



Immigrants' political engagement: gender differences in political attitudes and behaviours among immigrants in Italy

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Abstract

Despite the relevance of the gender dimension of immigration, political engagement of migrant women has rarely been the focus of scholarly research. This article tries to fill this gap. Using secondary data from the “Condizione e integrazione sociale dei cittadini stranieri” [Social Condition and Integration of Foreign Citizens] survey carried out by the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) in 2011–2012, we analysed the factors that at an individual level spur or inhibit migrants' political engagement in Italy in terms of gender differences. We decided to use political interest and political participation separately as dependent dichotomous variables in logistic models that consider structural, situational, migratory, and group-related variables as independent factors. From our analysis, some relevant differences emerged both in terms of gender and in terms of political attitudes and behaviours. Our results confirm the existence of a gender gap in political engagement among migrants in Italy: migrant women are always less likely to be engaged in politics compared to men, both in terms of interest and participation. After controlling for some characteristics, this gap never disappears completely. Our results also suggest that there are some notable differences in the determinants of political engagement. Indeed, family workload inhibits the probability of political engagement only for migrant women. Furthermore, our results cast light on the crucial role of social capital in spurring political engagement for both women and men, thus contributing to reducing the gender gap.

Keywords Political participation · Political interest · Immigrants · Gender differences · Social capital · Italy

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1 Introduction

Political participation is a crucial aspect of well-functioning democracies (Lijphart 1997; Putnam 1993). Several authors believe that being politically active produces individual and collective benefits. Participation reduces the distance between individuals and institutions and improves collective well-being by exerting a positive effect on social cohesion and the quality of democracy (Putnam 2000), thereby strengthening the sense of community. Moreover, it is considered a source of subjective individual well-being (Boffi et al. 2014), since it contributes to the quality of life of those who participate in the decision-making process. Yet not all individuals are “full members” of the political community in terms of full exercise of rights and equal participation in public life (Bauböck et al. 2006). Various aspects related to the social position of individuals, such as gender, ethnicity, social class, age, education, employment status and sexual orientation, can represent sources of inequality. Those who are in more advantageous social positions—males, natives, the richest and most educated people, and older generations—are more active in politics, especially in formal, conventional, and institutionalized forms of political participation (Verba et al. 1995).

Therefore, political participation represents one of the essential dimensions of immigrants’ integration in the receiving country (Martiniello 2005). However, since formal political participation is linked to holding the citizenship of the residing country, foreign citizens remain excluded.

To address this context of exclusion, they may use less conventional forms of political participation unrelated to citizenship, such as protests, demonstrations, sit-ins, hunger strikes, boycotts, and so forth (Pilati 2016).

Since “gender is one of the main sources of inequality in political participation” (Morales 1999, 223), when gender and migratory background intersect, it seems that the participation gap widens, creating a real “participatory chasm” (Kam et al. 2008, 205).

Therefore, in the case of migrant women, the benefits of political engagement are even more relevant. By enhancing civic vitality (Putnam 2000), political engagement in the country of residence can reduce isolation, increase well-being, produce a sense of capability and self-esteem, with positive health outcomes; it can also reduce disengagement and the negative consequences of labour segregation of migrant women in host countries, employed as domestic workers and caregivers.

Research on unequal political participation, mainly focused on the United States, has given extensive attention to gender gaps in political attitudes and behaviors in the general population (Welch 1977), as well as to the political engagement of ethnic minorities (Rath 1983), while the limited research that has examined the gender gaps within ethnic groups has almost completely ignored immigrant population in Europe and, above all, in Italy.

The recognition of an insufficient exploration of the gender dimension of immigrants’ civic and political participation (Martiniello 2005) justified the gendered approach to our analysis, which has had filling this void as its primary goal. In this regard, we did not limit ourselves to considering gender exclusively as a demographic variable, which simply had to be added and controlled in our models. Instead, we assumed a specific gender perspective, which has allowed us to see to what extent gender and politics mutually construct each other even in the context of migration. According to this approach, gender—as an organizational principle of all human experiences both for men and women (Lorber 1994)—is a central construct to analyze the processes related to politics, to migration (Donato et al. 2006; Morokvasic 2004; Piper 2006), and to the political incorporation of migrants (Jones-Correa 1998; Togeby 2004). As pointed out

by Togeby (2004, 518), “the question of whether the relations are the same—or *different on the contrary*—for men and women is particularly interesting in connection with ethnic minorities” and immigrants.

In light of these studies, we wondered what happens in terms of political engagement at the intersection of gender and migration, particularly for those who are women and foreigners. More explicitly, do gender differences exist also in migrants' political engagement in the country of residence (RQ1)?

Togeby highlighted that there are several reasons to expect gender differences “not only in terms of the scope of participation, but also in terms of factors that promote or inhibit activity” (2004, 518). Therefore, we also asked what indicators of political engagement matter for migrant women (compared to men). Are there gender differences in the determinants of the political engagement of migrants (RQ2)?

The overall aim of this study is to analyze the role of gender in influencing the levels of political engagement of migrants in Italy, focusing on two different dimensions of political engagement: (1) attitudinal (*political interest*) and (2) behavioral (*non-electoral political participation*). The main question addressed is whether there are gaps in *political interest* and *non-electoral political participation* rates between migrant men and women.

To answer our research questions, we used a quantitative empirical strategy based on the data from the “Condizione e integrazione sociale dei cittadini stranieri” [Social Condition and Integration of Foreign Citizens] (SCIF) survey, a nationally representative household survey, carried out by the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) in 2011–2012 (released in 2016). Using logistics regression models, we tested our hypothesis both for the entire immigrant population and separately for women and men. Moreover, we applied an interaction between gender and organizational involvement to verify whether social capital plays a different role according to gender.

This empirical strategy allows us to provide further evidence of the gender characterization of migrants' political engagement by examining gender differences in political engagement in a large sample of immigrants residing in Italy. The adoption of a specific gender approach makes it possible to recognize that the various predictive factors can operate differently for migrant women and men.

To the best of our knowledge, few quantitative studies have analyzed the case of Italy (Ortensi and Riniolo 2020; Gatti et al. 2021; 2022). This is the first quantitative study that focuses on gender differences in immigrants' political engagement in Italy based on representative data at the national level. The specific and innovative contribution of this work consists in trying to fill the lack of studies on the political engagement of immigrants in terms of gender differences, integrating three different literary bodies—literature on political participation, gender studies on attitudes and behaviors towards politics, and research on the political integration of migrants—with a specific focus on Italy.

Italy is an interesting case for the purposes of this study. First, Italy is no longer a country of new immigration, so the political integration of immigrant ethnic minorities is an important issue to be included in the political and academic agenda. Second, despite the stability of the foreign presence in Italy, the Italian political system appears to be highly restrictive and unable to accept fully the integration request from the resident immigrant population. Third, Italy is also particularly interesting with reference to the feminization of migrations (Kofman 2004). Indeed, despite the relevance of the gender dimension of immigration, this has rarely been the focus of studies in the Italian literature examining migrants' political engagement. After discussing the theoretical background and describing our data and methods implemented, including definitions and measures, we will focus on a discussion of the findings and conclusions.

2 Theoretical background

2.1 Gender and migration in studying political incorporation

Women in politics and immigrant incorporation literature suggests that pathways to political participation and incorporation may be distinct for women and men (Jones-Correa 1998). Research on the gender gap in political attitudes and behaviors has mainly investigated differences between women and men in general. This complex body of research has shown that women seem to be less informed, less interested, and less involved than men in many aspects of the political sphere (Fraile and Sánchez-Vítores 2020), and it has been shown that men tend to have a greater probability of engagement than women, especially in formal political activities (Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010).

Despite the rich scientific production of gender and migration studies (Donato et al. 2006; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994), the absence of gender studies in the migrant policy literature has been noted (Mugge 2013; Piper 2006). Few scholars have examined the determinants of political participation among immigrants, focusing on gender differences (Gidengil and Stolle 2009; Jones-Correa 1998; McIlwaine and Bermúdez 2011). Even fewer studies on migrants' political participation have considered gender differences in the role played by their organizational involvement in the receiving country (Mugge 2013; Schrover and Vermeulen 2005; Vermeulen 2006). In the same way, efforts to understand the factors underlying gender differences in migrants' political engagement still seem to be limited.

The literature on the gender gap among minorities, developed predominantly in the USA, has focused on Hispanics, African Americans, and Asian Americans, suggesting some variation according to race and ethnicity (Bejarano et al. 2011; García Bedolla et al. 2006). The limited existing research on gender differences in political engagement within immigrant populations, as for the general population, also suggests that immigrant men and women have a different conception of politics and address different political spheres and that their involvement takes very different forms (Hagan 1998; Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo 2005). Immigrant women are less likely to feel that they are capable of understanding politics and to be interested in politics compared to men; they also mobilize with different resources and on different issues compared to men (Montoya et al. 2000). Migration literature also highlights the lower propensity of immigrant women, unlike men, to participate in institutional political activities (Kam et al. 2008) and in homeland politics (Jones-Correa 1998).

The literature on women and politics has put forward a number of explanations to address gender differences in political participation. Some have highlighted the role of resource and opportunity inequalities (Verba et al. 1997), while others have focused on social processes, such as gender socialization (Atkeson and Rapoport 2003).

Welch (1977) identified three main explanations for different gender paths in political engagement: the first, the 'political socialisation' explanation, according to which women are socialised to a more passive political role than men, which discourages women from playing an active political role; the second, the 'structural' explanation, which highlighted the over-representation of women in demographic groups with low levels of participation; and the third, the 'situational' explanation, according to which particular family responsibilities (such as being a wife, mother or single parent) prevent women from fully participating in politics.

'Political socialisation' explanation was not tested in our contribution because SCIF data did not provide such information and did not allow for its analysis. The last two explanations were directly tested in our analysis and will therefore be analyzed in deeper below.

According to the 'structural' explanation (Welch 1977), in which demographic, social, and economic characteristics—especially income and education (Verba et al. 1997)—have been used as predictors of political engagement, different social positions imply different levels of resources, which would translate into different levels of political engagement. In the case of immigrants, it emerges that structural factors produce incorporation models differentiated by gender (Togoby 2004) and that class and race structural barriers are a brake on their political integration, with different gender outcomes depending on the contexts of reception and on the belonging groups (Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo 2005; Jones-Correa 1998). From the early studies of the 1990s on Latinos in the United States (Jones-Correa 1998), and as recently confirmed by comparative studies in Europe (Guarnizo et al. 2019), it emerges that political engagement is a gender process shaped by class. According to these studies, gender differences in political participation models depend on how the social status changes (loss or acquisition) in the host country impact decision-making processes and the future plans of migrant women and men (Jones-Correa 1998). Furthermore, the role of gender in shaping the political incorporation of migrants varies according to the country of origin (Bueker 2005) and the ethnic-racial groups to which they belong (Lien 1998). The country of origin and the experiences gained in it, both in terms of experience with repressive political systems (Bilodeau 2008; Bueker 2005) and premigration experiences with gender disparities, can have a negative effect on the political attitudes and behavior of immigrants (Bilodeau 2016). In line with this, we expect that gender shapes the political participation of migrants in different ways for women and men.

Political attitudes and behavior are not only shaped by structural factors, but they also encompass what are called "situational" factors, characterized by life-course experiences, such as transitions to union formation and parenthood, which may cause changes in time availability and personal priorities that affect political participation (Sartori et al. 2017). According to this situational explanation (Welch 1977), the role of women as wives, caregivers, and housewives and their "availability of time" as a political resource play an important role in political engagement (Mestre and Marín 2012). As highlighted by Verba et al. (1997), gender differences in family roles and the burden of raising children are relevant in explaining gender inequality in political engagement. According to this explanation, reduced levels in women's political interest and participation depend on the fact that as they become increasingly busy trying to reconcile a full-time job away from home with their role as primary caregivers within their family, they remain "time-poor". Even in the context of migration, gender roles and relationships, and their modifications during the migration experience affect their civic and political participation patterns (McIlwaine and Bermúdez 2011; Piper 2006). As highlighted by McIlwaine and Bermúdez (2011) in relation to Columbian migrants in London, migrant women's participation is restricted across class, gender roles, stages of life course, and childcare responsibilities. According to this strand of studies, lower levels of female political participation are linked to the higher burdens related to housework and family care.

To the best of our knowledge, the effect of having children and being in a partnership on migrant women's political participation has not previously been investigated in empirical quantitative studies. Filling this gap is one of the aims of this article. From the previously exposed arguments, we expect that also for migrant women the amount of time devoted to housework increases as the time devoted to political activities decreases. Therefore, we

hypothesize that situational constraints, such as marital status and the number of children, affect political engagement.

The migration literature has also identified factors related to migration experiences and group membership as determinants of political engagement. Among these, particular emphasis has been placed on the experience of organizational involvement. In line with these studies, we tested the role played by social capital (Putnam 1993, 2000) in migrants' political engagement, as illustrated in the following section.

2.2 The role of social capital on immigrants' political engagement

Gender differences in the ability to use resources can have important implications in terms of different political participation, as already highlighted in the previous paragraph. Among the different resources, there are those concerning belonging to a group, defined as social capital (Bourdieu 1986). According to Putnam (1993, 1996), social capital is made up of "trust, rules governing coexistence, networks of civic association". Social capital produced in civil society increases mutual trust between citizens (social trust), as well as their trust in democratic political institutions (political trust) and the intensity of political participation (both formal and informal). Since Putnam's work (1993, 2000), social capital has been regarded as a crucial resource for political participation and its effects have also been extended to the political participation of ethnic minorities and immigrants.

In the field of immigration studies, social capital has been seen as a factor of social cohesion, useful for facilitating the interaction between the members of a multicultural society and the integration of immigrants. In the studies on political participation, the concept of social capital has been made operational mainly as associational participation. The role of associations in political engagement has also captured the attention of migration scholars, who have questioned whether the organizational involvement of immigrants could lead to wider political participation and integration.

In the European context, a rich line of research developed since the 1990s has tried to explain the different levels of immigrants' political participation through their membership in ethnic and non-ethnic organizations, both at the aggregate (Fennema and Tillie 1999) and at the individual level (Berger et al. 2004; Tillie 2004; Togeby 2004). Subsequent analyses have confirmed the key relevance of individual involvement in voluntary associations not only as predictors of migrants' political participation but also of their political orientation, understood as interest in politics. According to these studies, migrants involved in associations, whether by being part of them or participating in activities promoted by them, would be more likely to be interested, to participate, and to integrate in the societies in which they live. Despite the lack of attention to the political experiences of immigrant women (Abu-Laban 2002) and to the different role played by social capital in determining different levels of political participation based on gender differences, the limited existing research that has tested the hypothesis of social capital in the analysis of the political engagement of different migrant groups found a positive association between belonging to voluntary associations and political resources for immigrant women. This result confirms that membership is a resource capable of increasing the level of political knowledge and integration of immigrant women (Marrow 2005); conversely, social isolation represents a clear impediment to political incorporation (Gidengil and Stolle 2009).

As stated so far, while the relationship between social capital and the political participation of migrants as a general population on the basis of national differences has been extensively analyzed, to the best of our knowledge there has not been the same effort exerted towards

investigating this relationship on the basis of gender differences between migrants. In this study, we try to fill this gap by testing at an individual level (see Jacobs and Tillie 2004) the hypothesis of social capital as a predictor of political engagement also for migrant women by verifying whether there are gender differences. In line with the strand of studies that have placed the emphasis on the role of voluntary associations as a source of political information, recruitment, and mobilization (Putnam 2000; Teorell 2003; Verba et al. 1995), we expect a strong relationship and a positive effect between social capital as a group-related resource and political engagement also for women.

2.3 Political engagement concept

Political engagement can be broadly defined (e.g., Zukin et al. 2006) entailing both attitudinal and behavioral dimensions: the former can be broadly defined as cognitive and emotional involvement in political matters, which manifests itself in individual political interest, political knowledge, political opinions, or political attitudes (Barrett and Brunton-Smith 2014); the latter is associated with political participation in the narrow sense, which refers to citizens' concrete actions aimed at influencing decisions of public representatives and officials (Deth 2014).

Specifically, this includes voting, running for office, contacting politicians, membership in political and civic organizations, and non-conventional activities such as protesting.

As noted by most observers, "all things being equal, more engagement of both types is better than less engagement". This is true not only for national citizens, but also for all and for the democratic political process in general: "both types of engagement can be seen as barometers of the health of our participatory system" (cf. Schildkraut 2005, 288). The literature on immigrants' political engagement has also distinguished between these two dimensions (Berger et al. 2004; Jacobs et al. 2004; Rapp 2020; Schildkraut 2005). Following the literature on political behaviour, migrants' political engagement in host countries can be examined through a variety of actions (Deth 2014), from voting in local elections to participating in unconventional forms of action such as protests (de Rooij 2012; Pilati and Herman 2019). In our analysis, due to the limitations of the dataset, electoral political participation will be not analysed.

2.4 Hypotheses

In sum, based on the reviewed literature, our research hypotheses are the following:

- *Hypothesis 1 (H1)*: Migrant women are less likely to engage in politics than migrant men.
- *Hypothesis 2 (H2)*: Being married or living in a partnership and having more children are negatively related to the likelihood of being engaged in politics only for women.
- *Hypothesis 3 (H3)*: Being involved in organizations spur political engagement not only for men but also for women.

3 Data and methods

3.1 Data and case selection

The analyses are based on data coming from ISTAT's SCIF sample survey. It was conducted on more than 9500 families with at least one foreign citizen residing in Italy. The

overall unweighted sample amounted to 25,326 individuals. We focused our analysis on foreign citizens at birth¹ (first and second generation) aged 15 and over. A total of 16,851 individuals (of which 55.7% were women) composed our final sample. The dataset was weighted for the descriptive analysis, and it was unweighted for the multivariate analyses.²

3.2 Dependent variables

In accordance with the literature review and based on available data, we considered distinct variables as indicators of behavioral and attitudinal engagement.³

We firstly considered *political interest* as the attitudinal indicator of political engagement. We opted to use *seeking information on Italian politics* to measure political interest. It is a dummy variable equal to 1 if migrants were interested in Italian politics; otherwise, it was equal to 0.

Our second dependent variable was *political participation* beyond voting as a behavioral indicator of political engagement. Political participation is not limited to one kind of behavior: various types can be distinguished (Barrett and Brunton-Smith 2014; van Deth 2014). We will focus on five types of (nonvoting) political activities: *giving money to a political party*, *listening to political debates*, *taking part in political meetings*, *taking part in political demonstrations*, *volunteering for a political party*.⁴ They are dichotomous variables (no, yes). This dependent variable is measured as a dummy variable, being assigned 1 if migrants engaged in at least one activity and 0 otherwise.

3.3 Independent variables

In line with the existing literature, we considered four sets of independent variables: structural variables, situational variables, migration-related variables, and group-related variables as individual relevant predictors of political engagement (both interest and participation). In Table 1, the percentages of the sample are shown separately by gender for all (dependent and independent) variables used in the analysis. *Gender* is the key variable of this study. The SCIF survey measured this variable in a binary way with male (0) and female (1) as the two categories. To test the role of structural effects, we included the following variables.

Country of origin was included in the model, and it was identified by the variable citizenship at birth. In order to assure significant and robust results, we selected only the first twelve countries of citizenship at birth (each with at least 300 unweighted cases): *Romania* (reference), *Albania*, *Bulgaria*, *Poland*, *Ukraine*, *Moldova*, *Sri Lanka*, *China*,

¹ In the body of the text, we also use the expressions migrants and immigrants to indicate foreign citizens at birth.

² For the robustness check, we considered also logistic regressions on weighted data. However, the results of the analyses (not included here but available on request) do not show relevant differences compared to the logistic regressions with unweighted data.

³ To examine migrant political engagement, the SCIF includes both political attitudes and behaviors using 12 items.

⁴ We decided to include in the political participation measure both conventional and nonconventional political activities (beyond voting) included in the survey. We decided not to include *giving money to a voluntary association*, *volunteering for a voluntary association in Italy*, *volunteering for a non-voluntary association in Italy*, and *volunteering for a trade union* as variables in the political participation measure since they are not *inherently* political activities.

Table 1 Distribution of model variables by gender. Percentages and means (in brackets)

Variables	Modalities	Women	Men
Political interest	No	52.2	42.5
	Yes	47.8	57.5
Political participation	No	90.6	87.6
	Yes	9.4	12.4
Gender	Men	0.0	100.0
	Women	100.0	0.0
Country of origin	Romania	22.4	20.2
	Albania	8.7	12.2
	Bulgaria	1.4	0.8
	Poland	3.6	1.3
	Ukraine	7.8	1.7
	Moldova	3.9	1.9
	Sri Lanka	1.5	2.1
	China	3.4	4.4
	Philippines	3.0	2.8
	India	1.9	3.1
	Morocco	8.0	11.9
	Tunisia	1.4	3.3
	MDCs	6.1	5.0
	Eastern Europe EU	1.2	0.2
	Eastern Europe NOT EU	6.1	6.1
North Africa	1.1	3.3	
Rest of Africa	5.1	7.4	
Rest of Asia	3.2	5.7	
Latin America	10.3	6.7	
Average age		(38.2)	(36.6)
Geographical division of residence	North	60.4	63.3
	Centre	24.9	23.7
	South and Islands	14.7	13.0
Educational level	Low	39.5	49.0
	Medium	46.9	42.2
	High	13.6	8.8
Occupational status	Employed	53.2	75.3
	Unemployed	9.1	10.0
	Inactive	37.7	14.8
Married or living in partnership	No	33.0	35.0
	Yes	67.0	65.0
Number of children	Having no children	32.4	45.5
	Having only one child	24.6	17.7
	Having two children	27.5	21.6
	Having three or more children	15.5	15.1
Migratory generation	First generation	86.6	79.1
	1.5 generation	13.4	20.9
Average years since migration		(9.8)	(11.5)

Table 1 (continued)

Variables	Modalities	Women	Men
Italian proficiency	Low	30.6	31.0
	Medium	32.1	32.6
	High	37.3	36.4
Naturalization and attitude toward Italian citizenship	Naturalized	4.6	6.1
	Not naturalized willing to acquire Italian citizenship	66.1	67.0
	Not naturalized unwilling to acquire Italian citizenship	29.3	26.9
Discriminated against	No, never	73.9	69.4
	Yes, in one context	14.9	15.4
	Yes, in two contexts	6.6	7.8
	Yes, in three or more contexts	4.6	6.8
Feeling at home in Italy	No	4.2	3.6
	More not than yes	13.1	13.9
	More yes than not	39.2	42.7
	Yes	43.5	39.8
Social trust	No	71.8	72.6
	Yes	28.2	27.4
Organizational involvement	No	96.0	93.9
	Yes	4.0	6.1
Total		100.0	100.0

Source: our elaborations on SCIF data

Philippines, India, Morocco, Tunisia. In addition, we included other *countries of origin* regrouped into larger categories with a sufficient size for the statistical analysis. Therefore, we differentiated between *More Developed Countries (MDCs), Eastern Europe EU, Eastern Europe not EU, North Africa, rest of Africa, rest of Asia, Latin America.* This heterogeneity provides greater completeness to the study, allowing us to compare immigrants from a wide range of countries of origin. We included a numeric covariate on both *age* (completed years) and *age-squared* because, as previous studies have found, there is a curvilinear relationship between age and political engagement. We also included in the model the *geographical area of residence*, classified into three categories: *North* (Ref.), *Centre*, and *South/Islands*.

We operationalized *educational level* attained as a categorical variable with three modalities: *low* indicated lower secondary school (reference); *medium* indicated upper secondary school; *high* indicated degree or higher educational level. We included *occupational status*, measured in three modalities: *employed* (reference), *unemployed*, and *inactive*.

To test the role of situational variables, we included the variables *living in a partnership* and *number of children*. The former was a dummy variable that differentiates between *not living in a partnership* (0) and *living in a partnership* (1). The latter was a categorical variable that considered the *number of children*: zero (reference), one, two, three, or more children.

Regarding migration-related variables, we included in our models a covariate on *migratory generation*, which was measured as a dichotomous variable that differentiated *first generation immigrants* (0) and children of immigrants born in Italy or who arrived in Italy before the age of 18, hereafter referred to as *1.5 generation* (1). In addition, we included a numeric variable on the number of *years since migration*. We also built a single variable on *naturalization and attitudes toward Italian citizenship*, combining the following information: whether the interviewee acquired Italian citizenship (yes/no) and whether they thought that it was important to acquire Italian citizenship (yes/no). The variable was measured using three modalities: *naturalized* (reference), *not naturalized but willing to acquire Italian citizenship*, and *not naturalized and not willing to acquire Italian citizenship*.

Proficiency in the Italian language was also considered in the model. Specifically, we used a battery of questions on self-perceived level of Italian knowledge that went from 1 (high level) to 4 (low level) to create a unique variable. The questions referred to listening, speaking, reading, and writing levels of proficiency in the Italian language. The variable was operationalized with three modalities: *low* (reference) if at least on one question the respondent answered 4 (the worst perceived condition), *high* if on each question the respondent answered 1 or 2 (the best perceived condition), *medium* if at least on one question the respondent answered 3 and never answered 4.

Finally, we added *group-related resources* as cognitive and emotional factors and membership. We included *social trust* as a dichotomous variable: 0 (reference) if the interviewee believed that most people were not trustworthy and 1 otherwise.

Concerning emotional factors, we considered both positive and negative emotions. Respondents were asked if they *feel at home in Italy*. We kept the four modalities contained in the survey: no (reference); more no than yes, more yes than no, yes. We also measured whether the interviewee had personally *felt discriminated against* because of their origin in the past 12 months. The survey contained a set of 12 questions (self-identified) on whether individuals experienced discrimination in 12 distinct contexts.⁵ Each question allowed three answers: yes (discriminated against), no (not discriminated against), did not know. We measured in how many contexts the respondent felt discriminated against. Therefore, as shown in Table 1, the values range from 0 (never discriminated) to 3 (discriminated in 3 or more contexts).

As a last variable, we introduced *organizational involvement*.

Following previous work (Berger et al. 2004; Jacobs et al. 2004; Tillie 2004), we used membership or involvement in an organization as a measure of social capital. The questionnaire included a detailed battery of questions on involvement in the previous 12 months in Italy in relation to nine types of organizations as defined by the main sector and domain of their activities.⁶ We synthesized previous questions in a unique dichotomous variable, in which the value 1 was attributed to the interviewee who a member was or had participated in at least one type of organization⁷; otherwise, it was equal to 0.

⁵ The contexts included in the survey are the discrimination in employment, in seeking employment, in finding housing, in medical examinations, in applying for a cash loan, in applying for insurance, in accessing public establishments, the discrimination from teachers, from school personnel, from classmates, at school or University and from neighbors.

⁶ Using a binary answer question (yes/no), the questionnaire distinguished between nine types of organizations without any specification about ethnicity: political, cultural, religious, sports, recreational, volunteering, trade union, international cooperation (NGOs), other organizations.

⁷ We have excluded the membership of political parties from the construction of the organizational involvement variable, since saying that participation in political organizations leads to political participation comes close to a tautological argument (see Berger et al. 2004).

3.4 Model specification

Given the dichotomous nature of our two dependent variables, after a descriptive analysis, we tested our hypotheses through a multivariate analysis that included a set of logistic models (Eggert and Giugni 2010; Giugni et al. 2014; Pilati and Herman 2019) to control for compositional effects and to analyze the main determinants of political engagement. We separately studied the political interest and participation dependent variables.

We performed a log-likelihood model to examine the role that situational, migration-related, and group-related variables play in determining gender differences in immigrants' political engagement. The statistical analyses were performed using the Stata version 13 (StataCorp, USA) and R version 4.3.0. These relationships were analyzed using a stepwise model, adding the independent variables to the model in four steps (Berger et al. 2004; Jacobs et al. 2004; Jacobs and Tillie 2004; Tillie 2004; Togeby 2004). In the first step of the analysis, the structural variables were included. This served as the basis for the following models. In a second step, the situational variables were introduced. In the third step, the individual-level variables related to the process of immigration were added. Group-related resources variables, including organizational involvement, were added in the fourth step. This last model combined all additional variables to evaluate the strength of the explanatory factors in the full model. Subsequently, this last model was run separately for two subgroups: women and men. This analysis allowed us to verify if there were variables that play a different role (in terms of significance and sign of the coefficients) for males and females regarding the probability of engaging in politics. Lastly, the differences in *political interest* and *political participation* between men and women in terms of organizational involvement were deepened through interactions discussed in the form of predicted probability and holding other variables at their mean values (Williams 2012).

4 Results

4.1 Multivariate results: differences in political engagement by gender

According to previous studies, our results confirmed that migrant women have a lower probability of political engagement compared to men. This result observed in the crude data (see Table 1) was confirmed in the multivariate analysis in which some specific factors were controlled.

The synoptic Table 2 shows the regression coefficients of political interest and political participation for the total population (male and female jointly) focusing only on the gender target variable. The results from model 1 (where only structural variables were introduced) showed that women have a significantly lower propensity towards engaging in Italian politics compared to men. This negative effect did not disappear with the introduction of other variables in the successive models, but the introduction of subsequent variables progressively reduced gender differences, both in case of political interest and political participation. This effect was more consistent for the political participation dependent variable. Conversely, in the case of political interest, the introduction of group-related variables in model 4 slightly increased gender differences.

Table 2 Logistic regression models of political interest and participation. Gender differences

	Mod. 1		Mod. 2		Mod. 3		Mod. 4	
	Od.R	<i>p</i> val	Od.R	<i>p</i> val	Od.R	<i>p</i> val	Od.R	<i>p</i> val
<i>Political interest</i>								
Female (Ref. Male)	0.604	***	0.610	***	0.615	***	0.614	***
R ² Nagelkerke	0.149		0.152		0.192		0.226	
<i>Political participation</i>								
Female (Ref. Male)	0.681	***	0.692	***	0.710	***	0.721	***
R ² Nagelkerke	0.071		0.072		0.089		0.140	
Structural variables	●		●		●		●	
Situational variables			●		●		●	
Migration-related variables					●		●	
Group-related variables							●	
Number of observations	16,851		16,851		16,851		16,851	

Note: Odds ratios from binary logistic regression. Statistical significance of the relationship is marked by * if $p < 0.1$; ** if $p < 0.05$, *** if $p < 0.01$

Source: our elaborations on SCIF data

4.2 Determinants of political interest: the different role of explanatory variables by gender

Table 3 shows the logistic regression models predicting the likelihood of interest in Italian politics separately for men and women. The results confirmed the importance of structural factors in the likelihood of political interest. With respect to the country of origin, for both genders, those who came from MDCs, Eastern Europe, and Latin America were more interested in Italian politics than those from African and Asian countries. However, some gender differences emerged. While for men, Albanians had a significantly (albeit slightly) higher probability of being interested in politics than Romanians; for women, this result was not significant. Conversely, only for women, being from Poland had a positive effect, and being from Sri Lanka, the rest of Africa, and Latin America had a negative significant effect on political interest. The interest in Italian politics appeared to be greater among women from the national groups in which their role as first migrants and breadwinners was greater in the Italian context (Eastern Europeans and Latin Americans) and less in those groups in which women migrated mainly for family reunification (Africans and Asians, except Filipinos).

The remaining structural variables had similar effects on the likelihood of interest in politics for both men and women. The probability of being interested in politics was positively related to increasing age, although at a decreasing rate. Migrants residing in central Italy had the highest probability of being interested in politics, while those residing in the South had the lowest. Our results indicated that the higher the educational attainment, the higher the likelihood of political interest. However, an important gender difference emerged regarding occupational status: among women, the unemployed were more likely to be interested in Italian politics compared to their employed counterparts, which is the opposite of what happened among men (in this case, the difference was not significant). This could depend on the employment situation of migrant women being

Table 3 Logistic regression models of political interest on two subsamples: women and men

Independent variables	Women		Men	
	Od.R	<i>p</i> val	Od.R	<i>p</i> val
Country of origin (Ref. Romania)				
Albania	1.081		1.191	**
Bulgaria	1.005		1.045	
Poland	1.342	***	1.327	
Ukraine	1.259	**	1.684	***
Moldova	1.722	***	1.686	**
Sri Lanka	0.661	**	0.802	
China	0.395	***	0.469	***
Philippines	0.457	***	0.455	***
India	0.379	***	0.748	*
Morocco	0.873		0.869	
Tunisia	0.932		1.026	
MDCs	1.406	***	1.755	***
Eastern Europe EU	1.291		1.174	
Eastern Europe NOT EU	0.951		1.092	
North Africa	0.952		1.290	
Rest of Africa	0.693	***	0.844	
Rest of Asia	0.698	**	0.661	***
Latin America	1.346	***	1.225	
Age	1.074	***	1.057	***
Age squared	0.999	***	0.999	***
Geographical division of residence (Ref. North)				
Centre	1.320	***	1.415	***
South and Islands	0.700	***	0.570	***
Educational level (Ref. Low)				
Medium	1.673	***	1.457	***
High	2.498	***	2.527	***
Occupational status (Ref. Employed)				
Unemployed	1.203	**	0.991	
Inactive	0.860	***	0.769	***
Married or living in partnership (Ref. No)				
Yes	0.997		1.119	*
Number of children (Ref. Having no children)				
Having only one child	0.977		1.217	**
Having two children	0.991		0.972	
Having three or more children	0.787	***	0.883	
Migratory generation (Ref. First generation)				
1.5 generation	1.206	*	0.927	
Years since migration	1.020	***	1.024	***
Italian Proficiency (Ref. Low)				
Medium	1.583	***	1.323	***
High	2.216	***	1.717	***

Table 3 (continued)

Independent variables	Women		Men	
	Od.R	<i>p</i> val	Od.R	<i>p</i> val
Naturalization and attitude toward Italian citizenship (Ref. Naturalized)				
Not naturalized willing to acquire Italian citizenship	1.159		0.908	
Not naturalized unwilling to acquire Italian citizenship	0.895		0.656	***
Was discriminated against (Ref. No, never)				
Yes, in one context	1.501	***	1.392	***
Yes, in two contexts	1.749	***	1.708	***
Yes, in three or more contexts	1.765	***	2.228	***
Feeling at home in Italy (Ref. No)				
More not than yes	1.207		1.513	***
More yes than not	1.176		1.443	***
Yes	1.563	***	1.887	***
Social trust (Ref. No)				
Yes	1.207	***	1.303	***
Organizational involvement (Ref. No)				
Yes	3.280	***	3.820	***
Constant	0.037		0.098	
Number of observations	9,385		7,466	
R ² Nagelkerke	0.220		0.226	

Note: See Table 2

Source: See Table 2

concentrated in activities that leave little time to do anything else (e.g. caregivers that live with their employers).

Considering situational variables, we found interesting gender differences. Having more children was negatively and significantly related to interest in politics for women, while living in a partnership and having one child was positively and significantly related to being interested in politics for migrant men. Our findings are in line with previous international literature, which has pointed out that migration-related variables play an important role in determining the likelihood of political engagement. Compared to first generation migrants being part of the 1.5 generation increased the likelihood of being interested in politics only among women but not among men. Furthermore, for both men and women, the number of years since migration and Italian language proficiency played a significant and positive role in the likelihood of being interest in politics. The role of knowledge of Italian was more evident among women than men.

Turning to group-related variables, feeling at home in Italy played a positive role for both women and men, although the result was more robust for the latter. Also, having social trust had a beneficial (and significant) effect for both women and men. Lastly, according to social capital theory, being involved in some organizations in Italy was positively related to the likelihood of being interested in Italian politics for both women and men; these were the biggest odds ratio in all models for both genders. However, it is important to highlight that this result refers to a small part of our sample. Specifically, only 4% of women and 6% of men interviewed declared that they had participated in

organizations (Table 1). In the next section we examine whether these patterns persisted in the behavioral dimension of political engagement.

4.3 Determinants of political participation: gender differences persist

The results of the models predicting the likelihood of political participation are shown in Table 4.⁸ We found that many of the associations already observed in the case of political interest were confirmed. At the same time, some relevant differences emerged that are worthy of study. With reference to the country of origin, all other things being equal, those coming from the MDCs and Eastern Europe had a higher probability of participation. Conversely, those from Asian countries had a lower probability than Romanians (ref.). Education effects continued to be consistent and positive for both men and women (with a more evident role among the women), confirming the role of education as a predictor of political engagement.

The role played by the number of children variable was more evident than in the previous model (Table 3). It was significantly and negatively related to the likelihood of political participation only for women, and it was not significant for men, confirming that situational factors that imply time-demanding tasks constrained female political engagement.

Passing to migratory-related variables, we found that they were significantly and positively related to the likelihood of political participation in particular for women. The 1.5 generation had a 52% greater chance of participating than the first generation. Women with a medium–high knowledge of the Italian language had respectively a 26% and 49% higher participation propensity than those with a low level of knowledge of Italian. The probability of political participation was significantly lower (by more than 31%) among women who were not naturalized and who did not intend to become Italian citizens compared to those who were naturalized. As other studies have shown, those who were more integrated were more likely to engage in politics than those who were less integrated. Although, contrary to what we expected, being part of the 1.5 generation was meaningful only for women. For the latter, being born and growing up in Italy increased political awareness by reducing gender differences.

Compared to the political interest dependent variable (Table 3), the role played by group-related variables was confirmed in the political participation model (Table 4), although there were some differences concerning the sign of the coefficients with respect to the previous regressions. In particular, the group-related variables showed a more evident association with political engagement in the case of the behavioral dimension than the attitudinal one.

According to the previous literature, discrimination experiences are positively related to a higher likelihood of political participation beyond voting for both women and men. Contrary to the previous results in Table 3, immigrants who felt at home in Italy did not have higher levels of political participation compared to those who did not feel at home in Italy for both women and men. Moreover, contrary to the political interest results, the social trust variable produced negative effects on participation and was significant only among women.

⁸ Carrying out robustness checks revealed that results remain substantially unchanged when a different number of categories are included for the measurement of political participation. The checks were carried out with a nonconventional political participation measure composed by three categories (listening to political debates, taking part in political meetings, taking part in political demonstrations).

Table 4 Logistic regression models of political participation on two subsamples: women and men

Independent variables	Women		Men	
	Od.R	<i>p</i> val	Od.R	<i>p</i> val
Country of origin (Ref. Romania)				
Albania	1.107		1.502	***
Bulgaria	0.788		1.209	
Poland	1.277		1.657	*
Ukraine	1.280		1.262	
Moldova	1.721	***	1.168	
Sri Lanka	0.295	**	0.792	
China	0.314	**	0.436	**
Philippines	0.741		0.516	**
India	0.475		1.261	
Morocco	0.984		0.904	
Tunisia	1.564		1.098	
MDCs	2.091	***	2.118	***
Eastern Europe EU	0.836		1.072	
Eastern Europe NOT EU	1.049		0.959	
North Africa	0.448		1.362	
Rest of Africa	1.17		1.173	
Rest of Asia	0.388	**	1.125	
Latin America	1.209		1.265	
Age	1.061	***	1.056	**
Age squared	0.999	**	0.999	**
Geographical division of residence (Ref. North)				
Centre	1.219	*	1.502	***
South and Islands	0.707	***	0.628	***
Educational level (Ref. Low)				
Medium	1.817	***	1.523	***
High	2.391	***	2.023	***
Occupational status (Ref. Employed)				
Unemployed	0.974		1.043	
Inactive	0.904		0.975	
Married or living in partnership (Ref. No)				
Yes	1.016		1.011	
Number of children (Ref. Having no children)				
Having only one child	0.891		1.074	
Having two children	0.770	**	0.890	
Having three or more children	0.577	***	0.902	
Migratory generation (Ref. first generation)				
1.5 generation	1.525	**	1.272	
Years since migration	1.019	***	1.023	***
Italian proficiency (Ref. Low)				
Medium	1.263	**	1.033	
High	1.491	***	1.375	***

Table 4 (continued)

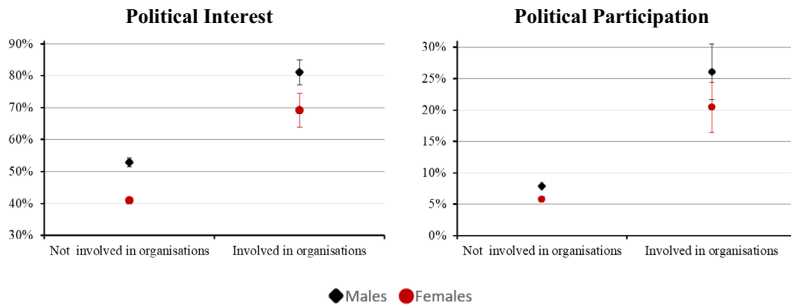
Independent variables	Women		Men	
	Od.R	<i>p</i> val	Od.R	<i>p</i> val
Naturalization and attitude toward Italian citizenship (Ref. Naturalized)				
Not naturalized willing to acquire Italian citizenship	0.875		1.178	
Not naturalized unwilling to acquire Italian citizenship	0.691	*	0.862	
Was discriminated against (Ref. No, never)				
Yes, in one context	1.776	***	1.541	***
Yes, in two contexts	2.062	***	2.188	***
Yes, in three or more contexts	2.402	***	1.977	***
Feeling at home in Italy (Ref. No)				
More not than yes	0.708	*	0.677	***
More yes than not	0.706	*	0.561	***
Yes	0.897		0.677	**
Social trust (Ref. No)				
Yes	0.768	***	0.940	
Organizational involvement (Ref. No)				
Yes	4.225	***	4.231	***
Costant	0.013	***	0.019	***
Number of observations	9,385		7,466	
R ² Nagelkerke	0.141		0.144	

Source: See Table 2

The role of social capital in spurring political participation was confirmed. Those who were involved in organizations were four times more likely to participate than migrants not involved in organizations.

4.4 Political engagement: the intersection of the gender and organizational involvement variable

In order to deepen the role played by social capital, the predicted probability of political engagement among migrant women and men, at different levels of organizational involvement and holding other variables at their mean values, are proposed in Fig. 1. The interaction between gender and organizational involvement had a similar profile for both political interest and participation. The highest likelihood of political engagement was that of men involved in organizations, followed by women with the same characteristic. Not surprisingly, women not involved in associations had the lowest likelihood of political engagement. However, we found that women involved in organizations had a higher likelihood of both political interest and participation than men not involved in organizations. In the case of political participation, the predicted probabilities differences between men and women involved in organizations were not statistically significant.



Note: in order to make the results more readable, we used two different scales on y-axis of left and right side figures.

Fig. 1 Predicted probabilities of political interest (left side) and participation (right side). Interaction effects for gender and organizational involvement
Source: our elaborations on SCIF data

5 Discussion and conclusion

Gender inequalities in political participation remain an important part of “democracy’s unresolved dilemma” of unequal participation (Lijphart 1997). Previous studies have highlighted the presence of a gender gap in political participation in the Italian context (see Quaranta 2016; Sartori et al. 2017). We are not, however, aware of previous studies investigating gender differences in the political participation of migrants.

Based on the importance—not only numerical—of the immigrant component of Italian society, in this contribution we analysed the existence of gender differences in political attitudes and behaviors among immigrants in Italy.

Based on the literature, we expected to observe a crucial role of gender in explaining the gap in political engagement among migrants (Hypothesis H1). Our results confirmed the existence of gender gap in political engagement. Gender, as a key source of inequality (Morales 1999), confirmed its direct effect also in case of immigrant population. In all our analyses, women were less interested and had lower levels of participation than their male counterparts. Also, when several control variables were considered in the multivariate analysis, this gap was confirmed.

Our work contributes to a more complete understanding of how gender shapes migrants’ political engagement and incorporation in Italy, confirming the presence of a gender gap in political affairs between immigrants as well as among the natives. Our results also suggest that there are some notable differences in their determinants.

Our results confirm that political interest and participation vary significantly according to the migrants’ country of origin, with non-negligible differences emerging from the intersection between gender and country of origin. In general, there seems to be a clear distinction based on the geographical and cultural proximity of the different groups (Bueker 2005): the analyses proposed here also show how Eastern Europeans and Latin Americans are more interested in Italian political events than Asians and Africans from the sub-Saharan region. Furthermore, with reference to immigrant women, interest in Italian politics appeared to be higher among those national groups in which their role as first-migrant and head of household was relevant in the Italian context and lower in those groups in which women migrated mainly for family reunification. This result is probably linked, on the one

hand, to the positive role that autonomous labour migration of women from some groups of origin can have in terms of empowerment and engagement and, on the other, to the negative role-played by the family commitments of women who arrived for reunification.

The studies on women and politics pointed out that situational variables represent an obstacle to political engagement more for women than for men. To the best of our knowledge, our contribution investigates for the first time the role these variables play in the case of migrants. The results indicate that situational variables inhibit the likelihood of being engaged in Italian politics only for women (Hypothesis H2), while for men they play a rather negligible role.

As has already been suggested, participation may be related to the social roles an individual assumes during their life (Neundorf et al. 2013; Nie et al. 1974), with outcomes that are not the same for men and women. Indeed, gender roles and family ties in many cases constitute a source of political inequality for women (Burns et al. 1997; Verba et al. 1995). While for men, stabilizing elements related to family status (such as being married and having a child) play a significant role in stimulating political engagement, women seem to accumulate multiple disadvantages, such as their different social roles as wife and mother and the various tasks and duties associated with them.

This disadvantage, most likely linked to the unequal distribution of care work within the couple and the family, seems to affect all women, even—if not more—migrants. Clearly, caring responsibilities reduce the time available to become politically involved and engaged. Given the nature and the extension of the role of migrant women in care work—*intra-family*, *extra-family*, for those working, and *transnational*—its negative repercussions on political participation would logically be felt more acutely by women than by men. In other words, it is women who bear a heavier burden, and certain circumstances, such as being in a partnership and having children, can further limit their chances of participation, thus amplifying participatory inequalities.

The analysis of the effect of family conditions on political engagement suggests that “private inequalities” lead to “political inequalities”, which are in contrast with the norms of just democratic politics (Lijphart 1997; Quaranta 2016, 390). Although the role of care work in women’s political participation is well known in the literature on women and politics (Burns et al. 1997; Schlozman et al. 1994; for Italy see also Quaranta 2016; Sartori et al. 2017), our findings highlight that this is also true in the case of foreign women. This evidence sheds light on an aspect that has not been investigated thus far in the literature regarding the political participation of migrants.

To break this vicious circle, to prevent women giving up on the possibility of political participation, our results suggest that politics could intervene with actions aimed at reducing the asymmetry between male and female commitments in the family and at balancing gender roles in the household, encouraging a more equitable distribution between partners regarding responsibilities and the burden of care within the family and also promoting a rethinking of the idea of masculinity and femininity and the roles assigned to them. It is important to emphasise that the disadvantage accumulated by immigrant women is already more than double that of native women, and also that they do not have the possibility of lightening the burden of care thanks to the support of mothers or other women in the family, who in most cases do not have the economic possibility of employing paid help, and in addition do not have equal access to welfare services—already scarce and residual in the Italian system. For these reasons, policymakers should adopt more inclusive and intersectional policies, capable of supporting not only native but also migrant women bearers of specific needs. In future works, it would be interesting to compare native and foreign women to see if there are significant differences in political participation on equal terms.

If family roles appear to inhibit the ability of migrant women to engage in politics, in contrast, their organizational membership seems to favor it. According to social capital theory (Putnam 1993, 2000), being involved in some organizations is positively related to the likelihood of being engaged in politics both for women and men (Hypothesis H3); these were the highest coefficients in all models.

In line with social capital theory, our analyses confirm that the forms of formal and informal sociability experienced within organizations builds relations of trust and reciprocity, which improve individuals' capability to "capitalise" political engagement. Our results confirm the work of European scholars on the essential role of social capital in immigrants' political engagement (Jacobs et al. 2004). Moreover, they also shed light on the role that social capital has for women, not just men, confronting the invisibility of migrant women in the research on political participation and social capital.

As highlighted by Lowndes, "there has in fact been little interest in gender within the social capital debate, and a simultaneous reluctance among those concerned with women and politics to engage with social capital models" (Lowndes 2004, 46). We also know very little about the relationship between political participation and the level of social capital developed in the group at the individual level by migrant political participation studies with a specific gender lens.

To the best of our knowledge, there are no European studies that have investigated the role of social capital as a predictor of migrant women's political engagement, much less studies that have delved into its role in determining gender differences in political participation. Our research thus updates existing scholarship and addresses this gap, with a focus on Italy. Our results show that social capital, or the positive societal consequences of group membership and participation, is a key explanatory factor in understanding political engagement by migrant women. Not only does group membership and participation increase the likelihood of the political engagement of migrant women, marking the difference between women who participate in organizations and those who do not, but the social capital developed in them allows women who are involved in organizations to overcome the levels of political engagement of men who are not involved. Moreover, in the case of political participation, when both women and men are involved in organizations, the gender gap becomes nonsignificant.

In light of these results, the crucial role of social capital in fostering political engagement was confirmed for both migrant women and men. With respect to women, the social capital developed within the organizations can act as an alternative resource to compensate for the lack of other resources that traditionally support political participation (Farris and Holman 2014, 345).

For the limitations strictly related to the available data set, it was not possible to analyze the interaction with different types of social capital developed in different organizational circuits. This type of analysis would have made it possible to verify whether in the case of associations in which women are more active,⁹ the gap between men and women is reduced, since "men and women may be involved in different, gender-specific 'circuits' of social capital that 'capitalise' political engagement in different ways (or not at all)" (Lowndes 2004, 47). We find that social capital diminishes the gender effect, but it does not vanish. Although this was not among the aims of this paper, it should be noted that our analysis is not able to fully explain what accounts for the gender gap in the political

⁹ The questionnaire did not take into account female associations.

engagement of migrants in Italy. To this aim, further investigations could be developed in the future.

Due to the low frequencies recorded in the subsamples, it was not possible to carry out disaggregated analyses by subgroups (such as Berger et al. 2004), working on the subsample of politically engaged persons in order to identify distinct typologies. Also, this difficulty is closely linked to the type of data set used derived from a general population survey, which usually produces relatively small samples of politically engaged people, making it very difficult, if not impossible, to carry out detailed analyses by subgroups (see Giugni and Grasso 2019, 20–21). This type of analysis by subgroups would require further in-depth study using a specific survey instrument.

Final remarks concern the limitations of this paper that should be addressed in future studies. First, as mentioned in Sect. 2.1, the SCIF data allowed us to test the ‘structural’ and ‘situational’ explanation of the different gender paths in political engagement. We could not consider the ‘political socialisation’ explanation (Welch 1977), which we intend to study in the future hoping in the dissemination of appropriate data in Italy. Second, for the same reasons, we were unable to test electoral political participation of immigrants, which represents one of the most important aspects of their political engagement. Third, in this contribution the participants’ ethnicity is measured only using the information on the country of origin identified by citizenship at birth. One of the strengths of our contribution is that few researches have considered such a large number of countries/areas of origin. However, important aspects such as ethnic identity and religious beliefs have not been considered in this contribution because it goes beyond its purpose. These important aspects influencing political engagement of immigrants, deserve future development in a specific contribution that focuses specifically on them. Fourth, the survey does not provide information on natives, so we could not measure how much the gender gap in political engagement of immigrants differs from that of natives. Certainly, interesting aspect little investigated in the empirical literature, but mainly addressed in qualitative research.

Author contributions This research article is the result of a joint effort, including the following individual contributions: *Conceptualization*: RG; *Literature research*: RG, AB; *Methodology*: AB, RG, SS; *Data Analysis*: AB, RG; *Writing—original draft preparation*: RG, AB; *Writing—review and editing*: RG, AB, SS; *Funding acquisition*: SS; *Resources*: SS; *Supervision*: SS. All authors commented on previous versions and read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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Declaration

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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