Responsive government? Public opinion priorities and government legislation in Belgium, Italy, Spain and the UK (2003-2013): A QCA analysis

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Abstract: In any democratic system, government responsiveness is a crucial component of democratic quality: the more a government is able to pass legislation matching its previous electoral promises, the more it has to be considered as being ‘responsive’ and, in turn, the more elections are decisive and citizens ‘matter’. Yet, even more important than the correspondence between party promises and legislative acts is to ascertain whether adopted laws match public opinion priorities. In other words, the question to be answered is the following: are parties (and, in turn, governments) able to respond to citizens’ needs and requests? This paper compares public opinion policy priorities and legislative production with regard to 17 governments in four Western European parliamentary systems – Belgium, Italy, Spain, and the UK – from 2003 to 2013. Methodologically, in order to unravel causal relationships, I run a QCA analysis in which causal conditions are represented by politico-institutional, macroeconomic, and contextual factors, while the outcome consists of the degree of overlapping between public opinion priorities and legislation (measured through the well-known ‘Gallagher Index’). It thus becomes possible to ascertain whether (and under what conditions) public opinion shifts shape the policy agenda.

Keywords: Comparative Politics – Democracy – QCA – Representation
1. Introduction

In any democratic system, government responsiveness is a crucial component of democratic quality: the more a government is able to pass legislation matching its previous electoral promises, the more it has to be considered as being ‘responsive’ and, in turn, the more elections are decisive and citizens ‘matter’. Yet, even more important than the correspondence between party promises and legislative acts is to ascertain whether adopted laws match public opinion priorities. In other words, the question to be answered is the following: are parties (and, in turn, governments) able to respond to citizens’ needs and requests?

Without any doubt, most European citizens would answer to the abovementioned question negatively: policymakers do not respond to public opinion preferences and there is an increasing distance between the policies which are signalled as the most important by citizens, on the one hand, and actual government policy decisions, on the other (Chaqués Bonafont & Palau 2011). However, this perception – though widespread across Europe – has been proven wrong: indeed, many authors have demonstrated that policymakers are vastly concerned about what citizens believe (Manin et al. 1999; Manza & Lomax 2002; Chaqués Bonafont & Palau 2011). Furthermore, both the legislative behaviour of parties and the issues that they emphasise in their election manifestos are influenced by voter policy priorities (Adams et al. 2004; Schumacher et al. 2013; Ezrow & Hellwig 2014; Klüver & Spoon 2016). After all, this sounds logically persuasive: policymakers have many incentives to follow public opinion priorities. In particular, their chances of (re)election mostly depend on how much citizens feel that they are fully represented by their elected representatives.

In line with this, this paper compares public opinion policy priorities and legislative production with regard to 17 governments in four Western European parliamentary systems – Belgium, Italy, Spain, and the UK – from 2003 to 2013. The main aim of this paper is therefore to ascertain whether Belgian, Italian, Spanish and British policymakers have been paying attention to the issues signalled as priorities by their respective citizens over the course of the last ten years – a period of huge political and economic turmoil – as well as to what extent variations in the degree of correspondence between public agenda and policy agenda depend on politico-institutional, macroeconomic, and contextual factors.

After a long period characterised by a relative lack of interest in the topic, in recent years scholars have started to pay increasing attention to the correspondence between citizens’ policy priorities and government legislation (Mortensen et al. 2011; Lindeboom 2012; Klüver & Spoon 2014). This renewed attention originates from the well-known work of Frank Baumgartner and
Bryan Jones on the comparative analysis of policy agendas (Baumgartner & Jones 2006; 2008): more and more scholars now analyse how much policy agendas differ across countries, how much they match public opinion priorities and preferences, and which factors have an impact on these dynamics. Thus, with regard to this, this paper is anything but exceptional.

Yet the originality of this work is twofold: firstly, to focus on (among the others) the Italian case is in itself a contribution, as most empirical analyses of the link between political activities and public preferences deal with the US and, more recently, the UK (Jennings & John 2009; John et al. 2013), Spain (Chaqués Bonafont & Palau 2011) or the Netherlands (Lindeboom 2012). In other words, to the best of my knowledge it is the first time that the responsiveness of Italian governments has been empirically analysed and measured. Secondly, the methodological approach which is used to ascertain whether governments respond to citizens is completely unknown in the literature on government responsiveness: indeed – in order to unravel causal relationships – I run a QCA analysis in which causal conditions are represented by politico-institutional, macroeconomic, and contextual factors, while the outcome consists of the degree of overlapping between public opinion priorities and legislation (measured through the well-known ‘Gallagher Index’).

The paper is arranged as follows: in the second section I briefly review the most relevant literature on government responsiveness, with a particular focus on those studies dealing with the correspondence between the policy priorities of citizens and policymakers; then in section 3, I develop several hypotheses as to how far variations in the degree of correspondence between those same priorities are related to politico-institutional, macroeconomic, and contextual factors. The fourth section explains the methodology and data. Based on this, the fifth section offers a descriptive analysis of both dynamics – public opinion priorities and government legislation – in each country over time, and shows the correspondence between the two. Then, section 6 consists of the QCA analysis, while in the last part of the paper (section 7) I propose some concluding remarks and directions for future research.

2. How and why policymakers (do not) respond to public opinion priorities

How able are political parties to interpret (as well as to intermediate) the needs and requests of citizens? How strong is the linkage between their electoral promises, on one hand, and legislation once in office, on the other? There is no doubt that these represent ‘traditional’ research questions in political science; yet, scholars have started analysing the level of correspondence between public priorities and government legislation only very recently (Binzer-Hobolt & Klemmensen 2005; Blais & Bodet 2006; Chaqués Bonafont & Palau 2011; Lindeboom 2012; Klüver & Spoon 2014).
Yet, the necessity of a responsive government, which is ‘in tune’ with the citizens it ought to represent, is absolutely central in the analysis of any democratic system: one of the main functions performed by political parties (and, in turn, governments) in parliamentary democracies, in fact, is represented by their ability to link citizens and policymakers (Dalton et al. 2011). Being intermediate bodies between the electorate and the State, the varying ability of parties to interpret citizens’ priorities and then transform those same priorities into public policies tells us very much about the quality of the democratic political system in which they operate (Mansergh & Thomson 2007, 311).

Initially, the correspondence between the priorities of citizens and the legislative action of representatives was theoretically assumed rather than empirically demonstrated; after all, politicians who do not represent anyone should have no chance of (re)election (Wlezien 2004). Even though this assumption appears completely reasonable, scholars proceeded to its empirical test rather quickly. From this point of view, it is possible to distinguish different approaches on the basis of the level of analysis (micro- or macro-level), and of the temporal focus (static vs. dynamic) (Binzer-Hobolt & Klemmensen 2005, 380). Micro-level studies generally focus on the correspondence between the votes of individual legislators, on the one hand, and the preferences of their respective constituencies, on the other (Miller & Stokes 1963), whereas macro-level analyses tend to compare public opinion preferences with government legislation (Monroe 1995). With regard to the temporal focus, since scholars realised that causal mechanisms are discernible only by following a dynamic perspective (Binzer-Hobolt & Klemmensen 2005), the original static approach was abandoned very soon (Brooks 1985; Page & Shapiro 1992).

What these first studies demonstrated is that the capacity of policymakers to respond to the preferences (and priorities) of citizens varies across issues, countries and policy venues. These variations depend on a good number of factors, the first being the institutional arrangements governing the political system: indeed, many scholars argued that proportional electoral systems tend to generate more responsive legislatures and governments\(^2\) (Huber & Powell 1994; McDonald & Budge 2005; Binzer-Hobolt & Klemmensen 2005).

In a recent article dealing with the level of responsiveness characterising Spanish governments from 1990 to 2007, Chaqués Bonafont and Palau (2011) focus on four further factors favouring the correspondence between public opinion priorities and government legislation: \(i\) the level of the so-called ‘institutional friction’; \(ii\) the degree of (de)centralisation characterising the issue (and the institutional arrangement of the country under scrutiny, more broadly); \(iii\) whether the government rests on a parliamentary majority; \(iv\) the fact that the parliamentary session is close to elections.

\(^2\) However, more recent studies challenge this picture: both Pennings (2005) and Blais and Bodet (2006), in fact, demonstrated that proportional representation does not foster closer congruence between citizens and policymakers.
Originally, the concept of ‘institutional friction’ was proposed by Jones and Baumgartner (2005): in their view, this is a two-dimensional concept, based on both the transaction costs associated with a particular policy venue and the number of individuals and collective actors whose agreement is required for decision-making. According to Jones and Baumgartner (2005), as well as to Chaqués Bonafont and Palau (2011) who built on their work, the higher the number of actors who can act as veto-players, as well as the higher transaction costs, the lower government responsiveness, and vice versa. In other words, between institutional friction and political responsiveness there is an inverse relationship.

The same inverse relationship is generally hypothesised between political responsiveness and the level of decentralisation characterising the policy issue, too: as Scharpf (1999) originally argued, ‘the increase in the number of governments involved in the policymaking process makes it less clear which government is doing what in relation to specific policy areas’ (cited in Chaqués Bonafont and Palau 2011, 709-710); in these cases, the possibility of recurring to ‘blame avoidance’ strategies, in turn, reduces the incentives for policymakers to pay attention to public opinion. Therefore, especially in federal systems, the level of correspondence between citizens’ priorities and government legislation will be particularly low in those policy areas where there is overlapping or shared jurisdiction.

Another condition that is generally considered as being relevant for political responsiveness is whether the government is not sustained by a parliamentary majority (Binzer-Hobolt and Klemmensen 2008, 315). In the case of minority government, in fact, that same government is expected to compromise more with a higher number of parties holding seats in parliament; this, in turn, implies the necessity of taking into account a wider range of preferences and priorities and, as a consequence, to approximate the views of citizens more closely. In other terms, due to their parliamentary self-sufficiency, there is less pressure on majority governments to widen their policy agenda in order to take into consideration the needs and requests of other parties. When this self-sufficiency does not exist, on the contrary, a growing number of parties is involved in the agenda setting; this, in turn, has remarkable consequences for the number of priorities which enter that same policy agenda and, therefore, for the level of correspondence between legislative action and public opinion priorities.

Traditionally, scholars are also convinced that elections matter a great deal with regard to political responsiveness (Jones 1994; Maravall 1999; Klingemann et al. 2006): before elections, parties are indeed expected to (try to) maximise their chances of re-election by taking into account

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3 This particular argument has been empirically tested (and verified) by Soroka and Wlezien (2004; 2010) with regard to the US, the UK, and Canada, as well as by Jennings and John (2009) with respect to the UK. Some evidence has also been provided by Chaqués Bonafont and Palau (2011) in their analysis of the Spanish case.
as many citizens’ priorities and preferences as possible. By the same token, governments which
have just been elected are expected to pay special attention to their electoral pledges precisely
during the parliamentary session that follows elections. Personally, I am much more persuaded that
parties are particularly responsive before elections, than after elections; however, scholars have
demonstrated that both sides of the abovementioned hypothesis hold true when empirically tested
(Chaqué Bonafont & Palau 2011).

Overall, what this bulk of literature has convincingly demonstrated is that politico-institutional
factors have a huge impact on political responsiveness: proportional electoral systems, institutional
friction, decentralisation, the timing of elections – all these conditions lead to more or less
correspondence between the priorities of citizens, on the one hand, and government legislation, on
the other. Yet, I am not convinced that only politico-institutional factors matter. Macro-economic
contingency and other contextual factors – for example – may also play a role.

3. Analytical framework: do macroeconomic conditions and trust in government matter?

As has just been reiterated, so far scholars have convincingly demonstrated that political
responsiveness varies across countries and policy venues. Yet, not all governments within the same
country are equally responsive, and the argument that this variation only depends on whether those
same governments are minority governments (Chaqué Bonafont & Palau 2011, 711) is not fully
persuasive. There should be other factors influencing the capability of cabinets to match public
opinion priorities. My argument is that both macroeconomic conditions and citizens’ trust in
government – alongside some (but not all) factors that have been identified in the literature so far –
may have an impact.

To date, macroeconomic conditions have been taken into account in order to explain the
electoral success, as well as the failure, of political parties (Lewis-Beck 1990): it has been variously
demonstrated that voters tend to punish parties in office when the country undergoes economic
recession and/or when the unemployment rate grows, and vice versa (Lewis-Beck 2000). Yet
macroeconomic conditions may also push governments to be more or less responsive: exactly due
to the fact that a negative macroeconomic contingency is likely to lead to electoral losses for parties
in office, those same parties may try to counterbalance this negative dynamic through being more
‘in tune’ with the priorities of citizens. In other terms, it appears reasonable that – ‘when (economic)
things go wrong’ – parties (and, in turn, governments) might attempt to increase their (scarce)
chances of re-election thanks to a higher level of correspondence between public opinion priorities
and government legislation. However, the dynamic could also be the opposite: a negative
macroeconomic contingency may exacerbate political contrasts within the cabinet, leading to legislative stalemate. Therefore, two competing hypotheses may be suggested:

\[ H1a: \text{A worsening of the economic contingency leads to higher government responsiveness.} \]
\[ H1b: \text{A worsening of the economic contingency leads to lower government responsiveness.} \]

A similar line of reasoning may be followed with regard to the level of citizens’ trust the government enjoys: on the one hand, when citizens do not trust in government, the latter may try to recover consensus by increasing its level of political responsiveness; on the other, a positive climate may encourage government legislation and, in turn, government responsiveness. Again, two competing hypotheses follow:

\[ H2a: \text{When citizens do not trust in government, this same government is more responsive.} \]
\[ H2b: \text{When citizens trust in government, this same government is more responsive.} \]

Yet, as I said before, not only macroeconomic contingencies and citizens’ trust matter for government responsiveness. In the literature – as reviewed in section 2 – four politico-institutional factors in particular have been stressed: \(i\) the majoritarian/consensual nature of the institutional arrangement governing the country\(^4\); \(ii\) the level of institutional decentralisation; \(iii\) whether the government is a minority government; \(iv\) the timing of elections. However, in my opinion three out of those same four factors are not fully persuasive.

Firstly, even though many scholars have argued that proportional electoral systems (and, more broadly, consensual institutional arrangements) tend to generate more responsive legislatures and governments (Huber & Powell 1994; McDonald & Budge 2005; Binzer-Hobolt & Klemmensen 2005), more recent studies challenge this picture: Blais and Bodet (2006), for example, demonstrated that proportional representation does not foster closer congruence between citizens and policymakers. In their words, ‘…congruence between the median voter’s position and that of the government is obtained through different routes in strong [majoritarian] and permissive [proportional/consensual] systems. In the former, extremist parties are prevented from winning seats by the strategic coordination of centrist voters around one centrist candidate. In the latter, extremist parties can more easily win votes, but they are barred from entering the government by the most centrist parties. The conclusion is that in both systems there is no guarantee of congruence.’ (Blais

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\(^4\) At the country level, the abovementioned concept of ‘institutional friction’ – being substantially linked to the number of veto players which are potentially active in policymaking – can be reasonably associated to the majoritarian or consensual nature of the institutional arrangement governing the country.
& Bodet 2006, 1245-1246). If their theoretical argument sounds convincing, and I do believe it does, consensual and majoritarian countries should be characterised by similar levels of political responsiveness.

I am equally sceptical about the so-called ‘minority government argument’. According to Chaqué Bonafont and Palau (2011, 711), ‘…when the executive does not have a majority, …, it is expected that a wider range of preferences of different political parties will be accommodated, and the outcome is likely to be closer to the preferences of the majority of the electorate.’ However, whether the government is a minority government does not really matter; what matters is the number of parties whose preferences and priorities are taken into account for setting the policy agenda. Consider the case that a minority single-party government faces two parties which are in opposition: in this situation, up to three parties may concur to the setting of the policy agenda. And now consider the case that a majority government is sustained in parliament by four parties: in this case, all those same four parties set the policy agenda. If we expect – as Chaqué Bonafont and Palau suggest – that the wider the range of preferences accommodated, the higher the responsiveness of the government, in the second case we should have a more responsive executive than in the first case.

Finally, the argument that ‘elections matter’ is also controversial: generally, governments resign in advance before elections, remaining in office only for routine administration tasks during the electoral campaign; by the same token, most governments do not take office immediately after elections, with negotiations among coalitional parties taking time. Therefore, in election years governments have less time at their disposal to legislate and, in turn, fewer opportunities to be responsive. As a consequence, the (presumed) incentive to increase the level of correspondence between public opinion priorities and government legislation immediately before and/or immediately after elections, could disappear.

Thus, the only politico-institutional argument I take into account in my analytical framework deals with the level of institutional centralisation/decentralisation characterising the country. In line with this, my final hypothesis is as follows:

\[ H3: \text{Correspondence between public and government priorities is higher for centralised countries.} \]

Before proceeding with the illustration of the research design (section 4) and later, with the actual empirical analysis (sections 5 and 6), it has to be stressed that all three of my theoretical hypotheses may be read in terms of necessity and/or sufficiency\(^{5}\); in other words, they are perfectly

\[^{5}\text{Indeed, H1 may be read as: ‘a negative macroeconomic contingency is sufficient for government (ir)responsiveness’; H2 may be read as: ‘citizens’ (dis)trust in government is sufficient for government responsiveness’;}\]
suitable for set-theoretic methods, as QCA (in all its different variations) undoubtedly is (Ragin 1987; 2000; Schneider & Wagemann 2012).

4. Research design

This study has the ambition to explain how much, as well as why, Belgian, Italian, Spanish and British governments have (or have not) been responsive to public opinion policy priorities between 2003 and 2013. Therefore, the first thing to do is to justify both the country selection and the time span under scrutiny. Where the country selection is concerned, it aims to compare centralised (the UK and, to a lesser extent, Italy) and decentralised (Belgium and Spain) systems, as well as Northern European (Belgium and the UK) and Southern European (Italy and Spain) systems. In other words, this country selection follows the necessity of testing both politico-institutional factors – centralised vs. decentralised parliamentary democracies – and macro-economic tendencies: indeed, both Belgium and the UK have been (relatively) less hit by the economic and financial crisis, which on the contrary has vastly damaged Italian and Spanish economies.

The time span, too, is justifiable on theoretical grounds: indeed, I take into account a period of huge transformations in Europe, comparing two very different sub-periods of five years: 2003-2007 (before the economic and financial crisis) and 2008-2013 (throughout the economic and financial crisis). As a consequence, the choice of the time span is also influenced by the aim of verifying whether that same crisis has had an impact on the ability of governments to respond to the needs and requests of citizens.

The second fundamental aspect that must be dealt with concerns the sources from which data have been collected. In particular, the level of government responsiveness is analysed recurring to two separate time series of issue priorities: the former is based on the biannual Eurobarometer survey, including the well-known ‘most important issue facing the country’ (MII) question, which is generally used by scholars focusing on public opinion priorities (Jennings & Wlezien 2011); the latter consists of the legislative acts initially sponsored by the government and then approved by the parliament. Whereas the so-called ‘MII question’ is a common standard when analysing citizens’ priorities over time (Jennings & John 2009), many scholars have used other data sources in order to detect government priorities. For example, studies of the British case (John et al. 2013), as well as the Dutch case (Lindeboom 2012), in particular, have been conducted by focusing on the so-called ‘Speeches from the Throne’: these speeches are officially given by the Queen at the opening of each parliamentary year, in order to set the agenda of the subsequent twelve months. Yet the political

H3 may be read as: ‘institutional centralisation is sufficient for government responsiveness’.
content of those same speeches is the responsibility of the prime minister, and thus they set out the political agenda of the government. As just mentioned, although the Queens’ speeches have been widely used in the literature, in this study I prefer to focus on legislative acts: I do believe that what government actually does is much more relevant than what government promises it will do within twelve months.

After the presentation of the data sources, the next step is to propose a common coding scheme for both the priorities of citizens and legislative acts. Especially with regard to legislative activity, scholars inevitably tend to resort to the scheme proposed by the researchers of the so-called ‘Comparative Agendas Project’ (CAP) (Baumgartner et al. 2006; John 2006): originally, this scheme was developed in the US context to test the punctuated equilibrium theory (Baumgartner & Jones 1993), according to which policymaking is generally characterised by long phases of stability or incremental change, interspersed with brief moments of radical transformations. However, the proposed codebook is neither theoretically constrained, nor necessarily linked to the characteristics of the American political system (Baumgartner et al. 2006, 963-969). Therefore, scholars understood its potential for comparative analysis very quickly (Chaqués Bonafont et al. 2012).

In more detail, the CAP coding scheme consists of 19 major topic categories and 247 subcategories. However, both CAP categories and Eurobarometer categories have been modified slightly to ensure comparability with one another: otherwise, the degree of correspondence between public opinion priorities and government legislation would not be empirically measurable. On this point, please see Table 1:

[TABLE 1 HERE]

In order to measure the level of correspondence between citizens’ priorities on the one hand, and government legislation, on the other, I decided to recur to the so-called ‘Gallagher Index’ – which is generally used to measure the proportionality of an electoral outcome⁶ – but which is also useful for any pair of percentage distributions⁷. Of course, we cannot expect the policy agenda to be in accord with public opinion priorities immediately: it is simply not possible to legislate ‘in real

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⁶ That is, the difference between the percentage of votes received, and the percentage of seats a party gets in the resulting legislature. The index involves taking the square root of half the sum of the squares of the difference between percentage of vote and percentage of seats for each of the political parties. It ranges from 0 to 100: the lower the index value, the higher the proportionality, and vice versa.

⁷ To the best of my knowledge, no scholars studying political responsiveness have resorted to this statistical tool so far. However, I believe that it could be very useful to incorporate this traditional ‘electoral index’ in this bulk of literature; it thus provides the data that have been later ‘calibrated’ in order to obtain the outcome of my QCA analysis.
time’, and at least some time must be allowed to pass. With regard to this, both Binzer-Hobolt and Klemmensen (2005), as well as Lindeboom (2012), found empirical support for the generally accepted rule-of-thumb of adopting a 1-year lag before public priorities are translated into government legislation. However, generally the legislative process does not last longer than a few months in Western Europe; moreover, especially in recent years, more and more external shocks constrain governments to legislate as quickly as possible in order to manage problems growing rapidly within the public opinion: think about macroeconomic shocks, terrorist attacks, the refugee crisis, etc. As a consequence, I decided to adopt a 6-month lag instead of the common standard of 1-year: in other words, citizens’ priorities in the period of January-June 2005, for example, are matched with government legislation in the period July-December 2005, whereas public priorities characterising the latter are matched with government legislation between January and June 2006.

As I argued in the introduction, to the best of my knowledge, this paper represents the first time that QCA has been used to unravel causal conditions leading to government responsiveness. QCA represents a relatively new research approach (Ragin 1987; 2000; 2008; Rihoux & Ragin 2009; Schneider & Wagemann 2012). Nevertheless, in recent years it has drawn increasing attention within the social sciences (Wagemann & Schneider 2010), and some scholars consider QCA as already being a ‘mainstream method’ in political and sociological research (Rihoux et al. 2013). As QCA scholars repeatedly argue, QCA is not just another (computer-based) data analysis technique; by contrast, it also needs to be understood – and applied – as a research approach in a broad sense. More precisely, applying QCA means that your theoretical expectations could (and, in turn, should) be understood as representing necessity and sufficiency relations among sets (Ragin 1987). Moreover, there should be good reasons to believe that the outcome under scrutiny results from the conjunction of several conditions, as well as the possibility it could derive from more than one causal explanation (Schneider & Wagemann 2010; 2012). Since I do believe that this is the case, in my opinion QCA is fully suitable to analyse government responsiveness.

That said, what is still lacking is to explain how data sources for causal conditions – the politico-institutional setting, the macroeconomic contingency and the citizens’ level of trust in government – have been identified. In other terms, before proceeding to the actual QCA analysis in section 6, I have to make clear that: i) the centralised/decentralised institutional setting characterising the country originates from the well-known Lijphart Index on unitary vs. federal democracies; ii) the macroeconomic contingency is measured through an index taking into account both economic growth (in terms of GDP) and unemployment rate fluctuations at the same time; iii)

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8 The same research design has been followed by Soroka & Wlezien (2010), and by Klüver & Spoon (2016).
the variation of the level of citizens’ trust in government has been collected thanks to the abovementioned biannual Eurobarometer surveys.

5. Descriptive statistics: the evolution of public and policy agendas in the 2000s

As Baumgartner and Jones (1993) originally noted, policy agendas are likely to vary both across countries and over time. A particular policy issue may be considered as being highly relevant in a particular country at a particular time, while receiving little or no attention in another country or at a different moment. Very often, policy agendas change incrementally over years (or even decades); yet there are periods of dramatic transformation that occur suddenly. Generally, huge changes are triggered by external shocks, which therefore tend to operate as detonators.

The opinions of citizens are likely to vary in a similar way: indeed, public perceptions of relevant and irrelevant issues seem to evolve based on external shocks, too. However, *ceteris paribus*, public opinion fluctuations are generally considered to be both more frequent and more randomly distributed. In fact, policymakers’ attention appears to be much more characterised by ‘path dependency’ than the preferences and priorities of citizens: inevitably governmental agendas are expected to be more stable than the public’s9 (Jones & Baumgartner 2005; Breeman *et al.* 2009). In order to take into account all these variations, please see Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3 and Figure 4, which show how the public agendas evolved in Belgium, Italy, Spain, and the UK, respectively:

[FIGURE 1 HERE]

[FIGURE 2 HERE]

[FIGURE 3 HERE]

[FIGURE 4 HERE]

The observation of the figures above – tracking the evolution of the most relevant issues of the public agenda in all countries – allows for some interesting considerations. First of all, differences between the pre-crisis period (2003-2007) and the crisis period (2008-2013) are impressive in all countries, concerning in particular the relevance of two issues: the state of the economy and unemployment. Both in Italy and Spain, as well as in Belgium and the UK, the first

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9 The main reason for this is that governments cannot simply ignore issues that were brought up by predecessors (Lindeboom 2012, 451).
semester 2008 represents the starting point of an ever-increasing centrality for economic issues: with regard to this, therefore, it is not possible to differentiate between Northern European countries, on the one hand, and Southern European countries, on the other. The trajectory of the unemployment issue is slightly different: it occupies an increasingly prominent place in all public agendas, but this prominence is far clearer in Spain and in the UK, than in Belgium and Italy. This is an unexpected empirical finding, given that the unemployment rate – during the economic and financial crisis – grew much more in Italy than in the UK. Secondly, two country-specific peculiarities merit particular attention: firstly, in Italy there is little room for discussion on welfare state issues, whereas the same topic is much more relevant in Belgium, Spain and the UK; secondly, the centrality of crime in the UK has no equals in the other three countries under scrutiny.

Yet the main aim of this paper is to ascertain whether the issues that public opinion defines as the most important are also the priorities of policymakers. To start answering this question, please see Figure 5, Figure 6, Figure 7 and Figure 8, which show how the policy agendas (government legislation) evolved in Belgium, Italy, Spain, and the UK, respectively. In this way, it is possible to disclose a preliminary finding concerning the level of correspondence between citizens’ priorities and government legislative activity.

If we look at the figures above, two aspects appear very clear: above all, and contrarily to what has been traditionally assumed in the literature (Lindeboom 2012), the policy agenda is much more instable than the public agenda. In all countries, the variance characterising government legislation is higher than the variance characterising citizens’ priorities. This is demonstrated by the many fluctuations that sprinkle the four figures above. Secondly, and differently from what was previously stressed with regard to the public agenda, in this case there is no substantial difference between the pre-crisis period (2003-2007) and the crisis period (2008-2013): it is not possible to ascertain any growing trajectory for economic issues, nor for unemployment. This represents a very interesting finding: on the one hand, it seems that the economic and financial crisis impacted very
much on the priorities of citizens, who are more and more concerned with issues like inflation, economic growth, taxes and – above all – unemployment; however, governments have not changed the amount of attention they give to those same issues. In other words, it seems that governments produce as many ‘economic’ legislative acts in periods of recession as well as in periods of ‘economic normality’.

However, so far I have focused on the issues which almost always tend to receive more attention than others, simply because they have a fundamental impact on the everyday lives of citizens: ‘crime’, ‘economy’, ‘welfare’, and ‘unemployment’. Yet, according to Table 1 in section 4, the topics under scrutiny are nine rather than four. Therefore, in order to consider the whole picture, see Table 2, Figure 9, and Figure 10:

[TABLE 2 HERE]

[FIGURE 9 HERE]

[FIGURE 10 HERE]

At first sight, Figure 9 and Figure 10 are rather similar, thus suggesting that between public agenda and policy agenda there is correspondence. However, they also differ in some respects. Above all, there are topics which are constantly considered as being more relevant by citizens than by policymakers – unemployment and civil rights – and topics that, on the contrary, are constantly considered as being more relevant by policymakers than by citizens – constitutional reform and environment. Secondly, across countries, policy agendas are more similar than public agendas: this empirical finding is not unexpected, giving support to the well-known hypothesis that Western European countries are substantially interlinked and, in turn, are called to face similar problems at the same time. The fact that policy agendas converge whereas public agendas diverge implies – and this is my third consideration – that some countries display higher levels of correspondence between citizens’ priorities and government legislation than others. See, Table 3 on this:

[TABLE 3 HERE]

As expected, countries differ with regard to political responsiveness: the Belgian case shows the highest level of correspondence between public opinion priorities and government legislation, whereas Italy, Spain and the UK display (very similar) lower performances. Yet, governments
within the same countries also differ to a great extent from one another. Therefore, politico-institutional factors are not sufficient to explain this variation. This leads us – once again – to the crucial question: what causes government responsiveness?

6. Public opinion priorities and government legislation: a configurational analysis

Berg-Schlosser and colleagues (Berg-Schlosser et al. 2008) listed five possible aims of using QCA: i) to summarise data; ii) to check the coherence of the data with claims of subset relations; iii) to test existing theories and hypotheses; iv) to overview quickly the basic assumptions of the analysis; v) to develop new theoretical arguments. More recently, Schneider and Wagemann (2010, 400) have added the use of QCA as a means for creating empirical typologies. Among all the aims above, in this case I focus on both the third and the fifth: if ‘traditional’ theories are not supported by empirical data, QCA is a powerful methodological instrument to broaden social theories.

Yet, there are different versions of QCA: while the older variant (Ragin 1987) requires a dichotomisation of the variables and is based on Boolean algebra, the more recent variant (Ragin 2000; 2008) also allows for values between 0 and 1. These so-called ‘fuzzy values’ describe the degree of membership of a given case in a particular set (Schneider & Wagemann 2006, 752). The older variant is currently known as crisp-set-QCA (csQCA); the more recent variant – which was proposed by Ragin himself as an answer to the criticisms csQCA had received – is currently known as fuzzy-set-QCA (fsQCA)\textsuperscript{10}. In this paper, I recur to fsQCA in order to empirically test the theoretical argument that institutional centralisation, macroeconomic contingency and citizens’ trust in government play a crucial role in government responsiveness.

One of the first steps in each fsQCA is the so-called ‘calibration’ of sets (both conditions and the outcome) (Ragin 2008; Schneider & Wagemann 2012). In this fundamental process – which should be as transparent as possible, and which should be discussed in detail (Schneider & Wagemann 2010, 403) – it is particularly crucial to specify qualitative anchors for full membership (1), full non-membership (0) and for the point of maximum ambiguity (0.5)\textsuperscript{11}. Table 4 summarises all the choices made, which are discussed in detail later on:

\textsuperscript{10} There are two further versions of QCA: multi-value-QCA (mvQCA) and time-QCA (tQCA) (Schneider & Wagemann 2012); yet, they are far less diffused than csQCA and fsQCA (Rihoux et al. 2013; Marx et al. 2014).

\textsuperscript{11} I make use of the direct method of calibration (Ragin 2008, 85): once qualitative anchors have been chosen, the QCA-software applies a logarithmic function and attributes fuzzy values to the remaining cases. The indirect method, by contrast, requires an initial grouping of cases into set-membership scores (for example: 0.8, 0.6, 0.4, 0.2): using the fractional logit model, these preliminary set membership scores are then regressed on the raw data; the predicted values of this model are then used as the fuzzy-set membership scores (Schneider & Wagemann 2012).
As for the concept of ‘institutional centralisation’, the full membership is attributed to the UK, which represents the ideal-type of a ‘centralised country’ in Lijphart’s (1999) analysis, whereas full non-membership is attributed to Spain\(^{12}\), which is generally considered as being a decentralised state (Lijphart 1999); the point of maximum ambiguity is thus located halfway between the minimum (-2) and the maximum (+2) of the original index. The calibration of this particular condition can be considered rather ‘easy’, building on previous research\(^{13}\). The same does not hold true for the remaining conditions and, to a lesser extent, for the outcome: in these cases, in fact, no previous conceptualisations exist and I have to proceed without any help.

In more detail, where macroeconomic contingency is concerned, the full membership of the set ‘positive economic contingency’ is represented by an average growth of GDP and employment equal to 5%, whereas the full non-membership is located at the -5% value; the point of maximum ambiguity is again located halfway\(^{14}\). Different considerations led to the calibration of ‘citizens’ trust in government’: indeed, in this case thresholds have been chosen asymmetrically. The art of governing is in fact difficult, demanding and, very often, implies consensus losses: therefore, I located full membership at the +10% value, full non-membership at the -20% and the point of maximum ambiguity at the -5% value. Finally, as previously said, the concept of ‘political responsiveness’ has been operationalised through the well-known ‘Gallagher Index’. With regard to this, scholars analysing elections and electoral systems making use of the Gallagher Index usually consider values that are higher than 15-20 as identifying ‘highly disproportional elections’. However, I believe that for governments it is much more difficult to proportionally represent the priorities of citizens in their legislation than for electoral systems to transform votes into seats: thus, I decided to pinpoint the point of maximum ambiguity – which represents the most important choice in calibration – at the value of 25. Then, full membership has been located at the value of 10, whereas full non-membership has been located at the value of 40.

Once sets have been calibrated, the second step of each QCA – both crisp-set and fuzzy-set – consists in the analysis of necessity relations, which should always be conducted before the analysis of sufficiency conditions (Schneider & Wagemann 2010, 404). With respect to this, as Table 5

\(^{12}\) And, then, to Belgium, which is characterised by a value of + 0.44 on Lijphart’s federal/unitary dimension.

\(^{13}\) Following Schneider and Wagemann’s (2010) standards of good practice in QCA, theoretical, not empirical, arguments, as well as prior knowledge external to data, should guide the identification of thresholds.

\(^{14}\) I am perfectly aware that this is a rough way of proceeding and that my thresholds could be considered as being arbitrary; however, I am persuaded that they help in gathering the ‘essence’ of the concept I make use of.
demonstrates, no condition (as well as its non-occurrence, indicated with the tilde ~) is necessary for the outcome:\footnote{All the consistency thresholds are lower than 0.9, which is the value over which empirical evidence is considered to support the claim that a condition is necessary for the outcome (Schneider & Wagemann 2012, 278).}

\[\text{[TABLE 5 HERE]}\]

Subsequent to the analysis of necessity, the empirical test of sufficiency set-relations between (combinations of) conditions and the outcome is conducted through the so-called ‘truth table’. In more detail, the process proceeds as follows: \(i\) the algorithm foresees the conversion of the data matrix into the abovementioned truth table; \(ii\) single truth table rows are assessed, on the basis of their consistency scores, whether or not they can count as sufficient conditions for the result; \(iii\) if this is the case they are included in the so-called Boolean minimisation process, otherwise they are not. See, on this point, Table 6:

\[\text{[TABLE 6 HERE]}\]

First of all, it should be noted that there is one logical remainder: the configuration of conditions identifying a government in a decentralised country facing a good macroeconomic contingency, but suffering from citizens’ distrust, is not represented in my sample. It means that not all combinations of conditions are characterised by at least one empirical case and that problems of limited diversity may arise. As a consequence, solution formulas – complex, parsimonious and intermediate – are not interchangeable\footnote{Indeed, in QCA, solution formulas differ on the basis of assumptions on logical remainders: the complex solution assumes that logical remainders would not produce the outcome. The parsimonious solution treats remainders as ‘don’t care’, stimulating outcome values so that parsimony is obtained. Instead, the intermediate solution evaluates the plausibility of remainders in accordance with the researcher’s simplifying assumptions based on theoretical or substantive empirical knowledge.} and assumptions on that same logical remainder should be made. In this case, it is generally suggested that the intermediate solution be considered in order to lower the risk of drawing wrong inferences about the automatic counterfactuals used in the parsimonious and complex solution (Jano 2016, 15).

Secondly, as Schneider and Wagemann (2012) suggest, only combinations of conditions which show a raw consistency higher than 0.75 should contribute to the minimisation of the truth table algorithm\footnote{However, the 0.75 threshold should not be applied mechanically.}; as a result, the intermediate solution formula is as follows:
Intermediate solution = economy*~decentralisation + ~economy*decentralisation + 
~trust*~decentralisation + ~trust*~economy

[TABLE 7 HERE]

Theoretically, the solution above means that government responsiveness may be achieved following four different causal paths: firstly, the correspondence between public opinion priorities and government legislation is favoured by the simultaneous presence of both a centralised institutional arrangement of the country and a positive macroeconomic contingency; yet, the same result is also linked to a decentralised institutional arrangement and a negative macroeconomic contingency; finally, the absence of citizens’ trust in government – alternatively connected to either a centralised institutional setting or a negative macroeconomic contingency – is associated to government responsiveness, too. While the consistency value of the intermediate solution is quite satisfying (0.77), and the coverage of the solution formula is remarkable (0.84), the theoretical interpretation of causal paths is, nevertheless, not always immediate and needs further reflection. Moreover, as Figure 11 shows, there is a logical contradictory case: indeed, the first Cameron government is characterised by a value of 0.63 with regard to the final solution formula – meaning it is ‘more in than out’ of the set of ‘governments which are expected to be responsive’ – and by a value of 0.33 with respect to the outcome – meaning that it is ‘more out than in’ of the set of responsive governments. Yet the first Cameron cabinet, being formed by a coalition of liberal-democrats and conservatives – represents a very rare case in British history: as such, it is not surprising it performs ‘unexpectedly’. On the contrary, three cases (Leterme 1 and 2; Berlusconi 3) – being above the diagonal in the upper-right corner – are explained by any (i.e. one or more) of the four equifinal sufficient solutions: in other words, following Schneider and Rohlfing’s (2013, 585) terminology, they are ‘typical cases’. Moreover, seven further cases (Berlusconi 2 and 4; Prodi 2; Blair2; Van Rompuy; Zapatero2; Rajoy) can be considered as representing good instances of both the four solutions and the outcome: in fact, even though they are below the diagonal, they are still in the upper-right quadrant. In other terms, they are no true logical contradictions and may be labelled – again following Schneider and Rohlfing (2013, 585) – ‘deviant cases consistency in degree’. Finally, while the five cases (Aznar 2; Blair3; Brown; Monti; Zapatero 1) in the lower-left quadrant – being neither good examples of causal conditions, nor of the outcome – do not merit particular attention, the ‘deviant case for coverage’ in the upper-left quadrant (Verhofstadt 2) is much more

18 It has to be stressed that the coverage does not refer to the whole population of cases under scrutiny, but only to cases showing the outcome.
interesting: indeed, its position indicates that it is not explained in my analysis. In other words, according to the analytical framework, it should not be responsive, but it is.

[FIGURE 11 HERE]

Overall, however, the configurational analysis seems to confirm that both macroeconomic factors as well as fluctuations in citizens’ trust in government are relevant for executives’ capability to legislate in accordance with public opinion priorities. Of course, this very preliminary finding needs much more research; nevertheless, it appears to be rather promising.

7. Concluding remarks and future research

One of the central functions of parties in democracies is to link citizens with policymakers (Dalton et al. 2011): in representative democracy, the more parties (and, in turn, governments) are able to structure and interpret public opinion priorities and preferences, the higher the democratic quality. Yet not all governments are equally responsive to citizens.

The results shown in this paper may contribute to the literature on government responsiveness in many respects. First of all, traditional literature on the correspondence between public agenda and policy agenda suffers from a blind spot: it has almost always focused on politico-institutional factors (majoritarian vs. proportional/consensual institutional arrangements; institutional friction; level of institutional (de)centralisation; etc.), while disregarding macroeconomic conditions and other contingent factors that (may) have an impact on political responsiveness. With regard to this, traditional theories should probably be refined and broadened, with the aim of taking into account a higher number of potential causal conditions.

Secondly, so far empirical analysis on political responsiveness has been conducted following two methodological approaches only: on the one hand, qualitative case studies (Chaqués Bonafont & Palau 2011; Lindeboom 2012; John et al. 2013) and small-N comparative analyses (Mortensen et al. 2011) have contributed to our knowledge of a few countries by offering mainly descriptive findings; on the other hand, scholars have recurred to multivariate regression, yet their analyses are mainly focused on parties rather than on governments, as well as on party manifestos rather than on government legislation (Klüver & Spoon 2014; Spoon & Klüver 2014).

A methodological approach which is completely unknown – within this bulk of literature – is Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA). However, it seems that QCA is gaining momentum in social sciences (Rihoux et al. 2013): indeed, more and more scholars have recently started to recur
to set-theory and configurational analysis in order to unravel complex causal relationships. This paper has followed the same path, and here lies one of its main added values: in a world where social phenomena are generally collinear and clustered, with statistics despising multi-collinearity (Blalock 1963; Bartholomew & Knott 1999), QCA – by contrast – considers equifinality and, above all, conjunctural causation as big positives. It is generally hard to sustain that a particular social phenomenon has been caused by a unique explanatory factor, and QCA is able to unravel this complexity\(^\text{19}\). Moreover, in statistical analysis, cases disappear behind coefficients and p-values: we do not immediately know which cases confirm the theory and which cases contradict it. Of course, it may appear to be a minor challenge in large-N studies; yet, even in analysing large-N populations of cases, QCA still takes into account each and every case: in all moments of the empirical analysis, you are perfectly aware that, for example, theoretical arguments hold for some cases and not for others; this, in turn, allows for a potential refinement of those same theoretical arguments.

This leads to where future research is likely to go. As said, the first Cameron government is a logical contradictory case in my analysis: it means that theory is openly disconfirmed in this case. Therefore, precisely an in-depth analysis of the peculiarities characterising this case could be very useful in order to refine and broaden theoretical arguments. Similarly, the only case lying on the upper-left quadrant in Figure 11 – the second Verhofstadt government – could also help very much in refining theory: in this case, while theoretical arguments are not contradicted, they nevertheless prove to be insufficient to explain the presence of the outcome. Again, an in-depth analysis of the context characterising that particular government could enrich our understanding of the phenomenon under scrutiny.

In conclusion, this paper represents a preliminary analysis of how and why governments in Belgium, Italy, Spain and the UK are (or are not) responsive. Nevertheless, the results that have been obtained are not insignificant: economic factors do matter for political responsiveness, as does citizens’ trust in government. Furthermore, those same factors are differently linked to institutional (de)centralisation for explaining how much a government is able to match the priorities of citizens once in office: it means that each causal condition plays a different role according to either the presence or the absence of other causal conditions. This latter finding, in particular, would not have been possible to detect with statistical analysis: this represents very well why QCA is gaining momentum in social sciences.

\(^{19}\) In other words, focusing on the so-called ‘net-effect’ of each independent variable on the variance of the dependent variable risks losing sight of the ‘big picture’: we are led to disregard multi-collinear results exactly because of their multi-collinearity; yet multi-collinearity is fully intrinsic in social reality.
REFERENCES


### Table 1  Eurobarometer-CAP issue areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy issues (9)</th>
<th>Eurobarometer categories (15)</th>
<th>CAP categories (19)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civil rights and immigration</td>
<td>• Immigration</td>
<td>• Civil rights, minority issues and civil liberties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constitutional reform</td>
<td>• Constitutional reform</td>
<td>• Government operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime and law</td>
<td>• Crime</td>
<td>• Law, crime and family issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>• Economic situation</td>
<td>• Macroeconomics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Government debt</td>
<td>• Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Inflation</td>
<td>• Banking, finance and domestic commerce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Taxation</td>
<td>• Foreign trade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>• Education</td>
<td>• Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Environment and energy</td>
<td>• Space, science, technology and communications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>• Defence/Foreign affairs</td>
<td>• Defence</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• International terrorism</td>
<td>• International affairs and foreign aid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign affairs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social welfare</td>
<td>• Health and social security</td>
<td>• Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Housing</td>
<td>• Social welfare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Pensions</td>
<td>• Community development, planning and housing issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>• Unemployment</td>
<td>• Labour and employment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1  *The diachronic evolution of the public agenda in Belgium (2003-2010)*

![Diagram showing the diachronic evolution of the public agenda in Belgium (2003-2010)](image1)

Figure 2  *The diachronic evolution of the public agenda in Italy (2004-2013)*

![Diagram showing the diachronic evolution of the public agenda in Italy (2004-2013)](image2)
Figure 3  The diachronic evolution of the public agenda in Spain (2003-2012)

Figure 4  The diachronic evolution of the public agenda in the UK (2003-2012)
Figure 5  The diachronic evolution of the policy agenda in Belgium (2003-2010)

Figure 6  The diachronic evolution of the policy agenda in Italy (2004-2012)
Figure 7  *The diachronic evolution of the policy agenda in Spain (2003-2013)*

Figure 8  *The diachronic evolution of the policy agenda in the UK (2003-2012)*
### Table 2  Percentage of attention by policy area: Belgium, Italy, Spain and UK in comparative perspective (2003-2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Citizen s</td>
<td>Government s</td>
<td>Citizen s</td>
<td>Government s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil rights</td>
<td>8.83</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>5.84</td>
<td>3.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constitution</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>6.36</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>12.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>10.98</td>
<td>23.79</td>
<td>9.34</td>
<td>12.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>31.76</td>
<td>28.96</td>
<td>44.99</td>
<td>27.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>9.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>5.11</td>
<td>8.31</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>11.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign aff.</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>10.80</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>13.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare</td>
<td>14.12</td>
<td>11.48</td>
<td>7.99</td>
<td>7.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>22.37</td>
<td>6.75</td>
<td>19.51</td>
<td>2.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### Figure 9  Four countries in comparative perspective: the public agenda from 2003 to 2013
Figure 10  *Four countries in comparative perspective: the policy agenda from 2003 to 2013*

Table 3  *How much political responsiveness?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Most responsive government</th>
<th>Least responsive government</th>
<th>Country average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>Leterme II (Gallagher Index: 16.5)</td>
<td>Van Rompuy (Gallagher Index: 23.6)</td>
<td>Gallagher Index: 19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Berlusconi III (Gallagher Index: 21.5)</td>
<td>Monti (Gallagher Index: 34.7)</td>
<td>Gallagher Index: 25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Zapatero II (Gallagher Index: 23.9)</td>
<td>Aznar II (Gallagher Index: 33.2)</td>
<td>Gallagher Index: 27.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Blair II (Gallagher Index: 24.3)</td>
<td>Blair III (Gallagher Index: 30.4)</td>
<td>Gallagher Index: 27.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4  *Calibration of sets: conditions and the outcome*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Set</th>
<th>Full membership</th>
<th>Point of maximum ambiguity</th>
<th>Full non-membership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(0.5)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional centralisation$^{20}$</td>
<td>-1.12 (UK)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+0.42 (Spain)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macroeconomic contingency$^{21}$</td>
<td>-5%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in government$^{22}$</td>
<td>+10%</td>
<td>-5%</td>
<td>-20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political responsiveness$^{23}$</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5  *Analysis of necessary conditions. Outcome: government responsiveness*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Consistency</th>
<th>Coverage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>decentralisation</td>
<td>0.750865</td>
<td>0.664964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~decentralisation</td>
<td>0.493656</td>
<td>0.593620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>economy</td>
<td>0.604383</td>
<td>0.677878</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~economy</td>
<td>0.696655</td>
<td>0.651564</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trust</td>
<td>0.666667</td>
<td>0.589195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~trust</td>
<td>0.643599</td>
<td>0.776078</td>
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</table>

---

$^{20}$ Operationalised through the Lijphart federal/unitary dimension, varying between -2 (fully centralised State) and +2 (fully decentralised State).

$^{21}$ Operationalised through the average between GDP growth and unemployment rate variation; this average varies between -100 and +∞.

$^{22}$ Operationalised through Eurobarometer data; these data may vary between -100 and +∞.

$^{23}$ Operationalised through the Gallagher Index, which varies between 0 and 100.
Table 6  Truth table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decentral.</th>
<th>Economy</th>
<th>Trust</th>
<th>No. of cases</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Raw consist</th>
<th>PRI consist</th>
<th>SYM cons</th>
<th>Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (94%)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Berlusc2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (100%)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Berlusc4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 (88%)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>Berlusc1;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Prodi2; Blair2; Cameron1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4 (47%)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>Berlusc3;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Prodi2; Blair2; Cameron1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4 (23%)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>Leterme2;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>VanRomp; Rajoy; Zapatero2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3 (82%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Monti; Blair3; Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3 (64%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>Verhof2; Zapatero1; Aznar2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 (100%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 Analysis of sufficient conditions. Outcome: government responsiveness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Raw coverage</th>
<th>Unique coverage</th>
<th>Consistency</th>
<th>Cases covered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>economy*~decentralisation</td>
<td>0.393310</td>
<td>0.139562</td>
<td>0.804872</td>
<td>Berlusc3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~economy*decentralisation</td>
<td>0.560554</td>
<td>0.069204</td>
<td>0.785354</td>
<td>Leterme1; Leterme2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~trust*~decentralisation</td>
<td>0.310265</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.957295</td>
<td>Berlusc2; Berlusc4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~trust*~economy</td>
<td>0.559400</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.818333</td>
<td>Berlusc4; Leterme2; Zapatero2; Rajoy; VanRomp</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Solution coverage: 0.84
- Solution consistency: 0.77
Figure 11  *Final XY Plot*