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MAKING DEMOCRACY WORK CIVIC TRADITIONS IN MODERN ITALY BY ROBERT D. PUTNAM- REVIEW OF BOOK

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Abstract

This article presents review on book “Making democracy work” by Robert D. Putnam which discusses the characteristics of regional governments of Italy. Author studied twenty regions of Italy.

Keywords:

Robert D. Putnam, Democracy, Civic Traditions, Modern Italy

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The book “Making democracy work” discusses the characteristics of regional governments of Italy. Author studied twenty regions of Italy. The main question which author tried to answer in this study is “what are the conditions for creating strong, responsive, effective representative institutions? The regions are been studied in this book, five of them were introduced before 1970 and remaining fifteen were created in 1970. The institutional design was same so the author controlled the institutions design and explained the other variables for the institutional performance. The institutions having same design were created in the regions which were different from each other under the cultural, economic, social and political circumstances. Chapter two starts from the historical analysis which starts from the medieval period and supports the theoretical idea of the author and by that theoretical analysis author tried

to answer the question “ how the process of introducing regional governments arose, how these institutions developed over twenty years and what were the implications on Italian politics and government?

In 1860 the Italian state was announced and during that time the central government was strong but they allowed the local authorities to maintain their power. These practices continued for a long period of time and after the World War 2 there was an attempt to formally protect regional power. The constitution of 1948 gave the legal cover to newly formed local governments. That was implemented in five regions but delayed in others.

After 1970 the reforms were undertaken and to study their effect author considered the analysis of political elites as an important figure of the research. The governing body was educated and well experienced and they saw their occupied

space in the government as full time job and their approach to politics was more practical than ideological. Political parties were not acting like strictly patched with their ideology but they were tolerant to their opponents. During those days the relationship between local and central government improved.

The councilors were energetic and they were taking the responsibility of regional issues but very soon they showed their dissatisfaction with the institutes because the bureaucracy was slow. The regional employees were the main problem because they were selected on the strong relationships rather than experience. The voters were less satisfied with the central and regional governments and this difference was in two different regions the south and the north, the people of north were satisfied with the regional government while on the other hand the people of south were more satisfied with the national government.

Author tried to find the answer of the question “Do some regional governments show systematically a better performance than others, so that we can speak about institutional success and failure? To find out the answer of this question the author took the empirical tests of the efficiency of the institutions. For this author used twelve indicators; cabinet stability, budget promptness, statistical and information services, reform legislation, legislative innovation, day care centers, family clinics, industrial policy instruments, agricultural spending capacity, local health unit expenditures, housing and urban development and bureaucratic responsiveness. By using these indicators author concluded that some regions performed better than others and he also found the consistency in that

performance over decades. Results show that the group of regions of north performed well while the performance of south was not consistent.

What explains these differences in institutional performance? What is it that differentiates the successful regions in the North from the unsuccessful ones in the South, and the more from the less successful within each section? Chapter four starts with this question. Here the author tries to understand this difference by understanding the socioeconomic conditions of the regions and the ties of civic community. North is economically strong than South and author took the proper indicators to understand this phenomenon by studying the number of associations in that region, associations like armature soccer clubs, literary circles and news readers and he also studied the participation of people in political affairs by the results of referendum. In the conclusion author concludes that the people of North are more active than the People of South.

Chapter five starts with the question “why some regions are more civic than others?” to find out the answer of this question author goes to the historical origins of these contrasting regions. The regimes in the North and in the South during the past decades had contrasting features. North was economically strong and putting the stress on importance of public order, justice and freedom of religion while South was characterized by a strict autocracy.

Author uses the indicators, membership in mutual aid societies, membership in cooperatives, strength of mass parties and turnout in the open election before the Fascist era, the longevity of local associations to check the durability of civic

traditions. Author found the result and concluded that where the civic engagement was high a century ago the high political and social civic-ness is found today.

Why the past is so powerful? This question opens the discussion in chapter six. Author develops the answer using the means of game theory and the idea of social capital. Common rule of game is one will win the other will lose and if one will cooperate other will get the benefit easily, third party can solve this problem but the enforcement of third party is not an easy task. In fact, the heavy use of third party enforcement is costly, unpleasant and less efficient than voluntary cooperation. Another problem related to third party enforcement is that it is itself a public good to which the same dilemma applies. However, game theory does not predict voluntary cooperation, which could explain "why uncooperative behavior does not emerge as often as game theory predicts.

Author discusses the social context in which game is played. Further he explains that social capital, level of trust norms and networks in a society are the solution to overcome the collective action problem. To support his idea, he uses the example of rotating credit associations, which are groups where people agree to make regular contributions to a fund which is given, in whole or in part, to each contributor in rotation. After a participant is assigned the sum, he is no more eligible to receive it again and no third party enforcement is involved. These associations are found in various parts of the world and their existence is a counterexample to the validity of theories that support collective action problem. If players were rational, they would leave the group after they received the fund. Nevertheless in societies where

is need to cooperate with each other people do not defect they usually cooperate with each other.

Networks of civic engagement and norms of reciprocity are the sources from where social trust arises. Civic engagement helps to improve the individual trust and with the help of this improvement social network get more and more dense. Horizontal relations can create trust, cooperation and social capital. Networks of vertical relations do not foster the creation of social capital because information is more inaccurate, relations unbalanced and obligations asymmetric. The horizontal relations can help for the goodness of government while vertical relations cannot help for the goodness of government.

In the end the author concludes that horizontal bonds make economic development and vertical one contrast it. This is not just the economic development that explains the institutional but it is the result of dense networks of horizontal relations. The last conclusion Putnam can draw from the regional experiment is that "social context and history profoundly condition the effectiveness of institutions" and that "effective and responsive institutions depend on republican virtues and practices".

This study "making democracy work" discusses the question "what are the conditions for creating strong, responsive, effective representative institutions? The area of research been selected is the Italian local government. Using the techniques of qualitative and quantitative methods and selecting democratic Italy author tried to find out the answer of this question. Political institutes as dependant variable and controlling the institute

design author tried to figure out the circumstances which are helpful to create the active, responsive and strong institutes.

Generally speaking institutes are the key figure of any government. Policies are made by the incumbents who are the representatives of the people. Next will be institute which will implement those policies to the public. If the institutes are working properly and they are doing their job actively then we can say that these institutes are working well.

On the other hand if the scenario is totally different and institutes are not working properly then the implementation of policy will become a gap and the other things which are against that policy they will fill the gap. That policy will get the status of nothing and that institute will lose the trust of people and that will directly hit the trust of government among the people. Low level of trust can cause unrest and in some extant civil war.

North of Italy is developed than South and Political institutes of North are more responding than South. Author tried to understand this difference by using the scientific techniques and concluded that if the society is more civic then they will participate actively in different political issues and there will also be check and balance on political institutes so the political institutes will work and respond actively.

According to my understanding the two things are missing which are very important. The one is institute design and the other is the selection of employees. Author controlled the institute design because the structure was same in both regions but I suggest that he should make comparison of institute design and selection methods in both

regions and if he found empirically no difference then author can control these variables. I agree with the theory of Putnam that civic engagement is the key factor for the responsiveness of any democratic institute but this is not the only thing because that social capital can lead an institute to the injustice and corruption which is not good for the flow of democracy. Institute design is also important. The design should match the demands of the public. Employee's behavior should also be equal to every citizen. The institutes are for the public not for the specific party or a specific group of people who are in majority.

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