

On the *amstrada* that soars along the Apennine spine of Italy, a hurried traveler can cover the 870 kilometers from Seveso in the north to Pietrapertosa in the south in one long day, looping first through the busy

A VOYAGE OF INQUIRY

This book aims to contribute to our understanding of the performance of democratic institutions. How do formal institutions influence the practice of politics and government? If we reform institutions, will practice follow? Does the performance of an institution depend on its social, economic, and cultural surround? If we transplant democratic institutions, will they grow in the new setting as they did in the old? Or does the quality of a democracy depend on the quality of its citizens, so that every people gets the government they deserve? Our intent is theoretical. Our method is empirical, drawing lessons from a unique experiment in institutional reform conducted in the regions of Italy over the last two decades. Our explorations will draw us deep into the character of civic life, into the austere logic of collective action, and into medieval history, but the journey begins in the diversity of today's Italy.

Why do some democratic governments succeed and others fail? This question, though ancient, is timely. As our tumultuous century draws to a close, the great ideological debates between liberal democrats and their adversaries are waning. Ironically, the philosophical ascendancy of liberal democracy is accompanied by growing discontent with its practical operations. From Moscow to East St. Louis, from Mexico City to Cairo, despair about public institutions deepens. As American democratic institutions begin their third century, a sense is abroad in the land that our national experiment in self-government is faltering. Half a world away, the former communist nations of Eurasia find themselves having to build democratic systems of governance from scratch. Women and men everywhere seek solutions to their shared problems—cleaner air, more secure jobs, safer cities. Few believe that we can dispense with government, yet fewer still are confident that we know what makes governments work well.

Studying Institutional Performance

Introduction:

CHAPTER 1