Title:
Civic capital and social distancing: evidence from the response to COVID-19 in Italy and Germany

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Abstract:
Social distancing can succeed in slowing the spread of COVID-19 if citizens voluntary comply with it and internalize the cost of their mobility on others. How do civic values mediate this process? Using data on individual mobility across Italian provinces we document that, after the start of the pandemic, mobility declined disproportionately more in areas with higher civic capital. This pattern holds even before the national lockdown - when no police enforcement was in place - and is not driven by higher risk of contagion or differences in healthcare capacity. We find consistent results for Germany where social distancing measures have been generally milder and citizens had greater discretion to manage their mobility.

Data Description:
We use daily data on the number of movements per capita in each Italian province and German district between February and April 2020. We combine this information with various proxies of civic capital commonly used in the literature. For Italy we use the number of blood donations (per 10,000 people), a survey-based measure of trust in others, and a measure of newspaper readership. For Germany the number of organ donors per capita, a survey-based measure of trust in others, the number of sport clubs per capita. Data on individual mobility are based on phone location tracking that records the number of movements an individual makes during the day from home (identified as the place where an individual regularly spends the night) to work or to other places such as shops, bars, restaurants, gyms, etc. and vice versa, with each trip from one place to another counting as one movement.

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