

What a Difference a Critical Election Makes: Social Networks and Political Discussion in Italy between 2008 and 2013

Donatella Campus*, Luigi Ceccarini**, Cristian Vaccari* ***

*Università di Bologna, **Università di Urbino Carlo Bo, ***Royal Holloway, University of London

Abstract

This article offers an analysis of the factors associated with frequency of political discussion among representative samples of Italian voters during the general election campaigns of 2008 and 2013. This diachronic comparison allows us to assess how political discussion was shaped in two campaigns characterized by widely different opinion climates, with the 2013 one marked by widespread political disaffection. Our findings show that political discussion notably increased in 2013 and the factors driving political conversations changed substantially. Whereas in 2008 those who voted out of protest and were part of politically homogeneous groups were less likely to talk about politics than the rest of the sample, in 2013 the interaction between protest voting and network homogeneity strongly boosted political discussion.

Keywords: social networks; political discussion; network homogeneity; electoral campaigns

Donatella Campus (corresponding author) Department of Political and Social Sciences, University of Bologna, Strada Maggiore 45, 40125, Bologna, Italy, Tel 39 051 2092586; (no available FAX); donatella.campus@unibo.it

Luigi Ceccarini, Department of Economy, Society, Politics, University of Urbino Carlo Bo, Piazza Gherardi, 4, 61029 Urbino – Italy; Tel. 39 0722 305737; (no available FAX); luigi.ceccarini@uniurb.it

Cristian Vaccari, Department of Politics and International Relations, Royal Holloway, University of London, Egham, Surrey TW20 0EX - United Kingdom Tel 44 01784414403 (no available FAX), cristian.vaccari@rhul.ac.uk

Introduction

Over the past three decades, a rich body of research has developed on the determinants and implications of political discussion among citizens. However, because most scholars have studied these phenomena in Anglo-American contexts and in cross-sectional perspective, we know little about the role that contextual factors play in shaping political discussion. We address this gap by assessing the implications of different types of elections for the intensity and determinants of political discussion. In particular, we compare two different elections in Italy and show that citizens engaging with a “critical” election, where the political landscape changes compared to the previous equilibrium, are more likely to discuss politics, and to do so when they are part of homogeneous networks and are disaffected from the political system.

The 2013 Italian election can be regarded as a “critical” election, in the sense of “those exceptional contests which produce abrupt, significant and durable realignments in the electorate with major consequences for a long term party order” (Norris and Evans 1999: xxxi). Both the dynamics of the campaign and the outcome of the vote were exceptional and signaled major changes. As for the campaign dynamics, the most salient aspect of the 2013 election was the clear discontinuity in the structure of party competition. Whereas until the previous election of 2008 the so-called Second Republic (1994-present) was characterized by increasing ideological polarization organized around two centre-right and centre-left coalitions, in 2013 the bipolar system was disrupted by several new actors, among which at least two established themselves as relevant parties: the *Movimento Cinque Stelle*-M5S (Five Stars Movement)¹ and the centrist coalition led by the incumbent Prime minister, Mario Monti. Those new political actors challenged the two main coalitions quite successfully, as the sum of votes obtained by the centre-right and centre-left dropped from 84.4% in 2008 to 58.7% in 2013 (Bordignon and Ceccarini 2013a, 14).

The second feature suggesting a turbulent electoral environment was a decline of trust in political institutions, which according to an index taking different institutions into consideration declined from 40% in 2008 to 24% in 2013². The combination of increasing citizen disenchantment with politics and dramatic shifts in party competition created new needs for acquiring information and expressing disaffection. Consistently, voting choices were made later, with the proportion of “late deciders” and “last-minute voters” growing substantially (Ceccarini and Diamanti 2013).

The fact that citizens have become more “critical” (Norris 1999) and the unraveling of bipolar electoral competition may explain the key outcomes of the 2013 election. First, voter turnout, already declining in the last two decades, dropped to its historical minimum of 75.2%, 5.3% less than in 2008—corresponding to almost 3 million voters lost. Second, electoral volatility reached the highest level in the history of the Republic (D’Alimonte 2013, 127). Third, the fragmentation of the party system increased substantially (Valbruzzi 2013). Such aspects can be present also in a “deviating election”, when “dissatisfied voters... defect temporarily to minor parties” (Evans and Norris 1999; xxviii). However, critical elections usually occur when new major parties become established in Parliament (Evans and Norris 1999, xxxi). This was the case of the M5S, which obtained 25.6% of the popular vote and became the most voted party in the House of Deputies (Bordignon and Ceccarini 2013a), thus marking the end of any form of bipolar competition and suggesting that the election can be regarded as critical³.

As Italy experienced notable changes in the political climate, which made the 2013 election a critical one, how did this particular contextual factor affect political discussion? Most studies of political discussion have focused on one or a few countries at a single point in time. However, to highlight aspects concerning discussion habits and networks dynamics, a comparison across time can be very fruitful, especially if it allows to assess the role of remarkable processes, described above, such as the loosening of partisan ties, rising feelings of antipolitics, and the emergence of

new parties and leaders. Because a broad shift in the political climate occurred between the Italian national elections of 2008 and 2013, these elections represent ideal cases for a diachronic comparative analysis⁴ aimed at exploring the implications of such systemic changes that would be missed by any study conducted at only one point in time. By comparing a “critical” election like 2013 to a relatively “normal” election such as 2008, we will thus investigate how changes in the national political climate were reflected in the frequency of political discussion and its relationship with citizens’ discussion networks.

Hypotheses

The instability of the 2013 electoral scenario created uncertainty among citizens. As a consequence, voters were forced to make a further effort to interpret the changing political environment to make their voting choices. Anxiety about political actors has been shown to encourage attentiveness toward politics (Marcus et al. 2000). Consistently, interest in the campaign rose from about 80% in 2008 to 89% in 2013 in spite of lower turnout (Ceccarini and Diamanti 2013, 137). Since discussion networks are reliable sources of political information and cues for citizens (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Beck et. al 2002; Schmitt-Beck 2003; Huckfeldt, Johnson and Sprague 2004) we expect that the rise of interest that is a typical feature of a critical election encouraged voters to gather information through discussions.

Another and partly alternative argument suggesting an increase of political discussion lies in the diffusion of disaffection towards politics and distrust in the political class. While sometimes those sentiments may produce detachment and abstention, some other times they may be channeled into forms of protest. The pervasiveness of feelings of distrust of politicians and unhappiness with the functioning of political institutions resulted in a marked change in the climate of opinion between 2008 and 2013, one of whose outcomes was the success of the M5S, and in turn this

contextual change may have manifested itself in patterns of political discussion. Whereas in 2008 the climate of opinion, though by no means enthusiastic, was not dominated by antipolitical feelings, in 2013 most respondents may have had a sense that the majority of the population shared their dissatisfaction and that the party system was about to be shattered. To the extent that they responded to this climate of uncertainty by furthering rather than reducing their engagement, citizens may have thus intensified their political discussion.

In light of the above considerations on the marked change in the climate of opinion between the 2008 and 2013 general elections, we hypothesize that political discussion should increase across the two campaigns. Our diachronic research design will thus allow us to test whether *political discussion increased substantially between the normal and critical elections of 2008 and 2013 (H1)*.

Another influential factor in shaping patterns of political discussion is the composition of discussion networks. People tend to talk about politics with those who share their political positions (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995) and as a result discussion networks tend to exhibit a certain degree of internal homogeneity, exposing members to relatively few differing viewpoints (Beck 1991; Mutz and Martin 2001). Nevertheless, due to weak ties that connect individuals to loosely associated acquaintances who do not share their backgrounds and viewpoints, a certain degree of disagreement in discussion networks survives (Huckfeldt, Johnson and Sprague 2004). According to the theory of the spiral of silence (Noelle-Neumann 1984), the more one talks about politics within homogeneous networks, the more he/she is protected from the risk of sanctions or social isolation for expressing dissenting views. However, according to Noelle-Neumann, individuals adjust their views of what ideas are prevailing by assessing the “climate of opinion” on the basis of societal cues coming, among others, from the mass media and discussion networks. Thus,

individuals express or conceal their attitudes based on whether they believe them to be within or outside the dominant climate of opinion.

In light of these considerations, we assess how the political composition of individuals' discussion networks interacts with their attitudes towards the political system in shaping patterns of political conversation. In particular, we test whether the relationship between homogeneity in citizens' discussion networks and their frequency of political discussion is moderated by political disaffection. In their analysis of the 2008 elections Campus et al. (2010) showed that political discussion habits were significantly related to ideology. Given the profound political change that occurred in Italy between 2008 and 2013, we hypothesize that, while in 2008 individuals who were part of homogeneous discussion networks and were detached from the political system may have felt isolated from the general climate of opinion and, as a result, may have avoided engaging in political discussion, in 2013 citizens who were critical of the system found a much more consonant climate of opinion among those with whom they talked about politics, which encouraged them to increase their engagement in political discussions. This may also suggest an interpretation that we will develop further in the concluding remarks—that in 2013 the homogeneity of networks might have been perceived more on the basis of shared feelings of protest than on ideological leanings. Therefore, we hypothesize that, due to the critical nature of the 2013 election, *voters who both were part of homogeneous networks and felt detached from the political system were substantially more likely to discuss politics in 2013 than they were in 2008 (H2).*

Data and Methods

This research is based on data collected by LaPolis⁵ right after the Italian general elections of 2008 and 2013. Surveys were carried out in the period 12-22 May 2008 and 13-18 March 2013 by Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI). Research designs and questionnaires are

fully comparable. Citizens' responses were collected by interviewing 2,132 cases in 2008 and 1,528 cases in 2013. In both cases sampling units were randomly selected. The two samples are representative of the Italian electorate for the following characteristics: gender, age, size of municipality and geo-political area⁶.

The variables taken into consideration are indicators of the main concepts that lay behind the relevant theoretical debates in the field of political discussion and the key research questions of our study⁷. Our dependent variable is participation in political discussion, measured through a question asking how frequently respondents talk about politics. Our main independent variables are the homogeneity/heterogeneity of respondents' political discussion networks and the meaning of individual electoral choice,⁸ which focuses on whether the vote was motivated by the desire to express a protest or trust in the party voted. To test H2 and assess whether our independent variables had different effects on the dependent variable between the 2008 and 2013 elections, we include the interaction among i) the two types of election, "normal" (2008) and "critical" (2013), ii) the level of homogeneity/heterogeneity of discussion networks and iii) protest against or trust in parties as main motivation for vote. We entered these variables, together with control variables measuring socio-demographic and political characteristics, in four logistic regression models, incrementally adding new variables at each step.

Findings

The frequency of political discussion increased markedly between the 2008 and 2013 elections, thus confirming H1. Figure 1 shows that the percentage of people claiming to have talked "often" about politics with family and friends during the campaign increased by almost 10% (39.5% in 2008, 49.6% in 2013). The difference between these percentages in 2008 and 2013 was statistically significant at $p=.000$, based on an independent samples two-tailed t test. As we

expected, the critical nature of the election was accompanied by a substantial increase in the amount of citizens who frequently discuss politics, as they took stock of the dramatic changes in electoral competition and public opinion.

Figure 1 about here

Another interesting finding from our data is that the percentage of respondents claiming to be part of networks formed of like-minded discussants increased by almost 20% in five years' time—from 28.1% in 2008 to 45.1% in 2013. The difference between these percentages in 2008 and 2013 was statistically significant at $p=.000$, based on an independent samples two-tailed t test. This increase is all the more remarkable because it occurred in a markedly uniform way across voters of all ideologies (data not shown).

To demonstrate the relevance of critical elections for political discussion, we now test H2, which predicts that voters who were part of homogeneous networks and felt detached from the political system were more likely to discuss politics in 2013 than in 2008. We do this through four stepwise logistic regressions on pooled data, from both the 2008 and 2013 surveys, shown in Table 1. Model 1 is limited to the standard sociodemographic variables. Model 2 builds on the first by adding interest in politics, political information, participation in campaign rallies, ideology, and three crucial variables for our study: homogeneity of discussion networks, protest voting and election year. Model 3 includes the three two-way interactions between homogeneity of discussion networks, protest voting and election year. Finally, Model 4 introduces the three-way interaction between homogeneity of discussion networks, protest voting and the election year. Figure 2 provides a graphical representation of the three-way interaction on the basis of the values predicted by Model 4, with other independent variables kept at their median or mode.

Table 1 about here

Figure 2 about here

As Model 1 shows, sociodemographic variables display a limited predictive power, while Model 2 appears more explicative with a notable rise of the Nagelkerke R^2 : from 7% to 32%. All our key variables (network homogeneity, protest voting, and election year) are significant, and the fact that coefficient identifying the “critical election” of 2013 is significant confirms that between 2008 and 2013 some important changes occurred in patterns of political discussion. The inclusion of two-way interaction terms in Model 3 does not yield statistically significant results, but in Model 4, when we add a further interaction term between network homogeneity, protest voting and the year 2013, the goodness of fit parameters of the model remain steady and the three-way interaction is significant, thus confirming H2.

How can this finding be interpreted? In 2008, respondents who were part of homogeneous networks but did not vote out of desire to protest, as well as respondents who were part of heterogeneous networks but did vote out of desire to protest, were both more likely, all else being equal, to discuss politics.⁹ However, in 2008 respondents who were part of homogeneous networks *and* cast a protest vote were not more likely to discuss politics than the rest of our sample, all else being equal.¹⁰ This is confirmed by predicted values shown in Figure 2: in 2008, among those in homogeneous networks, the likelihood to discuss politics was higher among those who voted out of trust (59%) than for protest (53%), but, among respondents in heterogeneous networks, those who cast a protest vote were more likely to discuss politics (60%) than those who voted out of trust (53%). By contrast, in 2013 respondents who were both part of homogeneous networks *and* cast a protest vote were substantially and significantly more likely to discuss politics than the rest of the sample. As can be seen in Figure 2, 80% of respondents in

heterogeneous networks and cast a protest vote discussed politics, by far the highest percentage in our sample, while only 56% of those who voted out of trust talked about politics.

In sum, in the normal 2008 elections citizens who were in homogeneous networks and were disaffected with the political system were not more likely to talk about politics, but they were, and remarkably so, in the critical 2013 elections. In 2008, when criticism of politicians was not a dominant feature of the climate of opinion, dissatisfied respondents were more likely to talk about politics when they encountered viewpoints different from their own rather than when their conversational partners confirmed their feelings. By contrast, during the critical election of 2013, disaffected citizens who were part of homogeneous networks engaged more in political discussion when they felt their conversational networks were characterized by the same hostility towards politics that dominated the climate of opinion.

Conclusions

Can a shift in the political climate be accompanied by a substantial increase in political discussion and alter the association between political discussion and contextual factors such as network homogeneity and disaffection towards the political system? Our diachronic comparative analysis of the 2008 and 2013 Italian elections suggests it can. As we demonstrated in this study, the rise of a wave of protest during the 2013 election corresponded to a notable increase in political discussion. Although the cross-sectional nature of our data for the two elections we studied does not warrant strong causal statements regarding the nature of the relationship we found, the evidence validates our hypothesis that, for a large number of citizens, the 2013 election became an opportunity for being actively critical rather than for entering a “spiral of silence” mode, as Noelle-Neumann (1984) described it. In 2013 detachment from politics was still a possibility, but the

option of expressing critical views became the predominant mode of reaction among disaffected Italians. As a consequence, while in 2008 political discussion appeared – all things considered – as a campaign activity among the others and was especially practiced by politically interested and leftist voters (Campus et al. 2010), in 2013 a larger number of voters intensely engaged in political discussion than in the previous elections and were more likely to do so if they were part of homogeneous networks while also being critical of the political system and, in particular, toward traditional parties and leaders. The unexpected success of the *Movimento Cinque Stelle*-M5S was based on those attitudes.

The first implication of our study is, therefore, that contextual factors, such as those that contributed to the shift in the Italian opinion climate between 2008 and 2013, can affect the frequency of political discussion in an electoral campaign as well as the factors associated with such discussion. As a result, research should focus more intensely on those contextual factors instead of concentrating only on classical individual traits and attitudes and on the characteristics of discussion networks—which are certainly fundamental to explain discussion habits but are not the only relevant factors, as our study has shown. Comparative research designs are particularly well suited to capture these dynamics, as they allow to treat as variables factors that inevitably feature as constants in cross-sectional, single-country case studies.

A second issue raised by our research concerns the role of homogeneous networks and their measurement. Our main finding is that the interaction between network homogeneity and protest vote was associated with the frequency of political discussion in different ways in two subsequent electoral contexts. When the opinion climate was characterized by political dissatisfaction, such dissatisfaction at the individual level was associated with higher frequency of political discussion among those who were part of homogeneous discussion networks. We have also noted that the percentage of respondents claiming to be part of networks formed of like-minded discussants

increased by almost 20% in five years' time, and did so irrespective of voters' ideologies. Our explanation has been that respondents – as a consequence of the shift in the opinion climate towards a generalized feeling of protest – evaluated the political composition of their networks not only in terms of ideology, but also with respect to their partners' degree of dissatisfaction with politics. Therefore, in 2013 critical voters found much more consonant opinions among those they talked with, which encouraged them to engage more in political discussions. In 2008, by contrast, in a context of substantial stability of the party system, respondents presumably assessed the agreement with their discussion networks more in terms of partisan and ideological affiliations. Since we did not administer further questions on network members and their political views, our account for the difference between 2008 and 2013 is driven by the analysis of contextual factors. However, the possibility that respondents may have changed the criteria based on which they assessed discussants' opinions reinforces the perplexities already advanced by several studies about the need to go beyond simple self-reports in the measurement of networks' homogeneity and disagreement (Parsons 2010; Nir 2011). In particular, both in cross-country analysis and in diachronic comparisons, misinterpretations may occur if respondents' assessments of the agreement with their discussants vary on the basis of country-specific or context-specific factors. This suggests that such aspects should be taken into account in the interpretation of findings of survey-based research on political networks and discussion.

Appendix

Four logistic regression models were performed using pooled data. Since only respondents who claimed that they voted in the elections were asked what their motivations for voting were, and since we use this question to measure attitudes towards the political system, our analysis focuses

on voters only, and should thus not be generalized to respondents who claimed that they did not vote.

Dependent variable

Participation in political discussion. “With *what frequency, during the electoral campaign period, did you talk about politics with your family members and/or your friends?*”. The response scale proposed was: i) often, ii) sometimes, iii) rarely, iv) never.

In our regression models, the four-level response scale was dichotomized and coded as follows: 1=often; 0 if else.

This coding is due to the fact that the 2013 elections saw a marked increase of respondents who claimed they “often” talked about politics; thus isolating these respondents allows us to identify the sources of this important change. Our regression models are thus constructed to predict the characteristics and political attitudes of those individuals who claim to frequently engage in political discussion, rather than of the occasional partakers in political dialogue.

Independent variables

Standard sociodemographic variables:

Gender. Coded 1 for male; 2 for female.

Age. Number of years.

Education. “What is the highest grade of school or level of education you have completed?”

Highest degree of education. Coded 1= elementary or below; 2=secondary school; 3= High school or above

Socio-economic status. “What is your job or profession?”

Blue-collar (coded 1)

White-collar (coded 2)

Professional (coded 3)

Tradesman; businessman, entrepreneur (coded 4)

Student (coded 5)

Housewife (coded 6)

Unemployed (coded 7)

Retired/other (coded 8)

Other independent variables

Interest in politics: “In general, you would say you are interested in politics...” i) very much; ii) fairly; iii) a little; iv) not at all?

Coded 1= very much; 0.66= fairly; 0.33=a little; 0= not at all

Exposure to different sources of political information on the campaign. “How frequently, during the month preceding Election Day, did you get political information through the following source...?” i) never ii) occasionally; iii) often, coded 0=never; 0,5=occasionally; 1=often. The variable entered in the model is a standardized cumulative index based on the responses for the following sources of information: television, newspaper, radio and internet (range 0-1).

Political ideology. “From a political point of view, do you define yourself as...” i) left; ii) centre-left; iii) centre; iv) centre-right; v) right; vi) not placed in the continuum.

Coded 1 =left and centre-left; 2 =center; 3 right and center right; 4= unaligned

Participation in campaign rallies. “How frequently, during the month preceding Election Day, did you get political information through campaign rallies in which you participated” i) often ; ii) occasionally ; iii) never. Coded 3=often; 2=occasionally; 1=never.

Homogeneity of political discussion network: “In general, the people with whom you talked about politics...”: i) mostly agree with you; ii) mostly do not agree with you; or, iii) more or less, half agree and half disagree with you.

Coded 1=mostly agree with you; 0 if else.

Protest voting : “What would you say was more important for your voting choice... i) trust in the party you voted or ii) the desire to protest?”

Coded 1=the desire to protest; 0 if else.

Election Year : Dummy variable based on the year in which the post-electoral surveys were carried out (2008 or 2013)

Coded 1=2013; 0=2008

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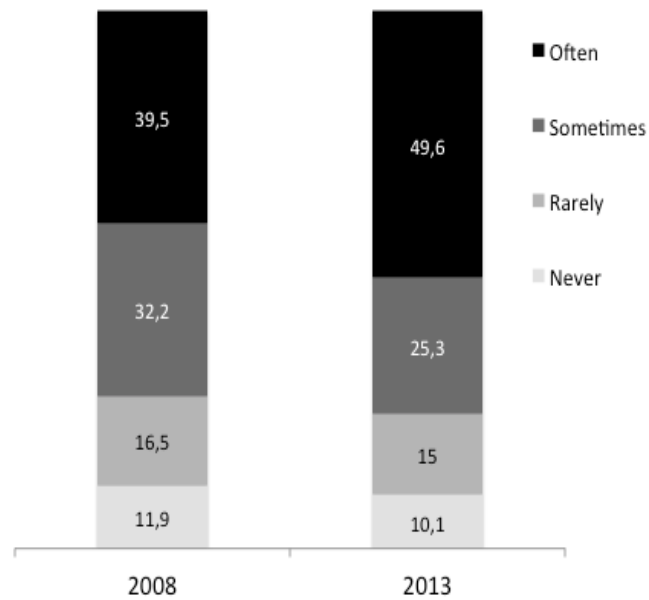


FIGURE 1. Frequency of Political Discussion with Family and Friends.
 (Comparison with 2008 and 2013 General Elections - % of Voters)

Source: Post-electoral survey LaPolis - University of Urbino Carlo Bo. May 2008 (N=2132) and March 2013 (N=1528)

Table 1 – Dependent Variable: Discussing Politics “Often”

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	<i>B</i>	(<i>S.E.</i>)	<i>B</i>	(<i>S.E.</i>)	<i>B</i>	(<i>S.E.</i>)	<i>B</i>	(<i>S.E.</i>)
Gender (<i>female=ref. cat.</i>)	.09	(.08)	-.15	(.09)	-.17	(.09)	-.16	(.09)
Age	.00	(.00)	-.00	(.00)	-.00	(.00)	-.00	(.00)
Education	1.17***	(.13)	.48***	(.15)	.49***	(.15)	.49***	(.15)
Socio-economic status (<i>Retired/Other=ref. cat.</i>)								
Blue-collar	-.25	(.16)	-.17	(.18)	-.16	(.18)	-.17	(.18)
White-collar	.25*	(.13)	.08	(.14)	.08	(.14)	.08	(.14)
Professional	.27	(.19)	.04	(.21)	.02	(.21)	.02	(.21)
Tradesman, businessman, entrepreneur	.06	(.18)	.14	(.21)	.13	(.21)	.13	(.21)
Student	.63**	(.21)	.14	(.23)	.15	(.23)	.15	(.23)
Housewife	-.20	(.13)	.03	(.15)	.02	(.15)	.02	(.15)
Unemployed	.05	(.20)	-.10	(.23)	-.10	(.23)	-.10	(.23)
Interest in politics			3.16***	(.18)	3.16***	(.18)	3.17***	(.18)
Political information index			1.43***	(.20)	1.45***	(.20)	1.44***	(.20)
Participation in campaign rallies			1.01***	(.17)	1.01***	(.17)	1.01***	(.17)
Ideology (<i>unaligned=ref. cat.</i>)								
Left and center-left			.58***	(.12)	.58***	(.12)	.58***	(.12)
Center			.17	(.16)	.18	(.16)	.18	(.16)
Right and center-right			.25*	(.12)	.26*	(.12)	.26*	(.12)
Homogeneity of discussion networks			.25*	(.08)	.15	(.12)	.24	(.13)
Protest as main motivation for vote			.24*	(.09)	.19*	(.13)	.30*	(.14)
Year 2013			.53***	(.08)	.42***	(.12)	.50***	(.12)
Homogeneity*Protest voting					.01	(.20)	-.41	(.28)
Homogeneity*Year					.21	(.17)	.01	(.20)
Protest voting*Year					.11	(.19)	-.19	(.24)
Homogeneity*Protest voting*Year							.80*	(.39)
Constant	-1.20***	(.27)	-3.38***	(.34)	-3.38***	(.34)	-3.39***	(.34)
Nagelkerke R ²	.07		.32		.32		.32	
Chi Square (df)	179.34***	(10)	914.93***	(19)	922.89***	(22)	927.09***	(23)
% correctly predicted	61.2		72.0		71.9		72.5	
Log-likelihood	-2227.45		-1854.61		-1853.72		-1851.58	

Note. * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$. $N = 3352$ for all analyses

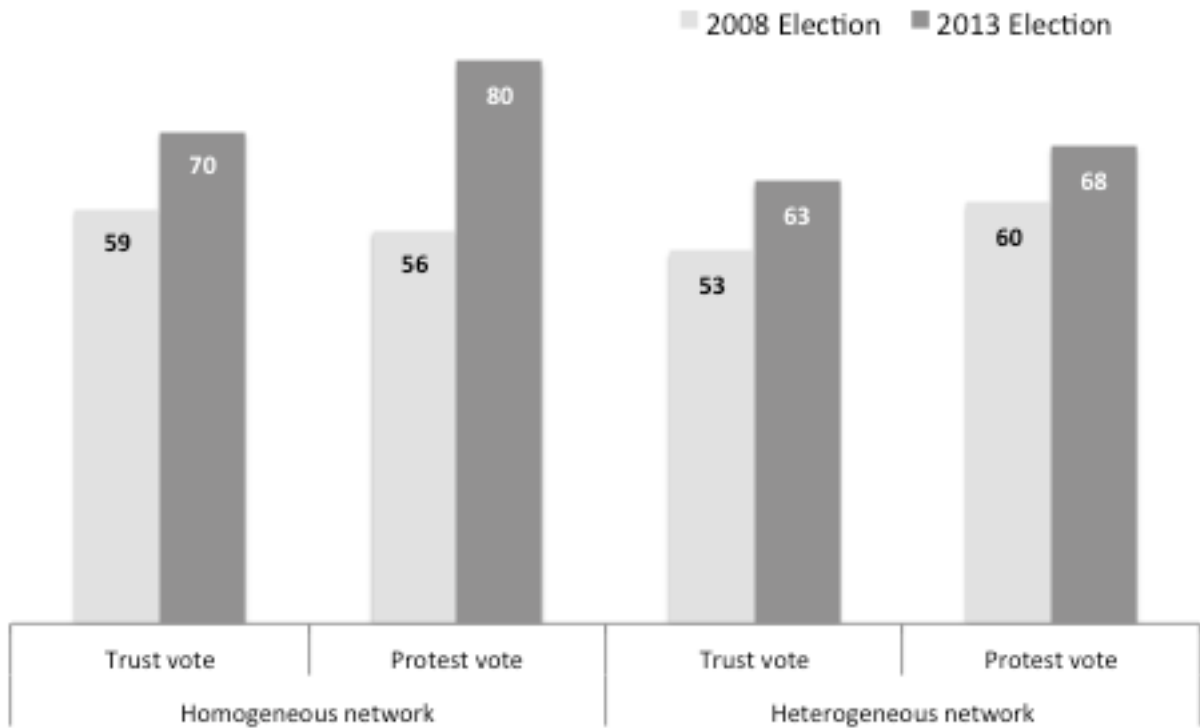


FIGURE 2. Graphic representation of main effect sizes

Note: the values are calculated on the basis of Model 4 in Table 1. The three variables whose values are varied (year, homogeneous/heterogeneous networks, and vote for protest/trust) are all dichotomous. The estimates are calculated by keeping all other variables constant at the median (for ordinal- and interval-level variables) or mode (for categorical variables) across the pooled sample.

Endnotes

¹ The Five Star Movement was founded by the well-known comedian Beppe Grillo, whose political program mainly consisted of fighting corruption, cutting the costs of politics, and protecting the environment. For details on the nature and history see Bordignon and Ceccarini (2013b).

² The index is built by taking into consideration the levels of trust in the President of the Republic, the Italian State, the Parliament, the European Union, the local government at the regional level, the City Council, and the political parties. See the annual reports of “Italians and the State”, <http://www.demos.it/a00935.php>.

³ As D’Alimonte et al. (2013) argued, although the 2013 election should be regarded as a critical election, the long-term success of the M5S cannot be taken for granted yet. Two aspects, however, indicate a potential realignment: the first is that the party obtained 21% of vote in the 2014 European elections, confirming that its roots were still rather solid; the second is that the 2013 election brought about a change in the social bases of parties, with an overwhelming support for the M5S among the youngest cohorts of voters (Maraffi et al. 2014).

⁴ As argued by (Lijphart 1971), comparing the same country at different points in time gives researchers the advantage of relying on some constants and relatively fewer variables than in most cross-national studies.

⁵ LaPolis, Laboratory of Social and Political Studies, University of Urbino Carlo Bo, Italy.

⁶ As for the 2008 post-electoral survey AAPOR Response Rate 2 is 13,58% and as for the 2013 post-electoral survey AAPOR Response Rate 2 is 10,65%.

⁷ The question wording of all variables in the models can be found in the Appendix.

⁸ We chose this variable because it allows discriminating between the group of people that can be considered closer to the definition of critical citizens and the group of people that can be considered simply as disaffected citizens. Comparing the answers to the relevant question in 2008 and 2013 convinced us that this was the best choice. By contrast, the measurement of confidence in institutions has a weaker potential for distinguishing the two groups, since both are prone to express low levels of confidence.

⁹ This can be inferred from that fact that the coefficients for these variables without interactions are positive, although only the coefficient for protest vote is also significant. Since an interaction

with the year 2013 is also present in the model, these coefficients refer to respondents who took our survey in 2008.

¹⁰ The coefficient for the interaction term is actually negative, although it does not reach statistical significance.