

Telescope Public Opinion Watch: A two-round analysis on Italian public opinion and political preferences in 2024

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Abstract

This article presents findings from the *Telescope Public Opinion Watch*, a set of two cross-sectional surveys analyzing Italian public opinion and political preferences throughout 2024. The first, conducted in May before the European Parliament elections, examined voters' electoral intentions, issue preferences, and opinion on leaders of the main parties. Results indicated high electoral uncertainty, persistent ideological divides, and the strategic importance of key leadership traits. The second survey, conducted in November, tracked shifts in public attitudes and introduced new items addressing emergent political debates. Findings revealed increased war-weariness, increasingly negative attitudes towards immigration, and growing climate change polarization. Class-based and generational divides within electoral coalitions deepened, particularly within the right-wing bloc. The article highlights the challenges of voter mobilization, the entrenchment of partisan loyalties, and the relevance of economic and security concerns in shaping electoral behavior. It offers a comprehensive overview of the current Italian political landscape and the structural constraints that might affect future electoral competition.

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1 Introduction: The Project Goal

Telescope Public Opinion Watch, presented in this paper, is part of the broader *Telescope* initiative (launched in 2024 by the CISE – Italian Center for Electoral Studies at LUISS Guido Carli University) dedicated to the public divulgation of analyses of elections, voting behavior, and democratic representation that employ the methodological rigor of political science. The initiative is designed to bridge the gap between political science research and public discourse, delivering high-quality academic insights in an accessible format. More specifically within the initiative, the *Telescope Public Opinion Watch* project leverages original data collection on public opinion: by offering empirical findings grounded in established theories and robust methodologies, the project provides the general public with a systematic and structured approach to understanding electoral processes in a timely manner.

Telescope Public Opinion Watch regularly publishes in-depth analyses based on original empirical survey data, analyzed through multivariate statistical models and other advanced methodologies, offering new perspectives on elections, party competition, and voter behavior. These analyses document current trends and contribute to broader debates on representation, institutional design, and electoral change. Through this research-focused approach, *Telescope Public Opinion Watch* aims to provide scholars, analysts, and policymakers with a data-driven, theoretically grounded understanding of contemporary political dynamics.

This research project overview presents the main results of *Telescope Public Opinion Watch* emerging from the analysis of survey data collected in 2024 in Italy. The 2024 European Parliament (EP) elections presented a crucial moment for Italian parties to refine their campaign strategies, identifying the most effective issues to mobilize their base and attract undecided voters. Some issues earned salience and other maintained their relevance among the electorate, and part of the aims of the project was to measure citizens' preferences and to track them over time. Using data from two original survey data collections conducted in May and November, we performed a systematic analysis of nearly 30 political and social issues. The findings offer relevant and fresh insights for all scholars interested in the study of public opinion and voters' preferences in Italy.

2 Data and Methodology

The *Telescope Public Opinion Watch* consisted of two rounds of original, cross-sectional data collection. The first was conducted between May 2 and May 9, 2024 – roughly one month before the EP elections took place; the second between November 20 and November 26, 2024. Both surveys were administered by Demetra, using CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing) on a non-probabilistic sample (extracted from a pre-selected respondents' pool) of, respectively, 1,204 and 1,206 respondents. Both samples were pre-stratified by gender, age, and geographic area and then weighted according to demographic characteristics and 2022 electoral recall. In both rounds, response rate was 40%.

The goal of the study was to employ a combination of descriptive statistics and regression analyses to examine patterns in public opinion and electoral preferences. The primary objective was not to establish causal inferences but rather to provide a detailed snapshot of Italian public opinion before a key political event – the 2024 EP elections – and in the months that followed.

3 Public Opinion and Voting Behavior in Spring 2024

3.1 Undecided Voters

As the 2024 EP elections approached, a notable feature of the pre-election landscape in Italy was the high proportion of undecided voters (not reporting any party choice), which varied across demographic and political subgroups. A clear gender disparity emerged¹, as 33% of female respondents reported being undecided, compared to 22% of male respondents. This large pool of undecided voters might be understood in relation to the literature on abstainers, as it most likely includes individuals who ultimately vote as well as those who refrain from doing so (especially if we consider that self-reported turnout is often subject to social desirability bias). While recent comparative evidence on the gender gap in voting turnout suggests that it is no longer the case that women turn out less than men to the polls (Angelucci et al. 2024), mild evidence has suggested that survey might often record a gender gap in turnout due to male voters over-reporting their turnout in surveys (Stockemer and Sundstrom 2023).

Generational differences also played a role in shaping levels of electoral uncertainty. Unlike previous electoral cycles, younger voters (aged 18 to 44) exhibited the highest levels of indecision. In contrast, older voters (aged 65 and above) demonstrated greater electoral certainty – a trend that paralleled occupational differences, with retirees expressing the most decisive voting intentions. This is in line with the well-established finding regarding the age-related turnout gap (Angelucci et al. 2025; Smets and Van Ham 2013) and suggests that political parties had an opportunity to target younger voters in the final stages of the campaign to shape the electoral outcome.

In addition to demographic factors, political orientation influenced the extent of indecision. Self-identified right-wing voters displayed the lowest levels of electoral uncertainty, with only 11% reporting indecision, followed by left-wing voters at 16%. However, uncertainty increased substantially among centrist voters, with 29% remaining undecided. The highest were observed among those who refused to place themselves on the left-right spectrum, where indecision reached 57%. These findings suggest that centrist and politically unaligned voters represented a crucial battleground in the electoral competition. Furthermore, nearly 30% of undecided voters expressed negative views regarding the Meloni administration, highlighting the potential for opposition parties to capitalize on dissatisfaction with the executive. In summary, all these dynamics suggested that last-minute campaign efforts and voter mobilization strategies might have been critical in determining the final electoral outcomes.

3.2 Issue Positions

When analyzing issue stances, a well-known trend emerges, combining left-wing positions on economic issues with right-wing positions on immigration. A substantial majority of respondents (82%) expressed support for redistributive policies aimed at benefiting lower-income groups. Yet, there was a notable preference for restrictive immigration policies, with 64% advocating for stricter controls. Support for European integration and NATO membership remained strong, but while 72% of Italians favored continued NATO membership, support for remaining in the European Union was slightly lower (65%). On international issues, pacifist sentiments were prominent. A significant major-

¹See this note on the CISE website.

ity (79%) supported the cessation of Israeli military actions in Gaza, while 64% endorsed diplomatic negotiations between Russia and Ukraine, even if such agreements entailed territorial concessions to Moscow. Italians emerged as notably divided in terms of security policy preferences: only a narrow majority (53%) favored the establishment of a European common army. Similarly, the issue of judicial power remained contentious, with 54% supporting the current level of judicial authority, and 46% advocating for a reduction in magistrates' influence. Regarding reproductive rights, public opinion leaned decisively against anti-abortion advocacy within public institutions, with 67% rejecting proposals to grant such groups access to public counseling centers. Environmental protection emerged as a politically salient issue, but partly divisive: only 58% supported prioritizing environmental policies even at the expense of economic growth.

3.3 Preferences on Leaders

To further examine potential electoral shifts, the *Telescope* survey evaluated four key leadership attributes: competence, energy, honesty, and empathy². These characteristics are widely acknowledged in political psychology as critical determinants of electoral appeal (Funk 1999; Kinder 1986; King 2002).

Among Italy's political figures, Antonio Tajani (FI) emerged as the most competent, likely benefiting from his extensive political experience, including his tenure as President of the EP. This was coupled with his strong ratings for honesty, where he secured 50.1% approval, outperforming Giorgia Meloni by 7 percentage points and Matteo Salvini (Lega) by 26 percentage points. Giuseppe Conte (M5S) distinguished himself in the domains of honesty and empathy, strengthening his image as a leader attuned to the concerns of ordinary citizens. In contrast, Elly Schlein (PD) and Matteo Salvini ranked poorly across multiple leadership dimensions. Schlein received the lowest rating for energy, a key trait for effective political leadership, while Salvini recorded the lowest score for honesty. Furthermore, Schlein's rating for empathy was second to last, an unfavorable outcome for a leader seeking to galvanize a progressive coalition centered on social justice issues. Giorgia Meloni (Fdi), despite not ranking highest in competence or honesty, remained dominant in perceived energy. She was widely regarded as the most assertive and capable leader, with 72% of respondents endorsing her strength – a perception that has remained central to her political identity since the 2022 general elections (Garzia et al. 2023; Puleo et al. 2024).

An innovative aspect of the pre-electoral *Telescope* was that it sought to assess public sentiment regarding a potential center-left leadership contest between Conte and Schlein. Conte emerged as the likely winner. Among self-identified left-wing voters, 32.9% preferred him as the leader of a hypothetical center-left coalition, whereas only 22.6% favored Schlein. The gap widened further among center-left voters (36.4% supporting Conte, 18% Schlein) and was even more pronounced among centrist voters, where Conte garnered 47.3% support compared to a mere 3.8% for Schlein. Notably, even within the PD electorate, Schlein failed to secure consensus. Only 36.4% of PD voters endorsed her as the preferred leader of the center-left, while 15.6% expressed a preference for Conte. This suggests that Schlein's leadership remains rather contested within her own party, raising doubts about her capacity to consolidate the opposition against the right-wing coalition.

²See this note on the CISE website.

3.4 Voting behavior

The 2024 EP elections provided a critical opportunity to analyze how electoral preferences are shaped by social characteristics in Italy. We reconstructed voting behavior by reusing voting intentions from the pre-electoral survey data but weighting the data to align with actual voting results³. Analyzing these data suggests that traditional gender-based voting patterns persist, albeit with notable shifts within the right-wing coalition. In recent decades, women demonstrated a higher propensity to vote for left-wing parties, particularly those who are employed, a trend consistent with the modern gender gap theory (Inglehart and Norris 2000). This pattern remains evident in the 2024 EP elections, with women displaying greater support for the M5S and the PD compared to men. However, an interesting exception emerged within the right-wing bloc, since among the Lega voters, a substantial proportion (30%) of female supporters identify as housewives, in stark contrast to the 13% among PD’s female electorate. This suggests that while the gender divide persists in broad ideological terms, specific right-wing parties have cultivated a distinct appeal among certain female demographics.

A generational divide in electoral preferences is also clearly observable. Among younger voters (18-29 years old), support was evenly split between the PD and FdI, with the Greens and Left Alliance (AVS) performing particularly well within this segment. The M5S secured its strongest support among middle-aged voters, particularly within the 30-44 and 55-64 age cohorts. FdI demonstrated peak support among the 45-54 demographic, a key segment of the working-age population, while maintaining a strong presence among older voters. FI performed notably well among those aged 45-54. Finally, the Lega attracted older voters but also maintained a foothold among those aged 30-44. These findings indicate that generational differences remain a significant determinant of party preference in Italy, with younger voters favoring progressive parties while middle-aged Italians lean toward the right.

Consistent with international electoral trends, education remains a strong predictor of voting behavior (Hooghe and Marks 2025). The dynamic can be summarized with the “Brahmin Left” versus “Merchant Right” framework proposed by Piketty (2018), where voters with higher cultural capital tend to support progressive left-wing parties, while those focused on financial security gravitate toward conservative ones. In Italy, the PD and centrist parties such as Action and United States of Europe (SUE) perform best among university-educated voters. Conversely, the M5S continues to underperform among graduates, a persisting trend across multiple election cycles. Right-wing parties, particularly FdI and Lega, draw stronger support from voters with lower education levels, reflecting a broader international phenomenon involving populist radical right parties (Ivarsflaten and Stubager 2012).

Religious affiliation remains a powerful determinant of voting behavior. Highly religious voters overwhelmingly support right-wing parties. In contrast, less religious voters demonstrated a clear preference for the PD and AVS, aligning with the secular and progressive orientations of these parties. Interestingly, M5S occupies an interesting position, maintaining notable support among religious voters. This may be attributed to Pope Francis’ emphasis on pacifism, which resonates with the M5S’s strong anti-war stance.

The historical cleavage between self-employed and salaried workers, a defining feature of Italian electoral politics for decades, appears to be evolving. FdI emerges as the dominant party among self-employed workers, salaried employees, and housewives, showcasing

³See this note on the CISE website.

its broad-based appeal across occupational categories. The M5S remains the unopposed leader among the unemployed, continuing its tradition of attracting economically precarious voters. Meanwhile, the PD secures its strongest support among students, with Action and SUE also performing well in this demographic. FI retains its traditional base among self-employed workers, while Lega garners support among both salaried employees and housewives. However, the party’s relative weakness among self-employed voters suggests a departure from its historic base in northern entrepreneurial circles. These patterns indicate a gradual realignment of occupational-based voting: the right consolidates its appeal among economically active groups and the left retains strong support among students and the unemployed.

Social class continues to play a decisive role in structuring electoral preferences, but its impact manifested in an increasingly complex manner, particularly within the right-wing coalition. The M5S maintained its dominance among lower-income voters; PD, Action, and SUE consolidated their positions among the middle and upper classes. Lega, traditionally associated with small business owners, has undergone a notable shift, now attracting a significant proportion of lower-income voters as well. In contrast, FdI performed exceptionally well among the upper-middle and upper classes, with its support rising from just 10% in the lowest income group to 36% among the highest earners. Overall, within the right-wing coalition, class divides are becoming more pronounced, with FdI increasingly appealing to affluent voters while Lega and FI compete for the support of economically disadvantaged segments.

3.5 Voting flows: abstention and limited inter-coalition mobility

The 2024 EP elections highlighted two key patterns in Italian electoral behavior: the substantial impact of abstention and the continued rigidity of partisan alignments, often referred to as the “Wall of Arcore”⁴. Drawing on data from the pre-electoral *Telescope* survey, weighted to reflect actual election results, this section examines patterns of voter retention, abstention, and party-switching between the 2022 general elections and the 2024 EP elections⁵.

One of the most salient findings concerns the differential rates of voter loyalty among Italy’s political parties. FdI demonstrated the highest voter retention rate, maintaining the support of 66% of its 2022 electorate. The PD followed closely with a 60% retention rate, while AVS retained 58% of its previous voters. Other parties faced greater challenges in sustaining their electoral bases. FI and Lega retained 54% and 51% of their 2022 voters, respectively, whereas the centrist parties, including Action, Italy Alive, and More Europe, experienced lower retention rates at 42%. The M5S exhibited the most significant voter erosion, retaining only 35% of its 2022 electorate.

Abstention emerged as a decisive factor in the 2024 elections. M5S registered the highest rate of voter defection to abstention, with half of its 2022 electorate (50%) choosing not to participate in the EP elections. These patterns suggest that M5S continues to face significant mobilization difficulties in second-order elections, where lower voter engagement compounds its structural disadvantages. Other major parties also suffered notable

⁴Named after the municipality of Arcore (Monza), where Silvio Berlusconi’s famous villa is located, the Wall of Arcore refers to Berlusconi’s ability to establish a bipolar and highly personalized electoral competition in Italy since 1994. Voters from the two opposing camps - center-right and center-left - rarely switch to a party in the opposing camp. Their long-term allegiance to a given camp has been reinforced by either sympathy for or hostility toward Berlusconi.

⁵See this note on the CISE website.

losses to abstention, with PD, Action, FI, and FdI each experiencing defection rates ranging between 23% and 26%. In contrast, Lega and AVS exhibited greater resilience in voter retention, losing only 6% and 18% of their respective electorates to abstention.

An analysis of voter transitions between parties indicates that most vote transfers occurred within the same ideological bloc, reinforcing Italy’s entrenched bipolarity. Within the center-right coalition, FdI absorbed 8% of its new voters from Lega and 4% from FI, while only 3% of its support came from the center-left. Lega primarily gained voters from within the right-wing bloc and from abstention, whereas FI managed to attract a notable portion of voters from centrist parties and, to a lesser extent, from PD and M5S.

On the center-left, PD gained electoral support from centrist voters and absorbed a significant 10% of former The Lega voters, potentially reflecting dissatisfaction with Salvini’s rightward shift. AVS experienced a substantial influx of former PD voters, with 27% of its electorate originating from the PD. Meanwhile, M5S remained largely stagnant in its capacity to attract new voters, with only 17% of its electorate in 2024 coming from outside its 2022 voter base. This suggests that M5S struggles to expand its appeal beyond its traditional strongholds, particularly in the context of an election where abstention disproportionately affects its voter base.

The findings underscore the mobilization challenges that Italian parties face in EP elections, which are traditionally characterized by higher abstention rates. The outcome also aligns with broader trends in second-order elections, where governing parties often experience electoral penalties, and opposition parties struggle to mobilize their supporters effectively (Reif and Schmitt 1980).

Furthermore, the persistence of the “Wall of Arcore”, evidenced by the minimal crossover between the center-left and center-right blocs, reinforces the continued polarization of the Italian electorate. These entrenched partisan divisions are likely to shape future electoral strategies, particularly in the context of coalition negotiations for upcoming national and local elections.

4 An ecological analysis of socio-economic divides

Coming to effects of socio-economic aspects, our findings indicate that class remains a significant determinant of voting behavior, albeit in a more complex and fragmented manner than in traditional left-right models (Oesch and Rennwald 2018). However, contemporary voting patterns reveal internal socioeconomic divisions within both political blocs, suggesting that economic status exerts a nuanced influence on electoral preferences.

The emerging class-based realignment in Italy mirrors patterns observed in France, as documented in recent work by Cagé and Piketty (2024). A key distinction in their analysis is the differentiation between income derived from labor and wealth generated from property assets. Urban, high-income wage earners tend to support center-left and progressive parties, while rural property owners, who derive income from land and real estate rather than wages, exhibit stronger support for conservative or far-right parties. This “geo-class” model, which integrates economic and territorial factors, provides a useful framework for understanding Italy’s shifting electoral landscape.

Applying this framework to Italy, we report here findings from a separate *Telescope* analysis ⁶ (not based on survey data) which also investigated how average taxable income per municipality correlates with party support. While acknowledging the risk of ecological

⁶See this note on the CISE website.

fallacy (Robinson 2009) in interpreting municipal-level averages, the results highlight class-based voting divisions. In municipalities with higher average incomes, support for PD and FdI increases, mirroring the individual-level trends identified with the survey data. In contrast, M5S and Lega dominate in lower-income municipalities. Notably, FI's support declines as municipal income rises, displaying an inverse trajectory to that of PD. This suggests that within the right-wing bloc, FI retains a distinct socioeconomic appeal, separate from those of Lega and FdI.

Beyond income levels, a further distinction emerges between labor-based earnings and property-derived wealth. PD and AVS gain support as labor income increases, reinforcing their appeal among high-income professionals. In contrast, FdI performs particularly well in areas where property wealth is higher, suggesting that its support base includes a significant proportion of asset-owning voters rather than wage earners. This finding aligns with research on patrimonial economic voting, which shows that better-off voters in terms of patrimony are more likely to vote right (Nadeau et al. 2009). M5S, Lega, and FI exhibit negative correlations with both labor and property income, confirming their broader appeal among economically precarious voters.

Beyond absolute wealth levels, the distribution of property ownership within municipalities further refines these insights. When property wealth is highly concentrated among a small number of large landowners, FdI benefits the most, with its support increasing by nearly 3.7 percentage points per standard deviation increase in property wealth. Conversely, in municipalities where property ownership is more widely distributed, this effect diminishes, suggesting that concentrated wealth fosters right-wing voting, whereas a broader distribution of property assets mitigates this trend.

For M5S and FI, the pattern is reversed: their electoral support declines in areas with highly concentrated property wealth but increases in municipalities where ownership is more evenly distributed. This suggests that their appeal may be stronger in communities where property ownership remains relatively accessible to the broader population rather than concentrated among elite rentiers.

The 2024 EP elections reaffirm the salience of social class in Italian electoral behavior, though in an increasingly fragmented manner. The analysis highlights the importance of distinguishing between property-based wealth and labor-derived income, as these factors exert distinct influences on party preferences. It suggests an ongoing realignment in Italian politics, where economic self-interest and wealth composition play a decisive role in shaping voter behavior. This evolving class dynamic will likely have significant implications for future electoral strategies and coalition formations, as parties seek to navigate the increasingly complex relationship between economic status and political preferences.

5 Public opinion in Fall 2024

The second (cross-sectional) *Telescope* survey, conducted in November 2024, provides an updated assessment of Italian public opinion on key political issues. This round included new survey items to track aggregate shifts in attitudes observed in the second half of the year, while also incorporating additional measures to capture perspectives on newly emergent topics in the political landscape. The findings illustrate a deepening polarization across several dimensions, notably on issues related to war, immigration, and climate change⁷

⁷See this note on the CISE website.

5.1 Issue positions

The trend of war-weariness identified in the spring survey became even more pronounced in fall 2024. Regarding the Russia-Ukraine war, 67% of respondents favored a negotiated peace agreement with Russia, acknowledging the annexation of occupied territories. This reflects a growing disillusionment with the prolonged conflict and aligns with broader European skepticism regarding continued military assistance to Ukraine. Similarly, public opinion on the Israel-Gaza conflict indicated rising opposition to Israel’s military intervention, with 81% of respondents advocating for its cessation – an increase of four percentage points compared to May 2024.

Attitudes toward European security cooperation also exhibited notable shifts. Support for the creation of a common European Union army declined by seven percentage points, falling below the majority threshold to 49%. The strongest opposition to this policy was observed among Millennials (52%) and Generation X (55%), while older respondents (60+) and those identifying with left-wing ideologies remained more supportive (57%). These trends suggest a diminishing willingness among Italians to engage in protracted international conflicts and a more cautious stance on deeper European military integration.

Public sentiment regarding immigration policy became even more restrictive compared to the spring. Support for tighter immigration controls increased from 62.9% in May to 67.7% in November, reinforcing an already entrenched trend in Italian and European political discourse. Although nativist attitudes still set populist radical right voters apart from the others (Crulli and Albertazzi 2024), immigration is now a pivotal issue for center-right voters as well, while left-wing parties face growing pressure to (further) moderate their positions (Abou-Chadi et al. 2020; Hjorth and Larsen 2022).

Public opinion on judicial power remained largely unchanged from the pre-European election survey. The divide over the role of the judiciary continues to align with partisan affiliations. Approximately 54% of respondents supported maintaining strong judicial powers, while 46% favored a reduction – closely mirroring previous findings. The entrenched nature of these attitudes suggests that judicial reform will continue to be a divisive issue shaping future electoral debates.

5.2 Climate change: a polarizing issue with a rise in skepticism

Climate change emerged as a particularly contentious issue in the fall survey, reflecting ongoing ideological polarization. Quite stably, 56.3% of respondents prioritized environmental protection over economic growth, similar to the 57.8% recorded in May. A large majority (76%) attributed recent extreme weather events to climate change, and an even higher proportion (81%) specifically linked Italy’s 2024 weather disasters to human-induced climate change. However, a sizable minority, ranging between 20-25%, rejected the scientific consensus, demonstrating the persistence of climate skepticism within certain segments of the electorate.

Skepticism toward climate change was more prevalent among specific demographic groups. Millennials (1981-1995) exhibited the highest levels of denialism (34%). In contrast, younger respondents from Generation Z (2006-1996) displayed the lowest levels of skepticism, with only 16% expressing doubts about climate change. Gender disparities were also evident, with men (30%) more likely than women (18%) to reject climate change narratives. Education and economic status further influenced beliefs, as less-educated respondents (30% among those with no formal education) and higher-income individuals

(56-60% of those in the top income brackets) demonstrated greater skepticism.

Political orientation also played a significant role in shaping climate attitudes. Among self-identified left-wing voters, only 7% expressed climate skepticism, whereas the proportion rose sharply to 43% among right-wing voters. This confirms the well-established finding that ideology strongly predicts pro-environmental political preferences (Mannoni 2025; McCright et al. 2016).

Direct exposure to extreme weather events significantly impacted climate change perceptions, underscoring the role of experiential factors. Among those who had personally experienced climate-related disasters in the past year, 86% believed in climate change, compared to 70% of those who had not. Similarly, 68% of residents in affected areas attributed climate events to human activity, compared to 59% of those who were unaffected.

Regarding the government response to climate change, public dissatisfaction with the executive’s handling of climate-related challenges was stark. A resounding 81% of respondents rated the Meloni administration’s response to climate and environmental crises as either “negative” or “very negative”. This high level of discontent indicates the increasing political weight of environmental issues, particularly as climate-related disasters become more frequent and severe.

Overall, we found increased politicization of environmental issues. Environmental protection, once predominantly championed by progressive and left-wing parties, has now become a highly polarized political issue. Over the past decade, opposition to climate-related policies has gained traction among radical right-wing parties (Schwörer and Fernández-García 2024). The *Telescope* findings confirm that climate change is now a divisive issue in Italian politics, mirroring patterns observed in the United States and across Europe. Moving forward, environmental policy might become a key contentious component of political discourse and electoral competition.

5.3 Insights into the next elections: PTVs

The analysis of propensity to vote (PTV) across different social groups reveals further demographic and socioeconomic patterns shaping electoral preferences in Italy. Using multivariate regression models, we examined the impact of gender, age, education, geographic region, economic well-being, and left-right self-placement on PTV (on a 1-10 scale) for the five main Italian parties: FdI, the PD, the M5S, FI, and the Lega. While some findings confirm well-established trends, others suggest emerging shifts that may influence future electoral dynamics⁸.

From this more sophisticated analysis, gender differences appear to play a marginal role in PTV, as no party exhibits a significantly stronger appeal among either men or women. However, age emerges as a critical factor, particularly for the M5S, whose attractiveness declines progressively with age. The party is most appealing to younger voters, scoring 3.67 among those aged 18-29, but sees its support drop substantially among those over 65, where it reaches 2.24. The PD also performs well among younger age groups but loses traction among middle-aged voters aged 45-64 before regaining strength among the elderly, a segment where it traditionally performs well, as seen in its 29% share in the EP elections. Within the center-right, FdI and FI demonstrate more consistent appeal across age groups. FdI, in particular, is most attractive among those aged 30-40 and 45-54, the latter being the group in which it achieved its highest electoral result, reaching 37% in

⁸See this note on the CISE website.

the EP elections. Lega also exhibits a similar generational profile, with notable support among 30-40-year-olds.

Geographic and economic factors further shape party preferences. The two main opposition parties, the PD and the M5S, show distinct geographical strengths: the PD enjoys greater support in central Italy, while the M5S remains particularly strong in the southern regions and the islands. By contrast, the three center-right parties maintain relatively stable levels of support across different regions, with FdI showing the least geographic variation. Economic well-being also matters, as individuals facing greater financial hardship show higher PTV for opposition parties, particularly the M5S. Among governing parties, no significant economic gradient is observed for FdI and FI suggesting a broad cross-class appeal. However, Lega is more attractive to those who report moderate financial difficulties rather than those in severe economic distress.

Education and ideological self-placement further differentiate party support. While the M5S shows no clear pattern based on educational attainment, the PD's appeal is now similar among high school and university graduates, marking a shift from its traditional concentration among the highly educated. In contrast, all three center-right parties are more attractive to voters with lower education levels, aligning with their strong electoral performance in this group. A mirror effect emerges in ideological self-placement, with the PD dominating the left with a score of 6.51 and FdI leading on the right with 7.24. These values significantly exceed the parties' average PTV, which stands at 3.28 for the PD and 3.64 for FdI, reflecting strong partisan loyalty. Among centrist voters, the PD holds a slight advantage, scoring 3.46 compared to FdI's 3.07, suggesting that it retains some appeal beyond its core left-wing base. Meanwhile, the M5S, despite positioning itself as a party of "independent progressives", remains more aligned with left-wing voters, where it scores 4.24, than with right-wing ones, where it reaches only 1.82.

Overall, the generational gap remains prominent, with younger voters favoring progressive parties and middle-aged Italians leaning toward the right. Education continues to shape ideological alignments, reinforcing polarization between the PD and FdI. The South remains a contested battleground, particularly for the opposition, while economic hardship continues to drive support for the M5S. As political dynamics evolve, these structural factors will remain key determinants of future party strategies and electoral competition in Italy.

6 Conclusion

The *Telescope Public Opinion Watch* project was designed to provide timely, data-rich insights into Italian public opinion, capturing shifts and continuities across key political issues. It consisted of two cross-sectional rounds of original survey data collection. The first, conducted ahead of the 2024 EP elections, revealed high levels of electoral uncertainty, particularly among younger voters and women, as well as divisions on key policy areas such as redistribution, immigration, and international affairs. Leadership evaluations showcased Giorgia Meloni's dominance in perceived strength, while Giuseppe Conte emerged as the most trusted figure among center-left voters. Despite some fluidity among undecided and centrist voters, the data confirmed the entrenched nature of Italy's political blocs. As the second round showed, such structural dynamics persisted throughout the year. Public attitudes became even more polarized, particularly on war, climate change, and immigration. As Italy moves toward its next electoral cycle, these divisions will shape party strategies, coalition negotiations, and policy priorities, these

contentious issues being at the forefront of national political discourse. With these findings, *Telescope Public Opinion Watch* ultimately aimed to offer a comprehensive lens into the evolving landscape of Italian politics, highlighting both continuity and change in voters' preferences and party competition.

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