

Duration and Durability of Italian Ministers: an Old Paradox Revisited

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Abstract

The Italian paradox of 'stable instability' characterized the First Republic, with a very short duration of governments but with a stable ministerial class. During the last twenty years we note a 'partial' growing of governmental duration, but what about the stability of ministers along with the crisis of party government? This question calls for an empirical investigation in search of a more precise understanding. First, this article will focus on the concepts of the duration and durability of Italian ministers, as a premise for further comparative analysis. Second, it will investigate the Italian ministerial elite in order to examine the decreasing role of political parties in stabilizing the political class. Finally, we will focus our attention on the instability of the Italian party system as one of the main explanations of (the lack of) governmental durability. This leads to the conclusion that, leaving aside the rhetoric of stronger Italian executives, Italy has been experiencing a period of greater instability.

1. Introduction

Stable instability: this is the traditional image associated with the Italian Republic during its first fifty years, as a result of a peculiar mix of very short government duration and the firm grip of political parties over political institutions (Cappadocia 1972). In comparative perspective, the First Italian Republic was characterized by the highest rate of cabinet turnover in Western Europe (Müller and Strøm 2000). Conversely, although the average life of a government was less than a year, the Christian Democratic Party remained in power during the whole period, giving rise to rather stable and stagnant (certainly not innovative, as specified in the section on this point) governmental formulas.

Partitocracy led to the lengthy careers of a restricted number of people in the higher echelons of government: more in particular, the composition and recruitment of ministers and junior ministers (*sottosegretari*) showed a remarkable degree of permanence and ministerial partisanship (Calise and Mannheimer 1982; Calise 1984). The super-elite were so stable that 'about one hundred ministers remained in office for more than five years, being part of numerous governments. In particular, two of them for a quarter of a century (Emilio Colombo and Giulio Andreotti) and one for twenty years (Paolo Emilio Taviani)' (Cassese 2022, VII, our translation).

What about the (apparent) paradox of Italian stable instability after the advent of the so-called Second Republic? This question calls for empirical investigation in search of a more precise understanding. Although we have registered a clear departure from the



short duration of the Italian executives of the past, so leaving aside the ‘governni balneari’¹ that symbolized an epoch, executive life has increased but still falls short of expectations. The average duration of governments over the last twenty years is about 690 days, while most of the 50s and 60s governments did not even reach the 100-day threshold – or barely touched it. Eleven governments, however, alternated from 2000 to 2021, with eight different Presidents of the Council, and only three of them lasted more than a thousand days (Table 1). Moreover, as the Christian Democrats’ one-party dominance was eroded, and the Italian party system radically changed, relevant consequences may be noted for the stability of the political class, with the occurrence of less ‘partified’ and durable ministerial career paths (Pritoni 2012; Bergman et al. 2015). This has raised the suspicion that the Italian Republic has been experiencing – since the 1992 election, which may be considered the last one of the First Republic (Bull and Newell 1993) – a period of greater instability.

Table 1. Italian governments and ministers (2000-2021)

| Government | Government's duration (days) | Number of ministers |
|-------------------|---|----------------------------|
| Amato II | 412 | 25 |
| Berlusconi II | 1,412 | 28 |
| Berlusconi III | 389 | 25 |
| Prodi II | 720 | 26 |
| Berlusconi IV | 1,287 | 22 |
| Monti | 528 | 19 |
| Letta | 299 | 22 |
| Renzi | 1,024 | 21 |
| Gentiloni | 536 | 19 |
| Conte I | 460 | 19 |
| Conte II | 527 | 22 |

Source: own elaboration on the Italian Government' official website.

Government duration might be combined with its durability. The stability of a government of a given political class (in this case ministerial) depends, indeed, on many factors. If duration is an objective and factual measure, taking into consideration the starting date and the end of the executive mandate, durability captures the relationship between the actual data and other intervening variables/factors (Lijphart 1984). To ride the Italian paradox of ‘stable instability’ that characterized the First Republic, with a very short duration of governments but with a stable political class, what has happened to the duration and durability of the Italian executives in recent decades, if we look at this from the angle of the duration of their ministers in office? And what are the main factors leading to, or limiting current governmental and ministerial stability?

¹ ‘Seaside government’, an Italian expression which indicates a care-taker executive which lasts for the restricted time of the summer holidays.

This article will be divided into three parts: first it will analyse the concepts of duration and durability by taking into account recent PS literature; second, it will focus on the Italian ministerial class in the last twenty years, to capture indicators of its permanence and underline dominant career paths, along with the decreasing role of political parties in stabilizing the political class. Finally, the instability of the Italian party system will be considered as one of the main explanations of (the lack of) governmental and ministerial durability. The main thesis of the article is that the crisis of party government and the weaker control of party organizations over ministerial selection in the post-1994 years, as well as a greater level of party alternation in government, have brought about the increasing instability of the ministerial class. This has determined the shift from the well-noted system of ‘stable instability’ (i.e., unstable cabinets and a stable political elite) to a system of ‘unstable stability’ (longer – though not sufficiently so – cabinets, but frequent ministerial turnover).

2. Duration and durability of government and ministers: starting from the concepts

Government stability comes from both duration and durability. The distinction between the two concepts emerged in the Political Science literature in the early 1970s, to explain how some democratic regimes may acquire a high level of stability with executives that do not last for a long time (Laver 2003). Indeed, while the duration of a government, or that of a minister’s office, consists in the observation of the time which elapses between the beginning and the end of the mandate, research on the durability of governments and ministers seeks to identify explanatory factors that impact the term of office. Therefore, duration is the essential starting point for our analysis, whereas durability is an analytical deepening into what factors may allow for government stability or instability. As a matter of fact, “‘ministerial stability’ is a generic term encompassing both ministerial duration and durability” (Fischer, Dowding, and Dumont 2012, 507).

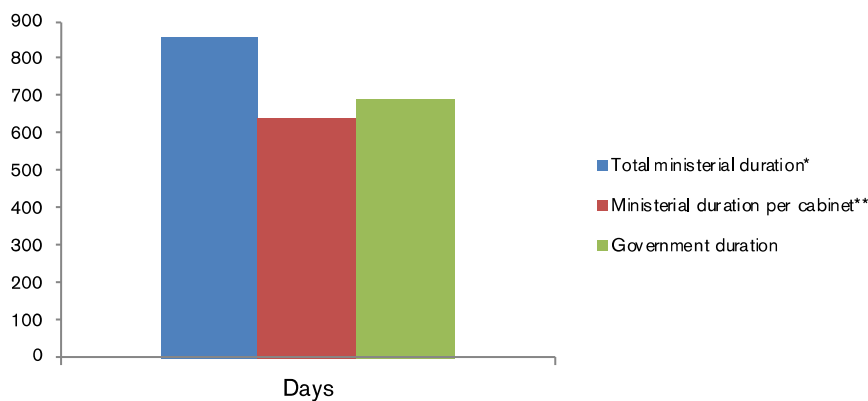
Starting from the concept of duration, although it constitutes an essentially empirical concept, which coincides with the time spent in office by a single minister, its operationalization may not be immediate. Studies on the topic have essentially followed two paths. Some scholars consider the ministerial mandate to be continuous through various governments (Blondel 1985; Shevchenko 2005), others view ministerial tenure as the length of time a minister serves in a given cabinet (Berlinski, Dewan, Dowding 2007; Berlinski, Dewan, Dowding 2012). In the first case, the duration of the ministerial mandate coincides with the time that occurs between the first ministerial appointment in a government and the end of his last ministerial mandate. Thus, for example, minister Dario Franceschini, who held a ministerial position (changing portfolio once) from 2013 to 2021 by crossing four governments, is considered to have been in charge for about eight years. In the second case, however, the minister’s duration officially ends with the end of a single mandate. Accordingly, in the event of the minister being appointed again in a different government, this counts as another office. This could be borrowed from research on cabinet stability, where the end of a cabinet is assumed to be a point of discontinuity both for the government as collective body and single ministers. In addition, we could point out that while the first type of measurement takes the minister’s point of view, looking at the total days spent in office by each individual, the second type of measurement of ministerial tenure adopts

the point of view of the government, noting the days in office of each individual for individual governments or by types of government.

Apart from the chosen ‘counting rule’ to measure the length of ministerial office, the mean of the duration in office (in days and/or in years) is generally seen as an accurate index of ministerial longevity.

As Table 1 above shows, if we compare the average duration of the Italian governments from 2000 to 2021 with the duration of ministerial offices in the same period, clear differences between the two measures may be observed. If we use the first measurement of duration, based on the total stay in office by individual ministers,² ministerial duration is longer than that of the government, as ministers are more stable than the governments that host them. Moreover, the two values show a (still unsatisfactory) increase in governmental duration compared with the First Republic: indeed, the average of 690 days for executives is double that of past executives, which was 315 days on average (Vassallo 2005; Pritoni 2012, 228). Yet, if one refers to the second type of measurement of ministerial stay in office,³ the current political scenario moves sharply away from the First Republic, when ‘there was a strong stability of the ruling class’ (Cassese 2022, VI; Frogner 1991).

Figure 1. Average duration of ministers and governments (2000-2021)



Notes: * total time spent in office by ministers; ** time in office of ministers per cabinet

Source: own elaboration on the basis of official government website and Musella, Fittipaldi and Rullo, *Monocratic Government Dataset: Personalisation of Leaders and Masses*, appendix of Musella (2022).

Indeed, an increase in the average duration of governments compared to the past is offset by a shorter tenure of the ministerial elite compared to the past. It is sufficient to note that the average value of ministerial duration in single cabinets, that is about 640 days, is much lower than that of the First Republic: ‘the degree of stability of the rulers was enormously greater than that of the individual governments’, so that in the first republican thirty years ‘152 ministers, one third of the total, enclosed two thirds of the presences in their hands; 1331 government posts as minister and/or junior ministers’

² In this case, the unit of analysis is the individual minister. We therefore aggregate all the days that the given minister has spent in government in a ministerial post, over and above the duration of the individual cabinets in which he or she has participated.

³ In this case, as mentioned above, the point of view is that of the executive and taken into account are the days each minister spends in office for each government or type of government.

(Calise 1997, 360-361, our translations). Thus, by adopting the second measure of duration, the last phase of republican history seems to result in greater ministerial instability.

Using these different types of measurement, we approach the concept of durability. Hence, we can argue that the concept of durability refers to the tentative explanatory models about the relationship between executive or ministerial duration and their causes. Following, therefore, a wide tradition of studies on the subject (Laver and Schofield 1990; Warwick 1994; Lupia and Strøm 1995), in this article we will look at the factors of change related to parties and party systems as the main unit of analysis of government and ministerial durability.

Various personal and political elements can determine the beginning and end of a ministerial mandate. In this way, several classes of explanatory factors have been identified in the Political Science literature as having an impact on ministerial time in office: 1) sociodemographic, 2) political and 3) institutional factors. As regards the first of these, the personal characteristics of the ministers such as gender, age, education, sexual and/or financial scandal and state of health are variables at the basis of many empirical studies on ministerial durability (Fischer, Dowding, and Dumont 2012). As regards the second, party affiliation, career paths, policy disagreement or criticism, (bad) ministerial performance, forms the research design of other studies on the subject (Berlinski, Dewan, Dowding 2007; Müller-Rommel, Kroeber and Vercesi 2020). Finally, among the last group, elements related to the government in which the ministers are in office, such as institutional framework or nature of coalition are key factors for those studies based on the analysis of structural characteristics and on (critical) events (Warwick 1979; Strøm 1985; Browne Frendreis and Gleiber 1984).

Although the Political Science literature has proposed several reasons to explain the degree of government durability (Taylor and Herman 1971; Laver and Shepsle 1996; Andeweg 2000; Smith 2004; Dewan and Dowding 2005; Dowding and Dumont 2009; Fittipaldi and Rullo forthcoming), there are no clear and unambiguous effects, however, between each of such variables and the duration of the ministers and governments in office (Huber and Martinez-Gallardo 2008; Back et al. 2009; Bucur 2017; Berlinski, Dewan and Dowding 2007; Bakema 1991). Nevertheless, the recent radical transformations of parties and party systems constitute key elements for understanding how governments change – and how long they last.

As the literature on the topic confirms, in our day, the loss of salience of the traditional lines of socio-political conflict shakes up the established and mainstream party systems (Panebianco 1988; Diamond and Gunther 2001; van Biezen and Poguntke 2014). The number of parties has been growing in almost all Western countries⁴ and the left-right axis which traditionally organized the dynamic of politics is less and less salient, thus opening a window of opportunity for the emergence of new political actors (Ignazi 1996). The result is that, in accordance with the thesis of the decline of political parties ('departitization'), we have fragile – and changing – majorities in cabinets and considerably fragmented and fractionalized assemblies with a remarkable number of

⁴ In the last decade, historical cases of two party systems, such as the British and Spanish, do not resist the test of the vote (Musella 2018). See also: Rodon and Hierro (2016) for the Spanish case and Lynch (2007) for UK. For a recent comparative view, see Chiaramonte and Emanuele (2022).

party switchers and independents (Sartori 1976; Bardi 2004; Musella 2018; 2022). It's been a long way from the *Parteienstaat* doctrine (Mortati 1972; Elia 2009) based on the idea that parties could provide legitimation for the democratic state. Indeed, if during the phase of the First Republic, the parties controlled both the processes of government formation and cabinet decision-making, having a considerable hold on society, in the subsequent period they have been undermined by other political actors. More precisely, as the gap between society and parties has widened, with dissatisfaction becoming the main political outcome (Morlino and Tarchi 1996), the pre-eminence of the President of the Republic and of the Prime Minister outlines a political scenario of residual party government (Fabbrini 1996; Calise 2015; Musella 2022).

The reduction in the party affiliation of ministers and the change in ministerial career patterns is one of the main evident results that will be analysed in the following paragraph.

3. The Instability of Political Parties

When Schattschneider (1942) claimed that democracy was impossible without parties, by referring to both the function of representation of such political intermediate bodies and their role in government, he made a statement which is still valid today. Indeed, although much time has passed since similar considerations were made, parties continue to be crucial actors in contemporary political systems (Morlino and Tarchi 2006). However, since the second half of the last century the crisis of political parties is an accomplished fact, so that while some observers still recognize their indisputable position, for other aspects one may suspect that the party is over (Mair 2013).

On the one hand, the main indicators on the presence of political parties in society present decreasing values: party membership seems to belong to the past, with party affiliates generally getting older, and voting not in accordance with the traditional socioeconomic and sociocultural cleavages that stabilized the parties in the second half of the twentieth century. Especially in the last few years, the instability of party systems seems a common feature in several contemporary democracies: from the United Kingdom to Spain, and including Italy, party systems suffered the shock of the so-called Great Recession (Emanuele and Marino 2018; Hutter and Kriesi 2019; Fittipaldi 2021), as the economic and financial crisis gave release to both a consistent loss of consensus to mainstream parties and the spread of radical and populist parties. On the other hand, as regards systems of government, while democratic political systems have appeared as party governments, today political leaders have acquired greater centrality on the political scene (Musella 2018; Musella 2022).

The result of such interrelated trends was very clear in the field of ministerial selection. With reference to the Italian case, indeed, from the birth of the Italian Republic to the second half of the '70s, party control was almost total, only tempered by the territorial linkages of the local (notable) politicians (Calise and Mannheimer 1982; 1986). Nevertheless, over time, the decline of party politics impacted the recruitment and career patterns of the political elites.

Indeed, the spread of the personalization trend over time, along with the emergence of technocratic governments during periods of political or economic crisis, provided more innovative paths for entering the executive. This is a fact that catches the eye when

observing the following table, where it can be noticed that over the last two decades, a good number of ministers have not had a party background, coming from academia or business instead. Although the party grip on ministerial selection remains crucial, and the ranks of government are still largely occupied by professional political personnel, with party affiliation and a traditional *cursus honorum* (Blondel and Thiébaud 1991; Cotta and Verzichelli 2007), the increasing number of cases of ‘non-partisan ministers’ marks the political change from the past (Verzichelli and Cotta 2018). In our country this trend was inaugurated by the rise of ‘non-partisan or non-political prime ministers’ (Mancini 1997; Pasquino and Valbruzzi 2012; Costa Pinto and Tavares de Almeida 2018; Musella 2018), with Silvio Berlusconi being a clear case on the international scene. During the last twenty years this phenomenon has spread from the apex of government to the entire ministerial elite. Consequently, although Italy has been a paradigmatic case of party government, with a tight and remarkable party and parliamentary control of the process of ministerial recruitment,⁵ our data highlights less linear and predictable ministerial careers.

Table 2. Occupation of ministers before their mandate

| Field of work | Ministers (N) | Ministers (%) |
|-----------------|---------------|---------------|
| Institutional | 20 | 8% |
| Business | 23 | 9% |
| Political Party | 66 | 27% |
| Military | 3 | 1% |
| Media | 13 | 5% |
| Academia | 61 | 25% |
| Judicial | 32 | 13% |
| Medical | 9 | 4% |
| Other | 21 | 8% |
| Total | 248 | 100% |

Source: Musella, Fittipaldi and Rullo, *Monocratic Government Dataset: Personalisation of Leaders and Masses*, appendix of Musella (2022).

The progressive relevance of innovative recruiting channels for the ministerial class establishes the development of a ‘genetically outsider political elite’, i.e., one that is formed outside that party-parliamentary circuit which has traditionally been recognized as the main one in Italy and in other European countries (Dogan 1979; Calise and Mannheim 1982; Winter 1991; Verzichelli 2016). The relevance of experts, such as academics (25 percent) or businessmen (9 percent), demonstrates the declining role of political parties in their basic and more crucial function, which is the selection of the political class (Neumann 1956; Marsh 1988), as can be seen in Table 3. Moreover, this fact is supported by the percentage of ministers with no previous parliamentary experience:

⁵ In the face of low government stability, the notable continuity of the political class was ensured precisely by the penetration of the parties both in society and at all levels of government. See: Verzichelli and Cotta 2000. On Italian party government see also (Pasquino 1987).

38% of the ministerial elite of the last twenty years did not come from the parliamentary benches. Our data confirms, indeed, that 94 out of 248 ministers between 2000 and 2021 became ministers without first having been members of parliament, thus subverting a classic route to the executive.⁶ A lower level of parliamentary extraction of ministers, indeed, confirms the lesser partyness of the ministerial elite. As an evident symptom of the erosion of Italian-style party government, this point also helps us to understand the growing ministerial instability in our country. By adopting the second measure of duration, based on the ministerial time in office per government, the duration rate of the ministers with no previous parliamentary experience appears much lower if compared with that of ministers who have had previous experience in the national parliament. Indeed, the former group has served in office for 140 days less than the latter one. This data tells us that a ministerial class coming from a party-parliamentary circuit is more durable and therefore more stable.

From a different point of view, the rise of non-partisan ministers has also resulted from a more general crisis of contemporary democracies. As on the one hand the post-materialist wind (Inglehart 1977) has been driving the birth of new political subjects who are unconventional from the point of view of political organization, repertoire of action, and/or issues, on the other hand ‘the withdrawal of the elites’ from the realm of civil society towards the realm of government (Mair 2013) has served to offset the loss of weight in society of political parties (Cotta and Verzichelli 1996). Indeed, on the side of government composition, the reduction in party weight brings to light the existence of a growing number of ministers not strictly belonging to a party organization and the diminished control of political parties over the selection of ministers.

Finally, to have a more concise representation of such trends, one may also use the index of party governmentness⁷ as a measure to outline the level of partisanship of the ministerial elite. Although a high degree of ministerial class partisanship has been noted in the past, a different scenario is emerging today. Indeed, in the last twenty years, 15 percent of ministers have lacked party affiliation, leaving behind the model of the politician with a typical pure party background. We must also note that ministers who have a party affiliation last, on average, 180 days more in office than those who are independent and, therefore, without party affiliation. Hence, the ministerial duration per cabinet is on average longer for partisan ministers. This leads us to think that we are leaving the ‘golden age’ of party government, when parties exercised full control over the executive appointments and stability of the political elite reached its highest values (Cotta and Verzichelli 2002).

Table 3. Index of Party Governmentness

| Cabinet | Index of Party Governmentness |
|---------|-------------------------------|
|---------|-------------------------------|

⁶ Musella, Fittipaldi and Rullo, *Monocratic Government Dataset: Personalisation of Leaders and Masses*, appendix of Musella (2022).

⁷ The Index of party governmentness is borrowed from the Katz’ concept of party governmentness (1986) and is calculated as the ratio between the number of partisan ministers and the total number of ministers who serve in office per single government (Pasquino and Valbruzzi 2012). For example, in a cabinet with all partisan ministers the value of the index is 1; instead in a cabinet with all non-partisan ministers the value of the index is 0.

| | |
|----------------|------|
| Amato II | 0.96 |
| Berlusconi II | 0.93 |
| Berlusconi III | 0.96 |
| Prodi II | 0.96 |
| Berlusconi IV | 1.00 |
| Monti | 0.00 |
| Letta | 0.86 |
| Renzi | 1.00 |
| Gentiloni | 1.00 |
| Conte I | 0.68 |
| Conte II | 0.86 |

Source: Musella, Fittipaldi and Rullo, *Monocratic Government Dataset: Personalisation of Leaders and Masses*, appendix of Musella (2022).

In more recent times, moving from the tendency of more independent ministers, a different feature of Italian politics has also emerged: the formation of non-partisan governments, matched with technocratic cabinets in periods of political and economic crisis, and the rise of a grand coalition government. In the technocratic cabinet led by Mario Monti (McDonnell and Valbruzzi 2014) the value of the party governmentness index is 0 while in the Conte I government it is lower than in other cabinets, as more than 30% of ministers do not belong to any party. Looking at the executives in the last two decades, the Letta government and the Conte II government show a relevant rate of non-partisan ministers as well, with a percentage of 14%. At the same time, some differences might be noted in terms of the presence of non-partisan ministers between the ‘political’ cabinets (centre-right – Berlusconi cabinets, and centre-left – Amato, Prodi, Letta, Gentiloni, and Renzi cabinets) and those that are ‘technocratic’ (Monti) and ‘techno-personalized’ (Conte I and II).⁸ As a matter of fact, the latter tend to appoint more independents, so emphasizing the differences between party-based cabinets and technical ones.

Table 4. Partisanship rate of ministers per type of government

| Type of government | Independents N (%) | Party affiliated N (%) | Total N (%) |
|---------------------|--------------------|------------------------|-------------|
| Centre-left | 6 (5%) | 107 (95%) | 113 (100%) |
| Centre-right | 3(4%) | 72 (96%) | 75 (100%) |
| Technocratic | 19 (100%) | 0 (0%) | 19 (100%) |
| Techno-personalised | 9 (22%) | 32 (78%) | 41 (100%) |
| Total | 37 (15%) | 211 (85%) | 248 (100%) |

Source: Musella, Fittipaldi and Rullo, *Monocratic Government Dataset: Personalisation of Leaders and Masses*, appendix of Musella (2022).

Especially in technocratic experiences, party politics seems gradually to have been replaced by the politics of depoliticization. This leads to an “enlargement of the ‘pool of

⁸ We use the label ‘techno-personalized government’ borrowing it from Valbruzzi (2019). We mainly refer to the relevance of the prime minister, understood (prior to the most recent position within the M5S) as a technical and independent premier until 2021, and to the presence of two highly personalized party leaders. The label also aims to emphasise the relevant influence of non-political experts or authorities over party politicians and partisan institutions in the decision-making process and in the cabinet in general (see the composition of the government and the reference to Valbruzzi 2019 for more details).

ministerables' and [...] confirming the hypothesis of a declining role of the typical career politicians described in the past decades" (Verzichelli and Cotta 2018, 93). Consequently, Italian party government appears as a feature that belongs more to the past than to the present and the future of the country. Our findings shed light on the relevance of the link between the party-parliamentary circuit and the duration and durability of the ministerial elite. The instability of governments in the past was, in fact, balanced by a high rate of duration in office of the ministers who contributed to delineating a stable political class. Today, the Italian paradox no longer holds, and the greater stability of the government is now 'balanced' by a greater instability of the political-ministerial class. In the next paragraph, we will look at the same phenomenon from another analytical perspective.

4. The innovative governments

Government refers, strictly speaking, to the executive body in a given political system. It is a crucial institutional actor in all regimes, in some way reinvented by contemporary regimes, which gradually expanded its borders and competences (Musella 2021). Therefore, given the progressive expansion of the role of the executive, it comes as no surprise that: 'the making and breaking of governments is one of the most basic of all political processes. Political competition is typically structured as a choice between governments, and it thus hardly surprising that government formation is of perennial fascination to political scientists' (Laver 1998, 1). In this line of thinking, Italy is an interesting political laboratory. During the so-called First Republic, our country showed a considerable political stalemate in terms of government formation (Curini and Pinto 2013), reproducing government formulas that were not very, or not at all new. If we define as 'innovative governments' those whose formation is new in the combination of its components, that is, when the coalition of government has never been realized before (Valbruzzi 2019), Italy exhibits a change only at the end of the First Republic.

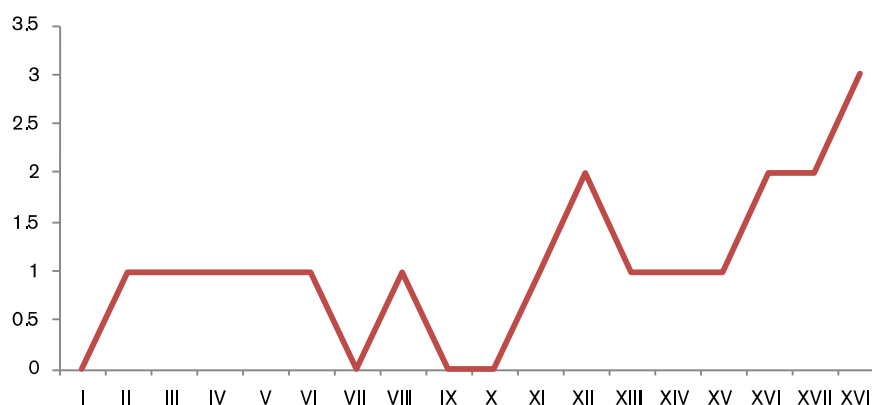
Indeed, as we noted above, despite the short duration of the governments of this first republican phase, instability in Italy was blunted by the permanence in office of the ministerial elite who, in fact, did not undergo much change or turnover. More precisely, despite the instability that characterized the 'golden age' of the Italian-style party government, the 'cooperation at the elite level' (Pasquino 197; Calise 1987),⁹ on the one hand, highlights the tendency and the tradition of political compromise within Italian governments and, on the other, it points to a kind of political inertia that has often brought an advantage to the incumbents, whether parties and/or individuals, already in office. As is clear, in the partitocratic era, the prominent role of the Democrazia Cristiana (DC, Christian Democracy) was a strong element of political continuity in Italy (Curini and Pinto 2013). In the light of the so-called *conventio ad excludendum*, another constant was the exclusion from the government of other parties, i.e., those which were 'anti-system',¹⁰ and especially, for a long time, the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI, Italian Communist Party). Consequently, cabinet formation reached one of the lowest turnover rates of any parliamentary democracy (Strøm 1990). From another angle, the

⁹ For an analysis of the Italian party system as a case of polarized pluralism and the patterns of elite cooperation see: Bogaards (2005).

¹⁰ See Sartori (1976 and 1982) for an overview of the Italian party system and the anti-system parties.

static nature of government formation and composition can be understood as the search for stability, overcoming the obstacle of the short duration of the cabinets.

Figure 2. Number of innovative governments per legislature (1948-2022)



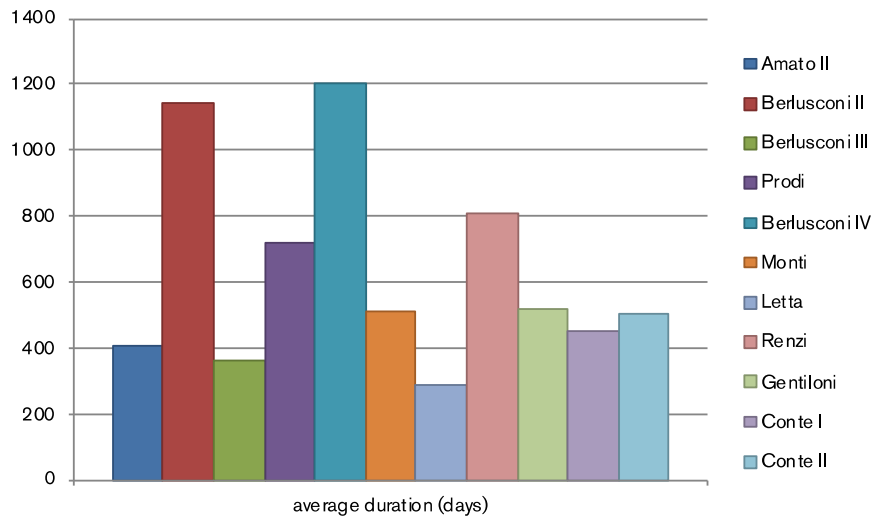
Source: own elaboration of ParlGov dataset, parlgov.org.

Indeed, as our data highlight, the Italian First Republic is characterized by a low degree of innovative governments: only about a quarter of the governments in the first eleven legislatures (1948-1994), in fact, can be defined as such. The relations between political parties were characterized – and determined – by a considerable ideological polarization ('K-factor')¹¹ and such a division could not allow for a real alternation of government. This paved the way for a 'blocked democracy' (Fabbrini 2009).

In the so-called Second Republic, data show an increasing government innovativeness (Figure 2). In the new socio-political scenario, more competition between coalitions is noted and government formation strictly connected to the electoral results of single political leaders (Musella 2019; 2020; Barbieri and Verzichelli 2003). It is reasonable to think that the higher the rate of government innovativeness, the greater the instability of the ministerial elite, as a consequence of greater party turnover. Indeed, looking again at the substantive aspect of the executive, namely its ministerial components, by reducing the stability of political parties over time, ministerial careers become shorter. Indeed, other channels of access to ministerial ranks have become more relevant and the weight of the party-parliamentary backgrounds is reduced. And this appears very clear when there are periods of greater alternation of government, as occurs in the Second Republic.

¹¹ K-Factor comes from the Russian word 'Kommunizm', that is communism - used for the first time in an editorial of *Corriere della Sera* of 30 March 1979 by Alberto Ronchey just to explain the lack of turnover of governmental political forces in the first fifty years of republican Italy. See Calise (2006) for an analysis of the so-called 'K' factor in Italian politics.

Figure 3. Average duration of ministers per single governments (2000-2021)



Source: own elaboration of the Italian Government's official website.

Therefore, if previously the rank of minister was the final step in a complex, linear and long career in political institutions (Calise 1987),¹² since the nineties Italian ministers have stayed less time in office. On average, the ministers who stayed in office longer were those belonging to the Berlusconi II and IV governments (about three years) and those in Renzi's government (about two years). The Prodi government, which ranks fourth, is the last to come close to the two-year threshold for the average duration of the ministerial class. The rest of the cabinets' ministers, in fact, are closer to the year mark. The party-political situation helps us even if we use another angle for our analysis (Warwick 1992). Centre-right governments report higher rates of ministerial duration than centre-left, technocratic and techno-personalized governments.

Table 5. Average duration of ministers per government type

| Ministerial duration per government | Ministers in centre-left government | Ministers in centre-right government | Ministers in technocratic government | Ministers in techno-personalized government |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| Days | 547.45 | 901.26 | 510.58 | 480.39 |
| Years | 1.50 | 2.47 | 1.40 | 1.32 |

Source: own elaboration on the basis of Musella, Fittipaldi and Rullo, *Monocratic Government Dataset: Personalisation of Leaders and Masses*, appendix of Musella (2022).

Moreover, since it is the technocratic and techno-personalized cabinets that have the lowest rate of partisanship, our analysis is clearly in line with other recent studies on the topic (see: Costa Pinto and Tavares de Almeida 2018), by underlining that the mean duration of non-partisan ministers, i.e. the ministerial duration per government, is always lower than that of ministers who are affiliated to parties.

¹² An articulate reflection on the 'self-reproduction' of the party bureaucracy and its leadership is found in Cassese (1974).

Finally, our data, on the one hand, emphasize the ‘constituent role of the parties in relation to democratic institutions’ (Calise 1987, 221, our translation) and, on the other hand, they testify to the deconstruction of the party system and the progressively less crucial role of party actors in terms of incubators – producers and selectors – of the ruling class.

5. Concluding remarks

The Italian political landscape of recent years is closer to the image of an unstable stability than to the topical paradox, Italian *par excellence*, of stable instability. Our article has highlighted some political duration trends of the Italian ministerial elite and executives.

After clarifying the conceptual differences between duration and durability, we note that the latter has been declining over the last twenty years. Indeed, while during the Italian First Republic government duration was balanced by the stability of the Italian executive political class, as the duration of governments seems to be (partially) growing during the Second Republic, the stability of the ministerial class is decreasing. Norberto Bobbio was right when he pointed out that partitocracy was the main feature of the Italian political system. With the change of the partitocratic world, our political system has changed its nature as well. Political parties are no longer the only incubators of the ministerial elites, with experts, academics and businessmen gaining, indeed, political terrain. This has been pretty evident in several variables we have considered in our analysis: the decreasing rate of partyness of the ministerial class, the growing deconstruction of the party system, the increasing rate of government innovativeness. Hence, the processes of elite recruitment and government formation have become less party-driven. Furthermore, without any majoritarian reform project of our institutions, it also results in a more unstable Republic.

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