An apathetic generation?
Cohorts' patterns of political participation in Italy

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Abstract

This article assesses the patterns of political participation of different cohorts in two forms of conventional political participation, attending political parties meetings and donating money to political parties, and in two forms of unconventional political participation, attending meetings of environmental, peace and civil rights associations and attending demonstrations, in Italy. To test the claim that the younger cohorts are less politically involved the article uses Bayesian cross-classified mixed models and repeated survey data collected by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) between 1993 and 2012. It is found that the conventional forms of participation are more widespread among "baby-boomers" than among the younger cohorts. Conversely, unconventional forms are increasingly popular in the cohorts born after the 1950s, in particular the more recent ones. The results show that the idea of the Italian younger cohorts as being apathetic and detached from the political sphere may be incorrect.

Keywords: Conventional and unconventional participation; Age-period-cohort analysis; Cross-classified logistic mixed models; Bayesian modeling; Youth; Italy.

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1 Introduction

The patterns of political participation are central to evaluate the health and the quality of democracies (Morlino 2011). For this reason, several scholars have raised concerns about the declining trends in participation in electoral and conventional politics arguing that democracies are "at risk" (Macedo 2005) and that the "fabric" of societies is getting loose (Putnam 2000). Furthermore, scholars underline that a strikingly political disengagement can be found in the younger generations. They are described as "disaffected", "disillusioned", "alienated" or "apathetic" with no interest in the public sphere and its processes (Norris 2003). But, *is this really true?* Other scholars have questioned this "pessimistic" view arguing that the younger cohorts are not detached from politics but, rather, engage in it differently than the older cohorts. The younger generations use a different *repertoire* of action, more oriented towards extra-parliamentary activities rather than towards conventional ones (Dalton 2009). Therefore, this article aims at exploring the participation patterns of different cohorts in Italy in order to understand whether or not the younger cohorts are actually disengaged from politics.

Italy has been often depicted as a democracy with low levels of civic engagement, trust in political institutions, attachment to the political system and satisfaction with democracy (see Sani 1980, Morlino 1998, Maraffi 2007, Raniolo 2007, Memoli 2009, Martini and Quaranta 2014). In brief, the italian political culture has being described as "not quite civic" (Pasquino 2002). Furthermore, the Italian younger cohorts are considered to be marginal, distant from institutions, detached from the political sphere, individualized and interested in the private. In fact, the younger generations have been defined as "invisible" (Diamanti 1999) or "disenchanted" (Bontempi and Pocaterra 2007), given their low levels of interest in the public sphere (De Luca 2007).

However, this picture might not be completely accurate as the literature on youth political participation may have some flaws (O'Toole et al. 2003). To study the patterns of political participation of the younger cohorts it is necessary to differentiate whether the levels of participation depend on the context of political socialization, on the general trends in participation or on the life cycle (Zukin et al. 2006). Indeed, the erosion of mass parties, the downfall of the party system in the 1990s and, in general, the end of cleavage politics have weakened the relationship between institutional politics and citizens in Italy (De Sio 2007, Raniolo 2007), but it has been counterbalanced by an extended *repertoire* of participation (Quaranta 2014).

The analysis is carried out using data collected by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) every year since 1993, on a variety of subjects, including political participation. A harmonization of the several surveys available allows analyzing the trends in participation of four forms of engagement, two conventional and two unconventional, across a period of time which roughly correspond to the so-called "Second Republic", and the patterns of participation across multiple cohorts, in order to test the claim that the younger cohorts do not engage in political participation *vis-a-vis* they engage in it differently. Therefore, the application of Bayesian cross-classified mixed models (Yang and Land 2008, Rasbash and Browne 2008) will allow studying the levels of engagement of the younger cohorts in different forms of participation and will provide the opportunity to analyze the participatory patterns of the future citizens. In fact, understanding

how the younger generations engage in politics could give an indication on the evolution of contemporary democracies (Hooghe and Stolle 2003). Thus, by looking at how the young behave politically it is possible to speculate on how democracies will be shaped, as generational replacement is the "heart" of societal change (see Delli Carpini 1989).

2 Cohorts' differences in political participation

The general claim found in the literature is that the younger cohorts are less involved in politics (O'Toole et al. 2003). The differences in the levels of participation of different cohorts can be linked to the experiences that citizens coming of age have during their formative years. This approach uses the concept of "political generations" (Mannheim 1952) and emphasizes the timing of socialization experiences or events that define a "generation", and which later influence the patterns of political involvement (Jennings and Niemi 1981, Jennings 1987). There are some generations that given their socialization are more likely to engage in politics or have specific patterns of participation. Accordingly, political participation depends on when the individuals are born and, therefore, on the *context* of socialization whose effect persists across time (Zukin et al. 2006).

The strong level of party system institutionalization in Italy in the 1950s and 1960s indicates that they were the main actors linking citizens to the political system. Mass parties, mainly the Communist Party and the Christian-Democratic Party, "dominated" civil society (Morlino 1998). However, by the end of the 1960s the emergence of an independent public opinion, the decline of the collateral organizations and the birth of new social actors and movements weakened the grip parties had on civil society (Farneti 1983). Furthermore, parties were unable to produce adequate reforms to meet the needs of a quickly changing society. In the 1960s the level of politicization and social conflict rose dramatically. Protestors asked for an improvement in their personal conditions and contrasted the dominant values of the time (Tarrow 1989, Della Porta 1996). In these years, the students and the workers' movements went beyond the traditional channels of participation introducing new modes of political action (Ginsborg 2006). Citizens socialized to politics in this period acquired the habit of political participation and, in particular, a strong propensity of engaging in protest activities (Jennings 2002). For this reason they have been defined the "protest generation" (Jennings 1987, Caren et al. 2010) or the "leftist generation" (Mattei et al. 1990). In the 1980s there was a progressive refusal of political engagement (Millefiorini 2002). The cohorts of the 1980s and 1990s, in fact, were labeled as "pragmatic", being they socialized in a post-ideological era (Van Deth and Elff 2000, Grasso 2014). Protest politics became more institutionalized, compromising, and focused on local and specific issues, such as the environment or new rights. The 1990s represent a moment of great change in the Italian political scenario. The end of the Cold War and the corruption scandals of the early 1990s caused a complete restructuring of the party system. During the so-called "Second Republic" and the years of *Berlusconismo* citizens became less ideological and, consequently, more volatile, losing contact with political parties (Morlino 2006, Corbetta and Ceccarini 2009).

According to the "generational approach", the cohorts socialized to politics in an era of strong mass parties are expected to be more involved in conventional politics than

the cohorts born later, which, instead, were socialized to politics in a moment of decline of mass parties and ideologization, or than the previous cohorts, socialized to politics when they came to age right after the II–World War, being them weakly politicized (Giovannini 1988). Similarly, the cohorts born in the 1950s, which were socialized to politics in the 1960s and 1970s, are expected to be more active in unconventional forms of political protest, compared to those born before and after, as they experience a period of social unrest and political mobilization ("Generational" hypothesis).

Cohorts' differences in political participation can also be attributed to the process of value change occurred in the last decades in Western democracies (Inglehart 1990, Inglehart and Welzel 2005). "Modernization theory" argues that some changes occurred in societies led, in turn, to a change in values and culture. The value shift explains the "transition from 'Old Politics' values of economic growth, security, and traditional lifestyles to 'New Politics' values of individual freedom, social equality and quality of life" (Dalton 2008, 82). For this reason, the birth of the "new social movements" has been linked to this value shift (Kriesi 1989). For instance, "the rise of the ecological movement [...] is not simply due to the fact that the environment is in worse conditions than it used to be [...] this development has taken place because the public has become more sensitive to the quality of the environment than it was a generation ago" (Inglehart 1990, 372–373). Indeed, postmaterialist values are connected with the emergence of new forms of political participation in the late 1970s, such as petitions and boycotts, and the decline of participation in conventional forms (Dalton 2008). In brief, there has been a shift in citizenship norms, from "duty-based citizenship" to "engaged citizenship" (Dalton 2009). The process of modernization brings the younger cohorts to be more postmaterialist and, therefore, oriented on self-realization and independence, compared to the previous ones.

According to this theory, conventional participation is expected be less popular as cohorts succeed, while unconventional participation should be more popular in the younger cohorts compared to the previous, independently of the context, as it appears to be a global phenomenon ("Modernization" hypothesis).

3 The trends in political participation

Another change that may have affected the younger generations' patterns of political involvement is the general shift from electoral and conventional politics. The literature shows that forms of participation linked to electoral politics are increasingly less widespread among the public (Dalton 2009). It is found that party identification has decreased over time in advanced democracies (Dalton 2000), as well as turnout turnout (Franklin 2004), and that citizens are less likely to be member of a party, to donate money to a party or to contact a politician (Norris 2003). This is probably because party organizations have become weaker and lost ability to act as mobilizing agencies (Mair and Van Biezen 2001). Similar patterns seem to be valid also for Italy. Electoral participation has declined constantly for any type of elections, showing negative peaks if local and European elections are taken into account (Corbetta and Tuorto 2004, Legnante 2007). As far as party engagement, the percentage of citizens who declare to be members of a political party has dropped substantively in the last twenty years (Raniolo 2007, Facello

and Quaranta 2013). This evidence is also confirmed by data on party identification and party mobilization, which show that both have decreased significantly across time (De Sio 2007). Following these findings, participation in conventional political activities is expected to decline over time ("Party de-mobilization" hypothesis).

Nevertheless, the decreasing trends in conventional participation appear to go along with a growth of the forms of unconventional and not institutionalized participation. Citizens are not abandoning politics, but are changing the way they engage in the public sphere (Inglehart 1990, Dalton 2009). Many different forms of participation have emerged and citizens have changed their participatory styles. Several scholars have shown that more citizens engage in protest politics compared to the past. Those who signed petitions, attended demonstrations, joined boycotts or occupied buildings have doubled since the 1970s (Norris 2002). In general, elite-challenging forms of participation are more common in recent years than in the past (Inglehart and Catterberg 2002). This change has been so marked that some scholars have coined the concept of "social movements society" (Meyer and Tarrow 1998). Studies on Italy also confirm these broad trends. For instance, between the 1980s and 2000s the percentage of citizens who signed petitions, attended demonstrations and occupied buildings has increased relevantly (Quaranta 2014). There has been the diffusion and normalization of protest politics and social movements in Italy. Many actors lost their radical character and integrated into local politics. Several groups focusing on single or specific issues were born, such as environmental issues and civil rights, and gained legitimization in the eye of the larger public (Della Porta 1996). An evidence of this change is the variety of actors involved in social movements and the frequency of protest actions, which are undertaken to make claims and express issues (Facello and Quaranta 2013). Following these accounts, engagement in unconventional participation is expected to increase over time ("Social movements society" hypothesis).

4 Research strategy

4.1 Data and sample

The hypotheses will be tested using a harmonization of the "ISTAT Multipurpose Survey – Aspects of Daily Life". The Italian National Institute of Statistics samples, every year from 1993 to 2012, about 50,000 individuals and collects information on a variety of themes, mainly daily activities, but also on political participation. After list-wise deleting the missing values for the dependent and independent variables, the dataset has 855,881 observations and an average of about 45,000 observations for each of the 19 surveys.[1] This dataset is very suited to study the patterns of political participation as it includes repeated cross-sectional surveys, it has several points in time, it does not suffer from the typical problems of panel data, i.e. panel conditioning and drop-outs (Firebaugh 1997, Glenn 2005), and its large sample size allows producing very precise estimates. However, this survey is not explicitly designed to study political phenomena. Many variables that are often used to predict political participation or to control for confounding factors, such as political preferences, values and attitudes, are not present.

[1] In 2004 the survey was not held. Respondents selected are between 18 and 85 years old.

Nevertheless, it does include information on socio-demographic factors associated with political participation (see Verba et al. 1995, Dalton 2008).

4.2 Dependent variables

This study analyzes four forms of political participation, meant as an "activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action – either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies" (Verba et al. 1995, 38).[2] Two can be classified as conventional, "attending political parties meetings" and "donating money to political parties",[3] while the other two are unconventional forms of political participation, "attending environmental, civil rights and peace associations meetings" and "attending demonstrations".[4] The indicators are all dichotomous.

The first two indicators measure forms of political participation that are closely linked to party politics. Specifically, the first variable measures a form of intense engagement, as it presupposes direct involvement in the activities of a political party and contact with the other participants (see Whiteley and Seyd 2002). Instead, the second indicates a mild form of political parties involvement, as it does not require direct engagement and it often means inactivity. The other two are typical forms of action employed by the so-called "new social movements", yet not exclusively. The first variable measures engagement in activities focusing on new issues, such as the protection of the environment, the opposition to international conflicts, the promotion of peace and the empowerment of new civil rights (Della Porta et al. 2006). By contrast, the second variable measures engagement in a typical form of political protest, used to express opposition and as a form of ritual (Barnes and Kaase 1979, Tarrow 1998).

4.3 Cohorts and periods

Two approaches can be found in the literature to classify respondents in cohorts. The first classifies respondents according to the historical context of their entering in political life, using the concept of "political generations" (see Van Deth and Elff 2000, Clarke et al. 2004, Zukin et al. 2006, Corbetta and Ceccarini 2009, Gallego 2009, Grasso 2014). For instance, respondents are classified according to some generations, e.g. pre- and post-II–World War generations, Baby-boomers, Generation X and Milennials, or according to the governments in office, major political or historical events they witnessed. However, even individuals that are born few years apart may have experienced different political events. In fact, the second approach uses "micro-cohorts" to classify individuals to better disentangle the effects of specific formative political contexts (see Whittier 1997). Furthermore, as a large sample size is available there is no need to bin the cohorts to avoid unreasonably small groups. Therefore, the respondents are classified in 20 micro-cohorts of 5-years starting from those born before 1906 to those born after 1995, to catch subtle differences between the cohorts. The cohorts comprise, on average, 40,000

[2] See Teorell et al. (2007) and Dalton (2008) for typologies or classifications of political participation.

[3] This indicator includes subscriptions and donations.

[4] The questions ask whether the respondent has engaged in each form of participation in the last 12 months prior to the interview.

observations, being the first and the last the smallest with, respectively, about 1,000 and 1,300 observations. As far as the periods are concerned, since 19 surveys are used, each held in a different year, respondents are treated as nested in the 19 years. Figure A1 in the appendix illustrates the cross-classification of respondents in survey years and in cohorts and the sample sizes of each combination.

4.4 Independent variables

To control for compositional effects, a number of independent variables are used. First of all, the models control for the respondent's age, which is binned in 3 categories ("< 36", "$36 - 65$", "> 65").[5] It is argued that political participation is strongly related to the life cycle (Zukin et al. 2006). This means that citizens are more likely to be involved in political activities at certain moments of their lives, given the different opportunities citizens have along the life cycle (Jennings and Niemi 1981). In fact, as life goes on citizens acquire a set of resources, such as cognitive or civic skills, which can be considered as pre-conditions for political engagement (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Furthermore, participation is linked to the transition to the adulthood and acquisition of "adult roles" (Highton and Wolfinger 2001). Conversely, with aging citizens tend to retire from the political sphere (Jennings and Markus 1988). As far as the Italian case is concerned, it has been found that also in this country participation is linked to the life cycle (see Corbetta and Ceccarini 2009). Then, the models control for the respondent's gender. The literature has often underlined that women tend to be less involved in politics, in particular in party and protest activities (Verba et al. 1995, Coffé and Bolzendhal 2010, Marien et al. 2010). Similar patterns appears to be present also in Italy (see Legnante 2007). The level of education in categories ("Elementary school or lower", "Middle school", "High school", "University or higher") is also taken into account. As largely shown in the literature, citizens with higher education have more opportunities to get involved in politics because they have the cognitive resources to elaborate political information, have higher social positions, and are more likely to live in an environment which stimulates and encourages them to engage in politics (Verba et al. 1995, Dalton 2008). The literature on Italy also shows that education is an important predictor of political participation (see Legnante 2007, Biorcio 2003).

The models are also controlled for employment status ("Employed", "Not employed").[6] Employment status is a relevant factor to understand participation in politics. In fact, those who are not employed tend to be in the margins of society and also have lower levels of income, which is considered a pre-condition for engagement. Instead, the employed may acquire political competence in the work place and have more social capital, both conditions favoring political participation (Brady et al. 1995). However, the employed may engage less in unconventional forms of participation. They are potentially risky activities, and this increases the costs of participation (see Beyerlein and Hipp 2006). Occupational status seems to be associated with participation in Italy as well (see Corbetta and Tuorto 2004). Additionally, the models include civil sta-

[5] A similar categorization is used by Caren et al. (2010).

[6] The latter category includes unemployed, homemakers, students and retired respondents.

tus ("Married", "Not married").[7] It is argued that partnership increases the likelihood of participation in conventional politics, as individuals perceive public affairs as more important. Instead, it reduces the probability of getting involved in unconventional participation (Voorpostel and Coffé 2012). Eventually, given the large differences across areas of Italy in terms of political sub-cultures (Diamanti 2003), the models control for the respondent's geographical area of residence ("North-west", "North-east", "Centre", "South", "Islands").[8] Table A1 in the appendix reports the descriptive statistics of all the dependent and independent variables.

4.5 Model

As this study deals with cohorts, periods and age it is important to take into account the "identification problem" (Firebaugh 1997, Glenn 2005). It stems from the fact that either one variable is a function of the other two, as $Cohort = Period - Age$. Several are the proposals to solve this issue, such as leaving one of the three terms outside of the equation; constraining some of the models parameters; including a term for age and using dummies for the period and cohort effects; including terms for age and time and using cohorts dummies; using variables measuring cohorts or periods characteristics as proxies of cohort or period effects. It has been argued that a good solution to the identification problem can be found in the application of multilevel models (Yang and Land 2008). In fact, when dealing with repeated cross-sectional surveys respondents can be considered as nested in both periods and cohorts, yielding to non-hierarchical or cross-classified mixed models (Rasbash and Browne 2008), which are also known as Hierarchical-Age-Period-Cohort models (Yang 2006). Such models help in assessing whether there is heterogeneity in survey responses between periods and cohorts, which are treated as independent and normally distributed random effects, while considering age and other respondents' characteristics as fixed effects. This mixed model specification is argued to be more efficient than fixed effects one, as it simply estimates two parameters that represent the distribution of the errors related to periods and cohorts; it allows leaving some unexplained variances across cohorts and periods, which in in the case of age-period-cohort analysis is a more appropriate assumption; it is preferable when dealing with large sample sizes and the number of cohorts and periods is also relatively large (Yang and Land 2008). Eventually, applying mixed models allows using the property of "exchangeability", by which the group-level parameters are estimated using the information contained in all the groups (i.e. cohorts and periods), not just the information in each group (see Jackman 2009).

The models are estimated using the Bayesian framework as this method provides some advantages over Maximum Likelihood. It allows estimating the uncertainty of all parameters used in the model obtaining more conservative tests; interpreting uncertainties in terms of probability, which is closer to the human reasoning; including prior beliefs in the models; building flexible models applicable to non-hierarchical data struc-

[7] The latter category includes unmarried, separated, divorced and widowed respondents.

[8] North-west includes: *Piemonte, Valle d'Aosta, Liguria, Lombardia*; North-east includes: *Trentino-Alto Adige, Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Emilia Romagna*; Centre includes: *Toscana, Umbria, Marche, Lazio*; South includes: *Abruzzo, Molise, Campania, Puglia, Basilicata, Calabria*; Islands includes: *Sicilia and Sardegna*. The NUTS1 classification is followed.

tures – as in this case, given that respondents are simultaneously nested in both surveys and cohorts (Gelman and Hill 2006, Rasbash and Browne 2008, Jackman 2009).

As the dependent variables are dichotomous, the probability of engaging in each of the forms of participation is estimated using the following model:

$$y_i \sim \text{Bernoulli}(\pi_i) \tag{1}$$

$$\pi_i = logit^{-1}(\eta_i) \tag{2}$$

$$\eta_i = \mu + \mathbf{x_i}\boldsymbol{\beta} + \alpha_t + \delta_c \tag{3}$$

In (1) a generic dichotomous response variable is indicated by y_i, where i indexes the n observations. The response variable follows a Bernoulli distribution and π_i is the probability of success for the i-th observation. Equation (2) links the probability to the linear predictor η_i. Equation (3) shows that the linear predictor is a combination of μ, which can be considered the "grand mean", and the vector of the independent variables $\mathbf{x_i}$ of length $k = 12$ and the vector of coefficients $\boldsymbol{\beta}$. The linear predictor also includes the year random effects, α_t, and the cohort random effects, δ_c, where t and c indicate, respectively, the years ($t = 1, \ldots, 19$) and the cohorts ($c = 1, \ldots, 20$). In practice, α_t and δ_c are deviations from the average. For the grand mean μ a $N(0, 0.001)$ prior is used, while for α_t and δ_c, respectively, $N(0, \sigma_\alpha^2)$ and $N(0, \sigma_\delta^2)$ priors are used. Eventually, σ_α and σ_δ both follow a $\text{Unif}(0, 10)$ prior.[9]

The Bayesian estimation of such models using a very large sample is burdensome. To accelerate the convergence of the chains redundant parametrization and blocking are applied (Gelman and Hill 2006). Nevertheless, these strategies may not be sufficient to speed up the estimation. Fortunately, an additional solution comes from the data themselves. Binary data can be aggregated to form Binomial data (Jackman 2009). Since the probability of success π_i for the i-th observation is the same for all those i which share common $\mathbf{x_i}$ and $\boldsymbol{\beta}$, an equivalent model for these observations is $r_\mathcal{C} \sim \text{Binomial}(p_\mathcal{C}, n_\mathcal{C})$, where $r_\mathcal{C}$ is the number of successes in $\mathcal{C}$ (i.e. number of respondents who engaged in one form of participation), $n_\mathcal{C}$ is the number of observations in the cardinality of $\mathcal{C}$ and $p_\mathcal{C}$ is $logit^{-1}(\mu + \mathbf{x}_\mathcal{C}\boldsymbol{\beta} + \alpha_t + \delta_c)$. The set $\mathcal{C}$ indicates a *covariate class* that represents a unique combination of the covariates. Thus, $n_\mathcal{C}$ is the number of unique combinations of the covariates. Therefore, instead of using $n = 855,881$ observations, $n_\mathcal{C} = 39,055$ unique combinations of the covariates are used to estimate the models, which however produce the same parameters with no loss in information as Bernoulli data are Binomial data. By consequence, this strategy improves computational efficiency and speed.[10]

5 Findings

Table 1 and 2 report the estimates of the models predicting the probability of attending meetings of political parties, donating money to political parties, attending meetings

[9] As the random effects work on the logistic scale this prior is sufficiently uninformative. Changing it does not affect the results.

[10] The models are estimated using Jags (Plummer 2012), Gibbs sampling run for 250,000 iterations with a burn-in period of 50,000 iterations, which are thinned by a factor of 10, and two chains. Several diagnostics were used to assess the convergence of the samplers (see Jackman 2009).

of environmental, civil rights and peace associations and attending demonstrations separating cohort, year and compositional effects in Italy.

In general, those who are younger than 36 and those who are older than 65 have a lower probabilities of engaging in the four forms of participation, indicating a mild life cycle effect. Nevertheless, no patterns are present across the different forms of participation. Furthermore, not in all cases the probabilities are different from the reference category and, overall, the age effect is quite weak. The other independent variables have the expected signs. Women have lower probabilities of engaging in each of the forms of participation compared to men. Conversely, education plays a positive role in pushing respondents to participate conventionally and unconventionally in politics. The employed and the married respondents engage more in conventional participation, while less in unconventional participation. Eventually, respondents in the South are more likely to attend political parties meetings and to attend demonstrations, while that North-eastern respondents donate more likely money to parties and attend meetings of environmental, civil rights and peace associations. All the models fit very well, as shown by the difference in Deviance Information Criterion (DIC) between each model and the corresponding unconditional model (Spiegelhalter et al. 2002).

[Tables 1 and 2 about here]

The tables also show how respondents in the various years and cohorts differ in terms of participation. In model 1 in table 1, the year random effects standard deviation (σ_α) is 0.161, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 0.109 and 0.222, while the cohort random effects standard deviation (σ_δ) is 0.576, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 0.364 and 0.813. These estimates clearly indicate that the probability of attending parties meetings does not vary much across years, but it changes relevantly between the cohorts. Model 2 also shows that there is significantly more variability between cohorts than between years. In fact, the former is about four times larger that the latter, indicating the presence of a strong cohort effect. The last two models, 3 and 4 in table 2, estimate the probabilities of attending meetings of environmental, civil rights and peace associations and attending demonstrations. In these two cases the differences between cohorts appear very substantial. The random effects standard deviations underline, in both models, that the probabilities of engaging in these two forms of political participation vary more between cohorts than between years. The year and cohort random effects standard deviations, in model 3, are, respectively, 0.270 and 0.963, while the year and cohort effects standard deviations, in model 4, are 0.413 and 1.693. The estimates in tables 1 and 2 provide evidence of a strong cohort effect on the four forms of participation, yet a weak period effect, net of the individual characteristics. However, the standard deviations do not tell us the direction of these effects.

Figures 1 and 2 show the shape of the cohort and the year effects on the probabilities of engaging in each of the four forms of political participation, with uncertainties, setting, respectively, the year and the cohort effects at zero and the independent variables at their means. The upper panel in figure 1 illustrates that four cohorts, those born between 1936 and 1955, have the highest probability of having attended political parties meetings in the last 12 months, which is around 0.04. Instead, the cohorts born before 1936 have around halved probabilities of having attended meetings of political parties.

Also the individuals born after 1955 show lower probabilities. In fact, the younger cohorts have low chances of attending meetings of political parties. Those born between 1956 and 1960 have a probability of 0.032, the next cohort of 0.027, the next two of about 0.024. There is a slight increase in probability for this born between 1986 and 1990, but the probability drops substantially for those born in the later years. The second panel illustrates that the probability of donating money to political parties follows similar patterns. The cohorts having the highest probability are more or less same. Those born between 1921 and 1955 have a probability of donating money of about 0.030, with a peak in probability of 0.034 for the cohort of those born between 1941 and 1945. The following cohorts have a lower probability of donating money to parties. Those born between 1961 and 1965 have a probability of 0.021, the following cohort of 0.017, the next one of 0.014, and so on. In general, the probability of donating money falls relevantly in the younger cohorts.

[Figures 1 and 2 about here]

The third panel in figure 1 shows that the probability of attending meetings of environmental, civil rights and peace associations increases as the new cohorts succeed. The cohorts born up to 1935 have a probability lower than 0.01 of attending the meetings of such associations. The probability starts increasing among the cohorts born between 1941 and 1960. In fact, it is about 0.018. For the following cohorts the probability decreases slightly, especially for those born between 1966 and 1975. Then, again, the probability increases reaching 0.027 for those born between 1991 and 1995. The last panel shows a similar pattern for the attendance at demonstrations, despite the magnitude of the cohort effect is much stronger. The probability of attending demonstrations is very low, close to 0.01 for those born up to 1930. The probability starts increasing substantially for those born after 1940. The probability is about 0.03 for those born between 1941 and 1945, it is around 0.04 for those between 1946 and 1966. The following cohorts have a much higher probability of attending demonstrations. In fact, those born between 1971 and 1975 have a probability of 0.06. However, the probability increases more in the following cohorts, being about 0.11, 0.13, 0.15 and 0.20 for the, respectively, 1976 – 1980, 1981 – 1985, 1986 – 1990 and 1991 – 1995 cohorts.

These results fully confirm the "modernization" hypothesis (Inglehart 1990, Inglehart and Welzel 2005). Conventional participation is more likely for the "baby-boomers", while increasingly less likely for the cohorts born afterwards. Conversely, the probability of engaging in unconventional participation is progressively higher for the younger cohorts, indicating that the value shift has led the young to engage in forms of participation which are elite-challenging and more oriented to new issues. The findings only partially support the "generational" hypothesis. Accordingly, those born in the 1950s or 1960s should have had higher probabilities of engagement in both conventional and unconventional participation, as they were socialized in years of great politicization and support for parties (Giovannini 1988, Mattei et al. 1990). Instead, the data indicate only that those cohorts are more likely to engage in conventional participation than the other cohorts, while *not* more in unconventional participation. Therefore, it seems that the approach emphasizing the process of values change accounts better for the patterns of political participation of the different cohorts in Italy compared to the one stressing the

importance of the historical periods in which citizens are socialized to politics.

Figure 2 illustrates that the probability of engaging in each of the four forms of participation does not change over time. In brief, the time trends show that both the "party de-mobilization" and the "social movements society" hypotheses do not hold. It appears that that there is neither an evident decline in the forms of conventional participation nor an increase in conventional participation, as instead argued by the literature (Inglehart and Catterberg 2002, Dalton 2009). The lack of change in participation is likely due to the time span of the analysis, despite it took into account almost twenty years. Indeed, the ideal data to detect more important changes and to study more deeply the trends in participation should go further back in time, at least from the 1980s. Unfortunately, surveys with many time points and a variety of indicators on political participation, as the one used in this study, beginning further back in time are not available.[11] However, other studies have already underlined that the trends in political participation have changed between the 1980s and 1990s in Italy (Millefiorini 2002, Raniolo 2007, Quaranta 2014).

In general, these findings support the argument that political participation, in Italy, depends on cohort differences, net of year and sample characteristics. This may mean that the different cohorts have different compositions, which drive the changes in the probability of engaging in forms of political participation. A factor that could be responsible for this mechanism is educational attainment. Younger cohorts have higher educational levels, and this is argued to have contributed to the changing patterns of political participation, given the process of "cognitive mobilization" (Dalton 2008), which also explains, for instance, voters' de-alignment, decrease in partisanship, increase in political sophistication, a progressive distancing from parties in general, with the consequent birth and growth of other forms of participation. As known, education provides individuals with skills that are fundamental to engage in politics, such as political knowledge and information (Verba et al. 1995). It is, thus, likely that the cohort effect is due to the expansion of the educational system in Italy in the last fifty years (Schizzerotto and Barone 2006), contributing to the increase in the citizens' educational level.[12]

6 Conclusion

This article explored how different cohorts engage in four forms of political participation, two conventional and institutionalized, and two unconventional or extra-representative, in Italy. The goal was to assess, by applying Bayesian cross-classified mixed models on the "Multipurpose Survey – Aspects of Daily Life" provided by the Italian National Institute of Statistics, whether or not the younger cohorts are actually detached from politics, disenchanted, self-interested and not concerned with the public

[11] The only surveys which date back to the 1980s are the European Values Study or the World Values Survey. Nevertheless, they have few points in time and small samples. Other surveys, such as the Eurobarometer series, contain few indicators measuring conventional and unconventional participation across time.

[12] As a robustness check the models are run using micro-cohorts of 3 years instead of 5 years and using age divided in 7 categories instead of 3. The findings are very similar to those presented here. The strategy shown in this article, however, is more efficient. Indeed, using variables with more categories increases the number of the unique combinations of the covariates. This implies that the convergence of the chains would be much slower.

sphere, as many scholars and commentators have maintained. This is a relevant issue, as looking at how the younger generations engage in politics means understanding the mechanism that makes societal and political change possible (Delli Carpini 1989) and speculate on how democracy will look like in the future (Hooghe and Stolle 2003).

On the one hand, the article showed that the younger cohorts do not engage in conventional politics. On the other hand, it appears that the younger cohorts have a higher probability of attending meetings of new social movements organizations and of attending public demonstrations compared to the previous cohorts. Many studies analyzing the younger cohorts' patterns of political participation using cross-sectional data have often indicated that they engage less likely in politics. However, this finding might be driven by the fact that they do not separate the age effect from cohort and period effects. In fact, they simply offer "snapshots" of the youth participation patterns (O'Toole et al. 2003). Conversely, this study, using repeated cross-sectional data, showed that participation mostly depends on birth cohorts, rather than on periods, or on the limited number of personal characteristics for which it was possible to control for, and that the gloomy picture of the young as being "non participatory" is not completely true.

Certainly, the greater engagement of the younger cohorts in unconventional forms of participation is a positive element. They are not as they are described, superficial or shallow, but have their own values, which make them focus on specific issues, such as the environment, civil rights or local issues, and make them being politically independent and form their own opinion (Zukin et al. 2006, Dalton 2009). Nevertheless, political systems do not live on demonstrations and new social movements organizations. The very low probability of participation in conventional politics of the younger generations in Italy should raise some concern. In fact, the very weak involvement of the young in political parties may impede the recruitment of the new political personnel (see Hazan and Rahat 2010). Furthermore, the distance between political parties and the young may translate into a problem of political representation and, in turn, of political and social inequality. The scarce presence of young members in political parties may reduce their "weight" in national politics. In brief, non participation in representative politics has undermined the political representation of the young and, in turn, their influence in the political arena (see Lijphart 1996).

The scarce participation in conventional politics has likely made the younger generations politically irrelevant and marginal, and in turn this may have also limited their life quality (see Putnam 2000, Wallace and Pichler 2009). The "baby-boomers" experienced and lived a period of relatively economic security which provided them with independence and political integration (Livi Bacci 2008). The younger cohorts are more subject to precarious employment, discontinuous and unstable careers and are excluded from welfare entitlements that would protect them to the new social risks and uncertainties (see D'Agostino and Regoli 2013). Italy appears to "stubbornly over invests on older, unproductive – while egoistically privileged – generations of 'rentiers' who sheltered themselves from any reform, thus intentionally burdening their descendants' perspectives" (Barbieri 2011, 147). Of course, the young are more involved in new forms of participation, such as online participation in the forms of contacting or supporting causes (Oser et al. 2013), which unfortunately this study could not investigate. However,

these modes of participation would be politically relevant only if they had a potential impact on the political process. Otherwise, they would be simply forms of political expression that, despite that, do not allow political representation.

To conclude, this article found that the younger cohorts do engage in politics in Italy and that, therefore, should not be considered "apathetical" or "disillusioned". Even though the analysis took into account specific country, which of course cannot be representative of the wider set of advanced democracies, it showed that the young increasingly get involved in forms of unconventional participation which, however, do not allow them to be fully part of national politics, being this form of participation non representative (see Macedo 2005). A potential solution to solve this growing distance between the young and institutional politics would be enhancing the effectiveness of political parties have to produce and implement policies which have a positive impact on the condition of the youth, in order to demonstrate that parties actually care for them. This may break the vicious circle moving away the young from political parties, which ultimately have the fundamental role of representing citizens' interests in democracies, making the young important constituents.

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Figure 1: The cohort effect on attending political parties meetings, donating money to political parties, attending environmental, civil rights and peace associations meetings, and attending demonstrations. Posterior probabilities and 95% highest posterior densities.

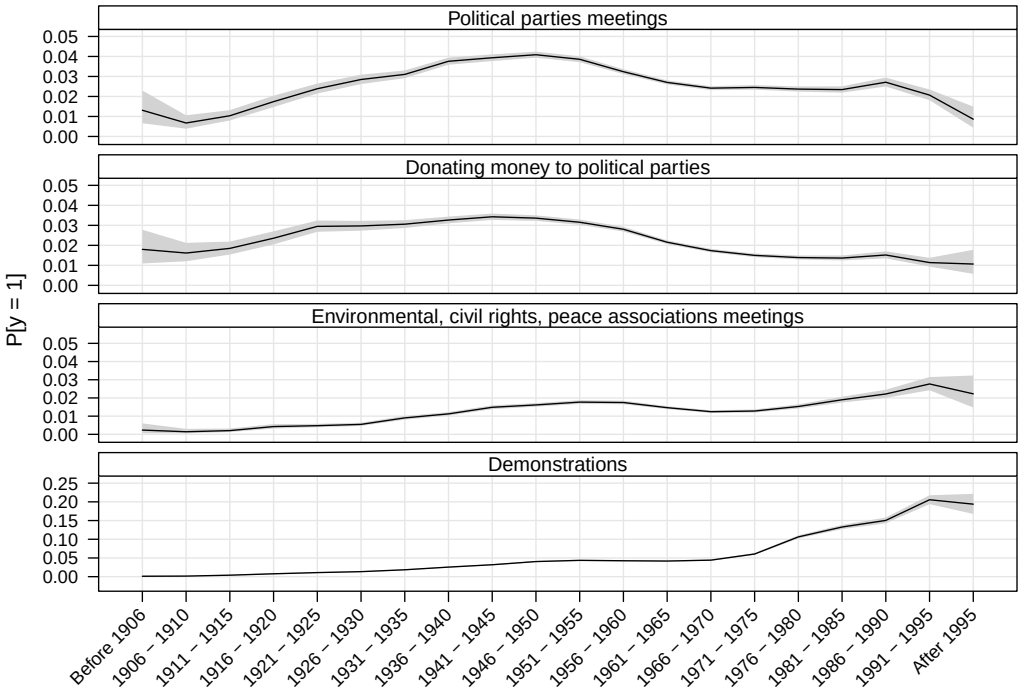

Figure 2: The year effect on attending political parties meetings, donating money to political parties, attending environmental, civil rights and peace associations meetings, and attending demonstrations. Posterior probabilities and 95% highest posterior densities.

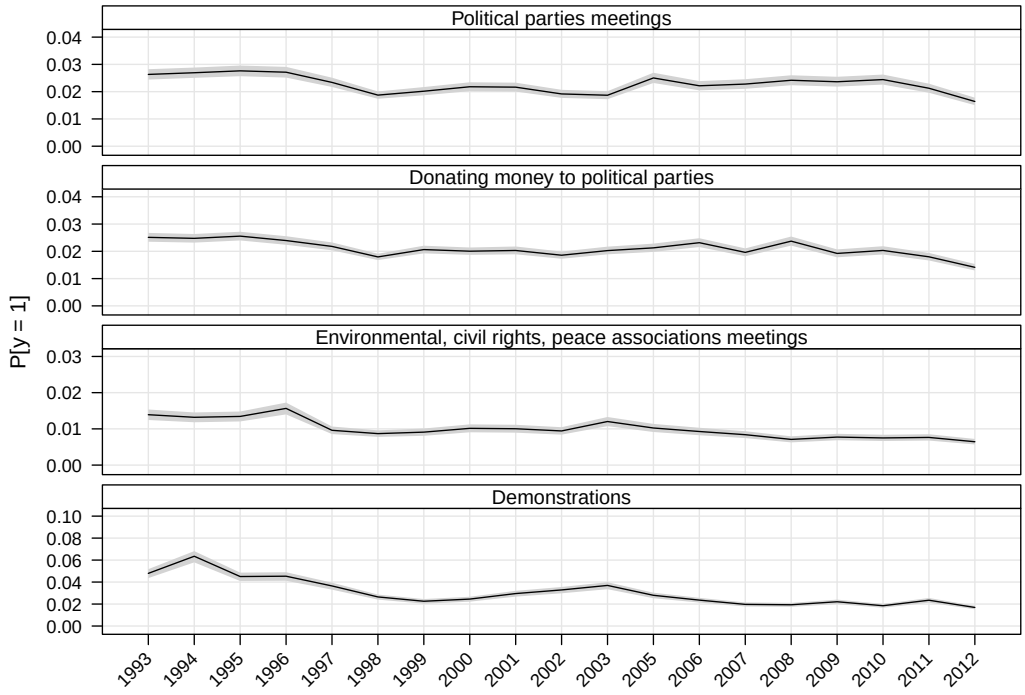

Table 1: Cross-classified mixed logistic models predicting the probability of, respectively, attending political parties meetings and donating money to political parties. Estimates (posterior means) and 95% confidence intervals (highest posterior densities).

		Model 1			**Model 2**		
		est.	c. i.		est.	c. i.	
Fixed effects							
μ		-4.109	-4.184	-4.030	-4.089	-4.158	-4.022
	Age (ref. 36 – 65):						
β_1	< 36	-0.071	-0.120	-0.025	-0.044	-0.100	0.011
β_2	> 65	-0.243	-0.306	-0.179	-0.127	-0.191	-0.061
β_3	Gender (Woman)	-1.159	-1.185	-1.133	-0.794	-0.822	-0.766
	Education (ref. Elementary school or less):						
β_4	Middle school	0.439	0.399	0.478	0.184	0.144	0.226
β_5	High school	1.040	1.004	1.078	0.638	0.600	0.678
β_6	University or higher	1.462	1.420	1.505	1.060	1.015	1.105
β_7	Employment status (Employed)	0.148	0.121	0.175	0.326	0.293	0.359
β_8	Civil status (Married)	0.090	0.063	0.117	0.104	0.074	0.135
	Area (ref. North-west):						
β_9	North-east	0.384	0.348	0.419	0.609	0.572	0.644
β_{10}	Center	0.217	0.179	0.255	0.229	0.189	0.269
β_{11}	South	0.522	0.488	0.555	0.024	-0.015	0.062
β_{12}	Islands	0.485	0.444	0.527	-0.249	-0.306	-0.193
Random effects							
σ_α		0.161	0.109	0.222	0.162	0.108	0.225
σ_δ		0.576	0.364	0.813	0.438	0.288	0.613
Diff. DIC			18,764.12			10,333.05	

Note: based on 39,055 unique combinations of 855,881 observations cross-classified in 19 years and 20 cohorts, and on 25,000 MCMC draws and 2 chains. Est. = posterior mean; c. i. = 95% Highest Posterior Density; Diff. DIC = Difference in Deviance Information Criterion between the model and the corresponding unconditional model.

Table 2: Cross-classified mixed logistic models predicting the probability of, respectively, attending environmental, civil rights and peace associations meetings and attending demonstrations. Estimates (posterior means) and 95% confidence intervals (highest posterior densities).

		Model 3			**Model 4**		
		est.	c. i.		est.	c. i.	
Fixed effects							
μ		-5.020	-5.136	-4.907	-3.310	-3.402	-3.220
	Age (ref. 36 – 65):						
β_1	< 36	-0.180	-0.247	-0.113	-0.507	-0.552	-0.464
β_2	> 65	-0.047	-0.159	0.060	0.012	-0.057	0.081
β_3	Gender (Woman)	-0.207	-0.238	-0.175	-0.492	-0.512	-0.473
	Education (ref. Elementary school or lower):						
β_4	Middle school	0.880	0.809	0.950	0.389	0.355	0.424
β_5	High school	1.569	1.502	1.635	0.439	0.405	0.473
β_6	University or higher	2.358	2.286	2.428	0.754	0.712	0.795
β_7	Employment status (Employed)	-0.234	-0.271	-0.197	-0.142	-0.165	-0.118
β_8	Civil status (Married)	-0.396	-0.433	-0.358	-0.214	-0.240	-0.189
	Area (ref. North-west):						
β_9	North-east	0.295	0.250	0.339	-0.103	-0.134	-0.071
β_{10}	Center	-0.106	-0.156	-0.056	0.022	-0.009	0.053
β_{11}	South	-0.226	-0.273	-0.180	0.272	0.245	0.300
β_{12}	Islands	-0.219	-0.280	-0.154	0.144	0.109	0.180
Random effects							
σ_α		0.270	0.183	0.372	0.413	0.278	0.563
σ_δ		0.963	0.614	1.352	1.693	1.134	2.330
Diff. DIC			7,523.526			5,185.273	

Note: based on 39,055 unique combinations of 855,881 observations cross-classified in 19 years and 20 cohorts, and on 25,000 MCMC draws and 2 chains. Est. = posterior mean; c. i. = 95% Highest Posterior Density; Diff. DIC = Difference in Deviance Information Criterion between the model and the corresponding unconditional model.

Appendix

Figure A1: Cross-classification: sample sizes by cohort and survey year.

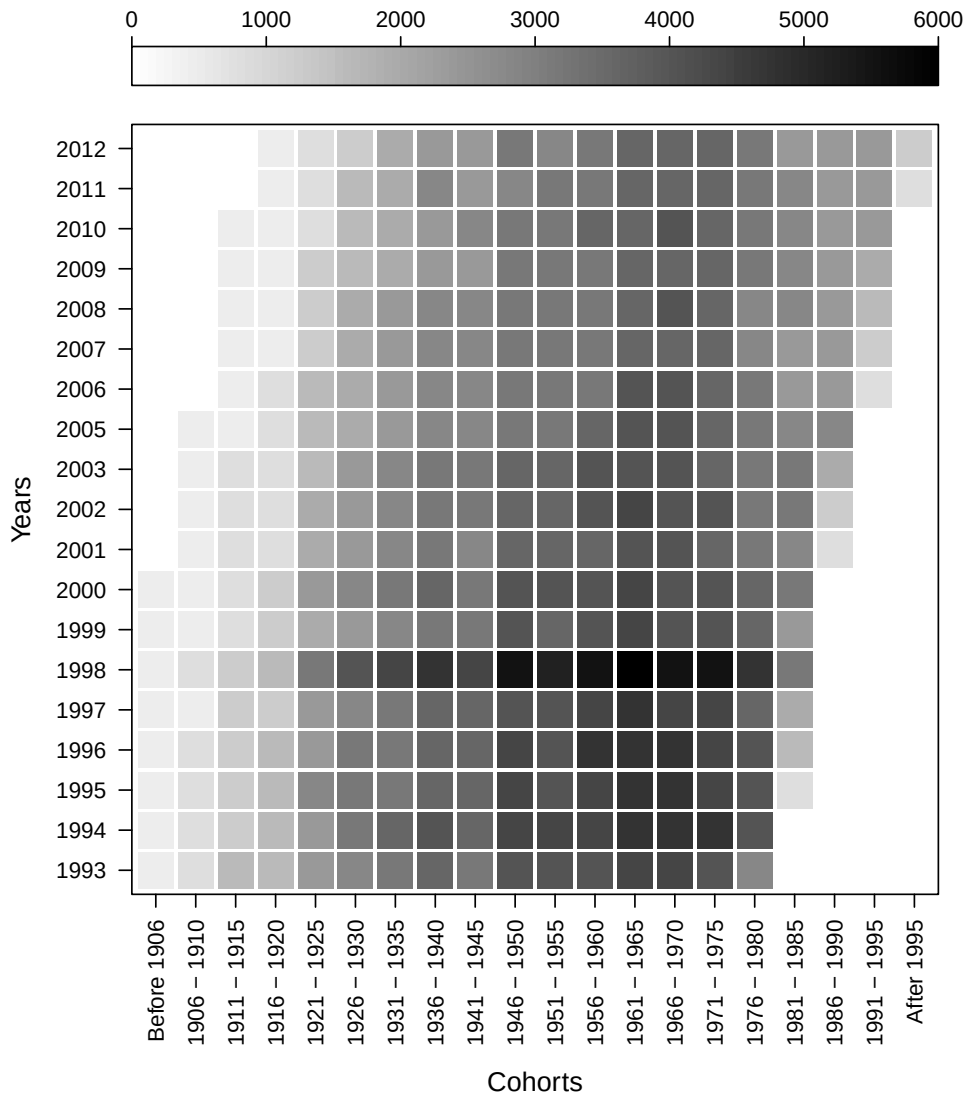

Table A1: Descriptive statistics.

	Proportion	Stand. Err.	Min.	Max.
Dependent variables				
Political parties meetings	0.0409	0.0002	0	1
Donating money to political parties	0.0303	0.0002	0	1
Attending environmental, civil rights, peace associations meetings	0.0193	0.0001	0	1
Attending demonstrations	0.0540	0.0002	0	1
Independent variables				
Age:				
< 36	0.3275	0.0005	0	1
36 – 65	0.4796	0.0005	0	1
> 65	0.1929	0.0004	0	1
Gender:				
Man	0.4801	0.0005	0	1
Woman	0.5199	0.0005	0	1
Education:				
Elementary school or lower	0.3066	0.0005	0	1
Middle school	0.3037	0.0005	0	1
High school	0.3095	0.0005	0	1
University or higher	0.0802	0.0003	0	1
Employment status:				
Not employed	0.5673	0.0005	0	1
Employed	0.4327	0.0005	0	1
Civil status:				
Not married	0.4276	0.0005	0	1
Married	0.5724	0.0005	0	1
Geographical area:				
North-west	0.2129	0.0004	0	1
North-east	0.2064	0.0004	0	1
Center	0.1859	0.0004	0	1
South	0.2858	0.0005	0	1
Islands	0.1090	0.0003	0	1
N		855,881		