

Precarity Across Elections: A Replication and Comparison of 2013 and 2018 Voting Behavior in Italy

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Abstract

This study replicates and extends Girardi's (2018) analysis of the relationship between perceived job insecurity and voting behavior in the 2018 Italian general elections. Drawing on the insider–outsider partisanship framework, the original study found that labor market precarity was associated with increased support for the challenger left party, *Movimento 5 Stelle* (M5S), and a corresponding decline in support for mainstream left parties. To assess the robustness and temporal consistency of these findings, this paper applies the same analytical framework to the 2013 Italian general elections a transitional period marked by the early effects of labor market liberalization. The replication confirms key aspects of the original results, particularly the political relevance of perceived precarity. However, it also reveals important differences: in 2013, economic hardship rather than perceived precarity more strongly correlated with support for challenger parties. These findings contribute to the literature on the political consequences of labor market transformations and the rise of challenger and populist parties across Europe in the post-2008 context.

1. Introduction

This paper presents a replication and extension of Girardi's (2023) study, which investigates the relationship between perceived labor market precarity and voting behavior in Italy. The original work provides insights into the emergence of populist parties, both left and right-wing, by analyzing how individuals respond to challenger parties amidst evolving labor market dynamics. This replication aims to test the theoretical arguments put forth by Girardi (2023) and to further explore the temporal stability of the proposed model.

Italy, characterized by its distinctive Mediterranean welfare system and labor market structures, has historically exemplified labor market dualism. Following the insider-outsider partisanship model (Rueda, 2005), workers in formal and permanent employment (insiders) benefit from substantive protections, contrasting sharply with limited or absent social protections for the atypically employed, unemployed, or those in the informal economy (outsiders). This inequality carries substantial social and economic implications, extending to policy preferences and political representation.

The insider-outsider partisanship model has been a crucial framework for understanding the link between employment status and voting behavior in post-war Italy. However, since the 1990s, profound transformations have reshaped the international and domestic economic landscape. Concurrently, successive governments have promoted flexibilization reforms that have fundamentally altered the labor market's structure. Precarity, defined here as the actual or perceived insecurity stemming from an individual's weak ties to their occupation and the broader labor market, has

transitioned from being a characteristic solely of marginalized workers to becoming a more widespread norm. This shift from labor market dualism towards generalized precarity challenges established assumptions within the insider-outsider literature and questions the applicability of traditional theories of political behavior and representation in dualized societies to contemporary Italy.

In the subsequent sections, this paper provides a detailed overview of the major labor market reforms implemented in Italy over the past three decades. It contests that precarity is no longer exclusive to workers in marginalized sectors but also affects individuals in permanent employment. Consequently, it is argued that employment status and contractual arrangements are no longer sufficient indicators of labor market vulnerability. In a context of generalized precarity, the perception of insecurity offers a more accurate measure of precarity in the labor market. The paper then empirically investigates the relationship between occupational precarity and vote choice in the 2018 Italian general election. The results of this analysis indicate that the perception of precarity, rather than formal employment status, had a strong influence on voting behavior. Specifically, contributed to political participation, increased support for the Five Star Movement, and decreased support for the Democratic Party.

This replication study extends Girardi's (2023) analysis by applying the precarity model to the 2013 Italian general elections. The year 2013 is particularly relevant as it followed the passage of Law 92/2012, which marked the initial erosion of insider protections. While the Jobs Act (2015) is identified as the inflection point for generalized precarity, 2013 represents a transitional period. This extension aims to determine if perceived labor insecurity was already politically salient before the decisive reduction of insider protections with Renzi's Jobs Act (2015) and to evaluate the temporal stability of the relationship between precarity and challenger party support.

2. Theoretical background

This section outlines the key theoretical frameworks and arguments central to Girardi, 2023's work. The original paper primarily built on the insider-outsider partisanship model and extended it to account for generalized precarity and the rise of challenger parties.

2.1 The Insider-Outsider partisanship model

The insider outsider partisanship model was first proposed by Rueda (2005). In the model, the labor market is conceptualized as divided into two segments: those with secure employment (the insiders) and those without (outsiders). These are defined as two separate groups, with clear contrasting interests. The insiders are generally more protected and shielded from unemployment, while the outsiders bear the costs of the fluctuations of the business cycle. Social democratic parties, according to this model, tend to focus their policy efforts on insiders, making them their main constituency. In return, insiders continue to support these parties, creating a feedback loop between voter base and party leadership. This often leads social democratic parties to prioritize legislation that favors insiders. On the other side of the political spectrum, conservative governments may adopt policies more appealing to outsiders, such as labor market liberalization and easier hiring and firing regulations.

Lindvall and Rueda (2013) argue that the insider-outsider distinction is essential to understanding the politics of industrialized democracies since the 1970s. Building on Rueda's original work, they extend the model by exploring how party strategies affect individual voting preferences. Their main

argument, based on the Swedish context, is that when center-left parties emphasize insider interests, outsiders are more likely to abstain or vote for radical parties. But when center-left parties focus on outsiders' needs, insiders tend to shift their support to the center-right. They define this as the insider-outsider dilemma. The conflict between the two groups mainly stems from their different exposure to unemployment. Insiders, feeling less threatened by job loss, are unlikely to support reforms that weaken their protections. Outsiders, who are more vulnerable to unemployment, favor policies that improve their chances of stable work.

Girardi (2023) in her work, argues that the insider-outsider model is challenged by the on-going process of labor market liberalization that started in the 1990s around Europe. This process shakes the very assumption of “insider stability”: when labor market de-regulation affects both the insiders and the outsiders in the same way (reduction of the employment regulation against job loss and facilitation of the use of atypical contracts), the labor market cannot be considered as dualized anymore, as generalized precarity becomes the norm. To better understand this premise, in the following section will be provided a short overview of the major labor market reforms implemented in Italy over the past three decades, based on the original author's reconstruction.

2.2 Italian labor market dualism and the generalized precarity problem

During Italy's post-war economic boom, welfare institutions and employment protections expanded in favor of unionized, regular workers. This led to what Ferrera (1996) described as a system of *iper-garantismo*, or hyper-protection. Over time, a sharp divide emerged between well-protected insiders in the core labor market and marginal workers in the secondary sector. The roots of this divide can be traced to the late 1960s and early 1970s, particularly after the “*Autunno caldo*” of 1969, when large-scale labor unrest prompted reforms that strengthened union power and workers' rights (Piore, 1980).

Throughout the First Republic (1947–1992), political dynamics further cemented this divide. Party competition, notably between Democrazia Cristiana (DC), the Socialist Party, and the oppositional PCI and MSI, contributed to a fragmented and insider-biased welfare regime. As Ferrera and Gualmini (2004) and Lindbeck and Snower (1989) highlight, this alignment led to a “workerist” social policy framework that prioritized the interests of organized labor while limiting labor market flexibility, particularly in regard to fixed-term and atypical employment.

In the late 1990s, as Italy prepared to join the European Monetary Union, reforms began to emerge. The Treu Law of 1997 and the Biagi Reform of 2003 expanded atypical employment but left core protections for insiders largely untouched. A major turning point came after the 2008 financial crisis. Economic pressures and European constraints led the Monti government to pass structural reforms. Law 92/2012 weakened protections for permanent workers, especially around unfair dismissal (Picot and Tassinari, 2017). Under Matteo Renzi, the Democratic Party broke with its historical defense of insiders and introduced the 2015 Jobs Act, which eliminated reinstatement guarantees for unfairly dismissed employees and restricted access to short-time work benefits.

According to Girardi's (2023), Italy's transition from labor market dualism to generalized precarity occurred in two stages. The first saw an expansion of atypical employment without threatening insiders' protections; the second, beginning in 2012, introduced reforms that weakened dismissal protections for permanent workers while continuing to liberalize atypical work arrangements. OECD data (2020, represented in Figure 1) illustrates this trajectory, showing a steady decline in restrictions

on temporary contracts from 1990 to 2018, and a delayed but pronounced drop in protections for permanent employment after 2012.

These institutional changes have had important material and perceptual effects. As job protections eroded and atypical work spread, even permanent employment ceased to guarantee stability. In the dual system, most workers in permanent jobs were largely insulated from unemployment. But as protections weakened and the number of precarious workers grew, insiders lost their immunity to both the real and perceived risks of job loss.



Figure 1: Strictness of employment protections¹, 1990–2018.(from the original paper)

2.3 Precarity and voting

According to the *insider-outsider dilemma* (Lindvall and Rueda, 2013), when social democratic parties stop defending insiders and instead adopt policies more favorable to outsiders, insiders react by voting for center-right parties, by a principle of adverse reaction. Conversely, when social democratic parties signal their closeness to insiders, outsiders respond by voting center-right, abstaining, or supporting radical parties. This dynamic raises the question of how precarity might shape voting in a context where the old insider-outsider divide has weakened. As permanent contracts no longer provide strong protections against unemployment, formal employment status may no longer reliably predict policy preferences. Moreover, precarious workers are no longer a small group whose support is electorally irrelevant. This shift prompts new questions about whether and how precarity influences voting behavior.

Previous studies (as reviewed by Schwander, 2019) have looked at the link between precarity and voting mainly by focusing on formal employment status. This approach is based on the idea that different types of contracts reflect different levels of job security and risk of unemployment. This makes sense in contexts where employment protections are strong and permanent contracts offer real job and income security. However, when these protections weakened - especially during economic crises and rising unemployment - even those with permanent contracts may feel insecure. In such situations, we can no longer assume that contract type alone tells us much about how secure someone

¹ Note from the original author (Girardi, 2023): The strictness of employment protections for **permanent contracts** is the average of four indicators that measure the strictness of the dismissal regulation of workers in permanent jobs (procedural requirements, notice and severance pay, regulatory framework for unfair dismissal and enforcement of unfair dismissal regulation). The strictness of employment protections for **temporary contracts** is the average of indicators that measure the restrictions to employers' usage of temporary contracts (e.g. the valid cases for the use of fixed-term contracts, maximum number of contract renewal and temporary contracts maximum (cumulated) duration). Both measures are constructed on a scale 0–6. The dotted line (drawn at 2012) signals the start of the second stage in the precarization of the Italian labor market.

feels in their job or what policies they might support. As also noted by Lewchuk (2017), using contract type as a measure of precarity can lead to serious validity problems, especially when studying how precarity affects political behavior. For this reason, Girardi (2023) opts that perceived job insecurity is a better and more accurate way to measure precarity, and that it likely has greater power to explain how people vote.

Generalized precarity also changes how workers are represented. In the insider-outsider model, outsiders were seen as underrepresented or politically discouraged. As precarity spreads, however, the number of voters interested in pro-outsider policies grows. When insecurity affects even workers in unionized sectors, their interests converge with those of more marginal groups, boosting their collective electoral weight. Nonetheless, not all parties are equipped to attract precarious workers' support. Whether precarity influences voting depends on whether voters see some parties as responsible for their situation, or more capable of improving it. In this regard, challenger parties appear to have an advantage over mainstream parties.

Political support for non-mainstream parties has risen against the backdrop of the 2008 Great Recession. In the wake of the economic crisis, recent elections in some European countries have often resulted in important gains for new and challenger parties. Following an economic voting logic, dissatisfied voters initially punished incumbents for their failing economic performance, voting for the mainstream opposition yet, the continuity of the crisis and the implementation of austerity policies by all of the mainstream parties have finally driven many discontented voters to support new and challenger parties (Ramiro and Lavezolo, 2017).

A few studies in other contexts suggest a positive relationship between precarity and radical or anti-establishment voting (e.g., Mughan et al. 2003; Marx and Picot 2013; Ramiro 2016). This theory holds that challenger parties attract precarious workers by offering an anti-establishment alternative and promising policies to improve their conditions. Antonucci et al (2021) in this respect identified two different possible mechanisms that might induce precarious workers to change their voting preference in favor of challenger parties. Voters might be attracted to new parties offering symbolic/anti-establishment options for those who feel they had a declined status due to their subjective work position (symbolic mechanism). Voters might want to hold social democratic parties, who proposed and moved the major processes in the labor market liberalization post 2008 crisis accountable for their worsening conditions. On the other hand, they might act on their situation by voting for the next best option that allows them to improve their labor market conditions (Instrumental route).

The mechanism proposed by Antonucci et al (2021) can be reasonably expected to play out in Italy with the needed contextualization. In southern Europe the 2008 financial crisis prompted an 'electoral epidemic' marked by low levels of turnout, declining support for the incumbents and diminishing trust in political parties, followed by unprecedented electoral volatility (Bosco and Verney, 2012; Hutter et al, 2018). From the loosened ties between the mainstream parties and their electorate, the challengers capitalized by using the discontent against austerity and voice the need for a regeneration of the political system (Hutter et al, 2018).

2.4 Hypotheses

The article (Girardi, 2023) presented three main hypotheses to check for.

Hypothesis 1: In the 2018 election, precarity has a negative effect on the probability of voting for mainstream parties. The negative effect is stronger for parties in the center-left than for parties in the center-right coalition.

In this context, it is reasonable to expect that precarity reduces support for mainstream parties. While Antonucci et al.'s symbolic mechanism should affect both mainstream left and right, the instrumental mechanism is expected to work more strongly against the center-left. This is because the Democratic Party was responsible for the most recent liberalizing reforms (Renzi's Jobs Act of 2015) and held power before the election.

Hypothesis 2: In the 2018 election, precarity has a positive effect on the probability of voting for challenger parties. The positive effect is stronger for the Five Star Movement than for right-wing challengers.

As for challenger parties, the convergence of mainstream parties on labor market deregulation can be expected to increase their appeal among precarious workers, which is in line with the symbolic mechanism theorized by Antonucci *et al* (2021). However, the instrumental link, supposedly should work most in favor of the left-wing challenger (*Movimento 5 Stelle*) as compared to the right-wing challengers.

The Five Star Movement (M5S), founded in 2009 by Beppe Grillo and Roberto Casaleggio, has consistently positioned itself as a pro-welfare, anti-precarity force in Italian politics. Even prior to its formal creation, Grillo voiced strong criticism against labor market reforms and the rise of precarious work, notably through his 2006 publication highlighting workers' insecurity. The demand for a guaranteed income featured prominently in M5S discourse, culminating in the proposal of a "citizenship income" (*Reddito di cittadinanza*, RdC), which became central to the party's platform during the 2018 election campaign. Upon entering government, M5S implemented the RdC in 2019 and introduced additional labor protections, including the *decreto dignità*, which curtailed the use of temporary contracts, and the *Decreto riders*, which extended protections to gig economy workers. This sustained focus on addressing precarious employment forms a key policy identity of the movement. As concerns the right-wing challengers, Antonucci *et al.* (2021) theorize that their welfare chauvinistic stances should attract the support of precarious workers. In line with this position, outsiders are depicted or overlapped with the losers of globalization. However, recent literature has shown that this overlap is not entirely true as it is their "outsiderness" and not the exposition to international competition, their major drive of income and employment insecurities (Natili and Negri, 2022). Coherently, neither *La Lega* nor *Fratelli d'Italia* manifested a commitment toward the protection of precarious workers which resembles the one displayed by the M5S. It follows that, while the symbolic mechanism should equally benefit anti-establishment parties regardless of their ideology and programmatic positioning, the instrumental link should work especially in favor of the M5S.

Hypothesis 3: In the 2018 election, the effect of precarity on voting choice is larger when combined with financial hardship.

The impact of precarity is likely to be moderated by voters' personal and household income. Although precarious workers share labor market vulnerability, differences in financial conditions shape how severely they feel constrained and which parties they support.

3. Data and Methods: Original paper

To test the formulated hypothesis, the author used data collected by ITANES during the March 2018 general election in Italy. A multinomial logistic regression was conducted to examine the effect of perceived precarity on voting choice. Political parties were grouped into four categories, following the definition of "challenger" developed by De Vries and Hobolt (2020), which includes parties without recent experience in government. Based on this classification, the parties were organized as follows: mainstream left parties (*Partito Democratico* and other members of the center-left coalition), mainstream right parties (*Forza Italia* and other parties in the center-right coalition), the challenger left (*Movimento 5 Stelle*), and the challenger right (*Fratelli d'Italia* and *Lega*). The *Lega* is categorized as a challenger party due to the restructuring initiated by its leader, Matteo Salvini.

The main independent variable in each model is the respondents perceived precarity in the labor market. This is defined as a condition of actual or perceived insecurity stemming from weak attachment to one's job or to the labor market more broadly. According to the author, this variable is well-suited to capture perceived precarity for two main reasons. First, it goes beyond the perceived risk of losing a specific job (i.e., perceived job insecurity) by reflecting a more general sense of labor market insecurity. Second, it is applicable to both employed and unemployed individuals, as it incorporates perceptions about the ease or difficulty of finding suitable employment. Perceived precarity is measured through the ITANES survey question: "*Over the last year, have you been afraid of losing your job?*". Respondents who answered they had been "somewhat afraid" or "very afraid" were classified as precarious, while those who answered otherwise were classified as not precarious. All unemployed respondents were automatically included in the precarious category.

The same set of control variables is applied to each model. First, the author controlled for formal employment status, relying on a categorical variable with four levels: self-employment (reference-category); permanent employment; temporary employment and unemployment. In line with Lewchuk (2017), controlling formal employment status allows to isolate the effect of perceived precarity from the effect of formal employment status and test whether one and/or the other influenced vote choice.

Furthermore, a set of socio-demographic controls is included. The chosen factors are age, gender, education level, region of residence and union membership. The inclusion of the first three is necessary since younger, female and less educated individuals are over-represented among precarious workers. The region of residence is included because differences in vote trends across Italian regions exist, with the M5S being more successful in Southern regions where unemployment, poverty and social distress are more widespread (Maraffi, 2018; Brancaccio *et al.*, 2019; Tuorto, 2019). Finally, union membership is included because of its well-established correlation with employment security and left-wing voting. The author also controls for a set of attitudinal factors: for respondents' self-positioning on the left-right scale, attitudes toward the European Union and immigration, trust in political parties, populist beliefs, and judgement of the performance of the incumbent government (the Democratic administration of Paolo Gentiloni) on economic issues. Controlling for the respondents' judgment of the Gentiloni administration allows to check rule out the possibility that the relationship between perceived precarity and vote choice is driven by an incumbent effect: among individuals dissatisfied with their employment situation the incumbent gets the blame and loses, the opponent thrives. Lastly, economic hardship is operationalized as a dummy scoring 1 if the respondent declared to be facing difficulties in living with the family income, 0 otherwise. This

variable is at first included as a control and, in a second stage, it is interacted with perceived precarity to test for hypothesis 3.

4. Original paper's results

In Table 1 the coefficients for the models are represented as odd ratios. Before testing the hypothesis, the author runs a binomial logistic regression (with the same dependent variable and controls as the main models) to test the relationship between precarity and turnout (Model 1). This was essential, as mainstream theories of representation (including the insider-outsider model by Rueda, 2005), consider the outsiders as politically inactive. As the results of Model 1 show, perceived precarity increases the likelihood of turnout (coefficient statistically significant at the 90% confidence interval). People who perceive their situation as precarious have, on average, a 4.17 percentage points higher probability of voting compared to those who do not perceive their situation as precarious, holding other factors constant.

	(1)	(2)		(3)	
	Turnout	Challenger Left	Challenger right	Mainstream Left	Mainstream Right
	vs	vs	vs	vs	vs
	Mainstream	Mainstream	Challenger	Challenger	Challenger
Perceived precarity (no)	1.771** (0.225)	1.679*** (0.198)	1.210 (0.243)	0.535** (0.256)	0.964 (0.273)
Status: permanent (self-employed)	1.543* (0.262)	2.087*** (0.249)	0.811 (0.278)	0.727 (0.312)	0.601* (0.302)
Status: atypical (self-employed)	1.020 (0.318)	1.253 (0.316)	0.784 (0.381)	1.141 (0.400)	0.775 (0.420)
Status: unemployed (self-employed)	0.872 (0.358)	0.834 (0.356)	0.580 (0.438)	1.624 (0.446)	1.048 (0.469)
Age	1.034*** (0.009)	0.998 (0.009)	1.005 (0.010)	0.981* (0.011)	1.004 (0.012)
Gender	0.927 (0.196)	0.825 (0.182)	1.003 (0.223)	1.406 (0.234)	0.867 (0.261)
Education	1.059 (0.045)	0.990 (0.041)	1.008 (0.049)	1.050 (0.052)	0.968 (0.055)
Residence: centre (north)	1.112 (0.259)	1.275 (0.227)	1.009 (0.273)	0.689 (0.280)	1.319 (0.324)
Residence: south (north)	0.941 (0.217)	1.865*** (0.205)	0.519** (0.259)	0.444*** (0.264)	1.510 (0.280)
Union member (yes)	1.048 (0.251)	1.168 (0.213)	1.534 (0.270)	0.874 (0.265)	0.830 (0.318)
Ideology: left (none)	1.009 (0.279)	0.319*** (0.320)	0.070*** (0.567)	4.453*** (0.387)	0.617 (0.736)
Ideology: centre-left (none)	2.603** (0.382)	0.241*** (0.322)	0.050*** (0.610)	7.440*** (0.392)	0.938 (0.731)
Ideology: centre (none)	2.012 (0.467)	0.421** (0.412)	0.453 (0.533)	2.722** (0.483)	1.513 (0.745)
Ideology: centre-right (none)	1.018 (0.301)	0.372*** (0.355)	1.286 (0.399)	0.636 (0.484)	5.348*** (0.494)
Ideology: right (none)	2.725*** (0.334)	0.091*** (0.345)	1.174 (0.362)	0.263** (0.566)	9.567*** (0.468)
Attitudes toward the EU	1.045 (0.146)	0.517*** (0.134)	0.670** (0.157)	2.219*** (0.184)	1.509** (0.175)
Attitudes toward immigration	1.039 (0.036)	0.988 (0.033)	0.834*** (0.042)	1.095** (0.042)	1.061 (0.047)
Trust in political parties	1.071 (0.047)	0.959 (0.042)	1.090* (0.051)	0.923 (0.053)	1.119** (0.056)
Populist attitudes	1.116 (0.086)	1.474*** (0.080)	1.480*** (0.099)	0.649*** (0.098)	0.756** (0.110)
Attitudes toward the incumbent	0.967 (0.043)	0.722*** (0.041)	0.804*** (0.048)	1.863*** (0.064)	1.002 (0.051)
Economic hardship (no)	0.909 (0.205)	1.209 (0.182)	1.171 (0.231)	0.842 (0.228)	0.881 (0.266)
Constant	0.412 (0.800)	13.166*** (0.791)	2.734 (0.936)	0.010*** (1.034)	0.031*** (1.048)
Observations	1569				
Akaike inf. crit.	887.731	1634.373	1634.373	1143.236	1143.236

* p < .1; ** p < .05; *** p < .01

Table 1 - Models of turnout (1) and vote choice (2-3) for the 2018 general elections. Coefficients displayed as odds-ratios. Reference categories in parentheses. Replicated from the original paper.

Model 2 and 3 in Table 1, display the results of the first sets of multinomial logistic regressions (as odds ratios). Model 2, estimates the relative likelihood to support *Movimento 5 Stelle* and a right-wing challenger compared to any mainstream party (mainstream right and mainstream left are aggregated into a single category); Model 3 displays the estimates for the relative likelihood to support a mainstream left and mainstream right party compared to any challenger party (challenger left and challenger right are aggregated into a single category).

For what concerns vote and hypothesis 1 and 2, perceived precarity increases the likelihood of voting for a challenger party over a mainstream one (Model 2), and conversely decreases the odds of voting a mainstream left party over a challenger one (Model 3). The effect of precarity, as theorized in Hypothesis 2, is stronger when considering the odds of voting for a challenger left, rather than a challenger right (with the former coefficient being non-significant even). The results from these models allow us to draw conclusions on the relative likelihood of supporting challengers over mainstream, suggesting that precarity might have had a significant influence in the process, although the effect is only significant for the challenger and mainstream left. This significance is reflected when considering the change in probability of voting for each single party when moving from a situation of security to perceived precarity. As shown by Figure 2, precariousness increases the probability of voting for a challenger left (*Movimento 5 Stelle*) by 6.5 percentage points ($p < 0.05$) and decreases it by 5.2 percentage points ($p < 0.05$) for the mainstream left (*Partito Democratico*). This is in line with the instrumental mechanism described by Antonucci et al (2021). Precarious workers did not turn to challengers indiscriminately but were drawn to the party that advocated for policies that directly safeguarded their interests on a basis of instrumental considerations.

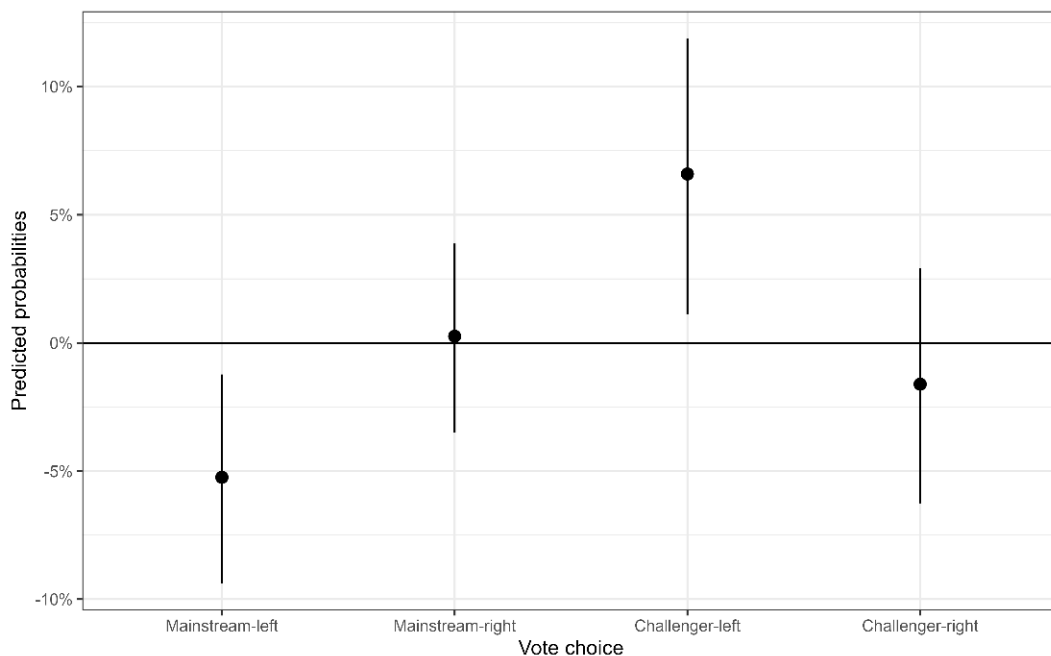


Figure 2 - Change in predicted probability of voting for each party, when shifting from "Not precarious" to "Precarious" with 95% CI (replicated from the original paper).

Concentrating on the effect of formal employment status, for models 2 and 3, it is only significant when considering the choice of challenger left over mainstream party (permanently employed people are 2.087 times more likely to vote challenger over mainstream, with respect to self-employed). This might seem counterintuitive at first, since permanently employed, historically the “insiders”, form the core constituency of mainstream parties (in particular mainstream left parties). But this result is in line with the consideration that this category of contracts was reformed by the very same mainstream left party (*Partito Democratico*) in 2014. Thus, it is reasonable for them to turn to the challenger left (*Movimento 5 Stelle*) who has openly spoken out against this trend of reforms. In addition, neither employment nor unemployment increased the likelihood of supporting the challenger left over any other party. This aligns with the theorized diffusion of perceived precarity among all types of workers. To exclude the possibility that the impact of precariousness varies across employment categories, the author included an interaction term between the two variables in Model 6 (model of the online Appendix²). The interaction terms are generally not significant, with one exception: the positive effect of permanent employment on support for the mainstream right over the mainstream left is stronger among those who perceive their condition as precarious. This finding aligns with the notion that labor market reforms introduced by the *Partito Democratico* since 2014 have eroded the job security of even permanent workers, prompting disillusionment with the mainstream left among those who feel insecure despite having stable employment.

Considering the controls instead, social demographic variables are uninfluential on the likelihood of voting for a category over another, apart from the residence. People from southern Italy are more likely to vote challenger (with respect to the North). This difference was to be expected: as mentioned in the previous section, *Movimento 5 Stelle* was a popular party in the southern regions (see data and methods section for references). Another important finding is the exclusion of the incumbent effect on the vote choice. The coefficient attitude toward the incumbent administration is significant, indicating a negative relationship with the likelihood of voting challenger left over mainstream (Model 2). This effect is lower than the one found for precarity in the same case.

Finally, the author tested whether the impact of precarity on voting behavior is conditional to income security, by running a model with an interaction term between precarity and economic hardship (Model 8). The results of Table 2, contradicts hypothesis 3: interaction coefficients are non-significant, which indicates that the effect of precarity is independent, in the proposed model, of the financial hardship.

² The Appedinx material of the original paper is not included in the paper, but can be found in the code repository on [Git-Hub](#).

	(7)	(8)		
	Turnout	Mainstream right vs Mainstream left	Challenger left vs Mainstream left	Challenger right vs Mainstream left
Perceived precarity (no)	2.385*** (0.329)	1.116 (0.475)	2.341** (0.332)	1.534 (0.417)
Economic hardship (no)	1.167 (0.285)	0.555 (0.541)	1.466 (0.337)	1.184 (0.422)
Status: permanent (self-employed)	1.524 (0.262)	0.605 (0.423)	1.823* (0.326)	0.631 (0.379)
Status: atypical (self-employed)	1.022 (0.319)	0.560 (0.563)	1.044 (0.408)	0.601 (0.495)
Status: unemployed (self-employed)	0.885 (0.358)	0.521 (0.624)	0.709 (0.456)	0.430 (0.557)
Age	1.034*** (0.009)	1.027* (0.016)	1.016 (0.012)	1.026* (0.014)
Gender	0.934 (0.196)	0.644 (0.342)	0.713 (0.237)	0.841 (0.290)
Education	1.057 (0.045)	0.922 (0.075)	0.957 (0.054)	0.960 (0.065)
Residence: centre (north)	1.132 (0.260)	1.782 (0.421)	1.522 (0.288)	1.284 (0.353)
Residence: south (north)	0.938 (0.217)	2.347** (0.376)	2.756*** (0.268)	0.847 (0.333)
Union member (yes)	1.038 (0.251)	1.133 (0.411)	1.126 (0.271)	1.502 (0.344)
Ideology: left (none)	0.991 (0.280)	0.135** (0.802)	0.265*** (0.392)	0.064*** (0.618)
Ideology: centre-left (none)	2.594** (0.383)	0.114*** (0.799)	0.164*** (0.396)	0.038*** (0.659)
Ideology: centre (none)	2.007 (0.468)	0.516 (0.836)	0.361** (0.495)	0.440 (0.605)
Ideology: centre-right (none)	1.012 (0.302)	7.197*** (0.652)	1.008 (0.490)	3.677** (0.530)
Ideology: right (none)	2.753*** (0.334)	30.051*** (0.708)	1.141 (0.585)	13.995*** (0.602)
Attitudes toward the EU	1.058 (0.146)	0.700 (0.254)	0.428*** (0.188)	0.530*** (0.222)
Attitudes toward immigration	1.038 (0.036)	0.928 (0.061)	0.946 (0.043)	0.796*** (0.054)
Trust in political parties	1.068 (0.048)	1.279*** (0.076)	1.053 (0.054)	1.240*** (0.066)
Populist attitudes	1.118 (0.086)	1.169 (0.143)	1.568*** (0.100)	1.587*** (0.127)
Attitudes toward the incumbent	0.968 (0.043)	0.544*** (0.081)	0.532*** (0.065)	0.550*** (0.074)
Perceived precarity x Eco. hardship	0.586 (0.415)	2.747 (0.701)	0.738 (0.461)	0.981 (0.574)
Constant	0.371 (0.805)	4.471 (1.427)	62.164*** (1.054)	17.941** (1.250)
N	1,569			
Log Likelihood	-421.016			
AIC	888.032	1,765.629	1,765.629	1,765.629

* p < .1; ** p < .05; *** p < .01

Table 2 - Models of turnout (7) and vote choice (8) for the 2018 general elections, with interaction term between perceived precarity and economic hardship. Coefficients displayed as odds-ratios. Reference categories in parentheses. Replicated from the original paper.

4.1 Robustness check of the models (Original Paper)

To increase confidence in the findings, the author conducts a series of robustness checks using alternative model specifications³. First, the author reclassifies *Lega* as a mainstream right party and replicates Models 2 to 4. This tests whether *Fratelli d'Italia*—unlike the *Lega* and other mainstream parties—attracted precarious workers. The results align with the main analysis: the coefficient of precarity is still significant on the support for the *M5S* and mainstream left, but not for right-wing parties, suggesting that precarious voters did not simply turn to any opposition party, but specifically to the one advocating policies in their interest.

Second, the author re-runs Models 1 to 4 excluding unemployed respondents to ensure that the relationship between precarity and vote choice is not driven by the inclusion of the unemployed in the "afraid" (precarious) category. The results (Tables S3 and S4 of the Appendix) remain consistent in both direction and significance.

Finally, the author includes 2013 vote recall as a control variable (Tables S5 and S6). Although significance is slightly reduced, the main effects are confirmed, strengthening the credibility of the findings.

5. The precarity model for the 2013 elections.

To assess the generalizability of Girardi's (2023) model, this section tests whether perceived precarity already influenced voting behavior in the 2013 Italian general elections. The year 2013 presents a particularly relevant case: it followed the passage of Law 92/2012 under Mario Monti's technocratic government, which represented the first substantive erosion of insider protections, including changes to dismissal regulation for permanent workers (Picot & Tassinari, 2017). Although Renzi's Jobs Act (2015) is indicated by Girardi's (2023) as the point of inflection for generalized precarity, the foundations were arguably laid in 2012, especially for the reform of permanent contracts. As such, 2013 can be viewed as a transitional moment between a dualized labor market and the emergence of generalized precarity.

In this context, testing the precarity model on 2013 data serves multiple goals. First, it allows us to determine whether perceived labor insecurity was already politically salient before insider protections were fully dismantled. Second, it provides an opportunity to evaluate the temporal stability of the relationship between precarity and support for challenger parties. If effects similar to those in 2018 are already detectable in 2013, it would suggest that symbolic or instrumental mechanisms linking precarity and challenger support were already in motion. Conversely, the absence of such effects would indicate that generalized precarity is a necessary condition for those mechanisms to operate — reinforcing Girardi's two-stage hypothesis.

On this basis I formulate the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1.1: In the 2013 elections, perceived precarity had a negative effect on support for mainstream parties, but the magnitude of this effect is smaller than in 2018.

³ The re-worked models are not included in this paper but can be found in the code repository on [Git-Hub](#).

Hypothesis 2.1: In the 2013 election, perceived precarity increased the probability of voting for the *Movimento 5 Stelle* (M5S).

6. Data and methods: Additional analysis

For the addition analysis I used data from ITANES survey during the February 2013 general elections in Italy and run a multinomial logistic regression to test the hypothesis. Even though the data came from the same source and much of the variables kept their structure (same variables, same question asked etc...), there are some important variations that need to be addressed. First, the dependent variable of the study (vote preference), was operationalized in a different way respect to the original. The category “challenger right” was dropped due to sparse data, causing problems for the coefficient estimations in the model (Table 3 for reference). I then included the challenger right parties of the original model (*Fratelli D'Italia*, being the “largest” one among the few) into the mainstream right category. This inclusion is justifiable on the basis that smaller right-wing parties like *Fratelli D'Italia*, run in a center-right coalition along Berlusconi’s *Popolo della Libertà*. Along the three categories of vote choice (challenger left, mainstream left and mainstream right) I included in the model a fifth category composed of people who did not vote. In the original model these respondents were flagged as missing values, but in the 2013’s case their weight was too large to ignore.

Category	n	Proportion
Mainstream left	415	0.275
Mainstream right	181	0.120
Challenger left	237	0.157
Challenger right	23	0.015
Abstain	523	0.346
Missing values	129	0.085

Table 3 -Dependent variable for the 2013 analysis, before recoding challenger right as part of the Mainstream right.

The main independent variable of “perceived precarity” was operationalized, on the basis of the same question asked in the 2018 ITANES: “*Over the last year, have you been afraid of losing your job?*”. Respondents were then categorized as “precarious” if they had been somewhat or very afraid; “not precarious” if not.

As for the control variables, I employed the same variables: for socio-demographics age, gender, education, residence and union membership. Furthermore, I controlled economic hardship and included a second model with an interaction term between perceived precarity and economic hardship.

Another important variable that was not equal to the one present in the survey of 2018 is formal employment status. While the main categories of permanent employment, atypical employment and unemployment were classified as responses, self-employment was not included as option. I opted to include also two additional categories left out in the original analysis: retired people and the inactive. The latter, were operationalized on the basis of the formal status declared by the person: student, housekeeper not looking for a job, incapacitated to work/disabled, wealthy individuals and finally, people not working not looking for a job.

Lastly, the same set of attitudinal controls were used: ideology (left-right scale), attitude towards the European Union, trust in political parties and attitude towards immigration, populist beliefs and judgment on the incumbent technocratic government of Mario Monti.

7. Results of the additional analysis

Following the analysis done by Girardi (2023), the analysis begins by testing whether perceived precarity influenced turnout in the 2013 elections, using a binomial logistic regression. Table 4 displays the results for Model 1.2, with coefficients presented as odds-ratios. Contrary to what found in 2018, precarity did not have an influence on the likelihood of voting as it fails to reach statistical significance. Instead, turnout appears to be shaped primarily by socio-demographic factors. Education emerges as a strong predictor: the higher an individual's level of education, the greater their probability of voting. Similarly, ideological orientation has a significant effect: those on the left are more likely to vote than right-leaning individuals.

Models 2.2 and 3.2 display the first result of the multinomial logistic regression used to test the hypothesis. Model 2.2 tests the likelihood of voting the challenger left party (M5S) or abstaining, over voting for a mainstream party (aggregated mainstream left and right parties). Contrary to expectations -and in contrast to the 2018 results- precarity has no significant effect on either outcome. These results reject both Hypotheses 2 and 3 for the 2013 context. Instead, it's the variable for economic hardship that had the greatest effect on the likelihood of voting for *Movimento 5 Stelle* (odds ratios of 2.25, $p < 0.01$). When isolating the single voting choice, moving from financial ease to financial hardship increases the probability of voting for M5S by 10.9 ($p < 0.01$) percentage points (Figure 3). This effect is statistically significant (though at different levels) for all the other categories, signaling a negative effect in the likelihood of voting for a mainstream right or left party, in favor of the M5S. More surprisingly, when a person suffers financial hardship, this reduces of 6.9 percentage points the probability of abstaining ($p < 0.05$). This challenges the assumption that hardship always leads to political disengagement. In this case, hardship seems to have mobilized voters in support of the M5S, rather than convincing them to abstain.

The coefficient for perceived precarity is only significant (at the 95% level) when analyzed with respect to vote choice between mainstream right and challenger left party (model 3.2), indicating that people who feel insecure about their position on the job market (and outside of it) are more likely to vote for M5S than to vote for the center-right coalition in the elections. However, no other model shows a significant effect for precarity, which limits the broader applicability of this result.

Formal employment status is significant only increasing the likelihood of voting for the mainstream left over challenger left. This is in line with the idea proposed by the insider-outsider model (Rueda, 2005) and can be interpreted as the adverse reaction of the insiders to the programmatic reforms carried out in 2012 by Monti's administration.

When including the interaction term between perceived precarity and economic hardship, no additional effect is found. Also, in the case of model 5.2, precarity and economic hardship are independent (Table 5).

	(1.2)	(2.2)		(3.2)		
	Turnout	Challenger Left	No voto	Mainstream Left	Mainstream Right	No voto
		vs	vs	vs	vs	vs
		Mainstream	Mainstream	Challenger left	Challenger left	Challenger left
Perceived precarity (no)	1.584 (0.293)	1.297 (0.255)	1.016 (0.227)	0.892 (0.292)	0.447** (0.367)	0.752 (0.271)
Status: Inactive (atypical)	1.040 (0.502)	1.544 (0.427)	1.246 (0.401)	0.612 (0.502)	0.441 (0.608)	0.796 (0.450)
Status: Permanent (atypical)	1.199 (0.492)	0.508* (0.395)	0.857 (0.370)	2.602** (0.446)	1.143 (0.579)	1.623 (0.431)
Status: Retired (atypical)	1.060 (0.590)	0.437 (0.527)	0.736 (0.454)	3.186** (0.589)	1.451 (0.751)	1.624 (0.579)
Status: Unemployed (atypical)	0.993 (0.516)	0.651 (0.421)	0.800 (0.413)	1.466 (0.492)	1.304 (0.621)	1.238 (0.459)
Age	1.009 (0.010)	0.984* (0.009)	0.991 (0.007)	1.014 (0.010)	1.010 (0.012)	1.006 (0.010)
Gender (male)	0.848 (0.242)	0.946 (0.224)	1.106 (0.180)	1.141 (0.246)	1.010 (0.306)	1.178 (0.242)
Residence: Center (North)	1.014 (0.291)	1.006 (0.271)	1.002 (0.215)	1.005 (0.296)	0.932 (0.360)	1.001 (0.293)
Residence: South (North)	0.960 (0.274)	1.239 (0.260)	1.478* (0.210)	0.850 (0.294)	0.608 (0.353)	1.169 (0.276)
Union (no)	3.117* (0.615)	1.137 (0.359)	0.477** (0.350)	1.169 (0.386)	0.211*** (0.586)	0.376** (0.445)
Education	1.498*** (0.103)	1.095 (0.097)	0.956 (0.074)	0.970 (0.108)	0.913 (0.125)	0.866 (0.103)
Ideology	0.867*** (0.044)	0.871*** (0.044)	1.030 (0.034)	0.776*** (0.059)	2.200*** (0.076)	1.227*** (0.051)
Attitudes toward EU	0.938 (0.146)	0.674*** (0.142)	0.764** (0.114)	1.683*** (0.160)	1.358 (0.190)	1.110 (0.150)
Attitudes toward immigration	1.069 (0.133)	0.904 (0.120)	0.852 (0.101)	1.083 (0.131)	1.207 (0.173)	0.954 (0.131)
Judgment on incumbent	1.091 (0.054)	0.869*** (0.051)	0.869*** (0.041)	1.307*** (0.057)	0.969 (0.069)	0.981 (0.055)
Populist attitudes	1.034 (0.087)	0.794*** (0.085)	0.972 (0.066)	1.204** (0.092)	1.233* (0.112)	1.223** (0.090)
Trust in political parties	0.933 (0.135)	0.950 (0.125)	1.130 (0.100)	1.109 (0.135)	0.987 (0.164)	1.186 (0.141)
Economic hardship (no)	0.664 (0.253)	2.254*** (0.239)	0.873 (0.193)	0.399*** (0.261)	0.574* (0.330)	0.396*** (0.256)
Constant	2.353 (1.077)	7.821** (0.992)	2.970 (0.827)	0.131* (1.110)	0.003*** (1.369)	0.376 (1.060)
N	925					
Log Likelihood	-288.598					
AIC	615.196	1,588.925	1,588.925	1,795.335	1,795.335	1,795.335

* p < .1; ** p < .05; *** p < .01

Table 4- Model for turnout (1.2) and vote choice (2.2 and 3.2) for the 2013 general election in Italy. Coefficients displayed as odds-ratios. Reference categories in parentheses. Extension of the original analysis.

	(4.2)	(5.2)		
	Turnout	Mainstream Right	Challenger Left	No voto
		vs	vs	vs
		Mainstream left	Mainstream left	Mainstream left
Perceived precarity (no)	2.219 (0.651)	0.410 (0.700)	1.598 (0.492)	0.728 (0.443)
Economic hardship (no)	0.706 (0.273)	1.385 (0.343)	2.832*** (0.298)	0.949 (0.260)
Status: Inactive (atypical)	1.051 (0.502)	0.710 (0.660)	1.667 (0.502)	1.284 (0.502)
status: Permanent (atypical)	1.189 (0.493)	0.438 (0.602)	0.378** (0.448)	0.624 (0.450)
Status: Retired (atypical)	1.071 (0.590)	0.450 (0.746)	0.317* (0.591)	0.506 (0.552)
Status: Unemployed (atypical)	1.008 (0.517)	0.876 (0.674)	0.683 (0.492)	0.837 (0.508)
Age	1.009 (0.010)	0.996 (0.012)	0.987 (0.010)	0.992 (0.009)
Gender (male)	0.840 (0.243)	0.893 (0.291)	0.862 (0.246)	1.040 (0.216)
Residence: Center (North)	1.011 (0.291)	0.929 (0.339)	0.997 (0.296)	0.990 (0.260)
Residence: South (North)	0.957 (0.274)	0.711 (0.351)	1.178 (0.294)	1.369 (0.260)
Union	3.112* (0.615)	0.183*** (0.568)	0.853 (0.386)	0.324*** (0.401)
Education	1.500*** (0.103)	0.939 (0.118)	1.036 (0.108)	0.891 (0.092)
Ideology	0.868*** (0.044)	2.831*** (0.078)	1.291*** (0.059)	1.579*** (0.052)
Attitudes toward EU	0.939 (0.145)	0.805 (0.187)	0.592*** (0.160)	0.660*** (0.142)
Attitudes toward immigration	1.071 (0.133)	1.116 (0.168)	0.928 (0.132)	0.879 (0.120)
Judgment on incumbent	1.092 (0.054)	0.741*** (0.065)	0.767*** (0.057)	0.750*** (0.050)
Populist attitudes	1.035 (0.087)	1.023 (0.105)	0.831** (0.093)	1.015 (0.079)
Trust in political parties	0.930 (0.135)	0.891 (0.146)	0.891 (0.135)	1.072 (0.116)
Perceived precarity x Eco. hardship	0.658 (0.705)	1.296 (0.795)	0.637 (0.569)	1.232 (0.533)
Constant	2.228 (1.079)	0.028*** (1.345)	7.001* (1.115)	3.024 (1.010)
N	925			
Log Likelihood	-288.410			
AIC	616.820	1,799.818	1,799.818	1,799.818

* p < .1; ** p < .05; *** p < .01

Table 5- Model for turnout (4.2) and vote choice (5.2) for the 2013 general election in Italy, with interaction term between perceived precarity and economic hardship. Coefficients displayed as odds-ratios. Reference categories in parentheses. Extension of the original analysis.

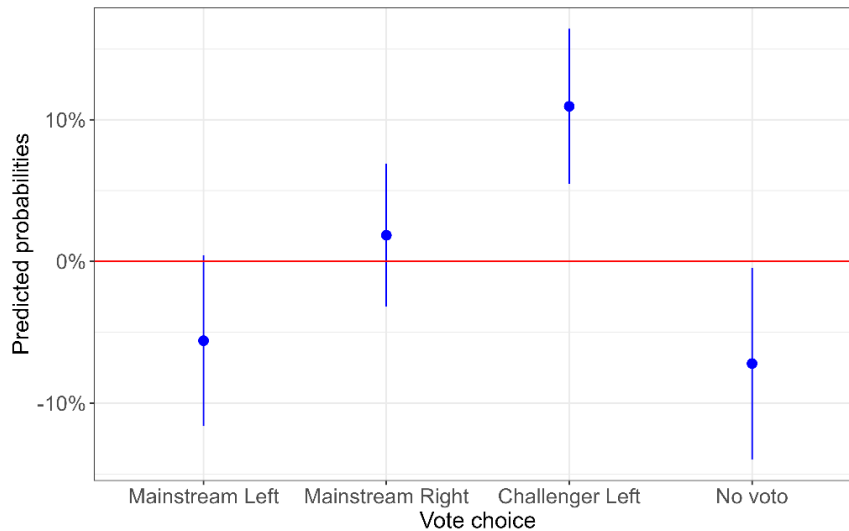


Figure 3 - Change in the predicted probability of voting for each party family, associated with a shift from financial ease to financial hardship, whit 95% CI. Part of the extension on the original analysis

8. Conclusions

This replication study set out to evaluate the core claims of Girardi (2023) regarding the relationship between perceived labor market precarity and voting behavior in Italy’s 2018 general election. Building on the theoretical foundations of the insider–outsider model (Rueda, 2005; Lindvall & Rueda, 2013) and the dual mechanism proposed by Antonucci et al. (2021), this study tested the robustness of Girardi’s conclusions and extended the analysis to the 2013 election, to examine whether the relationship between labor market insecurity and voting behavior was already visible prior to the full implementation of structural labor reforms, or whether, as Girardi posits, the political importance of precarity became more prevalent in later stages of labor market reforms.

The results of the 2018 replication confirm the original findings: perceived precarity significantly increases the probability of voting for challenger parties -especially for the *Movimento 5 Stelle* (M5S)- and significantly decreases the probability of supporting the mainstream left (*Partito Democratico*). This supports Hypotheses 1 and 2 of the original paper and is consistent with the instrumental mechanism described by Antonucci et al. (2021), whereby precarious voters are not merely driven by symbolic discontent but respond to parties that promise substantive change in their labor market conditions. M5S’s broader anti-precarity rhetoric plausibly served as a focal point for voters experiencing insecurity. In contrast, the mainstream left, being the promoter of the second wave of labor market liberalization reforms, was penalized by precisely those workers it historically represented. Notably, precarious workers did not indiscriminately support any challenger. There was no statistically significant relationship between precarity and support for right-wing challengers such as the *Lega* or *Fratelli d’Italia*, suggesting that instrumental concerns about labor policy—rather than generalized anti-establishment sentiment alone—drove vote choices. This asymmetry reinforces the theoretical claim that while symbolic disaffection may benefit all challengers, only parties that credibly advocate for precarious groups are rewarded by them at the polls.

When extended to the 2013 election, however, the model performs differently. Precarity was not a statistically significant predictor of voting for M5S (rejecting hypotheses 1.1 and 2.1). Rather,

economic hardship -measured as financial distress over the span of a year- emerged as the main factor increasing support for the M5S. This pattern suggests that, in 2013, during the initial phase of Italy's labor market liberalization and in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis, the insider–outsider framework remained partly intact, though it was beginning to evolve toward the precarity-based logic described in Girardi (2023). Permanently employed voters, still considered labor market insiders, appeared to consolidate support for the mainstream left (*Partito Democratico*), likely as a reaction to the perceived threat posed by Monti's 2012 reforms. At the same time, and in contrast to what the classic insider–outsider model might predict, being unemployed or atypically employed did not significantly increase the likelihood of supporting the M5S. Rather than formal labor market status, it was a broader sense of economic vulnerability that mobilized support for challenger parties. This indicates that outsider status in the 2013 context was less about contractual position and more about subjective financial insecurity. In this sense, the cleavage between insiders and outsiders began to shift from a structural to a perceptual basis, setting the stage for the rise of generalized precarity in 2018 as a significant factor for the consolidation of challenger parties.

In sum, this replication corroborates the hypothesis proposed by the author that the rise of generalized precarity, rather than formal employment status or hardship alone, played a significant role in shaping electoral behavior in Italy for the 2018 elections. The evidence aligns with broader theoretical expectations that in contexts of eroded labor protections and mainstream convergence on liberalization, precarious voters will gravitate toward parties that represent their interests both symbolically and materially.

8.1 Limitations of the study

The major limitation of the analysis I propose is, of course, the difference in the dependent variable. The results found, even though statistically significant, are limited to the sole case of challenger left, not having enough data to validate the model on the challenger right. Maintaining high fidelity to the original model was my main priority, constraining my analysis on the available ITANES datasets. The use of different datasets (where and when possible) is encouraged in two ways: first, for the possibility of larger samples and the potential possibility to corroborate the model also on a subset of voters who aligned themselves with challenger right parties, second, to test the overall validity of the model (both 2013 and 2018).

Furthermore, the study focused specifically on the 2013 election, which can be seen as a transitional moment between the early stages of insider protection erosions and the more extensive liberalization enacted by the Jobs Act in 2015. For a more comprehensive understanding of how perceived precarity has shaped the Italian electoral behavior, applying the precarity model to more recent elections (such as the 2022 general election) would be highly valuable.

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