Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the 'most' reformist one of all? Policy innovation and design coherence of the Renzi government

ABSTRACT
The Renzi government is currently under scrutiny by many scholars of Italian politics. Their main focus is either on the Prime Minister's leadership and communication skills or on government legislative activity with a particular emphasis on the relationship between the government and parliament. However, these studies still lack an analysis of the Renzi government with regard to the quality of its main policy measures. Has the Renzi government produced innovative and coherent policy reforms? To answer this research question, this article focuses on three policy sectors: education, the labour market, and public administration. We compare the Renzi cabinet with two other Italian governments that are generally considered very effective in decision-making: the first Prodi government (1996–1998) and the second Berlusconi government (2001–2005). Thus, we are able to assess how much policy innovation and policy design coherence characterize 11 major reforms that have been approved by those same 3 governments over time. This in turn allows us to verify whether the rhetoric of the Renzi government as 'the most innovative government' of recent decades holds empirically.

The Renzi government is currently under scrutiny by many scholars who are focusing on two main dimensions: first, the policy style characterizing the cabinet (Piattoni 2016; La Spina 2016; Ferrera 2016) and, above all, the Prime Minister's leadership (Musella 2015) and communication skills (Ventura 2015); and second, government legislative activity (Marangoni 2016a, 2016b), with a particular emphasis on the relationship between the government and parliament (Pasquino 2015).

As far as the government's (and Prime Minister's) policy style is concerned, analysts have emphasized the centralization of decision-making in the hands of the Prime Minister (Marangoni 2016a), the frequent recourse to public consultations (which detractors see as nothing more than an artefact), the marginalization of the main trade unions (Picot and Tassinari 2015), and the involvement of individual experts in policymaking on a random basis (Capano and Pritoni 2016). With regard to legislative

activity, analysts agree on a number of aspects. First, the Renzi government has shown an unparalleled rate of activism on the part of the Prime Minister.[1] Second, it has further consolidated a long-term trend in Italian lawmaking: forcing the ordinary legislative process by means of a systematic recourse to decree laws[2] (Capano and Giuliani 2001, 2003; Capano and Pritoni 2016). Finally, the cabinet has also increased its recourse to votes of confidence and in doing so, reinforced another practice very common during the so-called 'Second Republic' (Cotta and Verzichelli 2007).

Therefore, even though it came to office only 30 months ago, we already have a rather clear picture of the incumbent government both with regard to its policy styleand its legislative performance. Yet, there is still no assessment of the quality of the policy design of the Renzi government. Here, some questions should be raised: is the Renzi government really the 'most innovative' cabinet of recent decades? Is it true that – as the Prime Minister himself repeatedly claims – the incumbent government is reforming the *status quo* in all policy fields more than any other Italian Governmentin the more or less recent past? And are those same reforms 'good' reforms or 'bad' reforms?

To address these research questions, this article focuses on three policy sectors: education, the labour market, and the public administration. To assess the quality of its reforms in these fields, we compare the Renzi government with two other Italian Governments that are generally considered very 'effective' in decision-making, namely, the first Prodi government (1996–1998) and the second Berlusconi government (2001–2005). Consequently, we take into consideration 11 'major reforms': the 'Bassanini Law' (l. 59/1997), the 'Moratti Reform' (l. 53/2003) and the 'Buona Scuola' (l. 107/2015) in education policy; the two 'Bassanini Laws' (l. 59/1997 and l. 127/1997), the 'Frattini Law' (l. 145/2002) and the two 'Madia Laws' (l. 114/2014 and l. 124/2015) in public administration policy; the 'Treu Package' (l. 196/1997), the 'Biagi Law' (l. 30/2003), and the so-called 'Jobs Act' (l. 183/2014) in labour-market policy.

Specifically, we assess how much policy innovation, intensity of innovation, and policy design coherence characterize the 'design' of the above-mentioned 'major reforms'. Thus, we are able to assess the content of the output of policy formulation,not the effects of the implementation. This comparative assessment is based on an expert survey of policy specialists. This article is organized as follows. In the following section, we outline the research design, followed by the empirical analysis, which is presented in the subsequent section. Finally, in the section after that, the empirical evidence is discussed and some suggestions for further research are offered.

Research design

To assess the quality of the Renzi government's policy design, we compare the main decisions it took during its first 24 months in office with two other governments (with regard to the same time span): the first Prodi government (1996–1998) and the second Berlusconi government (2001–2005). There are many reasons to justify this choice.[3] However, the main rationale is that both the Prodi I government and the Berlusconi II government are generally considered to be cabinets that greatly changed the policies they inherited: Romano Prodi led the first government of the so-called 'Second Republic',[4] in a situation in which many changes had to be made, and Silvio

Berlusconi came to office after 5 years of centre-left governments on the basis of a policy agenda characterized by huge rupture with the past.

We have chosen three specific policy fields – education, the labour market, and public administration – because of their political and social relevance, and we have focused on the main decisions made regarding these policies, which are interventions that can be considered major reforms, at least according to the claims of the reformers, or can be considered the most relevant decisions taken within those three policy fields.

For these reforms, we have conducted an in-depth analysis to assess the quality of their design in terms of the following:

(1) The *total amount of policy innovation*, that is, the entire extent of policy change characterizing each reform, meaning the sum of the changes to the *status quo ante* introduced by the new regulations;

(2) The *intensity of policy innovation* of the legislative initiative, which measures the deviation of the new design with respect to the *status quo* and the breadth of the intervention. This particular measure helps in distinguishing between a reform characterized by a great number of relatively less innovative measures on the one hand and a reform characterized by a lower number of relatively more innova- tive measures on the other;

(3) The *coherence of the policy design*, which refers to the degree of consistency between the declared goals and the means that are provided for by the formal regulations analysed.

However, it is necessary to distinguish between the total amount of policy innovation, on the one hand, and the intensity of innovation and design coherence, on the other. The first dimension simply takes into account the degree to which the government changes the inherited public policy *status quo*; in other words, it accounts for the 'most reformist' government, but it does not say much about the quality of the design. However, both the intensity of innovation and the policy design coherence are strictly related to the quality of policy design: a 'good' reform is characterized by incisive innovation and coherent architecture. Thus, we assume that the quality of the policy design is a function of a combination of intensity of innovation and coherence of design.

To measure the above-listed dimensions concerning governments' policy designs, we first decomposed the legislative documents under scrutiny by hand-coding. In this way, legislative texts were divided into specific relevant items.[5]

Then, a survey of highly regarded specialists was conducted. Specifically, we contacted 36 academics who are almost unanimously considered the most reputed scholars of the analysed policy fields.[6] Twenty-five of them completed the questionnaire (for a satisfactory response rate of 69.4%); the number of respondents was in line with what is generally considered acceptable for party positioning[7] (Laver and Hunt 1992; Benoit and Laver 2006). The experts were asked to provide the following:

(1) Their judgement of each policy issue (on a scale from 0 to 10, with respect to deviation from the *status quo*, where 0 means 'very insignificant innovation' and 10 means 'very significant innovation'), identified through the previous hand-coding;

(2) A synthetic evaluation of the overall coherence[8] characterizing the policy design of each reform.

Empirical findings

Before presenting the empirical findings from our survey, it should be emphasized that most of the content of the 11 reform laws analysed here are laws of delegation through which the government is delegated to legislate directly according to the goals and the general set of policy instruments defined in the law. This feature implies a problem: it often happens that Italian Governments partially change the original objectives set out in the delegating law (sometimes correcting initial inconsistencies and sometimes introducing them). This behaviour can thus modify the original policy design in progress and increase or decrease the level of innovativeness and coherence. However, this possible evolution of policy dynamics does not undermine our analysis precisely because we compare the original policy decisions.

Education policy

All three of the governments analysed dealt immediately with the problem of reforming education (one of the most recurrent and 'wicked' policy problems). The Prodi government addressed it through a number of very significant provisions contained in law no. 59/1997 (a law redesigning many structural aspects of the Italian public administration). This law has two important aspects: managerial, organizational, and teaching autonomy was granted to educational institutions and the status of managers was attributed to principals. This redesign represented the end of a long-lasting debate about the empowerment of schools; the first Prodi government thus approved a radical shift from the historically inherited system – characterized by strong bureaucratic centraliza- tion – to a system that is more flexible and oriented towards local accountability.

The 'Moratti Reform' (l. 53/2003), approved during the second year of the second Berlusconi government, tried substantially to redesign many aspects of the overall education system. This law introduced many changes in the various organizational tracks of education, from primary to secondary. For example, the law delegated to the government the power to reform the organizational structure of the education system by moving from three separate tracks (primary school (5 years), junior high school (3 years), senior high school (5 years)) to a two track-system (8 + 5). It also granted the government the power to reform the structure of the high-school system (by creating two quite distinct tracks: the lyceum system and the vocational education system). As is well known, the former was never implemented, whereas the latter was implemented starting in 2010 (thanks to the fourth Berlusconi government).

The 'Buona Scuola' (l. 107/2015) is the 'official' name attributed by Renzi to the school reform approved by his government. The main provisions of this reform include strengthening the managerial powers of school principals (who can now directly recruit teachers by choosing them from those who have gained accreditation), a new system for selecting those who can be appointed as teachers, the establishment of an institutional unit for self-evaluation, and a plan to ensure the tenure of approximately 150,000 teachers who had been working under temporary contracts during the previous decade.

Table 1. Prodi I, Berlusconi II, and Renzi in comparison: education.

Government	Total innovation	Intensity of innovation	Design coherence
Prodi I	33.1	**6.61**	**7.25**
Berlusconi II	**87.9**	5.64	5.75
Renzi	86.8	5.91	6.25

Bold values indicate highest value.

In Table 1, we present the overall picture resulting from the experts' survey. What clearly emerges is that both the Renzi and Berlusconi governments have produced more innovation, thus changing many of the existing rules, whereas the Prodi government has the best results in terms of both the intensity of innovation and design coherence.

As a result, both the Renzi and Berlusconi governments can be considered 'big' reformers in terms of quantity of innovations. But, according to our theoretical premises, we should distinguish the total amount of policy innovation from the quality of policy design. On this, see Figure 1, which places the three policy reforms under scrutiny on a Cartesian plane where both the intensity of innovation and design coherence are taken into account. The top right-hand corner represents the point at which policies are considered by experts as both highly innovative and highly coherent. It represents, in other words, a 'high-quality' policy decision. In contrast, the bottom-left corner represents the point at which policy design is considered by experts as scarcely innovative and scarcely coherent, thus representing 'low-quality' policy decisions. Finally, both the top left-hand corner and the bottom right-hand corner represent intermediary situations. The former stands for policy designs that are evaluated as highly coherent but scarcely innovative; the latter for policies that are instead evaluated as being highly innovative but with little coherence.

Figure 1 clearly shows that the quality of the policy design of the Prodi government in education can be assessed as significantly better when compared to the designs of the other two governments. According to our measures, it appears that Berlusconi
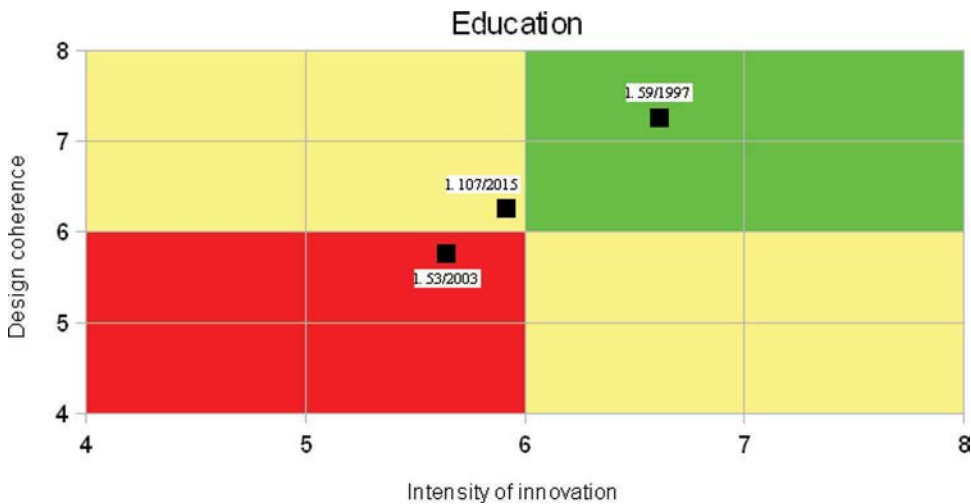

Figure 1. Intensity of innovation and design coherence: quality of design of reforms in education.

performed poorly on this, while the Renzi executive has barely performed sufficiently. In fact, the 'Buona Scuola' is considered quite coherent but not very innovative. With regard to education policy, two conclusions can thus be drawn. First, in absolute terms, the second Berlusconi government was the 'most' reformist cabinet of all. However, the winner of the 'quality contest' is undoubtedly Prodi.

Administrative policy

In dealing with the Sisyphean task of administrative reform, two major reforms of the Prodi government extensively affected existing policy arrangements in Italian public administration. Law no. 59/1997 delegated to the government the power to: restructure the organization of central ministries, the Presidency of Council, and many publicentities; strengthen the tools of policy evaluation, policy monitoring, regulating, and cost-benefit analysis; and deregulate many administrative processes and procedures. Law no. 127/1997 directly provided for simplification of a number of the rules regard- ing the certification Italian citizens are required to provide when requesting documents from the public administration, which reduced the complexity of administrative pro- cedures; attributed clear tasks and responsibilities to senior administrative officials, and introduced the position of Director General into local administrations.

The Berlusconi government's reform, embodied in law no. 145/2002, was much narrower in scope. Above all, it reinforced the spoils system and the role of evaluation in the careers of senior public officials.

Finally, the Renzi government seemed to follow Prodi's example in its reform of the public administration by approving a law of delegation and a law containing a number of regulations of immediate applicability. In fact, law no. 114/2014 introduced new rules relating to the early retirement of public employees; new rules for the inter-institutional transfer of public employees; the adoption of a common template for official forms citizens are required to complete, and a significant reduction in the facilities available to trade-union representatives to perform their roles. Law no. 124/2015 delegated to the government the power to introduce regulations concerning a large number of issues. Among these, the most significant concerned the reorganization of the police; a reduc- tion in the scale of the network of prefectures and of the chambers of commerce; a merger of the roles of a number of senior managers; a further clarification of the distinction between administrative and political responsibilities; a reorganization of local public services, and a redefinition of the role of the *Corte dei Conti* (the Public Audit Office).

Table 2 presents a general overview of the experts' assessments of the public administration reforms. In this case, it appears that the Renzi government is the most innovative in terms of the total amount of policy change, while the Prodi government also performed well in this respect. However, the Berlusconi government received a

Table 2. Prodi I, Berlusconi II, and Renzi in comparison: public administration.

Government	Total innovation	Intensity of innovation	Design coherence
Prodi I	144.3	6.38	7.28
Berlusconi II	52.9	4.77	5.11
Renzi	187.8	5.91	6.50

Bold values indicate highest value.

very low score. It should probably be emphasized in this regard that the landscape of Italian public administration had completely changed by the time the second Berlusconi government came to office; in fact, thanks to the two Prodi laws we have analysed, and other subsequent regulations, at the end of the 1990s, the institutional and policy arrangements of Italian public administration that had been in place 10 years earlier were completely changed (Capano 2000, 2003; Capano and Gualmini 2011). The evident inactivity of the Berlusconi government in the field of administrative reform could be explained by this legacy. However, the impressive innovations of the Renzi government can be attributed not only to his self-constructed profile as a major reformer but also to the fact that in recent years, there has been increasing public dissatisfaction concerning the performance of the public administration.

The results that emerge from assessment of the quality of policy design present a different and very interesting picture. In fact, the few interventions the Berlusconi government made in this policy field were of poor quality. Regarding the other two governments, we have assessed the experts' judgements of both reform laws each cabinet approved, and as shown in Figure 2, the two Prodi laws are judged better than Renzi's two reforms.

Furthermore, what is striking is the assessment of the two laws of delegation. Here, the quality of the design of law no. 59/1997 is judged as consistently better than the quality of the similar law approved by Renzi (l. 124/2015) both with respect to intensity of innovation and with regard to design coherence. In the case of the other reforms (laws providing for more direct intervention), the quality of design of the Renzi reform (l. 114/2014) is rather good, but still lower (on both dimensions concerning the quality of policy design) than Prodi's law (l. 127/1997). Thus, with regard to public adminis- tration, while Renzi is right in considering his government as the 'most reformist' one of all, there is no doubt that Prodi is still the winner of the quality of design game.
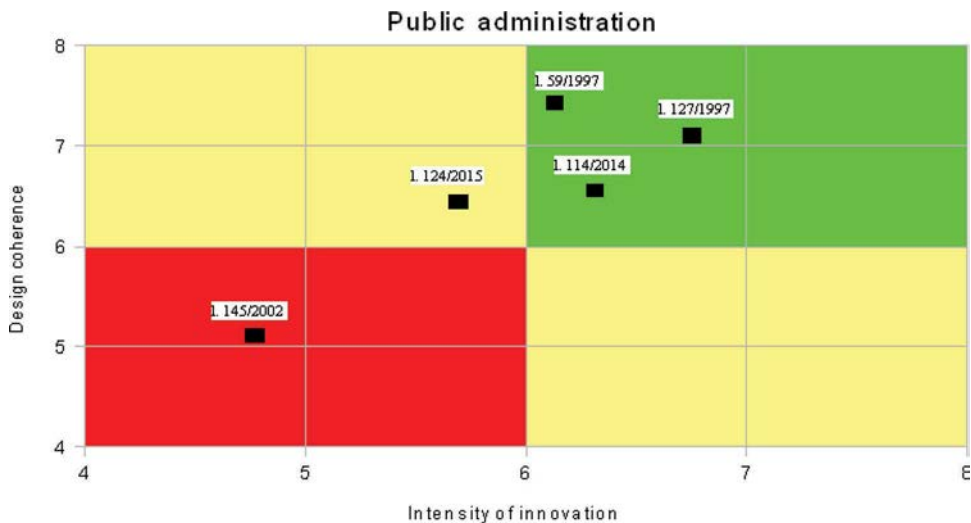

Figure 2. Intensity of innovation and design coherence: the quality of design of public administra-tion reforms.

Labour-market policy

The trajectory of reform initiated by the technocratic governments of the early 1990s[9] was continued by the first Prodi cabinet with the so-called 'Treu Package' (l. 196/1997), which was originally based on the 'Pact for Employment' jointly signed by the govern- ment and social partners (both trade unions and *Confindustria*, the most relevant Italian entrepreneurial association) in September 1996. The greater part of this pact, which was the result of detailed negotiations, was first translated into bill no. 1918, presented to the Senate in December 1996 and then approved by the Chamber ofDeputies at the end of June 1997. The 'Treu Package' regulated temporary and part-time employment, and on-the-job training; moreover, it reformed services to employ- ment. Generally speaking, it is widely accepted that this policy measure represents the first – rather significant – introduction of flexibility into the Italian labour market after decades of undeniable rigidity (Schindler 2009).

The second labour-market reform we want to analyse here is the so-called 'Biagi Law' (2003), commonly considered one of the most important political decisions taken by the second Berlusconi government due to its profound effect on the Italian labour market. Its main aim was to make it easier for young people to gain access to the labour market by introducing new, non-traditional contracts of employment. The underlying belief was that the rigidity of the Italian labour market restricted mobility, encouraged low productivity, and in turn a lack of competitiveness on the part of Italian firms relative to their international competitors (Accornero and Como 2003). As a result, the law reformed the conditions of both temporary and part-time employment. It also introduced new types of employment contract designed to enhance the flexibility of the Italian labour market.

The Renzi government also focused on labour-market policy as one of its policy priorities. The so-called 'Jobs Act', approved by the government in December 2014 and the third and final reform here analysed, aimed at the 'universalization' of unemploy- ment benefits; lengthening the duration of unemployment benefit payouts, and reform- ing Article 18 of the so-called Workers' Statute, which provides protection against unfair dismissal (Picot and Tassinari 2015). In other words, its main aim was to overcome the division in the labour market between those who were protected andthose who were not. The measure was concerned with four key areas: (i) restructuring unemployment benefits; (ii) reorganizing public–employment services; (iii) revising the range of employment contracts available, and (iv) facilitating the achievement of work- life balance.

Table 3 summarizes the experts' assessments. In terms of the total amount of policy innovation, the Renzi government, as in public administration, is by far the best performer. Put differently, the 'Jobs Act' is considered by the experts as introducing many more policy innovations into Italian labour-market policy than the 'Biagi Law' or the 'Treu Package' did. Renzi's reform is also assessed as the best in terms of intensity of

Table 3. Prodi I, Berlusconi II, and Renzi in comparison: labour market.

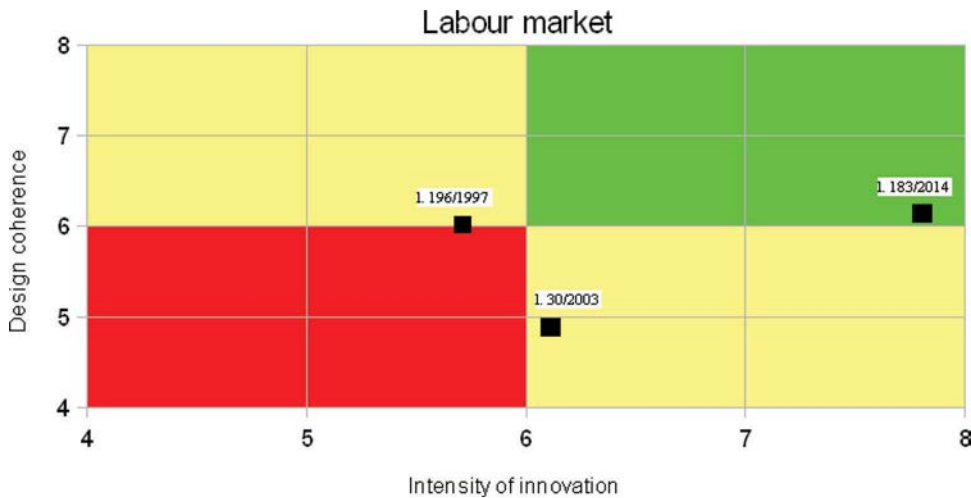| Government	Total innovation	Intensity of innovation	Design coherence
Prodi I	58.4	5.71	6.00
Berlusconi II	82.5	6.11	4.88
Renzi	101.1	7.80	6.13

Bold values indicate highest value.

Figure 3. Intensity of innovation and design coherence: the quality of policy design in labour-market policy.

innovation and design coherence. Renzi usually depicts this reform as a 'watershed' in labour-market policy; our experts tend to agree with him.

As Figure 3 shows, the 'quality' of the design characterizing the three policy reforms analysed here is not straightforward; only the so-called 'Jobs Act' receives sufficient scores in terms of both innovation and coherence – although, while it scores well in terms of innovation (7.80), in terms of design coherence it seems barely sufficient(6.13). Nevertheless, the policy designs of the other two governments are consideredby our experts as even worse: the 'Treu Package' is quite coherent but not very innovative, while the 'Biagi Law' is quite innovative but not very coherent. In conclu- sion, Renzi wins the labour-market contest both in terms of quantity of innovation and with regard to the quality of policy design. However, the way in which the policy instruments have been designed to reach their avowed aims is not evaluated by our experts as enthusiastically as they evaluated the intensity of innovation characterizingthe policy measure under scrutiny.

The overall picture: the Renzi government in a comparative perspective

The overall picture offered by our analysis is quite clear: Renzi is correct in considering his administration to be the most innovative cabinet of the last 20 years, at least with regard to the three policy sectors under scrutiny. As shown in Table 4, the four policy measures analysed here – 'Buona Scuola' (l. 107/2015) in education; the two so-called 'Madia Laws' (l.

Table 4. The total amount of policy innovation: Prodi I, Berlusconi II, and Renzi in comparison.

Government	Education	Public administration	Labour market	Total
Prodi I	33.1	144.3	58.4	235.8
Berlusconi II	87.9	52.9	82.5	223.3
Renzi	86.8	187.8	101.1	375.7

Bold values indicate highest value.

114/2014 and l. 124/2015) in public administration, and the 'Jobs Act' (l. 183/2014) in the labour market – together score an impressive of 375.7 for total policy innovation. This result is almost double the one characterizing both the first Prodi cabinet (235.8) and the second Berlusconi government (223.3). Thus, the Renzi government has pursued wide-ranging reforms addressing many components of the policy fields in question.

Renzi's reforms, taken together, are also characterized by the highest degree of policy innovation. Put differently, the Renzi cabinet is the most innovative government in both absolute terms and in 'intensity' terms. However, this overall result is mainly due to the experts' evaluation of the so-called 'Jobs Act'. In fact, in terms of education policy and in terms of policy towards the public administration, the first Prodi cabinet is con- sidered by our experts as being more capable of innovation than the Renzi cabinet.

The opposite is true with regard to the extent to which the governments are perceived, by our panel of experts, as capable of coherent policy design. In this case, the supremacy of the first Prodi government is rather clear both in overall terms and with regard to education and public administration, whereas Renzi's cabinet has legislated 'better' on labour-market issues (at least in the experts' view). Table 5 and Figure 4 summarize the findings that we have presented thus far:

Table 5. How much innovation per policy sector.

Government	Education		P.A.		Labour		TOT	
	Top-10 issues	Issues > 6.0	Top-10 issues	Issues > 6.0	Top-10 issues	Issues > 6.0	Top-10 issues	Issues > 6.0
Prodi I	3	4	8	15	1	6	12	25
	(60.0%)	(80.0%)	(34.8%)	(65.2%)	(9.1%)	(54.5%)	(34.6%)	(66.6%)
Berlusconi II	3	6	0	0	0	10	3	16
	(18.8%)	(37.5%)	(0.0%)	(0.0%)	(0.0%)	(60.0%)	(6.3%)	(32.5%)
Renzi	4	4	2	13	9	13	15	30
	(26.7%)	(26.7%)	(6.1%)	(39.4%)	(64.3%)	(92.9%)	(32.4%)	(53.0%)

Bold values indicate highest percentage.
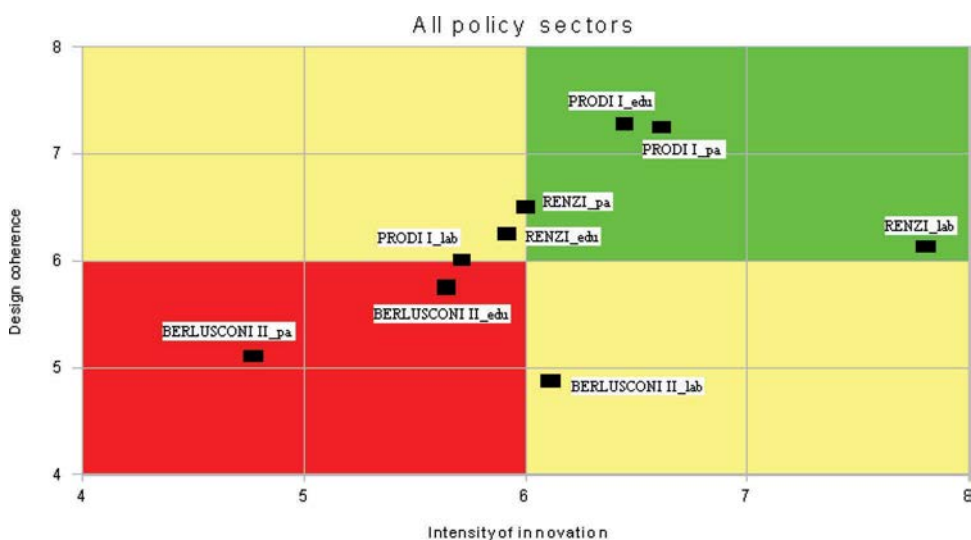

Figure 4. Intensity of innovation and design coherence: the quality of policy design in all policy sectors.

On the basis of Table 5 and Figure 4, two fundamental observations can be made. First, Prodi – more than Berlusconi and Renzi – is a Prime Minister who preferred to focus on a limited number of very innovative issues rather than producing very broad policy changes reforming many aspects of the policy field under consideration. Onethird of all Prodi's issues are among the 10 issues considered the most innovative intheir respective policy fields; moreover, two thirds are considered as sufficiently inno- vative. Both scores are higher than Renzi's and, in particular, those of Berlusconi.Second, in only four cases out of nine (i.e. Prodi's reforms in public administrationand education and Renzi's reforms in public administration and the labour market) has the policy sector under analysis been reformed in both a quite innovative and a quite coherent manner. In other words, in only four cases out of nine have our expertsidentified policy designs of real 'quality'.

Thus, is Renzi right when he says that the incumbent government is reforming the public-policy *status quo* more than any other Italian Government in the more or less recent past? And are those same reforms 'good' reforms or 'bad' reforms? The answer to the first question is without any doubt affirmative: at least with regard to the threepolicy sectors under scrutiny, the Renzi government is characterized by the highest levelof total innovation and the highest overall intensity of innovation. With respect to the second question, the results are more contradictory. Both the 'Jobs Act' (l. 183/2014)and the two 'Madia Laws' (l. 114/2014 and l. 124/2015) are considered by our experts asquite good in terms of the quality of policy design; however, the 'Buona Scuola' (l. 107/ 2015) is not. Thus, seen from this perspective, the reforming activity of the Renzi government overall, while being impressive in terms of quantity, is less impressive with regard to its quality.

Moreover, as far as design coherence is concerned, Prodi performed better than Renzi has done in education and public administration and almost equally well in the labour market. Overall, our (preliminary) impression is that the Renzi government has preferred to introduce as much policy change as it has been able, but with relatively less interest in the design coherence of its reforms.

Discussion of the findings and directions for future research

What emerges from our analysis is that, at least in the policy fields we have analysed, the experts' opinion is that Renzi's reputation asa 'good' reformer is less well deserved than he has claimed. His government has changed many aspects of policy but sometimes in not very impressive ways. From this point of view, it seems that those who emphasize the storytelling capacity of Renzi are right (Ventura 2015): he seems to be more effective in talking about change than in practising it, at least in 'qualitative' terms. Furthermore, his continuous assertions that his government is the first to try to make significant changes in decades is denied by the facts, as shown by previous research that has demonstrated that major changes – at least in terms of redesigning existing policy arrangements – were extensively introduced during 1990s by the first governments of the 'Second Republic' (Cotta and Isernia 1996; Di Palma, Fabbrini, and Freddi 2000).

What is interesting in our analysis is the gap that exists between the total amount of policy innovation on the one hand and the design quality of Renzi's reforms on the other. There is an impressively high degree of total innovation but a barely sufficient

level of design quality, one that − although almost always fully satisfactory − is lower than that shown by Prodi's reforms in two of the three analysed policy fields (education and public administration).

However, if we try to draw lessons from the analysis we have undertaken here − though very limited and restricted to only three policy fields − and thus expand our analytical perspective, a relevant issue that emerges concerns the policy design capacity of Italian Governments. Why did the Berlusconi government, which was very strong from a political point of view, perform so badly in terms of quality of policy design? Why did the Prodi government show good design capacity in education and public administration, while it was weak on labour-market policy? Why did the Renzi government display good design quality concerning the labour market, while being less effective in the other two fields? Obviously, a simple answer could be sought in the features characterizing the structure of the political arena (in which interest groups and party politics matter); however, we think that when policy design is at issue, there should be due consideration given to the technical and knowledge capacities of governments. Here, what might also matter is the framework of the policy advice that supports the formulation process.

For example, it is quite evident that policy decisions pursued by the Renzi government in the three policy fields have been addressed in different ways. For labour-market policy, it is well known that a group consisting of economists (belonging to a few academic institutions and to a specific school of thought) played a role in drafting the content of the labour-market reform. In contrast, the process of the formulation of the 'Buona Scuola' was characterized by public consultation without any involvement of relevant experts in the field. From this point of view, the experience of the Renzi government seems quite different from, for example, that of the Prodi government because the latter was characterized by the significant involvement of related policy communities in each policy field subject to reform.

We cannot force our expert's survey to say more, but it seems to us that to extend the use of this method to more policy fields could be a very promising way to assess the features of governmental policy design in Italy thus producing a complete assessment of government innovation and design quality. Of course, to obtain more reliable and refined results, the number of experts consulted should also be increased.

For now, the comparison we have presented allows the mirror to give Renzi a contradictory answer − not, of course, the answer he would like to have: 'You are the *most* but not the *best* reformist of them all'.

Notes

1. However, as Marangoni (2016a, 6) has correctly claimed, 'the rate of "prime-ministerialisation" of the executive's activity reflects the nature of government initiatives themselves, perhaps even more than it reflects the desire and the capacity for coordination with the Prime Minister's office'.
2. Thus, the Renzi cabinet confirms the chronic difficulty faced by Italian Governments in achieving their goals in Parliament through the ordinary legislative process.
3. Specifically, we are comparing a centre-left government (Prodi I), a centre-right government (Berlusconi II), and a grand-coalition government (Renzi). Moreover, whereas the Prodi cabinet was a minority government, the second Berlusconi cabinet was a minimum winning coalition, and the Renzi cabinet is an oversized coalition.

4. Scholars do not agree on when the Italian 'Second Republic' actually started: 1994 or 1996? We decided to consider the 1994–1996 biennium as still a transition period.

5. Specifically, the hand-coding process was developed as follows. First, each policy document was coded separately by both authors on the basis of a shared a priori criterion, namely, the decision to divide the policy measure under scrutiny into all its relevant items. Second, contradictory cases – for example, items included by one author but excluded by another author – were resolved jointly.

6. However, we excluded any expert who directly participated in any of the policy processes here analysed; otherwise, answers would have been unduly biased. In fact, it can be presumed that s/he would have evaluated her/his reforming law as the most innovativeand the most coherent of all. Furthermore, we have tried to balance the choice of experts in terms of their political preferences.

7. However, another potential source of bias has to be taken into account. Even though the questionnaire clearly asked for evaluations that disregard the actual implementation of policy formulations, it is not possible to exclude a priori that 'older' reforms expiate the fact that their implementation, most of the time, did not follow what was stated 'on paper'. In other words, experts might have included this aspect in their judgements, thereby misjudging Prodi's and Berlusconi's reforms with respect to those of Renzi. Yet, we are quite aware that this tendency, albeit potentially present, does not have a great impact on data reliability.

8. Intended as the causal relationship between policy aims and the adopted policy measures.

9. We are referring to both the 'Amato Protocol' of 1992 and the 'Ciampi Protocol' of 1993. In both cases, the social partners (i.e. the trade unions and employers) as well as policymakers agreed on the introduction of new employment contracts based on two levels: national-level collective agreements and agreements reached at the company/area level; moreover, those same pacts established a number of crucial guidelines for the comprehensive future reform of the Italian labour market.

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