

## POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN ITALY | YEAR 2019

# Citizens' political participation is declining

Between 2014 and 2019, the share of people aged 14 and over not engaged in politics has increased from 18.9% to 23.2%.

Political participation was mainly indirect by getting information from daily newspapers, magazines, or speaking about it (74.8%) and less by personal involvement (e.g. by demonstrating or contributing money to a political party, etc.) (8.0%). Young people were more involved in active politics, 14% of people aged 14-24 actively participated, especially by demonstrating and in marches (12.8%).

In 2019, something like 16 million people got information about politics by means of the Internet. Only one person out of three found information by means of daily newspapers (42.2% in 2014).

# 27.6%

**Share of people aged 14 and over who were not informed about politics**

Above all because of lack of interest (64.9%) and lack of trust in the political system (25.5%)

# 12 million

**People aged 14 and over who did not speak or get information about politics, and who were not directly involved in politics.**

# 42.2%

**The share of people who got information about political issues by the Internet**

Among people under 35 one out of four used social networks only

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## A minority of citizens took directly part in politics

Political participation is a multidimensional phenomenon that we can observe both at institutional and non-institutional levels. The former relates to small population groups; it refers to collective forms such as the participation in an electoral rally, in a protest march, or a direct involvement in a political party by volunteering or contributing money.

In 2019 participation in rallies ranked first (involving 4.1% of the population aged 14 and over), while volunteering in a party ranked last (0.8%). Participation in parades (3.9%) and financial support to a party (1.7%) lied between the two extremes. About 4.2 million people (8.0% of the population aged 14 and over) carried out at least one of the activities related to direct political participation.

A much larger share of citizens aged 14 and over, 74.8% (over 39 million), participated in political life through invisible or indirect forms. They talked about politics at least once a week 32.9% and 7.5% did it daily. They got information about politics at least once a week 52.7% (27.2% every day), 35.5% never talked about it (almost 7 million men and 11.7 million women) while 27.6% did not get information (5.5 million men and 8.9 million women). Therefore, people had more information than talks about politics. Listening to political debates was not that common (15.0%).

Women were less involved in politics compared to men. The former little participated in rallies (2.8% vs 5.6%), and hardly volunteered for a party (0.5% vs 1.2%) or gave money (1.3% vs 2.0%). The exception was a similar participation in parades (3.8% to 4.1%) but the participation rate in the parades of girls aged between 14 and 19 exceeded that of boys (14.5% to 11, 3%) (Table 1).

Indirect forms of participation recorded deeper gender differences: only 45.8% of women (60.2% of men) got at least weekly information on politics, spoke about politics at least once a week 25.3% (41.1% of men) and 11.9% (18.2% of men) watched political debates. The gender gap related to age, was absent among the youngest (14-17 years), while it progressively grew starting from the under 20 and became particularly evident for the over 60.

Political participation takes different forms at different ages of life. Participation in parades was higher among young people (12.9% of the aged 18-19) and progressively decreased. Participation in rallies instead ranged between 4% and 5% among the aged 20 - 64 and then declined. Volunteering for a party was limited at all ages. On the other hand, the invisible forms grew together with age, and then decreased after the age of 64.

## POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN 2019: THE MAIN NUMBERS

INDICATORS	ITALY 2019	VARIATION FROM 2014
% of people speaking about politics (a)	63.4	-4.7
% of people speaking about politics once a week (a)	32.9	-10.0
% of people getting information about politics (a)	71.2	-4.3
% of people getting information about politics once a week	52.7	-10.3
% of people listening to political debates (b)	15.0	-6.6
% of people taking part in a political rally (b)	4.1	-0.8
% of people taking part in a march (b)	3.9	-0.4
% of people volunteering for a political party (b)	0.8	-0.3
% of people contributing money to a political party (b)	1.7	-0.5
% of people getting information about politics by the Internet (c)	42.2	+14.5
% of people not engaged in politics (d)	23.2	+4.3

(a) Percentage of people aged 14 and over

(b) Percentage of people aged 14 and over with a form of political participation over the 12 months before the interview

(c) Percentage of people aged 14 who get information by the Internet over the total people aged 14 and over who are informed on politics

(d) Percentage of people aged 14 and over who do not speak of politics or inform themselves about politics or listen to political debates or attend a political rally, marches or contribute money or volunteer for a political party.

## While indirect political participation was declining, the direct one kept stable

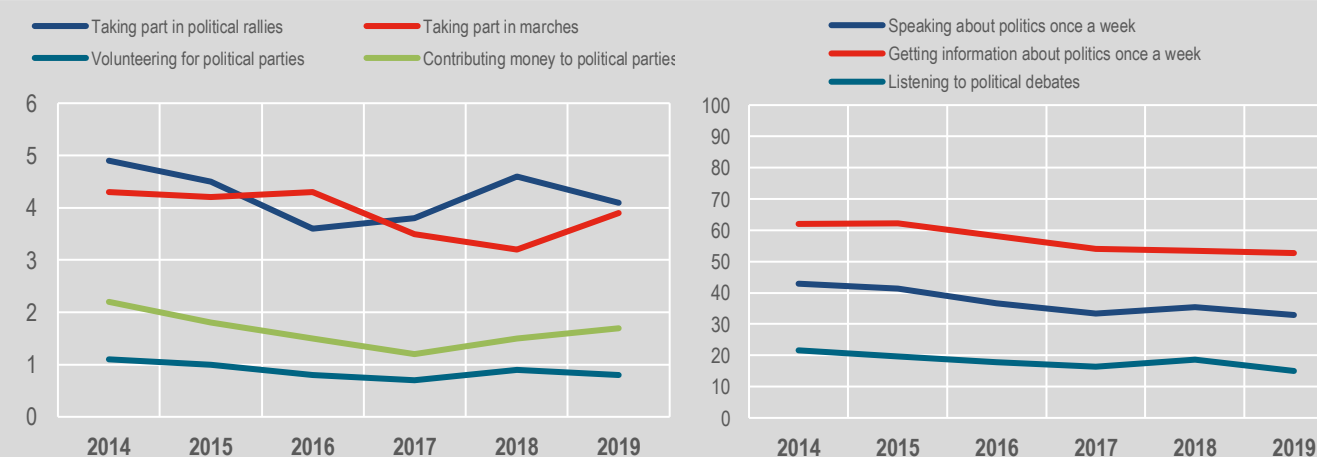
From 2014 to 2019, levels of political participation by people aged 14 and over declined. Even if they registered a slight increase during important electoral events.

As for direct participation, the erosion of the already low levels of participation was confirmed. The share of citizens who participated in political rallies passed from 4.9% in 2014 to a minimum of 3.6% in 2016. The economic support to parties passed from 2.2% to 1.2% in 2017. In 2018, because of the election campaign (the parliament elections of 4 March 2018 and the regional elections in Lazio and Lombardia), the direct participation raised again (the attendance to a political rally 4.6% and financial support to a political party 1.5%). Finally, in 2019 these political participation forms reached 4.1% and 1.7% respectively (Figure 1).

The participation in marches registered a trend not related to electoral events: from 4.2%/ 4.3% in 2014-2016 it declined to 3.2% in 2018, and grew again to 3.9% in 2019.

Between 2014 and 2019 the percentage of people speaking about politics at least once a week decreased from 42.9% to 32.9%, while the number of people getting information about politics at least once a week passed from 62.0% to 52.7%. In 2019, 15.0% of people aged 14 years and over used to listen to political debates compared to 21.6% in 2014. Additionally, indirect political participation due to electoral campaign was a little bit higher than in 2018.

**FIGURE 1. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN ITALY (a)**  
Years 2014-2019. Percentage of people aged 14 and over



(a) In the past 12 months before the interview

## Political information sources: less daily newspapers, more informal sources

Political participation is changing: a relevant number of people aged 14 years and over got information about politics at least sometimes in a year (71.2%, around 37.5 million of people). Interest in political life is a sign of engagement in public life - also at a psychological and emotional level - and it is important to highlight how information sources have changed over time.

Among the sources of political information, television was first with 89.2% of people using it to get information about politics. Newspapers (33.3%), radio (32.1%), week magazines (7.5%) and other magazines (3.0%) followed. People got information about politics also by discussing with friends (25.9%), relatives (22.9%), colleagues (13.1%), and acquaintances (12.8%). At the bottom political associations and trade unions, which recorded a percentage of around 2% (Table 5).

People got information about politics by using only one single source of information (32.9%), others used two sources of political information (27.0%) and almost 40% (39.5%) used three or more sources of information (Table 23).

27.6% of citizens used television as the only source of information; 14.6% combined television with informal sources (friends, relatives, acquaintances, or colleagues) while 7.9% got information by means of newspaper and television (Figure 2).

There was a relevant gender gap: if both men and women got political news above all by television, men usually read more newspapers than women (37.8% vs. 28.2%) and listened to the radio (35.7% to 28.0%). On the other hand, women got information more by discussing with relatives while men more with friends, colleagues, and acquaintances. Similarly, getting information from trade unions or political associations was more common among men than women (Table 5).

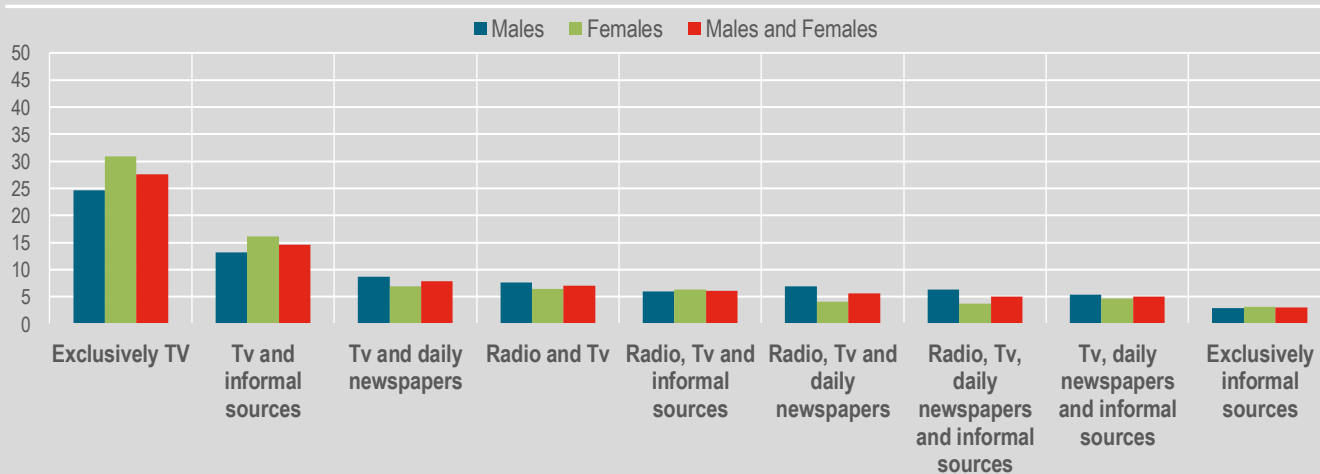
Women (35.8%) more than men (30.2%) used only one source to get information about politics, while young women got information in a pluralistic way as and more than their male peers (Table 23).

A more marked attitude of women was observed in using informal sources in the combinations of media used to get information about politics: women used only television (30.9%); they also got information about politics by television and informal sources (16.2%) or by television and by daily newspapers (7.0%). On the other hand, 24.6% of men used television only, 13.2% combined informal sources and television, and 8,7% television and daily newspapers (Figure 2).

Young people aged up to 34 used more informal sources to get information about politics, above all by discussing with friends and relatives. Also at this age men usually got information from friends while women by relatives.

### FIGURE 2. PREFERRED POLITICAL INFORMATION SOURCES

Year 2019. Percentage of people aged 14 and over of same sex by political information sources



## Among the traditional media, the use of radio increased while daily newspaper decreased

If the use of television was common to all social classes, the use of radio and daily newspapers, as well as other information sources, was more widespread among the highly educated and the high professionals. 45.1% of graduates and 48.6% of managers, entrepreneurs, and professionals got information about politics by radio and 49.9% and 51.3%, respectively, by reading daily newspapers. Among those with a primary school license, 14.1% used radio and 19.0% daily newspapers, which increased to 34.2% and 24.4% among blue-collar workers.

Even the use of informal sources (friends, relatives, and colleagues) was more frequent among highly educated people (28.9%, 26.4%, and 21.0% respectively among graduated and over). The exchange of political ideas among colleagues was widespread among white-collar workers (30.1%) (Tables 7 e 8).

In the South of Italy, the use of information sources others than television was lower than the national mean; there was observed the lowest percentage of men and women who got information about politics from daily newspapers (28.8% and 17.5%). Informal source discussions with friends were more common (35.2% of men and 26.3% of women) (Table 6.1).

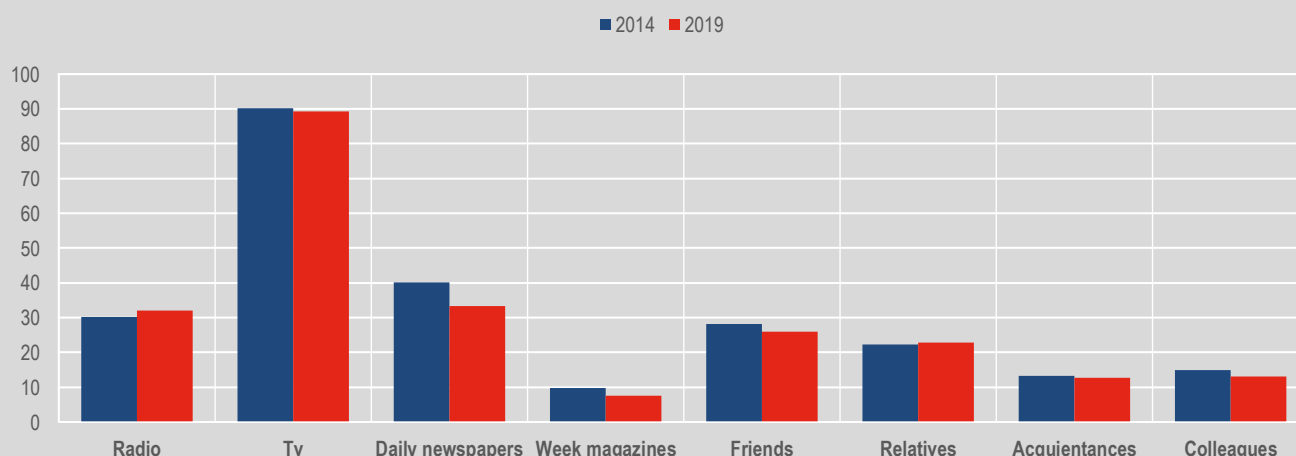
By comparing 2019 and 2014 data, the use of television declined a little bit even if it remained the main political information source (from 90.2% to 89.2%). The use of weekly magazine declined (from 9.8% to 7.5%) as well as the use of daily newspapers that dropped (from 40.2% to 33.3%). Only the use of radio increased (from 30.2% to 32.1%) (Figure 3).

There were many changes in the different age classes. Daily newspapers and weekly magazines were declining as sources of political information, especially for young people and adults, but also for the population aged 55-64, who in the past were usual users. The use of television among young people up to the aged 24 substantially decreased, while the radio, except for the very young (14-19 years old) was more used by people aged 45 and over. Discussions with friends, relatives, acquaintances, workmates, or classmates continued to grow among young people aged 18-24 (Tables 5 and 5.1).

These changes if on the one hand confirm the predominant role of television; on the other, they continue to be indicative of a search for information sources other than traditional or specialist ones, particularly among the youth. This search in the last decade has seen the rise of the Internet as a source of information.

**FIGURE 3. POLITICAL INFORMATION SOURCES**

Years 2014-2019. Percentage of people aged 14 and over who got information about politics



## More than 15 million people got information about politics via the Internet

In 2019, 15.8 million people aged 14 and over (30.1% of the total) got information about politics from the Internet (42.2% of people who get information about politics). Around half (47.7%) of people usually getting information about politics (at least one a week) used the Internet (Table 9).

The higher familiarity with the web of young people (compared to the elderly) in forms of political participation too was confirmed. 70% of people aged 14-24 got information about politics at least once a week via the Internet. This percentage decreased below 20% of people aged 65 and over. There was a gender gap in all age groups, except among young adults (25-34 years old) (Figure 4).

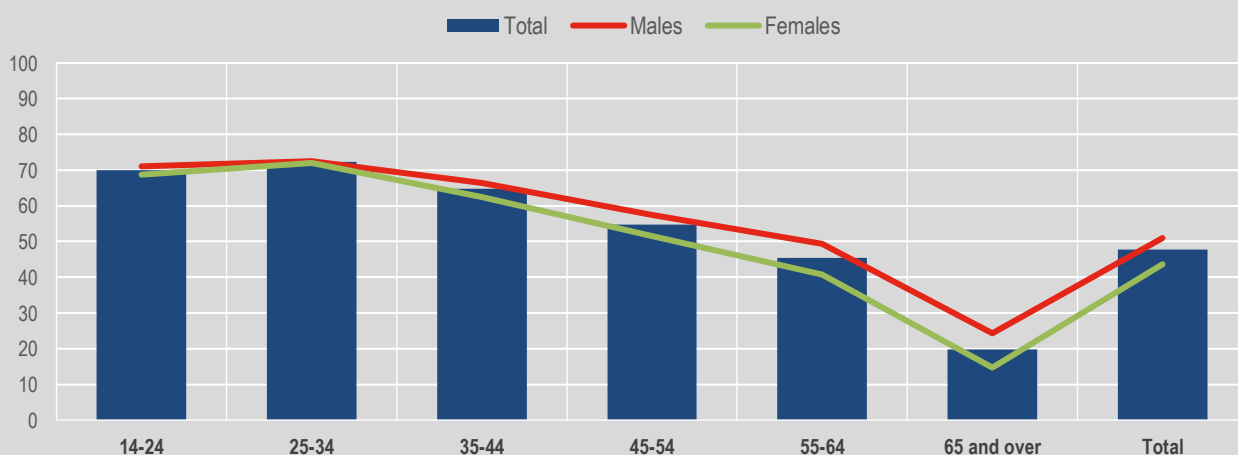
The use of the Internet as a political information source increased at the rising of educational level. Among the population aged 14 and over, the gap between graduates and those who have reached the middle school certificate was very wide (67.8% against 29.8%) and it was constant at all age groups, even among people aged 25-44 (75.9% against 36.6%). There were similar differences in education among those who get information about politics at least once a week from the Internet (Table 11).

The use of the Internet as a political information source was more widespread in the North and the Center of Italy (around 44%) than in the South (37.8%) and in the Islands (41.4%). They recorded higher percentages than the national mean among people who live in big towns (up 50 thousand population and more), above all in metropolitan areas (around 48% of people aged 14 and over who use the Internet like information channel about politics and around 53% used it at least once a week) (Table 10).

From 2014 to 2019, the percentage of people who got information about politics by the Internet passed from 27.7% to 42.2% (Tables 9 e 9.1). The rise of people who got information on the Internet more frequently (at least once a week) increased from 31.3% to 47.7%.

**FIGURE 4. PEOPLE AGED 14 AND OVER WHO GOT INFORMATION ABOUT POLITICS ALSO FROM THE INTERNET AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK BY SEX AND AGE GROUPS**

Year 2019. Percentage of people aged 14 years and over (of the same age and sex) who got information about politics



## Social Networks are more and more a source of political information

People got information about politics by the Internet, especially by reading newspapers, news, and online magazines (over 10 million people, 63.4% of those who use the Internet for this purpose). It was the only source of information in 33% of cases. In addition, a third of the people who read newspapers, news, and magazines online to get information about politics (over two and a half million people) did not use the printed versions for this purpose. Therefore, the decline in the use of newspapers, weeklies and print magazines seems to correspond, at least in part, to an audience of readers who used these channels of political information exclusively online.

Among people who got information about politics by the Internet, more than half used the web, particularly social networks, blogs, newsgroups and online forums (51.4%). A percentage of 22.9% listened to the radio and watched television online (5.6% exclusively) and 5.8% surfed in political party websites. The gender gap was very little, but a higher percentage of women compared to men got information about politics by social networks (50.3% vs. 46.4%). Over 65% of the adults aged up to 44 used traditional sources of political information also by the web (newspapers, news, magazines), while over 70% of young people aged 14-24 chose social networks: namely blogs, newsgroups or online forums (Table 9).

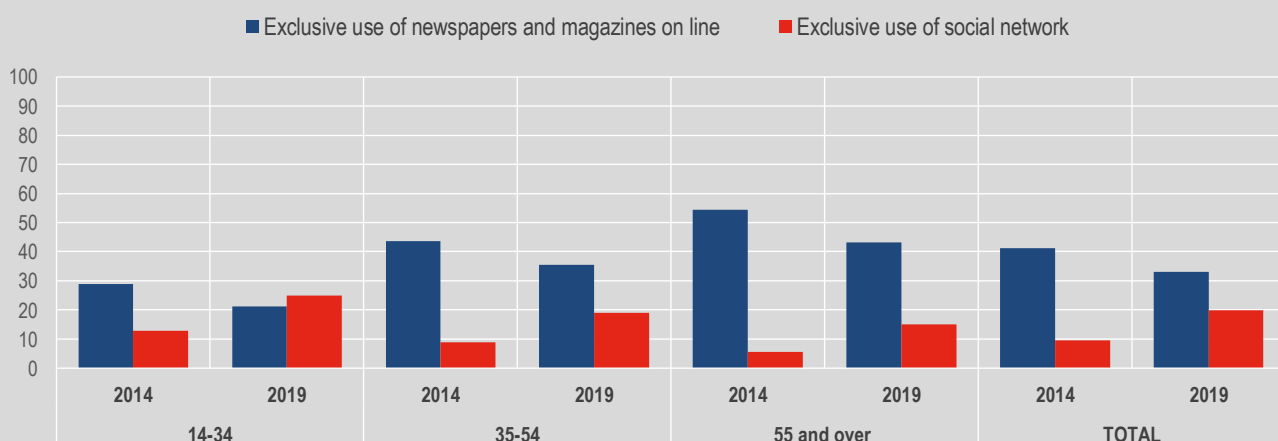
The majority of people who got information about politics also on the Internet used at least 2 media (38.5%). Above all young people up to the aged 34 used at least two media (47.7%), mainly social networks and the online daily newspapers. However, from the age of 35 onwards people preferred a single web information source especially for newspapers, news, and online magazines (Tables 14 and 24).

Preferences of online political information sources could refer to the generational differences already observed for traditional information sources. Among young people aged 14-34, 24.9% used social networks only to get information about politics, 21.2% of them used exclusively the daily newspapers, news, online magazines, and 17.8% used both information sources. For older age groups, the share of those who only get information through newspapers, news and online magazines increased (35.4% of people aged 35-54 and 43.1% aged 55 and over) and the percentage of people who exclusively used social networks decreased (18.9% of the aged 35-54 and 15.1% of the population aged 55 and over). Among the people, aged 35-54, 12% used both web information channels and around 8% of those over 54 (Table 14).

From 2014 to 2019 among people who informed themselves about politics by the Internet, the exclusive use of social networks grew (from 9.5% to 19.8%) while online printing fell (from 41.1% to 33.1% in 2019). The exclusive use of social networks as a political information channel exceeded in percentage terms the online press one among young people up to the age of 34. It doubled among the people aged 35-54 (from 8.9% to 18.9%) and almost tripled among people aged over 54 (from 5.6% to 15.1%) (Figure 5).

The widespread use of social networks as the only information channel is common among people aged 14 and over, regardless of the educational levels, even if the exclusive use of this type of channel was more widespread among people with medium-low educational levels.

**FIGURE 5. PEOPLE AGED 14 AND OVER WHO INFORM THEMSELVES ABOUT POLITICS ALSO VIA THE INTERNET BY EXCLUSIVE CHANNEL OF INFORMATION, SEX AND AGE GROUPS. Year 2019. Percentage of people aged 14 and over (of the same age and sex) who get information about politics from the Internet**



## Lack of trust and interest in politics: the main reasons of disinformation

More than a quarter of people aged 14 and over (27.6%) got information about politics neither by traditional channels nor by the web. They were mainly young people (14-24 years old, over 30%) and the elderly (aged 75 and over, around 34%). Among women, percentages were higher than men (32.9% vs. 21.9%). Moreover, the more the age increased, the more the gender gap widened.

People did not get information about politics because of lack of interest (64.9%), and of lack of trust in the political system (25.5%), they considered politics a complicated issue (about 10%) or they do not have much time (7%). There are not relevant gender differences: women manifested a higher lack of interest in politics while men lack of trust (Table 15). 52.5% of people who did not get information chose the lack of interest as the only reason of distance by politics and 17% indicated the lack of trust in politics (only 5% chose both).

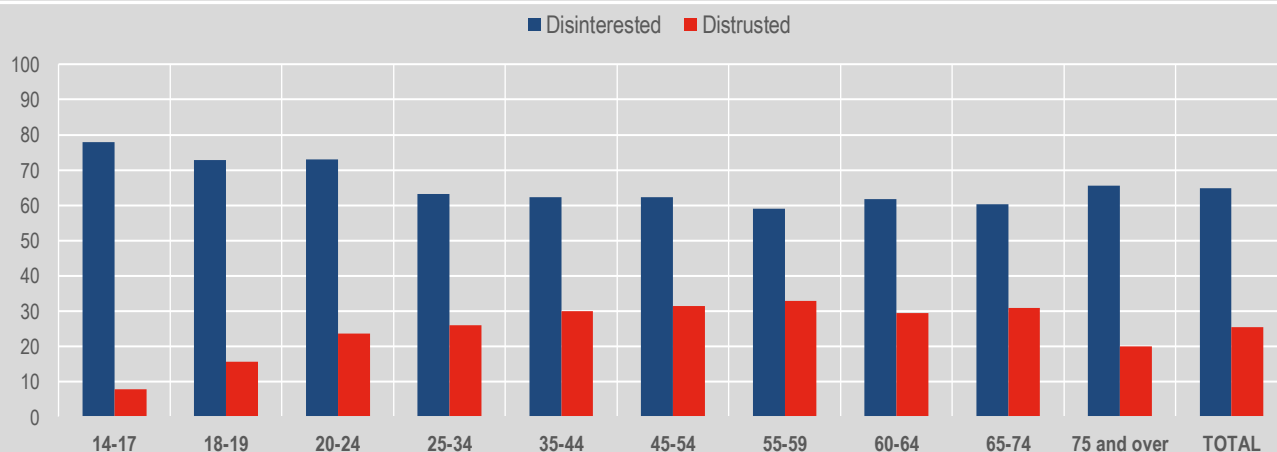
Among people who did not get at all information about politics, lack of interest reached a peak among young people up to the aged 24 (over 70%). Then gradually decreased with age, although it never went down below 60%. On the other hand, mistrust in politics tended to increase by the age, at least up to 60 years (with a peak of about 33% between the aged 55 and 59) and it decreased among the elderly (Figure 6).

The share of those who did not get at all information about politics increased together with the decrease of educational levels: it passed from 10.7% of graduates to 43.7% of those who have only primary school license. Gender differences, on the other hand, reduced when increasing the educational levels (Table 17).

The interest in politics was different depending on the position in the labor market: the lack of interest involved 10% of managers, entrepreneurs and professionals, 13.8% among middle managers and white collars and raised to 30.2% among blue collars workers. Among the employed, it was around 20% while reached 36.6% among the unemployed (Table 18). By considering an all-female perspective, the gap was important when comparing housewives (41% were never informed about politics) and employed women (23.8%), and the same gap was registered at all age groups.

The distance from politics was higher in the South of Italy than in other parts of the country. People aged 14 and over who did not get information about politics were about 36% of the total, compared to 22% in the North and 25.6% in the Center. Among women of the South, almost 44% did not get information about politics (less than 30% among men). The gender gap observed in the North was smaller (Table 16). The highest percentage of disinterested people was in the South of Italy (66.5%), the lowest one in the Center (61.6%) where there was the highest rate of distrusted people (26.8%). Compared to 2014 the percentage of people who did not get at all information about politics increased, from 22.6% to 27.6%. Lack of interest was the main reason for this tendency passing from 60.2% to 64.9% in 2019, while the percentage of distrusted people decreased from 31.3% to 25.5%.

**FIGURE 6. PEOPLE AGED 14 AND OVER WHO NEVER GOT INFORMATION ABOUT POLITICS BY REASON AND AGE GROUPS.** Year 2019 Percentage of people aged 14 and over who never got information about politics





## About a quarter of citizens totally detached from politics

About 12.2 million individuals, 23.2% of the population aged 14 and over did not get information about politics; they did not participate either directly or indirectly in the political life of the country. In this way, they gave up an important dimension of citizenship. They include women for almost two thirds, about 7.7 million (28.3%) and men about 4.5 million (17.7%).

The most detached from all forms of political participation were minors (46.6%) and the elderly (30.3% of people aged 75 and over, in particular women: 38.7%) (Table 19).

As for territorial differences, the distance from politics was higher in the southern regions where among the aged 14 and over three people out of ten (30.6%, about 5.5 million) did not participate in any way compared to 18.3% in the North and 21.6% in Central Italy (Table 20).

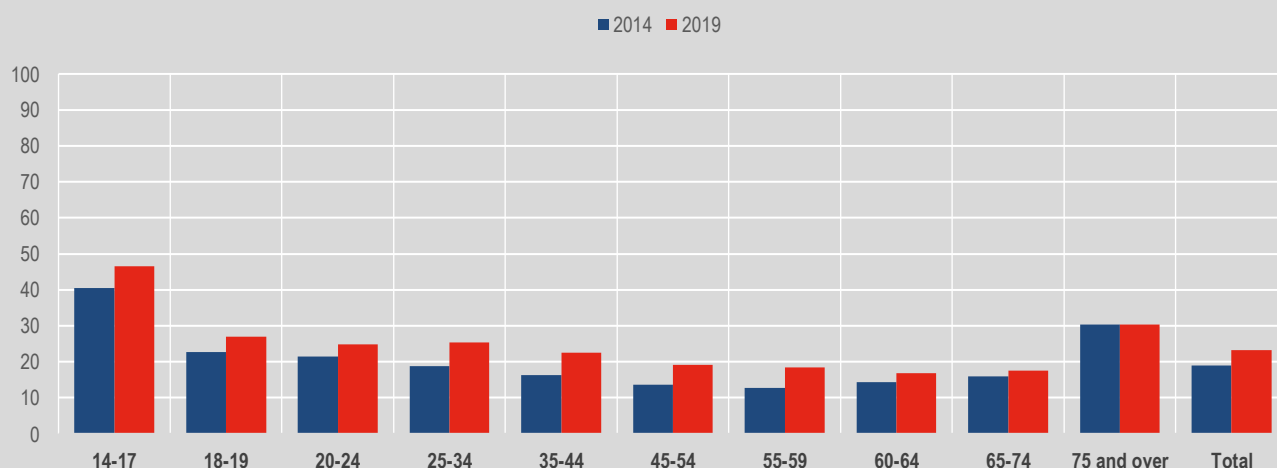
Political participation is directly proportional to educational level: 38.8% of people with a primary school license were very distant from politics compared to 17.1% of people with a secondary school license and 8.8% of the graduated. Moreover, the higher is the educational level the lower is the gender gap (Table 21).

There is a relationship between the lack of political participation and the working condition: 16.6% of employed to 30.7% of the unemployed did not participate in political life. Among women, there was the same gap between employed (19.8%) and housewives (36.2%). The distance from politics was lower among managers, entrepreneurs, and professionals and higher among blue-collar workers.

The distance from politics involved an increasing number of people – it was 18.9% in 2014 and 23.2% in 2019 – both women and men and in all regions of Italy. Moreover, even if this attitude involved mainly young people, it increasingly affected adults who used to be more engaged in politics (Figure 7).

**FIGURE 7. PEOPLE AGED 14 AND OVER WHO DID NOT ENGAGE IN POLITICS BY AGE GROUPS**

Years 2014-2019. Percentage of people aged 14 in the same age class



# Glossary

**Age:** Age refers to completed years

**Educational level:** the highest qualification achieved.

**Working condition:** the only or prevalent activity reported by people aged 15 and over.

**Occupational status:**

- employed: working person, on their own or employed, making a profit either getting a salary or collaborating with a family member working on their own without having a regular contract;
- unemployed: a person looking for a job, due to the loss of the previous job or who has never worked and is actively looking for a job that they are able to accept if offered;
- housewife: a person who is mainly devoted to housework;
- student: a person who is mainly devoted to study;
- retired from work: those who quit the job due to age, disability or other cause; they do not necessarily coincide with pensioners since the retired from work not always have a pension;
- other working conditions: those who are in a different condition from those listed above (unable to work, well-to-do, retired for reasons other than work, etc.).

**Occupational position:** the only or prevalent reported by those aged 15 and over, aggregated as follows:

- executive, employer, professional;
- middle management, white collar;
- blue-collar (including apprentices, home workers on behalf of companies);
- self-employed workers, family workers, assistants (including members of cooperatives for the production of goods and / or services).

**Geographical areas:** they constitute a geographical subdivision of the territory and are composed as follows:

- North: Piemonte, Valle d'Aosta/Vallée d'Aoste, Liguria, Lombardia (North-West); Trentino-Alto Adige, Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Emilia-Romagna (North-East);
- Center: Toscana, Umbria, Marche, Lazio;
- South and Islands: Abruzzo, Molise, Campania, Puglia, Basilicata, Calabria (South); Sicilia, Sardegna (Islands).

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