

Elections, political and social activities

The time series of data on political and social activity presented in this section deals with both the participation of citizens in political elections and referendums and their involvement in social and political activities in a wider sense.

The results of the various political elections cover the entire period from the constitution of the Kingdom of Italy to the current day. These data, all drawn from administrative sources, are inevitably affected by changes over time in the regulations regarding the right to vote in Italy (passage from restricted male-only suffrage to universal suffrage, extension of the right to vote to women, regulation of the right to vote for Italian citizens residing abroad, etc.). These modifications introduced considerable variations in the electorate which must be considered when reading the data.

Information on political and social activity, on the other hand, is drawn from sample surveys on households, dating back to the early 1990s when ISTAT launched a systematic monitoring of the Italian social life through the multipurpose system of household surveys.

Elections

The collection of data on electorate, participation in elections and their results is currently entrusted to the Ministry of the Interior, which is responsible for all the necessary measures for all sort elections and referendums governed by the State legislation. Over the years electoral data have been collected and subsequently published by various bodies, in various publications. During the Kingdom of Italy up until 1946, data were published by the General Statistics Division of the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce, and, from 1926 onwards, by ISTAT then known as the Central Statistical Institute, as well. Once Italy became a Republic, data were published by ISTAT in collaboration with the Ministry for the Constituent and subsequently with the Ministry of the Interior.

The results of political elections, once validated by the electoral Commissions, were published from the first term of 1948 up until the 8th term in 1979, by both municipality and electoral district. Immediately after the elections, ISTAT started publishing data by electoral district. From 1980 onwards the detailed publication of results of all elections was in care of the Ministry of the Interior, which directly publishes the results of elections and referendums governed by State law: political, European, regional (with the exception of those governed by regional regulations), provincial and municipal elections (in ordinary statute regions), repeal, constitutional and local referendums.

Once results had been scrutinised, the Ministry is responsible for collecting the initial results through the network of Electoral offices in Prefectures and Municipalities, and their immediate publication for information. The final data are published only after the official announcement of the winners. The announcement is made by the Central district office at the Court of Appeals or the competent court for the Municipality of the college, in addition to the Supreme Court, which performs non-judicial duties regarding legislative elections and popular referendums for the repeal of laws (Law no. 361/1957; Official Gazette no. 139 dated 03rd June 1957).

In addition to providing updated electoral data on its website, the Ministry also takes care of updating and publishing the historical election Archive, an online database containing the results of elections (announced by the competent Offices supported by magistrates), presented on a municipality basis. Within the scope of its duties and using its own organisational structures, the Ministry also produces, manages and archives data on the review of the electorate resident in Italy and abroad, performed every six months by Italian municipalities no later than the 30th June and 31st December each year.

Warnings for time series comparisons

For a correct reading of the data in the time series, take into account the variations to the exercise of the right to vote that have been introduced by law over the years, with their effect on the definition and composition of the electorate from a personal and socio-cultural point of view. The main changes to legislation are listed below:

a) The right to vote and the consequent evolution of the extension and composition of the electorate from a socio-demographic point of view:

- 1861. The right to vote is granted to men over the age of 25 capable of reading and writing and who have paid taxes of not less than 40 lire. This right allows 2 per cent of the Italian population to vote.
- 1882. Law no. 299 dated 24th September 1882 extends suffrage to all male citizens over the age of 21, who are literate (having passed the obligatory two years of primary school or military school) and who have paid direct taxes of at least 19.8 lire during the year. The resulting electorate is more than tripled.
- 1912. A law passed on 25th May 1912 establishes almost universal suffrage for men, extended to all men over the age of 21 capable of reading and writing, while the illiterate are granted the possibility of voting over the age of 30. Furthermore, the right to vote is extended to all citizens who have completed military service.
- 1918. The previous electoral law is modified to grant the right to vote to all male citizens over the age of 21, including the illiterate. Voting rights are also extended to minors who performed military service during the war.
- 1945. Universal suffrage is established, extending for the first time the right to vote to women. Voting rights now belong to all Italian residents, male and female, over the age of 21 for elections for the Chamber of Deputies and over the age of 25 for elections to the Senate (Lieutenant's Legislative Decree no. 23 dated 02nd February 1945).
- 1947. Voting rights are withdrawn from the population (and the relative number of those on electoral lists) in the territories ceded to France in 1947 and to former Yugoslavia (Paris Treaty of 10th February 1947).
- 1975. The age when voting rights are acquired is reduced for the resident population and all Italian citizens over the age of 18 have the right to vote for the Chamber of Deputies (Law no. 39 dated 08th March 1975).

b) Extension of voting rights to Italian voters resident abroad:

- 1979. The electoral base is extended and Italian voters resident abroad are included in the electoral lists of the respective municipalities of origin in Italy, thanks to Law no. 40 dated 07th February 1979.
- 1989. For the consultative referendum of 1989 Italian citizens resident in a member State of the European Community are granted the right to vote at the specific electoral booths set up in Consulates, in compliance with art. 1, paragraph 2 of Law no. 132 dated 18th April 1989 and art. 26 of Law no. 18 dated 24th January 1979. On 18th June 1989 the elections for the European Parliament were also held.
- 1994. For the purposes of the election of the European Parliament, in addition to the voters established by Law no. 40 dated 07th February 1979, citizens of any member State of the European Union resident in Italy who have presented an application to vote in their municipality of residence may vote in Italy. In this case, the European citizens are enrolled as voters in an additional roll to that of their respective municipalities, and they vote in the electoral seat in the local district where they reside (art. 2, Legislative Decree no. 408 dated 24th June 1994). The same regulation (art. 3, Legislative Decree no. 408 dated 1994) establishes that Italian voters resident in another member State of the Union who do not intend to exercise their right to vote and who are enrolled in the Ministry of the Interior's list of

Italian voters resident abroad may vote for the election of Italian representatives at the European Parliament in the electoral seats set up for the purpose in their Country of residence. In addition to Italian citizens resident in EU member States, the electoral lists also record Italian citizens who are temporarily in other EU State for various reasons (study, work), and who have presented an application to vote in their country of current domicile (art. 3, Legislative Decree No. 408 dated 24th June 1994 and art. 26 of Law no. 18 dated 24th January 1979). Italian voters who have applied to vote as citizens of another member State, however, are excluded from the Italian electorate and from the Ministry of the Interior's list of Italian voters abroad.

- 2001. For the reopening of the Italian Parliament and for national referendums (both repeals and constitutional referendums) a specific “foreign district” was created in accordance with Law no. 459 dated 27th December 2001. The same law, in addition to Presidential Decree no. 104 dated 02nd April 2003, Italian voters resident abroad have the right to express their vote by correspondence in the country in which they reside, if they prefer not to return to Italy in person to vote. From this year, voters resident abroad are detached from the national electorate and may vote in the “foreign district”.

Political and social participation

ISTAT collects information on political and social participation since 1993, as part of the annual survey on *Aspects of daily life*.¹ With regard to social participation, the activities taken into consideration range from the attendance of meetings to voluntary activities in associations or environmentalist groups, civil rights groups, recreational or cultural associations, volunteer organisations, professional associations and trade unions.

Political participation, as measured by the survey, relates to both direct involvement, such as participation in groups or demonstrations, or simply discussing or being interested in political matters. Religious participation is also recorded through a question on the frequency of church or other religious institution attendance. Information on political and social participation is collected for those of age 14 and over, while for religious participation is recorded for those of 6 years and over (in 1993 and 1994 the age limit was of 11 years).

Data on participation in associations, groups, demonstrations or attendance of political debates refer to the 12 months prior to the interview, while those on religious participation, discussion and interest in religious matters refer to usual behaviour.

Information on political and social participation is collected using a self-compiled questionnaire.

¹ For information on the “Aspects of daily life” survey, see [Households](#).