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Explaining Institutional Success: The Case of Italian Regional Government

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Why do some new representative institutions succeed and others fail? This article tests several hypotheses about the ecology of institutional performance, drawing on a ten-year study of Italian regional governments. Institutional success is greater where socioeconomic development is more advanced, where the political culture is participant and sociable, rather than passive and parochial, and where social stability is greater; these three variables alone account for more than four-fifths of the variance in institutional performance. Of particular importance is the impact of historical patterns of social solidarity and political mobilization on contemporary institutional success.

The Theoretical Question

Attempts to create new political institutions are not rare, but success—the creation of a new institution that meets its objectives comprehensively and efficiently and satisfies its multiple constituencies—is rare. Why do some new institutions succeed and others fail? We seek to answer that question.

The specific case we shall examine is the establishment of regional governments throughout Italy in 1970, correctly termed by Tarrow (1974, p. 36) “one of the few recent attempts to create new representative institutions in the nation-states of the West.” This experiment in regional government is among the most portentous developments in Italian politics and governance in more than three decades of the Republic, but here we shall focus less on the nation-specific aspects of the case than on the broader theoretical question of institutional success.

Two broad families of theories of institutional performance may be distinguished. (On institutionalization, see Selznick 1957; Huntington 1968;

Esman 1972; Ben-Dor 1975.) *Endogenous theories* seek to explain institutional success or failure in terms of internal characteristics and processes of the institution itself, such as the values and strategies of its leaders. By contrast, *ecological theories* emphasize characteristics of the environment of the new institution, such as the availability of external resources and the demands from various constituencies. Needless to say, these two approaches are complementary, and the larger study from which this article is drawn addresses both. Here, however, we shall focus on institutional ecology: What external circumstances are favorable or unfavorable to the creation of successful representative institutions?

The scholarly literature on political development offers a rich trove of relevant hypotheses (Huntington and Dominguez 1975). Three interrelated causal factors emerge with special clarity from even a cursory reading of this literature: socioeconomic development, political culture, and social stability.

Political sociologists since Aristotle have argued that the prospects for stable and effective democratic government depend on social and economic development. (Cnudde and Neubauer 1969, is a convenient collection; see also Dahl 1971.) Industrialization, mass education, mass communications, affluence—in short, social and economic modernity—provide a favorable environment for effective representative institutions. Reviewing the comparative success of urban governments around the globe, Fried and Rabinovitz (1980, p. 66) conclude that “of all the theories

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to explain the performance differences, the most powerful one is modernization." Thus, our first hypothesis is that *institutional success will be greater where socioeconomic development is more advanced.*

Other theorists link institutional success to political culture. "The development of a stable and effective democratic government depends upon more than the structures of government and politics: it depends upon the orientations that people have to the political process—upon the political culture" (Almond and Verba 1965, p. 498). The concept of political culture is, of course, complex and multidimensional, but certain elements are said to be especially relevant to the prospects for representative institutions. Almond and Verba trace a continuum from parochial to participant cultures, defined in terms of political awareness and involvement. Beyond such "civic competence," social trust and the associational capacities of a people are, it is said, decisive for the success of democratic institutions. "Successful self-government depends . . . upon the possibility of concerning the behavior of a large number of people in matters of public concern" (Banfield 1958, pp. 7-8). Thus, our second hypothesis is that *institutional success will be greater where the political culture is participant and sociable, rather than passive and parochial.*

Political culture is obviously affected by (and perhaps affects) social and economic development. As Huntington and Dominguez (1975, p. 28) point out, political participation varies universally with socioeconomic modernization. Yet political culture also reflects enduring political traditions, which may attenuate any strict correlation between development and political culture. Hence, it is possible that "the degree of democracy in a transitional or modern society will be decisively shaped by the nature of the previously existing traditional society" (Huntington and Dominguez 1975, p. 12). Thus, a corollary of our second hypothesis is that *institutional success will be greater where political traditions are more favorable.*

According to some theorists, socioeconomic development and political factors have an interactive effect on institutional performance (Neubauer 1967, pp. 1006-09; Jackman 1973; Huntington and Dominguez 1975, p. 59). At low levels of development, socioeconomic factors are said to be the primary determinants of institutional success, but at higher levels of development, other factors, including political traditions, become relatively more important. Increased socioeconomic resources allow, but do not ensure, institutional success. Exploitation of that potential is determined by political factors. Thus, a second order proposition worth exploring is that *where*

socioeconomic development is more advanced, institutional success will be less affected by development and more affected by political culture.

The results of modernization—economic affluence, social mobilization, political participation—may favor institutional success, but the process of modernization itself, if it entails rapid social change, may imperil institutional performance. "Modernity breeds stability, but modernization breeds instability" (Huntington 1968, p. 41). Rapid social change creates social conflict and disrupts existing norms, networks, and organizations that could buffer that conflict and buttress governments. The regrowth of a new social and political infrastructure is a much slower process, and in the interim, the prospects for institutional success are dim. Rapid social change, in short, increases social strain and decreases social solidarity. Thus, our final hypothesis is that *at any given level of development, institutional success will be greater where social stability is great and social change slow.*

Clearly, these simple propositions do not exhaust the overflowing warehouse of political development theory. But parsimony is important. Our self-set challenge is to see how fully we can account for differences in institutional success with only these three variables: socioeconomic development, political culture, and social stability.

The Empirical Context

To study how the environment affects organic growth processes, the botanist plants genetically identical seeds in diverse soils and climates. Consider, for a moment, the requisites for an equally rigorous test of theories of institutional development.

1. We need a significant number of formally identical institutions, with essentially identical organizational formats, equivalent formal powers, and similar objectives. Since the age of an institution may affect its performance, this, too, should be a controlled variable.

2. In order to maximize "external validity," the organizations to be studied should be (at least potentially) institutions of broad power, capable of arousing the passions and ambitions of professional politicians and responsible for decisions of real significance for large numbers of citizens on a wide range of issues.

3. If we are to assess the impact of ecology on institutional performance, the institutions must be implanted within very diverse settings. Socioeconomic development, political culture and political traditions, social stability, and perhaps other factors, such as population or party

strengths, must vary widely within our sample of institutional environments.

This is an imposing list of desiderata. But they are strikingly—perhaps even uniquely—satisfied by the case to be discussed here, the birth and evolution of regional governments in Italy.

On June 7, 1970, elections were held throughout Italy for fifteen new regional councils, culminating an intense struggle of more than two decades. Under the Italian Constitution of 1948, elected regional governments were to be granted powers in such areas as health, housing, urban planning, agriculture, and public works. The constitutional mandate was carried out almost immediately in five “special” regions, located along the national borders and on the islands of Sicily and Sardinia, areas threatened by separatism. But creation of the remaining “ordinary” regions (containing 85 percent of Italy’s population) was delayed by intense political resistance.

By the end of the 1960s, however, the sclerotic centralism of Italian government, an emergent interest in regional planning, and a leftward drift in national politics had created a climate within which the necessary enabling legislation could be passed, and in 1970 the first councils of the fifteen “ordinary” regions were elected (Kogan 1975; Gourevitch 1978). In its first several years, each council elected a regional president and giunta (cabinet), wrote a regional “statute” that spelled out organization, procedures, and specific areas of regional jurisdiction, and began to receive powers, funds, and personnel from the central government. During these early years, relations between center and periphery were very antagonistic. However, an articulate coalition of regionalist leaders generated strong grassroots pressures for more effective devolution. By the summer of 1977, two years into the regions’ second five-year legislative term, agreement was reached at the national level on a packet of decrees that would transfer to the regions substantial portions of several ministries, as well as hundreds of semipublic agencies (Leonardi, Nanetti, and Putnam 1981). Meanwhile, more or less independent reforms had begun to shift responsibility to the regions for the national hospital and health insurance systems, as well as partial control over territorial and economic planning. Total funds available to the regions grew almost exponentially during these years, rising from roughly \$1 billion in 1973 to roughly \$22 billion in 1979, more than 90 percent of that transferred from the central government. Total regional revenues now amount to nearly one-fourth of all government revenues in Italy, proportionately more than is accounted for by the American states. Although regional autonomy remains limited, the regional governments have attracted

and sustained an ambitious political class whose legitimacy is rooted in popular election, as well as in a broad consensus on regionalism among all major national parties. This is no mere exercise in administrative decentralization.

For students of institutional development, the Italian regional experiment has one crucially important feature: the social, economic, and political contexts into which the regional governments were introduced are exceedingly diverse. Socio-economically, the regions range from post-industrial Lombardia in the North to pre-industrial Basilicata in the South. In political terms, the regions range from Emilia-Romagna, buckle of the Red Belt and a hotbed of radicalism for more than a century, to neighboring Veneto, the heart of “White” Italy, culturally traditional and devoutly Catholic, and to Calabria—parochial, clientelistic, even feudal in its politics. Massive waves of immigration and social change have disrupted some regions, like Lazio, dominated by the hydrocephalic capital of Roma, while leaving others, like neighboring Umbria, relatively untouched. Economic, political, and social disparities among the Italian regions are greater than in virtually any other advanced country in the world. The setting is nearly ideal for studying the ecology of institutional development *in vitro*.

Beginning in 1970, we have closely followed the development of six regional governments, in Lombardia, Veneto, Emilia-Romagna, Lazio, Puglia, and Basilicata, selected to represent the full range of regional diversity. We have gathered evidence on both individuals and institutions, on both attitudes and behavior, and on both inputs and outputs. We have interviewed more than three hundred regional councillors, including a three-wave panel in 1970, 1976, and 1981 with nearly one hundred of them. In 1976 and 1981 we interviewed more than one hundred “observers” from these regions, including businessmen, trade unionists, farm leaders, mayors, journalists, and regional and national administrators. In 1972, 1977, and 1981 we conducted short interviews with nationwide samples of the electorate. We have carried out field studies of regional planning in each of the six regions, and we have gathered documentary and statistical evidence on each region’s legislation and administrative operations. In sum, we know these six regions quite well.

We have now begun to assess the performance of all fifteen “ordinary” regions, relying on concepts and measures of institutional capability developed during our six core case studies. This dialectical technique, interweaving the depth of our understanding of six regions and the breadth of experience reflected in the fuller set of fifteen, provides an optimal approach to studying institutional performance and its determinants. The pre-

sent article draws on both the broader and the deeper studies (and at some points encompasses the five "special" regions as well), but our primary emphasis is on the fifteen-region sample.

Seeking public support, and lacking much of the legal authority and administrative infrastructure necessary for carrying out substantial social reforms, most regions occupied themselves in the early years with distributing funds, such as loans for agricultural cooperatives and subventions for La Scala, often in the highly disaggregated form Italians call *legge* (little laws) and *interventi a pioggia* (projects showered indiscriminately over the region). On the other hand, some regions did introduce substantive reforms in such areas as urban planning and environmental protection.

The regions were putting down roots. Our surveys found that although dissatisfied in many ways with the regional governments, Italian voters expressed more respect for them than for the national government and almost as much as for local government. Even more strikingly, the regional attentive public (union leaders, businessmen, and so on) were actively involved and reasonably satisfied with the new institutions. On the other hand, both councillors and the attentive public were critical of the regions' administrative implementation. A sense of frustrated hopes, fruitless plans, and missed opportunities pervaded many regions. Many agreed with the mayor who told us, "The general lines of the region are fine, but the operative reality is not." Great expectations had given way everywhere to sober realism, and in some places to bitter delusion. Measuring and explaining these patterns of relative success and failure is the task before us.

This project meets the essential design requirements outlined above for a study of institutional development, but three unavoidable constraints complicate our task. First, the sample size is limited. With only fifteen cases, it is not easy to detect faint patterns or employ multiple controls. Fortunately, our principal findings are remarkably clear, significant both statistically and in terms of the famed "interocular traumatic test."

Second, since the regions are not sovereign, central controls and redistributive revenue-sharing constrain the potential variance in their performance. Poorer regions are shielded from the full effects of resource limitations, while activist and innovative regional governments are restrained by controls from Rome. Statistically, this levelling means that the obtained correlations may underestimate the strength of the underlying relationships.

Third, this natural experiment is still young, and we lack sufficient data over time for a full-fledged longitudinal study. Therefore, our inferences about causal relations will necessarily be

limited by the assumption that cross-sectional patterns reflect dynamic processes with reasonable fidelity (Somers 1971, p. 383). Although we continue to gather time-series data on the evolution of the new governments, we believe that our cross-sectional findings are reasonably persuasive.

The Dependent Variable: Measuring Performance

Although institutional performance is arguably the central dependent variable of political science, rigorous comparative institutional appraisals are rare (Dahl 1967). Measurement difficulties in a narrow sense have been one important obstacle, but conceptual and philosophical problems have been even more severe. Although as citizens and casual observers we all make judgments about the performance of governments, political scientists are professionally inclined to ethical relativism. We are sensitive to the multiple interests and objectives served by the political process and conscious of the diversity of standards by which governance can be judged. Yet if we are to begin to test theories of institutionalization, we must attempt systematic measurement of institutional performance. Huntington (1965, p. 405) first issued the challenge to empirical researchers nearly two decades ago:

Experience tells us that levels of institutionalization differ. Measuring that difference may be difficult, but it is not impossible. Only by measuring institutionalization will we be able to buttress or disprove hypotheses about the relationship between social, economic, and demographic changes, on the one hand, and variations in political structure on the other.

Any assessment of institutional performance must meet three severe tests: It must be *theoretically comprehensive*, *empirically coherent*, and *consistent with the objectives and evaluations of the institution's protagonists and constituents*.

Theoretically speaking, an institution's persistence and external effectiveness depend in the first instance on its internal stability and efficiency. Eckstein (1971) and Gurr and McClelland (1971) suggest that we measure an institution's performance in part in terms of the stability of its decision-making apparatus and the efficacy of its budgetary process. Essentially this family of measures asks: Whatever else this institution is doing, is it conducting its crucial internal operations smoothly and with dispatch?

But studying the performance of governments means studying policies and programs as well. Assessing such outputs comparatively and quantitatively is, of course, a complex, value-laden task. To be persuasive, any measure of policy per-

formance should be reasonably unaffected by differences in substantive priorities. Yet it is not easy to compare the innovativeness, effectiveness, and social importance of, say, a scholarship program and an irrigation program. However, in the context of our study, these difficulties are reduced to manageable proportions. Broadly speaking, the same themes were stressed in our interviews with policymakers and observers all across Italy, and although the urgency of certain problems varied from region to region, during these early years all regional governments tended to address similar issues, such as vocational education and land reclamation. But they did not address these issues equally promptly or comprehensively or with equal innovativeness, and the results did not equally satisfy the policymakers and their constituents. As Eckstein (1971, p. 8) has noted, "it is ludicrous to expect politics to attain goals they do not want to attain, but surely reasonable to expect them efficaciously to pursue those that are in fact strong preferences."

Our assessment of relative institutional success across the fifteen regions is based on eight diverse metrics, four covering aspects of internal processes and four addressing external policies. (The actual rankings of each region on each metric are shown in Figure 1.)

1. Giunta Stability. Some regions had highly stable regional cabinets, whereas others found it hard to patch a coalition together and keep it together (Bin 1976). Our metric here is: During what proportion of the first legislature (1970-1975) was there a giunta in office? This variable ranged from 100 percent in Umbria to 73 percent in Campania.

2. Budget Promptness. Beginning in 1972, all regions were supposed to complete action on their annual budgets by January 1st, the start of the fiscal year. Virtually none ever succeeded in meeting this target, but the average delay varied considerably from region to region (Bertolissi et al. 1976). Our metric here is this: On average, during the period from 1972 to 1976, when was the budget actually passed? This variable ranged from February 13th in Lombardia to June 5th in Piemonte.

3. Spending Capacity. During the early years, many of the regions accumulated enormous unexpended appropriations, owing at least in part to administrative inefficiency. These *residui passivi* turn out to be very difficult to measure reliably and comparably across regions because of divergent accounting systems as well as divergent allocations between current and capital accounts (Colombini 1979; Confederazione Generale

1980). However, a rough-and-ready measure can be based on regional expenditures from a special fund appropriated by the central government in October, 1975, for an antirecession jobs program. Our metric here is: What proportion of those funds allocated to the region were actually spent by December 31, 1977? This variable ranged from 59 percent in Emilia-Romagna to 0 percent in Lazio.

4. Law Passage Rate. Regional councils differed in the rate at which legislative proposals were actually approved (Good 1976). This factor is relevant because it indicates the degree to which councillors emphasized policy making instead of symbolic posturing. Our metric here is: What proportion of the legislative proposals introduced between 1970 and 1973 were actually passed? This variable ranged from 68 percent in Umbria to 15 percent in Calabria.

5. Legislative Innovation. In Italy, as in the United States, many legislative ideas tend to diffuse across subnational governments, as an attractive innovation introduced by a relatively advanced council is picked up and passed (often nearly *verbatim*) in less advanced regions (Walker 1969; Bertolissi et al. 1976). We examined seven diverse topics on which similar laws appeared in many of the fifteen regions: day-care centers, livestock production, industrial parks, hospital planning, promotion of artisanry, pharmaceutical insurance for self-employed persons, and agricultural improvements. Despite differing regional needs, regions tended to be consistent leaders or consistent laggards across nearly all these topics, with only two (or possibly three) exceptions. (Adoption patterns on pharmaceutical insurance, agricultural improvements, and, to some extent, livestock production did not fit the overall pattern.) Our metric here is: On average, across these seven domains, how old were the relevant laws as of June 1976? This variable ranged from more than two years in Lombardia to barely nine months in Molise. In fact, Molise had passed only two of these "model" laws and had been one of the last regions to do so in both cases, whereas Lombardy had passed six of the seven and had been the very first region to do so for three of the six.

6. Regional Planning. The need for regional planning was an important theme in the debates that led to the creation of the regions, and every region claimed powers in this field in its *statuto*. By 1976, two-thirds of our regional councillors spontaneously mentioned planning during an open-ended discussion of "the most important problems facing this region." It is appropriate, therefore, to assess the regions' institutional per-

formance in part by their implementation of this verbal commitment.

Our field studies in the six core regions enabled us to develop a scheme for grading each region's progress in both territorial (physical) and economic planning (Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1980). For example, by 1976 both Emilia-Romagna and Lombardia had approved programmatic budgets that linked regional outlays to specified regional economic priorities, whereas in Lazio and Puglia the *giuntas* had merely prepared generic statements of intent, without legislative endorsement and without any practical implementation. Across the six regions, our independent ratings turned out to be closely correlated with the councillors' own satisfaction with their regions' planning activities ($r=.67$), suggesting that policy-makers themselves shared our criteria and our judgments.

Using the available primary and secondary (Tecnocasa 1975) literature, we have subsequently applied this same grading scheme to all fifteen regions. Scores ranged from 10 (top performance on both economic and territorial planning) to 2 (minimal performance in both sectors). (Detailed assessments are available on request from the authors.)

7. Reform Legislation. To obtain a fuller appreciation of regional policy output across a range of functional areas, we examined all regional legislation produced during the first legislature in six sectors: agriculture, health and social services, artisanry and light industry, vocational education, urban planning, and territorial planning (Bertolissi et al. 1976). In each case we have assessed the extensiveness, innovativeness, and comprehensiveness of the legislation, using a five-point grading scale.

Take, for example, the case of agricultural policy, the single most active area of legislative interest throughout most regions. The regions varied widely in terms of comprehensiveness of the measures introduced, the support for technical innovations, the degree of structural reform embodied in the legislation, and the degree of coordination and explicit priority-setting. Grants and loans were provided for farm modernization and for cooperative programs of managerial training and technical services, but particularly in the early years, many regions showered these benefits with no coordination at all. Later, some regions began to tie their financial aid to broader regional and subregional plans, as well as to more explicit social and economic criteria.

A region's grades across these six functional areas were moderately consistent, with an average intercorrelation among the six of $r=.49$. Each region's six grades were summed, with the final

scores ranging from Lombardia's 27 (top performance in virtually all areas) to Basilicata's 8 (barely minimal activity in virtually all areas).

8. Tecnocasa Rating. After we had completed our initial exploration of institutional performance, we discovered an independent assessment of the housing and urban development policies of all twenty regions, carried out by an Italian consulting firm (Tecnocasa 1975) on behalf of the Lombardia regional government. This study produced a checklist of 24 programs and administrative practices that various regions had implemented, ranging from regional development corporations to zoning standards. Our metric here is simply: How many of these 24 innovations had been adopted as of May, 1975? The rank order ranged from Emilia-Romagna, which had adopted all 24, to Molise, which had adopted only three. Although this measure covers only a single policy sector, it is methodologically valuable, for it was produced independently of our own assessment. Remarkably, the regional rankings produced by the Tecnocasa study correlate almost perfectly with the net rankings from our own probes.

These eight measures, we think, meet the test of theoretical comprehensiveness, for they cover a wide spectrum of regional activities and employ a diversity of sources and techniques. But do they also meet the test of empirical coherence? Is there a single dimension of institutional success, or are different regions good at different things, so that any summary assessment is inevitably arbitrary? In statistical terms, we must seek "convergent validation." To the extent that our diverse metrics turn out to be empirically correlated, we can be more confident that performance can be conceived and measured unidimensionally.

We began this research skeptical that independent indicators of institutional performance would closely cohere, given measurement frailties, differences in regional priorities, and the multiple influences on any single institutional activity. For example, although the collapse of a regional *giunta* typically may represent institutional instability, it might occasionally be caused by the untimely death of a key figure. No single indicator can measure differences in institutional success with perfect fidelity.

Against this background, we were gratified to discover (as shown in Table 1) reasonably high consistency among our diverse indicators of institutional performance. All 28 correlations among the eight performance measures are in the correct direction, averaging $r=.56$; all but four are statistically significant, despite the modest number of cases. In short, those regions that have stable *giuntas*, adopt their budgets early, spend

their money promptly, and legislate instead of posturing are, for the most part, the same regions that pioneer new legislation, engage in extensive regional planning, and produce comprehensive legislation across a wide range of functional sectors. On the basis of these eight indicators we have constructed a summary index of institutional performance.¹ Table 1 shows how each indicator loads on this composite measure, and Figure 1 shows how the fifteen regions are finally ranked.

This summary index reflects coherent and important differences in institutional performance. But does it meet our third criterion: consistency with the evaluations offered by the institutions' protagonists and constituents? This test is not easy, for observers within any single region are not well placed to make fine-grained comparisons with other regional governments, nor is there assurance that inhabitants of the various regions have similar standards or thresholds of satisfaction (Stipak 1979). On the other hand, our interviews revealed that councillors, businessmen,

mayors, union leaders, journalists, and other community leaders know a great deal about the strengths and weaknesses of their own regional government. Moreover, these governments are avowedly representative, and therefore, their constituents have a special standing in any assessment of their performance.

In fact, our index of institutional performance is consistent with the appraisals offered by the regional councillors, by the attentive public, and by the electorate as a whole. Across our six core regions, the correlation between our index and a composite measure of the councillors' satisfaction with their own regional government and its policy outputs is $r = .71$. The analogous correlation for the attentive public is, coincidentally, also $r = .71$. Similarly, in the broader sample of regions for which we have reasonably reliable assessments of public sentiment, our index of performance is comfortably consistent ($r = .70$) with the "satisfaction with the activities of the regional government" expressed by each region's citizens.²

Our appraisal here of these governments is neither exhaustive nor value-free. The modest

¹Factor scores based on principal-components analysis provide the most reliable and valid means of combining multiple indicators of a theoretical variable (Zeller and Carmines 1980), and all indices in this article are based on that technique. Given the original objectives of Italian regionalists, autonomy from central control is potentially another important performance criterion. We have discovered no reliable indicators of regional autonomy for the full fifteen-region sample, but we have an abundance of information about the relative autonomy of our six core regions, based on reports from both councillors and observers. A composite measure of regional autonomy based on these data is strongly correlated ($r = .77$) with our index of institutional performance.

²This correlation, based on our 1977 survey, is doubtless attenuated somewhat by sampling error, even though we have excluded three small regions where the mass samples numbered fewer than fifty. For the remaining regions, citizen satisfaction was relatively stable across mass surveys in 1977, 1979, and 1981 ($r = .81$). At both the regional and individual levels of analysis, satisfaction with the regional government is negatively correlated with satisfaction with the national government, which implies that those who are more critical of their regional government are not simply more critical of government in general.

Table 1. Correlations among Eight Measures of Institutional Performance:

	Giunta stability	Budget prompt- ness	Spending capacity	Law passage rate	Legislative innovation	Planning evaluation	Reform legislation	Tecnocasa
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
2	.14	—						
3	.48	.44	—					
4	.49	.27	.49	—				
5	.20	.57	.42	.52	—			
6	.61	.60	.54	.72	.43	—		
7	.41	.58	.54	.79	.80	.67	—	
8	.62	.60	.58	.74	.71	.75	.95	—
Summary performance index*	.62	.66	.70	.81	.75	.84	.92	.95

*These coefficients are, in effect, factor loadings on the first and only factor from a principal-components factor analysis.

Figure 1. Nine Measures of Institutional Performance

Performance	Giunta Stability	Budget Promptness	Spending Capacity	Law Passage Rate	Legislative Innovation	Planning Evaluation	Reform Legislation	Tecnocasa Rating	Summary Performance Index
HIGH	UM-		ER-	UM-			LO-	ER-	ER-
	ER-			ER-					
	LO } TO } PU }			TO-	LO-		ER-	LO-	LO-
				LO-	ER-	ER } UM }			
	CL-	LO-			MA-	LO } TO }		VE-	
	VE-				VE,UM } LI,LA }	VE } BA }	UM-	TO } UM }	UM-
	MA-				AB-		VE-		
	BA-	VE-		LI-	PI } CA }	MA-	TO-		TO-
	LI-	ER-							VE-
	PI-			MA-			MA } LA }		
LOW		CA-		LA-		LI } AB }	PI-	PI } LA } LI-	MA-
		BA-		MO-		MO-	CA-	MA-	
		TO-		PI } AB }	TO } PU }		LI } AB }	AB } PU }	
			MA-	VE-	BA } CL }		MO-	BA }	
	MO } LA } AB }	AB-			MO-	PI } CA } PU }	PU }	CL-	LI-
		MA-				LA }	CL }	CA-	LA-
		LB-					BA-		BA-
	LI-	LI-		PU-			BA-	MO-	PI-
		UM-		VE,CA } LI,CL }					PU-
				MO-					CA-
	CA-	MO-		CL-					MO-
		CL-							CL-
		PI-							

Key: AB = Abruzzo, BA = Basilicata, CL = Calabria, CA = Campania, ER = Emilia-Romagna, LA = Lazio, LI = Liguria, LO = Lombardia, MA = Marche, MO = Molise, PI = Piemonte, PU = Puglia, TO = Toscana, UM = Umbria, VE = Veneto.

discrepancies among our several indicators suggest that institutional performance is not perfectly unidimensional. Moreover, we have disregarded substantive differences in policies, for example, public housing versus subsidized private dwellings or attentiveness to urban versus rural transportation, which would merit further investigation. Finally, our measures concern outputs, not outcomes. We have examined regional housing policy, for example, but we have not measured actual housing quality within the region.

We have disregarded outcomes for two reasons: first, they are influenced by many things besides the performance of the regional government, including factors such as the choices and the resources of individual citizens and the activities of private groups. "Surely one would not wish to give a polity low marks because of matters beyond its control" (Pennock 1966, p. 421). Second, outcomes are much harder to measure systematically with the data currently available. On the other hand, our measures of spending capacity and of constituent satisfaction suggest that closer attention to implementation would probably not greatly alter our relative appraisals of the various regimes. Moreover, the one detailed case study of regional policy implementation that we have discovered—an unpublished study of social services, kindly made available to us by Valeria Fargion—produced a ranking broadly consistent ($r = .60$) with our own.

An irreducible element of arbitrariness remains in our assessments, a certain bias toward "good government" standards of the sort congenial to American urban reformers and, as our interviews demonstrate, increasingly so to the Italian regional councillors and observers. Doubtless certain interests are served by the activities we have labelled poor performance. Inadequate zoning, for example, may favor construction firms and land speculators. Yet unless politics is conceived to be wholly zero-sum, it must be possible in principle to distinguish optimal from suboptimal government performance. If it makes any sense at all to speak of a political institution working well or poorly, then our measures seem to be making that distinction tolerably well.

Explaining Institutional Performance

That some regions have been more successful than others is widely recognized in Italy. Two patterns have been discerned impressionistically: 1) Northern regions are said to have been more successful than their counterparts in the Mezzogiorno; and 2) Communist-governed regions are said to have been more successful than regions led by Christian Democrats. Descriptively, our evidence confirms those impressions. The correlation

between our performance index and latitude is $r = .70$, and the correlation between performance and Communist-led *giuntas* is $r = .63$. But what is it about northern regions and Communist regions that has made them more successful?

Development and Performance. Our first hypothesis was that institutional success would be correlated with socioeconomic development. The contemporary indicators of economic development and social mobilization available for the Italian regions, such as per-capita income, literacy, non-agricultural employment, television and automobile ownership, and residential amenities, are themselves highly intercorrelated ($r \geq .90$), so we have combined them into a single index of development. Figure 2 shows that development in this sense is strongly associated with institutional performance. Wealthier, more advanced regions concentrated in the north have a marked advantage over their poorer counterparts in terms of both the gravity of the problems they face and the available material and human resources. Take a minor, but significant example: there are literally dozens of data-processing firms in Milan, but only one in Potenza. Regional administrators seeking help in measuring their problems or managing their personnel are clearly better off in Lombardia than in Basilicata. For these and perhaps other reasons, our first theoretical hypothesis is strongly confirmed.

But Figure 2 also demonstrates the limitations of any simple theory linking development and institutional performance. Not only is there dispersion around the main regression line, but this dispersion is heteroskedastic, that is, much greater among the nine more-developed regions at the right ($r = .15$) than among the six less-developed regions on the left ($r = .62$). At higher levels of development, factors other than development itself become more important determinants of institutional performance. In particular, although Piemonte, Liguria, and Lazio are relatively affluent, their regional governments perform no better than the governments of much poorer regions, like Abruzzo and Basilicata. Development is a necessary condition for institutional success, but it is not sufficient.

Political Culture and Performance. Our second hypothesis is that institutional performance is influenced by political culture. One crude indicator of political involvement is electoral turnout. Although regional variations in turnout are modest—from 96.6 percent in Emilia-Romagna to 80.1 percent in Molise in 1970, for example—these differences have been highly stable over long periods. Turnout in the 1970s was very strongly correlated with turnout in the 1940s and 1950s (r

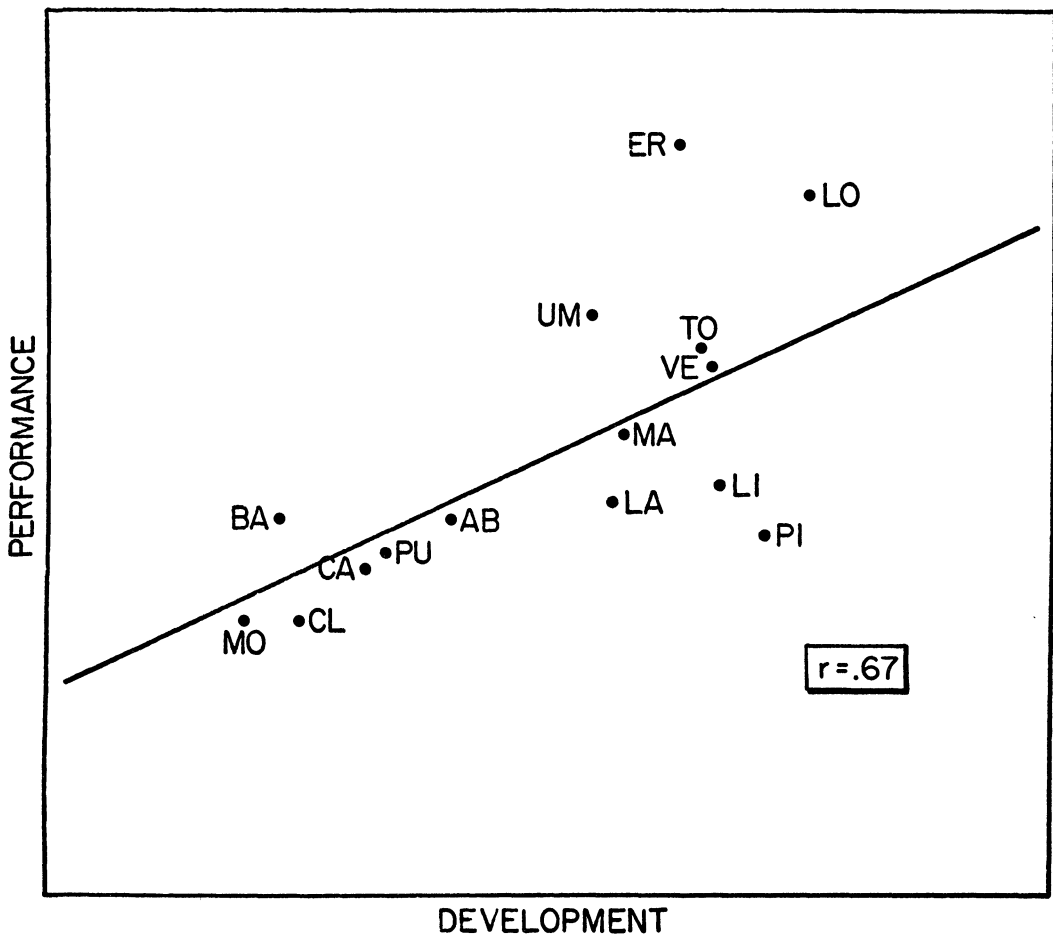
> .90) and fairly strongly correlated with turnout more than a half-century earlier ($r > .70$). Moreover, electoral turnout is part of a broader syndrome of sociopolitical participation. For example, high-turnout regions show consistently higher rates of newspaper readership and greater membership rates in secondary associations, such as trade unions. Therefore, we have combined these measures into a composite index of "civic culture."³

³Our index of civic culture is a factor score, based on four variables (loadings in parentheses): turnout, 1970 (.96); turnout, 1975 (.95); newspaper readership, 1974 (.87); and union membership (CGIL, CSIL, UIL), 1970-1976 (.74). Barnes' 1968 national survey confirms that

This label is further justified by survey data showing that citizens in regions that rank high on this index are more interested in politics than their compatriots elsewhere and are less ready, for example, to countenance police repression of political demonstrations.⁴ Historically speaking,

unions account for the bulk of Italians' memberships in secondary associations, so we use union membership as the best available proxy for associationism. Surveys are available from the University Consortium of Political Research.

⁴Across the fifteen regions, our civic culture measure correlated $r = .45$ with Town's (1973) activism scale and



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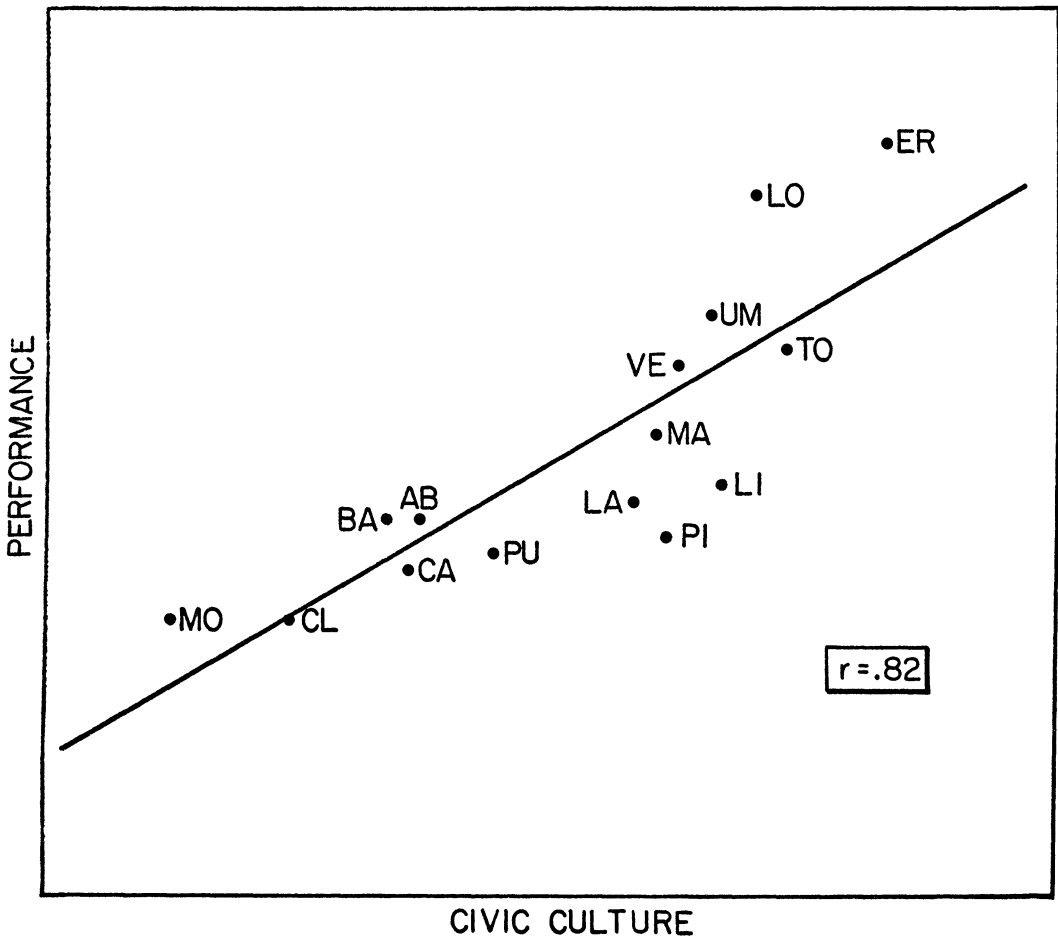
Figure 2.

regions ranking high on the civic culture index are the same regions that rejected monarchy in the 1946 referendum ($r = .77$). They also rank lower on such indicators of traditional religiosity as support for the antidiocese referendum of 1974 ($r = -.82$) and frequency of religious (as opposed to civil) marriages ($r = -.66$). Finally, citizens of these regions are much less frequent users ($r = -.80$) of the so-called preference vote, a well-

established indicator of personalism and factionalism in electoral politics (Katz and Bardi 1980). In short, this index arrays the Italian regions along a dimension of increasing political involvement and commitment to modern, secular, and democratic values.

Figure 3 shows that civic culture is even more strongly predictive of institutional performance than is socioeconomic development. To be sure, as elsewhere in the world, socioeconomic development and political culture are closely correlated across the Italian regions ($r = .89$). Normally, this multicollinearity would preclude any effort to sort out the effects of these two variables on institutional performance. In this case, however, several clues point to a solution to the mystery. First, as we have seen, the impact of development on per-

$r = -.68$ with his "law and order" scale, which measures attitudes to demonstrations, strikes, and police power. (Town's work is based on Barnes and Sani's 1972 national survey, available from the University Consortium of Political Research.)



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Figure 3.

formance is quite diffuse at higher levels of development. Second, among these more developed regions, development and political culture are much less collinear ($r = .30$), and unlike development, political culture retains its strength as a predictor of institutional success ($r = .80$). In fact, Figure 3 shows a marked curvilinearity indicating that the impact of civic culture on performance accelerates as we move from the lower to the upper ranges of this variable, or (what is essentially the same thing) as we move from less-developed to more-developed regions. These patterns are exactly consistent with the interactive effect predicted in our theoretical discussion.

At lower levels of development, economics may matter, but at higher levels, politics counts for more.⁵ Political culture helps explain otherwise inexplicable differences in institutional performance among the more developed regions. Of two relatively developed regions, like Emilia-Romagna and the Marche, the one with firmer civic traditions is the more hospitable to effective representative government, whatever the marginal differences in affluence between them. Thus, both our hypothesis about the effects of political culture and its second-order corollary about the interaction between development and political culture are strongly confirmed.

Political culture has been operationally defined here in terms of purely mass-level variables—electoral turnout, newspaper readership, union membership—because we lack comparative evidence on elite politics for the full fifteen-region sample. But the richer data from our six core regions show important parallels between mass and elite political culture.

First, councils in the regions that rank low on our measure of civic culture are heavily manned by traditional *notabili*, that is, gentry who have inherited their status as political and social leaders. Across our six regions, civic culture is almost perfectly (negatively) correlated with the proportion of councillors from upper and upper-middle class backgrounds ($r = -.95$) and with the proportion of the councillors who report family ties to other elected officials ($r = -.98$). We also asked our councillors and observers to rate their own regions on a scale from “programmatic” to “clientelistic,” and regions ranking low on our measure of civic culture were described by their own leaders as more clientelistic ($r = .91$).

In Italy, at least, the opposite of civic politics is not *no* politics, but rather a quasi-feudal type of

patron-client politics. In our mass survey, for example, citizens in the more traditional, southern regions actually reported more contact with their regional governments than did their northern counterparts, but these contacts are said to have involved primarily personal matters rather than broader public issues. In 1976 councillors in Emilia-Romagna, at the top of the civic culture scale, reported being contacted by an average of 17 constituents a week, as compared to 74 contacts per week for councillors in Puglia, one of the least “civic” regions. But in regions like Puglia, by far the most common occasions for meetings with a councillor were requests for jobs and patronage—what Verba, Nie, and Kim (1971) term “particularized contacting”—whereas Emilians were more likely to contact their representatives about policy or legislation. The average councillor in Puglia gets ten or twelve requests a day for jobs and other favors, compared to about one such request per day in Emilia-Romagna. On the other hand, the Emilian councillor also receives about one citizen inquiry a day on some public issue, the kind of topic virtually never raised with a councillor in Puglia. In short, citizens in regions of high civic culture contact their representatives less often, but when they do, they are more likely to talk about policy than patronage.

Differences in civic culture are also manifest in elite political culture. For example, in our six regions we probed the degree of cooperation and mutual trust within the regional council, asking “Which is more typical of this council—marked differences of opinion, or collaboration to find an agreed solution to a specific problem?” and “How much is one able to trust members of other parties in this region?” A composite index of political tolerance and cooperation based on those two questions was very strongly correlated ($r = .83$) with our measure of civic culture at the mass level.

Thus, the impact of mass political culture on institutional performance appears to be mediated by patterns of elite-mass linkage and elite political culture. Political participation in regions of high civic culture is secular rather than parochial or clientelistic. Citizens in these regions are more likely to fit Inkeles’s (1966) sketch of modern political man as “identified with and allegiant to leaders and organizations that transcend the parochial and primordial. He is interested in and informed about public affairs.” Politics in these regions is more issue-oriented, political leaders are not drawn so exclusively from the traditional ruling classes, and those leaders have cooperative, rather than conflictual, orientations to regional governance. It is this syndrome as a whole, not merely electoral turnout or newspaper readership

⁵Among the six less developed regions, performance is closely correlated both with development ($r = .62$) and with civic culture ($r = .75$). With so few cases, it is impossible to disentangle the joint effects of development and civic culture in this range.

or union membership, that helps to explain why civic culture is such a potent predictor of institutional success, quite independently of economic development. We shall see later that these differences in political culture and organization have deep historical roots.⁶

Social Stability and Performance. Many regions of Italy experienced historically unprecedented rates of demographic change and social upheaval during the 1950s and 1960s. These areas were flooded with new immigrants, mainly from the rural South, straining existing institutions and shattering older forms of social solidarity. Demographic change was to some extent correlated with economic development ($r = .65$), as affluence attracted immigrants. But controlling for levels of development, some regions endured much more than their "fair share" of social upheaval, while others escaped the deluge. For example, Emilia-Romagna is slightly more developed socio-economically than Lazio, but Lazio's population grew by 40 percent between 1951 and 1971, while Emilia-Romagna grew by only 9 percent. Did such differences have a discernible impact on institutional success?

Our index of social upheaval is based on four closely correlated indicators of demographic change: 1) population growth, 1951-1961; 2) population growth, 1961-1971; 3) proportion of residents in 1971 who had been born elsewhere in Italy; and 4) a curiously useful measure we termed the *endoregional marriage rate*, that is, the percentage of all marriages in which both spouses were born in the region where they were married. Social upheaval in this sense seems to have been associated with a breakdown of older norms and solidarities. With or without controls for levels of development, regions of rapid demographic change experienced much higher rates of crime, divorce, and illegitimacy, mute indicators of social pathology and anomie.⁷

The bivariate correlation between institutional

performance and demographic upheaval is negligible, but when we control for level of development, the correlation becomes significantly negative, as shown in Figure 4. In particular, Lazio, Liguria, and Piemonte (the regions around Rome, Genoa, and Turin, respectively) had unusually high rates of social upheaval, given their level of development. These are precisely the same three regions which Figure 2 showed to have much worse institutional performance than would have been predicted, given their affluence. At the other extreme, Emilia-Romagna's unusual institutional success appears related to the fact that it was spared the demographic trauma that afflicted many of its northern neighbors.

Regions that underwent demographic change faced daunting demands for public services, but by the early 1970s such problems were no longer a special affliction of these regions. Even controlling for their above-average affluence, demographic upheaval is essentially uncorrelated with many indicators of social need such as overcrowding of schools and housing. It is not the gravity of the policy challenges alone that explains poor institutional performance in these regions, but rather the destructive impact of rapid social change on pre-existing social and political infrastructures.

One hint of the effects of demographic change on regional politics is visible in Lazio, the only region of great social upheaval in our core sample. Fully half of the Lazio councillors were themselves immigrants to the region, unlike their overwhelmingly homegrown counterparts elsewhere. Lazio's was a government of strangers. It is probably not accidental that politicians there expressed exceptional skepticism about the prospects for their own institution, describing their region as unusually fragmented, corrupt, and unstable. Traumatic social change was echoed unmistakably within the "black box" of the regional institution itself.⁸

Each of the three theoretical variables that we have examined—socioeconomic development, political culture, and social stability—appears to have a significant independent impact on the odds for successful institution-building. A multiple regression involving these three variables alone, with an appropriate adjustment to take into account the concentrated impact of political culture at higher levels of development, achieves a multiple $R = .93$.⁹ By the standards usual in social

⁶Our conclusions about the impact of political traditions on government performance are strikingly parallel to White's (1980) anthropological findings. For additional views on the connection between economic development, political culture, and local politics, see Banfield 1958 and Pizzorno 1966.

⁷Factor loadings for the components of our index of demographic upheaval are: population growth, 1951-1961, .78; population growth, 1961-1971, .87; residents born elsewhere, 1971, .92; and endoregional marriage rate, 1967, -.85. The bivariate correlations between social upheaval and several indicators of social pathology are: total crime rate, 1976, .75; divorce rate, 1973, .75; illegitimacy rate, 1971-1973, .68.

⁸Not all sorts of social change undermine institutional success. Rapid economic growth, for example, is associated with slightly above average performance.

⁹Our theoretical hypotheses imply a fairly complex statistical model that is not easily testable in its full form

science, this is an explanation of extraordinary parsimony and power.¹⁰

with the available data. The full model includes interactive terms to allow differential impacts of both culture and development at high and low levels of development, along with a term for demographic upheaval. As a matter of information, the empirically obtained estimates for this full model are presented below, along with two more parsimonious and more reliably estimable models that are equally consistent with the available data. Taken together, this evidence shows that culture has a clear impact on performance among more developed regions, but as indicated in footnote 5, the available data do not make clear whether performance differences among less-developed regions are attributable to differences in development or to differences in culture. Various curvilinear models linking performance to culture alone were also examined, but their fit to the data is worse than the models presented here, and their theoretical interpretation would be less straightforward. In interpreting the coefficients, the reader should recall that all indices in this article are standardized.

Y_1 = performance

X_1 = socioeconomic development

X_2 = political culture

X_3 = demographic upheaval

Z = development dummy

(1 = above average development)

(t ratios, in parentheses, are significant at .05 level when $t = 1.8$)

Full Model

$$Y_1 = -.38 - .01Z + .36X_1 + .31X_2 - .36X_3 \\ (0.01) (0.50) (0.64) (-1.85) \\ - .23X_1 \cdot Z + 1.18X_2 \cdot Z \\ (-0.25) (1.74)$$

$$\bar{R}^2 = .78$$

$$SER = .48$$

Reduced Model I

$$Y_1 = -.44 + .57X_2 - .32X_3 + 1.07X_2 \cdot Z \\ (2.12) (-2.18) (2.20)$$

$$\bar{R}^2 = .83$$

$$SER = .43$$

Reduced Model II

$$Y_1 = -.60 + .44X_1 - .36X_3 + 1.45X_2 \cdot Z \\ (1.93) (-2.16) (3.97)$$

$$\bar{R}^2 = .82$$

$$SER = .44$$

¹⁰Essentially the same explanatory model fits each of the eight components of our performance index ($R^2 \geq .50$). Together with Table 1, this fact is powerful evidence for the reliability and validity of our performance measure. "If a set of items represents a concept empirically, the relationship between these items and indi-

History and Performance. Our theoretical discussion of the impact of political culture on institutional success alluded to the significance of history. If political culture powerfully affects performance, and if that culture in turn encapsulates earlier political traditions, then it would seem desirable to explore directly the historical antecedents of institutional success.

The regions of Italy have quite different traditions of mass political involvement and social solidarity. The first measurable manifestation of associationism in post-unification Italy were mutual aid societies, providing self-help insurance against illness, accident, and death (Neufeld 1961). Appealing mainly to urban artisans, these societies were formally nonpolitical, although some were vaguely radical and republican in inspiration and others were religious. Regional differences in membership rates in these societies were substantial and quite stable from 1873 through 1904 ($r = .86$), even though membership more than quadrupled in absolute terms over this period. Membership in these societies—"the first embryo of an associative process" (Trigilia 1981, p. 57)—peaked at the turn of the century, just as modern labor unions began to appear.

Union activity in both agriculture and industry expanded rapidly during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The largest of the union federations was socialist in orientation, but there was also a strong Catholic-inspired federation, along with a number of independent organizations. Also around the turn of the century socialists and progressive Catholics organized the first Italian political parties based on mass mobilization, the Italian Socialist party (founded 1892), and the Popular party (founded 1919), respectively. Each party had particular regional strongholds, but they shared opposition to the existing authorities, and both were weakest where the conservative alliance of local and central elites was strongest. The electoral strength of these two parties, jointly representing organized mass opposition to the traditional regime, reached a peak in the few years of universal male suffrage before the advent of fascism.

In regional terms, all these manifestations of social involvement, progressivism, and political mobilization were closely intercorrelated. From 1919 to 1921, combined Socialist and Popular party support was greatest where union membership ($r = .87$) and electoral turnout ($r = .71$) were

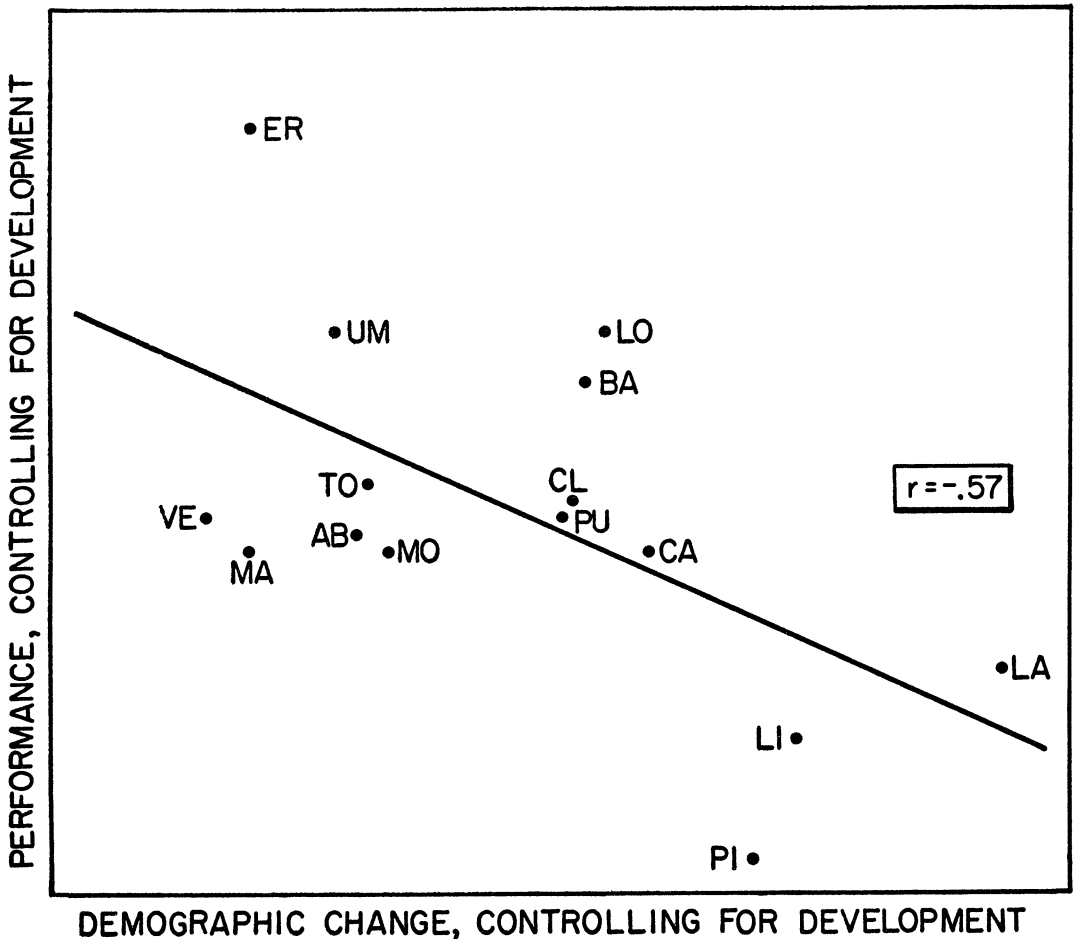
cants of other theoretically relevant variables should be similar in terms of direction, strength, and consistency. . . . Evidence of external consistency thus indicates that a set of items is measuring the same concept" (Zeller and Carmines 1980, pp. 16-17).

highest, and that map of sociopolitical activism matched almost perfectly the distribution of mutual aid society membership from 1873 to 1904. Moreover, these patterns were virtually identical to the distribution of civic culture as we measured it 50 years later. Civic culture in the 1970s correlated $r = .91$ with the strength of the mass parties (1919-1921) and $r = .84$ with the strength of mutualism nearly half a century earlier still.¹¹

¹¹Our index of the strength of mutual aid societies is based on data from 1873, 1878, 1885, 1895, and 1904. Our indices of party strengths are based on electoral

Contrary to any simple-minded economic determinism, these regional continuities in political culture are strikingly greater than continuities in economic structure or social well-being. For example, the agricultural share of the regional workforce in 1970 correlated $r = -.02$ with the same figure in 1870; the equivalent statistic for in-

returns in 1919 and 1921, as well as control of communal councils in 1920. In each case the components are very closely intercorrelated ($r \geq .90$). Both support for the socialists and support for the Popular Party are independently associated with civic culture, although the link with the socialist tradition is somewhat stronger.



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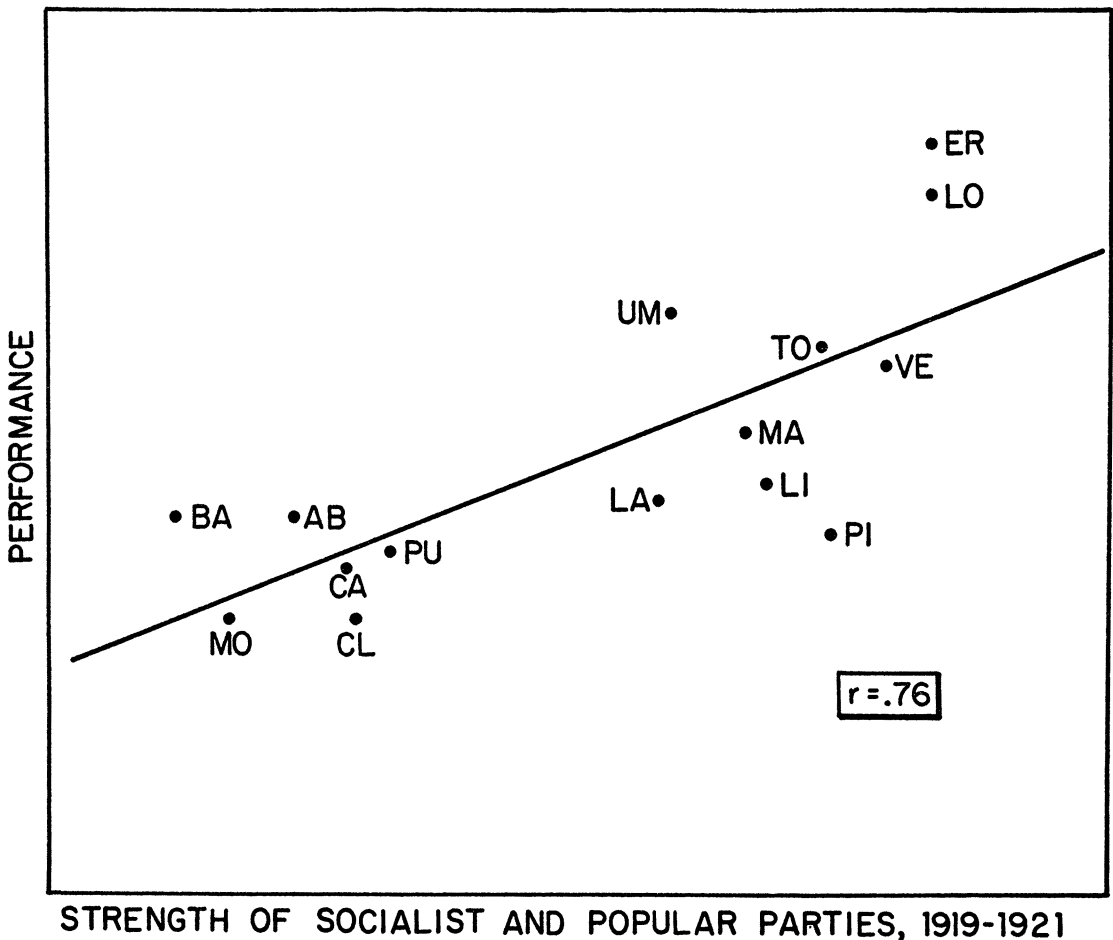
Figure 4.

fant mortality is $r = .01$. Those regions with a relatively agricultural economy in 1970 had not been the more agricultural regions a century earlier, and the regions with good public health in 1970 had not been the healthier ones in 1870. But the regions characterized by political activism and social solidarity in the 1970s were essentially the same regions that had been so a century earlier.¹²

¹²The basic developmental dimension that characterizes the Italian peninsula today did not crystallize until the industrial revolution around the turn of the century, and the correlations among our successive measures of political culture do not appear to be spuriously caused by covariance with general economic development.

In short, we can trace with remarkable fidelity over the last hundred years the historical antecedents of just those aspects of regional political culture—mass participation and civic solidarity—that in turn provide such a powerful explanation for contemporary institutional success. The

However, these historical patterns may conceivably be flawed in part by a version of Galton's problem (Naroll 1965). A fuller historical account would need to explore the possibility that various features of social, economic, and political modernity—including institutional capacity—diffused simultaneously down the Italian peninsula from the more advanced north.



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Figure 5.

strength of the connection between institutional performance and these features of history is remarkable. For example, Figure 5 shows that the correlation between institutional performance in the 1970s and the strength of the mass-based parties a half century earlier is $r = .76$. By comparison, recall that the correlation between performance in the 1970s and development in the 1970s was $r = .67$. In this crude sense, history is more important than economics in explaining institutional success.¹³

We do not yet fully understand the origins of these cultural and organizational traditions, nor the mechanisms by which they have been maintained over a century of such profound political turmoil and socioeconomic change. We regard these bits of evidence as goads and guides to future inquiry, rather than as theoretically conclusive.¹⁴ The truly significant features of history may involve even earlier traditions of local self-government that predate the Italian state itself. The old regimes, such as the Hapsburg Empire in the northeast and the Bourbon kingdom in the South, had notoriously different administrative and political characteristics. Peering even further back, it is surely not happenstance that the most successful regional governments in the 1970s were centered on such great Renaissance city-states as Bologna, Milan, Venice, Florence, and Perugia. The regularities that we have traced with some

rigor back into the nineteenth century provide a sharp reminder that history matters.

Performance and the Communists. The explanatory comprehensiveness we have already attained leaves little variance to be attributed to other ecological variables, to endogenous factors, and to measurement "noise."¹⁵ As noted earlier, our data confirm the widely held view that the Communist regions of Italy are better governed than most other regions. However, we are now in a bet-

¹³We find no support for the hypothesis that institutional performance is impaired by social or political heterogeneity, whether the latter is measured by intra-regional disparities in economic development or party strengths or by ideological fractionalization or polarization in the regional party system. On the other hand, controlling for development, political culture, and demographic upheaval, larger regions have had somewhat more successful governments, probably because they can draw on greater, more specialized resources and expertise. We also explored the notion that institutional performance improves with institutional age (Huntington 1968), making use of the one performance measure—the Tecnocasa rating—for which we have data on all twenty regions, including the five "special" regions, most of which were created in the late 1940s. The basic explanatory model outlined in the text also fits the twenty-region sample very well. As a group, the five older regions are not more successful than the fifteen newer regions, but when we control for development, political culture, demographic upheaval, and size, there appears a modest but significant advantage for the older institutions. In short, the "special" governments are located in relatively adverse environments, which continue to constrain their performance, but their headstart has given them a slight boost. For statistical mavens, we present the expanded regression equation for the full twenty-region sample; since the Tecnocasa rating is not standardized, of course, these coefficients are not directly comparable to those given in footnote 9.

Y_2 = Tecnocasa rating
 X_1 = socioeconomic development
 X_2 = political culture
 X_3 = demographic upheaval
 X_4 = population size (in thousands)
 X_5 = regional "age"
 0 = ordinary regions
 1 = "special" regions
 Z = development dummy
 (1 = above average development)

$$Y_2 = 8.46 + 2.46X_1 - 2.25X_3 + 6.94X_2 \cdot Z \\ (2.09) \quad (-2.68) \quad (3.45)$$

$$+ .00096X_4 + 3.50X_5 \\ (3.19) \quad (2.36)$$

$$\bar{R}^2 = .81 \\ SER = 2.47$$

¹³These regional traditions of political involvement may be detected even in the ferment of the *Risorgimento*. Professor Raymond Grew (personal communication) has calculated that our regional rankings of civic culture in the 1970s are closely correlated (Spearman's $r = .70$) with membership in the Italian National Society, a semiclandestine organization of supporters of unification from 1857 to 1865 (Grew 1963).

¹⁴More detailed exploration has turned up evidence of two important social structural antecedents of political culture. First, levels of mass literacy and affluence (per-capita bank accounts) in the 1870s, although uncorrelated with the limited industrialization of that era, are strongly correlated with our subsequent measures of social solidarity and mass mobilization, including civic culture a century later ($r = .73$). Second, the narrower base of property ownership in the 1880s, the greater the subsequent incidence of associationism, mass party strength, and civic culture ($r = .68$). In short, traditions of social solidarity and mass mobilization seem to have been spawned where large numbers of propertyless workers sought to improve their conditions and to have been retarded by pre-industrial ignorance and poverty. In a purely statistical sense, these two features of nineteenth-century Italian social structure account for more than two-thirds of the variance in institutional performance in the 1970s. Again, this pattern is strikingly consistent with White's (1980) anthropological conclusions.

ter position to interpret this fact, for we know that institutional success is strongly influenced by socioeconomic development, political culture, social stability, and history. With these factors controlled, the positive correlation between Communist strength and institutional success is reduced to statistical insignificance.¹⁶ The implication seems clear: Communist regional governments were more successful because they tilled more fertile soil, not because of their techniques of plowing. It is not who they were, but where they were, that counted. The PCI was fortunate that in the early years of the Italian regional experiment it ruled three regions (Emilia-Romagna, Toscana, and Umbria) that were relatively developed, unusually "civic" in their political culture and traditions, and demographically stable. Most regions governed by other parties were not so favored, but where they *were* favored, non-Communist *giuntas* performed virtually as well as their Communist counterparts.

One testable implication of this interpretation is that, should the PCI come to power in less-favored circumstances, it would govern less well than in its earlier strongholds. That hypothesis could not be tested during the period covered by the present research, but during the second legislature (1975-1980), Communist-led *giuntas* took power in regions much less favored by ecology. In particular, the Communists joined ruling coalitions in Lazio, Piemonte, and Liguria, precisely the three northern regions that scored poorly on our measure of institutional performance. We hope eventually to extend our analysis to include those later years, for they will provide a better test of whether partisanship (i.e., Communist rule) can have a favorable impact on institutional success in adverse environments.¹⁷

Conclusions

To the crispness of the Italian regional experiment in terms of research design corresponds a crispness of research findings. Each of our simple propositions about the impact of ecology on institutional performance is strongly confirmed.

¹⁶Similarly, when differences in development, political culture, and demographic upheaval are controlled, the performance differences between North and South vanish.

¹⁷Scattered evidence from the later period does not confirm the proposition that Communist participation improved performance. *Giunta* stability did improve where PCI-led coalitions took power in 1975-76, but it did so elsewhere as well. Among the three newly Communist regions, citizen satisfaction rose sharply in the period from 1977 to 1981 in Piemonte, fell sharply in Lazio, and remained unchanged in Liguria.

Collectively, they explain almost all there is to explain. Parsimony is normally the enemy of comprehensiveness, but not here. Indeed, much to our own surprise, our findings seem at first blush to support a naive sociological determinism. Without discounting for random error, and without opening up the black box of regional government, we can predict the relative success or failure of each of the Italian regions with extremely high accuracy, relying on such simple variables as per-capita income, electoral turnout, endoregional marriage rates, and nineteenth-century membership in mutual aid societies.¹⁸ Sociological determinism with a vengeance?

Such an unqualified claim, however, would be quite wrong, for two reasons. First, to understand how and why ecology affects institutional success, we must examine the intervening political process. In the case of political culture, for example, differences in mass political behavior are demonstrably associated with differences at the elite levels which probably have a more direct impact on institutional performance. Even in the case of demographic change, we have begun to suggest how turmoil outside the regional institution fosters turmoil within.

The second qualification to a full-blooded determinism involves "over-achievers" and "under-achievers," that is, regions whose actual performance is significantly higher (or lower) than is ecologically predictable. For example, the champion over-achiever, Basilicata, lodged in the instep of the Italian boot, is small and backward in terms of economics and political culture. In absolute terms, the performance of the Basilicata regional government was well below average. Yet taking into account its ecological handicaps, it did much better than we should have expected.

Our field research in Basilicata suggests that an important role in this unexpected success was played by a handful of regional leaders who have collaborated with unusual solidarity and decisiveness. Not unlike the archetypal American machine, this group has aroused controversy because of the firmness of their control and because of their deft use of patronage to build support, but they have won grudging respect even from partisan opponents for their energy, exper-

¹⁸If ecology determines institutional performance, then local governments across Italy ought to display similar patterns of success and failure, since they share the same milieus as their respective regional governments. We have no direct evidence on local performance, but in our mass surveys, whether analyzed at the regional level or at the individual level, satisfaction with regional and local government is strongly and positively correlated, as our ecological interpretation predicts.

tise, and *serietà*. Without firm direction, regional politics in Basilicata might well have degenerated into the ineffectual squabbling that has crippled some neighboring regional governments. In short, leadership counts. But in order to see where and how it counts, we need ecologically defined benchmarks of "expected" performance.

We intend to explore such endogenous factors in more detail in our six core studies. In the final analysis, however, at least in the case of the Italian regions, institutional ecology provides a powerful and parsimonious explanation of institutional success.

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