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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Is Democracy Effective Against Coronavirus? An Analysis of Citizens' Opinions in Italy

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ABSTRACT: The social and political implications of the COVID-19 pandemic are receiving increasing attention in the literature. This article aims to contribute to this fast-growing research programme by focusing on the degree to which Italian citizens perceive democratic institutions as effective in coping with crises like the COVID-19 emergency. We put forward a set of hypotheses whereby negative evaluations of the effectiveness of democracy can be associated with social proximity to the disease and with perceived health and economic threats. We also argued that political factors can interact with such threats. Moreover, we hypothesised that certain factors dealing with the concepts of social capital and civic culture can help inhibit negative opinions about the effectiveness of democracy. To test these hypotheses, we analysed public opinion data collected in Italy between April and July 2020 using a Rolling Cross-Section survey design. The data showed that evaluations of democracy became more negative with social proximity to the disease and with individual perceived vulnerability, understood in health and economic terms. Our findings also highlighted that certain social factors which “underpin” democracy moderated negative evaluations. Finally, political factors like ideology and government appraisal shaped the relationship between individual threats and evaluations of democracy.

KEYWORDS: COVID-19, Democracy, Economic insecurity, Health threat, Rolling Cross-Section

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1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the calls to defend democracy made by politicians, scholars and leaders of civil society have multiplied. Their main concern regards the impact of the global pandemic on democratic governance, rights and freedoms and the advancement of anti-system politics (Hopkin 2020) already present in liberal democracies. One such example is “A Call to Defend Democracy”, an open letter initiated by the Stockholm-based International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) and the Washington DC-based National Endowment for Democracy, with support from 73 pro-democracy institutions as well as political and civic leaders around the world. The message is unambiguous: “The COVID-19 pandemic threatens more than the lives and the livelihoods of people throughout the world. It is also a political crisis that threatens the future of liberal democracy. (...) Democracy does not guarantee competent leadership and effective governance. While democracies predominate among the countries that have acted most effectively to contain the virus, other democracies have functioned poorly in responding to the pandemic and have paid a very high price in human life and economic security. Democracies that perform poorly further weaken society and create openings for authoritarians” (<https://www.idea.int/news-media/multimedia-reports/call-defend-democracy>).

What remains implicit in similar arguments is that the institutional failure to protect citizens from the negative consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic may translate into the deterioration of public attitudes towards democracy. At the same time, there is some evidence that national incumbent and democratic

institutions benefitted from a sort of “rally-around-the-flag” effect (Mueller 1973),¹ especially during the first phase of the outbreak.

Although analysis of the Europeans’ views and evaluations of democracy is an extensively researched topic,² the COVID-19 pandemic has offered a unique opportunity to investigate what citizens think in a time of severe crisis. The COVID-19 emergency has and is causing tremendous stress to citizens, and to social, economic and political institutions. For scholars interested in public opinion and political institutions, the spread of the pandemic represents a unique shock, posing an unprecedented challenge for the governments of established democracies. Since early 2020, many countries have enforced lockdown measures to curb the spread of the contagion, limiting citizens’ civil liberties and often damaging the national economy.

A growing number of studies have investigated whether this affected public support for decision-makers, institutions and political regimes (Devine et al. 2020). Indeed, it has been noted that incumbents around the globe experienced rising popularity following the outbreak of the virus in their countries (Jennings 2020), which seems consistent with a “rally-around-the-flag” dynamic. Evidence has been provided that the implementation of lockdown measures increased trust in government in European countries (Bol et al. 2020). In the Netherlands, confidence in political institutions grew with the number of reported COVID-19 cases (Schraff 2020; but for Spain, see Amat et al. 2020). Similarly, in Denmark, political trust, satisfaction with democracy, support for the incumbent party and interest in politics were found to have increased after the outbreak (Bøggild and Jenssen 2020). A case study in Sweden showed that the COVID-19 crisis led to higher levels not only of institutional trust, but also of interpersonal trust (Esaiasson et al. 2020). Interestingly, De Vries et al. (2021) found that the implementation of a nationwide lockdown in Italy positively affected incumbent support in other European countries. Another strand of the literature has instead analysed the consequences of public trust on responses to governmental policy (e.g., compliance with the government’s policies) (Goldstein and Wiedemann 2020; Han et al. 2020; Olsen and Hjorth 2020; Toschkov et al. 2020).

One of the least extensively investigated aspects in this fast-growing research programme is the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on how citizens conceive and assess democracy. To our knowledge, as yet no study has been published on the degree to which democratic institutions are publicly perceived as effective in tackling the crisis. Some scholars have indirectly focused on the perceived effectiveness of democracy, especially in its relationship with trust-related attitudes. Instead, we tackle this issue *directly*. We believe this topic is crucial, as a widespread opinion that democracy is effective in coping with major health crises (or other major crises, for that matter) may translate into widespread support for democratic institutions and help the functioning of democracy (Easton 1975). Consistently, this article aims to contribute to the broader debate on how institutional performance influences opinions about democracy, by going beyond the predominant economic performance-based arguments that have been widely emphasised by scholars, especially after the Great Recession which began in 2007. A number of analyses of the impact of the Great Recession on opinions about democracy have yielded interesting insights and improved our understanding of support for and satisfaction with democracy. In a comparative analysis of the conceptions and evaluations of democracy in the different regions of Europe under the impact of the euro crisis, Kriesi (2018) produced evidence that the perceived poor performance of the economy and the government in the crisis led citizens across Europe to evaluate the way

¹ This concept was developed by Mueller (1973) to describe growing support for national leaders in times of international crises due to an awakened sense of patriotism in response to the perception of the nation under threat. Applications of this concept to the COVID-19 pandemic are not rare (Bækgaard et al. 2020; Bol et al. 2020; Sibley et al. 2020).

² See, for example, the collection of essays by Ferrín and Kriesi (2016). The analyses are based on a European Social Survey dataset covering 29 European and neighbouring countries.

their national democracy worked more critically.³ Recently, research has moved further, highlighting that both economic and political considerations are important in determining citizens' levels of satisfaction with their democratic system, depending on the national economic context and their personal economic circumstances (Daoust and Nadeau 2020; Nadeau, Daoust and Arel-Bundock 2020).

Against this framework, the link between the personal threat of COVID-19 and democratic support remains largely unexplored in the growing empirical literature on the political consequences of the recent outbreak. This article aims to contribute to this line of investigation. The main argument is that, on one hand, the (economic or health) threat felt from COVID-19 may have led citizens to question the effectiveness of democracy, especially if fuelled by political factors (such as ideology), while, on the other hand, the usual cultural factors underpinning democratic support were nevertheless still at work and prevented the delegitimation of democracy. The article contributes to the field by investigating how/to what extent the unexpected COVID-19 pandemic challenged citizens' opinions about the effectiveness of democracy, by focusing on the Italian case. It is extremely valuable to study citizens' evaluation of the performance of democracy during the pandemic, owing to the public and private health implications as well as the serious economic consequences of this unprecedented crisis.

The empirical analysis was based on survey data collected by the ResPOnsE COVID-19 project (University of Milan) during the "first wave" of the pandemic in Italy. Italy is a very interesting case to investigate whether citizens' beliefs about democracy were influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. It was the first European country heavily hit by the pandemic and the first Western democracy to implement restrictive measures to push down the epidemic curve. Moreover, Italy's lockdown was the longest in Europe, and its rules were the strictest. Like in a "natural experiment", one of the fundamental rights of liberal democracies (freedom of movement) was severely restricted for all citizens for two months. This limitation of civil liberties represented a stress-test that could undermine the citizens' endorsement of democratic values.

The article is structured as follows. Section 2 offers a review of the theoretical framework behind the main argument and outlines the research questions and hypotheses. Section 3 briefly illustrates the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic in Italy and the restrictive measures implemented. Section 4 presents the data and methodology. Section 5 is devoted to empirical analysis. The article ends with a discussion of the main results.

2. Theory and Hypotheses

Our investigation of the evaluation of democratic effectiveness is situated within the broad framework of two different analytical perspectives: one that is long-term in nature and centred around the role played by political attitudes and predispositions (the "political culture perspective") and another which is short-term and based on the cost-benefit calculations concerning the evaluation of a political actor's performance (the "reasoning citizen perspective").⁴

These two perspectives have quite a long intellectual history and have been put to the test in many analyses of political behaviour in different contexts. The "political culture perspective" goes back to Almond and Verba's (1963) seminal work and stresses the role of cultural factors and the relationship between democratic support, civic culture and social capital (Inglehart 1990; 1997; Norris 1999; Putnam 1993; 2000; van Deth et

³ However, it also showed that this critical evaluation of democracy did not undermine citizens' support for democracy. Quite the contrary: democratic principles were actually strengthened by citizens' dissatisfaction with the economic and political performance of their countries in the crisis.

⁴ The concept is an adaption of Samuel Popkin's (1994) "reasoning voter".

al. 1999). The short-term, instrumental evaluation of the performance of a political actor (government, leader, party, etc.), on the other hand, is best exemplified by the “economic voting” tradition in studies of electoral behaviour (Lewis-Beck and Paldam 2000; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000). Several empirical studies have, however, moved beyond this intellectual divide and shown that both types of factors, and their interplay, contribute to shaping citizens’ political support in advanced industrial democracies (among these, see especially Dalton 2004 for its influential role).

In this article we try to bring together and draw upon these two traditions by including both long-term cultural predispositions and short-term evaluations in our analyses. From this point of view, the COVID-19 pandemic offered us the unique opportunity to test the correlates and determinants of democratic support in the context of a major, non-economic crisis.⁵ This study aims to contribute to this line of investigation by exploring some of the relationships between the evaluation of the effectiveness of democracy and perceived health and economic threats. As already pointed out, the link between feelings of personal threat from COVID-19 and democratic attitudes indeed remains largely unexplored in the growing empirical literature on the political consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research on COVID-19 fears is growing and provides some useful insights to better investigate the link between feelings of threat and attitudes towards democracy. There is evidence that, in addition to the risk of serious illness and concern for oneself or loved ones, many individuals fear job or wage losses as a result of the economic crisis created by the pandemic. There is growing evidence that health and economic risk perception is influenced by psychological traits (Brooks et al. 2020; Zettler et al. 2020) and that risks and fears are not equally distributed among the population, but stratified socially (Dryhurst et al. 2020), culturally (Delia 2020) and economically (Wright et al. 2020). Scholars have pointed out that subjective risk perception predicts COVID-19-related attitudes and behaviours (e.g., public acceptance of authorities’ recommendations) more than the objective severity of the risk(s) (Guglielmi et al. 2020; Khosravi 2020; Naumann et al. 2020). However, very little attention has been paid to the link between feelings of personal threats from COVID-19 and support for democracy (Roccatò et al. 2020).

The first step of the analysis was devoted to exploring this relationship, considering perceived both health and economic threats. We aimed to answer the following questions: Does the perceived threat of COVID-19 have a direct effect on citizens’ opinions about the effectiveness of democracy? Does the intensity of the impact of the health threat differ from that of the economic threat? Moreover, the analysis also accounted for the extremely heterogeneous spread of Coronavirus across Italy. In the first wave, almost 40% of the positive cases were concentrated in Lombardy, 33% in three other Northern regions (Piedmont, Emilia-Romagna and Veneto), while the remaining cases were scattered about the other sixteen Italian regions. As a result, not only was the risk of contracting Coronavirus higher for those living in some areas than in others, but the level of closeness to people diagnosed with the illness was localised too. The expectation was that not only different kinds of perceived threats (health vs economic) but also different levels of social proximity to COVID-19 influenced opinions about the effectiveness of democracy.

Following these theoretical arguments, our hypotheses regarding the relationship between personal experience with COVID-19 and attitudes towards democracy were as follows:

- H1. *The COVID-19 Social Proximity Hypothesis*: knowing someone who died or was hospitalised as a consequence of Coronavirus has a negative effect on the opinion that democracy is effective;

⁵ There is an interesting body of literature about the effects of terrorist attacks on citizens’ civic orientations. A number of studies have analysed how 9/11 affected citizens’ political attitudes (see Woods 2011 for a summary). See also Dinesen and Jæger (2013).

- H2. *The Health Threat Hypothesis*: the perceived risk of contracting Coronavirus has a negative direct effect on the opinion that democracy is effective;
- H3. *The Economic Threat Hypothesis*: perceived job insecurity due to the economic damage caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has a negative direct effect on the opinion that democracy is effective.

Additional tested hypotheses were that political factors (political ideology and government evaluation) moderate the effect of perceived health and economic threats on opinions about the effectiveness of democracy (H2a, H3a). Our expectations were based on a cognitive approach. As far as the COVID-19 pandemic is concerned, political heuristics (Sniderman et al. 1993) may have reduced the complexity and uncertainty recurrent in times of crisis and, consequently, moulded opinions on the different objects of the political system. Generally speaking, we expected that the effect of the (economic or health) threat would vary based on political leanings and satisfaction with the government. As far as the former is concerned, scholars have shown that political ideology helps predict the threat felt from COVID-19 and susceptibility to fake news (Calvillo et al. 2020; Shao and Hao 2020). At the same time, literature on democratic support has pointed out that left-right placement is one of the main factors determining the endorsement/rejection of authoritarian alternatives (Ferrín and Kriesi 2016; Inglehart 1997). As for the role of government appraisal, a strand of the literature has highlighted the role of political closeness to the government in explaining support for democratic processes and outputs (see for example Anderson et al 2005; Curini, Jou and Memoli 2012).⁶ Given the relationship between government appraisal and democratic support, we expected government evaluation to moderate the link between perceived threats and opinions about democratic effectiveness. Against this framework, it is reasonable to argue that ideology and government appraisal shaped the relationship between perceived threat and democratic support in the first wave of the pandemic in Italy. The aim of the hypothesised interactions, however, remains explorative in nature.

In the second part of the analysis, we referred to the cultural and social correlates of democratic support within the “political culture” framework. Generally speaking, we argued that the usual “resources” of liberal democracies were still at work during the Italian outbreak, at least at the individual level: a sort of “democratic capital” (Persson and Tabellini 2009) operating at the micro-level which might be termed as the psychological underpinnings of democracy. First of all, we expected a positive effect from social capital (measured by social trust) and civic culture (measured by political interest and trust in institutions) on the perceived effectiveness of democracy. Besides, given that the infodemic poses a threat to one of the pillars of democracy – transparency and truthful information (Flinders 2020; Zarocostas 2020) – we checked how far trusting official epidemiological data affected the (output) legitimacy of democracy. Given the complex interrelationship between social and political factors defining “political culture” and democratic effectiveness, we were not interested in detecting any “causal” direction. Instead, we aimed to check to what extent the usual individual long-term underpinnings of democratic attitudes were at work during the pandemic.

Based on these considerations, we formulated our last hypothesis:

⁶ In this regard, it is worth pointing out that our interest was not in preferences for authoritarian rather than democratic regimes as a result of dissatisfaction with the government’s COVID-19 measures. While these preferences cannot be ruled out, it is too early for any reliable statistical evidence. Indeed, the data showed that the level of perceived effectiveness of democracy remained quite stable during the first wave of the pandemic in Italy. These findings are consistent with the large amount of cross-national empirical literature pointing to the weak relationship between domestic performance and support for democracy (for a different perspective see Magalhães 2014), based on the distinction between “diffuse” and “specific” support proposed by Easton (1975).

H4. *The “Underpinnings of Democracy” Hypothesis*: attitudinal pillars of democracy such as social trust, political interest, institutional confidence and belief in truthful information have a positive direct effect on the opinion that democracy is effective.

3. The COVID-19 pandemic in Italy: a snapshot

In mid-February 2020 Italians thought that the presence of Coronavirus in the country was limited to two Chinese tourists visiting Rome. On 21 February, a man living in Codogno, a small town close to Milan, tested positive for Coronavirus, and in the next few days, many other cases emerged. One month later the contagion curve was increasing at an impressive rate, only starting to flatten at the end of April. In six months, the virus killed more than 35,000 people. As of 23 February, the government started to restrict the movement of people living in some Northern towns where the virus was spreading fast.⁷ The restrictions got stricter and stricter and were extended to more and more towns until they were applied on a national scale on 9 March. This was the beginning of so-called “Phase 1”. Schools, commercial activities (except for essential services like supermarkets) and most economic activities were closed. Any form of gathering of people in public places was forbidden. It is worth noting that the hard-hit Northern regions of Lombardy, Veneto and Piedmont were governed by opposition parties, a situation fuelling both central-local tensions and politicisation of the outbreak (Barbieri and Bonini 2020). “Phase 1” lasted for two months and on 4 May the government started to relax the restrictions. In “Phase 2” many people went back to work, bars and restaurants reopened, and it was permitted to meet relatives living in the same region. “Phase 3” started on 15 June: people were allowed to travel all over the country and abroad. With the significant exception of schools, almost all activities reopened while all citizens were requested to keep following the rules laid down since the beginning of the pandemic: one-metre distancing, wearing protective masks in closed spaces and sanitising hands.

During the summer holidays, Italy had one of the lowest infection rates in the Western world, while other European countries experienced a new surge (especially France and Spain). Nevertheless, the daily counts started to rise, and new clusters were identified for the first time in Southern regions. The government imposed its first new restrictions – closing nightclubs and mandating mask-wearing, even outdoors, in areas with nightlife – in mid-August. Schools reopened in mid-September amid fears and controversy about the safety rules. Unfortunately, in October the pandemic began to spread rapidly again. The government announced a series of new measures: closing gyms and swimming pools and forcing bars and restaurants to shut at 6 pm. In November it was evident that the country was witnessing another wave of the Coronavirus epidemic. At the time of writing (the end of February 2021), the positive cases numbered 2,907,825, with 97,507 deaths.⁸ Further stringent measures began on 3 November, preliminarily lasting until 3 December. The government decree set out three regional tiers (yellow, orange and red), corresponding to three increasingly serious risk scenarios, and envisaging modular measures.⁹ The decree stated that between the hours of 10 pm and 5 am people could only travel for proven work needs, situations of necessity or health reasons. Other common national restrictions were: closure of shopping centres at weekends, a 50% cut in public transport capacity and the shift of all high school classes online. In the red zones (initially: Calabria, Lombardy, Piedmont and Val d'Aosta) more stringent limitations were laid down: people could not leave their homes except for work, health reasons or emergencies. Moreover, bars, restaurants and most shops had to close, and the final two years of middle school also moved online. For the first time since the start of the pandemic, at the end of October 2020

⁷ A list of the decrees (in Italian) issued by the Italian Prime Minister is available on the government website: <http://www.governo.it/it/coronavirus-misure-del-governo>.

⁸ [COVID-19 ITALIA - Desktop \(arcgis.com\)](https://www.arcgis.com); last accessed on 28 February 2021.

⁹ <http://www.salute.gov.it/portale/nuovocoronavirus/dettaglioFaqNuovoCoronavirus.jsp?lingua=english&id=230> last accessed on 26 November 2020.

demonstrations broke out in some Italian cities to protest against the government's measures. Interestingly, one protestor's motto was "No to the health *dictatorship*".

4. Data and Methods

4.1 Data

The present article relies on data from ResPOnSE COVID-19, a Rolling Cross-Section (RCS) survey carried out in Italy from 6 April to 8 July 2020 – that is, during the first wave of the pandemic – corresponding to a gross sample size of 15,773. The RCS design, which was first introduced and mainly used to monitor electoral campaigns, is well suited to account for very short-term and even daily evolutions in public opinions, attitudes and behaviours. Therefore, it is an ideal instrument to monitor public opinion during a pandemic (Vezzoni et al. 2020). The design consists of the daily collection of quantitative online interviews on sub-samples drawn from the main sample. If properly implemented for a sufficient time span, the RCS design gains a very desirable feature: independence among the daily sub-samples. This permits comparison of the daily samples and, in general, the drawing of robust and meaningful trends.

The online data collection was based on an opt-in panel of a private survey agency (SWG), stratified by macro-area of residence and, subsequently, quoted by gender and age class. The survey consisted of a core questionnaire including questions on the respondents' basic socio-demographic characteristics as well as questions about the economy; behaviour and compliance during the pandemic; trust; perceptions of risk; politics; opinions towards science; and appraisal of the national and local government. The answers to these questions were gathered for the entire duration of the data collection fieldwork. Five rotating modules on specific topics were also collected for shorter periods.

4.2 Method and Measures

To account for variations in citizens' opinions of the effectiveness of democracy during the Coronavirus crisis, we used a set of multivariate regression models where the dependent variable was *Democracy Effective*. This variable measured the degree to which respondents disagreed with the following statement: "The Coronavirus emergency proves that there are circumstances in which democracy is unable to solve people's problems", on a 0-10 scale (0=totally agree, 10=totally disagree).¹⁰ In other words, higher values indicated a more positive evaluation of democracy as an effective instrument to solve citizens' problems in particularly critical circumstances. The overall mean of this variable during the period from April to July 2020 was 4.54 (SD=3.02, N=14,959), indicating a moderately negative view of democracy as an instrument to solve people's problems during emergencies like COVID-19. Figure 1 displays the daily average of this variable during the period from 6 April 2020 to 8 July 2020. The graph shows that Italian citizens' evaluations of the effectiveness of democracy were quite stable over time, fluctuating slightly around the overall mean. This suggests that Italian citizens' opinions on the effectiveness of democracy did not depend on the government's actual actions during that period. The evaluations did not dramatically change after the lifting of restrictions either on 4 May (the start of "Phase 2") or on 15 June (the start of "Phase 3"). Hereafter, we explore the role of other key factors

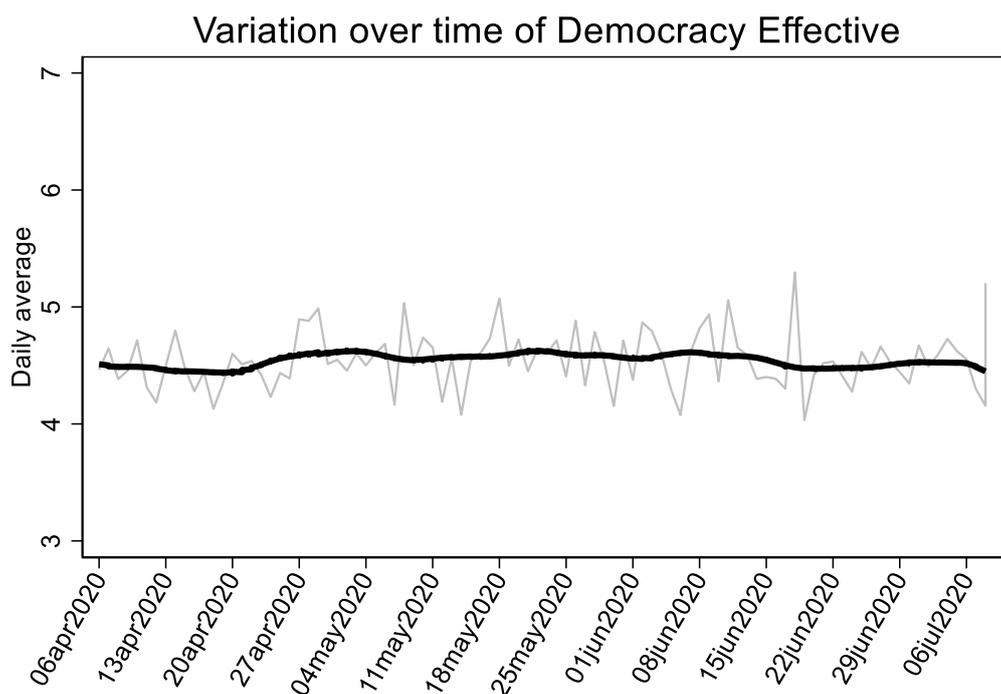
¹⁰ Note that we inverted the original scale of answers to the questionnaire, which ranged from 0 (totally disagree) to 10 (totally agree).

that can account for variations in citizens' evaluations of democracy as an effective instrument during crises like the Coronavirus pandemic.

In order to test our hypothesis about the impact of social proximity to COVID-19 on individual evaluations of the effectiveness of democracy (H1), in the analysis we included a categorical indicator that we called *Social Proximity*. This variable distinguished between those respondents who personally knew – within their social networks – someone who died or was hospitalised as a consequence of Coronavirus, those respondents who knew someone who was infected or quarantined, and those respondents who did not know anyone in any of the conditions above.

Our second hypothesis posits a negative relationship between the perceived health threat and evaluations of the effectiveness of democracy (H2). This hypothesis was tested by incorporating *Subjective Risk*, which measured the respondents' perception of the risk of contagion on a 1-5 scale. In this scale, 1 indicated that an individual believed s/he was much less exposed to risk than the rest of the population in her/his area, and 5 indicated that an individual believed s/he was much more exposed than the rest of the population in the area.

Figure 1 – Variation in citizens' evaluations of the effectiveness of democracy from 6 April to 8 July 2020. Daily averages and lowest interpolation



Source: Authors' elaboration of ResPOnsE COVID-19 data

As a way to operationalise the perceived economic threat (H3), we incorporated two variables in the analysis. One was *Job Loss*, measuring the likelihood that, in the respondent's view, someone in her/his family would lose her/his job in the following six months (0-10 scale, from 0=completely unlikely to 10=completely likely). The other one was *Prospective Economic Evaluation*, measuring the respondent's estimation of the

economic situation of her/his family in the following six months on a scale from -2 to 2 (-2=will considerably worsen, -1=will worsen, 0=will be the same, 1=will improve, 2=will considerably improve).

As discussed above, we expected political factors to moderate the impact of perceived health and economic risks on evaluations of democracy (H2a and H3a). We considered two political factors: respondents' ideological leanings and their judgment of the conduct of the Italian government. With regard to the former, we created the *Ideology* categorical variable, identifying those respondents who placed themselves on the left (scores 0, 1, 2, 3 on a 0-10 scale), in the centre (scores 4, 5, 6), or on the right of the political spectrum (scores 7, 8, 9, 10), and those who did not know where to place themselves or refused to do so. In addition, in the analysis we incorporated *Government Evaluation*, which captured how respondents evaluated the conduct of the Italian government during the Coronavirus emergency on a 0-10 scale where 0 corresponded to a totally negative evaluation and 10 to a totally positive evaluation.¹¹

Our last hypothesis (H4) focuses on the role of what we called the “underpinnings of democracy” in preventing negative evaluations of the effectiveness of democracy. We took these factors into account through a set of variables. One was *Political Interest*, measuring how much a respondent was interested in politics on a 1-4 scale. The second variable was *Social Trust*, operationalising confidence in other people on a scale ranging from 0 (can't be too careful) to 10 (most people can be trusted). The third was *Institutional Trust*, obtained as a combination (average) of the respondents' trust in the Italian parliament and in the European Union. The degree of trust in the two institutions was measured on a scale ranging between 0 (no trust at all) to 10 (complete trust). A fourth variable – named *Belief in Official Data* – measured how much a respondent disagreed with the statement that “In Italy, data on the real scale of the contagion are kept secret”, on a 0-10 scale.

In our regression analysis we controlled for a number of other factors that could be relevant in accounting for variation in Italian citizens' evaluations of the effectiveness of democracy. Firstly, we controlled whether a respondent lived in the North-West, North-East, Centre, or South and Islands. This distinction could be relevant not only because North-Western Italy was the area most seriously hit by the Coronavirus crisis in the spring of 2020, but also because of the different political cultures characterising the Italian regions. Secondly, we introduced a time indicator, identifying interviews collected during Phase 1 (until 3 May), Phase 2 (4 May – 14 June) and Phase 3 (from 15 June onwards). Thirdly, we controlled for a number of socio-demographic traits: the respondents' gender (coded 1 for women), age (in years), level of education (low, middle, high) and self-reported income (coded 1 if the respondent's family income allowed for a comfortable or well-off standard of living, and 0 otherwise). Descriptive statistics and further details on the operationalisation of the variables are reported in the appendix (Table A1).

¹¹ As robustness checks, we also ran our analyses using different operationalisations of the political factors. Firstly, we measured ideology as a continuous variable, based on the respondents' self-location on the left-right scale (0-10). Our findings did not change, with the only exception of the coefficients on *Social Proximity* (see Table A3 and Figures A1 and A2). Secondly, we employed a different indicator of citizens' evaluation of the government – namely, a variable capturing how respondents evaluated the measures imposed by the Italian government in order to contain the spread of Coronavirus, on a 0-10 scale where 0 corresponded to a totally negative evaluation and 10 to a totally positive evaluation. Our findings did not change if we used this variable, which was highly correlated with *Government Evaluation* (the Pearson correlation is 0.81).

5. Findings

We employed a set of OLS regression models to explore the sources of variation in the citizens' evaluation of democracy as an effective instrument in situations like the Coronavirus crisis. In our analysis, we pooled all the interviews in our sample, thus covering the entire period between 6 April and 8 July 2020.

Table 1 – OLS regression models predicting positive evaluations of democracy as an effective instrument to solve citizens' problems in particularly critical circumstances

	<i>Model 1</i>		<i>Model 2</i>		<i>Model 3</i>		<i>Model 4</i>	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
<i>Social Proximity:</i>								
Acquaintances Quarantined/Infected	-0.078	(0.068)	-0.077	(0.068)	-0.079	(0.068)	-0.081	(0.068)
Acquaintances Hospitalised/Died	-0.129**	(0.057)	-0.127**	(0.057)	-0.131**	(0.057)	-0.128**	(0.057)
<i>Perceived Health Threat:</i>								
Subjective Risk	-0.049*	(0.028)	-0.269***	(0.062)	-0.050*	(0.028)	-0.048*	(0.028)
<i>Perceived Economic Threat:</i>								
Job Loss	-0.034***	(0.008)	-0.035***	(0.008)	-0.060***	(0.014)	0.015	(0.019)
Prospective Economic Evaluation	-0.010	(0.039)	-0.015	(0.039)	-0.010	(0.039)	-0.001	(0.039)
<i>Political Factors:</i>								
Ideology: Refuse to Self-locate/Don't know	-0.908***	(0.082)	-0.917***	(0.082)	-1.002***	(0.111)	-0.906***	(0.082)
Ideology: Centre	-0.650***	(0.067)	-0.650***	(0.067)	-0.706***	(0.097)	-0.645***	(0.067)
Ideology: Right	-1.471***	(0.073)	-1.482***	(0.073)	-1.686***	(0.102)	-1.456***	(0.073)
Job Loss X Id.: Refuse to Self-locate/Don't know					0.029	(0.023)		
Job Loss X Id.: Centre					0.020	(0.021)		
Job Loss X Id.: Right					0.060***	(0.020)		
Government Evaluation	-0.074***	(0.012)	-0.167***	(0.027)	-0.076***	(0.012)	-0.047***	(0.015)
Subjective Risk X Gov. Evaluation			0.036***	(0.009)				
Job Loss X Gov. Evaluation							-0.008***	(0.003)
<i>Underpinnings of Democracy:</i>								
Political Interest	0.189***	(0.033)	0.187***	(0.033)	0.188***	(0.033)	0.190***	(0.033)
Social Trust	0.165***	(0.011)	0.164***	(0.011)	0.165***	(0.011)	0.164***	(0.011)
Institutional Trust	0.049***	(0.013)	0.049***	(0.013)	0.047***	(0.013)	0.050***	(0.013)
Belief in Official Data	0.202***	(0.008)	0.204***	(0.008)	0.204***	(0.008)	0.202***	(0.008)
<i>Control Variables (not reported)</i>								
Constant	4.305***	(0.206)	4.884***	(0.252)	4.412***	(0.210)	4.126***	(0.215)
N	12,391		12,391		12,391		12,391	
R-squared	0.169		0.170		0.170		0.170	

Note: OLS regression models. Cells report unstandardised coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses. Omitted category for Social Proximity: "None". Omitted category for Family: "None". Omitted category for Ideology: "Left". Statistical significance: * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

The regression results are presented in Table 1, where we have only reported the models with the clearest findings for reasons of space.¹² More specifically, Model 1 was the baseline model, which allowed hypotheses H1, H2, H3 and H4 to be tested. Model 2 tested the interaction between our measure of perceived health risk (*Subjective Risk*) and one of the variables operationalising political factors – namely, *Government Evaluation* (H2a).

Models 3 and 4 tested the interactions between one variable capturing perceived economic risk (*Job Loss*) and the two variables measuring political factors (H3a).¹³ In the table, a positive coefficient means that increases in the covariate were associated with more positive evaluations of democratic effectiveness, while a negative coefficient implies that increases in the covariate were associated with more negative evaluations of democratic effectiveness.

Generally speaking, the analysis supported our hypotheses. According to H1, greater social proximity to COVID-19 should be associated with more negative evaluations of the effectiveness of democracy. As expected, we found that the coefficient on *Acquaintances Hospitalised/Died* is negative and significant in all the models. This means that, if compared to those who did not know anyone affected by the virus, those with acquaintances who were hospitalised or had died due to COVID-19 gave a more negative evaluation of the effectiveness of democracy in coping with emergencies like the Coronavirus pandemic. The analysis also lent some support to our argument about the negative impact of perceived health risk on evaluations of democratic effectiveness (H2), as higher subjective perceptions of the risk of contagion were associated with more negative views of the effectiveness of democracy. Let us note, however, that in the models where *Subjective Risk* was not interacted with other covariates, its coefficient is only statistically significant at the 10% level.

With regard to H3, what citizens thought about the effectiveness of democracy was found to be strongly related to one of the two measures of perceived economic threat. In particular, the higher the perceived likelihood that someone in the respondent's family would lose her/his job in the following six months, the more negative opinions on the effectiveness of democracy (*Job Loss* was negative and statistically significant). At the same time, evaluations of democracy seem unrelated to prospective economic evaluations.

The findings concerning what we called the “underpinnings of democracy” supported our expectations (H4). In particular, the citizens' opinions about the effectiveness of democracy were more positive for those with more interest in politics, more trust in other people and political institutions, and a greater belief in the official data released by the government and the press. The coefficients on these covariates are highly statistically significant across all the models reported in Table 1.

As to political factors, the findings regarding citizens' ideological leanings were unsurprising. If compared to those citizens who placed themselves on the left (and hence were presumably closer to the government parties), all other ideological categories of citizens had more negative evaluations of the effectiveness of democracy. A closer look at the coefficients in Model 1 reveals that right-wing citizens were the ones expressing the most negative evaluations, followed by those who did not know how or refused to place themselves on the political scale. The finding regarding *Government Evaluation* in Model 1 was somewhat unexpected. Those who evaluated the government's actions more positively also tended to have more negative opinions of democracy as an effective instrument during the emergency. This might depend on the fact that, especially during the first months of the COVID-19 crisis, the Italian cabinet tackled the spread of the virus through a set of emergency decrees which seemed to curb “normal” democratic proceedings, both in their content and in the way they were adopted. The government decrees indeed limited some civil liberties and

¹² Table 1 does not report coefficients for the control variables, which are shown in the appendix (Table A2).

¹³ The models including other interactions are available upon request.

were issued by the executive while bypassing the ordinary parliamentary process. This argument is consistent with what has been found in some recent analyses of the Italian case showing that, during the first wave of the Coronavirus crisis, government appraisal was associated with citizens' willingness to give up individual liberties in order to contain the contagion (Segatti 2020).

Let us emphasise that, according to our hypotheses, political factors were expected to interact with the variables measuring perceived risk. These interaction effects were specifically assessed in Models 2, 3 and 4 and illustrated in Figures 2 and 3. In H2a and H3a, we assumed that political factors can shape the relationship between evaluations of the effectiveness of democracy and citizens' perceptions of risk – regarding their health and the economic situation of their family, respectively. In this regard, Model 2 tested the interaction between *Subjective Risk* and *Government Evaluation*.¹⁴ The interaction effects are displayed in the graph in Figure 2, where we plot, for each level of evaluation of the Italian government (from 0 to 10), the impact of a one-unit increase in health risk on the evaluation of democracy. The graph reveals that the relationship between perceived health risk and evaluations of democracy was not the same for all the individuals in our sample. A higher perceived risk of contagion was only associated with more negative opinions about democratic effectiveness for those citizens who evaluated the conduct of the government at 5 or lower. And the impact of the risk of contagion was stronger especially for those who evaluated the Italian government negatively. The perceived health threat seems to have no impact on evaluations of democracy for those with a fairly positive assessment of the government (between 6 and 9). It should be noted that, for those with an extremely positive evaluation of the executive (i.e., the 8% of the observations in the sample that allocated a score of 10), the risk of contagion had a positive impact on the dependent variable. In other words, for the most whole-hearted supporters of the Conte II government, perceiving a higher risk of contagion also increased the likelihood of disagreeing with the idea that democracy is ineffective in situations like the Coronavirus crisis.

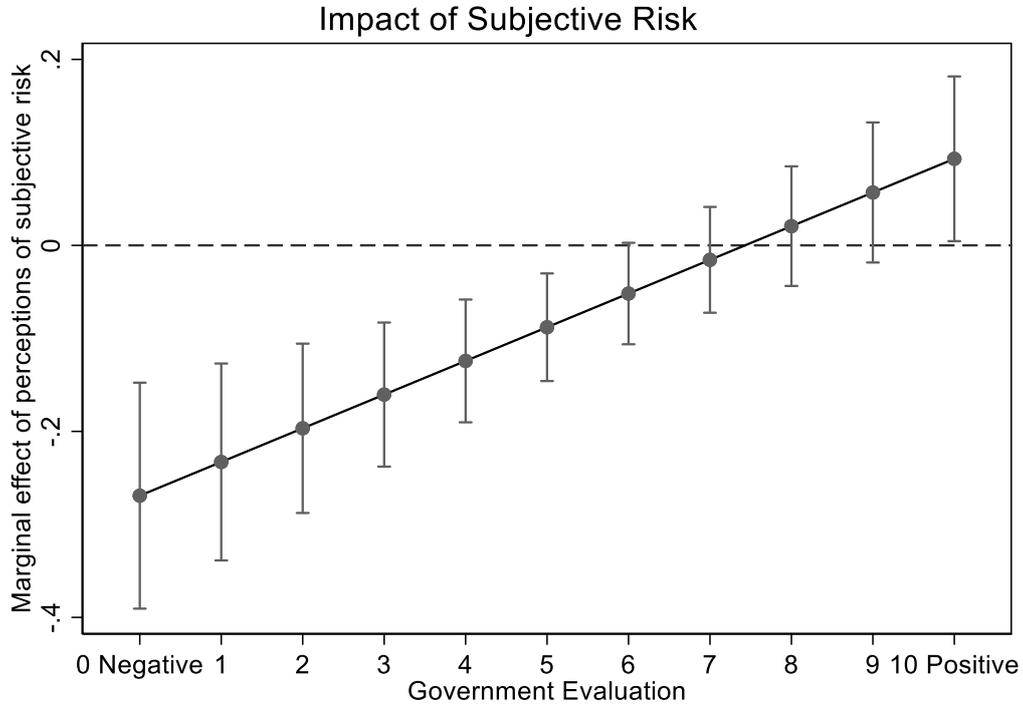
Models 3 and 4 empirically tested H3a – that is, the interaction between perceived economic risk (measured as *Job Loss*) and political factors (*Ideology* in Model 3 and *Government Evaluation* in Model 4). According to the results of Model 3, a higher perceived risk of job loss (in one's family) was only associated with more negative evaluations of democratic effectiveness for those who located themselves on the left or in the centre of the ideological spectrum. As shown in the left panel of Figure 3, a one-unit increase in the risk that someone in the family might lose her/his job led to more negative opinions on democratic effectiveness for centrist and (especially) left-wing citizens. The same does not hold for right-wing citizens or for those who refused to self-locate on the left-right scale or did not know where to place themselves. For these two categories of citizens, opinions about the effectiveness of democracy did not depend on perceived job insecurity.¹⁵

In a similar vein, the results of Model 4 indicate that a higher risk of job loss (within one's family) was only associated with more negative evaluations of democratic effectiveness for those who gave quite a positive evaluation of the actions of the Italian government.

¹⁴ The findings from the model where *Subjective Risk* was interacted with *Ideology* are not reported here. The analysis showed that the effects of the interaction between the two variables were not significant. In particular, the impact of perceived health threat was the same for all the ideological categories into which the sample was divided.

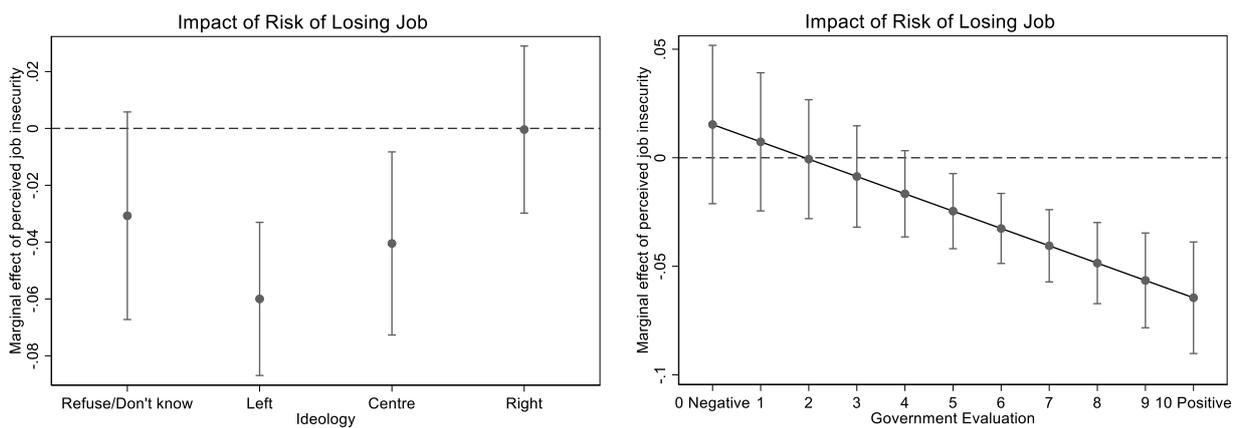
¹⁵ As shown by the negative coefficients in Model 1, right-wing citizens and those who refused or did not know how to locate themselves on the left-right scale held the most negative views of the effectiveness of democracy.

Figure 2 – Impact of perceived health threat on evaluations of the effectiveness of democracy, by citizens’ evaluation of the conduct of the Italian government



Note: The graph shows the impact of a one-unit increase in *Subjective Risk* on *Democracy Effective*, for each *Government Evaluation* score. Estimates from Model 2. Marginal effects with 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 3 – Impact of perceived economic threat on evaluations of the effectiveness of democracy, by citizens’ ideological leanings and evaluation of the conduct of the Italian government



Note: The graph shows the impact of a one-unit increase in *Job Loss* on *Democracy Effective*, for each *Ideology* category (left panel) and for each *Government Evaluation* score (right panel). Estimates from Models 3 and 4, respectively. Marginal effects with 95% confidence intervals.

As illustrated in the right-hand panel of Figure 3, a one-unit increase in *Job Loss* was only associated with more negative opinions on the effectiveness of democracy for those with a government evaluation of 5 or higher. The better the evaluation of the government, the greater this effect. In contrast, for those with a rather poor evaluation of the government, opinions about democratic effectiveness were unrelated to perceived economic threats.

Altogether, the findings in Models 3 and 4 seem to imply that political factors shape the relationship between citizens' perceived economic vulnerability and what they think about democracy as an effective instrument in situations such as the Coronavirus crisis, thus supporting H3a. More precisely, the association between higher economic risk and more negative evaluations about democracy was particularly strong for those citizens who were probably close to the Conte II executive in political terms (i.e., those on the left-hand side of the spectrum and those who greatly appreciated the government). The same association does not hold for those who did not like the government so much (i.e., those on the right-hand side or not located on the left-right scale and those who evaluated the government negatively).¹⁶

5. Conclusions

The social and political implications of the COVID-19 pandemic are receiving increasing attention from scholars. This article aims to contribute to this strand of research by focusing on a topic which has been understudied so far – that is, whether citizens perceive democratic institutions as effective in coping with crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. Investigating how citizens evaluated the performance of democracy during the pandemic can be extremely insightful, as the crisis threatened not only health but also the economy. To this end, we analysed public opinion data that were collected in Italy between April and July 2020 using a Rolling Cross-Section survey design. Building on the broader literature on political support, we put forward a set of hypotheses under which negative evaluations of the effectiveness of democracy are associated with social proximity to the risk of contagion and with perceived health and economic threats. We also argued that political factors can shape the relationship between such threats and opinions on the effectiveness of democracy. Moreover, we hypothesised that certain factors – mostly related to social capital and civic culture – can help moderate negative opinions about the effectiveness of democracy.

On the whole, the data we analysed supported our hypotheses. In particular, the evaluations of democracy became more negative when the respondent personally knew someone who had died or was hospitalised due to COVID-19. Remarkably, the findings also highlighted a discrepancy between individual perceived vulnerability – understood in health or economic terms – and certain factors that “underpin” democracy. While the former was related to more negative evaluations of democracy, the latter were associated with more positive views. In other words, negative opinions about democratic effectiveness in critical circumstances are triggered

¹⁶ As for the control variables included in our analysis, evaluations of democratic effectiveness varied across the Italian territory. They were more positive in the North-East and Centre than the North-West. They were more negative in the South and the Islands compared to the North-Western regions of Italy. Over time, the evaluations of the effectiveness of democracy seem to become slightly more negative. This is true if we compare Phase 3 with Phase 1. However, the coefficient is only marginally significant (C.I. 90%) from a statistical point of view. Turning to socio-demographic traits, the evaluations of the effectiveness of democracy became more negative with age and with lower levels of education. Finally, democracy was viewed as more ineffective by women than by men, while high income was not associated with evaluations of democratic effectiveness. Coefficients for the control variables, not shown in Table 1, are reported in the appendix (Table A2).

by short-term perceived threats, while long-term socio-political dispositions have an important moderating effect. This conclusion bears out the continuing role of political culture in any appraisal of the democratic process.

In addition, the analysis showed that political factors like ideology and assessment of the government shaped the relationship between perceived threats and evaluations of democracy; an important reminder that, at least in the Italian context, political partisanship continues to be a significant and enduring factor in shaping public opinion.

In this regard, we found that the risk of job loss in the family was only associated with more negative opinions on democracy for those citizens who were politically closer to the government, that is, who were left leaning and rated the Conte II executive highly. Further research is needed to understand whether this indicates the presence of a group of “critical citizens” (inclined to criticise the functioning of democracy when dissatisfaction increases due to perceived economic vulnerability), or the existence of a group of potentially “anti-democratic” individuals (prone to break away from democracy when economic threats loom large).

Additional investigation is also needed to better understand why a higher perceived risk of contagion was only associated with more negative opinions about democratic effectiveness for those who were more critical of the government, while a higher health risk was associated with more positive views of democracy for those who appreciated the government most. This last point appears compatible with the finding that, in the event of a pandemic, lockdowns (such as the one implemented by the Italian government in the spring of 2020) are indeed generally popular among citizens in established democracies and may feel reassuring to people concerned over the progression of the disease.

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APPENDIX

Table A1 – Operationalisation and descriptive statistics for the dependent, independent and control variables

<i>Cardinal Variables</i>	<i>Description/Question</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
Democracy Effective	The Coronavirus emergency proves that there are circumstances in which democracy is unable to solve people's problems: 0=totally agree – 10=totally disagree	4.57	3.00	0	10
Subjective Risk	Compared to the rest of the population in her/his area, R thinks s/he is 1=much less exposed, 2=less exposed, 3=equally exposed, 4=more exposed, 5=much more exposed to the risk of contagion	2.62	0.92	1	5
Job Loss	Likelihood that someone in R's family will lose job in the next six months: 0=totally unlikely – 10=totally likely	3.44	3.24	0	10
Prospective Economic Evaluation	Economic situation of R's family in the next six months: -2=will considerably worsen, -1=will worsen, 0=will be the same, 1=will improve, 2=will considerably improve	-0.33	0.71	-2	2
Government Evaluation	Evaluation of the conduct of the Italian government during the Coronavirus emergency: 0=totally negative – 10=totally positive	6.23	2.66	0	10
Ideology: LR Scale	Where do you self-locate on a scale from 0=extreme left to 10=extreme right	4.65	2.94	0	10
Political Interest	R's interest in politics: 1=not at all, 2=not very, 3=fairly, 4=very	2.74	0.81	1	4
Social Trust	People can be trusted: 0=can't be too careful – 10=most people can be trusted	3.47	2.33	0	10
Institutional Trust	Average between trust in the Italian parliament and trust in the European Union: 0=no trust at all – 10=complete trust	4.51	2.48	0	10

Belief in Official Data	In Italy, data on the real scale of the contagion are kept secret: 0=totally agree – 10=totally disagree	5.40	3.21	0	10
Age	R's age (years)	48.54	15.63	18	90
<i>Categorical Variables</i>	<i>Description/Question</i>	<i>Categories</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	
Social Proximity	Do you know personally someone who has been:	Quarantined/Infected Hospitalised/Died None of the previous	2,615 5,041 4,735	21.10 40.68 38.21	
Ideology	Where do you self-locate on a scale from 0=extreme left to 10=extreme right	Refuse to self-locate/Don't know Left (0, 1, 2, 3) Centre (4, 5, 6) Right (7, 8, 9, 10)	1,860 4,259 3,099 3,173	15.01 34.37 25.01 25.61	
Region	Geographical area where respondent lives	North-West North-East Centre South & Islands	3,553 2,431 2,365 4,042	28.67 19.62 19.09 32.62	
Time	Day of the interview	Phase 1 (until 3 May 2020) Phase 2 (4 May - 14 June 2020) Phase 3 (since 15 June 2020)	3,566 5,395 3,430	28.78 43.54 27.68	
Education	R's level of education	Low (primary or lower secondary school) Middle (upper secondary school) High (university)	1,066 6,265 5,060	8.60 50.56 40.84	
Gender	R's gender	Women Men	5,570 6,821	44.95 55.05	
Income	Standard of living granted by R's family income	Not comfortable (poor or not comfortable) Comfortable (comfortable or well-off)	5,894 6,497	47.57 52.43	

Note: The descriptive statistics are calculated using the dataset employed for the regression analysis reported in Table 1 (N=12,391). For Ideology: LR Scale, N=10,531.

Table A2 – OLS regression models predicting positive evaluations of democracy as an effective instrument to solve citizens’ problems in particularly critical circumstances. Full results

	<i>Model 1</i>		<i>Model 2</i>		<i>Model 3</i>		<i>Model 4</i>	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
<i>Social Proximity:</i>								
Acquaintances Quarantined/Infected	-0.078	(0.068)	-0.077	(0.068)	-0.079	(0.068)	-0.081	(0.068)
Acquaintances Hospitalised/Died	-0.129**	(0.057)	-0.127**	(0.057)	-0.131**	(0.057)	-0.128**	(0.057)
<i>Perceived Health Threat:</i>								
Subjective Risk	-0.049*	(0.028)	-0.269***	(0.062)	-0.050*	(0.028)	-0.048*	(0.028)
<i>Perceived Economic Threat:</i>								
Job Loss	-0.034***	(0.008)	-0.035***	(0.008)	-0.060***	(0.014)	0.015	(0.019)
Prospective Economic Evaluation	-0.010	(0.039)	-0.015	(0.039)	-0.010	(0.039)	-0.001	(0.039)
<i>Political Factors:</i>								
Ideology: Refuse to self-locate/Don't know	-0.908***	(0.082)	-0.917***	(0.082)	-1.002***	(0.111)	-0.906***	(0.082)
Ideology: Centre	-0.650***	(0.067)	-0.650***	(0.067)	-0.706***	(0.097)	-0.645***	(0.067)
Ideology: Right	-1.471***	(0.073)	-1.482***	(0.073)	-1.686***	(0.102)	-1.456***	(0.073)
Job Loss X Id.: Refuse/Don't know					0.029	(0.023)		
Job Loss X Id.: Centre					0.020	(0.021)		
Job Loss X Id.: Right					0.060***	(0.020)		
Government Evaluation	-0.074***	(0.012)	-0.167***	(0.027)	-0.076***	(0.012)	-0.047***	(0.015)
Subjective Risk X Gov. Evaluation			0.036***	(0.009)				
Job Loss X Gov. Evaluation							-0.008***	(0.003)
<i>Underpinnings of Democracy:</i>								
Political Interest	0.189***	(0.033)	0.187***	(0.033)	0.188***	(0.033)	0.190***	(0.033)
Social Trust	0.165***	(0.011)	0.164***	(0.011)	0.165***	(0.011)	0.164***	(0.011)
Institutional Trust	0.049***	(0.013)	0.049***	(0.013)	0.047***	(0.013)	0.050***	(0.013)
Belief in Official Data	0.202***	(0.008)	0.204***	(0.008)	0.204***	(0.008)	0.202***	(0.008)
<i>Control Variables:</i>								
Region: North-East	0.132*	(0.073)	0.132*	(0.073)	0.128*	(0.073)	0.134*	(0.073)
Region: Centre	0.128*	(0.075)	0.126*	(0.074)	0.127*	(0.075)	0.131*	(0.074)
Region: South & Islands	-0.227***	(0.066)	-0.224***	(0.066)	-0.234***	(0.067)	-0.225***	(0.066)
Time: Phase 2 (4 May-14 June)	-0.008	(0.060)	-0.010	(0.060)	-0.008	(0.060)	-0.009	(0.060)
Time: Phase 3 (since 15 June)	-0.124*	(0.066)	-0.129*	(0.066)	-0.124*	(0.066)	-0.125*	(0.066)
Age	-0.008***	(0.002)	-0.008***	(0.002)	-0.008***	(0.002)	-0.008***	(0.002)
Education: Low	-0.407***	(0.096)	-0.402***	(0.096)	-0.405***	(0.096)	-0.400***	(0.096)
Education: Middle	-0.261***	(0.053)	-0.255***	(0.053)	-0.260***	(0.053)	-0.258***	(0.053)
Women	-0.145***	(0.052)	-0.143***	(0.052)	-0.143***	(0.052)	-0.145***	(0.052)
Income	-0.013	(0.054)	-0.014	(0.054)	-0.015	(0.054)	-0.013	(0.054)
Constant	4.305***	(0.206)	4.884***	(0.252)	4.412***	(0.210)	4.126***	(0.215)
N	12,391		12,391		12,391		12,391	
R-squared	0.169		0.170		0.170		0.170	

Note: OLS regression models. Cells report unstandardised coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses. Omitted category for Social Proximity: "None". Omitted category for Family: "None". Omitted category for Ideology: "Left". Omitted

category for Region: "North-West". Omitted category for Time: "Phase 1 (until 3 May 2020)". Omitted category for Education: "High". Statistical significance: * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

Table A3 – OLS regression models predicting positive evaluations of democracy as an effective instrument to solve citizens' problems in particularly critical circumstances. Full results. Robustness check: LR scale as a measure of ideology

	<i>Model 1</i>		<i>Model 2</i>		<i>Model 3</i>		<i>Model 4</i>	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
<i>Social Proximity:</i>								
Acquaintances	-0.022	(0.073)	-0.023	(0.073)	-0.022	(0.073)	-0.024	(0.073)
Quarantined/Infected								
Acquaintances Hospitalised/Died	-0.098	(0.062)	-0.098	(0.062)	-0.100	(0.062)	-0.097	(0.062)
<i>Perceived Health Threat:</i>								
Subjective Risk	-0.054*	(0.030)	-0.219***	(0.068)	-0.056*	(0.030)	-0.054*	(0.030)
<i>Perceived Economic Threat:</i>								
Job Loss	-0.038***	(0.009)	-0.039***	(0.009)	-0.077***	(0.016)	0.013	(0.020)
Prospective Economic Evaluation	-0.042	(0.043)	-0.047	(0.043)	-0.043	(0.043)	-0.032	(0.043)
<i>Political Factors:</i>								
Ideology: LR Scale	-0.225***	(0.011)	-0.227***	(0.011)	-0.254***	(0.014)	-0.223***	(0.011)
Job Loss X Id.: LR Scale					0.008***	(0.003)		
Government Evaluation	-0.076***	(0.014)	-0.147***	(0.029)	-0.078***	(0.014)	-0.047***	(0.017)
Subjective Risk X Gov. Evaluation			0.027***	(0.010)				
Job Loss X Government Evaluation							-0.008***	(0.003)
<i>Underpinnings of Democracy:</i>								
Political Interest	0.158***	(0.037)	0.155***	(0.037)	0.154***	(0.037)	0.159***	(0.037)
Social Trust	0.147***	(0.012)	0.147***	(0.012)	0.147***	(0.012)	0.146***	(0.012)
Institutional Trust	0.050***	(0.014)	0.050***	(0.014)	0.048***	(0.014)	0.051***	(0.014)
Belief in Official Data	0.196***	(0.009)	0.196***	(0.009)	0.197***	(0.009)	0.195***	(0.009)
<i>Control Variables:</i>								
Region: North-East	0.12	(0.078)	0.12	(0.078)	0.117	(0.078)	0.121	(0.078)
Region: Centre	0.141*	(0.079)	0.140*	(0.079)	0.139*	(0.079)	0.143*	(0.079)
Region: South & Islands	-0.223***	(0.071)	-0.222***	(0.071)	-0.231***	(0.071)	-0.222***	(0.071)
Time: Phase 2 (4 May-14 June)	-0.042	(0.065)	-0.045	(0.065)	-0.043	(0.064)	-0.043	(0.064)
Time: Phase 3 (since 15 June)	-0.127*	(0.071)	-0.131*	(0.071)	-0.127*	(0.071)	-0.127*	(0.071)
Age	-0.009***	(0.002)	-0.009***	(0.002)	-0.009***	(0.002)	-0.009***	(0.002)
Education: Low	-0.265**	(0.105)	-0.263**	(0.105)	-0.265**	(0.105)	-0.260**	(0.105)
Education: Middle	-0.226***	(0.057)	-0.221***	(0.057)	-0.224***	(0.057)	-0.224***	(0.057)
Women	-0.155***	(0.055)	-0.154***	(0.055)	-0.155***	(0.055)	-0.156***	(0.055)
Income	0.002	(0.059)	0.001	(0.059)	-0.001	(0.059)	0.000	(0.059)
Constant	4.930***	(0.231)	5.377***	(0.284)	5.095***	(0.238)	4.737***	(0.241)
N	10,531		10,531		10,531		10,531	
R-squared	0.172		0.173		0.173		0.173	

Note: OLS regression models. Cells report unstandardised coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses. Omitted category for Social Proximity: "None". Omitted category for Family: "None". Omitted category for Region: "North-West". Omitted category for Time: "Phase 1 (until 3 May 2020)". Omitted category for Education: "High". Statistical significance: * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

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