

New Political actors in polarised democracies.

Is the case of Beppe Grillo the beginning of a success story?

Perspectives for the Left.

In Europe, two processes are responsible for the current favourable conditions for populist protest.

The first is the crisis of the mainstream parties and changes the traditional representation systems have undergone.

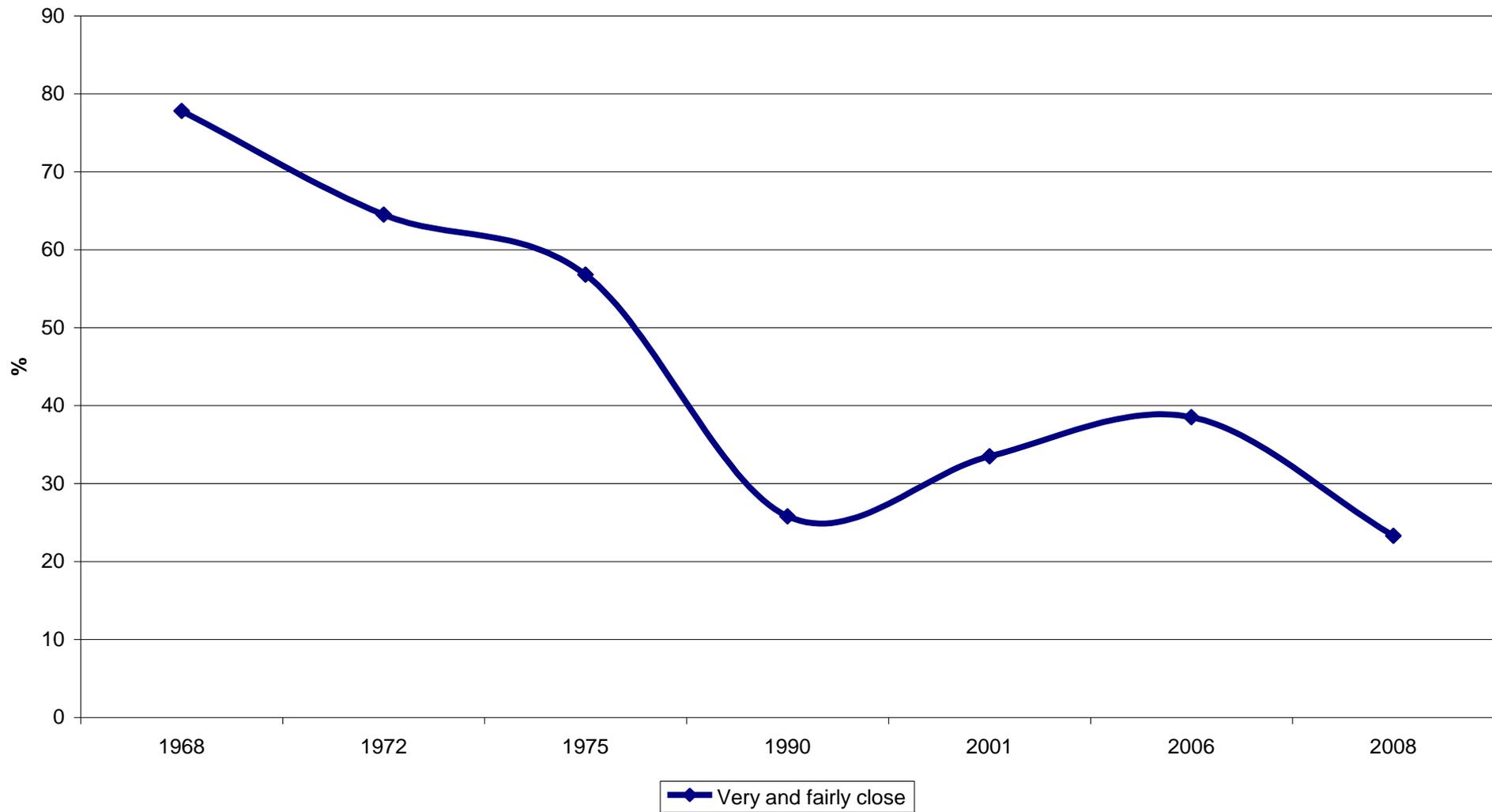
The second is the progress of globalisation which has created many problems and demands in various countries and created new social fractures that the main parties are unable to represent and manage. These problems have been worsened by the effects of the economic crisis and the austerity measures promoted by the European Union.

After WWII and the anti-fascist resistance, the Italian political system gave very little room for the spread of populism.

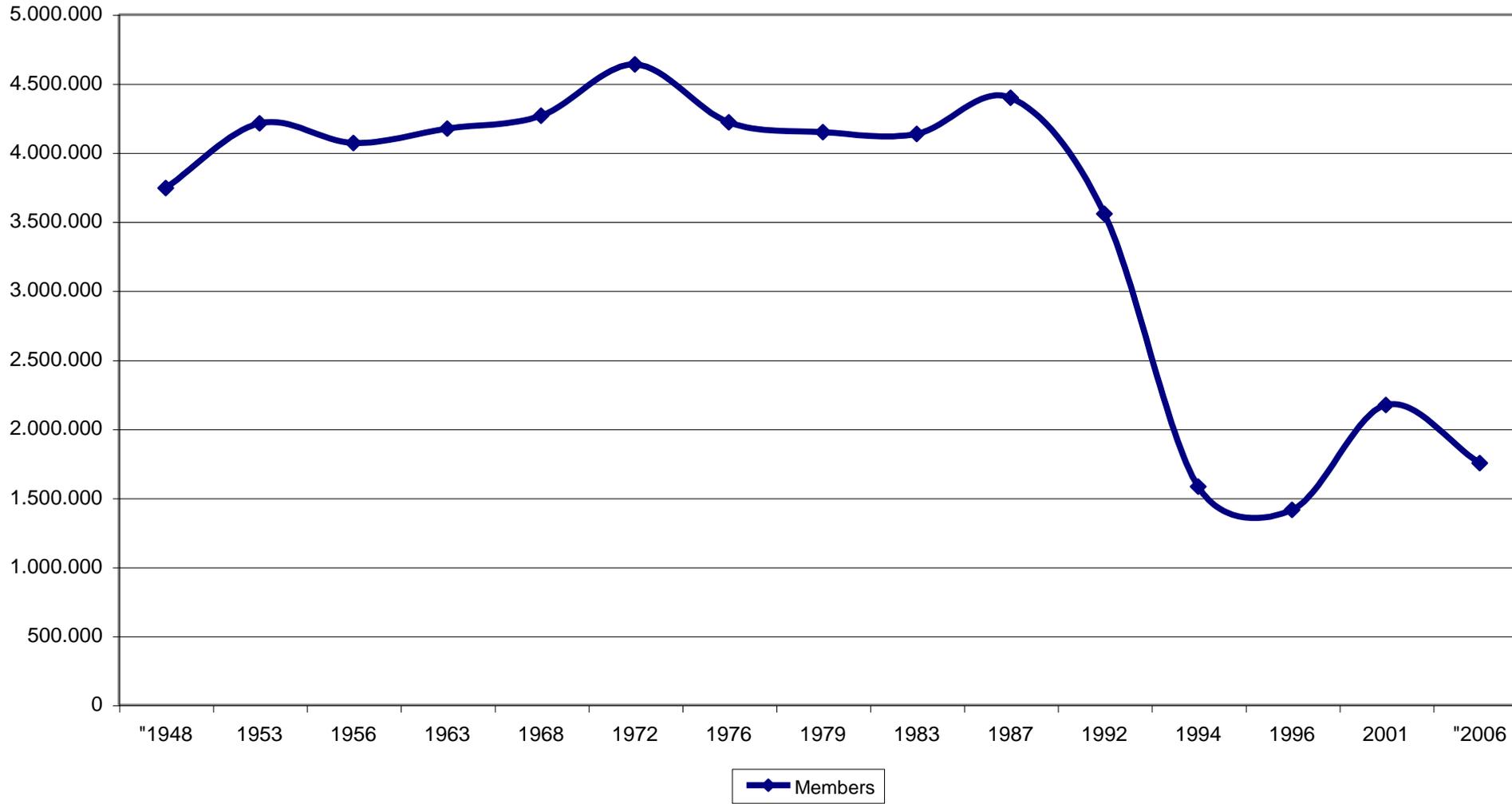
The breakdown of the relationship between the masses and the main parties grew in the Nineties, after the end of the cold war and above all before the *Tangentopoli* corruption scandals.

Distrust of the political class grew sharply and party membership collapsed.

Party attachment in Italy 1968-2008



Party Members in Italy

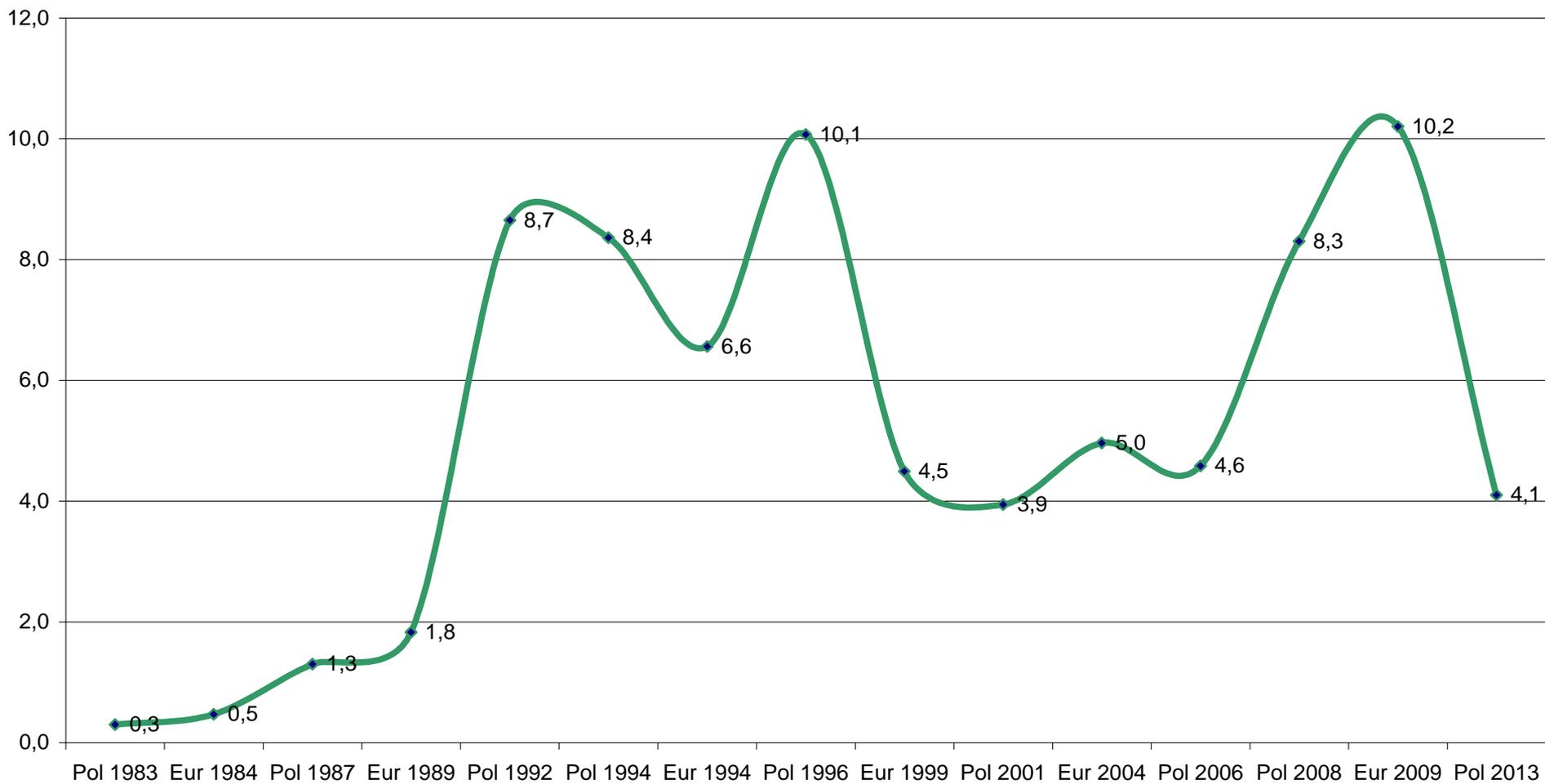


Far more room for unrest and populist politics was created in Italy than in other European countries.

The Italian Social Movement, the right-wing party most similar to the French *Front National* for historical and traditional ideology reasons, failed to take advantage of this political space.

The Northern League, a regional unrelated to the biggest traditional Italian parties, identified and exploited the space which was now available to a populist movement.

Votes for the Northern League in national and european elections



Serie1

Over the last few years however, distrust in the centre-right government has continued to grow. Not just Berlusconi, but other Northern League ministers were held responsible for the failures in the face of the expectations they had encouraged.

After the end of the Berlusconi government, the forming of a government led by Monti and supported by both the Democratic Party (Pd) and the People of Freedom (Pdl) undermined the credibility of the main political parties. Inquiries by the judiciary revealed scandals involving members of all parties, whilst the public were continuing to suffer the effects of the economic crisis and the austerity measures adopted by the government, supported by the three largest parties.

	Electinons 2013		Electinons 2008		Differences 2013 -	
	Votes	%	Votes	%	Votes	%
MOVIMENTO 5 STELLE	8.689.458	25,6			8.689.458	25,6
Center Left						
PARTITO DEMOCRATICO	8.644.523	25,4	12.095.306	33,2	-3.450.783	-7,8
SINISTRA ECOLOGIA LIBERTA'	1.089.409	3,2	1.124.298	3,1	-34.889	0,1
RIVOLUZIONE CIVILE	765.188	2,3	1.594.024	4,4	-828.836	-2,1
Centre-Right						
IL POPOLO DELLA LIBERTA'	7.332.972	21,6	13.629.464	37,4	-6.296.492	-15,8
LEGA NORD	1.390.014	4,1	3.024.543	8,3	-1.634.529	-4,2
FRATELLI D'ITALIA	665.830	2,0			665.830	2,0
Centre						
SCELTA CIVICA (MONTI)	2.824.065	8,3			2.824.065	8,3
UNIONE DI CENTRO	608.210	1,8	2.050.229	5,6	-1.442.019	-3,8

Creating a new type of movement

Before arriving on the election scene, Grillo built and consolidated a true movement starting online.

He gradually changed his role and on many occasions became a mouthpiece for citizens' protests and grass-roots movements..

The original approach and the innovative aspects of the new movement only came about however after the involvement of Casaleggio, one of the foremost experts in Italy on internet marketing strategy.

This collaboration showed that it is possible to successfully combine two possible strategies for managing political initiative and collective mobilisation.

The blog *beppegrillo.it*, which began in 2005, was a space for information and discussion, but it also became a platform to launch collective and participatory political initiatives, including the following campaigns: "Out of Iraq" for the withdrawal of Italian troops, "Clean Parliament", to remove convicted deputies from Parliament and campaigns defending consumers and small shareholders against big companies.

The creation of the movement really got going when the *Meetups* started, platforms which allowed the blog visitors to organise themselves as local activists in constant contact. A new space for meeting, interacting and socialising was created for people who were potentially interested in changing Italian politics and society, for many this was the first time they had participated in parties, groups or organisations.

In three years, a network of links between people with shared beliefs, a sense of belonging and a collective identity was created and they opposed the same elements: the typical features of a social movement. The new movement enjoyed success in Italy which is comparable to that of the *Piraten* in Germany or the MoveOn demonstrations in support of Obama during the 2008 election campaign. Today, the M5S has a network of around 1,100 Meetups, across 900 cities and small towns, with almost 140,000 activists.

Following the success of the V-Day rallies, the movement moved increasingly closer towards using another democratic tool; non-party lists, to participate in elections on a local level.

The Five Star Movement (M5S) was founded in Milan on October 4 2009, with a programme of 120 points and a "non-manifesto" which establishes the membership rules. The movement rejects the idea of creating a party as an organised and professional tool which acts as a representative/mediator between the public and the institutions.

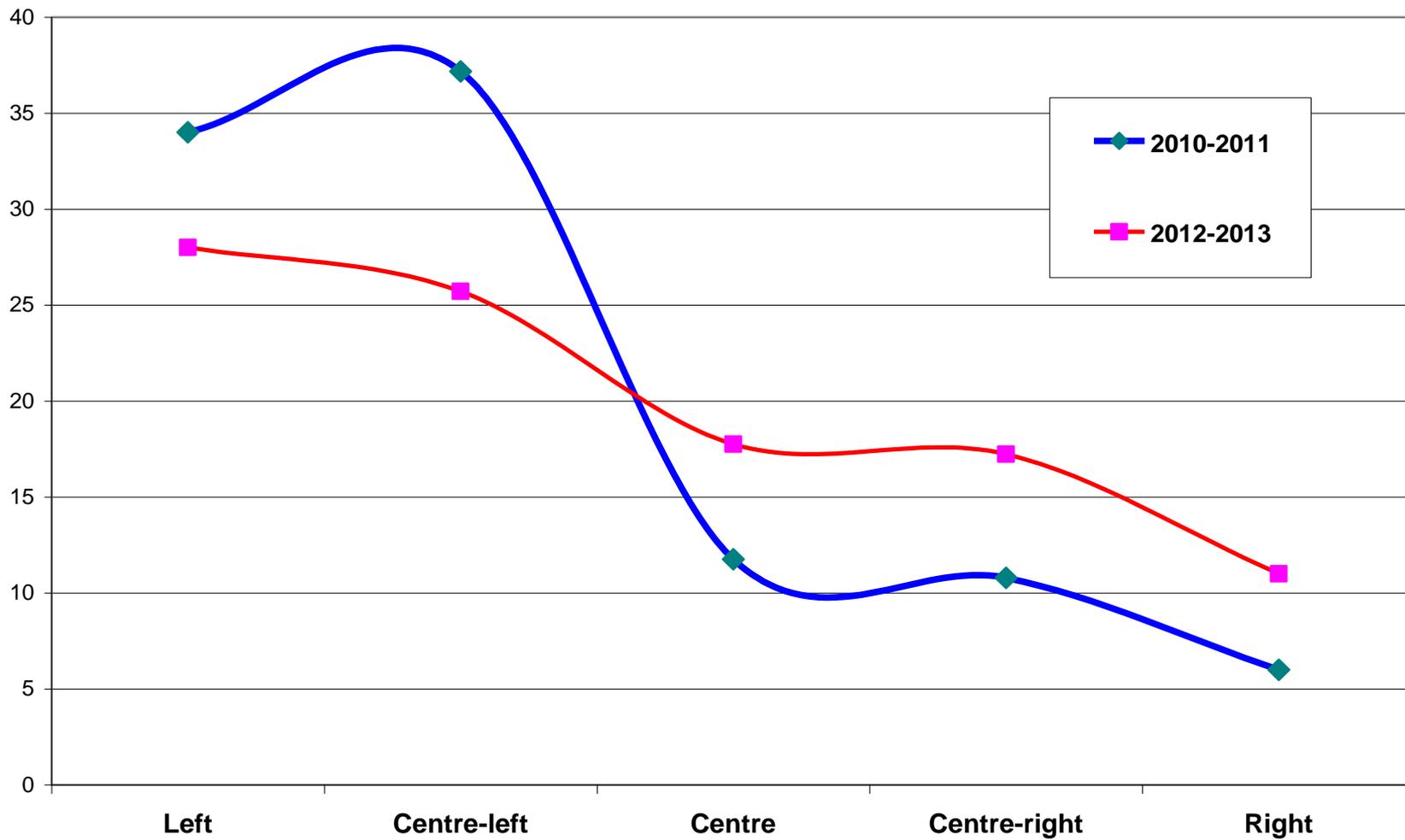
In the 2012 regional elections, the movement won over 500,000 votes, reaching 7% in the region of Emilia-Romagna and 5% in Piedmont.

In 2012, there was a decisive leap in the quality of the 5 Star Movement, which was seen as a more credible interpretation of the protests against the parties and against the Monti government.

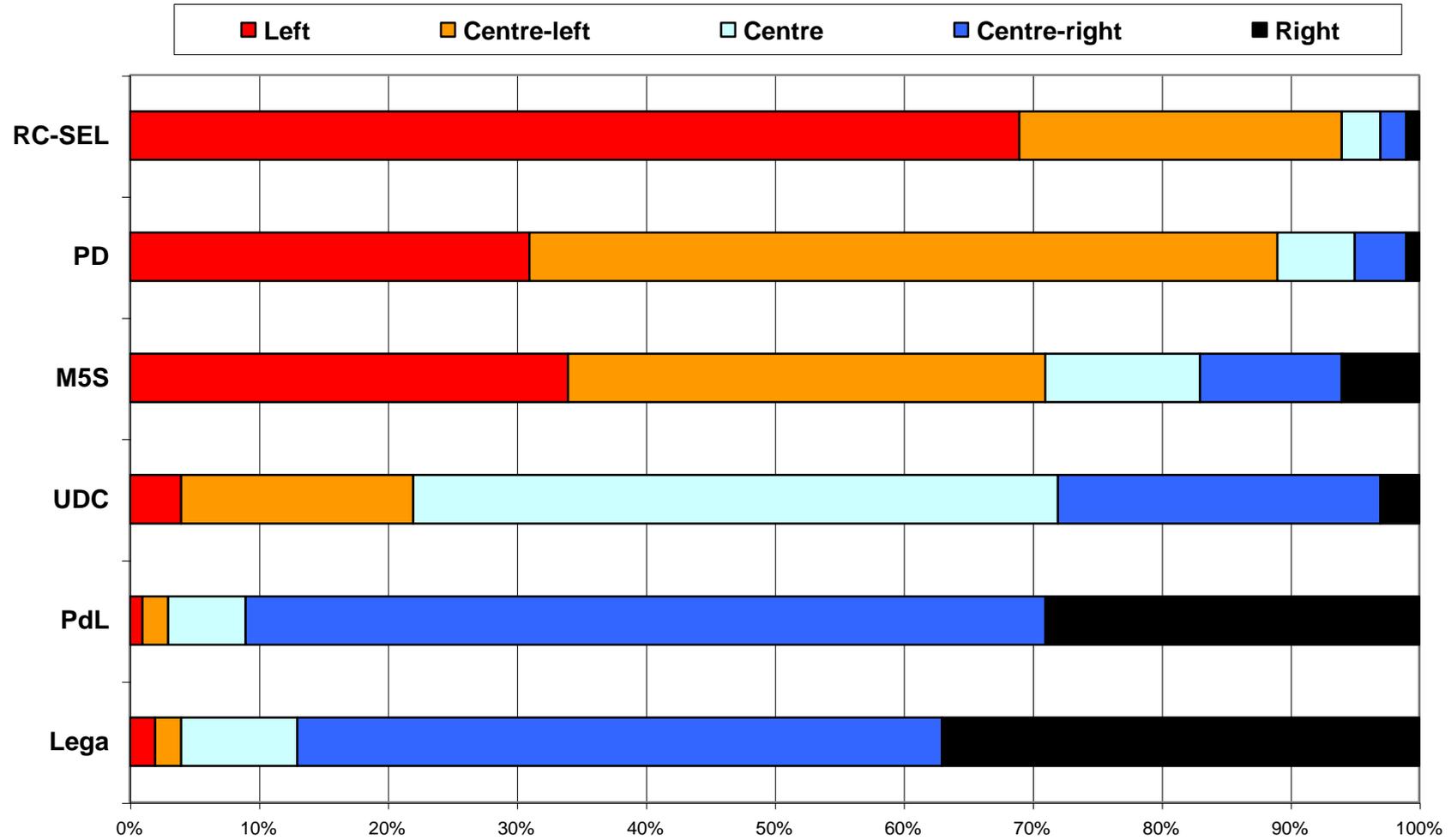
In Parma the M5S candidate became mayor, winning 19% of votes and then the second ballot with 60%. M5S was also successful in Genoa (with 14% of the vote) and in many other communes in the north and centre, with votes ranging from 8 to 12%. The results were higher than expected and national polls immediately doubled the estimates for the movement, from 6-7% to 18-20%.

M5S was the party which won the biggest share of the vote in the February 2013 elections, with 25% of the Chamber of Deputies. It collected almost a third of voters who voted for *Left Rainbow* or *Italy of Values* in 2008 and won 14% of former Democratic Party voters. It also won a lot of votes as a result of the severe crisis which shook the centre-right coalition. Grillo's movement similarly won 16% of voters who voted for the Pdl in 2008 and 24% of those who voted for the League.

Left-right orientations of M5S voters



Left-right orientations of party voters (January 2012)



The trends changed the social profile of M5S voters. Support is cross-cutting but particularly high amongst factory workers, the unemployed, the self-employed and students. It's no surprise that the Pd and the Pdl are particularly weak in these social groups which were worst hit by the effects of the crisis and the Monti government's austerity measures. Pd is most popular amongst the retired and the Pdl most popular amongst home makers.

Vote 2013 by Age

	Votote for:					
	M5S	LEGA	PDL	Centre	PD	Left (Sel-Rc)
18-29 years	33,2	4,5	14,0	8,9	19,2	8,5
30-44 y.	36,3	4,8	23,6	8,1	15,8	4,6
45-54 y.	30,5	3,0	20,3	9,0	24,8	7,0
55-64 y.	24,9	4,3	17,6	11,2	32,9	5,7
more them 64 y.	9,1	4,0	26,7	13,9	38,8	4,0
All	25,7	4,1	21,6	10,4	26,8	5,6

Source: Demos polls February 2013

Vote 2013 by Educational Attainment

	Vote for:					
	M5S	LEGA	PDL	Centre	PD	Left (Sel-Rc)
Elementary or none	15,6	4,5	24,0	11,4	38,1	3,6
Middle-school certificate	28,4	4,8	25,8	9,1	24,2	4,0
High-school diploma	27,5	3,9	19,0	10,9	23,7	6,6
Degree	21,0	2,3	11,8	13,2	35,1	9,8
All	25,7	4,1	21,6	10,4	26,8	5,6

Source: Demos polls February 2013

Vote 2013 by Employment Category

	Vote for:					
	M5S	LEGA	PDL	Centre	PD	Left (Sel-Rc)
Manual workers	38,8	5,5	22,8	1,9	20,8	6,5
White-collar employees	26,9	3,1	13,7	12,4	28,1	6,6
Shopkeeper, artisans, entrepr	44,3	5,0	24,5	8,7	13,1	1,7
Professionals	30,9	1,7	13,5	13,1	27,8	8,2
Students	29,9	3,4	10,2	13,1	19,2	9,9
Housewives	25,1	3,4	33,4	9,8	20,0	2,9
Unemployed	39,9	1,4	26,1	5,7	14,1	7,9
Pensioners	11,7	5,5	21,4	13,8	38,7	4,8
All	25,7	4,1	21,6	10,4	26,8	5,6

Source: Demos polls February 2013

Vote 2013 by Left-Right Self-placement

	Votote for:					
	M5S	LEGA	PDL	Centre	PD	Left (Sel-Rc)
Left	23,1	0,0	0,9	3,8	50,6	20,1
Centre-left	20,4	0,5	1,2	9,5	60,5	5,1
Centre	22,6	2,6	7,9	46,7	11,2	2,3
Centre-right	17,8	7,4	55,4	7,2	2,0	0,3
Right	17,5	11,1	53,2	2,5	3,3	0,9
No answer/Refused	53,2	4,8	13,6	10,0	11,8	2,2
All	25,7	4,1	21,6	10,4	26,8	5,6

Source: Demos polls February 2013

From populist rhetoric to promoting participatory democracy

Many commentators tried to undermine the 5 Star Movement, presenting it as one of the many populist demonstrations managed by right-wing political parties in other European countries. Grillo himself controversially accepted this comparison, turning the meaning on its head. The most obvious feature which makes the M5S similar to popular movements is its strong criticism of political parties and the political class. Grillo's line covers various aspects of populist rhetoric, in the disenchanted and ironic forms of a comedian.

The voters who voted for the M5S are different from those who voted for other political parties above all because of their deep distrust of public bodies and political institutions. In fact, trust in the parties (4%), the Chamber of Deputies (12%) and the trade unions (19%), is very low. These levels are much lower than those for League voters. There is a huge amount of criticism of financial institutions and the media. M5S voters have very little faith in banks (6%) and the stock market (13%). They also place very little on the reliability of Rai (13%) and Mediaset networks (23%).

Confidence in Political and Private Institution

	All	Voting intentions				
		M5S	LEGA	PDL	CENTRE	PD
Political Parties	14,7	3,5	12,8	18,5	27,6	22,9
Banks	20,1	6,4	15,1	27,3	21,6	18,7
Parliament	23,0	11,7	16,7	34,6	21,8	27,4
The Italian stock exchange	23,1	12,5	19,8	40,8	39,4	25,1
The public television Rai	32,8	12,6	27,0	29,3	44,6	35,8
Trade Unions	36,9	18,6	27,5	35,8	41,2	49,9
The private television Mediaset	37,0	23,3	67,0	67,1	52,4	20,3
Gouvernement	41,1	25,6	19,4	47,8	59,1	59,9
Employers' associations	52,5	34,6	47,3	63,4	65,9	51,0
Catholic Church	53,7	31,7	34,8	76,6	67,4	55,4
European Union	55,7	43,9	37,5	51,7	70,8	70,7
Presidency of the Republic	69,1	41,5	27,6	67,1	86,2	93,4

Source: Ipsos polls from September to November 2012

The way M5S has translated protests into proposals is very different from the populist right. For parties in this camp, the people can regain sovereignty by putting their faith in a "strong" leader able to represent the will of the common people to the institutions. The people are defined as a community in ethnic-cultural terms, which sees immigrants as the enemy and more generally other national communities or transnational bodies.

M5S's plan, on the other hand, is to establish itself as a tool for regaining the sovereignty of the people, by making way for participation by the public.

The programme put together by the Grillo movement is completely different from, in fact almost the opposite of, the platforms supported by populist parties.

The goals set out mainly focus on encouraging a democracy in which the public is involved, defending a universal welfare state, protecting and enhancing common and/or public property.

Opinions about immigrants and the death penalty

	All	Voting intentions				
		M5S	LEGA	PDL	CENTRE	PD
There are too many immigrants in Italy	36,2	34,0	60,1	47,5	42,8	24,9
In favor of the death penalty	31,1	30,9	51,9	49,5	32,4	19,2

Source: Ipsos polls from September to November 2012

Reasons for voting the Movement 5 stars (two choices)

	All	Voting intentions				
		M5S	LEGA	PDL	CENTRE	PD
The protest against all parties	65,9	53,8	59,3	74,7	79,2	71,6
The protest against government	51,3	40,6	27,3	47,9	59,4	64,6
M5S has heard more citizen requests	28,5	41,0	45,7	22,9	23,0	24,3
Trust in Beppe Grillo	14,1	9,1	39,0	26,8	9,7	9,1
The concrete proposals of the movement	12,5	40,3	8,6	7,6	9,8	6,6
Don't know	19,0	11,7	20,0	11,2	15,4	19,1

Source: Ipsos polls from September to November 2012

Opinions about M5S

	All	Voting intentions				
		M5S	LEGA	PDL	CENTRE	PD
The M5S in parliament will feel more the voice of the people	47,4	93,4	32,5	30,4	44,3	44,2
M5S is more democratic than other parties	42,4	84,5	37,7	27,0	38,7	33,7
Without Grillo M5S would be greatly weakened	66,1	44,0	72,6	66,8	81,4	64,2

Fonte: sondaggi Ipsos settembre-novembre 2012

The M5S was not built on a programme that was defined from the beginning. It progressively developed a manifesto-style platform which sought to meet the wide-spread needs and demands of the people, public opinion and in particular the more frequent users of the internet. In other European countries, political parties have in the past played a central role for democracy, ensuring that demands from the public for political action were communicated. When creating its programme, the M5S tried to reproduce this role in a variety of ways. A role which is played less and less and often in an unsatisfactory way by the current parties.

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The 5 Star Movement; rejecting politics as a profession, the public treating it as a temporary commitment and resisting creating organisational bodies away from the internet could create many problems for a political actor which must manage powers and responsibility on a national level.

The movement can't limit itself to simply being a "tool" to encourage protest and direct participation from the public, it must rethink its organisational structure.

Direct democracy may be sufficient to manage political issues in limited local areas or in the online community.

In this phase, Grillo can no longer limit his role to that of "guarantor" to avoid traditional political practices from repeating themselves. To interact with other national political leaders on a daily basis he must stress his role as the movement's political guide. Grillo is also the key link who keeps together the activists and ensures they have a significant influence in the political arena. There is still however, a certain ambivalence about his role which has caused some ructions and discussion amongst the activists.