



Electoral compass for the 2018 Italian general elections

On March 4, 2018 Italy voted to renew the two Houses of its Parliament (Chamber of Deputies and Senate). The last elections were held on 27-28 February 2013.

In the following note, we present a short summary of the background and the main results of these elections, as they emerge from a series of analyses carried out by the Istituto Carlo Cattaneo.

Founded in 1965, the [Istituto Carlo Cattaneo](#) is a non-partisan think-tank located in Bologna, and specialized in social and political analysis.

1. Electoral rules

In 2018 Italy voted for the first time with a new electoral law, passed by Parliament in the autumn of 2017. It is a mixed-member electoral system, similar for the two Houses, with 37% of seats allocated through the plurality formula in single-member districts (232 seats in the Chamber of Deputies, 116 seats in the Senate), and the remaining 63% of the seats allocated through proportional representation with closed lists (386 seats in the Chamber of Deputies, 193 seats in the Senate). In addition, 12 deputies and 6 senators are elected by Italians living abroad, using the open list system of proportional representation.

A 3% threshold is provided for at national level. Parties can formally join pre-electoral alliances to support candidates fielded in the single member districts. In this case, the national threshold is 10%, provided that at least one of the lists forming part of the alliance obtains 3% of the votes. The votes obtained by lists below 1% do not contribute to the overall sum of votes of the coalition.

The voting age is 18 for the Chamber of Deputies and 25 for the Senate. Each voter casts a single vote, either for 1) the candidate of the single-member district; or 2) their preferred list; or 3) both a candidate and a list supporting that candidate. In cases 2) and 3) the effect is the same: the vote goes to both one list and the corresponding plurality district candidate. In case 1) the vote goes to the plurality district candidate and is split between the lists supporting that candidate, on a proportional basis.

The effects of these rules on the allocation of seats between parties are by and large proportional. It is unlikely that a party or alliance can win a majority of parliamentary seats without reaching at least 40% of the votes (depending, among other things, on the geographical distribution of those votes, and on the number of lists overcoming the 1% and 3% thresholds).

2. Main political parties

The *Partito Democratico* (PD, Democratic Party) is the main partner of the incumbent government coalition, and the party of current Prime Minister, Paolo Gentiloni. It is a pro-european left of centre party; it belongs to the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats. It contested the 2018 elections in alliance with three minor partners: +*Europa* (euroenthusiast, liberal party), *Insieme*, *Civica Popolare* (centrist allied in the current legislature), SVP (German-speaking linguistic minority).

To its left there were two parties: *Liberi e Uguali* (LEU, Free and Equal) is an umbrella organization headed by the incumbent speaker of the Senate and former anti-mafia prosecutor Piero Grasso. It includes several small leftist parties and former PD members. *Potere al Popolo* (PaP, Power to the People) is a radical left party of recent formation.

The *Movimento 5 Stelle* (M5S, Five Star Movement) is a party founded in 2009 by Beppe Grillo and contesting elections for the first time in 2013, when it obtained a surprising 25.5% of the vote.

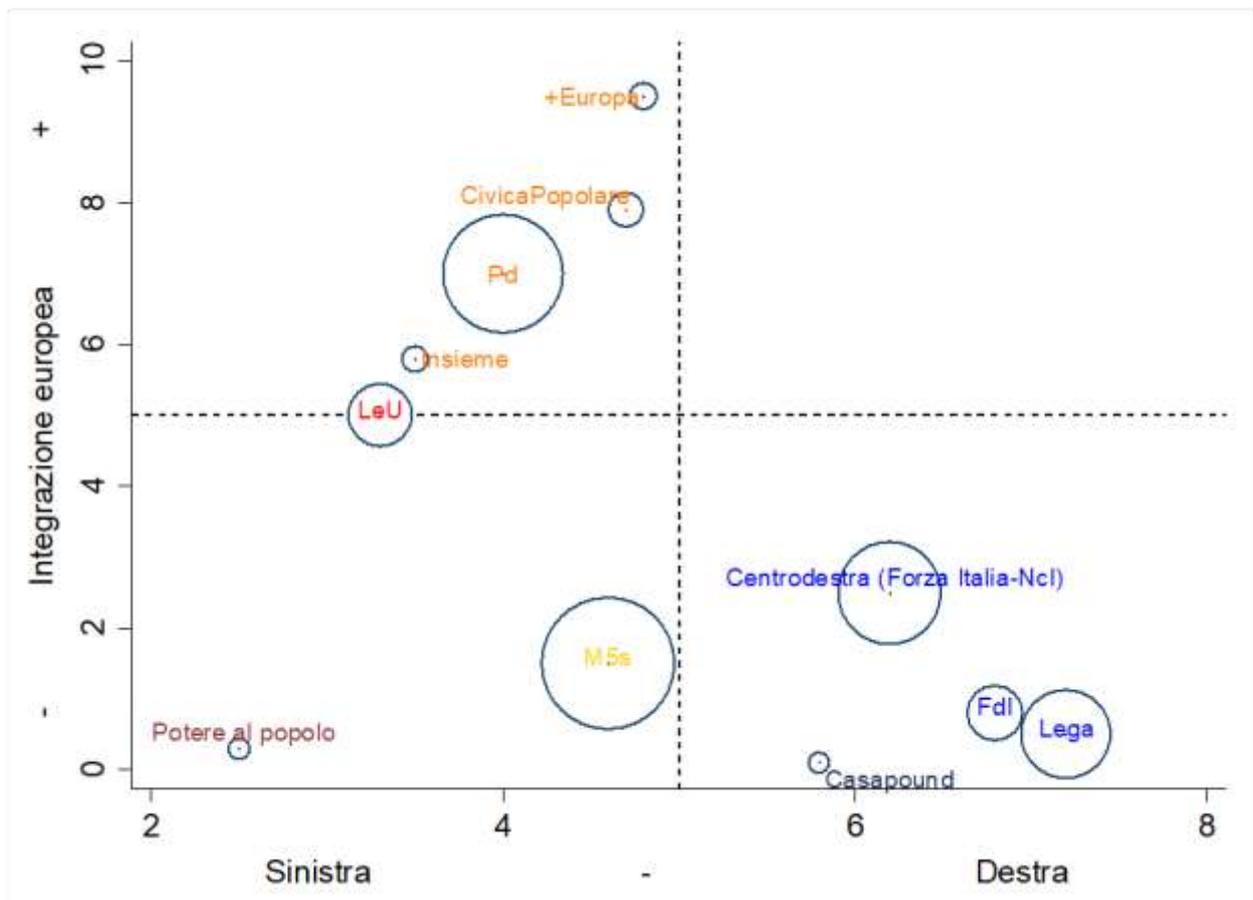
It is an anti-establishment party with mixed policy proposals on the left-right dimension. It is a Eurosceptic party, though its positions on Europe have been substantially moderated in the last few months. In the European Parliament it has joined the Europe for Freedom and Direct Democracy group, led by Nigel Farage.

The centre-right coalition is made up of *Forza Italia* (FI, Go Italy), the *Lega* (League) and *Fratelli d'Italia* (FdI, Brothers of Italy). FI is Silvio Berlusconi's personal party, member of the European People's Party. The banner *Berlusconi Presidente* appeared on the list's symbol, although he cannot assume public office until 2019, as a consequence of his criminal conviction for tax fraud in 2013. Matteo Salvini has remarkably reshaped the *Lega*, turning it into a radical right xenophobic party and abandoning the traditional Northern autonomist/secessionist claims. It belongs to the Europe of Nations and Freedom group in the European Parliament. FdI is a conservative post-fascist party, mobilising voters and activists from the old *Movimento Sociale Italiano* and then *Alleanza Nazionale*. Its leader is Giorgia Meloni; the party is not represented in the European Parliament.

On the extreme right, two neo-fascist parties were present, CasaPound and Forza Nuova.

Figure 1 displays the positioning of the parties based on an analysis of their 2018 electoral programmes on two dimensions: left/right and pro-/anti- European integration. The analysis has been carried out according to the methodology of the Manifesto Project (<https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu/>). The left/right position is a combination of the positions on 13 issues, mainly referring to the economic dimension.

Fig. 1. *Position of the Italian parties in the political space*



Source: *Istituto Cattaneo*.

3. Electoral turnout

The election turnout was 72.9% for the Chamber of Deputies and 73.0% for the Senate. These figures reveal a slow but visible downward trend in the propensity of the Italian voters to go to the polls, when compared to the corresponding figures in 2013 (75.2%) and 2008 (80.6%). However, when the figure is disaggregated at regional level, significant differences emerge. Northern and central regions remain the areas of Italy where turnout reaches its highest values, with a difference of more than 10 percentage points compared to Southern regions. The so-called Italian Red Belt (Emilia-Romagna, Toscana, Umbria and Marche) is the area with the highest level of turnout (77,8%), whereas in the South voter turnout has plummeted to 66,5%.

Tab. 1. *Voter turnout in the 2018 Italian general elections (Chamber of Deputies)*

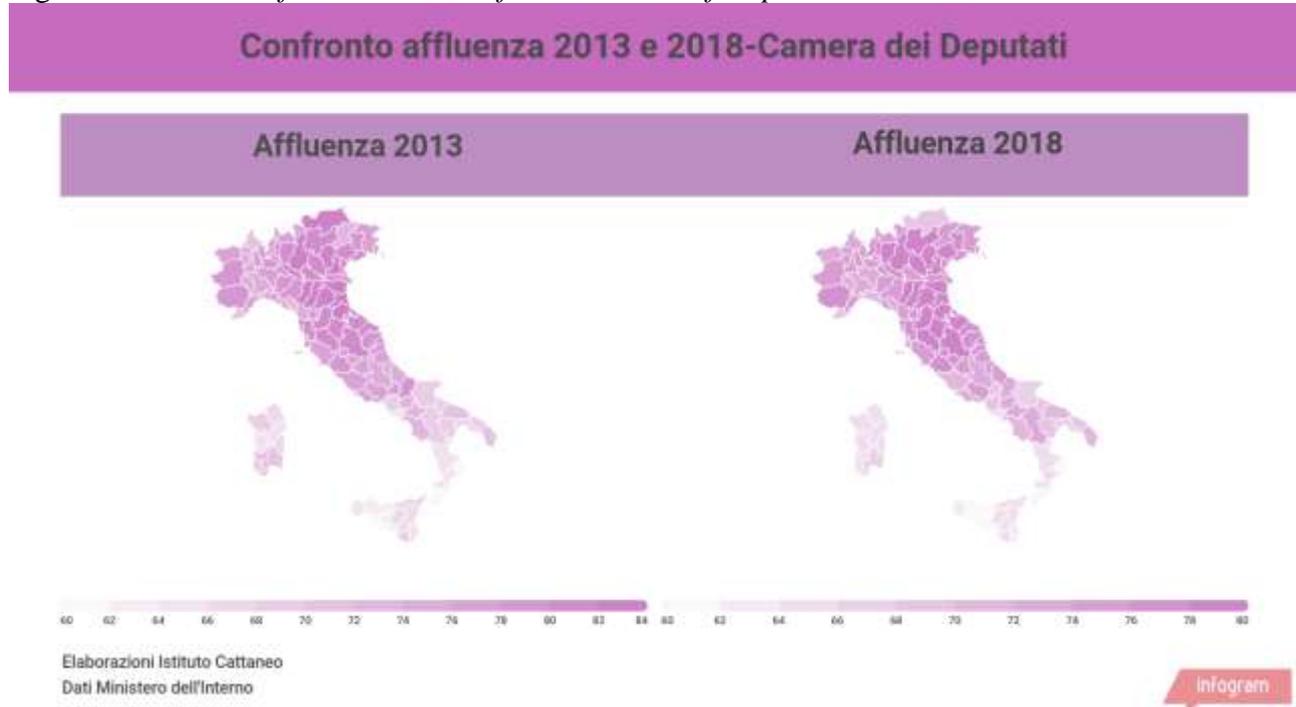
	Turnout 2018 (%)	Turnout 2013 (%)	Difference 2018-2013 (percentage points)
Valle d'Aosta	72.3	77.0	-4.7
Piemonte	75.2	77.3	-2.1
Lombardia	76.8	79.6	-2.8
Liguria	72.0	75.1	-3.1
<i>North West</i>	75.8	78.5	-2.7
Veneto	78.7	81.7	-3.0
Trentino Alto Adige	74.3	81.0	-6.7
Friuli Venezia Giulia	75.1	77.2	-2.1
<i>North East</i>	77.5	80.8	-3.3
Emilia-Romagna	78.3	82.1	-3.8
Toscana	77.3	79.2	-1.9
Umbria	78.2	79.5	-1.3
Marche	77.3	79.8	-2.5
<i>Red Belt</i>	77.8	80.5	-2.7
Lazio	72.6	77.5	-4.9
Abruzzo	75.3	75.9	-0.6
Sardegna	65.4	68.3	-2.9
<i>Centre</i>	71.5	75.4	-3.9
Molise	71.3	78.1	-6.8
Campania	68.2	67.9	+0.3
Calabria	63.7	63.2	+0.5
Puglia	69.0	69.9	-0.9
Basilicata	71.1	69.5	+1.6
Sicilia	62.7	64.6	-1.9
<i>South</i>	66.5	67.1	-0.6
<i>Italy</i>	72.9	75.2	-2.3

Source: *Istituto Cattaneo with data provided by the Ministry of Interior.*

However, the comparison of voter turnout in 2013 and 2018 revealed a significant counter-trend from both historical and geographical perspectives. In fact, the net losses in terms of voter turnout

have been higher in in the North (especially, in the North-East: -3.3 percentage points), while in some Southern regions (Campania, Calabria and Basilicata) the difference is indeed positive.

Fig. 1. Voter turnout for the election of the Chamber of Deputies in 2013 and 2018



Fonte: Istituto Cattaneo with data provided by the Ministry of Interior.

4. Electoral results and possible government coalitions

The M5S was the most voted party (with 32.7% of valid votes), while the center-right alliance was the most voted coalition (37.0%). Within it, the *Lega* received 17.4% of the votes, FI 14.0% and FdI 4.4%.

The PD is the big loser, obtaining 18.7%. LEU was barely able to overcome the exclusion threshold (obtaining just 3.4%). Other extreme left and extreme right parties remained well below the threshold as did the minor allies of PD.

These results do not allow us to indicate a clear path for the formation of the next government. No parties/alliances will control the majority of seats in the next legislature. Moreover, most party leaders declared, during the electoral campaign, that they were not available for coalitions beyond their pre-electoral alliances.

We envisage three (problematic) scenarios:

1. A minority government of the M5S, supported by the PD. However, the PD secretary, Matteo Renzi, ruled out this possibility in his press conference on Tuesday, 6 March.
2. A centre-right government (*Lega*, FI, FdI and minor allies), remains about 50 seats short of a majority in the Chamber of Deputies (and 25 seats in the Senate). In order to gather the necessary seats it would need to win the support of the centrist allies of the PD and about 40 PD and/or M5S Deputies and 15 Senators.

3. A M5S-Lega coalition would easily reach the majority (352 seats in the Chamber, 170 in the Senate), but this possibility has been firmly excluded by Matteo Salvini, given that it would involve breaking the centre-right alliance with FI, which currently governs at regional level in Liguria, Lombardia and Veneto.

Tab. 2. *Electoral results of the 2018 Italian general elections (Chamber of Deputies)*

Party list	No. votes		Diff. n. votes 2018- 2013	% 2018	% 2013	Diff. %2018- %2013	No. seats		Diff. N. seats 2018- 2013
	2018	2013					2018 8	2013 3	
Sinistra radicale (Rc, Pap)	515.210	860.028	-344.818	1,6	2,5	-0,9	0	0	0
Sel/LEU	1.109.198	1.089.231	19.967	3,4	3,2	0,2	14	37	-23
Partito democratico	6.134.727	8.646.034	2.511.307	18,7	25,4	-6,7	-	-	-
Altri centro-sinistra	1.346.079	332.319	1.013.760	4,1	1	3,1	-	-	-
Totale centro-sinistra	7.480.806	8.978.353	1.497.547	22,8	26,0	-3,2	112	340	-228
Forza Italia	4.590.774	7.332.134	2.741.360	14,0	21,5	-7,5	-	-	-
Lega	5.691.921	1.411.510	4.280.411	17,4	4,1	13,3	-	-	-
FdI + La Destra	1.426.564	889.401	537.163	4,4	2,6	1,8	-	-	-
Altri centro-destra	428.298	476.020	-47.722	1,3	1,4	-0,1	-	-	-
Totale centro-destra	12.137.557	10.109.065	2.028.492	37,1	29,6	7,5	260	123	137
M5s	10.697.994	8.704.809	1.993.185	32,7	25,5	7,2	222	108	114
Scelta civica + alleati	-	3.591.541	3.591.541	-	11,3	-	-	-	-
Destra radicale (Cp, Fn)	437.000	184.575	252.425	1,3	0,5	0,8	-	-	-
Altri	377.279	286.499	90.780	1,2	0,8	0,4	-	-	-
Totale voti validi	32.755.044	34.078.191	1.323.147	100	100		608	608	

Source: *Istituto Cattaneo with data provided by the Ministry of Interior. Note: the district of Valle d'Aosta and the vote of the Italians living abroad are not included in the computation.*

5. Vote flows

The Istituto Cattaneo has estimated the flows of votes in some Italian cities using the statistical technique known as the ‘Goodman model’. The main results of this analysis can be summarized as follows.

(1) in the central and northern regions of Italy, the M5S benefited from a strong flow of votes from the PD while losing a smaller portion of votes to the *Lega*. Generally speaking, the inflow of votes was greater than the outflow, but in some cities the latter was of the same size (e.g. Brescia) or even greater (e.g. Padua). As a result of these dynamics, in some part of the Centre-North the M5S did not progress from the percentages of votes obtained in 2013.

(2) In the Southern regions, the M5S did not suffer the competition of the *Lega* and accordingly was able to gain votes from the whole political spectrum (from PD to *Forza Italia* and also the area of abstention) with no significant losses.

(3) the electorate of the PD and Berlusconi’s party (in 2013 the PDL) has displayed many signs of disillusion and disaffection. Our estimates show strong outgoing flows from these two parties. The PD lost votes to (ranked in order of substantive dimension) M5S, LEU and abstention (in some cities even towards the *Lega*). The mainstream political party on the centre-right (*Forza Italia*) lost votes in favour of the *Lega*, the M5S and abstention.

(4) the only flow that only slightly attenuates the losses of the PD comes from Mario Monti’s former coalition. Indeed, almost all the voters of *Scelta civica* and its allied parties chose the Democratic Party in 2018.

(5) finally, within the centre-right coalition there was a large exchange of votes (from the former PDL to the *Lega* and *Fratelli d’Italia*).

Appendix. Vote flows in 11 Italian cities

Fig. 3. Vote flows in Napoli (5-San Carlo)

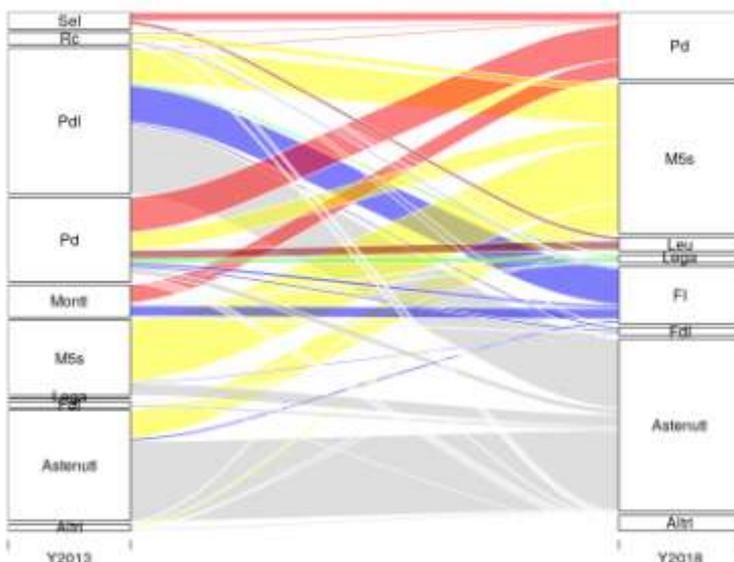


Fig. 4. *Vote flows in Napoli (6-Ponticelli)*

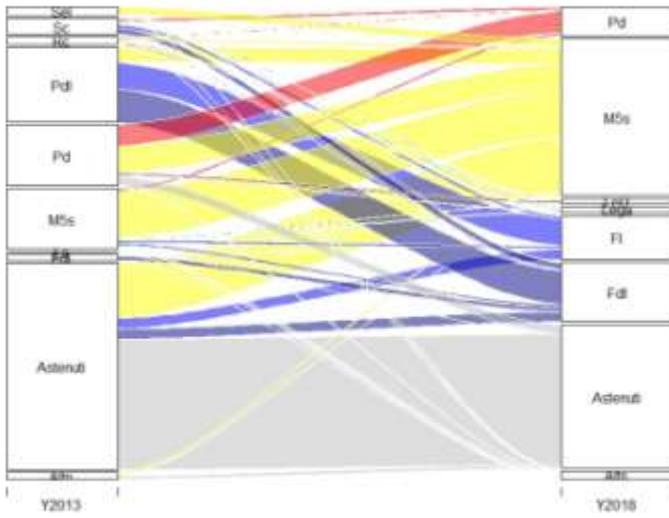


Fig. 5. *Vote flows in Bologna (6-Zona Urbana Mazzini)*

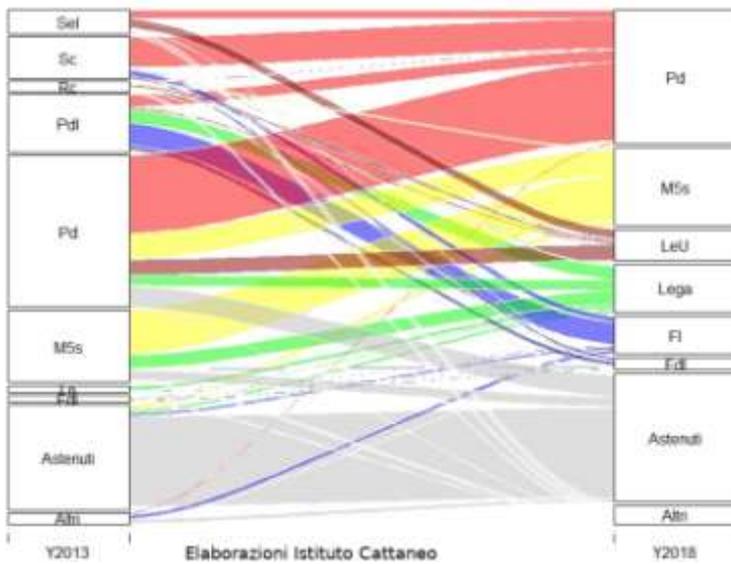


Fig. 6. *Vote flows in Bologna (7-Casalecchio)*

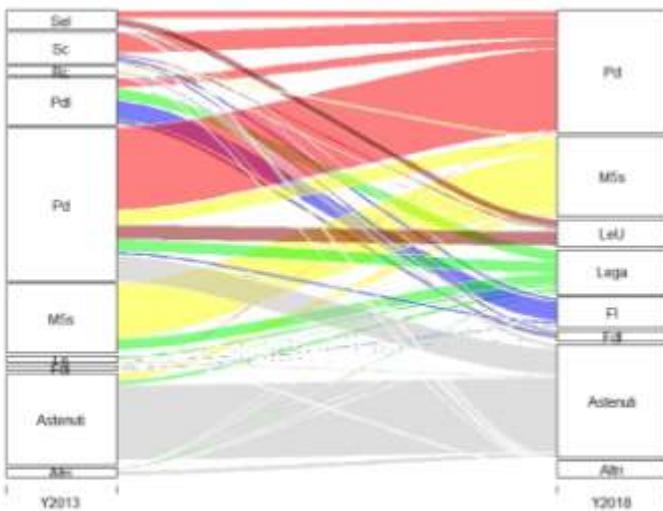


Fig. 7. *Vote flows in Ancona*

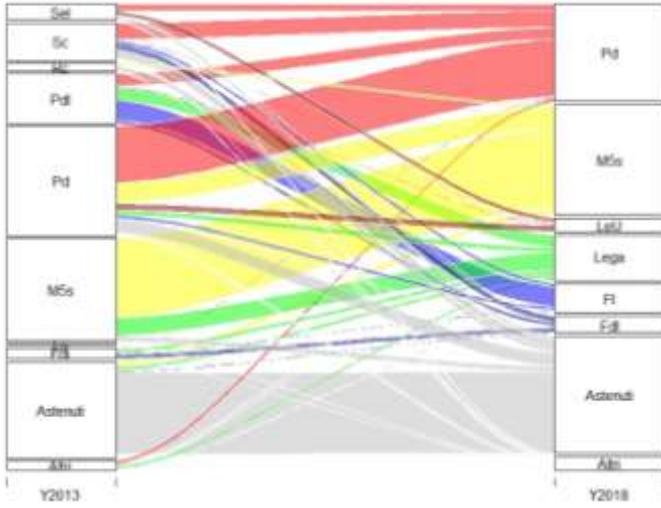


Fig. 8. *Vote flows in Ferrara*

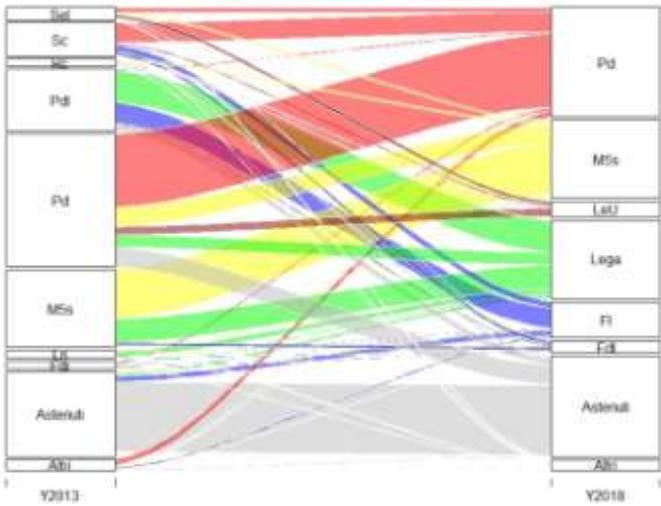


Fig. 9. *Vote flows in Firenze 1*

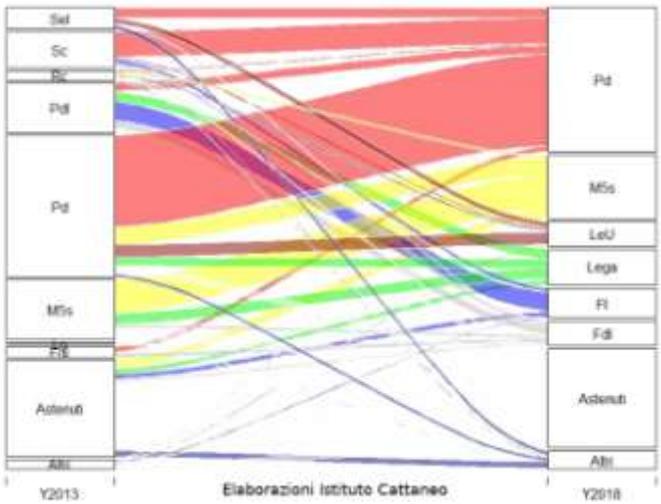


Fig. 10. *Vote flows in Firenze 2*

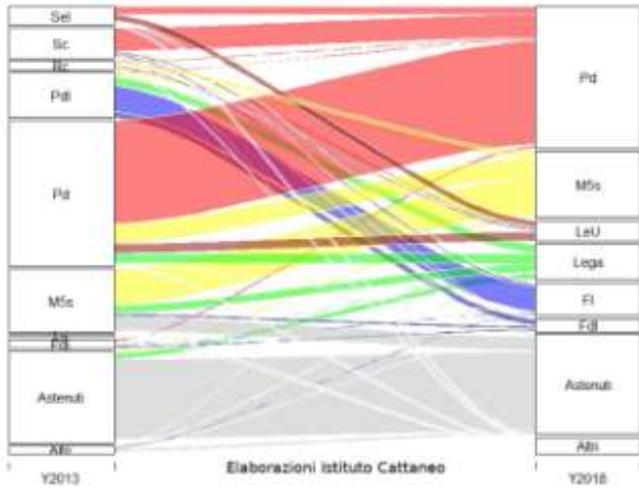


Fig. 11. *Vote flows in Livorno*

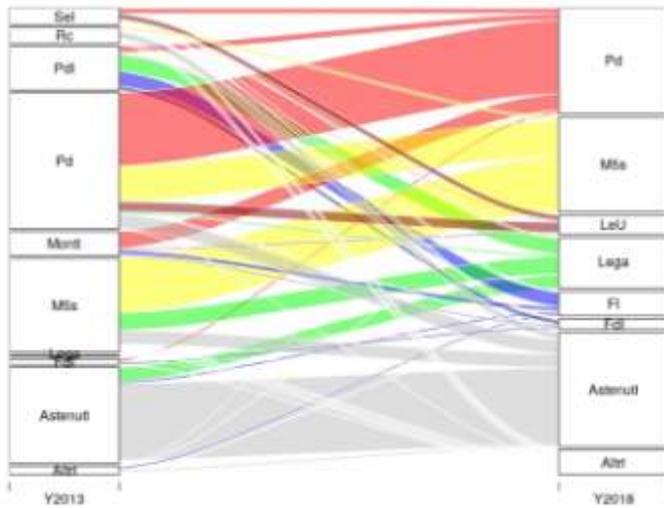


Fig. 12. *Vote flows in Padova*

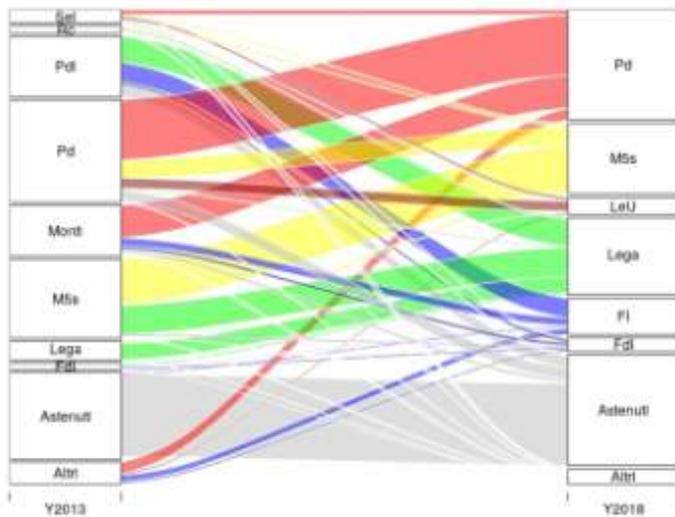


Fig. 13. *Vote flows in Perugia*

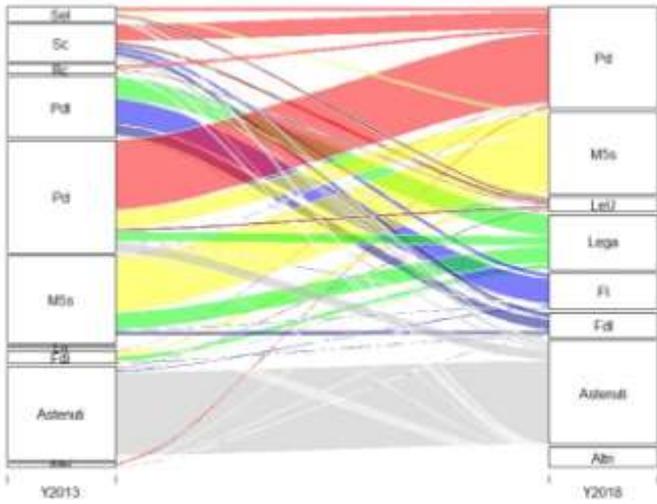


Fig. 14. *Vote flows in Pescara*

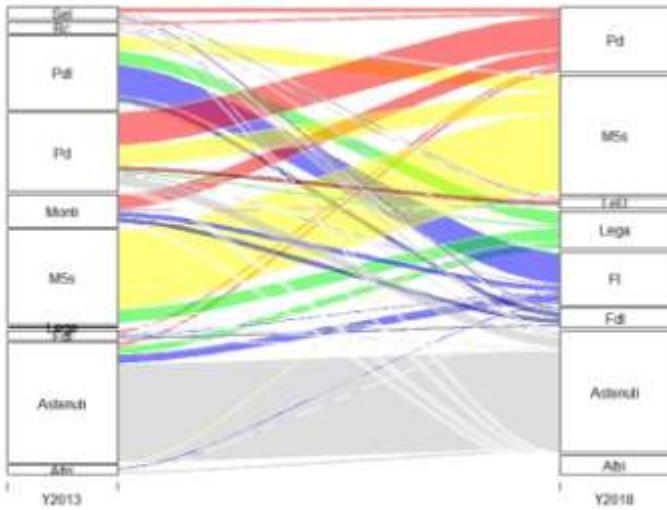


Fig. 15. *Vote flows in Prato*

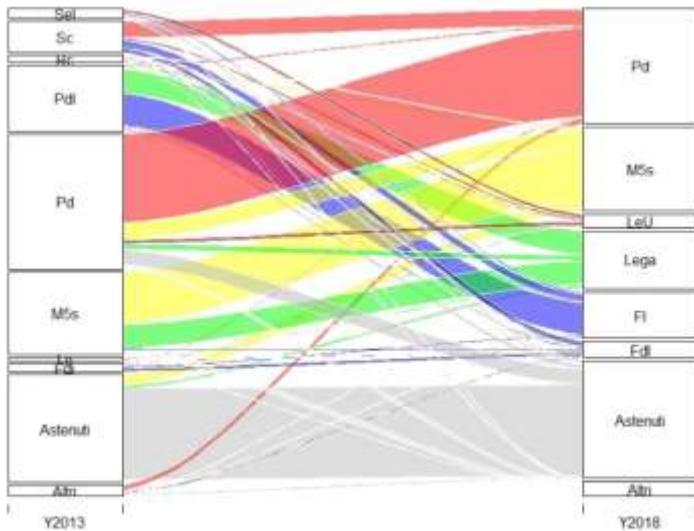
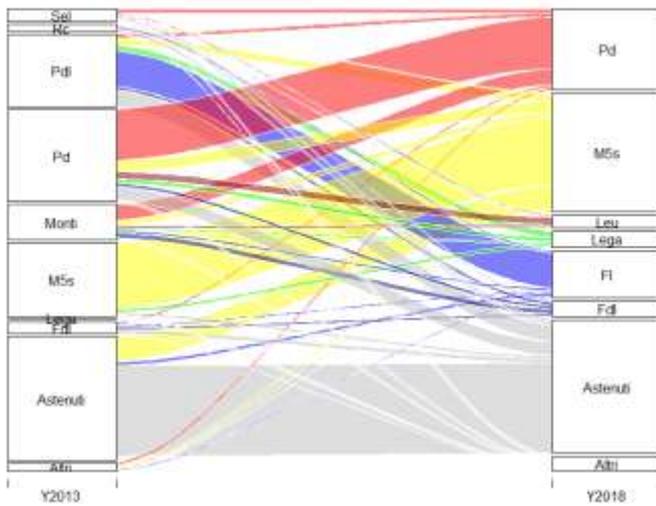


Fig. 16. *Vote flows in Salerno*



Source: *Istituto Cattaneo*.

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