
SALVINI DOWN, BUT NOT OUT IN ITALY REGIONAL POLL

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By Stefano Vergine

For Matteo Salvini, this weekend's regional elections in Emilia Romagna and Calabria were meant to be a crucial step in his comeback at national level.

"First we'll send them home on Sunday and then we'll give the government of landings, taxes, and handcuffs an eviction notice", the far-right political leader wrote on Sunday (27 January), violating campaign silence rules.

Although Salvini and his allies, nationalist party The Brothers of Italy and ex-premier Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia, won the majority of the votes in the southern Calabria region, they lost in Emilia Romagna, one of Italy's most populous areas, located in the centre-north of the country, and a more important political bellwether.

"If the left loses in its own house [Emilia Romagna], of course there will be a problem at national level", Salvini had warned over the last few days.

But that did not happen, even though Salvini's League spent more money in this regional election campaign on Facebook ads than any other party, investing ████████ over the last 30 days, Facebook data said.

The turnout in Calabria was similar to the last regional elections in 2014, but the number of Emilia Romagna residents who took part in the poll nearly doubled, from 37 percent to 67 percent.

The centre-right candidate, Jole Santelli from Forza Italia, will be the new governor of Calabria, replacing the centre-left Democratic Party (PD) representative Mario Oliverio, after Santelli won with 58 percent of votes.

But the PD's incumbent president of Emilia Romagna, Stefano Bonaccini, will stay in place after he got 50 percent, up from 44 percent in 2014.

Bonaccini beat the League's candidate, Lucia Borgonzoni, on 45 percent.

"Salvini has lost", the PD's national leader, Nicola Zingaretti, said after exit polls came out.

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