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Measuring Patriarchy in Italy*

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ABSTRACT

Patriarchy is an abstract concept; however, its consequences are visible and substantial in society in an endless list of events that mainly affect women's lives, but do not exclude men's life experience either. By defining a patriarchy index for Italy—for the first time ever—this article aims at describing patriarchy, from an economic perspective, as a complex aggregate, based on several stereotypes, represented by a series of variables related to behaviours, classified in four domains: the degree of patrilocality, the dominance of men over women, the dominance of older over younger generations, and socio-economic domination. As it is structured, the patriarchy index might complement the more famous Gender Equality Index (GEI), calculated by the European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE), with a measure that focuses on the 'invisible' component of gender inequality. This case study on Italy represents an opportunity to confirm the well-known socio-economic dualism between regions in the North and South from a gender perspective. Regions in the North and Central regions score very close results and show that, although patriarchal stereotypes are still present and strong, patriarchy is becoming minoritarian. On the opposite side, the South still shows strong and majoritarian patriarchal patterns.

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1. Introduction

Defining patriarchy is not an easy task. As Nancy Folbre recently wrote,

Patriarchy and patriarchal are words used to describe gender inequality.... While their exact definitions remain contested, they generally label social arrangements that give mature heterosexual men power over others. ... The noun 'patriarchy' (like 'capitalism') describes an entity that stands alone or separate, like a sun circled by planets subject to its gravitational force. (2021, 21)

In our attempt to measure patriarchy — for the first time ever — in our country, we needed to choose very carefully which 'planets' to consider. From an economic perspective, patriarchy can be described as a central component of a dual or hybrid system. In patriarchal economies, women are disproportionately concentrated in low-paying jobs and are responsible for unpaid reproductive labour. By giving the husband greater access to earnings, this practice not only supports capitalist economies but also

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patriarchal families in which the husband has economic control over his wife and children, as well as legal and ideological dominance (Matthaei 1999). As shown by numerous surveys, stereotypes concerning the roles of men and women are deeply entrenched throughout Italy. We deal with this ‘planet’ in Section Two.

By defining a patriarchy index, in Section Three, we focus our attention on four domains: the dominance of men over women, the dominance of older over younger generations, the degree of patrilocality, and socio-economic domination (including stereotypes connected with reproductive empowerment and gender-based violence). As the index is structured, it makes it possible to add a metric that emphasizes the ‘invisible’ aspect of gender inequality to the Gender Equality Index (GEI), which is calculated by the European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE). Moreover, its definition and quantification at regional level, make it possible to consider from a gender perspective the well-known socio-economic dualism between regions in the North and South of Italy. Section Four provides some conclusions.

2. Stereotypes Related to Gender Roles in Italy

Gender stereotypes have been identified by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) as a persistent barrier to gender equality and social, economic and sustainable development. At the international level, since 2018, UN Women tried to quantify the extent of gender stereotypes present in various countries, with the aim of monitoring, on a biannual basis, how these vary over time and how they are linked to women’s subordinate status in society.

The latest available data (UN Women 2022) show that discriminatory social norms and attitudes continue to hinder the progress of women and girls, particularly in times of hardship. Precisely in contexts of crisis, the gender attitudes and beliefs that guide people’s decisions and behaviours seem to lead to a reversal of hard-won gains in gender equality. For example, at the aggregate level, considering all 20 countries analyzed by UN Women, 25 per cent of interviewees agree that, ‘in times of food shortages, priority should be given to men’, and 31 per cent agree that, ‘when jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women’.

With reference to the Italian context, stereotypes related to the roles of men and women are deeply entrenched throughout the country. However, some differences are evident as regards trends in gender inequality over time and the degree of adherence to the stereotypes underlying the different spheres to be taken into consideration.

Research by IPSOS, carried out in 2018 for the Department for Equal Opportunities of the Italian Presidency of the Council of Ministers, revealed interviewees’ vision of a country in which deep inequalities of opportunity are linked to family origin; hard work certainly contributes to success in life but knowing the right people seems to be just as important; and coming from a wealthy or cultured family is also beneficial, albeit to a lesser extent. This is thus a society perceived as unequal, and in which ascribed characteristics are worth almost as much as acquired skills and abilities.

Referring specifically to the differences in opportunity experienced by men and women, the widespread view is that progress has been made in the situation of women but that gender discrimination and the stereotypes that accompany it are far

Table 1. Stereotypic views on gender roles in Italy.

	Very much agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Do not know
'Women should not work full-time if they have small children'	27	26	22	9	14	2
'Even if they work, women should have the main responsibility for caring for their families'	19	25	29	17	10	0
'Women generally make use of their physical appearance to succeed'	12	33	30	17	8	0
'Being attractive is more important for women than for men'	16	38	24	11	9	2
'Motherhood is the only experience that allows a woman to fulfil herself completely'	11	20	24	14	28	3
'All women dream of getting married'	9	18	25	21	23	4
'The economic management of the family is the man's responsibility'	5	9	34	19	32	1

Source: Ipsos (2018).

from being overcome, especially in two specific areas: the labour market and the personal/family sphere, especially as it relates to the care for dependent children.

Data presented in Table 1 show a strong adherence to gender stereotypes, which focus mainly on maternity-related factors, the roots of which therefore go beyond the boundaries of the labour market and refer to personal/family choices. Motherhood is in fact regarded as 'ballast' for women, which prevents them from gaining a foothold in professional spheres because they are still seen as principally responsible for caring for the family. Approximately half of interviewees think that women with small children should not work in the labour market (53 per cent) and just under half (44 per cent) think that, even if they do work, women should still be responsible for caring for the family. Approximately one-third of the population is convinced that motherhood is the only experience that allows a woman to fulfil herself completely.

Adherence to stereotypes is particularly strong among young people, those with a low level of education, and those located in the Centre and South of Italy (Figure 1). Approximately 40 per cent of the interviewees hold more attenuated views. Gender stereotypes seem to be much less shared by one-third (32 per cent) of the interviewees. This last group is mainly formed by: women, older people (55+), housewife and students, childless people, and those with a higher level of education.

The strong territorial heterogeneity in gender stereotypes is reflected in existing gender gaps among Italian regions. As shown by Amici and Stefani (2013), who

High (28%)	Medium (40%)	Low (32%)
<i>Mainly:</i> Age group (16-24) Centre and South Italy Low educational qualification	<i>Mainly:</i> Men Age group (25 - 55) North Italy	<i>Mainly:</i> Women Age group (over 55) Housewives and students Childless people Graduates and diploma holders

Figure 1. Level of adherence to stereotypic beliefs regarding women in the personal/family sphere in Italy.

Source: Ipsos (2018).

constructed an indicator based on Plantenga et al.'s (2009) gender equality index, adapted to the Italian context, all southern Italian regions, except Sardinia, have achieved the least progress towards gender equality, revealing clear evidence of the gender gap between northern and southern Italy.

The results of a survey carried out by ISTAT in 2018 make it possible for us to focus on the most common stereotypes about gender roles at regional level (Table 2). Adherence to stereotypes is more prevalent in southern Italy than northern Italy.

Table 2. Stereotypic views on gender roles in Italian macro-areas.

'In conditions of job shortage, employers should give priority to men over women'					
	Very much agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response
North-West	2.8	7.9	12.5	75.8	1.1
North-East	3.0	9.0	12.1	74.9	1.1
Centre	3.8	10.8	11.8	73.1	0.5
South	7.1	14.7	15.5	61.4	1.3
'It is, above all, men who must provide for the financial needs of the family'					
	Very much agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response
North-West	5.8	16.8	18.0	58.9	0.5
North-East	6.8	16.8	18.7	57.1	0.8
Centre	7.8	18.1	15.6	58.1	0.5
South	13.4	22.5	17.2	46.0	0.9
'It is the man who has to make the most important decisions concerning the family'					
	Very much agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response
North-West	2.3	4.8	9.8	82.6	0.5
North-East	1.6	3.8	11.8	82.5	0.5
Centre	2.4	4.9	11.6	80.6	0.5
South	6.0	7.1	12.2	73.9	0.9
'Men are less fit to take care of household chores'					
	Very much agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response
North-West	8.7	20.8	19.6	50.3	0.7
North-East	8.7	18.4	19.5	52.6	0.8
Centre	10.0	20.0	21.8	47.5	0.7
South	12.4	22.8	22.4	41.4	1.0
'For men, more than for women, it is very important to be successful at work'					
	Very much agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response
North-West	7.6	22.1	16.3	52.4	1.6
North-East	7.8	19.9	18.1	52.9	1.3
Centre	6.8	23.5	14.9	53.7	1.3
South	12.0	23.1	14.4	49.0	1.6
'Women can provoke sexual violence by the way they dress'					
	Very much agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response
North-West	4.5	17.4	21.5	52.5	4.1
North-East	6.3	17.0	21.6	50.9	4.2
Centre	5.4	14.8	19.7	55.7	4.4
South	9.0	17.3	20.9	46.2	6.7
'Women who do not want sexual intercourse manage to avoid it'					
	Very much agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response
North-West	10.3	25.8	25.7	31.4	6.8
North-East	13.9	26.1	21.8	31.3	6.8
Centre	12.4	25.1	25.2	29.9	7.4
South	14.5	27.7	24.3	23.6	9.8

Source: ISTAT (2018).

In the northeast, 27.1 per cent of interviewees believe that women are more suited than men to take care of the domestic work. In the South, 35.2 per cent of interviewees believe this to be the case. Similarly, in the northeast, 27.7 per cent of interviewees agree with the idea that success in paid work is more important for men than for women; in the South, 35.1 per cent do so.

ISTAT data also make it possible to analyze cultural models and factors that influence attitudes towards violence against women. The relationship between sexual violence stereotypes, gender role stereotypes and tolerance towards violence emerges from the data: the most common stereotypes are those suggesting that a woman always bears some responsibility when experiencing sexual violence.

In southern Italy, 42.2 per cent of interviewees agree strongly or moderately with the statement that ‘women who do not want sexual intercourse manage to avoid it’; 36.1 per cent in the North-West do so.

In response to the idea that how one dresses can provoke sexual violence, 26.3 per cent of interviewees in the South and 21.9 per cent in the North-West agree. These results were similar among men and women but differentiated greatly according to age and level of education. At national level, 32.4 per cent of people aged 60–74 years agree with this statement compared to 15.4 per cent of young people (18–29 years old), as do 39.6 per cent of those who have no educational qualifications or only a primary school diploma compared to 10.7 per cent of university graduates.

3. Patriarchy Index for Italy

The creation of a patriarchy index for Italy was inspired by three previous studies. We have taken the composite index developed by Gruber and Szołtysek (2016) as a point of reference for our calculations. They developed an indexed composite measure to assess family organization and relations across historical Europe. Their index is based on four domains: the domination of men over women; the domination of the older over the younger generation; the degree of patrilocality; and the numerical unbalance of the sexes (son preference). Following the example of Singh et al. (2022), our study integrates the socio-economic sphere within measurement of patriarchy in recognition of the social and economic imbalances that exist between men and women in the household, in terms of both earnings, control over money, and education. Finally, as in Zacharias et al. (2022), this analysis considers the relevance of the *patriarchal ideology* as revealed by survey data on gender attitudes.

To our knowledge, no one has ever calculated a patriarchy index for Italy. We have decided to do so for the four Italian macro-regions (North-West, North-East, Centre and South). We employ these macro-regions rather than the regions because doing so makes the results easier to access for the reader and because one of the datasets that we utilize provides only this level of disaggregation.

Section 3.1 describes the variables that were employed for the assessment of patriarchy in Italy. In Section 3.2, the formulae employed for calculating the patriarchy index, the descriptive statistics for the selected variables, and the results for Italy are presented.

3.1. Selection of Variables

Instead of the unmeasurable concepts of ‘family systems’ and ‘patriarchy’, Gruber and Szołtysek (2016), in their index, combine many different elements of power relations and agency to achieve a holistic, feasible, quantifiable, and comparable measure. The indexed composite measure incorporates a selection of variables related to family behaviour. As mentioned above, the variables are grouped into four domains. In our analysis, we abandoned the ‘son preference’ domain for two main reasons. First, because prenatal gender selection is not practiced in Italy and therefore the ratio of male/female newborns represents the natural rate. Second, because the main dataset that we use for this study (European Union Survey on Income and Living Conditions, EU-SILC) is weighted on the adult population, and therefore the results are not reliable when aimed at children.

Instead, we adopted the ‘socio-economic domination’ domain developed by Singh et al. (2022) and integrated it in an original way. We also integrated a socio-economic domain, following the example of the Gender Equality Index (GEI) developed by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). GEI’s variables (EIGE 2015), as our variables, focus on individuals rather than institutions or countries. Furthermore, we replicated in the socio-economic dimension of the patriarchy index the domains considered in the GEI, specifically the domain *work* (female participation rate and gender gap in involuntary part-time employment), *time* (proportion of mothers who are in occupations that allow reconciliation), *knowledge* (proportion of women more highly educated than their male partner), *power* (proportion of women elected at local level), *money* (proportion of women accessing a joint bank account with their partner or having their own account), and *health* (in terms of reproductive health, proportion of population that believe abortion is never justifiable). We also included a dimension that captures violence against women considering the share of people that believe ‘women who do not want sexual intercourse manage to avoid’. The variables that we used are described below. We updated or replaced some of the original variables with information that we believe better describes patriarchy in contemporary Italy (Table 3).

Where possible, we employed the indicators presented in Gruber and Szołtysek (2016) and Singh et al. (2022), and we kept these indicators in their original domain (for example, proportion of female heads of household, proportion of women older than their male partner, proportion of women more highly educated than their male partner). Where applying a similar indicator was not feasible with our data or was inconsistent in the context of our case study, we created a new indicator on the same lines (as, for example, in the domain of Patrilocality, we employed the Time spent by elderly fathers — 65 years old and over — with their adult children instead of the Proportion of elderly people living with married daughters).

Domination of Men Over Women

Proportion of Female Heads of Household

Patriarchal hypothesis: only men can be heads of household

Table 3. The four dimensions of patriarchy in Italy.

Domain	Indicator	Definition
Domination of men over women	Proportion of female heads of household	$\frac{\text{female household heads}}{\text{household heads (18 – 64)}}$
	Proportion of unmarried couples	$\frac{\text{coresident not married couples}}{\text{coresident couples}}$
	Proportion of women older than their male partner	$\frac{\text{women older than partner}}{\text{women living in couple}}$
	Proportion of single women (never-married) living in a mono-nuclear household	$\frac{\text{single women mononuclear household}}{\text{women (> 16)}}$
	Proportion of women single parents	$\frac{\text{women single parents}}{\text{mothers of children < 18}}$
	Proportion of unpaid care and domestic work performed by women	$\frac{\text{women's time spent in UCDW}}{\text{total time spent in UCDW}}$
	Proportion of unmarried men (35–69 years of age) who live with their parents	$\frac{\text{not married men living with parents}}{\text{not married men (35 – 69)}}$
Domination of the older over the younger generation	Proportion of never-married women (51–69 years of age) who live with their elderly parents	$\frac{\text{never married women living with parents}}{\text{never married women (51 – 69)}}$
	Proportion of young (17–34 years of age) single (never-married) men living in a mono-nuclear household	$\frac{\text{young single men in mononuclear household}}{\text{young single men (17 – 34)}}$
Patrilocality	Time spent by elderly fathers (65+) with their adult children	average daily hours spent with adult children
Socio-economic domination	Proportion of women (between 25 and 64 years of age) who are in the labour market	$\frac{\text{women in labor market}}{\text{women (25 – 64)}}$
	Gender gap in involuntary part-time employment	w-m in involuntary part-time employment
	Proportion of mothers of children (<18 years old) who are in occupations that allow reconciliation	$\frac{\text{mothers in (NACE REV.2 Q + P)}}{\text{occupied mothers of children (< 18)}}$
	Proportion of women more highly educated than their male partners	$\frac{\text{women more educated than male partners}}{\text{women in couple}}$
	Proportion of women elected at local level	$\frac{\text{women elected}}{\text{elected persons}}$
	Proportion of women who access joint bank account/have own bank account	$\frac{\text{women with a bank account}}{\text{women}}$
	Proportion of population that believes abortion is never justifiable	percentage of people that agrees or strongly agrees with the statement
	Proportion of population that believes women who do not want sexual intercourse manage to avoid it	percentage of people that agrees or strongly agrees with the statement

Cf. Gruber and Szoltysek (2016), Singh et al. (2022), and Zacharias et al. (2022).

This variable is the proportion of all female heads of household among adult (everyone over the age of 17 and under the age of 65) heads of household. To be the head of household, one must have the highest total earnings in that

household.¹ We exclude the population over 64 years of age because of the increasing number of female heads of household in the highest age group due to the natural longevity of women compared to men. This measure should be negatively correlated with patriarchy because, in patriarchal societies, men should earn more than their female partner (Braunstein 2014; Kabeer 2016; İlkaracan 2012; Matthaëi 1999).

Proportion of Unmarried Couples

Patriarchal hypothesis: couples must be married.

This variable is the proportion of co-resident unmarried couples among couples. This measure should be negatively correlated with patriarchy because, in patriarchal societies, cohabitation with a male partner for a woman is acceptable only after marriage as a form of control over her sexual freedom (Bettio 2006; Folbre 1983).

Proportion of Women Older Than Their Male Partner

Patriarchal hypothesis: the man is always older than his female partner.

This variable is the proportion of women who are older than their male partner among all co-resident couples. This measure should be negatively correlated with patriarchy because, in patriarchal societies, men would not marry women older than themselves. In fact, the bigger the age gap with the wife, the more bargaining power has the man in the couple (Carmichael 2011). We include all co-resident couples, married and unmarried.

Proportion of Single Women (Never Married) Living in a Mono-Nuclear Household

Patriarchal hypothesis: a woman cannot live outside of the home of her family of origin if she is not married.

This variable is the proportion of women who have never married and live in a mono-nuclear household to all adult women. This measure should be negatively correlated with patriarchy because, in patriarchal societies, a woman should always be under the control of a man. Therefore, single women are prevented from leaving the home of their family of origin before marriage (Folbre 1994).

Proportion of Women Single Parents

Patriarchal hypothesis: children should live with both parents.

This variable is the proportion of women who are not in a couple and live with at least one child below the age of 18 among all women parents who live with at least one child below the age of 18. This measure should be negatively correlated with patriarchy because, in patriarchal societies, children should live with both parents (Bettio 2006), as the domination of men over women is inextricably linked to motherhood through the exploitation of women's labour (Folbre 1983).

¹By earnings, we mean employee cash or near cash income, non-cash employee, company car, employer's social insurance, optional employer's social insurance contributions, contributions to individual private pension plans, cash benefits or losses from self-employment, pension from individual private plans, unemployment benefits, old-age benefits, survivor benefits, sickness benefits, disability benefits, and education-related allowances.

Proportion of Unpaid Care and Domestic Work Performed by Women

Patriarchal hypothesis: women should be exclusively responsible for unpaid care and domestic work.

This variable is the proportion of time devoted by women to unpaid care and domestic work in relation to total amount of unpaid care and domestic work. This measure should be positively correlated with patriarchy because, in patriarchal societies, women bear the burden of reproductive work (Kabeer 2016; İlkaran 2012).

Proportion of Unmarried Men (35–69 Years of Age) Living with Their Parents

Patriarchal hypothesis: sons who have never married or are separated/divorced or widowed live in or return to the house of their family of origin.

This variable is the proportion of unmarried men who live with their parents among all unmarried men (35–69 years of age). This measure should be positively correlated with patriarchy because, in patriarchal societies, unmarried men live in the home of their family of origin. Never-married men have never left the household (Adinolfi 2013; Bettio 2006). In the case of separated/divorced or widowed men, they return to their household of origin because a woman (the mother) can take care of them there and, possibly, their children too because, as mentioned above, in patriarchal societies women take care of family members and are responsible for domestic work (Kabeer 2016; İlkaran 2012).

Domination of the Older Over the Younger Generation

Proportion of Never-Married Women (51–69 Years of Age) Who Live with Their Elderly Parents

Patriarchal hypothesis: never-married adult daughters take care of their elderly parents.

This variable is the proportion of never-married women who live with their elderly parents among never-married women (50–69 years of age). This measure should be positively correlated with patriarchy because, in patriarchal societies, the unmarried daughter shall take care of the elderly parents. As for the variable ‘Proportion of unpaid care and domestic work performed by women’, in patriarchal societies women are responsible for unpaid care and domestic work (Kabeer 2016; İlkaran 2012). This character is represented in Italy by the so-called ‘figlia zitella’: spinster daughter. In the past, spinster daughters inherited the role of designated caretaker for aging parents.

Proportion of Young (17–34 Years of Age) Single Men (Never Married) Living in a Mono-Nuclear Household

Patriarchal hypothesis: sons cannot establish their own household if they are not married.

This variable is the proportion of young single men (never married and not in a couple) living in a mono-nuclear household among young never-married men (17–34 years of age). This measure should be negatively correlated with patriarchy because, in patriarchal societies, parents maintain control over their sons until those sons do not create a new household through marriage. How young people marry, when they marry, and where they live after marriage will reflect the degree to which their culture empowers parents (Wolf 2005).

Patrilocality

Time Spent by Elderly Fathers (65 Years of Age and Over) with Their Adult Children

Patriarchal hypothesis: adult children should establish their residence close to their father's home.

This variable is the average time spent by elderly fathers (65 years of age and over) with their adult children. In contemporary Italy very few adult children live in the household of their parents after marriage; however, patrilocality can still be assessed by comparing the time that elderly fathers spend with their adult children. This measure should be positively correlated with patriarchy because, in patriarchal societies, children shall establish their residence close to their father's home (Turaeva and Becker 2022).

Socio-Economic Domination

Proportion of Women (25–64 Years of Age) in the Labour Market

Patriarchal hypothesis: work should be divided on the basis of gender.

This variable is the proportion of women who are in the labour market among women 25–64 years of age. This measure should be negatively correlated with patriarchy because, in patriarchal societies, heterosexual couples specialize in different activities. Therefore, as men specialize in labour market activities, women specialize in unpaid care and domestic work (Bettio 2006; Kabeer 2016; İlkaran 2012).

Gender Gap in Involuntary Part-Time Employment

Patriarchal hypothesis: according to the institutional system, the 'he works/she cares' model is the norm.

This variable is the difference in the share of men employed involuntarily in part-time contracts and the corresponding share of women. This measure should be positively correlated with patriarchy because, in patriarchal societies, women are institutionally forced to work part-time because formal labour markets are incompatible with unpaid care work within households (Maestripieri 2023; McRae 2003).

Proportion of Mothers of Children Below 18 Years of Age Who are in Occupations that Allow Reconciliation Between Paid and Unpaid Work

Patriarchal hypothesis: if mothers are in the labour market, they should choose occupations that allow them to reconcile paid work and care responsibilities.

This variable is the proportion of mothers of children below 18 years of age who are employed in education or in human health and social work activities (NACE REV. 2 Q + P)² among employed mothers of children below 18 years of age. This measure should be positively correlated with patriarchy because, in patriarchal societies, mothers shall choose occupations that allow them to reconcile paid work and care responsibilities (İlkaracan 2012).

²The European Institute for Gender Equality uses these sectors for identifying gender segregation in the labour market for the purpose of providing data for the Gender Equality Index (<https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2022/domain/work/IT>).

Proportion of Women Who are More Highly Educated Than Their Male Partner

Patriarchal hypothesis: a husband is always more highly educated than his wife.

This variable is the proportion of women who are more highly educated than their male partner. This measure should be negatively correlated with patriarchy because, in patriarchal societies, men shall be more highly educated than their female partner (Braunstein 2014).

Proportion of Women Elected at Local Level

Patriarchal hypothesis: decision-making power is possessed by men.

This variable is the proportion of women who are elected at local level among elected people. This measure should be negatively correlated with patriarchy because, in patriarchal societies, men possess decision-making power (Kabeer 2016).

Proportion of Women Who Access a Joint Bank Account with Their Partner or Have Their Own Account

Patriarchal hypothesis: economic power is owned by men.

This variable is the proportion of women who access a joint bank account with their partner or have their own account among the total number of women. This measure should be negatively correlated with patriarchy because, in patriarchal societies, men adhere to behaviours aimed at controlling women's ability to acquire, use or save money or access credit or other economic resources, which harms their economic security and potential to achieve self-sufficiency. This behaviour is linked with the concept of economic violence whereby patriarchy aims to deny or restrict women's access to and control of finances and assets, leaving them without access to their own bank accounts or any form of independent income (Adams et al. 2008; Guiso and Zaccaria 2023).

Proportion of Population that Believes Abortion is Never Justifiable

Patriarchal hypothesis: women have no rights over their own bodies, and they are expected to just birth and nurture children.

This variable is the proportion of the population that believes that abortion is never justifiable. Zacharias et al. (2022) developed a patriarchy index that included a 'Sexual and Reproductive Freedom' domain. This measure should be positively correlated with patriarchy because, in patriarchal societies, women have no reproductive rights (Gammage, Joshi, and van der Meulen Rodgers 2020).

Proportion of Population that Believes Women Who do not Want Sexual Intercourse Manage to Avoid it

Patriarchal hypothesis: men have the right to punish women for 'incorrect' behaviour.

This variable is the proportion of the population agreeing that 'women who do not want sexual intercourse manage to avoid it'. This measure should be positively correlated with patriarchy because, in patriarchal societies, there is a strong belief, among both women and men, that violence is acceptable when used by men to discipline women whose behaviour transgresses social norms (UN Women 2022; van Veen, Cansfield, and Muir-Bouchard 2018).

3.2. The Patriarchy Index

Our patriarchy index is calculated to cover all of the domains described above. First, we calculate the patriarchy points for each variable. Some variables are positively correlated with patriarchy — as, for example, the proportion of unpaid care and domestic work performed by women — while others are negatively correlated with patriarchy — as, for example, the proportion of female heads of household. Patriarchy points are calculated for each variable in each region in the same way. The following formulae are used for this purpose:

- patriarchy points = $\text{RND} \left(\frac{10 \cdot \text{proportion}}{\text{maximum proportion}} \right)$ for variables positively correlated with patriarchy

and

- patriarchy points = $10 - \text{RND} \left(\frac{10 \cdot \text{proportion}}{\text{maximum proportion}} \right)$ for variables negatively correlated with patriarchy.

where RND stands for round and the maximum proportion is equal to the maximum value achieved by the variable in one of the four macro-regions under study. For example, the maximum proportion of female heads of household is recorded in the Centre and is equal to 0.37. Therefore, we calculate the patriarchy points for the proportion of female heads of household for the Centre as follows: $10 - \text{RND} (10 * 0.37 / 0.37) = 0$.

Even if some variables are positively correlated with patriarchy and others are negatively correlated with it, the resulting patriarchy points for each variable can be read in the same way. The closer the result is to 0, the lower the intensity of patriarchy. The closer the result is to 10, the higher the intensity of patriarchy.

The patriarchy index for each domain for each region is then calculated by summing the patriarchy points assigned to each variable belonging to that domain.

The four sub-indices are then added together to create the patriarchy index (PI). The maximum value assigned to each sub-index is equal to 10. As a result, the PI, that is, the sum of the four sub-indices, can range from 0 to 40 patriarchy points. The following formula is used whereby the number for denominator represents the number of variables that belong to each domain:

$$\text{PI} = \left(\frac{\text{male domination index}}{7} \right) + \left(\frac{\text{generational domination index}}{2} \right) + (\text{patrilocality index}) + \left(\frac{\text{socio-economic domination}}{8} \right)$$

For our purposes, we collected information from different datasets: the most recent Italian cross-sectional part (referring to the year 2019) of EU-SILC;³ the last available

³EU-SILC is a multi-dimensional dataset focused on income but simultaneously covering housing, labour, health, demography, education, and deprivation. It consists of primary (annual) and secondary (ad hoc modules) target variables, all of which are forwarded to Eurostat. The primary target variables relate to either households or individuals (persons aged 16 and over). The secondary target variables are introduced every four years, or less frequently, only in the cross-

wave of the Italian Time-Use Survey (IT-TUS 2013–2014);⁴ the data collected for the Italian BES Report (2021);⁵ the World Values Survey (2017–2022);⁶ and the IACOFI survey conducted by the Bank of Italy (2020).⁷ Summary statistics for each variable are presented in Table 4, which also specifies the different sources for each variable.

We examined each of these variables to identify if any correlations existed between them and, if so, whether those correlations were positive or negative, as we had hypothesized (Appendix, Table A1). Only the correlations between the variables ‘Proportion of not married men who live with parents’ and ‘Proportion of unmarried women who live with parents’ and ‘Proportion of women elected’ defied our presumptions. The rest of the correlations supported the aforementioned assumptions.

The first step of the analysis was calculating patriarchy points. The lower the number of patriarchy points accumulated for each variable, the lower the level of patriarchy for that variable in the region. Table A2 in the Appendix shows the distribution of patriarchy points in the four Italian macro-regions. The distribution shows that, for some variables, the gaps between regions are very high, such as for the ‘Proportion of unmarried couples’, which has 0 patriarchy points in the North-East and 7 in the South; or ‘Time spent by elderly fathers with their children’, which has 5 patriarchy points in the North-East and 10 in the South; or the ‘Proportion of women elected to local government’, which has 0 patriarchy points in the Centre and 5 in the South. For other variables, the differences across the country are less marked. The best, and most striking, example relates to the ‘Proportion of unpaid domestic and care work performed by women’: which varies between 10 and 9 patriarchal points across Italy.

Overall, the distribution of patriarchy points across the country reveals a significant difference between the South and the rest of the country. As for the other regions, the strength of patriarchy varies from indicator to indicator. The ‘Domination of men over women’ reports a picture of a wide gap between the South and the rest of the country. The South recorded 37 patriarchy points, while the rest of the regions reported around 20 points. The ‘Domination of the older over the younger generation’ is strong throughout the country. In the domain of ‘Patrilocality’ the North and Centre have

sectional component. Data are based on a nationally representative probability sample of the population residing in private households within the country, irrespective of language, nationality, or legal residence status.

⁴The Italian Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) regularly collects data on time use from 2002. The IT-TUS is carried out every five years and comprises three questionnaires: the individual questionnaire contains general information on family members and the household; the daily diary records the daily use of time of all members aged three years or older; and the weekly diary records the hours of paid work undertaken by all family members with a job. Individuals are required to fill in the daily diary for weekdays, Saturdays, and Sundays on a random basis. Sample weights are used to obtain statistics representative of the whole Italian population. Activities are classified in ten groups: physiological needs, professional work, educational activity, household activities, voluntary work in organizations and beyond, social life and entertainment, sport and recreational activities, personal hobbies, using mass-media, and time spent on moving and transportation. This classification enables detailed analysis of the time each household member spends on each activity. The IT-TUS does not include information on income and earnings.

⁵The BES report offers an integrated picture of the main economic, social, and environmental phenomena that characterise Italy. All BES reports are available at www.istat.it/it/archivio/269316.

⁶The World Values Survey (WVS) is an international research program devoted to the scientific and academic study of social, political, economic, religious and cultural values of the global population. The project’s goal is to assess the impact of stability in values or changes of values over time on the social, political and economic development of countries and societies (www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp).


⁷The IACOFI survey is conducted by the Bank of Italy to measure levels of financial literacy among adults in Italy using the methodology developed by the OECD’s International Network on Financial Education (INFE). The micro-data made available by the Bank of Italy contain information not only on financial knowledge but also on the ownership and use of different financial assets. We use the results of the 2020 survey for the computation of the patriarchy index. More information is available at the Bank of Italy website.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for variables used in the construction of the patriarchy index for Italy.

Domain	Variable	Mean	Min	Max
Domination of men over women	Proportion of female heads of household	0.33	0.31	0.37
	Proportion of unmarried couples	0.08	0.03	0.12
	Proportion of older female partners	0.15	0.12	0.17
	Proportion of single women	0.09	0.08	0.10
	Proportion of women single parents	0.14	0.12	0.17
	Proportion of UCDW performed by women*	0.77	0.74	0.82
	Proportion of unmarried men who live w/parents	0.33	0.27	0.38
Domination of older over younger generation	Proportion of unmarried women who live w/parents	0.19	0.16	0.21
	Proportion of young single men	0.15	0.11	0.20
Patrilocality	Time spent by elderly fathers w/children (expressed in hours)*	0.88	0.63	1.25
Socio-economic domination	Proportion of women in labour market	0.65	0.47	0.77
	Gender gap in involuntary part-time employment**	0.12	0.09	0.14
	Proportion of mothers in NACE REV.2 Q + P	0.24	0.22	0.27
	Proportion of women more highly educated	0.49	0.46	0.54
	Proportion of women elected**	0.22	0.17	0.33
	Proportion of women who access joint bank account/have own bank account ****	0.49	0.46	0.52
	Proportion of population that believes abortion is never justifiable***	0.21	0.14	0.30
	Proportion of population that believes women who do not want sexual intercourse manage to avoid it***	0.39	0.36	0.42

Source: Authors' calculations on IT-SILC 2016; *authors' calculations on IT-TUS 2013–2014; **BES Report 2021; ***Joint European Values Study and World Values Survey (2017–2022); ****IACOBI Bank of Italy 2020.

Table 5. Results for the patriarchy index for Italy.

Region	Patriarchy index	Map
North-West	18/40	
North-East	17/40	
Centre	18/40	
South	29/40	

Source: authors' calculations.

similar values, while a 4–5-point gap exists between the South and the other regions. In the 'Socio-economic domain', again, the South accumulates the highest number of patriarchy points. The largest differences between the South and the rest of Italy are recorded for the 'Gender gap in involuntary part-time employment' and the 'Proportion of population that never justifies abortion'.

The patriarchy index is, finally, estimated by adding up the mean of the indicators for each domain for each region (the results are presented in Table 5). Therefore, as mentioned above, the score can vary between a minimum of 0 points and a maximum of 40. North-West, North-East, and Centre are below the median (20/40). This result

could be interpreted as indicating that these regions, even if their scores are still revelatory, lean toward a reduction and a gradual disappearance in patriarchal stereotypes. The North-East records the lowest score (17/40). On the other hand, the South reported a score of 29/40, indicating a strong presence of patriarchal stereotypes.

4. Concluding Remarks

The definition of a patriarchy index for Italy is a tool based on empirical evidence that can inform researchers, policymakers, and civil society on the extent of discriminatory gender attitudes, which, if tracked consistently over time, could demonstrate how the level of changing gender stereotypes can be used as a critical tactic to promote gender equity.

This study represents a first attempt to measure patriarchy in Italy. The patriarchy index could complement the more famous GEI with a measure that focuses on the ‘invisible’ component of gender inequality. The patriarchy index replaces the illusive notion of ‘patriarchy’ with a comprehensive, workable, quantitative, and comparative assessment that takes into account a wide range of agency and power dynamics. The indexed composite measure includes a number of family behaviour-related variables, classified into four domains: the degree of patrilocality, the dominance of men over women, the dominance of older over younger generations, and socio-economic domination.

Applying the patriarchy index to Italy, the results confirm, once again, the existence of a North–South dualism. The results for the North and Central regions are very close and reveal that, even if patriarchal stereotypes are still present and strong, patriarchy is becoming minoritarian. In contrast, strong and majoritarian patriarchal patterns are still evident in the South.

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Appendix

Table A1. Pairwise correlations between measures of patriarchy (four regions).

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
(1) female heads of household	1.000								
(2) not-married couples	0.361	1.000							
(3) older female partners	0.784	0.736	1.000						
(4) single women	0.889	0.649	0.756	1.000					
(5) women single parents	0.955**	0.378	0.880	0.776	1.000				
(6) UCW performed by women	-0.496	-0.945*	-0.897	-0.647	-0.586	1.000			
(7) not-married men who live w/parents	-0.559	-0.427	-0.862	-0.351	-0.776	0.700	1.000		
(8) not-married women who live w/parents	-0.280	-0.835	-0.389	-0.686	-0.133	0.629	-0.090	1.000	
(9) young single men	0.478	0.840	0.919*	0.529	0.632	-0.969**	-0.844	-0.417	1.000
(10) elderly fathers w/children	-0.561	-0.974**	-0.830	-0.799	-0.556	0.948*	0.488	0.825	-0.844
(11) women in labor market	0.473	0.957**	0.879	0.642	0.557	-0.999**	-0.672	-0.654	0.960**
(12) gap in involuntary part-time employment	-0.087	-0.954**	-0.593	-0.392	-0.152	0.888	0.378	0.740	-0.808
(13) mothers NACREV.2 Q + P	-0.087	-0.954**	-0.593	-0.392	-0.152	0.888	0.378	0.740	-0.808
(14) women more highly educated	0.148	0.973**	0.567	0.500	0.155	-0.863	-0.263	-0.857	0.740
(15) women elected	0.606	0.609	0.417	0.883	0.394	-0.453	0.097	-0.871	0.245
(16) women own bank account	0.932*	0.662	0.864	0.980**	0.875	-0.722	-0.530	-0.588	0.647
(17) abortion never justifiable	-0.817	-0.829	-0.945*	-0.909*	-0.820	0.894	0.648	0.643	-0.834
(18) unwanted sex	-0.890	-0.505	-0.953**	-0.741	-0.978**	0.719	0.871	0.178	-0.776

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Variables	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)
(10) elderly fathers w/children	1.000								
(11) women in labor market	-0.954**	1.000							
(12) gap involuntary part-time employment	0.864	-0.905*	1.000						
(13) mothers NACREV.2 Q + P	0.864	-0.905*	1.000**	1.000					
(14) women more highly educated	-0.901	0.882	-0.981**	-0.981**	1.000				
(15) women elected	-0.708	0.465	-0.390	-0.390	0.552	1.000			
(16) women own bank account	-0.815	0.711	-0.416	-0.416	0.490	0.775	1.000		
(17) abortion never justifiable	0.930	-0.886	0.646	0.646	-0.682	-0.690	-0.955**	1.000	
(18) unwanted sex	0.650	-0.693	0.320	0.320	-0.296	-0.344	-0.859	0.867	1.000

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Source: authors' calculations.

Table A2. Patriarchy points for Italian macro-regions.

Domain	Variable	North-West	North-East	Centre	South
Domination of men over women	Proportion of female heads of household	1	1	0	2
	Proportion of not-married couples	2	0	2	7
	Proportion of older female partners	0	1	1	3
	Proportion of single women	1	1	0	2
	Proportion of women single parents	0	2	0	3
	Proportion of UCDW performed by women*	9	9	9	10
	Proportion of unmarried men who live w/ parents	7	9	9	10
	TOTAL	20	23	21	37
Domination of older over younger generation	Proportion of unmarried women who live w/ parents	10	8	8	10
	Proportion of young single men	0	1	2	5
	TOTAL	10	9	10	15
Patrilocality	Time spent by elderly fathers w/children (expressed in hours)*	6	5	6	10
	TOTAL	6	5	6	10
Socio-economic domination	Proportion women in labor market	0	0	1	3
	Gender gap in involuntary part-time employment**	8	6	9	10
	Proportion of mothers in NACE REV.2 Q + P	9	8	9	10
	Proportion of women more highly educated	1	0	1	1
	Proportion of women who access joint bank account/have own bank account****	0	1	0	1
	Proportion of women elected**	4	2	0	5
	Proportion of population that never justifies abortion***	5	6	5	10
	Proportion of population believes women can avoid unwanted sex***	9	10	9	10
	TOTAL	36	33	34	50

Source: Authors' calculations on IT-SILC 2016. *IT-TUS 2013–2014; **BES Report 2021; ***World Values Survey (2017–2022); ****IACOBI Bank of Italy 2020.