



Political Engagement Among Migratory Generations in Italy: The Role of Identity and Perceived Discrimination

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Abstract

International scholarship is increasingly addressing the determinants of political engagement among individuals with migratory backgrounds. Only a few studies have investigated the role played by identity and discrimination in influencing political engagement. No studies have considered differences by migratory generation. This article tries to fill this gap using data from Social Condition and Integration of Foreign Citizens (SCIF) survey of Italian National Institute of Statistics (2011-2012). In the proposed analyses, we measured political engagement using three different variables, two for attitudinal political engagement (interesting in Italian politics and talking about politics) and one for behavioral political engagement (participating in political debate). We applied a set of logistic regressions with findings presented as average marginal effects and we deepened the results applying the interaction between social identity and discrimination. The empirical results indicate that both for first generation and 1.5 generation there is no significant evidence of a negative role played by the preservation of the minority identity as long as it is also accompanied by the acquisition of a majority (national) identity. Furthermore, after accounting for the control variables, the results proved that as discrimination increases, political engagement (both attitudinal and behavioral) increases for both migrant generations considered.

Keywords Political engagement · Social identity · Perceived discrimination · Migratory generation · Italy

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1 Introduction

Political engagement is essential to the effective functioning and legitimacy of democratic systems (Barrett & Zani, 2014), which depend on their ability to represent the entire population. Yet not all social groups enjoy equal rights or opportunities to participate. Demographic factors (such as race, age, gender, migratory background, and generational status) shape both the manner and extent of political engagement. Particularly, women, migrants, and young people often face structural disadvantages that limit their access to democratic participation. Among these, young people with a migrant background are especially affected, as they face the dual challenge of being young and having foreign origins. These disadvantages, which intersect with other factors such as gender and socioeconomic status (SES), can significantly hinder their active participation in democratic life (Guglielmi et al., 2025).

Research has demonstrated that first-generation immigrants face several barriers to political engagement in their destination country, largely shaped by the immigration experience itself (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). These challenges stem from the pressures of settling down and achieving economic stability, compounded by language barriers and the lack of national citizenship (Wong et al., 2011). Conversely, their children may encounter fewer barriers to political engagement, primarily benefiting from compulsory schooling and greater fluency in the national language (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001), which facilitates access to information and civic resources (Bloemraad & Trost, 2008).

However, political engagement among immigrant-origin youth is far from uniform. Studies have highlighted significant variation across generations and ethnic groups, often producing non-linear outcomes (Hoffmann & Benoit, 2025). A substantial body of research has demonstrated that the political engagement of immigrant children is a multifaceted process, characterised by a particular set of challenges (Elodie, 2022), shaped by the negotiation of multiple identities (Fischer-Neumann, 2014; Hochman & García-Albacete, 2019; Rapp, 2020) and by experiences of discrimination linked to their family's migratory background (Alba & Foner, 2015; Bevelander & Hutcheson, 2022).

In this context, Italy offers a particularly compelling case due to the diverse composition of its foreign population and the growing presence of second- and third-generation immigrants (Dalla Zuanna, Farina & Strozza, 2009; Riniolo, 2019).

The condition of young people of foreign origin seems particularly relevant, as they occupy a unique position both in relation to their parents and to their native peers. On the one hand, compared to their parents they may benefit from having grown up and being socialised in Italy; on the other hand, they face the “double burden” of being young and of foreign origin (Riniolo & Ortensi, 2021), a combination that can produce a double disadvantage in a country that is “hostile to young people” (Rosina & Ambrosi, 2009) and hostile to immigrants (Panichella & Ambrosini, 2018). This disadvantage is exacerbated by Italy's restrictive citizenship regime, which does not include *jus soli* and makes it difficult for youth of foreign origin to acquire Italian citizenship (Strozza, Conti & Tucci, 2021). As a result, many remain excluded from formal political participation, since non-citizens cannot vote, and face discrimination compared to their native-born peers¹.

¹ Nevertheless, recent empirical work has shown that these youth tend to develop informal and alternative modes of engagement (Ricucci, 2014; Riniolo, 2019; Riniolo, 2023).

Against this backdrop, the article investigates the underexplored topic of political engagement of immigrants and their descendants in Italy. Specifically, it examines whether there are significant differences in the level and type of political engagement between migratory generations, namely first-generation (1G) and one-and-a-half generation (1.5G) individuals (respectively 1G and 1.5G, hereafter). Furthermore, the study explores how ethnic self-identification and perceived discrimination shape political engagement, and whether these factors interact across generational lines.

Adopting a quantitative strategy, the study employs multivariate analyses and logistic models to estimate the probability of political engagement among 1G and 1.5G immigrants. Unlike most existing research, which relies on small-scale panel studies (Simon & Ruhs, 2008), this analysis is based on data from the “*Condizione e integrazione sociale dei cittadini stranieri*” (Social Condition and Integration of Foreign Citizens - SCIF) survey, which was carried out by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) between 2011 and 2012. While prior research on this data has indicated heterogeneous participation patterns (Gatti, Buonomo & Strozza, 2021; Ortensi and Riniolo, 2020), gendered dynamics (Gatti, Buonomo & Strozza, 2022, 2023, 2024) and generational contrasts (Riniolo & Ortensi, 2021), the present analysis differs from earlier work in key respects: alternative operationalisations, distinct modelling choices, and explicit estimation of interactions between identity and discrimination.

Bringing together three interrelated strands of research, this study contributes to the existing literature by examining how perceived discrimination interacts with ethnic identification to shape political engagement across immigrant generations in a context of formal exclusion, such as Italy.

While much of the existing research has focused on North American and Northern European contexts, fewer studies have investigated how these dynamics unfold in Southern European settings, where institutional models of integration tend to be weaker and more fragmented.

Italy represents a particularly distinctive case due to its restrictive citizenship laws, limited access to political rights for non-citizens, and the central role of informal networks and civil society in shaping migrants’ political agency. These features may influence how identity, especially dual identification (belonging to both origin and settlement societies), and perceived discrimination interact with political engagement across migratory generations, making the Italian context especially relevant for exploring alternative pathways of politicisation. The present study aims to shed light on the mechanisms through which political attitudes and behaviours are formed and expressed in contexts marked by limited institutional inclusion. To this end, integrating theoretical insights with empirical analysis, this study proposes a more comprehensive framework for analysing the interplay between identity, discrimination and political engagement among migrants and their descendants. Furthermore, it offers an analytical lens to explore generational disparities in political engagement, moving beyond conventional measures of participation.

In light of these objectives, the article is structured as follows. In the next two sections, we discuss some conceptual definitions (Sect. 2) and theoretical approaches relevant to the hypotheses’ development (Sect. 3) concerning the role of identity and perceived discrimination in migrants’ political engagement. Then, we describe sources, data, methods and the variables used (Sect. 4). In Sect. 5 we show the results of the analysis, which will be taken up in the discussion and conclusions (Sect. 6).

2 Conceptual Definitions

2.1 The Concept of Political Engagement

In order to proceed effectively with the analysis of the political engagement of immigrants and their descendants, it is essential to clarify the conceptual framework adopted, especially given the lack of consensus in the literature regarding its definition and scope.

In line with previous studies (Gatti, Buonomo, & Strozza, 2024; Jacobs, Phalet & Swynedouw, 2004; Rapp, 2020; Schildkraut, 2005), in the present study, political engagement is understood as a multifaceted phenomenon encompassing “two related, but distinct, types of political engagement: behavioural and attitudinal” (Schildkraut, 2005, p. 288). We define political engagement as a set of attitudes and behaviours through which immigrants and their descendants participate in the host-country political system.

Behavioural engagement denotes observable political activity (e.g., voting, protests, campaigns); attitudinal engagement denotes psychological involvement (e.g., interest in politics, evaluations of the political system). As Schildkraut (2005) notes, “all things being equal, more of both types of engagement is better than less. This is true not just for non-white citizens, but for citizens of all stripes and for the political process overall. Both types of engagement can be seen as barometers of the health of our participatory system” (p. 288). Psychological involvement is strongly linked to political activity, implying “the intervening step to the latter” (Verba, Nie & Kim, 1978, p. 71), and relatively independent of institutional constraints such as formal participation rights. In a democratic setting like Italy, individuals without political rights may still discuss and take an interest in politics. For behavioural engagement, we follow the conceptualisation of political participation as a multifaceted construct (Barrett & Brunton-Smith, 2014), encompassing electoral and non-electoral activities; given the absence of electoral data in our source, we concentrate on non-electoral participation.

The framework under discussion encompasses both attitudinal and behavioural dimensions, thus allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of political engagement. In contrast to mono-dimensional approaches, this conceptualisation facilitates analysis in contexts of institutional exclusion, where access to voting may be restricted. By capturing both political orientations and practices, it proves particularly effective in examining generational differences and in assessing how identity and perceived discrimination shape political involvement beyond formal participation.

2.2 The Concept of Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity is recognised as a multifaceted and dynamic construct that evolves over time. It reflects how individuals perceive themselves and their commitment to both origin and destination societies (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000; Constant, Gataullina & Zimmermann, 2006; Phinney et al., 2001; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). It comprises multiple domains (including cultural practices, language, traditions, values, and a sense of belonging to an ethnic group) reflecting a complex interplay of personal and social factors (Rumbaut, 1994; Ashmore, Deaux & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004; Constant, Gataullina & Zimmermann, 2006). This approach suggests that ethnic identity cannot be reduced to a single characteristic or

experience; rather, it encompasses various aspects of an individual's social and personal life (Buonomo, 2025; Buonomo et al., 2025). Therefore, scholarship that considers ethnic identity solely through the lens of self-perception fails to capture its nature based on multiple domains².

The concept of ethnic identity has branched out over time into two main theoretical frameworks (Berry, 2003). The first conceptualises ethnic identity as a linear process, in which minority (origin) and majority (host) identities are inversely related, strong identification with one implies weaker identification with the other (Constant, Gataullina & Zimmermann, 2009; Phinney et al., 2001).

The second, now dominant, views ethnic identity as a two-dimensional process, allowing individuals to simultaneously maintain strong (or weak) identification with both origin and host societies (Berry, 1980, 1997, 2003; Phinney & Ong, 2007; Sliotman, 2018). Building on these insights, this study engages with empirical approaches that conceptualise immigrants' identification as a two-dimensional process recognising that adaptation to the host society and preservation of minority identity are not mutually exclusive (Berry, 1997) but can coexist and interact in complex ways. According to Berry's (1980) acculturation framework, identity is operationalised through four profiles: integrated, assimilated, separated, and marginalised. 'Integrated' denotes strong identification with both minority and majority cultures; 'assimilated' denotes strong identification with the majority and weak identification with the minority; 'separated' denotes the opposite; 'marginalised' denotes weak identification with both.

These profiles are widely used to examine links between identity, institutional trust, information access and political engagement (Berry et al., 2021; Fischer-Neumann, 2014; Simon & Klandermans, 2001; Simon & Grabow, 2010). Although rooted in psychological models (Berry, 1997; Phinney et al., 2001), dual identification has proved especially salient for political engagement in migratory contexts (Fischer-Neumann, 2014; Özdemir et al., 2024; Simon & Klandermans, 2001), fostering emotional, psychological and political ties to both settings (Berry, 1980; Simon & Grabow, 2010; Simon & Ruhs, 2008). Accordingly, Berry's (1980) acculturation profiles are adopted here as the analytical framework to study identity and political engagement in Italy.

2.3 The Concept of Discrimination

Discrimination refers to drawing differentiation, through judgment or action, either for or against an individual or group based on various sociocultural or biological factors such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality, or ability/disability. To "discriminate against" someone means to treat that person as inferior or undeserving of equal status or rights. As a multidimensional phenomenon, discrimination can be enacted by a range of actors, both individual and collective (e.g., non-state or state institutions), and it may manifest in various forms: overt (direct) or covert (subtle/indirect), legal or illegal.

Discrimination can be classified in different ways. One useful distinction is between political discrimination, which is embedded in State laws, policies or practices, and social discrimination, which arises in everyday interactions within public or private settings

² Identity is temporal and evolving, shaped by experiences, interactions and wider societal change (Colombo et al., 2009; Phinney, 2003).

(Oskooii, 2016, 2020). The present study focuses on social discrimination across various domains of personal and public life. Importantly, discrimination affects not only individuals externally but also shapes their internal responses and coping strategies. Behavioural reactions to discrimination vary depending on the perceived severity and nature of mistreatment but they generally fall into three main categories: resistance, internalisation, and denial (Oskooii, 2016).

Resistance is considered a protective response that may involve direct confrontation with discriminatory acts, the creation of safe spaces, community meetings, protests, boycotts, or legal action (Krieger, 1999). Internalisation, by contrast, occurs when individuals accept a perceived inferior status and refrain from confrontation, often due to fear of further marginalisation. This response may lead to self-destructive behaviours, such as substance abuse (Gibbons et al., 2004; Guthrie et al., 2002; Whitbeck et al., 2001). Denial refers to the non-recognition of discrimination. According to Crosby's (1984) denial hypothesis, stigmatisation induces psychological discomfort that prompts individuals to minimise or ignore their experiences (Foster, 2000). These behavioural responses are crucial for understanding how discrimination influences not only identity formation but also political engagement, particularly among migrant populations and their descendants.

3 Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

3.1 Theoretical Approaches to Immigrants' Political Engagement

The present study draws on three interconnected strands of research. Firstly, it builds upon theoretical approaches to immigrants' political engagement, considering both overall population-level dynamics and those factors specific to immigration-related experiences. The extant literature on determinants of political engagement highlights significant variation patterns among ethnic-minority groups across settlement countries, shaped by a range of factors (De Rooij, 2012; Pilati & Morales, 2018; Zani & Barrett, 2012). These include demographic variables such as gender (Bilodeau & Scott, 2023; Jones-Correa, 1998; Gatti, Buonomo & Strozza, 2024; Gidengil & Stolle, 2018; Guglielmi et al., 2025; McIlwaine & Bermúdez, 2011), age (Li & Jones, 2020), country of origin (Bueker, 2005; Gatti, Buonomo & Strozza, 2021; Superti, 2023), socio-economic status (Cho, Gimpel & Wu, 2006; Hajnal & Lee, 2011; Kam, Zechmeister & Wilking, 2008; Quintelier & Hooghe, 2012; Ramakrishnan, 2005), length of residence (White, 2023; Wong, 1999), language proficiency (Lacomba, 2017), citizenship status (Potochnick & Stegmaier, 2020), organisational involvement (Gatti, Buonomo & Strozza, 2024; Morales & Pilati, 2011; Pilati & Morales, 2016), migratory generation (Chui, Curtis & Lambert, 1991; DeSipio, 2011; Guglielmi, Riniolo, Maggini, Visioli & Sanarico, 2025; Potochnick & Stegmaier, 2020; Riniolo & Ortensi, 2021).

While other studies have demonstrated that emotional and attitudinal dimensions also related to the migratory experience - such as perceived discrimination, feelings of belonging or exclusion, and dual identification (ethnic, with the minority group; and/or national, with the majority group) - play a crucial role in shaping political engagement of immigrants in host countries (Besco, 2024; Oskooii, 2016; Schildkraut, 2005).

3.2 Theoretical Approaches to Social and Ethnic Identification in Migratory Contexts

Secondly, this study draws on Social Identity Theory (SIT) as a foundational framework for understanding how ethnic identity shapes political engagement, particularly in contexts of migration and minority status (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Recent scholarship has shown that social identification is closely linked to political participation, demonstrating how collective identities influence attitudes towards institutions, voting behaviour, and participation in public debate (Miller et al., 1981; Simon & Klandermans, 2001; Verba, Nie & Kim, 1978; Verba et al., 1995). Applied to the study of ethnic identity, SIT suggests that immigrants' political participation is shaped by their collective identities, namely their sense of belonging to a particular social category or ethnic group (Lien, 1994; Tajfel, 1981). In migratory contexts, ethnic identity serves as a key interpretive lens through which individuals assess their social position and potential for civic and political engagement. Emotional and symbolic attachment to one's ethnic group, rooted in shared history, culture, and experiences of marginalisation or privilege (Tajfel, 1981), can foster solidarity and collective purpose, shaping political attitudes and behaviours in ways that reflect group affiliations.

Interdisciplinary research has increasingly highlighted the centrality of ethnic identity in shaping political behaviour in multicultural societies (Chanda et al., 2024). It influences voting preferences, political affiliations, and drives engagement in social movements.

Building on this, migrant groups have increasingly emerged as prominent collective actors in the political arena, making claims and mobilising for recognition and participation (De Wit & Koopmans, 2005).

SIT explains collective action as an identity management strategy adopted by disadvantaged or devalued groups to achieve a positive identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986). In line with this view, the Social Identity Model of Collective Action (SIMCA) highlights that identification with a disadvantaged group (combined with perceived injustice and emotional responses such as anger) predicts support for collective action (Branscombe & Ellemers, 1998; Spears, Doosje & Ellemers, 1997; Van Zomeren et al., 2008). Experiences of misrecognition (defined as the denial or distortion of one's identity by dominant institutions or discourses) can thus trigger mobilisation aimed at placing grievances on the political agenda (Özdemir et al., 2024). Research on politicised collective identity confirms that collective identification is a prerequisite for participation in social movements and political activities (Simon & Klandermans, 2001).

Building on this framework, dual identification and experiences of misrecognition can foster politicised collective identities, mobilising participation in social movements, particularly under perceived injustice (Özdemir et al., 2024; Simon & Klandermans, 2001; Simon & Grabow, 2010). Existing research offers mixed findings on the relationship between dual identification and political engagement, suggesting the need for further empirical investigation. Some studies suggest that dual identification may reduce political engagement (Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2014), while others find that it enhances mobilisation and increases the level of political engagement, particularly when combined with perceived discrimination (Fischer-Neumann, 2014; Schildkraut, 2005; Simon & Grabow, 2010).

Recent empirical studies have illustrated how politicised collective identity manifests in concrete forms of political engagement among migrant communities. Sanders et al. (2014)

show that both minority entrenchment and majority acculturation are associated with greater political engagement among minorities. For instance, Özdemir et al. (2024) found that migrants who report strong dual identification and experiences of misrecognition are more likely to participate in collective actions, such as demonstrations, petitions, and advocacy campaigns. In Germany and the Netherlands, Simon and Grabow (2010) documented how dual identification fosters involvement in both ethnic-based organisations and mainstream political institutions, suggesting that migrants do not necessarily choose between identities, but rather mobilise across them.

3.3 Theoretical Approaches to Link Perceived Discrimination, Ethnic Identity and Political Engagement

Thirdly, the study engages with scholarly research on *responsive ethnicity* (Berger, Galonska, & Koopmans, 2004; Diehl & Schnell, 2006; Rumbaut, 2008), which explores how perceived discrimination can reinforce ethnic identification and act as a catalyst for political mobilisation (Simon & Klandermans, 2001; Simon & Grabow, 2010). Studies linking discrimination to political participation have produced mixed results. Discrimination can have negative or positive effects on the political engagement of people with a migratory background. On one hand, perceived discrimination may lead to behavioural and attitudinal alienation, including electoral abstention, institutional distrust (Brehm & Rahn, 1997), and feelings of political exclusion (Schildkraut, 2005). These reactions are often linked to a depletion of psychological resources and a weakened sense of belonging, which in turn reduce the likelihood of engaging in political processes (Brehm & Rahn, 1997). On the other hand, discrimination can also trigger a reactive form of political engagement (Kranendonk et al., 2018; Schildkraut, 2005). Immigrants who experience collective discrimination may seek to improve their group's status through actions that affirm its value, thereby strengthening ethnic identity and increasing levels of political mobilisation (Spies et al., 2020). The perception of shared grievances can generate collective emotions such as anger that drive political mobilisation, particularly in response to attacks on values held dear by these groups (Pérez, 2015; Wald et al., 2005). These dynamics illustrate how exclusionary practices and shared grievances can foster politicised collective identities. In contexts marked by exclusion or marginalisation, individuals may respond by strengthening their attachment to their ethnic group, a phenomenon known as *reactive ethnicity* (Rumbaut, 2008; Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007). This process, far from being merely defensive, can foster a sense of collective empowerment, particularly when discrimination is perceived not only as a personal grievance but as a shared collective injustice affecting the broader group (Oskooii, 2016, 2020; Simon & Klandermans, 2001).

These theoretical insights have been increasingly supported by recent empirical studies, which highlight the role of perceived discrimination in shaping political behaviours across diverse national contexts and generations. Rather than leading to political apathy or withdrawal, perceived discrimination has been shown to stimulate civic and political engagement, especially among younger generations who seek recognition, equality, and inclusion. International research has confirmed that perceived discrimination based on migratory background significantly shapes political attitudes and behaviours (Nandi & Platt, 2020), often motivating individuals to participate in protests, advocacy, and other forms of political expression as acts of resistance and affirmation (Barreto & Woods, 2005).

Recent cross-national evidence reveals a consistent association between experiences of discrimination and increased political engagement, heightened political interest, and a greater propensity to protest or donate (Besco, 2024). Moreover, perceived discrimination also mediates the link between dual identification and politicisation, suggesting that politicised collective identities are grounded not only in dual belonging but also in a shared awareness of grievances. In line with this perspective, Özdemir et al. (2024) find that higher levels of perceived discrimination among ethnic minorities are associated with lower trust in national institutions and weaker host-society identification, whereas stronger ethnic identification, particularly in contexts of misrecognition, predicts greater willingness to engage in collective action.

In the Italian context, a growing body of research has documented how migrants are exposed to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination from political and institutional exclusion (Ambrosini et al., 2024; Guglielmi, 2021), to economic marginalisation (Allasino, Venturini & Zincone, 2004; Busetta et al., 2018, 2020; Fullin & Reyneri, 2011), and social stigmatisation, including racism and physical violence. These systemic inequalities have increasingly prompted migrant communities to mobilise politically, demanding recognition, rights, and inclusion.

3.4 Hypotheses

Drawing upon the theoretical underpinnings and in light of the existing state of research, four hypotheses on 1G and 1.5G immigrants' political engagement have been formulated as follows.

Hypothesis 1 Our first identification-politicisation hypothesis is that the dual (integrated) identification can be expected to be associated with greater political engagement than a single (separate or assimilated) or no (marginalised) identification for both 1G and 1.5G respondents.

Hypothesis 2.1 Consistent with the literature, we hypothesise that feeling discriminated against is associated with higher levels of political engagement among both 1G and 1.5G respondents.

Hypothesis 2.2 Net of covariates, political engagement rises with the number of discriminatory contexts reported, but at a decreasing rate: each additional context contributes less than the previous one for both 1G and 1.5G.

Hypothesis 3 For both 1G and 1.5G, the discrimination-identity interaction will show that integrated and assimilated profiles display greater sensitivity to discriminatory dynamics, translating into higher political engagement; by contrast, separated and marginalised profiles are expected to exhibit a different response pattern to discrimination and engagement.

Hypothesis 4 Identity is expected to exert a stronger influence on political engagement among 1G than 1.5G. The rationale is that 1G typically form identities pre-migration in the origin context, whereas those arriving before age 18 spend their formative years in the host

country, which may contribute to greater integration into the new cultural environment and to the development of a more fluid or blended identity.

4 Sources, Data, and Methods

The analyses are based on the Social Condition and Integration of Foreign Citizens (SCIF) ISTAT sample survey conducted in 2011–2012 (released in 2016) on more than 25 thousand individuals to test our hypotheses. The SCIF dataset, despite its age, remains the most comprehensive source currently available on the resident foreign population in Italy (Morales et al., 2020). Moreover, its richness and structure, providing symmetrical information on both origin and destination, make it uniquely suitable for applying our adaptation of the Ethno-sizer (Constant, Gataullina, & Zimmermann, 2009).

We focused our analysis on both 1G (arrived in Italy after turning 18 years of age) and 1.5G (arrived in Italy before 18 years of age) aged 15 and over at the time of the survey. Excluded from the analyses are Italian citizens (because the survey provides only partial information to measure their social identity) and those born in more developed countries (our sample does not allow us to conduct a separate analysis for individuals from these areas because of their small number). A total of 15,470 individuals (of which 13,198 are 1G and 2,272 are 1.5G) composed our final sample. Weighted normalised data are considered to reproduce the main characteristics of the universe.

4.1 Dependent Variables

We considered three different variables, two for *attitudinal political engagement* and one for *behavioural political engagement*.

In the first case, we opted to use ‘*seeking information on Italian politics*’ and ‘*talking about politics*’ as indicators of *general political interest*. The first is a dummy variable equal to 1 if migrants were interested in Italian politics; otherwise, it was equal to 0. In the case of the second variable, we used the possible answers given to the question ‘*how often do you talk about politics?*’ in the SCIF questionnaire, ranging from 1 for ‘*never*’ to 6 for ‘*everyday*’. For consistency with the other dependent variables, we made this variable dichotomous and equal to 0 if the respondents state that they never talk about politics and equal to 1 in all other cases³.

For *behavioural political engagement*, we used the variable ‘*taking part in political debates*’ as indicators of *non-electoral political participation*. This is a dichotomous variable equal to 1 if migrants engaged in this activity and 0 otherwise.

In our sample, as summarized in Tables 1, 1G immigrants who are interested in politics are almost half of our sample (51.8%). Their percentage drops to 43.6% in the case of 1.5G. Consistent, but lower, is the percentage of respondents talking about politics for both 1G and 1.5G (42.1 and 34.0% respectively). Less than 10% of respondents indicated that they participate in political debates (8.8% for 1G and 8.2 for 1.5G).

³ Although ‘talking about politics’ is dichotomised for comparability across outcomes, we also modelled it on its original ordinal scale (1 ‘never’ to 6 ‘every day’) using ordered logit; results are reported in Table A3 and align with the main findings.

Table 1 Percentage distribution of political engagement (both attitudinal and behavioural) by migratory generation. Weighted data

Political engagement dimensions	Dependent variables	1G			1.5G		
		No	Yes	Tot	No	Yes	Tot
Attitudinal	Interest in Italian politics	48.2	51.8	100.0	56.4	43.6	100.0
	Talking about politics	57.9	42.1	100.0	66.0	34.0	100.0
Behavioural	Taking part in Political debate	91.2	8.8	100.0	91.8	8.2	100.0

Source: our elaborations on SCIF data

4.2 Independent Variables

Two are the key independent variables of this contribution.

The first key independent variable refers to social identity. In this study, we employ an indicator inspired by the *Ethnosizer* developed by Constant, Gataullina, and Zimmermann (2009). This approach draws on five distinct domains that the international literature has consistently associated with identity: language, cultural elements, ethnic self-identification, interactions with autochthonous and fellow citizens, and migratory history (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004; Constant, Gataullina & Zimmermann, 2009; Phinney, 1990). In line with the approach proposed by Constant, Gataullina & Zimmermann (2009), we treat these five domains as independent from each other. This methodological choice aligns with Berry's (1980) acculturation framework, which conceptualises identity strategies as combinations of two analytically independent dimensions, minority identification and majority identification, that may manifest differently across distinct domains of social life.

In accordance with the *Ethnosizer*-based design, we distinguish strong versus weak identity for each of the five domains. In most cases, the information collected in the survey was already dichotomous at source, as can be seen from Table 2, which reports the variables and the modalities as provided in the questionnaire. Following this scheme, for each of the five identified domains, we were able to create the four categories identified by Berry (1980): *integrated*, *assimilated*, *separated* and *marginalised*. Based on this assumption, we count the number of times the respondent is *integrated*, *assimilated*, *separated*, and *marginalised*. Clearly, for each respondent, each of these four variables can assume a value between 0 and 5. Furthermore, the sum of the four variables equals 5 for each respondent. Given these characteristics, to prevent generating collinearity, necessarily one of these four scores must be excluded (and used as reference) in the next logistic regressions (Constant, Gataullina & Zimmermann, 2009)⁴.

In addition to the *Ethnosizer*-inspired measure, we also operationalised identity through an alternative specification aimed at capturing aspects that may not emerge from previous classification. This approach quantifies, for each respondent, the number of domains (ranging from 0 to 5) in which a strong minority identity and a strong majority identity are separately observed. This alternative specification serves as a robustness check for the main measure of identity (Table A4).

Table 3 summarises mean identity scores by migratory generation. Across the sample, the *integrated* profile records the highest mean, followed by the *assimilated*, while the *marginalised*

⁴ We conducted supplementary checks of dimensionality (tetrachoric correlations, parallel analysis, EFA); results were consistent with the findings. Full details are available on reasonable request.

Table 2 Variables and categories for the measurement of social identity (minority and majority identity)

<i>N</i>	Categories	Information used	Question values or wording	Strong identity	Weak identity
<i>Minority identity</i>					
1	Language	Spoken and written knowledge of origin language	1 Yes 2 No	Yes	No
2	Culture	Watch news of the country of origin	1 Yes 2 No	Yes	No
3	Ethnic self-identification	He feels proud of his ethnic identity	1 Strongly disagree 2 Disagree 3 Agree 4 Strongly agree	Strongly Agree	Other answer
4	Ethnic interaction	Ancestry of three closest friends	Citizenship code	At least one same-nationality friend	No same-nationality friends
5	Migration history	He wishes to return to live in the country of origin	1 I think I'll stay in Italy forever 2 I think I'll return to live in my country 3 I think I'll change country	I think I'll return to live in my country	I think I'll stay in Italy forever, or I think I'll change country
<i>Majority identity</i>					
1	Language	Writing and/or speaking Italian is	1. Very difficult 2. Pretty difficult 3. Not very difficult 4. Not difficult at all	Not very difficult or not difficult at all	Very difficult, or pretty difficult
2	Culture	Watch Italian news	1 Yes 2 No	Yes	No
3	Ethnic self-identification	He feels totally at home in Italy	1 Strongly agree 2 Agree 3 Disagree 4 Strongly disagree	Strongly Agree	Other answer
4	Ethnic interaction	Ancestry of three closest friends	Citizenship code	At least one Italian friend	No Italian friends
5	Migration history	Willing to acquire Italian citizenship	1 Yes 2 No	Yes	No

Table 3 Means of identity variables and percentage distribution of self-perceived discrimination, by migratory generation. Weighted data^(a)

Identity	1G	1.5G	Discriminated against	1G	1.5G
Assimilated	(1.21)	(1.54)	No, never	70.5	74.6
Integrated	(1.77)	(1.71)	Yes, at least once	29.5	25.4
Separated	(1.26)	(1.01)			
Marginalised	(0.75)	(0.74)			
Sum	5.00	5.00	Total	100.0	100.0

a. Values in brackets indicate the average score

Source: our elaborations on SCIF data

profile is least prevalent. This ranking holds for both first-generation (1G) and 1.5-generation (1.5G) respondents. Notably, 1.5G report higher average assimilation than 1G (1.54 and 1.21 respectively), whereas 1G exhibit higher separation than 1.5G (1.26 and 1.01 respectively).

The second key independent variable refers to social discrimination. The contexts covered by the survey include discrimination in employment, job-seeking, housing, medical examinations, applying for a cash loan or insurance, accessing public establishments, and discrimination from teachers, school personnel, classmates, or neighbours, either at school, university, or in the neighbourhood. We included only those questions measuring discrimination based on ethnic and migratory backgrounds, excluding those related to other forms, such as gender-based discrimination.

We measured whether the interviewee *felt discriminated against* because of their origin in the past 12 months. Each question allowed three answers: yes (*discriminated against*), no (*not discriminated against*), did not know. We measured whether the respondent has at least once felt discriminated against. The variable takes on a value of 0 if the individual has never experienced discrimination and 1 if they have experienced discrimination at least once. To address potential non-linearity and capture intensity, we also construct an alternative count measure that records the number of domains (0–7) in which respondents report discrimination as a robustness check to our regression models.

Table 3 describes the percentage distribution of respondents who define themselves discriminated (at least once) or not (never discriminated) by migratory generation. As expected, 1.5G feels less discriminated against than 1G. In fact, while almost 75% of 1.5G respondents feel that they have never been discriminated against, in the case of 1G the percentage drops to 70.5%. Compared to 1.5G, first-generation migrants experience greater linguistic and cultural adjustment, increasing vulnerability to discriminatory encounters in everyday life, work and services; stronger ties to origin contexts may also slow adaptation, heightening stress and perceived discrimination (Tyrberg, 2024).

4.3 Control Variables

We included in the models the variables generally used in the literature on this topic as control variables.

With reference to structural variables, we included *sex* (*male* and *female*) and a numeric covariate on both *age* (completed years) and age squared. We expect a bell-shaped relationship between age and political engagement. The *area of residence* variable was added to the model, distinguishing among *North*, *Centre* and *South* of Italy. Educational attainment was entered as a three-category variable: *low* (up to lower secondary; reference), *medium* (upper secondary), and *high* (degree or higher). The last structural variable considered in the model is *occupational status*, measured with two modalities: *employed* (reference), and *not employed*.

To consider the role played by the household, we included the variables *living in a partnership* and *number of children*. First, we differentiated between *not living in a partnership* (0) and *living in a partnership* (1). Second, we adopted a categorical variable that considered the number of children: *zero* (reference), *one*, *two*, *three* or *more children*. However, in the case of 1.5G, since they have a low average age and few of them have children, we used a dichotomous variable that differentiates between *having no children* and *having children*.

Migration history was captured by two measures. *Country of origin*, proxied by citizenship at birth, was grouped to ensure adequate sample sizes: *Eastern Europe EU* (reference),

Eastern Europe non-EU, North Africa, Rest of Africa, Far East, Middle East and Central Asia, and Latin America (origin-specific models were infeasible, especially for 1.5G, due to sparse cells even with broad groupings; origin is therefore included as aggregated controls rather than separate sub-samples). *Duration since migration* was entered as *years since migration*, and the square of this variable.

Lastly, attitudes towards the host context were proxied by *social trust* and *organisational involvement*. *Social trust* was binary: 0 if the respondent judged most people untrustworthy (reference) and 1 otherwise. *Organisational involvement* was coded 1 for membership or participation in the previous 12 months in any Italian organisation (cultural, religious, sports, recreational, volunteering, trade union, international cooperation, other), and 0 otherwise.

4.4 Method

In order to test the hypotheses outlined above, a series of logistic regression models are estimated. The results are presented as *average marginal effects* (AMEs), which quantify the mean change in predicted probability (ranging from 0 to 1) associated with a one-unit change in a covariate. Due to the non-linear nature of logit models, marginal effects vary across observations⁵. Therefore, AMEs offer a more interpretable metric by expressing results on the probability scale, thus facilitating comparisons across models and covariates (Agresti, 2010; Mood, 2010).

To assess the joint influence of identity and perceived discrimination, models included an interaction, presented as predicted probabilities with other covariates held at their means. We propose this insight for both 1G and 1.5G, only for the dependent variable *interest in politics*⁶. To ensure robust and readable results we made an aggregation. As noted above, each category (*integrated, assimilated, separated, marginalised*) was originally coded on six levels (0–5). For this sensitivity analysis, we collapsed the counts into three levels: 0=*never* (count 0); 1=*low* (count 1; e.g., marginalised in one domain); 2=*medium/high* (count ≥ 2; e.g., marginalised in three domains).

5 Results

The logistic regression models estimated as *AMEs*, predicting the likelihood of engagement in politics by migratory generation (Table 4)⁷, indicate that identity and feeling discriminated against play a central role in influencing political engagement of both 1G and 1.5G respondents, although relevant differences emerge by migratory generation.

⁵ As a robustness check for potential endogeneity of perceived discrimination, we estimated 2SLS models for all three outcomes (separately for 1G and 1.5G), instrumenting discrimination with organisational involvement, generalised trust and employment status. The estimates corroborate the AME-based results and, where indicated by endogeneity tests, strengthen the substantive conclusions. Full specifications and diagnostics are reported in Tables A5 and A6 in Appendix.

⁶ Given the limited number of respondents who reported discussing politics or participating in political debates (see Tables 2 and 4), it was not feasible to apply this interaction to these two dependent variables.

⁷ As a robustness and to capture gradations in identity, we re-specified minority and majority identity as continuous scores (0–5) equal to the number of domains in which respondents display strong identification. Results (Supplementary Table A4) align with Table 4: majority identity is positively associated with all outcomes for both generations, whereas minority identity is positive and precisely estimated among 1G and weaker among 1.5G.

Table 4 Multivariate binary logistic regressions: effect of social identity and discrimination on political engagement (political interest, political debate and talking about politics) by migratory generation. Average marginal effects (AMEs). Weighted data

Independent variables	Political interest		Talking about politics		Political debate	
	AME	<i>p</i> -val.	AME	<i>p</i> -val.	AME	<i>p</i> -val.
First Generation						
<i>Identity</i> (Ref. Assimilated)						
- Integrated	0.017	**	0.015	**	0.004	
- Separated	-0.081	***	-0.047	***	-0.014	***
- Marginalised	-0.092	***	-0.076	***	-0.025	***
<i>Discriminated against</i> (Ref. No, never)						
- Yes, at least once	0.086	***	0.079	***	0.056	***
Number of observations	13,198		13,198		13,198	
Pseudo R ²	0.147		0.129		0.094	
1.5 Generation						
<i>Identity</i> (Ref. Assimilated)						
- Integrated	0.017		-0.012		0.017	*
- Separated	-0.086	***	-0.066	***	-0.016	*
- Marginalised	-0.094	***	-0.120	***	-0.023	**
<i>Discriminated against</i> (Ref. No, never)						
- Yes, at least once	0.097	***	0.129	***	0.045	***
Number of observations	2,272		2,272		2,272	
Pseudo R ²	0.160		0.162		0.163	

Average marginal effects from binary logistic regression. Other independent variables are gender, age, age squared, area of residence, educational level, employment status, living in a partnership, number of children (having children in the case of 1.5G), country of origin, years since migration and its squared measure (see Table A1 and A2 for their AMEs and p-values). Statistical significance of the relationship is marked by * if $p < 0.1$, ** if $p < 0.05$, *** if $p < 0.01$. Instrumental-variable (2SLS) robustness tests for perceived discrimination are reported in Tables A5 and A6 (Supplementary Material)

Source: our elaborations on SCIF data

For 1G immigrants, the variables used to indicate the attitudinal dimension of political engagement (*political interest* and *talking about politics*) have the most significant results. The role of identity is evident: those with an *integrated* identity show the highest likelihood of being interested in and talking about politics. Those who have a strong identity only toward the country of origin (*separated*) have a lower probability of being interested in Italian politics than immigrants who have a strong Italian identity only (*assimilated*). Immigrants who have both weak minority and majority identity (*marginalised*) have the lowest probability of being interested in Italian politics.

The *taking part in political debate* dependent variable demonstrates analogous associations with other models, with a salient exception: differences between *integrated* and *assimilated* profiles prove to be non-significant. Thus, minority identity does not reduce the likelihood of engaging in political debates, if it coexists with majority identification.

The *discrimination* variable enriches the figure just drawn by providing additional compelling evidence. It plays a significant role in the case of all dependent variables considered. In the case of 1G, political engagement appears to be positively associated with perceived discrimination, suggesting a possible protest-oriented dimension: respondents reporting discrimination are associated with a higher probability of political engagement.

The results for 1.5G are less clear-cut. In the case of attitudinal dimension of political engagement, identity is associated with the dependent variables in a manner substantially consistent with what we described for 1G, but in this case with a slight loss in significance in the case of *talking about politics* and *interest in Italian politics*. Moreover, in the case of *talking about politics* dependent variable, the *integrated* category indicates a not significant AME. A second notable difference is observed when the dependent variable is *taking part in political debate*: the *integrated* category is positively associated and reaches weak statistical significance⁸.

Even in the case of 1.5G, there is an increase in the probability of political engagement if the respondent feels discriminated against (Table 4). In this case, also, political engagement appears to be protest-oriented.

In the next step, we replace the binary discrimination indicator with a count of contexts in which respondents report discrimination and add its squared term, estimating these models separately for 1G and 1.5G and reporting AMEs (Table 5). For the 1G, the linear term is positive and statistically significant across all outcomes, while the squared term is negative and significant, indicating a concave association (rising engagement at a decreasing rate). Among the 1.5G, the discrimination variable remains positive and significant for all outcomes; the squared term is smaller and reaches significance only for political debate. Appendix Figure A1 plots the corresponding predicted probabilities and corroborates the pattern documented in Table 5.

Furthermore, to deepen the role played jointly by identity and perceived discrimination on political engagement, the predicted probabilities of *political interest* are proposed in Fig. 1 for 1G immigrants and in Fig. 2 for 1.5G, keeping the other variables at their mean values.

For 1G respondents, the interaction between discrimination and identity shows that the *integrated* and *assimilated* respondents are associated with a greater awareness and sensitivity to discriminatory dynamics, and the two together indicate a greater *interest in politics* (Fig. 1a). Specifically, on the one hand, as the number of contexts in which the respondent is integrated increases (from not integrated to medium/high levels of integration), the likelihood of *taking an interest in politics* also increases. On the other hand, feeling discriminated against indicates a significantly higher likelihood of *political interest* compared to those who do not feel discriminated against. However, in the case of weak integration the differences between the discriminated and non-discriminated are not significant. Looking at the *assimilated* category (Fig. 1b), a similar pattern is observed; however, in this case the differences between discriminated and non-discriminated respondents are always statistically significant.

The results for the other two *identity* dimensions enrich the previous evidence described with reference to Table 4 with new nuances. In fact, the *separated* and *marginalised* categories (Fig. 1c and d, respectively) display a similar but opposite trend: as the number of contexts in which the respondent is *separated* or *marginalised* increases, *interest in Italian politics* decreases. This shape is particularly evident in the case of *marginalised* immigrants. In addition, immigrants who report discrimination consistently exhibit higher political interest than their counterparts⁹.

⁸ The results of ordered logit models estimated separately for 1G and 1.5G, as a robustness check (Appendix Table A3) corroborate the main AME-based findings: identity profiles and perceived discrimination remain significantly associated with political discussion, with similar directions and magnitudes by generation.

⁹ 2SLS estimates reported in Tables A5 and A6 corroborate these patterns.

Table 5 Multivariate binary logistic regressions: effect of discrimination (number of contexts) and its squared term on political engagement (political interest, political debate and talking about politics) by migratory generation. Average marginal effects (AMEs). Weighted data

Independent variables	Political interest		Talking about politics		Political debate	
	AME	<i>p</i> -val.	AME	<i>p</i> -val.	AME	<i>p</i> -val.
First Generation						
<i>Discriminated against (number of contexts)</i>	0.327	***	0.057	***	0.036	***
<i>Discriminated against squared</i>	-0.040	***	-0.006	**	-0.004	**
Number of observations	13,198		13,198		13,198	
Pseudo R ²	0.147		0.129		0.095	
1.5 Generation						
<i>Discriminated against (number of contexts)</i>	0.087	**	0.104	***	0.046	***
<i>Discriminated against squared</i>	-0.013		-0.015		-0.007	*
Number of observations	2,272		2,272		2,272	
Pseudo R ²	0.161		0.161		0.169	

Average marginal effects from binary logistic regression. Other independent variables are identity, gender, age, age squared, area of residence, educational level, employment status, living in a partnership, number of children (having children in the case of 1.5G), country of origin, years since migration and its squared measure. 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

Political interest

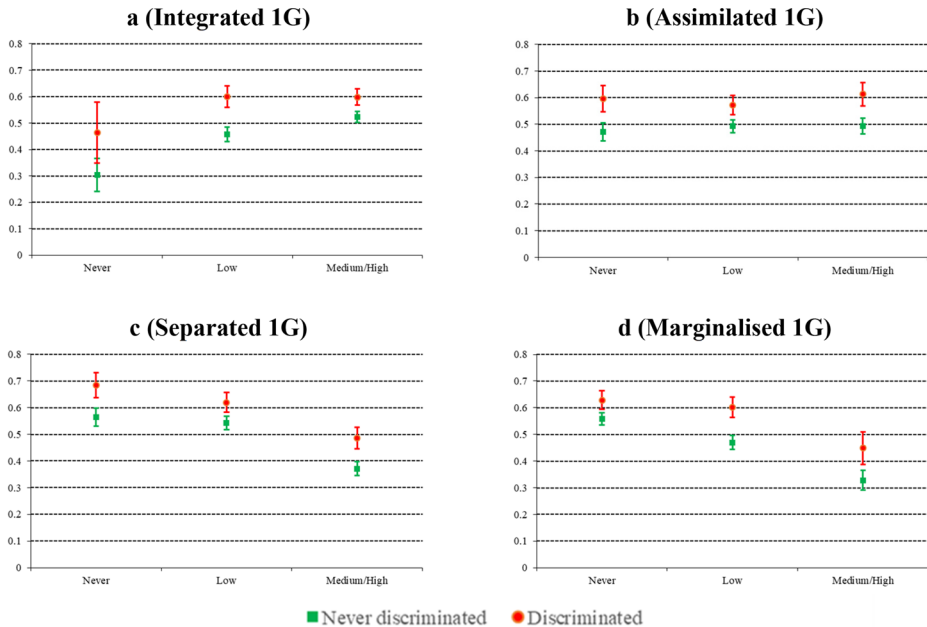


Fig. 1 Predicted at mean probabilities of *political interest* for 1G respondents. Interaction effects for *identity* and *discrimination*. Weighted data. *Notes:* See Table 4 for the control variables. *Source:* our elaborations on SCIF data

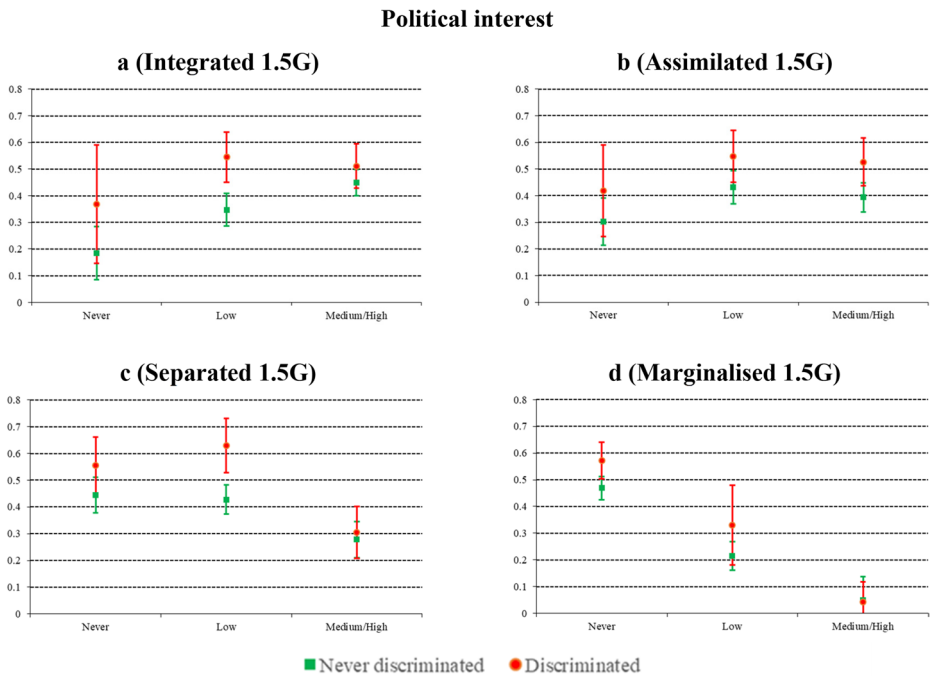


Fig. 2 Predicted at mean probabilities of *political interest* for 1.5G respondents. Interaction effects for *identity* and *discrimination*. Weighted data. *Notes*: See Table 4 for the control variables. *Source*: our elaborations on SCIF data

For 1.5G respondents the results are less significant (Fig. 2). As we noted with reference to Table 4, discrimination plays a less significant (although important) role than for 1G. Since we have fewer cases for 1.5G, the error intervals are wider. Furthermore, for this migratory generation the differences between discriminated and non-discriminated are not significant (except for the ‘low’ level of *integrated* and *separated* and for the ‘medium/high’ level of *marginalised*). The shape of the figure for 1.5G is similar but less clear-cut than that observed for the first generation.

6 Discussion and conclusions

Political participation enables individuals to exert influence over the public decision-making process by articulating their needs and preferences, thus constituting a fundamental element of democratic societies. While it is well established that people with a migratory background tend to participate less in political life than their native counterparts, the political engagement of young adults with migrant origins (particularly in relation to generational differences) remains underexplored. Moreover, few studies have highlighted how perceived discrimination and identification with the host country can significantly influence their political participation (Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2014; Sanders et al., 2014). To the best of our knowledge, no empirical contributions have also considered discrimination and its interaction with identity while distinguishing by migratory generation. In addition,

most research has considered only self-perceived identity and has not incorporated empirical indicators, thereby failing to capture identity's multiple domains (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004).

Drawing on data from the SCIF-ISTAT survey (2011–2012), this study investigates how social identification and perceived discrimination affect immigrants' propensity to engage politically in Italy, with the aim of uncovering generational patterns in political engagement.

To our knowledge, this is the first application in Italy of an *Ethnosizer*-inspired indicator (Constant, Gataullina, & Zimmermann, 2009) to investigate identity-engagement associations. Considering these elements, our analysis discussed the existence of migratory generation differences in (the drivers of) political attitudes and behaviours among people with migratory backgrounds residing in Italy.

The evidence obtained through our analysis partially confirmed the hypothesis that dual (*integrated*) identification is associated with a higher probability of political engagement than a single (*separate* or *assimilated*) or no (*marginalised*) identification (*H1*). Specifically, in the case of the attitudinal dimension (*political interest* and *talking about politics* dependent variables), the hypothesis is fully confirmed. In the case of the behavioural dimension (*taking part in political debate* dependent variable), having a dual identity shows no significant differences compared to those who have only a strong Italian identity (*assimilated*) for 1G respondents (but it is weakly significant for 1.5G respondents). Furthermore, in accordance with our hypothesis (*H1*), the described result is found for both 1G and 1.5G (although in this case the results are less clear-cut). This result is of great relevance. Specifically, there is an absence of compelling evidence to suggest that the preservation of minority identity plays a significant negative role. In other words, while at the level of political attitudes, dual identity maximises political engagement, in the case of political behaviours, no detrimental effects were found of preserving minority identity when it is combined with an Italian identity. These results could be explained in light of recent scientific literature that provides several explanations for the positive association between dual identity and political engagement. The findings reinforce both Social Identity Theory and the SIMCA model, which conceptualise politicised identity as a key driver of political engagement. In particular, dual identity emerges not as a barrier, but as a resource for democratic participation.

In line with our second hypothesis (*H2.1*), we find a positive association between perceived discrimination and political engagement (both attitudinal and behavioural) for 1G and 1.5G. Extending the analysis to the number of contexts in which discrimination is reported, we detect diminishing returns (*H2.2*): for 1G, the linear term is positive and the squared term negative and significant across outcomes, whereas for 1.5G evidence of concavity is weaker (significant only for political debate). This pattern indicates that the positive association between discrimination and engagement appears to weaken at higher reported levels of discrimination, more clearly among 1G migrants.

Considering this complexity, we proposed a further analysis aimed at investigating the joint effect of identification and discrimination. In line with our third hypothesis (*H3*), we found that for 1G immigrants, the interaction between identity and discrimination shows that as the level of integration increases, the likelihood of *taking an interest in politics* also increases. A similar, though less significant, result is observed when considering *assimilated* identity. This result becomes even more intriguing when considering that the opposite effect is observed in the case of *separated* and *marginalised* identities. In other words, this result

reinforces the evidence that having a strong *integrated* identity is the condition that maximises the likelihood of being engaged in Italian politics.

However, after conducting separate analyses for the 1G and 1.5G sub-samples, as we had hypothesised, for 1.5G the results are less significant (*H4*). In fact, both when looking at the AMEs and when considering the predicted probabilities determined by the interaction between *discrimination* and *identity*, the significance of the results is greater for 1G immigrants than for 1.5G. Specifically, 1.5G having arrived at a younger age are more likely to configure themselves as having an *assimilated* identity (weaker connection with the country of origin and stronger identification with the country of destination) and less frequently feel discriminated against compared to 1G.

The SCIF data have some limitations. The survey dates to 2011–2012, prior to subsequent political and social shifts in Italy (including the rising salience of right-wing parties and changes in immigration policy) which may limit generalisability to the present. While identity-formation mechanisms are plausibly stable across contexts and over time (Phinney et al., 2001), experiences of discrimination are contingent on socio-political climates (Nandi & Platt, 2020). Consistency with related national and international evidence nonetheless supports external validity (Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2014; Nandi & Platt, 2020). All estimates should be interpreted as period-specific associations, and any generalisation to later cohorts or different policy regimes should be made with caution. Despite the temporal lag, SCIF remains the most comprehensive, nationally representative dataset on immigrants in Italy and uniquely enables the analyses undertaken, providing robust evidence for the period and a baseline for interpreting more recent developments.

A second limitation is that key identity items were asked only of foreign citizens, and the sample is not representative of naturalised persons; consequently, naturalised citizens are excluded. Our aim was to examine associations between identity, perceived discrimination and political engagement among immigrants; even if naturalised citizens were available, they would form a separate comparison group rather than be pooled with non-naturalised immigrants, leaving the substantive results unchanged. Their absence nevertheless prevents direct comparisons with this subgroup and highlights the need for future national surveys to collect harmonised identity and discrimination measures for both foreign and naturalised citizens, including information on the timing and mode of naturalisation.

Potential endogeneity affects perceived discrimination, identity and political engagement. The cross-sectional SCIF design precludes causal inference: politically engaged individuals may be more likely to perceive or report discrimination, and unobserved traits (e.g., prior political socialisation, personality, network access) may influence both, biasing estimates despite extensive controls. Accordingly, we interpret results as associations, not causal effects. Future research should employ longitudinal designs and instruments capturing the timing, intensity and frequency of discriminatory experiences, complemented by qualitative evidence across migratory generations. Notably, studies that explicitly address endogeneity report findings consistent with the analytical framework adopted here (Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2014; Nandi & Platt, 2020).

Notwithstanding limitations, our strategy provides useful insight into how social identity, perceived discrimination and political engagement interrelate and the findings remain substantively robust and motivate specific policy implications. The promotion of a dual identity, that encompasses both minority and majority affiliations, has the potential to

enhance political participation and strengthen democratic inclusion. The positive association between perceived discrimination and political engagement underscores the pressing need for the implementation of more comprehensive anti-discrimination measures. These measures should not only encompass legal protections but also the creation of spaces that facilitate recognition, dialogue, and social cohesion. Furthermore, the observed generational differences suggest that policies should be adapted to suit the unique experiences of 1G and 1.5G migrants. The encouragement of participation in community organisations and civic life may serve as a valuable strategy to foster political engagement and build a more inclusive and multicultural society. The study emphasises the necessity for policies that acknowledge the intricate interplay between identity, discrimination, and political participation, and that proactively support migrant communities in becoming engaged and empowered democratic actors.

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Data Availability The data supporting the findings of this study are restricted, as they were used under licence for this study and are therefore not publicly available. However, the data are available from the authors upon reasonable request.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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