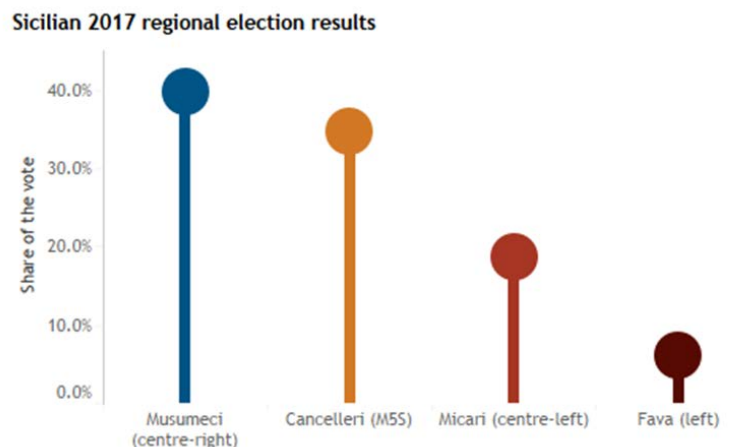


# Sicily, and the perils of going it alone

Blog post by Senior Associate Roberto Robles, 7 November 2017

Last Sunday's regional elections in Sicily were the last major electoral test ahead of Italy's general elections next spring, and they do not bode well for the Five Star Movement. They party high hopes of winning the contest, in a region that saw the party's best results in the 2013 general elections. After its victories in Rome and Turin in 2016, winning Sicily's regional government would have been the party's highest elected office, demonstrating not only that the party could win a serious contest, but also show "proof of concept" of what it would do once having control of the sort of domestic policy levers available to autonomous regions like Sicily. Instead, the Five Star Movement was defeated by a greater than predicted 5-point margin, a result that will likely demobilise a party's base that had believed that the party could win and be a serious electoral force.

While the Five Star Movement's refusal to work with other parties may pay dividends as a protest party, in the Italian system this has proved to now be a weakness that prevents the party from winning electoral contests and attracting voters interested in a serious alternative for government. Conversely, the victory of the coalition led by Nello Musumeci demonstrated the potential of the centre-right formula that also proved successful at the [local elections earlier this year](#). Though unable to stand himself, due to a 2013 tax fraud conviction, Sicily shows that Silvio Berlusconi and his Forza Italia party retain significant popular appeal. His tense relations with Lega Nord's Matteo Salvini - two leaders of parties that are neck-and-neck in the polls and still vying for the leadership of the Italian right - will have to be overcome for the sake of electoral expediency, and the success in Sicily now guarantees that the two will form a pre-electoral coalition in 2018. This imperative is now even greater since the approval of the 'Rosatellum' electoral law last month that creates first-past-the-post seats most easily winnable by aggregations of parties. The centre-right is the clearest beneficiary of these new electoral rules, and could turn its 34-35% of popular support into 40% of seats in parliament, while the Five Star Movement will be hurt by its inability to find political allies.



Source: Region of Sicily

Meanwhile, the third-place achieved by Matteo Renzi's Democratic Party will discredit the party's claims that it is stronger "on the ground" than in the polls. It will, in any case, be the largest 'mainstream' force in the next Italian Parliament, almost guaranteeing - except in the event of an unlikely but not implausible centre-right majority - that it keeps a leading role in the Italian government formed after the 2018 elections. Ultimately, the elections in Sicily make a Five Star-led government - and with it a possible referendum on the euro - an even more remote possibility.