

Politics in-between crises.

A political and textual comparative analysis of budgetary speeches and expenditure in Italy and UK

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Introduction

In the last decade, European countries have been heavily hit by two dramatic crises (the great recession and the Covid-19 pandemic) which have dramatically smashed national and even supranational economic policies. From an agenda-setting perspective, political actors act as 'agenda-takers' in moments of crisis, when a trend topic suddenly appeared gathers the attention, whereas they are freer to be 'agenda-setters' in usual times [2, 1]. However, although the total size of the budget tends to be incremental and characterized by very tiny changes [3], political actors have higher leeway in moving expenditure from a budget category from another. This paper is a preliminary attempt to approach the study of budget trade-offs looking at spending allocation across budget categories as compositional dependent variable by foregrounding the interdependence of decisions about public expenditure and surrounding the whole decision-making process. We develop our analysis by focusing and comparing public expenditure of Italy and United Kingdom from 2013 to 2019. We then triangulate our results with those coming from the study of parliamentary debates in order to capture the potential effect of the shifting attention during plenary discussions on budget trade-offs. In order to pursue our aims, the recently released corpora of the ParlaMint project¹ are investigated.

Main Objectives

- Quantitative analysis of the variation in public expenditure by budget groups in Italy and UK (2001-2019);
- Quantitative analysis of the frequency distribution of two set of keywords for the two dataset;
- Study of the yearly difference on the discursive space devoted to the discussion of expenditure by budget groups in Italy and UK for the two dataset;
- Comparison and triangulation of the results.

The dataset

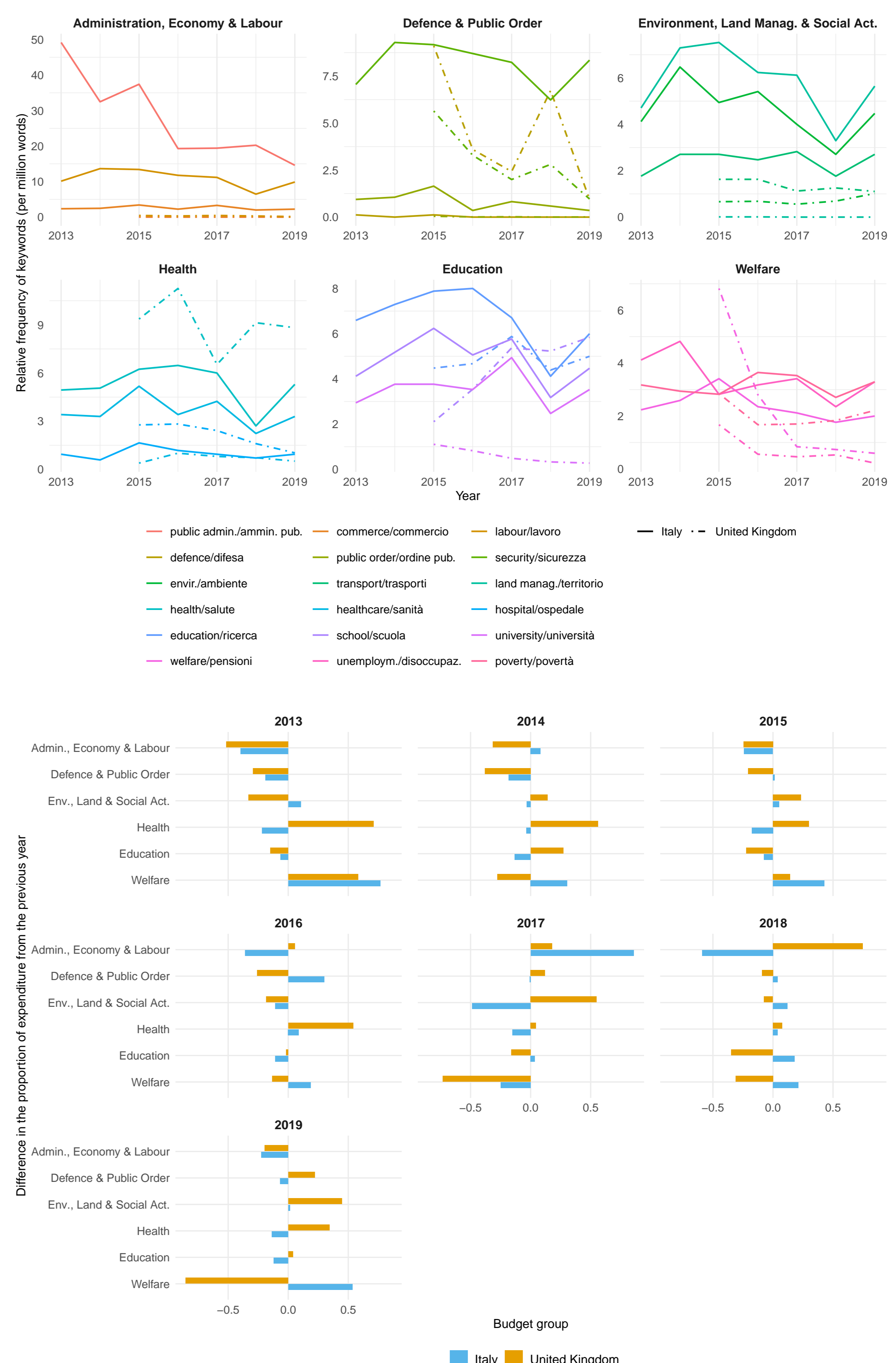
Our analysis focuses on the years between the two moment of crisis of the past decades, when governments are expected to have more room of manoeuvre to allocate expenditure across budget categories according to their preferences, without the need to consider such a dramatic events. In order to study political choices, the analysis includes two dataset for Italy and United Kingdom:

- Public Expenditure Data from 2013 to 2019 classified according to the COFOG² coding scheme, which splits expenditure into 10 macro categories and 69 micro spending categories;
- ParlaMint-IT and ParlaMint-GB, two linguistically annotated corpora which respectively contain Italian parliamentary debates in Senate and British parliamentary debates from both House of Lords and House of Commons.³ Table presents all the details concerning both linguistic dataset.

Table 1: ParlaMint Corpora

	Parla-Mint-IT 2.1	Parla-Mint-GB 2.1
Tokens	30,881,177	113,014,455
Types	171,465	151,917
Sentences	1,087,465	4,318,331
Paragraphs	214,300	1,143,313
Documents	1,199	552,103

Analysis



Forthcoming Research

Several questions still remain to be answered. Notwithstanding the relatively limited sample, this work offers valuable insights into the study of the relationships between speeches and actual decisions: is there a relationship between what politicians argue and what they actually do?

Further work needs to be done by:

- developing a more advanced analysis which to measure the impact of speeches and other variables on the trade-off in spending allocation across budget categories
- extending the dataset adding different countries and/or resources
- implement a more qualitative approach

References

- [1] Enrico Borghetto and Federico Russo. "From agenda setters to agenda takers? The determinants of party issue attention in times of crisis". In: *Party Politics* 24.1 (2018), pp. 65–77.
- [2] Bryan D Jones and Frank R Baumgartner. *The politics of attention: How government prioritizes problems*. University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- [3] Aaron B Wildavsky. *Politics of the budgetary process*. Little, Brown, 1964.

¹<http://hdl.handle.net/11356/1431>

²Available at the link: https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=gov_10a_exp&lang=en (viewed 30/06/2021)

³<https://www.clarin.eu/content/parlamint-towards-comparable-parliamentary-corpora>