

Political orientations in times of crisis in Italy: the consequences of job precariousness*

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Abstract

This paper explores the role played by job precariousness on political orientations. More specifically, this paper examines whether job precariousness could represent a new political cleavage in the Italian society, such to substitute the declining traditional ones (territory, class, religion). Our results showed that job precariousness cannot be considered a new cleavage that has substituted the traditional ones, but indeed it is an increasing social division exerting a significant impact on political orientations. Furthermore, we showed a role played by mass media in transforming job insecurity in a widespread and collective problem, increasing its explicative power on political attitudes through a sort of “salience effect”. We also found that the relation between job precariousness and political orientations is significantly influenced by territory and class. Findings and implications are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Our research is aimed at studying the role played by labour market precariousness on political orientations in Italy. The impact of global financial crisis on Western world since September 2008 has produced an increase in labour market precariousness associated with a subjective sense of insecurity in a large number of people. For example, in Italy between 2008 and 2009 gross national product fell six percentage points and the unemployment rate reached 8,6% in 2010.

A particularly serious aspect of the problem concerns the existential consequences elicited by job insecurity: people find themselves in a social condition deeply affecting and transforming the whole domain of their everyday life. For this reason, it seems plausible that a state of economical crisis may extend its influence well beyond the economic domain, affecting social attitudes underlying political orientations. In this line of reasoning, an interesting question arises as to *whether job precariousness is becoming a new political cleavage in the Italian society at the beginning of the xxi century*.

As recently noted, the Italian labour market can be considered one of the most flexible in Europe with some forty fixed-term contract types available (Fumagalli 2006). The process of labour market deregulation began at the legislative level in the 1980s as a means to ensure flexibility and to lower the high unemployment rate; however, these transformations led to a broader diffusion of precarious work, particularly among weaker social categories as youngsters, women and migrants (Choi and Mattoni 2010, Barbieri and Scherer 2009).

To this process of increasing flexibility, which started long time ago, we must add the consequences of the recent economic crisis. It assumed, following the Oecd report (Oecd 2010) a threefold face: *a)* part-time jobs have increased by about 10% in 2009, largely driven by workers accepting to work part-time because they could not find a full-time job; *b)* the workers benefited by the *cassa integrazione guadagni* (state subsidies for employees affected by temporary lay-offs or under a forced reduction of working hours) showed the rise of 26% in the first quarter of 2010, in contrast to most other countries (such as Germany and France) where subsidized hours stabilized or started declining already in the third quarter of 2009; *c)* severe job losses occurred among permanent employees (195,000 permanent jobs have been destroyed in the 2009 up to first quarter of 2010).

Even if it doesn't cause direct job losses, the economic crisis can have a wider impact on the lives of workers "at risk": the mere presence of work insecurity can have adverse effects on the health of workers, in addition to those of unemployment (Ferrie et al. 2002). Job insecurity is indeed a well-established concept in economics, psychology and sociology as the individual fear of job loss (De Witte 1999, Hartley et al. 1991, Gallie et al. 1994). Besides stating the negative consequences at the macroeconomic level and high levels of inflation, the social science literature shows that economic crises can lead to an unexpected change in a person's life.

Social psychologists pointed out that the problems related to a precarious working status may affect psychological well-being (for a review, see De Cuyper et al. 2008): job insecurity and job loss can lead to negative emotions such as stress, anxiety and anger (Greenglass and Burke 2001), loss of self-esteem (Baum et al. 1986) or depression (Warr 1984). It was stressed that job insecurity can harm not only individual well-being, but also health status (Kim 2003). Physiologically, the negative effects of a state of unemployment have been well documented: the mortality percentages of the unemployed have been found to be significantly higher than those of people with equivalent socio-economic status (e.g. Moser et al. 1990, Bethune 1997).

About the job precariousness consequences at a more extended social level, different opinions have been expressed. Ulrick Beck in his book "Risk society", stated that in the post-modern society "inequalities... become redefined in terms of an individualization of social risks... social problems are increasingly perceived in terms of psychological dispositions, as personal inadequacies, guilt feelings, anxieties, conflict and neuroses. Social crisis appear as individual crisis, which are no longer perceived in terms of their rootedness in the social realm" (1992, 100). The "process of

individualization deprives class distinctions of their social identity", and this tendency concerns also the working status: "they are growing gray zones between registered and unregistered unemployment as well between employment and underemployment... the culture of social classes is unable to provide a context of orientation for this...as a consequence, problems of the system are lessened politically and transformed into personal failure" (ibidem, 89).

On the contrary, it has been stated that job insecurity could develop not only personal but also social consequences (Blount 2002). Specifically, deindustrialization and globalization created new divisions which changed the preferences of the labour force, dividing them into a group of winners and a group of losers. It was claimed that this new cleavage is structurally based on a division between insiders and outsiders, or those with transferable skills and resources and those without such assets (Kriesi 1998, Kriesi 1999, Rueda 2005). Following this vision, labour market precariousness could represent a new political cleavage.

The increase of labour market precariousness may also influence the attitudes toward community and society: more in general political attitudes and civic culture. Higher rates of unemployment and job insecurity have been thought to influence mass political behavior (Anderson 2001, Mughan and Lacy 2002) and similarly public opinion about social policies (Boeri et al 2001).

Studies focused on the link between economic decline, increasing insecurity and political attitudes pointed out that in time of economic crisis people are inclined to turn their backs to democracy (Bermeo 2003): it has been argued that "economic crisis *represents one of the most common threats to democratic stability*" (Diamond and Linz 1989, 17).

At the same time, it was stressed that one of the most widespread consequences of unemployment is dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy (Baxandall 2001); recently, some studies showed that economic crises may affect peoples' confidence in political institutions (Ross and Escobar-Lemmon 2009) and lead to anti-democratic consequences (Cordova and Seligson 2009, Graham and Sukhtankar 2004).

Actually the more relevant results on political consequences of labour market precariousness in terms of democratic instability refer to two principal political attitudes: political involvement and ideological orientation.

2. Political alienation and ideological orientation

2.1. Political alienation

One of the most extensively asserted relations in the social sciences – both in theoretical and empirical terms – is the correlation between social and political marginality, in the sense that "persons near the centre of society are more likely to participate in politics than persons near the periphery" (Milbraith and Goel 1977, 89). Yet in his seminal work, "Political man" (1960), Seymour Lipset argued that "patterns of voting participation are strikingly the same in various countries:... men vote more than women; the better educated more than the less educated; urban residents more than rural; those between 35 and 55 more than younger or older voters; married persons more than unmarried; higher-status persons more than lower; member of organizations more than non members" (ibidem, 287). In the USA and Europe, a countless number of empirical studies validated empirically the correlation between social marginality and low political participation (among others, Verba et al. 1978, Parry et al. 1992, Verba et al 1995, Solt 2008). This relation has been investigated also in the context of the marginality in the labour market.

Probably the first empirical evidence confirming the existence of a relation between unemployment and political alienation is the "Marienthal study" conducted in the 1930s, in which Jahoda et al. (1972) showed that the unemployed had lower political interest and political participation than employed. The study pointed out that unemployed lose their perception of self-efficacy and perceive themselves as not able to decide about their own lives. Accordingly, subsequent studies replicated these results in many countries, showing that political alienation is

more frequent among the unemployed than among workers (e.g. Anderson 2001, Scholzman and Verba 1979, Scott and Acock 1979). Scott and Acock also argued that the socioeconomic status may intensify the effect of unemployment on participation: the unemployed of lower socioeconomic status were less likely to participate than those of higher status.

However, further studies pointed out that the relationship between unemployment and political activity is not so clear and that it is not evident that unemployment status always leads to political alienation (e.g., Clark 1985, De Witte 1992). Anderson (2001) showed that the relationship between unemployment and alienation presented important cross-national differences; for example, in some countries, like Italy, he found unemployed to vote more than employed.

Additionally, consistent evidence suggested that the relationship between working status and political participation can be indirect, indicating that the impact on political variables is determined by antecedent factors, related to the social and socio-economic status. For example, Gallego (2007) showed that education and social class are better predictors of participation; additionally, the results of his study indicated that the exclusion from labour market lacks predictive power when education, income and social class are controlled for.

At the same time, the significant role played by the social context on the negative effects of unemployment has been stressed, confirming the “*social norm of unemployment*” (Clark 2003). According to this interpretation, the personal frustration induced by unemployment is lower when unemployment rates are higher in the social surrounding context (e.g., Shields et al. 2009; Powdthavee 2007). We must add that, with some exceptions, the literature we reviewed treated only the influence of unemployment on political involvement, failing to investigate the possible consequences of a precarious working status. One of the exceptions is represented by Polavieja (1999), which stated that a precarious working status can have a direct impact on the decision to abstain, especially in cases where ideological positions are more extreme.

2.2 Ideological orientation

According to the previous research, ideological orientation is another political attitude that may be influenced by working status. However, on the relation between working status and ideological orientation the literature shows the presence of two contrasting theses.

Consistent with the partisan voting theory, the first thesis states that there is significant empirical evidence indicating that workers in unfavourable position in the labour market (unemployed and temporary workers) tend to vote for left parties (e.g., Alesina and Roubini 1997, Chapell and Keech 1988, Hibbs 1979). In general, voters more concerned about work and unemployment tend to ideologically prefer those parties able to promote the employment and workers’ protection (usually left parties), whereas the voters that evaluate as more important the policies centred on maintenance of price stability and low inflation tend to vote for right-wing parties (Hibbs 1979). Additionally, it has been shown that, during a period of economic recession, the increasing interest for the employment issue and the rising salience of unemployment may have as a consequence a generalized shift towards left parties, also by voters not personally hit by economic crisis (Kwon 2008).

However, the positive relationship between job precariousness and vote towards left-wing parties is not completely clear. Whereas it was shown that unemployment salience favours the electoral rise of left parties (Kwon 2008), it has also been found that voters tend to punish left incumbents when unemployment increases, above all if they are considered responsible of the economic situation (Powell and Whitten 1993). Moreover, contrary to expectations, in periods of mass unemployment the social democratic parties may have electoral performances more negative than conservative parties (Visser and Wijnhoven 1990). Actually, when dualization of labour market between insider and outsider is particularly strong, the social democratic governments tend to show high ambivalence and to favour in their policies insiders rather than outsiders (Rueda 2005).

The second thesis about the relationship between working status and ideological orientation, stressed that people in a marginal position in the labour market show more frequently right ideological positions. One of most well-known theories linked to this perspective is the theory regarding the “losers of modernization” (Betz 1994). During the transition to a post-industrial society, the labour market in an area of globalization has both winners and losers; the unemployed can be regarded as losers. According to this theory, the losers are those who do not fulfil the demands from the labour market and they risk to become economically, socially and culturally marginalized. The radical right parties have a special appeal to those losers of modernization in general, and to unemployed specifically (Bjorklund 2007). Consistently, Mughan et al. (2003) showed that perceived job insecurity is related to the popular support for right parties; in a period of economic globalization, job insecurity may play an important role in explaining the rise of right-wing populism (Mughan, Bean and McAllister 2003). At the same time, Jackman and Volpert (1996) found that unemployment was positively related to the electoral success of extreme right in European elections.

However, the results are not completely clear and consistent within the literature that stresses that unemployment or job precariousness tend to orient toward right parties. Contrary to the expectations, it was found a negative, rather than positive, association between the growth in unemployment and support for right-wing extremism (Knigge 1998). The growth of the radical right seems to find a more fertile soil when the employment rate is high: when unemployment issue is removed from the political agenda, a political space can be opened for questions like immigration, or more generally issues related to the socio-cultural cleavages (Bjorklund 2007). Another explanation refers to the fact that, in times of high unemployment, voters abandon the minor parties, less established within the existing political landscape (Arzheimer and Carter 2006); on the contrary, in times of economic prosperity, voters would be more willing to implement new electoral choices, choosing the “anti-establishment” parties, such as those of the extreme right.

For their importance in respect to stability of the democracy, political alienation and ideological orientation are the two fundamental dimensions in relation to which we studied the effects of job precariousness in the following sections.

3. Hypotheses

3.1 Job precariousness as a new political cleavage

Building on this empirical evidence, the first goal of our paper is to explore job precariousness in its capacity to shape political attitudes, in comparison with traditional cleavages of Italian politics

It is well known that Rokkan (1970) stated the existence of four “critical lines of fracture” findable in the history of each Western country, and precisely: a) center and periphery, b) State and Church, c) agriculture and industry, d) employers and workers – the first two produced in the making of a nation (“national revolution”) and the two last ones caused by industrialization processes (“industrial revolution”). In Italy, the second and fourth ones turned into political divisions, i.e. *religious* and *class* division, and gave rise to four political parties: the religious fracture produced the Popular Party (“Partito Popolare”), and then, after WWII, the Christian Democrats (“Democrazia Cristiana”); the class fracture gave way to the Socialist Party first and thereafter to the Communist Party.

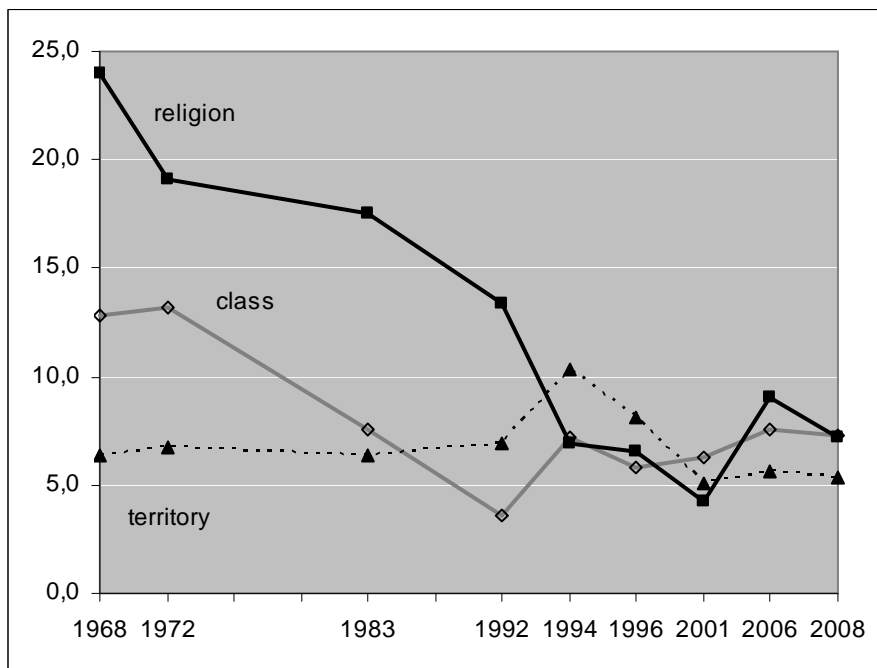
However, in order to investigate political culture in Italy, scholars considered also a third division with a *territorial* basis. On one side, this was the result of territorial overlapping and reciprocal reinforcement between religious and class divisions¹. On the other side, it stemmed from

¹ Due to the existence – in the ‘800-’900s – of regions characterized by an agricultural economy based on waged hand-labour and at the same time marked by a sharp State-Church conflict (we’re talking about those regions belonging to the former Papal State); and by regions marked by strong Catholic cultural traditions, and economically identified by small-scale land ownership and farming.

the traditional economic split between North and South². On these bases and in agreement with research work carried out by the 'Istituto Cattaneo' in the '60s, political scientists traditionally subdivided Italy into four territorial areas, each of them characterized by a different political culture: the industrial triangle, the "white" zone, the "red" zone, and the South.

As in all countries of the Western world, in Italy these traditional cleavages lost a considerable part of their relevance in shaping citizens' political attitudes in the last decades (among the others, see Rose e McAllister 1986, Kornhauser 1960, Touraine 1981, Lipset 1981, Bauman 2001). The figure 1 reports the decline of their influence on the vote over a period of 40 years, as it emerged from nine political elections from 1968 up to the last one held in 2008.

Fig. 1. Time series of the indexes³ of influence on the vote by religion, social class, and territory in Italy (Corbetta and Cavazza 2009).



In the present paper we examine whether, in times of crisis, political orientations could be better explained in a model including job precariousness in addition to traditional cleavages. According to many authors (among which we mentioned Kriesi et al. 1998, Kriesi 1999, Rueda 2005) job precariousness should be considered a new political cleavage:

HP1a Work precariousness can be considered a new political cleavage (in addition or substitution to the traditional ones) and differences between stable and unemployed or precarious workers significantly affect political attitudes

In particular, as far as political involvement is concerned, previous research suggested the following expectation:

HP 1a.1 Work precariousness should increase distrust of, and estrangement from, the political system, lowering political participation and interest toward politics

² A developed North that in the years '800-'900s was exposed to the winds of innovation coming from Europe and powered by a strong industrialization, and that of a backward South, static and economically marginal.

³ The measures of association between vote and cleavages are based on the average deviation of the categories voting percentages for the centre-right parties, having dichotomized the vote and normalized the percentages controlling for the other socio-demographic variables.

With regard to ideological orientation, previous research does not indicate univocal conclusions; consequently we have to test two competing hypotheses:

HP1a.2 Workers in unfavourable position in the labour market (unemployed and temporary workers) tend to be more left-oriented and to vote parties more sensitive to the employment and workers' protection issues (usually the left parties)

HP1a.3 Persons in a marginal position in the labour market are more oriented toward the right side of the political spectrum; in a period of economic globalization, job insecurity may play an important role in explaining the rise of right-wing parties

However, according to Ulrich Beck analysis, marginalised persons in the labour market live their experience in an individualistic way, in terms of a personal failure, and this prevent them from being aware of the social nature of their condition and from sharing a common fate with individuals in the same condition. Thus, we should expect the opposite:

HP1b. Work precariousness should not influence in a systematic way political attitudes

3.2. The effect of crisis salience

Some studies on the political consequences of a period of economic crisis (e.g., Remmer 1991, Davis and Langley 1995, Turner and Carballo 2005, Hayo 2005) showed that job insecurity, uncertainty regarding the future, pressure of competing in the flexible segment of the labour market, may become politically relevant only when the issue is salient in the public opinion (Kwon 2008). The increasing salience of unemployment issue, usual during a recession time, may increase the explanatory role of job precariousness, intensifying the differences between those experiencing negative and insecure work conditions (as temporary workers and unemployed) and those occupying permanent working positions.

This research line suggested that the influence of the economic crisis on political attitudes can be different according to the degree of “collective awareness” about the crisis: if the economic crisis is not in the media agenda, the personal uneasiness of people experiencing job difficulties can be repressed and interpreted as a personal failure (according to the interpretation of Ulrich Beck previously mentioned). In this case we expect weak or null influence of working status on political attitudes.

However, when the widespread crisis becomes salient and it is frequently discussed in the mass media, it becomes a topic of conversation among people in their everyday life. In these conditions, for marginalized workers it is easier to interpret their own situation as a collective problem, and the job precariousness could become a source of collective identification, influencing “systematically” political orientations.

In our recent past, a critical event may be detected as a starting point for the increasing salience of the existence of crisis: September, the 15th, 2008, the date of Lehman Brothers bankruptcy. We assumed this episode as the formal date in which the crisis became salient in the public opinion. From these considerations, we formulated the following hypothesis:

HP2 The salience of employment issue, generated by “collective awareness” of the existence of the crisis, has a moderating role on the relationship between individual job precariousness and political orientations: we expected to find political differences among permanent workers, temporary workers and unemployed magnified after September, the 15th, 2008.

3.3 Job insecurity and the traditional cleavages

We further aimed to explore whether traditional cleavage - territory, class and religion - moderate the effect of work precariousness on political attitudes. Indeed, to live in a specific territory, to be placed into a social class or to belong to a religious community could be able to determine resources availability through which individuals face their difficult situation and build the representation of political responsibilities. At the best of our knowledge, this specific issue still remains widely unexplored, thus we have adopted an explorative approach.

Job insecurity and territory

We hypothesized that job insecurity plays a different role in the North and in the South of Italy. In particular we expected to find in the South a weaker effect of job insecurity on political attitudes, because of what has been called “the unemployment social norm” (Clark 2003): in the South, job insecurity is so widespread in space and so continuous in time to become more “normative” than in the North, where it is a quite exceptional event. Southern people, being more familiar with job precariousness, should manifest less reaction to it and should be less prone to translate it into political orientations. So we expected that:

HP3.1 The impact of job precariousness on political attitudes is greater in the North than in the South

Job insecurity and class

We expected social class to moderate the effect of job insecurity; specifically, we expected a stronger effect among white collars than among blue collars, for two reasons. First, white collars experience a greater status inconsistency due to their high job expectations in contrast to low job positions, and this should enhance the effect of job precariousness on political attitudes. Second, among the Italian working class, the leftist ideological traditions (communist and socialist) never really vanished, the strength of the trade unions still now very engaged in the struggle against unemployment, so they could act as antidotes against the poisons of political cynicism and the right’ appeal. So we expected that:

HP3.2 The impact of job precariousness on political attitudes is greater among white collars than among blue collars

Job insecurity and religion

In Italy, religion is still an important factor in shaping the political attitudes. In general, religion is a source of social capital, and in Italy empirical evidence showed that religious people tend to have higher levels of interpersonal trust and civicness than non-religious ones (Cartocci 2002, Garelli 2011). On this basis, very religious people – above all if belonging to religious groups or communities, or frequently attending parish activities – should be less influenced by the political effects of job insecurity, since the religious community offers them psychological (and sometimes material) support, and it represents a sort of rescue network, protecting them from isolation and individualization, as mentioned by Ulrich Beck. For this reason, we expected that:

HP3.3 The impact of job insecurity among religious people is weaker among religious people as compared to non-religious people.

4. Data and method

4.1 Sample

One of the main problems in this kind of research is represented by the sample size. In order to have a sizeable number of unemployed and fixed-term workers we needed to interview a very large sample. Traditional surveys on political attitudes, like the ones regularly conducted in Italy by the Itanes (Italian National Election Studies) group, are insufficient for our purposes. For instance, in the 2008 Itanes survey, based on a sample of 3000 respondents (total population, not only workers) only 137 (4,2%) have been classified as unemployed and 60 (2,0%) as temporary employed. Thus, from this kind of data it would be impossible to carry out a deep analysis of our topic. For this reason we looked for some existing data set suitable for our purposes, and we managed to obtain some waves of data from the society Ipsos, a big marketing society which, among its activities, carries out the program “Polimetro”, consisting on weekly surveys (telephone interviewing) aimed to monitor the political climate of the nation, with questions on vote intentions, trust in the leaders and parties, judgments on government and opposition.

Our basic sample consists of three of these waves, carried out in the midst of economic crisis (in the periods April-July 2009; September-December 2009; January-March 2010)), for a total of 45,186 cases (as we'll see later, for comparison purposes we'll use also a forth wave of 11,832 people interviewed before the economic crisis, for a specific hypothesis we'll illustrate later).

It should be noted that our study was conducted in a period of time in which the nation was permanently governed by centre-right coalition led by Berlusconi: from this point of view, no change in the political colour of the government – a potential source of alteration over time of our data - has occurred during our research.

4.2 Variables

Independent variables

Our basic independent variable is worker position in the labour market, with special reference to her/his relation with job security / insecurity. We called this variable *working status* and we classified it in three categories:

- *regular workers*, e.g. people with a job contract without an expiry date;
- *temporary (contract) workers*, e.g. people hired for a fixed period of time or for a specific project that will end at some projected date;
- *unemployed*, e.g. people without a job because they have lost their previous job⁴

The first category can easily be ascribed to stable, secure work, with all the benefits granted by the modern welfare state; while the second and the third ones pertain to area of work precariousness. Certainly there are clear differences between secure and precarious jobs. But we don't want to overlook the differences between the two expressions of work precariousness.

We'll conduct our analysis only on employees, i.e. people working for an employer, either public or private, excluding from our analysis the self employed people, because our data do not allow distinguishing a stable, secure and well paid job from a very precarious one.

In sum, the 45,186 people in the databases were distributed with reference to their position in the labour market as depicted in table 1. Our analysis included the three categories in bold character, for a total of 15,556 people.

⁴ Among unemployed we included person with “cassa integrazione guadagni”, i.e. workers benefiting state subsidies for employees affected by temporary lay-offs or under a forced reduction of working hours. While we have excluded from the analysis people in search of first job, since their social and psychological status make them very different from people that have lost their job.

Table 1. Position in the labour market

Working people 18347	self employed 5185		Subsample analyzed
	employees 13162	regular workers 11637	regular workers 11637 (74.8%)
		temporary workers 1525	temporary workers 1525 (9.8%)
Non working people 26839	unemployed 2394		unemployed 2394 (15.4%)
	inactive 24445		
Total 45186			total 15556

Besides the position in the labour market, we included in the models as independent variables indicators of historical political *cleavages* in the Italian society. As specified in the previous section, they are territory, class and religion, and their categories and distributions are represented in table 2.

Table 2. Territory, class and religion in the analyzed sample

Territory	%	Class	%	Religious practice	%
North-west	26.3	White collars	68,4	Every week	26.3
North-east	12.3	Blue collars	31,6	Sometimes in the month	22.0
Center	18.1			Sometimes in the year	25.9
South	43.3			Never	25.8
Total	100	Total	100	Total	100
(N)	(15556)	(N)	(14706)	(N)	(15556)

Moreover, we added in the regression models sex (50.2% of female) and age (mean 43 years), as control variables.

Dependent variables

As we have already said, the two political constructs were studied are: political involvement and ideological orientation. Each of them has been operationalized through two variables.

Political involvement has been measured through:

- intention to vote / abstain in the next elections
- interest toward politics (scale 1-10, normalized to 0...1 in the analyses)

Ideological orientation has been measured through:

- party preferred (intention to vote in the next elections), dichotomized in center-left / center-right area (we will refer to them as “left / right”)
- self –placement in the left-right scale (scale 1-7, normalized to 0...1 in the analyses)

5. Results

5.1 Job insecurity as a new political cleavage

Firstly, we explored the extent to which the labour market precariousness may be considered a new political cleavage in the Italian society. In the section 3, two theoretically guided hypotheses were formulated.

HP1a: Work precariousness is a new political cleavage: the job security / insecurity influences workers political attitudes and this influence may be stronger than those exerted by traditional cleavages like territory, class and religion.

HP1b: Work precariousness cannot become a political cleavage because of its intrinsic individuality: unemployment or job precariousness are interpreted by people affected by these situations as personal failures, and they do not function as a mechanism of social or political aggregation.

In order to test these hypotheses, we constructed regression models with political attitudes as dependent variables, and the three political cleavages (territory, class and religion) plus working status as independent. Table 3 and 4 show the results of fitting the regression models to the political involvement and ideological orientation.

First at all, we note that both the models had R^2 value quite low and this result can be connected to the general consideration we advanced above, about the progressive weakening of the influence exerted by structural cleavages on political attitudes.

Table 3. Political involvement

	Abstentionism 0=vote / 1=abstention		Political interest 0....1	
	Logistic regression		Linear regression	
	B	Sig.	B	Sig.
Territory				
South (ref.)				
North-west	-.213	.009	.011	.058
North-east	-.488	.000	.015	.040
Center	-.408	.000	.005	.469
Class				
White collars (ref.)				
Blue collars	.268	.000	-.091	.000
Religion				
Never (ref.)				
Every week	-.313	.001	-.019	.003
Sometimes in the month	-.366	.000	-.035	.000
Sometimes in the year	-.331	.000	-.028	.000
Working status				
Regular workers (ref)				
Temporary workers	.054	.627	.008	.278
Unemployed	.196	.025	-.014	.030
R^2	.018	.086	.037	.031
N of cases	9004		14281	

The model includes age and sex as control variables.

The B coefficients are unstandardized. R^2 in the logistic regression is Nagelkerke index.

As regard to political involvement (table 3), class and religion still have a significant influence on both the variables considered, while the impact of work precariousness is significant only for the unemployed.

As far as ideological orientation is concerned (table 4), again the traditional cleavages influences are stronger than work precariousness. However, this variable still showed an influence on political attitudes: compared with regular workers, unemployed are strongly more right-leaning, while temporary workers are marginally more leftist.

Table 4. Ideological orientation

	Party preferred 0=Left / 1=Right		Left-right scale self-placement 0 ... 1	
	Logistic regression		Linear regression	
	B	Sig.	B	Sig.
Territory				
South (ref.)				
North-west	.241	.028	.013	.015
North-east	.337	.020	.032	.000
Center	-.353	.000	-.041	.000
Class				
White collars (ref.)				
Blue collars	.531	.000	.047	.000
Religion				
Never (ref.)				
Every week	1.040	.000	.113	.000
Sometimes in the month	1.083	.000	.116	.000
Sometimes in the year	.722	.000	.094	.000
Working status				
Regular workers (ref)				
Temporary workers	-.123	.132	-.013	.071
Unemployed	.219	.001	.028	.000
R ²	.109	.001	.081	.000
N of cases	7733		12341	

The model includes also age and sex as control variables

The B coefficients are unstandardized. R² in the logistic regression is Nagelkerke index.

On the basis of these results, we need to reject HP1a in its extreme formulation, e.g. work precariousness is a new cleavage that has substituted the traditional ones. However, we cannot completely embrace the HP1b, about political irrelevance of job insecurity. In fact, this variable shows a significant influence on political attitudes even if basically weaker than traditional cleavages.

Since work precariousness had a significant influence into political attitudes, it is important to stress the characteristics of this influence. As pointed out earlier in section 3, we expected an effect of political alienation induced by a state of work precariousness (HP1a.1); while we were not able to hypothesize a clear effect in term of ideological direction, and we formulated the two competing hypotheses: precariousness could orient voters to the left (HP1a.2) or to the right side of the political spectrum (HP1a.3).

It should be noted that in this first theoretical approach we did not specify any distinction between unemployed and temporary workers. Our approach was exploratory, since we did not have any particular expectation about political similarity or dissimilarity between unemployed and temporary workers. Actually we found in the results a noticeable difference between these two groups, and temporary workers and unemployed showed different political attitudes.

In summary, our results with regard to the political effect of work precariousness are the following:

As expected, unemployed were found more politically alienated than regular workers. On the contrary, temporary workers did not significantly differ from regular workers.

With regard to ideological orientation we found that unemployed were clearly more right-oriented than workers with a stable job, while – always in comparison with regular workers – temporary workers are more left-oriented.

5.2 The effect of crisis salience

We advanced the hypothesis (HP2) that time and space devoted to the economic crisis by the media after September, the 15th, 2008 (Lehman Brothers bankruptcy) induced a collective awareness in public opinion about the existence of serious problems on labour market, enhancing personal job insecurity effect on political attitudes. To test this hypothesis we compared two sub-samples in our data: the first wave of interviews collected after September 15, 2008 with the last one collected before this date⁵. In order to test the hypothesis, regressions have been fitted to the data in two steps: in the first we inserted the working status and the “time” (pre and post crisis)⁶ as independent variables; in the second step, we added the interaction terms between the variable “time” and the working status. The results of this analysis are reported in table 5 and 6.

Table 5. Political involvement and interaction with time

	Abstentionism 0=vote / 1=abstention				Political interest 0....1			
	Logistic regression				Linear regression			
	Step I		Step II		Step I		Step II	
	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.
Working status								
Ref. = Regular workers								
Temporary workers	-.038	.792	.101	.631	.015	.100	.012	.700
Unemployed	.274	.017	.104	.623	-.045	.000	-.010	.725
Time*	.506	.000	.497	.000	-.021	.000	-.019	.003
Working status by Time								
Ref. = Regular workers by Time								
Temporary workers by Time			-.246	.381			.002	.897
Unemployed by Time			.245	.331			-.021	.228
R ² **		.015		.015		.018		.018
N of cases	6943				9953			

* Time: 0 = pre crisis / 1=post crisis

**Nagelkerke for logistic regression

B = unstandardized coefficients; variables in the model: age, sex, fix, unem, time, fix*time, unem*time

⁵ The wave collected before September the 15th was not included in the sample analyzed in the previous section and in the following, since our research was basically conducted on data gathered in the midst of the crisis, i.e. after September the 15th. Only for this particular comparison we used data collected before September the 15th. We have chosen to compare the wave pre-crisis with only the first post-crisis wave in order to compare two surveys at minimum time distance, since with the passing of time many other variables change and the comparison becomes more problematic. Moreover sample of similar size are best comparable in terms of standard error and significance.

⁶ Plus, as control variables, sex and age.

Table 6. Ideological orientation and interaction with time

	Party preferred 0=Left / 1=Right				Left-right scale self-placement 0 ... 1			
	Logistic regression				Linear regression			
	Step I		Step II		Step I		Step II	
	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.
Working status								
Ref. = Regular workers								
Temporary workers	-.121	.166	.081	.499	-.012	.160	.064	.026
Unemployed	.410	.000	.392	.001	.053	.000	.020	.475
Time*	-.074	.153	-.033	.573	-.014	.007	-.011	.058
Working status by Time								
Ref. = Regular workers by Time								
Temporary workers by Time			-.414	.015			-.049	.005
Unemployed by Time			.026	.872			.020	.244
R ² **		.020		.021		.023		.024
N of cases		6.095				8.453		

* Time: 0 = pre crisis / 1=post crisis

**Nagelkerke for logistic regression

B = unstandardized coefficients; variables in the model: age, sex, fix, unem, time, fix*time, unem*time

As far as political involvement is concerned, both variables, i.e. electoral abstention and political interest, were significantly influenced by the “time” of data collection: intention of not voting and disillusion toward politics are grown with the salience of the economic crisis. But the interaction terms between “time” and job insecurity did not reach significance: political alienation increased strongly and in similar way in all workers categories.

As shown in table 6, results were quite different about the ideological orientation: the interaction terms were significant in the case of temporary workers. The time elapsed from the pre crisis to the post crisis introduced political differences between regular and temporary workers. In particular, analyzing in more detail the data⁷, we see that in pre crisis time regular and temporary workers were ideologically indistinguishable, while in post crisis the temporary workers showed a pronounced displacement toward the left on the political spectrum.

Our expectations about the “salience effect” are partially confirmed. After September, the 15th, 2008 we found temporary workers more oriented towards left than regular workers, while this difference was nonexistent before this date. Nevertheless this “salience effect” is not visible on the indicators of political involvement⁸

5.3 Job insecurity and traditional cleavages

5.3.1 Job insecurity and territory

We hypothesized that job insecurity could play a different role in the Northern and Southern regions, and we expected to find in the South a weaker effect of job insecurity on political attitudes (HP3.1), because of what we called “the unemployment social norm”: job insecurity is almost commonplace in the South and its negative effects on citizens well-being, and consequently on their political attitudes, are muffled.

⁷ That means computing regression b coefficient separately for dataset pre and post crisis.

⁸ We stress that, with the salience of the crisis, the political disillusion grew for all the workers categories, but grew in the same way for all categories.

We carried out four regression models fitted to the four political attitudes. In the first step, we inserted working status and the territory as predictors; in a second step, we added the interaction term between territory and working status. The results are presented in table 7 and 8.

Table 7. Political involvement and interaction with territory

	Abstentionism 0=vote / 1=abstention				Political interest 0....1			
	Logistic regression				Linear regression			
	Step I		Step II		Step I		Step II	
	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.
Working status								
Ref. = Regular workers								
Temporary workers	.111	.306	-.084	.604	-.003	.681	.020	.056
Unemployed	.312	.000	.086	.529	-.047	.000	-.032	.001
Territory (North-South)	.257	.000	.144	.062	-.001	.817	.009	.097
Working status by Territory								
Ref. = Regular workers by Territory								
Temporary workers by Territory			.380	.074			-.050	.001
Unemployed by Territory			.392	.024			-.030	.019
R ² **		.009		.011		.015		.016
N of cases		9.530				15.116		

* Territory 0 = North / 1= South

**Nagelkerke for logistic regression

B = unstandardized coefficients; variables in the model: age, sex, fix, unem, territory, fix*territory, unem*territory

Table 8. Ideological orientation and interaction with territory

	Party preferred 0=Left / 1=Right				Left-right scale self placement 0 ... 1			
	Logistic regression				Linear regression			
	Step I		Step II		Step I		Step II	
	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.
Working status								
Ref. = Regular workers								
Temporary workers	-.119	.127	-.097	.358	-.015	.032	-.031	.002
Unemployed	.328	.000	.238	.010	.039	.000	.028	.001
Territory (North-South)	-.031	.498	-.052	.317	.005	.200	-.001	.842
Working status by Territory								
Ref. = Regular workers by Territory								
Temporary workers by Territory			-.040	.791			.033	.017
Unemployed by Territory			.172	.181			.020	.095
R ² **		.022		.022		.025		.025
N of cases		8.203				13.104		

* Territory 0 = North / 1= South

**Nagelkerke for logistic regression

B = unstandardized coefficients; variables in the model: age, sex, fix, unem, territory, fix*territory, unem*territory

With regard to political involvement, from table 7 we can see that the interaction term between territory and job insecurity significantly influenced both variables - abstentionism and political interest – in the same direction: moving from North to South the relationship between job insecurity and political alienation became stronger (in the South both temporary workers and unemployed were more politically alienated than regular workers).

With respect to the ideological orientation in table 8, we note that the interaction term between territory and working status was statistically significant on the left-right self placement: specifically, in the South (compared with the North) both temporary workers and unemployed were pushed to the right of political spectrum more than the regular workers.

In conclusion, territory moderated the effect of working status, but not in the hypothesized direction. We expected to find an attenuated effect in the South, while we found in South a reinforcement of the negative effects produced by the precariousness on the unemployed (more alienated and more leaned to the political right), and the disappearance of the temporary workers leftist orientation which was visible in the North⁹.

How can we interpret these results? In our view, the strongest political disillusiones in the Southern regions among unemployed and temporary workers may be attributed to the weakness of political subcultures in the South¹⁰, the greater electoral volatility, and the lower levels of party organization. From Itanes surveys it consistently appeared that in the South trust in parties, trade unions and Parliament were lower than in the North¹¹. For this reason, the resentment caused by economic difficulties could be more easily directed against political institutions. For the same reason, distrust towards all parties (leftist included) prevented temporary worker from becoming in favour of leftist parties.

5.3.2 Job insecurity and class

As we know from the general results we reported at the beginning of this section, the main effects of the job insecurity were a state of political alienation and rightist orientation for unemployed, and a leftist collocation for temporary workers. We expected class to moderate the effect of job insecurity, and specifically we expected a stronger influence of job insecurity on political attitudes among white collars than among blue collars (HP3.2).

Table 9. Political involvement and the interaction with class

	Abstentionism 0=vote / 1=abstention				Political interest 01			
	Logistic regression				Linear regression			
	Step I		Step II		Step I		Step II	
	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.
Working status								
Ref. = Regular workers								
Temporary workers	.088	.423	-.010	.943	.008	.293	.018	.061
Unemployed	.272	.002	.339	.005	-.016	.014	-.003	.700
Class (white collars/ blue collars)	.222	.002	.217	.013	-.090	.000	-.082	.000
Working status by class								
Ref. = Regular workers by class								
Temporary workers by class			.260	.236			-.029	.070
Unemployed by class			-.114	.503			-.027	.034
R ² **		.008		.008		.035		.035
N of cases		9.004				14.281		

* Class 0 = white collars / 1 = blue collar

**Nagelkerke for logistic regression

B = unstandardized coefficients; variables in the model: age, sex, fix, unem, class, fix*class, unem*class

⁹ This consequence of the interaction term on the b coefficients is more visible when we run regressions separately for North and South (data available under request).

¹⁰ In Center-North we have in Italy what political scientists in the Sixties-Seventies called the “red” regions and the “white” regions, strongly characterised respectively by socialist and catholic culture. Nowadays these political connotations are much weakened; nevertheless, ideological anchorages are still more present in North than in South

¹¹ Itanes 2001 and 2008; data available on demand.

Table 10. Ideological orientation and the interaction with class

	Party preferred 0=Left / 1=Right				Left-right scale self placement 0 ... 1			
	Logistic regression				Linear regression			
	Step I		Step II		Step I		Step II	
	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.
Working status								
Ref. = Regular workers								
Temporary workers	-.144	.069	-.136	.150	-.017	.017	-.020	.023
Unemployed	.178	.007	.124	.176	.027	.000	.016	.050
Class (white collars/ blue collars)	.497	.000	.479	.000	.045	.000	.040	.000
Working status by class								
Ref. = Regular workers by class								
Temporary workers by class			-.028	.869			.008	.604
Unemployed by class			.109	.413			.022	.075
R ² **			.039	.039			.032	.032
N of cases		7.733				12.341		

* Class 0 = white collars / 1 = blue collar

**Nagelkerke for logistic regression

B = unstandardized coefficients; variables in the model: age, sex, fix, unem, class, fix*class, unem*class

The results of our analysis are presented in Table 9 and 10. Table 9 shows that class moderated the effect of job insecurity on the interest toward politics: the effect of job insecurity toward political alienation was greater among blue collars than among white collars. With respect to ideological orientation, we found an interaction effect on the left-right self placement scale: the rightist tendency of unemployed was stronger among blue collars.

In conclusion, the tendency toward political disillusion induced by job precariousness on both unemployed and temporary workers seemed stronger among blue collars, while we hypothesized that it would be greater among white collars. At the same time we found that the rightist tendency of unemployed was amplified going from white to blue collars.

5.3.3 Job insecurity and religion

In the same way we tested whether religion had a moderating role, adding in our analysis the interaction between religion and job insecurity. We expected a weaker impact of job insecurity (on political attitudes) among religious people (HP3.3). However, in our results the interaction term between religiosity and job insecurity was permanently non significant.

6. Conclusions and new directions

We started our research project wondering whether work precariousness could represent a new political cleavage in the Italian society, such to substitute or to be added to the traditional ones. We believe that this issue is important for a twofold reason: *a)* the decline, in Italy, as in the most modern societies, of the traditional social fractures that for decades have shaped the citizens political attitudes (in Italy: class, religion and territory); *b)* the recent raise of the division between people with stable and secure job and people with a precarious one, due to the processes of deregulation and greater labour market flexibility.

Our findings showed that work precariousness is indeed a social division exerting a significant impact on political attitudes, with a strength comparable to the traditional cleavages.

Importantly, we found a second result concerning the “work precariousness world”. One common thesis among labour market analysts (see Rueda 2005) is that the labour market in European societies is (and increasingly will be) split in two groups: insiders vs. outsiders. Insiders are regular workers, those with standard employment contract (full time, with a single employer, with all the social benefits provided by our social welfare - pension, health, paid holidays, maternity leave to mention a few, and the protection against unfair dismissal). Outsiders are persons without a permanent and socially protected job. With reference to the political orientations, the shared thesis is that these two groups are politically different with a certain degree of homogeneity inside.

Actually our results suggested that “outsiders” should be split in two categories: unemployed and employed with a temporary work. Indeed, we found significant political differences between these two groups. Unemployed were – in comparison with temporary workers but also with regular workers – much more exposed to political alienation and much more oriented to the right of the political spectrum. The distrust towards politics and their institutions, the sense of disillusion towards any collective action and the retiring to private life, are among the best known consequences of the unemployment, masterfully described by Jahoda et al. since the thirties of the last century in their well known Marienthal study (Jahoda et al. 1972). In the same way, we were not much surprised from finding them more oriented towards political right. Actually, this is in line with empirical evidence suggesting that the “losers of modernization” (Betz 1994) are exposed to the political proposals offered by rightist or populist parties: and in the current Italian situation, the coalition led by Berlusconi with the support of Lega Nord presents both characteristics.

However, we did not find the temporary workers to have similar political attitudes: they did not share this feeling of political alienation with unemployed; in addition they ideologically appeared as the most leftist group (slightly more leftist than regular workers). Actually this fact should not surprise us, since unemployed and temporary employed look at society, politics and the future from different positions: the formers from outside the labour market, the latter from inside even if from its margins. Unemployed have suffered an experience of downgrading, they live a state of exclusion, and they are dominated by *fear*: the fear of never finding a job. Temporary workers are at the periphery of the labour market but they can legitimately aspire to an upgrading, passing from temporary to stable job. Thus, we could imagine that the frame of their representations is not fear but *hope*

We also have to consider that in general unemployed live their condition in solitude: they do not attend factory or office, and this condition favours that “individualization of social inequality” (Beck 1992) which transforms systemic problems into personal failure. While, on the opposite, the temporary workers live a job condition that anchors them to a social network, to a collective situation, since they continuously interact with colleagues that are in their same situation: and we know that these are pre-conditions for the birth of a collective political awareness.

Furthermore, we found some conditions that “moderate” the influence of working status on political attitudes. First we explored the role played by mass media in amplifying the impact exerted by work precariousness, through a sort of “salience effect”. Before the critical event occurred on September, the 15th, 2008 (Lehman Brothers bankruptcy), people were more likely to live their insecure job position as a personal problem, and this did not translate into political reaction. After that date, media played a role of sounding board, giving people the awareness of job insecurity as a widespread and collective problem: and this intensified the political differences between those experiencing negative and insecure work conditions and those occupying stable working positions. Our data showed that, on the ideological orientation, the salience of crisis generated a shift toward the political left by the temporary workers. This was a validation – though partial – of the fact that social problems can assume political valence (or at least a greater political valence) if they are made visible by the media system, in a process that contrasts that mechanism of “singularization of the destinies” previously mentioned.

Second, territory also played a moderating role. In the Southern regions, differences in alienation level between stable and unstable workers were amplified: unemployed and temporary workers placed themselves more on the right side of the political spectrum than in the Northern regions. In our view this could be attributed to the fact that Southern citizens (as compared to Northern ones) have fewer political anchorages and less political stability, thus their political attitudes are more sensitive to the economic circumstances. For the same reason South could be a more fertile soil for populist propaganda, whose appeal has the effect of neutralizing the potential leftist tendency of temporary workers that we have seen in the North.

Third, social class exerted a moderating effect: the influence of precariousness on political attitudes was different for white and blue collars. In particular, regarding the two effects played by job insecurity:

- the tendency towards political alienation was stronger among blue collars (both for unemployed and temporary workers);
- the shift toward right among unemployed was stronger among blue collars.

In other terms, the “negative” impact of precariousness was stronger among blue than among white collars. With reference to the tendency toward political disillusion among blue collars, we speculate that trade unions and left parties are held responsible for failing to prevent the job crisis; as a consequence, the workers that are already ideologically placed on the left (mainly the blue collars) tend to develop a generalized resentment towards all parties, irrespective from their political color, and their protest becomes “exit” instead of “voice”.

Regarding the impact of job precariousness in producing a rightward shift among blue collars, we remember that in section 1 we cited the populism among the political consequences of job precariousness. Today in Italy the right offers a clear populist political proposal, which can be appealing among people with lower socio-economic and cultural status (e.g. the blue collars). This tendency can be connected to the process of continuous working class sliding to the right of the political spectrum, after the Berlusconi and Bossi (leader of the Lega Nord) entered into Italian politics (Bellucci and Segatti 2010).

These findings suggest many further directions that research on job insecurity and its political effects should undertake. First of all, new studies should better articulate and operationalize work precariousness, introducing distinctions among unemployed and persons not yet dismissed thanks to the state subsidies (we already mentioned the *cassa integrazione guadagni*). Also the analysis should be extended to people in search of first job, in order to explore political effect provoked by the lack of work on the younger generations.

Additionally the role played by the incumbent government political colour should be better explored. As we previously stated, our data were collected under a centre-right coalition government. Future research should establish the generality of the effects reported in the current investigation, examining these relationships also under a centre-left government. It remains an empirically unresolved issue whether we should expect the same effects of job precariousness on ideological orientation under a center-left government.

Further research is needed also to deepen the psycho-social mechanisms through which people restructure their relation to politics and their political orientation in reaction to a problematic working status. The data at our disposal did not allow us to identify potential mediators between job precariousness and political effects. For example, at present, we cannot say if the threat posed by job insecurity and the status loss enhances authoritarianism or negative attitude toward competing outgroups, or weakens the sense of political internal and external self-efficacy.

Nevertheless, despite the lack of psycho-social variables, we must acknowledge that the Ipsos database provided us that remarkable sample size essential to throw light on social phenomena – like unemployment or temporary work – involving only limited subsets of the population. We believe that our results could be extended beyond Italy, since the problems raised by economic crisis and processes of increasing labour market flexibility and deregulation are shared in similar way in all the European countries. Additionally, we believe that the social relevance of this problem

is destined to grow in the near future, as a consequence of the economic uncertainty that surrounds all Europe.

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