

Bringing Out the Italian-American Vote in Philadelphia

This essay is a first attempt to analyze the timing and the mechanics of the mobilization of Italian-American voters in Philadelphia during the so-called New Deal realignment. It evaluates and develops the insights of the pioneering research by Hugo Maiale, who first focused on the Italian-American vote in Philadelphia, but who did not specifically address these particular issues. This study concentrates on the passage of Philadelphia's Italian-American community from political apathy in the 1920s to electoral participation in the 1930s, and on the reasons for such a dramatic change of attitude. Therefore, unlike many analyses of ethnic politics, which seem to make a point of highlighting the role of leaders, this essay deals with the Italian-

 $^{^{\}rm I}$ Hugo Maiale, "The Italian Vote in Philadelphia between 1928 and 1946," Ph D $\,$ diss , University of Pennsylvania, 1950

² For Italian Americans see, e.g., Salvatore J. LaGumina, ed., Ethnicity in American Political Life The Italian American Experience (Staten Island, N.Y., 1968), and "The Political Profession Big City Italian American Mayors," in Remigio U. Pane, ed., Italian Americans in the Professions (Staten Island, N.Y., 1983), 77-110, Andrew Rolle, The Italian Americans Troubled Roots (Norman, 1980), 140-53, Anna Maria Martellone, "La presenza dell'elemento etnico italiano nella vita politica degli Stati Uniti dalla non partecipazione alla post etnia," in Bruno Brezza, ed., Gli italiani fuori d'Italia. Gli emigrati italiani nei movimenti operai dei paesi d'adozione (Milan, 1983), 345-58, Philip Di Franco, The Italian American Experience (New York, 1988), 139-59, Frank J. Cavaioli, "Charles Poletti and Fourteen Other Italian-American Governors," in Joseph V. Scelsa, Salvatore J. LaGumina, and Lydio Tomasi, eds., Italian Americans in Transition (Staten Island, N.Y., 1990), 137-52

American elite in Philadelphia only as a source of influence on the electoral behavior of members of the community.

Where social stratification of ethnics is a *fast accompli*,³ an approach emphasizing the popular vote is instrumental in writing political history "from the bottom up" not only in society as a whole⁴ but also within a single minority group. On the other hand, the search for patterns of electoral participation at the grass roots of an Italian-American community springs from the awareness that the political behavior of any ethnic group can hardly be inferred from the stand of its leadership. As previous studies of ethnic politics have shown, the rank-and-file voters often ignored the appeals of their leaders.⁵

Most political scientists and historians divide American electoral history into five periods or party systems, the last one being the New Deal era. These scholars point out that dominance of the presidency by one of the major parties characterizes each period. In their opinion, the onset of each of these eras but the first was characterized by an electoral realignment, namely a reshuffling of traditional partisan loyalties and a shift of previous voting patterns. According to this perspective, during a realignment voters' dissatisfaction with the party in power and the political awakening of potential constituents cause a new and lasting electoral cleavage that places the government under the control of the former minority party.⁶

³ A social hierarchy had been established among Philadelphia's Italian Americans by the beginning of World War I, see Richard N Juliani, "The Italian Community of Philadelphia," in Robert F Harney and J Vincenza Scarpaci, eds, *Lattle Italies in North America* (Toronto, 1981), 97

⁴ Samuel P Hayes, "Politics and Social History Toward a New Synthesis," in James B Gardner and George Rollie Adams, eds, Ordinary People and Everyday Life Perspectives on the New Social History (Nashville, 1983), 164-66

⁵ Robert P Swierenga, "Ethnocultural Political Analysis A New Approach to American Ethnic Studies," *Journal of American Studies* 5 (1971), 67, Thomas W Kremm, "Cleveland and the First Lincoln Election The Ethnic Response to Nativism," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 8 (1977), 69-86, Paul Kleppner, *The Third Electoral System Parties, Voters, and Political Cultures* (Chapel Hill, 1979), 3-8

⁶ The literature on realignments and the American party system is boundless, for two recent review and bibliographic essays, see John Zvesper, "Party Realignment A Past Without a Future," in Robert Williams, ed, Explaining American Politics Issues and Interpretations (London and New York, 1990), 167-86, Harold F Bass, Jr, "Background to Debate A Reader's Guide and Bibliography," in Byron E Shafer, ed, The End of Realignment, Interpreting American Electoral Eras (Madison, 1991), 141-78

One of the most intriguing problems of the New Deal realignment is that of identifying the sources of Roosevelt's political support. To take up this scholarly challenge, two major but not necessarily incompatible theories have been formulated.⁷

It has been suggested that many Republican voters of the 1920s bolted the GOP and went over to the Democratic party in the 1930s because they associated the Republican party with the economic crisis and blamed President Hoover for the persisting depression. As a result of this large shift of partisan allegiance, the Democratic party became the majority party and Roosevelt was elected to the White House in 1932. Four years later, the incumbent president further cashed in on Republican switchers who joined the Democratic party having benefited from the relief measures of the New Deal.⁸

On the other hand, it has also been pointed out that Roosevelt's electoral strength arose from the political support of new cohorts of voters who cast their ballots for the first time during the 1930s. Some scholars maintain that the nonvoters who surged into the active electorate in the fourth decade of the twentieth century belonged to a new generation coming of age. Other historians argue that the Democratic pluralities of the New Deal era resulted from the political mobilization of immigrants and native-born of foreign ancestry. In particular, elaborating on Samuel

⁷ Some political scientists used both models to explain the creation of the Roosevelt coalition See Samuel Lubell, *The Future of American Politics* (New York, 1952), 1-2, 28-31, 40, Valdimer O Key, "The Future of the Democratic Party," *Virginia Quarterly Review* 28 (1952), 165-66, and "Secular Realignment and the Party System," *Journal of Politics* 21 (1959), 199, 208-9

⁸ Duncan MacRae, Jr, and James A Meldrum, "Critical Elections in Illinois 1888-1958," American Political Science Review 54 (1960), 669-83, Everett Carll Ladd, Jr, with Charles D Hadley, Transformations of the American Party System Political Coalitions from the New Deal to the 1970s (New York, 1975), 57-87, Bernard Sternsher, "The Emergence of the New Deal Party System A Problem in Historical Analysis of Voting Behavior," Journal of Interdisciplinary History 6 (1975), 139, James Sundquist, Dynamics of the Party System Alignment and Realignment of Political Parties in the United States (Washington, 1983), 229-39

⁹ Angus Campbell et al, *The American Voter* (New York, 1960), 153-55, 166-67, 535-36, Philip E Converse, "Public Opinion and Voting Behavior," in Fred A Greenstein and Nelson W Polsby, eds, *The Handbook of Political Science* (8 vols, Reading, Mass, 1975), 4 140-43, Paul Allen Beck, "A Socialization Theory of Partisan Realignment," in Richard G Niemi et al, *The Politics of Future Citizens* (San Francisco, 1974), 201-12

¹⁰ Kristi Andersen, The Creation of a Democratic Majority, 1928-1936 (Chicago, 1979), John R Petrocik, Party Coalitions Realignment and the Decline of the New Deal Party System (Chicago, 1981), 36-42, 53-57, Paul Kleppner, Who Voted? The Dynamics of Electoral Turnout, 1870-1980 (New York, 1982), 83-111, Gerald H Gamm, The Making of New Deal Democratis Voting Behavior and Realignment in Boston, 1920-1940 (Chicago, 1989), esp 33-35, 81-89, 97-104, 162-65, 192-94

Lubell's insight that "before the Roosevelt Revolution there was an Al Smith Revolution," Carl Degler and David Burner held that Roosevelt profited from the urban vote of the ethnics who had already been pushed into the active electorate by Smith's presidential candidacy. In addition, although Walter Dean Burnham highlighted the progressive decline of voter participation in the twentieth century, he conceded that the New Deal years marked a reversal of the increasing erosion of the turnout. Burnham, too, pointed to the hyphenated Americans as the main group of voters who managed to drive electoral participation rates upward. In the same property of the

Even advocates of the so-called conversion thesis helped to corroborate the hypothesis that ethnic voters were more likely to have undergone mobilization rather than conversion during the New Deal realignment. They argued that the selection of test cases containing disproportionate numbers of ethnics invalidated the conclusions of the analyses supporting the mobilization theory. According to some scholars, these studies were biased toward mobilization because, unlike old-stock native Americans, immigrants and their offspring were a reservoir of potential voters ready to enter the active electorate following the appeals of Smith and Roosevelt.¹⁴

Despite the insights of the mobilization theory, the role played by Italian Americans among the new Democratic party adherents has been generally neglected. Their voting behavior during the New Deal era has often been compared to that of other ethnic groups in such presumed urban melting pots as Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. ¹⁵ Nonetheless there are no specific studies focusing on the factors that

¹¹ Lubell, The Future of American Politics, 35

¹² Carl N Degler, "American Political Parties and the Rise of the City An Interpretation," *Journal of American History* 51 (1964), 55-57, David Burner, *The Politics of Provincialism The Democratic Party in Transition,* 1918-1932 (Cambridge, Mass, 1986), 228-29, 252

¹³ Walter Dean Burnham, Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics (New York, 1970), 92, 97, 116-17, 132-33

¹⁴ Allan J Lichtman, "The End of Realignment Theory? Toward a New Research Program for American Political History," *Historical Methods* 15 (1982), 178, Sundquist, *Dynamics of the Party System*, 232

¹⁵ John Allswang, A House for All Peoples Ethnic Politics in Chicago (Lexington, 1971), Roland H Bayor, Neighbors in Conflict The Irish, Germans, Jews and Italians of New York City, 1929-1941 (Baltimore, 1978), 30-56, 126-49, John L Shover, "Ethnicity and Religion in Philadelphia Politics, 1924-40," American Quarterly 25 (1973), 499-515, and "The Emergence of a Two-Party System in Republican Philadelphia, 1924-1936," Journal of American History 68 (1974), 985-1002, Gamm, The Making of New Deal Democrats

triggered the political mobilization of any single Italian-American community in the United States.

In 1942 Harold Gosnell implied that Roosevelt relied not only on GOP bolters but also on "a huge army of new voters" to win his 1936 Pennsylvania majority. However, as far as the Italian Americans were concerned, no one but Maiale chose to pursue the issue. He showed that in Philadelphia's Italian-American community registrations increased from 42.6 percent to 69.5 percent between 1930 and 1940, and that the Italian-American turnout grew from 39 percent to 58.3 percent in the same decade. In a sample of the Italian-American community between 1932 and 1936, Maiale found that the GOP lost less than 800 votes, while Roosevelt gained over 6,000 additional votes. From the comparison between the jump in electoral participation and the relatively limited decline in the GOP vote, he concluded that "much of the Roosevelt vote came from the non-voter category."

Yet Maiale failed to elaborate on his statement and was satisfied with providing these few figures without attention to other elections. Moreover his numerical data refer to spans of time that do not exactly coincide. For instance, the Italian-American turnout might have started soaring only after 1936. Maiale's findings are partially weakened by his theory on Italian Americans' mobilization. In his opinion, the experience of Philadelphia's Italian Americans reflected a three-stage model on the participation of all hyphenated Americans in politics. During the first phase, affecting the first generation and the earliest years of the second, ethnics are said to have traded their votes for a share of patronage granted to their political brokers. The main shortcoming of this theory, however, lies in Maiale's assumption that among Philadelphia's Italian Americans "the first [stage] begins with their arrival on our shores." 18

In fact, at the beginning of their stay in Philadelphia, as elsewhere in the United States, Italian Americans were lukewarm toward politics. Old World culture and background prevented most of them from playing an active role in elections. Italians were unaccustomed to voting. Universal male suffrage had been introduced in Italy in 1912, but in the 1921

¹⁶ Harold F Gosnell, Grass Roots Politics National Voting Behavior of Typical States (Washington, 1942), 23

¹⁷ Maiale, "The Italian Vote in Philadelphia," 47-55, 124-25 (quote, 124)

¹⁸ Ibid, 287-91 (quote, 287)

parliamentary elections, the last before Mussolini's rise to power, the turnout was 58.4 percent in the country as a whole. Participation was as low as 51 percent in the South and 46.3 percent in the Islands (which included Sicily), the two areas of origin of most immigrants. By way of contrast, voter participation was 65.4 percent in the North, which, since the 1880s, had no longer provided the bulk of Italian expatriations to Philadelphia and the United States. ¹⁹ Moreover Italian women were disfranchised until the end of World War II.

In 1920 the attempt by Concetta Lippi and Anna Russo to launch a registration drive among their female fellow ethnics in Philadelphia was a complete failure.²⁰ Only a handful of Philadelphia women of Italian ancestry turned out to register. Their typical reply to party workers pressuring them to do so was: "It is for the husband to vote, and not I."²¹ Such statements highlight the traditional stereotype of the so-called "woman's place" as a hindrance to female political involvement. Within the community voting was regarded as unbecoming women.²² This attitude surfaced in the contempt for female registrants who had gone beyond their allotted tasks of cooking, washing, and having children.²³ As late as 1926 judge-to-be Eugene Alessandroni complained about the bigotry that weakened the Italian-American vote in Philadelphia by discouraging female participation.²⁴

Unlike the Irish, few Italian Americans mastered English, so they usually failed to understand what was going on in the land of their

¹⁹ Pier Luigi Ballini, Le elezioni nella storia d'Italia dall'Unità al fascismo Profilo storico-statistico (Bologna, 1988), 196 For the regions of origin of Italian immigrants to Philadelphia, see Aurora Unti, "The Italians in Philadelphia," in International Institute, Foreign Born in Philadelphia (Philadelphia, 1930), 5, Richard N Juliani, "The Origin and Development of the Italian Community in Philadelphia," in John E Bodnar, ed, The Ethnic Experience in Pennsylvania (Lewisburg, 1973), 241, Bianca Arcangeli, "Le colonie italiane di Philadelphia," Annali della Facolta di Lettere e Filosofia dell'Universita di Napoli 16 (1973-74), 237-42, 252-54

²⁰ Richard A Varbero, "The Politics of Ethnicity Philadelphia's Italians in the 1920s," in Francesco Cordasco, ed, Studies in Italian American Social History Essays in Honor of Leonard Covello (Totowa, 1975), 173

²¹ Evening Bulletin, Sept 3, 1920 (quoted by Varbero, "The Politics of Ethnicity," 173)

²² This is the reason cited for nonvoting among nearly 5 percent of Chicago's Italian-American women. See Charles Edward Merriam and Harold Foote Gosnell, *Non-Voting Causes and Methods of Control* (Chicago, 1924), 116-19

²³ Evening Bulletin, Sept 3, 1920

²⁴ Eugene Alessandron to Italian-American voters, Oct 30, 1926, in Order Sons of Italy in America, Giovanni Di Silvestro Papers, box 1, folder 22, Immigration History Research Center Collection, University of Minnesota, St. Paul

adoption. They were also unfamiliar with the U.S. political system, and the great bulk of them regarded governments as hostile entities which, based on their Italian experience, only collected taxes and drafted them into the army.²⁵

In addition, many Italians were "birds of passage," temporary or seasonal immigrants.²⁶ Until the 1920s, repatriates were one of the "two categories which accounted for a majority" of the Italian immigrants in Philadelphia.²⁷ According to Temple University professor Michele Renzulli, a contemporary eyewitness, their final goal in emigrating to America was to return to Italy and enjoy the money they had made in the United States.²⁸ Thus, they did not apply for U.S. citizenship, and thereby failed to qualify for the right to vote. At the very least, they postponed submitting their requests until they gave up all hope of returning to their mother country. The proceedings of the First Congress of Italians in the United States, which convened in Philadelphia in 1911, cast further light on their desire to go back to Italy. Appeals to immigrants to seek American citizenship, so they could play an active role in U.S. politics, went hand in hand with petitions to the Italian government to smooth procedures for repatriates who wished to regain their Italian citizenship.²⁹ As Luigi Villari, Italian vice-consul in Philadelphia in charge

²⁵ Rudolph J Vecoli, "The Coming of Age of the Italian Americans 1945-1974," Ethnicity 5 (1978), 141, Phylis Cancilla Martinelli, "Italian-American Experience," in Joseph S Roucek and Bernard Eisenberg, eds, America's Ethnic Politics (Westport, 1982), 219, Michael Barone, "Italian Americans and Politics," in Lydio F Tomasi, ed, Italian Americans New Perspectives in Italian Immigration and Ethnicity (Staten Island, NY, 1985), 379 Suspiciousness and hostility toward government and politics still persisted among Boston's Italian-American West Enders in the late 1950s, according to Herbert J Gans, The Urban Villagers Group and Class in the Life of Italian-Americans (New York, 1962), 163-69

²⁶ Richard N Juliani, "Una comunità in transizione Il caso italiano a Filadelfia," in Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Atti del Convegno "Le società in transizione italiani e italo-americani negli anni ottanta," Balch Institute, Philadelphia, 11-12 ottobre 1985 (n p, n d), 310

²⁷ Caroline Golab, Immigrant Destinations (Philadelphia, 1977), 58

Michele Renzulli, "Le colonie Italiane negli Stati Uniti d'America," La Voce della Colonia, Philadelphia, March 20, 1922, rpt in L'Italia e il Fascismo negli Stati Uniti d'America (Rome, 1938), 141 For the repatriation of Italian immigrants in general, see, e.g., Joseph Lopreato, Italian Americans (New York, 1970), 14-15, Andrew F. Rolle, The Italian-Americans (Norman, 1980), 47-55, Humbert S. Nelli, From Immigrants to Ethnics The Italian Americans (Oxford and New York, 1983), 40-47, Anna Maria Martellone, "Italian Mass Emigration to the United States, 1876-1930. A Historical Survey," Perspectives in American History 1 (1984), 410-12

²⁹ Relazione del Primo e Secondo Convegno degli Italiani degli Stati Uniti (Philadelphia, 1913), 15-16, 19, 21, 31, 40

of emigration problems, pointed out, "generally, the Italian emigrant is not inclined to Americanize himself." Indeed, in 1920 only 33.3 percent of Philadelphia's foreign-born Italians were naturalized, while 49.5 percent of the total number of the city's foreign born were American citizens. ³¹

Some of the earliest leaders of Philadelphia's Italian community were late in seeking naturalization. A five-year residence made immigrants eligible for U.S. citizenship. Nonetheless, Biagio Catania, the first Italian-American Democrat from Philadelphia to be elected to the Pennsylvania lower house, waited fourteen years after his arrival in the United States to submit his declaration of intent. Giuseppe Di Silvestro, publisher and editor of the weekly *La Libera Parola*, let thirteen years elapse. Robert Lombardi, who would become the second of his ethnic extraction to sit in Philadelphia's Common Council, made up his mind after seven years. Charles C.A. Baldi Sr., the first outstanding political broker of the community, went back to Italy to serve in the army before deciding to become naturalized.³²

The situation began to change in the late 1920s, which saw the coming of age of a second generation of Italian Americans. They were U.S. citizens by birth and spoke English as their mother tongue. Thus, they found it easier to get involved in politics than their parents had.³³

As for the previous generation, the enforcement of the Quota Acts and Mussolini's anti-emigration policy put an end to the era of the "birds of passage." Italy had sent over 29,000 people a year to the United States since the end of World War I.³⁴ But the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act, whose "national origins" clause became effective on July 1, 1929, slashed the

³⁰ Luigi Villari, Gli Stati Uniti d'America e l'emigrazione italiana (Milan, 1912), 290

³¹ M Agnes Gertrude, "Italian Immigration into Philadelphia," Records of the American Catholic Society of Philadelphia 58 (1947), 257

³² For Di Silvestro, see National Archives, Philadelphia Branch, Eastern District of Pennsylvania, Naturalization Records, series M-1522, roll n 86, petition n 6985 For all the others, see Philadelphia City Archives Court of Quarter Sessions of Philadelphia County, Feb 3, 1919, 39, for Catania, Prothonotary of the Court of Common Pleas, Petitions for Naturalization, 1794-1903, Sept 4, 1884, for Baldi and Jan 19, 1897, for Lombardi For Baldi's return to Italy, see also A Frangini, *Italiani in Filadelfia Strenna Nazionale* (Philadelphia, 1907), 15

³³ Anna Maria Martellone, "Italian Immigrants, Party Machines, Ethnic Brokers in City Politics, from the 1880s to the 1930s," in Walter Holbling and Reinhold Wagnleitner, eds, The European Emigrant Experience in the USA (Tubingen, 1992), 176

³⁴ Martellone, "Italian Mass Emigration," 392, table 1

annual Italian immigration quota from 42,057 to 5,802.³⁵ Moreover, starting from 1927, the Italian government cut off emigration, aiming to turn population growth into an asset for a Fascist expansionistic foreign policy.³⁶ As a result, the disruption of the influx of fellow ethnics from Italy caused Italian-American communities to gradually lose their ties with the motherland. This fact, along with the awareness that they could no longer go back and forth across the Atlantic,³⁷ contributed to ease their assimilation into American society.

In the early 1930s even the Fascist regime encouraged Italian Americans to acquire U.S. citizenship in the hope of exploiting their votes later to lobby Congress and the White House.³⁸ During his visit to the United States in November 1931, Italian Foreign Minister Dino Grandi urged Philadelphia's Italian Americans to become loyal and faithful citizens of the country of their adoption. Grandi purposely aimed to dispel doubts about naturalization by stressing that, far from being unbecoming for steadfast Italians, it was a sort of confirmation of their love for Italy.³⁹

Grandi's call for Americanization found fertile ground in Philadelphia, where Giovanni Di Silvestro had already urged Italian immigrants to

³⁵ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States* 1966 (Washington, 1966), 92, table 122

³⁶ Annunziata Nobile, "Politica emigratoria e vicende dell'emigrazione durante il fascismo," Il Ponte, 1974, 1328-33, Ercole Sori, L'emigrazione staliana dall'Unità alla seconda guerra mondiale (Bologna, 1979), 427-40, Alessandro Migliazza, "Il problema dell'emigrazione e la legislazione italiana sino alla seconda guerra mondiale," in Brezza, Gli staliani fuori d'Italia, 253-56

³⁷ In 1919, 76,910 Italians went back to Italy from the United States Following the passing of the Quota Acts, the annual average number of Italian repatriates dropped to 44,277 between 1921 and 1924, to 40,893 between 1925 and 1927, and to 12,846 between 1928 and 1940 See Francesco Paolo Cerase, L'emigrazione di ritorno Innovazione o reazione? L'esperienza dell'emigrazione di ritorno dagli Stati Uniti d'America (Rome, 1971), 90, table 3 During the second decade of the twentieth century an estimated 63 2 percent of all Italian emigrants to the United States had repatriated This percentage fell to 25 6 percent in the 1920s and 8 5 percent in the 1930s See Massimo Livi Bacci, L'immigrazione e l'assimilazione degli Italiani negli Stati Uniti secondo le statistiche demografiche americane (Milan, 1961), 35-37

³⁸ Daria Frezza Bicocchi, "Propaganda fascista e comunità italiane in USA La Casa Italiana della Columbia University," *Studi Storici* 11 (1970), 673-74, Nadia Venturini, "Le comunità italiane negli Stati Uniti tra storia sociale e storia politica," *Rivista di storia contemporanea* 13 (1984), 204-5, Paolo Nello, "Introduzione Profilo di Dino Grandi," in Dino Grandi, *La politica estera dell'Italia dal 1929 al 1932* (2 vols., Rome, 1985), 1 17, Paolo Nello, *Dino Grandi La formazione di un leader fascista* (Bologna, 1987), 264

³⁹ L'Opinione, Nov 21, 1931, La Libera Parola, Dec 5, 1931, Dino Grandi, "Ai Figli d'Italia Discorso agli Italio-Americani in Filadelfia," in La politica estera, 2 569-76, and Il mio paese Ricordi autobiografici (Bologna, 1985), 320-21

become naturalized. Giovanni was Giuseppe Di Silvestro's brother and Supreme Venerable of the influential and pro-Fascist Order Sons of Italy in America. Raising objections to the previous policy of the Fascist regime, which had forbidden the Fasci all'estero (Fascist clubs abroad) to get involved in the internal affairs of their adopted country, Di Silvestro suggested a diametrically opposed strategy. In his opinion, Italian Americans should become citizens of the United States in order to promote the interests of Italy by taking part in American political life. Moreover L'Opinione was ready to echo Grandi's words. During the following registration drives, it encouraged members of the community to retain their loyalty to both Italy and the United States, and to acquire citizenship in the latter so as to be in a position to further friendship between the two countries.

All these elements paved the way for increasing political participation by Italian Americans. The late 1920s, therefore, seem to be a timely starting point to study the factors that influenced the mobilization of the Italian-American community in Philadelphia.

Owing to the lack of electoral statistics that include an ethnic breakdown, the analysis is based on a sample of the Italian-American vote derived from aggregate data on Philadelphia's election returns. The Italian population of Philadelphia at that time was heavily concentrated in a few wards in South Philadelphia (Table 1).⁴⁴ Although Italian Americans tended to cluster together, they did not equal 100 percent of the eligible electorate in any single voting division. In 1930 the typical Italian immigrant lived in a neighborhood where only 38 percent of the population was of Italian stock.⁴⁵ The "Italian-American" vote has been assumed to

⁴⁰ Ernest L. Biagi, *The Purple Aster A History of the Order Sons of Italy in America* (New York, 1961), 21-23, Nadia Venturini, "Prominenti at War. The Order Sons of Italy in America," *Rivista di studi anglo-americani* 3 (1984-85), 448-49

⁴¹ See Enzo Santarelli, Storia del movimento e del regime fascista (2 vols, Rome, 1967), 1 480

⁴² Giovanni Di Silvestro, "Gli Italiani e le cose americane," *L'Opinione*, undated newspaper clipping, in Giovanni Di Silvestro Papers, box 12, folder 5

⁴³ L'Opinione, April 1, 2, 3, Sept 25, 1932

[&]quot;For an account of the development of Italian-American settlements in Philadelphia, see Richard A Varbero, "Urbanization and Acculturation Philadelphia's South Italians, 1918-1932," Ph D diss, Temple University, 1975, 51-65, Golab, *Immigrant Destinations*, 116, Juliani, "The Italian Community," 86, 90-91, 96, 101

⁴⁵ See Theodore Hershberg et al, "A Tale of Three Cities Blacks, Immigrants, and Opportunity in Philadelphia, 1850-1880, 1930, 1970," in Theodore Hershberg, ed, *Philadelphia Work, Space, Family, and Group Experience in the Nineteenth Century Essays Toward an Interdisciplinary History of the City* (New York and Oxford, 1981), 479-80

Table 1

Italian Born and Total Italian Stock as Percentages of Total
Population in Selected Wards of South Philadelphia
1920-1940

<u>I</u> 1	<u>l</u>	Total Italian Stock		
<u>1920</u>	<u>1930</u>	<u>1940</u>	<u>1930</u>	
15 0	16.9	15.1	44.8	
26.5	17.9	15.7	47.7	
22.4	159	13.6	42.7	
22.2	21.4	18.0	56.8	
4.6	8.3	7.1	22.3	
4.2	7.6	8.9	21.2	
3.7	11.2	15.9	30.6	
	1920 15 0 26.5 22.4 22.2 4.6 4.2	1920 1930 15 0 16.9 26.5 17.9 22.4 15 9 22.2 21.4 4.6 8.3 4.2 7.6	15 0 16.9 15.1 26.5 17.9 15.7 22.4 15 9 13.6 22.2 21.4 18.0 4.6 8.3 7.1 4.2 7.6 8.9	

Note: The federal census classified both Italian immigrants and Americans of Italian parentage as "Italian stock."

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920, 3: Population Composition and Characteristics of the Population (Washington, 1923), 896-99; unpublished work sheets for the 1930 Census, held by the Free Library of Philadelphia and Temple University Urban Archives; 16th Census of the United States: Population and Housing: Statistics for Census Tracts, Philadelphia, Pa. (Washington, 1942), 58-59, 80-81, 99-100, 103-04, 125.

be the vote of the divisions where, on the basis of a surname check conducted on the incomplete collection of the "Street Lists of Voters" held by Philadelphia City Archives, Italian Americans made up at least 80 percent of the registered voters. All the divisions where more than 10 percent of the remaining registrants belonged to the same ethnic group have been left off the sample to avoid the risk that, in a close election, the difference was made by members of other ethnic groups. Moreover the divisions dismembered or swallowed up by other divisions have also been excluded.⁴⁶

Table 2 gives the number of votes cast for each of the two major parties and the total number of ballots cast in the sample of the constituents of Philadelphia's Italian community from 1926 through 1944.⁴⁷ The

⁴⁶ For a detailed discussion of the criteria for making the sample and selecting the voting divisions, see Stefano Luconi, "La vita politica della comunità italiana di Filadelfia dalla fine degli anni Venti agli anni Cinquanta," tesi di laurea, Università di Firenze, 1989-90, 46-75

⁴⁷ The row votes were obtained from the Annual Reports of the Registration Commission for the City of Philadelphia for presidential, gubernatorial, mayoral, and row elections, from The Pennsylvania Manual (Harrisburg, 1927, 1939) for the senatorial races of 1926 and 1938

trend of the Italian-American turnout has been derived from the absolute numbers of votes cast, rather than from the proportion of the eligible electorate, because birth and death rates did not change appreciably within the sample.

The few divisions meeting the above-mentioned requirements and which were included in the sample were the 19th and 20th divisions of the Second Ward (merged in 1933 as the 11th division), the 2d and the 4th divisions of the Seventy-sixth Ward, and the 1st division of the Thirty-ninth Ward. They were, respectively, situated in Philadelphia's Census tracts 2-B, 26-C, and 39-D. No demographic data is available for Philadelphia's voting divisions. Nonetheless the city's Census tracts were small enough to assume that the variations in the percentage of the population of voting age (twenty-one years-old and over) were the same in both a Census tract and each of its own voting divisions. During the decade between the 1930 Census and the 1940 Census, the adult population declined 2.0 percent in tract 2-B and rose, respectively, 15.1 percent and 13.6 percent in tracts 26-C and 39-D. In this period, the total growth in the three tracts as a whole was 9.5 percent. 48 Such a rate cannot compare with the increase of 70.1 percent in the Italian-American turnout between the same two years.

The nature of the New Deal realignment among Philadelphia's Italian Americans lay mainly in the political mobilization of the community rather than in the conversion of its former Republican members. The downward trend of the Republican vote from the mid-1930s did not make up for the increase in the Democratic following. This point is well illustrated by a discussion of the election returns for 1936, the peak year of Democratic consensus. In 1936 Roosevelt added 868 votes to those he had obtained in 1932, while Landon lost only 106 votes over Hoover's winnings when the latter had carried the community four years earlier. These data lead to the conclusion that 106 Italian Americans bolted the GOP between 1932 and 1936. Roosevelt would have managed to outpoll Landon among Philadelphia's Italian Americans with only the votes of these 106 disenchanted Republicans. However, party switchers accounted for less than 14 percent of Roosevelt's plurality in the community in

⁴⁸ U.S. Bureau of the Census, unpublished work sheets for the 1930 Census, 16th Census of the United States Population and Housing Statistics for Census Tracts, Philadelphia, 59, 80, 103

Table 2

Votes Cast for the Two Major Parties in Selected Italian-American Divisions
1926-1944

<u>Year</u>	Office	Republican	Democratic	Other	Total
1926	U.S. Senator	1324	33	0	1357
1927	Mayor	1045	25	207	1277
1928	President	702	972	5	1679
1929	Register of Wills	1154	79	0	1233
1930	U.S. Senator	1232	310	0	1542
1931	Mayor	1566	40	7	1613
1932	President	983	805	13	1801
1933	Treasurer	984	773	25	1782
1934	Governor	935	1221	4	2160
1935	Mayor	1177	1154	5	2336
1936	President	877	1673	22	2572
1937	Controller	1039	1185	9	2233
1938	U.S Senator	1247	1266	0	2513
1939	Mayor	1346	1165	4	2515
1940	President	1214	1395	14	2623
1941	Register of Wills	1273	728	0	2001
1942	Governor	1342	734	0	2076
1943	Mayor	1472	636	1	2109
1944	President	1393	964	14	2371

1936. In that year, therefore, the bulk of Roosevelt's political support came from new voters.

Table 2 also shows that the 1928 "Al Smith Revolution" in turnout was followed by a drop in subsequent local and federal elections. Thus the realignment period within Philadelphia's community must be located between 1934 and 1940. As a matter of fact, 1934 was the first year when the total number of votes exceeded 2,000. The turnout held above 2,100 through 1940, after which came a slight decline in Italian-American electoral participation.

The twentieth-century pre-New Deal low turnouts have often been blamed on the incapacity, or even the unwillingness, of party machines to mobilize potential voters. Party workers allegedly preferred to curtail political participation, especially among ethnics, because the smaller the active electorate the easier its votes could be controlled.⁴⁹ This was not

⁴⁹ Merriam and Gosnell, Non-Voting, 194-201, Harold Foote Gosnell, Getting Out the Vote An Experiment in the Stimulation of Voting (Chicago, 1927), Petrocik, Party Coalitions, 54, 189, Robert H Salisbury and Michael MacKuen, "On the Study of Party Realignment," Journal of Politics 63 (1981), 529

the case in Philadelphia. By the 1920s Philadelphia had been a Republican bulwark for a long time. Buchanan was the last Democratic presidential candidate to carry the city in 1856. In addition, since the turn of the century, the GOP had lost only twice in local contests: in 1905, when the City party won the row elections, and in 1911, when Rudolph Blankenburg became mayor on the fusion ticket of the Democratic and the Keystone parties.⁵⁰

From 1922 until his death in 1934 William Vare was the boss of the GOP machine. Vare and his political allies managed to build a powerful organization that captured the bulk of Philadelphia's voters through election frauds, personal assistance, and political patronage. Republican committeemen provided the needy with food baskets, clothes, and coal—even scholarships for their children. They were also closely associated with the police and magistrate courts, which meant they could easily help their constituents who were in trouble with the law. Moreover, the Republican machine was instrumental in securing its stalwarts thousands of positions in both the city and county administrations and several private companies.⁵¹

Vare controlled not only the GOP organization but also the Democratic party. John O'Donnell, chairman of the Democratic City Committee, was on the Republican payroll along with many other local Democratic leaders. Vare even paid the rent for the Democratic headquarters in Philadelphia.⁵²

⁵⁰ Lloyd M Abernethy, "Insurgency in Philadelphia, 1905," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (hereafter, *PMHB*) 87 (1963), 3-20, Bonnie R Fox, "The Philadelphia Progressives A Test of the Hofstadter-Hays Theses," *Pennsylvania History* 34 (1967), 372-94

William S Vare, My Forty Years in Politics (Philadelphia, 1933), David Harold Kurtzman, Methods of Controlling Votes in Philadelphia (Philadelphia, 1935), John T Salter, Boss Rule Portraits in City Politics (New York, 1935), Salter, The People's Choice Philadelphia's William Vare (New York, 1971), Peter B Bart and Milton C Cummings, "Politics and Voting Behavior in Philadelphia," Undergraduate honors thesis, Swarthmore College, 1954, 112-15, 147-49 For a brief history of Philadelphia's Republican machine, see Peter McCaffery, "Style, Structure, and Institutionalization of Machine Politics Philadelphia, 1867-1933," Journal of Interdisciplinary History 22 (1992), 435-52

⁵² Austin F MacDonald, "The Democratic Party in Philadelphia A Study in Political Pathology," National Municipal Review 14 (1925), 293-99, Thomas Raeburn White, "The Philadelphia System," Forum 77 (1927), 680, Joseph F Guffey, Seventy Years on the Red-Fire Wagon From Tilden to Truman Through New Freedom and New Deal (np, 1952), 18, J David Stern, Memoirs of a Maverick Publisher (New York, 1972), 200, Irwin F Greenberg, "The Philadelphia Democratic Party, 1911-1934," Ph D diss, Temple University, 1972, 233-80

The GOP machine relied particularly on the so-called "river wards" and South Philadelphia, where the foreign-born and their offspring were crowded. By this means they outnumbered the votes of more independent districts of Philadelphia and elected their handpicked candidates or carried the city for federal or state Republican nominees. The core of Vare's power was in these areas where the prevailing poverty made residents heavily dependent on the economic help of the machine.

Charles C.A. Baldi, Sr., was the broker between the GOP organization and the Italian-American community from the late nineteenth century to his death in December 1930. Baldi came to Philadelphia from the province of Salerno in 1877. He made money in the coal business before extending his activities to banking and real estate. In 1906 he established *L'Opinione*, the only Italian daily in Philadelphia until the early 1930s. This newspaper, along with many ethnic benevolent societies and organizations that he controlled, provided Baldi with the means to wield remarkable influence among Philadelphia's Italian Americans.⁵³

One Malatesta was the first leader of the community to persuade his fellow ethnics to barter their political support for jobs, but he was soon replaced by Baldi as the dispenser of Republican patronage. Following Baldi's advice, Italian immigrants applied to become U.S. citizens, and then they went to polling places to cast their ballots for the Republican party. As a reward for their votes, the machine, through Baldi, appointed them to positions in the Department of Public Works, the Philadelphia Navy Yard, and in municipal street cleaning, and garbage and refuse collection projects. Vare himself was one of Philadelphia's principal contractors. Vare Brothers Construction Company was one of the major sources of employment for the members of the community.⁵⁴ The reliance

⁵³ La colonia italiana di Filadelfia all'esposizione di Milano (Philadelphia, 1906), passim, L'Opinione, Nov 8, 1931, Ernest L Biagi, The Italians of Philadelphia (New York, 1967), 162-64, Varbero, "Urbanization and Acculturation," 282-90, Juliani, "The Italian Community," 92-93, Victor R Greene, American Immigrant Leaders, 1800-1910 Marginality and Identity (Baltimore, 1987), 133-35

⁵⁴ Corriere d'America, Nov 1, 1927, Paul Palazzi, "Spires of Influence," 20-21, in Records of the WPA Historical Survey, Ethnic Survey, 1938-1941, Job n 66, "Italians in Philadelphia," 1938-41 (microfilm at The Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies), Neva R Deardorff, "To Unshackle Philadelphia," Survey, April 5, 1919, 19, Richard A Varbero, "Workers in City and Country The South Italian Experience in Philadelphia, 1900-1950," in Richard N Juliani and Philip V Cannistraro, eds, Italian Americans The Search for a Usable Past (Staten Island, NY, 1989), 17

of Italian Americans on the machine was such that they usually identified the Republican party not with its national leaders but with the committeeman of the division where they lived.⁵⁵

Although repeaters were largely employed, Republican party workers paid the poll tax on behalf of prospective GOP supporters who would otherwise have remained home on election day. Vare's chieftains were, therefore, instrumental in prompting electoral participation. It is hardly a coincidence that in 1932, when the machine lacked the money to get out its traditionally massive vote, Hoover's plurality was cut down in Philadelphia.⁵⁶

The Republican machine usually chose its committeemen in each voting division from the largest ethnic group in each division.⁵⁷ In the Italian-American community most people could hardly speak English and were extremely suspicious of anyone who did not come not only from their own country but even from their own region or province. Thus the presence of a fellow-ethnic committeeman contributed to improve relations between the machine and Italian Americans, and to smooth over the difficulties that prevented their political participation. As far as possible, these committeemen were selected from among outstanding leaders of Italian-American mutual aid and fraternal societies. Republican strategists thought that these *prominenti*, in their capacities as officers, commanded the means to influence the voting behavior of the community better than other prospective party workers.⁵⁸

Philadelphia was virtually a one-party city where victories by Republican candidates could be taken for granted until the 1930s. By choosing committeemen who ethnically matched the potential electorate of their voting divisions, the party aimed at bringing more Italian Americans to the polls rather than at wresting a handful of votes from a hopelessly staggering Democratic party. At the beginning, however, this tactic was not very successful. The failure of Italian-American GOP party workers to get their fellow-ethnic constituents out to vote is illustrated by the following example. In the early 1920s Bartolomeo Mansolino, leader of the Thirty-fourth Ward Italian-American Club, held one of the two posts

⁵⁵ John T Salter, "Party Organization," American Political Science Review 27 (1933), 618

⁵⁶ Thomas E Williams, "Will Pennsylvania Go Democratic," Nation, Nov 9, 1932, 452

⁵⁷ Salter, Boss Rule, 41

⁵⁸ Maiale, "The Italian Vote," 276

of committeeman in the 18th voting division of the Thirty-fourth Ward. At that time, the division had no more than six Italian-American registered voters.⁵⁹

The first massive political mobilization of Philadelphia's Italian-American community occurred during the 1928 presidential campaign of Alfred Smith. The New York governor was a Catholic who opposed prohibition and immigration restrictions. He was also the first nominee for the White House of either major party who did not belong to the Wasp establishment. Smith, therefore, quickly became the champion of the bottom dogs of the second-immigration wave who had been discriminated against by the Quota Acts. ⁶⁰

The awakening of Italian-American interest in politics because of Smith's 1928 campaign is demonstrated by two facts. For the first time the community disowned its traditional Republican allegiance and gave a majority to the Democratic party. Smith's role in stirring up Italian-American political participation is also demonstrated by a 23.7 percent increase in turnout over 1926 and a 31.5 percent rise over 1927. In addition, the Happy Warrior's campaign fostered the mushrooming of Italian-American Democratic committees that were independent of the official Democratic city organization controlled by Vare's machine. Several Republican committeemen, like Anthony De Sascio in the First Ward, resigned from the GOP organization to operate pro-Smith clubs.⁶¹

Ethnic politics usually relies on conferring individual benefits with a collective meaning for the groups whose single members are benefited. In particular, marginally involved hyphenated Americans are, presumably, stimulated to participate in elections by the presence of fellow ethnics running for office. The foreign-born and their offspring are driven to register and vote so as to support the candidates of their own group,

⁵⁹ Varbero, "The Politics of Ethnicity," 172

⁶⁰ Lawrence H Fuchs, "Election of 1928," in Arthur M Schlesinger, Jr, and Fred L Israel, eds, History of American Presidential Elections (4 vols, New York, 1971), 3 2593, Burner, The Politics of Provincialism, 181, 183, 194, 200-201, 221, 236, 242-43 For Smith's strength among Catholics in Pennsylvania, see Lola Smith Hobbs, "A Catholic Runs for President 1928 in Pennsylvania," M A thesis, Pennsylvania State University, 1961, 14, 21-26, 30-35, 37, Daryl R Fair, "The Reaction of Pennsylvania Voters to Catholic Candidates," Pennsylvania History 32 (1965), 307-8

⁶¹ Evening Bulletin, Oct 15, 1928

since the rank and file regard the election of their political leaders as an achievement of their own community as a whole.⁶²

One way of overcoming the deep-rooted alienation of Italian Americans toward politics and encouraging their electoral involvement was to offer balanced tickets. This term refers to the strategy of allotting candidacies on a party slate among members of different ethnic groups in order to gain the votes of these communities. As long as Philadelphia remained a Republican stronghold, the GOP did not adopt a balanced-ticket strategy because its monopoly on state and local patronage gave the Republican machine absolute control of the Italian-American vote. As a result, before 1928 no Italian American from Philadelphia was slated by either major party for Congress, the Pennsylvania Senate, or any of the forty-eight seats of Selected Council of the city. Only three Republican members of the community served in the State House of Representatives, and five were elected to the Common Council of Philadelphia on the GOP slate. Yet the city was entitled to forty-one representatives in the House and the Common Council had ninety-eight seats up to 1919.⁶³

Charles Baldi's son, Charles Jr., took the lion's share of the small political recognition the Republican party gave the Italian-American community. He sat in the Common Council from 1914 to 1916 and served nine consecutive terms in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives from 1917 through 1936. In addition, the GOP granted the Baldis many other offices. Charles Sr. was appointed to the Philadelphia Board of Public Education in 1915 and to the State Board of Undertakers in 1917. His son Frederic became medical inspector and then superintendent of the county prisons. Another son, Joseph, was slated for the Pennsylvania House of Representatives in 1928.⁶⁴ Therefore, although Charles Sr. was the leader of the community and its political broker, he seemed to work

⁶² Robert Dahl, Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City (New Haven, 1961), 53 See also Robert Lane, Political Life Why People Get involved in Politics (Glencoe, Ill, 1959), Theodore J Lown, At the Pleasure of the Mayor Patronage and Power in New York City (London, 1964), Daniel P Moynihan and James Q Wilson, "Patronage in New York State, 1955-1959," American Political Science Review 58 (1964), 296, Raymond E Wolfinger, "The Development and Persistence of Ethnic Voting," ibid 59 (1965), 898-99

⁶³ See Smull's Legislative Hand Book and Manual of the State of Pennsylvania (Harrisburg, 1881/85), The Pennsylvania Manual (1923-27), Journal of the Selected Council of the City of Philadelphia, 1880-1919, Journal of the Common Council of the City of Philadelphia, 1880-1919

⁶⁴ Biagi, The Italians of Philadelphia, 82, Manual of the City Council of Philadelphia, 1916-1930, Evening Bulletin, May 12, 13, 1925, L'Opinione, April 14, May 11, 1932

for his own family rather than for his fellow ethnics. After enumerating all the positions hold by his relatives, Italian-American cahiers de doléances charged Charles Sr. with exploiting all his cunning to show off. They also accused him of usurping for himself and his family most of the available political offices to the detriment of other members of the community.⁶⁵

Owing to these widespread allegations, the bestowal of individual benefits on the Baldis could hardly be regarded as the collective achievement of the Italian-American community as a whole. As a result, even Charles Jr.'s nominations for the Pennsylvania House of Representatives failed to stimulate a huge electoral participation among Philadelphia's Italian Americans.

Thus, despite Charles Jr.'s uninterrupted presence on the GOP slate, the vote-for-a-fellow-ethnic campaign became a tool for mobilization only as late as 1928. In that year the Democratic party slated a member of the Italian-American community to take advantage of the ethno-cultural conflict evoked by Al Smith's bid for the White House. By the same token, the Republican machine increased the places allotted to Italian Americans for the Pennsylvania House of Representatives from one to three. Through these additional candidates, the GOP obviously endeavored to curtail the ethnic appeal of the electoral strategy of the Democratic party within the community. 66 Since in 1928 both major parties deployed balanced tickets and the Democratic party relied heavily on ethnic issues, it is hardly a coincidence that this year saw the highest pre-New Deal electoral participation among Philadelphia's Italian Americans.

Yet no sooner was the 1928 presidential campaign over than the community relapsed into a state of political indifference. Italian Americans are usually regarded as more concerned with presidential elections than with municipal or county contests. ⁶⁷ A decline in the total vote between presidential and off-year elections is a traditional characteristic of U.S. political behavior. ⁶⁸ Therefore it is not surprising that fewer Italian Ameri-

⁶⁵ Undated press release, "Preamble to the Constitution and By-Laws of the Italian Reconstruction Committee," in Order Sons of Italy in America, Giovanni Di Silvestro Papers, box 12, folder 8

⁶⁶ See The Pennsylvania Manual (1929), 524

⁶⁷ Nelli, From Immigrants to Ethnics, 107

⁶⁸ Walter Dean Burnham, "The Changing Shape of the American Political Universe," in Robert P Swierenga, ed, Quantification in American History Theory and Research (New York, 1970), 196-97

cans voted for Register of Wills in 1929 than for president in 1928. Yet the 1929 election saw the lowest turnout in Philadelphia's community within the span of the whole period studied, and the 1930 senatorial contest was marked by an 8.2 percent decrease in voting participation in comparison with the 1928 presidential election. Not until the mayoralty contests of 1935 and 1939 did the turnout of a local election exceed that of the preceding state and federal elections.

The 1928 level of voter participation was exceeded finally in 1932. However this phenomenon cannot be explained solely in terms of Italian-American reaction to Hoover's unsuccessful attempts to curb the Depression. As a matter of fact, after the 1928 defeat, the GOP continued to carry the community through 1933, if by a narrowing plurality.

In the meantime the balanced-ticket strategy acquired further momentum. In 1932 Anna Brancato won the Democratic nomination for the State House of Representatives in Philadelphia's Fifth District.⁶⁹ In Pennsylvania both major parties proved reluctant to slate a woman, particularly when they anticipated winning the election. 70 As in 1932 the Democratic party was credited with good a chance to carry Pennsylvania.⁷¹ Brancato's presence on the ticket was an effort to mobilize the traditionally lukewarm eligible female voters of Italian ancestry. The leaders of Philadelphia's Democratic party endorsed her because they needed an Italian female candidate in a district with a relatively high number of Italian-American women.⁷² This strategy was successful. The turnout increased by 16.8 percent in the Italian-American community as a whole between 1930 and 1932, but participation among women soared by 23.4 percent. By the same token, comparing two consecutive presidential elections, overall Italian-American turnout rose by 7.3 percent between 1928 and 1932, but female participation jumped by 22.9 percent in the same period.73 A few years later, Brancato described herself as "the best votegetter that the [Democratic] Party has among women."74

⁶⁹ The Pennsylvania Manual (1933), 427-28

Namuel A Farmerie, "Pennsylvania Legislators, 1901-1963," Pennsylvania History 34 (1967), 40; Raisa B Deber, "The Fault Dear Brutus' Women as Congressional Candidates in Pennsylvania," Journal of Politics 44 (1982), 474-78

⁷¹ Williams, "Will Pennsylvania Go Democratic" 451-52

⁷² Frances L Reinhold, "Anna Brancato State Representative," in John T Salter, ed., The American Politician (Chapel Hill, 1938), 351

⁷³ Twenty-Third (1928), Twenty-Fifth (1930), Twenty-Seventh Annual Report of the Registration Commission for the City of Philadelphia (1932)

⁷⁴ As quoted by Reinhold, "Anna Brancato," 348

Nonetheless, the take-off of Italian-American electoral participation was delayed until 1934. Although Italian-American newspapers endeavored to boost Americanization and turnout,⁷⁵ they questioned the principles of American democracy and raised doubts about the meaning of elections in the United States. They, therefore, fed a sense of political ineffectiveness that promoted voting inertia.

The 1932 presidential campaign in particular saw an outburst of criticism toward the U.S. political system. As far as Prohibition was concerned, the two major parties were criticized for having devised ambiguous planks aimed at appeasing conflicting views rather than offering a definite policy to cope with the question of alcoholic beverages. Italian-American newspapers expressed distrust for both the Democratic and the Republican platforms because, in their opinion, the policies of these parties had been formulated out of a pre-existent awareness that they would never be fulfilled after election day.⁷⁶ The newspapers' position seemed to be corroborated by the outcome of the 1932 presidential election. Roosevelt's victory was hailed as a wet triumph, since the Democratic program included a call for the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment.⁷⁷ But after the outgoing Seventy-second Congress voted in one of its last sessions to keep Prohibition, the deed was regarded as a further example of how American politicians not only refused to comply with the people's will but were eager to trample on it. Comments like these in the ethnic press implied that elections were useless.⁷⁸

Somtimes these opinions were shared by the readership. Aldo Stella wrote to the editor of L'Opinione complaining that American politics was a farce. Roosevelt was barred from taking office right away, whereas outgoing congressmen were allowed to uphold a measure like Prohibition, which had been voted down by the American people in the previous presidential election.⁷⁹

Even the concept of American democracy began to be criticized. According to La Libera Parola, the system established by the Founding

⁷⁵ See, e.g., L'Opinione, Aug. 25, 1929 "He who does not register cannot vote and he who does not vote fails to fulfill his first duty as an American citizen"

⁷⁶ La Libera Parola, June 9, 11, 1932, L'Opinione, Nov 8, 1932

⁷⁷ Ibid, Nov 10, 11, 1932

⁷⁸ La Libera Parola, Dec 10, 1932

⁷⁹ L'Opinione, Dec 8, 1932

Fathers had degenerated into a plutocracy. Democracy was a senseless myth exploited to lure voters by deception. The United States was no longer governed by the people but run by tycoons and financiers who had ruined the middle class and reduced workers to slavery.⁸⁰

All these assertions, of course, aimed at extolling Italian Fascism, contrasting it with the substance of American democracy. For instance, the expulsion of former Secretary General Augusto Turati from the Fascist party was seized as an opportunity to point out that, whereas in Italy there was no room for corrupt people, in the United States "any dishonest person, any political adventurer, any embezzler is not only praised but also rewarded." Despite their purpose as pro-Fascist propaganda, the immediate consequence of these opinions was to spread apathy and lack of political motivation among Philadelphia's Italian Americans. These arguments encouraged the marginalization of the members of the community from the voting process because they highlighted the futility of elections in the United States.

Two conflicting theories have been formulated to explain individual decisions not to exercise the franchise. On the grounds that citizens express their allegiance to the existing political system by casting their ballots on election day, voting abstention is regarded as a subversive deed that aims at the delegitimation of the political system itself.⁸² On the other hand, especially in Western democratic regimes, eligible voters refuse to go to the polls because they are satisfied with the status quo. Nonvoting, therefore, turns out to be "a reflection of the stability of the system." 83

Whatever the correct hypothesis, distrust by a sizable share of the potential electorate in the efficacy of the instruments of popular representation results in a low election turnout. Citizens do not cast their ballots when they think that voting is useless. Moreover, since participation in elections is one of the basic rules of democracy, people who do not

⁸⁰ La Libera Parola, Aug 13, 20, Nov 26, 1932

⁸¹ Ibid, Dec 17, 1932

⁸² William H Riker and Peter C Ordeshook, *An Introduction to Positive Political Theory* (Englewood Cliffs, N J, 1973), 63, Raymond E Wolfinger and Steven J Rosenstone, *Who Votes*? (New Haven, 1980), 7

⁸³ Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man The Social Bases of Politics*, expanded ed (Baltimore, 1981), 185

appreciate this regimen are not inclined to subscribe to one of its cornerstones.⁸⁴

As R. Rosati, a journalist for L'Opinione, maintained, the blame for the crisis of American democracy could not be put on those potential voters who showed no interest in politics. On the contrary, electoral abstention arose from an awareness that the people were denied real and effective means to control their representatives. This idea was pivotal to the criticism of American democracy made by the Italian-American papers. Rosati's editorial, therefore, not only accounted for political indifference but also offered a justification to readers who wanted to keep their interest in electoral participation lukewarm. Starting from 1933, however, these negative comments about the U.S. political system began gradually to disappear, especially from the columns of L'Opinione. At the end of September 1933 La Libera Parola ran its last editorial against the American plutocracy. 66

After his father's death in 1927, Anthony Di Silvestro took over La Libera Parola. In October 1932 Generoso Pope, a millionaire building contractor from New York City, bought L'Opinione from the Baldi family and later merged it with Il Progresso Italo-Americano. Both Anthony Di Silvestro and Pope were Fascist sympathizers. Yet ideology does not explain the end of the controversy about the nature of American democracy in their newspapers.

Following Italy's invasion of Ethiopia, at the end of Roosevelt's first term, relations between the United States and the Fascist regime deteriorated.⁸⁷ A resumption of attacks on the U.S. political system could have been expected from Mussolini's fellow travellers. After all, the degeneration of American liberal democracy into "demoplutocracy" was the leitmotif of the Fascist ideological polemic against the United States, and it

⁸⁴ Mario Caciagli and Pasquale Scaramozzino, eds, Il voto di chi non vota L'astensionismo elettorale in Italia e in Europa (Milan, 1983), 16, Anthony Downs, An Economic Theory of Democracy (New York, 1957), 260-61, 269 An analysis of Italian-American political culture goes beyond the purpose of this essay For a brief discussion of this topic see Ernest E Rossi, "Political Acculturation Italian American Politics in Comparative Perspective," in Juliani and Cannistraro, eds, Italian Americans, 152-55

⁸⁵ L'Opinione, June 1, 1932

⁸⁶ It pointed out that the donkey was the most appropriate symbol for Democracy in the United States, because, "if people were not donkeys, they would rise against the spurs of their chevaliers of industry" *La Libera Parola*, Sept. 30, 1933

⁸⁷ John P Diggins, Mussolini and Fascism The View from America (Princeton, 1972), 290-91

gained momentum at the time of the Ethiopian crisis. Instead of echoing Fascist assaults on Roosevelt—as did *Il Popolo Italiano*, a Philadelphia pro-Republican daily Di Silvestro's and Pope's papers portrayed the President's foreign policy as beneficial to Mussolini's war against Ethiopia. Thus the reason for the disappearance of critical remarks about American politics from their papers seems to have been political rather than ideological. Both Pope and Di Silvestro were staunch supporters of the Democratic party. The owner of a chain of Italian-American newspapers, which enabled him to establish a quasi monopoly on his fellow ethnics' press, Pope aimed to become the most powerful broker of the Italian-American vote for the Democratic party. By the same token, running for the Pennsylvania Senate on the Democratic ticket in 1936, Di Silvestro sought to use his weekly newspaper to realize his political ambitions. Description of the Pennsylvania Senate on the Democratic ticket in 1936, Di Silvestro sought to use his weekly newspaper to realize his

The endorsement of Di Silvestro well illustrates the important role in electoral campaign strategies of the ethnic press. The Democratic City Committee picked the owner of *La Libera Parola* to replace William A. Hagen, who had withdrawn after winning the nomination in the primary. Di Silvestro had not entered the contest, and Michael De Luca had been Hagen's only Italian-American opponent. The choice of Di Silvestro, therefore, shows that the Democratic party needed not only an Italian-American candidate but also a leader with the means to influence public opinion and, hence, the political behavior of the community.

Like Pope with his longing for political brokerage, Di Silvestro was fully aware that his chances of election were tied to the future of the

⁸⁸ Pier Giorgio Zunino, L'ideologia del fascismo Miti, credenze e valori nella stabilizzazione del regime (Bologna, 1985), 323, 329-30, Anna Maria Martellone, "'Blood against Gold' Anti-American Propaganda in Fascist Italy," Storia Nordamericana 3 (1986), 52-53, 56, 60, 63-64, Michela Nacci, L'antiamericanismo in Italia negli anni trenta (Turin, 1989), 61-72, Domenico Settembrini, Storia dell'idea anti-borghese in Italia, 1860-1989 (Rome and Bari, 1991), 332-40

⁸⁹ Il Popolo Italiano, e.g., Oct. 24, 31, Nov. 2, 1935, Oct. 15, 24, 1936

⁹⁰ Il Progresso Italo-Americano—L'Opinione, Nov 3, 1936 (the two papers were merged in 1935 but L'Opinione was later dropped from the title), La Libera Parola, Oct 3, 1936

⁹¹ Philip V Cannistraro, "Generoso Pope and the Rise of Italian American Politics, 1925-1936," in Tomasi, ed , *Italian Americans*, 264-88, Cannistraro and Elena Aga Rossi, "La politica etnica e il dilemma dell'antifascismo italiano negli Stati Uniti Il caso di Generoso Pope," *Storia Contemporanea* 17 (1986), 217-43

⁹² Biagi, The Italians of Philadelphia, 182-83

⁹³ Philadelphia Record, Sept 5, 1936, La Libera Parola, Sept 12, 1936

⁹⁴ Philadelphia Inquirer, April 29, 1936

Democratic party.⁹⁵ The massive increase in overall turnout had made the Democratic party competitive in the city in the 1930s. Both Pope and Di Silvestro were interested in removing all obstacles likely to curb or deflate voting participation, including those topics that nourished distrust in the effectiveness of elections.

Ethnic appeal as a major stimulus to electoral participation was consolidated when Italian Americans began to run, or to be slated for, major offices. The 1934 elections can be regarded as the turning point. In that year the Italian-American turnout crossed the threshold of 2,000 voters for the first time.

John B. Kelly, leader of the anti-O'Donnell faction, became the new chairman of the Democratic City Committee in 1934, and the party threw off the Republican yoke. He tried to boost the Democratic vote in Philadelphia by forging the same ethnic coalition that had elected Roosevelt to the White House in 1932. During O'Donnell's tenure, Philadelphia's Democratic party had stuck to the Republican strategy of generally disregarding an appeal to ethnicity. Until 1934, therefore, the highest office of any Italian American politician was state representative on either the Republican or the Democratic ticket. Kelly's blueprint for drumming up the hyphenated vote through balanced tickets in local elections increased the recognition of the community, since it provided its members with new opportunities to make their way up the political ladder.

During Kelly's first year as chairman, he thought the time had come for an Italian American to run for Congress in Philadelphia. Kelly's organization endorsed Joseph Marinelli in the Democratic primaries for the U.S. House of Representatives. This choice upset several other Italian-American would-be congressmen. As a consequence, Marinelli was challenged at the polls by Leopold Vaccaro, Louis A. Manfredi, Thomas Edward Della Cioppa, and Michael A. Spatola. Although Marinelli's nomination eventually split his community into rival factions (leading to his defeat in November) with five fellow ethnics fighting in

⁹⁵ La Labera Parola, Oct 10, 24, 31, 1936

⁹⁶ Irwin F Greenberg, "Philadelphia Democrats Get a New Deal The Election of 1933," PMHB 97 (1973), 219-22, 232, Greenberg, "The Philadelphia Democratic Party," 551-52
⁹⁷ John P Rossi, "The Kelly-Wilson Mayoralty Election of 1935," PMHB 107 (1983), 182-

⁸³ 98 L'Opinione, April 28, 1934

a hot primary campaign, Italian Americans did become more involved in politics. In 1934 registrations soared by 13.7 percent from 1933 and by 35.2 percent from 1930 (when the previous gubernatorial election was held), 99 as the candidates' supporters crowded polling stations to cast their votes for one of the five.

If the 1934 outpouring of Italian-American registrants and voters sprang from the sudden speed-up of the political rise of their leaders, Charles Margiotti's bid for the Republican gubernatorial nomination should be credited with a pivotal role in stirring up interest in elections within the community. After all, it was the highest office in the state, and no Italian-American had ever campaigned for it previously. Margiotti was an affluent and successful criminal lawyer from Punxsutawney who enjoyed nationwide fame. ¹⁰⁰ As one of the few prominent Italian Americans in Pennsylvania, he had a sizable following in the Philadelphia community. In the 1934 primary election, Margiotti received 6.3 percent of the vote in the city as a whole, but 32.4 percent among Italian Americans, although both the machine and Giovanni Di Silvestro supported William A. Schnader. ¹⁰¹ Moreover, the community bolted to the GOP after Margiotti, following his defeat, had come out for Democratic candidate George Earle. ¹⁰²

The ethnic appeal of party tickets became stronger and stronger in the following years. When Kelly ran for mayor in 1935, he designated Michael A. Spatola as his running mate for Receiver of Taxes in order to capture the Italian-American vote. ¹⁰³ In 1936 the Democratic City Committee slated Anthony Di Silvestro. That very year the Republican

⁹⁹ Twenty-Fifth (1930), Twenty-Eighth (1933), Twenty-Ninth Annual Report of the Registration Commission for the City of Philadelphia (1934) As far as the 1930 elections are concerned, Table 2 includes votes for the senatorial race instead of those for the gubernatorial contest Since in 1930 Philadelphia's Republican machine supported the Democratic candidate for governor (see Sunday Dispatch, Oct 19, 26, Nov 2, 1930), causing an alteration in the voting pattern of the city, the returns for the more "normal" senatorial election have been used for comparison

¹⁶⁰ For Margiotti see Chester Harris, Tiger at Bar The Life Story of Charles J Margiotti (New York, 1956) For his 1934 campaign see also Maiale, "The Italian Vote in Philadelphia," 159-61, Luconi, "La vita politica," 242-44

¹⁰¹ Philadelphia Board of Elections, Election Returns for the 1934 Republican Gubernatorial Primary, Philadelphia City Archives, Giovanni Di Silvestro to Ralph E Evans, May 5, 1934, in Order Sons of Italy in America, Giovanni Di Silvestro Papers, box 10, folder 4

¹⁰² L'Opinione, Sept 13, 1934

¹⁰³ Il Progresso Italo-Americano-L'Opinione, July 29, 1935

party, too, resorted to a balanced ticket in the hope of preventing ethnics from going over to the Democratic party.

The GOP no longer controlled federal and state patronage, owing to the victories of Roosevelt and Earle. It had even lost a share of local patronage, following its defeat in Philadelphia's row elections of 1933. The need to gain votes forced the Republican party to adopt the balanced-ticket strategy. In 1936 Frank Pinola became the first Italian American to run on the Republican ticket for a statewide office in Pennsylvania (state treasurer). Moreover, the GOP slated John Alessandroni for Congress two years later, and John Da Grossa for the State Senate in 1940 to unseat Anthony Di Silvestro. That year even the Communist party, not usually thought to have exploited ethnic politics in Philadelphia, those Italian-American Jasper Passalacqua as candidate for the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. 107

Some trade unions, too, encouraged Italian-American voter participation through their pro-Roosevelt registration drives. Under the aegis of the Pennsylvania Labor Non-Partisan League of the CIO, they strove to reelect Roosevelt so as to protect the benefits of New Deal labor legislation. The Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA) stood out in such drives. The union took on the task of boosting registration among the residents of South Philadelphia, where there was a high concentration of clothing industry workers. The union took of the task of boosting registration among the residents of South Philadelphia, where there was a high concentration of clothing industry workers.

A long history of Republican allegiance might lead to the conclusion that a conservative attitude prevailed inside the Italian-American community. Yet labor militancy among the Italian Americans dated back to the early twentieth century.¹¹⁰ No statistics are available that show how many

¹⁰⁴ Il Popolo Italiano, April 28, 1936

¹⁰⁵ Philadelphia Inquirer, March 29, 1938, Il Popolo Italiano, April 23, 1940

¹⁰⁶ Paul Lyons, Philadelphia Communists, 1936-1956 (Philadelphia, 1982), esp. 84-85

¹⁰⁷ The Pennsylvania Manual (1941), 171

Philip Taft, "Labor's Changing Political Line," Journal of Political Economy 45 (1937),
 641-42, Thomas T Spencer, "Labor Is With Roosevelt' The Pennsylvania Labor Non-Partisan
 League and the Election of 1936," Pennsylvania History 46 (1979),
 3-16

¹⁰⁹ Elden La Mar, *The Clothing Workers in Philadelphia History of Their Struggle for Union and Security* (n p , 1940), 169-70, Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, "Industrial Unionism and Labor Movement Culture in Depression-Era Philadelphia," *PMHB* 109 (1985), 23

Edwin Fenton, "Italians in the Labor Movement," Pennsylvania History 26 (1959), esp 136, Ellen Ginzburg Migliorino, "La comunità italiana nel clima conservatore di Filadelfia agli inizi del Novecento," in Italia e Stati Uniti dall'indipendenza americana ad oggi (1776-1976) Atti del I congresso internazionale di storia americana (Genova 26-29 maggio 1976) (Genoa, 1978), 317-20

Italian Americans were members of the ACWA. Nonetheless, a random sample made by Rosara Lucy Passero out of the incomplete Incoming Membership Lists of the Philadelphia Joint Board shows a sizable presence in the union. In 1934, 74.3 percent of the members of Local 122, 69 percent of Local 75, and 56.4 percent of Local 143 were Italian Americans. Many of them joined the union around the 1936 presidential elections. As far as new members were concerned, Local 56 acquired 209 Italian Americans out of 305 (1936 and 1937), Local 156, 389 out of 392 (1934), and 101 out of 105 (1934-1937).

As for the political mobilization of Italian Americans, the recourse to the balanced ticket by the GOP was not the only consequence of the rising level of party competition in Philadelphia (which ensued from the Democratic victory in the 1933 row elections). According to several scholars, the narrowing of political options after the 1896 presidential contest accounts for the drop in turnout that characterized the first three decades of the twentieth century. In their opinion, people lost incentive to vote in elections with foregone outcomes, resulting from the establishment of a one-party Republican North and a Democratic solid South. 112 Since the New Deal turned Philadelphia from a Republican stronghold into a two-party arena, it could be argued that the availability of viable party alternatives on election day stimulated Italian Americans to participate in elections. After all, the level of 2,000 voters was surpassed in 1934, the year after the Democratic party scored its first victory in local elections since 1911. The role of patronage and personal assistance also helps to explain the postponement of the bulk of Italian-American political mobilization until 1934. The Depression hit Italian Americans hard. There is no data for specific ethnic groups in Philadelphia, but the situation in the community can be inferred from figures that are geographically aggregated. For instance, a survey conducted December 8 and 9, 1931, shows that in South Philadelphia 30.3 percent of the work force

¹¹¹ Rosara Lucy Passero, "Ethnicity in the Men's Ready-Made Clothing Industry, 1880-1950," Ph D diss , University of Pennsylvania, 1978, 302, 313

¹¹² E.E. Schattschneider, *The Semisovereign People A Realist's View of Democracy in America* (New York, 1960), 80, 100-101, 105, Burnham, "The Changing Shape," 198-207, 217-18, Paul Kleppner and Stephen C. Baker, "The Impact of Voter Registration Requirements on Electoral Turnout, 1900-1916," *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 8 (1980), 205-26

¹¹³ For the 1933 elections and their meaning for the restoration of two-party politics in Philadelphia, see Greenberg, "Philadelphia Democrats Get a New Deal," 210-32

was unemployed. This was the highest percentage among all Philadelphia's urban areas.¹¹⁴

Widespread hardships no doubt heightened the need Italian Americans had for those services that had been previously provided by the Republican organization. Indeed, since 1930 the GOP machine had established welfare committees that handed out coal and clothes, paid gas and electricity bills, set up relief kitchens, and offered free medical assistance. Yet Republican committeemen, too, faced hard times both for themselves and their constituents.

Philadelphia's mayor, J. Hampton Moore, advocated balancing the municipal budget. From 1928 when he took office to mid 1933, he dismissed nearly 3,500 employees from City Hall, cut wages by 10 percent, and forced policemen and firemen to take a two-week holiday without pay. He thereby undermined the traditional sources of Republican patronage. Although the economic crisis probably brought about a growth in the number of Italian Americans willing to barter their votes for relief, as a result of Moore's policy the machine no longer had the means to meet the needs of all those potential voters nor to mobilize them.

In the meantime, the anti-O'Donnell faction within the Democratic party began to adopt the same Republican strategy to gain votes within the community. For instance, as Paul D'Ortona, then chairman of the executive committee of the Twenty-sixth Ward, pointed out, "we went around begging for food and canned stuff and prepared a basket for people on relief and welfare and seen [ssc] that they had a good Christmas for their family." Nonetheless, patronage rather than food baskets better enabled the Democratic party to compete with the GOP.

Roosevelt's election at least provided Philadelphia's Democratic party with the opportunity to control federal positions. Joseph Guffey was

¹¹⁴ "Unemployment Survey of Metropolitan Life Insurance Co," Monthly Labor Review 32 (1931), 54

¹¹⁵ John Francis Bauman, "The City, the Depression, and Relief The Philadelphia Experience," Ph D diss , Rutgers University, 1969, 54-55

¹¹⁶ Bart and Cummings, "Politics and Voting Behavior," 135-36, Robert E Drayer, "J Hampton Moore An Old Fashioned Republican," Ph D diss, University of Pennsylvania, 1961, 305, 308-9, 311-26

¹¹⁷ Interview with Paul D'Ortona, May 17, 1977, in Walter Phillips Oral History Project Transcripts, box 3, Temple University Urban Archives

placed in charge of federal patronage for Pennsylvania. He wasted no time and, long in advance of inauguration day, built a machine that turned Pennsylvania into a "state-wide Tammany." Despite his early start, Guffey's initial efforts did not prove particularly successful as far as Philadelphia's Italian Americans were concerned. Whatever the uses of federal patronage, it failed both to mobilize and capture new voters for the Democratic party. Between 1932 and 1933 the Italian-American turnout decreased by 1 percent and the Democratic party lost 32 votes (Table 2).

Mayor Moore's budget reductions may be held responsible for postponing the impact of the New Deal on the political behavior of Philadelphia's Italian Americans. In his desire to pay off Philadelphia's debt, Moore boycotted make-work efforts of the Public Works Administration (PWA) and the Works Progress Administration (WPA) for fear of incurring expenses for the city.¹¹⁹

The Democratic party gained new sources of patronage after its victory in the 1933 row elections, and its capture of the governorship in 1934 was a bonanza in terms of job control. Earle's appointment of Margiotti as Attorney General of Pennsylvania appeased the claims for political recognition among Philadelphia's Italian Americans. ¹²⁰ Moreover, Margiotti surrounded himself with fellow ethnics. Four Italian Americans became his deputies and, during his tenure of office, over 10 percent of the staff of the Department of Justice was of Italian descent. Margiotti's Republican predecessor had employed only two Italian Americans. ¹²¹

When S. David Wilson succeeded Moore as mayor in 1936, the Democratic party was finally able to fully exploit the electoral dividends of the New Deal. Although elected on the Republican ticket, Wilson was aware that Philadelphia needed WPA funds to solve its problems,

¹¹⁸ Ray Sprigle, "Lord Guffey of Pennsylvania," *American Mercury* 39 (1936), 274-76 (quote 275), Joseph Alsop and Robert Kinter, "The Guffey The Capture of Pennsylvania," *Saturday Evening Post*, April 16, 1938, 16-17, 98-103, Charles Eugene Halt, "Joseph F Guffey, New Deal Politician from Pennsylvania," Ph D diss, Syracuse University, 1965, 123-24

¹¹⁹ Drayer, "J Hampton Moore," 309-11, Bauman, "The City, The Depression," 246-49, Greenberg, "Philadelphia Democrats," 230-31

¹²⁰ L'Opinione, Nov 23, 1934, Jan 15, 1935, La Libera Parola, Nov 24, 1934

¹²¹ See L'Opinione, Jan 17, Feb 6, 14, March, 27, 1935 The ethnic background of the appointees was identified through a name check conducted on the personnel directory published by *The Pennsylvania Manual* (1935/36), 624-25, ibid (1937), 945-46, ibid (1931), 1031-32

and he abandoned Moore's policy.¹²² Following the implementation of WPA projects in Philadelphia, the local Democratic organization was able to keep its 1935 campaign promise by rewarding its supporters with jobs available under the WPA. For instance, in October 1935 Ernest Crispi, an Italian-American party worker, stated that the Democratic leader of the Thirty-ninth Ward had declared that this ward "would be given ten per cent of all the jobs available under the WPA." Six months later, as denounced by Italian-American magistrate Charles Amodei, South Philadelphia applicants for WPA positions needed a letter of introduction from their Democratic ward leader. ¹²⁴

In order to understand the post-1933 jump in turnout among Italian Americans in terms of contextual factors, the implications of the "legal-institutional" thesis should not be ruled out. According to this theory the introduction of burdensome electoral registration procedures at the turn of the century was responsible for depressing turnout in the following years. ¹²⁵ It has also been suggested that procedural requirements, like personal registration, had the hidden purpose of disfranchising second-wave immigrants and their offspring, who were usually charged with being props of the socialist party and of corrupt machines. ¹²⁶

In 1906 Pennsylvania passed an annual personal registration act to ward off vote fraud and corruption. This statute introduced a cumbersome system that had the effect of reducing electoral participation owing to an

¹²² Philadelphia Inquirer, Jan 30, Aug 6, 1936, Greenberg, "The Philadelphia Democratic Party," 569-70

¹²³ Evening Bulletin, Oct 11, 1935 No official payroll of the WPA is apparently available A scanning of the incomplete records of the Philadelphia Department of Public Works (for the projects for the Democratic convention of 1936) shows that about one-third of the foremen had Italian-American surnames (Department of Public Works Papers, Director's office, Correspondence and Reports 1926-1936, 1936-1939, 1950, series A-658, folder "WPA Projects Jan '36-Dec '39," Philadelphia City Archives)

¹²⁴ Il Popolo Italiano, April 23, 24, 1936, Evening Bulletin, April 23, 1936

¹²⁵ Stanley Kelley, Jr, Richard E Ayres, and William G Bowen, "Registration and Voting Putting First Things First," American Political Science Review 61 (1967), 359-79, Philip E Converse, "Change in the American Electorate," in Angus Campbell and Philip A Converse, eds, The Human Meaning of Social Science (New York, 1972), 263-337, Converse, "Comment on Burnham's 'Theory and Voting Research,'" American Political Science Review 68 (1974), 1024-27, Jerrold G Rusk, "Comment The American Electoral Universe Speculation and Evidence," ibid, 1028-49

¹²⁶ Richard L McCormick, "The Party Period and Public Policy An Exploratory Hypothesis," *Journal of American History* 66 (1979), 295

increase of voting "costs." The new provisions were particularly onerous for Italian immigrants, once again on account of their Old World experience. Under Italian election law, eligible voters were not required to register on their own initiative; they were automatically included in lists of voters by local authorities. 128

In 1937 personal annual registration was superseded by personal permanent registration. Instead of enrolling their names every year, Philadelphians were allowed to register only once to be eligible to vote for the rest of their lives, provided that they did not change their residence or their party affiliation and went to the polls at least once in four years. The new requirements helped to pull more Italian Americans over the threshold of electoral indifference to become voters. As a matter of fact, the election of 1938—the first to be held under the new law—saw the second largest increase in turnout between any two consecutive elections in the 1930s. 130

In conclusion, the great bulk of Italian-American mobilization in the City of Brotherly Love took place between 1934 and 1940. The Philadelphia case, however, does not exactly match the Italian-American experience in other major cities. Political life in Italian-American communities before the 1920s has received relatively little study. Scholars agree, however, that Italian immigrants disregarded the franchise almost everywhere in the early period of their stay in the host country. Examples of their

¹²⁷ Joseph P Harris, Registration of Voters in the United States (Washington, 1929), 79-81, Walter Dean Burnham, "Theory and Voting Research Some Reflections on Converse's 'Change in the American Electorate,' "The American Political Science Review 68 (1974), 1005-9 The hindrances Philadelphia's aspiring voters had to overcome in order to register emerge clearly from the following passage "the office [of the Registration Commission] is on the 14th floor of City hall Annex, a building in which the elevators are notoriously slow and overcrowded The office is so small that it is nearly always congested and especially so during rush registration sessions when lines of would-be registrants often wind around the corridors and stairs and down two floors Confronted with such obstacles, many would be registrants surrender their right to be registered rather than spend the necessary time" Governor's Committee for the Investigation of Alleged Disfranchisement of Electors in Philadelphia, Disfranchisement and Potential Disfranchisement in Philadelphia Under the Permanent Registration Act (n p, Oct 7, 1938), 13-14

¹²⁸ Giorgio Candeloro, Storia dell'Italia moderna (11 vols , Milan, 1974), 7 308

¹²⁹ Thirty-Second Annual Report of the Registration Commission for the City of Philadelphia (1937), 1-3

¹³⁰ The highest jump in electoral participation in the fourth decade of the century occurred between 1933 and 1934, one year after the repeal of the poll tax in Philadelphia Twenty-Eighth Annual Report of the Registration Commission for the City of Philadelphia (1933), 1

political apathy abound. In St. Louis, in 1898, only three Italians were listed among the 180 registered voters in a precinct of Little Italy. 131 In 1905 in New York City only 16,355 Italians out of over 400,000 bothered to register. 132 Virginia Yans-McLaughlin provides no quantitative data on the Italian community in Buffalo, but she argues that early attempts to mobilize its members repeatedly failed. 133 A comparative analysis of the Italian Americans in Kansas City, Rochester, and Utica maintains that at the beginning of the twentieth century they still played a negligible political role. 134 Although there are some examples of Italian-American political participation in Boston's North End before 1909, 135 this ethnic group had not gone a long way in politics by 1919, when its first member entered the State Senate. 136 Moreover, the following year figures for the North End show that only 15.4 percent of men and 0.7 percent of women registered among Italian-American potential voters. 137 The only relevant exception seems to be Chicago, where Italian Americans had already "effectively adjusted to politics" by 1920.138

This situation began to change during the 1920s. In New York City, Fiorello La Guardia exploited his fellow ethnics' pride, their yearning for recognition, and their need for legal and personal services by organizing them into Republican clubs and enrolling them into his own political organization. ¹³⁹ In 1926 Edward Corsi, an aide to La Guardia, founded the Columbia Republican League to mobilize Italian-American potential

¹³¹ Gary Ross Mormino, *Immigrants on the Hill Italian-Americans in St Louis*, 1882-1982 (Urbana and Chicago, 1986), 174

¹³² Salvatore J LaGumina, "American Political Process and Italian Participation in New York State," in Silvano M Tomasi, ed, *Perspectives in Italian Immigration and Ethnicity* (New York, 1977), 89

¹³³ Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, Family and Community Italian Immigrants in Buffalo, 1880-1930 (Ithaca, 1971), 121-23, 130-31

¹³⁴ John W Briggs, An Italian Passage Immigrants to Three American Cities, 1890-1930 (New Haven, 1978), 172-74

¹³⁵ Anna Maria Martellone, Una Little Italy nell'Atene d'America La comunita italiana di Boston dal 1880 al 1920 (Napoli, 1973), 497-569, "La città nella Gilded Age Crescita e problemi," in Valeria Gennaro Lerda, ed , Citta e campagna nell'Eta Dorata Gli Stati Uniti tra utopia e riforma (Rome, 1986), 69-70

¹³⁶ Martellone, Una Lattle Italy, 567-68

¹³⁷ Gamm, The Making of New Deal Democrats, 82

¹³⁸ Humbert S Nelli, *Italians in Chicago*, 1880-1930 A Study in Ethnic Mobility (New York, 1970), 123

¹³⁹ Arthur Mann, La Guardia A Fighter Against His Times, 1882-1933 (Chicago, 1969), 134-35, 153-55, 231-46, 250-57, Bayor, Neighbors in Conflict, 33

voters in New York State in general, and in New York City's Twentieth Congressional District (the constituency of his boss) in particular. ¹⁴⁰ In 1924 Louis Jean Gualdoni established his own machine, which lured St. Louis's Italian Americans into polling places through his direct control of hundreds of appointive city jobs. ¹⁴¹ In Cleveland, a rise in political recognition and the Depression had stimulated Italian-American involvement in politics by the early 1930s. ¹⁴²

Italian-American registration in Boston underwent continuous growth from the mid-1920s to 1940. Most of the female voters of the community entered the active electorate on the occasion of Smith's candidacy in 1928. While several scholars claim that the Happy Warrior's campaign was responsible for a significant increase in female participation, Gerald Gamm holds that Boston's Italian-American women did not mobilize until the early 1930s. Thus their political behavior paralleled that of Philadelphia's female fellow ethnics who began to crowd polling places following Brancato's bid for the Pennsylvania House of Representatives in 1932. In Gamm's view, the election of 1932 rather than that of 1934 "was the center of the single greatest surge in mobilization of new registered voters" within both the male and female potential electorate of the Boston community. Unfortunately Gamm does not provide information for the early 1940s. It is, therefore, impossible to assess whether Italian-American participation declined in Boston too after 1940.

Since this overview has stressed that most of their fellow ethnics entered the active electorate between the 1920s and the early 1930s, Philadelphia's Italian Americans seem to have been late comers to politics, with the bulk of their mobilization occurring between 1934 and 1940. Local conditions were, of course, responsible for the different timing of electoral participation. This is why research on ethnic politics at the municipal level

¹⁴⁰ Mann, La Guardia A Fighter, 142, 243, 252, Martellone, "Italian Immigrants, Party Machines," 178-79

¹⁴¹ Mormino, Immigrants on the Hill, 180-89

¹⁴² Charles D Ferron, The Italians in Cleveland A Study in Assimilation (New York, 1980), 3

¹⁴³ Gamm, The Making of New Deal Democrats, 82

¹⁴⁴ Burner, The Politics of Provincialism, 229

¹⁴⁵ Lubell, The Future of American Politics, 40, Andersen, The Creation of a Democratic Majority, 9

¹⁴⁶ Gamm, The Making of New Deal Democrats, 84, 86

can help us to understand the timing and mechanics of the involvement of these groups in elections. As far as the Italian-American community of Philadelphia was concerned, all the major stimuli to voting (candidates' ethnic appeal, the balanced-ticket strategy, the distribution of patronage on an ethnic basis, the renewal of party competition, and the repeal of the most burdensome electoral registration requirements) were in place only by the mid-1930s.

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