The pace of the legislative process.

A diachronic analysis of the Italian legislature (1996-2006)

Enrico Borghetto and Marco Giuliani
University of Milano

Address for correspondence:
Dipartimento di studi sociali e politici
Università di Milano
Via Conservatorio 7,
20122 Milano (Italy)

enrico.borghetto@unimi.it
marco.giuliani@unimi.it

1. Introduction

Law-making is a process. As such it develops through time, having a beginning and (sometimes) an end. Time is thus an intrinsic component of the legislative process, and often a factor that is valued both by policy-makers and citizens. The former may be driven to speed up or slow down the approval of new pieces of legislation by political reasons, being time traditionally in scarce supply for political actors (Döring, 1995a).[1] The latter may award political elites showing decision-making efficiency in the attempt to fulfil their electoral promises, or criticize them for burying new and long-needed bills.[2]

One of the most interesting aspects of the temporal dimension of law-making, and at the same time one of the most under-researched issues, is the pace of the process itself.[3] More particularly, factors pertaining either to the content of the bill, to the adopted procedures or to further political factors (e.g. veto players, the consensual stance of law-makers, the electoral cycle, etc.) can affect the swiftness of the legislative process, and thus the performance of the parliamentary institution.

This paper investigates the differing impact of these factors through an empirical analysis of law-making in the Italian parliament in the 1996-2006 decade, that is in the two legislatures governed respectively by the centre-left and centre-right coalitions. In order to do that, it will use a new dataset providing information on all the laws adopted in Italy over that decade and, in particular, on the attributes of the adoption processes, the political environment where they occur, and the bills approved. To test the effect of our selected group of variables on the durations of Italian legislative processes we will make recourse to event history analysis. Event history analysis, also known as survival analysis, has been recently used as the standard approach in the social sciences for investigating phenomena where the major object of interest is the duration and timing of specific events (Box-Steffensmeier &

---

[1] An illustrative example is the statement by a British opposition spokesman reported by Anthony King: "One of the few things people...tend to forget is that almost the only weapon an Opposition has is time. Almost the only thing one can do is to deny the Government a certain amount of time. If you can persuade the government, fine. If not, time is all you have." (King, 1974: 99) (cited by King, 1990: 218)

[2] The cumbersomeness of legislative processes was already acknowledged by John Stuart Mill (1862: 109-10) when he criticized the contribution of the British Parliament to the drafting of bills. He argued that "the mere time necessarily occupied in getting through bills, renders Parliament more and more incapable of passing any, except on detached and narrow points. If a bill is prepared which even attempts to deal with the whole of any subject […], it hangs over from session to session through sheer impossibility of finding time to dispose of it."

[3] Two path-breaking comparative articles on this topic are certainly those written by Becker and Saalfeld (2004), and Martin and Vanberg (2004). At the same time, it is arguable that they both suffer from the intrinsic limits and difficulties of cross-country comparison (Giuliani 2005), as it is evidenced by the odd results of the first investigation and by the insufficiently justified selection of the two countries in the second one. As a way to bypass these shortcomings, we preferred to restrict our scope of analysis to a single country and to adopt a comparative diachronic perspective by including two legislatures ruled by alternative coalitions.

Bradford, 2004).[4] More importantly for the present discussion, it has already been used to explain the factors lying behind the different lengths of legislative process in comparative studies (Becker & Saalfeld, 2004; Martin & Vanberg, 2004; Bräuninger et al., 2008).

The paper is organized as follows. In section two we will briefly describe the different phases of the Italian legislative process and provide a first quantitative account of the selection process that brings literally thousands of proposals to become 'only' a few hundreds laws. In section three we will introduce a first descriptive account of the duration of law-making processes in the 1996-2006 decade. In section four we will propose the working hypotheses for our event history analysis, whose results will be discussed in section five. The final section concludes and points to further lines of research.

2. The long way to Tipperary

The process spanning from the simple act of proposing a bill to its final approval is, generally speaking, a complex one. Most of all, it appears as a rigorous selection process in which the largest part of proposals are unable to pass the institutional and political obstacles before the final vote. In our decade, out of more than 21,000 bills, only around 1,700 managed to become law, which roughly means an approval rate of 8%.[5]

In the Italian parliament there are no barriers to submitting bills. As such, it differs from other countries which have explicitly created them with the aim of rationalizing the legislative process (Mattson, 1995). Each MP can advance his/her proposals without having to find other supporting colleagues or the backing of the parliamentary group. Additionally, the legislative process is not organized in sessions, so that a bill, once proposed, remains in the circuit until its approval or until the end of the legislature.[6] These arrangements potentially increase the competition among MPs and between parliament and executive because of the restricted amount of legislative time available.[7]

Figure 1 outlines the major quantitative features of the legislative process in the two legislatures under consideration, breaking up the data both for type of bill, chamber and proponent. Bills are usually distinguished following a juridical classification in ordinary, budgetary, constitutional and laws converting

---

[4] For instance, its application to the study area of EU decision-making has recently sparked a methodological debate among practitioners in the pages of *European Union Politics* (Golub, 2008; König, 2008).

[5] Comparatively speaking (Andeweg & Nijzink, 1995; Giuliani, 2002), the Italian parliament seems to present a lower rate of approval than other countries.

[6] Under certain provisions, bills approved in one chamber can be even carried over to the next legislature.

[7] The legislative program is scheduled by the speaker of the House having heard the preferences of the executive and the parliamentary groups. Its adoption requires a 75% majority among the delegates representing the parliamentary groups in the lower chamber, whereas the delegates representing the groups sitting in the Senate have to vote for it unanimously.

temporary decrees.[8] As a matter of fact, a closer analysis would lead to further differentiations. Amongst ordinary laws, for instance, it is important to single out those laws that merely ratify international agreements: they constitute a significant proportion of ordinary bills in quantitative terms but, in most of the cases, they are practically of no political relevance.[9] At each stage it is reported which of the two chambers is in charge for the process – that is for action or inaction – although we will not go any further into an evaluation of the problems which characterise the perfect bicameral system in Italy (but see Zucchini 2008 for a thorough analysis). For the moment it is sufficient to remind that in Italy a bill has to go through the so-called *navette* system, that is it has to be approved by both chambers without any of the two prevailing, and without any conciliation committee or any similar procedure which could contribute to settle potential divergences. This may theoretically bring to an endless ping-pong between the two chambers, especially in the case of partially divergent composition of the majority, but this eventuality is not really an empirical issue.[10] It is also useful to remind that, differently from the Westminster tradition – where the term is associated with different moments or stages of the process (e.g. presentation, committee stage, discussion, vote) – each passage in a chamber is called 'reading', so that a bill needs at least two readings in order to become a law.

As already mentioned, more than 21,000 bills were submitted in the 1996-2006 decade, with a slightly bigger legislative initiative in the 13th legislature and in the lower chamber with respect to upper chamber (mostly due to the different number of MPs). Unsurprisingly, the vast majority of them (20,293) are ordinary bills. In fact, whereas the proposal of budgetary bills (100) and bills converting decrees (745) is reserved to the executive, the former category represents the classic arena for private member bills.[11] Almost 89% of the initiative comes in fact from the assembly, that is from single MPs or groups of them (not necessarily organized along party lines); 10% comes from the executive; and the remaining 1% is due to the mobilization of citizens (50,000 signatures are sufficient in order to submit a bill), to the action of regional governments, or the initiative of CNEL (an institution representing different types of social partners).
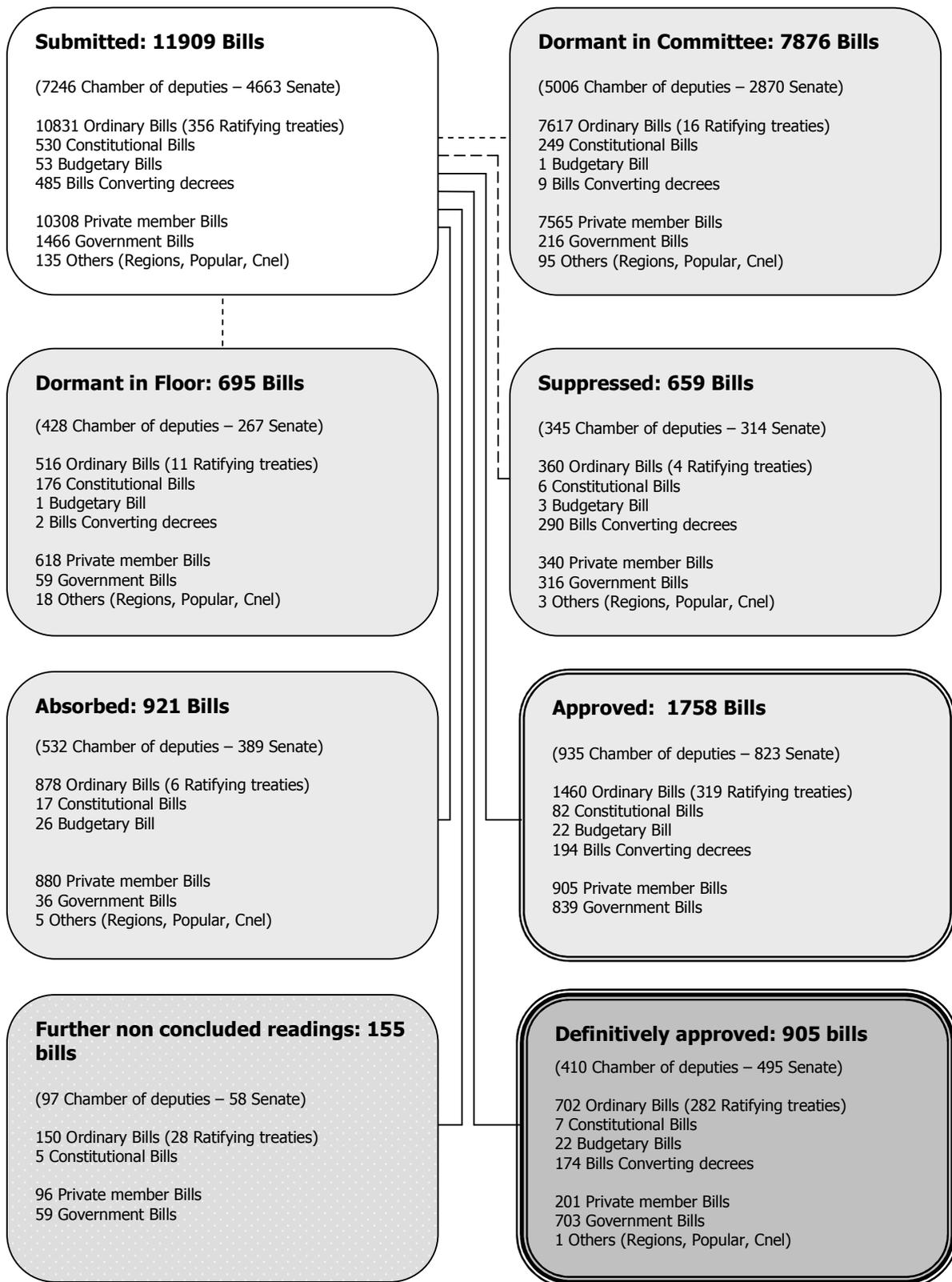
---

[8] Temporary decrees are issued by the executive for emergency reasons and are immediately placed in the legislative agenda for their conversion. Their normative power lasts 60 days, the time frame in which the parliament has to convert them into law, before they lapse.

[9] They are usually bilateral agreements on very specific issues that do not attract MPs' attention, so much that they often vote unanimously on them. Another sub-classification of ordinary laws might take into consideration those laws delegating legislative power to the executive.
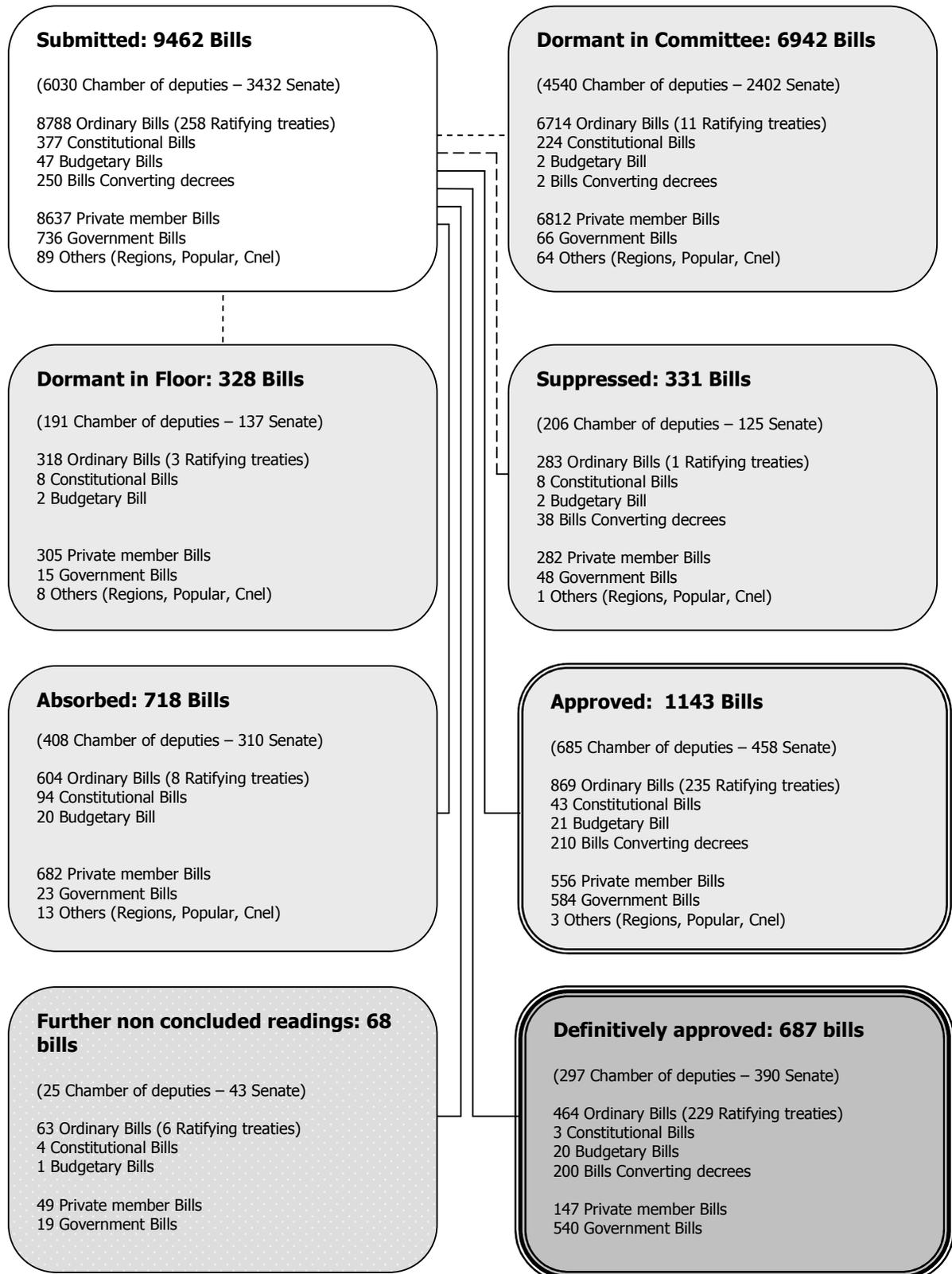
[10] Although for the 'law of anticipated reaction' one could argue that the eventuality itself can slow-down the whole process. The average number of readings in our decade has been 2.3 (Giuliani, 2008a).

[11] In practice, even the proposals of bills ratifying international agreements (614) – that is a subtype of ordinary bills – is monopolized by the executive.

Fig. 1 The long way of the legislative process in the 13th and 14th legislatures
13th Legislature (1996-2001)

Submitted: 11909 Bills

(7246 Chamber of deputies − 4663 Senate)

10831 Ordinary Bills (356 Ratifying treaties)
530 Constitutional Bills
53 Budgetary Bills
485 Bills Converting decrees

10308 Private member Bills
1466 Government Bills
135 Others (Regions, Popular, Cnel)

Dormant in Committee: 7876 Bills

(5006 Chamber of deputies − 2870 Senate)

7617 Ordinary Bills (16 Ratifying treaties)
249 Constitutional Bills
1 Budgetary Bill
9 Bills Converting decrees

7565 Private member Bills
216 Government Bills
95 Others (Regions, Popular, Cnel)

Dormant in Floor: 695 Bills

(428 Chamber of deputies − 267 Senate)

516 Ordinary Bills (11 Ratifying treaties)
176 Constitutional Bills
1 Budgetary Bill
2 Bills Converting decrees

618 Private member Bills
59 Government Bills
18 Others (Regions, Popular, Cnel)

Suppressed: 659 Bills

(345 Chamber of deputies − 314 Senate)

360 Ordinary Bills (4 Ratifying treaties)
6 Constitutional Bills
3 Budgetary Bill
290 Bills Converting decrees

340 Private member Bills
316 Government Bills
3 Others (Regions, Popular, Cnel)

Absorbed: 921 Bills

(532 Chamber of deputies − 389 Senate)

878 Ordinary Bills (6 Ratifying treaties)
17 Constitutional Bills
26 Budgetary Bill

880 Private member Bills
36 Government Bills
5 Others (Regions, Popular, Cnel)

Approved: 1758 Bills

(935 Chamber of deputies − 823 Senate)

1460 Ordinary Bills (319 Ratifying treaties)
82 Constitutional Bills
22 Budgetary Bill
194 Bills Converting decrees

905 Private member Bills
839 Government Bills

Further non concluded readings: 155 bills

(97 Chamber of deputies − 58 Senate)

150 Ordinary Bills (28 Ratifying treaties)
5 Constitutional Bills

96 Private member Bills
59 Government Bills

Definitively approved: 905 bills

(410 Chamber of deputies − 495 Senate)

702 Ordinary Bills (282 Ratifying treaties)
7 Constitutional Bills
22 Budgetary Bills
174 Bills Converting decrees

201 Private member Bills
703 Government Bills
1 Others (Regions, Popular, Cnel)

14th Legislature (2001-2006)

Submitted: 9462 Bills

(6030 Chamber of deputies – 3432 Senate)

8788 Ordinary Bills (258 Ratifying treaties)
377 Constitutional Bills
47 Budgetary Bills
250 Bills Converting decrees

8637 Private member Bills
736 Government Bills
89 Others (Regions, Popular, Cnel)

Dormant in Committee: 6942 Bills

(4540 Chamber of deputies – 2402 Senate)

6714 Ordinary Bills (11 Ratifying treaties)
224 Constitutional Bills
2 Budgetary Bill
2 Bills Converting decrees

6812 Private member Bills
66 Government Bills
64 Others (Regions, Popular, Cnel)

Dormant in Floor: 328 Bills

(191 Chamber of deputies – 137 Senate)

318 Ordinary Bills (3 Ratifying treaties)
8 Constitutional Bills
2 Budgetary Bill

305 Private member Bills
15 Government Bills
8 Others (Regions, Popular, Cnel)

Suppressed: 331 Bills

(206 Chamber of deputies – 125 Senate)

283 Ordinary Bills (1 Ratifying treaties)
8 Constitutional Bills
2 Budgetary Bill
38 Bills Converting decrees

282 Private member Bills
48 Government Bills
1 Others (Regions, Popular, Cnel)

Absorbed: 718 Bills

(408 Chamber of deputies – 310 Senate)

604 Ordinary Bills (8 Ratifying treaties)
94 Constitutional Bills
20 Budgetary Bill

682 Private member Bills
23 Government Bills
13 Others (Regions, Popular, Cnel)

Approved: 1143 Bills

(685 Chamber of deputies – 458 Senate)

869 Ordinary Bills (235 Ratifying treaties)
43 Constitutional Bills
21 Budgetary Bill
210 Bills Converting decrees

556 Private member Bills
584 Government Bills
3 Others (Regions, Popular, Cnel)

Further non concluded readings: 68 bills

(25 Chamber of deputies – 43 Senate)

63 Ordinary Bills (6 Ratifying treaties)
4 Constitutional Bills
1 Budgetary Bills

49 Private member Bills
19 Government Bills

Definitively approved: 687 bills

(297 Chamber of deputies – 390 Senate)

464 Ordinary Bills (229 Ratifying treaties)
3 Constitutional Bills
20 Budgetary Bills
200 Bills Converting decrees

147 Private member Bills
540 Government Bills

As a matter of fact, the level of the initiative represents nothing more than a statistical figure, because, by no means, these data are directly correlated with the end result of the legislative process, that is with the amount of approved laws. Most of the bills are either submitted for purely symbolic reasons or to display some parliamentary activity to their respective party group or constituency, and not really to see them ultimately adopted.[12]

As it can be seen in figure 1, most of the submitted bills remain 'dormant', that is they do not succeed in making any step forward in the legislative process. The rules of procedure of both chambers state that after a bill is formally acknowledged by the assembly, the floor assigns it to one of the fourteen permanent parliamentary committees (which may consult on their turn other permanent or special committees according to the cross-sectoral implications of the bill). This committee is supposed to examine and, if necessary, amend the bill before either approving it – if it is conferred legislative powers under a specialised decentralised procedure[13] – or referring it to the floor. It is in this very preliminary phase that most of the bills 'get lost', that they get virtually buried even before discussing them. Some of them are not assigned to a committee (especially towards the end of the legislature); the majority of them are never taken into account or examined; and for a few others the discussion may even begin but its continuation is never scheduled. For this reason, we choose the term 'dormant' for those bills that literally 'drop into' the legislative process and whose progression stops in the very few stages of the first reading. We are talking of almost 70% of the total amount of bills submitted, that is almost 15,000 bills (8,000 in the 13th legislature and 7,000 in the 14th). Ordinary and constitutional bills are proportionally overrepresented in this sort of burial ground, alike non governmental bills.

There is a second 'trap' in the first phases of the process, which is similar to the first one, although it is not as selective. Bills leaving the committee stage may not succeed to get adopted by the floor. This does not mean that they are rejected by the assembly – we will come shortly to this minor category, although we can anticipate here that only 64 bills have been outvoted in the first reading over the whole decade – but that they remain dormant in the chamber. Although after the conclusion of the committee scrutiny the bill is expected to be referred to the floor and then examined and voted[14], some of them simply do not manage to enter the floor's agenda and reach the first reading vote. More than 1,000 bills followed this fate – roughly 2/3 in the 13th legislature and 1/3 in the 14th – representing almost 15% of those that passed the committee stage. Once again ordinary and constitutional bills submitted by

---

[12] Our data tell us that the level of the initiative has increased since the introduction of the mixed majoritarian-proportional electoral system at the beginning of the 1990s, but the explanation of this phenomenon goes beyond the aims of this paper.

[13] The application of this procedure requires a qualified majority of four-fifths in the Committee, of a qualified majority of nine-tenths on the floor, and the agreement of the government.

[14] The floor can even send the bill back to the committee or request a new deliberation.

MPs represent the utmost part of them, without any relevant difference between the two legislatures. [15]

A third category of breakdown, which we labelled 'suppressed' bills, actually includes a wide variety of outcomes. It comprises bills that have been withdrawn for various motivations by the proponent himself (usually this cluster represents the vast majority within the category), those related to lapsed temporary decrees, bills rejected by a vote (a slim minority as we anticipated above), together with bills whose story ended for several technical or political reasons: they were cancelled, postponed, returned in order to be passed to the other chamber, or partitioned into several new bills. We counted almost a thousand bills ending up this way, distributed more or less in the same way as in previous categories. [16]

Already in their first reading – be it in the Senate or in the Chamber of Deputies – bills can be absorbed into other bills at an advanced stage of discussion, if the two legislative projects deal with more or less the same issues.[17] More than 1,600 bills have been absorbed in the 1996-2006 decade and their ratio compared to the amount of proposals is approximately the same in the two legislatures.

Finally, bills that are not aborted because dormant (in committee or in the floor), suppressed or absorbed are those that managed to overcome the initial line of technical and political hurdles, and thus they end up being approved in the first reading. Almost 3,000 bills reached this stage in our decade: 1,758 in the 13th legislature and 1,143 in the 14th – that is more or less one fourth of those that actually never entered the legislative process because not even discussed for one day in a parliamentary committee. Among these bills – whose approval may have been with or without amendments compared to the original text or to the one that emerged from the committee discussion – we counted 2,329 ordinary bills[18], 125 constitutional bills, 43 budgetary bills and 404 bills converting temporary decrees. In most cases, the 13th legislature appears more 'prolific' than the 14th, with the relevant exception of the conversion of temporary decrees which are equally distributed in the two five-

---

[15] Although, in absolute terms, the number of constitutional bills failing at this stage looks substantially higher in the 13th legislature than in the 14th, this figure is mostly due to the higher level of constitutional bills submitted.

[16] In the 13th legislature there is an 'excess' of lapsed bills related to temporary decrees and – consequently – a higher number of failed governmental bills. This is due to a 1996 ruling of the Constitutional Court that tried to contrast the abuse of temporary decrees and forced the government not to reiterate them, but to convert them all together.

[17] This is formally different from being considered a bill 'treated jointly' with another one since, if this is the case, the projects keep some sort of autonomous life, at least in terms of classification by the database of the parliament. Whereas an absorbed bill ends its life, two or three bills treated jointly and whose process continues appear as three different approved bills although, in the end, the law (and even the bill in the second reading) will be unique. It is for this reason that the number of approved bills does not match with the number of laws and that the sum of the bills into each category in figure 1 does not match the amount of the initiative.

[18] 554 bills simply ratify international agreements and 116 bills delegate legislative power to the executive.

year periods.[19] At this level, and in spite of the high amount of bills ratifying international treaties (normally initiated by the executive), private member bills and government bills are more or less of the same amount: with a slight prevalence of the first type in the 13th legislature – 905 against 839 – and the exact opposite in the 14th – 556 against 584.

But the 'road to Tipperary' is not concluded yet. The same passages (and corresponding risks) are replicated at least for the compulsory reading of the second chamber, if not for further ones. Another 155 bills fell in these traps in the 13th legislature – with a majority of private member bills but still with almost 40% of government ones – and 68 bills in the 14th legislature – almost 30% of them initiated by the executive. These figures clearly indicate that the highest 'hazards' in the Italian legislative process lie in the first reading, with almost 85% of the initiative terminated before the approval in the first chamber.[20] When a bill passes the first reading, it means that there is some degree of political commitment behind it and that it has a high chance to become law (sooner or later).

The 1996-2001 legislature, the one guided by centre-left governments (Prodi, D'Alema I and II, and Amato), eventually approved 905 acts, with a slight prevalence of laws adopted in the higher chamber. 77% of them were ordinary bills, although more than one third were simply ratifying international agreements. In addition, we counted 22 budgetary bills (100% of those approved in the first reading), 174 bills converting temporary decrees (almost 20% of the final output), and 7 constitutional bills. The ratio between executive and private member bills approved by this legislature was 3.5 to 1.

The 2001-2006 legislature, ruled by two almost identical centre-right governments (both with Berlusconi as Prime Minister), passed 687 acts - once again most of them were ultimately approved by the Senate (since the first reading is likelier to occur in the lower chamber and the number of necessary readings is on average around two). Ordinary bills were always the vast majority – 67.5% – despite the fact that almost half of them were made up by ratifications of international agreements. The total legislative output included also 20 budgetary bills and 200 bills converting temporary decrees (almost 30% of the total amount). The ratio between government and private member bills was similar to that of the preceding legislature: 3.6.[21]

---

[19] This balanced distribution is surprising since, at the start of the 14th legislature, the abovementioned ruling of the Constitutional court had already been in force for some years, thus the expectation was that the executive would not have tried to use the instrument of temporary decrees as frequently as in the past. Also budgetary bills are similarly split but this outcome is more the effect of the budgetary process itself, than a question of choice or capacity.

[20] For further data and analysis on this issue see Zucchini (2008).

[21] In the data presented in the next section, you will probably notice a small difference between the number of laws and the number of definitively adopted bills. This is due to the fact that we attributed to the 13th legislature a constitutional law which needed to be ratified by a popular referendum and the poll could only take place under the following legislature. Formally, the bill cannot be considered approved without the fulfilment of this constitutional requirement, but in fact its content had been entirely defined by the preceding majority. For this reason, the 13th

3. But… how long does it take?

The obstacles 'on the way to Tipperary' do not reflect themselves only in a tough selection process, but also in the length of the legislative process for those bills that manage to become law.

Tab. 1 The length of the legislative process

	N	Average	Min	Max
13th legislature	906	380,9	4	1764
14th legislature	686	299,7	3	1716
1996-2006	1592	345,5	3	1764

Source: *Italian law-making archive*

On average, successful bills take almost one year to get adopted in Italy, although their lifetime ranges from a minimum of three days to a maximum of more than four years.[22] The 14th legislature, even if (or maybe because) it is less 'productive', appears – so to say – more 'efficient': its laws took on average 80 days less than those of the 13th legislature. However, we have to take into account that in the 2001-2006 period the legislature passed a higher proportion of bills converting temporary bills, whose duration is inescapably less than 60 days: thus our first impression may be biased. A closer look at the distribution of the different durations of the process related to approved bills is provided by figure 2, where we can appreciate both the difference between legislatures, and the fact that most bills (of whatever type) are actually processed in more or less 100 days.

---

legislature has one more law compared to the number of adopted bills; the opposite holds for the 14th legislature.

[22] These are remarkable records, both in absolute and comparative terms. As far as we know, it is twice and three times the time needed respectively in the Netherlands and in Germany, no matter whether we look at the average time or at the maximum duration (Martin and Vanberg 2004: 20)

Fig. 2. The distribution of the durations of the legislative process
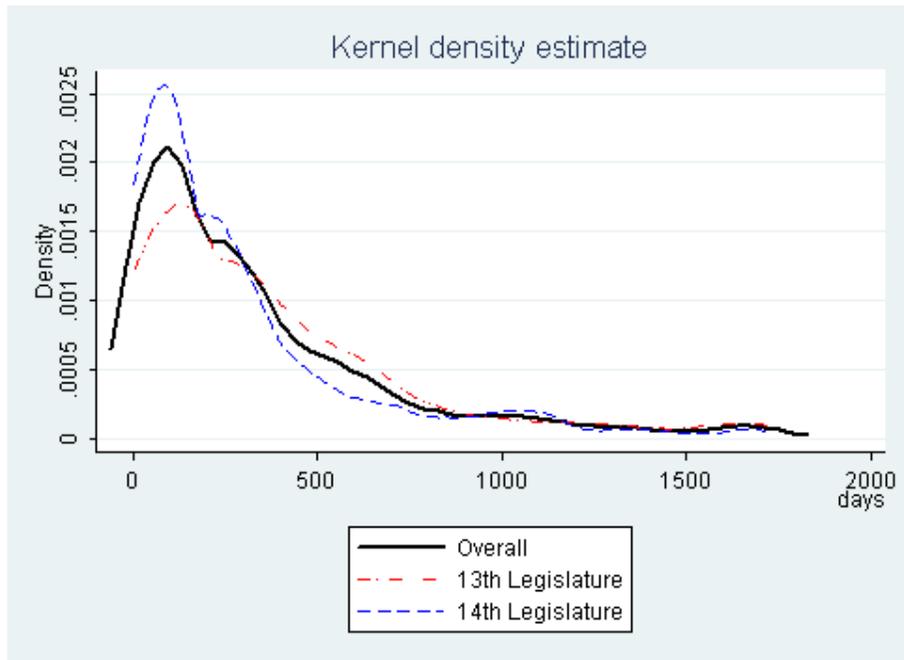
Source: *Italian law-making archive*

Clearly, the overall length of the process depends, among other factors, upon the number of readings, although these are not evenly distributed. Figure 3 presents the data regarding both the share of laws approved for each number of readings, and their respective durations.

Fig. 3 The distribution among different readings
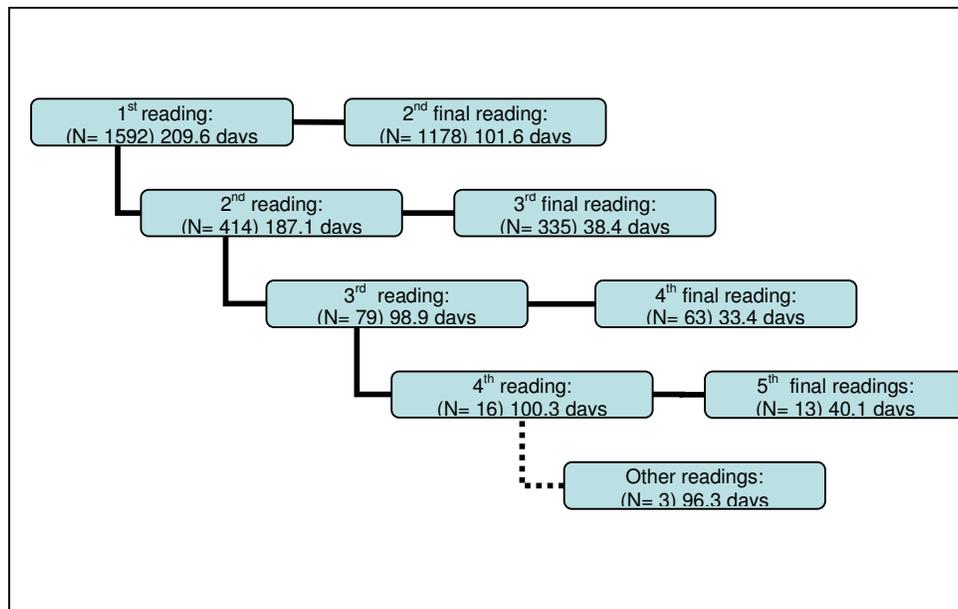
Source: *Italian law-making archive*

We can immediately note that the lengthiest reading is the first one, which, on average, lasts more than 200 days. This time is mostly used to verify whether there is a sufficient level of political agreement to allow the issue entering the legislative agenda (and not to leave it dormant as it happens in most of the cases), and to construct the policy consent on some sort of solution. Bills are actually only draft projects that require to be improved both in term of substantial content and in term of political equilibrium inside the governing coalition and – often – with the opposition. The first reading can thus be considered the most sensitive passage of the process, as demonstrated by the fact that 3 out of 4 laws are already definitively adopted in the second reading, that is without modifying the text formulated in the preceding chamber, in (on average) half of the time.

If not, in those 414 cases that continue to (at least) a third reading, the second one has the same functions, characteristics and average length of the first reading. In that event, the third passage is extremely brief if it is the final one (81% of the cases with an average duration around one month), whereas it is longer if the process is still not ended (79 cases with an average duration of almost 100 days). And the same pattern replicates with the fourth and successive readings. [23]

As we anticipated in the preceding paragraph, one important formal difference that influences the duration of the legislative process is the type of law to be adopted (see table 2). First of all, some of them have either a fixed timetable (e.g. the budgetary process) or a pre-established limit of duration (e.g. bills converting temporary decrees, that lapse after 60 days). In fact, these types of law have the most homogeneous duration in their category, as demonstrated by the uniform values across legislatures and by their low level in the standard deviation coefficient.

Tab. 2 Average duration, standard deviation and N for different types of laws

	13th legislature	14th legislature	1996-2006
Ordinary laws	502.3 *(467.9)* (N= 408)	557.9 *(434.2)* (N= 233)	522.5 *(456.3)* (N= 641)
Rat. int. agreements	419.4 *(215.1)* (N= 295)	270.7 *(151.2)* (N= 231)	354.1 *(203.4)* (N= 526)
Conv. temp. decrees	49.7 *(10.9)* (N= 174)	49.4 *(51.4)* (N= 200)	49.6 *(38.2)* (N= 374)
Budgetary laws	94.3 *(36.7)* (N= 22)	108.5 *(26.3)* (N= 20)	101.1 *(32.6)* (N= 42)
Constitutional laws	711.4 *(524.2)* (N= 7)	516.0 *(162.6)* (N= 2)	668.0 *(465.6)* (N= 9)

Source: *Italian law-making archive;* Note: Standard deviation in italics

[23] On the whole, those laws that are approved in two readings take on average 289 days, those that need three readings 455 days, four readings 694 days, five readings 853 days and (paradoxically) 6 readings 696 days.

Constitutional laws are unsurprisingly the kind of bills that require more time. On the one hand, they deal with fundamental elements of the polity and, on the other hand, they formally require a double reading in each chamber. For these reasons, although their duration is highly dependent on the saliency of the issues at stake[24] – and this may explain the difference between the average duration of the adoption processes for 7 constitutional bills enacted in the 13th legislature compared to the 2 approved in the 14th legislature – all other things being equal, they do require more time than other type of bills for simple procedural rules.

The ratification of international agreements should not have the same problem precisely because of their merely technical nature and low political salience, which is demonstrated even by the fact that they are usually adopted unanimously and without amendments (Giuliani, 2008b). Nonetheless, the average duration of their legislative process is quite random and, on average, approximates one year. There is even a sizeable difference between the two legislatures. In fact, these odd features can be explained by the fact that, precisely as a consequence of their low salience, they are not scheduled promptly in the legislative agenda. Most of the times they are voted in sequence from time to time, when there is some place in the parliamentary calendar, independently from the fact that they have been 'waiting' for a long time or have just entered the process. This confirms the low level of interest of this category for political scientists since, most of the times, the ratification of international agreements simply engulf the legislative process without eliciting the attention of MPs that often leave the floor almost unattended[25].

Finally, we are left with the category of the 'pure' ordinary laws. We use here the term 'pure' in order to underline that the ratifications of international agreements (formally ordinary laws themselves) were excluded. Even so, ordinary laws certainly cannot be considered as a uniform and consistent category. Quite the opposite. The standard deviation of their durations is the highest one (together with constitutional laws), calling for a deeper analysis of their intra-group variation. At the same time, there does not seem to be almost any difference between the two legislatures taken into consideration. In spite of the fact that the centre-left legislature adopted roughly twice as many ordinary laws in comparison with the centre-right one, their average duration persists to be over 500 days, with slightly faster processes for the first period.[26] This confirms the fact that what we observed while commenting table 1, i.e. some greater 'efficiency' displayed by the 14th legislature, is entirely due to its highest

---

[24] Arguably, reforming a significant element of the Constitution, such as the federal arrangements of the political system, is not the same as abolishing a single article related to the return to Italy of the former Italian royal family, banned after World War 2.

[25] The ratification of EU treaties – though still voted in Italy with large majorities – are obviously one relevant exception to this rule, but they do not influence our quantitative data and overall judgement.

[26] Contrary to our expectation, ordinary laws delegating power to the executive, here included into the major category, perform exactly in the same way as the other 'pure' ordinary laws, with an average duration of 521 days and a similar standard deviation.

quota of laws converting temporary decrees, and not to some consistent attitude of its governments, institutions or MPs.

The same distorting effect generated by the presence of a fast-track procedure for the conversion of temporary decrees may be at the origin of what we observe in table 3, where we confront the duration of bills approved on the floor with those adopted with the decentralized procedure directly in parliamentary committees.

Tab. 3 Average duration, standard deviation and N for different place of final adoption

	13th legislature	14th legislature	1996-2006
Floor	361.4 *(366.5)* (N= 675)	263.7 *(303.7)* (N= 577)	316.4 *(342.3)* (N= 1252)
Parliamentary committee	434.7 *(422.3)* (N= 231)	490.1 *(439.2)* (N= 109)	452.5 *(427.9)* (N= 340)

Source: *Italian law-making archive;* Note: Standard deviation in italics

We would have expected that laws adopted in committees were swifter than those adopted on the floor, whereas it is consistently the opposite across the two legislatures. But since bills converting temporary decrees have to be adopted on the floor by statute, they may bias our impression. It is something that will be better explored in the next two sections, although some hint is already provided by the distribution in figure 4.

Fig. 4. The length of the legislative process distinguished by site of final adoption
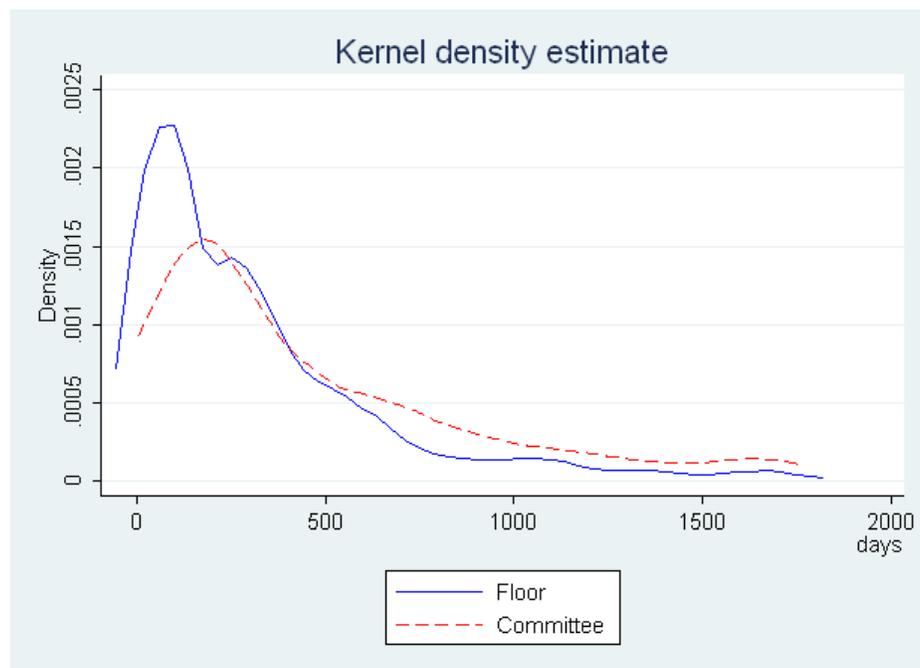
Source: *Italian law-making archive*

It is actually true that a significant group of laws are quickly adopted on the floor (the continuous trait in figure 4), but the same line has a second 'peak' which lies to the right of the more regular arch representing bills adopted in parliamentary committees. It is thus difficult to appreciate and interpret the effect of this important procedural factor without adopting some kind of multivariate analysis.

Finally, it is almost natural to compare the different lengths of government and private member bills. Since the executive holds a visible leverage upon the agenda-setting – although, in the Italian case, it has clearly less instruments than those available to other European executives – we expect its bills to follow a fast track through parliament.

Tab. 4 Average duration, standard deviation and N for different proponent[27]

	13th legislature	14th legislature	1996-2006
Government	295.8 *(267.8)* (N= 705)	196.1 *(189.5)* (N= 538)	252.7 *(242.1)* (N= 1243)
MPs	672.2 *(544.3)* (N= 200)	676.3 *(470.8)* (N= 148)	674.0 *(513.6)* (N= 348)

Source: *Italian law-making archive;* Note: Standard deviation in italics

Indeed, table 4 confirms our hypothesis, with private member bills taking from twice to three times as long as government bills. The difference is more clear-cut in the 14th legislature, which reminds us once more of the potential distorting effect of the presence of a higher quota of laws converting temporary decrees (whose initiative is – obviously and by statute –in the executive's hands). In this case, this bias could boost the difference between the two categories, which is something that can be partially glimpsed at in figure 5.

Whereas private member bills are evenly distributed amongst relatively fast and slow processes – as confirmed by the higher standard deviation reported in table 4 – government bills have a first peak of swift processes (probably associated with the conversion of temporary decrees), and then a second peak located around 300 days. Anyway, the two lines intersect around the value of 500 days, which should confirm that the rapidity of government bills is by no means entirely determined by the distinctiveness of the category of laws converting decrees, but it should be a relevant and consistent feature on its own.[28]

---

[27] We have not considered in the table the only adopted bill originated by the mobilization of citizens in the 13th legislature, whose legislative process lasted 1364 days.
[28] For a comparative analysis it may be useful to compare our figure 5 with those reported for Belgium, France, Germany and the UK in Bräuninger, Debus and Wüst (2008: 40).

Fig. 5. The length of the legislative process distinguished by proposer
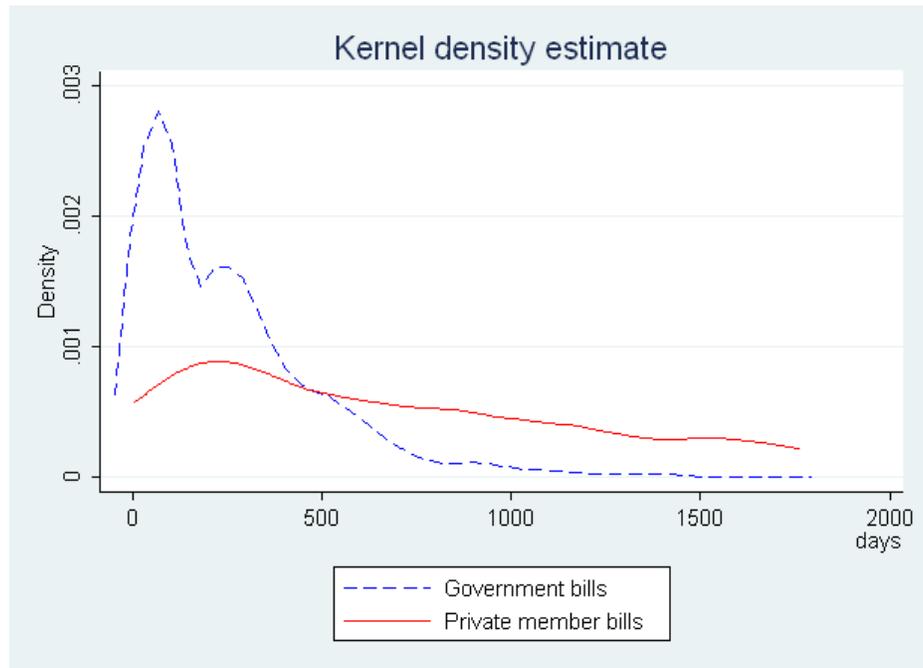
Source: *Italian law-making archive*

4. Hypotheses

Given the shortage of works trying to analyse the factors affecting the length of legislative processes in a quantitative fashion, for the present analysis we decided to develop an exploratory framework including all those factors that – according to our preliminary analysis - may have a bearing on the pace of law-making. The employed set of policy-specific covariates is clustered around three different categories of determinants: the characteristics of the bill; the characteristics of the process itself; and the characteristics of the political environment where it occurs.

4.1 Characteristics of the bill

4.1.1 Length of the bill

The nature of bills is the most various. Whereas there are bills including a handful of short articles, other bills may take up several pages and present a complex structure made of many articles (on their turn varying in terms of number of commas, words), annexes, tables etc. If we assume a mechanicistic perspective, the expectation is that the intrinsic complexity of a bill should affect the time required to adopt it. As a general rule, the passing of complex bills should take longer because information has to be collected on what is feasible in a particular policy area and the possible legal and practical implications of its many provisions.

H1: *The more complex a bill, the longer it takes to get adopted.*

4.1.2 Cross-sectoral implications of the bill

Another proxy for the complexity of the bill is the number of parliamentary committees involved in the consultation stage. Indeed, it is not unusual for a single bill to have implications for a range of policy sectors and, if this is the case, the parliamentary procedures require the consultation of the pertinent committees before its discussion in the plenary. Of course, since each committee may have a distinct set of policy preferences, it will be much more difficult and time-demanding to settle these conflicts on the floor when they arise. Thus the expectation is that bills that are scrutinized by many committees will tend to require more time in the legislative process.

H2: *The more committees are consulted, the longer a bill takes to get adopted.*

4.2 Characteristics of the process

The process itself depends on three factors: the procedures employed; the degree of conflict surrounding it; and the number of modifications made to the bill during the process.

4.2.1 Procedures

The literature on parliamentary law-making has long emphasized that institutions matter for the way the legislative process unfolds (Döring, 1995b; Döring & Hallerberg, 2004). Two institutional features have been singled out as especially relevant for the swiftness of legislative drafting: the control of the legislative agenda (Döring, 1995a) and the recourse to committees (Mattson & Strøm, 1995, 2004). Though who has the control over the selection of proposals that arise for a vote and the procedures to perform this control vary extensively across the range of democracies, a common trait in parliamentary systems is to give the government some prerogative on this front (Döring, 1995a). This is much less clear in the Italian case where the power to set the legislative agenda in the two Chambers is vested on the respective Committees of Parliamentary Group Leaders and Speakers (see note 7). In any case, it may be expected that the political proximity of the chambers' Speakers to the ruling majority and the latter's political leverage should confer a certain priority to executive bills. Indeed, this supposition seems to be comforted by what emerges from the descriptive analysis of the whole legislative output presented in section 3. On average, private member bills take two and a half times as long as executive bills. Thus we have the following hypothesis:

H3: *Executive bills are expected to take less time to get adopted.*

Another institutional device which has been widely applied to speed up the approval of bills in parliament is their examination by a parliamentary committee before submitting them for discussion and adoption to the plenary. Once again, the procedures vary extensively across countries. What remains

fixed is the rationale underlying the recourse to the committee stage in the legislative process. Because of their smaller composition and specialisation, the debate in committees is usually less time-consuming and more appropriate for discussion of technical matters. As mentioned above, the Italian case stands out for a peculiar version of this decentralization procedure: the so-called 'Committee acting in its legislative capacity' (*commissione riunita in sede legislativa*). Should there be a very large consensus among MPs and government actors, then both the examination and approval of a bill will take place entirely in a committee (see note 13). Our expectation is that decision-making should be faster when a bill takes this procedural path, since the matters under discussion are generally consensual and, what is more, they are dealt with in a more restricted arena. Quite remarkably, the data presented in section 3 seem to contradict this view, by displaying a completely inverted time pattern for the two law categories. We argued that this result might stem at least partially from the presence of laws converting temporary decrees, which have to be adopted on the floor by statute. Our multivariate analysis may help shedding some light on this issue.

H4: *Bills approved by committees acting in their legislative capacity are more prone to be adopted earlier.*

4.2.2 Degree of policy conflict

On the other hand, procedural arrangements aim also at goals which differ from the mere swiftness of parliamentary functioning. Bicameralism has long been conceived as a way to allow the coexistence of different representation criteria within the same parliamentary institution. The present paper does not address the impact of bicameralism – and especially Italian bicameralism - on its own merits (this would require a comparative analysis), but it is interested in estimating the effect of the multiplication of readings for the time required to get a bill through parliament. Indeed, a large number of readings may be taken as a proxy for the different distribution of preferences between the two chambers (Zucchini, 2008).

H5: *The more parliamentary readings for a single bill, the longer it takes to get adopted.*

Another measurement of the difficulty to reach an agreement on the content of the bill is the number of voted amendments it collects (Capano & Vignati, 2008). The tabling of amendments has traditionally been conceived of as a tool in the hands of opposition parties to exert some influence over the content of a bill. Of course, when political actors' preferences over the policy are highly divergent, it can also turn out to be an instrument of political obstruction. Nonetheless, amending is not only an opposition's business. It is perfectly normal for MPs belonging to the ruling majority to submit their own amendments, since there may be matters which are left unsolved between government and party leaders at the preparatory stage. This reasoning leaves us with the following hypothesis:

H6: *The more amendments voted for a single bill, the longer it takes to get adopted.*

The last proxy of policy conflict is the degree of consensus reached by every bill at the final voting stage. Aware that this may result in an incorrect imputation, we nonetheless expect that the level of agreement in the final vote of a bill may reflect to a certain degree the credit it enjoyed among political forces throughout the process. Thus our preliminary hypothesis is the following:

H7: *The smaller the consensus on the bill during the final vote, the longer it takes to get adopted.*

4.2.3 Number of modifications

A final process-related factor which, according to our expectations, should have an effect on adoption times is the degree of complexity of the process itself. What matters is not only the complexity of the end product, namely the approved bill, but the amount of modifications (if any) which are made to the bill in its original version to make it acceptable and eventually adopted. Such modifications may go in both directions, towards a simplification of the bill as much as towards its complexification. More importantly, we expect that if the latter, adoption times should be longer.

H8: *The more modifications to a bill from the day it is presented until it gets adopted, the longer it takes to get adopted*

4.3 Characteristics of the political environment

The life of legislative bills is not only determined by a combination of its complexity and the way it is handled by parliamentary actors. The missing pieces in what has been so far portrayed as a deliberative process unfolding in the two chamber and their corresponding committees are the political dynamics surrounding it. To incorporate such dynamics, we followed Tsebelis (2002) and we hypothesised that the more internally divided is a governing majority, the harder it is to achieve policy innovation.[29]

H9: *The greater the number of partisan veto players in the government, the longer it takes to get adopted.*

Finally, one has to consider that the duration of legislative processes is but one dimension of time describing law-making. Another interesting time-related issue has to do with 'when' the process occurs over the legislative-electoral cycle. The introduction of some policies may be more likely at the beginning of the legislature because of either their complexity or their redistributive effects, whereas other policies – normally those with distributive aims – may be expected to make their appearance on the eve of elections. In this case, we are not interested in the political choice behind the timing of law-making, but in

---

[29] Our use of Tsebelis' theory is partial since we do not consider fundamental characteristics of the process such as the congruence of vps' preferences and their internal cohesion (if they are collective actors). The measurement of these two factors is not so straightforward in quantitative analyses.

the way it affects the pace of legislative processes. More specifically, we expect that the further the formal introduction of a bill from the next election, the longer it takes to get adopted. Indeed, following Becker and Saalfeld (2004: 67), we anticipate that "bills tend to get rushed through parliament towards the end of a parliamentary session, especially where the measure is lost if it is not passed within the respective session", which is generally the case in Italy.

H10: *The further the presentation of the bill from the end of the legislative term, the longer a bill takes to get adopted.*

5. Event history analysis

5.1 Measurement of dependent and independent variables

Likewise the descriptive examination presented in section 3, our units of analysis are individual legislative processes and their duration, namely our dependent variable, has been calculated in days from the date of presentation of the bill in parliament to its final adoption.[30] In order to avoid any bias in our model we opted for restricting our analysis to the so-called 'pure' ordinary laws. The reasons underlying this selection based on the type of law emerge clearly from the observations made in section 3. On the one hand, it is pointless examining the temporal durations of budgetary laws and bills converting temporary decrees since they are respectively fixed and pre-established. On the other hand, laws ratifying international treaties and constitutional laws have peculiar features which make them unsuitable for a comparison: the former are normally technical low-salient bills, whose time trajectories are rather randomly distributed and mainly determined by politically neutral reasons; the latter are adopted following specific procedural patterns and, because of their highly varying content, do not lend themselves easily to generalizations. All these reasons lead us to focus only on ordinary bills, since it is the portion of the legislative output where the analysis of factors affecting time durations is more interesting from a political science perspective. That said, we are left with a total of 641 ordinary laws, 408 adopted in the 13th legislature and 233 adopted in the 14th (see table 2 for further descriptive data).

As for independent variables, the complexity of the bill (H1) was measured by counting the number of articles of the approved bill. To measure the number of parliamentary committees involved (H2) we added the number of committees, both permanent and special, consulted at the first reading with those consulted at the second reading as reported in the Senate database. Information on whether a bill was introduced by the government (H3) and approved in a committee (H4) was provided directly by the parliamentary database, as well as the number of readings (H5) and the number of voted amendments (H6). The level of preference convergence on every specific bill (H7) was measured by means of the 'Rice Cohesion Index' (Rice, 1928).

---

[30] When a bill is hauled out from a larger bill which is no longer under discussion (*legge stralcio*), the clock starts ticking on the day the excerpt is presented.

Number of modifications (H8) was measured by calculating the proportion between the number of words of the final act and that of the initial proposal. The number of partisan veto players in the government (H9) counts all those parties which have at least a representative among the junior ministers, regardless of their number of parliamentary seats. Since the number of partisan veto players in the government at the time of the bill's formal introduction may be different than at the time of its adoption, each process had to be split according to the number of cabinets which it went through and every cabinet was assigned its specific number of parties.[31] Finally, the timing of the process (H10) measures the number of days between the parliamentary presentation of the bill and the end of the legislative term. Table 5 summarizes the hypotheses discussed in section 4 and gives some descriptive statistics of the factors selected for the model.

Table 5: *Covariates, expectations and descriptive summary statistics*

Variables	Effect on adoption speed	N	Mean	Std.Dev	Min	Max
Bill-related						
Complexity	Delaying	641	8.37	10.81	1	102
Cross-sectoral implicat.	Delaying	641	8.50	5.49	0	29
Process-related						
Government initiative	Accelerating	641	0.49	0.50	0	1
Adopted in committee	Accelerating	641	0.47	0.49	0	1
Number readings	Delaying	641	2.52	0.73	2	7
Number amendments	Delaying	641	34.26	106.16	0	1119
Consensus on the bill	Accelerating	641	0.77	0.22	0.033	1
Number modifications	Delaying	641	2.73	7.29	0.29	157.32
Context-related						
Veto players (TVC)	Delaying	1023	5.69	1.45	4	8
Days to end of legisl.	Delaying	641	1323	469	112	1846

Notes: TVC= time varying covariate built in the model

5.2 Analysis and results

In order to estimate the effect of our set of covariates on legislative speed, we made recourse to event history analysis, a statistical technique expressly devised to deal with this kind of dependent variable. Since we have no theoretical reason to prefer a functional form of the baseline hazard (the impact of the passage of time on the adoption rate within our model) over another, we relied on a Cox semiparametric model, which leaves the form of duration dependence unspecified (Box-Steffensmeier & Bradford, 2004: ch.6).

---

[31] Thus the number of parties in every coalition is the following: Prodi(I) 4; D'Alema(I) 7; D'Alema(II) 7; Amato (II) 8; Berlusconi (II) 5; Berlusconi (III) 6. The use of time varying covariate (Box-Steffensmeier & Bradford, 2004: Chapter 7) is among the reasons justifying a recourse to Event history analysis to test our model (see *infra*).

Table 2: *Estimates for the Cox model with time-independent and time dependent coefficients*

Variables	Expecta-tions	Normal		Interacting with ln(*t*)	
		Coeff.	Robust s.e.	Coeff.	Robust s.e.
Bill-related					
Complexity	-	0.11***	(0.02)	-0.02***	(0.00)
Cross-sectoral implicat.	-	-0.28***	(.05)	0.04***	(0.00)
Process-related					
Government initiative	+	0.82***	(0.09)		
Adopted in committee	+	1.02*	(0.48)	-0.13	(0.07)
Number readings	-	-3.45***	(0.42)	0.52***	(0.07)
Number amendments	-	-0.00	(0.00)		
Consensus on the bill	+	-0.43*	(0.21)		
Number modifications	-	-0.20*	(0.10)	0.03	(0.01)
Context-related					
Veto players	-	-0.00	(0.05)		
Days to end of legisl.	-	0.00**	(0.00)	-0.00***	(0.00)
Wald Chi2(16)	418.76				
Log-likelihood	-2898.69				
Number of cases	641				
Number observations	1023				

Note: * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001. Robust estimators, standard errors in parenthesis adjusted for clustering on bills. Efron method for ties.

Three *caveats* are in order before proceeding with the presentation of results (table 2). Firstly, estimated effects are expressed in the form of changes in the hazard rate, namely in the probability that a bill is adopted at time *t*, given this event (i.e. adoption) has not yet occurred. A positive coefficient means that an increase in our covariate raises the probability of adoption of a bill given that its legislative process has lasted up or beyond some length of time: the passing of the bill should be faster (vice versa for negative coefficients). In order to simplify the interpretation of coefficients' effects, we calculated the percentage change in the hazard rate for a unit change in the independent variable (Box-Steffensmeier, 1996: appendix). Secondly, whether the adoption of a law occurred in the 13th or 14th legislature was incorporated in the model as a stratification variable. By stratifying our Cox model, we allowed the baseline hazard to vary across strata, while getting only one estimate of the regression coefficients. This way our model accounts for the fact that the baseline functions in the two legislatures are not proportional, but the effect of the change of legislature is not computed.[32] Thirdly, the check of the proportionality assumption shows that there are six offending variables: complexity, number of committees, adopted in committee, number of

---

[32] Proportionality of the baseline functions was checked by means of a Log-Minus-Log survival plot. It is worth remarking that when 'type of legislature' was included as a dummy in a standard Cox model, its effect was not significant. This suggests that there are no contingent explanatory factors associated with a specific legislature lacking in the model.

readings, number of modifications, and days until the end of the legislature.[33] A common solution to this problem is the incorporation of a time-interacting version of those covariates which violate this fundamental assumption, normally in the form of $B*\ln(t)$ (Box-Steffensmeier & Zorn, 2001; Golub, 2008). The inclusion of its corresponding time-interacting term affects the impact of a covariate, by making it depend on values of the time-independent and the time-dependent coefficients, as well as time (see also Brambor et al., 2006; Golub & Steunenberg, 2007). Since the passage of time may modify the size of the combined coefficient, its standard errors and – consequently - its statistical significance based on the Wald statistic, table 3 shows these values at different time points for each interested covariate. Given that the number of cases markedly decreases for very short and very long periods of time, thus impairing the reliability of estimated impacts, the time range considered in table 3 goes from one standard deviation below (66 days) and one and-a-half standard deviations above (1206 days) the mean survival time of 522 days (encompassing almost 90% of the cases).

The impact of our *complexity* covariate offers a first example of the time-varying effect on the hazard rate. At odds with our expectations, its impact is positive for the first 447 days - albeit decreasing and significant only until the 230th day - and subsequently it turns negative in line with the hypothesis that the more complex a law, the more its adoption is slowed down – it is significant from approximately 2 years and a half (962 days) onwards. This result may be explained by referring to the kind of proxy employed to measure complexity in our model: the final number of articles included in the law. Although this operationalization intuitively reflects the likely degree of difficulty lying behind the drafting of a piece of law, it does not consider that part of the negotiation efforts necessary to gather consensus may have already been made before the presentation of the bill. The positive coefficient for small durations may signal the presence of long and supposedly salient bills which were effectively sponsored in the pre-presentation stage, thereby curtailing their actual adoption time. On the other hand complex bills which were not subject to this preliminary scrutiny are bound to take longer than shorter bills *ceteris paribus*.

Also our second bill-related covariate, *cross-sectoral implications of the bill*, has a time-dependent effect on the hazard. As table 3 shows, the coefficient changes its direction from negative to positive after about 895 days, although beyond the 536th day it is no longer significant (p>0.5). In light of this result, our expectations seem to be for the most part fulfilled: a bill touching upon a variety of sectors, thus having a stake for a plurality of committees, takes longer to get adopted. Remarkably, this effect tends to wane over time.

---

[33] For the proportionality assumption (which underpins proportional hazard models such as the Cox model) to hold, the effect of a covariate on the hazard has to be constant over time. When this is not the case, correcting measures are needed since: "Estimating proportional hazards models when hazards are in fact non-proportional results in biased coefficient estimates and decreased power of significance tests."(Box-Steffensmeier & Zorn, 2001: 974).

Table 3: *The impact of time-dependent coefficients*

time (number of days)	66	180	294	408	522	636	750	864	978	1092	1206	
s.d. from the mean duration	-1	-.75	-.5	-.25	0	.25	.5	.75	1	1.25	1.5	
Complexity	**0.03*****	**0.02****	0.01	0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.01	**-0.01***	**-0.02***	**-0.02***	B
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	s.e.
Cross-sectoral implications	**-0.11*****	**-0.07*****	**-0.05*****	**-0.03****	**-0.02***	-0.01	-0.01	-0.00	0.00	0.01	0.01	B
	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	s.e.
Adopted in committee	**0.46****	**0.33*****	**0.26****	**0.22***	**0.18***	0.16	0.13	0.12	0.10	0.08	0.07	B
	(0.15)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.12)	(0.12)	s.e.
Number readings	**-1.25*****	**-0.72*****	**-0.47*****	**-0.29*****	**-0.16***	-0.06	0.03	0.10	0.17	**0.23****	**0.28****	B
	(0.15)	(0.09)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)	s.e.
Number modifications	**-0.09***	**-0.06***	**-0.04****	**-0.04***	**-0.03***	**-0.02***	-0.02	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	B
	(0.04)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	s.e.
Days to end of legisl.	**-0.00***	**-0.00*****	**-0.00*****	**-0.00*****	**-0.00*****	**-0.00*****	**-0.00*****	**-0.00*****	**-0.00*****	**-0.00*****	**-0.00*****	B
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	s.e.

Note: For a detailed account of the employed formulas for the calculation of the combined coefficients, standard errors and corresponding Wald statistic see Golub & Steunenberg (2007: 556-7).

Whether *the initiative belongs to the executive* positively affects the hazard rate in a constant and statistically significant (p<0.001) manner over time. More specifically, a bill initiated by the executive is 125% likelier (more than twice as much) to move more quickly through the legislative process than a private member bill at any time that it has not been adopted yet. This result stands out as one of the strongest factors in our model.

The effect of the *adoption in committee* covariate supports our expectations: this procedural option accelerates adoption times. Nonetheless its effect decreases over time and it becomes insignificant after about 551 days. This lack of significant impact for long durations may be due to the practice of submitting to committees for approval those bills upon which a consensus has been reached after sometimes long negotiations. This is especially the case when it is difficult to insert the bill into an already crowded plenary agenda and/or there is a will to preserve the compromise underlying the bill from further unexpected revisions. Overall, this result seems to confirm our suspicions that the different time patterns presented in table 3 may be the result of a bias. Secondly, it underlines that certain bills end up being adopted in committee because an agreement has been reached, not because there is an agreement from the very beginning. This is another indication that, similarly to other non-Westminster democracies, in Italy the consensus has to build, it is not usually a good at hand.

An increase in the *number of readings* slows down *ceteris paribus* the adoption of a bill until almost two years (713 days) have elapsed, then it makes the conclusion of the adoption process more likelier. The significance of negative coefficients wanes around the 560th day, whereas positive coefficients turn significant after the 953th day. A possible explanation for such a complex pattern may be the following: whereas for relatively short durations an additional reading has negative consequences for the overall swiftness of the process (every time the bill moves from one chamber to the other there are physiological waiting times before it enters once again the agenda), this is not necessarily the case when a substantial amount of time has already elapsed. We suggest that many readings may mean under this sort of circumstances that the bill is salient in the eyes of MPs and that efforts have been made to iron out the difficulties and find a common view accepted by both chambers, thus progressively shortening the duration of individual readings. Section 3 already illuminates this trend when it shows that: firstly, as the number of readings increases, the average duration tends to diminish; secondly, the last reading is always the shortest one (as it is logically predictable).

Our second proxy trying to capture the degree of policy conflict looks at the *number of amendments*. As expected the coefficient is negative, thus there is a delaying effect, but it is not significant. This result might hint at the fact that the possibility of amending is intended most of the times as a purely technical device to adjust certain unwanted details in a bill. Ordinarily, only a minority of amendments entail substantial and politically controversial modifications.

We find that the *consensus on a bill*, measured by means of the Rice cohesion index, significantly affects the hazard rate but, contrary to our expectations, it does so by delaying the passing of a piece of law. More specifically, a standard deviation increase (almost 22% in the Rice index) reduces the hazard rate by 9%. Quite interestingly, when we substitute it with other indices, such as the 'index of agreement' and a version of respectively the Rice and Agreement indices weighted for the rate of attendance (Giuliani, 2008b), the effect is no longer significant. An explanation of these peculiar results is that the Rice index measures the extent to which there is a relatively unified voting pattern *at the end of the adoption process*. Therefore, the problem with our hypothesis is that it does not allow for the fact that large majorities mostly result from long time-consuming negotiations processes. Additionally, with respect to other indexes which contemplate the possibility of a no-vote through abstention or non attendance, the Rice index is more demanding as a measurement of the supporting coalition size (the lower the amount of nays or, vice versa, the bigger the number of ayes, the higher the index), thus reflecting more genuinely the time it has taken to build a consensus in favour of the bill. Once again, the findings suggest that, ordinarily, the presence of large majorities in support of a policy is not an attribute of the bill from the start of its lifetime but something which has to be built along the adoption process.

The last process-related hypothesis, stating that an increase in *the number of modifications to the bill* leads to a delayed adoption, behaves according to our expectations. Nonetheless, its effect is constantly decreasing and it loses its significant impact as time goes by (after around 662 days). Plausible explanations for this result are: firstly, that a learning process comes at play over time; secondly, that, once negotiations have been underway for some time, the addition of new clauses to the text may represent in many cases the attempt to speed up the adoption of a bill, by accommodating minor changes within a text which has already been extensively reviewed and negotiated in its basic parts.

A noteworthy result is that the impact of our *veto players* index is not significant although it behaves in line with our expectations. This result calls into question the rough operationalization of the index employed in the model which is only partially consistent with Tsebelis' hypotheses.[34] Additionally, we may expect that a larger number of factual veto players impinge on the capacity of domestic institutions to achieve policy changes. For instance, Strøm refers to the role of 'powerful players' (2003: 77): they are not endowed with a formal veto position within the executive but they can exert some degree of external influence on the government and make sure that their interests are considered. The category of 'powerful players' may include the President of the Republic, the Constitutional Court, the representatives from the unions and/or the employer associations, and in general all the stakeholders affected by the policy.

---

[34] The recourse to other proxies such as the number of effective veto players (very small parties are not counted) and the percentage of votes available to the majority in the two chambers does not yield significant coefficients.

Lastly, the timing in the presentation of a bill has a negative and always statistically significant impact on the hazard rate. The more *days from the presentation of the bill* until the end of the legislature, the more the bill takes to get adopted. Not surprisingly, the time-dependent effect shows us that as the time elapses, the negative impact increases. We suggest that this effect may result from the way the model was built: the estimation of the coefficients for long durations uses information from cases with long adoption times thus presented earlier in the legislature. Nonetheless the magnitude of this increase is not noticeable. Whereas a six-month difference in the date of presentation of two perfectly similar directives slows down the adoption of the first directive by 21% when both have survived one year, the same impact rises up to 33% when both have survived three years.

6. Conclusions

The present paper represents a first attempt to shed light on a relatively under-researched issue in the field of legislative study, namely how the adoption of bills progresses through time and which factors account for the observable variation in the length of legislative processes. The empirical material on which this study was based included the totality of legislative processes initiated in Italy over the 13th and 14th legislature, thereby covering a ten-year time span (1996-2006) and a sequence of seven governments belonging to two opposing coalitions (both completing their five-year mandate).

Once we dissect the more than 20,000 bills presented in the dataset, the first noteworthy result is their failure rate: almost 90% do not get through the parliamentary process. The selection process takes place mainly during the first reading and we find that the reasons why a legislative process comes to a standstill or terminates are the most diverse, although the greatest proportion of cases are subsumed under the 'dormant in committee' category. The next step was to look more closely at the variation in the lifetime of that portion of bills which eventually get adopted. Not surprisingly, the greatest amount of time is spent in the first reading, namely the stage where most bills have to fight for their survival in the midst of a crowded legislative environment. Most of the 'survivors' are adopted in the second reading, although, if this is not the case, subsequent readings tend to take gradually less time. Having said that, once we move from the observation of time patterns to the explanation of their variation, the set of processes we consider has to undergo a further selection. More specifically, we had to discard all those types of law whose temporal dimension was fixed or pre-established, as well as determined by peculiar procedures or non-politically related reasons. This left us with the task of investigating what affects adoption times of 'pure' ordinary bills first in a descriptive and then in a multivariate analysis.

The findings point to a multi-causal explanation of the observed variation in legislative lengths. There are factors behaving in line with the expectations ('executive initiative'), showing no significant effect ('veto players' and 'number of amendments') and exhibiting an unexpected behaviour which is only apparently counterintuitive ('consensus on the bill'). Additionally, a relevant component of our model is the examination of the time-dependent effects for

some of our covariates, an aspect which has only recently begun to be tackled in empirical analyses (Golub & Steunenberg, 2007). We found that the 'complexity of a bill' has an unexpected accelerating impact on adoption times which decreases as time goes by and eventually becomes negative, thus delaying the enactment of laws. The same complex time pattern (although the direction is inverted) characterizes the 'number of reading' covariate. Other variables' effects wanes over time and, in certain cases, lose their statistical significance, such as 'number of committees', 'adopted in committee', 'number of modifications' and 'days to the end of the legislature'.

When trying to pull together the different elements emerged from the present analysis, we come up with a highly complex picture of the Italian legislative process. Firstly, with the partial exception of the group of laws ratifying international treaties, it is not a process governed by a mechanicistic logic. Quite the contrary, it resembles more an arena where an intricate cluster of political, procedural and issue-related factors meet and determine life or death for thousands of bills. Furthermore, the paper showed that these effects are not constant but vary over time, thus giving an additional dimension of dynamism to the final picture. What is true at the beginning of the process may not hold until its conclusion. The impression is that many insights may be gained from examining a covariate's effect conditional on time.

This line of reasoning leads us to a second observation: time is not only a weapon in the hands of the opposition (e.g. filibustering, the multiplication of amendments etc…) but a ubiquitous element of political life in every democracy. This should be the case especially in non-Westminster democracies, where the policy-making process depends predominantly on the successful search for a compromise among a plurality of political actors. Unquestionably, one of the elements facilitating the conclusion of agreements is that sufficient *time* is allowed to settle the dispute. An illuminating example is provided by the interpretation of the effect for our 'consensus' covariate. When looked at from a time perspective, its behaviour is no longer counterintuitive: the credit enjoyed by a policy among political forces is not something inherent to the content of the policy but an element which is susceptible of modifications. Most of the time, some consensus has to be build and this requires time, regardless of the pleas for faster decision-making processes (grounded on pure efficiency criteria) which often hit the headlines of newspapers.

Of course, this work represents only a first attempt to explore the time dynamics featuring in the legislative process. The way forward to build on the findings provided by the present work may be, first of all, its extension in a comparative framework, with the awareness that such a research path would have to cope inevitably with such hurdles as, for example, the cross-national specification of the units of analysis (Giuliani, 2005). Another element which deserves further attention is the exploration of the 'veto players' hypothesis, which might be expanded to include actors' preferences and/or move beyond the Tsebelis' version in line with other existing indexes (Henisz, 2000; Beck et al., 2001). Hopefully, there will be time to inspect these questions more thoroughly in the future.

REFERENCES:

Andeweg, R. B. & L. Nijzink (1995), 'Beyond the Two-Body Image: Relations Between Ministers and MPs', in Herbert Döring (ed.), *Parliaments and Majority Rule in Western Europe*, St Martin's Press, New York, pp. 152-78.

Beck, T., G. Clarke, A. Groff, P. Keefer & P. Walsh (2001), 'New Tools in Comparative Political Economy: The Database of Political Institutions', *World Bank Economic Review*, vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 165-76.

Becker, R. & T. Saalfeld (2004), 'The Life and Times of Bills', in Herbert Döring & Mark Hallerberg (eds), *Patterns of Parliamentary Behavior. Passage of Legislation Across Western Europe*, Ashgate, Aldershot, pp. 57-90.

Box-Steffensmeier, J. M. (1996), 'A Dynamic Analysis of The Role of War Chests in Campaign Strategy', *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 40, no. 2, pp. 352-71.

Box-Steffensmeier, J. M. & J. Bradford (2004), *Event History Modeling - A guide for social scientists*, Cambridge University Press, New York.

Box-Steffensmeier, J. M. & C. J. W. Zorn (2001), 'Duration Models and Proportional Hazards in Political Science', *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 45, no. 4, pp. 972-88.

Brambor, T., W. R. Clark & M. Golder (2006), 'Understanding Interaction Models: Improving Empirical Analyses', *Political Analysis*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 63-82.

Bräuninger, T., M. Debus & F. Wüst (2008), 'Governments, Parliaments and Legislative Activity', Typescript, University of Konstanz, University of Mannheim.

Capano, G. & R. Vignati (2008), 'Casting Light on the Black Hole of the Amendatory Process in Italy', *South European Society and Politics*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 35 - 59.

Döring, H. (1995a), 'Time as a Scarce Resource: Government Control of the Agenda', in Herbert Döring (ed.), *Parliaments and Majority Rule in Western Europe*, St Martin's Press, New York, pp. 223-46.

Döring, H. (ed.) (1995b), *Parliaments and Majority Rule in Western Europe*, St Martin's Press, New York.

Döring, H. & M. Hallerberg (2004), *Patterns of Parliamentary Behavior: Passage of Legislation Across Western Europe*, Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., Aldershot.

Giuliani, M. (2002), 'Il processo legislativo: comparazioni diacroniche e internazionali', in Orazio Petracca (ed.), *La competitività dell'Italia*, Il Sole 24 Ore, Roma.

Giuliani, M. (2005), 'Il senso del limite. Problemi aperti nell'analisi del legislativo', *Rivista italiana di Politiche Pubbliche*, vol. 2005, no. 3, pp. 15-55.

Giuliani, M. (2008a), 'Brand New, Somewhat New or Rather Old? The Italian Legislative Process in an Age of Alternation', *South European Society and Politics*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 1 - 10.

Giuliani, M. (2008b), 'Patterns of Consensual Law-making in the Italian Parliament', *South European Society and Politics*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 61 - 85.

Golub, J. (2008), 'The Study of Decision-Making Speed in the European Union: Methods, Data and Theory', *European Union Politics*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 167-79.

Golub, J. & B. Steunenberg (2007), 'How Time Affects EU Decision-Making', *European Union Politics*, vol. 8, no. 4, pp. 555-66.

Henisz, W. J. (2000), 'The Institutional Environment for Economic Growth', *Economics & Politics*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 1-31.

King, A. (1990), 'Modes of Executive-Legislative Relations: Great Britain, France, and West Germany', in Philip Norton (ed.), *Legislatures*, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 208-36.

King, A. S. (1974), *British members of Parliament: a self-portrait*, Macmillan, London.

König, T. (2008), 'Analysing the Process of EU Legislative Decision-Making: To Make a Long Story Short', *European Union Politics*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 145-65.

Martin, L. W. & G. Vanberg (2004), 'Policing the Bargain: Coalition Government and Parliamentary Scrutiny', *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 48, no. 1, pp. 13-27.

Mattson, I. (1995), 'Private Members' Inititatives and Amendments', in Herbert Döring (ed.), *Parliaments and Majority Rule in Western Europe*, St. Martin's Press, New York, pp. 448-87.

Mattson, I. & K. Strøm (1995), 'Parliamentary Committees ', in Herbert Döring (ed.), *Parliaments and Majority Rule in Western Europe*, St Martin's Press, New York, pp. 249-307.

Mattson, I. & K. Strøm (2004), 'Committee effects on legislation', in Herbert Döring & Mark Hallerberg (eds), *Patterns of Parliamentary Behavior. Passage of Legislation Across Western Europe*, Ashgate, Aldershot, pp. 91-112.

Mill, J. S. (1862), *Considerations on representative government*, Harper & Brothers, New York.

Rice, S. A. (1928), *Quantitative Methods in Politics*, Knopf, New York.

Strøm, K. (2003), 'Parliamentary Democracy and Delegation', in Kaare Strøm, Wolfgang C. Müller & Torbjörn Bergman (eds), *Delegation and Accountability in Parliamentary Democracies*, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 55-106.

Tsebelis, G. (2002), *Veto Players: How Political Institutions Work*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.

Zucchini, F. (2008), 'Dividing Parliament? Italian Bicameralism in the Legislative Process (1987-2006)', *South European Society and Politics*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 11 - 34.