



PARteecipazione e CONflitto
* *The Open Journal of Sociopolitical Studies*
<http://siba-ese.unisalento.it/index.php/paco>
ISSN: 1972-7623 (print version)
ISSN: 2035-6609 (electronic version)
PACO, Issue 10(1) 2017: 333-335
DOI: 10.1285/i20356609v10i1p333

Published in March 15, 2017

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BOOK REVIEWS

***The Politics of Migration in Italy. Perspectives on local debates and party competition*, by Pietro Castelli Gattinara. New York: Routledge, 2016, pp. 214.**

In recent years, the increasing securitization and politicization of immigration issues in Western democracies has greatly affected party competition, transforming electoral campaign debates and outcomes. In *The Politics of Migration in Italy*, Pietro Castelli Gattinara offers a timely contribution to our understanding of the emergence and consolidation of immigration and security issues in party competition, showing the important role played by local dynamics and strategic framing by political parties. Focusing on why and how contextual and strategic factors affect electoral debates, and emphasizing the interaction between political actors and mass media, this book help us assess the processes that determine how the politicization of migration occurs, and why they result in specific outcomes.

In the introduction, the author addresses the general purpose of the book, and presents his research design and methodology. The study focuses on the three Italian cities— Rome, Milan and Prato— and compares the electoral debates in six local campaigns in two moments in time. The author adopts a rigorous methodology, using quantitative content research with the help of core sentence analysis (CSA) to examine media coverage of the electoral campaigns and the political platforms produced by political parties.

In Part one, Gattinara introduces his theoretical framework and a description of the Italian immigration context. Adopting a multidimensional, actor-centered model for studying political competition, he aims to grasp the dimensional and framing processes that are developed during electoral campaigns, and to specify how contextual and interactive factors influence the emergence of migration issues. This model accounts for “dimensional strategies;” that is, strategies by actors with respect to their spatial positions.

Additionally, it shows why and how different dimensions of migration issues—namely, socio-economic, cultural and religious, and law and order—emerge from and consolidate in the electoral debates, depending on the actors involved, the relationships between them, and the circumstances defining their involvement. In particular, this model shows the different ways parties ‘frame’ issues according to strategic considerations. Developing his model, the author expects to find conflicts over specific migration issues, and variations across cases.

In Part two, the author presents his empirical findings. First, the analysis identifies variations in the saliency of migration issues in six electoral debates, showing the role of context and time in determining these variations. Second, focusing on the role of political parties involved in the electoral campaigns, and examining debates from the actors’ point of view, the analysis shows how support and opposition of actors vis-à-vis immigration issues varies depending not only on the relevance of specific migration issues in a given context, but also on the competition of the party system itself. The author explains that ideologies only partially explain the positions of actors. He finds that competing strategies involve selectivity in the ways actors decide to mobilize their frames. In particular, the study shows that actors seek to gain accessibility and resonance among local electorates based on considerations of what is “electorally appealing” and this explanation sheds lights on why political parties choose certain arguments rather than others to support their positions. Finally, the author spells out that the variations that appear across cases are the result of the different ways political actors frame immigration issues in electoral debates. He provides a general typology of dimensional strategies of competing issues, systematically distinguishing the different options available in electoral campaigning, and explaining why and how one topic, or one aspect of a topic on migration, is chosen over others. An important finding of this study is that political parties compete over ‘frames’— not of the migration issue as a whole, but of some of its constitutive dimensions.

In addition to these findings, Gattinara presents evidence of two key mechanisms that help us understand the dynamics of the politicization of migration, and the growing focus on security issues in immigration debates. The first mechanism is mediatization, which influences political debates insofar as the media tends to focus on the more sensationalistic aspects of immigration. Thus, securitization often prevails in media coverage because it is a more sensationalistic aspect of immigration than the economic or cultural ones are. The second mechanism concerns the difficulty some political parties have directing attention towards dimensions of migration issues that are favorable for them. While challengers and right-wing actors usually speak freely, and use immigration topics to their advantage to impose their agenda, governing parties and left-wing actors are

generally in a weaker position, and their discourses are often constrained by those of their adversaries. According to the author, this situation explains why left-wing and governing parties often take up aspects of migration issues that are disadvantageous to them, and which give their competitors the greater benefit.

In the final chapter of his book, the author draws general conclusions about the saliency of electoral debates on migration at the local level, and highlights the implications of his study for our understanding of electoral competition more generally. He offers insights on why and how immigration issues, and particularly securitization ones, are incorporated in mainstream political discourse more specifically.

The Politics of Migration in Italy is an opportune contribution to the study of agenda-setting by political parties, and the politicization of migration. It should be read by scholars interested in migration issues, local politics, and party competition. By adopting an actor-oriented approach, and emphasizing the interaction between actors and the mass media, this study goes beyond traditional agenda theories that explain party competition by focusing on policy dynamics or changes in public opinion. Additionally, by developing a multi-dimensional approach that accounts for several contextual and strategic factors, the study is able to show the conditions under which parties are likely to choose one strategy over others. Most importantly, by developing a typology of dimensions and frames for the analysis of local public debates on migration, Gattinara offers a useful map for studying these issues beyond the Italian case. Finally, the author provides an important contribution to our understanding of the mechanisms that shape the current securitization of migration issues. He explains why and how processes of securitization of immigration in public discourse have permeated local level and party competition, as well as media coverage. Focusing on the interaction between mass media discourse and the strategies of political actors, the author brings solid evidence of the emergence and consolidation of security issues over economic and cultural issues in migration debates, and offers several analytical tools for understanding these processes, which are particularly relevant in times of growing politicization of migration issues.

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