

An electoral tsunami hits Italy: 50 provinces washed away from PD and PdL

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Published in Il Sole 24 Ore, February 27, 2013

The tsunami that came to shore during last Sunday's and Monday's elections was named Beppe Grillo. His exploits were the main novelty of the 2013 elections. With 8,689,000 votes (26.6%) M5S became the first party in Italy at the expense of the PD and PdL. It is unprecedented in the history of Western Europe that a new party obtained such an extreme level of support in its first national elections. In order to find a similar example, we must look back upon the successes of FI in 1994; however, even then, Silvio Berlusconi's party only obtained 21% of the Italian vote. Considering the history of the Italian Republic, it is worth highlighting how similar percentages have only been obtained by the two main parties of the period. In the First Republic, the DC and the PCI were the only parties to reach similar numbers. Only later during the Second Republic, starting after 1992, were FI, the PdL, and the PD able to attain such numbers. The success of M5S in 2013 is therefore a monumental result in Italian politics.

At this point, it is interesting to analyze the territorial characteristics of Grillo's success. The map below shows how the territorial distribution has changed looking at the percentage of votes for the leading party in each Italian province. In recent elections, the PD and the PdL dominated the political scene. In 2008, Berlusconi's party was victorious in 67 provinces, winning almost everywhere but in the "red zone," where the PD was strongest. Today, M5S is the party that won the most provinces (50) and also the majority of regions (11). Grillo was hugely successful in Sicily, where his party came in first everywhere but Messina, reaching 40% in Trapani and 39% in Ragusa. Grillo's wave did not just stop on the island, where he had already obtained first place with 15% during the regional elections last October. Instead, he went on to win in many other areas of the country, taking 41 provinces that were previously center-right as well as 9 that were

center-left. Furthermore, M5S was able to win in some regions that were thought to be strongholds of FI and LN, such as the northeast, Cuneo, and western Liguria. It was also victorious in other areas like Marche, Torino, and Genoa, which were previously pro-PD.

The PD, led by Pierluigi Bersani, maintained its traditional strongholds in the "red zone," where it won with percentages between 30% and 44% in Emilia-Romagna, Umbria, and Tuscany (with the exception of Lucca, ex-enclave of the DC, won by Grillo). In the entire midsouth, Bersani's party only had the relative majority in three provinces. Interestingly, in Lombardy, the Democrats won almost everywhere, perhaps taking advantage of the decisive regional bonus in the Senate, benefiting from regional elections and the unusual structure of the election (five parties winning above 10% of the vote and therefore reducing the winners' quota well below 30%). The exceptions there are Sondrio (LN) and Como (PdL). The latter represents the only province in the midnorth where Berlusconi has the relative majority, whereas five years ago, he had 22. The remaining 16 provinces in which the PdL holds a lead are concentrated in the south, particularly in Apulia and in the provinces of Lazio and Campania.

Grillo's tsunami has swept away the historical stability of the Italian electoral map,¹ where, election after election, the different areas of the country followed similar trends. Only time will tell us if these are temporary changes or if we have witnessed the emergence of new Italian electoral characteristics.

¹ On the historical characteristics of the Italian electoral geography, see the analysis of Dogan [1967], Galli et al. [1968], Corbetta et al. [1988], Caciagli and Spreafico [1990], and Diamanti [2009].

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Figure 1. Map of winning parties by province (values are percentages)

