

‘The changing face of responsibility:

An overtime comparison of French social-democratic governments’¹

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the changing face of governmental responsibility through a comparative content analysis of the yearly budgetary presentations of the French ministers of economy and finance. The cases analyzed are the governments under the Hollande (2012-2017) and first Mitterrand (1981-1986) presidencies. In both cases there were strong external pressures that hindered the pursuit of expansionary budgetary policies and that forced the executives to pursue more restrictive measures. The analysis consists in a comparison of how the ministers in the two different time-periods justified this policy course, hypothesizing that international institutional constraints played a more prominent role during the Hollande than during the Mitterrand presidency. By distinguishing between responsive and responsible justifications, we find that institutional constraints are indeed more prominent in the justifications provided by contemporary ministers. These findings have important repercussions for our understanding how the national democratic cycle functions under the conditions of European integration. In particular, they indicate that the accountability stage results to be significantly altered, as governments do no longer take full credit for their measures, but rather present themselves as spokespersons for a web of institutions. These findings, we argue, are likely not to be peculiar to France but rather relate to a general trend in European politics.

Keywords: Responsiveness; Accountability; Justifications; Party-government; Responsibility

1. Introduction

Peter Mair’s (2013; 2014) theory about the increasing role of governmental responsibility *versus* partisan responsiveness derives from his lifelong research on the organizational developments of political parties throughout the twentieth century. The implications of his theory, however, go well beyond the party-politics literature and speak to one of the main questions in contemporary political science. After the ‘Golden age’ of party-politics (Mair 2008) and the period of ‘embedded liberalism’ (Ruggie 1982), nation-states seem to have lost parts of their political authority (Genschel & Zangl 2014) and the role of political parties – as vehicles for collective decision-

¹ Please cite as:

Karremans, Johannes & Koen Damhuis (2018) ‘The changing face of responsibility: A cross-time comparison of French social democratic executives’, *Party Politics*, first published online February 27: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1354068818761197>

making – seems to have withered (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000). In this new setting, it becomes questionable whether – and to what extent – the socio-economic policies of contemporary governments follow from the political programmes of the governing parties, or whether they are dictated by the rules set by international and supranational organizations like the EU or the IMF.

Testing this proposition requires a cross-time comparative approach, particularly when conceiving the issue in the terms that Mair proposes. His argument is that governments today have become *more* responsible and *less* responsive than in the past, and that this development, in turn, is affecting electoral competition (see Introduction of the present issue). As this argument outlines a long causal chain that connects EU-supranational decision-making to the relation between political parties and their voters – as Mair himself also recognizes (2014) – the implications of those mechanisms may not yet be clearly visible. This is illustrated by the fact that existing large-N longitudinal studies have found ambiguous results regarding the changes hypothesized by Mair (e.g. Potrafke 2009; Adams et al 2009; Dalton et al 2011). Therefore, we propose a qualitative research strategy that – rather than looking for patterns across diverse cases – tries to map overtime differences across most similar cases and in most similar situations. Following these criteria, we propose to compare governments of similar partisan composition facing adverse economic conditions, focusing the analysis on the political considerations behind the drafting of the yearly budgets.

The recent presidency of François Hollande and the governments of the first presidential mandate of François Mitterrand offer a very interesting opportunity for such a comparison. These two presidencies share the similarity of featuring a Parti Socialiste-dominated cabinet facing adverse economic circumstances, which strongly hindered the realization of the governing party's electoral programme. The difficult economic conditions and the progressive-oriented electoral programs offer the opportunity to compare governments facing a tension between responsiveness and responsibility under different levels of international economic and European integration.

France, in fact, as one of the founding members of the European Union, is one of the more strongly involved countries in the process of European integration, which after the Maastricht Treaty grew not only in economic terms, but also politically and institutionally (Smith 2006). At the same time, however, some of the country's domestic socio-economic characteristics have partially hindered its adaptation to certain European guidelines – such as in the case of the modernization of the

system of social protection – creating thereby a tension between European and domestic politics (Caune *et al* 2011). With a comparative study of these French social-democratic executives, it is thus possible to make a descriptive inference of the overtime changes in the system commonly known as party-government.

Following up on a study on the changing responsiveness of the French Parti Socialiste (Damhuis and Karremans 2017), this paper investigates how the French governments under the two presidencies profiled themselves as ‘responsible’. The paper thereby provides a comparative insight into how the ‘responsible’ side of policy-making today is different from the past. It shows that while under Mitterrand governments took full credit for their policies of budgetary rigor, under Hollande the blame is shifted to the European commitments to which the executive is expected to abide. This overtime difference, we argue, may have considerable implications for the relationship between parties and their voters.

The paper is structured as follows. We first discuss the theoretical framework on which our analysis is based, together with an overview of institutional constraints to budgetary policy-making in France between the 1980s and today. We then proceed by describing our methodology for analysing the justification arguments. Subsequently, we present the results of our comparative content analysis and provide evidence of the qualitative differences between governmental responsibilities in the two time-periods under study, reflecting on how these change the relationships between governments, parliaments and voters.

2. Theoretical framework: Distinguishing responsibility from responsiveness

The theoretical starting point of our comparative study is that government action in western democracies is always guided by both responsive and responsible policy criteria. Following Sartori (1976), we consider the balance between these criteria to be the very essence of the legitimacy of party-government. From this perspective, responsiveness relates to political parties’ representative function, whereas responsibility is linked to the duties concerning the task of governing. Consequently, we conceive responsiveness as the chain through which parties connect the preferences of their voters to policy outputs (Powell 2004). Responsibility, instead, concerns the institutional norms and procedures to which executives must abide. Accordingly, when it comes

to drafting the yearly budget, this means to comply with the rules regarding public deficits or to meet the obligations towards creditors.

As Mair's argument is based on the idea that contemporary institutional constraints are rendering the partisan composition of government irrelevant, we try to draw a borderline between the ideological identity of the governing parties on the one hand and the institutional continuity of governments on the other. From our perspective, the distinction between the two notions is strongly related to the distinctive programmatic characteristics of the governing party: what do party-voters expect from their representatives in office *versus* what is expected from governments disregarding of the party in office (see also: Damhuis and Karremans 2017; Karremans 2017). Accordingly, responsiveness characterizes the political colour of the government, whereas responsibility reflects the institutional setting in which a cabinet operates. To some extent, our distinction can be understood as a borderline between what a cabinet *wants* and what it *ought* to do, as there is not only an agenda it intends to pursue, but there are also rules and constraints to which it is expected to comply.

Whereas responsiveness is strongly related to the party operating in office, responsibility is more related to the rules concerning a particular policy field. When analysing the justifications for the yearly budgets, we thus consider responsible justifications to be those arguments that explain how the government's decision respects the institutional commitment to preserve sustainable public finances. Following the idea that the process of European integration has provided governments with a growing amount of institutional commitments in this regard, our expectation is that these type of justifications today are more prominent than in the past.

Institutional constraints in France between the 1980s and 2010s

As most other West-European countries, during the 1980s and 1990s, France transformed from an industrial into a post-industrial economy (Boix 2015). In parallel, while national governments aimed at steering the economy in the industrial era, their function in the post-industrial world became mainly to support markets and to create the right conditions for enterprises to compete in the global economy (Jessop 2007: 209-222). Consequently, national politicians have lost important

sets of economic policy instruments, and their influence on public policy has been considerably replaced by European and global actors (Cole 2008: 200).

Constraints to the government's sphere of action, however, also existed prior to the transition to a more service-based economy. Even in the years of the so-called *dirigisme* – during which governments would have five-year plans for the economy (Culpepper *et al* 2006) – the hands of French executives were regularly tied by constraining constitutional norms (Stone 1989). The power of the Constitutional Court, in particular, ranged – and still ranges – from general to particular policy issues, which regularly affects the final shape of legislation. As every policy-making decision can be subject to the court's scrutiny, governments need to be keen in complying with the constitutional requirements behind their action.

The establishment of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) in 1979, in turn, put considerable pressure on French executives to reduce the rate of inflation in order to reduce trade deficits and restore competitiveness. Even if it could be argued that there were other alternatives (Cameron 1996), the fiscal and monetary contractions adopted since 1983 were strongly related to the Thatcherite ideas about creating the conditions for economic growth with such measures (Gourevitch 1986). On top of that, the end of growth in the global economy of the 1970s rendered Keynesian policy strategies much less viable, making it particularly difficult for the political left to implement its traditional socio-economic programmes (Hall 1994).

The tension between a socialist policy programme and the pressures stemming from the international political economy thus already existed at the dawn of the post-industrial era. What has changed between the 1980s and 2010s, however, is the level of institutionalization of such pressures (Dorrucci *et al* 2015). Figure 1 reports the level of France's institutional integration in the EU between the 1980s and the 2000s, as indexed by Dorrucci *et al* (2015).

[*Figure 1 about here*]

With the various spill-over effects and the growth in competencies (Dinan 2010), the EU has become more than an abstract constraint for national policy-makers, but a concrete set of rules that considerably shapes what politicians consider to be appropriate action, both in practical and in legal terms (Smith 2006). Together with the embedment in other international organizations, these

developments have considerably changed the role of national states, as they are no longer the sole actors detaining political authority. Instead, they share the latter with other inter- and supranational actors (Genschel and Zangl 2014).

At the same time, national policy legacies too have a considerable constraining effect on the government's action. The accumulation of French national public debt (in % of GDP) in particular – which rose from around 20% in the 1980s to over 90% in the 2010s (see Figure 2) – considerably reduces the scope for discretionary spending in most OECD countries (Streeck and Mertens 2013). The public money invested in the rescuing of private banks in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis strongly accelerated this process (Schäfer and Streeck 2013). Consequently, the efforts undertaken at the European level since 2010 to reduce national public deficits represent an important further step in the growing influence of European rules in national policy-making, increasingly inducing governments to pursue contracting rather than expansive fiscal policies (Laffan 2014).

[*Figure 2 about here*]

This growth of institutional constraints – both at the national level and at the international level – has led Peter Mair to theorize that parties ‘have moved away from representing the interests of the citizens to the state to representing interests of the state to the citizens’ (Mair 2014: 582). Following this statement, we expect the over-time difference in institutional constraints to have observable implications in justifications for annual budgets.

[*Figure 3 about here*]

The redistribution of state resources – and by extension, as we will argue below, of social-democratic *vis-à-vis* institutional discourse – is also largely dependent on the levels of economic growth, which may increase or reduce the possibilities for governments to spend. This makes overtime comparison particularly difficult. Our case selection reduces this problem, as under both presidencies France had relatively similar levels of economic growth (Figure 3). Under these circumstances, thus, we expect the discourses of the Hollande governments – when compared to those of the Mitterrand governments – to feature more references of state commitments rather than to social-democratic policy goals.

3. The analysis of budget speeches

Justifications as unit of analysis

The analysis of justification arguments allows to focus on a stage of the democratic process that has been left largely unexplored in the party-politics literature. The system commonly known as party-government has been mostly conceived as a circular process running from citizens' preferences to policy-outputs and then from public policy back to citizens' preferences (Kriesi *et al* 2013: 58; Dalton *et al* 2011). Political parties are the dominant actors at each stage of this process, as they not only make sure that voters' preferences are represented at the policy-making stage, but they also provide information to the voters about their actions in office. While the first half of the process has extensively been examined in the party-politics literature, the second half is less well understood, in particular with respect to the responsive-responsible dilemma. It is in these parts of the democratic cycle, however, that it becomes particularly interesting to test Mair's hypothesis.

By studying the stage of the democratic cycle during which policy information starts to flow back from the institutional arena to the public, it is possible to obtain a more direct insight into how the partisan character of government relates to its institutional duties: when justifying their actions in government, politicians are no longer only representatives of particular sets of political preferences, but they also speak on behalf of a national institution. From the perspective of the party-model of representative democracy (e.g. Katz 2014; Rose 2014), such justifications should feature a certain share of arguments stemming from the politician's partisan affiliation and a certain share of arguments stemming from its institutional responsibilities. If the argument about the growing amount of institutional constraints is correct, we would expect that contemporary governments would feature a larger share of responsible justifications than governments from the past. In order to make such a comparison, however, it is necessary not only to identify comparable cases, but also to identify comparable speeches or texts.

Our analysis therefore focuses on the arguments with which governments justify their budgetary measures in front of the parliament. Budget speeches lend themselves very well for overtime comparisons as they are formal yearly recurrences that keep many factors constant. In France, the budget speeches are given each year in October by the minister of economy and finance in the *Assemblée Générale*. With our analysis, we compare the budget speeches held under the Hollande

presidency (2012-2017) with the budget speeches presented during the first office term of François Mitterrand when PS-dominated governments were in power (1981-1986).²

As the budget is presented in front of the whole parliament, the minister needs to address both the majority supporting the government as well as the opposition. Furthermore, as the policies presented have potential repercussions for all sections of society – as well as for external actors, such as international financial markets or foreign governments – the minister’s speech is likely to be picked up by a very broad audience, ranging from pensioners to international creditors. In such scenarios, the partisan and the institutional character of the minister are most likely to stand side by side. Through an overtime comparison, we can thus see how the balance and interaction between these two aspects of party-government have changed.

Our analysis focuses entirely on the explanations for government’s measures. In contrast to other studies of governments’ discourse, such as the work clustered around the Comparative Agendas Project (e.g. Green-Pedersen & Walgrave 2014), we do not analyse the full body of text, but only code those passages that are directly linked to actual policies or policy packages. For instance, in the following excerpt from the 2012 budget speech, we observe the references to the government’s policy/action (the underlined text), and the explanation/justification for it (the text in bold):

- We understand companies. We **want to help those who create, who innovate and export, because it is in companies that wealth and employment are created.** That is the aim of our action. [...] We therefore propose to put into place a tax status for entrepreneurs, to **encourage long-term investment** in order to better take into account the situation of those who reinvest in a new company the added value they have generated on the sale of the company they ran until then. (Pierre Moscovici, 16 October 2012)

The passages in bold inform us that the government’s action is directed towards companies that create innovation and employment, and that new tax status for entrepreneurs will encourage long-term investment. By listing these references, we created an overview of the criteria used by the governments to explain their actions. With this method, we gathered 940 justifications (464 for the Mitterrand governments and 476 for the Hollande governments) and we inductively grouped these

² All budget speeches can be found on the official website of the French Assembly. See: <http://archives.assemblee-nationale.fr/7/cr/> for the Mitterrand governments, and <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/14/debats/> for the Hollande governments (as viewed on November 2, 2017)

into 79 categories, which we list in the Appendix. By grouping the references, it is possible to distinguish between more partisan and more institutional justifications.

The proximity between justification and actual policy – together with the institutional context in which the speech is given – constitutes the core component for the methodological soundness of our analysis. When speaking in institutional contexts, in fact, policy-makers are expected to act consistently with their actions (Van der Veen 2011: 31). On top of that, by controlling for association between the policy-types that are being referred and their justifications, we show that there is a considerable consistency between justifications and government's actions. In fact, the policies presented in the budget speech can be subdivided in *expansive* and *restrictive* measures, which respectively increase and reduce the levels of public and expenditure and taxation. At the same time, the minister may also refer to policy packages including both type of measures or to regulatory policies. In these cases we classify the policies as *general*. Our expectation is that responsive justifications are more associated with expansive measures (increases in expenditure and taxation), whereas responsible justifications are more associated with restrictive measures (tax and expenditure cuts).

Responsive vs Responsible justifications

The list of justification categories can be aggregated into different levels of broader groups. Overall, in fact, we find that all justifications refer to three broad categories: society, economy and public finance. The former (rows 1.1-1.31 in the Appendix) constitute the justifications that we label 'responsive'. These have been extensively examined in our previous study (Damhuis and Karremans 2017), wherein we identified significant overtime changes in the representativeness of the Parti Socialiste, which are largely in line with the programmatic transformation of various European social-democratic between the 1990s and 2000s (e.g. Kitschelt 1994; Green Pedersen & Van Kersbergen 2002).

The shared characteristic of the various 'responsive' justifications is that they are related to the egalitarian goals of the party, with the overtime difference that in the 1980s the focus was more on redistributing wealth from high to low income groups, whereas today the party is more committed

towards maintaining social harmony. The following two passages are examples of the PS's responsiveness in respectively 1981 and in 2016:

- A considerable fortune, no one can deny, **confers a particular contributory faculty. This is the first reason for which it is legitimate to impose taxes on large fortunes**. Such taxation is also **justified by the need to correct inequalities, which are superior in terms of assets to those already considerable in terms of income**. (Laurent Fabius, 27 October 1981)

- The 2017 budget will also make 3 additional billion euro available for **schools and higher education**. Thanks to our action since 2012, the school system of the Republic is once again able to **educate our fellow citizens in the changes of today's and tomorrow's world**, and to play its emancipatory role **so that everyone, whatever one's social origin, can fully participate in public life**. (Michel Sapin, 18 October 2016)

These justifications reveal the partisan aspect of party-government, as the minister profiles the action of the executive according to certain ideological preferences: in the 1980s it was economic redistribution and today it tends to be more focused on social investment. In this paper, however, we wish to zoom into the institutional side of the same ministers and the same discourses.

Before being party-members, the ministers are first of all spokespersons of a national institution when presenting the yearly financial budget. The largest shares of their discourse are therefore not dedicated to the commitments they have towards their voters, but rather to the responsibilities they have towards the whole nation. Consequently, the economic developments and the performance of the country in terms of growth or employment occupy the larger share of the discourse. At the same time, the minister also needs to refer to the state of the public finances and the institutional rules to which the government is expected to comply.

While the partisan and institutional character of the government may easily be blurred in the justifications referring to the economy, this applies less to the arguments about public deficits or institutional rules. In the arguments about the economy (Appendix: rows 2.1-2.29), in fact, a social-democratic government may propose its partisan preferences and present them as responsible. Stimulating economic growth, for instance, may be beneficial for the country as a whole, but is at the same time a prerogative of the political left. When it comes to arguments referring to public deficits or budgetary targets that the government must meet (Appendix: rows 3.1-3.14), instead, the room for partisan discourse becomes smaller. In our analysis, therefore, these justifications

constitute the indicator that the government is profiling itself as ‘responsible’. The following excerpts from respectively the 2013 and 2016 budget speeches are clear examples of these justifications:

- For 2014, the objective of our nominal deficit target will be 3.6%, again **in line with our European commitments**. (Pierre Moscovici, 15 October 2013)

- this budget envisages a reduction of the deficit to 2.7% next year, after 3.3% this year. This return below the threshold of 3% will allow – some will say "finally" – **public debt to stabilize and even to fall slightly to 96% of GDP**. (Michel Sapin, 18 October 2016)

These justifications, contrary to the ‘responsive’ ones, do not reveal the political preferences of the government but simply report the duties it is expected to fulfil. These duties, we will argue, may have important repercussions for how the government holds itself accountable for its actions.

In the following section, we will present how the budget speeches of the different governments feature different shares of the different justification categories, before focusing more specifically on the ‘responsible’ justifications in section 5.

4. Results: The balance between responsive and responsible justifications

Table 1 reports the percentages per presidency for the responsive, economy-related and responsible justifications. For the first category, we observe a 6% decline between the Mitterrand and Hollande presidencies. In parallel, and in line with Mair’s argument, we observe that the ‘responsible’ justifications have almost doubled. The arguments referring to the economy, in turn, are clearly the most dominant category of justifications in both time-periods (about 50%). These justifications contain specific overtime differences, as the Mitterrand governments were mainly concerned with the levels of inflation and re-balancing the trade-deficits, whereas under Hollande the minister of economy and finance is more concerned with the investment climate and the competitiveness of the economy (see Appendix, rows 2.10, 2.11, 2.14 and 2.16).

[Table 1]

The discourses of the two time-periods thus share the characteristic of being dominated by references to economic indicators, yet they differ substantially when it comes to the question how

the latter are related to institutional budgetary rules. The overtime difference in the prominence of responsible justifications, in fact, is consistently present in the yearly budget presentations. Figure 4 illustrates these patterns, with the columns representing the total percentage of justifications collected per budget speech, and the different shades indicating the share of the corresponding justification categories. As can be observed, in each budget speech the Hollande governments consistently feature more ‘responsible’ justifications than the Mitterrand governments, with the exception of the second budget speech of the two office terms, wherein the levels are relatively equal. While under Mitterrand the non-partisan justifications are almost exclusively about the state and the performance of the economy, under Hollande these also feature a considerable amount of references to public deficits and institutional commitments.

[Figure 4 about here]

Another pattern emerging from the Figure 4, is how the yearly share of responsive justifications tends to follow the logics of the business cycle theory, according to which governments – and in particular left wing governments – generally pursue expansionary policies in the proximity of elections (Nordhaus 1975; Potrafke 2012). In both cases, responsive arguments tend to be more dominant in proximity of elections, whereas responsible justifications are used more in the central part of the office term. This is particularly true for the Hollande case, wherein for the first and fifth budget speeches we observe the largest shares of responsive justifications, and observe that responsible justifications register their highest peak in the third year in office. For the Mitterrand governments, instead, we observe that the highest peak of responsive arguments appears in the first budget speech, and that the share remains relatively constant in the subsequent years. The share of responsible justifications, in parallel, remains relatively small throughout the whole office term.

The parallelisms between the political business cycle theory and the yearly shares of responsive justifications suggest that there is a connection between policies and justifications. When taking into account the associations between justifications and the policy-types to which these refer, we do find confirmation of this idea. Responsive justifications are overall clearly associated with expansive policies, and are almost never used for restrictive policies. Responsible arguments, in turn, are mostly used for restrictive policies, and rarely appear when the minister presents increases

in public expenditure or taxation. Table 2 reports the percentages per yearly budget speech, per time period and for the total justifications gathered.

[Table 2 about here]

The association between policy-types and justifications allows us to make sense of the respective shares of responsive and responsible justifications. In both periods under study, for instance, the first budget speech (from 1981 and 2012) features relatively less responsible justifications than the speeches from the subsequent years of the office term. Restrictive policies, in parallel, are also much less referred to in these two budget speeches, reflecting the fact that at the beginning of both office terms the government tried to propose a more expansive policy approach that had to be reversed from the second year onwards. Under Mitterrand, however, the accent on the expansive policy course in the first part of the office term is much stronger than under Hollande. Under the latter instead, the institutional commitment to reduce public deficits considerably influenced the government's policy approach also in the first part of the office term.

In the subsequent years, both governments are forced to stick to policies that are more restrictive. In the case of Mitterrand, there is a clear U-turn in the policies presented, as references to expansive measures almost disappear in the 1983 and 1985 budget speeches, while between 1982 and 1984 – the years of the famous *tournant de la rigueur* – restrictive measures become increasingly prominent. Nonetheless, these measures are mainly justified in relation to developments in the economy (e.g. Appendix rows 2.2; 2.6; 2.10; 2.14; 2.19), and are only rarely referred to with references to budgetary rules. Under Hollande, instead, both restrictive measures and responsible justifications are much more present during all stages of the office term, suggesting that the policy course of the cabinet is much more influenced by pre-existing institutional rules.

Moreover, in the last speech during the Hollande presidency, the share of responsible justifications is also considerably high in the last speech, at the same time when the government increases its responsive arguments - presumably to win back the sympathy of party-supporters. In parallel, in the same speech the arguments about the economy are reduced to a remarkably low level. Instead, the minister focuses more on the efforts to keep public finances sustainable while maintaining a certain level of social cohesion. The following passage is an example of how, in the last budget

speech, the government tries to profile itself as both committed to reduce public deficits as well as sensitive to the functioning of France's social model:

- I repeat it once more here: the only credible and responsible budgetary strategy is the one we propose today to implement in the continuity [of previous measures]. It is the one that consists in a stable and durable control of public spending that allows for a **gradual reduction of the deficit and taxes** while **modernizing our social model**. (Michel Sapin, 18 October 2016)

This passage serves as a justification for the overall measures presented in the budget, and features a combination of responsible (“gradually reduce public deficits”) and social-democratic (“modernise our social model”) justifications. The restrictive measures pursued by the government are thereby presented as mutually compatible with the more social-oriented commitments of the Parti Socialiste.

As already discussed in our and other related studies (Damhuis and Karremans 2017; Huber and Stephens 2015; Gingrich and Häusermann 2015), the restrictive policy-attitude emerging from the justifications is for a considerable extent in line with the post-industrial ideological profile of the Parti Socialiste. However, the characteristics of the responsible justifications found in the budget speeches also reveal another side of this same story. In the justifications of the Mitterrand governments from 1982 onwards, in fact, the will to pursue expansive policies tends to be paired up with the bitter recognition that the constraints are too big and that the government must follow another policy course. Under the Hollande presidency, instead, the appropriateness of moving within the boundaries posed by the external constraints does not seem to be a matter of discussion. In other words, in the 1980s the PS seemed to stumble upon the constraints posed by the surrounding economic context. In the 2010s, instead, the constraints are pre-institutionalized, as international norms and procedures guide the responsible behaviour of governments, inducing them to pursue reductions of expenditure and taxation. In the following section we will provide further qualitative evidence of this important overtime difference.

5. The growing importance of institutional constraints

The justifications of the Mitterrand and Hollande governments do not only feature differences in the shares of responsible justifications, but also in the more specific content thereof. While during the Mitterrand period these justifications mainly contain general references to the state of public finances (Appendix: rows 3.1-3.3), the justifications of the Hollande governments display much more concrete references to the commitment of reducing public deficits (Appendix, rows: 3.4 and 3.5) and to the international rules to which the governments is expected to comply (Appendix: rows 3.6-3.14). Figure 5 illustrates these differences.

[Figure 5 about here]

The horizontal columns indicate the percentage of responsible justifications referring to respectively the general state of public finances, the commitment to reduce public deficits and the international institutional rules in this regard. As can be observed, the responsible justifications are almost exclusively about the first sub-category during the Mitterrand period, whereas references to concrete budgetary rules and objectives are much more frequent during the Hollande years. These differences are largely related to the way in which the governments profiled their budgetary responsibilities.

In 1983, for instance, the PS-led government took full credit for the restrictive policy *tournant* it implemented, justifying it with the argument that in the given economic circumstances, this was the only and best policy solution, and comparing its action with that of other countries. The following passage is an excerpt from that year's budget speech:

- It is a given fact and I do not see why, by what miracle, the small French would escape the constraints imposed on the whole of Europe. In order to better situate our strengths and weaknesses, it is interesting to compare ourselves with five other European countries: the United Kingdom, Belgium, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy and the Netherlands. It shows that we are fifth for inflation, (..) and sixth for the deficit of the balance of payments; (..). On the other hand, for the proportions of the budget deficit relative to the national product, we are the second ones, as well as for the cumulated economic growth over two years, even if our results are not very strong; and, when it comes to the fight against unemployment (..) we are the first. These are the strengths and weaknesses of the French economy. **If I have allowed myself to make these comparisons, it is, first of all, because they justify the policy of rigor that we have implemented** after others, or at the same time as others. (Jacques Delors, 19 October 1983)

The restrictive policy course is justified in light of the developments in the international economy and in comparison with the policies of neighbouring countries. The attitude of the government is thus responsible but relatively autonomous, in the sense that it takes credit for the decisions on the budget and acts as the institution in charge of the public finances. In other words, it profiles itself as the public authority in charge of the decisions surrounding public finance. Such responsibility is taken even when it has to justify a 3% limit to budget deficits, as the following passage illustrates:

- A few days ago, the President of the Republic, speaking to the French population, used two terms that symbolize our whole project: "resist" and "conquer". That is what it is all about. **Resisting on all sides in the international crisis we are facing. Resisting public finances by saying that the deficit will not exceed 3 percent of the national wealth.** (Laurent Fabius, 27 October 1982)

The main driver behind the restrictive policies of the 1980s are thus developments in the international economy, to which the government autonomously decides to respond by keeping public deficits under control. The institutional duties, therefore, still stem from decisions and rules taken at the national level.

Under the Hollande presidency, instead, the discourse portrays the minister as a sort of a spokesperson in a web of international institutions (Appendix: rows 3.11-3.14). The following two passages from the 2013 budget speech, for instance, serve as a justification for different reductions in public expenditures.

The consolidation of public accounts must continue at a sustained pace, **as an economy that is in debt is an economy that is weakening**, due to rising interest rates, and eventually ends up degrading. What we **want is a credible France, a France that has credit**. I can assure you that, **at the World Bank and IMF General Assemblies, our commitment to these principles is very much appreciated – indeed, we got credit for it.** (Pierre Moscovici, 15 October 2013)

- The structural effort on which our dialogue with the European Commission is now based, within the framework of its prerogatives, is extremely important: it reached 1.7 percentage points of GDP and has never been that high, after 1.3 points in 2012. For 2014, our nominal deficit target will be 3.6%, again in line with our European commitments. The structural effort, on the other hand, will represent 0.9 percentage points of GDP, which is essentially unchanged from the stability program transmitted to the European Commission in spring. (Pierre Moscovici, 15 October 2013)

The consolidation of public finances is no longer solely based on developments in the economy, but is justified as being in line with the guidelines of international credit institutions such as the

World Bank and the IMF. Similarly, the reduction of budget deficits is not presented as an autonomous decision of the cabinet, but rather as the consequence of European agreements and the guidelines of the European Commission. By referring to authorities other than the French president or the national government, the minister thus reassures the audience that the decisions have been taken ‘responsibly’.

The picture emerging from the qualitative comparison of the justifications is that governments in 1980s were already strongly constrained, but were confronted with these constraints first-hand. From the budget speeches, the government claims to have a relatively larger autonomy in deciding its policy course, and thereby to decide to either act ‘irresponsibly’ or to adapt its action to the given circumstances. In the 2010s, instead, the international institutional rules surrounding the government’s action seem to preventively withhold it from ‘irresponsible’ behaviour and organize its action according to its responsibility towards the public finances. Whereas the constraints derived directly from the (international) economy in the 1980s, they tend to take of international norms and procedures to which the government is expected to adhere in the 2010s.

In this sense, we find corroboration for Mair’s argument that the mounting institutional duties are putting more pressure on governments to act responsibly. The association between the responsible justifications and restrictive policies, in turn, provide evidence for how European guidelines may indeed prevent governments from pursuing expansive policies (Smith 2006). The blame shifting strategies of governments, in turn, are likely to affect how parties connect citizens’ preferences to political institutions.

6. Conclusion

In his latest contributions, Peter Mair (2013; 2014) argued that governments today are more constrained than in the past, particularly because of the growing interference with national politics of supra- or international institutions such as the EU or the IMF. In view of his arguments, this paper focused on the policy justifications referring to institutional constraints for contemporary and past French center-left governments facing economic downturns. Our findings indicate that both under Mitterrand and under Hollande presidencies the external constraints forced governments to pursue a more restrictive policy course, and thereby to pay more attention to the sustainability of public finances. The overtime difference, however, is that, while in the 1980s the

justifications for the restrictive policy course solely referred to *national* priorities, in the contemporary justifications there are considerably more references to how the restrictive policy-course is related to *supranational* budgetary rules.

When linking these insights to the overtime differences in the representativeness of the Parti Socialiste (Damhuis and Karremans 2017), a picture emerges wherein:

1) the *responsiveness* of the Parti Socialiste has shifted from being specifically attentive to the demands of low-income groups to speaking more on behalf of the middle classes and society-as-a-whole - a transition that is accompanied by a replacement of traditional welfare expenditure with social investment policies (e.g. Huber and Stephens 2015).

2) the *responsibility* of PS-led governments has shifted from advocating national budgetary priorities to emphasizing the compliance with international budgetary rules.

This results in a growing dispersion of political authority, wherein national governments are no longer the sole main responsible institution for the budget, but wherein this responsibility is increasingly shared with inter- and supranational institutions (Genschel and Zangl 2014; Katz 2014; Rose 2014). The findings presented in this paper speak in particular to this second development, suggesting that governments today are more constrained than in the past in the pursuit of their favoured fiscal paths. These findings, however, need to be validated against a wider set of cases.

The extension of this type of overtime comparisons, in turn, needs to be applied to governments with similar partisan composition and facing relatively similar economic circumstances. As budgetary discourse can be subject to many influences, it is important to keep many factors constant in order to carry out this type of comparisons. Following this reasoning, a possible further comparison could be between the Brown (2007-2010) and the Callaghan (1976-1978) Labour ministries in Britain. In order to extend the study to the center-right, in turn, other possible comparisons could be between the first Cameron (2010-2015) and the first Thatcher (1979-1983) ministries in Britain, or the between first Rutte cabinet (2010-2012) and the first years of the Lubbers administration during the 1980s in the Netherlands. Such an extension of the comparisons would significantly enlarge the number of comparable overtime justifications in European democracies, which would in turn allow further testing the validity of our findings.

The further testing of these findings would in turn deepen our understanding of the changing nature of the accountability stage of the democratic cycle. In particular, it would shed light on the extent to which – under the current European economic governance framework – governments have the space to profile themselves as representatives of distinct sets of socio-economic policy-preferences. From our comparison of the Hollande and Mitterrand governments, we find this space to be restricted, as supranational rules and expertise appear to play an ever more prominent role in the legitimation of budgetary policies. As the ‘changing face of responsibility’, that we have identified, relates to European budgetary rules to which all EU member states are subject, we believe that this overtime variation will also be traceable in other European countries.

Bibliography

Adams, J., A. B. Haupt and H. Stoll (2009) 'What moves parties? The role of public opinion and global economic conditions in Western Europe', *Comparative Political Studies*, 42(5): 611-639.

Boix, C. (2015) 'Prosperity and the Evolving Structure of Advanced Economies'. In: In: Beramendi, P., S. Hausermann, H. Kitschelt & H. Kriesi (eds.) *The Politics of Advanced Capitalism*, New York: Cambridge University Press: 67-88.

Cameron, David (1996) 'Exchange Rate Politics in France, 1981-1983: The Regime-Defining Choices of the Mitterrand Presidency. In Daley, Anthony (ed.) *The Mitterrand Era: Policy Alternatives and Political Mobilization in France*, New York University Press: New York: 56-82.

Caune, H., S. Jacquot, and B. Palier (2011) 'Social Europe in action: the evolution of EU policies and resources'. In: P. Graziano, S. Jacquot, B. Palier (eds.), *The EU and the Domestic Politics of Welfare State Reforms: Europa, Europae*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan: 19-47.

Cole, A. (2008) *Governing and governance in France*, New York : Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Culpepper P., P.A. Hall and B. Palier (eds.) (2006) *Changing France. The Politics that Markets Make*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Dalton, R. J. and M. P. Wattenberg (2000) *Parties without partisans: political change in advanced industrial democracies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dalton, R.J., D.M. Farrell and I. McAllister (2011) *Political parties and the democratic linkage: how parties organize democracy*, Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.

Damhuis, K. and J. Karremans (2017) 'Responsive to whom? A comparison of the Hollande and Mitterrand presidencies', *West European Politics*, 40(6): 1267-1287.

Dinan, D. (2010) *Ever closer union : An Introduction to European Integration*, Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan.

Doray-Demers, P., & Foucault, M. (2017). The politics of fiscal rules within the European Union: a dynamic analysis of fiscal rules stringency. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 24(6), 852-870.

Dorrucci, E., Ioannou, D., Mongelli, F. P., & Terzi, A. (2015) 'The Four Unions' PIE'on the Monetary Union "CHERRY": A New Index of European Institutional Integration', *ECB occasional paper nr 160*. Available at: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2548992 Accessed on July 12 2017.

Genschel, P. & B. Zangl (2014) 'State Transformations in OECD Countries', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 17: 337: 354.

Gingrich, J., & Häusermann, S. (2015) 'The decline of the working-class vote, the reconfiguration of the welfare support coalition and consequences for the welfare state', *Journal of European Social Policy*, 25(1): 50-75.

Gourevitch, P. (1986) *Politics in hard times: comparative responses to international economic crises*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Green-Pedersen, C., & van Kersbergen, K. (2002) 'The Politics of the Third Way' The Transformation of Social Democracy in Denmark and the Netherlands' *Party Politics*, 8(5): 507-524.

Green-Pedersen, C., & Walgrave, S. (Eds.). (2014). *Agenda setting, policies, and political systems: A comparative approach*. University of Chicago Press.

Hall, Peter A. (1994) 'The state and the market', in: Hall P.A., Hayward J., Machin H. (eds) *Developments in French Politics*. Palgrave Macmillan, London: 171-187.

Huber, Evelyne, and John D. Stephens (2015). 'Postindustrial Social Policy', in Pablo Beramendi, Silja Häusermann, Herbert Kitschelt and Hanspeter Kriesi (eds.), *The Politics of Advanced Capitalism*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 259-281.

Jessop, B. (2007) *State power: a strategic-relational approach*, Cambridge ; Malden, MA : Polity.

Karremans, J. (2017) 'State interests vs citizens' preferences: on which side do (Labour) parties stand?', EUI Ph.D. Thesis, Florence: European University Institute.

Katz, R. S. (2014) 'No man can serve two masters: Party politicians, party members, citizens and principal-agent models of democracy', *Party Politics*, 20(2): 183-193.

Kitschelt, H. (1994) *The Transformation of European Social Democracy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kriesi, H., S. Lavenex, F. Esser, J. Matthes, M. Bühlmann and D. Bochsler (2013) *Democracy in the Age of Globalization and Mediatization*, Basingstoke & New York : Palgrave Macmillan.

Mair, P. (2008) 'The challenge to party government', *West European Politics*, 31(1-2): 211-234.

Mair, P. (2013) 'Smaghi vs. the Parties: Representative Government and Institutional Constraints'. In: Schäfer, A. & W. Streeck *Politics in the age of austerity*, Cambridge: Polity Press: 143-168.

Mair, P. (2014) 'Representative versus responsible government'. In Mair, P. *On parties, party systems and democracy*, Colchester: ECPR Press: 581-596.

Nordhaus, William D. (1975) 'The political business cycle', *The Review of Economic Studies*, 42 (2): 169-190.

Potrake, N. (2009) 'Did globalization restrict partisan politics? An empirical evaluation of social expenditures in a panel of OECD countries', *Public Choice*, 140(1-2): 105-124.

Potrafke, N. (2012) 'Political cycles and economic performance in OECD countries: empirical evidence from 1951–2006', *Public Choice*, 150: 155–179.

Powell, G. B. (2004) 'The chain of responsiveness', *Journal of Democracy*, 15(4): 91-105.

Ruggie, J. G. (1982) 'International regimes, transactions, and change: embedded liberalism in the postwar economic order', *International Organization*, 36(2): 379-415.

Rose, R. (2014) 'Responsible party government in a world of interdependence', *West European Politics*, 37(2): 253-269.

Sartori, G. (1976) *Parties and party systems: A framework for analysis*, Cambridge London New York & Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.

Stone, A. (1989) 'Legal Constraints to Policy-Making: The Constitutional Council and the Council of State'. In: Paul Godt (ed) *Policy-making in France*, Pinter Publishers: London and New York: 28-41.

Schäfer, A. & W. Streeck (2013) *Politics in the age of austerity*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Smith, Andy (2006) 'The Government of the European Union and a Changing France'. In: Culpepper P., P.A. Hall and B. Palier (eds) *Changing France. The Politics that Markets Make*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan: 179-197.

Stone, Alec (1989) 'Legal Constraints to Policy-Making: The Constitutional Council and the Council of State'. In: Paul Godt (ed) *Policy-making in France*, Pinter Publishers: London and New York: 28-41.

Streeck, W. & D. Mertens (2013) 'Public finance and the decline of state capacity in democratic capitalism'. In: Schäfer, A. & W. Streeck (eds) *Politics in the age of austerity*, Cambridge: Polity Press: 26-58.

Van der Veen, M. (2011) *Ideas, interests and foreign aid*, New York & London: Cambridge University Press.

Table 1 Share of justification categories under Mitterrand and Hollande governments (in %)

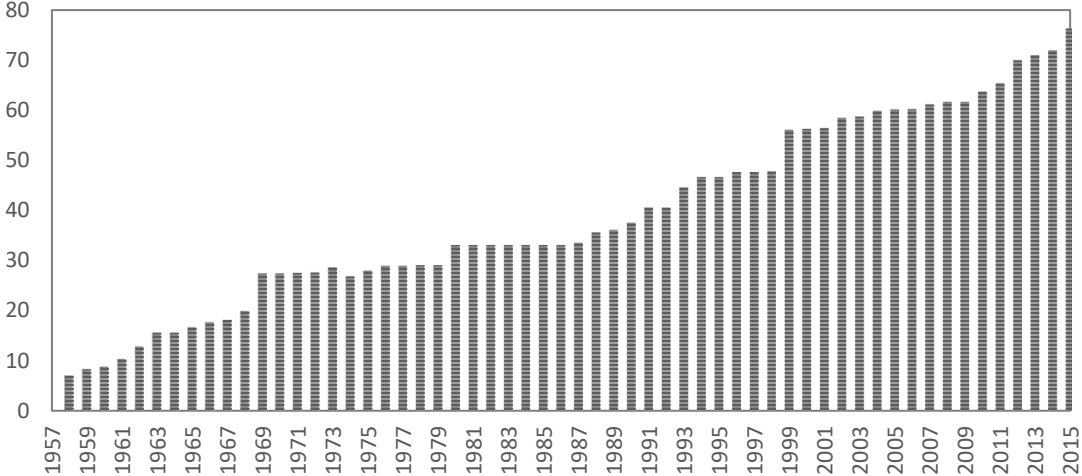
Justification category	Mitterrand governments	Hollande governments
Responsive justifications	35.1	29.2
General functioning of economy	51.5	46.1
Responsible justifications	13.4	24.7
Total	100	100
<i>N</i>	<i>464</i>	<i>476</i>

Table 2 Evolution of the share of policy types per justification category under Mitterrand and Hollande governments per year and per period (in %)

Year	Responsive			Economy			Responsible		
	Expansive	General	Restrictive	Expansive	General	Restrictive	Expansive	General	Restrictive
1981	28.4	18.9	1.1	24.2	23.2	0.0	0.0	4.2	0.0
1982	16.7	11.1	3.7	1.9	42.6	3.7	0.0	5.6	14.8
1983	5.0	15.7	4.1	4.1	53.7	5.8	0.0	2.5	9.1
1984	18.4	20.4	2.0	5.1	31.6	8.2	1.0	2.0	11.2
1985	2.2	28.9	1.1	0.0	51.1	7.8	0.0	8.9	0.0
2012	6.0	18.7	6.0	2.4	39.2	5.4	0.0	10.8	11.4
2013	4.0	14.9	4.0	11.9	49.5	2.0	1.0	3.0	9.9
2014	4.7	1.2	9.3	5.8	37.2	5.8	1.2	18.6	16.3
2015	7.5	10.4	17.9	1.5	29.9	10.4	0.0	4.5	17.9
2016	14.6	18.8	22.9	2.1	14.6	0.0	0.0	4.2	22.9
Period									
1981-1985	13.5	19.4	2.4	7.4	40.8	5.2	0.2	4.4	6.6
2012-2016	6.4	13.5	9.6	4.9	37.2	4.9	0.4	9.0	14.1
Total	9.9	16.4	6.0	6.2	39.0	5.1	0.3	6.7	10.4

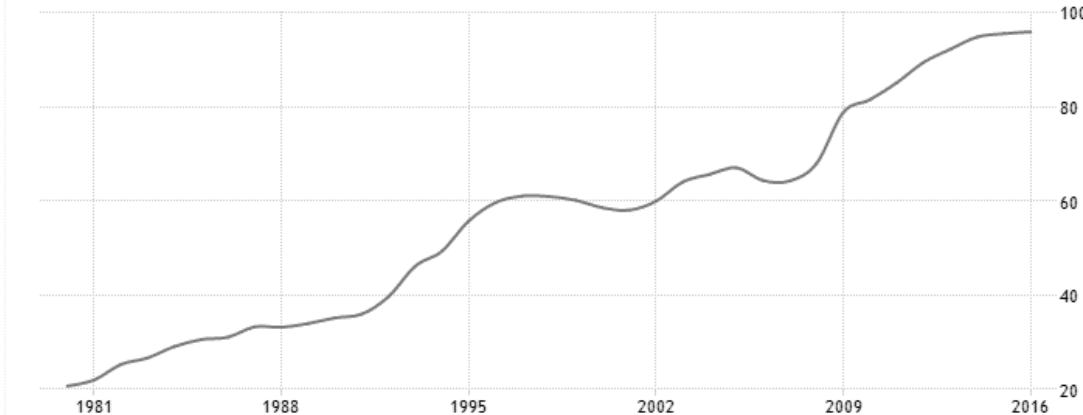
The bold values in Table 2 refer to the most frequent policy category per year.

Figure 1 The evolution of the integration of France within the European economic and monetary Union from 1957 to 2015



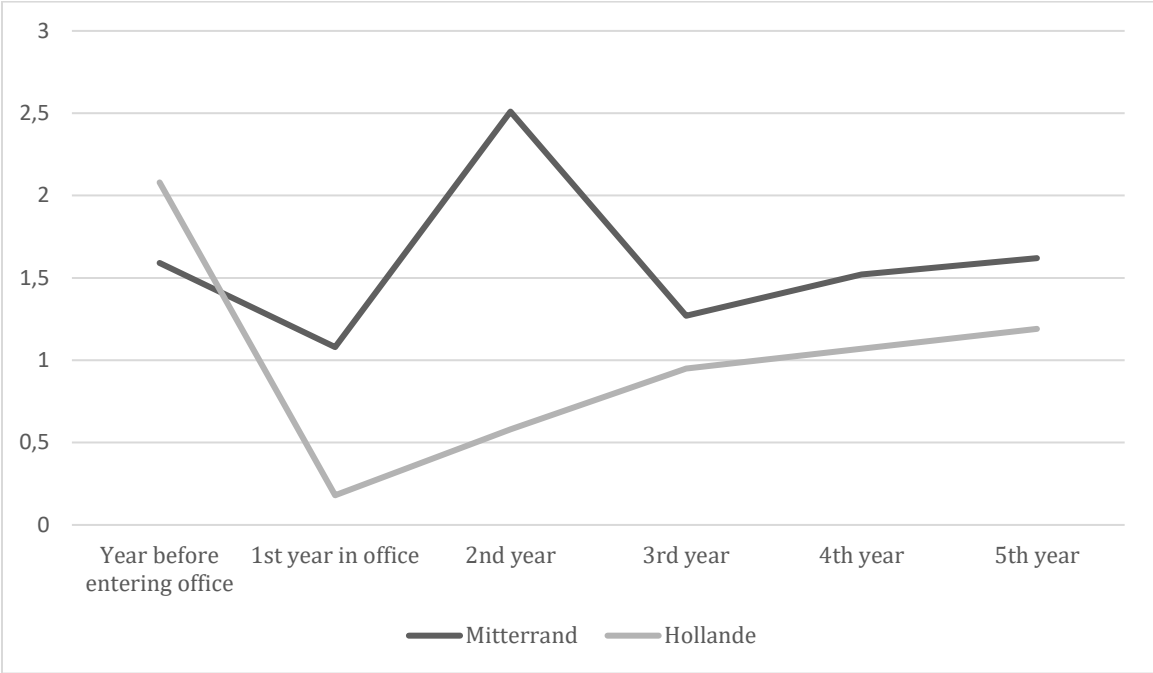
Source: European Index of Institutional Integration (Dorrucci et al. 2015). Note: cumulative scores calculated in January for each year.

Figure 2 France government debt to GDP (%)



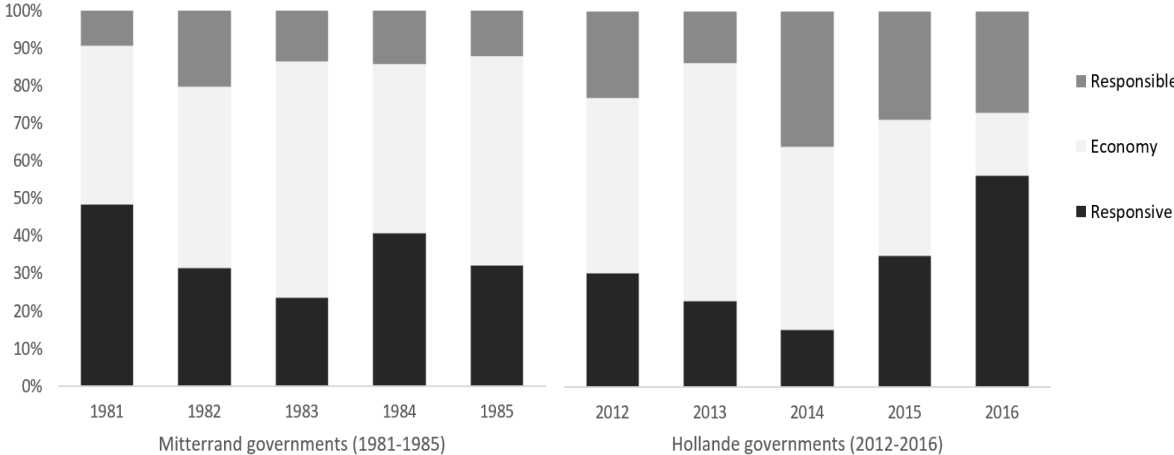
Source: TradingEconomics.com, Insée

Figure 3 Economic growth rates during the office term (% of GDP)



Source: World bank data:
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?end=2016&locations=FR&start=1980>
Accessed on 23 November 2017

Figure 4 Evolution of justifications types per year under Mitterrand and Hollande governments



Appendix 1 Coded justifications per year and type of policy

Justification category	1981			1982			1983			1984			1985			2012			2013			2014			2015			2016		
	E	G	R	E	G	R	E	G	R	E	G	R	E	G	R	E	G	R	E	G	R	E	G	R	E	G	R	E	G	R
1. Responsive																														
1.1 Reduce inequality	14	6		2	2		3	7		2	11	1	1	8		2	14	3	1	5		1						2	3	
1.2 Low-income classes	1			3		1		3	2	2	3				1	1	3			1	2		1	2		1		2	2	
1.3 Middle classes																1			1	1			2		1	6		2	2	
1.4 Unemployed	1									1	1		1	3					1								1			
1.4 Employees	1	1	1	1					2		1														1					
1.5 Families	1			1			2		1	1					1				1						1					
1.6 Young citizens	1							2		1	1					1			1			1			1					
1.7 Elderly	1					1				2											1				1			3		
1.8 General needs of social groups (other)																1														
1.9 Future generations (other)																	1													
1.10 Handicapped adults (other)										1																				
1.11 Welfare recipients (other)								1																						
1.12 Small business owners and shopkeepers (other)				1																										
1.13 Farmers (other)	1													1																
1.14 People who started working at young age (other)																1														
1.15 People living in tense neighbourhoods (other)																1														
1.16 Car users (other)	1																													
1.17 General social harmony		2					2						7		2	1		1								3	1			
1.20 Income/spending power		1		1					1	2	1		1		2	4		5				3			2		1	1		
1.21 Life conditions																1														
1.22 Public administration and public services	1	1								1					1							1				1	1			
1.23 Environment protection																1		1							1					
1.24 Health	1									1																				
1.25 Security	1	1								1			2								1			2		1				
1.26 Education (incl. research)	1			2		1			4			3											1		1					
1.27 Formation/extra training							2			1		1									1		1							
1.28 Culture	1																								1					
1.29 Fight against financial speculation		1													1	1														
1.30 Fight against austerity		5													1	5														
1.31 Fight against fraud				2															1						3					
2. Economy																														
2.1 Economic context general		1		2			3	1		2			7					4			4	1		2			1			
2.2 Economic crisis/conjuncture		1		3	1	1	5			2						3					5									
2.3 Econ. heritage previous gov.		1		1			1			1						1			2					2			1			
2.4 Inflation													1									4	1		1					

2.5 Structural economic changes		1		2		2		1												1				
2.6 International economic context		2		2		7	3	5				2	1			1	1							
2.7 Economic performance general	5	1		1	1	2		1	1	1	4		6	2		5							1	
2.8 Economic growth	4	2				5					3	1	2	20	2	2	10			6	1		7	
2.9 Fight unemployment	4	5		1	1	3		1	2		6		8		3	9			2	4	1		4	2
2.10 Competitiveness				1		10		4			3		6	3	3	9			1	1		1		2
2.11 Balance of trade	1	2		2	1	3		5	1		1		4											
2.12 Economic activity	1	1		1		1			2							1				3				
2.13 Global growth													4											
2.14 Reduce inflation	1	2		2		7	2	3			5													
2.15 Innovation						1							3		1	1								
2.16 Investment (climate)	2			1	1	2		1			2	2	1	2	1	2	4	1	1	2			1	1
2.17 Devaluation						1																		
2.18 Flexibility in economy						2		1			2													
2.19 Productivity						4	1	1	2		1		1			3								
2.20 Deflation									1											1				
2.21 Efficiency of industry								2			1													
2.22 Improve economic climate of companies												1	1		1									
2.23 Consumption	1										1		1											
2.24 Modernisation				3				1			4		1						1					
2.25 Industry more dynamic				1																				
2.26 Employment more dynamic																1								
2.27 Prepare future						5									1		1	1						
2.28 Make Paris a financial center											3	3												
2.29 Help enterprises	2			1				2		1			1									1	1	3
3. Responsible																								
3.1 Public finance general		4		2	3	2	9	1		8			3	8		1	1	8						8
3.2 Credibility general											1		1		1									
3.3 Room for government expenditure	3	3				1	1				3		1											
3.4 Reduce debt							2						3	4				1			9			2
3.5 Control Budget deficit				1	3					3			2	5		5		3		4				1
3.6 Credibility vis-à-vis Europeans											3						2	1		2			1	
3.7 Credibility extern Observers								1						1		1		1		2				
3.8 External expertise as justification								1		1					1		3			2				
3.9 There is no alternative				2									1											
3.10 Restricted room-for-manoeuver															1									
3.11 Engagements EU													3	1			2	1	4					
3.12 Justification IMF																	2			1				
3.13 European integration						1							5			1	1			1			1	1
3.14 Pressure Eurozone											3		1				3							

