

# Even in the Chamber of Deputies, the result is not to be taken for granted

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There is an electoral scenario that up to now almost nobody has taken seriously into account, and this is Silvio Berlusconi's victory at the Chamber of Deputies. The issue whether Pierluigi Bersani should win in this arena was, and still is, something taken for granted by most people. For several weeks, analyses have been focused on the lottery of the Senate, where, as a matter of fact, there is no assurance that the Bersani-Vendola (PD-SEL) coalition will win the absolute majority of seats. It will depend on the results of the elections in the following identified and monitored key regions: Lombardy, Sicily, and Campania. Further, what if the real unknown was the Chamber of Deputies? Several exit polls published last Friday gave a margin of five to six percentage points between the two major coalitions. In times of normality and a few days before the elections, there should be a safety margin to win at the Chamber of Deputies, where a single vote that separates one coalition from its competitors is enough for that coalition to get the majority bonus. But these are not times of normality. It is possible that the exit polls do not give us a fully accurate picture of the public opinion's climate. Within the numbers could be the so-called Berlusconi effect, similar to the Bradley effect in the United States. Bradley, the first black mayor of Los Angeles, was a gubernatorial candidate in the 1982 California elections. His popularity in the exit polls was systematically overestimated because many white electors felt ashamed in admitting that they were not prone to voting for a black man. Nowadays, with Berlusconi, something similar to the *Democrazia Cristiana* at the time of the First Republic could happen. And maybe, to some extent, it could also be true for Beppe Grillo. There are "techniques" to correct this bias, but it is not certain whether they will work. This is also a reason why exit polls give differences that could be very significant. Together with the above-men-

tioned examples is another poll that recorded a difference of only four points last week and another one, that of Euromedia Research (the company closest to Berlusconi), that estimated a difference of less than two points. Such minor differences that were unimaginable a few weeks ago are no longer unimaginable.

There are two ways to win the elections: One is by running after your competitor and overtaking him by getting one vote more. Another way is by looking at your competitor losing votes. Up to now, the analytical perspective for winning these elections has been the first. With the PD-SEL coalition gaining over 35% of the votes at the Chamber, it was not conceivable that Berlusconi could win. He could not get there, and he cannot. But what we have witnessed during these last weeks of the electoral campaigns is not only the largely foreseeable regain of *Il Cavaliere*, but also the slow wearing away of the PD and its ally, SEL. It is the combination of these two phenomena that puts into discussion some given certainties. We do not believe, and we have already written in this newspaper, that there are wide recovery margins for Berlusconi. This time, compared with 2006, he has too many competitors, among whom is Grillo, in a big reclamation in this phase. Nonetheless, if the fall of the PD and SEL continues, Berlusconi gaining a bit more than what he has now will be enough to make a comeback in the game being played at the Chamber of Deputies. If the threshold for winning drops and stays a bit above 30%, it is a totally different issue. At this point, an important difference can be made by the useful vote both at the Chamber and at the Senate.

As of mid-December, the PD has lost almost six percentage points, and the coalition as a whole has lost almost eight points (data provided by Ipsos). A series of different factors have contributed to this trend. Some are understandable, with others less

understandable. It was obvious that after the big deployment of the primary elections, things would be a blur. But it has lasted too long. It is fine to have a campaign branch out of Bersani, but why is the PD not among people like Grillo? Where are the volunteers that have given life to the confrontation for the primary elections? Social media are not enough to make an electoral campaign. One also needs the masses and the door-to-door campaign. Obama is a good example. And then, obviously, there are the scandals and omissions. It goes without saying that among the first of these scandals is *Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena*, which undoubtedly has caused damage to the image and bucket of consensus of the PD. As for the omissions, one should know that they are many, but one clamorously stands out: a convincing and obsessively communicated proposal on the costs of politics. This is a reform that stands at the top of the Italians' wishes and costs nothing.

These elections will be won not by the stronger, as it has always been during the Second Republic, but by the party less weak. With a few votes, the winner will receive the whole jackpot. It is a conflict between two weaknesses in a changing world.

The end of February will be pretty hot despite the temperature these days. But who knows, perhaps the resignation of the pope will change something.

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