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Till Policy Do Us Part:
What unites (and divides) the Five Star Movement and Lega electorates

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Abstract

Coalition governments are sometimes made up of parties with sharply differing priorities and policy preferences. This is the case of Italy's governing alliance between the Lega and the Five Star Movement, hailed by the media as populist. Relying upon pledges of change, and seemingly united by the sovereigntist claim to 'take back control', this unprecedented coalition has been called upon to address the promises to upend 'the system'. Whether this would be a doable task for the government or would, rather, turn into a likely loss of votes for the two parties, however, will largely depend on the extent to which the ideas of 'desired change' of the two different electorates might actually converge. On examining survey data, we find that M5S and Lega voters are likely to share anti-establishment, conspiracy rhetoric and sovereigntist attitudes, but have diverging views on domestic economic policies, migration, and cultural issues. These findings provide empirical grounds to advance, in the concluding remarks, some tentative scenarios for the likely developments of a governing coalition between different allies, whose direction would ultimately hinge upon the strategic options available to them.

1. Introduction

On 1 June 2018, the *Movimento 5 Stelle* (Five Star Movement, or M5S) and the Lega (the League) finally reached an agreement to form a coalition government, after weeks of tense negotiations. The event was hailed as a populist breakthrough, though populist parties are not new to governing roles (Kaltwasser 2016; De Lange 2012).

The Italian 'yellow-green' government features an alliance between two ideologically distinct actors, drawing on different electoral bases, apparently bound together just by their appeal to the 'popular will' and the anti-elite rhetoric.

But will such shared populist discourse be enough to ensure a stable governing coalition, despite the differences between the two allies? Will it be possible for these parties to reconcile their policy priorities without alienating their voters?

In this article, by analysing the attitudes and the policy preferences of the M5S and Lega electorates, we seek to assess whether and to what extent this coalition is called upon to respond to converging or conflicting demands from their respective supporters. This will allow us, in the concluding remarks, to formulate some speculations about the responsiveness, either supportive or hostile, of the two parties' voters to the policy choices undertaken by the governing coalition. We also explore the possible governing strategies,

patterns of policy bargaining, and potential tensions that might emerge in Italy's populist government. In so doing, we draw on previous research (Bellucci 1991; Powell and Whitten 1993; Plescia 2016), which shows that, in highly complex coalition contexts, voters' rewards or punishments of governing parties in subsequent elections are likely to be related to the clarity of responsibility for different policy outputs.

2. So near, so far?

There is little doubt that the actors who signed the governing deal are profoundly different from one another. On the one hand, the M5S began as an anti-establishment party, based on a protest against the 'old parties' and the 'political class', and claiming a 'post-ideological' nature (Passarelli and Tuorto 2018; Vittori 2017; Gerbaudo and Screti 2017), which rejects any classification fitting the traditional left-right political divide (Isernia et al. 2018). On the other hand, the Lega is the oldest party in the Italian parliament, with a long experience of participation in national and regional governments, decidedly right-wing oriented, and standing out as a regionalist movement turned into a fully-fledged nationalist party (Albertazzi, Giovannini and Seddone 2018). This then begs the question: what might hold together such diverse actors? Do they appeal to values and promote policies that could be shared by both electorates? Or, on the contrary, do the two governing allies have to deal with irreconcilable, diverging policy priorities?

The affinity, or at least compatibility, of the policy priorities promoted by coalition parties is a crucial issue, since they have to achieve an equilibrium between their electoral pledges and likely intra-cabinet tensions (Klüver and Spoon 2017, 794). When affinities emerge, allies can easily coordinate in decision-making and comply with their electoral commitments. However, when policy priorities diverge, each actor is faced with the likely consequences of their strategic choices: on the one hand, failing to reach an agreement could be punished by the electorate, as both parties would not deliver on their policy promises; on the other hand, if one party succeeds in the intra-cabinet conflict by pushing ahead its policy, it would be rewarded by its electoral base, but would increase the likelihood of alienation of the other party's voters, with the consequent withdrawal of support. The strategy followed by actors in this chess-like game will also depend on the model of coalition government adopted, either *collegial* – i.e. when policies are the result of intra-party coordination and bargaining, or *ministerial* – i.e. when offices are allocated among coalition partners, who enjoy wide autonomy and independence in decision-making on those policies under their direct control (Ibidem).

2.1. The common populist framework of the 'government of change'

Despite their differences, the M5S and Lega leaders achieved a deal, whose title 'Contract for Italy's Government of Change', significantly epitomizes their common will to upend the Italian system. It is precisely their appeal to the people's will, their claims to radically change the rules and defy the establishment that have strengthened the ties between two otherwise strange bedfellows. The anti-elite rhetoric was present in the cabinet's inaugural speech pronounced by the Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte: 'If populism means the ruling class listening to people's needs ... (and) if anti-system means aiming at introducing a new system, able to remove old, encrusted privileges and power, then these political forces deserve both these epithets'. In a similar vein, the Lega's leader Matteo Salvini,

Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister, asserted that 'there is no right and there is no left, there is only the people against the elites';[1] similarly, his M5S counterpart Luigi Di Maio, serving as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economic Development, Labour and Social Policies, said that 'it's going to be a hot autumn: the powers are rallying against us!'[2]

The anti-elitist message of the Lega and the M5S is centred on the typical rhetorical construction used by all populist political actors: a simple binary framing which juxtaposes an ill-defined, homogenous group, i.e., 'the innocent people', with another equally vague category, i.e., the obscure holders of economic and political power, lumped together in a single, unified bloc (Kriesi 2014; Mudde 2016 and 2004; Absts and Rummens 2007). This narrative, in turn, rests upon a paranoid, conspiratorial reasoning that is inherent in the very (dualistic) logic of populism (Castanho Silva, Vegetti, and Littway 2017; Mueller 2016) and that also represents a useful strategic and political device. It allows the simplifying of the complexity of political and social problems, also favouring the intertwining of heterogenous issues (Ibid.) and consolidates the idea of the 'we', that is the 'victims of the system', against the 'other', the elites. Conspiracy thinking, in this respect, is closely related to the populist anti-elitist rhetoric, since the deterioration of the bond of trust between the represented (i.e. the citizen) and their representatives (i.e. the elite) incentivizes people to blame the current mechanisms of decision-making and advance claims for alternative solutions. This popular disenchantment, in turn, serves the populist parties' purpose to hold people together around the shared belief that the truth has been kept secret by the liberal elites, while pledging to help them unveil the truth, to show 'how the world really works', against what the elites want people to believe.

Besides the 'people vs. elites' dichotomy or the conspiracy belief, however, populism is above all a matter of moral self-representation (Mueller 2016). By adopting such Manichean rhetoric, in fact, populist actors portray themselves as the only ones who are morally entitled to represent the will (and defend the interests) of the disempowered people. It is in their name that they promise to exert a change in the way things currently stand and to take back control from the deceptive elites (Ibid.). This perfectly applies to Italy's two coalition partners, whose appeal to the regaining of the share of national sovereignty transferred to supranational elites is commonly framed as the only possible precondition for the real exercise of the people's sovereign power to decide. The sovereignty claim has thus become the common nucleus for the 'thin' populist ideology of the Lega and the M5S and their 'government of change'. This has definitely provided the two parties and their supporters with a fundamental *trait d'union*, and a common battlefield. At the same time, it has conferred political legitimation to a post-electoral alliance that was not directly sanctioned by the popular vote.

These considerations lead us to formulate the first hypothesis:

> **H1:** Support for populist and conspiratorial arguments is higher among voters of Lega and M5S than of other parties. The two electorates converge in a 'us vs.

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[1] Available online at: https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/notizie/2018-05-24/salvini-maio-e-falso-mito-popolo-contro-elite-140704.shtml?uuid=AElnp4tE.

[2] Available online at: https://www.iltempo.it/politica/2018/08/26/news/di-maio-autunno-caldo-legge-bilancio-salvini-1082260/.

them', Manichean rhetoric, hostility and widespread mistrust of the elites, and claims for reaffirming popular sovereignty.

2.2. What divides them?

Although both Lega and M5S converge in the sovereigntist 'take back control' claim and in hostility to elitism, their ideas of sovereignty do not always overlap. In particular, they are likely to diverge in the way they construct the so-called 'populist heartland' (Taggart 2004), namely that virtuous and idealised territory where the sovereign rule of the people should be realised.

On the one hand, the Lega's conception of the sovereign people has an evident nativist, exclusionary nature (Albertazzi, Giovannini, and Seddone 2018; Bulli and Soare 2018; Verbeek and Zaslove 2016). Indeed, under Salvini's leadership, the boundaries of the Lega's (until 2018 named '*Lega Nord*', Northern League) ideal territory definitely widened: from those of the wealthy northern regions (the area of the so-called 'Padania') to those of the Italian nation state (Albertazzi, Giovannini, and Seddone 2018). In line with the far-right ethnic conception of nationhood as a natural division between people, the Lega's heartland is now clearly inhabited by the Italians, the natives. The Lega has thus seized attention for its political agenda on migration, framed as a main threat to Italian cultural sovereignty and as a primary security issue, and advocated a hard-line immigration platform (Passarelli and Tuorto 2018).

On the other hand, M5S has adopted a rather fluctuating and ambiguous stance on cultural sovereignism, and in particular regarding the migration issue (Bulli and Soare 2018; Pirro 2018), also probably because of its ideologically heterogeneous electoral support, which crosses the traditional left-right divide. Accordingly, we advance a second hypothesis:

> **H2:** Feelings of exclusivist identity, and hostility to migration, will prevail more among Lega voters than other parties, including the M5S. Cultural sovereignism will therefore mark a distance between the Lega and M5S electorates.

A different picture emerges when it comes to the economic dimension of these parties' sovereignty claims. Both the Lega and the M5S share the idea that Italy should regain its power to decide on economic policies (Pirro 2018, 10) and portray the EU as 'the locus of real power' (Albertazzi, Giovannini, and Seddone 2018, 649), a technocratic superpower that constrains nation states from using the necessary means to protect their own sovereign people (Ibid.; Passarelli and Tuorto 2018).

However, though both parties conceive the nation state as a common, economic heartland, they hold different visions of domestic economic policy. On the one hand, the Lega would stick to right-wing economic positions, based on economic liberalism and limited state intervention (Otjes et al. 2018). On the other hand, the M5S advocates redistributive policies and state intervention. The post-electoral deal offers some interesting clues as to the actual policy preferences of the two parties. In particular, two policy proposals stand out from the others, as they were the two parties' flagship policies during the electoral campaign: the 'citizens' income', promoted by the M5S, and a two-rates flat-tax, sponsored by the Lega. The former aims at redistributing wealth to the poorest sectors of the society, thus mostly impacting the impoverished southern regions, where the Movement gained more votes (Passarelli 2018). On the contrary, the Lega's flat tax is centred

on the expectation that the benefits generated for the wealthier people by tax reduction will 'trickle down' to the society at large, as they would encourage investments. This is clearly in line with both the Lega's pro-market positions (Verbeek and Zaslove 2016) and the configuration of its traditional main pool of votes, namely the rich northern areas of small and medium-sized enterprises (Passarelli 2018). Hence, we formulate the following hypotheses on economic preferences:

> **H3a:** In line with the anti-elitist perspective, Lega and M5S voters show greater hostility against EU authority over domestic economic policy than supporters of other parties, thus converging on economic sovereignism.

> **H3b:** The Lega and M5S voters have divergent policy preferences on domestic economic policies, with the former being more oriented towards pro-market positions, and the latter more inclined towards redistributive measures.

3. From common ties to diverging interests: exploring the preferences of M5S and Lega voters

To test our hypotheses, we use data for Italian public opinion from the EUENGAGE panel survey,[3] carried out between 2016 and 2017. It should be noted that, although the EUENGAGE sample slightly underestimates the actual votes won by the M5S and Lega at the General Elections held in March 4, 2018 (with 21% voting intentions for M5S and 13% for the Lega),[4] this result is in line with other surveys conducted in the same period[5] and captures an increasing voting trend for these two parties in the months that preceded the General Election.

In order to gauge similarities and differences in the preferences of the M5S and Lega voters, we first considered voting preferences as potentially exercising a cueing effect on policy preferences.

To this purpose, we identified three groups of survey items,[6] according to the three dimensions we focus on in our hypotheses, namely: Populist and Conspiracy Arguments, Culture and Identity Issues, and Economic Issues. For comparability's sake, we recoded all items into a 0-1 scale, where 0 corresponds to a more 'sovereigntist', 'exclusionary' or 'populist' stance, and 1 otherwise. We then compared the mean scores of the answers provided by the M5S and Lega voters on each item. In order to provide comparisons also with other party groups not in government, we further recoded each variable into a categorical one, and cross tabulated them by vote preferences expressed for the main Italian parties.[7]

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[3] A two-wave survey was conducted on a panel of respondents in June-July 2016 and June-October 2017 in ten EU countries, interviewed using Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI). Respondents were selected from an online panel. A specific set of weights, based on internet usage, gender, age, region, and education, was used to correct any likely misbalance due to the online sampling design. The Italian panel sample used in this study (people responding to both 2016 and 2017 waves) includes 1,210 cases.

[4] Results at General elections were instead: M5S 33%; Lega 17% (source: https://elezionistorico.interno.gov.it/index.php?tpel=C&dtel=04/03/2018&tpa=I&tpe=A&lev0=0&levsut0=0&es0=S&ms=S).

[5] See for instance the average of electoral surveys calculated by the website 'Termometro politico' (https://www.termometropolitico.it/2018-11-17-sondaggi-politici-elettorali).

[6] See the Appendix for a full description of the survey items used.

[7] Survey question: 'If the General Election was tomorrow, which party would you be most likely to vote for?' Parties were recoded according to coalition patterns at the 2018 elections, the only exception being the Lega, considered separately from the centre-right coalition, which it had joined before the elections

Statistically significant differences in both kinds of bivariate analyses were then examined by using appropriate post-hoc comparisons.[8]

3.1. The 'people' vs. the 'greedy, evil elites': populism and conspiracy thinking among M5S and Lega voters

The first hypothesis postulates a convergence between M5S and Lega supporters on populist and conspiracy claims. Populist claims typically feature two core issues: first, dissatisfaction with the current democratic institutions, both at EU and national level, perceived as unresponsive, untrustworthy, and systematically betraying the 'popular will'; and, second, the quest for more direct procedures of decision-making, as opposed to the traditional, liberal mechanisms of representative democracy, which is perceived as no longer effective and reliable. On the other hand, by 'conspiracy thinking', we refer to people's general perception that a hidden power of elites is secretly and opaquely ruling the world. This is measured through an index that combines respondents' answers to a set of statements concerning the allegedly closed and obscure nature of politics (Cronbach's alpha= 0.87).

Figure 1[9] shows the average scores with standard deviations for the answers on populist and conspiratorial arguments, by focusing only on the M5S and Lega voters while Table 1 cross tabulates[10] the same variables by all party groups.

Average scores and cross tabulations show that the supporters of the two coalition partners converge on all aspects considered, although with some distinctions. For instance, dissatisfaction with the way EU democracy works, which combines criticism towards liberal representative democracy with frustration with the EU project itself, is double among Lega voters (0.24), compared to the M5S group (0.12), although the latter is more spread out than the former. Post-hoc comparisons, however, reveal that the differences between the two groups under scrutiny are not statistically significant, while they are both markedly different from the other party groups, and especially from the centre-left. The M5S-Lega gap narrows on the lack of trust in government, while it widens between the two allies, on the one hand, and all the other party groups on the other, and, remarkably, with the Partito Democratico (PD)/Centre-left. However, since the survey was conducted when the PD was in government, it could be also possible that answers refer to a critical evaluation of that government's performance, rather than to a general lack of trust in a democratic institution.

(frequency in brackets): a) PD/Centre-left [223]: PD (208), Alternativa Popolare (which joined Civica Popolare: 4), Sudtirol Volskpartei (1), Centro Democratico and Radicali Italiani (forming '+Europa': 9), Union Valdotaine (1). Centre-right coalition [133]: Forza Italia (81), Fratelli d'Italia (39) Scelta Civica (5); Others/RA[331]; No vote [128].

[8] For categorical variables, post-hoc comparisons were carried out after running the crosstabulation (e.g. analysis of residuals and partitioning) (Sharpe 2015). For continuous variables, post-hoc comparisons were carried out after running analysis of variance (ANOVA) comparing the means (e.g. Bonferroni, Tukey, Sidak).

[9] To obtain these average scores, all continuous variables were recoded into a 0-1 scale, while categorical variables were recoded as dummies; in the latter case, data display the proportions. The same procedure applies also to Figures 2 and 3 for, respectively, cultural and economic issues.

[10] To run cross-tabulations, continuous variables were recoded as categorical variables, by grouping values into three modalities, with 1 indicating a more populist attitude, 2 somewhat neutral, and 3 less populist. The same procedure applies to Tables 2 and 3 for, respectively, cultural and economic issues.

The voters of the two governing parties overlap on support for direct democracy and for conspiratorial arguments. Here again, post-hoc comparisons reveal that voters of M5S and Lega solidly align on these issues, together with the people with no party attachment, while they significantly differentiate from all other party groups.

Overall, these findings confirm our first hypothesis: the gloomy perception of the mechanisms of liberal and representative democracy, seen as opaquely managed by a small group of unresponsive elites, provides a common set of values and beliefs that unites two otherwise distinct electorates.

Figure 1. Average scores for answers on populist and conspiracy arguments, by voting preferences (M5S and Lega)
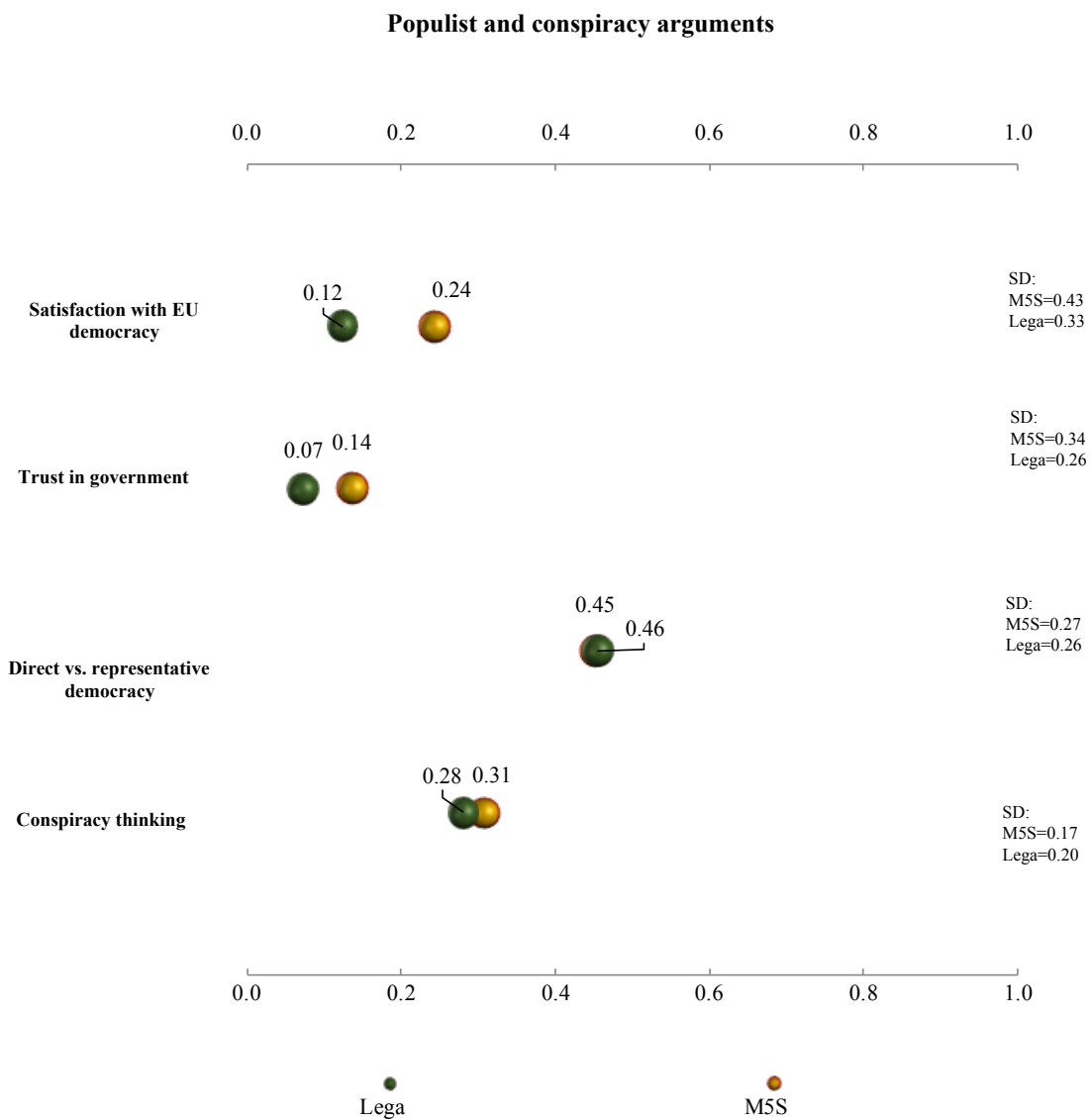

Populist and conspiracy arguments

Table 1. Populist and conspiracy arguments, by voting preferences (% - weighted)

	M5S	Lega	PD/Centre-left coalition	Centre-right coalition	Other parties	No vote	Pearson's $\chi^{2(5)}$
Satisfaction with EU democracy % of 'Very/somewhat dissatisfied'	76	88	50	81	75	84	$\chi2(5)=103.2915$, $p<0.001$
Trust in government: % of 'Never/Only Sometimes'	86	93	53	80	87	87	$\chi2(5)=167.5130$, $p<0.001$
Preferences for direct vs. representative democracy: % Support for Direct democracy (values from 0 through 0.4 on a 0-1 scale).	36	32	13	22	27	35	$\chi2(10)=65.1515$, $p<0.001$
Conspiracy thinking: - % of 'High conspiracy' (values from 0 through 0.4 on a 0-1 scale).	72	68	37	58	52	53	$\chi2(10)=115.3946$, $p<0.001$
N	*267*	*128*	*223*	*133*	*331*	*128*	
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	

3.2. Will culture tear them apart?

In the second hypothesis, we postulated a divergence between M5S and Lega on cultural and identity issues. In particular, we examine two core aspects of exclusionary feelings respectively: the support for restrictive policies on migration, and people's 'cultural sovereignism', which defines those attitudes aimed at protecting national identity and culture against any interference from outside.

As Figure 2 and Table 2 clearly show, both aspects mark relevant differences between the two political communities.

Majorities among M5S voters would support policies of assistance to people seeking a better standard of living (the so-called 'economic migrants'), as compared to 44% among Lega voters. Post-hoc comparisons confirm that M5S are significantly different from their coalition partners, while showing similarities with voters of other party groups, especially those leaning to the centre-left. On the other hand, the Lega group significantly aligns with the centre-right pole on migration policies. The picture remains almost the same when assistance is directed to people seeking international protection (i.e. refugees), although in this case support for assistance policies slightly increases among the Lega voters by 15 percentage points.

Moving to 'cultural sovereignism', we measured this through an index that combines items on the perception of migrants and attitudes towards the EU authority on migration (Cronbach's alpha = 0.79). Once again, the two groups show significant differences. The M5S voters have moderate stances on cultural sovereignism, although not as inclusionary as the centre-left supporters; their moderation, rather, gets close to that of the 'No vote' group. On the contrary, strong exclusionary attitudes clearly prevail among Lega supporters, showing the highest scores on the cultural sovereignty claim.

These findings therefore confirm our second hypothesis concerning divergence between M5S and Lega constituencies on cultural and identity issues.

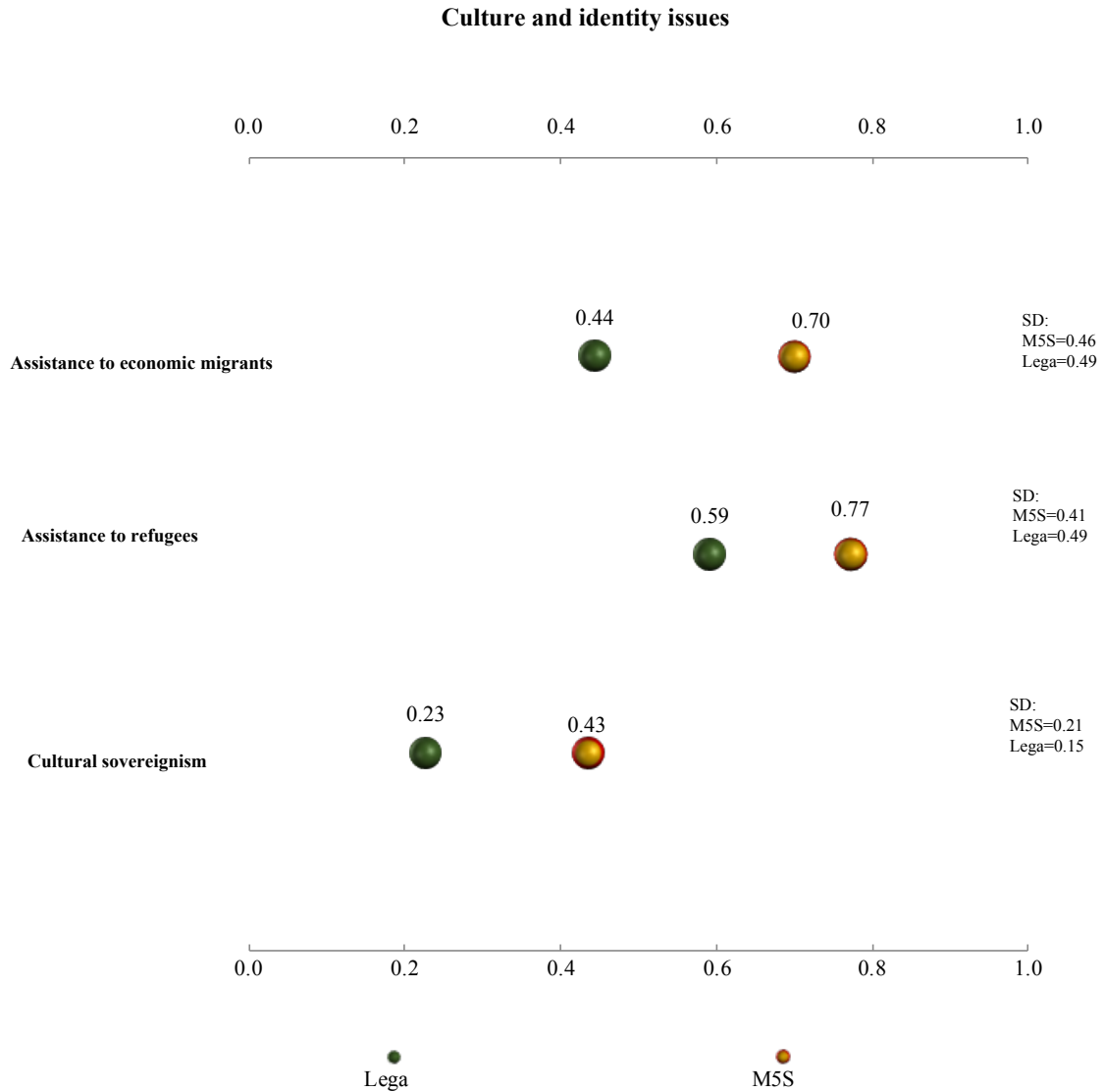**Figure 2.** Average scores for answers on Cultural and Identity items, by voting preferences (M5S and Lega)

Culture and identity issues

Table 2. Cultural and identity issues, by voting preferences (% - weighted)

	M5S	Lega	PD/Centre-left coalition	Centre-right coalition	Other parties	No vote	Pearson's $\chi^{2(5)}$
Assistance to economic migrants: % of 'Completely/tend to disagree'.	30	56	22	54	33	35	$\chi 2(5)=85.5008$ $p<0.001$
Assistance to refugees: % of 'Completely/tend to disagree'.	23	41	15	26	27	25	$\chi 2(5)=55.4266,$ $p<0.001$
Cultural sovereignism: % of 'High cultural sovereignism' (values from 0 through 0.4 on a 0-1 scale).	42	84	14	62	35	47	$\chi 2(10)=212.8447,$ $p<0.001$
N	**267**	**128**	**223**	**133**	**331**	**128**	
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	

3.3. Held together by the common EU-enemy, divided by economic policies

Finally, we test the economic hypotheses by focusing first on the role and nature of the state intervention on economy and, second, on the degree of the supranational authority over national economic policy (Figure 3 and Table 3).

Figure 3. Average scores for answers on Economy, by voting preferences (M5S and Lega)
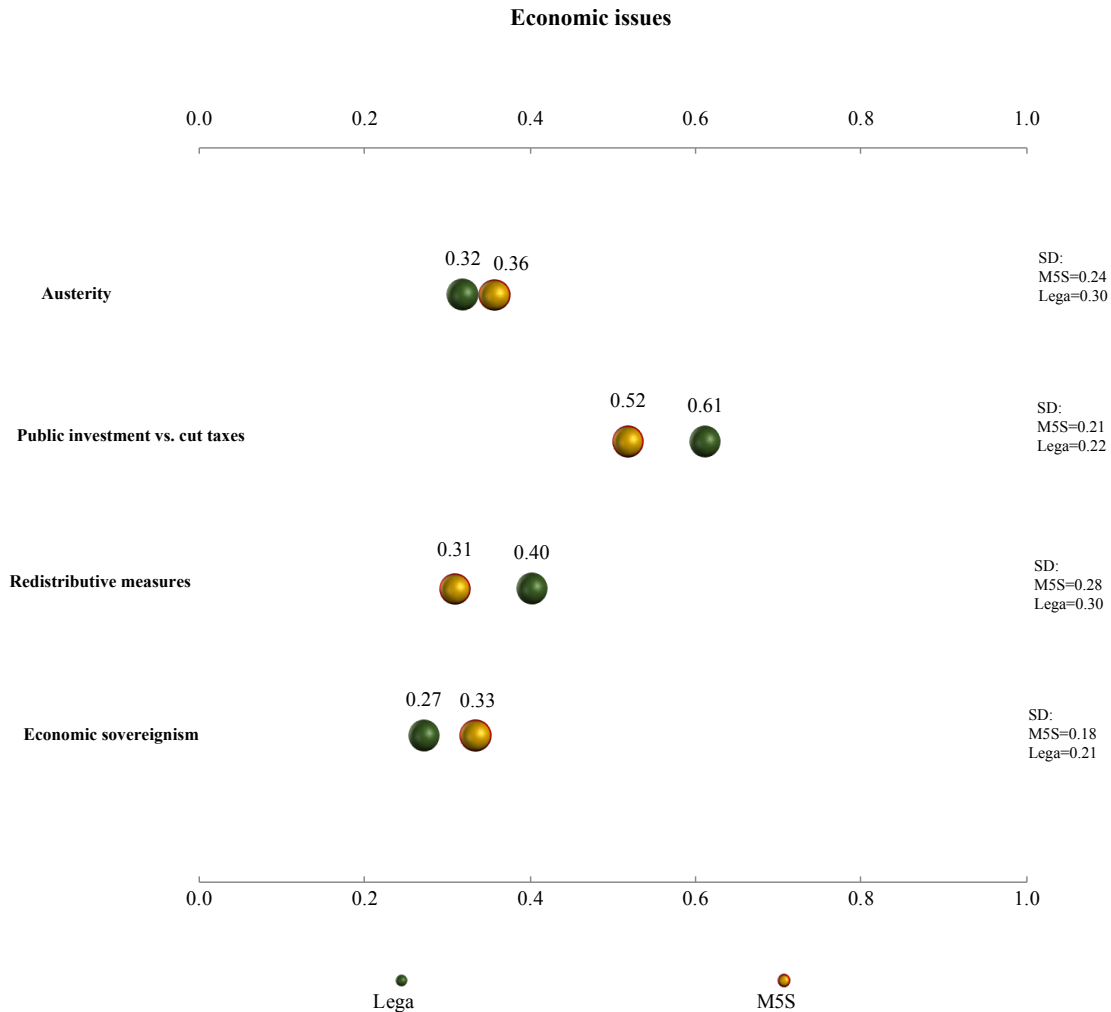
On domestic economic policies, Lega and M5S voters seem to look at two alternative models. On the one hand, M5S voters stand out as strong supporters of redistributive policies to reduce income inequalities. Post-hoc comparisons reveal a significant difference with the Lega group on support for redistributive measures, like the 'citizens' income', while getting close to the preferences of the centre-left camp. On the other hand, Lega voters neatly advocate traditional liberal, right-wing economic policies, like cutting public services to reduce tax, showing similarities with other centre-right supporters.

Table 3. Economic issues, by voting preferences (% - weighted)

	M5S	Lega	PD/Centre-left coalition	Centre-right coalition	Other parties	No vote	Pearson's $\chi^{2(5)}$
Redistribution: % of 'In favour of redistri-bution' (values from 0 through 0.4 on a 0-1 scale).	64	45	67	45	58	56	$\chi2(10)=65.7156$, $p<0.001$
Public services vs. cut taxes: % of 'Public services increased' (values from 0 through 0.4 on a 0-1 scale).	26	17	30	21	39	15	$\chi2(10)=43.1294$, $p<0.001$
Austerity: % of 'Increase public invest-ments' (values from 0 through 0.4 on a 0-1 scale).	66	75	70	48	55	39	$\chi2(10)=66.9842$, $p<0.001$
Economic sovereignism: % of 'High sovereignism' (values from 0 through 0.4 on a 0-1 scale).	67	83	26	64	39	59	$\chi2(10)=191.7314$, $p<0.001$
N	*267*	*128*	*223*	*133*	*331*	*128*	
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	

However, when it comes to support for public investments, as opposed to austerity measures aimed at balancing the budget, the differences between the M5S and Lega electorates significantly narrow (although public investments seem popular also among voters of other parties, especially on the left). Actually, rather than measuring just preferences for domestic policies, this item seems to tap attitudes towards EU 'interferences' on national policy making, since the balance of budget closely recalls the EU-mandated tough austerity measures adopted in 2011.

This links to our findings deriving from a more accurate measure of 'economic sovereignism'. It combines items on EU authority over the country's economic and budgetary policies, people's perception of the EU as endangering the country's welfare system and economic growth, and attitudes towards globalisation (Cronbach's alpha=0.71). Once again, this index shows a substantial agreement between Salvini's and Di Maio's supporters, although economic sovereignism significantly prevails among Lega voters, as compared to M5S voters. This dimension, however, marks a significant difference between the M5S-Lega electorates and the other parties' supporters, especially on the centre-left, where economic sovereignism is supported only by a minority.

According to these findings, hypotheses H3a and H3b are confirmed, since M5S and Lega voters diverge on the models of domestic economic policy, but largely converge on the need to shield the national economy from any outside interference.

4. United by the common enemy, divided over domestic and cultural policies

In order to provide further robustness to our empirical analysis, we regressed people's attitudes on populist, cultural, and economic issues, as well as left-right ideology, on the vote for M5S and Lega, with the vote for other parties as reference category, by using multinomial logistic regression. This analysis would allow us to test our hypotheses from a different perspective, namely, whether and to what extent the interplay of people's

preferences on economic, cultural, and populist issues is likely to orient people's voting choices, here considered as dependent variable.

As argued above, all independent variables were recoded into a 0-1 scale, where 0 corresponds to 'sovereigntist', 'exclusionary' or 'populist' positions, and 1 otherwise.[11] Accordingly, a negative coefficient in the regression means that a sovereignist/populist attitude increases the likelihood of a vote for Lega and/or M5S as compared to the other groups; on the contrary, a positive sign indicates that the Lega and M5S vote is explained by inclusionary or mainstream attitudes.

Table 2. Multinomial logistic regression of policy attitudes on vote for Lega and M5S

Other parties=reference category	M5S (1=Vote for M5S)		Lega (2=Vote for Lega)	
	Coef.	*SE*	*Coef.*	*SE*
Populist and conspiracy issues				
Satisfied with the way the EU democracy works	0.14	(0.21)	-0.32	(0.26)
Direct vs. representative democracy	-1.15***	(0.23)	-0.38	(0.25)
Trust	-0.39	(0.31)	-0.38	(0.25)
Conspiracy	-1.37***	(0.36)	-1.04**	(0.36)
Culture and identity issues				
Assistance to economic migrants	0.33***	(0.08)	0.17	(0.14)
Assistance to refugees	-0.08	(0.13)	0.23	(0.17)
Cultural sovereignism	1.18*	(0.52)	-4.7***	(0.45)
Economic issues				
Economic sovereignism	-2.42***	(0.32)	-1.33**	(0.46)
Austerity (0=public investments; 1=austerity)	-1.29***	(0.29)	-2.47***	(0.42)
Public services vs. cut taxes	-0.18	(0.29)	0.85*	(0.38)
Redistribution	-0.46*	(0.23)	-0.07	(0.33)
Left-right (Centre = reference category)				
Left	-1.29*	(0.51)	-1.60*	(0.63)
Centre-left	-1.17***	(0.31)	-14.11***	(1.14)
Centre-right	-0.46	(0.66)	1.07	(0.71)
Right	0.09	(0.65)	1.557*	(0.62)
Constant	1.24	(1.17)	0.93	(1.05)

Notes: N=1170; * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, ***$p<0.001$

Overall the multinomial findings (Figure 4 and Table 4) uphold the results obtained with the bivariate analyses, where voting preferences represented the main explanatory variable. Electoral support for M5S and Lega is more likely, as compared to other party groups, when the following attitudes and beliefs emerge among voters: hostility against EU-mandated austerity measures and economic sovereignism, and conspiracy thinking. This implies that both parties could increase their chances of keeping the support of

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[11] Except for the variable on austerity measure, where 0 represents 'Pursuing a policy to balance budget' (i.e. austerity) and 1 'Increasing public investments'.

their electoral bases by fuelling people's mistrust of the elites, and especially of the technocratic elites interfering with the national economy from Brussels.

Other issues would represent a potential source of support for the M5S only: the promotion of forms of participation alternative to representative democracy, like direct democracy, and support for measures of assistance to economic migrants.

Likewise, liberal right-wing policies of tax reduction stand out as potentially feeding the Lega's electoral consensus, although not significantly opposed by the M5S electorate, while redistributive policies would reward the M5S. We note that, for each issue, coefficients are statistically significant for one party only, respectively the Lega and the M5s. This suggests that each group strongly supports only one of these issues, and moderately opposes (M5S) or neglects (Lega) the other's preferred solution.

Nonetheless, divisions become sharp and potentially influential on voting choices on cultural sovereignism, where exclusionary policies would appeal significantly to the Lega voters, but would alienate M5S supporters.

Figure 1. Multinomial logistic regression of policy attitudes on vote for Lega and M5S (Predicted probabilities
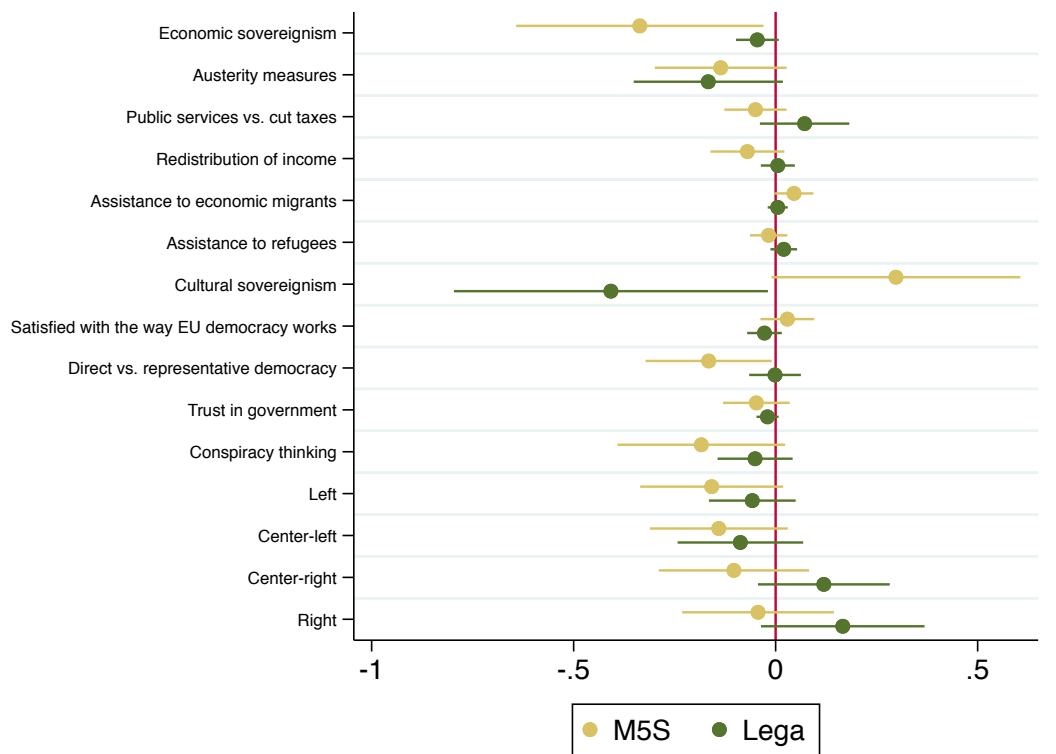
5. Conclusions: the chess-like game of the M5S-Lega coalition

In this article, we tested three hypotheses to unveil the shared preferences and the areas of conflict between the M5S and Lega voters.

Empirical results clearly revealed that the strong, common baseline that unites the two electoral bases is not what people strive for, but rather, what or whom they fight against. The common enemy are the obscure elites, and especially those based in Brussels, who operate according to secretive and hidden practices that serve only the

interests of small interest groups, at the expenses of the citizens, who are the actual 'victims' of the system. Accordingly, a first scenario would be that the M5S-Lega coalition will seek to exploit the populist rhetoric of the contraposition between the (EU) elite and the people to further strengthen the electoral consensus of their electoral bases (*Scenario 1: The common [EU] enemy*). Indeed, this scenario has already emerged since the early, frantic days of the government's formation, when a popular online blog leaked a first version of the contract outlining references to procedures to leave the common currency and questioning Italy's membership in the Eurozone, if not the EU (Basile 2018). This raised many eyebrows in Brussels and among international investors about the potential of the new Italy's 'populist' government to blatantly challenge, if not break, the EU rules. The final version of the government contract at least removed any openly Eurosceptic claim. Yet, the two coalition partners seem constantly eager to goad some EU reactions, for instance by defying the EU budget rules with the big-spending strategy envisaged in the draft budget plan for 2019.[12]

When it comes to divisive issues, however, the delights of the 'honeymoon' between the two allies seem to fade.

For instance, the redistributive measure of the 'citizens' basic income', strongly advocated by the M5S, would potentially alienate the Lega electorate, especially the voters in the industrial areas of northern Italy, who would perceive it as an 'incentive for unemployed people to stay at home on their sofa',[13] with likely revivals of South-North divides. On the other hand, a compromise solution[14] to the implementing decrees on this policy, due to a collegial model, would likely cause a loss of votes for the M5S, for having failed to fulfil a flagship electoral promise (*Scenario 2a: inconclusive bargaining over redistributive policies*). On the contrary, if a ministerial model of government should prevail, then the M5S might have greater control over this kind of measure, since the Movement's political chief Luigi Di Maio holds key competencies on social security measures within the government. This would ultimately reward the M5S, as its supporters would clearly identify it as the actor to whom to attribute the credit for the positive policy output. (*Scenario 2b: the M5S push for redistributive policies*).

Another area of potential conflict is that of migration issues. Lega's leader Matteo Salvini, Ministry of the Interior with competences on migration policies, has often vowed a hard line against the influx of migrants, even by adopting blatant measures such as the block of migrant rescue ships from Italian ports. In this case, such a policy would serve the electoral purposes of the Lega, as cultural sovereignty represents a crucial issue for its voters, but it would most probably alienate part of the M5S electorate. Here again, while the collegial model, and the related lack of decision-making, would be harmful for Salvini's party (*Scenario 3a: the moderating compromise over migration*), the ministerial model would likely be advantageous for the Lega, although at the expenses of M5S (*Scenario 3b: Lega's hard line on migration policies*).

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[12] In November 2018, since Italy's government failed to fully address the EU's concerns over the high deficit budget plans for 2019, the EU formally opened a disciplinary procedure against Italy, which was finally solved in December 2018 with an agreement to cut down expenses.
[13] Available online at: https://www.dw.com/en/italys-5-star-movement-defends-guaranteed-income-pledge/a-43323755.
[14] At the time of writing, the citizens' income has already been approved by the Council of Ministers, although it is too early to evaluate the concrete implementation and effects of this measure.

Clearly, these are just some of the possible developments of an unprecedented coalition experiment, although predicting the future is beyond the purposes of this article, if not of the tasks of political science.

Nonetheless, these scenarios suggest that coalition governments look like a chess game, where each player carefully ponders the next move. Like the knight, the coalition partner's actions might be largely unpredictable, and suddenly change direction from the expected one to minimise detrimental consequences at the next elections.

Appendix.
Survey Items used in the analysis (EUENGAGE data)

Satisfaction with EU democracy: 'On the whole, how satisfied are you with how democracy works in the EU?' [1/2 (recoded as 1): Very/Somewhat Dissatisfied; 3/4 (recoded as 0): Very/Somewhat Dissatisfied].

Trust in government: 'How much of the time do you think you can trust the Italian government to do what is right?' [Always, Often, Sometimes, Never]

Preferences for direct vs. representative democracy: 'Which number from 0 to 10 best represents how you think the system of governing Europe should work? Ordinary people making all decisions on their own (0); elected politicians and officials making all decisions on their own (10, recoded as 1).'

Conspiracy thinking: 'To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?' Index based on 9 items:

> **Q1:** 'We would be much better off now if our foreign affairs were conducted out in the open, for all to see, rather than secretly.'
> **Q2:** 'Most of the news we get from the press and the radio is deliberately slanted to mislead us.'
> **Q3:** 'I often feel that the really important matters are decided behind the scenes, by people we never even hear about.'
> **Q4:** 'The people think they govern themselves, but they really don't.'
> **Q5:** 'A secretive power elite with a globalist agenda is conspiring to eventually rule the world through an authoritarian world government, or New World Order.'
> **Q6:** 'Actually, it is not the government that runs the country: we don't know who pulls the strings.'
> **Q7:** 'Some people say officials of the European Union are gradually seeking to take over all law-making powers in this country.'
> **Q8:** 'The US administration of President Trump/ Russian administration of President Putin is behind the migrant crisis because it is in its interest to create chaos in Europe and split the Union's 28 member states over the issue.'
> **Q9:** 'The Italian government/EU institutions is/are deliberately hiding the truth about how many immigrants really live in this country.'

'For each of these statements, please indicate whether you completely agree, tend to agree, tend to disagree or completely disagree.' [Answers: 1/2: Completely/Tend to Agree (recoded as 1); 3/4: Completely/Tend to Disagree (recoded as 0)]

Assistance to economic migrants: 'Italy should offer assistance to people seeking a better standard of living'.

Assistance to refugees: 'Italy should offer assistance to people seeking a better international protection'.

Cultural sovereignism: Index based on 6 items:

> **Q1:** *Can you please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements about the general impact of immigration on [COUNTRY] and [NATIONALITY] people?* [Answer options: 1. Strongly agree, 2. Somewhat agree, 3. Somewhat disagree, 4. Strongly disagree] 'Immigrants increase the likelihood of a terrorist attack in Italy'.
> **Q2:** *Can you please indicate…* 'Immigrants contribute more in taxes than they benefit from health and welfare services' (answer order reversed).
> **Q3:** *Can you please indicate…* 'Immigration in general will improve our culture with new ideas and customs'(answer order reversed).
> **Q4:** *Can you please indicate…* 'The religious practices of immigrants are a threat to the Italian way of life and its traditions'.
> **Q5:** *Can you please indicate…* 'Immigrants are a significant cause of crime in Italy'.
> **Q6:** *For each of the following policy alternatives, please position yourself (...)*: Italy should decide for itself how many immigrants to accept each year (9); The EU should decide how many immigrants should be accepted by each Member State each year. (10, recoded as 1).

Redistribution: 'Redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor: fully in favour vs. fully opposed. Where would you place your views on this scale? Fully in favour of redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor (0) vs. fully opposed to redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor (1).'

Public services vs. cut taxes: 'Public services should be increased by raising taxes (0) vs. public services should be cut in order to reduce taxes. Where would you place your views on this scale? Public services should be increased by raising taxes (0), public services should be cut in order to reduce taxes (1).'

Austerity: 'For each of the following policy alternatives, please position yourself on a scale from 0 to 10, increasing public investment in the coming years (0) vs. pursuing a policy to balance the budget (1).'

Economic sovereignism: Index based on 4 items:

> **Q1:** *For each of the following policy alternatives, please position yourself (...):* Giving the European Union more authority over Member States' economic and budgetary policies (0) vs. Retaining full powers for economic decision-making in each Member State (10, recoded as 1).
> **Q2:** *Some people say that the European Union might endanger some important aspects of the nation. For each of the following aspects, please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree that they are endangered by the European Union [Answers: Strongly/somewhat agree, strongly/somewhat disagree]:* 'Achievements of the welfare system in Italy'. [Answer options: 1/2. Strongly/somewhat agree, 3/4. Strongly/Somewhat disagree].
> **Q3:** Some people say that the European Union might endanger (…): 'Economic growth in Italy'. [Answer options: 1/2. Strongly/somewhat agree, 3/4. Strongly/Somewhat disagree].
> **Q4:** Do you think that, overall, globalisation has a positive (0, recoded as 1) or negative effect (10, recoded as 0) on Italian citizens?

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Challenger parties in Parliament:
the case of the Italian Five Star Movement

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Abstract

In 2013, the Five Star Movement (M5S) won representation for the first time in the Italian parliament, the heart of the institutions they criticised and aimed to reform. With parliamentary ranks filled mostly with inexperienced politicians and a strong identification with the role of outsiders challenging the mainstream political consensus, the expectation is that their opposition style should differ substantially from that of other parties. This article explores this question by comparing the policy content of oral parliamentary questions submitted by the M5S with that of other Italian opposition parties during the 17th legislature (2013-2018). It analyses to what extent the M5S's issue profile 1) overlaps more with parties of either the left or the right side of the political spectrum, 2) is more likely to deal with matters emphasised in its electoral platform, and 3) is more likely to address issues not attended to by other parties. The results provide new insights into the behaviour of new challenger parties in parliament.

1. Introduction

At the time of their first entry into the national parliament, in 2013, the Five Star Movement (*Movimento 5 Stelle,* M5S) was described as a 'strange animal' wandering around 'the zoo of Italian politics' (Corbetta, 2013; 197). Although other Italian parties had made recourse to anti-establishment rhetoric in the past, the M5S brought the critique of corrupted party elites to a whole new level. It presented itself as an alternative to all political forces and it did not identify with any traditional cleavages, especially the socio-economic distinction between left and right. To further stress its distinctiveness, its parliamentary ranks were filled with non-professional politicians, presenting themselves as citizens and party delegates rather than representatives. All in all, the distance from past and current parliamentary parties could not have been any greater, so much so that it utterly rejected the 'party' label (Tronconi, 2018).

According to Hobolt and Tilley (2016), the M5S should not be considered an outlier in either Italian or European politics but rather a successful example of a new type of opposition party, which they label 'challenger party'. Similar to Podemos in Spain or the Front National in France, the M5S managed to attract disaffected voters by offering 'a clear alternative narrative to the mainstream consensus' (2016: 975) and by stressing its extraneousness to those political elites which were in office when the Euro crisis struck Europe. These parties are well-known for using traditional tools (e.g. protests and rallies)

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and new ones (e.g. the web) to challenge the mainstream consensus and influence the political agenda. However, little is yet known on how they employ more institutional channels such as the opposition activity of their MPs in parliament.

The main goal of this research article is to contribute to existing knowledge about the M5S and, more in general, new challenger parties, by analysing their opposition style in parliament. The expectation is that the M5S will attempt to mark its distinctiveness from the other opposition parties (see also De Giorgi and Dias 2018). When entering representative institutions, challenger parties as a rule must walk a thin line. They must prove that they are effective at representing the interests of their voters and militants, while at the same time avoiding being assimilated into the party system, thus losing their alleged purity. Building on the literature on party issue competition (e.g. Green-Pedersen, 2007; Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2010), this article contends that one way to achieve this goal is to emphasise issues which are different from your competitors. While research shows that all parties practise some form of selective issue emphasis, this article's argument is that new opposition parties have a greater incentive to set themselves apart than the other opposition parties.

To test this hypothesis, the following analysis will look at the issues opposition parties in the 17th legislature (2013-2018) decided to bring to the fore in their parliamentary oversight activities, more specifically during the so-called weekly question time (Russo and Cavalieri, 2016, Borghetto and Russo 2018). Admittedly, this is just one of the arenas where opposition parties are active. Yet, monitoring and challenging the government is one of their core functions (Martin, 2011). Additionally, the stake should be higher when the opposition is given the chance to ask questions on the floor and during a weekly televised debate in the presence of members of the cabinet. Thus, weekly question time represents an important stage where the opposition gains visibility and is able to signal to its voters.

The analysis is set up in two parts. The first step entails a comparison of the Movement's issue profile during the 17th legislature with that of opposition parties active from the 13th to the 17th legislatures and asks whether it overlaps more with parties of the left or the right side of the political spectrum. This way I can test whether the M5S lives up to its word of being indifferent to the socio-economic cleavage (H1). Second, I look closely at the agenda choices of the Movement in comparison with those of other opposition parties during the 17th legislature. On the one hand, the commitment to introduce some form of imperative mandate (which is prohibited by the Italian Constitution) for its MPs should make adherence to the party programme a relevant criterion for selecting the topic of parliamentary questions. H2 expects that the M5S should ask more questions on the key topics in its electoral manifesto than other parties. On the other hand, parties are strategic actors and do not act in a void. If most of their competitors in parliament ask questions on the issue of the day, it would be difficult for a party to avoid it. I argue that this should be less relevant in the case of the M5S. Because of its intention to portray itself as distinct and uncompromising, H3 expects that the M5S will choose topics which are different from the majority of other parties during a specific session.

I argue that this issue-based perspective and the choice to look closer at this less publicised side of the M5S – which is more well-known to the public for its town square rallies, social media campaigns and disruptive protests in parliament (Bordignon and

Ceccarini, 2015) – can provide important insights into the evolution of the Movement, from the pariah in Italian politics to main government partner in the current legislature (18th, which started in 2018). Many important studies have already analysed the Movement from different perspectives, bringing under the lens its communication strategy, organisational profile, charismatic leader and ideology. On the other hand, there is still little knowledge about the behaviour of its elected MPs in parliament (an exception is Pinto and Pedrazzani, 2015, and De Giorgi and Dias, 2018); in other words, on the behaviour of the party in public office, rather than the party on the ground and in central office (Katz and Mair 2003).

2. The M5S outside and inside Parliament

In the context of the ongoing transformations in contemporary democracies, Italy, for once, is no exception, but rather the place where some of the trends observable in most other European countries are amplified and, at times, anticipated. These include the sharp drop in the governing parties' level of support, the rise of new political forces that are often anti-establishment and with a strongly populist rhetoric (Bosco and Verney, 2012), and the increasing divide between parties that govern but are seen as incapable of representing, and parties that mostly do not govern, but that claim to represent (Mair 2011). Until its entry in 2018 into a government coalition with the League (which is still too early to assess) the M5S constituted a remarkable example of the latter type of party, that is, a typical challenger party (Hobolt and Tilley, 2016). Not tainted by government responsibility during the Euro crisis, it managed 'to monopolise the theme of protest against the establishment at a time when political elites reached their lowest level of popularity' (Tronconi 2018: 178).

Eventually, the defiance of the mainstream consensus coupled with a capacity to politicize issues mostly neglected by its competitors (Conti and Memoli, 2015, Passarelli and Tuorto, 2016) paid off. A party at its first electoral competition at national level, it gathered a level of consensus equal, when not superior, to that of the two mainstream parties from the centre right and centre left.[1] Immediately after their entry into the parliamentary arena, M5S MPs rushed to stress their non-involvement in the old party dynamics. In particular, they denied their availability to post-electoral alliances which would have helped overcome the political paralysis that had hit parliament (and the country) following the 2013 electoral results. The M5S wanted to convey the image of a movement from the bottom, close to the citizens and far from traditional party logics. Indeed, such a post-ideological positioning had been functional in their electoral success, since it allowed them to attract voters from all existing parties (Russo et al. 2017). Therefore, their MPs made an effort to appear in the parliamentary arena as an opposition that was alternative to all political forces – regardless of their position on the traditional socio-economic dimension – and with a declared mission to conquer alone the majority of seats and the government in the near future. Thus, the first demarcation line with other parties is that the M5S's issue profile during question time should be equally distinct from that of other opposition parties, whether they come from the left, centre or right pole of the political spectrum.

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[1] Only thanks to the electoral system, which rewarded the winning coalition and not the winning party, the centre-left Democratic Party (Partito Democratico, PD) obtained a majority prize in seats, succeeding in overtaking the M5S in the Chamber of Deputies (D'Alimonte, 2013).

H1 – The difference between the issue profile of the M5S and that of other opposition parties should not be correlated with their position on the socio-economic cleavage.

From a programmatic point of view, the first battles of Grillo and his supporters – from whom a large part of the new parliamentary elite is derived – can be traced back to the so-called 'new politics' (Poguntke, 1987). The key themes, at the origin of the Movement, concerned primarily environmentalism and renewable energy, issues of poverty and precarious employment, battles against the power of large enterprises and the effects of globalisation, the morality of politics, civil rights and, in particular, the pledge to open access to specific services and, above all, the internet to everyone (Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2015: 460). These very issues found space also in their electoral manifesto. On the other hand, their greatest innovation is probably not in the themes, which clearly lean towards the extreme left (Tronconi, 2016: 220) but in the interpretation given to the role of the representative in parliament. Since its founding in 2009 by the comedian, activist and blogger Beppe Grillo and the entrepreneur Gianroberto Casaleggio, the M5S has been a fierce critic of the delegation principle on which political representation is based. In their view, it inevitably leads to the betrayal of the citizens' will. From an organisational point of view, the Movement's self-declared inspiration is 'the horizontal network'. They claim that this same model should be applied to Italian political institutions through an increasing recourse to direct democracy and the exploitation of internet capabilities, especially social networks (Bickerton and Accetti 2018). Being connected in the network is considered by its founders as one of the essential tools to reform the model of representative democracy from the bottom. It is the only effective means through which citizens can keep control of their representatives and avoid the risk of being 'betrayed'. MPs, in turn, should be considered as temporary 'employees' bound by an 'imperative mandate'. Betrayal of the spirit of the mandate should be punished with expulsion from the parliamentary group. Although most parties nowadays stress the importance of mandate fulfilment, I expect that these constraints hold even more true in the case of the M5S. So, the second hypothesis reads as follows:

H2 – The congruence between the M5S issue profile during question time and in their electoral manifestos should be higher than for other opposition parties.

Their anti-elitist stance indisputably moulded their repertoire of action in parliament, which consisted of virulent protests and constant attacks against the 'caste' in their parliamentary interventions (Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2015; Tronconi, 2018). The goal was to convey to the media and the public at large an image of uncompromising opposition, marking a difference from the rest of the political forces. This distance is also visible in their collaborative stance towards other parties. De Giorgi and Dias (2018) provided evidence that M5S (likewise another anti-establishment party, the Northern League, LN, *Lega Nord*) tended to be less cooperative (measured as number of bills co-sponsored with other parties' MPs) than the average. On the other hand, there is still little research on their use of oversight tools such as parliamentary questions and their explicit issue choice in parliament. Another way to present themselves as extraneous to the system is, I expect, to address topics that are different from those most debated during a specific question time session. Thus, the final hypothesis reads:

H3 – The M5S should be less prone than other opposition parties to asking a question on the most debated topic of the day.

3. Data and analysis

The study presented in this article relies on the content-coding of oral parliamentary questions on the floor of the Chamber of Deputies during the 17th legislature. According to the rules of procedures, each parliamentary group is allowed only one question for each weekly session, regardless of the size of its delegation in parliament (Russo and Cavalieri 2016). Authorship was attributed on the basis of the party membership of the first signatory at the moment the question was presented; i.e. I do not consider the party affiliation of the remaining co-sponsors. To each question was attributed one of the 230 policy codes making up the Italian Policy Agendas codebook (Borghetto et al., 2018). These comprehensive range of topics can be aggregated into 21 policy topic areas.[2]

Figure 1 selects the ten most frequent topics (out of 21, counts on all topics are reported in appendix A) addressed by the M5S and shows the share of attention devoted by the M5S (triangle) and on average by the other four main opposition parties (circle) during the 17th legislature: Go Italy (FI, *Forza Italia*), LN, Left, Ecology and Liberty (SEL, *Sinistra [Ecologia] e Libertà*) and Brothers of Italy (BI, *Fratelli d'Italia*).[3] The start and end of the dashed line around the circle represent the opposition party with respectively the lowest and highest attention share.

The first finding worthy of note is that 'government operations' is by far the top-ranked issue: with its 41 questions, the M5S clearly stands out from the other parties (BI=15, FI=26, LN=9, SEL=19). 'Government operations' is a rather heterogeneous category including political, institutional and public administration issues as well as scandals and corruption connected with public offices. For the most part, this emphasis is driven by M5S's populist attacks against the so-called 'political caste': 32 percent of the questions (n=13) challenge government appointments to public offices; 34 percent (n=14) question the executive conduct from a political and legal perspective; finally, 12 percent (n=5) deal with electoral matters. Overall, it seems that the message they want to pass on is that their mission is to act as the watchdog of the 'elites' on behalf of the 'people'.

As regards other issues, the Movement does not differ remarkably from the average opposition party and this holds true regardless of the importance of the issue in the electoral programme. For instance, 'Justice and Crime', which ranked 13th in terms of importance in its manifesto, is the second main topic addressed by the M5S during question time. Vice versa, even for a signature issue of the M5S, clean energy and environment, they do not differ significantly from the average (a decline in the salience

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[2] The Italian Policy Agendas Project has been part of the Comparative Agendas research network since 2009 (Borghetto and Carammia 2010). For more information, visit: www.comparativeagendas.net. The data and R code used to conduct the analysis are made available by the author upon request.

[3] SEL was part of the centre-left alliance supporting Luigi Bersani as candidate for Prime Minister which won the relative majority of seats in both houses of the Italian parliament in 2013. After Bersani's failure to garner a majority in the Senate led to his resignation and the creation of a grand coalition led by Prime Minister Enrico Letta, SEL decided to move to the opposition in April 2013. At the beginning of the legislature, also FI, then called 'People of Freedom' (PDL) was part of the 'grand coalition' supporting the Letta cabinet. However, in September 2013, the PDL was dissolved and Berlusconi decided to launch a new 'Go Italy' party in the opposition.

of these issues was already detected by Manucci and Amsler 2018, 123). These findings suggest that issue selection during question time responds to a strategic reasoning. There are issues which parties cannot entirely 'disregard' because of their centrality in the public debate. Not focusing on them would mean surrendering the power of framing the issue to competitors. Although M5S MPs would theoretically prefer to focus exclusively on issues that are advantageous to them, they cannot entirely avoid issues 'owned' by their opponents (an emblematic case is 'Justice and Crime' which is a signature issue for the LN). From an issue competition perspective (Green-Pedersen, 2007; Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2010), the M5S does not seem to behave differently from other parties.

Figure 1. Distribution of attention across issues
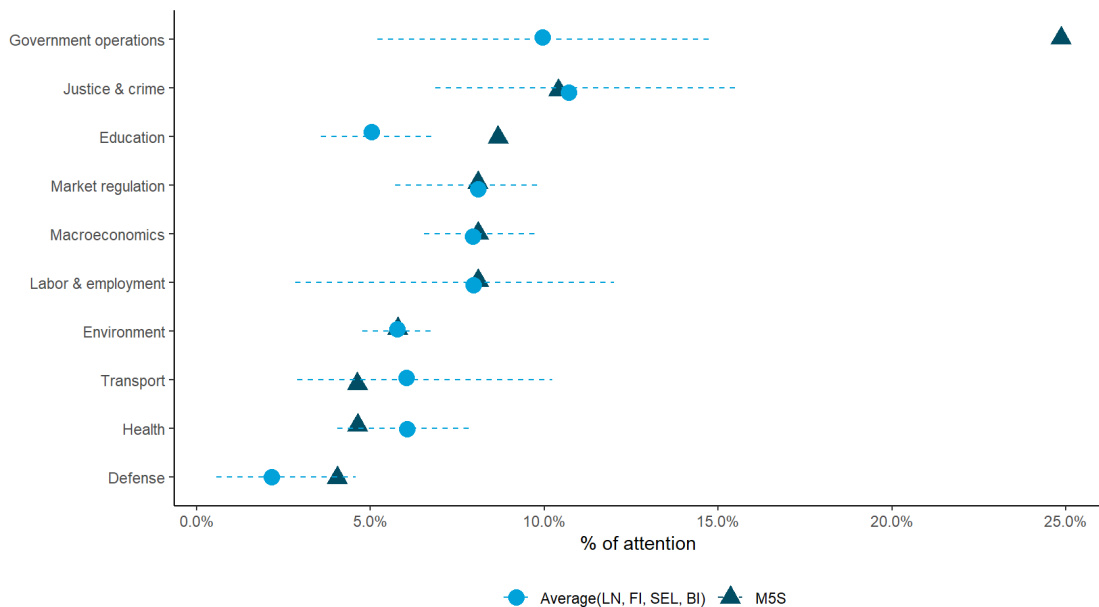
To gain further insight into how different the Movement behaved in comparison with other opposition parties and the extent to which its opposition style was innovative, I proceed in two steps. The first question I address is to what extent the overall issue profile of the M5S differs from the one adopted by other opposition parties, both on the left and right wing of the ideological spectrum. To answer this question, I merged the data on the 17th legislature with a database containing the content coding of all parliamentary oral questions submitted on the floor of the Chamber of Deputies during question time from the 13th to the 16th legislature (Russo and Cavalieri, 2016). For each legislature and opposition party, I calculated the share of questions devoted to a specific topic (using one of the 230 subtopics) and compared it to the issue distribution of the M5S in the 17th legislature. In order to measure the overall difference for each pair of issue profiles, I use issue convergence scores as developed by Sigelman and Buell (2004). This index sums the absolute differences in attention proportion for each of the issues included. This sum is subtracted from 100 and divided by 2, so that the index goes from 0, when the distribution of attention diverges completely, to 100, indicating a perfect overlap between the

two agendas. For instance, a value of 40 means that 40 percent of the party agenda is similar to the agenda of the M5S.

Figure 2 plots on the y-axis convergence scores and on the x-axis the position of opposition parties on the left (0) – right (10) dimension. The estimation of party positions for each legislative term relies on various waves of the Chapel Hill Expert Surveys (Bakker et al., 2015; Polk et al., 2017).[4] A regression line was drawn to fit the data. If one just considers parties from the 17th legislature, it does seem that the issue profile of M5S during question time is equally as close to that of parties from the left- and right-side of the political spectrum. For instance, both SEL and FI share more than 50 percent of the agenda with the M5S.[5] On the other hand, incorporating the comparisons with parties of past legislatures yields a different picture. Overall, the relationship between issue convergence and party position on the left-right axis is negative (the more we move to the right, the smaller the convergence score) and it reaches a conventional 0.05% level of significance if we remove the comparisons with parties of the 17th legislature (coefficient = -1.82, standard deviation = 0.72). The highest convergence scores are with Italy of Values (*Italia dei Valori*, IDV) in the 16th legislature (45 percent).[6] Moreover, there is some overlap with the PD in the 14th legislature (43 percent), Communist Refoundation Party (*Partito della Rifondazione Comunista*, PRC) in the 13th legislature (43 percent) and both PD and the Union of the Centre (*Unione di Centro*, UC) in the 16th legislature (around 40 percent). Vice versa, the M5S differs the most from both the LN (17 percent) and the UC (19 percent) in the 15th legislature. Although comparisons across time should be treated with caution, it appears that the M5S agenda tends to share more issues with that of left-wing parties.

The rest of the analysis implements a multivariate regression design, where the unit of analysis is the individual question. Two different models were developed, each testing one of the two remaining hypotheses. Model H2 tests the effect of the questioner's party affiliation on the probability of a question being about one of the top three topics in the party platform (H2). To measure topic salience in electoral platforms, each manifesto was divided into (quasi)sentences and to each of them was attributed one of the 21 topics of the Italian Comparative Agendas reflecting its policy content.[7] Once the share of sentences for each topic in each manifesto was computed, I assigned 1 to questions falling into the three most important topics, 0 to others (Appendix B lists the top three topics for each party).

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[4] I use the question 'Position of the party in YEAR in terms of its overall ideological stance. 0 = Extreme left : 5 = Center : 10 = Extreme right'.

[5] By default, agenda overlap between the M5S with parties from the same legislative term (17th) should be higher, regardless of the ideological leaning, because parties are responding to the same range of contingent events (such as media pressures and domestic/international events).

[6] The proximity between the M5S and the IDV comes as no surprise given that both are protest parties sharing a 'populist/anti-party elite' discourse. In 2009 Grillo expressed his support for two independent candidates in the IDV lists in the European elections, see: http://www.beppegrillo.it/2009/03/comunicato_poli_14.html.

[7] A similar approach was applied by Carammia et al. (2018). Note that FI and LN ran on a common platform in the 2013 general elections.

Figure 2. Agenda convergence between M5S and other opposition parties
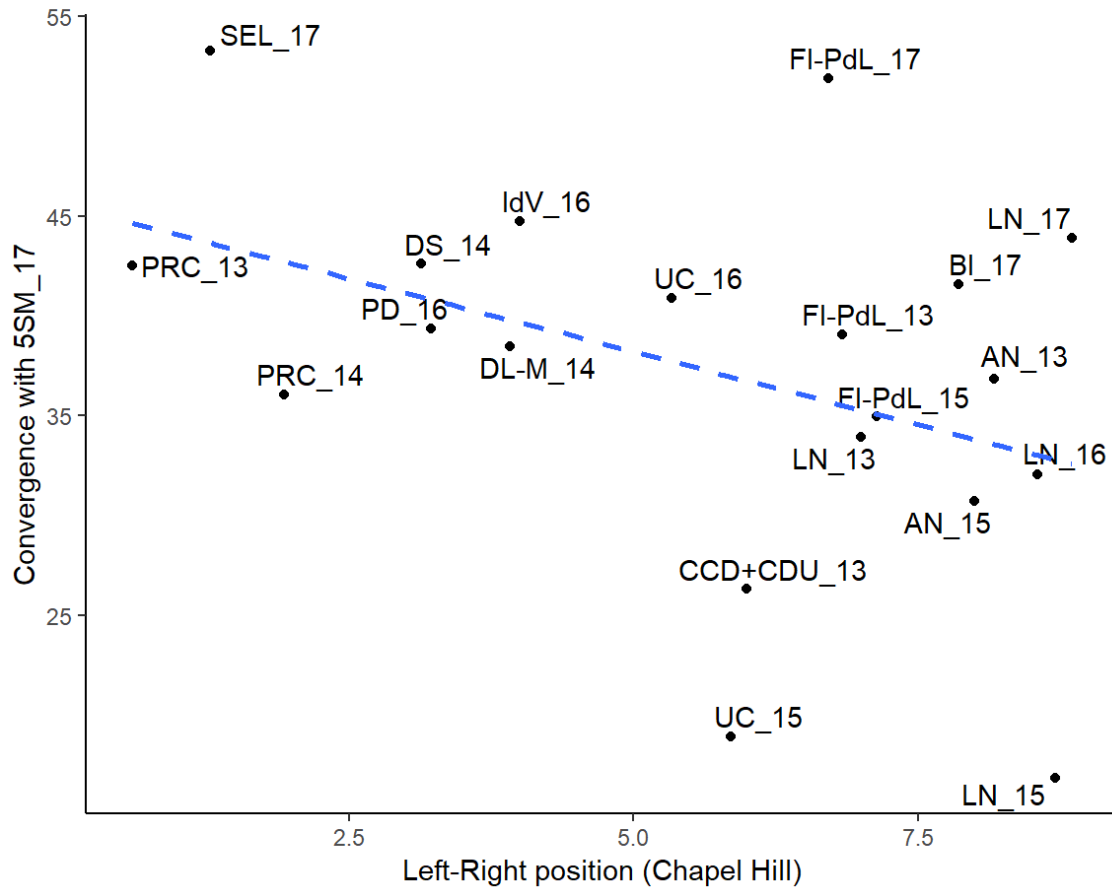
Note: SEL (Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà); PRC (Partito Rifondazione Comunista); DS (Democratici di Sinistra); PD (Partito Democratico); DL-M (Margherita); IdV (Italia dei Valori); UC (Unione di Centro); LN (Lega Nord); FI-PdL (Forza Italia, Popolo della Libertà); AN (Alleanza Nazionale); CCD+CDU (Centro Cristiano Democratico); BI (Fratelli d'Italia).

Model H3 tests the party impact on the likelihood of a question being about the topic receiving the most questions in that weekly session (H3). Since during a session each parliamentary group is allowed one question, I tallied all questions addressed by majority and opposition groups by topic (always out of 21 topics) and gave 1 to those questions related to the most popular topic(s) that week (i.e. receiving more questions), 0 to the rest. The main predictor of model H2 and H3 is the party membership of the questioner, considering only the five main opposition parties analysed in Figure 1. This predictor was fitted as a categorical variable with the M5S as the reference category. Furthermore, both models incorporate a control for the timing of the question, measured as the legislature year (it equals 1 for the first year since the elections, 2 for the second year, etc.). In model H2 this is introduced as both a control (H2a) and moderating (H2b, in interaction with party authorship) variable, as it is likely that the probability of a party addressing one of

its three most important electoral topics during question time will decrease as we move away from elections and new priorities hit the agenda.[8]

All models fit a binary dependent variable, so the recommended model specification is a multivariate logistic regression. All models fit clustered standard errors with the week as the cluster variable. The model results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Logistic regression model testing H2 and H3

	H2a	H2b	H3
	1 if the question is about one of the top three topics in the party platform, 0 otherwise		1 if the question is about the topic receiving more questions in a session, 0 otherwise
(Intercept)	-0.59 * (0.23)	-0.03 (0.38)	-0.69 ** (0.25)
BI	-0.21 (0.24)	-0.72 (0.56)	0.37 (0.26)
FI	0.00 (0.23)	-0.96 (0.55)	0.50 (0.26)
LN	-0.33 (0.24)	-1.35 * (0.58)	0.21 (0.27)
SEL	-0.81 ** (0.26)	-1.04 (0.60)	0.42 (0.26)
year in the legislature	-0.09 (0.06)	-0.30 * (0.13)	-0.27 *** (0.06)
year*BI		0.19 (0.19)	
year*FI		0.35 (0.18)	
year*LN		0.37 * (0.19)	
year*SEL		0.08 (0.21)	
N	867	867	867
AIC	974.35	976.34	959.35
BIC	1002.94	1023.99	987.94
Pseudo R2	0.03	0.04	0.04

Note: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$. Week-level clustered standard errors are reported inside parentheses

Starting from H2a, namely the first model in table 1, all coefficients (except for FI) are negative, meaning that the odds that the M5S asks questions on one of the three most salient topics in the electoral platform is greater than the odds for other parties. The coefficient for FI is 0, meaning that the odds are the same as those for the M5S. On the other hand, none of the party effects, except the one concerning SEL, are significant at a conventional 95 percent confidence level, meaning that I can reject the null hypothesis of independence only for the pair M5S-SEL. To summarise, while the difference in odds between M5S and FI is nil, it increases when I compare M5S and, respectively, BI and LN, and it is statistically significant only between M5S and SEL. This first piece of evidence provides us with some clue that the M5S does differ from other opposition parties, although for the most part this claim is not statistically supported.

Another interesting effect is the interaction of year in the legislature and party effects (H2b). Only the interaction terms of LN and the negative constitutive term 'year in the

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[8] I do not have theoretical expectations about the impact of time on the probability of addressing 'popular issues'. Furthermore, none of the interaction terms between time and party factors are significant in case H3. As a result, I did not include it in the analysis.

legislature' (which is the marginal impact of time when all other categorical variables equal to 0, namely in the case of the M5S) are statistically significant. Since interactions are difficult to interpret in logistic regression, I plot the predicted probabilities. Figure 3 reports the predicted probability of the impact of time since the start of the legislature (in years) on the probability of asking a question on the top three electoral topics by party. The difference between the M5S and the other opposition parties stands out, especially in the case of the LN. At the beginning of the 17th legislature, the predicted probability of the M5S asking such questions is the highest, around 42 percent, and it decreases sharply as time goes by, so much so that at the end of the legislature the odds drop to only 18 percent. I interpret this finding as evidence of the progressive learning process undertaken by M5S MPs over the course of the legislature. At the outset, at their first mandate in parliament, and lacking in experience, they stuck firmly to the topics emphasised on the party platform, which is the pattern expected by H2. Next, as new topics reached the public agenda and started being discussed on the web, they showed a greater propensity to embark on new topics.

Figure 3. Predicted probability of asking a question on one of the top three electoral topics at different times in the legislative term by party membership
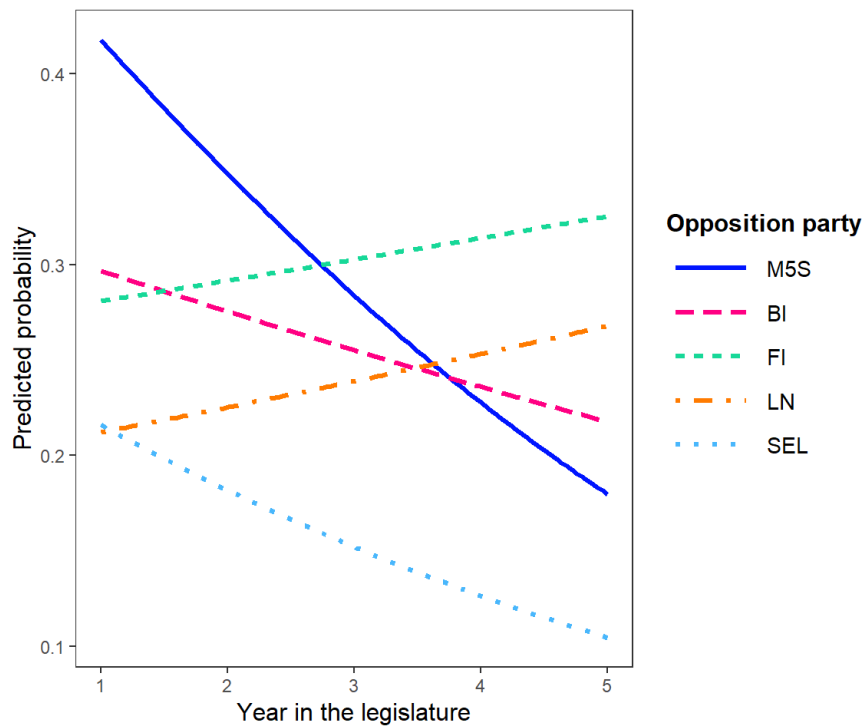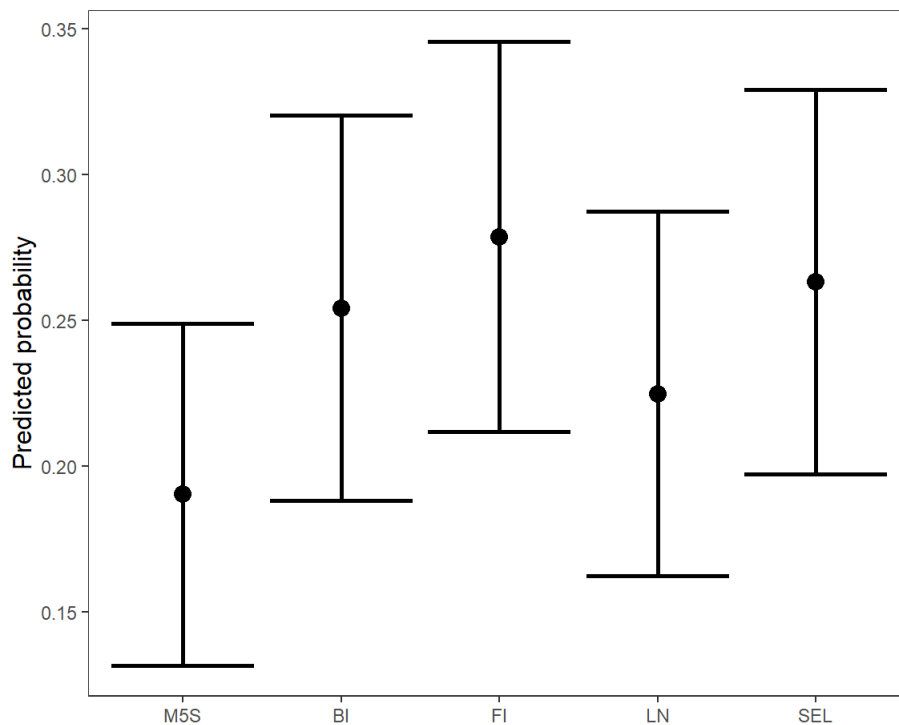

Note: Figure derived from Table 1, model H2b

Model H3 tests which parties show a greater tendency to ask questions on topics that are 'hot' (receive the most questions) in a specific weekly session (recall that each parliamentary group is allowed only one question per week). As in the previous model, none of the party coefficients is statistically significant, which suggests that we cannot reject the hypothesis of independence between the M5S and the other parties. Indeed, this is what we observe in Figure 4, which plots the predicted probabilities for our categorical party predictors. The M5S occupies the lower end of the spectrum, with a probability of asking

this type of questions of around 19 percent. As expected by H3, the odds of M5S MPs asking a question on popular topics are the lowest in the cluster of parties. On the other hand, the probabilities for other parties are rather close, hovering between 23 and 28 percent.

Figure 4. Predicted probability of asking a question on the most debated issue in question time

Note: Figure derived from Table 1, model H3

4. Conclusions

More than five years after the 2013 elections, the M5S is no longer the unidentified political actor it used to be at its origins. More and more pieces of the puzzle have been collected over the years, providing increasing insights into this new and successful actor in Italian politics. This research article has tried to contribute to this endeavour by casting light on its opposition activity in parliament during the 17th legislature. It argues that learning about the M5S can provide insights into the wider category of challenger parties (Hobolt and Tilley 2016), which are currently on the rise in European politics. In particular, starting from the premise that an issue-based perspective allows us to bring to the surface a rather unexplored side of the communication and political strategy of the party in public office, it focuses on the policy content of its parliamentary oversight activities.

Descriptive results reveal that the M5S stands out for its emphasis on political-administrative issues. In particular, it shows a tendency to question cabinet appointments and general conduct, especially when a potential scandal is in sight. This issue selection strategy is indicative of an attempt to portray itself as the 'watchdog' of the elites on behalf of the 'people'. On the other hand, it does not altogether disregard issues such as 'law and order', which have been salient in the political discussion but that are not its 'signature' issues. As far as the descriptive evidence is concerned, the agenda profile of the M5S

does not differ substantially from that of other parties. This can be interpreted as a sign that the M5S is not oblivious to considerations of issue competition (Green-Pedersen, 2007). It also confirms previous findings pointing at the 'ideological flexibility of M5S and its ability in strategically raising different topics at different times in order to remain constantly attuned to the people's mood and the ou tcome of the latest polls' (Manucci and Amsler, 2018: 127).

These results were refined by means of a statistical analysis. First, I set out a comparison between the M5S thematic profile during question time and that of current and past opposition parties. I found that the issue focus of the M5S crosscuts the left-right divide when taking into consideration parties from the 17th legislature, thus confirming Grillo's portrait of the Movement as 'post-ideological'. On the other hand, when the comparison is limited to opposition parties from past legislatures, there is a slightly stronger convergence with parties on the left side of the political spectrum. This finding corroborates previous studies showing that the identity of the M5S parliamentarians is 'ideologically much closer to the left on both socio-economic and socio-cultural issues' (Farinelli and Massetti, 2015: 222).

Second, I found some limited evidence that, compared to most other opposition parties of the 17th legislature, the M5S tends to ask more questions about the three most salient topics of its political platform (H2) and about topics that do not attract a lot of attention from other party actors (H3). On the other hand, these findings should be treated with extra care due to their lack of statistical significance. Another interesting finding – one that warrants more attention in future research – is the impact of time on the behaviour of the M5S's agenda decisions: the emphasis on the most salient electoral priorities declined dramatically as the time of the legislature went by. Of course, one can only speculate on the reasons accounting for such a pattern. I suggest that it might indicate the learning process M5S MPs have gone through. At the same time, it might reveal a change of communication strategy in the Movement, which was forced to progressively switch attention to new issues to stay in tune with the requests of its very heterogeneous electorate.

Be that as it may, these results speak to previous studies that point to a normalisation of the Movement (Tronconi, 2018) and an increasing capacity to flexibly adapt its message to changes in the public mood (Manucci and Amsler, 2018). One can conjecture that this careful adjustment of its image over the course of the legislature played a role in the broadening of its electoral base during the 2018 elections. Although more research is needed to generalise this finding beyond the Italian case, this flexibility in issue emphasis paired with a radical anti-elitism might be one of the distinctive characteristics of challenger parties' opposition style in parliament. Both untarnished by the stigma of holding office before or during the recent Euro crisis and unafraid of damaging their coalition potential by taking extreme or risky political stances, challengers are in a better position to engage the priorities of a changing public opinion while preserving their distinctiveness in the party system.

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The difficult harmonisation of EU policies: insights into the implementation of EU pesticide policy in Italy

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Abstract

The EU pesticide policy is informed by a one-fits-all logic: scientific guidelines as well as procedural norms have been harmonised and centralised at EU level. Yet member states have adopted very different institutional models to contribute to implementation. The paper provides an analysis of the institutional model in place in Italy and advances two main arguments. First, some of the features of the Italian model prevent national experts from fully contributing to EU common procedures; second, because of the harmonised nature of EU pesticide policy, inefficiencies at national level have the potential to directly affect the overall capacity of the EU to achieve policy results. The paper concludes by suggesting some potential directions for the reform of the Italian system.

1. Introduction

Scholars working on multilevel governance (MLG) have observed that the dispersion of policy making across territorial levels can be an effective arrangement for a polity as diverse as the European Union (EU) (Piattoni, 2010). They also observe that the EU strongly endorses this principle by requiring the decentralisation of policy competence in a number of sectors (Newig & Koontz, 2014). The Water Framework Directive, Cohesion policy, and Air Quality Directive are relevant examples in this respect. Notably, a push for a re-scaling of policy competence has been observed in the supranational sector *par excellence*: the Common Agricultural Policy (Garzon, 2006; Greer, 2005). Increasingly, EU policies have been adopted with a built-in specified multilevel governance architecture: provisions require cooperation at vertical and horizontal levels from a variety of institutional, civic and social actors. On a less positive note, scholars also observe that, while desirable in principle, 'it cannot be taken for granted that operational designs based on MLG bring necessarily to the desired improvements in implementation performance' at national level (Domorenok, 2017, p. 667) and point out that a variety of multi-level institutional arrangements with different degrees of efficiency have been adopted across Europe.

This paper builds on these insights from MLG literature on the variety and performance of institutional arrangements for policy implementation to expand the analysis to fully centralised and harmonised EU policies. It takes as a starting point the observation that the trend towards decentralisation is likely predominant but not ubiquitous. A push for centralisation and harmonisation at EU level can also be observed: REACH, food safety and pesticide policy are cases in point. These are areas largely characterised

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by a 'one-fits-all' logic, intended to define common regulatory standards that are valid across all Member States (MSs) and implement them according to uniform procedures. The EU also prescribes a specific governance architecture for these areas, requiring strong convergence in institutional arrangements and procedural norms (Knill, 2005). Yet research shows that harmonised EU policy might be characterised by relevant differences in national institutional arrangements and that, as in decentralised policies, institutional arrangements have different implementation performances (Bozzini, 2017). This paper argues that, unlike in decentralised sectors, in the case of a one-fits-all EU policy, inefficiencies at national level do have *direct* consequences for other MSs and for EU institutions, affecting the overall regulatory regime and its capacity to fully achieve policy results.

To illustrate the argument, the paper provides an in-depth analysis of the model adopted in Italy to deliver EU pesticide policy. Pesticide regulation[1] in particular is a good example in the context of centralised, one-fits-all sectors. To list but a few features included in Regulation (EC) 1107/2009: chemical substances to be employed in the production of pesticides receive a single 'pan-European' approval; the assessments are jointly carried out by authorities from all 28 MSs and the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) in a common procedure; shared protocols and guidelines prescribe in fine detail how scientific information must be gathered, evaluated, reported, and discussed in hazard and risk assessments. To some extent the allocation of workload across MSs is decided by the European Commission (EC), which also dictates the timing and content of assessments. Regulation 1107/2009 also foresees a specific governance arrangement at national level: each MS must designate a Competent Authority (CA) to contribute 'with one voice' to EU processes at EFSA and the Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety of the EC (DG Sante).

The paper describes the complex institutional arrangement in Italy and discusses the advantages and disadvantages in relation to EU harmonised goals. It argues that some of the institutional features of the Italian system prevent an effective contribution to common regulatory goals and, because of the one-fits-all logic of pesticide policy, have the potential to negatively affect EU procedures and policy results. The argument of the paper is structured as follows. The first section sets the context and illustrates the main defining goals of EU pesticide policy. The second section describes policy outputs and the contribution of Italian authorities to these, providing empirical evidence to show that Italy has had a low degree of involvement in common EU procedures. The third section focuses on Italian institutional arrangements in the sector as the main explanatory factor for the limited input to EU processes. The final section provides some concluding remarks on the potential implications of the Italian institutional model for the overall EU regulatory regime and suggests some directions for reform.[2]

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[1] Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 October 2009 concerning the placing of plant protection products on the market and repealing Council Directives 79/117/EEC and 91/414/EEC.

[2] The empirical base for the analysis was collected in the context of two research projects carried out by the author in the period 2015-2018: 'Law, science and interests in European policy-making' (LASI) funded by the ERC and the evaluation of implementation of Regulation 1107/2009 carried out on behalf of the European Parliament Research Service (Bozzini 2018). The research design involved semi-structured interviews with CAs across 28 MSs, EFSA and EU Commission officials. In addition, an extensive documentary analysis was performed. Specifically, the empirical documentary research for this paper

2. Features of the EU pesticide regulation

In the EU the first common pesticide policy was introduced in 1991 (European Union, 1991) and later reformed in 2009 (European Union, 2009). Since its inception the EU pesticide legislation has had a clear harmonisation character: main goals are to define shared, uniform scientific criteria and common regulatory procedures for the evaluation and approval of active substances that can be put safely in use in all 28 MSs (Bozzini, 2017).[3]

There are strong arguments to favour harmonisation in pesticide policy: to avoid market fragmentation and remove possible obstacles to trade are among the most important ones. Further, it is widely recognised that health and environmental protection goals are best served by the application of a 'one-fits-all' logic (Frank & Ottoboni, 2011). In particular the assessment of the safety of active substances is informed by the principle 'one substance, one assessment' (United Nations, 2017). It means that the inherent properties of a chemical are assessed once at EU level and are valid across all 28 EU MSs. From a toxicological point of view, this approach makes sense because the – let's say – carcinogenicity potential of a substance does not vary according to the national origins of individuals.[4] A similar point can be made for the environmental fate of chemicals or for ecotoxicology: if a substance is persistent in the environment or if it threatens the health of bees, this is because of the intrinsic characteristics of the chemical that do not change depending on the location. Last but not least, shared ethical norms require the minimal use of laboratory animals (Joint Research Centre, 2016), and therefore there is a need to avoid unnecessary repetitions of testing across MSs (Annys et al., 2014; Scholz et al., 2013).

The EU goals proved very ambitious, requiring the assessment of a wide range of hazards and risks according to stringent criteria.[5] As the EC observed 'in many instances, the risk assessment methodologies required for the evaluations did not exist and had to be developed. It was necessary to develop new science, and then to ensure agreement on its application' (European Commission, 2001, p. 4). The criteria for carrying out assessments have been harmonised (Hardy, Bopp, & Egsmose, 2012): over the years EU and national experts have adopted guidelines to establish what laboratory tests need to be taken into consideration for the evaluation of, for example, mutagenicity or genotoxicity, the protocols for their study design as well as quality criteria for the validation of testing (Brooks, Koch, Wathen, & Valley, 2015).[6]

Further, similarly to scientific guidelines, procedural rules have gone through a process of harmonisation (Bozzini, 2018). Regulation (EC) 1107/2009 prescribes that 'in the interest of predictability, efficiency and consistency, a detailed procedure should be laid

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includes interviews with five officers at the Ministry of Health and experts based at two certified research centres, an elaboration of data gathered from the EU Pesticide Database and an analysis of dossiers published in the EFSA Register of Pesticide Dossiers.

[3] It goes beyond the scope of this paper, but it is worth mentioning that commercial formulations containing one or more active substances approved at EU level must obtain a second 'zonal' authorization. The entire EU territory is divided into three zones, North, Central and South. Italy is included in the South zone together with Bulgaria, Greece, Spain, France, Cyprus, Malta, Portugal, and Croatia.

[4] Indeed, the UN advocate a global, harmonised system of hazard assessment.

[5] The EU legislation on pesticides is usually considered the most stringent and restrictive one. See (Pelaez, 2013).

[6] For a more informed overview of progress in the harmonisation of scientific guidelines see (Bozzini, 2018). It should be noted that regulators must (try to) keep pace with advances in scientific understandings; therefore, guidelines are always 'in progress' and their adequacy is often a matter of discussion.

down for assessing whether an active substance can be approved' (Regulation (EC) 1107/2009 preamble 12). The assessment of hazards and risks associated with active substances to be used in the production of pesticides is therefore centralised at EFSA, with the fundamental involvement of designated experts from all MSs who are required to contribute to the common EU assessments. Today there are guidelines that regulate all the different steps in the process, like the format of evaluation reports, the timing of procedures, how to organise the expert discussion for the interpretation of results, how to make information available to the general public. All these and other aspects have been painstakingly defined over the years by scientists and regulators at EFSA, DG Sante and MSs.

As mentioned, the procedure relies on the joint cooperation between EFSA and national CAs that are required to take part in common EU procedure. Specifically, the procedure for the assessment of an active substance starts at the national level: a manufacturer who want to market its pesticide in the EU submits an application to the MS of its choice or, if the substance is already on EU markets and its approval must be renewed, to an MS indicated by the EC.[7] The chosen MS becomes the Rapporteur Member State (RMS) for that specific active substance. It works on behalf of EFSA to perform a first evaluation of data and produce a Draft Assessment Report (DAR) on the active substance. This is arguably one of the most demanding tasks for CAs: legal requirements prescribe the analysis of data gathered from over 400 different tests in areas as diverse as chemistry and toxicology (Kaltenhauser, Kneuer, & Marx-Stoelting, 2017), and the DAR can total thousands of pages. The DAR, therefore, is resource-intensive: it entails the involvement of experts from different scientific backgrounds and specifically trained on regulatory issues.[8] Further, according to Regulation (EC) 1107/2009, the DAR must be finalised by national CAs within a specified time-limit: 12 months, possibly extended to 18 if additional data are needed to further clarify the risk profile of the chemical under evaluation. The existence of precise time limits is an extremely important point: deadlines make the procedure predictable to interested manufacturers as well as to other CAs who need to plan their activities in advance. Indeed, after this first evaluation on the part of one MS, the DAR, as well as the raw data, are made available to EFSA and to the other 27 CAs, who are required to step in and contribute to the assessment.

This second stage in the evaluation takes place at EFSA, which organises the so-called 'peer-review procedure' on the dossier. In this context, the peers who are required to review the DAR are mainly experts from the other CAs.[9] They have two months to read and send comments to the various part of the assessment report, according to a specified format, to double check the interpretation of evidence advanced by the RMS and assess the preliminary conclusions on the hazards and risks associated with the substance under discussion. In a third stage all the comments are subsequently discussed in common meetings at EFSA in Parma. The discussion between experts from 28 MSs and EFSA must be finalised within four months and terminate with the delivery of the document

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[7] Approvals of active substances are temporary. After 10 years, manufacturers must submit a request for renewal updating the existing dossier. See Regulation (EC) 844/2012.

[8] Space limitations prevent a discussion on this important point. Suffice to note that one thing is to have expertise in toxicology, another is being knowledgeable in the EU version of regulatory toxicology.

[9] A so-called 'sanitized' version of the dossier – clear of confidential information relevant to patent rights – is made available to external experts, stakeholders and the general public for comment. As might be expected, public participation is de facto non-existent on these highly technical dossiers.

reporting EFSA conclusions on the active substance. The publication of the 'EFSA con-
clusion' is the final act in the scientific assessment of risks associated with a specific
chemical and reflects the shared expert opinion as developed in the context of the EU pro-
cedure.[10] Finally, it is important to note that to ensure transparency and traceability, all
documents relative to an active substance are subsequently made available to the public
in the EFSA Register of Questions and in the EU Pesticide Database run by DG Sante.[11]
The latter represents the unique, pan-EU list of approved active substances which, as
mentioned above, has always been the ultimate policy output in the context of pesticide
regulation. At the time of writing (January 2019) the EU Pesticide Database collects the
scientific and legal documents published over the years on the safety of around 1400
chemicals. Of these, 490 have been considered safe and are therefore included in the list
of active substances approved for use; those remaining are banned from the EU pesticide
market.

To sum up, strong efforts have been sustained over the years to achieve ambitious
policy goals in terms of harmonisation and in so doing, ensure timely, transparent and
scientifically accurate assessments.[12] Harmonisation requires the contribution of all MSs
to joint evaluation processes carried out according to common rules and procedures as
well as specific deadlines. The next section illustrates to what extent the Italian authori-
ties have contributed to such policy efforts.

3. The Italian involvement towards common policy outputs in EU pesticide regulation

As noted in the preceding section, the most relevant – and demanding – tasks for na-
tional CAs in the implementation of EU pesticide legislation are the delivery of the DARs
and participation in EFSA peer-review processes. In this section I illustrate the involve-
ment of Italian authorities in these two tasks.

To start with, it is important to stress that MSs have, as might be expected, different
interest in the pesticide sector. This is evident if we consider that not all 490 approved
active substances are in use in all EU countries. MSs have different agronomic and cli-
matic conditions as well as agricultural productions and are therefore differentiated in
terms of their crop protection needs. **Error! Reference source not found.** shows in the
second column the number of active substances in use in each of the 28 MSs, to provide
evidence of the variation in terms of range of pesticides needed in each EU country. Of
interest in the context of this paper is the fact that Italy, with 335 different chemicals in
use, is first in this specific ranking. The high number of pesticides required by Italian
farmers reflects the highly diversified agricultural production of the country, as well as
its peculiar climatic conditions that make crops highly vulnerable to, for example,

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[10] The EFSA conclusions are then sent to DG Sante, and findings are discussed in the context of the
comitology committee SCoPAFF. A final decision on risk management is taken by a qualified majority
and adopted in the form of an Implementing Regulation.
[11] See the document available online: http://ec.europa.eu/food/plant/pesticides/eu-pesticides-data-
base/public/?event=homepage&language=EN.
[12] The effective capacity of the EU regulatory system to meet its ambition is a matter of debate. See
(European Parliament Research Service, 2018; Scientific Advice Mechanism, 2018).

bacteria and fungi. In short, Italy has a strong interest in the EU pesticide regulation and the importance of this sector for the country cannot be underestimated.

Table 1. Number of active substances in use, number of dossiers processed by each EU country, and the ratio between these two measures.

Country	Number of active substances[a]	Total number of dossiers[a]	Ratio
UK	275	152	1.8
SE	142	61	2.3
AT	266	103	2.6
DE	265	98	2.7
NL	266	98	2.7
FR	317	115	2.8
ES	304	70	4.3
IT	335	74	4.5
BE	287	57	5.0
EL	287	57	5.0
FI	148	29	5.1
IE	215	42	5.1
DK	153	26	5.9
PL	257	33	7.8
HU	266	25	10.6
CZ	261	22	11.9
PT	254	18	14.1
EE	149	9	16.6
LV	149	9	16.6
SI	204	10	20.4
SK	221	7	31.6
HR	197	4	49.3
BG	204	4	51.0
LT	162	2	81.0
RO	224	1	224.0
CY	189	0	
LU	219	0	
MT	54	0	
Total		**1126**	

[a] Source: Own elaboration from EU Pesticide Database

The third column of Table 1 provides information on the division of workload among CAs, in terms of the number of DARs delivered. Data show that out of a total of 1126 dossiers processed, Italy has been in charge of 74. The fourth column of the table synthetizes the data between national demands for pesticides and level of involvement in the regulatory effort. Specifically, the table reports the ratio between the number of active substances in use in a country and the number of dossiers processed by that same country. Data show that the ratio for Italy is 4.5, meaning that for each dossier delivered, Italian authorities 'receive' 4.5 in return. In other words, without the common EU regime Italian authorities would have to process 4.5 more dossiers to have the same number of 335 authorised chemicals in the country as they have today. In this sense the

ratio provides an indication of the added value of the EU regulatory regimes for each MSs: the higher the ratio, the greater the advantage for the country. This means that in relation to the national demand for active substances, Italy commits itself to a low number of evaluations.

In terms of participation in EFSA peer-review procedures, data show that the contribution of the Italian CA is extremely limited. The analysis of documents relative to the 49 procedures finalised at EFSA in 2016 and 2017 reveals that Italy wrote comments on two substances only: one for which it was RMS and one for which it acted as co-RMS, meaning that it cooperated with the official RMS in the drafting of the DAR.[13] On all other occasions the Italian authority sent no written contributions to comment on draft evaluations. This represents a serious limit, since – as noted – the peer-review procedure at EFSA is essential to achieve a shared, consistent assessment of the hazards poses by a chemical.

It seems safe to argue that Italy has had an overall low level of involvement in common EU pesticide regulation: it takes advantage of the input of other MSs in a significant measure while it provides a partial contribution, both in terms of DARs and participation in EFSA processes.

This paper suggests that Italy's low performance in contributing to the common pesticide regulatory effort is due to the features of the institutional model in place in the country, as illustrated in the next section.

4. The Italian institutional model

Article 75 of Regulation (EC) 1107/2009 establishes that each MS must designate a CA to deal with the obligations laid down by the legislation in terms of approvals of active substances and authorization of PPPs. All MSs are obliged to observe this requirement, and it is therefore possible to identify who is responsible for the implementation of Regulation (EC) 1107/2009 in each of the 28 EU countries plus Norway. Each country can adopt its own institutional arrangements and previous research indicates that there is significant variation between MSs in this respect (Bozzini, 2018).

As far as Italy is concerned, it adopts an institutional model that foresees the cooperation between a governmental body and external research institutes and universities. Assessments are outsourced to research centres which are in charge of evaluations of part of the dossier according to their competence. This means that the system is based on a vast network of institutional and research actors that have to coordinate to deliver pesticide policy.

To start with the governmental body, the institution officially identified as CA for the country is an administrative structure established in the context of the Ministry of Health and more specifically within the 'Direzione Generale per l'Igiene e la Sicurezza degli Alimenti e della Nutrizione' (DgSan). DgSan is therefore formally responsible for pesticide policy. More specifically, the 'Ufficio 7' within DgSan deals with all matters related to plant protection products, having responsibility for all EU legislation that covers the entire 'pesticide chain', from authorizations to factories, to market authorizations

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[13] Italy was RMS for the active substance Linuron, a herbicide. It was co-RMS for Iprovalicarb, a fungicide.

and labelling, to controls of residues on food. Officials from Ufficio 7 also participate in comitology procedures in Brussels.

As far as the scientific assessment of active substances is concerned, it is of note that officials at Ufficio 7 mainly guarantee administrative support and do not deal with the merits of evaluations, which are outsourced to certified research institutes. Specifically, eleven different centres and/or universities replied to a public procedure last launched by DgSan in 2014 and have been selected to provide scientific advice and perform evaluation on behalf of the Italian CA.[14] Centres meet a wide range of requirements; in particular they must possess expertise in all the disciplines included in the EU assessment of pesticides (chemistry, toxicology, ecotoxicology, endocrinology, environmental fate, etc.) as well as being familiar with EU regulatory guidelines and procedures.

Every year the centres sign a financial agreement, 'Convenzione', with DgSan and when an application is delivered to Italy, Ufficio 7 allocates it to one of the centres.

The allocation of dossiers depends on the availability and competence of the selected centres. For example, the Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna and the Fondazione Mach have specific expertise on biopesticides, while the others are generally in charge of the assessment of conventional chemicals. There is no official information available on the allocation of dossiers; as a consequence, it is not possible to track with certainty the process for each active substance and reconstruct 'who did what'. According to interviewees, most evaluations are carried out by the University of Milan, ICPS and ISS. Further on this point, it is of note that research centres can also decide not to carry out the evaluation in-house but, for example, to recruit ad-hoc external personnel to perform these tasks. Finally, it is important to note that DgSan allocates to external centres only dossiers for which Italy is RMS and for which it receives a fee from manufacturers, while there are no procedures in place (or resources) to identify experts who can contribute to EFSA peer-review processes.

Once the centre has the DAR ready, it is sent to the 'Commissione Consultiva Prodotti Fitosanitari' (CCPF). The CCPF is one of the five sub-committees dealing with food safety and was created in its current form in 2013.[15] It comprises representatives from four different ministries that have a policy interest in the authorization of pesticides: Health, Environment, Agriculture and Economic Development. Members are both public servants employed at the Ministries and experts appointed by each Ministry, for a total of 32. The CCPF has a wide variety of different functions, reflecting the complexity of tasks related to pesticide policy. It is of interest here to note that it should review assessment reports delivered by external centres to double-check conclusions. However, there are no indications of the CCPF's systematic involvement on this front. First, it might be noted that internal procedural rules at DgSan prescribe very tight deadlines for this particular task: CCPF members have 10 days to submit comments on the

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[14] The list was revised and confirmed in 2018. It includes: Istituto zooprofilattico sperimentale della Lombardia ed Emilia Romagna; Centro internazionale per gli antiparassitari e la prevenzione sanitaria (ICPS); Università Cattolica Sacro Cuore di Piacenza; ARPA Emilia Romagna; Istituto Superiore di Sanità (ISS); Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna; Fondazione Mach; Dipartimento di Scienze farmacologiche e biomolecolari dell'Università di Milano; Istituto zooprofilattico sperimentale del Lazio e Toscana; Università di Milano Bicocca; Istituto zooprofilattico sperimentale dell'Abruzzo e del Molise 'G. Caporale'.
[15] DPR 28 March 2013, n. 44, 'Regolamento recante il riordino degli organi collegiali ed altri organismi operanti presso il Ministero della salute, ai sensi dell'articolo 2, comma 4, della legge 4 novembre 2010, n. 183'.

draft assessment which, as noted, includes the analysis of hundreds of laboratory tests. Second, the remit of the CCPF is very broad and includes urgent tasks like the management of emergencies resulting from pest outbreaks.[16] As a result, CCPF mainly focuses on 'national' issues, leaving EU procedures at the margin.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The data illustrated in the preceding sections suggest two main considerations with regard to Italy. First, the regulation of pesticides is of relevant national interest for a country with strong and variegated agricultural production and where the use of pesticides is among the highest in Europe in terms of number of active substances needed by farmers. Second, the involvement of Italian authorities in EU assessments, measured in terms of number of dossiers and contributions to EFSA procedures, is significantly limited. My argument is that the reason for Italy's low involvement is to be found in the peculiar institutional arrangement for the delivery of assessments that prevents a greater contribution of the Italian CA to EU procedures.

The implications of this argument are that the Italian institutional arrangement presents relevant shortcomings that have an impact beyond the domestic arena; because of the one-fits-all logic of pesticide policy that requires common procedures as well as deadlines, such shortcomings have the potential to affect the workings of the EU system. In fact, Italy delivers dossiers on behalf of the entire EU. If Italy has an opaque procedure and does not send contributions to the EFSA peer-review procedure, this works to the detriment of the entire EU process of evaluation. This concluding section points out some of the most relevant consequences for the overall policy goals in the sector, focusing on the transparency, timing and consistency of EU evaluation procedures.

As noted, in Italy there is a fundamental lack of transparency in the pesticide system, since it is not possible to identify with precision who has performed the scientific assessment of a specific active substance. It might be argued that this lack of transparency on actual assessors is not an issue, since the final responsibility for the content of the DAR lies with the Ministry of Health which is formally accountable as CA for the country. However, two considerations emerge. First, lack of information on who is in charge of evaluations discourages manufacturers to apply to Italy, since this increases the overall uncertainty of a process that, as noted above, is very demanding and time consuming. Second, it should be noted that transparency and traceability are fundamental principles for EFSA. The EU authority publishes in the dedicated 'Register of Questions' the working material on each active substance, to make it possible for external interested parties to trace the entire process and the role of each actor in it, including minority opinions on specific aspects of the evaluations. In this sense, the opacity that characterises Italian assessment negatively affects the level of publicity sought at EU level.

The need for a public procedure to allocate the drafting of assessment reports is time-consuming and might have the effect of slowing down the substantial evaluation. Delays in the delivery of DARs to EFSA and to other CAs are not uncommon, and by no means limited to Italy. However, it is relevant to note that delays on the part of one MS

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[16] The most dramatic and known emergency is that of xylella in Apulia. However, in Italy there are dozens of smaller, less damaging outbreaks that need emergency legislation. See http://www.salute.gov.it/portale/temi/p2_6.jsp?lingua=italiano&id=1110&area=fitosanitari&menu=autorizzazioni.

affect the entire EU regulatory regime because the smooth implementation of a one-fits-all pesticide policy requires the careful planning of activities at the national level. In particular, national CAs have to schedule well in advance their assignments in EFSA written peer-review procedures that involve reading and commenting on DARs from other countries. Delays 'disrupt' such planning and therefore result in inefficiencies at EU level.

The Italian system also discourages the participation of Italian authorities in the EFSA written peer-review procedure which, as noted above, is one of the most crucial processes to achieve a EU-wide validation of scientific assessment. Ufficio 7 firstly allocates to external centres dossiers for which Italy is the RMS, but there is no identification of experts in charge of the review of DARs that are delivered by other countries. As a result, the Italian CA intervenes on a very limited number of active substances under discussion at EFSA. This holds back the valuable contribution of Italian experts to the common EU evaluations and potentially negatively affects the consistency and the strength of the EFSA procedures that rely on inputs from, ideally, all MSs to properly assure multidisciplinarity and pluralism.

Italian officers understandably tend to defend the system in place. Yet the analysis presented in this paper suggests that Italy is performing at a level lower than should be expected based on the relevance of the pesticide sector and the range of expertise possessed by the country. The analysis also reveals that improvements are possible, and that institutional reforms could be useful to achieve a better implementation performance. In this regard, it seems safe to argue that some of the shortcomings in the system could be easily solved. In particular, the lack of transparency and the low participation in EU procedures could be addressed in a relatively straightforward way, without substantial institutional reforms. The mandatory publication of information on risk assessors would allow stakeholders and interested parties to trace procedures. A specific provision to systematically identify experts who could participate in EFSA procedures could also be decided at DgSan. A more radical innovation could be the creation of an independent regulatory agency to conduct evaluations in-house. This could be an important – albeit expensive – improvement in the risk assessment of pesticides and more broadly in evaluations in 'cognate' sectors like biocides, cosmetics, and all the chemicals under REACH.

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The deep roots of populism:
Protest, apathy and the success of
Movimento 5 Stelle in the 2013 Italian Elections

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Abstract

Previous studies have argued that voters' attitudes of apathy and protest towards the Italian party system, triggered by the economic crisis of 2011, were exploited by Movimento 5 Stelle to increase its support in the 2013 Elections. However, little attention has been paid to the determinants of dissatisfaction that voters showed even before the sovereign debt crisis. In addition to providing a thorough geographical exploration of the party's geographical scattering (with the aid of global and local indicators of spatial autocorrelation), this article tests the relationship between the strength of the Movimento in 2013 and apathy and protest indicators in the pre-crisis period. SAR (Spatial Auto-Regressive) regression models will be employed in order to avoid biased estimates due to spatial autocorrelation. Results show that indicators of apathy or protest represent significant predictors of the Movimento 5 Stelle's geographical distribution.

1. Introduction

The Italian national election of 2013 represented a sudden discontinuity with respect to the balance of power that ruled in the so-called Italian Second Republic (ITANES 2013; Vegetti, Poletti and Segatti, 2013). Election results analyses showed that about 40% of voters changed their preferences with respect to previous elections (ITANES, 2013). Scholars also witnessed a dramatic decrease in support for the two main parties, albeit with their names changed, that had ruled the Italian political landscape in the previous 20 years: the centre-left Partito Democratico (Democratic Party, PD) experienced a loss of almost 3.5 million votes from previous elections, and the right-wing competitor, Berlusconi's Popolo della Libertà (People of Freedom, PdL), reported a loss of more than 6.2 million votes. A large number of these votes were collected by a new populist party that ran for the first time in a national election and gained 25% of valid votes: Movimento 5 Stelle (Five Star Movement, M5S).

As has been underlined many times in the recent literature (Corbetta and Gualmini, 2013), one of the main characteristics of the ideological apparatus of the Movimento is the rejection of traditional political cleavages, starting from the difference between 'left' and 'right'. The main cleavage that the Movimento theorises is that between the 'people' and the 'caste' of politicians, considered as a close, self-referenced group of corrupt people, unfit to govern the country (Biorcio and Natale, 2013).

A crucial element that intersects both the electoral earthquake of 2013 and the claims of Movimento 5 Stelle is the economic and political context in which the 2013 elections took place, characterized by a harsh economic crisis (triggered by the sovereign debt crisis

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of 2011), which led the Italian electorate to develop much more critical attitudes towards politicians and the traditional party system (ITANES, 2013; Bellucci and Maraffi, 2014). As previous research has stressed, the ability of the Movimento and its leader, the former comedian Beppe Grillo, to exploit the disenchanted and anti-political feelings of part of the electorate (Tronconi, 2013; Vegetti, Poletti and Segatti, 2013) contributed to increasing electoral support for the party. Several studies (Mosca, 2014; Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2014; Mosca and Quaranta, 2017; Biorcio, 2014) underline the relationship between indicators that measure protest and propensity to vote for the Movimento 5 Stelle. In particular, Bellucci and Maraffi (2014) show quite clearly that the 2011 sovereign debt crisis and the related voters' feelings of disenchantment towards the political system largely affected Italians' choices in 2013 (for similar results, see Vezzoni, 2014; ITANES 2013). The elections of 2013 and the emergence of Movimento 5 Stelle are thus important for understanding today's political trends in Italy because they represent a 'unicum', a realigning election (D'Alimonte, 2013), happening in a context of profound economic crisis.

If previous studies allow us to assess the relationship between protest and the Movimento's support in a cross-sectional fashion, they do not tell us much about the roots of this protest. Feelings of protest, indeed, did not start with the 2011 crisis and can be traced back to the First Republic era (Mannheimer and Sani, 2001; Tuorto, 2006). This paper aims to account for these 'protest' roots, by arguing that pre-crisis elements of discontent might be relevant in explaining the Movimento's success in 2013. Consistent with previous literature (see Martini and Quaranta, 2015), it is argued that a part of the electorate was already dissatisfied with democracy and the party system way before the debt crisis unfolded, and that this same quota of voters was already looking for a political actor that would be able to transform that dissatisfaction into actual preferences and support. The debt crisis, together with the appearance of Movimento 5 Stelle, provided the 'perfect storm' for a situation that had been simmering below the surface for a long time.[1] To test our theoretical argument, election results (before and after the 2011 sovereign debt crisis) at the municipal level will be employed. These data, indeed, allow us to measure the characteristics of the contexts in which people are embedded over time, providing regression coefficients in which the independent variable is, by design, exogenous.[2]

2. Background

2.1. Movimento 5 Stelle: a new Italian populism?

As stressed above, the national elections of 2013 were held in a general climate of – economic and political – turmoil. The political system instability period started in November

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[1] An additional indirect proof of this argument is the national elections of 2018 that showed that, even if the economic crisis was not as harsh as in 2013, the Movimento succeeded in increasing its share of votes (gaining almost 33% of valid votes).

[2] This work aims at identifying evidence of the connection between contextual political protest and apathy before the start of the economic crisis and contextual levels of support for the Movimento during the zenith of the political and economic crisis in which the party emerged. For our aims, thus, subsequent results obtained by the party (such as the European elections of 2014 and general elections of 2018) would lead us far away from the topic of the paper, since they were held in qualitatively different moments (namely, in contexts of economic and post-economic crisis).

2011, in which the sovereign debt crisis and an increasingly weak majority forced Berlusconi's government to resign. After a year and a half ruled by the technocratic government headed by former EU commissioner Mario Monti (and a set of austerity reforms), the 2013 elections presented several surprises: in a partially unexpected way, Movimento 5 Stelle became the largest party in Parliament with about 25.5% of valid votes, mainly at the expenses of traditional parties (ITANES, 2013). Also, results showed the second most important vote-swing in the post-war electoral history of the country, with an index of aggregate volatility of 39.1% (Bellucci, 2014; Emanuele, 2015).

The electoral campaign of the M5S in the 2013 election was based on accessible and captivating claims, such as, for instance, the institution of a basic income for the unemployed or the fight against corruption in public administration (ITANES, 2013). Also, the image of the Movimento was promoted by means of the selection process of MPs: in order to signal the distance between the Movimento and the old political elite, a troop of young citizens who had never experienced militancy in classic parties were selected by means of web-based polls (Biorcio, 2015; Caruso, 2015). The strategic choices of the Movimento, taken together, caused analysts to borrow Taggart's (1995) classification and to define it as a populist (or neopopulist) party (Corbetta and Gualmini, 2013; Biorcio and Natale, 2013; Diamanti, 2014). Two primary characteristics, typical of a populist party or movement, can be detected for M5S: first, the explicit reference to the struggle between 'the people' and a (corrupt and unfit) political elite and second, the evocation of direct contact between the charismatic leader and his people (Corbetta and Gualmini 2013, 202–205).

2.2. Political dissatisfaction and abstention in Italy: between apathy and protest

Dissatisfaction with the political system, acknowledged as one of the main determinants of the Movimento's success, is not a phenomenon born during the debt crisis of 2011. Despite Italy being, in the post-war period, one of the countries with the highest turnout (more than 9 Italians out of 10 went to the polling station between 1948 and 1976, see Mannheimer and Sani, 2001; Corbetta and Tuorto, 2004), starting from the 1979 national election, and for all the 1980s, the tradition of high levels of turnout started to fade. During the 1990s and the 2000s, the diminishing trend became even stronger: in 1996 turnout was about 83% and in 2008 the percentage of voters was even lower (80.5%). The 2013 elections presented the lowest turnout level ever in a national election in Italy until then: only 75.2% of the electoral body went to the polls. This 30-year-long trend, an 18 percentage point drop from 1979 to 2013, is partly consistent with what happened in other European countries (Franklin, 2004). Scholars argue that one of the determinants of the negative trend could be due to changes that hit European societies in general, such as the crisis of the mass parties, the disappearance of the classic cleavages that had ruled European politics since the end of World War II, and the increasing individualization of the political masses (Corbetta and Tuorto, 2004; Steinbrecher, Huber and Rattinger, 2007, Powell, 1986; Pattie and Johnston, 1998). The literature identifies two main elements as determinants of abstention, *apathy* and *protest* (see Tuorto, 2006). As regards apathy attitudes, voters do not go to the polls because parties fail to mobilise them. Their vote is thus a mere non-action (Corbetta and Tuorto, 2004) rather than an 'active' refusal of the political supply. On the contrary, with protest attitudes, voters do not vote to signal dissatisfaction towards alternatives that official politics offers them

and, to some extent, refuse to be part of the electoral game (Mannheimer and Sani, 2001; Corbetta and Tuorto, 2004; Tuorto, 2006).

It is common opinion (Corbetta and Tuorto, 2004; Tuorto, 2006) that, in general, the sentiment of apathy might be the primary driver of the vast majority of Italian abstainers. Socio-demographic characteristics can determine sentiments of apathy or protest: as pointed out by Mannheimer and Sani (2001), detachment from politics and abstention propensity can be increased by gender or age. The antipolitical protest, on the other hand, has been demonstrated to be positively correlated with age: young voters, indeed, tend to protest more than their parents and grandparents (Mannheimer and Sani, 2001).

Another way to signal protest attitudes through voting behaviour is to void the ballot (Knack and Kropf, 2003). Previous literature has empirically shown that ballot spoiling is consistent with a form of protest voting. More precisely, it is a clear and relatively cheap way of signalling discontent with all the political alternatives (Damore, Waters, and Bowler, 2012). However, a void ballot does not only signal political discontent, rather, it can be an involuntary consequence of the voter's incapacity to follow voting instructions correctly (Stiefbold, 1965; Knack and Kropf, 2003; Mannheimer and Sani, 2001). The history of void ballots in Italy follows an entirely different path compared to that of abstention (Tuorto, 2008). The number of blank and void ballots increased during the First Republic and reached 2.9 million votes in 1996 – 6% of the electoral body (Tuorto, 2008). In the 2006 and 2008 elections, the number of void and blank votes rapidly decreased, passing from more than 2.5 million between 1994 and 2001 to just 1.2 million in 2006, probably because of the simplification of the voting procedure introduced with the new electoral law and the removal of preference voting (Tuorto, 2008). However, it is beyond doubt that a component of protest, independent of involuntary annulment, remains in the void votes' stock (Knack and Kropf, 2003; Damore, Waters, and Bowler, 2012).

2.3. Hypotheses

The aim of this work, in addition to providing descriptive insight into the Movimento 5 Stelle geographical scattering in 2013, is to explain the geographical trends of the Movimento's results in Italy using indicators of apathy and protest. In particular, we want to test whether pre-crisis protest and apathy indicators can explain the 2013 achievement of the Movimento. This would be consistent with the argument according to which exogenous 'pockets' of discontent, already present in the country before the crisis, were able to contribute to the Movimento's success.

The first hypothesis connects apathy, measured with the levels of turnout in the national election of 2008, the first preceding the debt crisis of 2011, with Movimento 5 Stelle's performance. The hypothesis, thus, reads as follows:

> **Hp1**. The lower the turnout in 2008, the better the performance of Movimento 5 Stelle in 2013.[3]

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[3] This expectation has also been tested with different data by Riera and Russo (2016), who demonstrate that the larger the drop in turnout in previous elections, the higher is the prevalence at the local level of the Movimento in the 2014 European elections.

As regards protest, we argue, drawing upon previous literature, that the void ballot level can be partly connected with protest attitudes. The second hypothesis can be written as follows:

Hp2. The higher the percentage of void ballots in 2008, the better the performance of Movimento 5 Stelle in 2013.

3. Data, measures and models

3.1. Data and measures

The data employed to test our expectations are drawn from official data provided by the Italian Ministry of the Interior and the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT). Analyses will be performed at the municipality level, the lower geo-referenced level available. In sum, we will deal with 8,020 cases (Valle d'Aosta has been expunged from the analysis given that, as an autonomous region, it has a different party system).[4]

The geographical scattering of the Movimento 5 Stelle will be measured by the percentage of the Movimento at the municipality level in the 2013 elections.

The two measures presented above – that is, abstention and void ballots before the crisis – will be treated as possible determinants of the success of the Movimento in the Italian geographical space. As pointed out above, abstention and void ballots are measured in the elections held in 2008. In this way, in addition to the exogeneity of our independent score, we have another advantage, namely, that the 2008 elections were held before the crisis started. By employing 2008 aggregate measures, we can provide insights into the relationship between the Movimento's support and a set of explanatory variables that measure the level of apathy/protest in non-exceptional conditions, that is, a physiological level of apathy/protest. As an additional control variable, we will insert the number of eligible voters (in logarithm), the sex ratio and the percentage of over-85 voters (those two latter variables extracted from the 2011 Italian census).

Measures such as those proposed above are not immune to drawbacks. The first, and most important, is related to the validity of our measures. As pointed out before, stocks of abstainers in each election, as well as void votes, can be related to different individual behaviours and motivation: people can abstain by signalling a protest against the political system or, instead, because they have not been mobilised. Moreover, people can abstain because they are unable to go to the polls – for instance, because of disability or illness (Mannheimer and Sani, 2001). At the same time, people who cast a void ballot might signal protest or, rather, may not be able to cast their vote correctly. However, once the age and gender composition and the dimension of the municipalities have been controlled, the geographical scattering of the involuntary quota of invalid ballots should be randomly dispersed. As pointed out before, gender and age can affect the involuntary behaviour prevalence in the electoral population.

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[4] Since we will employ measures of two different elections (2008 and 2013), some small administrative adjustments to the structure of the municipalities (some municipalities merged, others split) have been made to harmonize the data. These adjustments, however, involve few municipalities and have been handled by finding a least common geographical arrangement that could preserve the structure of the municipalities in the 2013 elections.

In addition, while bias related to involuntary behaviour can be kept under control, the issue related to the validity of abstention stocks is much more difficult to solve. The abstention measure, although proven by scholars to be mainly related to individual apathy behaviours, represents, indeed, a measure of two different types of behaviour, that is, the aforementioned apathy and protest. Here, however, we have to remember that we are working with aggregate data. Thus, it is possible to state that, even if the stock of abstention represents different individual behaviour, at the municipality level, it just represents an environment more prone to protest or apathy and, we hypothesize, more prone to support Movimento 5 Stelle (in this respect, see Agnew, 2002; Goodin and Tillie, 2008; Pattie and Johnston, 1998).

Before investigating the relationship between the Movimento and the measure of protest and apathy in Italy, it is useful to assess whether these measures are scattered over the territory.[5] The most straightforward way of measuring the non-randomness of the geographical distribution of a variable is Moran's I. It allows us to calculate the correlation between the level of a specific variable in an ecological unit and its nearby locations, the so-called autocorrelation (Moran, 1950, Anselin, 1988). Moran's I is a standardized measure, in which 1 means perfect autocorrelation (that is, given the level of a variable in a point in space, all nearby points present the same level as the variable), 0 means that the levels of the variable in space are distributed randomly and -1 means perfect negative autocorrelation. Moran's I presents a local variant –the local Moran's I (Anselin, 1995). Local Moran's I identifies outliers of 'pockets of nonstationarity' (Anselin, 1995, 93). In this way, combining local Moran's I with descriptive results of the variable, it is possible to assess where clusters of support (or lack of support) are located.

In order to assess the relationship and the magnitude of the effect that links Movimento 5 Stelle support and measures of apathy and protest, we will employ multivariate regression models. The first model that will be fitted is a simple OLS model. This type of model, however, presents the main drawback, that is, the aforementioned spatial autocorrelation. OLS models assume independence of observations and the presence of spatial autocorrelation will lead to biased estimates. In order to solve this problem, and take into account the geographical scattering of the dependent variable, a SAR (Spatial Auto-Regressive) model will be fitted (for more information, see Anselin, 1988; Ward and Gleditsch, 2008).

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive analysis

A simple analysis of the strength of the party in different geo-political zones, such as that presented in Table 1, shows performances of the Movimento during 2013 elections in part of the country. The table shows that the Movimento is stronger in the centre and in the islands of the country.

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[5] Appendix 1 presents descriptive statistics of all the variables taken into account in the paper.

Table 1. Distribution of Movimento 5 Stelle's strength in 2013 by geo-political zone.

	M5s %	N municipalities
North-west	22.4	2,987
North-east	24.0	1,132
Red belt	25.0	966
Centre	27.4	683
South	22.8	1,485
Islands	31.2	767
Total	**24.7**	**8,020**

Note: Percentages calculated on voters

A more thorough analysis of the geographical distribution of the Movimento in 2013 is plotted in Figure 1.[6] The distribution of the party is significantly autocorrelated over the territory (Moran's I is equal to .70) and presents original characteristics: traditional electoral Italian studies (see Galli, 1968; Diamanti, 2003) used to split the Italian territory into different 'sub-cultures', in which one of the two main parties of the so-called Prima Repubblica (the Communist Party and the Christian Democrats) was dominant. For instance, the 'red zone', a strip of the region in the central part of Italy, used to present long-standing and strong electoral support for the Communist party (and saw high levels of support for centre-left parties, such as the Partito Democratico della Sinistra, lately Partito Democratico). The north-east part of the country, on the contrary, used to be ruled by the Christian Democrats, which was subsequently substituted by the Forza Italia/PdL-Northern League alliance. As pointed out by other contributions (see Cataldi and Emanuele, 2013) the pattern of Movimento 5 Stelle is new; that is, no other party in the Italian Republican history seems to behave geographically like the Movimento.

In general, several characteristics of this geographical pattern can be stressed: in the centre-north of the country, the Movimento's pattern seems to break the existing sub-cultural zones. In the north-western part of the country (which encompasses Piedmont, Lombardy and Liguria), the Movimento is strong in the four provinces of Liguria, in the province of Turin (but the average level is high in the whole of Piedmont) and is poorly supported in west Lombardy. This is surprising, since west Lombardy and Piedmont, during the first and the second Republic, tended to behave similarly.

The north-east of the country, which encompasses east Lombardy, Veneto and Friuli-Venezia Giulia, used to vote solidly for centre-right parties, shifted and supported the Movimento in 2013. Also, the centre of the country witnessed an upheaval. The so-called red zone – which encompasses Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna, Marche and Umbria and has, for almost a century, seen a robust left-wing majority – was broken by the new Movimento's rise of support. In Umbria and Marche, the Movimento has, almost everywhere, over 28% of valid votes, while in Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany the average level of support is lower. Moreover, the northern part of Lazio shows high levels of support for the Movimento. The other two clusters of strength are situated in the south of Sardinia and almost all of Sicily.

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[6] The classes in all the maps were obtained by dividing the distributions into 5 quantiles.

Figure 1. Movimento 5 Stelle percentage of valid votes, geographical distribution (Moran's I: 0.70).
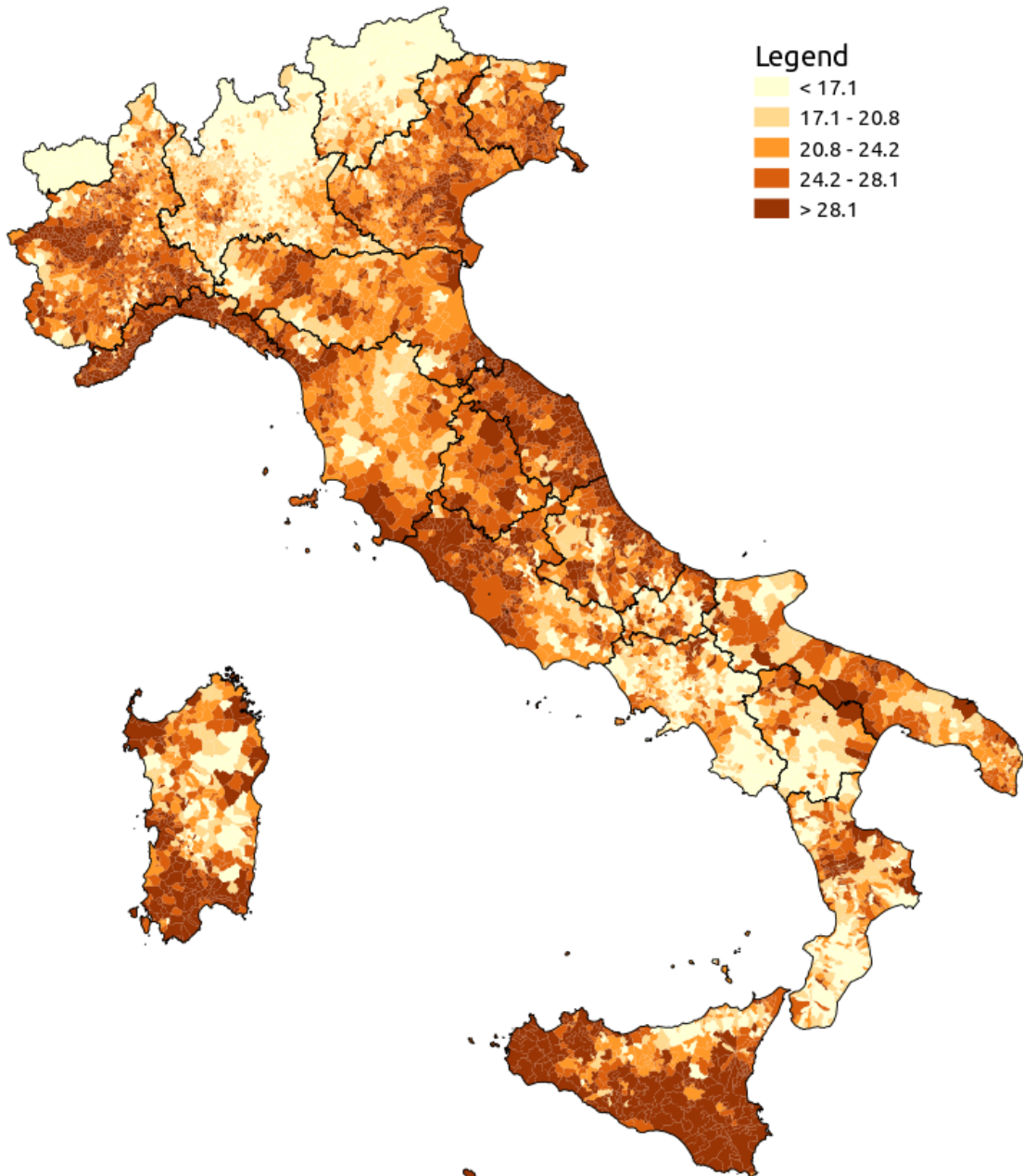
Figure 2. Movimento 5 Stelle 2013 results - Local Moran's I and statistical significance.
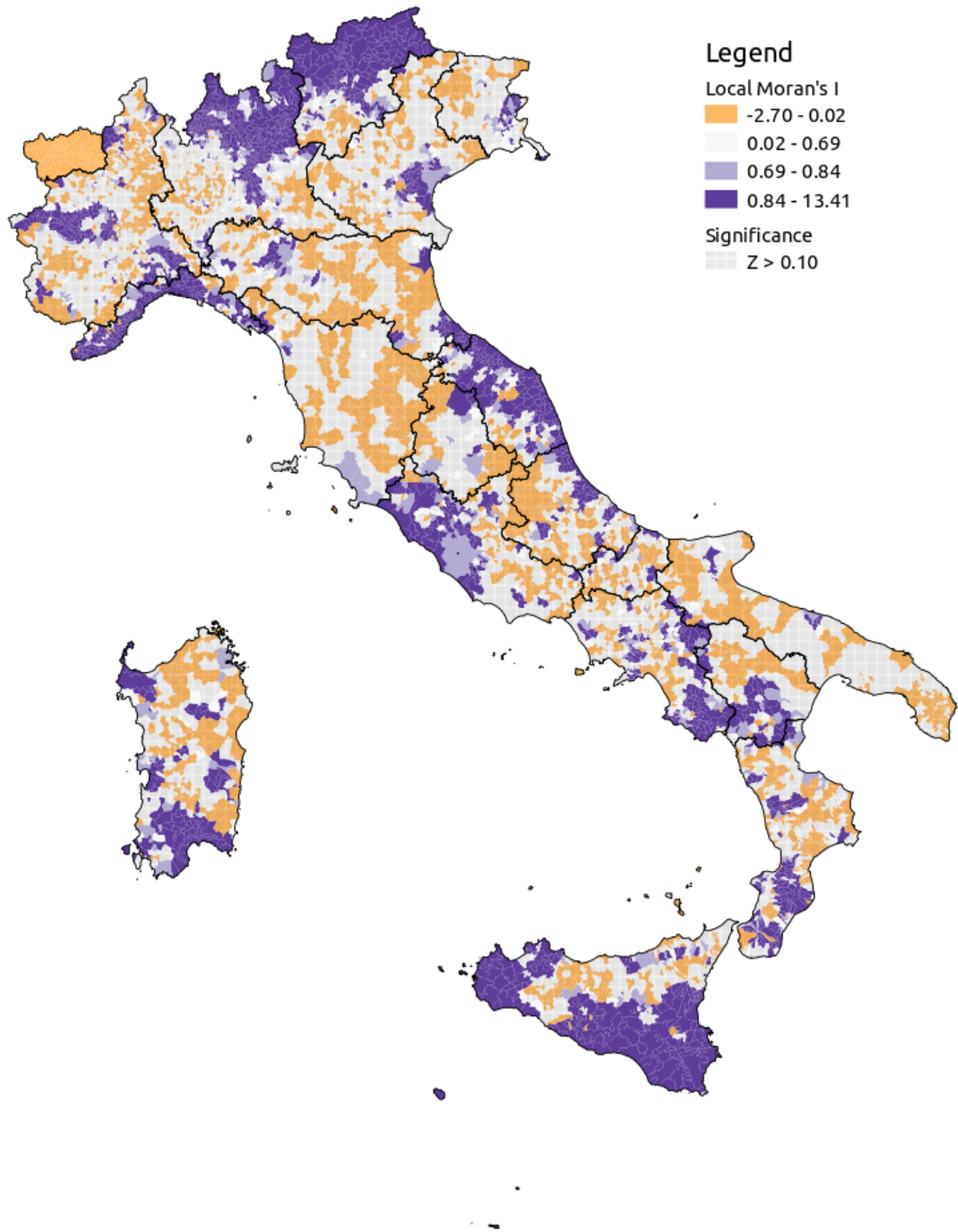
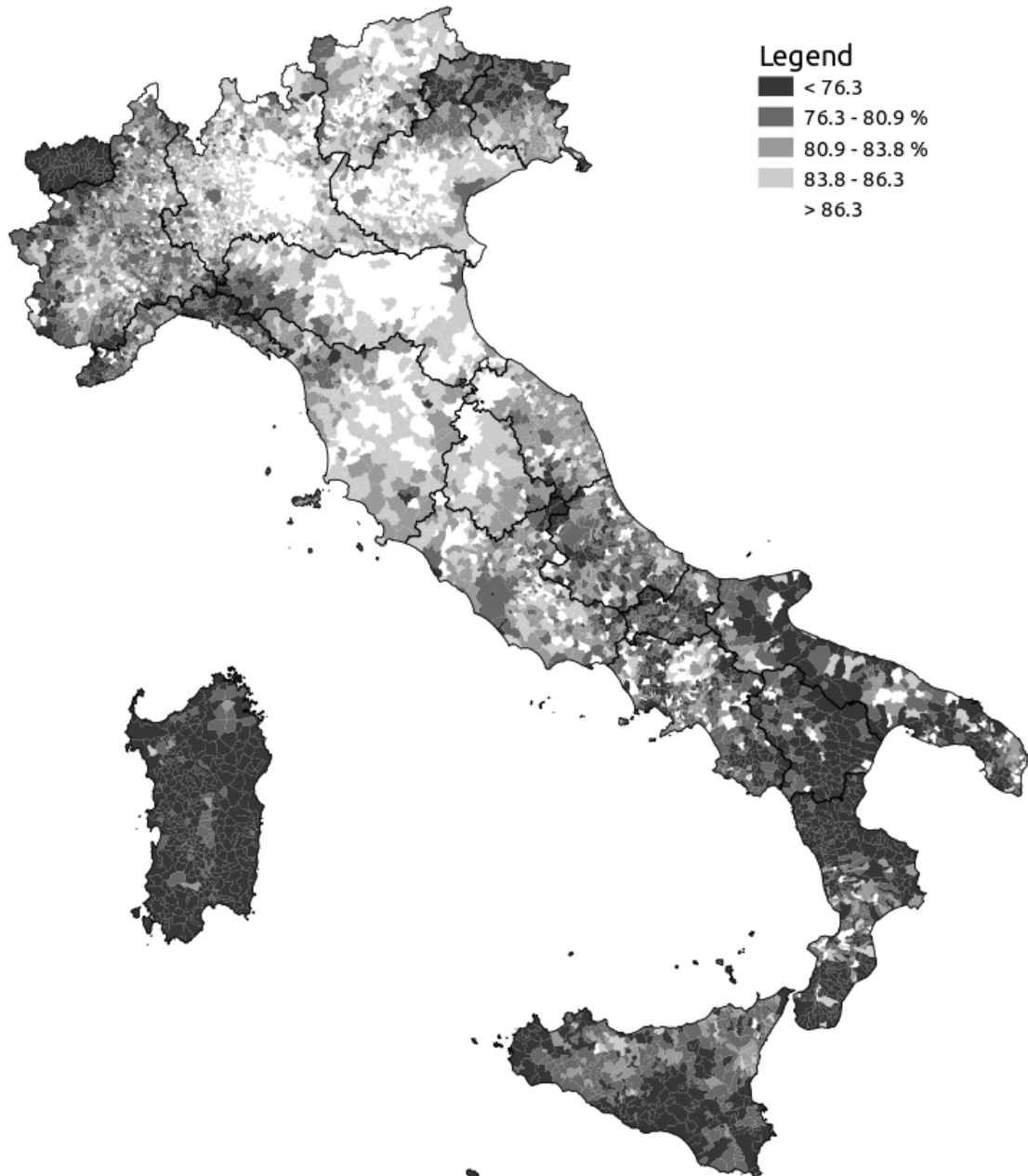**Figure 3.** 2008 Turnout geographical distribution.

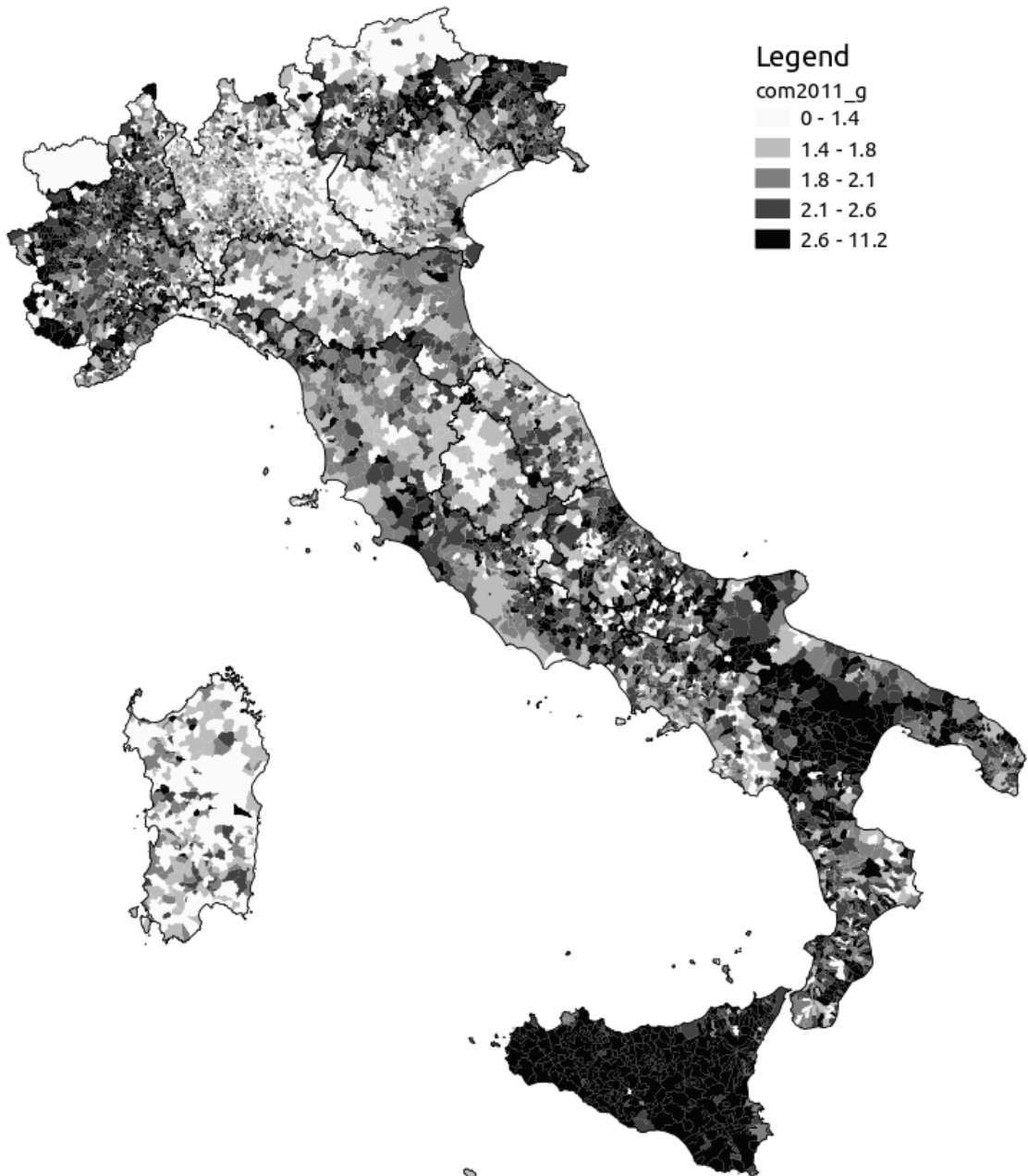**Figure 4.** 2008 Void ballots geographical distribution.

Figure 2 gives us results for the local Moran's I and shows a very similar situation (the parts of the country in which local Moran's I is not significant to 10% are coloured grey). A high level of autocorrelated, statistically significant support is in south and west Sicily (in particular the province of Trapani), in south and north-west of Sardinia, the coast of Marche (especially Ancona), in northern Lazio. By comparing Figure 2 with the previous one, it is possible to detect also clusters of low support, such as that in the southern part of Campania, north Lombardy and Südtirol.

Summarising, the geography of the Movimento, in its first electoral competition, is entirely different from that of other parties, present or past. As regards specific local outbreaks, however, it is possible to hypothesise determinants given by the particular situation of those places. For instance, in the province of Turin, and in particular in Susa Valley, the public work of high-speed rail (the TAV) to connect Turin with Lyon, has produced, for about 20 years, a movement against the construction of the line. Movimento 5 Stelle and Beppe Grillo himself have repeatedly underlined solidarity towards the No-Tav movement (Tronconi, 2013, Biorcio and Natale, 2013). Thus, it is possible to expect that citizens of these zones, massively against the public works, would support the only party that was explicitly hostile to it. Similarly, the cluster of support in southern Sardinia can be related to the struggle of Sulcis miners who, again, received Beppe Grillo's solidarity (Tronconi, 2013).

These local peculiarities should not challenge our main argument: if localised protests can account for localised outbreaks, our aim is to find a general, spatially coherent relationship between high (or low) levels of pre-crisis protest/apathy and high (or low) levels of Movimento 5 Stelle support. Before examining the regression models, it seems useful to assess the descriptive situation of void ballots and turnout (that is the hundred-complement of abstention) in the 2008 Elections. Figures 3 and 4 present the spatial distribution of the two measures. For instance, we can say that both measures present a clear north-south difference: in most of the south, the prevalence of void ballots is higher, and turnout is lower. Piedmont, Liguria, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, and the province of Belluno, moreover, present lower levels of turnout and higher levels of invalid ballots. Some differences, also, can be found by comparing the two apathy/protest measures. For instance, there is a relative absence of void ballots in the north-west, where there is a cluster of low turnout. Sardinia, also, presents medium-high levels of abstention (under 76% of turnout) and low levels of void ballots. In general, we can state that void ballots scattering is less clear than that of 'turnout.

4.2. Testing the relationship between void ballots, turnout and M5s geographical distribution

Two models will be treated in order to test the relationship between Movimento support and measures of apathy/protest. The second model presents the same parameters but is fitted as a SAR model. Coefficients for both models can be seen in Table 2.

It can be seen that in both models, the parameters are significant and follow our expectations. The SAR model presents smaller coefficients, once corrected for autocorrelation. The expected change in the Movimento's support with respect to a one-unit increase in turnout is -.06 percentage points for the SAR model. Although significant, it is not big. If we think that the central 90% of the distribution of turnout is around 18

points (from 69% to 89%), the difference in the predicted values of the dependent variable of a 5th-95th percentile-change of the turnout is something more than 1.2 percentage points. More interesting is the effect of invalid ballots. Keeping other variables constant (included age and gender controls) in the SAR model, the predicted rise of Movimento 5 Stelle's support with respect to a rise of 1 point in the level of void ballots is of .61 (the parameter is significant).

Table 2. OLS and spatial lag regression model

Predictors	OLS model		SAR model	
	Coef.	S.E.	Coef.	S.E.
2008 turnout (in %)	-0.10***	(0.01)	-0.06***	(0.01)
2008 void ballots (in %)	1.51***	(0.08)	0.61***	(0.05)
Eligible voters (n. logarithm)	1.33***	(0.06)	0.42***	(0.04)
Sex ratio	0.08***	(0.01)	0.04***	(0.01)
Over-85 persons (in %)	0.10*	(0.05)	-0.21***	(0.03)
Rho			0.77 ***	(0.01)
Constant	9.82***	(1.90)	1.24	(1.17)
Observations	8,020		8,020	
R-squared (Or Nagelkerke)	0.10		0.60	

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

The predicted difference for the 5th percentile to the 95th one is of 1.7 points (a bit less than 10% of the dependent variable's central 90% range). Thus, even if we are not dealing with big effects, we can say that part of the geographical variance of Movimento 5 Stelle is explained by measures of political apathy or protest.[7]

5. Discussion

In 2013, Movimento 5 Stelle, a new populist party, ran for the first time in a national election, gaining 25% of valid votes - one of the most striking successes of all times in mature democracies. The aim of this work was twofold. Firstly, except for few contributions (Cataldi and Emanuele, 2013), the literature lacked an accurate geographical analysis of this unique phenomenon. In this article, by employing local and global measures of autocorrelation, and with the help of municipality-level maps, we now have a clearer idea of the scattering of the territory of the Movimento in that crucial election.

Second, we stressed that the relationship between apathy/protest and the strength of Movimento 5 Stelle was only tested with reference to the exceptional situation of 2013,

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[7] There are two additional alternative hypotheses that might undermine the results presented here. First, apathy, in addition to other individual mechanisms, might be due to the medium/long-term local traditions of political engagement/disengagement that are typical of a certain area. Second, the economic conditions of the local context might change the structure of the coefficients that we see in Table 2. In Appendix 2 there are two additional models: the first model measures the gap in turnout between 2006 and 2008 (in a way that negative values of the variable represent a decrease in turnout). The second model adds an economic control variable (the average income for each municipality in 2012 - Source: Italian Revenue Agency). As can be seen, the two models do not show significant differences with respect to those shown in the main text, further confirming the overall pattern of the results.

implicitly addressing the success of the party led by Beppe Grillo as a fortuitous combination of events that led to its achievement. Little evidence was committed to finding more profound relationships between what we can call a 'traditional' level of apathy/protest and the result of the Movimento in 2013. Our basic expectation was that in places where measures of protest and apathy were stronger in non-exceptional moments, the support for the Movimento would have found fertile soil.

As concerns the first aim, and consistent with previous results (Cataldi and Emanuele, 2013), results showed entirely new electoral geopolitics. Geographical cleavages that lasted during the First and Second Republic are not traceable in any way in the Movimento's geographical scattering. Instead, old sub-cultures seem to be broken by the Movimento's support: the example of low Movimento support in Tuscany and high support in neighbouring Umbria – which used to be part of the same sub-culture - is enlightening. Geography, also, helps us to recognise clusters of support that are mainly due to particular local situations (such as the aforementioned Susa valley and the south of Sardinia).

At the same time, by means of regression models, we have seen that the engine of high-level support for the Movimento is not only related to a number of local issues but also has a systematic nature: in places where, even before the economic crisis, the level of protest and apathy (measured with abstention and void ballots percentages) was high, the level of support for the Movimento has been high too. Moreover, it seems that a clearer protest measure – invalid ballots percentage at the municipal level – has higher effects with respect to measures that do not tap precisely the concept of protest but are in-between to measure protest or apathy (that is, abstention). This could be indirect evidence that protest attitudes were activated in the 2013 national elections and that the success of the Movimento has deep roots, partly founded in traditional levels of apathy and protest. M5S success, thus, seems not to be produced entirely by a fortuitous series of circumstances (the crisis of representation and the economic crisis) that crystallised in more structured partisan support during the 2013-2018 electoral cycle. Instead, it seems that the routes of success were (at least in part) based on pockets of discontent that existed even before the intricate pattern of crises broke out. These pockets, geographically scattered, contributed to form the first kernel of the Movimento's support.

This paper presents at least three shortcomings: first of all, the variables employed to measure apathy and protest – though being the only ones available that, according to the literature, can tap the two concepts – present sizeable potential distorsions. Although we have tried to refine the analysis by adding possible confounders to the relationship (the percentage of female and over-85 voters, as well as other measures of apathy and economic wealth measures, see Appendix 2), we must take into account that our coefficients might be biased because of the fact that the levels of void ballots and abstention do not overlap completely with the concepts of protest and apathy. Second, as concerns the relationship between protest attitudes and the Movimento's support, it must be stressed that the analysis investigated just the aggregate levels of this support. This does give us clues as to individual-level mechanisms. An analysis that encompasses both the geographical and the individual levels would be able to present more explicit evidence on the past (and future) of the Movimento 5 Stelle. Third, the paper only takes into account the 2013 elections: although the choice is justified by the relevance of this election as a

turning point in Italian political history (in which profound economic and representative crises happened at the same time), future research should be devoted to assessing how the relationship between apathy/protest feelings and anti-system parties - and, in particular, the Movimento – has changed. Has the increasing institutionalization of the Movimento during the 2013-2018 cycle (see Ceccarini and Bordignon, 2018) led to a lowering of the protest component of its quota of support, or, rather, is the party still considered a viable option for expressing protest and discontent? Future research will be able to answer this crucial question for the future of the party.

Appendix 1

Table A1. The variables involved: descriptive statistics.

Variables	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std, dev.	5 perc	95 perc
M5S 2013 results	0.1	56.5	22.7	6.9	11.9	33.9
PdL 2013 results	0.3	57.1	20.8	6.8	10.9	32.8
PD 2013 results	0.9	56.6	22.9	7.7	12.4	37.5
2008 void ballots %	0.0	11.1	2.1	0.9	1.0	3.7
2008 Turnout %	17.8	100.0	81.2	6.3	69.1	89.1
Eligible voters (logarithm)	3.4	14.6	7.6	1.3	5.5	9.9
Sex ratio	67.8	190.9	97.1	6.3	88.8	106.8
Over-85 (in %)	0.5	18.5	3.4	1.7	1.5	6.5

Appendix 2

Table A2. Alternative SAR models.

Predictors	Original SAR model (see Table 2)		Alt. model (with turnout gap)		Alt. model (with income)	
	Coef	S.E.	Coef	S.E.	Coef	S.E.
2008 turnout (in %)	-0.06***	(0.01)			-0.09***	(0.01)
2008 void ballots (in %)	0.61***	(0.05)	0.71***	(0.05)	0.69***	(0.05)
2006-08 turnout gap (in %)			-0.12***	(0.01)		
Eligible voters (n. logarithm)	0.42***	(0.04)	0.42***	(0.04)	0.35***	(0.04)
Sex ratio	0.04***	(0.01)	0.04***	(0.01)	0.04***	(0.01)
Over-85 persons (in %)	-0.21***	(0.03)	-0.14***	(0.03)	-0.19***	(0.03)
Average income in thousands € (2012)					0.11***	(0.02)
Rho	0.77 ***	(0.01)	0.77 ***	(0.01)	0.77 ***	(0.01)
Constant	1.24	(1.17)	-4.19***	(1.06)	2.05**	(0.96)
Observations	8,020		8,020		8,020	
Nagelkerke R^2	0.60		0.60		0.60	

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

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