

The Italian Local Elections of 2011: Four Ingredients for a Political Defeat¹

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Abstract: This article focuses on the Italian local elections of 2011 and investigates their possible consequences at the national level. In particular, the analysis presented is two-fold. On the one hand, the vote in four key cities (Turin, Bologna, Naples, and Milan) is discussed in depth, looking both at the electoral strategies of the main coalitions and at the candidate selection process. On the other hand, the election results in the four cities are analysed from the perspective of general electoral trends and compared with the regional elections of 2010. The analysis shows that while the decline of the centre-right parties is evident, centre-left victory is more nuanced than expected and strong differences emerge when it comes to the results for the different components of the progressive coalition. In this respect, the 2011 local elections seem to have highlighted long-standing questions that need to be addressed by the leaderships of both coalitions as the possibility of early general elections becomes day by day more likely.

Keywords: Berlusconi, candidate selection, electoral campaign, local elections, primaries.

On 15 and 16, and 22 and 23 May, Italians went to the polls to elect the administrations of 1,343 municipalities and 11 provinces. The elections are likely to mark the beginning of a dramatic 180-degree turn in the political life of the country. For the first time since the 2008 parliamentary elections, Berlusconi's People of Freedom (Popolo della Libertà, PdL) and its ally, the Northern League (Lega Nord, LN), have suffered a heavy defeat.

Its size is evident from the fact that the centre-right coalition lost its electoral stronghold. Milan, the city where Berlusconi began his business career, and which more than any other embodied the so-called *miracolo italiano* (Italian miracle), elected its first centre-left mayor since 1993. In three other key cities, centre-left coalitions also gained the mayoralty; in Bologna and Torino the incumbent centre-left majority was confirmed, while in Naples the massive victory of Luigi De Magistris – supported by Di Pietro's Italy of Values (Italia dei Valori, IdV) and the radical left –

although clearly contributing to the general defeat of the centre right, also provoked turmoil among the progressive ranks following the exclusion of the Democratic Party (Partito Democratico, PD) candidate from the second, run-off ballot.

As confirmed also by the results of the four referenda held a couple of weeks after the elections, Berlusconi's election strategy seems to have been one of the key factors behind the defeat of centre-right. For the first time, personalisation of the election campaign and the direct involvement of the leader seem not to have favoured the centre-right candidates, and in some cases it clearly had a negative effect. At the same time, the LN seems to have been penalised for its unquestioning support for Berlusconi despite growing unease on the part of its supporters. The massive defeats in four major cities and the loss of support generally are therefore likely to have long-term consequences for the cohesion of the governing coalition.

While undoubtedly representing a clear victory for the centre left, the elections – marked by the re-emergence of the radical and non-mainstream left – pose some major questions concerning the future electoral strategy of the PD and the use of primary elections. Given the likelihood of an early general election, the development of a clearer strategy concerning the PD's future alliances and its relationship with the Terzo Polo [literally, 'Third Pole'] can be postponed no longer. Only if it succeeds in this respect, will the opposition be able to transform Berlusconi's local defeats into a centre-left victory at the national level.

In this article we will explore the nature of the election campaign, the process of candidate selection, and the election results in four key metropolitan cities. A general assessment of the results will follow, looking at the possible repercussions for parties' strategies and for the stability of the ruling coalition at national level.

Talking locally, thinking nationally: the campaign, elections and party strategies

This section looks at the campaign, the actors involved, and the results of the elections in four key cities. The four elections had very different outcomes. In Bologna and Turin the outgoing centre-left majorities were confirmed, despite their very different performances. In Naples the outgoing progressive majority suffered a dramatic defeat, but a different leftist majority won the elections at the expense of the centre right. Finally, in Milan a centre-left majority replaced the outgoing centre-right administration.

In the following paragraphs, the election results are analysed comparatively. In particular, comparisons are made with the results of the 2010 regional elections². Only when dealing with the percentages of votes obtained by the candidate mayors are the results of the previous local

elections considered. Although a comparison with these elections would be analytically more correct, in most cases it would be practically highly problematic and methodologically hazardous. Most of the elections took place in 2006, following Romano Prodi's victory, with very different partisan actors competing. Most of those parties no longer exist and the presence of a totally different party system makes the comparison impractical. A comparison with the last regional elections has greater explanatory potential and can assure more meaningful interpretations. Non-voters are also included in the computations in order to assess better the impact of changes in voter turnout.

Bologna

Although traditionally a leftist city, Bologna's centre-left establishment has experienced very troubling developments in recent years. Following the controversial mayoral term of Sergio Cofferati (a former leftist trade unionist) who decided not to run for a second term, the subsequent municipal government lasted less than a year after the mayor, Flavio Delbono, was forced to resign by the national leadership of the PD as he was being investigated for crimes such as embezzlement, fraud and aggravated abuse of office following allegations made by his former lover (Smargiassi, 2010). Following Delbono's resignation in January 2010, a government commissioner was appointed to oversee the administration of the city until new elections. The 'Delbono scandal' and the political shame involved in the imposition of government supervision in one of the left's strongholds sparked wide-ranging debate within the PD and the centre-left in general and provoked frustration among many leftist voters.

In many respects, the opportunity given by the primary elections for the selection of a new mayoral candidate appeared to many within and outside the PD as the best way to overcome the political impasse following Delbono's resignation. Moreover, the appointment of a fresh face would contribute to efforts to reconnect the party to voters. Three candidates participated in the primary elections: Amelia Frascaroli supported by Nichi Vendola's Sinistra, Ecologia e Libertà [literally, 'Left, Environmentalism and Freedom', hereinafter, SEL], the independent candidate, Benedetto Zacchioli, and Viginio Merola, officially supported by the PD.³ The primary elections, held in January 2011, were a clear success in terms of turnout (28,390 votes cast), with an increase of almost 4,000 voters in comparison to the 2008 primaries. As was to be expected, the primaries proved to be a profitable tool of mobilisation for the centre-left. The candidate sponsored by the PD won the nomination with more than 58 percent of the votes. Merola represented a smart choice for the leadership of the PD as it marked both continuity with the leftist tradition of the city and a break with the previous experience of Delbono. Merola had had a long career in the Party of the Democratic Left (Partito Democratico della

Sinistra, PDS). As a founding member of the PD, he had been appointed as a member of the municipal government during Cofferati's mayoralty and served as President of the City Council from 2009. On the other hand, he had stood against Delbono during the 2008 primaries, obtaining 21 percent of the votes.

On the other side of the political divide, following a lengthy period of conflict between the PdL and LN, the centre-right parties gave full support to the LN's candidate, Manes Bernardini. The acceptance of Bernardini did not represent an easy decision for the PdL leadership and it clearly reflects a shifting balance of power as a consequence of Berlusconi's decline. In March 2011, Umberto Bossi had officially announced that Bernardini would run as the party's mayoral candidate and had vowed to get the support of the PdL as well; but he had also stated that, if this proved impossible, then the LN would present lists separate from those of its ally (Setti, 2011). Faced with Bossi's *diktat*, the PdL, although facing a number of dissenting voices within its ranks, was forced to accept Bernardini in order not to waste the already slim chances of a victory and not to convey an image of division at national level.

Beyond the two main coalitions,⁴ two additional lists of some relevance competed in the elections: the anti-politics movement, Movimento Cinque Stelle (the Five Stars Movement) and the centrist list, 'Stefano Aldrovandi Sindaco', supported by the Terzo Polo.

Both the main coalitions based their campaigns on local issues and touched on national politics only tangentially. In particular, the centre-right candidate launched a communications strategy based on a law-and-order programme, emphasising security issues, the securitisation of immigration, and 'protection for real Bolognese people'; while Merola demanded continuation of the traditional Bolognese welfare system, giving particular attention to new rights and to ecology. He also openly criticised some aspects of the past administration.

Although by a very small margin (50.46 percent), Merola obtained an absolute majority, thereby securing election and avoiding a run-off.⁵ Bernardini got only 30.35 percent of the votes. If we look at the votes cast for the party lists however, interesting dynamics seem to emerge. In the centre-left coalition, the PD did not experience any loss and even gained a fraction despite the recent scandals, while the radical left doubled its support share by taking 7.69 percent mainly at the expense of Di Pietro's party (see Table 1). The centre-left party that experienced the biggest loss was IdV (-2.17). Within the coalition of the centre-right, the LN achieved a moderate increase (+1.73) at the expense of the PdL, which lost more than four percentage points. These figures confirm that Berlusconi's party was unable to capitalise on its opposition potential and gain from the scandals faced by the previous progressive administration. On the other hand, it is

evident that the LN is gaining increasing support in the 'red belt', while it profited from the imposition of its candidate on the coalition.

Table 1: Comparative assessment of the election results in Bologna (% of electors)

Party	Regional elections 2010	Local elections 2011	Difference 2010-11
Movimento Cinque Stelle	4.69	5.88	1.19
<i>Left</i>	3.17	7.69	4.52
<i>IdV</i>	4.48	2.31	-2.17
<i>PD</i>	23.74	23.94	0.20
Aldrovandi Sindaco	2.25	2.96	0.71
<i>PdL</i>	14.62	10.38	-4.24
<i>LN</i>	4.97	6.70	1.73
<i>La Destra</i>	--	0.40	0.40
Votes for the candidate of the centre left*	4.70	1.53	-3.17
Votes for the candidate of the centre right*	1.42	4.02	2.60
Others	2.00	3.71	1.71
Non-voters	33.96	30.47	-3.49
Totals	100.00	99.99	

Source: Istituto Carlo Cattaneo

*Besides having the option to express preferences between both mayoral candidates and the party lists supporting them, the elector can vote for one of the party lists only (in which case her vote is deemed also to have been cast for the mayoral candidate supported by that party). She may also vote for a mayoral candidate only without expressing any preference as between the party lists (in which case the vote has no effect on the distribution of support among such lists) or for a mayoral candidate other than the one supported by her chosen party list. Not dissimilar arrangements govern the election of regional councils and their presidents. The figures showing the votes for the candidates of centre left and centre right in the table thus show the percentages of voters supporting a mayoral or presidential candidate without also voting for any of the lists supporting him or her.

Worth mentioning also is the poor performance of the Terzo Polo (2.96 percent). Particularly relevant, on the other hand, is the success of the anti-political Movimento Cinque Stelle (5.88 percent), which attracted support from disenchanted centre-left voters (mainly from IdV) and thus helped to reduce the margin of Merola's victory. In terms of inter-coalition volatility, there was perceptible movement from the centre-right to SEL on the part of voters attracted by the candidature of Amelia Frascaroli thanks to her involvement in social-Catholic associations and NGOs (Corbetta, Colloca and Passarelli, 2011).

Turin

Turin over the past decade has represented the perfect example of centre-left *buongoverno* (good government). The outgoing Democratic mayor, Sergio Chiamparino, concluding his period as mayor after two successful terms of office, emerged as one of the most well-liked Italian local governors (Renzi, 2011). On the other hand, while the centre right had gained significant support in Piedmont in recent years,⁶ it had been unable to make inroads into centre-left support in Turin to any great extent. The city had therefore been able to preserve, under Chiamparino's management, its progressive connotation and its traditional values of working-class solidarity. In light of these assets, achieving confirmation of the progressive majority in Turin was rightly considered by many observers a relatively easy task for the centre-left coalition.

Following the conclusion of Chiamparino's term of office, primaries were organised by the centre-left coalition. Five contenders competed for the nomination: Piero Fassino and Davide Gariglio (both members of the PD), Gianguido Passoni, representing Nichi Vendola's SEL, and Michele Curto and Silvio Viale, two independent candidates. The presence of two Democratic candidates reflected latent tensions within the party between the traditional party establishment, represented by Fassino, and the *innovatori* ('innovators'), represented by Gariglio. If Fassino's candidacy was officially endorsed by the national leadership of the PD and publicly blessed by the outgoing mayor Chiamparino, then Gariglio ran without any support from the party, thereby emerging as the expression of an internal opposition. Fassino is a prominent national personality of the PD and he served as the last leader of the Democrats of the Left (Democratici di Sinistra, DS). He seemed to many to be the candidate best placed to mark continuity with the previous administration especially in light of his prestigious political background and nation-wide visibility (Finocchiaro, 2011).

As was highly predictable, Fassino won the primary elections with more than 55 percent of the votes, followed by the other Democratic candidate with 27 percent.⁷ The radical left proved fairly successful as it gained the support of more than 12 percent of the participants, thereby confirming its relevance as a key component of the centre-left alliances. The turnout confirmed that the primary elections represented a clear success of the PD's mobilisation potential. A total of 53,000 votes were cast, marking an increase of almost 14,000 votes in comparison to the 2009 primaries.

As for the centre-right, the choice of the coalition's candidate did not present any difficulty, given the very limited prospects of victory. The national leadership of the PdL sponsored the candidacy of Michele Coppola, who was officially endorsed by all the parties of the coalition. Coppola had served four terms as a member of the Turin City Council and, following the 2010 regional elections, had been appointed as councillor in

the regional government. Despite his political career Coppola could hardly be defined as one of the centre-right's key politicians at regional level. Although focusing on local issues (with almost no references to the ongoing national political debate), Coppola's campaign aimed at proposing a different model of city governance, thereby marking clear discontinuity with the previous decade dominated by progressive majorities. Coppola's task proved extremely difficult from the very beginning, also because Fassino could easily capitalise on the success and popularity of the previous administration, proposing his candidacy as the ideal evolution of Chiamparino's political heritage.

Beyond the two main coalitions, ten other lists presented mayoral candidates, among others, the anti-political Movimento Cinque Stelle and a coalition of local lists sponsored by the Terzo Polo.

As expected, the centre-left coalition easily obtained an absolute majority, while Michele Coppola obtained only 27.3 percent of the votes, confirming the limited appeal of the centre-right parties in the city. The centre left's victory also represented a personal success for Fassino who, in addition to the votes cast for the parties supporting him, also obtained a number of individual votes amounting to 10 percent of those entitled to vote.⁸ On the centre right, the proportion of individual votes for Coppola fell to 2.81 percent, reflecting his limited role in the coalition and his low visibility outside it.

Table 2: Comparative assessment of the election results in Turin (% of electors)

Party	Regional elections 2010	Local elections 2011	Difference 2010-11
Movimento Cinque Stelle	1.90	2.97	1.07
<i>Left</i>	2.92	4.15	1.23
<i>IdV</i>	4.81	2.69	-2.12
<i>PD</i>	12.77	19.5	6.73
UDC - Terzo Polo	1.60	2.16	0.56
<i>PdL</i>	11.08	10.33	-0.75
<i>LN</i>	5.15	3.87	-1.28
<i>La Destra</i>	0.46	0.40	-0.06
Votes for the candidate of the centre left	11.91	10.65	-1.26
Votes for the candidate of the centre right	7.69	2.81	-4.88
Others	1.20	4.42	3.22
Non-voters	38.49	36.03	-2.46
Totals	99.98	99.98	

Source: Istituto Carlo Cattaneo.

If we look at the results of the individual parties, the PD emerges as the real winner, with an increase of almost 7 percentage points, apparently reflecting the positive effect of Chiamparino's *buongoverno*. As in the Bolognese elections, so in Turin Di Pietro's IdV lost more than 2 percentage points, accounting for almost 50 percent of the share obtained in the 2010 regional elections.

Within the centre-right coalition, both the PdL and the LN lost support. In the case of LN, the decline (-1.28 percent) appears to have been mainly due to national factors, in particular, LN voters' growing sense of unease towards the party's alliance with the PdL and Bossi's recent support for proposed emergency legislation designed to overturn controversial legal judgements involving Berlusconi.

Naples

If Turin represented centre-left *buongoverno*, Naples clearly represented its *malgoverno* (bad government) and the failure of more than fifteen years of centre-left administration of the city. None of the centre-left administrations that had governed the city since 1993 had been able to deal successfully with endemic problems such as widespread corruption and crime, coupled with inefficient and expensive governance. In many cases evidence of stable links between important sectors of the administration and the local mafia had emerged, involving key political personalities. One of the clearest pieces of evidence of the administration's inefficiency was the long-running emergency related to the waste management issue which – despite a number of initiatives of the regional and central governments – had not been successfully resolved and which periodically re-emerges. In particular, the outgoing Democratic mayor of the city, Rosa Russo Iervolino, who had governed Naples since 2001, embodied the endemic inability to cope with the long-standing problems of the city as witnessed by the persisting waste emergency and by the judicial scandal that hit the city council in 2008 forcing the mayor to replace most of those occupying municipal governmental positions (De Angelis, 2009). It is no surprise that this unchanging state of affairs brought widespread frustration and political apathy among many voters.

In light of this explosive situation, the elections represented a challenge for both centre left and centre right. The former had to offer a credible way of overcoming the disastrous past without changing the governing majority, while the latter could not waste the opportunity to capitalise on fifteen years of centre-left *malgoverno*.

The centre-left coalition organised primary elections which proved in other contexts the best way to mobilise disenchanted voters. Four candidates competed for the centre-left mayoral nomination: Andrea Cozzolino and Umberto Ranieri (both among the PD's key local

personalities), Libero Mancuso (SEL) and Nicola Oddati representing the radical left. Given the high profile of *both* Democratic candidates, the national leadership of the PD did not openly support either of them, but left the final decision to voters. On the other hand, both Democratic candidates developed informal but particularly strong networks of supporters, which brought increasing divisions within the local structures of the party (Iurillo, 2011).

The primaries were held in January and turned out to be a disaster, bringing the coalition to a political *impasse*. The rate of participation (with more than 40,000 votes cast) was high. However, Cozzolino (with 37 percent) beat Ranieri (with 34 percent) by only 1,400 votes. In the days that followed, the defeated candidate questioned Cozzolino's victory on the basis of alleged irregularities in the voting and allegations of bribery (Lucarelli and Sannino, 2011). The clash between the two factions paralysed the functioning of the local PD. This situation forced the national leadership to declare the results of the primaries null and void and to impose an external candidate in order to avoid chaos. Mario Morcone was therefore appointed as the Democratic candidate. Despite his prestigious background in the state administration, Morcone was not able to re-unite under his name all the parties previously part of the centre-left coalition. While the PD, Nichi Vendola's SEL, and some minor parties decided to endorse Morcone's candidacy, Di Pietro's IdV and the communist left supported the candidacy of the former public prosecutor and current IdV MEP, Luigi De Magistris, who decided to run for the mayoralty following the failure of the primaries (Flores D'Arcais, 2011).

In January, the centre-right parties endorsed the candidacy of Gianni Lettieri, a local businessman with almost no political background. Coming from the local ranks of PdL, Lettieri got the official blessing of Berlusconi who personally supported his election campaign on many occasions. The personal involvement of the Prime Minister in the Naples campaign clearly reflected the significance of these elections in the eyes of the party leadership. Lettieri's candidacy had a fairly high 'attraction potential', as he managed to unite under his leadership more than ten lists, ranging from Christian Democrats to the far right.

Other relevant lists competing in the elections included the Movimento Cinque Stelle and the Terzo Polo supporting Raimondo Pasquindo, rector of the University of Salerno.

The election campaigns of the three main candidates focused almost exclusively on the endemic problems of the city, and in particular, on the waste management emergency. However, while both Lettieri and Morcone seemed to offer traditional solutions to the long-standing problems without managing to mark an evident rupture with the recent past, De Magistris adopted a totally different approach and proposed a programme based on a mix of innovation, populism, and regulatory leftism. On many occasions

the former public prosecutor declared that in order to address the radical *problems* of the city, radical *solutions* were necessary – solutions based on the direct involvement of the citizenry, hard-line environmentalism, and radical opposition to corruption and the mafia (Marcenaro, 2011). Among other things, De Magistris declared that under his administration the waste emergency would be solved in five days.

Table 3: Comparative assessment of the election results in Naples (% of electors) – First round

Party	Regional elections 2010	Local elections 2011	Difference 2010-11
Movimento Cinque Stelle	1.21	0.89	-0.32
<i>Left</i>	1.73	3.95	2.22
<i>IdV</i>	3.74	4.10	0.36
<i>PD</i>	12.42	8.37	-4.05
UDC – Terzo Polo	2.84	5.06	2.22
<i>PdL</i>	16.54	12.03	-4.51
<i>La Destra</i>	0.36	0.56	0.20
Votes for the candidate of the centre left	6.34	0.61	-5.73
Votes for the candidate of the centre right	5.94	9.51	3.57
De Magistris	---	9.84	9.84
Others	0.97	2.44	1.47
Non-voters	47.91	42.64	5.27
Totals	100.00	100.00	

Source: Istituto Carlo Cattaneo.

No candidate was able to win an absolute majority of votes at the first round. In particular, despite Berlusconi's personal involvement and the strong support given to the centre-right candidate by the party nationally, Lettieri failed to get elected as he obtained only 38.52 percent of the votes, one percentage point more than the centre-right candidate in the 2006 mayoral elections. However, what brought a real political earthquake was the impressively high support (27.52 percent) gained by De Magistris who thus went on to the second round at the expense of the Democratic candidate, Morcone (with 19.15 percent). If we look at the results obtained by the parties, what emerges is the poor performance of both the mainstream parties, reflecting voters' disenchantment with traditional politics. In particular, the PD and PdL lost respectively 4.05 and 4.51 percent. The lists which profited from this were the Terzo Polo and the radical left. However, the most significant outcome was the personal

success of De Magistris. While support for his party remained essentially unchanged, he obtained a personal vote amounting to more than 9 percent.

Within the two-week period that separated the first from the second round, both candidates tried to maximise support by appealing especially to the PD and the Terzo Polo. In particular, De Magistris – given the evident disenchantment of many Democratic voters – declared that every contribution to his election was welcome, but that no official deal would be agreed with the Democrats. In this situation the Democratic leadership declared unconditional support for De Magistris while the Terzo Polo did not make any invitation to its supporters as to how to vote. On the other hand, despite the personal support of Berlusconi and his direct involvement in the campaign by attending the final rally in support of Lettieri, the two-week electoral break negatively affected many centre-right voters.

Lettieri's weak opposition to De Magistris' claims generated a general state of disappointment among centre-right supporters, which brought a haemorrhage of votes and an extremely high abstention rate. Accordingly, the second round of elections resulted in a dramatic defeat for the centre-right candidate (who obtained fewer votes than in the first round) and the landslide victory of De Magistris with more than 65 percent of the votes (Geremicca, 2011). The personal success of De Magistris seems due to a number of factors. First, he managed to retain the preferences he had obtained in the first round. Second, he successfully attracted almost 90 percent of the Democratic and leftist voters (who supported Morcone in the first round). Third, a significant number of centre-right voters abstained in the second round, while some shifted their support to De Magistris (Tuorto, 2011).

Milan

Unlike Bologna, Turin, and Naples, Milan was the only metropolitan city holding elections that had been governed by an administration of the centre right. It was traditionally a Berlusconi stronghold. Historically, most of the key political phenomena that marked the last century originated and 'died' in Milan, from Fascist rule to the First Republic. For these and other reasons, both the centre right and the centre left looked to Milan as the 'red line' that would enable them to claim victory over the opposing coalition. This perception is confirmed by the declarations of several from among the centre right's key personalities. A few days before the elections Berlusconi declared: 'We will never lose Milan. Losing it would simply be a tragedy' (Mingoia, 2011).

Since 1993 the city has been governed by conservative majorities and it has represented the symbol of centre-right *buongoverno*. The outgoing mayor, Letizia Moratti, presented many elements of continuity with the

previous administrations and achieved some significant successes such as the nomination of Milan as host city for Expo 2015 and the development of an efficient anti-pollution plan. However according to many observers she had not been able to develop a proper communication strategy or to establish effective ties with the citizenry. Having served only one term, Moratti seemed the natural choice of candidate for the centre right. However, in the months that preceded her official nomination a hidden conflict unfolded between the PdL and the LN. In light of the LN's growing electoral potential, Bossi declared that 'Moratti's candidacy should not be taken for granted' and in the meantime put forward the name of Matteo Salvini, a key figure within the party (Da Rold, 2011). The final decision to unite around the candidacy of Letizia Moratti came on the insistence of Berlusconi who was able to have his way because he had granted the LN the mayoral candidate in Bologna. The acceptance of Salvini's nomination would have appeared as a clear sign of weakness on the part of Berlusconi and the final evidence of a shifting balance of power between the two parties.

On the other side of the political divide, five candidates competed in the primary election for the centre-left nomination: Stefano Boeri, the official candidate supported by the PD leadership; Giuliano Pisapia, a well-known Milanese lawyer supported by Nichi Vendola's SEL; the independent candidate, Valerio Onida, a former constitutional court judge, and the environmentalist, Michele Sacerdoti. In the weeks that preceded the primaries, a number of prominent Democratic spokespersons – including Massimo D'Alema and Pier Luigi Bersani – openly warned voters against a victory on the part of Pisapia, defined by many as 'the best way to loose'. Many within the PD believed that a candidate who was an expression of the radical left would simply not be able to maximize electoral support for the coalition in the 'moderate' city *par excellence*. On the other hand, Pisapia focused on local issues and managed to present himself as a 'gentle leftist'.

In terms of participation and mobilisation potential, the primaries represented a clear success for the centre left, but in terms of results they represented a political shock for the PD. Giuliano Pisapia obtained the nomination with more than 30,000 preferences, 3,000 more than Stefano Boeri. However, unlike in the case of Naples, the result was fully accepted and all the parties of the centre-left coalition – including the PD – nominated Pisapia as their official candidate and committed themselves to campaign as best they could for his success. the PD leadership convincingly supported Pisapia from the day after the primaries in order not to waste the small chance the centre left seemed to have of defeating Berlusconi in his stronghold (Senesi, 2010). On the other hand, Pisapia acted strategically and publicly announced that in the event of his election, Boeri would be granted a high-profile role in the incoming municipal government. Other

relevant candidates included Manfredi Palmieri (Terzo Polo) and Mattia Calise (Movimento Cinque Stelle).

In terms of communications strategies, the campaigns of Letizia Moratti and Giuliano Pisapia could not have been more different. While the former seemed increasingly to widen the gap with the voters and did not manage fully to galvanise centre-right supporters, the latter organised a very efficient network of supporters – especially young, semi-marginal voters – and conveyed his message in an innovative way to address different social groups (using internet-based communication to a massive degree, and social networks). In the words of journalist Maurizio Mentana, ‘Pisapia is the perfect candidate as he appears moderate to the moderates and radical to the radicals’.⁹ As his chances of reaching the second round appeared to increase, the PD mobilised an impressive number of volunteers from all over the country to support Pisapia’s candidacy.

Table 4: Comparative assessment of the election results in Milan (% of electors) – first round

Party	Regional elections 2010	Local elections 2011	Difference 2010-11
Movimento Cinque Stelle	1.67	2.06	0.39
<i>Left</i>	2.93	4.71	1.78
<i>IdV</i>	3.92	1.51	-2.41
<i>PD</i>	13.61	17.16	3.55
UDC - Terzo Polo	1.49	2.75	1.26
<i>PdL</i>	18.61	17.21	-1.40
<i>LN</i>	7.50	5.77	-1.73
<i>La Destra</i>	0.42	0.38	-0.04
Votes for the candidate of the centre left	5.32	8.35	3.03
Votes for the candidate of the centre right	2.65	4.28	1.63
Others	1.05	1.77	0.72
Non-voters	40.83	34.05	-6.78
Totals	100.00	100.00	

Source: Istituto Carlo Cattaneo.

The two candidates adopted very different approaches also in terms of the issues they touched upon in the campaign. While Pisapia focused almost exclusively on local issues, without involving national politics in his campaign, Moratti stressed Pisapia's radical past and focused her campaign on ‘perceived threats’ such as immigration, multi-culturalism and Islam, accusing her competitor of being over-liberal in this respect. In the final

days of the campaign Berlusconi personally supported Moratti with a speech against the 'red threat'. In order to maximize his mobilisation potential, Berlusconi also headed the PdL's list of candidates for the Milan City Council. One clear example of the level of conflict that marked the final days of the campaign was Moratti's claim during a TV debate that Pisapia had given logistical support to the Red Brigade terrorists in the mid 1970s – a claim that proved to be baseless and turned into an electoral boomerang.¹⁰

From the moment the initial results came through, it seemed clear that the centre-right coalition would not be able to avoid a run-off ballot and the final gap in terms of votes between Pisapia and Moratti was large (48.04 versus 41.58 percent), with the former very close to an absolute majority. This put the centre-right coalition in a very uncomfortable position. Moreover, in terms of individual preferences – as confirmed by the high turnout – Pisapia proved more successful than the centre-right candidate in attracting support (individual votes amounting to 8.35 percent). When it comes to the individual parties, the results appear even clearer. Both the PdL and LN suffered a decline in support (of -1.73 and -1.4 percent respectively), disconfirming the widespread belief that the LN would benefit from a fall in support for the PdL. Di Pietro's IdV lost more than two percentage points, thereby confirming the difficult situation of the party. The personal success of Pisapia is also confirmed by the limited growth experienced by SEL, which was able only partially to capitalise on the 'Pisapia effect'. The most striking result was obtained by the PD, whose support rose by more than three percentage points and in doing so narrowed the gap with the PdL to a few decimals. This result confirmed the re-emergence of strong support for the PD in northern Italy (Corbetta, Colloca, and Passarelli, 2011). A positive result was also obtained by the Terzo Polo (with 2.75 percent).

Within the two-week period that separated the first from the second round, high levels of activism were apparent on the part of both coalitions, although they each adopted very different strategies. While Pisapia continued his 'gentle' but effective campaign, the centre-right campaign was increasingly radicalised (Dell'Orefice, 2011). Despite the growing discontent among NL voters, both Bossi and Berlusconi actively participated in the campaign with public speeches and appearances in support of Letizia Moratti. At the national level the centre-right parties tended to minimise the results of the first round, stressing its strictly local significance. Bossi warned Milanese voters of apocalyptic scenarios in the event of a victory of the centre left. According to Bossi, Pisapia would promote the 'Islamisation' of the city and turn it into a 'gypsy land' (Re, 2011). While the centre right's fear-based campaign did not seem to succeed in attracting new votes for its candidate, it prevented many moderates from supporting her.

The centre right's worst expectations were confirmed by the results of the second round, when Pisapia obtained more than 55 percent of the votes, outdistancing his rival by more than ten percentage points. The success of Pisapia seems to have been due to a number of interconnected factors. First, as in the case of De Magistris, he retained the preferences obtained in the first round. Second, he attracted many moderate voters who supported Moratti or the Terzo Polo in the first round, while mobilising marginal sectors of the electorate generally not keen to vote. Third, many NL voters decided not to vote in the second round in order to show their growing opposition to Moratti and to send a clear message to the leadership of the party. Finally, Pisapia's gentle communication strategy and his wise use of interactive, internet-based, communication tools seem to have greatly contributed to his success.

Looking at the general trends: Who won and who lost?

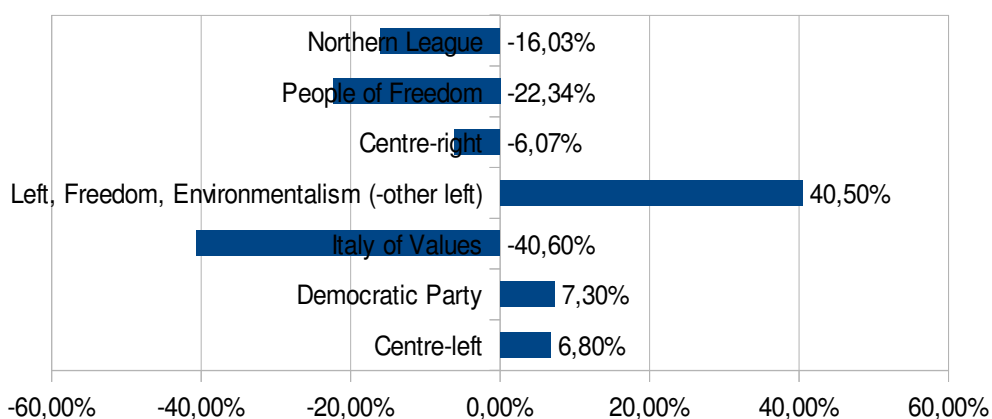
The size of the centre-left victory clearly emerges from Table 5. It seems to go far beyond the four metropolitan cities discussed above. If we look at the 13 main cities¹¹ where elections took place, of the outgoing administrations, 6 were presided-over by centre-left and 7 by centre-right mayors. As a result of the May elections, four cities experienced changes in their governing majorities. However, the changes are uni-directional – from from centre-right to centre-left administrations. These changes took place in three regional capitals, Milan, Trieste, and Cagliari, and in Novara, leaving only three administrations in the hands of the centre-right.

Table 5: *Winning coalitions in the 13 main cities*

City	Previous administration	New administration
Turin	Centre-left	Centre-left
Milan	Centre-right	Centre-left
Trieste	Centre-right	Centre-left
Bologna	Centre-left	Centre-left
Naples	Centre-left	Centre-left
Reggio Calabria	Centre-right	Centre-right
Cagliari	Centre-right	Centre-left
Novara	Centre-right	Centre-left
Ravenna	Centre-left	Centre-left
Rimini	Centre-left	Centre-left
Latina	Centre-right	Centre-right
Salerno	Centre-left	Centre-left
Catanzaro	Centre-right	Centre-right

The size of the defeat of the centre-right parties clearly emerges from Figure 1. In total, the coalition lost more than 6 percent in comparison to the 2010 regional elections. Both the constituent parties experienced heavy losses. Berlusconi's PdL lost more than 22 percent of its share in one year, with no relevant differences between North and South. At the same time the LN suffered a very significant outflow of support (-16 percent), with the exception of Bologna. It is therefore evident that the hypothesis of many observers that centre-right voters would re-direct their support within the coalition from the PdL to the LN was disconfirmed. The main reason behind the decline in support for the LN (resulting mainly from abstentions) seems related to the growing discontent among its voters with the party's alliance with Berlusconi. As in the case of Milan, one of the factors that seems to have contributed to the defeat of the centre-right coalition is the growing weight of abstentions in the second round. While support for the centre-right's candidates decreased by 3.1 percent, support for the centre-left's candidates went up by 16.8 percent. On the other hand, the decline in support for the centre right seems geographically circumscribed: post-election analyses confirmed that while experiencing a dramatic decline in support in the northern regions (-16 percent), the coalition performed well in the South (+12 percent), with the exception of Naples (Istituto Carlo Cattaneo, 2011). What emerges is that, for the first time since 2008, the direct involvement of national leaders in the campaign and their attempts to 'politicise' the local vote did not favour the centre-right candidates and in some cases even brought a decline in their support.

Figure 1: Changes in support for parties, 2010-11, as percentages of previous support shares



Source: Istituto Carlo Cattaneo.

Note: The calculations are based on the election results in the 13 main cities included in Table 5. Percentages refer to changes in share of the *valid* votes obtained by the parties.

By contrast, in total, the centre-left coalition experienced an increase of almost 7 percent, although in absolute terms it lost votes in comparison to the previous local elections. The performance of the coalition varies geographically with a significant increase in the northern regions, stable support in the centre, and significant losses in the South. If we look at the performance of the individual parties the picture appears more variegated. A general decline of the IdV seems confirmed. Compared to the 2010 regional elections the party lost more than 40 percent of its support. The party experienced an outflow of votes towards the other parties of the centre left in all the 13 cities considered in this analysis, with the sole exception of Naples, where it benefited from the 'De Magistris effect'. SEL's result appears extremely promising in that its vote share rose by more than 40 percent. The growth of the party seems related to two major factors: the growing visibility of its leader and the nation-wide impact of the charismatic candidacy of Pisapia, which went far beyond the borders of Milan. Worth mentioning also is the very significant growth of the PD (+6.8 percent). The party seems to have gained more in the northern regions, doing so at the expense of the PdL and the LN. This suggests the re-emergence of a strong Democratic electoral base in the North. The picture in the South, where the overall result was affected by the dramatic outcome of the Naples contest, appears more blurred.

When it comes to the minor parties, the Movimento Cinque Stelle experienced significant growth of almost 40 percent in terms of the size of its share of the vote, its growth coming mainly from disenchanted centre-left voters (e.g. in the case of Bologna) or from non-voters, while the Terzo Polo could not emerge as a pole of attraction for disoriented voters, given the growing polarisation between the main coalitions.

In terms of personalisation of vote, centre-left mayoral candidates seem to have been more successful in attracting votes additional to those going to the parties supporting them (9.1 versus 5.8 percent) (Passarelli, 2011). However, the party whose candidates benefited most from the personal vote was the LN. The proportion favouring the mayoral candidate at the expense of the affiliated coalition (18 percent), confirms once more LN voters' growing opposition to the party's coalition strategy. On the other hand, the stronger personal appeal of the centre left's candidates is confirmed by the fact that the elected mayors with the highest levels of personal support are Cosolini (Trieste) with 20.4 percent, Zedda (Cagliari) with 12.7 percent, and De Magistris with 12.0 percent (Istituto Carlo Cattaneo, 2011).

What next?

As hypothesised at the beginning of this article, the 2011 local elections are very likely to represent the beginning of a decline in the strength of

Berlusconi's leadership and more in general of the PdL – as confirmed also by the results of the four referenda held in June – while contributing to the emergence of further tensions between the PdL and the LN and to growing Government instability (Tito, 2011).

Following the elections, a growing number of dissenting voices within the PdL demanded more internal democracy, even in terms of the mechanisms for the selection of its leaders, thereby posing a very significant threat to Berlusconi's position, while favouring the emergence of *correnti* (factions) competing for influence within the framework of an increasingly empty party. In order to prevent what he perceived as a potential mutiny, Berlusconi adopted a two-fold strategy. On the one hand, he tried to minimise the results of the elections, stressing their local nature; on the other hand, he attempted to minimise the threat of internal dissent by announcing a new party congress and appointing the Minister of Justice, Angelino Alfano, as the first party secretary.¹² Despite Alfano's encouraging declarations and his ambitious intentions to reform the party, his appointment is very unlikely to bring genuine change as Berlusconi still retains absolute power over the party and does not seem to be willing to renounce it in the near future. However, what is becoming increasingly evident is that only through a process of liberation from the control of Berlusconi, will the PdL have any real chance of surviving its founder's decline (Hine and Vampa, 2011).

Following the LN's poor performance and defeat in the referenda, Bossi seems increasingly willing to distance himself from Berlusconi as, in his words, the LN 'is tired of getting slapped' (Palma, 2011). This strategy seems functional both to the mobilisation of disenchanted supporters and to the safeguarding of Bossi's leadership. At the recent annual Pontida rally, Bossi appealed to his supporters by drawing on old 'pro-independence' themes, while warning Berlusconi not to disappoint LN hopes. Bossi is increasingly adopting a political language not very different from the one used on the eve of the 1996 elections, when the party ran alone against both the centre left and Berlusconi's coalition. At present it is unclear if this situation is likely to result in the collapse of the Government – or if the greater likelihood is that the LN will continue to support it.

Developments on the centre left suggest that in order to capitalise on the success in the local elections and in the referenda, and to turn the defeat of the centre right locally into a nation-wide victory, the constituent parties will have to develop a coherent coalition agreement and reduce the endemically high level of inter-party conflict. In particular, the PD – as the leading force in the coalition – will have to define its relationship with the Terzo Polo and rethink the role of primary elections in order to increase its credibility in the eyes of voters (Braghiroli and Verzichelli, 2011). Losing this chance in a period marked by Berlusconi's decline would represent the

failure of the PD project and would lead to developments both unexpected and unexplored.

Notes

1 The author is grateful to Luca Verzichelli for his comments and suggestions.

2 The 2010 regional data are computed only on the basis of the electors resident in each of the four cities.

3 For further details see www.primariebologna2011.org/

4 The centre-left coalition included the PD, IdV, SEL and two lists representing the Socialists and the radical left.

5 Delbono did not obtain an absolute majority in 2009.

6 Roberto Cota (LN) was elected regional governor in 2010.

7 For further details see www.pd torino.it/?p=872

8 See note 1 of Table 1 for an explanation of the option to support a mayoral candidate without also voting for any of the lists supporting him or her.

9 For further details see <http://www.gadlerner.it/2011/05/30/linfedele-soffia-il-vento-dei-ballottaggi.html>

10 As an answer to Moratti's attack, Pisapia's supporters created a Facebook group called 'It's always Pisapia's fault' (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/E-tutta-colpa-di-Pisapia/20336593032087>) that became very popular, with more than 50,000 members. For further details see Caserta (2011).

11 That is, regional capitals and cities with populations of over 100,000.

12 Given the low level of the party's institutionalisation and its populist nature, only the party leader had been recognised as the ultimate authority in any matter.

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