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**PANDEMIC PUBLIC POLICY:  
SOCIAL CAPITAL AND ITALY'S COVID-19 CRISIS**

A thesis presented

by

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to

The Political Science Department

in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for Honors in Political Science

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## CHAPTER ONE

In the first six months of the 2020s, marking the onset of the new decade, the COVID-19 health crisis thrust every government in the world into an unprecedented policy predicament. This predicament became one of the most significant governance tests in the 21<sup>st</sup> century thus far, requiring government officials to craft and implement decisive policy responses in the face of complex and demanding political conundrums. Depending on their political system, some governments, like illiberal ones, had a far easier time imposing draconian policies upon their citizens. For these regimes, COVID-19 policy was a question of human life, regime stability, and economic endurance. Liberal democratic governments, however, faced a fourth factor making their COVID-19 policy decisions far more perplexing: civil liberties.

There are many democratic nations whose battles with coronavirus can yield fascinating conclusions for political science. Italy, however, stands out as an especially unique case. Italy and its people were the first western democratic nation to confront the pandemic in its most chaotic form—an unrestrained and un-mitigated outbreak. When coronavirus reached its inhabitants, it propelled Italy's central and regional governments onto the pandemic's front lines with the only clue for policy solutions coming from the World Health Organization and un-democratic nations such as China and Iran. Due to the nation's decentralized health system, the virus's sudden arrival forced regional governments to aptly formulate and implement public policies that had no guarantee of pacifying the deadly contagion. Italian elected officials were the first to face the difficult question that every democratically elected official would soon encounter; "how can I control a highly-contagious virus while simultaneously respecting the rights of my constituents?" As if fate drew its name from a hat, Italy found itself center-stage of

the crisis, with the Italian people and the rest of the world watching in hushed silence to see how policymakers responded.

Italy's first wave lasted from mid-February to the end of July, claiming 35,000 total lives.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, the entire nation did not suffer equally. Compared to other regions, Italy's industrialized and affluent northern regions were disproportionately devastated by the virus. By the end of the wave, the northern Lombardy region's population contracted 40% of COVID-19 cases, and the populations across three other northern regions contracted another 33% of cases.<sup>2</sup> The remaining COVID-19 cases were dispersed evenly throughout the rest of Italy. With the violent influx of cases in the North, COVID-19 patients overwhelmed regional healthcare systems, which was especially the case for Lombardy.<sup>3</sup> While northern regions struggled to control the virus's speed, in Italy's southern regions, which lack reliable healthcare infrastructures, COVID-19's health impact fortunately was far less devastating.<sup>4</sup>

But despite the highly localized consequences of Italy's first COVID-19 wave, many regional institutions across the nation adopted their own particular policy approaches to the crisis. For instance, when Lombardy health officials first detected an outbreak within their wealthy region, numerous northern Governors tried downplaying the intensifying crisis.<sup>5</sup> On the other side of the country, the Governors in the South preemptively closed schools and barred public gatherings before the central government finally issued a nationwide lockdown decree on March 9<sup>th</sup>, more than two weeks after Lombardy health officials discovered the COVID

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<sup>1</sup> Guglielmi et al., "Public Acceptability of Containment Measures during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Italy," 4.

<sup>2</sup> Guglielmi et al., 4.

<sup>3</sup> Horowitz, "For Southern Italy, the Coronavirus Becomes a War on 2 Fronts."

<sup>4</sup> Horowitz.

<sup>5</sup> Review, "Exporting the Italian Model to Fight COVID-19 | The Regulatory Review."

outbreak.<sup>6</sup> The factors that led to these different policy approaches have yet to be identified and analyzed.

Since 1970, Italian regional governments have been responsible for health and hospital services, urban affairs, and economic development, meaning that each regional government tried directly addressing the COVID crisis within their territories before the central government intervened. Italy's decentralized sub-national governance system suggests that it may be interesting to investigate how regional governments responded to the health crisis's challenges. The COVID crisis has extraordinary political significance because it has tested sub-national institutions' capabilities in being decisive, efficient, and cooperative. The crisis represents one of Italy's most significant public policy challenges since World War II. It is essential to understand how these regional governments performed and why they chose the policy paths they did.

One fascinating approach to this topic is through the lens of social capital theory. The renowned political scientist Robert Putnam pioneered social capital in his 1993 book *Making Democracy Work*. Using Italy's regional governments as the center of his study, Putnam created the social capital concept to explain how a thriving democratic civil society can make governments more effective and responsive to their citizens. Since social capital's debut, scholars have rigorously searched for new and innovative ways to understand the complex relationship between social capital and effective democratic institutions.

The unprecedented COVID-19 crisis introduces an unparalleled opportunity to investigate social capital in a new and unique light. In this study, any trends in the region's responses to COVID-19 can be insightful in furthering our understanding of the critical relationship between citizens and regional governments during times of significant crisis. Sub-

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<sup>6</sup> Review.

national institutions in the virus-stricken North adopted different health-related measures than those in the poor and economically depressed South, and social capital may help explain these differing approaches. The timing and quality of the regional authorities' responses to the crisis can help us understand how social capital may shape functioning under extreme pressure.

By investigating the various roles Italian regional governments played during the first wave of the 2020 pandemic, this thesis will look to deepen our knowledge of Robert Putnam's social capital theory. Though Putnam argues that social capital contributes to good governance, its effects may be different in a public health crisis. For instance, were institutions in areas with historically low social capital able to more quickly enact strict lockdown and social distancing mandates? Were institutions in areas with historically high social capital more hesitant to enact COVID-19 policies restricting their citizens' rights? While these are intriguing questions, alternative variables may have also played roles in government policy approaches. Partisanship, the average population age, population density, and healthcare system conditions are all necessary to consider as explanatory variables in the event of inter-regional differences.

### **Research Question and Findings**

Therefore, this thesis will ask, how did social capital shape Italian regional governments' policy responses to the pandemic and their overall efficacy? Faced with this question, scholars would likely hypothesize that since social capital can foster general institutional competence, high social capital levels would consistently facilitate effective governance and policies during the COVID-19 crisis. Furthermore, scholars might also assume that low social capital levels would hinder policymaking and effective governance. Drawing on a four-region comparative case study, my findings depart from these initial hypotheses. Examining Lombardy and Veneto, two regions with high social capital levels, and Campania and Calabria, two regions with low



social capital levels, I find that social capital did not fully determine policies. However, as regional governments formulated their policy solutions to the pandemic, social capital was an underlying factor shaping their decision-making. Furthermore, when they successfully adjusted their policies to accommodate for their region's social capital, these policies were more effective. This claim suggests that during a crisis, high social capital does not guarantee effective governance, and low social capital does always produce ineffective governance.

This comparative case study yields some interesting findings for social capital and its influence on governments when they are faced with an extraordinary emergency. While this study suggests that social capital levels can influence policies and their effectiveness, it is important to clarify that social capital does not fully determine policy responses. Rather, social capital appears to have had an underlying influence on regional governments' policy approaches to address the COVID-19 outbreak. Moreover, when these policy approaches took advantage the civic community's strengths, or addressed the un-civic community's weaknesses, then these policy responses were more effective in combatting the virus.

In high social capital regions, the civic community can play two noteworthy roles in influencing crisis policy approaches and efficacy. First, as Lombardy's case suggests, the civic community can create a barrier to decisive policy responses by intimidating policymakers, reminding them that they will be held accountable for any costly errors. On the other hand, Veneto's case suggests that when the government overcomes this intimidation and enacts a policy response, the civic community's ability to overcome collective action dilemmas can serve as a valuable tool in facilitating policy success. In low social capital areas, the lack of a civic community can play a fascinating role in crisis policy approaches. As seen in both Campania's

and Calabria's cases, the community's scarcity of trust and collective capabilities can permit governments to take assertive and aggressive measures to promote pandemic containment.

### **Alternative Hypotheses**

This thesis will also consider alternative hypotheses to identify other potential influences on regional government policy responses. The first alternative hypothesis (AH1) is that Italian regions containing older and densely settled populations had governments that responded aggressively to the virus. The second alternative hypothesis (AH2) claims that the assertiveness of Italian regional government policy approaches depended upon the strength of the region's healthcare systems. Finally, the third alternative hypothesis (AH3) claims that regions with comparatively high support for right-wing political parties contained governments that responded slowly to the virus. By examining these hypotheses, it will be possible to further identify the priorities held by elected officials when they created their COVID-19 policies. These priorities will help further reveal what democratic sub-national governments consider to be important in times of extreme crisis.

### **Literature Review**

The following scholarly arguments provide crucial context to this empirical investigation of how Robert Putnam's social capital theory can help explain policy approaches and efficacy in responding to COVID-19. Since its introduction into political science, scholars have widely praised social capital for its contribution to democratic thought. The theory has also received criticism. Furthermore, political scientists have analyzed Putnam's social capital theory in nearly every political scenario, with the most relevant to this study being natural disaster responses. Furthermore, in the crisis's aftermath, scholars have already begun to study the pandemic's effect on Italy's state and society relationships. Therefore, this section will be divided into four

sub-sections. The first describes the theory of social capital and its fundamental assumptions. The next sub-section addresses the prominent theoretical critiques of social capital theory. The third demonstrates how the theory has been applied and subdivided to explain institutional responses to natural disaster crises. The final sub-section will disclose two noteworthy studies that have investigated institutional confidence and trust during the first wave of COVID-19 in Italy.

### **Social Capital and Foundations**

The assumptions of Robert Putnam's social capital are inspired by Alexis de Tocqueville's classic *Democracy in America*. In his investigation of American democracy, de Tocqueville coins the term "civil society" when he observes that "Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions, constantly form associations."<sup>7</sup> He concludes that with an abundance of associations in a thriving civil society, Americans can efficiently collectivize and mobilize their communities to pursue shared desires and hold elected officials accountable for their governance. A democratic civil society gives political power to the people, thus replacing monarchs' absolute power and ensuring that politicians and institutions are responsive to their constituents. Robert Putnam relies heavily upon Tocquevillian philosophy when formulating his social capital theory.

Originally developed by sociologists trying to explain how social ties within families and communities affect cognitive development, social capital was linked to political science by Robert Putnam et al. in *Making Democracy Work*.<sup>8</sup> In what was deemed by one source as "the most important work of social science since Pareto and Max Weber," Putnam and his team

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<sup>7</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, Harvey C. Mansfield, and Delba Winthrop, "Democracy in America," *New England Review* (1990-) 21, no. 3 (2000): 129.

<sup>8</sup> Tarrow, "Making Social Science Work Across Space and Time," 922.

attempted to explain the vast discrepancies of institutional effectiveness between northern and southern Italian regional governments. To tackle this complex subject, Putnam et al. created a cross-section analysis of the young Italian sub-national governments.<sup>9</sup> Using quantitative data collected from twenty regional institutions and qualitative historical analysis of the contrasting regional histories, they theorized that the degree of social capital present in a community could explain institutional effectiveness and socioeconomic development.<sup>10</sup>

Like other forms of capital, social capital can be accumulated or lost over an extended period of time. Social capital is not built just by individuals but by communities as a whole. Communities build social capital from two sources; norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement.<sup>11</sup> When community members develop norms of reciprocity, the members can rely on each other to follow norms for acceptable behavior. When individuals follow a norm, they do so out of an expectation that their community will adhere to the same norm in the future. The expectation for social compensation is why this is more than a norm alone; it is a norm of reciprocity. On the other hand, when an individual disobeys a norm, the violator forfeits the community's future benefit and will be shunned as punishment for their deviance. A generalized network of trust and social exchange between community members is vital for these norms to blossom. One example of this norm of reciprocity provided by Putnam occurs in his neighborhood during the fall season. There is an unwritten norm in his neighborhood that when leaves from someone's tree fall on another neighbor's lawn, then the person whose property contains the tree is responsible for raking the tree's leaves. This norm is generated not by legislators or schoolteachers but by community members who mention it to new neighbors,

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<sup>9</sup> Tarrow, 922.

<sup>10</sup> Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti, *Making Democracy Work*, 114.

<sup>11</sup> Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti, 171.

discuss it in their communal conversations, and persistently rake their own yards.<sup>12</sup> When leaves from his tree fall on another neighbor's yard, Putnam rakes these leaves because he knows his neighbors would do the same for him, and if he does not rake the leaves, he risks being shunned from neighborhood events and losing the norm's future benefits.<sup>13</sup>

Like norms of generalized reciprocity, networks of civic engagement are also needed for social capital to accumulate over time. At first, it might seem surprising that an abundance of non-political civil organizations like choral societies and sports clubs can produce social capital effective governance, and socioeconomic development. These civic organizations, however, have many positive impacts on communities. First, networks of civic engagement help establish norms of reciprocity by increasing social interactions and reinforcing the community's expectations of acceptable behavior.<sup>14</sup> In turn, civic organizations raise the community cost of defecting from these norms, which leads to less opportunism and exploitation. Third, networks of civic engagement increase the flow of information throughout a community, which results in more mutual trust, cooperation, and collaboration. Finally, the past successes in collaboration facilitated by civic networks provide a "template for future collaboration," making community mobilization a ritualistically simple task.<sup>15</sup> When norms of generalized reciprocity combine with dense networks of civic engagement, communities are more capable of curbing deceit and opportunism. They are also more likely to solve collective action dilemmas consistently.<sup>16</sup>

A collective action dilemma arises when an endeavor requires widespread community participation for it to be successful. An excellent example of this endeavor is a protest, or in this

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<sup>12</sup> Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti, 171.

<sup>13</sup> Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti, 171.

<sup>14</sup> Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti, 173.

<sup>15</sup> Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti, 174.

<sup>16</sup> Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti, 172.

study's case, a COVID-19 lockdown and a community-based testing and tracing program. When facing this collective endeavor, individual citizens must be inclined to participate. In cases where rational citizens examine the endeavor through a cost-benefit perspective, they might choose to abstain from participating, forgoing any risks while receiving any benefits if the endeavor succeeds without them. If every citizen chooses this seemingly rational approach, then every endeavor requiring collective action will fail. For a community to overcome collective action dilemmas, they must trust that their peers will participate and mobilize alongside them rather than selfishly staying home. Putnam finds that social capital's norms of generalized reciprocity and civic engagement networks are valuable tools in mobilizing communities and conquering these collective action problems.

Once Putnam formulates the two social capital sources, he creates the civic community and correlates high social capital levels to this civic community, resulting in highly effective government institutions. Like de Tocqueville's civil society, Putnam believes that civic communities have high civic engagement levels, as measured, for example, by referenda voter turnout and media consumption. A civic community also contains numerous associational structures, which Putnam measures using the number and density of civic associations. Putnam claims that highly civic societies spawn effective institutions because they facilitate greater public engagement in politics, making citizens hold their governments to higher standards. As a result of this high expectation, politicians in these civic communities are more attentive to their constituents' needs. Also, citizens in a civic community develop attitudes of mutual trust, openness, and adherence to the rule of law. They have mutual respect for their peers and politicians, and they organize themselves with their politicians on a horizontal plane based on equality. These characteristics lead to the emergence of competent and capable institutions.

Putnam also finds that citizens lack a collective sense of honesty, solidarity, and discipline in areas with low social capital levels and un-civic communities. Without social capital, individuals are constantly suspicious of their community members and government officials. This suspicion results in citizens opposing their politicians, disobeying laws, and forcing them to engage in exploitative clientelism inside vertical hierarchies. These vertical hierarchies manifest within associations and citizen-government relationships. In this theoretical context, the policies and effectiveness of regional institutions in Italy during the COVID-19 pandemic can shed light on how social capital influences public policy's course, content, and success during times of extreme crisis.

After conducting his quantitative study of the twenty regions in Italy and thoroughly conceptualizing the civic community and social capital, Putnam consistently finds that the traditional and pre-industrial regions of the South contain the lowest levels of social capital. In contrast, the modernized and wealthy regions of the North contain the highest levels. Consequently, local and regional institutions in the North are far more effective than those in the South. Furthermore, he observed that while northern institutions are more focused on political relationships with the central government, the southern institutions are focused on their fiscal relationships with Rome. Putnam also produces a qualitative study of the historical civic traditions of northern versus southern Italy. Since the middle ages, northern Italy contained a far more extensive civic engagement network with a horizontal relation to their governing institutions. On the other hand, in southern Italy, a longstanding patriarchal rule normalized clientelist and vertical relationships. Putnam concluded that social capital develops slowly, and historical traditions play a significant role in the contemporary presence of social capital within a community. In the aftermath of social capital's study, institutions such as the World Bank have

designated social capital as the “missing link” to development.<sup>17</sup> It is the political variable that helps political scientists understand how societies improve their institutions' effectiveness and, ultimately, their community's socioeconomic well-being.

### **Criticism**

While it is an extraordinarily comprehensive and fruitful theory, social capital has also been the target of theoretical criticism. The criticism of social capital comes from Levi, Boix and Posner, Tavits, Navarro, Barcelo, Lijhpart, Solt, and Tarrow. These theoretical perspectives are essential to recognize because they introduce alternative variables that could have impacted sub-national institutions, and social capital cannot entirely explain COVID-19 policy responses. All critical material is provided to enhance the general understanding of social capital and the broader dynamics of the state and society relationship. These are not intended to completely negate social capital or render it obsolete. Instead, the following critiques serve as a reminder that social capital is not the sole explanatory variable for regional government responses to the COVID crisis.

Critiques of social capital reveal the theory's limitations and flaws. Levi, Boix and Posner, and Tavits all believe that social capital's base assumptions require scrutiny. First, Margaret Levi (1996) investigates the connection between individual associational membership and widespread trust. She asserts that while Putnam claims a link between civic membership and trust, he does not mention the exact mechanism that creates this link and what he truly means by “trust.”<sup>18</sup> Putnam believes that citizens and policymakers trust one another in civic communities,

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<sup>17</sup> John Harriss and Paolo De Renzio, “POLICY ARENA: ‘Missing Link’ or Analytically Missing?: The Concept of Social Capital. Edited by John Harriss. An Introductory Bibliographic Essay,” *Journal of International Development* 9, no. 7 (1997): 930.

<sup>18</sup> Margaret Levi, “Social and Unsocial Capital: A Review Essay of Robert Putnam’s Making Democracy Work,” *Politics & Society* 24, no. 1 (March 1, 1996): 46.



seeing themselves as equals on a horizontal plane. But citing the Italian Mafia as an example, Levi argues that citizens can acquire vigorous trust in vertical networks. Furthermore, state institutions can create mutual trust just as effectively as networks of association. This critique implies that social capital may not be exclusive to highly civic communities but can prosper in communities where vertical and hierarchical relationships are present.

Carles Boix and Daniel Posner's paper (1996) *Making Social Capital Work* claims that social capital theory is somewhat underdeveloped. They contend that one cannot simply judge institutional effectiveness by examining the community's social capital level. Instead, Boix and Posner insist that specific civic associations contribute more to social capital and community civicism than others.<sup>19</sup> Since many associations have different purposes, it would be wrong to assume that all associations equally contribute to social capital within a civic community. For example, anti-democratic associations like the Ku Klux Klan will undermine trust within a community.

Another significant critique of social capital comes from Margit Tavits (2006). In her article "*Making Democracy Work More? Explaining the Linkage between Social Capital and Government Performance*," Tavits refutes Putnam's claim that social capital can make democratic institutions more effective. Instead, Tavits argues that rather than predicting government performance, social capital is better in assessing political activism levels. This assertion diverts attention from social capital's cultural determinism and shifts the focus towards the broader political activism variable.<sup>20</sup> This criticism implies that institutional effectiveness in COVID-19 responses may correlate with higher political activism levels within regions.

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<sup>19</sup> Boix and Posner, "Making Social Capital Work: A Review of Robert Putnam's *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*," (1996): 8.

<sup>20</sup> Tavits, "Making Democracy Work More?," 224.

Much of Putnam's criticism focuses on his underestimation of alternative variables that can have notable impacts on institutional effectiveness. Navarro, Barcelo, Lijhpart, Solt, and Tarrow attempt to identify these intervening variables. Their respective scholarship adds insightful details to the complicated picture of what influences institutional effectiveness. One particular variable is popular mobilization led by political parties. Vicente Navarro (2002) suggests that in crediting northern institutions for their exceptional governance, Putnam ignores the important collectivizing role that the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and its ideology of solidarity played in fostering social capital. By neglecting the social change that the Communist Party carried out in northern Italy, Navarro insists that Putnam overlooked the unifying power of political mobilizations.<sup>21</sup> Joan Barcelo (2014) makes a similar argument by pointing out a correlation between PCI electoral support and social capital in northern Italy.<sup>22</sup> Both authors' arguments build on Antonio Gramsci's theory of civic associations that claims that a vibrant civil society will only benefit democracy when the associations form to combat capitalism.<sup>23</sup>

Frederick Solt (2004) adopts a similar line of criticism undertaken by Arendt Lijhpart (1996). Solt based his argument around Lijhpart's 1996 presidential address to the Political Science Association. In his address, Lijhpart claimed that as voter turnout and political participation rise, responsiveness from elected officials would increase, yielding a better democracy.<sup>24</sup> Like Lijhpart, Solt suggests that a better predictor of effective democratic institutions derives from self-motivated political participation. Furthermore, Solt believes that political participation is dependent on levels of economic development and the region's historical

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<sup>21</sup> Vicente Navarro, "A Critique of Social Capital," *International Journal of Health Services* 32, no. 3 (2002): 428.

<sup>22</sup> Joan Barceló, "Re-Examining a Modern Classic: Does Putnam's Making Democracy Work Suffer from Spuriousness?," *Modern Italy* 19, no. 4 (November 2014): 469.

<sup>23</sup> Barceló, 461.

<sup>24</sup> Lijhpart, "Unequal Participation," 3.

importance of landholding.<sup>25</sup> The variable of political activism is undeniably important, but as Putnam noted, clientelism can intrude on voter preferences, consequently undermining the essence of democracy. This hidden ulterior motive means that political scientists must approach the political participation variable with a grain of salt.

Sidney Tarrow (1996) offers the final intervening variables. Tarrow praises social capital's determinative capabilities, but he also advocates that other causes for institutional effectiveness can lie in structural deficiencies such as exploitative governments, lack of economic capital, and unstable public good prices.<sup>26</sup> These variables are a stark reminder that social capital may not provide the sole or comprehensive explanation of regional institution effectiveness during the COVID-19 pandemic. By acknowledging the theoretical limitations of social capital suggested by these authors, this study can carefully apply Putnam's theory of social capital to the coronavirus crisis.

### **Social Capital During Natural Disasters**

The most relevant scholarly literature on social capital for this thesis derives from investigations into institutional responses following natural disasters. While they are different from one another, both natural disasters and pandemics require decisive governmental responses. The similar role of policymakers is why these two crises can share a similar light. The natural disaster stream of scholarship has primarily applied social capital in the form of its different types. First introduced by Michael Woolcock (1998), these types are; bonding, bridging, and linking social capital.<sup>27</sup> Bonding social capital represents close, horizontal civic connections among homogenous individuals like ethnic groups and families. Bonding social capital alone is

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<sup>25</sup> Solt, "Civics or Structure?" 126

<sup>26</sup> Tarrow, "Making Social Science Work Across Space and Time," 391.

<sup>27</sup> Woolcock, "Social Capital and Economic Development," 154.

not sufficient to produce effective governance. Bridging social capital incorporates more vertical and limited connections among members of different socioeconomic classes. Finally, linking social capital identifies the hierarchical relations between communities and politicians serving in institutions. When these three social capital forms are combined, then effective governance and socioeconomic development can follow. These subdivisions are especially important to address because in many of Italy's southern regions, including Campania and Calabria, bonding social capital is prevalent. These regions contain dense family networks of organized crime, and while this does indicate the presence of bonding social capital, these networks cannot contribute to effective governance. Therefore, the overall social capital levels in the southern regions remain insubstantial.

The sparse research into social capital's effects during natural disaster crises begins with Yuko Nakagawa and Rajib Shaw (2004). To identify how social capital affects post-natural disaster recovery rates, the authors create a comparative case study of institutional responses to earthquakes in the Indian city of Bhuj and the Japanese city of Kobe. They discover that the higher the linking social capital level, indicating a closer tie between a community and its government, the faster the city's recovery and rehabilitation occurs.<sup>28</sup> However, not only is linking social capital required for an institution's effective disaster response, strong community and political leaders play a significant role as well. Meanwhile, the other two types of social capital, bonding, and bridging are irrelevant when a community faces irreversible natural disaster damage.

Oliver Rubin (2016) also explores the connection between social capital and natural disaster responses, but he dissents from Nakagawa and Shaw's emphasis on the linking

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<sup>28</sup> Yuko Nakagawa and Rajib Shaw, "Social Capital and Disaster Recovery: A Comparative Case Study of Kobe and Gujarat Earthquake," (2004): 3.

subdivision of social capital.<sup>29</sup> Rubin admits that linking social capital is significant for communities in natural disasters, but he posits that political survival theory is more determinative of institutional effectiveness. Political survival theory assumes that in-state actors will do whatever possible to maximize rents and time in office, and natural disaster crises pose significant political threats. In democratic nations, these threats are more intense.<sup>30</sup> This drive for political survival means that institutions' actions in the aftermath of natural disasters have distinctive political motivations behind them. While the COVID-19 pandemic may have notable differences to natural disasters, both kinds of crises force sub-national governments to mobilize, and the scholarly contributions of Nakagawa, Shaw, and Rubin provide a solid foundation upon which this thesis can build.

### **Institutional Confidence and Community Trust during Italy's First Wave of COVID-19**

In the months after Italy's first battle with COVID-19, political scientists and psychologists have already begun to ask interesting questions about how the nation's government and people handled the crisis. Two pieces indirectly related to social capital have arisen from these preliminary reports, the first concerning institutional confidence and the second concerning trust. Since trust facilitates social capital, and social capital spawns institutional confidence, these two reports provide valuable insight into the state and society relationships during the first Italian wave of coronavirus.

The first relevant report comes from Falcone et al. (2020), who investigate the importance of community and governmental trust during pandemic situations and use Italy's first wave as their case study. Viewing the pandemic through a psychological lens, Falcone et. al

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<sup>29</sup> Rubin, "The Political Dimension of 'Linking Social Capital,'" 432.

<sup>30</sup> Rubin, 440.

hypothesize that trust is an essential component for communities during pandemic situations. For communities to survive pandemics, their trust must not only lie within the community, it must also be shared with the government.<sup>31</sup> Italy has a protracted history of institutional mistrust, so when the COVID-19 crisis arrived, it would have been accurate to assume the nation was at a significant disadvantage. However, after administering a nationwide survey, Falcone et al. discover that at the beginning of the crisis, the nation's long trend of institutional mistrust suddenly reversed in what the authors characterize as a "trust boom."<sup>32</sup> This trust boom, which occurred everywhere in Italy, was not the product of a "collective epiphany" regarding the quality of governance.<sup>33</sup> Instead, the authors believe the phenomenon occurred due to a widespread cognitive realignment to accommodate for the new pandemic's reality. Now that the pandemic was threatening them, Italians realized that in order to survive, they needed to rely on their public institutions for guidance, and this reliance is the source of the trust boom.<sup>34</sup> The central government received the vast majority of trust resulting from this cognitive shift.<sup>35</sup> As Chapter Three's empirical analysis will clarify on this point, this newfound trust in Rome, coupled with Rome's poor public messaging, created significant problems for regional governments trying to persuade their citizens to take the virus seriously.

Also using Italy's first wave of coronavirus, Guglielmi et al. (2020) attempt to explain the complex relationships between institutional confidence and community adherence to COVID-19 policy directives. In their findings, the authors discover a similar trend as Falcone et al. where the majority of institutional confidence is directed towards the central government over the

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<sup>31</sup> Falcone et al., "All We Need Is Trust," 1.

<sup>32</sup> Falcone et al., 13.

<sup>33</sup> Falcone et al., 14.

<sup>34</sup> Falcone et al., 14.

<sup>35</sup> Falcone et al., 12.

regional governments. They also discover that institutional confidence is positively associated with policy compliance, a correlation they call the “cascade of confidence.”<sup>36</sup> This cascade of confidence is crucial for promoting policy compliance, but when institutions quarrel with one another, institutional confidence is weakened, the cascade of confidence falls, and policies are adhered to less.<sup>37</sup> To maintain the cascade of confidence, institutions must have clear and united public messaging agendas supporting the benefits of policy adherence.<sup>38</sup> The authors also discover a phenomenon called the “paradox of support,” where the perception of safety from COVID-19 decreases adherence to restrictive directives.<sup>39</sup> Both of these concepts are helpful in understanding the shifting dynamics between the institutions and their citizens.

### **Methodology**

To substantiate this thesis’s argument and judge the veracity of the alternative hypotheses, this analysis will be comprised of a qualitative and quantitative comparative case study of two northern regions, Lombardy and Veneto, and two southern regions, Campania and Calabria. The unit of analysis has been placed on the regional level for a variety of reasons. First, in federal political systems such as Italy’s, pandemics and all health-related crises, are directly combatted at the sub-national level. While the federal government can offer broad oversight and resources like federal funds and personal protective equipment, sub-national governments are initially responsible for formulating and implementing pandemic public policies. Even though the central government eventually imposed a national lockdown to supersede regional policies, regional governments were the first responders to the crisis. The second reason for this regional unit of analysis regards data availability. Local government data is significantly more difficult to

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<sup>36</sup> Guglielmi et al., “Public Acceptability of Containment Measures during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Italy,” 5.

<sup>37</sup> Guglielmi et al., 9.

<sup>38</sup> Guglielmi et al., 9.

<sup>39</sup> Guglielmi et al., 9.

gather and can lack reliability, a problem especially relevant for regions of poor governance and socioeconomic capacity like Calabria. The third reason for this study's unit of analysis is horizontal case comparability. By choosing to study Italian regions, it is possible to accurately compare regional performances on an even horizontal plane. Of course, some regional institutions had economic advantages over others; for instance, the Veneto regional government's capacity for expensive contact-tracing programs was far greater than Calabria's. In addition to this disparity, the virus's ramification was heavily localized in northern Italy rather than southern Italy. These discrepancies will be carefully addressed and factored into the final evaluation of each regional government's performance and the potential influences of the region's social capital level. Finally, by choosing to conduct this study at the regional level, it is possible to meticulously review the role social capital played in determining governmental responses to the COVID-19 crisis.

To successfully understand social capital's effects on policymaking during a crisis, four regions will be analyzed; two from the North containing high social capital and two from the South containing low social capital. For regions to take part in this case study, they must fulfill two fundamental criteria. First, for the selected region to honestly speak for the governmental effects of high or low social capital, their communities must genuinely contain that social capital level. To accurately determine a region's social capital, this assessment will follow Putnam's lead by evaluating the prospective region's four indicators of a highly civic community; association density, national referendum electoral turnout, newspaper readership, and preference voting levels. First, to identify associational structure density and the "vibrancy of associational life," data will be gathered on the number of community associations that form the region's civil



societies.<sup>40</sup> This data will be found in primary sources and online census records taken by both the Italian central government and the regional governments. The second, third, and fourth social capital indicators will measure the region's civic engagement with politics and their government. Two of these indicators, national referendum electoral turnout and newspaper readership levels, will be identified using primary data sources provided by the Italian National Institute of Statistics. The final civic community indicator, preference voting levels, will originate from a secondary source; the research conducted by a preference voting scholar.

Once the selected region's social capital levels have been determined as high or low, the second criterion will be examined. To compare each region's government response to the first wave of COVID-19, it must be established that each region was threatened by the virus at the beginning of the crisis. This threat would imply that their governments had sufficient reasons to take policy action. If a regional government had no justifiable reason to fear the crisis, the policy inaction resulting from this legitimate indifference would skew this study's results. As long as each of the selected regions can reasonably represent their ends social capital, and their governments had a logical reason to formulate policy to combat the COVID-19 outbreak, these regions are acceptable for analysis. After thoroughly screening Italy's twenty regions, the regions fulfilling these criteria to the highest degree are the two northern regions of Lombardy and Veneto, and two southern regions, Campania and Calabria. Lombardy and Veneto will represent the effects of high social capital, while Campania and Calabria will represent the absence of social capital.

Next, to investigate a regional government's experience with the COVID-19 crisis, this study will use primary sources such as political elite discourse and government decrees, as well

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<sup>40</sup> Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti, *Making Democracy Work*, 91.

secondary sources such as academic papers and media articles. To gain further insight into regional policy approaches, research will be supplemented by virtual interviews with community figures such as regional government politicians and health officials. All of this research will be gathered to serve a variety of purposes. First, in Chapter Three, research will be used to create a detailed timeline depicting the virus's onset in Italy. Second, after the crisis's general timeline is explained, each of the selected regional governments' policy approaches and responses will be disclosed and analyzed. This analysis will be used to determine any conclusions concerning the relationship between social capital and coronavirus governance. These conclusions may help contribute to the understanding of how social capital can be relevant during extreme crises similar to the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, in Chapter Four, all research and conclusions will be consolidated to assess the accuracy of the hypotheses.

### **Chapter Outline**

This thesis is centered upon the argument that social capital played an underlying role in regional government policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, and when these governments implemented policy solutions that accommodated for their region's social capital level, then these policies were consistently more effective in defending the population. To make this argument clear and precise, this study has been divided into four chapters. This chapter has served as an introduction, investigating the past scholarship on Putnam's social capital theory and how it needs examination in times of significant crisis. In the following chapter, I will introduce and justify the four-case comparison. Once the regions' social capital levels are examined, I will confirm that each regional government had significant motivation to formulate COVID-19 policies at the beginning of the crisis.

Divided into two parts, Chapter Three will serve as this study's primary empirical analysis. The first half of the analysis will include the general timeline of COVID-19. In the second section the potential roles of social capital will be revealed through an analysis of each selected region's policy response to the COVID-19 outbreak. Starting with the regions representing high social capital and working down to the regions representing low social capital, each government's response will be inspected for any potential influences generated by the region's respective social capital level. Chapter Four will summarize this study's claim and findings, assess the alternative hypotheses' accuracy, present avenues for future research, and conclude.

## CHAPTER TWO

By analyzing the dynamics between regional government COVID-19 policy approaches and social capital, this study can contribute to both the theory of social capital and the broader scholarship on state and society relationships. Understanding how social capital can affect governance during a crisis requires comparisons among Italian regions. By investigating two northern Italian regions with high social capital and two southern Italian regions with lower social capital, this study can craft substantial conclusions concerning how varying social capital levels can influence policy approaches during a crisis.

This chapter explains the process for selecting these four regions and analyzes their respective characteristics. The first half of this analysis will investigate each region's social capital, drawing on the four indicators of the civic community that Putnam identified in *Making Democracy Work*. The second half will examine each region's susceptibility to COVID-19. To accurately compare each region's policy responses to COVID-19 in spring 2020, it must be confirmed that each regional government had a substantive reason to be concerned about the virus when it was violently spreading in Lombardy in mid-February and early March 2020. To understand how social capital affected regional policy responses, COVID-19 must pose a significant threat across each of the regions taking part in this study.

### **Region Selection**

Much of the variation in Italy's policy responses to coronavirus took place among Italy's twenty regions. To examine how variation in social capital affected policy responses across regions threatened by the virus, this study will concentrate on the Lombardy and Veneto regions in the North, and the Campania and Calabria regions in the South. Each region's analysis will focus on the first wave of COVID-19 in Italy, which began in mid-February 2020. This first

wave placed regional government officials in a time-sensitive position, forcing them to devise wholly original and innovative policies to counter the spread, with little to no precedent to follow. If this study also analyzed regional government responses to the second wave of the virus, this standard of originality would be lost, as prior experience would prepare government officials.

The sections that follow will explain why each selected region—Lombardy, Veneto, Campania, and Calabria—varies in terms of social capital but is similar in terms of its threat from COVID-19 in spring 2020.

### **Social Capital**

To accurately determine how social capital can influence government policies during a crisis, each selected region's social capital level must be precisely identified and confirmed. Drawing on Putnam's example, each region's social capital level will be evaluated by examining the four key indicators of a civic community: association density, national referendum electoral turnout, newspaper readership, and preference voting levels.

The first core component and indicator of social capital is civic life's vibrancy, measured by the number of non-governmental associations present in a community. These associations can range from amateur soccer clubs to non-profit groups and literary circles. Invoking de Tocqueville's theory of civil society, civil associations can enhance the effectiveness, attentiveness, and foundations of a democratic government. In *Making Democracy Work*, Putnam confirmed De Tocqueville's thesis by concluding that civil associations not only teach members empathy, cooperation, and trust, they can unify individuals from diverse backgrounds in the pursuit of lofty goals. When this occurs, overall governance is improved, and elected officials are more attentive to their constituents' concerns.

An annual study conducted by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat) presents regional variation in association networks within Italy. Throughout the last twenty years, and regardless of location, Italy's association networks have slowly grown. However, there is still a sharp divide in the density of associational life between the northern and southern Italian regions.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, the trend Putnam discovered in the popularity of soccer clubs has remained constant. Today, sports and recreation associations comprise 64% of the civic associations in Italy.<sup>42</sup> To account for population differences, the association density variable will be calculated by the number of associations per 10,000 residents. In the North, the number of associations per 10,000 people in Lombardy was 189, while in Veneto, it was 163.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, in the southern regions, Campania's association density level rested at 58, and Calabria trailed directly behind at 57 associations per 10,000 residents.<sup>44</sup> These findings are the first clue to understanding the whole social capital level for each of these regions.

The next core element of the social capital variable is newspaper readership. While newspapers might seem to be an outdated concept, the close linkage between newspapers and public interest is undeniable. Consumers can use television and radio in various ways, but when someone reads a newspaper, they are interested in what is happening in their community. Using data gathered by Istat, the exact level of newspaper readership for each of the four regions will be measured in the number of people who read a newspaper five or more times a week out of one hundred residents. In the North, both Lombardy and Veneto had 35 readers per 100 residents.<sup>45</sup> In the South, Campania contained 22 readers while Calabria had 26.<sup>46</sup> While the discrepancy is

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<sup>41</sup> "Structure and Profiles of the Non-Profit Sector," 4.

<sup>42</sup> "Structure and Profiles of the Non-Profit Sector," 4.

<sup>43</sup> "Structure and Profiles of the Non-Profit Sector," 2.

<sup>44</sup> "Structure and Profiles of the Non-Profit Sector," 2.

<sup>45</sup> "Aspects of Daily Life : Social Activities - Detail Age."

<sup>46</sup> "Aspects of Daily Life : Social Activities - Detail Age."

less defined than association density, there remains a noteworthy difference between the northern and southern regions.

The third indicator of social capital and its civic community is political participation. A standard measurement for political participation would be electoral turnout, but Putnam noted simple turnout rates can be deceiving as a measure of social capital. In many parts of Italy, especially in the South, vertical patronage, and quid pro quo relationships can be subtle drivers of electoral turnout.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, to correctly measure political participation as a proxy for social capital, electoral turnout in national referenda is far more useful. Data for measuring national referenda turnout is provided by the Italian Department for Internal and Territorial Affairs.

Since the turn of the century, the scope and topic of Italian referenda have shifted away from household issues like divorce and renewable energy and towards constitutional reform packages.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, the downward trend of national referenda electoral turnout in Italy has persisted, with only four of the last ten referendums reaching the 50% turnout threshold.<sup>49</sup> Despite this widespread decline in turnout, the turnout for referenda in the last twenty years is useful in evaluating social capital. This variable will be interpreted using the last six national referenda in Italy, three of which concerned the constitution's provisions. The other three involved electoral law reform, oil drilling, and nuclear power.<sup>50</sup> As expected, the divide in voting levels between the North and South persisted. Lombardy's average turnout for these six referenda was 49%. When accounting for the region's significantly larger population upwards of ten million, this turnout is quite high. In the second northern region, Veneto, the average referendum turnout sat higher at 55%. Average national referenda electoral turnout in the South remained

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<sup>47</sup> Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti, *Making Democracy Work*, 93.

<sup>48</sup> "Le autonomie locali, le elezioni, la finanza locale e i servizi demografici..."

<sup>49</sup> "Le autonomie locali, le elezioni, la finanza locale e i servizi demografici..."

<sup>50</sup> "Le autonomie locali, le elezioni, la finanza locale e i servizi demografici..."

lower than that in the North. In Campania, turnout hovered around 42%, and Calabria stood one percentage point lower at 41%.<sup>51</sup> While the vast gap in turnout appears to have diminished since Putnam studied Italy's social capital disparity, the difference is still present, furthering the implication that the northern regions still lead the South in social capital.

The fourth and final indicator of social capital is preference voting levels. While Putnam found referenda voter turnout levels significant, he allocated far more weight to preference voting levels. During national elections in Italy, where voters allocate legislative seats to parties based on proportional representation, citizens select the political party they support. When Putnam was conducting his study, Italian electoral law permitted “open list voting,” where voters could also select a specific member from their chosen political party, utilizing their preference vote.<sup>52</sup> While scholars have disputed this correlation, Putnam concluded that preference voting was correlated with patron-client networks, designating an overall negative correlation with social capital.<sup>53</sup> This conclusion means that regions with high preference voting levels indicate clientelism and low social capital levels. Due to a 1993 referendum on Italy's electoral laws, the open list voting system that permitted preference voting in national elections switched to a closed list, abolishing the preference vote. Later, the Italian Electoral Law of 2015 reverted the voting system back to the open list. Fortunate for this study, however, open list voting was never repealed for regional elections and EU elections.

In *Preferential Voting Systems: Influence on Intra-Party Competition and Voting Behaviour*, Professor Gianluca Passarelli and his coauthors compared national and regional preference voting levels within Italy by taking a sample of 200 voters per election and seeing

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<sup>51</sup> “Le autonomie locali, le elezioni, la finanza locale e i servizi demografici...”

<sup>52</sup> Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti, *Making Democracy Work*, 94.

<sup>53</sup> Gianluca Passarelli, personal communication, February 11, 2021



how many had used their preference votes.<sup>54</sup> Analysis of Professor Passarelli's data partially confirms that the North-South social capital split in preference voting has persisted in Italy today.

In regional elections, Northern populations in Lombardy and Veneto cast far less preference votes than the southern populations. While the most recent regional election data gathered is from 2010, there is little reason to believe this enduring trend has reversed. In samples of 200 voters in Italy's 2010 regional elections, Lombardy had an average of 23 voters casting a preference vote.<sup>55</sup> Lombardy's northern neighbor Veneto had an average of 35 preference voters.<sup>56</sup> Down South, the Campania region saw a significant increase in preference votes cast, with an average of 91 votes cast out of 200. In Calabria, this number was 84.<sup>57</sup> There is a clear disparity in preference voting levels between the northern and southern regions selected for this study. This preference vote indicator has a slightly weaker correlation to social capital because, as Professor Passarelli noted, voters do not always use their preference vote as a tool for patronage. Sometimes voters can cast a preference vote because their preferred candidate has been friendly to them. Nevertheless, it is useful to investigate this indicator despite it having a weaker correlation to social capital. The collected statistics for each of the region's four social capital indicators can be observed in Table 2.1.

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<sup>54</sup> Passarelli, *Preferential Voting Systems Influence on Intra-Party Competition and Voting Behaviour*.

<sup>55</sup> Passarelli.

<sup>56</sup> Passarelli.

<sup>57</sup> Passarelli.

**Table 2.1 Regional Trends in Social Capital Indicators**

	<i>Association Density<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Newspaper Readership<sup>b</sup></i>	<i>Natl. Referenda Turnout<sup>c</sup></i>	<i>Preference Voting<sup>d</sup></i>
Lombardy	189	35	49%	23
Veneto	163	35	55%	35
Campania	58	22	42%	91
Calabria	57	26	41%	84

*Sources: Istat (Association Density and Newspaper Readership), Italian Department for Internal and Territorial Affairs (Referenda Turnout), Prof. Gianluca Passarelli (Preference Voting)*

<sup>a</sup> Association Density measured in number of associations per 10,000 residents.

<sup>b</sup> Newspaper Readership measured in number of residents who read newspapers 5+ times a week per 100 residents.

<sup>c</sup> Natl. Referenda Turnout measured in average regional turnout over the last six national referendums.

<sup>d</sup> Preference Voting measured in number of preference votes cast out of 200 voters in 2010 gubernatorial elections.

After examining all of the civic community's indicators, it is clear that the four regions selected for this study will accurately represent the variation of social capital in Italy, with higher levels in the North and lower levels in the South. While it appears that the social capital gap that Putnam discovered between the North and South has since narrowed, these regions still have evident disparities. Lombardy and Veneto continue to present higher social capital levels than their southern counterparts in Campania and Calabria. With the social capital levels concretely defined for each region, this process can proceed to the next criterion for region eligibility: whether or not COVID-19 was posing enough of a threat to motivate policymakers to take address it.

### **Concern for COVID-19**

For the regions of Lombardy, Veneto, and Campania, in mid-February 2020, COVID-19 threatened the regions' immense populations. These three regions all have populations above

five million, meaning the potential for a deadly human spread was extremely high. Furthermore, these three regions all contain dense cities that serve as popular tourist destinations: Milan in Lombardy, Venice in Veneto, and Naples in Campania. The presence of these dense urban environments, and the possibility of spreading the virus to other countries were most likely concerning for regional policymakers when facing the outbreak.

The concern caused by COVID-19's early spread in Italy for the regional government in Calabria is unique compared to the other three regions. Calabria is one of the poorest regions in Italy, with a considerably weak economy and healthcare infrastructure. For Calabria, while the virus was spreading thousands of miles away, the regional government knew of the tremendous economic damage the virus would inflict if it made its way into the region. The stakes were raised even higher due to the majority of Calabria's economy relying on tourism. If COVID-19 reached the region, the result would be both an economic and healthcare catastrophe. Regional government officials in Calabria were mindful of this in the early days of Italy's grapple with the virus.<sup>58</sup>

COVID-19's physical presence would also be useful in indicating a government's concern, so with the exception of Calabria, Lombardy, Veneto, and Campania were selected based upon how quickly the virus was spreading within each region during the early stage of the Italian outbreak. By establishing a standard of concern for coronavirus across selected regional governments, policy responses can be accurately compared, and social capital's influences can be identified.

On March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020, eleven days after Lombardy's health officials confirmed the presence of an uncontrolled outbreak, the Italian Department of Civil Protection began releasing

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<sup>58</sup> "CORONAVIRUS, JOLE SANTELLI." February 23, 2020.

data from COVID-19 test results conducted throughout the nation. In the eight days from March 2<sup>nd</sup> to March 9<sup>th</sup>, confirmed coronavirus cases nationwide grew by 345%, from 2,063 to 9,172. In this same period, the Lombardy, Veneto, and Campania regions saw cases increase at a similarly rapid rate. As the center of the outbreak, Lombardy's cases grew from 1,254 to 5,467, a 336% increase. Neighboring to the east of Lombardy, the Veneto region witnessed a case increase from 273 to 694, a 154% growth. Down South, the region of Campania saw cases grow from 17 to 120, for an increase of 605%. For these three regions, COVID-19 was spreading rapidly. Therefore, government officials were likely feeling pressured to implement policies to slow the spread of the disease. Meanwhile, in Calabria, from the 173 tests taken from March 2<sup>nd</sup> to March 9<sup>th</sup>, the region's cases went from one to eleven. While this caseload might not appear as alarming as the other regions, due to Calabria's economic and healthcare vulnerabilities, it is more than likely that coronavirus's mere presence within the region was problematic to policymakers.

**Table 2.2 Coronavirus Case increase from March 2<sup>nd</sup> to March 9<sup>th</sup>**

	<i>March 2<sup>nd</sup> Cases</i>	<i>March 9<sup>th</sup> Cases</i>	<i>% Increase</i>	<i>Tests Taken <sup>a</sup></i>
Lombardy	1,254	5,467	336%	12,210
Veneto	273	694	154%	6,174
Campania	17	120	605%	607
Calabria	1	11	909%	134
Nationwide	2,063	9,172	345%	30,481

*Source: Italian Department of Civil Protection*

<sup>a</sup> Tests taken from March 2<sup>nd</sup> to March 9<sup>th</sup>

While concern is not a quantifiable variable, it does have an underlying binary quality. When confronting a pandemic, you are either concerned for the virus, or you are not at all. As an elected official responsible for protecting those who put you in power, a pandemic would be extremely worrisome. Elected officials are primarily interested in increasing the likelihood of

remaining in power, and it is undeniable that your constituents' wellbeing is associated with this likelihood. When a virus with the potential to eliminate hundreds of thousands of your constituents comes knocking on your region's doorstep, you will notice. While an elected official's actions in response to concern can vary, what matters in this study is that there was that concern in the first place. These four particular regions have been selected because each regional government was undoubtedly aware of the virus and the potential devastation it could leave if it remained unaddressed. These regions may have had different reasons to fear the virus. Still, regardless, the concern for the virus was there, and policymakers were in the position to act.

### **Expected Outcomes**

Before proceeding to this study's empirical analysis, it is necessary to revisit the alternative hypotheses. It would be unreasonable to expect government officials to only have accounted for social capital when they developed their COVID-19 solutions, so it is still necessary to examine what else may have contributed to the policymaking process, and how these factors differed across the regions.

The first alternative hypothesis (AH1) posits that regions containing older and more densely settled populations had regional governments that responded vigorously to the virus. Due to COVID-19's significantly higher mortality for older age groups combined with its high rate of transmission, it would make rational sense for regional governments with older and densely settled populations to respond more aggressively. For this hypothesis to be confirmed, the regions with older average populations (Lombardian and Venetian populations both have average ages of 46) will respond in similarly assertive fashions.<sup>59</sup> The second requirement for this hypothesis to be confirmed is for regions with greater population densities to respond more

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<sup>59</sup>Statista "Italy."

zealously than others. This variable can also be judged by comparing the responses of the Lombardian and Venetian governments, where Lombardy's population density is far greater than Veneto's.<sup>60</sup> For this hypothesis to be denied, there needs to be no correlation with higher population age and density to assertive policy approaches.

The second alternative hypothesis (AH2) claims that the assertiveness of the region's policy response is dependent on the strength of the region's healthcare infrastructure. This variable could be significant because healthcare systems are directly tied to the region's ability in combatting the COVID-19 crisis. For this hypothesis to be substantiated, the regions with far poorer healthcare systems (Campania and Calabria), will approach policymaking in equally aggressive manners. On the other hand, in the northern regions with strong healthcare systems, regional governments might have responded slowly to the outbreak, knowing their healthcare systems were strong. If the policy styles across the two southern regions or across the two northern regions are not inversely proportional to their healthcare strength similar, then AH2 cannot be accepted.

The third and final alternative hypothesis (AH3) speculates that regions with high levels of support for right-wing political parties contain governments that responded slowly to the crisis. As this appeared to be a trend in the United States, it is worth analyzing in the hyper-partisan Italian political climate. A compelling method to judge this hypothesis is to compare the Lombardian and Venetian policy approaches, where both region's Governors are members of the far-right political party known as the Northern League. If both region's policy approaches are passive and ineffective, this can confirm the hypothesis. However, if either one or both of these

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<sup>60</sup> Binkin et al., "Protecting Our Health Care Workers While Protecting Our Communities during the COVID-19 Pandemic," 2.

governments pursues an aggressive and assertive policy approach to the crisis, then this hypothesis will be rejected.

### **Conclusion**

Italy's regional government officials faced an unprecedented challenge when coronavirus began spreading through their nation. With no viable guide to follow, the virus's potential devastation forced Italian regional governments to make tough policy decisions, knowing that the cost for failure would not only be human lives, but also their careers. This problematic position warrants an investigation into Italy and its regional governments within. In choosing each of these regions, policymaking conditions have been aligned, ensuring that all regions are more or less equally threatened by the virus, with this threat commencing simultaneously, during the start of Italy's first wave of contagion. By putting each of these regions through a preliminary analysis, it can be concluded that all selected regions, representing their end of social capital, are fairly oriented on the starting line. This is not to say that each region's relationship to the outbreak is exactly the same. As the next chapter will explain, some situational factors differ between the regions. This is especially the case for the Lombardy region, which contained the outbreak's epicenter. The following chapter, the most important one for this study, will explain how each of these four region's governments responded to the unprecedented COVID-19 outbreak in Italy.

### CHAPTER THREE

When one imagines a pandemic, the first images that come to mind range from the hellish drawings of the Black Death to the eerie photographs of the polio pandemic's iron lung ventilators. Of all kinds of crises, pandemics are uniquely dangerous and challenging to control. Unlike declarations of war or a bubble popping on Wall Street, viral pandemics are often completely silent when they begin. Further complicating matters is the obvious fact that politicians cannot negotiate with a virus. Viruses do not take bribes and are not intimidated by pre-emptive drone strikes. When a virus spreads at a rapid speed, it can be nearly impossible to contain. When it poses a deadly threat to specific populations, the potential for catastrophe is immense. If a government and its citizens fail to act decisively to a pandemic, the crisis can result in a devastating loss of life.

Moreover, unlike in other crises, a government cannot fight a pandemic alone. The only way for a government and its people to survive a pandemic is through close collaboration. A foundational prerequisite for effective collaboration between any two entities is trust. In the case of a pandemic, trust must function bilaterally – the government institution needs to trust its people, and the people must trust their government institution.<sup>61</sup> Governments must rely on their constituents' compliance, which is especially difficult when policies include unenforceable precautions like hand-washing and mask-wearing.<sup>62</sup> Citizens must place their trust in two places. First, to feel like they can make a difference as individuals, citizens need to trust one another, believing that if they do their part others will do the same. Second, citizens need to trust their government institutions, having faith that whatever policy response is applied, it will be effective and worth the effort. Since trust is a foundational part of social capital, social capital may have

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<sup>61</sup> Falcone et al., "All We Need Is Trust," 1.

<sup>62</sup> Guglielmi et al., "Public Acceptability of Containment Measures during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Italy," 1.



played an intriguing role in how Italy's regional governments and other democratic institutions formulated COVID-19 policies, as well as how those policies succeeded in stemming the pandemic.

COVID-19, also known as SARS-CoV-2, proved itself to be the “perfect storm” of a pandemic. While the disease was not as deadly as other coronaviruses like SARS which killed one in ten people,<sup>63</sup> COVID-19's lethality for certain subpopulations, coupled with its ability to spread rapidly, made it extremely dangerous.<sup>64</sup> Additionally, COVID-19 was an entirely novel and unidentified virus, leaving health officials scrambling to understand it. Policymakers, who were initially as confused as health experts, drafted containment policies on-the-fly, knowing that the virus was selecting a new target with every passing minute. In the first months of the new decade, the pandemic tested every government's ability to mobilize efficiently. Failure to act quickly usually resulted in governments hopelessly watching the virus wreak havoc through their communities.

The findings from this study suggest that social capital may have played an underlying and noteworthy role in shaping regional government policy approaches to COVID-19. In the first few months of the crisis, regional governments acted in ways that indicate they were being influenced by their civic community's strengths or weaknesses. For example, in the high social capital regions, government officials showed signs of hesitancy towards enacting policies that could potentially fail. This indecisiveness implies that government officials knew their civic communities held them to high standards, and if they fell short of these standards, the civic community would hold them accountable. On the other hand, when regional governments found the confidence to act, their civic communities collectively mobilized to help facilitate policy

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<sup>63</sup> Threats et al., *OVERVIEW OF THE SARS EPIDEMIC*.

<sup>64</sup> Giorno, “Coronavirus, 2 Morti e Oltre 100 Contagiati in Lombardia. Colpite 7 Province.”

success. In the South, regional governments approached COVID-19 policy urgently and coercively. This bold approach could be a reflection of the regions' weak healthcare infrastructures, which may have been weak due to the regions' social capital scarcity. Their assertive strategy could also potentially signal that social capital's absence made regional governments mistrust their citizens collective ability to comply with lockdown protocols, thus motivating the governments to use a more involved policies in protecting the regions. These conclusions concerning the civic community's effects on policy approaches could potentially place social capital in a meaningful position for explaining effective crisis governance.

This chapter will first explain how the pandemic began, how it arrived in Italy, and the Italian central government's policy response. After providing the context for the larger crisis, this chapter will include an analysis of how each selected region chose to confront the virus and how social capital may have influenced each regional government's policy approaches, and their results.

### **The First Wave of COVID-19 in Italy**

While the origins of the virus remain unclear, the World Health Organization states that in late 2019, the novel COVID-19 disease passed from an infected bat to a human in the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market of Wuhan City, located in the Hubei Province in Central China.<sup>65</sup> The pathogen proceeded to spread throughout Wuhan. Due to the population movement occurring in preparation for the Chinese New Year celebration, the virus quickly reached thirty provinces outside of Hubei.<sup>66</sup> With an incubation period of three days, the virus speedily infected family members and medical workers. By the end of January 2020, the World Health Organization confirmed more than 10,000 cases across China and issued a Global Health

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<sup>65</sup> "WHO, Archived: WHO Timeline - COVID-19 ."

<sup>66</sup> Zhang et al., "COVID-19 Containment," 215.

Emergency.<sup>67</sup> Beijing responded to the unprecedented outbreak by allocating significant funds towards public health services and imposing a lockdown for the eleven million people living in Wuhan.<sup>68</sup>

To slow the outbreak's speed, Hubei's provincial government, in cooperation with Beijing, declared for its 60 million inhabitants a "sealed containment" protocol.<sup>69</sup> Using volunteers from civil society associations, the provincial government began physically sealing people in their homes, building barricades, and ramping up surveillance to ensure widespread compliance with their decree.<sup>70</sup> While these measures effectively slowed the spread within China, the Chinese government had not moved fast enough to prevent the virus from entering other countries. By January 31<sup>st</sup>, Italy, the United States, Germany, Japan, Vietnam, and Taiwan located COVID-19 in isolated cases.<sup>71</sup> The first outbreak of COVID-19 took place in Wuhan, but soon, the Italian region of Lombardy would be next in line.

Until mid-February, the Italian government had identified three cases of the novel coronavirus, and effectively isolated them. On January 29<sup>th</sup>, Italian health officials detected the first two cases when a Chinese couple traveling from Wuhan flew to Milan and a week later began developing symptoms of the virus in Rome.<sup>72</sup> While no additional cases arose due to the couple, this incident served as a wake-up call for the Italian central government led by former Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte. On January 30<sup>th</sup>, two days after the couple arrived at Rome's Larazzo Spallanzani National Institute for Infectious Diseases, the central government suspended all international flights to and from China. This decision made Italy the first EU state to impose

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<sup>67</sup> Zu et al., "Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)."

<sup>68</sup> Zhang et al., "COVID-19 Containment," 215.

<sup>69</sup> Wu, "Sealed In."

<sup>70</sup> Wu.

<sup>71</sup> "A Timeline of COVID-19 Developments in 2020."

<sup>72</sup> Frignani, "Prima a Milano, Poi l'hotel a Roma."

restrictions on travel.<sup>73</sup> On January 31<sup>st</sup>, the Conte government declared a state of national emergency, granting the central government assertive action in preventing and addressing an outbreak. The third and final isolated case before the outbreak was contracted on February 6<sup>th</sup> by an Italian national who evacuated from Wuhan the week prior.<sup>74</sup>

### **The First Three Days of Italy's Outbreak**

Italy discovered the first coronavirus outbreak in the western world during the night of Thursday, February 20<sup>th</sup>, when a 38-year-old man, who the nation would soon know as “patient one,” tested positive for COVID-19 inside a Lombardy hospital.<sup>75</sup> After the patient showed resistance to a flu treatment, an anesthetist named Annalisa Malara decided to test the individual for COVID-19.<sup>76</sup> When the positive test result arrived, Malara became the doctor who discovered the Italian coronavirus outbreak.

Located just 40 miles south of Milan in the town of Codogno,<sup>77</sup> the hospital treating patient one became the center of the outbreak, and Codogno became the “Wuhan of Italy.”<sup>78</sup> Before this case was confirmed, doctors in the hospital had reported an influx of unexplained and “weird” cases of a pneumonia-like illness.<sup>79</sup> What made patient one’s case especially disturbing was his infection’s uncertain cause. Patient one had no relevant travel history to China and had zero contact with the other confirmed cases.<sup>80</sup> The only plausible source of transmission occurred two weeks earlier, on January 21<sup>st</sup>, when he had dinner with a European who recently returned from a business trip to Asia.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> “Italy Suspends All China Flights as Coronavirus Cases Confirmed in Rome.”

<sup>74</sup> CNN, “February 6, 2020 Coronavirus News.”

<sup>75</sup> Cereda et al., “The Early Phase of the COVID-19 Outbreak in Lombardy, Italy,” 4.

<sup>76</sup> “L’anestesista di Codogno che ha intuito la diagnosi di Mattia.”

<sup>77</sup> Goodman and Maines, “Not Just an Italian Problem.”

<sup>78</sup> “Coronavirus.”

<sup>79</sup> “Coronavirus.”

<sup>80</sup> QuotidianoNet, “Coronavirus, Altro Caso in Italia. Italiano Ricoverato a Codogno (Lodi).”

<sup>81</sup> “Codogno, i medici dell’ospedale in trincea.”

To make matters worse, patient one had an active social life. In the time between his infection and testing positive in the Codogno hospital, he had gone to work, participated in two half marathon races, routinely played recreational soccer, and attended multiple business dinners.<sup>82</sup> The infected individual was asymptomatic until February 14<sup>th</sup>, when he began displaying flu-like symptoms, and a doctor prescribed him medication in the town of Castiglione d'Adda.<sup>83</sup> Upon receiving his positive test result, his pregnant wife and another close friend rushed to a Milan hospital.<sup>84</sup> An Italian Epidemiologist grimly stated, “who we call ‘Patient One’ was probably ‘Patient 200.’”<sup>85</sup>

#### Friday, February 21<sup>st</sup>

On the morning of February 21<sup>st</sup>, Guilio Gallera, Lombardy’s Councilor for Welfare, held a press conference and shared the disturbing news. With advice from health experts, Councilor Gallera correctly claimed that patient one’s case was of asymptomatic contagion, and patient one had been unknowingly spreading the virus for upwards of eighteen days.<sup>86</sup> On the first full day of the outbreak, confirmed coronavirus cases jumped from zero to sixteen, with fourteen in Lombardy and two in Veneto.<sup>87</sup>

Responding quickly to the surge of cases, the Governor of Lombardy, Attilio Fontana, collaborated with the Ministry of Health and the Department of Civil Protection to create an emergency task force to govern the region's intensive care units (ICU).<sup>88</sup> At this time, Lombardy’s ICUs contained 720 beds across 74 hospitals.<sup>89</sup> An un-mitigated spread of the virus

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<sup>82</sup> “Coronavirus, in Veneto la prima vittima, Adriano Trevisan, 78 anni. Venti contagiati in Italia. Conte.”

<sup>83</sup> “Codogno, i medici dell’ospedale in trincea.”

<sup>84</sup> “Codogno, i medici dell’ospedale in trincea.”

<sup>85</sup> Horowitz, Bubola, and Povoledo, “Italy, Pandemic’s New Epicenter, Has Lessons for the World.”

<sup>86</sup> QuotidianoNet, “Coronavirus, Altro Caso in Italia. Italiano Ricoverato a Codogno (Lodi).”

<sup>87</sup> “Codogno, i medici dell’ospedale in trincea.”

<sup>88</sup> Grasselli, Pesenti, and Cecconi, “Critical Care Utilization for the COVID-19 Outbreak in Lombardy, Italy.”

<sup>89</sup> Grasselli, Pesenti, and Cecconi.

would quickly overwhelm the region's ICU facilities, so the task force's primary assignment was to identify ways to increase ICU capacity.<sup>90</sup> By the end of February 21<sup>st</sup>, the virus had claimed the first Italian victim, a 78-year-old man admitted into a Veneto hospital ten days before.<sup>91</sup> The worst nightmare of every Italian became a reality. Many anxiously looked at China, which now had 75,000 cases, with the number of deceased climbing steadily at 2,236.<sup>92</sup>

Saturday, February 22<sup>nd</sup>

On the next day, the rate of the infections radically increased, sowing chaos in Lombardy. Confirmed cases in northern Italy rose to 76, with 54 in Lombardy, 17 in Veneto, two in Emilia Romagna, two in Lazio, and one in Piedmont.<sup>93</sup> Two COVID-19 cases emerged in Milan, sending the city's five-person public health team scrambling to identify patient one's connection.<sup>94,95</sup> By now, Lombardy health officials had sent 18 infected individuals with severe respiratory symptoms to ICU units.<sup>96</sup>

After another fatality – this time a 68-year-old woman in Lombardy's Lodi province – Governor Fontana publicly stated that the number of people who needed to enter isolation would “be very significant.”<sup>97</sup> Lombardy government officials began receiving hundreds of questions from anxious business owners hoping to keep their doors open.<sup>98</sup> Representatives replied saying “There is no evidence to make us think about the closure of public services, but we are ready, and we are gearing up to be able to take all the necessary measures.”<sup>99</sup> From northern to southern

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<sup>90</sup> Review, “Exporting the Italian Model to Fight COVID-19 | The Regulatory Review.”

<sup>91</sup> “Coronavirus, First Italian Death: He Is One of the Two Patients in the Veneto Region. He Was 78 Years Old, He Died in Padua - Corriere.It.”

<sup>92</sup> QuotidianoNet, “Coronavirus, Altro Caso in Italia. Italiano Ricoverato a Codogno (Lodi).”

<sup>93</sup> online, “Coronavirus, Due Casi a Milano.”

<sup>94</sup> online.

<sup>95</sup> Goodman and Pianigiani, “Why Covid Caused Such Suffering in Italy's Wealthiest Region.”

<sup>96</sup> online, “Coronavirus, Due Casi a Milano.”

<sup>97</sup> “Coronavirus in Lombardy, the Contagion Widens.”

<sup>98</sup> “Coronavirus in Lombardy, the Contagion Widens.”

<sup>99</sup> “Coronavirus in Lombardy, the Contagion Widens.”

regional governments, fear was spreading faster than the virus. Southern regional officials, especially in Campania, Puglia, and Calabria, panicked, knowing that the virus could quickly shatter their regions' fragile healthcare systems.

Only two days into the outbreak, miscommunication between municipal, regional government, and central officials was already becoming an issue. While the Lombardy government warned of locking the region down, numerous municipal governments and the central government in Rome were sending mixed messages, hinting that a region-wide shutdown would be an unnecessary overreaction.<sup>100</sup> This ambiguous response tricked many Lombardy citizens into believing that everyday life could go on normally.<sup>101</sup>

#### Sunday, February 23<sup>rd</sup>

By the third full day of the outbreak, it was clear that the virus had gotten a significant head start, and was showing no signs of slowing. The number of coronavirus cases in Italy grew to 152, ranking the nation third globally for infections, behind South Korea's 602 and China's 76,936.<sup>102</sup> In northern Italy, Lombardy contained 110 cases, Veneto 21, and Emilia Romagna 9.<sup>103</sup> Milan alone contained over 100 of the cases in Lombardy.<sup>104</sup> The coronavirus also claimed its third Italian victim, an elderly woman in a Lombardy hospital.<sup>105</sup> By now, the window of opportunity to completely isolate, trace, and quash the virus had long passed.

The first substantial policy response arrived later in the day when Governor Fontana, the central government's Minister of Health, Roberto Speranza, and Councilor Gallera held a chaotic press conference.<sup>106</sup> To curb the contagion's speed, the Lombardy government, in collaboration

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<sup>100</sup> "Coronavirus in Lombardy, the Contagion Widens."

<sup>101</sup> Review, "Exporting the Italian Model to Fight COVID-19 | The Regulatory Review."

<sup>102</sup> QuotidianoNet, "Coronavirus, Terzo Morto in Italia. Oltre 150 Casi, Scuole Chiuse in 7 Regioni."

<sup>103</sup> QuotidianoNet.

<sup>104</sup> QuotidianoNet.

<sup>105</sup> QuotidianoNet.

<sup>106</sup> "Lombardy Govt. Ordinance 2.22.20."

with Rome, passed a decree designating infected municipalities as the Red Zone.<sup>107</sup> This Red Zone included ten municipalities in Lombardy and one in Veneto.<sup>108</sup> This decree mandated a strict quarantine for all 50,000 citizens inside the Red Zone, banning all public gatherings, religious services, recreational sports, schooling, and commercial activities (except for essential services like supermarkets and pharmacies).<sup>109</sup> Citing the recommendations provided by the World Health Organization, Governor Fontana, Councilor Gallera, and Health Minister Speranza stated that containing the virus required the lockdown.<sup>110</sup> To prevent citizens from leaving or entering the Red Zone, the Lombardy government dispatched 500 police officers while the central government mobilized the armed forces.<sup>111</sup> This policy created the COVID-19 pandemic's first lockdown inside a western nation. The February 23<sup>rd</sup> decree revealed the extraordinary measures that both regional and central governments were willing to take to combat the virus. Seeing how quickly the government acted to lock 50,000 people inside their homes, people across Lombardy worried that their own shutdown was inevitable.<sup>112</sup>

### **The First Wave in Full Swing**

Over the next few days, infections continued to increase in northern Italy. Italy's economy was also beginning to suffer. Before the end of February, the stock market had collapsed, millions of tourists canceled their visits, and the U.S State Department asked Americans to avoid Italy at all costs.<sup>113</sup> By Wednesday, March 4<sup>th</sup>, coronavirus cases nationwide numbered over 3,000 with 107 fatalities.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> "Coronavirus, Ongoing Summit between President Fontana and President of the Conte Council. At the End of the Press Conference."

<sup>108</sup> "Coronavirus, in dieci comuni lombardi."

<sup>109</sup> "Lombardy Govt. Ordinance 2.22.20."

<sup>110</sup> "Lombardy Govt. Ordinance 2.22.20."

<sup>111</sup> QuotidianoNet, "Coronavirus, Terzo Morto in Italia. Oltre 150 Casi, Scuole Chiuse in 7 Regioni."

<sup>112</sup> "Coronavirus in Lombardy, the Contagion Widens."

<sup>113</sup> Horowitz and Bubola, "Italy's Quarantine Leaves Locked-Down Towns Feeling 'Sacrificed.'"

<sup>114</sup> "Coronavirus."



Two weeks after the February 23<sup>rd</sup> decree, on Sunday, March 8<sup>th</sup>, with nationwide cases numbering 7,375, and 366 dead, the central government finally took action with another decree. Signed by President Mattarella, the March 8<sup>th</sup> decree extended the Red Zone to all of Lombardy and 14 provinces divided between the Veneto and Emilia Romagna regions.<sup>115</sup> This policy also forced the nationwide prohibition on all public gatherings, including all forms of schooling, religious events, and sports competitions.<sup>116</sup> Unfortunately, the night before the Prime Minister released the decree, a draft was leaked to the media. When the story broke, thousands of people in Milan fled to other regions throughout Italy.<sup>117</sup> Due to this costly blunder with the media, Prime Minister Conte enacted the March 9<sup>th</sup> “I Stay Home” decree, expanding the Red Zone to all regions, and commencing “Phase 1.”<sup>118</sup> Hoping to end the nationwide shutdown by April 3<sup>rd</sup>, this new decree barred citizens from crossing municipality borders except for “well-grounded work-related reasons or situations of need, or movements for health reasons.”<sup>119</sup> The vagueness of these exceptions created new challenges for sub-national governments trying to enforce the lockdown.<sup>120</sup> All of these policies subjected violators to harsh criminal penalties. By March 31<sup>st</sup>, daily deaths peaked at 2,000 and coronavirus had already killed 0.1% of the Italian population.<sup>121</sup> In just over one month, from February 21<sup>st</sup> to March 31<sup>st</sup>, the Italian death toll nearly tripled from 477 to 1,338.<sup>122</sup> These official mortality statistics are suspected of being underreported by a factor of two.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> “Coronavirus Emergency and Public Law Issues.”

<sup>116</sup> “Coronavirus Emergency and Public Law Issues.”

<sup>117</sup> Review, “Exporting the Italian Model to Fight COVID-19 | The Regulatory Review.”

<sup>118</sup> “Coronavirus Emergency and Public Law Issues.”

<sup>119</sup> “Coronavirus Emergency and Public Law Issues.”

<sup>120</sup> Ferraresi, “Italy’s Politicians Are Making the Coronavirus Crisis Worse.”

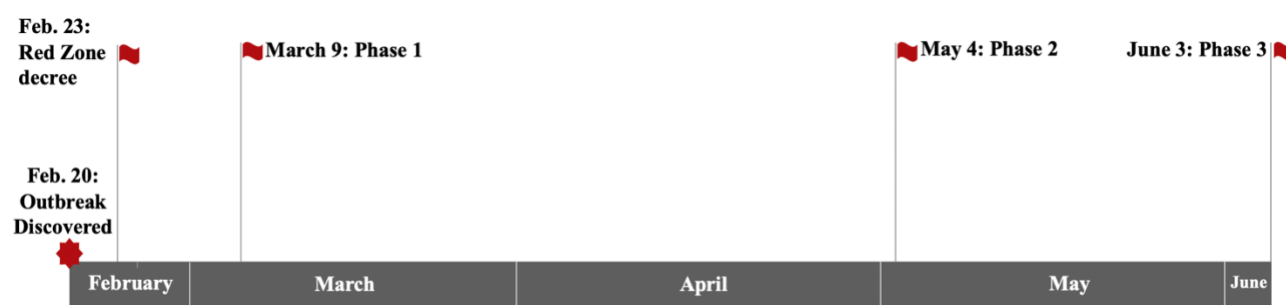
<sup>121</sup> “Ciminelli Garcia-Mandico (2020) COVID-19 in Italy. An Analysis of Municipal-Level Death Registry Data.Pdf,” 5.

<sup>122</sup> Ciminelli and Garcia-Mandicó, “COVID-19 in Italy.”

<sup>123</sup> Ciminelli and Garcia-Mandicó.

The “Phase 1” lockdown order ended on May 4<sup>th</sup> with “Phase 2,” when the central government permitted bars and restaurants to reopen, citizens to return to work, and citizens to visit family members if they were in the same municipality.<sup>124</sup> “Phase 3” arrived a month later, fully reopening Italy with the exception of schools (see Table 3.1 for reference).<sup>125</sup> By the end of July, COVID-19 infected 245,000 Italians, claiming 35,000 lives, with most deaths occurring in Lombardy.<sup>126,127</sup> From February to August, the average mortality rate in Italy was 14.2%, the fifth highest mortality rate in the world.<sup>128</sup>

**Table 3.1: First Wave General Timeline**



In later waves throughout 2020 and early 2021, COVID-19 continued to evade the central and regional government containment measures, forcing Italian health experts to desperately chase the virus down.<sup>129</sup> In a matter of months after the first wave, the virus returned in full swing, and by mid-December, during the second wave, Italy’s death toll reached 65,000.<sup>130</sup> As of early-April 2021, coronavirus fatalities in Italy have skyrocketed to 112,000, and regional governments have recently reinstated Red Zone restrictions.<sup>131</sup>

<sup>124</sup> Guglielmi et al., “Public Acceptability of Containment Measures during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Italy,” 4.

<sup>125</sup> Guglielmi et al., 4.

<sup>126</sup> Guglielmi et al., 4.

<sup>127</sup> Alicandro, Remuzzi, and La Vecchia, “Italy’s First Wave of the COVID-19 Pandemic Has Ended.”

<sup>128</sup> “Covid-19.”

<sup>129</sup> Paterlini, “Covid.”

<sup>130</sup> Amante, “Why Us Again?”

<sup>131</sup> Worldometer “Italy Coronavirus.”

## **Findings**

Despite the first wave of COVID-19 being highly centralized in the North, this was unquestionably a national crisis. There is no doubt that healthcare systems, economics, and political motivations are relevant in explaining regional government responses and the effectiveness of these responses. Yet social capital also may have played an underlying role in influencing the regional governments' responses, the policies they pursued, and the policies' efficacy. While government officials did not explicitly refer to social capital in their policy approaches, it is possible that social capital was a nearly unconscious influence on COVID-19 policymaking.

To make this argument clear and compelling, the following sections will analyze each of the selected regional governments during the pandemic and why social capital was an underlying influence on local policy solutions, and the overall effectiveness of these solutions. Research for this comparative case study was gathered from primary and secondary sources as well as virtual interviews with Lombardian and Campanian government officials.

### **The Lombardian Case**

Compared to every other Italian region, Lombardy was disproportionately devastated by the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since it contained the outbreak's epicenter, in some respects, Lombardy can be seen as an outlier from the other three regions in this study. But while some facets of the crisis fell outside the regional government's control, the government's indecisive and elusive approach to coronavirus policymaking was its fatal flaw. Rather than immediately taking decisive public policy action to combat the outbreak, the Lombardy government hesitated and pointed fingers at Rome. As a result of this ineffective policy approach, in the crucial first weeks of the crisis, the government did not choose a clear and

absolute policy solution. Instead, the regional government confused municipalities and citizens, and allowed the central government to undermine the region's healthcare policies.

### **Social Capital's Paralyzing Threat of Accountability**

Social capital may have contributed to the Lombardy government's reluctant policymaking approach. Lombardy's high social capital level could be related to the regional government's indecisive response in that officials knew their highly civically engaged populace would hold them accountable for any ineffective policy. Therefore, in the most critical period of the crisis, the civic community's threat of political accountability may have paralyzed Lombardy's elected officials, preventing them from taking the necessary yet potentially politically risky measures to fight the virus.

High standards and expectations for the regional government are engrained into the civic community's history and tradition. These high standards are enforced by the civic community's specialized ability to collectively mobilize and hold government officials politically and legally accountable. Throughout their careers, Lombardy government officials probably witnessed this trend of strict accountability. When the COVID-19 outbreak erupted, knowing that their economy and their constituents' lives were in jeopardy, these government officials likely felt intense pressure to enact successful policies. If these policies somehow failed, causing citizens to die or the economy to crash, then officials could assume the civic community would be especially unforgiving in the aftermath. The heightened pressure on policymakers consequently made them unwilling to implement policies that were not guaranteed to succeed. So instead of taking a daunting political gamble, Lombardian officials chose to play a reclusive role in the crisis, likely in hopes that the civic community would punish the central government instead of them. Evidence of social capital's influence can be seen in the government's ambiguous and

unclear public stance on the crisis. The regional Governor's confusing public rhetoric suggests that social capital's constant reminder of accountability contributed to the Lombardy government's ineffective policy approach.

### **Evidence of Civic Intimidation: A Paralyzed and Elusive Policy Response**

Social capital's pernicious influence on the Lombardy government's response to COVID-19 policymaking can be identified in the regional government's confusing and ambiguous public messaging. From the very beginning of the outbreak, Lombardy Governor Attilio Fontana was fully aware of COVID-19's potential for catastrophe in his region. Less than twenty-four hours after patient one tested positive for coronavirus, Governor Fontana created a task force to increase ICU capacity in the region's dense hospital network. Shortly after, he asked the central government to assist in shutting down the infected municipalities.<sup>132</sup> Rome obliged, and in coordination with Lombardy, passed the February 23<sup>rd</sup> decree, establishing a lockdown for the region's ten infected municipalities.

#### The Lombardy Government's COVID-19 Policy Dilemma

Once the February 23<sup>rd</sup> decree isolated the Red Zone municipalities, the central government, hoping to prevent panic and keep the northern economy open, assured the nation that COVID-19 was not spreading in Lombardy, and shutting down the whole region was an obvious overreaction.<sup>133</sup> Behind closed doors, the Lombardy government persistently urged the fervently dismissive central government to truthfully address the virus's seriousness.

The central government's misleading messaging forced Lombardy's government into an unprecedented policy conundrum. Either the regional government could nod its head with Rome and falsely comfort the public that the Red Zone fully contained the virus, or they could make

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<sup>132</sup> Grasselli, Pesenti, and Cecconi, "Critical Care Utilization for the COVID-19 Outbreak in Lombardy, Italy."

<sup>133</sup> Review, "Exporting the Italian Model to Fight COVID-19 | The Regulatory Review."

the correct decision by publicly advocating for a more comprehensive lockdown policy. Both of these choices contained significant political risks, which social capital may have helped intensify. Neither choice guaranteed success. Choosing to side with Rome ran the risk of the virus continuing to spread, meaning the regional government would be just as much to blame as the central government. On the other hand, choosing to publicly contest Rome by advocating for a stronger policy response had its own inherent risks too. Lombardy is the industrial center of the country.<sup>134</sup> In the case of a region-wide lockdown, the economic repercussions would be massive, not just for Lombardy, but the entire Italian nation. Local businesses in the ten Red Zone municipalities were already losing 50 million euros every single day.<sup>135</sup> Furthermore, if the regional government initiated the momentum towards a lockdown and Rome was somehow correct in claiming a lockdown was an overreaction, the regional government officials would solely be to blame. Finally, this decision was especially daunting to regional policymakers who were unsure if they could violate civil liberties with a comprehensive lockdown.<sup>136</sup>

#### The Lombardy Government's Response: Indecisiveness and Scapegoating Rome

When the outbreak shoved them into this challenging political puzzle, the Lombardy government froze. It is possible that neither choice convinced the regional government that they could successfully solve the crisis, and ultimately dodge the civic community's accountability. In response to being cornered by this seemingly unwinnable policy dilemma, the Lombardy government crafted a third option; making it appear that the central government was fully in charge of policymaking and blaming Rome when the crisis inevitably worsened.

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<sup>134</sup> Horowitz and Bubola, "Italy's Quarantine Leaves Locked-Down Towns Feeling 'Sacrificed.'"

<sup>135</sup> Horowitz and Bubola.

<sup>136</sup> Personal Interview with Lombardian Government Officials.

Afraid to implement a decisive policy strategy, Lombardy government officials appear to have looked for a way out of the policymaking position entirely. Rome's loud and misleading voice may have provided the Lombardy government with this escape route. By using Rome as a scapegoat, they could potentially redirect their civic community's crosshairs away from themselves. First, however, in order to convince the civic community that they were innocent, the regional government needed to allow Rome to misguide their initial policy approach. By briefly parroting Rome's rhetoric and conforming to their misguided directives, when the crisis worsened, the regional government could turn around and use Rome as a scapegoat. This may have appeared to be the only viable strategy in avoiding the civic community's collective wrath.

Scapegoating Rome might have also appeared especially compelling because of the Italian populations newfound trust in the central government. As Falcone et al. discovered, when the COVID-19 pandemic arrived, Italians across the country decided that the best way to face the crisis was to trust their institutions. As a result of the developing health crisis, Italy experienced a "trust boom," and citizens chose to place their trust primarily in their central government.<sup>137,138</sup> Lombardy government officials may have seen this trust and dependence in the central government as a way to outsource policymaking to Rome. This public image of dependence on Rome meant that when the central government inevitably failed to solve the crisis, the Lombardy government could use the excuse that they trusted Rome just as everyone else did.

This scapegoating strategy can be identified in the regional Governor's rapidly shifting rhetoric within a period of five days. From February 22<sup>nd</sup> to February 27<sup>th</sup> Governor Fontana's stance on the virus frantically flipped back and forth. Within three days from February 22<sup>nd</sup> to February 25<sup>th</sup>, Governor Fontana went from warning that more people would be required to enter

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<sup>137</sup> Falcone et al., "All We Need Is Trust," 13.

<sup>138</sup> Falcone et al., 5.

lockdown to equating COVID-19 to the common flu.<sup>139,140</sup> The Governor's ignorant rhetoric on February 25<sup>th</sup> matches the Prime Minister's, who claimed on the very same day that "Italy is a safe country and probably safer than many others."<sup>141</sup> On February 27<sup>th</sup>, after conforming to Rome's request to only test people showing COVID-19 symptoms, Governor Fontana reverted back to publicly calling the virus a serious threat and accusing the central government of hiding from reality.<sup>142</sup> These dramatic shifts in rhetoric suggest that the regional government briefly allowed itself to be led astray by the central government, so it could quickly switch back to its initial position and make Rome appear to be the crisis's culprit.

As his government continued to sidestep policymaking by blaming Rome for the crisis, the Governor was constantly pressuring the central government to take the virus seriously.<sup>143</sup> The Prime Minister replied to this pressure by warning Lombardy and Veneto's governments "not to go out of order because the measures risk being harmful."<sup>144</sup> Meanwhile, Governor Fontana began storming out of virtual meetings with the Prime Minister's cabinet.<sup>145</sup> Despite the Governor's private pleas, the Conte Government refused to mobilize until they had no choice but to lock Lombardy down on March 8<sup>th</sup>, 17 days after the outbreak began.<sup>146</sup>

During one of this study's interviews with Lombardy government health officials, the officials insisted that after the February 23<sup>rd</sup> decree, the regional government was unsure of whether they or Rome were responsible for creating coronavirus policies. While this certainly may have been the case, it is odd that when Rome appeared openly dismissive of the crisis after

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<sup>139</sup> "Coronavirus in Lombardy, the Contagion Widens."

<sup>140</sup> Review, "Exporting the Italian Model to Fight COVID-19 | The Regulatory Review."

<sup>141</sup> Horowitz, Bubola, and Povoledo, "Italy, Pandemic's New Epicenter, Has Lessons for the World."

<sup>142</sup> Horowitz, "Italy, Mired in Politics Over Virus, Asks How Much Testing Is Too Much."

<sup>143</sup> Horowitz, Bubola, and Povoledo, "Italy, Pandemic's New Epicenter, Has Lessons for the World."

<sup>144</sup> "Coronavirus, è Scontro Tra Roma e La Lombardia. Il Sindaco Di Casalpusterlengo."

<sup>145</sup> "Coronavirus, è Scontro"

<sup>146</sup> "Coronavirus Emergency and Public Law Issues."



February 23<sup>rd</sup>, Lombardy officials, who knew Rome was going to fail them, did not step up to the task and take the necessary policy action.<sup>147</sup>

### **The Lombardian Approach's Result: Irresponsible Policies and an Unclear Stance**

Lombardy's hesitant and elusive COVID-19 policy approach was ineffective in combatting the virus for two primary reasons. First, to acquire sufficient ammunition to effectively blame Rome for mishandling the crisis, the Lombardy Government allowed the central government to bully it into making irresponsible policy decisions. Second, with no clear guidance from the regional government, municipalities and citizens became confused and disorganized, and many continued with their daily lives, further spreading the virus.

#### Irresponsible Policies: Hospital Admissions and Testing Protocols

It is possible that to effectively propagate the narrative that Rome was responsible for policymaking and the Lombardy government was just following orders and trusting Rome's guidance, the Lombardy government allowed Rome to influence its COVID-19 healthcare policies. Despite knowing that Rome was terribly misguided, the regional government still succumbed to Rome's suggestions. The clearest cases of this policy submission can be found in the region's hospital admittance and testing policies.

After February 23<sup>rd</sup>, as the virus continued spreading rapidly throughout Lombardy and into neighboring regions, Prime Minister Conte scolded Governor Fontana for wearing a mask and attacked the Codogno hospital for being the epicenter of the outbreak.<sup>148</sup> Prime Minister Conte's criticism of the Codogno hospital staff had deadly consequences for Lombardy's healthcare workers. To convince Rome that they were treating COVID-19 cases, Lombardy

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<sup>147</sup> Personal Interview with Lombardian Government Officials.

<sup>148</sup> Ferraresi, "Italy's Politicians Are Making the Coronavirus Crisis Worse."

health officials ordered hospitals to admit patients whether they were symptomatic or not.<sup>149</sup> This policy resulted in Lombardy hospitals admitting 65% of infected people, causing coronavirus to quickly overrun hospitals.<sup>150</sup> By March 4<sup>th</sup>, the president of Lombardy’s anesthetists association said that he could “count the free [ICU] spots in the hospitals on the fingers of two hands.”<sup>151</sup> As the regional government privately quarreled with the central governments, ghastly photographs of Lombardy hospital hallways cluttered with occupied beds and exhausted healthcare workers sleeping in their protective equipment circulated the internet.<sup>152</sup> By the end of the first wave sixty Italian doctors were left dead, with the majority of them from Lombardy.<sup>153</sup>

Another example of the Lombardy government knowingly permitting Rome to damage its COVID-19 response can be seen in the region’s testing policy. After regional government health officials detected an outbreak in Codogno, they ordered all local citizens to receive COVID-19 tests, whether they had symptoms or not.<sup>154</sup> When word of this testing policy reached Rome, the central government argued that Lombardy was inflating case numbers and ordered testing to be limited to people displaying symptoms.<sup>155</sup> Unwilling to contest this order, the Lombardy government listened and proceeded to scale back its testing policy.<sup>156</sup> By the end of the first wave, the testing rate (tests per 1000 residents) in Lombardy was half that of Veneto’s, despite Lombardy’s outbreak being significantly more violent.<sup>157</sup> A timeline depicting the Lombardy Regional government’s policy solutions to the outbreak can be seen in Table 3.2.

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<sup>149</sup> Johnson, “Fewer Deaths in Veneto Offer Clues for Fight against Virus.”

<sup>150</sup> Johnson.

<sup>151</sup> Horowitz, “Italy’s Elderly Suffer Heavy Toll as Coronavirus Spreads.”

<sup>152</sup> “Italy’s Health Care System Groans Under Coronavirus — a Warning to the World - The New York Times.”

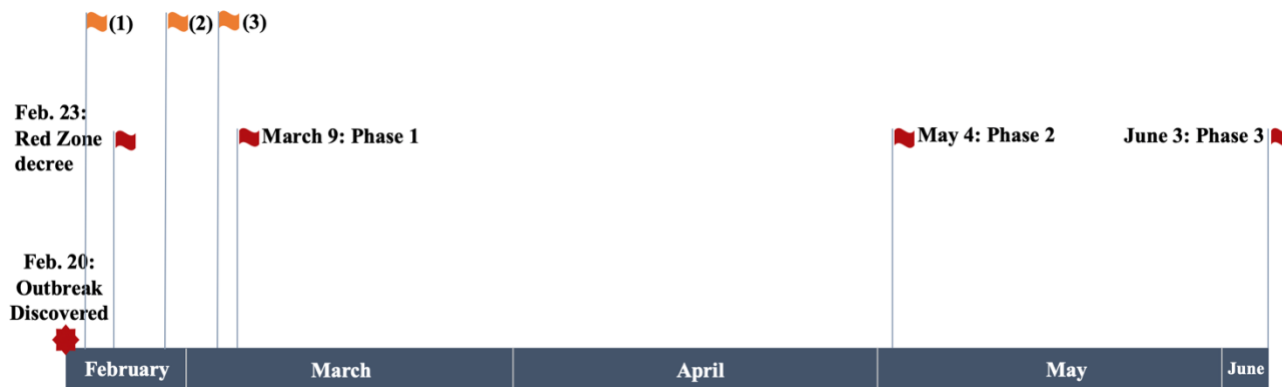
<sup>153</sup> Johnson, “Fewer Deaths in Veneto Offer Clues for Fight against Virus.”

<sup>154</sup> Horowitz and Bubola, “Italy’s Quarantine Leaves Locked-Down Towns Feeling ‘Sacrificed.’”

<sup>155</sup> Horowitz and Bubola.

<sup>156</sup> Paterlini, “Covid.”

<sup>157</sup> Binkin et al., “Protecting Our Health Care Workers While Protecting Our Communities during the COVID-19 Pandemic,” 4.

**Table 3.2: The Lombardy Government Response Timeline**

- (1) Feb. 21: ICU Task Force created by Governor Fontana, and schools are closed.
- (2) Feb. 27: Hospital and testing policies enacted, Mayor of Milan launches “Milan Doesn’t Stop” Campaign.
- (3) March 4: Lombardy ICU facilities are overrun by coronavirus.

### Disorganizing Municipal Governments and the Civic Community

The second reason the Lombardy regional government’s policy approach to COVID-19 was ineffective is that it did not produce a clear and coherent directive for municipal governments and the Lombardy civic community. The first clear sign of confusion came from the municipalities. In the immediate days after the February 23<sup>rd</sup> decree, Mayors across the region became frustrated with the regional government and demanded answers on how to proceed.<sup>158</sup> Unable to get a clear directive from the regional government, it appears that some municipalities turned to Rome. For instance, on February 27<sup>th</sup>, Beppe Sala, the Mayor of Milan, launched a “Milan Doesn’t Stop” campaign to reassure citizens that everything was normal.<sup>159</sup> As a result of the Lombardy government’s unclear communication, municipal governments turned to the more decisive central government. Consequently, citizens living outside of the

<sup>158</sup> Morris, Pitrelli, and Harlan, ““People Are Getting a Little Crazy.””

<sup>159</sup> Horowitz, Bubola, and Povoledo, “Italy, Pandemic’s New Epicenter, Has Lessons for the World.”

February 23<sup>rd</sup> Red Zone municipalities continued to spread the disease as they went on with their everyday lives.<sup>160</sup>

The Lombardy government's unclear policy approach to addressing the crisis also puzzled the citizens. When the outbreak began in Lombardy, the regional government had an extraordinary tool at its disposal: the civic community. If policymakers had implemented a clear-cut COVID-19 solution to take advantage of the civic community's collectivizing capabilities, then the civic community would have decisively mobilized, and the virus might have been more effectively contained. The Lombardy government could have looked to their civic community more as a tool for success rather than weapon for accountability. But instead, the policymakers were paralyzed by pressure, and rather than devising ways to effectively combat Rome's misinformation, the government looked for ways to escape liability. Fearing widespread political backlash from the civic community, municipalities, and the central government, the Lombardy government allowed itself to be overpowered by Rome's unrealistic and dismissive response to the outbreak.

### **Putting Lombardy's Case into Perspective**

Since they were the first to suffer the virus's devastating impact, the Lombardy regional government deserves some leniency. Furthermore, there were numerous problematic factors complicating their policymaking process, including unbending castigation from Rome, the virus's violent speed, and overwhelming economic concerns. These factors combined with the intimidating role played by the civic community, may have been responsible for stymying the Lombardy regional government's response to the COVID-19 crisis. Nevertheless, these factors do not make the Lombardian case obsolete. This case suggests that when a crisis is highly

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<sup>160</sup> Horowitz, Bubola, and Povoledo.

intense and the pressure on policymakers is multi-faceted, a high social capital level can potentially make governance more intimidating, thus contributing to ineffective policy responses.

Choosing a political stance that could potentially lock ten million people in their homes and destroy the economy the entire nation relied on, all in spite of the Prime Minister's wishes, seemed simply too daunting for Lombardy's government. So, knowing the political consequences, the regional government did not effectively contest Rome's misinformation. In their highly civic community, the greater political accountability fostered by social capital may have paralyzed Lombardy's government when they needed to act aggressively. It is quite possible that if the regional government knew it was not subject to the immense political accountability created by social capital, it would have acted faster to shut down Rome's lies and then Lombardy itself. Sure enough, this policy approach of inaction was not satisfactory to the region's civic community. In the aftermath of the pandemic's first wave, Governor Fontana faced a class-action lawsuit for mishandling of the crisis, and his dream of becoming Prime Minister was crushed.<sup>161</sup>

### **The Venetian Case**

Social capital also appears to have been an underlying influence on the Venetian government's COVID-19 policy approach and effectiveness. While Lombardy's case seems to place social capital in a harmful position, Veneto's case can potentially vindicate it. Judging from the Veneto government's policy approach to the crisis, social capital may have played a basic yet noteworthy role in influencing the government's policy approach and the success of that approach.

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<sup>161</sup> Staff, "Families of Italian Covid Victims Seek \$122 Million from Government."

At a foundational level, social capital may have assisted the Venetian regional government in its fight against COVID-19. Unlike Lombardy, where social capital's threat of accountability intimidated the government to the point where it became indecisive and elusive, Veneto's regional government took a political gamble by enforcing widespread coronavirus mitigation policies. These policies became widely known as the "Veneto Model." While the Veneto Model's testing, tracing, and quarantine programs were effective in and of themselves, part of the reason they worked so well was the Venetian communities' full cooperation with the regional government. Social capital's horizontal networks of trust were essential in this citizen-government cooperation. In defining social capital, Putnam saw trust as an "essential component."<sup>162</sup> He discovered that civic traditions in Northern Italy had produced a historical repertoire for mutual trust between the citizens within the civic community and between the citizens and regional government.<sup>163</sup> So when Veneto utilized a community-based COVID-19 policy, this policy activated the region's long tradition of horizontal, mutually-beneficial collaboration between the government and civic community.

Evidence of social capital's influence on the Veneto government's policy approach and effectiveness can be identified in two instances. Firstly, it may have reassured the regional government that the civic community's collective capabilities would help facilitate the Veneto Model's success. Second, when the Venetian government acted upon this reassurance by implementing the Veneto Model, their predictions became reality and their community-based policy was extremely effective.

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<sup>162</sup> Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti, *Making Democracy Work*, 170.

<sup>163</sup> Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti, 174.

## **Social Capital's Influence on Veneto's Government Policy Response**

The first way social capital aided the regional government was by making its community-based policy response feasible in the first place. Since networks of civic engagement in Veneto developed norms of collective action and civic collaboration, social capital's rich history in the region subtly reassured the Venetian government that their constituents would dutifully play their part in the fight against coronavirus. This reassurance encouraged the government to craft an ambitious policy that would only succeed if the public cooperated fully. On the other hand, if Veneto had a low social capital level, this norm of civic collaboration between the people and government would not be present. If the government proceeded with a community-based policy anyways, the policy would struggle to succeed, as it would be difficult for the residents to overcome the "barriers of suspicion and shirking."<sup>164</sup>

### Leading up to the Veneto Model

When Veneto health officials discovered their own cluster of coronavirus infections in the city of Vò on February 21<sup>st</sup> – only a day after patient one's diagnosis – the region's government in Venice responded quickly by locking down the infected hospital and testing all 3,300 town residents.<sup>165</sup> Veneto Governor Luca Zaia told national media that he was “ready to take all measures to stem contagion, including closing all of the region's schools and businesses.”<sup>166</sup> On the next day, the Veneto government carried out tests on staff and patients in every Venetian hospital.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti, 174.

<sup>165</sup> Boccia, Ricciardi, and Ioannidis, “What Other Countries Can Learn From Italy During the COVID-19 Pandemic.”

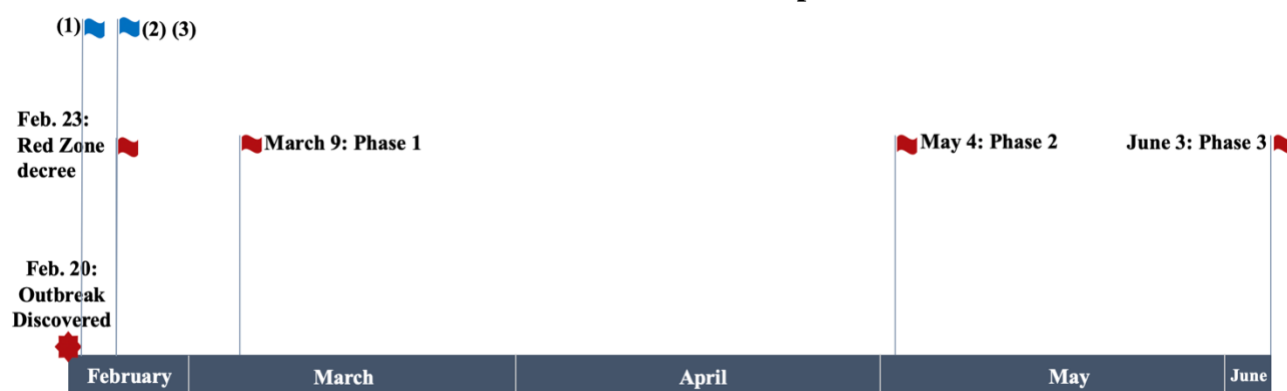
<sup>166</sup> “Coronavirus, First Italian Death: He Is One of the Two Patients in the Veneto Region. He Was 78 Years Old, He Died in Padua - Corriere.It.”

<sup>167</sup> “Coronavirus, in Veneto la prima vittima, Adriano Trevisan, 78 anni. Venti contagiati in Italia. Conte.”

When the outbreak claimed its third victim on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, in addition to the central government’s decree, Governor Zaia independently shut down all of Veneto’s churches and schools until March 1<sup>st</sup>.<sup>168</sup> When business owners lobbied Veneto’s government hoping to remain open, Governor Zaia briefly reversed his position on the virus to align himself with fellow Northern League party member Governor Fontana, calling the virus a “media pandemic” and blaming the press for sensationalizing the crisis.<sup>169</sup>

For a moment, Veneto’s government appeared to be going down the same road of inaction as Lombardy’s. But when the virus continued spreading on February 24<sup>th</sup>, Governor Zaia, advised by Andrea Crisanti, one of the nation’s leading virologists, began issuing region-wide COVID-19 policies to treat the sick and locate the virus. The policies crafted by Veneto’s government became known as the Veneto Model, the international gold-standard strategy for coronavirus mitigation.<sup>170</sup> The timeline for the Venetian regional government’s policy response to COVID-19 can be pictured in Table 3.3.

**Table 3.3: The Veneto Government Response Timeline**



(1) Feb. 21: Vò is isolated and all residents are tested.

(2) Feb. 23: Schools and churches are closed.

(3) Feb. 24: Veneto Model is implemented in all towns with COVID-19 clusters.

<sup>168</sup> “Coronavirus, in Veneto la prima vittima, Adriano Trevisan, 78 anni. Venti contagiati in Italia. Conte.”

<sup>169</sup> Review, “Exporting the Italian Model to Fight COVID-19 | The Regulatory Review.”

<sup>170</sup> Binkin et al., “Protecting Our Health Care Workers While Protecting Our Communities during the COVID-19 Pandemic.” 4.



### The Veneto Model Policy Package

The Veneto Model was created for two primary purposes; to safeguard the healthcare system and locate the virus before it could spread. To strengthen treatment capabilities, regional health authorities chose numerous large hospitals to specialize only in COVID-19 treatment.<sup>171</sup> Healthcare workers quickly transported non-COVID-19 patients from these designated hospitals to smaller treatment facilities.<sup>172</sup> This policy had four positive effects. First, separating infected and non-infected patients helped prevent hospitals from becoming the centers of transmission.<sup>173</sup> Second, by clearly designating which facilities contained infectious COVID-19 patients, this policy removed the ambiguity of where COVID-19 was, saving Venetian healthcare workers' lives. Third, with COVID-19 allocated to specific hospitals, healthcare workers could more effectively centralize medical resources to where they were needed most, which improved their ability to care for patients with severe symptoms.<sup>174</sup> Finally, hospitals now had adequate room to dramatically increase ICU capacity and store the necessary number of ventilators.<sup>175</sup> Thanks to this precautionary measure by the Veneto government, Veneto's hospitals did not become the grim picture of Lombardy's, where healthcare workers were resorting to drawing lines on the ground to mark contaminated areas.<sup>176</sup>

The second half of the Veneto Model was dedicated to proactively locating and isolating the virus before it could infect large swaths of the population. To do this, Veneto's regional government enacted a widespread testing and tracing program. In areas containing clusters of

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<sup>171</sup> Binkin et al., 4.

<sup>172</sup> Binkin et al., 4.

<sup>173</sup> Johnson, "Fewer Deaths in Veneto Offer Clues for Fight against Virus."

<sup>174</sup> Binkin et al., "Protecting Our Health Care Workers While Protecting Our Communities during the COVID-19 Pandemic," 4.

<sup>175</sup> Binkin et al., 4.

<sup>176</sup> "Italy's Health Care System Groans Under Coronavirus — a Warning to the World - The New York Times."

COVID-19 infections, the regional government built drive-through rapid-testing facilities and ordered all residents in the area to receive tests.<sup>177</sup> This directive was combined with a highly comprehensive contact-tracing regiment to hunt down the disease.<sup>178</sup> Once an infected person was found, rather than immediately sending them to a hospital, the government ordered them to isolate and quarantine at home.<sup>179</sup> If urgent care was necessary, health officials transported the infected individual to a designated hospital. The regional government also encouraged general healthcare practitioners to switch from in-person appointments to safer telehealth meetings.<sup>180</sup> Rather than chasing the virus, Veneto's government crafted policy to get in front of the virus, where it could be isolated and cordoned off from infecting the population.

### **Social Capital Influence in the Veneto Model's Effectiveness**

Once the government enacted the Veneto Model policies, social capital may have helped facilitate widespread community cooperation in two primary ways. First, once Veneto began messaging clearly to its citizenry, social capital's norm of reciprocity convinced Venetians that their government was making the correct policy decisions, encouraging them to follow the government's guidelines. Second, the region's dense associational networks aided the Venetian population in overcoming the policy's collective action problem, facilitating widespread participation. Since the success of the government's testing and tracing policies largely depended on the full cooperation of the people, social capital was an essential tool that may have saved countless lives in Veneto.

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<sup>177</sup> Johnson, "Fewer Deaths in Veneto Offer Clues for Fight against Virus."

<sup>178</sup> Binkin et al., "Protecting Our Health Care Workers While Protecting Our Communities during the COVID-19 Pandemic," 4.

<sup>179</sup> Johnson, "Fewer Deaths in Veneto Offer Clues for Fight against Virus."

<sup>180</sup> Binkin et al., "Protecting Our Health Care Workers While Protecting Our Communities during the COVID-19 Pandemic," 4.

Without social capital's norms of reciprocity, the Venetian population might have quickly dismissed the Veneto Model as ridiculous. At first glance and in the heat of the moment, the regional government's policies probably seemed utterly counterintuitive. As they watched the fatalities from COVID-19 steadily increase, infected Venetians probably questioned why the best way for them to fight coronavirus was at home rather than a hospital. Many also may have questioned why it was necessary to receive a COVID-19 test even if they were asymptomatic and had never contacted anyone infected. Additionally, Governor Zaia's initial skepticism of the virus likely detracted from the population's confidence in his policies.

But unlike Lombardy, Veneto's government began to message clearly about its plan, and the Venetian people cooperated. While the extreme urgency of the crisis can partially explain this behavior, the root of the population's participation could possibly be seen in the region's high social capital level. Veneto contains a reliable network of reciprocity, a mutually-beneficial relationship between the civic community and regional government, balanced on an equally horizontal plane. Veneto's citizens held their government officials to high standards, and they expected the government to perform diligently in crises. So, when Governor Zaia released the Veneto Model's policy directives, his region's citizens, basing their judgment on a long history of civic collaboration, expeditiously followed his orders.

### **Why Veneto's Government Acted and Lombardy's Did Not**

When comparing Veneto's policy response with Lombardy's, the differing situational factors must be clearly addressed. Unlike Lombardy's outbreak which was spreading violently across ten municipalities, Veneto's outbreak was initially isolated to one municipality, giving policymakers more room to breathe. Unlike Lombardy's government, which buckled under the uniquely intense pressure, situational factors permitted Veneto's government to be more level-

headed and rational. As a result, Veneto proudly chose to defy Rome because it was confident that its policy would be effective.

The regional government's confidence for the Veneto Model's success arose from three sources, two of which were exclusive to Veneto, and can help explain why the regional government took direct policy action. The first source of policy confidence comes from the region's long history of viral diseases. Since the region contains Venice, one of the most historically essential port cities of all European history, the Venetian people have a long history of viral epidemics and effective quarantine policies.<sup>181</sup> In fact, the word "quarantine" originates from the Venetian word "quarantena" meaning "40 days," the amount of time that ships suspected of carrying plagues were isolated in Venice's port.<sup>182</sup> Second, after the outbreak was detected in Vò, Veneto's regional Governor appointed Italy's leading virologist to be in charge of the region's mass-testing program.<sup>183</sup> These two exclusive sources of confidence combined with the crisis's vastly different intensity levels between Veneto and Lombardy, can clarify why the two regional governments' policy approaches to COVID-19 crisis were so dissimilar.

At first, social capital's intimidating threat of political accountability likely had the same effect on Veneto's regional government as it had on Lombardy's, as both Lombardian and Venetian governments faced the decision of either siding with the placid central government or taking the virus seriously by executing proactive policies. However, Veneto's case differs because the regional government overcame the accountability-induced hesitancy. The civic community's norms of reciprocity and acceptable behavior, coupled with a longstanding mutual trust between the government and its people, reassured Veneto's policymakers that its citizens

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<sup>181</sup> Johnson, "Fewer Deaths in Veneto Offer Clues for Fight against Virus."

<sup>182</sup> Johnson.

<sup>183</sup> Johnson.

could overcome any crisis-induced collective action problem. As a result of this encouragement, the regional government knew it could rely on its civic community, so it invented a community-based, region-wide policy to contain the virus. Sure enough, after implementing the Veneto Model, the region's citizens collectively mobilized and participated in the demanding testing, tracing, and quarantine guidelines. As a result of his policy's success, the virus did not hit Veneto nearly as hard as Lombardy, and Governor Luca Zaia became a national hero.<sup>184</sup>

### **The Calabrian and Campanian Cases**

Compared to their northern counterparts, the first wave of coronavirus spared the southern regions of Calabria and Campania. Largely thanks to the national lockdown declared by the March 9<sup>th</sup> decree, both populations remained virtually unscathed by the end of the pandemic's first three months. While the virus's damage in the two regions was far less compared to Lombardy and Veneto, the regional governments' policy responses to COVID-19 are still noteworthy.

These two regional governments can be analyzed together because both regions' social capital deficiencies appear to have influenced their governments' policy approaches in analogous ways. The governments' responses to the crisis suggest that low social capital does not invariably hinder decisive and effective governance. Instead, it appears that low social capital can produce vulnerabilities that may serve as an underlying motivation for governments to formulate and implement assertive policy responses. In the Calabrian and Campanian cases, there are two ways that low social capital levels might have compelled the governments to respond quickly and effectively to the crisis. First, without social capital's historical trend of effective governance, both regions' public health infrastructures were especially vulnerable to

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<sup>184</sup> Johnson, "Political Hero of Italy's Coronavirus Crisis Takes Shine off Salvini."

the crisis. Second, without social capital's interconnected networks of trust, the regions' communities lacked collective action competence, making the citizens less likely to overcome collective action dilemmas introduced by the crisis. As a result of this collective disadvantage, regional governments may have been doubtful that citizens would collectively participate in lockdown protocols. Due to these two weaknesses generated by social capital's absence, both regions were more vulnerable to the crisis, which prompted regional governments use assertive and effective policy responses.

While both regional governments responded in ways that demonstrate these two social capital-induced influences, each influence has one respective region where the influence's evidence is more pronounced and noticeable. The Calabrian regional government demonstrates the urgent and effective policy approach to protect the vulnerable public health infrastructure. The Campanian regional government's policy response is more emblematic of the influence stemming from the citizen's collective action incompetence.

### **Defending the Public Health Infrastructure: The Calabrian Government Response**

During the first wave of coronavirus, the Calabria regional government performed valiantly. With a healthcare system drowning in debt and the highest youth unemployment in Italy, the region was already in a state of crisis long before COVID-19 entered the picture. When the outbreak began in Lombardy, the only defense Calabria's population had from utter catastrophe was their regional government led by Governor Jole Santelli. In both southern regions, but more specifically Calabria, low social capital levels contributed to weakening the public health infrastructure, so when the crisis began, this infrastructural weakness played a pivotal role in provoking the regional government to take decisive policy measures in hopes of saving their healthcare system from imminent collapse.

### The Cause of Infrastructural Decay: The ‘Ndrangheta Mafia

In the decades leading up to the pandemic, the Calabrian healthcare system was in a permanent state of decline.<sup>185</sup> Despite Italy’s national healthcare quality ranking highly amongst EU countries and 80% of Calabria’s annual budget going to healthcare funding, the average Calabrian enjoys 52.9 years of good health, ranking the region’s healthcare quality behind Romania and Bulgaria.<sup>186</sup> As is the case in Campania, since 2010, the central government has directly governed Calabria’s healthcare system.<sup>187</sup> Healthcare quality in Calabria is on par with the developing world, and when citizens need medical attention, they fly north for treatment.<sup>188</sup> At the start of the pandemic, the region’s hospitals contained less than 150 ICU beds for its two million inhabitants.<sup>189</sup>

The cause for Calabria’s impoverished healthcare system lies in the region’s historical struggle with organized crime.<sup>190</sup> The prevalence of “mafioso” activity in southern Italy’s regions, including Calabria, Sicily, and Campania, resulted in widespread governmental corruption.<sup>191</sup> Over the last thirty years, Calabria’s mafia, the ‘Ndrangheta, has grown to become the largest criminal network in Italy, controlling 80% of the European drug market and earning a combined annual income of 44 billion euros.<sup>192</sup> This estimated revenue makes the ‘Ndrangheta worth more than every Mexican cartel combined.<sup>193</sup> The organization is decentralized with autonomous sects known as “Ndrines,” all connected by kinship and spread territorially across

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<sup>185</sup> Horowitz, “For Southern Italy, the Coronavirus Becomes a War on 2 Fronts.”

<sup>186</sup> Johnson, “How the Mafia Infiltrated Italy’s Hospitals and Laundered the Profits Globally.”

<sup>187</sup> Johnson, “Health Service in Italy’s Poor South at Mercy of Covid and Crime.”

<sup>188</sup> Horowitz, “For Southern Italy, the Coronavirus Becomes a War on 2 Fronts.”

<sup>189</sup> Sciorilli Borrelli, “Southern Italy’s Health Care Workers Brace for Coronavirus Wave.”

<sup>190</sup> Horowitz, “For Southern Italy, the Coronavirus Becomes a War on 2 Fronts.”

<sup>191</sup> Horowitz.

<sup>192</sup> Johnson, “How the Mafia Infiltrated Italy’s Hospitals and Laundered the Profits Globally.”

<sup>193</sup> Johnson.

the region.<sup>194</sup> The group even has an internal conflict-resolution committee staffed by ‘Ndrangheta elders.

Since the mid-1990s, when the group first emerged as the nation’s dominant crime syndicate, the ‘Ndrangheta criminal network has profited immensely by siphoning funds from Calabria’s healthcare system using corrupt regional and municipal government officials.<sup>195</sup> The younger generation of the ‘Ndrangheta manages this scheme with a business-like profession, and some hold degrees from prestigious business schools like the London School of Economics and Harvard.<sup>196</sup> Taking advantage of the many intermediary parties between the regional government, local governments, and hospitals, these sophisticated criminals employ an extraordinarily complex scheme to funnel money from government spending packages into the untraceable international financial sector.<sup>197</sup> In addition to revenue from extortion, the mafia uses this stolen money to fund the ‘Ndrangheta’s joint ventures in international drug trafficking.<sup>198</sup> Due to the group’s widespread influence throughout the region, combatting this fraud is an insurmountable challenge for the Calabrian government.

### Social Capital and the Mafia’s Rise

At the very root of Calabria’s healthcare and organized crime crisis is the region’s centuries-long social capital drought. When Putnam observed Italy’s southern regions, he discovered an inverse correlation between social capital and the prevalence of organized crime networks. Over the last millennia, distrust between community members developed from a combination of two factors. The first was an intense competition over scarce resources like jobs

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<sup>194</sup> Johnson.

<sup>195</sup> Johnson.

<sup>196</sup> Johnson.

<sup>197</sup> Johnson.

<sup>198</sup> Johnson.



and public goods, and the second was constant lawlessness creating pervasive uncertainty in all community transactions.<sup>199</sup> As a result of these competition and uncertainty trends, Calabria's population never formed the trust-based mutual-aid societies akin to those in the North.<sup>200</sup> The spirit of communal solidarity that saturated the North's civic communities never formed in Calabria.<sup>201</sup> Instead, slogans like "damned is he who trusts another" were historically ingrained into the minds of southern Italy's un-civic community members.<sup>202</sup>

Rather than horizontally trusting one's neighbor and government, the Calabrian people sought refuge in a vertical hierarchy of exploitation and dependence.<sup>203</sup> As a consequence of their deep distrust of one another, citizens of Calabria became more dependent on aid from people above them in the community hierarchy. But since the regional government was always unreliable and ineffective, citizens were left searching for alternative sources of aid and patronage. As a result, the mafia filled in the void left by the government. With the government too incompetent to deter the mafia or do its job and render the mafia obsolete, Calabria's citizens became wholly dependent on criminals. This dependence, in turn, raised the mafia's status past the government's, further lowering the trust between the citizens and their government officials.<sup>204</sup> By the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the 'Ndrangheta became so emboldened that they not only openly stole from the Calabrian people, they stole from the regional government, and when Rome intervened in 2010, they stole from them too.

The community interconnectedness of the 'Ndrangheta means that Calabria does not lack all forms of social capital. There is a civic community in this region, but it is solely comprised of

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<sup>199</sup> Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti, *Making Democracy Work*, 143.

<sup>200</sup> Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti, 143.

<sup>201</sup> Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti, 143.

<sup>202</sup> Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti, 144.

<sup>203</sup> Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti, 148.

<sup>204</sup> Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti, 146.

bonding social capital. Bonding social capital connects community members from a homogeneous group, including ethnic groups, or in this case, family networks. Bonding social capital is cultivated by the ‘Ndrangheta’s complex and comprehensive organization built upon family ties. Bonding social capital is enough to get the average Calabrian by. When in desperate need, they can go to the ‘Ndrangheta for help, which they routinely did after withstanding the economic damage brought by the pandemic’s first wave.<sup>205</sup> But bonding social capital alone is not enough for true social capital to accumulate. The first form of social capital that Calabria lacks is bridging social capital, the civic interconnections between heterogeneous communities crossing socioeconomic classes. The second form that Calabria lacks is linking social capital, the horizontal forms of trust and reciprocity that connects citizens with their government officials. These bridging and linking social capital subgroups set the civic communities in Lombardy and Veneto ahead of Calabria’s. With bridging, linking, and bonding social capital, citizens can develop the class-cutting mutually beneficial norms of behavior that produce the collectively competent civic communities found in the North.

#### Evidence of Social Capital-Induced Vulnerability: An Urgently Decisive Government Response

On February 23<sup>rd</sup>, once Rome placed eleven infected municipalities in lockdown, Governor Santelli quickly addressed her region. Calling the outbreak in the North an urgent threat to Calabria’s healthcare and economy, she reminded the region’s population that they needed to collaborate and comply with the incoming COVID-19 mitigation policies.<sup>206</sup> One day later, Governor Santelli passed an ordinance to close all schools and universities until March 2<sup>nd</sup>.<sup>207</sup> As the situation in the North worsened, this closure was promptly extended. Additionally,

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<sup>205</sup> Horowitz, “For Southern Italy, the Coronavirus Becomes a War on 2 Fronts.”

<sup>206</sup> Telemia, “CORONAVIRUS, JOLE SANTELLI.”

<sup>207</sup> Alizzi, “Scuole Chiuse in Calabria, La Santelli Conferma.”

Governor Santelli's February 24<sup>th</sup> ordinance directed all Calabrians arriving home from the Red Zone to immediately contact health authorities and quarantine at home for two weeks.<sup>208</sup> On February 28<sup>th</sup>, Calabria health officials located the first suspected case of COVID-19, and as a result, the regional government met with Prime Minister Conte's cabinet so they could discuss Calabria's unparalleled vulnerability to the virus.<sup>209</sup>

Eight days later, on March 7<sup>th</sup>, Governor Santelli took to social media to ask citizens to "leave the house only if necessary."<sup>210</sup> On March 8<sup>th</sup>, to address the mass exodus of infected northerners to the South, Calabria's regional government shut its borders.<sup>211</sup> Once the borders were closed and Rome enacted the national lockdown, the next assignment for Santelli's government was to fortify the healthcare system. On March 11<sup>th</sup>, the government approved an emergency plan to increase the stockpile of beds by 400, recruit 300 additional healthcare workers, and coordinate with provincial governments to establish hospitals exclusively for COVID-19 patients.<sup>212</sup> These decisive policy responses, which can be viewed together in Table 3.4, suggest that the regional government knew that it could not rely on the healthcare system to single-handedly hold the line against the virus.

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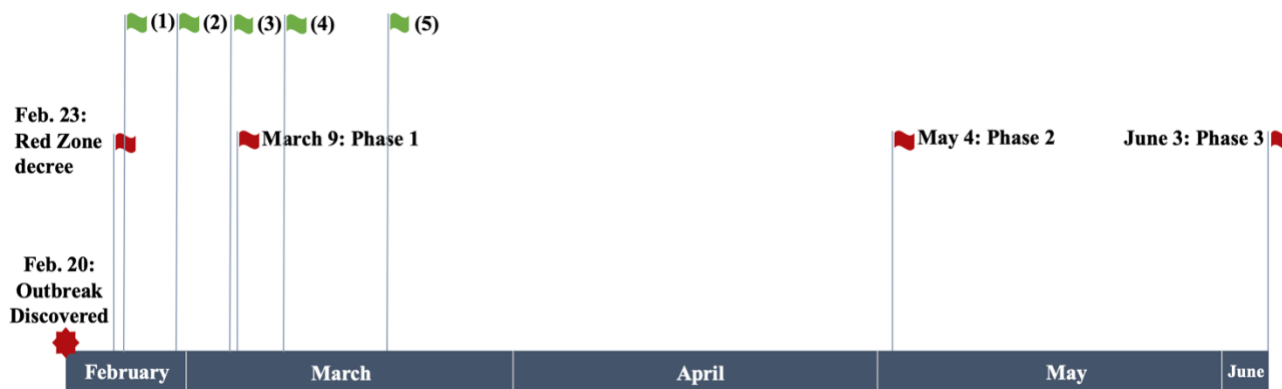
<sup>208</sup> Alizzi.

<sup>209</sup> Il Lametino, "Coronavirus, Si Attende Verifica 'Istituto Superiore Di Sanità Su Caso Di Cetraro."

<sup>210</sup> Calabria7, "Coronavirus, l'appello Di Jole Santelli Ai Calabresi."

<sup>211</sup> Staff, "Don't Come Back, Italy's South Tells Emigres in Virus-Hit North."

<sup>212</sup> Bangkok Post, "'Abandoned' Italian Hospital Fears Virus' March South."

**Table 3.4: The Calabria Government Response Timeline**

- (1) Feb. 24: Ordinance closes all schools and universities.
- (2) Feb. 28: First case confirmed, officials demand a meeting with Prime Minister Conte.
- (3) March 8: Calabrian border is shut down.
- (4) March 11: Emergency ICU expansion plan is activated.
- (5) March 20: Calabria receives support from the Italian Military.

### Addressing the Unique Situation in Calabria

While the findings concerning the Calabrian case are fascinating, they may not be as generalizable as the findings gathered from the other regions in this study. The ‘Ndrangheta might be a rare example of an untouchable criminal syndicate with a business team of all-stars and a surveillance network comparable to the Gestapo. Nevertheless, the Calabrian case further substantiates Putnam’s thesis; social capital engenders good governance, and without it, institutions are faced with greater challenges. When institutions struggle to address these challenges, their infrastructures struggle too. So, when a crisis occurs, governments know they cannot count on the infrastructure to be their saving grace. As a result of this heightened vulnerability, governments might feel more inclined to act urgently, decisively, and effectively.

### The Campanian Government’s Healthcare Epidemic

While the fragile infrastructure may have been less of a driving motivation, Campania’s feeble healthcare system also contributed to the Campanian regional government’s choice of an

assertive and effective policy solution similar to the Calabrian government. A few years prior to the 2020 pandemic, after receiving numerous corruption charges, Rome placed the Campania government on a ten-year healthcare spending prohibition. This spending prohibition made simple tasks like providing enough seasonal flu vaccines difficult, so a COVID-19 outbreak akin to Lombardy's or Veneto's would quickly destroy the Campania healthcare system.<sup>213</sup> At the beginning of Italy's pandemic, Campania's ICU capacity was dismal, and the region's health officials struggled to stay organized. With no clear orders from the government, healthcare workers quarantined infected individuals in whatever hospital rooms were free to spare.<sup>214</sup> Furthermore, the population's access to healthcare was extremely limited. Many Campania residents did not live in the vicinity of hospitals or even general medical practitioners.<sup>215</sup>

To bolster the region's feeble healthcare system, Campania Governor Vincenzo De Luca successfully persuaded Rome to end Campania's ten-year healthcare spending prohibition. Next, on March 7<sup>th</sup>, the government ordered five hospitals to specialize only in coronavirus treatment.<sup>216</sup> The following day, policymakers allocated 30 million euros to buy ventilators and increase the region's ICU capacity.<sup>217</sup> By the second week of March, Campanian officials prepared to boost ICU beds from 320 to 500.<sup>218</sup> Seeing how under-equipped Campania hospitals were, many government officials used their own money to supply healthcare workers with personal protective equipment.<sup>219</sup> Some officials directly contacted the Chinese government, hoping to organize a transaction of medical equipment.<sup>220</sup> These urgent and decisive responses

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<sup>213</sup> Personal Interview with Campanian Government Officials.

<sup>214</sup> Personal Interview with Campanian Government Officials.

<sup>215</sup> Personal Interview with Campanian Government Officials.

<sup>216</sup> "Coronavirus in Campania, the Plan."

<sup>217</sup> "Coronavirus in Naples, De Luca against Bars: Rules Not Respected Ready to Close the Premises - Il Mattino.It."

<sup>218</sup> "Coronavirus in Naples, De Luca against Bars: Rules Not Respected Ready to Close the Premises - Il Mattino.It."

<sup>219</sup> Personal Interview with Campanian Government Officials.

<sup>220</sup> Personal Interview with Campanian Government Officials.

indicate that like Calabria's government officials, Campania's government officials were fully aware of the their infrastructure's vulnerability, which in turn, made them respond assertively to the crisis.

### **Coercing Collective Action: The Campanian Regional Government Response**

The Campania regional government's policy response can also provide insight into how governments in areas with low social capital levels respond to a crisis. In a crisis where governments require full policy compliance from the public, Campania's case suggests that if a community has little social capital, the government may be more inclined to use aggressive policy responses like threats and coercion, in hopes of forcing widespread policy adherence. Unlike highly civic communities, in a community with low social capital, like Campania's and Calabria's, citizens typically struggle to successfully solve collective action problems. So, when this community faces a crisis like a pandemic, government officials might feel the need to employ more coercive strategies to solve the citizens' collective action problem artificially.

The trust between Campania's people and government operates in the opposite direction of Lombardy's and Veneto's. While the communities in northern Italy trust one another and perceive themselves as aligned in a horizontal network with their government, Campanians are more hesitant to place their trust in one another. Furthermore, they view their government through a vertical, hierarchical network of patronage and opportunism. As a result, northern regions are typically better suited to solve collective action dilemmas than southern regions like Campania. In Veneto, for instance, the COVID-19 collective action problem was participation in the government's ambitious testing and tracing mandates. Here in Campania and Calabria as well, the COVID-19 collective action problem was participation in the lockdown. In the absence of social capital, for Campania, this collective action dilemma was solved not as much by the

people as it was by the government. In Campania, citizens struggled to follow the lockdown measures, forcing the Governor to use exceedingly draconian policies and coercive rhetoric to facilitate policy compliance.

From the start of the lockdown to the Phase 3 reopening, Campania Governor Vincenzo De Luca expressed open signs of distrust in his people. Partly explained by the lack of social capital, this distrust was the government's driving motivation to implement coercive rhetoric and policies. Knowing that Campanians would struggle with the lockdown's collective action problem, Governor De Luca employed aggressive language and policies to coerce his citizens into participating in the lockdown. Governor De Luca might have also been more comfortable using this coercive rhetoric because he felt his citizens lacked the collective capability to effectively hold him accountable in the future.

Evidence of low social capital's influence on the Campanian government's response can be pinpointed in two areas. First, it can be seen in the regional government's ordinances to tighten lockdown restrictions, as well as the regional Governor's rationale for implementing these draconian restrictions. Second, low social capital's influence can be identified in Governor De Luca's performatively coercive public rhetoric combined with his heavy reliance on law enforcement and to coerce and deter collective action. These two behaviors suggest that an instinctive and underlying distrust made the Campanian regional government hesitant to passively assume their citizens would willfully and collectively comply with the lockdown mandates. Therefore, this suspicion, coupled with the community's historical incompetence in the face of collective action dilemmas may have compelled the government to solve this particular collective action problem coercively.

### Evidence of Distrust: Increasing the Lockdown Restrictions

When they received word of an outbreak in Lombardy, Campania government officials feared that the virus would soon hit their region.<sup>221</sup> In the following days, cases connected to Lombardy began trickling into the region. On February 27<sup>th</sup> – six days after Lombardy’s patient one – Governor De Luca mobilized a task force of epidemiologists to begin formulating a comprehensive contact tracing system.<sup>222</sup> Two days later, coronavirus infections in Campania rose to thirteen, with nine in Naples, and the remaining four cases divided between three other municipalities.<sup>223</sup> Acting with urgency, Governor De Luca ordered the closure of all schools and universities, intending to reopen them on March 1<sup>st</sup>.<sup>224</sup> When the March 8<sup>th</sup> decree leaked to the media and infected Lombardy citizens fled to the South, Governor De Luca and six other southern regions, including Calabria, immediately enacted policies to force all northern evacuees into a two-week quarantine upon arrival.<sup>225</sup> The central government responded with hostility, claiming that Governor De Luca and his colleagues were disobeying orders.<sup>226</sup>

A day later, the central government flipped its prior position, initiating a national lockdown. To Governor De Luca, however, Rome’s March 9<sup>th</sup> lockdown policy was not strict enough. Believing that the central government's decree was overly vague and lenient, Governor De Luca passed two aggressive ordinances on March 13<sup>th</sup>.<sup>227</sup> The first ordinance banned all walking in public without an urgent reason, and the second closed all forms of take-away food

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<sup>221</sup> Personal Interview with Campanian Government Officials. (in discussion with the author, March 2021).

<sup>222</sup> “Task Force Coronavirus in Campania, Ecco Il Team. Guida Italo Giulivo.”

<sup>223</sup> “Vincenzo De Luca.”

<sup>224</sup> “Vincenzo De Luca.”

<sup>225</sup> Ruccia, “Coronavirus, De Luca.”

<sup>226</sup> “Coronavirus, De Luca Chiude La Campania Ma Il Viminale Frena: «Ordinanza Non Coerente Con Il Quadro Normativo» - Il Mattino.It.”

<sup>227</sup> Ruccia, “Coronavirus, De Luca.”



unless the food was pre-packaged by a masked employee.<sup>228</sup> These two ordinances set an aggressive tone for the Campania regional government. Violators were subjected to three months in jail, a fine of more than 200 euros, and a mandatory two-week quarantine.<sup>229</sup>

The Governor's motivation for enacting these policies can be traced back to a deep distrust, and this distrust can be observed in his public addresses. To explain his rationale for banning public walking and most take-away food services, Governor De Luca told local media; "We are unfortunately forced to make these ordinances, because there are 90% of citizens who have understood that the situation is serious, but there is 10% of irresponsible people, who must be neutralized and put in a position to do no harm."<sup>230</sup> Later in the interview, the Governor stated "with ordinances we can regulate 99% of the problems, but then people's brains must be put into operation. Sometimes it feels like you're dealing with people who look like First Communion kids."<sup>231</sup> These statements, coupled with the government's draconian policies, suggest that an underlying sense of distrust was a noteworthy motivation for the regional government's decisive policy response in to the COVID-19 crisis.

#### Evidence of Collective Action Struggles: Coercive Enforcement and Rhetoric

Once the regional government implemented these strict lockdown mandates, the regional government immediately called upon Rome to dispatch the military to help law enforcement ensure widespread collective action success.<sup>232</sup> On March 20<sup>th</sup>, after persistently requesting Rome to "militarize" neighborhoods, Governor De Luca received military support to aide police in enforcing obedience.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Ruccia.

<sup>229</sup> Ruccia.

<sup>230</sup> Ruccia.

<sup>231</sup> Ruccia.

<sup>232</sup> Ruccia.

<sup>233</sup> Ruccia.

By May, the Governor was strong-arming the public with vivid threats, earning himself the title of “The Sheriff.”<sup>234</sup> During a May 2<sup>nd</sup> public address, Governor De Luca warned

Campanians with the following statement:

I will go out with a club in my hand, I will hide behind the walls and I will appear as soon as I see someone wandering without an urgent reason: a blow to the head and I leave him dead on the ground.<sup>235</sup>

After this, Governor De Luca told graduation party planners that if they violated his government’s lockdown orders, he would dispatch police officers armed with flamethrowers.<sup>236</sup>

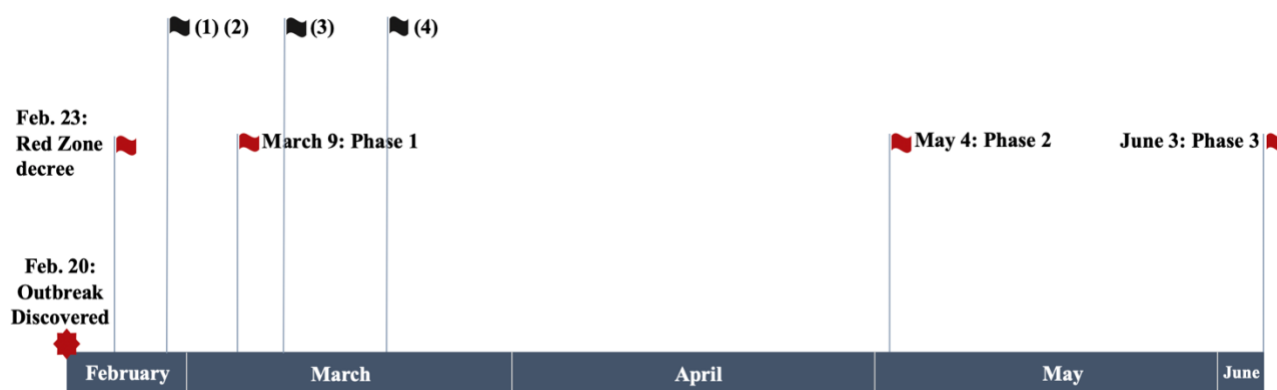
While the crisis’s urgency can somewhat explain this violent and coercive rhetoric, the underlying reason for this policy approach may have been a historically-embedded feeling of doubt and suspicion. If the Governor was wholly confident in his people's loyalty to his lockdown policies, he would not have felt compelled to coerce them so harshly. Unlike Veneto, where both citizens and government looked to their long history of collaboration and victory over collective endeavors, Campanians and their government officials had little reason to expect a resounding and effortless triumph over this collective action problem. Because everyone expected others to violate the guidelines, the government immediately resorted to third-party enforcement techniques. In the end, rather than dutifully obeying the government as part of their social contract, many in Campania followed the lockdown's rules out of self-preservation and the sheer fact that Governor De Luca sat at the top of the government's hierarchy. Nevertheless, the government’s policy response of coercion was successful, and the region was sheltered from the crisis. The Campania government’s COVID-19 policy responses can be pictured in Table 3.5.

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<sup>234</sup> Di Giorgio, “Coronavirus, lo sceriffo De Luca scatena l’ironia dei social.”

<sup>235</sup> Roncone, “Coronavirus, Il Granduca Vincenzo De Luca, Oratoria a Effetti Speciali Tra La Ragione e Il Lanciafiamme.”

<sup>236</sup> Roncone, “Coronavirus, Il Granduca”

**Table 3.5: The Campania Government Response Timeline**

- (1) Feb. 27: Governor mobilizes COVID-19 Task Force.
- (2) Feb. 29: Closes all schools and universities.
- (3) March 13: Passes ordinances to ban public walking and take-away food.
- (4) March 20: Campania receives support from Italian Military.

### The Calabrian Government's Pleas for Collective Action and Civic Collaboration

While their public statements were not as rambunctious and performative as the Campanian Governor's, Calabrian policymakers also exhibited signs of distrust and doubt in the citizens' collective capabilities. But rather than emphatically coercing the public, Calabria Governor Jole Santelli constantly pleaded for collaboration, often taking to Facebook to make statements like, "We are a people, who, during difficult times, can transform individualism into a great sense of community."<sup>237</sup> While the government's threatening rhetoric was more reserved, the Calabrian government still relied on tools of coercion. On March 20<sup>th</sup>, the military arrived in Calabria and Governor Santelli announced that like Campania's government, the Calabrian government would be banning all public walking.<sup>238</sup> Throughout the Calabrian lockdown, numerous videos went viral depicting local Mayors and politicians taking to the street and

<sup>237</sup> "Jole Santelli | Facebook."

<sup>238</sup> "Jole Santelli | Facebook."

shouting at people who were blatantly violating the lockdown rules.<sup>239</sup> In contrast, viral videos from northern Italy showed people playing music from their balconies in a spirit of solidarity.<sup>240</sup>

### **Putting the Calabrian and Campanian Cases Together**

In both Calabria and Campania, social capital's underlying influence on government responses may have contributed to their decisive, aggressive, and overall effective policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis. As seen in these two regions' government policy solutions, social capital's scarcity may have helped motivate policymakers to take more involved and assertive measures to adequately protect their citizens and health infrastructures. The un-civic community's underlying influence on policymakers in these regions came from two sources; a historically ineffective government leading to infrastructural decay, and a long-standing repertoire of distrust and collective action failures.

Unlike Lombardy and Veneto, where civic communities generated effective governance, producing reliable infrastructures, in Calabria and Campania, the lack of social capital produced ineffective governance and infrastructural decay. Secondly, unlike the North, where social capital established a mutual trust between the government and its citizens, Campania and Calabria enjoyed little mutual trust, which produced a historical repertoire for unsuccessful collective endeavors. As a result of these two pervasive forces, both regional governments knew they needed to take more assertive policy actions to stem the virus. As a result of these actions, the COVID-19 pandemic spared the regions. Governor De Luca became a national celebrity for his no-nonsense castigation of lockdown violators, and in September, he smoothly won

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<sup>239</sup> Heng, "We Will Send Police. With Flame-Throwers."

<sup>240</sup> Rocca, "Italians, Under Coronavirus Lockdown, Keep Their Spirits Up With Singing and Cooking."

reelection with a whopping seventy percent of the popular vote.<sup>241</sup> In Calabria, Governor Santelli, who had been fighting cancer for years, unfortunately passed away in October.<sup>242</sup>

### **Conclusion**

While it did not fully determine their responses, it does appear that social capital's conditions played underlying roles in each regional government's policy response to COVID-19. The findings from the two high social capital regions, Lombardy and Veneto, suggest that the civic community can both help and hurt policy decisiveness and general institutional efficacy during a crisis. Lombardy's case suggests that social capital's promise of future accountability can potentially impede decisive policy action. On the other hand, as seen in Veneto's case, when a government in a high social capital area responds to a crisis, if the policy response taps into a historical source of collective action success, the civic community can help facilitate policy effectiveness. In the regions with low social capital, Campania, and Calabria, the social capital scarcity might have contributed to the regional governments' motivation to decisively formulate and implement policies that could accommodate the regions' collective and infrastructural disadvantages. These findings indicate that a straightforward correlation of high social capital with effective crisis governance, and low social capital with ineffective crisis governance might not be entirely accurate.

### **A Recap for High Social Capital**

While significant situational differences made the dilemma far more complicated for Lombardy's government than Veneto's government, both governments faced a similar demanding political decision at the start of the outbreak. On the one hand, the governments could independently implement COVID-19 policies, possibly slowing the virus's contagion but

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<sup>241</sup> Ottens, "Italian Regional Elections."

<sup>242</sup> "Calabria Governor Jole Santelli Dead - English."

disregarding Rome's wishes, violating civil liberties and putting their economies in jeopardy. On the other hand, the governments could sit back and wait for the overly passive central government to act, which ran the risk of allowing the virus to spread uncontrolled throughout the populations. Due to both regions' high social capital, the governments knew their citizens expected a high-quality response to the ongoing crisis. If policymakers chose incorrectly, falling short of the civic community's rigorous expectation, the political repercussions would be swift, and by the next election, the civic communities would decisively end their careers in office.

A combination of factors made Lombardy's political dilemma far more challenging for the government to address rationally. Lombardy was the first region hit by coronavirus, and it served as the very epicenter of the outbreak. Within three days from February 20<sup>th</sup> to February 23<sup>rd</sup>, coronavirus had spread across ten municipalities. The virus's violent spread combined with economic concerns, the central government's interference, and the civic community's ominous threat, all combined to overwhelm policymakers, making the Lombardy government's policy response indecisive and ineffective. As a result, his government may have attempted to relinquish policymaking responsibility, permitting important policies to be impaired by Rome, and leaving municipal governments and the civic community confused on how to proceed. Since Lombardy has a history of civic and governmental collaboration, Governor Fontana could have utilized the same successful community-based containment policy that the Venetian government used. But the overwhelming pressure from Rome, economists, the civic community, and the crisis itself prevented him from this rational course of action.

The political dilemma that paralyzed Lombardy's government was far easier to manage for Veneto's government. With the virus only in one municipality, Venetian policymakers could rationally approach the political decision and look at their civic community as a tool rather than a

potential punisher. Veneto's long history of interregional collaboration between the civic community and government institutions cultivated a reliable trust between Veneto's government and its people. This tradition of trust reassured policymakers that if they implemented a widespread community-based containment measure, the Venetian citizens would fully participate. The civic community's source of policy confidence coupled with two other convincing sources was what drove the Venetian government to respond quickly and assertively to the crisis. Indeed, when the government enacted the Veneto Model policy package, the citizens willfully complied. The policy succeeded in repressing the virus, making Governor Zaia a celebrity and national political leader in Italy.

### **A Recap for Low Social Capital**

In Calabria and Campania, low social capital levels may have contributed to both governments' assertive and effective policy responses. This conclusion arises from how social capital's historical absence made the regions more vulnerable to the crisis. First, most clearly seen in Calabria's case, low social capital made the regions more vulnerable to the crisis by indirectly contributing to the public health system's decay. With a historical lack of social capital rendering the regional governments ineffective and unreliable, criminal organizations rose to power and quickly weakened the public infrastructure. Second, without social capital's blueprint for collective action success, in both regions, governments likely knew that their citizens were less capable of solving collective action problems. This collective incompetence was incredibly daunting because the COVID-19 lockdown required widespread collective action to be effective. The effects of this tradition of distrust and suspicion can be most clearly seen in the Campania regional government's policy response to COVID-19. When the coronavirus arrived in the North, the combination of these two low social capital-induced liabilities might have driven the

governments to take more aggressive measures in ensuring their regions were safe from the deadly virus.

### **Proceeding to Chapter Four**

Now that each of the regional governments' COVID-19 policy responses have been described and analyzed through the lens of social capital, this study can proceed to the fourth chapter. Chapter Four will provide a summary of the thesis's argument and sub-conclusions, an assessment of the alternative hypotheses, potential avenues for future research, and a conclusion.



## CHAPTER FOUR

Now that the relationships between the COVID-19 crisis, social capital, and regional government responses have been interpreted, this chapter will discuss the overarching claim, judge the alternative hypotheses, suggest avenues for future research, and conclude. The first section of this chapter will address the main argument that social capital shaped regional responses and their efficacy. The thesis demonstrates that, indeed, social capital played an underlying role in shaping local responses, and when responses meshed with the region's social capital conditions, they more effectively combatted the crisis.

The second section of this chapter will touch on the alternative hypotheses posed in Chapter One. These alternative hypotheses are intended to help explain what other factors may have influenced regional governments' policy responses to the pandemic. The first alternative hypothesis (AH1) assumes that regions containing older and densely settled populations had more assertive regional governments. The second alternative hypothesis (AH2) posits that the aggressiveness of regional government responses depended on their healthcare systems' strength. Finally, the third alternative hypothesis (AH3) correlates high-right wing support with slow policy responses. The third section will summarize the four sub-conclusions regarding the specific ways high and low social capital levels subtly influenced COVID-19 policymaking.

The fourth section will propose ways scholars can study this perspective of social capital in the future. As it pertains to all democratic institutions, social capital is a uniquely comprehensive concept. Since Putnam conceived it, political scientists have analyzed the theory in many scenarios. As of now, it appears the COVID-19 crisis is coming to a close, and there are undoubtedly many other ways to apply social capital to governance in this period. These four

Italian regions' policy responses during the first months of the crisis only provide a glimpse into the greater conclusions that have yet to be uncovered.

The final section will conclude by discussing the broader implications and goals of this study. This thesis has been written in hopes of accomplishing two goals. The first goal is to contribute to the expansion of social capital theory and its relevance to democratic governance. The second goal has been to extract meaningful lessons from the COVID-19 crisis so that political science can further prepare democratic institutions for effectively managing future emergencies.

### **Discussing the Argument's Claims**

#### **Did Social Capital Influence Policy Approaches?**

The conclusions from Chapter Three indicate that social capital played an underlying role in shaping regional government policy approaches. While regional social capital did not impact Rome's decrees, it likely influenced the regional governments' approaches. For instance, Lombardy and Veneto's regional governments were hugely relevant in the 17 days between the outbreak and Rome's national "I Stay Home" decree. In the South, due to their region's unique vulnerabilities, Campania and Calabria's regional governments were relevant throughout the entire first wave.

Whenever these regional governments were in the position to create COVID-19 policies, social capital may have subtly driven the policymaking strategies. The underlying influence of social capital can be interpreted in all four regions. In both regions containing high social capital levels, the governments may have felt pressure from their civic community's high expectations. Out of fear of being held accountable by highly engaged citizens, government officials only wanted to enact policy solutions that were certain to fulfill expectations. The Lombardian and

Venetian governments responded differently to this pressure, but nevertheless, it appears that this influence was present and pervasive. In the South, as the Campanian and Calabrian governments developed their policy solutions to the crisis, both governments appear to have been affected by their civic communities' weaknesses. The two Governors' public statements and policies suggest that policymakers knew they could not rely on support from their civic communities. Moreover, they knew that their region's organized crime and related weak bridging and linking social capital, had left them with crumbling public health infrastructures. This disadvantage may have convinced them that urgent and involved governmental action was necessary to combat COVID-19 effectively. In all four regions, social capital appears to have played an underlying role in regional government policy approaches.

### **Did Social Capital Accommodation Produce Effective Policies?**

Moreover, where regional policymakers chose policies that meshed with their social capital conditions, pandemic containment was more successful. In Veneto, Campania, and Calabria, policymakers enacted solutions that suited the strengths and weaknesses of their civic communities. Venetian officials blended their policies with their social capital by choosing a community-centric approach to take advantage of the civic community's collectivizing power. Campanian and Calabrian officials merged their policies with social capital conditions by hastily responding to protect their fragile healthcare systems and relying on coercion to account for the community's collective action weakness.

Lombardy's intense, early exposure to the pandemic makes it an outlier in some respects. However, it still appears that the government failed to contain the virus partly because policymakers did not merge their COVID-19 solutions with the region's social capital conditions. Like Veneto, Lombardy's civic community was fully capable of providing collective

support to the regional government in its crusade against the pandemic. Unfortunately, in the crucial weeks immediately following the outbreak, the Lombardy Government did not effectively mobilize this civic community. Due to concerns about political accountability and the immense pressure applied by Rome, the government failed to implement policies that took advantage of the ready and willing civic community. Instead, Lombardy stood down from the policymaking burden and gave the Prime Minister a louder and misleading voice. The regional government's withdrawal coupled with Rome's overly passive messaging led to poor healthcare policies and widespread confusion from municipalities and citizens. This confusion left the region's civic communities unsure how to react to the crisis, causing a scattered and disunified public response. As a result of this policy disaster, COVID-19 devastated the region, and the Lombardy government fell short of the civic community's standard of quality. In the wave's aftermath, the Lombardy civic community mobilized to hold their Governor to account.

In each of these four case studies, it appears that when regional governments modified their policy responses to address the capabilities of their civic communities, these policies were effective in stemming the pandemic. Social capital not only had an underlying influence on regional government policy approaches, but it could have also played a role in determining policy success.

### **Judging the Alternative Hypotheses**

A region's social capital level was not the only factor shaping policy responses to the 2020 pandemic. During the outbreak's critical first weeks, the regional governments needed to form their policies around many different components. While this study has suggested that social capital played an underlying role in the regional government's policy responses, there were undoubtedly other variables at play.

The first alternative hypothesis maintains that Italian regions containing older and densely settled populations had governments that responded aggressively to the virus. COVID-19's higher mortality rate for older age subjects, as well as its high rate of transmission can imply that these two variables were significant for regional governments as they assessed the crisis's threat. The example of Lombardy and Veneto suggests that population age and density was not decisive in shaping responses. Despite having contradictory policy responses, both regions contain the same average population age of 46 years old.<sup>243</sup> Due to this uniformity, it can be inferred that there is little correlation between aggressive policy responses and an older average age. The same lack of correlation can be seen in population density, where Lombardy's population density (420/km<sup>2</sup>) is far higher than Veneto's (270/km<sup>2</sup>), yet Lombardy responded less aggressively.<sup>244</sup> These statistics suggest no correlation between aggressive COVID-19 policies and average population age and density.

The second alternative hypothesis speculates that regional responses will depend on the strength of the healthcare sector, with weaker health infrastructure leading to more aggressive responses to contain the virus's spread. To judge the veracity of AH2, it makes sense to examine the policy responses undertaken by the Campanian and Calabrian governments. Both regions contain fragile healthcare infrastructures, and when the crisis arrived in the North, both regional governments implemented aggressive COVID-19 policies. So far, the hypothesis is accurate. Next, it is important to examine the two northern regions' policy approaches, since both contained robust healthcare systems. While Lombardy's conservative approach to the virus can reflect the government's reliance on their robust public health systems, Veneto's decisive

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<sup>243</sup> Statista "Italy."

<sup>244</sup> Binkin et al., "Protecting Our Health Care Workers While Protecting Our Communities during the COVID-19 Pandemic," 2.

response is not compatible with this hypothesis. The example of Veneto suggests that a strong healthcare system does not always lead to a less aggressive response.

The third and final alternative hypothesis supposes that regions with comparatively high support for right-wing political parties contained governments that responded slowly to the virus. As was the case in the United States, policymakers from the political right showed signs of hesitation in both accepting the crisis's pertinence and taking governmental action to combat the virus. The regional governments in Lombardy and Veneto are both headed by prominent politicians from the right-wing political party known as the Northern League. At the very start of the outbreak, Lombardy Governor Atilio Fontana and Veneto Governor Luca Zaia rallied along party lines and dismissed the crisis's severity. However, right-wing affiliation did not remain decisive. Governor Zaia promptly abandoned his party's rhetoric and adopted a rigorous policy package containing assertive testing, contact tracing, and health care reorganization. Governor Zaia's divergence from his prior allegiance to the Northern League indicates that partisan politics may have not played a substantial role in determining COVID-19 responses.

### **Sub-Conclusions for Social Capital's Policymaking Influences**

Age, population density, health infrastructure, and party affiliation do not decisively explain regional policy responses. Social capital – while not determinative of responses – does seem linked to policy formulation and efficacy. Therefore, Italian regional governments' experiences during the pandemic offer insight into how high and low social capital shape crisis governance.

#### **High Social Capital's Underlying Influences on Crisis Governance**

The example of Lombardy and Veneto suggests that high social capital influences crisis responses in two key ways. First, the Lombardy government's indecisive policy response

indicates that high social capital can potentially stymie assertive government responses. As a constant reminder of political accountability, social capital may have raised the stakes of policymaking, intimidating both Lombardy and Veneto's governments as they searched for solutions to the crisis. When the two governments approached the cumbersome burden of pandemic policymaking, social capital threatened their ability to respond firmly. While Veneto's government broke free from this paralyzing threat, Lombardy's did not.

As they witnessed during their time in office and throughout their region's long civic histories, policymakers in Veneto and Lombardy knew that if they failed to address the COVID-19 crisis correctly, their civic communities would eventually seek vengeance both at the ballot box and in the courtrooms. As a result of this looming threat, government officials only implemented policies they knew would succeed. This confidence prerequisite can help explain the difference between the contrasting policy responses between Lombardy and Veneto. While Veneto's Governor knew his COVID-19 policies would succeed and he would preserve the civic community's support, the Lombardy Governor was not confident that any strong policy response would indeed work. This lack of confidence explains why Lombardy conceded policymaking responsibility to the central government, despite knowing Rome's approach was incredibly flawed. By letting Rome inherit the task of policymaking, Lombardy government officials attempted to avoid accountability so that in the case of policy failure, the civic community's thirst for vengeance would hopefully aim at Rome.

Second, the Venetian case study indicates that high social capital levels can reassure governments that their civic communities will solve collective action dilemmas; therefore, the government may be more empowered to implement policies that require widespread community participation. Veneto's case suggests that social capital can contribute to solving the paralyzing

problem it initially creates. As mentioned, Veneto's Governor found confidence in his policy, overcoming the social capital-induced accountability threat and initiating the community-centric Veneto Model policies. While two other exclusive sources contributed to his confidence, social capital might have helped persuade Governor Zaia that his policies would succeed. The region's long civic tradition of mutual trust, norms of reciprocity, and civic engagement assured Veneto's government that its citizens would fully comply with rigorous policies. When the government initiated the policies, this speculation became a reality. The Veneto Model policy package saw extensive success and became the international gold standard for coronavirus policy.

#### Low Social Capital's Underlying Influence on Crisis Governance

The two southern regions' COVID-19 policy responses offer insight into how low social capital influences policymaking during a crisis. The shortage of social capital may have intensified the urgency for bold governmental action in two ways.

First, while this source of urgency may be less generalizable than the one concerning collective action enforcement, it is nevertheless worth mentioning. The lack of social capital in both regions may have contributed to the regions' public health vulnerability, further motivating the governments to use proactive policy solutions to COVID-19. This is especially the case for Calabria. Over the past thirty years, organized crime has devastated the healthcare system, and the prevalence of these organizations may have been caused by the region's lack of social capital. Knowing they could not expect the health infrastructure to handle an un-mitigated outbreak, the government threw itself onto the front lines of the crisis. Without a health system's reliable support, policymakers' only options were to either take decisive action or stand down and allow the virus to devastate the region.



The Campanian and Calabrian cases reveal a second way low social capital levels can motivate governments to respond decisively to a crisis. The governments knew that they could not expect their citizens to overcome the lockdown's collective action problem singlehandedly. As a result, the governments intervened by enforcing strict social distancing mandates and relying on coercion to solve the collective action dilemma. In Campania's case, the Governor supplemented this coercive approach by using intensely aggressive rhetoric. If the governments did not use this approach, citizens might have freely violated the rules, causing the virus to quickly spread and overwhelm the fragile healthcare systems. When the Campania and Calabria governments deployed these strict enforcement policies, the policies succeeded, and the regions survived the wave.

### **Future Research**

The coronavirus health crisis has posed many new and stimulating questions for political science. Of these many questions, this study has attempted to address one that pertains to the relationship between social capital and policy responses. Since social capital is used to explain general institutional strength, one would assume that crisis governance falls within this general domain. This study's surprising findings highlight how social capital's institutional benefits may not be so cut-and-dry. Social capital influences policy responses and their efficacy, but is not determinative of responses. In high social capital areas, social capital can serve as a barrier to decisive government action. When the government acts, however, high social capital areas are better able to overcome collective action challenges with cooperative action. In low social capital areas, the lack of trust and cohesion seems to both politically permit and practically necessitate decisive action.

There are many exciting ways to pursue further research into social capital and crisis policies. First, this thesis has only investigated four regions within one country. There are hundreds of other democratic nations that combatted the COVID-19 virus. The performances of these nations and their governments have yet to be analyzed in the context of social capital. For example, like Italy, the United States government struggled to contain the virus on both the federal and state levels. Furthermore, it appears that the relationship between Governor Fontana and Prime Minister Conte during the first wave of coronavirus, somewhat reflects the relationship between New York Governor Andrew Cuomo and President Donald Trump. It would be interesting to examine this relationship, as well as the New York State government's COVID-19 policy response and how social capital was involved.

A second avenue for future research can assess a crisis's ability to teach a low social capital community how to mobilize collectively. In an interview with Campanian government officials, the officials stressed that the first wave of coronavirus invoked a pervasive and powerful sense of communal solidarity which citizens had never experienced before.<sup>245</sup> While the government did need to take coercive measures to produce collective action, it is possible that as a result of this policy and the crisis, Campania's citizens also learned to trust one another. On this note, it might be interesting to examine crises as blueprints for collective action, potentially teaching communities to overcome their historical roots of distrust and initiating the long yet rewarding journey of social capital accumulation.

Another fascinating avenue for future research on social capital goes beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. There are many different kinds of crises, and a health crisis induced by a violently contagious disease is only one example. Even though all crises demand assertive government

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<sup>245</sup> Personal Interview with Campanian Government Officials.

responses, some crises operate in different ways. For instance, unlike the COVID-19 pandemic, which required swift action from public health services, a housing market crash requires decisive responses from public financial services. By investigating other crisis variants through the lens of social capital, scholars can further analyze the relationship between the civic community and crisis policy responses.

### **Conclusion**

This thesis has attempted to address the complex question of what role social capital played in determining Italy's regional government policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2020 pandemic was a unique situation in and of itself, but in Italy's specific case, the circumstances surrounding the nation's first fight against coronavirus were especially intriguing. Unlike policymakers from other western democratic nations, Italy's government officials had no viable policy guide to use when the virus emerged in full force in mid-February 2020. Following the example of Putnam's examination of Italy's decentralized government, a study of social capital, sub-national governance, and the first coronavirus wave seemed compelling and necessary. In hopes of furthering our knowledge of social capital and its general effects on governance, this study has revisited the birthplace of Putnam's theory during a "once-in-a-generation" crisis.

For democratic nations to endure the test of time, governments must know how to effectively manage intense crisis scenarios like the COVID-19 pandemic. Political science plays a pivotal role in producing this valuable knowledge. As this chaotic century progresses and new unprecedented crises brew in the future, political scientists must extract meaningful lessons from past crises. By studying these emergencies to the greatest possible extent, political science can

prepare governments and societies for the future. When another crisis eventually arrives, democracies will be more prepared, and more lives will be saved as a result.

This study is an attempt to contribute to this preparation. By investigating the connection between social capital and governance during the COVID-19 pandemic, this study has pushed to enrich the general knowledge of social capital and the greater state and society relationships that characterize democracies. Since all democracies will eventually face a crisis, by understanding how social capital impacted Italian sub-national institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic, these democracies may be one step closer to being fully prepared when that crisis eventually appears.

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