

Online primaries and intra-party democracy: Candidate selection processes in Podemos and the Five Star Movement

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Abstract

Online primaries are widely considered as the most inclusive and accessible form of intra-party decision-making. However, their openness also carries the risk of strengthening parties' leadership vis-à-vis other organizational units. In order to test the implications of these procedures on intra-party democracy, this paper addresses the candidate selection processes of two parties that rely exclusively on online primaries: Podemos and the Five Star Movement. The analysis combines two perspectives: first, it describes the rules of candidate selection processes in each party based on party statutes and other party documents, and second, it tracks the progression of candidates through all stages of the candidate selection process during the 2013 Italian and the 2015 Spanish general elections on the one hand, and the 2014 European Parliament elections on the other. Based on these two perspectives, the cases are classified along the four dimensions established by Rahat and Hazan (2001): *candidacy*, *selectorate*, *decentralization* and *voting/appointment systems*. The findings indicate that contrary to expectations, the candidate selection processes were more tightly controlled in Podemos, primarily through the adoption of block voting that favoured lists headed and supported by the party leader. Moreover, Podemos' lists of candidates were substantially modified after the primaries, a pattern not found in M5S. However, due to the tight restrictions on eligibility and the lack of availability of information regarding the voting rules applied in the candidate selection process, the Five Star Movement scores worse on inclusiveness and transparency, which also raises concerns regarding the competitiveness of the contest.

Keywords

online participation, intra-party democracy, candidate selection, party organization, cyber parties

Topic

comparative politics, party politics, party organization

Primarias en línea y democracia interna en los partidos: Los procesos de selección de candidatos en Podemos y el Movimiento 5 Estrellas

Resumen

Generalmente, la realización de primarias a través de internet se considera la forma más inclusiva y accesible de toma de decisiones en el seno de un partido. Sin embargo, esta apertura también entraña el riesgo de reforzar el liderazgo de los partidos frente a otras unidades de la organización. Con la finalidad de analizar las implicaciones de estos procedimientos en la democracia interna de los partidos, este artículo presenta los procesos de selección de candidatos de dos partidos que realizan sus primarias exclusivamente a través de Internet: Podemos y el Movimiento 5 Estrellas. El análisis combina dos perspectivas. En primer lugar, describe las reglas de los procesos de selección de candidatos en cada partido basándose en los estatutos del partido y otros documentos del partido. En segundo lugar, examina la evolución de los candidatos a lo largo de todas las fases del proceso de selección de candidatos durante las elecciones generales de 2013 en Italia y del 2015, en España, por un lado, y en las elecciones al Parlamento Europeo de 2014, por otro. Partiendo de estas dos perspectivas, se han clasificado los casos en cuatro dimensiones establecidas por Rahat y Hazan (2001): candidatura, selectorado, descentralización y sistema de votación vs. nombramiento. Los resultados indican que, al contrario de lo que se esperaba, los procesos de selección de candidatos estaban más estrictamente controlados en Podemos, principalmente a través de la adopción del voto en bloque, que favorecía a las listas encabezadas y apoyadas por el líder del partido. Además, las listas de candidatos de Podemos fueron modificadas sustancialmente después de las primarias, una pauta que no se ha observado en el M5S. Con todo y con ello, las fuertes restricciones a la elegibilidad y la falta de disponibilidad de información sobre las reglas de votación aplicadas en el proceso de selección de los candidatos conceden al Movimiento 5 Estrellas una peor puntuación en cuanto a inclusividad y transparencia se refiere, lo que genera inquietud a su vez en cuanto a las garantías de la competencia en la contienda.

Palabras clave

participación en línea, democracia interna partidos, selección candidatos, organización partidos, ciberpartidos

Tema

política comparada, política partidista, organización partidos

1. Introduction

Candidate selection is universally regarded as one of the party activities that are most decisive for intra-party democracy (Cross and Katz, 2013; Detterbeck, 2005; Rahat et al., 2008, Scarrow, 2015). As such, it constitutes an unparalleled research site for analysing intra-party power relations between different organizational units within political parties (Detterbeck, 2005; Pedersen, 2010). In particular, observing the rules and the execution of candidate selection processes allows researchers to gain direct insights into the relationship between what Katz and Mair's cartel party thesis calls the "three faces" of party organization:

the party in public office, the party in central office and the party on the ground (Katz and Mair, 1993, 1995, 2009).

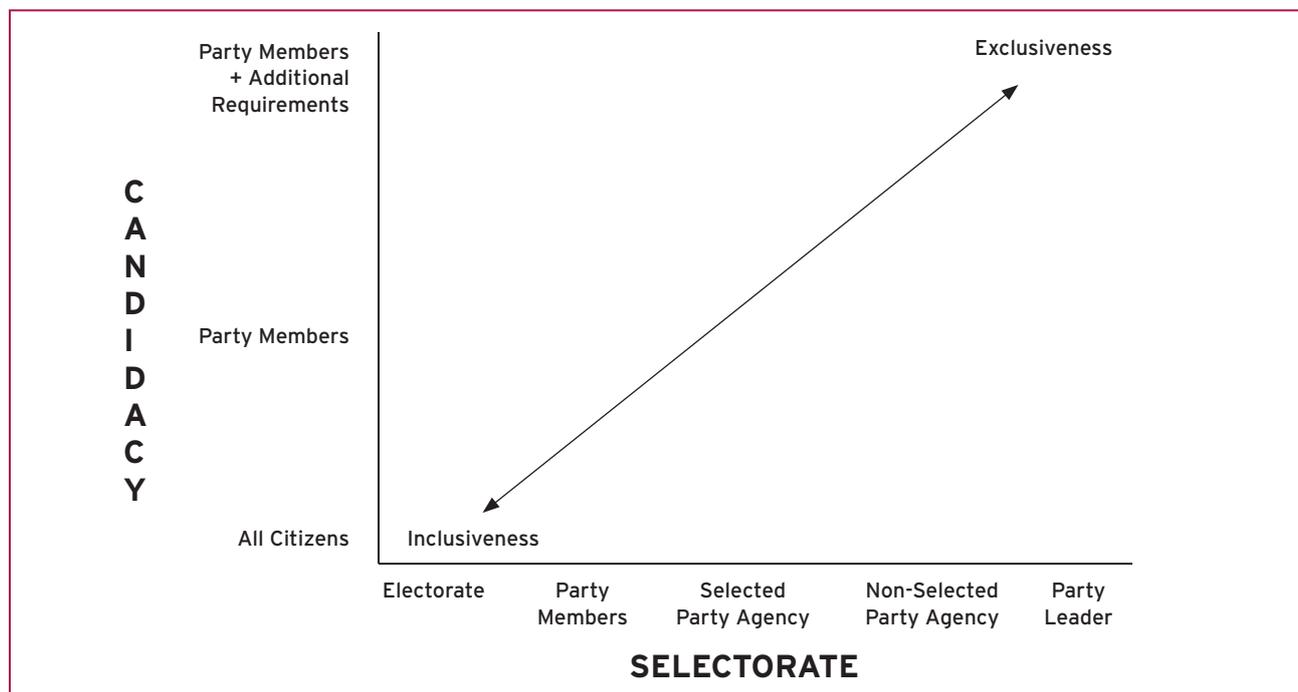
Arguably, the use of the Internet in candidate selection processes intertwined with a general move towards inclusiveness in party decision-making (Faucher, 2015; Gauja, 2015) might have an impact on these power relations. Such an effect would be most pronounced in organizations that Margetts called *cyber parties* which "use web-based technologies to strengthen the relationship between voters and party" and offer voters and supporters rights traditionally associated with formal membership (Margetts, 2006, p. 531; Hartleb, 2013). More specifically, due to the

lower costs of participation (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013; Bimber *et al.*, 2012), online primaries have the potential of being both more inclusive and more accessible than offline ballots.¹ However, whether they realize this potential depends on how the voting procedure is designed and executed. At the same time, the inclusiveness of intra-party decision-making can also strengthen the party leadership vis-à-vis the party intermediary elites (Carty, 2013; Hopkin, 2001; Mair, 2002) and thus foster anti-democratic tendencies within political parties. Nevertheless, the general interest of this paper lies in determining the share of power that online primaries grant ordinary party members and supporters, i.e. the party on the ground.

Several indicators have been proposed to measure variation in the extent to which candidate selection is democratic. One influential formulation applies two concepts: inclusion (formal eligibility) and access (the procedural costs of voting), both of which have a crucial impact on the competitiveness of the process (Scarrow 2015, p. 186-187). However, Rahat and

Hazan (2001) introduced a broader and more comprehensive set of indicators that can be used for describing the candidate selection process which corresponds more closely with the purposes of this paper. Their conceptualization is based on four dimensions: candidacy, selectorate, decentralization and voting/appointment systems. These dimensions reveal answers to the following questions: 1. Who can be selected? (*candidacy*); 2. Who selects candidates? (*selectorate*); 3. Where (at which organizational level) are the candidates selected? (*decentralization*) and 4. How are candidates nominated? (*voting/appointment systems*) (Rahat and Hazan 2001, p. 298-299). The *candidacy* dimension is measured on a scale ranging from inclusiveness to exclusiveness, and in that sense it overlaps with Scarrow's (2015) *inclusiveness* indicator. However, Rahat and Hazan's taxonomy makes a distinction between passive (*candidacy*) and active (*selectorate*) voting rights, both of which can be measured on an inclusiveness scale, albeit with different categories, which allow for more combinations. These combinations are graphically illustrated in Graph 1.

Graph 1. Inclusiveness/exclusiveness along the dimensions of candidacy and selectorate
Graph adopted from Rahat and Hazan (2001, p. 304). Empirical examples were removed from the original graph, as they do not serve the purposes of the current discussion.



1. As Rahat and Hazan (2001, p. 302) note: “Levels of accessibility and inclusiveness are higher if a party adopts such methods as postal ballots, tele-voting or spreading polling stations all over the country”. It seems logical to hold the same assumption with regards to online voting, which is yet another technical innovation that facilitates participation.

With regards to decentralization, Rahat and Hazan distinguish between functional and territorial decentralization. While this is a theoretically sound proposition, this paper can only benefit from the latter as none of the cases addressed here organize representation based on social/professional/sectorial subunits.² In terms of territorial decentralization, cases can be distinguished on the basis of whether candidates are selected at the local, the regional or the national level.

Finally, candidate selection processes can be distinguished based on the voting procedures they apply. In Rahat and Hazan's (2001) terminology, the procedures applied only constitute a pure voting system if 1. all of the candidates are only determined by votes, not a majoritarian or unanimous approval of closed lists, and 2. voting results are officially presented in order to provide legitimacy. Procedures at the other extreme can be defined as "appointment systems", while in-between cases where for instance *en bloc* voting for pre-established lists is allowed constitute "appointment-voting systems" (Rahat and Hazan, 2001, p. 306). I suggest that calling these latter systems "mixed" is more practical (as shown in Table 1). Nevertheless, the use of an

intermediate category will be crucial for our cases. Voting systems can be further differentiated using two parameters. According to the rules for the allocation of positions, we can distinguish between proportional (PR), semi-proportional (semi-PR), semi-majoritarian and majoritarian systems. Furthermore, voting procedures can be categorized on the basis of whether they select all of the candidates in one or multiple rounds. For a comprehensive summary of all logically possible combinations of appointment and voting systems, see Table 1.

2. Data collection strategy

The analysis presented below rests on two main sources of data: first, the regulation of candidate selection processes in party statutes and other party documents, and second, publicly available data on the actual execution of primaries, including lists of candidates, online discussions about the process and media coverage of these events. With regards to this second stream of data, I have compiled a dataset on the last Italian and Spanish general elections (of 2013 and 2015, respectively) and the 2014 European Parliament

Table 1. Appointment systems and voting systems

Category (Rahat and Hazan 2001)	Sub-category	Category (recoded by author)
Appointment systems	Pure	Appointment
	With <i>en bloc</i> ratification	Mixed
Appointment-voting systems	With ratification and correction possibilities	
Voting systems	One-round Majoritarian	Voting
	Multi-round Majoritarian	
	One-round Semi-majoritarian	
	Multi-round Semi-majoritarian	
	One-round Semi-PR	
	Multi-round Semi-PR	
	One-round PR	
	Multi-round PR	

Table adopted from Rahat and Hazan (2001, p. 308) extended by the author.

2. Although Podemos acknowledges such functional subunits (the so called "Círculos Sectoriales"), their role in the candidate selection process is marginal.

elections. At the same time, data on the selection of candidates for local and regional elections appear to be more difficult to access; however, obtaining them might be a feasible way of extending the scope of the findings presented here.

In the following sections, I will first present the rules and procedures each party adopted for the execution of their candidate selection processes. Then, using my own data, I will demonstrate to what extent their results favoured the party leadership vis-à-vis the party on the ground. Finally, I will evaluate these procedures as well as their results using the four dimensions presented above. The findings are not only relevant for determining the share of power held by party members, but also because the ways MPs are selected have an impact on their legislative behaviour: the more open and democratic the contest is, the more autonomous and competitive MPs are expected to be, whilst strong control of the party leadership over the process entails loyalty to the official party line (Katz, 2001; Pinto and Pedrazzani, 2015; Rahat and Hazan 2001). However, my primary interest lies in deducing to what extent neopopulist parties'³ claims of revitalizing intra-party democracy are substantiated based on their candidate selection practices.

3. The online primaries of the Five Star Movement

3.1. Regulation of primaries

Beppe Grillo's M5S was the first party in Italy to introduce online primaries to select its candidates for the 2013 general election. However, formal regulations of the candidate selection process in party documents are very succinct, a feature that is in line with the Five Star Movement's self-definition as an anti-/non-political party that defies such regulations. This ethos is reflected in the party's "non-statute", a document that consists of merely five pages divided into seven articles (MoVimento 5 Stelle, 2009). Article 7 specifies that:

On occasions of, and in preparation for, electoral consultations [...], the M5S will constitute the center of collection of candidatures and the vehicle for the selection of those subjects who will be authorized, on each occasion and in writing, to use the name and symbol 'MoVimento 5 Stelle' in the setting of their participation in each electoral consultation. [...] The identity of candidates for each elective office will be publicized on a dedicated website created within the framework of the blog; discussions regarding such candidatures will likewise be public, transparent and unmediated. The rules concerning the procedure of candidature and designation for national or local electoral consultations may be more precisely determined in accordance with the type of consultation and in the light of the experience that will be gained over time. (MoVimento 5 Stelle 2009, translation adopted from Pinto and Pedrazzani, 2015)

This latter point is especially relevant in the sense that M5S primaries have indeed been regulated in an *ad hoc* fashion: new regulations have been published on Beppe Grillo's blog (the only recognized platform through which the party operates) before each voting procedure, each with its own distinct set of rules. In the case of the primaries for the 2013 general election dubbed "Parlamentarie", potential candidates were required to be members of the Five Star Movement, to be at least 25 years old,⁴ not to be members of any other political party, not to have served in public office for two electoral cycles and not to have a criminal record (MoVimento 5 Stelle, 2012; Pinto and Pedrazzani, 2015, p. 106). Voters were also required to be members of M5S, and only those were eligible to vote who registered on the party's website before 30 September 2012, i.e. more than two months before the primaries took place (*ibid.*). Based on these requirements, the candidate selection process of M5S can be described as rather exclusive.

The regulation of the primaries for the 2014 European Parliament elections differed from the "Parlamentarie" in that the candidates were selected in two rounds: first on a regional level, then according to the five constituencies that are applied in the selection of Italian MEPs. Voters could cast three preferences in each round, and the winner of the first round in each region already secured his or her place on the final list of candidates. A fixed number of

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3. Both parties can be called populist as they apply "populist strategies" (i.e. top-down mobilization against the established political elites) to build mass support and advocate populist ideologies that divide societies into two antagonistic camps; "the virtuous people and some corrupt elites" (Kriesi, 2014, p. 5).
 4. This minimum age is a constitutional requirement in order to be eligible for the Italian Chamber of Deputies.

the top rated candidates⁵ in the second round would also appear on the final list of candidates in alphabetical order. Both candidates and voters had to meet strict requirements. Potential candidates were expected to have been enrolled in M5S prior to 31 December 2012 (the primaries took place on 1 April 2014), not to hold elected office, and not to have run or have a pending request to run for local elections in 2014. Voters had to be enrolled in the party by 30 June 2013 (i.e. nine months before the primaries) and not to have their membership suspended by 20 March 2014 (MoVimento 5 Stelle, 2014a).

3.2. M5S primaries in practice

Despite the apparent differences in their regulations, the two primaries yielded similar results, at least in numerical terms. In the case of the 2012 primaries, the voting was organized in correspondence with the 27 electoral districts and each voter had the opportunity to cast three preferences (Pinto and Pedrazzani, 2015). According to Beppe Grillo's official blog, the "Parlamentarie" involved a total of 1,400 candidates who received 95,000 votes from 32,000 voters (Grillo, 2012a). While prominent party representatives widely regarded these participation rates as "historic" (Capasso, 2012), these figures are quite modest in relation to the party's self-declared 255,339 members reported in the same month (Grillo, 2012b). The previous figure entails that only 12.53% of M5S members participated in the primaries for the 2013 general elections. However, if one takes into account the unreliability of objective (i.e. self-declared) party membership data (Scarrow, 2015, Van Haute and Gauja, 2015), the participation rate of actual members might have been higher.

In the 2013 general election, the Five Star Movement achieved its best electoral results so far: with 25.5% of the votes it won 109 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 54 in the Senate, becoming the second and third largest group in the two institutions, respectively. All of the elected MPs were selected through online primaries and there were no modifications in the candidacies, although the order of the candidates did change in relation to the order based on the number of votes they received. More interestingly, the size and the composition of the M5S parliamentary

group have changed significantly since 2013, mostly as a result of defections and expulsions. At the same time, this finding should not be interpreted as an indication of the candidate selection process being undemocratic but rather as a symptom of low institutionalization of the party and the underprivileged position the party in public office enjoys as opposed to the two other faces of M5S (Katz and Mair, 1995, 2009; Tronconi, 2015).

With regards to the candidate selection process, most concerns were related to the issue of transparency. A former councillor of the party in Bologna, Federica Salsi, who had previously been expelled from M5S because of criticizing the party for its lack of internal democracy, expressed these concerns in the form of twenty questions which went viral on the Internet (Collecchio, 2012). The questions revealed uncertainty about the way sensitive data related to voting were managed, the lack of publicly available detailed information on the results of the primaries (Grillo published only rounded figures on his blog, see Grillo, 2012a), and the lack of regulations referring to how and by which organ of the party disputes over contested results should be resolved (Collecchio, 2012).

In the case of the primaries for the 2014 European Parliament elections, reported participation figures were very similar to those of the "Parlamentarie": in the first round, a total of 5,091 candidates were presented for whom 35,188 M5S members cast 92,877 votes (MoVimento 5 Stelle, 2014b), whilst in the second round 33,000 voters expressed 91,245 preferences for the 112 candidates that emerged from the first round (MoVimento 5 Stelle, 2014c). With regards to the results, M5S became the second most voted party in Italy with 21.15% of the vote which yielded 17 seats in the European Parliament.

3.3. The M5S online primaries in light of the four dimensions

After having described the rules as well as the results of the most important candidate selection processes within the Five Star Movement, I now turn to categorizing these procedures using the four analytical dimensions developed by Rahat

5. 30 candidates for the North West constituency, 18 for North East, 20 for the Centre, 24 for the South and 20 for the islands of Sardinia and Sicily (MoVimento 5 Stelle, 2014a).

and Hazan (2001): *candidacy, selectorate, decentralization and voting/appointment system*.

In terms of *candidacy*, the processes described above clearly represent the exclusive end of the spectrum: not only membership is required but also the time of enrolment is fixed. Furthermore, would-be candidates who served in elected office for two cycles or more were also ruled out. However, as seen in Graph 1, with regards to the *selectorate*, allowing all members to vote brings M5S closer to the inclusive end of the continuum. Nevertheless, this might be a somewhat misleading interpretation as similar restrictions (time of enrolment) also apply to voters, which is more restricted than a typical scenario in which all members can vote irrespective of when they joined the party.

Decentralization is a delicate matter in M5S: whereas the candidates emanate from and are elected on the basis of regional constituencies, lists of candidates need to be approved by the party in central office, i.e. Grillo and his staff. This mechanism is also inherent in the party's non-statute: Beppe Grillo is the sole owner of the name and the symbol of the movement, and thus can unilaterally grant or withdraw permission to use them (Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2013). Thus, while it may seem partially decentralized on a territorial (regional) level, the candidate selection of M5S is closer to a centralized model. Finally, the *voting system* applied in the Five Star Movement's online primaries is a semi-proportional one in which the number of votes each selector is granted (3) is lower than the number of safe seats contested (Rahat and Hazan 2001, p. 307).

In sum, the online primaries of M5S display some contradictory features: although candidacy is extremely exclusive, the selectorate is relatively wide; regional representation is present but controlled by the centre, and the voting system applied is closer to proportional than to majoritarian systems, but the number of votes per elector is restricted.

4. The online primaries of Podemos

4.1. Regulation of primaries

Although for an external observer it might seem that online primaries are the bread and butter of Podemos, its crucial position is not reflected in the party's "organizational document" (Documento organizativo, Podemos, 2015a), nor in its official statute (Podemos, 2015c). According to these documents, it is the competence of the Citizen Assembly⁶ to "elaborate, through a process of open primaries, the electoral lists for public offices (from the first until the last candidate of the list) for the institutions of national representation" (Podemos 2015a, Article 13/a/2). The same corresponds to territorial Citizen Assemblies for institutions at the regional and local level (Podemos, 2015a, Article 33/2). The way primaries are executed is not specified in these documents.

To address this hiatus, Podemos adopted a distinct 12-page regulation for the primaries of the 2015 general election, which established the details of the candidate selection process (Podemos, 2015b).⁷ In order to vote, party supporters needed to be registered with Podemos.⁸ The deadline for registration entailing a right to vote was determined by the party's Electoral Commission, a supervisory organ whose members are ratified by the Citizen Council⁹ on the proposal of the Secretary General (i.e. the party leader). Unlike in the case of M5S, this deadline was highly permissive: voters could register until 10 am on 16 July 2015, while the primaries took place from 17 until 22 July. The voting system was differentiated: 1. the party's presidential candidate was selected in a single constituency and voters could only cast one vote; 2. candidates for the lower chamber of the parliament (Congreso de los Diputados) were also selected in a single constituency, using a voting system in which all voters could express from 1 to 350 preferences,¹⁰ the latter

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6. The Citizen Assembly is the supreme decision-making body of Podemos in which all members have a right to participate (Podemos, 2015a).
 7. To the author's knowledge, no such specific regulation was adopted for the primaries that preceded the European Parliamentary elections, save a presentation on Prezi.com.
 8. Initially, Podemos emphasized registration as a kind of "light membership" or supporter status. However, the distinction between members and "inscritos" (registered party supporters) could not be maintained under Spanish party law. Thus, current "inscritos" are notified on Podemos' webpage that by submitting their application form, they become members of Podemos as a political party.
 9. The Citizen Council is the main executive organ of Podemos, whose 62 members are selected by the Citizen Assembly (Podemos, 2015a).
 10. The system used by Podemos was different from single transferable vote (STV) systems in that preferences were not ordered (Podemos, 2015b, Article 4).

being the total number of deputies; and 3. candidates for the Senate were selected based on regional constituencies (autonomous communities), in which all voters could express from one to as many preferences as the number of seats assigned to their region (Podemos, 2015b, Article 4).

Unlike voters, candidates were not required to be party members, only to be over 18. Candidates for the post of Secretary General could simultaneously also run for candidacy to the Congress of Deputies or the Senate. However, simultaneous candidacies for the Congress of Deputies and the Senate were ruled out (Podemos, 2015b, Article 5). Individual candidates as well as integrated lists of candidates (ranging from 50 to 350 candidates) could be presented at the primaries. Members of lists were not allowed to also run individually. In case of voting for lists, voters could select the whole list as well as one or several of its components. Voters could also combine preferences for individual candidates with preferences for lists within the allocation of their 1 to 350 votes.

All of the candidates needed to be licensed¹¹ by either one of the Círculos¹² or by one of the elected organs of the party¹³ in order to ensure that they conform to the ethical and organizational principles of the party. In light of the results of the primaries, the final list of candidates was assembled based on the number of votes each candidate received, with the caveat that gender inequalities were to be compensated in a way that successive candidates alternate by gender (also known as the “zipper system”).

As the primaries were held in one state-wide constituency which does not correspond to the 52 provincial constituencies whose lists can be voted for at Spanish general elections, the resulting list was transformed into provincial lists of candidates as follows: the most voted candidate could select the provincial list on which he/she wanted to run as well as his/her position on that list, a process that was repeated by each successive candidate. The regulation also prescribed that in exceptional cases, pacts made with other political formations by the “directive organs” of Podemos can limit the availability of posts, a possibility that needs to be

communicated to all candidates by the Electoral Commission (Podemos, 2015b, Article 7.2).

4.2. Podemos primaries in practice

The primaries for the 2014 EP elections were the first candidate selection process Podemos engaged in, shortly after its foundation in January 2014. Thus, the procedures applied had been far less sophisticated and regulated than they were during the 2015 primaries. Candidacies were presented individually and each candidate had to gain support from one of the Círculos (base units). All the “Circles” could support three candidates at most. Voters were not required to be members of Podemos (which was only registered as a political party 16 days before the primaries started), only to be Spanish citizens aged 16 or over.

During the seven days of the primaries, approximately 33,000 individuals cast their votes for the party's 145 candidates. Each individual could express one preference for the head of the list and five preferences for other candidates. Online voting was facilitated by the Agora Voting application, and for one day offline voting was also possible, although its reach was geographically limited (Riveiro, 2014). The first 54 places on the list (which corresponds to the number of Spanish MEPs) were reordered in order to ensure gender balance. Therefore, the fifth most voted candidate, Miguel Urbán Crespo, was replaced by Lola Sánchez and did not get one of the five mandates Podemos won. Interestingly, out of the 5 Podemos MEPs selected in 2014, four had already resigned by January 2016 to run for positions in Spain. At the same time, they were all replaced by successive candidates from the original list, in line with the preferences party sympathizers expressed at the primaries.

The voting procedures of the primaries for the 2015 general election triggered many more controversies both internally and externally, above all because of the adoption of closed lists and the possibility of voting “en plancha” (i.e. to approve a whole list without expressing any individual

11. The regulation (Podemos, 2015b, Article 6) uses the Spanish verb “avalara”, whose meaning is closer to “support”. However, the regulation also states explicitly that “avalara” “does not entail support for a candidate”, only acknowledgement that the candidate conforms to the requirements established by Podemos.

12. The smallest local or professional groups that are the base units of Podemos.

13. It is important to note that due to this condition, the Citizen Assembly could not license/support candidates, as it is not an elected body.

preferences). Although voters were given the opportunity to select only a few candidates from a list and combine it with preferences for individual candidates, the results of this procedure were extremely skewed towards the list supported by the party leader, Pablo Iglesias. Numerically, only three of the 65 selected candidates (4.6 %) following Pablo Iglesias were not identical to the ones on his list, which underscores criticisms claiming that the candidate selection process was strongly dominated by the party leader and thus not truly competitive. In terms of participation, 59,723 members expressed their preferences, which represented a mere 15.52% of the total membership.

Another practice that raised concerns about the democratic nature of the candidate selection was that of making alliances with other political actors and the nomination of external candidates, the so-called “fichajes”. Although this was previously authorized by the membership¹⁴ and included in the regulations of the primaries (Podemos, 2015b), it has led to drastic changes in the final list of candidates. Out of the 75 candidates presented by Podemos at the general election, 30 (i.e., 40%) were not selected in the primaries but derived from regional alliances in Catalonia (En Comú Podem), Valencia (Compromís-Podemos-És el Moment) and Galicia (En Marea). From a different perspective, out of the 69 mandates won by Podemos and its allies, 27 (39.1%) were not directly approved by Podemos members in primaries (Manetto, 2015) but instead were selected using the mechanisms prescribed by the respective territorial partner organizations.

4.3. Podemos primaries in light of the four dimensions

As in the case of the Five Star Movement, the following section will evaluate the candidate selection processes of Podemos based on the four analytical dimensions of Rahat and Hazan (2001).

In terms of *candidacy*, Podemos was and until now has remained extremely inclusive: candidates are not required

to be party members as long as they are supported by one of the party organs or organizational units defined in the corresponding regulations. However, with regards to the inclusiveness of the *selectorate*, it has changed over time: while all citizens above the age of 16 could vote for the candidates for the 2014 EP elections, in 2015 this option was only available for those who were registered with Podemos, which technically and according to Spanish party law equals party members only. This is still closer to the inclusive end of the scale, but one could describe the evolution of the selectorate as backsliding towards traditional party models.

Podemos scores even worse on *decentralization* which is almost totally absent from its candidate selection processes, save the requirement that candidates can also be licensed by local base units (but by other, non-territorial organs too) and the election of candidates to the Senate which by definition is based on territorial representation. Even the selection of provincial candidates is based on one state-wide constituency, and the way candidates later select the constituencies where they would like to run for office is also not tied to any territorial principle.¹⁵

With regards to the *voting/appointment system* dimension, Podemos's primaries for the 2015 general election were a textbook example of Rahat and Hazan's (2001) in-between or “Appointment-Voting Systems” category, in which “model lists” are established by some party agency which are then subjected to *en bloc* voting. However, the process used before the EP elections was a pure voting system in which only gender imbalances were compensated for. Based on the position allocation formula, the voting system used in 2014 can be described as semi-proportional (fewer votes/person than safe seats contested) while the one applied in 2015 was a proportional system, both of which were based on one single constituency. In sum, it is not difficult to observe a gradual move in Podemos from inclusive towards more exclusive practices, especially regarding the use of closed lists and the extension of the selectorate. Table 2 summarizes the main empirical findings for both parties.

14. Party members were asked whether they would authorize the Citizen Council of the party to make alliances with “different political actors” at the regional or inferior levels with the condition that in case such alliances were made, the name “Podemos” would always appear first on the voting sheets (e.g. Podemos - name of other party). However, potential partners were not specified in the wording of the question.
15. Podemos explicitly supports transforming the electoral system so that constituencies correspond to the 17 autonomous communities and 2 autonomous municipalities instead of the 52 provinces (Podemos, 2016).

Table 2. The candidate selection processes of the Five Star Movement (M5S) and Podemos in light of the four analytical dimensions

Analytical dimension	Five Star Movement	Podemos
Candidacy	Exclusive (membership required, time of enrolment fixed)	Inclusive (membership not required)
Selectorate	Inclusive, with restrictions (membership required, time of enrolment fixed)	Inclusive, with restrictions (membership required, time of enrolment fixed, but highly permissive)
Decentralization	Regional (with the central party administration retaining some control)	National (primaries based on one statewide constituency)
Voting/appointment system	Pure voting system, semi-proportional representation (limited vote system)	Appointment-voting system, semi-proportional (2014) and proportional (2015) representation

As seen in Table 2, the eligibility criteria for candidates (labelled as *candidacy*) are higher in the Five Star Movement, whereas the two parties impose similar requirements on the *selectorate*, although the date of registration is much more flexible in Podemos. Based on these two criteria, the candidate selection processes of Podemos can be classified as more inclusive, which also presumes a greater share of power granted to the party on the ground. At the same time, the organization of candidate selection processes is more decentralized in Beppe Grillo's party and the vote choices are not as clearly dominated by the party leader as in the case of Pablo Iglesias's lists. However, the indirect influence of the unofficial party leader over the selection of potential candidates might similarly distort the outcome in M5S. Thus, further research is needed to determine the impact of decentralization and the voting/appointment system on intra-party democracy.

5. Conclusion and implications for future research

As the sections above have demonstrated, the candidate selection processes of both parties are mixed and feature elements that reveal undemocratic tendencies. Two of these elements are common: the restriction of the right to vote to party members only and the high level of control that the party leadership retains over the composition of lists of candidates. The particular methods for exercising control differ: Beppe Grillo retains the right to unilaterally grant or withdraw permission to use the party's symbols in electoral campaigns if he finds that a candidate does

not act in line with the party's principles, while in Podemos the party leader secures his own preferred candidates by compiling lists of candidates backed by himself. The first is a legalistic approach, while the second is based on the resources owned by Pablo Iglesias in terms of popularity, media coverage, rhetorical skills and the undisputable nature of his leadership that the former resources entail.

On the other hand, while few would doubt that online voting is more accessible than its offline counterparts, participation rates as well as the absolute number of participants are far from impressive in either of the two parties. Some of this could be attributed to the exclusive nature of the selectorate (although that would not explain low participation rates among members). Nevertheless, the fact that even the extremely open 2014 primaries of Podemos for the EP elections did not attract more than 33,000 people in a period when the political engagement of Spaniards reached unprecedented heights is intriguing. Similarly puzzling is the use of rounded figures such as the previous one when publishing the results of some of these primaries, which raises concerns about the reliability of these data.

This paper has also demonstrated that online candidate selection processes can be fruitfully categorized using Rahat and Hazan's (2001) four analytical dimensions. Further thought should be given to whether these indicators could be refined in ways that would make it easier to quantify them or at least make them more sensitive to variation by way of including additional categories. At the same time, future research on candidate selection for local and regional elections could yield further insights, especially on the effects of decentralization.

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