

# THE CHANGING SCENARIO OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

## THE MEDIATIZATION OF POLITICS

Rosanna De Rosa

Yerevan, ISEC, sept. 2021

## The mediatization of politics

Political communication systems are in a state of transition everywhere in the world.

The process of change has not recently started but has been ongoing for forty years now.

In Italy, it is a complex transition that is played out at a different level, and it is particularly sensitive to the role of media (and social media) in the public information scenario.

The process of pervasiveness of the media into society as a whole, and in politics in particular, is defined as **process of mediatization**.



**The first televised  
presidential election in  
Italy: 1955**

# The publicistic model

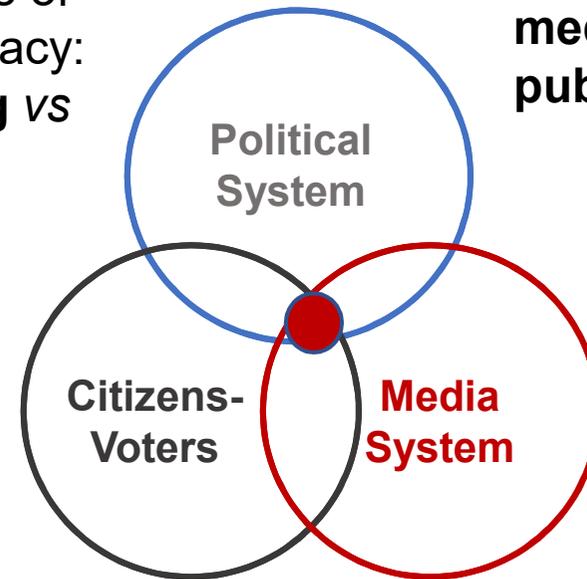
Scholars exemplify this transition using **two paradigms**.

The first one is the **dialogic-publicistic model**, the second the **mediatic one**.

The moving from the first to the second explains the reason why communication is becoming an **absolute necessity**.

**Communication is a central political activity that is unavoidable.**

Degree of legitimacy: **strong vs weak**



**The mediatized public sphere**

Type of legitimacy: **procedural** (by law) vs substantial (by **social recognition**)

The publicist model considers the three actors as having the same power and the same autonomy

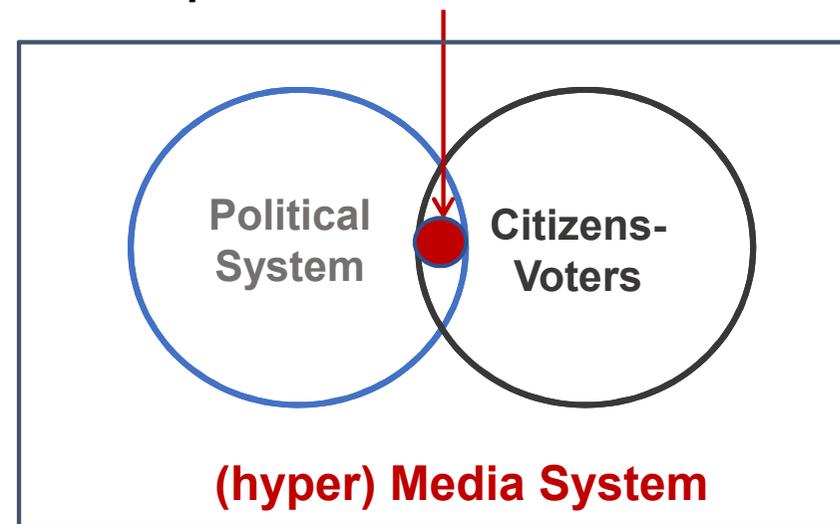
# The mediatic model

The process of **mediatization** has important effects on politics, as regards

- a) the **party organization**,
- b) the **leadership** formation,
- c) the selection of the **political class**,
- d) the search for (and maintenance) of **consensus**,
- e) the formation of **public opinion**.

Mediatization is so pervasive that the whole public sphere tends to be assimilated to the media context so that it becomes the environment in which all the public debate takes

Space for direct interaction



The **media becomes the context** where the interaction between the political actors and citizens is performed. But the media system is a more powerful actor because it rules the way politics and citizens interact, **influencing its logic**.

# The systemic effects of mediatization

## Effects of mediatization

### Political

- Leaderization
- Personalization
- Verticalization
- Polarization

### Mediatic

- Professionalization
- Spectacularization
- Simplification of message
- Trivialization of language

- The **party politics** is totally inspired by the **media logic**
- The political struggle tends to be moved on a **personal level**
- The style of political communication becomes **emotional and affective** (from persuading to convincing to exciting).
- The **political language** is transformed into a **contentious language** and an **anti-language**
- The **common sense** is upgraded and **translated into a general system of values** and a political program
- The **climate of opinion** becomes a structural variable of political communication, a **battleground** but also the **prize at stake**.

## The campaign evolution (Pippa Norris)

	Premodern Mid-19thC to 1950s	Modern Early 1960s–late 1980s	Postmodern 1990s+
Campaign Organization	Local and decentralized party volunteers	Nationally coordinated with greater professionalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Nationally coordinated but decentralized operations</li> </ul>
Preparations	Short-term, ad hoc	Long campaign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Permanent campaign</li> </ul>
Central Coordination	Party leaders	Central party headquarters, more specialist advisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Special party campaign units and more professional consultants</li> </ul>
Feedback	Local canvassing and party meetings	Occasional opinion polls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Regular opinion polls plus focus groups and interactive Web sites</li> </ul>
Media	Partisan press, local posters and pamphlets, radio broadcasts	Television broadcasts through main evening news	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Television narrow casting, targeted direct mail, targeted ads</li> </ul>
Campaign Events	Local public meetings, whistle-stop leadership tours	News management, daily press conferences, controlled photo-ops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Extension of news management to routine politics and government</li> </ul>
Costs	Low budget	Moderate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Higher costs for professional consultants</li> </ul>
Electorate	Stable social and partisan alignments	Social and partisan dealignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Social and partisan dealignment</li> </ul>

## Is the last campaign evolution a Post-Political one?

- **Campaign organization:** nationally coordinated, strongly centralized, data-driven, pop-politics,
- **Preparation:** permanent computational propaganda, black operations, automated bots running permanently, post-ideological language, micro-targeting,
- **Coordination:** Community organizing and campaign management systems, strong mobilization effort, bottom up campaigning, platform politics (platform such as: NationBuilder, DigitalVox)
- **Feedback:** real-time, social media monitoring systems, big data use
- **Media:** hybrid campaign = social media + broadcast media + citizen as media, news and media management, selfie-based penetration strategy
- **Campaign Events:** life-style media events, leader tours, video opportunities, catch-all strategy
- **Costs:** low budget campaign
- **Electorate:** instable, but social and partisan re-alignment around the anti-politics

# The pop-politics

- Digital media implies the **enlargement of the public sphere** to subjects previously excluded.
- The media context becomes more and more **fragmented**
- The places of formation and expression of public opinion are located outside the direct influence of the parties and mainstream media
- The center of gravity of politics moves further outwards.
- In this context both communication and politics becomes **centrifugal**
- To gain new followers, politics has to become more **popular**.
- The last evolution in political communication is the merging of the **popular culture** and the **political discourse**

Politicians Go Pop: The Rise of Pop Politics

BY MELISSA FEINBERG IN PHILOSOPHY · POLITICS



Oh, pop politics is so avant-garde! www.smithsonianmag.com

*“Due to pop politics, the line between what is important and what we keep in our lives for entertainment value has become increasingly distorted. **This distortion is problematic as pop politics becomes more important than regular politics**”*

# The pop-politics



# The pop-politics



## Changing the party organization

Political organizations started to look for new **discursive regimes** (style, language, tools) in order to gain the **trust** of a more instabile, and volatile, electorate.

In Italy in 20 years, we have assisted to:

- ❑ the born of **personal parties** (i.e: Berlusconi-Forza Italia)
- ❑ the introduction of **primary election as intra-party democracy** (ie: the Democratic Party in Italy)
- ❑ The constitution of an **internet party** (ie: M5S)
- ❑ the nationalization of a **territorial populist party** (ie. Lega Nord)
- ❑ the changing of **electoral law** (3 times)
- ❑ the running of Referendums on **Constitutional Reform**

## Populism becomes popular

In all cited cases, the **populist and anti-establishment rhetoric** become a relevant component of the political discourse (Taguieff, Revelli).

But in four different forms:

- Televised populism
- Top-down populism
- Ethno-nationalistic populism
- Socio-protestatarian

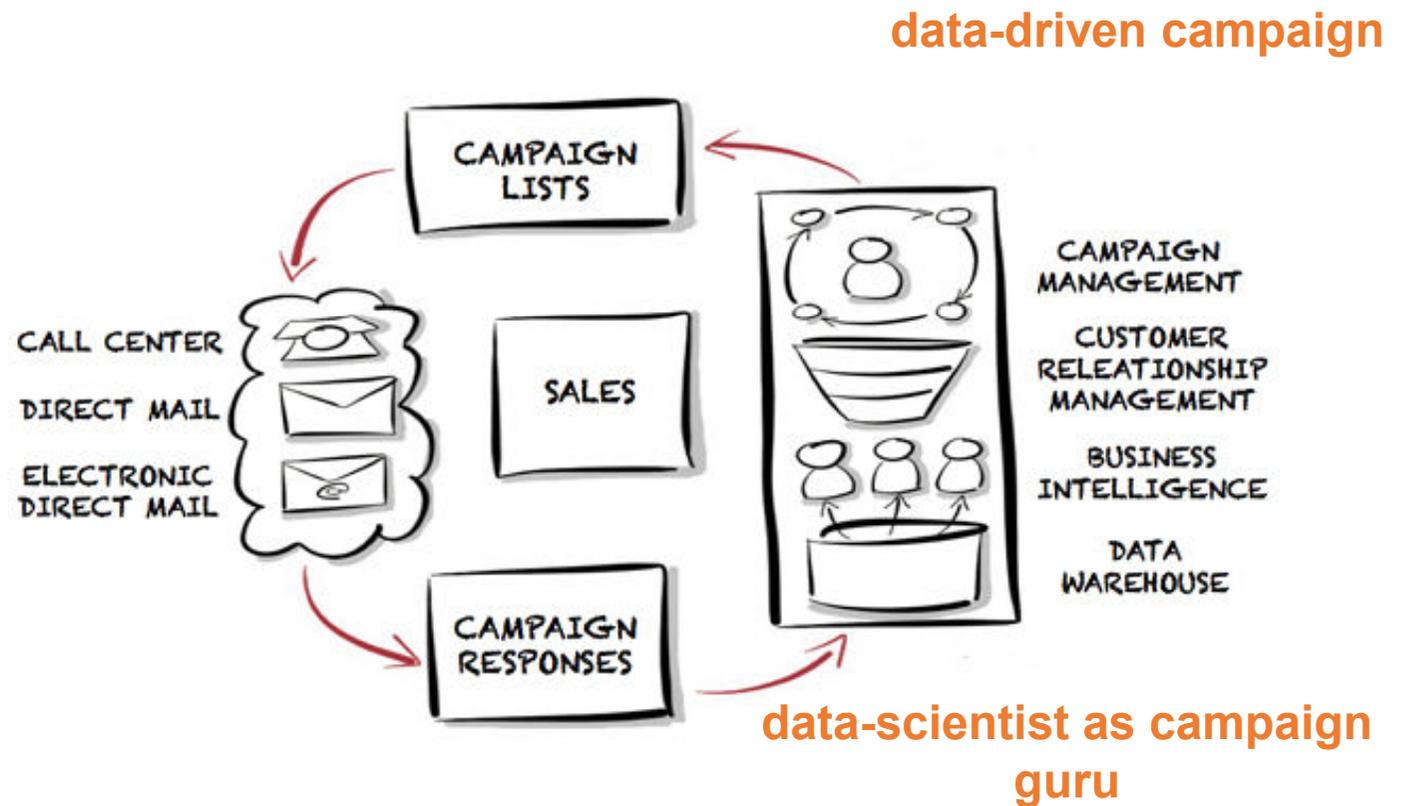


**EVOLVING PARADIGMS  
DATA-DRIVEN CAMPAIGN AND PLATFORM POLITICS**



# Facing the political uncertainty: the data-driven campaign

In order to cope with the growing uncertainty, the **data-driven campaign** becomes the new must, and data scientist the



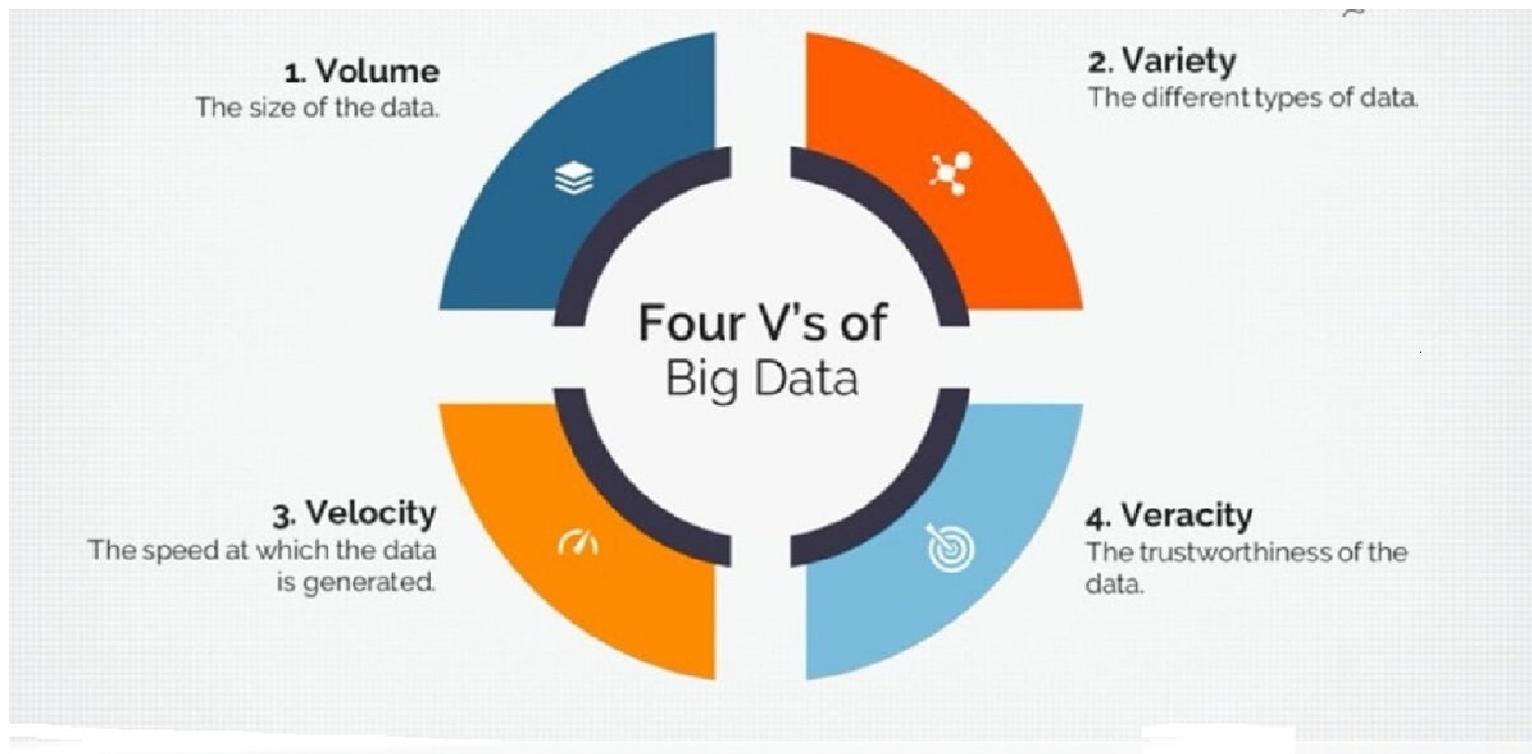
## The data-driven campaign

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- The *data-driven campaign* follows the same route already tracked by the so-called **professionalization of politics** (Scammell 1997; Negrine e Lilleker 2002)
- It is due to the **growing technological sophistication** of political communication (Blumler et al. 1996).
- It is strongly related to the development of **marketing tools and techniques** and to the **personalisation of politics** and **political discourse**
- Moreover, it is an answer to the **electoral volatility** and to the difficulty of **forecasting voter's behaviour**

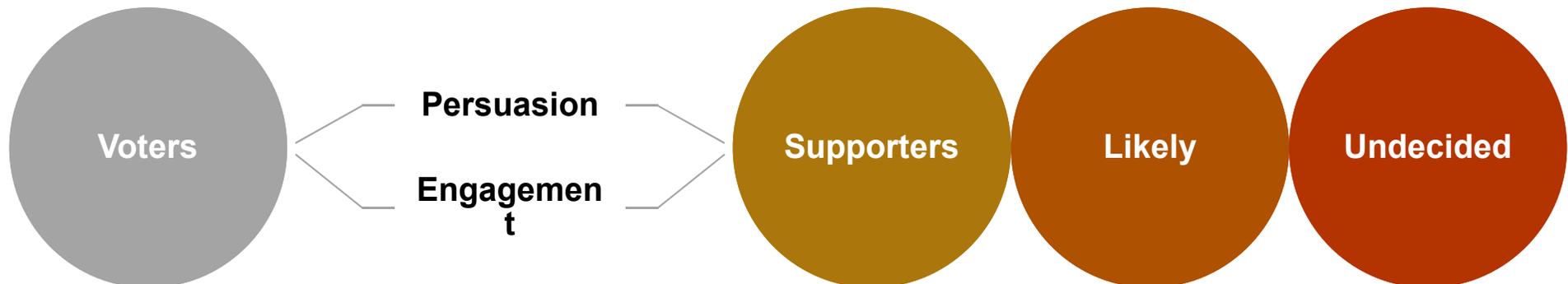
## Let's see what big data are

Big data are **massive amount of data** (McKinsey Global Institute) with three main features as for the 3Vmodel (Laney 2001) + 1 suggested by Chen et al. (2014):



## Big data: The reason why

- A stronger **control** of the campaign phase, voters and strategies
- A more **sensitive agenda** in respect of people needs (issues)
- A more **efficient campaign** organization
- More possibilities to **manufacturing consent** and to **monitoring campaign results**
- Extremely **targeted messages** and voter groups (segments, micro-targets)  
Targeting



# An example: 2012 Barack Obama Campaign: The Project Narwhal

- Diverse data **sources integration**
- Creation of a unique **data mining system**
- A **cost-effective** and **time-efficient** strategy
- **Real time feedback** from voters and public opinion
- **Microtargeting**



# The new augmented age of computational propaganda

Computational propaganda is the combined use of social platforms, algorithms, human bots, bots and big data to manipulate public opinion and voter' choice (Woolley e Guilbeault, 2017)

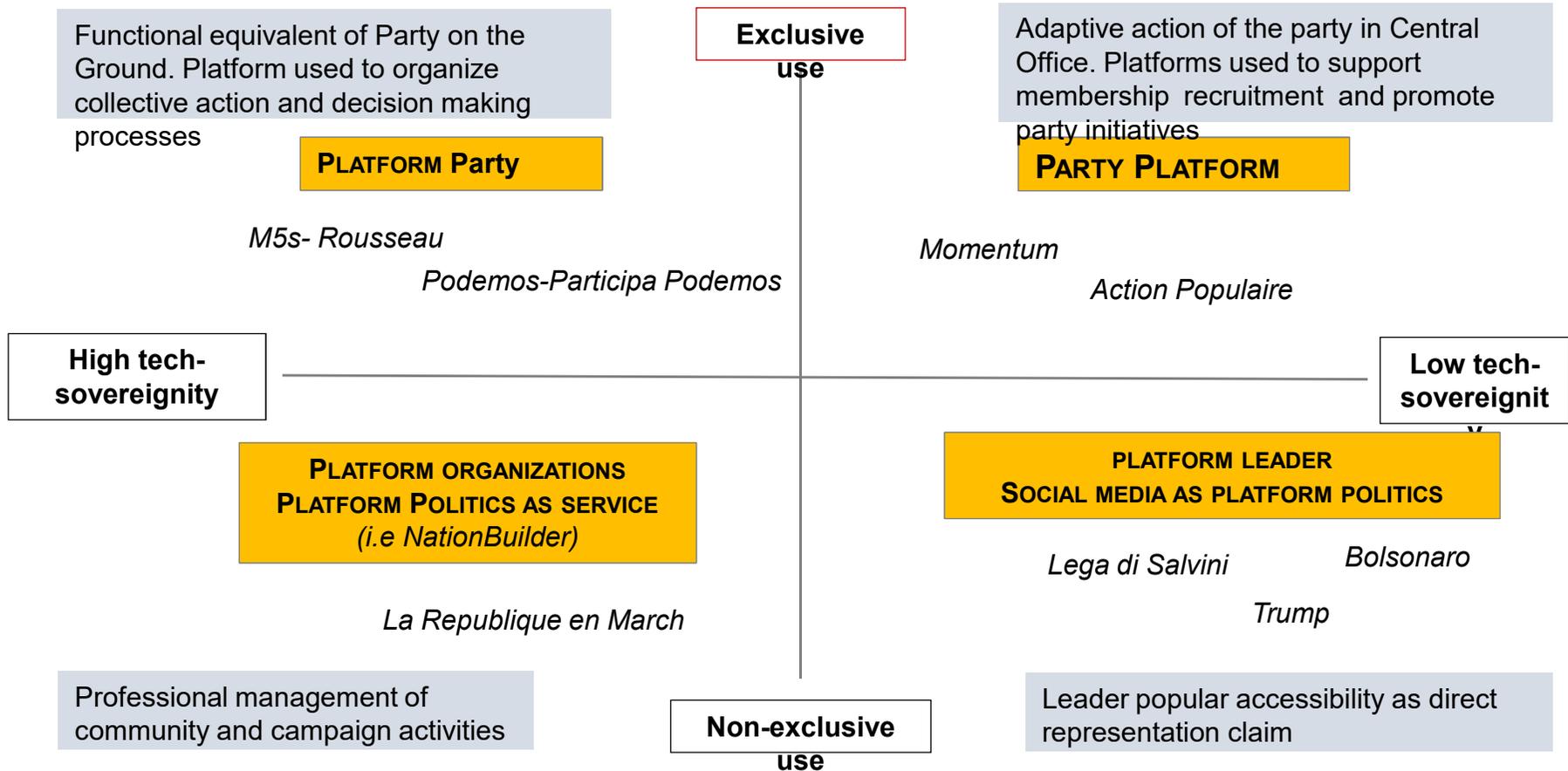


**Project on Computational Propaganda**  
Investigating Political Bots and Algorithms

Phil Howard, PI, @pnhoward  
David McDonald, Co-PI, @dwmcpd  
Sam Woolley, Project Manager, @samuelwoolley  
Norah Abokhodair, Researcher, @Norahak

The poster features a network diagram on the right side, consisting of a central node connected to several peripheral nodes, each containing a small image or text snippet. The nodes are color-coded in shades of blue, green, and red. At the bottom left, there are logos for the University of Michigan, the National Science Foundation (NSF), and the European Research Council (ERC).

# Platform-politics: 2 dimensions, 4 types



# THE ITALIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM. WHAT TRANSITION?

Rosanna De  
Rosa

Il part

# The form of government

Italy is a Parliamentary Republic

- The Constitution of the Italian Republic was enacted by the Constituent Assembly on 22 December 1947 and had effect from 01 January 1948.
- The republican form of government was established in 1946 by a referendum
- Power is divided among the **executive**, the **legislative** and **judicial** branches.
- The symbol identifying Italy is the Italian star (a greek symbol) + a wheel identifying the labour + 2 types of leaves: the olive and the oak, meaning peace and Italian territory

Emblema della Repubblica Italiana



Blasonatura

Composto di una stella a cinque raggi di bianco, bordata di rosso, **accollata** agli assi di una ruota di acciaio dentata, tra due rami, uno di olivo e uno di quercia, legati da un nastro rosso, con la scritta bianca in **carattere capitale** "Repubblica Italiana".

# The parliament, centrality without power

The Italian parliament has a perfectly symmetrical bicameral structure:

- the Chamber of Deputies (630 deputies) and the Senate of the Republic (315 senators plus 5 senators nominated by the president of the republic and senators for life) perform the **same functions**.
- As a parliamentary republic, the constitutional text attributes to parliament a **central role** in the political system with the attribution of legislative functions, political control and representation (Bagehot 1988).

The legislative function is exercised collectively by the two chambers, but the **legislative initiative belongs to the executive** that exercises it in the forms and ways allowed.

The **President of Republic** is elected by the parliament and 3 representative of regional government (art. 81 of Constitution), he is in charge for 7 years.



# The government, a weak power going stronger

- The executive power is exercised by the government under the direction of the Prime Minister, also called President of the Council of the Ministers.
- He is appointed by the President of the Republic and chooses his ministers.
- The government must be supported by a parliamentary majority.
- All the ministers are jointly responsible for the implementation of the country's laws and can propose new bills to the Parliament.
- The executive power was conceived by the constitution as a **weak power** because of the “complex of dictatorship” (Crispolti)



2013-16 M. Renzi (PD+Nuovo



2018: G. Conte (M5S+Lega)



2017: P. Gentiloni (M5S+Lega)

# The first republic: 1946-1993

A stable model of electoral behavior  
The party system  
The organizational dimension of parties  
The consolidation of party-government  
The cycles of political coalition  
The centrality of the parliament



ature



## *Definition of party-government*

The party is considered as an essential part to ensure stable majorities and to govern them in order to implement the program

# The second republic, phase 1: 1993-2008

- The crisis of party system (tangentopoli)
- The majoritarian rule
- The polarization of politics (bi-partitism yes, but still imperm)
- The loosing centrality of the parliament
- The representation crisis
- The empowering of government
- The permanent campaign
- Longer legislatures



# The second republic, phase 2: 2008-2013

The coming of **economic crisis**

The enduring **crisis of ideologies**

The **expansion** of public sphere (blogs and social media)

The **disintermediation** of politics

The empowering of **individual (voice)** and the **zoon politikon**

The emergence of post-ideological political organizations

The **post-politics** advent: anti-partitocratic and anti-establishment movements



# POLITICS IN ITALY: A FOCUS ON 5SM AND ITS TECHNOLOGICAL ORGANIZATION OF DISTRUST

III parte

Rosanna De Rosa

# Beppegrillo.it: disruptive power of a blog

theguardian | TheObserver

News | Sport | Comment | Culture | Business | Money | Life & style

News > Media > Blogging

## The world's 50 most powerful blogs

From Prince Harry in Afghanistan to Tom Cruise ranting about Scientology and footage from the Burmese uprising, blogging has never been bigger. It can help elect presidents and take down attorney generals while simultaneously celebrating the minutiae of our everyday obsessions. Here are the 50 best reasons to log on

Read Bobbie Johnson's blog on celebrity snoopers Nick Denton [here](#)

### 9. Beppe Grillo

Among the most visited blogs in the world is that of Beppe Grillo, a popular Italian comedian and political commentator, long persona non grata on state TV, who is infuriated daily - especially by corruption and financial scandal in his country.

A typical blog by Grillo calls, satirically or otherwise, for the people of Naples and Campania to declare independence, requests that Germany declare war on Italy to help its people ('We will throw violets and mimosa to your Franz and Gunther as they march through') or reports on Grillo's ongoing campaign to introduce a Bill of Popular Initiative to remove from office all members of the Italian parliament who've ever had a criminal conviction. Grillo's name for Mario Mastella, leader of the Popular-UDEUR centre-right party, is Psychodwarf. 'In another country, he would have been the dishwasher in a pizzeria,' says Grillo. Through his blog, he rallied many marchers in 280 Italian towns and cities for his 'Fuck You' Day last September.

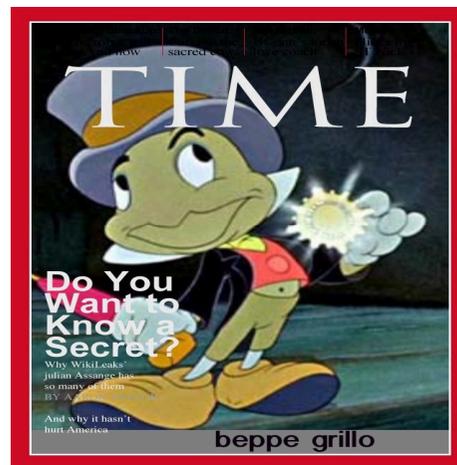
**Least likely to post** 'Sign up to our campaign to grant Silvio Berlusconi immunity'

[beppegrillo.it](http://beppegrillo.it)

# Foreign Media hype on Grillo?



Grillo, European hero of the Year, 2008 Time European Edition



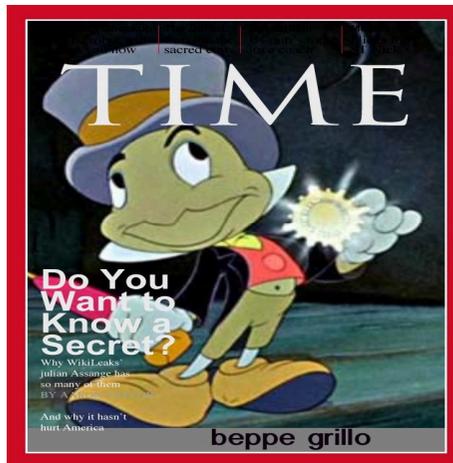
Time Magazine 21 May 2012, after local election

# Yes, but these covers were just FAKE

The fabric of fakes and politics as spectacle



Grillo, European hero of the Year, 2005 Time European Edition



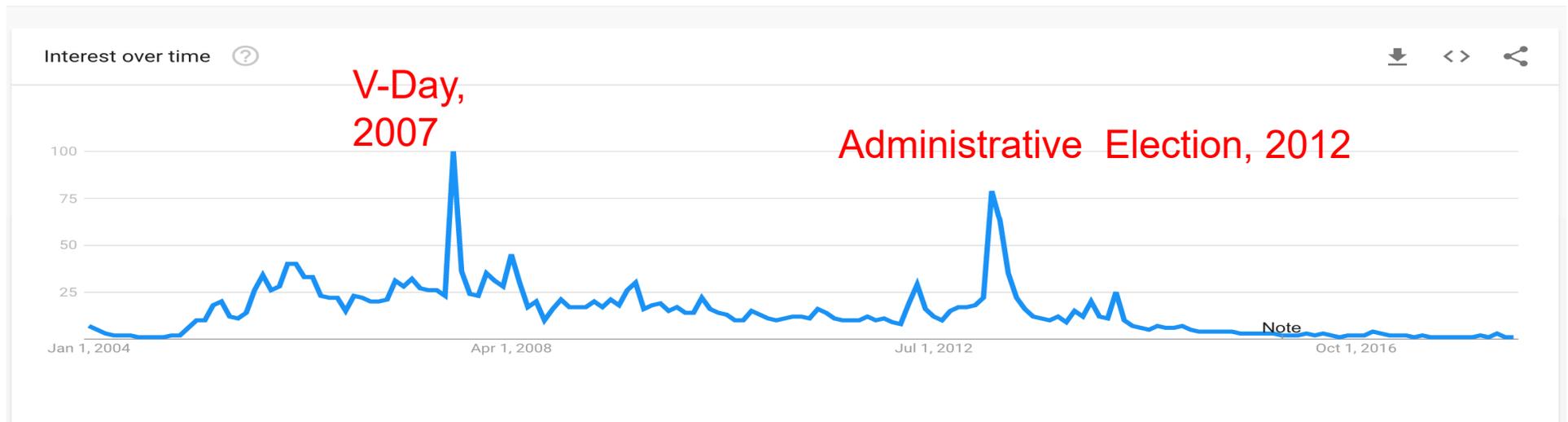
Time Magazine 21 may 2012, after Sicily local election

# What does it's true?

The popularity of Beppe Grillo is enormous as shown by Google Trends.

Popularity that reaches a high pitch in two situations:

- The organization of the first people mobilization in 2007
- The administrative election in 2012



## 8 September 2007: The Vday

A grassroots request for change the legislation consisting of three points:

- no to anyone involved in criminal lawsuits standing for parliament,
- no to re-election after two mandates
- yes to direct election of candidates (that simply means reintroduction of preferences into electoral law)



*«we are tired of feel ashamed for you»*



# The moving into the political arena

8 MARZO 2009



**CARTA DI FIRENZE**  
Comuni a Cinque Stelle

*I Comuni decidono della vita quotidiana di ognuno di noi. Possono avvelenarci con un inceneritore o avviare la raccolta differenziata. Fare parchi per i bambini o porti per gli speculatori. Costruire parcheggi o asili. Privatizzare l'acqua o mantenerla sotto il loro controllo. Dai Comuni a Cinque Stelle si deve ripartire a fare politica con le liste civiche per Acqua, Ambiente, Trasporti, Sviluppo e Energia.*

① Acqua pubblica	⑥ Piano di mobilità per i disabili
② Impianti di depurazione obbligatori per ogni abitazione non collegabile a un impianto fognario, contributi/finanziamenti comunali per impianti di depurazione privati	⑦ Connettività gratuita per i residenti nel Comune
③ Espansione del verde urbano	⑧ Creazione di punti pubblici di telelavoro
④ Concessioni di licenze edilizie solo per demolizioni e ricostruzioni di edifici civili o per cambi di destinazioni d'uso di aree industriali dismesse	⑨ Rifiuti zero
⑤ Piano di trasporti pubblici non inquinanti e rete di piste ciclabili cittadine	⑩ Sviluppo delle fonti rinnovabili come il fotovoltaico e l'eolico con contributi/finanziamenti comunali
	⑪ Efficienza energetica
	⑫ Favorire le produzioni locali



**2008 local election:**

**30 local administration  
7 borough officials elected**

**The Carta of Firenze is a first attempt to organize a shared program with activists**

# founded



One star for each of the cardinal points the Movement upholds:

- environment
- water
- development
- connectivity
- transport

The Meetup platform is used as a meta-organization platform for 5SM groups and activities (Lanfrey 2012)

# The 5SM activist profile



Mp Crimi



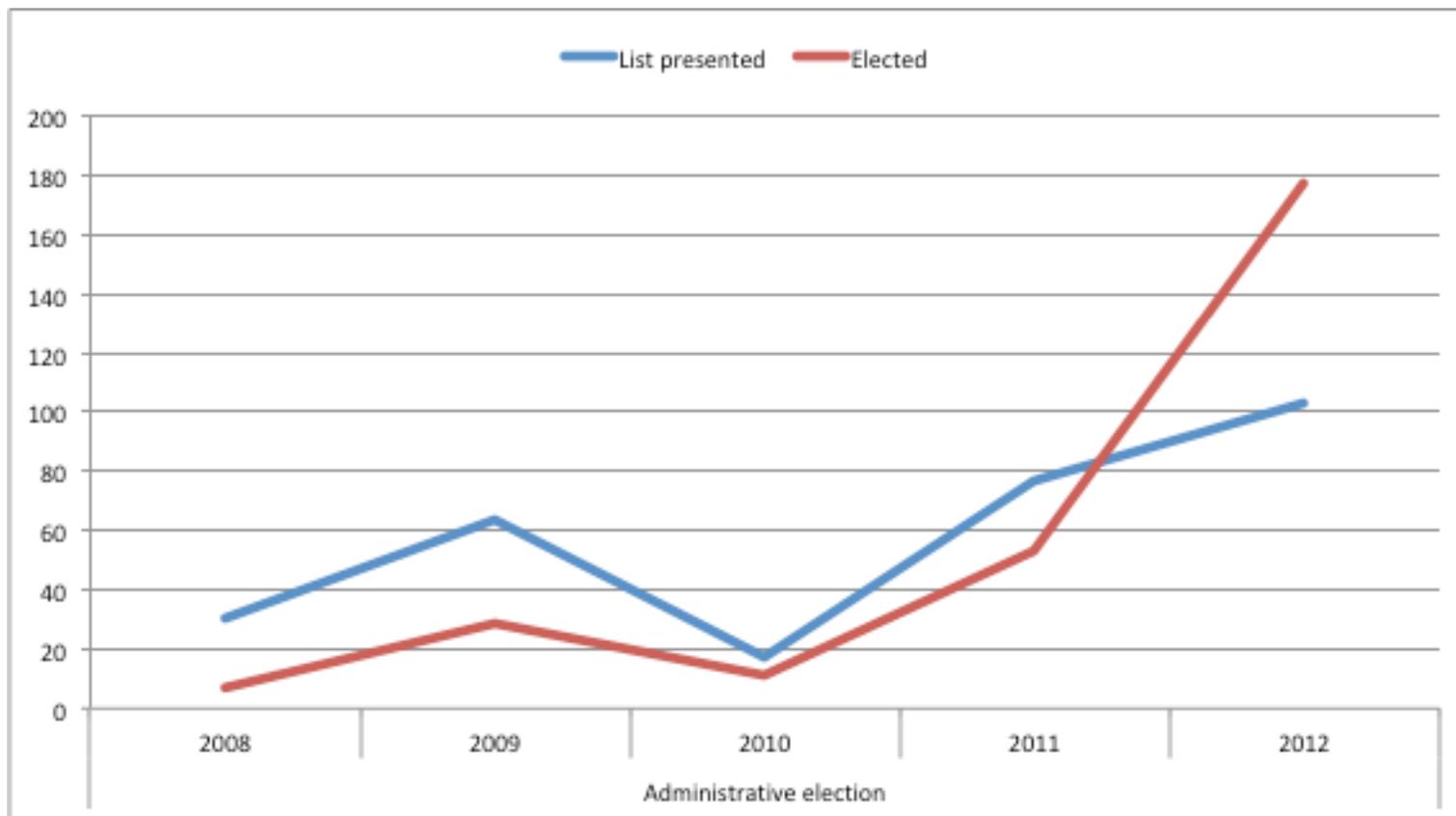
Mp Lombardi



Mp Fico

- **White-collar workers or self-employed professionals** in private firms, with a **smaller group of university students**.
- **They feel blocked by a political class** who are incapable of modernising themselves or the country, preferring to insist with conservative strategies.
- They appear **very radical as regards public administration, the media, the jobs market**.
- They also **refute the idea of leaderism and anti-politics** as media simplification preferring to

# 5SM elected in local institutions



# The reasons behind the success

The 5SM's new political offer emerges

There is an empty space that a new form of representation could fill

Social Media has reached a critical mass of people

Political corruption reached levels never so high since Tangentopoli

Meantime, Italy is starting to feel the crisis arriving

In Europe, the country's credibility have reached an all-time low

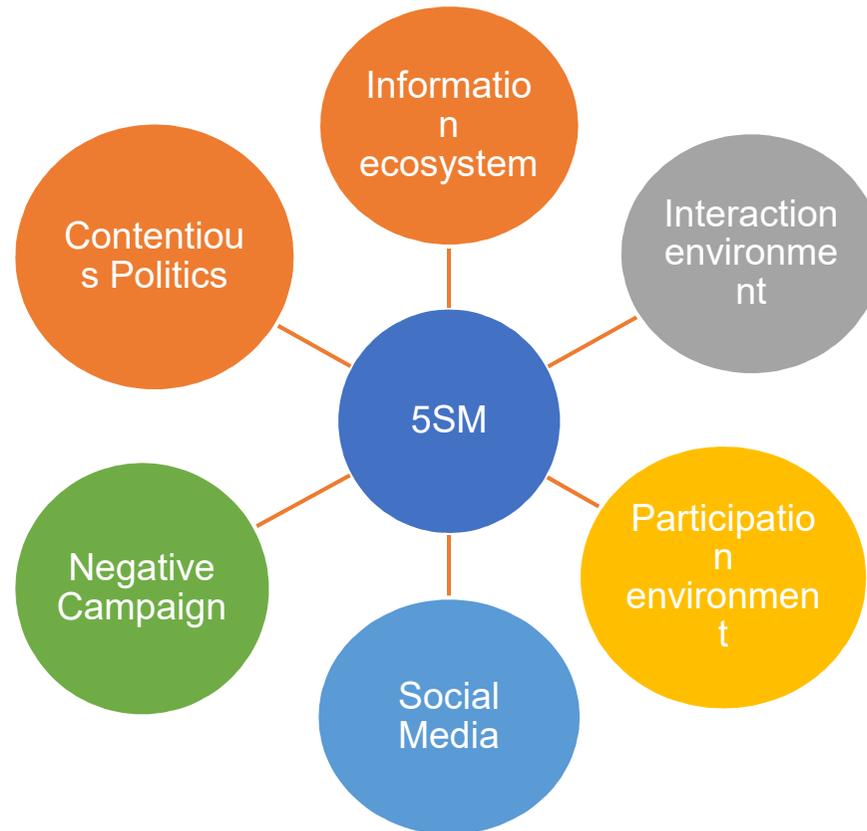
Up to 83% of citizens do not trust political parties any more

Traditional institutional equilibriums seemed to be wavering

Both the right-wing and the left-wing appear swamped in internal debate

Italian political scene had never looked so wobbly

# The cybercratic centralism



# Ruling the organization



The blog plays a central role in ruling the groups



The MeetUp groups are strictly local organisations



Candidates accept to campaign always and only on behalf of local issues



Candidates are not allowed to stand for other elections while they are in office.



The cult of the persona and careerist ambition are discouraged

imento 5 Stelle Sicilia

PARLAMENTO REGIONALE

LA PRESIDENZA

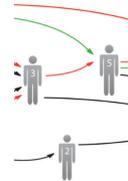
REGOLAMENTO

LA PRESIDENZA

Elected candidates need to account for their work every so often (compulsory mandate).

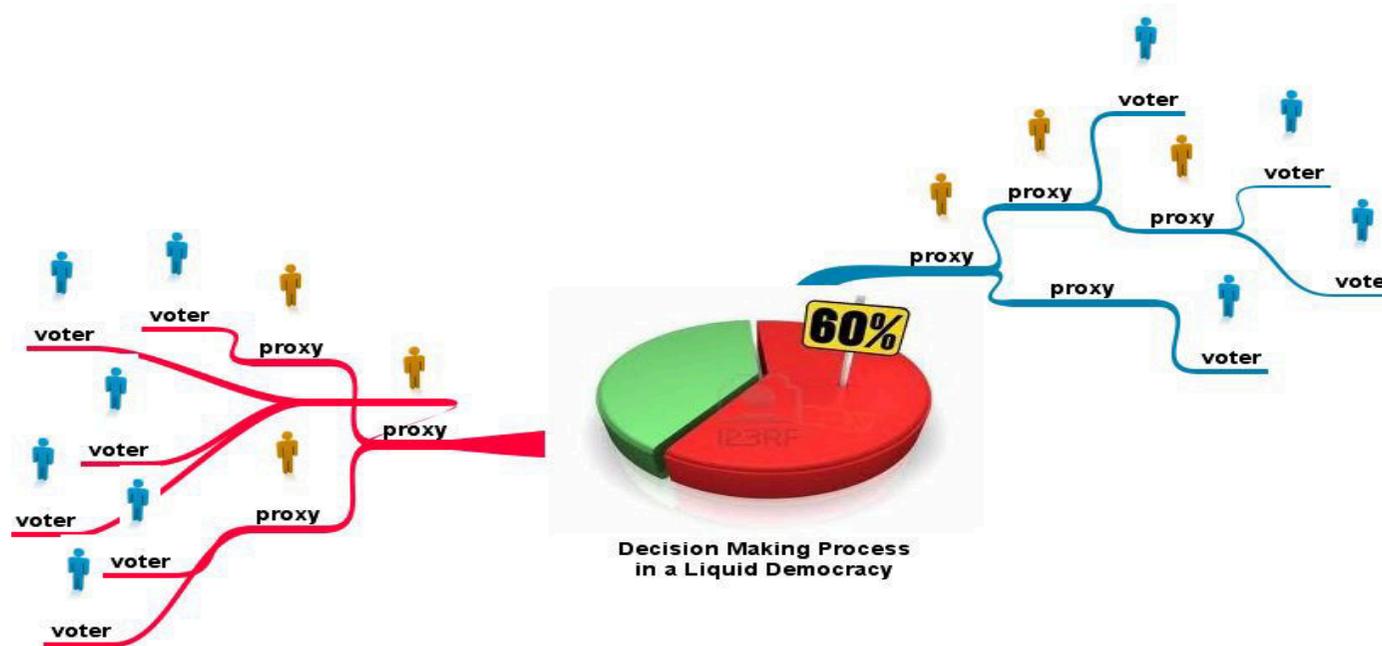


Leadership is mutually dependent on the constituency it represents



Decision-making is based on a proxy-voting system,

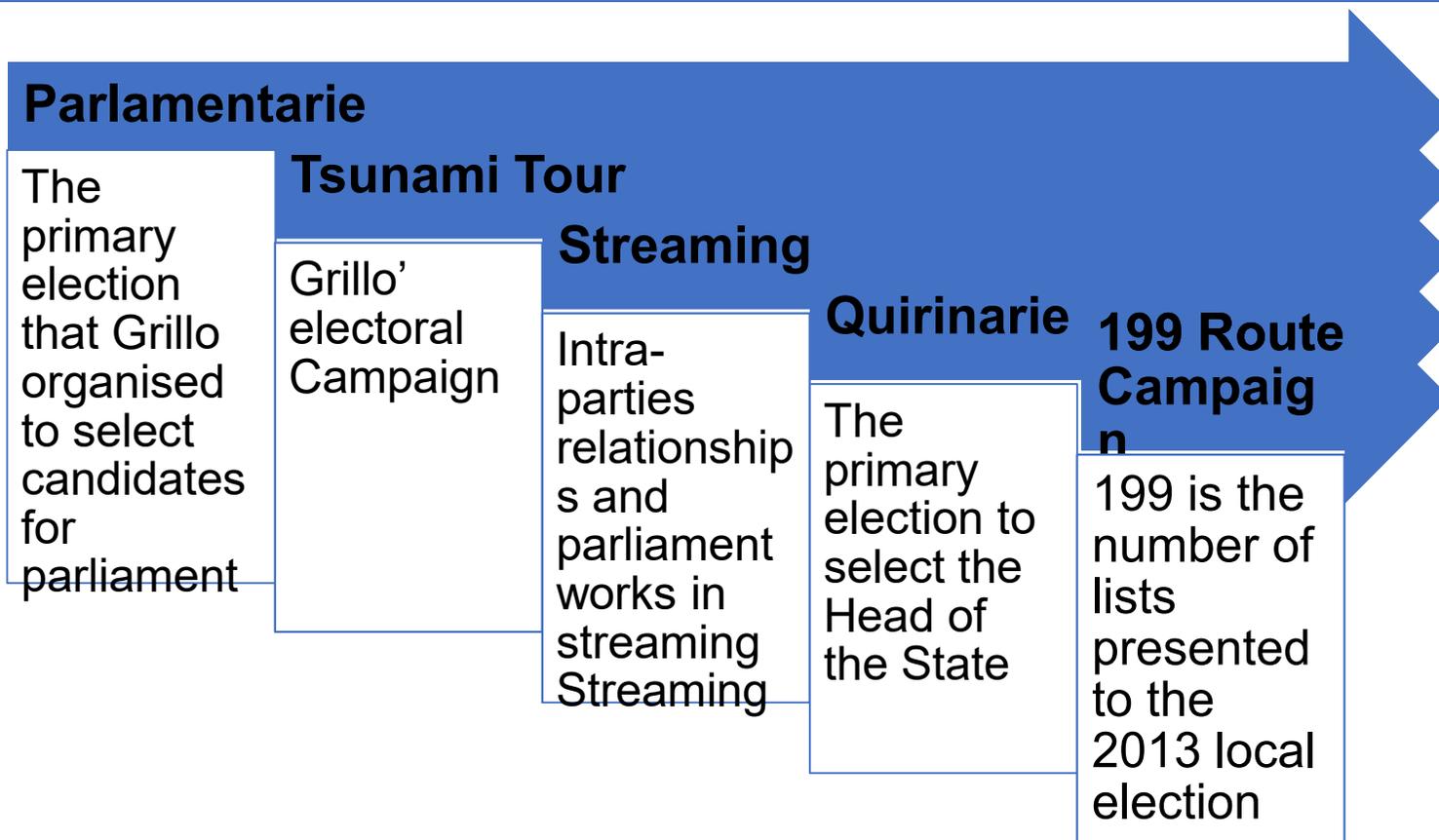
# The liquid-democracy model



The 5S people was inspired by the liquid democracy model already tested by the Pirate party in Germany and based on proxy vote.

After have tested different platform the Casaleggio Agency decided to build a own platform:

# 2013: the “counter-democracy” in movement



# Tsunami tour: an analogical campaign in a digital environment



Young and students: the post-political electorate target-group



Old and new way to campaign



Leader tour: Grillo meet citizens in over 70 squares



Meetup groups rose from 500 to over 1000



About 300.000 registered to the Grillo networks



Opinion polls rank the movement up 20%



2012: The Statute defines the electoral status of the movement

# 2013: a seamless campaign

Use of anti-language and going negative

**Globalizing  
the network  
finding a  
common  
enemy**

Re-mediation of communication

**Unifying  
media and  
message**

**Shared goals: Giving people an  
objective to fight for**

**Social-  
empowering**

**Organised  
communities**

**Micro-  
mobilisation**

# Election 2013 and the winner is: none

## RISULTATI ALLA CAMERA

### ITALIA

61.446 sezioni su 61.446



ALTRI 1,7%

Ultimo aggiornamento: 28 febbraio 2013 ore 14:24

The Movement got 8.69 million votes in total, **2.4 million in the South**, 2.1 in the North-East, and 1.6 in the so-called “red regions”.

## RISULTATI AL SENATO

### ITALIA

60.431 sezioni su 60.431



ALTRI 1,8%

Ultimo aggiornamento: 01 marzo 2013 ore 13:39

In the Lower House, the 5SM comes second to the Pd, with 25.55% of votes.

## RIEPILOGO ITALIA

Abitanti / Elettori 56.995.744 / 47.126.326

Seggi da assegnare 618

Affluenza alle urne (in percentuale)



Politiche 2001  
 Politiche 2006  
 Politiche 2008 (alla chiusura delle operazioni)  
 Politiche 2013 (alla chiusura delle operazioni)

ELEZIONI PRECEDENTI

In the Senate it gets 23.79% of votes.

Voting turnout decreases of over 5%

# The technological organization of mistrust



## The panoptical solution

**Video-streaming democracy** was the new format adopted by 5S activists which had serious implications on transparency and control.

The control chain and the no-confidence stance are very closely-linked. The 5SM activists control the political classes in the public office but are controlled by the Movement on the ground, thus making the accountability process a very central question.

# Understanding Grillo

- Grillo's 5SM is the tip of the iceberg of a complex phenomenon that emerges from the **dealignment of legitimacy and trust**, two principles which theories of democracy and representation had merged together in the form of electoral processes (Rosanvallon, 2008).
- The electoral process can no longer be seen as sufficient reason for keeping afloat a **political class that fails to respond to citizens' needs** and, more importantly, fails to deserve their trust.
- Grillo is then a product of a set of a unique circumstances: the political and **economic situation**, the **party system crisis**, the **transformative power of new media**, which now are enabling a critical mass of citizens to claim their rights, demanding transparency, effectiveness and participation in political processes.
- In this contest, the movement can be seen as a **technological organization of distrust**.

# POLITICS IN ITALY: TOWARD THE III REPUBLIC?

III parte

Rosanna De Rosa

## Transition or not?

For the last twenty five years we have witnessed:

- a process of **verticalization/personalization** of power
- a tendential transformation (pressure, behaviours) - in a **presidential** sense - of the form of government (Calise 2007).
- a **strengthening** of the government with regard to legislative power through the use of **confidence vote**, **urgent decrees**, and **delegation**.
- three electoral reforms (majoritarian in 1993, proportional with no personal vote in 2005, mix proportional and majoritarian with no personal vote in 2017) has transformed the accountability of the system into party discipline.

The combination of the **strengthening of the executive** and the **control of candidacies** has created a condition of **subordination** of the parliament to government action and a **loss of representation**.  
Let's re-start again from here

# Toward the third republic? 2018 election



**Rosatellum bis:**  
New electoral law  
same problem:  
how to ensure  
representation  
and governability  
in a country still  
too  
inhomogeneous

61%Proportional +  
37% Majoritarian +  
2% overseas vote,  
+ list soils 5%

# Keywords of the most awful campaign ever

- **Going Negative:** attack, media bias, fakes, meme (the hybrid war theory, Gerasimov doctrine),
- **Going Public:** media events, populism,
- **Going Social:** voter mobilization, agenda setting, occupying public debate
- **Going Personal:** “character assassination”, a unique enemy to fight (Renzi), but with all its likely voters
- **Going Comparative:** compare any present event/story/person with a present/past similar event/story/person to “argue” a theory only apparently rational: create anger and social envy



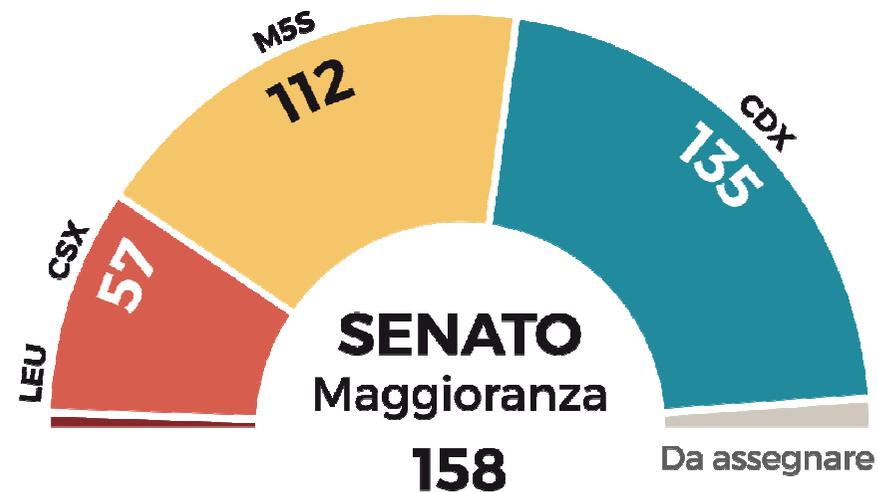
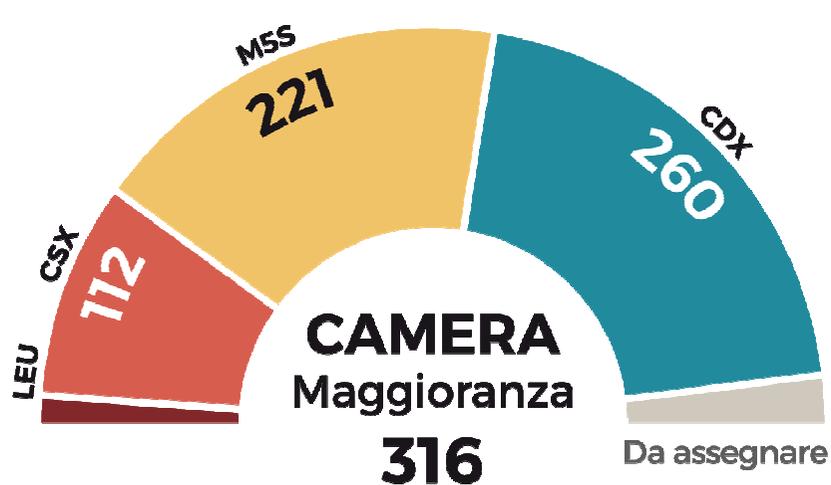
...and what about the PD?

# Electoral results: The CDX is the winner but...

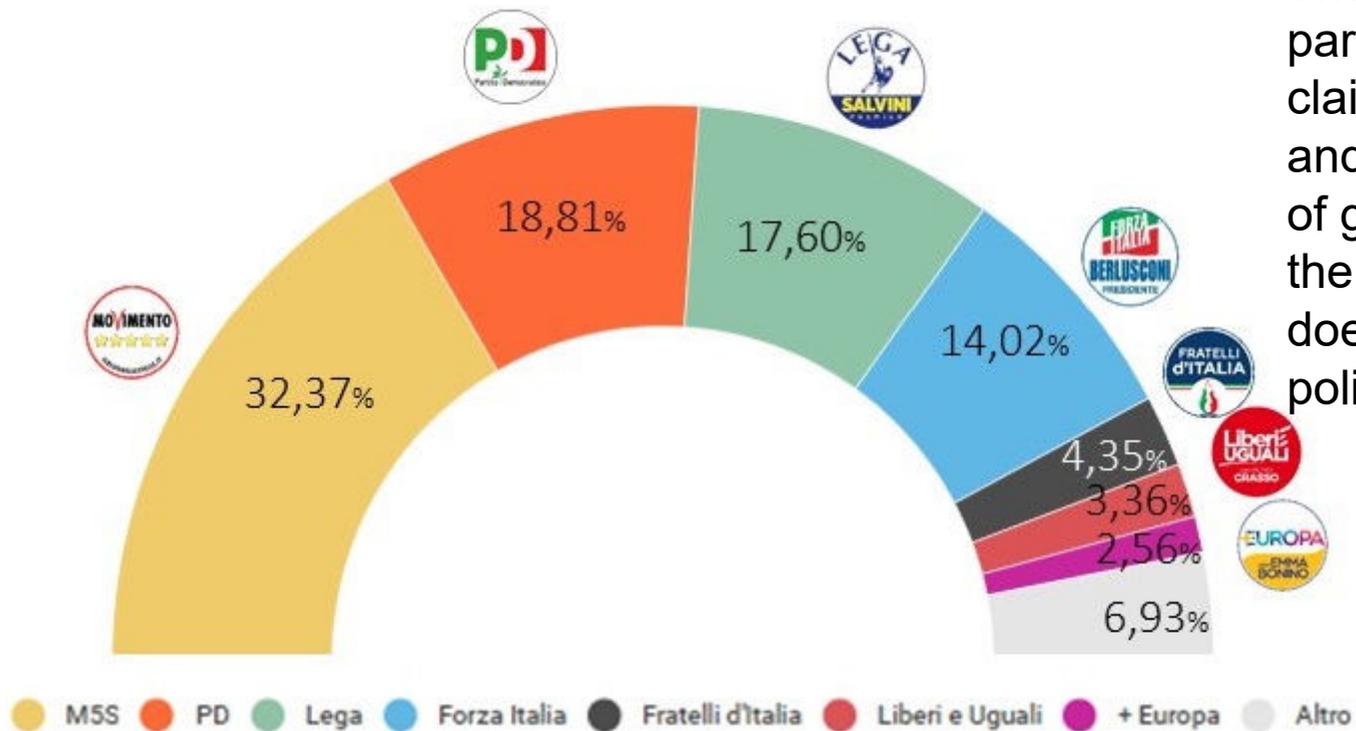
Voting turnout 2013: 75,24%

Voting turnout 2018: 72,93%

balance: - 2,31



# The 5SM is the ultimate winner

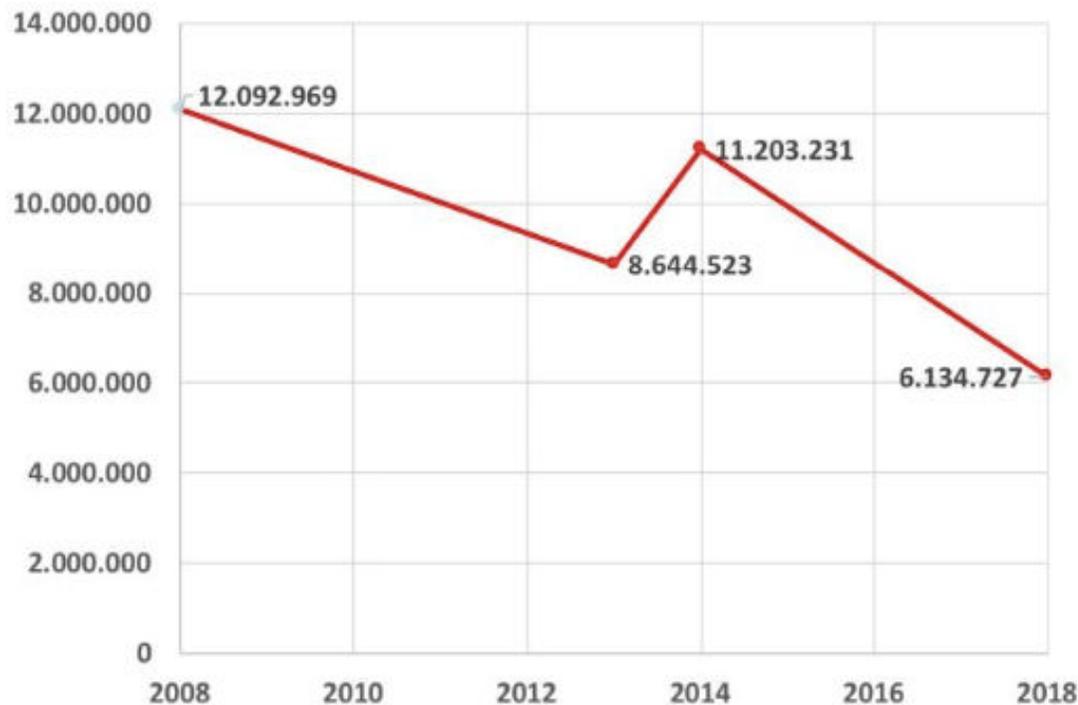


The 5SM is the only party running alone claiming the victory and the premiership of government...but the movement alone does not have the political majority.



# The halved party

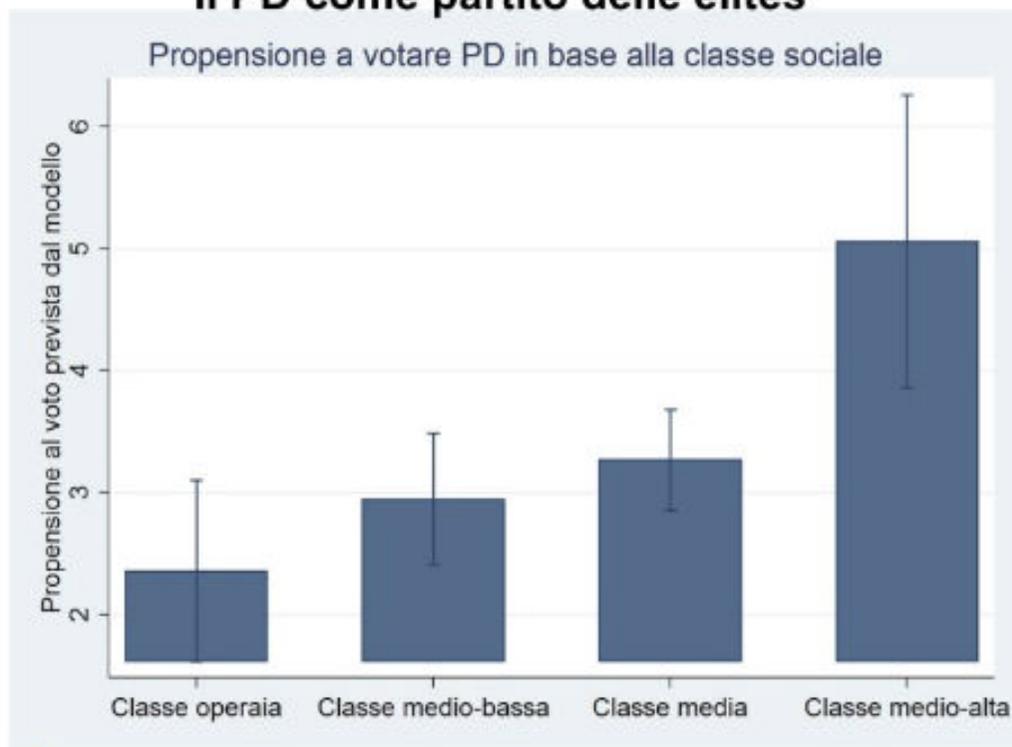
Il PD in voti, politiche 2008, 2013, 2018 e europee 2014



The Democratic Party went from 33.2% of the vote in the 2008 elections to 18.7% ten years later.

# PD voted by higher classes

## Il PD come partito delle élites



On the opposite site  
, the 5SM becomes  
representative of  
workers, poor  
people, small  
entrepreneurs

It is not about a coalition...but about a contract



# The third Republic: what should be?

Still unclear if we are facing to a third republic.

However some changes in power relationships seems relevant.

For example:

- The simplification of the political system with a bi-party system
- A form of legal negotiation – the contract among Lega and 5SM – instead of coalition
- The statement of pragmatic and non-ideological approach to government
- The statement of supremacy of politics over economics, bureaucracy, sovra-national organization
- The pressure for institutional simplification with reduction of MPs
- The pressure for introduction of forms of bottom up