A "media divide" in the vote of February 25?

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The M5S is undeniably the main winner of the elections of February 24 and 25, with an achievement that has consigned to a new political party more than 8.5 million votes. One of the central aspects of the M5S's success lies in its crosscutting nature: in geographical terms, cutting across the traditional Italian geopolitical areas (see Cataldi and Emanuele in this volume); in political terms, with the ability of attracting votes from the center-left and the center-right coalitions in a completely crosscutting manner (see the analyses of various vote shifts in Turin and Palermo; Monza, Pavia, and Varese; and Florence and Rome); finally, in social and demographic terms, with its great interclass spreading ability (see the analysis by Luca Comodo with Ipsos data in *Il Sole 24 Ore*, March 10, 2013).

The consequence is thus a curious paradox. The M5S stands out for the apparent lack of any characterization of its own electorate: not political nor geographical nor sociodemographic, if we are to exclude a strong underrepresentation among retirees. But what is then the main feature identifying Grillo's voters? To answer this question, it is necessary to make use of survey data: we take into account the data from the third wave of the CISE Electoral Panel. These are preelectoral interviews (the fourth postelectoral wave is still ongoing), but they reveal important dynamics that are coherent with other analyses and the electoral result. The first hypothesis that we have advanced is that generational features might be relevant: a sort of generational revolt, with the M5S triumph in the youngest social strata. Apparently, this hypothesis is substantially confirmed, but some aspects differ from expectations (see Table 1).

The border between "youngster" and "less-young people" is curious: among the former, we find those up to 54 years old (whose votes for the M5S are seven percentage points greater than the whole sample), while the M5S performs much

Table 1. Vote intentions for the main parties by age cohorts: Preelectoral data from the CISE Electoral Panel, reweighted for the actual results (N = 1,673)

Vote intention	Age cohorts					Whole sample
	18–29	30–44	45–54	55–64	65+	
PD	20.2	20.4	23.6	29.8	32.9	25.4
SEL	5.9	3.2	2.5	3.9	1.8	3.2
PdL	15.2	16.7	19.3	22.0	33.7	21.6
LN	1.3	5.2	4.5	4.4	3.5	4.1
M5S	38.4	35.4	32.3	14.2	8.8	25.6
Monti	9.5	8.7	6.7	8.9	8.2	8.3
Others	9.6	10.4	11.2	16.8	11.1	11.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
N	187	452	347	321	366	1673

worse in the last two age-groups. More importantly, generational effects do not affect the other parties, as the PD is not dramatically underrepresented among younger voters, and the SEL is even overrepresented (while the PdL is suffering more among younger citizens). In other words, it does not look like we are in the presence of a proper generational divide. So we have started to suspect that there could have been something more behind Beppe Grillo's success. We have thus examined what we deemed as another key variable: the respondents' declared prevalent source of political information. The key hypothesis was that those who informed themselves through the Internet would have rewarded the M5S more, for it is wide-

spread and systematically present on the Internet, indigenous to the web.

As predicted, not only were we right, but we have also found much more predictive power than what was expected. Table 2 shows the very strong relationship between the main information source and the voted party.

Table 2. Vote intentions for the various parties by the prevalent media source of political information: Preelectoral data from the CISE Electoral Panel, reweighted for the actual results (N = 1,592)

Vote intention	Prevalent media source of political information			Whole sample
	Newspapers	TV	Internet	
PD	34.5	23.3	21.7	25.4
SEL	3.2	2.2	5.5	3.1
PdL	21.9	26.3	9.4	21.9
LN	4.5	4.4	2.7	4.1
M5S	17.2	23.1	42.5	25.7
Monti	8.4	7.8	9.6	8.3
Others	10.4	12.9	8.7	11.5
Total	100	100	100	100
N	351	919	323	1592

The relationship is so powerful that it is already visible in qualitative terms: the three main political parties are neatly divided according to the leading role for three different publics. The PD is neatly the most preferred party among newspapers readers, with an advantage of twelve percentage points over the PdL and even seventeen percentage points over the M5S (such percentage values are particularly similar to those frequently mentioned in the public debate in newspapers, close to the elections!). Among TV viewers, the leading party is instead the PdL, with three percentage points more than the PD and the M5S. More importantly, it is especially among those using the Internet as their main source of information that the strongest characterization is more evident. In first place stands M5S,

with 42.5%, which is seventeen percentage points greater than the whole sample and even twenty-one percentage points more than the second party (the PD, with 21.7%). The PdL registers a percentage even smaller than 10% (9.4%). This is not a small share of the electorate: The share of respondents that inform themselves mainly through the Internet has already reached one-fifth of the sample in our case[1]. Such a powerful effect clearly cannot depend simply on a spurious generational effect (e.g., the younger generations of "Internet natives" voting for the M5S actually because of their younger age). In fact, we can observe that the choice of media stands as a more powerful explanation by disaggregating the vote for Grillo by information source and age cohort (see Table 3).

Table 3. Vote shares for the M5S by main media source of political information and age cohorts: Data from the preelectoral wave of the CISE Electoral Panel, reweighted for the actual results (N=1592)

Age cohort	Main media source of political information			Whole sample
	Newspapers	TV	Internet	
18–29	33.3	33.6	43.0	37.8
30–44	30.5	32.8	42.4	35.6
45–54	28.6	29.7	53.6	33.0
55–64	7.2	15.6	27.6	14.0
65+	7.0	7.9	34.6	9.0
Whole sample	17.2	23.3	42.5	25.8

As it appears, a strong difference between those who inform themselves mainly through the Internet and the others persists within age cohorts: the difference is greater than 10 percentage points in every age cohort, reaching even 25 percentage points for those aged 45–54.

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[1] Our sample is, however, the third wave of a panel study, implying some self-selection bias towards respondents with a higher level of political involvement. Other polls report figures around 10% for the share of voters with the Internet as their main source of political information.

In a nutshell, this early evidence seems to suggest the existence of a "media divide": what differentiates the electorate of various parties (particularly the M5S) seems to be the styles and sources of political information. Although this hypothesis will have to be scrutinized more in depth, our impression is that we have assisted different electoral campaigns, especially during the 2013 elections, because the voters were informing themselves through different media sources. Each media source had its agenda, its discourse, and its own salient issues. This is also partly visible in other analyses (not presented here), showing the absence of marked differences in the basic political attitudes (e.g., interest in politics, ideological positioning, position regarding specific issues) between the three "publics" analyzed. As such, our guess is that these marked differences in vote choice must somehow be related to different perceptions of the credibility of political parties. The PdL shows minimum levels in all three publics, while the PD is deemed credible by the three publics in terms of economic issues, but much less in relation to the reform of politics according to Internet users. At the present stage, we found clues to the existence of a "media divide": intuitions which we deem worth developing.

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