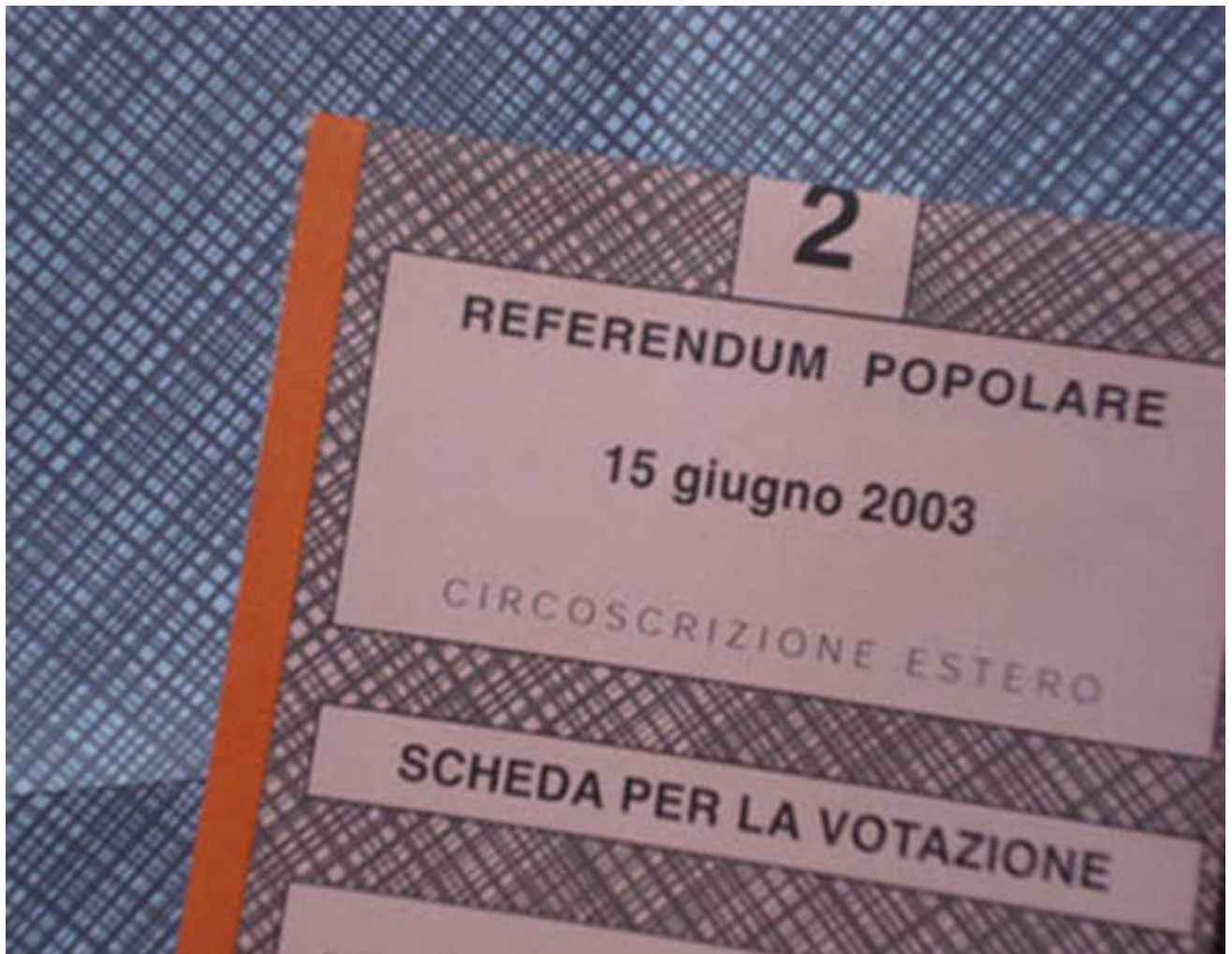




An Ex-W.O.P. Casts His Vote

Joey Skee (March 24, 2008)



Born in the USA and now an Italian citizen, I'm asked to vote. So, what do I know?

One theory holds that Italian immigrants were dubbed "wops" because all too many arrived in the States With Out Papers. Born and raised in New York City, I reclaimed my Italian citizenship in 2001. I was a wop no more. I have my papers.



My reasons for reclaiming Italian citizenship were varied and shifted over time: Italy was offering; I met the requirements; the imagined mischief of disrupting antiquated notions of “melting pot” Americanism; options in lieu of unforeseen political or economic turmoil; the Italian government’s historical accountability to its immigrant citizenry and its descendants; and because I’m Italian, with or without papers. The only practical benefit to date of being an Italian citizen is breezing through security at Fiumicino and Heathrow.

Requests for reclaimed citizenship are booming. I wasn’t able to find any data on the Web but the day my siblings and I finalized our paperwork at the Italian consulate in New York City, all the staff in the open office where we were sitting were dealing with the very same issue with other Americans. I couldn’t help feeling as if we born-again Italians were members of a new transnational confraternity, giving a 21st century twist to historical immigrant repatriation.

What I never suspected was that I would be called on to vote.

I didn’t know what to do the first time I received ballots for the 2003 referendum. I had been taught you would lose your American citizenship if you voted in a foreign election, so I didn’t. (I saved the ballots because I dug the design.) I was mistaken: one can vote in the Italian election and not lose one’s American citizenship.

I follow Italian politics as best as anyone can, enough to know what the big issues are. There are others, especially whose Italian is not proficient, who aren’t up on the issues or who don’t know Italians vote for a party and not individual candidates. In 2006, one Italian/American friend almost voted for the party that stood in opposition to her professed political beliefs because she was unaware of their platform. She was making a choice based on the attractiveness of the party’s logo.

I wonder how many votes are being lost because materials by the parties and the government are not bilingual (or trilingual in Canada!). I’ve received at least one email hoping that i-italy.org would be that place on the Web where people can get relevant information in both Italian and English.

Why do I vote?

It can be argued that as an American/Italian what happens in Italy doesn’t affect me. But I voted in the 2005 fertility law referendum in a way that was in concert with my political beliefs regardless where I live. The following year I was one of those italiani all'estero who helped sway the parliamentary elections; our vote the political right’s strategic miscalculation. I don’t believe the candidates of any party will represent me in the Italian parliament in the same meaningful ways my American representatives do. That’s one of the many reasons why I’m excited by Stefano Albertini’s proposed candidacy. The voting process has helped me become more Italian.

Call me a wop or chiamami un americano, but in April, I’ll be voting with all the other Italians.

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