DISRUPTING DEMOCRACY

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About the Bertelsmann Foundation

The Bertelsmann Foundation (North America), Inc., established in 2008, was created to promote and strengthen the transatlantic relationship. Through its research, debate forums and multimedia tools, the Foundation provides analysis and solutions to the most pressing economic, political and social challenges impacting the United States and Europe. As the analog era gives way to the digital revolution, the Foundation must also adapt to a changing environment. By looking at the Euro-Atlantic partnership through a digital lens, the Foundation will explore how technology is shaping the globe, and will use innovative approaches to highlight developments in a rapidly-evolving world.

ITALY

When Stars Align:
The Digital Era and the Rise of
Italy's Third Republic

By Anthony Silberfeld

"The amateurs are the ones conquering the world and I'm rejoicing in it because the professionals are the ones who have reduced the world to this state."[1]

— Beppe Grillo, co-founder of the Five Star Movement

Introduction

In Italy, the "V" sign no longer means victory. Today, it stands for *Vaffanculo (f*ck off)*, a rallying cry led by Beppe Grillo, one of the country's most popular comedians and co-founder of the Five Star Movement — and it succinctly represents the anger, frustration and contempt many Italian voters have for their political establishment. The wave of discontent built by years of corruption and financial mismanagement crested with the elections of March 4, 2018. But the story of how populism triumphed in Italy isn't just about disillusionment with the political class. It's more complicated than that. It's a story of how a confluence of people, technology and global events combined to turn Italian politics on its head.

For those who are new to this series, *Disrupting Democracy* is a project that explores how technology impacts politics and society around the world. It identifies micro-trends unique to the place and time of each country studied, and macro-trends that can herald challenges to come that transcend boundaries, language and economic status. To date, the Bertelsmann Foundation has conducted extensive research in five countries: Germany, India, Israel, Cuba and the United States. The macro-trends that emerged from those cases — accountability, voter apathy, digital divide, media literacy and demographic change — will serve as the lenses through which we approach the Italian case. On an average day, these macro-trends might manifest themselves in subtle ways. In the cauldron of an active election campaign, they become magnified, and their impact has the potential to increase exponentially.

As this chapter goes to print, the voting is over, but negotiations to form the next Italian government have just begun. The
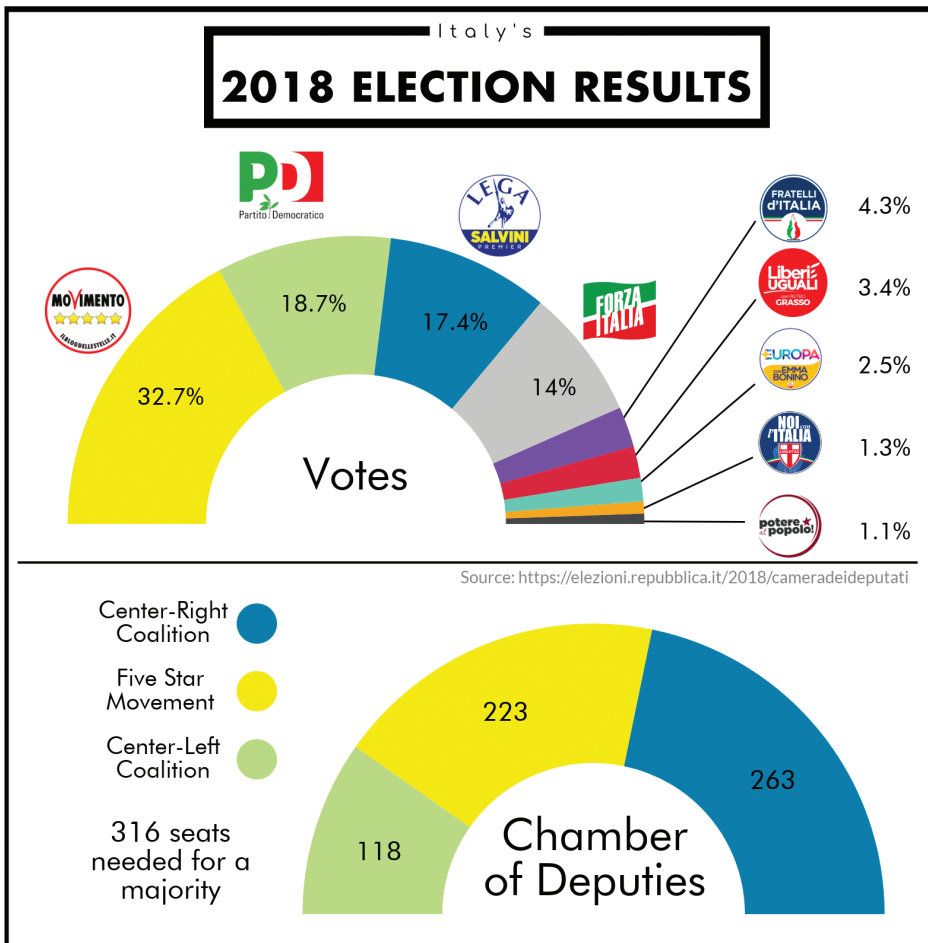
Five Star Movement emerged from the election as Italy's largest party, while Lega (League) surprised many by overtaking the pillar of the center-right, Forza Italia. The results were a disaster for the Democratic Party (*Partito Democratico*, or PD) and a death knell for former Prime Minister Matteo Renzi; they will be doing much soul-searching in the months and even years ahead.

In the pages to follow, we aim to explain the results of the Italian election with the benefit of 20/20 hindsight. The outcome may have been shocking to some, but it should not have come as a surprise. There were predictive signs all along, which ought to give hope to countries with impending elections. With a greater understanding of the factors buffeting democratic systems, policymakers and citizens will be better equipped to maximize the benefits and mitigate the consequences of navigating politics in a digital era.

First Consensus, then Chaos

The current state of Italian politics didn't come to be overnight. It is the product

Italy's
2018 ELECTION RESULTS

Votes

- PD — Partito Democratico: 18.7%
- Movimento 5 Stelle: 32.7%
- LEGA SALVINI PREMIER: 17.4%
- FORZA ITALIA: 14%
- FRATELLI d'ITALIA: 4.3%
- Liberi e UGUALI con Pietro GRASSO: 3.4%
- +EUROPA con Emma BONINO: 2.5%
- NOI con l'ITALIA: 1.3%
- potere al popolo!: 1.1%

Source: https://elezioni.repubblica.it/2018/cameradeideputati

Chamber of Deputies

- Center-Right Coalition: 263
- Five Star Movement: 223
- Center-Left Coalition: 118

316 seats needed for a majority

of decades of post-war inventing and reinventing of the Italian political system. Before delving into where we are today, it is instructive to take a glimpse at the modern democratic history of *il bel paese*.

The First Republic

In the aftermath of World War II, Alcide De Gasperi and his Christian Democrats (*Democrazia Cristiana*, DC) led an all-party government that included Socialists, Social Democrats and Communists. The decision to establish a coalition of all major parties was a deliberate repudiation of the experiment with authoritarian rule that brought bloodshed and economic ruin to Italy. The early focus of this government was to build a consensus around rebuilding the country and repairing relations with other nations, primarily the United States and Soviet Union.

As tensions rose between the Americans and the Soviets, the centrist DC and the Communist Party — each eager to curry favor with the superpower with which it identified ideologically — came into conflict as well. In May 1947, following an attack at an International Workers' Day event in southern Italy that left 11 people dead, De Gasperi expelled Communist and other left-wing ministers from government.

The following year's elections ended the immediate post-war era of all-party governance and established the political framework that would define Italy for the next four decades: a so-called blocked parliamentary system, with the DC always in government through a coalition with smaller parties and the Communists in opposition. Although DC domination made for relative continuity in policy, the party's reliance on junior partners created political instability, leading to dozens of short-lived governments throughout the 1950s, '60s and '70s. Coalition experimentation with the Socialists in a center-left configuration helped broaden the parliamentary base for DC but failed to yield long-term stability.

The 1970s brought political and social upheaval. Internal dissension, waning public support and the rising popularity of the Communist Party rendered a series of coalition governments virtually powerless and made policy stability almost impossible to achieve. The combination of political upheaval and the prospects of Communist leaders in other Western countries set the stage for the "historic compromise"[2] of 1976: DC Prime Minister Aldo Moro struck a deal with the Communist Party to create a cabinet of national solidarity. In the years that followed, Italian Communists began to distance themselves from Moscow to gain greater domestic appeal and influence, and that ideological shift resonated with voters.

The 1980s brought the first post-war Italian governments led by parties other than DC: first the center-left Italian Republican Party, and then the Socialists, led by Bettino Craxi. Craxi was highly critical of the Communist Party, which began to lose public favor after its charismatic leader, Enrico Berlinguer, died in 1984. The Socialists continued to move toward the center, attracting reform-minded Communists and cultivating better relations with other Western powers. But by the late '80s, global events and domestic scandals had cast a shadow over Italian politics. The end of the Cold War, combined with the *Tangentopoli* (Bribesville) corruption investigation — the moniker speaks for itself — effectively brought the First Republic to an end.

The Second Republic

Widespread corruption, skyrocketing public debt, poor leadership and the open influence of organized crime broke the major parties into unsustainable factions, which gave way to a new

cadre of politicians. One of the defining characteristics of this period was the prevalence of caretaker governments, appointed by the republic's presidents rather than elected by voters.

Silvio Berlusconi also arrived on the political scene that year, as an outsider who promised to translate his business acumen into good governance and institute political, economic and ethical reforms.

By the mid-1990s, political volatility in Italy was the norm. Voters were in no mood to countenance business as usual, as evidenced by the 1994 elections, which sent 452 new deputies (out of 630) and 213 new senators (out of 315) to Parliament.[3] Silvio Berlusconi also arrived on the political scene that year, as an outsider who promised to translate his business acumen into good governance and institute political, economic and ethical reforms. His first tenure as prime minister lasted only a year, however, as a major coalition partner, Lega Nord (now Lega), withdrew support for his government.

Center-left parties grouped as the Olive Tree governed from 1996 to 2001, when Berlusconi returned to power as head of a center-right coalition, House of Freedoms, headed by the newly created Forza Italia. House of Freedoms remained in power until 2006, when it was replaced in a general election by a center-left coalition.

Romano Prodi, who led the first Olive Tree government from 1996 to 1998 then served for five years as president of the European Commission, returned as prime minister in 2006. His new coalition, *L'Unione* (the Union), was similar to the Olive Tree but, unlike its predecessor, included radical leftist elements. Prodi lost a vote of confidence in the Senate in 2008 but stayed on as prime minister for four months pending early elections.

The 2008 campaign became a contest between two new political forces: PD, founded the year before by the Democrats of the Left and centrist party the Daisy, and the center-right People of Freedom coalition, made up principally by the reincarnated Forza Italia and the National Alliance. Although not part of the coalition, Lega Nord allied itself again with Berlusconi, who won the election and claimed the mantle of prime minister for a third time.

Berlusconi resigned in 2011 in response to mounting political pressure over multiple scandals and his failure to manage the financial crisis. Mario Monti, who represented the centrist Civic Choice party, was appointed by President Giorgio Napolitano to form a technocratic government to serve until the next scheduled general election in 2013. A week prior to becoming prime minister, Monti was appointed senator for life; Italy's debt had reached 116 percent of GDP,[4] and only someone with job security could implement the necessary but politically damaging reforms the grave situation required. The economic and labor-market policies Monti put in place increased taxes

and reformed pensions, which would become key issues in the 2018 election.

The 2013 vote resulted in a grand coalition of PD, People of Freedom, and Civic Choice — the first governing alliance in Italian history to include representatives of all major parties that had competed in a national election. PD Secretary Pier Luigi Bersani, in line to become prime minister, initially tried to form a government with the nascent Five Star Movement, but his bid failed and he resigned as party leader. Napolitano stepped in again and offered the reins to Enrico Letta, PD's vice secretary, who forged the grand alliance.

With the wily and indefatigable Berlusconi sowing discord within the coalition, Letta lasted less than a year as prime minister. Forza Italia pulled out of People of Freedom when Berlusconi, facing corruption and tax-evasion charges, was ejected from Parliament, and many lawmakers resigned on his orders over disagreement with PD leaders about value-added-tax (VAT) reform. Letta also faced challenges from the left wing of his party, led by Matteo Renzi, the young former mayor of Florence, who called for a radical program of reform and had the support of a large faction within PD. After the party backed Renzi's call for a new government, Letta resigned in February 2014. At Napolitano's request, Renzi formed a new government with cabinet members from PD, the New Center-Right, the Union of the Center, and Civic Choice.

While in office, Renzi oversaw an aggressive reform campaign encompassing taxes, the electoral system, labor law (making it easier for employers to hire and fire employees), social policy (same-sex civil unions were legalized), and public administration. He resigned in December 2016 after a referendum on constitutional reform he championed was roundly rejected by voters. PD voted the following year to retain him as secretary and support him as their prime ministerial candidate in the 2018 general election.

2018 Elections

The outcome of the 2018 elections was decades in the making. The rise and fall of the First and Second republics produced a political class in disarray and a disillusioned electorate ready to make a statement in protest of years of sacrifice. The vacuum created by irresponsible and ineffective leadership was filled with a mix of populists and extremists prepared to weaponize wedge issues like economic inequality and immigration to their political advantage. The flashback box (see pages 6-7) provides a glimpse into the choice that voters faced on the eve of the election.

The history and the present have collided in Italy to create an unstable environment in which anything is possible. In an era when traditional parties controlled all means of communication, the consequences of such volatility could be held in relative check. In the digital age, the playing field has been leveled and information channels are cheap, pervasive and under-regulated. While access to information under the best of circumstances should bring order, introducing the Internet to politics in Italy has, in many ways, exacerbated the chaos.

In the pages to follow, we will try to bring some order to the chaos. By analyzing the Italian elections through the lens of *Disrupting Democracy's* macro-trends, we can begin to understand the positive and negative effects of technology on our democratic systems of government.

Accountability and Transparency

The notion of maximizing accountability and transparency in government is one of the hallmarks of a modern democracy. Technological innovation has created unlimited ways for governments to pull back the veil on legislative and executive

FLASHBACK – MARCH 3, 2018 – Party Profiles

Democratic Party (Partito Democratico, PD)

It has been a shocking fall from grace for the party that leads the current center-left coalition government in Rome under Paolo Gentiloni. Just a few years ago, Matteo Renzi was a popular prime minister with the potential to provide long-term stability to a country still struggling to recover from the economic crisis. But a series of missteps, including a failed gambit to reform the constitution and a corruption scandal, dimmed Renzi's star power ahead of the election. In speaking with voters in Italy, it was clear that those shortcomings could be forgiven, but the PD's move to the center is driving its left-wing base to search for alternatives.

Forza Italia (FI)

Just when you thought Silvio Berlusconi's political career was finally over, the media magnate and three-time prime minister has found a way to resurrect his image. Despite being banned from holding office due to his conviction for tax fraud, Italy's "Teflon Don" remains the driving force behind its predominant center-right party. Mixing far-right positions on contentious issues like migration — Berlusconi recently called migrants a "social time bomb" — and more moderate economic stances, the party hopes to attract enough centrist and conservative voters to win leadership of the next coalition. There remains the question of who would take the helm of an FI-led government, but it is clear Berlusconi would be pulling the strings.

League (Lega)

Having transformed the former Northern League from a secessionist movement into a potential kingmaker in national politics, Matteo Salvini is leading his party into the next election as the anti-immigrant, Euroskeptic, nationalist alternative to Forza Italia, with which it is currently aligned in a center-right coalition. Given that migration is one of the primary issues on the minds of Italian voters, the environment is ripe for the League to make electoral gains à la the National Front in France and Alternative for Germany. The party would also stand to be the biggest beneficiary of any Russian intervention in the Italian election. The League maintains a cooperation agreement with Vladimir Putin's United Russia party, so keeping an eye on its finances and activity across digital platforms may offer clues into how the party will perform on Election Day.

Five Star Movement
(Movimento 5 Stelle, M5S)

The Five Star Movement, conceived by Internet entrepreneur Gianroberto Casaleggio and brought to prominence by comedian Beppe Grillo, has sprinted to the top of the most recent pre-election polls. Political analysts across Italy have used a variety of adjectives to describe M5S, including "fascist," "extremist" and "populist." A look at the Five Star platform — with its planks on environmental protection, universal connectivity and economic inclusivity — might lead one to conclude its ideological home is on the left, but opposition to migration casts an extremist shadow over the party. This contradiction produces the chief criticism of M5S: Since it stands for everything, it really stands for nothing. But speaking with voters from factory towns in Umbria or the gritty streets of Naples, it's apparent this doesn't bother them. Disillusionment with the established parties far outweighs the perceived lack of depth and consistency in Five Star's approach to politics. The notion of a party created on the Internet that trumpets direct democracy is appealing to Italians who feel the established parties have failed to deliver. With Grillo having distanced himself from politics and party affairs in recent months, the face of M5S is now 31-year-old Luigi Di Maio, who must figure out a way to ride voter apathy to victory in March.

Free and Equal
(Liberi e Uguali, LeU)

A perception that the Democratic Party under Renzi sold out the left in pursuit of the Blairite center created a schism in the progressive wing of Italian politics. LeU broke from PD to form a party dedicated to the core values of the traditional left. While it may find support among the working-class voters in Italy's industrial heartland, the party's best outcome will be to reach the 3 percent threshold to enter parliament and serve as a junior partner in a left-wing coalition. Most analysts believe, however, that the more consequential outcomes of the splintering of the left will be a weakened PD and a stronger Five Star Movement.

Brothers of Italy
(Fratelli d'Italia)

There are parties that are hyperbolically derided as "fascist," and then there are actual fascist parties. Brothers of Italy is the latter. Anti-migrant, anti-Europe, and nationalist, it is the modern-day successor of Mussolini's National Fascist Party. Despite its extreme views, party leader Giorgia Meloni, a minister in the fourth Berlusconi cabinet, has signaled that she would be prepared to sign on to a coalition of the right.[5]

processes and allow voters to see how the proverbial sausage is made. With Italy's history of corruption and the absence of trust in institutions, the digital era provides both opportunities and risks. Digital tools can be used to show how every penny is spent, but also to shine the spotlight on every penny misspent. It is the latter that has caused an uproar in Italy and had a clear impact on the 2018 election.

Familiar Hands in the Cookie Jar

There is almost an accepted level of corruption in Italy. Raise the topic with Italians and one is often met with a shrug that seems to say, "That's just the way it's always been done." But with broader access to information, the public's tolerance for overt graft has clearly waned. Recent examples involving the main center-right and center-left parties illustrate this.
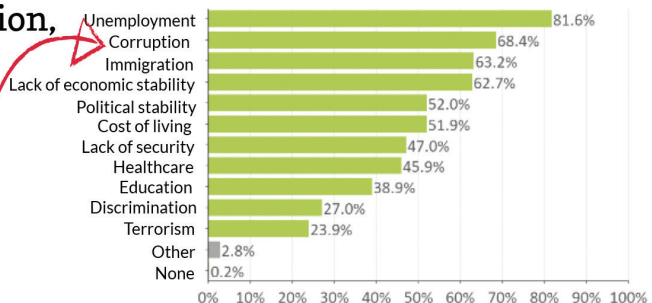
In 2011, Berlusconi was accused of paying for sex with a 17-year-old Moroccan belly dancer nicknamed "Ruby the Heart Stealer" and abusing his office, allegedly phoning a police station where she was being held on theft charges to get her released.[6] Convictions arising from the matter were overturned in 2014, but that year Berlusconi was found guilty of tax fraud, and in 2015 he was convicted of giving a senator a $4 million bribe nine

years earlier in a bid to undermine the then-center-left government.[7] Widely shared on electronic and social media, the stories eroded Berlusconi's and Forza Italia's credibility and made them a difficult sell to voters.

All this should have played into the hands of the Democratic Party, a successor to one of the few national parties to survive the *Mani Pulite* (Clean Hands) scandal of the 1990s, which resulted in the arrest of more than 3,000 government officials on corruption charges.[8] Renzi and his party did indeed capitalize on the tainted reputation of Forza Italia, for a time. By 2016, however, PD was engulfed in its own corruption scandal. The economic-development minister, Federica Guidi, was compelled to resign amid accusations that she had pushed energy legislation that would benefit her boyfriend's business interests.

Renzi defended Guidi, despite damning audio recordings, opening the door to up-and-comers ready to highlight PD's hypocrisy after it campaigned on a promise to eliminate corruption. (Among them, it's worth noting, was Luigi Di Maio, who would go on to lead the Five Star Movement. "This matter calls into question the whole government," he said. "It always puts people in charge who are in

In your opinion, what are the main issues facing Italy today?

Issue	Percentage
Unemployment	81.6%
Corruption	68.4%
Immigration	63.2%
Lack of economic stability	62.7%
Political stability	52.0%
Cost of living	51.9%
Lack of security	47.0%
Healthcare	45.9%
Education	38.9%
Discrimination	27.0%
Terrorism	23.9%
Other	2.8%
None	0.2%

Source: Questia / Bertelsmann Foundation Polling 2018

the pay of the lobbies or who are looking out for themselves."[9] Renzi survived this episode with his government intact but did not appear to learn any lessons. Amid further scandals over banking and public contracts, the narrative that PD had become everything it once condemned seemed to write itself, and the voters were watching.

In an October 2015 statement, Transparency International termed the level of corruption in Italy "unbearable."[10] The organization's 2017 Corruption Perceptions Index ranked Italy 54th in the world, tied with Mauritius and Slovakia.[11] And just after Election Day in March, the Bertelsmann Foundation, in partnership with the Questia Group, conducted its own survey in which 68.4 percent of Italians cited corruption as the principal challenge facing Italy.

Turning the Tide?

Public officials have made numerous efforts to restore trust in government institutions, but have largely fallen short. Technology provides lawmakers with another avenue for bridging the gap between the government and its people. At the national level, the PD government established a website (www.governo.it) that provides general information on who runs the government and how it works. A more useful initiative was launched by the Renzi government in 2014, as part of its digital strategy, with the Open Government Partnership which aims to increase transparency, addresses the legacy of corruption and uses technology to accelerate the repair of a badly broken system. Through government platforms such as *Soldipubblici and Opencatieri*, citizens now have a window into the use of public money.[12] The creation of a single digital identity platform called SPID (https://developers.italia.it/en/spid/) that facilitates access to public services has provided an additional avenue for holding government accountable for its

commitments. This is a work in progress, but Italy's action plan is a step in the right direction.

Though progress is being made in utilizing digital platforms to rebuild public trust in institutions, there is a long way to go.

Local governments across Italy are also implementing public-service tech initiatives, most notably in the northern town of Turin. Mayor Chiara Appendino, a member of the Five Star Movement, is driving a smart-city strategy that has put Turin far ahead of the curve in Italy, from the presence of innovation hubs to the provision of responsive government services, transparent procurement processes and accountability in the virtual and physical spaces. Turin's public-service portal, offering downloadable data sets for everything from public spending to the maintenance of the city's restrooms, is the best example of the philosophical change M5S is forging in the public sphere.

Though progress is being made in utilizing digital platforms to rebuild public trust in institutions, there is a long way to go. According to the Questia/Bertelsmann survey, 63 percent of Italians report little or very little trust in political parties, making them the least trusted institution in Italy. The Five Star Movement, however, has put considerable effort into turning the tide of public sentiment, and seeks to turn local success into national credibility.

Rousseau's New Social Contract

One of the founding principles of the Five Star Movement was that traditional political parties have failed Italy and a new political paradigm was required. No longer would candidates be chosen and key decisions made behind closed doors by the country's elite; M5S declared it would conduct its business in the open for all to see. With that in mind, under the leadership of the late Gianroberto Casaleggio, the party created an online platform called Rousseau that connects directly with voters in an almost utopian form of digital democracy. Candidates for office would be nominated and selected in online primaries through this portal; key planks of the party platform would be determined by the advice and consent of voters.
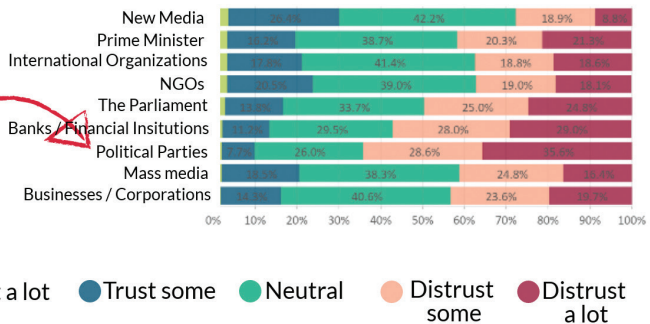
Five Star has been criticized for using Rousseau as window dressing for anti-democratic decision-making practices by the party's senior leadership including restricting engagement with media, and summarily dismissing party members. Voters seem unfazed by this critique. When Italians were asked what words they associate with the M5S, the most popular response was "transparency." Another word, "*basta*" — enough — was the sentiment we heard most often when speaking with Italian voters about corruption in politics. The Five Star Movement caught this wave of discontent and rode it to national popularity. As we

How much trust do you have in the following?

	Trust a lot	Trust some	Neutral	Distrust some	Distrust a lot
New Media		26.4%	42.2%	18.9%	6.8%
Prime Minister	16.2%	38.7%	20.3%	21.3%	
International Organizations	17.9%	41.4%	18.8%	18.6%	
NGOs	20.5%	39.0%	19.0%	18.1%	
The Parliament	14.6%	33.7%	25.0%	24.8%	
Banks / Financial Insitutions	11.2%	29.5%	28.0%	29.0%	
Political Parties	7.7%	26.0%	28.6%	35.5%	
Mass media	18.5%	38.3%	24.8%	16.4%	
Businesses / Corporations	14.3%	40.6%	23.6%	19.7%	

Source: Questia / Bertelsmann Foundation Polling 2018

move into the second macro trend, the question remains whether voter anger can be converted into support at the ballot box.
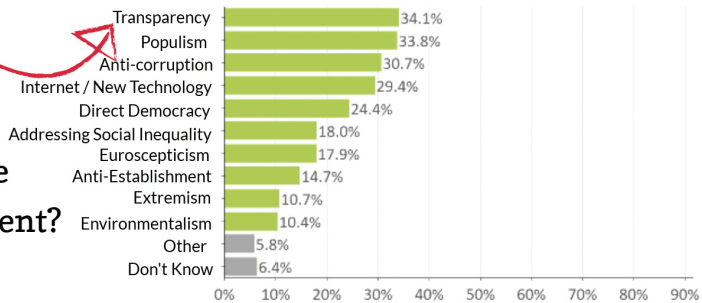
Voter Apathy

In the previous *Disrupting Democracy* case studies, voter apathy took one of two forms: depressed turnout or a surge to the polls for a protest vote. Italy is a particularly interesting case since voter turnout in the country typically outpaces that of many Western democracies, including the United States. In the 2018 race, more than 73 percent of Italian voters went to the polls, compared to approximately 58 percent of Americans in the 2016 general election. In the case of Italy, it's clear that the latter apathy scenario prevailed — a high turnout that boosted anti-establishment parties.

There may not be an Italian word for "pandering," but M5S has mastered the art.

The two parties poised to ride the wave of public disenchantment were the Five Star Movement and Lega. Notwithstanding being lumped together in this section for their anti-establishment orientation, they have little in common. We spent significant time in the run-up to the election with Five Star candidates and at campaign rallies, and there was one clear takeaway: Voters have no idea what the party stands for. There may not be an Italian word for "pandering," but M5S has mastered the art. Its manifesto is a collection of generally benign and superficial pronouncements. The one firm stance party leaders were forced to take, via a vote in Parliament, related to the migration crisis, putting them in the precarious position of being labeled "fascists" and "racists." The party is far more comfortable occupying the inoffensive middle ground that many populist parties prefer, so as not to offend any prospective voter. But it is difficult to discern the movement's ideological North Star.

Lega, for its part, has no such identity crisis. The party began as a secessionist movement in northern Italy, agitating to separate from the economically sluggish south. In this election campaign, it has reinvented itself as a national, nativist, "Italy First" party, appealing to those

What words do you associate with the Five Star Movement?

Transparency	34.1%
Populism	33.8%
Anti-corruption	30.7%
Internet / New Technology	29.4%
Direct Democracy	24.4%
Addressing Social Inequality	18.0%
Euroscepticism	17.9%
Anti-Establishment	14.7%
Extremism	10.7%
Environmentalism	10.4%
Other	5.8%
Don't Know	6.4%

Source: Questia / Bertelsmann Foundation Polling 2018

frustrated by the country's prolonged economic crisis and fear of "the other," represented by migrants. It has been described as fascist, and it does not shy away from that epithet.

So, with GDP growth projected to hover around 1 percent for the foreseeable future[13] and a youth unemployment rate of more than 37 percent,[14] voters who were angry at a system that had failed to deliver over the past decade would have two options on Election Day: a far-right, anti-migrant, anti-European party, or one that cannot be pinned down on the ideological spectrum and has no experience in governing at the national level. The electorate found itself in the unenviable position of selecting the "least bad" option. Once the votes were counted, both parties would claim victory. M5S would emerge as Italy's biggest party, while Lega would outperform expectations and overtake Forza Italia to become the leading party on the right.

At the same time, the establishment parties were severely punished at the polls. Renzi's PD fell from about 30 percent in the 2013 election to 19 percent this year; Berlusconi and Forza Italia, at 14 percent, lost their stranglehold on leadership of the center-right.

Digital Divide

The digital divide — in many countries around the globe, a chasm — can manifest itself in a variety of ways. It can be geographic — an urban/rural or north/south split. It can be economic, pitting the "haves" against the "have nots." It can be segmented by age and/or education. Italy, once again, presents a unique case. According to the 2017 edition of Europe's Digital Progress Report (EDPR), "Italy's slow performance is mainly driven by the usage side: low levels of digital skills translate into low levels of a range of indicators," including broadband uptake, number of Internet users, engagement in online activities such e-government and e-commerce, and a dearth of STEM degrees and IT specialists.[15]
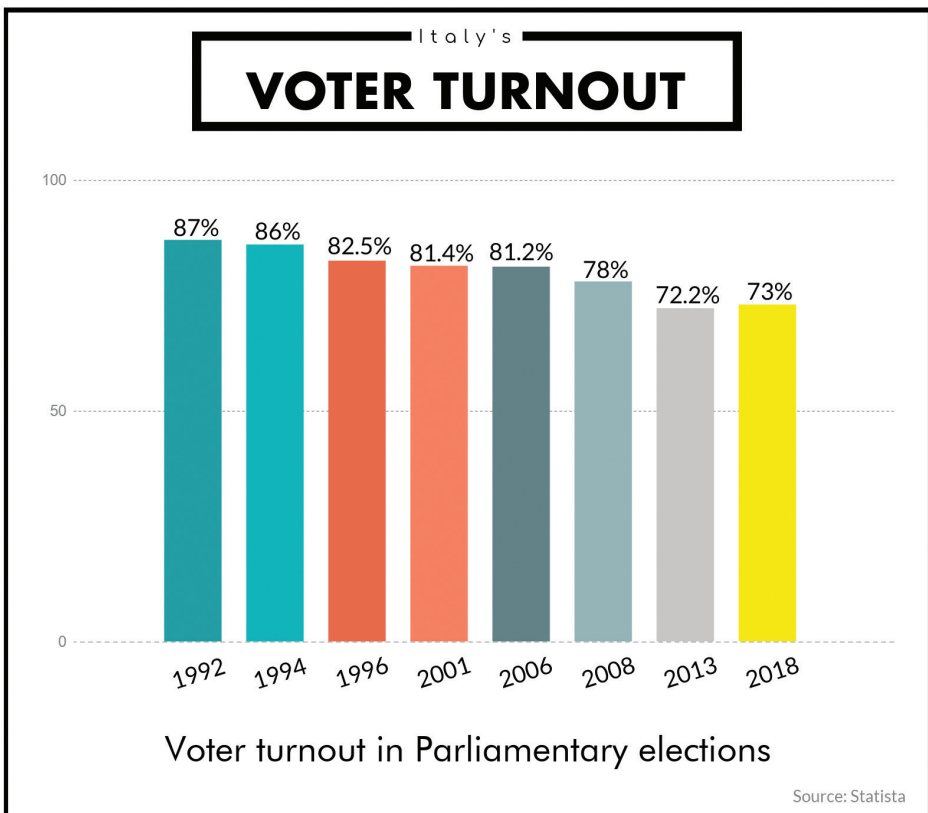
Only 55 percent of Italian households use fixed broadband, the lowest penetration of the 28 EU countries.
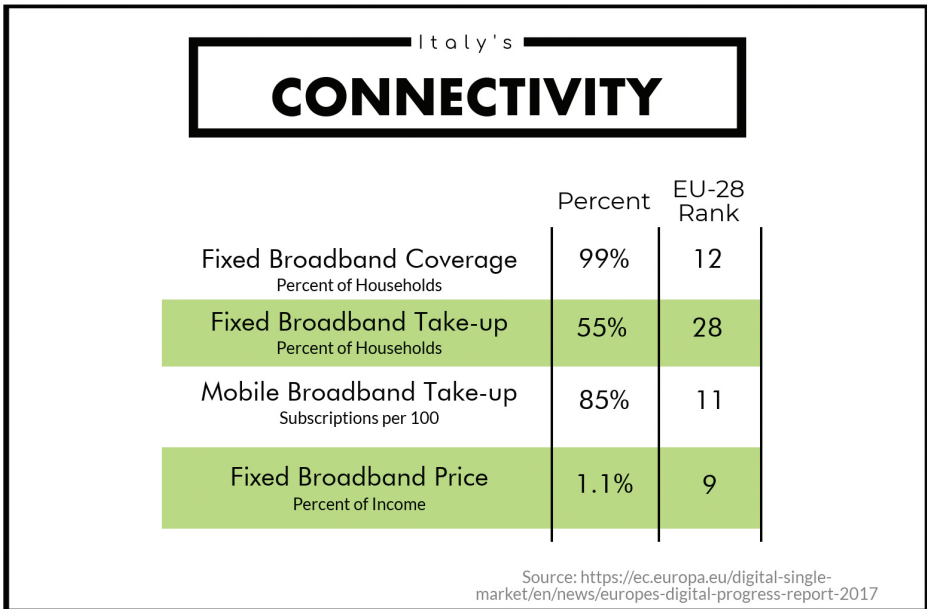
In other words, with the exception of marginal differences in usage related to geography, access and cost are not the culprits in Italy, as they often are elsewhere. Rather, Italians are unprepared to leverage the technology already available to them, due to tech-related behavioral patterns (covered in part II of this chapter) and lack of opportunities for science and tech education.

Regardless of their domestic cause, Italy's digital-divide indicators are relatively disturbing on the European level. Only 55 percent of Italian households use fixed broadband, the lowest penetration of the 28 EU countries. In Cuba, subject of a previous *Disrupting Democracy* report, the explanation is that the Internet is restricted by the authorities and cost-prohibitive. But in Italy, which ranks ninth in the EU in the cost of fixed broadband, access is relatively cheap, so that hurdle does not apply. More telling is that only 44 percent of Italians have basic digital skills, the fourth-lowest level in the EU.

The lack of digital building blocks creates a significant ripple effect. A population that is not connected has fewer avenues for information, fewer points of access to government services and fewer levers by which to hold officials accountable. This also extends into the economic realm, as Italy becomes less competitive in the digital economy and slips down the global value chain relative to its place as one of the world's largest economies.

Italy's VOTER TURNOUT

Year	Turnout
1992	87%
1994	86%
1996	82.5%
2001	81.4%
2006	81.2%
2008	78%
2013	72.2%
2018	73%

Voter turnout in Parliamentary elections

Source: Statista

Italy's
CONNECTIVITY

	Percent	EU-28 Rank
Fixed Broadband Coverage Percent of Households	99%	12
Fixed Broadband Take-up Percent of Households	55%	28
Mobile Broadband Take-up Subscriptions per 100	85%	11
Fixed Broadband Price Percent of Income	1.1%	9

Source: https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/europes-digital-progress-report-2017

The result is a vicious circle. Lack of information, disconnection from the political elite and waning competitiveness in the global economy create a noxious cocktail that results in the unease and volatility we now see in Italy. Rome has a national Digital Agenda Strategy that aims to address these deficiencies, but the EDPR concludes that, while Italy is taking the right approach to outfitting the next generation of voters with digital skills, there is a "shortage of strategic planning for addressing the digital skills' gap of the older generations."[16] How Italian governments address this need in the years ahead may dictate Italy's democratic prospects for a generation.

Media Literacy

In speaking with Italians about politics, the concept of *dietrologia* frequently comes up. This is the notion that what one sees on the surface is rarely the whole story; the truth can only be found *dietro*, or behind, the façade. It's particularly relevant in the current era, in which fake news and conspiracy theories go viral in an instant.

While Italians use social media less than Americans or other Europeans because of the dominance of television, the fake-news phenomenon still poses a challenge for Italy's electorate. Several high-profile examples, including stories about the supposed danger of vaccines and the future viability of pensions, struck at the core of Italian society.

Perhaps the most absurd example was circulated around the Italian body politic for the sole purpose of stoking fear and bolstering the fortunes of xenophobic and anti-establishment parties. In August 2017, amid an outcry over public assistance for migrants who were rumored to be getting a state stipend of €35 per day (the figure actually reflected what the government was giving local organizations that provide food and basic services to migrants, according to UNHCR), an image was widely circulated on social media of

two brown-skinned men lounging on a bench in the Tuscan town of Forte dei Marmi with shopping bags from high-end boutiques, ostensibly confirming Italians' worst fears about how African arrivals were spending their money. It was actually a photo of movie star Samuel L. Jackson and Hall of Fame basketball player Magic Johnson on vacation.

While Italians use social media less than Americans or other Europeans because of the dominance of television, the fake-news phenomenon still poses a challenge for Italy's electorate.

Thus did an easily verifiable item about two of the most famous black men on the planet enflame a serious debate about benefits for migrants — and reveal the necessity for a plan to combat fake news in Italy. Fortunately, some progress is being made on that front. In October 2017, Laura Boldrini, the president of the Italian Parliament, led the charge to create a media-literacy curriculum in Italy.[17] In conjunction with the Ministry of Education, a pilot program was established in 8,000 high schools around the country to prepare the next generation of voters to discern fact from fabrication online.

During our visit to Milan, we stopped by the Liceo Manzoni and heard first-hand from teachers and students. One of the central elements of this curriculum is the students' hands-on experience at the Sky Academy Studios, in which practicing journalists lead a master class in identifying news sources, controlling search engine results and verifying photos for authenticity. Once they've captured the basics, students work side-by-side with journalists to check sources on news items that arrive in the studio in real time. When asked about the stakes involved in this curriculum, one student replied, "Many times fake news are a threat to democracy. They are really unpredictable, and fake news, unfortunately, spreads easily because people share anything in an irresponsible way." She continued, "The fact that young kids are conscious of the risk…in my opinion is a good result. It is a starting point."

Perhaps learning the lesson from the exploitation of Facebook during the 2016 U.S. election, organizations in Italy have made a concerted effort to ramp up capacity for flagging fake news on the social-media platform. Pagella Politica (https://pagellapolitica.it/) an Italian fact-checking project founded in 2012, was modeled after PolitiFact in the United States. Pagella Politica started as a student blog, but in 2013 it signed a cooperation agreement with the national Italian broadcaster, RAI, and developed a comprehensive system for separating fact from fiction that included hiring journalists to spot and correct fake news.

Most people would consider this work a public service, but Pagella Politica often faces critics who accuse it of being biased toward one political party or another. The project's leaders take comfort that such critiques come from parties across the ideological spectrum: "That's how

we know we're balanced," co-founder Giovanni Zagni says. Their efforts to hold politicians accountable for the truthfulness of what they say has helped decrease the number of outlandish claims. Zagni recounts examples of politicians who have been exposed through Pagella Politica; while they rarely acknowledge the mistake, they do drop the false claims from their speeches and pronouncements.

The project has discerned patterns in particular politicians' casual relationship with the truth. Berlusconi, according to Pagella Politica's research, tends to make very precise claims using numbers that turn out to be incorrect or entirely fabricated. Renzi is also fond of using data in his prepared remarks at campaign events, but he sometimes interprets those figures in ways that stretch the limits of credibility. But Pagella Politica goes to great lengths to distinguish between misstatements and lying. It has five ratings for accuracy: *vero* (true), *c'eri quasi* (almost true), *nì* (yes and no), *Pinocchio andante* (Pinocchio growing) and *panzana pazzesca* (the equivalent of "pants on fire"). The verdict

Italy's

MEDIA LITERACY

Comedian Luca Bottura created a meme, joking about the spending habits of

"MIGRANTS"

knowing full well they were American celebrities.

Many didn't realize it was a joke.

Website

PAGELLA POLITICA

✅ Fact-checking politicians' statements ❌

system has resonated with the electorate, but its impact cuts both ways. On one hand, it gives readers an instant measure of veracity. On the other, readers tend to fixate on the verdict rather than delve into the underlying facts of the matter. Nevertheless, the reach of this work has been amplified through daily articles and videos each day appearing on the national broadcaster's website, highlighting factual and fictitious statements in the public domain.

Italians' susceptibility to fake news is not solely a reflection of the need to improve their digital literacy. It is also a reflection of the volatile environment in which they live. On issues ranging from economic stagnation to the migration crisis, the political establishment has failed to offer adequate solutions or explanations, leading voters to look for answers elsewhere. Sometimes they find those answers online in posts that sound perfectly reasonable but are false. Lega and the Five Star Movement seem to have benefited most from the prevalence of fake news, the nature of which is to sow division and foster discontent.

Demographic Change

It is not just the virtual world that is evolving; the actual world is changing, too, and Italy cannot escape this metamorphosis. This is an aging country in the midst of a prolonged economic malaise, lacking the resources to address an influx of migrants, which exacerbates the economic challenges, which inevitably opens the door to nationalistic tendencies.

> …the parties without a record of failing the voters have a distinct advantage at the ballot box over those that had myriad opportunities to get the house in order and did not deliver.

The politics of age are becoming increasingly complicated in Italy. Those over 65 now make up 21.5 percent of the population. To put this into perspective, only 7.5 percent of Turkey's population is above retirement age.[18][19] Why is that significant? It means a greater share of the population, now and in the years ahead, will likely face pension cuts as the government struggles to keep the nation financially afloat. This could have dangerous consequences as an increasing number of disgruntled retirees (who tend to be active participants in democracy) align politically with a growing population of un- and under-employed youth. Once again, the parties without a record of failing the voters (e.g., Lega and Five Star) have a distinct advantage at the ballot box over those that had myriad opportunities to get the house in order and did not deliver (e.g., PD and Forza Italia).

Immigration, too, represents the changing face of Italy. Migrants, primarily from Africa, have made the treacherous journey across the Mediterranean to seek refuge in Europe from war or poverty at home. For these men and women, Italy is often the first point of entry on the European continent, and a dysfunctional EU immigration system has left Italy to shoulder a disproportionate burden. Despite the number of refugees reaching a four-year low in 2017, public sentiment retains a virulent xenophobic strain.

In this environment, immigration became a wedge issue in the 2018 election, dividing parties into two camps: those who welcome migrants and those who want to turn them away. The Democratic Party and others on the left offered relatively permissive policies toward new arrivals. By contrast, Lega offered a dystopian view of what Italy would become if it continues to allow an influx of migrants. In a campaign rally, party leader Salvini claimed Italians "are the victims of the only racism in this country. It is the racism of the left that chooses the exact opposite: First the rest of the world, then Italians. Those choosing Lega on March 4 say the opposite. We come first." So as not to be outflanked, Berlusconi cynically drifted to the right on immigration, at one point likening his policy toward migrants to how one should treat an intruder in one's home in the middle of the night. For Lega, at least, this pernicious and anything-but-subtle appeal translated into electoral gold.

Disrupting Democracy: Italy's Third Republic

In the five previous *Disrupting Democracy* reports, it was technology that was the primary disruptor of a country's political system. In Italy, digital tools gave oxygen to upstart parties like the Five Star Movement and amplified divisive messages to the benefit of Lega, but the combination of economic stagnation, austerity, migration and suspicion of European institutions has rivaled technology in its ability to induce chaos. Still, the five macro-trends that cut across the previous case studies — accountability, voter apathy, the digital divide, media literacy and demographic change — have also found a home in Italy. Individually, they have had varying degrees of impact, but in sum, they help explain the results of this election and serve as a cautionary tale for those countries next in the electoral queue.

Given the circumstances, it should have come as little surprise that the Five Star Movement emerged as Italy's largest party, prompting M5S head Luigi Di Maio to declare the birth of the Third Republic. As this publication went to print, he was flirting with forming a government with Matteo Salvini and Lega but ruling out any alliance that involves Berlusconi. The center-right coalition the League now heads lacks the numbers for a majority, and the center-left is a shambles. Renzi, lauded only four years ago as the savior of Italian politics, resigned as Democratic Party leader at a funereal press conference the day after the election. The horse trading will likely continue for some time, until all efforts to form a coalition have been exhausted, at which point there will be a call for new elections that Italy cannot afford from neither a financial nor a political standpoint.

Italy is the fourth-largest economy in the European Union, but its value must be measured by more than GDP. At a time when the European project is being torn asunder from the north by Brexit and from the east by a revanchist Russia, Italy needs a reliable government that believes in stability and is pro-European in orientation. The anti-democratic turns of Poland and Hungary make the prospect of a Euroskeptic Italy led by Five Star or Lega even more dangerous.

The story of Italy is not just an Italian tale. It is a warning for democratic nations around the world that are coping with rapid and unsettling changes in the virtual and physical dimensions. Taking note of the *Disrupting Democracy* macro-trends is an important first step. Devising policies and electing responsible leaders to effectively implement them will be required to stem the tide of disruption that has begun to define politics in the 21st century.

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The Social Media Populists: How Salvini and Di Maio Leveraged the Internet

By Roberta Carlini

"We thank God for the net. We thank God for social networks. We thank God for Facebook."

- Matteo Salvini, Leader, Lega

Thank you, Mark

On the morning of March 5, 2018, the day after the elections, Matteo Salvini was the first politician to give a press conference. Dressed in a blue suit without a tie, his thumbs up, and showing a radiant smile, the 45-year-old leader of the League (Lega) solemnly thanked the Internet, social networks and Facebook. He spoke to journalists, who reported his speech to press agencies, on websites, to TV and radio broadcasting stations, and in dailies the day after, as well as – in real time – to viewers connected to the Facebook live stream. The video of the press conference garnered 4.1 million views. Salvini's final campaign rally, which took place in Piazza Duomo in Milan, was followed by 1.7 million people through the Facebook live stream. These figures can be compared only with the other major social media event of the election campaign, whose protagonist was Luigi Di Maio, the prime ministerial candidate of the Five Star Movement (Movimento Cinque Stelle, M5S). Three days before the elections, in an unconventional move with no basis in the Italian constitutional order, Di Maio posted a list of ministers he would appoint if M5S were to win; the live stream of that announcement was followed by 1.5 million people.

What happened? Was the 2018 Italian election campaign the first to be won on the web and social media, by the party that was best at using these tools, Lega, and by the one that was created by them, M5S? Is it possible that, in the country where TV became part of government – with the birth and rise of Berlusconi's political party as a business enterprise model – the scepter of political communication and election campaign spin has been passed to a new king? Or is it that social media prowess is a sign (rather than a cause) of electoral success? These are questions we can try to answer by focusing on facts and figures of the election campaign, both in virtual and real environments.

But there is another question we must address, one that reflects our peculiar political history. One of the most significant anomalies of Western democracy took place in Italy, when a media tycoon with considerable economic power seized the highest political office. This break from conventional democratic patterns, which began in 1994 and continues today, has been watched by the world, and has proven not to be a one-off occurrence. In 2013, another anomaly exploded onto the political scene: a movement born of the collaboration of a very popular comedian, Beppe Grillo, and a then-unknown digital media entrepreneur, Gianroberto Casaleggio. This movement, organized on a web platform, grew within the Internet and unexpectedly became the leading party in Italy. It represents an experiment, the success of which has no equal anywhere in the world. Can we say that this second anomaly offsets the first one, and that digital democracy has improved the health of the Italian democratic system?

In the Ballot Box and on the Net

The elections of March 4 did not establish a parliament with a clear majority that could form a government. The shift from a political race characterized by two large alliances (center-right and center-left forces) to a tripartite race (center-right coalition, M5S, and – on a smaller scale – the center-left forces) instead created a hung parliament. However, from a political point of view, the voters' choice was clear. The Democratic Party (Partito Democratico, PD), led by Matteo Renzi, obtained 2,613,000 fewer votes in 2018 than in the previous political elections of 2013. In percentage terms, it lost almost one in three of its voters. Forza Italia (FI, which literally means "forward Italy"), Silvio Berlusconi's party, performed even worse, losing 2,796,000 votes, or four

in 10 loyalists. Conversely, Salvini's Lega gained 4,223,000 votes, an increase of 300 percent. And M5S alone obtained a total of 1,817,000 votes, up 20 percent from 2013.

The two winners of the election are also popular on social networks, and on Facebook in particular, which boasts 30 million active users in Italy. During the month of the election, Salvini's personal page was followed by 2.1 million people, and Grillo's and Di Maio's were followed by 2 million and 1.5 million, respectively. Matteo Renzi's and Silvio Berlusconi's personal pages were followed by 1.2 million and 1 million people, respectively. But it wasn't just a question of followers. Throughout the entire election campaign, the initiatives, discussion topics, threads, and watchwords that would become trending topics and spill over into other media, originated in Salvini's and Di Maio's accounts – and, in this latter case, in those of M5S and Grillo as well. In other words, the two social media superstars set the agenda, and the others followed behind.

The two winners of the election are also popular on social networks, and on Facebook in particular, which boasts 30 million active users in Italy.

With that said, Renzi and Berlusconi have proven to be formidable masters of communication in their own right.

Beppe Grillo closes the Five Star campaign in Rome.

The former was the secretary of the governing party, which in its turn bears full responsibility for the governance of RAI, Italy's national public broadcasting company. The latter leads Mediaset, the main operator of the private television broadcasting system. The Center for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom defines this situation as "high risk" in relation to media pluralism,[1] because of the government's direct and indirect control of RAI and the conflict of interest it creates between private economic and political power. Furthermore, because of his age and style, Matteo Renzi is by no means an old dinosaur when it comes to communication. He became the leader of his party precisely by breaking with traditional schemes of external communication, as well as with the rules of internal politics. Silvio Berlusconi – whose name was printed on the ballot even though he was prohibited by law to stand as a candidate – had ambition to return to the center of the political scene at the age of 81, and in the last two years has been descri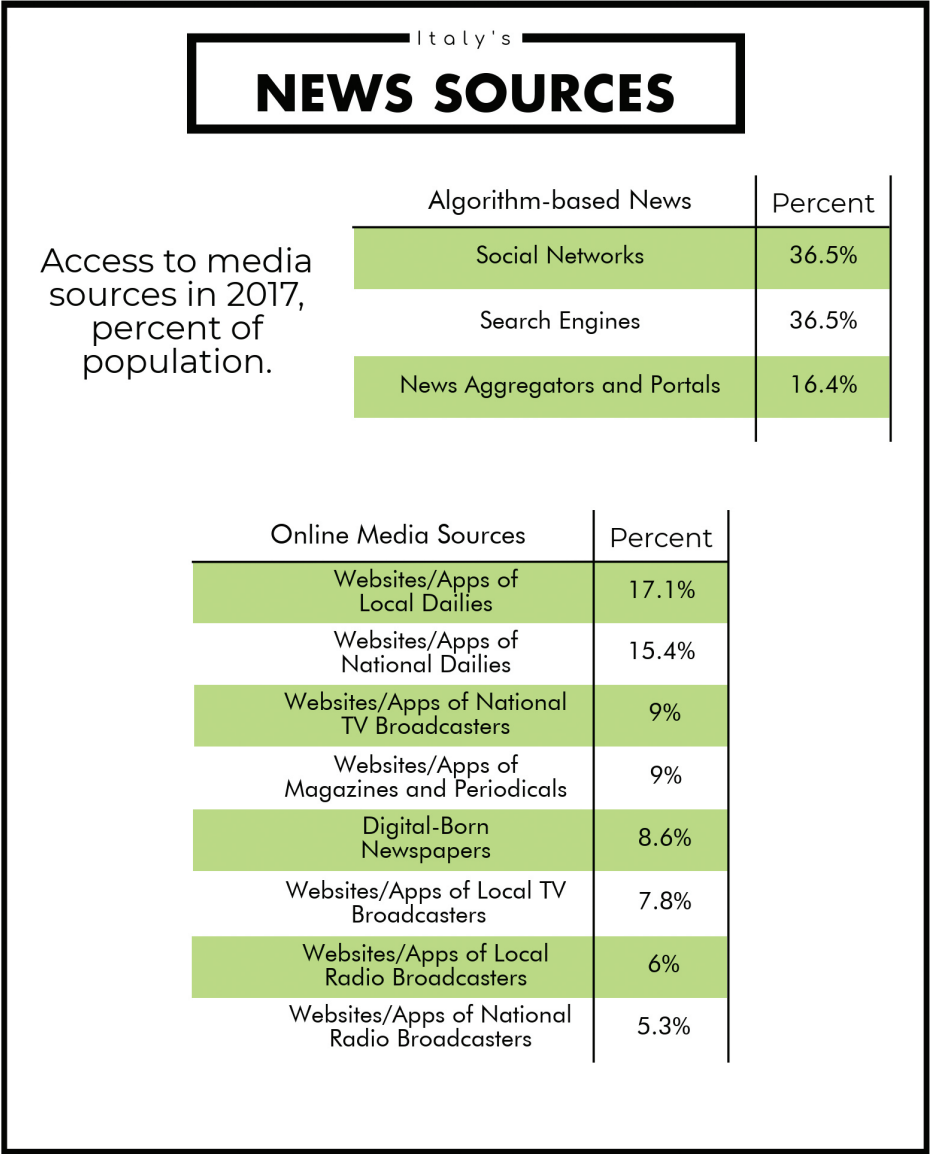bed as the protagonist of a communications and political resurrection miracle. Finally, until the eve of Election Day, polls had not forecast Berlusconi's defeat or the extent of Renzi's loss, and political actors and traditional press alike were speculating about a possible grand coalition between Forza Italia and Partito Democratico as a possible counter to anti-establishment forces in Parliament. Something of the sort had been attempted after the 2013 elections, which had similarly resulted in a hung parliament. But many things have changed between 2013 and 2018. This is true in media and especially in politics – as the five-year experience of center-left government with various prime ministers significantly eroded popular support for the PD.

The New Mediterranean Media Diet

Between 2013 and 2018, Italy's media landscape changed significantly. From an industry point of view, the media sector was struck by the double blow of the economic crisis and technological innovation. The economic model underlying print media has always been

on shaky ground in Italy, as the country has a far more limited number of readers than other industrialized countries because of the population's relatively late move to mass literacy. Newsstand sales of the two main daily newspapers, *il Corriere della Sera* and *La Repubblica*, have nearly halved over the past five years.[2] The development of digital sales did not make up for this decline, and the publishing industry's economic model was put under further strain by the

Italy's
NEWS SOURCES

Access to media sources in 2017, percent of population.

Algorithm-based News	Percent
Social Networks	36.5%
Search Engines	36.5%
News Aggregators and Portals	16.4%

Online Media Sources	Percent
Websites/Apps of Local Dailies	17.1%
Websites/Apps of National Dailies	15.4%
Websites/Apps of National TV Broadcasters	9%
Websites/Apps of Magazines and Periodicals	9%
Digital-Born Newspapers	8.6%
Websites/Apps of Local TV Broadcasters	7.8%
Websites/Apps of Local Radio Broadcasters	6%
Websites/Apps of National Radio Broadcasters	5.3%

analogous downturn in the advertising market. This decline affected general television broadcasting services – facing competition from pay-TV broadcasters – and the radio industry as well. Radio and TV remain fundamental ingredients of the Italian population's media diet though, with newspapers playing an increasingly smaller role and web-based information becoming more and more important. On this front, algorithm-based sources such as social networks and search engines are surpassing other online media outlets such as websites and apps of dailies, radio and TV broadcasters, and digital-born newspapers.

During this same period, the digital divide shrank in Italy. According to European Commission reports, broadband coverage reached 99 percent, and high-speed broadband coverage rose from 20 percent in 2013 to 72 percent in 2016. In recent years, Internet access through smartphones – which are used by almost four-fifths of Italians with mobile phones – has increased significantly. All of this has not eliminated or notably reduced the role played by TV and radio broadcasting. It has certainly redefined the role played by newspapers and, above all, has created a new media diet that a report by the National Communications Authority (*Autorità per le Garanzie nelle Comunicazioni*, Agcom) defines as "a distinct phenomenon of cross-media storytelling, which by now concerns over three-quarters of the Italian population."[3]

But how does this trend, which is common to all industrialized countries, fit into the Italian media scenario, already handicapped by a private and public television system with a low degree of pluralism and a relatively weak press sector? Italian traditional media, which have neither invested nor innovated in the new technological environment, did not manage to change their business model in the digital age; they instead drew news, sources, and topics from the wealth of information available online. Focused on the frantic pursuit of clicks, they adapted to what Massimo Mantellini, one of the most renowned digital experts in Italy, has defined in a recent book as the "low resolution" of the Internet.

"Problems arose when the economic model of the media industry declined, and when the bad faith of print press shifted to the dictatorship of the web audience." The few newspapers that had invested in reliability and high-quality content have continued to do so, facing greater and greater difficulties. All of the others – motivated by readers' preferences that are made clear by web-based statistics – have had to remove the mask, revealing the mechanism that underpins their work. No longer do we strive towards "all the news that's fit to print," as the famous *New York Times* claim states, but rather, "all the news that we manage to sell," a more prosaic variant fitting to a business model in decline.[4]

But if the website of my serious newspaper is just like my Facebook timeline, why should I bother to visit it?

All of this has led to the birth of what Mantellini calls the dictatorship of the "morbid box," the right-hand column on news websites that was initially dedicated to sex scandal stories and titillating content, and has expanded to include

A crowd gathers at an anti-establishment rally in Rome's Piazza del Popolo.

"strange but true" stories, kitten videos, terrible accidents, and horrors. But if the website of my serious newspaper is just like my Facebook timeline, why should I bother to visit it? The "morbid box" model has proven not to be very productive, and unsuitable as a means of saving an industry in crisis. On the contrary, it contaminates all traditional media, rendering them unable to effectively counter the fast spread of disinformation through the web. According to Luca Sofri, an Italian blogger, publisher and founder of *Il Post*, who has written a fierce and meticulous analysis of fake news published by newspapers,[5] this type of news is not specific to the web. Moreover, there are no effective tools to control or combat its spreading, especially in election campaigns, as the Italian traditional media have failed to acquire the necessary authoritativeness to play this role, particularly within the new digital environment.

But all of this – Italians' new media diet and the mutual feedback loop pattern of the web, television, and newspapers – does not explain why, through this diet, new entrants, i.e. the anti-establishment parties, have fattened up, whereas the formerly powerful ones have slimmed down. Neither does it explain why Renzi – the leader who broke traditional rules of etiquette in 2014 by joyfully tweeting "I'm coming!" from within the austere rooms of the Quirinal Palace while discussing the formation of his first cabinet with the President of the Republic – lost more than half of the electoral support he had had four years earlier (40 percent of ballots cast in the European elections). Nor does it tell us why Berlusconi, a media tycoon who entered the political arena in 1994 by sending a videotape to TV newsrooms, and today is assisted by a vast network and social media strategy, has been cannibalized by his ally Salvini.

The Mainstream Discourse

On Monday mornings, the Frecciarossa high-speed train from Rome to Milan is very crowded. Luca Caruso, one of the passengers on board, takes a picture with his smartphone and posts it on his Facebook page. The picture shows a boy with dark skin. Caruso's post begins as follows:

"The man in the picture, whose face I'm not bothering to hide, sat down next to me without any piece of luggage.

He only had a phone and a piece of paper in his hand; he boarded the Frecciarossa with an interregional train ticket. He was talking on the phone, but as soon as he saw the train inspector, he pulled on his hood and pretended to be asleep."

The remainder of Caruso's post recounts that the train guard asked the boy to show his ID documents and that the boy – who spoke neither Italian nor English – did not have them. As a consequence, no fine could be imposed, so he would travel to Milan with a ticket worth €4, instead of paying €86. The post concludes with a link to a story about a dreadful incident that had occurred in Macerata, a small town in the center of Italy, where Nigerian migrants allegedly killed a girl, Pamela Mastropietro, and chopped up her corpse.

"Pamela was slaughtered and her body defiled by people who – unlawfully and without reason – have crossed our doorstep because our doorstep was and remains wide open…

They speak of integration. Of understanding. Of welcoming. They're making fools of us and we're putting up with it. And now, go ahead and fight over 'racists' and 'do-gooders'…"

Caruso's outburst immediately spread through Facebook. In a few hours, it received over 120,000 likes and more than 70,000 shares. Thousands of comments followed, many of them openly racist. No one questioned Caruso's story, except for the journalists of a news website, *Valigia Blu*,[6] who crosschecked the news item and discovered it was not true.

"Trenitalia, which we contacted to verify the news item, sent us the official report by the train inspector, which contradicts the account that Caruso posted on Facebook: it's true, the passenger couldn't speak Italian, his English was very poor, and he was without ID documents. But he had two tickets, the one shown at the beginning, which was not valid for a Frecciarossa train, and a second one, presented after, which was valid for train no. 9608. Caruso's account was therefore untrue."

Almost all engagement peaks on Facebook and other social media in the run-up to Election Day were linked to the immigration issue, which was at the core of the electoral debate.

Of course, the correction of this piece of news received much less publicity than the fake story itself. As *Valigia Blu* editor Arianna Ciccone stated, however, "the real news is racism," with which that

post was fraught, regardless of whether it had been true. The other real news regards the speed and circulation of news that concerns migration – including true and false information and "grey-zone" news. Almost all engagement peaks on Facebook and other social media in the run-up to Election Day were linked to the immigration issue, which was at the core of the electoral debate. The key incident was the one in Macerata. When, following the discovery of the murdered girl's body, investigators identified a Nigerian drug dealer as the alleged offender, the first public figure to react on Facebook was the leader of the right-wing Brothers of Italy party (*Fratelli d'Italia*, FdI), Giorgia Meloni, who linked the incident to the allegedly pro-immigration policy of the center-left government. Immediately thereafter, Matteo Salvini published a far more successful post – with 58,000 reactions and 19,000 shares in a short time – stating that "leftists' hands" were "stained with blood."[7] The following day, a 28-year-old man shot randomly at a group of black people on the street in Macerata, wounding six. The offender, Luca Traini, had a clean record and had stood as a candidate for Lega in the local elections. When the police arrested him, he was wrapped in the Italian flag and gave the fascist salute.

A few hours later, Salvini commented on Twitter:

"Whoever shoots is an offender, no matter the color of his skin."

However, he continued,

"It is clear and evident that uncontrolled immigration, an invasion like the one planned, promoted, and funded in recent years, leads to social conflict."

Salvini did not show embarrassment for Traini's past as a Lega candidate, while

the PD decided not to emphasize the connection and postponed a planned anti-racist demonstration, in order to "lower the temperature" of the clash. They played a defensive game. In the March 4 elections, Salvini's (and Traini's) party obtained 21 percent of votes in Macerata, up from 0.6 percent in 2013.

These episodes are just a couple of examples of a general trend: the immigration issue pervaded social media communication during the election campaign. Salvini always managed to dictate its agenda and to ride the biggest wave in its wake. Of course, expertise played an important role. He used social media personally, without any mediation by his staff. He often made use of Facebook live streams and created a contest, "Win Salvini," wherein the first user to like a new post of his would be rewarded with a meeting with the candidate. (This was a strategy aimed at boosting the ranking of his posts within Facebook's algorithm, and maybe, to collect personal data as well). But above all, Salvini focused on a theme that was popular in a social context shaped by the migration crisis, with irrational fear that went well beyond the reality of the situation, particularly in the broad peripheries of urban centers and society. It was a theme that lent itself perfectly to effective social media communication: identification of a single target for criticism (foreigners), and simplification of the message (enough is enough, get out).

And what about M5S? Its politicians did not need to conquer social media, because they were born within it. They kept a low profile on what happened in Macerata. However, they were not playing a defensive game; their policy shift on immigration dates back to the last Parliament, first in relation to illegal immigration crime, then concerning the

campaign against NGOs that carried out save-and-rescue operations at sea, and finally, in opposition to citizenship for children born in Italy to foreign parents. In his book *L'esperimento*,[8] the journalist Jacopo Iacoboni recalls that the shift developed in response to data that the Casaleggio Associati firm – the owner and manager of M5S's web platform – had collected on M5S supporters' negative opinions about irregular immigration. Di Maio's peaks on social media were linked to other events – a waggish car journey with Orietta Berti, a well-known pop-folk singer, a sardonic response to PD politicians' criticism about his fellow party members' irregular accounting practices, and the presentation of his government team. (On that day, he achieved his highest level of engagement on social media.) Whereas Salvini's social media strategy deploys just one very aggressive tactic, M5S's digital presence is pervasive and covers all bases.

"Let us not forget that before becoming a political movement, M5S was established as an alternative information network, a project that was implemented over eight years through the creation of websites, blogs and Facebook pages," states David Puente, a blogger who worked with Casaleggio at the very beginning and – no longer a team member – now carries out debunking activities privately. M5S's social media community does not need to be coaxed or prodded; supporters activate immediately, mainly to spread news in favor of M5S or against its opponents. Thus, M5S currently enjoys the best possible conditions to take advantage of the new cross-media storytelling loop, which features a mutual back and forth exchange between traditional media – which M5S leaders, after an initially hostile stance, now use assiduously – and digital media. They set the agenda, re-launch posts, amplify news, and dominate the field. In a recent interview,[9] Alessandro Di Battista, one of M5S's most popular leaders and active social media users, commented that "it's like a small TV broadcaster." With a bit of naivety, he has said that Grillo and Casaleggio's initial dream – to break the monopoly on media and politics through digital democracy tools – has partly been realized. But at the same time, he shows

Migrant tent city in Rome

Lega supporters fill Piazza Duomo in Milan.

the implications of such a dream – "all this, just to have a little TV?"

More Social than Digital

It is possible to claim that the run-up to the 2018 election was the first proper social media campaign in Italy. It saw voters' unprecedented, massive presence on social media, and what happened on social networks foreshadowed the election outcome. However, stating that "the winners are social media" is an exaggeration, and could be an overestimation of the role of communication vis-à-vis politics. It is not by chance that the two winners on social media were those who held the most crowded rallies. The final party rallies before Election Day provided a concrete image of the electoral campaigns: Salvini and Di Maio before full, open piazzas, under the marvelous parapets of Milan's Duomo and Piazza del Popolo in Rome, and Renzi in a theater, in his hometown of Florence, something of a political fortress for him. It is not easy to determine whether social networks were simply an indicator that proved more accurate than standard surveys, or whether Salvini and M5S's ability to navigate more effectively within that environment made the difference on March 4.

"We are still a TV-centric country; it's a matter of digital culture and data culture…"

Although we can speak of a proper social media campaign, we cannot say that it was a digital campaign planned

in detail through the use of mass data, the coordination of activists via the Internet, and the establishment of data-driven communication machinery. This partial evolution can be explained by the structural and legislative features of the Italian system. As noted by digital expert Stefano Quintarelli, the very small size of electoral constituencies, on the one hand, and the constraints imposed by data protection legislation, on the other, make it extremely difficult to use data in a manner similar to that way it is used in the United States.[10] The use of data in Italy is furthermore curbed by cultural limitations.

"We are still a TV-centric country; it's a matter of digital culture and data culture," states Cristopher Cepernich, a media sociologist.[11] The latest elections completely lacked the active mobilization of people, wherein they might have transformed "click democracy" into relationships, events, discussions, and initiatives at the local level. In other words, no new forms of collective action have emerged in this election period similar to those that rose from crises of 20th century. Drawing on an observation

Cepernich makes in his latest book, "the viewer individual" seems to have shifted from television to the PC and smartphone, without becoming a "player individual" in the new digital world."[12]

"Mark Zuckerberg is a bigger threat to democracy than Donald Trump."

It remains to be seen whether the lack of a digital strategy and scientific use of data protects Italian democracy from the dark side of the web, vulnerability to external attacks, the huge power imbalance between those who hold data and those who do not, or from the possibility that voters might be influenced by propaganda hubs and fake news that limit or eliminate information pluralism. In this regard, David Runciman states in *How Democracy Ends*, "Mark Zuckerberg is a bigger threat to democracy than Donald Trump."[13] In

Matteo Renzi speaks to the Democratic Party faithful in Florence.

the 2018 election campaign, this threat was perceived but never materialized. Salvini is a friend of Putin, but this friendship seems to have helped him gain support among Italian exporters affected by sanctions against Russia, rather than funding or decisive support in techno-digital terms.[14] The relationships between Casaleggio Associati and the Farage-Breitbart-Bannon-Cambridge Analytica circle have reportedly been more political than operational in nature. This does not mean that threats are non-existent or that they do not affect other parties. Following revelations about Facebook sharing data with Cambridge Analytica, Agcom extended the list of requests for information and access to data that it had already submitted to Zuckerberg's group.[15] As stated by Antonio Nicita, an Agcom commissioner, "The fight against fake news is important, but it's not our responsibility to assess whether news is true. It is more important (and our responsibility) to identify and prevent disinformation. To do so, it is necessary that platforms provide data allowing us to understand whether and when automatic news circulation mechanisms come into play."

Threats to Democracy

Not all problems come from abroad or from bots. There are other threats that the 2018 election campaign has brought to light. The first one is fully internal, and, as is the case with Berlusconi's TV broadcasting services, pertains to the ownership of mass media. If M5S's power lies in the huge number of its supporters-agents, the movement's internal life and direct democracy are exercised through its Rousseau platform. Compared to other Internet figures, the reach of this platform is still rather limited; around 70,000 people voted in the primary elections to identify M5S candidates. Davide

Casaleggio has set a goal of obtaining 1 million subscribers and, in an article that appeared in *The Washington Post*, he extolled the role the Rousseau platform plays in the organization.

"The platform that enabled the success of the Five Star Movement is called Rousseau, named after the 18th century philosopher who argued politics should reflect the general will of the people. And that is exactly what our platform does: it allows citizens to be part of politics. Direct democracy, made possible by the Internet, has given a new centrality to citizens and will ultimately lead to the deconstruction of the current political and social organizations. Representative democracy – politics by proxy – is gradually losing meaning. Our parliamentarians who stood for election were chosen through online voting on the Rousseau platform – not inside a smoke-filled room like the established parties."[16]

But the Rousseau platform is owned by Casaleggio Associati. No one elected Davide Casaleggio, neither in Parliament nor on the Internet; he was chosen by his father, Gianroberto Casaleggio. After his father's death, he inherited – as was the case in medieval dynasties – the tool, data, and the machinery: the party. Moreover, the mechanism is anything but transparent. The codes and criteria of the platform are unknown, but several hackers have demonstrated its vulnerability. From an economic point of view, Casaleggio Associati benefits from M5S's political success – directly, thanks to fees paid by the elected parliamentarians, and indirectly, thanks to the proceeds from advertising sales and potential relationships with economic lobbies, on which there is very little information since Italian law does not regulate lobbying activities. Berlusconi, who is at the top of a gigantic network of media, entertainment,

sports, real estate, and politics, was given the nickname, "The Caiman," after the title of a film by one of the most famous Italian film directors, Nanni Moretti. Is a Five Star sequel about to come out, "The Caiman 2.0?"

The second threat has already been outlined in the discussion on immigration. There are themes that are likely to stir up hot debate on the Internet, and the topic of immigration did just that in the context of the Italian election campaign. It was not the only issue, but, due to its features, it dominated the scene of "media populism." Stories on immigration very often bear out readers' convictions, replicate stereotypes, and fuel fears. They attack vulnerable people, many of whom are victims of discrimination and violence, who are unlikely to react effectively on the Internet because of language barriers or lack of access to legal defense. All of this also held true in old media, but the digital environment strengthens and amplifies it. Readers become writer-authors, often without understanding or verifying what they have read, or refusing more in-depth
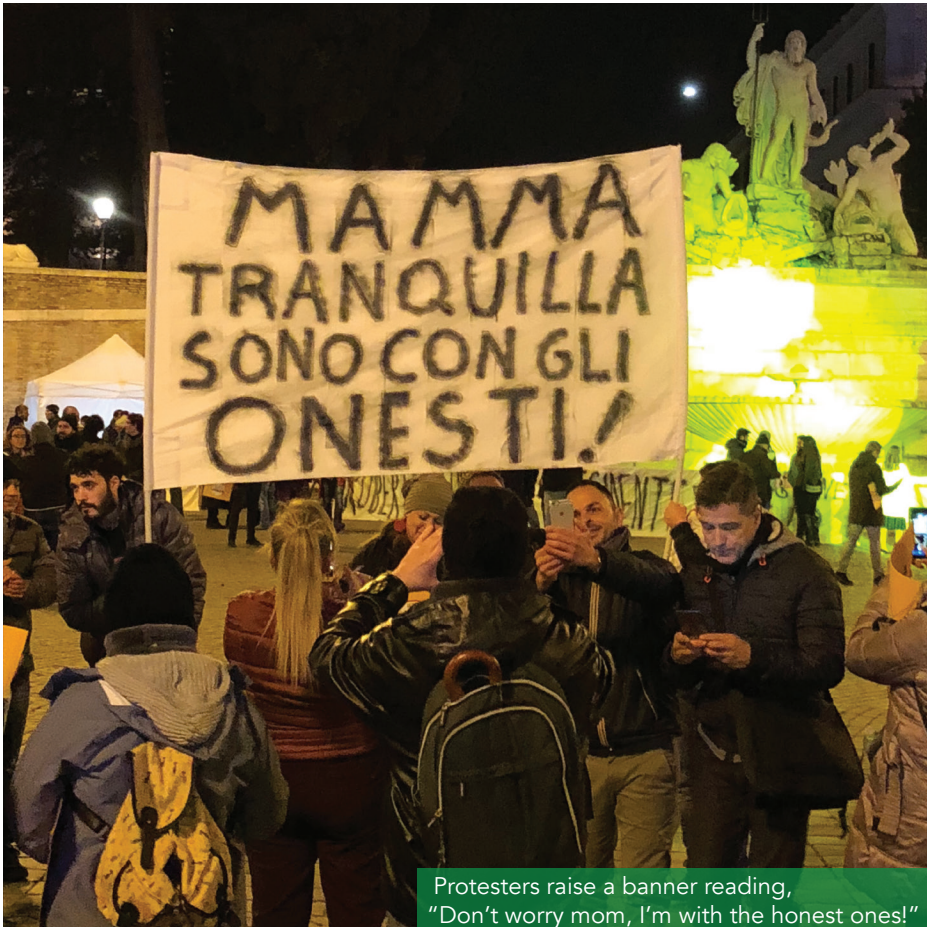
Protesters raise a banner reading, "Don't worry mom, I'm with the honest ones!"

information because of how fast the environment operates.[17]

At this point, we must shift from the media situation to the social and cultural landscape. Italy ranks low in the Survey of Adult Skills by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD),[18] which deals with functional illiteracy. The Media Pluralism Monitor identifies media literacy as one of the principal risk factors for information pluralism. Without media literacy, one is more prone to clicking without reading, sharing without gaining further knowledge, and, at the same time, adopting a cautious approach to news while sticking to whatever corroborates one's own worldview. And according to many Italians in 2018, immigration is a threat to their living standards and safety, and is the reason for their lost prosperity. Immigration poses complex challenges, but the "information downgrading" created by the echo chamber of the Internet and traditional media rejects complexity. And this undoubtedly poses a bigger challenge for policymakers, who – by definition – must deal with complexity. This presents an aggravating situation for the Italian center-left coalition – the refusal or inability to share a simple, opposing message in support of reasonable reception policies and diversity in an open society, for fear of losing political support. In the aftermath of the elections, once his work was complete, Dino Amenduni, who was in charge of PD's digital campaign, published a Facebook post with some reflections on this very issue. Commenting on the Cambridge Analytica case, he invited his readers to abstain from exaggerating "the role of communication as a referee and gauge of all things pertaining to politics and the election campaign."

"In my role as a communicator who would have the utmost interest in selling himself as a problem-solving guru, I say, it's all bullshit, please stop! Trump, Lega, right-wing parties in general win all over the world, first of all at a cultural level, thanks to their ability to impose their dominant view concerning immigration, the economy, the idea that building walls is the right response to globalization without solid rules and social protection. Left-wing parties stutter on these issues. They don't have the courage to say openly to their opponents that their proposed solution is wrong, and don't offer an alternative narrative. Nor do they dare admit that, in relation to some issues, they shouldn't have treated everybody as uncivilized barbarians (both positions are legitimate: I agree with the former theory. But, anyway, the important thing would be to choose a course of action). It is evident that, if one communicative actor has clear ideas and the other one doesn't, some will have an easier task, and others will struggle; but (and I'll never get tired of saying it), politics comes before communication, and the role of communicators is therefore as pivotal as it is marginal – luckily."

Conclusions

The 2018 election campaign in Italy was its first proper social media campaign. Compared to previous elections, citizens' presence on social media increased alongside the availability of online information, the role of newspapers declined significantly, and that played by TV and radio broadcasting services changed. We are witnessing an information loop between old and new media, in which social networks have become pivotal hubs. The protagonists and winners in this context have been Matteo Salvini and Luigi Di Maio, with their respective parties – Lega and M5S. This correlation goes both ways. The core issue of the social media campaign

was immigration; both winners relied on the spontaneous involvement and web activity of a broad community of fans and supporters, and the alleged presence of bots and automatic dissemination strategies did not play a decisive role or wield much influence.

The shadows and threats of this new scenario are diverse, and all of them have more to do with internal risks than with any concrete danger of external manipulation of the Italian political ecosystem. Among these risks are functional illiteracy, which increasingly weakens a democracy in which voters themselves become the protagonists or media hubs; the weakness of traditional media, in particular the press, which struggles to survive in the new digital environment; and the conflict of interest between private property and public good, which could turn the anomaly of Berlusconi's "political party as a business enterprise" into a new paradigm dominated by Casaleggio's "platform-based party." Bottom-up digitalization of political action, through the use of technology to mobilize, activate, and build new networks, could curb these risks and augment and improve the spaces for democracy.

Roberta Carlini is a journalist and a writer. She is a consultant with the Rome-based Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini.

Citations

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5 Sofri L. (2015), Notizie che non lo erano, Feltrinelli.

6 Romano A. (2018), "Il post razzista sul 'rifugiato senza biglietto' diventa virale: un linciaggio pubblico spaventoso e la storia era pure falsa", Valigia Blu, 13 February, https://www.valigiablu.it/facebook-treno-razzismo-biglietto/;
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7 A detailed analysis of the social media impact of the incidents that occurred in Macerata and, more generally, of the immigration topic during the election campaign, is contained in a documentary entitled 'Lo stato social', by Sky Atlantic (available on demand; the trailer is available at: http://video.sky.it/skyatlantic/speciali/il-racconto-del-reale-lo-stato-social-1/v407172.vid).

8 Casaleggio Associati dictated a "right-wing turn on immigration" to the communication strategy because it proved necessary, based on the available data concerning M5S supporters' orientation […] If the data provided the opposite picture, they would change their mindset within a few hours. – Iaconi J. (2018), L'esperimento. Inchiesta sul Movimento 5 Stelle, Laterza, p. 79.

9 The interview is contained in the documentary film 'Lo stato social', cf. note 7.

10 Quoted in the Bertelsmann Foundation interview with Quintarelli.

11 Quoted in the Bertelsmann Foundation interview with Cepernich.

12 Cepernich C. (2017), Le campagne elettorali al tempo della networked politics, Laterza.

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14 As to the role that the Russian network Sputnik may have played on the sensitive issues during the Italian election campaign, in particular immigration, cf.: https://elpais.com/elpais/2018/03/01/inenglish/1519922107_909331.html.

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17 "The convergence of citizens towards digital media has led to two different phenomena being likely to be confused. The by far more relevant of the two is the revelation of a new, widespread type of illiteracy. The other one is the overall reduction of expectations towards the media." – Mantellini M., cit., p. 35.

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POLLING DATA

NUMBERS BEYOND THE NARRATIVES

About the Report

This report, developed by Questia Group in association with the Bertelsmann Foundation, analyzes the impact of technology on civic engagement and democratic participation in Italy. Its conclusions are based on an online survey conducted by Questia Group between March 7 and March 14, 2018, among a representative online sample of 989 persons, aged 18-65.

This report is a collaborative effort based on the input and analysis of:
Andrada Nimu, Chief Research Officer
Andreea Vârtejanu, Chief Operating Officer
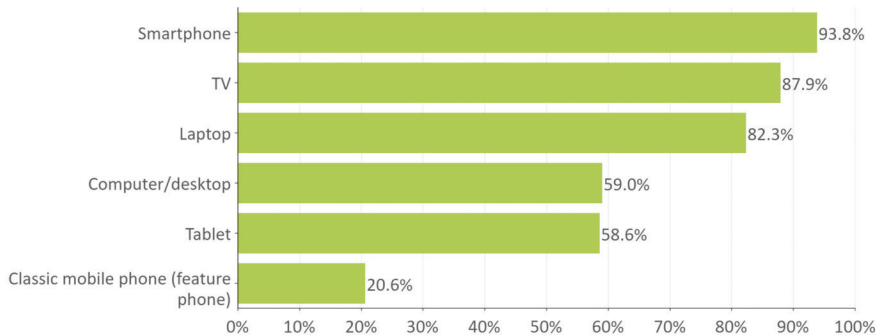
About Questia Group

Questia Group is a young, fast-growing company with a digital presence on several continents. The company believes that the key to success is constant innovation.

Questia's main domain of activity is public-opinion polling, taking the pulse of societies as events unfold.

ITALY

Media Usage

1. What types of devices do you own? (More than one answer) (N=989)

Device	Percentage
Smartphone	93.8%
TV	87.9%
Laptop	82.3%
Computer/desktop	59.0%
Tablet	58.6%
Classic mobile phone (feature phone)	20.6%

2. What type of data services (2G/3G/4G) do you have on your mobile phone? (N=927)

Service	Percentage
4G	72.4%
2G/3G	25.4%
I do not have data services on my mobile phone	2.3%
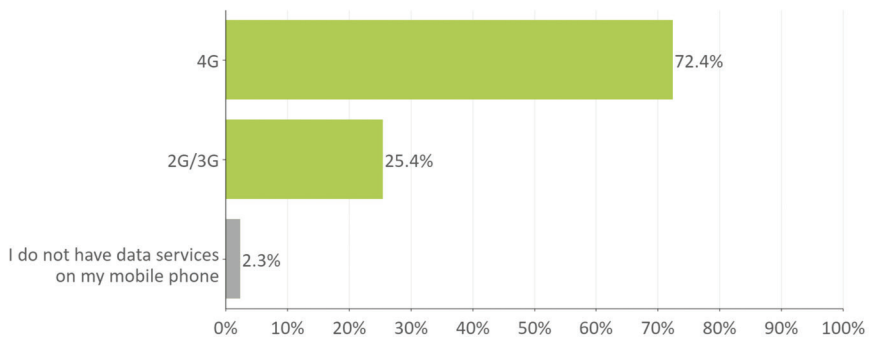
3. What type of TV services do you have in your household? (N=868)

Service	Percentage
Digital cable (with STB/ receiver)	63.9%
Terrestrial antenna	21.7%
IPTV (television through Internet signal)	6.2%
Analogic cable (without STB/ receiver)	3.8%
DTH (Direct-to-home)	3.1%
Don't know/No answer	1.3%
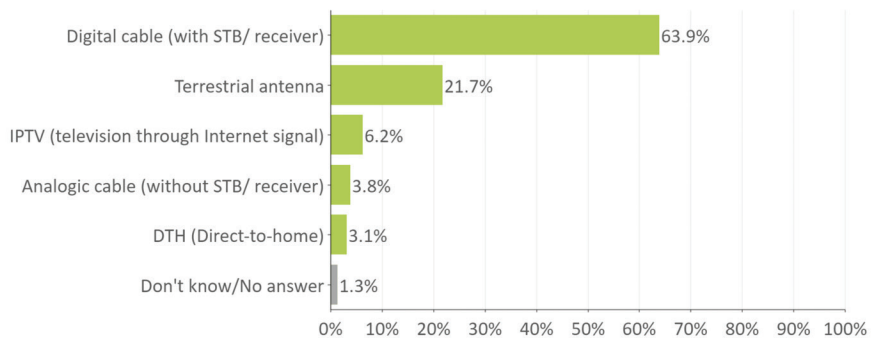
4. How often do you watch TV? (N=868)

Frequency	Percentage
Daily or almost daily	87.6%
A few times a week	9.3%
One time per week	1.2%
2-3 times per month	0.9%
One time per month	0.1%
Less than one time per month	0.5%
I don't watch TV	0.5%
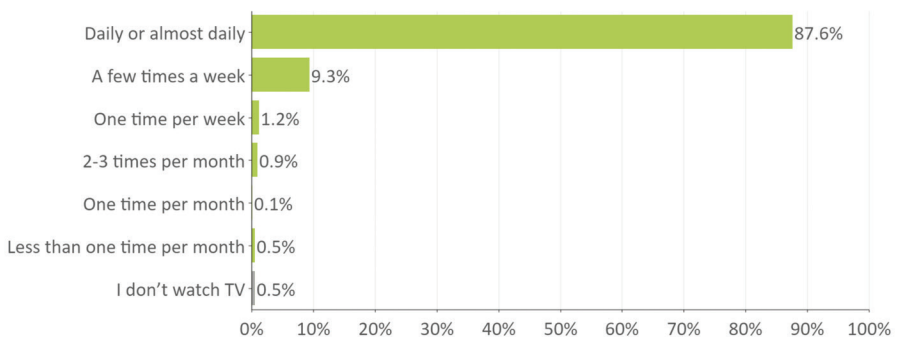
5. What types of content do you watch on TV? (More than one answer) (N=864)

Content	Percentage
Movies & series	86.0%
News	76.0%
Documentaries	58.7%
Sport	53.0%
Food	44.0%
Music	43.5%
Science	41.9%
History	35.6%
Reality shows	32.1%
Arts	23.6%
Fashion	17.5%
Soap operas	11.2%
Religion	6.6%
Other ...	0.9%
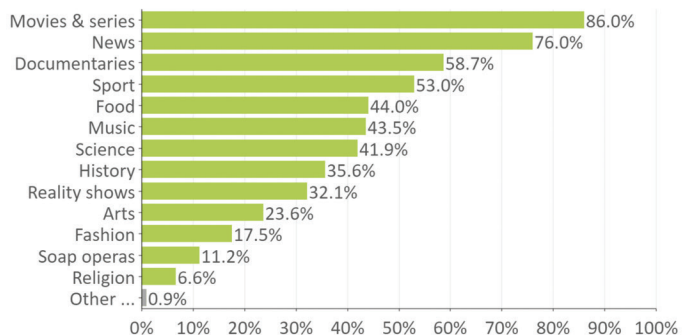
6. What type of fixed Internet services do you have in your household? (N=989)

Category	Percentage
Cable connection	47.2%
Optical fiber connection	41.0%
I do not have fixed Internet services in the household	9.4%
Don't know/No answer	2.4%
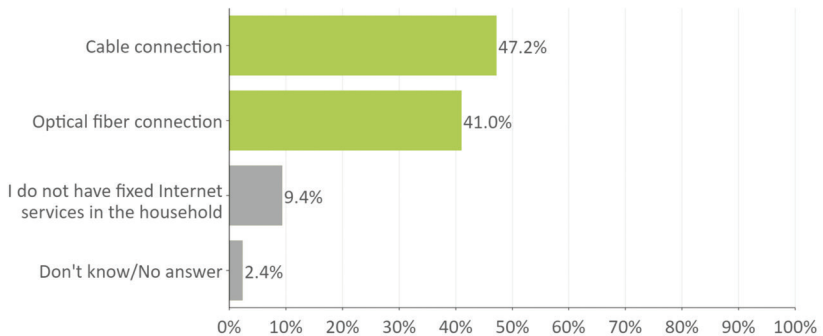
7. How often do you access the Internet? (N=989)

Category	Percentage
Daily or almost daily	97.2%
A few times a week	1.8%
One time per week	0.4%
2-3 times per month	0.5%
One time per month	0.1%
Less than one time per month	0.0%
I don't access the Internet	0.0%
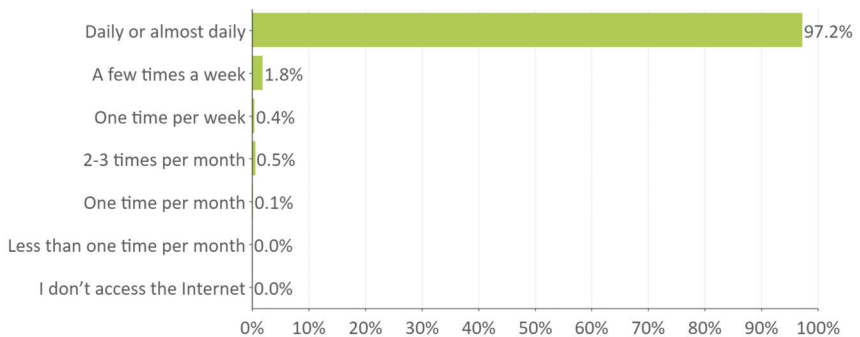
8. In general, from where do you access the Internet? (More than one answer) (N=989)

Category	Percentage
Home	96.6%
Work/school/university	48.1%
On my way to/from work/school/university	26.0%
Bars/restaurants	23.9%
Other places ...	0.6%
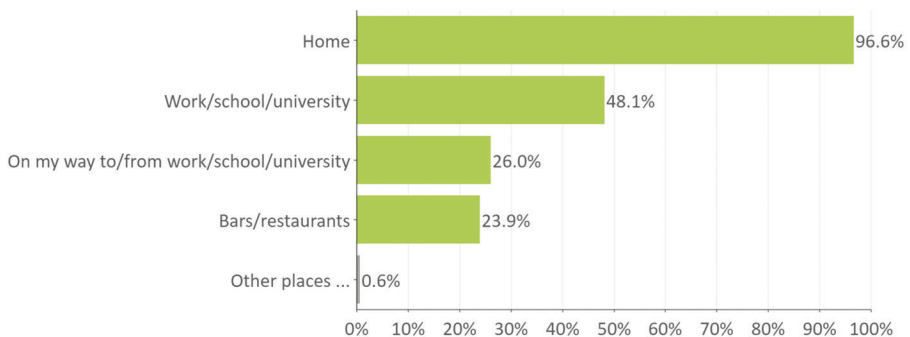
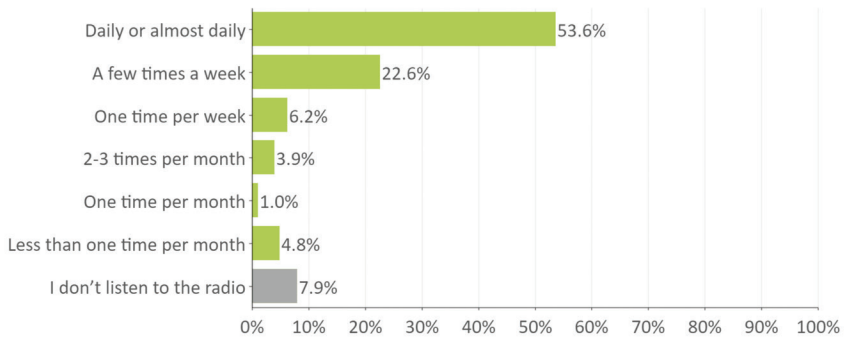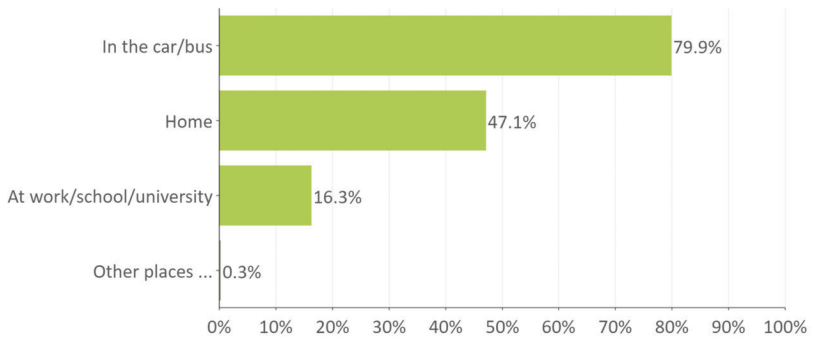9. Which of the following types of content do you access on the Internet? (More than one answer) (N=989)
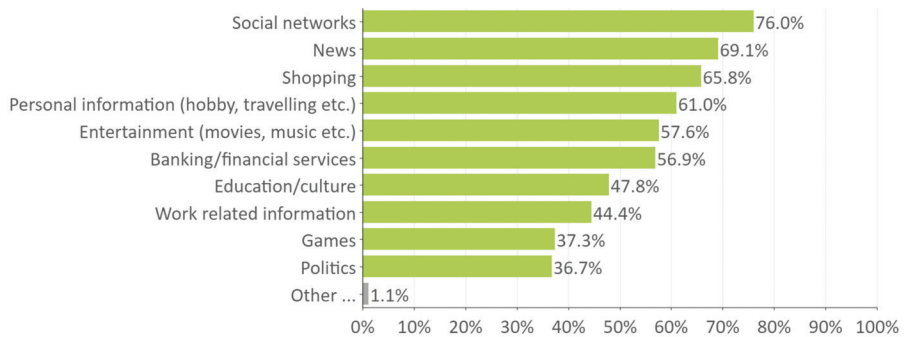
10. Which of the following websites/apps do you access? (More than one answer) (N=752)
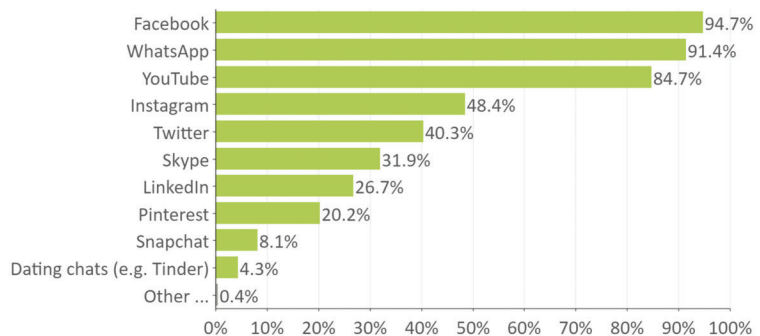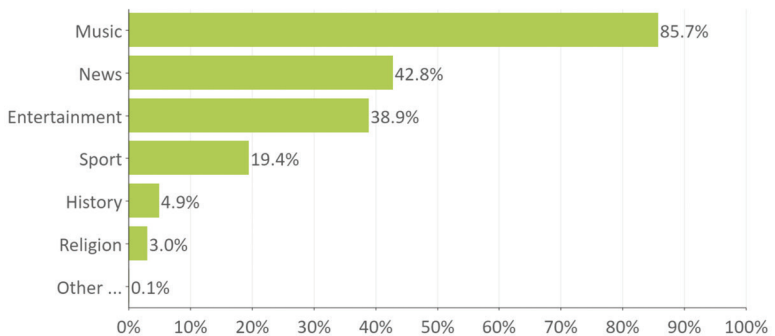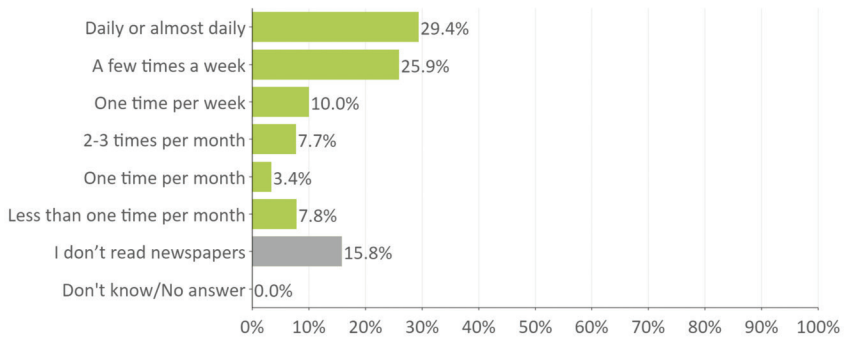
11. How often do you listen to the radio? (N=989)

Response	Percentage
Daily or almost daily	53.6%
A few times a week	22.6%
One time per week	6.2%
2-3 times per month	3.9%
One time per month	1.0%
Less than one time per month	4.8%
I don't listen to the radio	7.9%

12. In general, where do you listen to the radio? (More than one answer) (N=910)

Response	Percentage
In the car/bus	79.9%
Home	47.1%
At work/school/university	16.3%
Other places ...	0.3%

13. What types of radio shows do you listen to? (More than one answer) (N=910)

Response	Percentage
Music	85.7%
News	42.8%
Entertainment	38.9%
Sport	19.4%
History	4.9%
Religion	3.0%
Other ...	0.1%

14. How often do you read newspapers? (N=989)

Response	Percentage
Daily or almost daily	29.4%
A few times a week	25.9%
One time per week	10.0%
2-3 times per month	7.7%
One time per month	3.4%
Less than one time per month	7.8%
I don't read newspapers	15.8%
Don't know/No answer	0.0%

15. In general, where do you read newspapers? (More than one answer) (N=833)

Response	Percentage
Home	68.4%
At work/ school/ university	23.5%
On my way to work/ school/ university	16.1%
Other places ...	8.5%
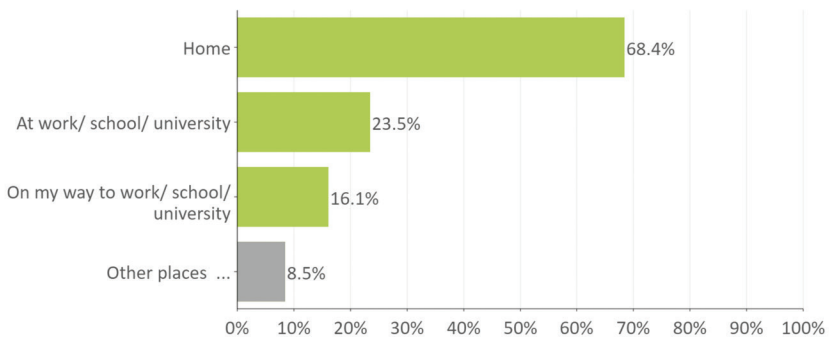
16. What types of newspapers do you read? (More than one answer) (N=833)

Response	Percentage
News	83.1%
Sports	30.3%
Entertainment	26.3%
Fashion	18.6%
Gossip	17.9%
Education	16.2%
Others	4.8%
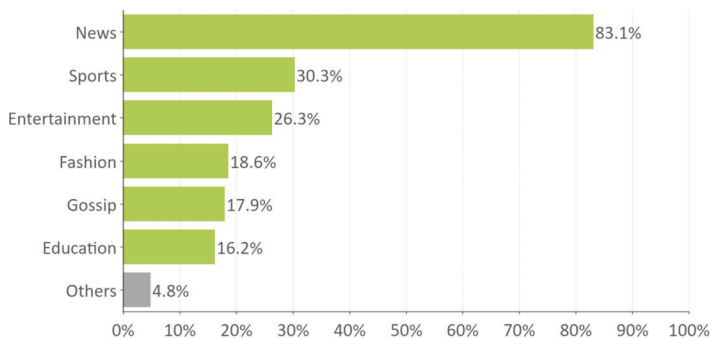
17. Generally, from which source do you get informed? (More than one answer) (N=989)

Source	Percentage
From internet websites	78.2%
From TV	75.4%
From the newspapers	46.3%
From social media (Facebook)	41.6%
From the radio	33.8%
From family/friends/colleagues through face to face communication	27.9%
Other sources ...	0.4%
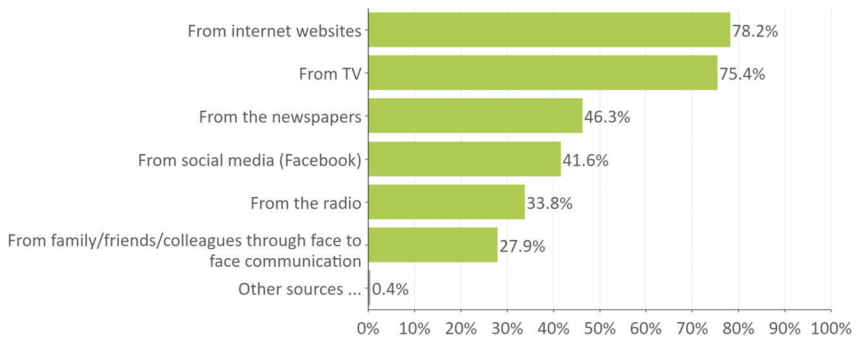
Civic and Political Engagement

1. How would you define democracy in Italy? (More than one answer) (N=989)

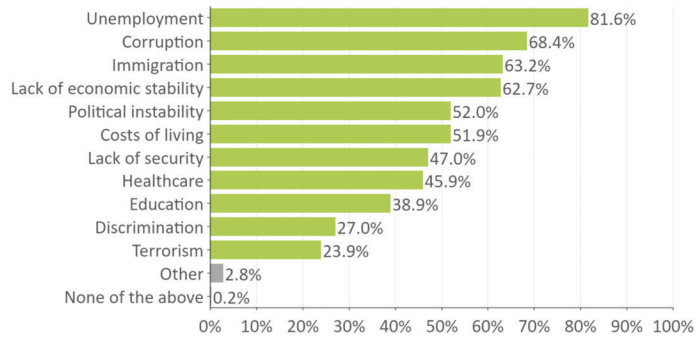| Definition	Percentage
Civil rights and liberties	48.7%
Being able to vote	46.0%
Having competition between political parties	30.0%
Having fair elections	29.1%
Part of our history	28.5%
Strong civil society	25.0%
Having access to public services	23.9%
Empowering vulnerable groups (women, minorities, poor people etc.)	19.0%
Being in continuous evolution	18.5%
Raising an overall feeling of optimism	8.5%
Other	5.2%
Don't know/No answer	3.1%

2. Generally speaking, would you say the political and economic conditions in Italy are heading in the right direction, or are they off on the wrong track? (N=989)
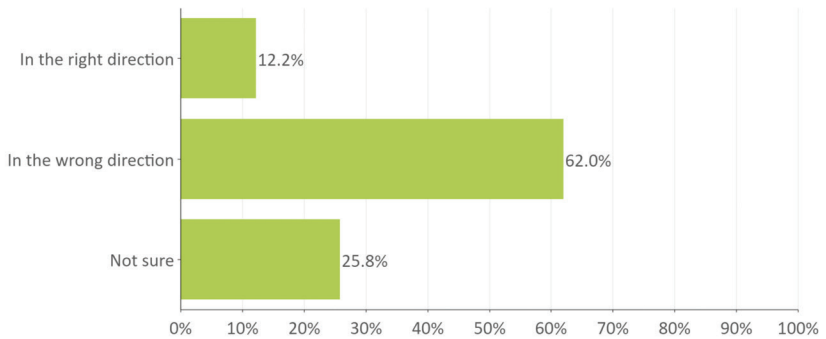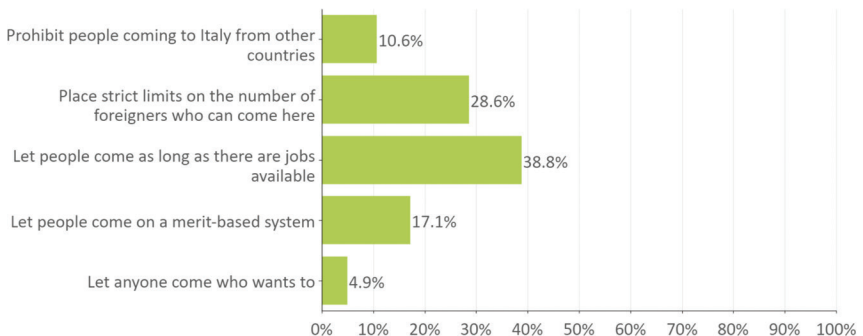

3. Why do you think that the political conditions in Italy are heading in the wrong direction? (More than one answer) (N=609)
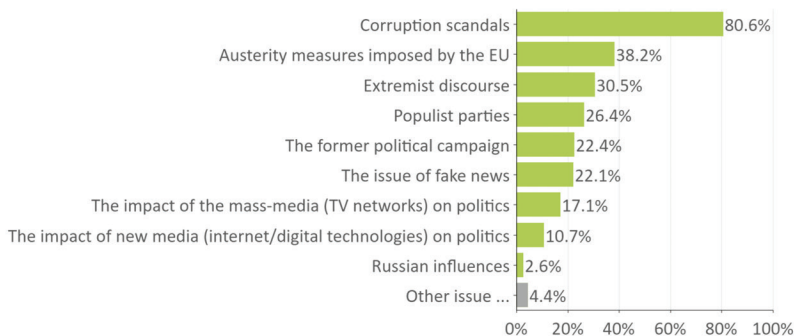
4. In your opinion, what are the main issues facing Italy today? (More than one answer)
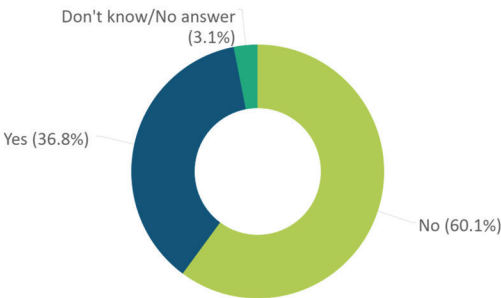(N=989)

Unemployment — 81.6%
Corruption — 68.4%
Immigration — 63.2%
Lack of economic stability — 62.7%
Political instability — 52.0%
Costs of living — 51.9%
Lack of security — 47.0%
Healthcare — 45.9%
Education — 38.9%
Discrimination — 27.0%
Terrorism — 23.9%
Other — 2.8%
None of the above — 0.2%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

5. In your opinion, which one of the following do you think the government should do?
(N=989)

Prohibit people coming to Italy from other countries — 10.6%
Place strict limits on the number of foreigners who can come here — 28.6%
Let people come as long as there are jobs available — 38.8%
Let people come on a merit-based system — 17.1%
Let anyone come who wants to — 4.9%
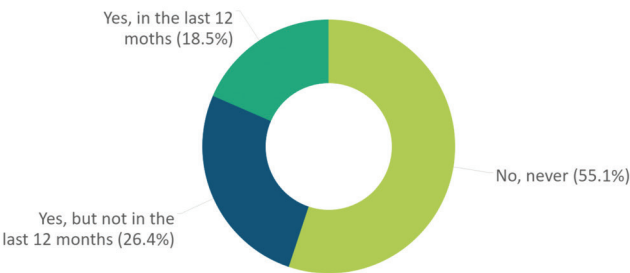
0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

6. When jobs are scarce, employers should give priority to natives over immigrants? (N=989)
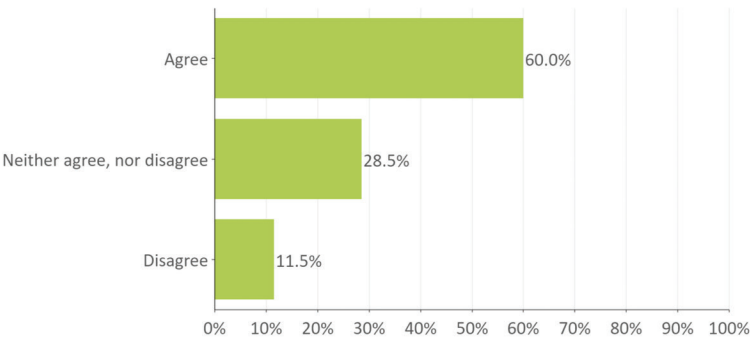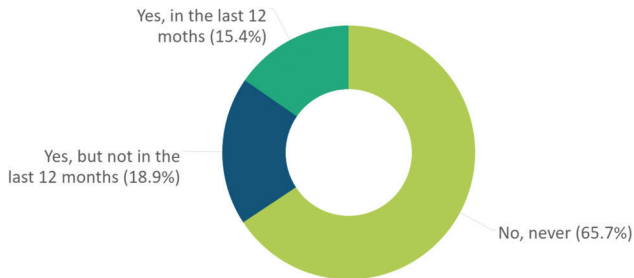

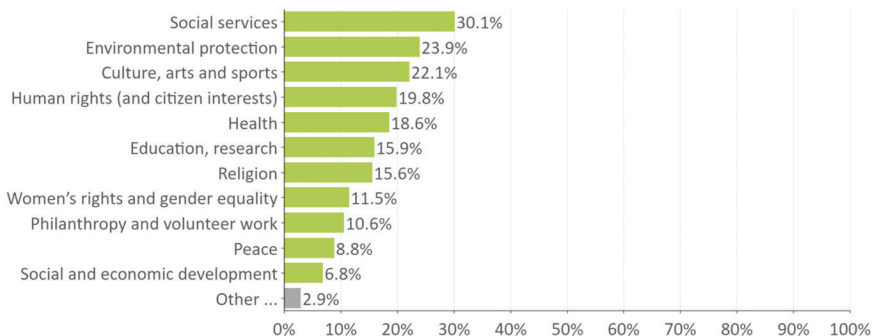7. Would you mind having immigrants in your neighbourhood? (N=989)

8. So far, have you been involved in solving any problems in your community? (N=989)
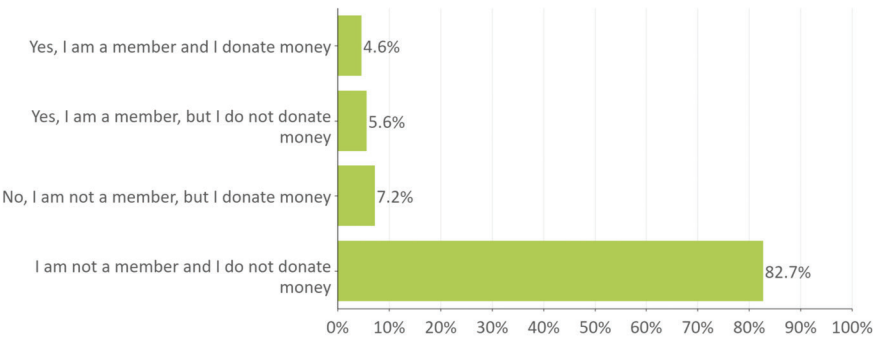
9. Have you volunteered in a group or a non-governmental organization (NGO)? (N=989)

Yes, in the last 12 moths (15.4%)

Yes, but not in the last 12 months (18.9%)

No, never (65.7%)

10. In which of the following areas did you do volunteer work? (More than one answer) (N=339)

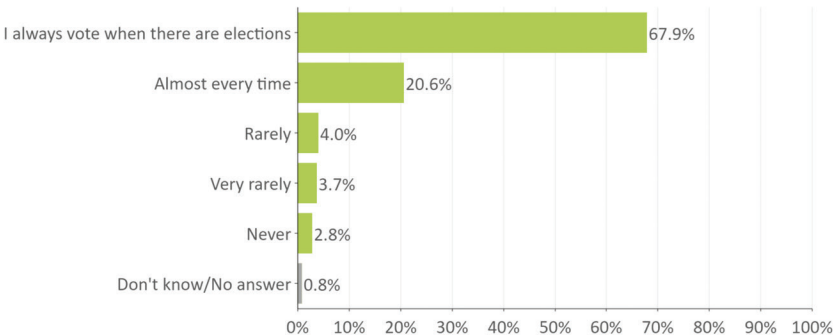| Area	%
Social services	30.1%
Environmental protection	23.9%
Culture, arts and sports	22.1%
Human rights (and citizen interests)	19.8%
Health	18.6%
Education, research	15.9%
Religion	15.6%
Women's rights and gender equality	11.5%
Philanthropy and volunteer work	10.6%
Peace	8.8%
Social and economic development	6.8%
Other ...	2.9%

11. Some people are members or donate money to political parties or political candidates. Are you a member or do you donate money to such an organization? (N=989)
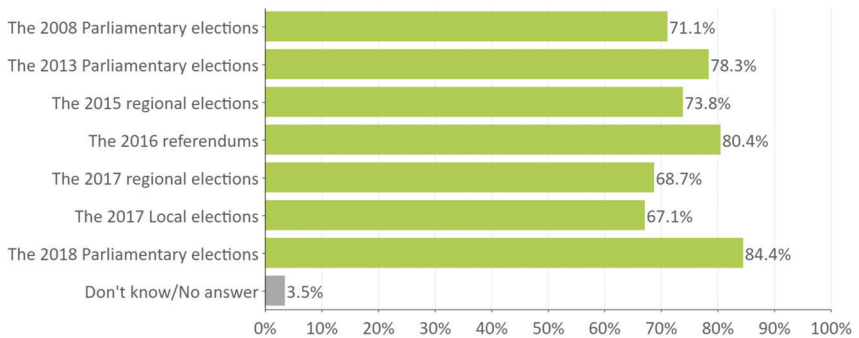

Yes, I am a member and I donate money	4.6%
Yes, I am a member, but I do not donate money	5.6%
No, I am not a member, but I donate money	7.2%
I am not a member and I do not donate money	82.7%

12. Are you actively involved in the organization of which you are member? (N=100)

No, I don't get involved actively (35.0%)

Yes, I get involved actively (65.0%)

13. How often do you vote? (N=989)

I always vote when there are elections	67.9%
Almost every time	20.6%
Rarely	4.0%
Very rarely	3.7%
Never	2.8%
Don't know/No answer	0.8%

14. In which elections did you vote? (More than one answer) (N=961)

Election	Percentage
The 2008 Parliamentary elections	71.1%
The 2013 Parliamentary elections	78.3%
The 2015 regional elections	73.8%
The 2016 referendums	80.4%
The 2017 regional elections	68.7%
The 2017 Local elections	67.1%
The 2018 Parliamentary elections	84.4%
Don't know/No answer	3.5%

15. When did you make your decision on which party to vote for during the 2018 general elections? (N=811)

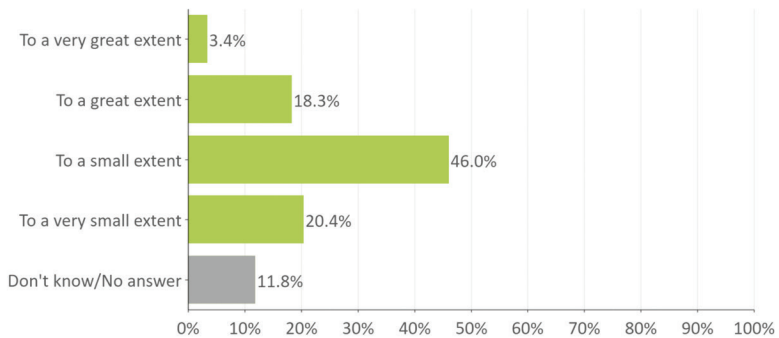| Decision timing	Percentage
In the last week of the campaign	29.3%
2 or 3 weeks ago	13.7%
4 or 6 weeks ago	21.0%
Sometime before the electoral campaign has started	36.0%
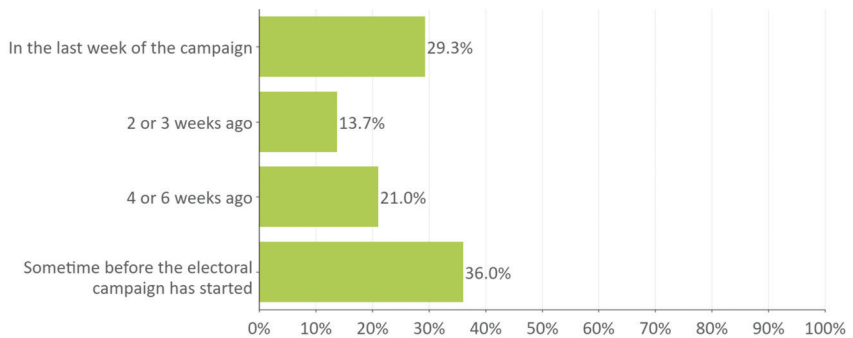
16. For which party did you vote in the Parliamentary elections held on March 4, 2018? (N=811)
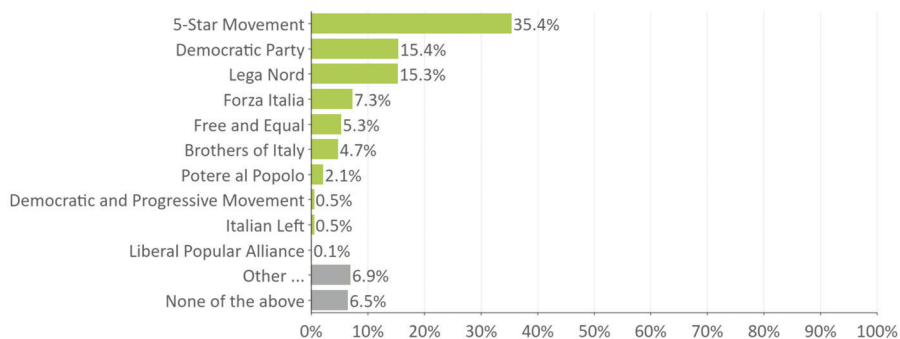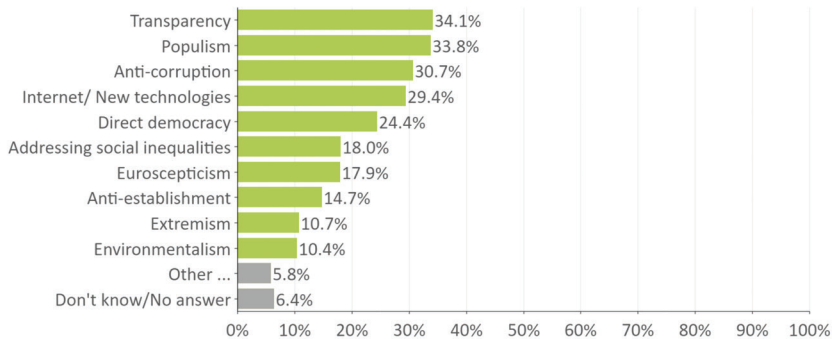

17. To what extent do you find that the voting procedures were completely fair and transparent during the 2018 Parliamentary elections? (N=989)
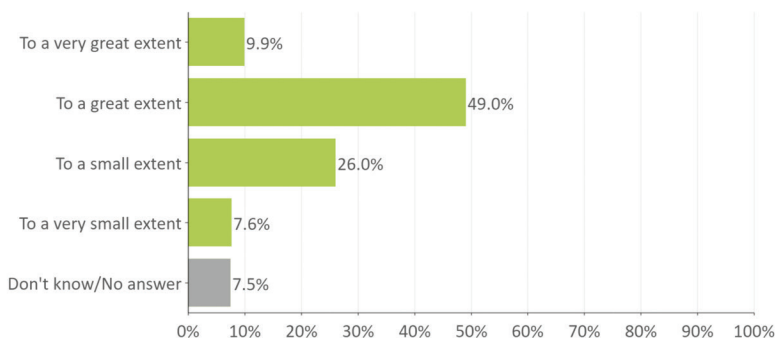
18. When thinking of the financial resources that parties have spent during the 2018 Parliamentary elections campaign, to what extent do you find that the money was spent in a fair and transparent way? (N=989)
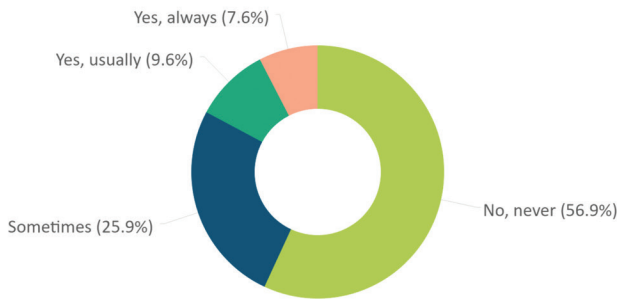
Category	Percentage
To a very great extent	3.4%
To a great extent	18.3%
To a small extent	46.0%
To a very small extent	20.4%
Don't know/No answer	11.8%

19. With which words do you associate the Five Star Movement? (More than one answer) (N=989)

Category	Percentage
Transparency	34.1%
Populism	33.8%
Anti-corruption	30.7%
Internet/ New technologies	29.4%
Direct democracy	24.4%
Addressing social inequalities	18.0%
Euroscepticism	17.9%
Anti-establishment	14.7%
Extremism	10.7%
Environmentalism	10.4%
Other ...	5.8%
Don't know/No answer	6.4%

20. Have you ever volunteered for a political organization or in a campaign for a candidate? (N=989)

Yes, in the last 12 months (5.1%)

Yes, but not in the last 12 months (9.8%)

No, never (85.1%)
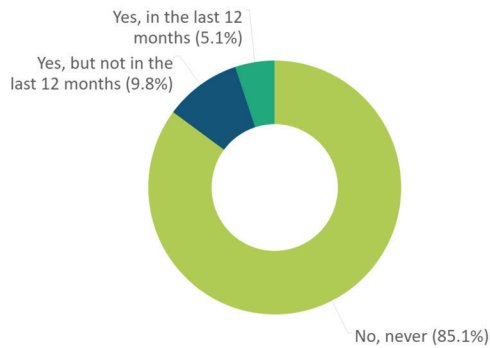
21. When elections take place, do you try to convince others to vote for those with whom you sympathize? (N=989)

Yes, always (7.6%)

Yes, usually (9.6%)

Sometimes (25.9%)

No, never (56.9%)

22. Have you ever participated in a protest march or demonstration? (N=989)

Yes, in the last 12 months (6.6%)

Yes, but not in the last 12 months (29.5%)
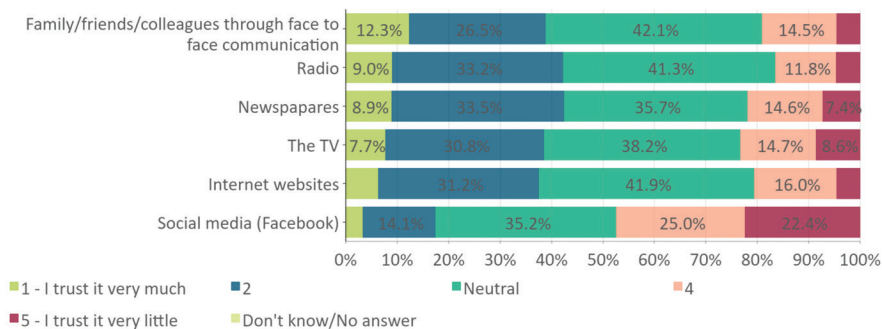
No, never (63.9%)
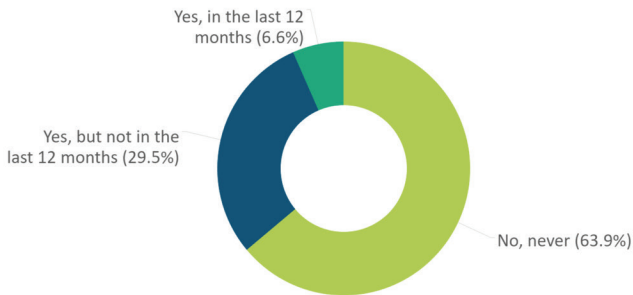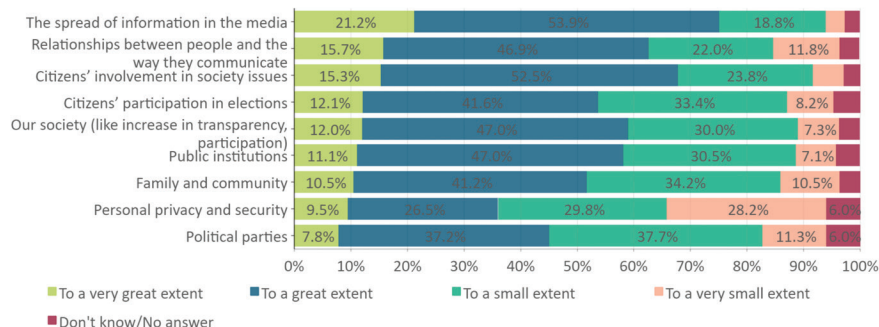
Impact of Technology on Democracy

1. When thinking of your use of technology in your day-to-day life (information, communication, entertainment etc.), how would you say this usage makes you feel? Please state your answer on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means you feel very addicted and dependent and 10 means that you feel very free and independent. (N=989)

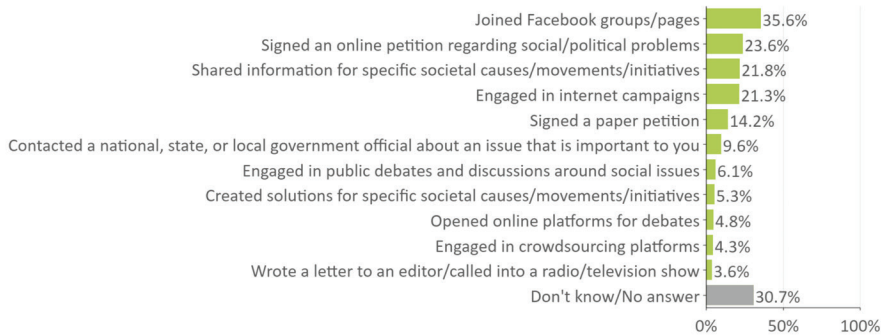|	
Very addicted and dependent	6.2%
1	4.1%
2	5.9%
3	8.4%
4	7.4%
5	16.9%
6	11.3%
7	14.8%
8	13.9%
9	5.0%
Very free and independent	6.2%
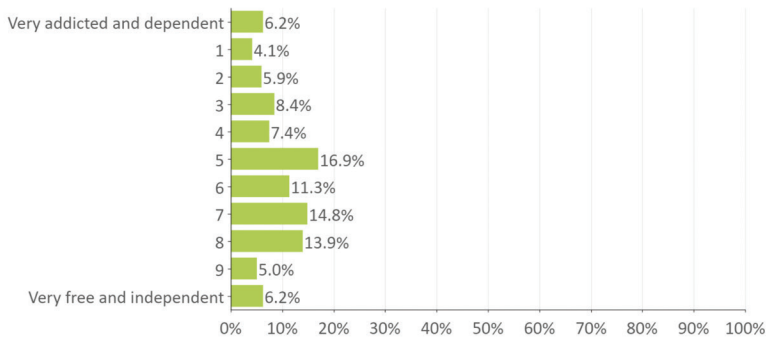
2. How much do you trust information coming from the following sources, on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means you trust it very much and 5 means you trust it very little? (N=989)
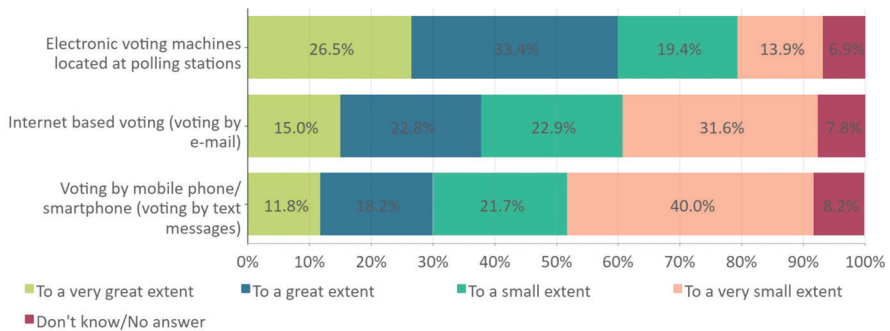

	1 - I trust it very much	2	Neutral	4	5 - I trust it very little	Don't know/No answer
Family/friends/colleagues through face to face communication	12.3%	26.5%	42.1%	14.5%		
Radio	9.0%	33.2%	41.3%	11.8%		
Newspapares	8.9%	33.5%	35.7%	14.6%	7.4%	
The TV	7.7%	30.8%	38.2%	14.7%	8.6%	
Internet websites		31.2%	41.9%	16.0%		
Social media (Facebook)	14.1%	35.2%	25.0%	22.4%		

3. To what extent do you agree with the following sentence: Technology has a positive impact on…. (N=989)

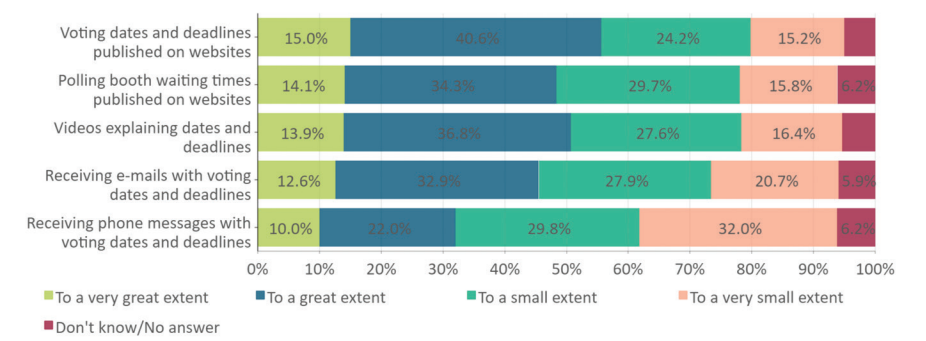|	To a very great extent	To a great extent	To a small extent	To a very small extent	Don't know/No answer
The spread of information in the media	21.2%	53.9%	18.8%		
Relationships between people and the way they communicate	15.7%	46.9%	22.0%	11.8%	
Citizens' involvement in society issues	15.3%	52.5%	23.8%		
Citizens' participation in elections	12.1%	41.6%	33.4%	8.2%	
Our society (like increase in transparency, participation)	12.0%	47.0%	30.0%	7.3%	
Public institutions	11.1%	47.0%	30.5%	7.1%	
Family and community	10.5%	41.2%	34.2%	10.5%	
Personal privacy and security	9.5%	26.5%	29.8%	28.2%	6.0%
Political parties	7.8%	37.2%	37.7%	11.3%	6.0%

4. Which of the following actions have you performed on online platforms or social media in the last 12 months? (More than one answer) (N=989)
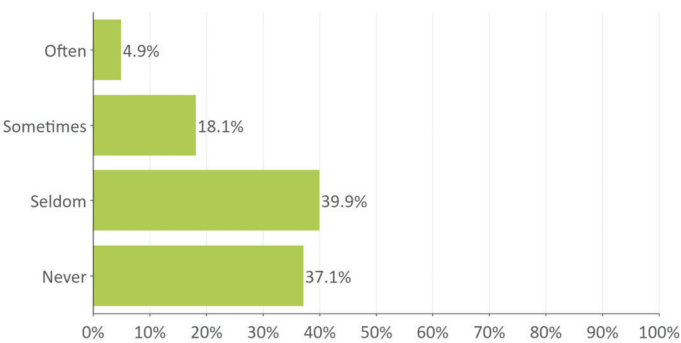
Action	%
Joined Facebook groups/pages	35.6%
Signed an online petition regarding social/political problems	23.6%
Shared information for specific societal causes/movements/initiatives	21.8%
Engaged in internet campaigns	21.3%
Signed a paper petition	14.2%
Contacted a national, state, or local government official about an issue that is important to you	9.6%
Engaged in public debates and discussions around social issues	6.1%
Created solutions for specific societal causes/movements/initiatives	5.3%
Opened online platforms for debates	4.8%
Engaged in crowdsourcing platforms	4.3%
Wrote a letter to an editor/called into a radio/television show	3.6%
Don't know/No answer	30.7%

5. If possible, to what extent would you prefer…: (N=989)

	To a very great extent	To a great extent	To a small extent	To a very small extent	Don't know/No answer
Electronic voting machines located at polling stations	26.5%	33.4%	19.4%	13.9%	6.9%
Internet based voting (voting by e-mail)	15.0%	22.8%	22.9%	31.6%	7.8%
Voting by mobile phone/smartphone (voting by text messages)	11.8%	18.2%	21.7%	40.0%	8.2%

6. To what extent would you be interested in the following information regarding elections? (N=989)

	To a very great extent	To a great extent	To a small extent	To a very small extent	Don't know/No answer
Voting dates and deadlines published on websites	15.0%	40.6%	24.2%	15.2%	
Polling booth waiting times published on websites	14.1%	34.3%	29.7%	15.8%	6.2%
Videos explaining dates and deadlines	13.9%	36.8%	27.6%	16.4%	
Receiving e-mails with voting dates and deadlines	12.6%	32.9%	27.9%	20.7%	5.9%
Receiving phone messages with voting dates and deadlines	10.0%	22.0%	29.8%	32.0%	6.2%

7. In an average month, how often do you go online to access government services (like www.governo.it)? (N=989)

Often	4.9%
Sometimes	18.1%
Seldom	39.9%
Never	37.1%

8. What is the main reason you never access online government services (like www. governo.it.)? (N=367)

Reason	Percentage
I am not interested in such information	55.9%
It does not offer all the options I need	15.0%
I prefer contact with a real person	13.4%
I still need to go in person for certain processes	4.9%
I don't know how to find such information	4.1%
I don't trust such services	6.8%
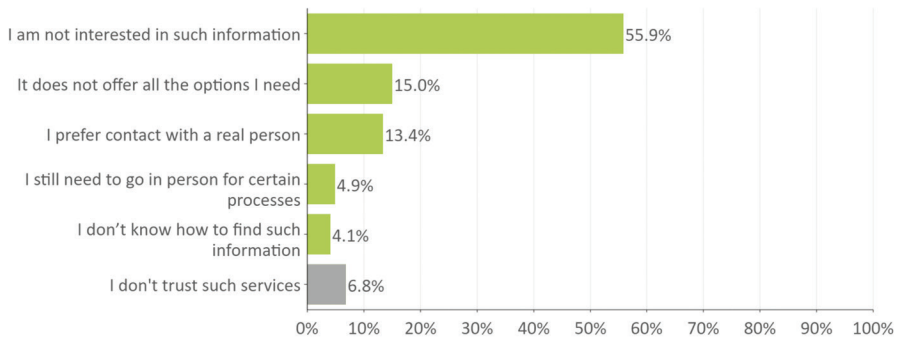
9. The following list contains several institutions in Italy. Please tell us how much trust you have in each one: very much, neutral or very little. (N=989)

Institution	1 - I trust it very much	2	Neutral	4	5 - I trust it very little
New media (internet/digital technologies)		20.4%	42.2%	18.9%	8.8%
The Prime Minister		16.2%	38.7%	20.3%	21.3%
International organizations (World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund etc.)		17.8%	41.4%	18.8%	18.6%
Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)		20.5%	39.0%	19.0%	18.1%
The Parliament		13.8%	33.7%	25.0%	24.8%
Banks and financial institutions		11.2%	29.5%	28.0%	29.0%
Political parties	2.7%		26.0%	28.6%	35.6%
Mass-media (the written press, TV etc.)		18.5%	38.3%	24.8%	16.4%
Businesses/corporations		14.3%	40.6%	23.6%	19.7%

Socio-Demographic Profiling

This online survey has been conducted among 989 Italians aged 18-65. Understanding their socio-demographic profile is vital when interpreting the results.

1. What is your gender? (N=989)

Male (49.0%)   Female (51.0%)

2. What is your age? (N=989)

Age	Percentage
18-24	10.9%
25-35	20.8%
36-45	25.1%
46-55	24.0%
56-65	19.2%
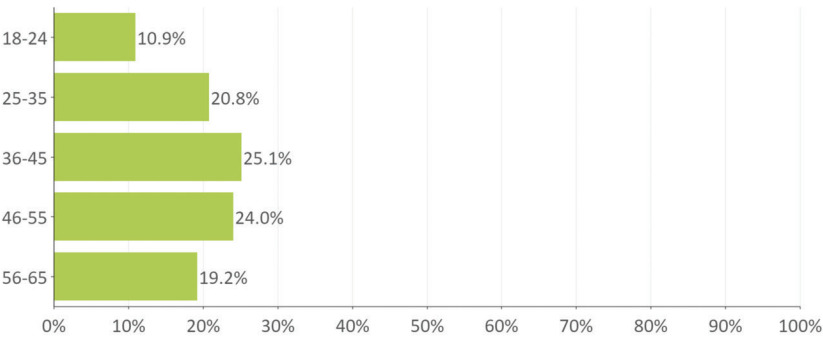
3. What is your permanent residence or the one where you spent the last 12 months? (N=989)

Region	Percentage
North West	24.6%
South	23.1%
Center	19.9%
North East	19.2%
Islands	11.0%
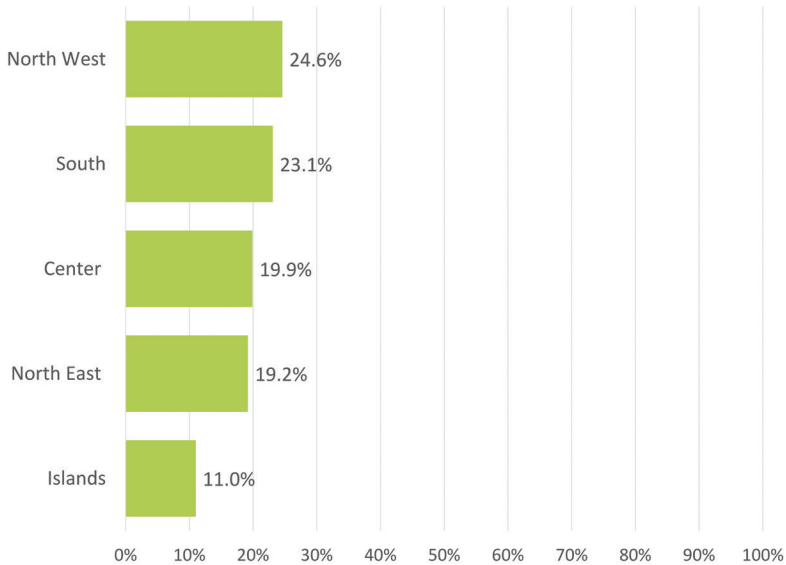
4. How many members live in your household (including yourself)? (N=989)

Household Size	Percentage
1	23.0%
2	24.8%
3	29.4%
4	17.0%
5 or more	5.9%
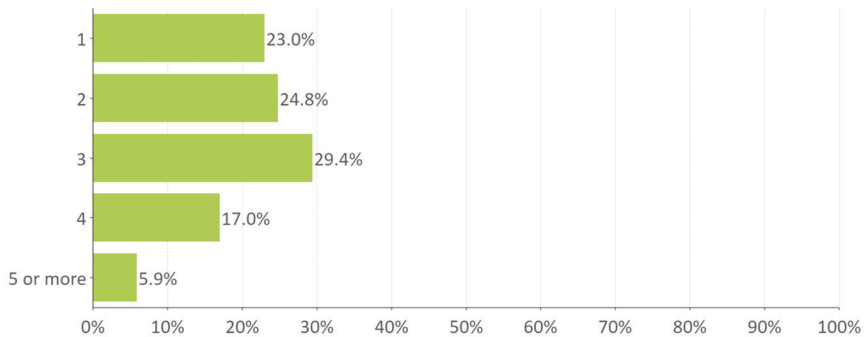
5. What is the total household net monthly income, considering all available sources of income in your household? (N=989)
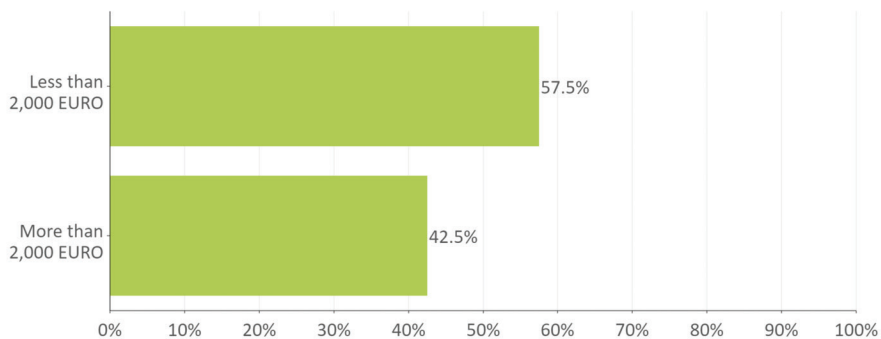
6. What is the highest degree/level of school that you have completed? (N=989)
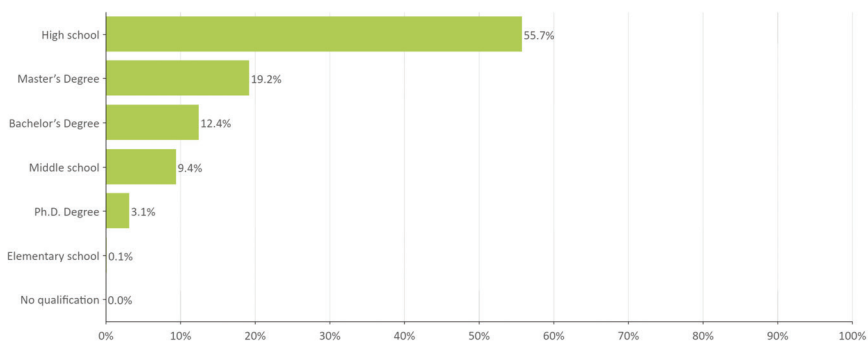
7. How many people in your household are children under 18 years of age? (N=762)

Response	Percentage
None	49.6%
1	26.8%
2	19.2%
3	3.9%
4	0.1%
5 or more	0.4%
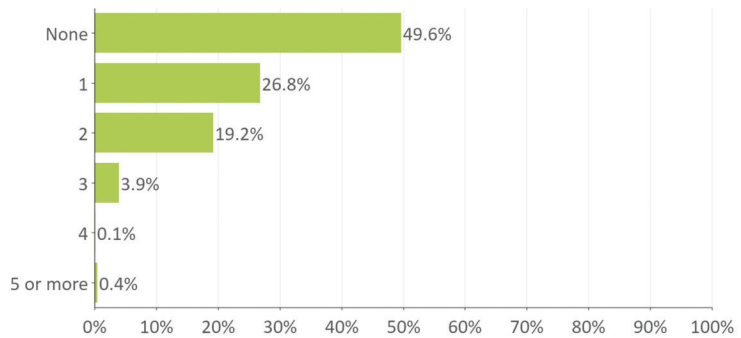
8. Who is the principal wage earner in your household? By principal wage earner in the household, we refer to the member with the highest income. (N=762)

Response	Percentage
I am	41.3%
Both I and another member	11.5%
Another household member	46.6%
I prefer not to answer	0.5%
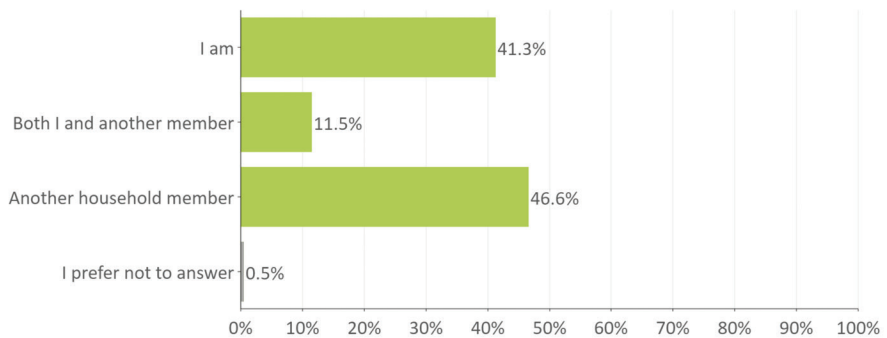
9. Which household member is responsible for the purchases in your household? (N=762)

I purchase them — 53.3%
Me and another household member — 41.3%
Another household member — 5.0%
I prefer not to answer — 0.4%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
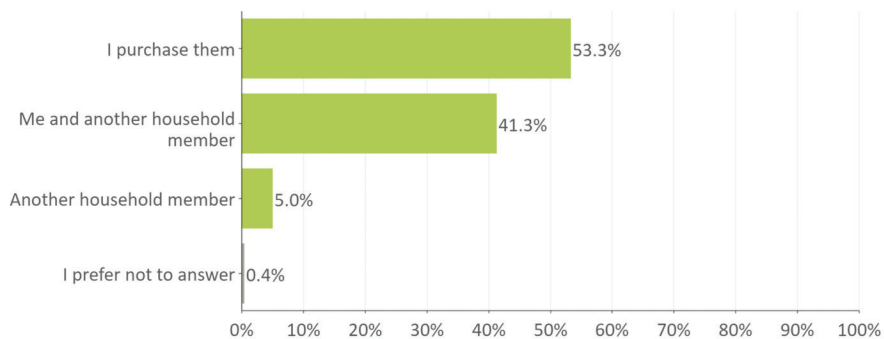
10. What is your total personal net monthly income, considering all available sources of income? (N=762)

Less than 2,000 EURO — 67.1%
2,000 EURO or more — 28.6%
I prefer not to answer — 4.3%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
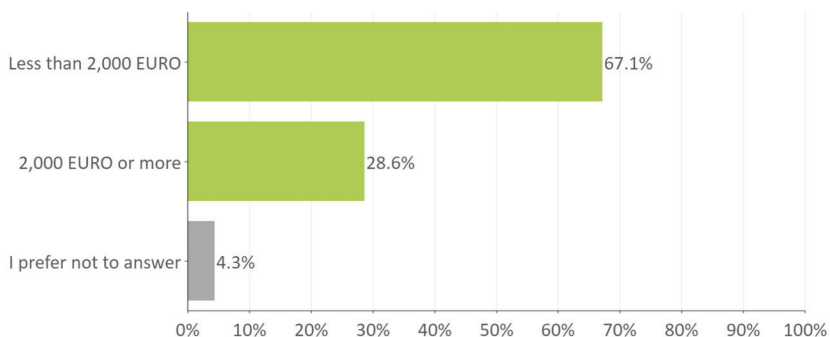
Survey Methods
Questia Group, March 2018 Survey

This report is based on an online survey conducted in Italy under the coordination of Questia Group. The interviews were conducted March 7 to March 14, 2018, among a representative online sample of 989 respondents, aged 18-65. Interviews were done in Italian.

The margin of sampling error for the complete set of weighted data is ± 3.1 percentage points. The margin of sampling error takes into account the design effect due to weighting. For results based on the full sample in a given country, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus the margin of error. The margin of error is larger for results based on subgroups in the survey. Sample sizes and sampling errors for subgroups are available upon request. In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question-wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce errors or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

This report considers information available as of March 2018. The analysis and research findings are those of the contributing staff and should not be attributed to other sources. Every effort is made to ensure, but not guarantee, their timeliness, accuracy, and completeness.