

ST32 : Le process tracing comme méthode d'analyse des politiques publiques

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Abstract

Les mécanismes des réformes institutionnelles : comprendre l'échec ou l'adoption de réformes démocratiques par le *process tracing*

(en anglais)

La question des réformes démocratiques est devenue de plus en plus centrale dans les démocraties consolidées d'Europe de l'ouest frappées par une crise de légitimité aux ramifications multiples. Les nombreuses réformes démocratiques initiées en Islande, en Irlande ou en Italie depuis la crise de 2008 ne sont que des exemples de la montée de ces questions dans le débat public. Dans ce contexte, il est à la fois essentiel de comprendre dans quel contexte les réformes démocratiques sont mises sur agenda, mais aussi d'expliquer l'issue finale de ces réformes. Cette contribution se concentre sur ce qui se passe *après* que des grappes de réformes (définies comme des réformes affectant de multiples dimensions de l'architecture institutionnelle liées explicitement par les réformateurs) soient mises sur agenda. On se penche sur trois séquences de réformes démocratiques : le passage du septennat au quinquennat et la réforme du calendrier électoral en France (2000-2001), les réformes électorale et constitutionnelle en Italie (2003-2006), et les multiples réformes lancées en Irlande depuis 2011.

Cette étude comparative utilise la méthode du *process tracing* pour analyser l'issue finale de ces grappes de réforme. L'intérêt de cette méthode est ici double : mettre à jour des mécanismes causaux complexes et des interactions entre variables, et mettre en évidence une typologie de ces mécanismes permettant de généraliser au-delà de ces trois séquences. Cette étude permet d'identifier deux types de réforme selon le niveau de soutien dont elles bénéficient (consensuelles et conflictuelles). Deuxièmement, la comparaison met à jour une distinction entre processus de réforme majoritaires, supermajoritaires et externalisés selon leur niveau d'inclusion. En croisant ces deux variables, on montre que l'issue finale des réformes dépend de la conjonction entre nature des réformes et processus choisi pour tenter de les adopter. Il apparaît que les réformes conflictuelles sont guidées avant tout par des logiques d'intérêt et que leur issue finale dépend principalement de la capacité des réformateurs à surmonter les différents joueurs de veto en construisant une coalition suffisamment large. Les réformes consensuelles obéissent à une logique de type *credit-claiming* : leur issue dépend de la capacité d'une majorité des acteurs à s'arroger le mérite d'une réforme populaire.

The Mechanisms of Institutional Reforms: Understanding Why Some Reforms Succeed and Others Fail through process tracing

"In solving a problem of this sort, the grand thing is to be able to reason backwards. (...) Let me see if I can make it clearer. Most people, if you describe a train of events to them, will tell you what the result would be. They can put those events together in their minds, and argue from them that something will come to pass. There are few people, however, who, if you told them a result, would be able to evolve from their own inner consciousness what the steps were which led up to that result. This power is what I mean when I talk of reasoning backwards, or analytically."

Sherlock Holmes in Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*, 1887

Introduction

The economic turmoil that struck Western Europe in the last five years makes it inescapable to reflect about the link between economic and political crisis, and institutional reform. Indeed, in the midst of the economic crisis, a number of countries have decided to engage in the path of institutional reform, by developing what has sometimes been a vast agenda of proposals touching upon multiple dimensions of the institutional architecture. As noted by Mair,

"Rarely has there been such widespread discussion of institutional reform, be it of the electoral system, parliamentary procedures, local or regional government, plebiscitary mechanisms, or whatever. Almost none of the European democracies have been untouched by these discussions and almost all have devoted considerable research effort to discussing the limitations of their present institutional arrangements and the ways in which they might be changed – sometimes quite drastically. Moreover, the single thread that runs through almost all of these discussions in almost all of the countries concerned is that reform is needed in order to bring government closer to the citizen" (Mair 2013, 75–76)

Taking the argument of Mair for granted, this paper will use the case of democratic reforms in order to examine how the method of process tracing can enable to illuminate the final outcome of a series of democratic reforms adopted in Italy, France, and Ireland between 2000 and 2015. Based on inductive reasoning, on triangulation and on the examination of a variety of sources (elite interviews, parliamentary and press archives, reports, etc), the three case studies presented here show how the methodology of process tracing can be used in order to build what Elman calls "explanatory typologies" (Elman 2005). Here, the aim of process tracing is twofold: produce causal explanations about the final outcome of the reforms that are being analysed, but also and more importantly, to build a typology that could eventually enable to analyse what has sometimes been labelled as "the politics of reform".

In his opus on *The Politics of Electoral Reform*, Renwick makes the following remark: "understanding the *politics* of electoral reform is crucial to full understanding of reform outcomes: we cannot just identify antecedent conditions and predict the end result" (2010,

83–84). Rahat defines the politics of reform as a concept that pertains to the struggles between the forces trying to preserve the existing system and those trying to change it (2011, 523). Indeed, when examining bundles of reform in which several reforms have been put at the agenda at once, one can only notice that some reforms are adopted whereas others are abandoned along the way. Why do some of the reforms succeed while others fail? This paper focuses on this general question in order to disentangle the causal mechanisms that can explain the final outcome of reform. It focuses on what happens *after* bundles of reform (i.e. several reforms affecting multiple dimensions of the institutional architecture linked together by the reformers) are being put on the agenda. Three sequences of reform are used in order to build an explanatory typology of reform outcomes: one in France (reduction of the presidential term and reversal of the electoral calendar, 2000-2001), one in Italy (constitutional and electoral reform discussed between 2003 and 2006) and one in Ireland (the sequence of political reforms starting in 2011).

The first section presents briefly the methodological challenges at stake in order to use process tracing to build explanatory typologies. The second section argues that reforms can essentially be divided in two types, divisive and consensual, according to the level of support they benefit from when they are being put on the agenda, and into three types of processes according to their level of inclusion (majoritarian, supermajoritarian and externalised). It is expected that the combination of these two factors influence the final outcome of reforms. Thirdly, I present the three bundles of reform selected for the analysis, as well as the material used in order to analyse the reforms. The fourth section presents a six-category typology of reform outcomes, based on the combination of the nature and of the processes of reform. I show how the reforms discussed – successful or unsuccessful - illustrate the different paths of reform and non-reform.

1. Process tracing and explanatory typologies

In this paper, I analyse bundles of reform, which I could define as *two or more reforms, or attempts to reform, dealing with several dimensions of the institutional architecture, which were initiated, discussed and/or adopted, concomitantly or otherwise, and were explicitly linked by the reform initiators during the process*. The interest of this notion is to enable to deal at once with successful and unsuccessful reform attempts, and to examine processes of institutional reform in all of their complexity – in particular, accounting for their sequential logic. I use it to uncover the *causal mechanisms* behind reforms, to answer a simple question: ultimately, why did some reforms succeed and others fail? There are basically four possible outcomes for any given reform during the phase of the final vote. These outcomes are, in this instance, the “dependent variable” that I try to explain. First possible case: the reform is adopted thanks to actors outside of the parliamentary majority, and therefore by a large majority. Second case: the reform is only supported during its time of adoption by the parliamentary majority, or in the case of referendums, passes by a small margin. Third option: the opposition manages to make the reform’s adoption fail, or the reform is abandoned before being put to a vote. Finally, the worst case scenario for a reformer: the reform fails to be adopted not only because of successful activism on the part of the opposition, but also because of defections within the parliamentary majority. The aim is therefore to examine what configurations lead to adoption, or non-adoption in three sequences of reform, through process tracing and explanatory typologies.

In order to do this, I adopt what Scharpf calls the “backward-looking” strategy (1997, 25) of causal analysis. Sherlock Holmes’s observation, in the words of Conan Doyle,¹ is probably the most accurate, and the most telling about the difficulty of the process-tracing enterprise: “In solving a problem of this sort, the grand thing is to be able to reason backwards” (*A Study in Scarlet*). To put it more academically, George and Bennett define process-tracing as a “method [that] attempts to identify the intervening causal process - the causal chain and causal mechanism - between an independent variable (or variables) and the outcome of the dependent variable” (2005, 206). The same authors argue that this method consists in examining “histories, archival documents, interview transcripts, and other sources to see whether the causal process a theory hypothesises (...) is in fact evident in the sequence and values of the intervening variables in that case” (2005, 6). Bennett and Elman also defines it as a “key form of within-case analysis” (2006, 455): in this instance, I do not only compare Ireland, France and Italy, but most of all, the contrasting outcomes observed in a single bundle of reforms in the three countries. The methodology of process tracing enables us to investigate complex causal relationships characterised by “path dependence, tipping points, interaction effects, strategic interaction, two-directional causality or feedback loops, and equifinality (...) or multifinality” (Bennett and Elman 2006, 457). Put differently, while statistical methods enable the investigation of causal effects, process-tracing enables the unravelling of causal mechanisms.

According to Hall, process tracing is attempting to build “theory oriented explanations because it construes the task of explanation as one of elucidating and testing a theory that identifies the main determinants of a broad class of outcomes and attaches special importance to specifying the mechanisms whereby those determinants bear on the outcomes”(2008, 306). Rather than focusing on theory-testing, I will centre this paper on the issue of inductive theory-building, and more specifically, on the development of explanatory typologies, or typological theories, the two terms being often employed interchangeably. The usefulness of typologies as analytical tools is beyond question in qualitative approaches, as “building blocks in explanations” (Collier, LaPorte, and Seawright 2012, 225). George and Bennett define typological theory as “a theory that specifies independent variables, delineate them into the categories for which the researcher will measure the cases and their outcomes, and provides not only hypotheses on how these variables operate individually, but also contingent generalizations on how and under what conditions they behave in specified conjunctions or configurations to produce effects on specified independent variables” (2005, 235). According to Elman, explanatory typologies are distinctive of descriptive and classificatory typologies in that they focus on the following question: ‘if my theory is correct, what do I expect to see?’ (Elman 2005, 297). They do not only seek to describe and classify, but also to predict an outcome. In such typologies, the different dimensions are provided by the theory’s explanatory variables, and each cell derives from the posited causal relationships so that each cell space is associated with predicted values of the dependent variables. Process tracing is particularly well suited in constructing such typologies, as it enables to uncover what Ragin calls “configurative causation” (2000), and to account for the fact many paths may lead to the same outcome, to account for equifinality or multifinality, but also to capture temporal effects, and to engage in counterfactual reasoning (Bennett and Elman 2006). Moreover, this approach enables to work through the logical implications of the underlying theory when the variables included take different values. It also provides a basis for generalization beyond the case studies used to build the theory.

¹ Many authors have used the comparison between process tracing and “the science of deduction” advocated by Sherlock Holmes, such as Bennett (2010) or Collier (2011).

To give a precise example before coming to the case of democratic reforms, one could argue that building an explanatory typology is precisely what Mahoney and Thelen intend to achieve in *Beyond continuity*, in order to provide a theory of gradual institutional change (2010). The dependent variable they look at is the type of change to the status quo, labelled as the “modes of institutional change” (displacement, layering, drift and conversion) identified by Streeck and Thelen (2005). The two authors then examine two independent variables, and argue that the differences in the character of existing institutional rules (opportunity to exercise discretion in the interpretation and enforcement of the rules) and the prevailing political context (veto possibilities) affect the likelihood of specific modes of institutional change. For instance, in contexts where there are strong veto players, change through layering (amendments to the existing rules) or drift (shifts in the external conditions in which the rule applies) is more likely, because of the difficulty to change the existing rules. Layering would tend to prevail where the level of discretion over the existing rules is low, whereas drift would be more likely when the discretion of actors over the enforcement and interpretation of the rules is high. For instance, layering could take the form of voluntary supplemental pensions alongside the public system of pension. Through the two-by-two typology they build, Mahoney and Thelen seek to unravel causal mechanisms that enable to explain why, in a given configuration of variables, one particular type of change is more likely. Let us now see how this type of reasoning can be applied to democratic reforms.

2. Two types of reform, three types of processes

I claim here that the reforms of the core democratic rules can essentially be divided into two categories, divisive and consensual reforms, according to the initial level of popular support they enjoy. Secondly, the processes of reform can be divided into three categories: majoritarian processes, in which the government takes the lead, supermajoritarian processes, where the opposition and majority collaborate, and finally, externalised processes whereby the elaboration of the reform is left to actors outside of the political system. These are the two main “independent variables” I analyse. The typology presented in the fourth section eventually shows how the conjunction of these two factors lead to different outcomes.

2.1. Divisive vs. consensual reforms

I have chosen to discriminate between the types of reform according to the level of public support they enjoy (or that actors perceive them to enjoy). Several assumptions are made here: (1) that actors, before they choose to make a proposal, attempt to evaluate the level of support such a proposal might garner among voters; and (2) that this evaluation may affect their subsequent behaviour. Of course, this does not imply that actors are necessarily right in their perceptions: they may over-evaluate the level of popular support enjoyed by a proposal or misperceive the effects that their actions may have on this level of support, as the process of reform may alter it substantially. Yet, through case studies, I believe it is possible to get a decent idea of the actors’ perceptions, of the level of support enjoyed by a project of institutional reform, and to trace the information that was at their disposal to back up their suppositions (in particular through press analysis, and access to reports). The fact that I am talking about the level of support *prior* to the process of reform taking place is also crucial here. Indeed, political actors may sometimes actively reframe reforms in order to turn them into divisive issues, if they believe this to be in their interest. Using our chosen perspective, the reforms fall in two categories: divisive reforms and consensual reforms.

I define divisive reforms as *reforms for which there is no perception of a broad agreement within the society or the political system on the part of the actors as to the desirability of the reform or the alternative envisaged*. In other words, these are reforms where a substantial part of the citizenry or of the political actors support the status quo rather than the proposed alternative. Consensual reforms, on the other hand, are *reforms for which there is a general perception of a broad agreement in the society and in the political system on the part of the political actors on the desirability of the alternative envisaged by the reform*. This means that maintaining the status quo is much less of an option for reformers, insofar as the majority within the society and within the political system believe that the institution should be changed in a definite direction. The key postulate is that each type of reform leads to different ways of formulating the actors' preferences:

H1. During reform processes involving divisive reforms, the behaviour of the political actors and their positions on alternatives to reform derive primarily from outcome contingent attitudes, i.e. from the expected outcomes of the reform (self-interested strategy).

During processes of reform where there is no broad agreement in the society on the proposed alternative, politicians primarily base their support (or lack of support) for a proposal on whether they believe the reform to be in their own interests in terms of votes, policy, offices, or power in general; or else on values. In other words, in such processes, if a party or an individual decides to support a proposal despite a lack of popular support, it is because he believes there is something in it for himself, not necessarily just in terms of power, but also in terms of promoting his ideas on desirable institutions. Like Renwick (2010), I adopt a very broad definition of "power" here: not only projections in terms of seats or offices, but also matters relating to coalitions or influence on policy. Values are also expected to have an influence, most notably on the definition and selection of the alternatives considered by the political actors.

H2. During processes of reform involving consensual reforms, the behaviour of the political actors and their positions on an alternative of reform derive primarily from act-contingent attitudes, i.e. from the expected benefits or costs of supporting the act of reform (credit-claiming strategy).

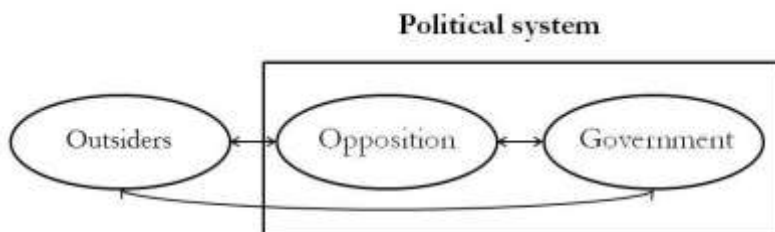
When a reform is broadly popular, the status quo is much less of a viable option than would be the case for divisive reforms. Consequently, the positions on the reform in the case of consensual reforms are, first and foremost, defined after examining the consequences of being seen to instigate the reform, as there are strong reasons to support it. This depends on the position of each actor in the process, and on its capacity to claim credit for a reform that is seen as desirable. In a seminal book, David Mayhew theorises on the three main activities of the members of Congress: advertising, position-taking, and credit-claiming (1974). Mayhew defines credit-claiming as "acting so as to generate a belief in a relevant political actor (or actors) that one is personally responsible for causing the government (...) to do something that the actor (or actors) considers desirable" (1974, 52–53). If this definition of credit-claiming is applied not to individuals in Congress, but to the collective political actors themselves (and particularly to parties), this means that these actors seek to make citizens believe that they are personally responsible for government's decision to enact a reform that is considered to be desirable by a majority of voters. Consensual reforms are characterised by a form of competition focused on invoking the paternity of the reform. I also argue that in cases where actors recognise their inability to claim credit for a reform, they have more of an incentive to change the framing of the reform, in order to weaken the actual initiator of the process. This strategy can also be understood as the "contrary" of blame avoidance as defined by Weaver (1986; 1988) who argues that politicians are usually primarily motivated by the desire to avoid blame for unpopular actions. On the other hand, when a policy or an action is popular,

credit-claiming becomes a rewarding strategy. A concrete example is given by Pierson, who shows that the periods of expansion of the benefits are leading to a process of “political credit-claiming” (1996, 143).

2.2. Majoritarian, supermajoritarian and externalised processes of reform

In established democracies, the decisions concerning the core democratic rules are usually elaborated and made in the parliament, and therefore by the actors who make up the political system of a given polity. However, there have been certain concrete cases in which the processes of reforms have been outsourced in order to involve actors outside of the political system, giving them power to define the alternatives that will later be discussed by the political actors. Therefore, three sets of actors can lead the processes of reform of core democratic rules: the government (and its parliamentary majority), the opposition, and actors outside the political system, which may include actors ranging from political experts to ordinary citizens (Figure 1).

Figure 1. *The three actors of institutional reforms*



Following this logic, when the decision to reform a given topic has been made, there are essentially three roads to reform: *majoritarian*, *supermajoritarian*, and *externalised processes*, depending on their degree of inclusion. I argue that for each reform route chosen there are different incentives for actors, as a given actor will be included in some cases, and excluded in others.

In *majoritarian processes* of institutional reforms, the actors that are involved in the definition of the alternatives and their concrete elaboration come only from parties that support the existing government. Therefore, the opposition is excluded from the processes of definition and elaboration, and intervenes only at a later stage, i.e., during the parliamentary discussion. In more abstract terms, such processes follow a logic that resembles the ideal-type of what Lijphart defines as the adversarial (1968), or majoritarian model of democracy (1984; 1999): the majority concentrates power in its own hands, the executive has a lead role on the process, the dominant logic opposes two blocks (the majority, and the opposition). Like Lijphart, one can associate such processes with a logic based primarily on competition, rather than cooperation.

In *supermajoritarian processes* of institutional reforms, the parties of both the parliamentary majority (and therefore the government) and the opposition are involved in the definition and the elaboration of the alternatives to reform. I refer here not to processes where only a tiny proportion of the opposition collaborates with the government, but to processes where, at the very least, the main party of the opposition takes a crucial part in the procedure. Bartolini considers that “the opposite of competition – that is of parallel and independent

effort to achieve the same prize – is negotiation or cooperation – that is concomitant and coordinated effort to obtain or to share the prize” (1999, 436). Supermajoritarian processes are defined by a greater degree of cooperation and negotiation than majoritarian processes of reform. To use Lijphart’s analogy again, such a process would resemble the ideal-type of a consociational, or consensus democracy, as it involves cooperation, bargaining, compromise and negotiation between the most relevant political forces within a given polity.

More attention should be devoted to understanding what I mean by *externalised processes* of institutional reforms. To be very clear, it is absolutely obvious that in most, if not all, of the reported cases of institutional reforms, the actors in the political system did not elaborate the proposals in a closed bubble of which outsiders were excluded from. The establishment of *ad hoc* expert committees to produce reports on potential reforms, or consultation with independent experts or exponents of civil society during the elaboration phase of the institutional reforms are common practices. These, to my mind, do not qualify as falling within the category of externalised processes of reform, as the politicians maintain a firm grip on the definition of the alternatives, and are in no way compelled to listen to the advice of the experts or civil society advocates they have consulted. Externalised processes of reform are processes during which the political actors *officially* delegate certain phases of the definition and elaboration of the reforms to actors outside of the political system: experts, or ordinary citizens. The second criterion is the requirement to provide answers to the proposals made by the body in charge of the definition, which can take several forms: the government obligation to officially reply to the proposals or the obligation to proceed via a parliamentary vote or through a referendum on the alternatives elaborated. The rationale, particularly in cases where ordinary citizens are entitled to define the alternatives to reform, is that of maximum inclusion: indeed, such processes may often only result from a deliberate choice on the part of key actors within the political system to give up their prerogatives to define institutional reforms.

To take concrete examples, and despite its significance in promoting the adoption of a mixed-member proportional system in New-Zealand, the institution of the Royal Commission on the Electoral System cannot be considered as an externalised process of reform: despite the Commission’s broad terms of reference, the government made no formal commitment to answer the its requirements prior to its institution (Vowles 1995). Dissimilarly, the citizens’ assemblies on electoral reform created in British Columbia in 2004 and in Ontario in 2006 are good examples of externalised processes of reform. These bodies, comprised of ordinary citizens, were charged with defining whether or not the First Past the Post should be retained, and elaborating a concrete alternative system, if deemed necessary. The politicians in power made the formal commitment to put the proposals of the citizens’ assemblies to a referendum, a promise that has been kept despite the fact that the two referendums in British Columbia and one in Ontario were defeated.

3. Three bundles of reform in Ireland, France and Italy

3.1. Case selection

These three cases have been selected on the basis of the dependent variable, i.e. bundles of reform presenting successful and unsuccessful reforms of the core democratic rules in France, Ireland and Italy. The general logic has consisted of selecting the three cases on the basis of the dependent variable (i.e. the occurrence, or non-occurrence of reform *within* a bundle). This strategy has been criticised in the past by several authors, who argue that

selecting on the basis of the dependent variable may lead to biased conclusions (Geddes 1990), or to the over-representation of positive cases in the sample (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994). Other authors, however, have adopted a much more nuanced stance, and have defended the theoretical and empirical soundness of case studies selected on the basis of the outcome of interest, on the condition that relevant *negative* cases are also selected (i.e. cases where the outcome of interest did not occur). I have adopted this perspective here, using Mahoney and Goertz’s “possibility principle”, which consists of selecting “only cases where the outcome of interest is *possible*” (2004, 653). Here, I have considered that all reforms included had some chance of adoption, insofar as they were on the agenda and were part of a wider bundle of reforms. These three bundles of reform have been selected because of their diverse characteristics: the level of support enjoyed by the reforms before the process took place, the ways in which the reforms were put on the agenda, the leading actors that elaborated the projects, and finally, the existence of both successful and failed reforms across bundles, and sometimes within each bundle. Moreover, in all three cases, referendums have been organised to validate some, or part of the reforms debated, influencing the course of the processes of reform (Table 1).

Table 1. *Comparison of the three bundles of reform investigated*

	Reform	Emergence	Nature of reform	Process of reform	Outcome	Referendum
Ireland 2011-16	Discussion of an agenda of reforms by the constitutional convention	Exogenous	Both consensual and divisive	Externalised	Negative (so far)	One due 22/5/2015
	Abolition of the Seanad	Endogenous/exogenous	Consensual	Majoritarian	Negative	Yes
	Reform of the organisation of elections, of the Dáil and of the local government, transparency	Exogenous	Both consensual and divisive	Majoritarian	Positive	No
France 1997-2002	Reduction of the presidential term from 7 to 5 years	Endogenous	Consensual	Supermajoritarian	Positive	Yes
	Reordering of the electoral calendar	Endogenous	Divisive	Majoritarian	Positive	No
Italy 2001-06	Constitutional reform of the second part of the constitution	Endogenous	Divisive	Majoritarian	Negative	Yes
	Electoral reform replacing MMM with PR with bonus	Endogenous	Divisive	Majoritarian	Positive	No

In Ireland, the sequence of reforms examined is still ongoing and started in 2011, taking the form of multiple successful and unsuccessful reforms launched after the arrival in power of a new Fine-Gael Labour coalition that had promised far-ranging political reform in their election manifestos. These range from the attempt to abolish the second chamber (te Seanad), to the modification of the manner in which everyday business in the Dáil was conducted, to the institution of a constitutional convention to examine various aspects of the Irish constitution, composed by 66 ordinary citizens and 33 politicians. All of these reforms resulted from the economic crisis that struck Ireland, leading to a narrative attributing the responsibility of the crisis to a failing political system. The reforms examined in France took place between 2000 and 2001, dealing respectively with the reduction of the length of the

presidential term from 7 to 5 years, and with the reordering of the electoral calendar to place the presidential elections before the legislative elections. They happened in the context of the third *cohabitation*, opposing the centre-right president Jacques Chirac and the left-wing government led by Lionel Jospin. The Italian reforms include a major constitutional reform attempting to modify multiple aspects of the balance of power, both between the executive and the legislative power, and between the central and local powers, and a major electoral reform replacing the Italian mixed-member electoral system with another mixed-system: PR with bonus. A large centre-right coalition led by Silvio Berlusconi was in power at the time.

In the Irish case, the large sequence of reforms initiated in 2011 was largely the consequence of public pressure that was exogenous to the political system itself, through the mobilisation of a multiplicity of actors from civil society and academia, and pushing forward an ambitious, but ill-defined agenda of reforms, ranging from making the Irish democracy more transparent, to involving citizens directly in the process of reform. As the table shows, part of what was discussed since 2011 was also put on the agenda as a result of endogenous mobilisation within the political system: I refer here to the proposal to abolish the Seanad, which enjoyed a high level of political support, and was supported by Enda Kenny, the current FG Taoiseach (Prime Minister). Secondly, the Irish case is the only one in which some of the reforms discussed have been externalised to actors outside of the political system, in this case, ordinary citizens within the realm of the Irish constitutional convention, containing both divisive and consensual reform proposals, such as the right to vote at presidential elections for Irish emigrants (consensual), the reform of the electoral system of the Dáil and the reduction of the voting age to 16 (divisive). Finally, a large number of other reforms have been conducted through a majoritarian process including for instance the local government reform, the reform of the organization of elections and transparency reforms. In this paper, I will mainly focus on the two first series of reform (Senate, and reforms assigned to the constitutional convention).

The French bundle of reforms examined comprises two reforms that were adopted between 2000 and early 2001. The reduction of the presidential term from seven to five years was the result of a mobilisation endogenous to the political system launched by prominent members of the UDF, and was conducted through a supermajoritarian process, meaning that both the parliamentary majority and the opposition were actively involved in the definition of the final proposal. This reform was adopted through a referendum, and can easily be classified as a consensual reform proposal, as all of the main parties supported it in the Parliament. The reordering of the electoral calendar to place the presidential elections before the legislative elections was, on the other hand, conducted exclusively by the parliamentary majority, without the opposition, but again with a positive outcome. This was a highly divisive reform.

Finally, the Italian case presents two major institutional reforms, one successful (the electoral reform), and one which failed to overcome the final obstacle, the referendum (the constitutional reform). In both cases, the reforms did not result from external public pressure, but rather from the efforts of actors within the political system. Secondly, in both cases, the processes of reform were conducted by the parliamentary majority and without the opposition or external actors. Neither the constitutional nor the electoral reforms enjoyed widespread support, as they were divisive proposals. Both of these reforms were very complex and focused on multiple aspects on the institutional system at once: the constitutional reform sought to modify around 50 articles of the Italian constitution, whereas the electoral reform sought to replace the existing system with an entirely different one.

3.2. Material of the case studies

Semi-directed interviews were conducted with academics, experts, journalists, civil society activists, policy advisors and politicians involved in the three processes of reform, during short and intensive stays: one month for the 23 interviews conducted in Ireland in May 2012 (principally in Dublin); around two months for the 16 interviews conducted in France between January and March 2013 in Paris; and a bit more than one month for the 14 interviews conducted between June and July 2013, mostly in Florence and Rome.² The interviews lasted, on average, around 50 minutes (from 30 minutes to an hour and a half). A different questionnaire comprising about twenty questions was used consistently for each country, and the use of interviews was facilitated by the fact they were always conducted in the native language of the interviewees. For each of the three interview guides, I adopted a sequential approach for the analysis of the reforms, dividing the processes into different phases (emergence of the issue of reform, construction of the agenda of reforms, negotiation, and adoption) in order to facilitate comparisons between the different reforms, and to reconstruct the sequence as precisely as possible. This also means that before going out into the field, a fair amount of time was spent studying the relevant secondary sources (reports and press articles), in order to get a fair idea of the sequencing of the reforms, and, of course, to identify the key people who should be interviewed.

In addition to these 53 interviews which have constituted the most important research material for the three case studies, the empirical corpuses have been complemented with a significant number of reports led by experts or by politicians in and outside of parliament, analysis of the press coverage of the reforms over a long period of time, occasionally archives, and consultation of the most relevant parliamentary debates, which are systematically available online for the period covered in all three countries. I therefore applied the triangulation strategy defended by Davies, advocated in particular when elite interviewing constitutes the major material (2001). The analysis of the press was systematised in order to lead to some additional quantitative analyses in the French case, while I re-used the study of the integrality of the debates on the electoral reform (both in committees and in plenary sessions) that I conducted in Italy for my Master's dissertation (Bedock 2009). In each case, I focused on several daily newspapers, trying as much as possible to use sources with different political sensibilities – ideally, one left-wing, one centrist, and one-right wing newspaper – and, when relevant (in Italy) published in different regions of the country. In Ireland, I consulted articles from the *Irish Times* (Dublin, centre-left), the *Irish Independent* (Dublin, centre-right) between 2009 and 2013. In France, the three main newspapers (*Libération*, left, *Le Monde*, centre, and *Le Figaro*, right) were systematically reviewed on the reduction of the presidential term and the reordering of the electoral calendar for a period covering July 1999 to June 2001. In Italy, the press archives cover a period ranging from January 2003 to July 2007, including in particular articles from *La Repubblica* (Rome, centre-left), *Il Corriere della Sera* (Milano, centre), *la Stampa* (Torino, centre-right) and *Il Giornale* (Milan, right).

I did not encounter major problems of access to the most important actors of the process, although it is indubitable that the fieldwork in Ireland was the easiest: the reforms studied were still largely “in progress” and high on the agenda, and there has been far greater involvement from civil society than in the Italian or French case. In all three cases I managed to meet some or most of the experts who were closely, intensively, and directly associated with the processes of reform studied. Regarding the politicians, I privileged meetings with those who were specialists of the institutional matters in their party, and who were actively

² See The list of interviews in appendix

involved in building the political alternatives that were examined by the parliament, and the policy advisers working in the cabinets and in charge of the concrete aspects of the elaboration of the reform. Overall, the interview process was very smooth, and I did not encounter many of the difficulties usually associated with elite interviews, which some have called a “minefield” (Lilleker 2003). I attribute this to several factors. First, institutional reforms are typically technical and not highly contentious issues. Institutional reforms tend to be dealt with by a limited number of specialists, who on many occasions have specialised knowledge in public law and/or political science. Secondly, both the experience of my Master’s dissertation and that of this thesis have opened my eyes to a paradox: it may actually be easier to interview elites in a foreign country. Indeed, both in Ireland and in Italy, my status as a French student in a European University was a help rather than a hindrance: my interviewees adopted a much more educational attitude than the French interviewees, and revealed the dynamics of the process more freely than they would have done with a “domestic” interviewer. These conclusions are relatively similar to those of Herod, who shows that being a foreign researcher can operate as an “ice-breaker” (1999, 325). National factors also certainly came into play, facilitating or complicating the interviews: Ireland’s small size and its tradition of informal and localist political elites making them more accessible in comparison, for example, to the centralised and vertical processes of policy-making in France.

4. A typology of reform outcomes

The typology of reform outcomes illustrates the variety of the causal pathways at work according to the combination of the type of process and the nature of the reform. It is possible to summarize the findings by presenting the six combinations of types of reforms and types of processes (Table 2), with empirical illustrations in the form of the successful and unsuccessful reforms that have occurred in Ireland, France and Italy. Most crucially, I will discuss the mechanisms behind these reforms.

Table 2. Outcomes for different combinations of types of reform and types of process

	Consensual reform	Divisive reform
Externalised process	++ Ex: none in the case studies	- Ex: most of the reforms discussed in constitutional convention in Ireland since 2013
Supermajoritarian process	++ Ex: <i>Quinquennat</i> in France in 2000	- Ex of attempt: Third <i>Bicamerale</i> in Italy, 1997-98
Majoritarian process	+/- Ex: Seanad reform in Ireland of 2013 “small” Irish reforms 2011-13 Federalism reform of 2001 in Italy	+/- Ex: constitutional reform of 2005 in Italy Electoral reform of 2005 in Italy Reordering of the electoral calendar in France

Note: ++ means that the reform is adopted by a majority going beyond the parties supporting the government, + that the reform is adopted by the majority/by a small margin, - that it is rejected or abandoned, -- that it is rejected and that there are defections inside the majority.

4.1. Consensual reform, externalised process

For this type of reform, the general logic is to involve all actors in the process of reform as much as possible, including those outside of the political system. As it concerns consensual reforms enjoying a great deal of popular support, and therefore bringing about positive outcomes for all of the actors within the political system, the dominant strategy consists of making sure that credit can be claimed for the reform, and therefore of ensuring involvement in the process. These reforms are not actually expected to be very frequent: there would be many reasons to expect that, whenever possible, the government will try to claim credit for a popular reform idea by controlling its elaboration (see 4.3-). The case of the Irish constitutional convention is particularly telling: out of the 38 recommendations it made to the government, only one has been put to a referendum, concerning the reduction of the required age to run for the President of Ireland from 35 to 21, and largely defeated. However, most of the reforms that had been put on the agenda of the Irish constitutional convention were divisive for the coalition in power (see 4.4-). This seems to confirm and expand the impasse already apparent to those who have studied citizens' assemblies: these devices are primarily created in order to deal with contentious issues such as electoral systems, or in the case of Ireland, the length of the presidential term, voting age, etc. They don't tend to deal with consensual issues. Yet, at this point, the Irish case doesn't seem to provide decisive proof that externalised processes of reform make the adoption of consensual reforms easier either, insofar as the reformers appear to have little motivation to delegate the elaboration of consensual reforms. Indeed, given the fact that consensual reforms are dominated by outcome-contingent logics and credit-claiming strategies, the externalisation of consensual reforms would amount to deliberately sharing credit with external actors for the initiation of a popular institutional reform: this is therefore relatively unlikely.

4.2. Consensual reform, supermajoritarian process

This second configuration of reform was encountered in the French case study, in relation to the shortening of the presidential term. This was the result of the country's particular institutional situation after the 1997 election, with the cohabitation of a Socialist PM and a Gaullist president. This situation of "divided majority" compelled the French political elites to collaborate, as both the president *and* the prime minister have some prerogatives regarding institutional reforms when they require constitutional change, as it was the case in this instance. Empirical evidence points towards a mix of collaboration between the majority and the opposition during the phase of elaboration of the content of the reform, and of the competition to be seen as the actor "responsible" for the reform during the adoption phase. The general hypothesis that the dominant logic is one of credit-claiming (H2) is confirmed. As a consequence, the final outcome is the adoption of the reform by a large majority regardless of the large number of parties in the Parliament, or of the referendum requirement.

The reform to introduce the *quinquennat* illustrated the double logic of competition and collaboration. The proposal was made by Giscard d'Estaing (UDF), supported by Jospin, in May 2000. Forced to act, the president of the Republic, Jacques Chirac, and his camp (the opposition) did indeed cooperate with the PM, Lionel Jospin and his allies (the majority) in order to pass a popular reform in the parliament, but this was followed by a phase of competition to claim credit for a reform which had been supported by the vast majority of the citizens surveyed for decades. The credit-claiming logic was abundantly clear, and actors were quite self-aware of this imperative. This was well evidenced, first, by the fact that Chirac

chose to support the reform after all, despite being against it personally, as it was popular both among the public and within the Parliament. Secondly, the credit-claiming dynamics are illustrated by the lack of involvement of the left-wing parliamentary majority in the constitutional referendum called by the president. For instance, Hollande, first secretary of the PS made the following declaration shortly before the referendum in September 2000,: « *Nous préférons le quinquennat au septennat. Le chef de l'Etat, lui, a préféré le référendum au Congrès. Donc, chacun sera jugé sur les décisions qu'il a prises.* »³ It shows clearly how the main political actors tried both to claim credit for the reform and to minimise (in the eyes of the public) their opponents' degree of involvement in the final, positive outcome. Conversely, Chirac's decision to hold a referendum that was not constitutionally required for the adoption of that particular constitutional reform was a consequence of his fear of being excluded from the benefits of a popular reform. Dominique Paillé, general secretary of the UDF at the time, argues:

« Si on était passé par un congrès, par exemple, la victoire aurait été plus patente pour la gauche. Chirac s'est dit également : si je fais un referendum là-dessus, je ne peux que le gagner. (...) Cette question, les français la veulent, la réponse positive, ils veulent pouvoir la donner, donc si je veux en tirer bénéfice, il vaut mieux que je sois à l'origine de cette opération ».⁴

The reform was passed by a very comfortable margin, both in the parliament and during the referendum held a couple of months later (73% of voters in favour, despite a low turnout of 30%), as a result of the agreement between the majority and the opposition on its merits.

In this second configuration of reform, the cooperation between the majority and the opposition in France was forced upon them by the constitutional character of the modification, and the situation of a divided majority. In all likelihood, as illustrated by the reordering of the electoral calendar (4.6), such cooperation would not have taken place if no institutional constraints had compelled the actors to act together. Going beyond the French case, it is arguable that situations in which the government and the opposition collaborate to pass a consensual institutional reform may actually be, if not exactly frequent, then at least relatively common. Indeed, in many countries, reforms of the core democratic rules, and constitutional reforms in particular, require a special procedure more stringent than that for the passing of ordinary legislation in the parliament. France, Ireland and Italy illustrate the consequences of the referendum requirement. However, supermajorities are also often necessary to pass a constitutional reform in parliament: in the US, for example, any constitutional amendment requires a supermajority of two-thirds of both houses of the Congress, *and* ratification by three-quarters of the states! In such cases, reformers who fight for the adoption of a given modification have greater incentives to work closely with the opposition, in order to have its support, notwithstanding the credit-sharing implicit in this set-up.

³ « Mauduit, Laurent, Noblecourt, Michel. « Il faut redonner aux Français les dividendes fiscaux de la croissance ». *Le Monde*, 1 September 2000.

⁴ Interview with Dominique Paillé, former general delegate of the UDF and UDF MP, 3 April 2013, at his office in Paris.

4.3. Consensual reform, majoritarian process

This case of reform is particularly interesting, and appears to be much more common than the two configurations mentioned above. The topics at stake are perceived as being popular with the public, and the government decides to retain the upper hand on the elaboration of the reforms.

Thus, contrary to the previous configurations, the government here chooses not to collaborate with the opposition during the phase of elaboration of the reform, and therefore to claim credit for the reform without sharing the spoils with its main contenders. The empirical evidence drawn from the three case studies shows that in such configuration, there is a particularly big chance in this situation that the opposition will switch positions before the process is over, being in favour at the beginning, and opposed at the end, particularly when a referendum is to be held during the final adoption phase, again as a result of act-contingent motivations (H2). This is a consequence of the exclusion of the opposition from the elaboration of the reform, and of the difficulty they would then have in claiming credit for the reform. Several examples of such reforms have been outlined in the case studies: the abolition of the Seanad in Ireland, and the vast majority of the reforms that have been debated in Ireland since 2011.

The failure to abolish the Seanad in Ireland resulted, to a large degree, from the successful re-framing of the reform debate, which turned a consensual issue into a divisive one through criticism of the motives behind the referendum. Secondly, the contenders of the government linked the issue with other contentious issues within the Irish institutional system, such as the matter of executive accountability. In the context of economic and political turmoil, the Irish upper house served as a cheap expiatory victim. The Seanad, its functioning, and the lack of added value of an upper house in its existing form had been criticised for decades, but most of the conclusions of the debates called for a profound reform of the Seanad. The decision to abolish the Seanad if Fine Gael went back to power was taken unilaterally by Enda Kenny and his advisors in October 2009, out of relatively cynical motives:

“Easy communication. (...) I think that was just a simple idea that could be easily communicated, whereas a lot of the other reforms, or issues about electoral reform, constituencies, lists, the public would find it difficult to understand without knowing how the system works an awful lot. It would have been harder to communicate on those issues than say, simple message of Seanad abolition, the reform agenda of the Seanad has not worked out, and therefore we put this out there”.⁵

It was soon directly or indirectly endorsed by all of the major political parties, as the idea was shared by a wide majority of the political and of the people at that time.⁶

Yet, during the official campaign before the referendum took place on the 4th of October 2013, the reform has been antagonised by the main opposition party, Fianna Fáil, by some ex-Fine Gael and Labour politicians, by the Greens, as well as by influent civil society advocates. The “yes” side, on the other hand, was supported by the government coalition (Fine Gael-Labour), but also by Sinn Féin. The coalition against the reform has attempted and succeeded in de-legitimising the reform, denouncing the cynical motives of Enda Kenny who had campaigned on the idea that the voters should get rid of senators costing €20 million a

⁵ Interview with a political adviser with the department of the Taoiseach, FG, 30 May 2011, at his office in Dublin.

⁶ In 2011, 58% of the people surveyed agreed with the proposition “the Seanad should be abolished”. The survey has been conducted by the Irish National Election Study of 2011.

year. The opponents have all argued that the Seanad should be reformed rather than abolished. They have also replaced the question of the Seanad in a wider frame, insisting on democratic accountability and linking the issue with Dáil reform, showing that the abolition of the Seanad was meaningless without the reinforcement of the lower Chamber. Eventually, the negative campaigning over the Seanad issues had led many of the undecided voters and experts to choose the “no” side on the referendum. In the end, against all odds, and despite the polls which consistently predicted the abolition of the Seanad by a comfortable margin,⁷ Kenny lost the referendum with 51.7% of the voters who casted a ballot against abolition. The turnout has been among the lowest ever registered for a referendum in Ireland, with only 39.2% of voters who went at the polls. The result of the vote can be thought to be a mix of sanction against the government and Kenny’s cynical motives behind Seanad abolition, of the lack of mobilisation, but also of the successful referendum campaign.

This example illustrates how the opposition, which had been excluded from the elaboration of the reform, felt the urge to hold a distinctly separate position from that of the majority, and partly or totally re-framed the issue at stake in order to weaken the position of the government. Moreover, the consequences of the exclusion of the opposition seem to be far less important for the outcome of consensual reforms when the final adoption takes place in the parliament, rather than in a referendum. Indeed, in such cases, the final outcome ultimately depends on the parliamentary majority: if this majority has enough seats in the parliament to pass the reform on its own, there is only so much that the opposition can or would want to do in order to reverse the final outcome on an issue that enjoys broad agreement. In Ireland, this was illustrated for instance, by the easy adoption, thanks to the compact and strong parliamentary majority of several reforms, the most emblematic being the adoption of gender quotas of 30% (40% in the future) of women candidates in the party lists (Buckley 2013). Indeed, insofar as the reforms of the core democratic rules tend not to be very salient, the credit-claiming logics are much less strong for issues that remain purely in the parliament. The conclusions may be different, however, in countries where reforms require supermajorities to pass: in such instances, it is probably a risky strategy for a government to attempt to claim credit for a consensual reform on its own by bypassing the opposition.

4.4. Divisive reform, externalised process

The empirical evidence shows that such a configuration is particularly likely when the government is trying to shelve a topic that it considers too important not to deal with, but where the government actually prefers the status quo. This appeared to be the case, in particular, when the agenda of institutional reforms was imposed upon the political elites by external pressures, as in Ireland in 2011. It is quite striking to see, for example, how all of the experiences of citizens’ assemblies on electoral reform eventually failed to lead to positive outcomes. The constitutional convention launched in Ireland on the 1st December of 2012 is a telling example to disentangle the dynamics behind this apparent paradox. The convention has made 38 recommendations, going much further than the initial narrow agenda it was handed over. However, none of these recommendations have led to concrete action so far (see 4.1).

⁷ On the last major poll of Ipsos MRBI published, when undecided voters were excluded, the proposal was backed by 62% and rejected by 38% of the individuals surveyed. When including the undecided, 44% backed the proposal, 27% said they would vote to retain the Seanad, 21% did not know what they would vote, and 8% said they would not vote.

Beesley Arthur. “Seanad referendum set to pass as voters back argument for cost savings”. *Irish Times*, 30 September 2013.

Even though the existing Irish legislature is far from being over, there is evidence that the setting-up of the constitutional convention was a way of getting rid of certain important and divisive topics regarding institutional reform, such as electoral system reform in particular, but also other aspects, such as voting age and the length of the presidential term, or gay marriage. On all of these issues, no agreement could be found between the two coalition partners when the Programme for Government was elaborated in 2011. On this matter, one of the experts interviewed makes the following remark: “So, for example, one of the things they [were going] to look at is gay marriage. (...) The government has managed to move an issue that would have been controversial for them to deal with to this body, so they killed two birds with one stone.”⁸ As a consequence, most of the issues that have been assigned to the constitutional convention are divisive, as evidenced by several polls. In 2011, for example, only 27% of the people surveyed agreed with the idea that “the electoral system should be replaced”.⁹ In 2012, when asked how they would vote on a referendum on the topic, 46% of the people surveyed only said they would vote yes “to reduce the term of the president from seven to five years”, and 56% said they would vote no “to reduce the voting age to 17”.¹⁰ In June 2013, 49% were in favour of the removal from the constitution of the references to the woman’s life as being in the home, and 62% were opposed to the reduction of the voting age (Coakley 2013, 16).¹¹

The heterogeneous agenda of the convention can be explained by a series of disagreements between Labour and Fine Gael, making it easier to “kick it to touch” to the convention. The government has allowed a certain number of issues to be on the agenda of the constitutional convention, either because they were divisive for the coalition (gay marriage) or because they did not really care about implementing them in the first place. The fate of the two referendums held on the 22nd of May 2015 as a consequence of the recommendations of the convention is particularly telling. Whereas gay marriage was divisive *at the beginning* of the legislature, the massive mobilisation of Irish civil society¹² and the decision of all major parties to back the “yes” has led to the adoption by referendum of this constitutional amendment with a 62% majority. On the other hand, 73% of the voters rejected the constitutional amendment on the reduction of the minimum age to run for Irish presidency from 35 to 21. The Labour party, junior partner in the coalition in power, decided not to take a position on this referendum. The choice of calling for a referendum on the issue of the is relatively trivial, given the mainly ceremonial role of the Irish President of the Republic and its complete “disconnection (...) from the governmental process” (Coakley and Gallagher 2010, 198). It also shows that the lack of social demand for a democratic reform is very unlikely to lead to popular adoption. The resounding failure of this referendum suggests that the most likely outcome is that there will be a lack of time, political resources, and momentum to implement any other suggestions of the convention. The current strategy therefore largely consists in moving the issues forward in time, later in the legislature. Therefore, the empirical evidence largely confirms that the most likely outcome of divisive democratic reforms, when an externalised process of reform is put in place, is either the non-adoption of a reform proposed by the body to which the government has delegated the elaboration, or the non-discussion of the reform in the parliament, which is even more likely. This empirical evidence is completely in line with the findings on citizens assemblies

⁸ Interview with Matt Wall, post doctoral researcher at ELECDEM, Phd in Trinity College Dublin and consultant for the Joint Committee on the Constitution, 2nd of May 2012, through Skype.

⁹ Source: Irish National Election Study of 2011.

¹⁰ Source: Survey of 2012 Ipsos –MRBI poll, “Ireland 2012: out changing attitudes and values”.

¹¹ Source: Ipsos-MRBI poll published in the Irish Times on the 15 June 2013.

¹² Whelan, Noel. “Exhausting, draining, and life changing: the Yes campaign”. Irish Times, 25 May 2015.

conducted in Ontario, British Columbia, and the Netherlands, where divisive electoral reforms have failed to be adopted or even put to a vote (Fournier et al. 2011).

4.5. Divisive reform, supermajoritarian process

Of all of the six configurations of reform, this one appears as the least likely to lead to a positive outcome. What is more likely, however, is that the process will begin with collaboration between the opposition and the majority on a divisive issue, that this collaboration will end in the middle of the process, and that this will lead either to abandon of the reforms at stake, or to switch to a majoritarian process of reform.

The example of the third *Bicamerale* in Italy presided over by D'Alema between 1999 and 2001 offers a good illustration of how the opposition and the majority failed to collaborate until the end of a project of constitutional reform that would have necessitated many substantial changes of the core democratic rules. Many of the provisions discussed over the course of the Bicameral Commission were abandoned altogether, whereas others led to a majoritarian process of adoption on the topic of federalism. The reason why these reforms are particularly unlikely to succeed is straightforward: it is just very difficult to bring together the interests of the majority and of the opposition on divisive issues. The interests of these actors are likely to be totally distinct, and if such a reform is not particularly popular with public opinion, self-interested logics tend to prevail. This to some extent explains why, despite numerous attempts to reach a shared solution (shared by the majority and the opposition) on constitutional reforms in Italy, the antagonistic interests represented in the Italian Parliament were always a stumbling block. Overcoming the barriers to reform represented by such a configuration would imply both the opposition and the majority sharing of a set of “selfish” interests, a situation that could arise if “within-block” divisions inside the majority and the opposition prevail over “between-block” divisions. Some examples exist, such as the 4% threshold for European elections adopted by the big parties (PD, PDL) in 2009 in Italy in order to weaken their numerous, small coalition partners. However, this situation is still quite exceptional, particularly in democracies based on a strong bipolar and alternating logic.

4.6. Divisive reform, majoritarian process

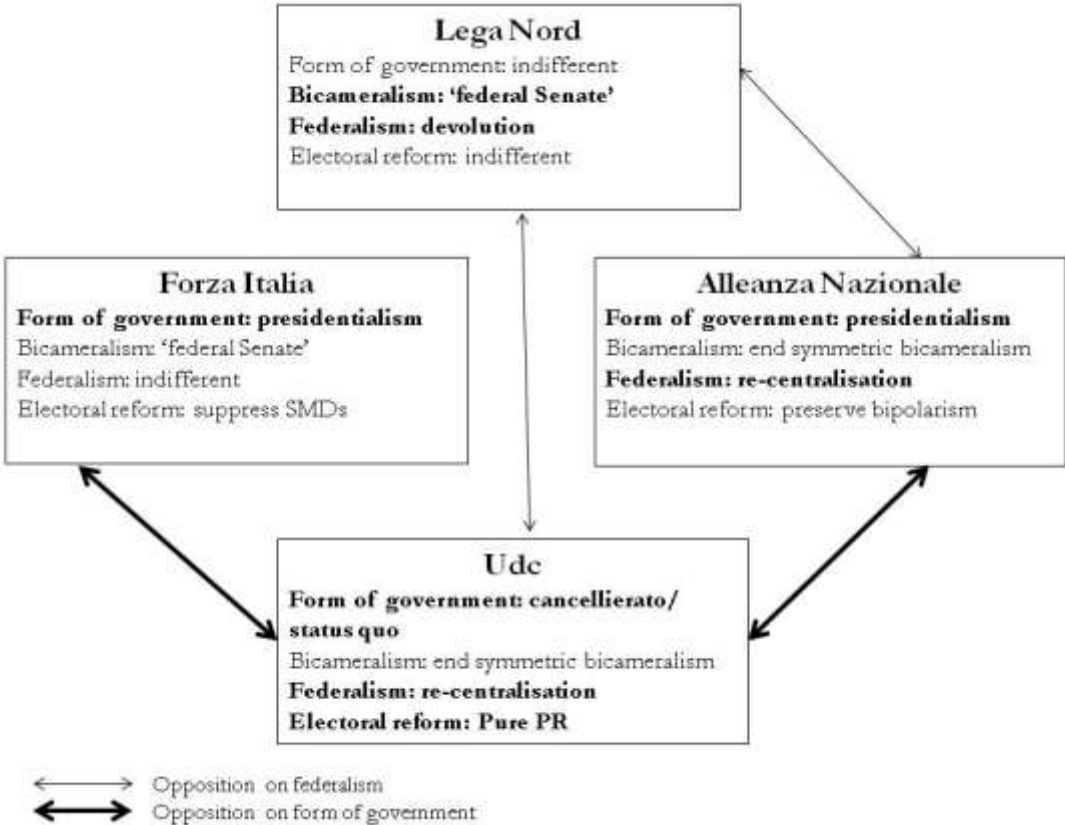
The last configuration is also probably the most frequent when it comes to the discussion of institutional reforms. It concerns divisive reforms, and processes during which the majority chooses to lead the process. When the majoritarian process is chosen to deal with such reforms, there are a number of possible final outcomes, which ultimately depend on the unity of the parliamentary majority.

The easiest situation is when the government can pass the reform on its own with the support of the parliamentary majority, because the majority is in agreement on the content of the reform. This implies, again, that no supermajority is required to pass the reform. In this case, the outcome is relatively straightforward: the opposition opposes, while the majority adopts the reform. The reordering of the electoral calendar in 2000 in France is a typical example. In 2002, for the first time and because of fortuitous circumstances, the legislative elections were to take place for the first time in the history of the Fifth Republic right before the presidential elections. All of the parties tailored their positions on this topic according to the belief that they had better chances to win the presidential (PS, half of the UDF), or the legislative elections (RPR, half of the UDF, small parties), confirming that self-interested

strategies are paramount when it comes to divisive reforms (H1) Despite the fact that the RPR, particularly in the Senate, tried to slow down the reform in every way possible, as long as the Socialist Party, with the help of the centrists, had enough votes to pass the law in the parliament, the outcome was certain.

A second possible situation concerns moments when the majority supporting the government is divided on the reforms at stake, with opposite positions. In such cases, as the Italian case shows, both for the constitutional reform (at the parliamentary stage) and for the electoral reform, the crucial factor that enabled the reform to pass was the ability of the majority to construct a bundle of reforms offering mutual concessions and “spoils” to each member of the coalition. Figure 2 shows that the positions of the four centre-right coalition partners (FI, AN, UDC, and LN) on the three main themes that structured the constitutional reform (form of government, bicameralism, federalism) and on the electoral reform were widely divergent. Andrea Pastore, one of the “wise men” in charge of the constitutional reform, describes the negotiation as such: “we prepared a draft that took into account the positive and negative will, that is to say the yeses and the noes of the components of the centre-right coalition”.¹³

Figure2. Initial positions in summer 2003 of the four parties of the majority on the four main institutional themes



Note: the text in bold indicates the leading priorities of each party. For example, the priorities of the Lega Nord related to bicameralism and federalism

¹³ « E preparammo una bozza che tenesse conto delle volontà in positivo e in negativo, cioè i si e no, dei componenti della coalizione di centrodestra. » Interview with Andrea Pastore, senator of Abruzzo between 1996 and 2013 and president of the Commission Affari Costituzionali I between 2001 and 2006, FI, 19 June 2013, at his office in Pescara.

Therefore, the negotiation in the parliament has mainly consisted in offering to each of the four coalition partners some concessions, expanding considerably the scope of the reform. For instance, whereas the project of constitutional reform presented by the government in first reading comprised the modification of 29 constitutional articles (an already considerable number resulting from difficult negotiations in summer 2003!) the final project comprised the modification of no less than 43 articles of the constitution! The complex character of the reforms, together with the uncertainty about their actual effects, and the actors' misperceptions – each of whom believed that they had been the canniest of all, successfully led to the adoption of complex and substantial reforms, at least in the parliament. It is also important to note that in such cases, a positive outcome may occur at the expense of the general readability and efficiency of the reform, and that reform can only occur when the different actors have different priorities. Otherwise, it is not possible to distribute the “spoils” in such a way as to satisfy everyone.

The third possible outcome is that the government has no majority with which to pass the reform, or that this majority changes during the final stages of the adoption. The 2006 referendum on the constitutional reform in Italy provides a good illustration. The reform was successfully adopted in the parliament thanks to the construction of a bundle of reforms during the parliamentary phase. Yet, the reform failed to pass the final hurdle, the referendum, as the 2006 election led to a switch of government majority (with the return of the centre-left), and to the defection of many centre-right voters. This also evidences the importance of timing for the final outcome of reforms. Rahat and Hazan suggest that, in the case of electoral reforms, delaying tactics serve as barriers to reform (2011, 487–488): procedural barriers, and the disagreement over content. Although the authors argue that these tactics cannot completely block a reform, the case studies suggest that they may be able to delay them for so long that the conditions favourable to a positive outcome may change.

Conclusion

To conclude, this analysis shows that the mechanisms leading to reform and non-reform are not the same according to the type of reform at stake and the process of reform used to conduct it, leading to the elaboration of a six-category typology to predict the outcome of reform. The use of an explanatory typology has the great advantage of attempting to “go beyond” the cases. For instance, it enables to show that certain configurations of reform are particularly unlikely, whereas others are more frequent. One can wonder how these empirical and theoretical findings could be expanded to other cases of reform. Beyond the conclusions that have been drawn on the combination between nature/process of reform, the examination of the causal mechanisms behind the different types of reform illustrate the contrasting role of veto players (defined as an agent which is able to block reform, whether a party or an institution, Tsebelis 2002), and of multifaceted reforms (reforms in which the issue at stake is framed as multidimensional, as opposed to one-dimensional reforms that are centred on a single issue).

It appears that for divisive reforms, the usual expectations about veto players and referendums apply: reform becomes more difficult as the number of veto player rises as their preferences differ more widely (1). For instance, in the Italian case, reform has been made particularly difficult – although not impossible – because of the wide divergences between the coalition partners. On the contrary, for consensual reforms elaborated through a supermajoritarian or an externalised process of reform, the number of veto players and the requirement to hold a

referendum have no impact on a reform's likelihood of adoption (2). This, for instance, is illustrated by the case of the *quinquennat*: as all major parties agreed in the Parliament and on their position on the referendum, the reform passed easily. For consensual reforms elaborated through a majoritarian process of reform, the positions of the actors throughout the process are likely to shift. The reforms can only be adopted when the parliamentary majority is cohesive and large enough to prevent the opposition from blocking the reform (3). Ireland enables to illustrate this third conclusion, through the failure to abolish the Seanad because of the switch of position of the Irish opposition parties on the matter. What this case also shows is that consensual reforms are more likely to be adopted if they are framed as one-dimensional issues (4). Indeed, in the case of the referendum on the Seanad, the opposition has linked this (consensual) issue with divisive issues regarding the Irish institutional system, showing, in particular, that this would make the government even more almighty. On the other hand, divisive reforms are more likely to be adopted when the majority is divided, if they are framed as multifaceted reforms (5). Indeed, in the Italian case, the fact that both the electoral and the constitutional reform were particularly complex and multifaceted facilitated their adoption in the Parliament by enabling each of the coalition partner to get "spoils", which would have been impossible if the reform concerned single issues.

These are only some of the examples of the theoretical generalisations that could be drawn from the explanatory typology presented above. One could also of course try to apply this typology to other cases of democratic reforms, or even to other types of reform where the consensual/divisive divide could also be applied. A promising research track could also consist in using a different method in order to investigate the applicability of these findings, such as configurational methods and qualitative comparative analysis (QCA, Rihoux and Ragin 2009). Here, however, I was mainly concerned with providing an example of the interest of explanatory typologies when using process tracing. Indeed, they contribute in helping to sort what Checkel considers to be the biggest flaw of process tracing, namely the risk of "losing the big picture" (2006, 368). By forcing the researcher to specify the mechanisms leading to particular outcomes, explanatory typologies are a "bridge" between the empirically fine-grained process tracing method, and the need for theoretical generalisations that are the biggest challenge of qualitative methods.

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Appendix: list of the interviews conducted

This presentation is ordered in the following way: name, function held during the sequence of reforms considered (for politicians and councillors), current function (for experts), other relevant functions (when applicable), party (when applicable), date of the interview, location of the interview, city in which the interview was held.

List of the interviews conducted in May 2012 on the agenda of political reforms in Ireland

- 1- Anon. political adviser in the department of the Taoiseach, FG, 30 May 2012, at his office in Dublin.
- 2- Byrne, Elaine, journalist and research fellow at University of New South Wales Sydney, co-author of politicalreform.ie, on the academic team of We the Citizens, 10 May 2012, at a café in Dublin.
- 3- Coakley, John, Professor of political science in the University College Dublin, 1 June 2012, at his office in Dublin.
- 4- Daly, Eoin, lecturer in the School of Law at University College Dublin, 9 May 2012, at a café in Dublin.
- 5- Dempsey, Noel, ex-Teachta Dála (TD) for Meath and Meath West between 1987 to 2011, ex-minister (1997-2011), FF, 30 May 2012, at a café in Dublin
- 6- Devins, Jimmy, ex Teachta Dála (TD) for Sligo-Leitrim between 2002 and 2011, ex local councillor in Sligo County Council between 1991 and 2002, ex-minister, FF, 18 May 2012, at his office in Sligo.
- 7- Farrell David, Professor of political science at University College Dublin, co-author of politicalreform.ie, on the academic team of We the Citizens, the constitutional convention and reformcard.com, 8 May 2012, at his office in Dublin.
- 8- Hardiman, Niamh, Professor of political science at University College Dublin, 22 May 2012, at a restaurant in Dublin.
- 9- Harris, Clodagh, Professor of political science at University College Cork, on the academic team of We the Citizens and reformcard.com, 21 May 2012, by Skype.
- 10- Hogan, Gerard, High Court Judge, ex-lawyer and professor of constitutional law at Trinity College Dublin, 29 May 2012 and 31 May 2012, at his office in Dublin.
- 11- Leahy, Pat, journalist for the Sunday Independent, 15 May 2012, at a café in Dublin.
- 12- Marsch, Michael, professor of political science at Trinity College Dublin, 15 May 2012, at his office in Dublin.
- 13- Mac Conghail Fiach, senator since 2011, director of the Abbey Theatre and Chairman of “We the Citizens”, Independent, 29 May 2012, at his office in Dublin.
- 14- Murphy, Eoghan, Teachta Dála (TD) for Dublin South-East since 2011, ex-Dublin city councillor from 2009 to 2011, FG, 24 May 2012, Leinster House, Dublin.
- 15- Murphy, Mary P., professor of sociology at NUI (National University of Ireland) Maynooth, member of TASC and Claiming our Future, 16 May 2012, at a café in Dublin
- 16- O’Connor Nat, director of the think tank TASC, 4 May 2012, at his office in Dublin.
- 17- O’Keeffe, Susan, senator since 2011, ex-journalist, Labour, 24 May 2012, Leinster House, Dublin.
- 18- O’Rourke, Mary, ex-Teachta Dála (TD) for Longford Westmeath and Westmeath (1981-1997, 2007-2011), ex-senator (1997-2007), ex-president of the Seanad (2002-2007), ex-minister (1989-1994, 1997-2002), FF, 23 May 2012, at her home in Athlone.

- 19- Power, Averil, senator since 2011, ex-political advisor of Mary Hanafin in the Department of Tourism, Family affairs and education, ex-spokesperson on political reform in the 2011 election, FF, 29 May 2012, Leinster House, Dublin.
- 20- Wall, Matt, postdoctoral researcher in the department of political science of the Free University, Amsterdam, 2 May 2012, by Skype.
- 21- Whelan, Noel, lawyer, columnist with the Irish Times and other media, ex-political adviser and FF politician, 14 May 2012, at a café in Dublin.
- 22- White, Alex, Teachta Dála (TD) for Dublin South since 2011, senator from 2007 to 2011, Labour, 24 May 2012, Leinster House, Dublin.

List of the interviews conducted between February 2013 and April 2013 on the quinquennat and the reordering of the electoral calendar

- 1- Avril Pierre, constitutional lawyer, ex-Professor of public law at *Institut d'Etudes Politiques* of Paris, 6 February 2013, in his home in Paris.
- 2- Bas, Philippe, former deputy general secretary of the Presidency of the Republic between 2000 and 2002, 19 February 2013, at his office in Paris.
- 3- Bourdon, Pierre, constitutional and administrative lawyer, ATER at University Paris I Panthéon Sorbonne, 25 February 2013, at a café in Paris.
- 4- Carcassonne, Guy †, constitutional lawyer, professor at university Paris-X Nanterre, 4 February 2013, at his office in Paris.
- 5- Colmou, Yves, former director of cabinet of the minister in charge of the relations with the Parliament, and adviser of the minister of Home Affairs between 1997 and 2002, 11 March 2013, at his office in Paris.
- 6- Dutheillet de Lamothe, Olivier, former deputy general secretary of the Presidency of the Republic between 1997 and 2000, 20 March 2013, at his office in Paris.
- 7- Gicquel, Jean, constitutional lawyer, emeritus professor of public law at University of Paris I Panthéon Sorbonne, 15 February 2013, at his office in Paris.
- 8- Giscard d'Estaing, Valéry, MP of the Puy de Dôme (1956-73, 1984-2002), former President of the Republic between 1974 and 1981, 11 March 2013, at his home.
- 9- Guelman, Pierre, former advisor of the Prime Minister for the relations with the Parliament, 1997-2002, 5 March 2013, at his office in Paris.
- 10- Ludet, Daniel, former advisor for Justice in the cabinet of Lionel Jospin, 1 March 2013, at his office in Paris.
- 11- Mazeaud, Pierre, member of the constitutional council between 1998 and 2004, former secretary of state in governments of Debré, Pompidou and Messmer, ex-MP of Haute-Savoie between 1988 and 1998, former president of the constitutional council (2004-2007), RPR, 5 March 2013, at his home in Paris.
- 12- Maus, Didier, constitutional lawyer and high civil servant, 20 February 2013, at his home.
- 13- Roman, Bernard, MP of the Nord (1997-now) and former president of the *Commission des lois* in the national Assembly (2000-2002), PS, 13 March 2013, at his office in Paris.
- 14- Mény, Yves, political scientist and specialist of the institutions, ex-director of the European University Institute, 31 January 2013, at a café in Paris.
- 15- Paillé, Dominique, former general delegate of the UDF, MP of the Deux-Sèvres between 1993 and 2007, 3 April 2013, at his office in Paris.

List of the interviews conducted between in June and July 2013 on the constitutional reform and on the electoral reform of 2005

- 1- Anon. Councillor of the Camera dei Deputati, 28 June 2013, at his office in Rome.
- 2- Calderisi, Giuseppe, Councillor for the president of the Senate between 2001 and 2006, 4 July 2013, at his office in Rome

- 3- Ceccanti, Stefano, Professor of Comparative Public Law at university La Sapienza of Rome, senator of Piemonte between 2008 and 2013, PD, 26 June 2013, at a café in Rome.
- 4- Chiti, Vannino, MP of Toscana between 2001 and 2008, minister of the relations with the Parliament between 2006 and 2008, senator of Toscana since 2008, DS, 3 July 2013, at his office in Rome.
- 5- D'Alimonte, Roberto. Professor of Italian political system at University LUISS Guido Carli of Rome, 13 June 2013, at his office in Florence.
- 6- D'Onofrio, Francesco, senator of Lazio (1983-1987, 1996-2008) and president of the parliamentary group from 2001 to 2006, ex-MP of Lazio between 1990 and 1996, UDC, 25 June 2013, at his home in Rome.
- 7- Fisichella, Domenico, senator of Lazio between 1994 and 2005, independent senator between 2005 and 2006, vice-president of the Senate from 2001 to 2006, AN, 3 July 2013, at his home in Rome.
- 8- Fusaro, Carlo, Professor in the department of legal sciences at Università degli Studi of Florence, 10 June 2013, at his office in Florence.
- 9- Maran, Alessandro, MP of Gorizia between 2001 and 2006 and member of the Commission Affari Costituzionali I between 2001 and 2006, MP of Friuli-Venezia Giulia between 2006 and 2013, senator of Friuli-Venezia Giulia since 2013, DS, 25 June 2013, in a restaurant, Rome.
- 10- Nania, Domenico, senator of Sicilia and president of the AN parliamentary group in the Senate from 2001 to 2006, MP of Sicilia between 1987 and 2001, AN, 26 June 2013, in the Senate, Rome.
- 11- Pastore, Andrea, senator of Abruzzo between 1996 and 2013 and president of the Commission Affari Costituzionali I between 2001 and 2006, FI, 19 June 2013, at his office in Pescara.
- 12- Tarli Barbieri, Giovanni, Professor of constitutional law at Università degli Studi of Florence, 17 June 2013, at his office in Florence.
- 13- Tonini, Giorgio, senator of Marche between 2001 and 2013, senator of Trento since 2013, DS, 4 July 2013, at his office in Rome.
- 14- Vassallo, Salvatore, Professor of Political Science and Comparative Politics at University of Bologna, former MP of Emilia-Romagna between 2008 and 2013, PD, 11 June 2013, at his office in Bologna.