Transition to adulthood and turnout.
Some unexpected implications from the Italian case

Dario Tuorto

Our article aims to study the evolution of turnout in Italy during the transition to adulthood. Previous studies in other countries (Bhatti and Hansen 2012) have attested an unexpected phase after the first vote, when turnout declines instead of following a progressive increase. We hypothesize that this trend also exists in Italy and is influenced by the characteristics of the living arrangement. The decision to leave or postpone the timing of exit from the parental home seems to play a crucial rule in the explanation of young adults' lower turnout. We also expect an interactive effect of variables such as the age-class of the young, their sex and occupational status. Data used for the analysis comes from two different sources (Osservatorio Prospex-Cattaneo, Itanes) and allows us to compare the level of turnout of young people in different living arrangements.

Introduction

Many studies in recent years have attested that young voters participate in elections less than older voters. In contrast to other forms of political participation where young people are more active, in the case of voting the relationship is normally reversed, with the curve of participation by age increasing as one moves from juvenile to adult age, and declining in correspondence with the age of "political retirement". There are various reasons for this gap: a reduced interest in politics, less knowledge about politics, a declining sense of civic duty (Topf 1995; Blais *et al.* 2004; Rubenson *et al.* 2004). And no clear trend has been identified in order to explain over-time and between-countries differences. But another question also remains unanswered: are age gaps due to life-cycle effects due to some specific feature of the youth transitory condition, or do they reflect peculiar generational differences and act through the process of generational replacement?

The first, well-known, explanation of these processes is based on the cycle effect. In this perspective the minor involvement is read as the consequence of a specific configuration of characteristics which affect the social statuses of

young people. Seymour M. Lipset, in his classic research (1960) connected the high degree of abstention of new voters with the impact of occupational mobility at the beginning of a job career. A young person voting for the first time has no previous political experience to rely on, still hasn't got a fixed set of political habits and tends to be more prone to receiving external influences, starting with those of his or her family. If these environments are homogeneous and transmit a specific input, the probability of voting will be higher, but more often a conflict situation prevails. In this case, young voters cannot simply limit themselves to their family's position and values because they contrast with those given by other reference groups. The "cross-pressure" effects are more likely to produce low turnout or inconstant political behaviour/orientation (Lipset 1960; Campbell 1960). During the complex phase of post-adolescence young people are caught between the need for independence and a still-active familiar conditioning. These contrasting forces, and the high instability of social rules that reflect a juxtaposition of different needs (being employed, forming a family, etc.) produce a weaker political identity and, as consequence, a more pronounced degree of abstention. Another obstacle in the acquisition of political maturity is geographical and residential instability experienced in juvenile age, which renders the stabilization of communitarian links and political contacts more difficult, with the effect of producing a substantially "disconnected voter" (Teixeira 1992). In synthesis, young adults are expected to vote less than older citizens because they are faced with the "start-up" problems that are typical of the juvenile age (completing education, searching for an occupation or a partner, etc.). In middle-age, participation rates normally reach higher levels as a result of the transition to marital status, although the presence of children in the household might act as a negative interference (Wilensky 2002).

A second explanation for the turnout age gap focuses the attention on generational differences. According to the classical definition of "political generation" elaborated by Karl Mannheim (a cohort of births linked by shared values, attitudes, opinion in society and politics: Mannheim 1964), the process of socialization – not the simple growth into adulthood – has an influence on citizens' views, which are moulded during adolescence or post-adolescence and remain fixed for one's whole life. The leading ideas in politics and society during the phase of entering into adulthood (as opposed to the phase itself) are decisive in the formation of political behaviour and vote orientations. Since the end of 1960s all Western countries have been invested by a persistent wave of disaffection and criticism toward political institutions and parties (Klingemann and Fuchs 1995). Citizens have become more dissatisfied with their government and express more negative feelings of alienation, cynicism, apathy, disillusion, which lead to growing abstention (together with a decline

in party identification, militancy, activism) (Pharr and Putnam 2000). At the base of this discontinuity a change occurred within the electorate, where generations grown during the 1980s and 1990s and influenced by uncertainty of present societies took over from the older generations which socialized 20 years before, during the "golden age" of participation. Minor participation of recent cohorts does not simply reflect a life cycle effect but a weaker political socialization, and generation replacement also explains long-term political changes (Franklin and Wessels 2002). Within this perspective, non-voting at juvenile age is not seen as an intrinsic characteristic of young people, but as a behaviour that has only recently emerged as an effect of the crisis of political belonging. As Mark Franklin stated (2004), becoming voters in a period of crisis means a lower turnout rate.

A negative trend in electoral participation of young people emerges in several researches as the effect of weak levels of party identification and political attention (Parry *et al.* 1992) and produced, as a consequence, a more intense sense of detachment among the less educated sectors of the youth population (Flanagan *et al.* 2009). Some explanations of this tendency have focused on the progressive disappearance of generalist political information and the fragmentation of media influences which make it more complicated for a young voter to acquire basic political exposure (following leading political events, knowing important news for the nation). All of this might have inhibited the formation of civic duty towards the vote and the propensity to participate. Robert Putnam, in his *Bowling Alone* (2000), follows the line of a negative influence of television on a young person's life and collective experiences. Nevertheless, the generation replacement thesis lacks of a complete and more specific theory about why the age gap in participation exists and has widened over time.

A different perspective combines life cycle and generation explanations for turnout decline, studying the timing and sequence of specific events which regulate the transition to adulthood. This approach takes into account how specific phases of young life have changed and how a given change impacts on the level of participation of the successive young generations. Focusing on the cohorts of voters pushed into the electoral arena during the last decades, several scholars have stressed the importance and diffusion of a new and increasingly longer "moratorium phase" in the adult transition (Cavalli and Galland 1993; Billari and Liefbroer 2010). Political engagement increases as one's life, roles, and institutional connections in the community become more stable. The adult roles give a predictable structure to life, which makes regular engagement in community affairs more likely and increases the probability of being recruited into civic affairs (Flanagan and Sherod 1998). The life cycles of present-day young adults are not the same as those of the past.

Young people now spend a more extended period in school, are faced with a more complicated access to the labour market and remain longer under the economic protection of the family or the state.

While entry into adulthood became more ambiguous, research also investigated the linkages between the delay in adult transition and its effect on political behaviour. Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980) compared the turnout rates of those who have/have not completed adult transitions, and registered a general homogeneity between the two groups. In France, Anne Muxel (2001 and 2010) found that young people who have experienced greater difficulty in their access to the labour market are, at the same time, those who have participated less. Focusing on the leaving home transition, Highton and Wolfinger (2001) found turnout among those who left the parental home to be lower than among those who had not taken the adult step of moving out, but once factors such as residential stability were taken into consideration the relationship became positive. In general, research generally attests that later maturation is expected to have an impact on turnout levels of younger cohorts and, as a consequence, explains part of the over-time decline in turnout among young people. In any case, there is no clear and definitive assumption that the effect of a later adult maturation (of every single life-event in the transition) is necessarily negative on turnout and political involvement.

As regards the familiar transition, a counterfactual hypothesis is arguable. Postponement in the median age of leaving home might produce a positive dynamic that balances the decline in turnout. In contrast with what happens when a job career starts later, staying longer with the family of origin could mean, above all, living in households where it is more likely that members vote and participate in politics. The underlined idea is that voters do not decide as rational individuals but as actors rooted in their social context, in primary networks that strongly influence voting behaviour. This is a widely consolidated assumption in literature (Campbell 1960; Lazarsfeld 1968; Zuckerman 2005). Parents influence their children directly, during primary socialization, and indirectly, through the transmission of social statuses (Verba *et al.* 2005). In political terms, this means that, when a young adult leaves the nest, the influence of the parents declines in favour of other social networks, which generally, for the present youngest generations, vote less than the their parents (the older generations). For all that, it is not surprising that longer youth-adult coresidence acts positively, and not negatively, on turnout. Living as a young adult in the parental home may matter, simply because voting is often a social act in which families go to the polls together. This is specifically what Bhatti and Janses attested in their analysis (2012): a correspondence between the processes of turnout decline and leaving home, and between the statuses of living with one's parents and higher turnout. Another intriguing finding in

their research is the emergence of a curvilinear relationship between age and turnout, with a temporary decline of participation after the first vote: a result registered only in a few countries (Denmark, Finland, Germany) but strongly conditioned by the availability of particular datasets and information on turnout at individual level. Among other things, a curvilinearity in the age-turnout relationship implies the emergence of three (not two) phases in a life cycle, with the youngest voting more than the relatively older young adults. These findings challenge the theoretical idea that young adults start out as habitual non-voters and gradually acquire a taste for voting proportional with the obtainment of adult roles (Highton and Wolfinger 2001; Plutzer 2002). If living with parents increases the likelihood of voting (and leaving the nest correspondingly decreases it), this partially explains the curvilinearity of the age-by-turnout curve.

The fascinating theory that the family environment positively influences young adult turnout could be particularly suited to the Italian case. Italy is a country where the young live a very long period (one of the longest in Europe) in the family of origin. It is also a country where youth unemployment is extremely high and, as a consequence of the delay in familiar transition, the parental home is the accommodation where young people out of the job market normally live. As in other western countries, families of origin have become a "safe" place to stay since the classic authoritarian model of education declined and new more egalitarian relationships prevailed. Whereas in the 1960s and 1970s new juvenile generations emerged as the effect of incomplete socialization, nowadays parents and children are more similar (not differentiated) in terms of values, opinions and attitudes (for Italy see: Corbetta *et al.* 2013).

Data and methods

The main theoretical question discussed in this paper concerns the relationship between (the decline of) turnout and (the delay of) transition to adulthood. How do life events concerning job or family careers interact with political participation? Is the postponement of adult transition negatively related to turnout? Do all relationships follow the same causal directions? Our hypotheses aim to evaluate, in general, the effect of the delay of adult transition and, specifically, the impact of transitions in working and familial careers (from not-employed to employed status, from condition of offspring in-out of parental home) on individual turnout. Following the theoretical assumptions described in par. 1 about young-adult rule theory (cross-pressure, disconnected status and so on) we test two rival hypotheses, *a)* and *b)*:

a) Turnout for young people is negatively influenced by the delay in adult maturation (delaying age of leaving school /education, acquiring the first job and leaving the parental home). In particular, the deadlock condition of not employed-not in education and the precarious job situation (economic dependency, unemployment, flexibility) might produce uncertain statuses and perceptions which depress political behaviour. Turnout should be higher both in the first phase after the legal age – a normal condition when all the transitions have yet to occur – and at the end of the transition, when all the adult statuses have been adopted by most of the younger generation. Differently, during post-adolescence or young adulthood the impact of delayed transitions should be both higher and negative because in these cases young people are living and acting at variance with the "right" (expected) age. We expect that a negative effect on turnout increases proportionally with a juvenile age-cohort's distance from the average age of adult maturation.

b) A rival hypothesis assumes as a key argument the influence of social networks and parents' socialization on their children's political life. Instead of depressing participation, remaining longer in the parental home may have a positive (not negative) effect on turnout during the phase of passage to adult status, because of the influence of a (generally) more participative household where the young are living. In particular, we expected: a) a positive relationship between living with parents and turnout; b) a higher positive relationship depending on the number of members in the household and the number of family members who participate; c) a positive effect (and a counter-balancing effect) of living with parents, regardless of a child's age; d) a decline in turnout level as one moves from a status of "children in the parental home" to a status of "married/cohabiting";

The perspective of matching variables on political behaviour with some variables related to life-course transitions calls for a very complex combination of data sources. Given these difficulties, we have collected information from different datasets in order to triangulate them. The first source comes from Itanes-Cattaneo Institute Archive on turnout. This is an extremely large archive of information on electoral participation of a representative sample of 100 sections of Italian voters. The official data covers two decades (1985-2006, with individual data from 1994), and provides the possibility of following the same voters over time. Samples range from around 55.000 cases to more than 80.000. This dataset allows us to explore in depth the relationship between turnout and age in the juvenile period. The second source is the Italian National Election Survey (Itanes programme of post-electoral studies). In this case, turnout derives from self-reported information and not from official

data[1]. The advantage of using this dataset is the possibility of including in the analysis information on life-course events within the format of static social condition (being/not being a student, employed, still at home and so on), while covering a large period of time.

The age gap in turnout: life-cycle, generation effect or both?

As the first point in our analysis we report a general overview of turnout rate by age-groups in Italy vs. other Western countries. This preliminary level of information is necessary in order to answer some basic key questions: do young Italian people participate less than other age-groups? Is the age gap in turnout more pronounced in Italy than in other countries? Has it widened in the recent elections?

Electoral participation has been high in Italy ever since the first post-war elections held in 1946, when voter turnout reached 89,1%. After those elections and over the course of three decades voting percentages remained stable at extremely high values. These peculiar characteristics changed in the late 1970s, but not until the 1990s did election turnout dynamics become a crucial factor in Italian politics. A comparison with the rest of Europe allows to place Italy within a broader framework. All countries have registered, to a greater or lesser extent, a growth of abstentionism in the last 20 years, while in the same period the oscillation range of the values has widened. Italy has always stood near the top of the international ranking on electoral participation, and it continued to do so throughout the 1990s. Although the declining trend of electoral participation in Italy has become evident in the past four or five elections, it has not been the most marked in Europe. Yet the fact remains that Italy is one of the few countries in which the number of voters has uninterruptedly declined in the last twenty years (figure 1 and table 1).

What about the age gap? According to an accurate comparative analysis of age differences in turnout in recent decades, the young-adult gap is shown to be strongly positive in some countries, positive in other countries and null only in Italy (Smets 2010). This peculiar finding has also been confirmed for the most recent elections. Turnout level among young Italian people (18-30 years old) is remarkably close to those reported by 31-60 and over 60 age classes (table 2). Whereas a similar trend occurs in some countries, in others

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[1] Self-reported turnout usually underestimates the percentage of abstainers. Previous analysis based on cross-check between official and survey data estimate in around 50% the quote of non voters who do not indicate their real voting behaviour (Tuorto 2006). Despite the distortion it is plausible that relationship between variables remain unaltered by this problem.

(i.e., US and Britain) the ratio is very low, with young people voting considerably less than all the older age-groups.

Figure 1: *Turnout (%) in Italy Parliamentary, European and Regional elections (1970-2014)*
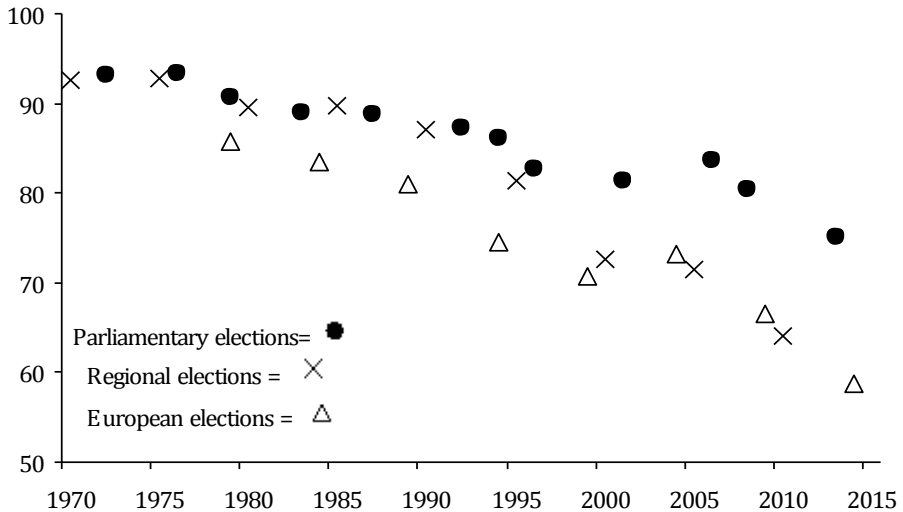
Source: The Italian Ministry of the Interior.

These preliminary results suggest the emergence of interesting trends: a) young people are less participative in many (but not in all) countries; b) the gap is larger in Anglo-Saxon countries; c) Italy is one of those countries where young people do not seem to have suffered a particularly strong penalization or political detachment, compared with other age-groups.

We then focused on turnout and age-class in Italy. For this purpose we derived results from larger national samples, in order to understand: a) if turnout increases with age; b) if the younger generation has always been (or has become after a certain period) less participative than adults; c) if turnout decline is a problem particular to young people or if it involves the whole population. When participation is normally minor at juvenile age and this trait lasts for a long period, it is plausible to detect a life cycle effect. If, on the other hand, minor participation characterizes only the recent cohorts of young people, a generation effect is the most probable dynamic. Alternatively, if the impact of change following a certain election occur, and concerns all voters, a period effect is in force. In this case, interactions between life cycle and generation, or life cycle and period are possible[2].

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[2] A limitation is given by the short time span, which covers 20 years, and is not adequate to give sufficient space to express all the age effects.

Table 1: *Turnout (%) in Europe in Parliamentary (Presidential) elections*

Turnout (recent election)		Turnout (average, 1990-2014)	
Belgium (2010)	89, 2	Belgium	91,0
Denmark (2011)	87,7	Denmark	85,6
Sweden (2010)	84,6	Sweden	83,8
France (2012, pres.)	80,3	Austria	83,5
Italy (2013)	75,1	Italy	82,6
Austria (2013)	74,9	France (pres.)	80,9
Netherlands (2012)	74,6	Germany	77,8
Germany (2014)	71,6	Netherlands	77,3
Ireland (2011)	70,0	Spain	74,1
Spain (2011)	68,9	Greece	74,0
Finland (2011)	67,3	Britain	67,2
Britain (2010)	65,8	Finland	66,9
Greece (2012)	62,5	Ireland	66,8
Portugal (2011)	58,0	Portugal	62,9

Source: Institute for Democracy and electoral assistance (IDEA).

How large is the participative gap and how has it changed over time in Italy? We have compared the turnout level of three age-classes – 18-30, 31-60 and over 60 years old – over the long electoral period from the mid-80s to the mid-2000 elections[3]. We expect a lower level of participation for young people (life-cycle hypothesis) and/or a progressive increase of the age gap (generation replacement), especially in correspondence with the less mobilizing elections. Data partially confirms both these theses. Registered turnout for young people places very close to adult turnout. Differences are minor until the mid-90s; they become higher in the following period (mid90s–mid2000s), but without exceeding a 4 point percentage; only in more recent elections did they reach their highest level (up to 6-7 p.p.) (fig. 2). In general, the turnout gap in Italy

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[3] Datasets used for this comparison are those from the Prospex official turnout archive, based on electoral registers. For previous periods and going back as far as 1968, data is available through electoral surveys but information is not particularly useful because turnout in Italy was too high for all voters to make a difference. We selected as age classes 18-30, 31-60 and over 60 in order to produce statistics comparable with those reported in tab. 2.

Table 2. *Turnout ratio 18-30/31-60 and 18-30/60+ in selected Western countries (single election)*

Turnout 18/30 vs. 31-60		Turnout 18/30 vs. 60+	
Sweden (2006)	1.01	Italy (2006)	1.09
Italy (2006)	0.96	Sweden (2006)	1.01
France (2007)	0.95	France (2007)	0.97
Netherland (2010)	0.94	Netherlands (2010)	0.95
Spain (2008)	0.86	Greece (2009)	0.82
Greece (2009)	0.84	Spain (2008)	0.82
Portugal (2009)	0.77	Portugal (2009)	0.72
Germany (2009)	0.74	Germany (2009)	0.66
Britain (2005)	0.41	Britain (2005)	0.35

Source: Our elaboration from Comparative Studies of Electoral Systems (CSES), module 3. For Britain data is taken from CSES module 2; for Italy: Prospex.

remains very limited and the decline in participation cannot be attributed to young people. More importantly, the over 60 age-class has made a significant difference, with negative performances over all the elections in the last two decades. This peculiar trait differs considerably from turnout dynamics in other Western countries, where youth disaffection reached very impressive levels[4]. In any case, while not decisive, the participation gap is also widening in Italy, and new voters have tended to enter into political life at a lower point than previous cohorts[5].

A suspicious curvilinearity. Why does turnout decline after the first vote(s)?

The study of turnout in juvenile age requires a very accurate analysis in order to disentangle different effects and detect the exact turning point in the curve. For this purpose, in our study we use a considerably large dataset, based on

[4] This is, in particular, the case in Britain. See: Clarke *et al*. 2004.
[5] A negative and instable trend in turnout rates among Italian young generations has been detected in several empirical studies See: Cuturi (2001); Tuorto (2010); Scervini and Segatti (2012).

Figure 2: *Turnout (%) by age-class in Italy Parliamentary elections (1985-2013); Regional elections (1985, 1990)**
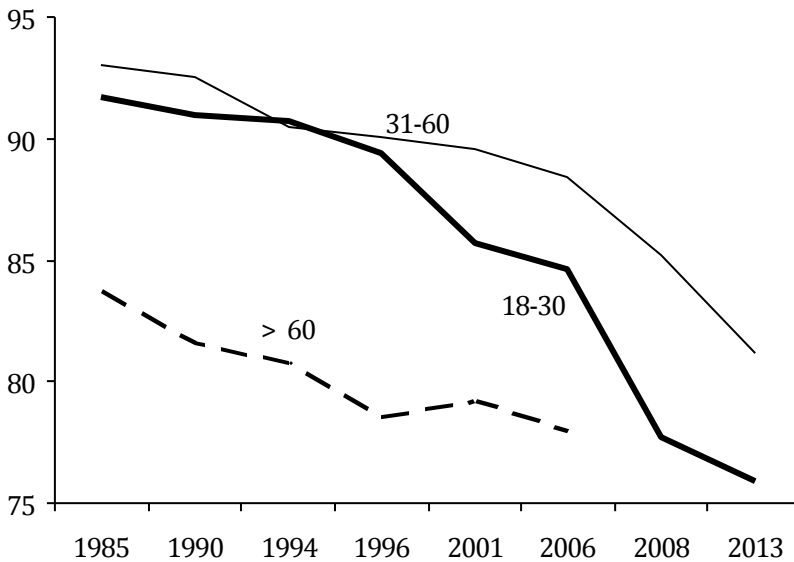

* F-values for group means differences: 1994 (0.28; ns.); 1996 (4.35; .037); 2001 (123.86; .000); 2006 (79.06; .000).
Source: Prospex (1985-2006); Itanes (2008 and 2013).

the official information of registered turnout in Parliamentary elections since the late 1980s (with the exception of the last two elections in 2008 and 2013, available via survey). As shown in previous tables, a very limited gap exists between Italian and adult voters, which has only recently widened. In order to better explore the relationship between age and turnout we have selected four age classes: 18-19, 20-25, 26-30 and 31-40 years old (including the oldest among the young) plus the group of "first voters" (overlapped with the first two categories). Results indicate that, while at the beginning of the period (during the 1980s elections) all the age categories showed a similar tendency, in the late 1990s and in the early 2000s elections some important differences arose. Young people in their 20s (20-25 and 26-30) have begun to lose more contact than the youngest (18-19) or oldest (31-40), with a significant difference of more than 5 percentage points lower than the average level of turnout for the entire youth electorate (fig. 3). Moreover, the decline has not affected new cohorts of the electorate at their first vote as it has for the young people in the intermediate phase of their passage to adulthood.

This highly interesting tendency needs to be investigated by virtue of a more accurate decomposition of data. Our large samples allowed us to create

Figure 3: *Turnout (%) by age-class at juvenile age Parliamentary elections (1985-2006); Regional elections (1985, 1990)*
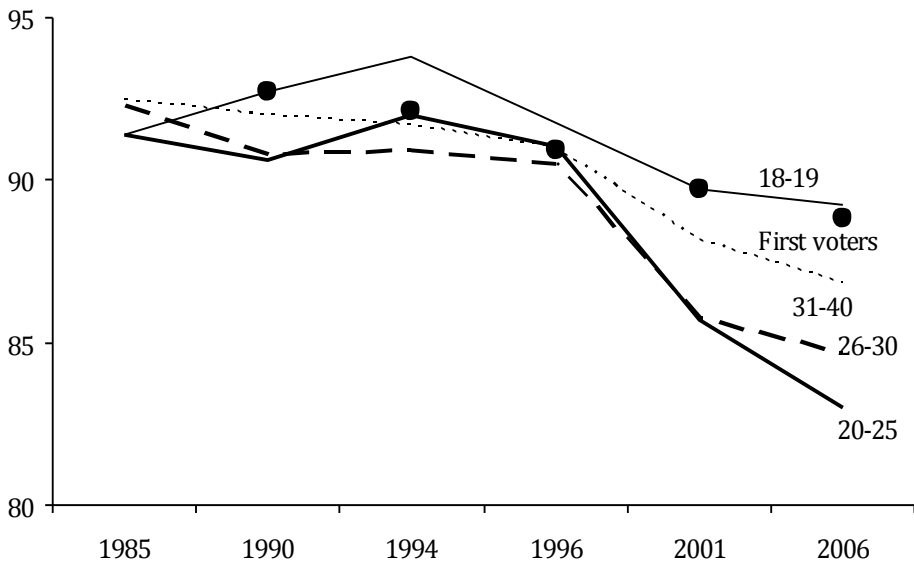
a turnout by age curve where turnout is reported year by year. The election span covers the period 1994-2006: the four elections with the most observations in our dataset (around 200.000 voters), and at least 1.000 cases every single year of age from 18 until 80. Similar curves for the two more recent elections (2008 and 2013) have also been reproduced using another data source (post-electoral survey).

1) The first result in figure 4 describes the peculiar condition occurring in the initial years of electoral life (first vote) with a very high level of turnout, comparable with the peak reached by the adults. An unexpected finding, given the higher cost (information, etc.) of going to the polls for a new voter (Plutzer 2002), but more understandable if we take into account the specific position of a very young voter over his/her life-course. A new voter in the first steps of the legal age is normally waiting to start up his/her job careers, and normally (in the Italian context) lives in the parental home: too young to be exposed to the negative impact of precariousness, and still at an age when the family influences continue to influence and regulate electoral behaviour. Instead, a key concern for our analysis is how turnout changes when young people move to more adult ages.

Figure 4: *Turnout (%) by age (single years) in Italy Cumulative period: Parliamentary elections (1994-2006)*
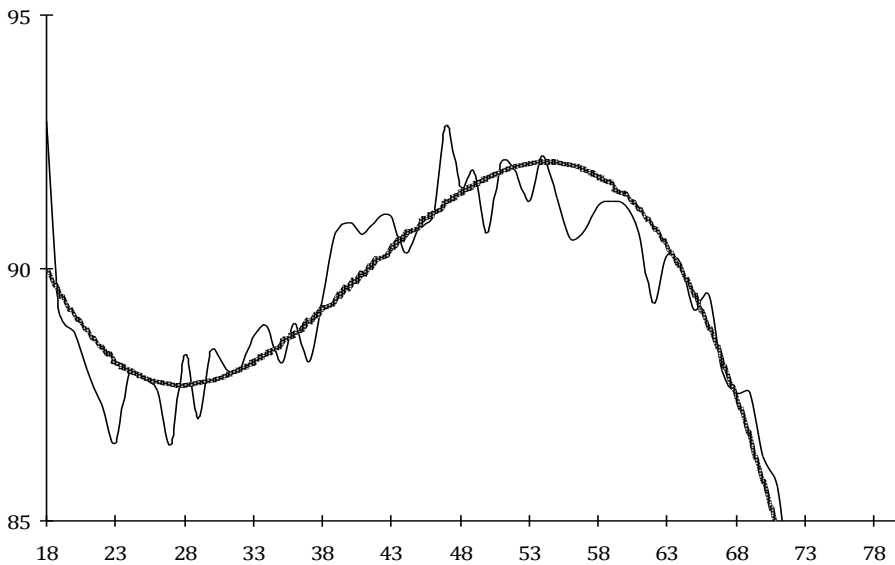
Source: Prospex. Number of observation around 200.000, N > 1.500 for every single year.

2) A second crucial characteristic emphasized in the graph is the sharp decline of participation after the first years, with turnout differences even exceeding 5 percentage points. The inversion concerns electoral behaviour of those in their early 20s, until 25-26 when the curve rises in a continuous progression, reaching the highest level at around 55 before then slowly declining.

3) The non-linear turnout by age relationship is not an episodic trait related to specific characteristics of a certain electoral cycle, but rather assumes the configuration of a structural aspect of voting behaviour in Italy. Indeed, in every election during the period 1994-2013 (fig. 5) we registered a clear inversion in the curve. Even when first voters have lowered their participation, young people in their 20s-30s have participated even less, and this accounts for the persistence of curvilinearity.

4) The curvilinear trait in age-turnout relationship is more pronounced among young men than among young women (fig. 6). Such a simple difference is probably linked to gender rules (the impact of the family burden, etc.) and different meanings of political participation and civic duty. Such issues would need to be explored in a more focalised research.

Figure 5: *Turnout (%) by age (single years) by election in Italy Parliamentary elections (period 1994-2013)**
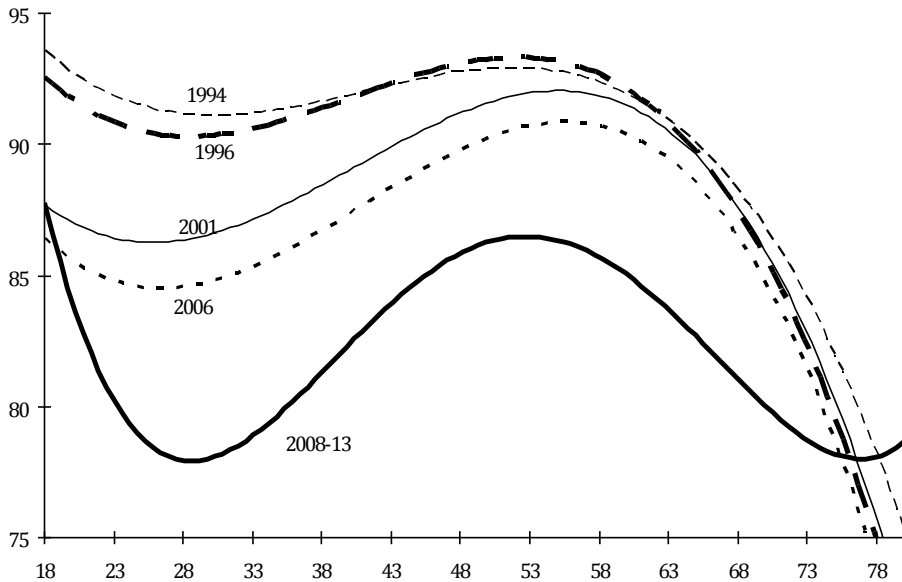
* All the reported percentages are weighted by the official rate of turnout.
Source: Prospex, Itanes (2008; 2013).

What lies behind this inversion in turnout rates after the first vote? Following literature on adult-role theory, we expected a linear relation, with a rise in participation moving from younger to adult ages. Only in a few countries has a different characteristic of turnout evolution (curvilinearity instead of linearity) been detected (see above). In addition to the classic explanations of adult role theory, literature on life-course transitions offers two arguments to clarify the puzzle of the curvilinearity. The first has to do with new trends in job careers. Lower turnout among the 20-30 age group means that young people experience worse conditions when they leave education (delayed age of first real job, precariousness, a longer period as "NEET", etc.). It is not surprising that a prolonged situation of ambivalence and instability regarding social statuses produces a negative effect on participation in public life and politics. What is both new and striking in contemporary life courses is the dimension of postponement and extension of this phase, which is compatible with the backlash on participation for those same age groups. A second argument concerns the dynamics in young people's living arrangements. If we assume that long parent-child coresidence may positively and not negatively influence the propensity to vote (see also: Bhatti and Hansen 2012), the decline of participation could be read as an effect of leaving home: not (only) the precariousness

Figure 6: *Turnout (%) by age (in single years) by sex in Italy Cumulative period: Parliamentary elections (1994-2006)*
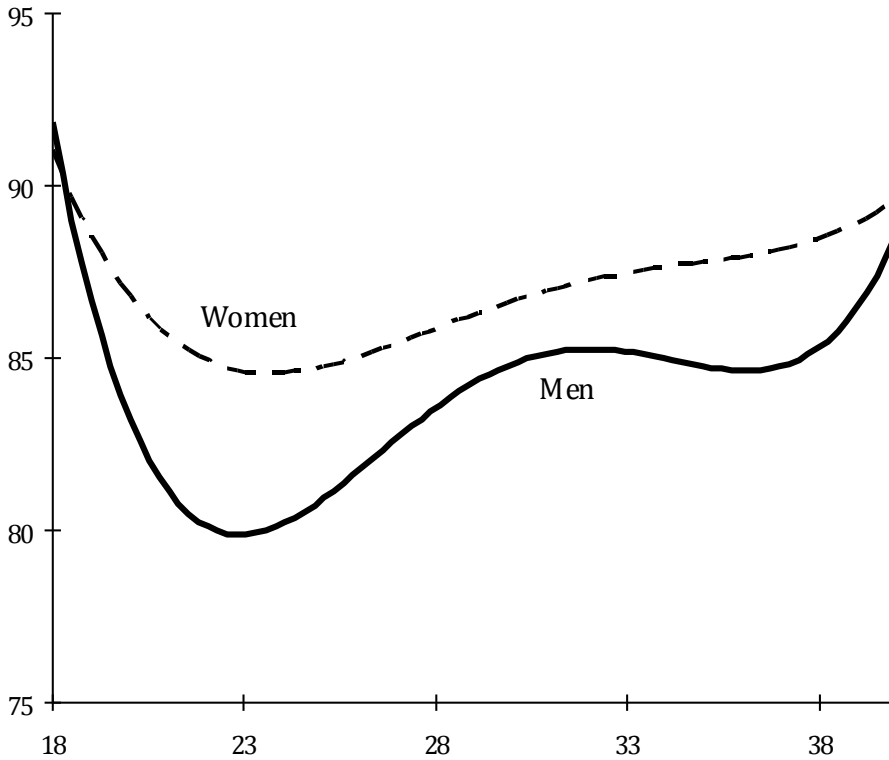
Source: Prospex.

of the job situation but (also) the activation of transition away from family, which implies leaving aside the protective phase of "son/daughter in parental home" and moving toward the complex task of setting up a new family. The relationship with turnout is clear: new families in their first years do not have the same level of "political capital" (experiences, values, practises, reinforcing examples) that consolidated families can count on. Besides, new families are generally composed of a low number of adult members (and voters who influence each other).

Looking through adult transition: are family characteristics a (good) explanation?

To sum up the main findings of our research: a) turnout in Italy is declining among young people with a similar intensity as among adults (a period effect?); b) young people have lost influence in recent elections (generation +

life-cycle effect); c) the decline has been more pronounced for voters in the 20-30 age group; d) young people participate less after their first vote and invert this trend at around the age of 25-26. In this paragraph we investigate how indicators of life-cycle (and changes in status condition) influence turnout rates. The process of maturation to adulthood is normally characterized by five markers: completing education, having a job, leaving home, being married and having children. For our analysis we focus on two of these factors – having a job and leaving home –[6]. As we are dealing with cross-sectional data, variables do not indicate transitions but rather statuses. In detail, the job career position is exemplified by the dichotomies "being employed/not employed", "being employed in atypical job/other condition" (specification of a precarious state)[7]. The living arrangement is simplified with the dichotomy "living as son/daughter in parental home vs. being married, cohabiting". Further information has been added in order to detect if a young offspring is effectively delaying the family transition. For this purpose we have calculated the median age of leaving home for age cohorts (in group of 5 years, with a distinction made between male and female). This procedure allows us to discern when a specific status in living arrangement is "right" or "wrong" (i.e., remaining with parents when the most part of his/her age group has left home), introducing this dimension as an interaction in regression models.

The unusual configuration of turnout by age curve suggests that we examine the transition to adulthood as composed of three distinct sections. In the first years of legal age no transition is expected to be completed (children are still living the "right" age for studying, remaining at home, etc.). At the later stage of a young person's (normal) life course, at the age of 30-35 until 40, all the markers should have moved coherently towards a fully adult status (a job, an independent family condition and so on). In both cases, turnout reaches a higher level in our curve, reflecting the effect of stability given by the specific configuration of social statuses (of youth and adult). The most problematic conjuncture coincides with the intermediate step – the renowned post-adolescence – when the negative influence of a "moratorium" phase might be more depressing (in terms of participation) for those people placed in a "wrong" condition (fig. 7).

Table 3 reports a distribution of turnout rates among the 18-40 age class taking into account young subjects' familial and working statuses. The per-

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[6] Marriage (the formation of a union) largely corresponds to leaving home in Italy (Schizzerotto 2002), while the impact of having children on political participation might have introduced several complications in the analysis (i.e., interaction with gender-related arguments)

[7] Education career, too, is partially included in the analysis, with the proxy variable "student vs. other condition".

Figure 7: *The three phases of adult transition and their impact on electoral participation*
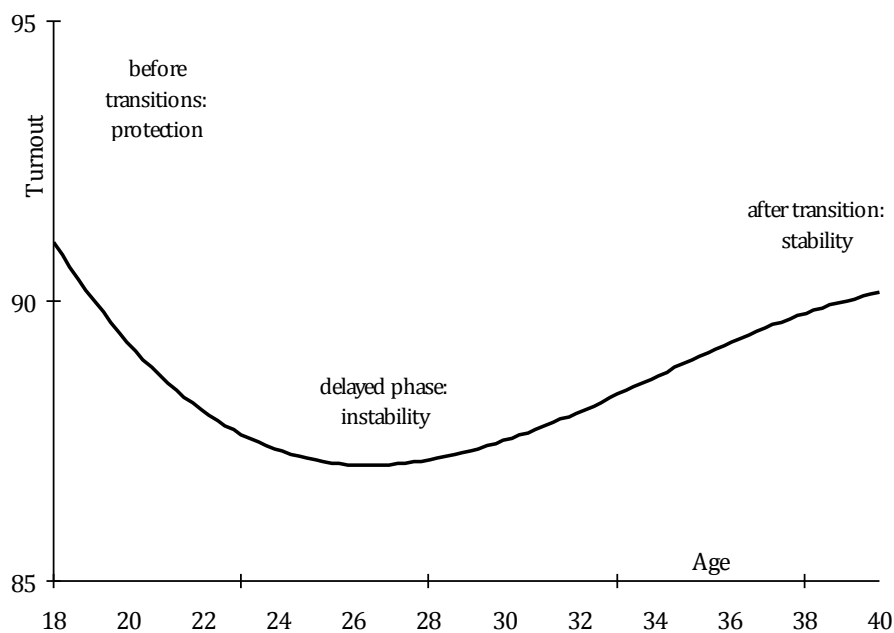
Table 3: *Turnout (%) of young people in different occupational and familiar status by gender and age**

	Tot (18-40)	M (18-40)	F (18-40)	18-30	31-40
Not completed education	83,4	80,3	86,2	83,5	82,9
Completed education	82,7	82,3	83,0	79,0	85,6
Not employed	75,7	70,8	77,8	72,8	78,4
Employed	85,6	85,0	86,5	82,1	88,3
Precarious job	73,9	71,8	76,1	67,9	83,3
Living in parental home	82,5	80,9	84,7	81,5	87,5
Living as his/her own	83,2	83,3	83,0	77,5	85,1
Living in parental home + employed	84,4	85,0	83,8	85,0	83,8
Living in parental home + not employed	80,9	73,8	85,2	77,3	85,2
N	3.980	1.979	1.911	2.199	1.781

* N min > 50 in all cells.
Source: Itanes 2001-2013 cumulative file (Parliamentary elections).

centages of people who turn out to vote become higher as one moves from the minimum to the maximum level of adult maturation. The only transition that truly makes a difference is that concerning the job career. The participation rates of the young employed exceed those of the young unemployed by 10 percentage points and performances of atypical workers also deteriorated (12 p.p. below). Both educational transition (having/not having left education) and family transition (having/not having left parental home) do not make a particular difference in this bivariate analysis. But the living arrangement contributes significantly in reducing the gap between the employed and not employed, with only 4 percentage points lower for young people who live in the parental home. Gender and age-class dimensions are also important aspects, and provide some interesting insights. A complete delay in adult maturation (not having completed any transition) reduces the participation rates of young males more than those of young females. The negative effect of unemployment is spread to all of the youth population, but has a greater impact on male turnout and, for these groups, is not attenuated by the coresidence with parents. Furthermore, while the effect of delay strongly depresses participation rates of the oldest section of the young category (30-40 years), an anticipation of the adult transition does not produce a positive effect among the youngest. For instance, having a job is associated with low turnout among the 18-30 group when this job is atypical (while the negative effect of precariousness decreases among the oldest group). Living with parents has a positive (not negative or null) correlation with turnout when a young individual is under 30. All these results suggest that the direction and the significance of the effect depend on: a) which specific life event/status is considered (job, living arrangement); b) the age ("right" vs. anticipated/postponed) at which a social status (being employed, unemployed, precarious, householder) is experienced.

In order to correctly evaluate the impact of adult transition on turnout we have run five distinct regression models, where the dependent variable is turnout (whether the young person has voted or not) and independent variables correspond to specific life-course indicators. The first four models add to the baseline model (with only socio-demographic variables), the status related to: educational passage (being/not being a student, Model 1), job career (being/not being unemployed, Model 2), precariousness in the job career (having/not having an atypical job, Model 3), leaving home transition (still in the parental home or living on his/her own, Model 4). The effect of being inactive along the job career changes significantly if the young subject is a student or unemployed. The condition of being a student does not seem to be viewed as a start-up problem and the relationship with turnout is generally positive, in line with other research (Highton and Wolfinger 2001; Smets 2010). This is a relevant result, although the low number of students who live on their own in Italy

makes it difficult to separate how much impact is due to the living arrangement or educational condition. Being unemployed is found to have a negative effect on turnout (beta value of -0,667). The relationship does not change sign in the case of a precarious job (beta: -0,507). The second indicator of life-course transition included in the regression is that concerning the familiar career. Our analysis has pointed out that living with parents is significantly related to a higher – not a lower – turnout (beta: +0,243). Instead of acting against turnout, a long-lasting coresidence actually seems to provide a safeguard from turnout decline. Finally, we have integrated into the regression a further analysis (Model 5) with the interaction between the living arrangement status (living in the parental home) and a dichotomous variable concerning the "correctness" or "incorrectness" of that status, calculated as a deviation from median age of leaving home for each specific age-cohort (and sex). Through this model it is possible to deduce that living with parents impacts positively on turnout, but only for young people whose age is lower than the median age for leaving home. Beyond this point a prolonging coresidence becomes problematic and decreases the probability to vote (beta: -0,356) (table 4).

Table 4: *Impact of adult transition statuses on the probability to vote. Logistic regression**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
	B (s.e.)	B (s.e.)	B (s.e.)	B (s.e.)	B (s.e.)
Still in education	+0.276 (0.174)				
Not employed		-0.667*** (0.143)			
Precarious job			-0.507** (0.293)		
Living in parental home				+0.243* (0.168)	+0.491** (0.227)
Living in parental home* older than specific median age for leaving home					-0.356* (0.226)
R² adjusted	0.07	0.18	0.09	0.09	0.10
N (obs.)	3.503	3.503	3.503	3.503	3.503

* Covariates not reported in the model are sex, age, education (not in Model 1), zone, occupational status (not in Model 1-3).
Source: Itanes cumulative file, 2001-2013 (Parliamentary elections).

Figure 8: *Predicted probability of voting by age according to the living arrangement condition and occupational status*
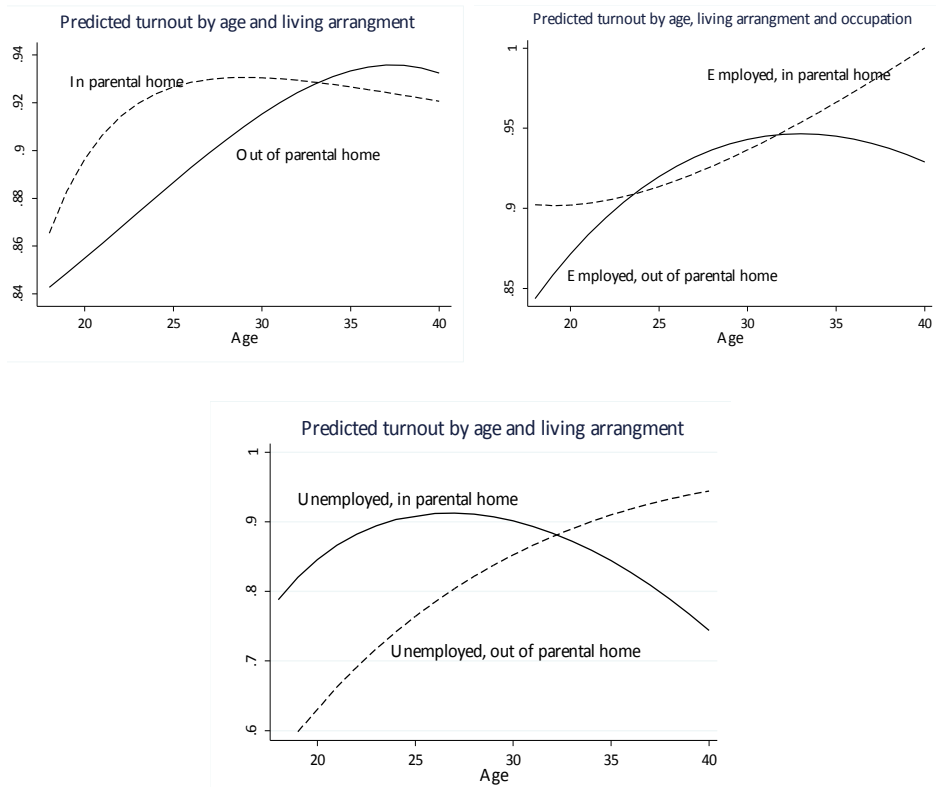
Source: Itanes cumulative file, 2001-2013 (Parliamentary elections).

The same results reported as regression coefficients are shown, in figure 8, as predicted probabilities of turning out to vote by age for different categories of young people, according to their living arrangement condition and occupational status. Compared with those living on their own, young people living in the parental home display a higher level of turnout. The gap is higher in the first years after the legal age and disappears only later, at around 30-35. The condition of the living arrangement significantly changes the probability of voting, especially for young unemployed individuals. Turnout is almost 20 percentage points higher when they live with parents at a very young age. Also for those employed, the status of coresidence boosts the probability of voting before the age of 25. This is a clear confirmation that, far from being negative, living in the parental home offers a very impressive advantage in the first years of political life.

Conclusion

The age gap in political participation is a has long been a subject of debate in political science. Much research has attested that young voters nowadays participate in elections less than the older voters in many established democracies. The classic explanations for these differences have focused on the life-cycle or on the generation effect, looking at the depressive impact of the (immature) condition of youth in itself, or stressing the process of replacement between more participative and less-participative cohorts of voters. In this article we have tried to combine life-cycle and generational explanations of turnout decline within a wider perspective, where turnout variation is seen in relation to the timing and sequence of specific events which regulate the transition to adulthood (the end of education, leaving home, getting a job, forming a family). In recent years all or many of these events have occurred later and this may have produced significant changes in young people's political maturation. Many scholars maintain that the growing uncertainty of the adult status might have contributed to a lowering of turnout levels, but recent explanations have supported a different reading, observing the positive effect on participation of a prolonged political socialization in the parental home.

Results based on the Italian case mainly support this hypothesis. Turnout by age curve reveals the existence of a curvilinear relationship, with the most critical situation (lower turnout) in correspondence with the age of young adulthood (20-30 years old): a phase during which young people experience frequently precarious statuses, abandon the safe environment of the parental home and move toward the complex task of setting up a new family. Regression analysis clearly point out that, using as a control other covariates, living with parents has a positive (not negative or null) effect on the probability to vote, but only for young people whose age is lower than the median age for leaving home (the "right" age for staying at home). Instead of producing electoral disaffection, a condition of parent-child coresidence in the crucial years of first adulthood seems to protect against the negative effect of social uncertainty. In fact, the status of a son/daughter in the family of origin contributes significantly in reducing the gap between the employed and not employed, increasing the probability of turnout to vote for the latter. Furthermore, while the effect of delay strongly depresses the participation rates of the oldest section of the young sector (30-40 years), an anticipation of the adult transition does not produce a positive effect among the youngest.

Our attempt to connect trends in youth turnout with the timing of adult transition offers an ideal framework for comparative and multilevel analysis. Further studies should incorporate, in individual analyses, variables concerning family models and material/immaterial exchanges between generations,

youth unemployment rates, social benefits and provisions for the young or young unemployed (insurance, minimum wage, etc). Following this direction of analysis, the level of political participation among young people (as well as the level of the youth-adult participative gap) might be interpreted in relation to specific welfare assets that regulate young people's life-courses: whether societies and policies deal with and offer contrast to the precariousness of the youth condition, and how the State or the family (instead of the market) supports working and familiar transitions.

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