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RESEARCH ARTICLE

WHO DID PARTICIPATE IN THE ONLINE PRIMARY ELECTIONS OF THE FIVE STAR MOVEMENT (M5S) IN ITALY?

Causes, Features and Effects of the Selection Process

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ABSTRACT: This research would analyze causes, characteristics and consequences of online primary elections organized by Five Star Movement (M5s), in December 2012, to select its MPs candidates. In particular, present work considers all the phases of this specific example of candidates selection process. Based on original and empirical data collected by C&LS research team, the work can be divided into four parts: after a general introduction, the article focuses its attention on the rules of the game (selectorate and candidacy rules) and measures the inclusion/exclusion level of the process, according to the scheme used by Reuven Hazan. So, this electoral study deals with the participation level and the voting distribution: how many people took place in the candidates selection process? How much "attractive" was the primary election and what was the level of competitiveness among candidates? The next part underlines the sociographical characteristics of the aspires MPs: who were the candidates and among these, what was the best candidates' profile? What were the variables that took some candidates to a successful results and other candidates to the in-success? Finally, what are the consequences of this specific case of primary elections?

KEYWORDS: Five Star Movement; Internet; political parties; participation; primary elections

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1. Candidate selection: an *outsourcing* function¹

Over ten years ago, a volume entirely dedicated to the study of political parties introduced the topic as follows: «there is a substantial and growing disaffection with many of the specific institutions of democracy, and no single institution is considered worse than the political party» (Diamond and Gunther 2001, ix). More recently, Bernard Manin, in his postscript to the Italian edition of his *Principles of Representative Government*, comments that «“distrust of political parties” has become a common expression» (2010, 267). Political parties are therefore necessary institutions (Schattschneider 1942), while at the same time they are discredited, in crisis. Their bad reputation is probably the consequence of citizens’ indifference towards democratic politics, commonly perceived as inadequate in resolving problems (Mair 2005). However the crisis, aside from the causes which have provoked it, has led political parties, if purely for self-preservation, to launch a slow, contradictory and patchy process of adaptation and, therefore, of transformation (Ignazi 2012).

According to a fitting analytical framework (Seddone and Valbruzzi 2012), political parties are increasingly less legitimate, more vulnerable, and less attractive. These dimensions are interdependent, and above all, an outward demonstration of clearly identifiable phenomena. First of all, parties’ growing vulnerability stems from an increase in electoral volatility that is the ever-growing trend for electors to change their vote from one election to another. Of course, this is not necessarily detrimental to the general quality of a democratic system (Rombi and Venturino 2013), but it equally shows a wear of the levels of identification with political parties. Parties’ lack of legitimacy and consequential reduction in attractiveness, rather, stems essentially from the deterioration – or we could say breakdown – of their ability to act as a bridge between the electoral and political classes. Political parties are now post-integrative institutions (Raniolo 2012) whose relationship with citizens is no longer a semi-automatic reflection of their widespread diffusion in society. The inevitability of this process is clearly demonstrated by a fall in terms of membership.

Indeed, several researches have described the parties’ loss of appeal, showing that between the 70s and 80s in many European countries (Denmark, Finland, Holland and the United Kingdom) the level of membership fell by around 2/3 (Ware 1996). This dramatic decline, in fact, has far from halted in the Nineties (Mair and Van Biezen 2001) and in the new millennium (Van Biezen, Mair and Poguntke 2012).

Considering the three well-known faces of party highlighted by Mair (1994) – party in public office, party in central office e party on the ground – we are more able to specify the nature of the crisis. If we solely take into consideration the information already cited, in fact, it is clear

¹ Even if this article is a joint work, Maria Elisabetta Lanzone has made a greater contribution to paragraphs 3 and 4, while Stefano Rombi to paragraphs 1 and 2. The authors would like to thank the members of the standing group Sisp “Candidate and Leader Selection” for their noteworthy support in data collection (www.candidateandleadersselection.eu).

that parties' reputation on the ground has suffered. This reputation concerns the relationship between party members and electors. The political parties, in fact, appear to be completely at ease within the public institutions and even to have replied to a crisis external to the State with a strengthening of their internal roots (Katz e Mair 1995). Moreover, their growing crisis of legitimacy and inescapable loss of attractiveness, have led the parties – though not all and not everywhere – to change their behavior. In this context, they have been forced to find new solutions to reconnect themselves with electors.

This process of adaptation/transformation certainly has an effect on the selection of candidates (Gallagher and Marsh 1988; Hazan 2002; Hazan and Rahat 2006 e 2010). This function was generally used in an *extralegal way* – except for Germany, Finland, Norway and, above all, the United States – and *internally* within the political party organizations, and therefore not inclusively².

How the adaptation process, brought about by the crisis, has affected this function? If we restrict our analysis to the Italian scenario, we note that, from 2004 (Fiorini and Venturino 2012) some political forces decided to intervene regarding the type of internal mechanisms for candidate selection, introducing an outsourcing process and, as a result, hugely increasing the level of inclusivity. In short, the primary elections, by which we mean the more or less open method for candidates' selection, should be interpreted as a *reactive action* forwarded by parties, in order to try to contain the avalanche of delegitimation and the lack of attractiveness.

The theoretical context outlined above seems to accurately explain much of what has occurred in the Italian political panorama. However, the particular case that we intend to analyze here concerns the *online* primary elections for parliamentary candidates, forwarded by the Five Star Movement (M5s) in December 2012 (gearing up for the national political elections) and called by Grillo and many mainstream journalists, "*Parlamentarie*". At this point some decisive and distinctive factors should be taken into consideration. The most important of these distinctive factors derives from the fact that the very same M5s party is a product of the legitimation crisis of the traditional political parties. In other words, the Grillo's party (Corbetta and Gualmini 2013) tangibly represents one of the most important indicators of the loss of legitimation of longstanding institutions: the anti-establishment protest. In this case the choice of a decentralized and non-exclusive method for the selection of parliamentary candidates cannot be interpreted, as in other cases, as a reaction to a (nonexistent) crisis. The M5s' case, in fact, even if a response to the Democratic Party (Pd) and center-left's adoption of inclusive methods, marries very well with the hyper-democratic narrative that, real or sham, epitomizes the Movement from its beginning.

The Five Star Movement constitutes the greatest change to the Italian political scene in the last decade and in the last political elections – held in February 2013 – it emerged as the main

² It is necessary to clarify that, despite frequent overlapping, the selection of candidates has little to do with the *leadership* selection within the party (Pasquino and Valbruzzi 2011), despite the fact that the processes that regulate them may seem the same.

party, obtaining 25.5% of electoral consensus³. It was a new political entity formed in 2009 thanks to the popularity of the ex-comic Beppe Grillo and the communication strategies of the *Casaleggio Associates*, but it was also a “movement” which has gradually gained ground thanks to the Internet⁴. At this point, we move to the second peculiarity, related to the location in which the (s)election was held: the world wide web. As previously underlined, even though M5s activism is also organized within local communities (offline), it is doubtless that the Movement «has made internet and the potential offered by Web 2.0 one of its major organizational resources, but also a fundamental element of its conception of politics and democracy» (Bordignon and Ceccarini 2013, 1). The use of internet, therefore, rather than being an ideological tool, seems to be the response to a limited presence of structured local organizations – such as those of the Pd – able to carry out competently and effectively the so-called “political primaries machine”. In short, both for *organizational* and *constitutional* reasons, the M5s could not adopt an approach that was at once open, inclusive, (although, as we will see later, only partially) and also managed solely through the internet.

If up until now we have situated the M5s process of candidates' selection within a far wider theoretical framework, for the evaluation of the primary elections we follow an analytical framework proposed by Reuven Hazan and his colleague Gideon Rahat (Hazan and Rahat 2000; 2006; 2010). In particular, these two Israelis scholars have identified four dimensions – each examined on the basis of a guiding question – useful to establish the total level of inclusiveness within the selection process: *candidacy* (who can be selected as a party candidate?); *selectorate* (who select the candidates?); *decentralization* (where does the selection take place?); *appointment* and *voting* (how candidates are selected?). Each dimension can be placed along a *continuum* whose limits are identified: on one hand, by the maximum level of exclusiveness; on the other, by the maximum level of inclusiveness.

In this work we plan to examine the characteristics and the outcome of the M5s primary elections based on an original *dataset* constructed through an intensive Internet research. This is the only strategy available to us, in the absence of complete official data, which could offer a full panorama. In the next section, having examined in detail the nature of the M5s primaries using Hazan and Rahat's framework, we focus on the numbers of the selection, and in particular, on the level of participation, on the distribution of votes and, finally, on the level of competitiveness. Instead, in the third paragraph, we focus on the candidates' socio-graphic characteristics. Then we proceed by concentric circles, progressively tightening the level of analysis: from all candidates, moving onto the selected candidates and finally looking at the most successful

³ In order to analyze the electoral results of the M5s in the political elections 2013, we refer to an accurate analysis by Tronconi (2013).

⁴ The M5s was founded and developed thanks to the internet, but also taking advantage of a period in which citizens had a limited trust in the established political organizations. This is also a distrust provoked by the extreme economic crisis. For the connection between crisis, distrust and the birth of populist parties, see the volume by Mény and Surel (2001).

selected candidates (i.e. those who obtained the highest number of votes in the primaries). In the fourth paragraph we complete this view by discussing the outcomes and consequences of the primaries. On this specific point we analyze, on one hand the distinguishing characteristics of those elected in the M5s primaries. On the other hand instead, we put forward a comparison between the candidates selected by Grillo party, and those chosen by the other political parties, by making a comparison which takes into consideration the method of selection employed. A short conclusion follows.

2. Primary elections requisites and numbers

Having briefly analyzed the reasons which brought the leaders of the Movement to opt for a non-centralized selection, and having also placed them within the wider theoretical debate regarding the political party crises, it is now time to enter *in medias res*. We concentrate on two aspects related to this theme: the basic requisites by which the selectors and candidates were defined, and the characteristics of the competition (level of participation, vote distribution, and competitiveness).

First of all, the selectorate is defined as an ensemble of those who can participate in the selection of candidates: it can be composed of one, a few, or many people, up to a country's entire electorate. With the aim to considering the analytical framework indicated by Hazan and Rahat, using an inclusiveness/exclusiveness *continuum*, at one extreme we have a selectorate composed of the entire electorate, while at the other extreme, rather than a selectorate, there will be a sole selector: the party leader. The M5s online primary elections took place between 3rd and 6th December 2012 and, as previously mentioned, it was only in part an inclusive procedure. In order to be a candidate it was necessary to meet these following criteria: to be uncensored, not signed up to other political parties, never to have carried out in the past more than one electoral mandate, to reside in the electoral district in which he or she was to candidate himself (or herself). Moreover, in order to avoid the likely bandwagoning effect, the right to participate was conferred to those who had already been a candidate but never elected during the local and regional elections in which the 5 Star Civic Lists or the M5s had already participated between 2008 and 2012. This choice cannot simply be interpreted, as the M5s would have us believe, as a reward for the un-elected⁵. The exclusion of elected political personnel, in fact, «inevitably allows for greater control from the top (by Grillo himself), and probably a greater dependency (even if only due to their lack of preparation) on central guidelines» (Gualmini 2013, 18). Analyzing the inclusiveness/exclusiveness *continuum*, at one extreme – that of maximum inclusiveness – there is the area in which every party elector is a potential candidate. The other end of the scale, of maximum exclusivity, corresponds with a series of re-

⁵ On 30th November 2012 on his blog, Beppe Grillo appeared in a video in which this benevolent motivation was placed at the base of regulatory decisions.

strictive conditions. The scenario under investigation is much closer to the second extreme than the first one⁶.

The fear of “infiltration” suggests a regulated openness, even regarding the selectorate. As a matter of fact, all legal adults could access to Grillo’s blog and express up to three preferences as long as they had joined up to the M5s by 30th September 2012, and had certified their identity by uploading a document by November 2012. The M5s primaries are therefore a clear example of closed primaries in which the opportunity to participate is offered only to party members. However, it should be made clear that the examples surrounding participation show some differences. Sometimes, indeed, there are additional requisites to the mere inscription (Hazan 2000, 176). The members’ participation to the selection process can be limited by a minimum period of *membership* prior to the candidate selection or by evidence of party activity.

According to official figures made public two weeks after the vote, even if the number of M5s members were 255,339, due to the strict regulations previously cited, the number of selectors with the right to participate was 31,612, 64.1% of which actually took part in the vote (20,252). The valid votes were 57,252, and therefore only a few chose to indicate less than three preferences. There were 1,486 candidates (945 were the places potentially available); 87.1% of candidates were male (1,293), while 12.9% were female (193).

On the basis of the above-outlined regulations, it is worth looking into the participation outcomes of the selection, as well as the level of competitiveness. In order to do this, it becomes crucial to focus on aggregated data.

Usually the inferable informations from aggregated data are studied by looking at the trend across the national territory. In this particular case, however, a number of problems are presented because of the limited transparency concerning the whole operation which, of course, prevented us from working with official and complete data. In fact, the primary election organizers provided more or less detailed information depending on the reference public. The “internals”, or rather those who, as candidates, had taken part in the *online* primaries, could consult all the available data (who had the right to vote, voters, votes cast), even disaggregated by district. The “externals”, or rather all the others, had to base their evaluation on the same three types of data but, a key detail, gathered at national level. In short, the only numbers available and known to all are related to the right to vote, to the selectors and the preferences expressed. It is easy to trace the position of each candidate, without however any reference to the number of its preferences.

If the data just cited was our starting point, after an in-depth research regarding the Internet site of *Meetup* active in the various constituencies, but also based on personal contacts with

⁶ As one can see, we have excluded two of the four dimensions of the Hazan and Rahat framework: *decentralization* and *nomination/vote*. The reason is very simple. With respect to the second dimension, there is very little to say: it is obvious, in fact, that, as it regards the primaries, the M5s candidates selection process did not take place through *appointment*, but rather *voting*. The first is also irrelevant, given the *online* nature of the selection.

candidates, we are now able to present a near complete scenario of the distribution of voters and their preferences throughout the national territory. Before looking at the data, however, it is necessary to take into consideration two important legal aspects. First of all, our research allows us to work with 93.1% of the preferences actually expressed (53.306); 328 (out of 1,486) candidates' votes are missing: 209 from the overseas districts⁷, 32 from Trentino-Alto Adige (North-East), 26 from Molise (South) and finally 61 from Apulia (South). Secondly, the number of voters presented is not a real figure, but an estimate obtained from the ratio between the total number of preferences and the average number of preferences given by each voter, equal to 2.83⁸. As example, we cite the case of Tuscany, where 3,934 preferences were attributed and, as a result, approximately 1,390 ($3,934/2.83$) selectors voted.

As we can see from Table 1, the (estimated) number of voters is overall limited, to say the least. For instance, even though it is the least populated region, the fact that Aosta Valley registered only 48 selectors tells us a lot about how restricted the perimeter in which the competition was carried out was. Unsurprisingly, given its size, the highest number of voters is in Lombardy (3,117). However, absolute values are not sufficient to correctly assess participation in each region. It is therefore necessary a participation index in order to make a comparison. Unfortunately, even in the case of the primaries for the parliamentary candidates, there is the well-known problem of the denominator (Venturino 2007). In other words, it is fairly difficult to identify who could be the potential voters. Actually, in the M5s primaries, the participation index could be easily calculated as the ratio between the number of voters and the number of entitled to vote. Nevertheless, those last data are not available disaggregated by region. Furthermore, this strategy would have excessively restricted the number of potential participants, preventing a full estimation of M5s supporters' desire for participation. A more fitting method could have taken into consideration the total number of Grillo's party members⁹, independently of the fact that the membership was completed by 30th September 2012 and certified by an identification document. But not even in this circumstance it was possible to obtain disaggregated data. As we know, the only available data is the number of party members at the national level (255,339)¹⁰. In order to overcome those obstacles, we compare the different regions based on the ratio (expressed as a percentage) between the number of voters in the online primaries and the number of those who voted M5s in the national elections of February 2013. Theoretically,

⁷ As regards the foreign districts, we collected the preferences of 15 candidates, to a total of 462 preferences. Moreover, given the lack of data available, we have decided to exclude them from the analysis.

⁸ The average numbers of preferences per voter is the ratio between the total number of preferences and number of voters. In numeric terms: $57,252/20,252 = 2.83$. Of course, we are hypothesizing the same number of preferences expressed by every selector in every district.

⁹ This is not a true membership inscription procedure, but rather an inscription to the internal sections of the blog.

¹⁰ Overall, considering the number of the entitled to vote, the participation index is 64.1%, while applying the number of party members as the denominator, the index falls to 7.9%.

cally, the index varies between a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 100. However, as Table 1 shows, the minimum participation level was 0.17% in Sicily, while the highest was 0.36% in Aosta Valley. Why is it so? Because the number of voters at the primaries was a great deal less than the number of voters at the general elections. These data certainly could come under criticism from many points of view, (starting with their excessive variability due to changes in the number of voters, even small ones) and, therefore, they have to be handled with care. However, they are the only ones available to make a comparison among the different regions.

Table 1 – Votes, voters and competition attractiveness

Region	Preferential voting	Voters	Participation Index	Competition attractiveness Index (CA)
Lombardy	8.822	3.117	0,28	0,06
Aosta Valley	137	48	0,36	0,33
Piedmont	4.639	1.639	0,23	0,41
Liguria	2.069	731	0,24	0,26
North-West	15.667	5.536	0,26	0,24
Friuli V.G.	1.148	406	0,21	0,14
Veneto	5.171	1.827	0,24	0,51
Trentino A.A.	-	-	-	0,50
North-East	6.319	2.233	0,23	0,47
Tuscany	3.934	1.390	0,26	0,32
Emilia-Romagna	5.324	1.881	0,29	0,40
Umbria	933	330	0,23	0,80
Marche	2.005	708	0,24	0,49
'Red Zone'	12.196	4.310	0,26	0,50
Lazio	7.101	2.509	0,27	0,37
Abruzzo	1.339	473	0,20	0,26
Sardinia	1.665	588	0,21	0,07
Basilicata	429	152	0,20	0,68
Molise	-	-	-	0,81
Apulia	-	-	-	0,16
Calabria	1.110	392	0,17	0,62
Campania	3.609	1.275	0,19	0,21
Sicily	3.871	1.368	0,16	0,11
South	19.124	6.758	0,21	0,34
Italy	53.306	18.836	0,24	0,38

Source: authors processing based on Candidate and Leader Selection data

Note: in the cases of Lombardy, Piedmont, Veneto, Lazio, Campania, and Sicily, columns 4 and 5 data are calculated as the mean of sub-regional values. The same goes for inter-regional data and for national data.

To begin with, even by looking at the Aosta Valley case, it is clear that moving from absolute to relative values we have to rethink our evaluations. Looking at the data, it comes out that the highest participation index was recorded in the central Italy (the so-called Red Zone) and North

West regions. In particular, besides the previously cited Aosta Valley, in Emilia-Romagna (0.29) and in Lombardy (0.28) the index reaches the highest values. On the other hand, the area of the country with the lowest participation is the South, with an overall index of 0.21 and with three regions (Campania, Calabria, and Sicily) which remain below 0.20. Finally, the North East falls in the middle, with a participation index equal to 0.23.

Aside from the voter point of view, the appeal of an electoral contest can also be assessed from the candidates' side. In this case it is worth asking how much attention has been provoked among the Five Star Movement supporters (the only ones who were able to put themselves forward). That is to say, to what extent the potential candidates have responded to their leaders' call.

To answer the question, we refer to the last column of table 1, which shows the *competition attractiveness index* (CA). The CA index is given by the ratio between the number of selected candidates and the number of selectable candidates (as to say, all those who run for the nominee). However, in order to avoid high index values indicating a low level of attractiveness, we have reduced the figure to 1. In such a way, the CA index varies between a minimum of 0 – the number of selected candidates is identical to the number of selectable candidates – to a maximum, only theoretical, of 1 – the number of selected candidates is equal to zero (and there is at least one candidate in the primaries), a case which is obviously impossible¹¹.

Before going into the details, it is necessary to verify if the CA index is positively correlated with the number of places to be filled in the future electoral lists. If it was thus, in fact, the number of candidates would be a function of the number of places in the list, and therefore, it would have nothing to do with the higher or lower desire to candidate oneself on the part of the militants of a certain electoral district. Currently the correlation coefficient ($r = 0.155$) is positive, but very weak, and above all, not statistically significant. The CA index, therefore, does not depend on the number of seats which must be assigned in a certain electoral district.

The index can be interpreted in two ways. A negative interpretation could adjudge the excessive number of candidates with respect to the number of available seats as an indicator of a fierce "race for the seat", by activists who were incapable of making it there in previous elections. Instead, from a positive standpoint, it could be read as the consequence of territorial penetration by the M5s. We could maintain, in fact, that the number of candidates, far higher than necessary, was mainly due to the deep-rooting of Grillo's party.

However, placing aside these interpretations (which are not mutually exclusive), it is opportune to take a closer look at the attractiveness of the Five Star Movement primaries. In line with the situation for the selectors, the Red Zone was the area of the country in which the attractiveness of primaries was higher. The CA index, in fact, is equal to 0.50, peaking at 0.80 in Umbria. However, overall the most intense candidate race was in Calabria, where the CA index reached 0.81. Despite the peak in Calabria, the CA index in the South overall (0.34) was lower,

¹¹ Obviously, since in an electoral competition there must be at least one winner, the maximum possible limit is 0.9999.

not only compared to those in the red regions, but even those recorded in the North-East (0.47). Finally, in the North West the index hit its lowest level, at 0.24. Looking at the individual regions, it is worth noting that, just as in the case of the highest peaks, also the regions with the lowest index – Lombardy (0.06), Sardinia (0.07) and Sicily (0.11) – show very different social, economic and political characteristics. This confirms the indifference of the index not only to the number of places available, but also to the features of the single territories. What strikes us, – and compromises the validity of the hypothesis of the Movement’s deep-rooting – is the low value of the index in a region such as Sicily, in which M5s centrality is not only solid (if you think of its enormous success in 2012 regional elections), but above all symbolic. In short, if in such an important region the primary elections were relatively unattractive, the same appeal is not probably a result of the territorial rooting of Grillo’s party, but instead the desire of the non-elected activists to obtain a prestigious political office. In any case, at this level such a conclusion can only be a simple conjecture in need of a systematic empirical check.

Hence it was a competition which saw a low participation – but, as we know, this outcome was willfully pursued by its organizers – and, especially in some areas of the country, as attractive to those who, possessing the right requisites, wanted to put themselves forward as candidates. At this point we need to ask a question which is fundamental to electoral studies: was it a competitive selection?

To provide an answer it is necessary to make reference to the Kenig index (2008): the ratio between the effective number of candidates¹² (Laakso and Taagepera 1979) and their real number (shown in table 2). This index varies between 0 and 1 and, as opposed to others¹³, takes into consideration the performance of all competing candidates.

The Kenig index is very appropriate in such situations where the distribution of percentages of votes between the candidates is relatively equal. Such a trend seems to be largely spread in the M5s primary elections.

Figure 1 sorts the regions according to their level of competitiveness. Moreover, it groups them into quartiles – identified by different shades of grey – in order to graphically show the areas of the country in which selection is mostly competitive¹⁴. Indeed it is evident that, in addition to those from the Aosta Valley, the groups of regions with the highest level of competition were made up of Sicily, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Abruzzo and Liguria. Whereas at the other end of

¹² Adopting the logic of the effective number of parties, ENC indicates the number of effective candidates. The formula is: $1/\sum c_i^2$. Where c_i is the percentage of votes obtained by the candidate i .

¹³ Among these, the *closeness* which takes into consideration the distance between the percentage votes of the top two candidates. Having carried out the calculation, we have been able to ascertain that, in this case, this characteristic cannot be used.

¹⁴ As stated, we decided to calculate the Kenig index on a regional basis. For information, we list the index for 13 districts that make up the six multi-district: Campania 1 = 0.447; Campania 2 = 0.506; Lazio 1 = 0.451; Lazio 2 = 0.790; Lombardy 1 = 0.447; Lombardy 2 = 0.582; Lombardy 3 = 0.642; Piedmont 1 = 0.434; Piedmont 2 = 0.637; Sicily 1 = 0.718; Sicily 2 = 0.831; Veneto 1 = 0.524; Veneto 2 = 0.551.

the scale, in which the least competitive regions are grouped, we find Emilia-Romagna, Campania, Calabria and Umbria, two southern regions and two from the Red Zone.

Table. 2 - *The level of competitiveness*

<i>Region</i>	<i>N. of candidates</i>	<i>N. of effective candidates. (ENC)</i>	<i>Closeness adapted</i>	<i>Kenig Index</i>
Lombardy	110	57,29	95,2	0,521
Aosta Valley	3	2,95	96,4	0,983
Piedmont	114	60,49	97,9	0,531
Liguria	23	15,38	98,8	0,669
North-West	250	136,11	97,0	0,544
Friuli V.G.	22	15,29	99,7	0,695
Veneto	145	77,81	97,4	0,537
Trentino A.A.	32	-	-	-
North-East	199	93,10	98,6	0,557
Tuscany	79	43,86	99,4	0,555
Emilia-Romagna	100	48,45	97,4	0,484
Umbria	81	34,31	96,6	0,423
Marche	47	30,26	96,9	0,644
'Red Zone'	307	156,88	97,6	0,511
Lazio	105	58,58	99,5	0,557
Abruzzo	27	18,18	98,7	0,674
Sardinia	27	14,28	97,2	0,529
Basilicata	34	17,18	98,6	0,505
Molise	26	-	-	-
Apulia	61	-	-	-
Calabria	78	36,26	99,5	0,465
Campania	92	43,07	97,9	0,468
Sicily	71	54,37	99,0	0,766
South	521	241,92	98,6	0,557
Italy	1277	628,01	98,0	0,542

Source: authors processing based on Candidate and Leader Selection data.

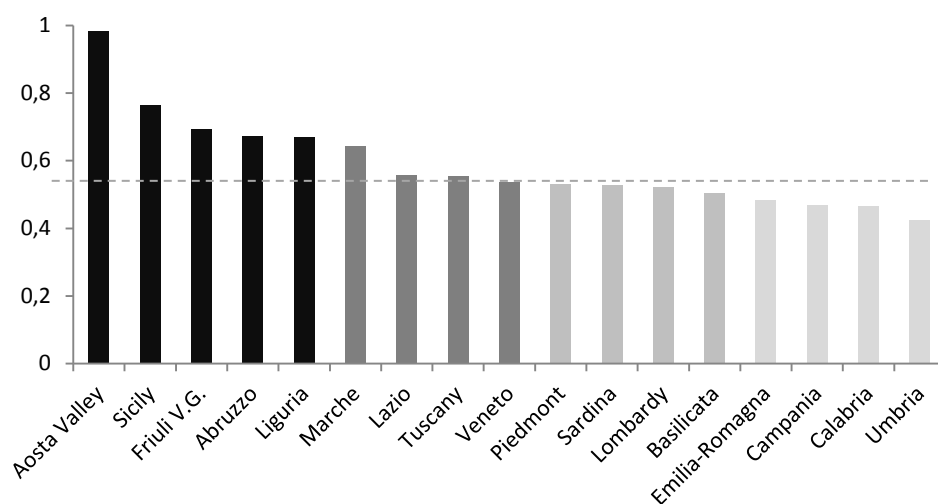
Note: a) in the cases of Lombardy, Piedmont, Veneto, Lazio, Campania, and Sicily, the ENC is calculated considering the ENC registered at the sub-regional level.

b) The Kenig index calculus is based on the ENC and on the overall number of candidates. The same procedure is adopted both for the inter-regional area and for the national level.

According to Downs (1957), competitiveness can have an impact, not necessarily a positive one, on the turnout in future elections. Of course, for such a theory to be plausible and, therefore, subject to verification, two conditions must be present: first of all, the same primary elections must be a great occasion for participation, able to involve a considerable amount of the party's electorate (or of the coalition); secondly, in the case of primaries for the parliamentary seats, the choice of vote at the general election should depend more on the individual candi-

dates present in the list than on the allegiances inspired by the leader of the party. When, as in the case of the M5s, the primaries were participated in by 0.23% of electors and the leader of the party presents himself as a master of the stage, it is totally hazardous and irrational to predict an impact of any type – that isn't, obviously, the definition of the names of candidates – on future elections. For these reasons, the competitiveness analysis is merely descriptive. However, such a description, far from being irrelevant, helps us better understand the nature of the competition organized by the leaders of the Movement.

Figure 1 - The Competitiveness in the Italian Regions. Kenig Index



3. Individual data: selectable and selected candidates' profile

After dealing and discussing with the general traits of the competition, we enter into details about individual data. In particular, firstly, we look at the whole spectrum of candidates, and, secondly, at the most successful candidates. For this second group we try to ascertain the reasons behind their success.

At least from a purely sociological point of view, the profile of candidates does not seem very different to that of a typical political seat candidate. Furthermore, there are only 193 females (12.9%). The average age is 43 years. Regarding their educational background, 46.9% of candidates are graduates, and a third of them also have a post-graduate degree (PhD, master, specialization); 45.7% have completed high school; finally 6.3% have only a middle school certificate (around 1% of candidates did not declare their study level). Focusing our attention on job positions the majority of candidates are employees (around 35%); 20% are freelance professional and just over 10% self-employed. Furthermore, 7.4% are entrepreneur; 5.8% teachers;

6.3% production workers; 3.6% managers; 3.8% unemployed; 2.5% students; 2.3% pensioners. Only 0.5% are housewives (0.4% did not declare their professional status).

Because of the nature of the candidateship regulation, no candidate had previously been in a similar role – either at local or national level – within other political parties, not even within the M5s. Only 0.5% of candidates stated in their presentation form (diffused on Grillo's blog or in a short video on *You Tube*) to have had in the past political party membership: among them there were ex-militants from the Italy of Values (Idv), Italian Greens, Democratic Party of the Left (Pds), Italian Socialist Party (Psi) and Radical Party and even those who had carried out a brief period of political activity within the Northern League (Ln).

An important element seems to be represented by the *Meetup* membership of candidates (the online platform of the M5s) and thus by their activism at a local level¹⁵. Indeed at the primary elections days, around 43% of candidates were, in fact, signed up to the platform and 41% of these members performed a high level role within a local group: *organizer*, *co-organizer* and *assistant-organizer*. As we shall see, the local groups – which today number around 1,220¹⁶ – carried out an important role during the selection process phases, as well as later on in the course of the national electoral campaign.

They were a sort of “electoral committee” able to act as a springboard for candidates, often unknown at national level, but already active in local groups for many years.

Having outlined the sociological and political backgrounds of candidates, it is fitting to look at the winners of the selection. To begin with, there were 822 winners (55.3% of the total): 556 were inserted in the lists for the Chamber of Deputies (based on their age) and 266 in the Senate lists.

Firstly, among the selected candidates the number of *Meetup* members increases: if within the total number of candidates, the number of members stops 43%, within the selected candidates it reaches 55%. The number of women also increases. Considering the whole spectrum of primary candidates, the number of women was slightly below 13%, within the selected candidates the female presence reached 18.3%. The average age of candidates remains mainly unchanged, passing from 43 to 41 years old. Also regarding to education and job positions the scenario does not change: the number of graduate candidates prevails, along with 35% of employees and 20% freelance professionals.

¹⁵ A multimedia platform used (from 2005 onwards) by groups of supporters of the Genoan ex-comic. The tool allowed hundreds of local groups to join together, to meet *offline* and sometimes to organize themselves during administrative (local and regional) elections, while maintaining a relative autonomy from the national staff.

¹⁶ The figure is from 31st August 2013. The number of *Meetup* groups saw a peak during the electoral period, when new groups were formed. After the general elections of February 2013, the number of groups has slightly been decreased (with the closure of groups which had only been formed by the electoral committee of some districts). For more precise and detailed analysis, see Mosca (2013).

In short, what emerges is that selectors had a relative preference for women and candidates who were most active at the local level.

Further restricting the analysis, we focus on those candidates who were able to gain a number of votes that allowed them to win the first places in the list. Such a placement, in many cases, led to a safe victory in the parliamentary ballot.

First of all, among the 54 top-list candidates (36 men and 18 women located at the top of the M5s's electoral lists for the Chamber of Deputies or Senate), only 42 entered into Parliament in the XVII legislature. In particular, 7 out of 12 non-elected top-list candidates came from foreign districts. Moreover, neither the top-list candidates of Molise were elected, nor the two competing in the single member district of Aosta Valley and, lastly, nor the top-list candidate for the senatorial elections of Trentino-Alto Adige.

However, aside from the cited figures, the most interesting aspect concerns the reasons that allowed these candidates – potentially unknown at a national level and “unfamiliar” with politics – to win a noteworthy level of support.

First of all, what have played a prime role in the winning of votes seems to have been – rather than the presentation video or their “programmatic curriculum” – their political past, or rather their past as activists, which was adapted into the organization of meetings of a local nature, diffused through the web platform *Meetup*.

Within *Meetup* – despite the overemphasis on the rhetoric of horizontality – there is a kind of pyramid which gives life to the organizational flow which attributes operative roles to some activists.

Naturally, carrying out a top level role worked in the favor of candidates, as it offered them a greater level of popularity. In stronger terms, we can sustain that, given the excluding characteristics of the rules of the game, having (or not) a role within a local group often proved decisive for the winning candidate¹⁷. More precisely, within the *Meetup* groups it was possible to identify four levels and therefore several organizational roles: in addition to that of humble *member*, at the top there are the *organizers* (who set up the *Meetup*) who are assisted by *co-organizer* and by *assistant organizer*. These two figures act as a kind of staff, able to assist the *organizer* during events, local meetings, and administrative election campaigns.

Looking at the data, we notice that 26 out of 38 top-list candidates signed up to the *Meetup* platform, are a part of a group active at the municipal level. For this reason, they won their popularity at a ‘super’ local level. Only 16 top-list candidates were not signed up to any *Meetup* in the period of the primaries.

If among all the candidates the majority was simply *member* (59%), in the top-list candidates, the *assistant organizer* and *co-organizer* (54%) prevail, making a total of *Meetup* members

¹⁷ A few concrete examples can be instructive: in the Lombardy district 3, the candidate with the highest percentage of votes (14%) held for some time the position of *organizer* in the province of Pavia. Another interesting case was in Sardinia, where a candidate was able to win over 15% of preferences: in this case, his first level role could be considered his activity within the territory, carried out since 2005 and, therefore, in a period prior to the official formation of the M5s.

equal to 71%. In short it is evident that the success of candidates is related to the activity carried out previously at a local level. Only in wider electoral constituencies – therefore with a larger number of seats available (Lazio, Piedmont) – candidates less active at the local level have been able to really compete.

4. Outcomes and consequences of the selection process

What specific impact did the selection process have? This is the main question of the paragraph. Having outlined the most salient points of the primary election, it is worth considering its final outcomes and its consequences, which should be measured looking at the arrangement of the new Parliament.

The M5s primaries have produced more a kind of “recognition among similar people” (Mosca and Vaccari 2013), than a real moment of political participation. However, the first experiment of an *online* primary had a significant impact on the public opinion¹⁸ and short term effects on some traditional parties which, in part affected by the Grillo’s party, decided to select (although with different rules and means) their aspiring parliamentarians through a primary election¹⁹.

We examine the *outcomes* of the selection, focusing on some of the socio-graphic characteristics of the primary winners elected in Parliament. We also compare these data against those discussed in paragraph 3, related to the various phases of the selection process.

Instead, the consequences affect the structure of the new Parliament. In particular, it would be very useful to understand what impact the M5s selection process had on renewing the parliamentary class. To achieve this goal, we compare the characteristics of parliamentary groups, whose member were elected solely by primaries (M5s), with those groups whose members were chosen partially by this method (Pd and Left, Ecology and Freedom - Sel), as well as with those parliamentarians selected solely by the party leadership (People of Freedom - Pdl, Ln, Civic Choice - Sc, Brothers of Italy - Fdi).

Looking at the outcome – that is the change in characteristics of the M5s parliamentary group compared with the overall online primary candidates – we remark that, shifting from the three areas of analysis (selectable candidates, selected candidates, top-list candidates) to the elected in Parliament, the gender ratio is reversed and men return to be predominant.

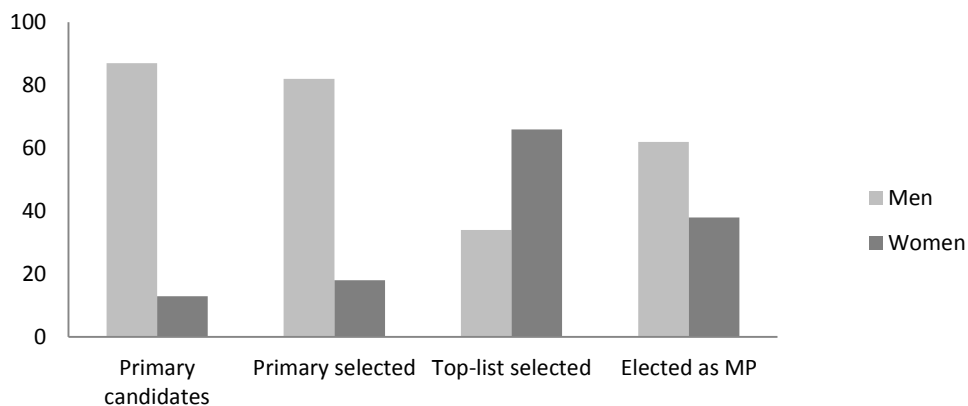
As figure 2 shows, for example, if the female presence among top-list candidates is equal to 66%, considering who is elected as MP it stops at 38%. However this figure is not negligible. In fact, as we know, woman selectable candidates were only 13%.

¹⁸ http://www.beppegrillo.it/2013/01/tsunami_tour.html. As you can see from the videos, during almost every stage of his electoral “Tsunami Tour”, Grillo used the *online* primaries as a *slogan* capable of stressing how central direct democracy is in the Movement political philosophy.

¹⁹ The reference is to Pd and Sel, which on 29th and 30th December 2012 held primary elections to select the majority of their candidates.

Looking again at primaries outcome, another interesting comparison concerns the average age of the candidates. We know that, overall, the average age of the primary candidates was 42 years old, but the selection process in fact lowered the average age. Among the top-list candidates the average age is 38 years old. However, the most relevant point is that the average of the new-parliamentarians is just 36 years old. More specifically, around 30% of M5s' new members of Parliament are under 29 years old.

Figure. 2 – Female Presence from Primaries to Parliament (percentage terms)

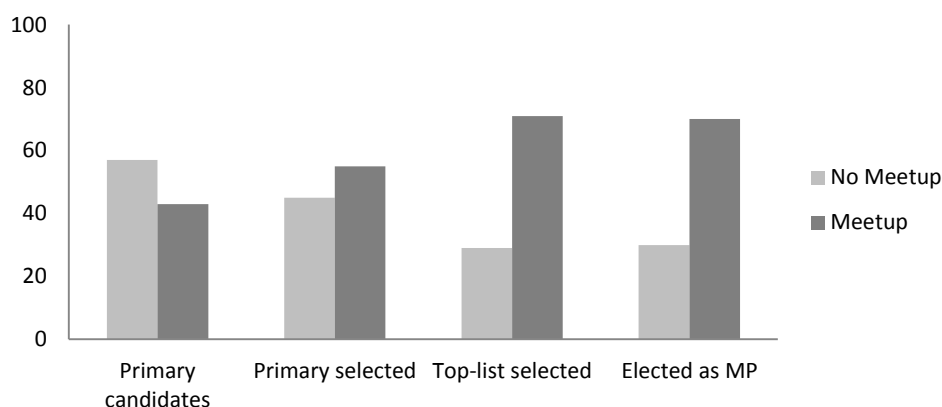


The other comparison is about *Meetup* membership: figure 3 shows that the members of the M5s' *online* territorial platform are largely overrepresented both among the top-list candidates, and among the elected in Parliament. In fact, as we know, 43% of all the selectable candidates were composed by *Meetup* members. This percentage, however, reached 71% for the top-list candidates and 70% among the new parliamentarians.

In general, therefore, if we focus on the profile of the elected in Parliament, we underline a strong presence of young (even if not very young) candidates who are active within the *Meetup*. The percentages regarding job position are unaltered, with employees at 35% in all phases of the selection process. Instead, there is a slight rise in the presence of graduates among those elected in Parliament. The M5s electors²⁰ and selectors have thus followed similar voting strategies. They have not looked at professional or educational elements. Instead, they have rewarded those who fall in a relatively younger age range. The only relevant difference in behavior concerns the gender. The vote of selectors favored women, while that of the electors produced a predominantly male parliamentary group.

²⁰ As it is known, the electors had not a vote of preference. Their power was that of approving or rejecting the list emerging from the primaries.

Figure. 3 – Presence of Meetup members from Primaries to Parliament (percentage terms)



Anyway, the most important effects of the candidate selection process concern its consequences on the composition of the Parliament. That is, the political arena in which selected (and then elected) candidates are involved.

The candidate selection process may affect the peculiarities of new MPs. To test this hypothesis, we compare the composition of the different groups on the basis of two important indicators of renewal: the number of women and the number of young parliamentarians.

First of all, M5s has brought to Parliament 163 MPs: 109 in the Chamber of Deputies (37 women) and 54 in the Senate (25 women)²¹. However, the key point is that the Grillo's group is, at *Montecitorio*, the second ranking for female representation (33.9%). The first place is held by the Pd, with 37.9% female representatives. If we exclude Sel – with 27% female deputies – in the other groups the percentage of women is far lower. It should be highlighted that the Northern League decided to elect all of its women in the Senate²².

In the Senate the M5s elected the highest number of women (47.1%). The Pd follows with 40.7% and the Ln with 30%. Women's presence in the Centre-Right is fairly limited.

Referring to the second indicator of renewal, we analyze only the groups' arrangement within the Chamber of Deputies (young candidates, between 25 and 40 years old, can be elected as deputies only). In this case, the deputies are divided both on the basis of the list of election and of their age-cohort. In particular, we identify five cohorts: *under* 30, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, and *over* 60. The M5s has the greatest number of parliamentarians between 25 and 29 years

²¹ Presently (September 2013), the M5s's parliamentarians are 155.

²² Those percentages are calculated on the basis of the parliamentary groups' composition at the beginning of the XVII legislature (15th March 2013).

(25.6%). The Ln and the Pd follows with, respectively, 5% and 4,4% of *under 30*²³. The most represented age-cohort is that of members aged between 30 and 39 years. These count for 67.8% of the M5s group; 40% of the Northern League group; 35% of the Pdl group; 27% of the Sel parliamentary group; and, finally, almost 21% of the democrats. While within M5s group the most common age-cohort is 30-39 years, within Pd and Sel the most represented are those between 50 and 59 years: in both cases, they are around 35%.

If we group together the parliamentary groups on the basis of their candidate selection process (primaries; primaries and party leaders choice; just party leaders choice), the scenario in figure 4 emerges.

Figure. 4 – Type of Selection process and MP's gender (percentage terms)

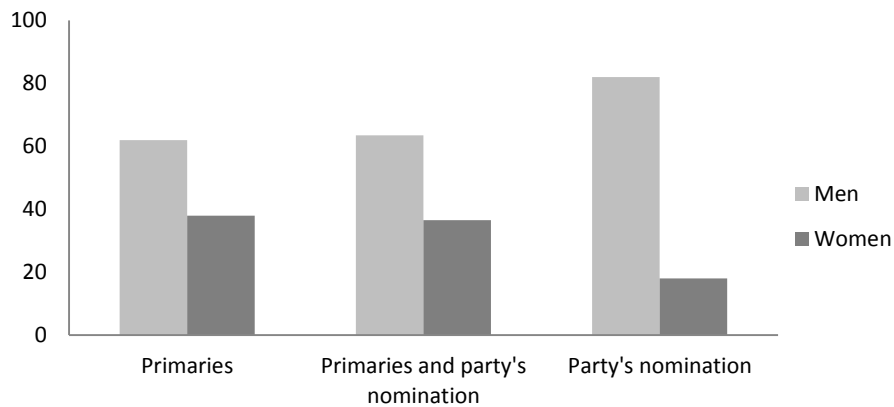


Figure 4 clearly shows how the M5s parliamentarians – all selected through primary elections – are largely the youngest. The 95.4% of them are aged 39 or younger. It goes without saying that such an exceptional percentage cannot solely be attributed to the type of selection adopted. If it was thus, in fact, among the Pd and Sel parliamentarians chosen through primary elections we would have found similar percentages. Actually, only 25,4% of their deputies are young and if we consider those selected through the primaries the number increases only by a few percent. Considering the parties that have selected their candidates through party leaders' nominations, the amount of young members falls to 14%. In summary, primary elections favor younger age-cohorts and this occurred in more significant proportions within the Grillo's party.

All in all, partly because of the M5s, the one of XVII legislature is a deeply-transformed Parliament. If we compare it with that of the XVI legislature (2008-2013), we notice that there is both a higher under 30 representation – with a lowering of the average age in the Senate as

²³ The overall percentage of under 30 within the Chamber of Deputies is equal to 7%.

well –, as well as a higher female representation. At the beginning of the current XVII legislature, the number of under 30 representatives was 7.6%. A surprisingly high percentage considering that this age-cohort was completely absent in past legislature. On the contrary, looking at the 30-39 years deputies, we remark that they have risen to almost 23 percentage points, compared with previous legislature. As concerns the gender, it should be highlighted that presently women constitute 31% of the parliamentarians (32% in the Chamber of Deputies and 30% in the Senate). This is an increase of 50% compared with the already significant level (at least by Italian standards) reached in the past legislature, when female parliamentarians totaled 20.9% (22.2% in the Chamber of Deputies and 18.5% in the Senate).

What we have said so far does not fully cover the issue of primary elections consequences. However, it is obviously still complicated to examine in an exhaustive manner the effects of a new parliamentary class and, in particular, that of the M5s on the functioning of Parliament. Moreover, it is equally difficult to examine the effects on intra-party relations. Future researches could be dedicated to the study of the level of internal cohesion within parliamentary groups and on the analysis of the relationship between the party in public office and others parties' organizational faces. Alternatively, they could look at cohesion with other parliamentary groups (and above all with those groups characterized by a top-down candidates selection process), in relation to the voting choice on specific policies.

5. Conclusions

The M5S primaries have responded to two needs. Firstly, the selection of candidates for the general elections of February 2013. Secondly, the blocking of candidates who had not been involved in the short history of the Movement and, therefore, potentially less-controllable by the national leaders. As documented, both aims have been substantially achieved. On the one hand, the *online* primaries were an effective tool for candidate selection in a party without an intermediate subnational structure (apart from the *Meetup leaders*) and, therefore, with insurmountable difficulties in following traditional candidate selection methods. To this, the image of horizontal democracy associated with primary elections is added.

On the other hand, the entry of external candidates was regulated by the nature of the competition rules. Rules which were far from inclined to encourage participation, as much in terms of *supply* (access to candidacy) as for *demand* (possibility to vote).

For this reason, a global assessment of the primaries of the M5s also brings us to reflect on the internal organization of the Grillo and Casaleggio party. From this point of view, first of all, a strong control by the *central office* emerges, both on the *party on the ground*, as in the *public office*. The consequences could be the dissatisfaction of two “party faces”. Firstly, the *party on the ground* complains²⁴ that it is not able to participate fully enough in internal decisions. Sec-

²⁴ The dissatisfaction of a large part of the M5s activists is supported by results from a web survey carried out by *Candidate and Leader Selection* after the *online* primaries. The web survey has been set up to

only, the *corpus* of elected could place distance between themselves and the central organization or discover divergences within the group itself. In this context, it should be taken into consideration that after every election the “working nucleus” of almost all parties becomes the elected body (Hazan 2006). It is therefore certainly no coincidence that the selection of candidate was influenced by the staff central control. And such a control was much stronger than a diffuse enthusiasm would have us believe.

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gather the opinions of the selectors on the candidates selection process. Sample: 638 cases; CAWI method; survey carried out between 27th February and 19th March 2013. In particular, data shows that 56% of the respondents were not satisfied with the way selection was carried out and therefore, would like to change something in future rules. The most appreciated change would be on voting rules (24%). Another well-accepted change would be on candidacy rules (16%).

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