

Italians and Defence

Research report edited by

Laboratorio Analisi Politiche e Sociali (LAPS) and IAI



ABSTRACT

Islamic terrorism, Libyan chaos, cyber-attacks and energy supplies constitute the most pressing concerns for Italians, who support old-time alliances within the EU and NATO frameworks as well as with the United States. While recent initiatives towards a greater defence integration and cooperation in Europe are endorsed beyond partisan divisions, there are divergent opinions on Donald Trump's impact on Italy's security. These are the outcomes of a survey carried out by University of Siena's Laboratorio Analisi Politiche e Sociali (LAPS) in partnership with Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI). In addition, the survey also considers Italians' orientations regarding international missions, defence expenditures, and other aspects related to Italy's defence policy.

*Public opinion | Italy's military policy | European defence | NATO |
Transatlantic relations | Military missions | Defence budget*

keywords

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Main Findings

Italians and international threats

Islamic terrorism, cyber-attacks, the Libyan chaos, energy supplies and migration flows towards Italy are the five most pressing concerns for Italians. The relations between the West and Russia, the Afghan theatre and the rise of China raise relatively less anxiety. The scenario slightly changes when interviewees are asked to give an opinion on the evolution of these threats over the last year. In this case, a worsening of the situation is perceived not only as regards Libya and cyber-security, but also in relation to Iraq and Syria, Afghanistan, and the relations between the West and Russia.

Italians and national security strategy

The alliance within the European Union continues to be seen as more important than the one with the United States, albeit the relative majority of the sample favours cooperation with both. In accordance with this inclination, Italians confirm their preference for NATO membership, hopefully in parallel with strengthening the decision-making power of European countries within the Atlantic Alliance. The impact of Donald Trump's administration on Italy's national security is judged in different ways, with a third of Italians assessing it negatively and a fifth positively. About 60 per cent of Italians is in favour of military cooperation and integration among EU countries.

* This report has been drafted by Davide Angelucci and Gianluca Piccolino under the supervision of Pierangelo Isernia (LAPS) and in collaboration with Alessandro Marrone and Karolina Muti (IAI). The field research has been directed by Francesco Olmastroni and Rossella Borri (LAPS). The editors are thankful to Riccardo Benetti (SWG) for the collaboration.

· Methodological note: The present study was coordinated by Laboratorio Analisi Politiche e Sociali (LAPS) of the University of Siena's Department of Political Social and Cognitive Sciences (DISPOC) between 24 and 31 October 2018. During the collection period, 1,119 persons of Italian nationality, having access to Internet and aged 18 years or over, have been interviewed. The sample was selected within an "opt-in" online panel owned and managed by SWG. The method used to extract the sample was stratified sampling based on gender and age groups, residence areas and education level, according to the parameters of the Italian adult population. The survey was self-administered through CAWI (Computer-assisted web interviewing) method. Data shown in the present report have been further weighted for socio-demographic variables (gender and age group, residence area and education level) on the basis of the distribution of Italian adult population. The survey randomly attributed different questions to sub-samples of interviewees.

Italians and their Armed Forces' role

When it comes to the military role, there is a very high support among Italians for the deployment of Armed Forces to provide assistance to civil authorities in cases of calamities and natural disasters, for contributing to counter terrorism and intelligence activities, as well as to control maritime routes. Second, the majority of the sample support traditional areas of intervention such as international missions, crisis-management operations and collective defence of NATO countries. However, Italians express some hesitation to increase the defence expenditure.

Italians and international missions

The absolute majority of Italians believe that the use of the Armed Forces in ongoing missions abroad benefits national security, at a higher percentage in cases like Lebanon, Iraq and the Baltic countries, rather than Afghanistan. There are relevant differences among the electorates of different Italian parties, as the voters of the Democratic Party (*Partito Democratico*, PD) and Forza Italia and are strongly in favour of international missions, those of the Five Star Movement (*Movimento 5 Stelle*, M5S) are largely contrary, while the electorate of the League is essentially split over the issue.

Italians and their knowledge of defence

The questions asked to test the Italians' knowledge on the defence sector reveal a quite discouraging picture. The public opinion proves to be largely unaware of the number of personnel of the Armed Forces, while the situation improves as regards the knowledge about the institutional leaders of Italian defence.

1. Italians and international threats

National security issues have traditionally represented an important and controversial element in the Italian political debate. The transformations occurring in the international security environment in the last decade, along with the emergence of new state and non-state actors, have brought defence and security issues back to the centre of the recent public debate, although not in a deep or systematic way.

The Libyan and the Ukrainian crises, as well as new causes of tensions, have been added to old international hotspots (e.g. Iraq and Afghanistan), thus potentially influencing the Italian citizens' perception. Several sources of tensions are geographically localised and directly involve Italy. For example, the recent crises in Ukraine and Syria have contributed not only to eroding the fragile relations between Russia and the US but also to redefining political and, in particular, commercial relations between EU countries (including Italy) and Russia. Similarly, the widespread instability in North Africa, particularly in Libya, and the intensification of migration flows towards Italy's coasts in the last years continues to have a central role in the Italian political debate.

Other sources of insecurity and instability, although particularly significant on the global level, are rather perceived as less relevant from an Italian point of view: this is the case of North Korea's nuclear programme or tensions between the US and a rising China.

Finally, other threats and sources of instability are at the same time more elusive and pervasive for Italy as they directly involve citizens, private sector and public institutions. In this regard, the risks associated with the growing diffusion of cyber-attacks have become more and more evident in recent years.

In this context, it is important to assess whether and to what extent Italians perceive these changes in the international scenario as a threat to their country. Which are the most worrying threats to national security? How do the changes underway in international relations affect Italians' perception of security?

As shown by Table 1, 82 per cent of interviewees identify Islamic terrorism as a concrete threat to national security – the most worrying. Since Italy has not experienced this kind of attacks over the last decades, the reason behind such a strong threat perception probably lies in the frequency of terrorist casualties in various European capitals over the last years and in their high level of media coverage.

A similar level of concern is expressed by interviewees with reference to the Libyan context, the risks related to energy supplies, cyber-attacks, as well as migration flows towards Italy. Indeed, 74 per cent of Italians are preoccupied by the development in Libya, plunged into anarchy since 2011, considering the situation of politico-institutional uncertainty in the country as a threat to Italian national security. At the same time, concerns are sparked by consequences of interrupting energy supply from abroad as well as by the diffusion of cyber-attacks, probably associated with developments within the Russiagate and Datagate, but also with the increasing importance of the internet in daily life: 72 per cent of interviewees refers to both issues as clear threats to national security. Moreover, 69, 67 and 65 per cent of interviewees identify respectively migration flows towards Italy, instability in Iraq and Syria, and the nuclear escalation of North Korea as sources of insecurity.

Finally, the increasing tensions with Russia, the situation in Afghanistan and the rise of China as a global power are viewed with relatively less concern. Nevertheless, even in this case, the absolute majority of the respondents identify these three issues as threats to national security: 58 per cent of the interviewees are concerned with the tensions between the West and Russia, 57 per cent with Afghanistan, and 52 per cent with the rise of China. This relatively low perception of insecurity as opposed to other scenarios should not be surprising. In recent years China has never emerged in the Italian political debate as a potential threat to the country; rather, the attention has often focused on Beijing as a commercial rival. Similarly, the media attention to Afghanistan has decreased significantly after the 2001 conflict and, particularly, after the withdrawal of most NATO's and Italy's troops from 2014 onwards. Finally, the relatively more moderate perception of insecurity

as regards relations with the Russian Federation can be attributed to several concurring factors: geographical distance and therefore absence of territorial claims or direct tensions; broad and profitable trade relations; sympathies for Moscow historically shared by both the left and right wings of Italian political spectrum; more recently, the political repositioning of the current government in favour of stronger cooperation.

Table 1 | Potential threats to Italy's national security

	It is a threat (%)	Intermediate level of threat (%)	It is not a threat (%)	I don't know (%)
Islamic terrorism	82	7	10	2
The situation in Libya	74	9	13	4
Cyber-attacks and cyber-threats	72	10	14	5
Interruption of energy supply towards Italy	72	12	13	3
Migration flows towards Italy	69	10	18	2
The situation in Iraq and Syria	67	13	16	3
North Korea's nuclear weapons programme	65	11	21	3
Tensions between the West and Russia	58	15	23	4
The situation in Afghanistan	57	14	23	5
The rise of China as a global power	52	15	29	4

Question: *Hereinafter you can find a list of international problems. For each of them, please indicate whether or not it constitutes a threat to Italian national security, referring to a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means "It is not a threat" and 10 means "It is a very serious threat".*

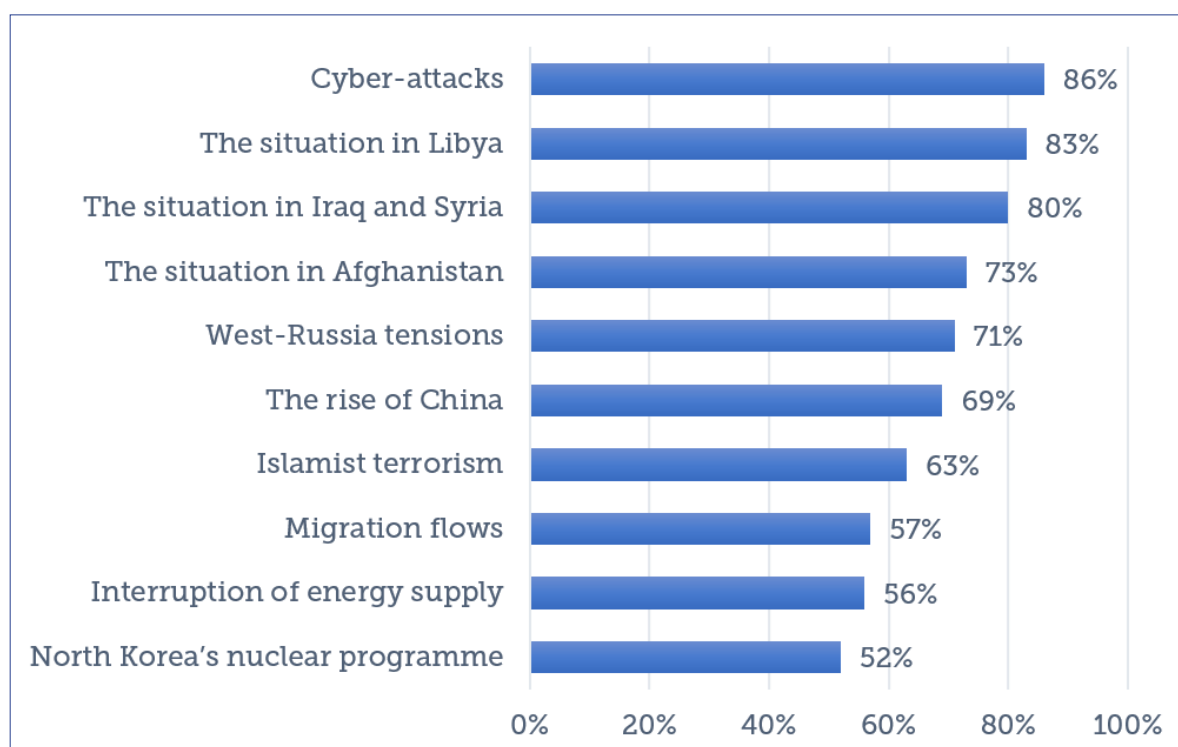
Source: LAPS, IAI survey on defence 2018.

Against this backdrop, it is interesting to assess the perception about the evolution of the threat. From this perspective, those who mentioned a given situation as threatening national security were asked to indicate how much it has improved or worsened (Figure 1). At first sight, the absolute majority of those who identify a given situation as threatening national security believe that it is really worsening. However, such perception varies considerably depending on the specific threat considered.

In some cases, a threat considered worrying is also deemed worsening. For instance, more than 80 per cent of the respondents mentioning the Libyan crisis, cyber-attacks and the situation in Iraq and Syria as primary threats to national security also believe that these threats have worsened over the last year. At the same time, public opinion is concerned about the development of scenarios generally perceived as relatively less threatening than others: notable cases in point are the Afghan context, West-Russia tensions and the rise of China. Roughly two thirds of the respondents within this sub-group believe that these issues have been worsening during the last year.

In other cases, the perception of the threat's importance is not linked to the assessment that the threat itself is worsening. For example, as regards North Korea, only 52 per cent of those considering the nuclear programme of this country as a threat argues that the situation has worsened. This perception of stability is probably caused by the extensive media coverage of the meetings between a North Korean leader and a US president, being the first bilateral meeting in the history of the two countries.

Figure 1 | The evolution of international threats (option "Got worse")



Question: *Over the last year, threats to national security coming from...*
 Source: LAPS, IAI survey on defence 2018.

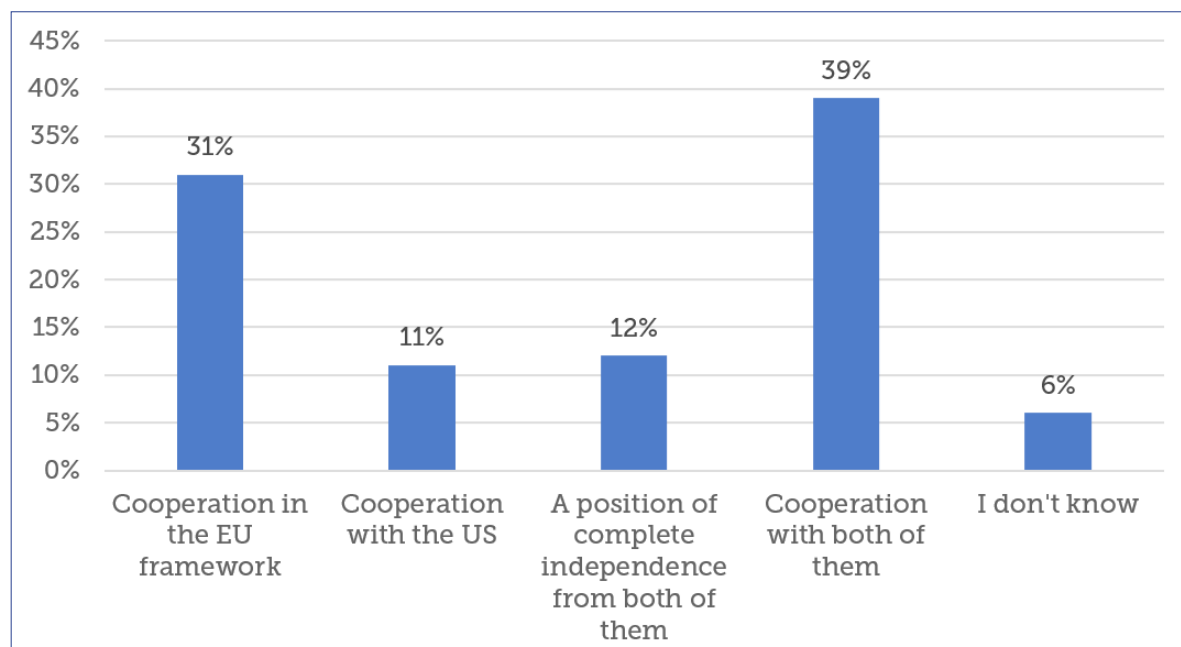
2. Italians and national security strategies

Italy's alliances on the international stage are traditionally among the most interesting topics within foreign and defence policy. Today this topic is particularly relevant, as one of the government parties is at its first ruling experience and the other is back in power after seven years with a new leader.

Italians have been asked four different questions on this matter. The first one concerns their preferences on the most significant relation to guarantee Italian national security (Figure 2). The relative majority of Italians attach importance to cooperation with both the US and the EU (39 per cent). Those more in favour of European cooperation follows with 31 per cent. Significantly lower percentages of the interviewees prefer cooperation only with the United States or a completely

autonomous policy – each with slightly more than 10 per cent of preferences.

Figure 2 | The most important relation to ensure Italy’s national security



Question: *Which of the following options do you consider the most important to ensure Italy’s national security: ...*

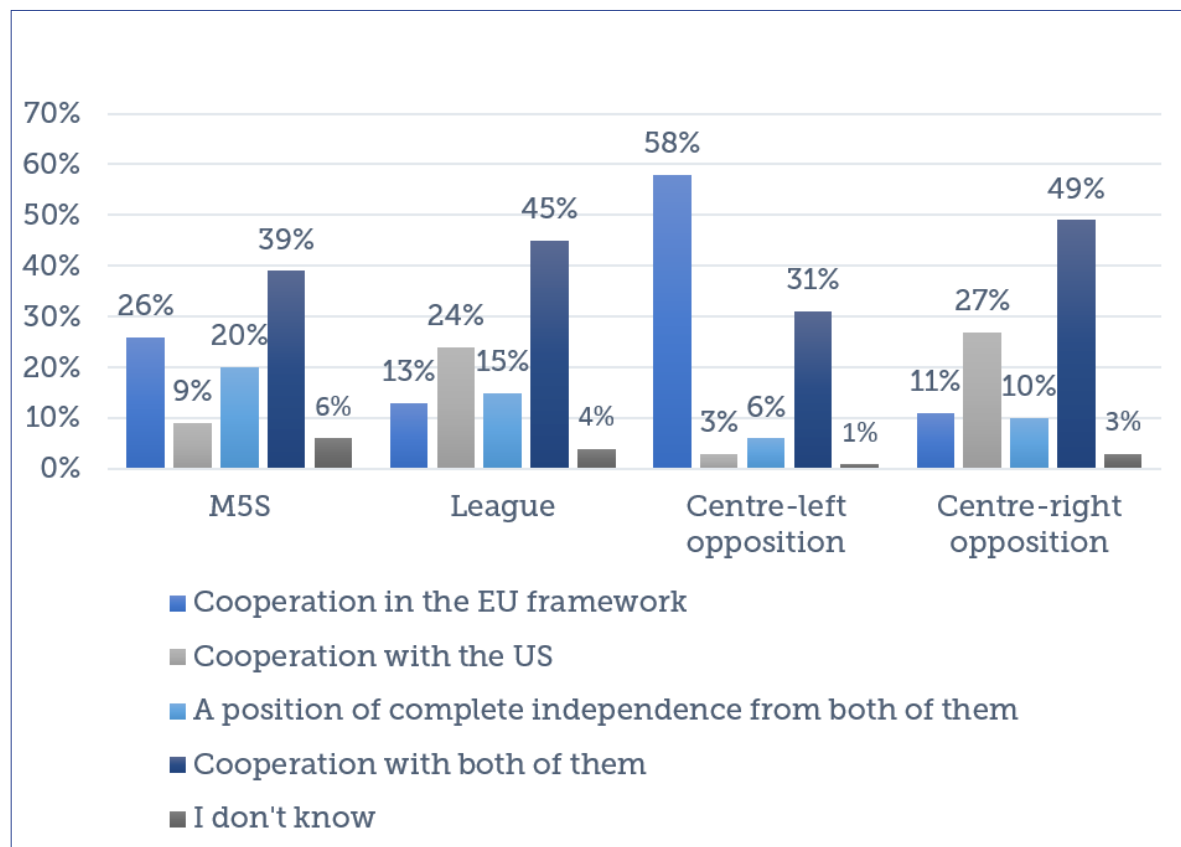
Source: LAPS, IAI survey on defence 2018.

Voters of the government coalition show a rather differentiated profile (Figure 3). On the one hand, similar data was registered among the electorates of both government parties regarding the support for the cooperation both in the EU framework and with the US. On the other hand, voters of the M5S are clearly more pro-European and less pro-American than those voting for the League party. While in the centre-left wing opposition¹ the importance of European connections is clearly dominant, the centre-right opposition² is predictably more pro-American than the other political groups.

¹ In this study, the centre-left opposition includes: PD; Liberi e Uguali; Südtiroler Volkspartei (SVP); Centro Democratico; +Europa; Potere al Popolo.

² In this study, the centre-right opposition includes: Forza Italia; Noi con l’Italia-UDC; Alternativa Popolare; Fratelli d’Italia; Casa Pound.

Figure 3 | The most important relation to ensure Italy's national security by partisan preferences



Question: *Which of the following options do you consider the most important to ensure Italy's national security: ...*

Source: LAPS, IAI survey on defence 2018.

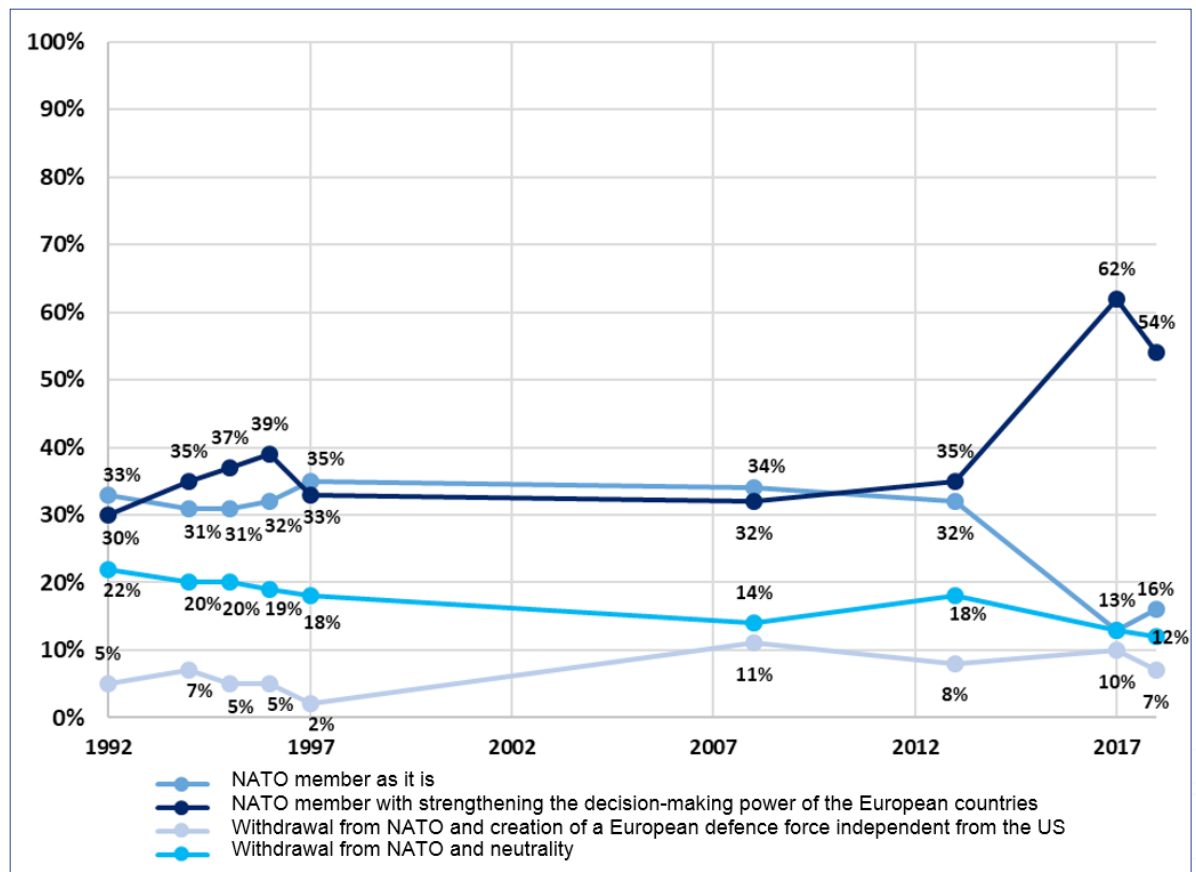
As regards Italy's NATO membership, the interviewees were asked the same question included in the survey on Italians and foreign policy conducted by IAI and University of Siena in 2017³ – which is part of a 20 years long series (Figure 4).

In particular, the report issued in 2017 confirmed that Italians are favourable to the Atlantic Alliance, but also want relation between the two sides within the alliance is rebalanced. Around 60 per cent of the sample expressed in fact preference for NATO membership, as long as the decision-making power of the European countries is strengthened within the alliance. This represented a significant increase compared to the historical trend, which fluctuates between 30 and 40 per cent of preferences. Even if declining, this year's results confirm that Italians support this option, which totals a percentage above the absolute majority (54 per cent). This growth occurs at the expenses of the option of NATO membership as it is which, although increasing in the last year (16 per cent), has more than halved if

³ LAPS and IAI, *Gli italiani e la politica estera 2017*, Rome, IAI, 2017, <https://www.iai.it/en/node/8352>.

compared to data retrieved within the last 25 years. In contrast, the two response options indicating Italy's withdrawal from the Atlantic Alliance – either to become a neutral country or to simultaneously create a European defence force – are confirmed to be a minority and continue to decline, hitting respectively the 12 per cent – the lowest level since 1992 – and 7 per cent of the sample.

Figure 4 | Italy's membership in NATO



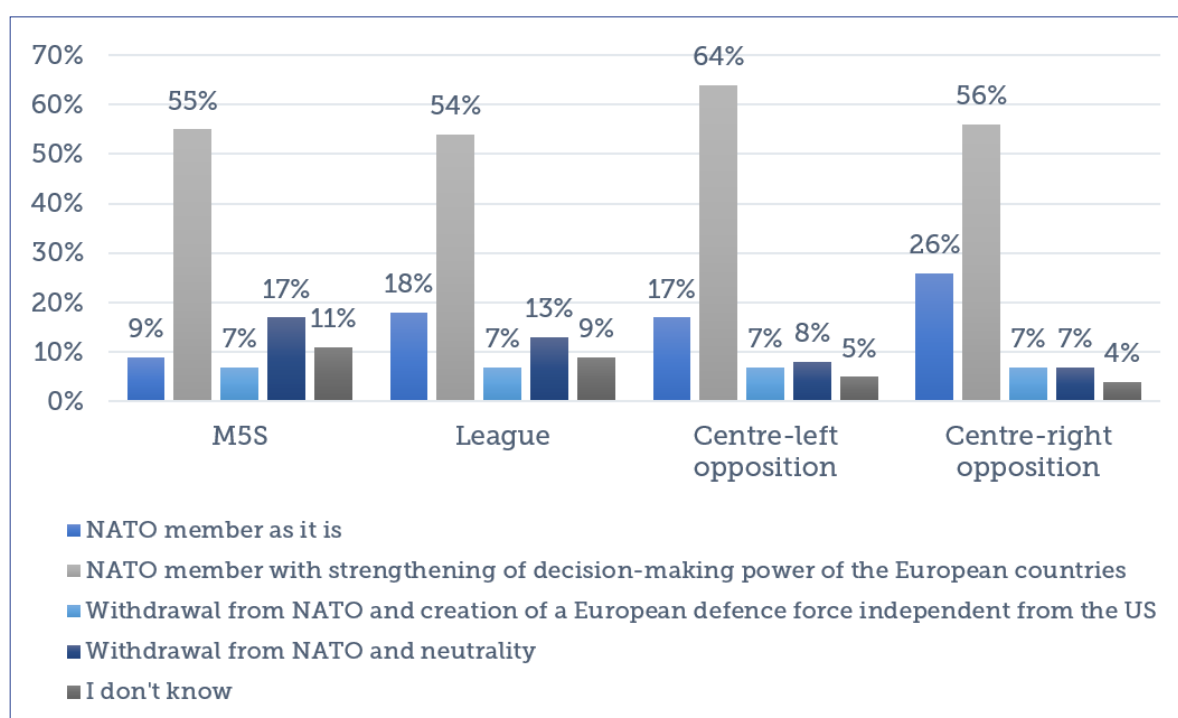
Question: Which is in your opinion the best way for Italy to provide for its own security?
 Note: Percentages calculated on the total including the answers "Don't know/Don't answer/Other".
 Source: 1992: Vespri Siciliani research (AD); 1994: Archivio Disarmo-SWG, CEMISS-Isernia research (CMS); 1995: Archivio Disarmo-SWG, Difebarometro No. 2; 1996: Archivio Disarmo-SWG, Difebarometro No. 3; 1997: Archivio Disarmo-SWG, Difebarometro No. 5; 2008: LAPS, MAE survey 2008; 2013: LAPS, IAI survey 2013; 2017: LAPS, IAI survey 2017; 2018: LAPS, IAI survey on defence 2018.

Preferences for political parties show more marked differences on this question than on others. (Figure 5). The distribution of the two government parties voters' answers is characterised by both similarities and divergences. On the one hand, the option of strengthening the European decision-making power within NATO enjoys similar support in the two parties: 54 per cent in the League case and 55 per cent in the M5S one. On the other hand, the M5S voters are relatively more favourable to withdraw from NATO than those voting for the League – 17 per cent as compared to

13 per cent – and they are less inclined to accept NATO membership as it is.

Concerning centre-left opposition, a vast majority of electors (64 per cent) is in favour of staying within NATO, on condition that its European component is strengthened. Conversely, this percentage drops to 56 per cent in the centre-right opposition, where there is also the highest percentage of those accepting the Atlantic Alliance as it is.

Figure 5 | NATO membership by partisan preferences



Source: LAPS, IAI survey on defence 2018.

Italians' stances about the positioning of their country on the international stage need to be considered in relation to the profound changes at global level. From this perspective, Trump's rise to the US presidency has been perhaps one of the most relevant events of recent years, particularly considering the consequences of this leadership change on transatlantic relations. It is not a coincidence that the establishment of the new Trump administration, in addition to Brexit and to internal pressures exerted by EU institutions and member states, has contributed to relaunching the process of defence integration within the Union.

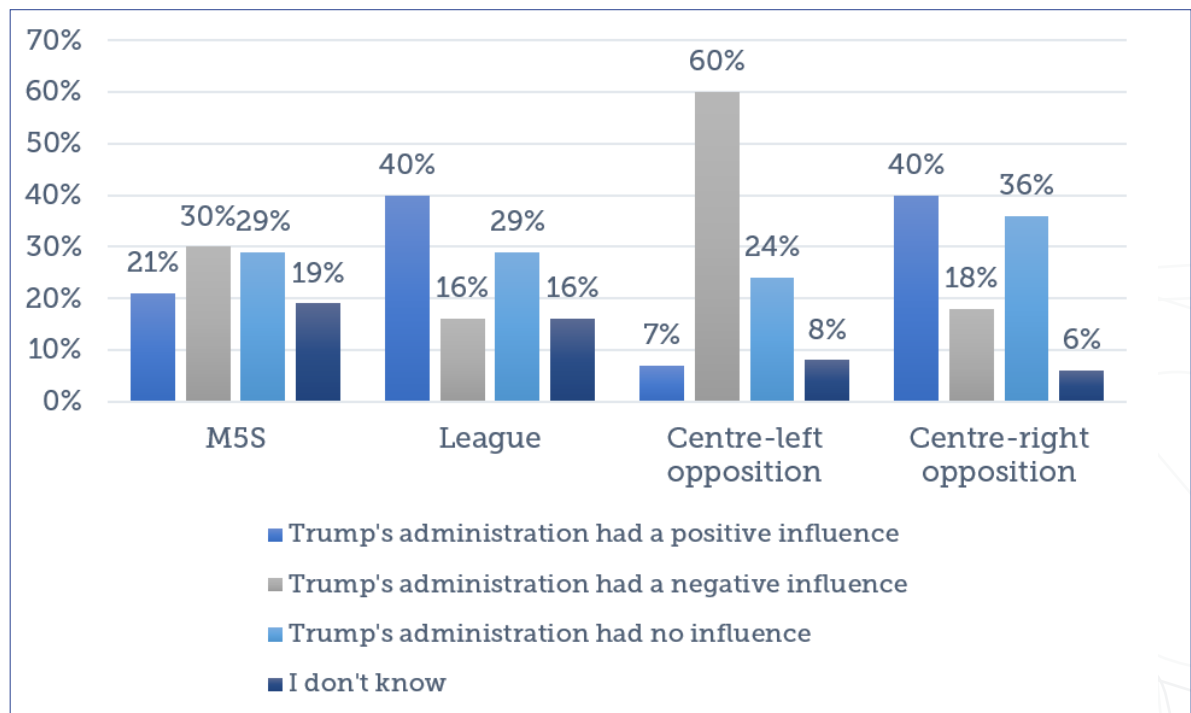
As for the impact of Trump's administration on Italy's national security, the public opinion proves to be uncertain and substantially polarised on the topic. A fifth of the interviewees admit not to have a clear idea on the role played by the new president on Italian security. Another 20 per cent express a positive opinion, considering the current American leadership as a positive factor for Italy's national security. On the opposite side, around 33 per cent of the respondents believe it is a negative one.

To complete the picture, a substantial proportion of the interviewees (28 per cent) considers Trump’s administration as deprived of any influence on the matter.

At a closer look, data gathered in Figure 6 reveals significant differences in opinions based on the different political preferences. Within the centre-left opposition, almost two thirds of the sample take critical positions over Trump’s administration, while only 7 per cent of voters believe that the new administration has had a positive impact. On the contrary, within the centre-right opposition, 40 per cent of electors consider a positive role of Trump’s administration positive Italian national security, whereas only 18 per cent deem it negative. Interestingly, among League’s electorate inclinations are quite similar to the ones of other centre-right parties’ voters.

In comparison, the situation is less clear in the case of the M5S electorate. Although the relative majority of M5S voters express a negative view on US president (30 per cent), 29 per cent of electors argue that his new administration has had no effect on Italy’s national security and a significant 21 per cent consider Donald Trump’s settlement as a positive factor.

Figure 6 | Trump’s administration and its influence over national security by voting preferences

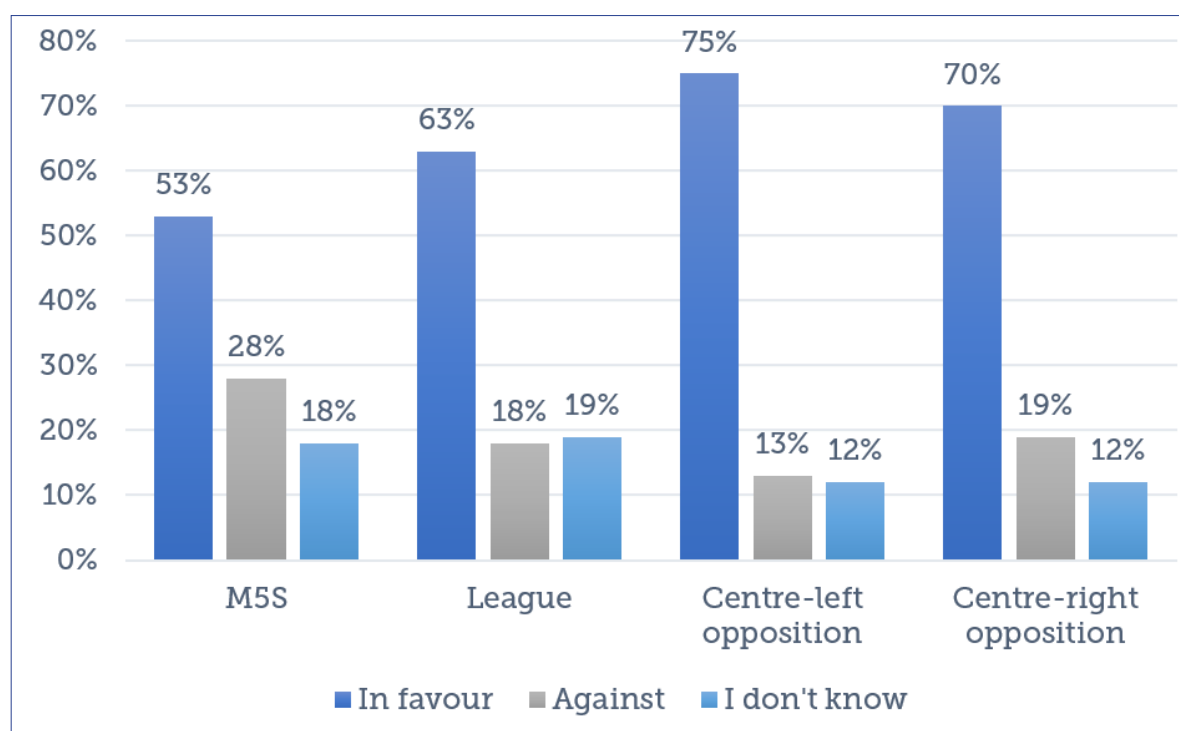


Question: *Some people believe that the US administration under president Trump has had a positive influence over Italy’s national security. Others believe instead that Trump administration has had a negative influence over Italian national security. Which position is closer to your view?*

Source: LAPS, IAI survey on defence 2018.

Finally, a large percentage of the sample proves to be in favour of strengthening defence cooperation and integration with EU member states: while 60 per cent of the sample support this option, only 19 per cent oppose it. Notable divergences are detected by breaking down the sample according to political parties' affiliation. While League voters are mostly in line with the overall average data (63 per cent in favour), M5S electorate is less in favour of European defence integration, albeit this option enjoys still 53 per cent of support). On the other side, the large majority of voters of all opposition parties express a clear support for defence integration within the EU, reaching a percentage above 70 per cent.

Figure 7 | Defence cooperation and integration within the EU



Question: *In general, are you very much in favour, somewhat in favour, somewhat against or very much against recent initiatives taken to deepen the cooperation and/or integration of EU countries in the military domain and defence industry?*

Source: LAPS, IAI survey on defence 2018.

3. Italians and the Armed Forces' role

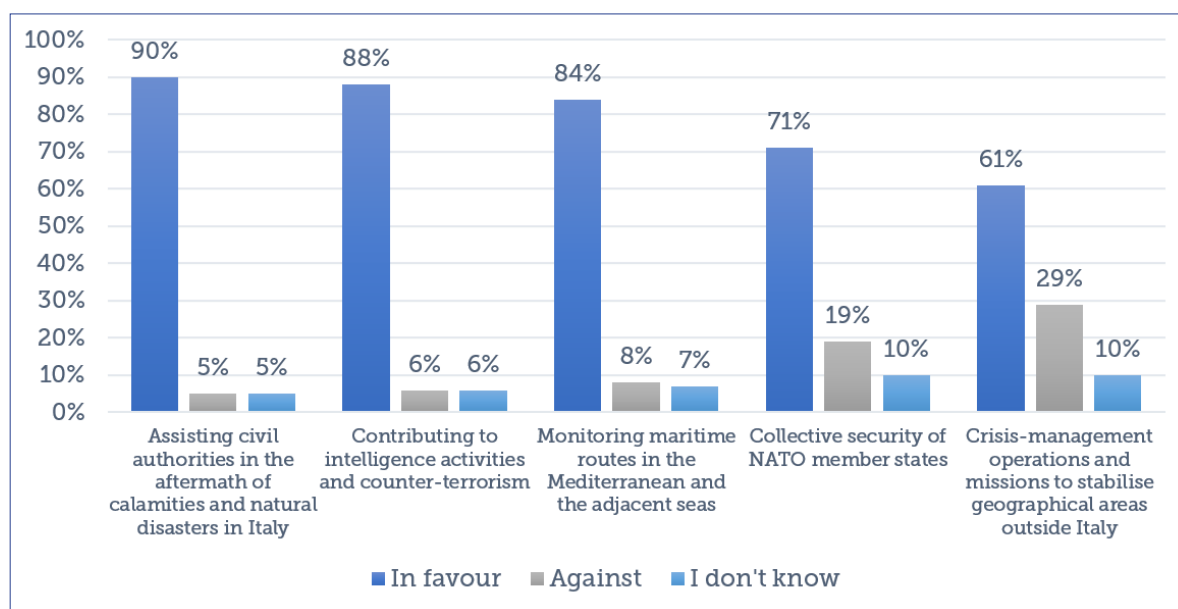
Concerning the Armed Forces' role, the Italian public opinion proves to be predominantly in favour of tasks aimed either to protect the national interests or to pursue solidarity goals.

The vast majority of the sample (Figure 8), is in favour of employing the Armed Forces to assist civilian authorities in the aftermath of calamities and natural disasters on Italian soil (90 per cent), to contribute to intelligence activities and

counter-terrorism (88 per cent), and to safeguard maritime shipping routes (84 per cent) in the Mediterranean and adjacent seas.

Although substantially high, the support for collective defence within NATO or for crisis-management operation is relatively lower than for the abovementioned activities. Indeed, 71 per cent of respondents declare to be in favour of the deployment of Italian Armed Forces to guarantee collective defence of NATO members. Similarly, 61 per cent of the interviewees express a positive view on the Armed Forces' participation in crisis-management operations to stabilise areas beyond Italian borders.

Figure 8 | Areas of intervention of Armed Forces



Question: *Are you very much in favour, somewhat in favour, somewhat against or very much against the performance of the following tasks by the Italian Armed Forces?*
 Source: LAPS, IAI survey on defence 2018.

Data concerning the Armed Forces' tasks are essentially in line with those regarding the support for the possible use of military force. In the latter case, the interviewees were asked a question with two different formulations. The original sample was indeed divided in two independent sub-samples (Sample A and Sample B) and each sub-sample received a specific version of the question. In particular, Sample A was asked to express their positions on the use of military force by "European countries" in a specific critical situation. Conversely, Sample B was asked to express their position on the same situation, with a clear reference only to "Italy" as military power. The subsequent analysis has not revealed any significant effect deriving from the different formulation of the question in the two sub-samples. Therefore, data are here presented in their aggregated form (Table 2).

Table 2 | The use of military force

	In favour (%)	Neither in favour, nor against (%)	Against (%)	I don't know (%)
Prevent an imminent terrorist attack to Italy	85	6	5	3
Provide food and medical assistance in crisis scenarios	84	6	6	4
Free Italian citizens held hostage	81	6	8	5
Prevent proliferation of nuclear weapons	79	7	9	4
Ensure Italy's energy supplies	76	9	10	5
Support international law	76	9	9	7
End a civil war	67	12	16	5
Provide military personnel to peacekeeping operations at the end of a conflict	66	11	17	5
Remove a government violating human rights	62	10	23	5
Defend a NATO ally under attack	59	17	18	6

Question: *I would now like to ask you some questions on the use of military force by European countries. Are you in favour or against the use of military force in order to ... (Sample A); I would now like to ask you some questions on the use of military force by Italy. Are you in favour or against the use of military force in order to ... (Sample B.)*
 Source: LAPS, IAI survey on defence 2018.

About 85 per cent of the interviewees declare to be in favour of using military force in order to prevent a terrorist attack in Italy, 84 per cent to provide food and assistance in crisis scenarios, and 81 per cent to free Italian citizens held hostage. Similarly, high rates of support are registered for the use of military force in order to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons (79 per cent), to ensure Italy's energy supplies (76 per cent), and to support international law (76 per cent). Noticeably, the support for the use of force slightly decreases when the focus shifts towards initiatives and contexts perceived as more distant from the immediate interests of the Italian citizens. This is the case of peacekeeping operations, interventions in civil war contexts, actions against governments violating human rights, defence of NATO allies. In particular, the use of military force to defend a NATO ally under attack is endorsed by 59 per cent of Italians, a support lower than for other tasks – albeit still substantially high.

Several factors can potentially influence the position of the Italian public opinion on the Armed Forces' tasks and the use of military force. Among these, a crucial role is played by the assessments on the economic impact that defence expenditure can have on the state budget.

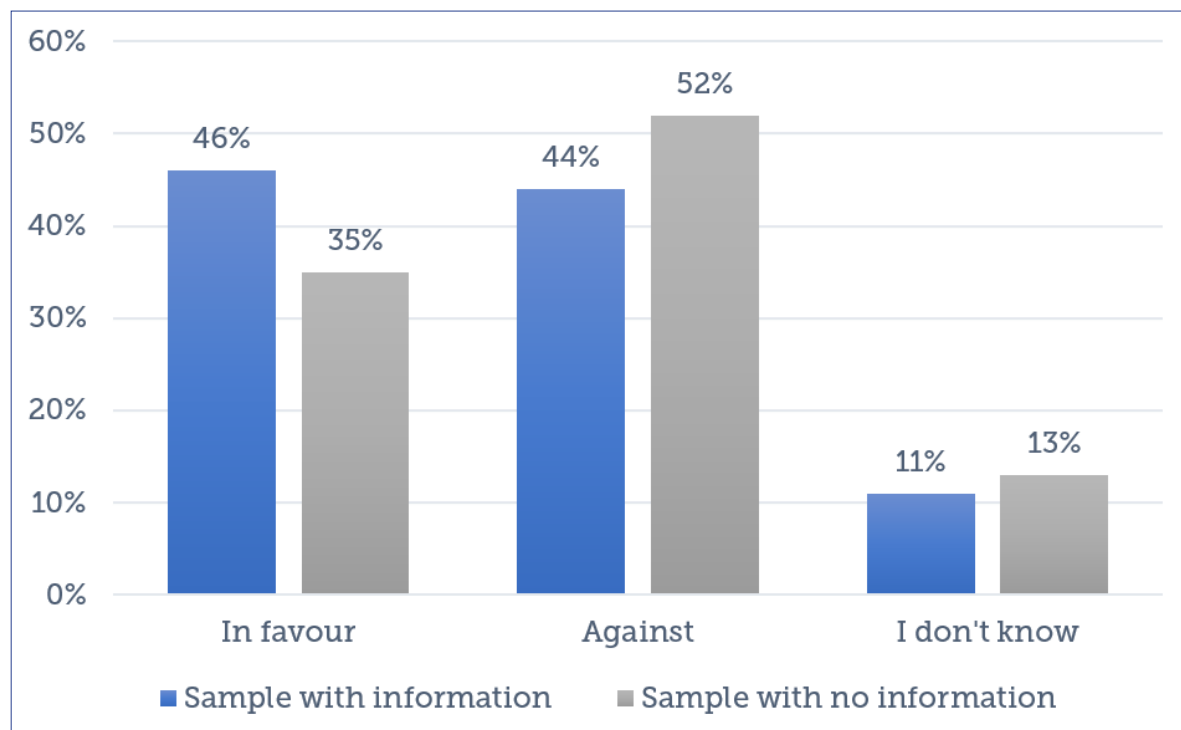
In the last years, the increase of resources for the defence sector, which is always sensitive for Italian political elite and public opinion, has regained prominence within the European debate. On the one hand, the US administration pressures NATO allies to align their defence expenditures to the agreed goals. On the other hand, the European defence integration process seems to experience a new momentum, through the launch of the EU Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and the definition of criteria and goals for defence expenditures within the Union.

Against this backdrop, it is particularly relevant to understand: 1) the public opinion's level of support for increasing the defence budget; and 2) the room of manoeuvre of the political establishment to push such increase.

To this end, the original sample of interviews has been divided in two independent sub-samples (Sample A and Sample B), and a different version of a question on increasing defence expenditure has been posed to each sub-sample. The Sample A was asked to express its position on a possible increase of Italian military budget without any reference or information about the expenditure of other European countries or the US, or about the NATO budgetary targets. Instead, Sample B was asked to express its position on increasing the Italian defence budget, after being provided with specific data on current Italian expenditure level in comparison with those of main allies and the NATO targets. This test allows to evaluate both the general level of support for military expenditure, and the eventual effect of a greater awareness about the Italian budget compared to other countries.

Data reported in Figure 9 show a clear and significant difference between the two sub-samples. In contrast with the survey realised by LAPS for IAI in 2017, where an analogous experiment gave opposite results, Sample A respondents (namely, those receiving a neutral formulation of the question) are significantly more in favour of increasing the defence expenditure (46 per cent) than those facing a question which includes detailed information (35 per cent). Moreover, while in Sample A a slight relative majority declare to favour an increase in the Italian defence expenditure (46 per cent, compared to 44 per cent opposing it), Sample B shows an absolute majority of 52 per cent against such rise, with only 35 per cent being in favour. Divergences detected between the two sub-samples seem to imply that the comparison with expenditure goals achieved by other countries does not represent a convincing argument for Italy's increase in defence expenditure.

Figure 9 | Support for increasing the defence expenditure



Question: *In relation with an increase in Italy's defence budget, are you...* (Sample A); *Today Italy spends about 1.1% of its GDP for defence, Germany 1.2%, France 1.9%, and Great Britain 2%, while the United States about 3.6%. The target agreed by the Heads of State and Government of the 29 NATO countries defines for each member state the need to spend at least 2% of its GDP by 2024 for its own national armed forces. In relation with an increase in Italy's defence budget, are you...* (Sample B).

Source: LAPS, IAI survey on defence 2018.

Also in this case, divergences across the political spectrum are significant (Table 3). The 67 per cent of the League voters receiving a neutral formulation of the question declare to be in favour of an defence expenditure's increase, as compared to 39 per cent of the M5S electors and 30 per cent of the centre-left opposition ones. As regards the centre-right opposition parties, a significant majority (74 per cent) support an increase in defence expenditure. In other words, the Italian centre-right electorate proves to be more inclined to support an increase in the defence expenditure than the centre-left one. This scenario does radically change when looking at Sample B (those receiving the question with detailed information about the expenditure levels of allied countries). Although the absolute majority of the League electors share a positive view on increasing Italy's defence expenditure, a clear difference emerges in comparison with Sample A: the rate of supporters in fact decreases from 67 to 54 per cent, with a decline of 13 points. Similarly, among the M5S electors, the proportion of people declaring to be in favour of increasing defence expenditure decreases from 39 to 31 per cent. The most evident gap can be seen in the centre-right opposition parties. In this case, the percentage of people expressing a positive view over increasing the defence budget declines by 25 points, from 74 per cent in Sample A to 49 per cent in Sample B. A completely

opposed trend is registered for the centre-left electorate. In Sample A, the absolute majority of centre-left voters (63 per cent) declare to be against an increase in Italian defence expenditure. Data change, albeit not substantially, in Sample B. When receiving information about Italy's defence budget in comparison with other countries, these voters are slightly more in favour of increasing the defence budget than those in Sample A, from 30 to 35 per cent.

Table 3 | Support for increasing defence expenditure by partisan preferences

	M5S (%)	League (%)	Centre-left opposition (%)	Centre-right opposition (%)
Sample with no information				
In favour	39	67	30	74
Against	53	28	63	11
I don't know	7	4	7	15
Sample with information				
In favour	31	54	35	49
Against	57	41	56	43
I don't know	12	5	9	8

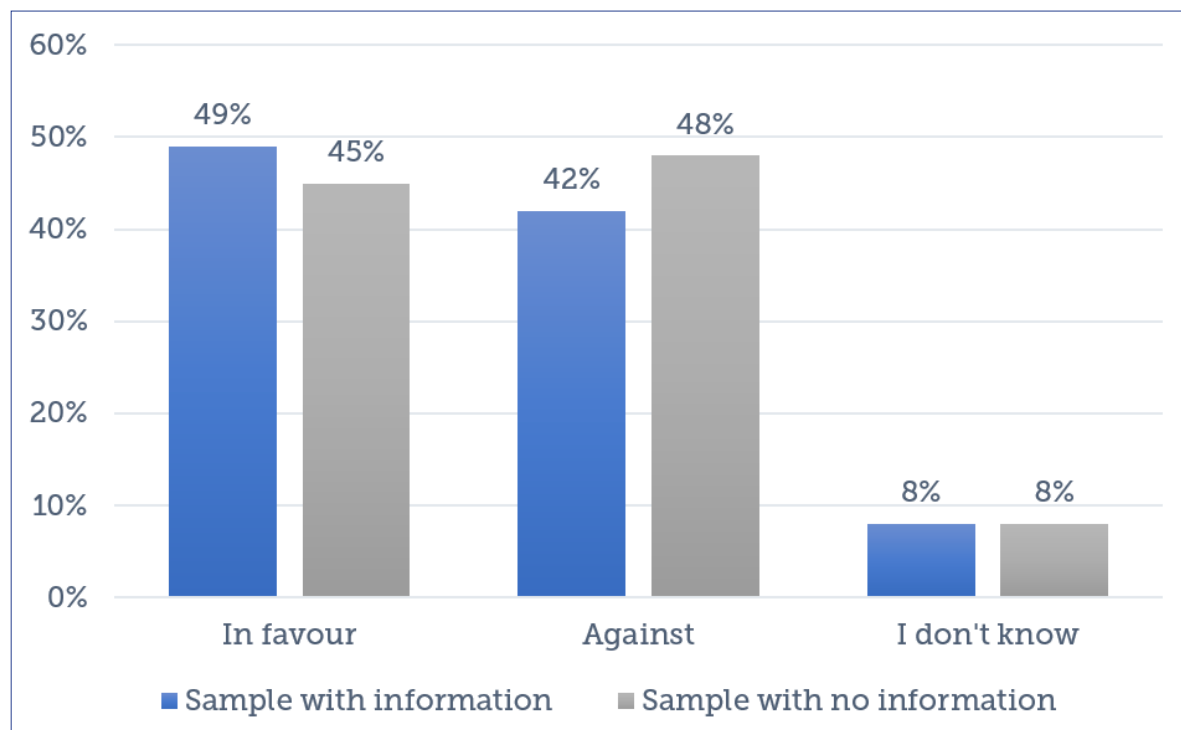
Source: LAPS, IAI survey on defence 2018.

To sum up, findings show that a comparison with allied countries expenditure generate a very different effect depending on the political affiliation of the respondents. In particular, a higher awareness significantly diminish the support for defence budget's increase as concerns the current government parties the centre-right opposition electorates. Conversely, a higher awareness relatively increases the support of the centre-left parties' voters.

4. Italians and international missions

The international missions involving Italian Armed Forces inevitably represent the most debated topic in relation to the defence sector. In a similar vein to the 2017 IAI report on Italians and foreign policy, interviewees were asked to express their views on Italy's military engagement abroad, with only half of the sample receiving information on the actual number of contingents deployed by the country – Sample A – and the other half did not (Sample B). As compared to 2017, Italians prove to be more in favour of deploying military personnel in international missions, although the public opinion is substantially split in two camps (Figure 10). Interestingly, in the Sample A with information on Italian military abroad the relative majority of respondents support such an involvement – 49 per cent – while in the Sample B with no information on international missions the relative majority – 48 per cent – oppose it.

Figure 10 | Support for international missions



Question: *Currently, about 6,100 Italian military personnel are deployed in missions abroad, mainly in Iraq, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Kosovo, Libya, Latvia and Somalia as well as in naval operations in the Mediterranean Sea. Italian troops participate in or lead UN, NATO or EU missions, or are deployed in entirely national missions. Generally speaking, in relation with the deployment of Italian military personnel in international missions, are you... (Sample A); In general, in relation with the deployment of Italian military personnel in missions abroad, are you... (Sample B).*
 Source: LAPS, IAI survey on defence 2018.

Table 4 | Support for international missions by partisan preferences

	M5S (%)	League (%)	Centre-left opposition (%)	Centre-right opposition (%)
Sample with no information				
In favour	37	53	62	74
Against	58	40	37	26
I don't know	5	7	1	
Sample with information				
In favour	34	48	56	74
Against	56	51	37	26
I don't know	11	1	7	

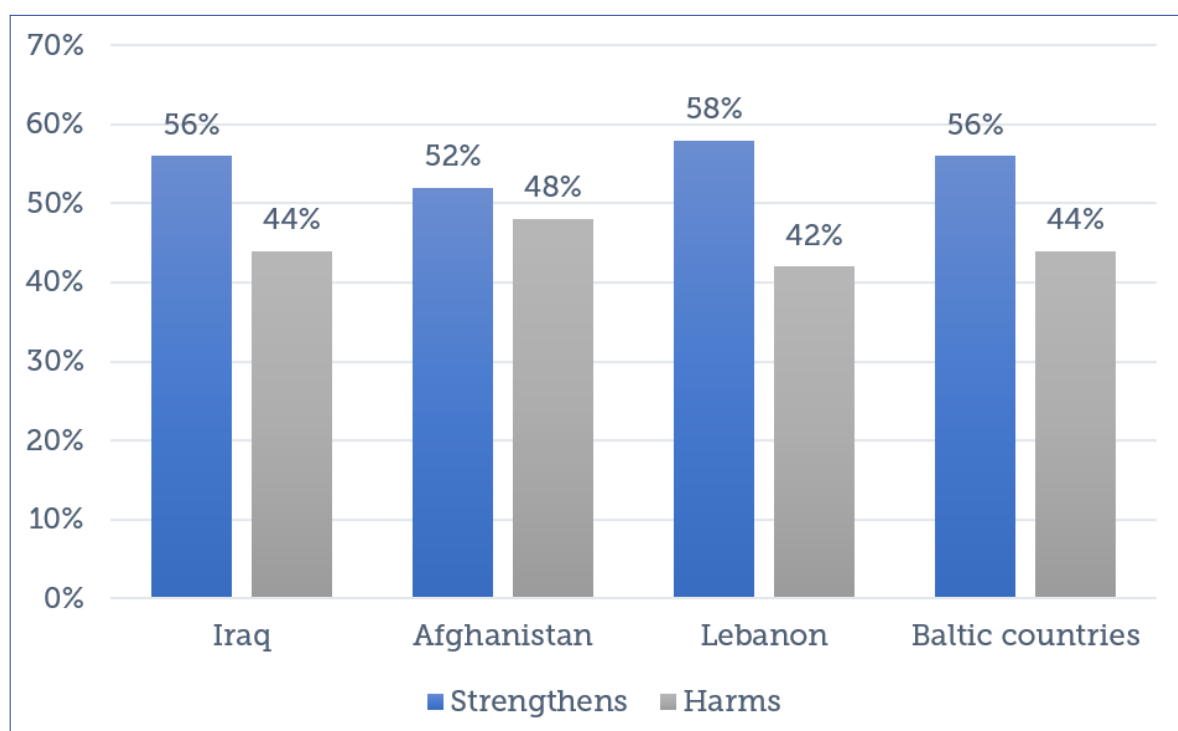
Source: LAPS, IAI survey on defence 2018.

Looking at the partisan preferences, among voters of the opposition parties (both in the centre-left and in the centre-right wings) those in favour of international missions represent an absolute majority in both samples. Among government parties

the situation changes profoundly (Table 4). The M5S voters are against international missions in both samples, by reaching percentages slightly below 60 per cent. Among the League electorate, preferences oscillate rather markedly between the two samples. When receiving the related information, those in favour are slightly above the absolute majority, with a clear margin: 53 per cent against 40 per cent. In the Sample B with no information, the situation overturns: those not in favour slightly prevail, with 51 per cent against Italy's participation to missions abroad.

Moving to an evaluation of the main missions Italy is concretely carrying out today in critical areas, the absolute majority of the public opinion declares in favour of deploying military personnel (Figure 11). Requested to assess the current Italian involvement in four scenarios – Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon and Baltic countries – the absolute majority of the sample considers that these missions are strengthening Italian national security, with percentages fluctuating between 52 and 58 per cent.

Figure 11 | International missions and national security



Question: *Since 2014, Italy has been participating to the mission in Iraq in support of local authorities in countering the Islamic State, within the framework of the multinational coalition against ISIS, authorised by the UN. Currently, there are about 1,170 Italian military personnel deployed. In your opinion, the Italian participation to this mission... Since 2003, Italy has been participating to the NATO mission in Afghanistan in support of local authorities in countering Al-Qaeda and Taliban guerrilla. Currently, about 900 Italian military personnel are deployed in the UN-authorized operation. In your opinion, the Italian participation to this mission... Since 2006, Italy has been participating in the UN mission in Lebanon in order to maintain the truce between Israel and the Lebanese group Hezbollah, as well as to consolidate peace and stability in the region for the purpose of preventing a new conflict escalation. In particular, today Italy is deploying around 1,100 military personnel, and has assumed the command of the mission several times over the last 12 years. In your*

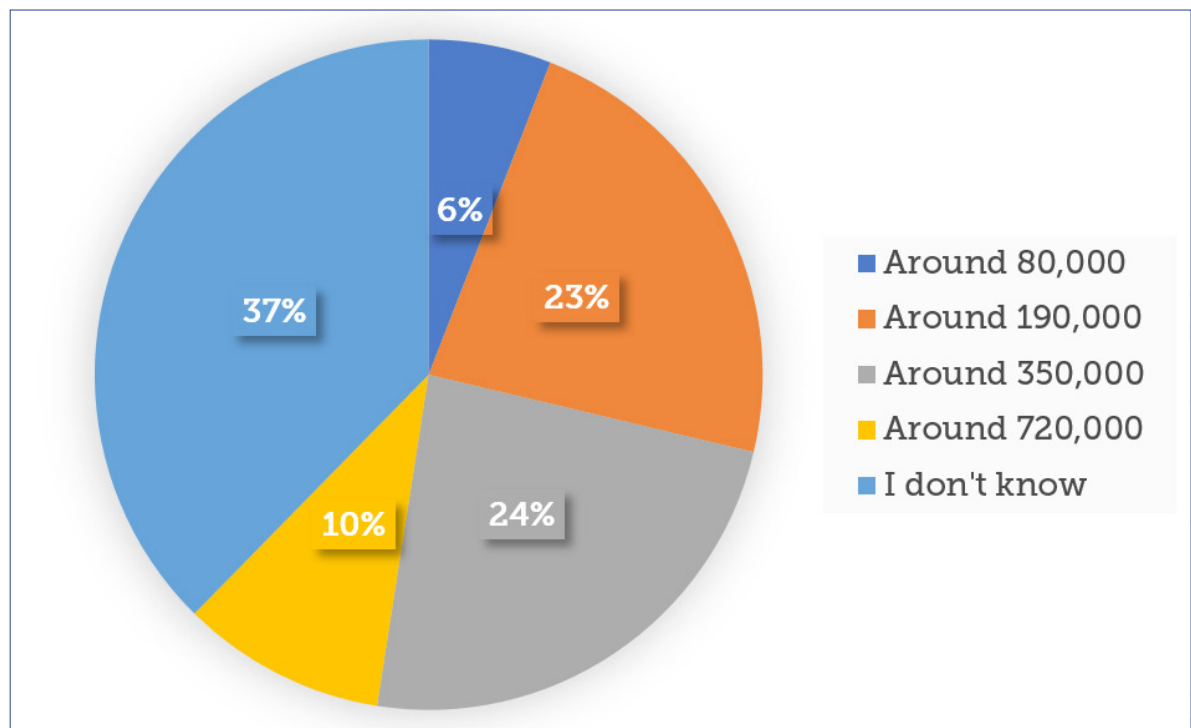
opinion this mission, currently led by Italy... Over the last years, Italy has participated with its military personnel to NATO missions of protection of the airspace and border control of Baltic countries. This is a particularly sensitive area within Europe, as demonstrated by the recent Russian aggressive behaviour vis-à-vis Ukraine and the following tension between Moscow and the West. In your opinion, these missions...

Source: LAPS, IAI survey on defence 2018.

5. Italians and their knowledge of defence

Three final questions have been posed to the interviewees in order to assess the Italians' knowledge of defence issues. First, they were asked to indicate the total number of personnel belonging to Italy's armed forces, with three options listed next to the correct one (190,000 units), which were quite distant from the real numbers. The results are not encouraging (Figure 12). Over a third of the sample admitted they did not know the answer, and 24 per cent incorrectly assessing the personnel at around 350,000 units. In other words, only 23 per cent of Italians figured out the actual size of their Armed Forces.

Figure 12 | Number of personnel in the Armed Forces (excluding Carabinieri)



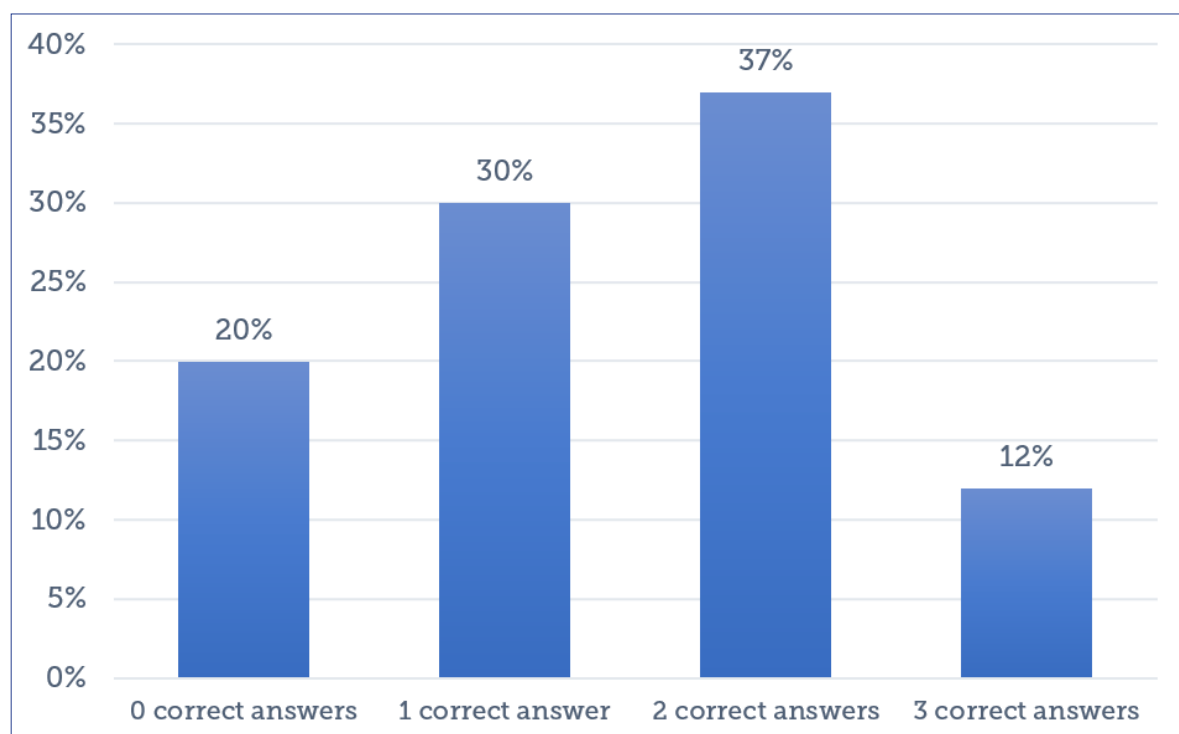
Question: *In your opinion, excluding the 'Carabinieri' (about 100,000 personnel) who perform functions of internal security, how many personnel there are in the Italian Armed Forces (Army, Navy and Air Force)?*

Source: LAPS, IAI survey on defence 2018.

The other two questions posed to the sample show better results. On the one hand, the interviewees were asked to name the current Italian Minister of Defence among a list of ministers belonging to the current government. On the other hand, the interviewees had to indicate who is the commander in chief of the Armed Forces according to the Italian Constitution, by choosing between four different institutional roles. In both cases, the absolute majority of the sample was able to give the correct answer – 62 and 56 per cent respectively.

Starting from these questions, an index of knowledge has been built, ranging from a score of 0 (the respondent gave a wrong answer to all three questions) to a score of 3 (the respondent gave the correct answer to each question). As a result, a fifth of the sample answered incorrectly to all questions, whereas only 12 per cent were able to respond correctly to all of them (Figure 13).

Figure 13 | Index of knowledge



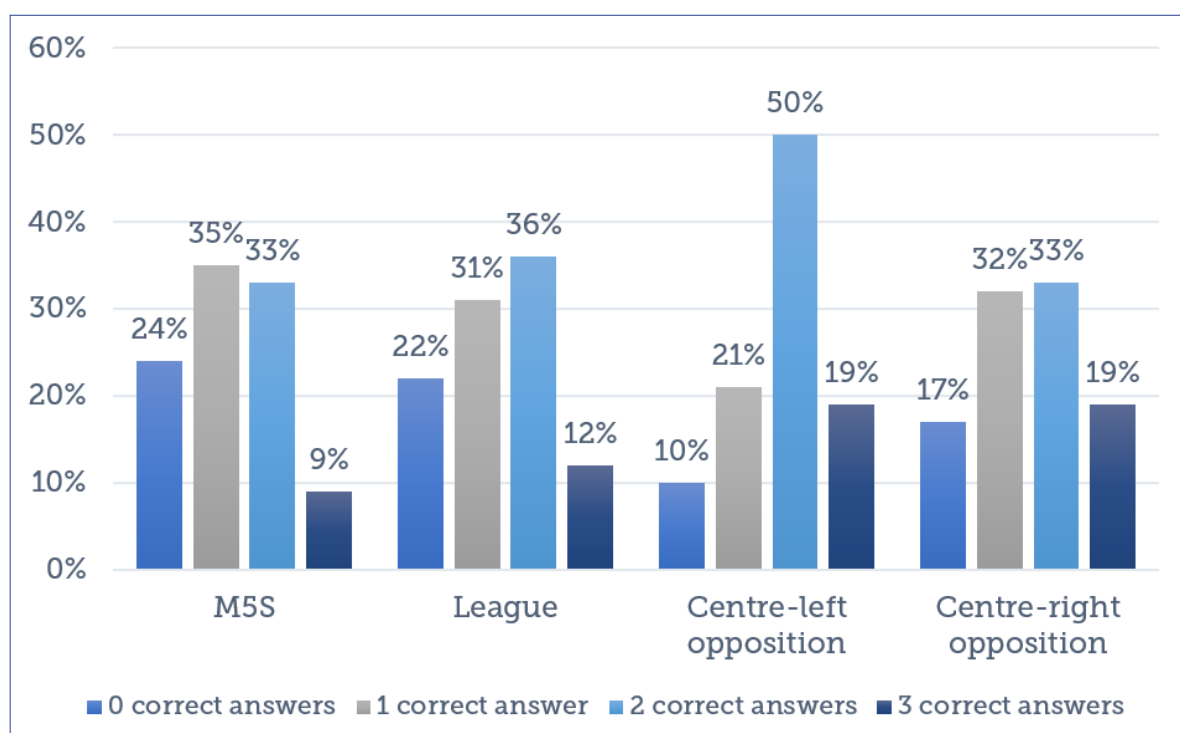
Question: *In your opinion, excluding the ‘Carabinieri’ (about 100,000 personnel) who perform functions of internal security, how many personnel there are in the Italian Armed Forces (Army, Navy and Air Force)? (See Figure 12); Who is the current Minister of Defence of the Conte government? Alfonso Bonafede / Danilo Toninelli / Elisabetta Trenta / Giulia Grillo / I don’t know; Our Constitution attributes the command of Armed Forces (Army, Navy and Air Force) to an institutional figure. Which one of the following? Prime Minister of Italy / President of the Italian Republic / President of the Senate / Minister of Defence / I don’t know.*

Source: LAPS, IAI survey on defence 2018.

Significant insights come from the breakdown of these questions among political parties' voters (Figure 14). Electors of centre-right and, in particular, centre-left opposition forces register a substantially better index in comparison to the aggregate electorate of the two government parties, in turn presenting a similar distribution.

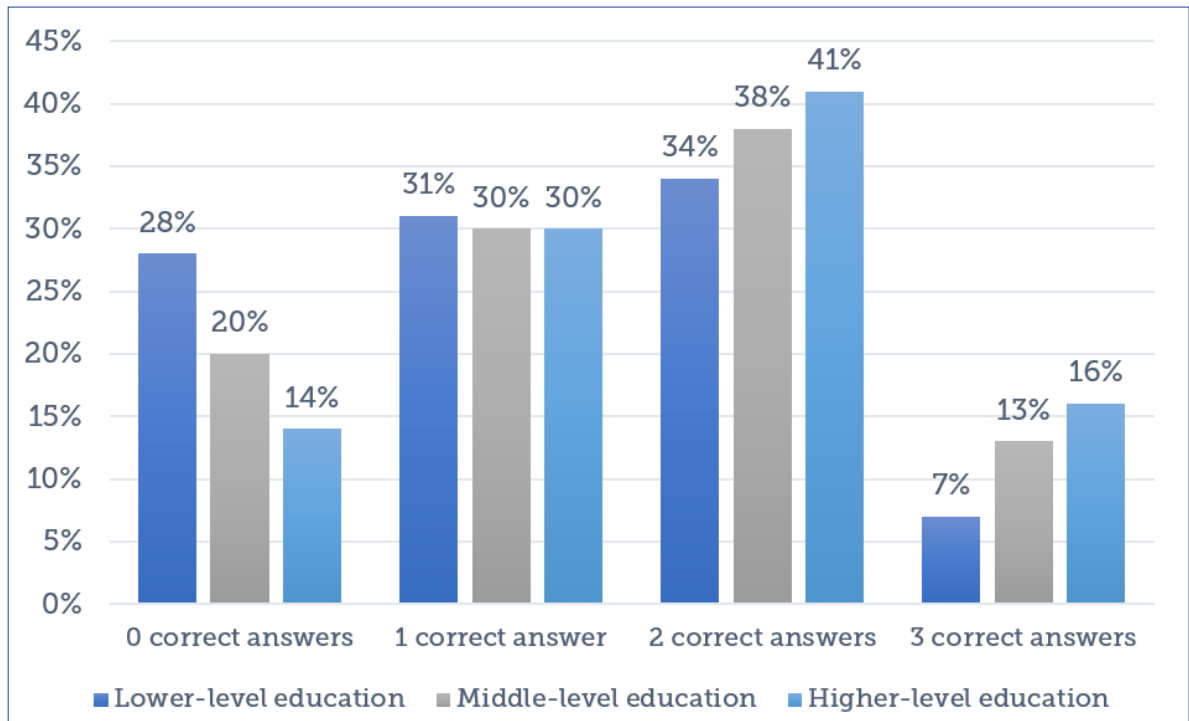
Finally, significant divergences are detectable according to the education level of the respondents (Figure 15). The lowest is the education level, the higher the percentage of interviews providing zero correct answers: 28 per cent. On the contrary, among graduates only 14 per cent are unable to give at least one correct answer. Accordingly, the respondents with a middle level of education, namely the high school diploma, place themselves in a mid-way position between these two poles.

Figure 14 | Index of knowledge by partisan preferences



Source: LAPS, IAI survey on defence 2018.

Figure 15 | Index of knowledge by education level



Note: Lower level education: no title, elementary school licence, middle school licence, professional qualification; Middle-level: high school diploma; Higher-level: bachelor's degree, master's degree, second-level masters, PhD.

Source: LAPS, IAI survey on defence 2018.

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