



# **Electoral debates on integration and immigration in Italian local elections Milan, Prato and Rome compared**

**Pietro CASTELLI GATTINARA**

**Ph.D. thesis defence on 09 December, 2014**

## **Abstract**

This research focuses on the politicization of immigration as an issue in local electoral campaigns, comparing the cases of three Italian cities. Based on the idea that immigration must not be understood as a one-dimensional category that parties endorse or dismiss, support or oppose, I investigate its multidimensional nature, and the importance of local factors and opportunities in determining public debates. Focusing on the dimensional choices and framing strategies of competing electoral actors, I propose an account of the different constitutive dimensions of immigration debates, and suggest that parties – next to competing over different issues – also compete with one another by selectively and strategically emphasizing different aspects of the same social reality. In particular, I identify three main dimensions of the immigration issue – the socioeconomic, cultural and religious, and law and order dimension – and seven specific frames corresponding to the arguments and justifications mobilized by political actors to articulate support and opposition to immigration. The construction of public agendas in electoral campaign periods is measured through an empirical content analysis of the coverage of local elections by newspapers and of local parties' electoral manifestos across two campaigns in the cities of Milan, Rome and Prato (2004-2011).

The results show not only that debates in different local settings deal with immigration in substantively different ways, but also that parties' electoral strategies rely upon the thematic structure of the issue, exploiting immigration dimensions in order to increase the accessibility and resonance of their messages among local electorates. The results of this dissertation offer one of the first comprehensive analyses of an issue that has too often been considered "emerging" in party competition, showing that when the issue cannot be dismissed, actors compete on its constitutive dimensions by mobilizing aspects on which they enjoy a strategic advantage. These findings pave the way to connect this field of research with other promising areas within the social and political sciences, such as public opinion research and the study of mediatization and communication in party politics, providing new insights into electoral politics and campaigning.



**Jury:** Hanspeter Kriesi (Supervisor) (EUI), Pietro Castelli Gattinara (Ph.D. candidate), Laura Morales (Univ. Leicester), Rainer Bauböck (EUI), Ruud Koopmans (WZB, Berlin) (in videolink)

**Bio** Pietro Castelli Gattinara is currently research assistant at the Department of Politics and International Relations of the University of Leicester. In 2013 and 2014 he was instructor of comparative politics and European political system at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris. Pietro's research is comparative and it develops in two main directions: the first focuses on the politics of immigration, especially in terms of political communication and electoral campaigning, and the second deals with extreme-right organizations, analyzing practices of militancy, repertoires of action, and policy demands. Among his recent publications: "Discourse and Practice of Violence in the Italian Extreme Right: Frames, Symbols, and Identity-Building in CasaPound Italia". *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 8(1), 2014, pp. 155-170; and *Fascisti di un altro millennio? Crisi e partecipazione in CasaPound*, 2014, Roma/Acireale: Bonanno Editore.