Italy's Run-Off Vote For 136 Town Administrations

Judith Harris (June 10, 2019)



In the final run-off vote for local administrations June 9, affecting 3.5 million voters in 136 townships, participation dropped by a quarter, from a healthy 68.2% to 52%. Some historic left-wing administrations fell to the Lega, but in some cases 5-Star Movement (M5S) voters chose to vote for the center-left instead of Lega candidates.

National general elections are four years away in theory, but some predict that they may happen as early as this autumn. This makes the final results of the run-off vote for local administrations in cities and towns all over Italy on June 9 - affecting 3.5 million voters in 136 townships - a potential harbinger of things to come, while bearing in mind that voters in urban centers are generally less conservative than those in rural areas.

Suggesting a certain election weariness, a significantly lower number turned out to vote than in the preliminary election held May 28. All told, participation dropped by a quarter, from a healthy 68.2%

to Sunday's 52%. Some historic left-wing administrations fell to the Lega [2], but in a number of cases voters loyal to the 5-Star Movement (M5S) [3] turned their backs on the Lega to vote for the center-left.

According to Roberto D'Alimonte and Aldo Papar for the Centro Italiano Studi Elettorale [4] (CISE), a primary characteristic of this vote was the "mobility" of the M5S. The CISE analysts were also struck by the fact that the PD [5] voters did not stay home but turned out to vote.

In fourteen of the larger cities where the vote was held, center-left and center-right fared surprisingly evenly. A center-left ticket of progressives won in the South, at Avellino, besting the Partito Democratico (PD) candidate by some 600 votes. In seven important northern towns the center-left prevailed: Livorno (Leghorn to the English), Reggio-Emilia, Cesena, Cremona, Prato, Rovigo and Verbania. At Cremona 27% of the Lega voters stayed home by comparison with just 1% of PD voters.

The center-left win at Livorno was particularly interesting because, after five years of 5 Star Movement administration, fewer than two-thirds of M5S voters (64%) did not bother to vote at all. Of those who did turn out, only 10% chose the rightwing candidate.

At Rovigo in the Northeast the voters overturned their rightist tradition, electing Edoardo Gaffeo of the PD. For that party's new secretary Nicola Zingaretti [6] these were "wonderful victories, wonderful confirmations" that demonstrate that "a new center-left" exists, an alternative to the Lega of Matteo Salvini [7], Deputy Premier.

In northern and central Italy the center-right prevailed in six cities - Ascoli Piceno, Biella, Ferrara, Forlì, Potenza and Vercelli - and, in the South, Foggia. For Ferrara, the election of mayor Alan Fabbri of the Lega was the first shift to the right for a city with a 70-year tradition of voting for the left, which fell behind by 10%. For neo-Mayor Fabbri, theirs was "an historic victory" and, for Salvini, an "extraordinary result."

The result for the Movimento Cinque Stelle was even more extraordinary in Campobasso, in the Campania, where the M5S candidate Roberto Gravina claimed over 69% of the vote, compared with the under 31% of his center-right opponent. Similarly, in Forlì, in the Emilia-Romagna, after a half-century of leftist mayors, right-winger Gian Luca Zattini was elected. Vercelli too overturned its leftist tradition. There, however, some 58% of those who had previously chosen the M5S stayed home instead of voting; only one out of four voted Lega while 17% opted for the center-left.

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