

# High fidelity and new votes for Renzi

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Two factors contributed to the success of Renzi's PD in a decisive way. The first one was Renzi's ability to bring to the polls those who voted for PD in 2013. And that was a different PD. The second was his ability to widen the consensus for his party even if this is a difficult task for an incumbent party in a period of crisis. The first factor was more relevant than the second one.

As the number of votes for parties in each polling station become available, it becomes clearer how things have gone in reality. Given these data, so far, the vote shifts among parties and from voting to nonvoting can be calculated for five cities. The baseline are last year's general elections. That was clearly an election different from European elections, but this is not particularly relevant for the purpose of this analysis. It is well known that the turnout for European elections is lower than the turnout for general elections, and this has been the case also this time. However, this fact doesn't modify the analysis on the vote shifts because this analysis includes also the shifts from voting to nonvoting and vice versa.

In the end, it is not very difficult to explain why Renzi won. In a context in which there were 6,500,000 voters less than in the 2013's general elections, PD gained 2,500,000 votes. Turnout went down while Renzi went up: this is simple. Explaining why this has happened is more complicated. Is it due to other parties' loss of votes—apart from the Northern League that gained around 300,000 votes—and Renzi's increase of votes? What do vote shifts in these five cities tell us about? Where do votes for PD come from?

These votes come primarily from PD itself, and this is the clearest finding. The loyalty rate of PD's electorate in these elections is extraordinary. Almost all of those who voted for PD in 2013 voted for it again in 2014. This is a very ef-

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fective mobilisation, and it is even more surprising since these were European and not general elections. Even if we take into account the fact that PD's electorate has a higher propensity to vote also at European elections, such a high loyalty rate is unusual. This is Renzi's first credit and the principal reason for his success. Indeed, bringing your voters to the polls is the first—and most important—rule for winning. Renzi was able to do this while the others were not.

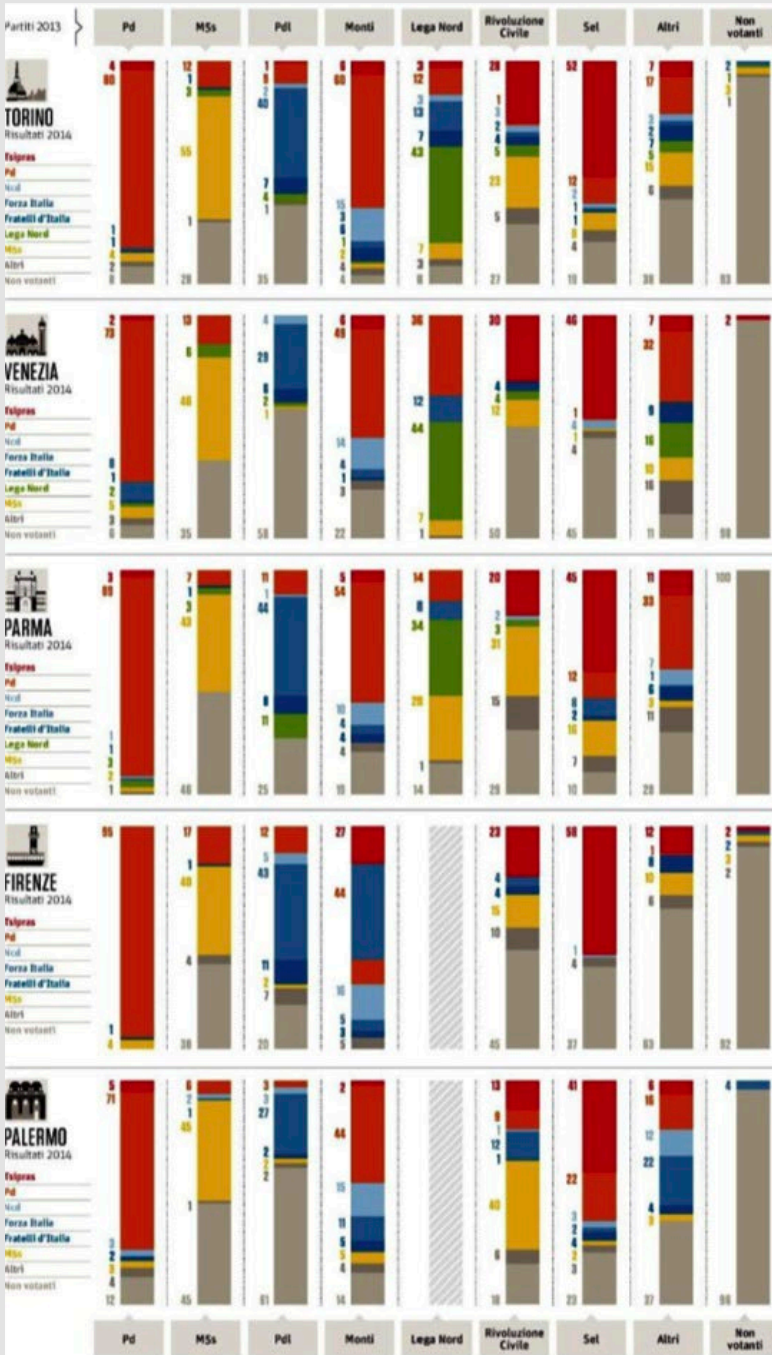
In Florence, PD gained the votes of an astonishing 95% of his previous electorate—and, incidentally, this result explains the extraordinary success of Dario Nardella, the just elected mayor of Florence. The lowest loyalty rate has been registered in Palermo—and this is not a surprise—but still is 71%. The comparison with the other parties is pitiless. In Venice, PDL lost 58% of its electorate towards abstention and 61% in Palermo. Things are better—so to say—in Turin with a loss of 35% and in Florence with a loss of 20%, but only because in these cases, the previous consensus was lower. A similar thing has happened to the M5S. In Venice, 25% of those who voted for this party in 2013 didn't go to vote for it again. In Florence, they were 38%, in Palermo 45%, and so on.

This phenomenon goes under the label of “asymmetric abstention.” Renzi would have won even with this phenomenon only. However, he has won even better because of an additional mechanism. In order to win—or to win “well”—you need to conquer new voters and not only to keep the old ones. And here, the results of the prime minister's ability to attract voters are evident. As already mentioned yesterday, and as it becomes clear in today's data from the five cities, PD has picked up voters from almost all other rival parties' electorate in different degrees. And among all these vote shifts, there is one that is particularly significant and is the one coming from *Scelta Civica*. The old Mario Monti's party has almost disappeared. A relevant part of its previous voters switched to PD, but many of them didn't turn out at the elections. In Turin, 60% of its 2013's voters switched to PD while 15% went to the party lead by Alfano. In this city, the shift towards abstention is minimum. Almost the same thing happened in Florence while something different happened in Palermo. In this case, in addition to voters switching to PD and NCD, there is also a vote shift towards *Forza Italia* (11%) and towards abstention (14%). So, thanks to *Scelta Civica*, a share of moderate voters has been gradually brought to the centre left, firstly to Monti, then to PD. But this wouldn't have happened without Renzi.

Vote shifts towards PD don't stop here. In addition to *Scelta Civica*'s voters, there are also M5S and FI voters. In this case, it seems that the vote shift is less relevant, but every vote counts. On the whole, it seems that Grillo's movement has been “more generous” towards Renzi's party. In Florence, 17% of those who voted M5S chose PD while 12% of previous PDL voters did the same thing. In Turin, the figures are respectively 12% and 9%. Even some voters of

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Figure 1 – Destinations of the electorates at the 2013's general elections and 2014's European elections



*Lega* have “betrayed” the party and contributed to increase PD’s share: 12% in Turin, even 36% in Venice, and 14% in Parma. All these tributaries have allowed Renzi to reach a historical 40.8%.

These elections were a difficult and delicate transition for Renzi, who wanted to face them without even putting his name on the election ballot. European elections are risky elections for big parties and especially for incumbent parties. Apart from the case of Germany—in which Merkel actually gained fewer votes compared to the previous general elections—it is clear what has happened in almost all countries of the European Union.

Consolidating this success now represents Renzi’s challenge. If he succeeds, we will remember these elections as a historical landmark towards building around PD a new social and electoral coalition that will tend to be a majority. Time also plays on Renzi’s side. Until 2018, there won’t be another national election. Once upon a time, there were regional elections—who has forgotten D’Alema’s resignation after the bad result for the centre left at the 2000’s regional elections?—but by that time, almost all regions went to vote the same day. Next year, it won’t be so since there are nine regions where there won’t be elections due to early resignations of the regional governments. This time frame represents a big chance to carry on a mid-term government program without electoral distractions. In a country where governing is very difficult, this helps too.

## References

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