1. Preference voting systems in Italy and their impact on local elections

In comparative studies of electoral systems preference voting has not been so much debated. The most significant studies have analyzed its three main components - ballot, constituency and formulatic structures\(^1\) – and its effects on party systems and voters’ behavior especially in single countries such as Italy, Japan and Ireland\(^2\).

As far as the Italian case is concerned, political scientists such as Luigi D’Amato (1964), Pasquale Scaramozzino (1979), Franco Cazzola (1972), Renato D’Amico (1987) and Gianfranco Pasquino (1972) have best provided useful studies, focusing on the political implications of preference voting in the golden age of partitocrazia (1948-1992)\(^3\). In the founding parliamentary election of 1948 the introduction of a proportional electoral system based on open party lists characterized a polarized party system and political instability until the early 1990s. During this period, voters could optionally indicate their preference for as many as three (or in districts with 16 or more representatives, four) candidates from the party list they selected\(^4\). As of 1992, voters could use only a single preference vote\(^5\).

In the Italian flexible system voters could cast either a list vote or nominative votes for particular candidates. The number of preference votes gathered by each politician could provide a direct popularity measure. Persons with reputation or supported by parties were generally placed in

\(^{1}\) There are different applications: 1) personalization list procedures i.e. votes given only to candidates; 2) SNTV Single Non-Transferable Vote when expressed in nominal terms; 3) STV Single Transferable Vote in ordinal choice. See Farrell, Mackerras, and McAllister 1996.

\(^{2}\) One exception in comparative studies is the analysis made by Richard Katz (1994).

\(^{3}\) “Partitocrazia is a distortion and perversion of party government in which all parties collude in sharing available state resources (“spoils”) and appropriating them for their own benefit” (Pasquino and Valbruzzi 2015:161)

\(^{4}\) Typically, only about 30 percent of Italian voters used any of their available preference votes. The Southern average is 50% and the Northern one is between 10-20% (Pasquino 1972).

\(^{5}\) A referendum on the electoral law was held on June 1991. Voters were asked whether the clause of the law on the number of preferences should be reduced. The result was 95.6% in favour, with a turnout of 65%.
higher position in order to maximize their vote share as well as preferences were usually concentrated on candidates at the top of the party list (Katz & Bardi 1980). Consequently, voting preferences could determine intra-party competition\(^6\) and allow the predominance of some deputies associated to a specific fraction that it was able to express public offices. In fact, one political aspect of preference voting was related to the system of fractions and tendencies mainly within the Italian Christian Democracy to assure their parliamentary representation (quota). The negative side of these competitions among fractions was the way to hand out benefits to the individual voter (vote-buying) that paved the way to clientelism/corruption, especially in the Southern part of Italy.

As Parisi and Pasquino (1977) argued intraparty preference voting is a potentially indicator of three model of party behavior i.e. traditionalism (voto di scambio), sophistication (voto d'opinione), and mobilization (voto d'appartenenza). The data suggested that traditional political culture may contribute to the contextual prerequisites for sophistication or mobilization to lead to preference voting.

It is true that in Italy both at national and local levels preference voting allowed candidates to compete with their party mates to be elected and high usages of preference voting were present mainly in local elections.

Starting with the elections held in 1994, the electoral system was substantially altered, and a mixed PR/majoritarian system (three fourths plurality and one fourth proportional) was implemented (D’Alimonte 2005)\(^7\).

This election represented the cut-off between the so called “First” and “Second” Republic due to domestic and International factors that provoked the collapse of the partyocracy system and the electoral dealignment that implied the decline of traditional mass parties and the rise of new political outsiders and parties.

The last twenty years of the history of Italian politics faced the emergence of personal parties, the degree of abstention increased, especially at local level, and a new record in the electoral volatility took place in the parliamentary 2013 election where the new Beppe Grillo’s party, called Five Star Movement\(^8\) (FSM), got 25.6% of votes (109 deputies and 54 senators). In the Italian political landscape two changes in the electoral laws in 1993 and in 2005\(^9\) occurred but the main political outcomes were the formation of a tri-polar system characterized by the growing electoral strength of the FSM a catch-all anti system party able to attract votes from different parts of the political spectrum.

There is no doubt that the process of personalization of politics and the “new media” strongly influenced the rise of personal parties in the Italian electoral campaigns of the 2000s. In such a context Grillo’s party was built on the dual pillars of mistrust of traditional politics and honesty of its members. So, its capacity to gather voters’ preferences is one of the main challenges to face for a new party in 154 municipalities with over 15,000 inhabitants, called to the polls for majors and councilors.

\(^6\) The analyses show that the degree of intraparty competition is lowest in rigid list systems, moderate in personal voting systems and highest in flexible lists (Bogdanor 1995).

\(^7\) Another important change in local electoral low occurred in 2012 with the law n. 215. According to its law, in the municipalities with over 5,000 inhabitants, voters have the possibility to use two preferences during local elections: one for a male candidate and the second for a female candidate. This possibility is called “gender preference” (“preferenza di genere”).

\(^8\) For the origin, the kind of organization and political representation of FSM, see Lanzone (2015), Corbetta & Gualmini (2013) and Biorcio & Natale (2013).

\(^9\) The so called Porcellum i.e. a bonus-adjusted PR with long and closed lists preventing the voters to choose their candidates, was ruled unconstitutional in 2013.
2. The Five Star Movement in local elections: eight chief-towns in comparison

This paper wants to explore preference voting for candidates of FSM party list in the local elections held in June 2016 in eight Italian chief towns: Roma, Torino, Bologna, Napoli, Cagliari, Cosenza, Milano and Trieste. In this regard, table 1 summarizes the party electoral results during last local elections. In particular, it shows the voting list, the number of preferences, the results during the first and the second ballot (percentage values) and the number of seats obtained by the party.

Table 1. The Five Star Movement in eight chief-towns (2016 local elections)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOWN</th>
<th>VOTING LIST</th>
<th>NUMBER OF PREFERENCES</th>
<th>VOTES % I BALLOT</th>
<th>VOTES % II BALLOT</th>
<th>SEATS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roma</td>
<td>420.435</td>
<td>41.694</td>
<td>35.32%</td>
<td>67.15%</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torino</td>
<td>107.680</td>
<td>11.483</td>
<td>30.01%</td>
<td>54.56%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bologna</td>
<td>28.115</td>
<td>3.865</td>
<td>16.59%</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cagliari</td>
<td>6.254</td>
<td>2.450</td>
<td>8.76%</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cosenza</td>
<td>954</td>
<td>968</td>
<td>2.36%</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milano</td>
<td>52.376</td>
<td>4.429</td>
<td>10.39%</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Napoli</td>
<td>36.359</td>
<td>6.916</td>
<td>9.66%</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trieste</td>
<td>13.173</td>
<td>2.863</td>
<td>17.58%</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: [http://elezioni.interno.it](http://elezioni.interno.it)

Starting from the analysis of voting preferences in the closed primary online, the degree of local penetration of the party, the popularity and electability of individual candidates will be explored in order to better understand the electoral and political performance of the FSM and its institutionalization in the Italian party system. In particular, the third paragraph will describe the methods of candidate selection and the results of potential primary elections with two type of analysis: attractiveness and competitiveness rates among candidates. In the fourth section we will consider preference rates in the eight cases, with a comparison between different lists in different towns. Also we will calculate the level of competitiveness among candidates during the first ballot of vote. In the fifth and final section we will tempt to evaluate the level of rootedness in the specific case (reasons of candidate success/failure) of the FSM and we will analyze the party transformations across time and space.

3. From selection to candidacy: who are the “Five Star” candidates?

The Five Star Movement did not use one method of selection of the candidates for the 2016 municipal elections, neither for the mayors nor for the councillors. In the eight chief towns we observed, three methods have been used: *designation*, that is the choice by the local direction of the party, the national one or both of them together; *internal selection* by an assembly of the members of the local Meetup; *primary election*, where all the certified members of the M5S living in the city
can vote. There is not a link between the methods used for selecting the mayoral candidates and the ones for the aspiring councillors, since the FSM used primary elections in all the cities but Bologna and Turin to select the mayors, while this method has been used only in Cosenza, Napoli and Rome to choose also the council candidates; table 2 summarizes the selection systems used in the county seats.

Table 2. FSM’s methods of candidate selection for 2016 municipal elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOWN</th>
<th>CANDIDATES FOR THE COUNCIL</th>
<th>SELECTION OF COUNCIL CANDIDATES</th>
<th>SELECTION OF MAYORAL CANDIDATES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bologna</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Designation</td>
<td>Designation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cagliari</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Designation</td>
<td>Online primary election</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cosenza</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Primary election</td>
<td>Primary election</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milano</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Designation</td>
<td>Primary election</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Napoli</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Online primary election</td>
<td>Online primary election</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roma</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Online primary election</td>
<td>Online primary election</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torino</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Internal selection</td>
<td>Internal selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trieste</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Internal selection</td>
<td>Online primary election</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It appears that designation has been used in the cities where there were internal conflicts or problems with the selection of candidates: Bologna is the county seat of Emilia-Romagna, the region where the FSM achieved its first relevant electoral results and some of the long-time members ask for more democracy within the party; here the rules for running for the nomination required the aspiring mayors to present a list of candidates for the council. This rules was meant to avoid “infiltrators”, but it de facto assured the appointment of the incumbent city group chair Massimo Bugani. In Milan, the winner of the mayoral primary election later decided to renounce the candidacy because of heavy criticism against her 10.

Designation has been conducted in a different way in Cagliari, where there has been an internal conflict: here the FSM organised primaries for selecting the mayoral nominee, each candidate was supported by a list and the member of the list of the winners would be designated for the council elections 11.

A similar situation happened in Trieste, where the mayoral candidates were supported by lists as well 12; but here the supporters of the winners were not directly appointed for the council elections; the council candidates were selected by the winning list in an assembly, and therefore we consider it as an internal selection.

Finally, in Turin the FSM did not organise primary elections because the mayoral nominee was chosen unanimously by an assembly of the local members, and therefore the councillors were selected this way as well.

Primary elections

Where primaries for the councils have been organized, they were linked to the mayoral ones: all the participants could run for the nomination for mayor, and the ones who did not get it would be selected for the council lists. However, the voting system was not the same in all the cities.

The first primary election to select both the mayoral and the council candidates was held in Cosenza, in Calabria. Here, in January 2016, the FSM organized a path to the nomination in which the aspiring mayors were asked to participate to thematic forums and to at least two of three assemblies where they should confront with the citizens; at the end of this path, the local Meetup

organized another assembly on 30th January where the enrolled members could cast their preferences for the candidates. In contrast with the FSM’s praxis, these primaries were not held online, and the organizers did not keep the minutes of the assembly, neither they spread the official results, about which only partial data are available\textsuperscript{13}.

In Rome the organization of the primaries was clearer. The vote was held on 18 February; all the certified members of the FSM could vote on the party’s website for the primaries\textsuperscript{14} from 10:00 am to 7:00 pm and cast up to five preferences for the candidates, whose outlines and résumés were published online the week before\textsuperscript{15}. After the publication of the results, the organizers would ask the ten candidates with the most preference to participate to the second ballot for selecting the mayoral candidate\textsuperscript{16}; after the run-off and the nomination of the mayor, the 48 candidates with the most preferences would be appointed for the council lists. At the primaries, the candidates were 197 and the voters were 3272 (at the time, the certified members of the FSM in Rome were approximately 9500), while the casted preferences were 14636. Six of the ten most voted candidates agreed to run in the second ballot, which was held on 23rd February\textsuperscript{17}.

The primaries in Napoli were held on 9th March; the rules were the same as the ones in Rome\textsuperscript{18}. The voters were 588, and they casted 2521 preferences for the 60 candidates. Three of the ten most voted candidates agreed to run in the second ballot\textsuperscript{19}, which was held on 15th March.

In both the cities, the actual lists of council candidates did not perfectly match the results of the primaries, for two reasons: some of the participants decided not to run in the elections, and, more importantly, the party had to respect law obligations like the female quota.

Organising primary elections for selecting the candidates for city council is not common in Italy, so the cases described above are particularly noteworthy, because they allow us to learn more about the internal dynamics of the FSM. While there is not enough data to analyse the case of Cosenza, we can examine in depth the results of the primaries in Napoli and Rome. First of all, since the Italian law promoted balanced gender representation in the electoral lists by introducing female quota and the double preference, it is interesting to observe whether the primaries have an impact on the selection of female candidates. As shown in table 3, both in Rome and Napoli almost three quarters of the candidates were male; while the female candidates were able to gather a bit more than one third of the preferences. However, female candidates are more competitive in Rome than in Napoli: besides the victory of Virginia Raggi in the mayoral primaries, there are 22 women among the 49 most voted candidates (44,9%), while in Napoli they are only 12 out of 35 (34,3%).

\textsuperscript{13} All the assemblies were streamed on the YouTube channel of the local section of the party, where they are still visible; however, the video of the final assembly where the candidates were selected is not currently available.

\textsuperscript{14} https://sistemaoperativom5s.beppegrillo.it/

\textsuperscript{15} http://www.beppegrillo.it/2016/02/i_candidati_del_movimento_5_stelle_romaairomani.html (accessed 7 September 2016).

\textsuperscript{16} http://www.beppegrillo.it/2016/02/votazione_per_i_candidati_al_consiglio_comunale_di_roma_romaairomani.html (accessed 7 September 2016).

\textsuperscript{17} http://www.beppegrillo.it/2016/02/i_candidati_del_movimento_5_stelle_a_roma_romaairomani.html (accessed 7 September 2016).

\textsuperscript{18} http://www.beppegrillo.it/2016/03/votazione_per_i_candidati_al_consiglio_comunale_di_napoli.html (accessed 7 September 2016).

\textsuperscript{19} http://www.beppegrillo.it/2016/03/i_candidati_del_movimento_5_stelle_a_napoli.html (accessed 7 September 2016).
The above mentioned results introduce a more general issue: what is the impact of primary elections in promoting participation and competition in the selection of candidates? In order to answer this question, in particular, we consider two measures in candidate behaviour: the primaries’ appeal for aspiring candidates, calculated as the index of appeal of the competition (AC)\textsuperscript{20}, and the level of competitiveness calculated as Kenig index (2008; 2009). It takes into account the effective number of councillor candidates (ENC). This number is based on Laakso and Taagepera (1979) effective number of parties\textsuperscript{21}. The rate ranges from 0 to 1. Kenig index is able to provide important information about the characteristics of electoral competition and about the preference distribution among candidates.

Table 4 shows the index of appeal of the competition, the effective number of candidates and the Kenig index for the two cases.

The data show that the Roman primary was clearly more attractive than the Neapolitan one. This element is consistent with the local context of the elections: while in Naples the FSM was not considered a likely winner because of the popularity of the incumbent mayor, in Rome it was the favourite according to observers and the polls. Therefore, the party was likely to obtain many council seats in Rome, which meant that the candidates could be elected with a few preferences. This was a strong incentive for participation.

On the other hand, competitiveness, as shown by the Kenig’s index, is definitely higher in Naples than in Rome. These results could be linked to the pre-existing presence of the FSM in the local institutions. While the party did not elect any councillor in the 2011 Naples’ election, it gained four seats in Rome in 2013: the four outgoing councillors were the front-runners in the primaries and together gained almost a third of the preferences: their performance is therefore crucial in lowering the rate of competitiveness of the competition.

4. Preference voting in the case of the FSM: results and candidate performances

The Italian Five Star Movement (FSM) was born as a personal party: in 2013 general election its electoral success was constructed especially around the popularity of its leader and founder, Beppe Grillo (Lanzone 2015). Also because of the law in force, parliamentary candidates

\textsuperscript{20} The index of appeal of the competition is calculated as 1 minus the ratio between the number of seats in the list and the number of candidates. Therefore, the value ranges from 0 to 1; the higher the index, the more attractive is the competition.

\textsuperscript{21} The Kenig index is based on the ENC and on the overall number of candidates.
did not have the opportunity to increase their popularity. So, for party candidates, local elections (mayoral and regional) still represent the only possibility to achieve a personal campaign and to construct their credit on the ground.

Between 2008 and 2010 the FSM had its first great chance to obtained seats in municipalities and regions. At the same time, the party was characterized by a feeble local rootedness reflected in a low preference rate compared to traditional forces. As an example, still in 2014, during regional election in Piedmont, the FSM obtained a preference rate equal to 8.7 compared with the rates of 19.2 in the case of the Democratic Party and 17.1 of the coalition formed by PDL/FI (Valbruzzi & Vignati 2014: 691). From 2009, previous researches demonstrated a general decreasing trend in preferential rates, especially during Italian regional elections (Valbruzzi & Vignati 2014; Rombi 2014, 2016). Even in the case of the mayoral elections it is possible to observe a preferential rates decrease among almost all parties (Rombi 2015; 2016). Taking into account the case of the FSM this trend appears still very apparent: surely, municipal elections are the most important occasion to measure the level of party rootedness. In this respect the FSM remains very weak but, at the same time, it is able to bring out some “learning” evidences.

Table 5. Preferential rates in the case of the Five Star Movement (2016, chief towns)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOWN</th>
<th>PREFERENCE RATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roma</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torino</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bologna</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cagliari</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cosenza</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milano</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Napoli</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trieste</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: http://elezioni.interno.it; own calculation

As table 5 shows, the FSM certainly maintains a low level in its preference rates. The same table proposes a comparison between the eight chief-towns included in our analysis. We can notice the lower values in Rome and Turin. They are just the two towns where the party has gained the 2016 mayoral elections and where a large part of voters preferred to express only a voting list or a direct vote to mayor candidate. Also, preference rate does not appear to be closely related to geographical area. With the exception of Cosenza, the values are quite similar regardless of the chief-town location. This aspect will be more visible in the comparative analysis broken down by list/party and not only by town. Especially in the cases of Turin, Milan and Rome, the FSM presented its lists for the second time: five years ago (2011) the party was at the beginning of its political history and its candidates were even more unfamiliar with an electoral campaign. In other cases, the FSM presented its candidates for the first time. For these reasons, we considered inappropriate to propose a comparison between current rates and those of 2011.

Figure 1 proposes a comparison between preference rates in the eight chief-towns. In particular, we consider again the FSM’s preference rate compared to the rates of the three most important parties/lists in each town. In four cases, one of the three main relevant list is not represented by a traditional party, but it was a civic list. In details, in Cagliari was the Partito Sardo d’Azione (PSA) to have a very important role in preference distribution among electoral lists (0.64); in Trieste we noted the civic list in support of mayor candidate Roberto Di Piazza (0.19); in Cosenza we included in our comparison the civic list in support of mayor candidate Mario Occhialto.

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22 The rate is calculated as the ratio between the total of preference votes really cast and the number of preferences expressible. According to the law in force since 2012, the denominator is equal to twice of votes validly cast. The rate ranges from 0 (no preference vote) to 1 (total of voters used the two preferences at your disposal).

23 We considered parties/lists that obtained more than 5% of votes.
(0.58) and in Naples the list in support of mayor candidate Luigi De Magistris (0.22). In other four cases, we compared the FSM with the three most important traditional parties (Democratic Party - PD, Northern League and Forza Italia).

The figure reaffirms a rather low preference rate in the case of the FSM. However, in some cases the same rate approaches to that of other lists. This is, for example, the case of Cagliari, where the FSM’s rate (0.19) is almost equal to that of the Democratic Party (0.20). In the same town the higher rates are those of Forza Italia (0.42) and of the already mentioned PSA (0.64). Probably the most interesting case is represented by Cosenza. In this chef-town, the FSM’s list is able to align its rate to the preferences rates of other electoral opponents. It is true that literature regarding preference voting in Italy demonstrated higher rates in the Southern regions. However it is the case of traditional and strongly rooted parties: so in this framework, the FSM shows an important “evidence of learning” (“segno di apprendimento”). In Cosenza the FSM’s list obtained a preference rate of 0.51 compared to 0.72 of the PD, 0.68 of Forza Italia (FI) and 0.58 of Occhiuto’s civic list. At the contrary, the same learning is not evident in the other two Southern towns (Cagliari and Napoli). Especially in Napoli, the FSM maintains a very low preference rate (0.09) in comparison with other lists (0.39 FI; 0.37 PD; 0.22 civic list).

In general, the scheme shows low rates in almost all the towns considered in our analysis. In particular, in the big town as Rome and Turin, the FSM was not able to reach the already low preference rates obtained by other lists. In Rome preference rates ranges from 0.19 in the case of Northern League (NL) and 0.16 of PD and FI. The FSM obtained only 0.05 of preference rate, as in the case of Turin, where the higher rate was that of PD (0.19). Again in Turin, the FSM approached that of NL (0.08). Bologna represents the only case where the lower rate was not that of the FSM but that of NL (0.05 of NL compared to 0.07 of FSM).

![Preference rates by town and by party/list](http://elezioni.interno.it; own calculation)

The aspects considered until now relate to the use of preferences by voters, now we can better analyse candidate performances and their attitudes during the electoral competition. In particular, we use the Kenig index to measure competitiveness in the list voting. Table 6 underlines a high enough level of competitiveness in at least five cases. For example, in Turin, Cosenza and Cagliari the vast majority of candidates had an important role in preference distribution. The table shows a different framework in Rome and Milan where the “battle” among candidates was far less strong. Preference voting was focused on few candidates, able to collected a large number of preferences. In Milan, this situation was probably caused by a previous intra-party debate resulted in the replacement of the FSM mayor candidate. In this context,
a large number of preference votes were concentrated in the hands of the councillor candidate who had previously retreated her candidacy as mayor\textsuperscript{24}.

Table 6. Competitiveness among councillor candidates in the eight chief-towns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOWN</th>
<th>NUMBER OF CANDIDATES</th>
<th>EFFECTIVE NUMBER OF CANDIDATES</th>
<th>COMPETITIVENESS (KENIG INDEX)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roma</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>18,7</td>
<td>0,39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torino</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>26,9</td>
<td>0,67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bologna</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>14,1</td>
<td>0,40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cagliari</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>19,3</td>
<td>0,69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cosenza</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17,2</td>
<td>0,66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milano</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>9,6</td>
<td>0,20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Napoli</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>20,6</td>
<td>0,59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trieste</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>29,2</td>
<td>0,75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: http://elezioni.interno.it; own calculation

In general, the analysis still shows low preference using by the FSM voters in the eight chief-towns we have considered. At the same time, the competition among councillor candidates appears quite significant in different geographical areas. This aspect represents an important indication in party rootedness with a growing number of candidates able to obtained personal votes\textsuperscript{25}. Anyway, there are still many variables elements to take into consideration in the analysis of party institutionalisation.

Conclusions

In this paper we observed the preference voting for the Five Star Movement and the party’s internal competitiveness in the 2016 municipal elections and, when feasible, in the council primaries.

Intra-party competition is a constant in Italian local elections because of the preference voting system, which has never been questioned by the electoral reforms even when preferences were suppressed in electoral law for the parliament. Although there are mixed opinions on the effect of preference voting on the quality of democracies, the capacity to gather voters’ preference at local level is an indicator of a party’s rootedness.

The quick rise of the Five Star Movement between 2012 and 2016 posed relevant organizational challenges to the party, both at national and local level, in order to strengthen the FSM’s feeble local rootedness and keep the participatory ideal of the movement without undermining its cohesion. This goal has to be taken into account when observing the methods of candidate selection for the local elections.

\textsuperscript{24} See http://www.ilpost.it/2016/03/13/bedori-milano-ritirata/ (accessed 7 September 2016).

\textsuperscript{25} See Lanzone and Rombi (2014).
Primary elections were organized in six of the eight observed chief towns to select the mayoral candidates, and, in Cosenza, Napoli and Rome, the council candidates as well. Where online council primaries were held we can measure the appeal of the competition and the rate of internal competitiveness (the Roman primaries were very attractive but not competitive, while the opposite is true for Napoli); however, intra-party competition and internal conflicts were observed in other cities as well, even though they were not measurable; in some cases the competition was public and covered by the press, like in Cagliari and Trieste; in other cases the internal conflicts were managed in less clear ways, like in Bologna.

There is not any correlation between the methods of candidate selections and the performance of the FSM in the municipal elections, neither for what concerns the overall results of the party nor for the preference rate and the internal competitiveness. More broadly, the data do not offer enough elements to draw a single model for explaining the FSM’s electoral results. We could formulate hypotheses to explain the variation in the preference rate and the Kenig index among the cities, but we need further data to test them.

The paper represents a first attempt to evaluate the level of rootedness of the FSM analysing the specific aspect relates to local candidates, its performances and its role on the ground. From these elements it is possible to retrace some important information about the future of party organisation. In particular, we can better investigate other variables concerning local candidates and their characteristics. For example who are the winning candidates? Voters prefer to choose male or female candidates? Also, age, job position and/or level of education impacts on candidate performances and on the style of their electoral campaign?

In regards to preference voting, recent events in party history26 risks to produce important consequences and relevant changes in preference using, too: internal debate and intra-party discussions, especially in Rome, create the so-called “factions” (“correnti”). The same fractures among party chairmen and the debate between the leadership (central office) and the party in public office may cause an electoral fragmentation, too. This aspect could become an effective element in preferences’ distribution, able to change candidate performances and voters behaviour.

So the FSM remains a very volatile party characterized by regular changing. Also for these reason it is a very interesting subject in political studies.

References


26 Regarding Rome and its mayor.


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