

Technicians, technical government and non-partisan ministers.

The Italian experience

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Abstract

Similarly to what observed in other democracies, Italian governments and ministerial elites have significantly changed during the last two decades. Besides the traditional types of ministers - partisan leaders who are expected to run for the top ministerial positions and ambitious parliamentarians who try to "climb" the ministerial ranking - different characters have recently appeared. Among them, independent chief executive who run a new type of technical government, non partisan ministers serving in specific posts and with specific delegations, and expert-politicians who have been recruited by their chef executives in order to deal with specific policy issues are to be mentioned.

This paper assesses the extent of change in the processes of government formation and ministerial careers in Italy, in a long-term perspective. Then, it raises some first interpretative considerations about the evolution of patterns of ministerial selection and governmental action in Italy, focusing in particular the phenomena of technical governments and non partisan ministers.

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1. Technocracy and non partisan ministers: old and new questions

The recent establishment of a *governo tecnico* (technical government) in Italy, and more in general the increasing number of non partisan ministers recruited within the European democracies – especially those where the financial crisis has been more pronounced¹ – pose a number of questions about the nature and the foundations of technocratic and non-partisan components within the democratic executives.

What kind of occurrences are we observing? Are we talking about a recurrent phenomenon, connected to the cyclical crises of our democracies? Should we consider a new grid of empirical dimensions able to describe some kind of innovative “post-parliamentary” patterns of government? These questions look fascinating but they are often addressed in a pretty superficial way: risks of *conceptual stretching*, *misclassification* and *degreeism* (Sartori 1991) are indeed behind the debate on technocracy and technical ministers.

A typical error of conceptual stretching occurs when we confuse the idea of a possible alternative to the party-government model with the simple presence of non-partisan members in a given cabinet. We mistakenly extend the idea of a different substantive model of democracy (a *technocratic government* somehow with some degree of independence from the political address of the representative assembly) to a situation where partisan delegations are still at work, although some portions of policy making are delegated to non partisan (or mixed partisan-expert) ministers, in order to provide more efficient answers to increasingly complex questions arising on the political agenda. A number of classifications concerning the role and the influence of “non

¹ Here we do not need to produce an inclusive report about the increase of non partisan ministers in Europe. Just to have a broad comparative framework, we remind that the materialization of a good number of “independent” ministers has been already studied in Portugal (Costa Pinto and Tavares de Almeida 2009), in Greece and in France. Interestingly enough, the presence of a few ministers with an “unorthodox” background (no parliamentary and relative party experience) has appeared also in the homeland of the “Westminster parliamentary government” (Yong and Hazell 2011).

insider" ministers (De Winter 1991) reflect this problems of conceptual operationalization, while, for the same reason, we often fall in the error of *degreeism*, when we use a too low cut off point, labeling as *technical government* a government which simply counts a limited number of non pure politicians.

Among the reasons frequently suggested as the factors explaining the growth of non partisan actors in government, we find: 1) the complex and "highly technological" nature of democratic governance; 2) the organizational and reputational decline of political parties, and the consequent use of non partisan personalities recruited from the "civil society" in order to avoid further phenomena of mistrust; 3) the concentration of power in the hand of a few people representing the "core executive" and the process of "presidentialisation" of government (Poguntke and Webb 2005) which implies the possibility for the chief executive to recruit more freely a number of "personal agents" within the cabinet; 4) The impact of supranational arenas and institutions over the structure of national political institutions and the consequent need to deal more effectively with the inputs and constraints coming from the supranational authorities. According to recent analyses, this would be particularly evident in the context of the European Union (Johansson and Tallberg 2010).

Each of these factors probably works in a largely independent way from the others. We must try then to sort them and to weight their specific impact, clarifying all the possible relations among them and the alternatives modes of ministerial delegation. In this paper we just want to move a step forward in this perspective of clarification, exploring the long term data concerning the Italian republican experience.

The fact that we have already been interested in this case of ministerial recruitment (Cotta and Verzichelli 2003; Verzichelli 2009) represents a first subjective reason of interest. In a more objective vein however, it can be easily seen that Italy represents a very interesting case in point when one raises the question of technocratic government. As a matter of fact, although not sharing the "*semi-presidential*" institutional devices which, according to the recent analyses, should help to increase non-partisan forms of delegation within the executive (Neto and Strøm 2006), the Italian government has recently experienced a number of critical changes in the process of government formation as well as in the cabinet structure and within the party system,

determining the conditions for several types of *non partisan* and *technocratic* ministerial appointments.

More precisely, in this paper we aim to demonstrate that such a relevant case in point – the Italian parliamentary democracy – shows some of the multifold structural phenomena which can stimulate a reappraisal of the concept of *technical government*. With this goal in mind, we have structured the paper as follows. In the first section, we develop an updated conceptual treatment distinguishing among the notions of technocratic government, technical appointments and non-partisan ministers. Successively, we discuss the presence of such distinctive phenomena in the recent experience of Italian parliamentary democracy, starting with a short reconstruction of the republican age to move then to the last couple of decades. In particular, we will look to the transformation of ministerial personnel, to the autonomy of chief executive from the parliament and to the relative autonomy of single ministers from their principals.

Finally, we examine the specific experience of two "paradigmatic" technical government, in order to get more robust evidences and to put forward a number of new propositions to be discussed in more in-depth and comparative analyses.

2. Penetration of technocracy and conceptual distinctions

With the help of the recent comparative literature we start distinguishing the different phenomena dealing with the penetration of technocratic figures and skills within the contemporary democratic executives.

A first occurrence concerns the *interruption of the delegation chain* (Strøm 2003) between the political identity of the parliamentary majority and the actor who is going to serve as the principal in the process of cabinet formation. In this model of government the PM (or chief executive, *lato sensu*) displays remarkably different characteristics in terms of career, reputation and autonomy vis-à-vis the main figures of the party organizations supporting the executive.

A second phenomenon somehow connected with the increase of technocracy of technical government concerns the interruption of the delegation chain within the cabinet: the PM (or chief executive, *lato sensu*), independently from her political identity, recruits ministers with enhanced characteristics of expertise and lacking a clear partisan identity. This kind of delegation is

connected with specific goals: non partisan ministers can be called to cope with the implementation of priorities previously highlighted in the governmental platform, or to act as a sort of “guarantors” for a number of reforms, or finally as “inspirers” in a given policy area.

A third situation deals with the interruption of that particular form of delegation involving parliamentary groups as ideal pools of aspirants for ministerial positions. The agents of the prime ministerial delegation are therefore not “*parliamentary-party representatives*” but people who can have some kind of political experience and representative capabilities, but are selected on the basis of other requisites, including policy expertise. Their policy skills are evident as well as their political commitments, so one expect that and their governmental action could be somehow reconnected to the party (or one of the parties) supporting the government. However, they are selected (also) because of their own experience and their policy skills.

Even a sketchy discussion of the complexity of the penetration of technocracy within the government, hence, shows at least three relevant dimensions which look independent from each other and which can take place with different degrees of intensity and in different times. They can be provisionally defined as: a. *prime ministerial autonomy* from the dominant political views in parliament, b. *ministerial political independence* of cabinet members and c. *expertise capabilities* of cabinet ministers.

In order to avoid conceptual stretching and incorrect classifications, we should analyze these dimensions considering their potential consequences in terms of dealignment from an ideal model of ministerial delegation as the one inspired by the *party government* approach (Katz 1987). In short, such a model could be defined as follows:

1. The prime minister is the direct political emanation of the parliamentary majority, being the leader of the dominant parliamentary party or the leader expresses by the main partisan components of a political coalition;
2. The ministers also reflect the political configuration of the parliamentary majority. They are party representatives, selected for their personal skills but mainly for their reputation within the party and in front of the parliamentary groups(s) which support the government;
3. The guidelines of the governmental action and the political priorities are detailed in the party platform(s) and controlled by the partisan actors within the parliamentary arena

(parliamentary party group, PPG) and/or outside the parliamentary arena (external party organization, EPO).

If we assume that what we commonly define technical government is a multifaceted phenomenon determining a number of deviations from such an ideal-type, in the direction of prime ministerial autonomy, ministerial political independence and policy expertise of cabinet ministers, we have to look to some different empirical aspects in order to evaluate such a phenomenon: the personal characters of the PM and of the cabinet members, the process of ministerial selection and de-selection and finally the nature of the governmental action. We briefly describe the possible indicators, along these three sub-dimensions of the penetration of technocratic experience in democratic parliamentary government, in the next table.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

In our framework, indicators of *prime ministerial autonomy* should be found in the following occurrences:

- in absolute terms, a PM is totally *autonomous* when she does not show any direct political affiliation to the party components of her political majority. However, the autonomy of a technocratic PM can be somehow limited by a sort of “delegation contract” defining the policy areas where the action of the government can (or cannot) be conducted;
- The autonomy of a technocratic PM can be further strengthened by the presence of a limited but recognizable group of *aides*, whose appointment is closely associated to the preferences of “their” leader;
- the autonomy of a PM from the parliamentary majority can be also verified looking at the capability of her ministers to start and finalize the implementation of those measures reflecting the ideas of the leader and her group of “technocratic” aides.

If we are considering the phenomenon of *ministerial political independence* we should look for the following indicators:

- the presence of a relatively high percentage of “technical delegates” (i.e. not selected among the PPG and/or within the EPO ranks) is an indicator of the decline of the “party mediated” type of delegation in the process of government formation;

- the more independent ministers are expected to be particularly active in the policy making, determining the conditions for a few but fundamental policy changes, produced by strong compromises with the Chief executive and within the core executive. When these compromises are impossible, we should expect that technocratic ministers will fight for their own ideas, thus determining asymmetric information or hidden action in the relationship between the PM and themselves. As a result of it, the governmental action will be characterized by *agent-shirking* (the minister does not do what was delegated to her) or *policy-shifting* (the minister will try to push her own ideas rather than the ideas of her principal) (Dowding and McLeay 2009). On the other hand, the PM will have the chance to de-select the independent minister more easily, in comparison to a partisan minister.

- Moreover, an increasing variability in the salience of the portfolios which are interesting for potential *independent ministers* is to be expected, with the consequence of a more evident struggle for the occupation or for the indirect control of such positions by the different parts (the same independent ministers but also partisan representatives).

Finally, the career pattern of specific expert ministers is expected to be linked to the fortune of their ideas and to the persistence of given priorities. The complexity of certain policy problems (i.e. environmental or even fiscal or administrative reform) can determine a more pronounced continuity in the “fitting” of a given office (the right person in the right place), thus determining a decrease in the phenomenon of mobility through portfolios, which was very recurrent in the past. However, we can also expect a relative shortness of the career of pure technicians (shortness not necessarily in terms of time but in terms of number of ministerial jobs). However, the "policy expert" ministers, as well as pure technicians, can be tempted by policy shifting.

This grid of dimensions and possible indicators has now to be applied to the long term analysis of republican Italy. We will start from a general description of the relative penetration of technical and non partisan actors in government since the beginning of the Italian republic (1948). We will then move to the period 1987-2012. The choice to produce a more detailed analysis of the last twenty-five years is due to the need to disentangle a number of evidences, probably having to do with all the dimensions of technocratic government, emerging during the last phase of the so called *first republic* and then clearly evident during the following period.

In our assessment about the nature and the magnitude of the technocratic presence within the Italian government we will focus mainly on the developments following the *big bang* of 1992, which can be conceived as the point of departure of a new cycle of the political system, although the interpretation of the effective change at the system level is still far from being clear (Morlino 2009). However, the story has to be told from the beginning. That's why we start with a short tale from the *prima repubblica*.

3. A tale from the “*prima repubblica*”: unwritten rules of party-government ministerial selection and limited use of technocracy

If the recent period has been characterized in Italy by an increasing weight of the technical/technocratic component of government, how can the *status ex ante* be described? No doubt, the Italian case for what concerns the period 1948-1992 has to be classified among the examples of a full *party government* within a parliamentary democracy. The ministerial recruitment was a major concern for the partisan elites who ruled the country, with a high degree of continuity, despite a well known low degree of governmental stability (Verzichelli and Cotta 2000). Data on the topic of ministerial partisanship have been extensively presented in other pieces of work (Dogan 1989; Cotta and Verzichelli 2003). Here, it is important to recall that the most comprehensive narratives of government formation converge over the idea of a set of *unwritten rules*² which maximized the bargaining power of parties, the presence of partisan elites in government and the “post-electoral” nature of process of government formation: indeed, both the policy guide lines and the structure of the cabinet team used to be shaped after the elections or after the formal termination of the previous government. Moreover, the process of government formation was also very much variable, thanks to the use of a relevant number of ministers without portfolio which changed continuously in number and in term of scope of delegation. This made the Italian governmental crises particularly time-consuming, even when the outcomes in terms of political compositions were largely predictable.

² The quotation is from Mattei Dogan (1989) who described the process of ministerial recruitment in Italy with ten *unwritten rules*. However, we should here refer to a broader process of government formation including the different institutional roles (from the Head of State to parliamentary leaders, and obviously the *formateur*), the logic of portfolio allocation game (Verzichelli 2008) and even the linkages to the development of a series of policy pledges. Under this point of view, the practices of the *first republic* have been covered by Calandra (1996), Verzichelli and Cotta (2000) Verzichelli (2002).

This interpretation of the first republic as a clear example of *party government* is however at least in part challenged by some peculiarities which contradict the rigid application of the ideal model described above: the most important among them is the changing status (and role) of the Italian Prime Minister during the first forty years of the republic. As many authors have described, the Italian chief executive could be considered only as a *primus inter pares* in terms of effective powers³. But he was also a figure with a very variable political status: most of the times, the candidates to the role of *Presidente del Consiglio dei Ministri* were important Christian Democratic leaders who did not cover, during their cabinet mandate, the office of party leader. This was due mainly to the complex and factionalised nature of that party, but the negative effects in terms of prime ministerial autonomy were evident. In any case, the variability in the room of maneuver of the Prime Minister, and in the degree of autonomy of the governmental coalition determined the succession of very different cabinets: we can therefore distinguish, with regard to the cabinets of the First Republic, between *organic party-government cabinets*, with expectations of a longer duration and of a more vigorous policy making, cabinets with a more *limited delegation*, *transitional cabinets* (very often minority governments formed only by the Christian democracy) and even purely *caretaker cabinets*.

Secondly, to argue that ministerial recruitment was dominated by partisan and parliamentary paths to power does not mean that other experiences and experiments of technocratic presence in government were totally banned from the practice of the first republic. According to our data, 28 of the 260 ministers (11%) serving between the first and the tenth legislature (May 1948 to April 1992) had no previous parliamentary experience. The average duration of their ministerial career was remarkably lower (2,2 years) in comparison to the duration of the entire population of ministers (3,7 years). Moreover, none of them covered core offices such as those of *Presidente del Consiglio*, Minister for Interior, Foreign affairs, or Labor; the most notable exception were the cases of Finance/Treasury ministers with a technical background recruited after the crisis of the seventies (see below).

If we look at ministers and junior ministers without a parliamentary experience (before their first appointment) in a diachronic perspective (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2), we can appreciate how the rate of governmental personnel recruited within the parliamentary arena during the first republic is

³ One should remember that a law regulating the office, the powers and the resources directly controlled by the PM, which was mentioned by article 96 of the 1948 Constitution, was put in act only in 1988.

clearly lower than the average level recorded after 1992. Looking at the ministerial personnel, we can also notice that, among the most stable phases of coalition governance (Verzichelli and Cotta 2000), only the *centrist governments* led by Alcide De Gasperi (1948-53) and the *national solidarity governments* led by Giulio Andreotti (1976-1979) made a relatively higher use of ministers with no parliamentary backgrounds. This is however perfectly understandable since in 1948 parliamentary practices had just been re-started (with the constituent Assembly of 1946), and the Andreotti governments of the national solidarity period were three Christian democratic *monocolore* (minority single party governments) which could more easily include a few technicians and expert ministers in order to meet the special problem solving expectations of the parties supporting the cabinet from outside. The “organic” *centre-left governments* led by Moro and Rumor (during the sixties and seventies) as well as the *pentapartito governments* led by Bettino Craxi during the eighties were, on the other hand, completely dominated by political ministers with a truly parliamentary background.

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

Within the little group of *forerunner technicians* who walked the scene of the first republic we can find distinguished economists recruited in significant but somehow “peripheral” offices (Costantino Bresciani Turrone, Giordano Dell’Amore) or lawyers involved in the reforms of justice (Francesco Paolo Bonifacio). Another isolated case of *policy expert* who joined the ministerial group was a young professor close to the Christian Democratic left, Romano Prodi, who was appointed Minister of Industry in November 1978 (Andreotti IV cabinet). During the crisis years following the oil shock, the demand for the appointment of a few competent and relatively autonomous policy makers, especially for the sectors of economic policy, public administration reform and public finance, was increasing. This explains the appointment of a few important names from the academic world and the higher civil service. Among them, we should mention for instance Massimo Severo Giannini, an eminent scholar of administrative law, who was recruited to the position of minister without portfolio for public administration reform in the Cossiga cabinet (1979). However, his attempt to translate his ideas and knowledge about the Italian public administration into a systematic reform soon failed, and in a few months he preferred to return to his job of university professor.

With the nomination of Rinaldo Ossola as minister of Foreign trade in 1976, a fortunate practice of ministerial inclusion of the most brilliant officers of the *Banca d'Italia* started. One decade later, during the complicated phase of negotiations on the treaty for a European Monetary Union following the document drafted by the Delors committee, it was the turn of the governor of the Italian Central Bank, Guido Carli⁴, who paved the way to a whole *procession of national bankers* in the core executive.

We can argue that this first (limited) number of technocrats in government during the golden age of the Italian partyocracy simply represented the answer to the occasional demands of expertise and/or, *non partisan competences*, in crucial but rather narrow areas of ministerial action. The limits to the autonomy of these ministers were relatively predictable, as well as their political subordination to the (collective) decisions taken by the ministerial selectorates (the top elites from governmental parties). This is fitting the image of a non perfect but rather penetrating pattern of party government: when the political conditions of the coalition governance did not allow the model to work at best, some limits to the autonomy of the PM (weak *monocolore* cabinets and weak PM controlled by party leaders) and some elements of policy expertise were introduced.

Figure 1 clearly shows that the quota of non parliamentary ministers increased after 1987 to a level of 25%. Because of a lack of long term data, we are not able to measure the increase in the trend of non parliamentary junior ministers, but even this line seems to reach a stable rate of about 20% after 1994 (Figure 2). This has to do with all the types of deviations from the linear model of partisan-parliamentary ministerial recruitment we have drawn above. Among the appointments who prove the interest to recruit more skilled policy makers the first were the above quoted Carli (at the treasury), a well known academic and scientist like Antonio Ruberti (who inaugurated the new ministry of scientific research), the top diplomat Renato Ruggiero (Foreign trade) and a famous journalist like Alberto Ronchey (minister of culture in 1992). However, we also find pure politicians not coming from the parliamentary ranks, like strong regional Christian democratic leaders directly projected from the regional scenes to some cabinet responsibilities (for instance, Gianni Prandini and Carlo Bernini). This deviation from the classic party-parliamentary trajectory of ministerial selection would be explained by the increasing role of sub-national political experiences, which reduces the separation between national rulers and territorial leaders, creating an *integrated pattern* of political career (Borchert 2003).

⁴ Guido Carli had actually already served as minister of Foreign trade in 1957 (Zoli Government).

Finally, we cannot exclude, on the basis of the chronicles, that a number of ministerial appointments during the years of the crisis were somehow inspired by the Head of the state, who also contributed to an interruption in the natural chain of delegation in the parliamentary democracies.

4. Specialists, fixers and "saviors ". The profiles of technocrats from the transitional years to 2012

The significantly increased number of ministers with a technocratic profile recruited between the difficult summer of 1992 and the beginning of the XIII legislature (1996), suggests a rather different scenario, both with regards to the quantitative amount of outsiders not belonging to the traditional partisan-parliamentary pathway to ministerial power, and to the qualitative profiles of the ministerial elite.

During the four years of political turmoil (1992-1996) the percentage of minister with no previous parliamentary career went up to 38% (34 out of the 90 ministers serving during the XII and the XIII legislature). Of course, this was due mainly to the fact that two "technical governments" were formed during this short period of time (the Ciampi cabinet of 1993-94 and the Dini cabinet of 1995-96). However, the nomination of different types of technocrats and non-partisan ministers was not exclusively limited to these executive teams: Amato, who served as Prime minister between June 1992 and April 1993 appointed a few ministers who did not hold a parliamentary office, some of them - for instance the minister of Treasury Piero Barucci and the already quoted minister of culture Alberto Ronchey - had a clear technocratic profile.

More importantly, the specific roles covered by several ministers during the period 1992-1996 clearly indicate that the process of government formation in Italy had changed during the transition to the second republic, determining much more relevant and autonomous tasks and, overall, depicting a new and compound picture of executive delegation. Three features in particular should be highlighted: 1) the drastic reduction of the number of ministers coming from the classical parliamentary-party pathway (figures 1 and 2); 2) the demand of new policy competencies "cut" for specific portfolios and oriented toward the formulation of specific policy actions; 3) a more pronounced ministerial accountability, although limited to a few "strong ministers" of the core executive. Indeed, the ministers without portfolio were reduced in number and attributed more and more often to non partisan or non-parliamentary figures, somehow

directly connected to the figure of the chief executive. It was the Berlusconi I cabinet (1994) who inaugurated such a interesting development, appointing, among the others, non parliamentary figures like Giuliano Ferrara (a journalist) and Sergio Berlinguer (a diplomat). In 2001, Berlusconi was bringing other technocrats (personally linked to him) in governmental roles: among the others, the ministers of health (Sirchia) and the minister for innovation (the former IBM top manager Stanca).

However, the evidence which clearly shows the necessity to get a more various landscape of ministerial personnel is the growing percentage of non parliamentary actors among the junior ministers (Figure 2). This is a clear indicator of the reduction of the impact of the parliamentary path, even within the personnel of “political governments”. Indeed, both Berlusconi (1994, 2001 and 2008) and Prodi (1996 and 2006) decided to hire some trustworthy figures from their own entourage or from the “civil society” as junior ministers in key positions (for instance, at the Presidency of the Council and at the Ministry of Economy and Finance). Among these figure, Gianni Letta (three times junior minister with Berlusconi) Enrico Micheli and Ricardo Levi (junior ministers with Prodi) and a number of experts and academics.

We can go in depth analyzing the parliamentary path of ministers. Table 2 reports the parliamentary experiences of the whole governmental personnel (junior and senior ministers) selected between 1987 (Governo Gorla) and today. The trend of consolidation of alternative routes to the ministerial selection, already noticed in Figure 1, is now described in details.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

In short, a quota of about 20% of the ministers, a significant portion of vice-ministers and even a few junior ministers confirm the new inclination to select from outside the parliament. Of course, this population of governmental actors who are not recruited "within the national parliament" is not necessarily consisting of independent technocrats and experts. For instance, some of them are well known regional politicians who directly jump into the governmental arena, thus confirming the increasing relevance of multi-level politics on political careers⁵. In other cases we have long term politicians who are not covering the office of parliamentarian at the moment of their

⁵ A good example of such a career trajectory comes from the current leader of Democratic Party, Pierluigi Bersani, who left the office of President of the region Emilia Romagna (1996) to serve as minister of economic development in the Prodi cabinet. Another similar example come from some leaders of the Lega Nord (Luca Zaia) and of the *People of Freedom* (Giancarlo Galan).

ministerial selection, but have had a distinguished political career at the national level (for instance in party offices?). In any case, some interesting cases of expert ministers who came directly to the national political scenario conquering a ministerial seat as their first spoil are evident. This category of expert ministers have maintained the same ministerial job in their different appointments (Sirchia, Stanca, Lunardi, Tremonti in the governments Berlusconi, Treu, Bassanini, Visco, Berlinguer in the centre-left government of the late nineties), thus confirming the hypothesis of an increased “specialization” of ministers evidenced by the consistency of their ministerial delegation.

A compound effect of the (relative) stability of the bipolar system and of the *presidentialization* of the executive has to be searched in the pattern of government and ministerial duration (table 3). The average duration of government has in fact clearly increased between the first and second republic and this affects above all the life expectancy of PMs. The duration of the other members of cabinet looks shorter, but this is due to the continuous alternation of different government after 1994 (centre-right, centre-left and technical governments). Indeed, some “colonels” of the chief executives of the second republic (Tremonti, Matteoli, Maroni in the centre right camp, Bersani, Bindi, Rutelli, Melandri in the centre-left) have crossed the whole period being appointed in different governments and different legislative terms.

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

5. Selection and de-selection of ministers. Ambiguous indications of change

The second empirical dimension which should be, according to our theoretical grid, influenced by the increase of technocratic penetration within the government is that of the nature of delegation within the government. In empirical terms, this would mean a number of possible changes in the processes of selection and de-selection of ministers (Dowding and Dumont 2009) and, in the end, in the patterns of ministerial career.

Undoubtedly, the increase of ministers with non political profiles has been the cause of a more complicate pattern of ministerial career. *Insiders* and *outsiders* compete for some important posts even within purely political executives, where the PMs tend to promote a little group of *aides* in some key positions (see above). The rate of duration of "non-aligned" ministers recruited between 1994 and 2011 (excluding the Monti government) is 2,4 years, while the group of ministers with

no parliamentary experience (no matter if with a clear partisan belonging or not) presents a rate of 2,6 years. The overall duration rate for this period is 3,0 years. Hence, as happened at the time of the first republic, the average duration of "independent" ministers is lower than the duration in government of "pure politicians", but the much longer life expectancy of the governments makes the difference between the two groups much reduced now.

However, the opportunity for a broader typology of delegations (and of career patterns) does not clearly show a stronger capacity of the PM to *hire and fire* her own ministers. For sure, a powerful leader like Mr. Berlusconi had the opportunity to introduce some reshuffles during his long lasting cabinets⁶, but if we move to a more qualitative analysis we realize that the room of maneuver of the chief executive was not always so evident. It is true that in some cases of *policy shifting* caused by technocratic ministers Berlusconi could use the reshuffle tool in order to fire the disobedient delegates⁷, but it is also evident that in other cases the demotion was delayed, sometimes not possible because of the political conditions, as the peculiar relationship between Mr. Berlusconi and his long term minister of Economy and Finance, Mr. Tremonti, reveals⁸.

In the end, the variable which played the most evident role in determining partial realignment in the processes of government formation and ministerial delegation has been the persistent instability of the party system. Surely, technocratic ministers could be more easily "managed" by their principals, but in a permanent transitional political scenario even the role of technocrats was often confused and ambiguous: some technical actors were oscillating between neutral and "partisan" attitudes and, in some cases, they transformed themselves in political actors.

The first appointment of Mr. Tremonti (as minister of finance) in 1994 was an example of technocratic appointee who socialized with the political party of his principal (Silvio Berlusconi). Mr Dini, another former technocratic minister appointed by Berlusconi, became leader of a fully technical government in 1995 and then, after founding his own parties and entering the parliament in 1996, one of the allies of Prodi (in 1996) and later of the Berlusconi's coalition. To

⁶ The cabinet Berlusconi II (2001-2005) saw 6 substitutions out of 24 ministers (25%). The cabinet Berlusconi IV (2008-2011) had 6 substitutions out of 22 ministers (28%, plus 2 ministers appointed to a later stage). Overall, the rate of substitutions of these governments is extraordinarily high in comparison to the past, when the rate of substitution was always under 10%.

⁷ The most evident case what perhaps that of Minister of Foreign affair Ruggero, fired a few months after his appointment in 2001.

⁸ Tremonti resigned in 2004 at the end of a long debate with some coalition partners, to be recalled in the same position in 2005. Appointed again as minister of economy and finance in 2008, Tremonti had a long dispute, this time with the same Berlusconi, but he was not reshuffled until the collapse of the whole cabinet at the end of 2011.

some extent, even the former prosecutor of *Mani Pulite*, Mr. Di Pietro, played a similar game: after serving as external minister in the Prodi Cabinet (with the attempt of the same Prodi to attract him within the first experimental "party of democrats", between 1998 and 1999), he founded a new party thus becoming one of the leaders of the new coalition supporting the Prodi II government in 2006.

All in all, we can say that the wider competition for ministerial positions, occurred after the crisis of the early nineties, confirms the increasing need for policy expertise, but it does not really suggest dramatic changes in the degree of PM's autonomy and in the patterns of division of the labor within the Italian cabinet.

6. Ministerial structure and policy action of technical governments: a comparison between the cabinets Dini and Monti

So far, we have focused the personal characters of the ministerial personnel and the development of the system of delegation within the cabinet, looking in particular to the political autonomy of the ministers and the PM, and to the capability of this latter to sack her ministers. Our work of empirical exploration, however, should deserve a particular attention to the truly technical governments (those satisfying all the dimensions listed in table 1). This qualitative analysis is crucial in order to give convincing answers to the questions above formulated, become extremely topical with the return of a *technical government* in the autumn of 2011.

Although the experience of government Ciampi (1993) should be also included in a qualitative analysis of technical governments⁹, we will compare here the experience of Dini (1995-1996) and Monti (2001- ...) which can be indicated as paradigmatic cases of technical government, presenting very similar features. Among those features, a relevant fact is that these two cabinets were born

⁹ The government led by Carlo Azelio Ciampi between 1993 and 1994 can be considered a truly technical government, since its chief executive was surely a non partisan and technocratic actor. Moreover, the cabinet team was strongly characterized by the absence of parliamentary background (11 ministers, 37,9%) and the absence of strong party backgrounds (18 ministers, 62.1%). However, the limited delegation provided by the parliament (a four points program including the reform of the electoral system, to be implemented before the dissolution of parliament) and the presence of a group of 37 fully political junior ministers (parliamentarians from the four parties supporting the government) are decisive reasons to exclude this government from our intensive analysis.

from the crisis of a centre-right government, with dramatic problems of financial stability (especially in the case of 2011) and growing priorities for the budgetary process¹⁰.

If we turn to the question "*who are really the tecnici?*" we find several elements of similarity. Generally speaking, when we analyze technocratic personalities, distinguishing within the broad category of "non parliamentary ministers" the sub-groups of appointees with peculiar non political and professional skills, we discover that, starting with the mid-eighties, occupational origins like university professors, expert professionals, *grand commis d'état*, judges and entrepreneurs are more present among the ministerial candidates, this reflecting the need of *policy expertise* described above. Such a structure of occupational origin is confirmed within the two truly technical governments: indeed, the Dini and the Monti governments present a very similar spectrum of technical ministers (Table 4). In details, the Dini cabinet presents 2 entrepreneurs and owners (Agnelli, Lombardi); 6 university professors (Arcelli, Fantozzi, Gambino, Clò, Salvini, Treu) who had also a good career of governmental experts; 8 *grand commis* and high bureaucrats (Dini, Masera, Corcione, Paolucci, Luchetti, Caravale, Guzzanti, Baratta) with an experience in ministerial offices or public banks; 3 judges (Mancuso, Brancaccio, Caianiello).

For what concerns the Monti cabinet we find: 2 private or semi-private managers (Gnudi, Passera); 8 university professors (Balduzzi, Fornero, Giarda, Monti, Profumo, Ornaghi, Riccardi, Severino); 9 *grand commis* (Barca, Catania, Moavero Milanese, Patroni Griffi, Catricalà, Di Paola, Cancellieri, Terzi, Clini).

These qualitative data suggest a predominance of the high bureaucracy (public or semi-public) and of experts, typically with a academic background. In most of the cases the specific competencies correspond to the portfolios allocated (a general to the defense, an ambassador to foreign affairs, a doctor to health, etc.). The limited number of private entrepreneurs or managers may have to do with economic considerations (a ministerial position entails for them significant economic losses compared to private sector salaries) but also with a weak propensity of Italian businessmen to take a public profile. Professors and *grand commis* have also a greater job security, to which should be added in general a previous experience in advisory positions to ministers or

¹⁰ In 1995-6 the Dini technical government had to keep the line of convergence in order to respect the timing of entrance in the EMU. In 2011 Monti had to correct the austerity policies already started by the previous government, in order to avoid a risk of default for the Italian public finance

parliamentary offices. They have also more to gain in terms of future professional advantages from their ministerial job.

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Social and political backgrounds of the personnel confirm a rather similar profile of the two cabinets. First of all, the almost complete extraneousness of the personnel to the political elite confirms that we are dealing here with an exceptional type of government formation. One should also note that when the technocratic demand forces the PM to hire personalities from different environments, the scarce presence of women in the Italian power elite comes out clearly, as well as the relative old age of the top elite people.

Another question we should try to answer, looking to the structure of these two governments, in comparison to the other cabinets with “expert ministers” and isolated technicians, is “Why the *Tecnici* and the *Governi tecnici* ?” This reconnects to our initial grid: are the two phenomena part of the same broader trend or are they relatively independent?

As already stated, a parsimonious hypothesis is that both can be related to a crisis of the parties and more in general of the party system. However we must probably maintain some distinction between the simple expansion in the use of technical ministers in the cabinet ranks and the more serious choice of the delegation to a technical government. In some way they can be both related to a “deficit” of the party model of government, but obviously the second points to a more serious one.

The first indicates that on one side parties face problems in attracting sufficiently qualified people in their ranks and thus to produce partisan ministers that are able to deal with highly complex problems. On the other side, this need is increasingly felt at governmental level and the solution is thus to recruit non partisan ministers.

As for the “*governi tecnici*” it is not just a problem of having “qualified ministers” but of facing a situation where the party system for a number of reasons is not able to provide a governing majority. In this sense they are “interim governments” perceived as a transitory situation to be put in place waiting for the moment when the party system will be able to face its political responsibilities directly. In the past with no possibility of alternation in government and with a strong party as the DC the solution was a Christian Democratic “*monocolore*”. Today a partisan

interim solution seems less acceptable and a fully technical government is required when the parties are not able to take the responsibility for difficult decisions. The question that remains to be answered is why grand coalitions of the main parties are not explicitly adopted in Italy in such situations? A tentative answer is that the current weakness of the main parties induces them to avoid taking in difficult times a more open responsibility: a technical government provides them with a “screen”.

A more in depth analysis of the effective delegation within the government is needed, in order to add robustness to our implications. What seems to be clear enough, from a rough reading of parliamentary chronicles, is that technical PMs have a limited policy delegation (in this sense they confirm to be a sort of care-taker governments, although with some relevant missions) but, at the same time, they show a significant power of persuasion and, at the very end, the power to de-select the minister who cause agent shirking or policy shifting. The affair of the parliamentary motion of no confidence against minister of Justice Filippo Mancuso (October 1995) shows a clear case of "indirect demotion", since the PM (Dini) was not defending his minister. This event (and more in general the position of Dini on the reform of Justice and the European policies) determined a shift in the governmental action, with a new personal and political commitment of Dini¹¹ who was supported, during the last months of the cabinet, by the centre-left and the Northern League but not from the Berlusconi's coalition. Under this point of view, a difference should be noted with the experience of Monti who, at least until the days we are drafting this paper, seems to act more as the external agent of a parliamentary "grand coalition", somehow recalling the experience of Ciampi rather than the prime ministerial style of Lamberto Dini.

In fact, Monti has always appeared more reasoned and moderate than his "delegates" within the cabinet, and he has often used his power of persuasion to preempt harsh conflicts between one of the ministers and one of the political actors of the majority supporting the government¹².

¹¹ Mr. Dini would have joined the centre-left coalition during the electoral campaign of 1996.

¹² Particularly, Monti has played the role of mediator after the proposals of the minister of welfare (Fornero) and the minister of economic development (Passera) who have repeatedly caused reaction both in the centre-left and in the centre-right parliamentary wings.

Provisional conclusions

Our analysis restarts from three main points of discussions: first of all, the demand of expertise and policy skills emerged in Italy before the crisis of the political system, diminishing the impact of the traditional party-parliamentary pattern of ministerial selection.

Secondly, the delegation given to the chief executive has been surely strengthened: the room of maneuver for the PM can be considered a relative autonomy, connected to the rising of specific policy issues and to the other factors which, according to the recent literature, influence the nature of delegation within the parliamentary democracies in Europe, namely the EU policy making and presidentialization (Johansson and Tallberg 2010).

Third, the *technical governments* (or at least the two truly technical governments we have found, according to a more strict definition) were born from the same pre-conditions: 1) deep crisis in the party-parliamentary sub-system; 2) strong political and financial emergence suggesting that this form of temporary interruption of the typical party government model could be more effective and desirable than the other formulas of care-taker government (*monocolore* cabinets supported by other parties, other *non organic* coalition cabinets, grand coalitions, etc.).

In this respect, we must also mention the nexus between the emergence of technical governments and the structural problems of the bipolar but extremely unstable party system developed after 1994. Particularly, this uncertainty applies when the centre-right government fails. This problem reflects very much the distinction between *succession* and *transition* in the general analysis of political change at the apical level (T'Hart and Uhr 2011): in the recent Italian history, and particularly with the failures of the party or coalition led by Silvio Berlusconi, soft successions have been not possible, paving the way to more complex phases of transitional governments.

A different implication concerns the delegation *within* the executive. In this paper we have tested, although by a sketchy analysis, that the autonomy and the growing expertise of a few ministers (core executive technocrats and other expert ministers) are now much more evident in comparison to the generalist figure of the classic party government. This has a clear impact in terms of ministerial career and ministerial duration. In the pure technical government, the delegation in the hands of a member of the cabinet is probably predictable but not rigidly delineated in the governmental pledges (like, for instance, it was in a quasi-technical government like that led by Ciampi in 1993). This entails a number of possible "attempts for reform" from different ministerial

actors who will try to push some of their ideas, but also the possibility of a rigid “stop” imposed from the parliamentary actors to the ministerial actors: both Dini and Monti had, although with different styles, to moderate some ministerial claims and sometimes to contradict their own agents during the confrontations with the political leaders and even during the parliamentary debates.

To put it in other words, while the increase of technocratic skills in the hands of experts and specialist ministers is an occurrence experienced in Italy since the late *first republic*, which does not differ from what observed in other democratic polities, the problem of the radical transformation of the patterns of delegation from the parliament to the cabinet and within this latter should be addressed with a bit of caution. In particular, we can argue that a higher degree of *prime ministerial autonomy* has been observable after the pro-majoritarian shift of the mid-nineties and after the emergence of a pre-electoral definition of the cabinet team (but this has been applied above all to the longest experiences of government, specially those of Berlusconi between 2001 and 2005 and, to a lesser extent, Prodi between 1996 and 1998). The emergence of a transparent delegation within the executive has also affected the relative autonomy of some core-executive ministers and the consequent reactions of their principal/MP who could, when the political conditions allowed it, respond to agent shirking and policy shifting using her power of persuasion and, as *extrema ratio*, sacking them (once again, the experience of Berlusconi II cabinet was probably the most notable example).

In spite of that, the particular case of what we call *governni tecnici* has to be analyzed separately. Although we cannot downgrade such experiences to the class of purely *care-taker* or *temporizing* cabinets, there is a line of continuity between the old *ad interim* monocolore governments of the Christian democratic age and these experiences. This time, the policy emergencies and the exogenous factors pushing the national executives require some room of action for the technical “saviors” but their delegation, their timing and their political agenda remain strictly defined and clearly limited.

This last consideration bring us to the questions this paper cannot answer: how good are the *tecnici*? And what about the effective policy impact of the *governni tecnici* ? What kind of problems they face and what problems they create ? These questions will be reformulated and explored in the light of a more reasoned analysis of the data briefly exposed here. However, this first

impressionistic examination has at least provided a first comprehensive picture of the empirical dimensions involved in the notion of *technical government*, to be used in a more systematic and comparative perspective.

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Table 1. Dimensions of technocratic penetration and possible indicators

	<i>Personal characters</i>	<i>Selection/De-selection</i>	<i>Governmental Action</i>
Prime ministerial autonomy	Technical profile of the Chief Executive Inner cabinet of ministers directly connected to the leader	Destiny of some ministers linked to the life-span of the PM Opportunity for the PM to reshuffle her technocratic ministers	Premier's imprinting over main governmental reforms
Ministerial political Independence	Core executive of experts with relative partisan commitments	More complicated patterns of ministerial career (insiders vs. outsiders) More pronounced use of ministerial reshuffle of non partisan ministers	Attention of independent ministers to a few paradigmatic changes, produced by compromises within the core executive. Independent ministers more often tempted by agent shirking and policy shifting
Ministerial expertise capabilities	Strong symmetry between expertise and assignment of ministerial portfolios	Longer ministerial career of expert political ministers (in comparison to pure technicians) but without changing portfolios (right persons in right place)	Strong focus on "mid-range" policy changes. Skilled ministers more often tempted by policy shifting Emphasis on problem solving and public management

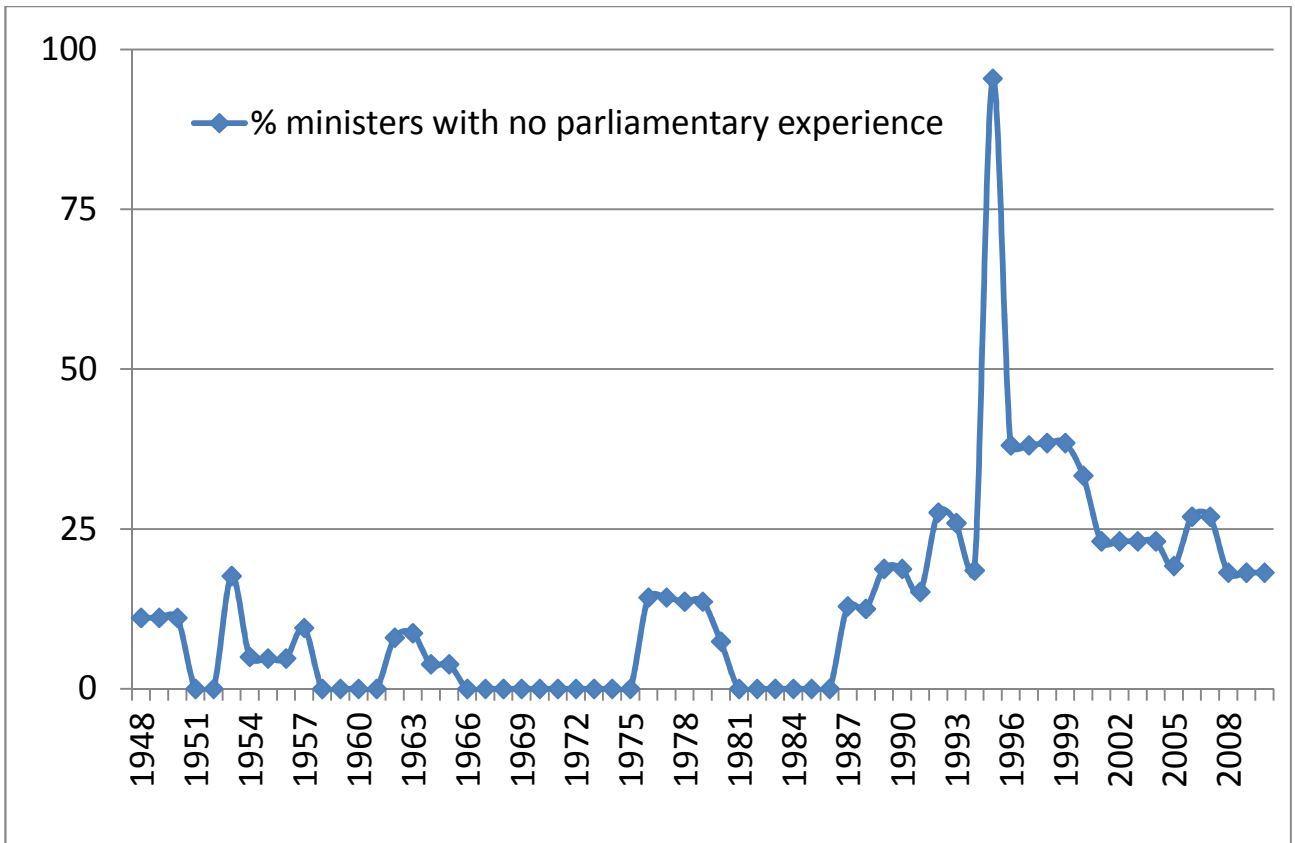


Figure 1. % Ministers with no parliamentary experience (before first full ministerial appointment)

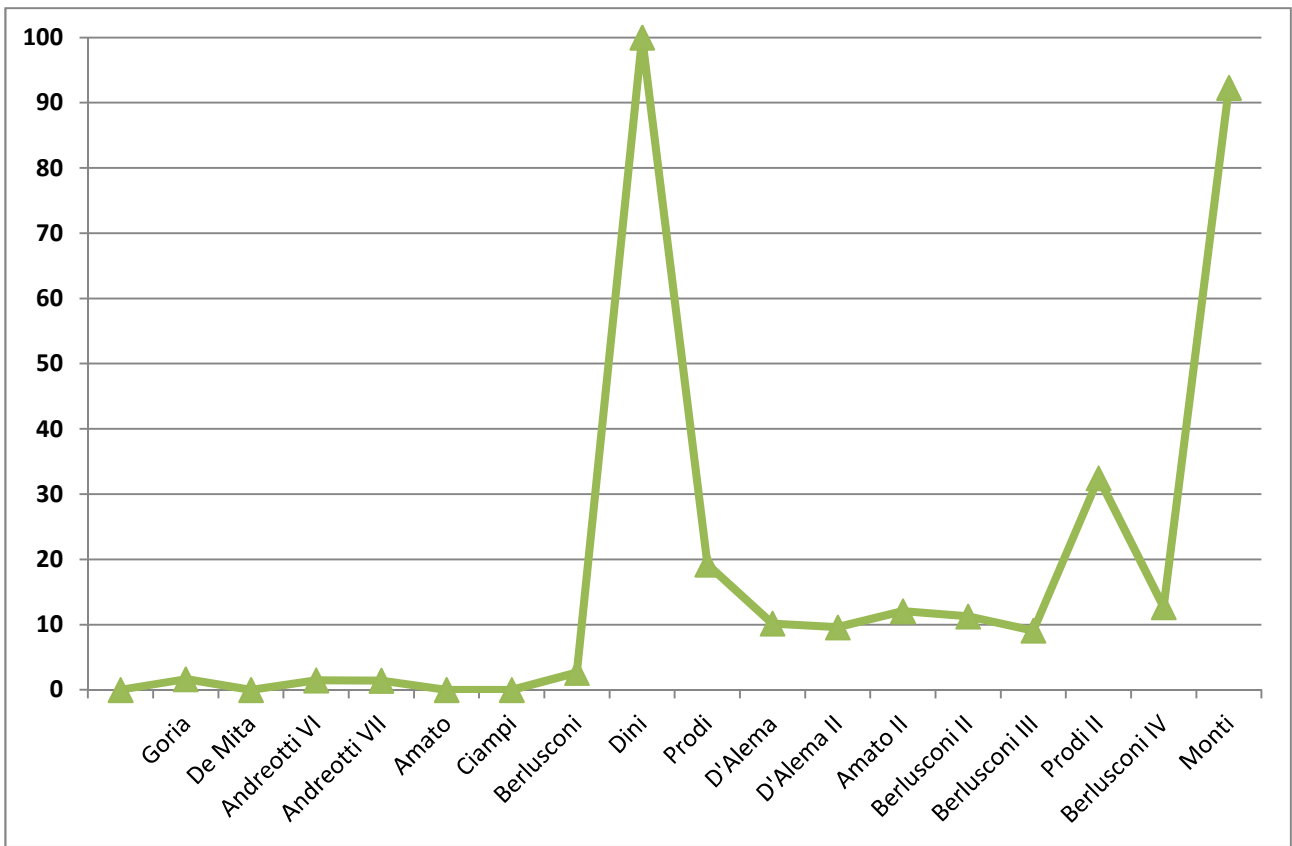


Figure 2. % Junior Ministers with no parliamentary experience (before first full ministerial appointment). 1987-2012

Table 2. type of parliamentary experience of ministers between 1987 and 2012

		parliamentary experience			Total
Government		None	At the time of appointment	Before the time of appointment	
Cabinet Ministers					
Goria	N	4	25	1	30
	%	13,3%	83,3%	3,3%	100,0%
De Mita	N	6	25	1	32
	%	18,8%	78,1%	3,1%	100,0%
Andreotti VI	N	7	30	2	39
	%	17,9%	76,9%	5,1%	100,0%
Andreotti VII	N	4	29	0	33
	%	12,1%	87,9%	,0%	100,0%
Amato	N	5	21	7	33
	%	15,2%	63,6%	21,2%	100,0%
Ciampi	N	12	10	8	30
	%	40,0%	33,3%	26,7%	100,0%
Berlusconi	N	3	23	0	26
	%	11,5%	88,5%	,0%	100,0%
Dini	N	20	0	2	22
	%	90,9%	,0%	9,1%	100,0%
Prodi	N	5	17	1	23
	%	21,7%	73,9%	4,3%	100,0%
D'Alema	N	7	19	4	30
	%	23,3%	63,3%	13,3%	100,0%
D'Alema II	N	4	19	3	26
	%	15,4%	73,1%	11,5%	100,0%
Amato II	N	5	19	2	26
	%	19,2%	73,1%	7,7%	100,0%
Berlusconi II	N	7	26	1	34
	%	20,6%	76,5%	2,9%	100,0%
Berlusconi III	N	4	20	2	26
	%	15,4%	76,9%	7,7%	100,0%
Prodi II	N	4	23	0	27
	%	14,8%	85,2%	,0%	100,0%
Berlusconi IV	N	2	28	2	32
	%	6,3%	87,5%	6,3%	100,0%
Monti	N	18	0	0	18
	%	100,0%	,0%	,0%	100,0%
Vice Ministers					
Berlusconi II	N	1	6	1	8
	%	12,5%	75,0%	12,5%	100,0%
Berlusconi III	N	1	6	2	9
	%	11,1%	66,7%	22,2%	100,0%
Prodi II	N	1	8	1	10
	%	10,0%	80,0%	10,0%	100,0%
Berlusconi IV	N	1	6	0	7
	%	14,3%	85,7%	,0%	100,0%

Monti	N	3	0	0	3
	%	100,0%	,0%	,0%	100,0%
Junior Ministers					
Goria	N	1	60	0	61
	%	1,6%	98,4%	,0%	100,0%
De Mita	N	0	68	0	68
	%	,0%	100,0%	,0%	100,0%
Andreotti VI	N	1	67	0	68
	%	1,5%	98,5%	,0%	100,0%
Andreotti VII	N	1	69	0	70
	%	1,4%	98,6%	,0%	100,0%
Amato	N	0	35	0	35
	%	,0%	100,0%	,0%	100,0%
Ciampi	N	0	38	0	38
	%	,0%	100,0%	,0%	100,0%
Berlusconi	N	1	37	0	38
	%	2,6%	97,4%	,0%	100,0%
Dini	N	42	0	0	42
	%	100,0%	,0%	,0%	100,0%
Prodi	N	10	33	9	52
	%	19,2%	63,5%	17,3%	100,0%
D'Alema	N	6	42	11	59
	%	10,2%	71,2%	18,6%	100,0%
D'Alema II	N	7	58	8	73
	%	9,6%	79,5%	11,0%	100,0%
Amato II	N	7	43	8	58
	%	12,1%	74,1%	13,8%	100,0%
Berlusconi II	N	8	51	12	71
	%	11,3%	71,8%	16,9%	100,0%
Berlusconi III	N	6	52	8	66
	%	9,1%	78,8%	12,1%	100,0%
Prodi II	N	25	21	31	77
	%	32,5%	27,3%	40,3%	100,0%
Berlusconi IV	N	8	50	5	63
	%	12,7%	79,4%	7,9%	100,0%
Monti	N	24	0	2	26
	%	92,3%	,0%	7,7%	100,0%

Table 3. Indicators of ministerial duration between I and II republic

	Governments 1947-1993	Governments 1994 -2012
Average duration of PMs (years)	2.41	3.65
Average duration of government (years)	0.93	1.74
Average duration of ministers (years)	3.30	2.8
Number of ministerships per each minister	4.09	1.9
Total number of ministerships	1150	299
Range total number of ministerships	1 : 30	1 : 8
Average number of different ministerial jobs	2.12	1.43
Mean age of newcomer minister	54.2	54.3

Table 4. A comparison between cabinet Dini and cabinet Monti

Dini (1995)		Monti (2011)
<i>structure of government</i>		
20	Number of ministries (including PM office)	13
0	Number of ministerships without portfolio	6
19	Number of ministers (beginning of the mandate)	18
38	Number of vice or junior Ministers	29
<i>Social backgrounds of governmental personnel</i>		
1 (5.3)	N (%) female ministers	2 (11.1)
3 (7,9)	N (%) female vice/junior ministers	3 (10.3)
60.8	Mean age of ministers (years)	62.8
<i>Ministers' occupational origin (%)</i>		
1 (4.8)	Professionals	-
3 (14.3)	Judge	-
6 (28.6)	University teachers	8 (44.4)
2 (9.5)	Entrepreneurs and owners	-
-	Managers	2 (22.2)
1 (4.8)	Military	-
8 (38.1)	Senior civil servant and grand commis	8 (44.4)
<i>Political background of governmental personnel</i>		
1 (5.3)	Parliamentary background of ministers (%)	0
0	Parliamentary background of vice/junior ministers (%)	1 (3.4)
2 (9.5)	Party background of ministers (%)	0