Leaving home, finding a partner and having kids:

Gender differences in political participation across the life course in Italy

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Abstract

This article analyzes how the political participation of men and women varies across the life course in Italy. Various studies on the topic have looked at the effects of the life cycle on political participation by using age as a proxy. Participation, however, may not be simply dependent on age. Instead, it may be related to the roles individuals assume during the life course. For this reason, the article looks at how participation changes during specific life transitions, such as leaving the parental home, forming a union and becoming a parent. Furthermore, the article puts special emphasis on how "private inequalities" in the household may become "political inequalities". In fact, family roles and responsibilities can be constraints to participation, especially for women. The article finds that while leaving the parental home is positively associated with participation for both men and women, forming a union and being a parent is detrimental to the participation of women, but not to that of men.

Key words: political participation; life course; life transitions; gender gap; household composition; Italy.

Introduction

This article uses a "life course" approach to study political participation in Italy. Several studies on participation have looked at the effect of age as a proxy for the life cycle (Zukin *et al.*, 2006; Quintelier, 2007). It has also been suggested that participation might instead be related to the roles an individual assumes during the life course (Nie *et al.*, 1974; Jennings, 1979; Jennings and Niemi, 1981; Highton and Wolfinger, 2001; Neundorf *et al.*, 2013). However, these roles are not the same for men and women. Often gender roles and family constraints, such as the division of labor within the household, constitute a source of political inequality (Verba *et al.*, 1995; Burns *et al.*, 1997; Schlozman *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, this article looks at how life transitions are associated with the political participation of men and women (Jennings, 1979), and analyzes three transitions in particular – leaving the parental home, forming a couple, and becoming a parent – which are fundamental steps in the transition to adulthood and determine household composition (Buchmann and Kriesi, 2011).

This article contributes to the literature on political participation in several ways. First, by using a resource model of political participation (Brady *et al.*, 1995) it looks at life events as possible "determinants" of such resources. Moving out of the parental home increases the independence of individuals in terms of personal choices and resources; entering a partnership reduces time availability, increases responsibilities, and changes political preferences; and becoming a parent also changes political priorities and it further limits or stimulates participation. Second, the article looks at how life cycle transitions are associated with patterns of political participation among men and women. Indeed, these stages may have different effects on their resources. "Private" forms of inequalities, due to the new roles assumed after leaving the parental home, becoming a partner and a parent, are relevant for participation (Burns *et al.*, 1997). In this regard, Italy represents a very interesting case. This country has often been described as "familistic" (Reher, 1998), with strong traditional values regarding gender roles and responsibilities in the household (Dotti Sani, 2012). In this context, women are over-represented in the domestic sphere but under-represented in the public sphere, with quite a low number of women in politics compared to most European countries (EIGE, 2010). Women are also less likely to get involved in

political activities (Tuorto, 2009; Quaranta, 2014). These contextual characteristics may have consequences for the political participation of men and women, as "private inequalities" within the household are very likely to become "political inequalities". This is important for two reasons. In Italy, the fact that women are less involved in politics may explain their low level of representation in the institutional political arena. If women participate even less as the life course goes on, this may lead to a further representation problem. In addition, the more women engage in politics, the more extensive policies for women might be. Thus, if participation follows the stages of the life course it means that policies for some categories of women will be more or less easily put on the governmental agenda. As is known, issues concerning those who are more involved in politics are more likely to be objects of political decisions (Lijphart, 1996). Therefore, looking at how men and women get involved in politics when going through certain life transitions allows an understanding of how political inequalities emerge across life and what their consequences could be. This study also adds new empirical evidence to the literature, as most of the findings on the relationship between life transitions and participation come from the US or just a few European countries.

Literature review and hypotheses

Leaving home and political participation

Leaving the parental home is likely to be the first step towards social independence (Buchmann and Kriesi, 2011). Individuals living on their own assume new roles – which may raise their attention to political issues – and are more autonomous (Plutzer, 2002). Moreover, leaving the parental home corresponds to a change in the availability of some resources, such as time and income (Gauthier and Furstenberg, 2002; Aassve *et al.*, 2007). It also means leaving behind the influence exerted by parents on young adults' political orientations (see Lane, 1959). A few studies have investigated the effect of leaving the parental home on political participation. It has been found that in the US turnout for those who still live with their parents is higher than that for those who have left home (Highton and Wolfinger, 2001), and that leaving the parental home has a negative effect on turnout in Denmark (Bhatti and Hansen, 2012). On the contrary,

in the US leaving the parental home provides new opportunities for participation and increases engagement in civic organizations (see Flanagan and Levine, 2010).

Several studies show that in Italy leaving the parental home is a complicated life passage (see Barbagli *et al.*, 2003), and it may affect some resources. When young adults leave the parental household there is a relevant increase in labor market participation. This could extend the chances for participation, given that the working environment can serve as a motivational stimulus (see Schlozman *et al.*, 1999). Time spent on housework also increases, although much less. On the contrary, time spent on leisure declines (Anxo *et al.*, 2011). The consequences of leaving home on resources for participation, however, may depend on gender. Indeed, Italy is a gendered society, pushing individuals to follow traditional social norms. It has been found, however, that leaving the parental household does not have different consequences for men and women in terms of participation in the labor market, housework or leisure (Romano *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, this transition has a negative impact on time availability, but at the same time it can enlarge the possibility for participation, given that individuals are more independent and enter into contact with new social circles. Accordingly:

H1) Not living in the parental household is expected to be positively associated with political participation, independently of gender.

Partnership and political participation

Forming a union can modify the way individuals look at political matters. Partnership increases citizens' interest in public matters, as different issues are now at stake. Partnership can be seen as a resource for participation, as it provides a series of incentives and new opportunities for engaging in politics (Jennings and Niemi, 1981; Stoker and Jennings, 1995). It can also be a constraint on participation, as it reduces time availability and increases private responsibilities (Burns *et al.*, 1997). On the one hand, the married show higher levels of political interest, efficacy, information, and turnout in the US (Verba *et al.*, 1997; Wolfinger and Wolfinger, 2008). This is also confirmed by studies on participation accounting for the absence or the loss of the partner, which is a source of political mobilization (Hobbs *et al.*, 2014). On the

other hand, scholars have found a negative effect of marriage on political participation. Stoker and Jennings (1995) find that marital transition in the US reduces political participation, as it introduces new preferences and priorities in the couple's life. Others argue that marriage alone, i.e. with no children in the household, is not linked to political outcomes (Jennings and Niemi, 1981).

Given that the division of labor in the household is unbalanced towards women, partnership mainly affects the participation of women (Burns *et al.*, 1997). In fact, they spend more time on chores compared to men, even if they do not have children (Gupta 1999). Thus, one study shows that marital status has an indirect effect on participation, through participation in the workforce (Schlozman *et al.*, 1999). Conversely, another study finds that marital status has a negligible effect on the political participation of both men and women in the US (Welch 1977). Similarly, the differences in participation between partnered men and women in Switzerland are found to be small (Voorpostel and Coffé, 2012).

The Italian case is particularly interesting for the understanding of the effect of partnership on the political participation of men and women. In this context, it has been found that forming a union modifies the allocation of time. In fact, housework increases when people enter a relationship, particularly among women (Romano *et al.*, 2012). Italian women, when in a couple, spend much more time than men doing household-related chores, independently of employment status, income or education (Dotti Sani, 2012). Italian women do more housework compared to European women in general, while Italian men do less housework compared to their European counterparts (Aliaga, 2006). Moreover, men tend to work more when joining a couple, while women do not (Anxo *et al.*, 2011). A greater involvement in the workplace for men could exert a positive effect on participation, but a negative one for women (Schlozman *et al.*, 1999). Therefore:

H2) Being in a union is expected to be associated more negatively with the political participation of women than with that of men.

Parenthood and political participation

Parenthood also has consequences for politics. Parents care more about public issues, public services,

taxes, education, and so on (Elder and Greene, 2012). Indeed, children can extend parents' social networks, favoring participation. Children can also be a constraint on participation, as they reduce time availability and household finances, increase responsibilities, and affect social relationships (Gallagher and Gerstel, 2001; Nomaguchi and Milkie, 2003). A number of studies emphasize a positive effect of being a parent on participation. In the US, parents engage in school district politics (Jennings, 1979), and are more attentive to a number of political issues (Elder and Greene, 2012). Others find that children have a negative effect on participation. It is found that in the US having children lowers turnout and attention to electoral campaigns (Welch, 1977; Wolfinger and Wolfinger, 2008). Research, however, has found that the effect of parenthood on political participation depends on the age of children. Indeed, pre-schoolers are much more in need of care and attention, isolating parents from the political sphere. On the contrary, children in school and teenagers provide more opportunities for parents to be engaged (McGlenn, 1980; Schlozman *et al.*, 1994).

Parenthood affects men and women differently. When children are small, women may exit the labor market, miss work experience, and may be less productive. On the contrary, men tend to earn more and work more hours (Gibb *et al.*, 2014). Small children also impact on the time budget. Women increase the time they spend on housework and childcare more than men (Anxo *et al.*, 2011). The effect of childbearing depends on the age of children. Women tend to re-enter the labor market and spend less time on domestic tasks and childcare when children grow (Gauthier and Furstenberg, 2002). Various studies show that the political participation of women is affected by childbearing more than that of men, and that the effects on both women and men are more pronounced when children are under school age, and less pronounced when children enter the educational system (McGlenn, 1980; Schlozman *et al.*, 1994, 1999; Voorpostel and Coffé, 2012). In general, differences have been found between mothers and non-mothers in terms of several political outcomes, such as involvement, information, efficacy, knowledge and trust (Jennings and Niemi, 1981). Although empirical evidence on the relationship between parenthood and political participation for the Italian case is absent, several studies show that the presence of children in the household affects the couple's resources for participation. The time budget changes when children are

small, especially for women (Craig and Mullan, 2010). In fact, they tend to work less when children are pre-school-aged. A similar process can be seen for domestic work and care (Anxo *et al.*, 2011; Dotti Sani, 2012). As children grow and go to school, the time dedicated to housework and childcare tends to shrink for both partners (Romano *et al.*, 2012). Thus, in this context:

H3) Being a parent is expected to be associated more negatively with the political participation of women than with that of men. The negative association, for both men and women, is stronger when children are small and weaker when they are older.

Empirical strategy

Data and sample

The hypotheses are tested using a harmonization of the "ISTAT Multipurpose Survey – Aspects of Daily Life". Every year since 1993 the Italian Institute of Statistics has sampled about 19,000 households and their members to collect information on a variety of topics, such as the family, housing, education, work, and other themes, including political participation. Although data on some confounding factors are not available, e.g. political preferences or values, the ISTAT survey has several advantages. It contains detailed information on the composition of the household, allowing the stages of the life cycle to be reconstructed and their association with participation to be tested. The dataset has a very large sample size, which has been deemed to be an important requisite for exploring the effects of life course transitions on participation (see Highton and Wolfinger, 2001). After list-wise deleting the missing values, the sample consists of 606260 respondents, of whom 295960 are men and 310300 are women.[1]

Dependent variable

This study uses a broad notion of political participation, defining it as "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, p. 38). The different life transitions, however, can also affect other forms of political involvement requiring

similar resources. Indeed, there are "latent" acts that should be taken into account (see Hooghe and Dejaeghere, 2007). In this article, political participation is measured using a continuum going from "latent" or less visible, to "manifest" or more observable acts (see Ekman and Amnå, 2012), which presupposes the presence of a hierarchy among the modes of participation, as they require increasing levels of commitment.[2] Six dichotomous items are selected: "giving money contributions to political parties", "attending meetings of political parties", "doing unpaid work for political parties", "listening to political debates", "attending rallies", and "attending demonstrations".[3] The items are summarized into one scale, which is tested using Mokken Scale Analysis (MSA) (Van Schuur, 2003), a non-parametric scaling technique already used to test the scalability of items measuring political participation (Quaranta, 2013; García-Albacete, 2014). It uses a probabilistic approach to tell whether a set of items can measure a one-dimensional underlying trait in different samples. The scalability of the items is evaluated using the "Loevinger's H" coefficient, given for the overall scale and for each item, which has to be higher than 0.30. Table 1 reports the results of the MSA and the distribution in terms of proportions of respondents who engaged in each form of participation. The analysis shows that the items can be summarized into an additive scale that is valid for both men and women (Van Schuur, 2003). In fact, the overall scale coefficients (H) are generally higher than 0.30, as are the items coefficients (H_i). The scale ranges from zero – the respondent has done none of the six activities, i.e. does not participate – to six – the respondent has done all six of the activities. The probabilistic nature of MSA allows a hierarchy to be found among the items. The proportions reported in the table show that a respondent who has engaged in a less "popular" form of participation is more likely to have also engaged in a more "popular" one. For instance, the scale for women indicates that a respondent scoring one has probably listened to debates, that a respondent scoring two has probably listened to debates and also attended rallies, that a respondent scoring three has probably listened to debates, attended rallies and also attended demonstrations, and so on. The average index value is 0.504 for the full sample, 0.663 for men, and 0.352 for women. These values already indicate a difference in participation between men and women.

[Table 1 here]

Independent variable

To test whether having left the parental home, being in a partnership and being a parent are associated with political participation, the respondents are classified according to life course transitions, using the following individual characteristics: living or not with parents, being in a partnership, cohabiting, parenthood, age of children, age, and age of partner (Gauthier and Furstenberg, 2002; Anxo *et al.*, 2011). The classification is the following: 1) being single and aged 18-35, living with parents and not having children at home; 2) being single and aged 18-35, not living with parents and not having children at home; 3) being in a partnership, i.e. cohabiting or being married, with both partners aged 18-45, and not having children at home; 4) being in a partnership with the youngest child aged 0 to 5 (pre-school age) at home; 5) being in a partnership with the youngest child aged 6 to 13 (school age) at home; 6) being in a partnership with the youngest child aged 14 to 25 (school and "independence" age) at home; 7) being in a partnership in which both partners are aged between 46 and 59, with no children at home; 8) being in a partnership in which both partners are 60 years old or more, with no children at home; 9) being single and 60 years old or more, with no children at home. These categories represent a "typical" life cycle and account for the "statuses" an individual goes through. Table 2 shows the distribution of the categories.

[Table 2 here]

This classification should be understood as a heuristic device to study how the life cycle is associated with political participation. An alternative to this categorization would be to interact the variables living or not with parents, being in a partnership, cohabiting, parenthood, age of children, age, and age of partner. Of course, this would produce very complicated estimates that would be very hard to interpret. Therefore, this classification – which relies on life cycle typologies already used in the literature (see McLeod and Ellis, 1983) – is a parsimonious measure to account for several variables defining life

transitions. Moreover, the classification provides a set of categories that correspond with common life cycle transitions that individuals are likely to experience (Marini, 1984). The sequence is pre-determined and it is thus possible that the stages in the life course may be "de-standardized" (Buchmann and Kriesi, 2011), and not follow the order outlined above. The classification is also not exhaustive, as some possible categories are excluded. However, it can be a useful instrument to test how conventional biographical transitions, which also define the household composition, are associated with political participation when truly longitudinal data are not available. For the purpose of this article, the stages of interest will be up to the sixth category.

Control variables

A number of control variables are used. First of all, the models control for level of education in categories ("Primary school or lower" as reference, "Middle school", "High school", and "University or higher"). The literature widely indicates that citizens with higher levels of education are more likely to get involved in politics (Verba *et al.*, 1995). Furthermore, education is considered a confounding factor for the transitions under study (Billari, 2004). Then, employment status in categories is used ("Employed" as reference, "Not employed", "Retired", and "Student").[4] Employment condition is considered a relevant predictor of participation, as those who are employed may acquire competences and social capital in the workplace, while those who are not employed occupy a marginal position in society (Schlozman *et al.*, 1999). As a proxy for income, a dummy indicator measuring satisfaction with personal finances is used ("Not satisfied" as reference, and "Satisfied").[5] The literature has largely shown that having personal economic resources is a pre-condition for political participation (Brady *et al.*, 1995). Furthermore, this indicator allows controlling for the potential availability of market-based domestic and care services.[6] Then, an indicator of residential stability is used, indicating whether in the last 12 months the respondent has moved into a new house ("No" as reference, and "Yes"). Residential stability is argued to be a factor in political participation, as moving to new places means adjusting to new networks (Highton and Wolfinger, 2001). Finally, a categorical variable indicating the geographical area of residence is used

("North-west", as reference, "North-east", "Centre", "South", and "Islands").[7] This variable is included as Italy shows large differences in terms of sub-cultures. Moreover, the patterns of life cycle transitions are quite different between northern and southern regions (Barbagli *et al.*, 2003).[8] The descriptive statistics are reported in Table A1 in the Appendix.

Model

In the analysis of repeated survey data, respondents are born in different periods, they therefore have different ages, and they experience different historical moments (Firebaugh, 1997). This means that the outcome of interest, i.e. political participation, can be a function of three separate elements: age, birth cohort and period. Therefore, there are three sources of heterogeneity that should be accounted for. Indeed, age, period and cohort are argued to be important factors for participation (Zukin *et al.*, 2006) and for the patterns of the different life transitions (Billari, 2004). Unfortunately, when analyzing age, period and cohort an "identification" problem emerges (Firebaugh, 1997). That is, they are linearly dependent. A solution that has been proposed to solve this issue is treating respondents as nested in cohorts and periods so as to simultaneously account for time and cohort heterogeneity by using Hierarchical-Age-Period-Cohort (HAPC) models (Yang and Land, 2008). The variable measuring life course transitions already accounts for age, and therefore it indirectly controls for it. The advantage of these models is that they allow all the surveys to be pooled, and so extend the sample size while controlling for time and cohort, which are independent and normally distributed random-effects, and for the individual characteristics, which are fixed effects. Therefore, these models are simply cross-classified mixed models (Gelman and Hill, 2006).

As the dependent variable counts the forms of political participation each respondent has engaged in, a binomial model for count data is applied. The dependent variable has a natural limit and each data point can be considered to be the number of successes out of a number of trials (Gelman and Hill, 2006). For instance, a respondent scoring two on the scale of participation shows two successes out of six trials, i.e. the number of forms of participation an individual could engage in. The model is specified as follows:

$$y_i \sim \text{Binomial}(n_i, p_i) \quad (1)$$

$$p_i = logit^{-1}\,(\mu + \boldsymbol{\beta}\mathbf{X}' + \alpha_t + \delta_c) \quad (2)$$

In (1) y_i indicates the dependent variable, where *i* indexes the *N* observations. The dependent variable follows a binomial distribution, where n_i is the number of trials and p_i is the probability of success. Equation (2) links the probability of success to the linear predictor, which is a combination of μ, the intercept, and the matrix of the independent variables **X** and the vector of coefficients **β**. The linear predictor also includes the year random-effects, α_t, and the cohort random-effects, δ_c, with standard deviations σ_t and σ_c , where *t* and *c* indicate, respectively, the years ($t = 1, ..., 19$) and the cohorts ($c = 1, ..., 7$).[9] Since the models are overdispersed, the standard errors are corrected. The models are estimated separately for men and women.[10]

Results

Table 3 reports the estimates of the models. The unconditional models (Models 0) show that in Italy women are less likely than men to engage in political participation, net of period and cohort effects. These models also indicate that participation varies more across cohorts than across time in both the male and the female sample.[10] As estimates of binomial models are not easy to interpret, the predicted probabilities of being engaged in any number of political actions are provided in this discussion. The probabilities based on the estimates of Models 0 indicate that a man has a 0.53 chance of being engaged in none of the forms of participation, while a woman has about 0.72. Similarly, the probability of a man being involved in one form of participation, probably listening to a debate, is about 0.36, while that for a woman is 0.24. Again, a man has a probability of about 0.10 of getting involved in two forms of participation, and of about 0.017 of engaging in more than two, and for a woman these probabilities are 0.04 and 0.003. These preliminary results demonstrate that women are much less involved in politics than men in Italy, confirming the presence of political inequalities in this context. Women may be discouraged from getting involved in politics, probably because it is a "men's game". Women, on average, are less likely to vote, to be involved in party politics, and to engage in protest actions (Tuorto, 2009; Quaranta, 2014).[11] Nevertheless, does

gender inequality in participation worsen as individuals go through life course transitions?

[Table 3 here]

Models 1 include the life cycle stages and the control variables. Interestingly, the cohort effect shrinks substantially when the independent variables are included in the models. This indicates that these life cycle and other control variables account for a considerable part of the variability in participation across cohorts. Instead, the variation in participation across periods remains mostly unchanged. Coming to the results of interest, to interpret the effect of life cycle transitions Figure 1 plots the marginal effects of being in each stage of the life course on the probability of engaging in none – that is inactivity, in one, in two, or in more forms of participation, for men and women.[12] When men and women have left the parental household, the probability of being politically inactive decreases. Conversely, entering a partnership creates differences in the probability of being inactive among men and women. When in a couple, women are less likely to be involved in politics, while men are more likely, compared to being single and living with their parents. When pre-school-aged and older children are present in the household, men tend to be more involved in participation, while women are less likely to be – i.e. the probability of inactivity increases – compared to living with parents. Instead, when children between 14 and 25 years old are present in the household, men are less inactive, while women are neither more nor less inactive, compared to living with their parents.

[Figure 1 here]

Similar, though reversed, patterns of participation can be seen when taking into account engagement in one, two or more forms of participation. Both men and women are more likely to be engaged in participation as they pass through the life cycle transitions, compared to living with their parents. However, the participation of women decreases when they enter a partnership and have children

between 0 and 13 years old, compared to being single and living with their parents. These models provide an indication that the life course, and probably the different household roles – which are known to be a burden more particularly for women than for men – are factors hindering the participation of women (see Burns *et al.*, 1997). The plot, despite being informative on the association between life cycle stages and participation, does not say much about the effects of each stage compared to the previous one, as it only provides the difference between each life cycle transition and the first stage, i.e. being single and living with one's parents.

Figure 2, instead, illustrates the differences in the probability of being involved in none, one, two or more forms of participation *between* each step of the life cycle and the previous one, for men and women.[13] Thus, for the first step, i.e. moving out of the parental house, it is the same as in Figure 1. Being in a partnership, however, is quite different for men and women. The difference in the probability of being inactive between a man in a partnership and a man who has moved out of the parental house is not different from zero. Conversely, the difference in probability of being inactive in any form of participation between a woman in a partnership and a woman who is not is about 0.04. Likewise, a woman who is in a partnership is less likely to engage in one or more forms of participation compared to a woman who is not, while this stage is not relevant for a man. This indicates that the transition into partnership only affects women negatively.

[Figure 2 here]

Compared to being in a couple, having pre-school children in the household again penalizes women, rather than men. In fact, the difference in the probability of being politically inactive between a woman who has pre-school-aged children and a woman who does not have children is about 0.05, while the same transition does not correspond to a significant difference for men. The same effect, but opposite, can be seen for the probability of engaging in one or more forms of participation. The presence of pre-school-aged children hampers the political participation of women but not of men. This is probably

because small children are demanding in terms of resources mostly for women in Italy. In fact, the institutional setting does not help mothers. Access to public childcare for children under 3 years old is very limited, double-earner households are not favored in terms of taxation, working hours are not very flexible for parents, and parental leave is mainly used by women (Solera, 2009). These are factors that force women to be more committed to care and housework, which in turn may produce political inequalities (Burns *et al.*, 1997). When children attend school, the "effect" on participation becomes positive, compared to when children are pre-school-aged, independently of gender. This effect can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, housework and childcare decrease when children grow older (Gallagher and Gerstel, 2001), and parents can at this point dedicate more time to political activities. On the other, when children attend school, mothers and fathers may be bound to new social networks stimulating participation (Jennings, 1979).

The data used in this analysis, however, span across almost 20 years. Therefore, respondents who are experiencing the same life cycle stage belong to different generations. Indeed, the analysis has not explored whether the differences in participation between men and women across life cycle transitions change with the succession of cohorts. Some scholars have underlined that participatory behavior changes across generations (see Caren *et al.*, 2011; Grasso, 2014), in particular with younger generations more likely to engage in unconventional forms of participation vis-à-vis older generations more likely to engage in institutionalized forms of participation. Therefore, it is worth testing whether the effect of the life cycle on participation varies across cohorts or not. It could be hypothesized that with cohort replacement the differences in participation among men and women narrow, as a process of equalization is also at play in Italy. In fact, men seem to be more involved than in the past in caring and household chores, while women are more involved in the labor market (see Esping-Andersen, 2009). To test this expectation the life cycle stages are free to vary, one at a time, across the cohorts in the male and the female samples. In brief, random-slopes are introduced in the HACP model.

Figure 3 shows the differences in the probabilities of engaging in at least one political participation between each life course transition and the previous one across five cohorts, for men and

women.[14] Overall, it seems that the association between the life course and participation does not vary substantially across respondents of different generations. Roughly, among men of different cohorts living own their own is associated with an increase in participation; entering in a relationship with a decrease in participation (except for the 1971-1980 cohort), being a father of small children means an increase in participation among the three oldest cohorts show in the figure, while a decrease for the other cohorts; instead, being a father of older children in associated with an increase in participation for all cohorts. Indeed, the highest variation in the slopes of the life course stages can be found for the "couple, children 0-5" stage (see Table A2 in the Appendix). The probability of participation for women increases when they live on their own; it decreases when they enter in a relationship; it further decreases when they are mothers of pre-school aged children (while less for the 1941-1950 and the 1961-1970 cohorts); then, the probability increases when the children are older. As for men, the slope that varies the most across cohorts is the one concerning the "couple, children 0-5" stage. The difference is that this stage is affects more negatively the participation of the male respondents of the younger cohorts, while a cohort pattern cannot be identified for women. It could be possible that the younger cohorts share more equally the responsibilities of childcare and domestic chores, and this depresses the engagement in politics of men. What it should be underlined, however, is that the association between the life course and participation is not very different across generations. What it actually varies is the baseline level of participation across cohorts: respondents belonging to some cohorts participate more than others, no matter the life course stage they are in.

Conclusion

This study has provided evidence for Italy supporting the hypotheses according to which life course transitions are associated with political participation, and that gender mediates this relationship. Although this country is not representative of contemporary democracies, the article has contributed to the literature by adding evidence on the topic from a different context, since the majority of studies, as seen in the literature review, use data from the US and a small number of European countries. The article has offered

"a different look" at the effects of the life course on participation (Jennings, 1979). It has proposed looking at specific life transitions – moving out of the parental home, forming a couple, and becoming a parent – rather than looking at age. These stages are relevant for an understanding of political participation as they deeply impact on the individual's resources. In particular, given the presence of the well-known "gender gap" in political participation, looking at life transitions allows how these might be responsible for it to be studied. In other words, as women carry a heavier burden, some life events can further limit their chances of participation (Schlozman *et al.*, 1994; Burns *et al.*, 1997).

The results presented in this article show that some life cycle stages matter for political participation, and that they amplify participatory inequalities. The analysis also showed that these patterns do not vary much across the different cohorts. Although women increase their likelihood of participation after leaving the parental home, forming a union and being mothers of pre-school-aged children depress it. Conversely, men are mostly unaffected by these transitions. The case of Italy can be very interesting to understand how life transitions can be linked to participation and how they can be seen as sources of political inequality. Italy is a rather traditionalist society which presents strong differences in the levels of engagement of men and women in the public sphere. Moreover, women appear to "suffer" more from the phases of the transition to adulthood. When they leave the parental home, form a couple and become mothers, Italian women have more constraints, as they are the main providers of care and domestic services, they often exit the labor market, exist on the margins of democracy, and therefore have fewer opportunities to be involved in politics. Conversely, men, as the life course goes on, assume more central positions, in particular in politics. Our results show that the more "problematic" passages are union formation and becoming parents of pre-schoolers. In these two phases, the participation of women is impaired the most. Women are already less likely to get involved in politics, even when they are single and without children, but when they enter a partnership and become mothers of small children, the positive impact of leaving the parental home is nullified.

These might be unfavorable conditions for political involvement, marginalizing women from politics. The European Commission has recently emphasized the importance of equalizing the

opportunities women have to participate in politics (European Commission, 2009). Therefore, it is relevant to understand which are the possible sources of these inequalities and their consequences. Some "private inequalities" linked to biographical stages are associated with a lower likelihood of participation. The weaker presence of women in politics leads to political inequalities that are in contrast with the norms of a just democratic polity (Lijphart, 1996). This also implies that women's interests are not channeled to the people in office as well as men's interests. Indeed, this is a very important issue as it has been found that the active presence of women in politics is more conducive to greater attention being given to issues that are closer to their preferences (Bonoli and Reber, 2010). While women are encouraged to engage in politics, the conditions favoring this process are not created, making it impossible to break this vicious circle. In a context that does not help to balance the roles in the household, family obligations mainly concern women, who probably have to give up chances of participation and lose representation. This process may push women to become stay-at-home moms, and push men to perpetuate the idea that they are not "fit" for care and housework. The "asymmetry" between men and women's commitment in the household can indirectly suggest why the "gendered" character of Italian society is hard to change.

Of course, this study presents some limitations. The data used has a cross-sectional nature that does not allow following up individuals during life cycle transitions as other studies have done (Voorpostel and Coffé, 2012). However, longitudinal data are not available in all contexts. In order to provide empirical evidence on a case with particular characteristics and for which no studies on the topic have been carried out, the strategy used was to create a sequence of events which an average individual is likely to pass through (see Gauthier and Furstenberg, 2002; Anxo *et al.*, 2011). In a moment of life cycle de-standardization, this choice can be questionable, but it is the only analytical tool which can be used to study the relationship between leaving the parental home, entering a partnership and being a parent, and participation. Another point that was not included in the analysis is the potential influence partners exert on each other (Stoker and Jennings, 1995). Furthermore, it was not possible to analyze other forms of participation, such as electoral turnout, which is a very institutionalized participation act, and on-line activism (see Oser *et al.*, 2013), which is less intensive and, therefore, may provide more opportunities for

participation. Other aspects of the life cycle that have been argued to be relevant for participation, such as divorce or widowhood, were not considered (Wolfinger and Wolfinger, 2008). The role of the family of origin could also not be accounted for (see Neundorf *et al.*, 2013).

To conclude, this article has aimed at looking at the gender differences in the effects of the life course on participation in Italy. In the light of the results, fruitful future research should investigate how these differences vary across countries and the possible explanations for this variation.

Notes

[1] The respondents are selected between 18 and 80 years old.

[2] Van Deth (2014) excludes latent forms of participation from his definition. For a recent debate on the concept of political participation, see also Hooghe *et al.* (2014).

[3] The items measure whether in the previous 12 months the respondent has engaged in each form of participation. Other items are not available.

[4] The "Not employed" category comprises the unemployed, homemakers, the unable, those in other statuses.

[5] The survey does not include information on household or personal income.

[6] In a separate analysis the models were controlled for the use of paid domestic services and baby-sitting, available in fewer surveys. The coefficients on the key independent variable were not different from those presented here.

[7] The areas are built according to the NUTS1.

[8] Due to space limitations, the comment of the control variables estimates is omitted.

[9] The birth cohorts are: "Before 1930", "1931 – 1940", "1941 – 1950", "1951 – 1960", "1961 – 1970", "1971 – 1980", and "After 1980".

[10] These effects are indicated by the random-effects standard deviations.

[11] Unfortunately, the dependent variable does not include an indicator measuring voting turnout, as the survey lacks of such item. It could be possible, however, that the presence of turnout in the scale of participation might have had a "moderating" effect on the differences across life stages and between men and women, given that voting is an "easier" political act to do. In fact, voting turnout would "boost" the number of respondents who engage at least in one action. Of course, without such an indicator this interpretation remains speculative. Future research should look at how voting turnout changes across life stages.

[12] The marginal effects are the differences in probability between the categories and the reference category, and are computed at the means of the variables using simulation (Gelman and Hill, 2006). To avoid presenting the marginal effects of the life cycle stages on each point of the political participation scale, only four categories are shown to reduce the amount of discussion.

[13] The differences in probabilities are estimated at the means of the variables, using the same technique as for marginal effects.

[14] The oldest and the youngest cohorts are not shown for clarity.

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Table 1: Mokken scale analysis for the index of political participation, in the full, male and female samples, along with the distribution of each form of participation

	Full		Men		Women	
	π^a	H_i^b	π^a	H_i^b	π^a	H_i^b
Money contributions	0.033	0.480	0.047	0.517	0.019	0.370
Meetings	0.046	0.553	0.072	0.574	0.021	0.493
Unpaid work	0.017	0.657	0.028	0.666	0.007	0.596
Debates	0.277	0.710	0.338	0.729	0.219	0.641
Rallies	0.078	0.566	0.111	0.586	0.047	0.496
Demonstrations	0.052	0.362	0.067	0.371	0.038	0.338
H^b		0.545		0.565		0.479
N	606260		295960		310300	

Note: [a] proportion; [b] Loevinger's H.

Table 2: The distribution of life course transitions

	All[a]	*N*	Men[a]	*N*	Women[a]	*N*
Single, 18-35, with parents, no children	0.173	134500	0.199	74679	0.150	59821
Single, 18-35, on their own, no children	0.015	11923	0.019	7256	0.012	4667
Couple, 18-45, no children	0.038	29510	0.039	14660	0.037	14850
Couple, children 0-5	0.105	81623	0.108	40748	0.102	40875
Couple, children 6-13	0.104	80885	0.108	40419	0.101	40466
Couple, children 14-25	0.216	167666	0.222	83421	0.211	84245
Couple, 46-59, no children	0.014	10469	0.012	4361	0.015	6108
Couple, 60+, no children	0.066	51565	0.055	20834	0.077	30731
Single, 60+, no children	0.049	38119	0.026	9582	0.071	28537
Total included	0.782	606260	0.788	295960	0.776	310300
Single, any age, with children	0.050	39033	0.024	8893	0.075	30140
Single, age 36-59, no children	0.032	24523	0.037	13724	0.027	10799
Others	0.136	105616	0.152	57146	0.121	48470
Total excluded	0.218	169172	0.212	79763	0.224	89409
Total	1.000	775432	1.000	375723	1.000	399709

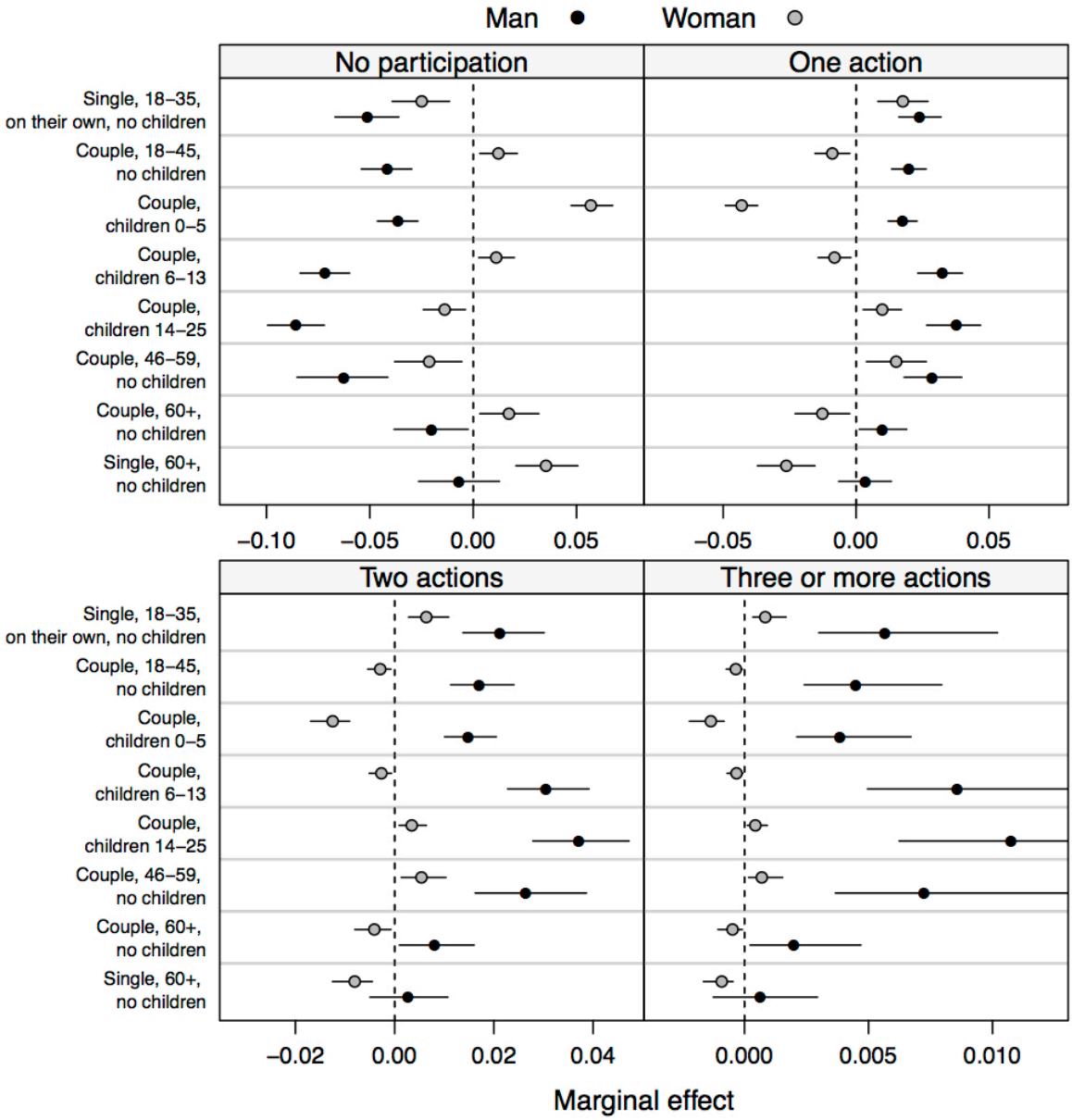
Note: [a] proportion.

Table 3: Cross-classified binomial mixed models predicting political participation in Italy

	Men						Women					
	(0)			(1)			(0)			(1)		
	coef.	s.e.	sig.	coef.	s.e.	sig.	coef.	s.e.	sig.	coef.	s.e.	sig.
Intercept	-2.175	0.110	***	-3.051	0.114	***	-2.878	0.141	***	-3.478	0.094	***
Life course transit. (r.c. Single, 18-35, with parents, no children):												
Single, 18-35, on their own, no children				0.164	0.024	***				0.106	0.029	***
Couple, 18-45, no children				0.134	0.019	***				-0.055	0.020	**
Couple, children 0-5				0.117	0.016	***				-0.274	0.017	***
Couple, children 6-13				0.227	0.018	***				-0.050	0.019	**
Couple, children 14-25				0.270	0.021	***				0.06	0.023	**
Couple, 46-59, no children				0.200	0.034	***				0.091	0.035	**
Couple, 60+, no children				0.066	0.029	*				-0.078	0.033	*
Single, 60+, no children				0.023	0.033					-0.164	0.034	***
Education (r.c. Primary school or lower):												
Middle school				0.293	0.012	***				0.404	0.014	***
High school				0.638	0.011	***				0.791	0.014	***
University or higher				0.944	0.014	***				1.204	0.016	***
Employment status (r.c. Employed):												
Not employed				-0.095	0.014	***				-0.251	0.010	***
Retired				-0.045	0.013	***				-0.021	0.017	
Student				0.443	0.016	***				0.455	0.016	***
Satisfied with personal resources				0.080	0.008	***				0.081	0.009	***
Recently moved				0.082	0.016	***				0.107	0.018	***
Geographical area (r.c. North-west):												
North-east				0.211	0.011	***				0.237	0.012	***
Center				0.169	0.012	***				0.094	0.013	***
South				0.435	0.010	***				0.148	0.012	***
Islands				0.316	0.013	***				0.082	0.015	***
Random-effects standard deviations												
σ_t	0.181			0.190			0.186			0.190		
σ_c	0.228			0.186			0.390			0.156		
BIC	746247			725511			507563			488077		
AIC	746278			725755			507595			488322		
N	295960						310300					

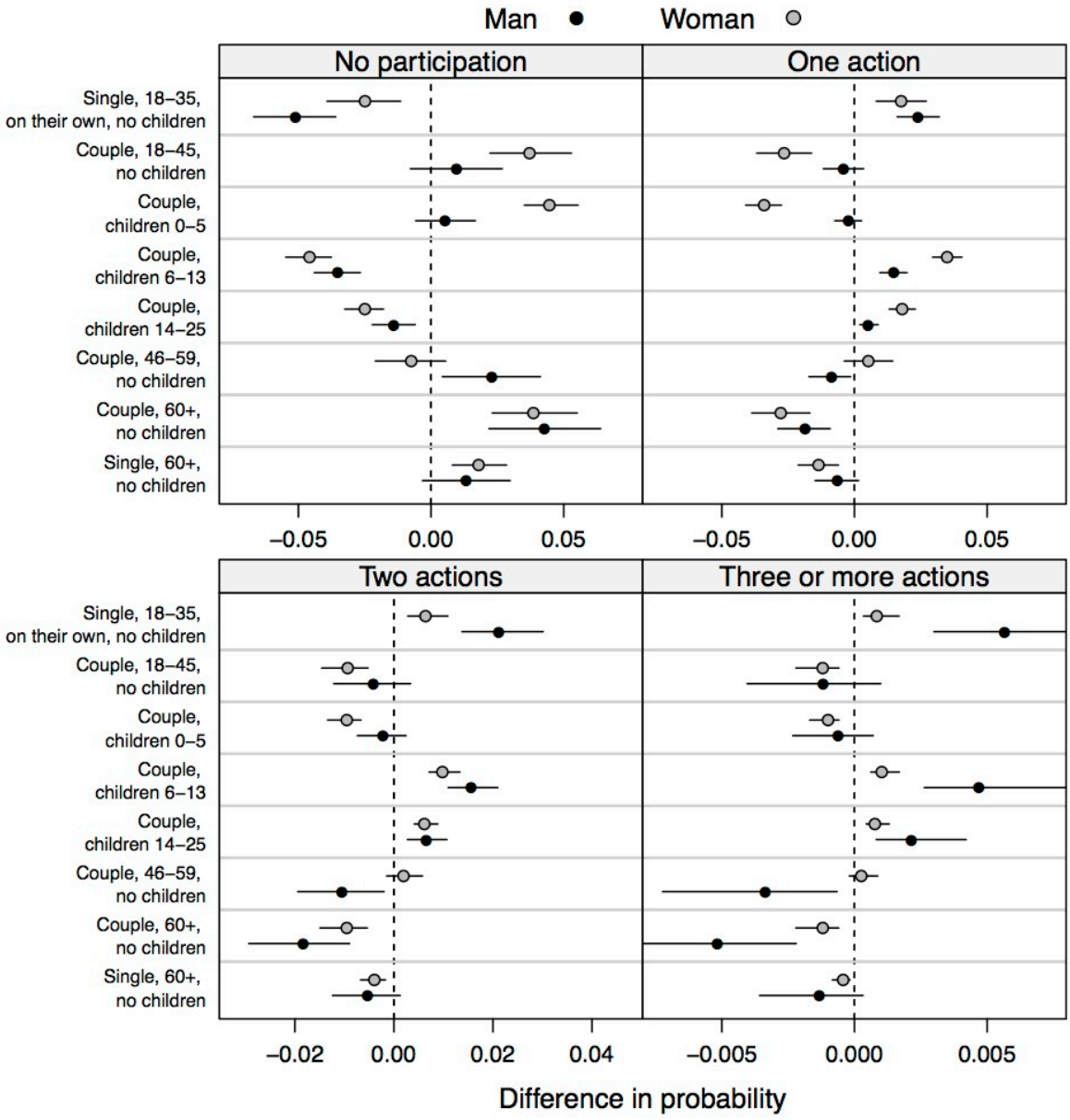
Note: respondents are nested in 19 years and 7 cohorts; coef. = log-odds; s.e. = standard errors; sig. = *** $p \leq 0.001$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, * $p \leq 0.05$; σ_t = standard deviation of the year random-effects; σ_c = standard deviation of the cohort random-effects; AIC = Akaike Information Criterion; BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion.

Figure 1: The marginal effects of life course transitions on the probability of engaging in no political participation actions, one, two, or three or more political participation actions for men and women, with 95% confidence intervals.



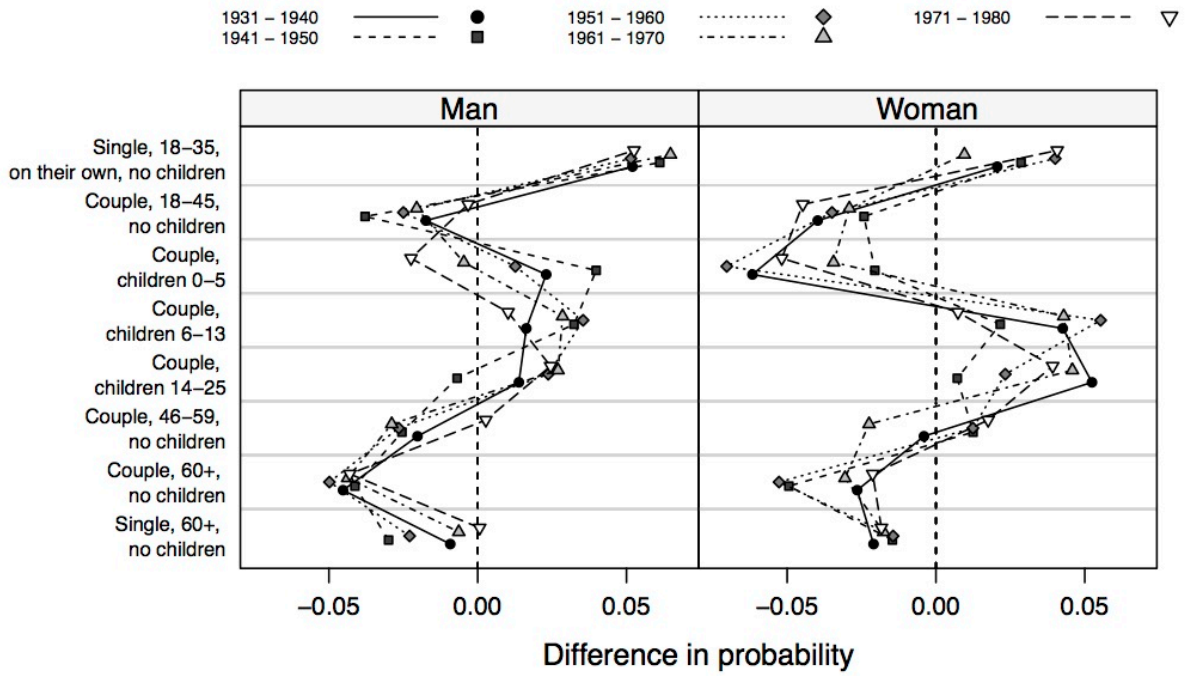
Note: probabilities based on the full models (Models 1 in Table 3).

Figure 2: Differences in the probability of engaging in no political participation actions, one, two, or three or more political participation actions between each life course transition and the previous one for men and women, with 95% confidence intervals



Note: probabilities based on the full models (Models 1 in Table 3).

Figure 3: Differences in probabilities of engaging in at least one political participation action between each life course transition and the previous one, for men and women, across cohorts.



Note: probabilities based on the random-slopes models (Table A2).

Appendix

Table A1: Descriptive statistics

	All	Men	Women		
	Mean/proportion			Range	
Index of political participation	0.504	0.663	0.352	0	6
Education:					
Primary school or lower	0.262	0.222	0.300	0	1
Middle school	0.295	0.326	0.266	0	1
High school	0.356	0.364	0.349	0	1
University or higher	0.087	0.088	0.085	0	1
Employment status:					
Not employed	0.265	0.097	0.425	0	1
Retired	0.179	0.208	0.152	0	1
Student	0.074	0.070	0.078	0	1
Employed	0.482	0.625	0.345	0	1
Satisfied with personal resources	0.636	0.641	0.631	0	1
Recently moved	0.044	0.045	0.043	0	1
Geographical area:					
North-west	0.209	0.208	0.210	0	1
North-east	0.204	0.205	0.204	0	1
Center	0.179	0.178	0.180	0	1
South	0.295	0.296	0.293	0	1
Islands	0.113	0.114	0.112	0	1
N	606260	295960	310300		

Table A2: Cross-classified binomial mixed models predicting political participation in Italy, with random-slopes of the life cycle stages across cohorts.

	(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)		(5)		(6)		(7)		(8)	
	Single, 18-35, on their own, no children		Couple, 18-45, no children		Couple, children 0-5		Couple, children 6-13		Couple, children 14-25		Couple, 46-59, no children		Couple, 60+, no children		Single, 60+, no children	
	Men															
	coef.	s.e.	coef.	s.e.	coef.	s.e.	coef.	s.e.	coef.	s.e.	coef.	s.e.	coef.	s.e.	coef.	s.e.
Intercept	-3.053	0.116	-3.045	0.115	-3.059	0.112	-3.065	0.109	-3.03	0.121	-3.051	0.117	-3.051	0.113	-3.052	0.112
Life course transit. (r.c. Single, 18-35, with parents, no children):																
Single, 18-35, on their own, no children	0.146	0.082	0.163	0.024	0.166	0.024	0.165	0.024	0.165	0.024	0.164	0.024	0.164	0.024	0.164	0.024
Couple, 18-45, no children	0.137	0.019	0.120	0.031	0.141	0.020	0.138	0.019	0.135	0.019	0.134	0.019	0.134	0.019	0.134	0.019
Couple, children 0-5	0.121	0.016	0.112	0.016	0.097	0.070	0.124	0.016	0.118	0.016	0.118	0.016	0.117	0.016	0.117	0.016
Couple, children 6-13	0.232	0.018	0.219	0.018	0.239	0.019	0.211	0.044	0.222	0.018	0.227	0.018	0.227	0.018	0.227	0.018
Couple, children 14-25	0.275	0.021	0.260	0.021	0.284	0.022	0.295	0.022	0.237	0.046	0.270	0.021	0.270	0.021	0.270	0.021
Couple, 46-59, no children	0.204	0.034	0.190	0.035	0.213	0.035	0.221	0.035	0.184	0.035	0.208	0.086	0.200	0.034	0.199	0.034
Couple, 60+, no children	0.070	0.030	0.055	0.030	0.080	0.031	0.092	0.030	0.010	0.038	0.065	0.029	0.068	0.032	0.067	0.029
Single, 60+, no children	0.027	0.033	0.012	0.033	0.037	0.034	0.049	0.033	-0.032	0.040	0.022	0.033	0.023	0.033	0.036	0.045
Random-effects standard deviations																
σ_t	0.190		0.188		0.189		0.189		0.190		0.190		0.190		0.189	
σ_c	0.183		0.188		0.179		0.176		0.194		0.186		0.186		0.186	
σ_β	0.090		0.046		0.116		0.065		0.049		0.023		0.005		0.045	
BIC	725502		725505		725504		725489		725498		725515		725515		725512	
AIC	725767		725770		725769		725754		725763		725780		725780		725777	
N	295960															
	Women															
	coef.	s.e.	coef.	s.e.	coef.	s.e.	coef.	s.e.	coef.	s.e.	coef.	s.e.	coef.	s.e.	coef.	s.e.
Intercept	-3.477	0.093	-3.481	0.093	-3.49	0.092	-3.499	0.09	-3.436	0.094	-3.478	0.092	-3.48	0.094	-3.479	0.093
Life course transit. (r.c. Single, 18-35, with parents, no children):																
Single, 18-35, on their own, no children	0.095	0.064	0.106	0.029	0.110	0.029	0.108	0.029	0.107	0.029	0.106	0.029	0.106	0.029	0.106	0.029
Couple, 18-45, no children	-0.055	0.020	-0.065	0.056	-0.045	0.021	-0.047	0.020	-0.056	0.021	-0.055	0.020	-0.055	0.020	-0.055	0.020
Couple, children 0-5	-0.275	0.017	-0.273	0.017	-0.344	0.124	-0.263	0.017	-0.277	0.017	-0.274	0.017	-0.274	0.017	-0.274	0.017
Couple, children 6-13	-0.051	0.020	-0.048	0.020	-0.031	0.020	-0.124	0.080	-0.066	0.020	-0.050	0.019	-0.051	0.019	-0.050	0.019
Couple, children 14-25	0.059	0.023	0.064	0.023	0.080	0.024	0.093	0.024	-0.010	0.059	0.059	0.023	0.059	0.023	0.059	0.023
Couple, 46-59, no children	0.090	0.035	0.096	0.035	0.112	0.035	0.125	0.035	0.042	0.037	0.055	0.073	0.090	0.035	0.091	0.035
Couple, 60+, no children	-0.078	0.033	-0.073	0.033	-0.057	0.034	-0.044	0.034	-0.167	0.044	-0.079	0.033	-0.077	0.033	-0.077	0.033
Single, 60+, no children	-0.164	0.035	-0.159	0.035	-0.143	0.035	-0.130	0.035	-0.257	0.046	-0.164	0.035	-0.157	0.035	-0.161	0.040
Random-effects standard deviations																
σ_t	0.190		0.190		0.190		0.188		0.189		0.190		0.190		0.190	
σ_c	0.157		0.156		0.153		0.150		0.155		0.156		0.160		0.159	
σ_β	0.083		0.088		0.214		0.140		0.091		0.033		0.019		0.026	
BIC	488073		488072		488044		488038		488048		488081		488079		488080	
AIC	488339		488338		488310		488304		488314		488347		488346		488347	
N	310300															

Note: respondents are nested in 19 years and 7 cohorts; coef. = log-odds; s.e. = standard errors; σ_t = standard deviation of the year random-effects; σ_c = standard deviation of the cohort random-effects; σ_β = standard deviation of the life cycle stage random-slope across cohorts. The life cycle stage that varies across cohorts is indicated in the columns. AIC = Akaike Information Criterion; BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion. The estimates of the control variables are not shown.