

When nation building goes badly: draft evasion, government repression and the origins of the Sicilian mafia

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ESRC MGS Conference
June 23, 2021

"For centuries Sicily was exempt from **military conscription**, and **Sicilians hated it**. Therefore, when the first draft call was made under the Savoy government, **many draftees evaded the draft**. Exhibiting **brutality** never seen before, the government went chase them as they were beasts. Moreover, to **civilise the barbarians**, the government sent army officials [to Sicily]. They suffocated common citizens with smoke [...], used torture to make deaf-mutes speak, raided towns at night, put them under siege and deprived them of water."

(Colajanni, 1900, p. 53)

► **Positive and statistically significant** relationship between mafia presence and gov't repression

► Relationship robust to the inclusion of a rich set of control variables and **different estimation techniques** (propensity matching, geographical matching, conditional logit and neighbour-pair FE)

- **Research questions:** Can **coercive nation building** explain popular support for organised crime? Was this the case for the **Sicilian mafia**?
- **This paper:** I study the impact of a radical *nation-building* reform, i.e. military conscription, externally imposed by the Italian rulers in 1861, on the early development of the mafia in Sicily
- **Claim:** the Sicilian mafia rose as a result of **lack of state legitimacy**, owing to a *nation-building* policy 'turning bad' during a crucial process of institutional change, i.e. Italy's Unification

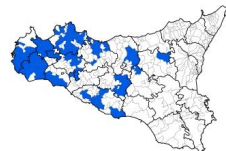


FIGURE 1: Repression-hit towns in 1863 depicted in blue, department boundaries in **bold**. Source: General Govone's military reports.

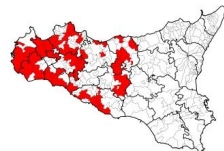
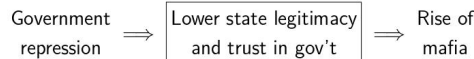


FIGURE 2: Mafia-ridden towns in 1875 depicted in red, department boundaries in **bold**. Source: Bonfadini enquiry (1876).



- **Voter turnout** \approx trust in institutions (Guiso et al., 2000)
- Linear regression model (unit of obs. = municipality):

$$Turnout_{ict} = \alpha + \beta_1 Repr1863_{ic} + x_{ict}'\beta_2 + \gamma_c + \epsilon_{ict}$$

estimated using OLS, where:

- $t \in \{1861, 1867\}$ (turnout in 1861 used for placebo test)
- γ_c : electoral constituency FE; s.e. clustered at the department level

- **Mechanism:** **repressive military campaign** conducted in 1863 by the recently-formed government to round up Sicilian deserters and draft dodgers \Rightarrow **increase in distrust in the Italian government** by a large part of the Sicilian society
- **Empirical strategy:** linear probability model and matching techniques, exploiting spatial heterogeneity in **exposure to military repression**; IV framework in progress
- **Data:** novel dataset containing municipality-level information on mafia presence in 1875, military repression episodes in 1863 and voter turnout in 1861-1867, all collected from archival material (+ rich set of confounders)

- Linear probability model (unit of obs. = municipality):

$$Mafia1875_{id} = \alpha + \beta_1 Repr1863_{id} + x_{id}'\beta_2 + \delta_d + \epsilon_{id}$$

estimated using OLS, where:

$$Mafia1875_{id} = \mathbb{1}\{\text{mafia is present in municipality } i \text{ in 1875}\}$$

$Repr1863_{id} = \mathbb{1}\{\text{military repression occurred in municipality } i \text{ in 1863}\}$ and:

- x_{id}' : land suitability for citrus, olives and wheat (Dimico et al., 2017), sulphur mines dummy (Buonanno et al., 2015), banditry in 1820-49 (Fiume, 1984), geographic controls, state capacity controls
- δ_d : department FE; s.e. clustered at the department level

Dependent variable:	Turnout 1861		Turnout 1867	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Repression 1863	-0.036 (0.023)	-0.037 (0.024)	-0.083*** (0.022)	-0.090*** (0.023)
Geographic controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mafia determinants	No	Yes	No	Yes
State capacity controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Constituency FE	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	349	349	349	349
No. of clusters	24	24	24	24
P-value wild cluster boot. test	0.173	0.130	0.015	0.009
R ²	0.076	0.322	0.196	0.418

Notes: Standard errors clustered by department are reported. * = p-value < 10%, ** = p-value < 5%, *** = p-value < 1%.

- Statistically significant association between gov't repression and (dis)trust in institutions only **after** 1863

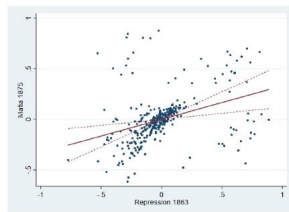


FIGURE 3: Residual plot from linear probability model (dashed curves = 95% confidence interval). $\beta_1 = 0.330$ (cluster-robust s.e. = 0.102). Obs = 349. P-value wild cluster bootstrap test = 0.000.