

Populist parties ahead in the Italian parliamentary elections

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RESULTS

Two parties won the parliamentary elections on 4th March in Italy: the 5 Stars Movement (M5S) and the Northern League (Lega). The M5S, a populist party led by Luigi di Maio confirmed its place as the peninsula's leading party. It won 32.68% of the vote, a score higher than in the previous parliamentary elections on 24th and 25th February 2013.

The right coalition formed by Forza Italia (FI), the party of former President of the Council (1994-1995, 2001-2011), Silvio Berlusconi, the League (Lega), a populist, anti-European, xenophobic party led by Matteo Salvini and the Brothers of Italy (FdI), led by Giorgia Meloni – came out ahead in the parliamentary elections. Together these parties won 37% of the vote but they failed to win the absolute majority.

Within this coalition the League easily drew ahead of Forza Italia winning 17.37% of the vote. Relinquishing his regionalist demands Matteo Salvini undeniably won his wager of making his party a National League (Italians First). Forza Italia and the League agreed that the party which came out ahead would lead any possible government. As for Silvio Berlusconi, he did not succeed in making a comeback and failed to convince the Italians that he would be a buffer against the populists to guarantee Italy's stability. Forza Italy won 14.01% of the vote, the lowest result in its history and the Brothers of Italy, 4.35% of the vote.

Finally, as in many other European countries, the left suffered serious defeat. The Democratic Party -PD – of outgoing President of the Council Paolo Gentiloni, led by Matteo Renzi and outgoing Economy and Finance Minister Pier Carlo Padoan in this election, won 18.72% of the vote, i.e. the lowest result since the foundation of the party in 2007. In all the left coalition won 22.85% of the vote.

Free and Equal (LeU), the left party against Matteo Renzi founded by the outgoing leader of the Senate Pietro Grasso, won 3.39% of the vote.

"For the first time in Europe the anti-system forces have won," it said in the editorial of the daily La Stampa on 5th March. Indeed, the M5S, the League, and the Brothers of Italy won 54.4% of the vote.

The new electoral law, Rosatellum bis, adopted on 3rd November last, will not have enabled Italy discern a majority. "The verdict is still the same: the country suffers permanent instability. Being ungovernable is now an endemic sickness," indicated Claudio Tito, an editorialist at the La Repubblica.

Turnout was below that recorded in the previous parliamentary elections on 24th and 25th February 2013 (- 2.29 points). It totalled 72.91%.

RESULTS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS OF 4TH MARCH 2018 IN ITALY

Chamber of Deputies

Turnout: 72.91%

Political Parties	% of the vote won	Seats (proportional)	Total seats
5 Stars Movement (M5s)	32.68	133	221
Democratic Party (PD)	18.72	86	112
League (Lega)	17.37	73	260
Forza Italia (FI)	14.01	59	
Brothers of Italy (FdI)	4.35	19	
Free and Equal (LeU)	3.39	14	
SVP		2	

Source : Italian Ministry for the Interior <http://elezioni.interno.gov.it/camera/scrutini/20180304/scrutiniCI>

Senate

Turnout: 72.91%

Political Parties	% of the vote won	Seats (proportional)	Total seats
5 Stars Movement (M5s)	32.21	68	112
Democratic Party (PD)	19.12	43	57
League (Lega)	17.63	37	135
Forza Italia (FI)	14.43	33	
Brothers of Italy (FdI)	4.26	7	
Free and Equal (LeU)	3.27	4	
SVP	3,28	1	

Source : Italian Ministry for the Interior <http://elezioni.interno.gov.it/senato/scrutini/20180304/scrutiniSI>

M5S Italy's leading party cannot govern alone. In the last days of electoral campaign, it talked of possible alliances with other political parties, an option that it had ruled out until then.

"The M5S result is a triumph, a climax," declared outgoing MP Alessandro di Battista when the results were announced. "This especially shows another important thing: that all of the other political parties will have to come and speak with us. And this will be the first time that this has happened," he added. "There is a certain factor that has emerged from the first results now coming in, it is that M5S will be the pillar of

the next legislature," maintained one of the party's leaders, Alfonso Bonafede.

The populists have managed to increase their electorate, which was already stable, and therefore to continue as Italy's leading party.

Luca di Maio hopes to transform M5S into a party that can govern. The result on 4th March might offer him that possibility. "The vote for M5S is not just one of protest but it is also one of acceptance. The movement is extremely well established in public opinion because it addresses many categories of voters, it represents a kind of catch-all as it takes advantage

of the economic and social crisis, of Euroscepticism, of mistrust towards the political world," indicates Marc Lazar, a researcher at Sciences Po. *"Luca di Maio is providing M5S with new impetus, he no longer wants to remain a protest party. He says that he has to take his responsibilities and assume them, he has to be competent. This means breaking with the traditional dimension of M5S, because he is not ruling out making alliances in order to govern. This is an all-time first, because in the last parliamentary elections on 24th and 25th February 2013 M5S based itself on the rejection of all compromise,"* he added.

"It is an immense source of satisfaction for the League and for Matteo Salvini, it is a historic result. We have won votes in the north and south and I think that Matteo Salvini's challenge has largely been won. Naturally we shall discuss matters with our allies first. We are looking to the future with great serenity and a sense of duty. We know what we have to do," declared Giancarlo Giorgetti, the League's second -in-command after the announcement of the results.

The theme of immigration was the centre of the electoral campaign, notably after one of the League's supporters, Luca Traini, opened fire on a crowd on 3rd February in Macerata, a town that lies in the Marches, shooting at a group of Africans, and injuring three of them in revenge for the murder of an 18 year-old girl – an affair in which three Nigerians are under suspicion. This attack led to violent demonstrations and confrontation between the far left and far right in several of the country's towns. Luca Traini's actions did not therefore damage the League.

The League, which now covers the entire peninsula, is also more critical of the European Union. *"Some say that they*

want more Europe, I say that we must have more Italy," repeated Matteo Salvini during the campaign. Some political observers maintain that the previous attacks by the party against Italians in the south have now turned into attacks against the leaders of Europe.

On the left, the Democratic Party of Matteo Renzi seems to be the major loser in these elections. The former President of the Council (2014-2016), who in an interview with the daily *Il Mattino* on 18th February last invited the Italians to vote for his party whilst holding their nose, failed to achieve the goal that he had set of winning at least 25% of the vote. He announced that he will resign from the head of the PD. Undoubtedly the Democratic Party fell victim to the sanction sometimes inflicted on outgoing governments (since 1994 each parliamentary election has led to alternation in Italy) because even though the socio-economic situation in Italy has improved (according to the figures), the Italians do not seem to share this view. Moreover, the Democratic Party was not spared by the deep crisis that is affecting all social democratic forces in Europe.

The M5S and the League might form a majority in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. The leaders of both parties have however rejected any possibility of joining forces. In all events that was the case prior to the election ... The next stage is set for 23rd March, when the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate will meet to elect their respective leaders. These two elections will show whether a majority (and which majority) is now emerging. The President of the Republic Sergio Mattarella will not start his consultations with the party leaders until after this date.

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