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Making Social Science Work Across Space and Time: A Critical Reflection on Robert Putnam's *Making Democracy Work*

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Political scientists are becoming more self-conscious about how they connect quantitative and qualitative data in social science and about the role of systematic country studies in comparative research. As the most striking example of both practices in recent years, Robert Putnam and his collaborators' Making Democracy Work *deserves more serious criticism than it has received. While Putnam's original project aimed at a precise goal—studying how a new administrative reform is institutionalized—his ultimate project aimed at nothing less than examining how differently democracy works in different sociopolitical contexts, operationalized cross-sectionally in southern and northern Italy. The sources of these differences he found in the two regions' histories, which led him to employ the quantitative interregional data he had collected for one purpose to support a model of historical development of North and South. This historical reconstruction rests largely on qualitative data; but it also rests on a set of comparative inferences about individual values and community cohesiveness in the two regions that is of questionable historical validity and innocent of structural grounding. This article applauds Putnam's joining qualitative and quantitative data but attacks his reconstruction of Italian history to fit his model of social capital.*

All self-respecting political scientists like to think of themselves as intrigued with what makes democracy work. But what brings a reviewer to risk a critical reflection on one of the most acclaimed recent works in the field?[1] That author and reviewer learned their trade in the same school and have both carried out research in Italy is part of the explanation, but only a small part.[2] A second reason is that we are becoming more self-conscious about the use of quantitative and qualitative data in social science and about the role of systematic country studies in comparative research.[3] And the third is the fact that the study on which Robert Putnam's book was based, which has caused a sensation outside academic circles, was first reported in this *Review* (Putnam and others 1983), a rare linkage between scientific effort and popular success.[4] Moreover, while Putnam's *American Political Science Review* article made modest claims, defining the problem as "institutional success," *Making Democracy Work* aims at a broader target—nothing less than the correlates of democracy.

In his book, Putnam (1993a) attacks two enduring problems in social science: how to marry directly collected quantitative data with historical information from external sources, and how to connect political culture to democracy. The first problem is particularly thorny when the logic of inference from primary data is cross-sectional while the external data are historical; the second is even tougher when political culture is specified and operationalized through past political traditions, while the indicators of democracy are lodged in the present. Since Putnam attempts both of these things, examining *Making Democracy Work* will help understand the problems we face both in joining history to systematic empirical data and in linking political culture to democracy.

MAKING SOCIAL SCIENCE WORK: THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF PUTNAM

It is worth underscoring the strategy and main successes of *Making Democracy Work*. Putnam's achievements are three. First, both the *APSR* article (Putnam and others 1983) and the book demonstrate how—and how unevenly!—institutional innovations are translated into practice. Second, Putnam shows that institutional performance is not policy-specific or idiosyncratic but is

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[1] The immediate assessments in the United States were ebullient. See, for example, David Laitin's commentary in this *Review* (1995) and Joseph LaPalombara's praise-filled review (1993). Professional reviewers in Italy have not, for the most part, shared this enthusiasm. Representative examples are Bagnasco (1994), Cohn (1994), Feltrin (1994), Pasquino (1994), Ramella (1995), and Trigilia (1994). More critical assessments began to appear in English in 1995. See the set of brief reviews by Arnaldo Bagnasco, Antonio Mutti, and Gianfranco Pasquino in APSA-CP, the newsletter of the Organized Section in Comparative Politics, June 1995, and the more probing analyses by Ellis Goldberg, Margaret Levi, and Filippo Sabetti in *Politics and Society*, forthcoming in 1996.

[2] See Tarrow (1967a, b) for two deeply out-of-date efforts to compare northern and southern Italy, about which Putnam has kind words to say in his book. More up-to-date works on the South that touch on some of the same bases as *Making Democracy Work* are by Trigilia (1992, 1995).

[3] On qualitative and quantitative methods, see the path-breaking volume by King, Keohane, and Verba (1994) and the symposium on that book in *American Political Science Review* (1995). For an alternative qualitative approach to similar issues as raised by Putnam, carried out in the same country, see Sabetti 1996.

[4] Among the press reviews that this author has scanned, the most enthusiastic were found in the *Times Literary Supplement*, February 1993, followed by *The Economist* in October 1993, *The Nation* in November 1993, and the *New York Times Book Review* in January 1995. The Italian media have been wildly enthusiastic over the book, but the tone of many of these reactions leads one to suspect an unfortunate attempt to enlist Putnam as an ally in the game of trashing the South, a game which became fashionable with the rise of the separatist Northern League in the early 1990s. For a reflection on this unfortunate coincidence, see Trigilia (1994).

coherent among policy sectors and stable over time. Third, he shows how the same seeds of institutional innovation grow differently in different socioeconomic and cultural soils to produce different kinds of institutional plants.[5] Let us examine each of these claims before turning to the problems of explanation sketched above.

Institutional Change and Democratic Politics

"Those who build new institutions," writes Robert Putnam in chapter 2 of his book, "and those who would evaluate them need patience" (1993a, 60). Not the least virtue of Putnam and his collaborators was to have the endurance and creativity to carry out research tasks in the Italian regions since they were created more than twenty years ago.[6] Given the growing tendency in parts of our discipline to substitute affirmations of revealed preferences for observation of behavior, this was no mean feat. But still more impressive is that, without suffering visibly from discontinuity, *Making Democracy Work* reads like a stratified rock formation of U.S. political science over the last three decades: from the behavioral methods and political culture theories of the 1960s to the policy-oriented studies of the 1970s, to the game theoretical perspectives and historical turn of the 1980s and early 1990s.

Putnam's central problem is a classical political culture dilemma:[7] How do traditions of association and civic engagement affect political behavior? He first examines how the regional governments created in Rome in 1970 and implanted over the next two decades in Italy's regions compare in terms of various measures of policy performance that he has constructed. He finds dramatic differences between the regions in North and South, differences that associate with different levels of civic involvement. Next he turns to the histories of each region to seek the sources of these differences in performance. Finally, he interprets the results in terms of the category of "social capital," a property that he finds lacking in southern Italy but flourishing in the North. This he broadens to the problem of democracy anywhere in the world, including the United States (1993a, chapter 6; also see Putnam 1994 and 1995), for where there is no social capital, he argues, democracy cannot flourish.

The first and uncontested success of these decades of research was to provide a magnificent profile of the birth, growth, and institutionalization of new representative institutions (Putnam 1993a, 17). But as the imperfect progress of the Italian regions shows, "that institutional reforms alter behavior is an hypothesis, not an axiom" (p. 18), and the hypothesis was only partially supported by the results of the regional reform. For while the first two decades in the life of the new institutions "transformed elite political culture" (p. 28), the greater efficiency that reformers anticipated from it did not materialize, and some of the classical dysfunctions of Italian public life even appear to have been exacerbated by it (p. 61).[8]

Measuring Political Performance

That some units of government will perform better than others is true by definition; and that Italy's regions are diverse and unevenly endowed is the first law that any student of Italian politics learns.[9] But without systematic measurement and comparison of policy areas, two possibilities follow. First, the aphorism "The South is different" may prove no more than a piece of political folklore. Second, as Theodore Lowi argues, each policy area may have a distinct politics, leading to the inference that it is the politics of the particular policy regime and not the character of the political unit that is responsible for the outcomes observed (Lowi 1985, 67–68).

Putnam's analysis shows that neither of these is the case for the Italian regional governments. His book documents and quantifies the regional governments' policy performance in twelve distinct policy areas and dimensions, finding the South consistently performing worse in each area and over time (Putnam 1993a, 65–76).

[5] The botanic metaphor is no accident; it was even more explicit in another report on the work in Italian by Putnam and others (1985).

[6] Almost from the beginning, Putnam was associated in the study with Robert Leonardi and Raffaella Nanetti, who had primary responsibility for the field research, collaboratively authored several publications with him, and produced several books of their own. See, in particular, Leonardi and Nanetti (1990), Nanetti (1988), and Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti (1981, 1983, 1985). For fuller citations of the products of their research by the three authors, see notes 1 and 2 in Putnam (1993a, 207).

To summarize briefly, they carried out four waves of interviews with regional councilors in six regions of Italy; three waves of interviews in these same regions and a nationwide mail survey with community leaders; six nationwide surveys of voters; extended regional statistical analysis; a "unique experiment" that tested the responsiveness of regional governments to citizen inquiries; and case studies of institutional politics which helped them "marinate" themselves (their term) in Italy's diverse regional realities. See Putnam (1993a, 12–14 and Appendix A).

[7] It is only fair to remark that Robert Putnam, in commenting on a draft version of this article, asserts that his book is not a political cultural interpretation of the Italian regions. He points out that virtually all his indicators of "civicness" are behavioral or structural, not attitudinal or cultural. Putnam and his collaborators certainly do not engage in symbolic or ritualistic forms of cultural analysis or use the "thick" description that some culturalists favor (Laitin 1995, 173). Reading their article in this *Review* (1983, 63–67), however, argues otherwise. The model of causation, which goes from civic capacity to political behavior, is in the main line of political culture research from the pioneering studies of Almond and Verba onward (Putnam 1993a, 11) and picks up on crucial arguments of that superb culturalist, Alexis de Tocqueville (Putnam 1993a, 89–91, 182, and 221, note 28). I can only say that, if *Making Democracy Work* is not a cultural interpretation, then Putnam and his collaborators fooled not only this critic but also many of their admirers, one of whom considers it "a stunning breakthrough in political culture research" (Laitin 1995, 171).

[8] For example, Putnam and his collaborators (1993a) found that the regional governments' procedures were often reminiscent of the practices of the central administration (p. 49); that in many cases, clientelism and party affiliation, rather than expertise and experience, were the main criteria for recruitment (p. 50); and that by the late 1980s the initial euphoria of the regional councilors had been replaced by "a grimly realistic assessment of the practical challenges of making the new government work" (p. 57).

[9] The first aphorism this reviewer ever heard (from a northerner) about the Italian Communist Party that he studied in southern Italy was that it resembled Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. For a more scholarly synthesis on southern and northern political cultures on which many students of Italy cut their teeth, see LaPalombara (1965).

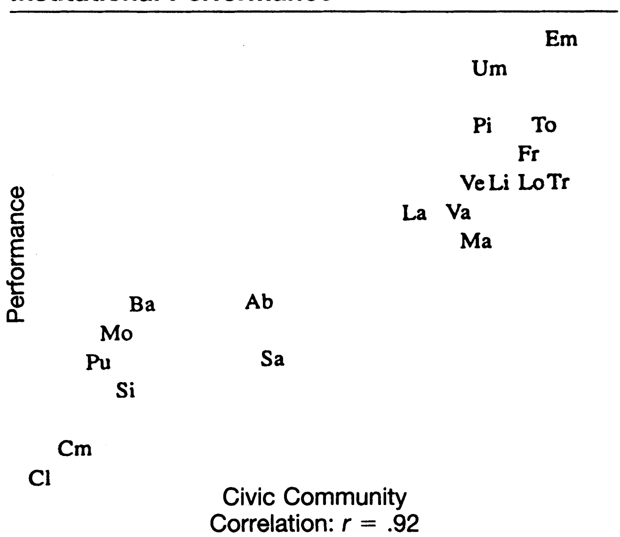
Not only that: The "objective" measures of policy performance that he developed correlate significantly with the assessments made by citizens and community elites of their own region's effectiveness (pp. 76–80). In every respect, what we suspected is true after all: The South is different, and this difference is so profound that even the new and formally standardized institutions simultaneously created in North and South were penetrated by it, affecting every aspect of policy performance. But does this difference, and the variations in institutional capacity that it produces, predict democracy? There is a long row to hoe until we get there.

Making Direct Inferences from Paired Comparisons

Although Putnam first set out to study the effects of a new institution on political socialization and recruitment over time (1993a, xiv; Putnam and others 1981), the cross-sectional differences he found led him away from his initial time-series design to a cross-sectional one. Using the North-South cleavage as an analytical lever, he began to ask: What it is about the South that is different (1993a, 83), and can it be linked to deficiencies observed in its regional governments' performance? And what is it about the Center-North in Italy that helped its regions turn the same new institutions to effective use? After a brief consideration of socioeconomic modernity, which Putnam argues does not explain the differences between North and South,[10] he centers on a construct he calls "the civic community" (enter political culture). This he links intellectually to the tradition of civic humanism (p. 87), which he specifies through four theoretical dimensions: (1) civic engagement, (2) political equality, (3) solidarity, trust, and tolerance, and (4) the social structures of cooperation (pp. 87–91).

Putnam spends a good deal of effort fleshing out the political and social correlates of these indicators (pp. 96–116) before building his measure of civic community on the first and the fourth: civic engagement, which he measures through newspaper readership and voting in referenda, and associational structures, which he measures through the density of sports clubs and other associations. He then adds another measure whose relation to civic humanism is not so obvious, the voters' use of individual preference voting, which he sees as a surrogate for clientelism and thus for the noncivic community.[11]

FIGURE 1. The Civic Community and Institutional Performance



Note: Southern regions are in the lower left quadrant.
Source: Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, p. 98. Copyright © 1993 by Princeton University Press. Reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press.

Although these measures bring into the analysis data from outside Putnam's primary data set, they were collected in standard form across the regions and are ordinal in form, and thus they can reasonably be associated with the indicators Putnam developed to measure institutional performance.[12] When combined, Putnam's composite index of civic capacity correlates impressively with the institutional performance of the regional governments. Figure 1, which reproduces Putnam's scattergram of the regions, tells the dramatic story. *All* the regions with high institutional performance and high scores on the civic community index are from the Center-North; *all* those that score low on both these measures are in the South. The North is the home of

[10] Jonas Pontusson, in a personal communication to the author, finds the following contradiction in Putnam's treatment of economic development. In his discussion of the North in the fifteenth century, Putnam points out that "the prosperity of the communal republics was arguably the consequence, as much as the cause, of . . . civic engagement" (1993a, 152). But subsequently Putnam observes that levels of economic development were not significantly different in the nineteenth century from the fifteenth. If northern Italian civicness produced economic development—and was produced by it—in the fifteenth century and again in the twentieth, why did it not have similar effects in the intervening period? I am grateful to Pontusson for pointing this out to me and regret that I have been unable to give sufficient attention to the relations between economic development, civicness, and institutional performance in this essay.

[11] Those who follow Italian politics will understand empirically how preference voting can be used as a measure of clientelism, but this does not help explain how it relates to the civic virtues that Putnam elucidates theoretically. One might argue intuitively, contra Putnam, that since preference voting is based on knowing the individual candidates, it is a *positive* element in civic involvement. Putnam points out that the preference vote is used in Italy to assure individual benefits, not to anchor a policy preference, and in that sense "preference voting can be taken as an indicator for the absence of a civic community" (1993a, 94). I do not find the justification convincing because the absence of personal ties between voters and officials is not an obvious element of civic virtue. It is what usually accompanies preference voting in southern Italy—corruption and clientelism—that makes it inimical to what Putnam sees in the civic community. If so, then it would have been more correct to use these factors as (negative) indicators of civic virtue.

[12] It should be noted that the four measures are also highly intercorrelated (Putnam 1993a, 96, Table 4.4). The problem with these measures is that they are also highly correlated with the size of the Communist vote, a party which was particularly anxious to have its supporters turn out, as Alan Zuckerman reminded me in a comment on the first draft of this essay.

civic competence and institutional performance;[13] the South is the site of neither.[14] "Happiness," concludes Putnam, "is living in a civic community" (p. 113).

It should be noted that in making the case for the North's civic capacity and for the South's civic weakness, Putnam's eye perhaps swept a bit too broadly across the Italian landscape to allow him to catch sight of a few jagged outcroppings which might have given him pause. On the one hand, recent research directed by Carlo Trigilia shows a growth in associational activity in the South, "in part political, but above all cultural, which is shaping new possibilities on the level of democratic growth and the positive use of civic resources" (Ramella 1995, 471).[15] On the other hand, it would have been interesting to learn what Putnam would make of the successive explosions in northern Italian public life that were erupting as *Making Democracy Work* was going to press: of corruption scandals on top of separatism; of mafia infestation on top of years of terrorism and political kidnappings; of the collapse of the Marxist and Catholic subcultures with their panoply of mass organizations, giving way to a party system whose capillary structures have all but disappeared.

Do Trigilia's findings on associational capacity question Putnam's image of the South? And do the symptoms of crime, separatism, and corruption mark a collapse of the North's vaunted civic capacity? Or does civic capacity have another face, one with less positive implications for democracy (Levi 1996)? Before turning to the democratic implications of civic capacity, let us follow Putnam in searching for its origins.

THE PATHWAYS OF PUTNAM: REACHING BEYOND DIRECT INFERENCE INTO HISTORY

For some social scientists, the internal inferences reported above and the startlingly high correlations they produced would have satisfied their urge for viable generalizations. But Putnam wanted to go farther.[16] He thought the differences he had found through cross-sectional analysis of his data transcended his study's initial focus on institutional growth—and on Italy. In fact, he argues, they "had astonishingly deep historical roots" (1993a, xiv). So, from an empirical focus on the cross-sectional variations within the twenty-year period of the Italian regional experience, his analytical lens shifted boldly to interpreting the differences among the regions in terms of longer historical differences. Much longer.

From City-State to Civic Competence

Leaving behind his familiar terrain of quantitative, cross-sectional statistical analysis, Putnam traveled back to the late-medieval origins of north-central Italy's city-state governments and to the simultaneous development of the autocratic Norman regime in the South during the same period. In both cases, he found analogues to the divergent civic capacities he identified in his contemporary data, analogues that he interpreted as their indirect causes. In the history of the South from the eleventh to the thirteenth century, he found a steep social hierarchy that was ever more dominated by a landed aristocracy endowed with feudal powers, while at the bottom of the social pyramid masses of peasants struggled wretchedly close to the limits of physical survival (pp. 123–24). Meanwhile, in the North, the solution created in these early times was quite different, "relying less on vertical hierarchy and more on horizontal collaboration" (p. 124). By the beginning of the fourteenth century, Putnam argues, Italy had produced not one but two patterns of governance with their associated social and cultural features (p. 130). These syndromes had crucial outcomes for the civic capacity of each region:

> Collaboration, mutual assistance, civic obligation, and even trust ... were the distinguishing features in the North. The chief virtue in the South, by contrast, was the imposition of hierarchy and order on latent anarchy" (p. 130).

I cannot deal fairly here with the historiographic aspects of Putnam's analysis of southern Italy since the Norman conquest or with the criticisms they have raised.[17] But it is worth pointing out that his image of the late-medieval northern city-state as a paragon of civic

[13] Putnam's correlations are dramatic enough, but his verbal inferences about Italy's civic Center-North verge on chamber-of-commerce enthusiasm. "Some regions of Italy," he writes, "have many choral societies and soccer teams and bird-watching clubs and Rotary clubs. Most citizens in those regions read eagerly about community affairs in the daily press. They are engaged by public issues, but not by personalistic or patron-client politics. Inhabitants trust one another to act fairly and to obey the law. Leaders in these regions are relatively honest. They believe in popular government, and they are predisposed to compromise with their political adversaries" (1993a, 115).

[14] Putnam's prose in describing the South is as bleak as his language about the Center-North was elegiac: "Public life in these regions is organized hierarchically, rather than horizontally.... Few people aspire to partake in deliberations about the commonweal, and few such opportunities present themselves. Political participation is triggered by personal dependency or private greed, not by collective purpose. Engagement in social and cultural associations is meager. Private piety stands in for public purpose. Corruption is widely regarded as the norm, even by politicians themselves, and they are cynical about democratic principles.... Trapped in these interlocking vicious circles, nearly everyone feels powerless, exploited, and unhappy" (p. 115).

[15] Working with organizational registers in the early 1990s, Trigilia and his collaborators found an impressive total of 6,400 cultural associations in the South, three for every 10,000 inhabitants, and more than two-thirds of them created since 1980 (Ramella 1995, 473). "There emerges," in their view, "a picture that differs in many ways from the opaque and static image of associational phenomena in the South" (pp. 473–74). See Trigilia (1995) for the full report of these findings.

[16] It is only fair to point out that Putnam devotes only nineteen pages to the historical roots of civic capacity in the North and to civic incapacity in the South. For some of his critics, this is evidence of scholarly superficiality (see, for example, Cohn 1994, 315), while Putnam, responding to Cohn, writes that if he "had known that the reviewers of [his] book would have applied themselves so devotedly to the nineteen pages ... [he] dedicated to the history of Italy before unification, [he] would have perhaps lost twenty years frequenting the historians to understand the intricate mechanisms that govern their shifting professional agreements and disagreements" (1994, 325).

[17] Cohn (1994, 318) writes: "Although Putnam admits that, moving from place to place within a single southern region, great differences in civic virtue can be found ... he abandons every restraint when he looks at the period before unification. The South of Putnam is an undifferentiated whole, from the Arab-settled western coast of Sicily up to the region of Rome, despite the fact that the southern regions presented very different situations in terms of the level of urbanization, agrarian

republicanism is telescopic, to say the least.[18] That the early Italian city-states had associational origins did not make them inherently civic, or even "horizontal." After a short period as voluntary associations, most of them produced closed urban oligarchies, fought constantly over territory and markets, and left the urban poor vertically compromised.

Moreover, Putnam places within the same general category of civic republicanism some northern regions whose experiences with communal democracy were long, others that were brief, and still others that were subject to continued feudal control or to the extended authority of the pope (Cohn 1994, 317).[19] Finally, in focusing on the golden age of the city-state, he treats the five or six centuries that followed somewhat cavalierly, trolling rapidly through a long and turbulent stretch of history for analogues of the cultural patterns he found in the earlier period without specifying the links either theoretically or empirically.

This is the feature of Putnam's evidentiary structure that has caused the greatest perplexity among historians and others (for example, see Cohn 1994, 319).[20] It would have been interesting to know by what rules of inference he chose the late-medieval period as the place to look for the source of northern Italy's twentieth-century civic superiority.[21] Why not look to the region's sixteenth-century collapse at the hands of more robust European monarchies; at its nineteenth-century conquest of the South (see below); at its 1919–21 generation of fascism; or at its 1980s corruption-fed economic growth?[22] None of these phenomena were exactly "civic"; by what rules of evidence are they less relevant in "explaining" the northern regions' civic superiority over the South than the period 800 years ago when republican governments briefly appeared in (some of) its cities?

But let us not exaggerate the importance of Putnam's speculations on distant historical times. Ever the empiricist, when his quest reached the nineteenth century, for which regional statistical data begin to be available, he developed a statistical index of "civic involvement" for each region which reinforced his image of the two regions. He found that "the same [north-central] Italian regions that sustained cooperatives and choral societies also provided the most support for mutual aid societies and mass parties" and that "citizens in those same regions were the most eager to make use of their newly granted electoral rights" (p. 149). In the South, in contrast, "apathy and ancient vertical bonds of clientelism restrained civic involvement and inhibited voluntary, horizontally organized manifestations of social solidarity" (p. 149).

The index of civic participation that Putnam developed for 1860–1920 correlates strongly with his directly observed contemporary indices of civic capacity ($r = .93$) and with the institutional performance of the regional governments ($r = .86$). So, on top of the other achievements in his book, Putnam appears to have demonstrated a correlation and a putative causal link from the communal associations of the early medieval city-state, to the growth of civic capacity in the nineteenth century, to contemporary civic politics and institutional performance. But there are problems with these sequential historical adumbrations of civic capacity.

First, looking backward from the nineteenth century, the fact that associations appear in different periods of a society's history does not give them each a similar function in that society or even make them "horizontal." Here, Putnam makes the same analogical error across time as did his great teacher, Tocqueville, across space, when he saw American voluntary associations as the analogue to the lost world of the French estates. When we look carefully at the intermediate structures that Tocqueville saw as buffers against an overweening Old Regime, they turn out to have been far less "horizontal" and certainly less nurturing of democracy than were the town meetings and local civic associations he found in America. Putnam makes a similar assumption about associations in different periods of Italian history.

Second, looking forward, although Putnam's nineteenth-century statistical measures of civic competence are ingenious and correlate strongly with his findings about contemporary performance and civic competence, it is not clear what these measures signify. To the naked eye, all the elements in this index (mutual aid societies, cooperatives, voting turnout, and unionization) support the thesis of "civic" competence. But why are they

systems, industrial development, the diffusion of banditism and the formation of the first mafias."

It would have been interesting to know, as Ellis Goldberg asks in his review of the book, whether Norman kingdoms established elsewhere in Europe left a similar heritage. Based on the regimes that followed the Norman conquest of England, he finds reason for skepticism. See Goldberg (1996) for this and other arguments that are not taken up in this essay.

[18] For one thing, Putnam has the merchants and bankers of these early northern communes supplanting the power of the church (1993a, 148), when recent research (for example, Bizzocchi 1987) shows that "an important dimension of the power base of the Medici in republican Florence came from ... the church hierarchy" (Cohn 1994, 326). For another, contrary to Putnam's paean to their relative social equality, early capitalist cities such as Florence and Venice produced enormous differences in stratification (see Ventura 1964; Molho 1994). This is no more than saying that the birth period of "civic society" was at the same time the birth period of bourgeois society, with all the patterned inequalities that capitalism produced.

[19] Putnam does not ignore the "uncivic" features of the city-states (see, for example, 1993a, 129). In a personal communication to the author, he argues that, "however uncivic they were in absolute terms, they were still more civic than the Norman kingdom." By Putnam's reasoning, two things should follow. First, intraregional differences in the independent variable should correlate significantly with intraregional differences in the outcomes he predicts (see Goldberg 1996 for this line of argument). Second, consistent differences in civicness can be traced over time for all the regions. On the scant evidence presented in the book, I do not find sufficient support for either test.

[20] And not only historians: As political scientist Gianfranco Pasquino writes, it is one thing to identify the political origins of contemporary political patterns in a period eight centuries ago, but it is quite another to skim through most features of the politics of the next 500 years (Pasquino 1994, 309). For Putnam's reply, see Putnam (1994).

[21] I am grateful to Suzanne Berger for this observation, which she first made at a panel dedicated to Putnam's book at the 1994 American Political Science Association meeting.

[22] Contra Putnam on the greater corruption of the South and the clean government of the Center-North, the spectacular corruption scandals that have shaken the Italian First Republic since 1990 began and were centered in the North. On corruption in Italy, see della Porta 1992.

strongest in the areas of the Po Valley in which popular politics, both socialist and Catholic, took hold in the late nineteenth century—what today we would call "the Third Italy" (Bagnasco 1994; Trigilia 1986)? This is no accident: Both socialist and Catholic parties rooted themselves in this soil by a deliberate strategy of creating just the kind of secondary associations that make up Putnam's measures of civic capacity. And these regions happen, for the most part, to be the areas of both effective regional government and progressive politics today.

Thus, the impressive correlations that Putnam displays in chapter 5 (figures 5.3 and 5.4), which he interprets as evidence of a causal link between past civic competence and present regional performance, can also be interpreted as a correlation between progressive politics then and now and between progressive political traditions and civic capacity. In both periods, electorates were deliberately mobilized on the basis of networks of mass organizations and social and recreational associations; and in both, civic competence was deliberately developed after World War II as a symbol of the left-wing parties' governing capacity (Putnam 1993a, 149, Table 5.1; p. 119). Both progressive politics and civic capacity were correspondingly weak in the South (Tarrow 1967a: chapters 3 and 8).

To some, these may seem like methodological niceties, but they begin to indicate an alternative model: The operative cause of the performance of the regional institutions in both North and South is neither cultural nor associational but political (Pasquino 1994). Expressed in the form of a hypothesis, the historical evidence can be read as support for the idea that the nineteenth-century popular politics of north-central Italy are themselves the source of both the civic community and the positive political performance of its regional governments. But something more than party building was occurring in nineteenth-century Italy—there was also state building and the differential structuring of a public culture.

THE PERILS OF PUTNAM: STATE BUILDING, STATE STRATEGY, AND DEMOCRACY

This takes us to the causes of the civic incapacity that Putnam identifies in the South and to the causes and remedies of the lack of social capital in general. Even agreeing with his depiction of the lack of institutional performance in the Italian South, I wish to raise two sorts of questions about its causes: the role of state structures in making causal inferences about civic capacity and the relations between social capital and democracy.

States as Independent Variables

This is not the place to speculate about the manifold mediations that could have helped explain the correlations Putnam found between civic vitality and regional policy performance. But there is one alternative or complementary explanation for Putnam's findings that he never considers: the effect of the pattern of state building on indigenous civic capacity.[23] The best way to suggest this is with a datum Putnam provides but passes over very quickly: Every regime that governed southern Italy from the Norman establishment of a centralized monarchy in the twelfth century to the unified government which took over there in 1861 was foreign and governed with a logic of colonial exploitation. Indeed, as he remarks, the last two regimes in the region before it was unified with the North in 1861 followed a strategy of promoting "mutual distrust and conflict among their subjects, destroying horizontal ties of solidarity in order to maintain the primacy of vertical ties of dependence and exploitation" (p. 136).

Nor did southern Italy's semicolonial status suddenly disappear with unification. The region was joined to the North by a process of royal conquest, its fragile commercial sector brutally merged with the North's more flourishing economy, a uniform tax system and customs union imposed on its vulnerable industries, and brigandage rooted out by a full-scale military campaign. Politically, the South's communes and provinces were governed by northern administrators who regarded the region as a *terra di missione*, and its economy was penetrated by carpetbaggers in search of new markets and raw materials.

Putnam does not neglect to describe the *trasformismo* that linked the South to national politics after unification.[24] But he says much less about how the region was actually governed: about prefects who bought elections for the government's candidates; about how they often arrested unfriendly candidates and closed down local governments which displeased them; and about the cooptation of the local elite into patron-client chains that began with the day worker standing hat in hand in the daily labor market in the village piazza and ended in the ministries in Rome (p. 124).[25] Like the merger of West and East Germany 130 years later, a stronger, richer, more legitimate regime conquered a weaker, poorer, more marginal one, inducting its residents into political life through the tools of patronage, paternalism, and the power of money—and rubbing it in by sending in commissions of experts to shake their heads over their backwardness.

Nor did the differences in state intervention in northern and southern Italy end when the "liberal" state gave way to the corporate and republican ones in the next century. Leaving fascism aside, since the end of World

[23] Putnam does entertain a state-centric model, but the states in question emerged and disappeared many centuries ago. As David Laitin (1994) notes, this is a "big bang" interpretation of history. Putnam is right to point out, in a personal communication to the author, that his focus on early states is consistent with his path-dependent model and does not ignore state building; rather, the criticism is that—once states were formed in northern and southern Italy—there were crucial changes in state building and in state strategy that find no place in his account.

[24] Strictly speaking, since the elections of 1876, the term *trasformismo* has meant the shift of opposition deputies to support of the government in return for favors, but it has become a general catch-phrase for corruption, clientelism, and the politics of exchange.

[25] The sources on the forced economic integration and on prefectoral interference in local elections are legion. See Fried (1963); Salvemini (1955, 73–74); and Tarrow (1967a, 21–28).

War II, the Italian state has continued to intervene in the South with "extraordinary" initiatives and institutions, interacting with the local elite in ways that are far different from its interactions with north-central Italy (for example, see Trigilia 1992). Putnam gives us a great deal of information about the development of the Italian regions after 1970, but he says much less about the system of center/periphery ties into which the new institutions were inserted.

How could Robert Putnam, who knows the history of Italian unification well, have missed the penetration of southern Italian society by the northern state and the effect this had on the region's level of civic competence? The reason seems to lie in the model with which he turned to history, a model that conceived of civic capacity as a native soil in which state structures grow rather than one shaped by patterns of state building and state strategy. In a comparison between the nineteenth-century unification of Italy and the twentieth-century installation of the regions, Putnam reveals this "bottom-up" model of causation very clearly. He writes:

> The new institutions of the unified nation-state, far from homogenizing traditional patterns of politics, were themselves *pulled* ineluctably into conformity with those contrasting traditions, just as the regional governments after 1970 would be *remolded* by these same social and cultural contexts (p. 145, emphasis added).

"Pulled?" "Remolded?" Who are the agents doing this pulling and remolding? Putnam does not say, and the lack of state agency in the book is one of the major flaws of his explanatory model.

More than thirty years ago, Edward Banfield (1958) went to a village in southern Italy and found a lack of associational activity, which led him to posit a lack of civic capacity, too.[26] With far more theoretical sophistication and more systematic data, Putnam's treatment of the relations between state and civic capacity in the South resembles Banfield's logic. For him, as for Banfield, the character of the state is external to the model, suffering the results of the region's associational incapacity but with no responsibility for producing it. But as Alessandro Pizzorno (1971; 87–98) asked, in the context of a centralized state with a system of Roman law and a history of marginality, can we be satisfied interpreting civic capacity as a home-grown product in which the state has played no role? The new Italian regions were certainly installed in different soils in northern and southern Italy. But an important part of that difference was a public culture shaped by more than a century of political and administrative dependency.

Political Culture and Democracy

This takes us to my final argument with Putnam's interpretation of his findings. His key causal inference, that a history of vibrant communal government has produced present civic capacity in the North, while autocratic monarchism was the source of the South's lack of civism, is a plausible one that may apply to other countries as well. In fact, Putnam himself is leading an initiative in this direction in the United States.[27] But does this mean we should expect to find a history of communal autonomy and flowering mercantile life everywhere that we encounter contemporary civic competence? And a history of communal weakness and centralized autocracy wherever we find civic incapacity? Putnam at one point quotes Maurice Agulhon's work on sociability in the villages of southern France as a parallel to the associational capacity Putnam found in northern Italy (Putnam 1993a, 137–38; Agulhon 1982). But he is surely aware that the Provençal villagers Agulhon studied organized their *cercles* and *chambrées* in the context of a state which was militantly centralizing and intruded heavily on local life.[28] If associational capacity co-occurs with state centralization in southern France and with local communal traditions in northern Italy, then either the link between communal traditions and civic competence is problematic, or it must be much more mediated than what Putnam describes.

This leads to my final point: How does the chain of causation that Putnam posits relate to the practice of democracy—which, after all, is in the title of his book? Let us summarize Putnam's argument. At the beginning of his causal chain depicting northern Italy's civic virtues are the horizontal associations of the late-medieval city-states; this civic capacity reappears in different form in nineteenth-century mutual aid societies, cooperatives, unions, and voting behavior and, in broader form, in the civic competence of today. This in turn produces the relative success of the regional institutions in the North, the ultimate outcome of which is to make democracy work, and the weak institutional performance of the South. "Tocqueville was right," concludes Putnam: "Democratic government is strengthened, not weakened, when it faces a vigorous civil society" (p. 182).

Putnam marshals a good deal of evidence that northern Italy, with greater civic competence, has higher institutional performance and that the citizens in the higher performance regions get results that they like. He regards this finding as a surrogate for democratic government. But is the causal link between the political culture of association and the practice of democracy really as straightforward as this? In the first place, Putnam's operational dependent variable is not democratic practice but policy *performance*, and performance is as likely to be positive in nondemocratic as in democratic states. There is good evidence that the administrative structures of southern and northern Italy worked

[26] But see the critiques of method and conception in Pizzorno (1971) and Sabetti (1996). It would appear from Sabetti's account of the village in which Banfield worked that, even in the early 1950s, there were forms of associational capacity which are remembered even today.

[27] See Putnam (1993b, 1995) for his thinking about the weakening of social capital in the United States. But here, beginning at the other extreme of associational capacity, he sees a decline in sociability with a resulting weakening of social capital remarkably resembling what he found in southern Italy. For recent data on U.S. associational life and a skeptical view of Putnam's interpretation, see Lipset (1995, 13–14).

[28] Indeed, much of what we know about the Provençal *chambrées* comes from the secret reports of the central government's powerful prefects.

as differently under fascism as they do today: Would that make fascist northern Italy more democratic than the South in Mussolini's heyday?

Finally, if we define democracy as effective policy performance, we run the risk of falling into an elitist definition of democracy. But if, as this reviewer is inclined to do, we follow the classics and define it as popular sovereignty and individual rights, I am afraid that history gives us little reason to expect a strong association with institutional performance. Putnam's book is good social science across space; its evidence about the historical and political-cultural sources of policy performance, although it can be challenged, is intriguing; but the book has little to say about democracy.

MAKING SOCIAL SCIENCE WORK ACROSS SPACE AND TIME

If the above observations are read as counseling students to stick to their own turf and never try to marry qualitative and historical information to quantitative data, this review will have been seriously misread (Tarrow 1995, reviewing King, Keohane, and Verba 1994). On the contrary, Putnam's achievement is to have gone considerably beyond the statistical model of cross-sectional comparison with which he began and to have integrated both quantitative and qualitative historical sources with his findings on contemporary institutional performance. I want to argue a somewhat different case.

Making History Work Better

History is not a neutral reservoir of facts out of which viable generalizations are drawn. The social scientist looking for validation of research findings goes to history with a theory, or at least with a set of theoretical hunches. Putnam's hunches came from his admiration of civic competence, specified and operationalized mainly through association. From the original twenty-year time frame of the study and the expectation that explanation would come from direct inference on behavioral variables, his focus shifted to a much longer time frame in order to interpret and explain what he had observed. The key to that door became historically developed traditions of civic competence.

But how can a concept that is derived from contemporary democratic politics be transposed to other periods of history and to other political systems? In the course of his search through history, Putnam's key variable intersected with a wide variety of institutional and sociological contexts. I have pointed to the effect of the national state in the South; another was the rise of popular political traditions in the Po Valley. Social scientists ignore history at their peril; but when we go to history, we must be aware that our models affect what we look for, how we interpret it, and how we conjoin it to our own data. The strength of Putnam's achievement was to go outside the comfort of his data into the less certain terrain of narrative and quantitative history; its main weakness was in the lack of a structural perspective with which to interpret what he found there.

Extending "Social Capital" Carefully

A final note: Some of my readers have found the above arguments so persuasive that they wonder why a reviewer would give the book such extended attention. This is a mistake. Putnam's bold hypothesis about the Italian South's civic incompetence—translated into his broader theory of social capital in chapter 6 and in subsequent publications (Putnam 1993b, 1995)—goes well beyond southern Italy. It parallels both arguments made about the causes of the urban malaise in U.S. society today and the developmental problems of the Third World. According to these arguments, the source of the personal anomie and social disintegration in U.S. urban ghettos and the weakness of development in parts of the Third World is a lack of social capital. This leads to a Tocquevillian policy prescription to policy makers: Work to develop networks of social capital in the cities and cooperative arrangements among Third World small farmers.

But if this reviewer is correct, and if the absence of civic capacity is the by-product of politics, state building, and social structure, then the causes of the malaise in U.S. cities or in Third World agriculture are more likely to be found in such structural factors as the flight of real capital, in the first case, and the instability of commodity prices and the presence of exploitative governments, in the second. In north Philadelphia and the Sahel, as in southern Italy, while the indicators of malaise may be civic, the causes are structural. If my critique of Putnam in southern Italy can be extended as far as his theory, then policy makers who attack the lack of social capital by encouraging association would be attacking the symptoms and not the causes of the problem.

But the achievements of *Making Democracy Work* are as impressive as its problems. After years in which the country was regarded as a kind of Potemkin democracy, Putnam has placed Italy squarely back among the industrial democracies of the West with important lessons to teach students of comparative politics. Through an ingenious strategy of controlled paired comparison, he demonstrated how institutional reform intersects with different contextual styles of politics to produce different plants from the same seeds. He has interpreted his results in such catholic terms that students of cultural interpretation and public choice—who differ in so many ways—can find common ground in the outcome. Scholars coming from a structuralist persuasion, like this reviewer, will be less easily convinced, but even they receive satisfaction from the fact that Putnam's concept of social capital has a structural as well as a normative dimension. If the results can be criticized, it is because Putnam dared to traverse the gap between the presentism of much social science work and the less certain terrain of history and culture. *Making Democracy Work* is a milestone in the marriage of quantitative and qualitative cultural and policy research and should inspire researchers for years to come.

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