

**The Impact of Electoral Systems on the Structure of the Executive: How Electoral Reform Strengthened the Italian Prime Minister**

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## **Abstract**

This paper addresses the question of how electoral institutions affect the organization of government. Italy entered the 1990s with a notoriously fragmented executive and a very weak Prime Minister. Before the decade was over, the power of the Prime Minister within the cabinet had increased to levels comparable to those of many other European countries. The paper finds that Italy's electoral reform in the early 1990s strengthened the Prime Minister's powers and improved the government's problem-solving capacities.

The change from proportional representation to a mixed but mostly plurality system led to elections being competed by two pre-electoral coalitions, each presenting a common program and a common candidate for Prime Minister. By raising the Prime Minister to the position of "guardian of the program" in the eyes of the voters, the electoral reform increased his autonomy from the other members of the cabinet and opened a window of opportunity for the strengthening of the Prime Minister's coordination capabilities.

Italy entered the 1990s with a notoriously fragmented executive and a very weak Prime Minister by international standards. Before the decade was over, a series of reforms raised the power of the Prime Minister within the cabinet to levels comparable to those of many other European countries. This paper explains why these reforms succeeded where all other attempts had failed.

In so doing, it also shows how electoral rules can affect the organization of government. The change from proportional representation to a mixed but mostly plurality system in the early 1990s led to elections being competed by two pre-electoral coalitions, each presenting a common program and a common candidate for Prime Minister. By raising the Prime Minister to the position of “guardian of the program” in the eyes of the voters, the electoral reform increased his autonomy from the other members of the cabinet and opened a window of opportunity for the strengthening of the Prime Minister’s coordination capabilities.<sup>1</sup>

The Italian case teaches important lessons on the impact of electoral institutions on the organization of the executive in parliamentary democracies, since Italy’s electoral reform – the product of a referendum pushed by peripheral political actors – was as close to an instance of purely exogenous institutional change as one can hope to get in the real world.

This paper, therefore, speaks both to the vast institutionalist literature that studies the effects of electoral systems and to the literature that focuses on the organization of central government in advanced democracies.

The normative concern that inspires this paper is that democratic governments should not only *represent* a majority of voters, but also be *responsive*, namely be able to implement policies that respond to society's demands. The lessons of this case matter because the organization of the executive can have a significant impact on the effectiveness of government. Especially in a coalition government, the ability of the government to implement its program depends on the coordination powers of the core executive. This paper thus focuses on explaining the coordination powers of the "core of the core executive," the Prime Minister.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: the next section details my argument and explains the choice of the Italian case, the following section presents the case, the last section discusses the results and concludes.

## **ELECTORAL RULES AND THE POWER OF THE PRIME MINISTER**

The past few decades have seen a cross-national trend towards an increase in the power of the "core executive" (Dunleavy & Rhodes, 1990), including the Prime Ministers. The explanations of this trend emphasize 'summitry' (King, 1994; Peters, Rhodes, & Wright, 2000), the personalization and presidentialization of politics (Poguntke & Webb, 2005), the interaction – in the case of the members of the European Union – with the European institutions (Moravcsik, 1994), the greater coordination required in more and more complex societies (Peters, Rhodes and Wright 2000), the impact of the restructuring of the central administration due to the implementation of new managerial approaches (Boston & Pallot, 1997).

What these explanations lack is an explicitly political dimension. Even treating parties as unitary actors (Laver & Schofield, 1990), a concentration of power in the Prime Minister or the core executive at large can well be explained by these factors in a single-party government, but why would parties in a coalition government – or at least those that do not get the prized top jobs – accept it? Even if parties may to some extent control each other through a judicious allocation of junior ministerial positions (Thies, 2001), and regardless of whether one assumes politicians to be policy or office oriented, the increase in the power and prestige of a few actors is bound to reduce that of the other actors in the executive. Addressing this question also serves to explain the persisting cross-national differences in the powers of the Prime Minister (Blondel, 1996; Goetz & Margetts, 1999; Goetz & Wollmann, 2001; Peters et al., 2000).

One obvious explanation for these differences is whether a government is coalition or single-party (Blondel & Müller-Rommel, 1993; Frogner, 1993; King, 1975). It is indeed to be expected that the Prime Minister will be able to concentrate power less in the former than in the latter situation, whether it be for the identification of Prime Ministerial and party fortunes in two-party systems (Bergman, Müller, Strøm, & Blomgren, 2003), the Prime Minister's greater access to the power of appointment and dismissal in single-party governments (Bergman et al., 2003), or the tension implicit in a coalition of parties that will likely run against each other in the next elections (Rose, 1991). In fact, countries with single-party government, such as Britain, Spain and Greece, do have some of the strongest Prime Ministers in parliamentary systems (Blondel 1996). However, the correlation between coalition/single party government and Prime

Ministerial power is far from perfect, Germany being a prime example of a country that combines coalition governments and a strong chancellor (King 1994).

This paper argues that the fundamental explanatory factor for the distribution of power within the executive is the type of electoral rules rather than whether a single party or a coalition is in the government. Ultimately, that is, the organization of the executive depends on the ability of voters to choose a specific Prime Minister, government, and government program, which in turn depends on the type of electoral system: the more majoritarian (the less proportional) the electoral institutions, the clearer the voters' electoral choices, and the stronger the Prime Minister. This argument covers single-party governments, given their strong correlation with plurality, but extends to cases when plurality rules do not lead to single-party governments (e.g. Italy in the 1990s) or to cases when distortions of proportional representation favor a strong Prime Minister (e.g. Germany).

Work studying the impact of electoral institutions has focused on a broad array of areas: their impact on the party system (Neto & Cox, 1997; Riker, 1982), democratic representitiveness (Blais & Bodet, 2006; Powell, 2000, 2006; Shugart, 2001), fiscal policy (Alesina & Drazen, 1991; Grilli, Masciandaro, & Tabellini, 1991; Velasco, 1999), party discipline (Carey & Shugart, 1995; Mainwaring, 1991), party behavior (Cox, 1987; Strom, 1990), even corruption (Chang & Golden, 2006). Only relatively recently has their impact on the organization of the executive been studied (Hallerberg, 2004).

This paper extends to the Prime Minister the logic of the approach developed by Mark Hallerberg with regard to the distribution of fiscal policy-making power within the executive in coalition governments (Hallerberg 2004). Hallerberg has shown that if the

electoral system gives parties an incentive to come together in pre-electoral coalitions, and if parties can expect to run together also in future elections, they will delegate the fiscal powers of the cabinet to the finance minister in order to avoid the common pool resource problems besetting government spending in a coalition government. This paper applies this insight to the problem of implementing a common government program and argues that the more the electoral system tends towards plurality, the greater the degree of delegation to the Prime Minister will be.

Plurality electoral systems provide greater identifiability – namely clearer “pre-electoral governmental choices” (Strom, 1984, p. 215) – than proportional representation systems since they tend to organize party systems into two parties or coalitions (Riker 1982). The voters’ electoral choice is then easily translated into a choice of alternative governments and programs and, at the next electoral round, the party or coalition in government can be held accountable for its policies (Powell 2000).<sup>2</sup>

Thus, plurality entails relatively high transparency with regard to policies: before the elections, voters can link policy programs and parties; after the elections, can hold the parties in government accountable for the policies they have (or have not) implemented.<sup>3</sup> Conversely, if the government is formed through post-electoral negotiations, as it is normally the case with proportional representation, the voters cannot choose the future government program. There is no clear link between the electoral results and government formation, and therefore no clear link between electoral commitments to the voters and the government program. The parties of the government coalition parties will have a greater incentive to respond to the interests of their individual constituencies than to

implement the government program, since at the next elections they will respond individually rather than as a coalition to the voters.

Moving to the question of the distribution of power within the executive, the extent of delegation to the Prime Minister will depend on the voters' ability to identify the future potential Prime Ministers. In the case of plurality rules, the voters' choice between alternative governments and alternative programs is also a choice between alternative Prime Ministers. Since voters can connect the electoral program of the winning party or coalition with the new government's policies, the Prime Minister assumes the role of "guardian of the program" (Weller, 1991). Conversely, under proportional representation the choice of Prime Minister does not directly derive from the elections, nor can she respond for the policy promises made at election time by the parties in the government coalition.

In sum, comparing electoral competition between "future governments" (alternative parties or pre-electoral coalitions headed by a candidate Prime Minister) to electoral competition among un-allied parties with post-electoral coalition formation, in the former case the Prime Minister has a greater incentive to uphold the government program, since he or she is directly responsible for it before the voters.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, in the case of a coalition government the Prime Minister enjoys greater autonomy from the parties of the coalition, as each member of the coalition has committed to a common program before the elections, knows that the coalition as whole will respond for it at the next elections, and thus has a greater incentive to facilitate the implementation of the program (Andeweg, 2000).

Thus, we should expect greater delegation of powers to the Prime Minister with plurality rules than with proportional representation, as the Prime Minister has both the motive and the opportunity (i.e. greater relative autonomy from the coalition parties) to increase her organizational resources. Namely, the implication for the organization of the executive is that plurality electoral rules will strengthen the organizational position of the Prime Minister compared to proportional representation systems, both in terms of the resources at his or her disposal and in terms of the Prime Minister's position in cabinet governance, the latter defined as "the rules by which the cabinet makes decisions" (Bergman et al., 2003).

Assessing the plausibility of this argument through cross-national comparisons is made difficult by confounding factors, such as national administrative traditions regarding the powers of the Prime Minister (King 1994). Given this problem, a longitudinal study of a single country which has undergone major change in its electoral system promises to be especially fruitful, in that a number of *cetera* can indeed be kept *paria* (George & Bennett, 2005; Lijphart, 1971; Van Evera, 1996). However, the simple occurrence of electoral reform is not enough to qualify a country for in-depth study of the impact of electoral institutions. As the "most manipulative" of political institutions (Sartori, 1997), electoral institutions are likely to reflect the interest of the key political actors, and this complicates the assessment of electoral reform on the behavior of the same actors.

It is for this reason that the Italian case is especially promising. As the following discussion shows, the reform of 1993 was a rare case of exogenous electoral change.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the postwar period, Italy used extremely proportional electoral laws for the

elections of the two chambers of Parliament (the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate).<sup>6</sup> Proportional representation (PR) fostered an extremely fragmented party system (Sartori, 1976) in which the most voted party, the Christian Democrats (DC), was also the “central party” (Roozendaal, 1990). Therefore, throughout the postwar period decisiveness of elections, namely the connection between electoral results and government formation, was minimal: even after a bad showing at the polls the DC could hold on to the government by adding parties to the government coalition.<sup>7</sup> Thus the DC was in every government between 1948 (the year of the first parliamentary elections) and 1993, sometimes forming minority governments alone, and most of the time in coalition with others.

However, in 1992 the DC and the other parties that had controlled the government and the parliamentary majority for the previous forty years entered a period of massive and irreversible crisis. The most immediate cause of this crisis was the start of investigations into the deep-rooted malfeasance of (especially) the government parties, while more indirect causes were the domestic impact of the end of the Cold War (which increased voter mobility by weakening the pull of anti-Communism) and the competitive pressures stemming from European integration (Bufacchi & Burgess, 1998; Gilbert, 1995 ; Ginsborg, 2003; Golden, 2004).

The first rumblings of imminent collapse were already heard in 1991, when actors peripheral to the party system promoted a referendum on a minor point of the existing electoral law and referendum was approved by the voters in spite of opposition by all the majority parties (Pasquino, 1997). The referendum movement then went on to propose a more substantively significant popular vote, aiming to eliminate the proportional

representation system, which was seen as facilitating excessive party fragmentation, impeding government alternation and fostering corruption.

A second referendum thus took place in 1993.<sup>8</sup> In the climate of anger against the parties, a large majority of voted for the abolition of the existing electoral system (Chimenti, 1994, p. 18; Istituto Nazionale dell'Informazione, 2000, p. 891). The referendum cancelled proportional representation (PR) and replaced it with a mixed (plurality/proportional) electoral system with a predominant plurality component. In the view of many Italians the change in electoral law was so important as to mark the move from the “First” to the “Second” Republic.<sup>9</sup>

The government parties (notably DC and the Socialist Party, PSI) had opposed the referendum movement until the wave of anti-system feeling became too large. At that point they engaged in a rearguard action by publicly supporting the referendum and then trying to minimize the impact of electoral change by implementing a new electoral law after the referendum that would do them as little damage as possible (Chiaromonte & Virgilio, 2006; Chimenti, 1997; Katz, 2001).<sup>10</sup> However, although they still held a majorities of seats in Parliament from the last pre-crisis elections (held in 1992, immediately before the voter support for the government parties began to collapse), they were under pressure not only from the enraged citizens, but also from the President of Republic, who made it clear that he would oppose elections with the old PR system and that at the same time he would expect the current government (led by the non-partisan Carlo Azeglio Ciampi) to resign as soon with the new electoral law was approved (Chimenti 1997, p. 35).

In the end, an agreement was reached on an electoral law that essentially reproduced the system left in place by the referendum, as this was widely seen in the public debates of the time as the one that most legitimately represented the wishes of the voters (Katz 2001).<sup>11</sup> The new law was for most parties a simple stop-gap solution (Katz 2001, p. 118); however, the parliamentary majority was not to have another chance to change it. In the wake of disastrous results in a number of local elections in 1993, the government parties effectively disappeared, and for the most part new parties contested the elections of 1994.<sup>12</sup>

## **THE EVOLUTION OF PRIME MINISTERIAL POWER IN ITALY**

This paper asks how the 1993 electoral reform affected the position of the Prime Minister within the cabinet. In terms of Prime Ministerial power Italy entered the 1990s as something of an outlier among European parliamentary systems, having one of the weakest Prime Ministers in Europe (Blondel, 1996; Hine & Finocchi, 1991). Operationalizing power can be difficult; since, however, in parliamentary systems the role of the Prime Minister – and more in general of the core executive (Rhodes 1997) – is chiefly to coordinate the activity of the cabinet (Blondel 1996; Peters, Rhodes and Wright 2000), this paper uses the staffing and procedural resources that the Prime Minister can use for coordination purposes as measures of Prime Ministerial power.

The first set of resources refers to the offices directly serving the Prime Minister. Their staff is often recruited from outside the civil service and thus can be more openly partisan. While this can put these executive support agencies in conflict with the

ministerial bureaucracy, it also facilitates the Prime Minister's role of stimulus for the implementation of the government program (Bakvis, 1997; Davis, 1997; King, 1975; Müller-Rommel, 1993; Weller, 1991), for instance by reducing the information advantages of line ministers over the Prime Minister (Michael Laver & Shepsle, 1996; Peters et al., 2000). The second set of resources is the rules that organize the work of the cabinet. They also can redress the information imbalance between line ministers and the Prime Minister and more in general facilitate policy coordination by regulating the discussion of policy initiatives by the cabinet (Bergman et al., 2003; Burch, 1993; Davis, 1997). Both types of resources are in fact aimed at ensuring "executive coherence," named at ensuring "that the component part of the government, and the policies they seek to implement, are consistent and not contradictory" (Weller & Bakvis, 1997).

### **WAITING FOR REFORM: 1948-1988**

Throughout the postwar period the Italian central government was a paradigmatical case of "government by ministry" (Andeweg, 1993). The proportionality of the electoral system meant that it paid off for parties to emphasize their own political identity rather than present voters with a cohesive pre-electoral coalition (Fabbrini & Vassallo, 1999). Unconstrained by a common pre-electoral program, the DC and its allies would negotiate a government program after the elections, but the ministers and the party (or party factions) they represented would have "feudal" control of their ministry rather than subject themselves to the necessities of the implementation of the common program (Amato, 1976; Ristuccia, 1980). Nor would they necessarily have to pay for the lack of implementation at the next electoral round. Once in government, the fragmentation and

high turnover rates of the governments made it easier for parties to “blur responsibility and spread blame” (Mershon, 1996).

The political inability of the Prime Minister to coordinate government policies was reflected in his lack of institutional capabilities for coordination.<sup>13</sup> Even though the Constitution of 1948 called for a law organizing the Council of Ministers (the cabinet) and regulating the role of the Prime Minister, for forty years no such law was passed by Parliament.

The lack of formal procedures regulating the relationships within the cabinet meant that information on policies would often hardly circulate among ministers or even between a line ministry and the Prime Minister. A typical case was the practice of the presentation to the Council of Ministers of a proposal by the Prime Minister (but on a request of a line minister) *fuori sacco*, namely without it being in the order of the day, and thus without any possibility of previous preparation and discussion on the part of other ministers (Pitruzzella, 1986), which effectively left the control over the agenda to the line ministries (Cocozza, 1989, 368; Merlini & Guglia, 1994, 506-507).<sup>14</sup> In case of conflict among ministers, since there was no formal procedure for solving them, they were solved on an ad hoc basis, often through extra-cabinet negotiations among the government parties (Pitruzzella 1986, pp. 319-320).

Beside lacking an appropriate framework of rules, the Prime Minister also lacked the resources for coordination. The Office of the Prime Minister (*Presidenza del Consiglio*) included a small cabinet office of the Prime Minister and an increasingly large general cabinet. Both were staffed with personnel that had no operative policy skills and whose background was in law, and who had the task of maintaining the cliental and party

links of the Prime Minister (Fabbrini and Vassallo 1999, pp. 155-156; Pitruzzella 1986, p. 397). Furthermore, over the years tasks of direct policy making accrued to the Office of the Prime Minister that were not under the control of the Prime Minister but of ministers without portfolio, so that the the Office became less a coordination structure than a haphazard combination of “mini-ministries” (Cassese, 1980). Finally, the unsuitedness of the Office of the Prime Minister to provide coordination to the cabinet as a whole was compounded by its lack of financial autonomy. Alone among the organizations of ministerial level, the Office of the Prime Minister did not have its own budget, but had to make do with funds of the Treasury ministry (Cassese 1980).

The need to formalize the operations of the cabinet and to define the role and resources of the Prime Minister – as per the constitutional requirement – was emphasized by would-be reformers on many occasions during the forty years that followed the approval of the Constitution (Cotta, 1996; Criscitiello, 2003; Hine, 2000; Serrani, 1979), but due to opposition from most government and opposition parties (the latter fearing the strengthening of the executive, (De Felice, 1996) only in 1988 was the law required by the Constitution finally introduced.<sup>15</sup>

Law 400/88 gave structure to the Office of the Prime Minister, in particular creating a staff organization around a Secretary general. The Secretary general is directly appointed by the Prime Minister outside of the line personnel of the Public Administration (Fabbrini and Vassallo 1999, p. 156). The purpose of the creation of this institutional figure was to specifically to provide “information and organizational support to the Prime Minister” (Chimenti 1997, p. 141). The Secretary general is also responsible for a number of departments – in particular the legislative department (*Dipartimento per*

*gli Affari Giuridici e Legislativi* or DAGL) and the department for economic affairs (*Dipartimento per gli Affari Economici* or DAE) – specifically tasked with supporting the coordination functions of the Prime Minister. Moreover, after the law all the heads of the departments within the office can be politically appointed from outside the Public Administration (Fabbrini and Vassallo 1999, p. 157)

The law also introduced new powers for the Prime Minister within the cabinet. In particular, the Prime Minister could now: issue directives to the ministers requesting measures related to the implementation of the government program, suspend the implementation of measures introduced by a minister and bring them to the attention of the next cabinet, and refer to the cabinet all questions on which there is no agreement among the relevant ministers (Caretto & Siervo, 2006).

The passage of law 400/88 forty years after the constitutional requirement was due to an especially favorable party-political context, as the leaders of the most important parties calculated that a strengthening of the Prime Minister could be to their advantage. The PSI, the largest coalition partner of the DC, was under the tight control of its secretary, Bettino Craxi. Craxi, who had crushed all internal factions since taking over the party in the mid-1970s (Craveri, 1995), had in the 1980s been the longest serving Prime Minister in the postwar period and aspired to soon be Prime Minister again. He based his personal and his party's electoral appeal on his apparently very decisive decision-making (Craveri 1995, p. 948), and had made the strengthening of the Prime Ministerial powers one of the planks of the PSI's political message (Cotta, 1997).

As for the DC, law 400/88 was passed when it had regained the Prime Ministership from Craxi. The DC Prime Minister, Ciriaco De Mita, was also party

secretary, a very rare concentration of power for a party that had made its policy to keep these two functions separate. He had in fact been elected secretary with the explicit mandate to be the “anti-Craxi.” Although he was ultimately unsuccessful (he lost both his posts a few months after the passage of law 400/88), he had attempted to reduce the role of factions within the DC in order to approximate Craxi’s power over his party and his ‘decisive’ style in the government (Floridaia & Sicardi, 1991).

Finally, in the late 1980s the Italian Communist Party (PCI) – the main opposition party – was undergoing a re-evaluation of its government prospects in light of the waning of the Cold War and the attendant perspective improvement of its *Coalitionfähigkeit*. In parallel, the position of the PCI began to move away from its traditional support for a strong Parliament and weak executive and to favor empowering the executive (De Felice 1996).

In spite of the passage of law 400/88, however, in practice the position of the Prime Minister hardly changed after 1988, since the implementation of the law lagged behind. The larger institutional context had not changed (the electoral law had not changed and the coalition governments remained uncommitted to a common pre-electoral program) so that there was no room for the actual strengthening of the Prime Minister within the cabinet (Amato, 1991, p. 50; Bassanini, 1991; Rizzoni, 1997).

The new departments (DAGL and DAE) did not fulfill their coordination tasks (Catelani, 2002; D’Auria, 1995; Tripaldi, 2001), so that even after the passage of the law much of the coordination work was done by individual advisers to the Prime Minister (Hine, 1993). Moreover, the Office of the Prime Minister continued to be saddled with the myriad extraneous tasks that were kept under the control of the ministers without

portfolio and to lack financial autonomy. As for the rules aiming to strengthen the cohesiveness of the cabinet, they remained dead letter as they rested on the introduction of the internal rulebook of the cabinet (Manzella, 1991), which had to wait five years and an altogether different political context.

### **THE WEAKENING OF THE PARTIES' HOLD ON GOVERNMENT: 1993-1999**

A window of opportunity for the strengthening of the Prime Minister's position in the cabinet opened in 1992, when the government parties entered their final crisis. The crisis had a two-fold impact on the veto power of the parties in the government coalition: it progressively weakened their control on the executive and – as we saw previously – it made it impossible for them to prevent a popular referendum to change the electoral system.

The crisis hit home in late spring 1992, right after a parliamentary election that had confirmed the overall hold of the parliamentary majority anchored around the DC and PSI. Beset by the spreading judicial investigation into political corruption, an impending currency crisis, and spectacular mafia bombings that questioned the very authority of the state, the parliamentary majority had to acquiesce in the election of Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, a second-tier Christian Democrat with an impeccable personal reputation, as new President of the Republic.<sup>16</sup> In the context of the unfolding investigations, the main pretender to the Prime Minister's post, the Socialist Bettino Craxi, had to give up his aspirations (Galli, 1993). He presented a list of possible candidates to Scalfaro, who selected the one that was least compromised with the party regime, Giuliano Amato.

Scalfaro and Amato, in whose hands rested responsibility to dissolve Parliament and call new elections, exploited the fact that the last thing that the parties in the current majority could afford was new elections (Bufacchi & Burgess, 1998; Capano, 2000) to impose a program of administrative and financial reform. The government, backed by Scalfaro, attached a confidence vote to the key parliamentary votes on the reforms (Hellman & Pasquino, 1993).

The parties' power probably reached its nadir in 1993. In April a series of referendums, including one asking voters to modify the existing proportional representation electoral law for the senate, received a resounding yes from the voters (Newell and Bull 1993). After the referendums, Amato (who had called them "most unconstitutional," Pasquino and Vassallo 1994, p. 69) resigned.

In the climate of legitimacy crisis of the political system, which the referendums had underscored, there was a diffuse sense that the new Prime Minister should not be a professional politician (Pasquino and Vassallo 1994). Scalfaro's choice was the governor of the Bank of Italy, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, whose a reputation of honesty was a definite plus in those days (Pasquino and Vassallo 1994). The government majority still included the DC and PSI along with the other minor parties that had often been their allies. However, for the first time in the postwar period parties were largely excluded from the choice of the ministers (Bufacchi and Burgess 1998; Gilbert 1995).<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, the continuing weakness of the majority parties meant that they still had an interest in postponing the elections as much as possible. Just as had been the case for the Amato government, this gave the Ciampi government significant leverage in imposing reforms. Supported in this by Scalfaro, the government could use the threat of

resignation to overcome the opposition to the reform. Thus, parties chose to minimize the obstacles to the implementation of the government's program, which included administrative reform (Marconi, Mercati, & Montebugnoli, 1998), so as not to risk precipitating the elections (Chimenti, 1994).

Freed by the vetoes of the parties supporting it, it was the Ciampi government, five years after the introduction of law 400/88, that finally passed the code of regulations for the Council of Ministers.<sup>18</sup> This code (*Decreto del Presidente del Consiglio dei Ministri* – Decree of the President of the Council of Ministers – of November 10, 1993) implemented the provisions for the regulation of cabinet business introduced by law 400/88. Moreover, it introduced or formalized a number of new procedures aiming to increase the coordination powers of the Prime Minister: it formalized the “pre-council” meeting, namely a preparatory meeting chaired by a fiduciary of the Prime Minister where representatives of each ministry and of the DAGL come together to coordinate their positions on the agenda to be discussed in the upcoming Council of Ministers (Chimenti, 1997; Merlini & Guglia, 1994; Tripaldi, 2001); it finally gave the Prime Minister sole responsibility over the government agenda in Parliament (namely it is the Prime Minister, having consulted the other cabinet members, that decides which pieces of legislation the government will introduce in Parliament, the order of priority of the bills and the type of procedure for their discussion in Parliament that will be used, Barbieri 2003; Morlini and Guglia 1994); and it entrusted one minister (the minister for relations with Parliament) with the task to follow the progress of government-initiated legislation through Parliament and to alert the Prime Minister if there are problems (Chimenti 1997).<sup>19</sup>

While the loss of control of the postwar parties on the Ciampi executive had an immediate impact on the reform of the cabinet, the impact of the electoral reform took longer to become apparent. Its impact depended on the bipolarization of the party system, which in turn required a period of learning. The new electoral law created new incentives to which the party elites had to learn how to respond. The learning regarded the management of the new pre-electoral coalitions, the transition from pre-electoral coalitions to government coalitions after the elections, and the very choice of coalition.

The existing parties did not dissolve into two main parties; rather, they formed coalitions. The new electoral law operated in the context of a highly fragmented party system, with parties, especially those on the extreme wings, cultivating a strong ideological identity and appealing to a faithful electoral core. Under these conditions, the majoritarian component of the new electoral rule (the law assigned 75% of the seats through a first-past-the-post system) gave significant bargaining power to the existing small parties since they – especially in marginal constituencies (namely constituencies that could easily go to either coalition) – could determine the electoral result by switching from one coalition to the other (Chiaromonte & D’Alimonte, 2004 ; D’Alimonte, 2001; Fabbrini, 2000; Hine, 1996).

The two coalitions developed highly centralized mechanisms for the allocation of constituencies among the members of the coalition (Di Virgilio, 1997, 2002, 2004 ), and in this process the smaller parties were able to obtain enough “high quality” candidacies (that is, candidacies in relatively safe constituencies) to win a number of seats in the majoritarian share at least proportional to (and often much greater than) their votes in the proportional share (Sartori, 1995).

The first elections with the new electoral rules were held in 1994. In these elections the structure of the electoral competition was not yet bipolar: on the one hand there was a center party (the Popular Party, heir to the DC) that competed independently of the center-right and center-left coalitions in the hopes of holding the balance between left and right after the elections (Ignazi & Katz, 1995); on the other hand the center-right coalition had a different composition in the North and in the South of the country, as it included a separatist party (the Northern League) in the former, and a centralist party (National Alliance) in the latter.<sup>20</sup> With its variable geometry, the center-right coalition won the elections but could not manage the transition from pre-electoral coalition to government coalition and lasted only a few months.

It was succeeded by a caretaker government that led the country to new elections in 1996. These were the first “mature” bipolar elections. The Popular Party, having learned the hard way the mechanics of a plurality electoral system (in the 1994 elections the Patto per l’Italia –whose main component was the Popular Party - won 15.7% of the votes for the lower chamber and 16.7% of the votes for the Senate, but obtained only 7.3% of the lower chamber seats and 9.8% of the Senate seats, (Bartolini & D’Alimonte, 1995, pp. 320-321), split, one part joining the center-left coalition and the other the center-right.

The two coalitions themselves were more ideologically cohesive. The center-left shed the extreme left (RC) and the center-right did without the Northern League. The voters were also more bipolar in their choices: 80.1% of the voters had chosen one of the two main coalitions in 1994; in 1996 this share rose to 85.2% (Chiaromonte & D’Alimonte, 2004 , p. 108).

Above all, the two opposing coalitions were formed before the elections and each campaigned based on a common program embodied by its own coalition leader, Romano Prodi for the center-left and Silvio Berlusconi for the center-right (Fabbrini, 2000; Giannetti & Laver, 2001).<sup>21</sup> Moreover, ideological consistency in the eyes of the electorate contributed to the victory. The winning coalition, the center-left “Olive Tree”, received more votes in the plurality ballot than in the proportional ballot, indicating that the coalition provided “added value” which attracted voters beyond those who voted for the individual parties. Conversely, the losing center-right coalition received fewer votes in the plurality ballot than in the proportional ballot (Di Virgilio 1997; Fabbrini 2000).

Since elections were now contested by two pre-electoral coalitions, the identifiability of the future governments, namely the ability of voters to connect their vote to formation of the new government, increased significantly from the First Republic (Shugart 2001). At the same time, voters were better able to assess the actions of the government compared to the past due to the decreased influence of the opposition on parliamentary work.<sup>22</sup> Even the continuing fragmentation of the government coalition was mitigated by the direct electoral legitimation of the Prime Minister, who at least for some time thus gained a degree of autonomy from the coalition parties (Fabbrini 2000).<sup>23</sup>

The center-left coalition formed the new government with Prodi as Prime Minister. One of the central elements of the center-left coalition was the reform of the public administration (Marconi et al., 1998; Parker, 1997). In 1997 the majority passed a law (law 59/97) that gave the executive delegated powers to introduce legislation to reform the central administration and specifically to strengthen the position of the Prime Minister (articles 11 and 12). The expressed purpose was to increase the Prime Minister’s

ability to coordinate the activity of the government towards the realization of its program (Bonetti, 2000; Criscitiello, 2003; D'Orta, 2000 ; Pajno, 2000).<sup>24</sup>

The Prodi government (the longest government of the postwar period) fell at the end of 1998 when RC withdrew its support.<sup>25</sup> The Prodi government was succeeded by another center-left government headed by Massimo D'Alema. The new government – whose personnel was largely the same as the one of the Prodi government – used the delegated powers given by law 59/97 to introduce legislative decree 303/99.<sup>26</sup> Following the lines set in the delegation, this decree gave the Prime Minister the power to intervene for the coordination of the policies that are considered strategic for the realization of the government program (Bonetti 2000; Criscitiello 2003) and to send to the cabinet policy issues over which there are conflicts among sectoral administrations (Bonetti 2000; Pajno 2000); it shed the administrative functions that had accumulated in the office over time and that were under the direct control of the ministers without portfolio (Criscitiello 2003); it gave the Prime Minister Office budgetary autonomy, meaning that the Prime Minister Office is no longer subject to many of the budgetary and accounting rules applied to the public administration and can thus act with greater flexibility (Battini, 2000; Bonetti, 2000; Criscitiello, 2003; D'Orta, 2000 ; Midiri, 2000; Sciuillo, 2000). Moreover, the flexibility of the organization directly serving the Prime Minister was increased by giving the Prime Minister the authority to modify it according to his policy interests (Bonetti, 2000; Roselli, 2000, 2001).

Furthermore, the D'Alema government acted to increase the organizational and personnel resources available to the Prime Minister for the coordination of government policies. In particular, the D'Alema government, implementing a decision of the Prodi

government, greatly increased the analytical capacities of the Prime Minister Office by allocating to the DAE thirty-five, mostly foreign-trained economists, who provided constant support to the Prime Minister in his direction of government activities (former head of the DAE, personal communication, 6/10/04; (see also Lanzillotta, 2002, pp. 168-169).<sup>27</sup> It also re-organized the DAGL, making it the office in charge of coordinating the legal and legislative activities of the government (Catelani 2002; Tripaldi 2000; Roselli 2001), and created within the Prime Minister Office a “taskforce for the simplification of legislation and procedures” (*Nucleo per la semplificazione delle norme e delle procedure*) for the coordination of the activities aiming to simplify and reduce the number of existing laws (Tripaldi 2001).

## CONCLUSIONS

Until the early 1990s the Italian Prime Minister scored very low in international comparisons of Prime Ministerial power. By the end of the decade a lot of catching-up had been done, and in terms of her organizational power within the cabinet the Italian Prime Minister was well within the European mainstream (my calculations based on the scoring system in Burch 1993). The empirical section largely confirms the original hypothesis presented in this paper, namely that the strengthening of the Italian Prime Minister was due to the electoral reform of the early 1990s which, by bipolarizing the party system, raised the position of the Prime Minister vis-à-vis the other members of the cabinet, increasing his autonomy from the coalition parties and thus opening a window of

opportunity for reforms that improved both the staff resources at her disposal and her procedural position within the cabinet.

As we saw, after an essentially stillborn reform in 1988, the increase in Prime Ministerial powers occurred in two circumstances: during the “non-political” Ciampi cabinet and during the Olive Tree cabinets that followed the first fully bipolar election in 1996. In both cases, the increase in the coordination capabilities of the Prime Minister can be attributed to the same factor: an increase in the political autonomy of the Prime Minister from the parties forming the government majority. It should in particular be noted that Prodi’s direct electoral legitimation meant that Prodi enjoyed greater autonomy from the parties supporting his government compared to his predecessors even if the fragmentation of the party system and the size of the government coalition actually increased from the early 1990s (Katz 2001).<sup>28</sup> Although it is beyond the timeframe of this research, it is worth noting that some of the reforms of the Prime Minister Office were dismantled right after a new electoral reform reintroduced proportional representation in 2005.<sup>29</sup>

Yet, one may wonder if the increase in Prime Ministerial powers may be due to causes that have little to do with electoral reform. Two alternative explanations appear particularly plausible. First, the strengthening of the Prime Minister could be due to the process of European integration. As the core executive acts as the interface or gatekeeper between the domestic and the European level, it is argued that European integration has the potential to increase the centrality in the cabinet of either the Prime Minister or the foreign affairs minister, depending on which of the two has primacy in European affairs (Laffan, 2006; Moravcsik, 1994). Studies of how the Italian executive has organized for

Europe, though, show that, especially with regard to the all-important process of defining the national position towards European policies, European integration has not strengthened the core executive (Fabbrini & Dona', 2003; Gallo & Hanny, 2003; Giuliani, 2000; Hine, 2000).

A second alternative explanation for the increased centrality of the Prime Minister is that it has been caused by the widespread trend towards increasing visibility and media exposure of premiers (Poguntke and Webb, 2005). However, in the Italian case this hypothesis does not find much support. Indeed, the Socialist Bettino Craxi – the first “charismatic” premier of Italy’s post-war history (Gunther, 2005, 263) – did try to increase the powers of the Prime Minister when he held that position in the 1980s. However, he failed due to the opposition of the other coalition partners.

More recently, Silvio Berlusconi, himself a media magnate, has been widely seen as the most blatant example of the impact of media control on politics (e.g. Ginsborg, 2004). However, his two terms in office as Prime Minister do not indicate that his high media visibility translated into an increase of Prime Ministerial power within the cabinet. Admittedly, his first experience in office (ten months in 1994-1995) might have been too short to affect much change. More significantly, it does appear that – although his second period as Prime Minister (2001-2006) warrants more research – during his second tenure the powers of the Prime Minister to coordinate policy actually atrophied. The specialized staff resources available to the Prime Minister lay unutilized (this was in particular the case of the DAE, former head of the DAE, personal communication, 6/10/04), the coordination role of the DAGL was reduced in favor of the autonomous activity of the

line ministries (Catelani, 2002), and control of government policy was concentrated into the hands of the Finance minister (Perez, 2003).<sup>30</sup>

Other analyses of Prime Ministerial power treat the Prime Minister's resources and position in cabinet governance as independent variables (Bergman et al. 2003; King 1994). Conversely, this paper has stressed that these factors need themselves to be explained. In particular, the key factor explaining the strength of the Prime Minister in the cabinet is not whether a single party or a coalition is in government, but the type of electoral system used. Electoral rules affect the organization of the executive by giving (or not) direct electoral legitimation to the Prime Minister and the program she embodies. Coalition governments can have a strong Prime Minister if the electoral system provides incentives to form pre-electoral coalitions headed by a candidate Prime Minister and sharing a common program, and if the parties in the coalition expect to run together in the following elections, when they will have to answer to voters on the implementation of their program.<sup>31</sup>

Once elected, the Prime Minister will have the motive – given her identification with the coalition's program – and the opportunity – given the collective expectation of the parties in government that they will have to respond of the implementation of the program – to wrest a degree of autonomy from the other cabinet members and to strengthen the powers of her office that she can use to coordinate the government action towards the implementation of the common coalition program. Conversely, if the parties forming the government coalition have contested the elections separately and expect to separately compete in the following ones (Hallerberg 2004), they will have an incentive to emphasize the interests of their specific constituencies, whether or not they are

compatible with the implementation of the government program. They will therefore aim to curtail the autonomy of the Prime Minister as much as possible, which is made easier by the fact that she has emerged from negotiations among the parties rather than being directly sanctioned at the elections. The coalition parties will emphasize a “government by ministry” structure of the executive, which is well suited to defend the interests of the constituencies of the individual ministries and of the parties that control them, but less so to advance a common policy program.

In other words, the difference between pre- and post-electoral elections is also a difference between different channels of delegation and accountability (Strom, Müller, & Bergman, 2003) for the Prime Minister. In the case of pre-electoral coalitions, the Prime Minister is more accountable to the voters, while in the case of post-electoral coalition she is more accountable to the coalition members. From a normative standpoint, the different chains of accountability are both consistent with the democratic ideal, the former reflecting the majoritarian and the latter the proportional view of democracy (Powell 2000). However, since each of the coalition partners is a veto player (Tsebelis, 2002), if the actors responsible for coordination of government policy lack autonomy from the coalition parties it will be difficult to move away from the status quo. Rather than broad policies that require agreement within the government coalition, governments parties will focus on distributive policies aimed at their own individual constituencies.<sup>32</sup> This is potentially a very serious problem for democracy, since extreme policy stability may mean that the political system is unable to address society’s problems.

In this regard, the Italian case is particularly significant. For forty years after the return of democracy, the connection between voters’ choice and government formation

was among the weakest among democratic countries, as a combination of institutional features typical of proportional governance, such as proportional representation electoral rules and high opposition influence on policy, limited the decisiveness of elections (Powell 2000). Government coalitions were formed after the elections, and government action lacked coordination, as each coalition partner looked after the interests of their individual constituencies. Not surprisingly, those forty years were also characterized by extreme policy immobilism, as one succeeding government after the other proved unable or unwilling to even begin to address the problems of a rapidly changing society. Unable and unwilling to bring about major changes in society, government parties were left, to bolster their support, to personalized benefits and the distribution of jobs and appointments in the vast state sector and in the large swaths of society that were under their control (De Felice, 1996; Pasquino, 1985; Pizzorno, 1996). By the early 1990s, Italians were the most dissatisfied with their own political system among all European citizens (Powell 2000, p. 251).

Starting in 1992, the hold of parties on the executive decreased, first with the “non-political” Amato and Ciampi governments of 1992-1993 and later when, in the second half of the 1990s, the decisiveness of elections significantly increased, as voters were finally able to vote for a coalition, a program, and a Prime Minister. At the same time, a series of reforms finally broke the pattern of policy immobilism, changing such central aspect of governance as the fiscal policy institutions, the pension system and the labor market. Although other factors such the pressure stemming from European integration were certainly also at work, a strengthened core executive – the Finance minister alongside the Prime Minister –played a vital part in this wave of reforms.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> When referring specifically to the Italian case, I will use the masculine pronoun for the Prime Minister, since all Italian Prime Ministers have been men. Following convention, when making more general arguments I will use the feminine pronoun to refer to the Prime Minister.

<sup>2</sup> In the interest of economical exposition, the paper treats the electoral system as a dichotomous variable, contrasting plurality and proportional representation. However, the multiple dimensions constituting the electoral system can be operationalized as a single continuous variable, which is particularly useful for cross-national comparisons, since then one can assess different degrees of plurality or conversely proportionality. In particular, Carles Boix has compared different national electoral systems based on a single measure of the “effective threshold” (Boix, 1999). Based on this measure Germany appears much less proportional than what would appear of one were only to consider the formula to transform votes into seats, since it sets a relatively demanding threshold to gain a seat in the Bundestag (5% of the national vote), higher than most other proportional representation systems (Powell, 2000, p. 28). Although the strength of the German Chancellor is undoubtedly largely the result of a tradition that goes back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is also compatible with the argument presented here.

<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that a plurality electoral system will tend, other things being equal, to bipolarize the party system, but not necessarily to reduce the number of parties. First, the number of parties depends on the *interaction* of electoral rules and cleavages in the country (Clark & Golder, 2006). Second, if a plurality electoral system is introduced in a country with a highly fragmented party system, smaller parties may hold the key to the electoral success of the electoral coalitions and thus have significant bargaining

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power (this is indeed what occurred in Italy in the aftermath of the electoral reform, (D'Alimonte, 2001). In sum, plurality electoral rules are entirely compatible with multiparty systems and coalition governments.

<sup>4</sup> Compared to other definitions of what constitutes a pre-electoral coalition (Golder, 2006)), mine is rather restrictive, since it limits it to coalitions that present a common candidate premier to voters.

<sup>5</sup> Another example of electoral reform that was initiated by peripheral political actors, also from the early 1990s and also involving resort to popular referenda, is New Zealand (Vowles, 1995). Japan's electoral reform of 1994 is less 'exogenous' in that it was developed from within the ranks of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (Shiratori, 1995). The case of Columbia is ambiguous: electoral reform involved a major challenge to the parliamentary parties and forcing the hand of the Constitutional Court, but was promoted by a very strong political actor, the president (Nielson & Shugart, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> The laws for the two chambers were different but produced very similar results in terms of the translation of votes into seats (Katz, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> In fact, Italy was an extreme case of disjunction between electoral results and government formation, as parties that lost votes were more likely than those that gained votes to enter a new government (Strom, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> In an interesting parallel with the Columbian case (Nielson and Shugart 1999), there were complaints – including from the then Prime Minister Giuliano Amato – that the question posed by the referendum was actually unconstitutional, and that the Constitutional Court, in approving it, had effectively caved in to popular pressure (G. Ferrara, 2004; Pasquino & Vassallo, 1994).

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<sup>9</sup> More precisely, the referendum only referred to the rules for the election of the senate. Since in Italy referendums can only repeal laws (or parts of laws), the referendum canceled from the text of the existing electoral law the provisions that apply a PR system to the senate elections. With this deletion from the law's text, the referendum changed the electoral law for the senate into a mixed system (75% of the seats were allocated through plurality vote and 25% through PR).

<sup>10</sup> Parliament's intervention was necessary, as the change in the electoral law for the senate made it necessary to also change the electoral law for the lower chamber to avoid an unworkable situation in which the two chambers – which have essentially the same powers – would be elected with two different electoral rules.

<sup>11</sup> The new electoral law was finally approved in early August 1993. The main difference with the outcome produced by the referendum was the introduction of a threshold for the PR share: for the Camera dei Deputati there is a 4% national threshold (Chiaramonte, 2002, 168); for the Senate there is no explicit national threshold, but there are implicit constituency-level thresholds, usually higher than 4% (Di Virgilio, 2002, 90) which was partly compensated by a complex mechanism that would reduce the PR quota for the parties winning the majoritarian seat (the mechanism however lost importance over time as parties developed strategies to limit its impact, (Baldini & Pappalardo, 2004, 55-62; Katz, 2001, 115-117)

<sup>12</sup> Among the new parties was Forza Italia – the party created in early 1994 by media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi – which was to become the lynchpin of the center-right coalitions to the present day.

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<sup>13</sup> I will use the phrase “Prime Minister” for the Italian *Presidente del Consiglio dei Ministri* (President of the Council of Ministers).

<sup>14</sup> The lack of Prime Ministerial control over the cabinet agenda was one of the most striking points of departure of the Italian case from the common European practice, where Prime Ministers usually control the order of the day (Thiébaud, 1993).

In the absence of the law regulating the operation of the cabinet, the main legal norm that regulated the Council of Ministers was Royal Decree 466/1901 (there was, however, some doubt over whether the decree was still valid after the regime change from monarchy to the republic (Pitruzzella, Villone, Ciarlo, & Carlassarre, 1994). According to this norm, the Prime Minister had the power to set the order of the day for the Council of Ministers, but this power was interpreted in practice as being exercised in consultation with the government parties and with individual ministers (Pitruzzella 1986). The royal decree also seemed to indicate that the Prime Minister had the power to suspend measures introduced by individual ministers and to bring the issue to the cabinet (Pitruzzella 1986, p. 340). However, the practice of the *fuori sacco* made this essentially impossible.

<sup>15</sup> It should be noted that in a different policy area, the budget, a similar situation obtained, whereby until the late 1988 all attempts to reduce the fragmentation of the budget process had failed due to the veto power of the government parties (e.g. Amato, 1974, 4).

<sup>16</sup> Casually, the election of the new Parliament coincided with the end of the term for the sitting President of the Republic.

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<sup>17</sup> A measure of the powerlessness of the government parties was the unusually high number of “technical” ministers, namely of ministers that were not members of Parliament and that were chosen for their expertise in a certain policy area. Technical ministers were very much the exception in the First Republic (at most one or two in the executives of the 1980s). However, there were six technical ministers in the Amato government and thirteen in the Ciampi government (Istituto Nazionale dell’Informazione, 2000).

<sup>18</sup> It was in fact Ciampi himself that pushed for the reform of the executive and the introduction of the rulebook of the cabinet (Criscitiello, 2003).

<sup>19</sup> Like the preceding provision, this measure was in contrast with established practice, whereby each minister was responsible for following the progress of the legislation pertaining to his/her policy sector (Morlini and Guiglia 1994).

<sup>20</sup> By 1994 the postwar parties had disappeared and new ones had appeared. The PCI had split in two, the hard-core Rifondazione Comunista (RC, Communist Refoundation) and the more moderate Partito Democratico della Sinistra (PDS, Democratic Party of the Left). The DC had transformed itself in the Popular Party. On the right of the political spectrum, the main new actor beside Forza Italia was the former small Fascist party which, under the new name National Alliance, began to move towards the mainstream.

<sup>21</sup> The relevance of government programs was underscored by the salience of substantive policy issues among voters (Giannetti & Sened, 2004) and in the media coverage of the campaign, as opposed to ideological issues or questions related to the party composition of the future governments which were at the center of media attention in the First Republic (Sani & Segatti, 1996). Substantive issues also increased their relevance

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compared to the 1994 elections (in 1994 they represented 36% of the issues covered and in 1996 they were 47% of the issues covered, Sani and Segatti 1996, p. 20).

<sup>22</sup> The influence of the opposition on policies decreased as new parliamentary standing orders reduced the power of the opposition in the determination of the parliamentary agenda (e.g. Caretti, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> The Olive Tree included the Democrats of the Left – the new name of the PDS – parts of the former Popular Party and a number of smaller parties.

<sup>24</sup> It should be noted the Pajno, Secretary General of the Prime Minister Office in the Prodi government, explicitly connected this reform to the fact that the electoral reform had given new political relevance to the government program (Pajno 2000). The same connection between electoral reform and reform of the central administration was made in the report that the government presented to the Camera dei Deputati on June 9, 1999 to accompany a draft of decree 303/99. See also Corte dei Conti (1996, p. 13).

<sup>25</sup> RC had not been part of the Olive Tree pre-electoral coalition but had to be included in the government coalition in order for the coalition to get a majority of seats in the Lower Chamber (D'Alimonte & Nelken, 1997).

<sup>26</sup> Consistently with this paper's argument, the D'Alema government was less autonomous from the coalition parties than its predecessor, although parties did not have the time to reassert the extent of control over the government that they had in the First Republic (Barbieri, 2003, pp. 71-77). In some policy areas the lower autonomy of the new government seems to have slowed down the process of reform. As in those areas, however, the high level of personnel continuity between the two governments ensured the implementation of the reform (see [author(s) names omitted]).

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<sup>27</sup> This strengthening of the DAE was based on the Prodi government policy to introduce new technical capabilities into the public administration. The 35 economists were part of 200 new hires that had been done based on a measure passed by the Prodi government in 1996 (former head of the DAE, personal communication, 6/10/04).

<sup>28</sup> The increase in the fragmentation of the party system and in the number of parties in the government coalition was due to – as described in the previous section – the significant bargaining power of the smaller parties in the pre-electoral coalitions.

<sup>29</sup> Beginning in 2006, the Prime Minister Office started to accumulate again a number of direct line functions which the 1999 reform had eliminated precisely in order to create a more streamlined structure that would be focused on coordination functions (Alesse, 2007).

<sup>30</sup> One can only speculate as to why Berlusconi did not seem to have interest in the organization power of the Prime Minister. Possibly, as some have argued, he was not interested in the broad policy-making of the government but only in more specific issues directly affecting him as private citizen (Allum & Newell, 2003). Moreover, his direct control of the media may have constituted a source of electoral appeal for himself and his party quite independent from how well his government actually performed.

<sup>31</sup> With reference to the Italian case, Alessandro Natalini has found greater correspondence between government programs and electoral programs in the governments directly chosen by the voters compared to those formed in post-electoral negotiations (Natalini, 2003).

<sup>32</sup> Bawn & Thies (2003) show that proportional representation systems are biased towards the representation of organized interest groups rather than voters at large.

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<sup>33</sup> For how the electoral reform led to the strengthening of the Finance minister see Hallerberg (2004); for how a stronger core executive and in particular a stronger Prime Minister was able to reform the labor market and pension system see Ferrara and Guelmini (2000).

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