



Do Migrants Get Involved in Politics? Levels, Forms and Drivers of Migrant Political Participation in Italy

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Abstract

Migrant political participation is a central challenge to our democracy, especially at a time when migration is so controversial. This study examines level, forms and predictors of migrant political engagement in Italy, a country where 10% of the total population is foreign-born. We measure migrant political participation on the basis of data provided by the Survey on *Condition and Social Integration of Foreign Citizens* carried out by the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) in 2011–12 ($N = 16,056$). In addition to individual characteristics, we analyse the role played by the family in influencing migrant political engagement using a multilevel logistic approach. Our analysis shows that migrants in Italy are largely inactive political subjects in comparison with Italian natives. Political disengagement is related to being a woman, low education and residence in South Italy and the islands. Moreover, we analyse the different factors that are driving soft and strong political participation. We also discuss the negligible impact of EU citizenship in enhancing political participation in Italy.

Keywords Political participation · Migrants · Italy · Family of origin · Integration

Introduction

In the last decade, and particularly in light of the so-called refugee crisis, migration has become a hot topic in the public discourse and a top policy priority in the European Union (ECFR 2018; Eurobarometer 2018). Current discourses on migration at the same time reify migrants as a source of concern (Ambrosini 2013) and depict them as passive entities, recipients of other agents' political choices (Catenaccio 2007; Zapata-Barrero

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et al. 2013; Giorgi and Vitale 2017). The lack of migrant voices and action in the political arena prevents the full implementation of democratic societies which require the equal participation of all residents who should be able to influence decisions affecting them and to have a stake in the community in which they live (Verba and Nie 1972; Verba et al. 1987; Lijphart 1997; Dahl 2006; Kaldur et al. 2012; Zapata-Barrero and Gropas 2012; ODIHR 2017). The political incorporation of migrants represents, therefore, both a crucial indicator of their overall level of inclusion in destination countries (Zapata-Barrero et al. 2013; Alba and Foner 2015) and a vital goal for advanced societies characterised by increasing diversity. Despite the importance of migrant political participation, empirical research has so far shown that, due to several factors at both the individual and structural level, migrants are significantly less likely than natives to participate in politics (among others Penninx et al. 2004; Morales and Giugni 2011; Kaldur et al. 2012; Zapata-Barrero et al. 2013).

Italy—with 6 million foreign-born individuals (10% of the total population)—is a relevant case study for the analysis of migrant political participation. First, because since the beginning of mass immigration in Italy in the 1990s, migration flows originated from a great variety of countries (Cesareo 2013; King 2015). This complexity is itself a challenge for equal political participation: on the one hand, dealing with multiple communities may imply overrepresentation of some groups and underrepresentation of others. On the other hand, different communities may have different or competing interests, bringing complexity and difficulties to the dialogue with institutions. Italy has had significant experience of migrant associations (with political, social or cultural aims) and consultative bodies, despite their irrelevant role in the policymaking process (Caponio 2005; Martiniello 2005; Mantovan 2007; Caselli 2010; Pilati 2010b; Kasic 2013). Moreover, scholars have repeatedly underlined that, despite overall positive outcomes of integration, native's reaction to immigration has been characterised by negative and stereotyped views of immigrants and media (King 1993; Bruno 2016; Eurobarometer 2018) with possible negative consequences on the participation processes.

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first quantitative study of migrant political participation in Italy based on a nationally representative household survey. The primary goal of the present article is to offer an in-depth analysis of forms, levels and drivers of immigrant political participation in Italy.

It is hard to find a consensus on how political participation should be defined. In light of this, it is worth starting from a clarification of the concept at stake. According to the classical definition of Verba and Nie (1972), political participation is a behaviour designed to influence the choice of government personnel and/or policies. Nevertheless, in the light of recent social and technological changes, critical reflections have been developed by several authors who highlight the necessity of a conceptual revision to entail a wider spectrum of political activities (Norris 2002; Fox 2014). Nevertheless, the risk is to shift from a strict definition of participation, exclusively referred to conventional political engagement, to a vague and too broad definition which entails all beyond voting (Pitti 2018). In the light of this, we decided to start from the definition of political participation offered by Vromen (2003: 82–83), that is ‘acts that can occur, either individually or collectively, that are intrinsically concerned with shaping the society that we want to live in’. To further articulate this definition, on the basis of criteria proposed by Fox (2014), we precise that these acts should be voluntary and lead

to tangible and/or symbolic goals. In addition to this, they should have a deliberate aim. Moreover, the target is limited not only to the state or government but also to other entities or people.

Accordingly, political participation entails a broad array of political activities, from discussing politics to attending political demonstrations, including individual and collective actions both in conventional and unconventional arenas that can be carried out even in the absence of political rights, which is relevant for our analysis. Indeed migrants, for the most part, lack political rights.

This paper uses a quantitative multilevel approach to answer the following *research questions*:

- (Q1) What is the level of political participation of immigrants in Italy?
- (Q2) What are the factors that influence their political participation?

To measure political participation, we focus on two typologies of political participation based on the variables provided by the Survey on *Condition and Social Integration of Foreign Citizens* carried out by the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) in 2011–12.¹ The ‘[Migrant Political Participation](#)’ section of the article—based on existing literature—focuses on political engagement also in terms of factors influencing it. The ‘[Data and Methods](#)’ section explains the data and describes the variables used to define political participation. The ‘[Results](#)’ section presents the results of the multivariate analysis, and the ‘[Discussion and Conclusion](#)’ section discusses the predictors of different forms of migrant political participation and outlines further areas of development and improvement.

Migrant Political Participation

For a long time, the thesis of the political quiescence of migrants was dominant among scholars. This thesis states that migrants are passive, apolitical and characterised by political apathy (Martiniello 2005). Some scholars maintain that this passivity is the inevitable consequence of the (total or partial) absence of political rights in the country of destination that prevents migrants from running for elections or having any form of representation through the right to vote (ibidem). Nonetheless, formal rights are not essential for the activation of migrants in the political arena. There is a consensus that political participation also includes less formal types of participation (Verba et al. 1971; Barnes et al. 1979; Norris 2002; Bauböck et al. 2006; Zukin et al. 2006; Dalton 2008; Morales and Giugni 2011; Zapata-Barrero and Gropas 2012) accessible to migrants (Martiniello 2005; Morales 2011; Moro 2013). Non-citizen migrants engage in making claims to belonging, to rights and to being political through a variety of strategies enacting forms of participation ‘from below’ (Nyers and Rygiel 2012). The mobilisation has been observed and studied even among undocumented migrants

¹ During 2011 and 2012, several political initiatives and elections took place: first, the campaign ‘L’Italia sono anch’io’ (I’m Italy too) that collect around 200,000 signatures to change the Italian law on the acquisition of citizenship and to grant foreigners the right to vote at local elections. Moreover, in 2012, some administrative and regional elections (in Sicily) took place. These events may have favoured interest in politics and direct participation.

(Chimienti 2011). More recent scientific literature shows that ‘unconventional participation [...] has somehow become mainstream politics itself’ (Alteri et al. 2016: 723). We witness a ‘reinvention of politics’ (Beck 1997) with unusual and new approaches to politics (Juris and Pleyers 2009; Alteri et al. 2016) open to migrants.

Even though the thesis of the political quiescence of migrants is obsolete, empirical research highlights that migrants participate in politics less than natives due to several factors at both the individual and structural level² (among others Penninx et al. 2004; Morales and Giugni 2011; Kaldur et al. 2012; Zapata-Barrero et al. 2013). Overall, scientific literature shows that at the individual level, the explanatory factors of migrant political integration (or exclusion) are multiple. In particular, high level of education, language proficiency, high socioeconomic status, high level of social trust, sense of belonging to the destination country and acquisition of citizenship in the country of settlement seem to be positively correlated with political engagement (among others Verba and Nie 1972, Fennema and Tillie 1999; Bauböck et al. 2006; Bloemraad 2006; Gallego 2008; Morales and Giugni 2011; Zapata-Barrero and Gropas 2012; Zapata-Barrero et al. 2013; Ambrosini et al. 2016; Pilati 2018).³ Another dimension should be considered in relation to political participation, i.e. the family context. Indeed the predisposition to participate in the public sphere is acquired through socialisation, which took place in the pre-adult years (Davies 1965; Verba et al. 1995; de Rooij 2012; Quintelier 2015). During this period, individuals build their political attitude, and this influences their political engagement or disengagement (Oosterhoff et al. 2017). In line with this, in addition to individual characteristics, we analyse the impact of household characteristics in influencing migrant political involvement.

Another crucial point is the analysis of the political participation of EU citizens. Non-naturalised EU citizens have the right to vote and to stand as candidates in both local and European Parliament elections although voter registration is not automatic and requires a one-off registration. They, therefore, enjoy full electoral rights, both active and passive, at the European and municipal level (Tintori 2018). If and to what extent EU citizenship affects migrant political involvement in Italy is a topic that requires further research. Previous evidence on registration to vote at the European or the municipal level is limited to a restricted number of nationalities and geographic coverage. Results suggest overall low participation in elections, although with some differences across nationalities and territories (ibidem). If difficulties in the registration to vote and lack of communication emerge as practical obstacles experienced by EU citizens (Berti et al. 2017), our analysis offers a broader insight on the issue because we

² As generally recognised, in addition to individual variables, institutional structures, integration models, policy philosophies and normative frameworks shape immigrants’ chances of political inclusion in the host country (Brubaker 1992). In Europe, the influence of the political opportunity structure (POS) on migrant integration and participation has been extensively studied (Penninx and Martiniello 2007; Penninx 2009; Morales and Giugni 2011; Cinalli and Giugni 2011; Alba and Foner 2015; Cinalli and Giugni 2016). It has also received considerable attention in the Italian context (see for example Cinalli et al. 2010; Pilati 2010a). Even though recognising the role and the influence of the political opportunity structure, it will not be the focus of the present article.

³ The role of social capital in fostering migrant political participation has been extensively studied (Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1988; Portes 1998; Putnam 1993, 2000): membership in associations can foster the political participation of migrants (Fennema and Tillie 1999; Tillie 2004; Jacobs and Tillie 2004; Togeby 2004; Pilati 2012; Pilati and Morales 2016).

adopt a definition of political participation that implies activities that are open to everyone and free from bureaucratic hurdles.

Data and Methods

Data

Data for this study came from the survey on ‘Condition and Integration of Foreign Citizens’ (*Condizione e integrazione sociale dei cittadini stranieri*; CIFIC). The Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) carried out this survey in 2011–12 as a part of the National Statistical Program (IST–02066) that defines the surveys considered necessary to understand the social, economic and demographic development of the country. The CIFIC sample is composed of men and women with a foreign background living in the 12,000 families randomly sampled from the civil registry in 833 municipalities of different demographic size (ISTAT 2014a). To carry out the current study, we selected from the original sample, foreign-born migrants aged 18 and over. A total of 16,056 individuals and 9526 families compose our final sample.

Methods

The CIFIC includes eight variables (see Table 1) suited to examine migrant political participation. If on the one hand, these variables do not account for all the political repertoires, especially the most recent and unconventional ones, at the same time they offer a spectrum of political activities accessible to migrants which are not limited to conventional forms of political engagement. Moreover, the selected eight items are relevant to previous literature (see among others, Ivaldi et al. 2017).

Discussing politics refers to the extent to which a person kept him or herself informed and contributed to the public discussion. It also includes e-participation such as participation in online political discussions through forums, social media and blogs (new internet-based activism). Information and communication technology (ICT) has been considered as a new opportunity for political participation even if there are different views as to whether all social groups (natives, migrants, minorities) can equally benefit from the use of the Internet and ICT (Ferdinand 2000; Norris 2001;

Table 1 Variables used to define political participation

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1. *Discussing politics* more than once a week in the last 12 months
 2. *Seeking information on Italian politics* at least once a week in the last 12 months
 3. *Listening to political debates* in the last 12 months
 4. *Volunteering for a political party* in the last 12 months
 5. *Volunteering for a trade union* in the last 12 months
 6. *Taking part in political meetings* in the last 12 months
 7. *Taking part in political demonstrations* in the last 12 months
 8. *Giving money to a political party* in the last 12 months
-

Brundidge and Rice 2009; Mossberger 2009; Min 2010; Spaiser 2012; Alietti et al. 2015). Indeed, it is generally suggested that socioeconomically disadvantaged groups are increasingly left behind. Nonetheless, there are also studies which highlight that Internet use may have a central role in empowering migrants (Elias and Lemish 2008).

Seeking information on Italian politics and listening to political debates—in some cases referred to as ‘invisible’ political participation (ISTAT 2016)—are indicators of the level of interest in politics and current affairs.

Volunteering for a political party represents, instead, one of the conventional forms of participation open to migrants. Even at a time where there is a decline in formal participation and a shift to non-electoral forms of participation, it is still an essential element to be taken into consideration.⁴

Since the 1990s, trade unions in Italy have played a significant role in migration-related issues (Kosic 2013; Ambrosini et al. 2016). *Migrant membership to trade unions* may be analysed from different perspectives: migration studies mainly focus on the influence of contextual factors on migrant unionisations, such as trade union strategies in promoting or hindering migrant membership. Conversely, industrial relation studies address the internal organisation of trade unions and focus on industrial relation systems (Marino 2012). In general, individual characteristics influence migrant unionisation (gender, age, language proficiency, attitudes and behaviours) (Marcaletti and Riniolo 2015). Structural characteristics of trade unions and the receiving society regarding trade union policies and strategies, trade union openness, social climate, national identity and ideology, political discourse, the legal and political framework and orientations are also crucial (Penninx and Roosblad 2000; Marino 2012). More generally, the literature suggests reading data related to migrant unionisation keeping in mind all these elements and specifically that national structural characteristics of trade unions influence participation more than individual characteristics of migrants themselves (Penninx 2011).

Moreover, *attending political meetings and/or political demonstrations* are an expression of active involvement and high awareness of issues of social relevance. The last indicator, *giving money to a political party* expresses a remarkable involvement in the objectives and mission of a political party.

To perform our analysis, we considered individuals declaring to have carried out at least one activity from point one to three as ‘softly political participants’ (soft political participation). These activities—that show a general interest in politics—should be connected to the so-called low-cost activities (de Rooij 2012). Individuals declaring to have carried out at least an activity from point four to eight—which are the most time-consuming acts—are defined as ‘actively engaged political participants’ (strong political participation). Finally, we define migrants who do not carry out any of the previous activities as ‘disengaged’.

⁴ Literature shows that participation in a political party, like that in a trade union, is strongly influenced by the political opportunity structure (POS) and by the openness or closure of the receiving structure (Penninx and Roosblad 2000). This point should be kept in mind when analysing this indicator: for example, if migrants score lower levels of participation in a political party than natives, this may not be exclusively due to their characteristics but to the capacity of political parties for attracting and including migrants.

Descriptive Analysis

We provide the proportion of active political individuals according to each definition (soft political participation, strong political participation, disengagement). To assess the association between the two forms of participation we calculate the Yule's Q index.

This index varies between $Q = -1$ and $Q = +1$. If Q is 1 or -1 , there is a perfect association between the events. A positive Q points to a positive correlation: if a person is a soft political participant, he or she is also likely to be a strong political participant. By contrast, a negative Q points to a negative correlation: if a person is not a soft political participant, he or she is also not likely to be a strong political participant. If Q is 0, there is no association between the two forms of political participation.

Multilevel Analysis

The CIFIC is a household survey. As highlighted above, the family is often considered the primary socialisation context for young people with regard to political attitudes and behaviours whether this process happens directly or indirectly (Davies 1965; Quintelier 2015). Moreover, individuals from the same family share the same country of origin background. Accordingly, the odds of experiencing the outcome of interest are not independent because individuals from the same family share common exposures to background characteristics. Single-level logistic regression requires the assumption of independence of the observations, conditional on the explanatory variables and uncorrelated residual errors. Data such as those presented in this study, where 16,056 individuals (level 1) are nested in 9526 households (level 2), do not usually meet this assumption. We, therefore, use a generalised linear mixed model approach to model political participation, fitting a two-level random intercept logistic regression that accounts for the non-independence of observations within households (Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal 2012). From the multilevel analysis, it is possible to estimate the variance in the incidence of political participation between the households. This variance represents the unexplained variation that remains after accounting for the factors included in the model.

We ran three models, each with a different definition of political engagement.

The general model specifies as follows:

$$\text{logit} \left\{ \Pr(y_{ij} = 1 | x_{ij}, \zeta_j) \right\} = \beta_1 + \beta_2 x_{2j} + \dots + \beta_k x_{kj} + \zeta_j$$

where $\Pr(y_{ij} = 1 | x_{ij}, \zeta_j)$ is the probability of being politically active (according to each model definition) for the i th individual in the j th household. x_{ij} is a vector of covariates corresponding to the i th individual in the j th household. The random intercepts $\zeta_j \sim (N, \psi)$ are assumed to be independent and identically distributed across households j and independent of the covariates x_{ij} . Given ζ_j and x_{ij} , the responses y_{ij} for the i th individual in the j th clusters are independently Bernoulli distributed.

Measures

According to the existing literature, we consider *education, job participation, migration experience, citizenship and attitudes toward citizenship, cultural consumption, Italian knowledge, behaviours and belief* as individual relevant predictors of political participation. We also considered *household composition and type, place of residence and house characteristics* (as a proxy of economic conditions) relevant predictors of political participation at the aggregated level.

Level 1 Variables

Socioeconomic Characteristics

- Gender: male, female (reference)
- Age (in completed years; numeric)
- Education: no title, primary school, junior high school, high school, university (bachelor's degree, master's degree, master's program, doctorate; reference)
- Geographical area of birth: European Union (reference), other European countries, Northern Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia, other Asian countries, Latin America, North America and Oceania

Migration Experience

- Year of the beginning of the current sojourn (numeric)
- The interviewee holds at least a working position in Italy since migration: yes; no (reference)
- The interviewee chose Italy as his/her destination for migration because he/she loved the language, the lifestyle or because he/she has Italian origin: yes; no, the interviewee chose Italy for other reasons (reference)

Citizenship and Attitudes Toward Citizenship

- The interviewee acquired Italian citizenship: yes; no (reference)
- The interviewee thinks that it is important to acquire Italian citizenship: yes; no (reference)

Cultural Consumption and Communication Skills

- Difficulty in understanding what an Italian mother tongue says: high (reference); moderate; limited; no difficulty
- The interviewee read at least a book (any type) in the last 12 months: yes, mainly in Italian; yes, mainly in another language; no (reference)

Behaviours and Belief

- The interviewee believes that most people are trustworthy: yes; no (reference)
- Religion: catholic; other religion or no religion (reference)
- The interviewee usually attends a religious service (any religion) at least once a week: yes; no (reference)

Level 2 Variables

Household Characteristics

- Number of household members
- Type of household: one-person household, couple without children, couple with children (reference), male single parent; female single parent
- Presence of a native Italian living in the household: yes; no (reference)
- The household resides in: Northwestern Italy (reference), Northeastern Italy, Central Italy; Southern Italy and islands

Economic Condition of the Household

- Homeownership: yes; no (reference)
- Poor housing conditions or overcrowding: yes; no (reference)

Results

Descriptive Results

According to our definition, 42.3% of the interviewees are ‘softly engaged political participants’, 3.4% are ‘actively engaged political participants’, and 57.2% are ‘disengaged’.⁵ Table 2 summarises the characteristics of the sample by type of participation.

The two forms of political participation are statistically associated: Yule’s Q of association has a value of 0.76 out of a maximum of 1, indicating a fairly strong positive relationship.

A total of 83.8% actively engaged political participants are also involved in ‘soft political participation’. However, the existence of a non-negligible proportion of actively engaged participants that are not involved in soft political participation (16.2%) shows that the two forms of participation are not nested in a scale of growing involvement in politics. On the other side, only 6.6% of softly engaged political participants are also actively engaged participants. Finally, the share of non-participants (not actively engaged or softly engaged political participants) is 57.2%,

⁵ The proportion of those who declare to be engaged in at least one form of political participation (42.8%) is not the sum the two form of participation because 2.8% of migrants in our sample declare to be involved in both forms of political participation (strong and soft political participation).

Table 2 Sample characteristics by type of political participation

| | All sample | Actively engaged | Softly engaged | Disengaged |
|--|------------|------------------|----------------|------------|
| % male | 45.1 | 61.8 | 50.9 | 61.8 |
| Mean age | 38.5 | 39.7 | 40.0 | 37.4 |
| % with no education | 7.9 | 6.5 | 4.3 | 10.5 |
| % with primary education | 5.5 | 3.2 | 3.7 | 6.8 |
| % with lower secondary education | 28.1 | 21.1 | 22.9 | 31.9 |
| % with higher secondary education | 46.6 | 46.4 | 51.6 | 42.9 |
| % with university education | 22.8 | 22.8 | 17.5 | 7.8 |
| % living with an Italian native | 21.0 | 25.0 | 27.1 | 16.5 |
| % that have held a job in Italy | 78.7 | 86.9 | 84.4 | 74.3 |
| % with Italian citizenship | 4.8 | 5.2 | 6.6 | 4.8 |
| Median year of the beginning of the current sojourn | 2001 | 1998 | 2000 | 2002 |
| % living in Northwestern Italy | 35.0 | 30.4 | 37.3 | 33.4 |
| % living in Northeastern Italy | 26.7 | 20.0 | 27.5 | 26.2 |
| % living in Central Italy | 24.3 | 37.4 | 25.5 | 23.31 |
| % living in Southern Italy/islands | 14.0 | 12.0 | 9.8 | 17.1 |
| Italy was the interviewee's preferred destination for migration | 15.5 | 21.7 | 17.9 | 13.5 |
| The interviewee read at least a book in the last 12 months, mainly in Italian | 14.4 | 16.5 | 16.0 | 12.9 |
| The interviewee read at least a book in the last 12 months, mainly in another language | 22.0 | 36.6 | 31.6 | 14.8 |
| The interviewee has a good level of comprehension of the Italian language | 87.3 | 93.4 | 94.9 | 81.7 |
| Religion: catholic | 25.5 | 29.5 | 27.8 | 23.7 |
| The interviewee attends a religious service (any religion) at least once a week | 25.8 | 21.7 | 24.3 | 26.9 |
| The interviewee believes that most people are trustworthy | 28.0 | 31.2 | 32.2 | 24.9 |
| The interviewee thinks that it is important to acquire Italian citizenship | 63.7 | 64.5 | 66.7 | 61.4 |
| % born in UE member states | 30.7 | 29.9 | 33.4 | 28.7 |
| % born in other European countries | 24.1 | 21.8 | 26.3 | 22.5 |
| % born in Northern African countries | 14.1 | 18.5 | 13.9 | 14.2 |
| % born in sub-Saharan African countries | 6.2 | 10.9 | 6.3 | 6.1 |
| % born Eastern Asian countries | 7.0 | 4.0 | 3.5 | 9.7 |
| % born in other Asian countries | 8.4 | 5.5 | 5.8 | 10.4 |
| % born in Latin American countries | 8.8 | 7.8 | 10.0 | 7.9 |
| % born in Northern American countries and Oceania | 0.7 | 1.5 | 0.9 | 0.5 |
| % by type of household: one-person household | 27.0 | 33.7 | 25.2 | 25.1 |
| % by type of household: couple without children | 51.7 | 46.5 | 53.2 | 51.7 |
| % by type of household: couple with children | 13.6 | 12.5 | 14.7 | 13.6 |
| % by type of household: male single parent | 1.4 | 1.6 | 1.0 | 1.4 |
| % by type of household: female single parent | 6.3 | 5.7 | 5.6 | 6.3 |
| % house owners | 27.8 | 34.1 | 34.0 | 23.3 |
| % living in poor housing conditions or overcrowding | 31.4 | 39.2 | 27.9 | 33.8 |

Source: authors' elaborations on CIFIC ISTAT data

showing that most migrants are not involved in politics while only 2.8% is involved in both participation forms (strong and soft political participation).

Multivariate Analysis

For all models, the test of the multilevel model fit against the simple logistic model suggests that it would be a mistake to ignore the multilevel nature of the data (i.e. assume cases were uncorrelated within households) confirming our hypothesis on the significant role of the family background in shaping political participation.

Model 1 indicates factors related to actively engaged political participation. The overall degree of dependence in the occurrence of strong political participation among migrants from the household (conditional intrahousehold correlation) for different individuals i and i' in the same household j is 0.666.

Results from Model 1 (Table 3) show that, fixed against all other characteristics, strong political participation is most common among men. The highly educated and those belonging to earlier cohorts of arrival in Italy show a higher occurrence of strong political participation. Stronger political participation is also observed among sub-Saharan African compared with other groups. Pairwise comparisons of marginal linear predictions (Table 3) show that strong political participation is significantly higher among sub-Saharan African than any other groups with the only exception of migrants born in Northern Africa. The latter are also significantly more politically active than most other groups.

Migrants reading books are also significantly more likely to be actively engaged political participants. Interestingly, migrants who acquired Italian citizenship and EU citizens, despite enjoying respectively full and partial political rights, are not significantly more strongly politically engaged than other migrants. This result is consistent with results from a recent study based on a natural experiment carried out in Switzerland (Hainmueller et al. 2015) that shows that, despite an overall positive effect of naturalisation on political participation, the impact in enhancing strong political participation was limited.

Variables related to household characteristics show that the members of large households are less likely to be strong political participants. On the contrary, the presence of a native Italian born has a positive influence on strong political participation along with bad housing conditions and residence in Central Italy.

Model 2 analyses the drivers of soft political participation (Table 3). The intrahousehold correlation for Model 2 is 0.564.

According to Model 2, soft political participation is strongly related to gender (being a man) and grows with age, education and participation to the job market.

Cohabitation with an Italian native, naturalisation and importance attached to this achievement, more years since migration, attachment to Italy before migration and a good level of comprehension of the Italian language—all indicators usually related to integration—are also positively related to soft political participation. Reading of books, along with an overall sense of trust towards other people, are further elements enhancing soft political participation. Interestingly, EU citizens are not more likely to be engaged in soft political participation than other migrants, while Asian migrants are significantly less engaged in soft political participation than other migrants.

Table 3 Subject-specific odds ratios from multilevel random intercept logistic regression analyses assessing associations between selected characteristics and political participation by type (Models 1, 2 and 3)

| Level 1 | | Model 1 Strong political participation | | Model 2 Soft political participation | | Model 3 Disengagement | |
|---|-------------------|--|----------|--|----------|--------------------------|----------|
| | | OR | SE | OR | SE | OR | SE |
| Gender | Male | 1 | (ref.) | 1 | (ref.) | 1 | (ref.) |
| | Female | 0.321*** | (0.0482) | 0.297*** | (0.0188) | 3.304*** | (0.206) |
| Age | | 1.000 | (0.007) | 1.030*** | (0.003) | 0.972*** | (0.003) |
| | Education | | | | | 6.465*** | (0.989) |
| Education | No education | 0.272*** | (0.0942) | 0.152*** | (0.0235) | 3.857*** | (0.597) |
| | Primary | 0.345*** | (0.123) | 0.253*** | (0.0397) | 2.961*** | (0.323) |
| | Jun. high school | 0.407*** | (0.0940) | 0.332*** | (0.0366) | 1.929*** | (0.189) |
| | High school | 0.549*** | (0.107) | 0.516*** | (0.0510) | 1 | (ref.) |
| | University | 1 | (ref.) | 1 | (ref.) | 1 | (ref.) |
| The interviewee holds at least a working position in Italy | Yes | 1 | (ref.) | 1 | (ref.) | 1 | (ref.) |
| | No | 0.957 | (0.180) | 0.746*** | (0.0577) | 1.350*** | (0.103) |
| Citizenship | Naturalised | 1 | (ref.) | 1 | (ref.) | 1 | (ref.) |
| | Foreign citizen | 1.284 | (0.458) | 0.655* | (0.114) | 1.504* | (0.259) |
| Year of the beginning of the current sojourn | | 0.964*** | (0.0104) | 0.980*** | (0.005) | 1.021*** | (0.005) |
| | | | | | | | |
| The int. chose for language, the lifestyle/Ital. origin | No | 1 | (ref.) | 1 | (ref.) | 1 | (ref.) |
| | Yes | 1.309 | (0.224) | 1.318*** | (0.106) | 0.737*** | (0.0588) |
| Difficulty in understanding what an Italian mother tongue says | High | 1 | (ref.) | 1 | (ref.) | 1 | (ref.) |
| | Moderate | 0.779 | (0.444) | 1.134 | (0.247) | 0.887 | (0.189) |
| | Limited | 1.030 | (0.534) | 2.234*** | (0.454) | 0.457*** | (0.0912) |
| | No difficulties | 1.485 | (0.768) | 4.853*** | - 1.003 | 0.219*** | (0.0443) |
| Religion | Other/no religion | 1 | (ref.) | 1 | (ref.) | 1 | (ref.) |
| | Catholic | 1.231 | (0.220) | 1.020 | (0.0844) | 0.990 | (0.0808) |
| | No | 1 | (ref.) | 1 | (ref.) | 1 | (ref.) |

Table 3 (continued)

| | Model 1 Strong political participation | | Model 2 Soft political participation | | Model 3 Disengagement | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|--------------------------|--|----------|--------------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| | OR | SE | OR | SE | OR | SE | | |
| Level 2 | The interviewee attends a religious service once a week | Yes | 0.778 | (0.130) | 1.029 | (0.0753) | 0.970 | (0.0700) |
| | The interviewee believes that most people are trustworthy | Yes | 1 | (ref.) | 1 | (ref.) | 1 | (ref.) |
| | | No | 1.068 | (0.162) | 0.781*** | (0.0528) | 1.271*** | (0.0849) |
| | It is important to acquire Italian citizenship | Yes | 1 | (ref.) | 1 | (ref.) | 1 | (ref.) |
| | | No | 0.817 | (0.123) | 0.665*** | (0.0439) | 1.499*** | (0.0976) |
| | The interviewee read at least a book (any type) in the last 12 months | No | 1 | (ref.) | 1 | (ref.) | 1 | (ref.) |
| | | In another lang. | 1.995*** | (0.413) | 2.207*** | (0.201) | 0.460*** | (0.0414) |
| | Geographical area of birth | In Italian | 3.641*** | (0.633) | 3.015*** | (0.240) | 0.333*** | (0.0262) |
| | | European Union | 1 | (ref.) | 1 | (ref.) | 1 | (ref.) |
| | Other European Countries | Other European Countries | 1.021 | (0.202) | 1.182 | (0.103) | 0.834* | (0.0720) |
| | | Northern Africa | 1.713* | (0.435) | 0.972 | (0.115) | 1.025 | (0.120) |
| | Sub-Saharan Africa | Sub-Saharan Africa | 3.149*** | (0.934) | 0.937 | (0.146) | 0.966 | (0.148) |
| | | Other Asian countries | 0.934 | (0.309) | 0.481*** | (0.0713) | 2.024*** | (0.295) |
| | East Asia | East Asia | 0.552 | (0.224) | 0.266*** | (0.0460) | 3.701*** | (0.629) |
| | | Latin America | 1.348 | (0.970) | 0.839 | (0.356) | 1.225 | (0.514) |
| | N. America/Oceania | N. America/Oceania | 1.072 | (0.323) | 1.059 | (0.149) | 0.913 | (0.127) |
| | | 0.842* | (0.0592) | 0.889*** | (0.0274) | 1.127*** | (0.0342) | |
| Number of household members | One-person | 1.187 | (0.279) | 0.613*** | (0.0634) | 1.574*** | (0.160) | |
| | Couple with children | 1 | (ref.) | 1 | (ref.) | 1 | (ref.) | |
| | Couple, no children | 0.756 | (0.182) | 0.706*** | (0.0731) | 1.407*** | (0.144) | |
| | Male single parent | 0.913 | (0.537) | 0.396** | (0.115) | 2.377*** | (0.676) | |
| | Female single parent | 0.875 | (0.273) | 0.850 | (0.112) | 1.187 | (0.154) | |
| | Presence of a native in the Household | No | 1 | (ref.) | 1 | (ref.) | 1 | (ref.) |

Table 3 (continued)

| | | Model 1 Strong political participation | | Model 2 Soft political participation | | Model 3 Disengagement | |
|---|------------------------|--|---------|--|----------|--------------------------|----------|
| | | OR | SE | OR | SE | OR | SE |
| The household resides in | Yes | 1.719** | (0.359) | 1.807*** | (0.178) | 0.538*** | (0.0524) |
| | Northwestern Italy | 1 | (ref.) | 1 | (ref.) | 1 | (ref.) |
| | Northeastern Italy | 0.807 | (0.202) | 0.927 | (0.102) | 1.055 | (0.114) |
| | Central Italy | 2.141** | (0.500) | 0.963 | (0.107) | 0.984 | (0.108) |
| Homeownership | Southern Italy/islands | 1.152 | (0.242) | 0.502*** | (0.0482) | 1.933*** | (0.183) |
| | No | 1 | (ref.) | 1 | (ref.) | 1 | (ref.) |
| Poor housing conditions or overcrowding | Yes | 1.431 | (0.273) | 1.485*** | (0.135) | 0.689*** | (0.0617) |
| | No | 1 | (ref.) | 1 | (ref.) | 1 | (ref.) |
| | Yes | 1.623** | (0.259) | 0.917 | (0.0679) | 1.062 | (0.0774) |
| Rho | | 0.666 ^{ooo} | | 0.564 ^{ooo} | | 0.555 ^{ooo} | |
| Number of observations | | 16,056 | | 16,056 | | 16,056 | |
| Number of groups | | 9526 | | 9526 | | 9526 | |
| AIC | | 4,082.763 | | 17,645.58 | | 17,766.81 | |

* $p \leq 0.05$ ** $p \leq 0.01$ *** $p \leq 0.001$ Likelihood-ratio test of $\rho = 0$ ^o $p \leq 0.05$ ^{oo} $p \leq 0.01$ ^{ooo} $p \leq 0.001$

Source: authors' elaborations on CIFIC ISTAT data

Table 4 Pairwise comparisons of subject-specific odds ratios from multilevel random intercept logistic regression (Models 1 and 2). The geographical area of birth by type of political participation

| | Strong political participation (Model 1) | | Soft political participation (Model 2) | |
|---|--|-----|--|-----|
| East Asia vs Northern Africa | 0.322 | * | 0.273 | *** |
| East Asia vs European Union | 0.552 | | 0.266 | *** |
| East Asia vs other Asian countries | 0.591 | | 0.552 | ** |
| East Asia vs other European countries | 0.541 | | 0.225 | *** |
| East Asia vs sub-Saharan Africa | 0.175 | *** | 0.284 | *** |
| Latin America vs East Asia | 1.941 | | 3.987 | *** |
| Latin America vs North America/Oceania | 0.795 | | 1.263 | |
| Latin America vs Northern Africa | 0.626 | | 1.090 | |
| Latin America vs other Asian countries | 1.147 | | 2.201 | *** |
| Latin America vs other European countries | 1.072 | | 1.059 | |
| Latin America vs other European countries | 1.050 | | 0.896 | * |
| Latin America vs sub-Saharan Africa | 0.340 | ** | 1.131 | |
| North America/Oceania vs East Asia | 2.442 | | 3.156 | * |
| North America/Oceania vs European Union | 1.348 | | 0.839 | |
| North America/Oceania vs Northern Africa | 0.787 | | 0.862 | |
| North America/Oceania vs other Asian countries | 1.443 | | 1.742 | |
| North America/Oceania vs other European countries | 1.321 | | 0.710 | * |
| North America/Oceania vs sub-Saharan Africa | 0.428 | | 0.895 | |
| Northern Africa vs European Union | 1.713 | * | 0.972 | |
| Northern Africa vs other European countries | 1.678 | * | 0.823 | |
| Other Asian countries vs European Union | 0.934 | | 0.481 | *** |
| Other Asian countries vs Northern Africa | 0.545 | | 0.495 | *** |
| Other Asian countries vs other European countries | 0.915 | | 0.407 | *** |
| Other Asian countries vs sub-Saharan Africa | 0.297 | ** | 0.514 | *** |
| Other Europe vs European Union | 1.021 | | 1.182 | |
| Sub-Saharan Africa vs European Union | 3.149 | *** | 0.937 | |
| Sub-Saharan Africa vs Northern Africa | 1.838 | | 0.963 | |
| Sub-Saharan Africa vs other European countries | 3.084 | *** | 0.793 | |

* $p \leq 0.05$ ** $p \leq 0.01$ *** $p \leq 0.001$

The analysis of variables related to household characteristics shows the negative effect of residence in Southern Italy or the islands, and in a large household on soft political participation. On the contrary, aspects like the presence of a native Italian born and homeownership have a positive influence on soft political participation. The analysis by type of household highlights that members of families of couples with children are more likely to be soft political participants than members of other household types but female single-parent household members. Interestingly, pairwise

comparisons of marginal linear predictions show that the latter are significantly more likely to be soft political participants than members of male single-parent households. Finally, Model 3 assesses the predictors of political disengagement that are largely driven by the most diffused form of participation. Being a woman, having low education and shorter length of stay in Italy, residing in Southern Italy or the islands, having foreign citizenship and no interest in naturalisation along with low trust in other persons are factors correlated to political disengagement.

Members of large households, living in a family without Italian natives with no ownership of their house, are less likely to show any form of political engagement.

Discussion and Conclusion

In Italy, the political incorporation of migrants is far from being reached. Most migrants in our sample (57.2%) are completely inactive in the political field (both regarding interest in politics and practices). Instead, among Italian natives—according to data collected in 2013—those who are not interested in politics neither take part in political activities in its various direct forms are 17.7% of the entire Italian population (aged 14 and over) (ISTAT 2014b). The difference between the percentages of natives and migrants actively engaged—despite not directly comparable—is striking. The absence of a large part of migrants from the political scene poses a significant challenge to our democracy, especially at a time where migration is so controversial. Foreign-born citizens risk being—not only in the general collective image but also in practice—passive recipients of measures affecting their lives, without the possibility to have a stake in these issues. Among those who declare their involvement in some form of political participation (42.8%), the actively engaged do not reach 8%. This percentage is quite low and highlights that only a small minority actively participate in the political field. The low participation of migrants in Italy—together with their irrelevant role in the policymaking process as shown by several studies—is in line with the migrant political disengagement in different European countries (Maxwell 2010; de Rooij 2012; Pilati 2018).

Political disengagement is related to gender (being a woman), education (low education) and age (being young). These are also crucial variables for Italian natives (ISTAT 2014b). Unsurprisingly, the lack of proficiency in the Italian language and lower length of stay discourage migrant political involvement. These findings suggest a positive relationship between integration and political incorporation, even if neither (integration and political incorporation) cannot be considered linear processes.⁶

Some aspects are common to both forms of participation: being male and having a high level of education and living in a small household are strong predictors of migrant engagement. Cultural consumption, measured in terms of the number of books read, is also a strong determinant of migrant political involvement.

Moreover, the household proves to be the key environment of socialisation. Data shows that the assumption of conditional independence among patterns of political participation of same household members is not realistic. Individuals living in the same

⁶ Indeed, literature highlights that political integration is not a progressive process, but it shows a maximum of political involvement of second generations and a decrease for third-generations (Chui et al. 1991).

household are significantly more similar in their forms of political participation than non-household members.

In addition to these variables, the two forms of political engagement (strong and soft political participation) have different predictors. In line with this, it is worth analysing them separately.

Strong political participation is not related to age. The link with integration is not straightforward: if there is a positive relationship with the length of stay, other key aspects like Italian language fluency, naturalisation and importance given to this achievement, or attachment to Italy before migration are not relevant in determining strong political participation. Moreover, the positive relationship between this type of participation and bad housing conditions suggests that this type of participation may be the reaction to bad economic conditions and/or working conditions. The latter may encourage activism in particular in the form of contacts with trade unions.

Soft political participation grows with age and is mostly related to attachment to Italy before migration and to indicators of integration and wealth both at the individual level (such as the level of comprehension of Italian language and length of stay in Italy) and at the household level (homeownership, cohabitation with an Italian native, living in a couple with children). Trust in other people is also influencing soft political participation suggesting that also among migrants we can observe a strong individual-level relationship between interpersonal trust and democratic participation observed among natives by Almond and Verba (1963) already in the 1960s.

The differences in terms of broad groups of countries of birth also suggest that the two forms of participation apply to different communities. African-born migrants are significantly more involved in strong participation compared with other migrants. At the same time, Asian migrants are less likely to engage in soft political participation.

Our model shows that Italian citizenship is a significant predictor of soft political engagement, consistently with evidence from the USA, Canada and Switzerland (Bloemraad 2006; Hainmueller et al. 2015).

Our data suggest some reflections about the political integration of EU citizens. It shows that EU citizens' political participation is not significantly different from extra EU migrants even if EU citizenship grants higher rights of formal participation (e.g. voting at local and EU elections). More of it, when it comes to strong political participation, it is significantly lower than levels observed among African migrants. At this point, two observations seem to be crucial and new in literature: the assignment of formal rights, as already stated, is not a pre-condition for political participation (and in this case is not even a determinant of participation). Second, this may suggest a lack of success of the EU as a supranational entity in enhancing political participation of members outside their countries of origin, a hypothesis that needs further in-depth analysis. Unfortunately, the survey did not collect information about voting in previous elections for naturalised Italian citizens and EU citizens. This point emerges as a limitation to our analysis of the political participation of these two subpopulations.

Another relevant finding regards the role of the territory. The two forms of participation seem to adjust to natives' behaviours in line with previous studies that highlight to what extent migrants also build their political attitudes and behaviours in the contexts in which they live (Voicu and Tufiş 2017). The relationship found with territorial patterns observed among natives and cohabitations suggests that soft political participation spreads with positive contacts with natives that engage in soft political

participation. When it comes to soft political participation, migrants settled in the south are less interested in politics, as are natives from the south (ISTAT 2014b). At the same time, the possibility to access a higher number of events (e.g. political demonstrations and meetings) due to proximity to the capital is crucial to enhance strong political participation.

As migrant political participation is critical for advanced societies, our paper provides useful evidence to support policies aimed at enhancing participation. First, language barriers should necessarily be overcome: emphasis on language integration is a necessary prerequisite. Second, integration seems to be positively related to overall interest in politics, while direct participation is also driven by reaction to bad living/economic conditions.

Finally, the gap between men and women in political participation suggests the need for a gendered approach in the analysis of migrants' political participation, supporting female participation and activism in emigration.

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