorities in Italy do not do enough for the elderly	91	92	1	92	89	-3
The level of pensions in this country is too low	89	89	0	89	90	1

Note: Figures for both elderly/non-elderly and retired/not retired are included here, since, despite the formal retirement age of 60 for men and 55 for women, less than 2/3 of pensioners in Italy are over the age of 55 (CENSIS 1999).

Source: Eurobarometer 37.1 (1992)

Table 4 Italy: Opinion on social welfare programs for the non-elderly by age

	16-54	55+	% difference	Not retired	Retired	% difference
In Italy the unemployed are sufficiently well protected (agree)	14%	15%	1	13%	20%	7
In Italy the poor are sufficiently well protected (agree)	6	11	5	6	12	6
Maternity leave in our country is too long (agree)	13	20	7	15	17	2
Special help should be available to single-parent families who raise their children alone (disagree)	9	10	1	9	12	3
The unemployed should be able to turn down a job, while still continuing to receive unemployment benefit, if the job on offer does not match their qualifications and experience (disagree)	60	67	7	61	66	5
The unemployed should accept additional training if they cannot find another job	86	90	4	85	90	5
People in their 50s should give up work to make way for younger people (disagree)	64	70	6	64	71	7

Source: Eurobarometer 37.1 (1992)

**Table 5 Proportion of U.S. Senior Participatory Activity
Performed by Non-AARP Members**

Voting	68%
Contributing	65
Contacting	54
Campaign Work	66
Voting on Social Security	65%
Contributing on Social Security	63
Contacting on Social Security	48

Table shows proportion of senior participators who were not AARP members; for example, 68 percent of senior voters were not AARP members.

Source: 1990 Citizen Participation Study

Table 6 Italy: Party identification by age group, 1990 and 1996

	1990		1996	
	Under 55	55+	Under 55	55+
Feels closer to one party than to others	61%	63%	76%	85%
How close do you feel to this party (very close)	18	32	25	37
Party member	8	9	8	4
Have always voted for the same party	72	83	--	--

Source: Italian National Election Study, 1990 and 1996

Table 7 Italy: Degree of over- or under-representation of elderly voters in selected political parties

	1987	1990 (party R. feels closest to)	1992	1994
Old pro-pensioner parties				
DC	19%	26%	25%	--
PSI	17	13	-35	194
PPI	--	--	--	46
New pro-pensioner parties				
RC	--	--	129	32
AN/MSI	--	--	0	50
PDS	--	--	7	30
Pro-pension reform parties				
Lega Nord	--	--	-30	-42
Forza Italia	--	--	--	-27

Figures in cells are the difference between vote shares among over-55-year-olds and voting population as a whole, as a percentage of vote share for population as a whole (-- in cell indicates party did not compete in that election).

Source: Italian National Election Study 1990, 1992, 1996.

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