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Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	xv
<i>List of tables</i>	xvi
<i>Notes on contributors</i>	xvii

Introduction

NICOLÒ CONTI AND FRANCESCO MARANGONI

1 The government and its hard decisions: how conflict is managed within the coalition

FRANCESCO MARANGONI AND MICHELANGELO VERCESI

2 Party priorities, government formation and the making of the executive agenda

ENRICO BORGHETTO AND MARCELLO CARAMMIA

3 From words to facts: the implementation of the government agreement

NICOLÒ CONTI

4 Looking beyond the aggregate figures: an investigation of the consensual approval of Italian government bills

ANDREA PEDRAZZANI

5 Governing by revising: a study on post-enactment policy change in Italy

ENRICO BORGHETTO AND FRANCESCO VISCONTI



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1 The government and its hard decisions

How conflict is managed within the coalition

Francesco Marangoni and Michelangelo Vercesi

Introduction

Conflicts are intrinsic in the nature of coalitions. Government parties, in fact, are allies but, at the same time, they are organizations competing (with one another) for maximizing votes in the electoral arena (Panebianco 1988). Individual components of the executive, ministers above all, are agents of the whole cabinet, in their respective departmental policy domain, but they are also (at least some of them) representatives of their own party within the government (Andeweg 2000). A tension between centripetal and centrifugal drives, therefore, is inherent in the very nature of coalition executives: something that might be conducive to more or less frequent and serious conflicts among partners.

If intense enough, conflicts might weaken the basis of the alliance and challenge the stability of the executive. Even when less threatening, in terms of risks for government survival, intra-coalition conflicts can undermine cabinet decision-making and government performance.

It stands to reason, therefore, that conflict management is an essential commitment for coalition governments. Coalition governance, indeed, is supposed to be a matter of conflict avoidance, even more than conflict management. Coalition agreements, discussed in depth by Conti in Chapter 3, are supposed to be crucial mechanisms in this regard (Andeweg and Timmermans 2008). Unforeseen, or deferred, issues of conflicts, however, might always arise during the government *life cycle* (Strom *et al.* 2008) and need to be addressed by government partners.

The analysis of conflict management, from this point of view, has proved to be a precious perspective for observing internal dynamics of coalition governments² and, in this respect, Italy is a very intriguing case to study. Before the 1990s, it was traditionally ruled by often conflictual and ineffective (in most of the cases coalition) governments (Di Palma 1977; Spotts and Wieser 1986). In the absence of any real chance of alternation, fragile governing coalitions were constantly formed around the Christian Democratic party (DC), which traditionally controlled the prime-ministership and the most influential cabinet portfolios (Verzichelli and Cotta 2000). On the one hand, resulting government majorities used to be fragmented and internally divided (as far as the main policy preferences are concerned). On the other, governments used not to be based on formal coalition agreements (Moury and Timmermans 2008). The attitude of Italian First

Republic governments to rely largely (if not exclusively) on arenas of conflict management and resolution that were external to the cabinet, therefore, is perfectly coherent with the arguments raised by the most advanced comparative literature on this issue. The common hypotheses, in fact, postulate that conditions like the fragility of coalitions, the bias in favor of one of the governing parties (as in the case of the DC) and the absence of any prior policy agreement among coalition partners, make government members more likely to resort to institutions that are external to the cabinet (such as a committee of parliamentary party leaders), or mixed arenas, open to both cabinet and non-cabinet actors (such as the renowned Italian 'majority summits' between ministers and party leaders), rather than to internal (and closed) arenas (i.e., the cabinet) for conflict resolution (Andeweg and Timmermans 2008).

The analysis of intra-coalitional conflicts (and of conflict management) during the Italian Second Republic, therefore, promises to be interesting and valuable. Not only because, as said, it will provide a precious empirical perspective for the observation of the government internal dynamics in an era, as emphasized in the introduction of this volume, of profound (but also uncompleted and even contradictory) transformation of the Italian political system. From a broader comparative perspective, it will also serve as a dynamic test of the same bulk of hypotheses on coalition governments and conflict management mentioned above.

It is true, on the one hand, that the evolution of the Italian political (and institutional) system between the First and the Second Republic has proved largely incomplete (Cecanti and Vassallo 2004; Almagisti *et al.* 2014), and that traditional features (and problems) of the Italian governments have remained substantially unaltered (or become even worse) as a result. Fragmentation and heterogeneity have continued to plague government coalitions that were assembled to win the elections and to defeat the 'opposite pole', but were also unable to govern (Diamanti 2007) and to produce stable executives (Pasquino and Valbruzzi 2011). Coalition fragility and cabinet instability, moreover, have opened the way to frequent government crises and, sometimes (as in the case of the executives formed after the crisis of the Prodi I government in 1998), to more traditional – First Republic-like – patterns of government formation and coalition governance: i.e., pure parliamentary (not electoral) legitimization of majorities, no pre-electoral coalition deals and policy agreements, subordination to partisan actors outside the cabinet. Under these premises, we could hardly expect to find evidence of a diminishing intra-coalitional conflictuality.

On the other hand, however, the structure of Italian governments has experienced some evident changes in the last 15 years, that we expect to have had an impact on mechanisms of intra-coalitional conflict handling. To say the least, the new bipolar electoral competition between center-right and center-left pre-electoral coalitions (Golder 2006) has led to executives (and prime ministers) with a more direct electoral derivation (and legitimization). The new (for Italian governments) habit of drafting coalition agreements focused on policies with constraining implications on coalition governance (Moury 2012), and the increased cabinet

membership rate of party leaders who, instead, used not to sit in the executive during the First Republic (Verzichelli 2009) are two of the main corollaries of this 'majoritarian turn' in Italian politics.

Drawing from the already quoted study by Andeweg and Timmermans (2008), who have found that when governing parties have prior coalition policy agreement to rely on, and when party leaders take a seat in the executive, conflicts tend to be solved within closed and internal arenas, we should expect conflict management by the Italian governments of the Second Republic to be somehow 'internalized' within the cabinet.

With the aim of verifying these general expectations, the next pages are organized as follows. We first present some basic features of Second Republic governments, with particular focus on the composition (and fragmentation) of the supporting coalitions, as these same characteristics are expected to have an impact on the dynamics of conflict occurrence and management. Intra-coalitional conflictuality is then measured for each single government (by means of an extensive newspaper analysis), as regards to both *quantity* (the number of conflicts that occurred) and *quality* (the objects of conflicts and their 'seriousness' in terms of the risks they posed to cabinet survival). Third, we provide some information about the role and the involvement of prime ministers in conflicts. The decision-making and conflict management arenas are finally examined (again using newspaper analysis as the main source of information) with particular regard to their openness or closure to actors outside the cabinet.

Government coalitions between 1996 and 2011

The starting point of the empirical investigation presented in this chapter is 1996. While we already have access to sufficient knowledge about intra-coalition conflicts and conflict management during the First Republic (Nousiainen 1993; Criscitello 1996; Verzichelli and Cotta 2000), no systematic studies regarding more recent years are available. At the same time, we decided not to consider the period immediately following the crisis of the First Republic in 1992, as this was characterized by extreme instability of the Italian government system, and it was ruled, almost entirely,³ by non-partisan, technocratic or quasi-technocratic executives (Fabbrini 2000).

Between 1996 and 2011 four politicians alternated as prime ministers and six coalition governments were appointed. For the sake of simplicity we treat as a single executive two governments following one another, without any change in the prime-ministership and without a general election occurring in between. According to these criteria, the six cabinets are Prodi I; D'Alema I–II;⁴ Amato II;⁵ Berlusconi II–III;⁶ Prodi II; Berlusconi IV. Only the Amato II and Berlusconi II–III cabinets did not terminate prematurely; and only the latter lasted for the entire legislative term.⁷ Table 1.1 indicates the first day in office, the date of resignation of each government, and the duration (in days) with full powers⁸ of these executives. The four prime ministers, with the exception of Berlusconi, were not leaders of their own parties when in office.⁹

Table 1.1 Italian cabinets, 1996–2011

Cabinet	Date in (sworn in)	Formal resignation	Days in (with full powers)
Prodi I	18 May 1996	9 October 1998	874
D'Alema I–II	21 October 1998	19 April 2000	546
Amato II	25 April 2000	31 May 2001	401
Berlusconi II–III	11 June 2001	2 May 2006	1786
Prodi II	17 May 2006	24 January 2008	617
Berlusconi IV	8 May 2008	12 November 2011	1283

With regard to the party composition, we consider as coalition members all parties explicitly supporting the cabinet in parliament, whether or not they have any representative in the Council of ministers, or any of their members appointed as junior minister.¹⁰ Table 1.2 reports the party composition of the coalition supporting each government, together with a measure of coalition fragmentation, computed as the number of parties that were strictly necessary to hold the absolute majority in both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate (i.e., parties with veto power). Some coalitions were oversized, but the number of parties that were necessary to hold a majority was actually smaller.

Table 1.2 Party composition of government coalitions (at time of inauguration), 1996–2011 (including parties giving external support)

Cabinet	Coalition ^a	"Necessary" parties
Prodi I	PDS-PPI-RI-VER-RC	5
D'Alema I–II	DS-PPI-VER-RI-PDCI-SDI-UDR	6
Amato II	DS-DEM-PPI-VER-RI-PDCI-UDEUR-SDI	8
Berlusconi II–III	FI-LN-AN-CCD/CDU-NPSI-PRI	4
Prodi II	DS-DL-RC-RNP-PDCI-IDV-VER-Indip./PD-UDEUR-SVP	10
Berlusconi IV	PDL-LN-MPA-DC	2

Notes: Parties giving only external support in parliament in italics.

a Even if other very tiny parties sometimes gave external support to cabinets, only the main coalition members are indicated.

Party names: AN, National Alliance; CCD/CDU, Christian Democratic Centre/United Christian Democrats; DC, Christian Democracy; DEM, The Democrats; DL, Democracy is Freedom – the Daisy; DS, Left Democrats; FI, Go Italy (*Forza Italia*); Indip./PD, Independents for the Olive Tree; LN, Northern League; MPA, Movement for Autonomies; NPSI, New Italian Socialist Party; PDCI, Party of the Italian Communists; PDL, People of Freedom; PDS (former DS), Democratic Party of the Left; PPI, Italian People's Party; PRI, Italian Republican Party; RI, Italian Renewal; RC, Communist Refoundation; RNP, Rose in the Fist; SDI, Italian Democratic Socialists; SVP, *Südtiroler Volkspartei*, People's Party of the South Tyrol; UDEUR, Union of the Democrats for Europe; VER, Greens.

Source: Marangoni (2013), revised.

Taken as a whole, data in Table 1.2 confirm that complexity and fragmentation have characterized Italian government coalitions (also) during the Second Republic. There are some variations among governments, but there is not any clear pattern toward simplification of government teams. On the contrary, the most fragmented coalition was the rather recent center-left alliance supporting the 2006–2008 Prodi II executive (ten necessary parties). As we will also discuss in the following pages, even the more homogeneous coalition supporting the Berlusconi IV cabinet (only two necessary parties) experienced significant troubles, due to an increasing level of internal conflictuality during the life of this government (ending up with an early dissolution of the executive).

Another aspect to be taken into careful consideration, because it is expected to have a significant impact on the attitude of governments toward conflict management, is the presence of party leaders within the cabinet. We find quite significant differences among the governments under scrutiny on this regard. Overall, the 'majoritarian' governments (those led by Prodi and Berlusconi) form a group on their own compared to the more First Republic-like governments (led by D'Alema and Amato), with the exception of the first Prodi government. Indeed, only one party leader entered this latter cabinet. On the contrary, more than half of the parties represented in the Berlusconi II–III and IV and Prodi II cabinets had their own leaders inside the (senior) ministerial group (Table 1.3).

Intra-coalitional conflictuality and conflict management

The level of conflictuality

In our effort to measure government conflictuality, we have first defined the concept of 'conflict' as any quarrel or explicit disagreement between two or more executive members and/or coalition (individual or collective) party actors.

Table 1.3 Number of party leaders in cabinet by government, 1996–2011

Cabinet	No. of coalition parties with cabinet representation	No. of party leaders in cabinet
Prodi I	4	1
D'Alema I–II	7	1
Amato II	8	1
Berlusconi II–III	4/6 ^a	3 ^b
Prodi II	9	5
Berlusconi IV	2	2

Notes

a NPSI and PRI obtained a representation in the cabinet only after the reshuffle of 2005.

b Initially, the cabinet comprised the leaders of FI, AN and LN. CCD and CDU merged into UDC (Union of Christian and Center Democrats) in 2002 under the leadership of Marco Follini, who entered the cabinet in 2004. The leader of LN, Umberto Bossi, had left his ministerial post some months before.

The number of (so defined) conflicts is the first indicator (rough) of the level of conflictuality a given government coalition has experienced. In this regard, we used newspaper reports as a source of information to detect single episodes of conflicts among coalition partners. Technically speaking, we operated a systematic keywords search¹¹ through the digital archives of two of the most relevant Italian national newspapers, *Il Corriere della Sera* and *Il Sole 24 Ore*, on all the articles (at both title and text level) published between May 1996 (the inauguration of the Prodi I executive) and November 2011 (premature end of the Berlusconi IV executive). Once we had collected the articles presenting at least one of the selected keywords, we went through a more in-depth analysis of the content of each piece, in order to find the commentaries effectively covering conflicts within government coalitions (excluding all other conflicts) and to isolate single episodes of conflicts.

At the end of this process, as reported in Table 1.4, we were able to observe more than 850 conflicts in the entire period under analysis: almost five conflicts per month, on average. Table 1.4 disaggregates data by individual governments. Interestingly, the absolute degree of conflictuality seems to vary quite independently from (or, better, not exclusively as a consequence of) coalition fragmentation and internal heterogeneity. The quite homogeneous (at least initially, before a split within the party of the prime minister) Berlusconi IV's coalition, for instance, experienced quite a high level of conflictuality (almost six conflicts, on average, per month). This was even higher than the level shown by the more fragmented Prodi II supporting coalition (on average, 4.7 conflicts per month).

As already said, however, the number of conflicts is only a rough indicator of the real level of intra-coalitional conflictuality. In fact, we cannot assume that all conflicts present the same (potential) risks for cabinet survival and for an effective and smooth functioning of government decision-making. Simply speaking, indeed, some conflicts are more 'dangerous' and serious than others. A coalition might frequently have to cope with minor internal disagreements or, vice versa, be affected by few, but very threatening conflicts. The simple observation of the frequency of conflicts can, therefore, be a good point of departure, but it is not enough for a detailed and reliable picture.

The seriousness of conflicts, therefore, needs to be carefully analyzed: a problem that we decided to consider, coherently with the literature on the topic

Table 1.4 Absolute and monthly average number of conflicts by government

Cabinet	No. of conflicts	Monthly average
Prodi I	168	5.6
D'Alema I-II	122	6.4
Amato II	57	4.1
Berlusconi II-III	186	3.2
Prodi II	98	4.7
Berlusconi IV	220	5.6
Total	851	4.7

(Nousiainen 1993; Müller and Strøm 2000; Andeweg and Timmermans 2008), by referring to the actors involved in the conflicts and the roles they perform within the government arena.

The actors in conflict

All else being equal, intra-party conflicts are commonly considered to be relatively less risky for government survival. This kind of conflict, indeed, does not directly affect the interparty cooperative basis of the coalition, unless the object of intra-party disputes is precisely the support for the government, or if internal conflicts result in party splitting (with one component leaving the majority). In these cases, even intra-party conflicts might lead to cabinet termination (Damgaard 2008; Saalfeld 2009).

Three different types of conflict do not involve (only) actors belonging to the same party: these are interdepartmental conflicts; party-government conflicts and interparty conflicts. As one might note, these different types are ordered according to the increasing involvement of partisan actors (the 'partyness' of conflicts): from conflicts where parties are not directly involved (interdepartmental conflicts) to conflicts between partisan actors (interparty conflicts). The same classification is also ordered according to increasing risks they cause to cabinet stability, as the partyness of conflicts is commonly considered a critical factor in determining the seriousness of conflicts (Huber 1996; Andeweg and Timmermans 2008).

The actors of interdepartmental conflicts are individual ministers acting as heads and in the interests of their departments, and not (purely) as representatives of their own party within the cabinet.¹² Conflicts between party and government are, instead, characterized by the actions of a coalition party (or some components of it) against the policies (even a ministry) or the overall trajectory of the government. Clearly, the prime minister is the most prominent among possible government members who can be involved in conflicts (Vercesi 2013).

The partyness of conflicts reaches its maximum strength in interparty conflicts. The most serious conflict in parliamentary systems generally (...) lies between parties (...) that are represented both in the government and the parliament' (Huber 1996: 270). Their dangerousness can be explained by the fact that the struggle occurs between two (or more) constitutive parts of the coalition, that is, the parties establishing a pact for government.

Each conflict in our dataset has, therefore, been classified in one (and only one) of these four categories.¹³ Figure 1.1 presents the relative distribution of the episodes of conflict by type and by executive. As a whole, interparty struggles, which we mentioned as being potentially the most risky type of conflicts, cover the larger area of the figure: almost 36 per cent of the conflicts we detected can be classified in this category. Rather interestingly, we noted an exceptionally high level of interparty conflictuality with the D'Alema I-II and Amato II executives (respectively, about 56 per cent and little less than 46 per cent). These data are coherent with our expectations and can be explained when one considers the origins of these two cabinets based, like the governments of the First Republic, on

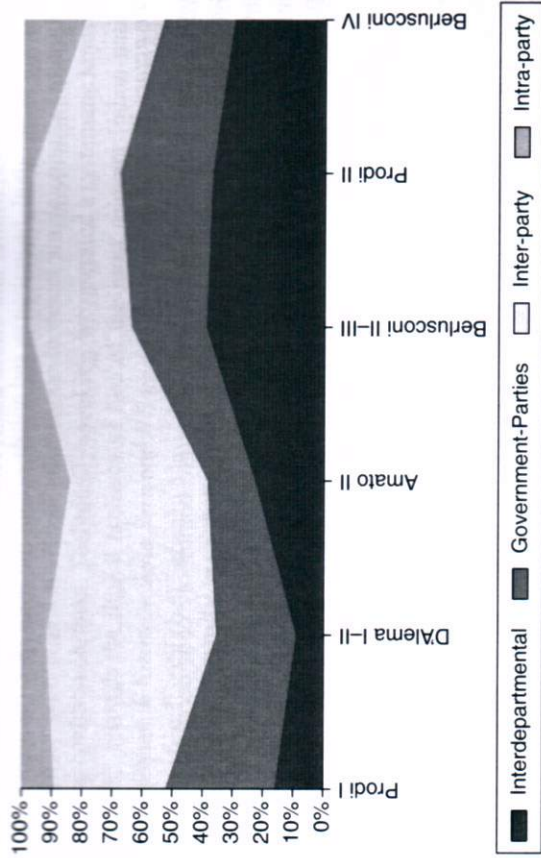


Figure 1.1 Percentage distribution of conflicts by actors involved

complex and fragile interparty bargaining and compromise in parliament after the crisis of the former executive and so under emergency conditions, rather than on electoral legitimization or a clear post-electoral agreement.

This pattern changes quite substantially with the new 'majoritarian' executives, as we define those governments resulting from pre-electoral coalitions and popular legitimacy in a context of bipolar competition (i.e., Prodi I; Berlusconi II–III; Prodi II and Berlusconi IV). The interparty conflictuality area shrinks, while conflicts progressively move into the cabinet. Interdepartmental struggles, in fact, rise from 17 per cent during the Prodi I government to almost 40 per cent during Berlusconi II–III and Prodi II governments and about 30 per cent during the Berlusconi IV.

It has been argued (Marangoni 2013) that this might be due to the relevance of the decisions taken by the executives of the Second Republic, given the tighter constraints of the EU on the Italian government and due to the fact that policy stagnation cannot be a rewarding strategy in the alternation system of the Second Republic (Curini 2011).¹⁴ On the other hand, one might read this data as indicating the consolidation of these executives as the *locus* of party leadership. As already noted (contrary to the First Republic), in the 'majoritarian' executives the leaders of the coalition parties usually took office in the cabinet,¹⁵ hence some interparty frictions might have boosted the interdepartmental conflicts.

The attempt by the 'majoritarian' executives of the Second Republic to play a more autonomous (from parties) and active role in the decision-making process can probably explain the high percentage of government-parties conflicts (27 per cent). At the same time, although a sign of their leadership, this type of conflict destabilized the same executives. The early termination of the Prodi I

and Prodi II governments, for instance, was the consequence of open conflicts between the executive and some party components of its supporting coalition.

Naturally enough, government-parties and interparty conflicts might end up nourishing one another. The opposition of a coalition member to a given government decision can easily lead to conflicts between the former and the other party components of the majority (those more aligned with the executive). In other terms, in this kind of situation, the same government acts could become the target of interparty conflicts. This was the case, for instance, of the formal crisis ending with a reshuffle of the Berlusconi II government in April 2005 (Vassallo 2005).

An important consideration here relates to the relatively high percentage of intra-party conflicts during the Berlusconi IV government (20.5 per cent). We assumed this type of conflict is, in general, not too risky for government survival. However, sometimes intra-party conflicts can be severe enough to threaten the stability of the coalition as a whole. The Berlusconi IV executive is a perfect case in point. The increasing tensions within the People of Freedom party that ended with the decision of Gianfranco Fini (one of the founding fathers) to abandon the party¹⁶ and to give birth in parliament to a new party (Future and Freedom) that did not support the executive, weakened the majority coalition and opened the way to a crisis in the government and to its resignation in 2011.

The objects of conflicts

Conflicts do not only differ from one another according to the actors involved. Quite evidently, the issues at stake can be of a very different nature, entailing different dynamics and risks for the government. We suggest, in this regard, classifying the issues of conflicts into three macro-categories: policy issues, structure of the cabinet, and coalitional equilibria. This latter category refers to struggles over the basic rules keeping coalition partners together: contrasts over the leadership of the coalition or on the strategies and goals to be followed by the executive are typical examples of conflicts falling in this category. Policy conflicts involve the decisions to be implemented (in terms of public policies) by the executive (the focus, therefore, is on the outputs of the government activity). Conflicts on cabinet structure are typically disagreements on the division of labor and prerogatives within the executive (starting with portfolio allocation).

Data in Table 1.5 show that, on the whole, the majority of conflicts (almost 63 per cent) concern policy issues (note that the few conflicts we have not been able to unequivocally classify into one of the three categories have been excluded). On the one hand, once again, this seems to confirm the relevance of the policy decisions the Italian executives have been called to deal with in the last two decades. On the other hand, however, these same data suggest that reaching a compromise over the policy measures to be implemented is still a difficult (and sometimes ineffective, as Conti demonstrates in Chapter 3) exercise for the Italian government coalitions.

Disaggregated data by executive are really interesting on this regard. We note, in fact, a significantly smaller percentage of policy conflicts during the D'Alema I–II and the Amato II executives (about 36 per cent and 48 per cent, respectively).

Table 1.5 Percentage distribution of conflicts by main issue (and by executive)^a

Cabinet	Policy issues	Coalitional equilibria	Cabinet structure	No. of conflicts classified
Prodi I	62.7	23.4	13.9	158
D'Alema I-II	35.3	30.3	34.5	119
Amato II	47.9	20.8	31.3	48
Berlusconi II-III	70.8	9.4	19.9	171
Prodi II	76.1	8.7	15.2	92
Berlusconi IV	68.6	7.7	23.7	207
Total	62.5	15.5	22.0	795

Note

^a Conflicts that are not unequivocally classifiable have been excluded.

This is very unlikely to be due to the more homogeneous nature of their supporting coalitions, or to their capacity to hold larger and more solid agreements (and a smoother decision-making process). The exact contrary is, instead, true. The rather composite nature of the majority coalitions, and the limited time (and policy) horizon of these two governments prevented more relevant and conflictual policy issues entering the government agenda.¹⁷ Conflicts over the coalitional equilibria and the structure of the cabinet, somehow (numerically) residual under most 'majoritarian' executives (with the partial exception of the Prodi I), have largely characterized the life of these two governments (they make up about 65 per cent and 52 per cent of the episodes of conflict, respectively), a phenomenon echoing the typical nature of conflicts in the First Republic (Nousiainen 1993).

At this point in the analysis, we are able to combine information on the actors and issues of conflicts to produce a more complete picture of the dynamics that characterize the internal life of Italian executives, notably of the kind of relationships between different tiers of government. Interdepartmental conflicts, like those involving the cabinet (the executive inner circle) concern almost exclusively policy issues (about 89 per cent of cases), with no significant variation among governments. Quite remarkably, parties-executive (66 per cent) and interparty conflicts (53 per cent) increasingly concern policies, another sign of the relevance of policy decisions to be taken by the governments of the Second Republic. Within this context, the 'First Republic-like' D'Alema I-II and Amato II governments diverge from this general pattern, with coalition governance and executive structure and organization being more frequent issues of (extra-cabinet) conflicts between allies (in 71 per cent and 53 per cent of the cases, respectively) or between one (or more) coalition parties and the government (62 per cent and 67 per cent of this kind of conflicts, respectively).¹⁸

Conflicts and the internal life of cabinets: the involvement of prime ministers

In our analysis of actors and issues of intra-coalitional conflictuality a special focus is devoted to the chief executive. The Italian prime ministers were commonly

considered comparatively weak by the literature on the First Republic (Hine and Finocchj 1991). However, in recent years some changes have been introduced in the role of this office with a relative strengthening of its power (O'Malley and Cavatorta 2004; Campus and Pasquino 2006; Calise 2007; Musella 2012). Our analysis of the involvement of prime ministers in intra-coalitional conflicts could contribute to shed light on this process of change and demonstrate to what extent this political figure has become more influential within the context of Italian politics.

According to our data, almost 25 per cent of all conflicts that we were able to detect involved (directly or indirectly) the prime minister, with little or no variation among governments. More than the quantity, it is the type of conflicts (particularly their contents) involving prime ministers that is of a particular interest here. Table 1.6 shows a distribution of conflicts in which prime ministers took part, by issue and cabinet. Two models seem again to emerge. On one hand, during the D'Alema I-II and Amato II executives, the conflicts involving the prime minister only rarely concerned policy issues (in no case during the Amato II government, in about 21 per cent of cases during the D'Alema I-II cabinet). The high percentage of chief-executive-engaging conflicts related to coalitional equilibria and cabinet structure suggests that these two prime ministers, deriving their legitimacy from pure interparty bargaining in parliament and not from an electoral mandate (exactly like First Republic prime ministers) played primarily the role of guarantors of office allocation and balance of powers among coalition partners.

'Majoritarian' prime ministers, on the contrary, building their legitimation on electoral (programmatic) mandate, tried to play a more active role in guiding government decision-making, even where this implied disagreement (over specific policy issues) with one or more components of the government.

Managing conflictuality: internal or external arenas?

Governments, in particular coalition governments, 'cannot survive long in an atmosphere poisoned by incessant conflicts: it is therefore important that these conflicts be resolved quickly' (Nousiainen 1993: 273).

Table 1.6 Percentage distribution of conflicts involving the prime minister (PM) by issue (and by executive)^a

	Policy issues	Coalitional equilibria	Cabinet structure	No. of conflicts involving the PM
Prodi I	67.5	25.0	7.5	40
D'Alema I-II	20.9	44.2	34.9	43
Amato II	-	75.0	25.0	8
Berlusconi II-III	41.7	29.2	29.2	48
Prodi II	75.0	5.0	20.0	20
Berlusconi IV	62.5	14.6	22.9	48
Total	48.8	27.5	23.7	207

Note

^a Conflicts that are not unequivocally classifiable have been excluded.

The recent comparative analysis of conflict management processes by coalition governments has mainly focused on the closure or openness of these same mechanisms to (individual and collective) components outside the cabinet. We referred to this general distinction to classify the conflict management arenas that appear to be more frequently employed by Italian governing coalitions in the period under analysis. In particular, we adopted a simplified version of the typology suggested by Andeweg and Timmermans (2008)¹⁹ distinguishing between: interdepartmental summits between two or more ministers (internal arena); committees of ministers and leaders of the majority parliamentary groups (mixed arena); committees of ministers (usually prime ministers and other relevant ministers) and majority party leaders who do not hold any office within the executive (mixed arena); committees of parliamentary majority group leaders (external arena); interparty committees among party leaders outside the cabinet (external arena).²⁰

In the same way as for measuring conflictuality, we relied on an extensive newspaper analysis to find single occurrences of the various types of conflict management arenas. We were able to isolate 261 committees and summits during the 15 years under analysis. As is reported in Table 1.7, about 66 per cent of the cases could be classified in the (mixed arena) ministers-party leaders category. These are, indeed, the so-called 'majority summits' which had already proved to be crucial decision-making arenas during the First Republic (Criscitiello 1996). About 10 per cent of the cases are ministers-parliamentary leaders committees that typically perform a 'technical' role, dealing with the parliamentary process of government bills. In almost 14 per cent of cases, the participants to the committees were non-governmental actors: the leaders of parliamentary groups (3 per cent) or majority party leaders who did not hold any office in the cabinet (more than 10 per cent).

External (and mixed) arenas, therefore, have continued to play an essential role in coordinating actions and managing conflict within government coalitions. At the same time, however, we found some evidence of the increasing importance of internal arenas for conflict management. As we show in Table 1.7, the participants to the committees were (exclusively) ministers (sometimes junior ministers) in about 11 per cent of the cases.

Quite interestingly, the latter kind of arena appears more relevant under 'majoritarian' governments (and purely external arenas not including members of the cabinet were only residual) and not under the D'Alema I-II and Amato II governments. In these two cases, on the contrary, coalition members largely resorted to external arenas, in particular interparty committees outside the cabinet: almost 27 per cent and 50 per cent of the conflict-resolution committees during the D'Alema I-II and the Amato II executives allowed as participants only those party leaders with no office in the cabinet.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have analyzed the degree of conflictuality that has characterized Italian government coalitions during the Second Republic and the mechanisms they have developed for management of conflicts.

Table 1.7 Percentage distribution of arenas by executive

No.	Committees of interdepartmental summits	Committees of ministers and parliamentary leaders	Committees of ministers and party leaders	Committees of party leaders (not holding office in the cabinet)
48	4.2	16.7	62.5	6.3
38	-	15.8	55.3	26.3
16	-	-	43.8	50.0
96	20.8	3.1	72.9	2.1
21	9.5	9.5	76.2	4.8
42	11.9	14.3	66.7	2.4
261	11.1	9.6	65.9	10.3
Prodi I	4.2	16.7	62.5	6.3
D'Alema I-II	-	15.8	55.3	26.3
Amato II	-	-	43.8	50.0
Berlusconi II-III	20.8	3.1	72.9	2.1
Prodi II	9.5	9.5	76.2	4.8
Berlusconi IV	11.9	14.3	66.7	2.4
Total	11.1	9.6	65.9	10.3

We relied on extensive newspaper analysis to first detect single episodes of conflict occurring among different (individual and collective) cabinet and coalition components during the life cycle of each of the six executives in office in the period under analysis;²¹ from the inauguration of the Prodi I government (May 1996) to the (early) end of the Berlusconi IV government (November 2011).

From a purely quantitative point of view, with more than 850 conflicts that we were able to identify, the high level of conflictuality confirms the complexity of government coalitions as an enduring trait of the Italian political system.

We tried, indeed, to measure intra-coalitional conflictuality not only in terms of *quantity* of conflicts, but also looking at the type of conflicts: in relation to the risks they entailed for the survival of the executive, and also to their content. As far as the first dimension is concerned, we classified single episodes of conflict into four different categories depending on the coalition (individual or collective) components who were in conflict with each other: intra-party conflicts (involving two or more actors of the parliamentary majority belonging to the same party, or two or more ministers of the same party in conflict for reasons related to the internal affairs of their own party); interdepartmental conflicts (between two or more ministers, acting as representatives of their respective departments and not as delegates of their own parties); government-party conflicts (involving one or more party components outside the cabinet and one or more members of the executive, in relation to decisions to be taken by the government); interparty conflicts (between two or more actors, belonging to two or more majority parties and not holding any office in the executive, or involving cabinet members acting in the exclusive interest of their own party).

As far as the content of conflicts is concerned, we distinguished between: policy issues (decisions and measures of public policy to be implemented by the executive); coalitional equilibria (issues related to the division of power and responsibilities among allies); and cabinet structure (issues concerning the organization of work within the cabinet).

Our results demonstrate that interparty conflicts, very often related to the 'power bases' of the coalition (that is, coalitional equilibria and cabinet structure) and the most risky ones for coalition governments according to comparative analyses, have surely characterized the life of the Italian executives during the Second Republic. Nonetheless, we also found some evidence of a process of progressive shifting of conflictuality into the cabinet and toward policy issues. This happened, in particular, during those executives that we have defined as more 'majoritarian': they were formed after the general elections on the basis of pre-electoral coalitions and their legitimacy stemmed primarily from the electoral arena.

These executives were able to claim, and partially to play, a more autonomous role with respect to their supporting parties than in the First Republic (also because, more than in the past, party leaders held ministerial responsibilities in these executives). On the one hand, the relatively large percentage of interdepartmental conflicts (mostly involving policy issues) also demonstrates the strengthening of the cabinet as a privileged arena where crucial and binding decisions

are taken. On the other hand, this same percentage, together with the relatively high rate of government-parties conflicts, proves the difficulty encountered by the Italian governing parties in governing together, even when they make pre-electoral agreements.

Then, we moved the analysis to mechanisms for conflict resolution. Drawing from the most recognized comparative analyses in the field, we decided to focus our attention on the arenas mostly used by governing coalitions for conflict management. For this purpose, we relied again on newspaper analysis in order to isolate the cases of conflict management in the period that we considered. We found 261 cases that we could classify, along Andeweg and Timmermans' lines (2008), as internal (only cabinet members as participants), external (only participants who did not hold an office in the cabinet), or mixed (where both cabinet members and party actors not holding office in the executive participated) arenas.

Andeweg and Timmermans, in their comparative analysis of conflict management by coalition governments in Western Europe, further argued that

the construction and the use of external or mixed arenas imply additional costs for the parties compared to internal arenas, and that, all else being equal, parties tend to prefer internal decision-making arenas. They will resort to external institutions when the coalition is fragile or the bargaining environment complex, when they have no definitive prior policy agreement to fall back on, or when the internal environment is likely to be biased in favour of one of the parties.

(Andeweg and Timmermans 2008: 296)

Their argument can well explain the preferential (or, better, almost exclusive) employment of external and mixed arenas of conflict resolution by the governments of the First Republic (Crisciello 1996; Verzichelli and Cotta 2000). Following the same argument, our expectation was that processes of conflict management by the coalition governments of the Second Republic would be more internalized within the executive. More precisely, we expected that: (1) a stronger (and more autonomous from parties) popular legitimacy of the government; (2) a larger presence of party leaders within the cabinet; and (3) a more articulated and formalized pre-electoral agreement of the government coalition²² should determine greater internalization of conflict management by the executive. Our results largely confirm these expectations. In particular, we found 'majoritarian' governments to rely, much more than in the past, on internal conflict management arenas. Conflict resolution (and avoidance) processes, however, were often open (also) to actors outside the cabinet: that is, they often took place in mixed arenas. Purely external arenas, indeed, were more extensively employed by those governments (like the D'Alema I-II and Amato II executives) that proved more similar to the First Republic model of governance (Fabbrini 2000): having not a direct electoral derivation but being the result of a compromise reached in parliament by parties after the crisis of former executives, they also proved less autonomous and more party-dependent. In this sense, our analysis shows that the use of the cabinet as an

arena for managing conflicts depends largely on the attitude of (governing) party leaders to be part of the executive.

In the Introduction to this volume, Conti and Marangoni question whether the advent of alternation has transformed the Italian political system toward an *outputs* democracy. Governments (and governing parties) in this new scenario face the urgency to provide and implement policy decisions, since they are fully accountable to voters. An urgency that the blocked (without alternation) governments of the First Republic did not really experience. The analysis of intra-coalitional conflicts seems to corroborate this argument. Policy decisions have become increasingly important as issues of conflict within government coalitions. On the one hand, this is an indicator of the pro-active attitude of governing actors with respect to policy-making during the Second Republic. On the other hand, the same high level of conflictuality demonstrates that Italian coalitions still encounter considerable problems in joint decision-making.

Notes

- 1 Michelangelo Vercesi is responsible for the first and second sections, Francesco Marangoni for the third to fifth sections, while the Introduction and Conclusion were written jointly by the two authors.
- 2 Although there are only a few comparative empirical studies of government conflicts, Nousiainen (1993) and the already quoted Andeweg and Timmermans (2008) are probably the two most important exceptions. But see also Miller and Müller (2010).
- 3 With the exception of the brief parenthesis of the first Berlusconi government between May and December 1994.
- 4 We count the two consecutive executives guided by Massimo D'Alema (October 1998–December 1999 and December 1999–April 2000) as a single government.
- 5 The first Amato cabinet was in office from 1992 to 1993.
- 6 We count the two consecutive executives guided by Silvio Berlusconi (June 2001–April 2005 and April 2005–May 2006) as a single government.
- 7 Although, as said, passing through a formal crisis.
- 8 I.e., not considering the period between formal resignation and formation of the new executive.
- 9 Massimo D'Alema resigned as national head of the left-wing party *Democratici di Sinistra* (DS – Left Democrats) soon after entering office as chief executive.
- 10 It is worth noting that in Italy executives need an explicit confidence vote from an absolute parliamentary majority (both at the Chamber of Deputies and at the Senate).
- 11 The keywords we used (in appropriate combination through Boolean operators) are: 'contrast'; 'conflict'; 'disagreement'; 'struggle'; 'against'; 'government'; 'minister'; 'majority'; 'parties'.
- 12 This distinction is not always easy to make. We relied, however, on a careful analysis of newspaper reports to include in this category only conflicts that have developed along interdepartmental lines.
- 13 As one might easily imagine, this kind of classification is not always easy or unproblematic. Some difficulties arise from individuals cumulating different roles, as in the case, for instance, of two ministers who are also leaders of their own parties. Any time these two ministers entered into conflict with each other, we distinguished whether they were in disagreement for interdepartmental reasons or, rather, they acted as leaders (and in the interests) of their parties, and then we classified single episodes of conflict accordingly.
- 14 On the impact of the (absence of) alternation on the agenda power and the effectiveness of Italian governments, see also Zucchini (2011).

15 With some variations among cabinets, as discussed above.
16 Formally, Gianfranco Fini was expelled by the National Steering Committee of the PDL.

- 17 Previous analyses, on this regard, have shown that these two governments fall significantly below the other executives of the Second Republic as far as their attitudes and capability to present significant bills to the parliament are concerned (Marangoni 2013). Interestingly enough, the Prodi I executive seems closer to this model than to the other 'majoritarian' executives, in particular as far as interparty conflicts are concerned (involving extra-policy issues in more than 50 per cent of the cases). The peculiar nature of the coalition supporting this executive (with the Communist Refoundation party that was not part of the cabinet, but gave only its external support) and the fact that this government represented a first experiment of an unprecedented (and, as such, in search for some equilibrium) center-left alliance might explain this phenomenon.
- 19 Andeweg and Timmermans counted two different arenas for each of the three types (internal; mixed; and external). On the contrary, we grouped internal arenas into one category: the summits between ministers, irrespective of the type of the meeting. It is important to note that all these different arenas might sometimes work as conflict-avoidance, rather than conflict-resolution mechanisms. In other words, they can work as decision-making arenas intended to reinforce compromise and agreement among the different components of the coalition.
- 21 As we mentioned above, we adopted counting criteria that differ from the official government numbering (in that we counted a new executive only when there was a change in the prime-ministership or a general election occurred).
- 22 See Chapter 3 on this aspect.

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