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General Election 2022 in Italy

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Table of Contents

Introduction 2
What led to the election? 2
Electoral process in Italy 3
Election overview 5
Agenda of the alliances/party 5
General Election 2022 Result 6
Change in vote share since 2018 7
Outlook 7
Geopolitical 7
Economic 8
Social 9
Political 9
Forecast 9
Author's profile 11
Contact us @ 12



Introduction

Italy's political system has garnered a reputation for being particularly unstable. Governments have dissolved repeatedly, resulting in 70 cabinets since the Italian republic was created. The nation's socioeconomic frailties, owing to a fragmented cultural heritage, a stark north-south divide and reliance on external support, have further exacerbated this issue.

To elect its 71st cabinet, a legislative election was conducted in Italy on 25 September. The election resulted in the country's first right-wing government since 2011. Giorgia Meloni, leader of the Brothers of Italy party, will become the first female Prime Minister of Italy and govern in a coalition with the League, led by Matteo Salvini, and Forza Italia, led by Silvio Berlusconi. The outgoing Prime Minister Mario Draghi will remain in charge until the new government is formed, which is expected to be in late October 2022.

Although voter participation is very high in Italian elections, only around 63 percent of the electorate voted this time compared to over 70 percent last time. The turnout was especially low in the south where centrist opposition parties, including the populist Five Star Movement party, still have considerable influence.

What led to the election?

The political instability in Italy started on 14 July, after a series of events that led to the resignation of Prime Minister Mario Draghi. It was sparked by the resignation of Prime Minister Mario Draghi on 21 July 2022 and the collapse of his coalition government, which included leftist, right-wing and centrist parties.

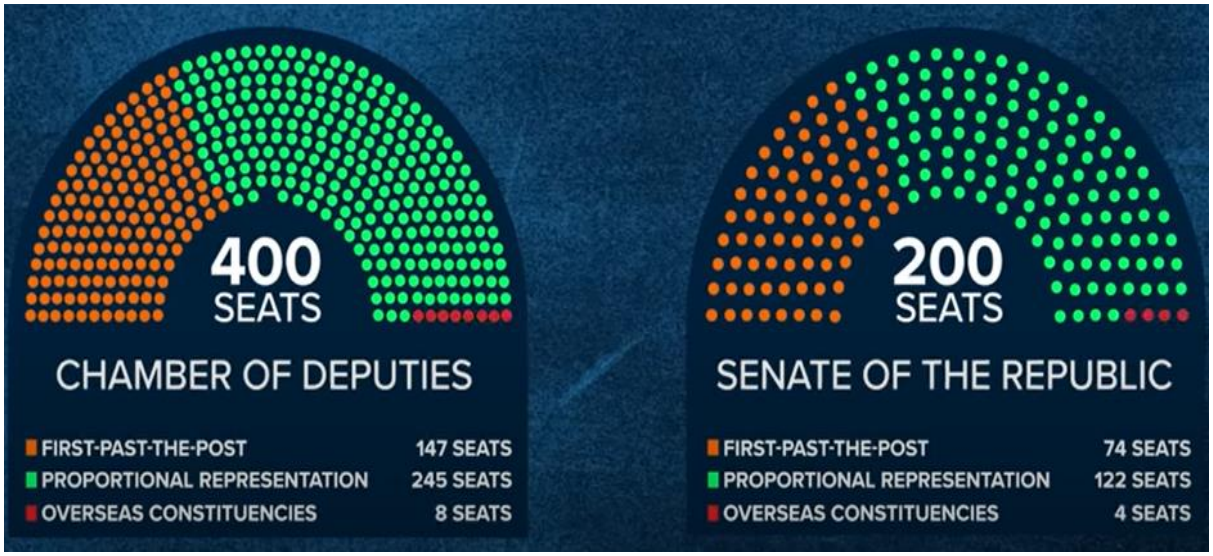
The downfall of Draghi's coalition came gradually through a series of political events:

- In June 2022, the coalition began to fall apart after disagreements within the Five Star Movement (M5S), and then between Five Star and Lega.
- The tensions regarding military aid to Ukraine following the 2022 Russian invasion, has caused a split within the M5S, with the foreign minister Luigi Di Maio, who left the movement in June 2022, founding his own political party, Together for the Future (IpF), in opposition to M5S leader Giuseppe Conte's criticism of weapons delivery to Ukraine.
- On 13 July, M5S announced that it would abstain during the confidence vote on the decreto aiuti (decree on economic aid), a government bill that introduced a EURO 23 billion stimulus to contrast the economic and energy crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war. M5S considered the economic aid package for families and small business proposed by the government, insufficient to tackle the cost-of-living crisis. The decree also included a project to build a waste-to-energy plant in Rome, which was criticised by the M5S, as they deemed it dangerous for the environment.
- On 14 July, the M5S finally revoked support to Mario Draghi's coalition government, as a clear opposition to the government's policies, and de facto opened a political crisis within the Mario Draghi cabinet. This led to the first-time resignation of Prime Minister which was rejected by the President.
- Meanwhile, two centre-right parties; Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia and Matteo Salvini's League also boycotted the confidence vote in the Senate, stating that they did not wish to continue an alliance with the M5S party led by former Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte.
- Finally, on 21 July, Draghi resigned for a second time following the failure of the confidence vote to pass with an absolute majority due to the withdrawals of M5S, Lega, and FI. On the same day, President Mattarella accepted the resignation and asked Mario Draghi to remain in office as caretaker Prime Minister, until Italy can hold a national election on 25 September 2022.

Electoral process in Italy

Under the Italian Rosatellum electoral system, Italians get two ballots each and vote for the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate of the Republic. Each vote is then counted for two types of seats, which are first-past-the-post and proportional representation methods. The first-past-the-post seats are won by the candidate who gets the largest number of votes even if they do not have majority. On the other hand, the proportional representation seats are indirectly based on the nationwide performance of the parties.

The first-past-the-post method tends to favour larger parties or those with strong regional bases. Because first-past-the-post candidates represent a party or a coalition of parties, each vote of a candidate automatically binds it to the party list supported by that candidate, and vice versa. For candidates backed by a coalition, each vote is extended proportionally to all the party lists in the coalition. So, a vote for a first-past-the-post is also a vote for the party or coalition that backs them, which in turn, decides the proportional representation seats. These votes are then calculated at a national level before being proportionally allocated back to the regions.



Source: CNBC

Two-thirds of Italian parliamentarians (62.5 percent, or 245 MPs and 122 senators) are elected by party-list proportional representation, while the other third are elected by first-past-the-post (37.5 percent, or 147 MPs and 74 senators). Out of these, 12 (eight MPs and four senators) are elected by citizens living abroad, using proportional representation only. For a party to win a seat in parliament, it must receive at least 3 percent of the vote, or 10 percent in the case of a coalition.

Election overview

Agenda of the alliances/party

Right Alliance

Economy: Flat Tax; Tax wedge cut; elimination of citizenship income.

Energy: Self-sufficiency; cap on gas prices at the European level; investments on renewable energies; nuclear energy.

Rights: No relevant proposals.

Europe and Foreign Affairs: Defense of the homeland's interest; revision of the Stability Pact; arming of Ukraine; ambiguous positions on sanctions on Russia.

Left Alliance

Economy: Tax wedge cut; dowry to 18 years old; optimization of citizenship income.

Energy: Investments on renewable energies; differentiation of gas supplies.

Rights: Ius scholae; extension of marriage rights; new regulation on the end of life; co-parenting; law against homo-lesbo-transphobia.

Europe and Foreign Affairs: EU as a federal system; reform of the Stability Pact; arming of Ukraine; sanctions to Russia.

Five Star Movement

Economy: Tax wedge cut; minimum wage; optimization of citizenship income.

Energy: Superbonus for business; investments on renewable energy facilities; energy recovery fund.

Rights: Ius scholae; extension of marriage rights; law against homolesbotransphobia; co-parenting.

Europe and Foreign Affairs: Reform of the Stability Pact; shared mechanism for the migration management; no arming of Ukraine; sanctions to Russia.

Centre Alliance

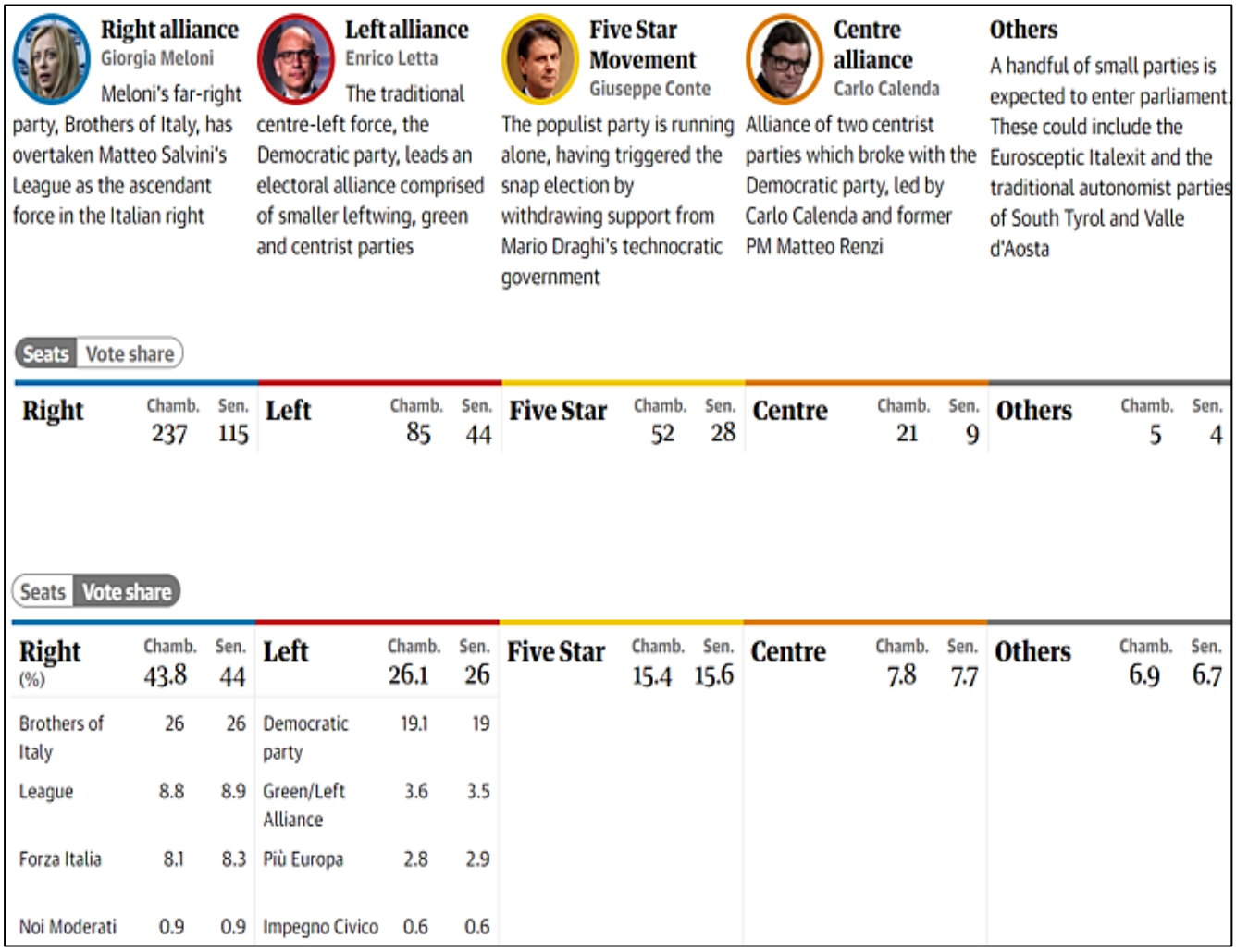
Economy: Elimination of citizenship income after the first job rejection; minimum wage.

Energy: Energy self-sufficiency; investments on renewable energies; nuclear energy.

Rights: Law against homo-lesbo-transphobia; protection of persons with disabilities; Ius scholae; increase anti-violence centers and other interventions to fight gender-based violence.

Europe and Foreign Affairs: EU as a federal system; arming of Ukraine;

General Election 2022 Result



Right alliance
Giorgia Meloni
Meloni's far-right party, Brothers of Italy, has overtaken Matteo Salvini's League as the ascendant force in the Italian right

Left alliance
Enrico Letta
The traditional centre-left force, the Democratic party, leads an electoral alliance comprised of smaller leftwing, green and centrist parties

Five Star Movement
Giuseppe Conte
The populist party is running alone, having triggered the snap election by withdrawing support from Mario Draghi's technocratic government

Centre alliance
Carlo Calenda
Alliance of two centrist parties which broke with the Democratic party, led by Carlo Calenda and former PM Matteo Renzi

Others
A handful of small parties is expected to enter parliament. These could include the Eurosceptic Italexit and the traditional autonomist parties of South Tyrol and Valle d'Aosta

Seats | Vote share

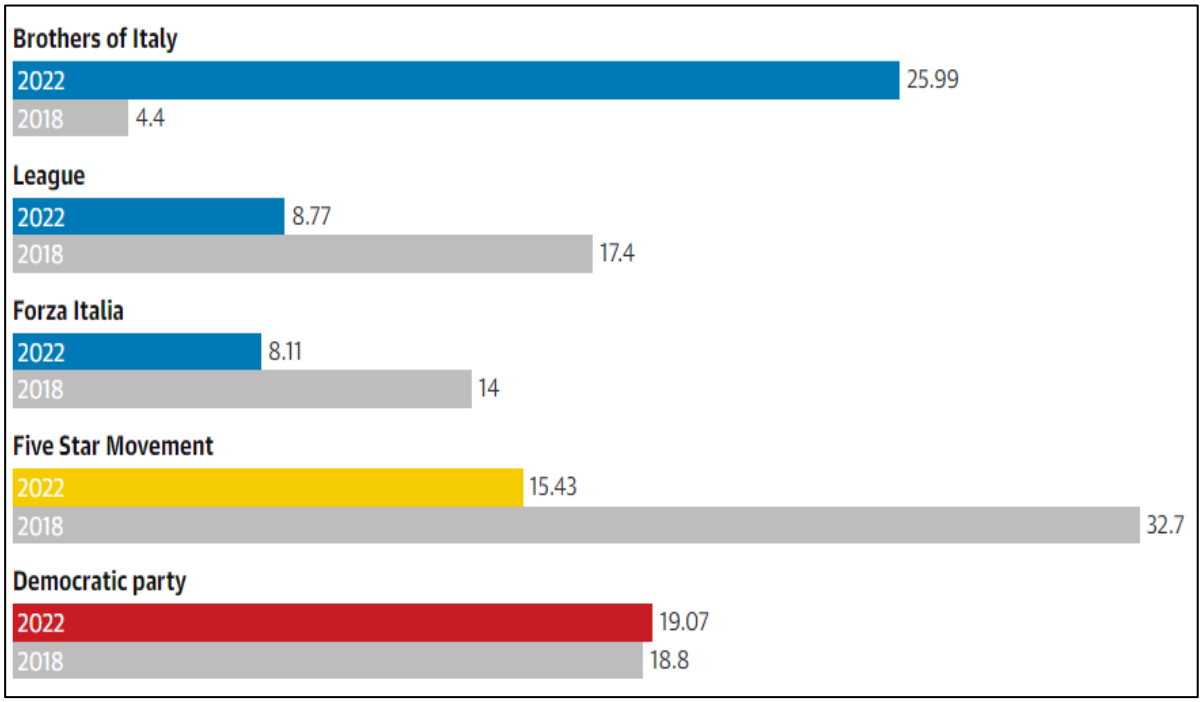
	Chamb.	Sen.
Right	237	115
Left	85	44
Five Star	52	28
Centre	21	9
Others	5	4

Seats | Vote share

	Chamb.	Sen.
Right (%)	43.8	44
Brothers of Italy	26	26
League	8.8	8.9
Forza Italia	8.1	8.3
Noi Moderati	0.9	0.9
Left	26.1	26
Democratic party	19.1	19
Green/Left Alliance	3.6	3.5
Più Europa	2.8	2.9
Impegno Civico	0.6	0.6
Five Star	15.4	15.6
Centre	7.8	7.7
Others	6.9	6.7

Source: The Guardian

Change in vote share since 2018



Source: The Guardian

Outlook

Geopolitical

- Giorgia Meloni's right-wing party is rooted in a post-war movement that rose out of dictator Benito Mussolini's fascists. Meloni's rhetoric on the European Union (EU) places her close to Hungary's nationalist leader Viktor Orban, which is seen as contradictory to EU's core values of human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law, and human rights.

- Italy is a founding father of the EU and a member of NATO. If the EU wants to further develop own resources, it will need the backing of the Italian government. However, this seems unlikely at the moment as Giorgia Meloni holds the view that EU should be a group of nations rather than a federal state and has announced that she will be putting national interest first.

- To-be Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni has stated that she will stick not only to former Prime Minister Mario Draghi's fiscal policies but also to his foreign policy stance, particularly with regard to the West's support for Ukraine against Russia. However,

other senior members of the coalition, notably Matteo Salvini and Silvio Berlusconi have had close ties with Russia. Berlusconi claimed that the Russian President was pushed into invading Ukraine while Salvini has called into question Western sanctions on Moscow. This increases the chances of Rome getting closer to Moscow, at a time when Europe is doing all it can to end the invasion of Ukraine.

- Due to its lenient migration policy, Italy has become one of the European Union's front-line destinations for undocumented immigrants. Meloni, on the other hand, has repeatedly called for a stricter immigration policy and a naval blockade of the Mediterranean. However, if Italy blocks its maritime pathway, the volume of immigrant boat crossings could increase to other Mediterranean countries such as Spain.

Economic

- Italy's GDP is forecast to expand only by one percent in 2023, decreasing from the 6.5 percent growth recorded in 2021 and the 3.3 percent projected for 2022. A weaker economy means Meloni will have less fiscal room for her own policies, including urgently needed interventions to help families and businesses cope with the current inflation and energy crisis, especially as winter is nearing.

- The economic platform of the right-wing coalition calls for tax cuts for individuals and businesses, combined with more social spending, like higher pensions and benefits for families. However, with a debt-to-GDP ratio near 150 percent, additional destabilization to government revenue streams through tax cuts could cause significant problems for budget sustainability.

- Rising interest rates, energy crunch and a potential recession could bring new uncertainties for investors. Hesitancy of investors to inject money in the economy may act as an obstacle for Italy's economic reforms, which are also a condition for the country to receive EU funds to accelerate its post-pandemic recovery.

- While the to-be President has pledged boosting defence spending to support Ukraine, senior members of the coalition opposing sanctions against Moscow has the potential to create a split with fellow EU members, which is likely to further damage the single currency of the EU.

Social

- Inflation and growing prices are increasing the degree of citizens' discontent in many European countries, leading to protest in Italy in the second quarter of 2022. In April 2022, demonstrators stated that the increased military spending, some of which had been directed to support Ukraine, is draining the Italian economy. As Giorgia Meloni has voiced for increasing the budget for defence, chances of similar demonstrations reoccurring in Italy cannot be ruled out.

- Giorgia Meloni and her party is against marriage equality, gay parents adopting children, and surrogate motherhood. Gender movement, like the anti-abortion protests in the US and the anti-hijab protest in Iran, have been gaining momentum all around the world, and it is likely to reach Italy too. Violent protests were reported in Italy in October 2021, when the 'Zan bill' was not passed, and similar protests could resurface if the coalition government introduces new anti-queer and anti-abortion policies.

Political

- Italy's current parliamentary system makes it almost impossible for any one party to win a majority. Parties are required to enter into often uneasy alliances to form coalition governments. Chances of collapse of the ring-wing coalition cannot be ruled out as the coalition partners have diverging positions on numerous issues including regional autonomy, pensions, and the Russia - Ukraine war, to name a few.

- The right-wing coalition wants to change the constitution so that Italians will be able to directly vote for their president. The position is currently appointed by parliament. Switching the presidential system would give more power to the executive and make it far more difficult to get rid of the elected head of state during their five-year term.

Forecast

At a time when high inflation and weak growth has been affecting the financial health of Italy, Meloni now faces the challenge of maintaining the downward debt trajectory just as the energy crunch caused by Russia intensifies. Additionally, the Mario Draghi government has spent the highest amount amongst EU countries for tax breaks and subsidies to help companies

and households that are below poverty line pay their energy bills. The measures, however, are due to expire in November 2022, and extending them until the end of the year would cost EUR 4.7 billion, which could further burden Italy financially. State pension reform as well as Italy's demographic problem of an aging population and declining birth rates also increases the pressure on public finance. The EU post-Covid recovery package could be of some help for Italy but in order to receive the EUR 200 billion funds allotted to Italy by EU, Italy must adhere to a strict set of conditions. However, Meloni had stated during the campaign that she wants to renegotiate the conditions for receiving the money. The European Commission has already announced that negotiations would not be possible, setting up a possible clash between the new Italian government and the Commission in the coming months.

With a nationalistic government, the trajectory of relation between Italy and the EU might change, but the victory of the right coalition in Italy is expected to represent more polished and electorally savvy new face of the European far-right. Among other EU members, Italy could emerge as more proactive, rather than reactive, country in terms taking control of its defence, migration and foreign policies as well as its national interests.

Author's profile



Bishakha Shrestha is a Geopolitical Risk Analyst with MitKat's Predictive Risk Intelligence team. She holds a Master's degree in International Relations from Christ University and a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration from Kathmandu University. She is a contributing author in the book 'Nepal's Foreign Policy: Emerging Challenges and Opportunities' (Adroit Publication, 2021).

As part of MitKat's PRI team, she has been monitoring and assessing global risks and is working towards expanding MitKat's global risk coverage. She is also involved in producing advisories and special reports ranging across various topics.



Contact us @

MUMBAI

511 Ascot Centre, Sahar, International Airport, Mumbai 400 099,

+91 22 2839 1243

GURGAON

Suite #008, 4th Floor, Times Square, Sushant Lok – 1, Gurgaon 122 002,

+91 124 455 9200

BENGALURU

C/O WeWork, 36, Infantry Rd, Tasker Town, Shivajinagar, Bengaluru 560001,

+ 91 95265 63359

SINGAPORE

101 Cecil Street, #23-12, Tong Eng Building, Singapore-069 533,

+65 9222 5030

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