

**MAKING DEMOCRACY
WORK**

CIVIC TRADITIONS IN
MODERN ITALY

Robert D. Putnam

with Robert Leonardi and Raffaella Y. Nonetti

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

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Published by Princeton University Press, 41 William Street,
Princeton, New Jersey 08540
In the United Kingdom: Princeton University Press,
Chichester, West Sussex
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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Putnam, Robert D.
Making democracy work : Civic traditions in
modern Italy / Robert D. Putnam with Robert Leonardi
and Raffaella Y. Nanetti
p. cm.
Includes index.
ISBN 1-400809-789

1. Regionalism—Italy. 2. Decentralization in
government—Italy. 3. Democracy—Italy.
I. Leonardi, Robert, 1945- . II. Nanetti, Raffaella Y.
III. Title.
JN5477.R35P866 1992
306.2'0954—dc20 92-18377

This book has been composed in Linotron Times Roman

Princeton University Press books are
printed on acid-free paper and meet the guidelines
for permanence and durability of the Committee
on Production Guidelines for Book Longevity
of the Council on Library Resources

<http://pup.princeton.edu>

Per Alberto ed altri

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Preface

THIS BOOK explores some fundamental questions about civic life by studying the regions of Italy. It is written with two very different audiences in mind—those who share my fascination with the subtleties of Italian life, and those who do not, but who care about democratic theory and practice.

The research itself began in conversations with Peter Lange and Peter Weitz in the spring of 1970, while we were all three in Rome studying various aspects of Italian politics. Unexpectedly, the Italian government agreed to implement a long-neglected constitutional provision for regional governments. Since these new institutions were to be built from scratch in each of Italy's diverse regions, the experiment offered an unusual opportunity to begin a long-term, systematic study of how institutions develop and adapt to their social environment. Had I realized, however, that the subsequent inquiry would last nearly a quarter century, or that it would eventually lead me into the farther reaches of game theory and medieval history, I am not sure that I would have had the good sense to embark.

With encouragement from the late Professor Alberto Spreafico, and with financial support from the University of Michigan, in the fall of 1970 I directed an initial survey of newly-elected councilors in several regions scattered along the peninsula. Later, back in Ann Arbor, I began to analyze these interviews with help from two talented young colleagues, Robert Leonardi and Raffaella Nanetti. By 1975, when a new cohort of councilors had been elected, Bob and Raffi had become faculty members elsewhere, in political science and urban and regional planning, respectively. We agreed to join forces to conduct a second wave of interviews, thus formalizing a close, durable, and productive collaboration.

Over the ensuing decades, the three of us spent hundreds of hours together, planning and carrying out the research described in this book. In the later stages, Bob and Raffi had primary responsibility for the exhaustive field research. All three of us returned repeatedly to the six regions that formed the core of our research. In addition, as our study became better known in Italy, several other regional governments invited us to conduct parallel studies of their operations.

Some of the subsequent publications from the project were authored collaboratively,¹ while others (such as this book and several that Bob and Raffi have produced²) were written independently, though drawing on evidence and ideas that had been produced collaboratively. Although neither of the other two scholars bears responsibility for the arguments devel-

oped in this book, their names appear on the title page as a mark of recognition and gratitude for more than twenty years of collaboration, creativity, hard work, and friendship.

The conceptual evolution of this project has been at least as complex as the development of the regional governments themselves. Social science is conventionally reported as though hypotheses were straightforwardly deduced from theory, evidence gathered, and verdicts rendered. Though theory and evidence have been important in this project, too, its progress has seemed more like an engrossing detective story, in which various suspects emerge and are cleared, shoe leather is wasted on false leads, new subplots materialize, some hunches pay off, earlier suspicions are reinterpreted in light of later evidence, each puzzle solved poses yet another, and the sleuth is never quite sure where the trail will lead.

At the outset, our research focused on continuity and change, using the 1970 interviews as a benchmark against which to measure institutional development. Later, as evidence mounted of compelling differences in the success and failure of various regional governments, our attention was drawn to comparisons across space, rather than across time. Gradually, it became clear that these differences among the regions had astonishingly deep historical roots. (In retrospect, as in many a tale of detection, the answer seems so obvious that we should have spotted the clues much earlier.) These historical continuities raised theoretical issues of import well beyond the confines of Italy, touching fundamental questions about democracy, economic development, and civic life.

Reflecting this evolution of the research, the organization of this book begins with a tight, close focus on the regional governments themselves and gradually pans outward to encompass the broader meaning of our discoveries. Taken as a whole, the book embodies an argument about democracy and community that I believe is also relevant to the discontents of contemporary America, but spelling out those implications is a task that I have set aside for the future.

Dozens of researchers have collaborated on this project over more than two decades, but special mention should be made of Paolo Bellucci, Sheri Berman, Giovanni Cocchi, Bryan Ford, Nigel Gault, Celinda Lake, Franco Pavoncello, and Claudia Rader.

Among the numerous Italian scholars and officials who provided guidance and assistance, I would like especially to thank Carmelo Azzarà, Sergio Bartole, Gianfranco Bartoiini, Sabino Cassese, Franco Cazzola, Gianfranco Ciaurro, Leonardo Cuoco, Alfonso Del Re, Francesco D'Onofrio, Marcello Fedele, Elio Gizzi, Luciano Guerzoni, Andrea Manzella, Nando Tasciotti, Lanfranco Turci, and the hundreds of local, regional, and national leaders who have spoken with us anonymously over the years.

In this project, as in dozens of other studies of contemporary Italy, a unique role was played by Alberto Spreafico. Alberto introduced me to Italy a quarter century ago, the Comitato per le Scienze Sociali that he founded hosted me on numerous occasions, and his gentle, wise encouragement was crucial in the initial stages of this project. The dedication of this volume reflects my profound debt to Alberto and to the scores of other generous, civic-minded Italians who have aided my efforts to understand the marvelous mysteries of their complex society.

Over the years, many colleagues have offered insightful and unsparing critiques of earlier drafts and outlines. In particular, I want to thank Alberto Alesina, James Alt, Robert Axelrod, Edward C. Banfield, Samuel H. Barnes, Michael Barzelay, Terry Nichols Clark, John Comaroff, Jeff Frieden, Paul Ginsborg, Richard Goldthwaite, Raymond Grew, Peter A. Hall, Jens Joachim Hesse, John Hollander, Steven Kelman, Robert O. Keohane, Robert Klitgaard, Jacek Kugler, Daniel Levine, Marc Lindenberg, Glenn C. Loury, Charles Maier, John D. Montgomery, Kenneth A. Shepsle, Judith N. Shklar, Malcolm Sparrow, Federico Varese, Jeff W. Weintraub, Vincent Wright, Richard Zeckhauser, and several anonymous reviewers. Aaron Wildavsky's gentle advice to "squeeze out of the stone of self one more ounce of creative thought" prodded me not to conclude the work prematurely, and Walter Lippincott's steady, thoughtful encouragement sustained my enthusiasm through moments when I was otherwise preoccupied.

Funds for various stages of the research were generously provided by the University of Michigan, the National Science Foundation (under grants GS-33810, SOC76-14690, and SES-7920004), the German Marshall Fund of the United States, Harvard University, the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, l'Istituto Carlo Cattaneo, la Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, the European University Institute, the Commission of the European Community, and an assortment of regional governments (Basilicata, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Emilia-Romagna, Marche, Toscana, and Umbria).

The University of Michigan, Harvard University (especially its Center for International Affairs), the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, the Bellagio Conference Center of the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Centre for European Studies at Nuffield College, Oxford University, have each provided gracious hospitality at various stages of my work.

Rosemary, Jonathan, and Lara Putnam have collaborated in this project for as long as any of us can remember, traveling through the regions, helping with data-analysis, commenting on endless drafts, and sharing my enthusiasm for our discoveries. For all this and more I am deeply grateful.

MAKING DEMOCRACY WORK

Introduction: Studying Institutional Performance

WHY DO some democratic governments succeed and others fail? This question, though ancient, is timely. As our tumultuous century draws to a close, the great ideological debates between liberal democrats and their adversaries are waning. Ironically, the philosophical ascendancy of liberal democracy is accompanied by growing discontent with its practical operations. From Moscow to East St. Louis, from Mexico City to Cairo, despair about public institutions deepens. As American democratic institutions begin their third century, a sense is abroad in the land that our national experiment in self-government is faltering. Half a world away, the former communist nations of Eurasia find themselves having to build democratic systems of governance from scratch. Women and men everywhere seek solutions to their shared problems—cleaner air, more secure jobs, safer cities. Few believe that we can dispense with government, yet fewer still are confident that we know what makes governments work well.

This book aims to contribute to our understanding of the performance of democratic institutions. How do formal institutions influence the practice of politics and government? If we reform institutions, will practice follow? Does the performance of an institution depend on its social, economic, and cultural surround? If we transplant democratic institutions, will they grow in the new setting as they did in the old? Or does the quality of a democracy depend on the quality of its citizens, so that every people gets the government they deserve? Our intent is theoretical. Our method is empirical, drawing lessons from a unique experiment in institutional reform conducted in the regions of Italy over the last two decades. Our explorations will draw us deep into the character of civic life, into the austere logic of collective action, and into medieval history, but the journey begins in the diversity of today's Italy.

A VOYAGE OF INQUIRY

On the *autostrada* that soars along the Apennine spine of Italy, a hurried traveler can cover the 870 kilometers from Seveso in the north to Pietrapertosa in the south in one long day, looping first through the busy

industrial suburbs of Milan, crossing rapidly the fertile Po Valley, plunging past the proud Renaissance capitals of Bologna and Florence, circling the grimy, joyless outskirts of Rome and then Naples, and climbing at last into the desolate mountains of Basilicata, isolated in the instep of the Italian boot.¹ To the thoughtful observer, however, this swift passage is less impressive for the distance spanned than for the historical contrasts between the point of departure and the destination.

In 1976 Seveso, a modest, modern town in the mixed industrial-and-farming belt ten miles north of Milan, became world-famous as the site of a major ecological disaster, when a local chemical plant exploded, spewing poisonous dioxin across its homes and workshops and fields and inhabitants. For many months thereafter, motorists on the superhighway that passes Seveso sped by with their windows rolled tightly shut, gawking at the boarded-up houses and the dreadful, white-hooded, goggle-masked figures laboring to decontaminate the town and its lands. Throughout the industrialized world, Seveso came to symbolize the growing risks of ecological disaster. For dazed local officials, the catastrophe at Seveso embodied the looming public policy challenges of the twenty-first century.²

From the perspective of public governance, to travel from Seveso to Pietrapertosa in the 1970s was to return centuries into the past. Many Pietrapertosesi lived still in one- and two-room stone hovels, clinging to the mountain face just below the rocky summit to which their Lucanian ancestors repaired many generations ago. Nearby, farmers still threshed grain by hand, aided only by the wind blowing through the tines of their rakes, as Mediterranean peasants had done for millennia. Many local men had sought temporary jobs in northern Europe, and the success of a few was marked by the German license plates on several automobiles parked just below the village. For less fortunate residents, however, transportation was provided by the donkeys that shared their rocky shelters, alongside a few scrawny chickens and cats. Lower on the hill, some returned emigrants had built stucco houses, complete with indoor plumbing, but for much of the village, the absence of running water and other public amenities remained the most pressing problem, as it had been throughout much of Europe three or four centuries earlier.

Like their compatriots in Seveso, the people of Pietrapertosa confronted grave problems of what economists call "public goods" and "public bads." The economic and social and administrative resources of the two towns differed dramatically, as did the details of their problems, but people in both needed help from government. In the early 1970s the primary responsibility for addressing these diverse problems of public health and safety, along with much else of concern to ordinary Italians, was suddenly transferred from the national administration to a newly created set of elected regional governments. For solutions to their shared con-

cerns, the citizens of Seveso and Pietrapertosa were now directed to nearby Milan and Potenza rather than distant Rome. Studying how well those new institutions responded to their constituents and why will lead us to confront basic issues about civic life and collaboration for the common good.

The borders of the new governments largely corresponded to the territories of historic regions of the peninsula, including such celebrated principalities as Tuscany and Lombardy. Since the unification of Italy in 1870, however, its administrative structure had been highly centralized, modeled on Napoleonic France. For as long as anyone could remember, local officials had been closely controlled by prefects reporting directly to Rome. No level of government corresponding to the regions had ever existed. Thus the fact that the public problems of Seveso and Pietrapertosa and thousands of other Italian communities, large and small, would be addressed by the untried regional governments was, for their citizens, an experiment of considerable practical importance.

Beginning in 1970, we have closely followed the evolution of a number of these nascent regional institutions, representing the range of economic, social, cultural, and political environments along the Italian peninsula. Our repeated visits to the various regional capitals soon revealed dramatic differences in institutional performance.

Even finding officials of the Puglia regional government in the capital city of Bari proved a challenge for us, as it is for their constituents. Like visiting researchers, ordinary Pugliesi must first locate the nondescript regional headquarters beyond the railroad yards. In the dingy anteroom loll several indolent functionaries, though they are likely to be present only an hour or two each day and to be unresponsive even then. The persistent visitor might discover that in the offices beyond stand only ghostly rows of empty desks. One mayor, frustrated at his inability to get action from the region's bureaucrats, exploded to us, "They don't answer the mail, they don't answer the telephone, and when I go to Bari to finish paperwork, I have to take along my own typewriter and typist!" A rampant spoils system undermines administrative efficiency: as a clerk once responded to his nominal superior in our presence, "You can't give me orders! I am 'well-protected.'" Meanwhile, the region's leaders engage in Byzantine factional feuds over patronage and posts, and offer rhetorical promises of regional renewal that seem never to reach reality. If Puglia is to become "a new California," as local boosters sometimes say, it will be despite the performance of its new regional government, not because of it. The citizens of Puglia do not disguise their contempt for their regional government; indeed, they do not often think of it as "theirs."

The contrast with the efficiency of the government of Emilia-Romagna in Bologna is stark. Visiting the glass-walled regional headquarters is like entering a modern, high-tech firm. A brisk, courteous receptionist directs

visitors to the appropriate office, where, likely as not, the relevant official will call up a computerized data base on regional problems and policies. Bologna's central piazza is famous for its nightly debates among constantly shifting groups of citizens and political activists, and those impassioned discussions about issues of the day are echoed in the chambers of the regional council. A legislative pioneer in many fields, the Emilian government has progressed from words to deeds, its effectiveness measured by dozens of day care centers and industrial parks, repertory theaters and vocational training sites scattered throughout the region. The citizen-debaters in the Bologna *piazza* are not uncritical of their regional government, but they are vastly more content than their counterparts in Puglia. Why has the new institution succeeded in Emilia-Romagna and not in Puglia?

The central question posed in our voyage of inquiry is this: *What are the conditions for creating strong, responsive, effective representative institutions?* The Italian regional experiment offers an unparalleled opportunity for addressing this question. It presents a rare opportunity to study systematically the birth and development of a new institution.

First, fifteen new regional governments were established simultaneously in 1970, endowed with essentially identical constitutional structures and mandates. In 1976-77, after an intense political struggle described in Chapter 2, all regions were granted authority over a wide range of public issues. In partial contrast with these fifteen "ordinary" regions, another five "special" regions had been created some years earlier, with somewhat greater, constitutionally guaranteed powers. These five regions were in border areas that had been threatened by separatist sentiment at the end of World War II. In some respects, the somewhat greater longevity and broader powers of the special regional governments make them distinctive. For most purposes, however, they may be safely considered alongside the fifteen ordinary regions. Generally speaking, in this book we draw evidence from all twenty regions.

By the beginning of the 1990s, the new governments, barely two decades old, were spending nearly a tenth of Italy's gross domestic product. All regional governments had gained responsibility for such fields as urban affairs, agriculture, housing, hospitals and health services, public works, vocational education, and economic development. Despite continuing complaints from regionalists about constraints imposed by the central authorities, all the new institutions had acquired enough authority to test their mettle. On paper, these twenty institutions are virtually identical and potentially powerful.

Second, however, the social, economic, political, and cultural contexts into which the new institutions were implanted differed dramatically. Socially and economically, some regions, such as Pietrapertosa's Basili-

cata, ranked with countries of the Third World, whereas others, such as Seveso's Lombardia, were already becoming postindustrial. Cutting across this developmental dimension were differences of political tradition. Neighboring Veneto and Emilia-Romagna, for example, had similar economic profiles in 1970, but Veneto was ardently Catholic, whereas Emilia-Romagna, the buckle of Central Italy's "Red Belt," had been controlled by Communists since 1945. Some regions had inherited patron-client politics more or less intact from the feudal past. Others had been transformed by massive waves of migration and social change that swept across Italy during *il boom* of the 1950s and 1960s.

The Italian regional experiment was tailor-made for a comparative study of the dynamics and ecology of institutional development. Just as a botanist might study plant development by measuring the growth of genetically identical seeds sown in different plots, so a student of government performance might examine the fate of these new organizations, formally identical, in their diverse social and economic and cultural and political settings. Would the new organizations actually develop identically in soils as different as those around Seveso and Pietrapertosa? If not, what elements could account for the differences? The answers to these questions are of importance well beyond the borders of Italy, as scholars and policymakers and ordinary citizens in countries around the world—industrial, postindustrial, and preindustrial—seek to discover how representative institutions can work effectively.

CHARTING THE VOYAGE

Institutions have been an enduring concern of political science since ancient times, but recently theorists have attacked institutional questions with renewed vigor and creativity in the name of "the new institutionalism." The tools of game theory and rational choice modeling have been put to use, casting institutions as "games in extensive form," in which actors' behavior is structured by the rules of the game.³ Organization theorists have emphasized institutional roles and routines, symbols, and duties.⁴ Historical institutionalists have traced continuities in government and politics and emphasized timing and sequences in institutional development.⁵

The new institutionalists differ among themselves on many points, both theoretical and methodological. On two fundamental points, however, they are agreed:

1. *Institutions shape politics.* The rules and standard operating procedures that make up institutions leave their imprint on political outcomes by struc-

turing political behavior. Outcomes are not simply reducible to the billiard-ball interaction of individuals nor to the intersection of broad social forces. Institutions influence outcomes because they shape actors' identities, power, and strategies.

2. *Institutions are shaped by history.* Whatever other factors may affect their form, institutions have inertia and "robustness." They therefore embody historical trajectories and turning points. History matters because it is "path dependent": what comes first (even if it was in some sense "accidental") conditions what comes later. Individuals may "choose" their institutions, but they do not choose them under circumstances of their own making, and their choices in turn influence the rules within which their successors choose.

Our study of the Italian regional experiment is intended to contribute empirical evidence to both these themes. Taking institutions as an independent variable, we explore empirically how institutional change affects the identities, power, and strategies of political actors. Later, taking institutions as a dependent variable, we explore how institutional performance is conditioned by history.

Between these two steps, however, we add a third that has been neglected in recent work on institutions. The practical performance of institutions, we conjecture, is shaped by the social context within which they operate.

Just as the same individual may define and pursue his or her interests differently in different institutional contexts, so the same formal institution may operate differently in different contexts. Though not stressed in recent theories, this point is familiar to most observers of institutions and institutional reform. The Westminster-style constitutions left behind by the British as they retreated from empire had very different fates in different parts of the world. We move beyond this generalization that "context matters" to ask which features of social context most powerfully affect institutional performance.

What do we mean by "institutional performance?" Some theorists see political institutions primarily as "the rules of the game," as procedures that govern collective decision-making, as arenas within which conflicts are expressed and (sometimes) resolved.⁶ (Theories of this sort often use the U.S. Congress as a model.) "Success" for this kind of institution means enabling actors to resolve their differences as efficiently as possible, given their divergent preferences. Such a conception of political institutions is pertinent, but it does not exhaust the role of institutions in public life.

Institutions are devices for achieving *purposes*, not just for achieving *agreement*. We want government to *do* things, not just *decide* things—to educate children, pay pensioners, stop crime, create jobs, hold down

prices, encourage family values, and so on. We do not agree on which of these things is most urgent, nor how they should be accomplished, nor even whether they are all worthwhile. All but the anarchists among us, however, agree that at least some of the time on at least some issues, *action* is required of government institutions. This fact must inform the way we think about institutional success and failure.

The conception of institutional performance in this study rests on a very simple model of governance: societal demands → political interaction → government → policy choice → implementation. Government institutions receive inputs from their social environment and produce outputs to respond to that environment. Working parents seek affordable day care, or merchants worry about shoplifting, or veterans decry the death of patriotism. Political parties and other groups articulate these concerns, and officials consider what, if anything, to do. Eventually, a policy (which may only be symbolic) is adopted. Unless that policy is "Do nothing," it must then be implemented—creating new nurseries (or encouraging private agencies to do so), putting more cops on the beat, flying flags more often. A high-performance democratic institution must be both responsive and effective: sensitive to the demands of its constituents and effective in using limited resources to address those demands.

Complexities abound in this domain. To be effective, for example, government must often be foresighted enough to anticipate demands that have not yet been articulated. Debates and deadlocks may stall the process at any point. The effects of government action, even when well designed and effectively implemented, may not be what proponents had hoped. Nevertheless, institutional performance is important because in the end the quality of government matters to people's lives: scholarships are awarded, roads paved, children inoculated—or (if government fails) they are not.⁷

Understanding the dynamics of institutional performance has long been of interest to comparative social science. Three broad modes of explaining performance can be discerned in the existing literature. The first school of thought emphasizes *institutional design*. This tradition has its roots in formal legal studies, a mode of political analysis that grew out of the ferment of constitution building in the nineteenth century.⁸ John Stuart Mill's "Considerations on Representative Government" reflects the faith this school of thought has in "structural and procedural contrivance."⁹ Mill's famous treatise is largely concerned with constitutional engineering, with discovering the institutional forms most favorable to effective representative government.¹⁰ This school of thought continued to dominate the analysis of democratic performance well into the first half of the twentieth century. "It was widely assumed [by such analyses] that viable representative government . . . depended . . . only on the proper

arrangement of its formal parts and reasonable good luck in economic life and institutional affairs; and that good structure would serve even in the absence of good luck."¹¹

The collapse of the interwar Italian and German democratic experiments and the immobilism of the French Third and Fourth Republics, along with increasing sensitivity to the social and economic bases of politics, led to a more sober view of institutional manipulation. Painstaking design did not ensure good performance. Nevertheless, in the contemporary era attention to the organizational determinants of institutional performance has re-emerged among advocates of the "new institutionalism," as well as among practical reformers. Constitution drafters, management consultants, and development advisers devote much attention to institutional design in their prescriptions for improved performance. Arturo Israel, a specialist in Third World development, observes that it is easier to build a road than to build an organization to maintain that road. In his recent work on institutional development, he draws our attention to managerial and organizational constraints on implementation and recommends improvements in institutional design to increase the prospects for success.¹² Elinor Ostrom is a thoughtful observer of institutions intended to overcome "the tragedy of the commons"—the dilemma of collective action that threatens "common pool resources" such as water supplies, fishing grounds, and the like. From a comparison of many such efforts, failures as well as successes, Ostrom extracts lessons about how to design institutions that work.¹³

Our research speaks only indirectly to these questions of institutional design. In fact, in our study, institutional design was held constant: regional governments with similar organizational structure were all introduced at the same time. What varied in our research design were environmental factors, such as economic context and political tradition. Such factors are harder for would-be reformers to manipulate, at least in the short run, so our research is not likely to suggest shortcuts to institutional success. On the other hand, the fact that institutional design is a constant in the Italian regional experiment means that we can detect more reliably the influence of other factors on institutional success.

While we do not explore directly the effects of institutional *design* on performance, our research does address the consequences of institutional *change*. Our examination of how the regional governments evolved over their first two decades includes a "before-after" comparison that helps us to assess the impact of institutional reform. How the institution and its leaders learned and adapted over time—the "developmental biology," so to speak, of institutional growth—is encompassed by our research. Did the creation of the new regional institutions lead to changes in the practice of politics and governance in Italy? What difference did institutional

change make for the way in which leaders and citizens collaborate and contend over public policy? In practice, how do institutional reforms change behavior and by how much? We return to these issues in Chapter 2.

A second school of thought about the performance of democratic institutions emphasizes *socioeconomic factors*. Political sociologists since Aristotle have argued that the prospects for effective democracy depend on social development and economic well-being. Contemporary democratic theorists, too, like Robert A. Dahl and Seymour Martin Lipset, have stressed various aspects of modernization (wealth, education, and so on) in their discussions of the conditions underlying stable and effective democratic government.¹⁴ Nothing is more obvious even to the casual observer than the fact that effective democracy is closely associated with socioeconomic modernity, both across time and across space. Social scientists concerned with explaining institutional development in the Third World have also emphasized socioeconomic factors. Arturo Israel, for example, asserts that "improved institutional performance is part and parcel of the process of modernization. Unless a country becomes 'modern,' it cannot raise its performance to the level now prevailing in the developed world."¹⁵ The sharp differences in levels of socioeconomic development among the Italian regions allow us to assess directly the complex linkage between modernity and institutional performance.

A third school of thought emphasizes *sociocultural factors* in explaining the performance of democratic institutions. This tradition, too, claims a distinguished lineage. In the *Republic* Plato argued that governments vary in accordance with the dispositions of their citizenry. More recently, social scientists have looked to political culture in their explanations of cross-national variations in political systems. The modern classic of this genre, Almond and Verba's study of the *Civic Culture*, seeks to explain differences in democratic governance in the United States, Great Britain, Italy, Mexico, and Germany through an examination of political attitudes and orientations grouped under the rubric of "civic culture."¹⁶ Probably the most illustrious example of the sociocultural tradition of political analysis (and one that is especially germane to our study) remains Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*.¹⁷ Tocqueville highlights the connection between the "mores" of a society and its political practices. Civic associations, for example, reinforce the "habits of the heart" that are essential to stable and effective democratic institutions. This and related propositions will play a central role in our analysis.

As we sought to extract lessons of general import from the details of the Italian experiment, we came to appreciate the admonitions of an earlier student of local institutional development. In his classic study of *TVA and the Grass Roots*, Philip Selznick observed that "theoretical inquiry, when

it is centered upon a particular historical structure or event, is always hazardous. This is due to the continuous tension between concern for a full grasp and interpretation of the materials under investigation as history, and special concern for the induction of abstract and general relations."¹⁸ While striving not to do violence to the rich particularities of the Italian experience, we must also try to do justice to its broader implications for our understanding of democratic governance.

METHODS OF INQUIRY

Truth, Karl Deutsch observed, lies at the confluence of independent streams of evidence. The prudent social scientist, like the wise investor, must rely on diversification to magnify the strengths, and to offset the weaknesses, of any single instrument. That is the methodological maxim that we have followed in this study. To understand how an institution works—and still more, how different institutions work differently—we must deploy a variety of techniques.

From the anthropologist and the skilled journalist, we borrow the technique of disciplined field observation and case study. "Soaking and poking," as Richard Fenno describes it, requires the researcher to marinate herself in the minutiae of an institution—to experience its customs and practices, its successes and its failings, as those who live it every day do. This immersion sharpens our intuitions and provides innumerable clues about how the institution fits together and how it adapts to its environment. At many points our story draws on illustrations and insights gleaned from two decades of poking around the regions of Italy and soaking up the local ambience.

Social science reminds us, however, of the difference between insight and evidence. Our contrasting impressions of governance in Bari and Bologna, no matter how keen, must be confirmed, and our theoretical speculations disciplined, by careful counting. Quantitative techniques can warn when our impressions, rooted in a single striking case or two, are misleading or unrepresentative. Equally important, statistical analysis, by enabling us to compare many different cases at once, often reveals more subtle, but important patterns, much as a pointillist painting by Seurat can best be appreciated by stepping back from the canvas.

The logic of our inquiry requires the simultaneous comparison of fifteen or twenty regions along multiple dimensions, and such techniques as multiple regression and factor analysis drastically simplify this task. Nevertheless, we have sought to minimize the intrusiveness of complicated statistical procedures into our story, usually relying on such devices as

percentages and scattergrams. The results that we present here satisfy the conventional tests of statistical significance, but more important, they also satisfy John Tukey's famed "interocular traumatic test."¹⁹

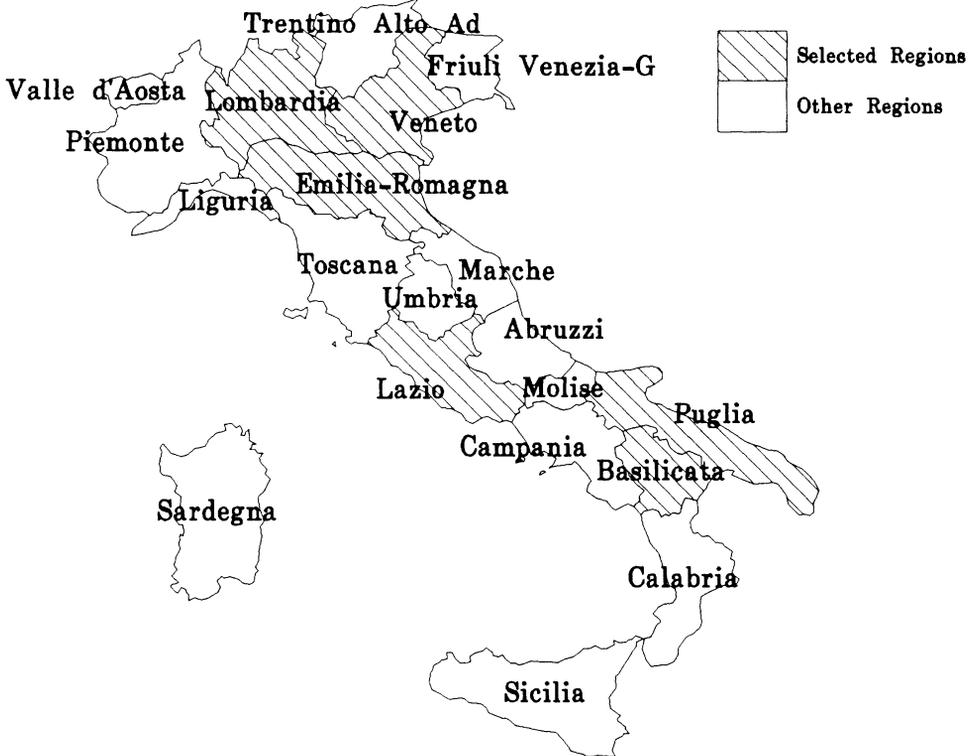
As with many a detective tale, solving the mystery of institutional performance requires us to explore the past—or more precisely, the contrasting pasts of the various regions. For some epochs, historians of Italy have provided marvelously rich accounts that are remarkably relevant to our task, and our story draws heavily on their work. In addition, for the last hundred years or so, we unearthed a wide range of statistical material that allowed us to quantify, and thus to test more rigorously, some of our most striking conclusions. We are not historians by trade, and our efforts in this direction are rudimentary, but in any rounded institutional analysis the tools of the historian are a necessary complement to anthropological and behavioral methods.

In short, the diversity of our goals demanded methods that would provide both breadth—the ability to cover different problems and their transformation over a period of time—and deeper analysis of particular issues, regions, and periods of the reform. We wished to gather systematic evidence across both time and space to allow both longitudinal and cross-sectional analysis.

To provide this type of information we conducted a number of separate studies that began with a focus on six regions selected to represent the vast diversities along the Italian peninsula. Our studies were then extended to all twenty regional governments. (Figure 1.1 provides an overview of our research sites.) Our studies, described in more detail in Appendix A, included the following:

- Four waves of personal interviews with regional councilors in the six selected regions between 1970 and 1989. More than seven hundred interviews over nearly two decades provided us with an unparalleled "moving picture" of the regional institutions from the point of view of their chief protagonists.
- Three waves of personal interviews of community leaders in the six selected regions between 1976 and 1989, as well as a nationwide mail survey of community leaders in 1983. Bankers and farm leaders, mayors and journalists, labor leaders and business representatives—these respondents knew their regional government well and could give us the perspective of informed outsiders.
- Six specially commissioned nationwide surveys, as well as several dozen other surveys of voters between 1968 and 1988. These interviews enabled us to chart differences in political outlook and social engagement across the regions and to probe the views of the constituents of the new institutions.

FIGURE 1.1
Italian Regional Study, 1970–1989



- Close examination of a multitude of statistical measures of institutional performance in all twenty regions, as described in Chapter 3.
- A unique experiment in 1983, described in more detail in Chapter 3, that tested government responsiveness to "street-level" citizen inquiries in all twenty regions.
- Case studies of institutional politics and of regional planning in the six selected regions between 1976 and 1989, as well as a detailed analysis of the legislation produced by all twenty regions from 1970 to 1984. These projects provided raw material for our assessment of the day-to-day business of politics and government in the regions and helped us interpret more antiseptic statistical data. (Our regular visits to each of the six selected regions incidentally allowed us to experience firsthand the devastating earthquake that struck southern Italy in 1980 and its aftermath.) In short, we came to know these regions and their protagonists well.

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

In the 1970s a tumultuous period of reform broke with Italy's century-long pattern of centralized government and delegated unprecedented power and resources to the new regional governments. In Chapter 2 we ask how the process of reform transpired, and what difference it made for the practice of politics and the quality of government at the grassroots. How was reform accomplished, given the inertia of older institutions? Did the new institution actually affect the character of political leadership and the way politicians ply their trade? Did it reshape the distribution of political power and influence? Did it lead to changes that were perceptible to the constituents of the new governments, and if so, what was their assessment? What evidence is there of the leverage that institutional change is said to exert on political behavior?

A primary concern of this study is to explore the origins of effective government. To lay the basis for that inquiry, Chapter 3 presents a comprehensive, comparative evaluation of policy processes, policy pronouncements, and policy implementation in each of the twenty regions. Whereas Chapter 2 examines change through time, Chapter 3 (and those that follow) make comparisons across space. How stable and efficient are the governments of the various regions? How innovative are their laws? How effectively do they implement policies in such fields as health, housing, agriculture, and industrial development? How promptly and effectively do they satisfy the expectations of their citizens? Which institutions, in short, have succeeded and which have not?

Explaining these differences in institutional performance is the objective of Chapter 4, in some respects the core of our study. Here we explore the connection between economic modernity and institutional performance. Even more important, we examine the link between performance and the character of civic life—what we term "the civic community." As depicted in Tocqueville's classic interpretation of American democracy and other accounts of civic virtue, the civic community is marked by an active, public-spirited citizenry, by egalitarian political relations, by a social fabric of trust and cooperation. Some regions of Italy, we discover, are blessed with vibrant networks and norms of civic engagement, while others are cursed with vertically structured politics, a social life of fragmentation and isolation, and a culture of distrust. These differences in civic life turn out to play a key role in explaining institutional success.

The powerful link between institutional performance and the civic community leads us inevitably to ask why some regions are more civic than others. This is the subject of Chapter 5. Pursuing the answer leads us back to a momentous period nearly a millennium ago, when two contrast-

ing and innovative regimes were established in different parts of Italy—a powerful monarchy in the south and a remarkable set of communal republics in the center and north. From this early medieval epoch through the unification of Italy in the nineteenth century, we trace systematic regional differences in patterns of civic involvement and social solidarity. These traditions have decisive consequences for the quality of life, public and private, in Italy's regions today.

Finally, Chapter 6 explores why norms and networks of civic engagement so powerfully affect the prospects for effective, responsive government and why civic traditions are so stable over long periods. The theoretical approach we develop, drawing on the logic of collective action and the concept of "social capital," is intended not merely to account for the Italian case, but to conjoin historical and rational choice perspectives in a way that can improve our understanding of institutional performance and public life in many other cases. Our conclusions reflect on the power of institutional change to remold political life, and the powerful constraints that history and social context impose on institutional success. This book does not promise to be a practical handbook for democratic reformers, but it does frame the broader challenges we all face.