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Italian Population: a million more, a million less.

It is no mystery that the last census of the Italian population 21-22/October/2001 was one of the more difficult. But the fact that the inhabitants resulted to be 56,305,568, as announced by ISTAT (*Istituto Centrale di Statistica* - Central Statistics Institute) in March 2002 is a bit doubtful, although this institution called it a provisional number.

We know that it is difficult to have a general census of the population so perfect that it will give true demographic and social characteristics. These are always estimates which present a more or less large margin of error with respect to the real situation, which can be much more precise if the census has been carried out very accurately. (*)

(*) In my book "*Demografia. Fatti e metodi di studio della popolazione*", published by Franco Angeli nel 1998, on page 478, regarding the world population and the rhythm of its growth, as it resulted from official sources, such as the UN and the World Bank, warning against the easy and sometimes exaggerated catastrophic prophecies (more than projections) given the great fragility of much basic data, first of all among the population numbers that were used at the time of the calculations.

The same can be said regarding the quality of the variables (mortality and fertility) and on the hypotheses of their evolution. As an example, I reported the case of Nigeria, of which the population was estimated at 99.6 million inhabitants in 1995 by the World Bank, which predicted 120 million people for 1991, and 295.1 million in 2025.

The Nigerian census in November 1991 counted, with much difficulty, to the point that they even closed their borders during the census period, 88.5 million inhabitants, with a difference of 26% less than the expected amount (120 million) at that date. When they re-calculated in 1992, the World Bank estimated that in 2025 the Nigerian population would arrive at 215.2 million, with a difference of around 80 million less people compared to their projection in 1985.

In the so-called "developed" countries, the data of the municipal registry is generally the reference point.

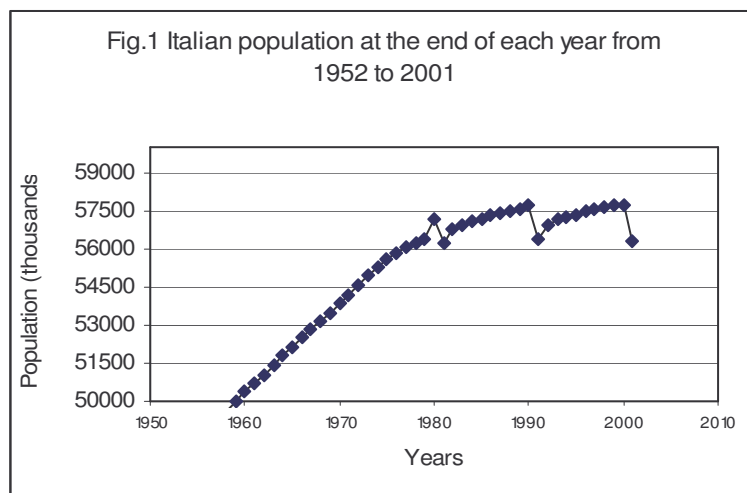
Past experience has shown that in each census during the past three decades the resulting number of the Italian population at the end of 1981, 1991 and 2001 have had a trend as a hiccup.

Each time it was practically “adjusted” during the following three-four years, thus coming near to the registry data of the year which preceded the date of the census itself and which takes up again the trend of the population.

This is reported in Figure. 1 in which we report the Italian resident population on 31 December of each year from 1952 to 2001.

The data refers to the registry office resident population. (note 1)

For 1981 and 1991 we have the definitive results of the respective census counts, which are slightly inferior to the number of the population at the end of the year.



For the year 2001 we have indicated the provisional population obtained from the relative census.

In practice, the definitive results, but for this reason not reliable ones, were supplied 4-5 years before the following census, as will likely occur again this time.

The number supplied by ISTAT in 2002, in spite of the fact that it was presented as provisional, is still very suspect as it is believed to be inferior by more than 1,500,000 individuals compared to the population which, very probably, will result from the 2001 census, if had been carried out more correctly (we are not in Nigeria....) and if

had not motivated many strongly critical articles in national newspapers and magazines during the various operational phases of the census.

And yet, together with the census forms, an ISTAT page was included which read: *2001 Census. The future of Italy begins at your house.* Then we found out, again through the press, for example from the weekly magazine Panorama on 21 November 2002, that the census operations continued on in Croatia, in Romania, who knows where else, on a tourist excursion that, as they believed at ISTAT, more fully guaranteed processing of the forms in Italy.

The provisional data published by ISTAT in 2002, besides confusing the ideas and the previous evaluations of the trend of development of the Italian population, also denies the data supplied by the registry offices in the territories. On the basis of these data, beginning with the resident population at the end of 1991 that amounted to around 56.86 million, we can write, still using data in millions:

* population on 31 December 1991	56.86
* natural balance (births minus deaths)	-0.19
* migratory balance from and to abroad and internal (note 2)	1.17
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* resident population on 31 December 2000	57.84

It is too bad that these residents become 56,305,568, or rather 1.54 million less, only around 300 days after the last registry survey on 1/1/2001.

Who should we believe? Wouldn't it be better to wait a little longer and report less precarious data?

Why did they prefer to satisfy the Italians with a number so full of unknown quantities?

Generally, in dictatorships the authority affirms that the census of the population (we will also call it thus) is carried out with the maximum accuracy.

The number of the population must result as that which is most convenient for these governments, in order to demonstrate that their country has a certain weight within the demographic picture of the

world, and also that certain governmental policies have been carried out and the objectives have been reached.

Fortunately, we have not arrived at this point. There are no certainties nor do we know the degree of approximation, for this reason there is nothing to do except to wait, hoping that these can be more trustworthy.

The definitive data on the population, as ISTAT promised Minister Frattini is March 2003, , but there are those, including myself, who believe that we will have to wait until 2004 (“Panorama” weekly magazine, 21 November 2002 issue).

On the other hand, we must keep in mind that the president of ISTAT, during a recent interview on this subject with Panorama magazine (the same number of the 21 November 2002), when asked: “*When will the definitive data on the population be ready?*”, responded: “*We have made a plan that has been respected for the provisional data. Then there is one for the definitive data, that does not have due dates required by law: it is only an incentive to finish with respect to quality. Which means to say, to have validated all of the results before releasing them.*”

Who knows if they will be capable of also “validating”, as people are saying, the data of the questionnaires that were never consigned and never collected or consigned again?

ISTAT, in its forecasts of the resident population published in 1997, taking the base calculations of the population of 1996, estimated the residents at the end of 2001 using three hypotheses: high, medium and low, which could be respectively 57,875,014, 57,529,945 and 57,267,273.

The forecasts of the United Nations, published in 1999, indicated the residents of Italy for the year 2000 at 57,298,000.

Regarding this same subject, for the Ministry of the Treasury-General Accountancy of the State, myself and a colleague, or rather only two people, elaborated forecasts of the Italian population which were published in 1995. We must note that, also in this case, the calculations used ISTAT data and different hypotheses from those used by ISTAT or by the UN.

In our hypotheses of trends of mortality and fertility, at the end of 2001 the population was 57,583,757, or rather the number of residents very near to that indicated above, although the forecasts were made two years before those of ISTAT.

On the home page of this site you can find the results of these last forecasts which are updated every month.

This is meant not only as a provocation, but I believe that it could be more convenient to strengthen the capacity of the collection and classification of municipal registry offices, and give up the census, which beyond furnishing dubious results, involves an expense of several million euros. With current methods, we have the possibility of obtaining in real (or almost real) time, information of great social, political and scientific importance.

ISTAT used to record the data from its questionnaires “by hand”.

Then optic reading came along. Finally, we have arrived at the computer era, which can store billions of data. We hear of great professional capacity, and of extremely sophisticated software, but the product is more faulty than ever.

A census controls and corrects registry data. But then, the registry data is used to tidy up the data of the census.

What is the point of all this?

Note 1

Resident population at the end of each year. Italy 1952-2001 (thousands).

Year	pop.	year	pop.	year	pop.	year	pop.	year	pop.
1952	47792	1962	51012	1972	54574	1982	56742	1992	56960
1953	48121	1963	51385	1973	54929	1983	56929	1993	57138
1954	48476	1964	51816	1974	55293	1984	57080	1994	57268
1955	48789	1965	52159	1975	55589	1985	57203	1995	57333
1956	49052	1966	52504	1976	55847	1986	57290	1996	57461
1957	49310	1967	52829	1977	56063	1987	57399	1997	57563
1058	49639	1968	53144	1978	56247	1988	57504	1998	57612
1959	50023	1969	53490	1979	56388	1989	57576	1999	57680
1960	50372	1970	53832	1980	57140	1990	57746	2000	57844
1961	50674	1971	54188	1981	(1)	1991	(2)	2001	(3)

(1) Census results 1981: provisional data 56244, definitive 56557.

(2) Census results 1991: provisional data 56411, definitive 56778.

(3) Census results 2001: provisional data 56306, definitive not available.

Note 2

The internal migration amount is given by the amount of enrolment from other communes or for other reasons, less the cancellations for other communes or for other motives.

Migration movements are not included.

The reason that the number of enrolments and cancellations from/to other Communes coincides on a national level can be attributed to the temporal phase displacement between the date of cancellation of a person by the Commune of emigration and the date of enrolment of this person at the Commune of immigration, not to mention registry practices of enrolment or cancellation only, following post-census verifications (mostly enrolments of people not included in the census and cancellations of people who were not included by error) or current registry verifications (mostly cancellations of people who could not be contacted).

Sources and bibliography

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