

Exploring Bill Winnowing in the Italian Chamber of Deputies (1996-2012)

Enrico Borghetto – Nova University of Lisbon

enrico.borghetto@fch.unl.pt

Alessandro Pellegata – University of Milan

alessandro.pellegata@unimi.it

Paper prepared to be presented at the **XXVII Annual Conference of the Italian Political
Science Association (SISP)**, University of Florence, 12-14 September 2013.

Abstract

A broad literature has focused on the partisan and institutional factors influencing legislative success, understood as the capacity to move bills toward enactment. A more recent literature has analyzed the motivation of bill introduction. This paper adopts a different perspective. It aims to assess the political and institutional determinants of bill survival beyond the parliamentary committee stage. We know little about why some bills progress while others languish (mostly they are never put to a vote) in committee. Since the work of committees occurs mostly behind closed doors, this is arguably the less well known stage in the process of bill approval. Even so, it is one of the most consequential stages, with only 10% of the bills being adopted by parliamentary committees in the first reading. Focusing on the winnowing dynamics underlying this fundamental step in the legislative process may yield new insights into the relationships between executive and parliamentary majority, as well as majority and opposition. Based on the entire set of bills assigned to Italian committees in the Chamber of deputies from the 13th to the 16th legislatures, we explore the factors accounting for the success of bills at the committee stage. We consider two main categories of determinants: the characteristics of the bills and the information on the sponsor(s) presenting the bills.

Introduction

Although with non-trivial cross-national variations, nowadays in modern representative democracies only a small percentage of bills introduced moves forward the different steps of the legislative process through the enactment (Andeweg and Nijzink 1995; Anderson et al. 2003; Krutz 2005). Often a bill, once having been assigned to a committee, languishes there without receiving attention and never reaches the floor. In parliamentary systems, since the agenda-setting power lies in the hand of the executive, most of the government bills successfully pass the pre-floor stage and are adopted as laws, while the success rate of bills introduced by the MPs is much lower (Andeweg and Nijzink 1995; Brunner 2013).

However, it is puzzling that, though the law-making process of parliamentary systems is strongly influenced by the executive, which has the capacity to push its law proposals to the enactment and to delay or block unwelcome private members bills, especially if introduced by representatives belonging to the opposition parties, MPs still make considerable use of their right to initiate legislation. In fact, in several Western European countries the number of bills initiated by MPs exceeds the number of government bills (Andeweg and Nijzink 1995: 171). Several recent studies investigate this conundrum, in particular the MPs' motivations in introducing so many bills even though the vast majority of these proposals never move forward the committee stage (Bräuninger and Debus 2009; Bowler 2012; Brunner 2013). Nevertheless, little is known about the factors affecting parliamentary bills' legislative survival at the committee stage. One question arises then: what attributes are shared by this small minority of bills?

The purpose of this study is to assess which political and institutional factors affect "winnowing", i.e. the pre-floor process by which a parliament determines the small percentage of bills that will receive committee attention (Krutz 2005). Since the work of committees occurs mostly behind closed door, the pre-floor stage is arguably the less known

step in the law-making process. In general, researches that aim to study the legislative success tend to focus their attention on the final stage of the legislative process that lead to the final adoption of laws (Anderson et al. 2003; Cheibub et al. 2004). Nevertheless, as Krutz (2005) argues, winnowing is an important agenda-setting process that impacts subsequent stages of legislative policy-making. Time is a scarce resource and, as such, is the amount of institutional attention available for new initiatives. Thus, the pre-floor selection operates as a first filter along the decision-making process, determining which bills deserve receiving attention. Indeed, evidence shows that winnowing is the most consequential stage in this respect. Compared to other steps of the legislative process, only a small percentage of bills progress to the next stage (see Figure 1 below). We argue that analyzing these winnowing dynamics may yield new insights into the relationships between executive and parliamentary majority, as well as between majority and opposition.

In the literature there are only few recent studies that focus on winnowing and analyze empirically which factors explain the success of a bill in moving forward the committee stage. Krutz (2005) examined the effect of leadership, bill sponsorship, and contextual factors in helping bills move forward the committee stage in the US Congress. Krutz and Jorgensen (2008) analyzed the winnowing process in a fragmented policy sector of US policy-making: environmental policy. Jenkins (2010) investigated the determinants of bill success at the US state level (Georgia, Vermont and Wisconsin). Calvo and Sagarzazu (2011) instead focused their study on Argentina, a presidential system characterized by multiparty legislatures, estimating committee success in majority- and plurality-led congresses. Finally, Yano, Smith and Wilkerson (2012) tested the winnowing model in US Congress introducing information on the content of the bills.

As we can easily notice, all these studies focus on presidential systems, the US political context (both at the national and at the state level) and the Argentinian multiparty

presidential system. To our knowledge there are no works in the literature that analyze the determinants of bills success in parliamentary democracies. The present study contributes to fill this gap by inspecting the winnowing process in the Italian Chamber of Deputies over almost 15 years. Differently from the US presidential system, in which formal agenda-setting power lies in the hands of the parliament (legislative initiative is a prerogative of MPs), in parliamentary democracies, like Italy, it is the executive to have the upper hand in the legislative agenda (Doring 1995), with more or less severe restrictions on parliamentary initiative (Mattson 1995). This institutional context generates a clear advantage for government proposals in the competition to get the floor attention (Andeweg and Nijzink 1995). Hence, given these conditions, the real puzzle is how MP's proposals manage to reach the floor in the first place.

Among Western European parliamentary democracies Italy represents an interesting case in the study of the winnowing stage. As we will explain in more details in the next section, Italy is characterized by a rate of private members initiative that is comparatively higher than in other parliamentary systems. At the same time, it exhibits a lower approval rate (Andeweg and Nijzink 1995).

In line with previous works in the field, our explanatory framework includes two categories of predictors of bill success: information about the sponsor (both main sponsor and – when it applies - other signatories) and about the bill itself. Our expectations on the causal relationship that links these explanatory factors to the success of a bill are tested on a sample including more than 18,000 bills initiated by MPs in the Italian Chamber of Deputies between 1996 and 2012, a time period which includes four legislatures of the “Second Republic” (from 13th to 16th).

The paper is structured as follows. The next section stresses some peculiarities of the Italian legislative system and presents a descriptive analysis of the success rates of the

bills according to the different characteristics they present. The third section explains the theoretical framework adopted and the research hypotheses advanced. Then, the fourth section describes the data and the variables used in the empirical analysis and the method employed to test the validity of the hypotheses. The fifth section discusses the main results obtained from the empirical analysis and finally, the last section presents the concluding remarks and several improvements for further research.

Bills Winnowing in Italy

Italy represents an interesting case for analyzing the winnowing process. Its law-making process presents a few peculiarities, in particular regarding the legislative initiative and the definition of the parliamentary calendar, that is worth discussing. Although there are some limitations in the introduction of private members bills in the Italian parliament, these restrictions are undoubtedly less severe than in other Western European systems (Mattson 1995). This right is shared amongst the government, MPs, regions, at least 50,000 citizens and the CNEL (*Consiglio Nazionale dell'Economia e del Lavoro*). Furthermore, there are basically no time limitations in presenting bills by MPs and the legislative session is not regulated either, lasting the whole legislature.¹ Thus, a bill introduced at the very beginning of the legislature have potentially five years to move forward the different steps of the legislative process.

What makes Italy interesting for the purpose of this study is that in the two houses every MP may decide at every moment during the legislative mandate to sign a bill alone or with other deputies irrespective of their partisan affiliation. As Giuliani and Capano (2001)

¹ The unique substantial time limits on legislative initiative is posited by the article 72, comma 2 of the Chamber of Deputies Regulation, which affirms that a bill with the same content of a bill previously rejected can be assigned to a commission only after six months from the rejection.

argued, the high relevance attributed in Italy to legislative acts and the presence of low demanding forms of restriction on private members initiative have historically contributed to the proliferation of parliamentary bills, making it one of the most prolific Western European parliamentary democracies (see Andeweg and Nijzink 1995: 171). The size of the parliamentary initiative, the two scholars claim, is per se one of the most relevant factor of delay of the Italian law-making process (Giuliani and Capano 2001).

In the rest of the section we present some data on the size of legislative initiative and on bill winnowing in the Italian Chamber of Deputies. This descriptive analysis aims to compare the bill success rates at committee level based on their origin (Government and MPs) and the type of parliamentary initiative (majority MPs, opposition MPs, or inter-coalition representatives).

The bar plot in Figure 1 reports the number of bills for few relevant stages of the legislative process. Data refer to all proposals, with the exception of bills which include ratifications of international treaties, presented in the Chamber of Deputies from the 13th to the 16th legislatures (May 1996 – December 2012).² Consistently with previous findings by Borghetto and Giuliani (2012), Figure 1 clearly demonstrates that the committee stage represents the most consequential step in the process of legislative agenda-setting for the survival of bills. While 95% (20,435) of the 21,458 presented in the Chamber of Deputies over the seventeen years analyzed were assigned to one or more committees for the discussion, only a very small percentage (2,259, 11%) left this stage. Even so, once they passed their chances of being approved increases dramatically: 78.6% (1,777) of the bills that

² As Giuliani (2008) argued, most of the bills ratifying international treaties have a technical nature and a low political salience, being swiftly discussed and usually unanimously voted for when there is space in the parliamentary calendar. Therefore, their limited relevance and their random scheduling suggest we should not include them in the analysis conducted here. On the web page “dati.senato.it” the bills of the 16th legislatures are available only through the end of 2012, even though the parliament was dissolved on March 2013.

reached the floor were later approved and moved to the Senate. Finally, 45.6% (811) of them were finally enacted (in the second or successive readings) and became laws.³ Collected evidence unanimously supports that the winnowing stage exhibits the lowest bill survival rate, i.e. the percentage of bills that progress from the previous stage of the legislative process.

Figure 1 about here

Table 1 presents the number and the percentage of bills that, on one side, moved through the process and, on the other side, languished in committee. This longitudinal comparison shows that there are no substantial differences in the four legislatures analyzed. The 13th and 14th legislatures report a bill survival rate only slightly higher than the average value, respectively 15% and 12.7%. On the contrary, while the 15th legislature displays the lowest success rate of the four legislatures (3.83%), the 16th shows a value closer to the mean (8.33%).

Table 1 about here

Table 1 allows shedding also some light on what happens to those bills that languish in committee until the end of the legislature without reaching the floor. It is worth noting that, in the four legislatures analyzed, while only 14% of the bills not reaching the floor went under committee scrutiny, about three fourths of them (74.9%) waited to be tabled in the committee agenda and then die at the end of the legislature. Another 11% instead is made up of bills absorbed by other bills due to similarity in topic, bills from which legislators excerpted only

³ In Italy all bills to become laws need to be approved in the same wording by the two chambers (Chamber of Deputies and Senate) theoretically with an endless *navette* system.

part of the text, withdrawn bills and bills waiting to be reported to the floor. This scenario denotes that time and attention are scarce resources and that competition to get on the legislative calendar is tougher in the committee stage than on the floor (Krutz 2005). This result is confirmed by Borghetto and Giuliani (2012) who show that in the Italian parliament (1987-2008) the time needed on average to move a bill through the committee agenda is more or less equal to the time needed to process it during the rest of the *iter*. Committee agendas are managed by committee chairmen in collaboration with parliamentary group presidents. In Italy, especially during the Second Republic, the chairmen of permanent committees, those discussing the lion's share of tabled bills, are members of parties in the majority coalition. Previous researches argued that chairmen act as gatekeepers, pushing through those bills on which all coalition parties agree and leaving controversial proposals floating, introducing them for discussion only when they achieve a reasonable level of consent (Borghetto and Giuliani 2012).⁴

Given the executive dominance in the law-making process (Döring 1995; Tsebelis 2002), it is worth comparing the success rate of bills in the winnowing stage on the basis of the different actors that initiate them. Table 2 subdivided all the bills assigned to one or more committees in each legislature according to their origin. "Governmental" includes all the law proposals presented by the executive, "parliamentary" refers to private members bills and "Others" groups the bills introduced by the regions, the CNEL and popular petitions. Three observations are in order.

Table 2 about here

⁴ Borghetto and Giuliani (2012) show that there are bills that are discussed in the same day of their assignment to a committee and others that have to wait up to as long as four years before being considered.

First, as expected, the vast majority (93,7%) of bills assigned to a committee are introduced by MPs, while only 5.2% of them are presented by the executive. The rest of the bills assigned to the committee (1.09%) have a different type of initiators (CNEL, regions or citizens).

Second, from a longitudinal perspective, the more active role of the MPs in presenting legislative proposals in comparison with the government consolidated in the seventeen years analyzed. Whereas the governmental initiative has constantly decreased from the 13th legislature, when it consisted in the 7.9% of the total amount of bills referred to committees, to the 16th legislature, 3.2%, the proportion of private members bills increased. MPs initiative increased from 90.7% in the 13th legislature, to 94.8% (14th), 95.3% (15th) and 95.5% (16th). This result confirms the scenario depicted by Capano and Giuliani (2001) for the 1987-1998 period, consisting in a constant proliferation of private members bills.

Third, and most importantly for the purpose of the present paper, despite the high inflation of private members initiatives, the success rate in the winnowing stage of governmental bills is remarkably higher than that of MPs. In the four legislatures analyzed, the former's survival rate is 52.8% (and reach a peak of 70% in the 14th legislature), the latter's is only 8.8%, with the lowest value of 2.8% in the 15th legislature. As a matter of fact, 53.3% of governmental bills that pass the winnowing stage are bills converting law decrees and budget bills. These bills can be proposed only by the executive and the constitution provides special arrangements for their adoption.⁵ However, even looking only at ordinary bills, the survival rate of governmental proposals is equal to 50.7%. Regarding the parliamentary bills that survived the committee stage, instead, it is worth noting that 65% of them were merged with other bills assigned to the committee and focusing on a similar topic,

⁵ Bills converting law decrees into law immediately enter the agenda of the parliament and must be approved within 60 days. Budgetary bills are regulated by the specific provisions and deadlines of the budgetary session.

so as to present a single text to the assembly. This percentage decreases to 7.6% for governmental bills. This result already provides some hints on one of the candidate predictors of success for MPs initiative: the capacity to create joint initiatives and build a large coalition behind a bills.

Table 3 offers a deeper analysis of success rates at the winnowing stage for private member's bills, distinguishing among bills signed only by members of the majority coalition, bills signed only by members of the opposition parties and bills presented by MPs of both the majority and the opposition.

Table 3 around here

In the seventeen years considered, the number of bills presented by MPs belonging to opposition parties (N=8,485, 46.4% of the total bills assigned to committees) is higher than that signed by representatives of the opposition parties (N=6,911 equal to 37.8% of the total bills). This result is in line with the scenario presented by other Western European parliamentary systems (Brunner 2013: 15-17). However, differently from other democracies in which the success rate of majority bills is higher, the Italian Second Republic presents a different trend. In the 1996-2012 period, the average success rate of opposition bills is equal to 8.6%, whereas that of majority bills is equal to 7.2%. Actually, there is a variation in the four legislatures considered: in the 13th and 15th legislatures the success rate of majority bills is higher. A potential reason is the greater facility to enact policies using the channel of government initiative. If a political majority wants to secure the enactment of an important measure, it is the executive which takes the initiative.

Another relevant point is that, similarly to other parliamentary democracies (Brunner 2013: 17), the highest success rate (10.7%) in the winnowing stage is exhibited by bills co-

presented by majority and opposition MPs. This is true for all the legislatures analyzed, apart from the 14th in which inter-coalitional bills present the same success rate than opposition bills.

In sum, the descriptive analysis presented above highlights an interesting puzzle that begs to be analyzed empirically. On one side, bills introduced by the government, namely the actor who has the agenda-setting power, present a considerably higher success rate at the committee stage. On the other side, despite the dramatically high number of bills presented by MPs, only a small percentage of them manages to win the extremely hard competition to get on the legislative calendar of committees and reach the floor. Bills sponsored by representatives of opposition parties and by MPs belonging to both majority and coalition show a comparatively higher success. In the next sections, the effect of these predictors will be put to test in a multivariate setting.

Research Hypotheses

In order to explain bill success at committee level we focus on two categories of predictors: information about the sponsor (both primary sponsor and – when it applies – information on other signatories) and about the bill.

By primary sponsor we refer to the legislator who proposes a bill and normally attaches its name to the final act, should the bill be ultimately approved. A first determinant of bill success is the **partisan affiliation** of the legislator. It is expected that MPs on the majority benches have a greater chance of seeing their bills scheduled in the committee agenda and eventually discussed. As a rule, the executive is expected to back up a majority initiative, conceding some of the agenda space it controls. What is more, it must be recalled the strong leverage of the Committee chairman, normally a majority representative, over the agenda. If the conference of political group presidents does not adopt the program with at least a three

fourths majority of votes (each president's vote carries a weight proportional to the seats of its group in the Chamber), the final word is with the Committee chairman.

Secondly, expected predictors of bill success are either the position of the primary sponsor within a political group or its parliamentary office. Both are good proxies of the visibility enjoyed and political leverage wielded by the MP. In the following, we focus on two prominent offices: the **Committee chairman** on the one hand, the **President of a political group** on the other. Holding one of these offices should increase the likelihood to get one's bill through the Committee stage. Besides these formal positions, there is another attribute that might help MPs standing out from the crowd: their **seniority in parliament**. MPs with long tenures are expected to benefit from a greater knowledge of the parliamentary machine, the substance of the issues at stake and the patterns of interests underlying each issue area (Kirkland 2011). In addition, their successful re-election indirectly presupposes their holding some major role in the party hierarchy. Finally, MPs differ in terms of the **numbers of bills sponsored**. Although the Congressional literature has shown that those who are most active are not, by default, more successful (Anderson et al. 2003; Krutz 2005), this hypothesis has still to be tested in a different parliamentary setting. Rather than assuming a direct relationship between activity rate and effectiveness, we expect that the reason to introduce the n-th bill is associated with a low hit rate during previous attempts. On its turn, this should be read as evidence of the low effectiveness of the sponsor.⁶

According to our data, almost three fifths of bills have one or more **cosponsors**, namely MPs who add their names as supporters of the primary sponsor's bill. Associating one's name to a bill is a direct admission of support, thus it might be hypothesized that the

⁶ We do not control for the possibility of introducing recurring bills, namely bills with content similar to previous bills which had failed to be adopted. This should improve the chances the n-th bill on the same subject survive the committee stage (Krutz and Lebeau 2006).

greater the number of supporting signatories behind a bill, the greater its chance to survive the committee. Even so, the previous descriptive analysis suggested that, besides the magnitude, it is also important to consider the composition of the supporting coalition. This might include **signatories from different political groups**, in some cases coming from both the majority and the opposition's ranks. We expect that receiving cross-coalition support improves the chances of a bill passing the committee. It may be taken as evidence that the content of the bill has by its very nature a consensual appeal. Alternatively, it might stem from its being a composite measure, able to incorporate provisions promoted by an heterogeneous group of signatories.

Last, it is important to incorporate some attributes pertaining to the bill itself. Firstly, it is important to distinguish between bills requiring the floor approval to get adopted and those that are finally approved by the committee itself, by virtue of a decentralized procedure called "*sede legislativa*". These bills normally introduce low-profile policies or measures involving some degree of mutual agreement by political forces (both among MPs and within the executive),⁷ hence they should be more prone to be finally adopted by the Committee. As anticipated, another procedure available at the committee stage is to deal with **two or more similar bills jointly** and to submit them as a single text to the assembly.⁸ The very fact of being handled by the legislator should be taken as evidence that the measure is worthy of some level of interest. What is more, the merging of different bills' provisions at the committee stage has been traditionally one of the most common techniques to build an enacting coalition in support of a policy. As a result, the recourse to this procedure is expected to improve the survival chances of a bill. Finally, bills differ in content. In particular,

⁷ Indeed, the bills is re-submitted to the Plenary if requested by the government, 10% of the deputies or 1/5 of the committee members

⁸ They are unified in a single text (*unificazioni*) or one of the bills becomes the basic text for discussion on the floor (*assorbimento*).

politically salient bills or so-called “omnibus” bills (which combine a number of topics into a single text to ease the way of the measures through the legislative process) normally touch on a variety of policy areas (Krutz 2000, 2001). For this reason, the Steering committee to which they are primarily referred normally request the opinions of other Committees in matters of their competence. Thus, a high **number of advisory committees** might hint at the fact that the bill belongs to one of the two above-mentioned typologies. In both cases, the chances of passing the committee stage should be higher.

Table 4 summarizes our hypotheses, highlighting the direction of the causal relationship associating each of the explanatory factors to bill success at committee level .

Data and methods

Data

The unit of analysis is the bill. We collected data on all bills – including their sponsors - presented during the first reading of the Italian lower chamber, the Chamber of Deputies, over four legislatures (XIII-XVI), thus covering a time span of 17 years (1996-2012).⁹ We included only bills sponsored by MPs. As it was shown in the previous section, they represent the lion’s share of Italian initiative. More importantly, their low rate of committee survival represents a puzzle in legislative studies. For reasons of comparability, three additional selection criteria were applied:

⁹ Since we had no reason to expect the Senate to behave differently from the Chamber, we focused only on the bigger of the two. Data were downloaded from the open data repositories of the chamber of deputies and senate, available at “dati.camera.it” and “dati.senato.it”, and from the Italian Law-Making Archive (Borghetto et al. 2012).

- a. Only ordinary laws. Other types of primary legislation follow fixed paths (budgetary laws), are characterised by supermajority requirements (constitutional laws) or are, for the most part, administrative in nature (laws ratifying international treaties).
- b. Only bills which are referred to a committee. A portion of bills (5%) are merely submitted to the attention of the Chamber speaker but are never referred to a Committee. Since the rationale underlying the introduction of bills that die before even reaching the committee stage is a conundrum on its own, we decided to drop this group of bills from the model.
- c. Only bills submitted to one of the 14 standing committees. All bills referred to select committees, namely committees with a specific purpose and usually for a limited period of time, were dropped because of their peculiar attributes.

This data collection process yielded 18,245 bill referrals to a standing committee of the Chamber of deputies. Out of these, only 8.4% (N=1539) passed the committee stage.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable used in the empirical analysis is the bill's success at committee level (*success*). This is operationalized as a dichotomous measure assuming the value of 1 if the bill passed the committee stage before the end of the legislature, 0 otherwise. This operationalization strategy implies that those bills for which the committee formally concluded the scrutiny but were not referred to the assembly are considered as unsuccessful.

Independent variables

Information on the sponsor was collected from "dati.camera.it". Since MPs might move to a different group during their mandate (*Majority*), or leave their office as committee chairmen (*Committee chairman*) or president of a party group (*Group president*), these dummies were coded taking into account their group membership or position at the time the bill is referred to

a committee. *Seniority* captures the number of legislative mandates won (in either of the two Houses) up to the legislature when the bill was submitted. *Bills presented* is the logarithm of the number of previous bills signed by the same sponsor during the legislature of reference. Similarly to what was done for the primary sponsor, we first counted the number of cosponsors and then we assigned them to either majority or opposition based on their group membership at the time the bill was referred to the steering committee. This way, it was possible to generate a categorical variable differentiating between single-sponsor bills and cosponsored bills supported by either members of the same coalition (*More signs/same coalition*) or from different coalitions (*More signs/diff coalition*). *Decentralized procedure* is a dummy distinguishing between, on one side, bills referred to committees acting as legislative bodies and, on the other side, those referred to committees operating “in sede referente” and “in sede redigente”. Finally, information on whether a bill joined another (*joined bills*) and the number of advisory committees (*advisory committee*) was downloaded from “dati.senato.it”.

Method

Given the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable, a bill either passes or not, we opted for a logit model. On the other hand, running an ordinary regression was reputed problematic since bills referred to particular committees are expected to share specific features and this could make them more similar to each other than the rest. The same reasoning holds true, if one considers the effect of legislature-specific features (length, particular events, degree of polarization) on the likelihood of bill survival. These reasons, supported by the computation of intra-class correlation scores (an indicator of within group homogeneity) at the committee ($\rho = .09$) and legislature level ($\rho = .08$), justified the recourse to a mixed logistic model, with

intercepts varying randomly at the level of the 14 types of committee (level 2) and 4 legislatures (level 3).

Discussion of Results

Table 5 summarizes the results of the mixed effects logistic regression. It provides 5 different model specifications. The first four (**XIII**, **XIV**, **XV** and **XVI**) provide estimates for each of the 4 legislatures analyzed separately, allowing the intercept to vary at committee level. The fifth (**3-levels**) is a three-level random intercepts model, with intercepts varying at committee and legislature level. It is the most general model and it will be the main focus of the discussion. The last two models were added as a further validation of the robustness of our estimates. The sixth (**2-levels**) includes bills from all four legislatures in a random intercept model (groups are committees) but directly control for the effect of belonging to a specific legislature through the use of dummy variables. The seventh is an ordinary logit regression including dummies for legislatures and type of committee.

In discussing the output, we focus only on fixed effects and interpret the coefficients in terms of odd ratios. First, majority sponsorship decreases the odds of survival. Substantively, the predicted odds that a bill sponsored by a majority MP survives (in comparison with an Opposition-sponsored bill) are .45. The suspicion is that majority MPs decide to introduce bills for reasons different than their eventual adoption and that relevant policies are mostly sponsored by a minister or the President of the Council. Second, as expected, either being a Committee chairman or president of a parliamentary group significantly increases the chances of a bill succeeding, respectively by .598 and .654. The impact of seniority is positive but significant only at .05 level. The first difference between the expected probability of having (*ceteris paribus*) two more years of seniority is marginal

and equals 0.3%.¹⁰ As expected, the greater the number of bills introduced, the lower the probability of success for the n-th bill. Introducing many bills might be part of a strategy to either raise attention for an issue, show one's commitment to a specific measure in front of the electorate or simply test the level of agreement for a bill and hope to get it in the agenda. The decrease in expected probability for a shift from the first to third quartile is .06%. The support of other co-sponsors is, as expected, helping the bill to succeed at committee level (the reference category is unique signatory). More so, if the co-sponsors come from both sides of the political spectrum: in this latter case, the odds increase by a factor of 64%, whereas it reaches an increase of 18% in the case of same-coalition co-sponsors (the odds are 1.4 greater for the first compared with the second group). Though the decentralized procedure is less diffused than in the past, when it is applied it is to secure the passage of a measure. In terms of percent change, the odds of bills which take this procedural path are 391% higher than in other two cases (*sede referente* and *redigente*). But the strongest effect is, without doubts, the capacity to join more bills at committee level: it increases the odds more than 16 times. The reasons underlying the recourse to this agenda-setting strategy are still unexplored in the literature. Even so, we might hypothesize that in conditions of time constraints, attaching one's proposals to another bill that has got some probability to pass is rational. The committee stage is the place where these mergers can be agreed on. Finally, number of advisory committees, which can be interpreted as either a proxy of complexity or a proxy of salience of the bill, increases the odds of success; more specifically the difference in predicted probabilities conditional in our variable held respectively at the first and third quartile is .05.

Concluding Remarks

¹⁰ Predicted probabilities were computed via simulations for a specific group of bills: those adopted in the XIII legislature and in the judicial committee.

The present paper addresses the topic of bills winnowing, i.e. the committee process by which a parliamentary assembly determines the portion of bills that will receive floor attention. Differently from previous researches which focus on the US Congress or other presidential systems' assemblies, this study analyzes winnowing in the lower chamber of the Italian parliament (Chamber of Deputies). In parliamentary democracies, such as Italy, the agenda-setting power lies in the hand of the executive which can push forward its proposals and block or delay unwelcome private members bills. Italy offers a puzzle that is interesting to analyze empirically because, unlikely other Western European parliamentary system, it presents a comparatively higher proportion of parliamentary law initiatives, but at the same time a lower survival rate at committee level.

Our data confirms previous findings (Borghetto & Giuliani 2012) showing that the winnowing process conducted in the committee stage represents the most relevant step in defining the legislative agenda. While governmental bills find more easier to get on to the calendar, private members bills have to face a stiffer competition in order to receive committee attention. As a consequence, the vast majority of bills introduced by MPs, once assigned to one or more committees, never reach the floor. This represents an interesting puzzle, which has not been studied empirically yet.

The empirical analysis built and then tested a model on the determinants of parliamentary bills success in the winnowing stage of the Italian Chamber of Deputies between the 13th and the 16th legislatures (1996-2012). We look at two types of potential explanatory factors of bills success: information regarding the bills and about the sponsor(s). Empirical results obtained confirm all the hypothesized relationships, apart the one between the majority status of the main sponsor and bills success.

The probability to move beyond the committee stage increases if the bill is sponsored by MPs with a long parliamentary experience and a political or institutional role inside the

committee or the group. Furthermore, the chances of success are higher if a bill is co-signed by more than one MP and if the sponsors belong both to the majority and the opposition. Looking at the bills characteristics, law proposals that touch on a variety of policy areas and on salient topics already considered in other bills have higher chance of passing the winnowing stage. These are bills that are normally referred to a higher number of advisory committees and merged with other similar bills. These findings resonate with previous research of political agendas (e.g. Baumgartner & Jones 2005, 2011). Attention is a scarce in politics and the works of committees is no exception. Indeed, there are reasons to argue that the committee stage can be an extremely hostile environment for bills. Only bills with strong motivated sponsors joining their forces can manage to stay afloat in the sea of bills and get ultimately to the shore.

In conclusion, we can consider several improvements to our model. First, although the second chamber of the Italian parliament (Senate) basically operates in the same way as the Chamber of Deputies, there are several differences in the regulations of these two assemblies that are worth taking into account. Second, there are other bills related factors that we could not test in the present work because data are not available at the moment. The number of words present in the text of a bill represents a quite reliable indicator of its complexity. Moreover, further studies would surely benefit by a classification of the arguments and the policy sectors which different bills focus on. This classification allows scholar to develop a measure of the saliency of the arguments treated by different law proposals in a legislature or during a specific period of time. Finally, the empirical results obtained here could be improved by taking into consideration the ideological preferences of the main actors involved in the legislative process. Knowing the policy preferences of the MPs, scholars can measure, for instance, the ideological distance between the positions of the main bill's sponsor and the median actor in

the parliament, the median member of the committee discussing the bill and the committee chairman, respectively.

References

- Anderson, William D., Janet M. Box-Steffensmeier and Valeria Sinclair-Chapman. 2003. "The Keys to Legislative Success in the U.S. House of Representatives", *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 28(3): 357-386.
- Andeweg, Rudy B. and Lia Nijzink. 1995. "Beyond the Two-Body Image: Relations Between Ministers and MPs". In Herbert Döring (Ed.) *Parliaments and Majority Rule in Western Europe*. Frankfurt am Main: Campus: 152-178.
- Baumgartner, Frank R., Bryan D. Jones, and John Wilkerson. 2011. "Comparative Studies of Policy Dynamics." *Comparative Political Studies* 44(8): 947–72.
- Baumgartner, Frank R., Bryan D. Jones, and John Wilkerson. 2011. "Comparative Studies of Policy Dynamics." *Comparative Political Studies* 44(8): 947–72.
- Borghetto, Enrico and Marco Giuliani. 2012. "A Long Way to Tipperary: Time in the Italian Legislative Process 1987-2008", *South European Society & Politics*, 17(1): 23-44.
- Borghetto, Enrico, Luigi Curini, Marco Giuliani, Alessandro Pellegata and Francesco Zucchini. 2012. "Italian Law-Making Archive (ILMA): A New Tool for the Analysis of the Legislative Process", *Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica*, 42(3): 481-502.
- Bräuninger, Thomas and Marc Debus. 2009. "Legislative Agenda-Setting in Parliamentary Democracies", *European Journal of Political Research*, 48(6): 804-39.
- Bowler, Shaun. 2012. "Private Members' Bills in the UK Parliament: Is There an 'Electoral Connection'?", *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 16(4): 476-94.
- Brunner, Martin. 2013. *Parliaments and Legislative Activity. Motivations for Bill Introduction*. Berlin: Springer.

- Calvo, Ernesto and Iñaki. 2011. "Legislator Success in Committee: Gatekeeping Authority and the Loss of Majority Control", *American Journal of Political Science*, 55(1): 1-15.
- Cheibub, José Antonio, Adam Przeworski and Sebastian M. Saiegh. 2004. "Government Coalitions and Legislative Success Under Presidentialism and Parliamentarism", *British Journal of Political Science*, 34(4): 565-87.
- Döring, Herbert (Ed.). 1995. *Parliaments and Majority Rule in Western Europe*. Frankfurt am Main: Campus.
- Giuliani, Marco and Giliberto Capano. 2001. "I Labirinti del Legislativo". In Capano, Giliberto and Marco Giuliani (Eds.) *Parlamento e Processo Legislativo In Italia. Continuità e Mutamento*. Bologna: Il Mulino: 13-54.
- Giuliani, Marco. 2008. "Patterns of Consensual Law-Making in the Italian Parliament", *South European Society and Politics*, 13(1): 61-85.
- Jenkins, Shannon. 2010. "Bill Winnowing in the U.S. States Legislatures", paper presented at the American Political science Association Conference, Washington, DC (September 2010).
- Kirkland, Justin H. 2011. "The Relational Determinants of Legislative Outcomes: Strong and Weak Ties Between Legislators.", *The Journal of Politics*, 73(3): 887-98.
- Krutz, Glen S. 2000. "Getting Around Gridlock: The Effect of Omnibus Utilization on Legislative Productivity.", *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 25(4): 533-49.
- Krutz, Glen S. 2001. "Tactical Maneuvering on Omnibus Bills in Congress.", *American Journal of Political Science*, 45(1): 210-23.
- Krutz, Glen S. 2005. "Issues and Institutions: 'Winnowing' in the U.S. Congress", *American Journal of Political Science*, 49(2): 313-26.
- Krutz, Glen S., and Justin Lebeau. 2006. "Recurring Bills and the Legislative Process in the US Congress.", *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 12(1): 98-109.

- Krutz, Glen S. and Paul D. Jorgensen. 2008. "Winnowing in Environmental Politics: Jurisdictional Challenges and Opportunities", *Review of Policy Research*, 25(3): 219-32.
- Mattson, Ingvar. 1995. "Private Members' Initiatives and Amendments". In Herbert Döring (Ed.) *Parliaments and Majority Rule in Western Europe*. Frankfurt am Main: Campus: 448-487.
- Tsebelis, George. 2002. *Veto Players. How Political Institutions Work*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Yano, Tae, Noah A. Smith and John D. Wilkerson. 2012. "Textual Predictors of Bill Survival in Congressional Committees". In *Proceedings of the Conference of the North American Chapter of the Association for Computational Linguistics (NAACL 2012)*, Montréal, Québec, June 2012.

Table 1. Different kinds of unsuccessful outcomes in the winnowing stage.

Legislature	Bills assigned to committee(s)	Successful bills	Unsuccessful bills			
			Tot.	Not received attention yet	Under discussion	Other outcomes*
13 th	6,736	1,014 (15,05%)	5,722	3,956 (69.14%)	794 (13.88%)	972 (16.99%)
14 th	5,553	705 (12,70%)	4,848	3,521 (72.63%)	778 (16.05%)	549 (11.32%)
15 th	3,082	118 (3,83%)	2,964	2511 (84.72%)	340 (11.47%)	113 (3.81%)
16 th	5,064	422 (8,33%)	4,642	3,635 (78.31%)	682 (14.69%)	325 (7.00%)
TOT.	20,435	2,259 (11,05%)	18,176	13623 (74.95%)	2594 (14.27%)	1959 (10.78%)

Source: dati.camera.it; dati.senato.it; Italian Law-Making Archive (ILMA).

* This category includes the bills absorbed by other bills assigned to the committee which focus on the same argument, the bills from which legislators excerpt only a part of the text, the bills converting decayed law-decrees, the retired bills and the bills awaiting to be reported to the floor.

Table 2. Bills success in the winnowing stage according to the bills origin (success rate in parentheses).

Leg.	Governmental			Parliamentary (MPs)			Others*		
	Not Successful	Successful	Tot.	Not Successful	Successful	Tot.	Not Successful	Successful	Tot.
13 th	279 (51.96%)	258 (48.04%)	537 (7.97%)	5,370 (87.83%)	744 (12.17%)	6,114 (90.77%)	73 (85.88%)	12 (14.12%)	85 (1.26%)
14 th	71 (29.83%)	167 (70.17%)	238 (4.29%)	4,727 (89.80%)	537 (10.20%)	5,264 (94.80%)	50 (98.04%)	1 (1.96%)	51 (.92%)
15 th	81 (69.23%)	36 (30.77%)	117 (3.80%)	2,857 (97.21%)	82 (2.79%)	2,939 (95.36%)	26 (100%)	- (0%)	26 (.84%)
16 th	68 (40.96%)	98 (59.04%)	166 (3.28%)	4,517 (93.38%)	320 (6.62%)	4,837 (95.52%)	57 (93.44%)	4 (6.56%)	61 (1.2%)
TOT	499 (47.16%)	559 (52.84%)	1,058 (5.18%)	17,471 (91.21%)	1,683 (8.79%)	19,154 (93.73%)	206 (92.38%)	17 (7.62%)	223 (1.09%)

Source: dati.camera.it; dati.senato.it; Italian Law-Making Archive (ILMA).

* This category includes the bills presented by the regions, the CNEL (*Consiglio Nazionale dell'Economia e del Lavoro*) and the popular petitions signed up by 50,000 citizens.

Table 3. Parliamentary bills success in the winnowing stage according to the type of initiative (success rate in parentheses).

Leg.	Only majority			Only opposition			Mixed initiative		
	Not Successful	Successful	Tot.	Not Successful	Successful	Tot.	Not Successful	Successful	Tot.
13 th	1,085 (88.79%)	137 (11.21%)	1,222 (21%)	3,289 (89.38%)	391 (10.63%)	3,680 (63.4%)	761 (84.09%)	144 (15.91%)	905 (15.6%)
14 th	2,324 (90.78%)	236 (9.22%)	2,560 (50.6%)	1,661 (89.11%)	203 (10.89%)	1,864 (36.8%)	567 (82.29%)	68 (10.71%)	635 (12.5%)
15 th	966 (97.38%)	26 (2.62%)	992 (35.3%)	1,281 (98.69%)	17 (1.31%)	1,298 (46.2%)	502 (96.72%)	17 (3.28%)	519 (18.5%)
16 th	2,033 (95.13%)	104 (4.87%)	2,137 (46.3%)	1,523 (92.70%)	120 (7.30%)	1,643 (35.6%)	752 (90.38%)	80 (9.62%)	832 (18%)
TOT	6,408 (92.72%)	503 (7.27%)	6,911 (37.8%)	7,754 (91.38%)	731 (8.61%)	8,485 (46.4%)	2,582 (89.31%)	309 (10.68%)	2,891 (15.8%)

Source: dati.camera.it; dati.senato.it; Italian Law-Making Archive (ILMA).

Table 4. Hypothesized direction of the causal relationships between the explanatory factors and the bills success in the winnowing stage.

Explanatory factor	Hypothesized direction on success
Partisan affiliation (Majority)	+
Parliamentary group president	+
Committee chair	+
Seniority (Num. legislatures)	+
Num. of bills presented (yearly)	-
Num. of co-sponsors	+
Inter-coalition bill	+
Legislative procedure (<i>Sede legislativa</i>)	+
Joined bills	+
Num. of advisory committee	+

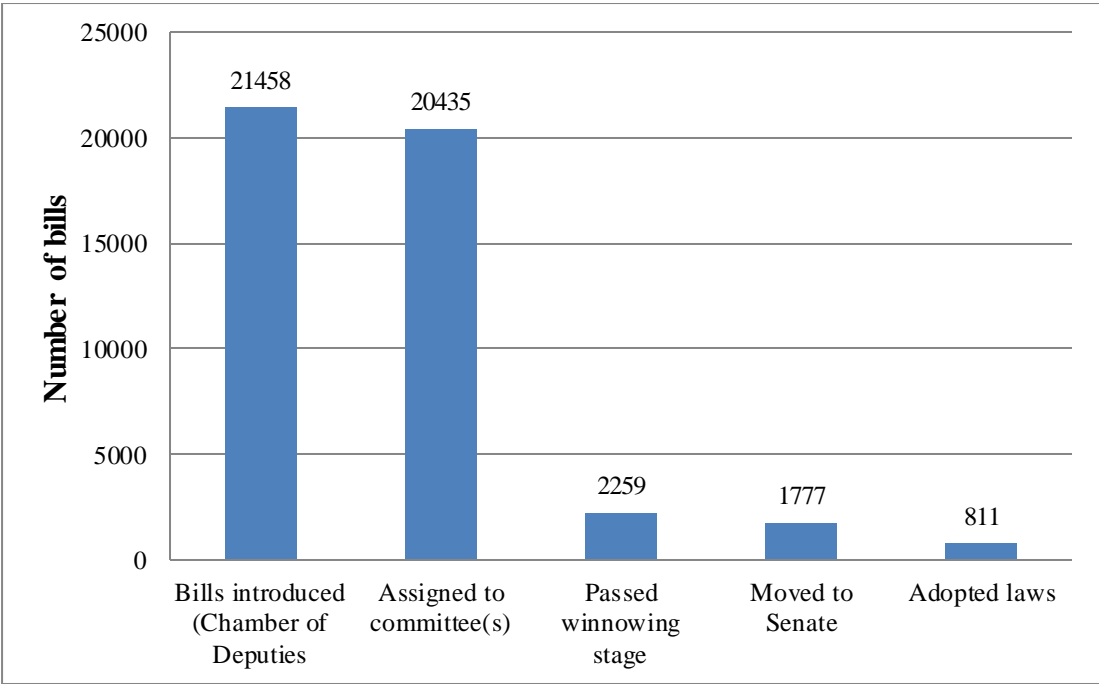
Table 5. Empirical results.

	XIII	XIV	XV	XVI	3-levels	2-levels (Committee)	2-levels (Legislature)	Ordinary logit
Intercept	-3.26 ^{***} (0.27)	-4.00 ^{***} (0.30)	-6.44 ^{***} (0.91)	-3.82 ^{***} (0.46)	-3.82 ^{***} (0.31)	-3.50 ^{***} (0.18)	-4.04 ^{***} (0.33)	-3.71 ^{***} (0.21)
Majority	-0.24 [*] (0.11)	-0.17 [*] (0.12)	0.61 [*] (0.44)	-0.26 [*] (0.17)	-0.18 ^{**} (0.07)	-0.18 ^{**} (0.07)	-0.18 [*] (0.07)	-0.17 [*] (0.07)
Group president	0.15 [*] (0.24)	0.53 [*] (0.28)	-0.19 [*] (0.74)	0.62 [*] (0.31)	0.40 ^{**} (0.14)	0.40 ^{**} (0.14)	0.40 ^{**} (0.14)	0.41 ^{**} (0.14)
Committee chairman	0.40 [*] (0.20)	0.92 ^{***} (0.27)	1.25 [*] (0.98)	0.69 [*] (0.40)	0.64 ^{***} (0.14)	0.64 ^{***} (0.14)	0.63 ^{***} (0.14)	0.63 ^{***} (0.14)
Seniority	0.04 [*] (0.03)	0.03 [*] (0.04)	0.14 [*] (0.15)	0.04 [*] (0.05)	0.05 [*] (0.02)	0.05 [*] (0.02)	0.05 [*] (0.02)	0.05 [*] (0.02)
Bills presented (log)	-0.14 ^{**} (0.05)	-0.17 ^{***} (0.05)	-0.33 [*] (0.20)	-0.10 [*] (0.08)	-0.14 ^{***} (0.03)	-0.14 ^{***} (0.03)	-0.14 ^{***} (0.03)	-0.14 ^{***} (0.03)
More signs/same coalition	0.18 [*] (0.11)	0.04 [*] (0.13)	-0.45 [*] (0.47)	0.71 ^{**} (0.24)	0.17 [*] (0.07)	0.17 [*] (0.07)	0.17 [*] (0.07)	0.17 [*] (0.07)
More signs/diff coalition	0.54 ^{***} (0.14)	0.07 [*] (0.18)	0.14 [*] (0.54)	1.33 ^{***} (0.28)	0.49 ^{***} (0.10)	0.50 ^{***} (0.10)	0.49 ^{***} (0.10)	0.50 ^{***} (0.10)
Decentralized procedure	1.28 ^{***} (0.15)	2.30 ^{***} (0.24)	20.26 ^{***} (807.99)	2.23 ^{***} (0.29)	1.59 ^{***} (0.11)	1.59 ^{***} (0.11)	1.60 ^{***} (0.11)	1.60 ^{***} (0.11)
Joined bills	2.28 ^{***} (0.11)	2.66 ^{***} (0.12)	5.90 ^{***} (0.47)	3.97 ^{***} (0.18)	2.81 ^{***} (0.07)	2.81 ^{***} (0.07)	2.80 ^{***} (0.07)	2.80 ^{***} (0.07)
Advisory committees	0.08 ^{***} (0.02)	0.18 ^{***} (0.02)	0.05 [*] (0.09)	-0.15 ^{***} (0.04)	0.07 ^{***} (0.01)	0.07 ^{***} (0.01)	0.07 ^{***} (0.01)	0.07 ^{***} (0.01)
Leg XIV						0.16 [*] (0.08)		0.16 [*] (0.08)
Leg XV						-1.16 ^{***} (0.15)		-1.17 ^{***} (0.15)
Leg XVI						-0.34 ^{***} (0.09)		-0.35 ^{***} (0.09)
Ambiente							-0.10 (0.21)	-0.09 (0.21)
Att. Produttive							-0.37 (0.22)	-0.36 (0.22)
Bilancio							0.48 (0.31)	0.48 (0.31)
Comunicazioni							1.14 ^{***} (0.20)	1.14 ^{***} (0.20)
Costituzionali							0.38 [*] (0.18)	0.39 [*] (0.18)
Difesa							-0.05 (0.25)	-0.05 (0.25)
Esteri							1.05 ^{***} (0.32)	1.05 ^{***} (0.32)
Finanze							-0.72 ^{**} (0.25)	-0.72 ^{**} (0.25)
Giustizia							0.28 (0.18)	0.28 (0.18)
Istruzione							0.09 (0.18)	0.09 (0.18)
Lavoro							0.31 (0.18)	0.31 (0.18)
Riunite							0.28 (0.20)	0.28 (0.20)
Sociale							0.07 (0.18)	0.08 (0.18)

UE							2.77 ^{**}	2.77 ^{**}
							(1.07)	(1.07)
AIC	3111.98	2309.87	249.97	1249.62	7246.14	7233.09	7220.82	7205.19
BIC	3191.90	2388.22	321.26	1326.86	7347.69	7350.26	7423.93	7423.92
Log Likelihood	-1543.99	-1142.94	-112.98	-612.81	-3610.07	-3601.54	-3584.41	-3574.60
Deviance	3087.98	2285.87	225.97	1225.62	7220.14	7203.09	7168.82	7149.19
Num. obs.	5765	5059	2809	4612	18245	18245	18245	18245
Num. groups: materiacomm	15	15	14	15	15	15		
Variance: materiacomm.(Intercept)	0.48	0.44	0.60	0.93	0.22	0.20		
Variance: Residual								
Num. groups: legislatura					4		4	
Variance: legislatura.(Intercept)					0.26		0.24	

^{***} p < 0.001, ^{**} p < 0.01, ^{*} p < 0.05. Standard errors in parentheses.

Figure 1. Wining of Bills in the Italian Chamber of Deputies, 13th – 16th Legislatures.



Source: dati.camera.it; dati.senato.it; Intalian Law-Making Archive (ILMA).