

Corinne Deloy

Results

# A wide majority of Italians reject the draft constitutional reform put forward by the government of Matteo Renzi, who has now resigned.

A wide majority (59.11%), of Italians said "no" to the draft Constitutional reform proposed by the President of the Council Matteo Renzi (Democratic Party, PD) which aimed to strengthen the country's political stability and facilitate the decision making process. It intended to break from the present equal bicameral system, which grants similar powers to both chambers of Parliament (the Chamber of Representatives and the Senate); as matters stand the executive is obliged to have the majority in each of the assemblies in order to be able to govern.

According to many observers this system is responsible for the country's political instability. "The system is costly and diminishes accountability because government can always blame the bicameral system for its inaction," declared Carlo Fusaro, a professor in Constitutional law at the University of Florence. In Italy, a government's

average lifespan is 396 days. The country has had 60 governments since 1946 and 36 since 1972, of which only 6 lasted more than a year and a half. "On average it takes three and a half years to adopt a bill. Governing can therefore prove to be extremely complicated," Alan Lemangnen, an economist with Natixis.

## Results of the referendum on the Constitutional reform of 4th December 2016 in Italy

Turnout : 65,47%

Subject of the referendum	% of the "yes" (number of votes is in brackets)	% of the "no" (number of votes is in brackets)
Approval of the constitutional reform	40.89 (13 432 208)	59.11 (19 419 507)

Source : Home Affairs Ministry, <http://elezioni.interno.it/referendum/scrutini/20161204/FX01000.htm>

However only four Italians in ten were convinced of the reform put forward by Matteo Renzi (40.89%). Turnout was high, since two thirds of the population voted (65.47%).

The 5 Stars Movement (M5S) led by Beppe Grillo, the Northern League (LN) led by Matteo Salvini, Forza Italia (FI), the party of former President of the Council (1994-1995, 2001-2006 and 2008-2011) Silvio Berlusconi, the parties on the far left and a share of Matteo Renzi's Democratic Party (PD)

led by former President of the Council (1998-2000) Massimo d'Alema and former Minister Pier Luigi Bersani, called to vote "no" in the referendum on 4th December.

The leader of the Northern League qualified the referendum as "a major democratic victory". "The regime's propaganda and all of its lies were the main losers in this referendum. The first winners are the citizens who raised their head and came out en masse," maintained Beppe Grillo.

"This referendum is a 'match' between nostalgia and the future, between those who want to change nothing and those who are looking to the future. It is not the end but the start of the modernisation of Italy," Matteo Renzi repeated during the electoral campaign. The "scrap merchant" (il Rottamatore) as he is called (when he took office the President of the Council promised to "scrap" Italian political traditions and to create a new leading class), chose to link his future as head of government to the referendum result. The personalisation of the vote at a time when winning a referendum would truly have been a miracle, was a mistake that Matteo Renzi was quick to acknowledge. "Matteo Renzi made an initial mistake and that was to turn the referendum into a personal affair, to show that he was at the heart of reforming action and to radicalise the debate. By doing this he encouraged the mobilisation of his adversaries," declared Fabio Magrini, director of the School of Government of the Luiss University, Rome. "It was almost a mid-term election but there was no other alternative to Matteo Renzi," stressed Marc Lazar, Director of the Centre of History at Sciences Po.

As promised the President of the Council handed in his resignation. "My experiment as head of government stops here. The "no" won quite clearly (...) we gave the Italians a chance to change things, for them to be simpler and clearer. But we did not manage it. I take responsibility for this defeat. I lost. In Italy politics no one ever loses. They say they did not win. I am different. I lost and I am saying out loud, even though I find it difficult," declared Mr Renzi. "I wanted to get rid of the surplus number of seats in Italian politics, those in the Senate, the provincial councils etc ... I did not succeed and as a result the first seat that is ejected is mine. Tomorrow afternoon I will convene the Council of Ministers then I shall go to the Quirinal to hand in my resignation to the President of the Republic," he concluded.

The reform put forward by Matteo Renzi planned to transform the Senate into a new assembly of 100 local representatives (74 regional councillors

and 21 mayors) appointed by the regional councils. Representing local interests, it would have retained a right to veto from a constitutional point of view but it would no longer have been able to overthrow the government and would only have been consulted regarding certain laws. The Chamber of Deputies would have been able to reject its proposals. Since the Senate guarantees the representation of the territories at national level the competences of the regions would have been limited.

The lower chamber would therefore have been the real place of power: it alone would have provided the government with its confidence, likewise it would have had power over most of the laws. The Chamber of Deputies must now be elected by a majority election, a bonus system (Italicum) which enables the party that wins in the election to achieve a majority. The reform of the voting method still has to get the greenlight from the Italian Constitutional Court.

For the adversaries of the constitutional reform it comprised a challenge to the balance of democratic power as it would have turned the Senate into a simple consultative assembly, allowing an excessive strengthening of central power, giving too much power to the leader of the political party that came out ahead in the elections. Matteo Renzi undoubtedly misjudged the almost sacred dimension, in the eyes of many Italians, of the Italian Constitution that was drafted in 1946 in order to consolidate Italian democracy after 20 years of a fascist rule.

And so, what now? Who will govern Italy tomorrow? Several scenarios are possible. The President of the Republic Sergio Mattarella might decide to convene a snap election (these were planned for February 2018) or choose to appoint a technical government (in which Matteo Renzi will not take part) which would have the task of reforming the law. Political analysts believe that the latter scenario, already experienced by Italy, to be the more likely.

Two conclusions can be drawn from this election:

the victory of the “no” postpones indefinitely the reform of the State’s architecture approved on 12th April last by the Italian parliament and after the referendum, Italy seems to more divided than ever before. “No one won” wrote the daily

La Repubblica. Indeed the left is threatened with implosion due to its divisions and the “no” camp has no distinctive leader. Early parliamentary elections would almost certainly lead to political stalemate once more.

You can read all of our publications on our site:  
[www.robert-schuman.eu](http://www.robert-schuman.eu)

Publishing Director: Pascale JOANNIN

---

**THE FONDATION ROBERT SCHUMAN**, created in 1991 and acknowledged by State decree in 1992, is the main French research centre on Europe. It develops research on the European Union and its policies and promotes the content of these in France , Europe and abroad. It encourages, enriches and stimulates European debate thanks to its research, publications and the organisation of conferences. The Foundation is presided over by Mr. Jean-Dominique Giuliani.