

Investigating the link between migration and civiness in Italy. Which individual and school factors matter?

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Abstract

This article investigates the link between migration and civiness using data on cognitive skills and civic competences collected from a sample of 2,747 eighth-graders in Italy. Contrary to the abundant evidence of migrant/native gaps in educational and occupational attainments in the country, this study finds no migrant-specific gap on civiness development. Children of immigrants achieve lower levels of civic knowledge than natives, but differences disappear once social background and, particularly, cognitive test scores are equalized across groups. Moreover, no differences are found, on average, between natives and children of immigrants with respect to institutional trust. However, at the top tail of the civic knowledge distribution, children of immigrants display less trust than natives. This result, coupled with their greater openness towards immigrants' rights, suggests that immigrants' children attach great importance to the inequality in rights concerning the immigrant population in the country and, as a reaction, participate more actively in the community. Insignificant or positive associations between the proportion of immigrants' children in the classroom and natives' civiness are found. Finally, fairness in student-teacher interactions is found to improve students' civiness development, suggesting that besides citizenship education, also the school climate plays a vital role in enhancing children's civic competences.

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1 Introduction

Besides being a place where students accumulate cognitive skills, school is also a place that stimulates children's acquisition and practice of civic competences (Ten Dam and Volman 2007; Geboers et al. 2015). Both through learning contents and everyday interactions with peers and teachers, students develop their democratic subjectivity (Biesta 2011) and, ultimately, become able to participate actively in political life (Dee 2004; Milligan, Moretti, and Oreopoulos 2004; Brint 2006). Migration-based diversity in schools—which has arisen in most Western countries as a consequence of international migration—poses novel challenges to this socialization goal of education systems and motivates empirical investigation on the capacity of schools to function as environments in which all students develop their civic competences regardless of their immigrant background. Research on the link between migration and civic competences assumes a broader theoretical importance as immigration brings about considerable changes to the social and cultural realms in the host societies (Anderson and Paskeviciute 2006). Hence, addressing this topic would on the one hand yield deeper understanding of the paths of immigrants' integration into the host society and, on the other, shed light on how democratic citizenship develops in a diverse society.

This paper investigates two related but distinct research questions. First, it addresses the link between individual immigrant background and civicness. While many studies have focused on 'structural' aspects – notably educational and labor market attainments (Heath, Rothon, and Kilpi 2008), research on children of immigrants' civicness is less developed (Kokkonen, Esaiasson, and Gilljam 2010). More precisely, this study analyzes migrant/native differences and their main individual and contextual drivers. Among the former, it concentrates on cognitive skills and social background, while, among the contextual variables, it focuses on school climate as measured by the quality of student-teacher relationships. Second, the paper explores the association between the proportion of immigrants in the

classroom and natives' civicism. The literature comprises two main competing theories, according to which the presence of ethnic minorities either increases ('contact theory') or decreases ('conflict theory') natives' civic competences (Putnam 2007). The question of whether the former or the latter hypothesis prevails is much debated but has still not received a conclusive answer. Matters become even more complicated when one considers that civicism is a multidimensional concept involving various competences related to knowledge, subjective attitudes and behaviors (Campbell 2006) and that migration can exert different effects on each of them (Kokkonen, Esaiasson, and Gilljam 2010). Hence, this study focuses on four distinct civicism dimensions: civic knowledge, institutional trust, tolerance towards immigrants, and participation in the community.

The analyses are carried out on a nationally representative sample of eighth graders attending Italian lower secondary schools. Italy is interesting as a case study because it is a country of recent immigration characterized by a weak structural integration of immigrants (Fullin and Reyneri 2011) and their children (Schnell and Azzolini 2015), and by comparatively high levels of negative attitudes towards immigrants (Horowitz 2010). The data employed in the analysis come from the combination of two datasets: the *International Civic and Citizenship Education Study* (hereafter ICCS) and the *Indagine sugli Apprendimenti* conducted by the National Evaluation Institute (hereafter Invalsi-SNV). While ICCS provides a wealth of indexes of civicism and a rich set of individual and school level variables, Invalsi-SNV adds students' cognitive skills derived from mathematics and Italian language standardized tests. Information on cognitive skills is important in light of the presumption that individuals endowed with higher levels of cognitive skills are also more able to accumulate and process complex civic concepts and are consequently expected to participate more in social and political life (Lipset 1959; Dee 2004; Lochner 2011). Moreover, for the purposes of this study, the possibility of comparing natives' and migrants' civicism controlling for

cognitive skills is vital because the latter often substantially underperform with respect to the former in cognitive tests largely because of disadvantaged social backgrounds and lower mastery of the host country language (Schnell and Azzolini 2015).

2 Literature review

2.1 Defining civiness

Even though civiness is a broad concept, whose meaning evolves over time and across contexts, it is commonly seen as strictly related to the notion of democracy (Lipset 1959; Putnam 1993). In a democracy, civiness can be defined as a set of competences which have to do with knowledge, values, attitudes and behaviors and that allow citizens' active participation in the political, social and civil spheres of a society (Putnam 1993; Nie 1996; Abowitz and Harnish 2006; Campbell 2006; Ten Dam and Volman 2007; De Coster et al. 2012). A first competence to be considered is civic knowledge. The latter gains importance under the assumption that a democratic society works insofar as its members have an adequate understanding about facts, institutions and concepts of citizenship (Lipset 1959). Civic knowledge should allow citizens to contribute actively and critically to social and political life (Glass 2000). A second element that enhances democracy is the degree to which its members have trust in its civic institutions (e.g., the parliament, political parties, the system of justice). While a certain degree of institutional trust is needed to facilitate collective actions and public goods production and thus ensure the functioning of a democracy (Warren 1999), too high a level of trust may be an indicator of acritical attitudes and disaffection (Putnam 1993; Inglehart 1997; Ten Dam et al. 2011). Indeed, the 'sign' of the relationship between knowledge and trust is shaped by the context. In a corrupt context, for example, a negative sign is indicative of critical attitudes which should be valued positively because they induce participation rather than complacency (Rothstein and Stolle 2002; Morris and Klesner

2010). Third, the extent to which individuals are tolerant and open towards minorities' rights (in our case, immigrants) is a further important factor in 'building' democracy, especially in an increasingly diverse society (Milner 2002). Finally, civic engagement is seen as a further important 'ingredient' to make democracy work (Putnam 1993). Civic engagement is a broad concept (Farthing 2010) which has been 'stretched' to cover different dimensions, from social to political and moral engagement (Berger 2009; Ekman and Amnå 2012). In this study, I focus on a limited aspect that relates to the active participation of individuals in the community, for instance by taking part in non-paid activities such voluntary work or political activism. These factors have been regarded as behavioral measures of civic engagement (Almond and Verba 1989), and they are often seen as positive 'social capital' (i.e., bridging social capital, Putnam 2007) that enhances the wellbeing of a community (Lipset 1959; Putnam 1993, 2001; Zukin et al. 2006).

2.2 The civicness development of immigrants' children

Drawing on prior studies, some expectations regarding the association between immigrant background and the four civic competences can be formed. First, children of immigrants are expected to achieve, on average, lower levels of civic knowledge than natives. This may be related to the same factors that explain the lower academic achievement of immigrants' children: i.e., less mastery of the host-country language and more disadvantageous social backgrounds (Kokkonen, Esaiasson, and Gilljam 2010). Hence, a large part of migrant/native differences on this indicator should disappear after adjusting for cognitive skills. Regarding institutional trust, children of immigrants may doubt institutions' neutrality if they feel that their families and themselves are discriminated against. Moreover, children of immigrants may be less trustful of institutions if they or their parents have experienced poorly performing institutions in their countries of origin (Kokkonen, Esaiasson, and Gilljam 2010; Ljunge

2014). Furthermore, immigrants' children are expected to be more open towards immigrants' rights because they are more aware of immigrants' life conditions and aspirations (Kokkonen, Esaiasson, and Gilljam 2010). Finally, in regard to civic behaviors like participation in the community, children of immigrants may be expected to participate less than natives do because they lack access to social networks and linguistic skills that ease communication and relationships with host-country members (Cvajner 2011).

2.3 The role of school: diversity and student-teacher relationships

The idea that education is an important precondition for democratic citizenship is quite popular (Lipset 1959; Almond and Verba 1989), and most of the empirical literature reports the existence of a positive correlation between individuals' education and civicness (Nie 1996; Lochner 2011), and also in the Italian case (Assirelli 2014).. Hence, schools are important socialization agents because they contribute to children's development of civic competences. In the classroom, where intense, formal and informal, interactions with teachers and peers occur on a daily basis, pupils can acquire the knowledge and competences that inform their actual behaviors at school and that are preconditions for their future civic and political engagement. Among the school-level factors that can contribute to children's development there may be school migration-based diversity. The literature on the effects of ethnic diversity on civicness and democratic citizenship has produced two main hypotheses. According to the so-called 'conflict theory', ethnic diversity leads to increased social and interethnic conflict (Alesina and Ferrara 2005) and negatively affects social and political trust (Putnam 2007). The underlying idea is that the more diverse a society, the more the members of the native population feel threatened because they perceive immigrants as new competitors for scarce resources and thus show higher levels of intolerance (Quillian 1995). Such a negative relationship may also emerge as a consequence of communication problems (Alesina and

Ferrara 2005). On the other hand, 'contact theory' predicts that diversity leads to higher tolerance and social trust thanks to frequent interethnic contacts, which reduce the formation of negative stereotypes and allow for the development of inclusive group identification (Allport 1979; Green and Wong 2008). 'Bridging' contacts are indeed found to positively affect social cohesion in England (Laurence 2011) and to reduce social distance in several European countries (Semyonov and Glikman 2009). Hence, it is important to carry out empirical tests that take a micro-level approach and focus on settings where contacts are intimate and are guaranteed to take place. Schools are an ideal setting because in the classes all students have frequent and intense contacts on a daily basis, are formally equal, and share super-ordinate goals (Kokkonen, Esaiasson, and Gilljam 2010; Janmaat 2012).

When studying the link between diversity and civiness, the possible heterogeneous effects of diversity on the different civic competences should be taken into account. According to some studies, a large proportion of immigrants in the classroom is detrimental for civic knowledge because of negative peer effects due to the lower knowledge of immigrants' children (Kokkonen, Esaiasson, and Gilljam 2010). Competing hypotheses exist with regard to the role played by diversity in institutional trust (Kokkonen, Esaiasson, and Gilljam 2010; Janmaat 2015). On the one hand, diversity may increase natives' institutional trust because, through everyday contacts, native students learn about the relative 'institutional advantage' of their country with respect to the less developed ones. On the other hand, natives may decrease their trust in civic institutions as they become aware of the existing inequality of rights and the institutions' inability to resolve it (Kokkonen, Esaiasson, and Gilljam 2010). As seen above, the idea that interethnic contacts generate tolerance and increase openness towards immigrants' rights is very popular, and several studies conducted at the neighborhood level (Green and Wong 2008; Stolle, Soroka, and Johnston 2008; Laurence 2011) or in schools (Kokkonen, Esaiasson, and Gilljam 2010; Isac, Maslowski, and van der Werf 2012;

Janmaat 2014) support this hypothesis. Finally, opposite mechanisms have been postulated to explain the link between diversity and participation (Campbell 2007; Janmaat 2012): on the one hand, participation may be highest in diverse contexts, where individuals may feel motivated to participate to pursue their interests; on the other hand, participation may be highest in homogeneous contexts where norms of civic participation are stronger.

Finally, school contexts may moderate the association between diversity and civiness. Classroom climate and fair student-teacher relationships have been found to foster citizenship (Geboers et al. 2013) and to be positively associated with favorable attitudes towards foreigners (Gniewosz and Noack 2008; Isac, Maslowski, and van der Werf 2012). A positive classroom climate has also been found to enhance civic participation in several countries (Janmaat 2012; Castillo et al. 2015). In Italy, perceived fairness in student-teacher relationships is negatively correlated with violent behaviors among students (Vieno et al. 2011). School climate may also influence children's institutional trust: since individuals form their opinion in their daily lives—e.g., infer from behaviors of civil servants on overall institutional trustability (Morris and Klesner 2010) —it may happen that students' trust in institutions is shaped by the quality of their relationships with teachers.

3. The Italian setting

Since the early 1990s, Italy has progressively become a destination of international migration. Inflows increased at particularly high rates throughout the 2000s, and the foreign population has increased by nearly seven times in the past two decades (OECD 2012). In 2010, the main foreign nationals in Italy were Romanians (around 20 per cent), followed by Albanians and Moroccans (around 10 per cent each) and Chinese and Ukrainians (4 per cent each). The younger segment of the immigrant-origin population has also increased markedly. In 2010, students with an immigrant background accounted for approximately 8 per cent of the overall

student body, while in 2000 it did not reach 2 per cent (Miur-Ismu 2011). A large majority of non-native students in 2010 were first-generation immigrants, meaning that they had experienced the migration process themselves. Most of these students had an East-European ancestry. Among the second generation, the incidence of North Africans was predominant, but also children originating from Western ancestries represented a non-negligible share.

Recent studies have shown that immigrants' occupational attainment in Italy is particularly poor. Immigrant workers are heavily concentrated in unskilled jobs, are more often employed in the irregular economy, and face very high job instability even when they are highly educated (Fullin and Reyneri 2011). This weak socioeconomic integration seems to contribute to the low educational performance of immigrants' children (Schnell and Azzolini 2015), who also display higher dropout risks and a higher probability of choosing shorter school careers (Azzolini and Barone 2013).

Prior studies have shown that children in Italy exhibit higher levels of civic knowledge compared with the average of countries included in the ICCS survey, but also more negative attitudes towards immigrants' rights (Torney-Purta 2002). Young people also show levels of participation in community activities and organizations devoted to environmental, social or political issues that are comparable with the EU27 average, and higher participation rates in political elections (Eurobarometer 2013). To date, no study has specifically addressed the topic of children of immigrants' civiness development in Italy. A partial exception is the work of Isac and colleagues (2012), who analyze the relationship between the proportion of immigrants in the classroom and natives' attitudes towards immigrants in 18 European countries. For Italy, the authors provide some support for the contact theory by finding that native students that have few immigrant classmates exhibit more negative attitudes towards immigrants relative to native students in classes with high proportions of immigrants.

Besides the above-mentioned factors that can negatively affect the acquisition of civic knowledge by the children of immigrants, there may be some institutional circumstances that affect other civiness competences. First, to be stressed is that naturalization in Italy is a quite long and difficult process. Italian law does not grant Italian citizenship to children of immigrants before the age of 18, even if they were born in Italy, so that children of immigrants are considered *de jure* 'foreigners' until they reach majority age. Moreover, residence permits for foreigners are strictly linked to their employment condition, thus increasing instability in family life-projects in the country. Taken together, the precarious legal and socioeconomic stability of immigrants in Italy may negatively affect immigrants' children levels of institutional trust and civic engagement.

Regarding citizenship education, this subject is part of the curriculum at ISCED-2 level in Italy. The main contents of citizenship education should cover (a) political literacy (knowledge of basic facts and understanding of key concepts); (b) critical thinking and analytical skills; (c) the development of values, attitudes and behaviors such as a sense of respect, tolerance, solidarity; (d) the encouragement of active participation and engagement at school and community levels. However, it is not a separate subject; rather, it is a cross-curricular area, and there are no official recommendations on the instruction time to be devoted to citizenship (De Coster et al. 2012).

4 Data and methods

4.1 Data and variables

I used a unique dataset that combined ICCS and Invalsi-SNV data providing information on eighth-graders enrolled at Italian lower secondary schools in the school year 2009/2010. The sample was drawn at two levels: first, public and publicly funded schools were randomly chosen and, second, one class belonging to the selected schools was randomly included in the

survey and all its students were interviewed. This implies that the separate effects of classes and schools are not identifiable. The sample comprised 2,747 students enrolled in 215 classes.

DEPENDENT VARIABLES

The first civicness index that I used was civic knowledge. Civic knowledge is a scale provided by ICCS that captures students' ability to apply the citizenship cognitive process to specific content domains (Schulz, Ainley, and Frailon 2011). The scale was constructed using 79 items with either multiple choice or constructed-response. One quarter of the items concerned factual knowledge and understanding, whereas the remaining ones covered reasoning and analyzing aspects related to four content domains: civic society and systems, civic principles, civic participation, civic identities.¹

The scale measuring students' trust in civic institutions was built on students' responses to the following question: 'How much do you trust each of the following institutions?'. The question included six items: the national government of your country; the local government of your town or city; courts of justice; the police; political parties; the national parliament. Answers could range from 'completely' to 'quite a lot' 'a little' and 'not at all'.

Student's attitudes towards immigrants' rights were measured with five items. Students were required to indicate on a 4-point scale (ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree') their level of agreement with the following statements: 'immigrants should have the opportunity to continue speaking their own language'; 'immigrant children should have the same opportunities for education that other children in the country have'; 'immigrants who live in a country for several years should have the opportunity to vote in elections';

¹ The results presented in this study are based on the first plausible value provided by ICSS. The analyses were replicated with the remaining four plausible values without noticeable differences (Schulz, Ainley, and Frailon 2011).

'immigrants should have the opportunity to continue their own customs and lifestyle';
'immigrants should have all the same rights that everyone else in the country has'.

Students' participation in the community was created by asking students to state whether they had participated in seven different organizations or groups in the wider community either 'within the last 12 months', 'more than a year ago,' or 'never'. The types of organizations considered were the following: 'a youth organization affiliated with a political party or union'; 'an environmental organization'; 'a human rights organization'; 'a voluntary group doing something to help the community'; 'an organization collecting money for a social cause'; 'a group of young people campaigning for an issue'.²

INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Students' migration background was measured with two variables: the first one was a dummy variable taking value 1 if the student was born abroad and 0 if he/she was born in Italy. The second one was relative to parents' migration status, and took the values 0 if both parents were born in Italy; 1 if at least one was born abroad; and 2 if both were born abroad. If only one parent was present, students were allocated according to their own place of birth, and thus either to categories 0 or 2.

Among the other relevant individual predictors of civiness (Torney-Purta 2002; Isac, Maslowski, and van der Werf 2011), I used two indicators of family background. The first was the highest occupational status of parents as measured through the international socioeconomic index (ISEI) (Ganzeboom, Graaf, and Treiman 1992). I then included parental education to capture the human capital possessed within the family. This variable was coded

² The data did not make it possible to discriminate 'bonding' from 'bridging' contacts (Putnam 2007) nor to identify organizations on the basis of their 'ethnic' composition (Demireva and Heath 2014). Hence, I excluded the item 'cultural organization based on ethnicity' included in the scale originally provided by ICCS. I used principal components factor analysis to build the new scale with the six mentioned items (the resulting Cronbach's alfa was 0.66).

in the following three categories: up to lower secondary education; upper secondary education; and university degree.

I then used a measure of student cognitive skills obtained as the average of the mathematics and Italian tests scores retrieved in the Invalsi-SNV dataset. Student age was a further important control variable because it measures students' school delay, which is mostly a consequence of grade retention and thus serves as a further proxy for school performance. Finally, gender was another individual control of some importance because female students are often found to have higher levels of civiness than males (Isac, Maslowski, and van der Werf 2011).

CLASSROOM-LEVEL INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

The first contextual variable used was the proportion of children of immigrants (defined as those children with two foreign-born parents) in the class. This variable took three categories identified in correspondence to three cut-off points in the distribution, namely the 50th, 75th and 90th percentiles. This criterion led to a sub-division of classes into four groups: a) classes with no children of immigrants (0%), classes with a low presence (up to 7.5%); classes with a medium presence (7.5-15%), and classes with over 15% of immigrants. To account for the classroom's socioeconomic composition, I calculated the proportion of children with at least one tertiary-educated parent. I then computed the average ability of the class by averaging student Invalsi-SNV scores over classes. Finally, to capture the quality of teacher-student relationships, I averaged students' perceptions of student-teacher relations across students within classes. Students were asked the following question: 'How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about you and your school?'. Answers could vary from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' with the following items: 'most of my teachers treat me fairly'; 'students get along well with most teachers'; 'most teachers are interested in students'

wellbeing'; 'most of my teachers really listen to what I have to say'; 'if I need extra help, I will receive it from my teachers'. Finally, all models controlled for area of residence, which was coded in five categories: northern-west, northern-east, centre, south, islands. Table 1 provides a descriptive overview of the sample and the variables' distribution.

[Table 1 here]

4.2 Methods

The analyses were based on multilevel models that made it possible to take the two-level structure of the data into account and thus jointly model individual and classroom effects. A series of nested models were implemented in order to assess the additional contribution of the each variable. Continuous predictors were centered on the grand mean. Models assessing the correlation between immigrants' children share and civicness were restricted to the subsample of students with at least one native-born parent in order to reduce the reflection problem (Manski 1993). Even though several important control variables were modeled in the analysis, the estimated relationships are by no means to be given a causal interpretation. Many other (unobservable) factors that affect both immigrants' allocation into schools and student civic competences may also be at work. To tackle this endogeneity problem, I could have included school fixed effects as done in other works (Contini 2013), assuming that the allocation of immigrants' children among classes within schools was random. However, this solution was not applicable because ICCS surveyed only one class per school. An instrumental variables approach, which would allow exploitation of exogenous variation in immigrants' allocation among classes/schools, did not seem applicable either, as no convincing instrument was available.

5 Results

5.1 Civic knowledge

Table 2 shows the coefficients of a series of models on civic knowledge. On examining the variance partition among and within classes (Model 1), civic knowledge is found to vary much more across individuals within the same class than across classes. The portion of the latter on the total variance (i.e., the Intra-Class Correlation), however, is far from being negligible (13%). Hence, schools play a non-negligible role in developing children's civic knowledge.

Model 1 also shows that there is a negative and statistically significant association between immigrant background and civic knowledge. Children of immigrants display sizeable gaps relative to natives, which reach 5.9 points (almost half a standard deviation) when both parents were born abroad. Model 2 adds students' social background (i.e., highest parental ISEI and education), gender and age. Parental education proves to be a very strong predictor of civic knowledge: students with high-educated parents obtain roughly 4.4 points more (roughly, one third of a standard deviation) than those with low-educated parents. Also parental ISEI is strongly and positively correlated with civic knowledge. Girls clearly outperform boys (+2.5 points), while older students (i.e., retained students) display lower civic knowledge (-1.5 points). Importantly, after adding these variables, the gap of children of two foreign-born parents decreases substantially and is no longer significant. This result points to the importance of social background in accounting for migrant/native gaps. At the same time, the gaps for foreign-born children and for children of mixed couples persist significantly.

[Table 2 here]

Model 3 adds individual cognitive skills. These substantially improve the model's fit and are strongly correlated with civic knowledge. Importantly, cognitive skills wash away all

residual migrant/native gaps, indicating that there are no migrant-specific disadvantages in civic knowledge accumulation. Also, social background's coefficients are smaller, suggesting that part of the advantage of children of more affluent and educated families is mediated by cognitive skills. Furthermore, the age coefficient is no longer significant, while females still display higher levels of civic knowledge than males. Interestingly, modeling cognitive skills reduces within-class variance but increases variance across classes. This may be due to the fact that the achievement levels vary substantially across schools. Indeed, when introducing classroom-level variables (including the average class skills, Model 4), variance across classes is significantly reduced, while the residual variance remains essentially unchanged. Compared with Model 1, the total variance is smaller and the ICC is unchanged. Interestingly, the socioeconomic makeup of the class is strongly and positively associated with civic knowledge, while, *ceteris paribus*, there seems to exist a trade-off between classroom average level of cognitive achievements and civic knowledge.

Model 5 finally shows that no trade-off exists between the proportion of immigrants' children in the class and natives' civic knowledge. On the contrary, native students in classes with low proportions of immigrants exhibit higher civic knowledge compared with students in classes with no immigrants. The coefficients of medium and high shares are also positive but not statistically significant.

5.2 Institutional trust

Models 1 to 3 in Table 3 indicate that no statistically significant differences exist between natives and children of immigrants on trust in institutions. Overall, the predictive power of individual factors is smaller compared with the results reported in Table 2. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that ISEI exerts positive and significant effects on students' trust when controlling for cognitive skills. In regard to prior schooling, it is also noticeable that students

who were retained one or more years exhibit lower institutional trust, while cognitive skills are not statistically associated with trust.

[Table 3 here]

In line with findings from other countries characterized by high levels of perceived corruption—e.g., Greece, Russia, see OECD (2011)—civic knowledge is found to be negatively correlated with trust, suggesting that the more individuals know about the civic institutions, the more they are aware of (and critical towards) the existing shortcomings in the political system, and the less trustful they are. Although this coefficient is small, it holds statistically significant even after modeling classroom level variables (Model 4). Among the latter, the quality of student-teacher relations is found to positively and significantly affect trust. This result points to the importance of classroom climate and the quality of everyday school interactions because students may evaluate institutions on the basis of their own experiences. Inspection of the variance partition shows that the ICC is rather small, varying from 4.8 to 2.8 in Model 1 and Model 4, respectively. Overall, schools seem less able to influence students' institutional trust relative to civic knowledge.

Model 5 examines the association between the proportion of immigrants' children in the class and natives' trust. Similar to civic knowledge, the data suggest that there are no detrimental effects of classroom diversity on students' civicism. On the contrary, low and medium proportions of immigrants in the class are positively associated with natives' trust in institutions.

5.3 Tolerance towards immigrants

Model 1 in Table 4 shows that students with two foreign-born parents are much more likely to accept and recognize immigrants' rights than other students. This result is stable even after the introduction of individual and contextual controls (Models 2-4). Interestingly, no effect of

students' immigrant status is detected. This result may be a consequence of the fact that attitudes towards immigrants' rights are mainly transmitted by parents – and to some extent reflect families' conditions – rather than being developed by children on the basis of their own experiences. With respect to social background factors, and in line with the literature (Coenders and Scheepers 2003), students whose parents possess higher ISEI and higher education display more positive attitudes towards immigrants, but these associations are no longer significant when cognitive skills and civic knowledge are modeled. A significant and positive effect is found for civic knowledge, hinting at the importance of civic education instruction in enhancing tolerance.

[Table 4 here]

The quality of teacher-student relations is positively associated with tolerance (Gniewosz and Noack 2008), as also found for institutional trust, highlighting the importance of this contextual factor for students' civiness development. However, roughly 95% of the variance in tolerance is explained at the individual level. Hence, once again, individual characteristics seem to matter more than school contexts. Turning to the relationship between the share of immigrants' children and tolerance (Model 5), the only significant coefficient is the one related to classes with medium proportions of immigrants, while both classes with low and high proportions of immigrants do not differ from those with no immigrants' children. These results do not provide a straightforward understanding of the relationship between ethnic diversity and tolerance attitudes, but they do not support the conflict hypothesis either.

5.4 Participation in the community

Mixed results are found regarding the relationship between immigrant background and participation in the community (Table 5). A negative effect is found for foreign-born students.

This could be explained by the fact that these children were born abroad and may therefore lack key linguistic and social networks resources. A negative association is found also for students with one foreign-born parent while, surprisingly, a positive effect is detected for children of two foreign-born parents, suggesting that the latter may be induced to engage more actively in the community as they realize the existence of inequality of rights concerning immigrants in the country (as seen in section 5.3). These patterns are stable across Models 1 to 4. These models also indicate that parental education, and to a lesser extent parental ISEI, are positively correlated with participation. A small but negative coefficient is found for civic knowledge. This may be partly due to the fact that the data only consider traditional forms of participation and not 'emerging ones', which are more fluid and less hierarchical, and which could allow children with high civic knowledge to express themselves more freely and be more participative (Farthing 2010).

[Table 5 here]

Finally, M5 shows that the higher the proportion of immigrants' children in the class, the higher the natives' involvement in the community, suggesting the existence of positive spillover effects, whose mechanisms cannot be disentangled within this study and on which further research is needed.

5.5 The relationship between civic knowledge and the other civic outcomes

In Tables 3-5 civic knowledge was found to be positively correlated with tolerance towards immigrants but negatively associated with social trust and, to a lesser extent, also participation in the community. Given the centrality of civic knowledge, not the least because among the other civic competences it is perhaps the one most 'easily' addressable by policy, in this section further analyses are presented in order to assess whether the average migrant/native differences discussed in the previous sections are stable across the civic

knowledge distribution. Figure 1 presents graphically the relationship between civic knowledge and the three other civicness dimensions by allowing for interactions with immigrant background (natives vs. children of immigrants). It is important to recall that these associations are estimated after controlling for individual cognitive skills; hence they reflect the ‘pure’ knowledge of civic contents rather than *also* general cognitive competences.

[Figure 1 here]

Figure 1 shows that civic knowledge is positively associated with tolerance but negatively with institutional trust and participation in the community, and that these results hold both for natives and children of immigrants. Interestingly, the slope of the relationship between civic knowledge and institutional trust is slightly steeper for immigrants' children; consequently, migrant/native differences in institutional trust happen to be larger at higher levels of civic knowledge. This result may be tentatively explained by the fact that children of immigrants with very high levels of civic knowledge may also be more aware of the deficiencies of democratic institutions not only in Italy but also in their origin countries and hence develop a more critical attitude towards institutions. An alternative explanation could be related to the fact that immigrant students with high levels of civic knowledge are more aware of the inequality of rights concerning the immigrant population and hence become less trustful.

6. Discussion

The study has revealed the existence of an intricate link between immigrant background and civicness in Italy. Children of immigrants score significantly lower than natives on a standardized test on civic knowledge. This result comes as no surprise, having been documented also in other countries (Kokkonen, Esaiasson, and Gilljam 2010), but, most interestingly, this drawback is not attributable to migration specific-factors that hinder the acquisition of civic contents and principles. On the contrary, immigrants' children display the

same levels of civic knowledge as natives when social background and, particularly, cognitive skills are held equal across groups. No differences are found between natives and non-native students on institutional trust either. However, at the top tail of the civic knowledge distribution, children of immigrants display lower trust than natives. This may suggest that immigrants' children with high levels of civic knowledge are more aware of the inequality of rights faced by the immigrant population in the host society, and hence become more skeptical about institutions' fairness. This interpretation is indirectly confirmed when considering that children with two foreign-born parents indeed attach greater importance to immigrants' rights than natives. Furthermore, children of two foreign-born parents show higher levels of participation in the community than natives, perhaps as a reaction to the perceived inequality of rights. Nonetheless, the evidence on the link between immigrant background and participation in the community is mixed because born-abroad students show lower participation, perhaps because of limited social networks. More research is needed to shed light on this issue, also paying attention to novel and non-traditional forms of participation (Farthing 2010).

The study has also assessed the separate contribution of cognitive skills and civic knowledge to other civic competences. This represents an improvement on most previous empirical studies, which do not make this crucial distinction. The results presented in this paper highlight the importance of civic knowledge, even net of cognitive skills, in enhancing children's critical attitudes to civic institutions and tolerance towards immigrants' rights. Hence, the study corroborates the understanding of civic knowledge as a basic competence for citizenship development.

Regarding school factors, the proportion of immigrants' children in the class is never found to be negatively correlated with any of the four civic competences, suggesting that migration-based diversity is not harmful to natives' citizenship development. On the contrary,

positive and significant correlations were detected, hinting at the possibility that 'contact theory' may apply, as also found by Isac *et al.* (2012). Furthermore, the quality of the relationships between teachers and students is positively correlated with civicism: fairness in the formal and informal interactions with teachers seems to inform students' judgments of civic institutions, increase their respect and tolerance towards immigrants' rights, and induce them to become active members of the wider community. Although these results are based on regressions that make it possible to control for several individual and contextual factors, they are likely to be affected by 'selection bias' due to the differential sorting of students into schools. Further research is needed in order to tackle the causality of these associations.

7. Conclusions

Contrary to the growing evidence of migrant/native gaps on several 'structural integration' indicators in Italy, including educational attainment (Azzolini and Barone 2013; Schnell and Azzolini 2015), this study reports no migration-specific gap on civicism development. This suggests that immigrants' adaptation in Italy follows heterogeneous paths –i.e., that 'civic integration' may take place also when structural inclusion is weak. Moreover, although the study could not disentangle the causality of the relationship, the proportion of immigrants' children in the class is found to be not detrimental to natives' civicism development. Considering that previous studies have found that class diversity does not harm natives' cognitive skills either (Contini 2013), it can be concluded that there is no strong empirical evidence in support of policies aimed at reducing immigrants' concentration in classrooms. What 'citizenship education' policy might instead be primarily concerned with is the introduction and reinforcement of programs aimed at improving civic knowledge, considering that the latter is positively associated with critical attitudes toward institutions and tolerance towards diversity, a dimension on which Italian children lag behind (Torney-Purta 2002). A further implication of this study concerns the importance of facilitating and stimulating school

practices that enhance school climate and fairness in student-teacher relationships because students' everyday experiences at school may exert positive effects on long-term citizenship. Beyond these general implications, the study does not address the causality of the relationships under study and cannot shed light on the specific mechanisms that link school contexts and civic knowledge with citizenship development. More research is required to redress these shortcomings.

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Table 1 Descriptive statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.
<i>Individual level</i>		
Civic knowledge ^a	54.183	13.92
Institutional trust ^a	56.114	13.82
Tolerance towards immigrants ^a	59.570	18.59
Participation in the community ^a	11.157	14.83
Foreign-born	0.056	0.23
One foreign-born parent	0.063	0.24
Two foreign-born parents	0.053	0.22
Highest parental ISEI	47.030	16.45
Parents with at least upper secondary education	0.487	0.50
Parents with tertiary education	0.217	0.41
Age	14.058	0.41
Cognitive skills (average of maths and reading)	64.023	18.12
Female	0.484	0.50
<i>Classroom level</i>		
Index of teacher-student relationships	51.281	3.80
Average skills	63.807	13.72
Share of tertiary educated parents	0.213	0.19
Low share of immigrants (up to 7.5%)	0.196	0.40
Medium share of immigrants (7.5-15%)	0.135	0.34
High share of immigrants (15% and above)	0.120	0.33
N students	2,474	
N classes	152	

^a Higher values reflect higher levels of civicism. Scores are normalized to improve comparability.

Note: Final student weights are used.

Source: Own elaboration on ICCS and INVALSI-SNV data

Table 2 Multilevel regression estimates of immigrant background and classroom diversity civic Knowledge

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Foreign-born (<i>ref. native-born</i>)	-3.368*	-4.380**	-1.642	-1.448	
	(1.994)	(1.929)	(1.672)	(1.659)	
One foreign-born parent (<i>ref. native-born parents</i>)	-2.256**	-2.061**	-0.632	-0.574	
	(1.092)	(1.046)	(0.908)	(0.900)	
Two foreign-born parents	-5.599***	-1.758	-2.010	-1.914	
	(2.090)	(2.035)	(1.765)	(1.748)	
Highest parental ISEI		0.165***	0.113***	0.108***	0.117***
		(0.0201)	(0.0175)	(0.0174)	(0.0179)
Parents with at least upper secondary education (<i>ref. lower secondary</i>)		3.184***	1.562***	1.370**	0.966*
		(0.627)	(0.546)	(0.542)	(0.557)
Parents with tertiary education		4.444***	2.741***	2.364***	1.996**
		(0.921)	(0.803)	(0.805)	(0.832)
Female (<i>ref. male</i>)		2.519***	2.655***	2.654***	2.728***
		(0.499)	(0.430)	(0.428)	(0.437)
Age		-1.468**	-0.00792	0.105	-0.0915
		(0.697)	(0.607)	(0.602)	(0.680)
Cognitive skills			0.472***	0.532***	0.544***
			(0.0169)	(0.0183)	(0.0186)
Index of teacher-student relationships				-0.0731	-0.0566
				(0.108)	(0.109)
Average skills				-0.407***	-0.421***
				(0.0371)	(0.0377)
Share of tertiary educated parents				8.045***	8.464***
				(2.241)	(2.274)
Low share of immigrants (up to 7.5%) (<i>ref. none</i>)					2.246**
					(1.088)
Medium share of immigrants (7.5-15%)					1.315
					(1.275)
High share of immigrants (15% and above)					0.913
					(1.394)
Constant	56.79***	52.62***	50.94***	52.64***	51.86***
	(1.027)	(1.020)	(1.206)	(0.959)	(1.074)
Between-Class Variance	24.30***	15.92***	33.95***	15.89***	15.74***
	(0.408)	(0.373)	(0.442)	(0.336)	(0.340)
Within-Class Variance	158.5***	146.2***	107.6***	107.1***	107.5***
	(0.185)	(0.178)	(0.153)	(0.152)	(0.155)
Deviance (-2*Log-Likelihood)	19739.4	19505.9	18865.4	18766.1	18087.5
Log-Likelihood Ratio Test	155.9***	233.4***	640.5***	99.33***	-
N	2,474	2,474	2,474	2,474	2,383

Note: All models include area of residence fixed effects. Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Source: Own elaboration on ICCS and INVALSI-SNV data

Table 3 Multilevel regression estimates of immigrant background and classroom diversity institutional trust

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Foreign-born (<i>ref. native-born</i>)	1.253 (2.101)	2.009 (2.115)	1.484 (2.102)	1.565 (2.091)	
One foreign-born parent (<i>ref. native-born parents</i>)	0.560 (1.148)	0.456 (1.145)	0.224 (1.138)	0.533 (1.131)	
Two foreign-born parents	-1.179 (2.197)	0.358 (2.226)	0.145 (2.209)	0.309 (2.195)	
Highest parental ISEI		0.0239 (0.0219)	0.0463** (0.0221)	0.0487** (0.0221)	0.0530** (0.0225)
Parents with at least upper secondary education (<i>ref. lower secondary</i>)		-0.711 (0.687)	-0.319 (0.686)	-0.309 (0.685)	-0.238 (0.694)
Parents with tertiary education		0.553 (1.006)	1.133 (1.004)	0.937 (1.025)	0.914 (1.046)
Female (<i>ref. male</i>)		-0.548 (0.548)	-0.187 (0.547)	-0.153 (0.545)	-0.272 (0.550)
Age		-2.569*** (0.762)	-2.727*** (0.758)	-2.636*** (0.755)	-3.143*** (0.843)
Cognitive skills			0.0212 (0.0208)	0.0243 (0.0268)	0.0474* (0.0271)
Civic knowledge			-0.144*** (0.0242)	-0.142*** (0.0248)	-0.144*** (0.0249)
Index of teacher-student relationships				0.570*** (0.0925)	0.568*** (0.0910)
Average skills				-0.0120 (0.0373)	-0.0429 (0.0373)
Share of tertiary educated parents				2.242 (1.982)	1.796 (1.971)
Low share of immigrants (up to 7.5%) (<i>ref. none</i>)					1.783** (0.881)
Medium share of immigrants (7.5-15%)					1.909* (1.067)
High share of immigrants (15% and above)					1.558 (1.174)
Constant	55.00*** (0.790)	55.44*** (0.966)	55.20*** (0.967)	55.48*** (0.912)	55.00*** (0.980)
Between-Class Variance	9.036*** (0.395)	8.774*** (0.394)	8.862*** (0.393)	5.133*** (0.411)	4.349*** (0.424)
Within-Class Variance	179.8*** (0.197)	178.3*** (0.196)	175.5*** (0.195)	175.2*** (0.194)	172.2*** (0.196)
Deviance (-2*Log-Likelihood)	19930.2	19909.3	19871.2	19836.3	19058.3
Log-Likelihood Ratio Test	31.9***	20.9***	38.1***	34.9***	-
N	2,471	2,471	2,471	2,471	2,380

Note: All models include area of residence fixed effects. Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$ Source: Own elaboration on ICCS and INVALSI-SNV data

Table 4 Multilevel regression estimates of immigrant background and classroom diversity tolerance towards immigrants

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Foreign-born (<i>ref. native-born</i>)	2.748 (2.720)	2.898 (2.705)	4.008 (2.666)	3.944 (2.663)	
One foreign-born parent (<i>ref. native-born parents</i>)	-0.195 (1.486)	-0.248 (1.464)	0.287 (1.443)	0.497 (1.442)	
Two foreign-born parents	14.70*** (2.844)	17.27*** (2.848)	17.66*** (2.802)	17.90*** (2.798)	
Highest parental ISEI		0.0634** (0.0280)	0.0208 (0.0280)	0.0267 (0.0281)	0.0177 (0.0289)
Parents with at least upper secondary education (<i>ref. lower secondary</i>)		0.841 (0.878)	0.0314 (0.870)	0.156 (0.872)	1.118 (0.890)
Parents with tertiary education		2.977** (1.286)	1.819 (1.272)	2.111 (1.303)	3.188** (1.338)
Female (<i>ref. male</i>)		4.591*** (0.700)	3.962*** (0.693)	3.972*** (0.693)	4.326*** (0.705)
Age		-2.432** (0.975)	-2.028** (0.961)	-2.043** (0.962)	-2.256** (1.083)
Cognitive skills			0.00228 (0.0264)	-0.00589 (0.0341)	-0.000851 (0.0347)
Civic knowledge			0.250*** (0.0307)	0.257*** (0.0317)	0.245*** (0.0322)
Index of teacher-student relationships				0.386*** (0.125)	0.410*** (0.128)
Average skills				0.0163 (0.0489)	0.0180 (0.0503)
Share of tertiary educated parents				-2.346 (2.650)	-2.703 (2.740)
Low share of immigrants (up to 7.5%) (<i>ref. none</i>)					0.875 (1.250)
Medium share of immigrants (7.5-15%)					2.641* (1.498)
High share of immigrants (15% and above)					2.076 (1.644)
Constant	54.10*** (1.030)	50.55*** (1.249)	50.83*** (1.220)	50.78*** (1.203)	48.88*** (1.343)
Between-Class Variance	15.63*** (0.508)	15.43*** (0.496)	13.79*** (0.489)	11.54*** (0.496)	12.52*** (0.501)
Within-Class Variance	301.1*** (0.254)	291.4*** (0.250)	282.5*** (0.246)	282.6*** (0.246)	280.9*** (0.251)
Deviance (-2*Log-Likelihood)	21232.5	21152.8	21071.1	21060.5	20277.4
Log-Likelihood Ratio Test	32.6***	79.6***	81.8***	10.6***	-
N	2,474	2,474	2,474	2,474	2,383

Note: All models include area of residence fixed effects. Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Source: Own elaboration on ICCS and INVALSI-SNV data

Table 5 Multilevel regression estimates of immigrant background and classroom diversity on participation in the community

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Foreign-born (<i>ref. native-born</i>)	-5.818*** (2.208)	-5.990*** (2.222)	-6.415*** (2.219)	-6.393*** (2.219)	
One foreign-born parent (<i>ref. native-born parents</i>)	-2.270* (1.211)	-2.305* (1.208)	-2.515** (1.206)	-2.399** (1.206)	
Two foreign-born parents	8.854*** (2.312)	9.318*** (2.343)	9.195*** (2.337)	9.248*** (2.336)	
Highest parental ISEI		-0.00842 (0.0232)	0.00673 (0.0235)	0.00841 (0.0236)	0.0116 (0.0243)
Parents with at least upper secondary education (<i>ref. lower secondary</i>)		2.433*** (0.726)	2.730*** (0.728)	2.761*** (0.730)	2.585*** (0.747)
Parents with tertiary education		3.450*** (1.063)	3.840*** (1.065)	3.884*** (1.086)	3.368*** (1.120)
Female (<i>ref. male</i>)		0.722 (0.578)	0.934 (0.581)	0.942 (0.581)	0.847 (0.593)
Age		-0.569 (0.803)	-0.730 (0.803)	-0.719 (0.804)	-0.709 (0.907)
Cognitive skills			-0.0126 (0.0230)	-0.0124 (0.0285)	0.00399 (0.0291)
Civic knowledge			-0.0807*** (0.0260)	-0.0797*** (0.0268)	-0.0920*** (0.0272)
Index of teacher-student relationships				0.260** (0.120)	0.307*** (0.117)
Average skills				-0.00168 (0.0446)	-0.0219 (0.0445)
Share of tertiary educated parents				-0.143 (2.515)	1.540 (2.486)
Low share of immigrants (up to 7.5%) (<i>ref. none</i>)					1.061 (1.151)
Medium share of immigrants (7.5-15%)					2.458* (1.367)
High share of immigrants (15% and above)					3.086** (1.498)
Constant	7.635*** (0.935)	5.319*** (1.108)	5.269*** (1.110)	5.333*** (1.108)	5.028*** (1.202)
Between-Class Variance	15.99*** (0.431)	15.90*** (0.429)	15.88*** (0.429)	14.92*** (0.429)	13.03*** (0.433)
Within-Class Variance	196.4*** (0.207)	194.9*** (0.207)	193.7*** (0.206)	193.7*** (0.206)	194.3*** (0.210)
Deviance (-2*Log-Likelihood)	19973.7	19954.4	19940.1	19935.4	19199.1
Log-Likelihood Ratio Test	58.7***	19.2***	14.4***	4.7	-
N	2,445	2,445	2,445	2,445	2,355

Note: All models include area of residence fixed effects. Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Source: Own elaboration on ICCS and INVALSI-SNV data

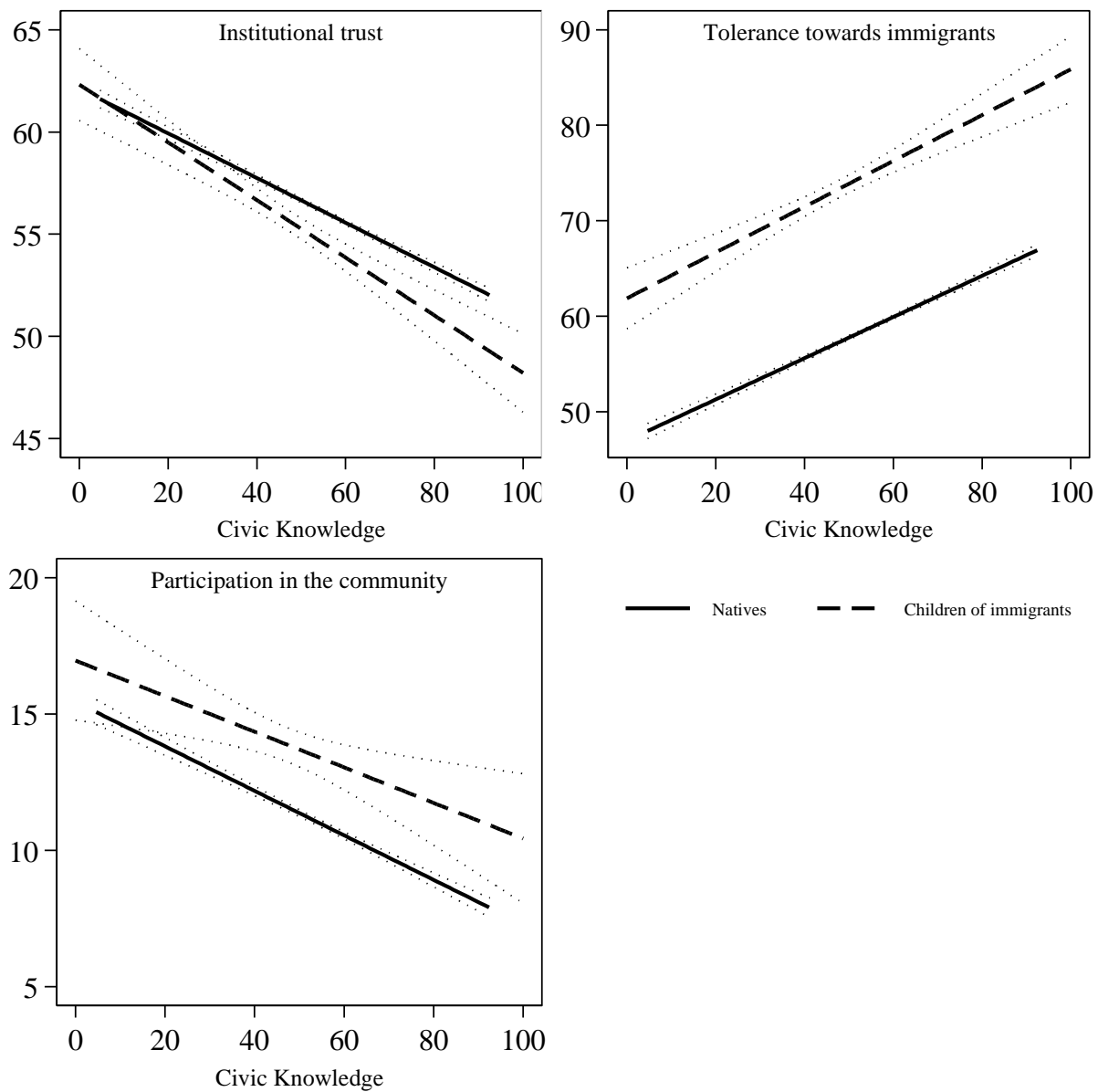


Figure 1 Interaction effects of immigrant background and civic knowledge on institutional trust, tolerance towards immigrants and civic engagement

Note: Predictions post-estimated after OLS models that also control for cognitive skills and the other variables included in Model 4. Dotted lines represent 95% C.I. lower and upper bounds of the estimates. Source: Own elaboration on ICCS and INVALSI-SNV data