

Why is Malta's south red and the north blue?

Regional voting patterns are result of a complex interplay of history, economic conditions, social structures and cultural identities

National Elections 2024 PL PN

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Blue was where the Nationalist Party won a majority; red for PL victories; and yellow, when no party won a council majority.

While the local council elections sprung some surprises, the outcome has actually reinforced the long-standing tradition of a predominantly Nationalist north and Labour's stronghold in the south of Malta.

Labour managed to eat into traditional PN strongholds in the past decade or so but the European and council elections of June 8 appeared to return the political situation to 'normal'.

The regional voting patterns in Malta are the result of a complex interplay of history, economic conditions, social structures and cultural identities.


Malta's geopolitical divide is as old as Maltese democracy itself. But what led to it?


Sociologist Godfrey Baldacchino said much of the support was in the south, and as a result, that is where


"Few people had a car at the time, so people had to work in the south for jobs," he said.

The Cospicua dockyard is the base of the

Many of the dockyard's workers supported socialist ideals, Baldacchino said.

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Malta's 1921 census shows that 35 per cent of Malta's working population at that time worked in industry.

Most of those workers were employed at the dockyard.

In the 1960s, new factories were also built in the south, as was the freeport, Baldacchino said.

“ If people move, they normally take their political allegiances with them ”

The Marsa and Bulebel industrial estates were built in the early 1960s and the Hal-Far industrial estate a few decades later; all brought more working-class workers and more Labour voters to the south, Baldacchino said.

Out of a process of elimination, those in the more suburban and rural north swayed PN.

People with tertiary education are also more likely to live in the north and are also more likely to vote PN, he said.

Just like Cospicua has a particular significance for the PL, so does Sliema have for the PN, University of Malta sociologist Michael Briguglio said

Sliema was first an area for summer houses before developing into its own locality with mostly middle-class inhabitants, Briguglio said.

It has been a PN stronghold since then, he said, with the PN often winning more than two-thirds of the vote.

Briguglio said that many English-speaking Maltese tend to vote for the PN and many of those reside in Sliema.

While some of those have moved onto other areas, most people in Malta normally like to live close to where they grew up, he said.

Others are, however, being elbowed out of their towns because of economic factors like high property prices, Briguglio said.

Vittoriosa and Sliema are two such examples.

Baldacchino said that the increased use of the car (and population movement during and after the war) might be changing Malta's political demographics, since people no longer have to live next to where they work.

If people do move, they normally take their political allegiances with them.

In fact, localities like Mosta, St Paul's Bay, Birkirkara and much of Gozo now have no particularly strong allegiance to either party, Briguglio said.

Either way, political polarisation is not as strong as it used to be, and political parties need to attract people beyond their core vote if they want to get elected, Briguglio said.

And why is Siggiewi blue in a sea of red in the south? That, a political observer said, could go back to the 1940s and 1950s, when George Borg Olivier, the PN leader, was a popular notary there.

Going back even further, and given political allegiances which go back generations, Gozo's traditional Nationalist support in the past could be rooted in Nerik Mizzi, who was a successful candidate for Gozo in the early decades of the 20th century.

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