

Italy country profile

🕒 4 October 2023



Take the art works of Botticelli, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Tintoretto and Caravaggio, the operas of Verdi and Puccini, the cinema of Federico Fellini, add the architecture of Venice, Florence and Rome and you have just a fraction of Italy's treasures from over the centuries.

While the country is renowned for these and other delights, it is also notorious for its precarious political life, and has had several dozen governments since the end of World War Two.

Italy's political landscape underwent a seismic shift in the early 1990s when the "mani pulite" ("clean hands") operation exposed corruption at the highest levels of politics and big business.

Several former prime ministers were implicated and thousands of businessmen and politicians were investigated.

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There were high hopes at the time that the scandal would give rise to a radical reform of Italian political culture, but these hopes were dashed when the old structures were replaced by a new political landscape dominated by the multi-millionaire businessman Silvio Berlusconi, who himself became increasingly mired in scandals and corruption affairs.

More recently, populist parties have made the political running, and in 2022 Italy elected its first far-right led government since 1945.

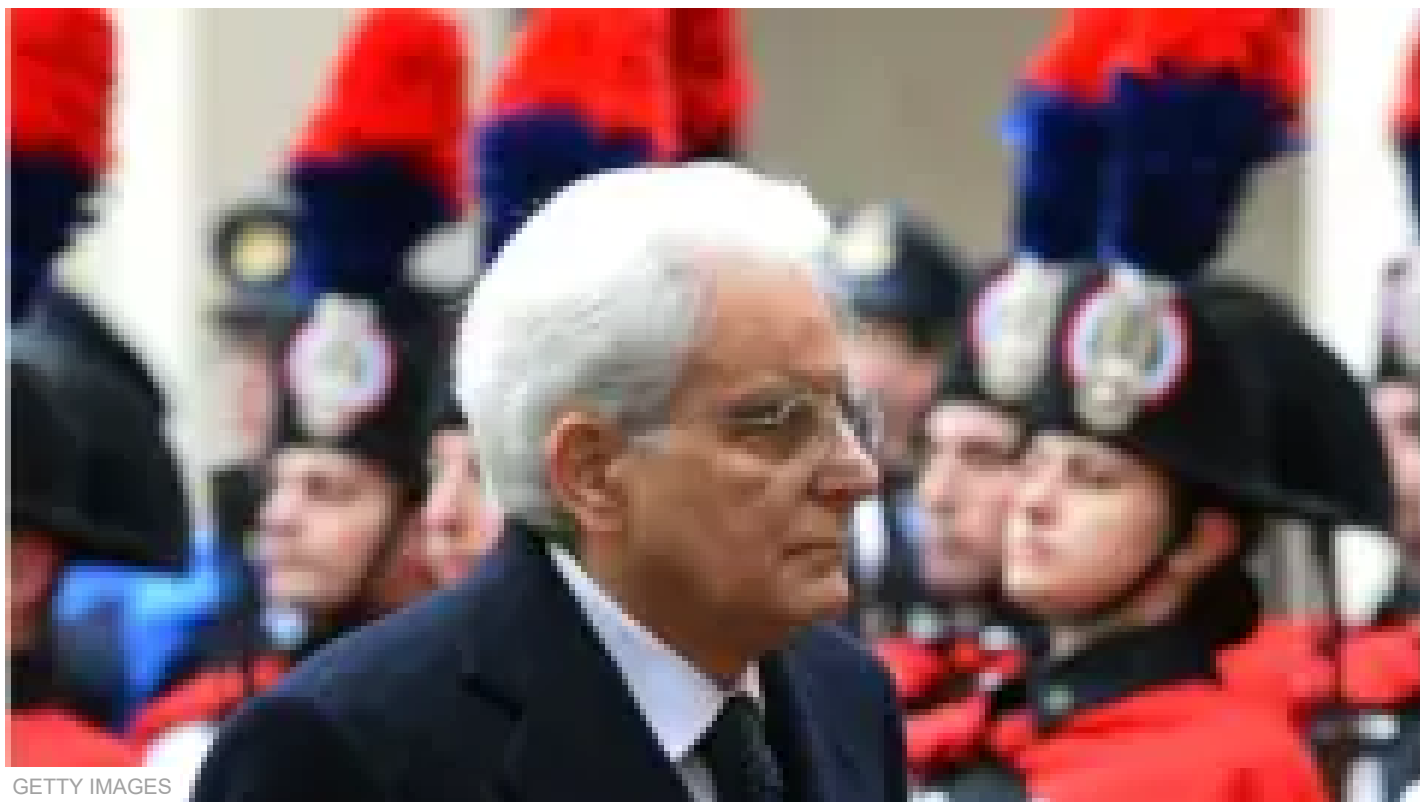
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REPUBLIC OF ITALY: FACTS

- **Capital:** Rome
- **Area:** 301,230 sq km
- **Population:** 58.8 million
- **Language:** Italian
- **Life expectancy:** 79 years (men) 84 years (women)

LEADERS

President: Sergio Mattarella



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Sergio Mattarella, a constitutional court judge and veteran centre-left politician, was elected president by parliament in 2015 to succeed Giorgio Napolitano, who stepped down due to old age.

He was little known to the general public, but is a respected figure in political circles after a 25-year parliamentary career and several stints as minister in governments of left and right.

Prime minister: Georgia Meloni



Georgia Meloni became Italy's female prime minister in October 2022 at the head of a coalition including her right-wing populist Brothers of Italy party, the far-right League and ex-prime minister Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia.

A year before her election, in a widely-quoted speech she said: "Yes to the natural family, no to the LGBT lobby, yes to sexual identity, no to gender ideology... no to Islamist violence, yes to secure borders, no to mass migration... no to big international finance... no to the bureaucrats of Brussels!"

Nevertheless, the new prime minister has promised to govern "for everyone".

She has sought to assure allies in Nato and the EU that there will be no foreign policy changes. An important point as both Matteo Salvini who heads the League and the late Silvio Berlusconi have been admirers of Russia's Vladimir Putin.

She used her maiden speech to MPs to stress her aim to halt migrant boats crossing the Mediterranean. "We must stop illegal departures and human trafficking," she said, repeating a campaign pledge to stop boats heading to Italy from North Africa.

For years Italy has been a hub for irregular migrants heading for Europe.

MEDIA



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Political chat shows are a staple of the Italian media scene

Italy's heady blend of politics and media has often made headlines at home and abroad, with concern regularly being expressed over the concentration of media ownership in the hands of one man - former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi.

Mr Berlusconi's Mediaset empire operates Italy's top private TV stations, and the public broadcaster Rai has traditionally been subject to political influence, so when Mr Berlusconi was prime minister he was able to exert tight control over both public and private broadcasting.

Between them, Rai and Mediaset dominate Italy's TV market and are a potentially powerful political tool, especially as 80% of the population is said to rely on television for its daily news - the highest percentage in the EU.