

# Italy General Election 2018: Analysis & Forecast



**DISCLAIMER:** The following is not a full-fledged analysis, also because I do not have the resources to perform one. Still, it is not an unreasoned predicting attempt, as I based my forecast on a series of factors influencing the Italian political system. So, you can consider it as an “educated guess” whose aim is to explain some background elements as well as to forecast the election’s results.

Note that the percentages I provide in the end do not refer to the number of votes a given list / coalition will obtain, but to the number of seats that it will ultimately have in the Parliament (after all, this is what matters in the end).

**IMPORTANT:** This report has by no means the objective of supporting any political force, to provide voting indications or to influence the electoral outcome in any way. Its aim is purely analytic and illustrative; and provides no projections. The full version containing my forecast will only appear on 4 March after the polling places will close at 11:00 p.m. Italian time.

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## Intervening Factors

I based my reasoning on the following elements:

- Italy's current electoral system; conceived as the combination of electoral law (the *Rosatellum*), the number of relevant parties / coalitions, the country's nature as a polity, etc.
- The existing balance of power & relations between the relevant parties / coalitions
- The present political discourse
- Italy's electoral and political tradition
- The socio-political sentiments among the Italian society
- Voting surveys
- My "gut feeling"

## Background information

**How *Rosatellum* works:** One-third of the Parliament is elected through a pure majoritarian system (the candidate receiving more votes in a uninominal district wins the seat) and the remaining two-thirds of MPs are elected with a proportional system in plurinominal districts. There is a single ballot for both the majoritarian and the proportional "parts", and panachage (*voto disgiunto*) is not possible: voting a candidate associated with a given list / coalition in the uninominal district will automatically assign the vote in the plurinominal district to that same list, and vice versa. **Given that the plurinominal (proportional) districts will be created by uniting several uninominal (majoritarian) ones, the latter will be more important; as they will influence the outcome of the plurinominal districts due to the automatic transmission of votes to a list / coalition in the uninominal districts to the same list / coalition in the larger plurinominal ones.** The election threshold is at 3% for single lists and 10% for coalitions (that must include a list having obtained at least 3% of votes).

### Relevant lists / coalitions:

- **Center-right:** it revolves around Silvio Berlusconi's *Forza Italia* with a liberal program aimed at boosting the economy; but other parties are included, notably the League (*Lega*) led by Matteo Salvini who pursues an anti-EU and anti-immigration agenda and is criticized in the mainstream political discourse.
- **Democratic Party (DP):** the main party in the center-left coalition, promoting moderate, pro-EU and reformist policies; headed by Matteo Renzi.
- **Five Stars Movement (FSM):** a party proposing a renewal of the political class, a guaranteed basic income and other measures leveraging on the popular discontent, which includes opposing the EU & Euro; it is attacked in the major political discourse and its leader is Luigi Di Maio.

- **Free & Equals (*Liberi e Uguali*)**: a list formed by the old guard of the DP that seceded from it. Its importance lies mainly in the fact that it may draw a non-negligible share of votes from the DP, weakening it and allowing this list to gain a certain coalition / blackmail potential when the moment of forming a government comes. It is led by Pietro Grasso.

**Relations between parties (lists) / coalitions:** In brief, each of the three main poles (center-right, DP and FSM) runs for victory on its own against the others; but **while some form of cooperation between the center-right and the DP when forming a government is not to be ruled out, the possibility of post-electoral coalitions including the FSM has been excluded by both the party itself and by its rivals.**

## Analysis

**The “Rosatellum effect”:** First, I reflected upon the effects the *Rosatellum* will have. **Due to its nature, this law will tend favoring parties (lists) that present one or both of the following characteristics:**

- Are deeply rooted in the territory, so have local “strongholds” (as they will likely win the majoritarian-assigned seats)
- Have a large and loyal national-level electoral basis (as this increases the likelihood of getting the seats assigned with the proportional system)

**Satisfying both of these conditions is particularly positive, as they mutually reinforce each other due to the impossibility of panachage:** if a party has many strongholds, its candidates will be elected in these majoritarian electoral districts, but it will also automatically get precious votes in the plurinominal districts (made by uniting the uninominal ones); if a party has a large nation-scale voting base, it will receive many MPs in the proportional districts but it will also be more likely to win the majoritarian seats, even just by few votes more than the second-classified party.

**The “nature” of electoral districts:** That said, I divided the electoral districts in two categories: **“Strongholds” and “Open” districts.** The first are those where a given party is rooted and is virtually sure to win; while the second are the actual battlegrounds that will determine the ultimate electoral outcome. The situation is different in the two cases:

- **Strongholds:** they represent a minority of the districts, but they will have an **“amplifying effect”** for those who hold them due to granted majoritarian seat and the spillover to the proportional part. **This is especially true when a party has many uninominal strongholds close to each other and forming a larger plurinominal one.**

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- **Open districts:** Here, I believe the **large national lists / coalitions will be favored**, as people will tend to vote these major and mediatized political entities (to some degree also for strategic reasons – to avoid wasting their vote by choosing a small party). It should be reminded that the list / coalition getting more preferences will not only get more of the proportional-assigned MPs but will also win the majoritarian-assigned seat. So, a further distinction needs to be made:
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  - In **uninominal districts** the outcome presents a significant degree of **unpredictability** due to the high number of parties and the very nature of the majoritarian system: to win the seat, it is sufficient that a list (even if globally in minority) gains slightly more votes than the others.
  - In **plurinominal districts** the situation **will generally reflect the national-level voting distribution**, but since voters will tend to vote for large parties (lists) / coalitions, **preferences will flow to major political forces.**