



Italy: Political development and data for 2017

PIETRO CASTELLI GATTINARA¹ & CATERINA FROIO²

¹*C-Rex, University of Oslo, Norway;* ²*ESPOL, Université Catholique de Lille, France*

Introduction

As 2017 did not feature any national election or referendum, Italian politics mainly revolved around the strategies of the major players in advance of the March 2018 national elections. Among those were: a splinter in the governing Democratic Party (PD) and the ensuing formation of new left-wing electoral cartels; the consolidation of the Five Star Movement (M5S) as the main opposition party in the system; and the successful establishment of a right-wing coalition by the centre-right Forza Italia (FI), and the radical right parties Northern League (LN) and Brothers of Italy (FdI). While the issue of migration and asylum dominated national debates throughout most of the year, a major turning point was the approval of a new electoral law after the Italian Constitutional Court ruled several crucial elements of the pre-existing system unconstitutional.

Election report

Since no national election took place in 2017, the November regional elections in Sicily represented a barometer of Italians' voting intentions for the 2018 consultation. The election was won by the right-wing coalition of the FI, LN and FdI, and the main loser was the centre-left PD, in government in Italy since 2013, and in particular its leader and former prime minister Matteo Renzi. The anti-establishment M5S (which came second) paid once more for its choice of refusing categorically to form alliances with any other parties. In October 2017, two of Italy's wealthiest northern regions held non-binding referendums demanding greater autonomy. While turnout was over 50 per cent in Veneto and just over 40 per cent in Lombardy, voters overwhelmingly voted in favour of greater autonomy.

Cabinet report

The Gentiloni I government in office on 1 January 2017 was subject to only one major change during the year, i.e., the resignation of minister of Regional Affairs and Autonomies Enrico Costa (Popular Area – AP), in July 2017. The minister resigned his post over disagreements with government campaigns for legislation on the penal system and citizenship for immigrants, and aimed to join the centre-right coalition and the FI for the 2018 elections. Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni (PD) temporarily assumed the minister's responsibilities.

Table 1. Cabinet composition of Gentiloni I in Italy in 2017

Duration of cabinet Period covered by table Type of cabinet	Inception From	12 December 2016 1 January 2017	Dissolution Until	Still in office at the end of 2017 31 December 2017		
	Oversized coalition (OC) ^a					
A. Party/gender composition on 1 January 2017	Seats in cabinet <i>N</i> %		Seats held by women <i>N</i> % of party		Seats in parliament <i>N</i> %	
Democratic Party/ <i>Partito Democratico</i> (PD)	13	68.4%	4	30.2%	303	48.1%
Popular Area/ <i>Area Popolare</i> -New Centre-Right/ <i>Nuovo Centro Destra</i> (AP-NCD)	4	21.1%	1	25.0%	26	4.1%
Independents	2	10.5%	0	0.0%	–	–
Totals	19	100.0%	5	26.3%	329	52.2%
B. Composition of Gentiloni I cabinet on 1 January 2017						
See previous editions of the <i>Political Data Yearbook</i> for Italy or http://politicaldatayearbook.com						
C. Changes in composition of Gentiloni I cabinet during 2017						
Ministerial title	Outgoing minister	Outgoing date	Incoming minister	Comments		
Minister of Regional Affairs	Enrico Costa (1969, male NCD)	29 July	Paolo Gentiloni Silveri (1954, male, PD)	Resignation (Paolo Gentiloni Silveri took the position ad interim until 31 December 2017)		
D. Party/gender composition on 31 December 2017	Seats in cabinet <i>N</i> %		Seats held by women <i>N</i> % of party		Seats in parliament <i>N</i> %	
Democratic Party (PD)	14	73.7%	4	28.6%	281	44.7%
Popular Alternative/ <i>Alternativa Popolare</i> (AP) ^b	3	10.5%	1	33.3%	22	3.5%
Independents	2	10.5%	0	0.0%	–	–
Totals	19	100.0%	5	26.2%	303	48.2% ^a

Notes: ^aIncludes only cabinet-level ministers. Since the government also includes a number of junior ministers from several other parties, the actual type of government is an oversized coalition throughout the year.

^bAP is the political party formed in March 2017 after the dissolution of New Centre-Right (see Parliament report).

Source: Governo Italiano (2018).

Parliament report

A number of minor changes in the composition of parliamentary groups took place in 2017. While the most notable episode is linked to the splinter in the governing party PD (see Political party report), several minor changes and aggregations concerned small centrist parties, mainly due to the negotiations to form centre-right and centre-left coalitions in advance of the 2018 elections.

Table 2. Party and gender composition of the lower house of parliament (*Camera dei Deputati*) in Italy in 2017

Party	1 January 2017				31 December 2017			
	All N	%	Women N	%	All N	%	Women N	%
Democratic Party (PD)	303	48.1%	109	36.0%	281	44.7%	104	37.0%
Five Star Movement/ <i>Movimento 5 Stelle</i> (M5S)	91	14.4%	32	35.0%	88	14.0%	30	34.1%
Go Italy!/ <i>Forza Italia</i> (FI)	50	7.9%	19	38.0%	56	8.9%	19	33.9%
Article 1-Democratic Progressive Movement/ <i>Articolo1 – Movimento Democratico e Progressista</i> (MDP) ^a	–	–	–	–	43	6.8%	12	27.9%
Italian Left-Left, Ecology, Freedom/ <i>Sinistra Italiana-Sinistra Ecologia Libertà</i> (SI-SEL)	31	4.9%	9	29.0%	17	2.7%	5	29.4%
Popular Area/Area Popolare-New Centre-Right (AP-NCD)	26	4.1%	2	7.7%	–	–	–	–
Popular Alternative (AP) ^b	–	–	–	–	22	3.5%	3	13.6%
Civic Choice for Italy/ <i>Scelta Civica per l'Italia</i> (MAIE)	16	2.5%	2	12.5%	16	2.5%	1	6.2%
Civics and Innovators/ <i>Civici e Innovatori</i> (CI) ^c	17	2.5%	3	18.7%	–	–	–	–
Northern League/ <i>Lega Nord</i> (LN)	19	3.0%	2	10.5%	22	3.5%	2	9.1%
For Italy-Democratic Centre/ <i>Per L'Italia-Centro Democratico</i> (PI-CD)	13	2.2%	2	14.3%	12	1.9%	1	8.3%
Brothers of Italy-National Alliance/ <i>Fratelli d'Italia-Alleanza Nazionale</i> (Fdi-AN)	11	1.7%	2	18.2%	12	1.9%	3	25.0%
Others	53	8.4%	9	16.9%	60	9.5%	14	23.3%
Totals	630	100.0%	191	30.3%	629	100.0%	194	30.8%

Notes: ^aMDP is the group that splintered from the PD in January 2017.

^bAP is the political party formed in March 2017 after the dissolution of the AP-NCD (see Parliament report).

^cThe group CI moved to the mixed group (others) in July 2017.

Source: Camera dei Deputati (2018).

Political party report

In February 2017, after lasting tensions culminating with the disagreement on the 2016 constitutional referendum (Castelli Gattinara & Froio 2017), an important section of the former social democratic leadership of the PD left the party and formed the splinter group Article 1 – Democratic and Progressive Movement (MDP). Counting three former party secretaries (Massimo D'Alema, Pierluigi Beransi and Guglielmo Epifani), the MDP successively joined with the more radical Italian Left (SI) in the new electoral list Free and Equal/*Liberi e Uguali* (LeU). Despite a programme demanding public investment, redistribution and extension of the welfare state, the LeU featured numerous former members of centrist coalitions, belonging to the socialist party family rather than the networks of Europe's radical left. This contributed to the emergence of the left-wing competitor Power to the People!/Potere al Popolo (PaP), which successfully coalesced various sections of Italy's extra-parliamentary left based on a radical programme of radical opposition to neoliberalism and economic austerity.

Table 3. Party and gender composition of the upper house of parliament (*Senato della Repubblica*) in Italy in 2017

Party	1 January 2017				31 December 2017			
	All		Women		All		Women	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Democratic Party (PD)	113	35.3%	46	40.7%	97	30.1%	39	40.2%
Go Italy! (FI)	42	13.1%	4	9.5%	44	13.7%	5	11.4%
Five Star Movement (M5S)	35	10.9%	15	42.8%	35	10.9%	15	42.8%
Popular Area/Area Popolare-New Centre-Right (AP-NCD)	29	9.1%	4	13.8%	–	–	–	–
Popular Alternative (AP) ^a	–	–	–	–	24	7.5%	5	20.8%
For Autonomies/ <i>Per le Autonomie</i> (SVP-UV-PATT-UPT-PSI-MAIE)	19	5.9%	2	10.2%	18	5.6%	2	11.1%
Article 1-Democratic Progressive Movement (MDP)	–	–	–	–	16	5.0%	5	31.2%
Civic Choice-Liberal Popular Alliance – Autonomies/Alleanza Liberalpopolare – Autonomie (SC-ALA) ^c	18	5.6%	2	11.1%	13	4.1%	3	23.1%
Great Autonomies and Freedom/ <i>Grandi Autonomie e Libertà</i> (GAL)	14	4.4%	3	21.4%	14	4.4%	3	21.4%
Northern League (LN)	12	3.8%	2	16.7%	11	3.4%	2	18.2%
Us with Italy/ <i>Noi con l'Italia</i> (NcI) ^d	–	–	–	–	11	3.4%	3	27.3%
Federation of Freedoms/ <i>Federazione delle Libertà</i> (PLI) ^b	–	–	–	–	10	3.1%	2	20.0%
Conservative Reformists/ <i>Conservatori e Riformisti</i> (CR)	10	3.1%	1	10.0%	–	–	–	–
Others	28	8.7%	12	42.9%	27	8.4%	7	25.9%
Totals	320	100.0%	91	28.4%	320	100.0%	91	28.4%

Notes: ^aThe AP is the political party formed in March 2017 after the dissolution of the AP-NCD (see Parliament report).

^bThe PLI was formed in May 2017 from former members of the NCD and the mixed group.

^cAs the SC joined the centre-right in November 2017, the group changed its name to the Liberal-Popular Alliance – Autonomies (ALA).

^dThe NcI was formed in December 2017 by a group of AP splinters.

Source: Senato della Repubblica (2018).

In the political centre, the Christian-democratic party New Centre-Right (NCD), led by Minister of Foreign Affairs Angelino Alfano, was dissolved into Popular Alternative (AP) in March 2017. Since its early days, the AP was torn into factions disagreeing on coalition choices for the 2018 elections, which eventually led to the dismantlement of the project. In December 2017, a group of AP members among which former coordinator Maurizio Lupi and former minister Enrico Costa formed the electoral list Us With Italy/Noi con l'Italia (NCI) supporting Silvio Berlusconi and the centre-right coalition. Contrary to this, the remaining AP formed the Popular Civic List/Civica Popolare (CP), under the leadership of Minister Beatrice Lorenzin, and in support of the centre-left coalition of Renzi.

Most other major parties in the system confirmed their leadership. The secretary of the PD, Renzi, resigned his position in February 2017, but was confirmed party leader at the

Table 4. Changes in political parties in Italy in 2017

A. Party institutional changes in 2017
<p>The Article 1-Democratic Progressive Movement/Articolo1 – <i>Movimento Democratico e Progressista</i> (MDP) was formed in February 2017 by a left-wing split from the Democratic Party (PD). Counting three former party secretaries among its members (Massimo D'Alema, Pierluigi Beransi and Guglielmo Epifani), the MDP successively joined with the more radical Italian Left (SI) in the new electoral list Free and Equal/<i>Liberi e Uguali</i> (LeU).</p> <p>New Centre-Right/<i>Nuovo Centro Destra</i> (NCD) ceased to exist in March 2017 as it transformed into the newly founded party Popular Alternative (AP), under the leadership of Angelino Alfano (1970, male). In December 2017, a group of AP members among which former coordinator Maurizio Lupi (1959, male) and former minister Enrico Costa (1969, male) quit the party to form the electoral list Us With Italy/<i>Noi con l'Italia</i> (NCI) supporting the centre-right coalition. The remaining AP formed Popular Civic List/<i>Civica Popolare</i> (CP), under the leadership of Minister Beatrice Lorenzin (1971, female), and in support of the centre-left coalition.</p>
B. Party leadership changes in 2017
<p>PD Secretary, Matteo Renzi (1975, male, PD), resigned as Secretary of the party, announcing his candidacy for the next leadership election on 19 February 2017; temporarily replaced by Matteo Orfini (1974, male, PD), Renzi was re-elected secretary of the PD on 30 April 2017.</p> <p>Five Star Movement (M5S) Political Head, Beppe Grillo (1948, male, M5S), was replaced by Luigi Di Maio (1986, male, M5S), who won the online primary elections on 23 September 2017 and became political head and prime ministerial candidate for M5S.</p>

open primary elections in April. On the centre-right, next to the uncontested leadership of Berlusconi over his personal party FI, Matteo Salvini was confirmed federal secretary of the LN in the leadership elections in May 2017, and Giorgia Meloni was re-elected president of the FdI in December. Finally, Luigi DiMaio won the online primary elections of the M5S, becoming the party's political head for the upcoming 2018 elections.

Institutional change report

The main institutional change in 2017 concerned Italy's electoral system. The Italian parliament had to approve a new law in response to a ruling by the Constitutional Court in January 2017 which radically changed the system that had been approved in 2015 under the initiative of Prime Minister Renzi, de facto leaving Italy with two different proportional electoral systems for the two chambers. The Rosato law – or Rosatellum – provides for a mixed electoral system aiming at ensuring governability. Specifically, about two-thirds of the total seats (398 in the Chamber of Deputies and 199 in Senate) are allocated through a proportional system using a party-list approach, whereas the remaining seats (232 and 116 respectively) go to the winners of single-member districts, according to a plurality rule. While party lists must respect gender parity (60 per cent), the law does not allow for split-ticket votes, meaning that voters must choose a party list and a candidate supported by that same list. To obtain a share of the seats through proportional representation, individual parties need to win 3 per cent and coalitions 10 per cent of the national vote. The law was approved by large majority, but it was criticized by M5S for disadvantaging parties that refuse to join alliances as it encourages pre-electoral coalition formation.

Issues in national politics

Government action focused on a wide array of issues, albeit not always successfully. Perhaps the most sensitive and conflicting area of intervention concerned migration. On the one hand, the government failed to find parliamentary support to pass the so-called ‘ius-soli’ bill, which would reform Italy’s citizenship laws and create an earlier path to citizenship for children of foreign parents who were born and schooled in the country. On the other, it successfully passed – thanks to a confidence vote – a new immigration law, under the initiative of the Minister of Internal Affairs and Minister of Justice (the so-called Minniti–Orlando decree), which set out to simplify asylum procedures and curtail illegal immigration by means of bilateral agreements and an expanded network of administrative detention. Following vocal public campaigns by anti-immigration organizations insinuating that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in rescue operations in the Mediterranean act in cooperation with human smugglers, government action targeted NGOs, threatening to shut its ports to those that failed to sign up to a controversial code of conduct implying, among other things, that the Italian army would be allowed to accompany their rescue missions. The new law was, however, harshly criticized for severely limiting the right to asylum and the protection of fundamental rights, and for reifying the idea that migration to Italy is a matter of emergency requiring state repression (Castelli Gattinara 2017).

In the second half of the year, heated debates emerged in relation to the choice of the Italian government to make 12 vaccines mandatory for children attending school. While the bill faced strong opposition by anti-vaccination advocates, it also confirmed the government’s effort to combat spreading misinformation and scepticism about vaccination in the country. Furthermore, in December the government successfully passed a law on living wills and the refusal of end-of-life care, which had been languishing in the Italian parliament for several years. The new law allows adults to write living wills and refuse medical treatment, artificial nutrition and hydration, deciding, in agreement with their doctors, their end-of-life medical care.

Other issues that characterized Italy’s national politics throughout 2017 include public controversy (and a parliamentary investigation) over a banking scandal that would involve members of the ruling PD, the massive protests for women’s rights in the framework of the Non Una di Meno (Me Too) campaign, as well as public debates concerning increasing neo-fascist mobilization in the country.

Sources

- Camera dei Deputati (2018). *Gruppi Parlamentari*. Available at: <http://www.camera.it/leg17/46>, last accessed 7 January 2018.
- Castelli Gattinara, P. (2017). The refugee crisis as a crisis of legitimacy. *Contemporary Italian Politics* 9(3): 318–331.
- Castelli Gattinara, P., & Froio, C. (2017). Italy. *European Journal of Political Research Political Data Yearbook* 56(1): 151–158.
- Governo Italiano (2018). *Ministri e Sottosegretari del governo Gentiloni*. Available at: <http://www.governo.it/ministri-e-sottosegretari>, last accessed 7 January 2018.
- Senato della Repubblica (2018). *Variazione nella Composizione dei Gruppi del Senato nella XVII Legislatura*. Available online at: <http://www.senato.it/Leg17/4244>, last accessed 8 January 2018.