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HOW DO MACROECONOMIC CONDITIONS AFFECT
THE PARTY-POLICY RELATION?
A STUDY OF PLEDGE FULFILMENT IN TIMES OF
ECONOMIC HARDSHIP

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ABSTRACT

This project investigates how the economic performance of a country affects the policymaking process and the party-policy linkage. More specifically, this research focuses on periods of economic downturn and explores whether governing parties are able to prioritise the adoption of their policy preferences even in times of recession. Drawing on a literature that explores pledge fulfilment to determine the congruence between parties' policy preferences and policies adopted, I investigate this topic using novel data on the realisation of electoral programs in Italy (1996-2018) and existing data on pledge fulfilment in seven democratic countries. By combining research on economic crisis with partisan and pledge studies, I argue that even though it is surely true that pledge fulfilment rates decrease during an economic downturn, partisan actors maintain a certain control over the policy implementation. Indeed, while a deterioration in the economic conditions of a country has a detrimental effect on public budgets, it might as well open up new opportunities and give parties new incentives, not least electoral ones, to carry out their policy proposals.

Keywords: Election promises; Economy; Policymaking; Party manifestos; Political parties

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INTRODUCTION

The issue of whether ideologically different governments pursue distinctive policies and achieve different outcomes is a fundamental aspect of our representative democracies. Indeed, as the Downsian mandate theory (Downs 1957) and its more recent developments¹ indicate, politicians compete during the electoral campaign by proposing alternative policy solutions to the voters, who, in turn, select their preferred candidate on the basis of these programs - although not exclusively. Elections are thus the instruments through which citizens can (indirectly) influence national legislation (Dalton, Farrell, McAllister 2011). In a democratic country, the electoral choice expressed by citizens holds true significance only if and when a change in the ruling party corresponds to a change in the policies implemented. Or, in other words, if there is a strong *party-policy linkage*. Given the relevance of this connection between parties and policies for governments' responsiveness and accountability, this topic has attracted significant scholarly interest. Partisan scholars have generally concluded that parties do matter in the policymaking process, although their capacities to implement their policy preferences depend on the conditions in which they operate, especially on the institutional context (Imbeau, Petry, Lamari 2001; Schmidt 1996). Accordingly, institutional features such as the political system (Royed 1996; Schmidt 1996; von Beyme 1984) and the type of government (Blais, Blake, Dion 1993; Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019; Thomson et al. 2017) provide more (or less) power in the hands of parties for giving a partisan direction to the governing agenda and, therefore, have been extensively researched in the literature.

While institutional factors have long been identified as affecting parties' capacities to shape policies, the impact of the economic context on the party-

¹ i.e. the promissory representation theory (Mansbridge 2003) as well as the model of party government (Ranney 1954).

policy relation is surprisingly under-explored. This scarce scholarly consideration is especially surprising since recent economic transformations call into question parties' ability to accurately represent citizens' demands and enact their policy preferences. A number of important contributions have already delved into the impact of globalisation and economic crises on parties' priorities (Adams, Haupt, Stoll 2009; Traber, Giger, Häusermann 2018; Williams, Seki, Whitten 2016) and electoral outcomes (Dassonneville, Hooghe 2017; Hernández, Kriesi 2016). However, their impact on concrete policy outputs has been less studied. Periods of economic slowdown and stagnation, the increasing integration in the global market, and the proliferation of international and supranational organisations and financial institutions contribute to transforming domestic politics and curtailing national governments' autonomy (Hellwig 2014; Rose 2014). Limits to the partisan room for manoeuvre are particularly evident in times of crises, as was the case after the onset of the Great Recession of 2007-2008. The ratification of austerity measures at the European level to respond to the crisis, for instance, further curtailed domestic actors' leeway and the adoption of structural spending cuts limited the amount of public resources available to implement more expansionary policy measures, with a consequent additional weakening of national partisan players. The severe consequences of the Great Recession on the political arena (Bosco, Verney 2012; Morlino, Quaranta 2016) make it necessary to investigate whether political parties are still able to bring about policy change consistent with their ideological position. Do parties still shape policies? Or, on the contrary, are policies largely unrelated to government partisanship due to the primacy of economic dynamics?

Following this reasoning, a focus on how the economic context constrains (or enables) parties' policymaking is of crucial importance especially today, in a period when the global economy is becoming increasingly interconnected and European countries have dealt with (and some are still dealing with) a severe economic crisis. Therefore, the aim of my research project is to investigate how the economic performance of a country affects the party-policy link and how the macro-economic context interacts with partisan ideologies and parties' capacities in shaping policies.

Partisan influence on policymaking: approaches and empirical results

a. The partisan literature

Since the second half of the XX Century, a long tradition of studies has focused on the functioning of the policymaking process and on the influence political parties have on the implementation of public policies. More specifically, the so-called partisan literature investigated the relation between government partisanship and policy outcomes. Are office-holders able to shape policies? Or, in other words, can the ideological family of the ruling party (or parties) explain policy outcomes? Scholars' interest was to empirically understand if different partisan preferences promoted by ideologically divergent parties could lead to appreciable differences in the policy implemented, especially with regard to economic outcomes. In his pioneering study, Douglas Hibbs (1977) examines the congruence between macroeconomic outputs and the left-right composition of the government in twelve Western countries. His main argument rests on the assumption that political parties - being rational office and policy-seeking actors - should act and promote alternative policies in line with their constituency's interests and concerns. Left-leaning governments should thus support measures to lower unemployment rates aimed at appealing to the working class, while right-wing parties should favour the upper classes' preference for lower inflation. Consistent with his expectations, Hibbs shows that in the post-war period, left-leaning cabinets are associated with higher rates of inflation and lower unemployment levels while the opposite is true for right-wing cabinets (Hibbs 1977). This theoretical contribution paved the way for many other studies investigating the relationship between the partisanship of the government and policy outcomes (for a review of these studies see Imbeau, Petry, Lamari 2001; Schmidt 1996). Evidence provided by several of them corroborates the *parties-do-matter* hypothesis (Alesina, Mirrlees, Neumann 1989; Boix 2000; Castles 1982; Swank 1988), however, other scholars do not come to the same conclusion (Solano 1983) or find little evidence of it, at best (Blais, Blake, Dion 1993; Imbeau, Petry, Lamari 2001).

As studies yield mixed results, criticism has emerged, primarily directed toward the underlying assumptions behind the theory (Kittel, Obinger 2003; Verma 2000) and the methodology employed to address the research question (Guinaudeau 2014). In particular, critics of the partisan theory have questioned the role of political actors in modern representative democracies. Without denying the validity of the parties-do-matter assumption in the post-war period, they claim that political parties can no longer be considered the main actors in policy production. In their viewpoint, post-industrial development, the increasing integration in the global economy, and the proliferation of international and supranational organisations coupled with an economic slowdown have heavily constrained, if not completely suppressed, governments' margin of manoeuvre (Strange 1995). As a result, proponents of a decline-of-partisanship claim suggest that parties no longer matter: subjected to the same constraints, countries should experience a convergence of their policies, regardless of the colour of the ruling party (see the discussion in Boix 2000; Kittel, Obinger 2003; Thomas 1980).

By contrast, evidence from other research continues to find divergence in policy outcomes, though the strength of the party-policy relation seems to differ over time and across countries. Other than the party composition of the governments, partisan theorists have recognised the importance of additional political and socio-economic factors that can affect policy outcomes, which have been thus progressively incorporated in their analyses (see i.e. Castles 1982). A good example of this is Carles Boix's study of the evolution of financial and monetary policies in nineteen countries between 1960 and 1995 (Boix 2000). Consistent with the parties-do-matter hypothesis, he shows that overall the partisanship of the government leads to differences in policy outcomes. At the same time, however, there are periods in which parties enjoy higher discretionary power in the fiscal and monetary sectors, such as right after the end of the Bretton Woods system, and periods in which national actors are more constrained by international dynamics, such as during the liberalisation of capitals (Boix 2000). Similarly, Swank (1988) illustrates that in the years after 1973, the effect of the partisanship of the government on public spending seems par-

ticularly hindered by the negative economic situation. These conclusions, nonetheless, do not corroborate the idea of an end of partisanship. In their meta-analysis of more than forty partisan theory articles, Louis Imbeau and colleagues claim that differences among the governments and the periods under consideration might represent a possible explanation for the conflicting results reported by different studies (Imbeau, Petry, Lamari 2001). But, at the same time, they do not find more support for the partisan theory in research focused on pre-1973 years compared to the ones considering the period after. On the contrary, they argue that results seem to depend on the policy outcomes studied. They suggest that, since the post-war years were characterised by strong economic growth in which ‘left-right partisan conflicts occurred mainly over welfare spending as a means of redistributing a society’s abundant resources’ (Imbeau, Petry, Lamari 2001, 24), the partisan impact on welfare spending should be more evident. Conversely, as the economic downturn of the 1970s has triggered a debate on the size of public budgets, this is the item in which the party-policy relation is stronger. Depending on the period or the country analysed, parties still matter in the policy production, though their effect might be just moderate (Blais, Blake, Dion 1993).

One of the reasons for diverging and sometimes contradictory findings of partisan studies relates to the methodology employed and, specifically, the dependent and independent variables considered (Guinaudeau 2014). Following the study of Hibbs, several scholars have delved into the matter of partisan impact by looking at different economic outcomes: the level of unemployment, the inflation rate, and GDP growth (Alesina, Mirrlees, Neumann 1989; Hibbs 1977; Verma 2000). Macroeconomic outcomes can, however, generate misleading findings as political actors cannot easily and directly shape the economy and impact economic indicators with their policies (Chappell, Keech 1986; Guinaudeau 2014; Hibbs 1986). Other scholars prefer to focus on policies and policy instruments, including monetary policies (Cahan, Doerr, Potrafke 2019; Hibbs 1986), fiscal policies (Boix 2000), and economic policies (Engler, Zohlnhöfer 2019). Also in this case, however, additional factors other than parties’ policy preferences might have an influence on them. With European inte-

gration and the creation of the Eurozone, for instance, several policy domains - first of all, monetary policies - are no longer under the (mere) control of national governments and therefore the influence of the partisanship of the government is expected to be almost null. Other studies indicate as their dependent variable the total government spending or the size of expenditure in specific policy areas (Blais, Blake, Dion 1993; Swank 1988; Verma 2000). However, the stability of budgets can generate results misleading the real partisan impact as well: new governments are hardly able to change significantly the budget allocation and not all policies are budget-related (Guinaudeau 2014).

The choice of the independent variables considered is sometimes problematic as well. Most of the studies presented before form their expectations regarding governments' ideology based on the left-right positioning of the ruling party (or parties). Some scholars measure the percentage of votes for specific parties (von Beyme 1984) or the number of seats in the cabinet allocated to parties on the right and the left of the political spectrum (Blais, Blake, Dion 1993; Verma 2000), others the left/right control of the government (Boix 2000; Swank 1988), others the positioning of the main governing party (Cahan, Dorr, Potrafke 2019; Engler, Zohlnhöfer 2019; Hibbs 1977; 1986). Observing the independent variable through the lens of traditional ideologies provides undeniable advantages like the harmonisation of categories to simplify long-term and cross-national analyses. Nonetheless, contemporary transformations of the socio-economic context as well as of the party systems in Western democracies undermine the foundations of a unidimensional differentiation (Hausermann, Picot, Gerring 2013). Political parties can no longer be considered as organisations that represent defined social groups and have fixed preferences. Theories on the evolution of social class identities, the end of traditional cleavages, and the increasing sensibility of contemporary societies to post-materialist and cultural interests alongside with socio-economic ones show the necessity to go beyond this assumption (Mair 2008; Guinaudeau 2014). As such, considering only the economic dimension of political competition overlooks other important elements structuring parties' policy preferences.

Instead of focusing on the positioning of parties on the traditional left-to-

right spectrum, other scholars have tried to point out alternative indicators that can be used to assess the partisan identity of the government. Thanks to the creation and development of the Comparative Manifesto Project, a new line of research, the salience literature, has thrived (for a review of these studies see Budge 2015). The empirical analysis of manifestos enables policy preferences to be accounted for in each new election by going beyond the assumption of partisan fixed ideology. Moreover, electoral program analysis is useful to capture party competition not only around economic issues but also in other policy areas. To this end, salience scholars compare the emphasis attributed to policy domains in party programs with the size of the public expenditure allocated for those policies. The reasoning is: if a political party deems some issues more important, then it will give more space to these issues in its manifesto and, when elected, it will raise public spending in that specific policy sector.

Even though the contribution of this scholarship to party competition and party responsiveness is undeniable, this method presents some limitations for the study of partisan influence on policy production too. On the one hand, in their campaign programs parties do not merely list their policy preferences but they usually also discuss the state of the country, current problems, and their competitors' viewpoints. Consequently, looking at the salience of policy issues within party manifestos might over or under-estimate partisan intentions. On the other hand, as I discussed above, not all policies require a change in government spending to be implemented.

b. Pledge literature

Given the limitations of partisan and salience studies previously outlined, in this research project I decided to primarily rely on another type of scholarship which provides an alternative method to tackle the party-policy relation: the pledge literature. From the first studies on the US case (i.e. Elling 1979; Pomper 1967), a growing body of literature has delved into the election promises that different candidates and/or political parties make during electoral campaigns (for a brief overview of these studies see Naurin, Royed, Thomson

2019). More than in the issue of pledge-making, these scholars have been particularly interested in the congruence between parties' policy commitments and the legislation adopted by a specific government - what is commonly known as the programme-to-policy linkage (Thomson 2001): do partisan actors keep or break their promises? This is the pivotal question around which pledge literature revolves. Through an analysis of pledge fulfilment, these studies aim to assess governments' performances and political actors' capacity to deliver on their electoral mandate.

Considering the complexity and the length of a thorough analysis of parties' manifestos and legislation, the vast majority of pledge literature studies focuses on single countries (Adhikari, Mariam, Thomson 2022; Artés 2011; Artés, Bustos 2008; Bouillaud, Guinaudeau, Persico 2017; Costello, Thomson 2008; Kostadinova 2019; McMillan 2020; Moury 2011; Moury, Fernandes 2018; Naurin 2011; Pétry, Duval 2018; Royed, Borrelli 1999; Serra-Silva, Belchior 2020; Thomson, Costello 2016). Nevertheless, some comparative works emerged as well, which are especially useful for highlighting differences and continuities among similar and/or different political systems, also over time (Mansergh, Thomson 2007; Royed 1996). The most successful attempt - so far - to provide a cross-national analysis of pledge fulfilment in several countries is represented by the work of the Comparative Pledges Project (CPPP), a research network formed by several pledge scholars who decided to put together their expertise and data in order to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the programme-to-policy linkage (the outcome of their research is published in Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019; Thomson et al. 2017).

The pledge literature provides a substantial contribution to my research in two respects. Firstly, these studies propose a sound approach to explore the extent to which partisan actors are able to influence policy production. Since the first studies of pledge fulfilment, the technique to gather data on the realisation of parties' campaign promises was systematised and refined over time (Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019; Royed 1996). Following this approach, parties' policy preferences are identified by looking at the *concrete* policy measures and outcomes advocated for by the different actors during the electoral campaign and

not by trying to extrapolate their (alleged) priorities from their party family (Hibbs 1977) or the topics they discuss in Parliament (Hobolt, Klemmensen 2005) or in the media (Klüver, Sagarzazu 2016; Seeberg 2023; Sigelman, Buell 2004). Moreover, differently from studies employing the Manifesto Project data (Abou-Chadi, Green-Pedersen, Mortensen 2020; Budge, Hofferbert 1990; Green-Pedersen 2007; Wagner, Meyer 2014), pledge analysis does not consider the content of the electoral programs as a whole by taking into account each phrase present in the original document. Instead, coders select merely those sentences or half-sentences that correspond to a ‘pledge’. To this end, the object of study is the election promises included in parties’ campaign manifestos. On the other hand, parties’ performance is evaluated by looking at the legislation adopted and the goals achieved. This approach consists of comparing what different candidates pledged to do during a specific election and what they actually do when elected. Parties’ ability to deliver on their mandate is therefore assessed through the analysis of the transposition of each campaign engagement into actual policy outputs.

Secondly, pledge studies reveal that - contrary to common beliefs and voters’ perception (Naurin 2011; Thomson 2011) - political parties keep their electoral promises (Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019; Pétry, Collette 2009). Even in countries where national governments are often regarded as weak or considered as having less control over the agenda-setting process (see for instance the case of Italy in Moury 2011), partisan actors are found to implement (at least some of) the policies they promised to adopt to their constituencies during the electoral campaign and attain some of the goals they aspired to. If we start from the premise that election promises perform various functions in our representative democracies, including mirroring parties’ policy preferences (Dolezal et al. 2018; Harmel 2018), high levels of programme-to-policy congruence suggest that political parties continue to play a pivotal role in our contemporary democracies. They do not merely propose alternative policy agendas to the electorate (Artés 2011; Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019; Royed, Borrelli 1999) but they also seem to have the power to influence the law-making process and, consequently, produce a partisan-driven legislation. Or, to use partisan litera-

ture terminology, *parties do matter*.

Under which conditions do parties matter?

Besides assessing whether office-holders stick to their electoral commitments, pledge literature studies provide valuable insight into the conditions favouring or hindering pledge fulfilment as well. Indeed, comparative analyses have revealed that office-holders keep on average 50-60% of their pledges, with sensible differences according to the country or the period analysed. Referring to the data reported in Thomson et al. (2017), for instance, pledge fulfilment rates range from 86% in the UK to less than 50% in Italy and Austria. High variance is also registered within the same country. Analysing the implementation of the campaign proposals made by the two main Spanish parties, Artés (2011) shows that the Socialist Party (PSOE) fulfilled around 74% of its promises in 1989 and 80% in 1993, but the percentage decreased in 1996 and 2000 when only 55% and 34% of the pledges were honoured. Fulfilment rates for the Popular Party (PP) follow a similar pattern, ranging from 36% in 1989 to 70% in 2000 (Artés 2011). Research on Canada also reveals a marked difference in the percentage of promises realised depending on the year under consideration, as only 53% of the electoral commitments were found to be carried out in 1993, a percentage far below the 84% registered in 2011 (Pétry, Duval 2018). As nearly all pledge studies report fulfilment rates varying depending on the period or the government studied, it seems clear that the analysis should not be restricted to investigating whether electoral mandates are translated into government decisions, but more importantly, it has to explore the conditions and motivations that foster this process. Accordingly, pledge scholars do not merely assess *if* parties keep their promises, but they investigate the *conditions under which* they are more likely to do so.

Previous findings have already highlighted the relevance of different elements affecting pledge fulfilment, which can be grouped into three broad categories: (1) institutional factors, (2) characteristics of the promise, and (3) economic conditions.

a. Institutional factors

Various studies of the partisan literature have already pointed to institutional features as elements affecting parties' capacities to shape policies (Blais, Blake, Dion 1993; Castles 1982; Schmidt 1996; von Beyme 1984). Manfred Schmidt, for instance, concludes his review of the parties-do-matter scholarship by claiming that the extent to which the partisanship of the government influences the policymaking process highly depends on specific features of the political system - or the 'state structures' as Schmidt calls them (Schmidt 1996).

Similarly, institutional elements - broadly defined - are by far the variables most analysed by pledge literature. In particular, it is found that pledge fulfilment highly depends on partisan actors' capacities to implement their policies (Brouard et al. 2018) and, above all, on the institutional power resulting from their position in Parliament and government. The relevance of partisan actors' control over policy production is well examined by those contributions that look at the differences in pledge fulfilment between countries. Comparing the Reagan and Thatcher administrations, for instance, Terry Royed (1996) identifies the 'decision-making environment' as one of the main determinants of the realisation of campaign engagements. Based on this, parties in the US are argued to be less effective in carrying out their policy preferences whenever the presidency and one or both houses of Congress are controlled by a different party. That is why, having to share the control of the policy production with the Democrats, the Republicans under Reagan are found to fulfil a lower percentage of promises compared to the Conservatives in the UK who enjoyed a large room for manoeuvre during the first period of the Thatcher era. The structure of the political and party system as well as constitutional arrangements by determining parties' and governments' control over the policymaking process and their autonomy inevitably affect their capacities and opportunities to honour their electoral commitments.

While some scholars have already compared pledge fulfilment under different institutional systems (Mansergh, Thomson 2007; Moury 2011), the first

comprehensive analysis of this argument was conducted by the CPP (Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019; Thomson et al. 2017). Overall, this cross-national analysis of twelve countries substantiates that the strength of the programme-to-policy relation is contingent on institutional factors. More specifically, office-holders in single-party cabinets are found to enjoy the best conditions for fulfilling their promises (Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019; Thomson et al. 2017). Results provided by single-country studies also indicate that being in government rather than in opposition (Artés 2011; Costello, Thomson 2008; Mansergh, Thomson 2007; Thomson 2001), governing alone rather than joining a governing coalition (Thomson 2001), or having the support of a majority rather than a razor-thin minority in Parliament (Moury 2011; Pétry, Duval 2015; 2018) create more favourable circumstances for partisan actors to substantially shape the governing agenda.

While in the case of the difference between majority and minority governments pledge studies deliver inconsistent and varying results, the different efficiency between governing and opposition parties is particularly evident. Parties that are members of the government and have at least one representative in the Cabinet are surely best placed to play a pivotal role in the legislature and the setting of government priorities, though opposition parties are found to deliver on their electoral commitments too (Serra-Silva, Belchior 2020). According to the different countries' constitutional arrangements, governments are provided with several instruments that they can mobilise to privilege their policy proposals, including the power to control the legislative agenda or the authority to issue decree laws.

A great deal of previous pledge studies have drawn attention to pledge fulfilment variation between single-party and coalition governments. Results are conclusive: single-party cabinets are more likely to honour their engagements compared to coalition governments (Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019; Thomson 2001; Thomson et al. 2017). A party in office alone does not have to share the power to control and shape the governing agenda with other partisan actors. As fewer players take part in the decision and law-making stages (Tsebelis 1995) and so as fewer interests and opinions are promoted, the pro-

cess of designing, discussing, and promoting new legislation should run smoothly and quickly. Consequently, it is reasonable to expect a stronger programme-to-policy linkage under single-party governments. On the other hand, when two or more parties have to collaborate and agree on a common policy agenda, things get more complicated. More actors, more interests, and more purposes are involved, emphasising the need for bargaining, negotiations, and concessions among coalition partners. The translation from election promises to policy outputs is therefore less straightforward. In addition, coalition cabinets are usually characterised by a high level of litigiousness and consequently instability, factors which have, for their part, a detrimental effect on pledge fulfilment (Moury 2011).

Taken together, all these studies suggest a strong relationship between pledge fulfilment and institutional (and constitutional) factors and settings. Nevertheless, these are certainly not the only variables involved. Policy production is indeed a very complex process, involving multiple actors with diverse interests, that cannot be considered merely the product of dynamics generated by the party system and/or political system. As the neo-institutionalist approach highlights, institutions do not shape policies *per se*, but rather create the conditions in which governing actors operate their choices (Kühner 2010). In other words, as discussed before, a single-party government provides a more favourable context - i.e. more time in office, a more stable majority, and more control over the policy agenda - for parties to translate their preferences into effective policies. But, in addition to having the power and the support needed to implement their promises – that is, a favourable institutional setting - partisan actors must also want to implement them. As Brouard et al. (2018) have argued, along with capacities, parties need to have incentives and motivations pushing them to commit themselves and to invest the resources at their disposal to carry out their proposals and to prioritise one policy over another. Institutional factors alone cannot thus explain differences in pledge fulfilment rates. Moreover, considering only the institutional context does not allow to identify the conditions under which party pledges are more likely to be realised, under the same or a similar institutional context (Bouillaud, Guinaudeau, Persico

2017). The impact of other factors should be therefore investigated too.

In this regard, in her book about the realisation of election promises in Sweden, Elin Naurin (2011) identifies a total of five elements that might have an influence, according to previous literature, on pledge fulfilment. Along with some institutional-related aspects that I have already mentioned, she underlines the importance of the type of promise and the economic context in which the government under consideration is embedded.

b. Types of promises

Other than by institutional factors, parties' capacities to keep their pledges are also influenced by some specific characteristics of the campaign promise (Bouillaud, Guinaudeau, Persico 2017; Naurin 2011; Pétry, Duval 2015; 2018). As election pledges are commitments that parties take to adopt a specific policy or reach an explicit goal (see definition in Royed 1996), their fulfilment is highly dependent on some features which might increase (or decrease) the complexity of the decision and policy-making processes (Bouillaud, Guinaudeau, Persico 2017). Without going into the debate about the promotion of 'impossible' pledges in party manifestos, some policy measures appear to be easier and quicker to be carried out, while for others parties need to intensify their efforts if they want to see them adopted. More specifically, pledge studies paid special attention to the policy area addressed by the promise (Bouillaud, Guinaudeau, Persico 2017; Royed, Borrelli 1999), the economic resources required to implement the measures (Pétry, Duval 2015; 2018; Thomson, Costello 2016), the coherence with previous legislation (Costello, Thomson 2008; Mansergh, Thomson 2007; Pétry, Duval 2018; Serra-Silva, Belchior 2020; Thomson 2001), inter-party agreement (Costello, Thomson 2008; Mansergh, Thomson 2007; Pétry, Duval 2015; 2018; Serra-Silva, Belchior 2020; Thomson 2001), the social groups benefitting from the policy (Artés, Bustos 2008), and media coverage (Kostadinova 2019). Clearly, politicians are more likely, for instance, to get a policy proposal passed that is aimed at maintaining the status quo - or promoting a small adjustment at the most - compared to bring-

ing about a radical change in the country's legislation (Costello, Thomson 2008; Mansergh, Thomson 2007). Similarly, adopting a specific policy measure and achieving an explicit goal - what is usually referred to as an 'output promise' (Naurin 2011) – require a different effort from partisan actors to be considered as kept (Bouillaud, Guinaudeau, Persico 2017). The latter indeed takes more than just successfully designing, negotiating, voting, and finally enacting a new bill. As the fulfilment of commitments to reduce public debt or to increase the employment rate depends on factors other than party's control over the policymaking process or its motivation, these types of promises are found to be more difficult to redeem (Naurin 2011). Specific characteristics of the election pledges do, thus, matter for their fulfilment.

c. Economic conditions

The final set of factors affecting pledge fulfilment relates to the economic context. Since previous studies highlight the relevance of economic dynamics for domestic policy (Boix 2000; Kittel, Obinger 2003), there are reasons to expect economic conditions to affect the realisation of electoral commitments. Nevertheless, the macroeconomic context, the financial problems, and the budget deficit are often merely mentioned as a side note or introduced to interpret surprising findings by existing pledge studies. Terry Royed and Stephen Borrelli (1999), for instance, list the state of the economy only as an additional argument in the conclusions even though their analysis was focused on the US parties' capacities to successfully promote their economic policy proposals. In the same vein, Thomson (2001) argues that one of the reasons explaining the surprisingly higher fulfilment rate for the Dutch PvdA during its 1994-1998 period in government compared to the period before is to be found in the better economic conditions of that period. Similar conclusions are also drawn by Lisi, Moury, and Belchior (in Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019) in their comparison of pledge fulfilment rates in two socialist governments in Portugal (the Guterres government (1995-1999) and the Sócrates government (2005-2009)). Other scholars discuss the relevance of economic factors for the making and realisa-

tion of election commitments (Mansergh, Thomson 2007; Naurin 2011; Royed 1996) and sometimes include an economic variable in their statistical models (Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019; Thomson et al. 2017), but they fail to provide a thorough analysis of these factors.

Very few studies have attempted to unveil the impact of economic factors on pledge fulfilment. This is for instance the case of François Pétry and Dominic Duval's paper of 2018 in which they hypothesise a correlation between public budgets and pledge fulfilment (Pétry, Duval 2018). As government budgets contribute to determining the funds national governments have to promote their policy agenda - they argue - parties' capacities to honour their commitments should be highly dependent on the state of countries' financial resources. This should be particularly true for those promises that are - either positively or negatively - associated with government spending (i.e. expansionary or restrictive promises). Evidence provided by looking at election promises in Canada between 1993 and 2015 supports their expectation (Pétry, Duval 2018): governing parties are more likely to carry out their programmatic agenda if the country ran a budget surplus in the period before. At the same time, however, expansionary promises do not appear to have a higher likelihood of fulfilment under more favourable economic conditions. Another study that provides further insights into the relationship between the economy and pledge fulfilment is the research conducted by Robert Thomson and Rory Costello on Ireland (Thomson, Costello 2016). Claiming that parties hardly adapt their programmatic agenda to the economic situation of the country during the election year nor to the situation anticipated for the future, they assume lower pledge fulfilment rates in times of economic distress. Here, the main argument proposed is the same as the one discussed by Pétry and Duval (2018): the state of the economy affects public budgets, thus influencing the financial resources at the disposal of parties to carry out their policy proposals. Results from statistical analysis again point to a positive association between economic growth and pledge fulfilment, which seem particularly strong for expansionary promises and promises to lower taxes (Thomson, Costello 2016)

A study of the impact of macroeconomic conditions on partisan policymaking: argument and overview of the thesis

Most of the previous literature shows how the political and the party system as well as the related distribution of power and influence on the decision and policy-making processes affect the capacities and motivations of parties to promote their programmatic policies. Far too little attention, by contrast, has been paid to economic conditions. Even when scholars introduce some economic-related issues, they are merely regarded through their impact on financial resources and budget implications.

This thesis provides an in-depth analysis of the influence of economic factors on the party-policy linkage. More specifically, the focus is on periods of deterioration of economic conditions and crises. To what extent and how does the macroeconomic context of a country affect governing parties' capacities to shape the policymaking process? Are partisan actors able to significantly influence the governing agenda and, thus, promote their policy proposals even during periods of economic distress?

By combining literature on economic crisis with pledge research, I explore the effect of economic dynamics on the party-policy relation. As the institutional and constitutional setting provide partisan actors with more or less power to control and therefore influence the policy-making process, in the same way, the economic situation of the country generates more or less favourable conditions for parties to prioritise their programmatic agenda. Previous research has suggested that parties, in order to affect the policy production, need capacities to carry out their programmatic agenda and incentives to act according to their pre-electoral proposals (Brouard et al. 2018). National and international economic dynamics, as a financial and economic crisis, affect both these aspects. This is, firstly and foremost, a question of financial resources (Pétry, Duval 2018; Thomson, Costello 2016). Needless to say, government budgets are affected, among other things, by the state of the economy. However, beyond constraining public budgets, tough economic times often also lead to issues within the governing body, hampering cooperation and negotiations

among partners, which might jeopardise government stability and control over the law-making process. Additionally, unexpected economic shocks, such as the onset of a financial crisis or rising inflation, alter governments' priorities and, thus, might impel partisan actors to set their campaign promises aside privileging other measures and actions (Stokes 2001). At the same time, however, the economic situation of the country influences the saliency of the policy issues, voters' concerns and demands, and the opportunities that governing parties have to significantly affect the policymaking process. Partisan actors have several incentives, not least electoral ones, to honour their campaign engagements no matter the economic climate. It is indeed true that voters hold them accountable for their capacities to deliver on their mandate (Matthieß 2020). On top of that, electoral commitments should reflect, at least partially, parties' policy preferences and, thus, they should include those measures that parties aim to adopt (Dolezal et al. 2018; Harmel 2018). An economic downturn therefore does not necessarily only have a detrimental effect on the partisan room for manoeuvre, but rather it also opens up new opportunities and gives parties new incentives to carry out their policy proposals. A recession, for instance, might provide a pretext for the adoption of austerity-like measures, while avoiding the blame attached to the implementation of spending cuts. Or, a critical period might generate a rally-around-the-flag behaviour, increasing support and backing for the government's programmatic agenda.

In this light, government partisanship is expected to remain an important determinant in the policymaking process, even during a major recession period. Even though it is surely true that pledge fulfilment rate decreases during an economic downturn, I contend that partisan actors maintain a certain control over the policy decision and implementation, and use this influence strategically.

The dissertation is structured as a collection of four papers.

The first two articles provide a cross-temporal analysis of pledge fulfilment in Italy between 1996 and 2018. Since the role played by macroeconomic factors on parties' capacities to redeem their electoral engagements has not been carefully explored, I decided to structure my research project by proceed-

ing first with a single-case study. Indeed, focusing on a single country allows me to keep several institutional variables – which are previously identified as having an impact on pledge fulfilment – constant. The constitutional arrangements and, specifically, the power conferred in the government’s hands do not change during the period under consideration and all the five governments considered in this analysis are formed by a coalition of parties, though the number of actors involved and the duration of the government varied from case to case. Additionally, taking into account a single country allows for a more fine-grained analysis of how the macroeconomic dimension and the partisan influence on the policy-making process interact within a single political system. The choice of Italy is ideal for this purpose, as during the period under consideration the country has seen a continuous alternation in power of centre-left and centre-right coalitions and has witnessed periods of both economic growth and crisis. A focus on the Italian case provides thus the chance to observe the performance of ideologically different governments under distinct economic circumstances.

To this end, I created a novel dataset on 2,412 election promises and their realisation gathered employing the pledge-testing approach, a method for collecting data on pledge fulfilment refined and employed by previous studies (Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019; Royed 1996).

Building upon Thomson and Costello’s (2016) and Pétry and Duval’s (2018) findings, Chapter 1 examines the financial constraints generated by a recession on the resources required to enact partisan-driven policies. The question of whether Italian ruling parties are still able to adopt their programmatic policies even when they have to deal with limited budgets drives the analysis. In the theoretical discussion, I posit that negative economic conditions might only hinder the implementation of those promises that require an allocation of public resources to be carried out. As not all promises are budget-based and since governing parties have incentives to honour their electoral engagements, other types of promises are expected to be prioritised. Three main results are obtained. First of all, parties in office maintain a certain room for manoeuvre to influence the governing agenda even in times of crisis. Italian governing parties

are found to fulfil a similar share of promises during periods of deterioration of economic conditions compared to normal or growing times. Then, contrary to the viewpoint upheld in previous papers (Thomson, Costello 2016), I provide evidence that during economic recessions the promises that require an expansion of public spending are not less likely to be fulfilled compared to other types of pledges. No matter the state of the national economy, expansionary promises have always a higher probability of fulfilment than non-expansionary ones. Finally, my analysis reveals that parties' capacity to shape policies is also highly contingent on their ideological family. In particular, left-leaning governments are particularly hampered by worsening economic conditions.

After exploring the financial constraints and the discretionary power that parties still hold in times of crisis, Chapter 2 deals with the opportunities that a recession might provide for parties to continue to adopt their preferred policies. To this end, in this chapter, I address whether under different economic conditions, political parties prioritise the implementation of different promises on the basis of their policy domain. Accordingly, the main focus is the policy issue of electoral commitments. Results suggest that during economic downturns parties strategically focus on socioeconomic issues. Electoral and political motivations, reputation issues, and voters' concerns boost partisan politics even in times of economic deterioration. A recession indeed seems to increase the electoral incentives that motivate partisan entrepreneurs to respond to their voters' requests and to increase their attention to the core problems of society. As was the case for the previous chapter, findings illustrate a relation between pledge fulfilment and the ideological family to which the governing party belongs. In particular, left parties are found to be able to fulfil a higher percentage of their social policy promises as the economy declines. At the same time, budget constraints and pressures to redress the balance pressure Italian parties to adopt restrictive and austerity-like measures in the economic sector, no matter their ideological affiliation.

Taken together, the conclusions drawn in the analysis of Italy provide a relevant contribution to the pledge literature and the literature on the party-policy linkage more broadly. Firstly, results reveal that the influence of the

state of the national economy on parties' capacities to deliver on their promises hinges on the type of policy and the family of the party under consideration. Additionally, I corroborate that even during an economic downturn partisan actors maintain a certain control over the policy implementation.

The first two chapters reveal that governing parties continue to keep a significant number of promises even under negative economic circumstances and this is because an economic recession opens up new opportunities for parties to carry out their policy proposals. One could argue that there might be an alternative reason for this somewhat surprising finding: anticipating the negative economic situation, partisan actors might adjust their policy proposals to the expected resources and capacities, by promising for instance more modest policies during the electoral campaign when future trends seem to show signs of slowing economy. Clearly, I do adopt some specific precautions to control for this possibility in my analysis. Nevertheless, I decided to carry out another study to specifically explore whether parties adapt their election programs to the state of the economy. This is the topic of Chapter 3.

To tackle this question, I compare the policy issues of election promises made in elections held right before and right after 2008 – where 2008 is considered the year of reference for the outbreak of the Great Recession in Europe - in three countries: Italy, Sweden, and France. Drawing upon salience literature, there are reasons to expect political parties to make more promises related to socio-economic issues after the onset of the Great Recession compared to the period before. According to the riding-the-wave argument, being strategic actors, parties emphasise the issues that are currently salient for the electorate and in the media (Klüver, Sagarzazu 2016). Since parties' election manifestos should reflect their voters' main problems and external conditions, during a period of economic distress election promises are expected to increasingly deal with economic matters and social concerns.

One of the most significant findings emerging from this analysis is that political parties do not seem to have adapted their policy priorities to the negative economic situation: after the onset of a severe economic recession parties' campaign engagements cover similar issues compared to the period before. On-

ly a small percentage of promises refers to a different policy domain. When there is a change, party pledges focus further on economic matters, while less attention has been devoted to social issues. In line with previous studies (Borghetto, Russo 2018; Seeberg 2023), when partisan actors adjust their policy preferences to the economic context they engage in those issues that are more salient for their voters and the electorate more in general.

Finally, Chapter 4 is a cross-national analysis of pledge fulfilment in eight countries: Canada, Ireland, Bulgaria, Germany, Sweden, Spain, Austria, and Italy. The idea behind this study is to test and try to generalise the conclusions about the influence of macroeconomic conditions on parties' capacities to shape policies built in the previous chapters on other institutional, socio-economic, and political environments. In this case, I rely on secondary data gathered by the Comparative Pledges Project (Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019; Thomson et al. 2017), that I combine with my data on the realisation of Italian promises.

Elements related to the institutional dimension are the ones most analysed by pledge studies. Several scholars have already shown the importance for pledge fulfilment of the distribution of power in the system and parties' capacities to frame and influence the government agenda (Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019; Thomson et al. 2017). Their attention was particularly focused on whether the government was formed by a single party or a coalition (see also Thomson 2001). Few studies, on the other hand, addressed the relevance of the economic context. And when they did, they were mostly focused on a single country (Thomson, Costello 2016; Pétry, Duval 2018). For this reason, in this chapter, my aim is to explore the extent to which macroeconomic conditions affect pledge fulfilment and how the effect of the economic context might differ from different types of governments. Specifically, I contend that all those features that are found to generate more favourable conditions for single-party governments to fulfil their promises compared to coalition governments are exacerbated during bad economic times. As parties in government have even less financial resources, the governments are even more unstable, and the conditions on which the coalition agreement was based change, I expect the differ-

ences in pledge fulfilment depending on the type of government to be even higher during periods of economic distress.

Consistent with previous findings, evidence suggests that coalition cabinets are less likely to keep their promises compared to single-party cabinets. However, when the state of the economic situation is controlled for, pledge fulfilment is significantly different for single-party and coalition governments only in periods of deteriorating economic conditions. On the contrary, in flourishing times, partisan actors who are members of a governing alliance are as effective as parties governing alone in pushing and carrying out their policy proposals. Finally, as the ideological family of the party was a key variable in explaining pledge fulfilment in Italy, I also look at the differences between left and right parties. While during bad economic times, right-wing parties do not seem to differ whether they governed alone or in coalition, left parties are found to be significantly more likely to take up their engagements in single-party governments than in coalition cabinets. Then, as the economy starts growing, this difference is again not statistically significant. Overall, this last chapter reveals that pledge fulfilment is contingent on both institutional and economic factors and, as such, both need to be taken into account by future research.

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CHAPTER 1

DO PARTIES KEEP THEIR PROMISES IN TIMES OF ECONOMIC DISTRESS? THE IMPACT OF FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS ON PARTISAN POLICYMAKING IN ITALY (1996-2018)²

Parties are key actors in Western democracies. Among other essential functions, they propose political alternatives to their constituencies and commit to enacting policies by organising and influencing the policymaking process (Dalton, Farrell, McAllister 2011). However, the centrality of parties in the policymaking process has been frequently questioned in the literature (Boix 2000; Hibbs 1977). In particular, parties' ability to influence the political agenda is recently challenged by the global financial crisis that broke out in 2007 and the consequent European sovereign debt crisis (Clements, Nanou, Real-Dato 2014; Roberts 2017). Are parties still able to produce ideologically driven policies even when confronted with an economic downturn? And more generally, to what extent and how does the macroeconomic context affect the party-policy linkage? At first glance, it is conceivable that financial constraints as well as the imposition of austerity and spending cuts reforms at the European level weaken national actors' discretion. Proponents of a decline-of-partisanship thesis, for instance, uphold that an economic downturn strongly curtails partisan autonomy, regardless of parties' ideological positioning (Pierson 2002). Some scholars of the 'convergence school' (Imbeau, Pétry, Lamari 2001, 1) even suggest that partisanship may no longer be a determinant factor explaining the policymaking process. In other words, no matter which party is in office, the policies adopted are similar. In contrast with these studies, in this chapter I contend that the influence of macroeconomic conditions on

² This chapter is an adapted version of my published paper Borgnino, G. 2023. "Do Parties Still Shape Policies in Times of Crisis? The Impact of Financial Constraints on Partisan Policymaking in Italy (1996-2018)", *Party Politics* 29 (6): 1088-1099.

partisan policymaking is more complex than it is usually depicted and needs further and deeper consideration.

Drawing on a literature that explores pledge fulfilment (i.e. the congruence between electoral partisan promises and the legislation enacted once in office) to determine the strength of the party-policy relation (Royed 1996), I investigate this topic using novel data on the realisation of electoral manifestos in Italy (1996-2018). A cross-temporal comparison allows observing how the macro-economic dimension affects partisan influence on policymaking within a single political system. Thus, keeping institutional variables constant allows focusing more clearly on the impact of economic variables. In addition, Italy is an ideal case study since, in the period under consideration, it has experienced variation both in the ideological composition of governments - with alternation in power between centre-left and centre-right coalitions - and in the economy - from the high levels of unemployment at the end of the 1990s and the deceleration of growth in the early 21st century, to the onset of the Great Recession and the sovereign debt crisis.

This chapter intends to demonstrate that parties still play a fundamental role in the policymaking process even in economically hard times. The deterioration and/or the improvement of the national economy generate different incentives for and constraints on political actors that affect the transposition of programmatic goals into actual policies. Specifically, in line with previous studies, the analysis is mostly focused on the financial constraints generated by an economic slowdown (see also Pétry, Duval 2018; Thomson, Costello 2017). To this end, I consider the differences in pledge fulfilment rates between costly policy proposals and promises that are not budget-related.

Evidence provided in the Italian case is clear: the impact of the economy is stronger for promises that require an expansion in public spending. As the odds of adopting expansionary policies plummet during a recession, their fulfilment greatly increases during economic upturns. Nevertheless, expansionary promises are more likely to be concretely carried out compared to non-budget-related promises regardless of the state of the economy. Moreover, my analysis reveals that while centre-left parties' capacities to influence the policymaking

process highly depend on the economic situation of the country, right parties are less challenged by macroeconomic factors.

1.1 *Partisan politics and economic performance*

This study draws upon a scholarship that empirically explores the existence of a party-policy linkage by looking at the congruence between parties' electoral promises and policy outputs. Single-country and comparative analyses demonstrate that what parties do (and are able to do) in office depends largely on institutional factors and, in particular, on parties' degree of control over the policymaking process (Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019; Royed, Borrelli 1999; Thomson et al. 2017). Consequently, governing parties (Artés 2013; Costello, Thomson 2008) and especially single-party governments (Thomson 2001; Thomson et al. 2017) are better placed to influence the political agenda, while pre-electoral agreements considerably increase the likelihood of fulfilling election promises in coalition governments (Mansergh, Thomson 2007; Moury 2011).

While several of the aforementioned studies include economic growth in their statistical models - mainly as a control factor - the extent to which the economic context interacts with partisan ideologies and partisan politics has received scant scholarly attention. Artés (2013) and Lisi, Moury and Belchior (in Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019) merely cite the economic situation as a justification for the lack of a strong difference in governments' performances under minority and majority executives in Spain and Portugal, respectively. In a similar vein, Robert Thomson (2001) lists economic growth among the factors explaining the strikingly higher fulfilment rate of the 1994 Dutch election manifestos compared to previous periods. Other scholars recognise the importance of the external financial situation but fail to sufficiently discuss its role in the policymaking process. For instance, along with the institutional context, the governing position, the prime-ministership, and the characteristic of the promise, in her theoretical discussion, Elin Naurin (2011) includes the socio-economic context among the main variables influencing pledge fulfilment,

without however analysing it in depth nor testing in the Swedish case. In their comparative study of the influence of institutional factors in twelve countries, Thomson and colleagues (2017) also find a positive association between the average economic growth in the mandate and pledge fulfilment (see also Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019). Yet, the significance of the coefficient disappears when single-party governments are studied separately from coalitions. This may suggest that the key variable is not the economic growth *per se*, but the differences among the constitutional and economic contexts of the countries analysed.

Far more interesting than these two large-N studies are, thus, single-country ones, where it is more evident how the economic context affects government performance since institutional factors are held constant. Thomson and Costello's article (2016) tries to do precisely that by focusing on the influence of economic conditions on pledge fulfilment in Ireland. According to their findings, the realisation of election promises is less likely when economic conditions deteriorate. Besides, pledges to cut taxes and to expand programs are particularly conditioned by financial problems. They argue that the main reason behind these findings lies in the fact that partisan actors do not adapt their manifestos to the situation by making, for instance, fewer promises to increase public spending when the economy worsens. But even so, the reasoning goes, it is unrealistic to think that political actors can exactly anticipate the future state of the national economy several years in advance. Similarly, Pétry and Duval (2018) examining Canadian governments underline the relevance of budget surplus for enhancing the likelihood of adopting governing parties' policy preferences. Partisan office-holders are found to keep more promises during a more favourable period in this case too. More importantly, they offer compelling evidence that the probability of fulfilling pledges strongly decreases as time passes when budgets run a deficit. Clearly, at the beginning of a new mandate partisan actors may try to impose their agenda, but very quickly they have to face the hard truth of the challenging situation and, thus, the necessity to cope with limited resources curtails the room for partisan manoeuvre. Finally, unlike Thomson and Costello's article, no significant association is found

between the state of the economy and the promises to increase spending.

In a nutshell, most of the existing studies reveal how institutional factors influence parties' capacities to promote their policy preferences (Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019; Thomson et al. 2017), but they rarely explore thoroughly the extent to which macroeconomic conditions can play a role in this process too. And even when they do, contrasting findings do not allow drawing clear conclusions. This chapter aims at making a substantial contribution to the literature by questioning at least two premises on which these studies are based. Firstly, economic crises are usually merely considered as constraining moments. Indeed, empirical evidence provided by various studies indicates that, albeit subjected to some constraints, parties are committed to realising (and actually do realise) their policy preferences, or at least a part of them, even in times of economic distress (Dalton, Farrell, McAllister 2011). For instance, in a fascinating long-term study across nine liberal welfare state countries before and after the onset of the Great Recession, McManus (2018) notes the growing importance of partisan ideology in social spending changes in the post-crisis period. In particular, differences in crisis management between the US and the UK can be partially explained by the divergent approaches adopted by Democrats and Conservatives (McManus, 2018; for similar results on the preservation of some policy discretion during an economic crisis see also Bermeo, Pontusson 2012). As outlined in the next section, the relationship between economy and partisan politics is so multifaced and complex that should not be restricted to the constrained capacities, financial above all, engendered by recession periods, and to their curtailing impact on partisan action. Secondly, existing studies do not question if and how pledge fulfilment can be affected differently by the macroeconomic situation depending on the ideological family of the ruling party. Supposedly, having their own preferences and constituencies, political parties from the left are not submitted to the same limitations and incentives generated by a critical period as right-wing parties. Starting from these considerations, in the next section I discuss the main hypotheses of this chapter.

1.1.1 Hypotheses

At first glance, it is perfectly plausible to expect an economic slowdown to generate major financial and political limitations to the realisation of parties' electoral manifestos. Needless to say, during a recession period, when public budgets are curtailed and sovereign debt increases, parties have to deal with strained resources to finance their programmatic measures (Morlino, Quaranta 2016). In the meantime, the need to pursue structural reforms and spending cuts narrows parties' policy options (Roberts 2017). Differently than under ordinary times, parties cannot implement all the policies they want but have to choose among a limited number of alternatives dictated by the particular situation (Bosco, Verney 2012). Other than by the availability of financial resources, the partisan influence on policymaking is also indirectly affected by the state of the economy. In the aftermath of the Great Recession, for instance, citizens held their governments responsible for the difficult period and considered them powerless to promptly meet new social demands (Morlino, Raniolo 2018). Lacking popular support, governments were more unstable and recorded a loss of confidence. Meanwhile, parties attempt to shift the responsibility for the negative economic consequences on their government allies. Conflicts within the governing coalitions become then a recurring leitmotif that jeopardises the executive's cohesion and agreement on the political agenda. As already demonstrated in the case of Italy (Moury 2011), more internally-fragmented coalitions have greater difficulties in gathering the necessary support for getting their policy measures passed in Parliament (Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019). Summing up, I first test the assumption which is directly derived from previous research (Pétry, Duval 2018; Thomson, Costello 2016): an economic slowdown may be regarded as a period where partisan office-holders are highly constrained in their action and their decision by the external situation, so their capacity to shape policies is at its lowest.

H1. Pledge fulfilment rate is lower during periods of economic slowdown compared to normal times.

The expectation of a lower fulfilment rate during an economic downturn may be particularly true for costly policies. Arguably, budget limitations most-

ly hinder the implementation of those policies that require consistent financial resources to be concretely implemented (Thomson, Costello 2016). At the same time, however, political parties have incentives to continue to keep their electoral engagements and meet their constituency's requests in order to appear trustworthy and responsive to their voters and, therefore, to get re-elected (Brouard et al. 2018) even when they deal with major economic problems. Hence, we might anticipate that, with their hands admittedly tied by strained budgets, governing parties can still have a say in policy production by focusing their financial and political resources on the adoption of some promises that are easier to be redeemed. This may be the case of non-expansionary pledges, promises with a more symbolic, ideological, or regulation nature, thus with a reduced impact on government spending. For instance, the realisation of the *jus solis* principle for the children of migrants - strongly supported by the Democratic Party during the 2013 electoral campaign - having no budget implications should not depend on the state of the national economy but just on party's capacities and motivations to keep the promise (Brouard et al. 2018). Following this reasoning, albeit constrained, parties may still produce partisan-driven legislation. Differently from the first hypothesis, I expect that in economically strained times only the probability of realising expansionary promises decreases whilst other types of pledges are not affected by the negative situation.

H2. During periods of economic slowdown, expansionary pledges are less likely to be fulfilled than other types of pledges.

The last hypothesis of this study examines a third possibility. Expansionary policies (or at least a subgroup of them) could be more likely to be fulfilled because of the heavy pressure exerted on governing parties by the external socio-economic situation and voters. These pressures should be particularly strong in a period with high volatility and in a multi-party system like the Italian one: having at his disposal a vast selection of parties, the dissatisfied voter can easily find a new party to support in the next elections.

Following Sylvain Brouard and colleagues' (2018) intuitions, in addition to capacities parties need to have incentives, mainly political and electoral ones, that encourage them to commit to enacting their programmatic prefer-

ences. The moment of the electoral cycle, the social group supporting a policy, and the salience of the issue, all these elements contribute to fostering partisan policymaking (Brouard et al. 2018). During periods of a slowdown of economic growth, new pressures emerge: economic matters come to the forefront of the political debate and citizens increasingly demand protection against unemployment and decline of families' income and assets (Bremer 2018; McManus 2018; Singer 2013). As a result, parties are incentivised to try to carve out space for those kinds of policies, which usually require a consistent allocation of financial resources. Being attentive to their constituency's needs and answering their requests is indeed electorally rewarding for partisan actors. Alternatively to the second hypothesis, this reasoning suggests that the adoption of expansionary pledges does not inevitably plummet during a recession.

In particular, the last hypothesis of this study is built on Christine Lipsmeyer's insight that a '[...] strategy that may work during prosperous periods may not be ideal during economically difficult times' (Lipsmeyer 2011, 960). To explore the strategies that may boost partisan policymaking, particular attention should be reserved to the differences between party families and the different incentives that motivate them to translate their programmatic goals into actual policies.

Left parties should be more constrained by budget deficits in their capacities to honour their electoral engagements since they are usually promoting and favouring more expansionary measures. At the same time, since left-leaning governments are traditionally more likely to be electorally punished if adopt restrictive measures or do nothing during an economically critical period (Alonso, Ruiz-Rufino 2020), it is plausible to expect that left parties are more sensitive to these crisis-induced demands. In addition, driven also by ideological commitment, they are willing to fully engage to expand public spending in certain sectors, especially during hard times. And an economic downturn may provide them with the chance to act.

In the meantime, right-wing parties are also subjected to the same pressures. In this case, however, being responsive to the electorate's concerns means distancing themselves from their programmatic preferences. Traditional-

ly, in fact, right parties are concerned by tax cuts and a decrease of state intervention in the economy, usually classified as unpopular measures, especially during tough economic times. But, since parties are supposed to ‘invest their limited resources in adopting those policies they expect to be the most rewarding’ (Brouard et al. 2018, 907), right-leaning governments are incentivised to act responsively as well. Even if this results in decreasing the congruence between their policy proposals and the measures implemented during their mandate. The third hypothesis tries to capture the expectation of a different fulfilment rate between left and right-wing governing parties. Election promises to increase spending of the left match more exactly the population’s needs and requests during a recession.

H3. During periods of economic slowdown, left and centre-left parties are more likely to fulfil their expansionary promises than right and centre-right parties.

1.2 Data and methods

1.2.1 Pledge-testing approach and case selection

For this study, I collected novel data on pledge fulfilment in Italy following the pledge-testing approach (Royed 1996), a method for assessing partisan policymaking by looking at the fulfilment rate of electoral pledges. Therefore, instead of analysing parties through their traditional positioning on the mono-dimensional left-right axis, party preferences are identified with their campaign promises that ‘crystallise’ partisan interests at a very specific moment (Bremer 2018).

In compliance with the guidelines established by this approach (Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019), I created a dataset following different steps. Firstly, I identified all the promises included in parties’ election manifestos. For this study, only the programs of governing parties, the ones that according to the literature are best placed to influence the policymaking process (Thomson et al. 2017), are analysed. More precisely, this chapter looks at the realisation of nine

Italian programmatic platforms, from 1996 to 2018 (Table 1). The technocratic government guided by Mario Monti (2011-2013) is excluded from this analysis since it replaced the previous Berlusconi cabinet without holding elections or presenting a programmatic platform. Concerning the general elections of 1996, 2001, 2006, and 2008, I exclusively considered the programs of the four pre-electoral coalitions that stood for election, instead of including manifestos for each single party member of the governing alliance.³ In fact, like party programs, Italian coalition platforms contain concrete and realistic policy proposals on which allied parties agreed (Marangoni 2010) and thereby play a key role in the choice of future governing decisions (Moury, Timmermans 2008). I can therefore expect coalition governments to truly commit to achieving their shared manifestos (or at least a part of them) when in office.

Table 1. Italian governments (1996-2018) and the electoral programs analysed.

Election	Parliamentary Term	Government(s)	Electoral Programs	Number of pledges
1996	1996-2001	Prodi I D'Alema I D'Alema II Amato II	Olive Tree	585
2001	2001-2006	Berlusconi II Berlusconi III	House of Freedoms	328
2006	2006-2008	Prodi II	The Union	797 ^a
2008	2008-2011	Berlusconi IV	People of Freedom Northern League	171 34
2013	2013-2018	Letta Renzi Gentiloni	Democratic Party People of Freedom Civic Choice Union of the Centre	72 201 185 43

^a 253 of the total 797 pledges coded are from Catherine Moury (Data collected for the comparative project presented in Thomson et al. (2017))

For the 2013 elections, since neither electoral alliance won the majority of seats and a grand coalition government was formed (Baldini 2013), all four

³ For the 2008 elections also the program of the Northern League is analysed since, even though the party was a member of the governing coalition, it did not share the electoral manifesto with its other allies (PoF).

main parties supporting Letta's government are included in the dataset. Even though during the parliamentary term (2013-2018) the ruling coalition changed, existing parties split and new partisan organisations emerged, these programs still mirror the policy preferences of those new parties that supported the parliamentary majority. People of Freedom, officially a unitary party created by the merger between Go Italy and National Alliance in 2009, split up in November 2013 and the newly formed New Centre-Right party continued to sustain Letta and then Renzi's governments. Similarly, from Civic Choice and Union of the Centre new political forces were formed and some of them remained in the majority. All the electoral manifestos are garnered from the Manifesto Project dataset.

Within the manifestos thus selected, I identified all those sentences or quasi-sentences that correspond to single electoral promises. To detect only the pledges whose fulfilment can be truly evaluated, promises were strictly defined, as is commonly done in similar works, as 'a commitment to carry out some action or produce some outcome, where an objective estimation can be made as to whether or not the action was indeed taken or the outcome produced' (Royed 1996: 79). All rhetorical and too ambiguous sentences (i.e. 'Rebuild the wheels of civil justice', Olive Tree, 1996), as well as claims on general principles (i.e. 'The only answer to populism is democratic participation', Democratic Party, 2013), were excluded.

The final dataset includes 2,412 promises made by nine Italian parties/electoral coalitions in the five elections held from 1996 to 2013 (Table 1).

1.2.2 Evaluation of pledge fulfilment

The second step of the pledge-testing approach consists of evaluating for each promise its fulfilment. Hence, the partisan influence on policy production was quantified by looking at the congruence between what parties promise and what they actually accomplish when in government. Firstly, I had to identify the laws and parliamentary acts that might have turned each pledge into practice. To do so, an important source of information was the Italian Chamber of

Deputies website. On this page, the main legislation approved during the legislature is grouped by policy issue and comments and descriptions of parliamentary activity make it easier to identify the different bills. Reports published by the Parliamentary committees and the Senate were also a useful tool for identifying laws, bills, and decrees. Other important resources were the documents published by the party/coalition at the end of their mandate. These documents, usually published on the party or coalition website, list the main achievements and the main actions taken by the government.⁴ If no relevant information was present within these documents, I proceeded to perform a keyword search into the archives of important national newspaper outlets (i.e. *La Repubblica* and *il Corriere della Sera*). I also used the Google platform in order to look for specialised journals or web pages that could have discussed newly adopted laws in a particular sector. Then, I read the actual content of the bills to determine whether the governing coalition effectively realised its campaign promise or not. Pledges on goals (i.e. ‘We will reduce public spending’, *People of Freedom*, 2008) were evaluated also looking at data from national (ISTAT) and international (World Bank, OECD) statistics. Additional information about the data collection process can be found in the Appendix.⁵

Pledges were then grouped into five categories: (1) the policy adopted is the opposite of what the party promised in its manifesto; (2) the pledge is broken; (3) the policy is included in the agenda, proposed and discussed by the cabinet members and/or in Parliament but then, for different reasons, is not

⁴ i.e. ‘Il governo Berlusconi: le principali realizzazioni’; ‘Il Governo Prodi: rapporto conclusivo sull’attuazione del programma di Governo’.

⁵ A reliability test was conducted comparing my data with the data coded by Catherine Moury for the *People of Freedom* manifestos of 2008 (Thomson et al. 2017): among the 107 pledges compared, 73,8 per cent of agreement was found. While a systematic pattern cannot be identified, disagreement can be partially explained by the different interpretation of the actual meaning of some pledges. For instance, the promise to reintroduce a baby bonus was evaluated as fulfilled by Moury since the government funded a ‘New Born Credit Fund’ while I considered that only with the introduction of birth grants this pledge could be really realised.

adopted; (4) the pledge is considered only partially fulfilled because some policies in the direction of the electoral promise are implemented, but the pledge cannot be evaluated as completely realised; (5) the pledge is fully fulfilled. For the purposes of the analysis, these original coding categories are rearranged into two broader ones: (1) pledge at least partially fulfilled, combining pledges partially and fully realised; (0) broken pledges, with all the residual categories.

1.2.3 Independent variables

Three independent variables are included in the study. Firstly, to identify the governments that experienced an economic slowdown during their mandate, I follow Thomson and Costello (2016) and define the change in the GDP per capita growth level as the difference between the average growth in the parliamentary term and the economic growth in the election year. A negative value of the *change in GDP growth* variable corresponds to a period in which parties and/or coalitions in office have to deal with economic decline during their mandate, while a positive value indicates economic expansion.

Secondly, I created the variable *expansionary pledge* to highlight if a promise explicitly refers to an increase in public expenditure, the creation of new public agencies or jobs, the promotion of public investments or projects. In other words, this category includes all the policies that require, in one way or another, an allocation of public resources to be implemented. Promises such as ‘Reintroduction of baby bonus’ (People of Freedom, 2008) or ‘Program of investments on human capital’ (Civic Choice, 2013) are both classified as expansionary pledges, whilst claims like ‘Reduction of the number of senators to 150’ (The Union, 2006) or ‘Regulation of lobby activities’ (Civic Choice, 2013) are not.

Finally, three broad categories are created to group the party and/or the coalition with respect to their ideological family: right and centre-right parties (including the Northern League party, the House of Freedoms, and the People of Freedom coalitions); left and centre-left parties (Democratic Party, the Union, and Olive Tree alliances); centre parties (Civic Choice and Union of the

Centre).

Several institutional variables usually considered relevant in simplifying or curtailing the realisation of electoral manifestos, such as the difference between single-party governments and coalition ones, are not taken into consideration since I look at a single country where all the governments are formed by a coalition. Others, such as the duration (in days) of the parliamentary term and the total number of pledges contained in each electoral manifesto are included in the analysis as control variables. Clearly, availability of time is a non-negligible key driver for promoting and getting programmatic policy proposals passed in Parliament, especially in a ‘perfect bicameralism’ system, such as the Italian one, where the adoption of every bill identically both in the Chamber of Deputies and in the Senate requires a longer procedure. Lastly, it is plausible to expect that it requires a greater effort to address a larger number of electoral engagements. And since the number of promises made differs considerably depending on the year and the party (see Table 1) also this variable has to be controlled for.

1.3 *Results*

In this section, I discuss the main findings of the analysis of Italian partisan politics under different macroeconomic conditions. Table 2 illustrates pledge fulfilment rates in Italy (1996-2018). Consistent with previous findings (Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019), Italian governing coalitions, on the whole, keep a narrow majority of their electoral engagements (50.7%), with significant variations among the periods under consideration. Since parties and coalitions participate in the elections with consistently different programs, the fact that the majority of pledges are redeemed contradicts the end-of-partisan-policymaking assumption whilst, at the same time, confirming the extant presence of a certain degree of space for partisan manoeuvre in policy production. In accordance with research on coalition platforms in Italy (Marangoni 2010; Moury, Timmermans 2008), these electoral manifestos seem to provide relevant insights about governments’ future actions. Even though, comparatively

speaking, Italy is one of the countries with lower fulfilment rates (Moury 2011), pre-electoral coalition platforms remain a key resource for exploring the programmatic agenda shared by allied parties, their policy priorities, and the issues around which they establish a joint position.

Table 2. Pledge fulfilment in Italy (1996-2018).

Period	Pledges broken		Pledges at least partially fulfilled		Total	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
1996-2001	47.2	276	52.8	309	100.0	585
2001-2006	47.0	154	53.0	174	100.0	328
2006-2008	55.6	443	44.4	354	100.0	797
2008-2013	52.7	108	47.3	97	100.0	205
2013-2018	42.0	209	58.0	288	100.0	497
Before-2008	51.0	873	49.0	837	100.0	1710
After-2008	45.2	317	54.8	385	100.0	702
Total	49.3	1190	50.7	1222	100.0	2412

This preliminary overview allows observing whether pledge fulfilment rate is actually lower during a severe economic recession (H_1), such as after the onset of the Great Recession in Italy (after 2008). The higher percentage of broken promises by the Berlusconi IV government could be comfortably explained by its presence in office when the Great Recession hit the national economy. Increasing pressures at the European level for implementing austerity reforms and spending cuts, reaffirmed also in the joint letter sent in August 2011 from the ECB and the Bank of Italy to Berlusconi's cabinet, contribute to widening the gap between what parties pledged to do and what they could actually do in office. Arguably, the program presented during the electoral campaign is no longer in line with the new situation that has arisen and with which the parties in government have to deal. It is reasonable to expect that parties' programmatic policies will go unheeded if during their electoral mandate external conditions change unexpectedly (Stokes 2001). Moreover, the growing litigiousness in the governing coalition about the solutions to the economic crisis, especially the opposition coming from the Northern League to a pension reform (Baldini 2013), increased the political weakness of the government alliance. Admittedly, the outburst of a severe recession in 2008 limited People of Freedom's and

the Northern League’s capacities to influence the agenda during the Berlusconi IV government. And yet, the higher fulfilment rate (57.9%) is accounted for by the three governments in office in the period between 2013 and 2018, when the consequences of the Great Recession and the sovereign debt crisis were still shaking up the country. Surprisingly, a great share of promises was actually realised, even though the crisis was far from over, a grand coalition supported the parliamentary majority, and substantial changes in the party system and in the composition of the governing alliance occurred during those five years. On the whole, in the post-2008 period Italian governing coalitions performed better with regard to the implementation of their ideologically-driven policies compared to the previous period (see Table 2).

Table 3. Percentages of pledge fulfilment and change in GDP growth by parliamentary term (1996-2018).

Parliamentary term	Percentage of pledges at least partially fulfilled	Change in GDP growth rate
1996-2001	52.8 %	0.75
2001-2006	53.0 %	-0.93
2006-2008	44.4 %	-1.03
2008-2013	47.3 %	0.02
2013-2018	58.0 %	2.28

Similarly, instead of the pre and post-Great Recession, we can look at the GDP growth, and especially its changes, to determine the periods of economic decline. A severe financial crisis is not a necessary condition for the economy to have an impact in the political arena, also smaller deteriorations of economic conditions may indeed curtail (or enable) partisan actors. Table 3 compares pledge fulfilment rates with the changes in growth observed in the same legislative period. Asserting a poor performance of the second government led by Prodi (2006-2008) is not uncanny. The weakness of the government due to the narrow victory that brought the centre-left alliance back into office and the fact that the governing coalition was large, conflictual, and internally-fragmented (Paolucci and Newell 2008) inevitably resulted in a limited ability to accomplish its programmatic goals. Moreover, the Prodi II government corresponds to the legislature in which the economy has deteriorated the most. Neverthe-

less, in this case just by observing pledge fulfilment rates the assumption of a decline of partisanship in the policymaking process during an economic downturn cannot be corroborated. In fact, during the previous legislature (2001-2006) worsening economic conditions resulted in a great deal of election promises carried out.⁶

Since from these preliminary findings it is evident that governing parties' ability to realise their programmatic promises is affected by several variables and since the role played by macro-economic conditions is still unclear, I conduct some binary logistic regressions (Table 4). In particular, Model 1 attempts to find empirical evidence supporting my first hypothesis, namely whether during an economic downturn pledges fulfilment is less likely (H_1). In this case, the main variable is the change in economic growth. As expected, the lack of significance of the direct effect indicates that partisan policymaking is not conditional on the economic situation of the country. Hence, in contrast with the decline-of-partisan-policymaking assumption (Pierson 2002) and previous findings (Pétry, Duval 2018; Thomson, Costello 2016), evidence shows that pledge fulfilment in Italy is not lower during a recession period. Economic growth, alone, is not directly associated with pledge fulfilment. The economic situation is, however, a key factor conditioning pledge fulfilment when its impact is considered in relation to other variables - as the analysis of models with interactions indicates (see Models 2 and 3) - underlining the importance of including the variable *change in GDP* and its interactions when exploring pledge fulfilment.

⁶ The lack of a relevant negative effect of economic downturns is not due to the fact that the electoral programs analysed are adjusted to the new situation. Italian governing parties do not seem to have adapted their manifestos by promising policies easier to implement when facing an economic decline. For instance, as Table A2 in the Appendix shows, the number of expansionary pledges is mostly constant among the different parliamentary terms. In particular, comparing the type of promises with the levels of GDP growth change, periods of deterioration of economic conditions (2001-2006 and 2006-2008) correspond to the ones with the higher percentages of expansionary pledges.

Table 4. Determinants of pledge fulfilment in Italy (1996-2018).

	Models		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
	b (SE ^a)	b (SE ^a)	b (SE ^a)
Change in GDP growth	.06 (.05)	.07 (.05)	.10 (.10)
Expansionary pledge		.57 (.09)***	.39 (.16)*
Party family ^b			
- Left and Centre-left parties			-2.61 (.91)**
Change in GDP * Expansionary pledge		.49 (.07)	.30 (.13)*
Expansionary pledge * Party family ^b			
- Left and Centre-left parties			.21 (.20)
Change in GDP * Party family ^b			
- Left and Centre-left parties			1.62 (.50)***
Change in GDP * Expansionary pledge * Party family ^b			
- Left and Centre-left parties			-.44 (.17)*
Number of pledges	-.00004 (.0002)	.00003 (.0002)	.005 (.002)**
Duration	.0002 (.0001)*	.0002 (.0001)*	-.001 (.001)*
Constant	-.33 (.25)	-.56 (.26)*	.83 (.61)
Log likelihood	-1659.58	-1638.90	-1623.85
Wald X2	23.98	63.79	89.05
Number of observations	2412	2412	2412

^a SE: robust standard error

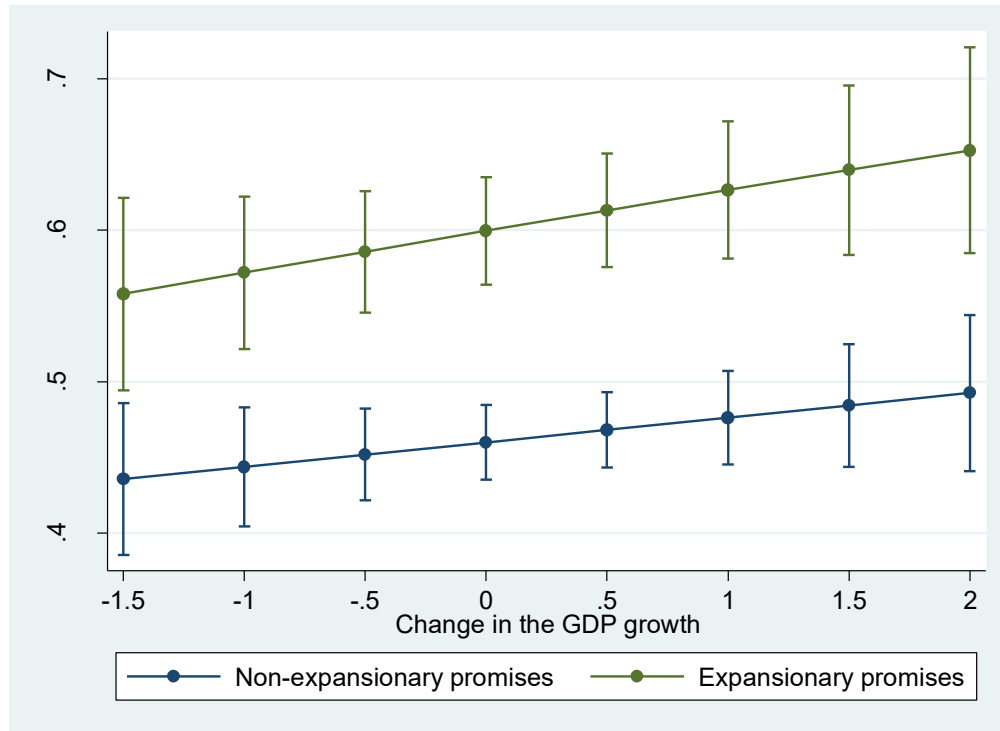
^b Reference category: right and centre-right parties. The category 'centre' is omitted from this table.

* $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; *** $p \leq 0.001$

Italian governing parties are therefore not automatically and inevitably constrained by the financial and political limitations generated during a recession in their ability to influence the agenda and in the choice of policies, as previous literature posited. Nevertheless, even though partisan office-holders may still have a say in policy production in tough economic times, they may not have the resources to adopt their expansionary policies to the same extent as during ordinary times. This hypothesis that expansionary pledges are less likely to be fulfilled than other types of pledges during a period of deterioration of economic conditions (H₂) is tested in Model 2. Firstly, worth noting, the variable *expansionary pledge* has a significantly positive effect in all models. This finding indicates that, taking into account the whole period (1996-2018) and controlling for all other factors, these pledges are more likely to be translated into actual policies. A graphical illustration (Figure 1) clarifies the association

between the variables *expansionary pledge* and *GDP change*.

Figure 1. Predictive margins of pledge fulfilment for expansionary and non-expansionary promises according to the change in economic growth during the mandate (estimates based on Model 2). Bars indicate 95% Cis.



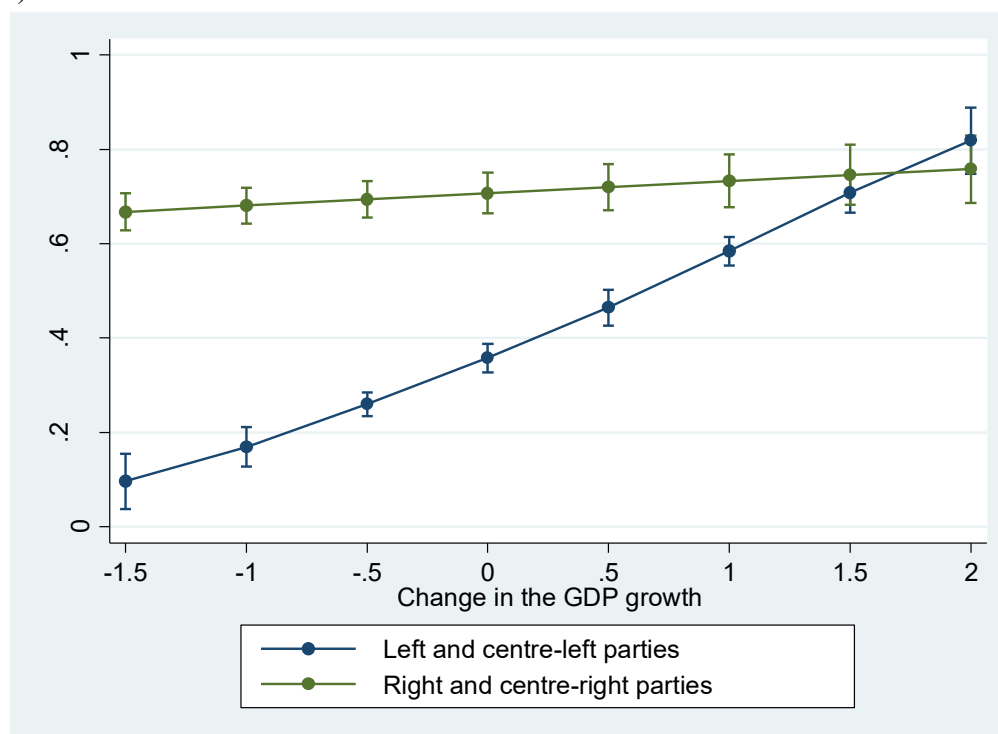
Evidence provided in this figure clearly rejects the second hypothesis: for each level of economic growth change, expansionary pledges have a significantly higher probability of being translated into actual policies compared to non-expansionary ones. Moreover, as economic conditions improve, office-holders increasingly act in accordance with their programmatic platforms. This finding reveals that the macro-economic context in which parties are embedded does matter in the implementation of both expansionary and non-expansionary policies: it constrains partisan action under tough economic circumstances whilst, at the same time, fostering partisan activity as the economy grows. Hence, although a recession period hinders partisan abilities to shape expansive policies, parties still have some room for manoeuvre to influence the agenda. In short, these findings suggest that the policymaking process is not necessarily non-partisan under tough economic times. Economic conditions cannot explain

different pledge fulfilment rates by themselves. Governing parties are not merely constrained by the economic situation of the country, other mechanisms come into play when looking at their abilities to implement their policy preferences. For this reason, we now have to explore if parties, according to their positioning on the left-right axis, are constrained in a different way by the state of the economy when it comes to realising their electoral programs.

Introducing a three-way-interaction term, Model 3 explores whether centre-left parties in office during an economic slowdown have incentives to realise (and actually do realise) their policies to expand programs to a greater extent than centre-right parties (H_3). From this model, three conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, the main results obtained in previous models still hold. Even when controlling for the party family, the fulfilment of electoral pledges is contingent on the financial nature of the policy and the economic situation of the country.

Secondly, left and centre-left parties in office are negatively associated with pledge fulfilment ($b=-2.61$) and are strongly affected by economic changes ($b=1.62$). Figure 2 shows that left-leaning governments' capacities to influence the policymaking process highly depend on the economic context in which partisan actors are embedded. Compared to right parties, the slope for centre-left parties is indeed steeper: economic growth has a far more important effect on pledge fulfilment for those governments. Their ability to act in accordance with their programmatic platforms increases as the economy grows and it rapidly drops as the economy gets worse. Voters' pressures are not strong enough to contain the heavy constraints exerted on public budgets and political resources by the external economic situation. Hence, a decrease in financial resources is translated into a lower implementation of left-driven policies. Centre-right parties, on the contrary, seem less sensitive to changes in growth. While left parties struggle during a recession, right-leaning governments preserve their capacities to exert a partisan influence on the policymaking process.

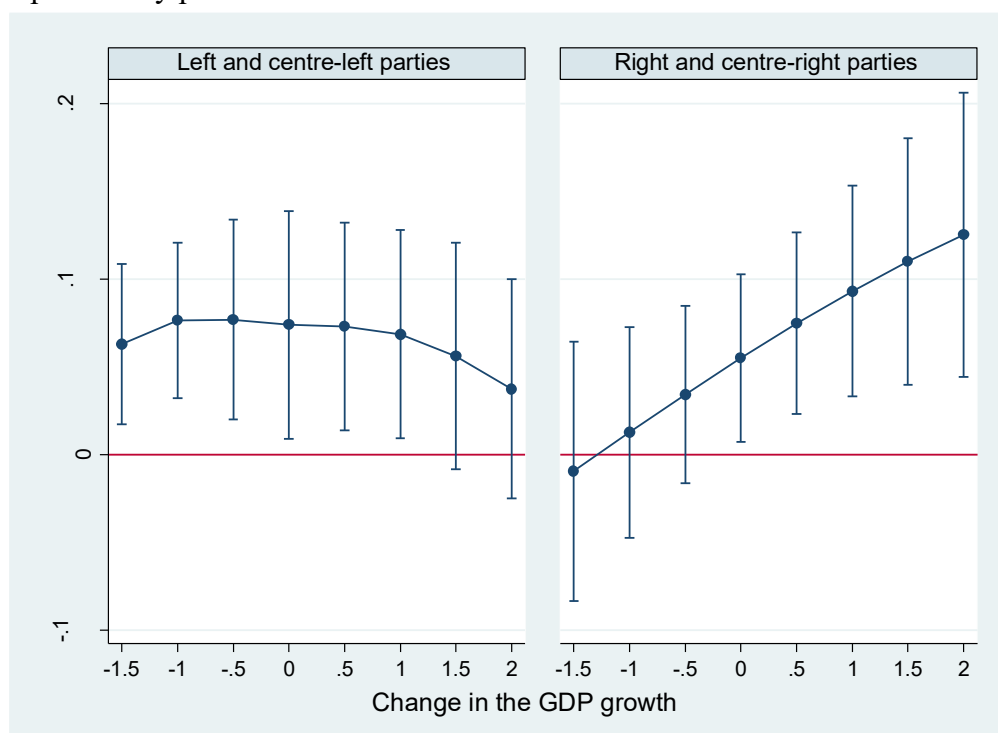
Figure 2. Predictive margins of pledge fulfilment by party family according to the change in economic growth during the mandate (estimates based on Model 3). Bars indicate 95% CIs.



Thirdly, the interaction between *change in GDP*, *expansionary pledge* and *party family* is significantly associated with the realisation of electoral promises. The meaning of the negative coefficient is clarified by Figure 3 which plots the contrast of pledge fulfilment predictive margins. As the figure shows, centre-left and centre-right parties behave differently during periods of deterioration and improvement of economic conditions depending on the type of policy promised. Specifically, except with very high growth, left parties are more likely to keep their expansionary policies compared to non-expansionary ones both during periods of deterioration and improvement of economic conditions. Taking into account centre-right parties, there is a roughly equal probability of fulfilling expansionary and non-expansionary pledges during an economic downturn. But, as soon as the economic conditions start growing, expansionary promises are also more likely to be kept by right-wing governments. Hence, evidence from the Italian case supports my third hypothesis: during an economic slowdown, left-leaning governments have a higher probability of keep-

ing their expansionary pledges compared to right-wing coalitions.

Figure 3. Contrast of predictive margins of pledge fulfilment for expansionary promises by party family depending on the change in economic growth during the mandate (estimates based on Model 3). The reference category is non-expansionary promises. Bars indicate 95% CIs.



The main implication of these findings is that right parties in Italy appear to be almost always able to give a partisan direction to the policies implemented during their mandate. Particularly, they take advantage also of tough situations to continue to pursue their policies. Economic hardship and, especially, the need to rationalise public expenditures may represent an unexpectedly favourable situation to accomplish some partisan policy, especially for those parties who endorse spending cuts and limited state intervention. In fact, these policy measures are more justifiable as necessary when coping with a recession and high levels of public debt, rather than during an economic boom. Secondly, the probability of fulfilling expansionary policies is boosted by economic growth in the case of right-leaning governments. Intuitively, having more financial resources increases parties' ability to implement these promises while

every chance of exploiting budget deficits to reduce spending is gone.

1.4. *Conclusions*

The aim of this study was to investigate how the economic performance of a country affects the policymaking process and how macroeconomic conditions interact with partisan ideologies and parties' capacities in shaping policies. A focus on constraints exerted by the economic context on partisan policymaking is of crucial importance especially today, in a period when the global economy is becoming increasingly interconnected and European countries have dealt with (and some are still dealing with) a severe economic crisis. To this end, the Italian case (1996-2018) provides a particularly relevant case study.

The main results show that parties still play a paramount role in policy production in Italy. Even though in some cases economic circumstances have dictated policy choices and hindered partisan scope for action, a quite important percentage of electoral engagements are kept. Berlusconi IV government, for instance, has been able to realise 47.3% of the coalition promises during the mandate despite the onset of a severe economic and financial crisis in 2007-2008. Legislatures during which the national economy experienced worsening economic conditions (2001-2006) or when the recession was far from over (2013-2018) correspond to the ones with the higher fulfilment rates. These results show that economic growth alone has not a clear and direct effect on partisan-driven policies. Its effect is only significant if mediated by other variables, such as the type of the pledge or the party family. The policymaking process and the relation between partisan politics and the economy are therefore more complex than usually depicted.

This study contributes to the existing literature by suggesting that the economic situation of a country has a multidimensional effect on parties and partisan preferences which cannot be merely narrowed down to financial constraints. Firstly, my findings indicate a noteworthy positive effect of economic growth on the implementation of expansionary policies. Italian parties in office are highly affected by the economic situation of the country in their capacities

and incentives to adopt policies that need a consistent allocation of public funds. And this is particularly true for centre-left parties. Secondly, according to the party family, partisan actors behave differently (and feel compelled to behave differently) under different economic times since they receive different pressures and may therefore adopt diverging strategies to cope with these pressures. More specifically, centre-left parties' *marge of manoeuvre* is heavily curtailed by strained budgets. Nevertheless, from the moment their hands are less tied, their capacity to implement their policy proposal is boosted. Conversely, the impact of economic conditions is weaker for centre-right parties, especially concerning non-expansionary policies. Right-leaning governments are less conditional on the situation of the country and maintain a quasi-constant ability to realise their programmatic policies, no matter the economic climate. These conclusions, however, have to be considered in relation to the limited number of cases under investigation. Arguably, further research is needed to generalise these findings. A cross-national comparison could allow expanding the conclusions drawn from this single-case study, observing how the hypotheses formulated for the Italian case work in different political systems and exploring the extent to which economic circumstances have similar/different impacts on institutionally different countries. This is precisely the aim of the last chapter of this dissertation (Chapter 4).

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CHAPTER 2

POLICY ISSUES AND THE ADOPTION OF PROGRAMMATIC POLICIES IN ITALY (1996-2018): WHICH PROMISES DO PARTIES PRIORITISE UNDER TOUGH ECONOMIC TIMES?

The relation between partisan politics and economy has received wide scholarly attention. Numerous studies have explored how an economic downturn affects national elections and voting intentions (Dassonneville, Hooghe 2017; Hernández, Kriesi 2016), partisan attention to economic and social problems (Adams, Haupt, Stoll 2009; Borghetto, Russo 2018; Bremer 2018; De Vries, Solaz 2019; Traber, Giger, Häusermann 2018; Williams, Seki, Whitten 2016), and welfare spending (Armingeon, Guthmann, Weisstanner 2016; Jensen, Mortensen 2014; McManus 2018). Yet, the literature questioning the effect of the economic context on parties' capacities to honour their election promises is surprisingly limited. Additionally, the few analyses that list the economy as one of the core drivers of partisan priorities and policy outputs have tended to focus on its negative budget implications: in tough economic times parties struggle to keep their policy engagements because of the strained financial resources in the hands of national governments (Pétry, Duval 2018; Thomson, Costello 2016). In the previous chapter, I challenge this assumption, by suggesting that governing parties continue to keep their election promises even in times of economic distress. To this end, I analysed pledge fulfilment in Italy and, specifically, the focus was on the financial constraints generated by economic problems. Overall, results indicate that partisan actors maintain some room for manoeuvre to significantly influence the governing agenda and push their policy priorities through, regardless of the state of the national economy. In addition, even though their likelihood of being fulfilled is significantly affected by the economic context, expansionary promises appear to be favoured despite dwindling financial resources.

Building upon these findings, this study aims at taking a step beyond: in addition to considering the constraining effect on government finances, it is also important to reflect on opportunities, issues, and electoral considerations that arise from an economic downturn. Accordingly, in this research I look at the policy domains of the campaign promises, instead of their expansionary/restrictive nature. This study tackles two main questions: to what extent are governing parties able to take advantage of a negative economic situation to further the adoption of (some of) their programmatic policies? Which types of promises do parties prioritise in times of worsening economic conditions?

Previous literature has already suggested that parties need to have both the capacities to act in a partisan way and the motivations that urge them to strive to enact their programmatic preferences (Brouard et al. 2018). Several institutional factors - such as the difference between single-party and coalition governments or the government/opposition positioning after elections (Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019; Schmidt 1996; Thomson et al. 2017) - may indeed create a more favourable or difficult setting for partisan office-holders to shape the policymaking process. Similarly, the economic situation of a country affects the extent to which government partisanship influences policy production (Boix 2000; Carlsen 1997; Lipsmeyer 2011). As the institutional setting, the rules and procedures influence indirectly the policymaking by acting on the context in which actors operate, in the same way, the economic situation of a country and the international setting do not determine the policy outputs per se. On the contrary, they set the boundaries within which parties can still behave according to their ideological preferences. The economy transforms the environment in which parties are embedded and are called upon to act. By doing so, it modifies the balance between the different incentives and their trade-offs and transforms partisan preferences by affecting their electoral strategies. Public opinion's priorities and concerns are affected as well. The classical partisan theory has long underlined that parties in office make decisions always keeping an eye on their core constituencies (Hibbs 1992). More recently, next to policy-seeking considerations the literature includes also office and vote-seeking goals in this discussion (Guinaudeau 2014; Kraft 2017). As a result, governing par-

ties can be expected to behave differently depending on the economic context in which they are embedded (Lipsmeyer 2011; Wenzelburger, König, Wolf 2019). Worsening economic conditions modify power dynamics, produce a change in the electorate's expectations, reduce the availability of financial resources, and increase international and European pressures on national politics. Faced with new external conditions and challenges, how do partisan office-holders react? How is the prioritisation of policies and policy issues affected by the new economic context?

The main argument of the chapter is that partisan actors are not inevitably constrained in their actions by a negative economic environment. A recession may even enhance governing parties' ability to shape policies. Indeed, I argue that while partisan leeway is strongly constrained in some sectors - namely the ones that are more affected by economic dynamics - ruling parties might still maintain some power to influence and shape the governing agenda in other policy areas.

Based on the analysis of pledge fulfilment in Italy (1996-2018), this study empirically shows that during a slowdown governing parties adapt their behaviour and strategies to the new context and pressures. In particular, results show that the influence of the state of the economy on parties' capacities to achieve their ideologically-driven policies is largely conditioned by (1) the ideological family of the ruling party and (2) the policy issue of the promise. In contrast with my expectation, Italian partisan office-holders are found to prioritise the socio-economic part of their electoral manifesto in times of economic slowdown. My results illustrate that, when facing economic problems, ruling parties and coalitions are more likely to honour their economic and social promises than government, education, and security-related promises. Additionally, the political affiliation of the governing party plays a pivotal role in this process too. On the one hand, the availability of blame-avoiding strategies boosts the adoption of restrictive economic policies during periods of deterioration of economic conditions. This is particularly true when right-wing parties are in office in Italy, though this result is not supported by logistic regression findings. On the other hand, albeit heavily constrained, left-leaning governments still

manage to employ the resources they have left for realising their social policies

2.1. The influence of an economic recession on parties' capacities and incentives

The view of an economic primacy over the political sphere has been introduced by the debate about globalisation (Boix 2000; Garrett 1998) and it re-emerged in the post-2008 period. The concept 'democracy without choice' – widely used in describing the political consequences of the Great Recession (Bosco, Verney 2012; Ruiz-Rufino, Alonso 2017) - perfectly depicts a situation where decisions have often a technocratic rather than partisan nature and, consequently, where a convergence of policies is the inevitable outcome. Implications are clear: no matter which party is in office, the policies adopted are similar since they are, in a way, 'imposed' by the economic context. In line with this reasoning, the first expectation of this chapter draws on the assumption that an economic contraction severely affects national politics.

Literature on pledges has already recognised parties' failure to keep all their electoral engagements when in office for different reasons. Among other things, since financial, temporal, and political resources in the hands of governing parties are limited, partisan actors are forced to choose which policies to prioritise. This goes especially for multi-party systems with coalition governments – as is the case in Italy – where governing parties need to spend additional time and political resources in persuading allies and other parliamentary actors to support their propositions (Moury 2011). In an economic downturn, partisan discretionary power can be expected to be curtailed even further.

The first reason behind this expectation relates to the decline of economic resources for concretely financing parties' policy proposals. As in the electoral campaigns parties promote policy measures and goals, some of which require a spending increase to be concretely achieved, a slowdown of economic growth necessarily compels governing parties to make a choice on how and where to spend the money still available. Moreover, a downturn increases conflicts within the government. In a coalition, allies keep passing the buck to one another so

as not to be blamed for the negative situation of the country. As internally-fragmented governing coalitions have a harder time agreeing on political agenda and policy priorities (Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019), compromising on policy solutions is hence harder. Finally, campaign programs provide policies and solutions to previous problems and challenges. The policies proposed are therefore representative of certain conditions that undergo a major change when a crisis breaks out.

Even though pledge fulfilment can be expected to be severely constrained in tough economic times, partisan office-holders have some policy, office and vote-seeking incentives that compel them to enact their programmatic preferences no matter what. On the one hand, parties include in their programs their policy preferences, namely the policies they think their country may benefit from. Political parties are, therefore, willing to try to realise them even in bad economic times. On the other hand, pledge fulfilment is a contributing factor to parties' electoral success. As the party mandate model implies (see Hofferbert, Budge 1992), parties present a program during their electoral campaign containing a list of promises, on the fulfilment of which is based the bond of trust between citizens and politicians. Voters will then express themselves on the work of the incumbent government during elections, sanctioning or rewarding them with their vote on the basis of the capacity to honour their engagements. There are, hence, reasons to expect parties to honour their electoral engagements no matter the economic context.

Clearly, poor economic performance does not affect all policy domains in the same way and to the same extent. Parties' lack of leeway can be expected to be specifically exacerbated in those domains that are most affected by an economic crisis, such as state revenue, the labour market, and the national economy more in general. Welfare and social policies are particularly affected by a decline in government resources as well given their high-spending nature (Armingeon, Guthmann, Weisstanner 2016). When running a budget deficit, it is difficult for governing parties to find the necessary financial resources to further the adoption of costly policies (Pétry, Duval 2018; Thomson, Costello 2016). Conversely, measures for the protection of online personal data or the

recognition of civil partnership - proposed by the Union in their 2006 electoral manifesto – are just two examples of policy proposals whose fulfilment should not be impacted by an economic recession. Having their hands tied in some sectors may drive parties to devote more space in the government agenda to those policy domains in which their autonomy remains high and, therefore, in which they can get their policy proposals passed more easily. Focusing on other policy fields provides an opportunity for parties to appear trustworthy to their rank-and-file voters and to show that they still act in their ideological interests, even when their overall policy leeway is extremely curtailed. And, as a result, they may avoid being punished at the polls. Following this reasoning, we might anticipate a better congruence between the policies proposed during the campaign and the policies actually implemented in those sectors that are less affected by an economic recession. Hence, the first hypothesis of this study is:

H1: During periods of economic slowdown, parties in government are less likely to implement their economic and social policies compared to other policy domains.

This expectation does not want to dismiss previous studies that suggest a lower pledge fulfilment under bad economic times (Pétry, Duval, 2018; Thomson, Costello, 2016). But simply that, aware of the impossibility of implementing their whole election manifesto, governing parties might focus their limited resources on keeping some parts of it, namely the parts in which they still maintain some room for manoeuvre.

While existing studies generally concur that citizens pay more attention to economic and social problems in the context of worsening economic conditions (Bremer 2018; Singer 2013), scholars disagree on the way in which parties respond to these dynamics. On the one hand, Jensen and Seeberg (2015), for instance, argue that the left in government has reason not to emphasise welfare - even though it enjoys issue ownership in that sector - knowing the severe limitations it has to deal with. In a rather similar vein, De Vries and Solaz (2019) illustrate that parties shift their attention away from the economy in hard times (similar conclusions are reached by Traber, Giger, Häusermann 2018). In this

way, the reasoning goes, parties hope to provoke a shift also in voters' attention and, therefore, avoid being blamed for the negative economic performance of the country (De Vries, Solaz 2019). On the other hand, other studies underline that a recession increases the electoral incentives that motivate partisan entrepreneurs to respond to their voters' requests and increase their attention to the core problems in the society (Borghetto, Russo 2018; Williams, Seki, Whitten 2016). During an economic downturn, citizens are often more alert to governments' actions (Ruiz-Rufino, Alonso 2017), either because they are personally affected by the dramatic consequences of the crisis or because the media devote more space to partisan initiatives. Hence, parties have to show more of their willingness and capacity to play a role in the policymaking process than during normal times. Poor crisis management jeopardises the stability of the government whilst opening also more space for the emergence of new competitors in the political arena (Morlino, Quaranta 2016). Electoral considerations and especially the need to please their own supporters and attract new voters pressure parties to prioritise those issues voters deem as most salient (Kraft 2017; Williams, Seki, Whitten 2016).

As a result, I contend that even though, as argued before, constraints exist, partisan office-holders have several incentives to accomplish their economic and social policy goals anyway. While in the previous study (Chapter 1) I have already shown that governing parties are still likely to fulfil more expansive promises even though they are harder to promote when running budget deficits, similarly parties can be anticipated to continue to implement their economic and social promises. Specifically, I expect the way in which parties react to an economic slowdown to be contingent on the ideological family of the party and/or coalition in office. The relevance of the partisanship of the government has been also emphasised by previous results obtained in the study of expansionary promises (see Chapter 1). Even more so, as each party has its own constituency - with its own policy preferences - and issue ownership, left-wing and right-wing parties should be affected differently by the economic context and, thus, should privilege the fulfilment of different types of policy proposals.

Enjoying issue ownership in the social sector (Ross 2000), left parties are

expected to put the spotlight on social problems and try to mitigate the insecurity and the negative effects of the crisis (McManus 2019). Electoral consequences for leftist parties are indeed severe when they do not adopt drastic measures to increase social benefits, particularly during a critical period (Alonso, Ruiz-Rufino 2020; Horn 2021).

Since, as previously discussed, in tough economic times, the existence of strong constraints on government budgets and the need to appear responsible at the international level cannot be denied, policy proposals that require large financial investments remain largely difficult to be implemented. However, the analysis of the previous chapter (Chapter 1) indicates that left parties in office favour the adoption of their more costly promises even in times of economic slowdown. They can be, thus, expected to prioritise their social promises even if they require several financial resources to be implemented. So, even though limits exist, left-wing governments are anticipated to keep their social policy proposals particularly when the country is experiencing a period of slower or negative growth.

On the contrary, right and centre-right parties have fewer opportunities and motivations for introducing their social policy preferences compared to left parties. Despite the fact that the difficult context may lead to a situation in which retrenchment and spending cuts in the welfare state – usually classified as right-wing policy preferences (Jensen, Mortensen 2014) - are easier to implement, there are three main reasons to support the opposite argument. Firstly, the unpopularity of welfare retrenchment (Kitschelt 2001) hinders restrictive proposals, particularly in periods when welfare state clienteles broaden – like during tough economic times. It is precisely in these moments that citizens are more concerned about social spending and welfare benefits and pay more attention to what governing parties do in this domain. Promoting unpopular measures in salient issues might negatively affect their electoral prospects. This is especially true when a right-leaning government is facing strong opposition from the left. Leftist opposition parties are likely to strategically emphasise social problems and consequently governments' unpopular cutbacks, taking away any possibilities for right-leaning governments to hide the implementation of

these measures behind the difficulties of the period (Jensen, Seeberg 2015). The risk of being blamed for welfare retrenchment strongly influences governments' policy decisions (Jensen, Mortensen 2014). Since voters electorally sanction incumbents on the basis of their awareness of the government's actions (Moury, De Giorgi, Barros 2020; Ross 2000), in this case, office-seeking motivations prevail over policy-seeking ones. Consequently, when facing slower growth right-wing governing coalitions have strong incentives to mitigate their position by adopting more moderate social policies (Lipsmeyer 2011). Finally, we can assume that right parties do not include in their manifestos significant retrenchment and welfare cuts, given their unpopular nature. Hence, even if they managed to pass them in parliament, the adoption of these types of measures would not be accounted for in the analysis of pledge fulfilment rates given the fact that these policies are not included in the electoral programs.

With regards to the economic sector, an opposite dynamic is expected: right-leaning governments should engage in carrying out more campaign promises related to the labour market and the national economy during periods of economic slowdown while in those particular policy domains left-wing parties are severely constrained by the external situation. In this case, parties on the right side of the political spectrum have the opportunity to leverage their good reputation for being able to provide financial discipline and balanced budgets. So when voters are more concerned about the state of the national economy they expect right-leaning governments to give much more importance to financial and economic matters. Under such economic conditions, right-wing partisan actors may indeed be anticipated to pursue a higher percentage of their economic promises compared to normal times. And this is particularly true for those promises that do not require a consistent allocation of financial resources to be implemented or that aim at cutting back on public expenditures. While under normal times - let alone during a growing period - a more nuanced and moderate position is preferred, economic hardship provides right-wing parties with the opportunity to implement measures to redress the balance. Spending cuts are policy measures that are more justifiable as necessary when coping

with slower or negative GDP growth and lower state revenues. In the social sector voters push for more expansive measures, whereas right parties enjoy more freedom in the economic domain.

Left-wing economic policy proposals are less consistent with the need to redress the balance and handle budget deficits. In tough economic times, Jonas Kraft (2017, 1435) notes, ‘left-wing incumbents face a trade-off between partisan interests in high spending levels and re-election motives to signal fiscal discipline and avoid the potential loss of swing voters’. Lacking issue competence on financial responsibility, left-leaning governments may strategically decide to leave behind their economic preferences and avoid getting blamed for poor crisis management.

Summing up, the second hypothesis of this analysis can be summarised by the following sentence:

H2: During periods of economic slowdown, left parties in government are more likely to realise their policies related to the welfare state (H2a), while right parties are more likely to adopt their economic policies (H2b).

2.2 Data and methods

As was the case for the analysis presented in Chapter 1, in this study, parties’ policy preferences are identified with the election pledges contained in their campaign manifestos. Assessing partisan priorities through concrete policy proposals is argued to avoid the oversimplification of considering parties as stable organisations with fixed preferences and party competition as unidimensional (see the discussion in Guinaudeau 2014). An analysis of the whole manifesto, using for instance Manifesto Project data (see for instance Horn, Jensen 2017; Traber, Giger, Häusermann 2018), perfectly gauges parties’ attention to different issues, though it may overestimate their engagement. In fact, campaign programs do not merely contain policy preferences but also statements of general principles, criticism of incumbent governments, and/or discussion of previously adopted measures.

Other than for its ability to assess changes in partisan preferences over

time, this approach presents a second paramount advantage. Pledge fulfilment directly explores parties' capacities to influence the policymaking process by pointing out the desired outcome - *the promise* - and the actual product - *the policy adopted*. Without denying the importance of the significant results achieved with other methods, a focus on the transposition of campaign engagements into concrete policies allows evaluating parties' abilities and commitment to using their influence, power, and strategic behaviour for adopting their programmatic agenda. Following the same reasoning, I decided to refrain from using a method that compares the issues of the newly-adopted laws with partisan priorities (i.e. Carammia, Borghetto, Bevan 2018). In this respect, Pritoni (2020) appropriately argues that correspondence between issues in the manifestos and issues in the legislation does not automatically mean congruence. The adoption of a law in a specific domain signifies attention but it says nothing about the directionality of the real decision. A policy may well be opposite to what parties pledged and still be considered positively in this issue-based approach.

More concretely, this analysis is drawn on the dataset of pledge fulfilment in Italy that was presented in the previous chapter. Mirroring Moury's (2011) contribution on the Italian case, I collected data using the so-called pledge-testing approach (Royed 1996; see also Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019). Accordingly, I first identified all the electoral promises in the selected manifestos. The electoral programs analysed are the ones published by the following governing parties and/or coalitions: Olive Tree (1996); House of Freedoms (2001); The Union (2006); People of Freedom (2008); Northern League (2008); Democratic Party (2013); People of Freedom (2013); Civic Choice (2013); Union of the Centre (2013). The period corresponding to the technocratic government led by Monti (2011-2013) is not included in this study. Differently from previous cabinet reshuffles, this newly formed cabinet was not representative of a specific party or coalition of parties nor it was elected on a program. This means that there are no election pledges to be attributed and to be compared with their governing agenda. Secondly, I evaluated the fulfilment of each electoral pledge. For each policy proposal, I checked whether the governing coali-

tion or the Parliament adopted a law transposing the promise into a concrete policy. In this case, the promise was labelled as ‘at least partially fulfilled’. When the party did not realise the policy promised, this latter was considered ‘broken’.

A single-case study is judged to be particularly appropriate for this chapter. Controlling for the institutional setting and the party system, the analysis can easily isolate the role of the economy on partisan policymaking. The Italian case presents also some particularities - related to the fragmentation of the party system, the instability of governments, and the existence of large post-electoral governing coalitions - that make it the perfect case for contributing to the existing literature. In fact, scholars often underline the high responsiveness of single-party governments, while coalition executives and the presence of a large number of veto players are always regarded as synonymous with compromises and a low likelihood of partisanship in policy production (Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019; Schmidt 1996).

The selection of the time period covered by this study matches the start of alternation in power in Italy. As already demonstrated by previous research (Borghetto, Carammia 2014; Carammia, Borghetto, Bevan 2018), the possibility of alternation - a distinctive feature of the so-called Second Republic in Italy - guarantees a higher party-policy connection. In addition, during the time frame selected, Italy experienced deterioration and improvement of economic conditions as well as periods of economic stability. Hence, focusing on the 1996-2018 period seems appropriate to explore the role and the behaviour of parties in government under different economic conditions.

2.2.1 Independent variables

The core independent variable of this study - the state of the economy - is defined as the change in economic growth from the election year during the parliamentary term (see also Chapter 1). Similarly to Thomson and Costello (2016), I estimated the difference between the GDP growth in the election year and the average GDP growth level of the whole governing period, using OECD

data. The advantage of employing this definition of the economic climate is two-fold. Firstly, looking at the average growth for the mandate, instead of yearly data, allows accounting for the fact that negative growth in one year can be compensated by an economic expansion in the subsequent years. Indeed, office parties may conveniently postpone decisions and wait for a more favourable environment to carry out their policy preferences. A measure of the average economic growth provides a clear overview of the state of the economy over the whole mandate. Secondly, this variable helps to estimate the real situation in which partisan office-holders are embedded. In this way, parties cannot adapt their policy preferences in response to changes in the state of the national economy, as for instance Haupt (2010) suggested. We can assume that it is hardly likely for national actors to correctly foresee changes in the economic situation (Thomson, Costello 2016).

Pledges are differentiated according to the issue to which the policy, the outcome, or the action promised refer, using the Comparative Agendas Project (CAP)'s major topics code as a reference. The exhaustive, detailed, and well-defined nature of the CAP codes helps determine the actual policy dimension of each promise and provides a comparative potential to my data. From the 21 CAP categories, the promises are rearranged into seven major categories (Table 1). Given the limited number of promises made in several policy domains, a residual category ('Other issues') is created.

Two additional sub-categories are designed to distinguish left-wing social policies and right-wing economic policies. To facilitate this differentiation, I decided to set up the financial dimension of the promise as the discriminant factor. Partisan theorists, in fact, usually distinguish left and right-wing preferences by their expansive or contractionary nature (Carlsen 1997; Hibbs 1992). The new variables are created by interacting the policy issue of the promise with its impact on public spending. Promises that do not require an expansion of public funds to be implemented are considered as 'non-expansionary'. When a promise refers to the creation of new agencies, new employments in public service, promotion of public investments or projects, or proposes an increase in expenditure, it is categorised as 'expansionary'. The variable welfare expan-

sionary pledge contains all the election pledges that simultaneously fall in the ‘social issues’ and ‘expansionary’ categories previously mentioned. Promises such as ‘Realisation of day-care centres for children’ (House of Freedoms, 2001) and ‘Welfare policies to support families involved in daily caring work’ (Union of the Centre, 2013) are included in this category. The variable economic non-expansionary pledge is designed in the same manner. The promise to ‘regulate atypical forms of employment’ (Olive Tree, 1996) is an example of this type of engagement.

Table 1. Policy issues categories

CAP categories	Policy Issues
Domestic Macroeconomic Issues	Economy
Labour and Employment	
Banking, Finance, and Domestic Commerce	
Foreign Trade	
Health	Social Issue
Social Welfare	
Community Development, Planning, and Housing Issues	
Government Operations	Government
Education	Education
Transportation	Transportation
Law, Crime, and Family Issues	Law and Order
Immigration and Refugee Issues	Other Issues
Civil Rights, Minority Issues, and Civil Liberties	
Agriculture	
Environment	
Energy	
Defence	
Space, Science, Technology and Communication	
International Affairs and Foreign Aid	
Public Lands and Water Management	
Culture	

Each party and/or coalition whose manifesto is analysed in the chapter is associated with one of the following three broad categories of party family on the basis of their positioning on the left-right scale (CHES data): right and centre-right parties (including Northern League party, House of Freedoms, and

People of Freedom); left and centre-left parties (Democratic Party, the Union, and Olive Tree); centre parties (Civic Choice and Union of the Centre). The category 'centre parties' occurs just for a single parliamentary term (2013-2018). Since both centre parties are associated with the same economic growth level - the one corresponding to the 2013-2018 period - this category is missing when the party family interacts with the GDP growth change in the regression models (Tables 3 and 4).

Two control variables are finally included in the analysis. Both the duration of the parliamentary term and the total number of pledges in the manifesto are likely to affect pledge fulfilment (Thomson et al. 2017). Having more time at their disposal and a shorter list of promises to keep may indeed increase governing parties' ability and opportunity to shape policies.

2.3 Policy issues and economic growth

Table 2 contains two logistic regression models which provide information regarding the first hypothesis of this chapter. By interacting the change in economic growth with the policy issue, I test whether parties in government in times of economic slowdown are more likely to keep their promises in non-economic and non-social policy domains (H_1). Since I am not only interested in the probability of fulfilling different types of policies but also in the difference of this probability depending on the policy issue - meaning whether, no matter their overall fulfilment rate, governing parties under different economic circumstances prioritise some policies instead of others - I decided to run two different models and plot the contrast of predictive margins. In this way, I can compare the probability of fulfilment for each policy issue with the two reference categories, which are the ones I am interested in. In Model 1 the reference category for the variable issue is the economy while Model 2 employs the social sector as the baseline.

Firstly, as was true for the study of the financial constraints (see Chapter 1), even when controlling for the policy issue the economic context does not seem to have an overall effect on pledge fulfilment. The coefficient for the var-

iable *Change in GDP* is thus not statistically significant (Table 2). Nevertheless, data show that the association between the economic context and the realisation of parties' electoral manifestos depends on the issue of the policy.

Table 2. The impact of economic growth on pledge fulfilment in Italy based on the policy issue of the promises. Results of binary logistic regressions where the dependent variable is pledge fulfilment.

	Models	
	(1)	(2)
	(ref. category: economy) b (SE ^a)	(ref. category: social issue) b (SE ^a)
Change in GDP	-0.14 (.07)	-0.02 (.10)
Issue		
- Economy		-0.16 (.15)
- Social Issue	.16 (.15)	
- Government	-.55 (.14)***	-.71 (.16)***
- Education	-.14 (.18)	-.31 (.20)
- Transportation	.08 (.21)	-.09 (.22)
- Law & Order	-.51 (.15)***	-.68 (.17)***
- Other	-.05 (.13)	-.21 (.15)
Change in GDP*Issue		
- Economy		-0.12 (.11)
- Social Issue	.12 (.11)	
- Government	.30 (.10)**	.18 (.12)
- Education	.39 (.14)**	.27 (.16)
- Transportation	.29 (.19)	.17 (.20)
- Law & Order	.41 (.12)***	.30 (.13)*
- Other	.26 (.10)**	.14 (.11)
Duration	.0002 (.0001)*	.0002 (.0001)*
Number of pledges	-.000008 (.0002)	-.000008 (.0002)
Constant	-.18 (.27)	-.01 (.28)
Log likelihood	-1634.15	-1634.15
Wald X2	71.96***	71.96***
Number of observations	2412	2412

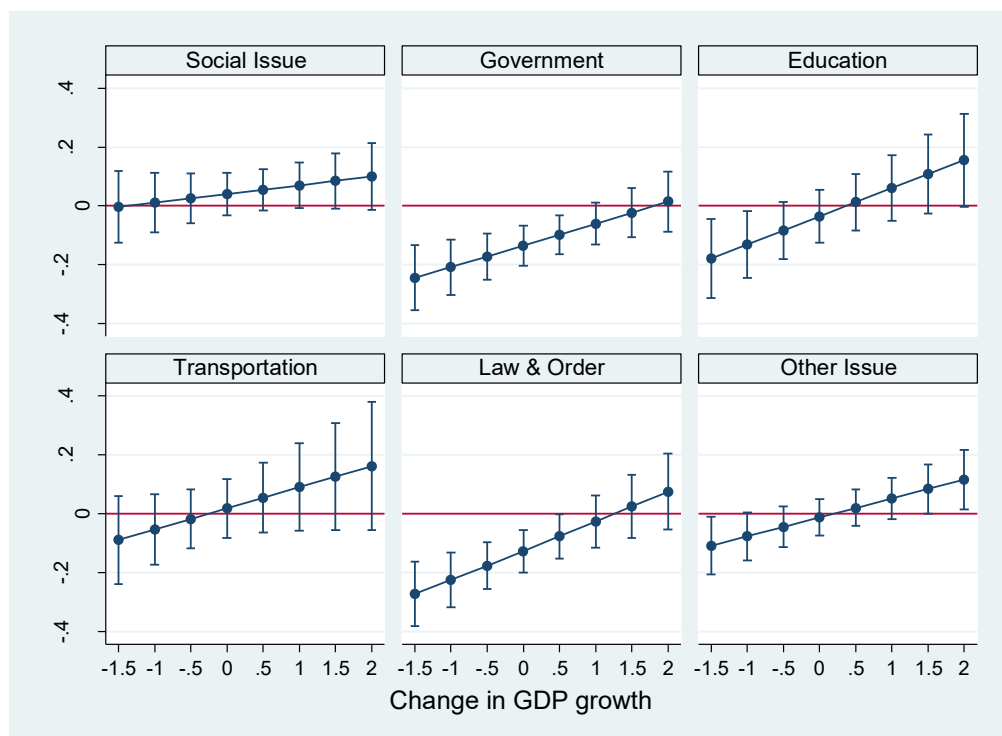
^a SE: robust standard error

* $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; *** $p \leq 0.001$

Figure 1 illustrates the contrast of pledge fulfilment predictive margins in different policy domains against the economic sector (the reference category). As the graph shows, all other issues - except for social and transportation policies - have a significant lower probability of being fulfilled compared to economic issues when the economic growth deteriorates during the mandate under

consideration. In times of economic slowdown, Italian parties are more likely to honour their economic promises than government, education, and security-related pledges. In growing times, the difference in the probability of pledge fulfilment between the various policy issues is not significant, except for education and other types of promises whose implementation seems to be favoured compared to economic policies (Figure 1). Similar results are obtained when the probability of fulfilment is compared with social issues (Figure 2). Here again, in times of worsening economic conditions governing parties are less likely to realise their government, education, and law-and-order commitments compared to social and welfare policy proposals.

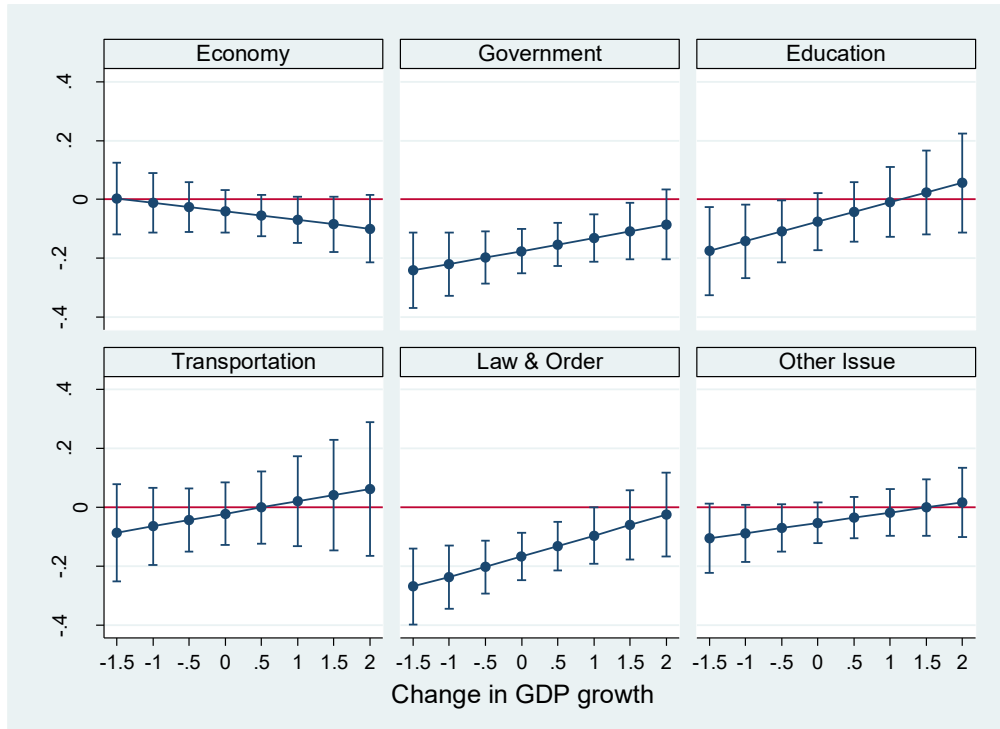
Figure 1. Contrasts of predictive margins by policy issue and level of economic growth (estimates based on Model 1). Reference category: economy. Bars indicate 95% CIs.



Evidence clearly contradicts the intuitive view of a so curtailed partisan autonomy that governing parties cannot give an ideological direction to the policies implemented in the sectors that ‘matter’. Contrary to expectations (H1), partisan office-holders do not shift towards other policy domains in times

of economic distress. Rather, particular attention is paid to economic and social issues.

Figure 2. Contrasts of predictive margins by policy issue and level of economic growth (estimates based on Model 2). Reference category: social issue. Bars indicate 95% CIs.



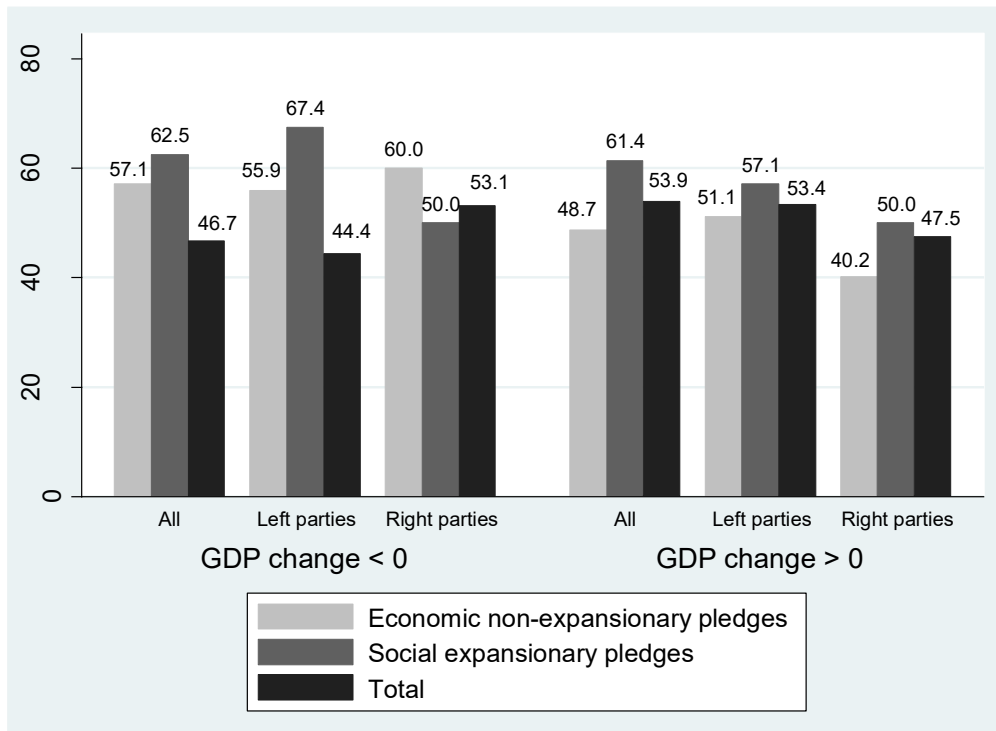
Taken together, these results illustrate that parties prioritise different policy issues according to the moment of the economic cycle. Under tough times, Italian office-holders are more prone to concentrate their financial and political resources on keeping the socio-economic part of their programs compared to other parts. Growing citizens' and media's attention to economic problems seems to positively influence partisan emphasis on the same kind of issues. Hence, confronted with renewed attention paid to economic matters (McManus 2018; Singer 2013), parties are encouraged to do the same: the state of the national economy, the labour market, the welfare state, and the social benefits become the salient issues in the legislature. In times of economic slowdown, governing parties seem to respond directly to voters' concerns by focusing and realising their electoral promises in the economic and social sector whilst, in

times of economic boom, education and other policy issues - such as civil rights or environment – are favoured. Conceivably, because of their limited financial, temporal, and political resources, governing coalitions cannot implement all their programmatic policies. Nevertheless, this does not push them to hide behind the difficulties, abandon their election engagements, or else focus on those promises easier to be implemented. On the contrary, my findings corroborate previous results (Borghetto, Russo 2018): having to choose which policies to prioritise, Italian parties always keep an eye on voters' concerns. Their reputation is at stake in the key domains (Kraft 2017). Therefore, governing parties strategically decide to engage themselves in legislating primarily on the issues that are salient at that very moment.

After demonstrating that parties in office do accomplish their policy goals in different domains depending on the state of the economy, the next step is to explore whether pledge fulfilment is dependent on the combination of economic growth and the political affiliation of the ruling party/coalition. To this end, the assumption that left-leaning governments are more likely to realise their social policies while right-leaning governments are more likely to focus their resources on economic policies (H₂) is first explored in Figure 3.

Overall, in times of negative growth pledge fulfilment rate is lower (46.7%) than in flourishing periods (53.9%). Italian parties appear to break a higher share of electoral engagements when the economic situation of the country worsens. Yet, significant differences between party families and policy dimensions can be noted. Specifically, non-expansionary economic policies have a higher percentage of realisation in declining periods (57.1%) compared to growing periods (48.7%). As discussed before, office-holders in Italy seem to favour their economic policy preferences when facing negative growth. And this is particularly true for restrictive measures. At the same time, expansionary welfare policies do not display a significant gap in the total fulfilment rate between the two periods: 62.5% of promises are kept in times of negative growth and 61.4% in better economic times. Their fulfilment, however, varies depending on the combination of government's partisanship and economic context.

Figure 3. Percentage of pledges at least partially fulfilled by period and party family in Italy (1996-2018).



As long as the change in the GDP growth level stays below zero, left-wing governments present a higher percentage of expansionary welfare pledges fulfilled compared to the total percentage of pledges kept. Even though left parties in office seem severely constrained by a negative economic situation in their capacity to enact their policy preferences (only 44.4% of total promises are fulfilled), they manage to employ the resources they have left for realising their social policy preferences (67.4% of these promises are carried out). Dealing with strained financial resources pressures them to implement more restrictive and austerity-like policies in the economic sectors (55.9%), nonetheless in the social sector expansionary promises are increasingly carried out. In times of slowdown, social expansionary promises are kept ten per cent more than in growing periods by left-wing coalitions. As expected (H_{2a}), while right parties did not differ in their capacities to keep social promises depending on the economic situation of the country (50% of welfare expansionary promises fulfilled in both periods), left parties in Italy did keep a larger share of their policies re-

lated to the welfare state during periods of negative growth.

Right-leaning governments, in general, perform better during periods of economic deterioration, especially when it comes to restrictive economic promises (60%). As the economy starts growing, the fulfilment rate for these latter promises extremely declines (40.2%). Consistently with my expectation (H_{2b}), Italian right parties seem to focus more clearly on their economic policies in an economically critical period. A similar dynamic is observed in the case of left parties, but in this case, the gap between recessions and booms is consistently reduced (4.8 percentage points). The reason supporting this finding may be two-fold. On the one hand, the economic policies analysed here are the ones that require less - if any - increase of the governing budget to be implemented. Clearly, policies in favour of spending cuts or rationalisation are easier to be adopted when economic growth is plummeting and national governments have to deal with budget deficits and rising unemployment rates. This situation is particularly exploited to foster restrictive policy solutions also by left-leaning governments in an attempt to avoid blame for fiscal deficits and the national economy's weak performance (Kraft 2017). On the other hand, the uncertainty generated by an economically difficult period urges politicians to rely more on their traditional views (Wenzelburger, König, Wolf 2019). Less room - and time - is left for experimentation. Policies contained in the election manifestos have already been discussed and, thereby, are ready-to-use solutions. Conversely, with strong growth, the relation is reversed: non-expansionary economic pledges have a lower probability of being fulfilled compared to other types of pledges. Clearly, it is easier to sell restrictive policies as necessary and justifiable measures to solve economic problems in critical times. In flourishing times, the conditions supporting restrictive economic policies, especially blame avoidance strategies, no longer exist.

To test the second hypothesis, I have also run some logistic regression to test whether the conclusions previously drawn still hold (Tables 3 and 4). Models in Table 3 include the variable *welfare expansionary pledges* and its interactions with the level of growth and with the ideological family of the party in office.

Table 3. Determinants of pledge fulfilment in Italy. Logistic regressions where the dependent variable is pledge fulfilment. Incorporation of the variable ‘welfare expansionary pledges’.

	Models	
	(3) b (SE ^a)	(4) b (SE ^a)
Change in GDP	-.06 (.07)	.16 (.10)
Party family ^b		
- Left parties	.15 (.20)	-2.82 (.93)**
Welfare expansionary	.46 (.18)**	-.09 (.32)
Welfare expansionary * Change in GDP	.02 (.13)	.41 (.25)
Welfare expansionary * Party family ^b		
- Left parties		.64 (.39)
Change in GDP * Party family ^b		
- Left parties		1.69 (.51)***
Change in GDP*welfare expansionary * Party family ^b		
- Left parties		-.84 (.34)*
Duration	.0004 (.0001)**	-.001 (.0006)*
Number of pledges	-.0002 (.0005)	.005 (.002)**
Constant	-.61 (.27)*	1.17 (.61)
Log likelihood	-1648.03	-1637.78
Wald X2	45.83***	60.87***
Number of observations	2412	2412

^a SE: robust standard error

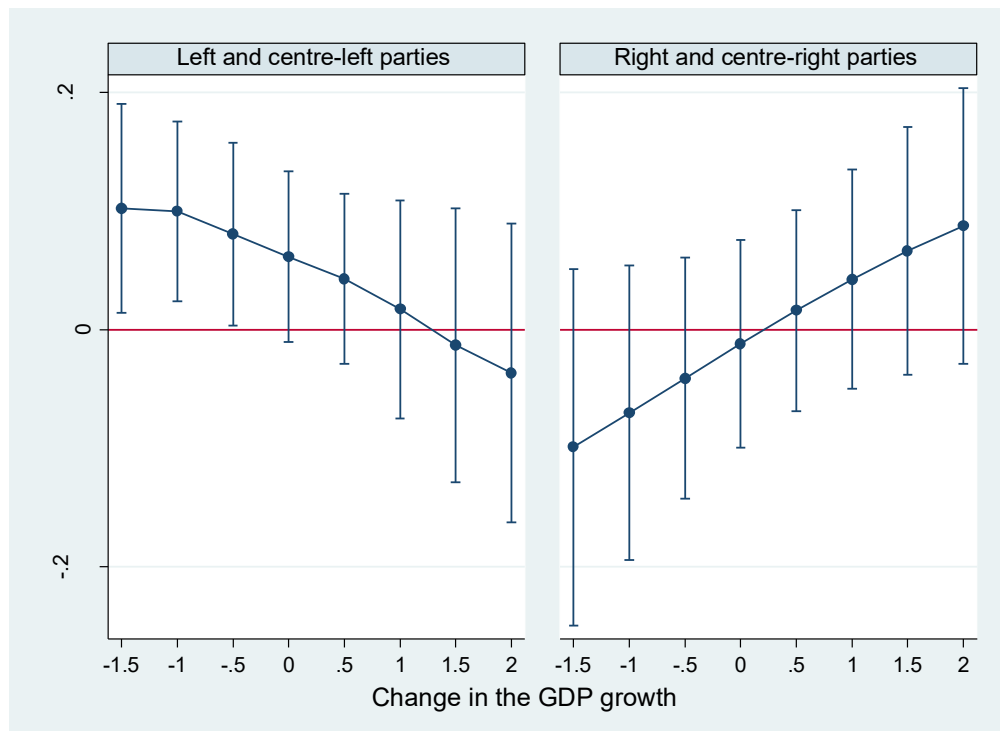
^b Reference category: right parties. The category ‘centre’ is omitted from this table.

* $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; *** $p \leq 0.001$

The lack of significance of the interaction term *welfare expansionary*change in GDP* (Model 3) confirms the findings illustrated in Figure 3 ($b=.02, p>0.05$): overall, the probability of fulfilment for this type of promise is not merely contingent on the economic situation of the country, but, as the three-way interaction term in Model 4 implies, it significantly depends on the combination between party in government and state of the economy. To better understand the results of this logistic regression, I plotted the contrast of pledge fulfilment predictive margins for welfare expansionary promises against the other types of policy issues (the reference category) by party family (Figure 4). As the graph illustrates, in times of negative growth, left and centre-left parties have a significantly higher probability of carrying out their welfare policies compared to other promises. Conversely, when the situation of the national economy improves, there is no significant difference in the likelihood of pledge

fulfilment between the various categories. The second hypothesis of this study (H_{2a}) is, hence, supported by regression results as well: during periods of economic slowdown, left-leaning governments are more likely to realise their social and welfare policies compared to all other types of promises. The same association is not found for right parties. Figure 4 shows that, in this case, welfare expansionary promises do not have a significantly different probability of being fulfilled compared to other policy proposals, regardless of the state of the economy.

Figure 4. Contrasts of predictive margins of the fulfilment of welfare expansionary pledges compared to other types of pledges (reference category) by party family based on the level of economic growth (estimates based on Model 4). Bars indicate 95% CIs.



Finally, I attempt to find evidence supporting the assumption that right-wing governments would rather focus on keeping their economic promises under economically troubled times (H_{2b}). Logistic regressions presented in Table 4 do precisely that by incorporating the variable *economy non-expansionary pledges*.

Table 4. Determinants of pledge fulfilment in Italy. Logistic regressions where the dependent variable is pledge fulfilment. Incorporation of the variable ‘economy non-expansionary pledges’.

	Models	
	(5) b (SE ^a)	(6) b (SE ^a)
Change in GDP	-.0007 (.07)	.21 (.10)*
Party family ^b		
- Left parties	.10 (.21)	-2.55 (.91)**
Economy non-expansionary	.13 (.11)	-.01 (.20)
Economy non-expansionary * Change in GDP	-.26 (.08)**	-.24 (.14)
Economy non-expansionary * Party family ^b		
- Left parties		.22 (.25)
Change in GDP * Party family ^b		
- Left parties		1.47 (.50)**
Change in GDP*Economy non-expansionary * Party family ^b		
- Left parties		-.0004 (.21)
Duration	.0004 (.0001)**	-.001 (.0006)*
Number of pledges	-.0001 (.0005)	.005 (.002)**
Constant	-.60 (.27)*	1.00 (.60)
Log likelihood	-1646.90	-1642.27
Wald X2	47.32***	55.59
Number of observations	2412	2412

^a SE: robust standard error

^b Reference category: right parties. The category ‘centre’ is omitted from this table.

* $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; *** $p \leq 0.001$

Model 5 explores whether, during a recession, governing coalitions in Italy concentrate - and are able to concentrate - their resources for the implementation of restrictive economic and financial policies. At first glance, the negative coefficient found for the interaction term *economy non-expansionary*change in GDP* ($b=-.26$, $p<0.01$) appears to suggest that restrictive economic pledges are negatively affected by economic growth. However, when the family of the party in office is controlled for in the model, the effect is no longer statistically significant (see Model 6).

Model 6 tests whether the effect of economic growth on the adoption of more right-wing economic policies depends on the party family. The three-way interaction term is very small and not statistically significant ($b=-.0004$,

$p > 0.05$). Differently than for the results provided in Figure 3, both left and right parties do not present any significant difference between the probability of fulfilling their economic and other policies promised. In this case, findings do not provide confirmation of hypothesis H_{2b} : right parties do not seem sufficiently more likely to concentrate their government agenda on adopting the economic part of their programs during periods of economic slowdown, at least as long as contemporary Italian partisan politics is concerned. Further research focusing on more cases may provide additional elements to these conclusions.

Finally, it is important to note that even when controlling for the issues of the policy proposals in the regression models, left and centre-left parties are more affected by economic factors compared to right-wing parties (see the coefficient for the interaction term *Change in GDP*Party family* in all the models). As was already discussed in the previous chapter of this dissertation, parties from the left side of the political spectrum are strongly constrained in their ability to honour their electoral engagements when the economic conditions worsen during their mandate. Right parties, on the other hand, do not appear to suffer any loss of power to promote their policy proposals: their probability of pledge fulfilment remains constant regardless of the economic context.

2.3.1 Robustness tests

As a robustness check, models 1 and 2 are run omitting data for the 2013 election (Appendix). Results are similar to the ones obtained in the abovementioned models. Arguably, one could have objected that during the electoral campaign of 2013 - being aware of the limits on parties' capacities to implement their engagements due to the Great Recession and the subsequent debt crisis - partisan actors might have presented a more modest electoral program. Yet, the main results of this study still hold when the 2013 case is omitted.

An alternative measure to account for the economic context is also employed (Appendix). Results hold when the unemployment rate change – the difference between the unemployment rate in the election year and the average unemployment rate during the mandate – replaces the GDP change. Clearly, in

this case, the likelihood of fulfilment is higher for social and economic promises, compared to the other types of promises, when the unemployment change is positive and, therefore, when there is a decrease in the number of people employed.

2.4 Conclusions

This chapter has explored the influence of the economic context on party-policy linkage through an analysis of novel data on the fulfilment of 2,412 electoral promises in Italy (1996-2018). Looking at election pledges for assessing parties' policy preferences is argued to capture changes in partisan preferences as well as the actual transposition of these preferences into concrete policy outputs. With respect to the issues, this study empirically demonstrates that - although an economic crisis severely affects the policymaking process - office-holders do preserve some room for partisan manoeuvre for implementing their preferred policies in the socio-economic sector. In times of economic slowdown, electoral considerations pressure parties to put economic and social policies at the forefront of the government agenda. As soon as the economy starts growing, these 'materialistic' concerns give way to other policy issues. These findings complement those of previous studies positing voters' and parties' increased attention to the social and economic domains in times of crisis (Bremer 2018; Borghetto, Russo 2018; Singer 2013; Williams, Seki, Whitten 2016): in addition to talking more about socio-economic problems, governing parties are more likely to prioritise the concrete adoption of their socio-economic policy preferences as well. Consistent with partisan theories (Hibbs 1992; Imbeau, Pétry, Lamari 2001), empirical evidence in the Italian case shows that parties and partisan ideological preferences continue to matter in the policymaking process even during economic recessions. Additionally, these findings highlight the relevance of government's responsiveness in policy production. The prioritisation of policies appears to be largely consistent with the salience voters attach to the different policy domains.

Another important finding emerges from the analysis of party family dif-

ferences in pledge fulfilment. As stressed in the theoretical section, the way in which governments act during a recession period is contingent on the combination of their political affiliation and the issue of the policy proposals. Left-leaning governments' autonomy is heavily curtailed in times of crisis. Nevertheless, they appear to be able to mobilise the discretionary power they have left for realising their policy preferences related to the welfare state. It is important to note that this surprising finding does not contradict previous studies, which underline left-leaning governments' limited capacities to act in a partisan way (see Kwon, Pontusson 2010), especially during the recent Great Recession. Even though left-leaning governments are found to have a higher probability of fulfilling their social policies in an economically difficult situation, their overall fulfilment rate is extremely low.

When looking at the percentage of promises realised by Italian parties and coalitions, right-leaning governments are found to redeem a high share of their restrictive economic measures when facing negative growth. I argue that the availability of blame-avoiding strategies and shared responsibilities for policy decisions - a feature of coalition governments - are potential explanations for this result. If so, further research is required to determine whether this finding holds merely for right parties in coalition governments. Single-party governments have, for instance, more autonomy compared to coalition ones (Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019; Thomson et al. 2017), but, at the same time, they are held more accountable for their actions by voters (Jensen, Mortensen 2014). Do right-leaning governments' capacities to fulfil unpopular promises during an economic crisis depend on the institutional context, above all the government type? To address this question, an analysis of the influence of the economic context on the partisan policymaking in other policy systems is therefore carried out in the last study of this dissertation (Chapter 4).

Finally, this study contributes to our knowledge of partisan politics during hard times. Specifically, I showed that an economic crisis does not merely have a detrimental impact on partisan capacities to shape policies. Parties in office are also able to take advantage of the negative economic context to adopt their programmatic policies. Electoral and political motivations, reputation issues,

and voters' concerns are just some of the elements that may indeed boost partisan politics during downturns. Data on pledge fulfilment in Italy support the claim that governing parties' behaviour in times of crisis is essentially different – and it is driven by different factors – in times of crisis compared to normal times (Lipsmeyer 2011). These conclusions underline once again that research on parties and party policies needs to take into account the external economic and institutional context in which parties are embedded (see Guinaudeau 2014), as it is likely to have a relevant effect on parties' capacities and incentives to shape the governing agenda.

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CHAPTER 3

DO PARTIES ADJUST THEIR POLICY PREFERENCES TO THE ECONOMIC SITUATION? EVIDENCE FROM THE GREAT RECESSION IN FRANCE, ITALY, AND SWEDEN

Governments have finite time and resources. The space on their agenda is limited as well, so they are forced to make a choice about which topics to discuss, which problems to address, and which policies to prioritise. The outbreak of the Great Recession makes this need to choose even greater since political parties have to deal with strained public budgets, increasing public debts, high government instability and citizens' dissatisfaction (Bosco, Verney 2012; Morlino, Raniolo 2018). The aim of this chapter is to explore the topics and, in particular, the shift in the topics covered in the campaign programs by political parties after 2008. Do parties adapt their election promises to the state of the economy? And if they do, which types of policy proposals do they prioritise?

Existing literature has approached the question of whether, when, and why parties modify their policy agendas from two different angles: changes in policy positions and changes in issue emphasis. Some scholars argue that political actors adjust their policy stances as a response to changes in the preferences of their voters, their core supporters, rival parties, past election results, or the economic context (Abou-Chadi, Green-Pedersen, Mortensen 2020; Adams, Somer-Topcu 2009; Schumacher, de Vries, Vis 2013; Calca, Gross 2019). Others have added that parties can also modify their agenda by emphasising or de-emphasising different policy domains without necessarily shifting their policy position (Dolezal et al. 2014; Green-Pedersen 2007; Green-Pedersen, Mortensen 2010; Ward et al. 2015; Wagner, Meyer 2014). While these two strategies are clearly not mutually exclusive (Green-Pedersen 2007), in this chapter I focus on the changes in issue salience for two main reasons. Previous studies have long underlined that parties increasingly compete in the political arena by

stressing different issues rather than by taking different policy positions on the same kind of issues (Green-Pedersen 2007; Dolezal et al. 2014). In addition, it is quicker – and sometimes, electorally speaking, safer (see Tavits 2007)– for parties to adjust their programmatic agenda by drawing more attention to or neglecting one or more policy issues instead of significantly altering their political stances.

Several scholars have already researched whether parties ‘talk’ more (or less, see De Vries, Solaz 2019; Traber, Giger, Häusermann 2018) about socio-economic issues in times of crisis (Williams, Seki, Whitten 2016; Hutter, Altiparmakis, Vidal 2019). To complement these studies, the purpose of this chapter is to explore the question of whether parties concretely commit themselves in front of their voters to adopt economic and social policies too. While existing studies on issue salience usually employ Manifesto Project data - so observe the policy domains discussed in parties’ campaign programs (Wagner, Meyer 2014; Ward et al. 2015; Spoon, Klüver 2015; Tavits, Potter 2015; Williams, Seki, Whitten 2016; Charalambous, Conti, Pedrazzani 2018) - in this chapter I investigate the topics political parties emphasise (or de-emphasise) in times of a severe recession by looking specifically at their election pledges. Instead of analysing the whole content of party manifestos, my focus is exclusively on the explicit engagements that parties take and write in these documents. As political actors do not merely include in their manifestos policy proposals but other information stands out as well (Harmel 2018), observing a large number of sentences related to a specific issue within these documents does not directly imply that parties make a concrete commitment to prioritise this domain in the governing agenda nor that they pledge to take some specific action. On the contrary, if a party promises to implement a specific policy or achieve a specific goal, then it takes a real commitment and, thus, can be held accountable for it by the electorate (Matthieß 2020).

To this end, I compare the policy issues of the promises made for the elections held right before and right after 2008 in Italy, Sweden, and France. As discussed in greater detail below, these three countries have similar, yet sometimes different, institutional and economic dynamics that make them a good

case selection.

From the analysis of these data, three main conclusions can be drawn. First of all, political parties did not significantly change the focus of their election promises after the onset of the Great Recession. Overall, the topics of their policy proposals seem to be quite stable over time. However, when there is a change, election promises are increasingly related to economic and financial issues. Results of this analysis indeed provide partial support to previous studies stating that parties brought economic matters back to the centre of the political debate after the outbreak of the Great Recession (i.e. Williams, Seki, Whitten 2016): even when looking at election promises, parties' attention to the state of the national economy, the finance, and the labour market increases. Surprisingly, the same is not true for social issues: in the post-2008 elections, the percentage of social promises decreased. It is important to note that these observations only apply when considering the three party systems as a whole. As I present in the last section of this chapter, important differences exist between single parties with respect to the number and share of economic and social promises contained in election programs.

3.1 *The prioritisation of policy issues*

A broad literature has been interested over the years in the reasons pressuring parties to opt for one topic over another (Petrocik 1996; Klüver, Sagarzazu 2016; Ward et al. 2015; Wagner, Meyer 2014; Seeberg 2021). Taken together, the different arguments can be traced back to two main rationales: the riding-the-wave and the issue-ownership arguments. Borrowing these ideas, in this section, I discuss the expectations regarding changes in policy priorities of parties' election promises during times of economic distress.

First of all, the content of election programs should keep pace with the country's development and needs. During the electoral campaign, as well as in times of day-to-day politics, party competition revolves around the state of the country. Parties have to respond and propose policies to deal with current problems; and during a severe economic recession, these problems are mainly relat-

ed to the economy, finance, the labour market, social benefits, and the welfare state. Needless to say, having profound economic, financial, and social consequences, the onset of an economic crisis urges parties to increasingly provide policy solutions mainly in these domains.

Other than responding directly to the critical period, parties are pressured to pay more attention to socio-economic dynamics for electoral purposes. Since one of the goals of election programs and promises is to attract new voters (Harmel 2018) - or at least not to lose votes at the next elections - political actors have a better chance to be (re)elected when they discuss, advertise, and portray themselves as able to deal with and to solve those challenges that are important and salient for the country and voters at that very moment (Klüver, Sagarzazu 2016). A political party that does not talk about the issues that are currently debated and discussed by the electorate and in the media might seem indifferent to its voters' concerns (Seeberg 2021). And, thus, it might suffer heavy electoral losses. It is indeed strategically rewarding for political parties to promote issues that are of public interest. During a recession period, economic and financial matters are at the heart of public concerns (Bremer 2018; Singer 2013) as well are questions related to welfare benefits and social spending (McManus 2018). In their study of the reasons explaining parties' issue priorities in Italy, Spain, and Portugal, Enrico Borghetto and Federico Russo (2018) highlight that in tough economic times parties are encouraged to focus more on economic problems since these coincide with citizens' priorities. As they note,

'In ordinary times, the public is often concerned about several issues simultaneously. The signals from the public are weak and contradictory, leaving much space for parties to decide their agenda. By contrast, during an economic crisis, [...] [voters'] attention is concentrated on a narrow set of issues. [...] in these cases, the signals coming from public opinion cannot be overlooked because ignoring them could be too costly from a political point of view' (Borghetto, Russo 2018, 74).

Issue competition studies have also revealed that party competition is

mostly played around those topics on which partisan solutions differ (see Green-Pedersen, Krogstrup 2008). It is precisely by making references to these ‘divided’ issues that politicians can more easily convey their position to the electorate and build up their image as actors with a clear and distinctive identity. Jae-Jae Spoon and Heike Klüver (2015) point out the relevance of voters’ polarisation too. Through an analysis of election programs, they show that parties increasingly respond to a salient issue when voters share contrasting views: parties are more inclined to prioritise those policy domains in which there is disagreement among the electorate because these are the issues that mobilise voters (Spoon, Klüver 2015). When the country is going through a recession phase, diverging solutions and expectations on how to deal with the negative repercussions on the national economy emerge. Ian McManus (2019) for instance points out that the Great Recession has challenged the neo-liberal consensus and, simultaneously, boosted partisan disputes over welfare expenditure. Following this reasoning, once again, parties are expected to stress their alternative policy positions and solutions to these common problems in their election manifestos.

After the outbreak of a severe financial and economic crisis - such as the Great Recession - parties are therefore expected to increasingly make promises related to socio-economic issues. A considerable amount of studies provide evidence to support this theoretical expectation. This is for instance the case of Williams and colleagues (2016), who conclude their analysis of campaign manifestos by stating that ‘parties talk about the economy more during bad economic times’ (60). Similar conclusions are drawn by Hutter et al. (2019) when looking at parties’ statements, though the saliency of economic matters is found to vary depending on the extent, severity, and duration of the critical period. Accordingly, I contend that parties can be expected not only to talk more about these topics but to take a larger number of policy commitments related to these issues too.

Results from other studies, however, challenge this view of a straightforward and positive relationship between economic crisis and attention to socio-economic issues. Underlying the converging pressure exerted by financial and

economic integration for national economic policies, Ward et al. (2015) suggest that it is far more cost-effective for political parties to make the electoral campaign revolve around non-economic issues. In doing so, the media and the public's attention might be driven away from problems that politicians are either incapable of solving or do not have the resources to solve (De Vries, Solaz 2019). According to this argument, there is no point in drawing attention to areas in which the policies are, in a way, 'decided' and 'imposed' by the bad economic situation, and in which the partisan margin of manoeuvre is practically zero (Traber, Giger, Häusermann 2018). Also from voters' perspective, it can be argued that the focus during a recession period might lie in non-economic matters. Aware that governments' leeway is severely hindered by global forces, the electorate appears to hardly consider parties responsible for economic policies (Hellwig 2014; Lobo, Pannico 2020). In Timothy Hellwig's (2014) words 'publics use information about integration in world markets to recalibrate their preferences, shifting demands away from economic issues and toward other domains' (12). It is important to note, however, that these studies do not claim that economic matters are no longer discussed in the political arena during economic turmoil, but rather that the salience of non-economic issues increases (Traber, Giger, Häusermann 2018; De Vries, Solaz 2019). Greene (2016) for instance suggests that, as governing parties are afraid they will be punished for the negative economic performance of the country, they decrease the centrality of economic issues in their electoral program in favour of a wider number of other policy domains in which their discretionary power remains high.

In any case, it is undeniably risky not to take some major engagements on timely and relevant issues. As nicely portrayed by the concept of 'party-system agenda' (Green-Pedersen, Mortensen 2010), political competition takes place in a 'system', where issue emphasis is not merely the result of individual choices of parties but is also the outcome of a back-and-forth process with other actors. From this perspective, the decision to prioritise one issue over another is driven by rival parties' strategies as well (Seeberg 2021). If a party decides not to make any promises in the economic or social sector while the main

opponent(s) does (do) take several socio-economic policy commitments, it is highly likely that - in the case where these types of issues are prominent - the party would lose voters' attention and support (Green-Pedersen, Mortensen 2010). The reasoning goes even further. A party that neglects a salient issue gets left out of the definition of the issue and the framing of the political debate around that issue (Green-Pedersen, Mortensen 2010).

In addition to being pressured by external conditions, voters' concerns, and the media's attention (*riding-the-wave argument*), political parties are more likely to make more promises in one policy sector if they 'own' the issue. As framed by Petrocik (1996), issue ownership is the result of parties' capacities to act in a specific policy domain – or, at least, the electorate's perception of the party having the ability to do so - and their constituency's preferences and requests. A party is thus positively associated with an issue if its key supporters are very interested in the issue and if the party was previously successful in acting in that domain. Since plenty of empirical evidence supports the idea that issue ownership influences voting behaviour (i.e. Bélanger, Meguid 2008), parties can be expected to emphasise the issues they own in the election campaign (Dolezal et al. 2014).

Other than being directly driven by electoral reasons, partisan actors have a second incentive to focus on the issues they enjoy ownership in: those are the policy domains in which they have the ability to solve problems, in which they are more likely to successfully translate their proposals into concrete policy outputs. As the concept of retrospective pledge voting rightly highlights (Matthieß 2020), political parties need to fulfil their electoral engagements to avoid being punished at the polls. So we can expect parties to include in their electoral programs those promises that satisfy their electorate and that they hope to be able to fulfil - at least to some extent.

The two arguments discussed above are clearly not mutually exclusive. In exploring the Danish case, Christoffer Green-Pedersen and Rune Stubager (2010) for instance argue that it is the combination of news coverage and issue ownership that shapes partisan actors' issue emphasis. A party is encouraged to focus its campaign promises on those policy issues it enjoys ownership only

when these policy issues are rather salient (Bélanger, Meguid 2008). As a result, the two main hypotheses of this study can be summarised as follows:

H1 (Riding-the-wave hypothesis): Overall, after the onset of the economic crisis, parties made more promises about socio-economic issues compared to the previous period.

H2 (Issue ownership hypothesis): Parties made more social or economic promises during an economic crisis if they own the issue.

While I will focus on these two main aspects, several other factors might influence parties' decision to prioritise one issue instead of another when elaborating their election promises (Harmel 2018). Notably, party organisation is considered a relevant element in the discussion of issue engagement and policy priorities (Wagner, Meyer 2014). While larger mainstream parties following more office-seeking incentives are considerably more responsive to the general public's concerns, parties with smaller organisations and fewer resources are more likely to meet the preferences of their rank-and-file supporters and voters and, therefore, have more stable policy programs (Abou-Chadi, Green-Pedersen, Mortensen 2020; Wagner, Meyer 2014; similar conclusions for leadership-dominated/activist-dominated parties in Schumacher, de Vries, Vis 2013; for alternative evidence see Walgrave, Nuytemans 2009). A similar discussion applies to single-issue parties and niche parties (Ezrow et al. 2011). Parties' position in the previous legislative term might also be seen as a mediating factor. As the economic voting theory has long posited that incumbents are strongly sanctioned in times of a negative economic situation, parties that were previously in office should increasingly try to redirect the attention to other issues, namely those issues in which their governing performance was deemed successful (Vavreck 2009). Consequently, we should also expect the type of party organisation and its government status to affect parties' decisions of which policy proposals to include in their campaign manifestos.

3.2 Data collection

3.2.1 Case selection

This chapter focuses on France, Italy, and Sweden. In addition to data collection constraints, these three countries were selected on the basis of different criteria. First of all, they all have a multi-party system characterised by plural competition. In particular, the last two decades saw a decline in traditional parties' support and the consequent emergence of new partisan actors. The end of the Cold War and the Tangentopoli corruption scandal brought on a deep transformation of the Italian party system where new political organisations emerged from the ashes of the so-called First Republic (D'Alimonte 2005). Similarly, the structure of the partisan competition in France evolved as well, as the National Front moved to the centre of political life (Bornschieer 2010) challenging the more traditional left-wing (Socialist Party) and right-wing (Union for a Popular Movement) parties. Even in Sweden, the party system underwent major transformations (Aylott 2016). The elections of 2006 brought profound changes in the political arena, marking the end of the predominance of the Social Democratic Party and the formation of the first centre-right government since 1994 led by the Moderates (Bäck, Bergman 2016). At the same time, the Green Party increased its vote share and became the third party in the 2010 elections (Sundström 2011) while the far-right party, the Sweden Democrats, obtained its first parliamentary seats in 2010 (Bäck, Bergman 2016). All three countries have therefore moved past a 'bipolar' system - even though sometimes an 'imperfect' one (Aylott 2016; Bornschieer 2010; D'Alimonte 2005). Since in those new configurations, the electoral volatility rises while voters' identification with parties decreases (Strömbäck 2016; Aylott 2016; Morlino, Raniolo 2018), issues gained more relevance in the elections (Green-Pedersen 2007). This is true even in Sweden where the 'left-right dimension' was usually regarded as 'the "super-issue" of Swedish election campaigns' (Oscarsson, Holmberg 2016, 261). We can thus expect the political competition of these countries to increasingly revolve around issues and their salience.

As Figure 1 shows, France, Italy, and Sweden had similar economic dynamics as well. All three national economies were badly hit by the outbreak of the Great Recession, though the slowdown of GDP growth was particularly sharp in Italy. The financial crisis that broke out at the end of 2008 after the

collapse of the US bank Lehman Brothers and the burst of the housing bubble in Spain was exacerbated by the sovereign debt crisis that struck Italy together with the other Southern European countries (Bosco, Verney 2012). The unemployment rate also dramatically increased, with a peak in the years after 2011 (Figure 2).

Figure 1. GDP growth rates in France, Italy, and Sweden (Source: OECD).

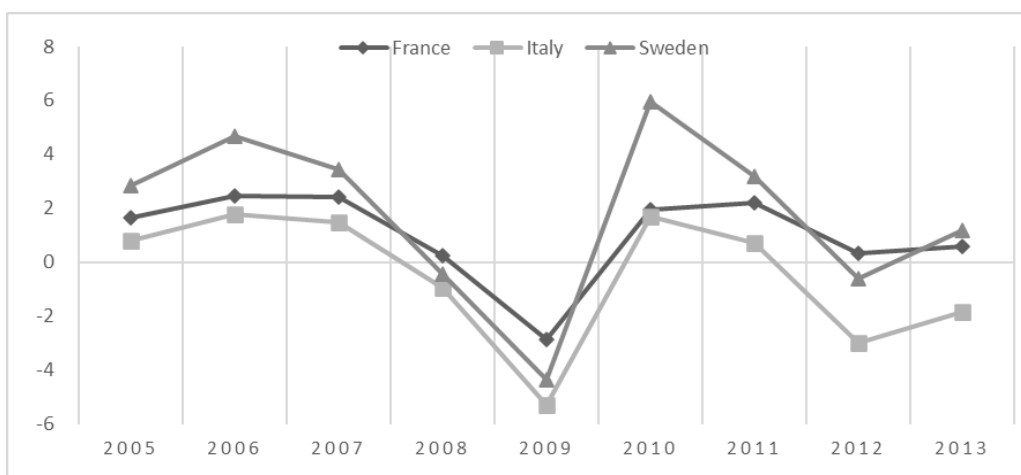
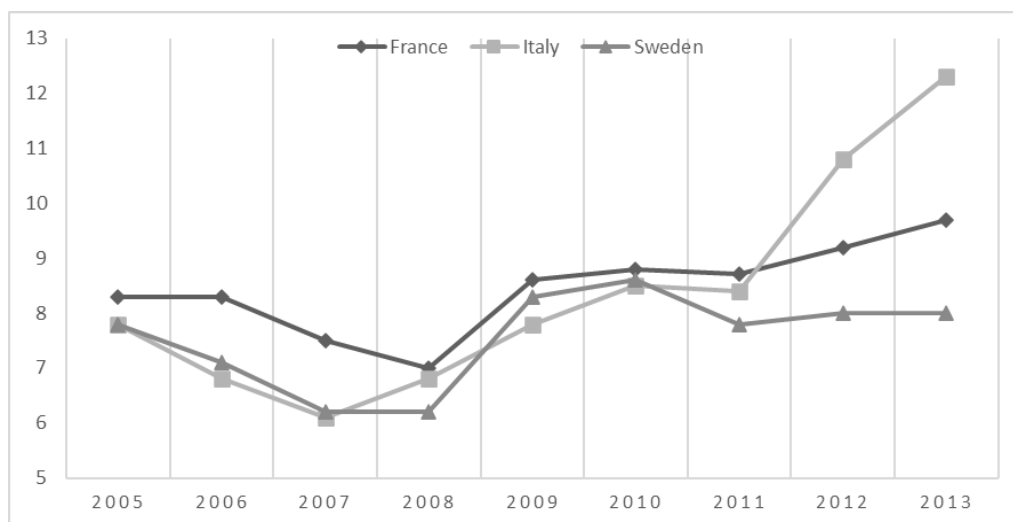


Figure 2. Unemployment rates in France, Italy, and Sweden (Source: OECD)



The crisis has not even spared the Swedish economy. GDP growth reached a negative value also in this country between 2008 and 2009. Nevertheless, unlike the case of Italy (Bosco, Verney 2012), the recovery was particularly quick

(Aylott 2010) - with just a little setback in 2012. France followed a pattern similar to the Swedish one, though its recovery was slower and weaker: in 2012-2013 the growth of GDP stabilised at a level slightly above zero and the unemployment level kept growing. In all three cases, the economic crisis played a central role in the election campaigns after 2008, though - as presented in the results section - to a different extent.

3.2.2 Data

To explore the influence of an economic crisis on parties' policy priorities, this chapter compares electoral promises for the same Italian, Swedish, and French parties for the election year right before and shortly after the onset of the Great Recession. In line with other studies (Bremer 2018; Traber, Giger, Häusermann 2018; McManus 2019), the year 2008 is identified as the moment in which the financial and subsequent economic crisis broke out in Europe. The election years selected are 2006 and 2010 for Sweden, 2007 and 2012 for France, 2008 and 2013 for Italy. For the Italian case, therefore, the 'before-crisis' period corresponds to the 2008 election. As the Figure above clearly illustrates (Figure 1), the economic crisis hit the Italian economy at the end of 2008 and mainly in 2009, when a decline in GDP growth of approximately 4.3 was recorded. The recession was consequently not among the main problems capturing mediatic and partisan attention during the 2008 electoral campaign (Guerra and Massetti, 2008). In turn, the three-year difference between the Italian 'after-2008' period and the Swedish one does not pose any concerns to the results of this research. In 2013, Italy was still going through an economically critical period, mainly because of the long-lasting consequences of the sovereign debt crisis. Solutions to the recession and unemployment, spending cuts, economic development, and citizens' declining trust were still all at the core of the campaign agenda and electoral debate.

The final dataset contains promises included in 29 electoral manifestos published by fifteen parties and/or coalitions (Table 1).

Table 1. List of parties' manifestos

Country	Election year (Before-2008)	Party	Election year (After-2008)	Party
Italy	2008	Democratic Party Union of the Centre People of Freedom Northern League	2013	Democratic Party Union of the Centre People of Freedom (+NL)
France	2007	The Greens Socialist Party Union for a Popular Movement National Front	2012	The Greens Socialist Party Union for a Popular Movement National Front
Sweden	2006	Green Ecology Party Left Party Social Democratic Party Liberal People's Party Christian Democrats Centre Party The Alliance	2010	Green Ecology Party Left Party Red-Green coalition Liberal People's Party Christian Democrats Centre Party The Alliance

Total number of pledges: 6,728

For Italy and France, I gathered my own data. For the Swedish case, I rely on secondary data.⁷ For comparative purposes, only the parties in the political system that participated in both elections considered are taken into account for the analysis. Since in 2013 the Northern League - differently from the previous election when it decided to present its own program despite being part of the People of Freedom electoral coalition - signed the coalition manifestos with its allies, this latter is the only manifesto analysed for both parties in 2013 (People of Freedom and Northern League). Similarly, instead of having its own program, in 2010 the Swedish Social Democratic Party decided to rally around the program of the Red-Green electoral coalition (Aylott, Bolin 2015); hence, this is the one analysed. The same is true for the Swedish Moderates, who dedicated their time to promoting the coalition manifesto (The Alliance) in both elections (Aylott, Bolin 2007; 2015).

Salience literature often employs data from the Manifesto Project to estimate the attention given to specific issues by parties at election time (Wagner, Meyer 2014; Ward et al. 2015; Spoon, Klüver 2015; Tavits, Potter 2015; Wil-

⁷ Håkansson, Naurin 2016; Naurin 2020

liams, Seki, Whitten 2016; Charalambous, Conti, Pedrazzani 2018). Thus, they analyse the content of the electoral programs as a whole in order to make assumptions about the saliency of topics. Relevant as these studies might be, as well as the information about issue responsiveness that they might provide (see for instance Spoon, Klüver 2015), measuring issue emphasis through manifestos might over (or under) estimate partisan engagement. First of all, as Green-Pedersen argues in his article of 2019, the scope – and consequently the coding scheme employed - of the Manifesto Project was to assess parties' positioning on the traditional left-to-right spectrum, not issue salience (Green-Pedersen 2019). Accordingly, the sentences analysed are classified depending on the 'ideological goals of certain policy measures' (Green-Pedersen 2019, 374) without considering the policy domain of the phrase under scrutiny. Additionally, electoral programs do not merely contain specific policy proposals. Different pieces of information stand out as well. Parties' and coalitions' manifestos are no strangers to discussions of general principles, criticisms of incumbents' or rival parties' actions and positions, mentions of the state of the country, and descriptions of measures adopted in the past, just to cite a few (Harmel 2018). Stating that a party pays more attention to economic or environmental issues because its electoral program contains a higher share of quasi-sentences related to these topics is not the same as claiming that the party increasingly devotes space in this document to new policy proposals - which is the focus of this chapter. Instead of looking at what parties talk about in their election programs, I decided to capture the concrete engagements that parties take in front of their voters, the topics to which partisan actors concretely commit themselves, and whether these commitments are affected by the state of the national economy. For responsiveness to be actually present, political elites are not just required to 'speak' about relevant matters, they have to 'take action' in the direction desired by the electorate. Or, at least, to concretely pledge to do so. Accordingly, within the electoral manifestos, I selected only those statements that can be defined as 'electoral pledges'. Following the widely used definition by Terry Royed (1996), campaign promises are sentences that refer to a policy, action, or goal the party or the coalition strive to attain.

Table 2. Categories of policy issues

CAP categories	Codes from Swedish data	Policy Issues
Domestic Macroeconomic Issues	Economics	Economy
Labour and Employment	Enterprise	
Banking and Finance	Employment	
Foreign Trade		
Health	Social Welfare	Social Issue
Social Welfare		
Housing Issues		
Government Operations	-	Government
Education	Education & Research	Education
Transportation	Infrastructure	Transportation
Law, Crime, and Family Issues	Legal Matters	Law and Order
Immigration and Refugee Issues	Migration	Immigration
Environment	Environment	Environment
Civil Rights and Minority Issues	European Union	Other Issues
Agriculture	Agriculture	
Energy	Culture	
Defence	Foreign Policy	
Space, Science, and Technology	Other	
International Affairs		
Public Lands		
Culture		

Election promises are then assigned to the policy issue they pertain to. To do so, as was the case for the study presented in the previous chapter (see Chapter 2), I employed the Comparative Agenda Project (CAP) codebook. The original 21 categories of the CAP are combined with the categories used for the Swedish data and, then, rearranged into the nine most-widely-discussed policy sectors (Table 2): (1) economy; (2) social issues; (3) government matters; (4) education; (5) transportation; (6) law and order; (7) immigration; (8) environment; (9) other issues. The category ‘government’ does not appear in the Swedish codebook, but, given the high relevance of institutional and administrative reforms especially in the Italian political debate, it was necessary to incorporate it as a separate category in my final dataset.

3.3 Results

3.3.1 Do parties change the topic of their promises?

Before tackling the question of the prioritisation of policy proposals after the outbreak of the Great Recession, it is important to assess whether issue emphasis does actually change in the manifestos under investigation. To measure the stability of issue attention, I employed the measure of issue convergence developed by Sigelman and Buell (2004), but instead of looking at the difference in the attention paid to the same issue by two different parties, I consider the difference in the attention given to the same issue by the same party before and after 2008 (a similar measure is employed by Mortensen et al. 2011). More concretely, issue stability is measured as the sum of the absolute difference between the percentage of promises related to each one of the nine policy issues made by a party in the two manifestos ('before 2008' and 'after 2008'):

$$\text{Stability index: } 100 - (\sum_{i=1}^9 |Pp(\text{after}) - Pp(\text{before})|) / 2$$

The closer the value of the index is to 100, the more stable issue attention is over time, thus the party makes pledges related to more or less the same kind of policy issues.

Overall, the parties examined in this study do not seem to have considerably changed the focus of their election promises in times of a deep financial and socio-economic crisis, such as after the Great Recession hit (Table 3). The topics of electoral commitments are particularly stable in France, where only 14% of the total pledges are related to different policy domains. This percentage even decreases when we look at the stability index of the Greens. In this case, the emphasis paid to different policy issues is nearly the same in the manifestos of 2007 and 2012. National Front and the Socialist Party have some of the highest stability scores as well. Swedish parties show values that differ greatly from one another: Christian Democrats' and the Greens' topics of election promises are quite stable over time whereas The Alliance's and the Left Party's are less so.

Table 3. Issue stability

Country	Party	Stability index
Italy	Democratic Party	75.5
	Union of the Centre	67.6
	People of Freedom	78.3
Country mean		73.8
France	The Greens	90.8
	Socialist Party	85.8
	Union for a Popular Movement	81.4
	National Front	86.0
Country mean		86.0
Sweden	Green Ecology Party	81.5
	Left Party	70.7
	Social Democratic Party	77.6
	Liberal People's Party	75.7
	Christian Democrats	84.5
	The Alliance	70.5
	Centre Party	74.8
Country mean		76.5

While French parties - and, to a lesser extent, some Swedish parties as well – appear not to have shifted the focus of their programmatic policies, in Italy the distance to perfect stability (when the stability index equals 100) is more pronounced. The average value of the stability index for Italy is the lowest, but important differences can be noted between the parties/electoral coalitions as well. The value for the People of Freedom's manifestos is close to the Swedish Social Democrats' one while the Italian Democratic Party and Swedish Liberals have very similar indexes: the change in issue emphasis is around 22% and 25%, respectively. The Union of the Centre is the party that has changed the most the topics of its campaign promises.

On the whole, the promises made by parties during the electoral campaigns revolve around similar topics in these two subsequent elections. Shifts do occur but the prevailing aspect is stability. Smaller, more radical, and sometimes single-issue parties (the French and Swedish Greens, and the National Front, for instance) are the ones whose policy proposals are more stable over time. Parties with fewer resources, a less diverse electorate, and powerful supporters have fewer opportunities and incentives to significantly shift their attention

(Wagner, Meyer 2014; Schumacher, de Vries, Vis 2013). Nevertheless, every election program has some degree of change, in some cases even going as far as one-quarter of the pledges related to distinct policy issues. In the next sections, I explore more in-depth the types of issues that are neglected and the ones that become more relevant after the onset of the economic crisis in 2008.

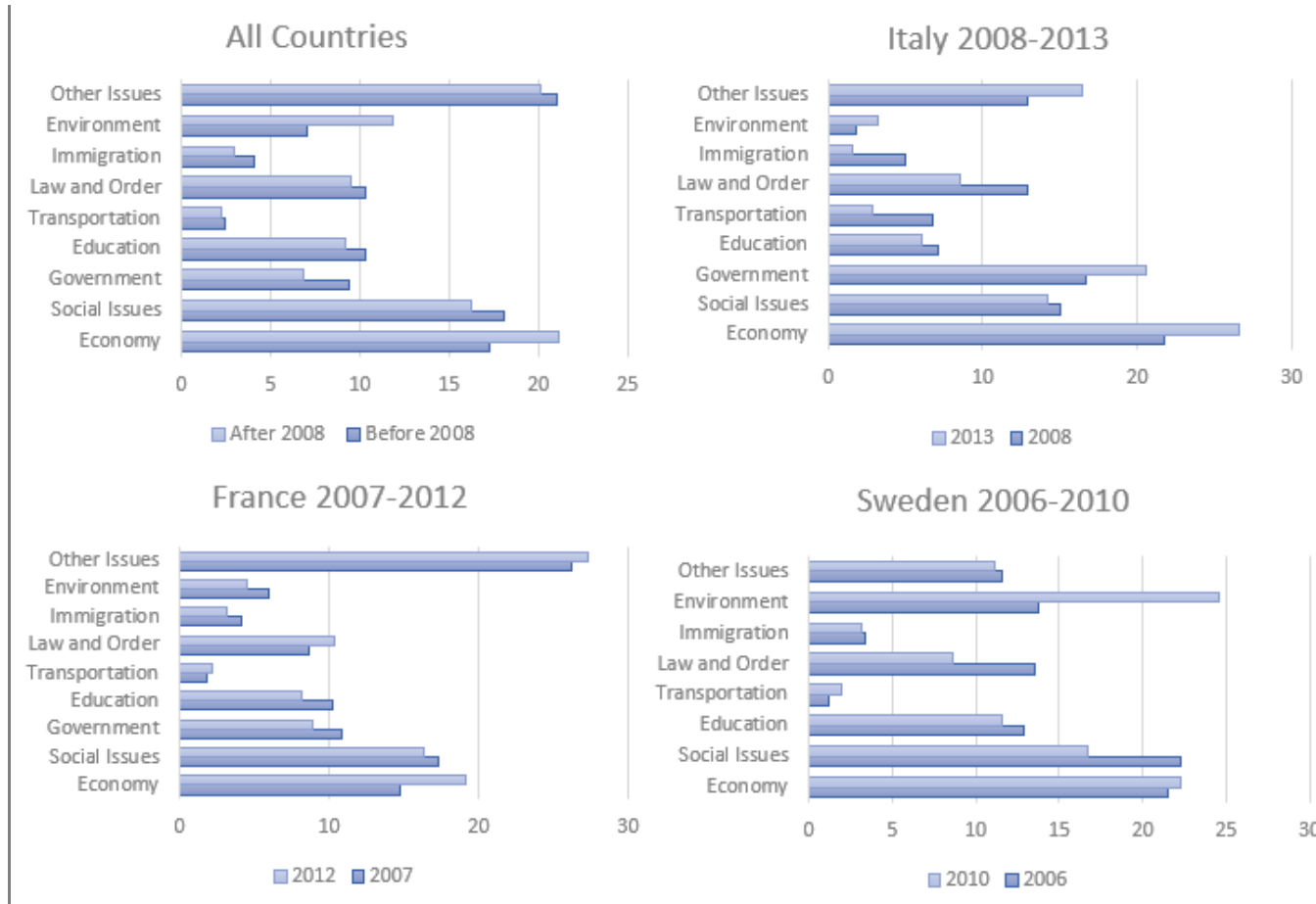
3.3.2 Which issues do parties emphasise during a recession?

Figure 3 illustrates the percentage of election promises made by the different parties depending on the type of policy issue. Generally speaking, data show that the salience of the topics addressed by parties' campaign commitments differs according to the period and the country considered.

In the top left-hand corner of Figure 3 data for all three countries are combined. In the period following the outbreak of the Great Recession in Europe, a higher share of policy proposals deals with economic matters (21.1% compared to 17.3% for the previous elections). The same is not true, however, for social issues. In this case, parties take a lower percentage of electoral engagements in the social and welfare sectors (18.1% before 2008 and 16.3% after 2008). Overall, a severe economic crisis does incentivise parties to draw more attention to problems related to the national economy, the labour market, public expenditure, and the tax system, though the same consideration is not paid to social problems. While in the pre-2008 campaigns, social promises were made slightly more than economic ones (18.1% and 17.3% respectively), after the outbreak of the crisis the situation reversed.

In Italy, a higher percentage of promises is devoted to economic and government issues in the programs of 2013 compared to the ones presented for the 2008 election. Indeed, other than having deep financial, economic and social consequences, the Great Recession and the subsequent debt crisis led to a political crisis as well (Bosco, Verney 2012). As economic conditions worsened, dissatisfaction with the government and its mismanagement of the crisis spread and gave rise to increasing levels of abstention and declining trust in politicians and political parties (Bosco, Verney 2012; Morlino, Raniolo 2018).

Figure 3. Percentage of promises made by policy issue.



As a consequence, pressures to reform the political system increased, conveyed especially by the new-born challenger party, the Five Stars Movement. This is not, however, a new phenomenon and a new issue within the Italian political landscape. Since the decline of the so-called ‘First Republic’ and the emergence of new organisations in the political arena, claims in favour of constitutional amendments and system reforms have been commonplace in Italy. Indeed, as Figure 3 shows, the second larger issue in Italy is ‘government’ even in the 2008 election campaign. However, the proportion of pledges dealing with government efficiency and bureaucracy strongly grew during the economic crisis, at the expense of other topics such as immigration, law and order, transportation, and, to a lesser extent, education and social issues that saw their percentages decrease.

Economic matters gained more attention also in France during the first election held after 2008. Here again, the share of social promises went down, even if only slightly (16.3% compared to 17.3% for the 2007 election). With the exception of transportation and law and order, less focus was placed on every other topic. As Grossman and Sauger (2014) put it, ‘the 2012 French general elections have been framed as those of the “great recession”’ (86; see also Kuhn 2013). Consistently, public finances and economic concerns were also the key aspects of the 2012 campaign if we look more closely at the topics of the election pledges.

The same trends described in the previous two countries are observed in Sweden as well. However, the extent of the changes in issue emphasis differs: the percentage of economic promises increased but not as much as in the Italian and French cases (it rose by only 0.8 percentage points), while the decline in the attention paid to social-related pledges was particularly pronounced. As the Swedish economy quickly recovered from a severe hit during the government led by the Alliance (2006-2010), the crisis was no longer the core question of the 2010 campaign (Aylott 2010). Of course, parties were still pledging to implement several economic policies – in particular labour market measures, tax reforms, and credits (Aylott 2010) – but there is not a significant prioritisation of these types of promises to the detriment of others. The strong increase

in the share of pledges pertaining to environmental issues stands out in Figure 3. As this topic became a key issue in Swedish politics (Aylott 2010; Oscarsson, Holmberg 2016), all seven parties and/or coalitions analysed in this study boosted the attention to environmental topics (see Table A3 in the Appendix).

In line with previous studies asserting that in times of recession parties ‘talk’ more about economic problems (i.e. Williams, Seki, Whitten 2016), my data show that parties in Italy, France, and Sweden have prioritised the making of economic and financial promises too. Less attention is devoted, on the contrary, to social promises. The first hypothesis of this study (H_1) is therefore partially confirmed: after the onset of the economic crisis of 2008, election programs did focus more on economic promises, but not on social issues.

3.3.3 Do parties differ?

In the previous section, we explored the attention paid to the different promises in the election manifestos by country. Nevertheless, there are important differences in the emphasis placed on economic and social problems by parties within these countries. Table 4 shows both the percentage and the absolute number of promises made pertaining to economic and social issues, divided by party/coalition.

Starting with Italian parties, we can already note diverging dynamics. The main centre-left party (Democratic Party) strongly decreased the number of its socio-economic promises after the outbreak of the Great Recession. While in the 2008 manifesto, the vast majority of policy proposals were related to the economy, in the 2013 election the attention and the resources of the party were focused more on government issues (see Table A2 in the Appendix). The percentage of economic promises rose both in the programs of the Union of the Centre and the People of Freedom. For the former, however, this increase was only present in relative terms; if we look at the absolute frequency, the number of promises made in the economic sector declined. The same is true for social promises. Employing the concept fostered by Laurenz Ennsner-Jedenastik et al. (2022), the reason for this divergence is due to ‘issue substitution’: overall the

party promised less, but an increased emphasis was devoted to these types of promises at the expense of other policy domains. People of Freedom is among those parties in the table who have the higher percentage increase for economic promises (59%). As centre-right and right parties are usually identified with more fiscal responsibility and balanced budgets (Bremer 2018), People of Freedom seems to be inclined to focus on economic matters in times of economic distress and, at the same time, neglect social issues. This finding provides a partial confirmation of the second hypothesis of the study: parties emphasise more social or economic issues during an economic crisis if they own the issue (H₂).

Table 4. Percentage changes in the number of pledges related to the economy and social issues by party.

Party	Economy			Social Issues		
	Pre-2008	Post-2008	Change	Pre-2008	Post-2008	Change
<i>Italy</i>						
Democratic Party	28,05 (46)	15,28 (11)	-.45	12,80 (21)	9,72 (7)	-.24
Union of the Centre	18,46 (36)	20,95 (9)	.13	13,33 (26)	37,23 (16)	1.79
People of Freedom	20,00 (41)	31,84 (64)	.59	18,54 (38)	10,95 (22)	-.41
<i>France</i>						
The Greens	12,94 (85)	17,22 (139)	.33	18,72 (123)	16,23 (131)	-.13
Socialist Party	21,88 (93)	30,88 (67)	.41	15,76 (67)	11,06 (24)	-.30
Union for a Popular Movement	14,44 (81)	16,25 (39)	.12	21,39 (120)	21,67 (51)	.01
National Front	12,68 (98)	17,65 (42)	.39	13,97 (108)	15,97 (38)	.14
<i>Sweden</i>						
Left Party	36,94 (41)	28,95 (11)	-.22	16,22 (18)	10,53 (4)	-.35
Social Democratic Party	18,87 (20)	30,30 (50)	.61	33,02 (35)	20,61 (34)	-.38
Green Ecology Party	15,25 (18)	12,50 (15)	-.18	15,25 (18)	3,33 (4)	-.78
Centre Party	26,03 (19)	28,14 (47)	.08	26,03 (19)	7,19 (12)	-.72
Liberal People's Party	17,26 (29)	6,28 (13)	-.64	20,83 (35)	28,50 (59)	.37
Christian Democrats	32,20 (19)	27,35 (32)	-.15	25,42 (15)	23,08 (27)	-.09
The Alliance	16,83 (34)	27,24 (76)	.62	22,77 (46)	15,41 (43)	-.32

Note: Absolute values in brackets.

Data for all other policy issues are available in the Appendix.

In France, all parties increased their attention to the economy in relative

terms. The outbreak of the Great Recession has therefore boosted the salience of economic and financial concerns in the electoral debate (see also Ivaldi 2015). As expected, the change was particularly large for the Socialist Party, the main opposition party in the previous mandate, and lower for the party of President Sarkozy, the Union for a Popular Movement, in office during the first years of the crisis. Initially, Sarkozy tried to build his campaign around his proposals to lead the country out of the crisis, but as soon as he realised that this was not a winning strategy he quickly moved to other topics (Nadeau, Lewis-Beck 2013). If we look more closely at the data, the absolute number of economic promises increased only for the Greens. Concerning the other three parties, the percentage increase was mainly due to a strong decline in the number of promises made in other policy domains (see Table A1 in the Appendix). The Socialists, for instance, pledged less on the social front and focused less on law and order matters than in the 2007 campaign. The Union for a Popular Movement in turn overlooked government and education measures. The only French election program in which the attention to social issues grew, though merely in relative terms, is the National Front's. Since the 1990s and particularly since the leadership of Marine Le Pen, the party tried to expand its electoral support and become a credible government candidate (Ivaldi 2015; Kuhn 2012). In order to do so, its electoral campaigns have to deal with the entirety of political issues, especially the ones that are deemed the most salient by voters (Kuhn 2012). Following this strategy, the National Front policy proposals were more focused on the economy, social issues, law and order, and institutional reforms.

If we now turn to Sweden, the Red-Green coalition and the Alliance strongly widened the number and the share of promises made in the economic sector. The main parties of these two coalitions had both built up a good reputation for managing the national economy thanks, in the case of the Social Democrats, to a steady economic growth registered in its governing years and, in the case of the Moderates, to a good crisis management (Aylott 2010). With a successful economic performance to its credit, the incumbent government led by Reinfeldt did not try to shift attention away from economic matters, but

quite the contrary. The quick and positive response to the GDP growth decline of 2008-2009 was such a great success that - according to Christensen, Dahlberg, and Martinsson (2015) - the moderates managed to 'steal' the ownership of economic issues from the Social Democrats in 2010 (see also Oscarsson and Holmberg 2016). Surprisingly, the economy stood out as the first issue of the Social Democrats' promises of 2010, even above social matters – traditionally their issue priority (Christensen, Dahlberg, Martinsson 2015). The number of economic policy proposals pledged to be adopted by the Centre Party and the Christian Democrats rose as well but these types of promises did not attract much attention from these parties (see the share of economic promises in Table 4). Other issues - such as education and the environment in the first case, and the law-and-order and immigration in the second – were given priority (see Table A3 in the Appendix). All the remaining parties decreased their promises in the economic sector. Concerning social issues, all changes between the electoral commitments made in 2006 and 2010 were negative except for the Liberals. As previously discussed (Figure 3), all Swedish parties did not focus more on social policy proposals following the onset of the economic crisis of 2008.

3.4 *Conclusions*

This article has explored the policy domains of the promises included in the election manifestos of Italian, French, and Swedish parties, with particular attention to whether these parties shifted their issue emphasis after the onset of the Great Recession. While we could have expected the emergence of a severe economic crisis to provoke a major shift in policy priorities, data show that parties commit themselves to the same kind of issues as the previous election. On average, only about 21-22% of the election promises are related to a different policy domain in the post-2008 election campaigns, compared to the pre-2008 ones. We can therefore infer that the emergence of the Great Recession did not significantly modify parties' electoral priorities. This result does not, however, necessarily mean that political parties did not discuss economic and financial problems or else avoided dealing with the negative repercussions of the crisis.

Rather, it merely suggests that the emphasis of parties' engagements did not change. Aware of their limited room for manoeuvre in some policy sectors and of the difficulties in adopting certain types of promises in times of crisis, parties might have stuck to previously-discussed policy options. An alternative explanation might be that the problems caused by the crisis were already present in the years before 2008, so they were already getting the attention needed. In Italy, for instance, signs of economic troubles were there well before, and the onset of the Great Recession has only aggravated the already challenging situation (Bosco, Verney 2012).

Another important finding concerns the prioritisation of policy issues. When parties did actually shift their attention to other policy domains in the aftermath of the Great Recession, they increasingly focused on economic issues: the share of economic and financial promises is thus higher in the manifestos published after 2008. As was hypothesised (H₁), political actors seem to adapt – albeit to a limited extent - their policy preferences to the economic context and engage in those issues that are more salient for their voters and the electorate more in general (Seeberg 2021; Borghetto, Russo 2018; Klüver, Sagarzazu 2016). Nevertheless, it is important to note that, at the country level, this only applies to economic issues and not to social issues, whereas there are major differences if we go into rather more detail about single parties. Some parties (Union of the Centre; National Front) gave a higher priority to both economic and social promises; others (People of Freedom; The French Greens; Socialist Party; Union for a Popular Movement; Social Democratic Party and the Red-Green coalition; Centre Party; The Alliance) only to economic promises; the rest placed much less emphasis on the economy and welfare after the outbreak of the economic crisis in 2008. Existing literature has underlined that many aspects could have an influence on the choice of prioritising one issue over another (i.e. Seeberg 2021; Green-Pedersen, Stubager 2010; Dolezal et al. 2014; Williams, Seki, Whitten 2016), and even in this case it is hard to identify a comprehensive explanation for this variation between parties. As I discussed in the theoretical section, the increase in attention to socio-economic issues after 2008 does sometimes depend on parties' issue ownership. This is for in-

stance the case of the main centre-right parties/coalitions analysed in this study: all three right-wing parties (People of Freedom, Union for a Popular Movement, and the Alliance) put more emphasis on economic promises. On the contrary, the Swedish Social Democrats strongly decreased their share of social promises even though this is one of the policy domains to which they are historically closer (Christensen, Dahlberg, Martinsson 2015). Notwithstanding the high context and party-dependent nature of these findings, this study offers relevant insights into parties' commitments and suggests, once again, the importance of bringing in the economic context in the study of party politics and competition.

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CHAPTER 4

HOW THE ECONOMIC CONTEXT AND THE TYPE OF GOVERNMENT AFFECT PLEDGE FULFILMENT: A CROSS-NATIONAL ANALYSIS

A great deal of research in recent years has focused on the functioning of the policymaking process and the influence of parties' preferences on policy outputs. Several scholars have concentrated their attention on electoral programs - conceived as a concrete object to assess partisan ideology - in an effort to understand motivations and constraints that shape governments' capacities to carry out their electoral policy proposals (for a review of these studies see Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019). While the role played by institutional factors has been largely investigated (i.e. Artés 2013; Naurin 2011; Thomson et al. 2017), vastly under-explored is the influence of macroeconomic conditions on parties' ability to enact their programmatic policies. Even more, no previous study has examined the interaction between institutional and economic factors. The aim of this study is, therefore, to investigate how the economic performance of a country might affect pledge fulfilment and, in particular, the extent to which the economic climate might have a similar or diverse impact in institutionally different contexts. More specifically, my focus is on the difference between single-party and coalition governments.

Building upon previous findings on single-case studies (Pétry, Duval 2018; Thomson, Costello 2016) and the conclusions drawn by the studies on Italy presented before (see Chapters 1 and 2), I argue that the economic context has a significant effect on governing parties when trying to realise their programmatic policies and goals. Political economists and partisan theorists have long recognised that international and domestic economic dynamics affect parties' influence on the policymaking process (Hibbs 1992; Boix 2000). In the same way, the state of the economy is likely to have a relevant effect on pledge fulfilment.

Research on pledges shows that coalition governments are less likely to keep their electoral engagements compared to single-party governments because of their lower control over the agenda and the policy-making process, higher number of actors aiming at influencing policy decisions, increased instability and conflicts within the Cabinet (Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019). When the economic conditions of the country deteriorate during their mandate, we can expect these features to be even more exacerbated. The economic situation of a country does not only determine the resources, financial above all, in the hands of national governments but also the conditions in which they are embedded. As noted by Hellström and Walther (2019), for instance, bad economic performance negatively affects the stability of coalition government as coalition partners should deviate from the already-planned governing agenda and propose policy solutions to deal with the changed situation. As a result, coalition governments are expected to be even more constrained in their capacities to fulfil their election promises when dealing with bad economic conditions. In times of better economic conditions, on the contrary, governing parties having more resources and fewer constraints should be able to promote and carry out a higher share of their policy proposals.

By combining institutional, political, and economic factors, I perform the first cross-national study of the influence of macroeconomic conditions on pledge fulfilment. While the few studies exploring how the state of the economy affects the programme-to-policy linkage are based upon single-case studies (Pétry, Duval 2018; Thomson, Costello 2016), this chapter undertakes an analysis of eight countries: Canada, Ireland, Germany, Bulgaria, Sweden, Austria, Spain, and Italy. Overall, results indicate that the impact of the type of government on parties' capacities to keep their election promises depends on the state of the national economy. While pledge fulfilment under single-party and coalition governments does not significantly differ in times of economic growth, during periods of economic distress the probability of successfully implementing their policy proposals is lower for parties governing in a coalition compared to parties in office alone. It is indeed dealing with the consequences for the financial and political resources and the cohesion of the governing alli-

ance generated by worsening economic conditions that hinders pledge fulfilment for coalition cabinets. As a result, the institutional factors that have been largely identified by earlier research as playing a key role in the party-policy linkage - the single-party/coalition government difference above all - only appear to have a real effect in economically difficult times. Additionally, a negative economic situation is found to have a detrimental impact on the realisation of election promises mainly for coalition governments led by left and centre-left parties. As was the case for Italian governing parties, pledge fulfilment for right parties seems less dependent on economic developments.

4.1 *Theoretical framework*

4.1.1 *The impact of institutional factors on pledge fulfilment in the literature*

A long tradition of studies, developed over the last decades of the twentieth century, has devoted large space to a topical question for representative democracy: are representatives able to give a partisan direction to policy outputs? Or, in other words, do parties matter? (Hibbs 1992; Schmidt 1996). By looking at macroeconomic outcomes and policies in the post-war period, research has largely confirmed that parties' policy preferences do indeed shape policies, though the extent to which parties matter in the policymaking process highly depends on specific features of the political system (Schmidt 1996). In reviewing the partisan theory, Manfred Schmidt (1996) stresses the importance of institutional constraints. The structure of political and electoral systems and constitutional arrangements confer to governments the power to have a say in the decision and policy-making process, which in turn allows partisan actors to bring about policy change (Schmidt 1996).

Similarly, pledge literature studies have claimed that differences in fulfilment rates observed between countries mainly tie back to elements of the political and electoral system, check-and-balance mechanisms, and the constitutional context. Clearly, in order to implement their election promises, partisan ac-

tors need to have control over the governing agenda and the power to make their policy proposals accepted and passed. In other words, they need to have what Brouard and colleagues (2018) define as ‘institutional capacity’ (905). Accordingly, the level of control exerted by political parties on the policymaking process varies in parliamentary and presidential (or semi-presidential) systems and it can be additionally affected by the presence of bicameralism and the degree of centralisation/decentralisation (Schmidt 1996). Royed (1996), for instance, argues that the Westminster model is highly effective in carrying out policy reforms since it provides the governing party large room for manoeuvre to influence policy decisions while, on the other hand, in the US the president’s leeway is constrained by the need to share its power with the Congress. Evidence gathered by more recent statistical studies on pledge fulfilment in multiple countries does not, however, come to the same conclusion (Thomson et al. 2017; Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019). In these cases, variables related to presidentialism, semi-presidentialism, bicameralism, and federalism are found to not significantly affect the realisation of election promises, whilst - as discussed below - variables related to the type of government do have an effect.

Observing pledge fulfilment data, differences within countries depending on the government or the period analysed emerge as well. In this case, parties’ capacities to shape policies depend on the type of government that was formed after the election (Thomson 2001; Thomson et al. 2017; Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019), its support in parliament (Pétry, Duval 2018; Moury 2011a), the position of the party after the election (Artés 2013; Costello, Thomson 2008; Serra-Silva, Belchior 2020; Thomson 2001), the number of parties members of the governing coalition, and the party size. All these elements grant greater (or lesser) freedom to partisan actors to significantly affect the decision-making process. This is particularly evident in the case of governing parties: parties holding ministerial positions are surely best placed to control, frame, and influence the governing agenda, especially under single-party cabinets supported by a parliamentary majority (Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019). It is indeed corroborated by several studies that being in government compared to being in opposition entails higher pledge fulfilment rates (Artés 2013; Costello, Thomson

2008; Naurin 2011; Thomson 2001).

Among institutional factors affecting parties' capacities to deliver on their mandate, the difference between single-party and coalition governments has received considerable scholarly attention. In particular, single-party governments are found to create conditions favouring pledge fulfilment compared to coalition governments (Moury 2011a; Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019; Thomson 2001; Thomson et al. 2017). It is thus no coincidence that, comparatively, the highest pledge fulfilment rates are recorded in the UK and in the legislative periods in which single-party governments are in office in Sweden and Portugal (see data Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019, 65-66). Having control over the cabinet by itself, a party can dictate the government line and which policy measures to promote and prioritise with greater autonomy. The number of partisan actors aspiring to have a more decisive role in setting the governing agenda is surely smaller than in coalition governments (Tsebelis 1995), where two or more parties have to collaborate and agree on a shared policy program.

Different is the case of coalition governments. Sometimes, parties form a pre-electoral alliance and rally around a common platform during the electoral campaign (Moury 2011b). In this case, a larger part of the electoral program is likely to be carried out (Moury 2011a). Very often though, coalitions are formed after the election (Bergman, Bäck, Hellström 2021). Parties with divergent policy positions and proposals have to then find a common ground for collaboration. As the resources available in the hands of the government, the time, and space in the agenda are limited, it is highly unlikely that political actors can implement all the policies promoted by the coalition partners. They can concretely realise just a few of them.

Other than the number of players involved in the decision-making process, scholars have underlined the relevance of the time spent in office as a key factor affecting pledge fulfilment as well. As coalition governments are usually more unstable and, thus, short-lived compared to single-party governments, they have less time at their disposal for designing, promoting, and pushing their policies through. Which, in turn, might have a detrimental effect on the realisation of their electoral commitments (see for instance the analysis of the Prodi

and Berlusconi's government in Italy by Moury 2011a).

Another important element explaining the higher efficiency of single-party governments has to do with parties' incentives to adopt their policy proposals (Brouard et al. 2018). As the concept of retrospective voting posits, voters sanction or reward incumbents on the basis of their accomplishments and performance when in office (Anderson 2000). A more recent development of this concept - the retrospective pledge voting (Matthieß 2020) - suggests the importance of pledge fulfilment for the evaluation of governments' past actions. In order to hold incumbents accountable for their actions, however, the electorate has to be able to place responsibility for government actions on partisan actors. In systems in which coalition governments are the norm, the allocation of responsibilities is jeopardised as it is not always clear which coalition partner should take the credit (or the blame) for policy performance (Fisher, Hobolt 2010). On the other hand, partisan actors in single-party cabinets are more easily identified as directly responsible for the policies implemented during their mandate (Anderson 2000; Vowles 2010). They are therefore incentivised to fulfil their mandate to a higher extent than governments formed by two or more parties.

A similar discussion could be applied to the difference between minority and majority governments. Majority governments have already the necessary support to push through their preferred policy measures. Minority governments, for their part, have to negotiate not only within the cabinet (in single-party governments) or within coalition partners (in coalition governments) but also with parliamentary partners that need to back every new decision. Arguably, in addition to the instability and early termination of governments relying on minority support (Petry, Duval 2015), the increased number of veto players in the decision-making processes might again hinder pledge fulfilment. In this case, however, pledge studies have yielded inconsistent results: while some research provides evidence of a significant difference in pledge fulfilment under majority and minority governments (Pétry, Duval 2018), this does not appear to be the case in other studies (Artés 2013; Thomson, Costello 2016; Moury, Fernandes 2018; Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019). To account for this, scholars

argue that the need to find partners in parliament may also represent an advantage, depending on the specific situation. Addressing election promises in Spain, for instance, Artés (2013) points out that fulfilment is not significantly reduced when minority cabinets are considered compared to majority ones. Both PSOE and PP-led minority governments, needing only the support from the Catalan party to stay in power, had the opportunity to make concessions to them on matters related to cultural issues in exchange for support for the economic policies proposed (Artés 2013). In a rather similar vein, Naurin (2011) suggests that ‘parliamentary cooperation enables the governing party to choose among different parties in the parliament. [...] It is possible that because the parliament also included other potential coalition partners, the governing party could choose to collaborate with the ones that made the fulfilment of its promises most likely in the different policy areas’ (65). Under such circumstances, non-ruling parties might increase their pledge fulfilment rate by taking advantage of the negotiations with governing parties too (Artés, Bustos 2008; Naurin 2011).

4.1.2 The economic context: a moderating factor?

In addition to political and institutional factors, some scholars have already recognised that the economic context in which governments are embedded might influence parties’ capacities to keep their election promises as well (Naurin 2011) and have included a variable accounting for the state of the national economy in their statistical models (Thomson et al. 2017). Despite this, only a few single-country studies explore in some detail the interaction between economic conditions and pledge fulfilment (Pétry, Duval 2018; Thomson, Costello 2016). In their analysis of Ireland, Robert Thomson and Rory Costello (2016) posit that parties do not adapt their programmatic agenda to the current economic conditions or the anticipated situation. Instead, parties include in their manifestos also promises that might be difficult to be concretely carried out (see also Håkansson, Naurin 2016). As a result, they reveal that parties are more likely to keep their electoral engagements when the economic sit-

uation during the election year is particularly favourable and when it does not deteriorate during the parliamentary term (Thomson, Costello 2016). Evidence provided from pledge fulfilment in Canada points in the same direction: parties have a higher probability of honouring their electoral commitments if their country runs a budget surplus (Pétry, Duval 2018). In the studies presented in the chapters before, I provide a thorough analysis of pledge fulfilment in Italy under different economic conditions. While in this case the economic variable is not found to be directly associated with pledge fulfilment, the economic context becomes relevant when considered in relation to other factors: Italian parties' capacities to keep their promises in times of an economic slowdown are highly dependent on their party family and the financial nature of the policy promised. Particularly noteworthy is that left parties in office seem particularly constrained during bad economic times as they have a very low likelihood of realising their campaign program compared to right-leaning governments. Nonetheless, evidence from the Italian case suggests that left parties prioritise the promotion of more expansionary policy proposals even during periods of economic decline.

Building upon these findings, this chapter offers a first in-depth investigation of the influence of the economic situation on pledge fulfilment in several countries. While a lot of scholars have explored the impact of institutional conditions and few others have been concentrated on economic factors, the interaction between the two remains largely underexplored. To address this gap, the purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which the economic context might have a similar/different effect on the party-policy relation in institutionally different contexts. As the economy transforms the environment in which parties are embedded, determines government budgets, and could cause tensions in the governing majority, I argue that the impact of institutional factors on pledge fulfilment is conditioned by the state of the national economy.

Overall, a negative economic context is asserted to have a detrimental effect on pledge fulfilment. As the situation in which parties are embedded changes, new priorities emerge and draw both politicians' and citizens' attention. Usually written shortly before or even during the electoral campaign, par-

ty manifestos include policy proposals and solutions to previous problems or foreseen challenges. The policies that parties pledge to adopt if elected and the goals they promise to achieve in their programs are therefore representative of certain conditions that undergo a major change when the economic situation changes. New priorities emerge and governing parties have to modify and adapt their agenda to the current situation. As the attention span and the space on the governing agenda are both limited (Froio, Bevan, Jennings 2017), while governing parties have to deal with the consequences of the new economic context, fewer resources – whether financial, political, or temporal – can be devoted to designing, promoting, and pushing through the policies promised during the electoral campaign. The situation is different in times of better economic conditions. In this case, as national governments have more resources than expected during the election year when writing the program and negotiating a governing agreement, the vast majority of the promises made during the electoral campaign are expected to be taken up.

Nevertheless, there are several reasons to expect the effect of economic factors on pledge fulfilment to vary depending on the type of government in office. As the literature discussed above suggests, single-party cabinets present some features making them more likely to keep their electoral engagements compared to governments formed by two or more actors. When the country is experiencing a period of economic distress, we can expect these differences to be even sharper. Coalition governments should thereby find it even more difficult to implement their policy proposals, for several reasons. First of all, because of the need to revise the governing agreement among coalition partners to deal with the new circumstances. As the economic situation deteriorates during the mandate, the conditions on which the government was formed and the foundation on which the coalition deal was based are no longer met. New arrangements have to be thus negotiated along with a novel governing agenda. Of course, this is true also for single-party governments, which have to similarly adjust their policy priorities. However, given the fact that each coalition partner has its own constituency and interests, different actors are likely to prioritise different solutions and proposals (Hellström, Walther 2019) which can

jeopardise the stability and the cohesion of the alliance when the government is called to deviate from the already-planned path. In their analysis of governments' responses to changes in fiscal conditions, for instance, building on the veto player model, André Blais et al. (2010) theorise the existence of a 'status quo bias' for coalition governments. While single-party cabinets are more able to quickly address new problems and adapt to new situations, the increased number of veto players entails that coalition governments face more difficulties in agreeing on a novel course of action (Blais, Kim, Foucault 2010). Coalition cabinets are therefore more at risk of instability when a sudden (economic) problem forces them to adjust their agendas. Research on government termination points out that internal disagreements and blame-shifting within the ruling coalition can lead to (additional) instability. In this light, Johan Hellström and Daniel Walther (2019), investigating the effects of the state of the national economy on government stability, clearly demonstrate that coalition governments, compared to single-party ones, suffer most from the consequences of poor economic performances. Conflicts and dissent within the ruling alliance, for their part, adversely affect partners' capacities to carry out their programmatic agenda (Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019).

Overall, my main argument is that while in times of better economic conditions governing parties have more support, less instability, and more resources to implement their policy proposals, during bad economic times their capacities to do so decrease. When only one party is in government, constraints generated by the economic situation are more limited and the party can continue to pursue its agenda. Clearly, as is true for coalitions, single-party governments have to manage scarce financial resources. However, they are found to be more able to adapt to the (economic) context as they encounter fewer coordination problems and conflictual positions. At the same time, single-party governments should pay more attention to the fulfilment of their electoral engagements as they are more likely to be held accountable for their governing performance by the electorate (Anderson 2000; Vowles 2010). Moreover, their stability is less affected by negative economic performances: parties governing alone should thus maintain a higher degree of control over the policymaking

process, no matter the economic context. When more actors participate in the government, things get complicated. Each party tries to push its own policies but it has to compete with its partners for the same resources needed to concretely carry out different proposals. And since compared to normal times these resources are even more strained during periods of economic decline, their capacity to keep a high share of their electoral promises is expected to be heavily constrained.

4.1.3 The relevance of the partisan composition of the government

Up to this point, I have referred to governing parties without making any difference between the ideological family to which the actors belong. Nevertheless, from the results provided by the partisan literature, it is clear that the partisan composition of the government has a relevant role in influencing policy production (Hibbs 1992), especially when looking at macroeconomic policies (Boix 2000).

With few exceptions (Pétry, Duval 2018), previous studies do not test the relevance of the family of the party for pledge fulfilment. As they explore the effect of institutional arrangements on parties' capacities to keep their electoral engagements (Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019), no theoretical assumption requires them to look at government partisanship. Instead, since in this study I focus on the state of the economy, being a left or a right-wing party should matter. There is indeed evidence that left and right parties are affected differently by and, therefore, react differently to macroeconomic dynamics (i.e. Alonso, Ruiz-Rufino 2020; Jensen, Mortensen 2014).

In the analysis of the Italian case, I have already addressed this question (see Chapters 1 and 2). Interacting party ideology with economic growth, left parties in Italy are found to be less likely to realise their campaign promises during bad economic times compared to centre-right and right-wing parties. When the economic situation deteriorates during the mandate, and thus governments are on a tight budget, their decision-making and agenda-setting power is severely constrained, though they still have several incentives that push

them to fulfil a high share of significant promises. When the economic situation improves, on the other hand, the odds of fulfilling promises substantially increase for partisan actors from the left side of the political spectrum.

In line with this, I expect the economic context to have a different impact on pledge fulfilment for left and right-leaning governments.

4.2 *Data and methods*

4.2.1 *Data on pledge fulfilment*

These expectations are tested with data on pledge fulfilment between 1993 to 2018 in eight countries: Canada, Ireland, Germany, Bulgaria, Sweden, Austria, Spain, and Italy. Table 1 displays the different legislative terms and electoral campaigns considered for each country.

Collecting data on pledge fulfilment is a very complex and long process. For the purpose of this analysis, I thus relied on existing data. More specifically, I combined data from two different sources. The first is the dataset on pledge fulfilment provided by the Comparative Pledges Project (CPP) and employed in two comparative studies about the influence of institutional characteristics on the adoption of election promises (Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019; Thomson et al. 2017). This unique dataset includes information on pledge fulfilment in twelve countries: the US, the UK, the Netherlands, Ireland, Sweden, Spain, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Bulgaria, Canada, and Austria. As it is a collection of various single-country datasets coded by the researchers members of the CPPP at different moments, data cover different time-periods, from the 1970s to the 2010s. For three countries (the US, the UK, and the Netherlands) the data collection process stopped during the 1990s: the last elections considered were in 1996, 1992, and 1994, respectively. For all the other countries, more recent elections are analysed. To provide a consistent time frame for the analysis, I decided to keep only the countries for which data was available from the early/mid-nineties to the 2010s. More elections within each country are considered in order to account for differences in national economic dynamics

over time. At the same time, only the elections that took place between 1990 and 2018 are included in the analysis as the aim is to take into account periods in which countries face similar global pressures, namely globalisation, the economic slowdown at the end of the twentieth century, and, in some cases, the Great Recession of 2008. Accordingly, data from the US, the UK, and the Netherlands are excluded from my study. The case of Portugal was discarded as well. In this instance, the CPP dataset includes only two non-consecutive elections, namely the 1995 and 2005 elections. As the promises presented in the two in-between electoral campaigns (1999 and 2002) are not coded, I decided to exclude the Portuguese case as well. Data for seven countries are finally retained: Ireland, Sweden, Spain, Germany, Bulgaria, Canada, and Austria.

For the Italian case, I employed the data that I collected employing the same approach and coding scheme used by the CPP. As discussed in the chapters before (see the data and method section in Chapters 1 and 2), this dataset includes information on pledge fulfilment in Italy for the period between 1996 and 2018. The final dataset thus created contains more than 8,100 promises for 35 elections (see Table 1).

Differently from other studies (Artés 2013; Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019; Thomson et al. 2017), only the promises made by those parties and electoral coalitions whose members were part of the governing cabinet after the election are considered in this analysis. Parties holding a ministerial post can indeed be expected to be more likely to carry out their own agenda since they are best placed to influence governing decisions (Artés 2013; Costello, Thomson 2008; Naurin 2011; Thomson 2001). It is true that scholars have also identified some conditions that can boost even opposition parties' capacities to keep their promises, as is the case for opposition parties with previous government experience (Serra-Silva, Belchior 2020). However, given the focus of this study, I decided to take into consideration merely the actors that, overall, have a better chance of influencing the decision-making process in order to see to what extent the economic context affects their power.

The dependent variable of the logistic models presented in the next section is a binary indicator of whether each promise included in the dataset is (0) bro-

ken or (1) at least partially realised during the parliamentary term under consideration.

Table 1. Summary of data

Country	Election year	Parliamentary term	Type of government	Number of promises
Canada	1993	1993-1997	Single-party	164
	1997	1997-2000	Single-party	58
	2000	2000-2004	Single-party	83
	2004	2004-2006	Single-party	87
	2006	2006-2008	Single-party	192
	2008	2008-2011	Single-party	101
	2011	2011-2015	Single-party	143
Ireland	1997	1997-2002	Coalition	313
	2002	2002-2007	Coalition	117
	2007	2007-2011	Coalition	524
	2011	2011-2016	Coalition	423
Germany	2002	2002-2005	Coalition	269
	2005	2005-2009	Coalition	228
	2009	2009-2013	Coalition	174
Bulgaria	1997	1997-2001	Single-party	60
	2001	2001-2005	Coalition	213
	2005	2005-2009	Coalition	293
	2009	2009-2013	Single-party	250
Sweden	1994	1994-1998	Single-party	36
	1998	1998-2002	Single-party	32
	2002	2002-2006	Single-party	61
	2006	2006-2010	Coalition	135
	2010	2010-2014	Coalition	223
Austria	1999	2000-2003	Coalition	322
	2002	2003-2007	Coalition	449
	2006	2007-2008	Coalition	294
	2008	2008-2013	Coalition	189
Spain	1993	1993-1996	Single-party	82
	1996	1996-2000	Single-party	97
	2000	2000-2004	Single-party	115
Italy	1996	1996-2001	Coalition	585
	2001	2001-2006	Coalition	328
	2006	2006-2008	Coalition	797
	2008	2008-2011	Coalition	205
	2013	2013-2018	Coalition	497

Total number of promises: 8,139.

Additional information about the process of fulfilment evaluation can be

found in Naurin, Royed, and Thomson (2019), previous chapters of this dissertation (Chapters 1 and 2), and the codebook supplied together with the datasets employed in the study (see also Appendix for Chapter 1). As observations might be nested depending on the party considered and the country, I employed clustered standard errors in the logistic models. To this end, 54 clusters of single parties at a specific election are created.

4.2.2 Independent variables

The main independent variable of this study accounts for the economic situation of the country during the mandate under investigation. Previous studies have employed different economic indicators, such as the average GDP growth during the mandate (Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019; Thomson et al. 2017), the budget balance (Pétry, Duval 2018), the economic growth during the election year (Thomson, Costello 2016), or the evolution of economic growth during the legislative term compared to the situation at the election year (Thomson, Costello 2016). In this study, I decided to use the latter for a specific reason: looking at changes in GDP growth allows recording whether the cabinet had to deal with a worsening or improved economic situation during its mandate compared with the context in which it presented its policy proposals and entered office. As was the case in the previous chapters, this variable is therefore equal to the difference between the average annual economic growth rate and the rate of GDP growth for the first year of the mandate (Thomson, Costello 2016). In my dataset, the variable *GDP change* ranges from -5.7 to 12.0, with a mean of -0.2 and a standard deviation of 2.8. Data are drawn from OECD databases.

The second key independent variable is the type of government. Overall, 15 single-party governments and 20 coalition governments are included in the analysis (see Table 1), with some countries presenting the same type of government over the years (Canada, Ireland, Austria, Germany, Spain, and Italy) and other alternating (Sweden and Bulgaria).

For each promise, I indicated the ideological position of the party or the

electoral coalition that has taken that specific commitment. The variable party family has three categories: left and centre-left parties, centre parties, right and centre-right parties. Parties and electoral coalitions are positioned based on expert surveys provided by the Chapel Hill dataset (see the Appendix for further information). Since the core aspect of this analysis does not deal with this feature and no clear hypothesis concerning the family of the governing party or coalition is set out in the theoretical discussion, there was no need for the creation of a more sophisticated variable. That being said, given the fact that the partisan literature underlines the importance of the ideological composition of governments for policy outputs (Hibbs 1992; Boix 2000), I felt it necessary to include this variable in the main analysis as well.

Other than the institutional and economic context, other factors can impact the probability of fulfilling election promises and therefore should be controlled for in the different statistical models. As shown in Table 1, the number of promises made and selected for the analysis varies greatly depending on the country and the election year. Making few promises during the campaign means that the party have fewer things to pay attention to and to prioritise in order to fulfil its mandate, whereas more promises require a greater commitment and effort. Of course, this might also depend on the type of policies promised. In any case, a variable accounting for the number of promises by electoral manifesto is included in the models presented in the following section as a control variable.

Finally, I control for the time spent in office by including a variable specifying the duration of the government to which the promises are related. Addressing differences in pledge fulfilment between minority and majority cabinets, Pétry and Duval (2015) suggest that the lower share of promises realised by governments supported by a parliamentary minority is related more to the time available to concretely carry out their programmatic agenda than to the need to compromise and to find support for their bills. Implementing a new policy measure or, even more so, achieving a specific goal requires some time to design, define, reach an agreement, and push through the new legislation. The same reasoning could be applied to coalition governments: cabinets

formed by two or more parties might perform worse than single-party governments because of their instability and relatively shorter duration (Bergman, Bäck, Hellström 2021). A variable indicating the years spent in office for every parliamentary term is therefore included as well.

4.3 Analysis

Table 2 presents the results of logistic regressions where the dependent variable is a binary indicator of whether the promise is broken or at least partially fulfilled.

Table 2. Determinants of pledge fulfilment

	Models	
	1 (without interactions)	2 (with interactions)
GDP Change	.01 (.03)	-.09 (.05)
Type of Government (<i>ref.</i> Single-Party)		
- Coalition	-.55 (.22)*	-.63 (.18)***
GDP Change * Type of Government		
- Coalition		.13 (.07)
Party Family (<i>ref.</i> Centre-Right)		
- Centre	.38 (.12)**	.33 (.12)**
- Left and Centre-Left	-.01 (.17)	-.04 (.17)
Number of Pledges	-.004 (.003)	-.004 (.003)
Duration	.13 (.05)**	.12 (.05)*
Constant	.31 (.25)	.45 (.22)*
Log likelihood	-5489.23	-5470.74
Wald X2	70.06	64.43
Observations	8,139	8,139

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table entries are logistic regression coefficients with standard errors clustered by party during a specific election in parentheses

Additional regression models are provided in the Appendix

Model 1 shows the direct effects of the different independent variables considered on the probability of pledge fulfilment. Other things being equal, the effect of change in economic growth during the mandate compared to the election year on governing parties' capacities to keep their campaign engage-

ments is very small and not statistically significant. The same result is obtained in other model specifications (see Model 2 in Table 2 and Table A2 in Appendix).

In contrast with evidence provided in the Irish case (Thomson, Costello 2016) but consistent with findings from Italy, these data suggest that the economic context is not directly associated with pledge fulfilment. While GDP growth during the election year was reported as having an effect by previous comparative studies (Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019; Thomson et al. 2017), the evolution of national growth rates, alone, does not seem to affect parties' abilities to realise their election promises. Instead, as was suggested in the theoretical section, the state of the economy appears as an important factor when considered in relation to other variables (see results provided in Model 2).

The coefficient for the variable type of government stands out as negative and significant (Model 1). As a result, cabinets formed by a coalition of parties are found to be less likely to fulfil their election promises compared to single-party governments, which are the baseline for the variable. This result is, therefore, in line with previous findings (Moury 2011a; Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019): when a party has to share its decision-making power with two or more other partisan actors, its capacity to implement the governing agenda and, hence, adopt its policy proposals decreases.

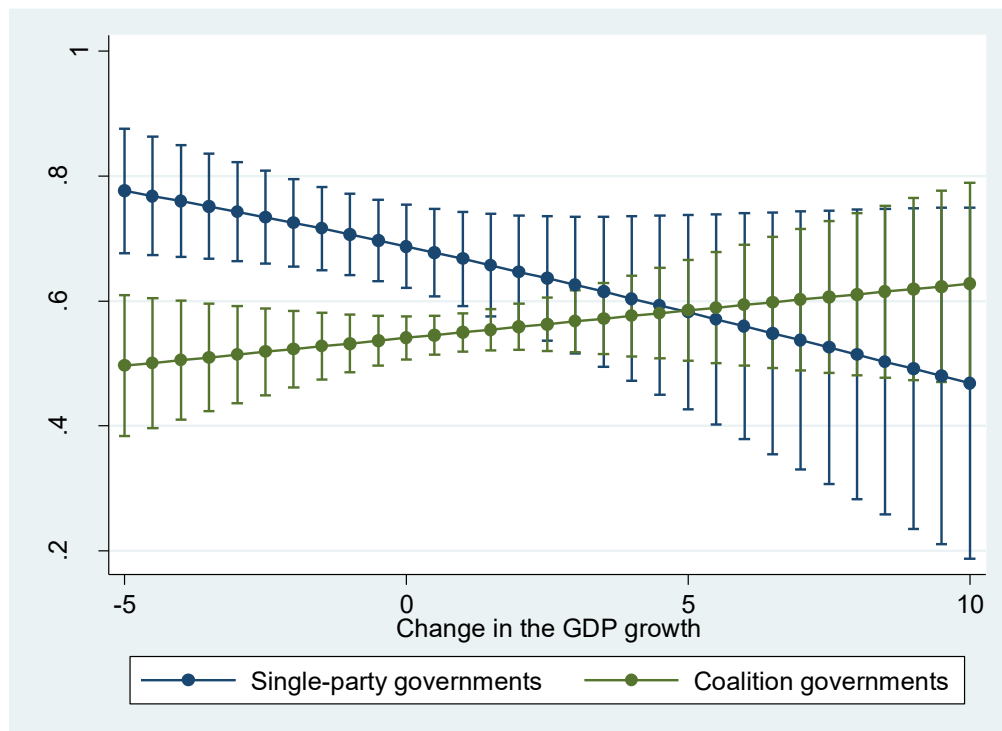
The time spent in office seems to represent an important factor influencing pledge fulfilment as well. Results in Table 2 clearly illustrate that the likelihood of keeping campaign proposals significantly increases with the duration of the government. This result reflects those of Naurin, Royed, and Thomson (2019) and Thomson and Costello (2016): having more time available provides governing parties with an opportunity for promoting and concretely adopting their programmatic policies.

To test the main expectations of this chapter, Model 2 includes an interaction term between change in GDP growth and the type of government. In this way, we can observe whether governing parties, during bad economic times, have less room to promote their programmatic agenda and whether coalition governments are even less likely to keep their promises compared to single-

party governments when the economy deteriorates during their time in office.

As Table 2 indicates, the coefficient term for the type of government variable is still significantly negative. To better interpret the two-way interaction coefficient, Figure 1 illustrates pledge fulfilment predicted probabilities by type of government for each level of change in GDP growth level during the mandate under consideration. This graphic illustration clearly indicates that the probability of pledge fulfilment depends on the economic context. In particular, we can see that the two categories – single-party governments and coalition governments - present a different pattern.

Figure 1. Probability of pledge fulfilment by type of government depending on the change in GDP growth. Estimates are based on Model 2 (Table 2). Bars indicate 95% CIs.



Interestingly, the probability of pledge fulfilment is significantly different for coalition and single-party governments only in times of negative - and very slow - economic growth. As long as the change in GDP growth is below the level of 1.5%, single-party cabinets have a higher likelihood of keeping their promises compared to coalition cabinets. Under better conditions, governing

parties do not seem to significantly differ in their capacities to carry out their programmatic agenda whether they governed alone or in alliance with other actors.

These findings shed new light on the association between institutional factors and pledge fulfilment. According to these data, the type of government in office seems to only matter in bad economic times. As expected, coalition cabinets are particularly constrained in their ability to fulfil their election promises when they have to deal with a decline in the economic situation during their mandate. Having to juggle fewer resources at their disposal for implementing the policy measures proposed by each coalition partner while simultaneously dealing with the new challenges, several campaign promises remain unheeded. Additionally, as Blais et al. (2010) argue, the need to agree on a novel course of action and deviate from the coalition agreement in an already complicated moment does nothing but increase tensions within the ruling alliance. Which, in turn, has a detrimental effect on the realisation of electoral commitments.

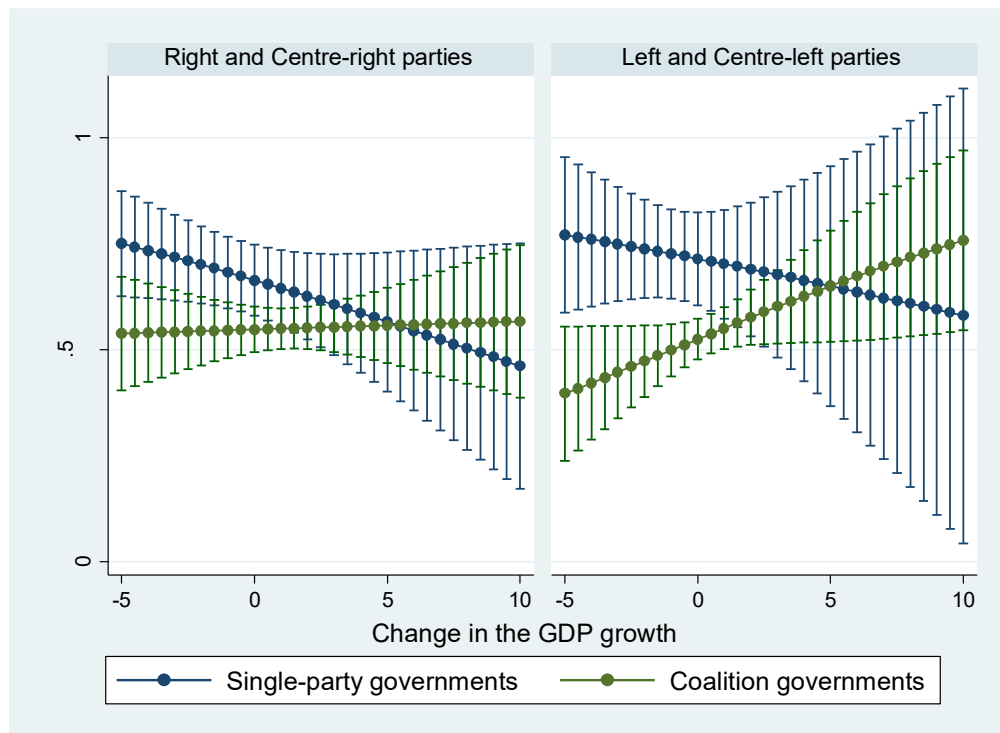
At the same time, however, in flourishing times they seem to encounter the same constraints as single-party governments. The likelihood of realising their programmatic agenda does not seem to particularly differ from parties ruling alone. During periods of economic improvement, governments have more resources, financial above all, than expected when allies were negotiating a governing agreement, which can be redistributed to satisfy their policy goals. Additionally, this finding could indicate that when partisan actors decide to form a governing alliance they commit to enacting a high share of policies proposed by the different partners, with or without a written post-electoral coalition agreement (Moury 2011b). As a result, parties members of a governing coalition appear to perform as well as single-party government. It is indeed dealing with an economic decline that hinders pledge fulfilment for coalition governments.

When the economy grows during the parliamentary term, the odds of keeping their election promises appear to be very similar for coalition and single-party cabinets.

4.3.1 Differences between party families

A three-way interaction term included in Model 5 (Appendix) allows to observe whether the family of the party in office has an influence on the extent to which the presence of a single-party or a coalition government affects pledge fulfilment under different economic conditions. Additional intermediate regression models are provided in the Table A2 of the Appendix.

Figure 2. Probability of pledge fulfilment by type of government for right and centre-right and left and centre-left parties. Estimates are based on Model 5 (Table A2). Bars indicate 95% CIs.



Regression results indicate that the interaction between change in GDP, party family, and type of government has a significant effect on the probability of pledge fulfilment. Figure 2 graphically portrays predictive probabilities for single-party and coalition governments grouped by party family. Given the few centre parties included in the dataset, this category is excluded from the analysis. As the figure shows, the type of government presents a similar pattern in

both cases. Nevertheless, single-party governments have a significantly higher likelihood of fulfilling their election promises compared to coalition governments only when left and centre-left parties are considered. As long as the economic growth is negative, left parties governing alone are more effective in pushing their campaign agenda than when they have to stipulate an alliance with other parties. The same is not true for right parties. In this case, even during bad economic times, there is no significant difference in being in office alone or with other actors.

If, as argued before, parties that join a governing coalition have less room for manoeuvre to carry out their policy proposals when the economic situation of the country deteriorates during their mandate, this is especially true for parties from the Left. As was the case in Italy, evidence provided from this cross-national analysis also points out that left parties governing in a coalition perform worse than right parties members of a ruling coalition but also left parties in single-party cabinets. This finding might be due to a combination of two reasons. On the one hand, left-wing policies are usually more affected by strained public budgets, given their high-spending nature. A decline in financial resources clearly has a detrimental effect on the implementation of these types of policy measures. On the other hand, parties from the left side of the political spectrum are also more likely to be sanctioned if voters perceive they have not done enough when in office (Alonso and Ruiz-Rufino 2020). Given that, as discussed in the theoretical section, parties governing alone are more likely to be held accountable for the policy outputs adopted during their mandate while the ‘clarity of responsibility’ is lower for coalition cabinet members (Vowles 2010; Fisher, Hobolt 2010), single-party governments led by left parties should be strongly incentivised to do all they can to keep their promises.

4.4 *Conclusions*

Existing studies have been focusing on the conditions that might explain different pledge fulfilment rates. They have centred their attention on the role played by institutional factors in favouring or hindering parties’ capacities to

shape policies (i.e. Artés 2013; Naurin 2011; Thomson et al. 2017). At the same time, with the exception of a few single-country studies (Thomson, Costello 2016; Pétry, Duval 2018), the impact of macroeconomic conditions has been largely overlooked. The aim of this study was to fill this gap and provide a cross-national analysis of pledge fulfilment under different economic conditions.

Relying on existing data on pledge fulfilment in seven countries, I show that the evolution of economic growth does not seem to directly affect pledge fulfilment. It is, nevertheless, an important factor conditioning the impact of the type of government and the ideological family of the party under consideration. Results indeed indicate that single-party and coalition governments significantly differ in their capacity to influence policy production and, thus, implement their programmatic policies only under bad economic times. When the economic conditions deteriorate during the mandate compared to the situation during the election year, being part of a governing alliance significantly decreases the chances of fulfilling a high share of their campaign program for parties in office. And this is particularly true for left parties. As I discuss in the results section, pledge fulfilment for left-wing parties in office might be hindered because they are expected to pursue more expansionary policies, especially in bad economic times. At this point, it could be interesting to see whether the type of promises or their financial nature might significantly affect their realisation. Pétry and Duval (2018), for instance, show that the Conservative party in Canada are more likely to keep promises aiming at reducing public spending and cutting taxes compared to the Liberals. In the Italian case, I find that although left parties are highly constrained in their ability to shape the governing agenda during a period of economic distress, they continue to keep a higher share of their expansionary promises during periods of deterioration of economic conditions. Building upon these findings, future research could explore this question in other contexts and, hence, provide additional insights on the fulfilment of different types of promises depending on the party holding office.

In times of better economic conditions, on the other hand, governing par-

ties appear to be likely to carry out more policy proposals. Having fewer constraints and more resources to pursue their policies, parties sharing office with other actors are able to implement a similar extent of promises than if governing alone. These results indicate that the difference in pledge fulfilment between single-party and coalition governments observed by previous research only stands during periods of economic distress. Earlier findings (see Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019; Thomson et al. 2017) need to thus be qualified: the type of government in office seems to only matter in bad economic times. Taken together, these findings underline once again that research on parties and policies needs to take into account the context in which parties are embedded, in particular the economic situation of the country, as is likely to have a relevant effect on parties' capacities to shape the governing agenda.

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CONCLUSION

Are political parties able to continue to implement their programmatic policies in times of economic hardship? This is the overarching research question addressed in this dissertation. Several existing studies have shown how institutions, the party system, and the related distribution of power influence the capacities and incentives of parties to promote their policy preferences (Artés 2013; Costello, Thomson 2008; Moury 2011; Naurin 2011; Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019; Royed 1996; Thomson et al. 2017). However, they rarely observe how the macroeconomic conditions in which parties are called to act might have an impact too (Pétry, Duval 2018; Thomson, Costello 2016). Additionally, no research has investigated the interplay between institutional and political variables and economic factors. The main assumption in the limited research that does exist on the impact of macroeconomic conditions on the party-policy linkage, appears to be that economic crises severely hinder parties' room for manoeuvre. Instead, in this thesis I argue that economic hardship may actually even provide opportunities and generate new electoral and political incentives for parties to enact their programmatic preferences.

To address this research question, I first explore the extent to which and how the economic performance of a country affects pledge fulfilment. I carry out a longitudinal study of Italy between 1996 and 2018 to investigate the financial constraints generated during tough economic times on governing parties' capacities to redeem their commitments (Chapter 1). Then, Chapter 2 focuses more on the different incentives that a period of deterioration of economic conditions might provide for political parties to achieve their policy goals. To this end, I look at the policy issues of the election promises made and realised by different partisan actors and the interaction between the economy and party family. In Chapter 3, I discuss and examine whether political parties adapt and adjust their policy proposals to the state of the national economy. In particular, this study compares party platforms before and after the onset of the

Great Recession in Italy, France, and Sweden. Finally, I combine institutional, political, and economic elements in order to examine whether the effect of macroeconomic conditions on the party-policy relation depends on the presence of different types of governments (Chapter 4). To observe how the state of the national economy might have a similar/diverse impact on institutionally different countries, I investigate this topic using data on pledge fulfilment in eight countries.

Three main conclusions can be drawn. First of all, parties continue to matter and, thus, adopt their policy preferences even in economically critical periods. As previously proposed (Hellwig 2014; Rose 2014; Stokes 2001), national governments' room for manoeuvre is constrained when they have to manage unexpected challenges, above all economic and financial ones. Nevertheless, partisan actors still maintain some discretionary power and motivations to shape the governing agenda, even in key policy sectors. Political parties do not only continue to compete during the electoral campaign by advocating different socio-economic-related policy solutions when facing a severe recession. They also prioritise these measures in the governing agenda.

Secondly, the role the economic context plays highly depends on the partisanship of the party and coalition in government. Governing parties' behaviour is essentially different in times of crisis compared to normal times for right and left parties. While the room for partisan manoeuvre is severely constrained for left and centre-left parties during periods of economic distress, right-leaning governments, on the other hand, seem less sensitive to the same limitations. Indeed, right-wing parties are less penalised by a bad economic situation as their agenda usually consists of more restrictive and pro-austerity measures, in line with the needs and requests of the period. Even more so, a deterioration of economic conditions provides them with a unique opportunity for adopting unpopular measures, without the fear of being punished. On the other hand, when the country is running a budget surplus, they favour more expansive policy proposals as the possibility to hide behind the necessity of being responsible is no longer applicable. In contrast, centre-left governing parties are forced to neglect a lot of their programmatic policies in times of economic distress.

Nevertheless, they keep some room for partisan manoeuvre that they exercise by prioritising their core legislation. Left-leaning cabinets are surely highly constrained during economic crises, but they still maintain some power to shape the policymaking process. Having a left or right-wing government does, thus, make a real difference for policy production even during economic downturns and challenging periods: ideologically-different parties are still able to bring about policy change consistent with their partisan and programmatic positions.

The third main result of my study deals with the combination of institutional and economic factors. Results from the last chapter indeed suggest that the effect of the economic situation on the party-policy linkage is contingent on the type of government: while in times of better economic conditions both single-party and coalition governments have a similar probability of keeping their election promises, in bad economic times being in a coalition reduces the likelihood of pledge fulfilment. On the one hand, this observation implies that a negative economic situation specifically hinders coalition governments. Coalition cabinets - having more actors involved in the decision-making process and higher instability - are less effective in pushing their policies through when new problems are added on top of existing (institutional) challenges. On the other hand, in better economic times, coalition cabinets appear to perform as well as single-party governments. When the context in which they are called to act is the same or even better than the one in which the coalition was formed, governing with one or more partners does not significantly alter office-holder's capacity to provide a partisan direction to policy outputs. Differently from earlier findings (i.e. Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019), it is not the multi-party arrangement that hinders pledge fulfilment for coalition governments, but rather the combination of these institutional aspects with economic factors.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that the economic context is a key aspect conditioning pledge fulfilment and, more broadly, the party-policy linkage. Contrary to the conclusions drawn from previous studies (Pétry, Duval 2018; Thomson, Costello 2016), my research indicates that the state of the economy has a multidimensional effect on partisan policy and the policy-

making process, which cannot be reduced to financial constraints and limitations to public budgets. Economic busts also generate some incentives and opportunities for partisan actors to carve out some space for their policies. The analysis of Italy, for instance, suggests that worsening economic conditions provide a perfect justification for right parties to adopt their austerity-like measures or for left-wing parties to push for the adoption of their pro-welfare and pro-spending proposals.

As such, this dissertation makes a valuable contribution to partisan theory studies and the literature of pledge fulfilment by incorporating the economic context among the main variables influencing the decision and policy-making process. More broadly, the empirical findings reported here have significant implications for party responsiveness and democratic accountability during a recession period. Existing research has already demonstrated the existence of a certain degree of congruence between the priorities and policy preferences of parties and voters (Costello et al. 2021; Ibenskas, Polk 2022). Other than by mirroring citizens' opinion talking about and promoting measures closer to the ones of their constituency (Hobolt and Klemmensen 2005; Klüver and Sagarzazu 2016), responsiveness is achieved when parties concretely act in accordance with these preferences. Or, in other words, when parties fulfil their mandate (Louwerse 2012). A close programme-to-policy linkage is therefore a positive indicator of parties' capacity to be responsive to their voters.

A second relevant implication of these findings relates to the importance of election outcomes. Election results do matter, as each party or coalition entering office is likely to bring about policy change consistent with its own programmatic agenda. Even in a situation in which the external context hinders their autonomy to act independently and imposes or conditions policy choices, ruling parties strive to pass some of their proposed legislation. Moreover, this suggests - once again - that election promises provide valuable insights into the policies and the goals that a future government intend to pursue, no matter the (economic) circumstances. This is especially relevant for pre-electoral coalition agreements. In this case, the policy proposals listed in the shared manifesto are the ones that need to be looked at to get a sense of the measures that are going

to be fostered by coalition partners if elected (see also Marangoni 2010; Moury, Timmermans 2008).

This dissertation provides the first comprehensive study of the role of economic factors and their interaction with institutional variables on pledge fulfilment. While my results enhance our understanding of the party-policy relation, many mechanisms remain to be elucidated. In particular, further research needs to be carried out in order to observe more in-depth the pledges that parties are more (or less) likely to redeem under different economic contexts. The comparative data available at the moment do not provide information about the characteristics of the promises, thereby preventing a thorough investigation as the one I provided for the Italian case in other countries. New – and latest – data on election pledges and their realisation need to be gathered. As discussed before, electoral promises could represent a novel and essential tool for studying both government performance and party responsiveness. Additionally, while this dissertation has been focused on governing parties, future works could also include and examine more closely the role of opposition parties. This element has already been investigated by some scholars (Serra-Silva, Belchior 2020; Thomson et al. 2017), and it could be interesting to see whether their control over the policy-making process differs in times of an economic downturn. As, for instance, a crisis generates a rally-around-the-flag behaviour, pushing for more cooperation and unity, it might represent a unique opportunity for partisan actors holding non-governmental roles to take up their proposals in return for their support. Bringing in opposition parties might, therefore, help shed some additional light on the mechanisms linking the macroeconomic context and parties' capacities to shape the policy-making process.

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APPENDICES

APPENDICES CHAPTER 1

Appendix 1.1 *Additional information about the data collection*

In this appendix, more information about the data collection is provided. Data were collected following the guidelines of the manifesto-testing approach (for more information see Royed 1996; Naurin, Royed, Thomson 2019). The scholars that introduced and developed this approach measure pledge fulfilment by looking at the content of the single pledges and by evaluating whether they are actually translated into policies and decisions during the parliamentary term. This approach is also particularly useful because it establishes a clear definition of ‘pledge’ and a procedure for determining pledge fulfilment.

Identification of the pledges in parties' manifestos

In this study, I used electoral manifestos as a source for identifying the promises a party makes during an electoral campaign. Only the programs of the parties member of the ruling coalition are analysed. If a pre-electoral alliance presented a shared manifesto, that program is the one analysed for the entire coalition. This is the case for instance in the 1996 and 2006 elections. In both cases, the centre-left coalition discussed and agreed on policy proposals and priorities that were then included in an electoral program approved by the major parties members of the alliance. Similarly, the electoral platform for the House of Freedoms coalition in 2001 was accepted by all the parties members of the centre-right coalition before the elections. In the case that the ruling coalition is supported also by smaller parties, their manifestos are not taken into consideration, assuming that only parties that received at least one cabinet to administer and that had several parliamentary seats have a real impact on the programmatic agenda of the government in office. Finally, if a new party is formed after the elections and enters the governing coalition (i.e. after a cabinet reshuffle), its program is not taken into consideration. This is the case, for in-

stance, of the Democratic Union of the Republic, a party born in 1998 that joined the governing coalition led by Massimo D'Alema.

The original electoral platforms were collected from the Comparative Manifesto Project dataset. Nine electoral programs are selected for the five Italian general elections held between 1996 and 2013 (Table A1).

Table A1. List of election programs analysed.

Election	Parliamentary Term	Government(s)	Electoral Programs	Parties represented by the program
1996	1996-2001	Prodi I D'Alema I D'Alema II Amato II	Olive Tree	PDS, PPI, UD
2001	2001-2006	Berlusconi II Berlusconi III	House of Freedoms	FI, AN, LN, CCD, CDU
2006	2006-2008	Prodi II	The Union	DS, Daisy, PRC, PdCI, Greens, IdV, UDEUR
2008	2008-2011	Berlusconi IV	People of Freedom Northern League	FI, AN LN
2013	2013-2018	Letta Renzi Gentiloni	Democratic Party People of Freedom Civic Choice Union of the Centre	PD PdL SC UdC

AN National Alliance; CCD Christian Democratic Centre; CDU United Christian Democrats; DS Democratic Left; FI Go Italy; IdV Italy of Values; LN Northern League; PD Democratic Party; PdCI Party of Italian Communists; PdL People of Freedom; PDS Democratic Party of the Left; PPI Italian People's Party; PRC Communist Refoundation Party; SC Civic Choice; UD Democratic Union; UdC Union of the Centre; UDEUR Union of Democrats for Europe.

After selecting the manifestos, I read all the nine documents to identify all the sentences (or quasi-sentences) that correspond to a 'pledge'. The pledges are defined following Royed (1996) definition:

«a commitment to carry out some action or produce some outcome, where an objective estimation can be made as to whether or not the action was indeed taken or the outcome produced».

This definition is the one shared by most studies of the pledge literature. In their comparative analysis (Thomson et al. 2017), the Comparative Party

Pledge Project uses an identical definition ('a statement committing a party to one specific action or outcome that can be clearly determined to have occurred or not').

Therefore, to identify a sentence as a pledge two main elements should be present. Firstly, the sentence should be a commitment; it should be about a policy or a result on the achievement of which the party engages itself. Usually, these sentences are introduced by expressions like 'we will', 'we promise', 'we have to' or even 'it is necessary to'. The second criterion is testability. Only the pledges whose fulfilment can be evaluated objectively are selected. All the criticism of previous government's actions, all the claims on general principles, all the promises too vague are not part of the final dataset. When in doubt, the sentence was kept in the dataset. Then, when I was in the process of checking fulfilment, it was clearer whether the pledge was actually 'objectively' testable or not.

Identifying electoral pledges was particularly easier for the Olive Tree alliance, the People of Freedom, and House of Freedoms programs. In those cases, the party structured its policy preferences and promises in bullet points. Other programs (i.e. the ones published by the Democratic Party, the Civic Choice, and the Union of the Centre) are more discursive texts, where the promises are incorporated within the main text.

Examples of statements that are considered as pledges:

√ *A gradual and progressive detaxation of Christmas bonuses* (People of Freedom-2008)

√ *We need robust work-life reconciliation policies* (Civic Choice-2013)

Examples of statements that are not considered pledges, because the testability criterion is not met:

× *Ensure universal access to sports activities* (House of Freedoms-2001)

× *Improve the quality of train, air, and marine services to meet European standards* (Olive Tree-2006)

From the final dataset, the pledges related to European and international institutions and changes are removed. For instance, I excluded all the proposals made by the Olive Tree Alliance in 1996 to reform the United Nations. In addition to the intentions and capacities of national partisan actors, other factors play a role at the international level, whose effect is impossible to grasp in this type of analysis. Italian governments cannot be considered accountable for the realisation of these promises to the same extent as for more ‘national’ matters.

Pledges are considered once. If the same promise is repeated multiple times in the same manifesto, it is included only once in the dataset. But, if the pledge is repeated in two different party manifestos in the same election year, both promises are retained in the final dataset.

Evaluation of pledge fulfilment

To evaluate pledge fulfilment, I compared the substance of the policy proposal with the legislation, the laws and the decree-laws approved during the legislature under consideration.

The first step consists of identifying the law that could have turned the pledge into practice. For the more recent governments, an important source of information is the Italian Chamber of Deputies website. On this page, the main legislation approved during the legislature is grouped by policy issue. Comments and descriptions of parliamentary activity make it easier to identify the right law. Reports published by the Parliamentary committees and the Senate were also useful. Other important sources were the documents published by the party/coalition at the end of their mandate. In these documents, usually published on the party/coalition website, parties discuss their main achievements in the different policy sectors (i.e. ‘Il governo Berlusconi: le principali realizzazioni’; ‘Il Governo Prodi: rapporto conclusivo sull’attuazione del programma di Governo’). In its website ‘perl’ulivo.it’, for instance, the main promises (‘the 88 thesis’) included in the electoral manifestos are restated, and, for each ‘thesis’, there is a list of the actions taken to fulfil the promise. If I could not find any information in these documents, I performed a keyword search into

the archives of important national newspapers (i.e. Repubblica and Corriere della Sera). I also used the Google platform in order to look for specialised journals or web pages that could have discussed newly adopted laws in a particular sector (to cite an example, *eduscuola.it* was helpful for school reforms). Sites like *handylex.org* were particularly useful for a general overview of the new laws, their abrogation, etc. If no action could be found, the promise was considered broken.

The second step was to actually read the content of the laws/decrees under scrutiny to evaluate if the pledge is actually realised, merely partially realised, or broken. This step was particularly relevant for verifying the accuracy of the information contained in more ‘partisan’ sources.

Pledges on goals (i.e. ‘we will reduce public spending’, People of Freedom, 2008) were evaluated by looking into national and international statistics and indicators of government performance.

I use five categories to evaluate pledge fulfilment. In this way, all the different levels of fulfilment are accounted for, and thus, a more detailed analysis can be performed.

(-1) *The policy adopted is the opposite* of what the party promised in its manifesto. The pledge to lower the limits of cash payments (Civic Choice-2013) falls into this category because the limit was raised. Only other two promises are contained in this category.

(0) *Broken pledge*. The party has not carried out the action expected from the electoral promise. The pledge to reduce the tax burden up to 33% of GDP (House of Freedoms-2001) is considered not kept because the percentage of the tax burden actually reduced to 40.3% of GDP but it grew again at the end of the mandate (42%). The exact percentage promise (33% of GDP) was never reached and overall the pressure cannot be considered reduced.

(1) *Policy included in the agenda*, but not fulfilled. For instance, if a pledge is proposed and discussed by the government but the policy proposal has not received the needed parliament support to be adopted. In this case, the ruling party has done all it can to carry out its programmatic

agenda, so this has to be accounted for in the data. This is for instance the case of the promises to reform the RAI and to control the advertising for television stations (The Union-2006). A draft law was approved by the government in that sense ('ddl Gentiloni'), but it was never voted by the Parliament.

(2) *Pledge partially fulfilled*: some policies in the direction of the electoral promise are adopted, but the pledge cannot be considered completely realised. The promise to drastically reduce the lawmaking in Parliament (House of Freedoms-2001) was evaluated as partially fulfilled because the number of laws approved is reduced from the previous parliamentary term but it is not considered a 'drastic' reduction. If a promise with a specific timeframe (ex., Reform of the electoral law as the first act of the new Parliament; Civic Choice-2013) was realised but outside the timeframe, the pledge is considered only partially fulfilled.

(3) *Pledge fully fulfilled*: the exact content of the promise is achieved and/or the policy promised is actually carried out by the ruling party/coalition.

I have also created a variable where pledge fulfilment is divided only into two categories, to simplify statistical analysis:

(0) *Broken pledges*: this category also includes the cases when the party adopted a policy that is the opposite of what they promised in the electoral campaign and when the parties only included the policy in the agenda. In all these cases, the pledge cannot be considered kept.

(1) *At least partially fulfilled pledges*: this category includes both partially fulfilled and fully fulfilled promises.

Data were collected by the author. As it can be easily guessed by the explanation above, this methodology is particularly time-consuming. The data collection process lasted a total of six months. To guarantee the reliability of the coding process and the data, three important precautions were adopted. Firstly, as previously discussed, I diversified as much as possible the sources used to determine whether the pledges are effectively realised or not. Secondly, every decision on pledge fulfilment was explicitly indicated in the final dataset. There

the author specifies the laws and, in some cases, explains the choice made. This guarantees the transparency of the data collection as well. Thirdly, a reliability test was conducted. The evaluation of the pledge fulfilment for the People of Freedom manifestos of 2008 was compared with the data collected with the same methodology for the same platform by Catherine Moury (Data collected for the comparative pledge project presented in Thomson et al. (2017)). Among the 107 pledges compared, 73,8 percent of agreement was found.

The dataset is published and publicly available on the Harvard Dataverse (Borgnino, G. 2022. "Replication Data for: Policymaking Under Tough Economic Times: Parties, Policy Issues, and the Adoption of Programmatic Policies", <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/OOIDR3> Harvard Dataverse, V2).

Appendix 1.2 *Expansionary pledges in parties' manifestos*

Table A2. Number and percentage of expansionary pledges included in parties' election programs by mandate.

	Expansionary pledges		Other types of pledges		Total	
	%	n	%	n	%	n
1996-2001	26.7	156	73.3	429	100.0	585
2001-2006	36.9	121	63.1	207	100.0	328
2006-2008	33.0	263	67.0	534	100.0	797
2008-2013	34.2	70	65.8	135	100.0	205
2013-2018	28.8	143	71.2	354	100.0	497
Before-2008	31.6	540	68.4	1170	100.0	1710
After-2008	30.3	213	69.7	489	100.0	702
Total	31.2	753	68.8	1659	100.0	2412

APPENDICES CHAPTER 2

Appendix 2.1 *Robustness tests*

Table A1. The impact of economic growth on pledge fulfilment in Italy based on the policy issue of the promises. Results of logistic regressions where the dependent variable is pledge fulfilment. Data for the 2013 election are omitted.

	(A1) (ref. category: economy)	(A2) (ref. category: social issue)
GDP	-.37 (.15)*	-.15 (.17)
Issue		
Economy		-.24 (.17)
Social Issue	.24(.17)	
Government	-.44 (.16)**	-.68 (.18)***
Education	.07 (.25)	-.17 (.26)
Transportation	.14 (.26)	-.10 (.27)
Law & Order	-.63 (.19)***	-.87 (.20)***
Other	.05 (.16)	-.19 (.17)
GDP*Issue		
Economy		-.23 (.21)
Social Issue	.23 (.21)	
Government	.50 (.19)**	.28 (.21)
Education	.72 (.27)**	.49 (.29)
Transportation	.44 (.30)	.21 (.32)
Law & Order	.25 (.21)	.03 (.23)
Other	.43 (.18)*	.20 (.20)
Duration	.0004 (.0002)**	.0004 (.0002)**
Number of pledges	.0003 (.0003)	.0003 (.0003)
Constant	-.68 (.38)	-.44 (.38)
Log likelihood	-1294.68	-1294.68
Wald X2	61.86***	61.86***
Number of observations	1915	1915

^a SE: robust standard error

* $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; *** $p \leq 0.001$

Table A2. The impact of unemployment rate change on pledge fulfilment in Italy based on the policy issue of the promises. Results of logistic regressions where the dependent variable is pledge fulfilment.

	(A3) (ref. category: economy)	(A4) (ref. category: social issue)
Unemployment change	.22 (.17)	.03 (.17)
Issue		
Economy		-.16 (.15)
Social Issue	.16 (.15)	
Government	-.55 (.14)***	-.72 (.16)***
Education	-.16 (.18)	-.32 (.20)
Transportation	.07 (.21)	-.09 (.22)
Law & Order	-.53 (.15)***	-.69 (.17)***
Other	-.06 (.13)	-.22 (.15)
Unemployment change*Issue		
Economy		.19 (.19)
Social Issue	-.19 (.19)	
Government	-.50 (.17)**	-.31 (.20)
Education	-.64 (.24)**	-.45 (.27)
Transportation	-.49 (.34)	-.30 (.35)
Law & Order	-.72 (.20)***	-.53 (.23)*
Other	-.43 (.16)**	-.24 (.19)
Duration	.0002 (.0001)*	.0002 (.0001)*
Number of pledges	.00005 (.0002)	.00005 (.0002)
Constant	-.20 (.26)	-.04 (.28)
Log likelihood	-1633.93	-1633.93
Wald X2	72.29***	72.29***
Number of observations	2412	2412

^a SE: robust standard error

* $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; *** $p \leq 0.001$

Appendix 2.2 *Additional information about policy issues and their distribution by manifestos*

Table A1. Number of promises included in parties' election manifestos by policy issue.

Year	Program	Policy Issues						
		Economy	Social	Government	Education	Transportation	Law and order	Other
1996	Olive Tree	114 (19.5)	101 (17.3)	127 (21.7)	32 (5.5)	22 (3.8)	68 (11.6)	121 (20.7)
2001	House of Freedoms	65 (19.8)	33 (10.1)	35 (10.7)	22 (6.7)	53 (16.2)	62 (18.9)	58 (17.7)
2006	The Union	138 (17.3)	77 (9.7)	118 (14.8)	76 (9.5)	36 (4.5)	106 (13.3)	246 (30.9)
2008	People of Freedom	38 (22.2)	35 (20.5)	16 (9.4)	6 (3.5)	10 (5.8)	23 (13.4)	43 (25.1)
	Northern League	5 (14.7)	3 (8.8)	9 (26.5)	0	8 (23.5)	1 (2.9)	8 (23.5)
2013	People of Freedom	60 (30.5)	22 (11.2)	37 (18.8)	12 (6.1)	8 (4.1)	18 (9.1)	40 (20.3)
	Union of the Centre	10 (23.3)	16 (37.2)	5 (11.6)	2 (4.6)	1 (2.3)	1 (2.3)	8 (18.6)
	Civic Choice	56 (30.3)	22 (11.9)	41 (22.2)	11 (5.9)	1 (0.5)	16 (8.6)	38 (20.5)
	Democratic Party	11 (15.3)	7 (9.7)	23 (31.9)	5 (6.9)	0	8 (11.1)	18 (25.0)
Total		497 (20.6)	316 (13.1)	411 (17.0)	166 (6.9)	139 (5.8)	303 (12.6)	580 (24.0)

Note: Absolute values. Percentages are shown in brackets.

APPENDICES CHAPTER 3

Appendix 3.1 *Promises by policy issues in France, Italy, and Sweden*

Table A1. Number and percentage of promises by policy issue in France

	2007 Election				
	National Front	The Greens	Socialist Party	Union for a Popular Movement	Tot.
Economy	98 12.68	85 12.94	93 21.88	81 14.44	357 14.78
Social Issues	108 13.97	123 18.72	67 15.76	120 21.39	418 17.30
Government	57 7.37	75 11.42	57 13.41	74 13.19	263 10.89
Education	85 11.00	50 7.61	33 7.76	79 14.08	247 10.22
Transportation	12 1.55	23 3.50	5 1.18	5 0.89	45 1.86
Law-and-Order	89 11.51	40 6.09	44 10.35	36 6.42	209 8.65
Immigration	47 6.08	24 3.65	11 2.59	18 3.21	100 4.14
Environment	41 5.30	65 9.89	9 2.12	29 5.17	144 5.96
Other Issues	236 30.53	172 26.18	106 24.94	119 21.21	633 26.20
Total	773 100.00	657 100.00	425 100.00	561 100.00	2,416 100.00

Number of promises with percentages below

[Table A1. Continued]

	2012 Election				Tot.
	National Front	The Greens	Socialist Party	Union for a Popular Movement	
Economy	42 17.65	139 17.22	67 30.88	39 16.25	287 19.11
Social Issues	38 15.97	131 16.23	24 11.06	52 21.67	245 16.31
Government	27 11.34	72 8.92	24 11.06	11 4.58	134 8.92
Education	8 3.36	58 7.19	23 10.60	33 13.75	122 8.12
Transportation	4 1.68	23 2.85	3 1.38	3 1.25	33 2.20
Law-and-Order	34 14.29	81 10.04	13 5.99	28 11.67	156 10.39
Immigration	15 6.30	21 2.60	3 1.38	8 3.33	47 3.13
Environment	1 0.42	63 7.81	1 0.46	2 0.83	67 4.46
Other Issues	69 28.99	219 27.14	59 27.19	64 26.67	411 27.36
Total	238 100.00	807 100.00	217 100.00	240 100.00	1,502 100.00

Number of promises with percentages below

Table A2. Number and percentage of promises by policy issue in Italy

	2008 Election				
	Democratic Party	Northern League	People of Freedom	Union of the Centre	Tot.
Economy	46 28.05	5 14.71	36 21.1	36 18.46	123 21.81
Social Issues	21 12.8	3 8.8	35 20.5	26 13.3	85 15.07
Government	35 21.3	9 26.5	16 9.4	34 17.4	94 16.67
Education	15 9.1	0 0	6 3.5	19 9.7	40 7.09
Transportation	9 5.5	8 23.5	10 5.8	11 5.6	38 6.74
Law-and-Order	16 9.8	1 2.9	23 16.4	33 16.9	73 12.94
Immigration	4 2.4	8 23.5	9 5.3	7 3.6	28 4.96
Environment	5 3.0	0 0	4 2.3	1 0.5	10 1.77
Other Issues	13 7.9	0 0	32 18.7	28 14.4	73 12.94
Total	164 100.0	34 100.00	171 100.00	195 100.00	564 100.00

Number of promises with percentages below

[Table A2. Continued]

2013 Election				
	Democratic Party	People of Freedom	Union of the Centre	Tot.
Economy	11 15.28	64 31.84	9 20.95	84 26.58
Social Issues	7 9.72	22 10.95	16 37.23	45 14.24
Government	23 31.94	37 18.41	5 11.65	65 20.57
Education	5 6.94	12 5.97	2 4.67	19 6.01
Transportation	0 0	8 3.98	1 2.35	9 2.85
Law-and-Order	8 11.11	18 8.96	1 2.35	27 8.54
Immigration	1 1.39	4 1.99	0 0	5 1.58
Environment	3 4.17	5 2.49	2 4.67	10 3.16
Other Issues	14 19.44	31 15.42	7 16.30	52 16.46
Total	72 100.0	201 100.0	43 100.0	316 100.0

Number of promises with percentages below

Table A3. Number and percentage of promises by policy issue in Sweden

	2006 Election							Tot.
	The Alliance	Centre Party	Liberals	Christian Democrats	Greens	Social Democrats	Left Party	
Economy	34 16.83	19 26.03	29 17.26	19 32.20	18 15,25	20 18.87	41 36.94	180 21.51
Social Issues	46 22.77	19 26.03	35 20.83	15 25.42	18 15,25	35 33.02	18 16.22	186 22.22
Education	32 15.84	2 2.74	35 20.83	7 11.86	10 8,47	17 16.04	5 4.50	108 12.90
Transportation	1 0.50	0 0.00	0 0.00	1 1.69	5 4,24	1 0.94	2 1.80	10 1.19
Law-and-Order	33 16.34	6 8.22	37 22.02	7 11.86	17 14,41	3 2.83	10 9.01	113 13.50
Immigration	11 5.45	1 1.37	11 6.55	0 0.00	2 1,69	2 1.89	1 0.90	28 3.35
Environment	29 14.36	24 32.88	4 2.38	5 8.47	32 27,12	10 9.43	11 9.91	115 13.74
Other Issues	16 7.92	2 2.74	17 10.12	5 8.47	16 13,56	18 16.98	23 20.72	97 11.59
Total	202 100.00	73 100.00	168 100.00	59 100.00	118 100	106 100.00	111 100.00	837 100.00

Number of promises with percentages below

[Table A3. Continued]

2010 Election									
	The Alliance	Alli- ance	Centre Party	Liberals	Christian Democrats	Greens	Social Democrats	Left Party	Tot.
Economy	76		47	13	32	15	50	11	244
	27.24		28.14	6.28	27.35	12.50	30.30	28.95	22.32
Social Issues	43		12	59	27	4	34	4	183
	15.41		7.19	28.50	23.08	3.33	20.61	10.53	16.74
Education	27		15	31	9	18	23	3	126
	9.68		8.98	14.98	7.69	15.00	13.94	7.89	11.53
Transportation	5		3	3	0	6	5	0	22
	1.79		1.80	1.45	0.00	5.00	3.03	0.00	2.01
Law-and-Order	13		8	32	11	17	8	5	94
	4.66		4.79	15.46	9.40	14.17	4.85	13.16	8.60
Immigration	3		0	11	8	8	4	0	34
	1.08		0.00	5.31	6.84	6.67	2.42	0.00	3.11
Environment	67		80	30	13	40	26	12	268
	24.01		47.90	14.49	11.11	33.33	15.76	31.58	24.52
Other Issues	45		2	28	17	12	15	3	122
	16.13		1.20	13.53	14.53	10.0	9.09	7.89	11.16
Total	279		167	207	117	120	165	38	1,093
	100.00		100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Number of promises with percentages below

APPENDICES CHAPTER 4

Appendix 4.1 Additional information about party families of the parties and coalitions analysed

Table A1. List of parties and their party family

Country	Party	Party family
Canada	Conservative Party of Canada	R
	Liberal Party of Canada	L
Ireland	Fianna Fáil	R
	Fine Gael	R
	Labour Party	L
	Progressive Democrats	R
	Green Party	L
Bulgaria	Bulgarian Socialist Party	L
	Movement for Rights and Freedoms	L
	National Movement for Stability and Progress	C
	United Democratic Forces	R
	Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria	R
Sweden	Social Democrats	L
	Centre Party	R
	The Alliance	R
Austria	Austrian People's Party	R
	Freedom Party of Austria	R
	Social Democratic Party of Austria	L
Spain	People's Party	R
	Spanish Socialist Workers' Party	L
Germany	Social Democratic Party of Germany	L
	The Greens	L
	CDU/CSU	R
	Free Democratic Party	R
Italy	Olive Tree Alliance	L
	House of Freedoms	R
	The Union	L
	People of Freedom	R
	Northern League	R
	Democratic Party	L
	Civic Choice	C
	Union of the Centre	C

Note: R (right and centre-right parties); L (left and centre-left parties); C (centre parties).

Appendix 4.2 *Additional logistic regression models*

Table A2. Determinants of pledge fulfilment

	Models		
	3	4	5
GDP Change	-.02 (.04)	.01 (.03)	-.08 (.06)
Type of Government (<i>ref.</i> Single-Party)			
- Coalition	-.54 (.22)*	-.38 (.29)	-.49 (.23)*
GDP Change * Type of Government			
- Coalition			.09 (.07)
Party Family (<i>ref.</i> Right and Centre-Right)			
- Centre	.40 (.12)***	.33 (.12)**	.37 (.11)***
- Left and Centre-Left	-.004 (.15)	.36 (.38)	.23 (.32)
GDP Change * Party Family			
- Centre	.02 (.05)		-.01 (.05)
- Left and Centre-Left	.12 (.07)		.02 (.12)
Type of Government * Party Family			
- Left and Centre-Left		-.48 (.43)	-.33 (.36)
GDP Change * Type of Gov * Party			
- Left and Centre-Left Party			.07 (.14)
Number of Pledges	-.004 (.003)	-.003 (.003)	-.003 (.003)
Duration	.11 (.05)*	.13 (.05)**	.10 (.05)*
Constant	.40 (.25)	.15 (.29)	.38 (.24)
Log likelihood	-5470.91	-5482.26	-5455.59
Wald X2	89.67	78.39	94.44
Observations	8,139	8,139	8,139

* p <0.05; ** p <0.01; *** p <0.001

Table entries are logistic regression coefficients with standard errors clustered by party during a specific election in parentheses