

The 'Normalisation' of the Protester. Changes in Political Action in Italy (1981-2009)*

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Abstract

Authors claim that political protest is 'normal' in contemporary democracies which are, therefore, 'social movement societies'. This article analyses the Italian case showing that there has been an expansion and a gradual institutionalisation of political protest, but it also tests whether there has been a 'normalisation' of the protester. It is argued that in a 'social movement society' protesters are more heterogeneous than in the past. Using survey data spanning over 30 years we find that the association between several individual characteristics and participation in political protest weakens or disappears. However, a complete normalisation of the protester has yet to be completed.

Keywords: Normalisation of Protest, Social Movement Society, Political Action, Individual Political Protest, Italy.

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Introduction

Since the 1990s several authors have maintained that Western democracies are becoming 'social movement societies' where protest actions are more common and, therefore, 'normal' (Meyer & Tarrow 1998; Van Aelst & Walgrave 2001). From the 1960s the unconventional expressions of political dissent started to be understood as rational instruments to promote social change, not a sign of the irrationality of the 'crowds' (Rucht 2007). Political protest seems to be common in Italy as well. Citizens mobilise every other day to protest against (or in favour) new civil rights, budgetary cuts, wars, protection of the environment, immigration, abortion, globalisation, multinational firms and so on. For these reasons, it could be argued that in Italy protest politics has become 'normal'. Several sources indicate that the Italian democracy has the characteristics of a 'social movement society'. There has been an expansion of protest politics in terms of quality and quantity since the 1960s and the forms of political protest have become more institutionalised.

In this article, we show that Italy has the characteristics of a social movement society, but we also investigate the 'normalisation' of the protester (Van Aelst & Walgrave 2001). In fact, the 'social movement society' thesis affirms that, together with an aggregate expansion and toleration of protest, we should also find that the citizens participating in protest actions do not have peculiar characteristics: they are heterogeneous. Many have shown that in Italy protest has changed over the years, from radical to more institutionalised, but less attention has been drawn to the characteristics of the protester. Therefore, we ask: are the individual characteristics still relevant to understand participation in political protest in Italy? We argue that, if the normalisation argument is correct, we should find that, over time, the association between individual characteristics and participation in protest actions weakens. Otherwise, the normalisation of protester has yet to be completed. If the protesters are 'normal' it means that there has been a social diffusion of political protest, that protest has gained legitimisation (Meyer & Tarrow 1998). In a few words, that political protest is more conventional, accepted and, therefore, can be an alternative to traditional forms of political participation (Crozat 1998).

In the next section we illustrate the argument according to which protest politics has become normal in contemporary democracies. In addition, we show that, on the aggregate level, political protest actions are more frequent than before in Italy and that they are accepted by institutional politics. Later, we review the main approaches to the study of individual participation in protest politics. Then, we present the methods and the data we use, which allow testing our hypotheses over a time span of almost 30 years. Eventually, we present and discuss the findings.

The Normalisation of Protest in Italy. Towards a Social Movement Society?

It is argued that political protest has become 'normal' in contemporary democracies (Van Aelst & Walgrave 2001) which are, therefore, 'social movements societies' (Meyer & Tarrow 1998). This implies that the repertoire of political action has expanded over the years going further beyond electoral politics, that the groups involved in such political activities are less identifiable, that the state is more prone to accept this form of political participation. Accordingly, political protest and social movements actions are no longer seen as a threat to the political system but a different way of voicing discontent and opposition, taking stands on issues or making proposals.

The social movement society and the normalisation of protest arguments have some key points (Meyer & Tarrow 1998). First, it is argued that political protest changes from being a sporadic, episodic and irregular form of political engagement to being routinised, predictable and continuous. Second, in a social movement society political protest is characterised by diffusion to new constituents. Societal groups that in the past would not join protest actions are more likely to get involved in the present. The 'average' protesters are no longer radicals, unionised workers or student activists, but are 'normal' citizens with varying social characteristics, political values and orientations (Van Aelst & Walgrave 2001). Third, political protest is a form of action that is becoming more institutionalised, accepted and, therefore, conventional (Croizat 1998; Dalton 2008). Furthermore, the state is more prone to accept political protest than in the past: instead of enforcing public order, the state now seeks for the protesters' informal cooperation so to limit the unexpected consequences of protest actions (Della Porta 1995).

Meyer and Tarrow (1998, pp. 9 and ff.) attribute these changes to two complex sets of mechanisms. The first concerns sociological and cultural factors: the increase in education and in the access to media. The larger access to education for newer generations did not translate into better job opportunities, and this made well-educated to be more likely to protest to express their dissatisfaction. Also, the content of education changed to more general subjects that eased the acceptance of postmaterialist values which are associated with participation in protest. Media helped the diffusion of contentious politics because they teach how protest actions can be mounted, and can be successful, and they provide information about the routines of protest. The second set of mechanisms concerns the professionalisation and institutionalisation of movements. After the peak of mobilisation in the 1960s, movements kept the organisational structure which turned them into organisations providing an indirect form of representation. This also made them more predictable, but able to be tolerated and trusted. In fact, ordinary citizens are more likely to join protest actions when they know the risk of participation. Some data show that Italy may be a social movement society. In fact, in 1981 those who attended a demonstration were 26 per cent, while 38 per cent in 2009. Those who signed a petition were 41 per cent in 1981 and about 51 per cent in 2009, while those who boycotted a

product rose consistently: from about 6 per cent in 1981 to about 13 per cent in 2009. Also more intense forms of political action, such as non-authorised strikes and occupations of buildings or factories, are undertaken by many more citizens in 2009 than in 1981 (see table 1). The number of protest events has also increased over the years. According to the European Protest and Coercion Data (Francisco 2000), in 1980 the number of demonstrations was eight, while it reached 66 and 60 in, respectively, 1994 and 1995; the number of marches¹ was three in 1980 and 23 in 1995. The 'State of Security' report by the Italian Ministry of the Interior shows that the total number of demonstration between the first semester of 2000 and the first semester of 2005 increased from about 1,800 to more than 4,000 (Ministero dell'Interno 2005).

These data confirm what the literature has shown about the change of political protest in Italy over more than 40 years. Briefly, in the 1960s and 1970s the absence of political reforms after a period of relative prosperity, the inefficient institutional setting, the lack of political representation for some social groups, such as the students, and the delegitimisation of trade unions produce a wave of great mobilisation (Tarrow 1989; Ginsborg 2006). The difficulty in introducing political reforms in a fast changing society and the opening of some political opportunities, such as formation of the first centre-left coalition governments and the transition towards a mature capitalism, create the conditions for the growth of protest movements. In these years coercive measures of controlling protest actions are normal and, at the same time, a limited amount of violence and violation of rules are deemed as necessary by protest groups to oppose the state repression (Della Porta 1998). In this decade, some 'new' forms of political engagement see the light in Italy. The repertoire of political action expands to what is called 'unconventional' political participation: petitioning, leafleting, sit-ins, obstructions, and occupations of buildings (Kaase & Marsh 1979).

The end of the 1970s represents the conclusion of a protest cycle. The following decade seems to be characterised by a 'moderation' of protest politics (Reiter et al. 2007), accompanied by a partial institutionalisation and a decline in violence (Della Porta 1995). The protest movements start to be more interested in specific issues, they become pragmatic and more compromiser. In fact, an improved economic situation, the victory over terrorism, the weakness of trade unions, the growth of political dissatisfaction and the emergence of the 'new left' bring protest movements to focus on single and specific issues rather than making general political claims (Lodi 1984). Activist groups try to be more institutionalised by entering electoral politics, cooperating with left parties and refusing the use of violence (Della Porta 1995). In this period the 'new social movements' emerge, such as the environmental movement (Diani 1988) and of the justice movement (Reiter et al. 2007).

The 1990s witness another change. The collapse of the Italian party system dra-

¹The dataset collects events from newspapers. In the dataset a 'protest gathering that generally moves short distances or focuses on a specific target' is coded as a demonstration, while a 'group movement from one point to another for a political reason' is coded as a march (Francisco 2000).

matically reduces the role of parties, in particular those on the extremes, in mobilising protest. Grass-roots organisations become the mobilisers of political protest (Reiter et al. 2007) and mainly focus on the redistribution of resources, equality, civil rights, development and globalisation. Between the 1990s and 2000s political protest actions are instruments to make public claims against the current—and global—state of affairs (Della Porta et al. 2006). Examples of this turn are the ‘Social forums’ held in Genoa in 2001 and in Florence in 2003 which serve as bases to organise the galaxy of groups opposing some events, such as the G8 or the Iraqi war, or reforms, such as the modification of the workers’ statute of rights. During the 1990s the control of protest actions diversifies depending on the type of protesters. Negotiation and cooperation is used when the protesters are groups belonging to institutional politics, such as unions and parties, while deterrence with large police presence is used with unpredictable groups, such as the *autonomi* (Della Porta 1998).

Later, the Italian movements focus more on local issues (Caruso 2010). Citizens appear to be more embedded in local organisations which have local interests, such as the opposition to the high-speed train track in Val di Susa or to the ‘Dal Molin’ US military base in Vicenza. This turn suggests that in Italy there has been a transition from ‘citizen oriented’ to ‘cause oriented’ activism (Norris 2007) and that protest politics may be an alternative to traditional political engagement.

Thus, the literature shows that political protest has changed over the last 40 years and that Italy may be considered a social movement society in which protest actions are common. However, it does not say much about the evolution of the Italian protesters, as we do not know whether or not their characteristics have changed, if the protesters are more ‘normal’.

The Normalisation of the Protester? Some Hypotheses

Van Aelst and Walgrave (2001) argue that if there has been a normalisation of the protester, some individual characteristics traditionally associated with participation in political protest lose their importance. We extend their argument and maintain that the normalisation hypothesis should be tested considering the wider background of the protester, without limiting the analysis to the socio-economic status. Therefore, we also include in the picture other sets of individual characteristics that are considered being powerful predictors of protest politics and that create differences in the levels of political protest. This is because the protester’s profile would not be complete if only the socio-economic status is taken into account, as also other factors are associated with participation in political protest. In this section we review the main approaches used to understand individual participation in protest and outline some hypotheses.

The workhorse of the study of individual political action is the socio-economic status model (Barnes & Kaase 1979; Brady, Verba & Schlozman 1995; Dalton 2008). Personal characteristics such as gender, education and income are fundamental to understand

engagement in protest politics. Gender represents an obstacle to this type of political participation. In fact, women tend to get involved much less than men in protest actions. This is believed to be related to a different socialisation, family roles and the position in the labour market (Coffé & Bolzendhal 2010). Education determines the 'civic skills' which are 'those communications and organisational capacities that are so essential to political activity' (Brady, Verba & Schlozman 1995, p. 273). Education affects the social position of an individual. The higher educated are more likely to live in an environment which stimulates and encourages them to engage in politics. Further, education influences other resources, such as money. Those with higher education have, on average, higher income, which is also relevant for political action. Money allows citizens to take part in political activities because, sometimes, these are not cost-free. A last element, which is not strictly related to the individual status, is age. Participation in protest politics depends on the life cycle and it has a curvilinear association with it (Highton & Wolfinger 2001). The young have different interests which are not related with politics, have lower levels of education and of political sophistication. Conversely, the elderly progressively retire from the public world and from the political one.

Another relevant approach to the study of political protest takes into account the role of dissatisfaction, both personal and political. A simple link connects dissatisfaction to political protest: citizens can be dissatisfied and decide to act in order to change the current situation (Gamson 1968; Barnes, Farah & Heunks 1979). Dissatisfaction has two origins. The first is dissatisfaction with the individual's own personal condition. Personal dissatisfaction was considered one of the main sources of political protest (Gurr 1970). It has been found that the satisfied tend to protest less than the dissatisfied, but that, however, this association is weak (Farah, Barnes & Heunks 1979; Flavin & Keane 2012). The second is dissatisfaction with public institutions. However, its relationship with protest is debated in the literature (Levi & Stoker 2000). Citizens supporting the political system and public institutions are expected to participate more in conventional political activities as they have stronger democratic feelings, but less in unconventional ones. Instead, the dissatisfied tend to participate more in protest actions because dissatisfaction works as a motivational mechanism and provides incentives to change the current situation (Norris 2002).

An important approach is the one emphasizing the role of mobilisation agencies, such as organisations and associations. These are 'schools of democracy' teaching citizens the values, attitudes and skills which favour political engagement (Putnam 2000). Organisations give their members a 'tool box' for political activities (Verba & Nie 1972, p. 184) and socialise them to political life. However, not all organisations are the same (Armingeon 2007). It is argued that membership in leisure organisations is associated with unconventional political participation, but to a lesser extent in comparison with activist or interest organisations (Van der Meer & Van Ingen 2009). In fact, these have precise objectives—influencing policies, the government and private subjects with public relevance—and provide stronger incentives for mobilisation. Members of such groups

have stronger political attitudes and values which allow them to feel more confidence and efficacy and which lead to political engagement (Leighley 1996). Membership in political parties is also relevant for participation in protest. Parties are organisations that politicise social cleavages and that defend the interests of the social segment they represent. Furthermore, parties stimulate a psychological mechanism of attachment and identification that may reduce the relevance of costs of participating in protest actions underlining the importance of benefits (Finkel & Opp 1991).

Also political orientations and values have been extensively used to understand participation in protest (Dalton 2008). Ideological orientations help to process political information and to structure the political space. The left represents the values related to social change, equality and opposition to hierarchy, while the right represents values related to individualism and the preservation of the social and economic order (Sani & Sartori 1983). For this reason, many have shown that leftists tend to protest more than the rightists (Klingemann 1979; Norris 2002; Dalton 2008). Attitudes towards social change are also useful to understand protest politics. The radicals will be more likely to engage in protest politics than moderate or conservative citizens, as they have more incentives to change social reality (Van der Meer, Van Deth & Scheepers 2009).

Eventually, postmaterialism has been associated to protest behaviour because it questions the authorities and challenge the elites in power (Dalton 2008). Unconventional participation is, in fact, 'elite direct' and 'elite challenging' (Inglehart 1990). The materialist/postmaterialist dimension has been linked to the rise of the 'new social movements' (Kriesi 1989). For instance, 'the rise of the ecological movement [...] is not simply due to the fact that the environment is in worse conditions than it used to be [...] this development has taken place because the public has become more sensitive to the quality of the environment than it was a generation ago' (Inglehart 1990, pp. 372-373).

Thus, if the normalisation thesis is correct, the association between the socio-economic status, personal and political dissatisfaction, membership in mobilisation agencies, ideological orientations, attitudes towards social change and postmaterialism should weaken over time.

Data and Methods

We test our hypotheses using the European Values Study (EVS) (2011). This is the only survey project in which questions concerning political actions are asked in Italy for four waves: 1981, 1990, 1999 and 2009.²

The dependent variable is an index of political protest. In the EVS contains five indicators asking respondents did, would do or would never five political actions. As we are interested in 'actual' protest we recoded the items to differentiate those who did the actions from those who declared the intention to do the actions or who declared to

²Walgrave and Verhulst (2011) argue that other methods of data collection, such as protest event surveys, are very rare before 1995.

have not done the actions.³ Table 1 shows the percentage of respondents who declared to have performed the actions. It has been shown that these five items well summarise the concept of political protest (Quaranta 2012) defined as a repertoire of political actions aiming at influencing the public decision-making which ‘do not necessarily assume anti-regime protests but may form one element of an expanded repertoire of political action’ (Kaase & Marsh 1979, p. 27).

[Table 1 about here]

We test the scalability of the items using Mokken Scale Analysis (MSA) (Mokken 1971; Van Schuur 2003) as it is suited for dichotomous indicators and it allows testing a cumulative and ordinal scale taking into account the probability of positive/negative answers. Table 2 reports the results of the MSA for the index of political protest in each wave of the EVS. The H coefficient tells the overall degree of scalability of the items.⁴ The coefficient is higher than 0.5 in all the EVS waves, making the scale a very good one. The ‘s coefficients, instead, give a measure of scalability of the single items and they are all much higher than 0.3. The analysis tells that respondents who answered positively to ‘difficult’ item have most likely answered positively to an ‘easier’ item. For instance, a person that has joined in boycotts has a high probability of having attended a demonstration and signed a petition. Looking at table 1 we see that in all the waves the most ‘popular’ is signing a petition, followed by attending demonstrations, joining in boycotts, occupying buildings/factories and joining unofficial strikes. Therefore, we build an ordinal cumulative scale and rank respondents from zero to five, where zero represents an individual that has not engaged in any political action, while five an individual who engaged in all actions.⁵

Figure 1 shows the distribution of the political protest index in the four waves. In 1981 the respondents who did not any action are about 48 per cent, while in 2009 are

³The question wording is the following: ‘I’m going to read out some different forms of political action that people can take, and I’d like you to tell me, for each one, whether you have actually done any of these things, whether you would/might it or would not/never, under any circumstances, do it/any of them: signing a petition; joining boycotts; attending peaceful/lawful demonstration; joining unofficial strikes; and occupying buildings or factories’. As reported by the longitudinal EVS documentation file (2008), the question has the same format in all the four waves of the EVS, therefore the comparability over time of the indicators measuring the individual participation in unconventional forms of political participation is ensured. If any unobservable bias produced by the question format is present, this would be constant over time, thus allowing us to compare the probabilities of participation across a period of almost 30 years. Other surveys include a time frame in questions concerning participation in political actions. However, as mentioned in the article, the EVS is the only one which allows to compare participation in protest politics over almost 30 years.

⁴The literature indicates that the H coefficient must be higher than 0.3 to build a reliable scale. If the coefficient is higher than 0.4 the scale is considered ‘moderate’, while if it is higher than 0.5 the scale is considered ‘strong’.

⁵As MSA is a probabilistic method and an improvement over Guttman scaling we could say that one represents, most likely, an individual who signed a petition, two an individual who attended a lawful demonstration, three an individual who joined in boycotts, four an individual who occupied a building or a factory and five an individual who joined unofficial strikes, and, respectively, the previous actions.

about 38 per cent. The amount of respondents who engaged in only one action does not change much over the years: it is about 31 per cent in 1981 and 27 per cent in 2009. Instead, the percentage of respondents who did two actions increases from 1981 to 2009: it goes from 12 per cent to about 18 per cent. Similarly, the number of respondents who have done three, four and five actions increases quite relevantly. In all the three cases the percentages double from 1981 to 2009. These results are a first indication that political protest has spread in Italy. Fewer citizens are completely inactive and more tend to get involved in the forms of political action mentioned above. Even the more radicals, those who engage in four or five modes of action, are more in 2009 than in 1981.

[Figure 1 about here]

The independent variables are the following. Socio-economic status is measured using gender; age in years and age in years squared to test a non-linear association between age and political protest; age at completed education in three categories (less than 14, 14 - 19, higher than 19); income in three categories (low, middle and high).⁶

Satisfaction with one's personal condition and with public institutions are measured, respectively, with an indicator of life satisfaction ranging from one (low satisfaction) to ten (high satisfaction) and with a composite index. We selected four indicators measuring the level of trust in the parliament, the education system, the civil service and the justice system. Many authors (see Norris 1999), in fact, use these indicators to measure 'specific support'. Moreover, it has been shown that satisfaction with specific institutional domains is indeed relevant for political action (Kriesi & Westholm 2007). As the indicators range from one (low trust) to four (high trust) we use MSA.⁷ The bottom half of table 2 reports the MSA results for the 'satisfaction with public institutions' index. The H and the 's coefficients are all higher than 0.3 showing that the items can form a good additive scale in each time point. The index ranges from four (low trust) to sixteen (high trust) and we use it as a continuous variable.

The role of mobilisation agencies is tested using dummy variables providing information on membership in four organisations: trade unions, cultural, human rights organisations and political parties. This choice reflects a classification that categorises organisations in three types: interest, leisure and activist organisations (Van der Meer, Grotenhuis, & Scheepers 2009). We add political parties to this classification, as they are also mobilisers of collective political action (Finkel & Opp 1991).

[Table 2 about here]

Political orientations are measured using the left-right continuum ranging from one (extreme left) to ten (extreme right) and a scale on attitudes towards social change. The respondent is asked to pick one between three statements that best describes his/her

⁶We used age at completed education because it is present in all the four waves, while educational attainment is not. Income is originally coded in three categories in the EVS.

⁷MSA is also suited for polytomous indicators (Van Schuur 2003).

attitude towards change: 1) our present society must be valiantly defended against all subversive forces; 2) our society must be gradually improved by reforms; 3) the entire way our society is organised must be radically changed by revolutionary action. The statements gauge, respectively, conservative, moderate and radical attitudes. To measure political values we use the postmaterialism scale (Inglehart 1990), which classifies respondents into ‘materialists’, ‘mixed’ and ‘postmaterialists’. The scale is built using four indicators asking the respondent what he/she thinks about the priorities of a country: a ‘materialist’ respondent chooses two materialist indicators; a ‘mixed’ respondent chooses at least one materialist indicator; a ‘postmaterialist’ respondent chooses two postmaterialist indicators.⁸ Descriptive statistics of the independent variables are reported in the appendix.

Given the presence of missing values in almost all the variables, we imputed the data to solve this problem. Ignoring this issue would lead to serious bias (King et al. 2001). We apply ‘multivariate imputation by chained equations’ (Van Buuren 2007). It consists in creating m datasets—in our case ten—where missing values are replaced with plausible values generated through an algorithm.⁹ The analysis is carried out on the m datasets and the estimates are combined using the rules outlined by Rubin (1987, pp. 76-77).

Since we argued that our dependent variable can be treated as an ordinal scale we use an ordinal logistic model (Long 1997). This model allows estimating the probability of having done zero, one, two, three, four or five actions. Other models, such as linear or count models, cannot provide such information as they cannot take into account the fact that the index of political protest is made of ‘steps’ and that the distance between them is not measurable. Instead, our model allows providing a detailed assessment of the respondents’ engagement in each category of the political protest index. Our model has the following specification:

$$y_i = j \text{ if } \alpha_{j-1} \leq y_i^* < \alpha_j, \text{ for } j = 0, \dots, J, \quad (1)$$

where y_i^* is the latent trait underlying the concept of political protest which goes from $-\infty$ to $+\infty$ and it is measured using the observed variable y , which is the political protest index, and α are the cut points. As the index has six categories (J , from zero to five, see figure 1), the relationship between latent and observed variable is determined by:

⁸The indicators are: 1) maintaining order in the nation; 2) giving people more say in important government decisions; 3) fighting rising prices; 4) protecting freedom of speech. Indicators 1) and 3) are ‘materialist’ indicators while 2) and 4) are ‘postmaterialist’.

⁹The imputation was performed on the four waves separately.

$$y_i = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } -\infty \leq y_i^* < \alpha_0 \\ 1 & \text{if } \alpha_0 \leq y_i^* < \alpha_1 \\ 2 & \text{if } \alpha_1 \leq y_i^* < \alpha_2 \\ 3 & \text{if } \alpha_2 \leq y_i^* < \alpha_3 \\ 4 & \text{if } \alpha_3 \leq y_i^* < \alpha_4 \\ 5 & \text{if } \alpha_4 \leq y_i^* < \infty \end{cases} \quad (2)$$

When y is equal to the category j , the model is estimated by:

$$P(y_i \leq j|x) = F(\alpha_j + \mathbf{x}_i \boldsymbol{\beta}'), \quad (3)$$

where $F(\bullet)$ is the inverse of the logistic function, α_j is the cut point for category j , \mathbf{x}_i is the vector of data for the i -th observation and $\boldsymbol{\beta}'$ is the vector of coefficients.

We estimate four models, one for each wave of the EVS. In these models we include all the variables described above. As the coefficients of a logistic proportional odds model are difficult to interpret,¹⁰ we calculate the predicted probabilities for each category of the index of political protests at different values of the variables using the following equation:

$$P(y = j|x) = F(\alpha_j + \bar{\mathbf{x}} \boldsymbol{\beta}') - F(\alpha_{j-1} + \bar{\mathbf{x}} \boldsymbol{\beta}'), \quad (4)$$

where α_j are the estimated cut points for category j , $\bar{\mathbf{x}}$ is the vector of the variables set to their means except for the variable for which we calculate the quantity of interest and $\boldsymbol{\beta}'$ are the estimated coefficients. For each 'step' of the political protest index we present plots showing the predicted probabilities. We also present a plot showing the differences in probabilities between respondents belonging to different variable categories or having different variables values.¹¹

Findings

Figure 2 and 3 show the association between the independent variables and the probability of doing zero, one, two three, four and five actions, for each wave of the EVS. Figure 4 shows the differences in the probability of doing zero, one, two three, four and five actions between respondents having different characteristics. If the normalisation of the protester has happened in Italy, we should see that these differences come close to zero across time.

¹⁰Long (1997, pp. 127-131) argues that it is preferable to use predicted probabilities when the interest is on the specific categories of the response variable, rather than focusing on the regression coefficients. It is suggested to use plots to show the association of the variables with the categories of the response variables or the discrete change of the variables, holding the other variables constant.

¹¹Predicted probabilities and their differences are estimated using a simulation method based on Bayesian inference (Kerman & Gelman 2007) and are calculated at the means of the variables. We did not show the confidence intervals of the predicted values in figures 2 and 3, which are however available on request, to avoid overloading the plot with information. The regression estimates are reported in the appendix.

In the first row of plots ($y = 0$) in figures 2 and 3, the y-axis indicates the probability that an individual has not done any political action, while the x-axis shows the independent variables at different values. The first variables are those testing the socio-economic status model. We see that there are differences between men and women in 1981 and 1990 in the probability of non-participation, which are respectively 0.08 and 0.09. Conversely, in 1999 and 2009 the differences in the probabilities of non-participation of men and women decrease and are 0.07 and 0.02 respectively. Therefore, the role of gender has decreased over time: women and man have almost identical probabilities of non-participation. This finding shows that gender differences no longer concerns participation in protest (Coffé & Bolzendhal 2010).

The differences between educational levels are important (Dalton 2008) and persist in Italy. As shown in figure 4, the higher educated have a lower probability of non-participation than lower educated: the difference in probability are 0.23 in 1981, 0.21 in 1990, 0.27 in 1999 and 0.16 in 2009. However, the probability of non-participation of a low educated respondent decreases: it is around 0.56 in 1981 and in 1990, 0.50 in 1999 and 0.43 in 2009. The differences in participation in protest actions due to income appear to be irrelevant over time. Citizens belonging to the three income groups do not show different probabilities of not engaging in any protest action. The same applies to age: there are no statistically significant differences between age groups. Conversely to what the literature argues (Highton & Wolfinger 2001), it appears the life cycle is not related to participation in protest. However, it is important to add a caveat concerning the association between age and political protest. The probability of participation and non-participation for different age groups is most likely influenced by the way the question measuring the engagement in the five political actions is worded. The question does not ask whether the respondent has engaged in the political actions, for instance, during the last 12 months or within a limited time frame (see note 3). It is possible that if we had a question asking about the respondent's participation in any given political action in the last 12 months, we would find a negative association between age and participation in that action. This implies that the question present in the EVS is likely to boost up the probability of participation of the adult and elder groups. Notwithstanding, a way to understand if any changes in the probability of participation in political protest have happened is to look at the differences between the same age groups over time. Comparing the same age groups over time reduces the risk the the probability of participation is biased by the life course. Figure 2 helps in detecting these differences. We can see that in 1981 a 20 year old respondent has a probability of non-participation of 0.48, while this probability becomes 0.36 in 2009. A 40 year old respondent does not participate in any action with a probability of 0.45 in 1981 and 0.30 in 2009. Finally, in 1981 a 60 year old respondent has a probability of non-participation of 0.49, while of 0.34 in 2009. Thus, despite the question format, it appears that, on average, a young, an adult and an elder respondent significantly reduces the probability of non-participation over time.

As far as satisfaction is concerned, we can see that the results are mixed: in 1981 and in 1999 satisfaction with life has a positive association with non-participation, while in 1990 and 2009 it is a negative association with it. However, the differences in probabilities between being and not being satisfied with life are not statistically significant in the four waves. This substantially confirms previous findings that life satisfaction is a weak predictor of political protest (Flavin & Keane 2012). Among the dissatisfied with public institutions there is no significant change in the probability of not doing any action across the 30 years we analyse. Instead, those who are satisfied seem to have lower probabilities of non-participation. In fact, the difference between satisfied and dissatisfied decreases over time and in 1999 and 2009 becomes not significant. This finding tells that the role of satisfaction with public institutions in understanding protest politics disappears over time. Despite the literature the literature does not indicate conclusive results concerning the association between dissatisfaction and propensity of joining protest actions (Levi & Stoker 2000), it appears that in Italy political dissatisfaction does not act as a motivational mechanism for protest.

Membership in organisations seems to be a discriminating characteristic, which importance does not change over time. Party members have lower probabilities of non-participation than non-members: in 1981 members the difference in probability is 0.18, while in 2009 is 0.21. A similar finding can be seen for interest organisations: in 1981, 1990 and 2009 non-members show statistically higher probabilities of not engaging in any action. Members and non-members of leisure organisations present significant differences in the level of non-participation with the exception of 1981. In fact, in the first wave we can notice that members have not higher probabilities of participation in at least one action than non-members. This also means that leisure organisations play a role in mobilising political protest in Italy, despite the literature argues that membership in type of organisations is not relevant to understand protest politics (Van der Meer & Van Ingen 2009). Eventually, being member of an activist organisation does not make a difference in the levels of non-participation in protest politics.¹² This is a striking result as these organisations are considered the 'engine' of protest politics. However, we think that this finding suffers from the fact that members in these organisations are very few in the samples and, therefore, the estimates are not quite precise.

Ideological orientations appear to be more relevant as time goes by. In 1981 a leftist has a probability of 0.18 less of non-participation compared to a rightist, conversely in 2009 the difference is about 0.30. In 1981 those who have conservative attitudes towards social change have similar probabilities of non-participation in protest politics compared to those who have moderate attitudes. Figure 4 shows that the differences in the probability of non-participation between conservatives and radicals do not change over time:

¹²It is argued that membership in organisations is strictly dependent on the socio-economic status, in particular education (Armingeon 2007). However, if the association between participation in protest and membership in organisations is spurious it should disappear when socio-economic status is included in a statistical model.

in 1981 the difference is 0.24, while in 2009 is 0.25. The differences between materialists, mixed and post materialists respondents in the probabilities of non-participation appear to be less pronounced over time, but they persist. In fact, the difference in the probability of non-participation between a materialist and a postmaterialist is 0.26 in 1981 and 0.20 in 2009. These findings confirm that ideological orientations and values still draw, in Italy, dividing lines between citizens joining and not protest politics (Inglehart 1990; Dalton 2008).

[Figure 2 and 3 about here]

The second row of plots shows the probability of doing one action ($y = 1$), which is most likely signing petitions. It appears that the role of a few variables change over time, as most of the lines representing the change in probability between categories are flat (figure 2). In 1981 higher educated participate in one action 0.1 more than lower educated, while in the following years the difference disappears. A similar trend is visible for satisfaction in public institutions. In fact, in 1981 the level of satisfaction discriminates between respondents, as a satisfied citizen has a lower probability, around 0.11, of participation in one action than a dissatisfied citizen. In 1990, 1999 and 2009 respondents with different levels of satisfaction do not show statistically different probabilities of doing one political action. The other variables appear to be not associated with the propensity of doing one action. This means that a low degree of involvement in protest politics does not require particular individual characteristics, as this form of protest action is nowadays very common and not costly in terms of skills, memberships, values or orientations. Potentially, anybody could do one political action, which is likely to be signing a petition.

On the third step of the scale there are those who have done two actions ($y = 2$), which are likely signing petitions and attending demonstrations, and it is shown in the third row of the plots. The variables measuring the socio-economic status do not create significant differences between respondents in terms of probability of doing two political actions, with the exception of education. In fact, the discriminating role of the educational attainment does not fade over time. There is a significant difference between high educated and low educated respondents: 0.09 in 1981 and 0.08 in 2009. The differences between age groups remain constant over time. However, we can see that the probability of participation in two actions for a respondent belonging to each age group increases relevantly over time. In fact, for a 20 year old respondent the probability of engaging in two actions is 0.11 in 1981 and 0.19 in 2009; for a 40 year old respondent the probability is 0.12 in 1981 and 0.22 in 2009; for a 60 year old respondent the probability is 0.11 in 1981 and 0.20 in 2009. Different roles are played between 1981 and 2009 by satisfaction with public institutions, membership in organisations, ideological orientations and political values. In 1981 and 1990 the dissatisfied and the satisfied with public institutions show statistically different probabilities of doing two actions, respectively 0.08 and 0.09. In the following waves these differences disappear, around 0.02 and 0.04 in 1999 and 2009 respectively, meaning that the satisfied are likely to engage in two actions, therefore also in

lawful demonstrations, as much as the unsatisfied. Being a member of a political party, an interest organisation and a leisure organisation translates in higher probabilities of having done two political actions in almost all the waves. This could mean that these organisations have important functions of mobilisation, in particular because the second action is likely to be a demonstration, as they provide incentives for participation in actions that require cooperation and trust between individuals (Armingeon 2007). However, non-members participate more in protest actions than in the past. Also members of activist organisations participate more than non-members in two actions. Unfortunately, as members of these organisations are not many the statistical error of the probability estimate is very large. The role of ideological orientations appears to be stronger in recent years compared to the past. In fact, the difference in probability of doing two actions between a leftist and a rightist is 0.06 in 1981, while 0.14 in 2009. The leftists participate more in two political actions (probability of 0.14 in 1981, 0.26 in 1990, 0.28 in 1999 and 0.27 in 2009), as well as those who position themselves at the centre of the scale (from a probability of 0.11 in 1981 to a probability of 0.21 in 2009), while the rightists do not have higher probabilities of participation. Ideological orientations deeply differentiate among respondents: different ideological positions correspond to different probabilities of action in all the waves. Respondents with moderate and radical attitudes towards social change have become more similar over the years. Concerning the postmaterialism scale, we can see that materialist and mixed respondents become similar, while who present postmaterialist values appears to have slightly higher probabilities to have done two political actions over time. In fact the probability of doing two actions for an average postmaterialist is 0.20 in 1981 and 0.30 in 2009.

[Figure 4 about here]

The respondents who are on the fourth step of the political protest scale have done three actions ($y = 3$), which are likely to be signing petitions, attending demonstrations and joining in boycotts. We see, as the lines representing the probability of participation of different values of variables are flat, that respondents with different socio-economic statuses, with different levels of life satisfaction, satisfaction with political institutions and different attitudes towards social change do not show different probabilities of participation in three actions over time. Instead, education still represents a characteristic that discriminates between individuals. We see that the difference between high and low educated in the probability of doing three actions does not change in 30 years: it is 0.04 in 1981 and 0.05 in 2009. However, the lower educated have a higher probability of doing three actions across time. In fact, in 1981 the probability is 0.03, while in 2009 is 0.06. Members of parties, interest organisations and leisure organisations present higher probabilities of joining three actions than non-members, and the differences with non-members widen. For instance, in 1981 the difference between party members and non-members is 0.03, while in 2009 becomes 0.10; in 1981 the difference between interest organisations members and non-members is 0.03, instead in 2009 is 0.06. As before, different ideological orientations, attitudes towards social change and values mean dif-

ferent probabilities of participation in three actions. The difference between leftists and rightists in the probability of doing three actions increases over time: from 0.03 in 1981, to 0.07 in 2009. Those who are on the centre of the left-right scale tend to join three actions more than in the past. Their probability of doing three actions is 0.4 in 1981, 0.06 in 1990, 0.07 in 1999 and 0.08 in 2009.

The last two steps of the scale ($y = 4$ and $y = 5$), which are most likely occupying a building/factory and joining unofficial strikes, show analogous patterns. Differences due to gender, income, age, levels of life and institutional satisfaction appear to be non-significant. In fact, they are not associated with different probabilities of participation in four or five actions, which are likely to be occupying building/factories or joining unofficial strikes. However, the respondents belonging to different gender, income, age groups have a higher probability of engaging in four or five actions in 2009 than in 1981. For instance, a young, an adult and an elder respondent have a significantly higher probability of engaging in four actions in 2009 than in 1981. Education, instead, as well as membership in political parties, interest and leisure organisations appear to create differences among respondents, particularly in the more recent years. Being a member of a party or of an interest organisation is more important in 2009 than in 1981. In fact, in the past members and not members show similar probabilities of having high levels of protest participation, while in 2009 the difference in probabilities rises (see figure 4). Respondents on the left and on the centre have higher probabilities of having done four or five actions compared to the past, while those on the right do not present significant differences, despite the probabilities increase. Those with radical attitudes towards social change have higher probabilities of engaging in four for five actions compared to the conservative, but do not have different probabilities compared to moderate respondents. The same can be said for the postmaterialist compared to the materialist respondents.

Conclusion and Discussion

According to Rucht (2007, p. 719): ‘political protest appears to have increased in terms of the frequency and number of participants, broadened and diversified regarding the range of issues, forms and social carriers [...] In all these respects, a remarkable spread can be observed’. This article aimed at understanding whether or not the change in the diffusion of political protest has occurred in Italy, a country with a long standing tradition of popular mobilisation. We saw that protest politics has evolved in this country from a confrontational, radical form of political participation to a more institutionalised one, characterised by a certain degree of cooperation with the state. Political protest has not only changed qualitatively, but also in its extent. Many more citizens are active and choose to communicate with policy makers and private subjects with petitions, demonstrations, boycotts and the other forms of protest actions.

In particular, we aimed at testing a specific element of the ‘normalisation’ of political

protest argument: the 'normalisation' of the protester. Understanding whether individual characteristics correspond to different levels of participation in protest politics means understanding if political protest regards an elite or if 'on the streets we are all equal' (Van Aelst & Walgrave 2001, p. 480).

Some points need to be made concerning the findings. First of all, there is a deep difference between complete non-participation and the other levels of participation in protest politics. Non participants are very different from those that have engaged in at least one action. On the one hand, the most relevant individual characteristics creating differences in the probabilities of non-participation appear to be education, membership in parties, interest and cultural organisations, ideological orientations and postmaterialism. On the other hand, we found that three variables connected with socio-economic are not sources of political inequality, as several authors have argued (see Dalton 2008). In particular, the gender differences found in 1981, 1990 and 1999 disappear in 2009. This seems to go against the idea that women tend to participate less in unconventional actions (Coffé & Bolzendhal 2010). The differences between age groups do not change over time. However, we showed that, on average, young, adult and elder respondent significantly engage more in protest politics compared to the past. Therefore, it is possible to say that participation in protest politics has spread in all the age groups.

Second, at different levels of involvement in protest the relevance of individual characteristics varies substantially. In fact, participation in one action, likely signing petitions, does not require particular resources, memberships, values or attitudes. Therefore, low levels of engagement in protest are 'normal' as well as the participants, since the individual characteristics do not discriminate among the respondents. As the 'intensity' of protest goes up other characteristics stand out. Participants in two and three actions are mainly members of parties and interest organisations, have leftist political orientations and postmaterialist values. Organisations appear to be great mobilisers of protest participation, in particular those with sound structures. Nevertheless, the socio-economic status is no longer important. Differences due to education are present, but they seem to diminish over time. Those who have the highest levels of participation in protest politics—those who engaged in four or five actions—are mostly likely to have radical attitudes towards social change, have postmaterialist values and leftist political orientations. At these levels, the socio-economic status and satisfaction do not play a role in protest politics.

The bottom line is that non-participants in protest actions have different characteristics compared to those that have at least participated in one action. The differences in participation due to the socio-economic status and satisfaction are not present or disappear over the years. The only relevant factor is education, which keeps its importance up to the highest levels of involvement. What is determinant for participation in protest politics is membership in organisations, ideological orientations and postmaterialism.

Therefore, we can conclude saying that participation in protest politics has changed since 1981 in Italy, but cannot state that a complete 'normalisation' of protester has

occurred. If we think of participation in political protest as made of three thresholds (Dalton 1988, p. 65)—transition from non-participation to participation, shift to direct actions, move to illegal but not violent acts—we can say that normalisation has happened for the first threshold. It appears that engagement in more than one protest actions require some individual characteristics that not everybody has. We have shown that protest politics is, to a certain extent, spread across social groups, as some gaps due to personal characteristics have shrunk or disappeared over the last three decades, but also that on the streets we are not all the same.

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Table 1: Respondents who answered positively to the political action items in the four waves of the European Values Study and relative change between 1981 and 2009. Items sorted by popularity.

Item	Wave				Relative change (%)
	1981	1990	1999	2009	
Signing petitions	41.4	46.7	54.1	50.8	22.8
Attending lawful demonstrations	25.7	35.1	34.2	37.9	47.5
Joining in boycotts	5.9	10.6	10.2	12.5	112.6
Occupying buildings or factories	5.9	7.6	8.0	9.9	69.8
Joining unofficial strikes	2.7	6.2	5.6	8.1	196.1
N	1,348	2,018	2,000	1,519	

Table 2: Mokken Scale Analysis for the ‘political protest’ index and for the ‘satisfaction with public institutions’ index

		Wave			
		1981	1990	1999	2009
Political protest index					
<i>H</i>	Index	0.532	0.579	0.510	0.552
<i>H_i</i>	Signing petitions	0.533	0.603	0.514	0.595
	Attending lawful demonstrations	0.570	0.654	0.584	0.628
	Joining in boycotts	0.499	0.546	0.484	0.519
	Occupying buildings or factories	0.476	0.528	0.442	0.466
	Joining unofficial strikes	0.581	0.503	0.489	0.510
Satisfaction with public institutions index					
<i>H</i>	Index	0.489	0.521	0.447	0.425
<i>H_i</i>	Parliament	0.514	0.516	0.453	0.423
	Education System	0.454	0.486	0.399	0.436
	Civil Service	0.511	0.542	0.492	0.475
	Justice System	0.477	0.537	0.443	0.370

Figure 1: The 'index of political protest': the percentage of respondents who did not participate ($y = 0$), participated in one ($y = 1$), two ($y = 2$), three ($y = 3$), four ($y = 4$), and five ($y = 5$) political actions in the four waves of the European Values Study

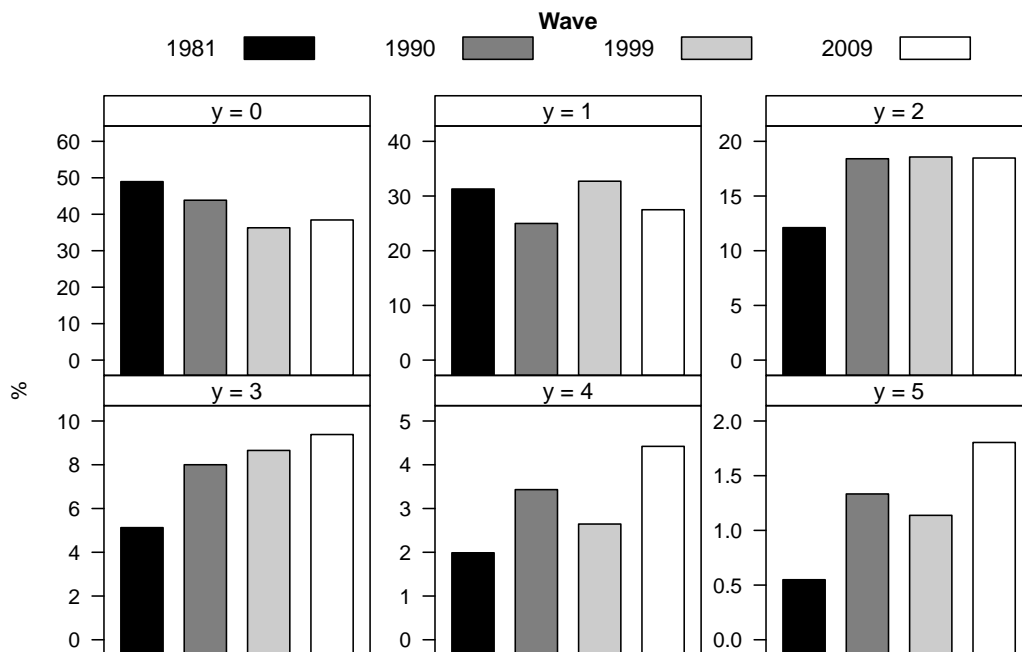


Figure 2: The association between gender, education, income, age, life satisfaction and satisfaction with public institutions and the probability of non-participation ($y = 0$), participation in one ($y = 1$), two ($y = 2$), three ($y = 3$), four ($y = 4$), and five ($y = 5$) political actions by each wave of the European Values Study

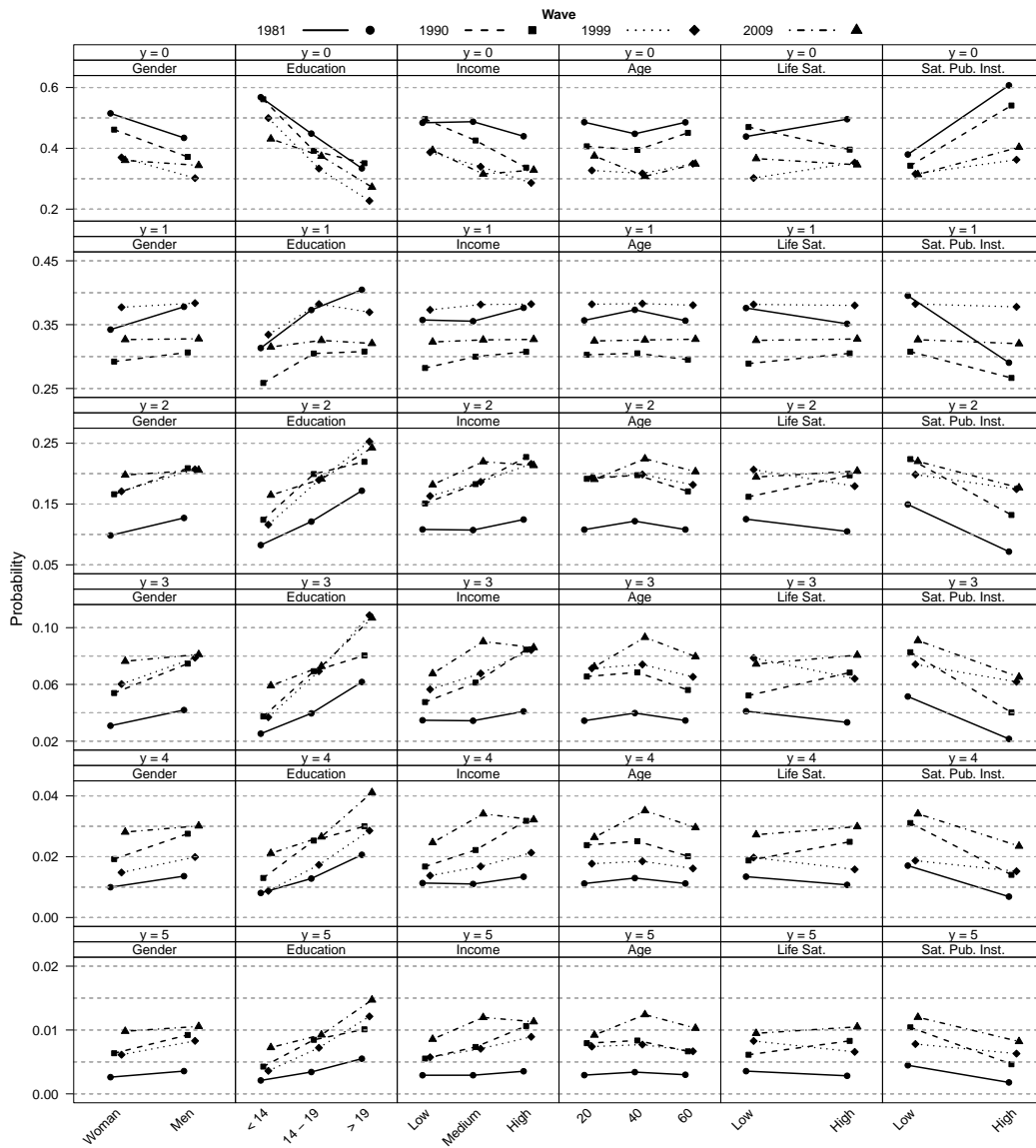


Figure 3: The association between membership in political parties, interest, leisure, and activist organisations, left-right scale, attitudes towards social change and the postmaterialism scale and the probability of non-participation ($y = 0$), participation in one ($y = 1$), two ($y = 2$), three ($y = 3$), four ($y = 4$), and five ($y = 5$) political actions by each wave of the European Values Study

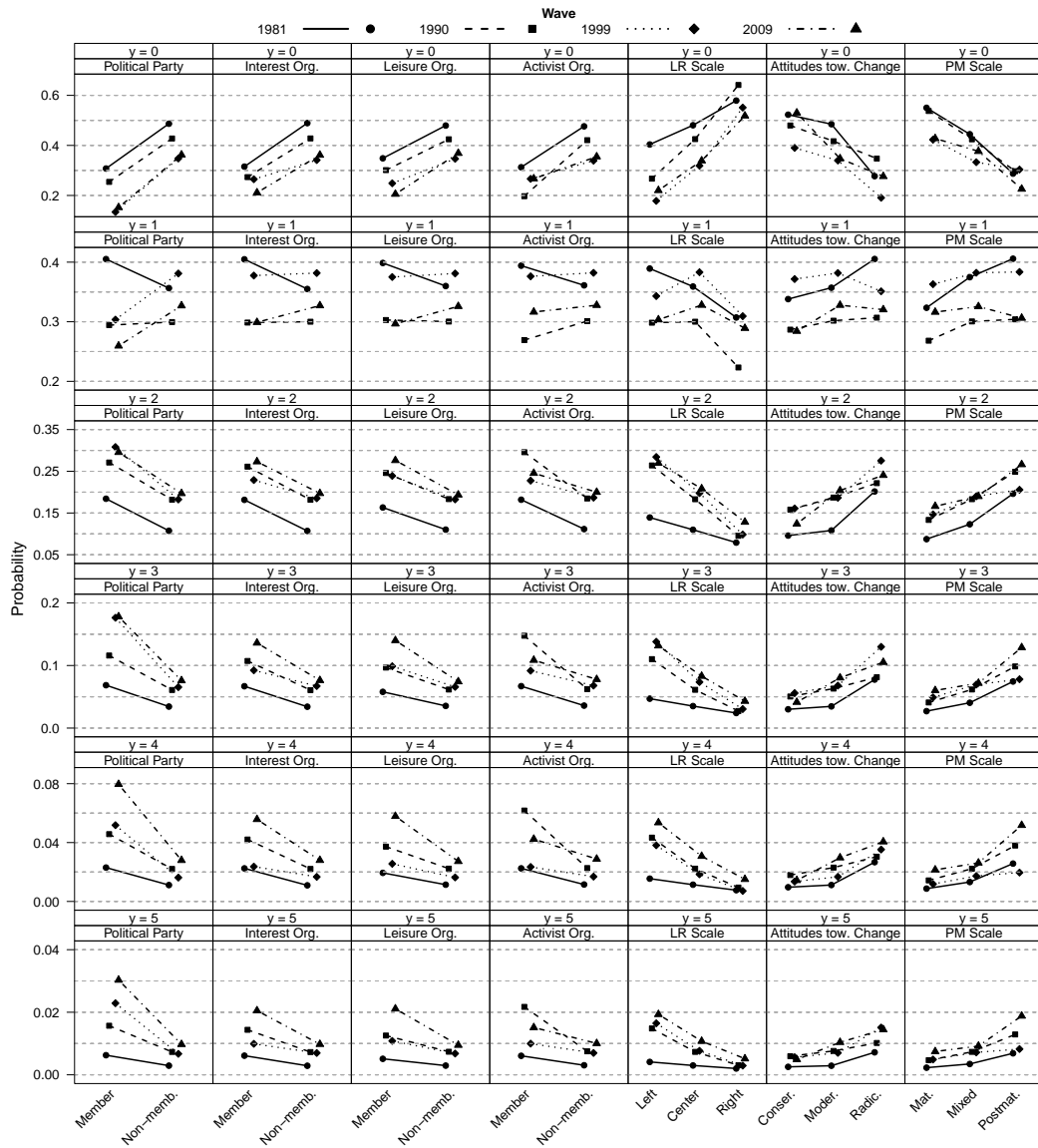


Figure 4: The differences in probability, with 95% confidence intervals, of non-participation ($y = 0$), participation in one ($y = 1$), two ($y = 2$), three ($y = 3$), four ($y = 4$), and five ($y = 5$) political actions between women and man, high and low educated, high and low income respondents, 20 and 60 years old, satisfied and dissatisfied with life and public institutions, members and non-members of political parties, interest, leisure and activist organisations, leftists and rights, radicals and conservatives, materialists and postmaterialists, by each wave of the European Values Study

