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Re-examining a modern classic: does Putnam's *Making Democracy Work* suffer from spuriousness?

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What makes democratic institutions work efficiently? Robert Putnam argued in *Making Democracy Work* that a mixture of political participation and immersion in associative and social networks in the community, conceptualised as 'civic community' or 'social capital', is the explanation. Ever since its publication, many questions have arisen about the validity of Putnam's theory. Among the most relevant concerns stands the influence of the Italian Communist Party on Putnam's empirical tests. This paper aims to fill the gap left in the literature by testing Putnam's hypothesis against the political party in the regional government and the PCI's electoral support. Supporting Putnam, this paper finds that variations in the quality of democratic governments in Italy's regions are a function of civic community even after adjusting for the presence of the Italian Communist Party.

Keywords: democracy; social capital; civic community; Putnam; Italian Communist Party

Introduction

In the last 20 years, democratic systems have rapidly spread even beyond western countries. This new extension of the democratic boundaries has come along with an increase in the distrust and discontentment with political institutions even in societies with longer tradition of democratic institutions (Norris 1999, 2011; Torcal 2006). Thus, knowing the conditions that make democracy work efficiently is of paramount salience for both the theoretical scholarly literature and real world politics.

The publication of Robert Putnam's important work *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* in 1993 reorients this academic literature stream. With the use of empirical data for a period of twenty years in Italy, Putnam concluded that the performance of government and other social institutions is powerfully influenced by what he termed social capital (Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1993). *Civicness* is theorised to be the central independent variable to explain variations of institutional performance among Italian regions.

Even though Putnam's thesis has become a cornerstone in the understanding of democratic institutions, the political literature still lacks a rigorous methodological reanalysis to test the validity and reliability of his work. Validity is, following Joppe (as cited in Golafshani 2003, 598), understood as being the extent to which 'the research truly measures that which it was

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intended to measure or how truthful the research results are'. Reliability is, following Joppe (as cited in Golafshani 2003, 599), understood as constituting

> the extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study is referred to as reliability and if the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable.

The importance of *civicness* and the concept of social capital have been of paramount relevance for recovering the salience of cultural and social variables for the understanding of democracy and institutional efficiency. This has been considered the greatest step forward in the tradition of the political culture since Almond and Verba's *Civic Culture* (Almond and Verba 1965; Boix and Posner 2000; Laitin 1995) and proclaimed as 'the missing link' to complete the equation for the World Bank in the understanding of economic growth and democratisation processes (Grootaert 1998).

However, with the opening of new lines of research and the proliferation of literature on the topic, the apparition of Putnam's book came along with an important number of critical reviews that demanded a readdressing of some points of the book. These have been broad in its scope. Some stressed the weaknesses in the historical study and the path dependency theory that goes back to the twelfth century where Putnam found the roots of the inequalities of social capital among regions (Cohn 1994; Sabetti 1996; Tarrow 1996). Others detected the absence of the micro-mechanisms between the independent and the dependent variable and attempted to fill the theoretical gap by means of rational choice arguments and arguing that social capital may be generally defined as the existence of inter-individual expectations of cooperation supported by institutional networks (Boix and Posner 1996, 2000; Levi 1996; Paldam 2002; Ríos Cázares and Ríos Figueroa 1999).

Apart from general consensus built around some points of Putnam's thesis, there are dark points that are still debated in the literature. One of the crucial elements still unresolved in the reviews up to now is the role of political parties and ideology (Rothstein 2001). Some have thought about the importance of a communist subculture in some regions to explain institutional performance (Kohn 1999). Others found extraordinary how Putnam unconvincingly discarded the correlation between *civicness* and the presence of the Communist Party (PCI) as the key determinant of his study (Karimi 2011; Putzel 1997) and the general intention of the Communist Party for class mobilisation (Foley and Edwards 1996; Karimi 2011; Rothstein 2001).

This paper is built as an attempt to contribute to the examination of the validity of Putnam's main argument in *Making Democracy Work*. The validity test deals with the analysis of the possible spuriousness of Putnam's main relationship due to the intervening effect of the PCI's institutional or electoral support. There is a plausible doubt that Putnam's indexes may capture elements such as the party in office at the regional government, ideological orientation of the society or regional culture instead of the civic community and/or the institutional performance. Therefore, a validity test on Putnam's thesis needs to study both its validity and spuriousness since both concepts overlap in this specific case. Notice, however, that Putnam develops an argument by using mixed methods in a consistent combination of qualitative and quantitative data. Yet, the validity test of this paper is limited to the re-examination of a particular aspect of the quantitative section of Putnam's study.

In particular, I analyse the role of institutional power and/or voting support for the Italian Communist Party (PCI) as intervening variables of the main relationship. Firstly, I study whether a variable that captures the main party in the regional government influences the observed outcomes. Thus, Putnam's relationship is replicated after taking into account the new variable so as to see whether the relationship still upholds after adjusting for it. Secondly, the *civicness*–performance

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connection is also re-examined after controlling for the PCI's percentage of vote in order to test the robustness of the relationship. Finally, I discuss the main results and conclude the analysis.

Putnam's hypothesis: citizen engagement and institutional performance

Putnam's theory, built upon evidence from the Italian regional experience, asserts that civic context matters for the way institutions work. The author took this case as an ideal natural experiment. Italy was undertaking the implantation of a new institutional network with different governmental units with a common political, administrative and legal structure. All of them enjoyed the same financial and legal resources. Despite this equality, Putnam saw how the efficiency of the new institutions was not the same for all the regions; some were highly and others less efficient. Putnam eventually explained these differences by arguing that variations in *civicness* caused institutional inequalities. In short, Putnam explained that a given socio-cultural context, rooted in a long range historical causation, creates the *civicness* of a community, or its social capital, which, eventually, explains the institutional performance. In the end, Putnam's contribution does not aim to give an explanation to the functioning of the Italian institutions, but to draw on a wider and deeper theoretical contribution about why democracies succeed or fail.

As far as his results are concerned, Putnam measured, on the first hand, the institutional performance of the recently institutionalised Italian regional governments. Putnam's data confirm that some regional governments are more effective than others in transforming the reality of their territory. Putnam also measured the degree of civic community for each region. The results show that there is an extremely high correlation between *civicness* and institutional performance. Thus, the author concludes that *civicness*, a mixture of political participation and immersion in associative and social networks in the community, is the causal explanation of efficient governments.

Concerns over Putnam's hypothesis: validity issues and theories of spuriousness

Methodologically, concerns have been raised about the validity and reliability of Putnam's work The methods used by the author, and especially his indicators, have been rather controversial. Soon after the publication of Putnam's work, a debate developed about the meaning of the indexes in his analysis. According to Jackman and Miller (1996) when Putnam's index is disaggregated to its indicators no significant relation exists. For instance, those authors showed that if instead of taking the index one takes all the indicators as the independent variables of institutional performance, then these are not statistically significant. Therefore, they argued, Putnam's thesis is invalid (Jackman and Miller 1996, 643–644). To illustrate this, Table 1 shows the explanatory capability of each indicator on the Institutional Performance Index. It seems clear that, individually, the strength of the indicators is fairly low, except for the referendum turnout. However, when all of them are taken together, they are able to explain up to 88% and 89% (not adjusted coefficient of determination) of the variation of institutional performance. At the same time, the collinearity among variables cannot be considered as a factor since all of the coefficients have a Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) below 10 (Kutner, Nachtsheim, and Neter 2008).[1]

However, some authors have defended Putnam's methodology (Granato, Inglehart, and Leblang 1996; Swank 1996). Social science theories, they argue, usually take variables based on multiple indicators since a core variable (such as civic community in Putnam's work) is measured imperfectly when a simple indicator is used. Thus, it is justifiable and logical that when a complex concept is operationalised it needs a more complex calculation through a mixture of different indicators (Granato, Inglehart, and Leblang 1996; Swank 1996). In this

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Table 1. OLS regression coefficient for the indicators of the Civic Community Index on institutional performance.

Indicators of Civic Community Index	Ordinary regions	All the regions
Referendum turnout	.60*	.63*
Preference voting	− .22	− .26
Newspaper readership rate	− .00	− .00
Lack of sports and cultural associations	− .23	− .19
Constant	.34	.53
(n)	15	19
R^2 adjusted	.83	.86

Note: OLS regression. Dependent variable: Institutional Performance Index. Significance levels: *$p < .1$; **$p < .05$; ***$p < .01$. 'Ordinary regions' include those regions newly institutionalised in the 1970s. These are all of them except Valle d'Aosta, Trentino-Alto, Friuli-Venezia, Sicilia and Sardegna. The column of 'All the regions' includes all of them except Valle d'Aosta which is missing in the original Putnam's dataset.
Source: own elaboration from Putnam's data.

sense, although the relationship may not be confirmed when the analysis is carried out with individual component variables one-by-one, it might be true that the four indicators of civic community create a real concept which is actually capturing Putnam's concept and may be taken as the explanatory variable of his model.

Apart from the validity issue about Putnam's indicators, the spuriousness hypothesis loomed over Putnam's thesis from the very beginning of his publication. Knowing such potential criticism, in *Making Democracy Work*, Putnam tries to be on the safe side by referring to possible variables that might explain institutional performance better than civic community (Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1993, 119). The author finds some important possible confounding or intervening variables to consider prior to settling on his theory. Among these, ideological polarisation of the party system or any kind of other political or social conflict seems to be totally uncorrelated with institutional performance (1993, 119). Social stability is found to be insignificant in his full analysis of performance and social change. Education, measured as the fraction of the regional population who attended school beyond the minimum school-leaving age of 14, is said to be also insignificant (1993, 119). Urbanism, measured as size as well as population density, has no association of any sort with the success or failure of the regional governments (1993, 119). Unlike what might have been expected, personnel stability is found not to have a positive correlation with performance in either regional councils or the cabinet (1993, 120).

The same happened with the correlation between economic prosperity and institutional performance, which was dismissed in Putnam's original work Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1993) as it was considered of weaker relevance than civic community. However, Solt (2004) tested measures of social engagement against aspects of Italian socio-economic structure. He concluded that economic development and the historical distribution of land, not social engagement, are the underlying explanatory variables of institutional democratic quality through higher levels of self-motivated political participation, that is, that sort of political participation that does not come from clientelistic networks. Thus, Solt (2004) identified that the level of political participation is the intermediate variable between structural causes and institutional performance. However, I argue that if economic development and distribution of land impact on self-motivated participation, which is a concept closely related to social involvement or social capital, and this in turn impacts on institutional performance, there is no contradiction with Putnam's main theory.

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Ultimately, the Italian Communist Party is mentioned as a possible confounding variable in the relationship between civic community and institutional performance in Putnam's original work (Putnam et al. 1983; Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1993). Notwithstanding this, the hypothesis was ruled out arguing that 'Communist regional governments were more successful because they tilled more fertile soil, not because of their techniques of ploughing. It is not *who* they were but *where* they were that counted' (Putnam et al. 1983, 72, emphasis added; Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1993). However, after Putnam cites the conclusions of his previous research, he admits that this may not explain all the variation as when the PCI took power in less civic regions its regional institutional performance tended to improve.

Doubts arising from the original works of the authors (Putnam et al., 1983, 72; Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1993, 120) were exacerbated by later contributions on the issue to which we will now turn. In this sense, some authors have argued that the main relationship in the book may have problems of spuriousness caused by the influence of political and ideological struggles pursued by political parties as well as the existence of specific political values in certain regions (Foley and Edwards 1996; Goldberg 1996; Karimi 2011; Kohn 1999; Putzel 1997; Rothstein 2001) and, specifically, it is the impact of the PCI that makes the main relation spurious? (Karimi 2011; Kohn 1999; Putzel 1997).

Specifically, the first and most empirically solid critique was made by Margaret Kohn (1999). She argued that the variation in the Italian regions does not lie in the civic community, but in the role of the red subculture anchored in the Italian Communist Party in mobilising and integrating subaltern classes into political life (Kohn 1999). She carried out an empirical examination of associational life in Italy to defend the argument that empirical evidence supports Gramsci's (2001) argument that a rich associational life will further the project of democracy only when it reflects the ideological and strategic coherence of organised resistance to capitalism. However, the strong thesis is said to be less substantiated by the empirical evidence throughout the article (Webber 2003).

Kohn argues that the differences may only lie in regional differences between South and North as there is no variability within these two groups of regions. Thus, although *civicness* and institutional performance correlate, they vary between northern and southern regions reflecting a general pattern between the two parts of Italy, as happens with many other variables without a necessary causal relationship. Thus, according to Kohn's argument the relationship between *civicness* and institutional performance are supposed to be exclusively based on the North–South dichotomy and not in any other trend. However, it can be seen by looking at Figure 1 that, even though northern regions are clearly in the upper side of the graph and southern regions in the lower side, when the regions are taken apart from each other the relationship upholds within the regions of the South and the regions of the North. Notwithstanding this, it is reasonable to include area differences in the final model when assessing a theory since the binary variable North–South may capture relevant variation in the data.

To support her argument of area differences, Kohn brings a new competing variable to civic community, this is a red political subculture. This concept is composed of four indicators: members of the *Associazione Ricreativa Comunista Italiana*, which was a cultural and recreational organisation affiliated to the Communist Party; members of the *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro*, a communist–socialist trade union federation; membership to the Italian Communist Party (PCI) between 1981 and 1984; and number of people affiliated to the *Lega Nazionale delle Cooperative e Mutue* which captures the magnitude of the cooperative movement. The author showed that this index has a strong correlation explaining institutional performance for all the regions in Italy as well as within northern and southern regions

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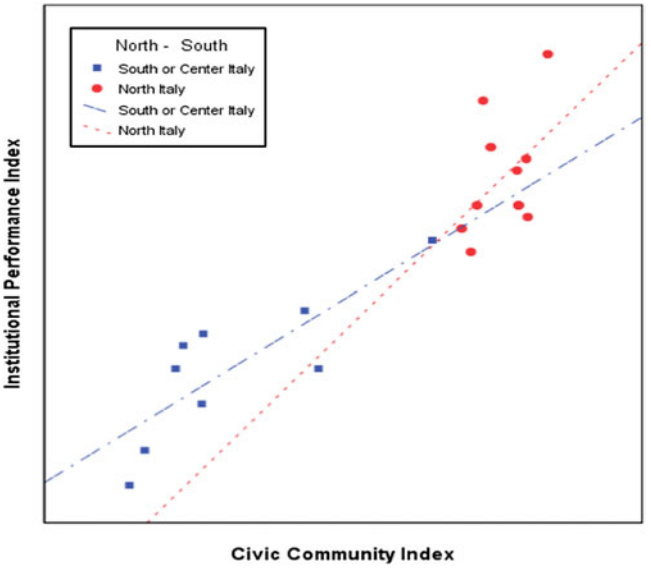


Figure 1. Civic Community Index and Institutional Performance Index by northern or southern regions. Source: Author's elaboration using Putnam's original data.

separately. This enabled her to assert her strong conclusions about the red subculture as the determinant factor of institutional performance.

Nevertheless, there are some aspects in Kohn's arguments that need further discussion. In particular, it may be rather controversial to say what portion of the membership of *Associazione Ricreativa Comunista Italiana* is due to its recreational and cultural activities and what portion lies in the communist–socialist ideological motivation, so belonging to Kohn's red subculture. The same occurs with the *Lega Nazionale delle Cooperative e Mutue*, the attribution of all of its members to a red subculture may be rather simplistic. It is reasonable to think that some portion of its members is in these associations for different interests such as an economic interest. Ultimately, it may be understood that what Kohn attempted to show is that the inter-regional variation was explained by a communist ideological subculture, but she failed in operationalising the concept in such a way that only ideology was in it . As a result, Kohn's indicators may have incorporated aspects of both ideology and social capital. Instead of her four indicators, a rather precise proxy of ideological attachment to communism may be the percentage of PCI electoral support. This will be analysed later on in the paper.

All in all, definitive empirical evidence on the issue has not been provided yet. The following section aims to fill the gap left so far in the literature. I will attempt to determine whether Putnam's thesis has any methodological failing concerning its spuriousness with the institutional power or the electoral support of the Italian Communist Party.

Validity test: the spurious hypothesis

One of the most common and serious interpretation fallacies found in social science is those of spurious relationships. Those variables available for analysis are not always the ones that would be chosen as the ideal set of variables for the purpose of research. This can lead to spurious

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correlations due to omission of relevant variables which might be correlated to both the independent and dependent variable. Thus, a great danger is to confound correlation with causation due to spuriousness. *x* may correlate with *y* but it does not necessarily mean *x* causes *y*, since there may be a third variable *z*, correlated with both *x* and *y*, which is really causing, totally or partially, the phenomenon. In fact, this is the same as saying that the model *x* on *y* violates the *ceteris paribus* assumption for not taking into account the impact of *z*. To avoid this, the researcher has to include the potentially confounding variables in the model with the main relationship; otherwise, the researcher may be overstating or understating the causal inference. Similarly, if we were in the case where *z* constitutes an intervening variable, the solution would be exactly the same, that is to run *x* on *y* with the control of z (Huck 2012; Lewis-Beck, Bryman, and Liao 2004). However, as shown below, there are reasons to believe that the third variable correlates with both the independent and the dependent variables.

So far, many questions remain unanswered about Putnam's Italian regional work. Putnam's thesis, built upon evidence from the Italian regional experience, asserts that civic context matters for the way institutions work. However, indicators of civic community and institutional performance are far from incontrovertible.

The index regarding institutional performance was constructed from the following 12 indicators: (1) cabinet stability; (2) budget promptness; (3) statistical and information services; (4) reform legislation; (5) legislative innovation; (6) day care centres; (7) family clinics; (8) industrial policy instruments; (9) agricultural spending capacity; (10) local health unit expenditures; (11) housing and urban development; and (12) bureaucratic responsiveness. It can be easily argued that some of these indicators may be conditioned by third factors such as ideologically conditioned policy preferences or party's position in the distribution of power.

As mentioned, indicators such as the quality and depth of regional statistical and information services, reform legislation, legislative innovation and the various regional policies might be conditioned by whether the party in the regional governments is of the same colour as the party in the central government. It seems obvious that a party in the opposition nationally and with no influence whatsoever on central policies will strive especially hard to change the reality wherever it has regional power. Thus, it might explain why opposition parties in Rome and with no parcels of power at all in the 1970s, especially the Italian Communist Party (PCI), might be expected to have a greater disposition towards change in its spheres of power than those regional governments led by the Christian Democrats (DC) which also held the central government.

The previous potential bias is fed with a possible parallel bias for the dependent variable in the same direction. As the transformative aspirations of the central opposition party in 1970s Italy might be expected to be higher, the same can be said for the indicators used in the Civic Community Index. These indicators are the followings: (1) referendum turnout; (2) preference voting; (3) newspaper readership; and (4) scarcity of sport and cultural associations. Among these, the most important particular explanatory power is referendum turnout (see Table 1). It is a sound argument to think that those who support the opposition party, and therefore with less chances of transforming the reality through the government, are more likely to mobilise for a referendum call and, therefore, more likely to turn out in the referendum as this constitutes the only way to influence directly the political outcome. Again, Putnam's indicators might be argued to be biased by either the party in the regional government or the regional electoral support.

All in all, the existing literature has left out the test of the possible spuriousness of the relationship between the main variables of the thesis. This is why it is highly relevant to know whether there is a correlation between *civicness* – as measured by Putnam – and vote for or regional power of the PCI and between institutional performance – as measured by Putnam –

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and vote for or institutional power of the PCI. If both relationships are proven to be sufficiently strong in the period analysed by Putnam, then the relationship between *civicness* and institutional performance is likely to be biased either by overstating or understating its causality due to spuriousness caused by the third relevant omitted variable. After controlling for the third variable, there are three possible scenarios or hypotheses that will determine whether Putnam's relationship suffered from spuriousness or not:

H_0: The original relationship (*civicness*–institutional performance) remains at about the same level of strength and in the same direction after controlling for the third factor. Therefore, the relationship is independent of the third factor.

H_0: The original relationship (*civicness*–institutional performance) strengthens after controlling for the third factor. Therefore, the relationship was partially hidden.

H_1: The original relationship (*civicness*–institutional performance) disappears or weakens so as to become a statistically insignificant relationship. Therefore, the relationship is spurious.

Putnam's thesis will be tested as valid if our conclusions fall in any of the two first hypotheses (H_0), and we will have to reject the hypothesised effect of *civicness* on institutional performance if it falls in the last scenario (H_1). The exact same conclusions can serve in case the effect was theorised to be intervening instead of spurious. The following section is devoted to test the validity of Putnam's theory.

PCI's institutional power and institutional performance

To see how the PCI's governments may affect the theorised relationship, I add the colour of the government for each region and for each legislature to the civic community–institutional performance link. Using data for the same period studied by Putnam, that is, the first 20 years of the institutionalisation of the ordinary regions in Italy, Figure 2 takes Putnam's classic relationship and marks the party in charge of the region at each term. As mentioned first in Putnam et al. (1983, 72), and reiterated later on (Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1993, 120), the PCI does take the government in regions with high levels of *civicness* and institutional performance. However, these variables seem not to affect the positive slope of *civicness* and institutional performance when the variation within groups of regions under governments of the same party is taken into account.[2]

Figure 2 clearly illustrates how the cross regional pattern shown by Putnam upholds when only the variation of the variables with the same party in government is taken into account. This is true, with varying intensity depending on the legislature, for the four elections from 1970 to 1985. In this line, the graphs show how the relationship for those regions under the Christian Democrat's government has a coefficient of determination above 0.81. As a consequence, although regions where the PCI was in government were more civic and performed better according to Putnam's indicators, the fact that the relationship remains highly significant for regions with the DC's governments further strengthens Putnam's findings.

Thus, results do not uphold the spuriousness theory. If the political party in government were the key variable to understanding the variation in institutional performance, then the level of institutional performance expected for a region *i* would have been the same irrespective of the civic community for a given party *j* in government. However, figures demonstrate that variation remains significant within groups of cases under the same party in government (see Table 2). Nevertheless, even though civic community does remain nearly unaltered after the introduction of the variable 'colour of the party in the government', this seems to be relevant for the

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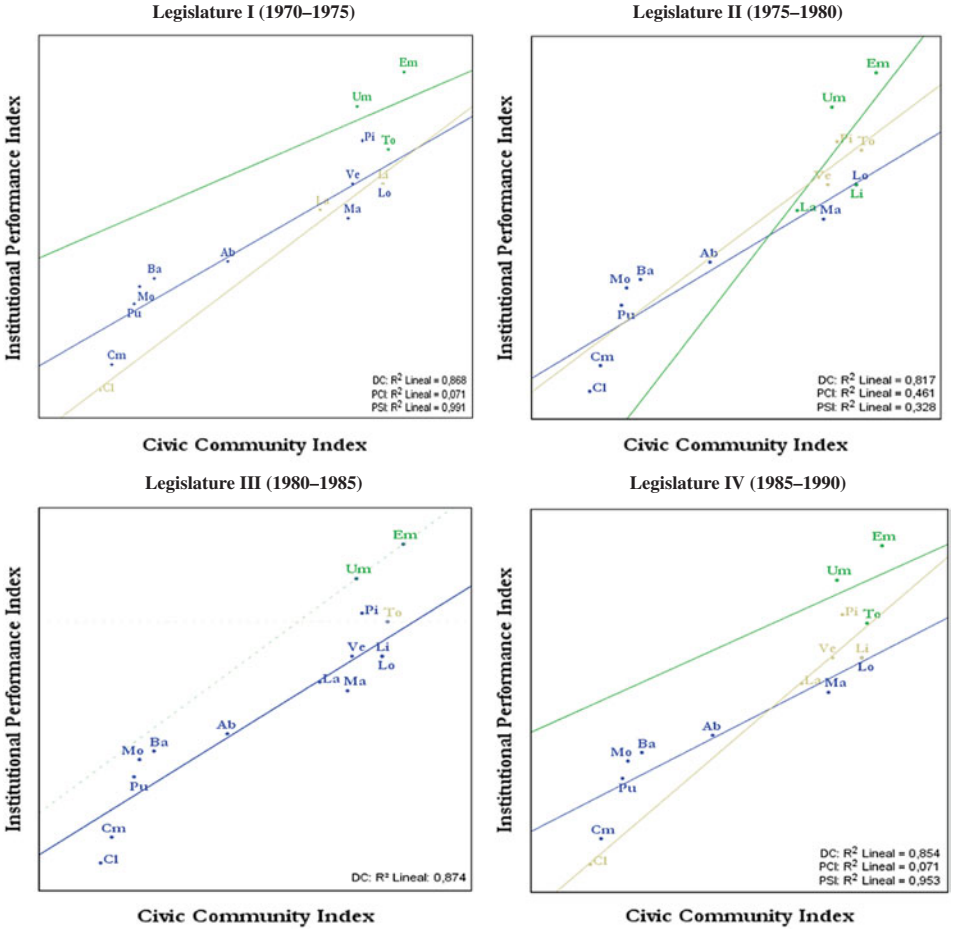


Figure 2. The Civic Community Index and the Institutional Performance Index by the party in the regional presidency. Source: Author's elaboration using Putnam's original data. Key: Ab = Abruzzo; B = Basilicata; Cl = Calabria; Cm = Campania; Em = Emilia-Romagna; Fr = Friuli - Venezia; La = Lazio; Li = Liguria; Lo = Lombardia; Ma = Marche; Mo = Molise; Pi = Piemonte; Pu = Puglia; Sa = Sardinia ; Si = Sicily; To = Toscana; Tr = Trentino; Um = Umbria; Va = Valle d'Aosta; Ve = Veneto.

understanding of regional institutional performance as it adds between 5% and 8% – except for the legislature II – to the total variability explained by the data or, what is the same, the explanatory power of the model.[3]

The PCI's electoral support and institutional performance

Even though the colour of the party in government may have some impact on the understanding of the differences of institutional performance of the Italian regions, it does not undermine the main thesis of Putnam's work. However, the analysis carried out here may be easily criticised as an oversimplification of a more complex reality. It is hardly credible that the control of institutional power can be fully measured as the colour of the party of the regional presidency.

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Table 2. OLS regression coefficients for the Civic Community Index on institutional performance controlling for party in the governmental cabinet.

	No controls	Legislature I	Legislature II	Legislature III	Legislature IV
Civic Community Index	0.913***	0.804***	0.77***	0.817***	0.813***
Party in government (reference category: DC)					
PSI (1)		0.188	0.321	−0.084	0.177
PCI (1)		0.944***	0.509	0.642**	0.600**
Constant	0.10	−0.44	−0.107	−0.05	0.040
(n)	15	15	15	15	15
R^2 adjusted	0.83	0.91	0.84	0.88	0.90

Note: dependent variable: Institutional Performance Index. Significance levels: *$p < .1$; **$p < .05$; ***$p < .01$. As a rule of thumb, none of the coefficients presents a Variation Inflation Factor above 10, so there is no severe multicollinearity (Kutner, Nachtsheim, and Neter 2008).

Thus, to improve the validity of the analysis the variable PCI's voting support also reflects the PCI's institutional power and can be used as a proxy for a general support and power of the PCI in each region.

After all, the PCI's percentage of votes is assumed to be highly correlated with the PCI's percentage of seats and, therefore, with its likelihood of having a say in what the government does, its participation in legislative and governmental coalitions and being in charge of the government. Results show that regional differences in the electoral support for the PCI were very disparate across regions and highly stable over the four elections under study, ranging from an average of 16.2% in Molise to 45% in Emilia-Romagna, Umbria and Toscana. The average electoral support and institutional power of the PCI was 27.7% of votes and 2 (of 15) regional governments in 1970; 32.9% and 4 (of 15) regional governments in 1975; 31.2% and 3 (of 15) regional governments in 1980 and 30.2% and 3 (of 15) regional governments in 1985. To capture the overall PCI's electoral support throughout the period, I take the average percentage of electoral support for the four elections 1970, 1975, 1980 and 1985, which serves as my variable in the evaluation of the potential spuriousness due to the predominant colour of the party in the region.

If the hypothesis that the PCI's electoral support may be creating spuriousness in the causal relationship between *civicness* of the region and institutional performance is correct, then the two should be strongly positively correlated as occurs in Figure 3. Yet, Table 3 illustrates how this strong correlation becomes insignificant when controlling for the Civic Community Index. The same pattern is found for the four elections from 1970 to 1985 and for the overall electoral results.[4]

Whereas Figure 3 and Table 3 have shown that there is no relationship between the PCI's electoral support and institutional performance when controlling for *civicness*, the main Putnam's theory may also be spurious due to the implications of Kohn's variables related to the red subculture and the North–South differences. Table 4 shows the regression analysis when all the possible variables are included in the model. The index of red subculture upholds highly significant after controlling for the area where the region is located (North and South – Centre of Italy) and the civic community variable. The PCI's electoral support and the red subculture become insignificant when included in the same model. Yet, their Variation Inflation Factors reach values above 5 which, even though this cannot be considered as being as collinear as to cast doubts on the validity of the models 4 and 5 (Kutner, Nachtsheim, and Neter 2008), it implies that there is some multicollinearity.[5] To test the hypothesis even further, the sixth model

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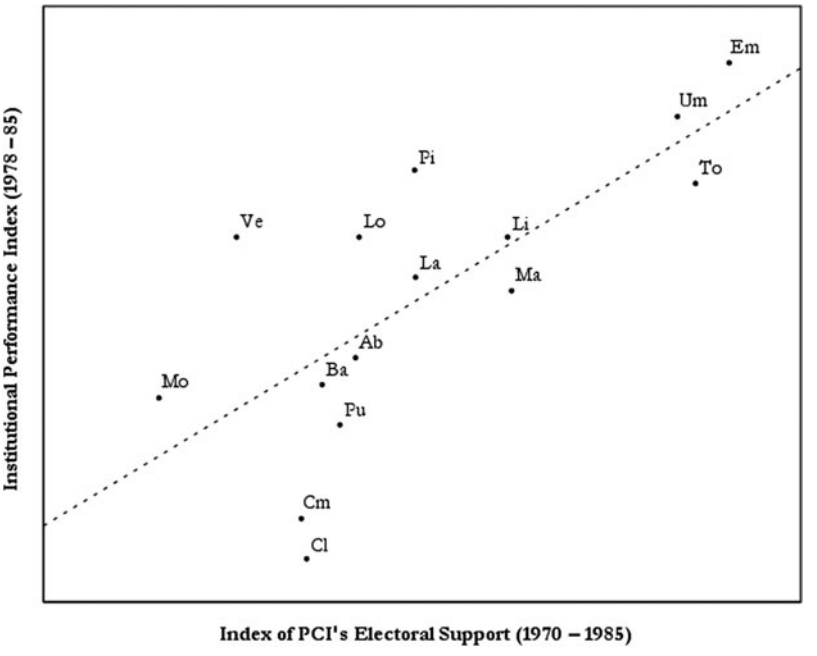


Figure 3. The PCI's electoral support and the Institutional Performance Index. Source: Author's elaboration using Putnam's original data for the Institutional Performance Index and Italy's regional data from Ministero dell'Interno. Dipartimento per gli Affari Interni e Territoriali. Servizi Informatici Elettorali. Key: Ab = Abruzzo; Ba = Basilicata; Cl = Calabria; Cm = Campania; Em = Emilia-Romagna; Fr = Friuli - Venezia; La = Lazio; Li = Liguria; Lo = Lombardia; Ma = Marche; Mo = Molise; Pi = Piemonte; Pu = Puglia; Sa = Sardinia ; Si = Sicily; To = Toscana; Tr = Trentino; Um = Umbria; Va = Valle d'Aosta; Ve = Veneto.

pools the observations for the four legislatures. In all the models, results show that the Civic Community Index is highly relevant to explain the cross regional variation in the Institutional Performance Index. Therefore, empirical evidence supports the null hypothesis (H_0) of the independent effect between *civicness* and institutional performance, and so the validity of Putnam's theory as regards the potential spuriousness of the main relationship analysed here.

Table 3. OLS regression coefficients for the PCI's electoral support on institutional performance.

	Regional elections, 1970	Regional elections, 1975	Regional elections, 1980	Regional elections, 1985	Regional elections, 1970–85
Civic Community Index	0.817***	0.790***	0.789***	0.799***	0.797***
Percentage of PCI's Electoral Support	0.023	0.023	0.021	0.021	0.022
Constant	−0.543	−0.67	−0.565	−0.537	−0.586
(n)	15	15	15	15	15
R^2 Adjusted	0.851	0.867	0.866	0.844	0.868

Note: dependent variable: Institutional Performance Index. Significance levels: *$p < .1$; **$p < .05$; ***$p < .01$. As a rule of thumb, none of the coefficients presents a Variation Inflation Factor above 10, so there is no severe multicollinearity (Kutner, Nachtsheim, and Neter 2008).

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Table 4. OLS regression coefficients for civic community on institutional performance with controls.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Civic Community Index			0.776***	0.794***	0.881**	0.881***
Kohn's red subculture	0.614***	0.296**	0.238**	0.252	0.277	0.277**
Average of PCI's support (percentage)				−0.004	−0.006	−0.006
North (1) over South (0)		1.377***	0.0		−0.203	−0.203
Dummy 1975						−0.137
Dummy 1980						0.130
Dummy 1985						0.126
Constant	0.021	−0.742***	−0.018	0.179	0.357	0.163
(n)	15	15	15	15	15	60
R^2 adjusted	0.33	0.74	0.86	0.85	0.88	0.88

Note: dependent variable: Institutional Performance Index. Significance levels: *$p < .1$; **$p < .05$; ***$p < .01$. As a rule of thumb, none of the coefficients presents a Variation Inflation Factor above 10, so there is no severe multicollinearity (Kutner, Nachtsheim, and Neter 2008).

Finally, the hypothesis that the salience of the communism in the region mattered in the understanding of the institutional performance has been tested by measuring both the impact of the party occupying the presidency of the region, the electoral support for the Italian Communist Party (PCI) in the first four elections and Kohn's red subculture index. Even though it seems clear that those regions with high levels in the index of civic community tended to vote more for the Communist Party and had higher levels of red subculture as measured by Kohn, it has been proved that there is sufficient variability in the data to test the same relationship within groups of regions with the same party in government, or to control for the PCI's electoral support and Kohn's index, and the original thesis still works. Therefore, it has been shown that Putnam succeeded in capturing what he meant to explain and that a potential distortion from the colour of party would not change his conclusions.

Conclusions

The thesis that variation in the quality of democratic governments in Italy's regions is a function of Putnam's hypothesised civic community depends on the assumption that no other variable is substantially influencing the causal mechanism, or in other words, that there is no third variable affecting both the independent and the dependent variable. This paper counters empirically the doubts raised over the spuriousness of this main relationship.

Most of the potential third variables threatening the main model were already ruled out by Putnam in his original work. However, not all of them were successfully discarded in his book and this has been a major source of doubts about the validity of Putnam's model with regards to the potential influence of an external variable not taken into account in the original work. If this were true, this would erode the quantitative results of Putnam's work, leading to less solid conclusions. Even though many authors have criticised Putnam on this flank (Foley and Edwards 1996; Goldberg 1996; Karimi 2011; Kohn 1999; Putzel 1997; Rothstein 2001), none of them has ever analysed whether the explanatory role of the Italian Communist Party, through either its institutional power or electoral support for institutional performance, was sufficient to make Putnam's main relationship spurious.

After replicating Putnam's model and looking at how the PCI's institutional power and electoral support influenced the *civicness* of the community and the Institutional Performance

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Indexes, it has been proved that a plausible objection to Putnam's work can be discarded. Results have shown several interesting aspects of Putnam's theory and models. Firstly, the Civic Community Index is sufficiently robust to capture not only differences across Italian regions, but also differences across northern regions, on one side, and southern regions, on the other side. Also, it has been seen that the main relationship upholds after adjusting for a dummy that captures the North/South geographical situation.

Secondly, while it has been illustrated that there is no relationship between the PCI's electoral support and institutional performance after controlling for *civicness*, it can also be seen that the PCI's institutional power is indeed significant and positive at explaining institutional performance. So, it seems that what mattered was not a communist culture but instead the PCI in the government. Nevertheless, this finding never undermines the main relationship. It should also be noticed that results provided here do consolidate the existing evidence of an empirical quantitative relationship between *civicness* and institutional performance given the data in the 1970s and 1980s. However, it is outside the scope of this paper to assess whether the origin of such relationship stems from the local political regimes in place in the Middle Ages or, as Tarrow (1996) considers, of more recent origin as a result of political processes during the nineteenth century. In either case, the contemporaneous conclusion is that even though the PCI's institutional power and electoral support correlated positively with both the main variables under study, it is irrelevant as regards to Putnam's main theoretical contribution.

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Notes

1. In a regression model, we believe that each independent variable has an independent effect on the dependent variable. It may occur that the independent variables are so severely correlated to each other that we have difficulties in isolating or separating the specific effect of each independent on the dependent variable independently. When this occurs, we have a problem of severe multicollinearity and, as a consequence, coefficients can have inflated variances making estimations less precise, tend to have wider confidence intervals and artificially pushing variables to non-significant levels, inflated R^2 and results more sensitive to small changes in the data. To make sure we do not incur these problems the most widely used measure is the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). The VIF quantifies how much the variance of an estimated regression coefficient is inflated due to collinearity. A standard rule of thumb is that estimators with VIF values below 10 do not suffer from severe multicollinearity (Kutner, Nachtsheim, and Neter 2008).
2. Source of Italy's regional data: Ministero dell'Interno. Dipartimento per gli Affari Interni e Territoriali. Servizi Informatici Elettorali.
3. The additional explanatory power can be derived by calculating the difference between the R^2 of each model with controls for each legislature and the R^2 of the baseline model without controls. So, the power of the model is increased by 8%, 1%, 5% and 7% for the legislature I, II, III and IV, respectively.
4. The regressions referring to specific years (columns 1, 2, 3 and 4 of Table 3) use the percentage of the PCI's electoral support as the independent variable. The regression referring to the overall period (column 5 of Table 3) uses the average of the percentage of the PCI's electoral support.
5. This is unsurprising given the strong correlation between the PCI's electoral support and the red subculture of 0.89. However, the VIF values in models 4 and 5 of Table 3 are between 5.05 and 6.01.

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