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ORIGINAL PAPER

Does far-right populism affect immigrants' working conditions?

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Abstract
Anti-immigrant stances are central in far-right populist propaganda. We investigate whether the electoral success of far-right populist parties affects the labor market conditions of immigrants. Using administrative panel data from Italian manufacturing workers in 1994–2005, we show that higher electoral support for the populist party Lega Nord significantly increases injury risks for foreign workers within job spells. This effect is most pronounced in small firms, which are characterized by lower levels of unionization and employment protection. The increase in injury rates appears driven by task reallocation to overtime and night shifts and to the exploitation of immigrants' labor supply rigidity. While alternative factors such as import competition and robotization influence injury risk, they fail to explain our core findings.

Keywords Social norms · Discrimination · Workplace injuries · Night-shift segregation

JEL Classification D72 · J28 · J71

1 Introduction

The recent surge in electoral support for far-right populist parties, mainly among white, non-college-educated voters, is well documented. Protectionist and nativist claims stem from a complex interplay of economic insecurity and cultural reactions

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to globalization and automation. Fears of labor market competition between natives and migrants are intensified by trade shocks and automation and further radicalized in the political arena (Scheve and Slaughter 2001; Mayda 2006; Colantone and Stanig 2018a; Colantone et al. 2022; Carreras et al. 2019; Ballard-Rosa et al. 2021a, b; Anelli et al. 2021; Guriev and Papaioannou 2022; Deole and Huang 2024). As a result, right-wing populist propaganda increasingly targets social resentment towards outgroups, mainly immigrants and minorities (Autor et al. 2020; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2006; Rho and Tomz 2015, 2017; Guiso et al. 2017; Rodrik 2018; Inglehart 2018; Inglehart and Norris 2017).[1]

Numerous studies provide evidence of the adverse effects of publicly expressed anti-immigrant sentiments on immigrants' welfare. Feinberg et al. (2022); Edwards and Rushin (2018); Müller and Schwarz (2019), and Romarri (2019) find that the electoral success of populist parties in the UK, the US, and Italy increases the expression of hate and occurrence of hate crimes against immigrants. Grosjean et al. (2023) reveal that Trump's political rallies affect the behavior of law enforcement officers toward racial minorities. Bracco et al. (2022) show that electoral campaigning against minorities leads to actual increases in societal hostility towards immigrants and bullying episodes against minority children in schools. Cerqua and Zampollo (2023) and Bracco et al. (2018) indicate that populism impacts foreigners' residential choices, reducing their inflows in municipalities where the mayor is supported by anti-immigrant parties.

Populist propaganda often hinges on the concern that immigrants compete with natives for jobs.[2] Yet, the literature has so far neglected whether populism affects immigrants at the workplace. In this paper, we seek to fill this gap and investigate whether the electoral success of populist parties in the province of employment bears actual implications for immigrants' labor market conditions. We focus on the electoral results of *Lega Nord*, an Italian populist party with a marked anti-immigrant stance, which achieved significant electoral success during the analyzed period.

Our main focus is on workplace safety, a key dimension of worker well-being that can be measured objectively based on administrative data (Hamermesh 1999; Boone and van Ours 2006), as the downward wage rigidity in the Italian labor market may prevent us from observing the effects of populism on other key outcomes like salaries (Leombruni et al. 2013). Drawing on unique information on the type of work incidents (severe, overtime, night shift), we can analyze aspects of job quality and intensity that reflect broader dimensions of workers' physical and psychological well-being, such as effort and work satisfaction.

In our application, we take advantage of Italian administrative data covering the 1994–2005 period. Exploiting information on the exact dates of individual injuries, we examine within-job-spell variations in injury rates before and after the national election rounds in 1994, 1996, and 2001. We consider manufacturing workers for the core of our analysis but show that the results carry over to other sectors.

Our results show that a unit increase in the share of votes for *Lega Nord* results in a 0.2% rise in workplace injury rates among non-native workers. The effect is driven by

[1] For brevity, we will hereinafter refer to far-right populism whenever we talk about populism.

[2] According to a 2020 poll, 53% of Americans favored stopping legal immigration if it protects jobs for Americans during the COVID-19 crisis (Rosenberg and Cooke 2020).

firms with less than 15 employees, where trade union representation is less formalized and jobs are less protected. In this subgroup, the estimated effect increases to 1%. Moreover, we observe that accidents that occurred during non-standard hours—i.e., overtime and night shifts—account for most deterioration in immigrants' workplace safety.

Exploring alternative explanations for this result, we demonstrate that economic factors—such as import competition, robot adoption, and firms' economic hardship—affect workplace safety but do not explain our core findings. Rather, pro-populist electoral outcomes appear to signal the legitimacy of anti-immigrant behaviors, which include shifting the burden of night shifts and overtime work onto these workers. We also provide suggestive evidence that the spread of anti-immigrant resentment is associated with increased labor supply rigidity among immigrants.

Our findings contribute to the emerging literature on the consequences of the rise of populism and represent, to the best of our knowledge, the first study on the labor market effects of populism.

The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 discusses the theoretical framework and institutional context, Sect. 3 illustrates our empirical approach, and Sect. 4 our data. Section 5 presents the results, and Sect. 6 discusses possible mechanisms underlying them. A broad set of robustness checks is introduced at the end of Sect. 5 and detailed in the Online Appendix. Section 7 concludes.

2 Background and theoretical framework

2.1 Anti-immigrant stances in the Lega Nord party

We acknowledge the presence of other populist parties in Italy (see the definition in Inglehart and Norris 2016), but, following Bracco et al. (2022), we focus on Lega Nord because of its distinctive anti-immigrant positions.

The Lega Nord's platform blends themes of cultural identity with concerns over economic insecurity. Regionalism (which later turned to nationalism) and opposition to immigration have been central since its foundation. In the 1980 s and early 1990 s, its rhetoric focused on defending the economic interests of Northern regions over Southern ones.

Over the decades, the Lega Nord adjusted its platform to secure broader national consensus. It shifted from advocating secession and opposing internal migration to a mostly anti-EU, anti-globalization, and anti-immigrant rhetoric. In the 90 s, immigration was still limited in Italy and had little impact on the labor market (Venturini and Villosio 2006). Yet, Lega Nord representatives already portrayed immigrants as a threat to local community values, collective identity, and natives' jobs. The party strongly opposed the 1990 immigration law, which it criticized as promoting "a multiracial state" (Bossi 1990). It presented its own proposal for a more restrictive immigration law (La Repubblica 1990) and founded an "autonomous" trade union, among whose objectives there was "the defense of indigenous workers from immigrants' assault" (Bonerandi 1990).

In the 1992 elections, the Lega Nord participated for the first time in the electoral competition as a single alliance of previously separated regional parties promoting similar issues, gaining 8% of votes, which is remarkable considering the young age of the party and the limits of its constituency, which was mainly based in the North (see Fig. 2). In 1994, the party joined the center-right coalition, contributing to its victory with 8% of the nationwide vote. A few months after the elections, it withdrew support to the coalition, causing the collapse of the first Berlusconi government. In the next round of elections in 1996, the party did not participate in any coalitions and was rewarded by the polls gaining 10% of votes, although this did not bring the party to power. In 2001, the party joined the center-right coalition again, gaining remarkably lower consensus—less than 4%—but nonetheless contributing to the victory of the coalition, which brought Silvio Berlusconi to win his second mandate as a prime minister and Lega Nord leader Umberto Bossi to become Minister for Institutional Reforms. Over the years, Lega Nord's anti-immigrant rhetoric became increasingly explicit and confrontational. In a 2003 interview with a newspaper, Umberto Bossi called for "opening fire" on ships carrying undocumented immigrants to Italy (Corriere della Sera 2003).

Lega Nord's primary electoral base was made of middle-aged males, blue-collar workers and low- or mid-level white-collars, and self-employed workers with mid- to low-levels of education (Mannheimer 1995). It was strongest among small and medium-sized enterprises in small- and medium-sized municipalities in the North, which had benefited from fast growth during the sixties and seventies and more recently started to face the negative impact of globalization. In 1990, 26.3% of Lega voters cited the need to defend Lombardy from immigrants and foreigners as their primary motivation (Mannheimer 1991). In 1991, 53.7% of them stated that non-EU immigrants were the cause of an increase in crime and drug use, and 32.3% called for a ban on their entry (Biorcio 1997). According to the 1994 Eurobarometer survey, 76% of prospective Lega voters attributed a rise in crime to immigrants, compared to an average of 50% (Biorcio 1997).

2.2 Immigrants' working conditions and the role of firm size and trade unions

The strong anti-immigrant stances outlined in the previous paragraph imply a high likelihood of discriminatory tastes among firms and coworkers where the consensus for Lega Nord is high. As shown in the literature, differences among workers in terms of outside options, preferences, or reservation wages may lead monopsonistic firms to impose larger mark-downs and worse working conditions on workers with less elastic labor supply (Hirsch and Jahn 2015; Manning 2003).

Foreign workers generally face fewer outside options and are often characterized by lower labor supply elasticity. It is well established that they are more tolerant to risk and job disamenities, have lower reservation wages, and tend to replace natives in riskier jobs and more displeasing job schedules, such as night shifts, weekends, and overtime hours (e.g., Orrenius and Zavodny 2009, 2010, 2013; Giuntella 2012; D'Ambrosio et al. 2020; Bond et al. 2023). Differential treatment of foreign workers

may benefit monopsonistic employers by allowing labor cost savings and flexible adjustment of working hours to temporary output variations.

In this context, firm size plays a crucial role in protecting foreign workers from unequal treatment in the workplace. Indeed, until 2013, the regulatory frameworks for firms with more or fewer than 15 employees differed significantly.[3]

First, employees in firms with more than 15 workers were granted stronger protection against unjust dismissal. This included reinstatement rights and compensation for lost wages of up to 15 months (Law no. 300 of 1970, i.e., Workers' Statute). Smaller-firm employees were not eligible for wage compensation nor reinstatement and their employers faced lower mandated severance payments.

Second, the 15-employee threshold marked differences in the right to constitute workers' representative bodies and in the bargaining power accorded to trade unions. In large firms, the law guaranteed the right to establish firm-specific worker representative bodies ("Rappresentanze Sindacali Aziendali") to negotiate wage levels and working conditions. Trade union representation was not granted to workers in smaller firms.

Third, the law established different workplace safety accountability structures in firms above and below 15 employees. In larger firms, employees elected an internal workers' safety representative from among trade union members to express their concerns regarding workplace health and safety. These delegates could appeal to the responsible authorities if they deemed risk prevention and protection measures inappropriate. In smaller firms, the worker safety representative could be external to the firm and responsible for several small firms in the same local area or industry (Legislative Decree No. 626 of 1994 on workplace safety). Also, larger firms had to hold annual safety meetings, while smaller firms were not obliged.

Overall, the institutional setting had practical implications for workers' ability to voice their concerns on health, safety, and working conditions, potentially implying less effective representation of workers' issues in smaller firms. Such differences may matter especially for employees with limited bargaining power, like immigrant workers.

Previous works have shown that trade unions facilitate immigrants' inclusion and promote their equal working conditions (Marino et al. 2017) and that they contribute to reducing inequalities in the distribution of job disamenities like unpaid overtime (Bell et al. 1999; Bell and Hart 1999; Hart 2004; Alves et al. 2007). Trade union activity may also limit employers' ability to bypass safety regulations and engage in discriminatory practices, thereby reducing monopsonistic power. Therefore, we anticipate that anti-immigrant attitudes will have a stronger impact on immigrant workers in smaller, less unionized firms.

3 Identification strategy

Our empirical analysis investigates how Lega Nord's electoral success differentially impacts native and immigrant workers and how these effects vary across EPL regimes in firms with more or fewer than 15 employees.

[3] The 2012 labor market reform reduced part of these differences.

A critical strength of our approach is the ability to study this relationship including job spell fixed effects, i.e., fixed effects for the specific worker-firm match, along with period dummies. Job spell fixed effects are included to account for unobserved heterogeneity related to individual workers and tasks, which could otherwise confound our results (see Hummels et al. 2014 and Krishna et al. 2014 for more arguments in favor of spell fixed effects). This strength relies critically on the quality and detail in our data and is not a common feature in studies on workplace injury risk. The residual variation in injuries conditional on the specific worker-firm match is an intrinsically valuable object of study.

Period dummies, capturing common time trends within subperiods, allow us to control for the general trends in our variables, among which, importantly, the differences in the average consensus for Lega Nord across electoral rounds. Drawing on precise data on weeks worked and on the injury date, we can split observations crossing an election year into their before-election and after-election components and tell whether the injury took place before or after the elections. This division of pre- and post-election exposure enables us to compare injury rates across time intervals of varying lengths.

In this way, we associate the before-after election variation in the shares of Lega with changes in injuries and exposure, conditional on time-invariant match-specific unobservables, average levels of consensus for Lega Nord, time trends, and covariates. This approach is designed to effectively capture the impact of changing levels of support for Lega Nord on workers' injury risk.

Specifically, our main outcome of interest is y_{ijpt}, the number of injuries of individual i in job spell j employed in province p at time t. We assume that the outcome is affected by individual factors, job characteristics, and fixed effects as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} y_{ijpt} &= f(\beta_1 \text{Lega}_{pt} + \beta_2 \text{Below15}_{jt} + \beta_3\, \text{Lega}_{pt} \times \text{Below15}_{jt} + \beta_4 \text{Foreign}_i \times \text{Below15}_{jt} \\ &\quad + \beta_5 \text{Foreign}_i \times \text{Lega}_{pt} + \beta_6 \text{Foreign}_i \times \text{Lega}_{pt} \times \text{Below15}_{jt} + \rho \text{LogExposure}_{ijpt} \\ &\quad + \gamma_3 W_{ijt} + \gamma_1 X_{pt} + \delta_p + \psi_t + \theta_s + \mu_j) + \varepsilon_{ijpt} \\ &= f(\boldsymbol{X}_{ijpt}\boldsymbol{\beta}) + \varepsilon_{ijpt}. \end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

$Lega_{pt}$ represents the share of votes for Lega Nord in province p during period t. $Foreign_i$ is a binary variable equal to one for foreign-born workers, while $Below15_{jt}$ is a binary variable identifying firms with fewer than 15 employees.

Our primary focus is on β_6, the coefficient of the triple interaction term $\text{Foreign}_i \times \text{Lega}_{pt} \times \text{Below15}_{jt}$, which measures the differential effect of increased support for Lega Nord on foreign-born workers in firms with fewer than 15 employees.

Following common practice in the epidemiological literature, we add a measure of exposure, measured as the full-time equivalent (FTE) number of weeks worked.[4] W_{ijt} is a vector of individual or job-specific characteristics, including tenure (linear and quadratic), professional qualification (apprentice, blue-collar), log firm employees, and work intensity (i.e., the ratio of FTE weeks worked to the number of paid weeks, interpretable as a part-time share). X_{pt} is a vector of province-level controls that includes unemployment rate, immigration rate, small firms share, as well as indices

[4] We do not impose its coefficient ρ to be equal to one, as the data reject this assumption.

for import competition from China (IC) and robot penetration.[5] As our variable of interest is at the province level, it is important to include control variables that capture alternative channels through which province-level time-varying variables may affect injury rates. Unemployment, import competition, robotization, and immigration have been found to correlate with firms' economic performance, workplace safety, social resentment, and populist preferences.[6] Therefore, following Halla et al. (2017) and Barone et al. (2016), we include these variables as simultaneous controls. Including province-level controls that correlate with Lega Nord, the estimation of (1) captures the effect of populist preferences on injuries, holding province variables constant. Still, we will show that excluding these variables makes little difference. As anticipated, we further include fixed effects at the levels of job spell (μ_j), period (ψ_t), as well as of province (δ_p) and sector (θ_s).[7]

We consider yearly observations on injuries for a particular worker-firm combination, except for the election years, when observations are split into two to distinguish the pre-election from the post-election injuries, drawing on precise information on the injury dates. Hence, with 12 years in our sample and three electoral rounds, we have in total 15 period dummies (two pre-post election dummies for election years 1994, 1996, and 2001 and one for the remaining years). We also split yearly exposure into its before-after election components. We assign the share of Lega of the previous electoral round to the pre-election period and the share of Lega of the new electoral round to the post-election period. The other variables are measured at the year level.

As the number of injuries is a count variable, in our main specification, we employ the Poisson pseudo-maximum likelihood (PPML) regression with multi-way fixed effects[8], as follows:

$$y_{ijpt} = exp\Big(\boldsymbol{X}_{ijpt}\boldsymbol{\beta}\Big) + \nu_{ijpt} \tag{2}$$

[5] We compute the exposure of Italian provinces to the import competition from China similarly to Caselli et al. (2020) and Barone and Kreuter (2021) as $IC_{py} = \sum_s \frac{L_{psy_0}}{L_{py_0}} \frac{M_y^{\text{ITA}}}{L_{sy_0}}$, where p is the province, y the year, s the tradable sector, and y_0 is 1991, i.e., the first period when we observe import and employment data in the Census. M_y^{ITA} is the yearly real imports from China to Italy in sector s, L_{psy_0} is the start-of-period employment in province p and sector s, L_{sy_0} is the start-of-period Italian employment in sector s, and L_{py_0} is the start-of-period total employment in province p.
We follow Acemoglu and Restrepo (2020) in computing the robot exposure index as $RP_{pt} = \sum_s l_{pst_0} APR_{st}$ where $APR_{st} = \frac{R_{st}}{L_{st_0}} - \frac{Y_{st}}{Y_{st_0}} \frac{R_{st_0}}{L_{st_0}}$. R_{st} and R_{st_0} are the operational stocks of robots in Italy in sector s at time t and t_0 (i.e., 1991), respectively. Y_{st} and Y_{st_0} are the values of output in sector s at time t and t_0. L_{st_0} is the total number of workers in sector s in Italy in 1991. To obtain the sector-specific robot exposure, we convert the IFR classification of sectors into ISIC and then into NACE rev. 1 sectors. In some cases (ISIC sectors 19–21, 24–25, 29–30), the IFR classification is more aggregate than NACE, so we have to assign the same value of robot penetration to two industries. For industries C and E, the first available value of output Y is not available for 1993, so we assign 1995 as a start-of-period value. Output data are drawn from the UNIDO INDSTAT database and are not available for non-tradable sectors.

[6] The literature on the effects of immigration on populist preferences presents partially divergent findings. Halla et al. (2017) and Barone et al. (2016) find that greater immigrant inflows fuel consensus for populism. In contrast, Lonsky (2021) shows that greater immigration rates shift political preferences away from far-right populism towards pro-immigration positions, consistent with intergroup contact theory.

[7] We control for province and sector fixed effects along with job-spell fixed effects as, for a minority of individuals, the province of work and core activity of the firm within the same job spell may change.

[8] This model is estimated using the `ppmlhdfe` Stata package developed by Correia et al. (2020).

Identification rests upon the assumption that unobserved shocks experienced by native and foreign workers have similar effects in large and small firms. This assumption is more likely to hold if the most pressing sources of heterogeneity and omitted variables are controlled for, as we aim to do by including province, sector, time, and size effects, as well as province- and individual-level controls. Under this assumption, the triple interaction effect identifies the differential impact on injury risk for foreign workers in smaller, less regulated firms within provinces showing higher support for Lega Nord.

It is worth noting that, while our approach sheds light on the before-and-after effects of changes in Lega Nord's support, it is not a strict difference-in-differences design and does not provide immediate insights into the effects' dynamics as an event study approach would (see Appendix A.3 for more details).

4 Data

Our estimation sample is based on the WHIP-Salute database, which combines longitudinal data on individuals' working histories with information on workplace injuries.[9] We had access to a systematic sample of individuals' working histories drawn from official population-level social security data from the Italian Social Security Archive (INPS), matched with confidential workplace injury data from the National Work Injuries Insurance Administration (INAIL). Sampling is based on the individuals' day of birth. Our data oversample foreign workers (their records are extracted based on 12 birthdays per year) relative to native workers, whose records are extracted based on 4 birthdays per year.[10]

Our sample includes male workers from 1994 to 2005, spanning 102 provinces, i.e., all Italian provinces established under the 1995 administrative reform, except for Valle d'Aosta.[11] It contains information on individual characteristics such as age and region of birth (including foreign nations) and job/firm characteristics such as number of worked weeks, earnings, injuries, professional qualification (apprentice, blue-collar), two-digit NACE rev. 1 sector, province of work, number of employees, and the initial and final day of each job spell. A job spell is defined as the continuous employment period between a specific worker and a single employer.

[9] For details on how to access the WHIP-salute database, see (in Italian) https://www.epi.piemonte.it/whipsalute/normativa.php.

[10] Hence, the sampling probability is 1:30 for foreign-born and 1:90 for native workers. Sampling probability is fully determined based on whether the worker is foreign-born and is exogenous to our data, hence in our application weighting is unnecessary for consistency and even harmful for precision (Solon et al. 2015; Wooldridge 1999).

[11] The 1995 administrative reform increased the number of provinces from 95 to 103. To match the relevant structure of provinces and attribute the post-reform province of work to 1994 observations, the WHIP administrators updated the province of work information based on confidential data on the municipality of work. When control variable data were unavailable for 1994 for the 1995-established provinces, we imputed their values based on the provinces they originally belonged to. The issue does not concern electoral data, whose original level of disaggregation is municipality-level or finer, allowing univocal attribution of the post-reform province.

We match WHIP-Salute data with data at the municipality level on Italian elections in 1994, 1996, and 2001, available from the Italian Ministry of the Interior.[12] Although different electoral rules apply to different rounds, it is always possible to recover the share of votes for each party (the "proportional" vote) in the Chamber of Deputies. These shares are aggregated at the provincial level, which represents the maximum level of detail available in the WHIP-SALUTE dataset due to confidentiality constraints.[13]

Our outcome of interest is workplace injuries. Workplace injuries are defined as physical harms from accidents that lead to death or impairment in a worker's ability to perform their job.[14] With regards to injured workers, the data report the date of the accident, the days of injury leave, the type of injury, as well as the time of the day when the injury took place. The latter will be our main source of information about work in non-standard schedules.[15] Commuting injuries are excluded from our analysis as their underlying causes differ significantly from those of other work-related injuries.

We define immigrant workers based on their nation of birth. In our sample, most of them originate from low-income countries.

Female workers were excluded from the sample due to the unavailability of data on domestic work, a key employment sector for foreign female workers. We exclude workers in the transportation industry due to widespread self-employment and workers in agriculture and fishing due to data limitations, as our sample is not representative of these industries.[16] Furthermore, due to widespread informality in construction and few foreign workers in mining, we mainly focus on manufacturing workers. Jointly with mining and construction, manufacturing accounted for most workplace injuries in the sample period (INAIL 2002). We also exclude a minority of anomalous job spells with zero duration. We show the robustness of our results to lifting sample restrictions in Appendix A.4.

Finally, in our empirical analysis, we restrict the sample to workers aged 18–55 with at least 3 years of potential labor market experience. Several reasons motivate this restriction.

First, it allows us to compare native and immigrant workers with similar language and communication skills and mitigate the impact of unobserved heterogeneity in productivity. In the first years, language difficulties may limit foreign workers' productivity and push them into worse and more hazardous occupations. Indeed, immigrants'

[12] Before the national elections in 1992, there were several regional League parties (i.e., Lega Lombarda, Lega Veneto). We consider the votes obtained by all these parties as consensus for Lega Nord.)

[13] The unavailability of municipality information prevents us from analyzing the effects of local elections or considering labor market outcomes at the Local Labor Market level.

[14] https://www.lavoro.gov.it/temi-e-priorita/previdenza/focus-on/Assicurazione-contro-infortuni-sul-lavoro-e-malattie-professionali/Pagine/Infortunio-sul-lavoro.aspx.

[15] Our data do not provide information on whether or how much workers participated in night shifts or overtime hours. This can only be inferred from the timing of the injuries. Yet, if greater consensus for populism did not systematically affect within-firm task and work schedule allocation, injury timing should be conditionally random.

[16] This bears some implications for our estimates. Indeed, in the north, most immigrants are employed in manufacturing and services, while in the south, they are mostly employed in agriculture. Excluding agricultural workers due to data limitations, we effectively neglect a majority of immigrants employed in the south. Hence, our results will be more representative of the northern regions.

hazard rates in the first 3 years of their labor market career grow more steeply with labor market experience than those of natives (see Figure A.6 in Appendix). Thus, including workers with less than 3 years of labor market experience would challenge the assumption that unobserved shocks affect foreign and native workers similarly.

Second, the restriction mitigates the impact of measurement error in the exposure to injury risk for both foreign and native workers. In the period under study, both types of workers were extremely likely to report injuries during their first day of work due to a widespread practice in the informal sector: irregular workers would remain informally employed until an injury event imposed job regularization to allow the worker access to health assistance and injury benefits.[17] More generally, immigrants are more likely to be employed in informal jobs, especially when they are newly arrived. Hence, the length of their job spells is more likely to be under-reported in the administrative data.

Third, more experienced workers are generally more tenured and settled (Dauth et al. 2021): they are less sensitive to macroeconomic conditions and less likely to change firms and/or provinces. This increases the probability of observing them before and after an election and helps our identification strategy, which is based on within-spell variation (see Sect. 3).

A fourth reason relates to changes in the institutional framework that occurred over our period of observation. Indeed, two major immigration reforms—popularly known as the "Turco-Napolitano" and "Bossi-Fini" reforms—were introduced in 1998 and 2002, respectively. Both entailed a vast regularization of previously undocumented foreign workers who were working in the informal labor market. Lacking information about workers who benefited from the regularization, we can only measure labor market experience with error; restricting the analysis to more experienced workers, we intend to mitigate the impact of this limitation.

One obvious limitation of our application is that it focuses on legal immigrants. During the observation period, the proportion of illegal to legal immigrants was estimated to remain relatively constant (Bianchi et al. 2012).

5 Results

5.1 Descriptives

The final estimation sample consists of 129,485 observations, drawn from 15,531 individual workers and 16,846 unique job spells. Table 1 presents the summary statistics. On average, individuals in our sample report 0.19 workplace injuries and 0.07 severe injuries per job spell-year, being exposed to workplace risks for an average of 37 weeks per year. A total of 22.4% of the workers in our sample are employed in small firms. On average, employees have a tenure of 6.7 years in their jobs. They are overwhelmingly working full time (intensity is 99.8% on average), and about 3% of them are employed as apprentices. The average log-transformed firm size is 4.4, equivalent to an average of 81 employees per firm. This relatively large firm size results from our sampling, which covers most large firms but tends to undersample small firms. Foreign-born

[17] This practice was counteracted by specific laws in 2006 and 2007.

Table 1 Summary statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. dev	Min	Max
Count injuries per spell-year	0.192	0.422	0.000	4.000
Count severe injuries per spell-year	0.074	0.268	0.000	3.000
Exposure (weeks)	37.504	15.314	0.022	53.000
Intensity	0.998	0.028	0.019	1.000
Apprentice	0.030	0.171	0.000	1.000
Tenure	6.732	5.007	0.000	20.000
(Log) Employees	4.394	2.131	0.000	11.330
Prov. unempl. rate	7.812	6.046	1.300	33.200
Immigration rate	0.041	0.216	0.002	3.349
Share small firms in province	0.334	0.054	0.224	0.600
Import competition	481.201	349.202	53.083	2189.366
Robot exposure	−85.428	227.141	−1566.150	801.000
Lega	10.492	11.719	0.000	41.974
Foreign	0.248	0.432	0.000	1.000
Below15	0.224	0.417	0.000	1.000

Summary statistics of the main estimation sample. Observations: 129,485. Individuals: 15,531. Job spells: 16,846

workers constitute 25% of our sample, a proportion higher than that of the general population. This is consistent with the oversampling of foreign workers in our data and with the fact that most foreign-born residents are employed. Regarding province characteristics, the average unemployment rate in the considered period was about 7.8%, and the share of votes for Lega Nord was 10.5%. The province-level immigration rate over the considered period was 4.2%. The average employment-weighted exposure to imports from China is approximately EUR 50,000 per worker. The average negative value of robot exposure suggests that, in most sectors, the industrial output has grown faster than robot adoption over the considered period.

Figure 1 plots injury rates by Lega Nord vote shares for both native and foreign workers. The relationship appears positive and comparatively stronger for foreign workers.

In Fig. 2, we display the geographic distribution of our variable of interest. For comparison, Figure A.1 in Appendix illustrates the geographic distribution of immigration and manufacturing employment. As mentioned in Sect. 2.1, vote shares for Lega Nord were already very high in 1992, peaked in 1996, and declined in 2001 (Fig. 2). Preferences for Lega partially overlapped with immigration and manufacturing employment, but were much more geographically concentrated in the north and showed less temporal variation.

5.2 Main estimates

In Table 2, we report the results of our baseline estimates, focusing first on all injuries and then restricting the analysis to severe injuries only. Column 1 displays

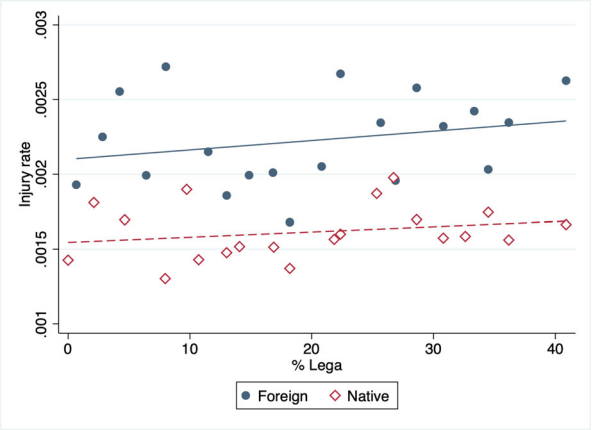

Fig. 1 Injury rates by share of votes of Lega Nord for native and foreign workers. Average injury rates for native and foreign workers in the manufacturing sector by share of votes gained by Lega Nord. Injury rates are measured as the ratio of total injuries to total exposure by 1% bins of votes

the control-only model without interaction effects. *Log exposure* is positive and significant, confirming that longer exposure to injury risk increases the likelihood of injury. As anticipated, this coefficient is significantly different from 1, supporting our choice not to constrain it to this value. Control variables have the expected signs and are unreported for brevity. Higher provincial immigration rates are associated with increased within-spell injury risks, likely due to competition among workers. When analyzing all workers together, the share of votes for Lega Nord does not significantly affect injury risk. We cannot include a dummy for foreign-born alone as its effects are absorbed by the job-spell fixed effects that overlap with individual fixed effects.

In column 2, we augment our model with an interaction effect between *Lega* and *Foreign*. Consistent with our expectations, the interaction term has a positive and significant impact on injury rates, whereas the main effect remains insignificant. This suggests that higher shares of votes for Lega Nord significantly increase the risk of injury, particularly for foreign workers. In column 3, we further augment the specification with key province-level variables that may correlate with Lega, i.e., import competition and robot penetration measures. Conditional on covariates and fixed effects, these variables have no appreciable effect on injuries. As a result, the coefficient of the triple interaction effect of interest is virtually unaffected.

In column 4, we add the triple interaction between *Foreign*, *Below15*, and *Lega*, along with all underlying dyadic interactions. The results clearly indicate that the previous results are driven by foreign workers employed in small firms. Interestingly, we do not detect significant effects of Lega Nord on natives' injury rates, nor a differential injury risk for foreign workers in small firms as a whole.

In column 5, we augment the specification in column 4 with the import competition and robot penetration measures measured at the province level. Again, these variables are insignificant and do not affect our main results.

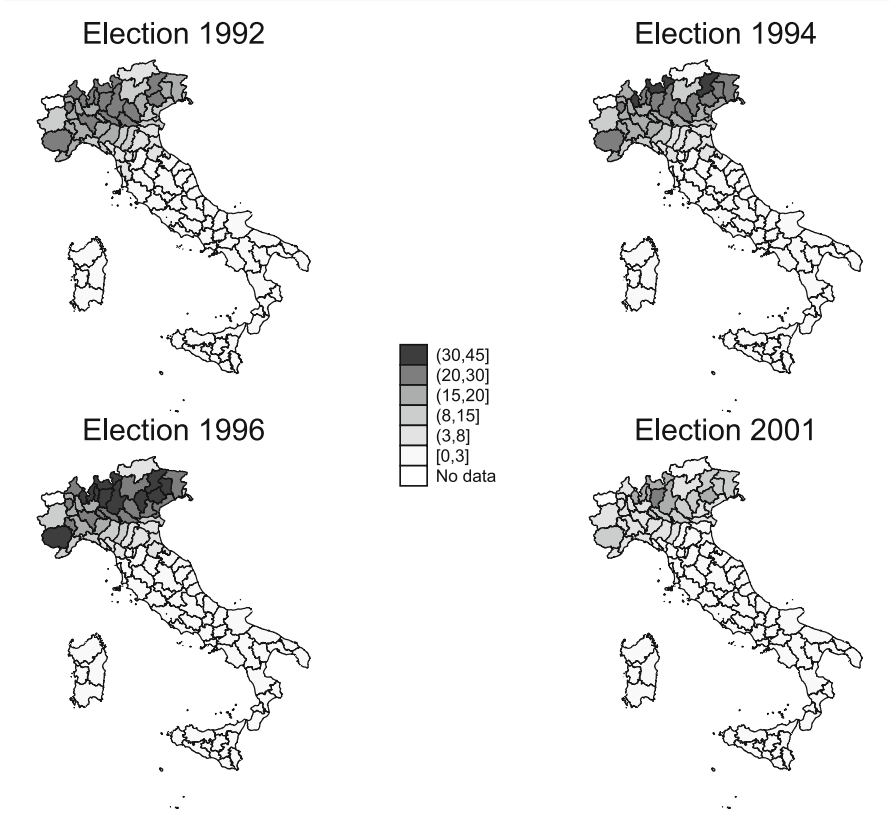

Fig. 2 Percentage of votes for Lega Nord. Geographic distribution of the shares of votes for Lega Nord in different election years. Source: own elaborations on Ministry of Interior data

The Poisson regression coefficients represent semi-elasticities, indicating percentage changes in injury risk. The estimates in column 2 imply that a unit increase in the share of votes gained by Lega Nord increases the number of injuries experienced by foreign workers as a whole by approximately 0.2% (i.e., $(e^{(0.0024\times 1)} - 1) \times 100$; see, for instance, Wooldridge 2019) and that the estimated semi-elasticity goes up to approximately 1% in small firms (column 5). Given that we control for exposure, the coefficient can be approximately interpreted as a 1% increase in injury rates per week worked.[18]

Restricting the analysis to severe injuries (columns 1 and 2 of Table 3) yields consistent results, supporting the robustness of our findings. We label as a "severe"

[18] The approximation is due to the fact that we do not constrain the exposure coefficient to one. The interpretation becomes exact if we impose this restriction (column 3 of Appendix Table A.6): in this case, straightforward algebra allows expressing the expected value of the dependent variable as the ratio between the number of injuries and exposure (in levels), removing exposure from the regressors and leaving the remaining set of variables and coefficients unchanged. The estimated semi-elasticity with offset log exposure is again very close to 1, precisely 0.995%.

injury a workplace accident requiring immediate care or leading to more than 20 days of injury leave (Leombruni et al. 2019). The reason for this check is that less severe injuries may be under-reported if workers fear that reporting injuries increases the risk of losing their jobs. According to Boone and Van Ours (2006), severe injuries, requiring immediate care, are less subject to under-reporting. Focusing on severe injuries reduces statistical power, as they represent a small subset of overall injuries, which are already rare events. Nonetheless, the coefficient of the triple interaction in column 7 is very similar to the ones displayed in columns 4 and 5 of Table 2 and even

Table 2 Effects of populism on workplace injuries. All injuries

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Log exposure	0.498***	0.498***	0.498***	0.499***	0.498***
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Below15	0.046	0.046	0.046	0.020	0.021
	(0.057)	(0.057)	(0.057)	(0.062)	(0.063)
Immigration rate	0.074***	0.075***	0.075***	0.075***	0.075***
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Lega	0.002	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.002
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)
IC			0.015		0.015
			(0.043)		(0.043)
Robot exposure			0.014		0.014
			(0.019)		(0.019)
Foreign × Below15				-0.050	-0.051
				(0.100)	(0.100)
Below15 × Lega				-0.000	-0.000
				(0.003)	(0.003)
Foreign × Below15× Lega				0.010**	0.010**
				(0.004)	(0.004)
N	129,485	129,485	129,485	129,485	129,485
Net effect		0.004	0.004	0.011	0.011
Standard error		(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)
p-value		[0.116]	[0.110]	[0.000]	[0.000]

PPML estimates. The measures of import competition and robot exposure have been divided by their respective standard deviations to facilitate the interpretation of their coefficients. All estimates include job spell, province, time, industry fixed effects, and the following control variables: log exposure, intensity, apprenticeship dummy, tenure, tenure squared, province unemployment rate, log employees, province immigration rate, share of small firms in the region, and province-level aggregate measures of import competition and robot exposure. Columns 2 and 3 report the net effect of Lega for foreign workers (i.e., both in small and large firms). Columns 4 and 5 report the net effect of Lega for foreign workers in firms below 15 employees. Standard errors clustered at the province level in parentheses. * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

Table 3 Effects of populism on workplace injuries. Severe injuries

	(1)	(2)
Log exposure	0.163***	0.163***
	(0.021)	(0.021)
Below15	0.031	0.015
	(0.080)	(0.095)
Immigration rate	0.051***	0.051***
	(0.015)	(0.015)
Lega	0.006*	0.005
	(0.003)	(0.003)
IC	0.123*	0.123*
	(0.066)	(0.066)
Robot exposure	0.015	0.015
	(0.022)	(0.022)
Foreign × Below15		-0.131
		(0.150)
Below15 × Lega		0.001
		(0.004)
Foreign × Below15 × Lega		0.014**
		(0.006)
N	61,601	61,601
Net effect	0.004	0.014
Standard error	(0.003)	(0.005)
p-value	[0.293]	[0.002]

PPML estimates. The measures of import competition and robot exposure have been divided by their respective standard deviations to facilitate the interpretation of their coefficients. All estimates include job spell, province, time, industry fixed effects, and the following control variables: log exposure, intensity, apprenticeship dummy, tenure, tenure squared, province unemployment rate, log employees, province immigration rate, share of small firms in the region, and province-level aggregate measures of import competition and robot exposure. Column 6 reports the net effect of Lega for foreign workers (i.e., both in small and large firms). Column 7 reports the net effect of Lega for foreign workers in firms below 15 employees. Standard errors clustered at the province level in parentheses. * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

slightly larger, implying a semi-elasticity of approximately 1.4%. In the case of severe injuries, we also find that import competition weakly increases injury rates, consistent with Adda and Fawaz (2020); McManus and Schaur (2016)).

5.3 Identification issues

In the Online Appendix, we perform a wealth of robustness checks and extensions aimed at addressing the most pressing identification issues. One concern regarding our estimation strategy is the potential reverse causality or omitted variable bias.

For instance, the results may capture the demand for populism of small firms with high injury rates and little resources for safety investments that look for political and rhetorical backing (Guiso et al. 2017; Rodrik 2020). Furthermore, one may worry that our approach does not fully account for omitted variables, such as (i) province-level time-varying shocks correlated with Lega, (ii) time-varying firm-level factors linked to Lega votes that differentially affect foreign workers in smaller firms, and (iii) confounding effects of the 2002 Bossi-Fini law. Further, the contemporary control variables included in the model may be "bad controls" (Angrist and Pischke 2009).

In Appendix A.2, we address these concerns through multiple methods. We implement a control function approach that instruments province-level votes for Lega Nord using the average votes for the party in neighboring provinces—intuitively, these provinces are located far enough to belong to a different local labor market but close enough to affect political preferences. We further challenge our proposed interpretation of the results including different sets of fixed effects, including province-time fixed effects, and additional triple interactions. The inference remains remarkably stable.

A second set of concerns is that our design is not strictly a diff-in-diff and does not provide immediate insights on the dynamics of the effects as an event study approach would. The use of a difference-in-differences design is problematic in our context, due to both conceptual and practical reasons. These reasons include (i) the arbitrariness of converting the continuous vote share for Lega Nord into a binary treatment variable, (ii) treatment reversibility, (iii) the lack of a strict pre-treatment period, and (iv) statistical power (see Appendix A.3 for more details). Nonetheless, to explore the effects' dynamics, we include a few event study analyses in Appendix A.3, taking them as purely suggestive. Consistent with intuition, the event study results suggest that working in provinces where Lega Nord was successful at the polls leads to small but stable increases in injury risk over time.[19] We observe that the vote share required to trigger an increase in injury rates is lower when Lega Nord secures a position in government.

In Appendix A.4, additional checks confirm the robustness of the results to alternative estimators, to lifting sample restrictions, to restricting the analysis to more homogeneous subsamples, and explore the sensitivity to removing countries, provinces, and sectors one by one. The effects are weakest for the more automatized metal-mechanic sector and strongest for lower-tech manufacturing (manufacturing of non-metal minerals and other manufacturing industries) and workers from Morocco. At the time, Moroccan citizens made up the largest community of immigrants and were strongly targeted by anti-immigrant propaganda.

Finally, the results remain robust, though smaller in magnitude, when replacing the share of Lega Nord votes with the total share of right-wing party votes. This is expected given the less markedly anti-immigrant stance of other right-wing parties. The results disappear when running a placebo with the share of votes for left-wing

[19] If a large consensus for populistic parties worsens immigrants' working conditions, this need not immediately increase their injury rates. Injury rates are adverse events out of the worker's control, whose increase is not purposely pursued by employers and coworkers. Rather, worsening immigrants' working conditions will translate into a longer-term, possibly self-reinforcing increase in injury risk. Subjective well-being measures of job satisfaction can react more quickly to a worsening in labor market conditions and may display different patterns.

parties. The findings are also robust to employing a different measure of Lega Nord based on province-level elections instead of national polls (Appendix A.5)

6 Mechanism

The robust effect of the share of votes for Lega Nord on immigrants' injury rates, particularly in small firms, may be explained by different mechanisms. In other words, why should within-spell injury rates change with changing preferences for Lega Nord? An advantage of our approach is that, by employing job-spell fixed effects, we can address this question rather precisely. Broadly, we could attribute the increase in workplace risk to a populist response to economic factors or a behavioral reaction to a revelation effect.

6.1 Economic mechanism

The economic mechanism may draw on deterioration of natives' labor market conditions, which, in turn, correlates with the consensus for populist parties (Barone and Kreuter 2021; Caselli et al. 2020). Increased competition from low-wage countries causes economic distress and drives significant changes in the supply chains of local production systems. These pressures challenge the survival of incumbent firms and simultaneously foster preferences for populist parties (Colantone and Stanig 2018b). In response to cost-cutting and flexibility pressure, firms may have to reorganize tasks and cut investments in workplace safety. In line with these arguments, Adda and Fawaz (2020) and McManus and Schaur (2016) show that import competition imposes a "health toll" on workers by increasing injury risk. Our results may conceal an economic mechanism linked to import competition.

An alternative explanation may draw on the literature on the labor market effects of robot adoption. Over our sample period, Italy was among the countries experiencing significant advances in robotics technology adoption (Acemoglu and Restrepo 2020). Investments in robots increase safety at work by decreasing the physical demand of tasks (Gihleb et al. 2022; Nikolova et al. 2023), but they threaten lower-skilled workers' employment (Graetz and Michaels 2018; Acemoglu and Restrepo 2020). They have been found to deteriorate workers' sense of meaning and autonomy at work (Nikolova et al. 2024) and may increase the working pressure for workers with lower bargaining power. The negative consequences of automation fuel populist preferences among vulnerable individuals (Anelli et al. 2021), while the productivity increases associated with robotization may threaten smaller firms with limited resource buffers, similarly to import competition. The combination of improved safety in larger firms and increased workplace pressure in smaller ones may lead to a relative rise in work intensity and injury risk for foreign workers employed in small firms.

We are aware of the complex interaction between cultural and economic factors and the difficulty in disentangling them empirically (Colantone et al. 2022). Yet, in our

application, the effects of import competition and populist preferences may be viewed to operate on two conceptually distinct channels. Import competition decreases the incentives to invest in workplace safety (McManus and Schaur 2016); robot adoption may be a protective factor in large firms but has ex-ante ambiguous effects on smaller firms (Gihleb et al. 2022). Conditional on these effects, populist preferences may erode social norms (Bursztyn et al. 2020), legitimizing the reallocation of job disamenities to non-native workers with weaker bargaining power.

To explore the different interpretations, we expand our specification with an additional triple interaction of *Foreign* and *Below15* with import competition and robot exposure measures (Table 4). For each variable, we employ a standard version, aggregated at the province-level, and a province-sector-specific one.[20] The latter may display a stronger association with individual injury risk. The former captures the broader effects of import competition in the workers' province of work and is more likely to confound the effects of Lega Nord.

Across specifications, the results confirm that import competition increases injury risk, especially for foreign workers and small firms. This confirms the presence of a "health toll" from import competition (Adda and Fawaz 2020; McManus and Schaur 2016), which is borne especially by migrants and workers in small firms.[21]

Concerning robot exposure, the province-sector-specific estimates show that it has opposite effects on workers in small and large firms. In line with Gihleb et al. (2022), robot exposure generally improves workplace safety, but it deteriorates it in small firms. No distinctive effects of robot adoption emerge for foreign workers.

These new insights do not substantially affect our main results. The estimated excess risk for foreign workers in small firms located in provinces with greater populist preferences remains substantially stable. This indicates that import competition and robot adoption alone are not the main drivers of these effects.

A broader economic interpretation of our results may be that Lega Nord's electoral success is greater in regions where small firms face greater financial difficulties and shutdown risk—beyond import competition and robot adoption—which will reduce their safety investments (as proposed by McManus and Schaur 2016). To explore this interpretation, we leverage the demographic information about the firms in our data to identify those that ended up closing during our period of observation. We then add a further interaction effect with a time-to-closure variable in our main regression (Table 5), capturing whether the firm will close in 0, 1, 2, 3, or 4 years, so that the main interaction effect captures the effect of Lega Nord on firms that will not close within the next 4 years.

[20] The province-sector-specific measure of import competition from China is $IC_{psy} = \frac{L_{psy_0}}{L_{py_0}} \frac{M_y^{\text{ITA}}}{L_{sy_0}}$, and the province-sector-specific robot penetration index is $RP_{pt} = l_{pst_0} APR_{st}$, where notation is the same as in footnote 5.

[21] According to these estimates, import competition does not drive a distinctive deterioration in injury risk for foreign workers in small firms: the interaction $Foreign \times Below15 \times IC$ is negative and sometimes significant, and may be explained, conditional on the populist preferences included in the specification, by the decreased work pressure associated with import competition. We address the effects of import competition on workplace injuries in Italy—irrespective of populist preferences—in a companion paper (D'Ambrosio et al. 2024).

Table 4 Estimates with import competition and robot exposure

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	IC and Robot exposure (all sectors in the province)			IC and Robot exposure (province-sector-specific)		
Below15	−0.069	0.025	−0.077	−0.010	0.036	0.006
	(0.074)	(0.062)	(0.074)	(0.064)	(0.063)	(0.064)
Immigration rate	0.073***	0.074***	0.072***	0.074***	0.075***	0.074***
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Lega	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
IC	−0.041	0.012	−0.044	−0.014	0.019	−0.019
	(0.046)	(0.043)	(0.046)	(0.018)	(0.011)	(0.019)
Robot exposure	0.014	0.017	0.006	−0.021***	−0.028***	−0.032***
	(0.019)	(0.016)	(0.020)	(0.008)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Foreign × Lega	0.001	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Foreign × Below15	0.031	−0.053	0.037	−0.003	−0.065	−0.017
	(0.115)	(0.101)	(0.114)	(0.102)	(0.101)	(0.102)
Below15 × Lega	−0.000	−0.000	−0.000	−0.000	−0.000	0.000
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Foreign × Below15 × Lega	0.010**	0.010**	0.010**	0.010**	0.010**	0.010**
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Foreign × IC	0.084***		0.091***	0.069***		0.077***
	(0.020)		(0.022)	(0.026)		(0.028)
Below15 × IC	0.072**		0.086***	0.062**		0.084***
	(0.032)		(0.032)	(0.028)		(0.029)

Table 4 continued

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	IC and Robot exposure (all sectors in the province)			IC and Robot exposure (province-sector-specific)		
Foreign × Below15 × IC	−0.063		−0.078*	−0.091***		−0.114***
	(0.043)		(0.040)	(0.048)		(0.046)
Foreign × Robot exposure		−0.018	0.006		0.024	0.029
		(0.021)	(0.020)		(0.025)	(0.028)
Below15 × Robot exposure		0.021	0.010		0.076*	0.094**
		(0.028)	(0.032)		(0.040)	(0.044)
Foreign × Below15 × Robot exposure		−0.027	−0.032		−0.089	−0.101
		(0.048)	(0.046)		(0.074)	(0.078)
N	129,485	129,485	129,485	129,485	129,485	129,485
Net effect	0.012	0.011	0.012	0.011	0.011	0.011
Standard error	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
p-value	[0.000]	[0.000]	[0.000]	[0.000]	[0.000]	[0.000]

PPML estimates. The first three columns include the aggregate measures of import competition (IC) and robot penetration that are computed using all sectors in a province. The last three columns include province-sector-specific measures of import competition and robot penetration corresponding to the worker's job spell. All measures of import competition and robot exposure have been divided by their respective standard deviations to facilitate the interpretation of their coefficients. All estimates include job spell, province, time, industry fixed effects, and the following control variables: log exposure, intensity, apprenticeship dummy, tenure, tenure squared, province unemployment rate, log employees, province immigration rate, the share of small firms in the region, as well as province-level (columns 1 to 3) and province-sector-specific (columns 4 to 6) measures of import competition and robot exposure depending on the specification. The net effect represents the impact of Lega (i.e., the Lega coefficient plus interactions) on foreign workers in firms below 15 employees. Standard errors clustered at the province level in parentheses. * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

Again, we find support for the argument that time to closure affects injury rates, but this does not seem to be the main driver of our results. Indeed, the triple interaction effect remains positive and significant and very stable in magnitude. Moreover, the

Table 5 Interactions with time to closure

	(1)				
Below15	0.017				
	(0.066)				
Immigration rate	0.075***				
	(0.008)				
Lega	0.002				
	(0.003)				
Foreign × Lega	−0.002				
	(0.002)				
Foreign × Below15	−0.076				
	(0.104)				
Below15 × Lega	0.001				
	(0.003)				
Foreign × Below15 × Lega	0.010**				
	(0.004)				
Years to closure	0	1	2	3	4
	−0.085	0.082	0.034	−0.021	0.160**
	(0.131)	(0.069)	(0.075)	(0.074)	(0.071)
Foreign ×	0.046	−0.073	−0.176	−0.051	−0.348**
	(0.214)	(0.124)	(0.127)	(0.134)	(0.165)
Below15 ×	0.256	−0.262*	0.269*	0.096	−0.151
	(0.211)	(0.152)	(0.157)	(0.139)	(0.138)
Lega ×	0.006	−0.012**	−0.004	0.001	−0.008**
	(0.007)	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Foreign × Lega ×	−0.007	0.012*	0.013**	0.011*	0.017**
	(0.013)	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.008)
Foreign × Below15 ×	−0.557*	0.228	0.142	0.112	0.490*
	(0.325)	(0.282)	(0.311)	(0.242)	(0.269)
Below15 × Lega ×	−0.034**	0.018**	−0.013	−0.011	0.000
	(0.014)	(0.009)	(0.011)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Foreign × Below15 × Lega ×	0.052***	−0.013	−0.002	−0.000	−0.010
	(0.020)	(0.014)	(0.017)	(0.011)	(0.014)

PPML estimates. The estimates include, in addition to the baseline interaction terms, a set of further interactions of each term with yearly dummies capturing whether the firm will close in 0, 1, 2, 3, and 4 years. In addition, all estimates include job spell, province, time, industry fixed effects, and the following control variables: log exposure, intensity, apprenticeship dummy, tenure, tenure squared, province unemployment rate, log employees, province immigration rate, the share of small firms in the region, and province-level aggregate measures of import competition and robot exposure. Standard errors clustered at the province level in parentheses. * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

results suggest that foreign workers in provinces expressing greater consensus for Lega Nord tend to face greater injury risk in the year of closure, while the injury rates of natives tend to decrease in the year immediately preceding closure, consistent with the well-documented counter-cyclicality of workplace safety.

Overall, our results suggest that the economic mechanism plays a role in workplace safety, but it is not the main driver of our estimated effects.

6.2 Revelation mechanism

An alternative explanation may be that immigrants' excess risk is the result of a different attitude towards immigrants in firms below 15 employees. Consistent with monopsonistic theory (Black 1995; Berson 2016), votes for Lega Nord may proxy for anti-immigrant preferences, with the time variation in injury rates reflecting progressive deterioration in immigrants' working conditions due to diminishing outside options.

Firms with discriminating tastes and some monopsony power may find it appealing to worsen safety conditions or exploit foreign workers' labor supply rigidity to decrease costs and adjust to temporary output variation. As argued by Black (1995) and Berson (2016), observing discrimination in racially prejudiced firms, firms with neutral tastes learn that they have an opportunity to decrease their own costs by exploiting immigrants' reduced outside options. The greater the number of prejudiced monopsonists surrounding a focal firm, the more unequal the ultimate result. The interplay of taste-based discrimination and labor supply heterogeneity implies worse working conditions for immigrants in regions with greater shares of firms with discriminating tastes.

These dynamics do not strictly need elections to manifest. However, the electoral signal and electoral debates may accelerate them. Suppose the polls signal that the number of citizens with discriminating tastes is greater than expected. Electoral outcomes update firms' and workers' perceptions of the prevalence of anti-immigrant sentiments, making the social perception of anti-immigrant behaviors more legitimate—in line with the mechanism proposed by Bursztyn et al. (2020). In this way, racially prejudiced firms learn that they are likely to face lower social sanctioning than expected if they offer migrants worse working conditions or take advantage of their labor supply rigidity.

This interpretation seems supported in Fig. 3, which plots the estimated effect of Lega Nord exceeding particular shares of votes on the injury rates of foreign workers employed in small firms. The effect is clearly increasing in the political consensus gained by Lega Nord until the share of votes reaches about 16%, i.e., 6 points above the highest results reached at the national level. Above this value, the differential effect for foreign workers in small firms decreases in magnitude but remains positive and significant. Beyond 20%, i.e., almost twice the result gained by Lega Nord at its best national result, the effect loses significance. Intuitively, when the votes for Lega Nord exceed 16%, the revelation effect à la Bursztyn et al. (2020) may be less salient in the

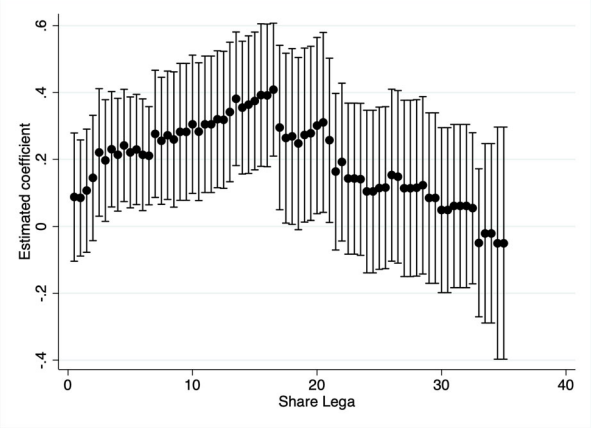

Fig. 3 Differential effect on injury rates by share of votes of Lega Nord. Estimated coefficient of the triple interaction effect *Foreign* × *Below15* × *Lega high*, where the dummy *Lega high* is equal to 1 if the share of Lega exceeds *x*%, and zero otherwise. The underlying regression is a PPML model with standard errors clustered at the province level. In addition to the triple interaction, all estimates include individual, province, time, and industry fixed effects, and the following variables: intensity, apprenticeship dummy, tenure, tenure squared, province unemployment rate, log employees, province immigration rate, log employees, province immigration rate, the share of small firms in the region, sector-specific and province-level aggregate import competition, a *Below15* dummy, a *Foreign* dummy, a *Lega high* dummy, as well as all the binary interaction effects between them

sense that the information about the anti-immigrant preferences may be widespread and does not need elections to be revealed. [22]

Moreover, in Appendix A.3, we provide suggestive evidence that the increase in injury rates operates differently in electoral rounds when Lega Nord went to power and when it did not. When the party goes to power, the level of consensus needed to trigger the effect on workplace safety appears lower. When the party does not go to power, we still find that the intensity of anti-immigrant preferences matters. These findings are remarkably in line with a revelation effect. In all cases, the effect on injury rates appears to grow over time, consistent with monopsonistic dynamics à la Black (1995) and Berson (2016).

Overall, the impact of Lega Nord on injury rates may be viewed as a result of the mix between the intensity of anti-immigrant preferences and revelation effects.

6.2.1 Night-shift segregation

Deteriorating labor market conditions may result from the redistribution of undesirable tasks within firms. We cannot test whether immigrants are assigned to comparatively riskier tasks, because the within-firm allocation of tasks is unobservable to us. We can

[22] Diminishing marginal effects may also suggest that a maximum level of workplace risk has been reached, beyond which further increases are not legal, feasible, or socially acceptable, even in the presence of strong anti-immigrant sentiment. However, plotting the corresponding net effects (Figure A.2) reveals that, even when the triple interaction effect is not significant, populist preferences still significantly increase the overall injury rates for foreign workers in small firms, aligning more closely with a revelation effect.

also not observe whether foreign workers are assigned non-standard schedules, as our data are uninformative in this regard. However, we can leverage the detailed information in our data to study whether injuries occur during unpleasant job schedules, such as overtime, night shift hours, and weekends.

We define nighttime and overtime injuries as those occurring between 6 p.m. and 8 a.m. or after the eighth hour of work. We refer to weekend injuries as those occurring on Saturday or Sunday. We then run another series of models with the same right-hand side covariates and the following outcomes: (i) the number of overtime or nighttime injuries; (ii) the number of injuries that occurred during "non-standard" hours, i.e., weekends, overtime, or nighttime hours; and (iii) the probability of an injury during standard working hours (i.e., between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m.). Overtime and nightshift injuries account for about 24% of all injuries in our sample and weekend injuries for about 5%.[23]

The first three columns of Table 6 show that the above-detected effects are entirely driven by overtime and nightshift injuries. This is a remarkable result considering the lower statistical power of these models compared to the previous ones. The estimated effect of populism for this subset of injuries is even larger than previously estimated: the semi-elasticity is 2.6% for nighttime and overtime injuries and 2.3% for injuries occurring during non-standard working hours.[24]

These results suggest that populism increases the exposure of foreign workers to job disamenities. To understand whether this implies a deterioration in labor market conditions, we must analyze the effects of Lega Nord on wages. Indeed, if higher wages compensated for more disamenities, foreign workers' overall labor market conditions would not necessarily worsen or imply differential treatment.

Columns 4–5 of Table 6 report the results of a set of wage regressions estimated by OLS and PPML (the latter follows Manning and Mullahy 2001 and Blackburn 2007). We compute weekly wages by dividing the deflated earnings in the annual job spell by the number of weeks worked, with all variables measured on a full-time equivalent scale.[25] In both cases, the estimated triple interaction effects on wages are negative and insignificant.

Hence, there is no evidence of compensation for the increased risk and work disamenities faced by foreign workers in small firms. This suggests a reallocation into lower-quality, non-standard work schedules which may be indicative of segregation and may imply a disruption in relationships with colleagues and superiors and a broader deterioration of well-being at work (Nikolova and Cnossen 2020).

In line with Black (1995) and Berson (2016), the deterioration in safety and workplace amenities for foreign workers, without corresponding wage increases, suggests the presence of monopsony power. Monopsonistic firms may exploit foreign work-

[23] Less than 1% of the injuries are declared to take place after the 8th hour, which unfortunately hinders a separate analysis for overtime and nightshift injuries.

[24] We also estimate the corresponding PPML and linear probability models including the full set of province-time, sector-time, firm size-time fixed effects, with fully robust results (Table A.3)

[25] Unfortunately, we cannot separate the pre-election and post-election wage within an election year because we only have information on annual remuneration.

Table 6 Effects of populism on workplace injuries in specific job schedules and wages

	(1) Injuries	(2)	(3)	(4) Wages	(5)
	PPML Night/overtime	PPML Non-standard	PPML Standard	OLS log weekly wage	PPML weekly wage
Below15	−0.452***	−0.374***	0.090	−0.022**	0.005
	(0.155)	(0.143)	(0.070)	(0.010)	(0.050)
Immigration rate	0.042***	0.038***	0.096***	0.004***	0.009*
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.010)	(0.001)	(0.005)
Lega	0.003	0.003	0.001	0.000	−0.001
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.003)	(0.000)	(0.003)
Foreign × Lega	−0.007**	−0.006**	0.003	0.000	−0.002
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.000)	(0.003)
Foreign × Below15	0.203	0.225	−0.046	0.005	−0.017
	(0.212)	(0.195)	(0.120)	(0.015)	(0.087)
Below15 × Lega	−0.002	−0.002	−0.000	−0.001	−0.001
	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.003)	(0.000)	(0.002)
Foreign × Below15 × Lega	0.026***	0.023***	0.005	−0.000	−0.005
	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.005)	(0.001)	(0.006)
N	43,475	49,125	96,141	129,467	129,467
Net effect	0.020	0.018	0.008	−0.000	−0.009
Standard errors	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.003)	(0.001)	(0.006)
p-value	[0.002]	[0.004]	[0.017]	[0.540]	[0.084]

The table contains PPML regressions on the number of injuries during overtime and night shifts (column 1); overtime, night shifts, and weekends (column 2); and standard working hours (column 3). The table also contains OLS log wage regressions (column 4) and PPML wage regressions (column 5). All estimates include job spell, province, time, and industry fixed effects and the following control variables: log exposure, intensity, apprenticeship dummy, tenure, tenure squared, province unemployment rate, log employees, province share of small firms, province immigration rate, the share of small firms in the region, and province-level aggregate measures of import competition and robot exposure. The number of observations in PPML regressions on injuries reduces due to the presence of singleton observations. Standard errors clustered at the province level in parentheses. * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

ers' demand rigidity to cut costs and increase production flexibility. To explore this interpretation, in Table 7, we study the probability that the worker ends up in non-employment for the next 180 days, changes job spell (hence, changes firm), province, sector, and firm size category.[26] Across specifications, the results indicate that native workers in small firms and provinces with higher shares of Lega Nord are comparatively mobile—they are more likely to end up non-employed, separate from their firms, and change province, sector, and firm size category—while an opposite pattern emerges for foreign workers. Foreign workers as a whole (not only those working in small firms) are less likely to separate from their jobs and remain non-employed when they work in provinces with greater shares of Lega Nord (column 1). Moreover, foreign workers in small firms in provinces expressing greater support for Lega Nord

[26] The set of covariates is similar to the one in equation (1) but excludes exposure and includes individual instead of job-spell fixed effects.

are less likely to change firm (column 2) and firm size (column 5). Instead, they are not significantly different from other workers when it comes to changing province (column 3) or sector (column 4). The reduced job mobility of foreign workers, despite worsening conditions, supports the interpretation of greater labor supply rigidity among immigrants.[27]

In Appendix A.6, we analyze the profile of native and foreign-born leavers and stayers, highlighting that the profile of native leavers is similar to that of foreign workers, while foreign stayers are paid significantly less and are more strongly concentrated in small firms. Taken together, our results highlight two parallel effects of Lega Nord's electoral success. On the one hand, it leads native workers to lose "bad" jobs more intensively than foreigners; on the other hand, it leads to a significant increase in injury risk for immigrants within job spells. Overall, the burden of risk appears to shift onto the shoulders of immigrants.[28] Our results align with the well-known phenomenon of reallocation of physical burden and injury risk from native to foreign workers (Giuntella et al. 2019) and suggest that immigrants have a more rigid labor supply function than natives, consistent with Hirsch and Jahn (2015).

7 Discussion and conclusions

This study is among the first to examine how populism impacts labor markets. Exploiting within-spell variation in injury rates on a sample of Italian manufacturing workers, we show that the electoral success of Lega Nord over 1994–2005 had a detrimental differential effect on the working conditions of foreign workers, increasing their risk of injuries mainly during night shifts. Results are consistent with a reallocation of working schedules and job disamenities. The results are driven by firms with fewer than 15 employees, characterized by lower employment protection and more fluid allocation of tasks and working schedules.

We do not find evidence that the reallocation of job disamenities is matched by adequate monetary compensation. On the contrary, we find suggestive evidence of increasing labor supply rigidity among immigrants.

Our findings indicate that polls serve as public signals that reduce social sanctions against anti-immigrant behavior (Bursztyn et al. 2020). This legitimizes both the expression of such sentiments among natives and their tacit support for employers' actions that deteriorate foreigners' working conditions. The magnitude of the estimated effects, especially for injuries in non-standard working hours, may signal a broader deterioration in less objectively measurable and more quickly reacting dimensions of job quality. These dimensions encompass not only physical effort but also relatedness and self-determination, including the quality of workplace relationships and the ability to negotiate and shape the work environment (Nikolova and Cnossen

[27] Moreover, the results in column 4 are reassuring that changes in the location of immigrants are not driving our results—in line with the results by Bracco et al. (2018) that higher shares of Lega Nord discourage new inflows of foreign residents, but do not lead to outflows.

[28] These findings may imply that the greater separation rates observed for natives as a response to Lega Nord may yield a positively selected sample, with workers with comparatively lower injury rates remaining in the control group. We discuss this possibility in Appendix A.6.

Table 7 Effects of populism on the probability to turn into non-employment, to change job spell, province, sector, firm size

	(1) Nonempl	(2) Change spell	(3) Change prov	(4) Change sector	(5) Change firm size
Below15	0.016**	0.033***	0.025***	0.032***	0.040***
	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Lega	0.001***	0.001**	0.001**	0.001**	0.001**
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Foreign × Lega	−0.001**	−0.000	−0.000	−0.000	−0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Foreign × Below15	0.002	−0.001	−0.003	−0.015	0.000
	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.012)	(0.014)	(0.013)
Below15 × Lega	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Foreign × Below15 × Lega	−0.000	−0.001*	−0.001	−0.001	−0.001*
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
N	129,485	129,485	129,485	129,485	129,485
Net effect	0.000	−0.000	−0.000	−0.000	−0.000
standard error	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
p-value	[0.858]	[0.687]	[0.806]	[0.886]	[0.771]

OLS estimates. All estimates include individual fixed effects, province, time, and industry fixed effects, and the following control variables: apprenticeship dummy, tenure, tenure squared, province unemployment rate, log employees, province immigration rate, share of small firms, and province-level aggregate measures of import competition and robot exposure. Standard errors clustered at the province level in parentheses; * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

2020). Our results are compatible with a self-reinforcing dynamic à la Black (1995) and Berson (2016). Immigrants' deteriorating working conditions within firms and shrinking outside options allow firms to save on labor costs. As a result, an increasing number of employers—not necessarily racially biased—may find it profitable to assign unpleasant tasks to foreign workers.

Interestingly, we do not find clear evidence of any improvement in natives' working conditions. Future research is needed to test whether this is due to an underlying substitution of foreign with native workers and whether employers ultimately benefit from these dynamics.

Finally, our results suggest that stronger employment protections can mitigate the impacts of populism. However, enhancing employment protection in small firms may reduce their labor flexibility, leading to a shift in the firm size distribution towards larger companies. The selection of more productive firms that, through rent-sharing, can improve workers' working conditions (McManus and Schaur 2016) may be a device to create, in the long run, "good jobs" fostering the middle class (Rodrik and Sabel 2019) at the cost of lower survival rates among small firms in the shorter term.

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Data Availability The data used are proprietary. Information on individual injuries and social security data is covered by a strict confidentiality agreement with the Italian Ministry of Health. For this reason, we cannot deposit the data in a public repository. The data can, however, be accessed by researchers establishing an agreement with the Italian Ministry of Health. For details on how to access the WHIP-salute database, see (in Italian) https://www.epi.piemonte.it/whipsalute/normativa.php.

Declarations

Competing interests The authors declare no competing interests.

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