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Revisiting the Origins of Democratic Quality in Italy

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Revisiting the Origins of Democratic Quality in Italy

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Abstract

What determines the responsiveness and effectiveness of democratic governments in meeting their citizens' needs? Based on his 1993 study of the twenty Italian regions, Robert Putnam argued that "civic community," a self-reinforcing syndrome of social engagement and political participation, is the explanation. A re-examination of Putnam's data reveals little evidence of such a syndrome, but confirms that where more citizens participate in politics outside of networks of clientelistic exchange, more effective democratic government results. To discern the causes of variation in this self-motivated political participation, I then test Putnam's measures of social engagement against aspects of Italian socio-economic structure. Economic development and the historical distribution of land, not social engagement, are found to be powerful predictors of self–motivated political participation and in turn democratic quality. [125 words]

Civics or Structure? Revisiting the Origins of Democratic Quality in the Italian Regions

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Introduction

Governments selected by at least approximately free and fair elections have proliferated around the globe in recent years, leading to a new scholarly emphasis on the quality—rather than merely the existence—of democratic governments. One of the most ambitious studies addressing this issue is Robert Putnam's book, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*.[1] Drawing on empirical data collected over a twenty-year period, Putnam mapped the performance of the elected governments of Italy's twenty regions in a laundry list of policy areas ranging from the timeliness of the regional budget to the provision of day care. He found remarkable consistency among these measures: some regional governments were simply more effective and responsive in meeting their citizens' needs than others were. These differences, he ultimately concluded, were the result of centuries-old variations in "civic community," a self-reinforcing syndrome of political participation and engagement in social networks.

This article begins with a review and reanalysis of Putnam's data to determine whether civic community actually exists in the Italian regions. The exercise reveals that that the apparent intercorrelations among political and social activity across regions that justified considering them aspects of a single syndrome are in fact artefacts of the vast differences between Italy's north and south. It then finds that patterns in the rates in which citizens participate in politics on their own terms and outside of networks of clientelistic exchange, although distinct from patterns of social engagement, do exist across Italian regions. The differences in government performance found in Italy, it

concludes, can be explained by these differences in self-motivated political participation and not by a Toquevillian effect of joining recreational associations or reading newspapers.

The remainder of the article then seeks to account for the differences observed in rates of self-motivated political participation and so, indirectly, in the quality of the regions' democratic governments. It tests Putnam's hypotheses on the positive effects of social engagement as measured by participation in recreational associations and newspaper readership against aspects of socio-economic structure: economic development and a factor that plays an important role in many qualitative accounts of democratic development but is often overlooked in quantitative analyses, the legacy of historical patterns of landholding.

Retesting the Civic Community Hypothesis

In *Making Democracy Work*, Putnam contended that the variation in the effectiveness of Italy's regional governments was the result of differing levels of what he termed "civic community." Inspired by Tocqueville, he argued that, where present, civic community is manifested in a profusion of recreational and cultural associations, high rates of newspaper readership, voting in national elections based on the ideological stances of parties rather than the personalistic appeals of individual candidates, and high turnout for political referenda. The differences in civic community exhibited in the regions of contemporary Italy, further, can be traced to patterns of behaviour established in early medieval times, at least as early as 1100 A.D. The conventional argument

linking democratic performance to socio-economic factors is based on a spurious relationship, according to Putnam: both politics and economics are driven by civics.

One of the first aspects of the argument to come under criticism was its historical component. Putnam's account compressed eight centuries of Italian history into nineteen pages; its sweeping generalizations on rich traditions of cooperation in the north and mistrust in the south were virtually assured to be superficial. Not only, however, was his reading of history deemed highly selective, it was condemned as wildly inaccurate in light of the well documented examples of collaboration and mutual assistance, such as sheep-grazing associations, that persisted during much of this time period in some southern regions.[2]

That the patterns of civic culture Putnam found in post-war Italy did not exist prior to the twentieth century, of course, does not directly disprove their contemporary existence. Putnam's contention that the political and social elements of civic community actually form a coherent syndrome, however, does not withstand closer examination. As Ellis Goldberg noted, the wide divergence between northern and southern Italy tends to spuriously inflate correlations when all twenty Italian regions are considered. The true test of whether proposed relationships actually exist, therefore, must consider those relationships both "within the north and within the south."[3] Indeed, it was on this basis that Putnam rejected any simple explanation of government performance based on levels of economic development.[4]

When the regions of northern and central Italy and those of southern Italy are considered separately,[5] the high intercorrelations among the elements of the civic community index that justified considering them to be aspects of an underlying

"civicness" disintegrate. The first column of Table 1 reproduces Putnam's principal-components factor analysis of his indicators of the civic community index across all regions. The second and third columns present similar analyses using Putnam's data for the northern regions and for the southern regions separately. [6]

[Table 1 about here; see page 18]

Across northern Italy, the two indicators of political participation, preference voting and referendum turnout, display the expected close relationship. However, the indicators of Toquevillian social participation, newspaper readership and the density of recreational associations, actually display signs opposite to those hypothesized: more social participation is found in regions with less political participation across the north. The civic community index does fare somewhat better in the south, where at least all of the loadings are in the expected directions, but even there the relationships are less impressive than when all twenty regions are considered, and only the indicators of political participation are statistically significant. Putnam's civic-community hypothesis, in short, fails his own test.[7] The impressive intercorrelations among the elements of the civic community index found when all Italian regions are considered are not the result of measuring various aspects of a single underlying concept of civicness, then, but only the vast differences between northern and southern Italy.

Explaining Effective Democratic Government in Italy: The Role of Self-Motivated Political Participation

As Putnam's hypothesized civic community does not in fact form a coherent syndrome across the Italian regions, it cannot serve as an explanation for the wide

variation he observed in the performance of the regional governments. I hypothesize that it is the rate of self-motivated political participation—and not the Toquevillian effects of joining associations or reading newspapers—that explains these differences in democratic quality.

In democracies, elections are the principal means by which citizens may hold government officials accountable for their performance. Where more citizens participate in politics outside of patron-client networks, therefore, governments should be expected to be more responsive to their citizens' needs. As Arend Lijphart underscored in his 1996 presidential address to the American Political Science Association, there is an expansive literature establishing that higher turnouts are more representative of the entire public. When turnouts are lower, "the inequality of representation and influence are not randomly distributed but systematically biased in favour of more privileged citizens—those with higher incomes, greater wealth, and better education—and against less advantaged citizens." Because "democratic responsiveness of elected officials depends on citizen participation," lower rates of self-motivated political participation yield lower–quality democracies.[8]

Participation induced by patronage, however, defeats the electoral mechanism: votes cast in exchange for particularistic benefits reflect the preferences of the patron rather than those of the voter. Referenda turnout is therefore actually a better indicator of "representation and influence" than electoral turnout in Italy, because, as Putnam explains, many of those going to the polls in general elections do so in "a straightforward *quid pro quo* for immediate, personal patronage benefits."[9] Further, voting in referenda, unlike electoral voting during this time, was not compulsory in Italy. Participation in

national referenda, because it excludes the effects of patron-client networks and compulsory voting laws, more accurately measures self-motivated political participation and so the degree to which a region's inhabitants demand government representative of and responsive to their interests.[10] Putnam also notes that preference votes are "essential to the patron-client exchange relationship" in many parts of Italy; for this reason, preference voting also reflects the extent of self-motivated political participation in each region.[11]

The analyses presented in Table 1 above show that referenda turnout and preference voting are closely interrelated in the regions of northern and central Italy as well as in those of the south. On this basis, I have created a principal-components factor index of self-motivated political participation that equally weights these two measures across all regions. Table 2 below confirms that this index is indeed highly correlated with referenda turnout and preference voting both in the north and in the south.

[Table 2 about here; see page 17]

To test whether self-motivated political participation provides a better explanation for differences in regional-government responsiveness than any Tocquevillian effects of joining associations or reading newspapers, I use Putnam's index of government performance as a dependent variable in an OLS regression analysis. The results of this test are presented in Table 3 below.

[Table 3 about here; see page 18]

The first column of Table 3 presents the results of the regression analysis when all twenty Italian regions are considered. The effect of self-motivated political participation on the performance of democratic governments is strong and highly statistically significant. Newspaper readership is found to have a negative effect on government performance, contrary to hypothesis, although this relationship is not statistically significant. When all Italian regions are considered, the scarcity of recreational associations does exhibit the expected negative relationship to the responsiveness of regional government, and this coefficient is significant at the .05 level. This effect, however, cannot be distinguished from zero when the northern and southern regions are examined separately, as the second and third columns of the table reveal. The effect of self-motivated political participation, on the other hand, remains strong and statistically significant in both halves of the peninsula.[12] This analysis demonstrates that differences in the quality of democratic government across the Italian regions are not the direct result of a culture of social engagement as evidenced by joining recreational associations or reading newspapers, but of the extent to which citizens, through self-motivated political participation, hold government officials accountable for their performance. Figure 1 below demonstrates graphically the relationship between self-motivated political participation and democratic quality across the Italian regions.

[Figure 1 about here; see page 19]

Explaining Self-Motivated Political Participation: Hypotheses and Data

Effective democratic government in Italy does not appear to be directly related to a syndrome of factors that Putnam called civic community, but rather is well predicted

only by rates of self-motivated political participation. Therefore, the remainder of this article focuses on the factors that potentially influence rates of such participation and so indirectly affect democratic quality. Drawing on the literature on democratic participation as well as comparative historical works explaining the origins of democracy, I hypothesize that self-motivated political participation depends not on social engagement evidenced by newspaper readership and networks of recreational associations, but on levels of economic development and historical patterns of landholding. These hypotheses are set forth below.[13]

Social Engagement

Although Putnam's measures of social engagement, associationalism and newspaper readership, do not demonstrate direct relationships with effective democratic government, these measures may have indirect effects through their relationship with self-motivated political participation. Putnam, in fact, justified combining associational density and levels of newspaper readership with referenda turnout into a single index of civic community on these Tocquevillian grounds. He argued that associations teach the skills and habits of cooperation and shared responsibility and therefore "members of associations displayed more political sophistication, social trust, political participation, and 'subjective civic competence.'" Similarly, he reasoned that "[n]ewspaper readers are better informed than nonreaders and thus better equipped to participate in civic deliberations" and "newspaper readership is a mark of citizen interest in community affairs."[14] To evaluate these hypotheses, I again use Putnam's data on the density of recreational associations and rates of newspaper readership across the regions.

Economic Development

A common hypothesis is that economic development increases political participation. Development expands education and increases incomes, thereby providing more people with the resources needed to participate in politics. Both cross-national research using aggregate data and studies conducted at the individual level have supported this hypothesis, demonstrating that education and income are highly significant and robust predictors of electoral turnout.[15]

Education is here operationalized as the percentage of the regional population over the age of six that had at least an elementary education according to the 1981 Italian national census.[16] For regional gross domestic product per inhabitant, I use European Community figures for 1977 through 1986 as reported by Robert Leonardi.[17] In the Italian regions, these two indicia of socio-economic development are highly correlated with each other (r=.900), making combining the two indicators into a single principal-components index of development ('Dev') appropriate; the loading for each on this index is 0.927.[18]

A crucial element of Putnam's argument in *Making Democracy Work* is that differences in socio-economic development across the Italian regions are the product rather than the cause of variations in participation in politics and social associations. "[T]he powerful contemporary correlation between economics and civics did not exist a century ago," he claimed, but, "[l]ike a powerful magnetic field, civic conditions seem gradually but inexorably to have brought socioeconomic conditions into alignment."[19] The possibility that differences in self-motivated political participation are the cause of

variation in economic development is, however, slight in the Italian case. Differences across the Italian regions in levels of education have been remarkably stable over the preceding century and predate the suffrage reforms that made broad political participation possible. Rates of elementary education measured in 1981 are very highly correlated with the literacy rates revealed by Italian national population censuses of 1936 (r = .983), 1911 (r = .974), and 1881 (r = .948).

A simple analysis similar to the "statistical horse race" Putnam presented can be used as a further test for endogeneity. In the language of time-series statistics, this is known as a test of Granger causality. If economic development does cause self-motivated political participation, earlier levels of development should predict later political participation even when controlled by early rates of participation—in a sense, changes in participation rates over time will be linked to earlier differences in development. But if political participation generates economic development, early rates of participation will predict later development even when controlled by earlier development. If both of these hypotheses prove true, the relationship between economic development and self-motivated political participation is reciprocal: each affects the other.

When self-motivated political participation is predicted using rates of political participation and levels of development from the early decades of the twentieth century, early development is a statistically significant predictor (beta = .667, p = .009), but early political participation is not (beta = .201, p = .215).[20] Conversely, contemporary economic development is extremely well predicted by early levels of development (beta = .916, $p < .001$), but not by early rates of political participation (beta = .078,

p□□201). If there is a causal arrow between levels of development and rates of self-motivated political participation, this analysis demonstrates that it almost certainly runs only from the former to the latter.

Agrarian Legacies

One condition that so far has been overlooked by the quantitative literature on political participation is the historical structure of the agricultural sector.[21] Putnam, in a footnote, discounts agrarian legacies "because traditional landholding patterns in Italy vary in complex ways that are at best imperfectly correlated with" the variations in political behaviour he observed.[22]

There are, however, sound theoretical and empirical arguments for the importance of the distribution of land to political participation. Patterns of landholding typified by medium-sized family farms tend to disperse economic resources more evenly, making the concentration of political power more difficult; patterns of large estates and small peasantry (*latifondi* and *minifondi*), on the other hand, tend to concentrate economic and political power in the hands of relatively small groups of landed elites who frequently oppose participatory and competitive politics.[23] Even after competitive politics are established, this relative concentration of power found when family farms are weak not only makes self-motivated political participation appear futile to those on the lower rungs of society, but also facilitates both its outright repression and its cooptation through patron-client networks.[24]

Qualitative evidence of the Italy's pre-war experience appears to support this hypothesized relationship between landholding patterns and contemporary political

participation. Margaret Kohn argued that the tiny peasant plots that, in numerical terms, constituted the vast majority of landholdings in southern regions, inhibited independent political participation, and when peasants did form autonomous political organisations at the turn of the century, the southern "*latifondisti* supported military style repression" to crush them.[25] Sydel Silverman concluded that the highly fragmented peasant holdings in the south (in contrast to the family farms typical of central Italy) prevented the formation of stable political alliances within the lower class and, by denying most agricultural families even minimal self-sufficiency, made individual patron-client relationships of greater importance than in the north.[26] Filippo Sabetti noted that large landholders dominated the countryside in the south in the years after the 1860 unification of Italy and locked most ordinary people into an "iron circle": they had no legal means of defending themselves from the landlords' oppression because the law favoured the landlords, and no illegal remedies would be tolerated by the new national government.[27]

Landholding patterns have not remained unchanged, however, since the post-war reestablishment of democracy in Italy. Over the 1950s and 1960s, land reform gradually did away with the south's large landholdings, although, as Silverman observed, "land reform has meant a redistribution of large estates in dispersed fragments to peasants of the area; this has increased the land in peasant proprietorship, but it has not significantly altered agricultural organization"—medium-sized, family farms remained rare in the south.[28]

In any event, the hypothesis presented here is not that contemporary landholding patterns help explain differences in political participation: in the post-war era, Italy has become one of the world's most advanced industrial societies, and it would be surprising

indeed if the current distribution of agricultural land powerfully shaped political life. The legacies of the distribution of land just *before* democratization, however, plausibly may play such an important role through two complementary mechanisms. First, patterns in self-motivated political participation and patronage-driven politics established in the early years of Italy's democracy and originating in differences in contemporary landholding became institutionalized in autonomous political organizations and patron-client networks. These institutions then outlived the social structures that created them and maintained differences in self-motivated political participation decades after their creation. Second, as Dahl has suggested, initial distributions of land continue to shape the distributions of income, wealth, and other economic resources as economic activity shifts from agriculture to industry.[29] The relative concentration of economic resources in regions typified by large estates and small peasantry rather than family farms is reproduced in other forms of economic inequality even when the distribution of land subsequently changes, and so continues to facilitate the concentration of political power.[30]

There is some empirical evidence that historical landholding patterns had the hypothesized effects on both institutional development and the later distribution of economic resources in Italy's regions. Kohn has argued that the Italian Communist Party (*Partito Comunista Italiano*, PCI) served as the most important autonomous political organization in post-war Italy.[31] Although PCI membership was uniformly low throughout the southern regions (and so cannot be explained by varying landholding patterns), across the northern regions, PCI membership is highly correlated with the pre-war strength of family farms ($r = 0.799$, $p < 0.001$).[32] Data on the current distribution of economic resources in every Italian region is unavailable, but a survey of the incomes of

over eight thousand Italian households conducted by the Bank of Italy in 1995 and archived by the Luxembourg Income Study allowed me to measure income inequality in eighteen of the twenty regions.[33] According to this data, income inequality, calculated as the ratio of the income of the top ten percent of households to that of the bottom fifty percent of households, is strongly negatively correlated to the pre-war strength of family farms across all regions (r = -0.692, p = 0.001), in the north (r = -0.748, p = 0.004), and in the south (r = -0.737, p = 0.030).[34]

I therefore hypothesize that the greater the historical importance of family farms, the higher levels of self-motivated political participation in the region will be. To test this hypothesis, I use data on landholding patterns found in the comprehensive survey of land ownership at the regional and provincial levels conducted in 1930 as part of Italy's first general census of agriculture.[35] Following contemporary analysis of the 1930 agricultural census, I operationalise the strength of family farms as the percentage of agricultural land held in farms of more than ten hectares but less than one hundred hectares.[36] The amount of land historically held in family farms varies from 14.5% in Valle d'Aosta and 16.2% in Abruzzi to 56.2% in Umbria and 58.9% in Emilia-Romagna.[37] Although one might reasonably suspect that the fertility of a region's agricultural land determines the size of farms, this does not appear to be the case across the Italian regions. Using data on total agricultural output and total land used in agriculture collected in 1937,[38] I calculated average agricultural productivity for each region. The correlation between agricultural productivity and the percentage of agricultural land held in medium-sized, family farms in 1930 is essentially zero (r = -0.031, p = 0.902).

Explaining Self-Motivated Participation: Results and Discussion

The hypothesis that self-motivated political participation—and, therefore, the responsiveness and effectiveness of elected governments—depends on levels of economic development and patterns of land distribution rather than social engagement is strongly supported. Economic development and the historical strength of family farms both display strong and highly statistically significant effects on self-motivated political participation across all regions as well as when the north and south are considered independently.

[Table 4 about here; see page 20]

Putnam's measures of social engagement display little relationship to rates of self–motivated political participation. The effect of higher rates of newspaper readership on political participation is consistently negative, contrary to hypothesis, and cannot be distinguished from zero. The scarcity of recreational associations exhibits the hypothesized negative effect only when all regions or the south are considered; the effect turns positive across northern Italy. It fails to reach statistical significance in any of the three analyses.

The effects of historical landholding patterns and economic development on rates of self-motivated political participation remain strong when the social engagement variables are excluded from the model. Figure 2 below graphs regional political participation scores against the values predicted by economic development and landholding patterns.

[Figure 2 about here; see page 21]

Conclusions

Variation in the quality of democratic government in Italy's regions is not a function of Robert Putnam's hypothesized civic community, but rather results directly from differences in self-motivated political participation and indirectly from patterns of socio-economic structure. A closer examination of Putnam's data reveals that civic community does not exist as a coherent syndrome of social engagement and political participation in the Italian regions. Although the elements of civic community appear well related across all of the regions, these correlations disappear when examined within the north and within the south, the test Putnam himself used to evaluate and reject rival hypotheses.

Self-motivated political participation, independently of Putnam's measures of Toquevillian social engagement, explains the differences in the regional governments' performance. Democratic elections provide a mechanism for holding public officials accountable, but their efficacy depends upon broad participation: lower rates of participation yield a skewed picture of citizen preferences. Similarly, patronage politics circumvent the electoral mechanism, because votes then indicate the preferences of the patron rather than the voter. When more citizens participate in politics and participate on their own terms, not as part of a clientelistic exchange for an individual benefit, elections better serve to hold public officials accountable for their performance, and so governments are more responsive and effective in meeting citizen needs.

Self-motivated political participation does not appear closely linked to patterns of social engagement built up across Italy by associations, newspapers, and common endeavours over the last ten centuries. Instead, my analysis demonstrates that its strongest and most consistent predictors are socio-economic variables. First, consistent with the findings of a broad literature on electoral turnout at both the individual and aggregate levels, higher levels of economic development generate higher levels of political participation across the Italian regions. For a given profile of the distribution of economic resources, greater economic development means that more people have the education and income needed to participate effectively and on their own terms in politics.

Second, historical patterns of landholding also display a powerful effect on self-motivated political participation in my analyses. Where more land was held in family farms rather than great estates and tiny peasant plots when democracy was established, the relative dispersion of economic resources facilitated the strengthening of autonomous political organizations such as the PCI and discouraged the formation of patron-client networks; once in place, these institutions continued working to mobilize (or demobilize) self-motivated political participation decades later. Further, the historical distribution of land affected the distribution of other economic resources even after agriculture's importance to Italy's economy declined: the stronger a region's family farms were historically, the less concentrated the region's economic resources are today. As during Italy's first experience with democracy in the early decades of the twentieth century, more dispersed economic resources act to make attempts to concentrate political power more difficult and so both permit and encourage broad political participation outside of clientelistic relationships.

The economic resources of a region's citizens are the resources that may be used to influence others or to resist others' influence: economic resources are therefore political resources. The analyses presented in this article demonstrate that the quality of democracy in Italy's regions does not depend on bird-watching groups or soccer clubs, but ultimately on the amount and distribution of these resources. Where economic resources are more plentiful and more evenly distributed, more citizens participate in politics on their own terms. Higher rates of self-motivated political participation in turn make elections better mechanisms for holding government officials accountable, and higher quality democracy results.

Table 1. Testing Putnam's Civic Community Hypothesis in Northern and Southern Italy

	All Regions (*n* = 20)	**Northern Italy (*n* = 12)**	**Southern Italy (*n* = 8)**
Preference Voting	–0.947***	–0.787***	–0.723*
Referendum Turnout	0.944***	0.922***	0.836**
Newspaper Readership	0.893***	*–0.262*	0.582
Scarcity of Sports and Cultural Associations	–0.891***	*0.600*	–0.638

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, one-tailed tests; results contrary to hypothesis are italicised. Principal-components factor loadings.

Table 2. Bivariate Correlations Between Self-Motivated Political Participation, Referenda Turnout, and Preference Voting in Northern and Southern Italy

	Self-Motivated Political Participation		
	All Regions (*n* = 20)	**Northern Italy (*n* = 12)**	**Southern Italy (*n* = 8)**
Referenda Turnout	0.977***	0.876***	0.755*
Preference Voting	–0.977***	–0.927***	–0.801**

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, one-tailed tests; results contrary to hypothesis are italicised.

Table 3. Ordinary Least Squares Regression Analysis of Regional Government Performance

	All Regions (*n* = 20)	**Northern Italy (*n* = 12)**	**Southern Italy (*n* = 8)**
Self-Motivated Political Participation	0.835***	0.824*	1.158*
	(0.170)	(0.404)	(0.347)
Newspaper Readership	*–0.007*	0.006	*–0.015*
	(0.011)	(0.025)	(0.013)
Scarcity of Sports and Cultural Associations	–0.258*	–0.215	–0.324
	(0.144)	(0.407)	(0.157)
R^2	0.877	0.345	0.807

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, one-tailed tests; results contrary to hypothesis are italicised. Unstandardized coefficients are reported on the first line in each row; the second line reports the associated standard errors in parentheses.

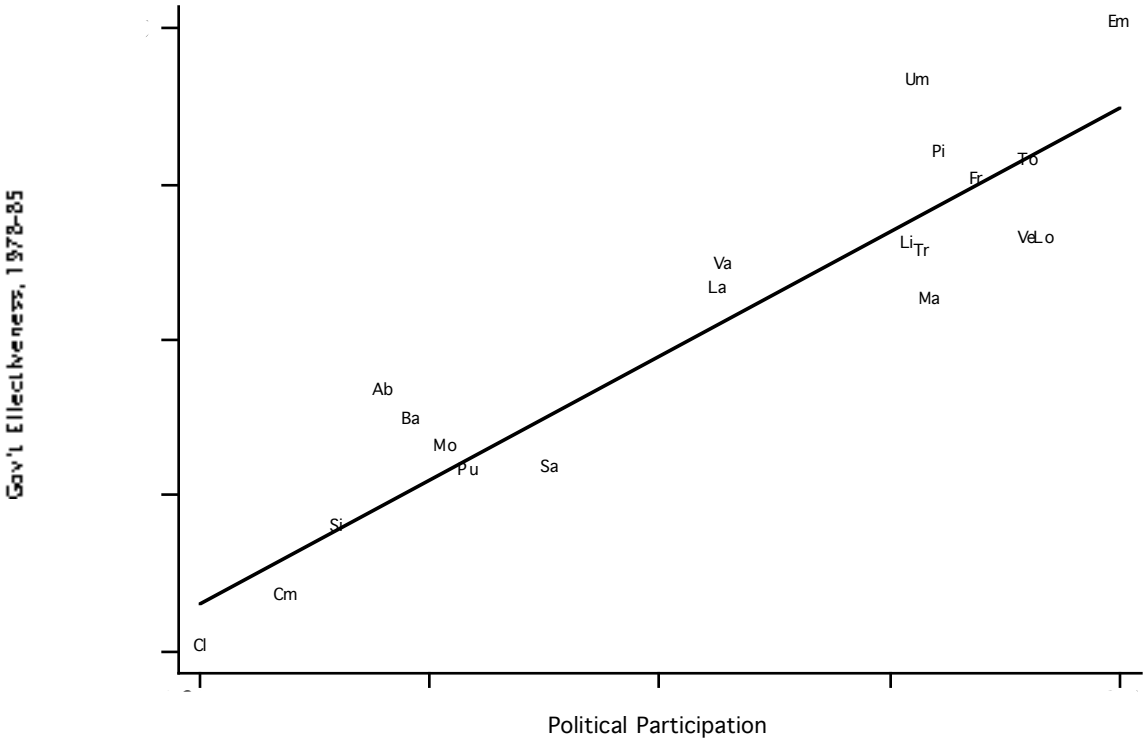

Figure 1. Effectiveness of Italian Regional Governments as Predicted by Self–Motivated Political Participation

Table 4. Ordinary Least Squares Regression Analysis of Self-Motivated Political Participation

	All Regions (*n* = 20)	**Northern Italy (*n* = 12)**	**Southern Italy (*n* = 8)**
Newspaper Readership	*–0.007*	*–0.009*	*–0.025*
	(0.011)	(0.017)	(0.016)
Scarcity of Sports and	–0.025	*0.346*	–0.129
Cultural Associations	(0.109)	(0.201)	(0.140)
Historical Strength of	0.036***	0.027**	0.061*
Family Farms	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.022)
Economic Development	0.893***	0.585*	1.112*
	(0.172)	(0.250)	(0.484)
R^2	0.935	0.737	0.775

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, one-tailed tests; results contrary to hypothesis are italicised. Unstandardized coefficients are reported on the first line in each row; the second line reports the associated standard errors in parentheses.

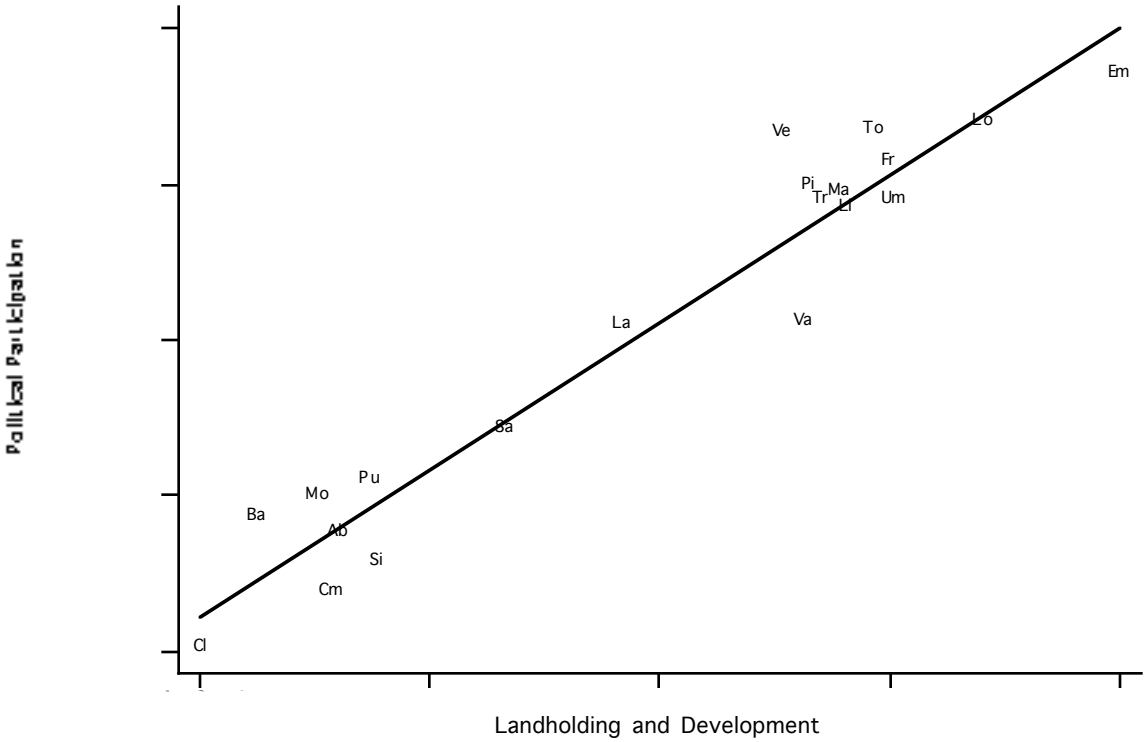

Figure 2. Self-Motivated Political Participation as Predicted by Historical Landholding Patterns and Economic Development

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[1] Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[2] Sidney Tarrow, "Making Social Science Work Across Space and Time: A Critical Reflection on Robert Putnam's *Making Democracy Work*," *American Political Science Review* 90, no. 2 (1996); Filippo Sabetti, "Path Dependency and Civic Culture: Some Lessons from Italy About Interpreting Social Experiments," *Politics and Society* 24, no. 24 (1996). Although he did not directly address Putnam, Hendrik Spruyt presented an explanation of the decline of the medieval northern Italian city-states in the face of the challenge of the nation-state that completely contradicts Putnam's version of northern Italian history. Spruyt argued that the northern Italian city-states declined because they were riven by internal *distrust*. He noted that individual neighbourhoods commonly maintained their own military forces to defend against attacks by their fellow citizens and recounted the well documented tradition of many northern Italian towns that brought inhabitants together in the central plaza—to chuck rocks at each other. Hendrik Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors: An Analysis of Systems Change*, *Princeton Studies in International History and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 138, 245 n.53.

[3] Ellis Goldberg, "Thinking About How Democracy Works," *Politics and Society* 24, no. 1 (1996), 8.

[4] Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, 86.

[5] Following Putnam, the northern and central Italian regions as Piemonte, Valle d'Aosta, Lombardia, Trentino-Alto Adige, Veneto, Friuli Venezia-Giulia, Liguria,

Emilia-Romagna, Toscana, Umbria, Marche, and Lazio. The southern regions are Abruzzi, Molise, Campania, Puglia, Basilicata, Calabria, Sicilia, and Sardegna. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, 85. Some other authors have considered Lazio, the region around Rome, to be part of the South, but this choice does not qualitatively affect the analyses presented below.

[6] All statistical analyses for this article were conducted using *Intercooled Stata 6.0.*

[7] See Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 45.

[8] Arend Lijphart, "Unequal Participation: Democracy's Unresolved Dilemma," *American Political Science Review* 91, no. 1 (1996), 1.

[9] Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, 93.

[10] As Robert Jackman and Ross Miller noted, referenda turnout has steadily declined since the 1970s as referenda have become more frequent and the number of issues to be decided increased, consistent with the voter fatigue hypothesis. Robert W. Jackman and Ross A. Miller, "A Renaissance of Political Culture?" *American Journal of Political Science* 40, no. 3 (1996), 642 n.11. Indeed, several recent referenda have been rejected for failing to meet minimum turnout requirements. Of course, it is not the absolute levels of political participation, but rather the *relative* levels of participation across regions, that are important in an explanation of relative government performance.

[11] Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, 94.

[12] Multicolinearity does not impact any of the results presented in Table 3. The highest variance-inflation factor is that for self-motivated political participation when all

regions are considered, 3.4; multicolinearity is typically considered problematic when the variance inflation factor reaches 4.0, the point at which standard errors are doubled.

[13] In the interests of space and clarity, several additional factors suggested in the literature are not presented in the analysis below. Although André Blais and Agnieszka Dobrsynska, in their article, "Turnout in Electoral Democracies," *European Journal of Political Research* 33, no. 2 (1998), found some support for demographic factors as predictors of electoral turnout cross-nationally, population size and density do not have statistically significant relationships with self-motivated political participation in Italy when controlled by the other factors considered, and their inclusion does not substantially change the results reported. Margaret Kohn has argued that the explanation for variation in the Italian regions lies in neither civic community nor directly in socio-economic structure, but in the role of the red subculture anchored in the Italian Communist Party (*Partito Comunista Italiano*, PCI) in mobilizing and integrating subaltern classes into political life. Kohn, "Civic Republicanism Versus Social Struggle: A Gramscian Approach to Associationalism in Italy." The strength of the PCI, however, does not have an independent impact on rates of self-motivated political participation when included in the analysis presented. It has also recently been argued that the northern regions' greater "proximity to the epicenter of liberalism on the European continent in the 18th and 19th centuries, France," accounts for the differences between north and south in Italy; see Stephen Hanson and Jeffrey Kopstein, "Regime Type, Diffusion, and Democracy: A Methodological Critique of *Designing Social Inquiry* in Comparative Politics" (paper presented at the 2000 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C., September 3, 2000). This argument lacks even face validity, as the

most effective governments and highest rates of self-motivated political participation are not found in the regions closest to France, but in the central regions of Emilia-Romagna, Toscana, and Umbria. Valle d'Aosta, which borders France, actually scores lowest among the northern and central regions on these variables. Institutional effects on democratic quality and political participation have garnered increased attention recently, but because the Italian regions share a common legal-institutional structure, variation across them cannot be attributed to different political institutions or voting laws.

[14] Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, 90, 92. At least one recent study has purported to provide support for the civic-engagement hypothesis. Amber Seligson, on the basis of survey data collected in the six Spanish-speaking countries of Central America, concluded that participation in certain civic associations increases democratic political participation, although participation in recreational associations does not. Amber L. Seligson, "Civic Association and Democratic Participation in Central America: A Test of the Putnam Thesis," *Comparative Political Studies* 32, no. 3 (1999). Education and wealth, she found, did not have consistent effects. Seligson's findings, however, are somewhat clouded by her unusual choice of measure for "democratic political participation": demand making on elected officials. Such demand making may indeed serve as a mechanism of accountability as she suggests, but may also be simply a means of garnering individual patronage benefits.

[15] Blais and Dobrsynska, "Turnout in Electoral Democracies;" Jan E. Leighley and Jonathan Nagler, "Individual and Systematic Influences on Turnout: Who Votes? 1984," *Journal of Politics* 54, no. 3 (1992).

[16] Istituto Centrale di Statistica (ISTAT), *Annuario Statistico Italiano* (Roma: ISTAT, 1985) 53.

[17] Robert Leonardi, "The Role of Tuscany in the European Union," in *Regional Development in a Modern European Economy: The Case of Tuscany*, ed. Robert Leonardi and Raffaella Y. Nanetti (London: Pinter, 1994), 15.

[18] Both education and gross domestic product per capita remain strongly and highly significantly correlated with the index of development within the northern regions as well as within the southern regions; all of these correlations are greater than 0.850.

[19] Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, 153. Putnam's analysis, however, was flawed by bad data. As Italian economic historian Vera Zamagni established even before the publication of *Making Democracy Work*, the pre-World War I Italian national population censuses on which Putnam's analysis relied greatly overstated the industrial workforce of southern regions because the censuses "considered female domestic production of textiles for the family a form of 'industrial' occupation," a phenomenon much more common in the south. Vera Zamagni, "A Century of Change: Trends in the Composition of the Italian Labor Force, 1881-1981," *Historical Social Research* 44 (1987), 37. Using data from concurrent national industrial censuses, she was able to correct these inaccuracies. When the corrected figures are used, the correlation between industrial employment in 1911 and turnout in the first elections under universal manhood suffrage a decade later (r = .569) is almost exactly identical to that between 1961 industrial employment and referenda turnout in the 1970s (r = .542). This stable relationship between industrial employment and political

participation can hardly be seen as evidence that economic development has been magnetically "brought into alignment."

[20] Early political participation is here operationalized as turnout in the national and local elections held between 1919 and 1921, the only elections conducted under universal manhood suffrage during Italy's first, brief experience with democracy. Levels of early economic development are measured using literacy rates from 1911 and 1936, as complete data on GDP per capita across regions for the early decades of the twentieth century are unavailable. Reported significance levels, given the directional hypotheses, are based on one-tailed tests.

[21] A partial, if crude and largely under-theorized, exception may be the traditional use of a dummy variable or a separate regression for the U.S. south in work on turnout in the United States. See, e.g., Leighley and Nagler, "Individual and Systematic Influences on Turnout: Who Votes? 1984," Samuel C. Patterson and Gregory A. Caldeira, "Getting out the Vote: Participation in Gubernatorial Elections," *American Political Science Review* 77 (1983).

[22] Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, 233 n.96.

[23] Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyne Huber Stephens, and John D. Stephens, *Capitalist Development and Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[24] Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*, 82-86, Evelyne Huber, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and John D. Stephens, "The Paradoxes of Contemporary Democracy:

Formal, Participatory, and Social Dimensions," *Comparative Politics* 29, no. 3 (1997): 344.

[25] Kohn, "Civic Republicanism Versus Social Struggle: A Gramscian Approach to Associationalism in Italy," 226.

[26] Sydel F. Silverman, "Agricultural Organization, Social Structure, and Values in Italy: Amoral Familism Reconsidered," *American Anthropologist* 70, no. 1 (1968).

[27] Sabetti, "Path Dependency and Civic Culture: Some Lessons from Italy About Interpreting Social Experiments," 30.

[28] Silverman, "Agricultural Organization, Social Structure, and Values in Italy: Amoral Familism Reconsidered," 18.

[29] Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*, 82-86.

[30] The two mechanisms likely reinforce each other. Institutionalized patterns of political participation rooted in earlier landholding patterns bolster the reproduction of the distribution of economic resources—autonomous political organizations provide the means of checking a new concentration of wealth, while notables use their patron-client networks to ensure that redistributive policies do not reach the political agenda. The reproduction of patterns of economic inequality similarly reinforces associated institutions: continued relative equality makes certain that existing autonomous political organizations are not choked off, and the maintenance of a highly skewed distribution of economic resources allows patron-client networks to retain their importance.

[31] Kohn, "Civic Republicanism Versus Social Struggle: A Gramscian Approach to Associationalism in Italy."

[32] The PCI membership data used here is taken from Kohn, "Civic Republicanism Versus Social Struggle: A Gramscian Approach to Associationalism in Italy," and is for the years 1981 to 1984. The operationalization of the strength of family farms is described in the next paragraph.

[33] Valle d'Aosta was excluded by the survey, and fewer than one hundred households were surveyed in Molise, rendering the resulting distribution unreliable. Further information on the survey and the Luxembourg Income Study is available on the internet at http://www.lisproject.org.

[34] According to this data, income inequality was lowest in Umbria (1.59) and Toscana (1.76) and highest in Campania (2.46) and Calabria (2.35). The ratio of incomes of the top ten percent of households to the bottom ten percent and that for the top twenty percent to the bottom twenty percent display nearly identical patterns.

[35] Istituto Centrale di Statistica del Regno D'Italia, *Censimento Generale Dell'agricoltura, 19 Marzo 1930*, 3 vols., vol. 2, pt. 2 (Roma: Istituto Poligrafico Dello Stato, 1935). In addition to regional data, the survey also provides provincial (sub-regional) level data that allowed me to calculate the percentage of land in family farms in Abruzzi and Molise (they are reported jointly in early regional-level statistics), for Valle d'Aosta and Piemonte (Valle d'Aosta was part of Piemonte until after World War II), and for Friuli Venezia-Guilia (much of the region's area during the interwar years eventually became part of Yugoslavia and now Slovenia).

[36] Alfredo De Polzer, *Statistiche Agrarie*, ed. Corrado Gini, *Trattato Elementare Di Statistica* (Milano: Istituto Centrale di Statistica del Regno D'Italia, 1942), 124. Operationalizations with different ranges—those varying the lower limit from 10 to 3 or

5 or 20 hectares or the upper limit from 100 to 50 hectares—although not included here, yield substantially similar results.

[37] Interestingly, the 1930 census does not support the revisionist view, based largely on the incomplete agricultural census of 1947, Istituto Nazionale di Economia Agraria, *La Distribuzione Della Proprietà Fondiaria in Italia*, vol. 2 (Roma: Edizioni Italiane, 1948), that *latifondi* were rare and unimportant in southern Italy by the start of the twentieth century: approximately half of all agricultural lands in Basilicata, Calabria, and Sardegna were held in estates of greater than 100 hectares in 1930, although these estates of course composed a relatively small fraction of the total number of farms.

[38] Istituto Centrale di Statistica del Regno D'Italia, *Annuario Statistico Dell'agricoltura Italiana, 1936-1938*, vol. 1 (Roma: Tipografia Failli, 1940).