

# Post-election map: Fear, Loathing and Poverty in Italy

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**The post-election map of Italy has two main traits: fear and poverty. Northern and Central regions have gone to a Centre-right coalition where the leader is not anymore Forza Italia's Silvio Berlusconi but League's Matteo Salvini, who dropped its previous 'Lega Nord' emphasis to turn it into a nationwide Le Pen-style National Front.**

In the Northern counties of Lombardy and Veneto the Centre-right is over 50%, with the League reaching 33 to 38% in its areas of traditional settlement. In Piedmont outside the Turin area the Centre-right is close to 50%, with a weaker League. In the rest of the North the Centre-right is almost everywhere over 40%; in Emilia, Tuscany and Umbria the percentage is over 35%; in Lazio excluding Rome is at 40%.

In Southern regions (including Marche) the Five star movement (Cinque stelle) heavily won, reaching almost 50% of votes in Sicily and northern Campania, over 40% in Calabria, Basilicata, Puglia, Molise and Sardinia.

More complex is the picture of large cities. The Centre-right wins some first-pass-the-post seats in Turin, Milan, Venice, Palermo. The Five stars conquer seats in Turin, Genoa, Palermo, Rome and Naples. Turin, Milan, Bologna, Florence, Rome have some Democratic Party winners.

The 37-38% (respectively in the House and the Senate) won by the Centre-right comes from the success of the League, gone from 4% in the 2013 general elections, to 6% in the European elections of 2014, to 18% today, while Forza Italia falls from 22% in 2013 to 17% in 2014 and to the current 14%. The 32-33% (respectively in the Senate and the House, with a younger electorate) of the Five stars should be compared with the 26% of the general elections of 2013 and with the 21% of the European elections of 2014.

Matteo Renzi is the clear loser of the election, with his Democratic Party getting 19% of the vote - it had 25% five years ago and peaked to 41% in the 2014 European elections - and his coalition reaching a total of 23%, including the 2.6% of the 'More Europe' party of Emma Bonino. On the Left 'Liberi e Uguali' obtained just above 3% of votes, failing to build a significant left wing opposition. Voters' participation was similar to five years ago, around 75%, while in the European elections had fallen to 57%.

## Shared discontents

Those of the Centre-right and Cinque stelle are parallel successes, fueled by common ingredients: protest vote, populist rhetoric, criticism of Europe, anti-immigrant feelings. In the Center-Right coalition such drivers coexist with very distant interests - those of the rich and powerful around Berlusconi; the balance of internal power relations in the coalition will be difficult to sort out, in terms of political hegemony even before the formation of a government. In the Five Stars those ingredients coexist with the attempt to achieve a transformation from protest movement to

government party, with an evolution – in terms of identity and political agenda – that is yet to be charted.

These same drivers, however, have taken different directions in the North and South. The League's roots in Northern regions have expressed demands for lower taxes, for protecting falling incomes, local and national identities. The South – who has been 'left behind' by political and economic developments, abandoned by the new emigration, marked by social degradation and criminal powers – has expressed a protest that demands new political power. The main limit of Matteo Salvini's attempt to build an Italian 'National Front' has been the inability to overcome these regional division.

Ten years of severe economic and social crisis are the background of all these developments. Italy's per capita income is now back to the levels of twenty years ago; behind this average there is a collapse – of about 30% – of the income of the 25% poorest Italians, living in the South or in the declining peripheries of the Center-North. Twenty years of stagnation and decline means a generation with ever-lowering expectations in terms of income, work and life. Impoverishment has become a reality for a very large part of Italians. The Five Star vote reflects the poverty of the South – their call for a general minimum income has been attractive in this regard. The vote for the League expresses the fear of impoverishment in the North. Only in the centres of major cities – where the richest and the highly educated live, and the economy is better – the vote has taken different directions, going to Forza Italia and the Democratic Party.

### **The migrant factor**

Poverty is coupled with fear. The fear of worsening economic conditions and social status; the fear to have immigrants next door, other poors competing for fewer low-skilled jobs and scarcer public services. In the elections the most agitating fear was that of immigrants – the landings in Lampedusa, the inability to integrate them, the killing and shooting happened in Macerata. Matteo Salvini turned anti-immigration attitudes into his most effective political tool; the Five Star expressed the same hostility – calling NGOs saving immigrants in the Mediterranean 'water taxis' for illegal aliens, and refusing to vote a bill granting citizenship to second generation Italians with migrant origin.

Fear and poverty, in a strange twist, have become the main forces shaping Italian politics. Fear is now the ideology of the League; poverty is the condition of Five Star success. Replacing left and right, we have now the politics of fear and the lament of the impoverished, the ones excluded from the 'caste' of the powerful.

The tragedy of the Left is that for over for two hundred years equality, social security and solidarity have been its banners. They have been gradually lost in the loss of collective identities, in ever less involving political practices, in government policies that were increasingly in contrast with those values. In this political degradation it must be emphasized that dangerous impulses like fear and poverty are expressed with the tools of democracy: 75% of voters at polling stations and files are the only good news of the March 4, 2018.

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