

# The uncertainty of Monti's electoral hold

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The country's next government will depend on the vote at the Senate. This is true in both of the following cases: if Silvio Berlusconi wins at the Chamber of Deputies or if Pierluigi Bersani wins, which seems pretty likely, given the most recent trends. In this branch of the Parliament, anything can happen. In 2006, Berlusconi's CdL<sup>1</sup> placed first in 7 out of 17 regions, and this was enough to give *Il Cavaliere* 155 seats against the 154 seats of Romano Prodi's *Unione*<sup>2</sup>. It went like that because the CdL won in many so-called heavy regions: Lombardy, Piedmont, Veneto, Lazio, Apulia, and Sicily (together with Friuli-Venezia Giulia). Prodi saved himself, thanks to Campania, where he placed first with 49.6% of the votes against 49.1% of the center-right coalition. Without that margin of 0.5 percentage points, the history of the country would have taken another direction.

In 2013, if Berlusconi wins in the same seven regions, he will get 124 seats (i.e., 31 less than last time)—this without considering his percentage of votes. This data alone tells how much the present situation has changed compared with 2006. The difference is represented by Mario Monti and Beppe Grillo. In 2006, the competition had two major players. Today, there are four. Indeed, there are four coalitions which are able to get more than 8% of the votes at the Senate, thus getting seats. This means that the coalition that loses the bonus in a region loses many more seats than it had in 2006 because it does not get all the seats meant to be given to the losers. In fact, it has to share these with the other two competitors. Hence, in order to win today, one should place first in many more regions. Actually, one should win in virtually all regions. Only in this way can one hold a solid majority.

With that said, there are three possible outcomes of the Senate's lottery. The first is that Bersani and Nichi Vendola get the absolute majority of the seats as Berlusconi did in 2008, when he managed to elect 174 senators. It is difficult but not impossible that this happens again this time. In any case, there are different kinds of majority. Also, that of Prodi was a majority. But it was very narrow. Let us imagine that the center-left wins in all 17 regions. In this case, it would total up to 178 seats. A good result. But Lombardy, Veneto, and Sicily are unanimously considered regions in a precarious balance. It would suffice that Bersani loses Lombardy and would go down to 162 seats, only four seats above the majority threshold. To lose 16 seats in a single region is drastic and illustrates well the line of reasoning above. Losing the bonus in heavy regions—with Lombardy being the heaviest—means going from heaven to hell. But Lombardy alone is not enough. As a matter of fact, even if the center-left won here but with Berlusconi winning in Veneto and Grillo (or Berlusconi) in Sicily, the center-left coalition would stop at 159 seats: definitely too few for a safe navigation. Winning in Sicily would not be enough for Bersani to have the absolute majority, even if he very narrowly loses in Lombardy and Veneto. In other words, the possibility that Bersani and Vendola succeed in winning the majority themselves exists, but it is very fragile.

The most likely outcome of the elections is that the center-left needs Monti to form a government. This result may stem from different combinations of gained or lost regions. In the table below, we have made some hypotheses, but obviously, one could make others. The last two simulations show what would happen if the center-left lost all three regions in a precarious balance: it would have 143 seats, but with 33 from Monti's list, the eventual government's coalition could count on a majority of 176 seats. As is shown, we have also considered the hypothesis that Grillo and not Berlusconi might win the majority bonus in Sicily, but this circumstance would not change anything for the center-left. For Bersani,

<sup>1</sup> CdL (Casa delle Libertà – House of Freedom) was in 2006 the name of the center-right political coalition led by Berlusconi.

<sup>2</sup> L'Unione (The Union) was in 2006 the name of the center-left political coalition led by Prodi.

Table 1. Distribution of seats in the Senate based on different scenarios for uncertain regions

Winning coalition in uncertain regions			Distribution of seats, Senate				Distribution of seats, Senate with Monti under the threshold in Liguria, Emilia, Tuscany, Umbria, and Marche			
Lombardy	Veneto	Sicily	CL	Monti	CR	M5S	CL	Monti	CR	M5S
C-L	C-L	C-L	178	33	60	42	178	27	64	44
C-R	C-L	C-L	162	33	76	42	162	27	80	44
C-L	C-R	M5S	159	33	70	51	159	27	74	53
C-R	C-R	C-L	153	33	85	42	153	27	89	44
C-R	C-R	M5S	143	33	86	51	143	27	90	53
C-R	C-R	C-R	143	33	95	42	143	27	99	44

Note: The other 14 regions with the bonus are assigned to the center-left. One of the seats of Molise is given to the M5S and one to the center-right. Four of the seats of Trentino-Alto Adige are given to the center-left (together with SVP), two to the coalition of Monti, and one to the center-right. Three out of the six seats of the Italians residing abroad are given to the center-left, one to the center-right, one to Monti, and one to an independent party. The seat of the Aosta Valley is given to a local independent party of any other coalition. The simulations are built on the basis of hypothetical percentages.

the victory in these regions is very important, but provided that he is not the winner, it is irrelevant who the winner will be between the other two.

On the contrary, what really matters for Bersani is Monti's electoral hold. In the table, we have considered the hypothetical case that the premier's list goes below 8% in some regions. This way, its total would go down from 33 to 27 seats. A loss of six seats reduces the majority of the eventual future government with Bersani but does not jeopardize it. Everything would change, though, if Monti does not go above the threshold of 8% in other heavy regions. For instance, if we added Lombardy to the regions considered in the table, Monti's list would go down to 22 seats, making the foreseeable postelectoral majorities with Bersani much more difficult as well as opening the way to the third possible outcome of these elections.

If Berlusconi wins in the uncertain regions and reverse the forecasts in others where he is currently taken as a loser and if, at the same time, Monti's list was below expectations, the sum of Vendola's, Bersani's, and Monti's seats could not be 158. In this case, the only possible governments would be either the big coalition (without Grillo) or a government together with Grillo. There is no need to highlight the risk of instability with such a scenario. Luckily, it is the least probable scenario.

These days, nothing is really certain with the exception of one thing: Berlusconi cannot get the absolute majority of the seats at the Senate. This

is one of the few absolute certainties of these elections. For this to happen, it should be enough that the center-left wins—and this will be the case—in Tuscany, Emilia, Marche, Umbria, and Basilicata. But this leads us to a final question: if Berlusconi won at the Chamber of Deputies, how could he form a government given that he could not get the absolute majority of seats at the Senate? With whom could he form an alliance? And with which perspectives for the country?

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