

POLITICS AND MAFIA CULTURE: A RESEARCH ON
CANDIDATES IN SICILY¹

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Summary. – Locus of control was studied in a group of 54 candidates (46 men and 8 women) running for three different types of elections that took place in Sicily in 2001, *Amministrative*, *Regionali* and *Politiche*. Semi-structured interviews have been used to make a qualitative analysis of the narrations collected; the Rotter's Internal-External Locus of Control Scale was used to measure subjects' *locus of control*, in addition to a worksheet to record socio-demographic variables (e.g. religious creed, party, years of militancy). Analysis shows how subjects have an internal locus of control, according to the theories by which *internals* tend to exhibit more political behaviors than *externals*. A higher internal locus of control was found for candidates running for the *Regionali*. A hypothesis for these results has been referred to the electoral systems underlying the different political competitions, to the socio-cultural context of Sicily and to the mental attitude of Sicilians towards politics, characterized by *dogmatism*, *close-mindedness* and what we called *mafioso feeling*, ruled by values such as fidelity, attachment and dependence.

Essentially two theoretical models inspired our study. The *social cognition* – that in political phenomenology takes the name of *political cognition* (Catellani, 1997) – is focused on cognitive processes, considering man as an active subject, selecting and processing information coming from the environment; the *social dynamic* explores individual and collective mental phenomena in terms of driving forces, defenses, conflicts, relationship, conscious and unconscious elements.

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We paid attention to a cognitive process, the *locus of control* of Sicilian political leaders; from the other side, we intended to go beyond 'measures', pointing out subjectivity, relationship, culture. The field we explored includes social and psychodynamic processes, necessarily linked to cognitive ones.

Thus, the purposes of our research were twofold. First, we intended to investigate what we called 'sense of *being able vs. being in power*', that political leaders feel near the elections, experiencing different aspects of political involvement: the capacity to effectively act in the political field and the general idea candidates get of political power *sensu lato*. Then, we wanted to reflect on the influence that *mafioso feeling*⁴ (Di Maria, 1986; Di Maria *et al.*, 1989; Di Maria, Lavanco, 1995), *dogmatism*⁵ and close-mindedness³, the clearest and most evident indexes of the 'shared social thinking' of Sicily, have on almost the entire electoral model and on the generalized expectancies of controlling events (internal vs. external) perceived by the candidates.

The assumption of our study means that psychological analysis of politics and of political participation cannot ignore the power dynamics involved, influencing at the same time the possibility to act in the social and political field and the nature of the relationship between the individuals and the community.

METHOD

Measures

This paper deals about a quantitative and qualitative study carried out in Sicily, from 1997 to 2001, during different elections. Purpose of the whole research has been highlighting behaviors, emotions,

⁴ *Mafioso feeling* is an unconscious, automatic way of thinking, of a dogmatic type (Di Maria, Menarini, Lavanco, 1995), also present in the political field. The values are continuity and replication; there is no space for planning and changing. Things must be identical to themselves; the vote is a fidelity vote to the group one belongs to, as a warranty of old certainties and protection, not a way to pluralism, to confront with the other one and to change.

⁵ *Dogmatism* involves a rigid dichotomy of reality in positive and negative believes, an uncritical adhesion to the system, an archaic defense towards the incapacity to bear uncertainty, changing, complexity and the contradictions it involves.

³ In the Sicilian culture, it is the result of a social and familiar context characterized by authoritarianism and dogmatism, in which changing is negative, and being different is dangerous.

expectations and attitudes spread among candidates. We used semi-structured interviews, allowing a qualitative analysis of the stories, the *narrations*, collected; the Rotter's IE (internal-external) Scale⁶, submitted to the last three elections candidates (*Elezioni Politiche, Regionali* and *Amministrative* in 2001⁷) before the interview, allowed to measure candidates' *locus of control*, thus to reflect on their sense of *being able/being in power*.

The study followed these guidelines:

- a) find if the generalized expectancies system which the candidate refers to is prevalently internal;
- b) seek if there is any difference, in terms of locus of control, between the leaders involved in different elections;
- c) see how *locus of control* varies with age, educational level, years of militancy, belonging to a particular party, religious creed, marital status;
- d) reflect, then, to the complex relation between individual and collective psychic dimensions, between the personality trait of locus of control and the collective aspect of *mafioso feeling*.

We used the Rotter's I-E (internal-external) Locus of Control Scale, in addition to a worksheet to record sociodemographic variables (sex, age, educational level, marital status, religious creed, party, years of militancy) of the candidates.

The IE Locus of Control Scale is composed by 29 forced-choice items on a wide variety of themes, linked to people's very general, cross-situational beliefs about their perceived influence on events in their life. People can be classified along a continuum from very *internal* to very *external*. People with a strong internal locus of control believe that the responsibility for whether or not they get reinforced ultimately lies with themselves. Internals believe that success or failure is due to their own efforts. In contrast, externals believe that the reinforcers in life are controlled by luck, chance, or powerful others. Therefore, they see little impact of their own efforts on the amount of reinforcement they receive.

⁶ We refer to the Italian version, developed by Giovanna Nigro (1983).

⁷ Turning into English electoral system, our *Amministrative* and *Regionali* might be similar to English *Local Elections*; the *Amministrative* allow to elect the 'local government' (including county and district councils), the *Regionali* let people elect Regional Assemblies (one for every Italian region). Italian *Elezioni Politiche* can be compared to English *General Elections*.

The propensity to engage in political behavior seems to be stronger for individuals who have a high internal locus of control, whereas Klandermans (1983, in Lavanco, 2000), asserts that participating to political life means trying to control events by subjects with an external locus of control. However, the locus of control is not a typology, because strong is the importance of situational aspects. This is the reason why we considered different round of voting.

Subjects

The sample was composed of 54 politicians, running for Sicilian *Politiche* and *Regionali* elections, and for Palermo *Amministrative* (Table 1); subjects were chosen equally in the two main coalitions present in Italy (one including the Center-Right and the Right wing, the other including the Center-Left and the Left wing)⁸ (Figure 1), approached in the two weeks before the elections.

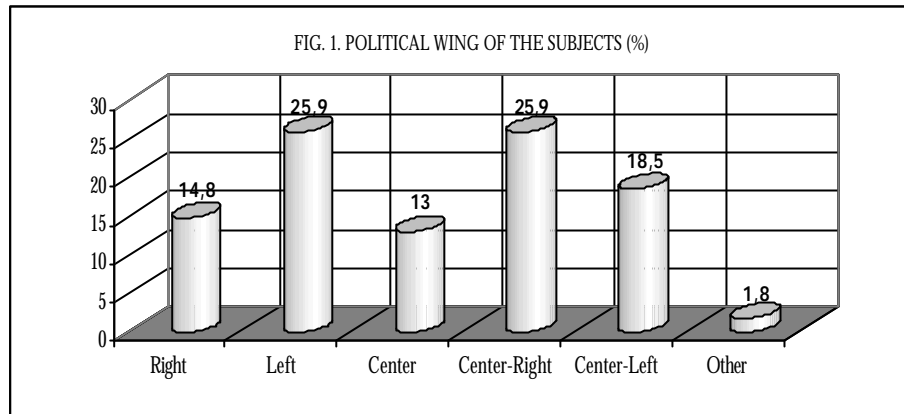
TABLE 1
SEX OF THE SUBJECTS IN THE DIFFERENT ROUND OF VOTING

AMMINISTRATIVE		(Palermo)	
MEN	25	80,60%	
WOMEN	6	19,40%	
Total	31	100,0%	

REGIONALI		(Sicily)	
MEN	11	91,7%	
WOMEN	1	8,3%	
Total	12	100,0%	

POLITICHE		(Sicily)	
MEN	10	90,9%	
WOMEN	1	9,1%	
Total	11	100,0%	

⁸ Broadly speaking, these coalitions can be compared to the *Conservative Party* and to the union of the *Labor Party* to the Catholic wing.



$p < .005$

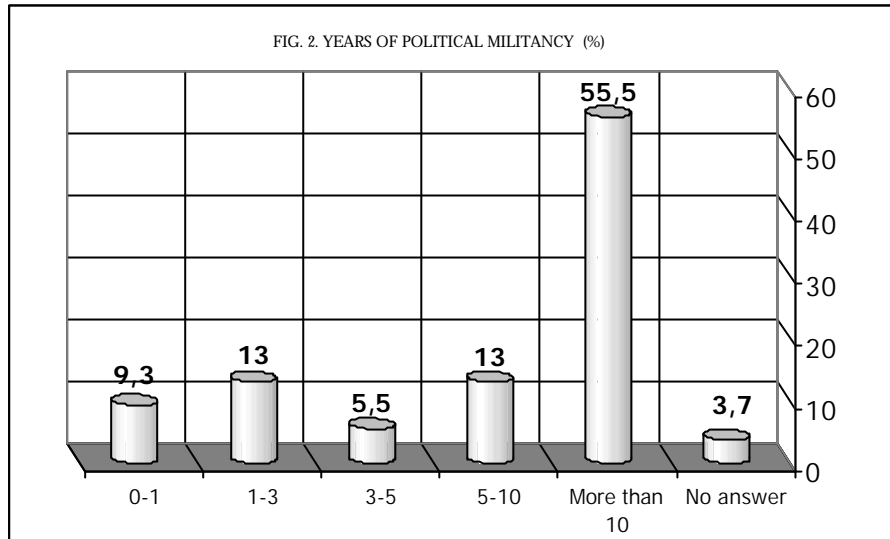
The sample was composed prevalently of men (87%); Table 2 shows mean and standard deviation for age.

The subjects involved show a medium-high educational level; they are prevalently Catholics and practicing Catholics; the 66,7% of them is married. They are prevalently involved in several political activities, often holding managerial positions.

TABLE 2
AGE - MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION

<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
42,5	9,8

The 55,5% of the sample has a more than ten yearlong political militancy (Figure 2), especially the candidates running for the *Regionali* and the *Politiche*.



$p < .001$

Rotter's IE Scale results show how the subjects involved have an internal locus of control (Table 3), without any distinction for the three rounds of voting.

TABLE 3
LOCUS OF CONTROL - MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION

<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
7,13	3,41

This means that candidates perceive events as basically determined by themselves, depending by their abilities and efforts. The comparison between means assessed by the Student *t* test, shows how subjects involved in the *Regionali* have a more internal locus of control than candidates in the *Politiche* and the *Amministrative* (Table 4). It seems as if in the *Regionali*, more than in other political competitions, candidates tend to consider success or defeat as dependent from themselves.

TABLE 4
MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS ON *LOCUS OF CONTROL*
SCALE FOR DIFFERENT ROUND OF VOTING

Elections	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Politiche</i>	7,58	4,01
<i>Regionali</i>	4,83	2,72
<i>Amministrative</i>	7,87	3,08
Total	7,13	3,41

p < .002

No correlations were found between scores on Rotter's scale and variables such as age and years of militancy, or such as educational level, religious creed and party.

Political psychology merges the individual world with the collective dimension; this consideration demands to reflect on community relationships (Di Maria, 2000), specific to every local community.

The system underlying *Politiche* elections induces candidates to count mostly on themselves, on their efforts and on their group, during the phases preceding the candidature and before choosing the district they are going to run. Decisions are taken in the highest places of the political power, where seats and tasks are assigned. This is the most stressful period for them.

The *Amministrative* are undoubtedly the heaviest elections in terms of candidates' own energy resources: everyone has to gain personally the voters' consent in his territory, keeping in touch with them and their needs, building solid and useful relations.

The system behind the *Regionali* is completely different. An 'everybody against everybody' climate rules the whole competition: candidates have to be trustworthy and faithful to their political group, constantly at war with both enemies and allies. Actually, the party, and the political group, is the leading role of the scenery the one who really manage the electorate, giving the candidate very little power on events.

Do the systems beneath the elections make a kind of selection of their candidates?

The marked internal locus of control of the subjects running for the *Regionali* might be read as an aptitude useful to 'react' to the higher level of uncertainty linked to this type of political competition, perceiving a higher control on events.

Besides, the results of our study must be referred to the cultural field of Sicily and to the mental attitude of Sicilians towards politics. *Dogmatism, close-mindedness* and what we called *mafioso feeling* pervade the fabric of Sicilian culture and society and seem to dominate a sizeable portion of the political system. At the bottom there is a relational model of keen competition, although subject, at the same time, to values such as fidelity, attachment and dependence.

The *Regionali* elections seem to be ruled by such a modality: personal power is subdued to a *kraftspiel* in which relationships are built on devotion and obedience and linked to the always-present fear of treachery.

Therefore, it would be of the greatest importance studying how the 'factors of success' vary with different socio-cultural contexts and which new *criteria* today's electoral systems use to select candidates.

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