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The impact of party policy priorities on Italian law-making from the First to the Second Republic (1987-2006)

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1. Introduction

8th May 2001. On the verge of the Italian elections, the centre-right coalition leader, the media-tycoon Silvio Berlusconi, signed a contract with its voters during a live TV show. The contract listed five general policy pledges and contained a provision, whereby he would resign from politics at the end of its mandate if at least four of the points were not fulfilled. From a symbolic viewpoint, this event is meaningful in recent Italian history: its media-exposure allowed to strengthen to an unprecedented level the linkage between campaign pledges, policy actions by the elected executive and the threat of electoral sanction (albeit in this case, it would be self-inflicted). More specifically, it can be argued that its rhetoric fits rather conveniently with the emergence of bipolar competition in Italy after the 1994 elections.¹ Conversely, it seems to conflict with the logic underlying the so-called Italian First Republic, where Italy witnessed no alternation in government. Parliamentary majorities and their common programmatic platforms formed only *after* the elections through prolonged negotiations between the omnipresent Christian Democrats (DC), its centrist allies (and their respective social partners) and (after 1963) the Socialist Party (PSI). The content of party manifestos presented in the eve of elections did not tie the hands of governing elites, because the threat of an electoral sanction was not credible and the coalitions were not formed yet.

The wider question of whether the policy content of election platforms does make a difference in subsequent policy making decisions has been widely addressed by the literature (Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994; Royed 1996; Budge et al 2001; McDonald and Budge 2005). In its stylized version, mandate theory expects governing parties, acting as utility maximisers, to stick as close as possible to election promises, so as to avoid retaliation by disappointed voters in the subsequent election. In other words, it stresses the strategic importance of elections as a mechanism of direct accountability between elected officials and citizens in democratic systems. A plurality of conditions have to be met for a mandate to exist, although arguably the most fundamental one is often taken for granted: there must exist the political conditions for alternation.

Our analysis of the Italian case contributes empirically to this debate by focusing on one of the few cases of transition from a blocked system, with the relative-majority centrist party permanently in government, to a system of government alternation featuring a greater level of political competitiveness. In particular, it inspects whether, with respect to the past, there is evidence that the new alternation system brought about a greater congruence between the party and the legislative agenda. It does so by carrying out a longitudinal study of the extent programmatic priorities laid out

¹ Remarkably, since 2001 all Italian governments have featured a Minister *without portfolio* officially in charge of implementing the government programme.

in the winning coalition's manifestos are reflected in the legislative agenda across a period of twenty years (1987-2006) and five elections.

We contend that focusing on the Italian case over the recent two decades offers an interesting testing ground for this theory. While it experienced the above-mentioned party system change, Italy maintained many past traits of a consensual democracy, such as the presence of multiparty fragmented coalitions (Chiaramonte, 2007) and a relative balance of power between legislative and executive branch (De Micheli and Verzichelli 2004). According to some commentators (Morlino, 2009), the transition from the so-called First to the Second Republic entailed only an adjustment of the Italian consensual system and not a passage to a majoritarian democracy. The question arising is thus whether, *ceteris paribus*, the introduction of alternation in office was sufficient to produce a higher level of government accountability or it needed other factors to work, such as a smaller size of the party system or a strengthening of executive agenda-setting powers. For these reasons, we argue that the Italian transition is a crucial case to test theories about the policy implications of alternation. The purpose of this article is, thus, to consider some preliminary evidence relevant to this issue. What is more, answering this theoretical and empirical question promises to contribute also to the important scholarly debate on the nature and consequences of the Italian transition on the functioning of its democratic system (i.e. Bull and Rhodes 2007).

The paper is organized as follows. Next, we draw on the literature on mandate theory to formulate two exploratory hypotheses on the impact of alternation on the congruence between the pre-electoral agenda of winning parties and their ensuing legislative agenda. Secondly, we illustrate the data and the methodology employed to evaluate these expectations. Finally we present and discuss our results and draw the conclusions.

2. Government alternation and the mandate theory

The party mandate theory revolves essentially around the role of elections in democracy. More precisely, it focuses on the way and extent electoral institutions translate voter preferences into collective choices. According to the theory, political parties play a fundamental role in democracy because “they alone tie representatives to a particular set of past and promised policies on which voters can make an informed choice in the elections” (Budge and Hofferbert 1990, 113). Parties compete in elections by presenting voters with different policy options contained in their respective electoral platforms. Voters are informed about the policy profiles of each party and, after comparing them, they give their vote to the party closest to their preferred position. On its turn, the winner tries to run government in line with the policy pledges made before the election, because it is on the basis of these pledges that it got elected in the first place. Moreover, the failure to fulfil the mandate

might reduce its odds of re-election. That said, the prerequisite underlying the model can be encapsulated in one postulate: all parties are legitimate candidates to government and there must exist the political conditions for alternation in government.

Italy stands out among other parliamentary democracies because for most of its republican history this last condition was lacking. Imagine a country where all political players know that no Government will be possible without a party (DC), and many of them believe, by way of some sort of *conventio ad excludendum*, that no Government will be possible with other two parties because of their label of “anti-system” (one of them is the Communist Party, PCI, then the second largest party, the other is the neo-fascist party). Imagine also that both beliefs are always confirmed by the electoral results and by the post-electoral coalitional party behaviours. In other terms, imagine a country where government parties are more or less always the same, and they are supposed to be the same election after election, it does not matter how many cabinets are made and broken during a legislature (Galli, 2000). Finally, add that the only visible change during a long period is a gradually increasing party fragmentation both in the Parliament and in the Government. This is a description of the Italian First Republic, a country where the DC, as the party of relative majority, stayed permanently in office for more than forty-five years in alliance with smaller parties of the centre and, later on, with the support of the PSI.²

This status-quo did not imply that there existed no visible divisions and rivalries within the governing coalition and between parliamentary party groups and ministers. Indeed, the PR electoral system compelled parties to maintain distinct identities, especially after the mid-1970s and the increase of volatility and fragmentation in the electorate. Even so, differences were often watered down in electoral platforms and concerned only minor issues, so as not to put at risk the above-mentioned *conventio*. As Cotta puts it: “Electoral line-ups and governing alliances, dictated principally by choices regarding the level of metapolicies, necessarily required adherents to play down divergences in their programmatic outlooks” (Cotta, 1996, 31-2 cited in Newell, 2000, 43). Additionally, party platforms could hardly be taken as policy templates after the elections. The coalition’s main policy lines were generally agreed after the elections, namely when coalition parties could count their votes and bargain an agreement (mainly on the distribution of government portfolios) far from the spotlight of public attention (Verzichelli and Cotta 2003). Of course, keeping the lid on policy competitiveness impacted not only on coalition dynamics but also on policy outcomes. Most of the legislative activity was directed towards patronage-type micro-policies in favour of the respective party clienteles, a practice which went largely to the detriment of structural reforms in key policy sectors (health, education, development of southern regions).

² Apart from the PSI, the coalition partners for the DC were the Italian Liberal Party (PLI), the Italian Republican Party (PRI) and the Italian Social Democratic Party (PSDI).

Towards the beginning of the 1990s, a combination of factors brought about the unexpected implosion of the party system (Newell 2000). Between the 1992 and 1994 elections, both the Christian Democracy and the Socialist Party splintered into many small parties. The Communist party got a new name and new credentials as a legitimate candidate for governing Italy in the post-Cold War era (it will be part of the left-centre coalition winning elections in 1996). The extremist right-wing MSI (later on, *Alleanza Nazionale*) followed the same path of normalization and became an important component of the centre-right coalition winning the majority in the 2001 elections. Regionalist parties, such as the *Lega Nord*, increased their electoral support and *Forza Italia*, a new party created almost overnight by Berlusconi, ran the 1994 elections and conquered a relative majority in the country in that year.

That said, the change concerned not only the identity of parties and their internal composition but the structure of the party system itself. With the change of the electoral rules in 1993 (from a proportional to a mixed electoral system) and, above all, with the 1996 general elections and the installation of a centre-left government, Italy appears to have started a path towards a competitive democracy. Looking at electoral outcomes, the change is undeniable: in the last decade two centre-left coalitions (1996 and 2006) alternated with two centre-right coalitions (2001 and 2008). What had been at most a ‘peripheral alternation’ by centrist allies around the pivotal DC (Sartori, 1976) transformed into a real alternation between two distinct poles. At least on the surface, this change implied a relative simplification of the system, which shifted from a tri-polar format to a competition between two pre-electoral coalitions headed by two leaders (the coalitions’ candidates for the position of Premier). Coalitional agreements took the form of large pre-electoral “coalition manifestos”, spelling out policy pledges like in a typical majoritarian democracy. More importantly, since alternation was now a possibility, the link between the political fortune of the governing majority and the implementation of the programme seemed to be strengthened.

Yet, despite the institutionalisation of a bipolar logic in the electoral arena, party fragmentation thrived under the umbrella of the two coalitions (indeed it even increased with respect to the first Republic), exemplified by repeated shifts in alliances and the aggregation/separation of new party groups (Chiaromonte, 2007; Conti, 2008). This dispersion of power within the ruling coalitions meant that government initiatives have been often hampered by allies’ vetoes in parliament, thus sacrificing the adoption of important policies on the altar of coalition stability (D’Alimonte and Bartolini 1997; 2002). This situation is exacerbated by a system of coalition management which continues to be not as efficient as the one in place in Belgium and the Netherlands (Moury and Timmermans 2008). In addition, although allegedly there was some increase in the agenda-setting powers of government, the “viscosity” of the legislative process for executive-sponsored bills

remained a trademark of Italian politics (Capano and Giuliani 2001; De Micheli and Verzichelli 2004). All in all, there are still good reasons to be pessimistic about the likelihood of clear party program-to-policy accountability in Italy in the new Republic.

Our first exploratory hypothesis is then, whether the present bipolar system should lead by itself to a greater correspondence between electoral commitments and policy output. Conversely, our null hypothesis is that no change occurred. So far, existing research has evaluated the rate of pledge fulfilment only for a few governments – always in the Second Republic - thus comparisons had to be mostly cross-national (Moury, *forthcoming*; Newell, 2000). This paper employs a different approach to measure the connection between party pledges and government performance and it explores whether this relationship varied longitudinally across the span of the five legislatures covered by this research.

Our second hypothesis concerns the impact of the time elapsed during a parliamentary term on the party program-to-policy linkage. Once again, our expectation is that this linkage will be consistently stronger *during* the legislative terms of the Second Republic in comparison with those of the First Republic. In addition, we expect to observe a specific trend in the legislatures of the Second Republic, where a mandate effect should be at work: the linkage should increase in the first two years and then stabilize or worsen. This is due to what studies adopting a policy-agenda approach have variously named “issue intrusion” (Jones and Baumgartner 2005, 84-5) or “external pressure” (Walgrave, Varone, and Dumont 2006). At the beginning of the term, especially in the so-called “honeymoon” period when government’s popularity should be at its peak, governments are normally in a better position to implement their mandate. Later in the term, it is more likely that new and unexpected events will get access to the government agenda, diverting attention to issues not originally envisaged in the coalition programme. In other words, we expect that at least in the short term, the existence of a mandate contributes to structure the democratic policy process³, which is normally portrayed as chaotic from the standpoint of policy theory (March and Olsen 1976).

3. Operationalisation

Going back to our initial example, the lengthy controversy sparked by the debate over whether Berlusconi eventually kept its electoral pledges and could once again feature as leader of the centre-right coalition (Ricolfi, 2006) is rather indicative of the difficulty in empirically demonstrating that political parties keep (or do not keep) their campaign promises. Academic research developed

³ See also the concept of “party government” developed by Katz (1986).

various methods to carry out this assessment, each entailing gains and losses in terms of validity and reliability of both dependent and independent variables (Pétry and Collette 2009).

In this paper, we adapt an approach which was originally employed by scholars associated with the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) both in comparative (Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994) and in single-country studies (Budge and Hofferbert 1990; Hofferbert and Budge 1992). In its original version, the method consisted of correlating variations in the thematic emphases of party platforms in specific policy domains and the proportion of central governmental expenditures on corresponding policy areas. According to what they refer to as “the parties’ strategy of selective emphasis” (Hofferbert and Budge 1992), election programmes are likely to include only references to areas where parties want to act upon. Thus, emphasis on defence should be correlated with an expansion of expenses in this sector.

The method has been criticized, firstly, because it conflates positive and negative attitudes towards an issue into the same index of policy emphasis and does not distinguish their intrinsically different effect on policy (Royed 1996). A second difficulty is that the only measurement of government output considered is budget outlays. Since the patterns of budget changes vary quite slowly, they are not very likely to reflect electoral changes in the short-term.⁴ That said, these works are unanimously recognized as major contributions in the field of comparative public policy and they have become a reference point for other studies testing empirically the impact of campaign pledges on policy output.⁵

This paper tests the policy consequences of campaign pledges by correlating the relative emphasis devoted in policy platforms to each policy category with the share of legislative measures enacted in the same category. This way, it adopts the correlational design devised by Klingemann et al. (1994), but it introduces two differences in the way it operationalized both the party and legislative agendas.

3.1 Manifestos

All the governments that alternated during the period analysed are coalition governments. Apart from that, as it has already been highlighted above, there are substantive differences between the First and Second Republic. In the First Republic, all coalitions making and sustaining governments were post-electoral: the electors voted single parties with a PR system; coalitions were then formed only after elections. Moreover, coalition agreements were not made public, thus we lack a

⁴ The works adopting this approach were also object of a methodological critique by King et al. (1993) and Thome (1999).

⁵ See in particular the growing body of literature on “pledge fulfillment” originating from the approach elaborated by Royed (1996), which look at specific party pledges and determine how many pledges have been redeemed.

document comparable to the coalition manifestos we find for the XIII and XIV Republic (respectively for the Olive Tree and House of Freedoms coalitions). Absent coalition agreements, we measured coalition agendas in three ways:

- By considering the most relevant and/or the median party agenda only. This measure of the coalition agenda is based on the idea that the major party is in “control” of the agenda of the whole coalition (McDonald & Budge 2005).
- By considering the coalition agenda as the sum of (relative measures of) salient issues in each party manifesto. Here, all party agendas are considered as having equal importance, irrespective of the size and relevance of each party in the coalition. Indeed, this approach over-represents the agendas of smaller parties. The idea behind this measure can be related to a veto-player view of coalitions, where all actors are assumed to have the same relevance (Tsebelis 2002). This is also related to the “blackmailing power” of small parties, that can threaten to exit from the coalition and withdraw their support to the government (Sartori 1976).
- By considering the coalition agenda as a sum of (relative measures of) salient issues in each party manifesto, but adding a weight to each party agenda based on its share of parliamentary seats. This is a middle way between the other two measures. Smaller parties are considered here, but the relevance of their programmes is weighted so as to take into account their leverage within the coalition. Several measures could be used. Here, we decided to multiply the agenda of each party by the intra-coalitional share of seats in parliament (see table 2, *infra*).

3.2 Legislative measures

With regard to the legislative agenda, in line with Walgrave et al. (2006, see also Bara 2005), our output consists in legislation. This choice tries to respond to the critiques against the use of public budget. Arguably, focusing on legislation allows us to cast a wider analytical net and to capture a greater array of state activities. Moreover, it is less sensitive to changes in the direction of preferences: the odds are that if we mention an issue in a platform, we aim at regulating it through a legislative measure, irrespective of whether it implies a budget increase or decrease.

On the other hand, a law is not quantifiable in the same way as a budget increase. While, in principle, the number of laws issued in single policy areas is a good indicator of policy priorities, it might also be the case that some laws are more relevant than others. Especially in a country like

Italy where the Parliament is empowered to legislate over all kinds of issues, from the most political to the most technical one, the law is a very heterogeneous unit of analysis. Consequently, we decided to measure the priority assigned to single policy sectors also through an alternative measure: by counting the number of words contained in laws falling in any policy sector.⁶

Laws present another analytical challenge. Assigning a single policy topic to a law produces biased scores when the pool of observations contains a substantial number of *omnibus laws*, namely laws spanning more than one issue. In Italy, this holds especially true for delegating laws, parliamentary acts which delegates legislative powers to the executive within specified time boundaries and according to explicit conditions (Art.76, Italian Constitution). Over the last twenty years, Italy carried out reforms across many sectors via *legislative decrees* (executive decrees resulting from the delegation) and often delegating laws touched upon more than one policy area. Moreover, legislative decrees are equivalent to laws in the hierarchy of norms, so they represent an important legislative instrument in the hands of governments. To account for their effect, we will perform our analysis both on laws (including 106 delegating laws, N=2224) and laws plus legislative decrees (this time, dropping delegating laws so as not to count twice the same topic content, N=2573). The result is a finer-grained figure of attention distribution across policy sectors (Table 1), especially for delegating laws falling in sector 1 (macroeconomics) and 20 (government operations).

⁶ Note that we excluded budgetary laws (N=81) from this count. These include a few major budgetary laws, and a more substantive number of attached minor budgetary laws (“collegati al bilancio”). The reason underlying this exclusion is that budgetary laws are generally rather long: they contain on average 10320 words, while other laws have on average 2023 words. Hence, they are likely to overweight the macroeconomic sector within the legislative agenda, even more so if the agenda is analysed at the “subtopic” level (they were all classified 105, namely “national budget and debt”).

Table 1. Legislative decrees and delegating laws

		Topics of legislative decrees																					
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	20	21			
Topics of delegating laws	1	23		10	2	10	1	1			2	1	6		3	8	1	1	44	1	1	115	
	2		9																1			10	
	3			3								2										5	
	4				7																	7	
	5	1	1			27							2		3				5			39	
	6						8															8	
	7							2														2	
	8								4													4	
	9									3												3	
	10		1								15			1			2					19	
	12											46				4			2	4	2	58	
	13												5									5	
	14													1								1	
	15				2	1									13					1		17	
	16												1			4						5	
	17																					0	
	18											1						2				3	
	20	7	2	2	6	6	4	1	3		5	8		1	8	4	12	4	57	2	15	147	
	23														1						6	7	
	Total		31	13	15	17	44	13	4	7	3	22	58	14	3	28	20	15	7	109	8	24	455

Note: N in cells is number of legislative decrees.

4. Data and coding issues

Both elections platforms and legislative measures are coded into a policy category by means of the same topic codebook. While the coding of laws and legislative decrees is relatively straightforward, to code the content of manifestos we adopted the CMP approach: each sentence, or “quasi-sentence” in case of sentences containing more than one reference, was assigned exclusively to a single category. Those sentences that could not be fitted into one topic were assigned the “uncoded” category.⁷ For both manifestos and legislation, the coding activities were carried out by two different coders and cross-checked at the end under the supervision of one of the authors.

The topic codebook used is an adaptation of the US codebook developed by Bryan Jones and Frank Baumgartner as part of the US Policy Agendas Project. This policy topic classification system is designed to be *comprehensive* (it includes the full span of issues) and *mutually exclusive* (each *quasi-sentence* in a party manifesto and each law is assigned to one and only one topic). The coding scheme contains 20 policy areas, usually referred to as “major topics”, ranging from

⁷ The “uncoded” category includes on average 10% of coded items and never exceeds 20%.

macroeconomics to culture.⁸ Each major topic is broken down into 229 “subtopics” (e.g., macroeconomics is further divided into inflation, unemployment rate, and six more subtopics). Hence the content of policy agendas can be observed both at the major- and micro-topic levels. The complete list of major topics and their corresponding subtopics is provided in annex 1.

Before turning to the longitudinal analysis of correlations between party and legislative agendas, it is worth introducing briefly our data.

Table 2. Legislative terms and party coalitions in Italy, 1987-2006

Legislative term	Election year	Party	Type of manifesto	Party weight within coalition	Laws	Legislative decrees
X	1987	DC	Party	0,62	833	32
		PSI	Party	0,25		
		PRI	Party	0,06		
		PSDI	Party	0,04		
		PLI	Party	0,03		
XI	1992	DC	Party	0,62	236	51
		PSI	Party	0,28		
		PLI	Party	0,05		
		PSDI	Party	0,05		
XII	1994	FI	Party	0,30	171	21
		LN	Party	0,33		
		CCD	Party	0,08		
		AN	Party	0,30		
XIII	1996	Olive Tree	Coalition	0,89	565	227
		RC	Party	0,11		
XIV	2001	CDL	Coalition	1	419	124

* Length of manifestos is expressed in sentences and quasi-sentences

As shown in table 2, the years between 1987 and 2006 saw 5 parliamentary terms. The two terms shown at the top of the table are the last First Republic terms. The X term lasted for a whole 5-year period (1987-1992), during which four governments alternated. All governments were supported by the “pentapartito” (Dc, Psi, Pri, Psdi, Pli), except the last one which was not supported by Pri⁹. The

⁸ We excluded the category “foreign affairs” because it is more a fact-driven rather than agenda-driven policy and it could introduce a bias in our analysis. As regards laws and legislative decrees, we excluded all measures ratifying international treaties and transposing EU directives.

⁹ Note that we do not include the manifesto of Pri in the analysis, because of the poor quality of the only document available (a newspaper interview with the Republican leader Giovanni Spadolini, without any reference to policy

XI term was a highly turbulent one, in which two governments alternated, both supported by Dc, Psi, Pli, and Psdi. This parliamentary term experienced the economic and political tensions that paved the way to the end of the First Republic. Moreover, while all other analysed terms lasted for the whole “natural” five-year period, the XI term was stopped after two years.

The Second Republic was opened by another unstable parliamentary term, the XII legislature (1994-1996). A coalition between Forza Italia, Lega Nord, Msi and CCD won the election. However, the first Berlusconi government was overturned after less than one year, followed by the “technical” Dini government which lasted against all odds for another year. The 1996 elections saw the victory of the centre-left “Olive Tree” coalition that, with the external support of Rifondazione Comunista (RC), gave life to the first Prodi government.¹⁰ After two years and a half, RC withdrew its support to the government. Following the breakdown of the Prodi government, the post-communist party split into two parties, one of which supported the three governments (D’alema I and II and Amato II) that brought the term to its end. The subsequent elections in 2001 were then won by the centre-right coalition of the House of Freedoms (Cdl), featuring by and large the same parties supporting the first Berlusconi government. Significantly, this coalition governed once again a full parliamentary term (2001-2006), during which two Berlusconi governments alternated.

Because of its peculiarities and, consequently, the difficulties in comparing it with other parliamentary terms, the XII legislature will not be included in this research. While we are going to report the results for the XI term, we expect anomalous findings in the relationship between party and legislative agendas, as unforeseen events are assumed to have driven the policy agenda of both the Amato and Ciampi governments.

priorities). We computed the scores of the “coalition agenda” weighted for the share of parliamentary seats owned by each party both considering all parties and without the Pri. As differences were not appreciable, we used the first procedure to compute coalition agendas in the X term.

¹⁰ With regard to the Second Republic, data about disaggregated party priorities within coalitions are only available for the XIII legislative term - when RC issued a manifesto different than that of Ulivo (the latter actually being a coalition manifesto in itself) - because the centre-right Cdl only issued a coalition manifesto before the elections for the XIV legislative term.

5. Data analysis

5.1 The correlation between party priorities and legislative agendas in the First and Second

Republic

As mentioned above, most of the statistics shown below are correlation scores.¹¹ We correlate the policy content of party manifestos (at the quasi-sentence level, see Budge et al. 2001) and legislative outputs. Before moving to the illustration of the findings of this research, two specifications are needed. The first one has to do with the “depth” of the analysis of policy content. For both party priorities and legislative production, the results shown below are based on an analysis at the subtopic level in terms of our policy content classification¹² (see annex 1)¹³. The second specification has to do with the construction of the dataset of laws employed here. All analyses are run on the dataset which includes laws (except for delegating laws) and legislative decrees. As specified above, the aim is to minimise the bias introduced by ‘*omnibus* laws’.

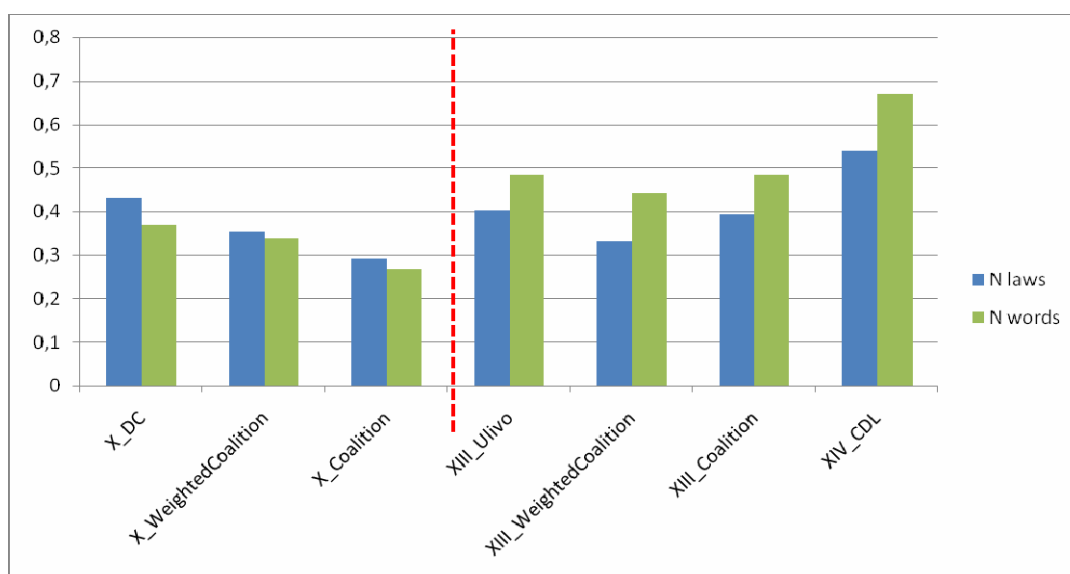
We begin by analysing the correlation between party and legislative agendas across the three five-year legislative terms covered by this research. The results are shown in figure 1. On the x-axis we find the parties and/or coalitions in office (cfr. Table 1). Note that, whenever possible, we include three different measures of the “coalition agenda”, that is 1) the priorities of the major party (e.g. Dc in the X term in the figure), 2) the sum of the priorities of all coalition parties, where all parties are weighted equal (e.g. X_Coalition), and 3) the sum of the priorities of all coalition parties, where a weight is applied to each party based on its share of seats in the Low Chamber (e.g. X_WeightedCoalition). As anticipated, we distinguish between the number of laws (blue bars) and number of laws (green bars) issued in each policy sector.

¹¹ All correlations presented are statistically significant at least at .05 level.

¹² The analysis of data at the major topic level yields partly different results (see annex 2). Facing this problem, we decided to focus on the subtopic level because we believe that the more fine-grained description of policy categories allows a better grasp of the differences and similarities between agendas. In fact, when analysed at the macrotopic level, specific policy areas are collapsed, e.g. “Expulsion of illegal immigrants” (933) and “Citizenship” (932) are collapsed into the broad label of “Immigration issues” (900). Accordingly, the test of correlations at the subtopic level should be both more demanding and more reliable.

¹³ When computing correlations between policy agendas at the subtopic level, one risk is that “empty cells” or zeros in the correlation matrix can bias correlation coefficients. Such a risk would likely be run when correlating different agendas, coded through a highly detailed coding scheme. In order to avoid this bias, we first ranked the frequency of policy subtopics on party manifestos, and then ‘cut’ the frequencies around the median (116 out of about 230 codes). Correlations with coded laws were then computed on this subsection of the database only.

Figure 1. Legislative terms. Correlation between party and legislative agendas (laws and legislative decrees)



Based on our first hypothesis, we expect correlations to be higher in the Second Republic with respect to the First Republic. Indeed, Figure 1 provides evidence in support of this hypothesis. The only unexpected value is the high correlation score between the legislative agenda of the X term and the DC party agenda. Nonetheless, the pattern is clear. In the X term, we observe a correlation score between party and legislative agendas ranging from .27 to .43, based on how the party coalition agenda is measured. The correlation increases in the XIII term, ranging from .33 to .49; and reaches an impressive score of .67 in the XIV term.

Whereas the DC-related finding in the X legislature is arguably consistent with the median party mandate thesis (McDonald and Budge 2005; see Best et al. 2010 for an application to two-bloc systems), the results about the relevance, in the XIII term legislative agenda, of Olive Tree priorities *vis-à-vis* Rc priorities point to a different explanation. The difference between the correlation scores for the Olive Tree manifesto and for the unweighted coalition manifesto – which actually overweights the priorities of Rc – is marginal, which may imply an effective role of Rc as veto player (see Table A1 in Annex 2 for more details, including correlation scores for Rc), despite its small parliamentary size.

So far, we did not mention the findings about the XI terms. These show completely different – and, we suspect, anomalous – results: this term shows an unexpectedly high level of correlation between party and legislative agendas (see Table A1 in Annex 2). This might be imputed to the exceptional weakness of the legislative body at the time, which allowed the government to enforce more easily its agenda. Yet, this conjecture does not hold against the finding of a very strong capacity by small parties to affect the legislative agenda. Correlation scores increase from the low level of .22/.29

(depending on the measure of the legislative agenda) when the manifesto of the pivotal Dc is considered, to a very high .49/.58 correlation when the unweighted sum of coalition manifestos is considered – that is, when small parties’ manifestos are overrepresented. It is possible, however, that apart from the strong shocks that hit the Italian political system in the early 1990s, the comparison between the XI and the rest of observed terms is biased by its very short duration. If this is the case, we should find consistent evidence on it in the next section that analyses the correlation between party and legislative agendas across the years of each legislative term.

So far, our analysis has not taken into account an important factor: the incentives to fulfil the electoral mandate might be offset by a high degree of policy stability. In other words, legislators, no matter the policy priorities expressed at the time of elections, are bound by external constraints to focus always on the same kind of issues. In the following, we focus on Second Republic terms only (a complete list of correlation scores are shown in table A3 of Annex 2).¹⁴ More precisely, as far as the XIII term is concerned, we control the party program-to-policy correlations for the legislative priorities which characterised the X and XI terms. As regards the XIV term, the control term consists in the X and XIII term legislative priorities.

Table 3. Partial correlations between party and legislative agendas controlling for the legislative priorities of earlier legislatures. Laws and legislative decrees.

Control Variable	Party Agenda	Correlation with legislative agenda (n. of laws)	Correlation with legislative agenda (n. of words)
XI legislature		XIII legislature	
	XIII Olive Tree	0,307**	0,49**
	XIII Coalition	0,215*	0,39**
	XIII Coalition (weighted)	0,296**	0,49**
X legislature		XIII legislature	
	XIII Olive Tree	-0,037	0,21
	XIII Coalition	-0,018	0,10
	XIII Coalition (weighted)	-0,034	0,20*
X Legislature		XIV legislature	
	XIV CDL	0,209*	0,58**
XIII Legislature		XIV legislature	
	XIV CDL	0,307**	0,59**

* Significant at the .05 level

** Significant at the .01 level

The partial correlation scores reported in table 3 are constantly lower if compared with our previous findings, reflecting the idea that there must be some level of inertia in law-making activities. Apart from this general common feature, however, the results are remarkably different for the XIII and

¹⁴ We cannot run a similar control for the X legislative term because we do not have data about the IX term. On the other hand, we do not consider the XI for the reasons mentioned above.

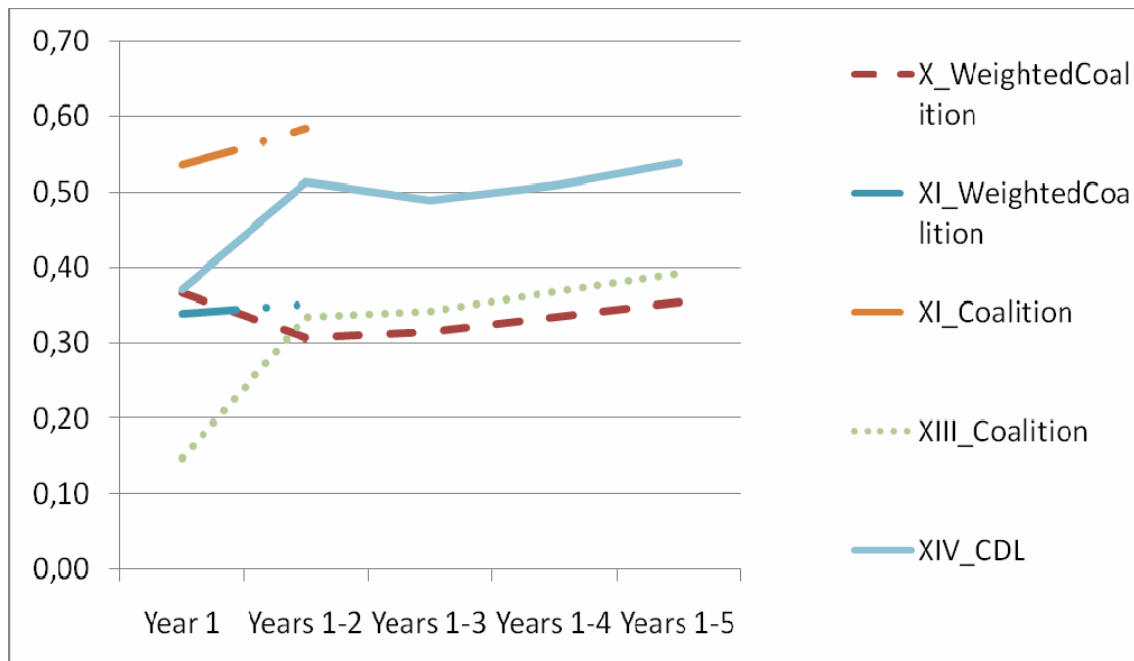
XIV terms. In the XIII term, the correlation between party and legislative agendas decreases by about ten points when controlling for the XI term, but becomes statistically non-significant when controlling for legislation of the X term. This indicates first of all a substantial level of correlation between legislative priorities of the X and XIII terms, as confirmed by the test of correlation between all legislative terms (see Table A4 in Annex 2). Second, and more importantly, the correlation between the legislation of the X and the XIII terms is so relevant that taking into account the policy priorities of Olive Tree and Rc does not add to the explanation of variation in the legislative agenda, when legislation of the X term is taken into account.

The data point to completely different findings with regard to the XIV legislative term. When controlling for the content of legislation issued during the X and XIII legislatures, correlation scores decrease but remain both statistically and substantially significant, especially when the number of words rather than the number of laws is taken into account. Quite interestingly, at least when the number of laws is analysed, correlation is higher if controlling for the legislation of the XIII term, which indicates that the policy content of laws issued during the XIV term are more strongly correlated to those of the X than to those of the XIII legislature (see Table A4 in Annex 2).

5.2 The correlation between party priorities and the legislative agendas across parliamentary terms.

Apart from the strength of correlations between party agendas and the legislative priorities resulting from the analysis of all the laws issued during a legislative term, it is also interesting to observe how this correlation evolves over each term. Above, we presented our expectation: as a consequence of the mandate effect introduced with the transition to the Second Republic, we do expect: a) a higher correlation between party and legislative agendas in the two last terms considered; b) that this correlation increases at the beginning of the term, and then decreases in next years as governments meet with new incoming information and external events. An alternative expectation could be that governments need time to enforce their programmatic priorities; if this was the case, we should observe an *increase* in the correlation over time.

Figure 2. Cumulated years within legislative terms. Correlation between party and legislative agendas (number of laws and decrees).



The x-axis of Figure 2 gives a “cumulative measure of the years elapsed”, namely for “Years 1-2” we correlate party agendas with the legislation issued during the first and second year of the term; for “Years 1-3” we correlate the content of party agendas with that of legislation issued in years one, two, and three; and so on. Note that, for the sake of clarity, we include in the graph only those measures of coalition priorities that yield the highest correlation with legislative agendas, i.e. the “weighted” measure of coalition agenda for the X term and the “unweighted” measure of coalition agenda for the XIII. The figures about other measures of coalition and single party agendas are shown in Table A2 and Figures A1-2 of Annex 2.¹⁵

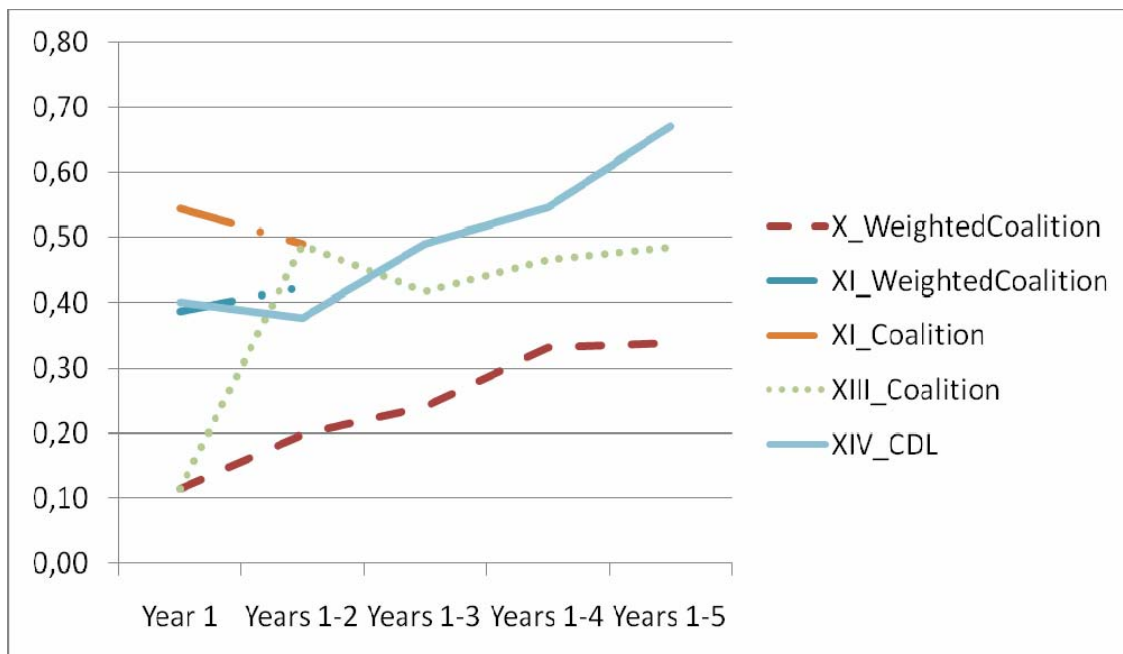
Our findings do not lend support to our expectation. When the number of laws per policy area is taken into account (Figure 2), both the XIII and the XIV terms show a low correlation between legislative priorities and party agendas in the first year of the term, a sharp increase in the second, and a very small increase or stability along the remaining years of the term. Quite interestingly, the shape of the curves showing the variation of correlation scores is very similar between both Second Republic terms, but it differs for the X legislature. This trend is not consistent with our expectation of a decrease of correlation. We do observe, in contrast, a stabilisation or even a small increase over

¹⁵ Note that the shape of the line indicating the trend of correlation along time, which is what we are interested in here, is virtually identical when the different measures of coalition agendas are taken into account. With regard to the XI term only, we include the two different measures of coalition agenda because they show different tendencies in Figure 3.

time, which might suggest that it takes time to implement the relevant legislation but in the end a higher congruence between party and legislative agenda is achieved.

If we use our second measure of legislative priorities, i.e. the number of words per policy sector, the observed trend is reinforced, which once again lends support to our alternative hypothesis that foresees an *increase* of correlation over time (Figure 3). First, quite surprisingly, an increase in the strength of correlations from the beginning to the end of the term is observed also for the X legislature, and the pace of the increase is rather steady along the term. Second, the trends about Second Republic parliamentary terms diverge. While the pattern for the XIII legislature is similar to the one observed in figure 2, this is not the case for the XIV term, where the increase in correlation over time is impressive. This may be indicative of a better capacity of the Cdl government to enforce its agenda across the whole life of the term, due to the higher intra-bloc cohesiveness. The low record for the Olive Tree governments – which is however substantially higher than the one for the First Republic X term governments – is consistent with the unstable story of the coalition supporting them: a major governmental crisis breaking the Prodi Government after two years.

Figure 3. Cumulated years within legislative terms. Correlation between party and legislative agendas (number words in laws and legislative decrees)



The analysis of intra-term correlation between party and legislative agendas has shown that it varies substantially during single parliamentary terms. Such variation is likely to bias the comparisons between terms of different duration. The previous section illustrated somehow anomalous results about the XI term, notably an extremely high level of correlation between agendas and a rather

weak role for the main coalition party in influencing the legislative agenda. While the anomalous character of the XI legislature is consistent with the Italian economic and political crisis of the early 1990s, it is likely that the comparison is also biased by the different duration of the terms analysed. This corroborates our decision to exclude the two-year XI term from the comparison between the other five-year terms covered by this research.

6. Conclusions

This paper presented a longitudinal analysis of the correlation between party priorities and legislative outputs in Italy over the 1987-2006 period. It sought to analyse whether the systemic change, culminating in the introduction of alternation in government, that occurred between the First and Second Italian Republic affected the correspondence between the priorities declared by political parties in their party manifestos and their legislative choices once they gain access to government. We contended that focusing on the case of Italy offers a controlled situation, not easily found elsewhere, to study the effect of the introduction of alternation in government on the party program-to-policy link.

In analysing this relationship, we focused on two legislative terms of the First Republic (X and XI), and two legislative terms of the Second (XIII and XIV). Since the XI legislative term was short-lived and experienced exceptional circumstances, such as the political and economic turmoil that precipitated the collapse of the First Republic, it was analysed separately.

Although the goal of this paper was to present some preliminary evidence relevant to the issues we raised, some tentative conclusions can be drawn. First, we found evidence of a greater correspondence between party and legislative agendas during the Second Republic terms in comparison with the only “long” First Republic term analysed. This is consistent with our expectations. The introduction of government alternation created the conditions for the “mandate effect” to work. Policy priorities laid down in party manifestos are more congruent with the thematic composition of the legislative agenda. Unsurprisingly, the party program-to-policy link is remarkably higher in the XIV legislature, the first legislature in the Italian Republican history where the electoral coalition winning the elections coincided with the governing coalition. It is this legislature that represented a proper ‘break with the past’, rather than the Olive Tree coalition. This finding is further corroborated if we control our correlations for the composition of legislative priorities in previous legislatures. Contrary to the partial correlations in the XIII legislature, which lose statistical significance, the partial correlation in the XIV legislature is still significant even when controlling for the policy structure of past legislative agendas.

Second, observing the evolution of the party program-to-policy linkage over time yields unexpected results. We predicted a trend of rising congruence in the first years of every Second Republic term, as a consequence of the mandate effect in conjunction with the honeymoon effect. We expected the congruence to stabilize or decrease over time, as governments encounter unforeseen problems and external pressures that constrain their ability to enforce their agendas. Remarkably, the resulting trends reveal that, as time goes by, the congruence between party and legislative agendas increases (albeit the patterns of increase varied depending on whether we used laws or words to measure the legislative agendas). This finding suggests that Italian government coalitions, no matter their temporal location, need time to pass relevant legislation so as to implement their platforms. Bills may already be introduced in the very first months after the elections, when the political and external conditions normally favour the respect of electoral commitments, but it takes time to build consensus on their content and they are finally passed only later in the term. Interestingly, it seems that Italian governments became more capable to enforce their agendas over time, especially in the XIV legislature.

The next steps in the development of this paper are an extension of the temporal span covered (with the addition of the IX legislature), and an inclusion of the manifestos of opposition parties. Especially this latter improvement is crucial for the validation of our results. First, it will permit to control for the differentiation of the party profiles: if all parties rank their priorities more or less similarly (e.g. Sani and Segatti 1998), this should affect our statements on the existence of a mandate. Second, it will be possible to take into account also the election priorities expressed by opposition parties. The collection of these data is about to be completed.

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