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Italy

Italian local elections – low turnout but setback for the right

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Nearly half the electorate stayed away from the polls as 12 million Italians were called to the vote Sunday and Monday in local elections in all the main cities. What would have been a good turnout in Britain represents a continuing very worrying trend of non-participation in Italy. A few decades ago votes were often at the 80 to 90% level. It is possible that the overall political situation, where both the right and so called left parties are ruling together in a coalition government, means that the average voter might not see much point in choosing between different parties since they are working under the neoliberal Draghi.

The winner in this diminished contest was the social liberal PD (Democratic Party) and the clear loser was the racist hard right Lega (League) leader, Salvini. In Milan, the regional capital of Lombardy, the historic heartland of the Lega, it got around 10%, a third of the PD score. The M5S (Five Star Movement) continued its decline and partial disintegration. Meloni, leader of the post fascist Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy) was smiling as her party continued to build support at the expense of the Lega. Her party was only a point behind Salvini in Milan and Michetti, her candidate in Rome has a reasonable chance for the second round. Even the old fraudster, Berlusconi, has something to cheer about as his Forza Italia candidates won the leadership of the Calabria region with more than 50% of the vote and also in Trieste. Unlike the M5S its decline seems to have stabilised and he is even rising a little in the polls.

Enrico Letta, the relatively new leader of the PD, won a bye-election in Sienna to bring him back into parliament. PD candidates won in Naples, Milan and Bologna on the first round and are still well in the race in Rome and Turin. The PD has tried to engineer a so-called centre-left coalition with the M5S but only really achieved it in Naples. The outgoing -M5S mayors in Rome and Turin had very poor scores as they stood alone. Conte the new leader of the M5S is hoping to win support for the coalition policy. The M5S did best in Naples where they stood with the PD.

This limited victory for the PD must be put into the perspective given to it by Letta, who said the vote was 'in tune with the country' and 'strengthens Draghi'. Remember Draghi is the ex-Euro banker who is leading a coalition government of all the parties except Meloni. He is managing the covid recovery in line with the dictates of the EU central bank and the bosses. Letta appears to be competing with Starmer for champion of Europe for social liberal collaboration with capital.

Although the right-wing were in a single coalition there had been a huge amount of wrangling about candidates so in the end this meant weaker candidates often won out. Their results in these elections were way below the majority their coalition has been recording in opinion polls. This is true even if one takes into account that the left usually is stronger in the major cities and in a contest over two rounds. Unlike in Berlusconi's heyday there is no leader who appears able to federate the three main currents. Each current is trying to gain at the other's expense. For the social liberal left of centre the PD had de facto the hegemony because of the rapid decline of the M5S. This puts into perspective many commentators' views that the next government will be a right of centre one. Overall it confirms a decline in support for what is dubbed the populist solutions of the M5S and the Lega.

Not only is Salvini under pressure from the growing national popularity of Meloni but he is being challenged by key leaders in his own party led by Giorgetti who disagree about his national strategy. They do not like his populist concessions on the pandemic and the Lega regional leaders want a more responsible government strategy. At the same time the guru of Salvini's previously effective social media campaign, Morsi, has been caught drug dealing. A few years ago Salvini made a big fuss about a migrant who was supposed to be a dealer, taking the media to his door. It turned out he was innocent. Now he has to support his friend Morsi, who himself made dog whistle statements in the past about the 'scourge' of the drugs trade.

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The Draghi national coalition government is barely affected by these elections which seem to have more importance for showing the relative support of each component of the left and right coalitions. Neither should the relative success of the PD mean that the social liberal left of centre will win the next national elections. There is still no shared programme, strategy and leadership between the PD and the M5S. Very high abstention distorts these results.

Unfortunately, the Di Magistris list in Calabria – where Mimmo Lucano, the ex-mayor of Raice who was recently sentenced to 13 years for helping migrants, was a candidate – only got 16% of the vote for the governorship. Although Mimmo won nearly 10,000 votes this did not get across the 5% threshold required for election.

Other lists to the left of the PD did not get through the threshold either with the Angelo D’Orsi slate in Torino supported by the main left groups getting only 2.5%. Where radical left currents like Potere al Popolo (Power to the People) stood alone they did no better than 2%.. Although this group did get 4 neighbourhood councillors elected in Naples, which is its stronghold. It is positive that in some areas there was an agreement between anti-capitalist forces for a common slate but this is not happening at a national level. A space exists to the left of the social liberal PD for a class struggle movement with an electoral impact. However it is difficult to see this growing unless the social movements and trade union struggles reach a different level.

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Source [Anti*Capitalist Resistance](#).

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