the cartel party and the italian case

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Cartel party literature has generated three lines of research investigating the transformation of party organizations, the party system, and policy output. The third line of research, which could be defined as the political economy of the cartel party, has shown that party systems resemble oligopolistic markets in two respects: the policy output has changed, and voters have the impression that changes in political supply did not represent adjustments to the transformation of voters’ demands. Yet literature on this subject has not provided any evidence to sustain the claim that parties’ behavior resembles the behavior of oligopolistic firms in a cartel. The purpose of the present article is to show that the legislative behavior of Italian parties gives the impression that Italian parties are engaged in collusive practices and that, for this reason, it is appropriate to regard the Italian party system not only as oligopolistic, but also as a cartel.

The aim of this article is to show if and to what extent it is legitimate to utilize the notion of the cartel party to describe interparty interactions. The analysis is based on the legislative behavior of Italian deputies and parties in the course of the XIII and XIV Legislatures. This particular analysis allows us to demonstrate that legislation is passed by Parliament in an almost unanimous fashion, that explicit dissent is almost nonexistent, that absence from parliamentary sessions is remarkably frequent and that sometimes the members of the opposition are absent en masse, thereby giving the impression of helping the majority to pass those laws on which it is divided for the final vote. All this provides an indication of behavior that is coherent with the notion of a cartel party system.

By “cartel party system,” I refer to a party system in which parties collude to promote their collective well-being and profits by minimizing the representativeness of the party system itself. Hence, while cartel party systems resemble consociational party systems in that they both are cooperative, nonadversarial party systems, they differ from one another in a major respect: while in consociational democracies (see Lijphart 1977), cooperation at the elite level is meant to neutralize the polarization.
of the electorate, make government work, create the condition for
government performance, secure the survival of the democratic system,
and promote the national interest, the cooperation detected in cartel
party systems is primarily intended to promote the interests of the parties
themselves.\textsuperscript{2} Parties in cartel party systems collude and distort
competition in three basic ways: they supply the same policies that a
competitive party system would have supplied, but they do so for a higher
cost; they underrepresent the preferences of some segments of the
electorate; they underrepresent social preferences not simply to promote
the national interest, but also—and more importantly—to promote their
own collective well-being. It is precisely because Italian parties collude to
protect/promote their collective interests that the Italian party system
should be viewed as a cartel party system rather than as an instance of
consociationalism (see Bogaards 2005).

The hypothesis of cartel party theory, initially proposed by Katz
and Mair (1995), utilized the term ‘cartel party’ to denote a new phase
in the development of party organizations in European democracies
(Katz 1990; Katz and Mair, 1993, 1994). The cartel party, argued Katz
and Mair, differs from the party of notables, because it always operates
in a context characterized by universal suffrage. But it also differs from
the mass party for three reasons: first, because it has a smaller number
of members and activists than the mass party; second, because it is
no longer exclusively financed by membership fees and members’
donations, but it is financially dependent on generous state
contributions; and third, because the party in public office enjoys more
independence from the bureaucracy and from party cadres. Katz and
Mair (1995) then noted how the cartel party differs from the catch-all
party, with which it also shares some characteristic—fundamentally for
the fact that it no longer acts for the public good, but rather for private
interests. The hypothesis of the cartel party formulated by Katz and
Mair (1995) generated a rather vast debate and has intrigued not only
scholars of party systems, but also those from the realm of political
economy who have either appreciated or criticized the use of an
economic metaphor to describe interactions among parties in the cartel
party era (Kitschelt 2000).

In political economy, the notion of the cartel is used to describe
those oligopolistic markets within which competition is distorted by
collusion among firms. This notion of the cartel can be extended to
describe the models of interaction among parties subject to three
conditions. In the first place, it has to be shown, just as it is in the case
of economic oligopolistic arrangements, how and to what extent
political oligopolistic arrangements distort party systems. In the second
place, it must be shown that party systems are noncompetitive, just as
oligopolistic markets are in the sense that supply does not alter in
response to changes in demand. This means, as far as party systems are
concerned, that the political supply of these systems no longer follows
the demands of the constituents. In the third place, it must be shown
that the distortion in political supply is the result of collusion among
parties. The present article breaks new ground in this direction: by
analyzing the final votes in the Chamber of Deputies in the XIII and
XIV Legislatures, I hope to verify if and to what extent the legislation
that is produced—which is utilized as the political counterpart of
market supply—may or may not be interpreted as the product of
collusive practices.

Previous studies (Blyth and Katz 2005; Katz and Mair 1995) have
shown that political supply today is less diversified than it was in the
past. Assuming that political demand remains unchanged, both studies
concluded that the transformation of political supply denotes the
noncompetitive, and hence oligopolistic, nature of European party
systems. Pelizzo (2003) has demonstrated what previous studies (Blyth
and Hopkin 2003; Blyth and Katz 2005; Katz and Mair 1995) had
assumed: political supply had not been responsive to changes in
political demand and that it is therefore legitimate to argue that the
functioning of party systems mirrors that of oligopolies. However, none
of these studies has investigated whether European political parties
resemble oligopolistic firms that operate like cartels. In this paper I
show not only that there is a high level of interparty agreement, but also
that this level of agreement is high despite the fact that parties claim
to have rather different preferences and thereby pretend to occupy
different positions in the political spectrum. This point is important,
because if there was a high level of agreement between parties as a result
of considerable similarity in their electoral platforms, it could be argued
with Downs (1957) that the lack of political variety is the consequence
of requirements of electoral strategy: parties converge to similar
positions, therefore there is less variety in supply in order to become
more appealing to larger portions of the electorate and to win more
votes. If this was the case, the lack of variety in political supply could be interpreted as the consequence of electoral competition rather than that of a collusive liaison among parties. In the Italian case, instead, parties during the electoral campaign, occupy—or claim to occupy—very distinct positions. However, the level of interparty agreement (calculated on the basis of final votes in Parliament) is very high.

In the first section of this article, the institutional context within which Italian parliamentarians and parties operate is discussed. Beyond reviewing how bills are passed, this section focuses on how the data used in this article has been collected and analyzed. The second section presents and discusses the results of the analysis, demonstrating that Italian parties are characterized by a high degree of intraparty cohesiveness and, surprisingly, by a high degree of interparty agreement measured on the basis of likeness score. The analysis reveals that the approval from the present deputies for most of the laws passed in the course of the XIII and XIV Legislatures has been almost unanimous. Section 3 shows how the results of this analysis are compatible with the hypothesis of the cartel party. It is argued that, given that almost all bills were passed (whether directly or otherwise, implicitly or not) with support from all parties, the parliamentary party system in Italy can be interpreted as equivalent to a cartel of parties in an oligopoly market. In the final section, some conclusions on the possible relevance of the results presented in this study are formulated and explored.

### Institutional Context and Data

Before analyzing how Italian parliamentarians voted in the course of the XIII and XIV Legislatures, it is appropriate to provide some information regarding the institutional context within which parliamentary voting takes place.

In a typical legislature of a parliamentary system, the legislative process is rather clear: the bill is introduced, is assigned by the Chamber president to one or more parliamentary committees, and is discussed and modified by the relevant committees before being returned to the assembly where it is voted on and passed. When a bill is assigned to a parliamentary committee in this fashion, the bill is assigned to the committee for comments (*sede referente*). The standing rules of the Deputies’ chamber establish that parliamentary
committees can also examine legislative bills in *sede redigente* or *sede legislativa*. The examination is conducted by the committee in *sede redigente* when the Assembly gives the committee the mandate to write a number of articles of a bill, which consequently has to be passed by the Assembly in a final vote. The examination of a bill is conducted by the committee in *sede legislativa* when the committee has the mandate to examine and pass the bill. In this case, the bill is passed without the final vote of the Assembly. In all cases when an assembly vote is necessary to pass a bill, the approval of the bill requires the fulfillment of the following conditions: first, the quorum must be reached in the Assembly; second, the majority of those present must vote in favor of the bill.

The rule of the Deputies’ chamber foresees that voting in the Assembly can consist of either a secret or an open vote, the latter introduced by the reform of parliamentary rules in 1988 (Pasquino 1996). This reform has effectively limited the use of the secret vote to specific circumstances. The secret vote can be utilized only in voting procedures that regard individuals, the rules of the chamber, constitutional bodies, regional bodies, and electoral laws. All other votes are clear votes.

The fact that the Assembly does not have to vote on all bills, because some are passed by committees, and that some votes are secret, implies that the number of final votes in the Assembly is lower than the number of bills that become law. Therefore, the Chamber of Deputies provides information on the final votes for 630 bills for the XIII Legislature, and for 574 bills for the XIV Legislature. The analysis in this article of the legislative behavior of individual deputies and of various parties (i.e., how they have voted in the final votes) is based on this sample of 1,204 bills.

The data made available by the Chamber of Deputies allow us to see how each deputy voted in these elections. By aggregating the individual data by party affiliation or by parliamentary group, two indexes can be estimated that have already been used for several years in the study of legislative behavior of the U.S. Congress: Rice’s index of cohesion and the likeness score (Cooper and Bombardier 1968; Cooper and Young 1997 and 2002).

Rice’s index of cohesion estimates how cohesive a party is. This index measures the average of the absolute difference between the
percentage of members of a party or a parliamentary group who vote in favor of a given legislation, and the percentage of members of the same party who vote against it. The index is calculated in the following way. First, the percentage of deputies in a party who vote in favor of a bill is calculated. Then the percentage of parliamentarians of the same party who vote against the bill is calculated. By calculating the absolute difference between the two percentages, the index of cohesion of the party for that particular vote is obtained. The formula to measure the cohesion of a party for a specific vote is:

\[ \text{cohesion} = |\%yes_A - \%no_A| \]

Rice’s index of cohesion for a party in the course of the legislature is obtained by calculating the average of this index for all the final votes that have taken place in the course of that legislature. I calculate the index of cohesion for all major parties in the course of the XIII and XIV Legislatures.

The likeness score is an index that calculates the degree to which two parties vote in the same manner or in the opposite manner in the course of a given legislature. The likeness score is calculated in two stages. First, the absolute difference is calculated between the percentage of deputies who belong to a given party or parliamentary group who vote in favor of a specific bill and the percentage of parliamentarians from another party who vote in favor of the same bill. Once this absolute difference is determined, the resulting figure is subtracted from 100. Therefore, the formula to calculate the likeness score between party A and party B can be written in the following manner:

\[ \text{Likeness} = 100 - |\%yes_A - \%yes_B| \]

The likeness score between two parties in the course of a specific legislature is obtained by calculating the average likeness score of every vote that takes place in the course of that particular legislature. In the next section, some data is presented concerning intraparty cohesion and interparty likeness in the Chamber of Deputies in the course of the XIII and XIV Legislatures.
Results and Discussion

Italian parties occupy, or at least claim to occupy, very distinct positions from one another, as we show in Table 1. Given these profound ideological divergences among various Italian parties, reflected in their respective electoral platforms, what results should be expected regarding intraparty cohesion and interparty likeness?

In the first place, one should expect a high level of intraparty cohesion. If parties, now coalitions, compete against each other on the basis of profound and irreconcilable differences, and if members and activists adhere to parties because in some way they identify with their ideological connotations or collocations, it is fairly implausible that they would break away from party lines to vote with the parties of the opposite coalition. Besides, irrespective of the quasi-ideological motivation mentioned earlier, parliamentarians have few rational motives to violate party discipline. By breaking party discipline and voting with the parties of the opposing coalition, the rebellious deputy risks incurring a probable sanction from his party/coalition, without necessarily receiving an adequate payoff, either material or symbolic, from his or her political adversaries. Italian parliamentarians know very well that, despite the 1993 electoral reform that should have (among other things) diminished the power of parties on elected representatives, such power has not been decreased in the least. Parties have retained the power to decide who should run in the proportional quota, who should run in a single-member district, who should run in a safe district and,

Table 1. Positions of Italian Parties on Right–Left of Political Spectrum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Positions on right–left of political spectrum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>RC, PDCI -26.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>RC -32.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Klingemann and others (2006).
finally, who should “enter the lion’s den.” This way, parties have maintained several devices at their disposal to punish prospective defections: parties can decide not to re-endorse the parliamentarian who has inappropriately violated party discipline or, alternatively, they can allocate rebellious candidates to single districts where these “traitors” can easily be defeated. In these conditions, the benefits associated with defection for the single candidate are low and rather precarious, while the costs are high and rather certain.6

Second, given the profound ideological differences expressed by Italian parties, it is legitimate to hypothesize that low levels of likeness between parties will be recorded. In a highly polarized party system where there are high costs for those who defect, single parliamentarians have no rational reason to place themselves at odds with their respective parties. Moreover, one would expect that the more diversified parties are, the more the system will be polarized, and the lower the likeness score between various parties will be—a proposition that will be empirically verified later in this study.

Third, on the basis of the previous remarks, it should not be surprising to find the recorded likeness score between parties of the same coalition higher than the recorded likeness score between parties that belong to opposite alliances.

Fourth, it is expected that the likeness score between parties that are not disciplined by coalitional logic—such as the Northern League (LN, *Lega Nord*) in the XIII Legislature or the Communist Refoundation Party (RF, *Rifondazione Comunista*) in the XIV Legislature and other parties—should be lower than the likeness score recorded among all parties that, more or less stringently, need to obey coalitional logic.

Fifth, it is conceivable to hypothesize that the likeness score among government parties should be higher than the likeness score recorded among opposition parties which, not having any governance responsibilities, can concede more voting freedom to their parliamentarians.

But what is discovered when the cohesion index and the likeness score for the XIII and XIV Legislatures is estimated? The first finding is that Italian parties are characterized by a high level of intraparty cohesion. The data presented in Table 2 shows that, in the XIII Legislature, the level of cohesion for five of the six major Italian parties is higher than 95 percent and that, in two cases, intraparty cohesion is
higher than 99 percent. The data in relation to the XIV Legislature do not present substantial differences. Four of the five parties for which the intraparty cohesion index has been calculated have a cohesion level higher than 98 percent and two parties—Italy Go (Forza Italia, or FI) and the Communist Refoundation Party (Rifondazione Comunista, or RC)—have a cohesion level higher than 99 percent.

To appreciate the extent of intra-party cohesion levels presented in Table 1, it is worth comparing Italian data to corresponding data from the United States. Between 1867 and 2003, the level of cohesion of the U.S. Democratic Party has shifted from a minimum of about 54 percent to a maximum of approximately 84 percent, while the level of cohesion of the Republican Party has shifted from just below 54 percent to a little above 90 percent.7 In over a century, American parties have not been able to experience a cohesion level as high as the one of Italian parties. See the figures in Table 3.

The second finding is that the data relative to the XIII and XIV Legislatures show, contrary to what was hypothesized earlier, and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Cohesion in Legislature XIII</th>
<th>Cohesion in Legislature XIV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democrats of the Left</td>
<td>99.3</td>
<td>93.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communist Refoundation Party</td>
<td>99.2</td>
<td>99.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian Popular Party</td>
<td>98.2</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern League</td>
<td>95.5</td>
<td>98.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Alliance</td>
<td>95.1</td>
<td>98.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy Go</td>
<td>91.9</td>
<td>99.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democrats</td>
<td>54.3</td>
<td>83.9</td>
<td>68.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republicans</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>90.1</td>
<td>70.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source*: Cooper and Young (2007).
despite the claimed ideological differences, how the legislative behavior of Italian parties is characterized by high levels of interparty agreement. The figures presented in Tables 4 and 5 demonstrate, in fact, that the level of interparty agreement, measured on the basis of the likeness score, varies from a minimum of 51.5 percent recorded in the course of the XIV Legislature between the Rand the National Alliance (AN, *Alleanza Nazionale*) to a maximum of 99.35 percent recorded in the course of Legislature XIII between the Democrats of the Left (DS, *Democratici di Sinistra*) and the Italian Popular Party (PPI, *Partito Popolare Italiano*).

Third, the figures presented in Tables 4 and 5 show, in addition, that interparty agreement among coalitional partners is higher than the level of agreement recorded between parties that belong to different coalitions.

Fourth, as hypothesized earlier, the lowest likeness levels are recorded, in both the XIII and XIV Legislatures, between parties not tied to coalitional obligations and between parties of opposite ideological orientation. Therefore, while in the XIII Legislature the three lowest levels in the recorded likeness score were between the LN on one side, and the RC, the PPI and the DS on the other, in the XIV

### Table 4. Likeness Score between Major Italian Parties in Legislature XIII

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parties</th>
<th>Likeness Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DS_PPI</td>
<td>99.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPI_RC</td>
<td>96.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DS_RC</td>
<td>96.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FI_AN</td>
<td>90.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AN_LN</td>
<td>81.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FI_LN</td>
<td>81.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPI_FI</td>
<td>78.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DS_FI</td>
<td>78.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RC_FI</td>
<td>69.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DS_AN</td>
<td>68.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPI_AN</td>
<td>68.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RC_AN</td>
<td>67.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DS_LN</td>
<td>64.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPI_LN</td>
<td>64.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RC_LN</td>
<td>56.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Landi and Pelizzo (2006).*
Legislature the lowest levels recorded in the likeness score were between the RC on one side, and the AN, the FI and the LN on the other. Fifth, the study’s figures also show that the likeness score records its highest levels for the parties that belong to the incumbent coalition. The three highest likeness levels recorded in coalitions of the XIII and XIV Legislatures are among government partners. The likeness score between the DS and the PPI, between the PPI and the RC, and between the DS and the RC was respectively 99.35, 96.86 and 96.82 in the XIII Legislature. With the dismissal of the government in the XIV Legislature, these figures declined to 94.95, 80.8 and 83.11 respectively. By contrast, the likeness score between the FI and the AN, the AN and the LN and finally the FI and the LN, which in the XIII Legislature was 90.52, 81.47, and 81.25 respectively, increases in the XIV Legislature with the center-right in power to 98.8, 97.2 and 97.6, respectively.

It would be tempting to conclude the analysis here, arguing that the notion of responsible party government is safe: parties—or in the Italian case, coalitions—compete on the basis of ideologically informed electoral platforms; when parties/coalitions win elections they tend to, or at least attempt to, be faithful to their own electoral promises; and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parties</th>
<th>Likeness Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FI_AN</td>
<td>98.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FI_LN</td>
<td>97.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AN_LN</td>
<td>97.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DS_Margherita</td>
<td>94.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DS_RC</td>
<td>83.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margherita_RC</td>
<td>80.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margherita_FI</td>
<td>73.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margherita_AN</td>
<td>72.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margherita_LN</td>
<td>71.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DS_FI</td>
<td>70.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DS_AN</td>
<td>69.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DS_LN</td>
<td>69.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RC_LN</td>
<td>51.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RC_FI</td>
<td>51.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RC_AN</td>
<td>51.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Landi and Pelizzo (2006).*
that ideological differences between parties translate clearly and directly into observable legislative behavior.

As far as responsible party government theorists (Schattschneider 1942; Katz 1987) are concerned, this is not at all the end of the question in the Italian case. This would be the end of the question if the levels of likeness recorded between a center-right and a center-left party were not only lower than the values recorded among parties of the same coalition, but also lower in absolute terms. But this is not the case. In the XIII Legislature, the likeness score between the LN on one side and the AN and FI on the other was greater than 81 percent. In the same legislature, a likeness score just below 79 percent was recorded between the FI on one side and the DS and PPI on the other. Berlusconi, Italy’s richest man, founder and leader of Forza Italia, and three times Prime Minister, devoted the best of his energies to a sort a permanent campaign against the dangers of communism. Despite Berlusconi’s continuous attacks on communism and communists,9 the likeness score between the FI and the RC was higher than 69 percent and was of a higher value than the likeness score recorded between the AN and the DS.

The figures change slightly in the course of the XIV Legislature, but they do not change the sense of the story that the level of interparty agreement among Italian parties, including those that belong to opposing coalitions, is extremely high. Likeness scores recorded between government parties were higher than 97 percent. The likeness score between the DS and the Margherita (Daisy), now the opposition, has just touched 95 percent. The likeness score between the DS and the Margherita, on one side, and the RC on the other has amply exceeded the threshold of 80 percent, and interparty agreement has exceeded the threshold of 70 percent for the FI and the DS, the FI and the Margherita, the Margherita and the LN, and the Margherita and the AN. The lowest levels of likeness score, recorded between the RC and the center-right parties, have in any case exceeded the threshold of 51 percent.

To appreciate how high these likeness score levels are, it is again useful to compare the figures presented up to this point with figures relevant to the case of the United States. Between 1867 and 2003, the likeness score between the U.S. Democratic Party and the Republican Party was recorded at a minimum of just above 21 percent, a maximum of just above 80 percent and an average of about 55 percent. See Table 6.
The figures relevant to the American case allow us to place the Italian data in a realistic perspective. The highest level of interparty agreement recorded in Italy in the two legislatures under scrutiny is about 20 points higher than the maximum level of agreement that has occurred between the U.S. Democrats and the Republicans. The lowest likeness score between two Italian parties is marginally lower than the average value observed between the Democrats and the Republicans in the United States, where the party system is renowned for its low level of ideological polarization and for its high level of interparty agreement. The lowest likeness score recorded between the Democrats and the Republicans is about 30 points lower than the lowest value recorded in the two Italian legislatures under scrutiny. In sum, in the ideologically diversified and historically polarized Italian party system, interparty agreement reaches levels never reached in the case of the United States.

What makes the Italian case even more surprising is the fact that, after having spent the electoral campaign for the elections of the XIII Legislature explaining to their voters and to the general electorate why the other party is not suitable to run the country, the DS and the FI (the major center-right and center-left parties) had a remarkably high likeness score. Berlusconi, if one listens to the DS (see D’Emilio 2007; Pasquino 2000), was not suitable for government as a result of his media empire, the sizeable conflict of interests and his connections. Conversely, Berlusconi spent the entire electoral campaign arguing that the DS, despite the double change of name—from Partito Comunista d’Italia (PCI) to Partito Democratico della Sinistra (PDS), and from PDS to Democratici di Sinistra (DS)—was the same old communist party and that, therefore, it continued to represent a serious threat to Italian democracy. It is interesting to note, however, that despite the mutual accusations, the likeness score recorded between the DS and the FI in the XIII legislature would have to be the second-highest recorded

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21.06</td>
<td>80.71</td>
<td>54.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Cooper and Young (2007).
in the American Congress between 1867 and 2003. But this is not the only extraordinary result. In only eight of the 68 Congresses for which likeness scores are available, the likeness score between Democrats and Republicans has been higher than the recorded likeness score between the FI and the RC in the XIII Legislature. And the likeness score between Democrats and Republicans has been higher than the recorded likeness score between the post-fascist AN on one side and the RC and the DS on the other in only nine Congresses. Similar considerations can be inferred by analyzing the data relative to the XIV Legislature. The likeness score between the RC on one side, and the AN, the LN and the FI on the other in the XIV Legislature is greater than the one recorded between the Democrats and the Republicans in 26 of the 68 Congresses between 1867 and 2003. Of the 68 Congresses in the period between 1867-2003, the likeness score in the United States has been higher than the 69 percent recorded between the DS on one side, and the AN and the LN on the other on only eight occasions. In sum, the extent to which the FI, AN, LN, DS, and the RC have voted in harmony is typical of those stages in the history of the U.S. Congress that experts define as “bipartisan,” although nobody in their right mind would consider Italian parties to operate, on the basis of what they say (and especially in view of what they say of one another), in a bipartisan manner.

These results confirm that there is a discrepancy between what parties say and what they do. The legislative behavior of Italian parliamentarians and parties in Parliament is not at all coherent with the ontological diversity professed in the course of electoral campaigns. Italian parties criticize each other verbally, but then they vote in accordance with one another. Also, the legislative behavior of parties is not in the least influenced by the fact that in the course of the electoral campaign they take set positions on specific issues, and that there are, accordingly, more or less marked differences among them. Starting with the traditional assumption underlying spatial analysis that political differences can be expressed spatially, and that interparty agreement (which we measure with the likeness score) is a function of the distance between the parties in question, the correlation between interparty distances and the likeness scores for various pairs of parties should yield a negative coefficient, strong and statistically significant. But this is not the case. In the XIII Legislature, Pearson’s coefficient for the correlation between inter-party distance and the likeness score is
positive, barely perceptible and statistically insignificant, as evident
from the figures in Table 7. This means that the extent to which parties
agree has nothing to do with how far or how close they profess to be
from one another. Given this behavior, it is only logical to ask whether
Italian parties criticize each other to raise the stakes before reaching an
agreement or whether they do it to distract voters from the fact that
underneath or beyond the facade and the verbal conflict expressed, for
instance, in electoral platforms, there is, between Italian parties,
significant agreement.

Leaving aside this question, the fact remains that Italian parties,
unexpectedly, vote in agreement the majority of the time.¹ How should
this result be interpreted? What does it mean? It is sufficient to argue
that the Italian party system functions like an oligopolistic cartel? If not,
are the high levels of interparty agreement somehow connected to the
fact that Italian parties operate like cartels? And how?

How do we explain these high levels of interparty agreement
reflected in the likeness score? If the high level of interparty likeness had
been recorded exclusively in the XIII Legislature, it would have been
possible to argue that, given the dimensions and the possible internal
divisions of the coalition government, it was necessary to build alliances
with opposition parties in order to be able to govern—something that
would explain the high level of interparty agreement. But, as previously
noted, a high level of interparty agreement characterizes also the XIV
Legislature, in which two Berlusconi governments could count on a
rather consistent parliamentary majority. In the XIV Legislature, the
Berlusconi government did not find it necessary to seek help among the
ranks of the opposition to govern and the opposition had no reason
to help a government that was already enjoying the support of a huge

<table>
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<th>Likeness Score</th>
<th>.064 (0.649)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: As for Tables 1 and 4.*
majority. Therefore, the dimensions of government majority do not provide a convincing explanation of the extent of interparty agreement in Italy. And so, why is there a high level of likeness between parties, including those that belong to opposite coalitions?

There are two different answers to this question, depending on whether it is assumed that the themes and problems on which the Italian Parliament has legislated are the only themes and problems that require its attention. If it assumed that the legislation passed by the Parliament deals with all the issues that need to be dealt with, it must be concluded that there was no substantial disagreement among Italian parties. In this case, all Italian parties were in favor of the same solutions for the same problems and, consequently, if the government or governments were different in their ideological orientation, they would not have produced any legislation significantly different from the one that was passed. If the produced legislation, which can be seen as the political counterpart of supply in the economic market, does not reflect the ideological orientation of the government (and of the governing coalition), the party government can no longer be characterized as responsible party government (Katz 1987; Pasquino 1987; Ranney 1954; Schattschneider 1942). Therefore, in this scenario the political market, within which political supply is not responsive to changes in political demand, is not competitive, as oligopolistic markets are not. As such, it seems fair to claim that the legislative behavior of parties resembles that of oligopolistic firms in the market (Blyth and Katz 2005).

If, alternatively, we assume that the legislation passed by Parliament does not deal with all the issues that it should, what are the issues on which Parliament legislates? The answer is that Parliament legislates on those issues that the parties of both coalitions agree upon, while no legislation is passed upon which there is no intercoalitional agreement. In this second scenario, the political supply does not reflect the ideological orientation of the government; the political market is not competitive because it does not adjust the supply of political goods (legislation, public policy) to changes in the political demand. Given its functioning, this political market is not competitive, and the behavior of parties resembles that of firms in oligopolistic markets. But the fact that parties “gang up” and only make decisions that are supported almost unanimously by all parties, shows how the parliamentary party system resembles a particular type of oligopolistic market: the cartel. This is the
reason for which it is admissible to describe this second type of oligopolistic party system as a cartel party system.

The data analysis suggests that this second scenario accounts more accurately for the legislative behavior of Italian parties that the first scenario. Despite the fact that the number of laws produced by the Italian Parliament is generally higher than the number of laws produced in other countries (e.g., France, Germany, and the United Kingdom), the number of laws represents only a modest percentage of the bills introduced by the government and by individual parliamentarians (Capano and Giuliani 2001, 2003). Therefore, even assuming that the number of bills introduced is inflated by the fact that Italian parliamentarians introduce legislative proposals without any intention of having them enacted, a number of issues remain that should be dealt with in a legislative manner and about which Parliament takes no initiative. Parliament, however, does take the initiative and acts on bills on which interparty agreement is almost unanimous. In the final vote of 388 of 630 (almost equal to 62 percent) bills passed in Parliament in the course of the XIII Legislature, the majority was over 97.5 percent (Landi and Pelizzo 2006). In the XIV Legislature similar majorities, almost completely unanimous, were registered in 348 cases out of 574 (equal to 60 percent).

There are various reasons that explain why such large majorities support the approval of bills. Some of these reasons have been mentioned above: intraparty cohesion is quite elevated and, therefore, all parties of government—which have the duty to make the government function properly—are present in the chamber and vote in favor of passing bills that originate from the government. The second factor noted earlier concerned the high level of interparty agreement between government parties and opposition parties—that vote the same way more frequently than would be expected. There is a third factor as well: the absences.

In general, I hold that government parties are the most present at the final votes (see Table 8).

The combination of these two factors (parties are highly cohesive, opposition members often stay home,) can be used to explain the quasi-unanimity of favorable votes with which laws are passed. These factors can also contribute to the conclusion that, by contrast, parties do not behave like cartels: the majority does what it wishes, the opposition stays home, and therefore numbers are what they are. However, this
kind of conclusion fails to account for the values represented by the likeness score. Few opposition members turn up to vote, but when they do, they tend to vote overwhelmingly in favor of the proposed bill (or at the most they abstain). A more solid conclusion seems to be that it is essential to consider the role played by absenteeism under a different light. It is clear that in general absence from voting can be dictated by matters of opportunity. If one knows that the bill is going to be passed in any case, it is useless to vote on it, particularly when the presence of a sufficient number of parliamentarians is guaranteed. In these circumstances, it could be more beneficial to devote oneself to other activities, political or otherwise. Yet the absences of individual deputies can have another strategic merit for two different reasons. A deputy who belongs to a government party can decide to stay at home to express his or her opposition to a specific government-originated bill without having to vote against party line or abstain. Conversely, an opposition deputy can stay at home to express his or her support for a government bill without having to formally break party discipline by voting in favor of the government proposal. But absenteeism is a strategic device not only for individual deputies, but also for parties.

In the course of the XIII Legislature there have been numerous occasions in which all the deputies of an opposition party, or further, all the deputies of all the main opposition parties (FI, AN, LN), have stayed at home. The simultaneous absence of all the opposition parliamentarians has not been coincidental. In some cases, opposition

### Table 8. Average Absences (in Percentages) of Parliamentary Groups for the Legislature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parties</th>
<th>Legislature XIII</th>
<th>Legislature XIV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FI</td>
<td>44.33</td>
<td>15.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AN</td>
<td>52.23</td>
<td>27.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LN</td>
<td>51.02</td>
<td>19.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DS</td>
<td>18.37</td>
<td>28.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margherita</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>36.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RC</td>
<td>37.05</td>
<td>34.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Based on data from the Chamber of Deputies. The figures for Margherita in the XIII Legislature have been obtained by combining the Popular Party and the Democrats.14
parties have been absent *en masse* with the hope of preventing the quorum from being reached. Once the quorum was reached, voting would take place, all possible opponents of the bill would be absent and all those present would favor the approval of a particular bill, that, therefore, would be passed by a very high percentage of those present. In such cases, the legislative behavior of the government and of the opposition is not in harmony with the notion of a cartel party system. The notion of a cartel party system is nevertheless vindicated on those occasions when opposition parties, knowing that government majority was divided over a bill, would decide to stay at home to lower the quorum required for the approval of a bill. If all are present in the Chamber of Deputies, as there are 630 deputies, the required majority for the approval of a bill is, in this case, 316 deputies. If the government had a minimal majority, or the 316 deputies, and if the government and the opposition voted in a strictly partisan manner, the defection of only two deputies from the majority would be sufficient to fail the approval of the bill. But if all the deputies of the opposition stayed at home, the necessary majority for the approval of the bill would be much lower, and the approval of the bill would not be compromised from the possible defections of some deputies of the majority.

This is exactly what happened in some of the final votes of the Chamber of Deputies. The opposition, by being absent *en masse*, has prevented the defeat of bills due to possible divisions inside a not-so-large government majority. For example, in the case of bill 7570, which eventually became law 142 of April 3, 2001, given the defections of some parliamentarians of the majority—defections that were manifested in a contrary vote or in an abstention—the government would not have been able to pass the bill if the opposition parties had been present or if they had voted against the bill.

There are four basic factors that corroborate the argument that the functioning of the parliamentary party system in Italy resembles the modus operandi of oligopolistic markets and Italian parties behave like a cartel of oligopolistic firms. First, opposition members may assist the government to pass its own bills by staying home *en masse*. Second, the opposition parties can also help the government, when they are present in the chamber, by voting to a large extent along with the government majority. Third, the bills that pass are supported by almost unanimous majorities. Fourth, and finally, only those bills that are unanimously
supported are passed while bills on which there is no agreement are abandoned.

Conclusions

Previous studies on the cartel party have emphasized the structural similarities between party systems and oligopolistic markets. As a matter of fact, in both cases a small number of actors (firms in the market, parties in the electoral market) control all market shares (Blyth and Katz 2005). In addition to this structural similarity, previous studies have emphasized how competition in the electoral market is distorted the same way as in oligopolistic markets: that is, because the supply of political goods is not responsive to changes in the demand of political goods. For example, despite the fact that Italian voters had clearly expressed their desire to abolish state subventions to party finance in the 1993 referendum, Italian parties reached several all-party agreements to reintroduce them (Pelizzo 2004). Katz and Mair (1995) have argued that the increasing similarity of electoral platforms provides a clear indication of the fact that parties converge and that political supply is distorted. For Blyth and Katz (2005, 43) evidence of the oligopolistic nature of party systems is provided by the fact that right and left-wing parties agree that ‘states do not need to produce the public goods that they produced in the past because the market can do it better’.

Showing that the electoral platforms of parties have become increasingly similar, and/or showing that the supply of political goods has become, over time, less diversified or more limited, the studies of both Katz and Mair (1995) and Blyth and Katz (2005) have illustrated that in the last three decades there has been a transformation in the political supply. But these studies, given the nature of the data presented, have not been able to show whether the changes in political supply represent a competitive adjustment to the transformation of the political demand, or if they have materialized irrespective of the nature of political demand.

Pelizzo (2003) has suggested analyzing whether the transformations in the political supply are on par with corresponding changes in the political demand, in order to verify whether the transformation of political supply is a competitive adjustment. Utilizing the position of
the median voter as indicator of the political demand and using the
center position of the party system as indicator of the political supply,
this study has demonstrated how, in the course of three decades, the
distance between the median voter and the center of the party system
has widened. The increase in this distance, and, consequently, the more
limited representativeness of the main European party systems has been
generated by a simultaneous shift of the electorates to the left and party
systems to the right (Pelizzo 2003). The increased gap between what the
voters want (or think they want) and what voters believe they receive
from party systems shows not only that the party systems of the major
European democracies are perceived as less representative than they
were in the past. The gap also shows that the transformation of the
political supply is not responsive to the demand, and that therefore it is
justified to argue that European party systems function like oligopolistic
firms. Previous studies conducted on the cartel party have therefore
justified the use of the economic metaphor, or rather, the description of
the party system as a set of oligopolistic parties, but have not presented
sufficient evidence to argue that European party systems resemble a
specific type of oligopolistic market, that is, the cartel.

The analysis of the legislative behavior of Deputies and Italian
parties in this article illustrates a number of points: the production of
legislation in Italy does not vary in response to changes in political
demand; production of legislation reflects intercoalitional agreements;
only bills supported in this almost unanimous fashion are passed; bills
on which there is no general agreement are abandoned. These
outcomes give the impression that Italian parties collude to decide
which legislation can be passed and which, conversely, is not to be
passed. The apparently collusive nature of interparty agreements
justifies the argument that not only the Italian party system can be
described as oligopolistic, but also that it can be described as a cartel
party system.

This conclusion is of some interest for two reasons. For scholars of
the cartel party thesis, the relevance of these results lies in the fact that
they justify not only the description of party systems as oligopolistic,
but also as cartels—something that previous studies were not able to
argue. For scholars of Italian politics, the relevance of this study is that
its results can be of assistance in highlighting some aspects of the
functioning of the Italian political system that previous studies, which
adopted a different analytical focus, did not adequately illustrate. The cooperative, nonadversarial nature of the interparty relationship is not meant to promote the national interest by depolarizing conflicts, as is the case in consociational democracies, but is meant instead to secure parties’ collective interests.

Notes

1 The author would like to thank Massimiliano Landi for his kind permission to use the data employed in Landi and Pelizzo (2006).

2 A perfect example of this highly cooperative behavior can be found in the all-partisan agreement (or support from all parties) that supported the passage of party finance legislation. The April 18 1993 referendum in Italy abolished state contributions to party finances that had been introduced by the law n. 195 of May 2, 1974. The presidential decree n. 173 of June 5 1993 did not, however, abolish the state contribution to reimburse parties for their electoral expenses. In the years following the abrogation of the law 195/1974, the Italian parliament passed in an all partisan fashion several pieces of legislation, such as the law n. 515/1993, the law n. 43/1995, the law n. 309/1995, the law n. 2/1997 and the law n. 157/1999 that increased the amount of money allocated for the reimbursement of parties’ electoral expenses and effectively reintroduced the type of state subventions to party finance that the Italian electorate had meant to eliminate with the 1993 referendum. Hence, parties in the Italian party system still supply Italian voters with policy output, but by colluding they do so at a higher price. See Pelizzo (2004).

3 See Articles 72-81 of the rules of the Chamber of Deputies.

4 See Article 49 of the rules of the Chamber of Deputies.

5 This is not the only methodology used to estimate party cohesion. Other methodologies also take into account that either favorable or adverse votes do not exhaust other possible manifestations of parliamentarians’ legislative behavior. Parliamentarians can abstain or be absent. For a discussion of the methodologies that take into account abstentions and absences in the calculations of intra-party cohesion, see respectively Hix, Noury, and Roland (2005), and Landi and Pelizzo (2006).

6 A future study to be conducted by the author proposes to investigate in more detailed fashion what happens to those who violate party discipline.

7 This time frame for the Congress was used to show that the levels of cohesion and likeness reached by Italian parties in the last two legislatures are fairly exceptional in comparison to the entire U.S. spectrum. As far as the likeness score is concerned, for example, no matter how long the time frame of congressional history taken into account is, levels of likeness as high as those registered in Italy among various coalitional partners could not be found. Moreover, the level of likeness calculated between parties belonging to opposite coalitions is generally the same as the level of likeness recorded between the Republicans and the Democrats in periods of bipartisan spirit. It would be interesting to place this data in terms of the Italian perspective, especially for a comparison between the First Republic, for which data is not available, and the Second Republic.

8 To the point where the likeness score between the LN and the DS, that in the XIII Legislature was 64.15, increased to 69.12 in the XIV Legislature, with the incumbency of the LN and the DS as opposition—this is an increase of almost 5 percent.
Berlusconi’s obsession with communism and communists is well exemplified by the some of the quotes collected online at http://it.wikiquote.org/wiki/Silvio_Berlusconi.

Regarding this matter, Capano and Giuliani (2001, 20) have observed that Italian Deputies have a certain “inclination to consensus.”

The data at my disposal cover only those final votes that have concluded with the approval of bills. Given the nature of the arguments developed in this paper, it would be extremely interesting to verify empirically if, when, and how often the opposition has been able to—by being absent en masse—prevent the quorum from being achieved. Using this type of information, it would then be possible to formulate some interesting hypotheses with regard to not only the strategic nature of absences, but also with regard to the issues about which parties appear to collude or, alternatively, about the manifestation of insoluble differences between the government and the oppositions.

The Amato 2 government, as a matter of fact, received the confidence of the chamber in a vote in which 5 of the 622 present Deputies abstained, 298 voted against and 319 voted in favor (Pasquino 2001, 59).

In the course of the vote, the bill received 258 votes in favor, 2 votes against and 11 abstentions due, for the most part, to Deputies of the RC but also to proper governmental Deputies respectively affiliated with the Lista Dini (1) and with the Popolari-Democratici (2). It is evident that 11 defections from a majority as slim as that of the Amato government would have been sufficient to place the executive in a difficult position and with every probability, they would have sufficient to prevent the approval of the bill.

The following website allows one to see how each member of the House of Deputies votes in each of the final votes in the course of the XIII Legislature: http://banchedati.camera.it/Votazioni/leg13/Default.Asp The data for the XIV Legislature can be found at http://banchedati.camera.it/Votazioni/votazionisperi/leg14/CercaVotazioni.Asp By aggregating the individual votes by party, Landi and Pelizzo (2006) computed likeness and cohesion for the parties in the XIII Legislature. By replicating what they did, I estimated cohesion and likeness scores for the XIV Legislature.

**About the Author**

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**References**


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