

Italian parties' loss of support and the success of a new political actor

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One of the most relevant elements emerging from the political elections of 2013 is the backward trend of the two main center-right and center-left parties, PdL and PD, with respect to the previous election of 2008. In this paper, we will try to analyze the trends of the main Italian parties with a diachronic comparison, which includes the 2006 elections as well. As can be seen in Table 1, M5S was the party to receive more votes at the Chamber “(excluding Aosta Valley and the foreign constituency); this party obtained little more than 8.5 million votes, with a percentage of 25.6%, despite its first time at these political elections. This is indeed an impressive feat: never in the history of the republic after the elections of 1946 has a new party obtained a similar percentage at its first political elections. The success of Beppe Grillo’s movement, for certain, occurred to the detriment of the other main parties, PD and PdL. The draining of votes from PD and PdL can be explained only partially by the competition represented by the M5S; the second relevant factor is the decrease in electoral turnout of roughly five percentage points with respect to 2008 (dropping from 80.5% to 75.2%). This decline equals slightly more than 2.6 million voters, a figure that exceeds the physiological reduction in the turnout given by the generational turnover (estimated at around two percentage points). The decline will be even more consistent if the data from 2006, when turnout was 83.6%, is considered. For this reason, it is possible to assume that part of the votes given to PD and PdL in 2008 turned to abstention.

In fact, Pierluigi Bersani’s party went from 33.2% in 2008 to 25.4% in 2013, dropping almost 3.5 million votes along the way. The comparison with the *L’Ulivo* list¹ is unflattering as well: the lost votes

in this case are again roughly 3.3 million. The decrease for Silvio Berlusconi’s PdL has been even more marked, both as a percentage and as an absolute value. PdL indeed went from 37.4% in 2008 to 21.6% in 2013, a decrease of 15.8 percentage points. More than 6 million voters abandoned Berlusconi’s party. In 2006, FI and AN together obtained almost 14 million votes. Today, this support declined by half. Even by summing the votes gained by the two “splinter” parties (FLI and FdI), only a little more than 8 million votes are reached, which is far less than the 13.6 million of 2008. Today, PdL has less votes (both in absolute terms and as a percentage) than FI in 2006. The other new political actor of these elections is Mario Monti’s list, which gained almost 3 million votes, representing 8.3% of the total. At the Chamber, Monti’s list has surely damaged its allies: FLI and UdC. In particular, Pierferdinando Casini’s list currently does not even reach the 2% threshold, from 6.8% obtained in 2006 and 5.6% in 2008: it lost 2 million votes in the past seven years. If we sum the votes of the LN and those of GS-MpA, it could be said that Roberto Maroni’s party regained more or less the levels of 2006 (when it allied itself with MpA). Regarding center-right minority parties, Francesco Storace’s LD, with its 0.6%, reached the same percentage obtained by FT in 2006.

Considering the center-left, it can be noted that the SEL obtained roughly the same amount of votes (and the same percentage) of SA in 2008, while RC obtained less votes of both IdV in 2008 (one of the parties converged in RC) and SA (also formed by parties now part of RC). In 2006, the PRC, the PdCI², and the *Verdi*³ gained—when summed to-

¹ L’Ulivo (Olive Tree) is an electoral list of the center-left coalition formed in 2006 by the merger of DS and DL.

² PdCI (Partito dei Comunisti Italiani – Party of the Italian Communists) is a left-wing party founded in 1998.

³ I Verdi (The Greens) is an environmentalist party founded in 1990.

gether—almost 4 million votes. Today, the SEL and RC together do not reach 2 million. This represents an overall draining of support for the “radical” left parties.

If we consider the results of the Senate (Table 2), the most important differences with respect to the Chamber include the PD being the first party with 27.4% of votes, followed by the M5S with 23.8%. The worst performance of the M5S at the Senate (and the better performance of PD) might be due to the different electorate (citizens have to be 26 or

older to vote for the Senate) and the possibility of expressing different preferences for the Senate and Chamber. Faced with the option to vote differently for the two institutions, the perception of what was at stake in some regions might have provided an incentive for some of Grillo’s voters to vote for the PD at the Senate in order to achieve the regional majority bonus.

In addition to this, Monti’s coalition ran with a united list, which obtained 9.1% at the Senate (almost the same percentage reached by UdC, FLI,

Table 1. Votes to parties at the Chamber (general elections of 2006, 2008, and 2013)

| Chamber lists | 2006 | | Chamber lists | 2008 | | Chamber lists | 2013 | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|------|-----------------|-----------------|------|---------------|-----------------|------|
| | absolute values | % | | absolute values | % | | absolute values | % |
| L’Ulivo | 11.928.362 | 31.3 | PD | 12.092.973 | 33.2 | PD | 8.644.187 | 25.4 |
| PRC | 2.229.604 | 5.8 | SA | 1.124.435 | 3.1 | CD | 167.170 | 0.5 |
| PdCI | 884.912 | 2.3 | | | | SEL | 1.089.442 | 3.2 |
| Verdi | 783.944 | 2.1 | | | | RC | 765.172 | 2.3 |
| IdV | 877.159 | 2.3 | IdV | 1.593.487 | 4.4 | | | |
| RnP ¹ | 991.049 | 2.6 | PS ² | 355.513 | 1.0 | PSI | – | – |
| Socialisti Craxi ³ | 115.105 | 0.3 | | | | | | |
| SVP | 182.703 | 0.5 | SVP | 147.666 | 0.4 | SVP | 146.804 | 0.4 |
| FI | 9.045.384 | 23.7 | PdL | 13.629.068 | 37.4 | PdL | 7.332.667 | 21.6 |
| AN | 4.706.654 | 12.3 | | | | Fdi | 665.830 | 2.0 |
| AS Mussolini ⁴ | 255.410 | 0.7 | | | | FLI | 159.332 | 0.5 |
| FT | 231.313 | 0.6 | FT-LD | 885.226 | 2.4 | LD | 219.769 | 0.6 |
| LN-MpA | 1.748.066 | 4.6 | LN | 3.024.758 | 8.3 | LN | 1.390.156 | 4.1 |
| | | | MpA | 410.490 | 1.1 | GS-MpA | 148.552 | 0.4 |
| UdC | 2.579.951 | 6.8 | UdC | 2.050.331 | 5.6 | UdC | 608.210 | 1.8 |
| | | | | | | SC Monti | 2.824.065 | 8.3 |
| | | | | | | M5S | 8.689.458 | 25.6 |
| | | | | | | FiD | 380.756 | 1.1 |
| Total Others | 173.263 | 0.5 | Total Others | 2.527.104 | 6.9 | Total Others | 770.954 | 2.3 |
| Total valid | 38.151.407 | 100 | Total valid | 36.452.259 | 100 | Total valid | 34.002.524 | 100 |

Note: This summary excludes the foreign constituency and Aosta Valley.

¹ RnP (Rosa nel Pugno – Rose in the Fit) is a center-left electoral list formed in 2005 by the merger of SDI (Socialisti Democratici Italiani – Italian Democratic Socialists) and RI (Italian Radicals).

² PS (Partito Socialista – Socialist Party) is a center-left party founded in 2007 by the merger of some minor social-democratic parties and groups (among them the most important one was SDI). In 2009 the party was renamed PSI (Partito Socialista Italiano – Italian Socialist Party) as the old Italian Socialist Party founded in 1892.

³ I Socialisti (The Socialists) is a center-left party founded by Bobo Craxi (son of Bettino Craxi) in 2006.

⁴ AS (Alternativa Sociale – Social Alternative) is a coalition of right-wing parties. It was founded in 2004 by Benito Mussolini’s granddaughter Alessandra Mussolini and in the 2006 general elections AS was a member of Silvio Berlusconi’s coalition.

Table 2. Votes to parties at the Senate (general elections of 2006, 2008, and 2013)

| Senate lists | 2006 | | Senate lists | 2008 | | Senate lists | 2013 | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|------|--------------|-----------------|------|--------------------------|-----------------|------|
| | absolute values | % | | absolute values | % | | absolute values | % |
| DS + DL | 9.701.748 | 28.4 | PD | 11.042.452 | 33.7 | PD | 8.400.161 | 27.4 |
| | | | | | | CD | 163.375 | 0.5 |
| | | | | | | Il megafono ¹ | 138.581 | 0.4 |
| PRC | 2.518.361 | 7.4 | SA | 1.053.228 | 3.2 | SEL | 912.308 | 3.0 |
| Insieme con L'Unione ² | 1.423.003 | 4.2 | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | RC | 549.995 | 1.8 |
| IdV | 986.191 | 2.9 | IdV | 1.414.730 | 4.3 | | | |
| RnP | 851.604 | 2.5 | PS | 284.837 | 0.9 | PSI | 57.688 | 0.2 |
| Socialisti Craxi | 126.431 | 0.4 | | | | | | |
| FI | 8.202.890 | 24.0 | PdL | 12.511.258 | 38.2 | PdL | 6.829.587 | 22.3 |
| AN | 4.235.208 | 12.4 | | | | | | |
| AS Mussolini | 214.526 | 0.6 | | | | FdI | 590.083 | 1.9 |
| FT | 204.498 | 0.6 | FT-LD | 686.926 | 2.1 | LD | 221.114 | 0.7 |
| LN-MpA | 1.530.667 | 4.5 | LN | 2.642.280 | 8.1 | LN | 1.328.555 | 4.3 |
| | | | MpA | 355.361 | 1.1 | GS+PDS-MpA ³ | 170.718 | 0.5 |
| UdC | 2.309.442 | 6.8 | UdC | 1.866.356 | 5.7 | SC Monti | 2.797.486 | 9.1 |
| | | | | | | M5S | 7.285.850 | 23.8 |
| | | | | | | FiD | 278.396 | 0.9 |
| Total Others | 1.858.046 | 5.4 | Total Others | 916.911 | 2.8 | Total Others | 893.648 | 2.9 |
| Total valid | 34.162.615 | 100 | Total valid | 32.774.339 | 100 | Total valid | 30.617.545 | 100 |

Note: This summary excludes the foreign constituency, Aosta Valley, and Trentino-Alto Adige.

¹ Il Megafono (The Megaphone) is a center-left electoral list presented by Rosario Crocetta (governor of Sicily) in the 2013 general elections only for the Senate in Sicily.

² Insieme con l'Unione (Together with the Union) is a center-left electoral list formed by Verdi, PdCI and Consumatori Uniti (United Consumers) for the 2006 Senatorial election.

³ PDS (Partito dei Siciliani – Party of the Sicilians) is the regional section of MpA in Sicily.

and SC together at the Chamber, 10.6%). Monti's list at the Senate gained more votes, both as a percentage and in absolute terms, than UdC both in 2008 and 2006 (when Casini's party, still allied with Berlusconi, performed best out of all the three previous political elections). In general, when compared with the past, the observations made for the other parties at the Chamber is also valid for the Senate.

In conclusion, these political elections registered an increased electoral volatility that affected the majority of Italian parties forced to face the increasing disenchantment and alienation of the citizens with respect to politics in general (outlined by a significant increase in abstention) and the emergence of new political actors in particular (first of

all, Grillo's M5S).

All these elements suggest that we are undergoing a phase of electoral realignment and the possible deconstruction of Italian political system.

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