

Claremont-UC Undergraduate Research Conference on the European Union

Volume 2019

Article 2

8-23-2019

Experience with and Perceptions of Immigrants in Italy

Arianna Babraj
University of Southern California

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.claremont.edu/urceu>



Part of the [International and Area Studies Commons](#), [International Relations Commons](#), [Migration Studies Commons](#), and the [Psychology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Babraj, Arianna (2019) "Experience with and Perceptions of Immigrants in Italy," *Claremont-UC Undergraduate Research Conference on the European Union*: Vol. 2019, Article 2. DOI: 10.5642/urceu.201901.02

Available at: <https://scholarship.claremont.edu/urceu/vol2019/iss1/2>

This Chapter is brought to you for free and open access by the Current Journals at Scholarship @ Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in Claremont-UC Undergraduate Research Conference on the European Union by an authorized editor of Scholarship @ Claremont. For more information, please contact scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu.

Experience with and Perceptions of Immigrants in Italy

Cover Page Footnote

I would like to thank the School of International Relations, specifically Professor Robert English, with whom I developed and completed this project. His guidance led me not only to produce a successful independent research project, but also to participate in the 2019 Undergraduate Conference on the EU at Scripps College where I ultimately received the opportunity to publish my research. I would also like to thank the Italian Department, specifically Professors Margaret Rosenthal and Alessio Filippi who both shared their knowledge of Italian language and culture with me specifically regarding this project. Additionally, I would like to extend a special thanks to my classmate and dear friend Paulina Nuñez who not only assisted me in the planning of the trip and the completion and recording of my interviews in Italy, but also in translating all of them and turning the data into legible graphs. Finally, this research would not be possible without the funding I received from the USC chapter of Phi Kappa Phi who generously granted me a Summer Scholarship to complete my research.

2

Experience with and Perceptions of Immigrants in Italy

Arianna Babraj

University of Southern California

ABSTRACT

This research explores Italians' experiences with and perceptions of immigrants, along with their ideas of how the government should formulate immigration policy. Using in person surveys, 117 subjects were interviewed in the northern, central and southern regions of Italy. After accounting for variables like age, gender, and region, the data revealed interesting trends. Overall, the main findings of this study hold that there is a connection between the proximity of a subject's relationship with immigrants and how positive their experiences are. These experiences can influence how the subject then views immigrants as either an advantage or a disadvantage, however, other factors like culture and economy, also play important roles. Finally, most subjects recognized the failures of the Italian government to properly handle immigration reform and generally favored the idea of increasing restrictions on who could enter the country.

KEYWORDS

immigration, perception, experiences, attitudes, far-right

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most influential forces shaping Europe is the rise of populism and nationalism, along with the radicalization of the right wing. This trend can be seen across the continent, most notably in some Central European countries, such as Poland and Hungary, and in the recent national referendum in Britain which produced Brexit. Other nations who do not necessarily have majority coalitions on the far right have seen increases in their own national parties like the National Democratic Party (NPD) in Germany or the Social Democrats in Sweden. The extreme stances of these parties, particularly on immigration issues, separate them from the more traditional center right and ultimately contribute to their success.

Italy became the latest European state to elect a populist government during their March 2018 national elections. Though initially producing a stalemate with no clear victor, the ultimate coalition between a historically neo-fascist party, Lega (formally known as Lega Nord), and a new, anti-establishment party, Movimento Cinque Stelle, was formed and united by, among other policies, their clearly anti-immigrant stances. Such results came in the wake of what many consider to be a failure of the previous Italian government to properly manage the impact of the 2015 'migrant crisis' that swept through Europe. The policies that have emerged from the new administration are hard-lined, with actions such as blocking non-governmental organization (NGO) boats carrying migrants to Italian shores and calls for questions about ethnicity to be added to the census. However, it is important to note that the rise of Lega and Movimento Cinque Stelle is not only part of the larger movement sweeping the European continent, but also a continuation of the political developments of previous Italian administrations.

Italian immigration policy has been more or less focused on security and tightening of borders since the 1980s (e.g. Al-Azar, 2006; Colucci, 2018). Even under center-left governments, the security narrative has played into and fed off of public opinion, which has become increasingly hostile towards immigrants (Sciortino & Colombo, 2004). The rise of neo-fascist parties like Lega Nord in the late 1990s and early 2000s brought about a polarization of rhetoric and allowed for a justification of increasingly extreme policies (Al-Azar, 2006). The 2015 migration crisis also had notable impacts on Italy both demographically and politically, exacerbating existing problems such as the lack of legislation in place to integrate second generation immigrants. In order to make anti-immigrant arguments, the public opinion had to be receptive to such arguments and their own experiences with and perceptions of immigrants must have compelled them to sympathize with extreme rhetoric. The importance of real contacts with immigrants cannot be underestimated, nor can the often negative impacts of abstract contact via mass media (Panichella and Ambrosini, 2018). Finally, within Italy, there is an overall lack of trust in the government's ability to properly deal with immigration, with very few recognizing immigration as being positive (Dixon et al., 2018).

2. OVERVIEW OF STUDY

The significance of this study lies in its focus not only on the importance of public opinion, but also in its design and timing. Studies like that by Dixon et al., support the idea that most Italians would not have any significant relationships with immigrants, making them receptive to the anti-immigrant platforms of Lega and Movimento Cinque Stelle. The survey investigated the relationship between actual experiences and perceptions as well

as political preferences. The design of the survey accounts for comparable data between age groups, gender, and region. In particular, the decision to include southern, central and northern regions also served to account for the distribution of votes during the 2018 election cycle with the North voting primarily for Lega Nord, the Center voting for Partito Democratico (an establishment, center-left party), and the South voting primarily for Cinque Stelle. The surveys were collected between July and August 2018, a few months after the national elections and coalition formation and mere weeks after Salvini blocked the Aquarius from docking in Sicily, events which frequently came up during interviews.

3. METHODOLOGIES

This project is an example of exploratory research in which in-person interviews were conducted in the public spaces of city centers. The target population was adult, native Italians in metropolitan cities of Palermo, Bologna, and Milan. This population was selected because they were all voting age citizens, meaning that their opinions dictate policy formation and administrative makeup of the government. The metropolitan areas of these cities were selected based on region, with one in each major region, that is, South, Center, and North. Further, metropolitan areas are the most accessible both in terms of transportation and in ability to encounter subjects.

The sampling type used was non-probability sampling, meaning that the conclusions drawn from the study cannot be inferred from the sample to the whole population due to bias. More specifically, the study used convenience sampling as subjects were selected while research was being conducted based on their presence in public spaces, and not before. Some biases that this study produced include that the only people surveyed were those who happened to be in the city center during the study. Further, the survey took place during the summer, specifically during the national holiday of *ferragosto*, meaning that many locals were likely on vacation. Additionally, bias existed in the process of selecting subjects. Though the selection was done “at random,” certain types of discrimination existed. For example, only individuals who were alone and not obviously busy with any work or tasks were approached. Moreover, the sampling frame consisted of only adults who considered themselves to be locals.

The data collection process was as follows. Subjects were approached and first asked if they were from the city in question. It should be noted that though subjects were specifically asked if they considered themselves to be locals, some might have not been from that target city, giving responses such as “more or less” or “I think so.” The vagueness in their answers could have indicated a misunderstanding of the question or an uncertainty in their own concept of belonging to a given city. Regardless, unless the subject answered “no,” the survey was conducted. Following their affirmation, they were asked whether they would be willing to answer questions for an academic research project and if they were willing to be recorded anonymously. No personal data was collected in order to ensure that subjects felt free to express their opinions. All categories analyzed were created after the data was collected, coded based on trends in responses. The only demographic variables were gender and age, usually estimated based on appearance.

Figure 1. Population Sizes of Cities Visited^a

Population	Palermo	Bologna	Milan
6-25,000	Cefalù (~14,000)	Crevalcore (~13,000)	Senago (~21,000)
26-50,000	Monreale (~39,000)	Casalecchio di Reno (~36,000)	Abbiategrosso (~32,000)
50,000+	Bagheria (~55,000)	Imola (~69,000)	Legnano (~60,000)

Source: "Guida ai Comuni" (n.d.)

^aExcluding capitals themselves; organized by metropolitan area name

The sampling size was originally 120, with three recordings being lost during the data transfer process. All data was collected via audio recording, though in six cases they were written instead due to lack of willingness on the part of the subject to be recorded. In total, the study consists of 57 women and 60 men, with 41 young adults (aged 18-39), 49 middle-aged adults (aged 40-59), and 28 older adults (aged 60+). It must be noted that most of these ages are estimates as subjects were not directly asked their age. In certain cases, subjects offered this information freely, in which case their exact age was recorded. The largest group was middle-aged adults as they were the most represented in public spaces. Regionally, ten surveys were conducted in each city with four cities visited in each metropolitan area, that is, 40 in Palermo, 40 in Bologna, 37 in Milan. The three additional cities besides the capitals of each metropolitan area were all relatively similar in size, with one small (roughly 10-20,000 people), one medium (roughly 30-40,000 people) and one large (roughly 50-60,000 people) (see Fig. 1 for more detail).

This project was conducted over a one month period between July and August 2018. Roughly ten days were spent in each metropolitan area. All interviews were conducted during the day on various days of the week. Usually one day was spent in each city to collect ten surveys, though certain cities took up to two days. Surveys were typically conducted from mid-morning to late afternoon. This collection method allowed subjects to answer freely and in more detail because it did not constrain them to pre-designated categories. In addition, conducting an online survey limits who can participate, whereas in person interviews are limited only by who is willing to participate and whether or not the surveyor comes into contact with them. Further, due to the structure of Italian cities and the lifestyle of those who live in them, this method was effective due to high foot traffic in public spaces.

4. RESULTS

The analysis of results will walk through each question asked and explain trends in answers based on overall, regional, gender, and age analyses.

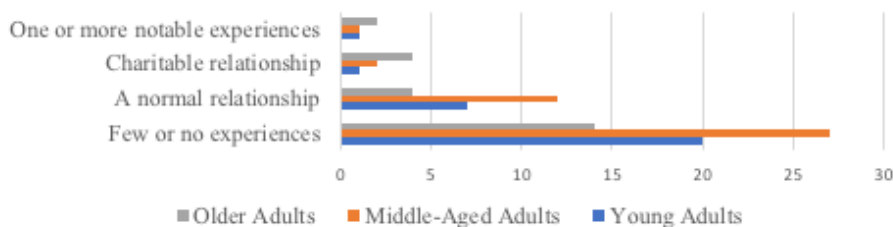
4.1. WHAT IS YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH IMMIGRANTS HERE IN (CITY)? ARE THESE EXPERIENCES MOSTLY POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE?

Overall, most people had little to no experience with immigrants, with the second most frequent answer being that they had a "normal" relationship. Of those who responded that they had little to no relationship with immigrants, only 42.9% characterized these experiences as positive, whereas 82.6% of those who had a normal relationship characterized their experiences as positive. That being said, overall, most people (58.1%) had positive experiences with immigrants.

The same trend extended regionally, with the most prevalent answer always being “little to no experience.” Those from the Palermo area were more likely to have little to no experience (70%) than those from the Bologna (47.5%) or Milan (43.2%) areas. While only 7.5% of those from the Palermo area cited having normal relationships, 30% of those in Bologna and 21.6% of those in Milan reported having such relationships. In every region, most people had positive experiences with immigrants. The Bologna area saw the highest number of positive responses at 70%, compared to Milan at 51.4%, and Palermo at 51.2%. It should be noted that Bologna also saw the highest portion of subjects who characterized their experiences as negative at 15%, whereas only 4.9% in Palermo and 8.9% in Milan characterized their experiences as negative.

In terms of gender, both men and women mostly had little to no experience with immigrants. The spread of this data was almost identical, with 54.9% of men and 49.1% of women having little to no experience and 19.1% of men and 21.1% of women having normal relationships. All other categories (charitable relationships, one or more notable experiences, work-related experiences, and friendships or familial ties) were similarly mirrored. That being said, 70.2% of women compared to 49% of men considered these experiences to be positive. However, a slightly greater portion of women (14%) than men (11.8%) considered their experiences to be negative. Overall, 29.4% of men and 14% of women thought that their experiences were neither positive nor negative.

Figure 2. What is your experience with immigrants in (city)? Analysis by age.

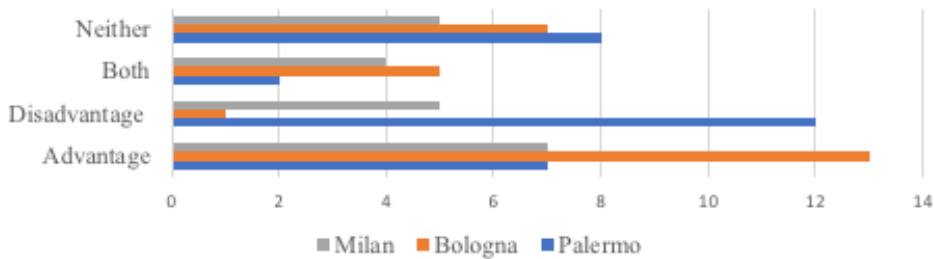


By age group there was not much diversity between ages regarding those who had little to no experience, with 48.8% of young adults (18–39 year olds), 58.7% of middle-aged adults (40–59 year olds), and 50% of older adults (60+) citing such an answer. Middle-aged adults had the most normal relationships relative to the other groups, while young adults had the most friendships or familial ties with immigrants, at 26.8% of respondents in this category (see Fig. 2). This is significant because overall, 92.9% of subjects who had friendships or familial ties characterized their experiences as positive while 0% of them characterized their experiences as negative. Moreover, while all groups had mostly positive experiences, the proportion of young adults was highest at 65.9% compared to 56.5% of middle-aged adults and 46.4% of older adults. Older adults were the most likely to have negative experiences at 17.9% versus 8.7% of middle-aged adults and 4.9% of young adults. Interestingly, older adults were also the most likely to have charitable relationships (14.3%), or relationships in which the subject would consider most of their interactions to be actively helping immigrants through an organization or during everyday encounters. Overall, 85.7% of subjects who had a charitable relationship with immigrants had positive experiences, with 0% having negative experiences.

4.2. IN GENERAL, DO YOU THINK IMMIGRANTS ARE AN ADVANTAGE OR DISADVANTAGE TO YOUR COMMUNITY? WHY?

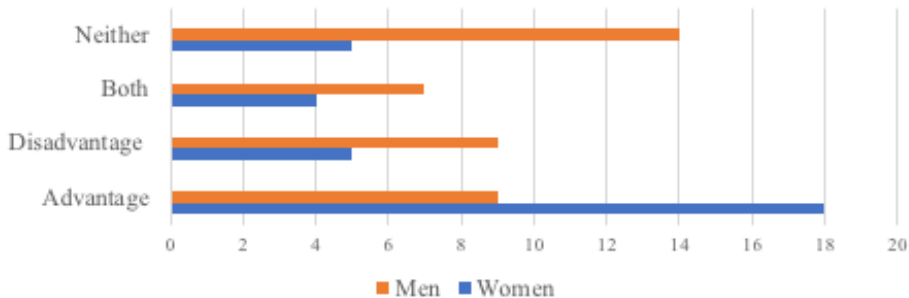
Overall, most people thought that immigrants were either an advantage to their community (23.9%) or that it depended on additional factors (22.2%). Those who thought that immigrants were an advantage were most likely to cite cultural exchange (37%) or economic benefits (25.9%) as the reason why they answered the way they did. Those who thought that it depended on something had various factors in mind, including whether or not immigrants integrated (38.5%) or on the individual themselves (23.1%). Those who thought that immigrants were a disadvantage made up 15.4% of overall respondents and were most likely to cite economic costs (33.3%) or say that immigrants were delinquents or criminals (22.2%). Overall, most people cited a need for immigrants to be integrated (28.3%) or a failure of Italian political structure itself (13.3%).

Figure 3.1. Do you think immigrants are an advantage or disadvantage to your community?
Answer by region.



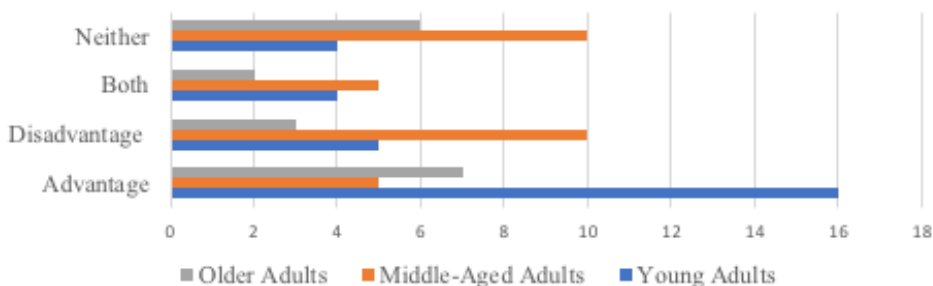
Of all the metropolitan areas, Palermo saw the largest number of subjects who thought that immigrants were a disadvantage. On the other end of the spectrum, in the Bologna area only 2.5% of subjects thought that immigrants were a disadvantage, and instead 32.5% thought that they were an advantage. Most people in the Milan area (29.7%) thought it depended on additional factors (see Fig 3.1). People in the Palermo area were most likely to cite economic costs (15%) or the idea that immigrants receive benefits that Italians do not (15%) as a determination of their answer, whereas people in the Bologna and Milan areas were both most likely to cite integration.

Figure 3.2. Do you think immigrants are an advantage or disadvantage to your community?
Answer by gender.



Women were more likely to think that immigrants were an advantage than men. Further, 33.3% women thought that it depended on additional factors, with only 8.8% of women thinking that immigrants were a disadvantage. An equal amount of men saw immigrants as an advantage and as a disadvantage (both 17.6%), with most men (27.5%) thinking that they were neither an advantage nor a disadvantage (see Fig 3.2). The reasons why both men and women thought that immigrants were neither an advantage nor a disadvantage were wide-ranging, with no clearly favored answer emerging.

Figure 3.3. Do you think immigrants are an advantage or disadvantage to your community?
Answer by age.



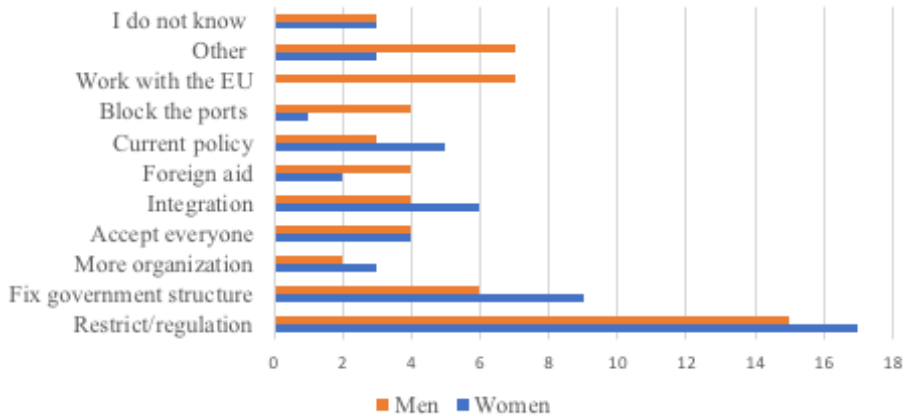
By age, young and older adults were most likely to think that immigrants were an advantage. Most middle-aged adults (27.1%) thought that it depended on additional factors, with 20.8% stating that they believed immigrants were a disadvantage. Only 10.4% of middle-aged adults thought that immigrants were an advantage (see Fig. 3.3). Once again, the most common reason why subjects thought that immigrants were an advantage was cultural exchange. This trend was also reflected in young adults' explanations, with 22.5% of young people citing cultural exchange as the reason why they answered the way they did.

4.3. WHAT DO YOU THINK THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD DO?

Overall, most people (28.3%) were in favor of more restriction and regulation of who enters the country. Instead of proposing solutions, many simply expressed frustrations with Italian government itself (13.3%). The answers that were coded under this category ranged from inadequacy of government infrastructure, believing it to be unfixable, to a call to get rid of the recently elected administration. Moreover, this category represents those who did not actually propose any solutions, but acknowledged the inefficiencies of the government to take appropriate actions.

All regions favored restricting and regulating who entered. Only 5.6% of those in Palermo and 2.7% of those in Milan suggested increased integration, compared to 17.5% in Bologna. In Milan, 18.9% of subjects expressed frustration with the government compared to 12.5% in Bologna and 8.3% in Palermo. No one in Milan discussed the idea of actively blocking people from entering, which 10% of people in Bologna and 2.8% of people in Palermo discussed. In Palermo 8.3% and in Milan 10.8% of people proposed helping potential immigrants in their country of origin, while 0% in Bologna did so.

Figure 4. What do you think the government should do?
Answer by gender.



Both men and women thought that there should be increased restriction and regulation of who enters. Interestingly, only men (11.9%) proposed working more closely with the EU. A larger portion of women (17%) expressed frustration with the government versus 10.2% of men, however more women (9.4%) outwardly agreed with the current administration compared to 5.1% of men. Overall, 6.8% of men versus 3.8% of women proposed helping potential immigrants in their country of origin (coded as “foreign aid”) (see Fig 4).

Across age groups, around 30% of subjects thought that there needed to be a restriction/regulation of who enters. Middle-aged adults were more likely to say that they didn’t know how to answer (13%) versus 2.7% of older adults and 0% of young adults. While only 2.6% of young adults proposed the option of helping immigrants in their country of origin, 6.5% of middle-aged adults and 8.1% of older adults answered in this way.

5. DISCUSSION

Below are analyses of the most important takeaways from each question asked, following the order of the results section.

5.1. RELATIONSHIPS ARE ESSENTIAL

As is suggested by the ‘contact theory’ (Pettigrew, 1998; McLaren, 2003), this data demonstrates a relationship between the proximity of an individual’s relationship with immigrants and how positive their experiences are. When asking subjects about their experiences with immigrants, the definition of ‘immigrant’ was purposefully left open to allow for a wide variety of experiences. This did generate some answers in which the subject would differentiate certain ethnic groups from others. For example, one respondent noted that those from Morocco and Tunisia created problems, while another noted that those from Bangladesh are ok but that the Romani are not. Derogatory references to Romani (the use of the word “zingari” which translates to “gypsy”) did occur, always in a negative context. Some referenced a change in the type of immigrants, saying things like “those from before were ok but those coming now are different,” a trend which will be discussed further below.

An important phrase which emerged during the study was “normal relationship.” Examples of a normal relationship include the idea that immigrants exist within the community, are visible in the workplace, usually in service positions, but that the subject did not have any relationships beyond these basic interactions. Some would note that immigrants “do not annoy me,” or “I do not have any problems with them.” Others noted things like “they seem like peaceful people,” “I get along with them” or, in a few cases, “they are good people.” In other words, for many individuals, their personal interactions were not sufficient or significant enough for them to draw a very strong opinion either way. In having what subjects seemed to consider a “normal” relationship, there was a sense of a certain degree of acceptance and recognition of the presence of immigrants in their lives. Even if two subjects encountered immigrants to the same degree, those who claimed to have a “normal” relationship instead of “little to no experience” generally displayed a sense of positivity, which was reflected in their characterization of these experiences.

Moreover, the way subjects characterize their experiences is indicative of their perceptions of immigrants. For example, despite having about the same level and types of interaction, men and women did categorize their experiences differently, with more women considering their experiences to be positive than men. More men than women also answered “neither positive nor negative” when describing their experience. In answering in this way, there was a sense that not only were the experiences minimal but they were also relatively insignificant. Those who instead answered “both positive and negative” gave more of a significance to their experiences, no matter how few or how short they were. In this sense, men can be considered more indifferent to their experiences, while women looked at them more positively, despite reporting the same level of contact.

In terms of relationships, younger adults had more friendships and familial ties than any other age group. The significance of these relationships is that of those who had this type of relationship with immigrants, none considered their experiences to be negative, with the overwhelming proportion of the answers being “positive.” A similar trend emerged among older adults who had the most “charitable relationships,” a category in which no one considered their experiences to be negative. Most of these adults were older women who reported that they either volunteered with immigrants or that they went out of their way to buy things from street vendors that they didn’t need, just to give them the money. Others in the group gave “alms” to poor immigrants, or those who they visibly saw to be in need. While these people considered their relationships to be overwhelmingly positive, these types of relationships do perpetuate a potentially damaging view of immigrants as poor and lower class. Nonetheless, these results suggest that higher levels of exposure and development of significant relationships between immigrants and natives is important to an overall acceptance of immigrants into the natives’ society. See interview #1 below for an example.



<https://scholarship.claremont.edu/urceu/vol2019/iss1/4/>

Interview #1 (double click icon to play)

Location: Cefalù, Palermo

Subject: Female, approx. 60 y.o.

Discusses how she buys things that she does not actually need from poor immigrants on the streets and how her father emigrated to France.

5.2. CULTURE AND ECONOMY

As suggested by Sides and Citrin (2007), economic interests, cultural identity, and proper education on the issues all play an important role in the formation of opinions of immigrants. In this study as well, culture and economy were the most common reasons behind someone's categorization of immigrants as either an advantage or a disadvantage. When it came to responses, the answers clearly reflected the subject's priorities.

Overall, most subjects thought that integration was important in determining whether or not immigrants were an advantage to their community. However, integration meant different things to different people. For some, it meant that immigrants need to become a part of the community through work, while others emphasized the importance of speaking Italian and understanding Italian cultural norms. In any case, the idea that immigrants need to integrate is clearly favored, not only in this answer, but in the previous one as well. That is, since significant relationships increase how positively subjects viewed immigrants, it can be inferred that integration, to some extent, is an important part of accepting immigrants in Italian society.

When culture serves as the lens through which people view outsiders, unfortunately, tendencies towards racism often manifest. There was a group of around 10 respondents who qualified one or more of their statements with "I am not a racist but..." or who would distinguish certain groups of immigrants from others that, in their eyes, did not belong. For example, one subject noted that he specifically considered immigrants from Africa to be a disadvantage, categorizing them as drunks and criminals. Another spoke exclusively about Muslims, who he saw as a threat to Italian culture and Catholic tradition. Accordingly, none of these individuals saw immigrants as an advantage to their community, only answering with "it depends" or "disadvantage." Those who thought it depended answered either in reference to the idea that immigrants receive advantages that natives do not, or that it makes a difference where the immigrants came from. Further, those who thought they were a disadvantage often categorized immigrants as delinquents or criminals. While it would be wrong to label all subjects who answered "disadvantage" as being racist, most of those who answered in this manner made statements during their survey that suggested that they were discriminating against a certain ethnic group, usually either from African or Middle Eastern countries. See interview #2 below for an example.



<https://scholarship.claremont.edu/urceu/vol2019/iss1/4/>

Interview #2 (double click icon to play)

Location: Crevalcore, Bologna

Subject: Female, approx. 55 y.o.

Discusses how immigrants are a "disaster," especially those from Morocco and Tunisia, and should be sent back to where they came from.

The regional analysis most clearly demonstrated the role of economic factors in opinion formation. Most people in the Palermo area considered immigrants to be a disadvantage and they were often associated with an economic burden on their communities. There was a distinction between their experiences, which were mostly positive, and their sense that immigrants were actively hurting their community's economy. A significant number did see immigrants as an advantage, often citing that immigrants do work that locals no longer do. Due to the economic weakness of the South compared to the North, the

association of economic cost or benefit is understandably central to the determination of immigrants' places in society. In contrast, in Bologna most people saw immigrants as advantage and talked about integration. What was remarkable was the lack of people who saw immigrants as a disadvantage and the lack of reference to economics in their opinion formation.

Age seemed to be another determinant of whether culture or economy most heavily impacted an individual's views. That is, most young and older adults thought that immigrants were an advantage. While a few young adults looked to economic reasoning, the majority saw the benefits of cultural exchange and blamed the inadequacy of the Italian government, with a considerable amount outwardly frustrated with the current administration. Interestingly, no young adults associated immigrants with crime and delinquency. Also, no older adults mentioned the idea that immigrants impose economic costs on society. Most middle-aged adults thought that it depended, and a significant amount thought that immigrants were a disadvantage. As for why, many middle aged adults cited the idea that immigrants receive benefits that Italians do not and economic costs. That is to say, middle-aged adults seemed the most focused on economic factors in their opinion formation.

5.3. "OUR GOVERNMENT DOESN'T WORK"

In regards to what the government should do, it is clear that most Italians do not believe that the government is currently capable of dealing with immigration. While the most prevalent answer was to restrict and regulate who enters, this answer, too, reflects a deficit in current government policy. Those who more directly expressed frustrations with the Italian government itself offered various answers from proposing to get rid of the current administration to a complete reluctance to speak about Italy's governing system, dismissing its legitimacy entirely. Regardless, all of these subjects were similar in that they did not see the government, as it is in its current state, as being able to solve any issues related to immigration. This lack of trust in the government contributes to a sense of threat posed by immigrants, which manifests in the idea that more controls need to be put in place to protect Italians from those entering without papers and without restriction. See interview #3 below for an example.



<https://scholarship.claremont.edu/urceu/vol2019/iss1/4/>

Interview #3 (double click icon to play)

Location: Milano Centrale, Milan

Subject: Male, approx. 30 y.o.

Discusses how the government does not have the capacity to integrate immigrants and how the current administration frustrates him.

This sentiment also manifested in other, less popular, opinions like blocking ports entirely, an action taken by the government about one month prior to when this study was conducted. Interestingly, no one in Milan discussed the idea of actively blocking people from entering. This response was interesting because it does not correlate with the fact that the north of Italy overall voted mostly for Lega, whose leader, Matteo Salvini, was the one who implemented such a policy. Again, this study does not reflect the opinions of the overall population, but perhaps suggests that those in Milan are less preoccupied with blocking the ports due to their geographical distance from them.

Another interesting trend that emerged was in reference to Italy's relations with other nations. In terms of European relations, only men proposed working more closely

with the EU. None of these men saw immigrants as a disadvantage or reported negative experiences, citing a wide range in types of relationships (normal, friends and family, work-related). Many of them thought that either immigrants were an advantage or could be an advantage if the laws were in place to deal with them. Since many saw a lack in Italian government policy, they thought that Italy should instead aim to work more closely with the EU to develop a cohesive policy, with one noting that Italy had been left alone and calling for all of Europe to work together.

In terms of relations with nations from which large amounts of immigrants came, older adults were the most likely to talk about helping people in their country of origin instead of letting them enter. A seemingly humanitarian alternative, the idea of using foreign aid to help rebuild the damaged homelands of those who escaped them is actually an example of the influence of right-wing ideology. That is, foreign aid in this case becomes a way to keep migrants out of the country on the basis of ethnicity. In reality, those who answered this way mostly thought that immigrants were disadvantage to their community, with a significant proportion of them justifying their answers by stating that immigrants were delinquents and/or criminals. In other words, there is a correlation between those who made racist statements and those who proposed foreign aid as government policy.

6. CONCLUSION

Overall, the main findings of this study hold that there is a connection between the proximity of an individual's relationship with immigrants and how positive their experiences are. The closer the relationship, the more likely it is that a subject would consider their experiences to be positive. These experiences do at times play a role in determining how the individual then views immigrants as either an advantage or a disadvantage. However, other factors, like culture and economy, also play important roles. There were obvious regional divides between North/Center and South, mostly having to do with economic disparities. Most subjects held a certain level of contempt for the Italian government and/or its lack of action, acknowledging that the work that has been done up to this point is insufficient. Reinforcing the historical analysis of immigration policy, the public clearly favors the idea of restricting and regulating who enters, indicating a general sense of unrest regarding the rate at which immigrants are currently entering the country.

This type of research can be used to better understand how to address the acceptance of immigrants into Italian society. Namely, integration seems to play an important role in Italian society, with most natives feeling disconnected from immigrants, despite their perception that there are an overwhelming number of them. Integration could help facilitate closer and more meaningful relationships between immigrant groups and natives, which, as demonstrated by previous studies and this one alike, is extremely important in improving inter-group relations. That being said, more abstract concepts and types of contact, like media exposure or sense of cultural belonging, also influence public opinion. Therefore, though increased contact is important, other factors like rhetoric utilized by mass media must also be addressed.

In November 2018, the Italian government passed what is being referred to as the Salvini Decree. One of the most notable aspects of the decree is that humanitarian protection has been abolished for those who are not eligible for asylum but cannot be sent home according to international law. These individuals are being forcefully removed from the *centri di accoglienza* (welcome centers) where they have been residing. Many of these indi-

viduals were previously granted work permits that are now being taken away and are being evicted to live on the streets. Such a loss of protection renders these individuals “illegal immigrants” who will likely become homeless. Recently in San Ferdinando, paratroopers forcefully evicted migrants and used bulldozers to destroy the refugee camp, claiming that they would be moved to new reception centers, though aid groups suggest most have been forced into homelessness (Tondo, 2019). At the time when the legislation was being passed, popular support for Lega soared while some politicians from Movimento Cinque Stelle openly opposed the legislation, which they noted would impact thousands of immigrants throughout the nation (Scherer, 2018). The legislation followed Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte’s recent decision to walk out on of a United Nations (UN) meeting on immigration. His actions were clearly impacted by Salvini’s public statement that Italy would neither attend nor sign anything related to immigration with the UN (Scarsi, 2018). As Andrea Mammone (2018) points out, Salvini has now positioned himself politically so that his voice rises above that of both Conte and Luigi Di Maio, head of Movimento Cinque Stelle.

In the wake of such extreme measures and decisions to abandon international cooperation, the future of Italy seems to be headed towards increasingly hostile stances towards immigration. Unfortunately, laws like the Salvini Decree make things like integration and increased contact between immigrants and natives that much more difficult to accomplish. The continued stigmatization and isolation of immigrants will ultimately neither make the state more secure nor improve public opinion. Going forward, it will become increasingly challenging to facilitate relations between groups, providing fertile breeding ground for extremism, both among native and immigrant groups. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that private and civil sector actors take steps to mitigate the damages of anti-immigrant policies and rhetoric. Further, the role of the media will continue to be crucial in opinion formation, making the defense of freedom of the press a key task in order to ensure that the public is not misled or manipulated into seeing immigrants through an unrealistic lens.

REFERENCES

- Al-Azar, R. (2006). Italian immigration policies: The metaphor of water. *SAIS*. Retrieved from <http://www.saisjournal.org/posts/italian-immigration-policies>
- Colucci, M. (2018). Per una storia del governo dell’immigrazione straniera in Italia dagli anni sessanta alla crisi delle politiche. *Meridiana*, (91), 9–36.
- Dixon, T., Hawkins, S., Heijbroek, L., Juan-Torres, M., & Demoures, F. (2018). Attitudes towards national identity, immigration and refugees in Italy. *More in Common*. 1–131.
- Guida ai Comuni, alle Province ed alle Regioni d’Italia. (n.d.) *Tuttitalia*. Retrieved from <https://www.tuttitalia.it/>
- Mammone, A. (2018, June 11). Italy points the way for Western right-wing nationalists but avoids EU exit. *Social Europe*. <https://www.socialeurope.eu/italy-points-the-way-for-western-right-wing-nationalists-but-avoids-eu-exit>
- McLaren, L. (2003). Anti-immigrant prejudice in Europe: Contact, threat perception, and preferences for the exclusion of migrants. *Social Forces*, 81(3), 909–936. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.2003.0038>
- Panichella, N., & Ambrosini, M. (2018). Between fears, contacts and family dynamics: the anti-immigrant attitudes in Italy. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*,

- 19(2), 391–411. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-018-0536-6>
- Pettigrew, T. F. (1998). Intergroup contact theory. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 49(1), 65–85.
- Scarsi, A. (2018, Dec 1). Italy walks out on UN migration meeting saying national borders are no business of the UN. *Express*. Retrieved from <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1053045/italy-news-giuseppe-conte-UN-global-compact-for-migration-Marrakech>
- Scherer, S. (2018, Nov. 29). Italy's Salvini gets win with new asylum and security rules. *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-italy-politics-immigration-security/italys-salvini-gets-win-with-new-asylum-and-security-rules-idUSKCN1NY1JN>
- Sciortino, G., & Colombo, A. (2004). The flows and the flood: the public discourse on immigration in Italy, 1969–2001. *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 9(1), 94–113. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1354571042000179209>
- Sides, J., & Citrin, J. (2007). European opinion about immigration: The role of identities, interests and information. *British Journal of Political Science*, 37(3), 477–504. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123407000257>
- Tondo, L. (2019, Mar. 6). Salvini crackdown: bulldozers demolish Italian camp housing 1,500 refugees. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/mar/06/salvini-crackdown-bulldozers-clear-italian-camp-housing-1500-refugees>

APPENDIX

Figure 2 Data

	Young Adults	Middle-Aged Adults	Older Adults
Few or no experiences	20	27	14
A normal relationship	7	12	4
Charitable relationship	1	2	4
One or more notable experiences	1	1	2
Work-related relationship	1	3	2
Friendships or familial ties	11	1	2

Figure 3.1 Data

	Palermo	Bologna	Milan
Advantage	7	13	7
Disadvantage	12	1	5
Both	2	5	4
Neither	8	7	5
Depends	6	9	11
Could be an advantage	4	3	4
Not a disadvantage	1	2	0

Figure 3.2 Data

	Young Adults	Middle-Aged Adults	Older Adults
Advantage	16	5	7
Disadvantage	5	10	3
Both	4	5	2
Neither	4	10	6
Depends	7	13	6
Could be an advantage	5	2	4
Not a disadvantage	0	3	0

Figure 3.3 Data

	Women	Men
Advantage	18	9
Disadvantage	5	9
Both	4	7
Neither	5	14
Depends	19	6
Could be an advantage	4	5
Not a disadvantage	2	1

Figure 4 Data

	Women	Men
Restrict/regulation	17	15
Fix government structure	9	6
More organization	3	2
Accept everyone	4	4
Integration	6	4
Foreign aid	2	4
Current policy	5	3
Block the ports	1	4
Work with the EU	0	7
Other	3	7
I do not know	3	3