

Italian coalitions and electoral promises: assessing the democratic performance of the Prodi I and Berlusconi II governments

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Italian party coalitions (from both the centre-left and the centre-right) have enacted an average of 57% of the pledges included in their common manifestos. In relative terms, Italian political parties keep their electoral promises much less than parties governing in single-party government, but slightly outperform those that form post-electoral coalitions. Although this finding contradicts the widespread pessimism about Italy's performance, it also illustrates that there is no significant advantage to bipolarism and the existence of a common programme as opposed to situations where coalitions are formed after the elections. This might explain Italians' dissatisfaction with the way democracy works in their country.

Keywords: coalition governance; electoral pledges; Italian political parties; institutions

Introduction

It has been said that the political leaders of Italy's First Republic (1947–1992) were incapable of adopting important policy reform even though these ministers were often reappointed after government crises. To cite the title of Di Palma's well-known book, Italian political parties have been able to 'survive' but not 'govern' (Di Palma 1978). The author convincingly demonstrates that the governing majorities were unable to adopt major reforms or fulfil their electoral pledges. Instead, they produced a massive amount of legislation that was narrow in scope and served specific constituencies (see also Capano and Giuliani 2001). This behaviour resulted in an alarming level of public debt in the 1980s.

The reasons for the First Republic parties' inability to decide are well known: the political system at that time was characterised by a multiplicity of parties and political institutions, each of which was in a position to prevent significant reforms. The party system, based on proportional representation rules, was extremely fragmented: it featured a sizeable Communist Party that was constantly excluded from government, a pivotal but highly factious Democratic Party, and smaller parties that were often necessary for a parliamentary majority. The system of preference votes also made it very difficult for party leaders to control their parliamentary parties (Vassallo 2007). Moreover, parliamentary procedure rules¹ provided the leader of each parliamentary group with a predominant agenda-setting role (under the unanimous agreement rule), enabled small groups of MPs to

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considerably delay the examination of bills (by not establishing deadlines for the debating process) and allowed MPs to introduce numerous amendments to government bills (Capano and Giuliani 2003, 12–15). Finally, the Constitution provided (and still provides) for a Prime Minister with very limited powers, two chambers with inconsistent majorities (in which each bill must be passed)² and parliamentary committees with strong prerogatives (such as the power to legislate directly). In a nutshell, Parliament predominated over the Executive and the number of veto players was so high that any significant move from the status quo was virtually impossible.

Things started to change when a new mixed electoral system was adopted through the referendum of 1993,³ which substantially reformed the political system and hence put an end to the ‘First Republic’.⁴ The resulting new system consisted of the election of three-quarters of the senators and ‘deputies’ by means of the first-past-the-post system in single-member districts, and the other quarter by means of a PR system.⁵ In all subsequent elections (including those since the 2005 reform which almost brought back proportional representation)⁶, the two coalitions (centre-left and centre-right) have been presented to the voters under the leadership of that coalition’s chosen candidate for the premiership, and most often with a common electoral platform.⁷ Moreover, Parliament reformed its standing order in 1997–1998 so as to provide the government, and the Speaker, with greater agenda-setting powers (Capano and Giuliani 2003). In addition, the Prime Minister’s position within the cabinet has been strengthened (Vassallo 2007). All these developments have profoundly changed the Italian political system. Elections have become decisive: in theory at least, the electorate can vote for a programme and choose a prime minister and a coalition team capable of implementing their electoral pledges.

However, the electoral reform of 1993 did not remove all the obstacles that governing parties must face when making policy. As described in detail below, MPs have a role in the agenda-setting and legislative process, which considerably weakens the Executive. Also, the existence of single-member constituencies obliges the largest parties to include ‘micro’ parties in their coalition to maximise their chance of winning, thus giving those small parties (especially from the centre-left coalitions) the opportunity to pressure and blackmail their larger coalition partners (Bull and Pasquino 2007; Conti 2008). As a result, the change introduced in 1993 did not lessen Italian dissatisfaction with the way democracy works in their country.⁸ As Bull and Rhodes put it recently, ‘Ten years later . . . it is fair to speak of a feeling of dashed expectations. The much-vaunted “Second Republic” has clearly not arrived, even if the “First” is apparently clearly no longer with us’ (Bull and Rhodes 2007, 660).

In this article, I propose to fuel the debate with some empirical evidence by measuring the ability of political parties in the Second Republic to fulfil the pledges they made to voters in their electoral programmes. Using a homogeneous methodology designed by researchers belonging to the same research group, Italy can be compared with four other West European countries (the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Sweden). This comparison is very interesting as it not only allows us to contrast Italy with single-party and post-electoral coalition governments but also to compare Italian minority governments with those in other countries. In my view, this is a good – and relatively objective – way of assessing the efficiency of the Second Republic from a comparative perspective. As case studies, I focus on two past governments that drafted a common pre-electoral programme, one centre-left (Prodi I) and one centre-right (Berlusconi II),

and measure to what extent they kept their electoral promises. These results are then compared with those for the fulfilment of pledges in single-party governments governing as a majority (UK, 1974–1977) and a minority (1994–2002) and in post-electoral coalitions with (Netherlands, 1986–1998; Ireland 1977–2002) and without a majority (Ireland 1981–1982; 1997–2002).

The article is structured as follows: the first section sets my research questions within the context of ‘party mandate theory’, which predicts that voters choose parties to enact particular policies and that the parties subsequently enact them. The second specifies how the empirical data were collected and presents the empirical results. To anticipate my results, I intend to show in this article that Italian pre-electoral coalitions fulfil the promises included in their common programmes to a (much) lesser extent than parties in single-party governments (including minority ones). On the other hand, the Italian coalitions’ fulfilment of pledges included in their common programmes is only slightly higher than that of pledges made by post-electoral coalition parties and included in their individual manifestos. Hence, there is no significant advantage to bipolarism and the existence of a common programme as opposed to situations where coalitions are formed after the elections. This might explain the general feeling of dissatisfaction that followed the end of the First Republic.

Testing the party mandate model

Katz defined ‘party government’ as governments where policies are made by the parties (Katz 1986, 7). He adds that party governments are democratic when people freely elect parties and where there is alternation of power. Several scholars have since stressed other fundamental conditions to qualify a party government system as democratic. Among these, the party mandate model, also known as the ‘promissory representation model’ (Mansbridge 2003),⁹ features a system where voters choose parties according to the policies they propose and, once in power, they enact these policies. This model is based on two prerequisites. On one hand, the model requires voters to judiciously weigh up their voting options: they should use information about the parties’ positions and choose to vote for parties that propose the policy positions closest to their own. On the other, the party system is expected to be competitive and political parties should offer distinct policy options, impose party discipline and efficiently carry out the mandate given by voters. Consequently, it is the voters’ choice in the elections that indirectly controls political decisions, given that the political party fulfils the pledges made to the voters (Klingemann, Hofferbert and Budge 1994; Royed 1996; Pierce 1999; Thomson 2001).¹⁰ Electoral programmes are persuasively assumed to be the best indicators of what parties communicate to the voters, not so much because voters read them, but because they determine the political discourse of party officials during the electoral campaign (Klingemann, Hofferbert and Budge 1994; Costello and Thomson 2008)¹¹. The argument made against this model is that many voters do not have an in-depth knowledge of the policies proposed by the parties and they rely on their ideology as a proxy when making their voting choices (Downs 1957, 98). Even if this is true, it still makes sense to argue that, in an efficient democratic political system, parties should enact the policies they told the voters they would bring in.

The most ambitious comparative project measuring this aspect of party performance was that of the Manifesto Research Group (MRG) (Hofferbert and Budge 1992; Klingemann, Hofferbert and Budge 1994).¹² These scholars measured how the emphasis given by parties to a certain policy is reflected in an increase in government spending in the specific policy area. They conclude that party government works largely as mandate theories say it should, i.e. in response to electoral endorsements of party policies. As discussed by Royed (1996, 51–54), the main problem with this approach is that it assumes that there is an implicit promise to increase spending on a policy when it is written about at greater length although, in fact, sentences might include pledges to decrease spending or even promise a policy change that does not need a budget adjustment.

Hence, Royed (1996) took a more straightforward approach to assessing the fulfilment of party pledges in the UK and United States, namely that of looking at specific pledges in party programmes and determining whether or not they were carried out. She formulated a specific method of identifying a ‘pledge’ and its ‘fulfilment’ (see above), which was subsequently used by various scholars (the Comparative Party Pledge Group, CPPG) to test the fulfilment of party programmes in the Netherlands (Thomson 2001), Ireland (Mansergh 2003), Spain (Artes and Bustos 2007), New Zealand (McCluskey 2008) and Sweden (Naurin 2009) and to test the transfer of coalition agreements into governmental decisions in Belgium, the Netherlands and Italy (Moury 2011, forthcoming). All these scholars conclude that most of the pledges (sometimes the overwhelming majority) included in the party or government programme were actually enacted.

But this approach also has its limitations. First, the CPPG scholars look mainly at whether a law fulfilling the pledge was passed, without determining whether it was properly implemented or if it achieved the desired outcome. Many also acknowledge the difficulty of distinguishing between a ‘fully’ and ‘partially fulfilled’ pledge, and some (including me) have decided to merge the categories so as to compare ‘at least partially fulfilled’ pledges with those that are ‘not fulfilled’. The need for such choices arose because the approach is very time consuming and researchers need to draw a line somewhere. However, we must acknowledge that this method is very ‘generous’ with parties when assessing their fulfilment score. Another problem with this method is that all election promises are treated equally. For example, a promise to reduce taxes by 10% is weighted in the same way as promises about substituting old civil service computers. The scholars studying pledges convincingly argue that it is difficult to give different weights to different pledges. Moreover, this flaw is much less important than it seems since, generally speaking, the more pledges there are on a particular issue, the more the issue can be considered as significant to the party in question. While recognising these considerations, I still believe this is the most convincing approach for measuring congruence between party promises and policy outcomes.

The above-mentioned work of the CPPG scholars allows some comparison with my results for Italy. However, due to the small number of comparable countries and the large number of potentially explanatory variables, I am unable to test any hypotheses that seek to explain the differences in the extent to which pledges are fulfilled. In this research, I therefore content myself with measuring pledge fulfilment and asking *to what extent Italian political leaders fulfil their electoral pledges*.

Meanwhile, we should note that the keeping of manifesto promises will generally be easier for parties in single-party systems than in systems where coalition is the rule. Whereas decision-making is highly centralised in the first case, the parties’ chosen policies

need to accommodate those of other coalition parties in the second. Hence, we may expect the fulfilment of pledges in coalition to be poorer than in single-party government systems.

In the specific case of Italy, parties form coalitions before the elections and present voters with common policy platforms with which they hope to gain an electoral mandate for a term in office. Like all coalition agreements, such a document includes policies upon which the participants agree, but it also determines the overall balance of concessions made by the various parties. Some concede on one issue, others on another. While it is true that parties may in time forget their initial tolerance, in theory it should be easier for the members of a coalition team to fulfil the pledges included in their common programme than the sum of the pledges included in their individual manifestos. Hence, it should be expected that pledges made by coalition parties are more faithfully carried out when there is a common pre-electoral programme.

Methodology

As already mentioned, I have employed the method developed by Royed (1996), and also used by various scholars, to calculate how far the common manifesto has been translated into decisions. This technique has proved highly reliable and consists of identifying pledges in the electoral programme (for us, the common manifesto) and verifying their fulfilment.

In concrete terms, the first step in this method involves codifying all the pledges included in the common manifesto. Then pledges about *outcomes* (e.g. to 'reduce unemployment', 'reduce the public deficit', 'increase safety') – compliance with which not only depends on Cabinet decisions but also on external factors – are distinguished from pledges concerning *actions* (e.g. to 'provide subsidies to companies to hire the unemployed', 'raise spending on the disabled', 'increase the number of policemen on the streets') – compliance with which depends only on the Cabinet. In order to remove the impact of unexpected events that make some of the 'outcome pledges' impossible to fulfil, I consider only pledges concerning *actions*.

I then distinguish three types of pledges involving actions: (1) non-testable pledges, the fulfilment of which is practically impossible to assess because they are too vague or relate to values or norms, e.g. 'to promote the well-being of citizens'; (2) imprecise pledges, the implementation of which is testable but allows the respective decision-maker a certain amount of discretion, e.g. 'to reduce taxes'; and (3) precise pledges,¹³ the implementation of which is precisely defined thus leaving the minister no room for discretion, e.g. 'to cut income tax by 3% for all employees in the private sector'. The selection of testable pledges is a key point in the analysis as it is crucial to a truly objective measurement of fulfilment. After identifying the pledges, I analyse degrees of fulfilment by examining each pledge and ascertaining whether we can find a government decision that was congruent with the proposal in the pledge. For example, if I want to assess the transfer of the pledge 'proposing a law on equal opportunities at work' into a government decision, I first read the concise analyses provided by the party itself (e.g. *Il programma dell'Ulivo: Le realizzazioni ottenute in questi quattro anni di governo*); by political scientists (e.g. *Politica in Italia*) and by journalists. If no information is found in the reports by such experts and journalists, I then search the parliamentary databases (collecting all cabinet decisions on that particular parliament), using key words (in our example, 'equal opportunities', 'gender', 'female', 'work', etc.).¹⁴ If I find a law on equal opportunities at work in the database, the pledge is

then considered fulfilled. If I cannot find any laws or cabinet decisions after submitting carefully selected and predefined key words, the pledge is considered unfulfilled. To determine whether budgetary pledges were congruent with government decisions, I rely more on the summaries of financial laws presented by the Council of Ministers to the press as they summarise the key points in a financial law.

I consider that a pledge was transferred into a government decision when it was either ‘fully fulfilled’ or ‘partially fulfilled’, so as to have a reliable form of coding. As I have also observed, Thomson (2001) found that the two-category distinction between ‘fully fulfilled or partially fulfilled’ and ‘not fulfilled’ was more reliable than the three-category distinction between ‘not fulfilled’, ‘partially fulfilled’ and ‘fully fulfilled’.¹⁵ Specifically, it is very difficult to state whether an imprecise pledge is ‘partially’ or ‘fully fulfilled’. For the same reasons, I did not carry out a qualitative assessment of each government decision. In the example given, the pledge was considered fulfilled if the common manifesto mentioned a law on equal opportunities at work, the government subsequently presented such a bill and the bill was passed by Parliament and became law; no consideration was given to whether the law was really efficient in increasing equal opportunities at work.

Setting the scene: political decision-making during the Italian Transition

The existing literature undoubtedly gives us more reasons to be pessimistic than optimistic about the capacity of Italian parties to fulfil their pledges. First, as Vassallo (2007) notes, Italy has an underdeveloped system of coalition governance, unlike other countries such as Belgium and the Netherlands (see also Moury and Timmermans 2008). In these countries, the formation of coalition governments is preceded by extensive negotiations, led by party leaders who often become ministers and are subsequently designated to guide the cabinet’s actions. This document is ratified by all party organs. In Italy, pre-electoral coalitions often present a common programme, but the drafting process does not include all coalition party leaders and the document is only rarely ratified by party bodies. Moreover, even if common programmes appear to be as long and complete in Italy as in Belgium and the Netherlands, they are much less precise and conflicts are not so carefully mapped in advance as in the other two countries (Timmermans and Moury 2008). Second, the Italian Constitution, the electoral law and the parliamentary procedure rules all converge to provide two chambers, with inconsistent majorities, in which each law must be passed and within which individual MPs¹⁶ and parliamentary group leaders and committees possess substantial prerogatives (Capano and Giuliani 2003). Third, while parties find it advantageous to form coalitions in order to win elections, the subsequent constraints are fewer and it is not uncommon to see a party leave a coalition soon after the vote (Diamanti 2007) or to observe the ‘micro-parties’ necessary for a majority pressuring and blackmailing their larger coalition partners (Bull and Pasquino 2007; Conti 2008).

As a result, Italian governments have great difficulty in getting their bills passed by Parliament; this is particularly true of the centre-left governments that happen to lack a strong leader and a (large) majority in both Chambers. For my two case studies (Prodi I and Berlusconi II), Figure 1 shows the proportion of government bills passed by Parliament. We can see that whereas only half of government bills were passed by the 13th Parliament, almost 90% of those presented by the Berlusconi II government were passed.

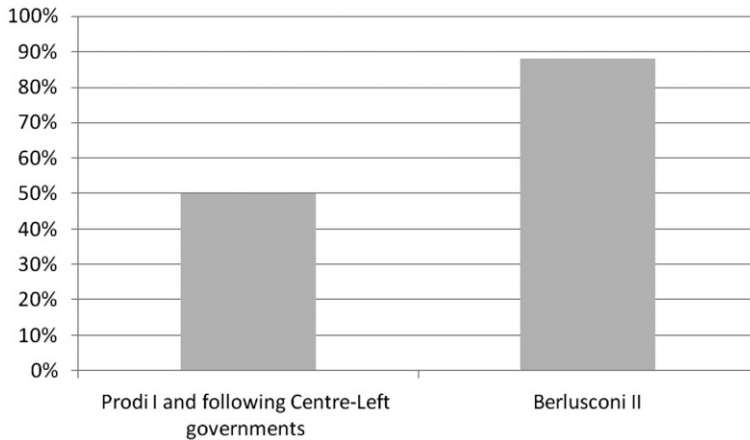


Figure 1. Government bills passed by Parliament.
Source: Own drafting on the basis of <http://www.Senato.it>

However, despite a substantial parliamentary majority, the government led by Berlusconi also encountered substantial difficulties in getting its bills approved by Parliament through the standard legislative procedure. This is clearly demonstrated by the fact that the centre-right government called for a vote of confidence on more occasions than would normally be expected. This procedure allows the Executive to give priority to the bill for which the vote of confidence is called, whilst also rejecting all the parliamentary amendments that have been tabled on the bill (Vassallo 2007).

However, several scholars have shown that the executive of the Second Republic managed to pass important legislation despite these difficulties. Capano and Giuliani (2001) and Vassallo (2007) demonstrate that the Executive made good use of ‘decree laws’ and ‘delegating laws’¹⁷ (Capano and Giuliani 2001; Vassallo 2007). To be more precise, Italian governments in the 1980s were already making broad use of their powers to promulgate ‘decree laws’ on the grounds of presumed, often non-existent, reasons of ‘necessity and urgency’. However, the number of delegating laws passed by the 13th and 14th Parliaments increased considerably. Figure 2, which is based on the data collected by Capano and Giuliani (2003) and by Zucchini (2010), shows a clear and recent increase in the number of delegating laws passed annually by Parliament. Moreover, the delegated powers were mainly in the policy fields covered in the common manifestos: for Prodi I, immigration, administrative decentralisation, fiscal policy and budgetary institutions and, for Berlusconi II, company law, the tax system, national broadcasting, labour-market reform and infrastructure construction (Capano and Giuliani 2003; Vassallo 2007).

Thus, the parliamentary majority groups were well aware of the need to delegate to the Executive in order to circumvent the slowness of the ordinary legislative process and implement their manifestos. This development somehow counterbalances the negative expectations regarding the ability and willingness of governing parties to fulfil their pledges.

Case studies: the common manifestos of Prodi I and Berlusconi II governments

There have been five general elections – 1994, 1996, 2001, 2006 and 2008 – since the electoral reform of 1993. My study covers two governments which had drafted a common

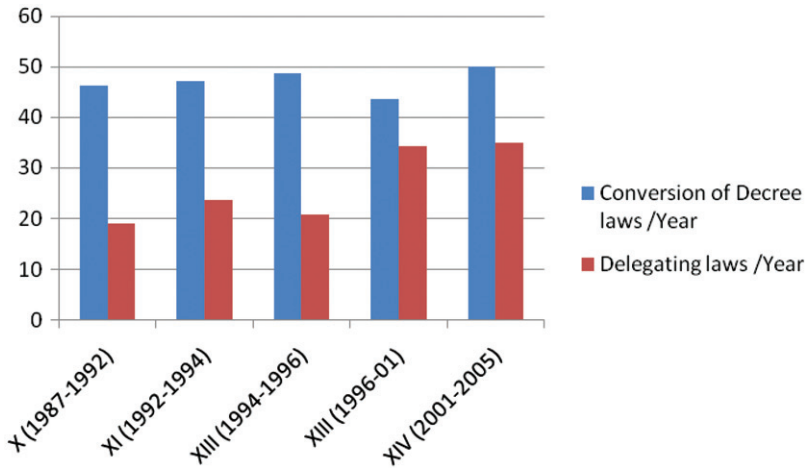


Figure 2. Yearly rate of decree laws converted into laws and of delegating laws passed by Parliament.

Source: Capano and Giuliani (2003); Zucchini (2010).

electoral manifesto before being elected: Prodi I (centre-left) and Berlusconi II (centre-right). The first coalition was formed when the Democratici di Sinistra moved towards an 'opening-up to the centre' in 1994 and accepted Romano Prodi's proposal the following year that the parties on the left should join a government coalition, Ulivo, on the understanding that he would be prime minister in a possible future government. Several small parties decided to join Ulivo (Popolari, Democratici-Patto Segni, Alleanza Democratica and Socialisti Italiani) (Virgilio 1996, 535). Six months before the elections of November 1995, Prodi and what was called the group of seven 'wise men' started to formulate the common electoral programme: the 'Tesi dell'Ulivo'. Although none of these formulators was a party leader, they all eventually became ministers. Prodi's common manifesto was very long (40,000 words, or the equivalent of a 100-page book). This ambitious programme covered a broad range of topics and was presented to the congresses of the coalition parties for ratification. A group of three small parties rejected it: the Greens, who were not convinced by its environmental policies, and Patto Segni and the Socialisti Italiani, who were opposed to the institutional reforms proposed. Nevertheless, these parties stayed in the pre-electoral coalition and were later given a place in government. The elections did not give Ulivo an overwhelming victory: it obtained a small majority in the Senate, but needed the votes of the Communist Refoundation Party to obtain a majority in the Chamber of Deputies.¹⁸ Two years later, the government fell when the Communists withdrew their support and the governing coalition failed to win a parliamentary vote of confidence.

The centre-right coalition, on the other hand, was formed only a few months before the June 2001 general election: six parties formed the 'Casa della Libertà' coalition. Three parties had already participated in the 1996 elections (Berlusconi's Forza Italia, the 'post-fascist' Alleanza Nazionale and the Christian democratic Biancofiore).¹⁹ They were joined by the right-wing ethno-regionalist Lega Nord, led by Umberto Bossi, and two other very small parties (the socialist 'Nuovo Psi' and Republican Partito Repubblicano).

Table 1. Examples of pledges fulfilled.

Government	Main pledge	Fulfilled (Yes/No/Partially)
Prodi I	Simplification of administrative decision-making processes	Yes
Prodi I	Introduction of a constitutional amendment increasing the power of the prime minister and the majority	No (failed under the <i>bicamerale</i> the system)
Prodi I	Greater autonomy for local entities	Yes (law passed in 1999)
Prodi I	Reform of the penal system	Partially
Prodi I	Unification of tribunals and prefectures	No (defeated in Parliament)
Prodi I	Reduction of the public debt in order to participate in the first phase of the EMU	Yes
Prodi I	Introduction of regional taxes	Yes (law passed in 2000)
Prodi I	No increase in taxes	No
Prodi I	Creation of specific 'authorities' and an anti-trust body	Yes
Berlusconi II	E-government (computerisation of administrative services)	Yes
Berlusconi II	'Devolution', i.e. further federalisation	Yes ^a
Berlusconi II	Introduction of 'Obiettivo' Law	Partially
Berlusconi II	Reduction in taxes on corporate profits	Yes
Berlusconi II	Reduction in taxes on earned income	No
Berlusconi II	Introduction of measures to fight tax evasion	No
Berlusconi II	Legalisation of capital held abroad	Yes
Berlusconi II	An increase for those on low pensions	Partially
Berlusconi II	Rise in the retirement age	Yes

Note: ^aThe devolution law was passed but was defeated by a popular referendum in June 2006.

The centre-right coalition represented various electoral programmes, including 'a letter to the Italian people', sent to all centre-right activists and published on the Forza Italia website, and the 'contract with the Italian people', the signing of which was televised, with its five broad pledges and Berlusconi's commitment to leave political life in the case of non-fulfilment.

A few days before the elections, the Forza Italia website also published the 'government plan for the whole parliamentary term' just one week after centre-left politicians had accused the Casa della Libertà of not having a programme. This manifesto was much shorter than its predecessor: less than 10,000 words. All the parties in the coalition subsequently accepted it as their official manifesto. The media reported that this programme included a deal between Berlusconi and Bossi providing for fundamental Lega claims in the programme (tax reduction and federalisation of the country) in exchange for its membership in the coalition. The programme also included pledges dear to the National Alliance and Christian Democrats, such as important public works and state aid for the southern regions where a significant part of these two parties' electorate is based (Diamanti 2007). However, the document was never formally ratified by the rank and file of the parties. In the elections of 13 May 2001, the centre-right coalition won a large majority in both chambers mainly thanks to the seats obtained by Berlusconi's Forza Italia (around 30%, or nearly 60% of the total received by its coalition).

Table 2. Comparison of Prodi I and Berlusconi II.

	Parties	Duration of drafting process	Number of words in the programme	Participation of ministers in the negotiations	Party leaders who entered government and their weight in seats	Seats of governing parties in the Lower Chamber
Prodi I (1996–1998)	DS, PPI, RI, UD, PS, SI, Verdi	180 days	41,500	7/17 41%	2/7 29% 4% of seats	290/630 (46%)
Berlusconi II (2001–2006 ^a)	FI, AN, LN, CDU-UDC, NPSI, PRI	7 days	9,600	3/17 18%	3/6 50% 51% of seats	366/630 (58%)

Abbreviations: DS Democratici di Sinistra (Democratic Left), PPI Parti Popolare Italiano (Italian People's Party), RI Rinnovamento Italiano (Italian Renewal), UD Unione Democratica (Democratic Union), PS (Patto Segni), SI Socialisti Italiani (Italian Socialists), FI Forza Italia, AN Alleanza Nazionale (National Alliance), LN Lega Nord (Northern League), CDU-UDC Cristiani Democratici Uniti – Unione Cristiana Democratica (Christian Democrats), NPSI Novo Partito Socialisti Italiani (New Italian Socialist Party), PRI Partito Repubblicano Italiano (Italian Republican Party)

Note: ^aIn April 2005, the UDC pulled its four ministers out and a new government was formed a few weeks later. I consider it as a continuation of the first government because Berlusconi III was formed with the same six parties (FI, AN, LN, UDC, NPSI, PRI) and a minor cabinet reshuffle.

Sources: UK: Royed (1996, 61); Sweden: Naurin, (2009); Netherlands: Thomson (2001, 184); Ireland: Mansergh (2003, 190), Costello and Thomson (2008, 247–8). The table reports only the fulfilment of pledges by governing parties in the parliamentary system, and thus excludes the opposition parties that the authors also report on. It also excludes results of external support parties or results for presidential systems. In addition, it excludes studies that do not use the same definitions and methods. For a full and up-to-date comparison of all empirical works on promise fulfilment, see Naurin 2009.

Table 2 summarises the information in the two case studies: it presents the duration (in days) of the drafting of the common manifesto, the number of words involved and the number of seats held by the governing parties in the lower chamber. We also identify whether party leaders joined the government,²⁰ the respective strength of these party leaders, and the number of ministers who participated in the negotiations.²¹

It is immediately apparent from these data that these two governments were very different in a variety of ways, but both provided good reasons to be sceptical about the political parties' ability and willingness to carry out their pledges. On one hand, the negotiators for the Prodi I programme took a long time to draft their (extensive) programme. Although a large proportion of these negotiators became ministers, the party leaders (with the exception of two very small parties) remained outside the government.²² The future ministers, to a large extent former negotiators, may well have 'internalised' the policies included in the document that they themselves had drafted but it is unlikely that they would have had the authority to impose a strong commitment to them. Subsequently, the seeds of disloyalty were sown when some coalition parties refused to ratify the resulting manifesto and, ultimately, Prodi I could not count on a majority in the Chamber. On the other hand, Berlusconi had an agreement that was mainly drafted by his partners,

though it included certain concessions to some of his party champions who also entered the Cabinet. The manifesto was much shorter than that of Prodi I, and had been drafted in just one week but was not formally ratified by the parties.

Fulfilment of pledges in Italy

As explained above and exemplified in the processes for drafting manifestos, the Italian political system leads to some pessimism about the political parties' ability to fulfil pledges. This raises the important question of whether the promises Italian parties make to their voters are consistent with what they do once in power. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 shows that the Prodi I and Berlusconi II governments fulfilled 41% and 58% respectively of their electoral pledges. These results are better than pessimists would probably have predicted. Not surprisingly, the fulfilment score of the Prodi I government, which did not complete its mandate and was a minority government, was lower than that of the Berlusconi II government, which had a large parliamentary majority and lasted four years. Nevertheless, Prodi managed to fulfil 41% of 218 pledges in less than two years. A possible hypothesis from these insights is that the centre-left ministers may have tried to implement their programme as quickly as possible because they were well aware that without a parliamentary majority they could not expect to remain in power for long.

Moreover, we should note that Prodi introduced many 'delegating laws' in this period, which were subsequently passed by Parliament in the following centre-left governments. Hence, a higher fulfilment score (57%) is obtained if we take into account the three centre-left governments that succeeded Prodi during the parliamentary term; this score is similar to that of Berlusconi II (58% of its 183 pledges). It should also be noted that while the Prodi I government fulfilled 41% of its pledges in two years, little was added to this score (16% in a similar time frame) by the following government formed after the elections. However, this is not surprising since the following majorities were not the same as those who had negotiated the agreement in the first place.

Comparisons

In Table 4, I compare the Italian percentages with those obtained by scholars who have studied other parliaments, using the same method.

Table 3. Pledges fulfilled.

	Pledges fulfilled		
	Total	Precise	Imprecise
Prodi I (1996–1998)	112/274 41%	20/48 42%	92/226 41%
Centre-left governments (1996–2001)	156/274 57%	24/48 50%	132/226 58%
Berlusconi II (2001–2006)	107/183 58%	36/61 60%	71/122 58%

Table 4. Fulfilment scores obtained by PPG scholars (%).

	Single-party government		Post-electoral coalitions		Pre-electoral coalitions	
Majority	UK (1974–1997)	85	Netherlands (1986–1998)	59	Berlusconi (2001–2005)	58
			Ireland (1977–2002)	54.5		
Minority	Sweden (1994–2002)	87	Ireland (1981–1982; 1997–2002)	31.5	Prodi (1996–1998)	41

We can see here that the governing parties in Italy respect their pledges much less than their equivalents in the single-party governments, including the government that did not enjoy a parliamentary majority, i.e. in Sweden (where an average of 85.5% of pledges are fulfilled). This result was to be expected: Italian governing parties, in coalition, have to find agreement on every single law and this makes it more difficult for them to fulfil their pledges than their British or Swedish counterparts governing alone. However, the marked difference between these two groups of countries (–30%) illustrates that the Italians are still far from fully fledged ‘bipolarism’, where the winning coalition or party is in a position to implement a large part of its programme.

On the other hand, Italian governments slightly outperform post-electoral coalition governments if we compare their pledge fulfilment score with the proportion of fulfilled pledges from the individual pre-electoral manifestos of coalition parties. Berlusconi’s fulfilment score is very similar to the average score for individual parties with a parliamentary majority (on average, 59% in the Netherlands, 54.5% in Ireland); but Prodi outperforms the minority coalitions in Ireland by 10% (41% versus 31.5% of pledges fulfilled). However, given that Italian manifestos are already the result of negotiations and compromises between coalition parties that voluntarily decide to form a coalition before the elections, it may have been reasonable to expect a larger difference between the two sets of countries.

It therefore emerges that Italian parties respect their pre-electoral programme to a considerable extent but it is clear from a comparative perspective that they could have performed better. Many important pledges were undoubtedly addressed by each of the governments studied. For example, the Prodi I government significantly reduced the public debt and deficit, thus enabling Italy to enter the EMU, and reformed the immigration laws and school system; Berlusconi introduced further federalisation, reformed the labour laws, lowered taxes on investment and reformed the pension system. However, both governments could have done much more: important pledges that were emphasised during the electoral campaign were not fulfilled. For example: the promised reform of the state, the executive and the legal system was not carried out by the Prodi I government (which also increased taxes when the manifesto had explicitly promised not to); Berlusconi did not pass measures to reform the executive or fight tax evasion.

As stated earlier, our analysis only considers if a law was passed and not whether it was implemented or achieved the desired goal. However, two examples suitably illustrate the point that passing a law does not always mean solving a problem. The first example concerns the ‘conflict of interest’ issue, i.e. the potential conflict between the public and private interests of those in government. It is well known that this risk was particularly acute for Berlusconi as he controls half the television channels, a substantial slice of

the dailies and magazines published and, through his influence on the advertising market, a good number of periodicals that are nominally independent. Because an electoral victory would also give him control of public broadcasting, Berlusconi repeatedly promised during the campaign that he would solve this problem once he became Prime Minister. After a few months in office, Frattini did in fact present a bill addressing the issue which was passed by Parliament. As a result, the pledge was codified as partly fulfilled. However, the legislation introduced the principle that only managers of a certain firm, not the owners, are supposed to have an interest in this firm; it is therefore doubtful that the conflict of interest concerning Berlusconi was truly resolved. A second example relates to the bill on the liberalisation of certain sectors included in the Prodi I programme (e.g. telecommunications, electricity) that were obstructing competition to the detriment of consumers. Although the bill was successfully passed by Parliament, some of the relevant provisions needed to be implemented by local and regional administrations. The resistance of the sectors in question sometimes managed to block implementation, partially annulling the effect of the law and provoking widespread disappointment.

Conclusion

The analysis presented provides insights into the general feeling of dissatisfaction that followed the end of the First Republic in 1993. We observe that pre-electoral coalitions do not fulfil their programme to the same extent as single-party governments. They also only slightly outperform the fulfilment scores for the individual manifestos of parties that govern in coalition. Indeed, in the above cases, many important pledges were not adopted despite repeated emphasis during the campaign. An even less positive picture emerges on closer scrutiny of the laws claiming to fulfil the pledges, some of which fall far short of reaching the desired outcome either because they do not satisfactorily address the problem or because they could not be successfully implemented.

This result does not come as a complete surprise in light of the large number of veto players that Italian governing parties face when making policies as well as the conditions under which the common manifestos are drafted. The work of ministers is hindered by a cumbersome legislative process: each law must be passed in two Chambers with different majorities and MPs' prerogatives allow legislation to be slowed considerably or even obstructed. Moreover, despite the fact that a significant proportion of ministers were negotiators in the manifesto-writing process (and may therefore have 'internalised' the deals included in the programme), not all party leaders participated in its drafting and some parties did not ratify the resulting manifesto. Hence, the involvement of all party leaders in the drafting of a precise common programme, together with the ratification of this programme by all party organs, may have increased commitment to the deals included in the document.

However, the glass can also be seen as half full: despite very difficult constitutional and governmental conditions, the Italian political leaders managed to fulfil almost 60% of their pledges. Notably, Prodi I ministers managed to keep 41% of its promises in less than two years. We have seen that this respectable score was obtained mainly through government use of extraordinary legislative procedures. As Capano and Giuliani have noted, this illustrates the ambiguous workings of the Italian political system (Capano and Giuliani 2003). On one hand, the government is clearly unable to lead Parliament

and therefore finds alternative ways to accomplish its duties, mainly by increasingly resorting to delegation. On the other, Parliament usually passes these delegating laws: like Ulysses and the Sirens, it agrees to be bound to the mast as the only way of letting the executive govern effectively.

To conclude: Italian leaders managed to fulfil the pledges they had made in their manifestos to a greater extent than some sceptical analysts would have expected, mainly by means of bypassing the normal legislative procedure. Nevertheless, despite a very 'generous' form of coding, I identified that half of their pledges were not even partially enacted. Nor does this invalidate the conclusion that voters have good reason to be disappointed.

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Notes

1. These were formalised in the standing order of 1971 (see Capano and Giuliani 2003).
2. Deputies are elected on a national basis and senators on a regional one.
3. In fact, certain partial modifications in this direction had already been made at the end of the 1980s, e.g. a reduction in the use of the secret ballot in the Senate, the reinforcement of the role of government in agenda-setting, and the setting of time limits to examine the bills in both Chambers (see Vassallo 2007).
4. Without constitutional change.
5. The system for electing the two chambers differed in a number of respects (for a complete review, see Katz 2006).
6. The 617 members of the Chamber of Deputies are elected by PR throughout Italy, with the exception of the Valle d'Aosta and Italians abroad. The coalition with the most votes in the 617 member-districts is guaranteed at least 340 seats (55%). The same 55% floor is used for the Senate but is applied region by region (Katz 2006).
7. With the exception of the 1994 election.
8. In 1997, 1998 and 1999 Italy was the only country in the European Union where the majority of people were not satisfied with the way democracy worked in their country (62%). Source: Eurobarometer: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/
9. Some alternatives have been proposed to this model, for example the *anticipatory representation model*, according to which representatives should act in line with what they think their voters would approve at the next (rather than the past) election; and the *gyroscopic representation model*, according to which representatives act in such a way as to reach a large, unspecific policy goal which is also shared by their voters (Mansbridge 2003).
10. Another consequence of the model is that parliamentarians and their voters are congruent in terms of policy issue preferences when the programmes and the voters' attitudes are based on the same one-dimensional ideology (Thomassen 1999).
11. The authors show that media coverage of the campaign included a substantial amount of information on the specific pledges of the main political parties (Costello and Thomson 2008).
12. A number of scholars have also looked at specific promises or countries, using their own methods (for an updated review see Naurin 2009).
13. This codification is developed from Royed (1996), who uses the terms 'rhetorical', 'difficult definite' and 'definite' pledges.
14. This type of database has been available on the internet since 2001 (<http://www.senato.it/ricerche/avanzata/nuova.ricerca>) and on CD-ROM since before that date.

15. The use of two-category fulfilment was identified as highly reliable and that of three-category fulfilment only as satisfactory.
16. For example, in the Italian Parliament there are no restrictions on the presentation of bills by individual MPs and the amendment system favours MPs over the government.
17. 'Decree laws' are passed by governments on their own authority and come into force immediately, but lose their validity if not converted, by Parliament, into ordinary legislation within 60 days. 'Delegating Laws' are approved by Parliament but empower the Government to issue, on its own authority, legislative decrees pursuant to the objectives set out in the laws themselves.
18. Ulivo had made a pre-electoral agreement with Rifondazione Comunista.
19. The new label under which the CCD and CDU were grouped together after the 1996 election; the name was changed to UDC in March 2001.
20. I am relying on Müller's definition of party leaders, i.e. 'those who internalise the collective interest of the party and monitor the party's other office holders' (Müller 2000, 317).
21. By 'negotiators', I mean those individuals who participated in the negotiations during the entire drafting of the common manifesto, as members of their party's main delegation, and thus I exclude those who were invited to participate in roundtables preparing the negotiations. These figures were obtained by reading press and specialists' reports on the negotiations. I compared this list with the list of ministers with portfolios who made up the government. When a minister was replaced by another, both are taken into consideration.
22. Prodi himself did not belong to any party, although he had been close to the old Democrazia Cristiana.

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