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The Rise of Unconventional Political Participation in Italy: Measurement equivalence and trend over time, 1976-2009

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Introduction

The concept of political participation is very common in everyday life public discourse, especially in the last few years. For instance, Italy has experienced a new wave of mobilization. Many different parts of the country have risen their voices against the government, banks, international organizations and corporations. Demonstrations, marches, sit-ins, symbolic occupations, petitions are actions undertaken by citizens in order to influence not only the political process, but also the general decision making.

Norris (2002) argued that citizens are not moving toward civic and political apathy, but are become more and more engaged in the political sphere. In the 1980s many examples of transnational protest were seen (Della Porta 2007b). Many studies argue that Italian civil society is lively and organized (Della Porta 2007a; Reiter et al. 2007). There also has been a change in the modes of unconventional participation from radical opposition to institutionalization of protest activities.

For instance, in the last 15 year Italy witnessed the large scale protests at the G8 summit in Naples in 1994, disorders during the Genoa G8 summit in 2001, demonstrations against involvement in the Afghanistan war in 2001, final demonstration in Florence after the European Social Forum in 2002, demonstration against the Iraqi War in 2003 in Rome, mobilization against university reform in 2005, opposition to the high speed train line in Val di Susa from 2005, protests against the military base in Vicenza from 2007, mobilization against the last university reform in 2010 and against the governments cuts due to the financial crisis. In everyday life it appears that more and more citizens participate in demonstrations, boycotts, petitions and other forms of contentious actions. It is claimed that Italy is developing a protest culture since political actions are undertaken everyday in order to raise citizens' voice (Della Porta et al. 2006).

This article describes the trend of unconventional political participation in Italy over 30 years. First, we define unconventional participation outlining its core features. Our conceptualization follows the work of Barnes, Kaase et al. (1979), who first created a distinction between conventional and unconventional participation. This framework has been followed by Inglehart (1990), Parry and colleagues (1992), Dalton (2008) and Norris (2002).

Second, we test a measurement model demonstrating that the concept of unconventional participation can be measured using five items and one latent construct. To do so, we use Multi Group Confirmatory Factor Analysis (MGCFA) in the framework of Structural Equation Modeling (Bollen 1989) and test for configural, metric and scalar equivalence (Steenkamp and Baumgartner 1998; Vandenberg and Lance 2000). It is well known in the social sciences that concepts have to travel if we want to take advantage of their use, but in doing so we risk to stretch them and to lose their utility (Sartori 1970). We test whether the construct of unconventional participation is equivalent across time and verify that we are measuring the same phenomenon in different periods. Not considering the issue of measurement equivalence jeopardizes the subsequent research because the results can be biased (Adcock and Collier 2001; King et al. 2004). Furthermore, the literature lacks a measurement instrument for the Italian case and a systematic study about the trend of unconventional participation.

Third, we build an index of unconventional participation to verify whether or not there has been a rise over 30 years using four waves of the European Values Study (European Values Study 2011) and the Political Action Study (Barnes and Kaase 1976). This analysis provides evidence that there has been a significant growth and we formulate some possible explanations for this change.

The Concept of Unconventional Participation

In order to define the concept of unconventional participation it is necessary to discuss the broader concept of political participation. Political participation can be loosely defined as those activities which aim to modify the current state of affairs. One of the first conceptualization of political participation is the one by Verba and Nie (1972) which influenced subsequent research on political action. They argued that political participation refers to “those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take” (Verba and Nie 1972, 2).

This definition focused on the government and particularly on how the actions are targeted towards it (Milbrath 1965; Milbrath and Goel 1977). Verba and Nie had the merit of enlarging the scope of activities in which citizens could engage (Teorell, Torcal and Montero 2007). In fact, by that time political participation substantially meant voting and the activities related to institutionalized politics. Until the end of the 1970s, other forms of political engagement that addressed other issues or targets were considered irrational or infrequent behavior (Rucht 2007). This conceptualization is too narrow to be useful because it cuts out most of the forms of political participation and it restricts the scope of action to the government.

Political participation is more than voting and sometimes the act of voting it is not a necessary condition for identifying a person involved in politics. Therefore, other authors went beyond this narrow definition and added other modes of participation to their analysis. Barnes, Kaase *et al.* (1979) differentiated between “conventional” and “unconventional” activities. On the one hand, “conventional” participation concerned institutionalized modes not necessarily addressing political aims, such as reading about politics, discussion of politics, contacting officials, work for a party and other activities concerning the electoral process. On the other hand, they identified a “protest potential” which referred to the involvement in “unconventional forms of political behavior as a means of political repress, namely [...] the use of tactics as petitions, demonstrations, boycotts, rent or tax strikes, unofficial industrial strikes, occupations

of buildings, blocking of traffic, damage to property, and personal violence” (Marsh and Kaase 1979b, 59). As a consequence of the distinctions between “conventional” and “unconventional” participation, political participation is defined as “all voluntary activities intended to influence either directly or indirectly political choices at various levels of the political system” (Marsh and Kaase 1979a, 42).

The merit of this conceptualization is that it goes beyond the governmental target and it addresses the point that political participation can be directed towards other objects. In fact “the authoritative allocations of values is *not* the sole responsible of state actors of the public sector [...] these non-governmental institutions may be targeted by citizens attempts to influence political outcomes” (Teorell, Torcal and Montero 2007, 336). For instance, boycotting is a clear example of an action that is not oriented towards the public actors but instead to private, transnational organizations. In fact, the targets are “often major multinational corporations, exemplified by consumer boycotts of Nike running shoes, McDonald’s hamburgers, and California grapes” (Norris 2002, 193). The rise of boycotts has been so relevant that several studies have investigated on it, labeling this mode of political participation as “political consumerism” (Stolle, Hooghe and Micheletti 2005). Following the same line, very often demonstrations are not organized against state’s decisions, but to show opposition towards other actors’ decisions. The rise of social movements is often connected to issues that goes beyond the state public actors (Della Porta and Diani 2006).

All these forms are part of a *repertoire* of actions in the sense that they constitutes a “whole set of means [a group] has for making claims of different types on different individuals” (Tilly 1986, 2). And more importantly, these actions are part of a hierarchy of action. Political participation can be seen as a continuum in which there are several thresholds separating different states of intensity: “[t]he first threshold indicates the transition from conventional to unconventional politics. Signing petitions and participating in lawful demonstrations are unorthodox political activities but still within the bounds of accepted democratic norms. The second threshold represents the shift to direct action techniques, such as boycotts. A third level involves illegal, but nonviolent, acts. Unofficial strikes or a peaceful occupation of a building typify this state. Finally, a fourth threshold includes violent activities such as personal injury or physical damage” (Dalton 1988, 65). This continuum of participation modes is also defined according to the different requirements of participants and differ in the nature of their influence. The continuum is outlined using four criteria: whether the act conveys information about the individual’s political preferences or/and applies pressure for compliance; the potential degree of conflict that is implied in the activity; the effort put into the activity; the amount of cooperation with other people involved in the action (Dalton 2008).

In addition, the inclusion of other forms of political participation into its definitions has followed the rise of citizens engagement in the public sphere: “[t]here are many reasons to believe that the shift from traditional interest groups to new social movements has influenced the agencies, repertoires, and targets of political participation [...] the analysis of protest politics shows that many of these forms of activity, such as petitions, demonstrations, and consumer boycott, are fairly pervasive and have become increasingly popular during recent decades. Protest politics is on the rise as a channel of political expression and mobilization” (Norris 2002, 234).

By “unconventional participation” we mean a *direct* form of political participation, that it is something more immediate and happens without the intermediation of other actors. As a form of direct participation, unconventional participation requires a deeper and more extended effort;

it presupposes a certain degree of conflict, potentially it produces a high amount of pressures on the actors who are contested, although it may not produce the expected outcome. Unconventional participation also presupposes collective action (Tilly and Tarrow 2006). Citizens do not live in a vacuum, so they aggregate and get organized in order to accomplish what they desire. This is, usually, done through forms of organizations that vary in structures, memberships, scopes, resources, capacity of mobilizations and so on (Della Porta and Diani 2006). Unconventional participation is an “episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when (a) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claims and (b) the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants” (Tarrow and Tilly 2007, 438). “Episodic” refers to the fact that it does not happen following a fixed schedule, it can happen just occasionally and for specific reasons. “Public” is used in this definition in order to differentiate all those events that are organized, promoted and sponsored by private organizations. “Collective action” refers to the fact that a multitude of citizens participate, but the benefits of the action are not necessarily distributed among the participants, but also among a wider public. In this sense, “collective” refers to the action but also to the result, because the larger public may benefit from it.

For this article, we decided to follow the line initiated by the Barnes and Kaase study that included more intense forms of political participation in its conceptualization. This study has created a tradition within the field of political participation (Dalton 1988; Parry, Moyser and Day 1992; Klingemann and Fuchs 1995; Norris 2002; Dalton 2008).

Testing Measurement Equivalence over Time

Longitudinal research often assumes that the measurement instrument is valid in each time point in which it is applied. The researchers working in the field of comparative politics are always concerned about “conceptual stretching” (Sartori 1970). One of the major problems in comparative politics is comparing things that are not the alike, since a concept may not represent the same construct in different areas of the world. The same is true when working on a single country using different time periods. In practice we have to make sure that a concept can travel freely across time: “[t]he empirical problem is that we badly need information which is sufficiently precise to be meaningfully comparable” (Sartori 1970, 1052).

This problem is particularly relevant in cross-country research but the same argument applies in longitudinal research. It is argued that one of the greatest challenges in cross-national research is to assess measurement equivalence (Van Deth 1998; Adcock and Collier 2001; Harkness, Van de Vijver and Mohler 2003). Different authors have expressed their concern about the lack of interest in proving the measurement validity of the instruments used (Adcock and Collier 2001; King et al. 2004). The problem is that the issue of measurement involves directly on fundamental task of social and political research: theory testing (King, Keohane and Verba 1994). Therefore, if we want to compare the levels of unconventional participation across time we need to be sure that our measure is equivalent in each time point.

Concepts have a “contextual specificity” and therefore it is necessary to verify the measurement validity of the instruments (Adcock and Collier 2001, 529-530). In fact, “[i]n political science, this concern with context can arise when scholars are making comparisons across different world regions or distinct historical periods [...] the potential difficulty that context poses for valid measurement [...] deserves more attention in political science” (Adcock

and Collier 2001, 534). This may have very important consequences for empirical research. On the one hand, the conclusions drawn from a non-tested scale measuring a latent concept are “at best ambiguous and at worst erroneous” (Steenkamp and Baumgartner 1998, 78). On the other hand, if the measurement instrument has not been cross-validated, then we cannot be sure that the correlates of the scale and other covariates are reliable. In fact “without evidence of measurement invariance, the conclusions of a study must be weak” (Horn 1991, 119). In brief, we need to assess whether the measurement instrument works similarly across contexts in the sense that the underlying construct has the same structure and the same meaning across the groups under investigation. If researchers do not look for measurement equivalence they cannot be sure, for instance, that the differences in the regression coefficients are due to differences in the effects or to systematic biases (Steenkamp and Baumgartner 1998; Vandenberg and Lance 2000). It is, in brief, necessary for both descriptive and causal inference (Adcock and Collier 2001). Therefore, the assessment of cross-national equivalence of the measurement instruments should be a central concern to researchers willing to test hypotheses and theories in different contexts (Hui and Triandis 1985).

Measurement equivalence can be defined as “whether or not, under different conditions of observing and studying phenomena, measurement operations yield measures of the same attribute” (Horn and McArdle 1992, 117). That is to say that what we observe through measurement is reliable and valid. Several publications addressing the issue of measurement equivalence argue that it has three hierarchical levels (Horn and McArdle 1992; Steenkamp and Baumgartner 1998; Vandenberg and Lance 2000; Byrne 2008). The first level of equivalence is the “configural invariance”. It mainly refers to the structure of the factor loadings and it means that in all the contexts the latent construct shows the same configuration of factor loadings. This implies that in all the contexts the same items measure the latent construct(s) in which the researcher wants to use a concept. A latent construct is structurally invariant if the model defining the items measuring the latent construct(s) fits the data well in all the contexts, if all the factor loadings are significantly different from zero and if the correlations between the factors are different from one (Steenkamp and Baumgartner 1998). “Configural invariance” tells us that a concept can be measured with the same items in different contexts but it does not say whether or not we can use the construct for establishing relationships with other variables without incurring in biases.

The second level of measurement equivalence is “metric invariance”. This type of equivalence requires that all the factor loadings which measure the strength of the relationship between items and construct are equal across the groups. Therefore, “metric invariance” is obtained constraining the factor loading to equal across the countries. If our measurement instruments is metrically invariant this means that we can compare the construct’s correlates across countries but this does not allow us to compare the means.

The last level of measurement equivalence is “scalar invariance” which is necessary to compare the construct’s means across groups. “Scalar invariance” is a requirement to compare meaningfully the levels of a scale in different contexts being certain that the differences are “true” and not due to bias. In a few words, “it implies that [...] differences in the means of the observed items are due to differences in the means of the underlying construct(s)” (Steenkamp and Baumgartner 1998, 80). “Scalar invariance” is supported if the latent means are equal across the contexts. If a researcher wants to meaningfully compare mean scores all the three levels of equivalence are required.

Method

We can model the relationship between a set of items and a latent construct in different contexts using Multi-Group Confirmatory Factor Analysis (Bollen 1989). Our measurement model has one latent construct, *unconventional participation*, and five observed variables: signing petitions, joining in boycotts, attending lawful demonstrations, joining unofficial strikes and occupying factories or buildings. Therefore, following Inglehart (1990), Norris (2002), Inglehart and Welzel (2005) and Dalton, Van Sickle and Weldon (2010) we use these five items to measure the individual propensity to engage in unconventional participation.

In order to test for measurement equivalence, we perform two analyses. In the first, we estimate a CFA for each wave of the EVS. This is a very relevant step for assessing equivalence because it allows to achieve the best model specification at each time point (Byrne 2010, 199). We assess the model fit with standard statistics that are commonly use in SEM (Bollen 1989; Hu and Bentler 1999; Cheung and Rensvold 2002): the Chi-squared, the comparative fit index (CFI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI). These statistics assess the magnitude of the discrepancy between the sample and the fitted covariance matrices. In the second analysis we apply MGCFA (Jöreskog 1971), which estimates simultaneously the measurement model for all the time points and is the standard technique to test measurement invariance (Steenkamp and Baumgartner 1998; Vandenberg and Lance 2000).

Data

The items used for the scale are part of a battery of questions on political actions. Table 1 gives the question wording for the political participation scale in the EVS questionnaire is given. The items have been recoded assigning zero to those who would never do, one to those who might do and two to those to have done each political action. The index aims to measure not only actual participants, but also potential ones. Including only those who declared to have participated to the political action would exclude a relevant part of information. We decided to keep into account also who answered to be willing to participate because it allow us to measure the “*potential to participate*, the individual readiness to be mobilized, [which] is an abiding property of a wide sector of the whole political community, whether currently active or not” (Marsh and Kaase 1979b, 58).

This means understanding what is the possible magnitude of participation in several time points in Italy. Marsh and Kaase (1979a, 72-73) use two different scales for measuring unconventional participation: a protest scale and a might do protest scale. They find high correlation between the two scale in all the countries they analyzed. Therefore, we argue that the two scale can be synthesized in one to measure both behaviors and behavioral intentions.

We use the Political Action Study data (Barnes, Kaase et al. 1976) and the available EVS waves (European Values Study 2011).¹

Table 1. Items Measuring the Unconventional Participation Scale

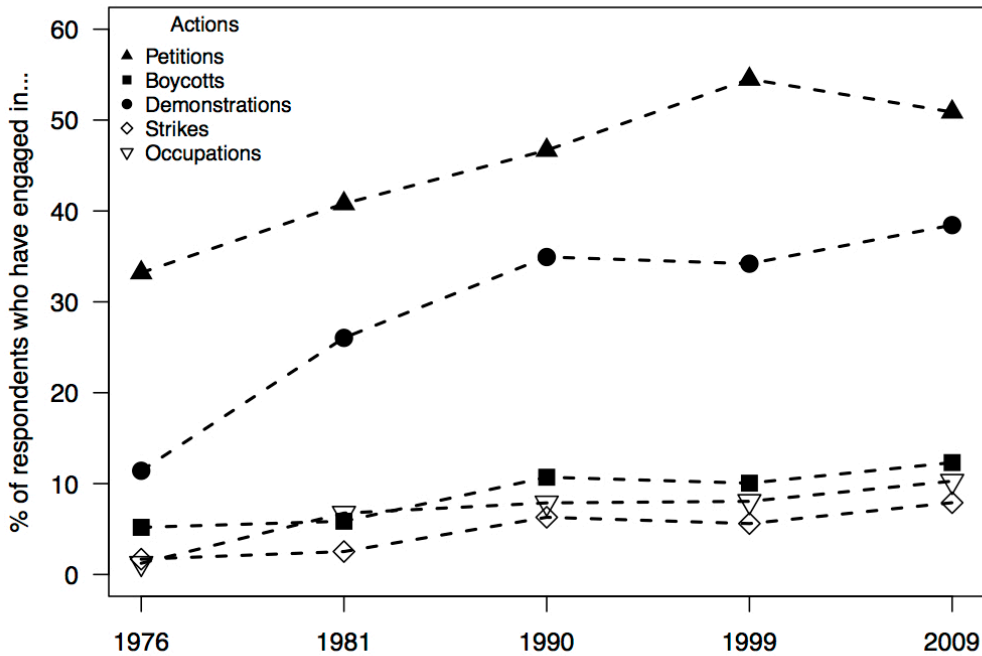
Question wording
Now I'd like you to look at this card. I'm going to read out some different forms of political action that people can take, and I'd like you to tell me, for each one, whether you have actually done any of these things, whether you would/might do it or would not/never, under any circumstances, do it/any of them:
Signed a petition
Joining in boycotts
Attending lawful/peaceful demonstrations
Joining unofficial strikes
Occupying buildings or factories

Source: 1976 Political Action Survey; 1981-2009 European Values Survey.

The data show that in Italy there has been a rise of the several forms of unconventional political participation.² Figure 1 (below) shows the trends for the five modes. On the one hand, we notice that there has been a rise in all of the forms of participation, especially for attending lawful demonstrations, joined boycotts and signing petitions. The literature on social movements in Italy has underlined that in 1990s a number of large demonstrations occurred in Italy (Della Porta et al. 2006). In 1976 respondents who signed a petition were 33 percent, while in 2009 they are 51 percent. In 1976 those who attended a demonstration were 26 percent, while in 2009 the percentage rises to 38 percent. Citizens joining boycotts has also risen; in 1976 they were about 5 percent, while in 2009 they were 12.5 percent.

The change in the direct action forms is apparently less pronounced in absolute terms, but the figures display a great rise relative to the first timepoint. In fact, unofficial strikes and occupation of building or factories have risen substantially. In over 30 years the percentage of citizens who have participated to unofficial strikes became almost five times bigger, instead those who have occupied a building or a factory have become even more. Unofficial strikers were almost two percent in 1976, 2.5 in 1980, 6 percent in 1990 and in 1999, and 8 percent in 2009. Occupiers are a little bit more than 1 percent in 1976, 6 percent in 1980, 7 percent in 1990, 8 percent in 1999 and ten per cent in 2009.

Figure 1. The Modes of Unconventional Participation



Source: 1976 Political Action Survey; 1981-2009 European Values Survey.

These figures tell us that over this time span the five forms of unconventional participation have risen steadily and have become part of the *repertoire* of political actions. Italy, in fact, is a country where citizens are very much involved in this form of political participation. Considering only data from the last EVS wave, for example, Italy has the highest percentage of citizens joining unofficial strikes. Only the French attend demonstrations more than Italians and occupiers are more common only in France and Denmark.³

Analysis

Single-wave analysis

We begin with the analysis of each time point.⁴ We decided to correlate the errors for some items in our confirmatory factor analyses: 1) joining unofficial strikes with occupying building of factories and 2) joining in boycotts and attending lawful/peaceful demonstrations. We did this for all the models. The theoretical reason is that these forms of political action are more intense to the respect with signing a petition. In fact, they require a higher amount of motivation (Muller and Opp 1986). Further, the costs of engaging in these forms of action are much higher than signing a petition (Opp 1989). The empirical reason is due to the results from the modification indices. We observed that the modification indices of the covariance between these items were quite high, so we decided to set the parameters free (Jöreskog 1971; Silvia and MacCallum 1988).⁵

Table 2 Standardized Factor Loadings and Single-wave Analysis Global Fit Indices

	Factor Loadings				
	<i>Petitions</i>	<i>Boycotts</i>	<i>Demonstrations</i>	<i>Strikes</i>	<i>Occupations</i>
1976	0.507	0.833	0.787	0.499	0.470
1981	0.461	0.714	0.853	0.488	0.568
1990	0.585	0.822	0.880	0.492	0.511
1999	0.446	0.859	0.909	0.411	0.419
2009	0.539	0.802	0.849	0.455	0.467
	Fit Indices				
	<i>Chi-squared</i>	<i>CFI</i>	<i>TLI</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>	<i>SMRS</i>
1976	26.450	0.961	0.871	0.071	0.025
1981	28.404	0.951	0.835	0.079	0.038
1990	2.892	1.000	1.000	0.000	0.008
1999	7.117	0.995	0.983	0.026	0.011
2009	7.459	0.994	0.980	0.031	0.011

Source: 1976 Political Action Survey; 1981-2009 European Values Survey.

Table 2 reports the fit indices we use for evaluating the models and the covariances between the errors for each wave. We can notice that the single wave models fit quite well the data.⁶ All the models can be accepted using the the goodness-of-fit indices we discussed earlier. The RMSEAs are below 0.08 and the SRMRs are below 0.06 in each of the models. Further, in the five models CFIs and TLIs are above 0.95. All the items loads very well in all the waves, they are all above 0.4 and some of theme above 0.8 (in particular attending lawful/peaceful demonstrations), meaning that it is a very important action within overall unconventional participation. All the items show high statistical significance. This first steps tells us that there are not particular differences in the measurement of the construct of unconventional participation

in five time points in Italy. Therefore, we can expect from the MGCFA to find measurement equivalence across the selected time span.

Multi-group confirmatory factor analysis and test for equivalence

We also performed a MGCFA to test for measurement equivalence, that the construct, the relations and the means are comparable across time. We follow a bottom-up procedure (Vandenberg and Lance 2000).⁷ It requires to first test the configural equivalence, which is the least constrained model, then to test the metric equivalence in which the number of constraints increases. Third, we test the scalar equivalence.⁸

In the previous section we performed the single context CFAs with the aim of having preliminary results to specify the model for the MGCFA. Therefore, we decided to test the configural invariance of the unconventional participation scale adding the same correlations between the error terms used in the single-wave models. The reason for these two correlated errors is that in the single context analysis we verified the presence of this pattern. Ignoring the presence of these patterns would not allow us to specify the correct measurement model for the unconventional participation scale.

Table 3 shows the model fit indices of the invariance tests. The results for the configural invariance model tell us that the construct configuration holds in all five contexts. This means the concept of unconventional participation can be measured using the same construct across time in Italy. We see that all the fit indices meet the requirements for accepting this model. In fact, CFI is 0.984 and the TLI is 0.950. SRMR is 0.015 which is much lower than 0.06. Also, RMSEA is below the threshold for acceptance, it is, in fact, 0.047. The Chi-squared test also allows us to accept this model.

Table 3 Multi-group Confirmatory Factor Analysis Models Fit Indices

Model	Fit Indices				
	<i>Chi-squared</i>	<i>CFI</i>	<i>TLI</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>	<i>SRMR</i>
1. Configural invariance	72.321	0.984	0.950	0.047	0.015
2. Full metric invariance	149.786	0.968	0.949	0.047	0.032
3. Full metric + scalar invariance	295.159	0.934	0.930	0.055	0.056

Source: 1976 Political Action Survey; 1981-2009 European Values Survey

The second row of the table presents the results for the metric equivalence model in which we constrained the factor loadings to be equal across the five waves. By looking at the fit indices we can also accept this model. As a matter of fact, the decreases of the fit indices is under the cut-off criteria (Chen 2007). We can see that the differences between model one and model two of RMSEA and SMRS are, respectively, about 0 and 0.016. According to these results we can compare the covariates of unconventional participation across time in Italy

The third model tests the scalar equivalence of the unconventional participation scale. In this model, in addition to factor loadings equality constraints, we constrain the intercepts to be equal across time. RMSEA is 0.055 which is far under the threshold of 0.8. SRMR is 0.056 which is also under the suggested threshold.

We compare this model with the metric equivalence model to assess whether or not we accept its scalar equivalence. According to the fit indices and to the differences between these and the indices of model two we can accept this model and argue that the means of the construct of unconventional participation are comparable across time.

These findings allow us to argue that the construct of unconventional participation, the factor loadings and the intercept *are equivalent* across the five points. This also tells us that the concept we are going to use can be measured by the same items in a period of over 30 years, that we can compare the correlates of unconventional participation with other independent variables and, above all, that we can compare its means.

The Index and the Trend of Unconventional Participation

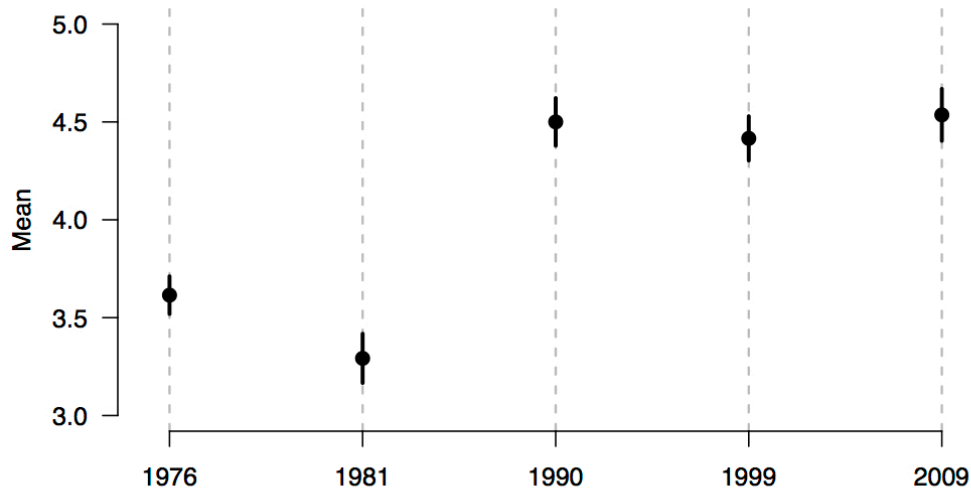
Once equivalence across time of the unconventional participation scale has been tested, we now turn our attention on the construction of the index. First, we analyze the reliability and the internal consistency of the unconventional participation scale. We use two common measures of scale reliability: Cronbach's alpha and Mokken scale analysis.

A Cronbach's alpha above 0.7 is generally considered the threshold of an acceptable internal consistency of a scale. In 1976, 1981, 1990, 1999 and 2009 the coefficient is, respectively, 0.741, 0.729, 0.784, 0.727 and 0.758. Therefore, these results confirm the unconventional participation scale to be a reliable scale.⁹ In all the waves the H-coefficient produced by Mokken scale analysis is above 0.3, which is considered the threshold for a good scalability (Sijtsma and Molenaar 2002). In 1976, 1981, 1990, 1999 and 2009 the coefficient are, respectively, 0.523, 0.537, 0.592, 0.520 and 0.546. Both Cronbach's alpha coefficient and Mokken scaling analysis confirm that the five items form a unidimensional construct measuring the underlying concept of unconventional participation which has a good level of internal consistency.

Second, we computed the standardized individual factor scores and we rescaled the index of unconventional participation to range from zero to ten. Zero represents an individual who has never engaged nor thought of engaging in any of the five forms of political participation and ten represents an individual who has participated in all five forms.

Figure two shows the mean values of the unconventional participation index in the five time points with 95 per cent confidence intervals. This analysis allows us to assess the trend in unconventional participation over 30 years and test whether there are significant differences between the years. We notice that the unconventional participation index average scores are significantly different.

Figure 2. Means of the Unconventional Participation Index with 95 percent Confidence Intervals: 1976-2009



Source: 1976 Political Action Survey; 1981-2009 European Values Survey.

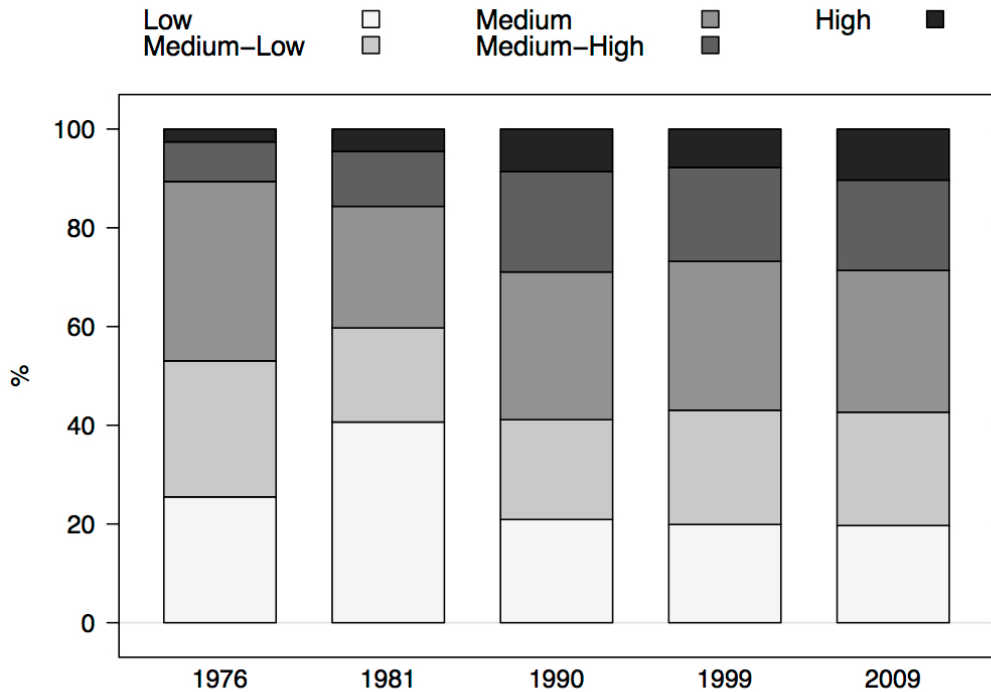
Unconventional participation clearly rises in Italy. In 1976 the average score is 3.6; in 1980 the index declines to about 3.3; in 1990 the score increases to 4.5; in 1999 the average score stays at about the same level, 4.4; in 2009 the index gets back to about 4.5.

Figure 3 presents the frequencies for the index of unconventional participation. We divide the distribution in five categories: low, low-medium, medium, medium-high, high scores of unconventional participation. This allows us to have a deeper look into this trend. In 1976 about 25 percent of respondents had a low score on the index; this rises almost 40 percent in 1980. In 1990 they become about 20 per cent. Later the percentage of respondents with low scores decreases to 19 per cent.

The medium-low category also shows a decrease. It goes from about 27 per cent in 1976 to 22 per cent in 2009. The percentage respondents with medium scores decreases in 1981 to then it rises until 2009, but in general we can say that this category shrinks during the analyzed time range. The medium-high category rises substantially. In fact, in 1976 respondents belonging to this category are about 8 per cent, they become 20 per cent in 1990 and remain stable until 2009. The high category also increases significantly and steadily. This category represents 2 per cent of the respondents in 1976, then 4.5 per cent, in 1990 it is about 8 per cent, while in 2009 it achieves almost 10 percent of the respondents. Looking at this figure we can notice that the distribution becomes more and more “normal” as the time passes. Italian citizens are clearly engaged more and more in unconventional participation. Therefore, we can argue that both the “quality” and the “quantity” of unconventional participation have changes. In fact, more citizens

show higher scores of unconventional participation, meaning that more citizens engage in all the modes of participation.

Figure 3. The Distribution of Unconventional Participation from 1976 to 2009



Source: 1976 Political Action Survey; 1981-2009 European Values Survey.

Conclusion

This article assesses the trend of unconventional political participation in Italy over 30 years. Several authors have underlined that in Italy unconventional political activities have become a common activity among citizens to express their claims (Della Porta et al. 2006). We wanted to provide a more systematic evidence that unconventional participation has increased by providing an index to measure it. We not only consider the actual participants, but also those who may engage in unconventional actions. This gives a larger picture of the potential unconventional participants present in this country over 30 years.

We also address the issue of measurement equivalence. Although measurement issues are not of a great interest in political science, is a fundamental part of the empirical research (Van Deth 1998; Ariely and Davidov 2011). We provide evidence that the measure of unconventional participation is equivalent across time in Italy and has a unidimensional construct. Therefore, our estimates are unbiased and reliable.

First, we outlined the concept of unconventional participation distinguishing it from conventional political participation. Barnes and Kaase *et al.* (1979) initially created the distinction between conventional and unconventional political participation arguing that the latter addresses not only political institutions but also private parties using more intense forms of political action.

Second, we illustrate the problem of cross validation of the concept and address the issue of testing the measurement equivalence using CFA and MGCFA. In doing so, we followed the current literature about survey research and measurement distinguishing three levels of equivalence. The confirmation of equivalence over time ensures that when draw inferences from our cases they are valid (King, Keohane and Verba 1994).

Third, we built the index and compare the average scores across time. We verified that unconventional participation has risen significantly since 1970s. In fact, the average scores of unconventional participation rise constantly, despite the most relevant change can be seen between the 1980s and 1990s. Further, there has been a decrease of inactive citizens and an increase of highly-active ones.

We suggest that the rise of unconventional participation may be due to a change of individual resources (Verba, Nie and Kim 1978; Brady, Verba and Schlozman 1995; Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995), to increasing dissatisfaction with politics (Norris, Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006), to modernization of values (Inglehart 1990; Norris 2002; Dalton 2008), to the mobilization of social movements (Della Porta *et al.* 2006; Della Porta 2007a; Reiter *et al.* 2007) and grass-root organizations (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993) and to generational replacement (Putnam 2000; Caren, Ghoshal and Ribas 2010). Some authors argue that advanced industrial democracies are ‘social movements societies’ in which the forms of unconventional participation are regularly used by citizens to make their claims (Meyer and Tarrow 1998). These forms of action are not undertaken no longer by radicals, but by a larger public since there has been an institutionalization of unconventional participation.

To conclude, we wanted to contribute to the literature on unconventional political participation in Italy by providing an index to measure it and to verify that actions has increased in Italy. This implies that we are witnessing to an institutionalization and routinization of a “protest culture” (Della Porta *et al.* 2006). We can argue that there has not been a civic decline in Italy, but rather an new wave of engagement. Not only we have seen that unconventional participation has risen at the aggregate level, but also that more and more citizens show higher levels of engagement at the individual level. This means that more citizens use more forms of participation than in the past.

It is important to emphasize this change in unconventional participation since it has been demonstrated that the broader dimension of political participation can affect the quality of other dimensions of democracy (Diamond and Morlino 2005) and it represents one of its “engines” (Morlino 2011). We underlined that there has been a change and that some hypotheses need to be tested in order to understand the determinants of this change so to have a complete picture of the trend.

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Endnotes

¹ The samples sizes for each wave are, respectively, 1542, 1348, 2018, 2000 and 1519. Due to the presence of missing values we performed multiple imputation. As known, non-response is a frequent problem in survey research. The standard approach is the list-wise deletions of missing values if the amount is quite low. However, a pre-condition for removing missing values is the fact that they are *missing completely at random* or at least *missing at random*. In case these conditions are not met, list-wise deletion can lead to serious bias (King et al. 2001). The solution to this problem is multiple imputation (Rubin 1987). Multiple imputation consists in imputing m values for each missing values creating m datasets which are later pooled together for the analysis. The missing values are replaced with values obtained from a probabilistic mechanism. For our data we use an imputation approach which uses *chained equations* (Raghunathan et al. 2001; Van Buuren 2007). The multiple imputation procedure has been applied to each wave separately creating as many datasets as waves and then pooled back together.

² Own calculations based on Political Action Study data (Barnes and Kaase 1976) and EVS (2011).

³ Own calculations based on Political Action Study data (Barnes and Kaase 1976) and EVS (2011).

⁴ Since the items are not normality distributed, we use weighted least square estimation since it accounts for normality violation assumptions (Flora and Curran 2004).

⁵ The presence of correlated errors has been deeply debated in the literature. One assumption of CFA is the absence of correlation between the errors, but this situation seems to be unrealistic in empirical research. In fact, Bentler and Chou (1987) argue that including correlated errors into a measurement model helps in describing in a more realistic way the factorial structure of the observed data, without compromising its validity.

⁶ The RMSEA and the SRMR are absolute fit indexes and measure how well an *a priori* model summarize the data. These two indexes should be, respectively, smaller than 0.08 and 0.06. The CFI and TLI are incremental fit indices, they measure a model fit compared to a baseline model with a more restricted specification. The two indices should be close to 0.95 (Hu and Bentler 1999).

⁷ We use the flowchart proposed by Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1998) and Vandenberg and Lance (2000).

⁸ To compare the model fits we rely on Cheung and Rensvold (2002) and Chen (2007). They argue that the difference in RMSEA and SRMR from a configural model to more constrained models should be, respectively, 0.010 and 0.025.

⁹ Cronbach's alpha allows us to verify the internal consistency of a scale using the correlations among the items forming the scale (Revelle and Zinbarg 2009). Notwithstanding, Cronbach's alpha coefficient has some problems. Alpha coefficient is affected by the number of items, by items intercorrelation, and dimensionality (Cortina 1993). Cronbach's alpha is not a measure of homogeneity, despite internal consistency is necessary to have homogeneity (Sijtsma 2009; Revelle and Zinbarg 2009). In order to avoid the shortcomings of using Cronbach's alpha as a measure of internal consistency we can use Mokken scale analysis (Mokken 1971). Mokken scaling analysis is useful to test for homogeneity among the items forming a scale (Van Shuur 2003).