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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# BEYOND THE MIGRATION CRISIS, DEEP VALUES. WHERE DOES HOSTILITY TO IMMIGRANTS COME FROM?

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**ABSTRACT:** Immigration has become a key issue in electoral competition in Italy. Several studies have demonstrated the weight of immigration on voting choices of Italian voters, as well as the importance that this issue has had for the electoral success of certain parties, namely the League. However, it is still unclear why voters are mobilized on this issue and, more generally, what are the underlying factors of individual attitudes towards migrants. In this paper we explore whether and to what extent these attitudes are the result of latent cultural factors, which find their roots in long-standing and deeper value predispositions. We do so, relying on an original survey carried out among Italian citizens and making use of the Schwartz conceptualization and measurement of values. A series of regression analyses demonstrate that, besides conditions of objective economic deprivation, proximity to migrants, and perception of threat and insecurity, values are the most relevant explanatory factors of attitudes towards immigration. This leads us to conclude that hostile attitudes towards immigration are not the result of a radical transformation of public opinion in Italy, but rather the expression of more general, structurally conservative value orientations.

**KEYWORDS:** Demarcation, Immigration attitudes, League, Salvini, Values

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## 1. Introduction

Immigration is certainly one of the issues that have sparked the electoral campaign for the Italian general election of March 2018 and which still has a relevant place in the Italian political agenda (Valbruzzi 2019; Roncarolo and Cremonesi 2019). Several analyses have widely demonstrated the weight of immigration on voting choices of Italians, as well as the importance that this issue has had (and continues to have) for the electoral success of political parties such as the League (De Sio and Paparo 2018). Specifically, by adopting a hard line on the management of migration flows and implementing restrictive policies on immigration, the party led by Matteo Salvini was able to mobilize the Italian electorate, which was already largely critical of the phenomenon: according to some recent data (De Sio, Emanuele, Maggini, Paparo, Angelucci and D'Alimonte 2019), about 80% of respondents believe that the number of migrants in Italy is too high, where only 20% believe that Italy can still welcome more migrants.

But what is at the root of the attitudes of Italians towards immigration? What makes a significant portion of the Italian electorate hostile towards migration flows (Emanuele, Maggini, and Paparo 2019)? These are the main research questions that we investigate in this paper.

Of course, there is no lack of studies addressing the reasons behind negative attitudes towards migration. Scholars have regularly shown, for example, that attitudes towards migration are associated with objective conditions of economic insecurity and deprivation; others, instead, maintain that critical positions towards immigration should be attributed to the (real or perceived) presence of migrants in their neighbourhoods and to the security threat (real or perceived) that they represent. However, in this paper we adopt a perspective that has been only rarely applied to the specific case of Italy (for an exception see Catellani and Milesi 2010). This approach links attitudes towards immigration to *value predispositions* of Italian citizens. On this basis we advance here the argument that attitudes towards migrants are the result of latent cultural factors (which certainly were not born in recent months), rather than short-term factors.

The implications of using this approach are not trivial. One thing, in fact, is to discover that the Salvini League's mobilization capacity has relied on a new restlessness due to the migration crisis; another thing would be to find out that in reality he brought to light profound attitudes that had been in the past also at the basis of the consent to the centre-right led by Berlusconi. In short: have Italians, inspired by Salvini, suddenly become all intolerant (as we read frequently in the media), or - substantially - a part of them has always been hostile to immigration? In this sense it should be remembered that the Bossi-Fini<sup>1</sup> law was introduced by the centre-right led by Berlusconi; and it was still within that coalition that Roberto Calderoli (at the time vice-president of the Senate) compared the minister Kyenge to an orangutan (Hogarth 2016). In this perspective, the restrictive attitude expressed by Salvini could be in fact perhaps more in continuity with the identity of the centre-right coalition than frequently perceived. However, it is worth exploring this issue based on public opinion data. Are critical positions towards immigration the result of individual predispositions rooted in an important part of Italian society?

A recent contribution investigating exactly the link between immigration attitudes and the success of Salvini's League in the 2018 Italian general election has shown that indeed Italians are no more anti-immigrants

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<sup>1</sup> Law No. 189 of 30 July 2002 on immigration is best known as 'Bossi-Fini' after of its signatories (Colombo, Sciortino, and Craveri 2002), respectively the then secretary of the Northern League (Umberto Bossi) and the secretary of the National Alliance (Gianfranco Fini). Although the law has been understood in very different ways by different scholars (see e.g. Pugliese 2006; Einaudi 2007), the Bossi-Fini law is often considered as indicative of the anti-immigration rhetoric (and legislation) during the center-right government led by Silvio Berlusconi between 2001 and 2006 (Geddes 2008).

than they were a few years back (Vezzoni 2018). Then, the increased relevance of immigration issues on voting behaviour lied in the increase of the saliency they had in voters' minds, which Salvini's electoral campaign was able to produce. Thus, Salvini was able to advance electorally as a consequence of his ability to match, voice, and legitimate voters' pre-existing anti-immigration attitudes in such context in which they became more prominent.

In this paper, we start from Vezzoni's findings, which seem to indicate the prevalence of long-term determinants of (stable) anti-immigrant attitudes of Italian voters, and we develop a comprehensive account of the factors behind anti-immigrant attitudes, comparing and contrasting the relevance of long-term value predispositions with the (actual or perceived) presence of migrants and of related phenomena.

We do so by employing an original survey dataset collected by the Centro Italiano di Studi Elettorali (Italian Centre for Electoral Studies, CISE) through Demetra in December 2018, which features multiple items investigating respondents' value orientations, insecurity, and interactions with immigrants.

In our empirical analysis, we show that both economic insecurity and socio-demographics matter only to a marginal extent in accounting for anti-immigrant attitudes. Furthermore, proximity to migrants and perception of physical threat have significant roles in explaining attitudes towards immigration, but they still provide a limited account of individual-level variations in attitudes on immigration. Conversely, and most importantly, the main contribution of our investigation is the finding that long-term values have more relevant effects on orientations towards immigration at the individual level, with significant implications for the way we interpret the success of the League under Salvini's leadership riding the immigration issue.

The paper is structured as follows. In the next section we review the literature on classic explanations of attitudes towards immigrants, from which we derive specific hypotheses we empirically test later. We next discuss the concept of political values, and the potential role of values in accounting for attitudes towards immigrants, leading to specific expectations about empirical findings. We then introduce our data and the methodological choices we made to provide an empirical assessment of our hypotheses. Finally, we present empirical findings, which let us assess the effects of values and other predictors on voters' attitudes on immigration in 2018 Italy. Conclusion follows.

## **2. Literature review: explaining attitudes towards immigration**

Attitudes towards immigration are variously explained - both in public debate and in specialized scientific literature - relying on different theoretical perspectives. In this section we review the most relevant contributions to this topic, leaving to the next section the discussion of our value-based original contribution to the literature and its relevance in the context of the Italian case.

A recurrent narrative, both in public and academic debate, links attitudes towards migrants to economic insecurity of individuals. In particular, socio-economic status and, more generally, social class have been argued to affect political tolerance and, more indirectly, orientations towards immigration (Ignazi 1992; Quillian 1995; Burns and Gimpel 2000). The theoretical underpinnings of these claims rest on the argument that the chances for familiarization with diversity -responsible, in turn, of a greater level of openness and tolerance- are profoundly based on the socio-economic resources of individuals (Sullivan, Feldman and Pierson 1981; Scheve and Slaughter 2001). On the one hand, higher social classes have the necessary resources to access higher levels of education - and education is a key variable to explain different levels of tolerance and openness. On the other hand -and with specific reference to immigration-, higher social classes, enjoying better material

conditions than lower classes and being freed from economic need, feel less the economic threat potentially resulting from migrant inflows. Quite the contrary, lower classes, being more likely to experience difficulties in the labour market, perceive inflows of migrants as an economic threat: indeed, increasing levels of migration flows could generate a widening of the labour supply, pushing wages down and reducing employment opportunities. In other words, the weight of the economic threat would fall entirely on the most disadvantaged socio-economic strata (Scheve and Slaughter 2001). However, more recent research has shown that, rather than linear, the relation between economic conditions and attitudes towards immigration is rather curvilinear, with relatively deprived and relatively gratified both displaying more negative attitudes compared to those laying in between the two extremes (Guimond and Dambrun 2002; Postmes and Smith 2009; LeBlanc, Beaton, and Walker 2015; Jetten, Mols and Postmes 2015). In line with this approach, negative attitudes towards immigration found among wealthier-off are to be attributed to the (somehow paradoxical) fear to loose socio-economic privileged positions: “the perception that one is relatively wealthy is therefore not always more comfortable than the perception that one is relatively deprived... Feelings of gratification might be pleasing and comfortable at one level, but like all delights such relative advantages might well bring latent insecurities of loss and fears of decline (Jetten, Mols and Postmes 2015: 20).

The role of economic conditions has been explored not only at individual level (linking individual economic conditions with attitudes towards migrants), but also at the aggregate level. In this respect, Quillian (1995) first suggested that to analyse attitudes towards immigration we should focus not only on individual-level variables, but also on context-related factors, accounting for cross-country differences. In particular, the size of the immigrant population, along with the macro-economic conditions of the country are deemed to have an effect on attitudes towards immigration, because they both indicate threat and competition in the host society (Davidov and Meuleman 2012: 758; for other studies focusing on economic data at the aggregate level see e.g. Meuleman 2011; Semyonov et al. 2006).

A different perspective is provided by theories of proximity and closeness. According to this approach, attitudes towards immigration would not be the exclusive result of social and economic factors, but rather of the direct experience of migration in everyday life, as well as the relative perception of insecurity (personal and non-economic) deriving from the sharing of physical and social spaces. To be sure, empirical evidence related to the effect of proximity and contextual factors is far from being conclusive (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014, 236-237). On the one hand, several scholars found that the proximity and visibility of migrants in the places of daily life - such as in the streets, at work, in public transport, etc. – is a driver of attitudes that tend to be more wary and hostile towards immigration (Fetzer 2000; Enos 2013). On the other hand, there is evidence that proximity increases the chances of interactions, in fact reducing negative stereotypes (Fetzer 2000, 106-107). A broader perspective is provided by those scholars who reconnect these apparently different mechanisms to contextual factors. Hopkins (2010), for example, shows that individuals who live close to migrants develop more negative orientations towards immigration when significant and sudden demographic changes occur in the residential area and when the issue becomes highly salient and politicized. Focusing on the Italian case, these two conditions seem to be -at least partially- met. Indeed, the country has been at the forefront of the migrant influx in the European Union (EU)<sup>2</sup> and the immigration issue has become highly politicized in the internal political arena in recent times (Vezzoni 2018; Gianfreda 2018).

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<sup>2</sup> Italy is for sure one of the main countries of first arrivals for immigrants reaching Europe by the sea. In recent years migration flows have increased noticeably. For example, as reported by Castelli Gattinara (2017, 319): “Of the one million refugees that crossed the Mediterranean in 2015 alone, 154,000 landed in Italy, resulting in a 31 percentage-point increase in annual asylum application rates”.

As argued above, and from an opposite perspective, some studies show how the sharing of everyday spaces and experiences actually creates the conditions for greater tolerance, encouraging the exchange of ideas, mutual knowledge, and openness to diversity (Fetzer 2000; McLaren 2003). These findings nicely fit the classical framework of the contact hypothesis (Allport 1958; Amir 1969). According to this hypothesis, when people from one social group enter into personal contacts and increase their personal interactions with members of another group, they tend to develop more positive attitudes towards the outgroup. However, when applied to the case of native attitudes towards immigrants, empirical evidence is not conclusive. Some studies have confirmed the expectations of the contact theory, demonstrating that having friends or working with people from immigrant groups make negative attitudes towards immigrants less likely (Fetzer 2000; McLaren 2003; Ellison, Shin, and Leal 2011; see also Homola and Tavits 2017). Others, instead, found null or opposite results (e.g. Ford 1986; Gravelle 2016). In the attempt to explain these mixed results, Homola and Tavits (2017) suggest that the effect of contact on attitudes towards immigration is conditional across individual ideological predispositions: contact reinforces positive attitudes towards immigrants among leftist people, while it produces no effect or slightly increases threat perceptions among rightist.

Moreover, anti-immigrant attitudes have been considered to be related with not just actual (social and personal) contacts with them, but also with perceptions. In particular, perceptions concerning personal physical security. We trace this idea back to the notion of securitization of migration, which has strongly linked the discourse about immigration with public order and security (Huysmans 2006). Specifically, in Italy, both mainstream parties and anti-establishment ones, have faced the migration crisis adhering to a logic of emergency, nurturing public anxieties and security concerns, and thus favouring a conflation between immigration and personal insecurity (Castelli Gattinara 2017, 11). In this general perspective, immigration has been often framed in terms of potential physical safety threats for citizens (McLaren and Johnson 2007).

Finally, the literature has revealed effects for a number of socio-demographic conditions. As for the effect of gender on attitudes towards immigration, empirical evidence is far from being conclusive. While in traditional studies on tolerance women were generally identified as less tolerant than men (see e.g., Stouffer 1955; Nunn, Crockett, and Williams 1978), more recent studies on attitudes towards immigration among women and men reach different results (Facchini and Mayda 2009). Mixed evidence exists also for the effect of age on attitudes towards immigration. Some scholars found out that young people hold more positive attitudes towards immigration (Facchini and Mayda 2009); others, instead, contradict this finding (Fennelly and Federico 2008). On the contrary, scholars are unanimous as for the role of education on attitudes towards immigration: more educated individuals generally adopt more open attitudes towards immigration (Sullivan et al. 1981; Scheve and Slaughter 2001; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007; Manevska and Achterberg 2013)<sup>3</sup>. With reference to municipal size, it has been shown that in small, rural areas, orientations towards immigration should be more restrictive compared to urban areas (Fennelly and Federico 2008).

The arguments that we have briefly described reconnect attitudes towards immigration to factual conditions (socio-economic status; socio-demographic characteristics; proximity) or to individual perceptions deriving to some extent from these conditions (e.g. perceptions of personal insecurity).

However, we claim that an even more interesting argument can be retrieved in the comparative literature. This looks at the effect exerted by value predispositions. On the basis of this perspective, attitudes towards immigration would not be so much (or only) conveyed by factual conditions of economic deprivation and

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<sup>3</sup> Although Lancee and Sarrasin (2015) suggest a more complex relationship.

proximity or by subjective perceptions of insecurity, but rather from that set of general and existential principles that guide people's opinions and social behaviour. This perspective has been comparatively less studied (Davidov and Meuleman 2012), especially with specific reference to the Italian case – although with some remarkable exceptions (e.g. Sagiv and Schwartz 1995; Pantoja 2006; Davidov et al. 2008; Catellani and Milesi 2010; Davidov and Meuleman 2012). Notwithstanding, still there is not full agreement on the expected direction of the relations between attitudes towards immigration and values. The adaptation and application of this view to the Italian case constitutes the core of our investigation. This is discussed in the next section.

### 3. Values and immigration

Values can be defined as abstract and relatively stable principles that regulate individual action through the definition of motivational goals (Schwartz 1992; 1994; 2006; Catellani and Milesi 2010). Schwartz defined them as “desirable transsituational goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or other social entity” (Schwartz 1994: 21). As such, they are different compared to attitudes: values refer to general situations and are more abstract compared to attitudes, which instead apply to specific objects or situations (Davidov and Meuleman 2012: 760). Furthermore, values are deemed to be more durable over time, whereas attitudes change in different contexts and situations (Davidov and Meuleman 2012).

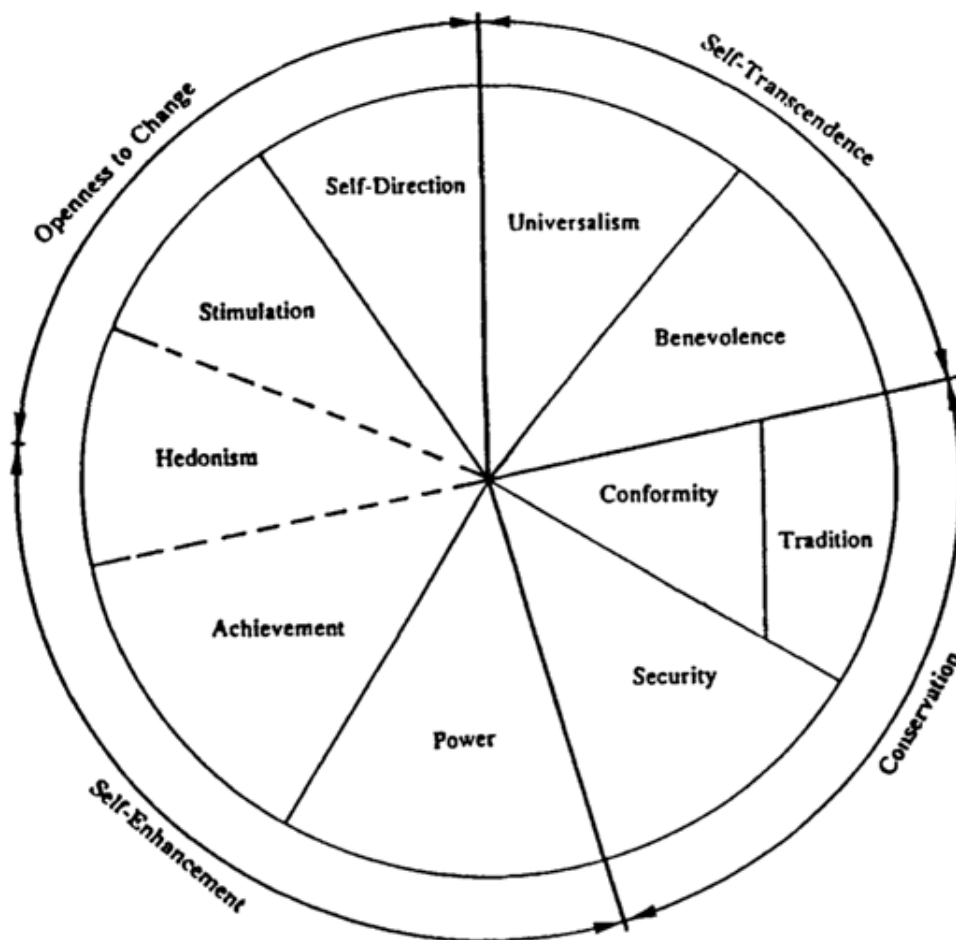
Values are also considered as constitutive elements of political ideologies, the basic elements that ground a coherent structure of convictions concerning not only the social world as it is but also as it should be (Catellani and Milesi 2010). From this point of view, values are not simply a guide to individual action (what is good or fair to do for the individual) but, from a political perspective, also “heuristic devices” that regulate the attitudes of individuals towards certain policies or specific issues (what would be right for the political system to do in relation to certain issues) (Catellani and Milesi 2010, 221). In other words, although value predispositions are existential principles, they can have clear political implications. For example, in a study conducted on the 2006 Italian National Election Study, Catellani and Milesi (2010) showed how certain values were significantly correlated with a right-wing ideological position, whereas other values were significantly correlated with a left-wing ideological position. It is exactly adopting this perspective that the question of how values relate to attitudes towards immigration becomes clearly relevant. To the extent that values are deemed to be at the base of political orientations and attitudes towards policy issues, it is then a matter of determining whether and to what extent value predispositions structure the ways in which people perceive migrants. Moreover, an additional perspective justifies our attention to values as explanatory factors of attitudes towards immigration. Conceptualizing values in terms of motivational goals, we indeed expect that individual attitudes will be affected by value predispositions if the object of the attitude prevents the achievement of the more general value objective. In other words, we deem values able to modify individual attitudes towards immigration if immigration is perceived as an obstacle to the realization of the value motivational goal (Davidov et al. 2008; Davidov and Meuleman 2012).

Probably, the most systematic attempt to identify the main values that guide human action is to be attributed to psychologist Shalom Schwartz (1992, 1994, 2006). In a series of studies conducted in more than 60 countries, Schwartz identified a list of ten fundamental values that people recognize as guiding principles of their social action and which identify as many existential objectives: Universalism (Understanding and tolerance); Benevolence (Improvement of the well-being of nearby people); Tradition (Respect for tradition and its heritage); Conformity (Respect for the rules, the established order and social norms); Security (Protection of social order and personal security); Achievement (Personal success and social recognition); Hedonism (Search for

sensory pleasure); Self-direction (Autonomy and control of one's own destiny); Stimulation (Search for a life in continuous evolution and full of stimuli); Power (High economic and social status that gives access to the resources necessary to obtain a dominant position compared to others).

These values are not disconnected with one another, but they are rather characterized by dynamic interactions. In particular, they can be ordered along two general dimensions, defining the broader psychological structure that organizes values in terms of reciprocal compatibility. The two dimensions are bipolar and each of them contrasts two opposite existential objectives. In Figure 1 we report the structure of relations among values provided by Schwartz (1994, 221). The first dimension (Conservation-Openness to change) contrasts the desire for conformation to tradition and social norms (including the values of tradition, conformity, and security), and the desire for independence (including the values of stimulation and self-direction). The second dimension (Self-enhancement – Self-transcendence) reflects the opposition between the will to achieve power and success (including the values of power and achievement) and the will to commit for others (including the values of benevolence and universalism). As for the value of hedonism, it is still dubious to which of these four categories should be included. Some scholars found that it is closer to self-direction and achievement, others instead that it is closer to the values of power and achievement (Catellani and Milesi 2010).

Figure 1 - Types of values



Source: Schwartz (1994, 24).

Once assessed the nature and the structure of relations between values, we now move to set our expectations on how values could affect attitudes towards immigration. In this respect, extant research is far from conclusive. Indeed, only values associated with self-transcendence and conservation seem to have unambiguous effects. More controversial, instead, are findings concerning values associated with self-enhancement and openness to change. Let's thus start by fixing expectations related to values of self-transcendence and conservation, the ones where the literature is substantially in agreement.

Sagiv and Schwartz (1995), starting from the basic conceptualization of values as motivational goals, argued that the arrival of immigrants in the host society might be perceived as an obstacle to the achievement of the conservation values. Indeed, immigrants bring their own traditions and norms, which are a powerful source for social change. In societies where multicultural instances are on the rise, it becomes much more difficult for conservative individuals to defend customs and values of the traditional culture (Davidov and Meuleman 2012). People who deem these values important in their life, tend to emphasize the need for law and order and manifest a clear resistance to change and novelty (Leong and Ward 2006). They are also the ones who feel more threatened by unexpected events, ambiguous situations, and modification of traditional lifestyles. As a consequence, they are expected to hold more negative attitudes towards everything that might modify (or deviate from) traditional social norms and cultural habits (Hofstede 1979, 1980).

On the contrary, people who are committed for others and seek to improve the well-being of other people (i.e. benevolence and universalism), should be more likely to develop a positive attitude towards immigrants (Davidov et al. 2008; Sagiv and Schwartz 1995). These are in fact people who assign great value to tolerance and protection for others. For these people, the inflow of immigrants produces social changes that are in line with their value predisposition and that allow them to pursue their preferred motivational goals (Davidov and Meuleman 2012).

More controversial is the establishment of clear expectations about the effect of values belonging to the broader orientations towards self-enhancement and openness to change. For values embedded in the self-enhancement pole, some scholars suggest that these should be correlated with negative attitudes towards immigration. In this argument, based on traditional group conflict theories (e.g. Blalock 1967), political and economic competition is key to explain negative attitudes towards out-groups: as the latter are seen as rival, negative attitudes should be greater. Thus, as the increased inflow of immigrants is perceived by those who seek personal power and success as an additional obstacle to the realization of their motivational goals, people who assign great relevance to self-enhancement values should have more negative attitudes towards immigrants (Duriez et al. 2002). However, out-group contact may provide members of the dominant group with opportunities to gain or express power and control. If out-group members hold inferior statuses in society -as minorities usually do- dominant group members are able to exercise authority and to experience superiority over them" (Sagiv and Schwartz 1995: 440). As a consequence, for those who seek power and personal success, immigrants' inflows might in fact represent an opportunity, rather than a threat to their power positions (or their ambitions for power). Thus, we should expect a positive correlation between self-enhancement and attitudes towards immigration. It is exactly because of these contradictory expectations that Sagiv and Schwartz (1995) expect to find no significant effect of self-enhancement on attitudes towards immigration.

The same ambiguity applies to intellectual and affective autonomy (i.e. self-direction and stimulation). These are in fact typical values of those people who assign a relatively high importance to freedom and equality (as opposed to embeddedness in extant social norms and hierarchy), aspects that should lead -intuitively- towards more positive attitudes towards diversity. Sagiv and Schwartz (1995) support this expectation, claiming that contact with out-group might provide occasions to express autonomy, pursuit novelty, and explore new



and different ways of life -which are all central to self-direction and stimulation values. Furthermore, people who assign relevance to these values are less likely to accept stereotypes about out-groups, because they are more likely to express autonomous and independent evaluations based on their experience (Sagiv and Schwartz 1995: 440; Triandis and Triandis 1972). However, and contrary to this argument, Duriez et al. (2002: pp. 43-44) notes that the presence of out-groups might be also perceived as a threat for the realization of the values embedded in the broad orientation towards openness to change.

Finally, in line with Sagiv and Schwartz 1995, no effect is expected for hedonism, as immigration is not expected to pose an obstacle to the achievement of sensory fulfilment and pleasure.

Following on this discussion, we summarize in Table 1 our expectations about the relation between value predispositions and attitudes towards immigration:

Table 1 - Values and their expected effects on attitudes towards immigration

<i>Broad value orientation</i>	<i>Values</i>	<i>Sign</i>
Conservation	Security	-
	Conformity	-
	Tradition	-
Self-transcendence	Benevolence	+
	Universalism	+
Openness to change	Self-direction	+/-
	Stimulation	+/-
Self-enhancement	Achievement	+/-
	Power	+/-
Hedonism	Hedonism	0

## 4. Data and methods

In order to assess whether and to what extent the positions on immigration are the result of value predispositions, we use the data collected in a recent Computer Assisted Web-Interviewing (CAWI) opinion survey designed by CISE and conducted by Demetra srl in December 2018 on a representative sample of the Italian electoral population (N = 1,113). The main variable of interest, which will constitute the dependent variable in all our empirical models, is the attitude towards migrants and was measured on a scale ranging from 1 to 6, where 1 indicates those who believe that “Italy receives too many migrants” and 6 those who instead believe that “Italy could welcome more migrants”.<sup>4</sup> The (Italian) question wording for this item was taken from the pre-electoral Italian National Election Study of 2018 and the same question has been already employed and validated by other studies (Vezzoni 2018). Moreover, we deem that such survey item reflects nicely the actual policy debate in the country at the time, which revolved around the ‘Porti Chiusi’ policy, separating those in

<sup>4</sup> The exact question wording and the distribution of the variable are reported in Table A4 of the Appendix.

favor of it, desiring no more accesses (and possibly repatriations) from those opposing it (who in turn prefer keeping ports open to migrants).<sup>5</sup>

To assess the predictive ability of values on immigration attitudes, measured as just outlined, we relied on ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis.<sup>6</sup>

The respondents' value orientations were measured using a battery of ten items, one for each of the ten Schwartz values previously discussed. Specifically, each respondent was asked to indicate on a scale from 0 to 4 the importance attributed to each value (0 = Value contrary to my principles, 4 = Very important value); the higher the value of the variable, the greater the degree of importance attributed to a specific value. The assessment of the effects of these variables on the abovementioned indicator of attitude towards migrants constitutes the core of our empirical investigation.

However, in order to properly assess the effects of value predispositions on attitudes towards migrants we also need to take into account the numerous arguments put forward by previous literature on the topic which we have presented in Section 2. We do so by also including additional predictors related to different strands of literature, as detailed below.

Namely, we have two indicators for factual conditions of economic distress –social class and unemployment. Social class is operationalized according to the innovative classification advanced by Oesch (2006a, 2006b) on the basis of professional placement. The class variable includes five categories: 1) Unskilled workers (Low class); 2) Skilled workers (working class); 3) Small business owners (medium-low class); 4) Lower-grade service class (medium-high class); 5) Higher-grade service class (high class). In regression models, the highest social class is used as a reference category. Finally, a last indicator is included to identify respondents unemployed at the time of the interview (a dichotomous variable with 1 = Unemployed).

We also include a battery of items that measure the proximity to migrants in daily life, i.e. factual conditions of proximity according to different levels of intensity, along with perception of physical insecurity. A first variable measures the presence of foreign colleagues in the workplace. We deem this an indicator of *personal* contacts with immigrants. The variable is included in the model as dichotomous, with 1 indicative of the presence of foreign colleagues. A second variable measures the presence of foreigners in the streets near the respondent's place of residence – *social* contacts. Again, the variable is operationalized as a dichotomous variable, with 1 indicative of the presence of foreigners on the street. Finally, the model includes a variable of perception aimed at measuring how much the respondents feel safe when they return home. The variable is once again operationalized as dichotomous, with 1 = Perception of insecurity.

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<sup>5</sup> The item was designed to gauge respondents' attitudes towards migrants independently from their knowledge about the actual presence of migrants in the national territory. We do not ask respondents (neither directly or indirectly) to quantify the number of migrants in Italy, but simply whether they prefer to have more or fewer of them. We deem that this item relaxes respondents from having a precise knowledge about migration flows in order to state their attitudes.

<sup>6</sup> We do so in order preserve interpretability of the coefficients, after having verified that the meaningful effects are corroborated by the most appropriate ordered logistic regression model. Findings employing this alternative strategy are reported in Table A1 of the Appendix.

Finally, our empirical strategy features the inclusion of a battery of sociodemographic variables that measure gender (Reference category = Man), age cohort (Reference category = 45/54 years), educational qualification (in ascending order), and residency (municipal size).<sup>7</sup>

## 4. Findings

Before moving to empirical analysis, it is worth noting once again that value systems are considered to be relatively stable over time (Peffley and Hurwitz 1985, Feldman 1988, Hurwitz and Peffley 1998), so that established predispositions in individuals tend to remain solid throughout the life cycle of people. If this is true, it is clear that certain attitudes, when linked to specific values, cannot be considered as an entirely new fact, but rather as attitudes already widespread in society and that, for various reasons, have remained latent, unexpressed or simply invisible. It is worth asking then if this is the case of immigration attitudes and how different values act on attitudes towards immigration. But before doing that, we need to corroborate our argument, by showing that values among Italians have remained pretty stable over time.

Table 2 - The hierarchy of values in 2018 Italy

<i>Values</i>	<i>Hierarchy of values</i>	<i>N</i>
Security	0.5	1,113
Conformity	0.5	1,113
Self-direction	0.4	1,113
Hedonism	0.3	1,113
Tradition	0.3	1,113
Benevolence	0.2	1,113
Universalism	0.1	1,113
Stimulation	-0.3	1,113
Achievement	-0.4	1,113
Power	-1.2	1,113

Note: Cell entries are centred means. These should be intended as deviations from the average importance assigned to all the ten values included in the dataset.

To assess the stability of value predispositions among Italian voters, we report in Table 1 the mean relevance of any single value for respondents of our sample. In so doing, we followed Catellani and Milesi (2010) and, for each respondent, we centred the importance assigned to each value to the mean relevance assigned to the whole set of the ten values included in our dataset. Apart from some negligible differences, our data appear in line with previous investigations among Italian voters (Catellani and Milesi 2010). Indeed, our data show that

<sup>7</sup> Finally, we include a categorical variable for the macro-regional area (reference category: Northern Italy), although expectations from comparative literature are not clear-cut. However, we deem this control variable relevant for our models, in particular as it allows us to distinguish the regions where the electoral performance of the League has been historically more positive and where the party, probably, has been more able to mobilize anti-immigration positions.

the most important values among Italian voters are security, conformity, and self-direction. These are exactly the same values that Catellani and Milesi found as the most relevant for Italian voters in 2010. Accordingly, we find that also the least relevant values among Italian voters are the same as a decade ago (namely stimulation, achievement, and power). Although indirectly, this provides a further empirical confirmation of the stability over time of value predispositions, with specific reference to the Italian case, revealing that over the past decade the hierarchy of values among Italian voters did not change significantly.

Let us now assess the ability of different value predispositions in driving attitudes of Italian citizens towards migrants. Table 3 reports evidence from the OLS regression investigation outlined in the previous section.

We start by pointing out that the  $R^2$  in our regression, which includes all relevant predictors, is 0.25 (25% variance explained). Compared to an identical model not including value items,<sup>8</sup> the model reported in Table 3 increases predictive power by as much as 14 percentage points. In other words, compared to socio-demographic conditions, factual conditions of proximity and individual perceptions of threat, value predispositions weigh more than double in determining respondents' attitudes towards immigration. This appears as an indeed very relevant piece of evidence in our investigation of the role of values on immigration.

At this point we can finally look at what are the value predispositions that push towards a more or less positive attitude towards immigration.

As we expected, values of the self-transcendence dimension (benevolence and universalism) play in favour of more positive attitudes towards immigration, as indicated by the positive and significant coefficients. This indicates that voters considering these values particularly important have more open attitudes towards immigrants. On this, our analysis confirms what Catellani and Milesi already observed in their 2010 study, where universalism and benevolence were identified not only as correlated with attitudes towards immigration, but also as variables strongly correlated with a left-wing ideological dimension. More in general, this supports the idea that for people who assign great value to tolerance and protection for others, the inflow of immigrants produces social changes that are in line with their value predisposition and allow them to pursue their preferred goals.

Again, as expected, our analysis shows that, in the opposite direction, values of the conservation dimension have a statistically significant negative effect on our dependent variable. However, this holds true for safety and tradition, while the value of conformity – controlling for everything else, including safety and tradition – is not a significant predictor of attitudes towards migrants. This means that those individuals who give a particularly important weight to values of security and tradition tend to have more critical attitudes towards the possibility of welcoming more migrants in Italy. This is substantially in line with what has been observed in the past by Catellani and Milesi (2010) and corroborates the classical theoretical argument that these people, feeling threatened by unexpected events and modification of traditional lifestyles, dislike immigration that might modify traditional social norms and cultural habits.

In addition, we had a definite theory expectation for hedonism – namely that it would not yield a significant effect. And, once again, the evidence reported in Table 2 is in line with our expectation and previous literature.

Coming to values of the self-enhancement and openness-to-change dimensions, we had rival theory arguments supporting opposite (negative and positive) effects. Our findings show that only the openness-to-change value of self-direction has a significant effect.

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<sup>8</sup> The model not including value items is reported in Table A2 of the Appendix file. In Table A3 of the Appendix we also include among the predictors, as a robustness test, the left-right self-position of respondents (measured on a conventional 0(=Left) 10(=Right) scale). Results are fully consistent with ones presented in Table 3 of the manuscript.

Table 3 - OLS regression: Determinants of attitudes towards immigration in 2018 Italy

<i>Predictors</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Gender (Female)	0.0713	(0.387)
Age:		
18/29	0.265	(0.051)
30/44	0.0357	(0.746)
45/54		<i>Base</i>
55/64	0.0624	(0.606)
65+	0.194	(0.174)
Education	0.0821*	(0.036)
Class:		
High		<i>Base</i>
Medium-high	0.0584	(0.702)
Medium-low	-0.162	(0.322)
Working	-0.0471	(0.717)
Lower	-0.163	(0.273)
Unemployment	-0.167	(0.126)
Zone:		
North		<i>Base</i>
Centre	0.0285	(0.811)
South	0.0111	(0.904)
Municipal size	-0.0337	(0.309)
Foreign colleagues	0.312***	(0.001)
Foreign neighbours	0.139	(0.147)
Perception of security	-0.462***	(0.000)
Universalism	0.391***	(0.000)
Benevolence	0.385***	(0.000)
Power	0.0349	(0.455)
Achievement	-0.0829	(0.133)
Hedonism	-0.0902	(0.152)
Self-direction	-0.227**	(0.002)
Stimulation	0.0613	(0.269)
Security	-0.507***	(0.000)
Conformity	0.00960	(0.898)
Tradition	-0.253***	(0.000)
Constant	3.100***	(0.000)
N		1,062
R <sup>2</sup>		0.253

Notes: OLS regressions; p-values in parentheses; \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001. The dependent variable scores 1 when respondents state that that Italy receives too many migrants and 6 for those who instead believe that Italy could welcome more migrants.

Thus, positive coefficients indicate an effect in the direction favourable to immigrants, a negative coefficient and effect in the anti-immigrant direction.

In particular, self-direction has a negative effect, which is in contradiction with what Catellani and Milesi observe in their study, and with the classical literature arguments stressing that contact with out-group and stereotypes might provide opportunity for autonomy and independence. Rather, this piece of evidence seems to support that the presence of out-groups is perceived as a threat for the realization of the values embedded in openness-to-change dimension (Duriez et al. 2002).

Finally, as anticipated, net of everything else, self-enhancement values do not influence immigration attitudes. This supports the rejection of both the classic group-conflict theoretical argument and its rival one, based on the opportunity represented by immigrants for people desiring power and achievement. It might very well be that both mechanisms are at play for different individuals, but the point is that none of the two prevails in statistical terms in the Italian electorate.

To sum up, our empirical investigation shows that, even in a complex multi-variate regression model, the predictive power of value predispositions over immigration attitudes is clear and large. Moreover, it indicates that the links between value types and immigration follow the routes indicated by the literature. Thus, they are intelligible and can be interpreted as confirmation for relevant theoretical arguments.

Besides the evidence pertaining values, Table 3 includes a number of elements of substantial interest, which, though lateral to our line of inquiry, deserves to be noted.

In short, our findings reveal that, when including long-term value predispositions, the only predictors with a distinctive statistically significant effect on immigration attitudes are education (positive effect), proximity in the workplace (positive effect) and perception of insecurity (negative effect). On the contrary, no statistically significant effects emerge for age,<sup>9</sup> gender, residence, social classes nor unemployment.

Thus, in the Italian case, and when including value predispositions, the classic claim that conditions of economic insecurity of individuals are linked to anti-immigrant positions is not empirically confirmed. Moreover, no single socio-demographic indicator has an effect that overcomes the test of statistical significance. With one exception – education. Thus, the claim that more educated individuals generally adopt more open

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<sup>9</sup> In relation to age it is worth noticing that in the models without value items we found a positive effect both among younger (18/29 years old) and older (+65 years old) age cohorts, when compared to the 45-54 age cohort. This pattern, although not in a significant way, also emerges when including value items in the models. This seems to suggest that younger and older people might have more favorable positions towards migrants than middle-aged people. While this is not surprising for what concerns young people (who are generally considered more open to external influences), more interesting is the case of older people. There are different arguments (not tested here) that could plausibly explain this finding. A first argument looks at the role of socialization. The cohort aged 65 or more was in fact socialized at the end of the 60's, in a period of radical cultural, social, and political transformations for the Italian society. In this respect, there is evidence showing that generations socialized in that environment, were in fact more liberal (in cultural terms) or more left leaning (in political terms) compared to previous generations (Corbetta and Ceccarini 2010). Thus, the relatively more positive attitudes towards migrants might well be the consequence of a cultural orientation deriving from the specific context in which such generations were socialized. Another possible explanation looks instead at the objective economic conditions of people of different ages. While for older people, retired from the job market, immigration does not represent an economic threat (quite the contrary, it could be seen as a resource for the sustainability of the pension system), the same does not apply to people in their working age who might perceive immigration as a source for increased competitiveness (and precariousness) of the job market.

attitudes towards immigration appear to be present, significant, and robust to the role of values. So as the mechanisms highlighted by the theories of proximity and closeness are.

Finally, we shall note that our empirical evidence also indicates that individuals who feel insecure about their personal safety hold, net of everything else, significantly less welcoming attitudes towards migrants, which suggests that the frequent framing of immigration in terms of potential physical safety threats for citizens has indeed broken through the minds of Italian voters.

## 6. Conclusion

The results of our analysis show that the arguments taken into consideration in this study, although all to some extent relevant, contribute differently to explaining attitudes towards immigration. Indeed, these attitudes appear to be only marginally a result of socio-demographic factors, whereas it does not seem, from our data, that conditions of objective economic deprivation play a significant role in accounting for them. Accordingly, objective conditions of proximity to immigrants and subjective perceptions of threat and insecurity, although relevant predictors, still offer only a limited perspective on which are the main drivers of attitudes towards immigration. It is in fact the value predispositions of individuals that explain the largest share of differences in attitudes towards immigration among Italian voters.

As our literature review has indicated, difficulties experienced in a precarious labour market, fear of competition on economic resources and jobs, and perceptions of insecurity associated with a larger presence of immigrants are often considered as elements of critical opinions towards immigration and tend to provide legitimate arguments for these positions. However, the explanatory capacity of these arguments appears to be clearly limited. In fact, what clearly emerges behind these factors are latent cultural elements, which have deep roots in the personal history of the individual and which inform a way of thinking and acting in society. In a nutshell, we find that the values of safety, tradition and (to a smaller extent) self-direction are associated with more critical attitudes towards immigration, while benevolence and universalism play in favour of more positive attitudes towards immigration. To some extent, this resonates with recent comparative research featuring the Italian case, which highlights the effect of universalistic concerns on solidarity practices towards refugees (Maggini and Fernández 2019).

The main implication of this result is straightforward: if it is true that values are the key to understanding the way individuals relate to the phenomenon of immigration, then we need to take a different look at recent changes in public opinion and electoral behaviour that have seen a large increase (in fact a multiplication) of the support enjoyed by Matteo Salvini's League. While most commentators have suggested that Salvini's disproportionate emphasis on immigration has been a driving force for his electoral success (Chiaromonte, Emanuele, Maggini, and Paparo 2018; Emanuele, Maggini, and Paparo 2020), we argue that our findings suggest a more articulated and deeper view: the emphasis on immigration might in fact be an instrument used by the party to give voice and visibility to specific existential values. These are those that more than others favour critical, if not even hostile, attitudes towards migrants – in particular, as our investigation reveals, those linked to the conservation dimension, such as security and tradition. Values that in turn – being (assumed to be) genuine, relatively deep existential principles – are unlikely to be subject to short-term fluctuations, as they represent more profound aspects of the individual structure of attitudes and opinions.

Finally (in accordance with Vezzoni 2018), this leads to rejecting the possible interpretation that in the last years (between the migratory crisis and the strengthening of Salvini's leadership) a genuine transformation of

position towards immigration has taken place among Italians. In fact, the observation that anti-immigrant attitudes are predicted by general value orientations suggests that these are more structural characteristics of a part of Italian citizens, also in line with a value configuration that throughout the Second Republic has provided a basis of support for the centre-right coalition and its restrictive policies towards immigration. As a result, these attitudes simply appear as the expression (in specific years characterized by a higher saliency of immigration, possibly in consequence of a smart party communication and politicization strategy by the League) of more general conservative attitudes and values that constitute a structural aspect of an important part of public opinion in Italy: a datum that both scholars and politicians will have to take into account for understanding future developments.

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## APPENDIX

Table A1 – Ordered Logistic Regression: Determinants of attitudes towards immigration in 2018 Italy

<i>Predictors</i>		<i>Model without value items</i>		<i>Model with value items</i>	
		<i>b</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Gender (Female)		0.140	(0.242)	0.0874	(0.490)
Age:	18/29	0.459*	(0.019)	0.450*	(0.029)
	30/44	0.112	(0.504)	0.106	(0.547)
	45/54		<i>Base</i>		<i>Base</i>
	55/64	0.267	(0.143)	0.155	(0.417)
	65+	0.553**	(0.007)	0.338	(0.120)
Education		0.200***	(0.001)	0.141*	(0.020)
Class:	High		<i>Base</i>		<i>Base</i>
	Medium-high	-0.197	(0.371)	0.0742	(0.745)
	Medium-low	-0.170	(0.473)	-0.293	(0.241)
	Working	-0.0965	(0.603)	-0.0290	(0.880)
	Lower	-0.323	(0.135)	-0.220	(0.327)
Unemployment		-0.0582	(0.730)	-0.161	(0.358)
Zone:	North		<i>Base</i>		<i>Base</i>
	Centre	-0.0871	(0.621)	0.0674	(0.714)
	South	0.0640	(0.643)	0.0277	(0.846)
Municipal size		-0.0222	(0.652)	-0.0692	(0.174)
Foreign colleagues		0.488***	(0.000)	0.359*	(0.011)
Foreign neighbours		0.311*	(0.031)	0.248	(0.098)
Perception of security		-1.054***	(0.000)	-0.750***	(0.000)
Universalism				0.762***	(0.000)
Benevolence				0.634***	(0.000)
Power				0.0630	(0.399)
Achievement				-0.111	(0.202)
Hedonism				-0.200*	(0.038)
Self-direction				-0.399***	(0.001)

Stimulation			0.0618	(0.480)
Security			-0.715***	(0.000)
Conformity			-0.0944	(0.404)
Tradition			-0.445***	(0.000)
Cut point 1	0.897*	(0.020)	-1.466*	(0.022)
Cut point 2	1.529***	(0.000)	-0.726	(0.254)
Cut point 3	2.334***	(0.000)	0.204	(0.749)
Cut point 4	3.488***	(0.000)	1.477*	(0.021)
Cut point 5	4.475***	(0.000)	2.527***	(0.000)
N		1,062		1,062
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>		0.042		0.108

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Table A2 – OLS Regression: Determinants of attitudes towards immigration in 2018 Italy

<i>Predictors</i>	<i>Model without value items</i>	
	<i>b</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Gender (Female)	0.118	(0.182)
Age:		
18/29	0.340*	(0.019)
30/44	0.0634	(0.593)
45/54		<i>Base</i>
55/64	0.180	(0.166)
65+	0.370*	(0.015)
Education	0.137**	(0.001)
Class:		
High		<i>Base</i>
Medium-high	-0.135	(0.413)
Medium-low	-0.143	(0.418)
Working	-0.103	(0.462)
Lower	-0.242	(0.131)
Unemployment	-0.0862	(0.465)
Zone:		
North		<i>Base</i>
Centre	-0.0369	(0.775)
South	0.0440	(0.660)
Municipal size	-0.00721	(0.840)
Foreign colleagues	0.404***	(0.000)
Foreign neighbours	0.201	(0.052)
Perception of security	-0.706***	(0.000)
Constant	1.536***	(0.000)
N		1,062
R <sup>2</sup>		0.109

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Table A3 – Robustness test (OLS Regression): Determinants of attitudes towards immigration in 2018 Italy, including left-right self-position of respondents

<i>Predictors</i>		<i>b</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Gender (Female)		0.0484	(0.536)
Age:	18/29	0.226	(0.080)
	30/44	0.0674	(0.519)
	45/54		<i>Base</i>
	55/64	0.00482	(0.966)
	65+	0.170	(0.210)
Education		0.0613	(0.100)
Class:	High		<i>Base</i>
	Medium-high	0.0498	(0.731)
	Medium-low	-0.116	(0.455)
	Working	-0.0781	(0.526)
	Lower	-0.127	(0.365)
Unemployment		-0.186	(0.074)
Zone:	North		<i>Base</i>
	Centre	-0.0162	(0.886)
	South	-0.0468	(0.594)
Municipal size		-0.0220	(0.483)
Foreign colleagues		0.265**	(0.003)
Foreign neighbours		0.0834	(0.358)
Perception of security		-0.359***	(0.000)
Left-right self-position		-0.166***	(0.000)
Universalism		0.228***	(0.000)
Benevolence		0.312***	(0.000)
Power		0.0407	(0.358)
Achievement		-0.0366	(0.486)
Hedonism		-0.109	(0.068)
Self-direction		-0.180**	(0.010)
Stimulation		0.0659	(0.211)
Security		-0.457***	(0.000)
Conformity		0.0214	(0.763)
Tradition		-0.174**	(0.005)
Constant		4.281***	(0.000)
N			1,059
R <sup>2</sup>			0.332

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Table A4 – Frequency distribution of the Dependent Variable. Exact question wording is as follows: “Alcuni dicono che riceviamo troppi immigrati. Altri dicono che va bene come è adesso. Altri ancora dicono che potremmo accoglierne di più. Lei dove collocherebbe la Sua opinione? 1= Riceviamo troppi immigrati; 6= Potremmo accogliere più immigrati”

		<i>Freq.</i>	<i>%</i>
Riceviamo troppi immigrati	1	545	48.97
	2	153	13.75
	3	176	15.81
	4	143	12.85
	5	54	4.85
Potremmo accogliere più immigrati	6	39	3.5
Missing values		3	0.27
Total		1,113	100