

Italy rejects constitutional attack with “No” vote

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The constitutional referendum held in Italy on March 22–23, 2026 has resulted in a significant political defeat for the government of fascist Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni. By a margin of roughly 54 percent, voters rejected the proposed judicial restructuring advanced by Justice Minister Carlo Nordio. With turnout approaching 59 percent, the vote assumed the character of a national plebiscite, far exceeding the narrow constitutional and technical questions formally placed before the electorate.

Presented as a modernization of Italy’s notoriously slow and bureaucratic judicial system, the so-called “Nordio reform” sought to amend multiple articles of the postwar constitution governing the role and organization of the judiciary.

Its central provision to separate career tracks between judges and public prosecutors was justified by the government as a measure to ensure impartiality and align Italy with other European legal systems. In reality, the reform was widely understood as an attempt to weaken prosecutorial independence and concentrate power in the executive, undermining the separation of powers established after the fall of fascism.

The rejection of the reform represents the first major institutional defeat for Meloni’s right-wing coalition since it came to power in 2022. More fundamentally, it punctures the phony image of political invulnerability cultivated by the government and signals a sharp escalation of social and political tensions within Italian society.

What was formally a referendum on judicial procedure became, in substance, a referendum on the government’s entire agenda: authoritarian restructuring of the state, complicity in war and genocide, intensification of militarism and deepening attacks on the working class.

The referendum unfolded amid a dramatic escalation of global conflict, particularly in the Middle East and Eastern Europe. Following the February 28, 2026 assault

led by the United States and Israel against Iran, the Italian government insisted it was not a direct participant in the war. This hypocritical claim, intended to appease overwhelming opposition to war, is contradicted by Italy’s role as a critical logistical hub for US-led military operations.

Key installations in Sicily, including the Naval Air Station Sigonella and the MUOS satellite system, have played an indispensable role in coordinating and sustaining military activities across the region. Increased cargo flights, reconnaissance operations and communications support have effectively integrated Italy into the war effort, notwithstanding formal claims of non-belligerence.

At the same time, the government has deepened its commitment to the war in Ukraine, shifting from direct weapons transfers to financing, logistics and defensive systems aligned with NATO priorities. Total Italian assistance since 2022 exceeds €3 billion, reflecting the country’s deepening integration into the strategic objectives of the Western alliance.

This militarization is inseparable from the emergence of a “war economy” domestically. Under pressure to meet NATO spending targets while adhering to European Union fiscal constraints, the government has advanced plans for increased military expenditure, including expansion of the F-35 Lightning II program, development of next-generation fighter systems and modernization of armored capabilities. Major infrastructure projects, such as the proposed Strait of Messina bridge, are increasingly justified in strategic and military terms, even as public debt rises and social spending is curtailed.

The concurrence of escalating militarism abroad and deteriorating living standards at home has fueled a powerful wave of social opposition. Between late 2025 and early 2026, Italy witnessed mass protests and strikes involving millions of workers. The September-October

“standstill” saw over 2 million people mobilize across 85 cities, disrupting transportation networks and blocking key ports such as Genoa, Livorno and Trieste.

Initially sparked by opposition to the war in Gaza, these protests rapidly expanded into a broader movement against militarism, austerity and social inequality which is still unfolding. Dockworkers played a particularly critical role. On February 6, 2026, coordinated strike action across 11 ports disrupted the transport of military goods, underscoring the strategic position of the working class within global supply chains.

The government responded with escalating repression. Security decrees introduced harsher penalties for protest activity, including prison sentences for blocking roads and critical infrastructure. A February 2026 decree followed clashes in Turin, triggered by the eviction of a social center, and was used to justify expanded policing powers. These measures formed part of a broader effort to suppress dissent and normalize authoritarian methods of rule.

It was in this context that the referendum assumed its true political significance. The “No” vote expressed not merely opposition to a specific constitutional amendment, but a broader rejection of authoritarianism, war, genocide and the subordination of society to the interests of the ruling class. The high turnout underscores the extent to which large sections of the working population perceived the reform as a direct threat.

At the same time, it is necessary to draw a sharp political line against the so-called opposition parties. Leaders such as Elly Schlein and Giuseppe Conte have sought to posture as defenders of democracy in the aftermath of the vote. These claims are entirely hypocritical. Both the Democratic Party and the Five Star Movement bear direct responsibility for previous attacks on democratic rights, austerity measures and the expansion of Italy’s role in NATO-led military operations.

Indeed, many of the constitutional and judicial reforms now denounced by these parties have their origins in policies they themselves advanced while in government. Their opposition to the Meloni administration is not rooted in any fundamental disagreement with its pro-capitalist and pro-imperialist orientation, but in tactical differences over how best to defend the interests of Italian capitalism. In fact, they created the conditions for the rise of a fascist government.

The real significance of the referendum lies not in the maneuvers of parliamentary factions, but in the

intervention of the working class. The result reflects a growing awareness among broad layers of workers and youth that the defense of democratic rights is inseparable from the struggle against war, austerity and social inequality.

At the same time, the vote does not resolve the underlying crisis. The forces driving militarization and authoritarianism remain fully in operation. Sections of the ruling class will inevitably seek new mechanisms to achieve the same objectives rejected in this referendum.

The Meloni government has already indicated its intention to proceed with further constitutional changes, including proposals for the direct election of the prime minister (“Premierato”). Such measures would represent an even more direct concentration of power in the executive and a further erosion of the institutional framework established in the aftermath of World War II.

The referendum result has nonetheless created a new political situation. It has confirmed the potential for unified mass opposition and has exposed the fragility of the government’s position. As Italy moves toward the 2027 elections, the ruling class faces a more volatile and uncertain landscape.

The decisive question, however, is the development of an independent political movement of the working class. The rejection of the judicial reform, while significant, is only a defensive victory. Without a clear political program aimed at the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of socialism on an international scale the gains achieved through such struggles will remain precarious.

The events in Italy are part of a broader global process. Across Europe and internationally, governments are responding to economic crises and geopolitical conflict with militarization and attacks on democratic rights. The Italian referendum stands as an early indication of the explosive social opposition this agenda is generating.

The essential task is to transform this opposition into a conscious political movement, uniting workers across national boundaries in a common struggle against war and exploitation. Only on this basis can the threat of authoritarianism and the catastrophic consequences of escalating global conflict be overcome.



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