

# Votes to coalitions at the local level: Berlusconi takes the lead in small towns, and Bersani wins in the cities

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This article analyzes the electoral performance of the four main coalitions in the 8,018 Italian municipalities (Aosta Valley is excluded) ranked according to categories of demographic dimension. At the national level, Pierluigi Bersani's coalition won by a small margin (29.5% against 29.2% of the center-right), while the M5S gained third place with 25.6%. The result of the coalition headed by Mario Monti was disappointing: it reached only 10.6% (see Table 1). However, looking more in depth at the demographic dimension of the municipalities, the previous picture shows interesting details.

The center-right lost votes with the increase in the municipality dimension, especially thanks to the contribution of LN, whose voters are mainly gathered in small urban centers. The center-left experienced the opposite, even though the presence of the separatists of Südtirol of SVP attenuated the underrepresentation in municipalities with up to 5,000 inhabitants (SVP is so strong in the small municipalities of the Bolzano province that it managed to reach 1.4% at the national level). The consequence of this dichotomy between city and countryside that affects the two main coalitions is highlighted in Figure 1: Silvio Berlusconi's coalition placed first in municipalities with up to 50,000 inhabitants, while the center-left managed to surpass the rivals and win the majority premium at the Chamber, only thanks to the votes obtained in middle and big urban centers. In big cities, the center-left achieved four percentage points more than in middle-sized urban centers, reaching 33.4%, while the center-right conversely dropped down to 25% and was surpassed by even the M5S.

If results are disaggregated for the various geopolitical areas, further empirical evidence emerge that are worth noting here.

The most striking difference can be seen in the northwest. Here, the various coalitions seem

to achieve remarkably different results whether the three major cities or the dense regional net of tiny municipalities<sup>1</sup> (especially in Piedmont and Liguria) are considered. Up to 5,000 inhabitants indeed, the center-right is ahead with respect to Beppe Grillo's party, while the center-left places only third, almost seven points behind. Starting from small centers, while the center-left begins its recovery, the center-right, however, experiences a loss of votes. So in this category, it is the M5S that wins first place. On the other hand, in the municipalities with more than 15,000 inhabitants, the center-left closes the gap and surpasses its two rivals; its head start increases in the next two "urban" categories until reaching, in big cities, more than 12.5 points over the center-right, which slides down to 21.6%. In the northeast, a similar trend can also be observed, but here, Grillo's relative weakness and the Northern League's hold over the region, support the center-right in maintaining first place until the middle-sized urban centers. On the other hand, in big cities, Bersani manages to overcome Berlusconi and gain an advantage of more than five points over him. The northeast is also the area where Monti's coalition is stronger; in fact, it has reached 12.2% and 14.2% in big cities, while it remains confined to single-digit percentages south of the Po river.

In the "red zone" (namely, an area where the center-left is historically dominant, which comprises Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany, Umbria, and Marche), the supremacy of the center-left is unchallenged, even taking into account the loss of 10 percentage points with respect to Veltroni's performance in 2008. The center-right, already historically weak in this area, drops to 21.1% and is

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<sup>1</sup> Municipalities with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants.

Table 1. Votes to main parties and coalitions by town size

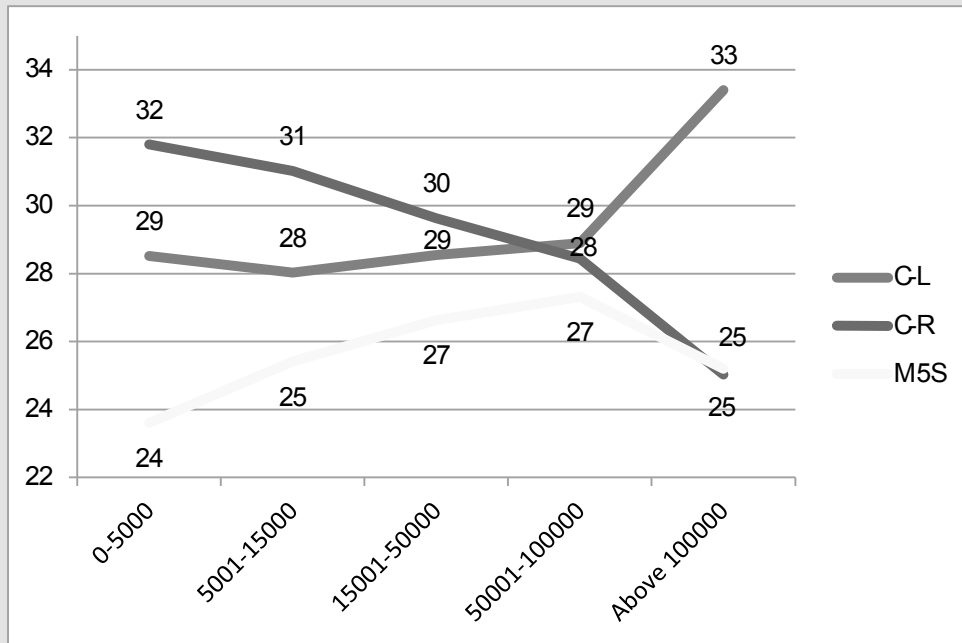
Italy	Town size	Center-left	Center-right	M5S	Monti
	0–5,000	28.5	31.8	23.6	11.1
	5,001–15,000	28.0	31.0	25.4	10.4
	15,001–50,000	28.5	29.6	26.6	10.2
	50,001–100,000	28.9	28.4	27.3	10.4
	Above 100,000	33.4	25.0	25.2	10.7
	Total	29.5	29.2	25.6	10.6
Northwest	0–5,000	24.9	31.7	28.3	11.5
	5,001–15,000	27.0	28.3	29.8	11.3
	15,001–50,000	29.4	26.1	29.2	11.3
	50,001–100,000	29.7	25.5	28.8	11.8
	Above 100,000	34.2	21.6	28.0	11.7
	Total	29.1	26.8	28.8	11.5
Northeast	0–5,000	26.6	35.9	20.3	11.8
	5,001–15,000	25.2	34.8	23.1	11.5
	15,001–50,000	28.0	31.4	23.3	11.9
	50,001–100,000	30.0	31.3	21.0	12.7
	Above 100,000	32.6	27.4	20.0	14.2
	Total	27.7	32.8	21.9	12.2
“Red zone”	0–5,000	34.7	24.7	27.2	9.0
	5,001–15,000	38.6	21.3	26.6	8.7
	15,001–50,000	38.8	21.0	26.3	9.1
	50,001–100,000	37.5	20.7	27.0	9.6
	Above 100,000	42.1	19.7	23.0	9.8
	Total	38.9	21.1	25.7	9.2
South	0–5,000	30.0	29.9	23.8	10.9
	50,01–15,000	25.6	32.7	26.4	10.0
	15,001–50,000	23.9	33.4	28.3	9.5
	50,001–100,000	25.2	30.9	29.2	9.8
	Above 100,000	29.6	27.3	27.9	9.3
	Total	26.8	30.8	27.3	9.8

surpassed by the M5S. In big cities, the divide between progressives and conservatives goes beyond 22 points (42.1% vs. 19.7%).

These results underline how, after 15 years of center-right supremacy, Bersani’s coalition improved its competitiveness in the northeast by reducing Berlusconi’s advantage to roughly five points. At the same time, the “red regions” still remain off-limits, and the leadership of the left there remains unchallenged. The trend for the three main coalitions in the south is quite curious. When the overall result for the south is considered,

the center-right places first by far with respect to the rivals, and the center-left places third, surpassed even by Grillo. If, on the other hand, the results for the different municipalities are disaggregated based on their demographic dimension, Bersani seems to have the advantage, although small, in municipalities with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants (30% to 29.9%). In small urban centers (5,001-15,000 inhabitants), however, it suffers from a relevant loss of 4.5 points, while both Berlusconi and Grillo gather more consents and become first and second, respectively, for all the middle demo-

Figure 1. Trend for the three coalitions in Italian municipalities



graphic categories (municipalities with between 5,000 and 100,000 inhabitants). In big cities, as usual, the center-left recovers and gains first place, while the center-right is surpassed by the Five Star Movement and places third.

Considering all 20 categories of demographic dimension in which the municipalities have been divided (five demographic ranges in each one of the four geopolitical regions), the following can be observed: the center-left is first in 11 categories (including big cities in all regions, the entire “red zone”, “belt municipalities”<sup>2</sup> and middle-sized urban centers in the northwest, and tiny municipalities in the south), the center-right takes the lead in eight categories (including tiny municipalities in the northwest, the entire northeast except for big cities, small centers, belt municipalities, and middle-sized urban centers in the south), and Grillo’s party surpasses all the others in small centers in the northeast.

Another useful tool to understand electoral results achieved by the coalitions in the Italian municipalities are position indexes, such as the quartiles. These are obtained by ordering the 8,018 Italian municipalities based on the percentage of

votes obtained by each coalition and then considering the 25% of municipalities where the coalition performed best and the 25% where it performed worst. Table 2 reports for the three coalitions the total number of municipalities included in the top and bottom quartiles, divided by categories of demographic dimension. The center-left confirms its markedly urban character: the top quartile includes 24 out of 46 big cities, while only 4 are in the bottom quartile (Giugliano in Campania, Andria, Latina, and Catania). This city-oriented profile of the progressive coalition is sidetracked by the presence of SVP, which, as mentioned before, is rooted in the tiny municipalities of the Alto Adige. In fact, it always reaches more than 50% of the votes in these municipalities, bringing about an overrepresentation of the category of municipalities with less than 5,000 inhabitants in the top quartile of Bersani’s coalition. The center-right, on the other hand, witnesses a strengthening of its rural character with respect to 2008: only two cities (Giugliano in Campania and Andria) with more than 100,000 inhabitants and eight middle-sized urban centers appear in its top quartile.

In general, among 141 municipalities with over 50,000 inhabitants, only 10 (7%) appear in the center-right top quartile, while 45 (almost one-third) appear in its bottom quartile (this list includes some of the most important cities of the country: Venice, Florence, Bologna, Genoa, Turin,

<sup>2</sup> Municipalities with between 15,000 and 50,000 inhabitants, often belonging to the greater metropolitan area of the main urban center.

Table 2. Municipalities included in the top and bottom quartiles for the three main coalitions

Municipalities by category		Center-left		Center-right		M5S	
BEST 25%							
Italy	N	N	%	N	%	N	%
0–5,000	5,629	1,482	26.3	1,542	27.4	1,249	22.2
5,001–15,000	1,666	356	21.4	362	21.7	503	30.2
15,001–50,000	582	120	20.6	91	15.6	203	34.9
50,001–100,000	95	23	24.2	8	8.4	38	40.0
Above 100,000	46	24	52.2	2	4.3	12	26.1
TOTAL	8,018	2,005	25.0	2,005	25.0	2,005	25.0
WORST 25%							
Italy	N	N	%	N	%	N	%
0–5,000	5,629	1,442	25.6	1,394	24.8	1,665	29.6
5,001–15,000	1,666	429	25.8	410	24.6	270	16.2
15,001–50,000	582	113	19.4	155	26.6	57	9.8
50,001–100,000	95	17	17.9	25	26.3	6	6.3
Above 100,000	46	4	8.7	20	43.5	7	15.2
TOTAL	8,018	2,005	25.0	2,004	25.0	2,005	25.0

and Rome). If we consider all the municipalities with more than 15,000 inhabitants, only 101 out of 722 (14%) appear in the center-right top quartile, while double that number (200) is present in its bottom quartile.

In this picture, the result obtained by the M5S resembles more that of the center-left than that of the center-right. Although, as was said before, Grillo's party is generally unrelated to demographic dimension, it appears weak in tiny municipalities (only 22% of these appear in its best quartile), while it is overrepresented in the other four categories, especially in the belt municipalities and in the middle-sized urban centers. Considering cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants, Grillo's party appears more city-oriented than Bersani's coalition, with 50 municipalities in its top quartile and only 13 in its bottom quartile. If we consider all

municipalities with above 15,000 inhabitants, this feature is even more marked: 35% is included in Grillo's top quartile, while only 10% is included in the bottom quartile (the difference for the center-left is less notable, 23% to 19%).

## References

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