

Who Affects Government Declarations and Why: Contrasting the Left-Right Scale with the Welfare Dimension

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A lively debate among students of parliamentary democracy concerns how coalition governments build their policy proposals. Some scholars maintain that government declarations mirror the position of the median party in Parliament; others argue that these proposals better agree with the weighted mean of the coalition parties' electoral promises. This paper sheds lights on this puzzle by investigating the role played by several political actors in shaping government declarations in two dimensions: the ideological left-right scale and a genuinely policy-based welfare scale. The results reveal that the agenda setters on the two dimensions do not coincide. On the left-right scale, the Prime Minister's party plays a leading role. On the welfare scale, government declarations are affected by the party of the median legislator in Parliament and by the parties of the labour and social affairs ministers. Furthermore, government declarations on the welfare dimension tend to drift rightward with adverse economic conditions.

Keywords. Government declarations; Electoral manifestos; Ideological congruence; Political parties; Left-right scale; Welfare policies.

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1950s, coalition theorists have tried to explain how coalition governments make their policy proposals. To recall one of the most influential contribution, McDonald and Budge (2005: 147-148) found that declared cabinet position better accords with the position of the median voter than with the position of the parliamentary median party or the weighted mean position of coalition parties. However, employing the same dataset, Warwick (2001, 2011) obtained different results: he revealed that declared cabinet position responds to the weighted mean position of coalition parties and, where present, to the position of external support parties.

Taking our cue from the so far mixed results provided in the literature, this paper investigates to what extent declared cabinet position corresponds to the policy stances staked out by governing parties at election time in their manifestos. Furthermore, drawing on established theoretical arguments, the paper evaluates to what extent other political actors (i.e. the parliamentary median party, the Prime Minister's/PM's party and individual ministers) are able to influence declared cabinet position beyond their contribution to the weighted mean position of coalition parties. Delving into the possible answers to these questions is relevant inasmuch it tells us about what Powell refers to as the 'chain of responsiveness' between voter policy preferences and government policy positions (2005: 62-76). Indeed, if the parliamentary median party proves to be the key player in determining declared cabinet position, then which government forms after the dust of the election is settled becomes less significant than scholars have so far assumed. Conversely, if declared cabinet position reflects a compromise among the coalition partners or if it is largely given by the positions of individual ministers, then the result of bargaining over government formation becomes highly relevant for explaining and predicting policy outcomes.

To date, studies dealing with the degree of ideological congruence between the electoral promises made by parties at election time and government policy stances have largely focused on the ideological right-left (RILE) dimension. This choice is consistent with Dahl's (1961: 223-328) pluralistic approach to politics, according to which the actors involved (i.e. coalition parties), their

electoral promises and the resources they own (i.e. their parliamentary seats share) determine the policy content in different fields. In a sentence: politics determines policies.

However, the reverse of this often-cited sentence, Lowi's claim according to which policies determine politics (1972), also deserves our attention. Indeed, Lowi's work (1972) reminds us that the issue at stake is likely to affect the relative weight of the actors involved in the formulation of the government policy proposal.

Accordingly, this paper contributes to the existing literature concerning how coalition governments formulate their policy statements by contrasting the degree of congruence between declared cabinet position and the weighted mean position of governing parties as expressed in their electoral manifestos on two dimensions: the traditionally employed RILE scale and a genuinely policy-based welfare scale. This comparison checks whether the actors able to influence the policies that coalition partners jointly agree to take forward in the government declaration coincide.

To achieve this goal, the paper draws on a largely neglected and long abandoned part of the data collection made by the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP; MARPOR 2014): namely, the coding of government declarations in ten European countries with the same coding scheme that has been used to analyse party manifestos over the entire post-war period (Budge *et al.* 2001).

Results demonstrate that the actors able to shape government declarations on the two dimensions do not coincide. On the ideological RILE dimension, which includes several policy areas, the PM's party determines the content of the declared cabinet position beyond its contribution to the weighted mean position of coalition parties. Thus, the results suggest that when the party of the PM is forced to compromise with the other coalition parties on several policy dimensions, it is able to pull declared cabinet position towards its ideal point by pivoting and counterbalancing among alternative solutions. Instead, the parliamentary median party and competent ministers (i.e. labour and social affairs ministers) are key players on the welfare dimension. Welfare policies, indeed, ask governments to distribute societal wealth to specific groups, usually subtracting resources from other societal segments. Given the distributive and redistributive conflicts entailed by this policy domain and the

blame-sharing strategies pursued by governing parties forced to retrench the welfare state, the party owning the median legislator in the parliamentary arena is highly involved in decision-making processes, together with the competent ministers. Furthermore, rising inflation experienced by parties in office seems to make declared cabinet position to drift rightward.

The paper is structured as follows. The section that follows critically reviews the theories advanced in the literature and details the research hypotheses. Next, the dataset and the model specification are described. Then, in the main analytical section, the role played by governing parties, the parliamentary median party, the PM's party and individual ministers in shaping declared cabinet positions both on the RILE and the welfare dimensions are assessed. The last section discusses the main findings and indicates paths for future research.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND MAIN HYPOTHESES

Declared cabinet position on the RILE dimension: who is expected to shape it and why

Coalition governments have to confront a fundamental challenge in policymaking that is absent under single-party governments: namely, government policy proposals on any specific issue have to be made jointly by parties that may express divergent policy positions and that are separately held accountable at the election time. This challenge raises a critical question: whose policy positions are ultimately reflected in government policy proposals? Thus far, the literature has provided at least four alternative accounts to answer this question.

A first account maintains that declared cabinet position simply reflects a compromise among the governing parties. This intuitive expectation rests on the extension of Gamson's law (1961) from the office dimension (i.e. the quantitative allocation of portfolios among coalition partners) to the policy dimension (i.e. the policy proposals ratified by coalition partners).

Taking advantage of the Government Declarations Data on ten European countries (Budge *et al.* 2001), Warwick (2001, 2011) demonstrated that declared cabinet positions on the RILE dimension correspond to the mean position of governing parties as derived from their electoral manifestos,

weighted by their seats shares. Moreover, he proved that other political actors are able to bias declared cabinet positions towards their ideal points: namely, the party holding the finance portfolio, the formateur party (i.e. the party that was assigned the task of putting the coalition together), parliamentary parties (2001) and external support parties (2011). More recently, Martin and Vanberg (2014) found strong evidence that government-sponsored legislation adopted in Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands since the 1980s reflects a compromise among the policy positions of coalition partners. Taking our cue from these results, we formulate our first hypothesis:

H₁: Declared cabinet position corresponds to the weighted mean position of the coalition parties, with their share of seats in the lower chamber constituting the weights.

Hypothesis 1 serves as a baseline assumption in this paper. This approach is common in various studies on coalition politics and parliamentary governments (See also Grofman 1982). However, in addition to this extension of Gamson's law (1961), alternative accounts on the distribution of policy payoffs to the members of multiparty governments will be taken into consideration. Note that the following accounts are not considered as full alternatives to hypothesis 1, but rather as causing deviations from the expected Gamson's result.

A second account is the well-known median voter theorem (Black 1958; Downs 1957: 142-163) according to which the party controlling the median legislator will have a stronger bargaining power than the other coalition parties because there are no other points in the ideological space that are preferred by a majority to its ideal point. Accordingly:

H₂: Declared cabinet position is biased away from the weighted mean position of the coalition parties towards the position of the parliamentary median party.

Testing the median voter theorem, Budge and Laver (1992b: 409-464) found that declared cabinet position on the RILE dimension did not mirror the positions of either the median party or the predominant party. Notwithstanding these discouraging results, McDonald and Budge (2005: 147-148) found a reasonably strong relationship between declared cabinet position and that of the parliamentary median party.

These mixed results suggest that declared cabinet position may reflect other influences (Warwick 2001, 2011). Among those influences, this paper focuses on the role played by the PM's party (third account) and by the ministers having jurisdictions in specific policy fields (fourth account).

The third account refers to the general class of proposer models (Baron 1998; Diermeier and Feddersen 1998), which suggests that the formateur party is able to bias declared cabinet position towards its ideal point beyond its share of seats. These models maintain that the formateur party, being in charge to propose an alternative to the status quo, will propose a policy that makes the median voter indifferent between accepting or rejecting its proposal (i.e. the median voter ideal point will be located in the interval between the status quo and the formateur ideal point). In this way, the proposal of the formateur party will be accepted. In this paper, the formateur party coincides with the party of the PM (Woldendorp *et al.* 2000).

H3: Declared cabinet position is biased away from the weighted mean position of the coalition parties towards the position of the PM's party¹.

Finally, the fourth account, the portfolio allocation model by Laver and Shepsle (1996: 281-285), assumes that ministers are policy dictators in their jurisdictions. This model maintains that the policy positions of the minister party will prevail in the specific policy area governed by that minister. In this regard, Warwick (2001) demonstrated that the RILE position of the party holding the finance minister only has a modest influence on declared cabinet positions.

H₄: Declared cabinet position is biased away from the weighted mean position of the coalition parties towards the position of the party of the competent minister.

Going beyond the left-right continuum by taking a deeper look at the welfare dimension

The large majority of the studies here reviewed only focused on the ideological RILE scale. By contrast, this paper investigates how coalition governments build their policy proposals by developing two parallel analyses. The first tests the four hypotheses listed so far on the RILE dimension; the second extends the same analysis to the pro-anti welfare state expansion dimension. Indeed, only the comparison between these two dimensions allows verifying whether the political actors able to pull declared cabinet position towards their ideal points coincide.

We chose the welfare dimension for several reasons. It is the most debated policy area in the existing literature on the degree of congruence between parties' long lasting ideological positions, their contextual electoral pledges and subsequent policy choices (e.g. Barnes 2013; Häusermann et al. 2013).

The stream of literature known as Partisan Theory (e.g. Hibbs 1992), for example, expects governing parties to maximize the interests of their core electoral constituencies. Left-wing governments, being the advocates of the working class, are expected to fight for welfare state enlargement or at least to minimize welfare state retrenchment; right-wing governments, being supported by upscale groups, are expected to favour a reduction of state intervention into the economic sphere.

In the same vein, McDonald and Budge (2005: 149-150) applied the median voter theorem (Black 1958; Downs 1957: 142-63) to the welfare domain with encouraging results: the welfare position of the median legislator positively correlates with declared cabinet position on the same topic.

However, other scholars reply that parties' ability to shape welfare policies has been reduced, if not completely erased, by institutional configurations (e.g. Laver and Shepsle 1996: 61-124), divided government and shared policy control (e.g. Tsebelis 2002: 187-206), economic constraints or policy legacies (e.g. Pierson 1994: 27-50).

Studies in this field search for a connection between governing parties' positions and social expenditure or aggregate indexes of welfare state generosity. These studies, however, tend to operationalize government partisanship through dummy or categorical variables indicating whether the cabinet is more left- or right-leaning. Even when more sophisticated measures based on party manifestos or expert surveys are employed, governing parties' positions are put in direct relationship with social policy outcomes without investigating the intermediate passage between the positions expressed by governing parties in their manifestos at election time and the declaration pronounced by each newly formed government at the beginning of the mandate. This paper intends to shed light on this missing link.

Moreover, we chose the welfare dimension because it is related to the most conflict-ridden cleavage in industrial democracies, the capital-labour cleavage (Pierson, 1994: 27-50). Thus, governments are expected to make considerable efforts because they know they will be largely evaluated according to their achievements in this field. Furthermore, the role of the State in providing social services is the most debated topic in government declarations (Martin and Vanberg 2014). Finally, providing welfare support is a large part of what industrial democracies do. Thus, the focus on this domain, which implies heavy budgetary consequences, allows elucidation of the so-called politics of constrained choice.

As explained by Lowi (1972), the policy domain at stake affects the actors taking part in decision-making processes and their relative weights. He applied his well-known policy taxonomy (i.e. distributive, redistributive, regulatory and constituent policies) to the American presidential politics from Roosevelt to Johnson, showing that the Congress played a major role in distributive and regulatory policies, while the executive power was stronger in shaping redistributive policies.

Adapting Lowi's theoretical claim to this analysis, the actors able to shape declared cabinet positions on the RILE and on the welfare dimensions are expected to differ.

Indeed, on the genuinely policy-based welfare dimension, which typically involves distributive and redistributive conflicts among societal segments, the legislative assembly (i.e. for distributive

policies) and the competent ministers (i.e. for redistributive ones) are likely to exert significant influences on the formulation of declared cabinet position.

Conversely, on the ideological RILE dimension, which is a super-issue involving heterogeneous policy areas (Together with the macroeconomic dimension, it includes military policies, human rights, internationalism, constitutionalism, political authority, traditional morality, law and order, etc.), the PM's party is expected to play the major role. The PM, indeed, is likely to pull the declared cabinet position towards his/her ideal point by balancing and counterbalancing among the policy proposals formulated by the other ministers and coalition parties in several policy areas.

DATA DESCRIPTION AND MODEL SPECIFICATION

Dependent variables

The key ingredient to build the two dependent variables employed in the analysis is provided by a long-abandoned part of the data collection made by the CMP, the Government Declarations Data (Budge *et al.* 2001). It contains the coding of government declarations in ten European countries (Belgium, Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden) from the end of World War II to the end of the 1990s (Appendix Table 1 reports the time covered for individual countries). Government declarations are public speeches pronounced in institutional settings (i.e., usually the Parliament) by a head of state on behalf of a recently formed government or by a PM at the time of his/her investiture debate (Laver and Budge 1992: 19). These statements initiate the governing process by detailing the official programme to which the government publicly commits itself. Accordingly, they are an intent, rather than a fulfilment, with regard to policies (McDonald and Budge 2005: 141).²

Because of bargaining, anticipated administrative and practical constraints and the need to obtain parliamentary approval, government declarations differ from the 'weighted wish list' derived from the electoral manifestos of the coalition parties (Budge *et al.* 2001: 172-174). Indeed, party manifestos

are static documents written by parties just before election time (Dolezal *et al.* 2012). Ray defined these documents as contracts between parties and voters containing a realistic assessment of the policies that they would implement if elected (Ray 2007). However, together with policy pledges, party manifestos contain party advertising and rather abstract statements of the party identity and philosophy. Notably, Dolezal *et al.* (2012) underlined that since party manifestos are written to be used during the electoral campaign, they embed positive references to past party records and attacks towards their competitors (i.e. negative campaigning)³.

The difference between government declarations and the electoral manifestos of coalition parties also emerges from the content analysis of these documents conducted by the CMP. Indeed, government declarations are usually shorter than party manifestos (in each country, the mean number of quasi-sentences in government declarations is lower than the mean number of quasi-sentences in party manifestos). Moreover, by comparing the policy content of these two types of documents, it emerges that the electoral dynamics that dominate party manifestos are substituted by more credible policy pledges in government declarations. Indeed, in its investiture speech, the government is supposed to publicly confront itself with the Members of Parliament (MPs), shifting the dimension of conflict from purely ideological positions to issues more related to the actual agenda of the cabinet. Accordingly, policy fields such as the need to keep military treaty obligations, to support international organizations and the European Union, to enforce law and order, to improve government and administrative efficiency and to reduce budget deficit are more frequent in government declarations than in party manifestos.

Having clarified the difference between government declarations and the electoral manifestos of the coalition parties, we detail the operationalization of our dependent variables. The first dependent variable, *declared cabinet position on the RILE dimension*, is measured through the well-known method proposed by Budge and Laver (1992a: 1-64). Specifically, the position held by each government on the RILE dimension is equal to the difference between the proportion of each government declaration devoted to 13 categories identified as right-wing and the proportion devoted

to 13 left-wing ones⁴. The theoretical range of the RILE scale is -100 (extreme left) +100 (extreme right), although in practice this variable is comprised between -45.8 and +55.1 (See Appendix Table 2).

The second dependent variable, *declared cabinet position on the welfare dimension*, is calculated by subtracting the proportion of each government declaration devoted to welfare state expansion (CMP variables per503 and per504) from the proportion devoted to welfare state retrenchment (CMP variable per505). The theoretical range of the WELFARE scale is -100 (welfare state expansion) +100 (welfare state retrenchment), but in the sample the variable ranges from -40.9 and +3.2 (See Appendix Table 2).

The CMP variables employed to build the welfare scale are included in the formula used to estimate the RILE scale. To what extent do government welfare positions resemble those on the RILE dimension? To answer this question, Figure 1 plots the pairwise correlation coefficient between the two.

[Figure 1 about here]

The variable declared cabinet position on the welfare dimension is positively correlated with that on the RILE dimension (i.e. 0.565; see Appendix Table 3). However, this coefficient is far from being equal to one, thus suggesting that these two dependent variables, even if similar, do not describe exactly the same phenomenon. This result gives reason to test whether the same political actors affect declared cabinet positions on these two dimensions.

Main independent and control variables

Concerning independent variables, we used the CMP coding of party electoral manifestos (MARPOR, 2014) to measure the weighted mean position of governing parties, the position of the

median party in Parliament, that of the PM's party and that of the parties holding the finance, the labour and the social affairs portfolios.

Using Seki and Williams (2014), we merged the CMP dataset (MARPOR 2014) with the information on government compositions provided by Woldendorp, Keman and Budge (2000). The *cabinet weighted mean on the RILE dimension* corresponds to the mean of the RILE positions of cabinet parties, weighted by their share of seats in the lower chamber (Powell 2009). Appendix Table 3 shows that the cabinet weighted mean on the RILE dimension is positively correlated with the declared cabinet position on the same dimension (0.446). This coefficient, however, is far from being equal to one, making the case for other actors to affect the first dependent variable.

Similarly, we assessed the *cabinet weighted mean on the welfare dimension* as the mean of the welfare positions of cabinet parties, weighted by their share of seats in the lower chamber. As before, the correlation coefficient is far from being equal to one (0.401; see Appendix Table 3).

The positions of the median legislator on the RILE and on the welfare dimensions have been calculated by assuming that legislator positions can be represented by the positions of the parties to which they belong. To identify the party containing the median legislator on the RILE dimension, parliamentary parties have to be arrayed in a left-right order. To do the same on the welfare dimension, parties have to be ranked according to their scores on the welfare issue⁵.

Hypothesis 2 suggests that the positions of the median legislator influence declared cabinet positions on the RILE and on the welfare dimensions beyond their contribution to the weighted mean. As in Warwick (2011), these types of effects are captured by two variables. The first variable, *median party – cabinet distance on the RILE dimension*, corresponds to the RILE position of the median party minus the *cabinet weighted mean* on the same dimension. The second variable, *median party – cabinet distance on the welfare dimension*, measures the difference between the welfare position of the median party and the cabinet weighted mean on the same dimension.

Hypothesis 3 maintains that the position of the PM's party influences declared cabinet positions on the RILE and on the welfare dimensions beyond its contribution to the weighted mean. This party has

been identified through the Woldendorp, Keman and Budge's (2000) dataset. Thus, the variable *PM's party – cabinet distance on the RILE dimension* is equal to the RILE position of the PM's party minus the cabinet weighted mean on the same dimension. Similarly, the variable *PM's party - cabinet distance on the welfare dimension* records the deviation of the PM's party from the cabinet weighted mean on the welfare dimension.

The last political actors that are potentially able to affect declared cabinet positions are ministers (Hypothesis 4). Laver and Shepsle's portfolio allocation model (1996: 281-285) is less easily tested with the data at hand because the RILE and the welfare scales appear too encompassing to be under the exclusive control of any one minister. However, following Warwick (2011), it is possible to assert whether declared cabinet position on the RILE dimension is heavily influenced by the position of the party holding the finance minister and whether declared cabinet position on the welfare dimension is heavily influenced by those of the parties holding the labour and social affairs portfolios. These types of effects can be verified by determining whether the deviations of the positions of these ministers from the cabinet weighted mean (i.e. *finance minister – cabinet distance on the RILE dimension* and *labour/social affairs ministers – cabinet distance on the welfare dimension*) exert any independent influence on declared cabinet positions.

All the hypotheses formulated in section 1 focus on the political actors able to affect the final formulation of declared cabinet positions on the RILE and on the welfare dimensions. However, influences coming from the external reality are possible, as well.

In particular, declared cabinet position is likely to deviate from the coalition parties' electoral promises towards a more rightist attitude in response to adverse economic conditions. Even if reasonable, this expectation has not found empirical support so far (Warwick 2001, 2011). This paper controls for adverse economic conditions through the following variables. *Change in inflation rate* records the difference between the inflation rate registered in the month in which the government was formed and the inflation rate registered in the last month of the mandate of the preceding government.

Similarly, the variable *change in unemployment rate* registers the corresponding difference for the unemployment rate⁶. The same occurs for the variable *change in GDP* (Strøm *et al.* 2008).

Appendix Table 2 provides descriptive statistics for all the variables listed so far, while Appendix Tables 3, 4 and 5 display pairwise correlations.

Concerning the choice of the functional form, it may be the case that declared cabinet position will be influenced by the position of its predecessor (serial correlation) and that declared cabinet position in one country may be systematically different from that in another country (panel heteroscedasticity). Thus, all the models include a first-order lag of the dependent variable and employ panel-corrected standard errors (Beck and Katz 1995).

The lagged dependent variables in this analysis are the declared cabinet positions on the RILE and on the welfare dimensions of the immediately preceding government. The inclusion of the lagged dependent variables captures the idea that declared cabinet positions may be influenced by ‘the dead weight’ of past policies: whatever policy position a coalition government agrees on, it may be necessary or expedient to move policies to that ideal point only gradually⁷. Using McDonald and Budge’s words, ‘policies change from one government to the next, but not much and not rapidly’ (2005: 171).

Finally, all the models embed a set of country dummies to control for time-invariant cross-country differences (Wilson and Butler 2007).

RESULTS

The testing procedure will be guided by the notion that absent any other influences, declared cabinet position should reflect the weighted mean position of governing parties (Hypotheses 1). The hypotheses regarding the other political actors (Hypotheses 2, 3 and 4), indeed, involve hypothesis 1 as a reference point.

This analytical section is structured into three parts. A first subsection investigates the role played by the additional political actors (i.e. the parliamentary median party, the PM’s party and the party

holding the finance or the labour/social affairs ministers) on the RILE dimension. Next, a second subsection replicates the same analysis on the welfare dimension.

Note that the effects of each political actor on declared cabinet positions are investigated one by one. This choice is imposed by data shortage: indeed, the Government Declarations Data (Budge *et al.* 2001) provides complete information on just 157 governments (See Appendix Table 1), while the hypotheses to be tested are four on each dimension, without taking into account economic control variables and country fixed effects. However, acknowledging the importance of identifying the net effect of each independent variable when all other influences are controlled for, a third subsection displays two additional model specifications, in which declared cabinet positions on the RILE and on the welfare dimensions are regressed on the most important independent variables referring to both political actors and economic conditions⁸. The results displayed in this third subsection clarify the previous ones.

Influences on declared cabinet position on the RILE dimension

The models displayed in Table 1 prove that declared cabinet position on the RILE dimension is strongly affected by the position of its predecessor and by the weighted mean position of coalition parties (Hypothesis 1). In detail, model M₁ proves that if the weighted mean position of the coalition parties moves one point to the right, the position staked out by the government in its declaration is likely to increase by approximately 0.3 points.

[Table 1 about here]

However, the beta referring to the weighted mean position of coalition parties is positive and significant but far from being equal to one. Thus, it is worth looking for additional political actors and external forces able to shape the declared cabinet position on the RILE dimension in addition to the coalition partners.

Model M_2 does not support hypothesis 2, according to which governments respond to the position of the parliamentary median party: indeed, the variable median party – cabinet distance does not reach statistical significance.

Models M_3 and M_4 lead to the same conclusions for hypotheses 3 and 4, according to which the PM's party and the party holding the finance minister are likely to bias the declared cabinet position towards their ideal points. Indeed, the betas referring to the variables PM's party – cabinet and finance minister – cabinet distances are not statistically significant⁹. However, the variable PM's party – cabinet distance is quite near to conventional levels of statistical significance ($p=0.105$), suggesting that hypothesis 4 deserves deeper investigation¹⁰.

The results discussed so far demonstrate that, even taking into account the RILE positions of the parliamentary median party, the PM's party and the finance minister, substantial differences remain between the declared cabinet position and the weighted mean position of governing parties. These two variables, indeed, systematically differ from each other in their long-term country-level equilibria, corresponding to the country means. Government declarations contain stances that are substantially more right wing (the average across the pooled dataset is -0.22) than those that cabinet parties would have preferred, judging from their own electoral manifestos (the average is -7.97). This tendency holds within every country but two (i.e. France and Ireland). This empirical regularity may reflect the preoccupation of governments with 'administrative concerns and ongoing matters of government which have not necessarily entered into the election campaign' (Laver and Budge 1992: 410-412). Might the economic conditions experienced by governments help explain this rightward shift? All the models displayed in Table 1 are clear in rejecting this explanation: declared cabinet position on the RILE dimension is insensitive to changes in inflation rate, unemployment rate and GDP since the end of the preceding government mandate.

Influences on declared cabinet position on the welfare dimension

Do the political actors and external forces affecting declared cabinet position on the RILE dimension behave in the same way on the welfare dimension? Table 2 answers this question.

[Table 2 about here]

The weighted mean position of governing parties determines declared cabinet position on the welfare scale as well (Hypothesis 1). Indeed, model M₅ demonstrates that if the weighted mean position of coalition parties moves one point towards a more contractionary attitude, the position staked out by the government is likely to move in the same direction by 0.12 points.

However, as for the RILE dimension, the coefficient referring to the weighted mean position of governing parties is far from one. Moreover, once we look for political actors and external forces able to bias declared cabinet position on the welfare dimension, the estimates tell a different story from the one discussed above.

Model M₆ supports hypothesis 2 demonstrating that the median party plays a crucial role: indeed, a unitary increase in the variable median party – cabinet distance moves the declared cabinet position approximately 0.3 points towards a more contractionary attitude.

Model M₇ shows that the welfare position of the PM's party is unable to affect the dependent variable. Accordingly, hypothesis 3 is rejected.

Things are different for the position of the party holding the labour and the social affairs ministers. Indeed, as displayed by model M₈, this party is likely to bias the declared cabinet position towards its ideal point by approximately 0.007 points. However, the magnitude of this effect and the level of statistical significance, which is above conventional standards, cast some doubt on the acceptance of hypothesis 4, which deserves deeper investigation.

The systematic rightward shift in declared cabinet positions registered on the RILE dimension appears on the welfare dimension, as well: across the pooled dataset, the country mean for declared cabinet position is equal to -7.146, while that for the cabinet weighted mean is equal to -11.719.

The models displayed in Table 2 test whether this shift can be explained by economic circumstances. Declared cabinet position on the welfare dimension seems to be affected by changes in the inflation rate since the end of the preceding government: a unitary increase in this variable makes the declared cabinet position move towards a welfare a state retrenchment attitude by approximately half a point. However, changes in the unemployment rate and GDP do not affect the dependent variable.

Simultaneous influences on declared cabinet position on the RILE and the welfare dimensions

The two previous subsections estimated the potential effects of each political actor on declared cabinet position on the RILE and on the welfare dimensions one by one because the dataset provides complete information on just 157 governments in ten countries (See Appendix Table 1). However, to identify the net effect of each independent variable when all other influences are controlled for, Table 3 displays two additional models in which declared cabinet position on the RILE and the welfare dimensions are regressed on the most important independent variables at once.

[Table 3 about here]

Overall, the results are consistent with the previous ones. First, when all the other influences are controlled for, the parliamentary median party confirms its inability to bias the declared cabinet position on the RILE dimension (M₉), while it proves to be crucial on the welfare dimension (M₁₀). Second, the PM's party demonstrates the ability to bias declared cabinet position on the RILE dimension (M₉), but not on the welfare dimension (M₁₀). These findings demonstrate that the PM's party exerts extra leverage on declared cabinet position on the RILE dimension, which is absent for the parliamentary median party on the same dimension. Accordingly, when these two key positions

are occupied by the same party (see endnote n. 10), it is the fact of being the party of the PM, rather than the median legislator status, that grants this party its additional effect on declared cabinet position on the RILE dimension. On the welfare dimension, the mechanism is reversed: in the case of overlapping between the party of the PM and the median legislator, it is the median legislator status that grants this party extra leverage on the declared cabinet position on the welfare dimension.

Third, these additional models shed light on hypothesis 4. The position of the party holding the finance portfolio is unable to affect declared cabinet position on the RILE dimension, while that of the party holding the labour and the social affairs ministers has a positive and statistically significant effect on the declared cabinet position on the welfare dimension.

Finally, a rising inflation rate from the end of the previous cabinet does not affect the declared cabinet position on the RILE dimension, but seems to have a statistically significant effect on the welfare dimension, shifting the declared cabinet position towards a more contractionary attitude¹¹.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper investigated several hypotheses concerning the main determinants of the positions adopted by coalition governments in ten Western European parliamentary democracies since the end of WWII. As highlighted by the literature review, previous influential studies based only on the left-right dimension provided by the CMP coding of coalition government declarations and party manifestos provided mixed results.

This paper contributes to the existing literature by adding a genuinely policy-based pro-anti welfare scale to the ideological RILE scale traditionally employed. This choice allows checking whether the actors able to influence declared cabinet position on these two dimensions coincide.

The results demonstrate that there is a connection between declared cabinet policy stances and the weighted mean positions of coalition parties as derived from their electoral manifestos both on the RILE and on the welfare dimensions. Indeed, this connection appears in both models M_1 and M_5 , making the lack of fit between declared cabinet positions and coalition parties' electoral promises

lamented by Budge and Laver (1992b: 409-464) and McDonald and Budge (2005: 145-148) appear overly pessimistic. Moreover, this first finding is consistent with the results obtained by Martin and Vanberg in the cases of Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands (2014).

However, the relationship between declared cabinet position and the weighted mean position of coalition parties is far from the one-to-one correspondence needed to affirm that Gamson's rule (1961) applies to policy payoffs as well as to portfolio allocations, making Warwick's claims appearing overly optimistic, as well (2001, 2011).

Notably, the results suggest that other political actors and external forces are able to bias declared cabinet positions. Moreover, such political actors and external forces do not behave in the same way on the two dimensions studied here.

Starting from the RILE scale, the findings seems to support, at least in part, the central requirement of proposer models because the PM's party exploits its position by extracting more than its proportional share of the policy payoff. Notice that the agenda-setting power of the PM's party may also originate from PM's personal traits, such as charismatic leadership and communicational style (See endnote 1).

Moving to the welfare dimension, our results suggest that Lowi's motto, according to which 'policies determine politics' (1972), is partially true: the political actors shaping declared cabinet position over the welfare dimension do not coincide with the ones on the RILE scale.

In particular, in addition to the weighted mean position of coalition parties, which continues to be a determinant of declared cabinet position, the parliamentary median party and the competent ministers look crucial. As expected, the distributive and redistributive nature of the programmes included in the welfare dimension, which see economic resources to be provided to specific societal segments, usually at the expense of other groups, grants additional leverage in decision-making processes to the party of the median legislator and the party of the labour and social affairs ministers.

The finding of a significant effect emanating from the parliamentary median party on the welfare dimension is intriguing. Indeed, this party is that of the PM in 43% of the governments in our sample.

Moreover, 51% of the parties that occupy the median parliamentary position on the RILE dimension are also that of the median legislator on the welfare dimension. However, once we control for the influences emanating from the key political actors simultaneously (see Table 3), the median legislator status proves to be relevant in shaping declared cabinet position only on the welfare dimension (see also Appendix Table 6). This result suggests to scholars focused on the degree of congruence between government partisanship and policy outcomes in the welfare domain to seriously consider the policy positions of the party of the median legislator when dealing with the measurement of their independent variable. Indeed, this party is likely to employ its legislative median status to move declared cabinet position toward its ideal point, thus potentially affecting subsequent policy outcomes in the welfare domain.

The finding of a significant effect emanating from the parties holding the labour and social affairs ministers are consistent with the ministerial autonomy assumption that underpins Laver and Shepsle's (1996: 281-285) portfolio allocation model. Indeed, even if the results highlight that declared cabinet position on the welfare dimension more closely reflects the policy positions of the entire cabinet, net of other factors, the parties of the labour and social affairs ministers do wield a degree of influence over declared cabinet position on the welfare dimension. This finding is consistent with the evidence provided by Barnes (2013), according to which the policy positions of the ministers responsible for welfare state programmes are strong determinants of the level of welfare generosity.

Concerning external forces, declared cabinet position on the welfare dimension tends to respond to rising inflation rate experienced by the coalition parties when in office.

Finally, it is worth recognizing the most important limitation affecting the analysis performed here, namely, data scarcity on the explanandum (i.e. declared cabinet positions). This paper assessed the degree of congruence between declared cabinet positions and the weighted mean positions of governing parties on the RILE and the welfare dimensions and proved that these two measures of government partisanship do not describe exactly the same phenomenon. As famously underlined by McDonald and Budge (2005: 141), government declarations 'should certainly be taken as better

indicators of eventual policy than simple party electoral program intentions. They have the advantage of outlining a whole range of plans, for legislation and administration as well as spending’.

Accordingly, it seems extremely important and promising that future research carry on the coding procedure of government declarations conducted by the Manifesto Research Group from the aftermath of WWII to the mid-1990s. This choice will allow comparison of government positions as derived from their declarations with those obtained by computing the weighted mean of coalition parties’ positions as derived from their electoral manifestos, thus exploiting a large amount of data already available online.

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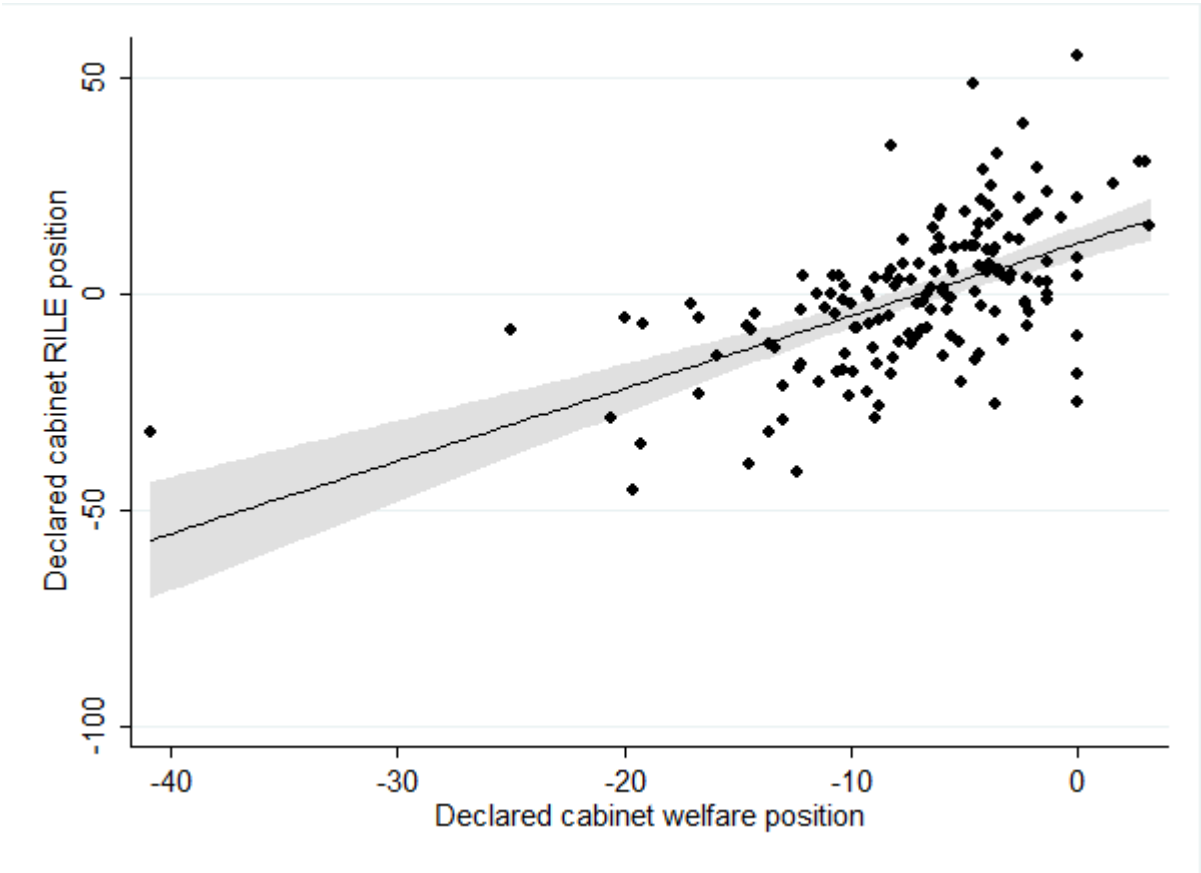
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FIGURE

Figure 1: *Pairwise correlation between declared cabinet RILE and WELFARE positions*



TABLES

Table 1: *Influences on declared cabinet position on the RILE dimension*

	M_1	M_2	M_3	M_4
Declared cabinet position lagged	0.175 [†] (0.093)	0.185* (0.094)	0.186* (0.092)	0.195* (0.093)
Cabinet weighted mean	0.309*** (0.092)	0.204 [†] (0.122)	0.288** (0.091)	0.309*** (0.092)
Median party – cabinet distance		-0.203 (0.159)		
PM’s party – cabinet distance			0.417 (0.257)	
Finance minister - cabinet distance				0.234 (0.177)
Change in inflation rate	0.321 (0.852)	-0.0951 (0.902)	0.167 (0.844)	0.321 (0.832)
Change in unemployment rate	-0.211 (1.400)	-0.793 (1.465)	0.045 (1.399)	-0.689 (1.415)
Change in GDP	-0.855 (1.037)	-1.155 (1.080)	-1.094 (1.032)	-1.087 (1.031)
Country dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	0.950 (4.573)	-1.184 (4.886)	1.234 (4.552)	1.498 (4.564)
R ²	0.360	0.368	0.376	0.370
N	147	147	145	147

Notes: OLS estimations with panel corrected standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is *declared cabinet position on the RILE dimension*. Model M_3 has 145 observations rather than 147 because the variable PM’s party - cabinet distance is missing for the governments Barre I and II in France. Indeed, Raymond Barre has never been affiliated to any party.

[†] $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 2: *Influences on declared cabinet position on the WELFARE dimension*

	M_5	M_6	M_7	M_8
Declared cabinet position lagged	0.101 (0.085)	0.061 (0.084)	0.107 (0.086)	0.099 (0.084)
Cabinet weighted mean	0.126 [†] (0.075)	0.317** (0.103)	0.129 [†] (0.076)	0.127 [†] (0.075)
Median party – cabinet distance		0.281* (0.123)		
PM’s party – cabinet distance			-0.044 (0.228)	
Labour and social affair ministers - cabinet distance				0.007 [†] (0.004)
Change in inflation rate	0.413 [†] (0.239)	0.461* (0.227)	0.424 [†] (0.238)	0.420 [†] (0.239)
Change in unemployment rate	0.373 (0.355)	0.412 (0.347)	0.365 (0.360)	0.384 (0.355)
Change in GDP	-0.149 (0.262)	-0.075 (0.242)	-0.156 (0.261)	-0.150 (0.262)
Country dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	-6.660** (2.205)	-3.394 (2.487)	-6.526** (2.223)	-6.669** (2.199)
R ²	0.334	0.362	0.337	0.340
N	147	147	145	147

Notes: OLS estimations with panel corrected standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is *declared cabinet position on the welfare dimension*. Model M_7 has 145 observations rather than 147 because the variable PM’s party - cabinet distance is missing for the governments Barre I and II in France. Indeed, Raymond Barre has never been affiliated to any party.

[†] $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 3: *Simultaneous influences on declared cabinet RILE and WELFARE positions*

	M_9	M_{10}
	<i>RILE dimension</i>	<i>WELFARE dimension</i>
Declared cabinet position lagged	0.214*	0.045
	(0.092)	(0.085)
Cabinet weighted mean	0.261*	0.329**
	(0.113)	(0.103)
Median party – cabinet distance	-0.102	0.310*
	(0.150)	(0.126)
PM’s party – cabinet distance	0.443†	-0.043
	(0.260)	(0.227)
Minister - cabinet distance	0.252	0.046†
	(0.179)	(0.028)
Change in inflation rate	0.253	0.367†
	(0.773)	(0.202)
Country dummies	Yes	Yes
Constant	1.498	-3.324
	(4.783)	(2.493)
R ²	0.386	0.370
N	145	145

Notes: OLS estimations with panel corrected standard errors in parentheses. Models M_9 and M_{10} have 145 observations rather than 147 because the variable PM’s party -cabinet distance is missing for the governments Barre I and II in France. Indeed, Raymond Barre has never been affiliated to any party. † $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

APPENDIX

Appendix Table 1: *The coverage of the CMP government declarations data*

<i>Country</i>	<i>Range of governments with coded declarations</i>	<i>Number of coded declarations</i>	<i>Total number of governments in range</i>
Belgium	1946-1981	23	29
Denmark	1947-1987	15	23
France V Republic	1959-1984	14	18
(West) Germany	1949-2002	18	27
Ireland	1981-1987	2	3
Italy	1948-1983	38	39
Luxembourg	1945-1984	9	13
Netherlands	1946-1994	7	20
Norway	1945-1989	11	21
Sweden	1948-1990	20	20

This table shows the range of governments included in this analysis. Each range starts no earlier than the year of formation of the first government after the initial post-war election and runs to the end of the final government whose declaration was coded. The total number of governments that were formed in each range is shown.

Appendix Table 2: Descriptive statistics

<i>Variable</i>		<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Dev.</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>
Declared cabinet position	overall	-0.221	16.793	-45.08	55.1
on the RILE dimension	between		10.366	-21.06	10.616
	within		14.454	-35.291	50.701
Declared cabinet position	overall	-7.146	5.675	-40.91	3.2
on the welfare dimension	between		3.362	-13.773	-4.24
	within		4.813	-35.75	6.628
Cabinet weighted mean	overall	-7.976	16.933	-61.4	45.854
on the RILE dimension	between		12.384	-28.416	7.413
	within		12.926	-43.811	36.377
Cabinet weighted mean	overall	-11.719	7.72	-46.2	0.008
on the welfare dimension	between		5.211	-24.361	-6.427
	within		5.163	-33.557	9.142
Median party – cabinet distance	overall	0.542	11.847	-39.545	37.907
on the RILE dimension	between		7.718	-20.836	6.753
	within		10.97	-32.459	31.696
Median party – cabinet distance	overall	1.177	4.689	-12.2	26.9
on the welfare dimension	between		1.437	-0.138	3.863
	within		4.514	-13.707	25.393
PM’s party – cabinet distance	overall	0.236	5.938	-17.955	28.937
on the RILE dimension	between		3.87	-4.39	7.966
	within		5.305	-15.667	21.207
PM’s party – cabinet distance	overall	-0.003	1.805	-6.36	6.592
on the welfare dimension	between		1.232	-0.947	2.536
	within		1.629	-5.983	6.774
Finance minister – cabinet distance	overall	0.118	8.423	-21.021	54.079
on the RILE dimension	between		3.902	-4.433	6.733
	within		7.874	-17.519	48.883

Labour/social affairs minister – cabinet distance on the welfare dimension	overall	1.556	14.708	-34.499	56.707
	between		9.049	-16.164	13.120
	within		12.608	-30.932	45.143
Change in inflation rate	overall	0.193	1.647	-5	8.2
	between		0.852	-0.677	2.533
	within		1.526	-4.632	5.86
Change in unemployment rate	overall	0.041	1	-2.6	7.5
	between		0.393	-0.185	1.167
	within		0.961	-3.025	6.551
Change in GDP	overall	0.152	1.603	-8.9	6.5
	between		1.411	-1.5	3.8
	within		1.245	-7.248	3.852

Appendix Table 3: *Pairwise correlations among declared cabinet position and cabinet weighted mean on the RILE and on the WELFARE dimensions*

	<i>Declared cabinet position on the RILE d.</i>	<i>Declared cabinet position on the welfare d.</i>	<i>Cabinet weighted mean on the RILE d.</i>	<i>Cabinet weighted mean on the welfare d.</i>
Declared cabinet position on the RILE d.	1			
Declared cabinet position on the welfare d.	0.566*	1		
Cabinet weighted mean on the RILE d.	0.446*	0.436*	1	
Cabinet weighted mean on the welfare d.	0.312*	0.401*	0.629*	1

Notes: * $p < 0.001$ or better.

Appendix Table 4: *Pairwise correlations among variables referring to political actors on the RILE dimension*

	<i>Declared cabinet position</i>	<i>Cabinet weighted mean</i>	<i>Median party – cabinet dist.</i>	<i>PM's party – cabinet dist.</i>	<i>Minister - cabinet dist.</i>
Declared cabinet position	1				
Cabinet weighted mean	0.446*	1			
Median party – cabinet dist.	-0.163*	-0.535*	1		
PM's party – cabinet dist.	0.0891	0.102	-0.048	1	
Minister - cabinet dist.	0.034	0.007	0.249*	-0.081	1

Notes: * p<0.05 or better.

Appendix Table 5: *Pairwise correlations among variables referring to political actors on the WELFARE dimension*

	Declared cabinet position	Cabinet weighted mean	Median party – cabinet dist.	PM’s party – cabinet dist.	Minister - cabinet dist.
Declared cabinet position	1				
Cabinet weighted mean	0.401*	1			
Median party – cabinet dist.	0.019	-0.569*	1		
PM’s party – cabinet dist.	-0.002	0.094	-0.185*	1	
Minister - cabinet dist.	0.129	0.065	-0.07	0.13	1

Notes: * $p < 0.05$ or better.

Appendix Table 6: Influences on declared cabinet RILE and WELFARE positions without overlapping cases

	<i>M₂ without overlaps</i>	<i>M₃ without overlaps</i>	<i>M₄ without overlaps</i>	<i>M₆ without overlaps</i>	<i>M₇ without overlaps</i>	<i>M₈ without overlaps</i>
Declared cabinet position _{t-1}	-0.031 (0.132)	0.00597 (0.123)	0.189+ (0.104)	0.348* (0.154)	0.530*** (0.114)	0.235 [†] (0.137)
Cabinet weighted mean	0.555* (0.257)	0.425*** (0.106)	0.328** (0.105)	0.405** (0.134)	0.103* (0.0491)	0.121** (0.044)
Median party – cabinet dist.	0.109 (0.297)			0.368*** (0.105)		
PM’s party – cabinet dist.		0.749* (0.296)			0.048 (0.357)	
Finance minister - cabinet dist.			0.339 (0.208)			
Lab./Soc. minister – cabinet dist.						0.007*** (0.002)
N	76	74	138	81	79	92

Notes: OLS estimations with panel corrected standard errors in parentheses. Control variables omitted for purpose of readability. All these model specifications replicate the corresponding models in Tables 1 and 2 by dropping from the sample observations in which the party of the PM, of the finance and of the labour/social affairs ministers expresses also the median parliamentarian. [†] p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001.

¹ Note that the operationalisation of the formateur party as the PM’s party is forced by data availability. However, it is worth to remind that the agenda-setting power enjoyed by the party expressing the PM may derives by additional sources: e.g., individual leadership, personal communication and presentational style (fostered by professional spin-doctors). By now, we cannot disentangle the role played by such individual factors, but we keep them in mind for future developments of the present research.

² Note that government declarations do not coincide with coalition agreements. Coalition agreements are extra-parliamentary means to promote discipline between governing parties. They tend to include the government’s policy agenda, the procedural rules under which the coalition parties will cooperate and the allocation of government offices (Strøm *et al.* 2008). Müller and Strøm (2008) conducted an extensive study on 262 coalition agreements in 15 West-European countries over the period 1945–1999. Of these coalition agreements, 67% were concluded immediately after elections; 21% were negotiated during a parliamentary term, and 7.6% were purely pre-electoral. Of the written coalition

agreements, 83% were intended for the public domain, while the remaining agreements were kept private.

³ Accordingly, electoral manifestos reveal parties' dual nature of policy and office seeking actors and, thus, are affected by strategic dynamics. Moreover, parties are collective actors whose members display similar but non-identical policy positions. A growing field of literature focused on intra-party politics (e.g. Greene and Haber 2014) has shown that party positions expressed in party manifestos well approximate the mean position of party internal factions, weighted by their share of seats in the party bodies.

⁴ The literature suggests alternative measures to assess cabinets' ideological positions (see, for example, *Electoral Studies* 26 (1), 2007). However, being aware of the critiques addressed to the coding-scheme, the traditional RILE position derived from it has been employed to make the results of this paper directly comparable with those obtained by previous influential studies on the same topic (Warwick, 2001, 2011).

⁵ Only half of the parliamentary median parties covered by this study coincide on both dimensions: 51% of the parties of the median legislator on the RILE dimension are also the parties of the median legislator on the welfare dimension (pairwise correlation=0.28*). Moreover, as proven by other analyses (e.g. Laver and Budge 1992: 409-430, Müller and Strøm 2000), the party of the median legislator is also a member of the governing coalition under multiparty PR systems about 80% of time. Furthermore, the party of the median legislator is almost always involved in the government coalition, if not the single-government party, in SMD systems. This means that the RILE and the welfare positions of the median parliamentary parties also enter into the computation of cabinet weighted mean. Pairwise correlations are reported by Appendix Tables 4 and 5. Moreover, all the models have been tested for collinearity, and no problem has been detected.

⁶ As in Warwick (2001), annualized monthly inflation rates were calculated from data on consumer prices provided by the International Labor Review (1945–1963), the Bulletin of Labor Statistics (1964–1970) and the International Financial Statistics (1970–1990). Unemployment data came primarily from the U.N. Monthly Bulletin of Statistics (1947–1990), supplemented by the OECD Main Economic Indicators. Historical Statistics 1969-88 (1990).

⁷ The inclusion of the lagged dependent variable in the model specifications results in the loss of 10 cases. Moreover, because declared cabinet positions are not coded for every government (see Appendix Table 1), the inclusion of this variable would have generated an additional loss of cases. As in Warwick (2011), this concern is addressed by means of multiple imputation (King *et al.* 2001). Notice that this technique is employed only to estimate a value for the lagged dependent variable when the immediately preceding government is missing and not to add un-coded observations to the sample.

⁸ Testing the influences on declared cabinet position emanating from different political actors at once also allows to control for identity of parties in key situations (the parliamentary median party, the PM's party and the party holding the finance/labour and social affairs portfolios may overlap). To verify the empirical relationships among these key players, the Appendix provides two correlation matrices of all these variables (i.e. Appendix Tables 4 and 5). Moreover, post-estimation checks for collinearity have been run: no problem has been detected. Finally, Appendix Table 6 displays replicates models dropping overlapping cases from the sample: results hold.

⁹ These results differ from those of Warwick (2001). Indeed, the betas referring to the roles of the PM's party and the finance minister parties are correctly signed, but they do not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. This happens because this paper employs the standard two-tailed test, while Warwick chose the one-tailed test.

¹⁰ Note that on the RILE dimension, the party of the parliamentary median legislator and the PM is the same in 47% of the governments under scrutiny. Appendix Table 4 shows that the pairwise correlation between these two variables does not pose collinearity concerns. As displayed by models M₂ and M₃ in Table 1, the effects emanating from both the parliamentary median party (M₂) and the PM's party (M₃) fail to reach conventional levels of statistical significance. However, the variable

referring to the PM's party is quite close to statistical significance ($p=0.105$). This result suggests that in case of overlap, the additional leverage owned by this party on declared cabinet position is better explained by the fact that it is the party of the PM than by the fact that it occupies the median parliamentary position. This finding seems confirmed in Appendix Table 6. Model M₉ in Table 3, which estimates the effects emanating from every key political player at once, will clarify this statement.

¹¹ All the models have been also estimated using GLS random effects models, GLS fixed effects models and standard OLS models. Overall, the results concerning political actors are confirmed. Tables are available upon request.