

Italian Law-Making Archive: A new tool for analysis of the Italian legislative process

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Abstract

The Italian Law-Making Archive (ILMA) is a relational database that combines information on the legislation, legislative initiative, legislative processes, parliamentarians (MPs) and government members and policy positions of parties present in different legislatures and governments. It covers a period that extends from the beginning of the 10th legislature of the Italian Republic in 1987 to the end of the 15th legislature in 2008. In contrast to commonly available data sources, records are non-redundantly stored in the database, are organized in different tables characterized by unique keys, and are linked to each other by relations, thus permitting scholars to extract, through queries on a specific web interface, only those data necessary for their empirical studies. This article aims at presenting ILMA and its main components. We describe the type of data it contains, the sources from which these data have been drawn and the procedures used to aggregate available information in a unique and comprehensive database. In the second part of the paper, we offer some practical applications for potential use of the database for quantitative studies of the Italian legislative process.

Keywords: database; Italy; law-making; legislative studies; parliament.

1. Introduction

The political and institutional changes that have impacted Italy over the last 20 years have provided important stimuli for research focusing on the Italian legislative process.

The collapse of the traditional party system and the electoral reform in 1993 moved Italy from a pivotal system to a democracy based on the alternation in government of different coalitions. Several studies have analyzed if and how these major changes have affected the complex dynamics of the legislative process (among others, Capano and Giuliani 2001a; 2001b; Curini and Zucchini 2012; De Micheli and Verzichelli 2004; Giuliani 1997; Giuliani and Zucchini 2008; Verzichelli 2003; Zucchini 1997; 2001).

Although these studies have undoubtedly contributed to the understanding of the legislative process and its main characteristics, the new electoral reform adopted in

2006 and a rapidly evolving partisan configuration call for new and deeper analyses on potential transformations of the Italian legislature.

Unfortunately, scholars aiming to conduct quantitative research on the Italian parliamentary arena are confronted by non-trivial problems. In fact, they must examine several sources, each one focusing exclusively on some of the data necessary to perform a comprehensive analysis. In many cases, data are not publicly available in a «ready-to-use» format, or they are not regularly updated. The inevitable consequence is that researchers must spend much of their time finding and merging different types of data gathered from heterogeneous sources. The Italian Law-Making Archive (ILMA) overcomes most of these shortcomings that affect common approaches to data collection. ILMA is a relational database that combines in a single infrastructure various pieces of information about the Italian legislation, the legislative initiative, the dynamics of and the actors involved in the law-making process, the votes cast by MPs and the policy position of parties for the period of 1987 to 2008. A web interface allows researchers to specify the period of time and the type of data they are interested in and, in contrast to commonly used sources, to extract the data in a format suitable for quantitative research.

The present paper is divided into two main parts. In the first part, we present ILMA and its main components. We describe the type of data contained in ILMA, the sources from which these data have been gathered and the procedures used to aggregate the information in a unique and comprehensive database. In the second part, we offer some practical demonstrations of potential use of the database for quantitative research on legislative processes in the Italian context.

2. ILMA: A brief description

Compared to the sources commonly used by scholars studying the Italian legislative system, ILMA presents a different structure. In fact, the data we have collected are not stored in a unique matrix with a single unit of analysis and many variables. On the contrary, ILMA is a relational database that non-redundantly combines different pieces of information coming from heterogeneous sources. Quantitative and qualitative data are stored in different tables characterized by unique keys and linked to each other by relations. Through a web page, this infrastructure permits scholars to extract, through queries, only those data necessary for their empirical studies¹. Currently, relational databases are fundamental instruments commonly used by institutions and corporations to manage different types of data for several purposes. International organizations, such as the OECD, the World Bank and the IMF, rely on relational databases to provide easy access to a great amount of economic data. On the other hand, the availability of large research-friendly databases in European political science is still relatively low². To our knowledge, there exist no data sources – not only in Italy but also in other European countries – that provide a comprehensive spectrum of records on parliaments and the evolution of legislative processes³. ILMA tries to redress this bias by combining, in a

¹ The database is developed on MySQL, and it is publicly available from www.socpol.unimi.it/ilma.

² However, there are some interesting exceptions. One is represented by the «ParlGov database», developed by Holger Döring and Philip Manow, which provides data on parties, elections and governments for thirty-eight countries. See <http://parlgov.org/stable/index.html> and Döring and Manow (2011). Another is Sara Hagemann and Simon Hix's «Vote Watch Europe» on the activities of the European Parliament and Council. See www.votewatch.eu.

³ At the end of 2011, the Italian Parliament developed a web infrastructure that collects open data on its activity (<http://dati.camera.it>). Nevertheless, this web page presents different shortcomings. First, it reports data regarding only one of the two chambers of the Italian Parliament (Camera dei Deputati); second, it does not include several important data sets, such as roll-calls; third, and most importantly, these data are provided in a format that is not suitable for statistical investigation.

unique infrastructure, data on legislative measures, their adoption processes and the actors involved in these processes.

ILMA originated from an idea of a group of scholars affiliated with the Department of Social and Political Studies at the University of Milan (Italy), and it is one of the scientific products of the Center for the Observation of Legislatures (COoL)⁴.

It contains information on

- legislation: laws and legislative decrees;
- legislative initiatives and processes;
- people: MPs, ministers and junior ministers (including repetitions);
- parliamentary parties (including renaming and changes).

These data cover a period that ranges from the beginning of the 10th legislature inaugurated on July 2, 1987, to the end of the 15th legislature on April 28, 2008. During this period, there have been 15 different governments. The first was the government headed by Goria, and the last was the second Prodi government. This temporal extension allows scholars to conduct hitherto impossible longitudinal studies and to overcome what Baumgartner and Jones (2002, 6) consider one of the «truly great failings of the policy sciences». Furthermore, it is worth noting that the period covered by the database is particularly interesting for the evolution of the Italian legislative process because it encompasses the last traditional legislature of the «first» Republic (10th), the two so-called transition legislatures (11th and 12th) and the first three legislatures of the «second» Republic (13th, 14th and 15th).

⁴ www.coolresearch.net.

Table 1 presents a summary of the main contents of ILMA in its current version. Moreover, on the ILMA web page (www.socpol.unimi.it/ilma), users can find a diagram summarizing the structure of the database and a codebook with a description of all the attributes included in the different tables.

Table 1 about here

Information on legislation has been mostly gathered from the website www.normattiva.it, the official portal of the Italian legislation, and from the historical digital archive of the Senate, which is available on the webpage www.senato.it. ILMA includes data on the different types of laws and their main characteristics, such as the title, the argument they treat, their origin (parliamentarian or governmental), a link to the text and the number of articles and words of which they are composed⁵.

Regarding legislation, ILMA also provides specific information on legislative delegation to the government. As emphasized in section 3.1, legislative delegation has become a prominent legislative instrument over the last two decades. For this reason, ILMA includes 162 delegating laws, with 817 specific delegations to the government, and 1200 related legislative decrees⁶. Similarly to laws, the database provides a description of the content and the main features of delegations and legislative decrees, as well as references to the process that resulted in their adoption and a link to their text.

Another added value of ILMA is that all legislative measures are classified by their policy content, using the codebook developed by the Italian section of the

⁵ The database contains a link both to the text originally approved by the Parliament and to a version that permits users to identify successive changes made to it.

⁶ Records on delegating acts adopted during the 10th, 11th and 12th legislatures are extracted from Camera dei Deputati (1997).

Comparative Agendas Project (CAP, see Borghetto and Carammia 2010). Each measure is assigned one or more of the 21 major topics (e.g., environment, health) and one or more of the 240 minor topics (e.g., waste disposal, regulation of the drug industry). ILMA also reports the topic classification based on the CAP master codebook, thus enabling scholars to compare trends in Italy with those of other countries analyzed by the CAP.

For all of the laws analyzed, ILMA reports information regarding the legislative initiative and the processes that led to their adoption. More precisely, it records the name of the proposers and all the co-signers of the bill from which the laws originated; in addition, in the case of members of the government, we register their institutional role, whereas in the case of MPs, we register their partisan affiliation. Furthermore, ILMA provides data on all passages of a bill in the two chambers until its final adoption as law (with the dates of each passage), the parliamentary committees (permanent or special) involved in the discussion of the bill and the procedure (ordinary or decentralized) adopted for its approval. It also distinguishes between particular cases of laws rejected by the President of the Republic and returned to the parliament for new approval and laws subject to a vote of confidence by the executive.

Another important type of data included in ILMA refers to all the actors involved in the legislative process, such as the MPs and the members of different governments (ministers and junior ministers). For each actor, the database provides information such as the date of birth, region of origin, level of education, profession exercised before he/she became MP or minister and the political experience gained in parties and local governments. Moreover, ILMA includes information regarding the partisan affiliation of all the actors at the formation of legislatures and governments and

any possible changes successively made to other parties. The Camera dei Deputati and Senato's websites constitute the primary sources for the information on MPs, while data on the composition of governments are gathered from the website of the Italian government (www.governo.it) and a dataset of the «Istituto Carlo Cattaneo»⁷. In addition to this general information, ILMA also registers the roll-calls of all the MPs on the bills voted on while on the floor for each reading in the Chamber of Deputies⁸. Given that in the *navette* system, a bill can be discussed and voted on in a chamber more than once before becoming a law, ILMA includes 2,628 vote sessions for 2,385 (out of 3,390) laws voted on while on the floor.

Finally, ILMA provides information on the position of all parliamentary and governing parties for different policy dimensions. These data are gathered from the expert surveys conducted by Laver and Hunt (1992) and Benoit and Laver (2006), the Comparative Manifesto Project (Budge *et al.* 2001; Klingemann *et al.* 2006) and analyses of the legislative speeches made by party leaders at the formation of different governments (Curini and Martelli 2009). These data allow scholars to build the political space of different legislatures and to identify the position of succeeding governments and their distance in terms of policy preferences.

3. Potential uses of ILMA

In this section, we present three basic empirical analyses performed by extracting groups of data contained in ILMA. The first study is a descriptive analysis on the evolution of legislative delegation in Italy since the early 1990s, using original data on

⁷ <http://www.cattaneo.org/default.asp>.

⁸ Final votes on all laws adopted in the 13th, 14th and 15th legislatures are gathered from the digital archive on www.camera.it, whereas all the other votes are gathered from electronically recorded data obtained from the administrative personnel of the Italian parliament.

individual legislative delegations. The second study develops a measure of intraparty similarity using data on legislative initiative. More precisely, it uses data on the co-sponsorship of bills presented in the Chamber of Deputies. Finally, the third analysis explores the interaction between the time of legislative processes and practices of consensual law-making. This analysis merged two different types of data: information on legislative processes and roll-calls of parliamentary groups in the Chamber of Deputies.

3.1. Legislative delegation in Italy

Since the early 1990s, recourse to the legislative delegation has been a prominent phenomenon both in quantitative terms and from a substantial point of view in the Italian political landscape⁹. In particular, it has been argued that the advent of government alternation and the consolidation of a bipolar system in the «second» Republic created an incentive for governing majorities to look for new means to increase their functional legitimization while avoiding the bottlenecks of ordinary legislative processes (Capano and Giuliani 2001b; Zucchini 2010). Legislative delegation was one of the responses they found. Whereas in the first half of the 1990s this legislative option was predominantly used to transpose EU directives and to initiate large emergency budget reforms, since 1996 it has established itself as one of the strongest instruments available to the executive to implement its legislative agenda (Vassallo 2001).

Although legislative delegation holds an intrinsic importance for studies of the evolution of the Italian political system, most large-N analyses have, thus far, been

⁹ The Italian Constitution regulates this procedure in Article 76. The use of this legislative instrument was further regulated by Law n.400 of 1988, which - among other things - created the denomination of «legislative decrees» for this type of executive act.

restricted to a discussion of the quantitative rise in the number of legislative decrees over time (Della Sala and Kreppel 1998; Kreppel 2009, but see also Vassallo 2001). The problem with these data is that they offer only a partial or inaccurate picture of the delegation phenomenon. While some delegations are not implemented by the executive or they are only partially fulfilled, others lead to the adoption of more than one legislative decree. By relying only on issued legislative decrees, the danger is to incorrectly identify the scope of delegated powers in one issue area or time span. On the other hand, focusing on delegating acts is not the solution as each of these legislative acts may contain more than one delegating article/comma, in some cases related to different subject areas (see *infra*). For these reasons, the unit of analysis in this section will be the individual delegation. The ILMA database provides researchers, for the first time, with information on every delegation adopted since 1987, and it connects these data with records on each delegating law that contains it and the legislative decrees it authorized. The rest of this section will be devoted to illustrating one possible use of these data without any pretention to be exhaustive or to offer conclusive answers on the topic¹⁰. The idea is to outline some peculiar aspects of the way legislative delegation has been employed in the Italian context over the study period considered and, on the basis of this evidence, to advance a tentative reading of the reasons underlying the diffusion of this procedural device over the last decade (see table 2).

Table 2 about here

¹⁰ We set aside all delegations concerning the transposition of EU directives as they are normally included in a periodic omnibus law called the «Community Act», which is, in many aspects, different from ordinary delegating acts (on the use of legislative decrees for the transposition of EU directives, see Borghetto, Giuliani, and Zucchini 2012).

First, it is important to draw attention to the content of a delegation. A significant proportion of delegating laws tend to be complex instruments that include more than one delegating provision and, in some cases, address more than one sector. Table 1 shows that out of 146 delegating laws enacted during our study period, approximately 45% (66) had more than 1 primary delegating provision¹¹. Indeed, an average delegating law included roughly 3 primary delegating provisions. If one codes each delegating provision according to one of the 21 major topics of the Italian policy agendas codebook, then approximately 60% (40) of the delegating laws incorporating more than one primary delegation (66) also address more than one major topic. Overall, these figures reveal that delegating acts tend to take the form of complex acts involving more than one delegation and focusing on more than one topic.

Our second point concerns the time granted to the executive to promulgate the decrees. According to the Constitution, every delegation has to include a specified time limit, but nothing precludes the parliament from extending the deadline by passing an amendment to the delegating act. These extensions are normally in response to an executive's request to be granted more time to draft the necessary decrees. This practice has been widely employed over the years, although its use was more systematic during the 10th (33.3% of the total) and 12th (48.3% of the total) legislatures. Remarkably, the practice has gradually waned over the years, and it completely disappeared during the 15th legislature. In contrast to this trend, the phenomenon of «corrective delegations» is on the rise. Corrective delegations authorize the government to revise existing legislative decrees within specified time limits (for instance, one or two years after the issuance of the first legislative decree), and as a rule, they must respect the policy

¹¹ We only count primary delegations and not delegations to revise and update existing decrees (from now on, «corrective delegations», see *infra*).

guidelines and procedural constraints laid down in the parent delegation. The rationale underlying this temporal extension of the delegation is to provide the executive with the opportunity to adjust its decrees in light of the first implementation results. Originally, this gradual approach, which allowed for the distinction between a phase of «experimentation» and one of «revision», was judged particularly necessary in the case of complex and far-reaching delegations purporting to revise a whole policy sector. On the other hand, a review of the temporal evolution of these procedural devices reveals that its use is no longer selective but rather that it has become standard practice. If up to the 12th legislature, the ratio between «corrective» and «primary» delegations is one to ten, since 1996, it has stabilized, on average, to almost one of every two delegations.

Our third remark regards the requirement for a parliamentary opinion before the issuance of a legislative decree. Our data reveal that this prerequisite has been the standard since the beginning of our study period. The proportion of primary delegations compelling the executive to present the draft decrees to the relevant committees increased from approximately 80% in the 10th legislature to more than 90% in the last legislature. These figures are remarkable given that Law 400 of 1988 stipulated that a parliamentary opinion was compulsory only in the case of delegations with a time limit of more than two years, namely, for a handful of delegations (five during the period considered). Moreover, this monitoring activity has been occasionally buttressed - particularly since the 13th legislature and mostly in the case of salient delegating laws - through the creation of specialized inter-chamber committees.

Although the presented evidence allows one to only scratch the surface of this complex phenomenon, it is possible to advance some tentative hypotheses on the reasons underlying the expansion of legislative delegation. Of course, these views must

be considered while keeping in mind the political conditions of the period, which witnessed increased executive leadership in its parliamentary majority, especially when the EU or economic emergencies required a prompt response. That said, what factors facilitated this deliberate transfer of legislative power from the parliament to the government? Although more work is warranted regarding this issue, the first reason may be the tendency to include delegating provisions within large package laws. The bundling together of many, and not necessarily related, delegations in the same act may be interpreted as an attempt to pass policies whose outcomes would be uncertain if dealt with separately. What is more, sometimes these delegations are incorporated in commas of a maxi-amendment (amendments that entirely replace a bill) and/or these large package laws are subject to a vote of confidence. Even without recourse to these procedural devices, however, the desired outcome is to divert the parliament's attention from controversial issues while emphasizing those items that enjoy a wider support. Second, by stretching, in many cases, the duration of a delegation beyond the natural conclusion of a legislative mandate - either by extending the deadline or by including corrective delegations - it has made the consequences of delegating power to the executive more acceptable in the eyes of the opposition, as new or corrective legislative decrees can always be adopted in case of government alternation without the need of another delegating law. Third, there is evidence of a greater reliance on post-delegation scrutiny by parliament. The justification for the expansion of this procedure has to be found in the fragmented Italian coalitions. The level of internal policy divergence often impairs the capacity to draft sufficiently detailed delegation criteria, or it makes it extremely costly, so much so that the delegation's benefits are relatively nullified. Therefore, we hypothesize that MPs may have decided to invest in other monitoring

devices that are activated after the delegating act is adopted, and during the interim period, they concede to the ministerial agent to draft the decrees. These monitoring devices partially correspond to classic cabinet-level accountability tools and partially take the form of consultation procedures involving parliamentary committees. Even so, the committees' opinions remain non-compulsory, and more research is needed to prove whether, and more importantly when, they affect the executive's final decisions on draft legislative decrees (Mattei 2007).

In conclusion, the exploratory analysis presented in this section was aimed at illustrating one among the many potential applications of the ILMA database for the analysis of legislative delegation. For the first time, all records on delegating acts, individual delegations and legislative decrees have been incorporated within a unique data structure, thus allowing for innovative analyses on the evolution and characteristics of delegation processes from the parliamentary stage to the final issuance of government decrees. The evidence suggests that the increase of legislative delegation in Italy was favored by the simultaneous incorporation of a range of procedural devices to veto-proof the adoption of the delegating bill in parliament or, at least, to make it more acceptable for majority and opposition forces.

3.2 A measure of intraparty similarity

As previously illustrated, in ILMA, we have different information about legislative activities that can be easily connected in a systematic way. This allows us to focus on research questions that, until now, have received little attention in the literature (in particular, with respect to the Italian case) given the lack of available data. For example, it is usually assumed that party unity in roll-calls is the norm in contemporary

parliamentary democracies. A large comparative literature confirms this point. For example, if we focus on the Rice index as a measure of party unity, this rarely falls below a threshold of 95% (see Sieberer 2006)¹². Still, it is not self-evident what factor lies behind an observed level of party unity in roll-calls. Is it (mainly) the result of party discipline (i.e., the by-product of effective sanctions and/or positive incentives that make members vote together even though their preferences differ)? Or is it the consequence of intraparty similarity (i.e., the existence of shared preferences among the MPs within the same party) (Hazan 2003, Bowler *et al.* 1999)? One possible way to disentangle the two distinct effects would be to rely on a measure that permits one to capture the original MPs' policy preferences. Only through that does it become possible to produce a measure of party unity that can be considered as entirely due to intraparty similarity (rather than party discipline). This is not, however, a simple exercise.

One obvious, but misleading, method is to use each MP's actual voting behavior. This path has led to the development of extensive literature in political science that analyzes roll-calls. Originally developed to investigate the U.S. Congress, this methodology is increasingly being employed even in other contexts, including parliamentary democracies (Poole 2005; Cox and McCubbins 2005). The problem with this methodology is that, in a parliamentary context, by scaling roll-calls, what we measure is the structure of the «revealed behavioral space» (Hix and Jun 2009). This implies that the MPs' ideal points so estimated, as well as the latent dimension(s) revealed by the voting behavior, are linked only indirectly with the underlying ideological and policy dimensions of conflict in a polity (Hall and Grofman 1990;

¹² As is well known, the Rice index is the standard measure of legislative voting unity, and it corresponds to the absolute difference between the percentages of *ayes* and *nays* in a parliamentary party group on any given roll-call.

Curini and Zucchini 2012). Thus, it is mainly the outcome of compulsion from the party leadership that heavily limits the possibility for MPs to express preferences and priorities different from those of their parliamentary group when voting on the floor (see Curini *et al.* 2011). In this case, we cannot talk about similarity because, looking at the observed behavior, this is not referred to in the original policy preferences among MPs.

One possible solution to this dilemma is to rely on less constrained parliamentary activities to infer MPs' original preferences. Among these, legislative co-sponsorship represents the best alternative. Indeed, as rightly noted in the groundbreaking contribution by Aleman *et al.* (2009: 91-92), «activities that have no immediate policy consequences and do not depreciate the party label are not as tightly monitored by party leaders. Consequently, floor voting choices should more intensely reflect the costs of defection imposed by parties than cosponsoring should». A second advantage of using co-sponsorship pertains to agenda processes. Sponsoring a bill takes place at the beginning of the legislative process, and it is usually less affected by strategic considerations than by other parliamentary behaviors. Finally, in the Italian Parliament, sponsoring a bill is a very frequent and easy activity, which does not require compliance with any special rules or criteria. In other words, any individual MP can sponsor a bill¹³.

In ILMA, we have collected data about all of the bills introduced in the Italian Chamber of Deputies since the 10th Legislature that have become laws. For each bill, we have the name of the sponsor (i.e., the first signature) and all the other possible co-sponsors. In the present analysis, to increase the variability of the sample, we have added data about all of the bills introduced in the Italian Chamber of Deputies that have

¹³ See, also, Marangoni and Tronconi (2011) for a work on the Italian case that employs co-sponsorship data.

not become laws¹⁴. We then eliminated from our sample all bills that have not been sponsored by MPs and all bills with only one sponsor (given that they do not provide any useful information to estimate MPs' ideal points, see below). This leaves us with a sample of more than 15,030 bills. The relatively comprehensive (and extensive) character of the data helps ensure that the results of the analysis are not a function of sample bias or period effects. On average, in the Italian Chamber of Deputies, the mean number of co-sponsors during the 1987 to 2008 period was 15.63, and 90% of the bills initiated by legislators had fewer than 38 co-sponsors.

The decision to co-sponsor a bill reveals the MP's preference for the proposal over the current status quo, as well as a special interest in or importance attached to that particular bill. Moreover, the co-sponsoring of legislation can be seen as low-cost position-taking by MPs who signal to target audiences (e.g., constituents) or to fellow representatives, or both (Kessler and Krehbiel 1996). Following Aleman *et al.* (2009), we build an affiliation matrix for each legislature, with each cell indicating the number of times each pair of legislators co-sponsor legislation together. We then use a principal-components analysis (PCA) with singular-value decomposition on this agreement matrix to extract the ideal-point estimates of the MPs. By definition, the more often two MPs present similar (dissimilar) policy preferences, the more (less) they co-sponsor the same bills. To decide how many components (i.e., dimensions) to retain in each of our PCAs on co-sponsorship data, we rely on the popular Cattell's scree test. The results of our analysis show that the policy space for each legislature is always multidimensional. In half of the cases, we have a bi-dimensional policy space, while in the 10th, 13th and

¹⁴ These data are gathered from Curini and Zucchini (2011) and will become a future extension of the same ILMA project.

15th legislatures, we have three significant policy dimensions (see Curini and Zucchini 2011).

To produce a measure of intraparty similarity at the level of the whole parliament (variable label: DISPERSION), we calculated the Euclidean distance separating each MP from the median position of his/her party in the multidimensional policy space previously obtained by employing co-sponsorship data. We then estimated the median of these values. Such a measure of variability, referred to in the literature as the «median absolute deviation», is particularly resistant to outliers. According to the procedure just explained, as the value of DISPERSION increases, the overall level of party similarity decreases, and vice versa. Figure 1 shows the trend of our index of DISPERSION in each of the five legislatures analyzed¹⁵.

Figure 1 about here

As seen, the overall level of intraparty similarity in the Italian parliament seems to have increased during the second Republic, at least until the last legislature, when a new proportional electoral rule with a majority prize was introduced. More interesting, however, is the comparison between cabinet and non-cabinet parties (see Figure 2). If we consider a cabinet party to be any party that belonged to government for the whole legislature life-span (with the exclusion of caretaker cabinets), then, until the 12th legislature, cabinet parties always show a lower level of intraparty similarity than non-cabinet parties. This difference declines in the following period and is reversed when center-left coalitions control the cabinet. One possible explanation for this divergence

¹⁵ The present analysis is based on the assumption that each MP is a member of the parliamentary group he/she belonged to in the last parliamentary session. The variable DISPERSION is estimated accordingly.

can be connected to the change that occurred in the dynamics of the party system. In particular, with the beginning of the «second» Italian Republic, alternation in power became a realistic expectation for all parties, and intraparty similarity, as a consequence, started to matter in an increasing fashion for the cabinet parties. Indeed, recruiting MPs with too eccentric preferences can not only expose the government's survival to risk, but can also increase the chances of electoral victory of opposition parties.

Figure 2 about here

Summing up, the information contained in ILMA can be used to understand intraparty similarity as distinct from discipline as a source of party unity. Separately weighting the explanatory power of similarity and discipline on individual legislative behaviors is not only interesting *per se*, but it helps to evaluate the relative importance of electoral versus legislative rules. After all, intraparty similarity depends on the recruitment process, and conversely, recruitment is obviously affected by electoral rules. In contrast, discipline strictly depends on legislative rules and the government agenda's establishing power. An increase in party unity without an increase in intraparty similarity could, therefore, suggest that legislative rules play a major role in shaping voting behavior inside the parliament and vice versa.

3.3 On time and consensus

In this section, we will further exemplify how we can search for a preliminary answer to a major research question by using simple techniques and some creative use of the data contained in the ILMA dataset. We will discuss time and consensus in the legislative

process; however, the focus will not be on either of these two single factors (Giuliani 2008; Borghetto and Giuliani 2012), but on their logical interaction.

The general idea is that legislative processes unfold differently in different types of democracies (Lijphart 1999). In Westminster democracies, the parliament has lost most, if not all, of its legislative functions. The place for discussing private members' bills is severely limited by statute, and the predominant executive knows that, at the end of the day, he/she can «bring home» the original proposals. In this type of democracy, crossing the floor is relatively rare and is considered an act of rebellion. The length of the process is a matter of efficiency, and it is firmly in the hands of the government. Unicameralism, or strongly asymmetric bicameralism, reinforces this adversarial style. In consensus democracies, there is comparatively more place for an autonomous intervention of the legislature. Their embedded principle and aim, therefore, should be that of widening the legislative majorities and favoring more inclusive agreements. The time needed to obtain that result cannot be easily predicted, especially in a situation of perfectly symmetrical bicameralism, heterogeneous legislatures and coalition governments. However, in this context, time should not be considered as a cost, as it is in Westminster democracies.

In the Italian case, wide legislative majorities are typically associated with the use of the decentralized procedure, which assigns legislative power directly to permanent committees without passing through the floor, but they can occur even in an open assembly¹⁶. Therefore, we advance the following hypothesis. The longer the legislative process, the more «time» that should be used to favor consensus-oriented practices, such as the use of decentralized procedures or more cohesive votes on the

¹⁶ As it is well known, this can be accomplished only without the opposition of the government, or of 5% of the committee or of 10% of the floor.

floor. For example, we would expect that committees are more frequently assigned legislative powers in second readings than in first readings and that a second vote by the same chamber should exhibit broader agreement compared to its first review¹⁷.

Figure 3 about here

We begin our empirical exploration using figure 3, which reports the number of laws approved after a specific number of readings and where they were finally adopted. We consider only the 1,482 ordinary laws passed between 1987 and 2008, as the other types of law (laws converting decrees, approving budgets, constitutional laws and laws ratifying international treaties) can only be approved by the whole assembly. Apparently, the data seem to contradict our hypothesis. The number of laws approved in a consensual institution, such as a parliamentary committee, is remarkable. However, laws that necessitate three readings are adopted on the floor more frequently than those voted on in two readings, and the percentage increases for those approved in four readings, etc. Relatively speaking, when legislatures take more time, they seem to prefer to avoid the decentralized procedure.

However, these percentages cannot really be compared because they are calculated on the basis of different denominators. Relying on that comparison, we would incur a selection bias because we would assume that laws approved in two readings have the same characteristics as laws approved in three, four or five readings, an assumption that is patently false. Figure 4 more accurately attempts to follow the different paths taken by our ordinary laws.

¹⁷ It is worth noting that in Italy, the term «reading» refers to the whole passage in a chamber in a *navette* system and not to a specific stage of the legislative process as in the United Kingdom.

Figure 4 about here

Already in the first reading, MPs, party groups and the executive agree in assigning, more or less, two-thirds of the bills (977 out of 1,482) to the decentralized procedure, that is, to the legislative powers of the committees. In the second reading, these policy actors can decide to confirm that choice or to reverse it, which is exactly what can happen to bills originally assigned to the floor. The choice of the decentralized procedure, however, increases its attractiveness because 89.9% of the bills already assigned to committees remain in their hands (compared to only 72.3% of bills with a double reading on the floor), and another 140 bills (27.7%) originally discussed in the assembly are transferred under the power of committees (whereas the opposite path is followed only by 10.1% of the bills). The same asymmetry, once the bills already approved (228 by the assembly and 712 by committees) have been eliminated, is reproduced between the second and the third readings. More than 90% of the bills remain under the control of parliamentary committees compared to less than 67% for those treated on the floor, and most of the changes of procedures increase (33.1%) rather than decrease (9.2%) the legislative power of the committees. The trend is confirmed even in the fourth reading, with committees once again overcoming the floor both in the confirmation of the procedure (85% compared to 80%) and in the relative appeal of the change (20% compared to less than 15%).

All in all, the data presented in figure 4 largely confirm our original expectation: bills remaining in the process are preferably assigned to institutions and procedures that are intrinsically consensual. The former readings or preceding discussions on the floor

help in reducing the more contentious elements of a policy and contribute to craft the agreement and the mutual trust necessary for the decentralized procedure.

Our dataset offers a second opportunity to test the same hypothesis from a different perspective using the results of roll-call voting in the lower chamber for computing indices of cohesion and agreement for the whole parliament¹⁸. This perspective nicely complements the first one, taking into consideration only those bills that have not already been treated consensually under the decentralized procedure. In fact, all of these indices correlate positively with the duration of the legislative process: the longer a bill remains in the process, the more the parliament votes consensually.

Unfortunately, even these results are biased because of selection problems. As anticipated, in the set of bills that necessitate a final vote on the floor by statute, there is a relevant number of conversions of decrees (approximately one-third). This type of bill has, by definition, a very quick legislative process (less than 60 days) and is, *de facto*, more confrontational than other types (second only to budgetary bills). It is primarily due to the many swift and adversarial conversions of temporary decrees that we found a positive correlation between the duration of the process and the voting cohesion indices. When controlling for the type of bills, the significance of the association disappears.

However, our data offer a less straightforward, albeit a more reliable way, to test our hypothesis, at least for those laws that have undergone a roll-call vote in the lower chamber in at least two subsequent readings. In all, 207 laws, for a total amount of 224 couple of readings, have this characteristic. We then compute our cohesion measures for each reading, and we confront them under the supposition that the more the process advances, the more it will be inclusive, showing higher values of the indices. In table 3,

¹⁸ The cohesion index uses only *ayes* and *nays*, whereas the agreement index includes abstentions. They are both presented for the Italian case in Giuliani (2008), together with the proposal of their weighted versions, which multiplies them for the respective rate of attendance.

we present the average differences between these indices and the test regarding their statistical significance.

Table 3 about here

All of the indices have a positive sign, as expected, and the results are not affected by considering only the *ayes* and *nays*, as in the Rice index, or by including abstentions, as in the agreement index. This implies that, on average, the floor tends to vote more cohesively in successive readings, thus slowly constructing consensus around the original bill. Unfortunately, in spite of the right sign, the test is statistically non-significant for the traditional versions of the indices, whereas it is significant for both weighted versions, thus giving greater importance to the more relevant processes.

In summary, the information contained in the database permits us to test the hypothesis that time, in the legislative process, is not merely a cost but may serve the goal of obtaining more inclusive policy decisions. Laws can be followed in their different stages and readings, and they can be divided according to type, legislature, procedure, etc. In this way, there are several possibilities for avoiding potential biases and for thoroughly controlling the original hypotheses. We have provided an example of this wide range of opportunities using fairly simple techniques and demonstrated, for ordinary laws, the increased delegation of legislative power to parliamentary committees during the legislative process. Complementarily, those bills that do not follow the decentralized procedure show an increase in consensus reading after reading, although that increase is statistically significant only once we take into account the attendance rates of the roll-call voting.

4 Conclusions

The Italian Law-Making Archive (ILMA) represents an innovative tool for research on the Italian legislative system. It is a relational database that connects different types of data - on legislation, legislative processes and initiatives and political actors - gathered from a variety of sources. The present article is divided into two main parts. The first part provided a brief description of the structure and the main contents of the database. The second part offered three empirical analyses with the aim of showing the potential uses of ILMA.

In conclusion, it is important that we make some final remarks. First, even though this article has presented mainly descriptive analyses, it is worth stressing that data included in ILMA also permit and facilitate more sophisticated investigations. For instance, scholars can use ILMA to investigate, with an event history analysis, which features affect the duration and complexity of legislative processes. Alternatively, scholars can use information on co-sponsorship or roll-calls to build the policy space of the Italian parliament in different legislatures and then study the spatial dynamics of cabinet composition. Second, we are constantly updating and expanding ILMA. The new release will include records from the 9th legislature (July 1983 – July 1987), while the data collection process for the current legislature is already under way. At the same time, we aim to include new contents in the database, such as bills that do not become laws, law decrees, parliamentary inquiries and sentences of constitutional illegitimacy by the Constitutional Court. Finally, ILMA was fundamentally proposed as an open source project. The ILMA's identification keys are the only requirement for producing data that can be integrated within the database. Actually, ILMA encourages this type of

contribution. For instance, researchers interested in creating a new classification of laws can exploit the link to the text (in its original and revised version) or to our aggregation of policy topic categories.

We conclude that ILMA should become an open platform for a wide range of research interests and a reference site for the international community of scholars interested in legislative studies.

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Tab.1: *Summary of the main contents of ILMA (1987-2008).*

| Information | Observational units | N | Main sources |
|--------------------------------------|--|----------|---|
| Legislation | Laws | 3,390 | www.normattiva.it |
| | Delegations (from delegating laws) | 817 | www.parlamento.it |
| | Legislative decrees | 1,200 | www.senato.it |
| Legislative initiative and processes | Bills | 44,000 | www.comparativeagendas.org Borghetto and Carammia (2010) |
| | MPs | 3,369 | www.camera.it www.senato.it |
| People | Ministers and Junior Ministers (including repetitions) | 1,323 | www.governo.it Dataset of «Istituto Carlo Cattaneo» |
| | Roll calls (only for deputies) | 2,628 | www.camera.it Electronically recorded data |
| Parties | Parties (including renaming and changes) | 42 | ParlGov Database Comparative Manifesto Project Laver and Hunt (1992) Benoit and Laver (2006) Curini and Martelli (2009) |
| | Parliamentary groups | 88 | www.camera.it www.senato.it |

Notes: the number of bills is only approximate, and the number of roll-calls refers to the number of the sessions of voting in which the vote of the single deputies is recorded.

Source: ILMA

Tab. 2: *Summary indicators of legislative delegation.*

| | 10th | 11th | 12th | 13th | 14th | 15th | Total |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-------------------|
| Delegating acts with more than one delegation* | 12 | 4 | 3 | 24 | 22 | 1 | 66 |
| % of the total* | 46.2 % | 25.0 % | 60.0 % | 41.4 % | 50.0 % | 8.3% | 38.5 % |
| average number of delegations* | 3.4 | 5.2 | 9 | 4.5 | 4.5 | 6 | 5.4 |
| Delegating acts dealing with more than one topic* | 5 | 3 | 3 | 15 | 14 | 0 | 40 |
| % of the total* | 19.2 % | 18.8 % | 60.0 % | 25.9 % | 31.8 % | 0.0% | 25.9 % |
| average n. of topics* | 2.4 | 3.7 | 4 | 3.5 | 2.8 | 0 | 2.7 |
| Primary delegations | 54 | 32 | 29 | 135 | 112 | 14 | 376 |
| with extended deadlines* | 18 | 2 | 14 | 29 | 30 | 0 | 93 |
| % of the total | 33.3 % | 6.3% | 48.3 % | 21.5 % | 26.8 % | 0.0% | 24.5 % |
| without extended deadlines* | 36 | 30 | 15 | 106 | 82 | 14 | 283 |
| % of the total | 66.6 % | 93.8 % | 51.7 % | 78.5 % | 73.2 % | 100.0 % | 75.5 % |
| Corrective delegations | 1 | 7 | 2 | 45 | 47 | 10 | 112 |
| Delegations requiring parliamentary scrutiny | 44 | 25 | 26 | 121 | 94 | 13 | 323 |
| % of the total | 81.5 % | 78.1 % | 89.7 % | 89.6 % | 83.9 % | 92.9% | 85.9 % |

Note: * we consider only primary delegations

Source: ILMA

Tab. 3: *Two-sample paired difference test for various cohesion indices.*

| | Paired differences | | | | | | | Sig. (2-tails) |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|--------|-------|-----|-------------------|
| | Mean | Standard deviation | Std. err. mean | Confidence intervals, 95% | | t | df | |
| | | | | min | max | | | |
| Delta Rice Cohesion index | .01333 | .24470 | .01635 | -.01889 | .04555 | .816 | 223 | .416 |
| Delta Agreement index | .01302 | .19919 | .01331 | -.01321 | .03925 | .978 | 223 | .329 |
| Delta Weighted Rice index | .02386* | .16008 | .01070 | .00278 | .04494 | 2.231 | 223 | .027 |
| Delta Weighted Agreement index | .02171* | .13707 | .00916 | .00366 | .03976 | 2.371 | 223 | .019 |

* significant at $p < 0.05$ (two-tails)

Source: ILMA

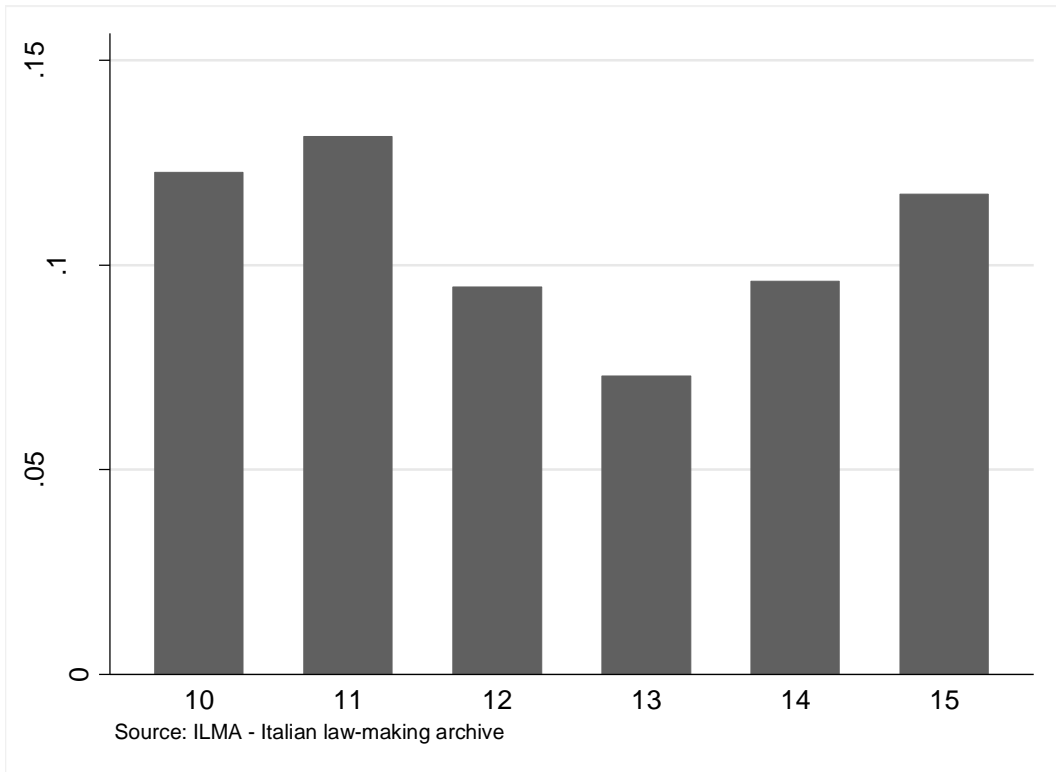


Fig. 1: *Index of DISPERSION by Legislature (10th – 15th).*

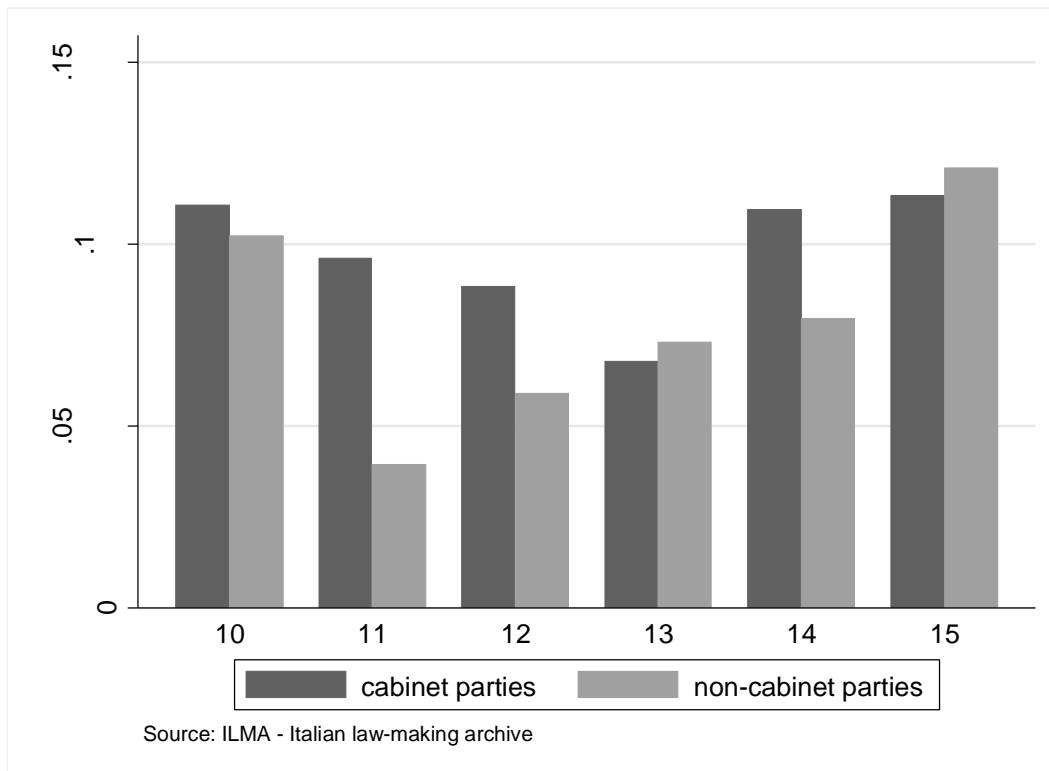


Fig. 2: *Index of DISPERSION for cabinet and non-cabinet parties by Legislature (10th – 15th).*

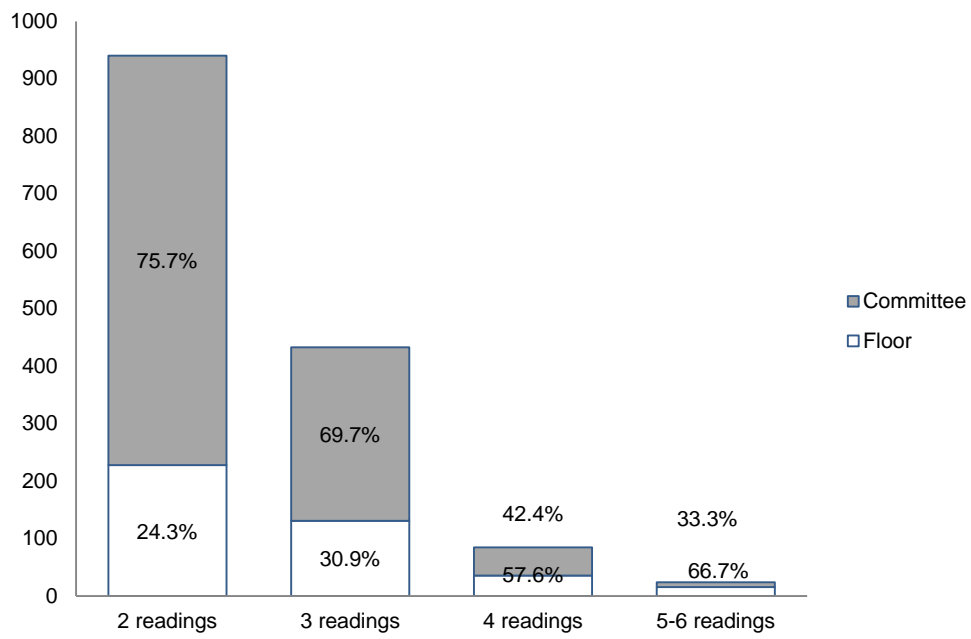


Fig. 3: *Number of readings and institution of final approval (ordinary laws; 1987-2008).*

Source: ILMA

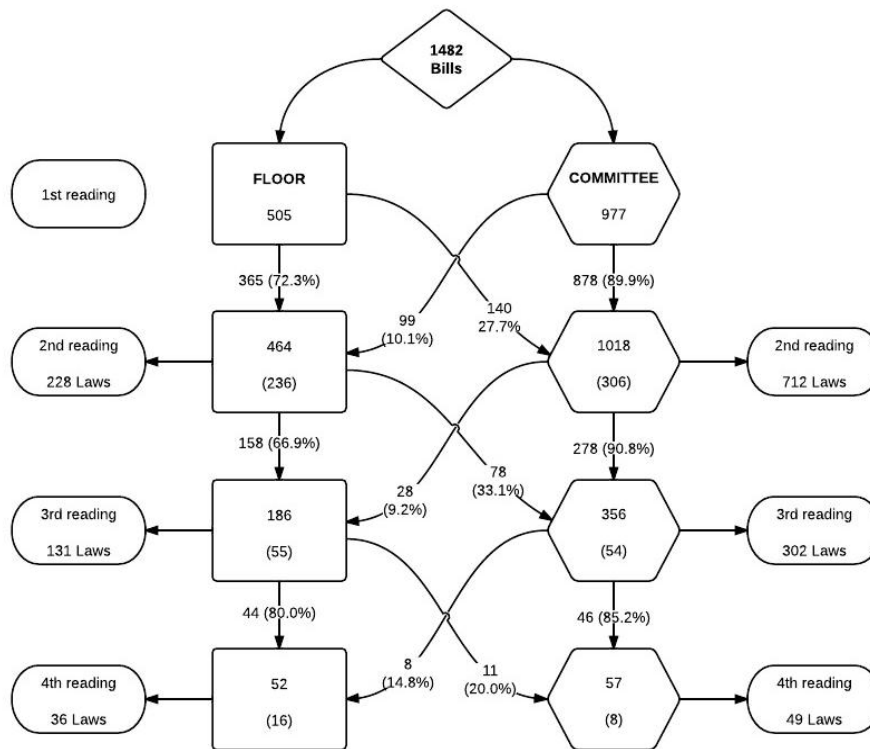


Fig. 4: Paths of approval across readings (ordinary laws; 1987-2008).

Source: ILMA