Changing the Transmission Belt. The Programme-to-Policy Link in Italy between the First and Second Republic

Abstract

This article analyses the transmission of policy priorities from election campaigns to legislative outputs, and the effect of the agendas of the majority and opposition therein, under different institutional configurations. Because of its change from a system with no alternation in government to a system with perfect alternation, and of the strengthening of the role of cabinets in the law making process, Italy provides an ideal quasi-experimental context. To test the general relationship between party electoral agendas and legislative outputs, we rely on CAP-coded datasets of party manifestos and laws covering the period 1983-2012. Empirical analyses make use of a time series cross-sectional design with panel corrected standard errors. Our findings are overall consistent with mandate theory, or the promissory model of representation, which would expect the shift to the Second Republic to result in a stronger relation between the electoral priorities of governing parties and their legislative outputs. The introduction of alternation to government results indeed in an increased effect of the electoral priorities of governing parties on the legislative priorities they pursue once in office. However, consistent with agenda-setting theory, our findings also reveal a more complex picture. While the effect of the electoral agenda of parties in government grows in the Second Republic, so does also the effect of opposition agendas. The introduction of alternation in government, and the strengthening of the government's

legislative capacity, put more pressure for parties in government to stick to their electoral priorities; but they also increase the incentives to uptake the priorities of opposition parties, thus strengthening their agenda-setting power. Our findings have important implications for the understanding of the effect of institutional change on the functioning of representation in the democratic process.

Introduction

How elected representatives set their policy priorities and, subsequently, manage to translate them into policy decisions is central to the functioning of democratic government. As such, it has attracted substantial attention from comparative politics scholars. According to mandate theory (e.g. McDonald, Mendes, and Budge 2004; McDonald and Budge 2005), political elections sanction the conferral of a mandate from voters to political parties. Parties are voted into government based on the platform of policy priorities that they present during election campaigns. Representatives know that they are expected to keep their campaign promises during their term in government if they do not want to face electoral punishment by their voters at the next election. Accordingly, mandate theory expects a high degree of congruence between the platforms of parties in power and the content of their decisions.

Agenda setting studies (e.g. Jones and Baumgartner 2005; Baumgartner and Jones 2015) do not dismiss the relevance of electoral platforms, but point out that the transposition of electoral priorities into policy outputs is constrained by a number of factors. Some – notably political institutions such as the system of separation of powers and the party system – are usual suspects for scholars of comparative politics. Others, such as cognitive frictions and incoming information about policy problems, have been

traditionally more familiar to public policy scholars (Cobb and Elder 1983; Kingdon 1984).[1] In addition to these multiple constraints and frictions, agenda setting theories also describe a complex pattern of interaction between majority and opposition parties that may result in governing parties uptaking issues emphasised in the opposition's platform (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2010, Seeberg 2013) to maximize their re-election chances. On the one hand, this strategy could neutralize potential accusations from their competitors of having irresponsibly neglected certain problems (Sulkin 2005). On the other hand, these strategic responses may challenge the adversaries' monopoly or "ownership" of certain issues (Sigelman & Buell 2004; Damore 2004; Sides 2006).

Indeed, rather than as alternative accounts, party mandate and agenda-setting should be understood as coexisting "mechanisms through which a political system processes information to produce public policies" (Froio, Bevan, and Jennings 2016). While they differ on the relevance assigned to the factors and processes affecting the congruence between electoral mandates and policy outputs, both agree on the relevance of political institutions. Comparative politics studies have traditionally focused on the discrimination between the proportional and the majoritarian models of democracy, entailing different levels of centralisation and dispersion of decision-making power (Lijphart 2012). By centralising power in the hands of government, and exposing them to the threat of electoral sanctions, more majoritarian institutional designs should facilitate the translation of inputs into outputs. In contrast,

1 Cognitive friction refers to limitations in government's capacity to deal simultaneously with the abundance of policy problems asking for attention and solutions (Jones and Baumgartner 2005). The default response to this complex environment is to implement marginal adjustments in most policy areas most of the time. Occasionally, when new information enters the system and mount pressure on policy-makers to a level that cannot be disregarded (e.g. economic crises or natural disasters), government shifts their attention disproportionately.

because they disperse power across multiple actors and institutions, and they complicate the assignment of responsibilities for policy choices, more consensual institutions should be expected to constrain the transposition of electoral priorities. While acknowledging the relevance of this categorisation, this article draws attention to a relatively unexplored institutional feature that has potentially an impact on the studied mechanism: the possibility of government alternation. We define it as the perception of voters and representatives that a concrete possibility exists that the incumbent may be replaced through elections (Bartolini 2000, Pellegata 2016). On the one hand, since the possibility of alternation in government implies a greater vulnerability for the incumbent, it should create the conditions for a significant and positive effect of policy priorities on legislative output for parties in government. On the other hand, the greater vulnerability of incumbents to oppositions' attacks in a competitive alternation system should also create incentives for incumbents to trespass on their rivals' issue.

This article contributes to our understanding of the party program-to-policy linkage by asking: first, whether it occurs and, if so, whether both majority and opposition's platforms have an impact; second, if these mechanisms depend on the possibility of alternation in government. It does so by focusing on one case, Italy, and analysing how the change from a blocked system with one dominant party to a competitive system based on the alternation in power of two alternative coalition blocs influenced the transmission of party priorities to legislative outputs.

Hit in the early 1990s by dramatic exogenous and endogenous pressures, the Italian political system reacted with a radical institutional change. The transformation cascaded from the electoral law to political parties, the party system, and the relationship between government and parliament. The greatest consequence of this change was the introduction of (perfect) alternation to government after more than 40 years without alternation. The analysis relies on the policy content coding of all party

platforms and primary acts adopted in Italy between 1983 and 2013 using the coding system developed by the Comparative Agendas Project (Baumgartner et al. 2011, www.comparativeagenda.net).

First, the findings presented in this article contribute to a wider debate in comparative politics and public policy on the functioning of the transmission belt between the issues that parties put before their voters and the policies they make once in government. Empirical evidence has been mixed so far. For example, Klingemann et al. (1994) found a strong correlation between policy priorities emphasized before elections in party manifestos and patterns of budgetary allocations (Budge and Keman 1990; Hofferbert and Budge 1992). However, Imbeau et al's. (2001) meta-analysis of 43 policy studies on the subject showed no consistent linkage between the left-right composition of governments and policy output. Only recently, works have started analysing the congruence between government party agendas and legislative priorities (Borghetto, Carammia, and Zucchini 2014; Froio, Bevan, and Jennings 2016; Bevan, John, and Jennings 2011; Persico, Froio, and Guinaudeau 2012, Baumgartner, Brouard, and Grossman 2010). In this article, we test whether the presence of credible government alternation increases the program-to-policy linkage. We argue that Italy represents a unique case study to investigate the effect of different models of party competition on this mechanism, while controlling for other structural factors.

Second, we contribute to research on party government in Italy and its change over time. Italian law-making has often been depicted as unpredictable and relatively unresponsive to party programs. Indeed, the 1993 move from a proportional to a mixed electoral system was also triggered by a desire to establish a more direct relationship between electors and representatives. By tracing party attention and government action to particular policies over long periods of time, our research design allows analysing whether such radical change in the political system brought about a closer linkage between electoral programmes and the laws adopted from government. We thus provide empirical evidence on one of the

biggest European countries, Italy, which has not figured in previous extensive comparative studies (e.g. Klingemann et al. 1994) or has been studied mostly by evaluating the rate of pledge fulfilment for a limited number of governments (Moury 2011; Newell 2000).

The article is organized as follows. We first set the stage for the analysis by discussing existing theories on the relationship between party policy priorities and the legislative agenda, and make our expectations explicit. Next, we show how those expectations apply to the analysis of the Italian transition, and illustrate the data and methods used to test them empirically. Finally, we present our findings and draw some conclusions.

Mandate and agenda setting approaches to representation

One of the tenets of representative democracy is that a legislator's behavior in office should take into account the interests of the voter. The so-called promissory model of representation (Mansbridge 2003) assigns political parties a fundamental role in the policy process, as "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). Beyond rhetorical statements and attacks to the opponents, party competition during election campaigns revolves primarily around pledges and intentions that political parties promise to fulfil, if voted into office. Through electoral manifestos, political parties outline their distinctive profiles and make them public by emphasizing those issues that they repute will gain them votes, while trying to de-prioritize those issues that might advantage their opponents (Petrocik 1996; Budge and Farlie 1983; for a review see Budge 2015). In sum, it is on the basis of distinct manifestos that political parties compete during election campaigns; and it is through party competition that voters make sense of the policy profile of each party, and choose the party that is

closer to their preferences. Against this background, our first hypothesis moves from the baseline argument that some degree of mandate effect is present:

H1: The issue emphasis of majority manifestos positively affects the legislative agenda.

The agenda-setting approach shifts the attention to the fact that governments have to adapt to a constant flow of information and thus address problems that were not foreseen at the time of election (Jones and Baumgartner 2005). In other words, they have to please not only the voters that voted them into office in the first place, but also their future voters. Therefore governments also have to constantly keep track of changes in public opinion (Stimson, Mackuen, and Erikson 1995; Wlezien and Soroka 2012), respond to the media (Vliegenthart et al. 2016) and maintain open channels of communication with interest groups (Hall and Deardoff 2006). According to this model, we should not entirely discard some level of congruence between the priorities of governing parties and the legislative agenda.[2] Strategic and forward-looking representatives have an incentive to show that, given the opportunity, they carry through their programmatic priorities. On the other hand, a wide range of factors may push them away from electoral promises.

2 Agenda-setting scholars mitigated the claim that the 'program-to-policy' link is a normative requisite for the good functioning of democracies: besides respecting electoral commitments, governments also need to govern (Baumgartner, Jones, and Wilkerson 2011, 954), and this implies addressing new or changing priorities that may be different than those formulated during election campaigns.

This article pays particular attention to one of these factors and tests whether parties in governments also respond to the issues prioritized by their rivals.[3] Recent empirical work on parties' issue campaigning brought consistent evidence that political parties do not simply focus on issues where they hold an advantage over their competitors, disregarding all the others (issue ownership); they also tend to engage in direct confrontation on the same issues (issue overlap) (Sigelman and Buell 2004; Damore 2004; Sides 2006). Green-Pedersen and Mortensen (2010) and Seeberg (2013) drew on this literature to show that the 'party system agenda', the set of issues object of inter-party discussion at a specific point in time, is strongly influenced by opposition parties and this, in turn, can constrain the activities of governing parties.

Building on these contributions it is possible to explain why government parties should also respond to at least some of the issues emphasized by their opponents in the election campaign. Sulkin (2005) defines "issue uptake" as the strategic activity in which "challengers have an incentive to identify salient issues that the incumbent has previously neglected and to prioritize these issues in their campaigns. Winners are motivated to respond to these signals and act on their challengers' issues in office in order to remedy their weaknesses and promote their future re-election prospects." (Ibid: 168). This does not imply an alignment with the policy position of opposition parties.[4] Rather, majority

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3 Once again, the role of opposition parties is not entirely discarded by advocates of mandate politics: "[c]onstitutional and practical political considerations structure the situation in such a manner that those (temporarily) invested with authority must take some account of the agendas of 'out' parties" (Klingemann et al. 1994, 49).

4 Policy agenda scholars use different lenses to read into this relationship: their focus is not much on the congruence of *position* but on the congruence of *attention to issues* between representatives and the voters. This change of perspective has fundamental consequences on expectations about policy

parties are forced to take up issues they would have otherwise neglected.

Because they outline the main directives on which the challenger runs its electoral campaigns, party manifestos represent one of the major sources of information on which the incumbent builds its expectations on the lines of attacks of its opponent in the upcoming campaign. In light of the fact that it will be easier for challengers to criticize the government moving from their own issues, the incumbent will be better placed to shore up those "weaknesses" if at the end of its term in office they can show some record of uptake. Addressing an issue through legislation is often the best option to counter the blame, because it depoliticizes the issue rather than rising the hype around it (Seeberg 2013). Therefore, from an issue uptake perspective we should expect that the content of challengers' manifestos contribute to shaping the content of a majority's subsequent activity in office. Another reason to "trespass" is to counteract or undermine the competitors' issue ownership, i.e. changing the voter's perception on which party has the best solutions in that area. Although this is less frequent, there are studies documenting instances in which this strategy was successfully employed (e.g Blomqvist and Green-Pedersen 2004).

In sum, mandate and agenda models lead to rather different expectations on the party program-to-policy congruence. The former predicts that majority coalition platforms will be the main policy

responsiveness. First, this account views the process of legislative representation as far more dynamic. Even though actors' policy preferences may remain stable for long time, incoming information about policy problems and ways to deal with them, coming from outside and/or from within the political system, continuously reshapes actors' policy priorities(Jones 1994). Second, and more interestingly given our interest on the linkage between elections and legislative behavior, agenda-setting scholars highlight a number of reasons whereby the agenda of the governing party should be only one among several other factors affecting the content of legislative outputs.

templates for legislative decisions. There is little incentive to incorporate the priorities of challengers, because this would divert attention and resources away from the issues 'owned', which have a potentially higher payoff: building a reputation of efficiency in the eyes of electors. Conversely, in line with the agenda-setting perspective, the issue uptake hypothesis implies that opposition party manifestos should also have an impact on subsequent legislative decisions of the majority. Campaigns represent an important source of information on the issues that will be more rewarding in the future. On the one hand, government can pre-emptively neutralize the opponents' attacks. On the other, they can challenge their ownership over specific issues. Accordingly, our second hypothesis drawing on the agenda model reads as follows:

H2: The issue emphasis of the opposition manifestos positively affects the legislative agenda.

While mandate and agenda models provide different views of the relevance of being in government to get a program reflected in legislative priorities, both are premised on the implicit assumption that the conditions exist for alternation in power. The mandate model is grounded on the idea that political parties compete for obtaining a government mandate. Once in office, the threat of losing the next elections pushes incumbents to carry through their policy program. Research based on the agenda model also moves from the assumption that a real competition for political positions is actually in place. For instance, competition for election in single districts, and thus in the US Congress, is a central tenet of the issue-uptake theory in Sulkin's analysis (2005). Losing elections and not returning to Congress is a concrete possibility for individual representatives. Indeed, issue-uptake by Congressmen is expected to increase as "vulnerability", i.e. the chance of not being re-elected, grows (Sulkin 2005: 91). Re-election-oriented incumbents will not feel obliged to pay attention to opponents' issue priorities, in turn,

if their prospects of being returned to office are already high. This line of reasoning results in our third hypothesis:

H3: Both the "mandate" and "opposition" effect should become stronger when there is a credible possibility of alternation.

The Italian case

What occurs if a political system is in a situation where, after decades of electoral results confirming roughly the same coalition of parties in power, the likelihood of alternation becomes remote? And what happens in turn when, following changes in the electoral law and in the party system, alternation is injected to the system? Post-war Italy offers a privileged case study to analyze policy responsiveness under different scenarios. After the Italian political system was hit by economic and political shocks in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it moved from a blocked political system with no alternation in power (1948-1994) to a system where alternation became the rule: no coalition was confirmed in power at any of the five elections held between 1996 and 2013.

Table 1 shows changing majority and opposition parties/coalitions during the period covered in our analysis, which comprises two First Republic legislative terms, two "transition" terms and four Second Republic terms. Different interpretations have been provided on the functioning of the party system of the First Republic (Cotta and Verzichelli 2007, 69–72). Sartori (1976) talks of "polarized pluralism", with two anti-system parties (the Communist Pci and the post-fascist Msi) making a bipolar opposition against the centrist coalition.[5]

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5 Since the early 1980s called "*Pentapartito*", namely "five parties", as it featured four minor centre-left (Psi, Psdi, Pri) and centre-right (Pli) parties allied to the pivotal Democrazia Cristiana (Dc)

Table 1. Majority and Opposition Parties from the IX to the XV legislative terms (1983-2008).

Legislative term	**Election year**	**Majority (%seats in Low Chamber)**	**Main opposition parties (%seats in Low Chamber)**
IX	1983	Dc (35,9%) Psi (11,7%) Pri (4,6%) Psdi (3,5%) Pli (2,5%)	Pci (28,1%) Msi (6,67%)
X	1987	Dc (37,2%) Psi (15,9%) Pri (3,2%) Psdi (1,9%) Pli (1,7%)	Pci/Pds (23,7%) Msi (5,2%)
XI	1992	Dc (28,4%) Psi (14,4%) Psdi (2,4%) Pli (2,7%)	Pds (16,7%) Rc (5,2%) Msi (5,4%)
XII	1994	Fi (17,9%) Ln (18,6%) Ccd (4,3%) AN (17,3%)	Progressisti (26%) Ppi (5,2%) Patto Segni (13%) Rc (6,2%)
XIII	1996	Ulivo (38%) Rc/Pdci (5,7%)	Fi (18,8%) An (14%) Ln (7,4%) Ccd/Cdu (2%)
XIV	2001	Cdl (53,3%)	Ulivo (36,1%) Rc (2%)
XV	2006	Unione (44,9%)	CdL (41,7%)
XVI	2008	Pdl (44%) Ln (9.5%)	Pd (34%)

The high polarization of the political space was complemented by a largely centrifugal pattern of party competition grounded on ideological divisions. This status quo also entailed substantive rivalries within

the governing coalition and between parliamentary party groups and ministers. The proportional electoral system compelled parties to maintain distinct identities, especially after the mid-1970s and the increase of electoral volatility and fragmentation. Importantly, Sartori also argued that since the mechanics of governmental turnover was not working in Italy, there was a short circuit in the transmission of electoral inputs onto the governmental agenda. Parties in government were not fully accountable: since the threat of losing future elections was remote, there was little incentive for them to fulfil the mandate.

The implementation of the program of government was not a priority in view of the next electoral competition. Political conditions favored the maintenance of this situation, as "governmental instability and shifting or quarrelsome coalitions obscure[d] the very perception of who [was] responsible for what" (Ibid. 139). On the opposition camp, relevant parties presented themselves as competitors in the elections, but with little prospects of gaining government posts. The lack of any concrete chance of alternation due to the "non-coalitionability" of the main opposition party, the Pci, fostered low responsibility in both majority and opposition parties, that could indulge in the so-called 'politics of outbidding' (over-promising), without having to expect to 'respond' for their promises.

Because of the dominant role of the two largest parties – Dc and Pci, respectively in the majority and the opposition fields – a competing account defined the system as an instance of "imperfect bipolarism" (Galli 1966) where the qualification of imperfect was due to the lack of alternation. On a similar note, Farneti (1983) questioned the actual extension of the ideological space and the overall dynamics of competition, which he defined as centripetal rather than centrifugal. This was due to the changing strategy of the Communist party that progressively weakened its links with the Soviet Union and underwent a process of parliamentarization (Pizzorno 1997). A similar view was shared by Di Palma (1977) that emphasized the development of a habit of close parliamentary cooperation between the two

main parties. Rather than a polarized system, Italy was described as an example of "consociational" democracy, where many laws (providing for both small and large reforms) were adopted through a decentralized procedure (i.e. in parliamentary committees) thanks to the vote of the Communist opposition (Cazzola 1974).

The advent of the so-called Second Republic was not the result of major constitutional reforms. Rather, it originated from radical transformations at the level of formal and informal political institutions. The joint action of international (the fall of the Berlin wall) and domestic events (the fiscal crisis; the prosecution of a large share of MPs and the general accusation against most political parties known as Tangentopoli; the change of the electoral law from a proportional to a mixed majority system) determined the collapse of all the parties that had been in government throughout the whole First Republic (e.g. Newell 2000).

A 'transition' followed, with two short legislative terms between 1992-1996. The 11th term, the last one of the First Republic, was governed by two technocratic governments, Amato and Ciampi, which implemented some key reforms to the economy, justice, and government institutions and operations, including the electoral law. The 1994 elections held with the new law were destined to transform Italian politics radically, opening the way to the Second Republic. The party system was entirely shaken-up. Against all expectations, the coalition of post-Communist Pds and (leftist) post-Christian Democrats was defeated. The newly created Silvio Berlusconi's party, Forza Italia, managed to win the elections with two separated coalitions, one with Lega Nord running in northern Italy, and the other one with post-Christian Democrats and post-fascists in central and southern Italy. However, the first Berlusconi government lasted just about 18 months and, following the defection by Lega Nord, left the way to a technical government supported by opposition parties.

We take the 13th legislative term (1996-2001) as the start of the Second Republic. This was both the first time alternation in power occurred in the Italian Republic, and the first time a leftist coalition (made of a centre-left cartel of post-Communists and the heirs of the left wing faction of the Christian Democrats, with external support from the Communists) won the elections. Although the Prodi government was overturned because of intra-coalitional conflicts, the legislative term was brought to its natural end by three further cabinets (D'Alema I and II, and Amato II) supported by a slightly different coalition of centre-left parties.

The years of the centre-left were followed by the centre-right 14th term (2001-2006) with government held by 'Casa delle Libertà' (House of Freedoms), a coalition of Forza Italia, Lega Nord, Alleanza Nazionale and the post-Christian Democrats of Ccd/Cdu, that stayed in government for the entire term. The last (Second Republic) terms that we include in our analysis are the 15th (2006-2008) and 16th (2008-2013). The 2006 elections were won by the 'Unione', a cartel of centre-left parties ranging from 'centrists' that were previously allied with Berlusconi to Rifondazione Comunista and the Partito dei Comunisti Italiani. The coalition leader was once again Romano Prodi, who had just completed his term as President of the European Commission. The Unione won the elections with an extremely low margin, leading to a very unstable government that only lasted two years.

The change following the advent of the Second Republic affected not only the identity and internal composition of political parties, but also the structure of the party system itself. With the change of 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 center-left government following a center-right government, Italy seemed to have taken the path of a competitive democracy. The change is apparent if one looks at electoral outcomes and the perfect alternation between two center-left coalitions (1996 and 2006) and two center-right coalitions (2001 and 2008).

At least on the surface, this change implied a relative simplification of the system, which shifted from a tri-polar format to a bipolar competition between pre-electoral coalitions headed by clearly identified leaders – the candidates of each coalition to the position of Premier. Coalition agreements then took the form of large pre-electoral "coalition manifestos", spelling out policy pledges as in typical majoritarian democracies. More importantly, with alternation to government a concrete possibility, we expect the link between the implementation of policy programs and the performance of the governing majority to be tightened. As spelled out in the previous sections, for mandate theory to work, in fact, all parties should be legitimate candidates to government and this was clearly not the case in the Italian First Republic. Furthermore, we want to test whether under the blocked system of the First Italian Republic the incentives to engage in issue uptake were even *lower* than in the competitive Second Republic.

Data and Methods

The empirical analysis of the congruence between electoral pronouncements and actual policy decisions has been a challenge for quantitative research designs. In particular, the dependent variable – policy output – has been difficult to measure, since each operationalization has entailed gains and losses in terms of validity and reliability (Pétry and Collette 2009). To test our hypotheses, this article builds on the coding system of the Comparative Policy Agendas Project. Under the supervision of the authors, teams of trained coders located respectively at the University of Catania and the State University of Milan coded the policy content of party programs and legislation using the Italian policy agendas codebook, which envisages a total of 21 main policy areas (see appendix). Our dependent and main independent variables are the yearly share of attention devoted to each of these policy areas respectively in the legislative agenda and in the party agenda of the majority and the opposition. More information on the operationalization of these and other control variables is given below.

Party platforms

For party manifestos, the unit of analysis is the 'quasi-sentence', i.e. each part of a single sentence which includes a logically autonomous statement. Overall, the party manifestos included in the dataset have been broken-up into more than 39,000 quasi-sentences, each coded based on its main policy content.

Note that, in the Italian case, formal post-election coalition agreements have never been signed. On the other hand, the reforms of the electoral law adopted in 1993 and 2005 provided powerful incentives for political parties to form pre-election coalitions. When available, we coded pre-election coalition manifestos. When these were not available, we were confronted with the need to merge single parties' manifestos.[6] We adopted an aggregation criteria, based on the idea that in forming the agenda of the coalition, parties with a larger representation in parliament had a stronger bargaining power (Strøm 1990). To take this possibility into account, we built a measure of coalition agenda where the mean of party agendas for each issue is weighted by their relative share of seats in the Lower Chamber. Since we take years as our time units, we repeat our measure of the governing and opposition party platforms for each year making up the legislative term.[7] Of course there is another possibility that follows the veto players theory (Tsebelis 2002). That is that all parties to hold some veto power in the coalition

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6 Nothing similar happened during the First Republic and in part of , when coalitions were post-electoral and their main policy lines also were generally agreed after elections, when single parties could count their votes and bargain agreements (mainly on the distribution of government portfolios) far from the spotlight of public attention (Verzichelli and Cotta 2000).

7 Therefore, for the 11th, 12th, and 15th legislative terms we repeat the party agenda twice, in the case of the 9th term four times and for the remaining terms five times.

regardless of their size. In this case, we aggregated party agendas by taking the simple mean across parties for each issue in the overall agenda of the coalition and these results of analyses with this version of the independent variables are presented in the appendix and offer the same general inferences.

Law-making

The unit of analysis of the legislative agenda is the single legislative act. Data were drawn from the Italian Law-Making dataset (Borghetto et al. 2012). Overall, our dataset of legislative outputs includes 5615 content-coded units. We filtered out laws ratifying international treaties (n=1343) and budget laws (n=142). The former are somehow exogenous to domestic party politics. The latter are mostly complex bills with heterogeneous content spanning many sectors, thus they could not be assigned to a specific topic area.

We also run the analysis on the subset of executive-sponsored legislation (n=2213). The Italian law-making process put relatively little constraints to the proposal of laws. Single MPs can and do propose a large number of bills, yet most of these will never be turned into actual laws. Most bills are indeed introduced by the government, that in turn is comparatively rather successful in having the Parliament voting them into laws (Kreppel 2009). As a consequence, repeating the analysis on those laws initiated by the government should provide a more detailed understanding of the operation of the mandate hypothesis, as well as a more stringent test of the issue uptake hypothesis.

To obtain a yearly measure of the legislative agenda, we did not use the calendar year to aggregate laws since elections normally fall in the middle of the year. Rather, each legislative term was divided in

periods of 365 days. This entailed that the last year of the legislature has slightly more or less than 365 days.[8]

Control variables

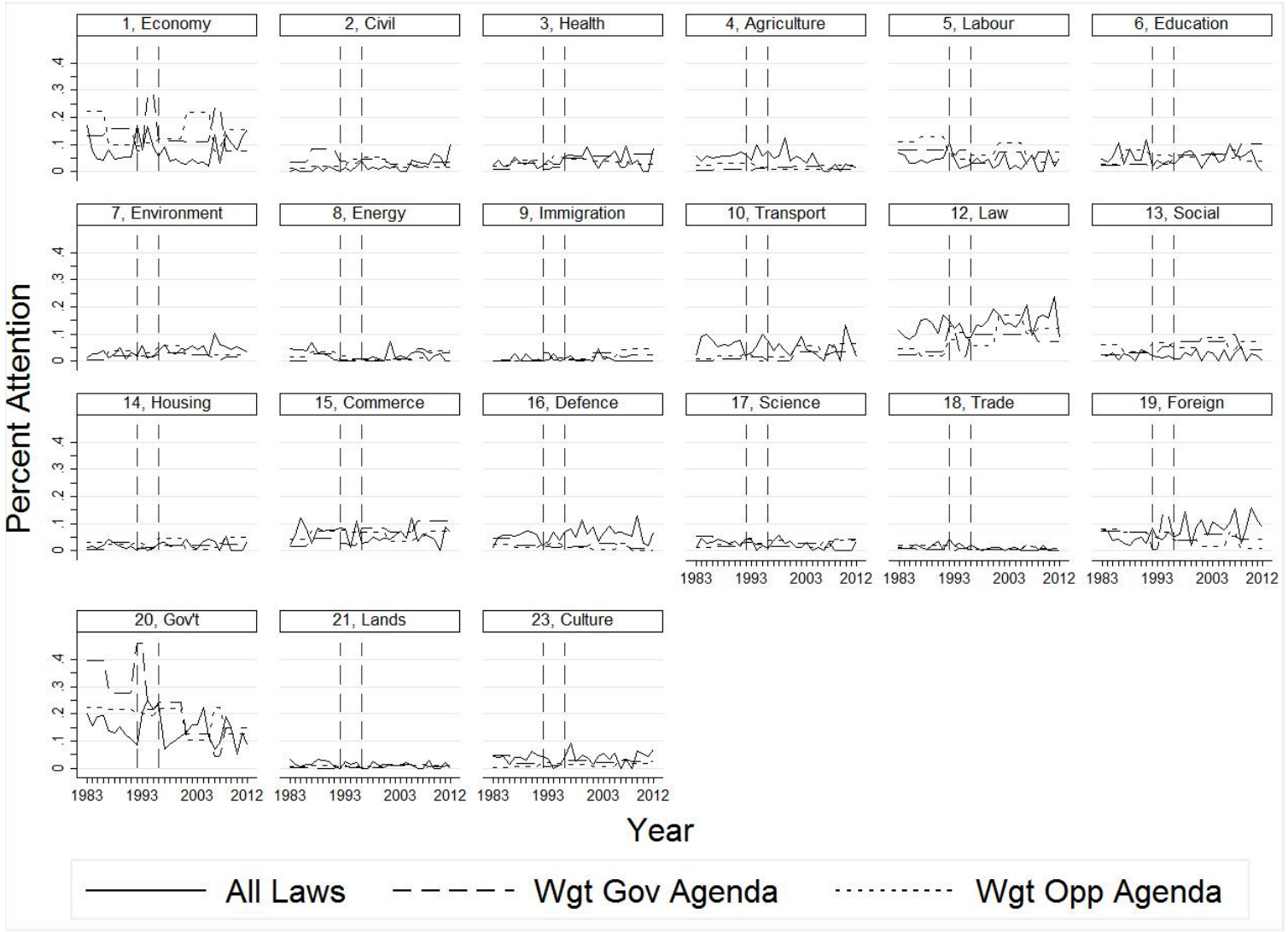
Our models include a range of control variables. The first variable is total government support (*Government Seats*) and measures the seat share of all parties in government weighted by the numbers of days in office in a given year. The *effective number of parties* uses Laakso and Taagepera' formula and data on parliamentary seats (1979) to produce a legislature-specific score. Both indexes were drawn from Armigeon et al. (2016). Ideological distance (*Rile score*) measures the difference between the left-most and right-most party for each legislature using estimates of party positioning on the left-right axis provided by the Manifesto Research Project (Volkens et al. 2015). These three control variables aim at capturing contextual variables that have an impact on the capacity of a majority coalition to implement its agenda: the parliamentary support it can rely upon, the fragmentation of the parliamentary arena and its level of ideological heterogeneity. Finally, we also checked for the presence of 'electoral cycle' effects ,by introducing two dummy variables taking the value of 1 when the year is respectively the first (post-electoral) and the last (pre-electoral) in the legislative term. In line with the literature (Blais and Nadeau 1992; Schultz 1995), we expected the congruence between the majority and legislative agendas to be stronger in proximity of elections. This resulted in a tiny post-electoral effect in some analyses ($>10^{-8}$), but did not change any other results, therefore we do not present the model here.

8 The last legislature years include 355 days on average, with a standard deviation of 33. The longest one occurs during the 12th (391 days) and the shorter during the 10th (297 days).

Analyses

The consistent topic coding across each of these datasets allows us to test the general relationship between both the government and opposition agendas in relation to legislative outputs. Before moving on with the analysis, it is useful to inspect visually. Figure 1 presents the weighted government and opposition agendas alongside the all laws measure for each topic. Here the two vertical dashed lines indicate the end of the first republic and the beginning of the second republic with the period in-between representing the transition.

Figure 1. Percent attention to single topics in the government and opposition agendas and in legislation (all laws)



To test our expectations, we make use of a time series cross-sectional design with panel corrected standard errors. Years are used as our unit of time and each major topic code acting as an individual panel producing a total N of 630 (30 years (T) * 21 major topics (n)) observations. Specification tests for each panel demonstrate no clear time series processes in the form of autoregression or a moving average. Unit root tests also offer no evidence of such a process for all panels. Finally, the majority of panels are white noise according to the Ljung–Box Q that tests for the joint significance of autocorrelations across a number of lags.

In order to test our hypotheses concerning the differences in the effects of the government and opposition agendas during different time periods we make use of a number of multiplicative interaction terms between the government and opposition agendas measures and dummy variables coded 1 for the first (1983-1991) and second republic (1996-2013) and zero otherwise. Namely, we include a government first republic and a government second republic interaction as well as an opposition first republic and an opposition second republic in our models. These interaction terms allow us to calculate substantively meaningful marginal effects for the government and opposition agendas with the transition period as the omitted time period. As is necessary with interaction terms we further include the first and second republic dummy variables in the model separately although we have no expectation for differences in the overall number of laws by year based on time period.

Our analyses are completed for two versions of the dependent variable, namely all laws and all executive sponsored laws. The results comparing the two dependent variables are presented in Table 2 and to fully assess our results the marginal effects based on the interactions are presented in Table 3.

Table 2: Weighted Majority and Opposition Agendas on Percent Laws

	All Laws	All Executive Sponsored Laws
Majority	-0.012	0.076
	(0.126)	(0.122)
Majority * 1st	0.252	0.179
	(0.158)	(0.163)
Majority * 2nd	0.374*	0.227
	(0.153)	(0.158)
Opposition	0.927***	0.771***
	(0.238)	(0.219)
Opposition * 1st	-0.782**	-0.596*
	(0.261)	(0.251)
Opposition * 2nd	-0.754**	-0.555*
	(0.252)	(0.238)
1st	0.025***	0.020*
	(0.007)	(0.008)
2nd	0.018*	0.016*
	(0.007)	(0.008)
Government Seats	-0.000	-0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Effective Number of Parties	-0.000	-0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Rile Score	0.000	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Constant	0.004	0.007
	(0.007)	(0.007)
R^2	0.34	0.30
N	630	630

+ $p<0.1$; * $p<0.05$; ** $p<0.01$; *** $p<0.001$

Table 3: Marginal Effect of Weighted Majority and Opposition Agendas on Percent Laws

	Marginal Effects – All Laws	Marginal Effects – All Executive Sponsored Laws
Majority 1st Republic	0.240*	0.255*
	(0.095)	(0.109)
Majority Transition	-0.012	0.076
	(0.126)	(0.122)
Majority 2nd Republic	0.362***	0.304**
	(0.088)	(0.100)
Opposition 1st Republic	0.145	0.175
	(0.107)	(0.123)
Opposition Transition	0.927***	0.771***
	(0.238)	(0.219)
Opposition 2nd Republic	0.172*	0.217*
	(0.083)	(0.093)

Note * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$, † $p \leq 0.10$

As our primary findings contain interactions we first focus our discussion on the marginal effects for the first republic, transition period and second republic contained in Table 3. Consistent with hypothesis H1, we find a positive and significant effect of the government agenda in both the first and second republic for the two models. The effect intensifies by becoming both larger and more significant in the second republic over the first pointing to the attempt by the governing coalition to follow the priorities of its legislative agenda and offering support for H3 that posited that the effect should increase with the introduction of alternation. However, there is no effect for the government agenda during the transition period which we will discuss more in relation to the opposition agenda.

In both of our models the effect of the opposition was positive, but insignificant during the first republic. This follows the widespread understanding of domination of the Pentapartito coalition, but works against H2, that the opposition parties influence the government agenda via the structuring of the party system agenda. During the second republic the effect of the opposition agenda was however both positive and significant showing that at least with the introduction of alternation the opposition agenda matters offering some support for H2 and clear support for H3 that the effect of the opposition is larger during the second republic. Further support for this hypothesis also certainly exists during the transition period where the focus on reform highlighted by the opposition had comparatively large positive and significant coefficients in both models.

Finally we turn back to Table 2 to discuss the models' controls. In both cases the base level of attention was highest during the first republic, then the second, followed by the omitted transition period. This of course makes sense with the transition focused on a very narrow agenda. Similarly, no effects were found for the number of government seats, the effective number of parties or the Rile Score in either

model indicating that none of these potential controls has a direct effect on the overall level of legislative activity. Model fit denoted by the R-squared is slightly higher for all laws indicating that our model is best at explaining this part of the law-making agenda.[9]

Conclusion

The transmission of priorities from voters to parties and their translation into public policy is at the heart of what many mean by democracy (Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994; Robertson 1976). Yet, the extent to which, once in government, political parties stick to the policy priorities emphasized during election campaigns is still a contested question. In this article we use thirty years of data on the Italian case to test the influence of party mandates on the legislative agenda, the extent to which governing majorities also try to take up issues from the opposition platforms and, finally, how these two strategies are affected by changes in the institutional context. We argue that with its shift from a blocked system to a system of alternation in government, and the parallel centralization of

9 Tables A1 and A2 in the appendix extend this same analyses to two additional versions of the dependent variables based on decrees, namely legislative and executive decrees. Here the model fit was the same or lower than executive sponsored laws. The one major reversal substantively with this data over the dependent variables presented here was marginally or significant effects for the opposition agenda in the first republic, but not in the second. This suggests that when it comes to decrees the power of the opposition is at best mixed (H2) and goes completely against the idea of increasing effects for the opposition from the first to the second republic (H2) All other results are consistent with the findings in Tables 2 and 3.

governmental powers, Italy provides a quasi-experimental context for studying the effect of the exposure to increased party competition on the party program-to-policy link.

Through a set of time series cross-sectional analyses we find robust evidence that both a mandate and an opposition effect are at play under the new alternation system. Overall, these findings point to the complex and dynamic character of the governmental process. While there is evidence of a mandate effect following the introduction of alternation – which supports previous research on the topic (Borghetto et al. 2014) - mandate politics seems to capture only part of the picture. The paradox of the introduction of alternation in Italy is that both the effect of the majority's and that of the opposition's agenda became stronger.

These findings bear some irony if one considers that the Italian reforms of the past two decades were aimed to reinforce the 'governability' of the system and increase the accountability of governing parties with the key goal of strengthening the mandate effect – whereas the resistance to the reforms was grounded on the fear that the opposition would become too weak. With obvious *caveats*, our findings may be understood as a sign of the increased relevance and temporal persistence of those issues on which electoral campaigns are fought. The parties in the Second Republic seem to be caught in a state of permanent electoral competition, which results in legislative agendas increasingly drafted with an eye on the future electoral prospects. Governing parties are indeed (more) worried about their re-election, and this results in a pressure not only to follow up on their electoral priorities, but also to uptake the priorities of their opponents.

Our findings show that the effects of institutional reforms may be poorly understood. When the chances of re-election become less predictable, the government becomes more responsive not only to the priorities outlined in its policy platforms, but also to those of its competitors. The relationship between

majority and opposition, and the way in which each of them contributes to shaping the agenda of government, appears to be more complex than is generally assumed.

Future research will have to more closely investigate party strategies aiming at influencing voters' perceptions over the attribution of issue ownership and the circumstances when it succeeds. To date, we know little about how issue trespassing is used, whether it is directed to weaken the opponent's issue ownership or, when the circumstances allow it, to steal it. Remarkably, we do not lack examples when this strategy is put to use in everyday politics. For example, at the time of writing this article in summer 2017, the relative majority party in government, the Democratic Party, tabled a bill to abolish the so-called "vitalizi" (the life pension granted to MPs who have served for at least four and a half years). This "anti-caste" measure, a valence issue in its essence, was not included in its manifesto but in the Five Star Movement's, namely its main opponent. The Democrats' move is a clear attempt to disarm the M5S anti-elite attacks in the coming 2018 elections, by preventively shifting their position closer to the Movement on the need to lower the "costs" of politics. The success of this strategy will become clear only in the medium/long run and it will largely depend on the discipline of PD MPs at the moment of voting on the bill, on the reaction of the M5S and on the way voters will read this decision.

Future investigation should also focus on the influence of additional agendas on the manifesto-policy link, namely the role of media and public opinion (see for instance Froio et al. 2016). These actors exert pressure on government actors along the whole policy mandate and may end up mediating the impact of the opposition agendas: ultimately the government should take up its rival's issues only when they are likely to dominate the next election. Finally, future research should incorporate issue preferences, which – alongside attention - is a fundamental determinant of party competition. For instance, the greater the distance between a governing party and its rival on a popular issue is, the more difficult for the former to effectively take it up without triggering revolts in the party and among its

more ideological voters. Even with these limitations, the present analysis sheds new light on the transmission of electoral mandates into policy agendas, by providing evidence about the relevance of institutional features and the role of political opposition.

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