

***Super Partes?* Ideological Leaning of Heads of State and their Distance from Prime Ministers**

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Abstract

Presidents in parliamentary democracies are commonly perceived as neutral actors, with limited influence on everyday politics. However, Italian Heads of State have the widest set of powers among European parliamentary democracies. Recent episodes occurred during the presidential terms of Giorgio Napolitano and Sergio Mattarella suggest that Heads of State can indeed play a political role, influencing cabinet formation and everyday politics. This paper examines whether the Head of State can be considered as a non-partisan political actor or, to the contrary, his ideological leaning can be detected from public speeches and declarations. By collecting and analysing a new and original dataset, based on the content analysis of Presidents' investiture speeches and New Year's Eve messages, we mapped the political position of Italian Heads of State over 76 years (1946-2022). As such, the paper investigates under which conditions the position of the President is closer to that of the Prime Minister on the ideological left-right scale and on foreign policy. The analysis reveal that their ideological distance is lower when both belong to the same ideological party family and when the Prime Minister has been appointed to form a President's cabinet, closer to the preferences of the Head of State.

Keywords: Head of State, Prime Minister, Ideology, Legislative Speeches, New Year's Eve Messages, Content Analysis

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Introduction

In parliamentary democracies the powers of Heads of State are generally limited to representing the unity of the country and (formally) appointing the Prime Minister (PM). Within parliamentary democracies, however, some Presidents seems to retain stronger powers than others. This is the case of Italy, whose President is deemed to have the widest set of powers among European parliamentary democracies (Grimaldi 2015; Tebaldi et al. 2019, 2022). Despite their formal powers, for a long time, Italian Heads of State were perceived as neutral political actors, with a limited influence on everyday politics.

Recent episodes occurred during the presidential terms of Giorgio Napolitano and Sergio Mattarella, however, suggest that Heads of State can play a political role trying to influence cabinet formation and the everyday political process (Ikeya 2015). For instance, Napolitano played a crucial role in replacing Silvio Berlusconi with the independent technocrat Mario Monti as Prime Minister, in November 2011, in the middle of a severe crisis of the public debt. Few days before the official resignation of the Berlusconi's cabinet (Smith-Spark 2011), in fact, Napolitano appointed Monti as "senator for life" (Grasso 2011)¹, as an attempt to show that a Monti-led cabinet was in the air. Few months later, in order to deal with the stalemate due to the hung parliament generated by the 2013 election results, Napolitano threatened to step in again to appoint a stop-gap prime minister of his own (Day 2013). Actually, the temptation of Heads of State to appoint a PM of their choice, usually in periods of political instability, dates back in time to the Pella (1953) cabinet, followed by other "President's cabinets" (Ceccanti 2013; Innamorati 2016; Tedaldi 2018; Valenti 2021)²: Zoli (1957), Ciampi (1993), Monti (2011), Draghi (2021) and, according to someone (e.g., Stefanoni 2018), also Dini (1995) and Letta I (2013).

¹ See also: https://www.corriere.it/politica/11_novembre_09/mario-monti-senatore-a-vita_87ba0e7c-0aff-11e1-8371-eb51678ca784.shtml

² See also: https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Governo_del_presidente

More recently Mattarella revived the debate about the formal or substantial power of the Head of State by rejecting the nomination of Eurosceptic Paolo Savona as Minister of the Economy during the formation of the populist Conte I cabinet (2018), led by the Five Star Movement (M5S) and the Northern League (LN).³ At the beginning, this rejection brought Conte to resign and Mattarella appointed the independent Carlo Cottarelli, as an attempt to either start a technocratic cabinet or call snap elections. However, M5S and LN finally accepted the rejection of Savona and found an agreement to form the new government.

Although similar rejections took place in the past (Pagella Politica 2018), Mattarella's choice generated a massive debate (for a review: Capussela 2018) about the extent of discretionary power in the hands of the President, who publicly explained his choice and defended it,⁴ while the M5S threatened to call for the impeachment (Baynes 2018).

These examples indicate that, although Italian Heads of State are supposed to be politically neutral, they can take autonomous political choices, sometimes oriented by their own partisan preferences, and such choices may generate a power struggle between different political institutions.

Previous studies emphasized that President's ability to take political actions can depend on the strength of other political actors (Amoretti and Giannone 2014; Ikeya 2015; Pasquino 2011). The former Prime Minister, Giuliano Amato, suggested a provocative metaphor: the set of powers concentrated in the hands of the Head of State is similar to an accordion. When political parties are strong and the political system is stable, this prevents the President from playing the accordion in compliance with his wishes and

³ See: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-06-01/giuseppe-conte-to-lead-populist-government-in-italy/9823700>

⁴ See: <https://www.thelocal.it/20180529/italy-president-sergio-mattarella-statement-english/>

interpretation of his functions. On the contrary, in contexts of political instability, when parties are weaker, the President will be able to play the accordion at his full discretion.

In view of that, this paper examines whether the Head of State can be really considered as a non-partisan political actor or, to the contrary, his ideological leaning can be detected from public speeches and declarations. If this is the case, the paper will investigate under which conditions the positions of the President are more distant from those expressed by Prime Ministers.

We do that by creating a new and original dataset, based on the content analysis of Presidents' investiture speeches and New Year's Eve messages, which maps the political position of Italian Heads of State over 76 years (1946-2022). The analysis reveals that the ideological leaning of Heads of States can be inferred from their public declarations, which suggests that the President does not speak as a fully neutral political actor. Interestingly, the distance between his ideological leaning and the position of Prime Ministers is lower when both belong to the same ideological party family and when the PM has been appointed to form a President's cabinet, closer to the policy preferences of the Head of State.

The paper is structured as follows. The first section describes the formal and informal powers of Italian Presidents, the following one details the research questions and the expectations. The third section presents the measurement of the Presidents' positions, the fourth section displays the analysis, the last section concludes.

The Head of State in Italy

After the end of Fascism, the founding fathers of the Italian Republic disregarded the idea of assigning strong powers to the executive. Such attitude, deeply rooted in the experience of the dictatorship, affected the work of the Constitutional Assembly and the discussion of the presidential role when defining his

authority (Koff 1982). In this regard, the Head of State was portrayed in the Constitution as a *super partes* authority, tied to a clear political neutrality, which was supposed to represent the entire country and to symbolize the national unity. The President is in charge of safeguarding the respect of the rules of the game within the political system and to arbitrate the political competition between rival partisan actors.

Still, the neutrality of the Italian Head of State only indicates he is not a partisan power, without minimizing his ability to influence significant political decisions (Amoretti and Giannone 2014). In fact, he can be considered as a relevant actor with the widest set of powers among parliamentary democracies (Grimaldi 2015; Tebaldi et al. 2019, 2022).

In particular, the President of the Republic retains three crucial powers. To start with, the article 92 of the Italian Constitution indicates that the Head of State is in charge of appointing the President of the Council of Ministers and, upon his proposal, the ministers. Furthermore, based on art. 88 Const., in consultation with the presiding officers of Parliament, the President may dissolve one or both Houses of Parliament.⁵ Finally, on the grounds of art. 87 Const., formal presidential authorization is required to introduce governmental bills and promulgate laws; in this regard, art. 74 Const. posits that the President of the Republic may send to the Parliament a reasoned message to request that a law scheduled for promulgation will be considered anew (a kind of partial veto); however, if such law is passed again, then it shall be promulgated anyway.

The literature on presidential activism has usually focused on Presidents' capacity of exploiting their discretionary use of formal powers. However, informal powers, defined as actions and behaviours not clearly codified in the Constitution (Grimaldi 2021), can matter as well. These powers include public speeches, bargaining strategies, private talks and meeting behind closed doors. Indeed, in the Italian

⁵ Notice that the President may not exercise such right during the final six months of the presidential term, unless such period coincides in full or in part with the final six months of Parliament.

context, beside the opportunities described above, which are directly prescribed by the Constitution, the political influence of the President, and often the public perception around him, is also shaped by other informal powers. Amongst them, the President can take advantage of some strategies of moral suasion (Amoretti and Giannone 2014). These strategies usually lie in the grey area involving his personal and political relationships with the Prime Minister and the cabinet (Lippolis and Salerno 2013). They are activated by communicating President's personal concerns about bills or political actions taken by the government directly to the cabinet, through face-to-face informal talks in closed-door meetings.

Finally, another informal strategy consists in the so called power of *esternazione* (declaration), which refers to his possibility to publicly express personal individual opinions concerning several political matters, without previous consultation with the cabinet (Amoretti and Giannone 2014; Tebaldi 2014). All these elements can be seen as strategies to engage in everyday politics and to influence the actions of the cabinet.

Such formal and informal powers, however, rest on the assumption that the President is a non-partisan political actor that, being neutral, should not interfere with everyday politics (unless national unity or other fundamental values described in the Constitution are put at risk).

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Based on this, we want to investigate whether Italian Heads of State are really non-partisan actors that distance themselves from everyday political conflict, even in terms of language and contents expressed in their declarations. As such we formulate two research questions.

Research Question 1 (RQ1): Can we really consider the Head of State as a non-partisan political actor or, to the contrary, are we able to detect his ideological leaning from public speeches and declarations?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): If the ideological leaning of Head of State can be detected, under which conditions the positions of the President are more different than those expressed by Prime Ministers?

Starting from these two research questions, the paper will try to investigate similarities and differences in the ideological positions of Heads of State and Prime Ministers, assessing which elements are associated with a higher or lower ideological disagreement between the two actors. To start with, we argue that the ideological affiliation of the two actors does matter. Indeed, Tavits (2008) noted that presidents can be more passive when the same party controls both the presidency and the legislature. Accordingly, differences between Presidents and Prime Ministers can emerge especially when they come from opposing parties (Grimaldi 2021).

Despite the multiparty character of Italian politics, until recent years almost all the Presidents and Prime Ministers could have been assigned to three historical and distinct ideological families: The Christian Democrats, the Liberals/Liberal-democrats (combining conservative and democratic viewpoints), as well as the Socialists/Social-democrats (along with their heirs).⁶ Since the ideological culture in which each politician grew up can affect the attitudes expressed in public declarations, we hypothesize that when the ideological affiliation of the President matches that of the Prime Minister, the ideological distance between the two actors should be lower.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): The ideological distance between Presidents and Prime Ministers is lower when both belong to the same ideological family.

Net of their ideological affiliation, the closeness between Presidents and Prime Ministers can also be affected by other elements. Notably, when Heads of State appoint a PM of their choice, we would expect

⁶ The only exceptions could be the PMs Giuseppe Conte and Giorgia Meloni.

to observe a lower ideological distance between them. Over time, since the beginning of the Italian Republic, we can find several examples of “President’s cabinets”. The very first President’s cabinet dates back to Pella, appointed by Einaudi in 1953, followed few years later by Zoli (appointed by Gronchi in 1957). Additional examples can be found during the Second Republic (or during the transition to it): Scalfaro appointed the Ciampi (1993) and Dini (1995) cabinets, while Napolitano appointed the Monti cabinet in 2011 and the Letta I cabinet in (2013). This usually happened in times of political instability or economic turmoil, when the President was able to take advantage of agenda-setting powers, exploiting them in a more discretionary way. Consequently, we can hypothesize what follows:

Hypothesis 2 (H2): The ideological distance between Presidents and Prime Ministers is lower when a “President’s cabinet” was appointed.

Finally, as discussed above, the disagreement between a President and a Prime Minister can also occur during the process of government formation. Sometimes the name of some politicians to be appointed as ministers are actually disapproved by the President. Although the discussion between Presidents and Prime Ministers takes place behind closed doors, often some informal rumours emerge indicating that the Presidents refused to appoint one specific minister. The most recent example concerns Mattarella’s rejection of Savona as Minister of the Economy in the Conte I cabinet, but other instances took place in the past: In 1979 Sandro Pertini requested to replace the proposed Minister of Defence in the Cossiga cabinet; other rejections involved the Ministry of Justice: in 1994 Oscar Luigi Scalfaro rejected Berlusconi’s proposal to nominate his lawyer, Cesare Previti in such position; in 2001 Carlo Azeglio Ciampi vetoed Roberto Maroni and in 2014 Napolitano put a ban on the prosecutor Nicola Gratteri.

We can expect that such disagreement will be reflected also in a higher ideological distance between the President and the cabinet. Accordingly:

Hypothesis 3 (H3): The ideological distance between the President and the Prime Minister is higher when the President rejected one of the ministers proposed by the Prime Minister.

Measuring the Ideological Positions of Heads of State

To answer our research questions and to test our hypotheses concerning the ideological disagreement between Presidents and Prime Ministers we need to estimate their positions.

Scholars argued that Presidents' speeches represent a source of power, particularly when major issues are at stake (Eshbaugh-Soha 2006). Accordingly, and taking the cue from studies on the power of *esternazione* (e.g., Tebaldi 2014), we argue that the public declarations delivered by Presidents in specific key moments of their mandate can be informative on their core ideological leaning. Indeed, since a long time, political speeches are a crucial source of information suitable to assess the policy position of political actors. The analysis of speeches or written documents has been used to estimate the positions of political parties (Budge et al. 2001), legislators (Giannetti and Pedrazzani 2016), governments (Klüver and Bäck 2019), or intra-party factions (Ceron 2019), among other actors.

Consequently, to measure the ideological position of the Head of State we relied on the content analysis of speeches delivered by them during their term. By doing that, we produced a new and original dataset (which is part of the HIPSTEXT database: Hand-coded Italian Political Speeches and Texts). We focused on two specific types of speeches: the Presidents' investiture speeches, delivered when the President takes office, along with the New Year's Eve address. These speeches have been widely used for academic research (e.g., Bernardi and Tuzzi 2007; Bolasco et al. 2006; Cortelazzo and Tuzzi 2007; Fusaro 2003). Indeed, they represent a well-established tradition in Italian politics. The first New Year's Eve speech

was delivered by Luigi Einaudi in 1949;⁷ such presidential messages, which became slightly longer over time (especially in the 1990s), offer valuable insights into the Italian socio-economic context and the ongoing political situation (Cortelazzo and Tuzzi 2007) and are deemed influential as both citizens, news media, parties and political actors do pay attention to them.

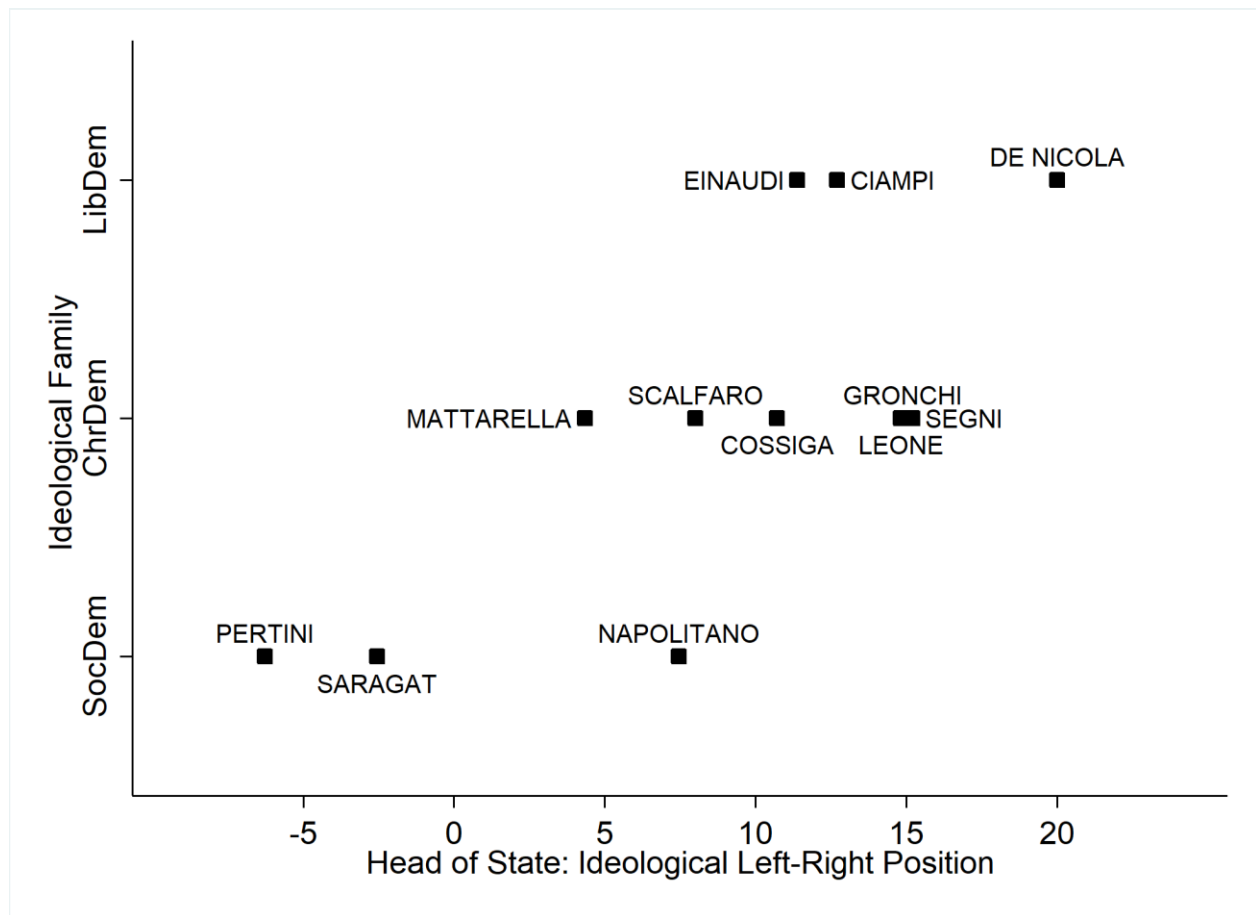
We hand-coded these speeches using a coding scheme similar to that of the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP: Budge et al. 2001), though the original 56 CMP categories have been expanded to 68, in order to take into account some peculiarities of the Italian context (such as positive or negative references made by parties to the Catholic Church). Each speech was divided into quasi-sentences, and each quasi-sentence was assigned to one of these 68 categories. The final ideological position of the President was then assessed through an adjusted version of the well-known CMP RILE scale, in which the percentage of quasi-sentences belonging to categories associated with left-wing positions is subtracted from that of right-wing categories. Accordingly, this ideological scale theoretically ranges from -100 (only left-wing quasi-sentences have been included in the speech) to +100 (only right-wing quasi-sentences are mentioned in the speech). This omni-comprehensive scale covers different policy domains (with a stronger attention for economic or social issues, as well as for foreign policy topics). It takes into account several policy features, ranging from the support/aversion toward the army, the European Union (EU) and the Western World, the support/aversion for free market, Welfare State and State intervention into the economy, or the support/aversion for patriotism, law and order, civil rights and immigration. As such, the scale seems suitable to catch the traditional ideological cleavages dividing the political left from the right.

Figure 1 displays the positions of the Presidents on this ideological left-right dimension. All the Presidents retain overall relatively moderate positions (ranging from -6.3 to +20), even though some

⁷ Consequently, for the first (provisional) Head of State, Enrico De Nicola (1946-1947), we estimated his position relying on his investiture speech only.

differences exist across Presidents. At a first sight, there seems to be an association between the position on the scale and the affiliation of the Presidents with one of the three ideological families mentioned above.

Figure 1: Ideological Left-Right Position of the Head of State (by Ideological Family)



For instance, the three Presidents belonging to a socialist or social democratic ideological family are located on the left (average value: -0.5) compared to the Christian democrats (11.3) and the liberals (14.7). The left-wing socialist politician Sandro Pertini is properly classified as the most left-leaning President (-6.3), whereas Enrico De Nicola, a conservative liberal-democratic politician, is the most

right-wing one (20). Conversely, the other two Heads of State with a liberal (though more progressive) background stand on a more moderate position. Presidents belonging to right-wing Christian Democracy (DC) factions, such as Antonio Segni (15.2), Giovanni Leone (14.8) and Francesco Cossiga (10.7), are located on the right side as well. To the contrary, Mattarella, member of centre-left DC factions, stands to their left (4.3). Summing up, the polychoric correlation between their ideological position and their respective ideological family is positive and significant (0.8).

While the ideological scale covers several policy domains, this measure is positively correlated especially with economic topics (0.69) and social issues (0.54); such linear associations are statistically significant, suggesting that leftist Presidents favours a stronger intervention of the State into the economy as well as more progressive social policies. To the contrary, the correlation between ideology and foreign policy is weak (0.15) and not significant. However, we know that specific competencies in the field of defence and foreign policy represent crucial formal attributions that the Italian Constitution has assigned to the Head of State (Tebaldi et al. 2022). In particular, art. 87 Const., indicates that the President is the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, shall preside over the Supreme Council of Defence established by law, and shall make declarations of war (as have been agreed by Parliament); the President shall also accredit and receive diplomatic representatives and ratify international treaties (which have been, when required, authorized by the Parliament). In view of that, the political position of Presidents on foreign policy issues deserves further attention (Coticchia and Vignoli 2021; Tebaldi et al. 2022). Figure 2 displays the position of Presidents on the foreign policy dimension with respect to their overall ideological leaning. The vertical axis reports their location on an anti-Atlantic/pro-Atlantic scale, in which higher values indicate that the President is more willing to support military expenditure, to sustain the Atlantic alliances with the USA and the NATO or to expand the EU integration.

Figure 2: Ideological Left-Right and Foreign Policy Attitudes of Heads of State

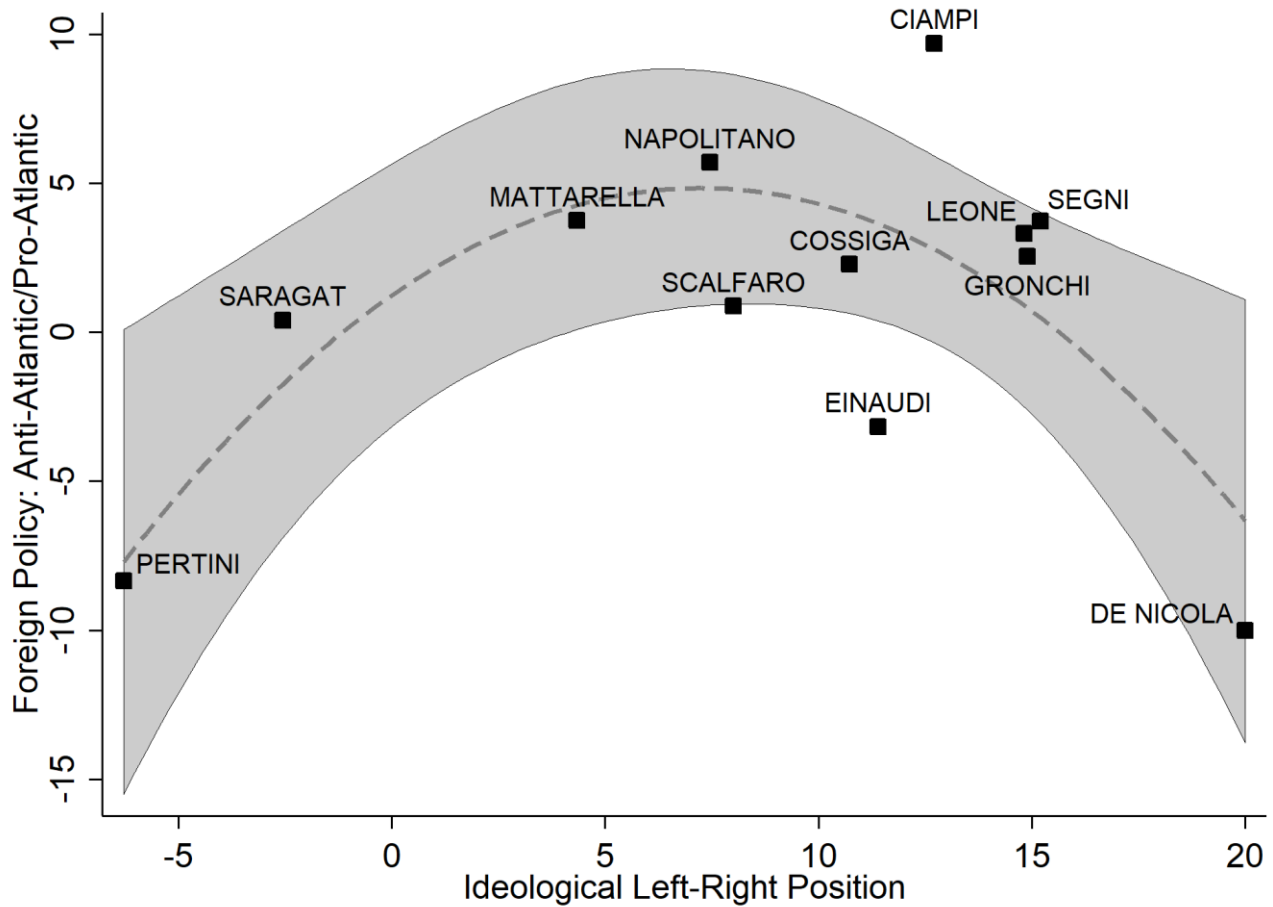


Figure 2 highlights a quadratic relationship between ideology and the anti-Atlantic/pro-Atlantic cleavage (e.g., Wagner et al. 2017): moderate Presidents express stronger support for NATO, EU or the army, than their less moderate counterparts (most notably Pertini, who was in office during the Sigonella crisis between Italy and the USA, and De Nicola, who attempted to refuse signing the Paris Peace Treaty between Italy and the victorious powers of World War II, in 1947).

Data and Analysis

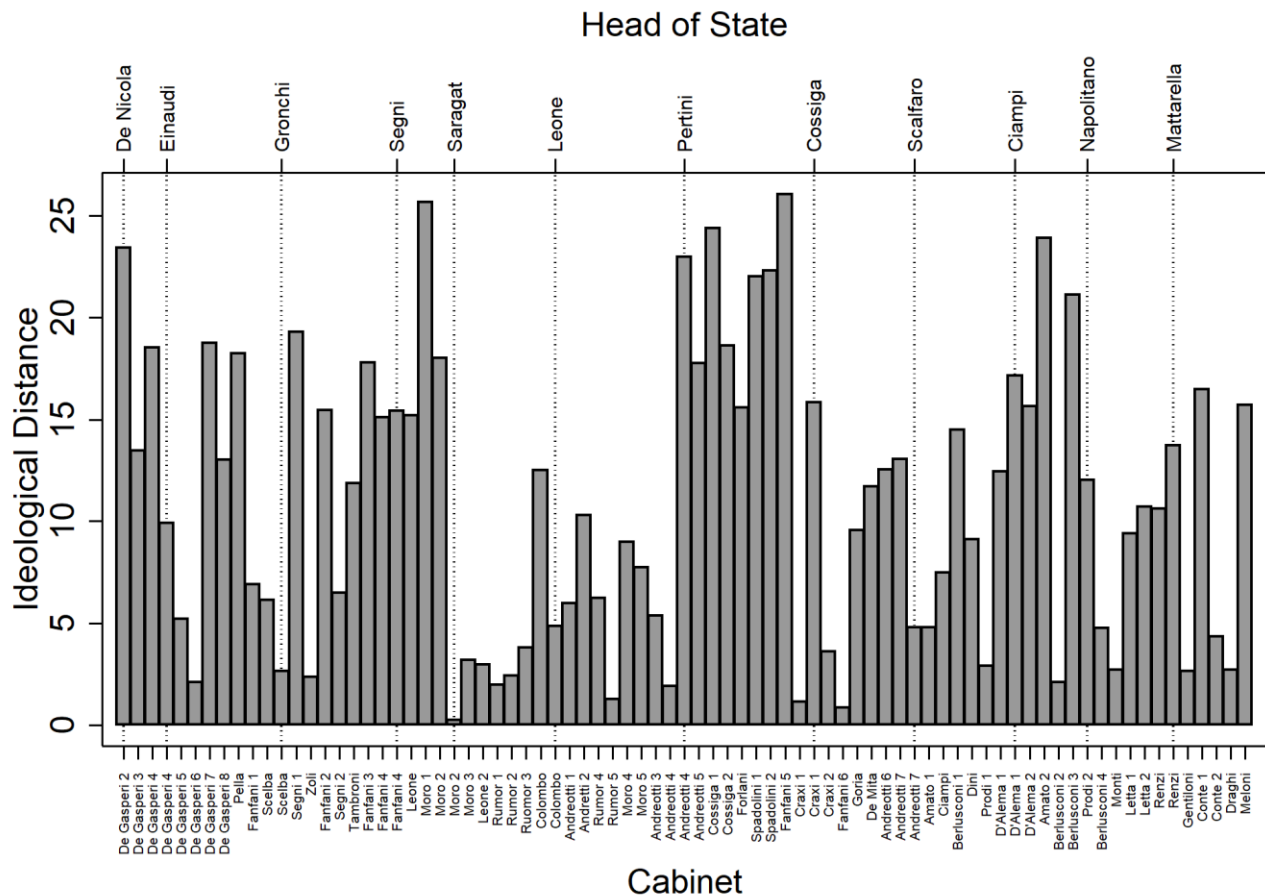
To test our hypotheses, we need to contrast Presidents' and Prime Ministers' ideological positions. Prime Ministers positions are taken from the Italian Legislative Speeches Dataset (ILSD), which is based on the hand-coding of cabinets investiture debates through the same coding scheme discussed above (Ceron 2012). This ensures the comparability between the two sources of data. The variable Ideological Distance is equal to the gap between the President and the Prime Minister on the adjusted version of the RILE scale. Figure 3 displays Ideological Distance over time. Overall, there are 79 bars; 69 are related to new original governments (from De Gasperi II to Meloni), while 10 of them refer to governments that are included twice in the analysis because a new Head of State was elected to replace the previous President, when the cabinet was already formed.⁸ Ideological Distance ranges from 0.25 to 26.08, with an average value equal to 10.9 (standard deviation: 7.18). There is some variation over time though. We observe higher distances at the beginning of the 1960s (1960-1964), when an internally divided DC (Ceron 2019) struggled to launch the centre-left coalition formula, to include the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) into the government (after years of more conservative centrist cabinets). The distance grew again at the beginning of the 1980s, when the centre-left formula was definitely dismissed in favour of a larger coalition (*Pentapartito*), which also included the Italian Liberal Party.

Overall, highest values mark the difference between the socialist Pertini and cabinets led by Prime Ministers belonging to the right-wing DC factions, such as Andreotti IV (23) or Cossiga I (24.4). In the Second Republic, we also notice a large gap between Ciampi and Berlusconi III (21.1). Instead, we find a lower distance between the social-democratic Giuseppe Saragat and centre-left cabinets such as Moro II (0.3) and Moro III (3.2) or Rumor I (2), II (2.4) and III (3.8). Similarly, we find a closeness between the PSI President Pertini and the PSI led Craxi I cabinet (1.2) or, in the Second Republic, between Scalfaro and Prodi I (2.9). The case of Mattarella, a former politician of the Democratic Party, is

⁸ Notice that this did not happen when Napolitano was elected, 15th May 2006, since he appointed a new cabinet immediately after his election (Prodi II, 16th May 2006).

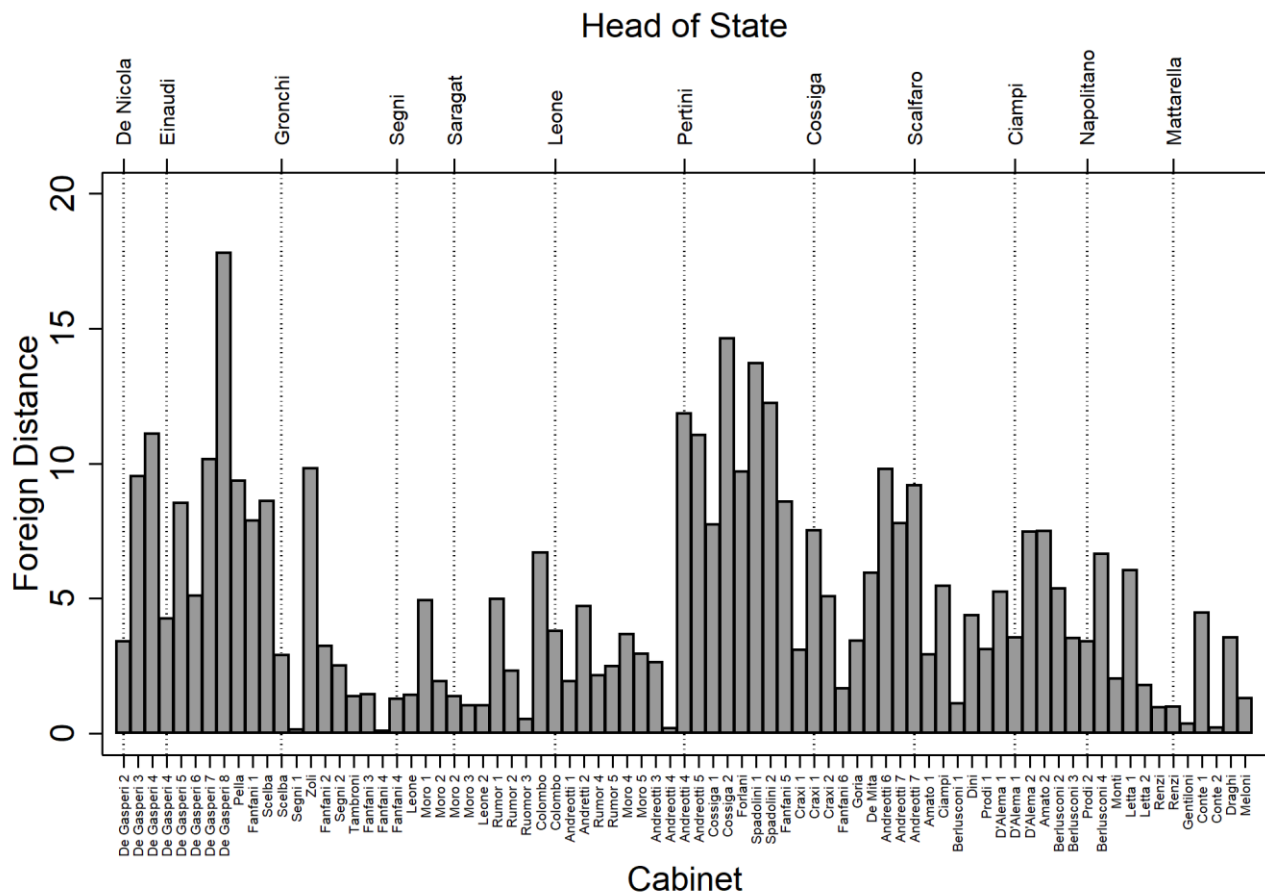
particularly interesting. During his term, due to strong levels of political instability, Mattarella was able to play the accordion and enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy during the process of cabinet formation. Indeed, our measurement reports a striking ideological similarity between him and several cabinets, including Gentiloni (2.7), Draghi (2.7) and Conte II (4.3). The tiny distance from the centre-left Conte II should also be put in contrast with the higher gap from the previous cabinet, Conte I (16.5), which Mattarella disliked up to the point of rejecting the nomination of the minister of the Economy on the ground of Savona’s Euroscepticism. It is worth noticing that the gap between Mattarella and the populist Conte I (Ceron et al. 2021) is quite similar to his distance from the current right-wing government led by Giorgia Meloni (15.7).

Figure 3: Ideological Distance between Heads of State and Prime Ministers



While Ideological Distance is our primary dependent variable, we will also test our hypotheses separately on a different dependent variable that records the differences on the foreign policy dimension alone. Figure 4 displays this variable over time. We observe higher differences between Presidents and Prime Ministers on foreign policy attitudes at the beginning of the Italian Republic (1946) and during the Years of Lead.

Figure 4: Foreign Policy Distance between Heads of State and Prime Ministers



This comes as no surprise. Indeed, immediately after World War II, Italy was among the countries that had lost the war and there was uncertainty about the direction of its foreign policy. The Years of Lead

(“*Anni di piombo*”), has been a critical period in Italian history too. It was characterized by social and political turmoil with a spike of political violence and repeated episodes of far-left and far-right terrorism. It started in December 1969, with the Piazza Fontana bombing, and lasted until the trial for the killing of Aldo Moro by the Red Brigades, in December 1982 (political violence almost disappeared afterward). In the same period, rumours emerged about the existence of a “Strategy of tension”, with the involvement of foreign states and secret services. This can partially explain the variation in the distance over time. Summing up, Foreign Distance is on average equal to 5.02 (standard deviation: 3.85) and it ranges from 0.10 to 17.81.

We now turn to investigating the elements that affect the ideological and political distance between Heads of State and Prime Ministers. The statistical analysis has been performed through an OLS regression. Table 1 displays the results. In Model 1 we test the impact of our main independent variables, which are the following ones: Ideological Affinity (H1), is a dummy variable equal to 1 when the President and the Prime Minister belong to the same ideological family; President’s Cabinet (H2) is a dummy variable that records cabinets promoted by the Head of State; Minister Rejection (H3) is a dummy variable that accounts for cabinets in which one of the ministers was initially rejected by the President.

In Model 2 we additionally control for the occurrence of crises. In fact, the accordion metaphor suggests that Presidents can play a peculiar role when the political system is under pressure. This was the case especially during the Scalfaro term (1992-1999), when the country was affected by a political turmoil due to the *Tangentopoli* scandal (Ceron and Mainenti 2015) and the relevance and visibility of the Head of State grew (Amoretti and Giannone 2014). To control for this, we add the variable Crisis, which accounts for specific periods of systemic crisis that the Italian democracy met over time. In particular, we combine together several crises including *Tangentopoli* (1992-1994), the Years of Lead (1969-1982), and the Covid emergency (2020-2022), which reshaped everyday politics.

Model 3 and 4 replicate the previous models testing them on the alternative dependent variable Foreign Distance; given the curvilinear relationship between ideology and foreign policy (e.g., Wagner et al. 2017), we include the ideological Left-Right scale and its quadratic term among the regressors.

Table 1: Analysis of Ideological Distance between Presidents and Prime Ministers

VARIABLES	(1) Ideological Distance	(2) Ideological Distance	(3) Foreign Distance	(4) Foreign Distance
Ideological Affinity	-5.864*** (1.590)	-5.939*** (1.699)	-2.676*** (0.855)	-2.764*** (0.890)
President's Cabinet	-6.480*** (2.191)	-6.480*** (2.215)	-1.889* (1.102)	-1.812* (1.078)
Minister Rejection	1.473 (2.769)	1.428 (2.712)	-2.229 (1.958)	-2.339 (1.998)
Left Right			0.193** (0.076)	0.167** (0.074)
Left Right X Left Right			-0.001 (0.003)	0.000 (0.003)
Crisis		0.406 (1.603)		0.809 (0.960)
Constant	13.319*** (1.129)	13.217*** (1.190)	4.629*** (0.567)	4.437*** (0.577)
Observations	79	79	79	79
R-squared	0.181	0.182	0.263	0.270

Notes: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1, robust standard errors in parentheses

To start with, Ideological Affinity (H1) is strongly associated with Ideological Distance, at the 99% level of confidence. When the President and the Prime Minister share the same ideological leaning, we can expect to observe a convergence of their ideology as expressed in public declarations. The gap between the two in terms of Ideological Distance will shrink by 6 points (-55% compared to its average value), which is almost equal to a one standard deviation decrease from the mean. Foreign Distance will decrease too, by approximately 2.7 points (-54% compared to its mean). Interestingly, the effect of President's

Cabinet (H2) is strong and significant too, though this impact is more evident for the ideological gap than for the distance on foreign policy. When the President appoints a Prime Minister of his choice, the overall ideological distance between the two will be 6.5 points lower; conversely, the effect on Foreign Distance is around -1.8. Contrary to the expectations, when a President rejected a minister, the ideological gap between him and the Prime Ministers is not affected. This could happen because, while rejecting a minister can be a sign of disagreement (which should in principle lead to a higher distance), the adjustments made to comply with the President's request will produce a cabinet that is less distant and these two effects can cancel each other out.

Conclusion

The present paper tried to shed light on whether the Head of State in Italy can be considered as a non-partisan political actor by assessing whether the content of his key public speeches, such as the investiture speech and New Year's Eve addresses, can be analysed to infer his ideological leanings. For this purpose, a new and original dataset has been created by means of content analysis. This dataset is part of the HIPSTEXT database (Hand-coded Italian Political Speeches and Texts) and maps the political position of Italian Heads of State over 76 years (1946-2022), reporting their overall ideological leaning as well as the position on foreign policy issues. The distances between the President and the PM on these two scales have been analysed to investigate which elements are associated with a stronger or lower gap.

The results of statistical analysis reveal that Presidents and PMs are closer when they belong to the same ideological party family and when the PM has been appointed to form a President's cabinet, which should be more aligned with the preferences of the Head of State. The effects are stronger especially when focusing on the overall ideological positions rather than when only foreign policy issues are considered.

These findings indicate that the ideological leaning of Heads of States can be inferred from their public declarations, and the partisanship of the President still matters in defining the content of his speeches. The strong and significant effect of President's Cabinet can further suggest that the President is really able to influence everyday politics and to shape policy-making when appointing a PM of his choice.

From a normative point of view, this could open the debate around the powers of the Head of State. If the President is not merely a *super partes* authority in charge of safeguarding national unity, but a political actor that expresses partisan ideological leanings and that could act accordingly (especially under some conditions), this would call for a Constitutional reform able to match the current *de facto* role of the President with his *de iure* powers.

While higher ideological distance entails a stronger disagreement between the President and the PM, it remains to answer the question of whether such disagreement will be translated into concrete political actions by the President, generating a power struggle between institutions. If this is the case, given the larger ideological gap between Mattarella and the right-wing Meloni cabinet (which is similar to the distance from him and the yellow-green populist Conte I), we would expect to observe actions taken by Mattarella to influence the policy-making or to express his dissent during the XIX Legislature. In this regard, however, the past behaviour of Mattarella is emblematic of how the President can play the accordion, exploiting his powers only when the political system is weak. Indeed, in 2018, in a context of stalemate where no clear majority emerged from the elections, Mattarella did his best to avoid the formation of an unwanted populist coalition, trying several different options before the Conte I was finally appointed. Conversely, in 2022, he immediately appointed Meloni as the centre-right won the elections and secured a clear and wide parliamentary majority.

Future research could address this topic, assessing whether disagreement, per se, will lead the President to exert his formal and informal powers (Grimaldi 2021), such as moral suasion and the power of

esternazione, or the power to veto the promulgation of laws, sending them back, joint with a reasoned rejection message, to the Parliament.

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