

Last Polls and Guerrilla Posters - Two Weeks Before Elections

Judith Harris (February 15, 2018)



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ROME -- This is the last week before polling is prohibited, and in these final days the campaigning for general elections March 4 is tense. Throughout Italy, parties from left, right and center face accusations of illicit activities, starting with corruption. The field is also fragmented, with no fewer than 28 national parties facing off against each other.

Pollsters place the center-right alliance solidly in the lead, with three parties: [Matteo Salvini](#) [2]'s Lega, [Silvio Berlusconi](#) [3]'s Forza Italia and their tiny ally, Fratelli d'Italia, headed by [Giorgia Meloni](#) [4], her party's candidate for premier. For the reputable pollster EMG reporting Feb. 12, Forza Italia is expected to win over 16.1% of the vote and is gaining consensus. Salvini's Lega, while slightly dropping, polls at least 13.9% and Meloni, 4.6%, for a total of 37.4%. Although an Ixè poll, also released Feb. 12, gave the trio a slightly lower result, 36%, the center-right alliance remains well ahead of arch-rival [Movimento 5 Stelle \(M5S\)](#) [5].

In their marriage of convenience, however, these presumable future allies do not get along particularly well. Salvini, for instance, is peeved that to date Berlusconi declines to name their



alliance's choice for a future premier. By law Berlusconi himself cannot be elected to parliament nor serve as premier, but he is definitely running the center-right show even though in recent polls the general public gives him barely 21% of preferences.

Ironically, the M5S, now headed by [Luigi Di Maio](#) [6], with founding grandpa [Beppe Grillo](#) [7] ostentatiously in the wings writing his separation blog, remains the largest of any single party, with its predicted 27.3% of the vote. Nevertheless, faced off against the rival Berlusconi-Salvini-Meloni alliance, it falls 10 points behind.

Former premier Matteo Renzi heads the Partito Democratico (PD), which fields the two-year-old government of Premier Paolo Gentiloni. But at 28% Renzi is decidedly lower in personal popularity than Gentiloni. With an approval rating of 38%, the calm and collected Gentiloni is today's single most popular politician in Italy (OpinItalia poll just published by ANSA press agency). Next comes Emma Bonino, 71, with 34%. Bonino is something of a surprise candidate, whose tiny party, +Europa, is expected to command no more than 5% of the vote. Still, and despite lung cancer she claims is in remission, Bonino is being mentioned even for a possible future presidency of Italy.

Although the front-running center-right alliance seems close to victory, it still may fall short of the 40% that would allow it to take charge of the government. Can another possible alliance be cobbled together? It is not impossible. This week's polls show that together Renzi's PD, with a weak showing of 23.7% despite its command over the government, and De Maio's M5S (27.3%) could theoretically forge a winning alliance. However doubtful this may seem now, no one can tell until the horse trading over a future government actually begins.

Polling has been criticized since [Donald Trump](#) [8]'s election as president, when pollsters understated his support in battleground states. A reason, according to the New York Times, was that turnout proved higher than expected, and the undecided made their decisions "in the final hours." This could happen in Italy:

the fact remains that 33.8% of those who can vote say they will abstain while another 14.2% say they are still undecided. With a total of 48%, this makes the undecided and abstainers the largest single party in Italy (Emg poll released Feb. 12).

One novelty is the aggressive campaigning by the [Casa Pound](#) [9] candidates. Although polls give them only from 2% to 3%, the Casa Pound is from the far (not to say extreme) right. Under national secretary Simone Di Stefano, this controversial party hopes to be represented in parliament for the first time. Di Stefano has already said he might back Salvini in a future government.

With the arguments over immigration continuing as the dominant issue, a startling novelty in the campaign is what is being called a "blitz" of posters showing the faces of immigrants. "VOTE FOR ME," say the posters being put up by night in seven big cities -- but that requested vote is not for the black Africans, Asians, Muslim women in the photos -- but to ask voters not to be narrow minded.

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