

# **PTV-gap as a new measure of partisanship: a panel-data, multi-measure validation showing surprising partisanship stability<sup>1</sup>**

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Comparative studies of partisanship still suffer from the lack of a comparable transatlantic measure. While in the U.S. the traditional ANES measure is used, studies of multi-party systems – especially in Europe – mostly use a party-closeness measure. A recent contribution proposed the PTV (propensity-to-vote) gap as a potential solution to this issue, showing that this new measure (the gap in PTV scores between the best- and the second best-placed party, easily applicable to both two- and multi-party systems) has desirable properties in the American case. In this article we test the same measure on the multi-party case of Italy, using panel data from the CISE (Italian Centre for Electoral Studies) 2012-2013 Electoral Panel. The case is particularly relevant, given the turbulence experienced by the Italian party system at the time, with the emergence of important new parties. As a result, this period appears as a crucial test for performing a classic validation of party identification measures – their stability over time vis-à-vis vote choice (Thomassen 1976). Findings – comparing the new measure with the traditional

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party-closeness measure – show that: a) both measures are more stable than vote choice, in line with party identification theory, and contrary to previous research on other European multi-party systems; b) the two measures are virtually equivalent in terms of over-time stability. As a second comparative validation, we investigate endogeneity issues for both measures, by assessing the mutual effects relating partisanship and vote over time. Results show superiority for the PTV gap measure, which has similar predictive power on vote choice, but in turn is predicted by it to a statistically inferior extent. As a result, we conclude that our validation of the PTV gap measure – already successfully tested in the U.S. context – qualifies it as a productive tool for comparative research on partisanship.

## *1. Introduction*

Election analysts have long been aware that voting reflects both long-term considerations, such as general ideology and party loyalties, and short-term considerations, such as the particular issues and candidates present in a given election. Comparative literature shows that the relative influence of long- and short-term considerations on the vote will vary with institutional contexts such as electoral systems, historical factors such as the stability or instability of party systems, and social and economic developments and changes (Thomassen 2005).

Unfortunately, the comparative study of the long-term partisan component of political attitudes has long suffered for the lack of a uniform measure. American scholars have traditionally measured this partisan component through the classic ANES party identification question items, but this measure and its various modifications have always been problematic in the European context, especially in party systems seeing intense multi-party competition. Therefore, election studies in Europe have typically measured the partisan component through party-closeness survey items.<sup>2</sup> Naturally, while both refer to the concept of party identification, the divergence in the employed measures could be one of the reasons why empirical findings on this partisan component often tend to diverge between Europe and the U.S. (Bartle and Bellucci 2009).

European scholars have identified some problems in applying the classic concept of party identification to their multi-party systems (Thomassen 1976; Van der Eijk and Niemoller 1983, Bartle and Bellucci 2009). Among other attempts, new measures were introduced (namely propensity-to-vote – PTV – scales: see Van der Eijk and Niemoller 1984) that have been successfully employed to investigate partisan attitudes and party preference patterns in multi-party systems. More recently, PTV-based indices have even been suggested as alternatives for measuring partisanship in multi-party systems (Van der Eijk 2011). We argue that this recent contribution suggests a possible solution to the difficulties in the comparative study of partisanship across the two sides of the Atlantic. In particular, we propose the adoption of a specific PTV-based measure (one that was already tested – with success – in the U.S. context) as a possible comparative measure for partisanship: PTV-gap, i.e. the gap in PTV scores – reported by each respondent – between the best and the second-best party.

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<sup>2</sup> See different question wordings in the Appendix.

In a recent study the validity of such measure was confirmed in the U.S. two-party system, showing, among other properties, its ability to classify respondents on a partisan scale yielding monotonic partisan attitudes on a range of dimensions, thus outperforming the 7-point PID scale traditionally used in the US (Paparo, De Sio, and Brady 2015).

In this article, we switch to a typical multi-party system such as Italy, and validate the new measure through a twofold strategy. The first focus is on *stability over time*. We first replicate the original analysis by Thomassen (1976) on Italian data, showing how in fact even the classic party-closeness measure of partisanship proves more stable than vote choice (even at a crucial time such as the critical season of party-system change between 2012 and 2013). Secondly, by leveraging the panel structure of our data, we compare the two partisanship measures in terms of their *ability to predict vote choice* (rather than being reversely predicted by it).

The article is structured as follows. In the next section, we review the literature regarding party identification and partisanship, with a particular emphasis on comparative research addressing measurement issues. We also outline the hypotheses to be empirically tested. We then present the datasets, and discuss specific methodological choices. In the fourth section, we report and examine our empirical findings. Conclusions follow.

## *2. Measuring partisanship in comparative perspective*

The comparative study of the partisan component of vote choice has long suffered from the lack of an established cross-national measure. Over half a century ago Campbell and his colleagues (1960) introduced the concept of party identification with specific reference to the American case. The idea that individuals develop a socio-psychological attachment to a political party, either through the family environment or through key experiences during the political socialisation process, quickly established itself as one of the key approaches for interpreting political attitudes and voting behaviour in the United States. The notion of party identification was also quickly operationalised through the classic two ANES survey items. This has remained unchanged despite numerous conceptual re-formulations of the original Michigan concept – such as those proposed by, among others, Fiorina (1981) and Kelley (1983) – and the emergence of relevant structural changes in the patterns of partisanship within the U.S. population (Dalton 1984).

Given the success and usefulness of the concept in the American case, attempts were naturally made by social scientists to adopt the same conceptual apparatus to study multi-party systems, especially in Western Europe (Campbell and Valen 1961). However, the results were much less successful, and the usefulness of the concept of party identification is still contested with reference to multi-party systems (Bartle and Bellucci 2009). First, early applications of the concept of party identification to multi-party systems immediately led to measurement problems, with European election studies not able to employ the same question wording used in American ones given the multiplicity of parties. Secondly, empirical findings on genuine multi-party systems ended up, in some cases, openly rejecting some of the cornerstones of the theory, such as the prediction that party identification ought to be more stable than actual vote choice (Thomassen 1976);<sup>3</sup> they also highlighted how, in multi-party contexts, respondents often “identified” with more than one party (Van der Eijk and Niemöller 1983).

It inevitably appears true that the presence of multiple parties makes it less likely for voters to develop the kind of deep attachment that is embedded in the American notion of party identification. This is possibly also related to the lower stability of European multi-party systems, where clearly parties

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<sup>3</sup> The prediction that party identification should be more stable than actual vote choice is at the core of party identification theory. According to the concept of a *funnel of causality*, the influence of long-term party identifications on vote choice is complemented by other short-term factors. As a result, while voters are in general expected to vote for a candidate of the party they identify with, they may occasionally vote for a candidate of a different party, while still retaining their original party identification. Such *normal vote* dynamics (Converse 1966) imply the prediction of a stability of party identification over time which is higher than the stability of vote choice.

are born, split, merge, and change labels much more frequently than in the American case – especially in recent years. For these reasons, voters in multi-party systems might tend to develop a sense of general orientation towards political objects starting from their ideological orientation – rather than their preferred party – and perhaps hold multiple party identifications with different parties within a certain ideological field (Van der Eijk and Niemöller 1983; Van der Eijk, Schmitt, and Binder 2005).

However, it is undoubtable that – despite the aforementioned objections – relatively stable partisan attitudes have a clear role in Europe too, which is abundantly testified by an important strand of research (Budge, Crewe, and Farlie 1976; Cain and Ferejohn 1981; Richardson 1991; Holmberg 1994; Berglund et al. 2005). As a result, recent contributions have introduced the notion of *partisanship* as a concept which, regardless of its nature (especially in terms of *identity* vs. *attitude*), identifies the presence of relevant partisan attitudes (Bartle and Bellucci 2009).

To some extent, the real problem in assessing whether partisan attitudes are as relevant in multi-party systems as in the U.S. might simply be a matter of appropriate *measurement*. In fact, part of the doubts over the applicability of the Michigan theory to Western Europe derived from early studies based on specific measures constructed for multi-party contexts (Thomassen 1976), given the impossibility of directly translating the ANES measure into Western European systems. For example, recent studies have confronted this problem by employing comparable experimental methodology to measure the *effects* of partisan attitudes. In particular, they have clearly demonstrated the relevance of *partisan cueing effects* (voters clearly deriving their policy preferences from the positions expressed by parties) in a variety of multi-party systems, providing strong confirmation of the importance of partisanship even in such contexts (Brader and Tucker 2012; Petersen et al. 2012; Slothuus and de Vreese 2010; Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007; Samuels and Zucco 2014).

As a result, we argue that: a) it is still worth investigating the relevance of partisanship in comparative perspective; b) if we are interested in an analysis that investigates the full theoretical extent of the concept of partisanship (rather than simply its effects on issue preferences, as in the aforementioned strand of research), the only possibility is to develop an effective comparable measure of partisan attitudes at the individual level that can easily travel across two-party and multi-party systems.

A first effort of alternative conceptualisation and measurement of partisan attitudes – applicable both to two-party and multi-party contexts – was introduced over thirty years ago through *propensity-to-vote* – PTV – scales (Van der Eijk and Niemöller 1984; Van der Eijk 2002; Van der Eijk et al. 2006; Van der Eijk and Marsh 2007). PTVs, which effectively showed that voters in multi-party systems have preferences over parties largely based on ideological overlap grounds, were eventually introduced into

the European Election Study in 1989. Since then they have gradually been adopted by numerous electoral studies in multi-party systems (Tillie 1995; Van der Eijk and Franklin 1996; Van der Brug, Van der Eijk, and Franklin 2007; Van der Eijk and Franklin 2009).

The basic idea behind PTV scales is to measure respondent attitudes towards multiple parties, with the precise goal of capturing overlapping party preferences. The typical PTV question wording usually reads, repeatedly for each relevant party in a party system: “... how likely is it that you will ever vote for this party?”<sup>4</sup> The question clearly aims at measuring a party-oriented attitude that is explicitly connected to voting behaviour. However, it purportedly “free[s] the respondent from familiar restrictions that apply to the real act of voting (often the restriction that one can vote for only one of the parties)” (Van der Eijk et al. 2006, 432), and that do not apply to general party preferences. Hence: 1) the emphasis on the word “ever” and the deliberate absence of any specific indication of a precise time period or particular election; 2) the absence of *ipsativity*, i.e. any constraint on the sum of scores across different parties (Van der Eijk et al. 2006, 433). Such characteristics are aimed at constructing a *projective device*, able to capture the current state of respondent party preferences through responses that are not restricted by the typical constraints encountered in actual decision-making.

As a result, the core element of PTV scores is that they are a measure of *preference* rather than *choice*, unlike typical vote choice questions. Vote choice questions are intrinsically ipsative, as choosing to vote for a party excludes voting for another party as well, whereas PTV scores allow each respondent total freedom over scores assigned to different parties. Thus, PTVs have proven particularly effective for studying behaviour in multi-party systems. Such measures have allowed scholars to have a deeper understanding of voters’ overall set of preferences and a clearer image of their “choice sets”. This makes it possible to assess the presence of overlapping electorates, respondents with ties and quasi-ties to different parties, and to better understand the overall structure of political competition in these systems (Enyedi and Deegan-Krause 2013). Moreover, PTV-based measures have been used to ascertain the extent to which respondents are close to the political system in general (Dassonneville and Hooghe 2013).

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<sup>4</sup> The question is usually preceded by an introduction, e.g. “Some people are quite certain that they will always vote for the same party. Others reconsider in each case to which party they will give their vote. I shall mention a number of parties. Would you indicate for each party how probable it is that you will ever vote for that party?” Responses, on a 0-10 or 1-10 scale, usually have extreme categories semantically anchored with labels such as (0 or) “1: ‘I will certainly never vote for this party’ and 10: ‘I will certainly vote for this party at some time’”. See the Appendix for the actual question wording employed in this study.

Finally, and we come back to our original concern, recent contributions (Van der Eijk 2011) have suggested that PTV measures might also be employed for measuring *partisanship*. In particular, the measurement of the *PTV score gap between the best- and the second best-placed party* might be considered an indicator of *partisanship*, in that a large gap would imply that the respondent clearly differentiates between the best party and all other parties. This differentiation between one party and the others is very close to the core of the idea of *identification*, which by definition cannot be with more than one party. Empirical findings in several European countries have shown that both PTV patterns and such new PTV-based measures of partisanship present properties similar to what is expected from a measure of party identification (Van der Eijk 2011).

This new measure also proved useful as regards another aspect: its ability also to be applied to two-party systems such as the U.S. This application was performed as an attempt to address an enduring problem highlighted by empirical research in the United States: the consistent pattern of non-monotonicity in partisan attitudes, when respondents are classified based on the classic ANES 7-point PID scale (Alvarez 1990; Keith et al. 1992; Petrocik 2009; Abrams and Fiorina 2011). The problem is mostly related to the difficulty of interpreting leaning Independents, who often show stronger loyalty to their party than weak identifiers. A PTV-gap based measure of partisanship was then developed and applied to U.S. data, showing that a partisanship scale based on the new measure yields monotonic partisan attitudes (Paparo, De Sio, and Brady 2015). Building on this result, we argue that a PTV-based measure, when validated on a multi-party system, could represent a step towards a possible cross-national measure of partisanship. We then turn in this paper to assess the ability of this measure to yield meaningful results in a multi-party system such as Italy.

Our strategy is then structured as follows. First, in order to obtain an appropriate reference for our new measure, we validate the classic, party-closeness measure. We then assess our PTV-gap-based measure in comparison with such reference. Our primary aim is to test whether the new measure is able to perform at least equally to the classic one. If this turns out to be the case, then the new PTV-gap-based measure of partisanship would prove valid, with the additional advantage of its ready applicability to both two-party and multi-party systems.

Our tests (for both the validation of the classic measures and for the comparison of the classic and the new) will be performed on two criteria, both strongly related to the theoretical core of party identification theory. The first is *stability over time*, which represents one of the key elements of the Michigan notion of party identification (cf. footnote 3). To do so, we will assess the stability over time – vis-à-vis vote choice – of our new measure, in comparison to the classic party-closeness measure. The

second criterion concerns instead the mutual *predictive abilities* between partisanship and vote, which reflect the decision processes of voters. It is clear that, according to the classic Michigan model, party identification plays a causally antecedent role, which – combined with short-term factors – leads to actual vote choice. As a result, any valid measure of genuine partisanship should retain this antecedent role (to the extent that causality can be reasonably assessed through statistical modelling, even on panel data): in fact – e.g. in a panel design – it should predict vote choice better than vote choice predicts partisanship.

We can translate the aforementioned research questions into a set of empirically testable hypotheses. The first concerns the validation – on our new data – of the classic party-closeness measure. We perform it in terms of: a) its stability over time vis-à-vis vote choice; b) its mutual effects with vote choice (we require it to predict vote choice better than it is predicted by vote choice). With reference to the traditional party-closeness measure, we then expect that:

*H1a: Partisanship is more stable over time than vote choice;*

*H1b: Pre-electoral partisanship has a positive effect on post-electoral vote choice; such effect is larger than the one in the reverse direction (pre-electoral vote choice on post-electoral partisanship).*

After this validation, we then use the classic measure as a reference point, and proceed to validate our new measure. With respect to the PTV-gap, we again expect that:

*H2a: Partisanship is more stable over time than vote choice;*

*H2b: Pre-electoral partisanship has a positive effect on post-electoral vote choice; such effect is larger than the one in the reverse direction (pre-electoral vote choice on post-electoral partisanship).*

Finally, with reference to the comparison between the classic and the proposed new measure, we expect that:

*H3a: The stability assessed in H2a is at least as high as that of the classic party-closeness measure (assessed in H1a).*

*H3b: The effects assessed in H2b correspond to a performance that is at least as high as that of the classic measure (assessed in H1b).*

### 3. *Data and measures*

In order to test the above hypotheses we employ survey data from the CISE 2012-2013 Electoral Panel. The panel consists of four waves administered from April 2012 to the immediate aftermath of the 2013 Italian general election (thus, three pre-electoral waves, plus one – Wave 4 – post-electoral wave). The surveys were conducted on samples of the Italian voting age population using both landline (CATI) and mobile (CAMI) telephone interviews.<sup>5</sup> The time span covered by this panel study is particularly interesting as it saw the emergence of relevant new political parties that rapidly established themselves as credible contenders, thus breaking down the bipolar competition framework that had characterised the previous two decades of the Italian political system. In particular, during this period of time two major events took place. The first was the rise of the Five-star Movement (M5S), which moved from being a small party with no national MPs, to being the most-voted party with almost one supporter for every five Italian voting-age citizens.<sup>6</sup> The second was the birth of Civic Choice (SC), founded by the then Prime Minister, Mario Monti. This party was the core of a centrist coalition that received over 10% of valid votes in the 2013 general elections. All these elements are crucial to our attempt to assess the stability of alternative measures of partisanship, as they allow us to evaluate their ability to yield stability under a scenario that is close to a worst-case natural experiment in terms of party system turbulence.

There are three focal variables employed in our empirical tests: vote choice, and the two alternative measures of partisanship we are interested in – the traditional party-closeness measure and the PTV-gap measure we are proposing. For all three of them we have followed similar measurement strategies, to maximize the comparability of our findings. For simplicity, we created dichotomous variables separating, in each panel wave, respondents who are partisans (or voters) of a party from those who are not. Obviously, we also took account of the party they are partisans (or voters) of. In this way we can easily assess stability over time for these three variables, and comparatively discuss them. Let us clarify how exactly we operationalised each of the three aforementioned variables.

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<sup>5</sup> Respondents were selected through quota sampling, with quotas defined on two variables. The first was constructed by combining gender and age; the second was constructed by combining province and provincial capital status, effectively distinguishing – within each province – the local capital from all other towns.

<sup>6</sup> Only 5.1% of respondents declared their intention to vote for the M5S in Wave 1 of the panel, in April 2012. This means that it almost quadrupled its support in the Italian electorate during the short year covered by the CISE 2012-2013 electoral panel.

The PTV-based partisanship measure is based on what we define as the PTV-gap. For each respondent we have separate independent PTV scores for each party, ranging from 0 to 10. The PTV-gap is simply the difference between the propensity-to-vote score assigned by the respondent to her *best* party (the one receiving the highest PTV) and the score assigned to the *second-best* party (the one receiving the second-highest PTV). So, the gap ranges (as the PTVs) from 10, when a respondent assigns a 10 PTV score to her best party and 0 scores to all other parties, to 0, when the best and the second-best parties have received the very same PTV score. In order to obtain a dichotomous measure (needed for conceptual comparison with the party-closeness and vote choice measures) a gap cut-off has to be chosen. On theoretical grounds, it is not easy to define what the minimum PTV-gap should be to classify a respondent as “partisan”. We experimented with various gap cut-off values, ranging from 1 (the best party has only 1 point more than the second best) to 4. This way we have a total of four PTV-based dichotomies, gradually including a lower number of increasingly stronger PTV-based partisan respondents. Ideally, the PTV-gap measure should classify as partisans a similar percentage of respondents as the classic measure of partisanship: this is the criterion we adopt to select an appropriate PTV-gap (see Table 1 below).<sup>7</sup>

A second problem is represented by the choice of parties to be included in the PTV-gap calculation. In the 2012-2013 CISE electoral panel, PTV scores were consistently measured for a total of six parties throughout the whole panel. Along with the aforementioned M5S, they are the Democratic Party (PD), the People of Freedom (PDL), the Union of the Centre (UDC), the Northern League (LN), and Left Ecology Freedom (SEL). We then have the exceptional case represented by SC. Since it was founded in December 2012, between Wave 2 and Wave 3 of the panel, PTV scores for this party were only measured in the two final waves of the panel. This means that only in those waves is it possible for respondents to be PTV-partisans of such party. Overall, the seven listed parties received 89.9% of the valid votes for the Chamber of Deputies in the 2013 general elections (Baldini 2013; Garzia 2013).

On the second measure of partisanship employed in the empirical test, the classical party-closeness variable, respondents are assigned 0 or 1 values according to their answers to the first question among the relevant survey items – asking respondents whether there is a party they feel closer to. To be

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<sup>7</sup> The data already clearly show that there is a strong difference in PTV gap between partisans and non-partisans (identified with the classic party closeness measure). In our four waves, the mean PTV gap among partisans was respectively (95% confidence interval in brackets) 2.97 points [2.79 ; 3.15], 2.97 [2.78 ; 3.15], 2.81 [2.64 ; 2.98], 2.97 [2.78;3.16], while the mean PTV gap among non-partisans was much lower, to a clearly significant extent: 1.64 [1.54 ; 1.74], 1.68 [1.56 ; 1.80], 1.91 [1.75 ; 2.07], 1.87 [1.69 ; 2.06].

clear, we assigned a 0 value to respondents not feeling closer to any particular party, and a 1 value to those who declare their closeness to a specific party. In order to have comparability with stability rates computed on the alternative PTV-based measure of partisanship, we accepted as valid party-closeness partisanship only reported closeness to one of the seven parties listed above, for which PTV scores were available.<sup>8</sup> To be exact, we again have six possible party choices in the first two waves, and seven options in the remaining two.

Finally coming to the vote choice measure, for the first three waves it is measured as the intention to vote in the event of immediate general elections. In post-electoral Wave 4, however, the main vote choice item asks respondents which party they voted for in the recent general elections. If we were to use this variable, we would have three intended hypothetical behaviours and one recall of an actual past behaviour – which would entail some comparability issues. Luckily, the CISE 2012-2013 electoral panel includes, in Wave 4, a specific variable that serves our purposes nicely. After having been asked about the recall of their vote in the February 2013 general elections, respondents were asked whether they would change their vote if immediate new general elections were to be held – thus in fact replicating the vote intention question of the previous three waves. We have then used, for those respondents answering “Yes” to this question, the party they declared they would vote for as their vote choice in Wave 4.<sup>9</sup> For all other respondents we assumed that vote recall for the 2013 general elections was a valid representation of vote intention, since they declared they would not change their vote in the event of immediate new elections. Once again, for the sake of comparability with the partisanship measures, we only considered as valid-vote responses those indicating one of the seven parties for which PTV scores were measured.<sup>10</sup>

We have thoroughly presented how the three independent variables of interest were coded. We still need to discuss the issue concerning the specific cut-off to be employed for the PTV-gap measure in order to distinguish between partisan and non-partisan respondents. As we have mentioned, it is not easy to define on theoretical grounds what the minimum PTV-gap should be, in order to allow a respondent to be classified as partisan. It is quite clear that a 1-point gap between the best party and the second-best party is a conceptually meaningless threshold, as it would classify as non-partisans only those

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<sup>8</sup> This means that respondents declaring that they feel closer to a party not included in the list are coded with a 0, as non-partisans (of the seven major parties). However, as a robustness check, we replicated our crucial stability estimations omitting these respondents from all three target variables, and findings were equivalent. Results are available on request.

<sup>9</sup> Roughly, 13% of the overall respondents of Wave 4 declared they would change their vote in the event of immediate elections.

<sup>10</sup> Again, this means respondents with a valid vote choice for other parties are coded as non-valid vote intentions.

respondents assigning a tie. However, is 2 the proper threshold? Or, should it be 3 – or perhaps even higher? We decided to proceed inductively in order to overcome this measurement problem. We coded four alternative dichotomous partisanship measures, based on increasingly higher cut-offs of the PTV-gap measure (from 1 to 4), which obviously classify as partisans increasingly smaller portions of the electorate. Since the focus of this paper is on comparative assessment with the classic party-closeness measure, we will look at descriptive statistics of these measures across the panel. In particular, since we are interested in a possible new measure for partisanship, we aim for our measure to identify a number of partisans similar to that of the classic party-closeness measure of partisanship.

As is apparent from Table 1, the most adequate PTV-gap threshold appears to be a 2-point gap (PTV-gap >1 in the table).<sup>11</sup> The table clearly shows that a lower cut-off would be inappropriate, as it would classify as partisans fractions of the electorate ranging from 60 to 75%: much higher than the equivalent figures for party closeness – roughly ranging from 30 to 55% (and, these latter, in line with other studies). Furthermore, if 1 were to be the selected threshold, we would have many more partisans than voters in three out of four panel waves, while when looking at the classic party-closeness measure we always have more voters than partisans. In this regard, the 3-point gap appears to be a more reasonable cut-off, since it always identifies fewer partisans than the voters of that wave. However, only in Wave 1 does it identify a number of partisans similar to the party-closeness measure, which has in all other instances a somewhat larger number of partisans – with differences between 8 and 20 percentage points. All this considered, it would not be appropriate to test stability over time on this so comparatively restricted group of respondents, which can reasonably be considered less likely to change their attachment.

The 2-point gap shows figures that are very similar to those of party-closeness partisanship for the final two panel waves, while only in Wave 1 does it identify a significantly larger number of partisans

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<sup>11</sup> In addition to the question concerning the proper gap between best and second-best parties, there is one more issue about the proposed PTV-based measure of partisanship that needs to be discussed. One might argue that a respondent who assigns a 10 to the best party and a 7 to the second-best is a clear partisan, while a respondent with a 5 to the best party and a 2 to the second-best is hardly so. Yet, they share the same gap between the two relevant PTV scores. In order to verify whether the PTV-based measure needs to take into account the actual *score* assigned to the best party, we will replicate the stability tests on subgroups of respondents who did assign *different* minimum scores to their best party. As reported in the Appendix, this produces very similar results; however, we recommend that such a robustness test is performed in any future application.

(10 percentage points); also, as expected, the two measures are correlated.<sup>12</sup> In any case, it is worth noting that this choice constitutes a particularly challenging test for the PTV-gap measure and the empirical verification of H3a, since we are selecting a cut-off that consistently considers partisans over 40% of the respondents, while the party-closeness variable has similar numbers only when close to the elections. It can be more difficult for this more inclusive measure to show stability among a wider group of arguably less attached partisans; thus, it represents a test that might err on the conservative side.

More in general, Table 1 shows that the PTV-gap measure appears, regardless of the specific cut-off employed, to be more stable over time in terms of the number of partisans it selects. It seems to be less influenced by the approach or the outcome of the general elections, which on the other end hugely affects not only vote choice (as is entirely to be expected) but also the party-closeness partisanship measure.<sup>13</sup> This impermeability to the electoral process appears to be a particularly desirable property for a partisanship indicator deployed in the hope that it captures stable and long-term partisan attitudes, which drive vote choice – and do not reflect them. Nevertheless, it is clearly just an initial and isolated piece of evidence.

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<sup>12</sup> The correlation between the two measures (being classified as partisan according to party closeness or according to a 2-point PTV-gap) is strong, although not tautological. Correlation coefficients estimated at Wave 1 are respectively 0.57 for the PD, 0.57 (PDL), 0.51 (LN), 0.40 (SEL), 0.43 (UDC), 0.36 (M5S).

<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, all six variables reported in Table 1 show a linear increase over time. This might certainly be related to the effect of the mobilization leading to the February 2013 elections, but it also points to the panel attrition issue. Roughly 50% of the 3,502 initial respondents were not part of the panel in Wave 2. In Wave 3 and in Wave 4, dropout rates were smaller: 65% of respondents included in Wave 2 were interviewed again in Wave 3, while 73% of those that were part of Wave 3 were included in Wave 4, the final panel wave. This increases the likelihood that those who remain in the study are a biased subset of the original sample. In particular, we suspect that those who persist through multiple rounds of interviewing for an election survey may be disproportionately interested in and attentive to politics, and thus more likely to be partisans or to have a clear idea about what they might vote for. To partially compensate for this, the second and third waves of the panel included a replenishment of respondents, in order to partially recover representativeness on basic socio-demographic variables. In any case, since we have no reason to assume that this is differently correlated to vote choice, vote propensity, or party closeness, our estimates involving these three variables should not be biased.

**Table 1 –Voters and Partisans in the waves of the CISE 2012-2013 electoral panel**

	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4
Voters (valid votes)	33.4	39.9	60.9	77.9
Party-closeness partisans	31.3	38.5	49.0	56.5
PTV partisans				
PTV-gap>0	61.1	65.1	70.4	74.2
PTV-gap>1	42.0	46.0	48.9	53.1
PTV-gap>2	29.8	30.4	33.4	35.9
PTV-gap>3	20.8	22.4	24.9	26.6
Overall Respondents	3,052	2,453	2,043	1,492

We now need to discuss how we measured stability over time for the three key variables we just presented. In particular, we are interested in comparing, in terms of stability, both partisanship measures with vote choice (H1a and H2a), as well as between themselves (H3a). We will look at each possible pair of waves among the four included in the CISE 2012-2013 electoral panel. This means that overall we will have six combinations for the comparison of stability rates: stability between Wave 1 and 2; stability between Wave 1 and 3; stability between Wave 1 and 4; stability between Wave 2 and 3; stability between Wave 2 and 4, and stability between Wave 3 and 4. Separately for each variable, we will only consider those respondents expressing the attitude (for one of the seven selected parties) in both panel waves.<sup>14</sup> We will then simply calculate how many have declared a partisanship/vote choice for the same party in the two selected waves, rather than switching to another party attachment.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> To be clear, this means excluding those respondents having a PTV-gap above the selected cut-off threshold in the first selected wave, and a PTV-gap below such threshold in the second. Since in this latter case the respondent is not considered a partisan, she does *not* have the attitude in *both* selected waves.

<sup>15</sup> This strategy is consistent with previous literature conducting research on stability over time of the same attitudes – partisanship and vote choice. For instance, both Thomassen (1976) and LeDuc (1981) selected only those respondents declaring the target attitude in all the selected waves, and then measured the percentage maintaining the same party. The extent to which this is the most correct approach to measuring attitude stability over time, and whether in particular this choice affects findings concerning partisanship and vote choice stability, is not discussed here. Here let it suffice to say that there are at least two possible alternative measurement strategies. The first involves the role of “exits”. These are respondents moving from having the target attitude in the first wave of the two selected for the stability calculus, to *not* having the attitude in the second wave. According to our strategy, these respondents are not part of the group on which stability rates are computed;

Finally, to look at the mutual predictive power of partisanship and vote choice over time (H1b, H2b, H3b), we will employ different sets of structural equation models (Kline 2011). In particular, we will test and compare two SEMs: the one employing the party-closeness partisanship measure, and the one employing the alternative PTV-based measure. Both of them will assess the effects of vote choice on the selected measures of partisanship, and the opposite ones (from partisanship to vote choice). The effects will be measured between Waves 1 and 4, the first and the final panel waves. This is done in order to maximize the time span covered by the analysis (and evaluate diachronic effects over a longer period of time), and also to include the actual elections in order to incorporate possible post-hoc rationalisation effects into the models.

For this last test, which requires estimating the link between partisanship and vote choice across all parties in a multi-party system, we will adopt a *stacked* data analysis strategy (Van der Eijk et al. 2006). We will thus generate multiple observations for each respondent, each pertaining to one of the seven considered parties. For each of these voter-party relationships, dummy variables will express partisanship (in its two versions) and vote choice. In fact, such dummy variables will code whether the respondent is a partisan of that party, or whether she intends to vote for it.<sup>16</sup> The combination of vote choice and two alternative measures of partisanship, each at two time points, yields six sets of dummy

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alternatively, they might be selected, and counted as non-stable. The second alternative strategy also considers switches from not having the attitude to having it. Practically, all respondents included in both the selected panel waves would then be part of the analysis. They would be coded as stable if they maintained the same party, or a non-valid attitude. On the contrary, they would be coded as non-stable, if they changed party, or if they moved from having the attitude to not having or from not having it to having it. We replicated our main stability comparisons adopting these two alternative strategies, and our main findings were generally confirmed. Results are available upon request.

<sup>16</sup> With regard to the alternative partisanship measures, it is also possible to use the information concerning the *intensity* of the attitude. The party-closeness survey items asks respondents declaring they are close to a party, if they are simple sympathisers, fairly close, or very close to that party. And, clearly, PTV-gap partisanship can be used as an ordered scale. However, in order to validate the proposed partisanship measure *vis-à-vis* vote choice in terms of their relative predictive power (H1b and H2b), we need to be able to compare the effects of vote choice on partisanship with the reverse effects. Since vote choice can only be a dichotomous measure, we are forced to keep the partisanship measures dichotomous as well. However, as a robustness check of our finding concerning H3b, regarding comparison of the effects of the two alternative measures of partisanship on vote choice, we have replicated the two structural equation models adopting two 4-point scales for the partisanship variables. On party closeness we have non-partisans, simple sympathisers, quite close, and very close partisans. On PTV-gap we have respondents with less than a 2-point gap, those with a gap of 2, those with a gap of 3, and those with a gap of 4. Findings here reported and estimated with the dichotomous measures are confirmed. Results are available on request.

variables.<sup>17</sup> On these six dichotomous stacked variables we can run structural equation models (Bollen 1989).<sup>18</sup> For each pair of tests we will include all those respondents that are part of both the selected panel waves, in order to have the same number of observations in the structural equation models, which will allow us properly to compare the relative measures of goodness of fit (Kenny and McCoach 2003).

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<sup>17</sup> Again, for all the three related variables the SC party option is missing for the first two panel waves, and available as an option for the remaining two.

<sup>18</sup> Such models do not include additional control variables, given the complexity of setting up an appropriate set of control variables in a path model estimated on a stacked data matrix (with the computation of separate sets of y-hats with different dependent variables, also preventing effective comparability across models). To be exact, not having any latent component, the models we will estimate are in fact simple path models.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 Validating Party closeness as a measure of partisanship

We report here the empirical findings concerning the validation of the party-closeness measure of partisanship *vis-à-vis* vote choice in terms of stability over time (H1a), and mutual predictive power (H1b). To recall, H1a claims higher stability for partisanship than vote choice, while H1b expects party closeness to predict vote better than vote predicts party closeness. We then start by replicating the classical analysis by Thomassen (1976, 68) comparing stability of vote choice and the traditional European measure of partisanship (party closeness) across multiple panel waves. In that seminal study, the Dutch scholar showed that in the Netherlands of the early 1970s partisanship was “less stable than vote preference, [since] in all three combinations of panel waves the turnover of party identification was higher than the turnover of vote preference” (*ibidem*). As we can see in Table 2, such findings are not replicated in Italy in the 2012-2013 period, another context characterised by a political realignment (Chiaramonte and De Sio 2014). Overall, partisanship clearly has higher stability rates than vote choice: quite consistently around 80%. In turn, vote choice has similar peaks, but shows more variegated stability rates – between 68 and 85% in the different two-wave comparisons.

Looking at the details, we start by noticing (last row of the table) that 67.5% of the respondents have maintained a stable vote choice across the whole time span covered by the panel, declaring they would vote in March 2013, in case of immediate new elections, for the same party they intended to vote for in April 2012. However, if we move to the right half of Table 2, showing the analogous stability rates for the party-closeness measure of partisanship, we find that 79.3% of partisans declared they were close to the same party in April 2012 and March 2013. This means an 11.8 percentage point greater stability for partisanship than vote choice. Furthermore, it is worth pointing out that, despite the relatively low number of respondents included in the relevant groups, this difference is significant in statistical terms.

Table 2 allows a few more interesting comparisons, since it reports stability rates for the other five pairs of panel waves. Partisanship clearly proves to be more stable, as it has higher stability rates than vote choice in all but one of these comparisons. In addition to the aforementioned comparison between Waves 1 and 4, we find three more instances in which the stability difference in favour of partisanship is statistically significant. These are the stability across Waves 2 and 4, the one between Waves 1 and 3, and between Waves 2 and 3 – although in this latter case the significance is only slight,

with  $p < 0.1$ . The differences range between 6 and 12 percentage points, with partisanship showing stability above 80%, while vote choice is between 71 and 76%.

If we look at stability between Waves 1 and 2, and between Waves 3 and 4, we can see that stability rates for the two variables are almost identical. In the former case, though by a small margin, partisanship still has a higher stability rate. In particular, we have 85.3% of voters of Wave 1 intending to vote for the same party in Wave 2, as against 85.6% of partisans of Wave 1 being closest to the same party in Wave 2. However, in the latter instance, it is vote choice that has a (slightly) higher stability rate. Table 2 shows that 80.2% of voters of Wave 3 declare in Wave 4 an intention to vote for the same party, while only 79.7% of partisans of Wave 3 declare in Wave 4 that they feel close to the same party. Therefore, we have a 0.2 and a 0.5 percentage point difference – the former in favour of partisanship, the latter in favour of vote choice. However, obviously neither of the two differences is statistically significant.

**Table 2 – Stability of Vote choice and Party-Closeness Partisanship across the 2012-2013 CISE electoral panel**

	%	Stable Vote choice			Stable Party-Closeness Partisanship			
		N	[95% C. I.]		%	N	[95% C. I.]	
Wave 1 - Wave 2	85.3	465	82.11	88.56	85.6	444	82.28	88.84
Wave 2 - Wave 3	75.8	678	72.54	79.00	81.3	579	78.11	84.48
Wave 3 - Wave 4	80.2	939	77.63	82.74	79.7	683	76.71	82.76
Wave 1 - Wave 3	71.4	424	67.08	75.71	82.5	375	78.60	86.34
Wave 2 - Wave 4	72.1	587	68.43	75.71	81.4	529	78.07	84.73
Wave 1 - Wave 4	67.5	381	62.74	72.19	79.3	333	74.97	83.71

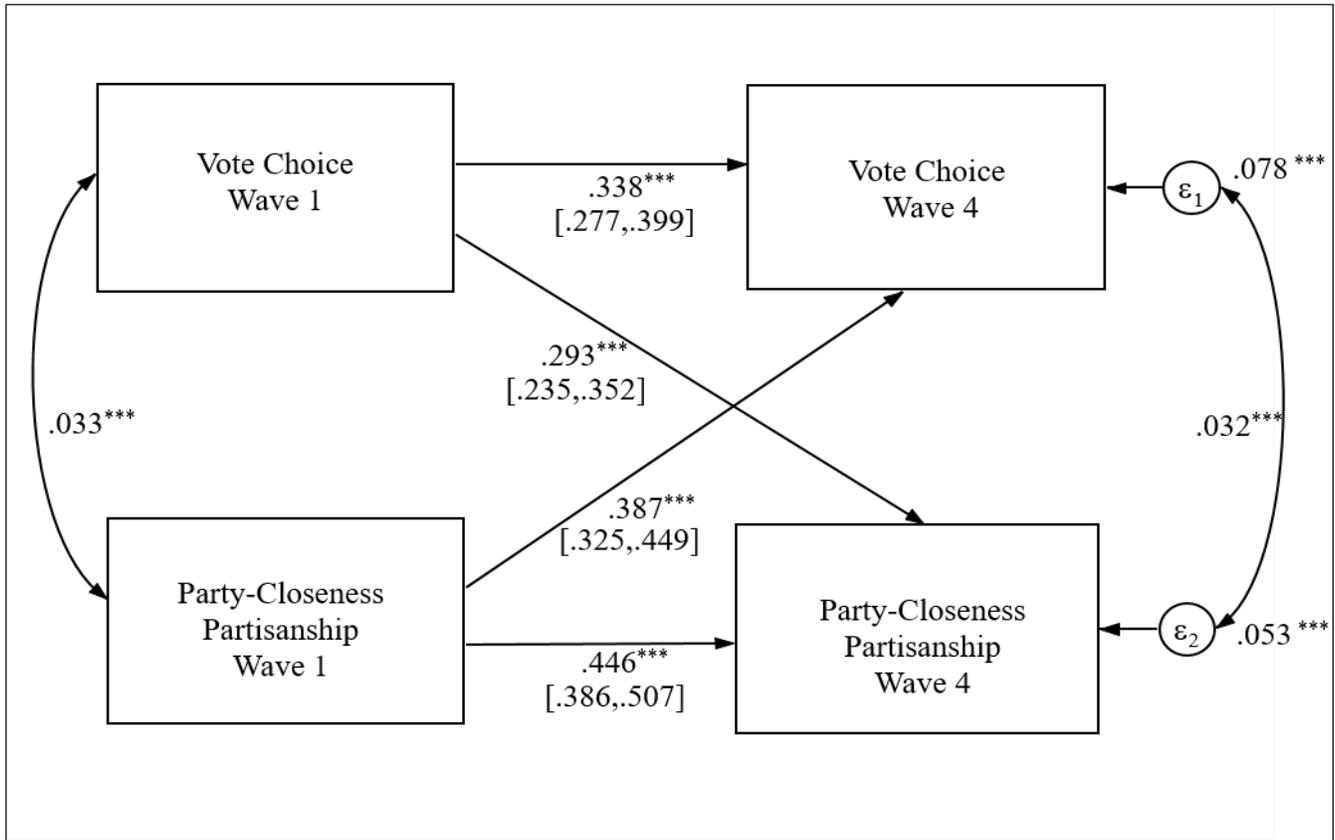
It is appropriate to recall here a point we mentioned earlier. In December 2012, after Wave 2 and before Wave 3 of the 2012-2013 CISE electoral panel, Monti founded a new party (SC) that would get 8.3% of the votes in the general elections held two months later. This means that between Waves 1 and 2, and between Waves 3 and 4, the possible parties to choose from (for both vote and partisanship) were the same, while in all other four comparisons the second wave has an additional party that respondents could validly choose. This element appears to be relevant to this discussion since it is exactly when no party-system change is involved that vote choice is as stable as partisanship. In contrast, when a new party emerges, partisanship proves to be statistically more stable than vote choice, whose stability is far

more affected by the sudden appearance of a relevant new actor (it basically shows a 10-point drop). Actually, this piece of evidence appears clearly to confirm one of the original predictions of party identification theory.

To summarise, Table 2 shows that out of the six possible comparisons, the party-closeness measure of partisanship is more stable than vote choice in five of them. Furthermore, the greater stability of partisanship proves statistically significant in four of these five instances. It also emerges that the stability rates are virtually identical in the two comparisons involving pairs of waves not characterised by changes in the party system. To reiterate, we are referring to the appearance in Wave 3 of the party founded and led by then Prime Minister Mario Monti (SC), which was not yet present when Wave 2 was run. Overall, this appears as a clear empirical confirmation of H1a. Partisanship, measured through the classic European closeness-based measure, is more stable than vote choice, especially when party system stability is challenged by the emergence of relevant new parties.

We now move to empirical assessment of the mutual predictive power of partisanship (measured through the party-closeness variable) and vote choice. Figure 1 reports the findings of a structural equations model estimating mutual effects for party closeness and vote choice across Waves 1 and 4. Our hypothesis (H1b) in fact requires that partisanship affects vote choice more than the other way around. Findings only marginally support such a claim. It is true – as expected – that the effect of (party-closeness) partisanship on vote choice is larger than the reciprocal ( $0.387^{***}$  vs.  $0.293^{***}$ ), but their difference lacks statistical significance at the conventional level ( $p=0.13$ ). This in principle would lead us to reject our hypothesis. However, it should also be observed that the coefficient for the autoregressive effect of partisanship is clearly larger than its vote-choice equivalent ( $0.446^{***}$  vs.  $0.338^{***}$ ), and to a statistically significant extent ( $p < .1$ ). In other words, greater predictive power is visible for partisanship, as it yields stronger effects on the analogous measure at a later point in time: much more than is true for vote choice. This is in line with party identification theory, although it does not represent a full confirmation of H1b.

**Figure 1 – Estimated values of parameters for over-time mutual effects between Party-closeness Partisanship and Vote choice in the 2012-2013 CISE electoral panel.**



Notes: Coefficients reported here were estimated through a linear probability model.<sup>19</sup> 95% Confidence intervals in brackets. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ . There are a total of 6,741 observations in our stacked data matrix. Standard errors are clustered by individuals (903). Goodness-of-fit indices: SRMR=0.000; CD=0.349; AIC=-3,340.144; BIC=-3,271.985.

<sup>19</sup> Full results are reported in the Appendix (see Table A3, left half). We adopt a linear probability model (estimated through the *sem* Stata command, which does not allow the specification of logistic regressions) for the sake of the interpretability of the coefficients, and in order to have some crucial measures of goodness of fit needed to compare with the homologous model estimated using PTV-gap partisanship. We verified that a similar model estimated through the *gsem* Stata command (findings reported in the Appendix, Table A2, left half), which allows logistic regressions, generated an almost equivalent pattern of coefficients. The model is similar but not identical because the *gsem* command does not allow correlations between the error terms of endogenous variables (which is required when they share at least one common omitted cause (Kline 2011, 107), which is clearly the case here with the election campaign, and/or the election results). The other downside of the *gsem* command, and the most relevant reason why we do not report here coefficients estimated through it, is the unavailability of goodness-of-fit measures.

Overall, the evidence presented in this section represents a validation (albeit partial) of the classic party-closeness measure as a proper criterion for partisanship against our panel data. Contrary to previous literature (Thomassen 1976), we have shown that party closeness has been significantly more stable than vote choice during the 2012-2013 period in Italy, despite the presence of significant turbulence in the party system – thus confirming H1a. However, such measure does not prove to be better able to predict vote choice than the opposite, as expected by H1b. Nevertheless, the prior role of partisanship is still suggested (besides by its higher stability) by an autoregressive effect that is significantly larger than that of vote choice (suggesting that the higher stability of partisanship is resistant to the introduction of the cross-lagged effects of partisanship and vote choice across panel waves). As a result, we consider these findings still quite encouraging with regard to the ability of party closeness to measure partisanship. In the next section, we will look – adopting party closeness as a point of reference – at the comparative performance of the innovative, PTV-based measure of partisanship.

## ***4.2 Validating PTV-gap: a PTV-based measure of partisanship***

As anticipated, we report here the empirical findings concerning the validation of the alternative measure of partisanship: PTV-gap. Table 3 reports stability rates computed for such measure across all the six possible pairs of panel waves. We can then conduct the empirical verification of H2a, which claims for PTV-based partisanship greater stability than vote choice. Overall, we can say that the pattern observed in Table 2 is mostly replicated and that H2a is confirmed. PTV-gap partisanship is generally more stable than vote choice, the difference being statistically significant in most cases. As in the previous analysis, only one of the comparisons shows vote choice to be more stable than PTV-gap partisanship, and – again – only when no party system change is involved.

Let us now examine each of the six two-wave combinations. As anticipated, PTV-gap partisanship has higher stability rates in five out of six comparisons. The largest difference is recorded for the comparison between Waves 1 and 4, the one covering the largest time span: 6.6 percentage points. Basically three PTV-partisans out of four had the same best party between the initial and the final panel wave, while only two voters out of three maintained a stable party preference. However, because of the small number of respondents belonging to the relevant groups, this 6.6 point difference is not statistically significant ( $p=0.19$ ). We then find three more instances in which the stability of PTV-gap partisanship is higher than vote choice but not to a statistically significant extent. All these three differences are very small, between a half and three percentage points. Listed in order of stability difference, these are the comparisons between stability in Waves 2 and 4, the one between Waves 1 and 3, and the ones between Waves 2 and 3. The remaining instance in which PTV-gap has a higher stability than vote choice occurs in the comparison between Waves 3 and 4, the two final waves of the panel. In particular, we have 86.1% as the proportion of stable PTV partisans, as against 80.2% for stability of vote choice. The difference is, then, almost 6 percentage points, and this time it is statistically significant ( $p<0.05$ ).

However, it is worth pointing out that from the comparison between Waves 1 and 2, the only one where vote choice is more stable, a statistically significant difference in turn emerges. Furthermore, this is the largest difference of all the six two-wave comparisons (almost 10 percentage points). Again, it confirms that vote choice is more affected in terms of stability when a new competitor emerges – as the comparison between Waves 1 and 2 is the only one with a stable party system, before the arrival of SC, a new party.

**Table 3 – Stability of PTV-Gap Partisanship across the 2012-2013 CISE electoral panel**

	Stable PTV-gap Partisanship			
	%	N	[95% C. I.]	
Wave 1 - Wave 2	76.0	452	72.08	79.98
Wave 2 - Wave 3	76.2	497	72.47	79.98
Wave 3 - Wave 4	86.1	508	83.04	89.09
Wave 1 - Wave 3	73.2	349	68.52	77.86
Wave 2 - Wave 4	75.0	412	70.77	79.17
Wave 1 - Wave 4	74.1	304	69.11	79.02

This only represents a first step towards validation of the proposed new measure of partisanship. We then need to prove that, in addition to being more stable than vote, it is at least as stable as the traditional party-closeness measure – as H3a claims. Comparing the stability rates reported in Table 3 with those in the right half of Table 2, we find that, out of the six two-wave combinations, PTV-gap partisanship shows higher stability than party closeness only once: when looking at stability between the two final waves. However, though isolated, this 6.3-point difference is statistically significant. PTV-gap reveals itself, then to be particularly capable of maintaining stability when facing the stress of the electoral process – especially when accompanied by a turbulent electoral campaign. In contrast, party closeness is more stable in all other five instances. However, despite the fact that none of these differences is particularly small, none reaches the 10-point threshold, as they are all between 5 and 9.5 percentage points. Moreover, only two of them are statistically significant. These are the two largest ones, observed by comparing stability between Waves 1 and 2, with stability between Waves 1 and 3. The difference with stability between Waves 2 and 4 is slightly significant ( $p < 0.1$ ). The remaining two comparisons yield differences that are not even marginally significant.

In any case, we should always keep in mind that we have selected a quite low threshold on the PTV-gap variable in order to classify respondents as partisans of a certain party: a 2-point gap between the best and the second-best party. Yet this is sufficient to yield stability rates that are generally comparable to those observed on the party-closeness measure – which considers as partisans those respondents explicitly stating that they feel closer to a specific political party. All this considered, we can reasonably conclude that these findings provide clear enough empirical confirmation of H3a: overall, the

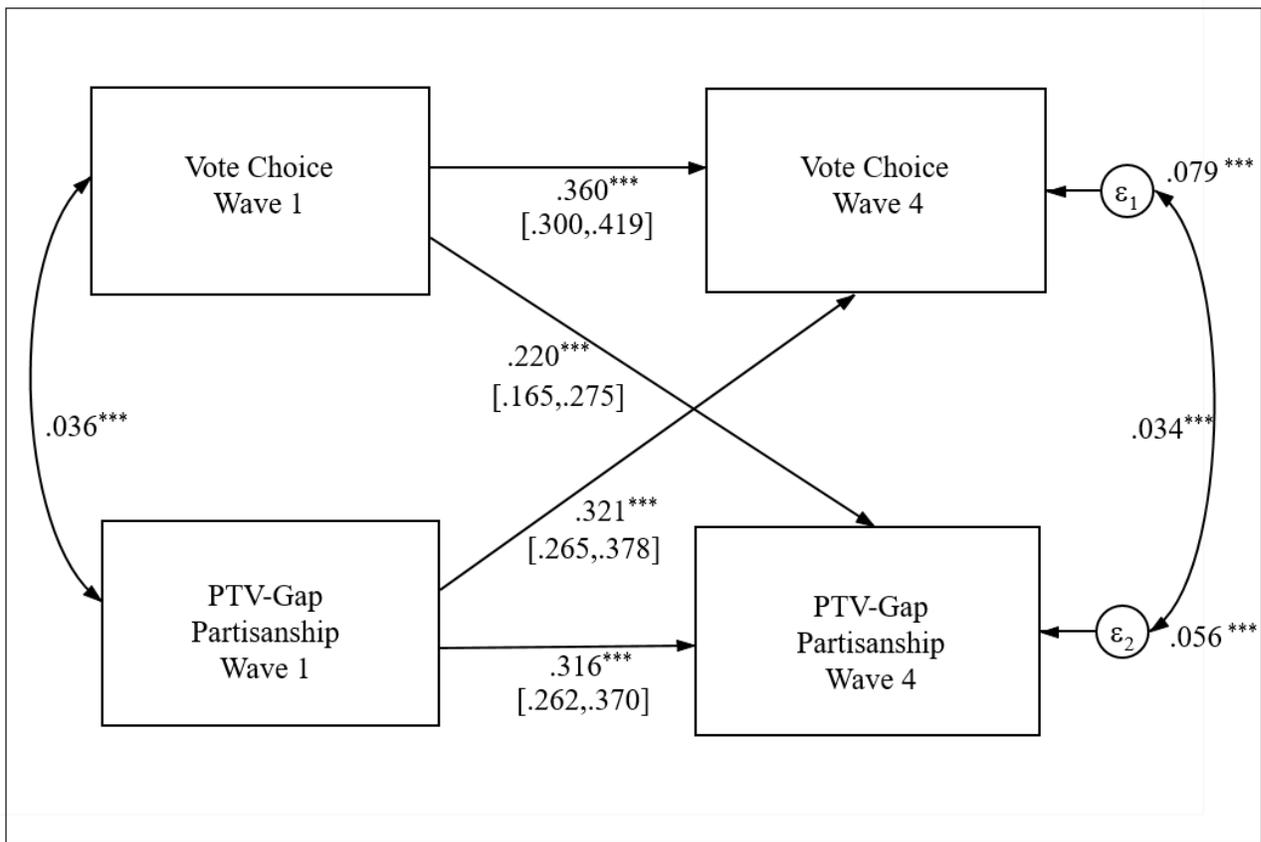
proposed PTV-gap measure of partisanship is not less stable than the traditional closeness-based measure.<sup>20</sup>

We now move to empirical assessment of the mutual predictive power over time of PTV-based partisanship and vote choice. To do so we can consider Figure 2, which replicates Figure 1 with the only difference that the alternative partisanship measure is employed. PTV-gap has a positive and significant effect over time on vote choice, as indicated by the coefficient for its effect on vote intention measured in Wave 4 (0.321\*\*\*). This is also obviously true for vote choice, whose effect over time on PTV-gap partisanship is also positive and significant (0.220\*\*\*). However, there is a difference compared to our previous observations concerning classic party closeness: in this case the two effects are different to a statistically significant extent – though only marginally so ( $p < 0.1$ ). This leads us to confirm H2b, as the statistical significance of the difference between the two crucial coefficients indicates that PTV-based partisanship does in fact predict vote choice better than vote choice predicts PTV-based partisanship.

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<sup>20</sup> We have also computed the same stability rates among respondents whose best party received at least an arbitrary, minimum PTV score. We have set two thresholds: the first at 6 (or more), the second at 8 (or more). In the various waves, a proportion of the overall PTV partisans ranging between 84% and 94% for the less demanding cut-off, and between 65% and 78% for the more demanding, have assigned at least the requested PTV score to their best party. The stability rates for partisans on the PTV-gap measure who, in addition to having a value of the PTV-gap measure above 1 have also assigned the indicated scores to their best parties in both compared waves, are reported in the Appendix (see Table A1). Findings adopting this alternative measurement strategy for the PTV-based measure of partisanship show only marginal increases in the stability rates, computed on significantly smaller groups of respondents selected by the measure.

**Figure 2 – Estimated values of parameters for over-time mutual effects between PTV-gap Partisanship and Vote choice in the 2012-2013 CISE electoral panel.**



Notes: Coefficients reported here were estimated through a linear probability model.<sup>21</sup> 95% Confidence intervals in brackets. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ . There are a total of 6,741 observations in our stacked data matrix. Standard errors are clustered by individuals (903). Goodness-of-fit indices: SRMR=0.000; CD=0.269; AIC=-2,229.641; BIC=-2,161.481.

The final step in our validation of PTV-gap partisanship concerns the comparison of its mutual predictive power with vote choice, *vis-à-vis* the classic party-closeness measure. H3b claims that the new measure should perform no worse than the old does, in order to serve as a transatlantic comparative measure not inferior to the current standard in Europe. When looking at the findings presented above, we find that, overall, PTV-based partisanship performs better. This results from the comparison of two types of coefficients. The first is the effect from partisanship (Wave 1) to vote choice (Wave 4): here the two

<sup>21</sup> Full results are reported in the Appendix (see Table A3, right half). As for the model reported in Figure 1, we also employed a similar structural equation model using logistic regressions, which yields analogous results (see Table A2, right half).

coefficients do not differ significantly (0.387\*\*\* for party closeness vs. 0.321\*\*\* for PTV-gap). The two measures affect vote choice to a roughly equivalent extent. However, the second comparison concerns how the two measures are affected by vote choice (something that should be weaker, according to party identification theory), and here PTV-gap performs better. Indeed, vote choice affects party closeness with a coefficient of 0.293\*\*\*, while it affects PTV gap with a smaller coefficient of 0.220\*\*\*. Again, this difference is clearly not statistically significant, but still it surely indicates that the PTV-gap measure of partisanship is not more affected by the contamination effects of vote choice than the classic party closeness measure. Furthermore, in this comparative assessment of the two partisanship measures in terms of mutual predictive power over time with vote choice, PTV-gap partisanship shows a statistically larger effect on vote choice than the opposite, while the same does not hold for party-closeness. Overall, these findings appear as clear empirical confirmation for H3b. Especially looking at the mutual predictive power with vote choice over time, PTV-gap appears a more valid measure of the original concept of party identification, compared to the party-closeness measure.

## 5. Conclusion

In this article we have aimed at validating the PTV-gap measure as a possible measure for partisanship that could travel across two- and multi-party systems, something that has been long been missing from the comparative study of electoral behaviour. Building on previous validations in the U.S. context (Paparo, De Sio, and Brady 2015), we took on the task of validating it in a multi-party system, with an obvious comparison with the classic party-closeness measure currently used in most such systems. Our validation criteria were aimed in two directions: *stability over time*, especially compared to vote choice (Thomassen 1976), and *predictive power of vote choice over time*.

We started by validating the classic party-closeness measure against our data. We required it to prove more stable over time than vote choice, as expected by the classic party identification literature but previously rejected by empirical research in a multi-party system such as the Netherlands. In this regard, our findings are quite striking: party closeness consistently shows, over time, higher stability rates than vote choice. Nevertheless, our findings also show that, not completely in line with our expectations, values of mutual over-time predictive power between party closeness and vote choice appear quantitatively equivalent, thus challenging the theoretical requirement of a genuine causal antecedence of partisanship (to the extent that it can be effectively tested in an observational setting, even with panel data). However, overall, the striking finding of a higher stability of party closeness compared to vote choice is in our opinion of great importance.

We then moved to the comparative validation of the innovative, PTV-based measure of partisanship. Again, PTV-gap partisanship too proves to be generally more stable than vote choice; and its stability is mostly similar to that of the party-closeness measure, providing a first corroboration of its potential for studying different contexts.<sup>22</sup> However, findings that are even more important are those relative to the mutual predictive power with vote choice: here, PTV-gap clearly outperforms the traditional party-closeness measure. Its power to predict vote choice is statistically greater than the power

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<sup>22</sup> It is worth recalling that we here needed to create a dichotomous partisanship variable from the PTV-gap measure – unlike in the U.S. study mentioned earlier, where the gap was operationalised as a numeric variable. To that end, we have selected a quite loose threshold for the PTV-gap measure, which always identifies a larger number of partisans than the party-closeness variable (see section 3, and Table 1 in particular, for detailed discussion). This might partially account for the slightly lower stability, and it has to be considered when evaluating the overall potential of the PTV-gap measure – the potential of which, by the way, also lies in its quasi-cardinal level of measurement.

of vote choice to predict PTV-gap, while, as mentioned above, this does not hold for party-closeness. This provides a second corroboration of PTV-gap, which in fact presents interesting intrinsic properties, even without considering its much higher potential for comparison across two- and multi-party systems.

What are the implications of our study for the literature on party identification, or partisanship more generally? We deem two points worthy of final emphasis. The first concerns the general problem of the comparative stability of partisanship and vote choice. Our evidence shows that, even in a turbulent setting such as Italy in 2012-2013, with a party system challenged by dealignment, partisanship appears (perhaps precisely because of this challenge) to be more stable than vote choice. This confirms the original theoretical prediction of party identification theory, at the same time challenging the findings emerged in the Netherlands in the 1970s, which for decades cast a negative light on the applicability of party identification theory to Western Europe. In this regard, we suggest that future research should attempt to replicate our findings on panel data in other party systems, to provide an updated comparative assessment of this important research question.

Secondly, our findings highlight the promising potential of the newly introduced, PTV-based measure of partisanship. While our tests showed that, in the context we analysed, party closeness performs as a valid and acceptable indicator of partisanship (we rejected the claims of lack of stability), they also showed that a measure of partisanship based on PTV-gap generally equals or outperforms party closeness, while offering the advantage of being easily used also in two-party systems.<sup>23</sup> We deem this a promising finding, one that provides an initial validation of PTV-gap as a possible measure of partisanship. An immediate challenge for future research might be to exploit the easy operationalisation of our measure quickly to perform comparisons of the two measures using the already available comparative datasets that include PTV batteries. A comparative validation of such measure might lead to a measure of partisanship that could be profitably adopted across a variety of two- and multi-party systems, possibly overcoming the lack of a cross-national comparative measure for partisan attitudes.

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<sup>23</sup> An additional advantage we did not systematically discuss is its potential to offer a *quasi-cardinal* operationalisation of partisanship, opening up a variety of applications.

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## *Appendix*

### **PTV-battery survey items included in the 2012-2013 CISE electoral panel:**

Some people are quite certain that they will always vote for the same political party. Others reconsider at each election which party they will vote for. How likely is it that you will ever vote for a candidate from each of the following political parties?

On a scale where 0 means ‘not at all probable’ and 10 means ‘very probable’.

### **Party-closeness survey items employed in the 2012-2013 CISE electoral panel:**

Do you consider yourself to be close to any particular party?

**Follow-up question only for respondents answering “Yes” to the previous question:**

Which party do you feel close to? [Open-ended answer. Only one answer possible]

Do you feel yourself to be very close to this party, fairly close, or merely a sympathiser?

### **Classic ANES Party Identification survey items:**

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent or what?

**Two possible follow-up questions, according to whether respondent answers Independent (2) or not (1):**

1. Would you call yourself a strong [Democrat/Republican] or a not-very-strong [Democrat/Republican]?
2. Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or to the Democratic Party?

**Table A1 – Stability of PTV-gap Partisanship across the 2012-2013 CISE electoral panel for respondents with a specified minimum score assigned to the best party**

	PTV best party>5				PTV best party>7			
	%	N	[95% C. I.]		%	N	[95% C. I.]	
Wave 1 - Wave 2	78.7	374	74.5	82.9	79.9	264	75.0	84.7
Wave 2 - Wave 3	77.0	419	72.9	81.0	82.2	310	78.0	86.5
Wave 3 - Wave 4	87.4	460	84.4	90.5	89.7	376	86.6	92.8
Wave 1 - Wave 3	73.8	292	68.8	78.9	73.1	220	67.2	79.0
Wave 2 - Wave 4	79.0	349	74.7	83.3	82.6	269	78.1	87.2
Wave 1 - Wave 4	75.1	261	69.9	80.4	75.4	194	69.3	81.5

**Table A2 – Full structural equation model estimates for the relationships over time between selected measures of Partisanship and Vote choice in the 2012-2013 CISE electoral panel: logistic regressions.**

	Party-closeness Partisanship	PTV-gap Partisanship.
<hr/>		
Vote choice Wave 4		
Vote choice Wave 1	1.983*** [1.684,2.282]	1.993*** [1.701,2.285]
Partisanship Wave 1	2.170*** [1.871,2.469]	1.901*** [1.624,2.178]
Constant	-2.568*** [-2.637,-2.498]	-2.572*** [-2.641,-2.503]
<hr/>		
Partisanship Wave 4		
Vote choice Wave 1	2.039*** [1.713,2.365]	1.479*** [1.150,1.808]
Partisanship Wave 1	2.706*** [2.396,3.017]	2.193*** [1.888,2.499]
Constant	-3.117*** [-3.218,-3.017]	-3.133*** [-3.235,-3.030]
<hr/>		
<i>Observations</i>	6,741	6,741
<i>Groups</i>	963	963
<i>AIC</i>	6,651.538	6,749.339
<i>BIC</i>	6,692.433	6,790.235

95% Confidence intervals in brackets

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Table A3 – Full structural equation model estimates for the relationships over time between selected measures of Partisanship and Vote choice in the 2012-2013 CISE electoral panel: liner probability models.**

	Party-closeness Partisanship		PTV-gap Partisanship	
<b>Vote choice Wave 4</b>				
Vote choice Wave 1	0.338***	[0.277,0.399]	0.360***	[0.300,0.419]
Partisanship Wave 1	0.387***	[0.325,0.449]	0.321***	[0.265,0.378]
Constant	0.070***	[0.065,0.074]	0.069***	[0.065,0.074]
<b>Partisanship Wave 4</b>				
Vote choice Wave 1	0.293***	[0.235,0.352]	0.220***	[0.165,0.275]
Partisanship Wave 1	0.446***	[0.386,0.507]	0.316***	[0.262,0.370]
Constant	0.040***	[0.036,0.044]	0.039***	[0.035,0.044]
<b>Mean (Vote choice Wave 1)</b>				
Constant	0.064***	[0.059,0.068]	0.064***	[0.059,0.068]
<b>Mean (Partisanship Wave 1)</b>				
Constant	0.061***	[0.057,0.066]	0.071***	[0.067,0.076]
<b>Var (ε.Vote choice Wave 4)</b>				
Constant	0.078***	[0.074,0.082]	0.079***	[0.075,0.083]
<b>Var (ε.Partisanship Wave 4)</b>				
Constant	0.053***	[0.050,0.057]	0.056***	[0.052,0.059]
<b>Var (Vote choice Wave 1)</b>				
Constant	0.060***	[0.056,0.064]	0.060***	[0.056,0.064]
<b>Var (Partisanship Wave 1)</b>				
Constant	0.057***	[0.053,0.061]	0.066***	[0.062,0.070]
<b>Cov (ε.Vote choice Wave 4 , ε.Partisanship Wave 4)</b>				
Constant	0.032***	[0.029,0.036]	0.034***	[0.031,0.038]
<b>Cov (Vote choice Wave 1, Partisanship Wave 1)</b>				
Constant	0.033***	[0.030,0.037]	0.036***	[0.032,0.040]
<hr/>				
<i>Observations</i>	6,741		6,741	
<i>Groups</i>	903		903	
<i>AIC</i>	-3,340.144		-2,229.641	
<i>BIC</i>	-3,271.985		-2,161.481	

95% Confidence intervals in brackets

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$