

## 2 Electoral debates on migration

### A dimensional perspective

#### Introduction

This book analyzes electoral campaigning on the immigration issue in six local elections in Italy. The study of electoral campaigns by political scientists has focused on two aspects: the effects on voters and the strategies of political actors. The first stream of literature focuses on campaigns as a source for information processing by the citizens, suggesting that these provide voters with necessary information for making a choice in line with their pre-existing preferences (Arce-neaux, 2005; Finkel, 1993; Gelman and King, 1993; Lazarsfeld *et al.*, 1944; Stimson, 2004). In this sense, communication between political actors and voters is a multi-step process, which includes the media as the main transmission belt conveying political information and frames to the public (Hänggli, 2010). The second stream of research focuses more specifically on campaigning, looking at the way in which the political actors involved in electoral competition engage in public debates involving their competitors, the media and the public (Brandenburg, 2002; Hänggli, 2012; Kiouisis *et al.*, 2006; Kriesi *et al.*, 2009; Matthes, 2012). In the course of electoral campaigns the conflict between political actors unfolds, as the actors involved form coalitions, compete and craft messages based on alternative arguments, frames and worldviews, with the goal of getting public and media attention and of mobilizing support.

I focus on the second aspect, and address the role of political actors, i.e. the actors who initiate campaign events and provide the main input into electoral debates. The key argument is that choices of politicization are driven by the attempt of political actors to control competitors and the media as to impose their preferred issues and messages in the campaign. Literature in this area is well established, as previous research has underlined that thematic emphasis is fundamental to understand electoral competition and to explain strategies and results (Budge and Fairlie, 1983; Green-Pedersen and Blomqvist, 2004; Klingemann *et al.*, 1994; Petrocik *et al.*, 2003). At the core of 'saliency theory' approaches is the idea that parties do not engage in comprehensive debates addressing all policy issues, but rather privilege only those issues that they consider favourable to their side (Budge and Fairlie, 1983).

This approach was applied predominantly to study the way in which parties introduce new issues on the agenda in order to manipulate the terms of the

competition. The problem with this understanding is that we do not know much of what happens once the ‘new’ issues stabilize within party systems (Green-Pedersen, 2010; Rovny and Edwards, 2012; van der Brug and van Spanje, 2009). Moreover, by failing to differentiate between large policy themes, or bundles of issues, and their constitutive dimensions, this approach underestimates the complexity of policy issues in public debates. When complex bundles are publicly debated, instead, political actors generally focus on a limited, partial and often incomplete subset of their underlying dimensions (Baumgartner and Jones, 2002). In line with a growing amount of literature aiming at dissecting the elements that make up complex policy issues (De Sio, 2010; De Sio and Franklin, 2012; Froio, 2012, 2013; Guinaudeau and Persico, 2014; Helbling, 2013; Rovny, 2012), in this study I suggest looking at the different dimensions of the immigration issue upon which electoral competition takes place. I suggest that practices and efforts aimed at manipulating the electoral agenda may vary depending on the features of the issue at stake, since political decisions tend to encompass a multiplicity of dimensions of choice.

In this sense, political actors may strategically shift the point of reference of public debates from one aspect of a given political issue to another. When facing complex bundles of policy issues, political actors do not consider all features as equally important. On the contrary, they emphasize the dimensions on which they expect to enjoy a strategic advantage, which leaves them to adopt different approaches to each sub-category as well (Odmalm, 2012). Similarly, De Sio (2010) hypothesizes a ‘second-stage’ of selective emphasis: when confronted with complex issues, parties do not only choose whether to address the issue or not, but they can also decide which aspects of a given issue they want to highlight and which others they prefer to hide.

In order to test this idea, my choice is to focus on immigration, a policy issue that has often been recognized as being complex, multidimensional or at least cutting across traditional policy areas (i.e. Helbling *et al.*, 2010; Höglinger *et al.*, 2012, Odmalm, 2011; Odmalm and Super, 2014), yet it has predominantly been analyzed as a single issue in party competition. I shall compare three case studies that differ in terms of composition of the immigrant populations and of the corresponding key immigration problems. By looking at electoral campaigns in each city setting and by comparing campaigns across contexts, my aim is to assess the constraints and opportunities that determine discursive choices of actors in electoral campaigns on migration. The remainder of this chapter will first introduce the choice of focusing on the issue of immigration and present the rationale for the identification of its constitutive dimensions and frames. Then I shall outline the main argument of the book, and discuss a model for the understanding of electoral campaign strategies based on multiple issue dimensions and strategic framing of policy issues. Lastly, I present the main hypotheses and expectations concerning context conditions, campaign conditions and party conditions driving the electoral strategies of political actors with respect to the dimensions and frames of the immigration issue.

### The immigration issue: culture, economy, security

To test the abovementioned model, this book looks at migration affairs as a prototypical multidimensional issue field. Debates on this issue cut across several thematic fields, and the politicization of the issue has been subject to a conspicuous degree of variation across parties, contexts and over time (Feldblum, 1999; Helbling, 2013; Lahav, 2004; Lakoff and Ferguson, 2006; Messina, 2007; Messina and Lahav, 2006; Perlmutter, 1996; Vliegthart and Roggeband, 2007; van der Brug *et al.*, 2015). As I have illustrated earlier, although multiple issue attributes and problem definitions can coexist simultaneously within public agendas (Baumgartner and Jones, 2002), debates will generally not address all of the aspects, topics or dimensions that could possibly be used to define immigration. In particular, political and media narratives often simplify drastically the complexity of the issue and its implication in terms of migrants' integration. The same applies for the justification of policy-making, since political actors have to rely on straightforward stories which can be explained in terms of cause and effect. As a result, debates on immigration have a structural tendency to 'short-circuit' the complexity of the issue (Boswell, 2011, p. 13). Based on previous research in this area, I argue in this section that multidimensionality emerges from three interrelated domains pertaining to the politics of immigration and integration: policy-making, public opinion and public debates.

To begin with, policy analysts have insisted on the disaggregation of immigration policy into distinct policy components (Lahav and Guiraudon, 2006). Baumgartner and Jones (2002) suggest that, although primarily defined by the problem of controlling borders, immigration policies have implications on a number of policy areas. The migration policy arena is made of numerous issue dimensions, 'making immigration more similar to health care policy (a complex policy arena with many ramifications) than to agricultural policy (a one-dimensional arena focusing primarily on the extent of subsidies offered to producers)' (p. 74). In this sense, immigration takes on distinct dimensional definitions, which the authors classify as policies on border control and for the preservation of the national identity; policies addressing immigration as a labour resource for national industries; and policies looking at immigration through humanitarianism and oriented at the protection of the politically and religiously persecuted from other countries. Immigration policies therefore often overlap with policies on the consequences of migration in terms of civic integration, as border security and illegal migration is often associated with internal security and crime, whereas economic policies on migration directly affect labour market regulations and welfare state policies (see: Berkhout and Sudulich, 2011). Similarly, Guiraudon (2003) argues that due to its implications for labour, economics, foreign affairs, social affairs and internal affairs, migration as a policy issue can hardly be confined to a single ministry.

As a result, prior studies generally disaggregate the issue along two dimensions. On the one hand is the differentiation between issues pertaining to immigration and aspects concerning the integration of migrants. This is generally done

in line with Tomas Hammar's (1985) distinction between immigration control policies and immigrant policy: the first refers to the framework regulating the entry and stay of foreigners, whereas the latter concerns their integration into host societies. On the other hand, authors differentiate among the various fields that are potentially affected (Messina, 2007; Messina and Lahav, 2006). Recent studies have also combined the two lines, assessing, for instance, whether security issues pertain to the access or the stay of migrants, and whether economic aspects have to do with labour market integration or economic migration (Berkhout and Sudulich, 2011).

For the present study, which focuses on local politics, issues of border control and immigration are generally of lesser importance.<sup>1</sup> My focus is therefore primarily on issues of integration of migrants, and distinguishes between three dimensions: the *socioeconomic dimension*, the *cultural and religious dimension* and the *law and order dimension*. The first two broadly correspond to the understanding of most previous studies, proposing a twofold differentiation where economic arguments are opposed to cultural and identity ones. Similarly, Kriesi *et al.* (2012) suggested that immigration and ethnic diversity have the potential of generating new political conflicts that have more to do with conceptions of national identity than they do with concerns about personal economic circumstances, labour competition and fiscal burdens (see also: Hainmueller and Hiscox, 2007). Economic challenges resulting from globalization interact with increasing cultural diversity at the societal level, which sets up processes of cultural competition for which ethnically different populations become symbols of potential threats to collective identity and to the standard of living of the natives (Kriesi *et al.*, 2012).

In addition, security arguments are increasingly crucial in driving migration debates. On the one hand, debates are securitized in terms of the illegal entry of migrants and the challenges of migration to international security. On the other, migrants are often perceived (and portrayed) as sources of criminality and even terrorism, so that ethnic stereotyping is often used in crime news to substantiate the nexus between immigration in general, minority communities and threats to the physical well-being of host populations (Bigo, 2014; Buonfino, 2004; Caviedes, 2015). Security, therefore, is considered here as a third independent category that refers specifically to securitized narratives on migration. Although similar discursive practices often trigger feelings of cultural insecurity, the cultural and security dimensions are based on different understandings of the relationship between migration and host societies. If cultural arguments opposing immigration consider migrants as the ones who disrupted a culturally homogeneous space, law and order ones accuse migrant communities of having brought physical insecurity and criminality to previously 'safe' societies. Securitization of migration refers to public concerns over immigration harming the quality of life and physical and societal security of native citizens (Buzan *et al.*, 1998; Huysmans, 2000; Weiner, 1993). More broadly, international migration is perceived as a potential source of conflicts, be that because of migrants' often imperfect economic and cultural integration, their marginalization in ethnic ghettos and the related processes of blaming

and stereotyping, or the emergence of negative sentiments or xenophobic movements and parties. Moreover, after 9/11 immigration came to be increasingly identified with invasion, terrorism, violence and physical insecurity (see: Bigo, 2002; Lahav and Courtemanche, 2011; Rudolph, 2007). In this way, specific groups (or migrants as a whole) tend to be targeted in public discourse as potential or actual sources of physical threats and insecurity, and come to be identified as ‘problem’ groups. Accordingly, the law and order dimension focuses on the explicit and implicit association of immigrants with insecurity, danger and emergency.

The three immigration dimensions provide the general framework for the classification of the arguments used by political parties to frame the immigration issue. As was discussed previously, my definition of framing processes involves both selection and diagnosis: once certain issue dimensions are emphasized, framing implies the active effort to provide meaning to the aspects in question. Hence, in line with previous research in this area, I opt to link a frame explicitly to an issue dimension and an evaluation (Chong and Druckman, 2007; Druckman, 2004; Hänggli, 2010; see also: Callaghan and Schnell, 2004; Entman, 2004).<sup>2</sup> Looking at substantive, issue-specific frames implies focusing on the aspect of the problem definition, and it entails that every issue can have different issue-specific frames. This is also in line with the choice of a vast array of studies on strategic framing, which focused on the proposition level as a unit of analysis and followed an inductive strategy for frame extraction diminishing the risk of overlooking types of arguments that were not anticipated *a priori* (Hänggli, 2010; Matthes, 2009; Matthes and Kohring, 2008).<sup>3</sup>

Table 2.1 below summarizes the threefold categorization of the immigration issue, specifying the seven alternative frames that I identified within each dimension,<sup>4</sup> and taking into account the crucial fact that parties may adopt different positions depending on the aspect of migration that is highlighted (Odmalm, 2011, 2012, 2014). These are the *multiculturalism* and *nationalism* frames (corresponding to the two alternative understandings of the cultural dimension), the *economic prosperity* and *labour and security* frames (consistent with arguments pushed forward to discuss the socioeconomic impact of migration), and the *urban issues*, *Roma issues* and *emergency issues* frames (corresponding to territorial, group-specific and emergency logics within the security dimension). Given that issue-specific frames are justifications of actor positions, each category can be interpreted in terms of Habermas’ seminal typology of arguments: ‘pragmatic’, ‘identity-related’ and ‘moral’ types of argumentation in media and elite discourse (Habermas, 1993; see also: Helbling *et al.*, 2010; Lerch and Schweltnus, 2006; Sjursen, 2002).<sup>5</sup>

### ***The socioeconomic dimension***

Socioeconomic aspects are often at the core of technocratic and expert debates on migration (Citrin *et al.*, 1997). This is because economic factors are behind international labour migration, and because immigration is a factor that inevitably influences the receiving country’s economy. Hence, this dimension is grounded on

Table 2.1 Categorization of immigration dimensions and frames

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Frames</i>	<i>Frame category</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Socioeconomic	<i>Economic prosperity</i>	Pragmatic	Economic growth/ decay International competition
	<i>Labour and security</i>	Pragmatic	Welfare state Unemployment rates Unfair competition
Cultural and religious	<i>Multiculturalism</i>	Moral-universalistic	Tolerance Cultural diversity Failure of multiculturalism
	<i>Nationalism</i>	Identity-related	National identity Loss of tradition Citizenship
Law and order	<i>Urban issues</i>	Pragmatic	Suburbs issues Ethnic neighbourhoods Urban violence
	<i>Emergency issues</i>	Pragmatic	Refugee and asylum abuse Illegal migration/ amnesties Terrorism/civil liberties
	<i>Roma issues</i>	Pragmatic	EU citizenship Lifestyle incompatibility Nomadism

pragmatic reasoning: immigration is instrumentally connected to individual and collective interests, or to the achievement of specific outputs in terms of personal and group well-being (Helbling *et al.*, 2010). With respect to framing, immigration is discussed in terms of not only market logic and structural characteristics of the economy, but also economic wealth and growth (*economic prosperity frames*). Alternatively, the logic may be that of stressing the relationship (and potential trade-off) between welfare and employment opportunities of national and immigrant workforce (*labour and security frame*).

Concerning economic prosperity, this frame is primarily associated with pro-migration claims, but anti-immigration political entrepreneurs can also use it to contest the arguments of their adversaries or to deny the beneficial effects of migration. This frame connects migration to economic performance at the collective level (national or local), which in turn results in changing living conditions for the native population as well. Quotes from the data collected might help illustrate the main message that is associated with this type of frames.

Due to immigration, since many years Milan has become a 'global city' [. . .]. Without the support of its new citizens originating from around the world, the city would not stand economically.<sup>6</sup>

According to Sandro Ciardi, the positive economic cycle is closed, and the conditions to welcome more foreigners no longer exist.<sup>7</sup>

In general, supporters and opponents of immigration may highlight different aspects of how the issue of immigration is related to the national or local economy. Here, the focus is on the benefits that immigration brings to a country's economic performance (also in fiscal terms) and to advantages that can arise from admitting and integrating hard-working and highly motivated economic migrants. Attention is given to the changes in the structure of the economy, which are held to make it necessary and beneficial to have a steady supply of labour to fill the gap in the sectors where native labour is increasingly scarce.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast, the labour and security frame is more easily mobilized to oppose immigration than to promote it, as it makes reference to work opportunities for natives and immigrants in terms of labour market and welfare resources. Compared to the prosperity frame, the focus is more directly on the consequences of immigration for the native workers.

In this period of economic hardship, conceding the right to participate in competitive exams to immigrants who hold a simple residence or visiting permit means taking jobs away from the Milanese people and the regular migrants who have resided here for long.<sup>9</sup>

Their number [foreign residents and illegal migrants] has been growing steadily over the past years, and they currently take up 30% of the economic resources available in the social services.<sup>10</sup>

When used to oppose immigration, this frame often conceptually associates the arrival of immigrants with decreasing opportunities for native workers, financial burdens for taxpayers, and welfare reduction (although migrants can be depicted as either net-receivers of social benefits or as net-contributors in the national welfare system). Similarly, this frame challenges the admission of asylum seekers and refugees, when this is justified in terms of burdens to the economy, welfare and housing. Immigrant workers are regarded as alien or even illegal competitors reducing the amount of resources and job opportunities available to native ones. The logic is that immigrants tend to find jobs in the black market, corrupting labour relations by working at conditions unacceptable to native workers. Pro-migration political entrepreneurs generally use this frame in a reactive way, challenging the understanding that the economics of migrant and native labour are a zero-sum game. Instead, they might approach the issue of labour, welfare and migration in terms of general labour regulations, which apply to all workers and employers, irrespective of whether they are of migrant origin.

They don't want to expel them [the immigrants]; they want to keep them here in order to put them in competition with precarious workers, in a contest between the last and the semi-last people in our society.<sup>11</sup>

A woman – says Cenni – wrote me that she failed to receive an apartment because there were fifty foreigners before her in the public housing list.<sup>12</sup>

### *The cultural and religious dimension*

The cultural and religious dimension was built with Habermas' (1993) conceptualization of identity-related and moral-universalistic frames in mind. The main frames correspond to arguments stressing the core values of community belonging against perceived identity threats (*nationalism*), or to moral-universal arguments calling for universal rights and peaceful coexistence of cultural and religious groups (*multiculturalism*). Negative arguments involving the cultural and religious dimension therefore see (excessive) diversity and (uncontrolled) migration as inherently or practically dangerous for the integrity of national culture, and for peaceful coexistence within the nation state. National and local traditions are considered endangered because of increasing concentrations of immigrants in previously ethnic homogeneous areas, and city landscapes are described as corrupted by the increased presence of migrants' places, whether shops, houses or religious buildings. Fully nationalist arguments invoke local cultural and linguistic superiority. In this sense, the national community is defined in exclusive terms with respect to cultural and political rights. These arguments always juxtapose 'aliens' with 'natives', claiming the necessity to prioritize the latter over the former, and tend to reject the possibility of reformulating national identity and citizenship on multi-ethnic and multi-religious grounds.

Carla De Albertis [. . .] aims at strengthening the sense of identity of her fellow citizens. According to her, being 'Milanese' is a value needing preservation, protection and enhancement. This means zero tolerance towards illegal migrants residing in the city.<sup>13</sup>

Nobody likes immigrants [. . .] but we, the Italians, are a nation of emigrants. We must offer the same hospitality, rights and duties that our ancestors received. We must pretend that our constitution, laws, traditions and habits are respected. After all, the foreigners are guests.<sup>14</sup>

Multiculturalist arguments, by contrast, emphasize the opportunities provided by cultural and religious diversity, as well as the inevitability of ethnic differentiation. Diversity is described as beneficial for the quality of society, and hence the suggestion is made to promote tolerance and foster policies tackling inequalities in various domains, from education to political rights and access to citizenship. The main arguments have to do with acceptance and respect for difference of culture, traditions and religion. Political entrepreneurs aiming to capitalize on pro-immigration electorates claim that equality remains at insufficient levels, and



promote integration-oriented policy-making and civil participation. Assimilation policies and practices, by contrast, lead to increased inequality, conflict and marginalization.

The list claims to be ‘secular’ and ‘multicultural’, and it promises to engage in improving the political, social and religious opportunities for the city’s migrants, in the name of ‘hospitality, solidarity and multiculturalism’.<sup>15</sup>

An effective integration policy can not be achieved by means of an absurd demand for assimilation against those that are considered different.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, the cultural and religious dimension emphasizes cultural compatibility between different ethno-religious communities, and promotes intergroup tolerance and integration. This can take the form of debates over multiculturalism and cultural integration. Multiculturalist frames foster respect for cultural difference of immigrant communities and expect enhanced integration to be a result of the increasing availability of instruments and infrastructures allowing the free expression of culture, religion and traditions of migrants. Although each frame can be easily associated with either the pro-immigration or the anti-immigration camp, contestation and trespassing are frequent among political actors in electoral debates. Supporters of immigration try to expose the nationalist nature of opponents’ arguments, while anti-immigration actors criticize the intrinsic dangers and negative outcomes of multiculturalist policies and cultural tolerance. In this case, politicians aiming to capitalize on opposition to increased immigration stress the need for immigrants to adapt to the culture and traditions of the destination country, without necessarily mobilizing nationalist rhetoric. Migrants’ predisposition to cultural assimilation is often regarded as a necessary condition for sustainable immigration and integration in the receiving country.

The mayor claims that we are bound to become a multi-ethnic, multicultural and multi-religious city, but I pretend that we at least preserve our own history.<sup>17</sup>

My experience among the Chinese in Prato taught me something: it is not possible to build a multicultural society when people are unwilling to communicate with one another.<sup>18</sup>

Bringing the contest on the field of, so to speak, different ‘ethnicities’ is always a bad sign for the quality of electoral campaigns.<sup>19</sup>

### ***The law and order dimension***

The law and order dimension links the arrival and presence of migrants, or specific groups of migrants, to security and emergency issues like national defence, conflicts, legality and the safety of individuals. This applies to the security of borders, to international migration and to the perceived insecurity within the host country

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(Caviedes, 2015; Lazaridis, 2011), since dangers might be associated with the entry or residence of migrants and also with migrants themselves, in case of international crises and criminal networks.<sup>20</sup> More precisely, I identify three ‘logics’ corresponding to three frames of the law and order dimension. First, the territorial logic of *urban issues* focuses on the context where migrants settle, linking the physical presence of migrants in a given territory with instability and threats to personal safety. Second, the group logic or *Roma issues* highlights stereotyped group characteristics in order to address one specific community as the source of social and security problems, defining a nexus between constructed lifestyles of ethnic minorities and illegality and criminality. Third, the emergency logic of *emergency issues* associates migration to unexpected happenings and traumatic events, ascribing the migration phenomenon itself to a category of exceptionality requiring action and resolution.

As far as *urban issues* are concerned, frames connect the presence of legal and illegal migrants to city-specific problems, claiming real or perceived insecurity for local communities due to the presence of migrants in city boroughs and neighbourhoods. The focus is often on decency and decorum in the areas of the city where migrants are settled (illegal settlements, housing and household conditions, street vending, etc.), or this frame more explicitly connects migrant residence to violence and crime in the city. Although most claims recognize that areas densely populated by migrants may be insecure or inaccessible to native citizens, pro-migration arguments do not blame deviance *per se*, but suggest the dismantling of ethnic ‘ghettoes’ to improve the quality of life of the residents, and the requalification of urban peripheries to reduce risks.

The growth of immigration in specific sectors of the city has contributed to the exponential expansion of serious problems, such as security. Not being properly managed, immigration is likely to blow up the equilibrium of our city.<sup>21</sup>

Concerning ghetto suburbs, the point is not how and when to use repressive instruments, but also to understand the emergence of youth problems that eventually cause these forms of violence.<sup>22</sup>

In addition, political actors frame law and order by targeting specific ethnic groups. In particular, local political entrepreneurs in Italy have been addressing the Romani community as a source of social problems, connecting perceived insecurity to the ‘nomadic lifestyle’ of Roma people.<sup>23</sup> As suggested by McGarry and Drake (2013), the combination of lifestyle stereotyping and security concerns makes it that the Roma ‘occupy a nexus of illegality, criminality, belonging and responsibility’ in public discourse. The Roma are subject to pejorative stereotyping describing them as a collective threat for the host population, and individually as responsible for rapes, kidnappings and robberies, so that their very presence ‘cause[s] troubles to their “decent neighbors”’ (van Baar, 2011, p. 321). Security frames of this type create a favourable context for group-specific repressive measures, including the indiscriminate expulsion of Romani migrants. The law and order logic of this frame, therefore, addresses the Roma as a group rather than

individuals within the community. Blatantly discriminatory claims are normally challenged by arguments stressing the need to integrate the Romani community, by arguments reconstructing the genocide of the European Roma during the twentieth century, and by pragmatic argumentations underlining that the vast majority of Roma residents in Italy are EU citizens.

If Lega will get the position of vice-Mayor after the elections, ‘nomadic settlements will disappear in a few days. With our representatives in the city council, similar situations of illegality will not be tolerated any longer.’<sup>24</sup>

The Roma are EU citizens: security can not justify legal actions and discriminatory policies that are contrary to Community law.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, the law and order dimension is tackled by means of the *emergency frame*, which approaches security issues through an explicitly alarmistic logic stressing the urgency to take action. Political actors mobilize this frame pragmatically, to address the consequences of immigration in terms of deviance, crime, illegality and violence, or more broadly to define the whole phenomenon as an emergency. This happens when migration is not described as a long-lasting phenomenon of Western societies, but rather as a sudden, unexpected event which needs urgent and decisive tackling, such as in case of refugee crises, when the emergency discourse is articulated in humanitarian terms, expressed through concerns with cooperation and humanitarian intervention (Buonfino, 2004). Besides this, emergency frames connect migration to local, national and international crises leading to unforeseen outcomes and requiring exceptional interventions and decision-making, and focusing on security aspects related to the entrance, stay and repatriation of migrants. Pragmatic considerations generally tend to prevail, since the goal is that of pursuing national security in a way that does not jeopardize the life and basic rights of illegal immigrants, refugees or foreign residents, although moral arguments might also mobilize the urgent need for shelter and protection during migration crises.<sup>26</sup>

Because of our geographic position, we represent the gateway to Europe. But I confirm, once again, that we do not have sufficient resources to be able to cope indefinitely with an humanitarian emergency of this magnitude.<sup>27</sup>

Rejections are ‘necessary though painful, as we face the arrival *en masse* of populations from the southern hemisphere and we have to react’.<sup>28</sup>

### **Agenda setting, framing and dimensional competition**

The core theoretical assertion of agenda setting research is that the attention accorded to specific media objects or issues leads to increased public concern with those same issues (Kiousis and McCombs, 2004; Lopez-Escobar *et al.*, 1998). The related concept of agenda building was introduced by Cobb and Elder (1971, p. 905), who investigated ‘how issues are created and why some controversies or incipient issues come to command the attention and concern of decision makers,

while others fail'. In line with this approach, I investigate the ability of political actors to influence attention during electoral campaigns. Yet, whereas agenda building is concerned with the issue level, I look at the different dimensions and aspects of the same issue, following the approach that communication scholars generally call second-level agenda building (Kiousis *et al.*, 2006; see also: Riker, 1986). Lopez-Escobar *et al.* (1998, p. 337) contended that 'both the selection of *objects* for attention and the selection of *attributes* for describing these objects are powerful agenda-setting roles'. In a similar fashion, I suggest that in order to understand how complex political issues are politicized in electoral campaigns, one has to look at the salience of issues and issue dimensions. Accordingly, I use the salience of issue-specific attributes and frames in the media as a dependent variable and investigate the factors that influence the change in the relative salience of each dimension in the coverage of electoral campaigns.

A major advantage of this approach is that it offers a framework for examining issue and dimensional salience separately, and therefore for investigating how the shifts in dimensional attention can influence the overall salience of the issue (Ghanem, 1997; Kiousis *et al.*, 2006). Hooghe *et al.* (2002) have noted that certain issues (in particular EU integration) constitute a challenge for parties, as they are unable to assimilate them within either of the traditional dimensions of political conflict, namely the socio-cultural and the economic left-right dimension. The multiple dimensions of policy issues, in fact, structure the interplay between parties, resulting in a set of ideological 'pulls' on each issue dimension (Odmalm, 2011, 2012). More broadly, these tensions generate patterns of incentives and constraints for political actors, affecting their behaviour and competition *vis-à-vis* each issue aspects. Parties, therefore, are not only confronted with the question of when, why and how to emphasize the immigration issue in their election campaign. They must also engage in the much more delicate task of balancing their emphasis and positions on each issue dimension, using alternative frames and issue emphases in order to shift the focus over their key areas of strength.

As a result, campaigning strategies involve not only a struggle over what issues set the electoral and media agenda, but also how these issues are portrayed in public and electoral debates (Kiousis *et al.*, 2006). Previous studies used the concept of second-level agenda setting to describe the way in which the dimensions and frames pushed forward by political entrepreneurs are reproduced by the mass media (Huckins, 1999; Kiousis *et al.*, 2006; McCombs and Ghanem, 2001; Tan and Weaver, 2007; Wirth *et al.*, 2010). Hence, the concept of salience can be applied either to the degree of attention that is given to certain issues rather than others, or to the importance of issue-specific attributes relative to others (McCombs, 2004; McCombs and Reynolds, 2002). Similarly, literature on framing suggested that frames attract attention to certain aspects of an issue rather than others: by selectively emphasizing and evaluating certain issue features, frames provide coherence to political messages and convey an interpretation of a perceived reality (Ferree *et al.*, 2002; Gamson, 2004; Hänggli, 2010). Consequently, I focus on two ways in which messages are crafted, which represent two steps within the same communication process: selective emphasis on issue dimensions and framing (Riker, 1986; Odmalm, 2012).

Second-level agenda setting calls attention to the special status of certain attributes of policy issues in the content of political messages. The idea is that each ‘object’ (McCombs, 2004, p. 70) in the agenda is composed of numerous attributes, or dimensions, that define the scope, properties and traits that characterize the object. If first-level agenda setting is about transmission of issue salience, the second level involves the selective emphasis of certain attributes of a policy issue rather than others. Baumgartner and Jones (2002) proposed that ‘every public policy of substance is inherently multidimensional, but official consideration (and public understanding) of the issue at any given time typically is only partial’ (p. 47). Similarly, I contend that when political actors are confronted with complex issues such as immigration, they do not only choose whether to address the issue or not, but they will also try to highlight certain aspects whilst hiding others.

There are three main reasons supporting the idea that issue competition is about the selection of – and emphasis upon – particular issue attributes rather than policy themes as a whole. The first has to do with the substantial complexity of policy problems that may have multifaceted implications and cut across several policy sectors (*inherent complexity*). In addition, complex policy problems are fragmented into distinct dimensions in order to facilitate information processing. Studies on framing and priming effects have demonstrated that human minds process information in a selective manner, focusing on the most relevant aspects, possibly producing partial and incomplete representations (*cognitive factors*; see: Iyengar, 1991; Iyengar and Kinder, 1987, 2010; Kiousis *et al.*, 2006; Sniderman and Theriault, 2004; Zaller, 1992). The third reason has to do with the fact that politicians have neither the resources nor the incentives to address political problems in all their dimensions. Rather, they will promote only the perspective on problems that they expect to favour them alone (Kriesi *et al.*, 2009; Swanson and Mancini, 1996). Struggles for attention to alternative dimensions of a general problem, hence, are essential to political competition (*strategic factors*). Taken together, these three reasons support the idea that strategic political actors expecting an advantage from a certain dimension of the immigration issue will selectively emphasize the issue as to shift the terms of debate from one dimension to another. The implication is that each attribute of complex policy issues provides distinct opportunities for electoral campaign actors. Agendas are thus the result of the struggle between the preferences of political entrepreneurs regarding the main conflict dimensions of policy issues.

Framing, instead, involves not only selection and salience, but also diagnosis, evaluation and prescription (Gamson, 1992): frames define problems, detect their causes, make moral judgments and suggest remedies in function of costs and benefits. Numerous approaches to the concept of framing exist (Entman, 1993), yet the most widely accepted definition looks at frames as messages promoting ‘a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described’ (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Although frames can be considered as ‘spotlights’ that drag attention to certain aspects of an issue, their main characteristic is that they provide coherence to a set of concepts and

elements (Ferree *et al.*, 2002, p. 105). Hence, if attribute agenda setting focuses on salience, framing implies the active effort of an actor to construct a certain meaning for a given reality or phenomenon (Entman, 1993; Hänggli and Kriesi, 2010).<sup>29</sup>

Since political actors do not want their messages to be cancelled by those of their competitors, campaign strategies combine simultaneously the two communication processes. Competitive actors emphasize specific issue attributes and look for the appropriate framing of these, with the goal of influencing the public's interpretation of a problem in such a way that supports their own point of view. In other words, candidates make choices with respect to the various dimensions of an issue and then justify their positions in order to differentiate themselves from, or to challenge, their competitors hoping to shift the attention toward other dimensions of the issue. Although both strategies aim at dominance in the electoral agenda, their premises are markedly different. Based on selective attention, the first expects that the predispositions of individuals toward a specific aspect of a political issue are favourable, and therefore draws the public's attention to it. Based on rhetorical strategies of framing instead, the second one may lead to a change in the evaluative content of individual beliefs with respect to a specific issue dimension. Hence, the first one builds upon individual predispositions whilst the second can also imply an attempt to modify the beliefs and preferences of targeted parts of the electorate.

Starting from the case of the immigration issue, Figure 2.1 below depicts in graph form the multiple steps of issue politicization in a multidimensional framework. As can be seen, the more the strategy of Party A resembles the one of its competitor Party B at each step of competition (issue level, dimension level and framing level), the more the two parties engage in direct confrontation. To begin with, parties must decide whether to take up an issue (in this case immigration) or discard it altogether from their campaign. In line with Meguid's model (2005, 2008), mainstream parties can deliberately dismiss certain issues, thereby signalling their lack of importance. On the one hand, however, this approach seems to oversimplify the dilemmas and available choices for parties. On the other, dismissive strategies seem less and less rewarding as migration is incorporated into party-system agendas, which makes it increasingly difficult for mainstream parties to simply avoid discussing it.<sup>30</sup>

If parties take up the issue, multidimensional competition follows three basic strategic clusters, depending on party choices with respect to issue dimensions, support or opposition to migration, and framing. First, parties have to decide the dimensional focus of their campaign. Odmalm (2011) suggests that parties are required to perform a delicate balancing strategy in order to avoid criticism from their competitors and adverse electoral outcomes. Emphasizing the wrong stream *within* the immigration issue, in other words, may detract attention from the parties' core competences and provide an advantage to their competitors. In this sense, each party has to choose whether to take up the same issue dimension as their competitors or rather try to shift the debate toward alternative aspects. If they mobilize alternative dimensions, their strategy is oriented at raising attention on aspects that they deem electorally rewarding, and/or diverting attention away from aspects on which their opponents enjoy an advantage. The goal is therefore to attract swing voters whose interests and values are not captured by the dimensional politicization of other candidates. This strategy is likely to be followed by

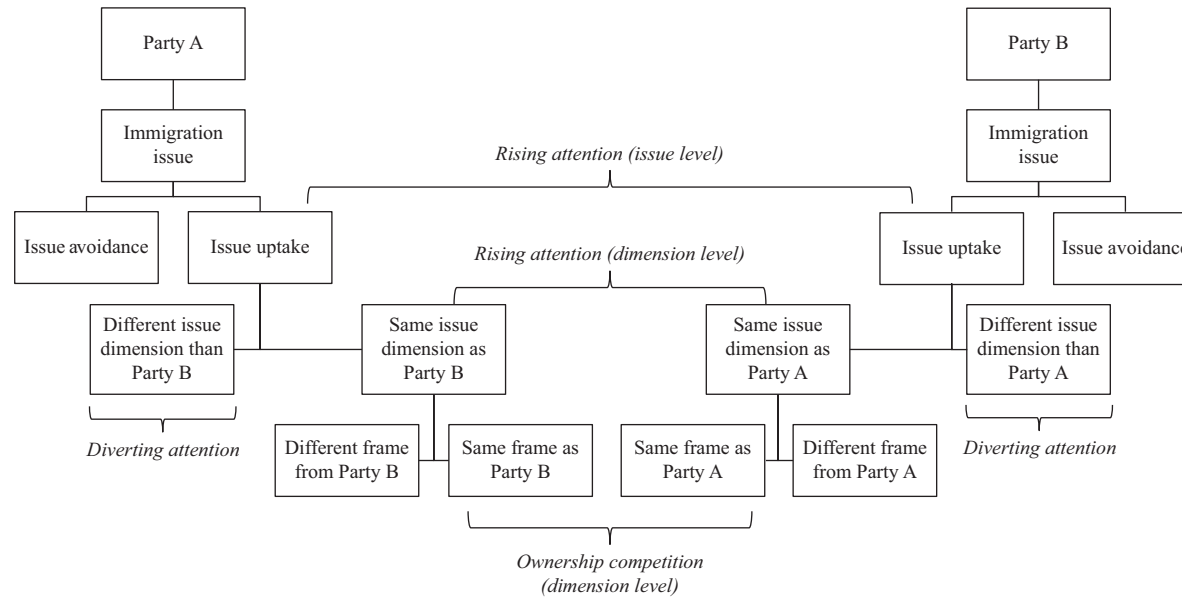


Figure 2.1 Dimensional and framing strategies of issue competition

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parties belonging to different camps (pro- and anti-immigration), or by parties within the same camp that prefer not to compete directly.

Alternatively, parties can focus on the same issue dimensions as their competitors, which can be done by taking up the same position or the opposite position of their counterparts. In either case, parties also have to decide on the specific arguments that they intend to mobilize in order to explain *why* a given aspect of immigration is emphasized, and *why* a certain position is taken. Similar to the previous stage, parties can mobilize a single frame or multiple frames, and have to decide whether to apply the same framing as their competitors or not. If they focus on different explanations, parties try to divert voters away from each other, persuading them that their own interpretation of a given aspect of immigration is preferable to that of the opponent. If they mobilize the same frames and the same dimensions as their competitors, parties directly challenge one another, offering the same interpretation of one aspect of the issue. In line with literature on valence issues (Green, 2007; Stokes, 1963, 1992) and issue ownership (Green-Pedersen, 2007; Petrocik, 1996), this strategy implies that parties compete primarily in terms of their competence on the immigration issue. In the present case, parties will set up their strategies based on the competence that they display on each aspect of the issue.

#### **Main hypotheses and expectations**

As I hope to have shown, my main proposition is that speaking of immigration politics writ large provides only a superficial image of electoral campaigning, since political conflict unfolds over multiple dimensions of migration. In so doing, I seek to specify the factors that influence the emergence of issue attributes and frames in electoral campaigns. I address the dynamics of electoral campaigning within an actor-centred political process model, in which all actors are part of a contest for the control of the public agenda and its interpretation of specific political issues (Wolfsfeld, 1997, 2011). The argument is therefore that public understandings of the migration issue emerging from electoral debates are not restricted to one single meaning, but change depending on the actors involved in the debate, the relationship between them and the circumstances defining their involvement. More specifically, I look at three levels in the definition of electoral strategies on the immigration issue: the context level, the campaign level and the actor level. In this section, I discuss the main expectations of the study for each of the three levels (the full list of hypotheses is reported in Table 2.2 at the end of the section).

My focus is primarily on political actors, i.e. on the actors who engage in electoral campaign events, and who provide the key informational input to it. Campaigns, however, are embedded in specific political contexts with institutional, cultural, issue-specific and campaign-specific features, which are decisive for the choices of competing candidates. Context conditions may affect debates in election campaigns in two ways (Koopmans *et al.*, 2005). On the one hand, debates may differ across contexts according to the opportunities and constraints in each electoral environment. Because of changing political opportunities related to each dimension of the migration issue, the same type of strategy by political actors



may have very different chances of gaining media attention and public legitimacy in election campaigns. On the other, the impact of contextual conditions may be indirect, via its effect on party predispositions, on the configuration of actors in the party system, and on other conditions pertaining to a specific campaign.

Odmalm and Bale (2014) suggest that party responses to immigration are not only driven by exogenous – environmental and societal – conditions, but also by intraparty constraints and by the dynamics of party competition, since endogenous and intermediate factors influence the way in which political actors respond to contextual circumstances (Morales *et al.*, 2014). Parties emphasize policy objects on which they expect to enjoy a strategic advantage, but debates may vary in terms of issue diversity (Hobolt *et al.*, 2008; Walgrave and Nuytemans, 2009), which is why dimensional priorities must be looked at in the light of the broader process of agenda setting competition. Accordingly, my model addresses factors at the contextual level, at the campaign level and at the party level, accounting for the composition of campaign agendas, the role of the different actors in an election campaign and each actor's stance on the immigration issue (Helbling *et al.*, 2010; Odmalm, 2012; Petrocik, 1996; Statham and Trenz, 2012).

First, I distinguish the context conditions that pre-structure electoral campaigns, such as the institutional setting, the media system, the discursive field (Steinberg, 1999) or discursive opportunity structure (Koopmans and Statham, 1999), and the more short-term circumstances that affect choices at the electoral campaign level. Other factors, such as the type of actors involved in a competition (Meguid, 2008), exogenous or unexpected events (Birkland, 1997), and changing public moods (Marcus *et al.*, 2000), might interact with the characteristics of the issue at stake and influence strategic choices. At this level, I argue that the three dimensions of the immigration issue identified in the previous section interact with local circumstances and issue-specific characteristics at the context level. Second, I look at how much leeway political actors have in attributing importance to immigration issue dimensions and in taking a position on these (Odmalm and Bale, 2014). While context conditions and campaign pressures are relevant in explaining their choices, one should also look at actors' ability to handle the multiple dimensions of the immigration issue. I therefore look at the electoral campaign level in order to identify the events and conditions that drive the selective emphasis and framing strategies of the competing parties. Thirdly, I consider each political actor taking part in the competition to assess the logics of their politicization strategies in terms of dimensional preferences and constraints. Figure 2.2 below summarizes the model.

At the first level, concerning context conditions, each setting is characterized by issue-specific conditions concerning the nature and socio-demographic features of local migration. Moreover, party actions can be explained by the institutional framework of competition, but also by the discursive opportunities and constraints determining which type of argument is likely to gain visibility in the media and achieve legitimacy in the public discourse (Koopmans and Statham, 1999). Of course, none of these factors is fully independent from the others, since the way in which the characteristics of the political context are translated into patterns of opportunity for political actors is inevitably related to the nature and features of the issue at stake.

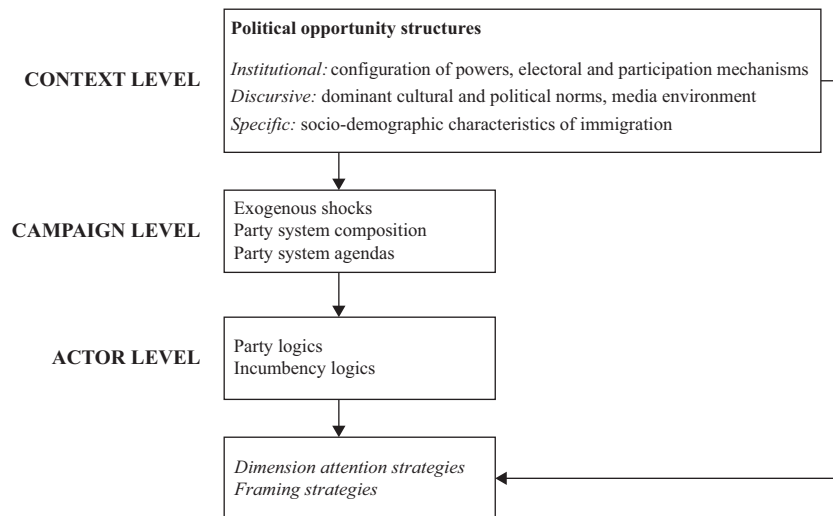


Figure 2.2 Framework for the analysis of electoral campaigning on immigration

At the second level, I account for temporal variation regarding issue attention and emphasis, looking at the impact of factors at the electoral campaign level on parties' electoral strategies and rationales. In particular, I consider the composition of the party system and the composition of party-system agendas. This is because in each election campaign political actors engage in continuous debates with each other, so that the content of party-system agendas also constrains the issue emphasis of individual parties (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2010, 2014; Hobolt *et al.*, 2008). Moreover, previous literature underlined the relevance of immigration shocks in driving public debates (for example, as a consequence of refugee crises, migrant tragedies, sensationalistic news stories), looking at critical junctures and the way in which parties respond to these in terms of pledges and positions (Odmalm and Bale, 2014). I consider this aspect in terms of focusing events, which are 'sudden; relatively uncommon; can be reasonably defined as harmful or revealing the possibility of potentially greater future harms; [its consequences] are concentrated in a particular geographical area or community of interest; and [are] known to policy makers and the public simultaneously' (Birkland, 1998, p. 54).

At the lower level, I account for the agency of campaign actors in terms of their own politicization strategies, since 'the relative roles of parties and movements in taking leadership roles in framing issues in the media is an important and understudied aspect' (Ferree *et al.*, 2002, p. 296). My focus is on how mayoral coalitions and parties handle issue dimensions based on the different types of pressures that apply to each issue aspect. Electoral strategies are therefore likely to emerge from the tension between party positions on each issue dimension, candidates' ideological orientation and the degree to which they are constrained to respond to

the pressures of their competitors. The next sections outline the hypotheses at the three different levels in detail.

### ***Context conditions***

Based on the assumption that the characteristics of national political landscapes affect the politicization of the migration issue, previous studies explained variation in immigration debates and attitudes according to variation in national contexts (Albertson and Gadarian, 2009; Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup, 2008; Ivarsflaten, 2008; Kitschelt, 1997; Rydgren, 2008; Thränhardt, 1995; van der Brug and van Spanje, 2009). By selecting three case studies that are most similar in terms of electoral system, media environment and institutional architecture, but that differ substantially in terms of regional or local conditions that can facilitate the mobilization of specific sub-dimensions of the immigration issue, I seek to do the same for the politicization of immigration in local arenas (Hopkins, 2007, 2010). The choice of the three local settings in Italy allows for minimizing the degree of variation in terms of institutional configuration while preserving substantial differences in specific local characteristics. The cities were carefully selected based on the composition of their migrant population and the corresponding key immigration problems. They differ systematically with respect to the dimension of migration that is expected to be crucial in electoral campaigns – economic in Prato (the local Chinese business community), cultural in Milan (the local Muslim community and the mosque issue) and law and order in Rome (the local Roma issue). This choice enables investigating the way in which different dimensions relate to electoral campaigning in each local setting.

The first expectation is that debates are shaped by the actual competences that local political actors possess in terms of migration affairs. As will be discussed more extensively in Chapter 3, Italian municipalities perform an important role in developing migration and integration legislation, in particular concerning the initial welcoming and sheltering of forced migrants. Moreover, local authorities hold important competences in the field of crime prevention and safeguarding public safety and urban security, with powers of injunction that apply to either extraordinary circumstances or routine regulations.<sup>31</sup> Given the importance of law and order among the responsibilities of local administrations, it is likely that similar aspects constitute the bulk of local debates on immigration. Accordingly, Chapter 4 investigates whether and why security aspects dominate local debates on migration more than any other aspect of migration (context hypothesis 1).<sup>32</sup>

Furthermore, I consider that political actors take into account – upon formulating their campaign strategies – the type of claims, pledges and demands that are most likely to be considered reasonable, realistic and legitimate in the context and at the time in which competition takes place. In particular, they will take into account the specific characteristics of migration at the local level, therefore focusing their attention on the aspects that have the most chances of achieving prominence in a given campaign. Accordingly, the mobilization of different dimensions of immigration can be the result of the available opportunities to mobilize on

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this issue, which differ across cities due to the characteristics and history of local migration. Social and economic aspects are crucial in an industrial city like Prato, where the demand for a cheap labour force has been the main drive of migration, and where the inflow and subsequent settlement of Chinese migrants represent a primary public concern. In Milan, debates are most likely to cluster around cultural and religious aspects of migration, since the Muslim population accounts for 40% of the total migrants in the city (Bombardieri, 2011; Rebessi, 2011). For years, the Islamic community demanded an official worship place but local authorities have been for a long time fully unresponsive to these calls. As for the case of Rome, securitized arguments are easy to mobilize, since urban security is often a salient aspect in large metropolitan areas. Discursive opportunities for law and order, moreover, have to do with the fact that Rome hosts one of the largest community of Romani people in Italy, which policy-makers almost exclusively tackle in terms of emergency and public order. In sum, I expect that the characteristics of the migrant population and the history of migration in each city influences the resonance of different types of argumentations across local settings, providing competing actors with varying sets of discursive opportunities (context hypothesis 2).

#### ***Campaign conditions***

In terms of electoral campaign factors, variation is primarily interpreted as the result of migration shocks, in line with one of the main approaches in the study of party competition on the immigration issue (see: Mudde, 2004; Odmalm and Bale, 2014). First, changes have to do with the composition of party systems, such as in the case of emerging radical right parties.<sup>33</sup> Second, migration shocks refer to other factors such as increasing migration pressures, refugee and asylum seeker crises, changing levels of media attention and unexpected or focusing events, forcing political actors to increase attention to migration (Carvalho, 2013; Odmalm and Bale, 2014; Walgrave and Varone, 2006). Accordingly, campaign-level factors influence the composition of the party-system agenda, which has to be distinguished from the individual strategies of political actors aiming at influencing agenda contents. In agenda setting literature, the composition of agendas at the party-system level is crucial, since it constrains the issue emphasis of all actors involved in the campaign (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2010). Being composed of a hierarchy of issues, party-system agendas force individual parties to allocate attention according to this hierarchy, even as parties compete on its future content (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2014).

The first campaign-level hypothesis, therefore, has to do with the role of party-system agendas. In terms of issue dimensions, migration agendas describe the relative importance of each aspect of the issue at any given time, at the party-system level. In line with the above mechanism, parties must address the issue dimensions that are prominent in the agenda, while they compete to influence the dimensional composition of the agenda in the future. Hence, if the pressure of party-system agendas prevails over each party's individual preferences, party choices should differ more for the same party between elections than across

parties within a single election campaign (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2010). In other words, dimensional choices of any party at any given point in time will be relatively more similar to the allocation of attention of any other party in that context at that time, than to its own in another context or at another point in time (H1).

The remaining hypotheses at the campaign level anticipate that electoral debates focus on migration, and display high anti-immigration tones, when at least one independent radical right actor runs for office, and when a migration-related focusing event lends itself to be exploited by strategic-minded actors. Concerning the first aspect, previous research suggested that the increased salience of an issue pushes the position of mainstream parties in the direction of the position of the party owning the issue (Green-Pedersen *et al.*, 2013). In other words, parties adjust their policy positions on immigration to substantial changes in the political context in which they are operating, so that the presence of radical right actors leads to right-wing, anti-immigration shifts in debates (Van Spanje, 2010). Accordingly, the more important the immigration issue writ large is, the more the other actors in the competition will adapt their positions to the ones of the issue owner. I therefore anticipate that campaigns involving independent radical right challengers will be characterized by more emphasis on, and more negative tones about, the migration issue (H2a). In addition, I will test whether this rationale applies to dimensional competition on migration. In view of the considerations mentioned above, I expect that issue owners influence the choices of selective emphasis of the other parties in the system. If the presence of radical right actors shifts the general debate towards the position preferred by the radical right, then it is reasonable to anticipate that electoral debates might also shift towards the aspects of the immigration issue most preferred by the radical right (H2b).

The third campaign-level factor has to do with the presence of migration-related focusing events, which influence the behaviour of political actors by opening windows of opportunity to politicize aspects that – otherwise – could not gain public visibility. Similar junctures, in other words, have the potential to transform low-salience matters into concrete problems (Birkland, 2001). This mechanism takes into account that the definition of public problems can change over time because of changing media coverage of the issues connected to the focusing event's subject matter (Birkland, 2001; Kingdon, 1995). In line with Birkland's classification of focusing event types (Birkland, 1997, p. 147), I focus on crime-related events since these are often very powerful in driving media attention and policy change. In particular, I expect to find a link between the relative importance of security considerations and the occurrence of crime stories which fit in the category of 'common events under uncommon circumstances',<sup>34</sup> as these enjoy great newsworthiness due to their unusual features and sensationalistic tones (H3).

### ***Party conditions***

I look at party strategies from the point of view of issue and dimensional preferences and the constraints that they face when deciding whether to focus on specific issue aspects rather than others. Party choices are analyzed in terms of

attention to the immigration issue as a whole, dimensional emphasis, positions and framing. In addition, I also address electoral debates by comparing parties' 'ideal agendas' – corresponding to the preferences emphasized at the beginning of the campaign within election manifestos – and 'tactical agendas' – emerging from media reports of the election campaign. First, I discuss the hypotheses that have to do with party logics and ideological preferences, and then the expectations on the potential constraints that parties face upon choosing their strategies of selective emphasis (structural and incumbency disadvantage logics).

In terms of party logics, the assumption is that the ultimate goal of any political actor is to convince the public of a specific interpretation of the social reality. Accordingly, it is reasonable to expect that the argumentations parties mobilize, whether for or against immigration, must somehow resonate with the broader ideological understanding of the party (Statham and Trenz, 2012). Similar ideological commitments are generally plotted along left–right scales, in which cosmopolitan and social security aspects characterize the left while nationalism and free-market liberalism characterize the right (Helbling, 2013; Knutsen, 1995, 2006). This is because although the immigration issue can be rightfully considered as a valence question when mainstream parties tend to agree on the general policy direction (Odmalm and Bale, 2014), it remains very ideologically loaded when it comes to its multiple issue dimensions. The mobilization of different issue aspects of the broad migration phenomenon may trigger tensions not only along the left–right axis but also within each party family. On the one hand, in fact, immigration puts in question the dilemma between cultural conservatism and market liberalism within mainstream right-wing parties; on the other, it contraposes left-wing parties concerned with the risk of splitting the working classes, with reformed left parties that address migration primarily as a fundamental human right (Bale, 2008; Odmalm and Bale, 2014). As a result, the choice of mainstream and radical parties to approach the immigration issue in terms of, for example, market economy rather than cultural and labour market protectionism, yields important implications for party behaviour and electoral competition.

Looking at migration in its entirety, the main expectations therefore follow traditional comparative research on issue politicization on the left–right scale (Alonso and Claro da Fonseca, 2009). Right-wing parties are generally advantaged in immigration debates: on the one hand, radical right actors offer overtly xenophobic discourses and build their electoral appeal on unconditional opposition to immigration; on the other hand, mainstream right-wing actors<sup>35</sup> exploit the nationalistic tendencies of their electorates (Bale, 2003; Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup, 2008; Ivarsflaten, 2008). Although the 'logic of defence' (Garner, 2005, p. 133) characterized mainstream right positions long before anti-immigration parties appeared (Bale, 2008), centre-right parties often exploit the presence of radical right actors in order to address immigration in ways that traditionally were more closely associated with the extreme rather than the mainstream (Bale, 2003). This is particularly the case in those countries, like Italy, where the centre and more right-wing parties cooperate or have recently cooperated to form governments. In short, I expect the radical, but also the centre-right, to emphasize the immigration issue the most, accounting for its increased salience over time (H4).

According to this literature, the mainstream left can adopt two possible strategies in response: it can opt to ignore the issue altogether, minimizing the attention to this issue and signalling its lack of importance (a strategy which has been called ‘dismissive’ by Meguid, 2008), or it can decide to include the issue in its agenda. Previous studies have illustrated that the latter strategy was followed by the French left, as a result of the shift of their traditional electorate towards Le Pen in 1986 (Meguid, 2005). Moreover, it has been suggested that the adoption of the immigration issue by centre-left parties takes place when the challenge of a new issue or new actor becomes manifest, and in particular, when an anti-immigration actor contributes to centre-right governments taking office (Bale *et al.*, 2010; see also: Van Spanje, 2010). It is therefore reasonable to expect that the mainstream left engages in competition over immigration when the issue becomes salient in an electoral campaign (H5).

Concerning dimensional emphasis, left-wing parties are generally expected to adopt more liberal views than their right-wing counterparts do and to seek to improve the social conditions of migrants as well as to extend their cultural rights (Andall, 2007a; Lahav, 2004). Bale *et al.* (2010) suggest that although a ‘principled’ strategy would entail openly making the case for tolerance of migration and multiculturalism, the substance, form and pace of the response of left-wing parties has been far from uniform (Bale *et al.*, 2010, p. 423). In particular, the abandonment of progressive welfare policies by established parties of the left has led to their gradual shift towards restrictive immigration policies (Andall, 2007a, 2007b; Lahav, 2004; Messina, 1990, 2002). For the Italian case, scholars tend to agree that the mainstream left could – at least in theory – adopt open stances on cultural tolerance and the inclusion of migrants in the labour market without having to deal with strong fears of ‘social dumping’ among its constituencies (Chaloff, 2005; Massetti, 2014). As a result, left-wing parties are likely to address immigration primarily in terms of cultural and economic arguments (H6a). More specifically, in line with previous studies on framing choices, left-wing parties are expected to frame their arguments primarily in terms of multiculturalism and labour and security frames, which correspond to their cosmopolitan and labour protectionist ideas (Helbling, 2013).

Conversely, security discourse is likely to be the primary argument on the right side of the political spectrum. Over the past decades, centre-right parties have often helped to prime the radical right’s law and order agenda, stressing the supposedly over-generous treatment of foreign immigrants (Bale, 2003), mobilizing the feelings of insecurity among their followers, and referring in particular to crime issues (Helbling, 2013; Mudde, 2007) (H6b). In the Italian context, right-wing parties often ground these arguments on emergency logics, which tend to depict immigration-related problems as unexpected and immigration in general as a temporary phenomenon (Chaloff, 2005).<sup>36</sup> Given that opposition to immigration is one of the primary political activities for radical right parties, these parties mobilize on multiple aspects that could be used to oppose immigration (Helbling, 2013), including crime and security, cultural diversity and the erosion of the welfare state (H6c). In this sense, next to law and order, radical right parties mobilize nationalistic frames when debating the cultural dimension, and labour and social

security ones to stress the trade-off between national and immigrant welfare and employment (De Lange, 2007).

Party choices, however, do not depend exclusively on party ideological preferences, but also on the constraints that parties are subject to in any election campaign. In particular, I account for the competence of parties on immigration affairs and their role as incumbents or challengers in election campaigns. Concerning the first element, previous research underlined that selective emphasis is the tool by which parties try to activate valence decision frameworks on given policy issues, i.e. the tool by which parties select aspects that connect them with good government performance (Budge and Fairlie, 1983; De Sio, 2010; Green, 2007). The degree to which they are able to divert attention to their most favourable issue attribute, however, depends on their degree of competence. Issue owners are able to focus on the issue dimension on which they are considered most competent, whereas their opponents will be forced to take a position on that issue dimension rather than divert attention to other – potentially more beneficial – aspects.

Accordingly, actors enjoying a reputation on migration affairs will be more able to focus on their own issue dimensions than on the ones mobilized by their competitors, whereas disadvantaged parties will be more subject to the pressure of their competitors' attention profiles (structural disadvantage logics). In general, mainstream right parties are advantaged in these types of debates, alongside radical right actors that managed to play the immigration card, while mainstream left parties are seen as the most vulnerable actors when it comes to immigration (Alonso and Claro da Fonseca, 2009; Arzheimer, 2009). This implies that right-wing parties should be more able to focus on their preferred dimensions, whilst left-wing actors will be more likely to change their distribution of attention in favour of the issue dimensions politicized by their opponents (H7). Similarly, structural disadvantage logics might explain the difference between parties' ideal agendas (corresponding to the preferences emphasized at the beginning of the campaign within election manifestos) and tactical agendas (which instead result from the interaction with the media, ongoing events and political competitors). Although ideal agendas cannot be considered fully isolated from anticipations of media reactions, it is reasonable to expect that actors enjoying a reputation on immigration affairs get easier access to the media than weaker actors. Chapter 7 addresses this dynamics in detail, testing whether and why the immigration issue is overrepresented in the media for mainstream right and radical right parties compared to all other actors (H8).

Moreover, one should account for whether an actor runs as incumbent or challenger (incumbency disadvantage logics). This is especially so in local electoral campaigns with high degrees of personalization, two main coalitions and enhanced electoral accountability. Previous studies suggested that the immigration issue as a whole is more attractive to parties in opposition than to those in office (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2010), because while government parties are held responsible for all policy sectors, opposition parties can focus selectively on advantageous issues, and hold incumbents accountable over immigration affairs. More generally, research has noted that the agenda setting strategies of opposition parties are likely to put pressure on the allocation of attention by incumbent



actors (Hobolt *et al.*, 2008). Challenger parties have incentives to introduce new elements in public debates and/or reframing existing ones, since changing the nature of the debates may jeopardize the campaign of the actors in government and enable them to win office. In order to stay in power, governing parties, in turn, are compelled to respond to the elements brought in by the opposition parties through their manipulative strategies (Klingemann *et al.*, 1994; Riker, 1986; Walgrave and Nuytemans, 2009). As opposition actors are more able to exert an influence on the party-system agenda, they will be more able than governing ones to focus on favourable issue dimensions and frames. Conversely, as government parties are more responsive to party-system agendas, they will focus relatively more on the issue dimensions of their opponents (H9). Similarly, due to incumbency disadvantage logics, challenger parties may force incumbents to take up the issue and issue dimensions in the course of the election campaign. Hence, one may expect the difference between the salience of immigration in electoral manifestos and the media to be higher for incumbents than for challengers, since incumbents are more subject to campaign-specific constraints (H10).

### Conclusive remarks

This chapter presented and discussed the main theoretical traits driving my analysis of the politicization of migration across multiple issue dimensions in local electoral campaigns in Italy. As I have illustrated, researchers in this field increasingly agree on the need to open the black box of policy issues, disaggregating the separate elements that make up complex political issues in order to improve the understanding of issue politicization. In this sense, rather than viewing issues and partisan strategies of mobilization as one-dimensional, I propose to take into account the complexity of political debates, analysing how the separate aspects of issues are taken up, contextualized and framed in partisan and media agendas.

I suggest that practices and efforts aimed at manipulating the electoral agenda may vary depending on the features of the issue at stake, since political decisions tend to encompass a multiplicity of dimensions of choice. This is because when parties are confronted with complex policy issues, they do not only choose whether they will address an issue in the electoral campaign, but they can also decide which aspects of that issue they want to highlight, and how. Beyond competition over saliency of policy issues, electoral actors interact with one another on the basis of issue dimensions, positions and interpretations. In other words, they act strategically in order to shift the focus of debates to dimensions and understandings of immigration over which they presume to be more credible than their rivals are. Accordingly, I identify a number of conditions – at the context, campaign and party levels – that are likely to drive the choices of politicization by competing political actors (Table 2.2).

As I will illustrate in the next chapters, this approach provides valuable insights for the study of campaigning. Firstly, it suggests that the scholarly understanding of the construction of public agendas must be refined. A comprehensive account of political conflict in electoral campaigns requires analysing not only partisan

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strategies *across* issues, but also strategies of politicization *within* issues, i.e. the strategies that parties adopt toward issues that they cannot avoid or cannot afford to dismiss. Secondly, this framework offers an innovative interpretation of the study of electoral campaigning, combining issue competition explanations and framing approaches to the construction of public debates. Third, this model suggests that variation in the composition, framing and tone of local electoral debates depends on a combination of conditions, opportunities and factors at three levels of analysis. Accordingly, the next chapters shall address the interrelated roles of the individual strategies of the actors involved, the characteristics of each electoral campaign and the socio-contextual features of the setting where competition takes place.

Table 2.2 Overview of the hypotheses

<i>Context level</i>
<i>Electoral debates are influenced by the actual competences of local administrators</i>
<i>Electoral debates are influenced by the characteristics of local immigration</i>
<i>Campaign level</i>
<i>The party-system agenda</i>
<b>H1:</b> <i>Dimensional choices are more similar across parties at a given time, than within parties across time</i>
<i>The agenda setting role of the radical right</i>
<b>H2a:</b> <i>Campaigns involving independent radical right actors will be characterized by more emphasis and more restrictive positions on immigration</i>
<b>H2b:</b> <i>Campaigns involving independent radical right actors will focus on the issues upon which the radical right mobilizes the most</i>
<i>Focusing events</i>
<b>H3:</b> <i>The salience of immigration and the relative salience of immigration dimensions are influenced by the presence of focusing events</i>
<i>Party level</i>
<i>Party logics</i>
<b>H4:</b> <i>The radical right and the mainstream right emphasize the immigration issue the most</i>
<b>H5:</b> <i>The mainstream left engages in immigration debates when the issue is salient in the election campaign</i>
<b>H6a:</b> <i>Left-wing parties tend to address immigration in terms of cultural and religious aspects and economic arguments</i>
<b>H6b:</b> <i>Right-wing parties tend to prioritize the security over the cultural and the economic dimensions</i>
<b>H6c:</b> <i>Radical right parties mobilize on all three issue dimensions</i>
<i>Structural disadvantage logics</i>
<b>H7:</b> <i>Right-wing actors are more able to focus on their preferred issue dimensions; left-wing actors are more likely to change their distribution of attention</i>
<b>H8:</b> <i>The immigration issue is overrepresented in the media for mainstream right and radical right parties compared to all other actors</i>
<i>Incumbency disadvantage logics</i>
<b>H9:</b> <i>Opposition parties are more able than governing parties to focus on their preferred issue dimensions and frames</i>
<b>H10:</b> <i>The difference in attention profiles in electoral manifestos and the media is higher for incumbents than for challengers</i>

## Notes

- 1 In fact, distinguishing between immigration and immigrant politics often implies overlooking other aspects of public discourse. Previous research illustrated that this distinction is particularly difficult to ‘unpack’ in empirical terms, since incorporation arguments are often used by governments to deter new migrant entries (Lahav and Guiraudon, 2006, p. 208), whilst the distinction between international security and social fear has become increasingly thin (Buonfino, 2004). In this sense, I am interested in disentangling the various kinds of problems and opportunities that political actors address upon debating migration, rather than focusing on the differentiation between stages of policy implicit in the integration/immigration distinction.
- 2 This choice is the most appropriate for a study on strategic framing in electoral campaigns, but it is different from the one of comparative studies focusing simultaneously on multiple issues, or studying relatively long time periods (Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart, 2009; Helbling, 2013; Roggeband and Vliegenthart, 2007). These studies generally make use of what de Vreese *et al.* (2001, pp. 108–110) and de Vreese (2005) call ‘generic frames’ (as opposed to ‘issue-specific’ ones), which correspond to more general descriptions of a reality (or news), and are broadly applicable to a range of news topics, over time, and potentially in different cultural contexts. This is not to say that generic frames are unable to yield useful insights. However, they are more useful to advance theories of framing and framing effects in the field of communication than they are for a study on competition strategies in electoral campaigning.
- 3 The terms ‘inductive’ and ‘deductive’ are used to refer to frame extraction only and not to refer to the general epistemological orientation of the study. Inductive strategies imply that frames are generated as a result of the analysis rather than being (theoretically) derived beforehand. A deductive strategy would have implied that pre-defined frames are coded and that no new frames are generated (Matthes and Kohring, 2008).
- 4 For each claim, moreover, I further specify the directional nature, which allows accounting for the direction of the relationship between each dimension and frame and the immigration issue.
- 5 Pragmatic frames are present when positions are supported by arguments stressing the ability of proposals to reach a certain goal or interest. Identity frames focus on community-specific features, ideas and values as justifications. Finally, moral-universal frames have to do with universal standards of justice that are supposedly shared by everyone across and beyond community-based and individual interests.
- 6 ‘I nuovi cittadini dimenticati’, in *La Repubblica*, 17/04/2011
- 7 ‘Immigrati, due visioni a confronto’, in *Il Tirreno*, 10/06/2004
- 8 Some authors claim that pro-migration utilitarian reasoning may even rely upon unequal treatment of immigrants, suggesting that ‘economic utility and humanitarian need are alternative and competing models’ in the definition of the immigration discourse (Bauder, 2007, p. 109).
- 9 ‘L’ultima leggenda finti rom in metrò’, in *Il Giorno*, 17/04/2011.
- 10 ‘Milone e Bini rilanciano: “Ci sono quarantamila clandestini”’, in *Il Tirreno*, 31/05/2009.
- 11 ‘Comunali, lista in rosa nella “Sinistra per Pisapia”’, in *Il Giorno*, 05/04/2011.
- 12 ‘Sedute di giunta pubbliche’, in *Il Tirreno*, 14/05/2009.
- 13 ‘La Vanoni si candida per la Moratti’, in *Il Giorno*, 04/04/2011.
- 14 ‘Taiti e Bernocchi: la città è satura’ in *Il Tirreno*, 10/06/2004.
- 15 ‘Magdi Allam e Shaari sfida sull’immigrazione’, in *La Repubblica*, 10/04/2011.
- 16 ‘Sull’immigrazione un’ondata di follia’, in *Il Tirreno*, 11/06/2009.
- 17 ‘Un parco intorno alle mura’, in *Il Tirreno*, 09/06/2004.
- 18 ‘Sull’immigrazione un’ondata di follia’, in *Il Tirreno*, 11/06/2009.
- 19 ‘Caro Cenni, ma cosa è successo?’, in *Il Tirreno*, 19/06/2009.

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- 20 In fact, the protection of individuals' safety is not intended exclusively in terms of the host population, but it can also address a larger category including migrants themselves. As suggested by Caviedes (2015), security in immigration discourse is also mobilized to depict migrants as victims of dangerous and instable social environments.
- 21 'I romani si sentono insicuri', in *Il Messaggero*, 10/04/2008.
- 22 'Concerto per l'immigrazione', in *La Repubblica*, 30/04/2006.
- 23 Yet, the media and political actors involved in electoral campaigning often use the category 'Roma people' to refer to numerous non-Romani groups, including stateless persons of presumably Balkan origin, as well as Romanian citizens in general (Sigona, 2008).
- 24 'Lega: Mandiamo via I nomadi dalla città', in *Il Giorno*, 18/05/2006.
- 25 'Una messinscena elettorale dopo il boicottaggio fallito', in *La Repubblica*, 03/05/2011.
- 26 The vast majority of claims mobilizing egalitarian understandings of immigration used moral-universalistic arguments and referred primarily to multiculturalist aspects (rather than security). Whenever appropriate, therefore, I categorized these frames in the cultural dimension.
- 27 'Il sindaco incassa il sostegno del Pid', *Il Giorno*, 19/05/2011.
- 28 'Bagno di folla e ovazioni per Silvio', in *Il Tirreno*, 03/06/2009.
- 29 In this sense, the distinction between 'priming' and 'framing' effects may help elucidate the difference between issue dimensions and issue framing. Unlike studies on priming, which deal with the outcomes of agenda setting processes (Scheufele, 2000, p. 306), framing studies do not focus exclusively on what people talk or think about, but also on how they think and talk about political issues (Pan and Kosicki, 1993, p. 70). Similarly, in their discussion on the construction of public opinion on Europe, Hooghe and Marks (2009) distinguish between strategies of political entrepreneurs oriented at priming (making a consideration salient) and framing (connecting a particular consideration to a political object).
- 30 Of course, the extent of this varies across context, campaigns and settings. Morales *et al.* (2014) show that, although mainstream Spanish parties had started to incorporate the issue in their pattern of electoral competition, migration virtually disappeared from debates in the 2011 elections in Spain, when issues related to the economic crisis absorbed most of the attention. On the contrary, the scenario in Greece is quite different, since the economic crisis did not seem to drive attention away from migration issues (Tampakoglou, 2014).
- 31 In 2010, the regional administrative tribunal of Veneto contested the constitutional legitimacy of the articles of the Italian law on local administration (D.Lgs 267/2000) granting extensive powers of mayors in terms of the management of public order.
- 32 In particular, previous accounts on the development of the concept of 'urban security' as a distinctive policy field underline its connection to processes of urbanization and internal and external migration (Calaresu, 2013; Italia, 2010; Regione Piemonte, 2012).
- 33 For a definition of the way in which I use the concept of 'radical right' and an overview of the terminological debate on this issue, see Chapter 1 in this volume, and Mudde (2000, 2007); Ignazi (1992, 2003); Kitschelt (1995); Minkenberg (2007). Chapter 1 also presents a detailed discussion of the categorization of mainstream and radical parties and the conceptual implications of this terminological choice.
- 34 This type of events stand out, in terms of newsworthiness, compared to other types included in Birklands' classification, most notably normal events such as natural occurrences, and new events that have never happened before (Birkland, 1997).
- 35 Following Meguid's definition, by 'mainstream parties' we mean the electorally dominant actors in the centre-left and in the centre-right blocs of the left-right political spectrum (2005, p. 348). Given the increasingly bipolar nature of Italian politics, especially at the local level, the empirical chapters use indifferently the terms 'centre-right'

(‘centre-left’) and ‘mainstream right’ (‘mainstream left’). The research design section in Chapter 1 offers a broader discussion of this and other terminological choices in the selection and definition of party families.

36 Yet, this strategy has also been pursued by left-wing parties; see: Massetti (2014).

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### 3 Local politics, migration and integration in Italy

#### Migration to Italy: an overview

##### *From emigration to immigration*

Research on the politics of migration in Europe has overwhelmingly devoted itself to traditional immigration destinations like Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and France, which have experienced large-scale migration since the 1950s and 1960s. Far less attention has been devoted to countries in Southern Europe, which have only more recently become host societies, but are increasingly concerned by international migration, as every year thousands of people drown in the waters between Africa and Italy. As the ongoing refugee crisis demonstrates, Italy today plays a crucial role in the migration route to Europe, and events taking place on the Mediterranean have played a fundamental role in shaping public debates on migration. Today, Italy is at the core of the military patrol operations launched by the EU in the Mediterranean with the claimed goal of preventing further migration tragedies and of detecting illegal immigrants, and the regular migrant 'crises' experienced in its southern regions are customarily and widely addressed by the news media and national political actors.

Colombo and Sciortino report that immigration to Italy is commonly described as a 'new' phenomenon (2004, p. 49). The novelty refers not only to the beginning of the influx, generally held to coincide with the oil crisis of the early 1970s (when Italy's balance of migration became positive), but also to the difference between *old* and *new* types of immigration. Previously, Italy was a prominent example of classical migration flows: first, massive emigration took place in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, mainly towards the Americas, followed by a smaller but still significant wave in the aftermath of World War II, when hundreds of thousands of Italians moved to the industrialized countries of Northern Europe as labour migrants. Since then the in- and outflow of migration has reversed, transforming Italy from a net emigration country into a net immigration destination. The shift has been attributed to push factors in the sending countries, such as conflicts and poverty (Maciotti and Pugliese, 1991), as well as the development of restrictions on immigration in the older immigration destinations, which had the unintended effect of transforming Southern European countries into second-best choices for international migrants (Pugliese, 2002).