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# How Would your Kids Vote if I Open my Doors? Evidence from Venezuela

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# Abstract

For how long does cultural heritage persist? Do the culturally inherited values of immigrants dilute as generations pass? We answer these question by studying the relationship between revealed political behavior of immigrant families and the culture of the place where they migrated from, either one or many generations ago. Using surnames as indicators of region of origin of Italians in Venezuela, we study the effect of cultural heritage on two indicators of revealed political behavior: (i) propensity for civic engagement, and (ii) propensity for redistribution. A well established literature documents greater propensity for civic engagement and lower propensity for redistribution among Northern Italians. In Venezuela, we measure the former by turnout before the era of political polarization and the latter by signing behavior against Hugo Chávez in the 2004 recall referendum drive. Despite the fact that the wave of Italian immigration to Venezuela occurred more than half a century before the events studied in this paper, we do not find a greater propensity for civic engagement nor preference against redistribution among descendants from Northern as opposed to Southern Italians, suggesting that cultural assimilation may be a strong determinant of political behavior in the long run.

Keywords: Social capital, political incorporation of immigrants, family economics, redistribution, political preferences, civic engagement, Latin America.

*JEL Classification:* Z1, F22, P26. Introduction

The Human Development Research Paper (HDRP) Series is a medium for sharing recent research commissioned to inform the global Human Development Report, which is published annually, and further research in the field of human development. The HDRP Series is a quick-disseminating, informal publication whose titles could subsequently be revised for publication as articles in professional journals or chapters in books. The authors include leading academics and practitioners from around the world, as well as UNDP researchers. The findings, interpretations and conclusions are strictly those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of UNDP or United Nations Member States. Moreover, the data may not be consistent with that presented in Human Development Reports.

Culture is often believed to be a significant determinant of political behavior. The idea that differences in culture will lead to different political preferences has often been used as an argument to create selective immigration regimes which restrict immigration from “different” countries, and the postulate that immigrants will affect the political equilibrium is taken as given in many political economy models of immigration.<sup>1</sup> However, relatively little evidence exists on the importance and durability of these perceived effects.

This paper estimates whether cultural heritage has an effect on political behavior. Tackling this issue provides us with a set of significant empirical challenges. In order to distinguish cultural heritage from personal experience in the source area, it is necessary to concentrate on immigrants of second or higher immigration, though most data on political behavior only contain information on the place of birth of the respondent and thus only allow us to study first-generation immigrants. In order to distinguish the effect of culture from the different opportunities sets available to immigrants from different places – and abstract, for example, from the effects of discrimination – we need to use populations of immigrants which can be argued to have distinct cultural heritages but which are also treated similarly by the host country population. Furthermore, while a declaration of political preference is informative, ideally we would want to know whether culture affects political behavior (i.e., what voters do instead of what they say they would prefer to do).

Data on the political behavior of Italian migrants to Venezuela allows us to tackle all of these issues simultaneously. First, the wave of Italian immigration to Venezuela occurred during the 1950s and 1960s, so that the group of people with Italian surnames in Venezuela is made up of predominantly second or higher generation immigrants. Second, since Italian immigrants from different regions spoke the same language and had the same religion, they were not exposed to significantly different treatment by Venezuelan natives. Third, recent data from Venezuela offers measures of revealed political behavior identified by surname,

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<sup>1</sup> Barriers to immigration are also justified on the basis of concerns about the efficiency or distributive effects of immigrants on the home economy, as well as due to the more diffuse effects that they may have on “social cohesion” (Benhabib, 1996; O’Rourke and Sinnott, 2006). Countries in the Persian Gulf have sued this ‘like-minded’ argument to justify differential migration policies. Another alternative is to avoid giving political rights to migrants, like in short term programs. One example, with its own problems, was the “Bracero” Program (1942-1964) implemented in the US (Calavita, 1992). See Mayda (2006) on how having similar culture shapes the attitudes of domestic voters over immigration

and thus susceptible of being linked to cultural heritage among second and higher generation immigrants, namely the measures of voting turnout and signatures of recall referendum petitions captured in the *Maisanta* database (Hsieh et. al., 2008).

Most importantly, the distinction between Italians according to their regions of origin allows us to have as good a measure as possible of political cultural heritage. Foundational papers in the study of social capital and culture have documented the significant differences between Northern and Southern Italy (Banfield, 1958; Putnam, 1983).<sup>2</sup> If we wanted to find two groups within a nation for which we would expect cultural differences to be strong enough so as to persist over time, we would be hard pressed to find a better example than that of Northern and Southern Italian immigrants

The idea that culture affects economic and political behavior goes back at least to Weber (1905). Recently these ideas have been tested econometrically with the use of large micro-level data on immigrants. Using the Current Population Survey, Bueker (2005) has shown that country of origin explains naturalization and turnout among US immigrants. However, his work covers only first generation migrants, where the effects of culture are strongly confounded with those of experiences in the source country before emigrating.

Another strand of the literature uses *stated* preferences and tries to distinguish the role of culture from other factors. The most frequent<sup>3</sup> approach can be exemplified by Wust (2000), who crosses party preferences and place of birth to look for differences among different source countries. Again, the work covers only first generation migrants and cannot distinguish common pre-emigration experience from cultural heritage.

Luttmer and Singhal (2008) try to tell apart culture in determining preferences for redistribution by studying the preferences of first generation European immigrants to other

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<sup>2</sup> Guiso, Sapienza and Zingales (2007) claim that the medieval experience of independence seems a crucial factor underlying the development of social capital. This can even explain variation in trust within the North of Italy

<sup>3</sup> Surveys about political preferences pervade the spectrum of both political science and electoral research. However, this research is much more interested in the descriptive statistics and the use for pragmatic forecasting of voting and targeting than to explore causality.

European countries. Their results show that part of the stated preferences over redistribution of an Italian living in Germany can be explained by the average preferences of other Italians in Italy, over and above what can be explained by usual covariates. Their data covers first generation migrants to countries that are geographically very close to the sending country. So, again, it is uninformative about intergenerational persistence.

Alesina and Fuchs-Schündeln (2007) come closer to our work by exploiting the episode of German reunification to show that former East Germans ended up having a higher preference for redistribution after half a century of living in a communist regime<sup>4</sup>. Their identification strategy controls for historical events previous to World War II, dealing with concerns on pre-existing differences among groups. Because we are looking at events that occurred in the much more distant past, our paper can be seen as exploring the long-run persistence of this type of cultural differences on revealed political behavior.

Other attempts have looked at longer term effects by going beyond the first generation. Alesina and Giuliano (2007) show how families from cultures with strong family ties tend to rely more on these ties and less on markets and governments as sources of income and social insurance. Some other studies concentrate on the behavior of second generation migrants<sup>5</sup>. However, these studies rely on cross-national differences and thus cannot control for differences in treatment at the host country of people with different nationalities (differential discrimination).

Our paper builds on this literature in a number of dimensions. First, we are looking at the effect of culture on political values half a century after the wave of migration. Thus our estimates allow us to evaluate theories that predict stickiness of culture over time (Bisin & Verdier, 2002; Benabou & Tirole, 2006; Tabellini, 2008). Second, we use as input one of

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<sup>4</sup> Their main point was not persistence but documenting that there was a significant change in preferences assuming that the actual position of the border had nothing to do with original preferences for redistribution

<sup>5</sup> Giuliano (2007) shows that the decision to live with the family or to leave the parents' nest is influenced by the country of origin in a persistent way. She claims it is mediated by culture because, among other things, the living arrangements of second generation migrants in the United States somehow mimics the patterns lived in their countries of origin. Fernandez and Fogli (2009) follow the fertility decisions of women from different ancestries in the United States finding that the average fertility in the country of origin is a statistically significant predictor of fertility in the US.

the few large examples where *revealed, active and costly* political action can be traced back to people with name and surname. It contrasts with survey approaches where people were merely asked what they *think* about redistribution<sup>6</sup>. Third, by focusing on a single country pair, we can separate cultural heritage from observable characteristics that may trigger differences in treatment, such as religion and language.<sup>78</sup>

Most previous papers find significant cultural effects<sup>9</sup>. In contrast, we find that the well documented higher propensity for civic engagement (Putnam, 1993) and lower preference for redistribution (Bavetta, 2008) among Northern relative to Southern Italians does not translate to Venezuelan citizens with Italian ancestry. A possible explanation for our results, which we do not tackle at the current stage, is that *differential* within region self selection is playing a major role, leading pro-redistribution, non-civically engaged Northern Italians and anti-redistribution, more civically engaged Northern Italians to emigrate to Venezuela. While this is certainly a possibility, we find no indication that anything about the Venezuelan selection process for immigration (which essentially welcomed all Italians) nor the Italian selection process for emigration could have generated this type of bias.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 presents a basic framework. Section 3 explores the context of Italian Migration to the Americas, focusing on Venezuela as a recipient country. Section 4 explains the data and our estimation technique, with a strong emphasis on explaining how to trace back Italian surnames into regions. Section 5 shows

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<sup>6</sup> This is the largely discussed difference between actual choice and contingent valuation in Economics.

<sup>7</sup> Our paper has similarities with other attempts to unveil propensity for civic engagement from country fixed effects. See Fisman, Ray and Edward Miguel. "Cultures of Corruption: Evidence from Diplomats' Parking Violations," 2006.

<sup>8</sup> These authors focus on documenting the link with corruption in their countries of origin. However, it seems more reasonable to connect it to their propensity for civic engagement, since it was not against the law avoid these payments

<sup>9</sup> One exception, in a different problem, has been Carroll, Rhee and Rhee (1994). They find that savings rate among immigrants in Canada are unrelated to their country. The same authors (1999) used immigrants to the US and found differences among countries of origin. Nonetheless, they discarded cultural factors because "saving patterns of immigrants do not resemble the national saving patterns of their countries of origin". Indeed, people coming from Asian countries with high savings rate – like Korea, Japan or Taiwan – do not show particularly high savings in the United States when compared to other countries. This result is in the flavor of what we argue in this paper: if there are differences among Venezuelans of different regions of Origin, they do not resemble the original ranking in Italy



the results of the estimation and discusses them. Finally, section 6 presents some concluding remarks.

## 1. Framework for empirics

Recent theoretical work has attempted to integrate culture within rational theories of decision-making. In general, these contributions treat culture as a *bequested* preference parameter, making intergenerationally altruistic parents the key ingredient to rationalize culture (Bisin & Verdier, 2002; Benabou & Tirole, 2006; Tabellini, 2008). In a reduced form, these theories predict a sticky law of motion for culture,

$$Culture_{it} = Culture_{it-1} * Adapt(X_{t-1} - E_{t-1}^{parents}[X_t])_{it}$$

,where  $Culture_{it}$  represents a preference parameter for members of family  $i$ 's generation number  $t$ . This preference parameter can be interpreted as a preference for a given type of choice, over and above the effect of other economic determinants. Similarly,  $Culture_{it-1}$  represents the same parameter for the parental generation. The ratio between the two is the effect of indoctrination made by parents.  $Adapt(.)$  is an adaptation function that takes into account expectations of changes between the environment where parents lived ( $X_{t-1}$ ) and the one where their kids will do as adults ( $X_t$ ). We assume  $Adapt'(\cdot) \geq 0$  and  $Adapt(0) = 0$

Following Tabellini (2008), the relevant environments for the creation of past culture are places where most of the transactions –either economic or not – took place in the far past. We will proxy these places by the (sub-national) region of origin in Italy. For generations *before* migration,  $t < T$ , we assume that people lived in a stationary environment where rational expectations imply  $E_t^{parents}[X_t] = X_{t-1} = X_0^{region}$ . Thus, we can recover the baseline cultural preference in a region as  $Culture_{t < T}^{region} = Culture_0^{region}$

In this paper we are interested in the *average* ratio of these preferences between two groups after immigration. After a period  $t-T$  from migration, the ratio can be expressed as

$$\frac{Culture^A_t}{Culture^B_t} = \left[ \frac{Culture_0^A}{Culture_0^B} \right] * \alpha_t$$

with the *cumulative relative adaptation factor* being  $\alpha_t \equiv \prod_{\tau=T}^t \frac{Adapt(X^A_{\tau-1} - E_{\tau-1}[X^A_{\tau}])}{Adapt(X^B_{\tau-1} - E_{\tau-1}[X^B_{\tau}])}$

Since we do not observe culture directly, we will interpret as a measure of culture the coefficient of a region of origin fixed effect, over and above what other standard determinants of civic engagement and preference for redistribution. The core question we will ask is whether adaptation is slow enough as to allow distinguishing a difference in these “regional effects”

Assuming that the adaptation function is the same for both groups<sup>10</sup>, we have two testable hypotheses - conditional on receiving the same set of opportunities and choices, one for civic engagement and the other for redistribution-related voting. These are built under the null that adaptation effect is small enough.

**Hypothesis 1: [Propensity for civic engagement rank]** Let  $C^j_t$  be the average propensity for civic engagement (propensity to vote) for a group cultural origin  $j$ . If  $(C_0^A - C_0^B) > 0$  then  $(C_t^A - C_t^B) > 0$  for  $t > T$ . The ranking in the average propensity for civic engagement of two groups remains constant after migration.

Similarly, following the idea that cultural origin shapes the attitudes towards redistribution<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> With an equal adaptation function for both countries, arguably the group with larger difference between their options in Italy and in Venezuela would adapt faster, moving the ratio of cultural preferences towards one.

<sup>11</sup> See for example Tabellini, 2008b; Luttmer & Shingal, 2008

**Hypothesis 2: [Redistribution rank]** Let  $R_t^j$  be the average propensity to vote against redistribution for a group with cultural origin  $j$ . If  $(R_0^A - R_0^B) > 0$  then  $(R_t^A - R_t^B) > 0$  for  $t > T$ . The ranking in the average propensity to vote against redistribution of two regions remains constant after migration.

Note that both hypotheses are written as strict inequalities, so they can be rejected if the difference in cultural propensities becomes zero or switches sign<sup>12</sup>

Interestingly, our case of Italians in Venezuela provides a reasonable control for many features to test the above hypothesis and implicitly estimate the magnitude of the adaptation coefficient  $\alpha_t$ . First, in contrast to, say, Asian and Latino immigrants in the United States, Northern and Southern Italian immigrants had arguably similar opportunity sets in Venezuela, thus  $E_{t-1}[X_t^A] \approx E_{t-1}[X_t^B]$ . Also, the timing of migration is relatively concentrated, making more plausible the idea of comparing groups after a common migration time  $T$ . Additionally, to identify the cultural preferences we will work with a very controlled choice set: going to the ballot box in 2000 (or not) and signing against the incumbent President in 2004 (or not).

## 2. Understanding the context

### 2.1. Italians in Venezuela

There are many reasons making the wave of Italian immigration to Venezuela an interesting case for our empirical implementation. First, the enormous heterogeneity in people's ability to pursue collective action and economic activity and its link to region of origin has been well documented in the literature (e.g., Banfield (1958) and Putnam (1993)). Second, the massive numbers of Italian emigration to countries in the Americas imply that it is

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<sup>12</sup> Like in Carroll, Rhee and Rhee (1999), where savings switches sign across groups

possible to get statistically relevant quantities for analysis. Moreover, Italian migration to Venezuela was very concentrated in two decades in the middle of the XX century, reducing the potential confusion emanating from different cohorts of migration

Additionally, cultural heterogeneity of Italians does not reflect in language or religion. Although Italians had regional dialects, they did have a national language<sup>13</sup>. Similarly, almost all Italians were Roman Catholic. We can thus be reasonably confident that our estimated differences will have originated in the local environment (e.g. Putnam et al, 1993) and not, say, in differences in religious principles or in treatment of observably different persons.

Furthermore, Italians seem to have had limited residential mobility for centuries, making local culture strongly dependant on the local environment. Even today there is a strong tendency in Italy to live close where parents live; more than in the US and other European countries (see Bordignon et al, 2006). Finally, Italy is a good source of surnames because different regions had different ways to mix concepts to build surnames<sup>14</sup> (see also Cavalli-Sforza et al 2004). This feature helps us trace back people to regions without losing too much power in the attempt.

## *2.2. The Migration Wave: roughly 1940 to 1965*

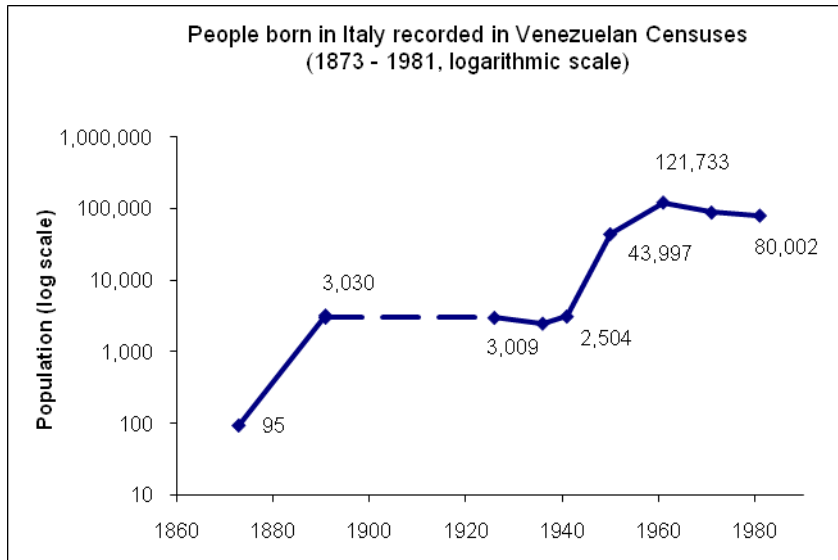
Unlike many other countries in The Americas, which received relevant Italian populations even before 1900, Italian migration to Venezuela was quite low until the middle of the XX century. As shown in Figure 1 (note the logarithmic scale), the big jump in Italian inflow to

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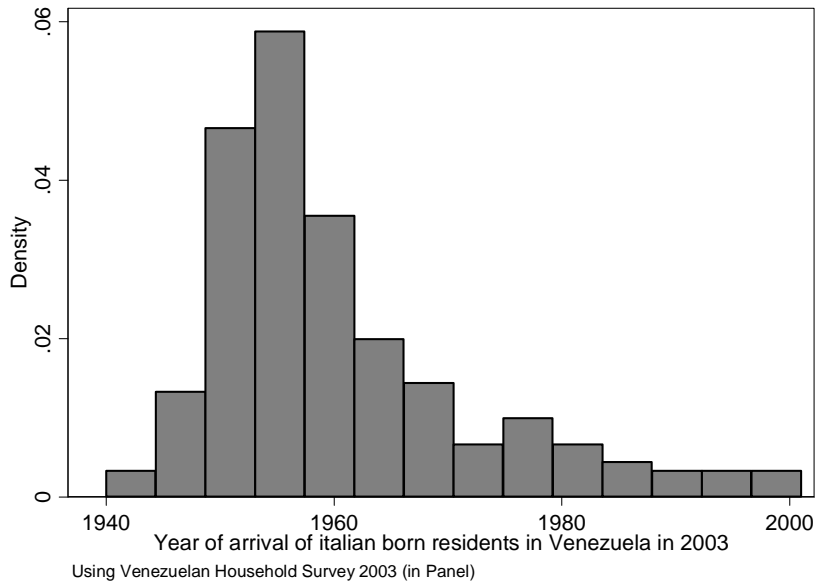
<sup>13</sup> Italians descendants in Venezuela do not seem so different in terms of observables when one split them by region origin. Moreover, we did not find any evidence of differential discrimination across Italian groups by Venezuelans. Different sources cite Italian migration as a contribution to the county's stock of human capital. See Cunill (1996); Iannettone 2003; D'Angelo 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Similarly, the creation of these surnames was more or less in the right timing for our purposes in Italy, because we can still observe the heterogeneity in surnames. Family names in Korea and China were created many centuries ago but now a large fraction of the population holds the same surnames. This is just a result of mechanics of mating and the passage of time in the so called Galton-Watson decay process. In contrast, the Netherlands uses surnames only since the early XIX century and, for a small country, they have more than 60 thousand surnames.

Venezuela happened after World War II and lasted until the late 1950s. Before 1941 there were less than 3 thousand people that reported being born in Italy. Twenty years later the census figures are *forty times* larger. This concentration in the arrival date is important for our purposes; it helps to avoid confounding our estimates of persistence with differential timings of migration. The migration spike lasted until roughly 1965. As shown both by the Census (Fig. 1) and the 2003 household survey (Figure 2), the arrival of Italian born citizens severely declined after 1965. Given that some of the migrants in the 1950s may have died by 2003, the actual decrease in the flow of immigrants is likely to be understated by the graph. In short, even if people migrated in other moments, we have arguably one concentrated window of migration between the 1940s and 1965.

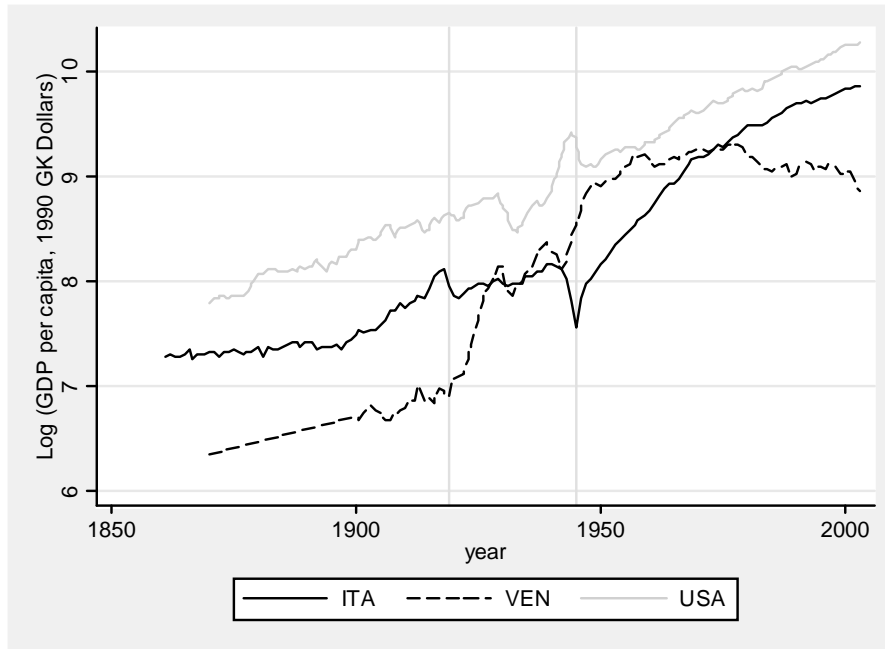


**Figure 1.** People born in Italy recorded in the National Venezuelan Censuses. Source: Author's calculation based on the compilation of Cunill, 1996.



**Figure 2.** Year of arrival to Venezuela of Italian born answering the 2003 Venezuelan household survey. Non weighted histogram.

Both political and economic factors seem to rationalize the sudden interest of Italians for Venezuela. On the one hand, at the time of the World Wars Venezuela had grown enormously due to an influx of oil revenues (Rodríguez 2008; Rodríguez and Gomolin, 2008) precisely in a moment when the Italian economy was devastated. In 1960, per capita income in Venezuela was almost as high as in the United States (Figure 3). On the other hand, the military government of Venezuela was proactively looking for European Italian migration in the post war period, under the belief that immigration from Europe would improve Venezuelan culture.



**Figure 3.** Output per capita in Venezuela and Italy (log scale) between 1860 and 2000. Measured in GK Dollars of 1990. GDP for USA and well as the years 1919 and 1945 were included in shade as benchmark. Note that Venezuelan growth rate was very fast in the middle of the XX century, with a second acceleration towards the end of WW II coinciding with the highest inflow of Italian immigrants. Note also the Italian postwar collapse and the subsequent recovery. Source: Author's calculations based on Angus Maddison's database of historical GDP.

The reported stock of Italian born citizens in Venezuela is certainly not the same as the number of Italian descendants living in the country. Generations migrated before 1940 had the opportunity to have many more kids and grandkids in Venezuela, which were not recorded as Italian born in the census, but which appear in our methodology. Even if we cannot discard some differential in the dates of arrival to the country, this episode of Italian migration to Venezuela seems likely to one of the most concentrated examples available.

### *2.3. Venezuelan politics in the era of Twenty-First Century Socialism.*

Venezuela's political context also gives an interesting setting for our analysis. After the arrival of Hugo Chávez to power in 1999, his government has progressively moved towards a regime with strong state control in almost every economic activity. The regime, labeled

by Chávez one of “Twenty-First Century Socialism”, benefited from a large increase in oil prices to bolster political support, at the cost of high polarization (see Rodriguez, 2008; Corrales, 2007). Recent estimates show large productivity and resource allocation losses due to political conflict (Hsieh, Miguel, Ortega and Rodríguez, 2008).

The Venezuelan Constitution, approved in 1999, allowed a referendum to recall the President to take place conditional on the collection of signatures from more than 20% of the voting population. The complete names of all signers were later published by pro-government legislator Luis Tascón, with the explicit support of the Chávez administration. This data set allows us to have unique information linking revealed political behavior to individual names and surnames.

Some caveats, however, must be mentioned with respect to the use of this data.

First, some Venezuelan residents with Italian passport may have left the country before the signature process took place, and thus may still appear as registered to vote even if they actually never had the option of signing the petition, in spite of being the ones that dislike the regime the most. Although this would be a violation of the assumption of a constant choice set<sup>15</sup>, if the propensity to leave the country is constant across regions it should not affect our results.

Second, people may not have full incentives to *truthfully reveal* these preferences. Unlike in a vote with secret ballot, here the President himself clarified that every single person signing the petition would be identified. Hsieh et al. (2008) find that the cost from signing the petition was as high as 4 percent of pre-signing income, mostly caused by lower probability of public sector employment. We thus interpret the signature as political behavior rather than deep preference.

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<sup>15</sup> There are even websites specialized in finding the “lost grandparent” that will get you access to Italy, and more importantly, to the entire European Union.



In any case, these two criticisms are less of a problem when looking at civic engagement, because our turnout data is from political participation in elections previous to the year 2000, when polarization was significantly smaller.

### **3. Empirical strategy**

#### *3.1. Data*

To follow our families of interest we used three types of data: (i) records of the political and economic behavior of people in Venezuela, including their surnames; (ii) data of average characteristics in Italian regions and; (iii) a mapping from surnames to regions in Italy.

Venezuelan data comes from the *Maisanta* list and the Venezuelan Social Security database. The *Maisanta* list<sup>16</sup> indicates name, surname and national ID for people in voting age population. It also lists the signers of a petition against Hugo Chavez in 2004 as well as their turnout in elections previous to the year 2000. This list was used to punish people that voted against the regime, which is the main focus of Hsieh et al (2008), as well as to target political supporters during the campaign for the 2004 recall referendum. Venezuela's *Instituto Venezolano de los Seguros Sociales* ([www.ivss.gov.ve](http://www.ivss.gov.ve)) lists the income history of 4 million Venezuelans working in the formal sector identified by their national ID and date of birth, which are public information available in the National Electoral Registry.<sup>17</sup>

To trace people back to Italian region we used the database compiled in the site *Indettaglio.it*, kindly shared at a regional level by its administrator. This database was built using current Italian population in each geographic location. As robustness check for our surnames, we used a US commercial list of ethnic origins of surnames at a *national* level.

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<sup>16</sup> See Hsieh, Miguel, Ortega, Rodriguez (2008) for further description

<sup>17</sup> At the best of our knowledge, our paper seems to be the first at using this detailed dataset.

Finally, Italian regional data is much more standard. Stated preferences come from the World Value Survey / European Value Survey 1990. GDP and population are from EUROSTAT.

### 3.2. How do we trace back people into Italian regions?

Each person is assigned to Italian region  $r$  if the following two conditions hold. First, the frequency of her surname in that region *today*,  $S^i_r$ , should be at least 70% of the overall frequency of that surname in Italy. Second, to avoid infrequent surnames, we required that at least 100 people should have that surname in Italy. If any of these two conditions fails, the individual is removed from the sample.<sup>18</sup>

$$\text{Region}_i = \begin{cases} r & \text{if } (S^i_r / \sum_j S^i_j) \geq 0.7 \text{ and } \sum_j S^i_j \geq 100 \\ \text{empty} & \text{if } \textit{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

This procedure gets rid of common surnames that are all over the place in Italy (e.g. *Rossi, Russo, Ferrari, Esposito, Bianchi, Romano, Colombo...*), creating a *one to one mapping* between one of 20,460 surnames and one of the twenty Italian regions. When merged with surnames in Venezuela, we get a sample of roughly 120 thousand people.

Some surnames with Italian origin also are widespread in Spain. This can make a surname common in Venezuela in spite of not being an indication of Italian heritage. To address this concern we use two additional filters. One is to delete these common Spanish surnames using local criteria. This is not that controversial because of the well known large frequency of some of these surnames. In the appendix we provide a list of the surnames we discarded. 38,077 observations survive this filter. Of them, 13,431 can be matched with the Social Security Data to get employment and (censored) income

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<sup>18</sup> An alternative would be to build the probability that your parents came from region  $r$ . We expect to do this in extensions of this paper

As a robustness check we also used a commercial database of Italian surnames<sup>19</sup> (without regional classification). This was an alternative way to avoid non Italian surnames in our match. From our subsample of 120 thousand, only 20 thousand survived to this filter.

### *3.3. Descriptive statistics*

Table 1 shows some basic summary statistics, which are already indicative of our main result. There seems to be no support for the idea that descendants from Northern Italy have either higher income, propensity for civic engagement, or propensity to oppose redistribution in our sample.

For example, abstention from turnout in elections shows no statistical differences across regions. If any, the abstention proportion estimates are lower for surnames coming from Southern Italian regions. This is completely opposite to what one would expect based on the well documented trend of the civic engagement in the Northern regions (e.g. Putnam, 1993). Income and employment differences are also minor among groups of regions, without any clear North versus South pattern. With the exception of subpopulation (2) we do not observe major differences in petition signature against Chavez in 2004. In subpopulation (2), representing those from the Northeast Italian region, we do see a higher prevalence of petition signing, but the small size of the regional subpopulation makes the estimate imprecise and not significant. If any, the Northwest more than compensates against it, leaving the Northern average slightly below the rest.

To check that the quality of the match between electoral data and social security data is reasonable we compute the main descriptive statistics in Table 2. The only important yet small difference appears to be in the average age. However, this is what one would expect as some young people may be of voting age population yet not enrolled in the social security administration. In any case, the difference is quite small (one year); below we run the regressions using age controls.

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<sup>19</sup> Melissa (c)

**TABLE 1: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS ABOUT THE SAMPLE AND THE SUBPOPULATION**

	Sign petition [binary] against Chavez (2004)			No turnover [binary] (pre 2000)			Male [binary]			Age [years] (2004)			Log (wage e 15)			Active Worker [binary] (2007)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)	
North East	mean	0.38	0.51	0.44	0.37	0.32	0.38	0.60	0.57	0.59	41.20	42.39	41.16	0.04	-0.01	-0.02	0.44	0.49	0.42
	cv	1.28	0.98	1.13	1.32	1.46	1.28	0.82	0.87	0.84	0.35	0.37	0.34	0.04	0.05	0.05	1.13	1.03	1.17
	n/N	0.13	0.05	0.22	0.14	0.05	0.22	0.13	0.05	0.20	0.13	0.22	0.05	0.13	0.06	0.18	0.13	0.05	0.20
North West	mean	0.30	0.30	0.43	0.37	0.37	0.36	0.56	0.57	0.50	41.19	43.25	41.09	-0.04	-0.05	-0.02	0.42	0.41	0.36
	cv	1.52	1.53	1.14	1.31	1.31	1.33	0.88	0.86	1.00	0.37	0.37	0.36	0.04	0.04	0.06	1.18	1.19	1.33
	n/N	0.55	0.69	0.20	0.55	0.67	0.21	0.54	0.67	0.20	0.55	0.20	0.69	0.53	0.65	0.16	0.54	0.67	0.20
Center	mean	0.43	0.39	0.43	0.33	0.35	0.34	0.55	0.52	0.58	40.46	40.79	39.06	0.11	0.18	0.22	0.41	0.40	0.44
	cv	1.14	1.25	1.16	1.42	1.36	1.39	0.91	0.96	0.86	0.35	0.33	0.34	0.04	0.04	0.03	1.19	1.23	1.14
	n/N	0.05	0.04	0.11	0.05	0.04	0.11	0.05	0.04	0.11	0.05	0.11	0.04	0.05	0.03	0.10	0.05	0.04	0.11
Islands	mean	0.42	0.45	0.49	0.31	0.30	0.32	0.56	0.55	0.52	39.01	38.58	38.29	0.08	0.09	0.03	0.46	0.49	0.51
	cv	1.16	1.11	1.03	1.49	1.53	1.47	0.89	0.91	0.95	0.35	0.34	0.35	0.04	0.04	0.04	1.09	1.03	0.98
	n/N	0.14	0.13	0.21	0.13	0.13	0.21	0.13	0.12	0.22	0.14	0.21	0.13	0.14	0.14	0.25	0.13	0.12	0.22
South	mean	0.43	0.46	0.44	0.29	0.27	0.29	0.54	0.50	0.55	39.37	39.78	39.10	0.01	0.11	-0.07	0.45	0.47	0.47
	cv	1.15	1.09	1.12	1.56	1.63	1.56	0.93	1.00	0.91	0.34	0.35	0.34	0.05	0.04	0.04	1.12	1.07	1.07
	n/N	0.13	0.10	0.26	0.13	0.10	0.26	0.14	0.11	0.28	0.13	0.26	0.10	0.15	0.12	0.30	0.14	0.11	0.28
Total	mean	0.35	0.35	0.45	0.35	0.35	0.34	0.56	0.56	0.54	40.62	40.92	40.46	15.41	15.42	15.50	0.43	0.43	0.44
	cv	1.36	1.37	1.11	1.37	1.37	1.41	0.88	0.89	0.92	0.36	0.36	0.36	0.04	0.04	0.05	1.15	1.15	1.12
	n/N	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	N	37854	15659	3060	27195	10986	2263	13358	5540	1107	37832	3059	15650	6079	2547	523	13301	5521	1098
	MSD	0.03	0.05	0.11	0.04	0.06	0.12	0.05	0.08	0.18	0.93	3.28	1.43	0.11	0.17	0.38	0.05	0.08	0.19

*regional classification*

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics: by groups of Italian regions of origin and type of sample. Population (1) only eliminates dead persons and obvious Spanish surnames. Subpopulation (2) includes the same variables as (1) plus the US commercial list. Subpopulation (3) is as (1) but only gets one random person per surname. Gender and worker status is available only for the match with social security.

TABLE 2. MATCH WITH SOCIAL SECURITY DATA

	with SS Data			w/o SS Data		
	mean	cv	N	mean	cv	N
signed against	0.37	1.30	13358	0.34	1.39	24482
abstention	0.36	1.35	9848	0.34	1.38	17337
male	0.58	0.88	13358	.	.	0
age (2004)	41.6	0.31	13358	40.1	0.39	24460
log wage	15.4	0.04	6068	.	.	0
active worker	0.43	1.16	13287	.	.	0
<i>Italian Origin</i>						
north	0.67	0.69	13358	0.69	0.67	24482
center	0.05	4.41	13358	0.05	4.60	24482
islands	0.13	2.54	13358	0.14	2.48	24482
south	0.14	2.45	13358	0.12	2.65	24482

Table 2: Assessing the quality of the match with social security data.

#### 4. Estimation

We first explore differences in propensity for civic engagement, proxied by electoral participation *before* the era of high political polarization in Venezuela (*circa* 2000). Table 3 presents a horseshoe of regressions that, in the spirit of Proposition 1, look for differences in levels of electoral abstention between the North and the South of Italy. *A priori*, one would expect to see higher rates of participation among the more civic-minded Northerners.

As shown in Table 3, we found no results supporting this story, even after controlling age, age squared and gender. Indeed, the Italian zones included in the regression appear between 0 and 5% more likely to *avoid turnout* than the South, which is the omitted category. Moreover, when we add earned income, we continue not finding regional effects in favor of higher participation for Venezuelans coming from Northern Italy. All three different samples used (as noted in the head of each column) show a consistent result that does not go away after controlling for income.

Another piece of evidence against a direct relationship between propensity for civic engagement of Italian descendants in Venezuelans and the average propensity for civic engagement in the region of origin is provided in Figure 4. Italian regions where there is lower propensity for civic engagement, as measured by the willingness to sign a petition, are associated with higher turnout in Venezuela (lower abstention). Again, we get a result that does not mirror the Italian situation.

TABLE 3. REGRESSIONS OF ABSTENTION (NON TURNOUT) ON REGIONS OF ORIGIN AND CONTROLS

	<i>Specification</i>								
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)
NW dummy	0.0768*** [0.0107]	0.0952*** [0.00810]	0.0710*** [0.0169]	0.0698*** [0.0109]	0.0879*** [0.00670]	0.0393 [0.0230]	0.0527*** [0.00877]	0.0521** [0.0221]	0.0174 [0.0379]
NE dummy	0.0729*** [0.0105]	0.0449*** [0.0120]	0.0884*** [0.0224]	0.0635*** [0.0107]	0.0413** [0.0181]	0.0793*** [0.0271]	0.0225** [0.00916]	0.0194 [0.0274]	0.0636 [0.0450]
Island dummy	0.017 [0.0174]	0.0249** [0.0113]	0.0261 [0.0176]	0.0152 [0.0237]	-0.00788 [0.00506]	0.0211 [0.0324]	-0.00101 [0.0152]	-0.0328 [0.0222]	0.0659 [0.0546]
Center dummy	0.0409*** [0.0108]	0.0786*** [0.0126]	0.0507** [0.0228]	0.0292*** [0.00988]	0.0870*** [0.0228]	0.0590* [0.0287]	-0.0139 [0.0159]	0.0245 [0.0261]	0.152*** [0.0453]
Male dummy				0.0306*** [0.00632]	0.0349*** [0.00970]	-0.0215 [0.0234]	0.0378*** [0.0101]	0.0451*** [0.0123]	0.0252 [0.0313]
Age in 2004 [years]				0.0306*** [0.00130]	0.0267*** [0.00354]	0.0335*** [0.00310]	0.0359*** [0.00302]	0.0280*** [0.00373]	0.0372*** [0.00852]
Age ^ 2				-0.00027*** [1.39e-05]	0.00023*** [3.54e-05]	0.00029*** [3.62e-05]	-0.00036*** [3.93e-05]	0.00026*** [5.64e-05]	0.000342** [0.000112]
Log (wage)							-0.0159 [0.00944]	-0.0204** [0.00942]	-0.0387 [0.0383]
Constant	0.292*** [0.00916]	0.274*** [0.00459]	0.291*** [0.0165]	-0.467*** [0.0316]	-0.407*** [0.0806]	-0.514*** [0.0836]	-0.337** [0.146]	-0.123 [0.168]	-0.0573 [0.675]
Observations	27185	10981	2262	9848	4006	836	4513	1859	406
R-squared	0.004	0.005	0.005	0.04	0.04	0.05	0.044	0.041	0.063
N_clust	20	19	20	20	18	20	20	16	17

Robust standard errors in brackets  
 \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Table 2 Linear probability regression of electoral abstention (no turnout circa year 2000) of Venezuelans on Italian regional origin and controls. Standard errors clustered at the level of Italian Region (rather than groups of region indicated in the regression).

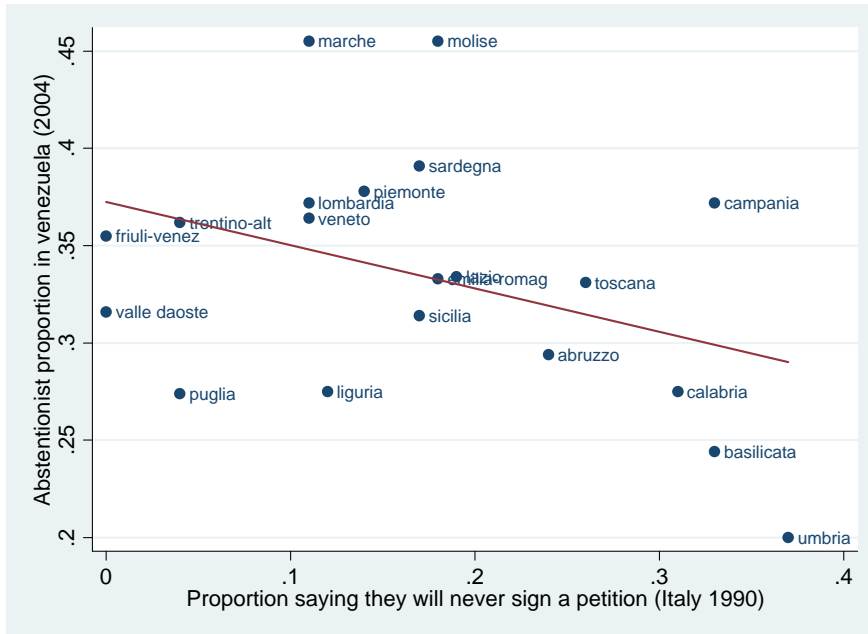


Figure 4. Proportion of abstention in Venezuelan election plotted against indicator of (low) propensity for civic engagement in the region of origin: Proportion saying that they will never sign a petition in Italy (1990). Source: Author’s calculation based on Maisanta database with Italian Surnames and European Value Survey 1990.

Thus, our analysis so far provides no support for hypothesis 1, which predicted constant rank of propensity for civic engagement across groups. The people that crossed the Atlantic and arrived at Venezuela in the mid of the XX century seem to have a different behavior from the average in their regions of origin.

The next natural step is to make a similar exercise, but explore the “preferences for populist redistribution”. Table 4 shows that petition signature against the Government of President Chavez in 2004 does follow a similar pattern. Once we control for income, there is no difference among Italian zones of origin. The only exception is the Northwest, but that works against the idea that a Northern Italian origin makes people, *ceteris paribus*, less attracted by populist redistribution.

**TABLE 4: Opposition to Chavez by Italian region of Origin**

	Specification								
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)
NW dummy	-0.128*** [0.0193]	-0.160*** [0.0102]	-0.00967 [0.0113]	-0.124*** [0.0179]	-0.152*** [0.00830]	-0.0446 [0.0334]	-0.147*** [0.0225]	-0.175*** [0.0192]	-0.0537 [0.0605]
NE dummy	-0.0525 [0.0321]	0.0541 [0.0324]	-0.005 [0.0241]	-0.0353 [0.0297]	0.0861*** [0.0270]	-0.00934 [0.0429]	-0.0537 [0.0378]	0.076 [0.0693]	0.0183 [0.0674]
Island dummy	-0.00582 [0.0373]	-0.0124 [0.00892]	0.0428* [0.0220]	-0.0106 [0.0361]	0.00419 [0.00312]	0.0114 [0.0295]	-0.0282 [0.0334]	-0.0274 [0.0188]	-0.0206 [0.0593]
Center dummy	0.00306 [0.0194]	-0.0672*** [0.0102]	-0.0158 [0.0145]	-0.0184 [0.0248]	-0.0859** [0.0331]	-0.0128 [0.0299]	-0.0223 [0.0363]	-0.153 [0.0996]	0.0829 [0.0740]
Male dummy				-0.0358*** [0.00596]	-0.0201* [0.0108]	0.0125 [0.0163]	-0.0268*** [0.00927]	-0.0118 [0.0193]	-0.0478* [0.0268]
Age in 2004 [years]				0.00259** [0.00113]	0.0036 [0.00224]	-0.00177 [0.00408]	-0.00128 [0.00229]	0.00484 [0.00442]	-0.00376 [0.00761]
Age ^ 2				-1.74e-05* [9.88e-06]	-2.1E-05 [2.21e-05]	-8.4E-06 [4.57e-05]	2.71E-05 [2.67e-05]	-4.1E-05 [5.13e-05]	6.45E-06 [8.70e-05]
Log (wage)							0.0291** [0.0125]	0.0136 [0.0124]	0.0284 [0.0471]
Constant	0.430*** [0.0171]	0.459*** [0.00792]	0.443*** [0.00421]	0.390*** [0.0321]	0.362*** [0.0532]	0.554*** [0.0902]	0.0539 [0.179]	0.167 [0.136]	0.242 [0.767]
Observations	37840	15653	3059	13358	5540	1107	6068	2542	522
N_clust	20	19	20	20	18	20	20	16	17
R2_adjusted	0.014	0.024	0.000	0.014	0.028	0.000	0.018	0.030	-0.002
R-squared	0.014	0.024	0.002	0.015	0.029	0.006	0.019	0.033	0.013

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Robust standard errors in brackets

Table 3. Linear probability of Petition signature against Chavez, regressed against Italian regional dummies and usual covariates. The three samples chosen to head each column follow the definition in the previous section.

Although there are concerns about omitted variable bias, some basic checks seem reassuring. One of them is that the sign and magnitudes of the income effect seem reasonable: as a first approximation, a 1% higher income makes people 0.2% more likely to sign a petition against Hugo Chavez in 2004. Similarly, the male coefficient appears negative, consistent with the general trend in Venezuela.

So far, this evidence supports neither Hypothesis 1 on propensity for civic engagement, nor Hypothesis 2 on redistribution. Overall, there are few differences in the political behavior of people coming from different region in Italy.



Formally, we find suggestive evidence that the speed of adaptation,  $\alpha$ , is large. To interpret the calculated value as an actual speed we need to assume that the differential self selection of migrant families is not excessively correlated with the determinants of political behavior used in the regression. If this assumption seems reasonable, then an open question is what may be the reasons under this high measured convergence in behavior? One possibility is that cultural heritage is transmitted much more strongly when both parents migrate from the same culture. In Venezuela, the postwar migration of Italians was very skewed towards males (in some years in a ratio of three or four to one). While some of them came back to Italy later on, many others married local women, which may have helped speed cultural convergence. Another explanation would trace the high speed of convergence to the set of opportunities available. As suggested by the framework put forth in section 2, if there is a large gap between Southern Italy and Venezuela in terms of the environment, then altruistic parents may favor a disproportionately large adaptation vis-à-vis the Northern Italian immigrants.

*Counterarguments, confounding factors and alternative stories.*

One potentially confounding factor cited in these cases are differences in human and physical capital at the moment of arrival. While it is interesting to explore this possibility, the potential dependence on these factors will not impact our conclusion that the average culture of a region of origin alone is a poor predictor of political behavior.

Another concern can be that measurement issues create too much noise. If this is correct, that could be the cause explaining why we fail to get support for hypothesis 1 and 2. Discarding this issue requires a long set of additional analyses that go beyond the current paper. However, it is important to note that the precision of our measure is considerably higher than that of many alternative exercises in the literature. On the one hand the definition of surname was an exercise to increase precision of origin. Requiring that 70% of people with that surname live in a given region focus us on families with low mobility *within* Italy. On the other hand, if culture is highly persistent, and if this persistence travels

within the family, then the surname of origin may be a less noisy predictor than the actual nationality of origin. For example, a French born with Italian surname living in Venezuela may be identified as Italian, which makes sense under the hypothesis that family is the channel through which the cultural signal travels.

Additionally, in this paper we have dealt with relevant *revealed* behavior of Venezuelans in a very particular and clear situation and choice set: voting or not circa 2000 and signing a petition against Chavez or not in 2004. If any, these seem better indicators of behavior than the stated preference in a long survey with many and not fully clear alternatives (e.g. the World Value Survey). Thus, we believe that at least in this dimension we are being more precise than what has been standard in the cultural economics literature.

In conclusion, so far we cannot reject that within region self selection of migrants is driving our results. However, if one believes in the identification strategy, we can still say that average cultural characteristics of a region of origin seem second order at explaining political behavior.

## **5. Concluding Remarks**

For how long does cultural heritage persist? Do the culturally inherited values of immigrants dilute as generations pass? To explore these questions we studied the relationship between *revealed* political behavior of immigrant families and the culture of the place where they migrated from. In particular, we attempt to tell apart the more local aspects of culture (e.g. Banfield, 1958; Putnam, 1983) from other country-to-country fixed effects such as religion, language or discrimination by recipient country's population. In order to achieve this, we focused on emigrants to Venezuela from different regions of Italy and used descendants' surnames to link them to regions of origin.

Prima facie, the well known propensities for civic engagement and against redistribution of Northern Italians in comparison to their Southern counterparts do not seem relevant for

Italians in Venezuela. This can be because of either within-region self-selection of migrants or dilution over time of family's preferences. In any case, our evidence points towards average culture at origin as a second order issue for both economic success and political behavior.

This measurement paper leaves us with many avenues for future research. A first priority is to put bounds on the hypothesis of differential self selection. To do that the authors are currently exploring immigration records which contain proxies for wealth and human capital at the moment of arrival, which can be compared across regions and with the population that remained in Italy in the middle of the XX century. A second major concern is to verify that these results are robust to alternative ways to trace back surnames to regions. While the current paper presents some basic checks, there are alternative methods which we plan to explore further. The most obvious is moving from a deterministic into a stochastic relationship, where surnames will have a probability of belonging to one of twenty Italian regions of origin. Although such an approach imposes a higher computational burden, it can also increase the sample size by effectively including surnames which are prevalent in two or three regions. Third, Venezuelan local politics surely plays a role. In practice, using the geographic distribution of voters among Venezuelan states can further reduce the variance of our estimates. Finally, since many non –returning male migrants married with native Venezuelan women, it may be that part of the rapid convergence can be accounted for by intermarriage instead of cultural adaptation of offspring.

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## 7. Appendix

### Box 1. Some notes about surnames

- The mapping of surnames to Italian regions was made with current population. As a result, surnames that are highly common or that belong to families that had a history of high internal migration within Italy are under-sampled in the analysis (the Bayesian updating provided by the additional information of the surname changes very little the prior about the region of origin).
- Surnames travel only through fathers, similarly to a genetic locus in the Y-chromosome. While in both Italy and Latin America people use both father's and mother's surnames, the only one that passes to the next generation is the one held by the grandfathers. In principle, assuming that sex ratios are orthogonal to our surnames, this does not seem like a problem for the results. Thus, our study so far looks at the effect of having a father with an Italian surname. Extending this and exploring heterogeneity is beyond the scope of the current paper.
- Due to the Galton-Watson decay process, the surnames that we observe today are ones that disproportionately experienced high population growth at some point during history, both in Venezuela and in Italy. Our sample is based on Darwinian survivors. To interpret our results in a somehow causal way one needs to assume that this effect is orthogonal to the variables included in the regression.

TABLE 5. Mincer regressions by Italian region of Origin

	Sample					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)
o_nordov	-0.0544*** [0.0144]	-0.153*** [0.0422]	0.0578 [0.0487]	-0.0451*** [0.0132]	-0.134*** [0.0449]	0.0646 [0.0494]
eo_norde	0.0255 [0.0158]	-0.109 [0.0708]	0.0496 [0.0786]	0.0248* [0.0141]	-0.0853 [0.0786]	0.0699 [0.0844]
geo_isole	0.0667*** [0.0227]	-0.00918 [0.0437]	0.0983** [0.0430]	0.0687*** [0.0171]	-0.00111 [0.0455]	0.0998** [0.0427]
geo_centro	0.104** [0.0425]	0.0778* [0.0429]	0.290*** [0.0761]	0.103*** [0.0348]	0.0805 [0.0460]	0.300*** [0.0764]
male				0.00265 [0.0146]	0.0265 [0.0228]	-0.0299 [0.0504]
edad_2004				0.0500*** [0.00978]	0.0514*** [0.0134]	0.0366*** [0.00778]
edad_2004_sq				-0.000594** [0.000116]	-0.000627** [0.000162]	-0.000460** [0.000104]
Constant	15.42*** [0.0139]	15.52*** [0.0418]	15.43*** [0.0414]	14.44*** [0.192]	14.52*** [0.259]	14.76*** [0.168]
Observations	6068	2542	522	6068	2542	522
N_clusters	20	16	17	20	16	17
R-squared	0.006	0.011	0.013	0.028	0.041	0.036

Standard errors in brackets  
 1, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Table 4. Mincer regressions augmented by Italian region of origin

TABLE 6. Employment regressions by Italian region of Origin

	Sample					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)
NW	-0.0287*** [0.00550]	-0.0517*** [0.00993]	-0.106** [0.0464]	-0.0151* [0.00766]	-0.0375*** [0.00606]	-0.0729** [0.0344]
NE	-0.00798 [0.0173]	0.0208 [0.0232]	-0.0438 [0.0257]	0.00704 [0.0162]	0.0314 [0.0223]	-0.0205 [0.0299]
Islands	0.0104 [0.0188]	0.0202* [0.00989]	0.0432*** [0.00877]	0.00261 [0.0142]	0.00735 [0.00669]	0.0256* [0.0132]
Center	-0.0328* [0.0172]	-0.0669 [0.0407]	-0.0301 [0.0319]	-0.0181* [0.00948]	-0.0598** [0.0220]	-0.0245 [0.0314]
male				-0.0361*** [0.00984]	-0.0261 [0.0155]	-0.0482 [0.0296]
Age				-0.00979*** [0.00256]	0.00891*** [0.00302]	-0.0156*** [0.00439]
Age^2				1.04E-05 [2.36e-05]	4.65E-06 [2.86e-05]	7.15E-05 [4.63e-05]
Constant	0.445*** [0.00150]	0.466*** [0.00976]	0.467*** [0.00808]	0.843*** [0.0605]	0.830*** [0.0711]	0.992*** [0.105]
Observations	13287	5515	1097	13287	5515	1097
R-squared	0.001	0.004	0.01	0.052	0.049	0.059
N_clust	20	18	20	20	18	20
r2_a	0.000679	0.00297	0.00676	0.0519	0.0478	0.0532

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Robust standard errors in brackets

Table 5. Linear probability regression of employment.

AIRES	HILLER	QUINTANA
APONTE	KAMMERER	ROSAS
ARMAS	LANZ	SCHUSTER
BLANCA	LUIS	STEINER
CABELLO	MONCADA	STOLL
CORDERO	NAVA	UGAS
CRESPO	NAVAS	VALDES
ESTE	NIETO	VOLCAN
FINK	OCA	WINKLER
FRITSCHER	OSIO	
GRUBER	PALMAS	
HAFNER	POHL	

Table 6. List of surnames eliminated from the list for not coinciding with Italian surnames.