The Influence of Coalition Parties on Executive Agendas in Italy (1983-2008)

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Party Priorities, Government Formation, and the Making of the Executive Agenda (1983-2008)

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1. Introduction

In parliamentary democracies the after-election confidence vote represents the foundational moment in a government life. It sanctions the accountability relationship between a legislative majority and a cabinet. Similarly to other countries, in Italy the actual voting is preceded by a speech of the appointed Prime Minister (PM), laying down the policy priorities of the cabinet for the rest of the mandate.[1] Although the cabinet survival is not conditioned on the fulfilment of each policy commitment mentioned in the speech, the latter has historically represented one of the few opportunities for Italian PMs to officially outline their policy platforms. Due to its political relevance, the evolution of its format and substantive content have already been the subject of previous analyses (Villone and Zuliani 1994). Less is known about the extent each coalition member's priorities, as expressed at the time of elections, are merged into the executive agenda.

The congruence between the policy content of party platforms and the government agenda should be by definition high in single-party government. Most of the policy priorities emphasised during the electoral campaign (and condensed into the party manifesto) should become automatically the blueprint for government action. In principle, one should expect the mechanisms of agenda definition to be less linear in multiparty governments. The cabinet agenda represents the final result of a compromise between coalition members. On its turn, how this compromise is reached depends on the format of the coalition and the rules governing its formation.

With few exceptions, Italy has been governed by party coalitions for its last thirty years of republican history. The formation and governance of these coalitions, however, changed

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[1] It is followed by a debate where representatives of party groups are given the chance to reply to the PM.

markedly over this time period. Before the change of the electoral law in 1993, governing coalitions always included a dominant party, Christian Democracy (DC), in alliance with a varying set of medium (Socialist Party, PSI) and small parties. Most importantly, coalitions were ordinarily formed immediately after elections, usually as a result of secretive bargaining among party leaders. The results of these negotiations – also called coalition agreements, consisting in more or less formal statements on policy matters and procedural decision rules "inducing shared expectations and cooperation between coalition partners" (Strøm and Müller 1999, 266) - were not made public.

The substitution of a pure proportional electoral system with a mixed system created strong incentives for political parties to form pre-electoral coalitions. The post-1994 party competition (at least up to the 2013 elections) revolved around two encompassing coalitions, alternating in power. Whereas in the first years, these coalitions did not undersign formalized coalition agreements, the 2001 elections marked a watershed with the introduction of coalition manifestoes by both main competitors. If ever, the current electoral law, an atypical party-lists proportional representation system prescribing electoral thresholds and a strong majority premium for the relative majority coalition, consolidated the practice of pre-electoral coalitions held together by a common programmatic platform.

The last thirty years of Italian history (1983-2008) provide an ideal background against which to test hypotheses about the impact of variations in coalition politics and governance on the incorporation of coalition priorities into the government agenda. In looking at the congruence in the distribution of policy priorities in party manifestoes and government investiture speeches, the chapter follows a typical agenda-setting approach. However, it also tests the claims of a complementary approach, mandate theory. The proponents of this

theory expect a greater congruence between pre- and post- electoral agenda when there is a credible threat of being sanctioned by voters at the next elections for not fulfilling the mandate. The empirical section is devoted to explore whether the passage to a bipolar competition after 1993 increased the extent to which cabinet agendas relate to the priorities communicated by coalition members to voters during election campaigns. The analysis relies on data on party manifestoes and investiture speeches coded according to the policy content coding system of the Italian Policy Agendas Project.

The chapter is organized as follows. It first provides an overview of the changes in coalition governance occurred in Italy over the last thirty years. To this end, it introduces a brief discussion of the evolution in the format of electoral manifestos and PM's investiture speeches at an aggregate level and briefly discuss their meaning. Next, it outlines some theoretical expectations that we were able to generate drawing on existing literature, and discusses our research design. Finally, it analyses the findings and reappraises them in the conclusions.

2. The politics of coalitions in Italy between the First and Second Republic

Until the first half of the 1990s, the creation and dismissal of Italian governments occurred against the background of peculiar conditions of party competition which Sartori famously baptised "polarised multipartism" (Sartori 1976). Formally, pre-1994 elections were conducted as an everyone-against-everyone contest to get the absolute majority of seats in parliament. Remarkably, however, no single party ever achieved the share of votes necessary to form a single-party government. The relative majority party (the Christian Democracy, DC) formed different minority governments ("*governi monocolore*"), some

lasting very shortly (Leone I 1963; Leone II 1968; Andreotti I 1972; Fanfani VI 1987) others one year or more (De Gasperi VIII 1953; Pella 1953; Fanfani I 1954; Zoli 1957; Segni II 1959; Tambroni e Fanfani III 1960, Andreotti III 1976; Andreotti IV 1978). However, in the greatest majority of cases, governments had to rely on the support of party coalitions. As a result of the perception of the Communist Party (PCI, the biggest party of the left) and the post-Fascists of the Italian Social Movement (MSI) as anti-systemic forces with scarce democratic credentials, the range of coalition partners for the DC was relatively predictable. Up to the 1994 elections, Italian governments relied on the support of coalitions characterised by the alternation of some relative small and medium parties around the pivotal Christian Democracy.

The lack of alternation in government and the strongly proportional electoral rule encouraged coalition partners to bargain the division of government spoils and policy platform after the polls were closed and each party could measure the respective electoral weight. While the distribution of government posts has undergone extensive scrutiny in the scholarly literature (Ceron 2013), the study of coalition agreements has lagged behind. This is largely due to the fact that whereas coalition agreements have become standard practice in post-war parliamentary systems (Muller and Strom 2008), Italian coalitions never formalised the outcome of their negotiations. In practical terms, there was no text or declaration summarizing the terms of the reached compromise.

The exclusion of anti-system parties from the range of "coalitionable" parties (Sartori 1976) resulted in "constrained coalitions" (Verzichelli and Cotta 2000). Membership, however, was the only element of stability of coalition governments. The inclusion of parties with different ideological profiles and policy priorities, coupled with the lack of institutionalised

mechanisms for the definition and enforcement of shared agendas, resulted in extremely unstable governments, marked by continuous negotiations between (and within) coalition members in search of ad hoc agreements on a decision-by-decision basis.

The concurrence of multiple shocks made an apparently stable system collapse suddenly in the early 1990s (Cotta and Isernia 1996). The joint action of the *Mani Pulite* (Clean Hands) investigations, the end of the Cold War, and the budgetary and fiscal crisis of the early 1990s, precipitated a longer-term trend of growing dissatisfaction with the functioning of Italian politics. The governance of coalition governments was generally understood as a crucial weakness of the system. It is not a case that the renewed social activism during the transition from the First to the Second Republic was catalysed by the 'Referendum Movement'. The leading idea of the movement, which soon escalated into general consensus, was that the 'transmission belt' between public demands and government's output was malfunctioning; and that a plurality rule would lead to a more direct connection between public and governments, thus improving government performance in terms of both responsiveness and accountability. Since the party system showed resistance to change, this should be achieved through the constitutional tools of direct democracy.

The referendum movement won its battle and the parliament passed the new electoral law in 1993 (Laws n.286 and 287). In terms of effects, grafting a quasi-majoritarian law in a fragmented and polarised party system did not result in a change toward bipartism, but rather in further fragmentation. As will be discussed in the next section, however, a key

departure from the old system was the creation of incentives for political parties to form pre-election coalitions.[2]

In sum, while multi-party coalitions have been central to the Italian Republic experience since the post-war years, until 1993 the terms of their agreements were never formalised and were the object of a constant bargaining among coalition members. This impacted also on their governance, which was generally rather inefficient, resulting in instability and limited governing capacity. To this, one must add the lack of responsiveness of governing parties, which were perceived to ignore public priorities. The lack of transparency, effectiveness and accountability of First Republic coalitions was a crucial weakness of the system. Accordingly, the architect of the Second Republic tried to build the new system on different premises. Key to this goal was building coalitions around a common and publicly known set of policy positions.

This chapter tests empirically the operation of these mechanisms between the First and Second Republic by exploring the correspondence between party manifestoes and government speeches. It focuses on the genesis of coalition priorities, looking at the agenda of multiparty coalition cabinets as spelled out during investiture speeches in front of parliaments, and contrasting them to the priorities presented by political parties during election campaigns. In focusing on declarations instead of decisions or public policy outputs, it excludes the operation of a number of constraints to the implementation of the government mandate, such as the difficulty in passing a legislative bill or the lack of funding

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[2] This also explains why the move back to a proportional law in 2005 did not result in a major change to the pattern of coalitions. Not only had this law an in-built disproportionality which is hardly found in proportional representation systems; it also provided powerful incentives for the formation of pre-electoral coalitions, such as a system of thresholds which favoured pre-election aggregations, the indication of coalition leaders, and the presentation of coalition manifestoes.

for a policy. In a sense, it looks at pure agenda-formation – those processes preliminary to policy decisions and law-making activities that are instead investigated in other chapters of this volume.

It is expected that the move to the Second Republic increased the correspondence between the agendas of coalition governments on the one side, and the priorities spelled out by political parties during election campaigns on the other side. First, the shift from post- to pre-election coalitions made the system similar to those with directly elected executives, which generally have higher degrees of responsiveness (Perrson and Tabellini 2007). The public discussion of the programmes of coalition parties is key to election campaigns of the Second Republic. Therefore, coalition cabinets in the Second Republic should not move too far from electoral priorities when they take office and declare their agendas.

In addition, the introduction of alternation should have made cabinets more sensitive to the possibility of future electoral sanctions. Against a political discourse and a public mood increasingly focused on the respect of a political mandate, the clear allocation of political responsibility to pre-electoral coalitions should push governments to incorporate more faithfully their electoral priorities into the government agenda. In short, the introduction of (perfect) alternation to government introduced real electoral contestability, which also is usually associated to higher responsiveness (Hobolt and Klemmensen 2008). Moreover, a number of formal and informal changes increased the decision-making power of the government vis-à-vis the Parliament,[3] improving agenda control.

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[3] Formal changes included, for example, the strengthening of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers (Law 400/1988) and of the Minister of the Treasury, culminated in the creation of the Super-Minister of the Economy. Informal changes resulted from increased legitimacy of the government and the Prime Minister, consequence in turn

Of course, even in the Second Republic coalition agendas are not expected to be the mere reproduction of election platforms. First, there are clearly differences between oral and written languages. Second, PM's agendas might also deviate from the list of priorities set in party manifestos due to the personality of the leader or the propensity to uptake some of the priorities of the opposition. Yet, overall, there are strong reasons to expect an increase in the translation of electoral priorities on to cabinet priorities.

The radical change consequent to the move to the Second Republic provides an ideal opportunity to explore the functioning of the governance of coalitions under different settings. While coalition governments have long been the subject of scholarly interest, the main focus has mainly been on issues related to the formation of coalition governments and the allocation of government portfolios among coalition members (see e.g. Laver and Shepsle 1996, Riker 1962; on Italy, Giannetti and Laver 2001). The governance of coalition cabinets, in turn, is a more recent object of study – not least because of the difficulty to analyse the actual functioning of coalitions. To address this question, studies of coalition governance have looked into the 'keys to togetherness' (Strom and Muller 1999): the coalition agreements that hold together individual political parties.

The study of coalition agreements has furthered the understanding of the governance of coalition governments. Agreements have been found to be crucial to the governance of coalition cabinets. In permitting to address the crucial problems of bargaining and delegation (Strom and Muller 1999: 256; Strom et al 2008), agreements reduce policy conflict among coalition parties (Timmermans 2003, 2006). Recent research has gone even farther than that. In a comparative study of four countries, Moury (2012) found systematic

of the more direct connection with the electorate that pre-electoral coalitions and 'candidate Presidents of the Council' enjoyed.

evidence that agreements work as contracts among coalition members and are implemented to a significant extent.

As detailed below in the discussion of research design, the small number of observations limits the possibility to pursue a comprehensive statistical test. However, beside the degree of transposition of electoral priorities on to government agendas, our analysis also explores how individual parties contribute to setting the agenda of the coalition. In particular, it explores the agenda-setting role of small and large parties, the influence of the *formateur*, and the impact of the introduction of coalition agreements on the coalition government agenda. Different roles for individual (types of) parties in the formation of the coalition agenda mean different models of coalition agenda-building. A pure *mandate model* would imply that single parties' influence on the coalition agenda should be proportional to their electoral share (Warwick 2001, 2011). If the main party of the coalition – which in Italy has the median position in the coalition's ideological space – has a dominant influence on the coalition agenda, then a *median party mandate model* would apply (McDonald and Budge 2005). A *proposer* or *formateur model* would result in a greater influence for the party of the Prime Minister (Baron and Ferejohn 1998). Finally, a veto-player model would assign disproportionate agenda-setting power to small parties (Tsebelis 2002).

3. Data and research design

The empirical analysis relies on data collected and coded by the authors as part of a larger research project, the Comparative Agendas Project. All sentences and quasi-sentences of all manifestos and PM investiture speeches (only those immediately following the election of a

new parliament) between 1983 and 2006 were attributed to one of the 21 topic codes making up the Italian policy agendas codebook (Borghetto and Carammia 2001, see appendix A). Trained coders working in pairs coded independently each sentence or quasi-sentences. In case of disagreement, codes were discussed under the supervision of the authors until a common solution was reached. Inter-coder reliability reached over 90% in both data collection projects.

The coding of sentences in PM investiture speeches used a variable indicating whether statements actually had policy content. Those statements referring to the government formation process or to some very general point about government with no substantive agenda relevance were excluded from the study. The datasets of party manifestos and PM investiture speeches contain respectively some 41000 and 7000 content coded sentences.

In the following two sections, we begin with mapping the general empirical picture of both types of agendas, with findings at aggregate level, and briefly discuss their meaning. Then we proceed with the analysis of convergence between the priorities set in manifestos and in the PM speech during the seven legislatures under exam and confront our hypothesis with the findings.

4. Evolution of party agendas: manifesto data

As anticipated, one of the most apparent elements of change between the first and second republic was the substitution of individual party manifestos with pre-electoral coalition agreements. Before 1993, classical party manifestos fulfilled their purpose by reinforcing the elements of identification of voters to specific parties. The predisposition to vote for one party instead of another was then traditionally based on social identities and political

cleavages (mainly religion and class) rather than on either the content of policies on offer, the reputation of the candidates or the competence shown in government (Segatti and Bellucci 2010). Nothing precluded these documents to include references to concrete measures to be taken once elected in office, but party elites knew from the origin that voters could hardly hold them accountable for not fulfilling their promises. The heterogeneity of Italian coalitions and, above all, the blocked system of government formation (with a dominant centrist party and with alternation in government virtually impossible, hence little incentives for government performance) prevented voters to punish-reward their representatives through a retrospective evaluation.

The new electoral system brought about a change – albeit gradual – in the political supply. In 1994 Berlusconi won the elections by creating a coalition of 'variable geometry' (with right-wing forces in the South and with regionalist separatist parties in the North). Faced with different and untested rules of the game, parties adopted a conservative strategy and no official coalition manifesto was drawn up to sanction the alliances. In 1996, the centre-left forces united behind Prodi's leadership and created the Ulivo (Olive Tree) coalition. Their manifesto was the first instance of large programmatic platform but it did not find an equivalent in the centre-right camp. The reasons underlying these different approaches were mostly rooted in post-electoral rather than on pre-electoral calculations. Since the beginning of the Second Republic, the creation of electoral cartels has been a necessity in the left coalition due to the lack of a unifying leadership emerging from the ranks of the predominant party (Prodi himself, as the manager of the Institute for Italian Reconstruction, was initially an outsider) and the high degree of fragmentation (coalition-building was traditionally very inclusive, with parties ranging from the centre to the extremes of the political spectrum). Conversely, the right could boast a strong leadership, Berlusconi, at the

helm of a comparatively bigger party, Forza Italia, dealing with a lower number of satellite coalition partners.

The advent of government alternation occurred in 2001 with the victory of the centre-right Casa delle libertà (Cdl, House of Freedoms) over a re-edition of the Olive tree. It was the first campaign to witness the diffuse reference to excerpts drawn from the respective coalition manifestos as communicative devices. The tone of the campaign was set by Berlusconi himself and his unorthodox use of media, which culminated in the symbolic "Contract with Italians", a document signed during a television show where he committed himself to respect the five most salient measures presented in the CdL's manifesto. Finally, the 2006 elections saw a renewed confrontation between the 1996 candidates for the two poles, Prodi and Berlusconi, but the new electoral law and its majority prize provided new incentives for building even larger coalitions. Berlusconi opted for a minimalist programmatic platform, bolstered by his and his party's pivotal position in the centre-right. By contrast, the centre-left had to deal with the usual problems of internal fragmentation. It has been suggested that the solution to the problems of coalition-management may have been found in a large and articulated coalition manifesto, used by coalition partners to minimise agency loss when delegating to ministers of other parties (Moury 2011). In fact, specifying the details of each policy commitment allowed coalition partners to keep ministers into account in case they decided to deviate too much from what had been agreed in the manifesto.

The dramatic evolution of the party agenda in the run-up to elections, as captured by party manifestos, is described through a range of indicators in Figure 1 (a list of party platform included in the analysis can be found in the appendix). First, the introduction of coalition

manifestos was associated with a significant increase in the size of these documents. An upward trend starts from the XII Second Republic legislative term and increases over time. The trend peaks in coincidence with the XIV and XV terms, which were respectively one and two times longer than the average manifesto in the previous elections. The XV legislature stands out as well for the extremely large standard deviation in the length of documents, resulting from the centre-left manifesto being eleven times longer than the centre-right one (346 vs 3960 (quasi-) sentences). The average length of manifestoes then decreases in the last term analysed, the XVI. This coincided with an attempt of both left and right coalitions to exclude smaller parties and simplify the system.

The greater detail of coalition documents does not necessarily stem from a higher heterogeneity in the range of covered topics. The agenda space (the absolute number of policy issues touched upon in a document) of an average party manifesto in the First Republic is already quite extensive. Rather, it is doubtful whether all policy sectors were given equal importance in the manifesto. The measurement of policy entropy, namely the diffusion of attention in manifestos across policy topics, shows that coalition manifestos in the XIV, XV, and XVI legislatures are in a class of their own. The normalised Shannon's entropy score increases from an average of around .8 up to around .95, meaning that the spread of attention across all issues became more equal.[4] Finally, an analysis of the longitudinal change in the composition of the agenda reveals that the most notable change

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[4] This score varies between 0 and 1 and it increases as the spread of attention across all issues evens out. Assuming a maximum of 20 topics in the agenda, it will get: a 1 if each topic receives exactly 5% of the attention; a 0 if the speech deals with just one topic. It is calculated as follows:

$$Shannon'sHnorm = \frac{-\sum_{i=1}^{n} p(x_i) * lnp(x_i)}{ln(N)}$$ where x_i represents an issue, $p(x_i)$ is the proportion of total attention the issue receives, $lnp(x_i)$ is the natural log of the proportion of attention the dimension receives and N is the total number of issues.

in an otherwise remarkably stable agenda is the proportional increase in attention devoted to welfare issues (see also Conti in this volume).[5] Topics like employment, health, culture and education, the integration of immigrants, community development and housing Issues and more in general help for disadvantage social categories gained more space in manifestoes (sometimes to the detriment of previously key cold-war related topics such as foreign policy).

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

A combined reading of these indicators reveals the profound mutation of manifesto documents. Confronted with the necessity to speak to larger audiences of voters and win the support of the median voter, the two cartels of parties opted for broadening their policy offer to a level unknown in the past: they widened the coverage of policies in their platforms, and also allocated a more balanced share of coverage to individual issues. In the new era of government alternation, elections and not parties after elections decide who gets into office. Manifestos are one of the weapons in the hands of large coalitions to reach an electorate which: 1) is diversified, given the heterogeneity of partners making up the coalition; 2) gives increasing relevance to valence factors in their voting choice. In other terms, the evaluation of candidates is increasingly based on the evaluation of party leaders, their effectiveness in government, and the policies parties commit to pursue once in power (Bellucci 2012).

Yet, there is evidence of a divergence between how the two coalitions made use of this tool. Being coalition manifestos the minimum common denominator of different party profiles and being in the interest of party leaders to minimize the number of promises to keep in front of their voters, the expectations are that the lower the level of fragmentation, the

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[5] To improve the understanding of the graph, the 21 CAP issue areas were collapsed into 6 macro-categories. See Appendix A.

more concise the document. In this case, leaders of the centre-right coalitions were favoured, given the presence of a clear leadership in their camp. The same reasoning cannot apply to the centre-left, whose internal heterogeneity is reflected in long and detailed documents laying down in details the terms of the compromise.

5. Evolution of cabinet agenda: government declarations

Italian cabinets in the first Republic did not use to issue a distinct cabinet programme or commit to a specific set of policies in front of their electors, or either provide civil servants with a unitary policy direction (Verzichelli and Cotta 2003). To be true, the requirement for the Prime Minister designate to deliver a speech in front of both chambers before the confidence vote has been existing since the first years of the Republic. Yet, the main addressees were not voters or administrators, but rather coalition parties (Villone and Zuliani 1994). A content analysis of government declarations from the period reveals that for the most part, they were filled with symbolic and general references aimed at sanctioning the post-electoral pact among coalition partners. Decisions on specific measures were left to other arenas, either informal meetings of party leaders or the meetings of parliamentary committees, where deals could be brokered not only with coalition partners but also with the opposition (Di Palma 1977).

The relative dearth of programmatic references in one of the most publicized and significant interventions of the Prime Minister in parliament is indicative of its peculiar weight in the balance of power characterizing the first forty years of Republican history. Italy was then an emblematic case of strong party government (Vassallo 1994). Parties played a pivotal role not only by filling political institutions with their candidates, but also by directly influencing

executive decision-making processes.[6] Given these conditions, the leadership role formally bestowed on the Prime Minister by the Constitutional Chart varied extensively, depending on the presence of multiple facilitating factors[7]: their own and the ministers' respective political stature, the minister's portfolio, the political leverage of their party and the political support they could elicit within it. As a result, Italian PMs were traditionally depicted as weak in comparison to other heads of governments (Hine and Finocchi 1991).

It has been argued that the majoritarian turn of the early 1990s contributed to strengthen the PM figure both in its positive power of policy direction and in its negative powers of limitation of ministerial discretion (Verzichelli 2006). The PM can now rely on a direct mandate from electors as leader of the electoral cartel they vote for, so much that some scholars speak of a presidentialisation of Italian politics (Venturino 2001). Yet, three further factors might be said to have contributed to this unprecedented visibility. On the one hand, a series of reforms (e.g. law 400/1988 on the structure of the Presidency of the Council) provided the PM with new tools to control the cabinet agenda and coordinate the actions of ministers. Second, the personalistic and centralizing interpretation of the role of PM by Berlusconi created a strong precedent. Third, the greater frequency of European and international meetings between heads of state and government increased the need for strong and durable leaders representing the country.

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[6] For instance, they could do so by "opposing initiatives of ministers from another party, or defending explicitly the action of 'their' ministers during a conflict with the PM about a specific policy competence" (Verzichelli 2006, 449).

[7] Article 95 of the Italian Constitution states that the President of Council of Ministers conducts and is responsible for the general policy of the government. He is to ensure the unity and consistency of the political and administrative programme 'by promoting and coordinating the activity of ministers'.

Once again, one can make recourse to a range of indicators to read the evolution of the instrument of the PM speech (see Figure 2). The analysis which follows compares the first two legislatures (IX and X, illustrating First Republic speeches) with the last four (XIII to XVI, illustrating Second Republic speeches). The XI and XII legislatures are considered legislatures of transition and will be dealt with separately. In terms of length, the average number of sentences shifts from 224 in the First to 359 in the Second Republic. The only exception is Berlusconi who opened his fourth government during the XVI term with an exceptionally short speech, probably carved up to fit the tight television schedule. Second, speeches cover a considerably wider range of topics. The average agenda space is almost twice as big in the Second Republic (from around 12 to more than 18). Thirdly, the average distribution of attention across policy sectors rises from 0.65 to around 0.8. Finally, similarly to manifestos, there is a decrease of attention devoted to foreign policy issues, while domestic matters like the welfare state are given more consideration. Overall, PM's speeches became not only longer and larger in scope, but also more balanced in the distribution of attention to different topics. In sum, there is evidence that their format mutated over time, taking more and more the shape of articulated accounts of the cabinet's stance on a variety of issues. Exactly what one would expect from programmatic platforms in a majoritarian system.

INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE

Reported scores point to a significant increase in many indicators already in the XI legislature. It is argued that these increases largely stemmed from the exceptional circumstances characterising those years. Italy had just signed the Maastricht treaty and was under constant pressure from international markets and European partners to keep its national debt under control. In the meanwhile, the national currency, the Lira, was

undergoing a period of wild fluctuation, which eventually led to its withdrawal from the Exchange Rate Mechanism (September 1992). Finally, traditional political parties were weakened by both the unsatisfactory results obtained in the last elections and the allegations of corruption against a large number of their most prominent members.

It may be argued that these extraordinary conditions both constrained and gave a freer rein to the Amato government in setting the agenda. On the one hand, he had to implement a range of budget cuts and austerity reforms advocated by European partners. Their presentation as externally imposed conditions allowed Amato to introduce them safely in the agenda. On the other hand, the dire state of the political forces supporting his government might have pushed him to present a more articulated speech, where he tried to bind coalition partners (DC, PSI, PSDI and PLI) and external supporters (RP) to the mast in support of his "weak" cabinet (that would eventually last 10 months only). The exceptional character of the period stands out if one considers the dramatic change occurred in the subsequent legislature, XII, where the speech delivered by the new PM Berlusconi exhibited lowest scores in all indicators but already showed most features of the new format of government declarations in the Second Republic.

6. Analysis: the formation of government agenda

The main objective of this chapter is to analyse the link between the issues attended in party/coalition manifestos and those at the moment of the government investiture. Previous works have examined this link from a positional perspective: are the preferences expressed in party manifestos reflected in the cabinet agendas (McDonald and Budge 2005;

Warwick 2011)? This study looks at the correspondence between the pre-electoral issue priorities of parties/coalitions and the policy priorities of the government. The previous sections outlined the significant metamorphosis both in the format of party manifestos and PMs' investiture speeches occurred in the mid-1990s as a consequence of the change in the Italian party system. This section aims at exploring whether this passage increased also the congruence between the priorities declared in party manifestos and those set by the PM at the beginning of the legislature.

In order to quantify the similarity between the two agendas we applied the measure of "issue convergence" developed by Sigelman and Buell (2004) to capture how much attention each candidate devoted to every potential issue in presidential campaigns.[8] The maximum level of congruence is 1. For instance, a score of 0.5 would indicate a 50% overlap between the two agendas (for an application of this measure to agenda-setting research on executive speeches, see Mortensen et al 2011).

Since the first four government coalitions under observation did not issue a common manifesto before elections, we computed three different versions of it. In this way, we can capture different forms of agenda-building. Firstly, "formateur" represents the agenda of the party which is called to form the government, namely the party of the Prime Minister. According to the "proposer" model delineated by Baron and Ferejohn (1989), the formateur is in a more favourable position with respect to coalition partners and thus will get a greater payoff in terms of cabinet posts. We explore this hypothesis in the setting of the cabinet

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[8] It is measured as follows: $1 - (\sum_n^{i=1} |PercM - PercS|)/2$ where PercM and PercS are the percentages of the total attention devoted to a particular issue respectively in manifestos and speeches, and the absolute differences between them are summed over all n of the potential issues.

agenda (see also Curini and Ceron Forthcoming).[9] Second, we measure 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). Finally, we consider 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. Smaller parties are considered here, but the relevance of their programmes is weighted to take into account their leverage within the coalition (cfr. Warwick 2001 and 2011). This captures the variation in the "blackmailing power" of small parties, which can threaten to exit from the coalition and withdraw their support to the government (Sartori 1976).[10]

Figure 3 illustrates the longitudinal variation of issue convergence between our three measurements of coalition agenda and the cabinet agenda outlined in the course of the investiture debate. The first remarkable finding is the jump in the score of issue convergence between the two last legislatures of the First Republic and the subsequent period. First the dismantling of the old party system (XI and XII) and then the instauration of a system of bipolar alternation in government (XIII, XIV, XV and XVI) introduced a shift in the pattern of agenda formation. After the 1993 reform of the electoral law, citizens express a

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[9] The formateur in the seven legislatures under observation were respectively: IX(PSI), X(DC), XI(PSI), XII(Forza Italia), XIII(Ulivo), XIV(Casa delle Libertà), XV(Ulivo).

[10] The three measures coincide in the XV legislature where only the centre-left and centre-right coalition issued a manifesto.

preference not only for a party but also for a governing coalition which shares a common leader and often also a common programme. In addition, as we argued above, the PM evolved toward a role as coalition leader rather than mediator.

An analysis by legislature permits to make more specific comments on the differential impact of the three distinct measurements of majority coalition priorities on the cabinet agenda. In the IX legislature, the highest convergence score is associated with the agenda of the formateur, the Socialist party manifesto led by the Bettino Craxi. This result is consistent with accounts of the peculiarly strong interpretation of premiership by the PSI leader (Hine 1986). His "presidentialist" approach in conjunction with the creation of a first version of core executive (an inner cabinet composed of the party leaders) strengthened his political coordination of the executive.

The low convergence score recorded during the X legislature, a re-edition of the previous 5-party coalition, is emblematical of the disconnection between the government agenda and the issues debated in party manifestos. Aware of its "political weakness" the government headed by the Christian Democratic leader Goria opted for a low-profile speech, postponing the debate on the most critical decisions to other venues.

Although the Amato government (XI legislature) could rely on a similarly flimsy majority, the high convergence scores (the highest in our study period) signals that other "external" factors might account for this result. One thing to recall is that the speech delivered by Giuliano Amato is an outlier according to most of our indexes. Its length, heterogeneity and fairer distribution of time across many policy topics makes it more comparable to a written platform than to a traditional parliamentary speech. It is arguable that this peculiar traits account for the outstandingly high convergence scores. A more difficult question is that of

understanding the reasons underlying the preference for a long and complex executive agenda. As already anticipated, there might be two main underlying reasons. First, it might be due to the existence of strong European and international pressures on its government to push forward a restructuring of the Italian budget (which he did in his short term in office). Second, it might stem from the state of political disarray experienced by Italian party elites in those months, which might justify the emergence of a PM with a well-defined mandate written in conjunction by coalition partners (higher levels for majority and weighted majority scores).

Remarkably, irrespective of the measure of coalition agenda that we use, the convergence scores after 1992 has not declined below the 0.7 level. The strong imprinting given by Berlusconi (XII) to its first cabinet agenda is reflected by the substantial congruence with the manifesto of his own party (.81). Even though the overall level of convergence is lower when we look at the Berlusconi government of the XIV legislative term, we still find that as the formateur he gave much higher prominence to the electoral priorities declared by his own party. The influence of smaller parties in the cabinet agenda of his coalition was lower, as evidenced by the lower degree of convergence between the cabinet agenda and the unweighted electoral agenda of coalition parties. It is when we weight the relevance of parties in the construction of the coalition manifesto, thus assigning a larger role to big parties and a smaller role to smaller parties, that we find an higher correspondence. We read the comparatively lower score of the un-weighted Manifesto priorities in the second Berlusconi executive as evidence of his presidential style and the lower level of fragmentation of his coalition. In turn, the last Berlusconi government appointed after the 2008 elections shows opposite evidence: the smaller coalition party – in that case, the only ally formally separated from the Berlusconi party was Lega Nord – enjoys a disproportionate

agenda-setting power when confronted to the main coalition party. This was the result of the Lega Nord capacity to mainstream some key points of its programme, such as migration and federalism, in the cabinet agenda.

When we look at centre-left governments, both Prodi's speeches (XIII and XV) share a strong proportion of topic with the two manifestos of the centre-left coalition. During the first Prodi government (XIII), the Ulivo coalition of centre-left enjoyed external support from the post-Communists, which issued an autonomous electoral manifesto. Interestingly, adding the priorities of the Communists does not increase nor decrease markedly the convergence between the cabinet agenda and that of the Ulivo coalition. This indicates that in his investiture speech Prodi incorporated the priorities of the external supporting party, resulting in similar convergence scores with the three versions of coalition agenda. The centre-left coalition which won the 2006 election (XV term) issued a single coalition manifesto. This does not permit us to explore the influence of individual parties in the coalition agenda. What is interesting here is the striking similarity between the degrees of manifesto-speech convergence for the two centre-left governments, which indicates that the introduction of a public pre-election coalition agreement did not affect substantially the translation of electoral priorities on the government agenda; though it moved negotiations forward to the pre-election stage.

INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE

Summing up, we find strong support for our main expectation. In comparison to the First Republic, the priorities that political parties use as a basis for their election campaign are taken into much higher consideration by coalition cabinets of the Second Republic. This

holds consistently for all governments, with the partial exception of the formateur appointed at the beginning of the IX term who managed to have his own party dominate the cabinet agenda.

We would be inclined to expect that the introduction of coalition agreements would increase the correspondence between electoral priorities and cabinet programmatic priorities. This is not what we find. While the correspondence is higher during the Second Republic, an increased correspondence is found when a coalition manifesto was not issued. This comes out by comparing the centre-right coalition, which either did not present a coalition manifesto or complemented it with the manifestoes of single parties, with the centre-left coalition, which always presented a coalition manifesto: the correspondence between electoral and government priorities is always higher for centre-right governments.

When we look at the specific way the coalition agenda is 'built' – relating more closely to the role of the formateur/large/median party; or rather to the veto-power of smaller parties – we do not find a clear pattern. During the First Republic, the Socialist leader Bettino Craxi managed to give his own (rather small) party disproportionate influence on the government agenda. In contrast, the formateur appointed after the next elections had very little influence on the cabinet agenda. We find inconsistent evidence for Second Republic governments too. In two cases (XII and XIV), Berlusconi's party was successful in dominating the government's agenda, as was clearest in the XIV term when the notorious 'Contract with Italians' was formalised during the election campaign. In other cases, the Lega Nord acted as a veto player that exercised disproportionate influence. In contrast, the centre-left always presented a pre-election coalition manifesto, even when it was not required by the electoral law, and the correspondence to government priorities was always lower than it was with

the centre-right. We are not able to reconstruct the priorities of individual parties, as they are watered-down in the coalition manifesto. Perhaps the latter hides the higher influence of single parties within the coalition, which could have resulted in a higher degree of correspondence if those priorities were observed. The lack of a systematic finding seems to point to the creation of ad hoc equilibria in the governance of individual coalitions, rather than systematic patterns of agenda-building.

7. Conclusions

This paper analysed how the priorities of the components of coalition governments are composed in the construction of coalition agendas. Italy represents an ideal case to explore the dynamics behind the formation of coalition agendas in a quasi-experimental context. The passage from the First to the Second Republic marked a radical shift toward a more majoritarian model of democracy. Before 1993, each party ran its own electoral campaign by presenting itself before electors with a distinct profile of priorities, mostly synthetized in individual party manifestos. The failure for a single party to win an absolute majority of seats led inevitably to the post-election creation of oversized coalition governments, or more rarely (Christian democrat-led) minority governments. The programmatic platform of Italian governments was therefore decided by party leaders only after elections. The consolidation of a bipolar pattern of party competition in the early- to mid-1990s made governments more accountable to the public opinion. This had a great impact on how coalition governments and their policy priorities are formed, resulting in the shift from post-electoral coalitions with no coalition agreements to pre-electoral coalitions with (pre-electoral) agreements, increasingly incorporated in coalition manifestoes.

We first explored the consequences of this change on the structure and content of both party and coalition agendas, looking respectively at party (and later coalition) manifestoes and investiture speeches. We found that both changed in a way consistent with the context and institutional background. From the First to the Second Republic, party manifestoes became first of all longer in size, which is consistent with their evolution toward pre-electoral coalition agendas. The changing function of party manifestoes also affected their policy scope, which became broader, also reflecting the consolidation of a bi-polar pattern of competition and the related need to catch larger portions of the electorate. Finally, party manifestoes gradually moved toward the inclusion of a more policy-oriented content. We found similar changes in the structure and content of investiture speeches. Moving from a largely symbolical role addressed to coalition members during the First Republic, investiture speeches increased in length and in the breadth of policy issues covered, and the distribution of attention across policy topics became more even.

We also tested a hypothesis about the translation of party policy priorities on to the agenda of coalition governments. We expected that the combination of the shift to public, pre-electoral coalition agendas, and the increased public accountability of governments, would in turn increase the correspondence between the policy priorities of coalition parties' agendas as made public during election campaigns on the one side, and the priorities of coalition governments declared in investiture speeches on the other side. The findings corroborate our expectations: in comparison to the governments of the First Republic, the distribution of priorities declared in the investiture speeches of Second Republic governments is far more congruent with the (coalition) party agendas issued before elections. Contrary to what other chapters in the volume show, under the Second Republic the government approaches more an electoral mandate model, with a closer connection

between the priorities spelled out during the election campaign and the agenda announced by the PM during the investiture speech. Then, as the other parts of the volume show, problems of implementation arise later.

When we explored the agenda-setting power of individual coalition parties, we did not find consistent evidence for any model of agenda-building. We found differences within rather than between the First and Second Republic. We also found differences within blocks in the Second Republic. Finally, when both single party and coalition manifestoes were issued before elections, and we could compare the relevance of pre-election priorities with those of individual parties in influencing the coalition cabinet agenda, we did not find consistent evidence for an increased transposition of the priorities issued in the coalition manifesto. This suggests that, in their search for congruence with the electoral priorities, in building their cabinet agendas individual coalitions do not follow any systematic agenda-setting pattern but rather pursue ad hoc equilibriums.

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APPENDIX A:

21 Policy topics and 6 Macro topics in the Italian Policy Agendas Codebook

CODE	POLICY	MACRO POLICY
1	Domestic Macroeconomic Issues	Economy
2	Civil Rights, Minority Issues, and Civil Liberties	Justice
3	Health	Welfare
4	Agriculture	Environment
5	Labor, Employment	Welfare
6	Education	Welfare
7	Environment	Environment
8	Energy	Economy
9	Immigration	Welfare
10	Transportation	Economy
12	Law and Crime	Justice
13	Social Welfare	Welfare
14	Community Development and Housing Issues	Welfare
15	Banking, Finance, and Domestic Commerce	Economy
16	Defense	Foreign policy
17	Space, Science, Technology and Communications	Economy
18	Foreign Trade	Foreign policy
19	International Affairs and Foreign Aid	Foreign policy
20	Government Operations	Government
21	Public Lands and Water Management	Environment
23	Culture policy issues	Welfare

APPENDIX B:

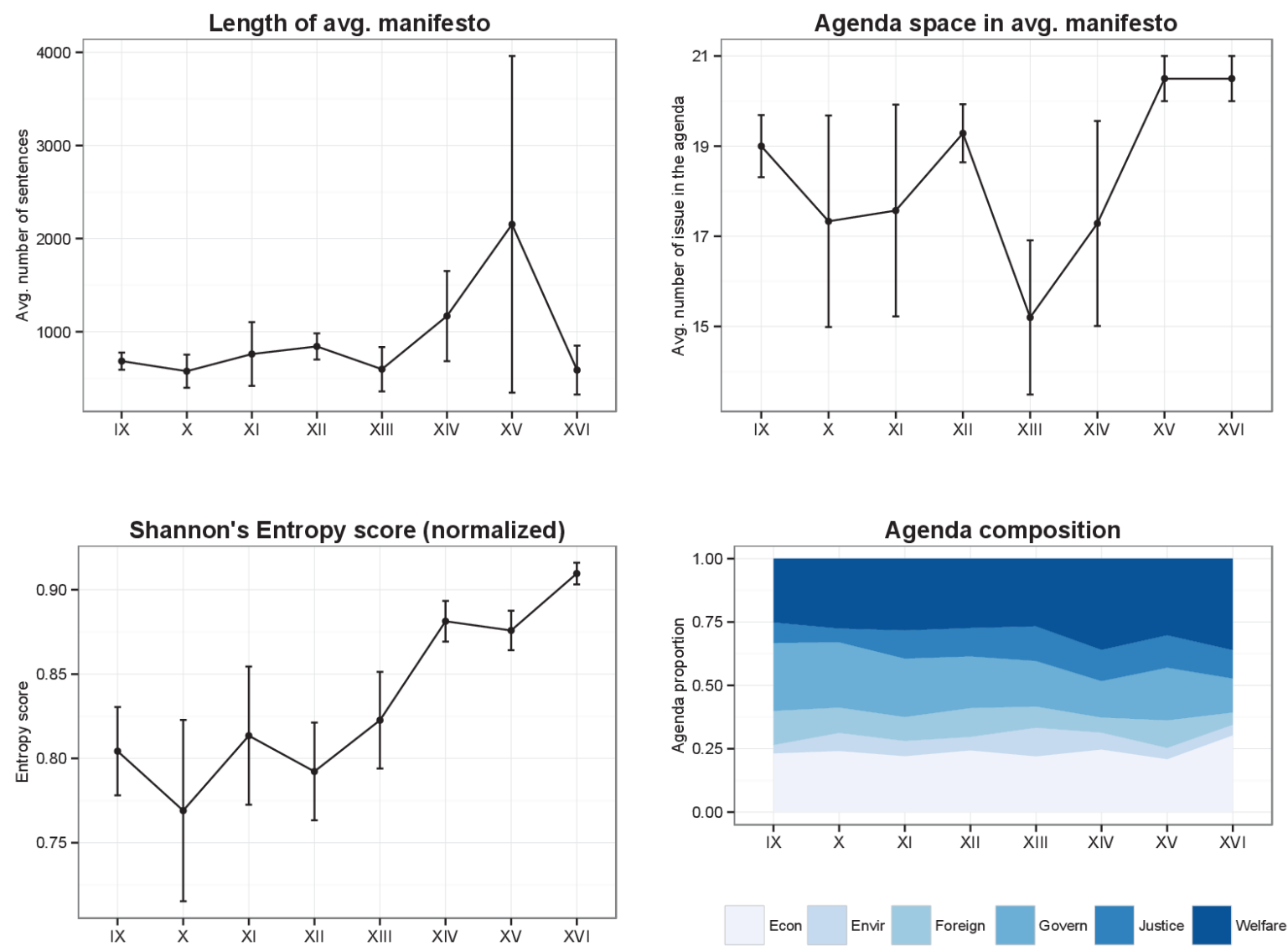| Legislature	Election date	Prime Minister	Number of days (since)	Confidence Vote (Chamber of Deputies)	Coalition Parties	Coalition manifestoes included in the analysis
IX	1983-06-26	Craxi I	1094 (1983-08-04)	1983-08-12	DC — PSI — PRI — PSDI — PLI	DC — PSI — PRI — PSDI — PLI
X	1987-06-14	Goria	260 (1987-07-28)	1987-07-30	DC — PSI — PRI — PSDI — PLI	DC — PSI — PSDI — PLI
XI	1992-04-05	Amato I	304 (1992-06-28)	1992-07-04	DC — PSI — PLI — PSDI	DC — PSI — PLI — PSDI
XII	1994-03-27	Berlusconi I	252 (1994-05-11)	1994-05-20	LN — AN — FI — CCD	LN – AN – FI
XIII	1996-04-21	Prodi I	887 (1996-05-18)	1996-05-31	PDS — PpP — DINI — FdV	ULIVO, PRC, Verdi, PPI
XIV	2001-05-13	Berlusconi II	1412 (2001-06-11)	2001-06-21	FI — AN — CCD/CDU — LN	CDL, Lega-Polo Agreement, CCD/CDU
XV	2006-04-09	Prodi II	722 (2006-05-17)	2006-05-23	Ulivo — PRC — RnP — IdV — PdCI — FdV — PA-UDEUR	UNIONE
XVI	2008-04-13	Berlusconi IV	1287 (2008-05-08)	2008-05-14	IPdL — LN	PdL – LN

Figure 1. Evolution of party/coalition manifestos by legislatures

Figure 2. Evolution of government speeches

Length of government declarations

Agenda space

Shannon's Entropy score (normalized)

Agenda composition

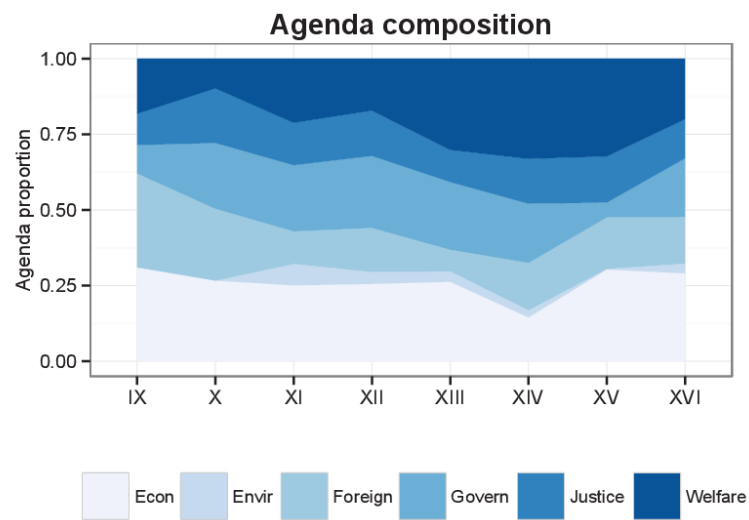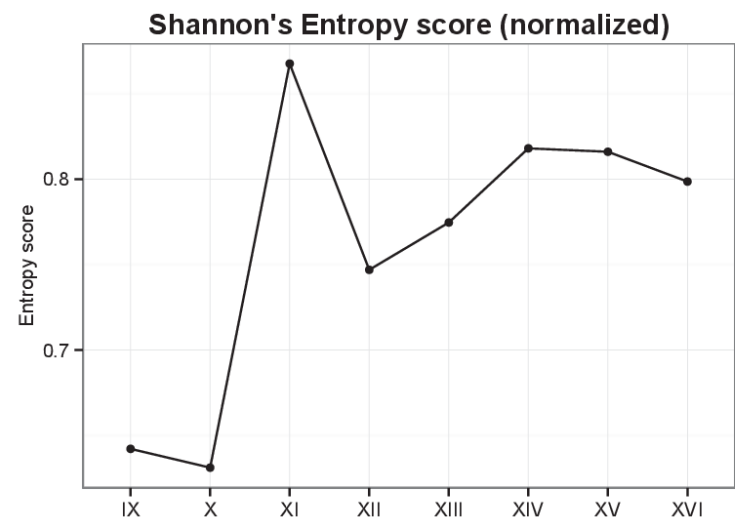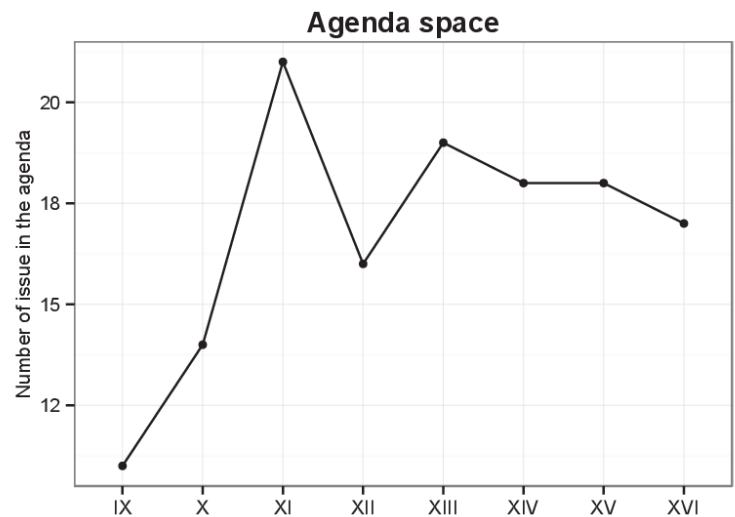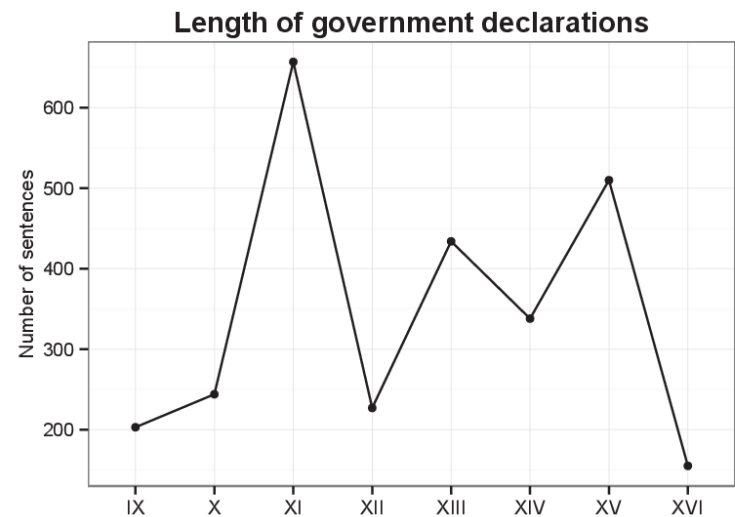Econ Envir Foreign Govern Justice Welfare

Figure 3. Convergence scores between party agendas and government agendas over time