

Social customs and demographic change: The case of godparenthood in Catholic Europe

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Abstract

This article analyzes social norms regulating selection of godparents in Italy and France and how they will be affected by demographic change. On the grounds of Vatican statistics and of the World Values Survey, it demonstrates that the vast majority of children in Catholic Europe are baptised and that birth rituals are considered important even by non-believers. Relying on historical data, it shows that the custom of selecting godparents from among kinsmen, currently dominant, is a recent development. A new survey about selection of godparents in Italy and France, conducted for this study, shows that godparents are chosen not for religious, but for social-relational reasons. Selection of kinsmen is the norm, with uncles and aunts being the majority choice. For Italy, choice determinants are explored by means of multinomial regressions. The results are contrasted with demographic change to show that in lowest-low countries current godparenthood models are bound to disappear.

Keywords

godparenthood, godparents, spiritual kinship, demographic change, social change, social customs, social norms, baptism, lowest-low fertility

1. Introduction

Despite secularization, the ritual act of baptism maintains its importance in European Catholic countries. If the proportion of baptized children has decreased over the past twenty years in the majority of these countries, this decline has been quite slow and most of the newborn children still receive the first sacrament of the Catholic Church. This trend is not surprising. First of all, it is a well-known fact that the religious ‘rites of passage’ are the most resilient sign of belonging to a denomination. Even those who do not define themselves as true believers are generally reluctant to totally abandon these ritual forms signalling cultural attachment to an inherited community, grounded in society and family (Garelli, 1991). Secondly, it is a mistake to think that secularization implies the end of ritual needs (Fellous, 2001; Dianteill et al., 2004). Even urban-educated, socially-advanced individuals want to formalize the main changes of their personal or familial life-course with some traditional –or invented– solemnities, in which relatives and friends are involved. Baptism fits very well with this goal, firstly because since ancient times it is the ritual used across Europe to celebrate the birth of a child. Secondly, because during the ceremony some people other than the father, the mother or the child are designated and honoured: the godparents. In the past, the Catholic Church even recognized a specific kind of kinship (‘spiritual’ kinship) between the baptized and his or her parents. The notion of spiritual kinship disappeared during the 20th century, while godparenthood lost part of its relevance. However, godparents are still essential actors at baptism, playing a key ritual function. In many instances they are considered important connections with whom a formal, ritualized social tie is established. As a result, they still have a real social relevance in Catholic Europe as well as in areas accepting other versions of the Christian religion (Alfani, 2009a; Alfani and Gourdon, 2010b). Godparenthood, though, has been studied only rarely, and almost exclusively with regard to the past. This article intends to explore, for the first time, social norms regulating choice of godparents today, by means of a survey accomplished by the authors in Italy and France.

Section 2 discusses recent developments in the practice of baptism across Catholic Europe on the base of Vatican statistics and of the World Values Survey, demonstrating that this practice is still very important for Europeans belonging to any Christian confession (and even, it seems, to many non-believers). Section 3 recapitulates key points in the history of godparenthood, showing that current social norms are the result of endogenous developments that began two to three centuries ago. As a consequence, these cannot be simply dismissed as ‘traditional behaviour’ but need to be understood as the result of fairly recent social and demographic developments. Section 4 presents the survey and the data collected for nowadays Italy and France, analyzing it by means of descriptive statistics. It shows that choice of godparents from within kin is dominant, and that only rarely are the religious duties of the godparents taken into account. Section 5 explores strategies of selection of godparents from within kinship by means of multinomial logistic regressions, identifying key explanatory variables. It also relates current social strategies to demographic change, suggesting that in countries such as Italy, with their low fertility, choices about godparents are bound to change in the near future.

2. The continued importance of baptisms and rituals of birth in Western Europe

There are no official state statistics about the number of children born alive receiving Catholic baptism. The only available data are given by the Church in its *Statistical Yearbook (Annuario Statisticum Ecclesiae)*, where information about the annual number of baptisms coming from every diocese of the world is collected and aggregated by country. Until the 19th century, babies were baptised immediately after birth, in the place where they were born. This is no longer true, given that now an increasing proportion of children is baptized after the first year of life, and often not in their birthplace. In 2008, the proportion of Catholic baptisms of people over seven years old was 1.1% in Italy, 2.6% in Spain and 6.3% in France. Vatican statistics enabled us to calculate only an

approximation of the annual proportion of baptized children. Assuming that the mean age at baptism equals to six months and that births are evenly distributed during the year, we calculated the proportion of baptized children as the ratio between the number of baptisms celebrated in a country and half of the live births occurred in the same year plus half of those occurred the previous year. Results for a selected group of Catholic countries are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1 about here

Even if baptism is no longer a universal rite as was almost the case for Catholics in the 1960s and 1970s, the share of children actually being baptized is still substantial. Around 2008, the last year for which data is available, children being baptized were still about 80% of the total in Italy and 70% in Spain and Austria. In Poland, the proportion of baptized children increased slightly after the election of Pope John-Paul II (1978) and during the crisis of the Communist regime in the 1980s. By the 2000s, Catholicism had been restored as an essential element of the Polish national identity, which also resulted, around 2008, in 95% of babies being baptized. This is not without saying that in many Western European countries a slow decline in the proportion of baptized children occurred during the last decades. Secularization is not the only explanation for this. Part of the decline can be attributed to recent immigration of non-Catholic people, for example Orthodox Eastern European immigrants in Italy or Muslims in Spain, who have their own religious rituals of birth. For the Italian case since 1998 we took into account the presence of the children born to non-Catholic foreign mothers. Without them, the proportion of baptized children remains around 85% and the decline of the 2000s disappears, as seen in the divergence of the curves 'Italy' and 'Italy(*)' in Figure 1. In France, the proportion of baptized children is much lower than in other Catholic countries. This is partly due to a longstanding anti-clerical tradition coming from the French Revolution and to a dominant secularized culture promoted by the Republican state since the 19th century (Willaime, 1998). In particular, the French Catholic Church experienced a deep crisis between 1965 and 1975 (Pelletier, 2002).¹ Even in France, Catholic decline did not result in the end of birth rituals, as shown by the increasing success of civil baptisms (*parrainages républicains*) organized by a growing number of municipal administrations since the 1980s to answer to the demands of many French parents wanting to publicly give their children godparents without any involvement of the Church (Gourdon, 2005; Mandret-Degeilh, 2007).

The World Values Survey contains a question about the importance of holding religious services at birth. For most people in Europe the answer is clearly positive. Looking more precisely at Italian and French national results, we see that proportions remained stable during the period 1990-1999 (Table 1) and that no strong opposition to religious services at birth can be detected in the younger generations, even if obviously the older ones are keener to consider them as important. Comparing the figures for Italy and France shows that Italians were more likely to answer that it is important to hold religious services at birth than the French in 1990 (83% and 63% respectively). In 1999, the proportions are not much different. The Italian and French samples show, respectively, a slight increase (86% in 1999 against 83% in 1990), and a slight decrease (60% in 1999 against 63% in 1990). In both samples and both years, women attribute more importance to religious services at birth than men. Interestingly, in both samples there is an increase in the proportion of young respondents (15-29 years-old) answering positively the question about whether religious services at birth are important (from 70% and 50% in 1990 to 79.5% and 51% among Italian and French men respectively; from 85% and to 61% to 86% and 64% among Italian and French women).

Table 1 about here

¹ As in other Western European countries, the growing presence of Muslims in the French population played a role. In 2003, 6% of the French population declared they belonged to the Muslim faith. CSA survey, 'Les Français et leurs croyances', March 2003.

Table 2 shows that the strong and almost stable interest for a religious ritualization of birth is even more visible among the Catholic respondents in other European countries (e.g. 96% and 97% in 1990 and 1999 respectively in Poland; 82% and 84.5% in Spain). Furthermore, it concerns also Protestant respondents (59% and 64% in 1990 and 1999 in Sweden; 65% and 70% in Germany) or Orthodox (91% and 77.5% in 1990 and 1999 in Bulgaria). Interestingly, respondents who do not belong to any religious denomination also state that it is important to hold religious services at birth (84.5% and 86% in the Netherlands in 1990 and 1999; 64% and 70% in Great Britain).

Table 2 about here

3. Godparents in the past

In the Middle Ages, both the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches attributed specific roles to godparents. They had a ritual function during baptism, replying to the priest's questions in place of the child.² Secondly, they were expected to act as tutors in the Christian education of the baptized, a role which they shared with his or her parents. Lastly, they were witness to the baptism itself, and as such could be called to testimony (Alfani, 2009a: 2, 15-16). Furthermore, godparents became relations of both their godchildren and their godchildren's parents, by means of spiritual kinship. According to the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, baptism was a second birth, a 'spiritual' birth that happened within a group of relatives normally different from that based on blood relations: the spiritual family, of which godparents were key members (Guerreau-Jalabert, 1995; Alfani, 2009a; Alfani, Castagnetti and Gourdon, 2009; Alfani and Gourdon, 2010b).

Whatever the beliefs of theologians and Church authorities, rarely were godparents really selected to fulfil their 'official' roles of tutors. A growing literature suggests that godparents were considered very important indeed, but also that they were chosen according to the parents' interest much more than for fostering the well-being of the newborn, let alone ensuring his or her Christian education (Alfani and Gourdon, 2006; 2010a). It is also for this reason that in much of Western Europe social customs developed that allowed selection of many godparents for each baptism, notwithstanding the opposition of the Catholic Church whose rulings on the matter were largely ignored (Alfani, 2009a).

In the 16th century, the Reformation fostered deep innovations in how baptism and godparenthood were managed. Luther suggested that the notion of 'spiritual kinship' did not make sense on the grounds of the Holy Scriptures and had to be cancelled entirely. However, he also suggested that godparents should be kept, given that they played an important role as witnesses to the ceremony and, more importantly, as tutors of the Christian education of their godchildren (Bossy, 1985; Spierling, 2005; Alfani, 2009a). Calvin favoured a more radical approach, given that he tried to eliminate godparents entirely, to be replaced at baptism by the parents of the infant. However, a proof of the importance attributed to godparenthood is the fact that Calvin was faced with such a strong popular opposition that he had to reconsider, finally acknowledging godparents (Spierling, 2005). A similar attempt to eliminate godparents, also doomed to fail, was pursued by the English puritans in the 17th century (Coster, 2002). As a matter of fact, godparents continued to play an important social and economic role in the part of Europe accepting the Reformation, and were selected according to strategies very similar to those common in the Middle Ages (see, for Germany, Sabeau, 1998 and for Sweden, Ericsson, 1989; 2000; for Iceland, Gunnlaugsson and Guttormsson, 2000). The loss of *theological* relevance, then, did not also imply a loss of *social* relevance (Alfani, 2009a; Alfani and Gourdon, 2010a; 2010b).

² This had not been necessary in the early centuries of Christianity, when baptism of adults was the standard procedure (Lynch, 1986; Alfani, 2009a).

In Catholic Europe, the Council of Trent (1545-1563), which started the so-called ‘Counter-Reformation’, proved much more radical than Luther in altering ancient godparenthood practices. This was obtained chiefly by stating that one godparent per baptism was enough, be it male or female, but a maximum of two of different gender were acceptable: one godfather and one godmother. Similar rules had been unsuccessfully introduced before, but now the Catholic Church proved able to impose them in effective ways, notwithstanding the attempts at resistance of European populations that were unwilling to face the crisis of complex social networks based on spiritual kinship ties. As regards spiritual kinship itself, the Council of Trent limited and regulated its extent (and consequently, the extent of the impediments to marriage) by stating that spiritual kinship existed only between godfathers and godmothers on one side, parents of the baptised child on the other; between the child and his godfathers and godmothers; between the child and who baptised him or her (usually the priest). Previously other ties of spiritual kinship were recognized, for example between godchildren and the children of their godparents.

The baptismal ritual used today by the Catholic Church is the direct descendant of the one defined by the Council of Trent in 1563 and the *Rituale Romanum* of 1614. Only recently, as a result of Vatican Council II of 1962-65 and the related *Ordo baptismi parvulorum* of 1969, has the Catholic Church modified the ritual by clarifying and strengthening the role of the baptized’s parents, to the detriment of godparents who had been the only ones mentioned by earlier rituals (Revel, 2004). As regards spiritual kinship, already in 1917 a new Code of Canon Law reduced the extension of spiritual kinship by recognizing that it existed only between godfather, godmother and the minister of baptism on one side, and the baptized on the other side. A later version of the Code, introduced in 1983 and also strongly influenced by Vatican Council II, does not even mention spiritual kinship. As a result, this social institution has entirely disappeared from the Catholic Church, while it still exists among the Orthodox (Alfani, 2009a; Alfani and Gourdon, 2010b).

As is shown by the continued relevance of godparenthood under the Reformation, neither the disappearance of spiritual kinship nor the alteration of the baptismal ritual prevents godparents from being perceived as relevant connections, nor do they change the need of selecting godparenthood according to ‘good’ strategies. These strategies, though, have changed over time, for complex reasons that are still largely to be explored. In some cases, the innovations introduced by the Churches played a role. This is what happened in Catholic Europe after the Council of Trent when, due to the new rule forcing selection of just one godfather and one godmother, godparenthood tended to become, for a period at least, an instrument to build and manage social clienteles (Alfani, 2009a). This article is especially interested in a more recent development, one which clearly differentiates current social norms from the Medieval and Early Modern ones: the selection of godparents from among family and kin.

The data available for Western Europe consistently suggests that, during the late Middle Ages and the Early Modern period, godparents were usually chosen outside kin. In 16th century Italy, for example, godparents who were also relations were well below 10% of the total, maybe even below 5%. This situation began to change in the late 18th and the 19th century, when kinsmen began to be chosen as godfathers and godmothers more and more frequently (Figures 2a and 2b) (Alfani, 2008b; 2009b; Munno, 2008). The few available studies about godparenthood in 19th and 20th century Europe, both in Catholic and Protestant areas, suggest a similar trend (for Spain, Pitt-Rivers, 1958; 1971; for Portugal, Silva, 2007; for Germany, Sabeau, 1998; for Sweden, Bringéus, 1971). However, if we know the general direction of the transformation, we are still uncertain about both its causes and its chronology.

About the causes of the transformation, factors have been proposed such as the crisis of traditional forms of community life from the 17th century or the development within the bourgeoisie of a new vision of the family later spreading to lower social strata. In France, the precocity of intra-familial

or intra-kin choices might have also been helped by the customs concerning name-giving.³ However, at present none of these or the other factors mentioned in the literature seems able to fully explain what is still a mysterious process (Alfani and Gourdon, 2010b).

Figures 2a and 2b about here

About the chronology of the transformation, the few available studies suggest that it was a process common to the whole of Western Europe, and not only to the Catholics. However, it began in different moments according to the area, and developed in partially different ways. In Northern Italy, it seems that only after World War II did selection of godparents from among kin become prevalent. In Southern Italy this seems to have happened even later, such as in the Sannio region where the 50% threshold of within-kin choices was exceeded only after the 1980s (Palumbo, 1991, 134-137). In France, on the other hand, the information collected by folklorists about the last part of the 19th century supports the idea that in rural areas relatives were preferred as godparents (grandparents for the firstborn; uncles and aunts, followed by cousins or older brothers and sisters for the others). This has been largely confirmed by historical and anthropological research on the 19th and 20th century (Zonabend, 1978 for North Burgundy; Segalen, 1985 for Lower Brittany; Fine, 1984 for the Pays de Sault). The French situation was the result of a process that had begun in earlier epochs, with detailed genealogical studies suggesting that in some villages kin could account for 80% of godparents already by the 18th century (Bardet, 2009). Also for France, though, these figures are much higher than those to be found for the Middle Ages or the 16th and 17th centuries.⁴

We can safely assume that, during the 19th century, the process of increasing choices from among kin was influenced by the spread of the new ‘bourgeois’ ideology of the family suggesting intimacy, love and affection (and not economic interest, or at least not blatantly) as ‘relational virtues’ within kinship (Alfani and Gourdon, 2010a). The process, though, had begun earlier, and was to be completed only in the following century. It was influenced by the demographic transition, but it was not caused by it, nor did the end of the transition stop the ongoing developments. The prevalence of choices of godparents from kin that, as will be shown, characterizes recent decades, should not be regarded as ‘normal’ or as the fruit of an unspecified ‘tradition’. On the contrary, it is a fairly novel fact, and needs to be understood and researched as such – especially considering that the current situation is, from a demographic point of view, intrinsically fragile, especially in countries with lowest-low fertility.

4. An ad-hoc survey for the study of godparenthood today

This paper makes use of the results of surveys, completed by the authors themselves, about the selection of godparents in modern Italy and France.⁵ These surveys were devised as a pilot project, aimed at suggesting that international studies on godparenthood may be relevant and that this topic offers a novel perspective from which to look at current transformations of society prompted by demographic change. The surveys have been conducted by asking baptized people to specify the

³ Considering that the newborn received the first name of the godfather or the godmother, choosing a godparent from blood relations could make it possible to preserve the ancestral onomastic stock.

⁴ Among the Protestants of Preuilley-sur-Claise (central France), during the 17th century kinsmen accounted for 37-44% of all godparents (Cousseau, 1993). For Provence, choices from kin began to rise in the 17th century, but the 30% threshold of godparents selected from kin was exceeded only at the end of the 18th century (Cousin, 2009). The only case study available for 16th century France, concerning Aubervilliers near Paris, suggests that relations accounted for about 20% of godparents in 1552-1614 (Berteau et al., 2010). While the figure is between two and four times what was to be found in the same period in Northern Italy, it still accounts for fairly uncommon choices.

⁵ A preliminary and partial version of the Italian database (about one-third the size of the final database presented here) was used in Alfani, 2008a.

characteristics of their godfather and godmother (Was his or her godparent a relation? Of which kind? Or was he or she a friend, or colleague, or neighbour, etc., of the parents?), some key information about the modalities of occurrence of baptism (Are you baptized? Where did the baptism take place? Was baptism followed by a party?) and the nature of interaction with the godparents (Do you see regularly your godfather/godmother? Do you receive gifts from them? See Table B in the Appendix).

Initially, a question about perception of the relationship with godparents ('How would you define your godparents?', with different options from a preset list plus the possibility of specifying freely) was also included. A first round of questionnaires, distributed in 2006-2007, suggested that, to explore in a satisfying way the social norms regulating selection of godparents, complete information was needed about the structure of the family at the time of baptism and about the availability of close kin (how many living uncles/aunts and grandparents). As a result, the questionnaire was revised so that questions about perception of godparents (to which a large part of the respondents had not answered, see later) were sacrificed in favour of questions about the structure of the family. The final questionnaire, which was distributed in Italy in 2007-2008, is reproduced in Figure A in the Appendix. It should be noted that the number of questions included in the questionnaire had to be compatible with the possibility of filling in the form in a short time. A one-page space constraint was therefore respected throughout the study. The structure and the scope of the questionnaires was also influenced by the key question we aspired to answer, which was about the prevalence of choices of godparents from within kin. In fact, we wanted to verify whether the trend observed in historical studies continued into the contemporary period (it did).

Respondents were recruited among university students in both Italy and France.⁶ While in France the questionnaire was asked in different places (Paris, Bordeaux, Tours, Amiens), in Italy it was asked only of students enrolled at Bocconi University in Milan. However, the national coverage of Italian respondents is ensured by the long-lasting tradition of Bocconi University to attract students from all parts of the country.⁷ Respondents have a mean age of 20 years in both samples, and their baptism was celebrated in the decade 1981-1991.

The resulting databases are sizeable. If we consider Catholic baptized individuals who were born in the period 1981-1991, our sample consists of 687 cases for Italy (304 answered the first version of the questionnaire, and 383 the second) and 204 for France.⁸ In the Italian sample there are six cases of multiple godparents (four cases with two godmothers, one with two godfathers and one with three godmothers), a rare occurrence that requires a special dispensation to be obtained from the relevant bishop. These cases were excluded from the analysis. Also, some respondents (9.25% in Italy and 0.98% in France), while reporting that they received Catholic baptism, did not report any information about either godparent. Excluding those cases, the final sample consists of 618 cases of Catholic baptisms in Italy and 202 in France. The sample provides us with descriptive information about the social norms regulating godparenthood today in Italy and France. The data from the second questionnaire also allow a model to be built to analyze strategies of selection (Section 5). As shall be seen, the descriptive statistics show striking similarities between Italy and France. This

⁶ Easy access to students representative of specific age groups induced us to devise our survey as one in which the respondents were the baptized, and not the parents. There are advantages in this, including the possibility of studying the perception and relevance of the godparent-godchild relationship, but future surveys might prefer submitting questionnaires to parents of baptized children and not directly to the baptized. This kind of questionnaire would be especially relevant for studying strategies of selection from outside kin, when for example the economic interest of the parents may have been crucial, a fact of which the baptized might not be aware.

⁷ For example in academic year 2007-8, when we began our survey, 58.3% of Bocconi students came from the North of Italy (of these, 34.9% were from Lombardy), 12.3% from the Centre, and 23.3% from the South (the others were foreigners or Italians coming from abroad). While this distribution does not perfectly reflect the Italian population, it allows for testing the statistical significance of the area of origin of the baptized.

⁸ 336 questionnaires were collected in the French survey and 716 in the Italian one. In France, the share of respondents who declared they were not baptized or not Catholic was much larger.

suggests that our national samples do not present substantial distortions due to selection of respondents or, at least, that our samples are not distorted as regards the main questions we wish to answer. Future enquiries might differentiate respondents according to educational or income level of their parents, but this is beyond the scope of this study.

Table 3 clearly shows the absolute preference for selection of godparents among kinsmen. In Italy, relations account for 86% of all godfathers and 85% of godmothers; in France, for 88% and 71%. (For regional differences in Italy, see Table C in the Appendix.) In both cases, the largest share of relation godparents comes from uncles (54% and 59% in Italy and France, respectively) and aunts (50% and 48%). While in Italy, the second most frequent choice is grandfathers or grandmothers (17% and 18% respectively), in France grandparents represent only a marginal choice category (4%). This is somewhat surprising given that, in 19th century France, selection of grandparents as godparents was the standard, at least for the firstborn (Gourdon, 2001), while there is no proof in the literature that a similar social norm ever developed in Italy.

Table 3 about here

Joint description of both godparents (Table 4) suggests that godfathers and godmothers are selected symmetrically among kin or non-relative networks. In France, almost all respondents (99%) have both a godmother and a godfather; in Italy, this is true for just 71% of respondents, as 16% only have a godfather and the remaining 14% only have a godmother. According to our data, these cases are concentrated in the North-East and in the South of Italy, where 40% and 46% of baptized children have a single godparent. These differences are consistent with what we know from some case studies for the 19th century (Alfani, 2009a: 214-216; Munno, 2005), which suggest that we are faced with ancient social norms determining long-standing regional differences in behaviour. In the Italian sample, then, only 368 individuals with non-missing information on the identification of both godparents have both a godmother and a godfather. Of these cases, the great majority have both godparents both selected among the kinship network (81%), followed by those who have both godparents selected among non-relatives (13.8%). Cases with one godparent selected from among relatives and the other among non-relatives are a small minority (5.1%). A similar symmetry is visible in the choice of godparents from among kin: an uncle and an aunt are simultaneously selected in 39.7% of cases, a grandfather and a grandmother in 12% of cases. In the French sample, among the 193 individuals having both godparents, the proportion of godparents selected from the kinship network is lower than in the Italian case (65.8%), while the share of respondents with both godparents selected among non-relatives is lower (5.7%) and different combinations of godparents account for 28.5% of all respondents. Symmetry in the choice of godparents from among kin can be found only in the case of uncles and aunts (33.2% of cases), the other choices being dispersed among the various other combinations. Less symmetry suggests greater freedom in selection, which could also be related to weaker family ties in France compared to Italy.

Table 4 about here

The first version of the questionnaire included a set of questions in which the respondent was asked to specify if he perceived his godfather/godmother as a religious or spiritual guide, a moral counsellor, a provider of psychological support or material help, a confidant, a complete stranger, and so on. The full list of the possible answers can be found in Figure 3; multiple choices were allowed. In Italy, the non-response rate on these questions was high (23% and 10% of for godfather and godmother respectively), while this was not the case in France (7% and 3%).

Figure 3 about here

Only in a minority of cases was the godparent perceived as a religious guide or moral counsellor. The first option in particular, the one that better corresponds to the theoretical finalities attributed to godparenthood by the Catholic Church, is around 5% for both godfathers and godmothers in both countries. This is not surprising given that the aspirations of Church authorities in this field have been frustrated for centuries. The most frequently chosen option is always 'friend', followed in Italy by 'moral counsellor' and 'provider of psychological help' while in France we find, for godfathers, 'provider of material/financial help' and 'moral counsellor' and, for godmothers, 'provider of psychological help' and 'moral counsellor'. It is possible that these differences correspond to a difference in perception between Italy and France (with relationships between godchildren and godparents being less formal and more 'friendly' in France than in Italy, or altogether more distant, given that the share of people answering that a godparent is to them 'a stranger' or 'an unknown' is markedly larger in France) and between godfathers and godmothers, the second group answering more frequently to a need for intimacy and general psychological support. However, the data currently available is not yet conclusive on this point. It is relevant, though, that the vast majority of the people answering 'other' specified that the tie was one of kinship (67% and 75% with respect to the godfather and godmother, respectively in Italy; 81% and 77% in France). For example, an Italian respondent defined his godfather, who was an uncle, as 'one of many relatives'; another respondent, with respect to his godmother, wrote 'she is my grandmother, I could not define her role in a different way'. Similarly, a French respondent wrote 'simply my aunt. The "godmother" title is only symbolic'.

These findings are consistent with the hypothesis formulated by recent literature on the history of godparenthood (Alfani, 2009a), according to which, when the tie of godparenthood overlaps one of kinship, the social and psychological meaning of godparenthood is almost entirely sterilized and practically stops being perceived. In other words, when godparenthood overlaps pre-existing ties with close kin, only rarely is it capable of providing any relational surplus or of modifying the social and psychological meaning of the kinship tie. The current prevailing custom of selecting godparents from among relations, then, is the final outcome of a key historical development of godparenthood which strongly differentiates the current institution from its Middle Ages and Early Modern equivalents, at least from the social-relational point of view. The reasons why certain relations are selected as godparents are therefore worthy of a specific analysis, presented in the next section.

5. Understanding the selection of godparents from among kin: a multinomial logistic regression

Using the subsample of Italian respondents for whom we have available information on the structure of the family at birth, it is possible to proceed to a regression analysis with the purpose of understanding which are the characteristics associated with the choice of a specific godparent. In particular, our aim is to understand under which conditions a godparent was selected from among kin. Future surveys could provide data that allow exploration of the reasons for selection of specific individuals from outside kin, but this is beyond the scope of this article. Instead, we aim to better understand the characteristics of the model of selection that the descriptive statistics showed to be largely prevalent in Italy and France, and probably in the rest of Europe as well. The main assumption that we want to test is whether the structure of the kinship network at birth has an influence on the criteria for selection of godparents. Are non-relatives chosen only when all close family members have been satisfied? Also, we are interested in exploring differences in godparent selection mechanisms between the South and the North of Italy.

To answer these questions, we rely on multinomial logistic regression. The dependent variable is a categorical variable describing which kind of godfather and which kind of godmother the

respondent has received. We consider four categories for the godfather, namely uncle, grandfather, other relative and the category non-relative, which encompasses all non-relative godfathers (neighbour, colleague and friend of the parents). Similarly, for the godmother, we consider as categories aunt, grandmother, other relative and non-relative. The choice of a four-category dependent variable comes from two main assumptions: first, that kin and non-relative relations are too different to be considered jointly, and secondly, that the uncle/aunt and grandfather/grandmother categories are too distinctive (and numerous enough) to justify their separate consideration. In fact, the selection of uncles/aunts is dominant today, while that of grandparents has dominated in some parts of Europe (e.g., France) in the past. Furthermore, it is quite frequent today that, when there are no uncles/aunts to be chosen, a grandparent is selected instead.

If, in principle, it is interesting to jointly analyze the choice of the godfather and the godmother, the limited sample size would prevent us going beyond a simple classification among relative and non-relative godparents. In fact, considering all possible combinations of choices would require a 16-category dependent variable, with some of the combinations being zero and some being representative of very few cases (see Table 4). Therefore, in order to fully exploit our data, we run separate models for the choice of the godfather and the choice of the godmother. The sample sizes for the two models differ because only 71% of the respondents have both godfather and godmother.

From the questionnaire we have data on the following covariates: the godchild's sex (1 if male, 0 if female –reference–), his/her birth order (1 if he/she is the first-born, 2 if second-born, etc.), number of uncles/aunts who were alive at the time of the baptism, number of grandfathers/grandmothers who were alive at the time of the baptism, whether the godchild had no uncles/aunts and grandfathers/grandmothers alive at the time of the baptism, and whether the godchild is from Southern Italy (1 if the region of birth is in Southern Italy –Regions of Abruzzo, Molise, Campania, Balisicata, Apulia, Calabria, Sicily and Sardinia–, 0 otherwise –reference–). To account for the fact that godchildren who are at lower birth orders have more uncles and aunts available to be chosen as godparents with respect to godchildren who are at higher birth orders, we also control for the interaction between the number of uncles/aunts available and the godchild's birth order. Descriptive statistics for the variables involved in the regression models are summarized in Table 5. The coefficients of covariates indicating that no uncle/aunt or grandfather/grandmother was alive at the time of baptism are constrained to be equal to zero in the equation contrasting uncle/aunt with non-relative and grandfather/grandmother with non-relative, respectively.

Table 5 about here

Results of the multinomial logistic regression for the choice of godfather and godmother are presented in Tables 6 and 7, respectively. Regression results are interpreted in terms of relative risk ratios (RRR). Results from the model for godfathers are discussed first. Gender differences in the choice of godfather are found only for the contrast between uncle and non-relative. Male godchildren are nearly twice as likely (RRR = 1.9) than female godchildren to have an uncle rather than a non-relative as a godparent, the other variables held constant. The likelihood of having a non-relative as godfather rather than an uncle increases, however, with the birth order of the godchild: for each subsequent birth order, the choice of a non-relative godfather is more than twice as likely (RRR = 0.48) than the choice of an uncle, controlling for availability of uncles at birth.

Table 6 about here

Table 7 about here

According to our estimates, the number of uncles alive at the time of the baptism is not associated with the selection of uncles as godfathers. This suggests that the number of uncles available is irrelevant, provided there is at least one available to be chosen. The unavailability of grandfathers is not related with the choice of uncles versus non-relatives. For the contrast 'grandfather vs non-relative', the relative risk of having a grandfather instead of a non-relative member as a godparent increases with the number of grandfathers alive at the time of baptism (RRR=2.64). Furthermore, the probability of selecting a grandfather rather than a non-relative increases when the godchild has no uncles available. The relative risk of choosing a grandfather rather than a non-relative as godfather for a child who has no living uncles increases almost eightfold (RRR=7.72) in comparison to godchildren who have at least one uncle available. We find a similar association in the equation contrasting other relatives to non-relative godparents (RRR=4.15). These estimates suggest that non-relatives are selected only when there are no close family members available to be chosen as godfathers and that, among family members, uncles have precedence over the others, including the grandfathers.

Finally, godfather selection strategies show a regional variation within Italy. The relative risk ratios comparing godchildren who were born in Southern Italy to those born in Central or Northern Italy assumes values below one for all the three contrasts. In particular, it is rarer to choose one of the godchild's two grandfathers as the godfather, with respect to a non-relative (RRR=0.24), but it is also less likely for other relatives (RRR=0.33) and uncles (RRR=0.36). This would seem surprising if one assumes that Southern Italy, more than the North, is characterized by the strong family ties typical of Mediterranean Europe (Reher, 1998). Such surprise is however misplaced, given that this North/South difference is entirely consistent with differences in the social norms described by the historical literature (See section 3), which suggests that Southern Italy was slower in accepting the 'new' custom of selecting godparents from within family and kin. Furthermore, this difference between Northern and Southern Italy can be explained, at least partially, by more frequent selection of godparents acting as patrons or protectors in the South, as suggested by anthropological studies on the *compari politici* (politicians often chosen often as godparents, Piselli 1987). Also in this case, we are faced with deeply enrooted and slowly changing cultural differences whose origins are the object of recent research (Alfani, 2009a; Alfani and Gourdon, 2010a). A third point to consider is that the implication that if the family is strong then godparents are chosen from within family is very probably false, given that historical evidence as well as our data seem to support the opposite: that is, that if the family is (relatively) weak then godparenthood is more frequently used to ritually reinforce family ties.

As regards godmothers, we do not find any statistically significant association between our covariates and the choice of the godmother. The only exception is the dummy variable indicating whether the godchild was born in Southern Italy. As observed for godfathers, also in this case it is less likely to choose a godmother among relative rather than non-relatives. Nonetheless, this association is not significant in the contrast 'aunt vs non-relative', and in general the model is not acceptable, the Independence of Irrelevant Alternatives (IIA) assumption is in fact violated. Also in this case, the finding is not surprising if placed in the perspective of demographic-historical literature suggesting that traditional Italian culture has always attributed less importance to godmothers than to godfathers, or at least, that the selection of godmothers has been less 'strategic' than selection of godfathers (Alfani, 2009a; 2010).

Overall, our analysis of the Italian case showed the absolute prevalence of a social model of godparent selection favouring uncles and aunts and explored its characteristics, notably as regards the impact on selection of the structure of the family. There is a final non-obvious implication of this that must be stressed. Historical research showed that this model developed slowly over time, probably from the 18th century but acquiring dominance only in the late 19th or 20th century. What we know of demographic trends in Italy in recent decades, however, suggests that this model is doomed and bound to disappear, or to change deeply, in the near future. Italy is the typical example

of a lowest-low fertility country (Kohler et al., 2002), having reached a minimum of 1.19 children per woman in 1995, followed by a slow increase to 1.41 by 2009. A consequence of this, which is usually overlooked, is that in a country of lone children, uncles and aunts tend to disappear. When the generations of lone children born in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s baptizes their offspring, they will not choose their own brothers and sisters to act as godparents. This will not be due to a change in their preferences or in social norms influencing their actions, but to constraints. It is well known that demographic change results in social change, but the specific perspective of godparenthood had never been considered before. Also, godparenthood is an angle from which to consider more generally how demographic change will affect forms of sociability and social interaction between generations. Does the lack of uncles and aunts reflect a lack of nephews for the older generation, and will this be perceived as a condition of deprivation? In other words, is there a need for inter-generational links that risks being unmet, affecting somehow the personal satisfaction or 'happiness' of the generations of lone children? Of course, more research on this point would be needed and we must be wary of stretching our argument too far. We can, however, wonder how selection of godparents will change in the future. Will grandparents, given that improvements in survival have been making them increasingly available and many are likely to be in good health at the time of baptism of their grandchildren, become the dominant choice? Our data hints at this, but what if the lack of ties prevails and godparenthood will be used to establish new formal ties out of family and kin? In this case, the social institution of godparenthood might have a bright future.

6. Conclusion

This article focused on the social institution of godparenthood, analyzing current selection of godparents in Italy and France in the light of historical developments. This topic is interesting for many reasons. First, because the vast majority of Europeans (Catholic or Protestant) continue to have their children baptized and to believe that birth rituals are important. To demonstrate this point we used a database built from Vatican statistics on Catholic baptisms and the World Values Survey, 1990-1999. Secondly, because godparenthood is the perfect field in which to explore how social norms affect individual choices and behaviours. Thirdly, because selection of godparents will be deeply affected by the demographic trends of recent decades, especially in countries that are or have been characterized by lowest-low fertility.

By analyzing the few case studies available on selection of godparents from within or outside kinship in the past, we concluded that the custom of choosing relations is fairly recent, and became common only during the 20th century. The current models of selection, both in Italy and France, which clearly favour family and kin to act as godparents, are not the result of ancient traditions but are something inherent to contemporary 'modern' societies. We analyzed this by means of a survey, conducted by ourselves, that was specifically aimed at clarifying the determinants of the choice of relations as godparents. The survey, however, also included questions about perceptions of the tie between godparents and godchildren. From these, we concluded that only in a minority of cases is the godparent perceived as a religious guide or moral counsellor. This is consistent with what we know about godparenthood since the Medieval and Early Modern times: the Catholic Church always tried to regulate this social institution that was born to absolve religious and ritual functions, but repeatedly failed to prevent it from being used for social, economic and relational reasons extraneous to religion.

For the Italian case, we analyzed the choice of godparents from within or outside kin by means of a multinomial logistic regression. We found statically significant results especially for godfathers. Uncles, when available, are the first to be chosen. If uncles are not available, then grandfathers are chosen. Birth order of the godchild is important because it affects availability and sex of previously not chosen kin, with newborn males more often given uncles as godparents than female newborns. We also found that selection of godparents from within close kin is less common in Southern than

in Northern Italy. This finding, which is related to cultural differences, might seem counter-intuitive. However, we argued that it is entirely consistent with what we know about the history of godparenthood as well as about the ‘vertical’ strategies of selection of godparents (to give protection or help) described by anthropologists for many Southern Italian regions.

The current situation, which took centuries to fully develop, is fragile and will probably be compromised by the demographic change which has occurred in recent decades. In fact, selection of godparents is one of the aspects of human life that are bound to be influenced by low and lowest-low fertility. In a country of lone children, with time uncles and aunts will disappear (Murphy, 2010; 2011). In Italy, for example, where fertility has been extremely low in the past, the current social norms suggesting selection of uncles and aunts as godparents will become unsustainable, simply because, for parents belonging to lowest-fertility generations, having any brothers or sisters is the exception. Our enquiry on godparenthood, then, not only allowed us to explore almost unknown aspects of social practice, but also to consider from a new perspective the social consequences of demographic change, and to suggest that greater attention should be given to their ‘relational’ implications.

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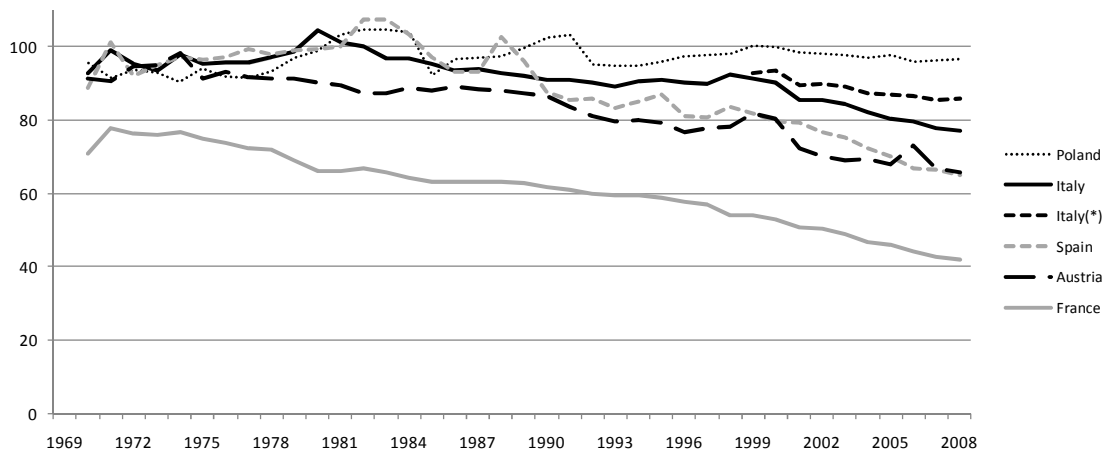
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Figure 1: Proportion of baptisms on the total number of live births for selected European Catholic countries, 1970-2008



Sources: Data on baptisms from *Annuarium Statisticum Ecclesiae*, 1970-2008; data on births from Eurostat, *Population Statistics*.

Notes: Only cases of Catholic baptism are considered. The ratio is calculated assuming that the mean age at baptism is 6 months. The series labeled “Italy(*)” reports the proportion of baptized children born to Catholic mothers. Children born to non-Catholic mothers have been identified on the basis of the religion of the mother’s country of origin (Source: ISTAT, *Rilevazione degli iscritti in anagrafe per nascita*). In the case of countries of origin with a high degree of religious fragmentation, the number of non-Catholic births has been weighted by the proportion of Catholics in the country. In some countries, for example in Spain and Italy in the 1980s, the number of live births decreased so quickly each year that the ratio of baptized children could exceed 100% for a while, as a result of the delay between birth and baptism.

Figure 2: Proportion of godparents chosen from among kin. Aubervilliers (France), Ivrea, Nonantola (northern Italy), 1490-1900

Figure 2a: Godfathers

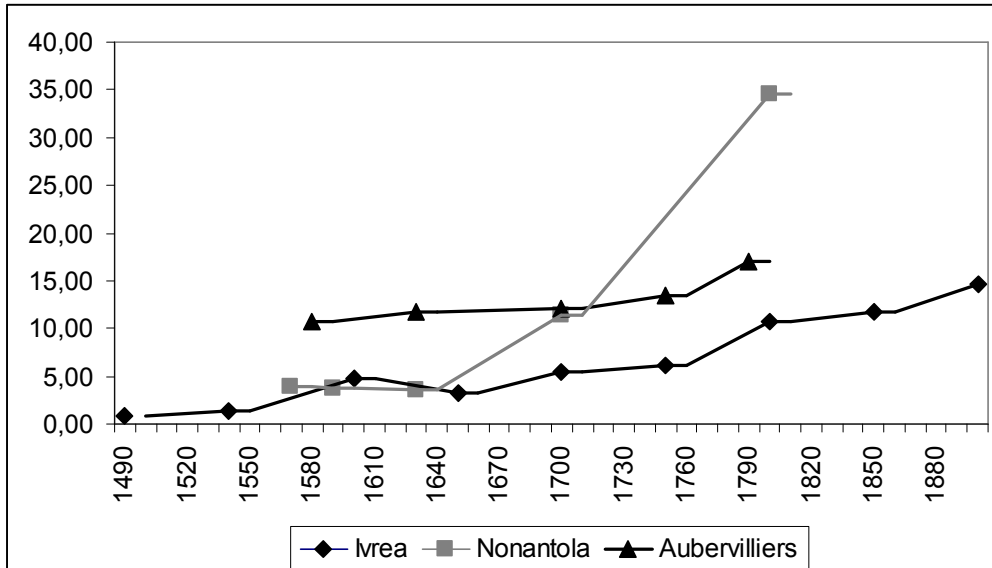
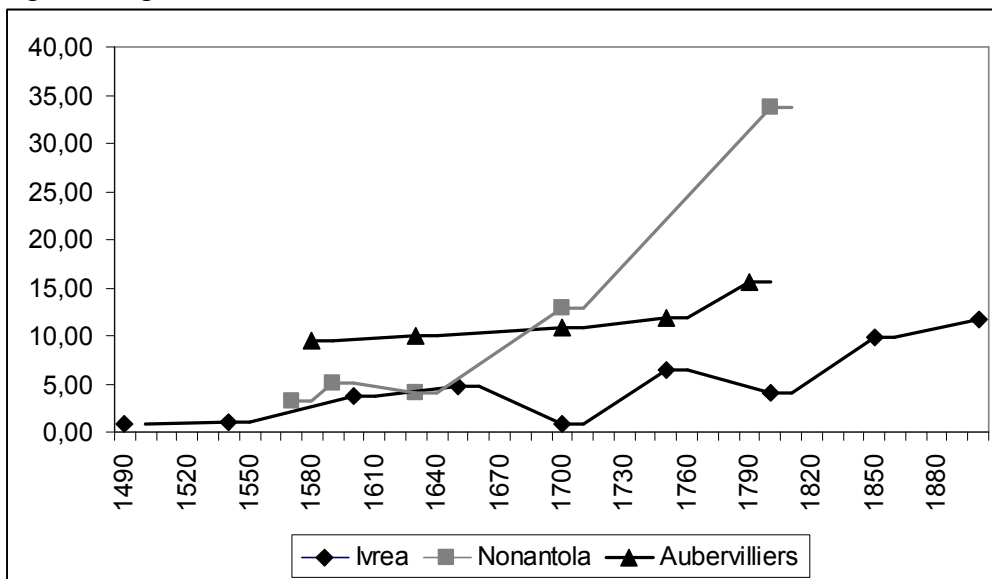


Figure 2b: godmothers



Sources: Own elaboration with data from Alfani, 2008b; 2009b; Berteau et al., 2010.

Notes: Proportions are computed on the basis of homonymy criteria between the father and the godparents. As a result, only kinsmen of the father are considered. By doubling the values chartered, a rough indicator of overall choices from among kin can be obtained.

Figure 3: Perception of godparents in Italy and France

Figure 3a: Godfathers

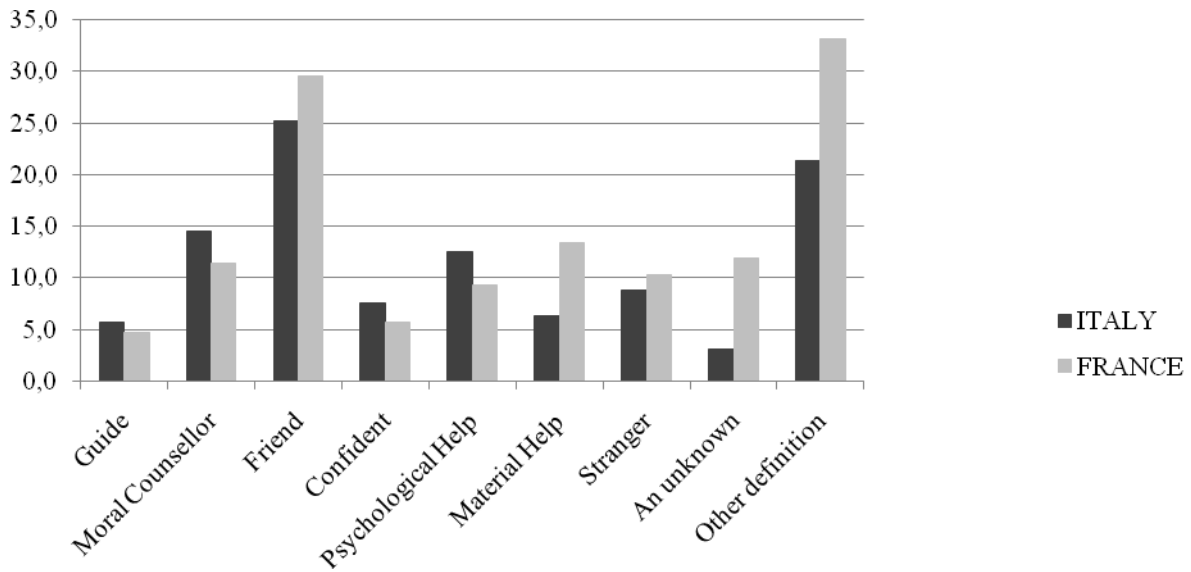


Figure 3b: Godmothers

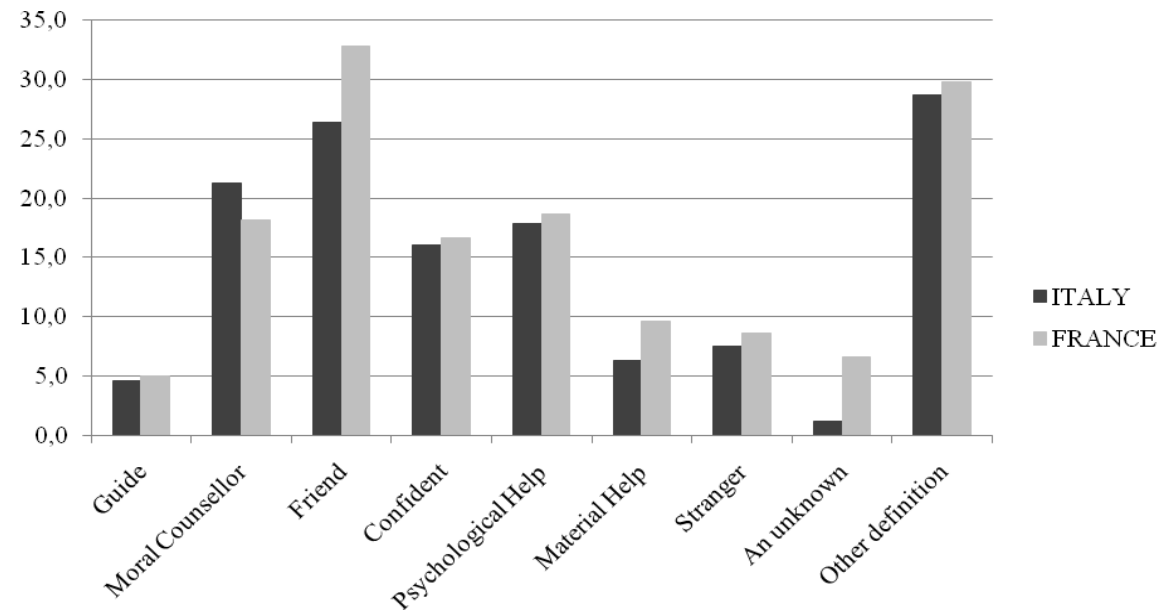


Table 1: The importance of religious services at birth. France and Italy, 1990 and 1999

	Italy 1990					France 1990				
	Yes	No	DK	NA	Total	Yes	No	DK	NA	Total
Male	76.7	19.3	3.7	0.2	964	60.0	34.9	5.1		473
Age: 15-29	69.8	23.7	6.2	0.3	263	49.6	45.5	5.0		121
Age: 30-49	75.5	20.8	3.7		338	50.0	45.5	4.5		154
Age: 50 and more	82.9	14.8	1.9	0.4	363	74.2	20.2	5.6		198
Female	89.0	8.5	2.2	0.3	1,054	66.0	32.1	1.9		529
Age: 15-29	85.0	12.1	2.9		249	61.4	36.1	2.5		158
Age: 30-49	84.4	12.6	3.1		357	60.7	37.4	1.9		206
Age: 50 and more	94.9	3.2	1.1	0.7	448	77.0	21.8	1.2		165
Total	83.1	13.7	2.9	0.3	2,018	63.2	33.4	3.4		1,002

	Italy 1999					France 1999				
	Yes	No	DK	NA	Total	Yes	No	DK	NA	Total
Male	81.5	14.5	2.2	1.8	959	55.1	41	2.5	1.5	773
Age: 15-29	79.5	13.4	3.1	4.0	224	51	44.4	3.3	1.2	147
Age: 30-49	77.8	19.7	1.9	0.6	360	45.3	50.6	2.9	1.2	292
Age: 50 and more	86.4	10.1	1.9	1.6	375	65.4	31	1.8	1.8	334
Female	90.1	7.1	1.9	0.9	1,041	62.2	34.8	2.3	0.8	842
Age: 15-29	86.0	10.0	3.2	0.9	221	64	35	0.6	0.4	171
Age: 30-49	89.2	8.7	1.3	0.8	378	54.4	42.3	2.9	0.5	345
Age: 50 and more	93.0	4.3	1.8	0.9	442	69.3	26.7	2.6	1.3	327
Total	86.0	10.6	2.1	1.3	2,000	58.8	37.7	2.4	1.1	1,615

Sources: Own elaboration on World Values Survey.

Notes: 'DK' and 'NA' stand for 'Don't Know' and 'No Answer', respectively.

Table 2: Opinions regarding the importance of religious services at birth, by country and religious denomination, 1990 and 1999

	Year	Yes	No	DK	NA	N
Religious denomination: Roman Catholic						
Poland	1990	95.9	2.9	1.2		918
	1999	97.2	2.2	0.6		1,029
Italy	1990	90.8	6.8	2.4		1,680
	1999	93.7	4.4	1.4	0.6	1,623
Belgium	1990	88.7	9.1	2.2		1,821
	1999	87.4	11.6	0.7	0.3	1,087
Great Britain	1990	88.4	10.6	1.0		127
	1999	68.2	27.3	3.1	1.5	126
Austria	1990	87.7	7.5	4.5	0.2	1,116
	1999	85.3	12.5	2.3		1,200
Portugal	1990	83.1	14.4	2.2	0.3	836
	1999	94.3	4.4	1.2		853
France	1990	82.1	15.6	2.3		577
	1999	78.9	19.9	0.9	0.3	849
Spain	1990	82.0	14.9	3.1	0.1	3,492
	1999	84.5	13.2	1.8	0.5	967
Netherlands	1990	80.5	18.4	1.1		297
	1999	69.4	29.7	0.9		224
Germany	1990	76.3	13.6	10.0		1,018
	1999	84.0	14.8	1.0	0.2	431
Religious denomination: Protestant						
Netherlands	1990	78.1	18.8	3.1		118
	1999	70.1	29.9			98
Great Britain	1990	77.0	22.2	0.8		591
	1999	60.8	36.1	2.6	0.5	550
Austria	1990	76.1	13.4	10.5		85
	1999	74.7	20.6	4.8		79
Germany	1990	65.1	21.2	13.7		1,334
	1999	69.8	25.6	4.5		695
Sweden	1990	58.6	38.0	3.4		797
	1999	64.1	33.6	2.4		711
Religious denomination: Orthodox						
Bulgaria	1990	91.2	5.6	2.0	1.2	251
	1999	77.5	14.8	4.9	2.8	578
Religious denomination: Free/Non denominational church						
Netherlands	1990	84.5	15.5			58
	1999	86.2	13.8			74
Great Britain	1990	64.1	35.2	0.7		110
	1999	69.8	29.4		0.8	67

Sources: Own elaboration on World Values Survey.

Notes: 'DK' and 'NA' stand for 'Don't Know' and 'No Answer', respectively. Only Christian Churches with a sample size above 50 for each year are considered.

Table 3: Choice of godparents, Italy and France

Choice of Godfather	Italy		France		Choice of Godmother	Italy		France	
	N	%	N	%		N	%	N	%
Relative	427	86	171	88	Relative	415	85	143	71
Non-relative	69	14	23	12	Non-relative	75	15	58	29
<i>N</i>	496	100	194	100	<i>N</i>	490	100	201	100
Relative:					Relative:				
Uncle	266	53.6	115	59.0	Aunt	246	50.2	97	48.3
Grandfather	84	16.9	8	4.1	Grandmother	86	17.6	7	3.5
Cousin	54	10.9	41	21.0	Cousin	57	11.6	26	12.9
Other relative	20	4.0	7	3.6	Other relative	22	4.5	10	5.0
Non-relative:					Non-relative:				
Parents' friend	66	13.3	22	11.8	Parents' friend	72	14.7	56	27.9
Parents' colleague	3	0.6	1	0.5	Parents' colleague	3	0.6	2	1.0
Parents' neighbour	3	0.6	0	0.0	Parents' neighbour	4	0.8	3	1.5
Parents' employer	0	0	0	0	Parents' employer	0	0	0	0
<i>N</i>	496	100	194	100	<i>N</i>	490	100	201	100

Notes: Numbers refer to the sample of Catholic baptized people who were born in the period 1981-91, for which the information on choice of godfather (godmother) is non-missing. Cases of multiple godfathers (godmothers) are excluded. The godfather (godmother) choice 'Other relative' encompasses the categories: great-uncle, elder brother, stepfather (great-aunt, elder sister, stepmother).

Table 4: Joint choice of godparents, Italy and France (Percentage of the total)

Italy		Choice of Godmother (%)				<i>N</i>
Choice of Godfather (%)		Aunt	Grandmother	Other relative	Other non-relative	
Uncle		39.7	4.3	6.8	1.9	194
Grandfather		4.1	12.0	0.5	0.5	63
Other relative		5.7	0.8	7.1	0.5	52
Other non-relative		1.1	0.3	0.8	13.8	59
<i>N</i>		186	64	56	62	368 (100%)
France		Choice of Godmother (%)				<i>N</i>
Choice of Godfather (%)		Aunt	Grandmother	Other relative	Other non-relative	
Uncle		33.2	3.1	8.8	14	114
Grandfather		2.1	0	1	1	8
Other relative		9.3	0.5	7.8	7.3	48
Other non-relative		5.2	0	1	5.7	23
<i>N</i>		96	7	36	54	193 (100%)

Notes: Only cases of simultaneous presence of both godfather and godmother are considered (therefore sample sizes differ with respect to those presented in Table 3). Percentages are calculated on the total.

Table 5: Descriptive statistics for children in regression analysis sample

	<i>N</i>	%			<i>N</i>	%			
Dependent variable	327	100			290	100			
Godfather Choice:					Godmother Choice:				
Uncle	160	48.93			Aunt	145	50.00		
Grandfather	60	18.35			Grandmother	53	18.28		
Other relative	38	11.62			Other relative	31	10.69		
Non-relative (ref.)	69	21.1			Non-relative (ref.)	61	21.03		
Independent variables	Mean	S. D.	Min	Max	Independent variables	Mean	S. D.	Min	Max
Male	0.66	0.47	0	1	Male	0.55	0.50	0	1
Birth order	1.48	0.75	1	7	Birth order	1.49	0.71	1	5
N. of uncles	3.11	2.61	0	22	N. of aunts	3.00	2.24	0	12
Birth order * N. of uncles	4.97	6.15	0	44	Birth order * N. of aunts	4.68	4.99	0	40
N. of grandfathers	1.54	0.64	0	2	N. of grandmothers	1.82	0.44	0	2
No uncle	0.06	0.24	0	1	No aunt	0.06	0.24	0	1
No grandfather	0.08	0.28	0	1	No grandmother	0.02	0.14	0	1
Southern Italy	0.32	0.47	0	1	Southern Italy	0.34	0.47	0	1

Table 6: Choice of godfather (reference category: non-relative). Coefficient estimates (β) and relative risk ratios (RRR) from the Multinomial Logistic Regression (standard errors in parenthesis). Subsample of Italian respondents ($N = 327$)

	β		RRR
Godfather's Choice: Non-relative (ref.)			
Godfather's Choice: Uncle			
Male	0.64**	(0.31)	1.90
Birth order	-0.74**	(0.38)	0.48
N. uncles	-0.16	(0.17)	0.86
Birth order * N. uncles	0.16	(0.10)	1.17
N. grandfathers	0.45	(0.32)	1.57
No Uncle available (omitted)			
No Grandfather available	1.05	(0.70)	2.86
Southern Italy	-1.01***	(0.31)	0.36
Constant	0.87	(0.86)	
Godfather's Choice: Grandfather			
Male	0.54	(0.39)	1.71
Birth order	-0.55	(0.45)	0.58
N. male grandfathers	-0.15	(0.21)	0.86
Birth order * N. uncles	0.13	(0.12)	1.14
N. grandfathers	0.97***	(0.36)	2.64
No Uncle available	2.04***	(0.61)	7.72
No Grandfather available (omitted)			
Southern Italy	-1.42***	(0.42)	0.24
Constant	-1.10	(1.05)	
Godfather's Choice: Other Relative			
Male	0.24	(0.44)	1.27
Birth order	-0.02	(0.45)	0.98
N. uncles	-0.01	(0.21)	0.99
Birth order * N. uncles	0.09	(0.11)	1.09
N. grandfathers	-0.14	(0.44)	0.87
No Uncle available	1.42*	(0.73)	4.15
No Grandfather available	0.60	(0.91)	1.83
Southern Italy	-1.12**	(0.46)	0.33
Constant	-0.63	(1.16)	

p-value: *** < 0.01; ** < 0.05; * < 0.1

Table 7: Choice of godmother (reference category: non-relative). Coefficient estimates (β) and relative risk ratios (RRR) from the Multinomial Logistic Regression (standard errors in parenthesis). Subsample of Italian respondents ($N = 290$)

	β		RRR
Godmother's Choice: Non-relative (ref.)			
Godmother's Choice: Aunt			
Male	0.14	(0.32)	1.15
Birth order	-0.40	(0.42)	0.67
N. aunts	0.08	(0.19)	1.09
Birth order * N. aunts	0.06	(0.11)	1.06
N. grandmothers	0.00	(0.43)	1.00
No Aunt available (omitted)			
No Grandmother available	-0.39	(1.19)	0.68
Southern Italy	-0.64**	(0.32)	0.53
Constant	1.15	(1.12)	
Godmother's Choice: Grandmother			
Male	0.34	(0.39)	1.40
Birth order	-0.01	(0.51)	0.99
N. male grandmothers	0.19	(0.24)	1.21
Birth order * N. aunts	-0.06	(0.14)	0.94
N. grandmothers	0.45	(0.51)	1.56
No Aunt available	1.15*	(0.60)	3.16
No Grandmother available (omitted)			
Southern Italy	-1.15***	(0.44)	0.32
Constant	-1.12	(1.34)	
Godmother's Choice: Other Relative			
Male	0.33	(0.46)	1.40
Birth order	-0.16	(0.54)	0.85
N. aunts	0.02	(0.25)	1.02
Birth order * N. aunts	0.08	(0.13)	1.08
N. grandmothers	-0.29	(0.59)	0.75
No Aunts available	0.64	(0.87)	1.90
No Grandmother available	-0.40	(1.62)	0.67
Southern Italy	-0.54	(0.47)	0.58
Constant	-0.31	(1.55)	

p-value: *** < 0.01; ** < 0.05; * < 0.1

Appendix

Figure A: Questionnaire used for the survey on godparenthood today (latest version)

SURVEY ON GODPARENTHOOD/ GODMOTHERHOOD

PERSONAL INFORMATION:

1- YEAR and PLACE OF BIRTH (town and county):

2- ARE YOU BAPTIZED? YES NO (if yes but with a rite different from catholic, specify)

3- PLACE OF BAPTISM (IF DIFFERENT FROM PLACE OF BIRTH)

4- GENDER M F

INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR FAMILY AT THE TIME OF YOUR BAPTISM:

5- DID YOU HAVE UNCLES AND AUNTS (EVEN IN-LAW) STILL ALIVE AT THE TIME OF BAPTISM?
Specify the number of:
 PATERNAL UNCLES: PATERNAL AUNTS:
 MATERNAL UNCLES: MATERNAL AUNTS:
 (paternal uncles and aunts= brothers and sisters of your father, and their wives/husbands; maternal uncles and aunts = the same, but regarding your mother)

5- DID YOU HAVE GRANDPARENTS STILL ALIVE AT THE TIME OF BAPTISM? (specify)
 GRANDFATHER (FATHER'S SIDE): YES NO GRANDMOTHER (FATHER'S SIDE): YES NO
 GRANDFATHER (MOTHER'S SIDE): YES NO GRANDMOTHER (MOTHER'S SIDE): YES NO

6- DO YOU HAVE BROTHERS AND SISTERS? (specify the number)
 OLDER BROTHERS: OLDER SISTERS:
 YOUNGER BROTHERS:..... YOUNGER SISTERS:

INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR GODPARENTS

7- DID YOU RECEIVE A GODFATHER?: YES NO AND A GODMOTHER?: YES NO

8- WERE YOUR GODPARENTS ALSO RELATIONS? GODFATHER: YES NO GODMOTHER: YES NO

8b – IF YES, OF WHICH KIND? (mark with a cross)

<p>GODFATHER:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Paternal uncle (brother of your father)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> In-law paternal uncle (husband of your father's sister)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Maternal uncle (brother of your mother)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> In-law maternal uncle (husband of your mother's sister)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Paternal grandfather</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Maternal grandfather</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Older brother</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Cousin</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify)</p>	<p>GODMOTHER:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Paternal aunt (sister of your father)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> In-law paternal aunt (wife of your father's brother)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Maternal aunt (sister of your mother)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> In-law maternal aunt (wife of your mother's brother)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Paternal grandmother</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Maternal grandmother</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Older sister</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Cousin</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify)</p>
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9- DO YOU HAVE BROTHERS OR SISTER THAT RECEIVED RELATIONS AS GODPARENTS? IF YES, SPECIFY FOR ALL OF THEM:
 Older brothers:.....
 Older sisters:
 Younger brothers:.....
 Younger sisters:.....

10- IF YOUR GODPARENTS WERE NOT RELATIONS, THEY WERE:

<p>GODFATHER:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> colleague of your father</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> colleague of your mother</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> neighbour</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> friend of your father</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> friend of your mother</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> employer or boss of your father</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> employer or boss of your mother</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)</p>	<p>GODMOTHER:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> colleague of your father</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> colleague of your mother</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> neighbour</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> friend of your father</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> friend of your mother</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> employer or boss of your father</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> employer or boss of your mother</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)</p>
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11- DO YOU SEE REGULARLY YOUR: GODFATHER YES NO GODMOTHER YES NO

12- DO YOU RECEIVE REGULAR GIFTS (FOR EX. AT CHRISTMAS) FROM: GODF. YES NO GODM. YES NO

13- DID YOUR PARENTS ORGANIZE A PARTY FOR YOUR BAPTISM? YES NO

Table B: Choice of godfathers and godmothers from among kin in Italian macro regions

Region	Godfather relative		Godmother relative	
	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>
North-West	90.1	212	87.6	226
North-East	88.2	76	82.5	57
Center	86.5	52	84.6	52
South	76.2	105	74.5	102
Islands	80.0	50	86.3	51

Table C: Interaction godparents-godchildren and wealth of godparents

	Italy		France					
	Relative		Non-relative		Relative		Non-relative	
	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>
Meet godfather regularly	71	390	37.5	72	47.2	163	38.1	21
Receive gifts from godfather	75.2	383	45.8	72	66.3	160	57.14	21
Godfather wealthier than parents	17.8	100	0	1	27.9	153	25.0	20
	Relative		Non-relative		Relative		Non-relative	
	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>
Meet godmother regularly	76.8	405	40.9	71	67.4	138	30.36	56
Receive gifts from godmother	82.3	395	51.4	72	73.5	136	60.38	53
Godmother wealthier than parents	12.1	116	100	1	19.2	130	25.93	54

Notes: N=number of respondents to each question (not every respondent answered to all questions). The question about whether the godparents were wealthier than the parents at the time of baptism was included in the first version of the questionnaire but discontinued thereafter, mainly because we realized that often the respondents did not possess the information needed to answer in a reliable way. Hence the relatively low number of respondents to this question.

When interpreting the answers to the questions about whether the respondent regularly met his or her godparents, it should be remembered that when the godparent is a relation, it is difficult to say whether godparenthood affected godparent-godchild interaction in a significant way (also see Section 5 on this issue). This is why the share of godchildren regularly meeting their non-relative godparents is much lower than that of those regularly meeting their relative godparents.