

Small States Challenges to democracy

Republic of San Marino

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Small States

The quality of democracy in the country

Preliminary considerations

- Geographically and culturally San Marino is very close to Italy and many issues related to democracy should be placed in a broader “Italian” context.
- Given the limited size of San Marino, “national dimension” and “regional dimension” coincide.
- Many international surveys about democracy do not include San Marino.
- It isn’t correct to automatically transfer Italian data and observations to San Marino, even if some situations are similar.
- The main characteristic of how democracy is exercised in San Marino can be defined as “**short chain**”.

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Preliminary considerations:

What does Short Chain mean ?

- There is closeness between the representatives and those represented (in a small country like San Marino the ratio between the elected to Parliament and the electors is very small when compared to bigger countries – e.g. It is 1 to 570 in San Marino and 1 to more than 50.000 in Italy).
- Many electors know the elected personally because of friendship, kinship ties, etc.
- It's very common and usual to meet representatives in everyday-life.
- The relationship between representatives and represented is a direct relationship.
- If we consider other institutions besides the Parliament, the above issues are even more relevant.

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- Comparative tools and indexes (1 of 2):
 - Freedom House assigns a very high score to San Marino (global freedom score: 95/100) suggesting that some minor problems exist only in relation to corruption, under-representation of women in politics, and journalists that are subject to heavy fines for defamation (this can encourage self-censorship).
 - San Marino scores the maximum in all the indicators except in category mentioned above, where it obtains 3 out of 4.
 - Polity IV, V-dem project, The Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy index, Trust in political institutions don't consider San Marino.
 - According to the qualitative Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2019 (United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor), San Marino is characterized by a high level of democracy and respect of human rights; (available at the Internet address:
<https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/san-marino/>)

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- Comparative tools and indexes (2 of 2):
 - The GRECO (GRoupe d'États contre la Corruption - Group of State Against Corruption - Council of Europe) Report 2019's conclusion states:
“GRECO congratulates San Marino for the measures taken to respond effectively to all recommendations regarding the financing of political parties”

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“Subjective” measures of the quality of democracy (1 of 6)

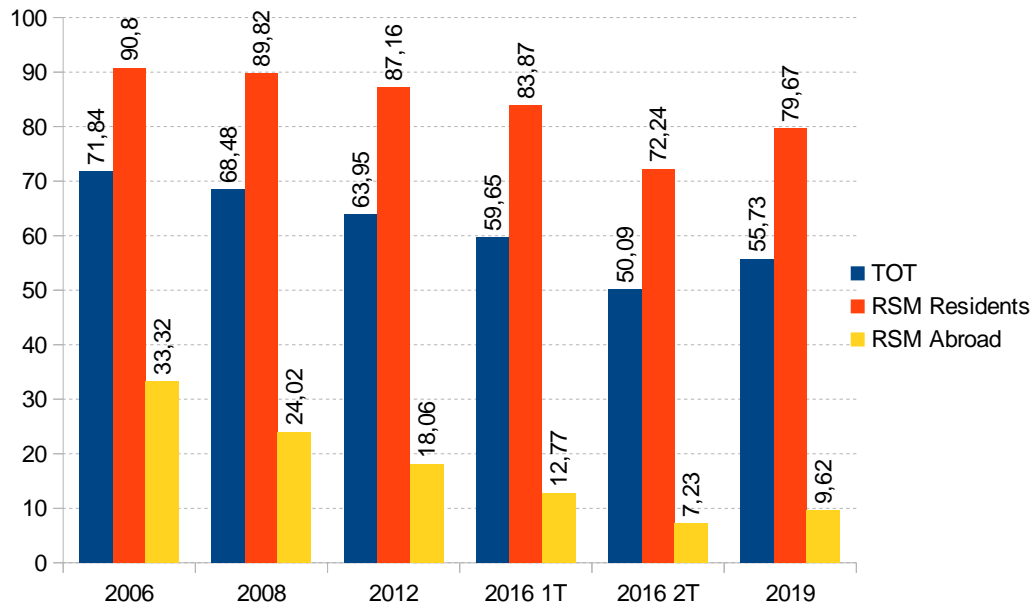
San Marino does not produce studies or surveys to measure the citizen’s perception of democracy; therefore, we will have to resort to indicators such as electoral participation.

The following slides report the participation rates for the general election over the period 2006 - 2019 and to the referendums held from 2008 to 2019.

The participation rates are reported for the Total and separately for Residents and citizens Living abroad, and the latter represent more than 1/3 (34%) of eligible voters.

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“Subjective” measures of the quality of democracy (2 of 6)

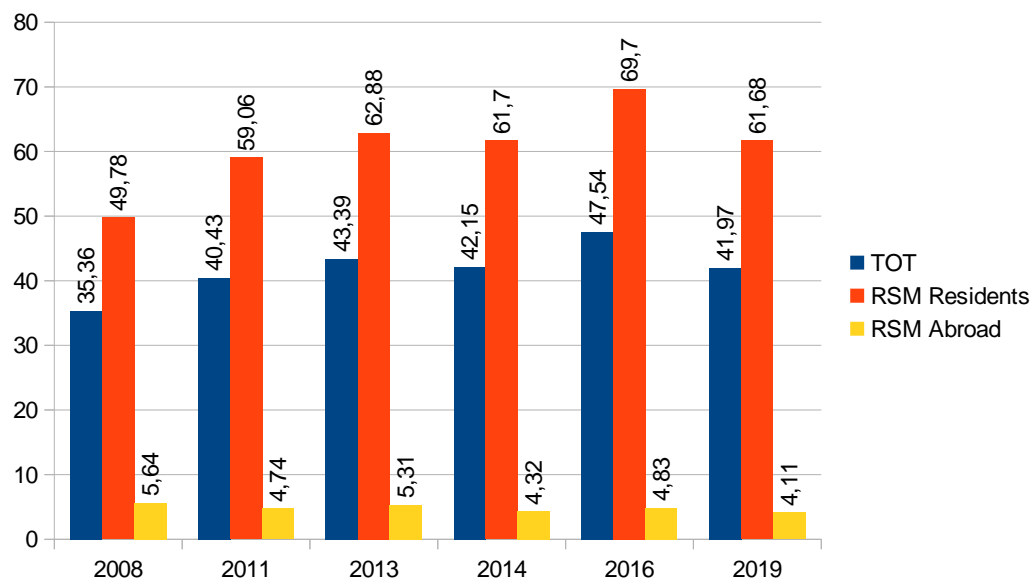


General Elections (participation rate)

- With the exception of 2016, the rate of total participation steadily declines from 2006 to 2019, (from 71.8% to 55.7%, – 16 percentage points).
- The rate of participation of the residents is much higher than that of those living abroad and the decline has been less relevant (- 11 percentage vs. - 24points).
- The rate of participation to General election in San Marino is 8 percentage points higher than that in Italy.

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“Subjective” measures of the quality of democracy (3 of 6)



Referendums (percentage of participation)

- In this case data show an increase of the total rate of participation from 2008 to 2016 (+ 12 percentage points) and a decrease from 2016 to 2019 (- 5,5 percentage points) .
- If we consider only residents, the variations appear more relevant (+ 20 percentage points from 2008 to 2016, and – 8 percentage points from 2016 to 2019).
- Compared with Italy, these percentages are much higher. In Italy the rates of participation of the last three referendums (2009, 2011 and 2016) were 23%, 55% and 31%, respectively

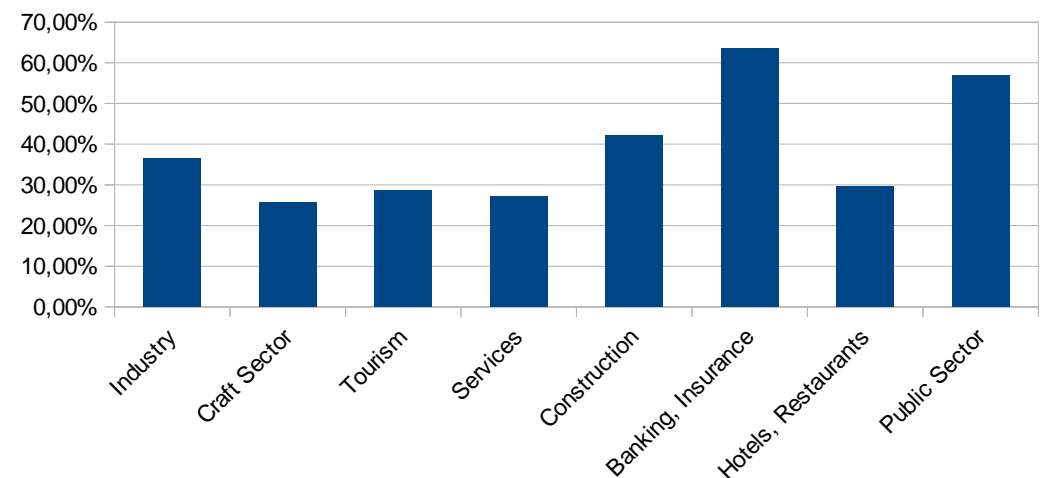
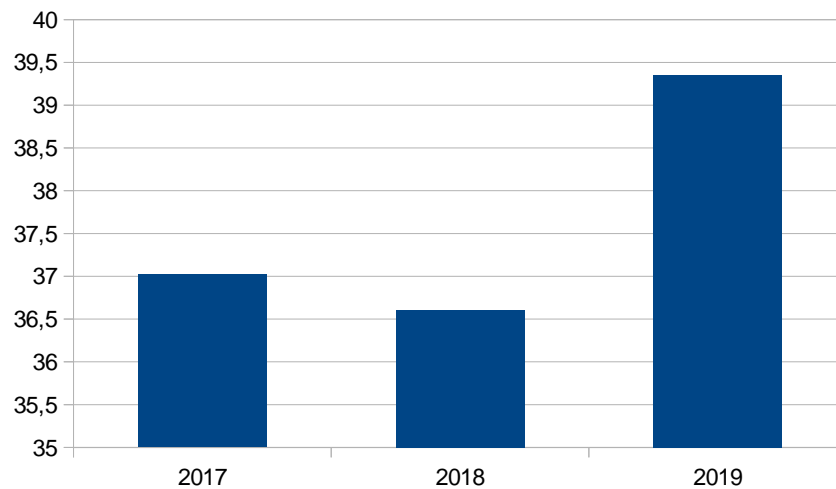
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“Subjective” measures of the quality of democracy (4 of 6)

Presence of Trade Unions

In San Marino there are three Trade Unions: the San Marino Confederation of Labour (CSDL), the Democratic Confederation of San Marino Workers (CDLS), the San Marino Union of Workers (USL). Totally they have 8214 members (2019). The rate of unionization is 39.35%.

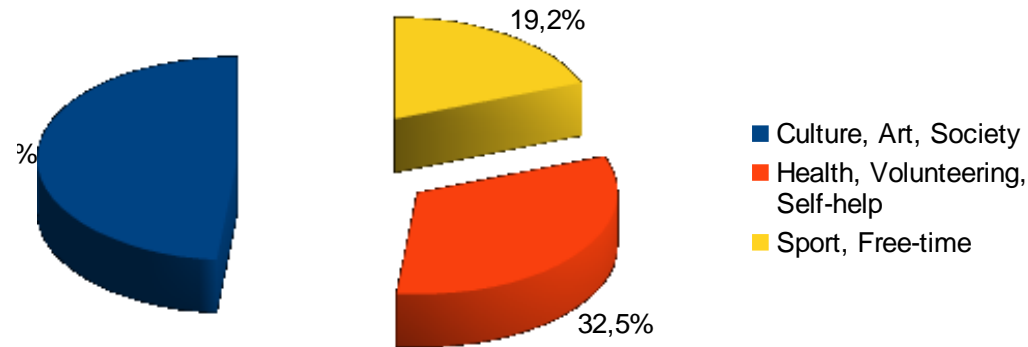
The following tables report the evolution of unionization rate in the last three years (on the left) and the rate of unionization in the different sectors of activities (2019) (on the right).



Small States “Subjective” measures of the quality of democracy (5 of 6)

Associations

In the Republic of San Marino there are 120 associations operating in several fields of activities as described in the following Graph:



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“Subjective” measures of the quality of democracy (6 of 6)

Conclusions:

In conclusion, San Marino is characterized by:

- rates of participation in general elections and referendums higher than those of other European countries (e.g. Italy);
- a rate of unionization higher than that of other European countries (e.g. close to 40% vs. 33% in Italy);
- a huge number of associations with a relevant number of members.

These data strongly suggests that in San Marino the trust in democratic institutions is holding up quite well despite the crisis that is affecting all European countries. It must be considered that the limited dimension and population of the Republic and the "short chain" can favor a greater social control.

Obviously, targeted quantitative and qualitative research could provide more accurate and reliable information than the data we have reported in the previous slides.

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Social cleavages

- What kind of political/social cleavage exist in the country?
 - In San Marino there is no evidence of social conflicts. As mentioned in the report presented in Luxembourg, no citizen is in absolute poverty; only 2.1% of families face economic difficulties, but there are measures aimed to support their income.
 - Foreigners represent 1.1% of total population, and 90% are Italian.
 - The only possible source of social conflict could be constituted by the high presence of cross-border workers who make up almost 32% of total employment.
 - The political system is characterized by the presence of numerous parties and this leads to the frequent renewal of the structure of the parties. There is a clear alternation between governments. Obviously the debate, even heated, between political forces exists but is contained within the democratic discussion.

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Mobilisation of anti-democracy sentiment

- The main issue that could mobilize anti-democratic sentiment is corruption. Relatively recent events, connected to serious mistakes in the management of economic institutions, may have increased the climate of distrust towards the institutions.
- San Marino shares with other European countries a widespread sense of distrust and pessimism toward politics, while present uncertainties contribute to worsen the situation. However the risk that these feelings could mobilize anti-democratic sentiments are, at the moment, very low.

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Corruption and inefficiency

Preamble

- The 2019 GRECO Report states that San Marino needs to introduce different measures with recommendations on corruption offenses.
- Freedom House points out that San Marino doesn't reach the maximum score on the issue of corruption.
- San Marino has only very recently exited from the black list of countries with privileged taxation.

Considerations

- There are also some indications that San Marino citizens feel that corruption and inefficiency are the biggest issues that the Republic must confront (e.g. some focus groups conducted in 2019 with Trade Unions workers).
- This situation certainly influences the political debate and leads to frequent government crisis, but it is not so severe to endanger the democratic system.

Small States Populism

- Compared to other European realities, in San Marino populism manifests itself "under the radar". It exists but it remains at the individual level; at present, no structured groups are giving voice to populist sentiments.
- It is likely that the proximity to Italy will lead some people to join populist groups in the nearby Italian territory.
- No party presents populist-type political programs; indeed all political forces indicate populism as an "enemy to be defeated". Neither inside nor outside the parliament political groups similar to the Italian Lega are present.
- At the moment populism appears to be a problem just because of the position of San Marino within the European context but does not seem to have concrete roots in the country yet.

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Extremism and extremist parties

- Similar considerations can be expressed for extremist parties. In San Marino there are no extremist parties or groups, unlike in Italy where extremism is manifested by right-wing movements that find "political support" in parties sitting in Parliament.
- It is possible that some San Marino citizens adhere to extremist parties or groups active in Italy, but their number is certainly very limited.
- Furthermore, it is possible that traditional parties have extreme fringes that proclaim extremist ideas but, even in this case, their strength is very limited and the ideas expressed are not part of the political orientation of the party.
- The problem, as with populism, is linked to the Italian and European context in which San Marino is inserted and which, in the long run, could lead to emulation phenomena.

Small States Democracy and COVID-19

- The measures adopted, in line with Italy, were aimed at containing the spread of the virus through:
 - limitation of people's mobility
 - suspension of events, demonstrations, meetings etc.
 - regulations for the workplace
 - information to citizens
 - prevention
 - Monitoring
- Attention was paid to avoid power concentration in the hands of the executive, abuse of power and violation of human rights.
- In general, citizens showed a high sense of responsibility; some discontent and protests were recorded, albeit very limited and not in organized forms.

Conclusions

- To understand the way in which democracy is interpreted and evaluated in San Marino, it is necessary to use the interpretative key of the "short chain". As already explained, this means that political relations very often take place in a "face to face" logic.
- The strength of this feature is that it can give rise to a sort of direct democracy where the representatives have the opportunity to understand the needs and opinions of those represented.
- The peculiarity of this model is that it can give rise to phenomena of clientelism and lead to a democracy "hostage to pressure groups".