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Right-wing victory in the 2022 italian parliamentary election: territorial patterns and systemic implications

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Abstract. The snap election held in September 2022 saw the victory of the right-wing coalition, with a remarkable performance of the populist radical right party Fratelli d'Italia and its leader, Giorgia Meloni, who has become the first female Prime Minister of the country. Another unprecedented element concerns participation, which was the lowest in post-war Italy for a national election. Throughout this article, we first shed light on the background of this election, by highlighting how the specificities of the electoral system and previous developments during the last legislature affected the alliances among of political parties. We then proceed to the illustration of the results, with a territorial analysis of participation figures, vote share and competitiveness of electoral constituencies. Finally, we assess the implications of this election for the institutionalization of the party system. What emerges is a picture of growing abstention, disproportionality, fragmentation and electoral volatility, which suggests an overall consolidation of instability.

Keywords: general elections, Italian politics, Fratelli d'Italia, voting patterns

1. INTRODUCTION

The 2022 Italian election was called before the natural end of a turbulent legislative term, during which the country witnessed the alternation of three different cabinets. Despite the rushed electoral campaign conducted over the summer, the dilemma of which alliances should be formed and the uncertainty about the effects of the electoral system after the significant reduction in the number of MPs, the results confirmed the prediction of the polls. The right-wing coalition[1] prevailed, bolstered in particular by the impressive result of the populist radical right party Fratelli d'Italia (FdI, *Brothers of Italy*) – whose leader, Giorgia Meloni, swore in as the head of a new government one month after the election.

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[1] We will refer to this coalition as "right-wing" rather than "centre-right", given that in 2022 the weight of the right-wing parties – Fratelli d'Italia (*Brothers of Italy*) and Lega (*League*) – made the former label much more suitable than the latter (see also Chiaramonte *et al.*, 2023).

Throughout this article, our goal is to gain a deeper understanding of the territorial variations in electoral outcomes and to evaluate the impact of this election on the Italian party system. The first section is devoted to describing the political context in which the election took place and in particular the coordination of parties in response to the incentives of the electoral system. In the second section, we illustrate the results by party and electoral coalition. We provide both national and provincial data on abstention, which reached its highest level in post-war Italy for general elections. Subsequently, we analyse the overall results and the spatial voting patterns, focusing on larger geographical areas, as well as electoral districts and municipalities.

The third and last section aims at assessing to what extent the election results have affected the overall party system dynamics. Employing four key indicators of party system institutionalization (Casal Bértoa & Enyedi, 2021; Casal Bértoa, 2023), we detect higher levels of volatility, fragmentation and disproportionality, among others. These elements contribute to a picture of consolidated instability, marked by a large share of the electorate deeply disaffected and prone to vote switching. In the conclusion, we summarise the main implications of the election for the country.

2. THE CONTEXT OF THE ELECTION

2.1 A Parliament in turmoil

The XVIII legislative term of the Italian Parliament (2018-2022) mirrored the deinstitutionalization of the country's party system (Chiaramonte & Emanuele, 2014; Chiaramonte et al., 2018). Born in the context of a hung parliament, it has seen the takeover of three cabinets with (very) different ideological mix-ups, an unprecedented event in the so-called Second Republic.[2] After the 2018 election, the Parliament was fractured among the centre-right coalition, with just over 40% of seats; the Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S, *Five Star Movement*), by far the largest party with roughly one-third of MPs; and the rest belonging to the centre-left, which ran the election separately with a coalition led by the Partito Democratico (PD, *Democratic Party*) and another list which

aggregated some leftist parties, Liberi e Uguali (LeU, *Free and Equal*). Several months of negotiations followed, leading in June 2018 to the formation of the first full-fledged populist government in a major country of Western Europe (Garzia, 2019), composed of the M5S and Matteo Salvini's Lega (*League*). The cabinet was led by a figure chosen outside the Parliament, the academic Giuseppe Conte, an independent widely considered close to the M5S.

The government fell already in August 2019. After the European election, which saw a clear success of the Lega and the electoral collapse of the M5S (Chiaramonte et al., 2020), Salvini tried to exploit his popularity by calling for a snap election. Within a few weeks, however, the M5S and the PD reached an agreement for a new government and in September the second Conte cabinet was born. This move involved a crucial role for the former PM Matteo Renzi, who earlier that month had left the PD to form his own party, Italia Viva (IV, *Italy Alive*). Only a few months later, the second Conte cabinet was confronted with the Covid-19 emergency, responding with several containment measures. After an initial phase in which also opposition parties exhibited relative unity in the response to the emergency (Albertazzi et al., 2021), the right-wing parties – Fratelli d'Italia and Lega in particular – became vocally critical of the government on the most important issues related to the management of the pandemic, such as the closure of the economic activities, or mask and vaccine mandates.

Tensions erupted quickly also among government parties, in particular between Italia Viva and the rest of the coalition. Already in the late Spring of 2020, Renzi's party criticised the government for the management of the economic consequences of the pandemic. Italia Viva then pushed the government to accept the special funds coming from the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), a proposal to which the M5S was opposed (Cavatorto et al., 2021). The rift between Renzi and the other governing coalition partners became irremediable on another issue related to the EU. Conte had been able to claim a personal victory from the success of the negotiation that led to the adoption of Next Generation EU, but the overall governance behind the draft of the country's National Recovery and Resilience Plan paved the way for the government crisis. Renzi's party withdrew its support in January 2021; lacking a viable majority in both houses, the cabinet resigned. To overcome the crisis, several leaders and commentators had voiced their support for a government led by Mario Draghi already in 2020. The former president of the European Central Bank had never held an electoral mandate before, but at the time he was widely considered the front-runner

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[2] Although it had happened that three or more cabinets alternated in power during the same legislative term, this was the first time that the parliamentary majorities presented different ideological mix-ups. In the 1996-2001 legislature, for instance, the four governments were basically an expression of the then centre-left coalition – with important changes between the first and the following three cabinets – while in the 2013-2018 legislative term the three cabinets were all led by the Partito Democratico in alliance with centre-right parties.

for the (parliamentary) election of the President of the Republic in 2022. Draghi accepted the task to lead a new cabinet, which took the form of a national unity government supported by all major parties except Fratelli d'Italia.

During his term, Draghi had a hard time holding together such a heterogeneous governing coalition. In particular, during 2022 the cabinet faced pressures on two fronts. On the one hand, although the M5S succeeded to deliver several of its policy proposals during the legislature, it was expected to face large severe electoral losses. The risk of becoming irrelevant prompted Conte, as the new head of the M5S, to progressively re-position the party profile as much more progressive compared to 2018 (Carteny & Puleo, 2022). On the other hand, Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia (FI, *Go Italy*) and the Lega began to distance themselves from the government on several key issues, suffering the electoral pressure of FdI's steady growth in the polls. The government thus resigned in July after a confidence vote in the Senate, where it obtained the support only of a relative majority, given the abstention of the senators of the M5S and the absence of those belonging to Forza Italia and Lega. Given the impossibility of forming a cabinet until the end of the legislature, an early election was called on September 25.

2.2 Rules of the game and strategic coordination

For the second time, Italians voted with the mixed system introduced in 2017 (Chiaramonte & D'Alimonte, 2018). Two constitutional reforms, however, changed the rules of the game starting from this election, even though they were not directed to the electoral law *per se*. First, the voting age for the two chambers was unified at 18 years; previously, it was set at 25 for the Senate. Second, and perhaps most importantly, the number of MPs was reduced from 630 to 400 in the Chamber of Deputies and from 315 to 200 in the Senate. This reform, strongly supported by the Movimento 5 Stelle and confirmed by a national referendum in 2020, drastically changed the constituencies of the election.

Leaving aside some technicalities, the electoral system is rather similar between the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. Apart from the seats for Italians living abroad (2% of the total), roughly 37% of seats in both chambers are allocated through single-member constituencies (SMCs, first-past-the-post system) and 61% are distributed proportionally to party lists in multi-member constituencies (MMCs). Each candidate in the SMCs must be associated with a list competing in MMCs and different lists may form an electoral coalition to support common candidates in the SMCs (in such eventuality,

candidates' votes in SMCs will be associated with the whole coalition).[3] Split voting is not allowed, i.e. it is not possible to vote for a given candidate in the SMC and a list in the MMC different from those supporting such candidate. Seats in MMCs are allocated starting from the national level for the lower Chamber and region wide for the Senate. The representation threshold for lists is 3% at the national level – 10% for coalitions – or 20% at the regional level (only for the Senate or for lists representing linguistic minorities). Thus, while the system is mainly proportional and the electoral threshold is rather attainable for small- and medium-sized actors, it does provide clear incentives for coordination of parties in the form of pre-electoral alliances to compete with common candidates in SMCs, where victory is fundamental to achieve a governing majority. However, like in 2018 (De Lucia & Paparo, 2019; Chiaramonte *et al.*, 2019), parties reacted very differently to such incentives.

On the Right, it was possible to find an agreement for a coalition that mirrored the one presented in 2018, based on three main pillars – Forza Italia, Lega and Fratelli d'Italia – plus a residual centrist list, Noi Moderati (*We the Moderates*). Even though the members of this coalition had never collectively supported any of the three cabinets of the legislature, they had come closer together in the previous months. As in 2018, one of the main uncertainties concerned who was actually in charge of it. In 2018, Salvini and Berlusconi fought for the supremacy of this area, with FdI in a much less competitive position. The Lega was ultimately able to get more votes than Forza Italia – the first time Berlusconi was ousted as the main actor of the centre-right. In the latest electoral campaign, it was clear which party would have won the most votes: the impressive rise of Fratelli d'Italia in the polls in the two years before the election, and the simultaneous decline of the Lega (Crulli, 2022: 7-10), made Giorgia Meloni the undisputed front-runner of the election. However, it was no secret that Salvini and Berlusconi would have probably joined their forces to question her leadership of a future government, had the sum of the votes of their parties exceeded those for FdI.

The main opponents of the right-wing coalition had an electoral strength that made them – in theory – competitive in the election, but they failed to overcome their disagreements. Ideological divisions and personal rivalries played different roles in such an outcome, but we can iden-

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[3] If a voter choose only a list in the MMC, her/his vote is automatically translated to the corresponding candidate supported by the list in the SMC. Voters can also simply just vote for a candidate in their SMC: in this case, the vote is transferred to the corresponding list in the MMC or, in case of a coalition, distributed proportionally among the various lists, based on their vote shares in that SMC.

tify the main cleavage in their different attitudes toward the Draghi cabinet. The pivotal actor of this front was the Partito Democratico. After the poor results obtained in 2018, the party changed three leaders during the legislature and was led in the electoral campaign by Enrico Letta, a former PM who tried to combine a firm loyalty to Draghi with an open dialogue with all parties opposing the right-wing coalition. Unlike in 2018, the M5S was available for a pre-election alliance with the centre-left, already tested – with mixed results – in some local elections. However, the fall of the Draghi cabinet created an unsolvable rift with Letta, widely perceived as the main supporter of the continuation of the Draghi government.

Besides the impossibility of running with the M5S, the PD faced other difficulties in building its coalition. On its right, there was a liberal-centrist area with clear technocratic veins. The three actors of this turf shared similar ideological stances, profound distances from the right-wing coalition, and complete loyalty to Draghi, but they had different relationships with the PD. The party most inclined to coalesce with Letta was +Europa (*More Europe*), led by former EU commissioner Emma Bonino, while Matteo Renzi's Italia Viva had much more tense relations with the PD. This was due to both the personal strife between the party leaders and Renzi's constant tactical manoeuvres over the years. Finally, the main player in this area was considered to be Azione (*Action*), a party founded in 2019 by MEP Carlo Calenda, a former minister in Renzi's cabinet. While Calenda was elected in the 2019 European election within the PD list, he took an increasingly autonomous position that received a fairly positive response in opinion polls. To consolidate his position, he harboured several former key members of Forza Italia who opposed the party's anti-Draghi turn, a choice that caused discontent in the other centre-left parties.

At the beginning of August, the Partito Democratico signed two separate deals – rather than a comprehensive coalition agreement – to form a pre-electoral alliance with both +Europa and Azione, on the one hand, and a left-wing list composed of Sinistra Italiana (*Italian Left*) and Europa Verde (*Green Europe*), called Alleanza Verdi Sinistra (AVS, *Green-Left Alliance*), on the other. Calenda, however, backtracked on the agreement, considering it impossible for his party to run together with political forces that opposed Draghi, and formed a unitary list with Italia Viva. The PD thus gathered a small coalition, which lacked competitiveness in the SMCs, composed of PD,[4] +Europa, AVS and Impegno Civico-

Centro Democratico (*Civic Commitment-Democratic Centre*), a negligible list led by the former M5S leader and Foreign Affairs Minister Luigi Di Maio, who left the party with some loyal MPs to keep supporting the Draghi government.

In such a scenario, the electoral campaign was not so much about *who* would win the election, but rather *how large* the parliamentary majority of the right-wing coalition would be. On the opposite front, the three blocks instead sought to lose *as little as possible*, in order to maintain the party leadership (Letta), keep the party electorally alive (Conte), or be decisive in the event of future realignments (Calenda and Renzi).

3. A LARGE VICTORY IN A DISAFFECTED COUNTRY

3.1 Participation and abstention: the sub-national and territorial level

Participation in this end-of-summer snap election was at a record low (Figure 1). National turnout reached 63.9%, which is not only the lowest in the post-war history of the country but also corresponds to the largest drop in participation between consecutive elections (Garzia, 2022), with a decrease of around 9 percentage points. In addition to participation, a further element worth analysing is the combination of blank and invalid votes. As reported in Figure 2, the share of blank and invalid ballots in the 2022 election was 1.1% and 1.7% of the whole electorate, respectively. This corresponds to a non-negligible increase compared to 2018 and can be connected to growing sentiments of disaffection among Italian voters (Chiaramonte, 2023). To sum up these data, just 61% of eligible voters cast a valid ballot in the election.

Figure 3 explores the evolution of the turnout in the general elections of the so-called Second Republic, according to geo-political macro-areas.[5] It was obtained through a ratio between the turnout in each area and the national score. As in the past, for instance, the South performed worse than the other areas, where we find results either in line with the national level (Centre-South) or higher than that (former Red Zone and North-

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[4] The lists of the PD included also candidates from Articolo 1-Movimento Democratico e Progressista (*Article 1-Democratic and Progressive Movement*), a party that in 2018 led the Liberi e Uguali list.

[5] More than geographical divisions, such areas refer to different territorial political subcultures (Diamanti, 2010; Trigilia, 1981). While there is not a univocal way to identify such areas (for recent examples in literature see Vegetti *et al.*, 2013; Vassallo and Shin, 2019; Chiaramonte *et al.*, 2023; Improta *et al.*, 2022), we have decided to group them as follows: North-West (Aosta Valley, Liguria, Lombardy and Piedmont); North-East (Friuli-Venezia Giulia; Trentino-Alto Adige/South Tyrol, Veneto); former Red Zone (Emilia-Romagna, Marche, Tuscany and Umbria); Centre-South (Abruzzo, Latium, Molise); South (Apulia, Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Sardinia and Sicily).
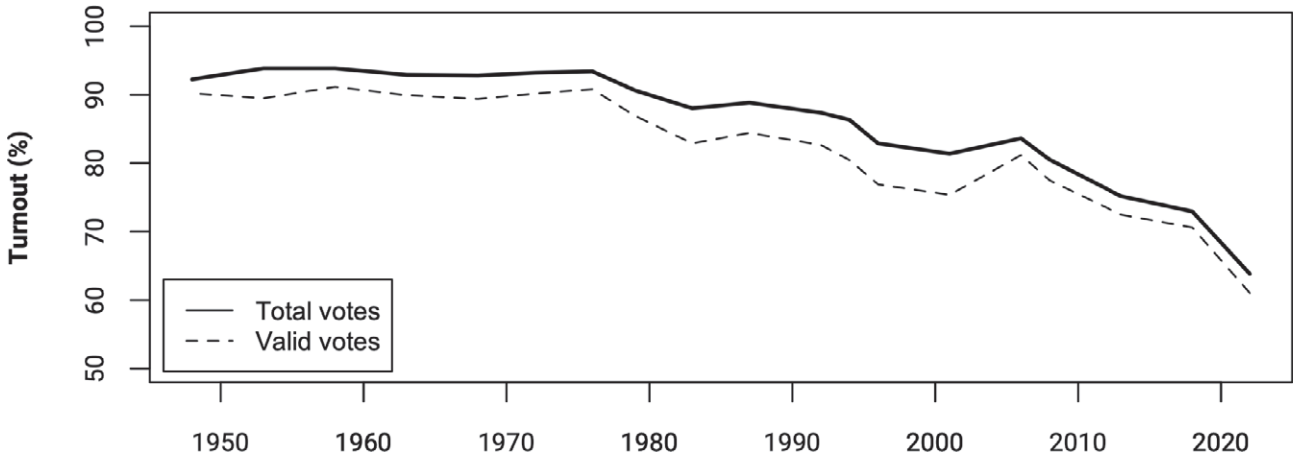
Figure 1. General turnout and valid ballots in Italian elections since 1948 (% of the electorate; Chamber of Deputies). Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior data. Abroad constituency not included.

Figure 2. Blank and invalid ballots in Italian elections since 1948 (% of the electorate; Chamber of Deputies). Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior data. Abroad constituency not included.
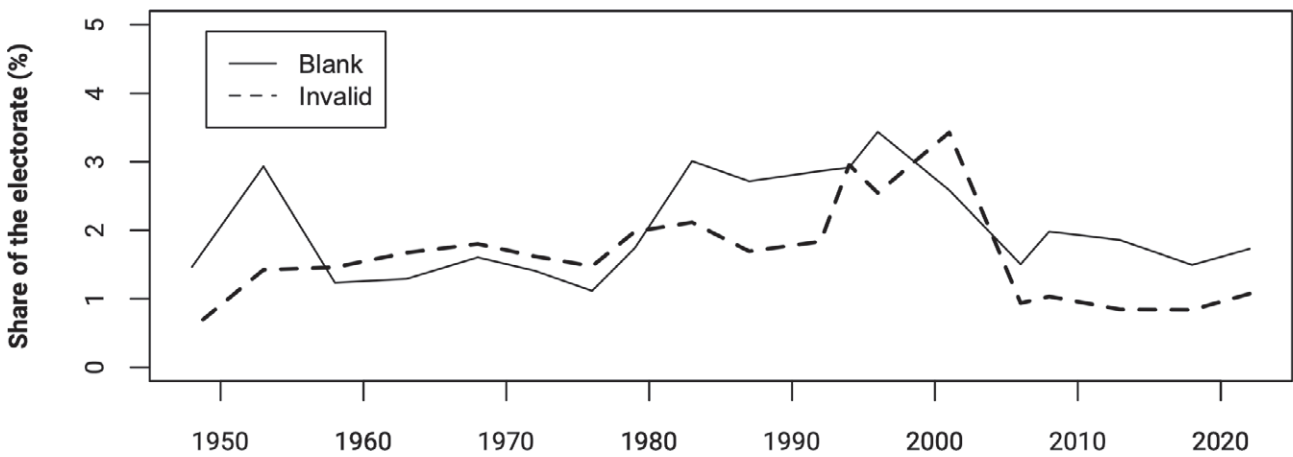
ern regions). Moreover, in 2022 this gap was accentuated compared to the past.

This pattern is evident from the map on the left side of Figure 4, showing participation rates in the 2022 election, at the provincial level. This helps us provide an even more fine-grained analysis compared to research looking at macro-areas. We notice that turnout was overall higher in the North, especially in Emilia Romagna (around 71%), followed by Lombardy, Veneto and Tuscany, slightly below 70%. Conversely, the South witnessed markedly lower participation, especially in Calabria and Sardinia, two regions where the turnout was just over 50% of votes. This trend is shown also in the map in the right panel of Figure 4, where the results of 2022 are compared to those of 2018. We can see severe drops in participation in most of the South. An exception is Sicily, where the national election was

paired with the regional one, thus encouraging higher turnout rates (or at least, lower losses compared to previous elections).

3.2 The results

As long announced by the polls (see Garzia, 2022), the clear winner of the election was the right-wing coalition and in particular Giorgia Meloni, whose party Fratelli d'Italia gained almost 26% of the votes – with an impressive increase of over 21 percentage points compared to 2018. Looking within the right-wing coalition, the excellent performance of FdI somehow compensated the disappointing results of Forza Italia, scoring 8.1% (it had won 13.9% in 2018), and Lega, dropping to only 8.8% from 17.3% of four years earlier. The fourth coalition partner, Noi Moderati, only got 0.9% of the votes.
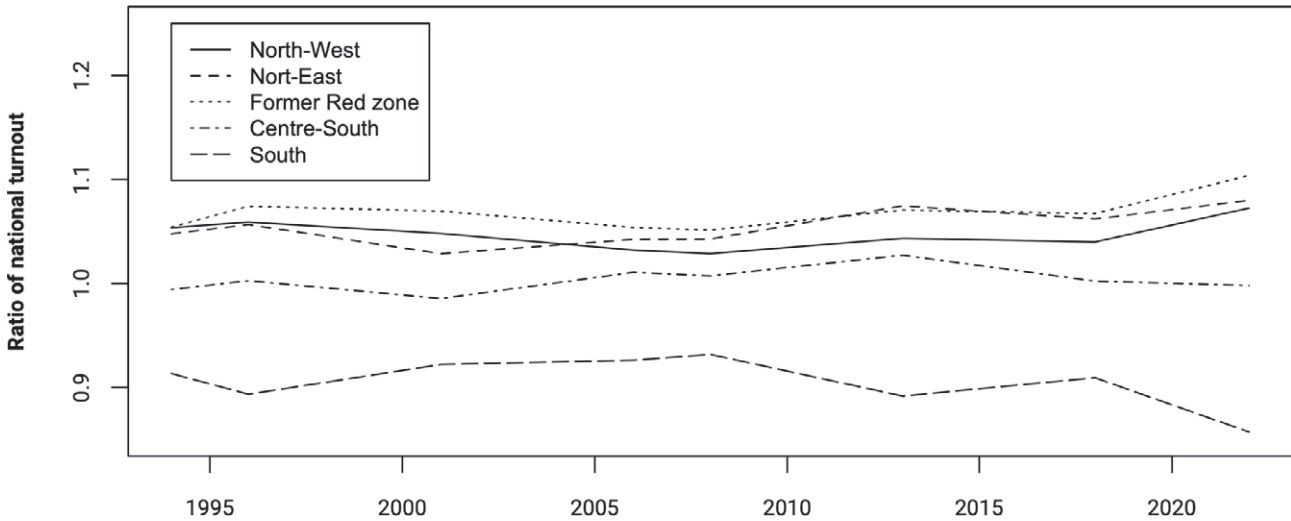
Figure 3. Ratios between macro-areas and national turnout (Chamber of Deputies). Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior data. Abroad constituencies not included.

The centre-left coalition gathered 26.1% of the votes overall, with a slight increase in its share from 2018.[6] The Partito Democratico obtained 19%, a slight increase in the vote share compared to 2018 but not enough to avoid a personal defeat for Letta. Among its coalition partners, AVS won 3.6% of votes, while +Europa and Impegno Civico failed to reach the 3% threshold. The Movimento 5 Stelle came in third place with 15.4% of the votes, a sharp drop compared to the 32.7% of 2018, but enough to keep the party relevant in the political landscape. Finally, the new centrist list consisting of Azione and Italia Viva (A-IV, the so-called Terzo Polo, *Third Pole*) gained 7.8% of the votes.

The vote share of 43.8% obtained by the right-wing coalition earned them a clear majority of seats, 237 in the Chamber of Deputies and 115 in the Senate. Among the remaining seats, around 21% were distributed in each house to the centre-left coalition, 13-14% to the M5S and around 5% to Azione Italia-Viva, plus a handful of SMCs won by the Südtiroler Volkspartei (SVP, *South Tyrolean People's Party*), lists representing Italians abroad, and other regionalist parties.

The overall performance of the right-wing coalition in the single-member constituencies was remarkable: it won more than 82% of the SMCs for the lower Chamber and just under 80% for the Senate. Despite a difference of more than 10% of votes, the centre-left and the M5S won a similar number of SMCs for the Chamber of Deputies

– 12 vs. 10 – and the Senate – 6 vs. 5. Finally, Azione-Italia Viva did not win any SMC, but only seats in the proportional part. Table 1 summarises these results for the Chamber of Deputies (above) and the Senate (below).

Figure 5 shows the percentage of seats obtained by the winning pre-electoral alliance[7] since the election of 1994, starting year of the so-called Second Republic, when the creation of pre-election alliances became a constant trait of the Italian political landscape. We can see that for the first time since 2008 a pre-electoral coalition obtained the absolute majority in both Chambers. Moreover, the share of seats of the right-wing coalition in 2022 is the highest obtained by a pre-electoral alliance in both chambers. Interestingly, the number of seats obtained by the right-wing coalition is quite similar between the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, an event that has not regularly occurred in the past.

3.3 Territorial distribution of the vote

After looking at the national results, we can examine the territorial differences in party performances. In Figure 6 we have a measure of the nationalisation of the vote for the main parties in this election. We selected the parties within the main coalitions that got at least

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[6] It must be noted that in 2022 the coalition was different compared to 2018, since four years earlier the centre-left did not include some leftist parties that run with the list Liberi e Uguali. At the same time, in 2018 it was led by Matteo Renzi, a rival of the centre-left coalition in 2022.

[7] The data for the first two elections consider the total seats won by the centre-right (1994) and the centre-left (1996). Although these coalitions did not run those elections under the same pre-electoral alliance, but rather with different formulas, we have grouped them since the presentation of candidatures in the SMCs was generally agreed among the parties composing each coalition.
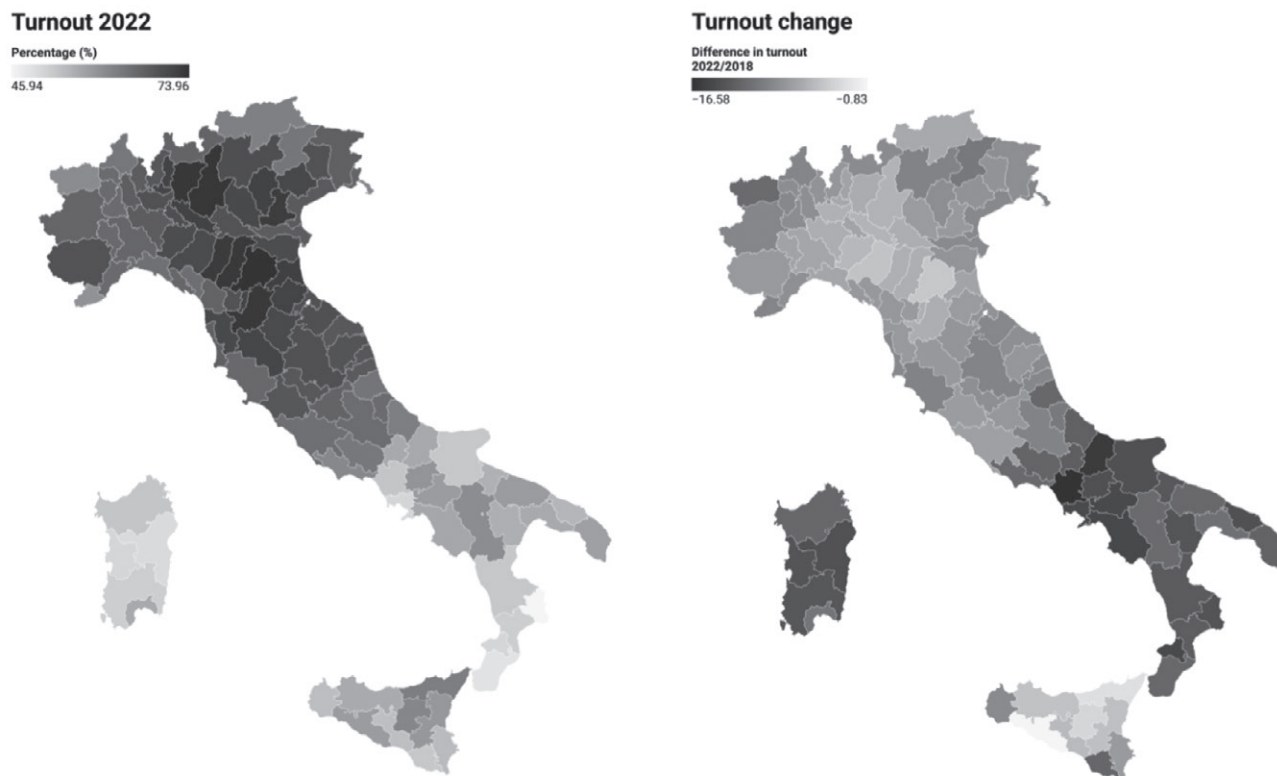
Turnout 2022

Percentage (%)

45.94   73.96

Turnout change

Difference in turnout
2022/2018

-16.58   -0.83

Figure 4. Turnout in 2022 (left) and difference between 2022 and 2018 turnout (right) (Chamber of Deputies). Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior data.

1% of the votes, plus M5S and A-IV. We present the results for the Party Nationalization Score (standard-ised and weighted - PNS$_{sw}$), a measure introduced by Bochsler (2010) based on the Gini coefficient of parties' vote shares at the sub-national level. It could theoretical-ly range from 0 (complete absence of nationalisation) to 1 (party vote perfectly nationalised).[8]

Two parties stand out immediately. First, Fratelli d'Italia was the most nationalised party in the election. This finding puts FdI rather in continuity with its 2018 results, but represents a shift from its political tradition – especially compared to former parties with which FdI has deep historical ties (Puleo & Piccolino, 2022), namely Movimento Sociale Italiano (*Italian Social Movement*) and Alleanza Nazionale (*National Alliance*). According to the historical data of such scores, the former was never

one of the most nationalised parties of the system, while the latter had mixed results over time (Kollman *et al.*, 2019), specifically due to their better performances in the Centre-South and South of the country (Ignazi, 1998). The Movimento 5 Stelle indeed shows a sharp decrease in its degree of nationalisation, another last step of what can be called the "Southernisation" of the party. The M5S had one of the most homogeneous distributions ever recorded for a major Italian party at its first exploit in the 2013 election, but by 2018 its distribution was already markedly concentrated in the Southern regions (Chiara-monte & Emanuele, 2018: 147).

In Table 2 we can further explore the results of each party, by single macro-area. FdI greatly increased its vote share in all macro-areas compared to 2018, in par-ticular in the Northern regions. Conversely, its allies lost votes in all macro-areas and presented a rather distinct electoral geography: FI had its best results in the South, while the Lega performed better in the North. However, the Lega lost less in the Southern regions compared to the other areas. In other words, as we have also seen in Figure 6, the party became more nationalised while los-ing votes. The winning coalition increased its vote share

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[8] We used the *circoscrizione* (*circumscription*) as unit of analysis. This level roughly corresponds to the regions – some of them are divided in more than a *circoscrizione*. They include one or more MMCs and mostly serve to distribute the seats allocated nationwide for the Chamber of Deputies. We chose them in order to ensure the highest degree of com-parability, since that level has been left unchanged with the reduction of the number of MPs.

Table 1. Electoral results, votes and seats.

List or *coalition*	Votes National constituencies N (000s)	%	Abroad N (000s)	%	Seats MMCs	SMCs	Abroad	Total	%
Chamber of Deputies									
Fratelli d'Italia	7,301	25.9	-	-	69	49	-	119	29.8
Lega	2,470	8.8	-	-	23	42	-	66	16.5
Forza Italia	2,279	8.1	-	-	22	23	-	45	11.3
Noi Moderati	254	0.9	-	-	0	7	-	7	1.8
Common lists[a]	16	0.1	283	26.1	-	0	2[a]	-	-
Total right-wing coalition	*12,321*	*43.8*	*283*	*26.1*	*114*	*121*	*2*	*237*	*59.3*
Partito Democratico	5,349	19	306	28.2	57	8	4	69	17.3
Alleanza Verdi Sinistra	1,022	3.6	53	4.9	11	1	0	12	3.0
+Europa	796	2.8	30	2.8	0	2	0	2	0.5
Impegno civico-Centro Democratico	174	0.6	12	1.1	0	1	0	1	0.3
Total centre-left coalition[b]	*7,340*	*26.1*	*401*	*36.9*	*68*	*12*	*4*	*84*	*21*
Movimento 5 Stelle[b]	4,335	15.4	93	8.6	41	10	1	52	13
Azione-Italia Viva[b]	2,186	7.8	60	5.6	21	0	0	21	5.3
Other parties	1,970	7	249	22.9	1	4	1	6	1.5
Total	28,152	100	1,086	100	245	147	8	400	100
Senate									
Fratelli d'Italia	7,169	25.5			34	32	-	66	33
Lega	2,437	8.7			13	16	-	29	14.5
Forza Italia	2,281	8.1			9	9	-	18	9
Noi Moderati	248	0.9			0	2	-	2	1
Common lists[c]	156	0.6	295	27.1	0	3[c]	0	-	-
Total right-wing coalition	*12,291*	*43.7*	*295*	*27.1*	*56*	*59*	*0*	*115*	*57.5*
Partito Democratico[d,e]	5,230	18.6	371	34	31	4	3	39	19.5
Alleanza Verdi Sinistra[d,e]	990	3.5			3	1	0	4	2
+Europa	810	2.9			0	0	-	0	0
Impegno civico	162	0.6	15	1.3	0	0	0	0	0
Common list[f]	22	0.1	-	-	0	1[f]	-	-	-
Total centre-left coalition[d,e]	*7,214*	*25.6*	*385*	*35.3*	*34*	*6*	*3*	*43*	*21.5*
Movimento 5 Stelle[e]	4,319	15.4	102	9.3	23	5	0	28	14
Azione-Italia Viva[e]	2,138	7.6	76	7	9	0	0	9	4.5
Campobase[g]	101	0.4	-	-	0	1	-	1	0.5
Other parties	2,064	7.3	231	21.2	0	3	1	4	2
Total	28,127	100	1,090	100	122	74	4	200	100

Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior; Chamber of Deputies and Senate websites.

[a] Data refers to common lists presented in the Aosta Valley and overseas constituency. The elected MPs abroad Lega (1) and Fratelli d'Italia (1) – were re-distributed to their parties in the total column of seats.

[b] It does not include data of Aosta Valley, where PD and A-IV supported a regionalist candidate and AVS and M5S were in another leftist list. The SMC was won by the candidate supported by PD and A-IV and belonging to a regionalist party.

[c] Data refers to common lists presented in Aosta Valley (1 elected MP), Trentino-Alto Adige/South Tyrol (2 elected MPs) and overseas constituencies. The elected MPs belong to Lega (2) and Noi Moderati (1) and were re-distributed to their parties in the total column of seats.

[d] It includes the votes for candidates in two SMCs of Trentino-Alto Adige/South Tyrol where PD and AVS presented competing candidates.

[e] It does not include data from Aosta Valley, where PD and A-IV supported a regionalist candidate and AVS and M5S were in another leftist list.

[f] Common list presented in one SMC of Trentino-Alto Adige/South Tyrol. The elected MP belongs to the PD and was re-distributed to its party in the total column of seats.

[g] Common list presented by centre-left and A-IV in three SMCs of Trentino-Alto Adige/South Tyrol. The seat was won by a local candidate.
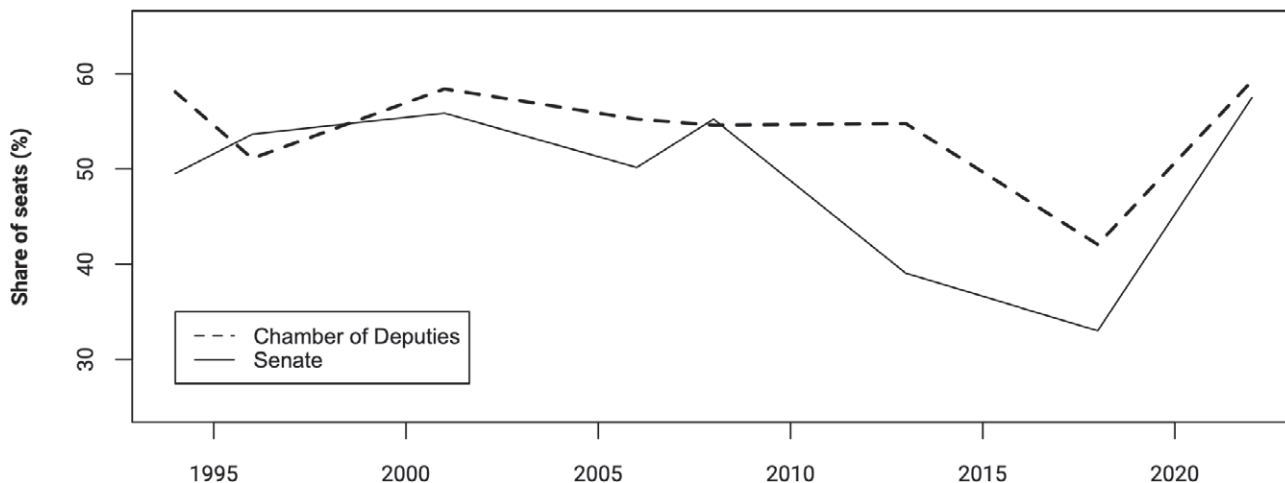
Figure 5. Percentage of seats obtained by the alliance winning most of the votes in Italian elections since 1994 (%). Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior data. Calculations for the Senate do not include senators for life.
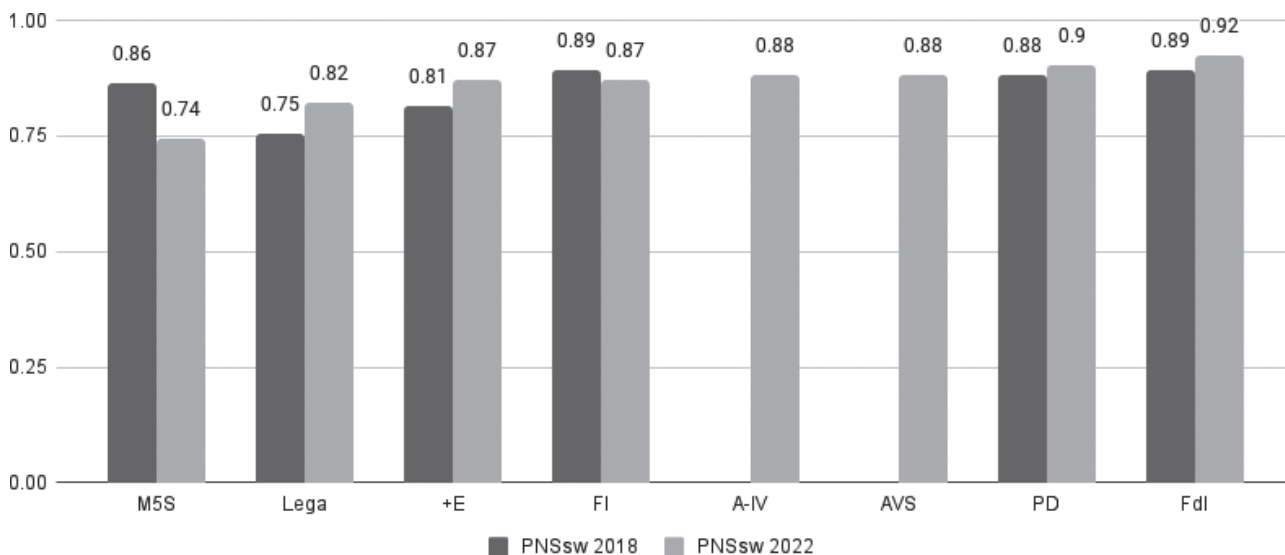

Figure 6. Party-level PNSsw in 2018 and 2022 election (Chamber of Deputies). Source: authors' elaboration of Ministry of the Interior data based on Bochsler (2010) and (Kollman *et al.*, 2019).

in all macro-areas, from a minimum gain of 4.2% in the North-West to a maximum of 10.1% in the Centre-South.

The centre-left slightly increased its vote share in each macro-area, but such gains were not enough to prevail in any of them. Significantly, the distance from the right-wing coalition has grown in every macro-area, including the former Red Zone. The electoral decline of the M5S has not affected all macro-areas in the same way: it was particularly sharp in the Northern regions, while in the South the party was able to limit the damages remaining the largest party of this area. As a result, while this area accounts for roughly 27% of total votes,

the proportion of M5S votes coming from the South reaches 52.6% (compared to 42.5% in 2018).

Fratelli d'Italia was the largest party in the majority of SMCs, 86 out of 147 (Table 3), while its allies obtained this result only in one SMC (with Forza Italia). The strength of the M5S in the South was remarkable: the party came in first place in most of the SMCs of that area. As a result, despite a lower national vote share compared to the PD, the M5S came in first place in more SMCs: 36 for the M5S, just 19 for the PD.

In Figure 7 below we present further data regarding the prevalence of Fratelli d'Italia within the right-wing

Table 2. Results of coalitions and main lists by macro-areas (Chamber of Deputies, % of valid votes).

		FdI	Lega	FI	*RWC*	PD	AVS	+E	*CLC*	M5S	A-IV
	NW	27.7	12.2	7.7	*48.5*	19.5	3.9	3.7	*27.6*	8.7	9.6
	NE	30.5	13.1	6.4	*51.7*	16.8	3.7	3.1	*23.9*	5.9	8.1
	FRZ	26.4	7.3	6	*40.2*	25.8	4.4	2.9	*33.4*	11.1	8.7
2022	CS	30.1	6.9	7.7	*45.3*	18.8	3.6	2.7	*25.7*	16	7.8
	S	20	5.2	10.9	*37*	15.1	2.8	1.9	*20.8*	29.5	5.1
	National	26	8.8	8.1	*43.8*	19	3.6	2.8	*26.1*	15.4	7.8
	NW	4.0	25.8	13.6	*44.3*	20.8	-	3.5	*25.2*	23.6	-
	NE	4.2	29.4	10.1	*44.7*	16.8	-	2.8	*20.6*	23.7	-
	FRZ	4.0	18.4	10.0	*33.0*	26.7	-	2.8	*30.6*	27.7	-
2018	CS	7.3	13.2	13.5	*35.2*	17.7	-	2.9	*21.7*	34.9	-
	S	3.7	5.7	18.6	*30.4*	13.2	-	1.3	*15.9*	46.9	-
	National	4.4	17.4	14	*37*	18.8	-	2.6	*22.9*	32.7	-

Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior data. Aosta Valley not included. RWC: right-wing coalition; CLC: centre-left coalition; NW: North-West; NE: North-East; FRZ: former Red Zone; CS: Centre-South; S: South.

Table 3. Winners and first party in SMCs (Chamber of Deputies).

	Winners by macro-area (N SMCs)					First party by macro-area (N SMCs)					
	RWC	CLC	M5S	Others	Total	FdI	PD	M5S	FI	Others	Total
North-West	33	4	0	1	38	30	7	0	0	1	38
North-East	17	0	0	2	19	17	0	0	0	2	19
Former Red Zone	20	6	0	0	26	15	11	0	0	0	26
Centre-South	16	2	0	0	18	16	1	1	0	0	18
South	35	0	10	1	46	8	0	35	1	2	46
Total	121	12	10	4	147	86	19	36	1	5	147

SMCs won by vote share (N SMCs)

	Right-wing coalition	Centre-left coalition	M5S	Others	Total
> 60%	6	0	0	0	6
50-60%	36	0	0	1	37
40-50%	48	3	5	0	56
30-40%	31	9	5	3	48
Total	121	12	10	4	147

Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior data.

coalition. Meloni's party outperformed its coalition partners combined in 134 out of 146 SMCs. However, as a demonstration of the relatively homogeneous territorial distribution of this party, it obtained more than 30% of the votes in only 37 of them, and in none did it exceed 40%. Finally, we calculated that in 59 SMCs Fratelli d'Italia outperformed not only its allies taken together, but also the centre-left coalition and the other parties. This finding is interesting because candidates belonging to FdI won *fewer* SMCs (49) in the Chamber of Deputies. Of course, we cannot infer from these data how many seats FdI would have won in the (very hypothetical) case it had run alone, but they show how much the size of the party's victory had been underestimated also during the negotiations for the joint candidatures of the right-wing coalition.[9]

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[9] It should in any case be noted that at the Senate the final distribution of seats better reflected the different strengths of right-wing parties.
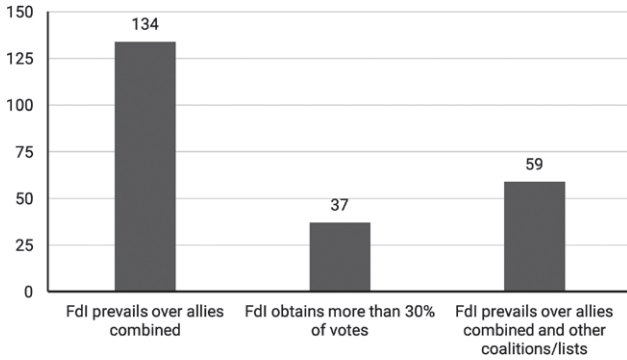
Figure 7. Assessment of FdI's strenght in SMCs (Chamber of Deputies). Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior data.

The overwhelming prevalence of the right-wing coalition across the peninsula is clearly illustrated by the map in Figure 8 below. Out of 43 SMCs won with the absolute majority of votes, 42 were won by the right-wing coalition (and one by the SVP). Out of the 12 SMCs won by the centre-left, half were in the former Red Zone and the other six came from large metropolitan areas (Genoa, Milan, Rome and Turin). Unsurprisingly, all the SMCs won by the M5S came from the South. The party obtained a particularly impressive result in the province

of Naples, where it won all the SMCs, plus a SMC each in the regions of Calabria, Apulia and Sicily. Results by MMCs (on the right) saw the right-wing coalition prevailing in all districts – and in 13 of them with more than 50% – except for the constituencies around Florence and Bologna (won by the centre-left) and Campania 1, which includes the province of Naples and it was won by the M5S. In brief, the right-wing coalition won all the SMCs in the North-East except for those in the province of Bolzano. Only the limited success of the centre-left in the large cities prevented the right-wing coalition from winning all the SMCs in the North-West and the Centre-South as well. The Former Red Zone and the South were instead more competitive.

The territorial distribution of support for the main coalitions and lists is illustrated more in detail in the maps in Figures 9 to 12, comparing their vote share in the Chamber of Deputies by SMC in 2022 and 2018. From Figure 9, we can see that the highest vote share of the right-wing coalition came from the Northern regions and the Centre-South. The lowest results were instead achieved in the largest cities and in most of the South and the former Red Zone, besides Aosta Valley and South Tyrol, where regionalist parties prevailed.[10]

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[10] It should be noted that the Aosta Valley is not a multi-member constituency, but only a single-member one.
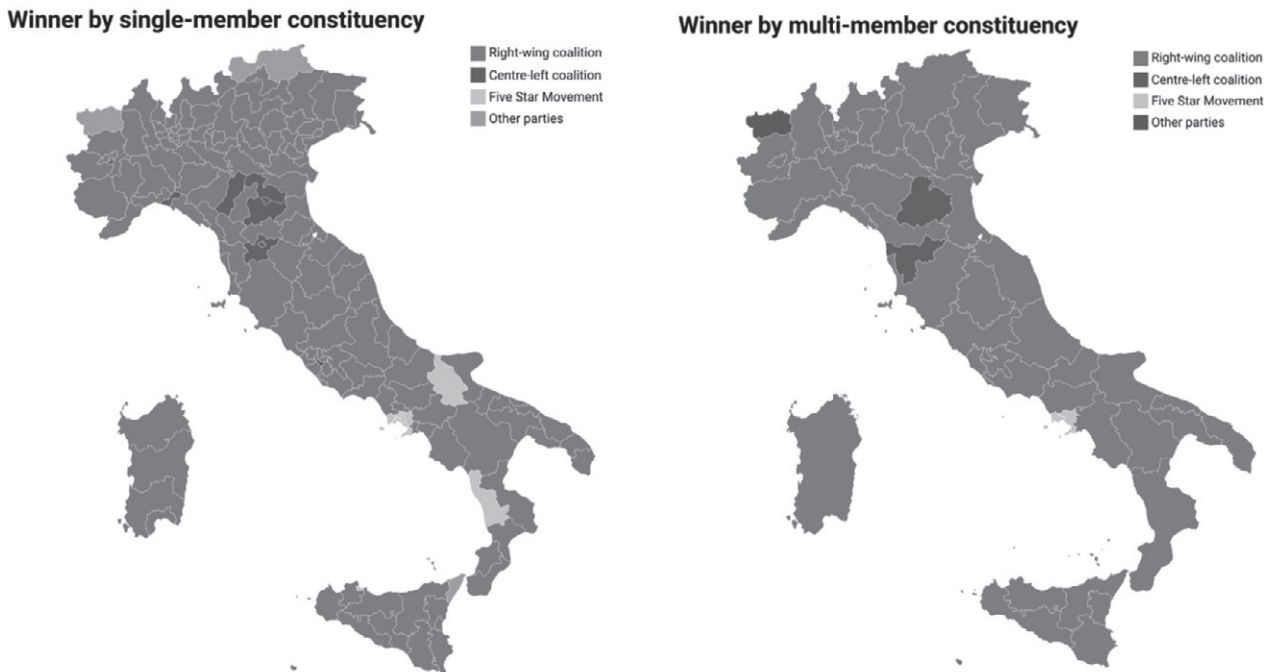

Figure 8. Winning coalition or list by SMC (left) and MMC (right) (Chamber of Deputies). Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior data.

The performance of the centre-left coalition (Figure 10) was the mirror image of the results of the Right. Indeed, it gathered most of its votes from Emilia Romagna and Tuscany and in the largest cities, and in some SMCs of these areas it won over 35% of votes. The support for the coalition was lowest in the South, where it performed even worse compared to the Northern regions. Looking at the 2018 results by SMC (on the right of Figure 10), we can see that support for the coalition was more homogeneous across the peninsula in 2018 compared to 2022 (on the left in the figure).

The highest percentages for M5S were reached in Campania, Apulia and Calabria – as is visible in Figure 11. The M5S obtained more than 20% in all Southern SMCs except one, while it reached 10% in only twelve SMCs in the North-West and none in the North-East. Moreover, the M5S got more than 40% of votes in five SMCs – a result that no other party achieved. In 2018, the M5S was instead able to win a large majority of the SMCs in the South and also some in other macro-areas (Emanuele & Vassallo, 2018).

Finally, the territorial distribution of Azione-Italia Viva (Figure 12) is quite similar to that of the centre-left coalition. Indeed, the share obtained by A-IV in the SMCs has a non-negligible positive correlation with that of the centre-left coalition (Pearson's r=0.62) and a rather high one with +Europa, a party largely similar in terms of ideological placement (Pearson's r=0.82). As we can see from Table 4, no other pair of parties enjoyed such a high level of correlation, even though there are other interesting associations, such as the positive correlation between FdI and Lega.

As an earlier analysis (Vassallo & Vegetti, 2022) showed, the sum of votes of the centre-left coalition and Azione-Italia Viva outperformed the right-wing coalition only in 14 additional SMCs. These two actors share indeed many of their areas of strength – former Red Zone and metropolitan areas. For example, out of the 17 SMCs in which Azione-Italia Viva obtained more than 10% of votes, 7 had already been won by the centre-left coalition. Moreover, the 4 SMCs where A-IV had its best results were *all* won by the centre-left coalition.

Overall, the territorial distribution of the vote for each coalition is therefore rather distinctive, with the centre-left retrenched in some parts of the former Red Zone and large urban centres and the M5S in the South – against a background of the predominance of the right-wing coalition in the large part of the country.

A further level to explore is that of municipalities, in order to assess the extent to which the urban-rural divide affected the results of the parties. For such analysis, we rely on the classification of Italian comuni (*municipalities*) made by the Agenzia per la Coesione Territoriale (*Agency for Territorial Cohesion*) in the framework of the Strategia Nazionale Aree Interne (SNAI, *National Strategy for Internal Areas*), with some modifications.[11] This classification has the advantage of not merely relying on the population size of the sub-units, but rather taking into account the presence of or distance from public services and crucial infrastructure. Accordingly, Table 5 displays the vote share obtained by the main parties by municipal category; the darker shades of grey indicate results above the national share, and the lighter ones those below.

Support for the centre-left parties and Azione-Italia Viva shows quite clearly how those actors performed better in most central municipalities. Conversely, Forza Italia and Lega performed better outside the main centres. Fratelli d'Italia shows a rather homogeneous distribution among the various categories. Meloni's party as well performed below its national share in most central municipalities, but the same applies for the most peripheral ones. Instead, its best vote shares were obtained in a "Middle Italy" of urban belt and intermediate municipalities. Finally, the M5S also has a rather homogeneous distribution.

Breaking down this analysis by macro-areas, we see (Table 6) that the centre-left parties and Azione-Italia Viva, on the one hand, and Forza Italia and Lega, on the other, tend to replicate the national trend, albeit with some exceptions. Fratelli d'Italia shows instead a more complex picture. In the North-West and the former Red Zone, its vote share tends to increase as the centrality of the municipality decreases, but the same does not apply in the other areas, where the party confirms its strength in intermediate categories. Finally, the Movimento 5 Stelle has its electoral strongholds in major cities and the urban belt of the South.

3.4 Competitiveness and Contestability

All in all, is this electoral geography stable over time? Italy's high degree of electoral volatility (Chiaramonte & Emanuele, 2013; Chiaramonte *et al.*, 2018) enables changes in voting behaviour that may shift the territorial distribution of the vote. It seems therefore appropriate to discuss the extent to which these elections were competitive – namely, how contested

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[11] For the national figure, we differentiated the cities labelled as "Pole" or "Intercommunal pole" (indicating the most central category) into three categories: largest cities (population above 500,000 inhabitants) and the remaining poles between those above/below 100,000. In the analysis by macro-area, however, we unified all poles, as in some areas their overall number was too small.

Figure 9
Right-wing coalition 2022

Vote percentage (%)

10.4   64.42

Right-wing coalition 2018

Vote percentage (%)

10.93   59.39

Figure 10
Centre-left coalition 2022
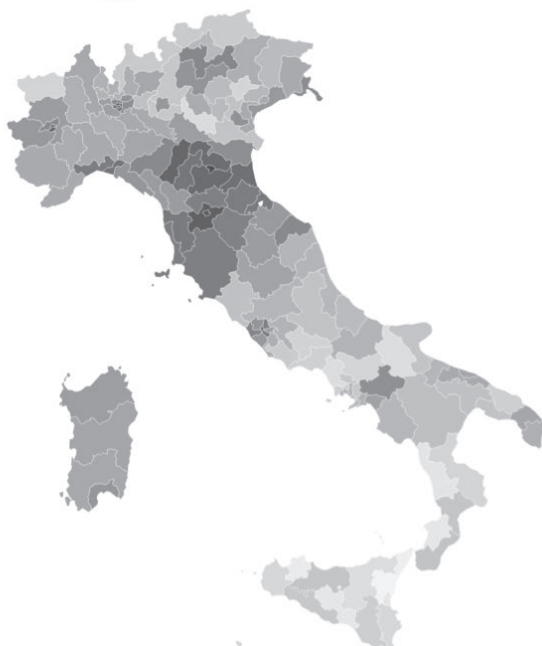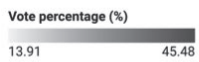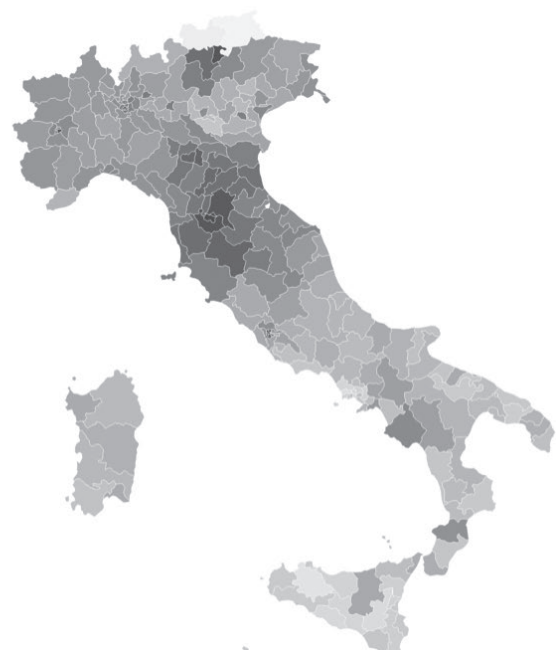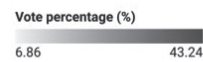
Vote percentage (%)

13.91   45.48

Centre-left coalition 2018

Vote percentage (%)

6.86   43.24

Figures 9-12. Vote share of main coalitions/parties by SMC in 2022 (left) and 2018 (right) (Chamber of Deputies). Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior data.

Figure 11
Movimento 5 Stelle 2022

Vote percentage (%)

2.18   47.2

Movimento 5 Stelle 2018

Vote percentage (%)

9.45   63.42

Figure 12
Azione-Italia Viva 2022

Vote percentage (%)

1.29   23.05

Figures 9-12. Vote share of main coalitions/parties by SMC in 2022 (left) and 2018 (right) (Chamber of Deputies). Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior data.

Table 4. Correlation matrix among vote shares obtained in SMCs.

	FdI	PD	M5S	Lega	FI	A-IV	AVS	+E
FdI	1	0.07	-0.65	0.71	-0.19	0.28	-0.13	0.2
PD	0.07	1	-0.4	-0.12	-0.57	0.54	0.61	0.57
M5S	-0.65	-0.4	1	-0.67	0.5	-0.6	-0.4	-0.59
Lega	0.71	-0.12	-0.67	1	-0.11	0.28	-0.14	0.27
FI	-0.19	-0.57	0.5	-0.11	1	-0.48	-0.7	-0.6
A-IV	0.28	0.54	-0.6	0.28	-0.48	1	0.48	0.82
AVS	-0.13	0.61	-0.4	-0.14	-0.7	0.48	1	0.65
+E	0.2	0.57	-0.59	0.27	-0.6	0.82	0.65	1

Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior data. Aosta Valley not included.

the constituencies were among coalitions. Looking at the difference in percentage points between the winning coalition and the one that came in second place, we can see how contestable each electoral district was. Figure 13 below shows a map of such gaps between the first and second coalition in every single- and multi-member constituency. The contestability (the darker shades in the map, corresponding to smaller differences) was higher in the former Red Zone and in the South, as well as in Milan, Turin and Rome. Indeed, no SMC in the former Red Zone and the South was won with an absolute majority of the votes. Overall, 47 single-member districts (and 14 MMCs) were won by a margin of 10 percentage points or less. Among them, 22 (and 6 MMCs) were highly contestable, with a distance of 5 percentage points or less.

In Table 7, we can see the distribution by macro-area of the coalition or party that came in second place in the SMCs of the lower Chamber won by the right-wing coalition. They show very clearly the specular geographical distribution of the centre-left coalition and the M5S – as suggested by our correlation matrix above,

which indicates a negative correlation between the vote for the M5S and the parties of the coalition. The centre-left coalition arrived in second place in all the SMCs won by the right-wing coalition in the Northern regions and the former Red Zone and in most of the Centre-South. In the Southern regions, the situation is radically different. Conte's party prevailed over the centre-left coalition in 24 SMCs – 34 in total, taking into account those won by the M5S – while Letta's coalition outperformed the Movimento 5 Stelle in only 10 SMCs. Finally, Azione-Italia Viva did not come in second place in any SMC, also considering those not won by the right.

4. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ITALIAN PARTY SYSTEM

Previous literature considers Italy as an outlier among other Western European countries, due to its low level of party system institutionalization. As Emanuele and Chiaramonte (2020) note, based on the high innovation and volatility in the electoral, parliamentary, and governmental arenas, the Italian system is in fact de-institutionalized. The same conclusion is also reached both by broader comparative studies on party system institutionalization (see Casal Bértoa, 2017; Chiaramonte & Emanuele, 2019) and by analyses assessing the Italian electoral results, that show overall low levels of stability and predictability of party competition, especially since 2013 (Chiaramonte & Emanuele, 2014; Chiaramonte *et al.*, 2019; Chiaramonte *et al.*, 2023). In this section, we briefly analyse four classic indicators of party system institutionalisation, placing the figures for the 2022 election in the framework of the country's overall historical trends. In the remainder of this section, we therefore discuss disproportionality, fragmentation, party system innovation and electoral volatility. All the indicators are calculated for the Chamber of Deputies.

Table 5. Vote share of major parties, by municipality type.

	Largest cities (above 500,000)	Poles above 100,000	Poles below 100,000	Urban belt	Intermediate	Peripheral	Ultra-peripheral
Fratelli d'Italia	22.5	23.2	25.4	28.2	27.1	25.6	24.4
Partito Democratico	22.6	23.3	20.3	17.4	17.2	16.3	15.6
Movimento 5 Stelle	17.7	14.8	15	14.3	16.8	17.9	14.8
Lega	5.0	6.4	8.3	10.7	9.0	8.8	9.9
Forza Italia	5.5	6.4	7.9	8.6	9.8	10.3	10.1
Azione-Italia Viva	10.3	8.9	8.3	7.1	6.0	6.1	6.4
Alleanza Verdi Sinistra	5.1	4.9	3.9	3.2	2.8	2.6	3.2
+ Europa	4.0	3.3	3.0	2.7	2.1	1.8	1.7

Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior data. Only list votes are considered. Aosta Valley not included. Dark grey: results above the national share. Light grey: results below the national share.

Table 6. Vote share of main parties across municipality types, by geo-political macro-area.

	FDI	PD	M5S	Lega	FI	A-IV	AVS	+E
North-West								
Milan	20.6	25.5	7.7	6.4	5.9	15.7	6.4	5.5
Turin	20.8	25.4	12	6.7	5.6	10.5	6.4	5.4
Genoa	19.8	26.1	14.9	7.9	5.1	8	5.4	3.7
Poles	25.9	21.6	9.1	10.5	7.4	10.6	4.2	3.9
Urban belt	29.9	17.7	8.4	13.8	8.4	8.5	3.4	3.3
Intermediate	31.7	16.8	7.6	15.2	8.5	7.6	2.9	2.8
Peripheral	35	14	5.1	18.5	8.9	7.4	2.5	2.5
Ultra-peripheral	37.3	13.2	4.1	19.5	8.8	7.4	2.1	2.4
North-East[a]								
Poles	27.1	21.4	7.1	10.1	5.8	9.9	4.9	3.9
Urban belt	33.6	15	5.6	15.2	7	7.5	3	2.8
Intermediate	29.8	13.8	5.3	13.3	6.6	6.4	3.7	2.4
Peripheral	26.8	12.7	4	11.8	5.3	5.3	4	2.3
Ultra-peripheral	16.6	9.1	2.7	7.5	2.9	3.5	5.2	2.1
Former Red Zone								
Poles	24.6	27.2	11.0	6.2	5.3	9.5	5.2	3.3
Urban belt	27.7	24.7	11.3	8.0	6.4	7.8	3.9	2.7
Intermediate	27.8	25.9	10.5	8.2	6.6	7.8	3.5	2.5
Peripheral	30.3	23.5	10.3	8.8	6.8	7.4	3.3	2.3
Ultra-peripheral	35.5	19.4	8.2	9.8	8.0	6.8	3.2	1.9
Centre-South								
Rome	28.6	23.2	13.9	4.3	4.5	10.4	4.9	3.9
Poles	30.2	16.8	16.6	8.3	9.2	6.8	3.2	2.4
Urban belt	32.7	15.3	17.0	7.9	10.2	5.9	2.8	2.0
Intermediate	32.9	15.9	16.5	8.4	9.8	5.7	2.8	2.0
Peripheral	28.6	17.2	19.1	8.9	10.0	5.5	2.7	1.6
Ultra-peripheral	29.1	16.0	16.8	7.9	12.6	5.0	2.4	1.4
South								
Naples	12.3	16.0	43.2	1.9	6.4	6.0	3.6	2.0
Palermo	16.5	13.9	36.1	3.3	8.7	5.5	2.5	2.6
Poles	19.8	15.8	29.1	4.8	9.9	5.3	3.4	2.0
Urban belt	20.1	14.4	31.7	5.1	11.0	4.6	2.6	1.9
Intermediate	22.3	14.1	26.5	6.1	12.7	4.5	2.3	1.6
Peripheral	21.2	14.2	24.8	6.5	12.7	5.5	2.1	1.5
Ultra-peripheral	21.3	16.5	20.3	8.9	12.1	6.9	3.0	1.5

Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior data. Only list votes are considered. Aosta Valley not included.
[a] Shares in the Peripheral and Ultra-Peripheral municipalities of this area must take into account the results of the SVP, which scored in them 18.9% and 41.1% respectively.

### 4.1 Electoral disproportionality

In section 3, we already highlighted the mismatch between the vote shares of political parties and the share of seats, due to the majoritarian component of the electoral system. To capture (and visually inspect) this gap between votes and seats, we rely on the formula pro-posed by Gallagher (1991, 2023).[12] As we can see from Figure 14 below, disproportionality was quite low during the First Republic, thanks to a proportional formula with extremely attainable representation thresholds. After 1994, Italy experienced different electoral systems

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[12] The indicator is calculated as the square root of the sum of squared differences between each party's percentage of votes and of seats, divided by 2.

Contestability of single-member constituencies

Difference in vote percentage
between the first two coalitions

0.02   47.45
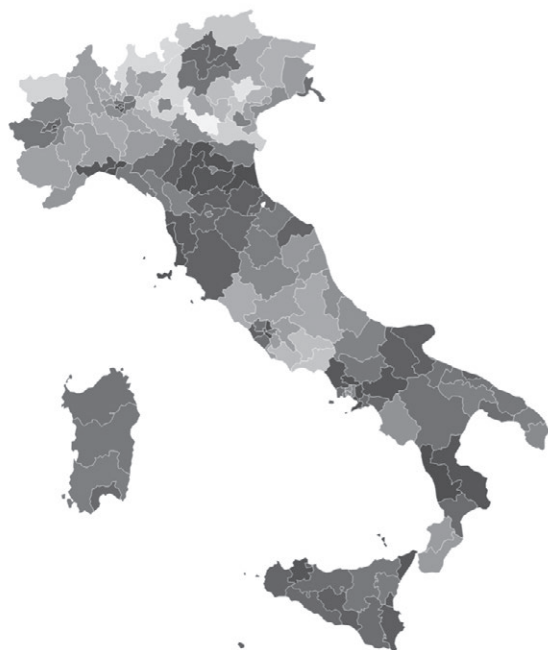
Contestability of multi-member constituencies

Difference in vote percentage
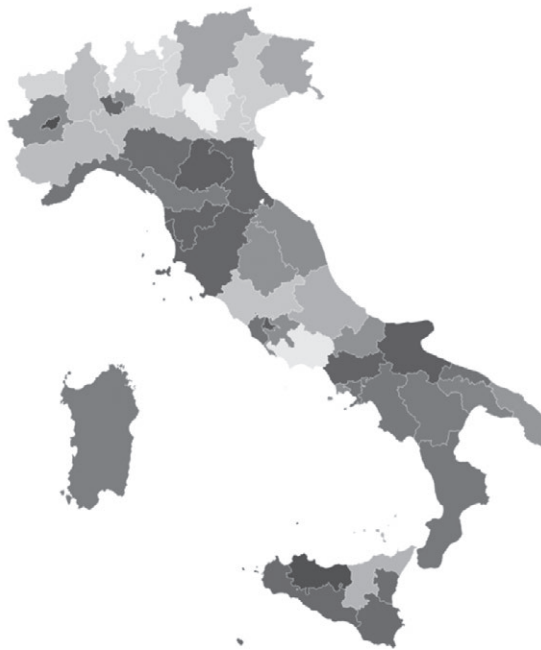between the first two coalitions

0.05   37.72

Figure 13. Contestability of SMCs (left) and MMCs (right) (Chamber of Deputies). Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior data.

and each of them incorporated – to varying degrees – some majoritarian components. This is reflected in the level of electoral disproportionality, which has been higher since then (Pasquino & Valbruzzi, 2023). After the exceptional levels reached in 2013, the 2022 election showcases another clear increase compared to the 2018 election – although held with the same electoral system.

As we have already seen in our analysis of the contestability of the SMCs, the right-wing coalition, with a vote share of 44%, won around 80% of SMCs in both chambers while in 2018 the dominant actor (again the right-wing coalition) obtained just over 40% of seats with 37% of votes. The disproportional effect of the electoral system thus was displayed in full force in 2022. Four years earlier, in fact, the territorial differentiation among the three main blocks somehow "hid" the majoritarian effects of the electoral system (Emanuele & Vassallo, 2018).

4.2 Fragmentation

Italy is generally considered a rather fragmented party system, due to the high number of political actors competing at the national level (but see, for

Table 7. Coalition/list in second place in SMCs won by the right-wing coalition (Chamber of Deputies).

	Centre-left coalition	Movimento 5 Stelle	Others	Total
North-West	33	0	0	33
North-East	17	0	0	17
Former Red Zone	20	0	0	20
Centre-South	15	1	0	16
South	10	24	1[a]	35
Total	95	25	1	121

Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior data.
[a] In this constituency the second party was the regionalist list Sud Chiama Nord (*South Calls North*), founded by the former mayor of Messina Cateno de Luca.

instance, Vampa, 2015, for the regional level). This is not an entirely new phenomenon. Although fragmentation had peaked already in the 1990s (cf. Morlino, 1996; D'Alimonte & Bartolini, 1997), the subsequent electoral laws offered increasing incentives to coalesce and structure political competition around a smaller number of "blocs", thus reducing the overall level of fragmentation.
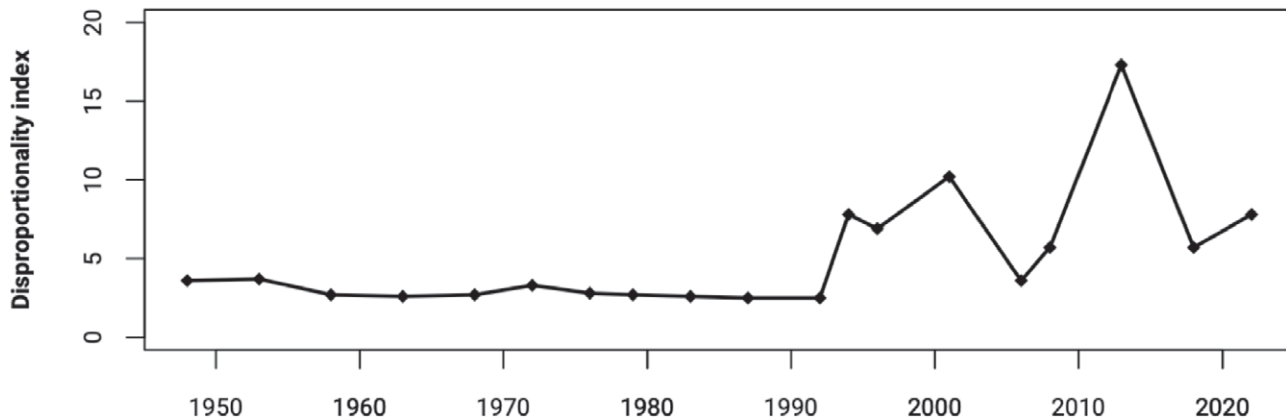
Figure 14. Electoral disproportionality in Italian elections since 1948. Source: authors' elaboration based on Gallagher (2023) and Ministry of the Interior data.
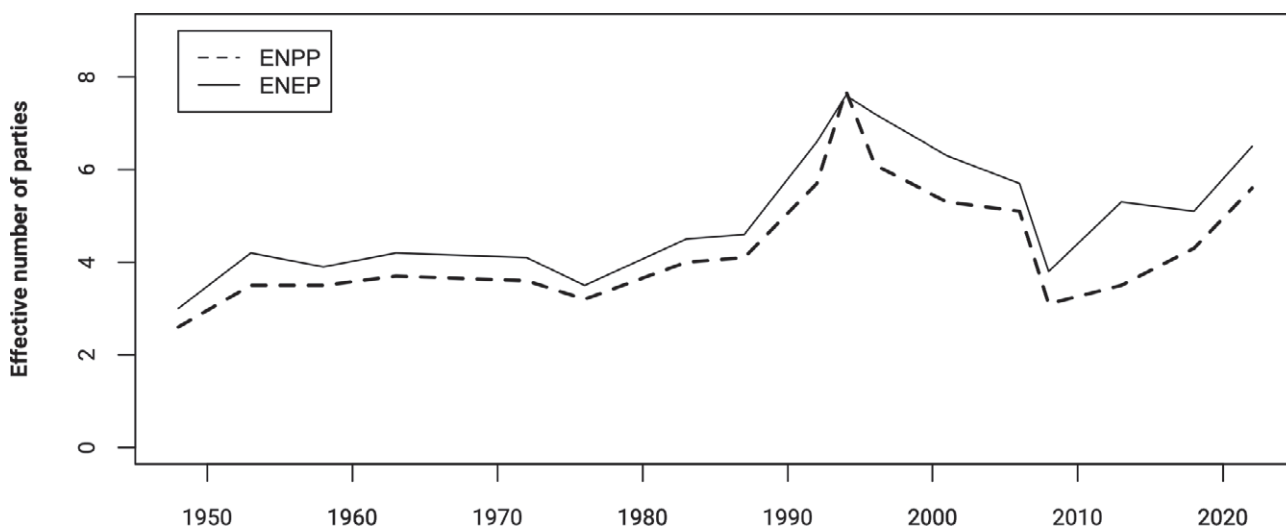

Figure 15. Effective number of parties in Italian elections since 1948. Source: authors' elaboration based on Gallagher (2023).
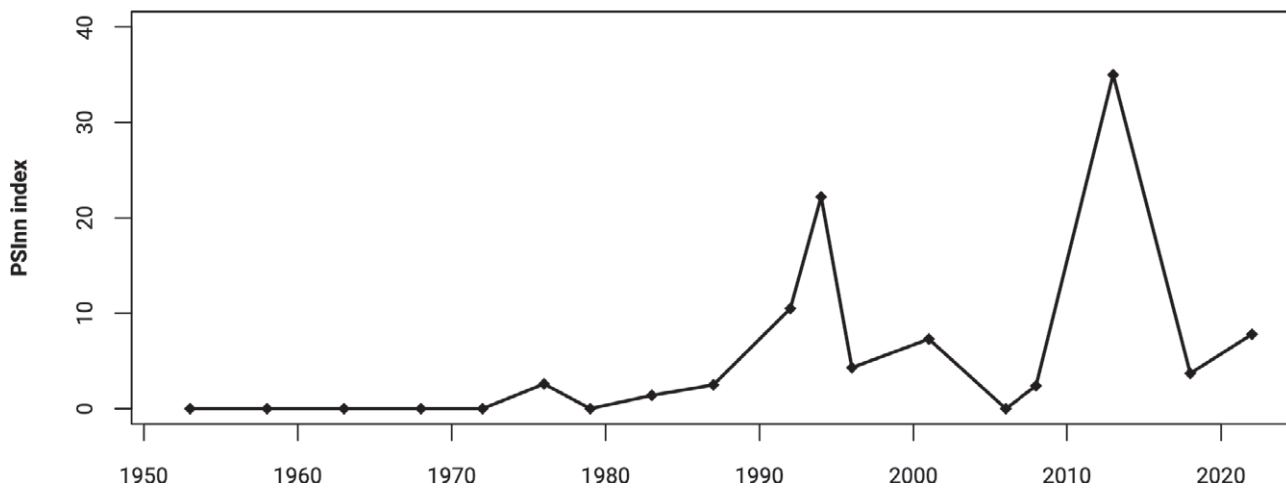

Figure 16. Degree of party system innovation in Italian elections since 1948. Source: authors' elaboration based on Emanuele (2016).
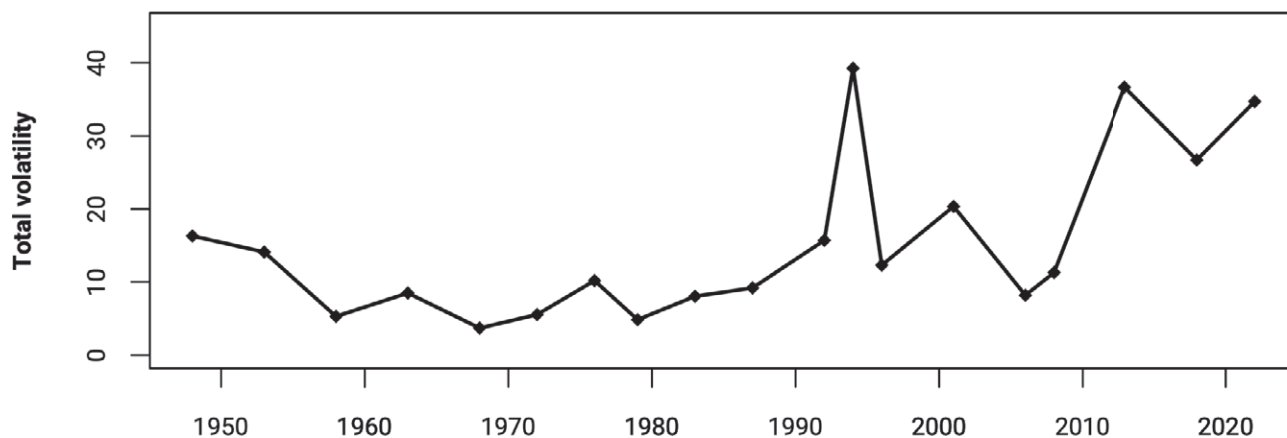
Figure 17. Degree of electoral volatility in Italian elections since 1948. Source: authors' elaboration based on Emanuele (2016).

The degree of fragmentation of a party system can be expressed through the effective number of political parties. The most common measure thereof is the index proposed by Laakso and Taagepera (1979; cf. Gallagher, 2023), which weighs parties according to their size and can be applied both in the electoral and the parliamentary context. Figure 15 shows the effective number of parliamentary parties (ENPP) and the number of electoral parties (ENEP).[13] We can see that the level of fragmentation had been stable in the so-called First Republic, then experiencing the sharpest increase in the early 1990s. In 2001-2008, where the party system approximated a "weakly institutionalised" (Chiaramonte *et al.*, 2023: 23) bipolarism, the fragmentation decreased to then increase from 2013 onwards. In other words, the effects of the majoritarian elements introduced by the electoral laws adopted since 1994 have been at best mixed, and fragmentation has been increasing in the last three elections, in which the competition was characterised by the presence of three main blocs – centre-left, (former) centre-right, M5S – plus other national lists able to enter the Parliament (a centrist actor in 2013 and 2022; a left-wing one in 2018 in particular).

4.3 Innovation

The number of new actors in the system – excluding coalitions or mergers of previous parties – is useful to understand how innovative the political landscape is in terms of supply. Those new actors, however, do not necessarily have a disruptive effect on the party system

merely because of their existence; much depends on their coalition and/or blackmail potential (Sartori 1976), connected to the support they gather. To grasp such dynamics, we rely on the data by Emanuele (2016) to calculate an index of party system innovation. Such an index aggregates the vote shares of new parties reaching 1% of votes nationwide and indicates how much (or how little) the emergence of new parties affects the political balance in a country.

As is visible in Figure 16 below, after the peak in 1994, with the radical re-structuring of the party system and the start of the so-called Second Republic, 2013 witnessed another radical election in terms of innovation, mainly due to the rise of the M5S. The latter finding is in line with the simultaneous developments in other European countries, and it may be connected to the rise of challenger actors across Europe in the aftermath of the 2008-2009 financial crisis. In 2018 the degree of innovation was overall rather low, while in 2022 the index of innovation increased again from 3.7 to 7.8, thanks to the rather good result of the newly formed Terzo Polo.

4.4 Electoral volatility

Electoral volatility can be understood as the amount of change in the configuration of the party system that is due to individual vote transfers: in short, it measures the extent to which voters switch from one party to another between elections. It therefore provides a measure of the stability of electoral competition and the loyalty of voters to the same party from one election to the other. It is thus strongly connected with the effective number of parties and with party system innovation (cf. Emanuele, 2015).

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[13] The indices are calculated dividing 1 by the summation of the squared share of seats (for ENPP) or votes (for ENEP) of each party in the system.

For an index of the total electoral volatility of the Italian party system, we rely on the Dataset of Electoral Volatility and its internal components in Western Europe (1945-2015) published by Emanuele (2015) and updated to the latest election (see Emanuele & Marino, 2022). We show the historical trends thereof in Figure 17 above, which reports the score of the Pedersen (1979) index.[14] Unsurprisingly, the highest values correspond to 1994 – the first election after the collapse of the so-called First Republic – and 2013, when the M5S made its impressive electoral debut. In other words, elections in which the emergence of new actors led to a deep restructuring of the party system. Nevertheless, the value for the 2022 election is the third highest and comes after an election – that of 2018 – that still presented a high level of volatility. Indeed, the figure of volatility in the last three Italian elections is unprecedented across Western Europe (Chiaramonte *et al.*, 2023: 22).

6. CONCLUSIONS

The outcome of the 2022 election did not come as a surprise: Fratelli d'Italia's success and the formation of the Meloni government confirmed the predictions of the polls. The right-wing coalition gathered support across the whole country. The opposition parties appeared too ideologically fragmented to coordinate effectively against the right-wing coalition, thus paving the way for it to win a large parliamentary majority – the first time since 2008 that a pre-electoral alliance was able to do so. The only real winner of the election can therefore be considered Fratelli d'Italia, the most nationalised party in terms of geographical distribution and even relatively homogeneous in terms of urban-rural divide. Its allies obtained disappointing results compared to 2018 and rarely exceeded – combined – the electoral strength of FdI at the local level.

The structure of competition, however, has remained substantially tripolar, despite the changes in the internal balance of the right-wing coalition. The disproportional effects of the electoral system have been fully displayed, but still failed to reduce the fragmentation in both the electoral and parliamentary arena, where the effective number of parties has increased compared to 2018. In fact, the share of votes received by new political parties has also increased. The electorate itself appears to be fickle, each time supporting the actor that portrays itself as the outsider: indeed, the total volatility of the system almost reached the levels of 2013.

These elements paint a picture of fragmentation and instability, that characterize the low degree of institutionalization of the Italian party system. This could be especially problematic in a context of record low turnout where political dissatisfaction seems to remain the protagonist, with less than two out of three voters casting a valid ballot. The resulting trend, therefore, marks a paradox: a consolidation of instability itself.

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[14] The index is calculated as the summation of the vote change in consecutive elections for each party, divided by 2.

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