

Horses and hippos: Why Italian government bills change in the legislative arena, 1987–2006

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Abstract. Scholars interested in legislative processes pay relatively little attention to the changes made to bills in parliamentary democracies. On the one hand, comparative research has often described parliamentary institutions as ineffectual *vis-à-vis* cabinets throughout the lawmaking process; on the other hand, for a long time the rational choice literature has focused more on the formal rules regulating amendatory activity than on amendatory activity itself. Hence, very few studies have tried to explain how much government bills are altered in parliament and why. This article investigates the changes made to governmental legislation in Italy. Taking the modifications occurring during the legislative process as the dependent variable, a number of explanatory hypotheses derived from both existing scholarship and original arguments are discussed and tested. This also allows the identification of some usually unobserved aspects of the decision-making process within the cabinet. The findings can also be relevant for comparative research since Italy has been characterised during the period under scrutiny (1987–2006) by two distinct electoral systems, two extremely different party systems (pivotal and alternational), governments with various ideological orientations and range, and both partisan and technical ministers.

Keywords: executive–legislative relations; lawmaking; coalition governance; Italian political system

Introduction

On several occasions, the former Italian premier, Silvio Berlusconi, blamed the Italian parliament for deeply changing the bills that were introduced by his government. He has recently stated that ‘the fiery horse that Palazzo Chigi¹ passes for final approval, after floor and committee debates in both chambers, is transformed by the parliament into a hippo’.² Such an amazing mutation deserves an in-depth investigation. Is it really a ‘horse’ that the government introduces into the legislature, or a well made-up hippo holding its breath to cover the size of its belly? Are all government bills bound to be changed and, mostly, ‘inflated’ during parliamentary debates? Which type of animal enters and leaves the parliament? What happens (and happened) in the Italian parliament and why?

In this article, we aim to start answering these questions. By doing so, we also try to indirectly uncover some aspects of the often unobservable decision-making process within the Italian cabinet. What is discovered by studying the Italian legislative process also has value for comparative research. During the period that we have investigated, Italy has been characterised by two distinct electoral systems, two extremely different party systems, governments with various ideological orientation and range, and both partisan and technical ministers.

In parliamentary democracies, government bills are often changed during the lawmaking process. This observation is so trivial that it does not seem to deserve any further investigation. Furthermore, legislative research, in particular within the rational choice approach, has for a long time dedicated very little effort to the topic, focusing instead on formal rules.³ These studies are mostly interested in the level of similarity between the final legislative outcome and the proposer's ideal point. Taking preferences as stable, this similarity will depend on the rules, and any change in this similarity will depend on some change in the rules. However, the distance between the proposer's preferences and final outcomes does not necessarily result in observable changes made to the initial proposal (i.e., amendments). If governmental actors completely know the other actors' positions and the implications of the legislative rules, then they should refrain from proposing their ideal points (or a compromise among their ideal points). Rather, anticipating all the other actors' moves, they could propose the bill that corresponds to the best policy they can obtain, given the present rules and distribution of preferences in the parliament. Hence, we would observe no changes even if there was a substantial gap between the proposers' favourite policy and the final outcome. Remarkably, this would happen not only under a closed amending rule, but also with an open rule.

What makes the successful amendments possible (and theoretically consistent) that we observe in real-world politics? What affects their number and size? *A priori*, two simple facts that are sometimes neglected in the standard models of the legislative process are:

- Not all political utility comes from the legislative outcome. The parliamentary arena is also a 'stage' where political actors send messages to their 'audience' (Mayhew 1974; Huber 1996). For governmental actors, proposing a bill that they know will be changed is not useless, but can have a position-taking utility.
- Politicians usually have incomplete information about the other actors' preferences and imperfect information about the effects of laws (Krehbiel 1991).

At least one of these two conditions must be met to observe changes in the bills in the parliament. However, increases or decreases in these changes do not depend just on increases or decreases in the level of position-taking utility or information. On the whole, we have identified four sets of (not mutually incompatible) possible explanations for the modifications occurring to government bills during the legislative process:

- *Changes in the position-taking utility.* An increase in public opinion's attention or a weakening of political trust between political leaders and followers can increase the role played by symbolic politics.
- *Changes in the degree of conflict among actors.* Given a certain level of position-taking utility of the actors in the cabinet, the dissimilarity between the initial bill and the final law indicates a discrepancy among preferences – a true conflict among the actors involved in the lawmaking process.
- *Changes in the level of knowledge.* If knowledge in the cabinet is low, the following parliamentary step may allow legislators to learn and correct the initial proposals.
- *Changes in the formal rules.* Given a certain level of position-taking utility or knowledge, any shift from the open rule to more restrictive rules will decrease the modifications made to the government bills.

In the next two sections, we pass under review any plausible and testable hypotheses that can be derived from arguments based on conflict among the actors, lack of knowledge, changing value of position taking and *de facto* changes in formal rules. We then introduce our empirical analysis. After presenting our original dataset, we set out how we operationalised the dependent variable, as well as the independent variables derived from the hypotheses put forward in the theoretical sections. Finally, we illustrate the results of our multivariate analysis and discuss their implications.

Explanations based on conflict

Governmental laws are the outcome of a two-stage process: they are first proposed and deliberated in the cabinet; and then introduced, discussed and finally approved in the parliament. Hence, the conflicts that can explain the modifications made to government bills reflect the possible interactions both within the cabinet and between the cabinet and the parliament. More precisely, two factors have a crucial role: the type of decision making within the cabinet; and the difference in terms of preferences between cabinet and parliament.⁴

The literature dealing with coalition governments provides two alternative models of cabinet decision making: ministerial discretion, and collective cabinet responsibility. According to Laver and Shepsle's (1994, 1996) ministerial discretion model, coalition parties are granted property rights over specific jurisdictions through the allocation of ministerial portfolios. Each minister drafts the bills falling under his or her policy jurisdiction independently of the other cabinet members, and then presents them to the parliament for approval.⁵ In contrast, Tsebelis' (1995, 2002) veto players framework is the basis of a model of collective cabinet responsibility. As each coalition party's agreement is necessary for a change of policy, the responsibility of government decisions is collective and there is always deliberation or a bargaining process within the cabinet.

With regard to the distance, in terms of preferences, between cabinet and parliament, the cabinet can either be representative or non-representative of majoritarian preferences in parliament. In the former case, the preferences that are present in the cabinet reflect those of the parliamentary majority. Hence, their aggregation in the cabinet should, at least in principle, generate an equilibrium (i.e., a governmental bill) that corresponds to the equilibrium in the legislature. In the latter case, the cabinet might happen to be a minority cabinet or might control a majority of parliamentary seats, but for some reason its decisions do not represent the preferences of the parliamentary majority.

Combining these two criteria, we can obtain a conceptual map of the conflict-based theoretical explanations of the changes made to government bills during the legislative process. In the remainder of this section, we discuss the hypotheses displayed in Figure 1.

When cabinets do not represent parliamentary majority preferences

When the preferences in the cabinet do not reflect those of the parliamentary majority and actors are driven by position-taking motives, the legislation approved in the cabinet is unlikely to be satisfactory for the floor. Government bills are thus altered throughout the legislative process. The preferences in the cabinet may not be representative of those of the parliamentary majority in three circumstances: when, quite trivially, a minority government is in office; when government legislation has a distributive nature; and when, due to the voting rule employed in the cabinet, government decisions are far from the median legislator. All these three circumstances are independent of the type of cabinet decision making.

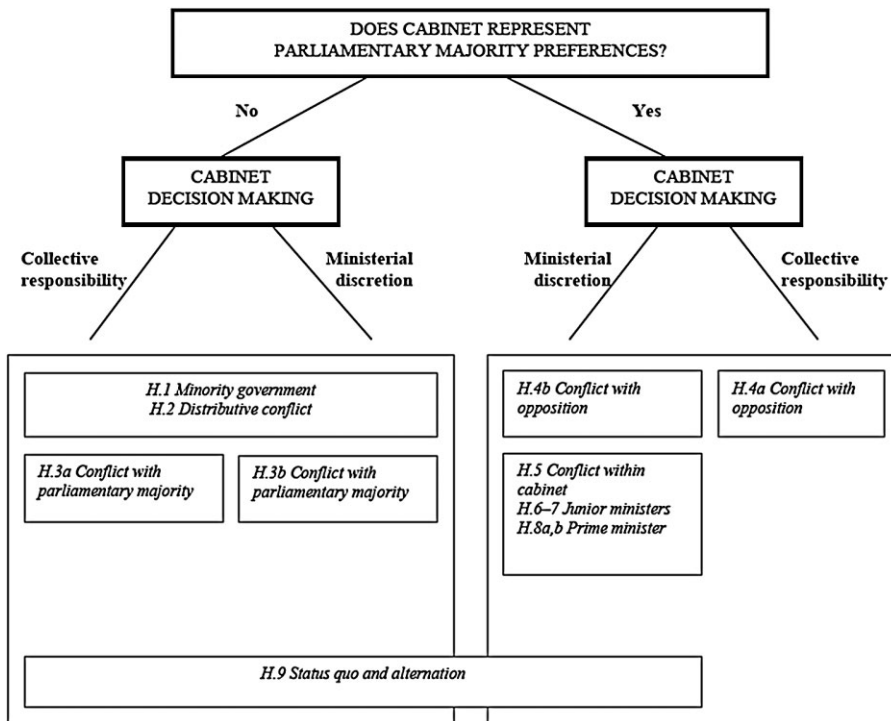


Figure 1. Conceptual map of the conflict-based theoretical explanations.

Minority governments

By definition, minority governments control no more than 50 per cent of the seats in the parliament.⁶ Driven by position-taking incentives, the members of the minority governments can propose bills that – they know – are unsatisfying for the parliament, and hence, will be amended. The legislation initiated by minority governments is modified in parliament, irrespective of whether it reflects just the drafting minister's ideal point or the outcome of a full cabinet bargaining. Thus, we can derive the following hypothesis:

H1: We expect more changes to government bills during the legislative process when the government is a minority government rather than a majority one.⁷

Distributive conflict

One of the theoretically crucial explanations that we have tested relies on a distributive perspective on legislative institutions (e.g., Shepsle & Weingast

1981; Weingast et al. 1981; Weingast & Marshall 1988; Baron & Ferejohn 1989). Within this approach, bills are conceived as proposed distributions of benefits among districts. Bills concentrate benefits in a well-defined special interest and widely distribute costs (Wilson 1973: 333–334), and are used to secure politicians' re-election. For our purposes, we may argue that governmental actors propose legislation that delivers particularistic benefits to their geographical constituencies or to certain interest groups. Even if ministers are supported by (and are members of) parties controlling a parliamentary majority, and even if we suppose that ministers collectively decide on the content of the bills (and consequently, government proposals represent the entire cabinet), their bills can benefit too few geographic or functional constituencies to win a majority of votes in parliament without being changed. Therefore, re-election-seeking legislators include additional constituencies until a parliamentary majority is reached. Ministers, in turn, may derive considerable utility from showing that they are trying to promote the interests of their district or satisfy the demands of some influential groups, regardless of the number of changes that their bills will undergo in parliament. We thus derive the following hypothesis:

H2: Bills with a distributive nature should be more extensively modified in parliament than other types of bills.

Conflict with parliamentary majority

Government bills may be altered during the parliamentary process simply because the cabinet and the floor have different policy preferences. Apart from minority executives and distributive legislation, this may also happen when governmental proposals are distant from the parliamentary median voter, which is expected to be the final equilibrium in the legislative arena. For instance, if cabinet decisions are taken by majority rule and each party enjoys equal consideration, regardless of its size, in a one-dimensional policy space, the median voter in the cabinet can be different from the median voter in the parliament. Although government parties know that the difference between these two majority equilibria will result in modifications to the initial bill in parliament, they could agree to submit a bill corresponding to the cabinet median voter to convey a symbolic 'compromise' message to the electorate. Thus, we can derive the following hypothesis:

H3: We expect more changes to government bills as the policy distance between (a) the government compromise or (b) the proposing minister and the parliamentary median voter increases.

When cabinets do represent parliamentary majority preferences

When the preferences of the cabinet and those of the parliamentary majority coincide, the cabinet members are expected to introduce legislation that is acceptable to the legislature and, thus, will not be modified. However, in the presence of position-taking incentives, this might not actually happen. First, in the legislature coalition partners may be forced to accept some modifications proposed by the opposition parties. Second, if we hold that each minister autonomously drafts the bills in his or her jurisdiction and presents them in parliament for approval, such discretion may generate intra-cabinet conflicts based on the ideological divergence among the different parties to which the ministers belong.

Conflict with opposition

A number of important comparative works emphasise the influence of the opposition in parliamentary systems, highlighting how legislative institutions strengthen opposition parties in the course of the parliamentary process (e.g., Strøm 1990; Döring 1995a; Müller & Strøm 2000; Powell 2000; Saalfeld, 2000). As time is one of the scarcest resources in the legislative arena (Döring 1995b; Cox 2006), opposition parties may play an important role in modifying government legislation under both collective responsibility and ministerial discretion. Indeed, parties in opposition could exchange the possibility to delay the final approval of a governmental bill for the introduction of some modifications that bring some benefits to their own electoral constituencies. Reasonably, the greater the opposition parties perceive government proposals as detrimental to the interests that they represent, the more they will be inclined to use dilatory tactics. Government parties, in turn, may introduce bills that, although bound to be altered, symbolically represent the will of the coalition or their ideal point. Therefore, our next hypothesis can be given as follows:

H4: We expect more changes in government bills as the policy distance between (a) the government compromise or (b) the proposing minister and the opposition parties increases.

Conflict among coalition parties

A fairly recent line of research focuses on delegation relationships within multiparty coalitions and identifies ideological conflict among cabinet members as the fundamental factor explaining the occurrence of modifications to governmental bills (Martin & Vanberg 2004, 2005, 2011).⁸ In this view, the

implementation of the coalitional compromise that makes the existence of the government possible is subject to agency problems, also known as ‘ministerial drift’: ministers, acting as agents of the cabinet as a whole, may not work fully in the interests of their principal. More precisely, each minister enjoys a near monopoly on policy initiation within the jurisdiction of his or her portfolio (see Gallagher et al. 2006: 43–44) and may attempt to use his or her discretion and informational advantage in drafting legislation to move policy in directions favoured by his or her own party, but that can be damaging with respect to the interests of other coalition members.⁹ To manage the delegation relationships between them, coalition partners thus use a variety of mechanisms, such as legislative review – that is, changing government bills through amendments. According to Martin and Vanberg’s (2005, 2011) model, when the ideological conflict within the cabinet is sufficiently severe, position-taking motives may drive ministers to introduce bills that deviate from the coalition compromise, thereby inducing their coalition partners to restore the agreed-upon policy by means of legislative review. The authors’ core hypothesis is thus the following:

H5: As ideological divergence within the coalition becomes larger, the incentives both for ministerial drift and for coalition partners’ monitoring increase, and hence, more modifications will be made to government bills.

While legislative review operates in the parliament, other control instruments can be employed in the cabinet (Andeweg & Timmermans 2008).¹⁰ To the extent that these are able to contain ministerial drift in the pre-parliamentary stage (e.g., in cabinet meetings or in the drafting ministry), we may not observe modifications to government bills. As Thies (2001) points out, junior ministers appointed to ‘hostile’ ministers are commonly employed as executive-level control instruments (see also Verzichelli 2008). Hence, when coalition members can gather information concerning the proposing minister’s behaviour through their junior ministers, they are enabled to exert control at the executive level and thus they are unlikely to make use of review in the legislative arena. We formulate the following hypothesis, which has been successfully tested by Martin and Vanberg (2005) against data from Germany and the Netherlands:¹¹

H6: The presence of a junior minister from a partner party in the drafting ministry should reduce the level of changes made to the bill in the assembly.

Indeed, the presence of a partner party in the drafting ministry should reduce parliamentary changes only insofar as the minister and ‘his or her’ junior ministers have divergent preferences. Thus, the following is a refinement of the previous hypothesis:

H7: We expect fewer modifications when the ideological preferences between the proposing minister and his or her junior ministers are more diverged.

Also prime ministers can have some role in mitigating intra-cabinet conflicts. Unlike line ministers, the prime minister does not have jurisdiction over any specific policy area and his or her task is supposed to be that of ensuring intra-cabinet coordination (see Andeweg 2000). Hence, when a bill is presented by the prime minister, we can reasonably suppose that it is the entire cabinet that wants its approval.¹² Thus, we can derive the following hypothesis:

H8a: Prime ministers' bills should be changed less in parliament.

Interestingly, Müller and Meyer (2010: 1086) suggest an opposite interpretation of the prime ministers' role. The coalition party that holds the prime ministerial post is in a relatively privileged position: given the institutional prerogatives that they may exploit to favour their own constituencies, prime ministers are particularly risky agents for the entire cabinet. When it is their turn, the other coalition partners will put considerable efforts into controlling the prime ministers' actions. Hence, an opposite hypothesis that involves prime ministers is the following:

H8b: Prime ministers' bills should be changed more in parliament.

Status quo and government alternation

The previous explanations all ignore where the status quo is located before lawmaking starts in the cabinet, which is similar to assuming that cabinet members cannot prevent a decision-making process for which the last outcome is, for them, worse than the status quo. However, this assumption may be disputable. Fundamental contributions in the literature on comparative politics (Tsebelis 2002; Cox 2006) assign the possibility of vetoing the policy change to each government party. If we employ a veto player's framework, this possibility is taken into account and the position of the status quo becomes a crucial variable.

If the status quo is between the two most extreme government parties (i.e., in the gridlock area), none of the government bills will be changed at all. When the status quo is outside the gridlock, but still close to the policy position of some of the government parties, then the bargaining margins are quite narrow. In this situation, if we assume that the conflict is between the government (or a single minister) and the parliamentary majority as well as within the cabinet,

then parliamentary changes in government bills will be minor. On the contrary, when the status quo is far away then the final outcome passed in the parliament can be far from the original proposal coming out of the cabinet. In other terms, parliamentary changes can be greater.

It seems rather difficult to empirically assess where the status quo is located. Nevertheless, if in a certain policy area we interpret the status quo for the current government as the decisions taken by the prior cabinet, then government alternation is a systematic source of relatively large shifts in the position of the status quo in many policy domains (Zucchini 2011a). We thus derive the following hypothesis:

H9: We expect that government bills, approved in an alternational party system, are changed more than government bills approved in a pivotal party system.

Explanations based on limited information, position-taking utility and use of rules

As we have stressed, position-taking utility is a requisite for any explanatory hypothesis based on conflict among actors. However, changes in the level of position taking, just as those in the level of information, can have a direct impact on the modifications being made to government bills in the parliament. A further explanation focuses on the use of rules.

Complexity and multidimensionality

Cabinet ministers may not completely know the other actors' preferences, and may be unable to perfectly anticipate the effects of laws. Governmental bills may reflect such a lack of knowledge, and scrutiny in the legislative arena may allow actors to learn and correct the initial proposals. Although ministers certainly have not less resources than ordinary members of the parliament, the variety of the legislators' origins and competences, as well as the specialisation of parliamentary committees, provide the expertise needed to revise governmental legislation (Gilligan & Krehbiel 1989; Krehbiel 1991).

If parliamentary changes to government bills are driven by an improvement of the decision makers' knowledge, then this should be especially true for legislation addressing complex issues or multiple policy areas. In other words,

H10: We expect more changes when the subject of a governmental bill is more complex.

H11: We expect more changes to those bills that can be evaluated according to more than one policy dimension.

Technical ministers

As pointed out earlier, initiating legislation also serves the purpose of communicating with the electorate. However, some ministers are much less sensitive to such an incentive – for example, the technical ministers, who are non-partisan ministers appointed for their technical competence in a particular policy domain. Unlike their partisan colleagues, who become ministers for the purpose of representing the coalition party to which they belong in the cabinet, technical ministers are assigned portfolios because of their expertise. These ministers neither represent a certain political party or constituency, nor do they seek to be re-elected. Therefore, they do not have the necessity to send signals to voters, and when they initiate legislation, they are likely to propose the technically feasible policy that is the closest to the coalition agreed-upon compromise. Since coalition parties are unlikely to modify such a ‘technical’ proposal, we can derive the following hypothesis:

H12: Bills proposed by technical ministers would be less extensively changed in parliament than those sponsored by partisan ministers.¹³

Amending rules and impatience

As restrictive rules limit MPs’ ability to alter legislation in the parliament, any departure from the open amending rule will decrease the amount of modifications made to government bills. We cannot directly test the impact of different rules because during the period that we have considered (1987–2006), the institutions regulating legislative processes in Italy have not substantially changed. However, we can evaluate changes in the use of rules.

Maintaining that the amendment rule employed in a legislature is endogenous, Baron and Ferejohn’s (1989) model predicts that in the presence of impatience, legislatures prefer a closed rule to an open rule. We can argue that the more MPs are impatient, the more they are willing to accept the original text of the bills as proposed by the government. Indeed, trying to correct the initial proposal could lengthen the debate in the parliament, thus postponing its approval, even with the risk of preventing it. Although the open amending rule is not formally changed, impatient legislators tend to modify less in the initial proposal, behaving as if a restrictive rule is in force. For elected politicians, approaching new elections is the major reason to be impatient.¹⁴ As a consequence,

H13: We should expect fewer changes in governmental bills in the parliament as the legislative term progresses.

Data and operationalisation

The data

In the present study, we concentrate on government legislative production in Italy between 1987 and 2006. This time period allows a reasonable amount of variation in some key explanatory factors, as well as reliable measures of parties' policy preferences across several policy areas (see below). In particular, to evaluate the effect of a pivotal versus an alternational party system, we included two First Republic legislatures (1987–1992 and 1992–1994) and two Second Republic legislatures (1996–2001 and 2001–2006).¹⁵ To empirically analyse the modifications occurring to government-sponsored legislation in the course of the parliamentary process, we constructed an original dataset in which the units of analysis are approved governmental laws. We excluded certain types of laws¹⁶ and restricted the analysis to those governmental laws that have been introduced (as first reading) in the Chamber of Deputies.¹⁷ Thus, our final dataset consisted of 636 governmental laws.

The dependent variable

Operationalising *government bill changes* (i.e., the dependent variable) requires some kind of comparison between the final version of the bill adopted by the legislature and the original version introduced by the government. Counting how many amendments have been approved during the legislative process would not be particularly useful because amendments can vary considerably in their scope. A single amendment can alter just a small aspect of a bill as well as a major part of it.

Martin and Vanberg (2005, 2011) have measured the level of legislative review as the number of section changes, which is the sum of all the sections altered, deleted or added to the draft version of the bill. According to them, this measure captures the policy significance of modifications because bills are subdivided into several (sub-)articles, each dealing with a specific issue.¹⁸ However, Martin and Vanberg's operationalisation presents various problems. With regard to the Italian case, it does not take into account some important features of the parliamentary process and legislation, such as the use of 'maxi-amendments', through which a number of articles in the drafted bill are turned into a single article in the final law.¹⁹

Generally, any operationalisation relying on sections or subsections of bills seems problematic. For example, in the Italian legislation, although bills are normally voted upon article by article, often more than one aspect is addressed by a single article. Each single article is subdivided into smaller parts called '*commi*', which deal with more specific aspects. Thus, we can have an article change either because the article is entirely modified, or because just one '*comma*' (or a part of it) is altered. If we employ Martin and Vanberg's measure, these two situations will lead to exactly the same outcome: one article change. Likewise, a measure counting the number of modified '*commi*', although more accurate, would present similar risks.

Given these problems, we decided to look at the most basic units in the text of bills and measure our dependent variable as the number of words that are changed (i.e., added, deleted or modified) during the legislative process. In particular, we computed for each single word appearing in either version the absolute difference between the number of times it occurs in the draft bill and the number of times it occurs in the final law, and then summed all these absolute differences. In this way, we considered substituted words, but over-estimated their number, which resulted in twice the actual value.²⁰ For this reason, we computed the absolute difference between the number of words in the original bill and the number of words in the final law to get the *number of added or removed words*, subtracted this quantity from the sum of the absolute differences calculated in the second step and divided the result by two, thus finding the actual *number of substituted words*. Finally, we added the number of substituted words to the number of added or removed words, and obtained the total number of changed words.²¹

Undoubtedly, our operationalisation presents drawbacks. First, there are words such as 'not' that, if added or removed, may completely change the meaning of sentences. Moreover, our measure is subject to problems of language ambiguity, which are, however, common to all computer-based techniques of content analysis.²² More generally, similar to Martin and Vanberg, we did not deal with the substantive content of the legislation. We simply looked at what is modified in the text of bills during the legislative process, and not at the actual policy significance of these transformations. However, given the increasingly technical and specialised nature of modern legislation, understanding the actual policy impact of each change made to a certain bill seems to require a prohibitive effort by researchers. This is especially true when the analysis concerns a relatively large number of bills dealing with several policy areas, as in the present case. On the whole, there seem reasons to believe that the number of changed words is a fairly reliable measure, as well as a more refined one than Martin and Vanberg's operationalisation.

The independent variables

Several explanations based on conflict concern ideological divisions between political actors. To identify policy positions, we used the expert surveys conducted by Laver and Hunt (1992) as well as Benoit and Laver (2006).²³ For each party, these data provide position and saliency scores on a 20-point scale in several policy dimensions. After assigning each governmental law to one of these policy domains, we calculated the absolute difference between the positions of the relevant actors on the issue under consideration. Then, to take into account the saliency of the policy area addressed by legislation, we weighted the obtained ideological distances by an issue-specific measure of salience, which we computed using saliency scores from the same expert surveys.²⁴

Accordingly, *conflict with parliamentary majority* (i.e., the policy divergence between the government compromise – or the proposing minister – and the parliamentary median voter) (*H3a* and *H3b*) was calculated as the (saliency-weighted) absolute difference between the mid-range position of the government – or the score of the proposing minister's party – and the score of the party controlling the median legislator in the chamber.²⁵ Similarly, *conflict with opposition* (*H4a* and *H4b*) is the (saliency-weighted) distance between the minister's position – or the government mid-range – and that of the farthest opposition party.²⁶ We measured *ideological conflict within the cabinet* (*H5*) as the distance between the proposing minister's party and the farthest coalition party (see Franchino & Høyland 2009: 612). Similarly, *JMs' distance* in *H7* is the distance between the minister submitting the bill and the junior minister who is farthest from his or her position in the same ministry.²⁷ Both variables were weighted by saliency. *JMs' presence* (*H6*) is a dummy, which takes the value of 1 when a junior minister from a partner party is present in the ministry drafting the bill, and 0 otherwise.

Prime minister (*H8a* and *H8b*) is a dummy whose value is 1 when the prime minister is the first signatory of the bill. *Minority* (*H1*) is a dummy taking the value of 1 if the government proposing the bill does not control a majority in the Chamber. The dummy *distributive* (*H2*) is 1 when the bill contains at least one pork barrel clause (i.e., when the bill includes benefits for particular professional categories, interest groups, organisations, places or persons). Alternation (*H9*) has been operationalized in two different ways. First, we used the dummy *Second Republic*, with the value of 1 for bills approved during the XIII and XIV legislatures (1996–2006), and 0 for bills approved during the X and XI legislatures (1987–1994). In other words, we considered the Italian party system as pivotal in the First Republic and alternational in the Second Republic. Second, we calculated the *Corrected Tsebelis Alternation*, which is the absolute difference between the mid-range of the government introducing

the bill and the mid-range of the previous government, unless the mid-range of the previous government is included in the Pareto set of the current government. In this last case, the measure is equal to 0 (Zucchini 2011b).²⁸

With regard to the hypotheses based on actors' informational problems, the dummy *complexity* (H10) becomes 1 if the bill includes more than one aspect regarding the subject at issue, while the *number of consulting committees* to which the bill is referred operationalises the multidimensional nature of bills (H11). The dummy for *technical ministers* (H12), who are supposed to be less sensitive to position taking (and also better informed), takes the value 1 when the first signatory of the bill is a minister who does not represent any party. We identified technical ministers drawing on Verzichelli and Cotta's (2000) data on the distribution of cabinet ministerships in Italy up to 2000. For the succeeding years, we tried to follow the authors' logic. Finally, legislators' *impatience* (H13) is operationalised as the number of days between the introduction of a certain bill and the end of the legislative term.

The *length of the initial bill* and the *policy area* that the bill deals with are incorporated as control variables in our analyses. With regard to the former, which is measured as the number of words in the drafted version, longer bills are obviously more likely to be modified than shorter ones. Concerning the latter, bills addressing a certain policy area might systematically face more changes than others. This could happen if, for instance, the issues within that policy domain are intrinsically more complex, or because in that policy area external interest groups and advisory bodies provide legislators with the information needed to modify government bills. We thus created a number of separate dummy indicators, one for each policy domain, following the classification of the Comparative Policy Agendas Project.²⁹

Analysis and findings

Our dependent variable counts the number of words changed in governmental bills. It takes only non-negative and integer values and is far from being normally distributed.³⁰ Therefore, we used an event count model – more precisely, a negative binomial regression, given the presence of over-dispersion in the data (King 1989; Long 1997; Cameron & Trivedi 1998). All analyses are carried out using Huber-White robust standard errors.³¹

With respect to the results (Table 1), our data only partially seems to support Martin and Vanberg's hypothesis that policy divisions within the coalition increase the amount of changes made to governmental bills during the legislative process (H5). The coefficient of *conflict within cabinet* is positive and statistically significant in model 1, which also incorporates the proposing minister's distance from the farthest opposition party and the dummy for the

Table 1. Negative binomial models of government bill changes in Italy, 1987–2006

Independent variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Minority	0.288 (0.194)	0.360* (0.198)	0.305 (0.194)	0.689*** (0.183)	0.438* (0.224)	0.482** (0.223)
Distributive	−0.023 (0.118)	0.011 (0.118)	0.014 (0.118)	0.001 (0.119)	0.004 (0.119)	0.029 (0.117)
Conflict within cabinet	0.061*** (0.023)	0.024 (0.032)				
JMs' presence	0.296 (0.206)					
JMs' distance		0.051** (0.024)	0.061*** (0.018)	0.061*** (0.018)		0.044** (0.021)
Conflict minister – opposition	−0.002 (0.020)	−0.014 (0.020)	−0.011 (0.020)	−0.023 (0.020)		
Second Republic	0.485*** (0.131)	0.447*** (0.136)	0.443*** (0.136)		0.473*** (0.132)	0.416*** (0.137)
Corrected Tsebelis Alternation				0.064** (0.026)		
Prime Minister	0.490*** (0.153)	0.527*** (0.158)	0.545*** (0.153)	0.558*** (0.154)	0.463*** (0.151)	0.518*** (0.156)
Technical minister	−0.566*** (0.152)	−0.567*** (0.154)	−0.547*** (0.153)	−0.573*** (0.155)	−0.541*** (0.151)	−0.562*** (0.151)
Conflict government mid-range – parliamentary majority					0.128** (0.061)	0.060 (0.071)
Conflict government mid-range – opposition					−0.057* (0.034)	−0.043 (0.035)
Complexity	0.432*** (0.153)	0.423*** (0.151)	0.419*** (0.150)	0.427*** (0.148)	0.402*** (0.149)	0.408*** (0.148)
Multidimensionality	0.127*** (0.031)	0.129*** (0.031)	0.130*** (0.031)	0.138*** (0.030)	0.123*** (0.032)	0.127*** (0.031)
Impatience	−0.000 (0.000)	−0.000 (0.000)	−0.000 (0.000)	−0.000* (0.000)	−0.000 (0.000)	−0.000* (0.000)
Length of bill	0.000*** (0.000)	0.000*** (0.000)	0.000*** (0.000)	0.000*** (0.000)	0.000*** (0.000)	0.000*** (0.000)
Constant	4.070*** (0.393)	4.486*** (0.360)	4.573*** (0.342)	4.746*** (0.354)	4.901*** (0.517)	4.796*** (0.518)
AIC	8,528.217	8,526.064	8,524.412	8,527.814	8,526.044	8,525.116

Notes: Dependent variable: Government bill changes. *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$. Entries are estimated negative binomial regression coefficients (with standard errors in parentheses). $N = 636$.

presence of a hostile junior minister in the drafting ministry. However, that coefficient falls to insignificance once we include *JMs' distance*, which, in contrast, has a significant and positive coefficient (model 2).³² Conflict within cabinet and junior ministers' distance are fairly and positively correlated (Pearson's correlation coefficient is 0.660 with $p = 0.000$),³³ and hence, keeping both of them in the same model could increase standard errors, reducing the precision of our estimates. Therefore, in model 3 and subsequent models, we retained only junior ministers' distance – the effect of which is rather strong and stable in all the specifications. This seems to suggest that, at least in the Italian case, it is the policy divisions within the drafting ministry, and not the overall ideological conflict within the coalition, which increase the amount of modifications made to government bills in the parliament. Remarkably, against the original expectation (*H7*), the sign of the coefficient is always positive. In particular, for a standard deviation increase in the distance between the proposing minister and his or her farthest junior minister (3.5 points on the 20-point scale of expert surveys), the average number of changed words in a government bill increases by 23.5 per cent.³⁴ This implies that Italian junior ministers do not prevent ministers from presenting 'idiosyncratic' bills, but they induce legislators to amend them.³⁵

Along with junior ministers' distance, two other hypotheses based on conflict among actors find strong support in all our analyses. First, due to the farther positions of the initial status quo from the present cabinet, *government alternation* (*H9*) increases the amount of changes made to government bills. As our dummy indicates, during the alternational Italian Second Republic, government bills were altered more extensively than during the pivotal First Republic. Consistently, as model 4 shows, the more the current government is distant from the previous one, the more its legislation is modified in the parliament. The increase in the expected number of changed words is 56 per cent in the Second Republic and 20 per cent for a standard deviation increase (2.6 points) in the Corrected Tsebelis Alternation. Second, quite surprisingly, the bills that are introduced by the *prime minister* are more extensively altered than those proposed by the line ministers (by 72 per cent). This is at odds with the expectation that prime ministers should ensure coordination among governing parties at the executive level (*H8a*). On the contrary, instead of pursuing coalition-wide goals, prime ministers are the members of the cabinet who are the most susceptible to position-taking incentives, and hence, are most likely to present legislation that will be modified in the parliament (*H8b*).

Confirming our expectation about different levels of position taking, the bills drafted by *technical ministers* prove to be the least likely to be amended in the parliament (*H12*). The expected number of changed words is expected to decrease by 42 per cent when the proposer is a technical minister. In

contrast, neither the *ideological conflict between minister and opposition* (H4b) nor the *distributive nature* of bills (H2) seems to have any impact on the transformations undergone by the ministerial drafts in the parliament.³⁶ *Minority governments* (H1) seem to have a positive effect on the level of changes, but both the significance and magnitude of the coefficients are rather unsteady across the models.

With regard to information-related explanations, our findings provide strong support for both the hypotheses that we included. Government bills dealing with *complex subjects* (H10) or *many policy dimensions* (H11) are more extensively amended than other bills. In contrast, we found no strong evidence that *legislators' impatience* counts (H13). The coefficients do not have the expected sign, and the standard levels of significance are rarely reached.

Model 5 tests the hypothesis of conflict with parliamentary majority and includes distances involving the government mid-range. In other words, the initial bill is assumed to reflect a compromise among all the coalition parties (H3a).³⁷ As expected, the *distance between the government mid-range and the parliamentary median voter* is found to have a positive and significant impact on the level of changes. The more the preferences of the cabinet are different from those of the parliamentary majority, the more a cabinet compromise – proposed for position-taking motives – will be modified in the legislature. In addition, rather unexpectedly, the coefficient of the distance between the government mid-range and the farthest opposition party is significant with a negative sign.

Reasonably, what we found about the conflict with junior ministers within the drafting ministry seems quite at odds with this last result concerning the conflict between government mid-range and parliamentary median voter. The two hypotheses follow different logics. In one case, the drafting minister proposes something that he or she knows will be changed in the parliament by the coalition parties that have junior ministers in her or his ministry. In the other case, it is the entire cabinet that introduces bills that will be amended by the parliamentary majority. Trying to make sense of these two conflicting results, we incorporate both the hypotheses in a single model. As shown by model 6, the conflict within the drafting ministry seems to prevail: once we include it, the conflict with parliamentary majority loses all its significance, and so does the impact of the opposition. In contrast, the significant and positive effect of junior ministers' distance is noted to be robust to all specifications.

Conclusion

Horses are certainly animals that attract more aesthetic admiration than hippos. Italian government actors know this perfectly, and usually prefer to

allow a monstrous transformation of a *thoroughbred* than introducing a *hippo* from the beginning of the lawmaking process. Therefore, the size of the changes that inflate and disfigure the initial horse's shape depends, first, directly or indirectly (i.e., through the conflict), on the position-taking utility enjoyed by the government actors. The former Italian premier Berlusconi did not look for the 'guilties' too far from his coalition. Indeed, despite the important institutional prerogatives of the Italian parliament, the opposition parties seem to have no role, and the most robust empirical models seem to confirm that the coalitional nature of executives is crucial. Parliament appears to be an arena at the coalition partners' disposal, where a second, decisive round of the cabinet decision-making process is played. The model of ministerial discretion is not supported by clear-cut evidence against the model of collegial responsibility. Bills prepared and submitted by autonomous ministers, once introduced in the legislature, become subjected to a bargaining process among the coalition members. The 'complained' transformative powers of the Italian legislative branch are thus not independent of factors related to the executive – namely, the ideological conflict among its members.

Martin and Vanberg's argument has not been fully rejected; rather, it has been somehow refined. We have shown that the conflict that actually affects the amount of modifications made to government bills in the Italian parliament is not among all the parties in the coalition, as Martin and Vanberg (2005, 2011) suggest, but just among those partners that are represented in the drafting ministry, and hence, have the relevant information needed to revise the proposed legislation in the parliament.

This leads us to suppose that junior ministers' role in Italy is close to what Martin and Vanberg suggested in their 2011 book. Italian junior ministers inform their own party about the policy implications of the bills, enabling them to correct the initial proposals in the parliament. However, different from Martin and Vanberg's findings, in Italy, shadow junior ministers do affect the amount of transformations made to government bills. Moreover, the limited level of information at ministers' disposal when they draft legislation systematically increases the parliamentary changes undergone by governmental bills.

Our analysis also provides additional insights into intra-cabinet politics. The members of the Italian multiparty governments who want to implement the agreed-upon compromise do not rely on prime ministers because these prove to be the most risky agents for the entire coalition and are thus subject to extensive monitoring activity. However, they can place the highest trust on technical ministers, who use their expertise to pursue the goals of the coalition and, hence, are the least risky agents for the entire government. The legislation introduced by technical ministers is unlikely to be corrected in parliament not only thanks to their reputation as experts, but also because their behaviour is

strategic as they are able to anticipate the possible behaviour of other legislative actors, but not 'political', as they ignore the utility to take positions in front of some constituencies.

Furthermore, we found that the shift from a pivotal to an alternational party system represents a structural break. When government alternation is a real possibility, government bills are largely changed in the parliament. However, such a phenomenon can have more than one explanation. As we hypothesised, when the status quo is far away, then there are wider margins to bargain. If a political system combines more than one government party and a status quo that is not really controversial (because it is very bad for all government parties), then the distance between the minister's initial proposal and the final legislative outcome can be very large. Another possible explanation can be based on the different position-taking utilities enjoyed by the political actors in the two types of party system. If position-taking utility increases with the party system competitiveness, then we should expect more changes in an alternational party system.

Acknowledgements

Earlier versions of this article were presented in the EPSA annual meeting (Dublin, Ireland, 16–18 June 2011), in the SISP annual meeting (Palermo, Italy, 8–10 September 2011) and in the Oslo–Rome International Workshop on Democracy (Rome, Italy, 7–9 November 2011). We thank all participants, as well as Fabio Franchino, Luca Verzichelli and the anonymous referees for their helpful comments and suggestions.

Notes

1. The Italian Government Building.
2. See www.corriere.it/politica/11_febbraio_23/berlusconi-stati-general-roma_ab6ec0c6-3f42-11e0-ad3f-823f69a8e285.shtml
3. The type of amending rule employed in a legislature has primarily been studied as one of the institutional factors that constrain actors' behaviour (see Rasch 1995, 2000).
4. At least in principle, the type of decision making within the parliament could also be relevant. However, as in the present work we have only analysed ordinary legislation, such a factor remains constant across laws. As Rasch (1995: 494–495) shows, in Italy and all the other European countries, the voting procedure adopted in the parliament for passing ordinary legislation is the simple majority.
5. See also Austen-Smith and Banks (1990); Laver (2006).
6. Governments in parliamentary systems are supported by a parliamentary coalition comprised of the set of legislators who are expected to support government initiatives. The parliamentary coalition supporting minority governments may include the parties

that endorse the government on its formal investiture or in subsequent confidence votes (Laver 2006: 127–128).

7. The ‘all else being equal’ clause is presumed in all the hypotheses we have formulated.
8. In this body of literature, delegation relationships within multiparty coalitions are conceptualised within a principal-agent framework (see Strøm 2000; Strøm et al. 2003, 2008). As Lupia (2003: 33; emphasis in original) defines it, ‘delegation’ is ‘an act where one person or group, called a *principal*, relies on another person or group, called an *agent*, to act on the principal’s behalf’.
9. To put it in a slightly different way, ministers belonging to multiparty governments act as agents of two potentially competing principals: the party to which they are affiliated and the parliamentary majority more generally (Müller & Meyer 2010: 1067; Strøm et al. 2010: 519).
10. See also the contributions in Müller and Strøm (2000). A third arena is the extra-parliamentary one, which concerns, most of all, coalition treaties (see Müller & Strøm 2000, 2008). However, the study of these conflict management instruments is outside the scope of the present work.
11. In their latest work, instead, Martin and Vanberg (2011: 113–116) examine the effect of the presence of a hostile junior minister in the drafting ministry on the relationship between intra-coalition divisiveness and degree of changes in parliament, and find out that in the same two countries the presence of a shadow junior minister has no impact. They also find evidence that shadow junior ministers suppress the delaying effect that conflict within coalition has on the duration of legislative processes. According to the authors, this means that junior ministers perform a mere information-gathering task, without a direct impact on the level of modifications in parliament.
12. Also, the number of government parties that (by means of their respective ministers) formally co-sponsor a government bill can indicate the degree of intra-cabinet control. The higher this number is, the more the bill will approximate the coalition compromise, thus making legislative review superfluous. In analyses not reported here we tested this hypothesis, which, however, is not supported by the data.
13. Another obvious argument for this hypothesis is with respect to the level of knowledge. Bills drafted by experts need much less correction and integration during the parliamentary readings.
14. At the beginning of the parliamentary term, representatives reasonably expect to have enough time to alter government-sponsored legislation. As the term proceeds, they know that the time for modifying bills in parliament is getting shorter, and hence the value that they assign to future benefits or policy achievements progressively decreases. When the end of the term is near, such a value is very close to zero.
15. We excluded the transitional XII legislature (15 April 1994 – 8 May 1996), which was rather exceptional. Its inclusion in the analyses could pose problems for testing the hypotheses concerning alternation and technical ministers. First, although this legislature does not certainly belong to the First Republic, it does not present the characteristics of a true alternational system. In 1994, almost all the prior governing parties disappeared, along with a 45-year-long pivotal party system; a new quasi-plurality electoral system came into force, and new or previously excluded parties won (or had the actual possibility to win) the elections. However, after an 8-month centre-right government (Berlusconi I), a fully technical executive was formed (Dini). Second, while all the ministers in Dini’s cabinet were technical, very few ministers were technical in all the other cabinets included in the period considered here. Hence, if the XII legislature were

included, the variable for technical ministers would capture the effect of the XII legislature, and not the impact of introduction by technical ministers. Third, technical ministers are supposed to face lower position-taking incentives than their partisan colleagues, yet we cannot expect this logic to work within the fully technical Dini government.

16. In particular, we excluded constitutional laws, budgetary laws, annual Community Acts, and laws ratifying international treaties and agreements because the parliamentary dynamics leading to their approval are radically different from the rest of the government legislation.
17. The texts of the bills introduced in the Senate are available in electronic format only from 1996 onward. (see www.senato.it/ric/sddl/nuovaricerca.do?params.legislatura=16). In any case, the Italian parliament is conventionally considered a symmetrical legislature because both chambers perform identical functions (for our purposes, they have the same role in the legislative process). Moreover, although elected on a somewhat different basis, the two houses have almost always had identical composition. For example, Hine (1993: 189–190) defines the Italian parliament as a case of ‘perfectly co-equal bicameralism’. More recently, however, some scholars have stressed that Italian bicameralism is becoming less perfect in the Second Republic (Zucchini 2008). This would imply that, in a given legislative term, the two chambers can have different majorities and different median voters. We controlled for this in two ways. First, since the congruence between the two chambers is likely to vary just across legislative terms, we rerun our analyses including dummies for the parliament during which the law has been passed. Second, we rerun our models incorporating the number of parliamentary readings, which can be considered an indicator of the congruence of the two chambers’ preferences. In both cases, our findings do not change (results are available upon request from the authors).
18. Martin and Vanberg (2005) take articles as the logical subunits of laws, while in Martin and Vanberg (2011) they choose either articles or sub-articles on the basis of a substantive reading of the bills.
19. In an extreme case, a bill made up of a certain number of articles can be at last approved as a single-article law. While the bill is passed without any actual modification in the text, Martin and Vanberg’s measure would indicate a relatively high degree of change. Since the 1990s, Italian cabinets have made increasing use of maxi-amendments. These have been employed, together with delegating laws and decree laws, as circumventing tactics – that is, techniques to circumvent the ordinary legislative process (see Zucchini 2011a; see also Kreppel 1997; Capano & Giuliani 2001; Newell 2006). Both delegating laws and bills converting government decrees into laws are included in our sample.
20. Substituted words would be counted twice: once as words appearing in the original text, but not in the final one, and once as words appearing in the final text, but not in the original one.
21. Changes in spelling, capitalisation and punctuation have not been counted as modifications. Descriptive statistics and the distribution of government bill changes are presented in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2, respectively. See Appendix 6 for a more detailed illustration of how we measured government bill changes and Appendix 7 for a comparison between our measure and that of Martin and Vanberg. All the appendices can be found online at: www.coolresearch.net/horses-and-hippos/.
22. For a discussion, see, e.g., Laver and Garry (2000).

23. We used the former for the 1987–1994 period, and the latter for the 1996–2006 period. Expert surveys prior to Laver and Hunt (1992) considered either a single or a few policy dimensions (see Morgan 1976; Castles & Mair 1984). An important alternative source of party positions is the Manifesto Research Group/Comparative Manifestos Project (MRG/CMP; Budge et al. 1987, 2001). However, the scores provided by the MRG/CMP appear hardly plausible for the Italian parties during the period considered here. For instance, if we use the left–right positions calculated according to Laver and Budge (1992), in 1992 the PDS (i.e., the former communists) is found to be on the right of the Christian Democrats (DC) and has the same position as the PLI (Liberals), while in 1996, the PPI (the left-wing component of the former Christian Democrats) is the most right-wing party in the parliament, situated even to the right of Berlusconi's Forza Italia.
24. As Martin and Vanberg suggest, position-taking incentives are stronger on more salient issues. Thus, we should expect more changes on bills dealing with issues that are more salient for the parties' constituencies and, hence, for the parties themselves. On each policy dimension we proceeded as follows. First, for each parliamentary party, we divided its saliency score on that policy dimension by that party's average saliency across all dimensions, thus obtaining the party's relative saliency on that dimension. For example, in the 1987–1992 parliament, the Christian Democrats (DC) had a saliency score of 16 on the social policy domain and an average saliency of 13.22 across all domains. It follows that the DC's relative saliency on social policy was 1.21. Second, we multiplied the party's relative saliency by its proportion of parliamentary seats, thus obtaining the party's weighted relative saliency. Since the DC controlled 234 out of the 630 total parliamentary seats, the DC's weighted relative saliency on social policy was 0.45. Third, we computed thereafter the overall saliency of a certain dimension by adding up the weighted relative saliency of all parties on that dimension. The social policy domain had an overall saliency of 0.45 (DC) + 0.02 (PLI) + 0.04 (PRI) + 0.03 (PSDI) + 0.17 (PSI) + 0.02 (DP) + 0.02 (Greens) + 0.06 (MSI) + 0.32 (PCI) + 0.02 (Radicals) = 1.15. Finally, we repeated this for all the dimensions. This measure follows the same logic as Martin and Vanberg's (2005: 100, note 18) government-specific measure of salience, and is constructed in such a way that relatively more salient issues in parliament (like social policy in the 1987–1992 term) present values greater than 1, while less salient issues display values lesser than 1. Each ideological distance was multiplied by the salience of the issue addressed by the bill.
25. In general, the proposer's policy position is measured as the government mid-range (see Tsebelis & Chang 2004) for the hypotheses assuming cabinet collective responsibility, and as the score of the first signatory for those assuming ministerial discretion.
26. We did not consider parliamentary opposition groups with less than 20 legislators because these parties are usually constrained in their ability to influence legislation (e.g., they do not take part in the meetings where the legislative planning is decided).
27. *JMs' distance* is equal to 0 if the proposing minister is not 'shadowed' – that is, either when there are no junior ministers in the drafting ministry, or when the minister and his or her junior ministers are co-partisan.
28. The results of our analyses would be the same using Tsebelis' (2002) original measure of alternation.
29. Descriptive statistics for the independent variables and for the indicators of policy domains are given in online Appendices 3 and 4 (see Note 21 above).

30. Having no upper limit, the variable enables us to distinguish between a situation in which the whole text of a bill is substituted and one in which the whole text is substituted and extra words are added – that is, a more extensive change.
31. It should be noted that in all the models displayed in Table 1, the dispersion parameter *alpha* is positive, which implies that a negative binomial regression is more appropriate than a Poisson regression. The dispersion parameter and the coefficients for the policy dummies, although not displayed, are available upon request from the authors. We have also rerun all the models, including the XII legislature and without policy dummies, and our results did not substantially change (results available upon request from the authors).
32. *JMs' distance* is a better measure than *JMs' presence*, because a continuous measure is more accurate and the use of the distance seems a more appropriate (and meaningful) way to operationalise conflict within the drafting ministry in the Italian case. In Italy, where the number of both coalition parties and ministries has always been relatively large, it is almost always the case that a junior minister from a partner party is present in the drafting ministry (Verzichelli & Cotta 2000). It must be emphasised that for 95 per cent of the bills in our sample, there is – at least – one hostile junior minister in the drafting ministry (see online Appendix 3).
33. They both measure ideological divisions among parties in the coalition. In almost half of the laws in our sample (312 out of 636), the proposing minister's distance from the farthest coalition partner and that from the farthest junior minister coincide.
34. For an explanation of how we calculated the percentage changes in the expected number of changed words for changes in the covariates, see online Appendix 5, where we give a more immediate interpretation of our results based on a discussion of the magnitude of the effects of the independent variables. In addition, in online Appendix 8 we show through simulation how changes in the covariates affect the expected value of our dependent variable.
35. Just like the other variables measuring ideological distances, *JMs' distance* operationalises the conflict among parties and, hence, assumes that parties are sufficiently cohesive on the floor. Indeed, partisan discipline in the Italian parliament is less strong than in other legislatures (Cotta 1994), and this could affect our results. However, we can reasonably suppose that a junior minister will induce his or her co-partisan legislators to amend a ministerial draft only when his or her parliamentary party is sufficiently cohesive. In other words, in the presence of fully disciplined parties we would observe an even stronger impact of junior ministers' distance on the amount of changes made to government bills.
36. Our result concerning the impact of the opposition seems to contrast with the common wisdom that during the amendatory process, Italian governments need to renegotiate the content of their bills with opposition parties (Capano & Vignati 2008). This idea is supported by the very high proportion of laws adopted by a quasi-unanimous vote in the Italian parliament (Capano & Giuliani 2001; Giuliani 2008). However, the way we operationalise our opposition-related variable does not allow us to take a position regarding the level of cooperation between government and opposition. All we can say is that the ideological distance between cabinet and opposition does not affect the level of modifications made to government bills in parliament. We thank an anonymous referee for suggesting that we clarify this point. As for the result concerning distributive bills, the Italian parliament is traditionally considered an appropriate setting for the application of a distributive perspective (e.g., Cantelli et al. 1974; Cotta 1994).

The pork-barrel nature of Italian legislation is also emphasised in recent studies (see, e.g., Golden & Picci 2008). In any case, testing the distributive hypothesis probably deserves a better operationalisation than a dummy indicator. In addition, more importantly, we may also think that distributive bills are changed no more than other bills because of logrolling. Due to an exchange of mutual support, a number of particularistic pieces of legislation could be passed without observable modifications (see Tullock 1981).

37. In analyses that we do not report here, we found that the ideological distance between the proposing minister and the parliamentary median voter (*H3b*) does not have any significant impact on our dependent variable (results available upon request from the authors).

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