



Making Democracy 1993

Work: Civic

Traditions in

Modern Italy

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Robert Putnam, with

Robert Leonardi and

Rafaella Y. Nanetti

Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam is well known for his contention, first presented in an article entitled “Bowling Alone,” that civic engagement in con-

temporary America is in decline. The intellectual foundation for his argument was this book, *Making Democracy Work*, based on research done by Putnam and his associates, not in the United States but in Italy, contrasting the social and political structures of the country’s northern and southern regions. An examination of the mechanics of successful democracy, the book has become in the twelve years since its publication a contemporary classic of political science.

Putnam argued that northern Italy had flourishing political institutions because of the complex web of informal and formal organizations that brought people together, fostered communications, and increased involvement in the community. He contrasted this with the comparative paucity of such social organizations in southern Italy, which had much weaker political institutions. Economic development did not explain the strength of political institutions; rather, it was the quality of civic life—voter turnout, newspaper readership, and membership in associations ranging from sports clubs to choral societies—that brought about the strength and efficacy of political institutions.

The book was hailed in the *New York Times Book Review* as a “rare classic in political science,” and in the *Nation* as the modern successor to Tocqueville’s classic *Democracy in America*. The *Economist* described it as a “great work of social science, worthy to rank alongside de Tocqueville, Pareto, and Weber.”

Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy (. ISBN 9780691037387) is a 1993 book written by Robert D. Putnam (with Robert Leonardi and Raffaella Y. Nanetti). Published by Princeton University Press, the book's central thesis is that social capital is key to high institutional performance and the maintenance of democracy. The authors studied the performance of the twenty regional Italian governments since 1970, which were similar institutions but differed in their social, economic and "A remarkable study of `civic traditions.'"--Steven Lukes, The Times Literary Supplement. "It is rare that one comes across a classic in political science, yet in Robert D. Putnam's Making Democracy Work we undoubtedly have one. . . . Mr. Putnam's seminal work addresses in a rigorously empirical way the central question of democratic theory: What makes democratic institutions stable and effective? . . .Â One crucial implication of Making Democracy Work is that feeble and corrupt government, operating against the background of a weak and uncivic society, tends not to foster the creation of wealth, but rather to renew poverty. Overmighty government may stifle economic initiative.