



AUGUST 2018 **Attitudes towards  
National Identity,  
Immigration and Refugees  
in Italy**



**More in  
Common**

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## ABOUT MORE IN COMMON

More in Common is a new international initiative, set up in 2017 to build communities and societies that are stronger, more united and more resilient to the increasing threats of polarisation and social division. The More in Common initiative took shape from work undertaken since 2015 to understand why advanced democracies failed to respond more effectively to the refugee crisis and its impact on domestic politics. More in Common was incubated in 2017 by Purpose, a creative agency specialising in social change and movement building.

More in Common's objective across its different streams of work is to build closer and more inclusive societies, which are resilient to the appeal of xenophobia and authoritarian populism. We aim to support the efforts of civil society and key influencers who share the values of open and inclusive societies, and help catalyse other new initiatives that advance these values.

More in Common is a non-profit organisation with teams in France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States. The co-founders of More in Common are Tim Dixon, Mathieu Lefevre, and Gemma Mortensen.

For more information, please visit [www.moreincommon.com](http://www.moreincommon.com)

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## DOWNLOAD

This document is available to download as a free PDF at: [www.moreincommon.com](http://www.moreincommon.com)



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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

This report provides insight into Italians' opinions about their country, its place in the world and their relationship to Italy's recent migrants. It comes at a time of political disruption and division, with 89 per cent of Italians in a recent poll describing their country as divided<sup>1</sup>. Italy drew international attention in 2018 when post-election negotiations led to the formation of governing coalition of populist parties. The MoVimento 5 Stelle and Lega were elected on a wave of 'anti-establishment' feelings.

As this report shows, Italians are profoundly frustrated with their governing classes, corruption and inequality. They feel that the system is broken, and they worry about a lack of opportunities for the next generation of Italians. They are disappointed in the European Union's failure to support them, and are especially frustrated by the failure of other nations to help them manage their sea borders. In an era of deep scepticism about conventional solutions, they are looking for change.

The lead-up to Italy's March 2018 election reflected the increased prominence of issues on immigration and the 'othering' of specific groups. Italians identify immigration among their highest priority of concerns and the prominent media coverage of boat arrivals across the Mediterranean has led to an increased perception of insecurity.

Across Europe, extremist parties see opportunities in the current political and social environment to improve their standing and potentially take power. Their copybook includes sophisticated use of digital technology, simple narratives of immigration as an invasion, migrants as economic, cultural and security threats and governing elites as out of touch and unable to control the country's borders. A struggling economy and

high levels of unemployment amongst young people provide fertile ground for divisive social narratives and a redefinition of national identity on exclusionary terms, with the promise of Lega to "put Italians first" ("prima gli Italiani").

Yet as this report shows, although they believe that immigration has had negative effects on Italy, most Italians also have feelings of solidarity and empathy towards outsiders. Hospitality and welcome are important to Italians as part of their national character. Public attitudes in Italy are more nuanced than is often assumed.

This research forms part of a larger initiative to address the growing threats to open and inclusive societies. To understand these threats, More in Common has been undertaking detailed research into public attitudes in a series of countries (United States, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Greece and Italy). This work has examined public perceptions of a common set of forces that is contributing to social fracturing and divisions in many countries. These forces include economic insecurity, growing inequality, cultural and demographic change and the weakening of local communities. Many people are feeling a loss of identity and belonging, and authoritarian populists and extremist forces are exploiting these vulnerabilities by advancing 'us' versus 'them' narratives, often focusing on migrants and refugees. Social media is also elevating conflict in public debate and bringing extreme narratives into the mainstream. More in Common's work is identifying commonalities and differences in public perceptions of these issues, with a view to identifying ways to strengthen resilience against the threats to democracy and inclusive societies.

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<sup>1</sup> Italy ranked fifth of 27 countries for perception of division, in response to the question: "Overall, how divided do you think your country is these days?" Bobby Duffy (2018), BBC Global Survey: A World Divided? <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/bbc-global-survey-world-divided>

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## Methodology

This study employs a population clustering segmentation analysis method that draws on a range of attitudinal characteristics of the Italian public. This form of segmentation provides a rich composite picture of how a population is divided in its views, going beyond basic demographic factors to show how networks of attitudes and opinions are connected.

The research was conducted by Ipsos in Italy and consisted of online and phone surveys with a representative sample of 2,000 adults. Respondents answered demographic questions as well as questions relating to the issues of greatest concern to them, their political views and affiliations, familiarity with refugee and immigration issues, their understanding of different terminology in the refugee and migration debate, their personal experience with refugees and their responses to different policy approaches and messages. Following an evaluation of the quantitative data and the conclusion of the segmentation analysis, the research was concluded with a qualitative phase involving two focus group discussions with members of two of Italy's 'middle' segments (the Disengaged Moderates and Left Behind).

## General Findings

- 1. There is widespread dissatisfaction with the status quo in Italy, deep distrust in elites and an overwhelming view that Italy is losing out from globalisation.** It is difficult to find any segment in Italian society that believes that globalisation has been good for the country. Only 16 per cent of Italians believe that globalisation has had a positive impact on the Italian economy. Frustration with the status quo is reflected in the 73 per cent of the population who say that traditional parties and politicians do not care about people like them.
- 2. Italians describe their country as weak, angry, and divided.** While 53 per cent of Italians describe Italy as weak, only five per cent describe the country as open, optimistic, and confident. Italians agree that unemployment is the greatest problem facing their country, but they identify immigration and crime as the next most pressing issues. They also believe Italy's wider political situation as a cause of concern.
- 3. Traditional cultural identity is important to Italians, and a majority are concerned that their identity is disappearing.** Half of the Italian population report that they sometimes feel like a stranger in their own country. An even larger number (59 per cent) believe that Italian identity is disappearing (only 22 per cent disagree).
- 4. Despite deep concerns about the management and impacts of migration, most Italians do not embrace extremist attitudes towards migrants themselves.** Many Italians remain warm towards outsiders including refugees and migrants:
  - The vast majority of Italians (72 per cent) support the principle of asylum and believe that people should be able to take refuge in other countries, including Italy (only 9 per cent disagree).
  - At the personal level, a larger number of Italians feel warm towards refugees (41 per cent) than cold ones (29 per cent), with 27 per cent neutral. Feelings about migrants in general are slightly less warm.
  - Italians reject extremism: a large majority of Italians (61 per cent) feel concerned about the rise of racism and discrimination and only 17 per cent say that they are not concerned.
  - There is more support for human rights groups than nationalist groups. Only 11 per cent of Italians said that they feel a strong connection with political movements in defence of the nation, while 37 per cent felt a strong connection with the human rights movement.
- 5. The public is concerned about immigration because most Italians think its impact on the country is negative, especially given the weak job prospects for Italians.** Only 18 per cent view the impact of immigration on Italy positively, while 57 per cent feel its impact overall has been negative. The concern about the negative economic impact of immigration is partly related to Italians' view that migrants compete for jobs and suppress wages.

- 6. Negative sentiment about immigration has been heightened by concerns about security, the perceived loss of control of Italy's borders, and the failure of authorities to manage migration effectively.** Many feel that there are too many people arriving for the country to handle the situation well (and 42 per cent believe that it is too dangerous to let refugees into Italy as they constitute a major security threat), that Italy has been left alone in this crisis, and that because of its economic circumstances, Italy cannot afford to welcome more migrants or refugees. The depth of Italians' frustration over these issues is reflected in their willingness to contemplate extreme actions in response.
- 7. Behind Italians' negative sentiment about immigration and the erosion of Italian identity, there are deeper concerns about integration.** Asked for their agreement or disagreement with the statement that migrants generally make efforts to integrate into Italian society, 44 per cent disagree, and only 29 per cent agree (25 per cent neither agree nor disagree).
- 8. Like people in many other countries in Europe, Italians do not feel a strong sense of connection with Muslims.** The concern that people from Islamic backgrounds may not integrate into Italian society is reflected in the view held by 40 per cent of Italians that Italian identity and Islam are incompatible.
- 9. In comparison to other Europeans, more Italians feel that they are free to speak their mind about controversial issues.** There is less concern about 'political correctness', that certain issues are off-limits or that open conversation about cultural sensitivities is being stifled. This is significant, because extremist groups often exploit these sentiments to build a backlash against cosmopolitan values. This approach appears less likely to resonate within Italy's more outspoken public culture.
- 10. Religious identity is important to Italians, and for almost half of the Italian population their country's Catholic heritage influences their belief that they have a responsibility to others, including migrants and refugees.** 42 per cent agree that as a Catholic country Italy should help provide for the needs of those entering Europe as migrants (while 28 per cent disagree and 27 per cent choose neither), perhaps also reflecting Italy's heritage as a country whose people have settled across the world in other nations. However alongside this hospitality to others is an anxiety about Italy losing its Catholic identity. 48 per cent agree that Italy's religious heritage needs to be protected from outside faith and beliefs.

## Italian Segments

This study groups people into different population segments according to their beliefs and values around issues of identity, belonging and Italians' relationship to the outside world. These groups are placed on a spectrum between 'open' and 'closed' values. Those in the closed groups tend to have a narrower view of what it means to be an Italian, and they share a deep distrust of their country's elites and a suspicion of immigration and trade. Those in the open segments are often more international in their outlook (although not all believe that globalisation has been beneficial for their country) and want Italy to be an open society that welcomes migrants and refugees. The middle segments are marked by mixed attitudes, often reflecting specific concerns such as economic insecurity, the preservation of cultural identity or the need for security from outside threats. Some are distinctive for not having strong views on any of these issues.



Each of Italy's middle segments leans towards open or closed views, although they differ from the open and closed groups in holding a mix of perspectives. For example:

- 35 per cent of Security Concerned and 23 per cent of Left Behind “strongly agree” that they are worried about rising levels of racism and discrimination, compared with only 9 and 10 per cent of the Hostile Nationalists and Cultural Defenders respectively. Similarly, 40 per cent of Hostile Nationalists and 27 per cent of Cultural Defenders disagree even with protecting and helping young and unaccompanied refugees, while just 13 and 14 per cent of Security Concerned and Left Behind disagree.
- The Security Concerned are evenly divided on the question of whether migrants generally make efforts to integrate into Italian society (41 per cent agree, 41 per cent disagree, and 15 per cent are undecided). This puts them closer to the open segments than the closed segments on the issue of integration. It also suggests that if their security fears are adequately addressed, this group would be more supportive of migrants and refugees and less aligned with closed views.
- Disengaged Moderates have higher levels of uncertainty than the open segments, and their distrust of the system make them skeptical of immigration even though they empathise with migrants.

## OPEN SEGMENTS



### ITALIAN COSMOPOLITANS

54% FEMALE 46% MALE



#### ATTRIBUTES

Young students and retired pensioners  
50% are non-believers or practise religions aside from Catholicism  
72% identify with parties on the left or centre-left  
Mid-low levels of education

#### KEY CONCERNS

Unemployment, Italy's political situation, public health

- Optimistic about their personal prospects and the direction in which the Italian economy and Italian society are heading.
- Globalisation is bad for Italy, but immigration is good for Italy's economy and cultural life.
- Migrants and refugees are similar to other Italians.
- More active than other groups in helping refugees in Italy.
- Feel strongly connected to human rights movements and do not criticise the efforts of NGOs to rescue migrants on boats in the Mediterranean.



### CATHOLIC HUMANITARIANS

57% FEMALE 43% MALE



#### ATTRIBUTES

Older (many over 65s)  
71% active Catholics  
57% identify with parties on the centre-right or centre-left  
More Democratic Party and Forza Italia voters

#### KEY CONCERNS

Unemployment, the economy, the political situation, retirement

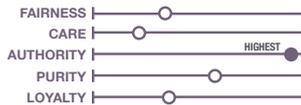
- Optimistic, they strongly believe that the Italian economy is both better now than one year ago, and that it will improve over the next five years.
- More proud of their Italian identity than any other segment; do not feel that Italian identity is disappearing.
- Compassionate, they feel a strong sense of duty to help refugees, particularly unaccompanied minors, because solidarity and compassion is part of being Italian.
- Catholic faith shapes their values, and they strongly agree with Pope Francis on the need to be more welcoming of migrants entering Italy.
- Feel strongly connected to other Italians and their neighbours.
- Feel warm towards refugees and migrants and warmer towards Muslims than other segments.
- Also more likely than others to make financial contributions to support refugees.

## CLOSED SEGMENTS



### HOSTILE NATIONALISTS

49% FEMALE 51% MALE



#### ATTRIBUTES

Mid-low level of education  
 Middle-aged  
 62% active Catholics

#### KEY CONCERNS

Unemployment, immigration, crime, the political situation, corruption.

- Optimistic about their personal prospects, but many feel that it is hard for people like them to succeed.
- Pessimistic about the future for Italy's society and economy, and believe the latter is rigged to benefit the rich and powerful.
- Believe that men and women have different roles to play in society.
- Proud of Italy's history and believe that their Catholic heritage should be protected from outside faiths and beliefs.
- More negative views towards migrants, refugees and Muslims than any other segment.
- Authoritarian leanings - more than any group, believe rights must be set aside in order to address threats to Italy.
- More than any segment, feel they can express their opinions on migrants and refugees.
- Italians should be given priority over migrants in the jobs market.



### CULTURAL DEFENDERS

39% FEMALE 61% MALE



#### ATTRIBUTES

Middle aged (more 31-50s)  
 Mixed education levels  
 Blue collar workers  
 More in the north west

#### KEY CONCERNS

Unemployment, the economy, immigration, crime, the political situation, disappearing Italian identity

- Believe their own circumstances will remain the same or improve over the next five years, but think Italian society is deteriorating.
- Believe that Italy needs a strong leader to fix the country.
- Very worried that Italian identity is disappearing.
- More concerned about the cultural impact of immigration than any other group.
- Believe newcomers to Italy are mostly economic migrants who are taking advantage of Italy's welfare services and draining society's resources.
- Believe media reporting on immigration and refugees cannot be trusted.
- Believe rising crime is linked to migrants.

## MIDDLE SEGMENTS

Italy's 'middle' segments comprise almost half the population. Similar to More in Common's findings in France, Germany, the Netherlands and Greece, they hold a combination of 'open' and 'closed' views, which in turn are shaped by differing moral priorities. The three middle groups differ significantly from each other, as well as from the middle groups in other countries. Overall, people in these groups have generally not engaged deeply with the issues of identity, immigration and refugees in Italy. They are more likely to hold conflicting or neutral views – especially people in the Disengaged Moderate segment.



### DISENGAGED MODERATES

56% FEMALE 44% MALE



#### ATTRIBUTES

Younger (more 18-30s)  
Well-educated  
More white collar workers  
30% do not place themselves on the left to right ideological spectrum  
More in the north west, and south and islands

#### KEY CONCERNS

Unemployment, political situation, corruption, social services, public administration

- Uncertain about the prospects for success for people like them, and whether people like them have a say in politics and society.
- Believe Italy is “divided” and “weak” but also “welcoming”.
- Moderately proud of being Italian, but do not regard loyalty to family or nation as important.
- Often do not express an opinion on controversial issues.
- Weak attachment to political parties, do not feel traditional parties care about people like them.
- Generally warm feelings towards refugees, migrants, and Muslims.
- Unsure whether immigration is good or bad culturally and economically for Italy.
- Do not know if there is pressure to think a certain way about refugees, but do feel that media reporting is often unfair and inaccurate.



### LEFT BEHIND

56% FEMALE 44% MALE



#### ATTRIBUTES

Older (more over 65s)  
 Retired  
 Low education levels  
 More in the north east  
 More Lega voters

#### KEY CONCERNS

Unemployment, immigration, crime, the political situation, corruption, education

- Pessimistic about the outlook for Italy and themselves, feeling that conditions are worsening for themselves, the economy and Italian society.
- Believe that more than other parts of society, they have borne the brunt of economic decline and social change.
- Believe the Italian economy is rigged to advantage the rich and powerful, making it hard for people like them to succeed.
- More than other segments, feel that there are pressures on them to think a certain way about refugees.
- More strongly opposed to immigration than any other group, believing it is dividing the country, and draining resources.
- Frequently feel like strangers in Italy, cold feelings towards Muslims, refugees, and migrants.
- Nevertheless they support the principle of asylum, believe that refugees are welcome if they accept Italian culture, and are compassionate towards unaccompanied minors.



### SECURITY CONCERNED

48% FEMALE 52% MALE



#### ATTRIBUTES

Older (more 31-64s)  
 44% identify with the centre or centre-right  
 Mid-low level of education  
 More in the centre south

#### KEY CONCERNS

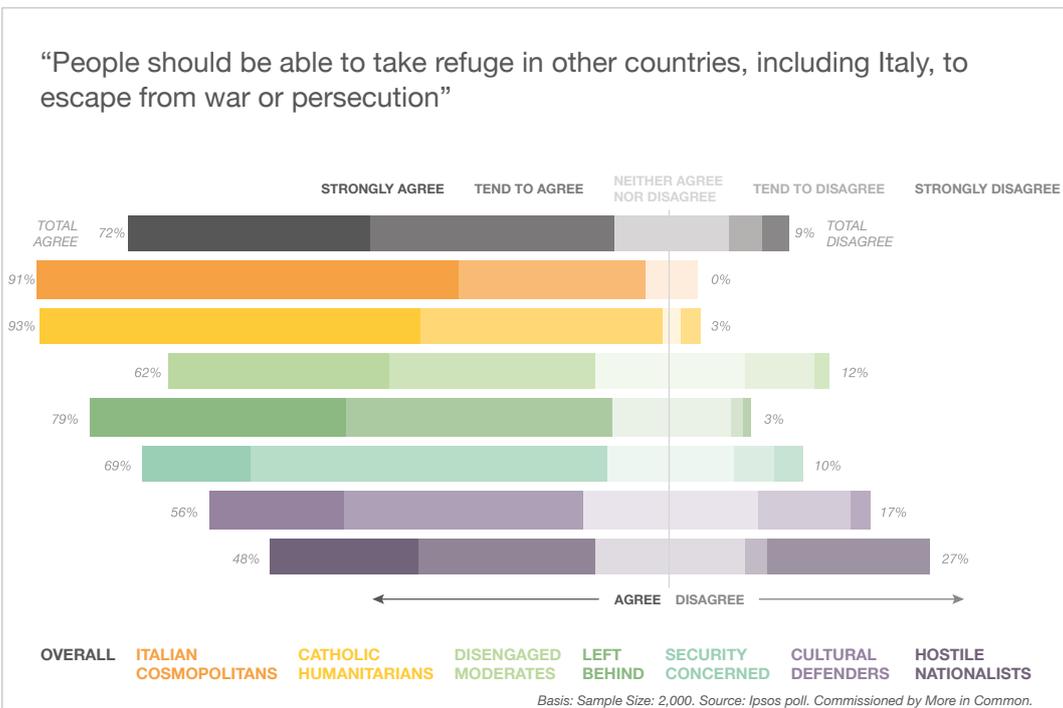
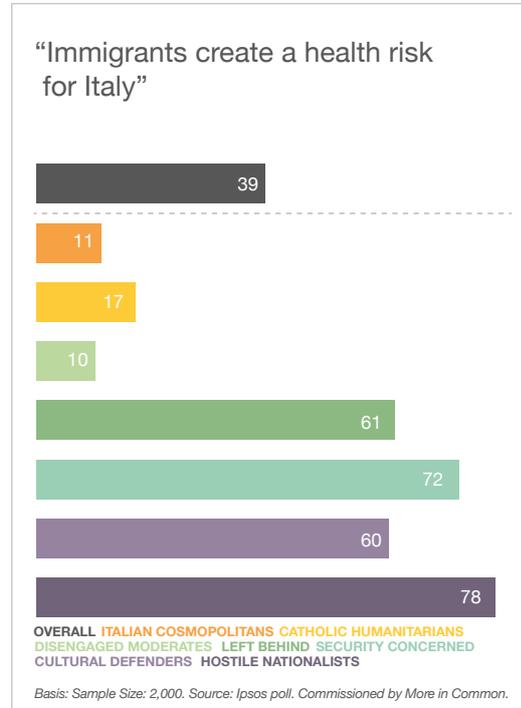
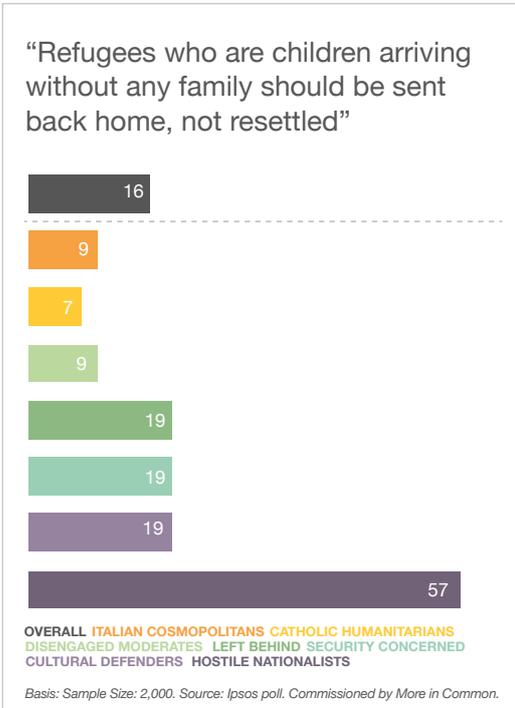
Unemployment, immigration, crime, the economy, tax burdens

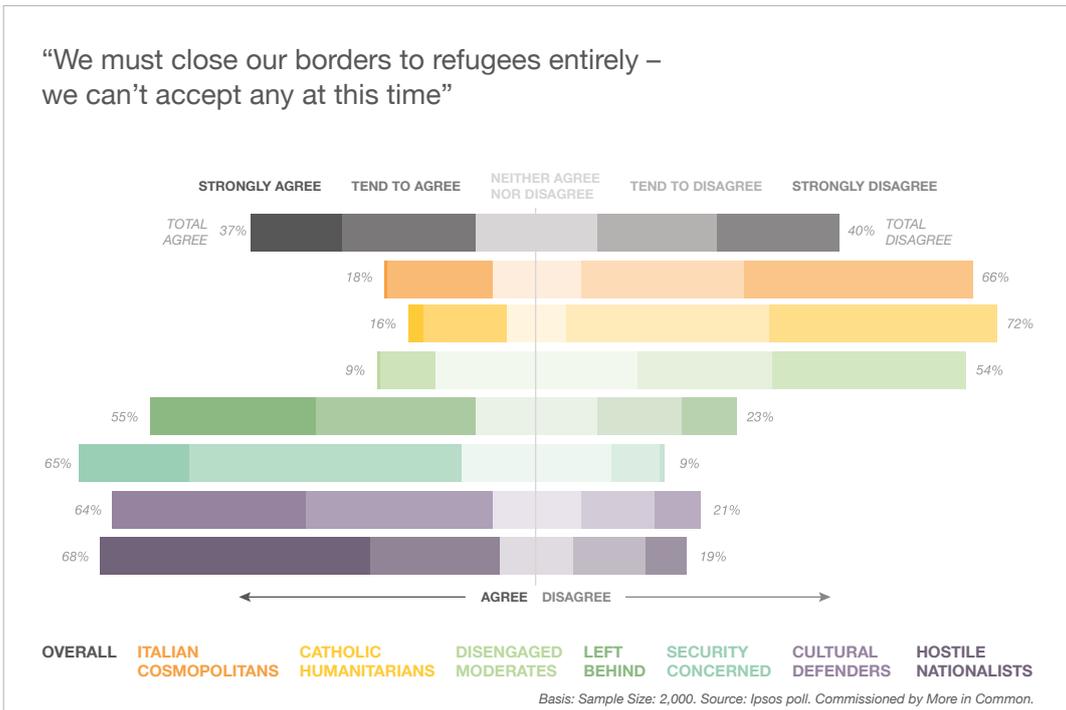
- Optimistic about the future of the Italian economy, and believe the impact of globalisation has been positive.
- However, more pessimistic about their personal prospects and the future of Italian society
- Anxious about threats to Italians' security, from both crime and terrorism. They see other issues through the lens of those concerns about security.
- It is too dangerous to let refugees into Italy, given the risk of terrorism.
- Italy should take whatever steps to prevent terrorism are necessary, even if that means ignoring human rights.
- Migrants and refugees are violent and threatening; we should close Italy's borders.
- Yet they are also concerned about increasing levels of racism and discrimination in Italy, and the growing opposition to migrants from all sides of the political spectrum.

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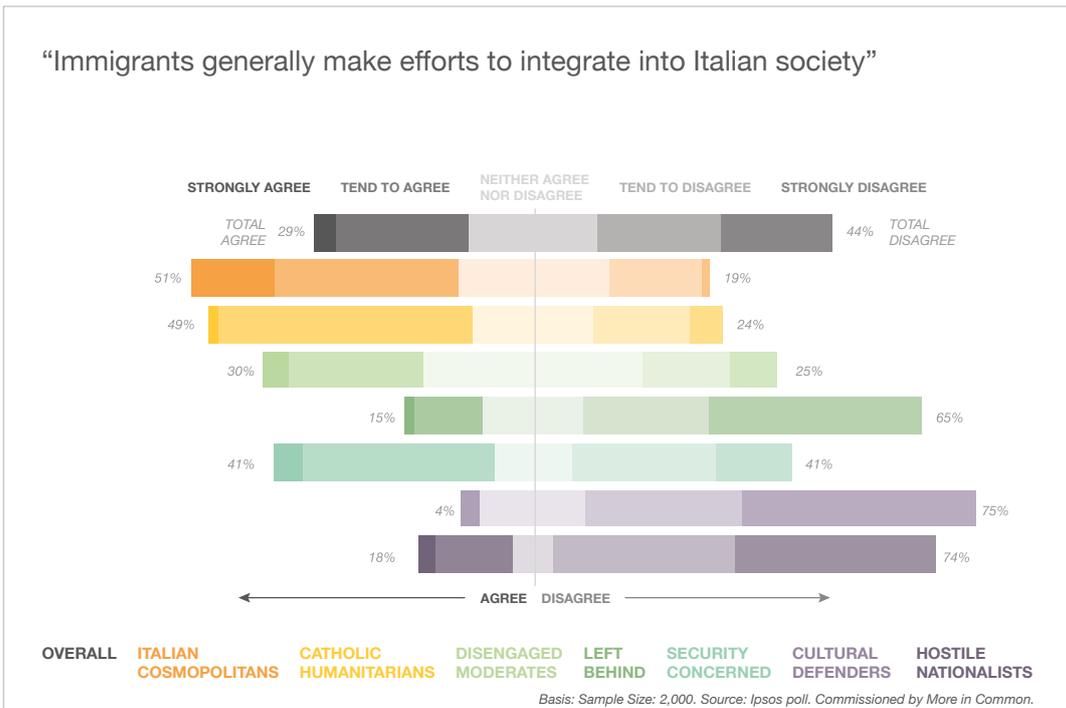
## Key findings: Italy's seven segments

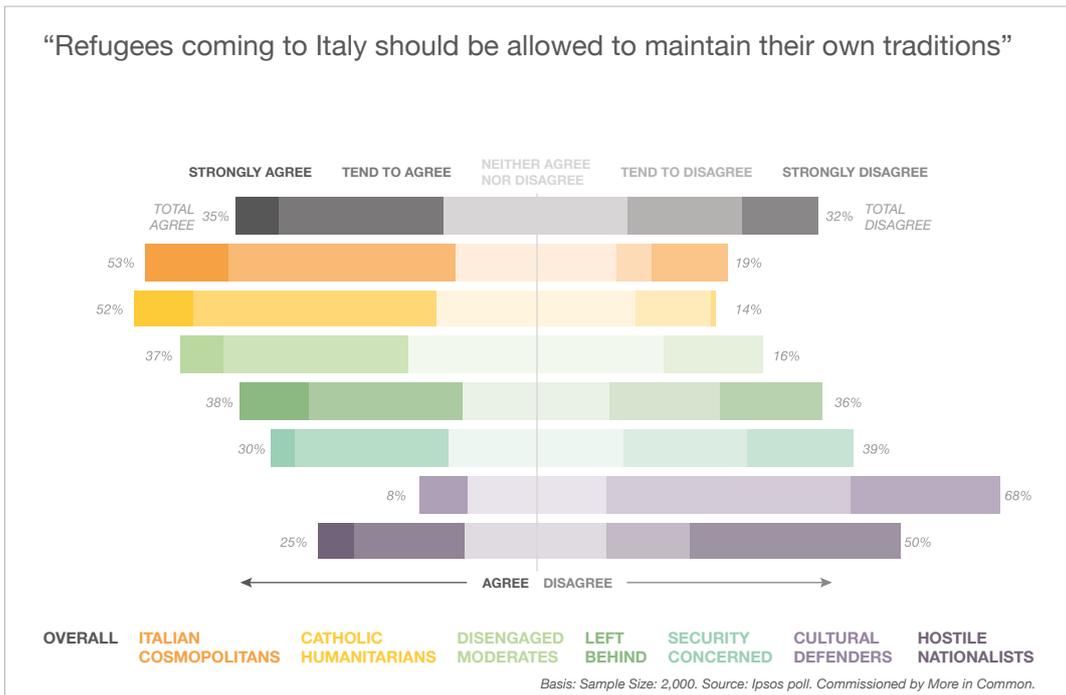
1. **Italians understand the differences between migrants and refugees, but they tend to see them as one big 'out-group' ('the other').** In circumstances of increased polarisation, people are more likely to view issues through the group identity lens of an in-group that is being threatened by hostile out-groups, i.e. "us" versus "them".
  2. **The 'open' segments view the impact of immigration positively, the Disengaged Moderates are unsure, and the Left Behind, the Security Concerned, and the 'closed' segments view its impact negatively.** The drivers behind this judgment are different for each segment.
    - a. The middle segments differ from the 'closed' segments, who view migrants through the lens of the clash of cultures between Italians and migrants, and opposition to immigration in any form.
    - b. The Security Concerned form their views through the lens of national security, and worry that newcomers increase the threat of terrorism.
    - c. The Left Behind form their views through the lens of their own economic insecurity. They see migrants as a threat: unfair competitors in the labour market who also take advantage of public services.
    - d. The Disengaged Moderates view migrants as part of their in-group and empathise with them (particularly with the young ones). They see them as peers in their struggle to thrive within a broken system. Because of their overall sense of disaffection, they remain neutral or disengaged and focus instead on their own personal circumstances.
  3. **One unusual feature of public perceptions in Italy is the connection that some groups make between immigration and public health threats.** The idea that migrants pose a health risk is felt by Hostile Nationalists (78 per cent) and the Security Concerned (72 per cent). Neither the open segments nor the Disengaged Moderates agree.
  4. **The middle and closed segments are especially anxious about newcomers respecting Italy's laws and cultural values.** While they recognise that Italians themselves often only follow rules loosely and that corruption is a major problem, they - especially the Left Behind and Security Concerned - are anxious that newcomers follow the rules.
  5. **All segments support the principle of asylum, but most are worried that refugees coming to Italy are economic migrants and that Italy does not have the administrative capacity to process claims and integrate legitimate migrants.** While the Left Behind and Security Concerned are more suspicious of the motivations of newcomers, the Disengaged are not. With the exception of the Hostile Nationalists, all segments agree that Italy should give priority to looking after unaccompanied minors. Italians reject the idea that children should be sent back to the countries where they came from.
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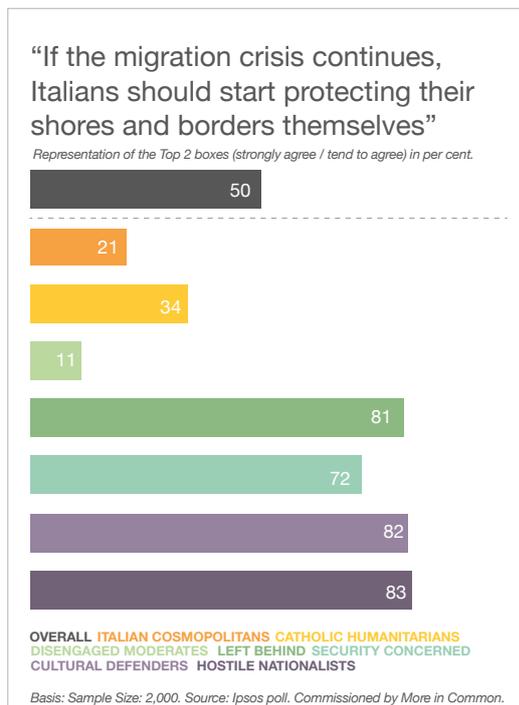
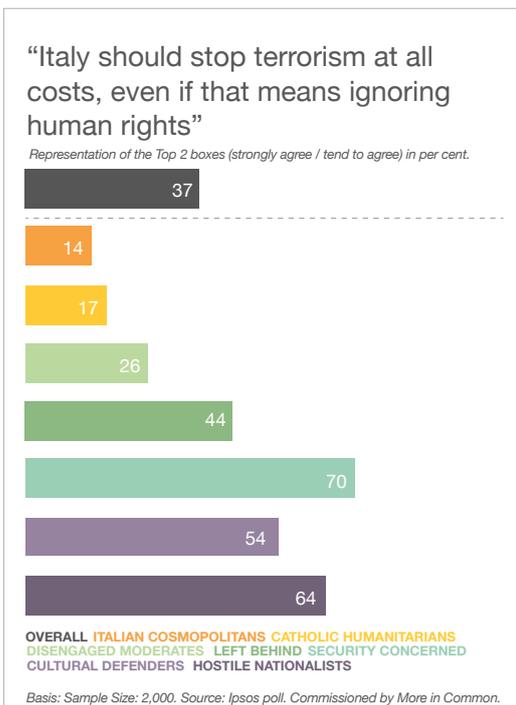


**6. Many Italians doubt that newcomers want to integrate into Italian society.** The open segments believe that migrants try to integrate, and the Disengaged Moderates blame the system for making it harder for them to integrate (such as by not providing legal papers and through reception systems that are not focused on long-term assistance). The Left Behind are sceptical about integration and equate it to assimilation, while the Security Concerned are split on this matter but are more driven by their security fears.

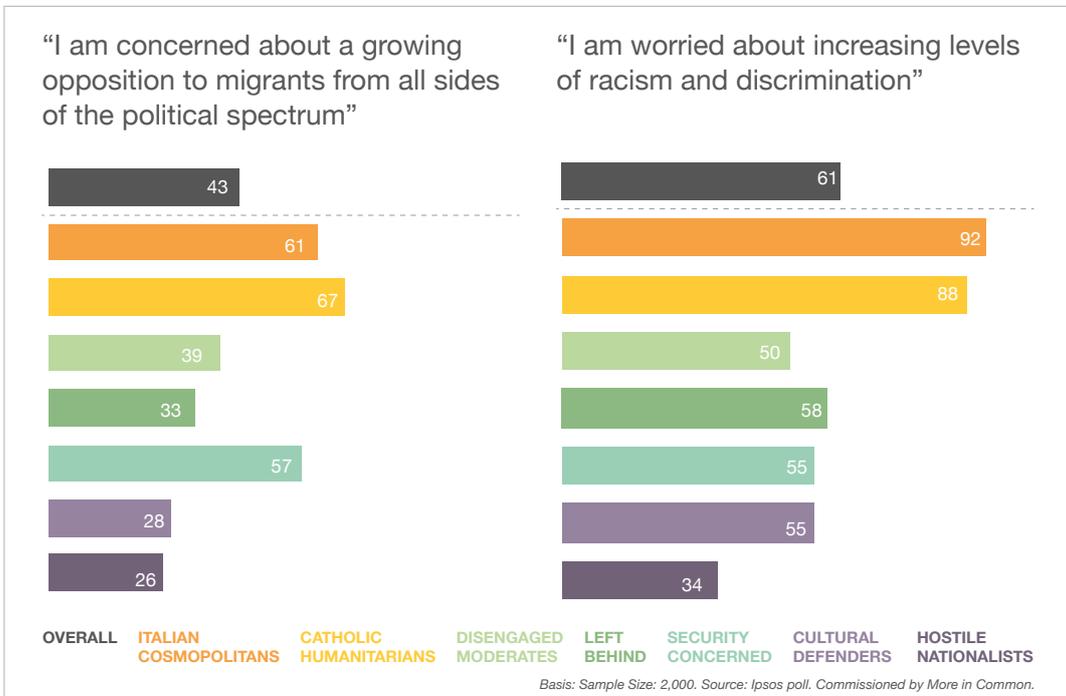




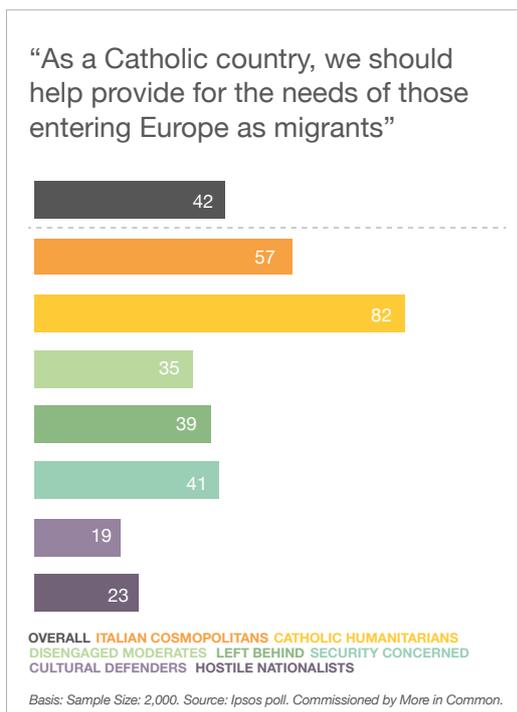
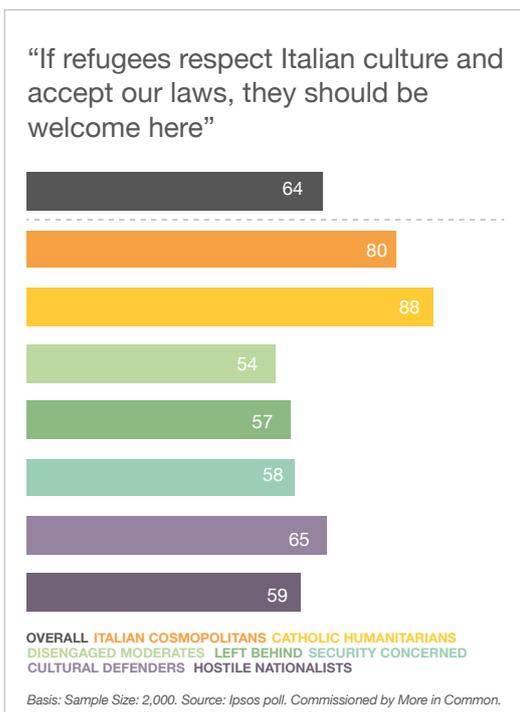
7. **Italians feel abandoned by the European Union’s failure to support Italy in responding to the arrival of asylum seekers in Italy.** This is true even among strong supporters of the EU. However the segments disagree on how Italy should respond to the EU’s failures.
8. **Italians have become more open to authoritarian populism and extreme positions because of the combination of economic austerity, a sense of cultural decline, widespread corruption, the loss of faith in Italian institutions, and the failures of the political establishment.** Authoritarian values are most strongly embraced by the Hostile Nationalists, the Left Behind, the Security Concerned, and the Cultural Defenders, of which 70-80 per cent agree that Italy needs a strong leader who is willing to break the rules. There is support for this sentiment even among the open segments. The Disengaged Moderates are the least likely to agree.



**9. Most Italians are concerned about an increase in racism and discrimination in their country, and the growing hostility to migrants from all parts of the political spectrum.** This discomfort with the direction of national debate is shared by all segments other than the Hostile Nationalists.



**10. Attitudes towards migrants and refugees become far more positive when Italians are reassured of their willingness to embrace and respect Italian culture and traditions (both nationally and regionally).** There is remarkably strong support for welcoming refugees who “respect Italian culture and accept our laws” from every segment of the Italian population. This framing has greater resonance across the segments than the humanitarian arguments appealing to Italy’s Catholic duty to help migrants entering Europe.



# Recommendations

The key recommendations emerging from this report are as follows:

- 1. Italians need a coherent alternative to the narrative of extremist nationalism.** Populist narratives resonate with Italians because they speak to many of their frustrations: the self-serving political establishment, economic stagnation, high unemployment, widespread corruption, a sense of national decline, the loss of a sense of belonging and mismanagement of immigration. To resonate with a majority of Italians, alternative narratives must understand the depth of these frustrations but also speak to people's desire for a better future. Italians do not want a return to the status quo or a purely defensive reaction to the rise of populist parties. What is needed is an alternative to both the status quo and extremism.
- 2. There is a large and potentially receptive audience for a more inclusive narrative of Italian identity that projects a bigger 'story of us' for Italians.** This narrative should speak to Italians' desire for a sense of belonging and self-confidence. It should affirm welcoming and inclusive values as core elements of Italian civic identity, highlighting what Italians can achieve if they come together and providing a credible pathway to a different future that benefits all parts of Italian society. The key to countering anti-migrant attitudes is to highlight what native-born Italians and migrants have in common, in order to build a story of migrants as part of the 'in-group' – in other words, where migrants are part of the solution not the problem.
- 3. Restoring order and confidence in Italy's migration system is essential in countering extremist narratives.** As long as Italians feel that Italy is failing to manage the arrival of migrants from across the Mediterranean, and is not receiving adequate support from the European Union, extremist opinions will garner support among Italians. This perception makes Italians vulnerable to efforts to create a sense of crisis in order to justify extremist policies. Future crises - manufactured or real - should be anticipated, and communications strategies should address people's anxieties and project confidence.
- 4. To anchor a majority of Italians towards the values of hospitality and inclusion, communications efforts should mostly focus on the least polarised groups** - the 48 per cent in **the middle groups**. Italian Cosmopolitans and Humanitarian Catholics are already convinced of the importance of these values, and Hostile Nationalists (and to a lesser extent, Cultural Defenders) are too resistant to be persuaded to adopt new attitudes in the short term. Messages that target people in the middle groups should reflect the perceptions and attitudes belonging to each of those segments.
- 5. Rather than being the target audience for communications, Italian Cosmopolitans and Catholic Humanitarians should be the target audience for mobilisation efforts.** They are the two groups most ready to support the values of inclusion and hospitality, and counter the scapegoating of minorities by extremist groups. However they must also take care to engage middle groups on their own terms, since experience from other countries suggests that middle groups often find cosmopolitans condescending and judgemental, while humanitarians can come across as weak and naive about the malicious intent of out-groups.

6. **Civil society should focus on how to shift Disengaged Moderates from their perspective of disengagement and distrust of the system, towards seeing value in strengthening their communities.** The Disengaged Moderates are a large group with a humanitarian outlook but their stance as bystanders is allowing more extreme voices to dominate public debate. Their inaction reflects a combination of not feeling motivated to engage more strongly, and not feeling that their engagement makes a difference.
7. **More work is required to understand how to best address the concerns of Italians who have experienced financial hardship in recent years.** The purpose of these efforts is for Italians in the Left Behind segment to see themselves and migrants having a shared interest in a stronger economy, rather than seeing them as competitors in a zero-sum game, who compete for jobs and suppress wages. Addressing these concerns more effectively may have more impact on public opinion than any other change in policy or communications.
8. **Efforts to communicate with the Security Concerned (and other Italians anxious about crime and terrorism) should demonstrate an understanding of their fears.** To counter 'us' versus 'them' narratives focused on the threat of foreigners, target audiences need to see real-world examples of migrants who are protecting Italians from security threats, such as migrants working in emergency services, law enforcement and defence. The voices of Italian migrants themselves are especially important in helping Italians to better understand migrants as individuals and not as a homogeneous group.
9. **Given the importance of Catholic faith to many Italians' sense of identity, Catholicism can play an important role in engaging middle groups.** Catholicism remains an anchor for many Italians in a time of uncertainty and rapid change. However, in reaching Catholics beyond those already in the Catholic Humanitarian segment, communications should not only speak to the values of care, compassion and welcoming the stranger. Communications should also build upon other moral foundations of Catholicism and the ways in which it connects to Italians' identity: through values, cultural heritage and the sense of belonging that it can foster.
10. **For the closed segments, communications efforts should not ignore the Cultural Defenders segment, whose views are considerably less extreme than those of the Hostile Nationalists.** This group is a prime target for extremist parties that have already locked in support from the Hostile Nationalists. Therefore, greater efforts are needed to reduce the allure of extremism and hatred to the Cultural Defenders and Security Concerned as well as to the Left Behind, but in ways that reach these segments and speak to their genuine concerns.

## Conclusion

Understanding the different segments of public opinion in Italy helps provide a clearer strategy for countering the forces of polarisation and extremism. As this report illustrates, many Italians hold a mix of ‘open’ and ‘closed’ views, and are not comfortable with either an ‘open borders’ or ‘closed borders’ worldview. They regard hospitality and welcoming people as fundamental traits of Italian society and they want Italy to play its role in helping people who have been forced to flee impossible conditions in their home countries. Nevertheless, there is deep apprehension about Italy’s ability to successfully manage migration and little confidence in the status quo. They also want the migration system in their country to be managed competently and fairly, and they want newcomers to integrate, respect Italian culture and contribute to society.

This report demonstrates that despite increasing public concern about migration policy, most Italians reject extremism. However, new approaches are needed to counter the growing influence of narratives that set one group of Italians against another. New infrastructure and strategic, targeted approaches are needed to respond to the increasingly sophisticated, well-resourced and targeted communications strategies of authoritarian populists and ‘othering’ narratives.

More effective public engagement starts with a better understanding of the public. But this alone is insufficient in of itself. If the threat of extremism is to be resisted, these insights need to be translated into new initiatives by political parties, civil society, philanthropic actors and a much wider range of Italian institutions. Like other Europeans, Italians seem to be in search of new narratives that offer both hope and realism. This is urgently needed if Italians are to turn the tide on fundamental threats not only to minorities within Italy, but to the character of Italian society and the integrity of democracy.

## ITALIAN POLITICAL IDENTITY AND THE OPEN/CLOSED VALUES SPECTRUM

In most European countries the open and closed values spectrum has become an increasingly powerful predictor of individuals' political identity, as issues of identity, diversity and migration have become increasingly prominent in national life<sup>2</sup>. With votes spread across a larger number of major parties, and a long tradition of coalition governments, Italy's political landscape is more complex than most. Although the same open/closed patterns are in evidence in this study, Italians of all political identities and party attachments are more spread across all of the segments.<sup>3</sup>

The key insights around the relationship between political identity and views on identity and immigration from the survey are that:

- As in many other countries, there are higher numbers of Italian Left and Centre-Left voters with views at the open end of the spectrum, and higher numbers of right and centre-right voters with closed views. But the correlation between left/right political identity and open/closed views is weaker than in other countries - in other words, there are many Italians on the political Right with open views, and on the political Left with closed views.
- The correlation between open/closed and left/right values is strongest for the two segments at the furthest ends of the open/closed spectrum: Italian Cosmopolitans and Hostile Nationalists. Among Italian Cosmopolitans, 36 per cent identify with the Left (compared to 11 per cent of Italians overall) and just 2 per cent identify with the Right (compared to 14 per cent of Italians). Similarly, among the Hostile Nationalists 31 per cent identify with the Right (more than twice the national average) and just 3 per cent with the Left (less than one third of the national average).
- The survey shows a large gulf in the perspectives of supporters of M5S and Lega, the two major partners in the coalition government formed after Italy's March 2018 election. Lega voters are concentrated among the Hostile Nationalists and to a lesser extent the Left Behind, Cultural Defenders and Security Concerned – that is, the segments that have the highest concerns about migrants. In contrast, M5S supporters are found in all of the segments. 20 per cent of M5S supporters are in the open segments, 25 per cent in the closed segments and 55 per cent in the middle segments.
- On the subjects of identity and immigration, the views of supporters of M5S are very close to national averages. This highlights a tension in M5S forming a coalition government with Lega, when the views of M5S supporters are very different from those of Lega supporters. For example, there is no statistical difference between views of M5S and the general public ' on the question of whether Italy should welcome refugees because it has always had a culture of solidarity and compassion (40 per cent agree, 28/27 per cent disagree, 31 per cent choose neither). In contrast, there is almost twice as much opposition among Lega supporters (50 per cent) and less than half as much agreement (19 per cent) as the national average.

### 5SM vs Lega Attitudes

**“Italy should start sending the people smugglers’ boats back across the Mediterranean, even if that causes the loss of lives”**

	National average	M5S	Lega
Strongly agree	15	17	46
Tend to agree	17	17	24
Neither	21	22	16
Tend to disagree	19	23	8
Strongly disagree	25	19	3
Don't know	3	2	2

<sup>2</sup> This oft-cited observation is reflected in More in Common's studies in Germany, France and the Netherlands.

<sup>3</sup> Although the survey was fielded several months prior to the March 2018 election, the distribution of voting preferences was close to the final election result for those respondents who identified a preference for one of the main national parties (59 per cent of respondents in the survey identified a preference for one of the main parties, while voter turnout in the March election was 73 per cent). One in three of those respondents identified with M5S, just over one in five with PD and one in six for each of Lega and Forza Italia. Lega won a slightly higher proportion of votes in the election, and Forza Italia slightly fewer.

- M5S voters reflect the views of the average Italians on a wide range of questions such as the economic and cultural impacts of immigration, immigrants' willingness to integrate into Italy and sending migrant boats back across the Mediterranean. On some issues that reflect on trust in government or other people, M5S voters hold slightly more closed views (diverging from averages typically by 5-10 per cent). On other issues, such as whether refugees increase the risk of terrorism in Italy or whether migrants present a public health risk in Italy, M5S hold slightly more open views than the national average (also diverging by up to 10 per cent). In contrast, those of Lega voters often diverge by as much as 30-40 per cent from the average. On each of these issues, Lega voters generally hold the most extreme views of any political grouping.
- The segment that most strongly supports M5S is the Disengaged Moderates, who comprise 24 per cent of M5S's supporters, reflecting the success of M5S in tapping into their frustration with the status quo in Italy. The segment with the lowest support for M5S is the Catholic Humanitarians, who are the most strongly attached to the traditional major parties (PD and Forza Italia).
- The Catholic Humanitarians, the group most compassionate towards refugees, are far less concentrated on the left of the political spectrum than open segments in other countries. In fact the Catholic Humanitarians are the second strongest supporters of Forza Italia among all the segments, making up one in four of their voters. Among Catholic Humanitarians who identify with a major party, just under one third support Forza Italia, and just over one third support the PD.
- Disengaged Moderates are less likely to identify with any part of the political spectrum. 35 per cent describe themselves as Left or Centre-Left, 26 per cent as Right or Centre-Right, 9 per cent as Centre and 30 per cent as none. They are strong supporters of M5S and PD: among those Disengaged Moderates who identified with one of Italy's main parties, almost three quarters supported one of those two parties.
- The Security Concerned tend to identify as Right, Centre-Right or Centre, and while they are found in all parties they are stronger supporters of Lega and Forza Italia. The Left Behind also lean towards the Right and Centre Right, but include more Left and Centre Left voters (23 per cent). The highest support among both of these segments is for M5S, and second highest support is for Lega.

### Party affiliation and segment

	% of total	M5S	Lega	PD	Forza Italia	Left Parties	FdI
Italian Cosmopolitans	12%	10%	3%	16%	3%	27%	1%
Catholic Humanitarians	16%	10%	2%	24%	25%	32%	8%
Disengaged Moderates	19%	24%	6%	27%	8%	28%	17%
Left Behind	17%	18%	29%	11%	21%	7%	15%
Security Concerned	12%	14%	17%	11%	20%	2%	18%
Cultural Defenders	17%	18%	24%	7%	8%	2%	36%
Hostile Nationalists	7%	7%	19%	5%	14%	2%	5%
Total	100%	101%	100%	101%	99%	100%	100%

*Note: the table shows which segments comprise the support base for each party grouping – i.e., Italian Cosmopolitans are 10 per cent of M5S supporters, 3 per cent of Lega supporters etc. Due to rounding errors, some totals do not tally to 100%.*

# 1

## Introduction

Issues of identity and belonging have never been far from public debate among Italians in the two centuries since the Napoleonic war, when a unified Italy began taking shape. Strong attachment to regional identities persists in Italy to this day, more than in most other European nations. A national Italian identity is nevertheless celebrated among the tens of millions of Italian emigrants and their descendants around the world. Throughout the 20th century, Italians' sense of identity and their relationship to the outside world was shaped by major external developments - from the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian empire and the rise of Fascism, through to the post-war rebuilding and the formation of the European Union. In the 21st century, Italian identity continues to evolve, shaped by a prolonged economic crisis and inward migration from across the Mediterranean Sea.

At a time of major political disruption, this report aims to provide insight into the state of Italians' opinions about their country, its place in the world and their relationship to non citizens within Italy. This is a time of division in Italy, with 89 per cent of Italians in a recent poll describing their country as divided<sup>1</sup>. The 2018 election resulted in an unprecedented governing coalition of the MoVimento 5 Stelle (Five Star Movement or M5S) and Lega - both populist parties, elected on a wave of 'anti-establishment' feelings with the promise to "put Italians first" ("prima gli Italiani"). As the research outlined in this report shows, Italians are profoundly frustrated with their governing classes, corruption and inequality. They feel that the system is broken, and they worry about a lack of opportunities for the next generation of Italians. They are disappointed in the European Union's failure to support them, and are especially frustrated by the failure of other nations to help them manage their sea border. In an era of deep skepticism about conventional solutions, they are looking for change.

The two populist parties have been highly critical of previous governments' handling of migration issues, and have sought to capitalise on public frustration. Lega has put anti-immigration and anti-Roma policies at the centre of its efforts to build national support beyond its core base in northern Italy, where it campaigned for the independence of the region of Padania under the name Lega Nord. Lega has promised to repatriate half a million African and Arab migrants<sup>2</sup>, ban sermons in Arabic, and require public votes before new mosques can be built.

MoVimento 5 Stelle is a political innovation that is more difficult to place on a traditional left-right spectrum. In its infancy, it mustered the support of younger voters across the country, with a message of direct participation in democracy and a fierce indictment of corrupt and out-of-touch Italian elites. Although it has campaigned on migration issues, M5S has been less strident than Lega, reflecting the fact that its supporters have more moderate views on migration, in line with the overall Italian population.

Lega, the extremist Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy) party and M5S have all exploited Italians' disenchantment with the political order. Like populists in many other countries, they have invoked the people of their country as an 'in-group.' As academic Yascha Mounk explains, an in-group is "united around a shared ethnicity, religion, class, or political conviction - in

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<sup>1</sup> Italy ranked fifth of 27 countries for perception of division, in response to the question: "Overall, how divided do you think your country is these days?" Bobby Duffy (2018), BBC Global Survey: A World Divided? <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/bbc-global-survey-world-divided>

<sup>2</sup> Salvini promised repatriation in January 2018 (see: [https://www.huffingtonpost.it/2018/01/23/salvini-caccere-mezzo-milione-di-immigrati\\_a\\_23340743/](https://www.huffingtonpost.it/2018/01/23/salvini-caccere-mezzo-milione-di-immigrati_a_23340743/)). The measures were also discussed during coalition talks (see: <http://espresso.repubblica.it/palazzo/2018/05/17/news/rimpatriare-500mila-migranti-irregolari-ventisette-anni-di-voli-e-oltre-un-miliardo-di-spesa-1.322054>)

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contrast with an out-group – whose interests can be disregarded.”<sup>3</sup>As in many European countries, the out-group in Italy is composed of migrants and refugees. However, as this report notes, hostility towards migrants runs up against traditional Italian values of hospitality and welcome to newcomers. These values create resilience against a simplistic narrative of division, which associates migrants and refugees universally with negative characteristics, such as criminality, disease or abuse of Italian hospitality.

Many Italians feel conflicted, between their traditional values, and their frustration towards the mismanagement of migration policy. There is evidence of those mixed feelings even amongst the groups most hostile to migrants and refugees. However, they are strongest in the “middle” segments of the population identified in More in Common’s research. During focus group discussions, some participants argued that immigration issues are being used as a smokescreen by powerful interests, to avoid their responsibility to address real issues such as economic and social inequality, employment, education and the economy.

This report aims to help shape efforts by leaders of civil society, politics and social institutions to understand the attitudes of different parts of the Italian population, to identify the susceptibility of certain groups to dangerous, ‘othering’ narratives, and to engage the middle segments of the population more effectively.

## THE MIGRATION CRISIS

Migration policy has become a major political flashpoint in recent years, and Italy’s populist coalition has made changes to migration policies central to its governing platform. This was highlighted in June 2018, soon after the Government came into office, when Italy refused docking rights to the Aquarius and Lifeline migrant rescue boats, forcing the boats to seek help in Spain and Malta. Interior Minister Matteo Salvini sparked a storm of media response when he referred to migrant boats as having a cargo of “human flesh”.

Italians identify immigration as among their highest priority concerns. Media coverage of the large volume of boat arrivals from across the Mediterranean and reports of crime associated with migrants in recent years has heightened public anxieties. Perceptions of a loss of control at the borders persist even though there has been a decline in arrival numbers (according to the International Organisation for Migration, 2017 saw 110,319 people arrive in Italy by sea, the lowest number in four years). At the same time, the previous Italian government’s agreement with Libya in 2017 to curtail the passage of would-be migrants through Libya and across the Mediterranean has attracted criticism in Italy and abroad, especially because of the poor conditions in detention centres in Italy. Criticism of the previous Government’s management of migration issues contributed to its defeat in the 2018 election.

Xenophobic political parties and advocates claim that the arrival of migrants from the Mediterranean increases the risk of crime, terrorism and disease on Italian soil. Crimes involving migrants have been widely publicised, contributing to an association in the public’s minds between migrants and crime. Regular media reports of the involvement of the mafia

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<sup>3</sup> Yascha Mounk (2018), *The People Versus Democracy*, p. 42.

in trafficking of migrants into Italy, and in the running of migrant reception centres, raise further concerns about the handling of immigration issues in Italy.

Another element of public debate in Italy is the extent to which those arriving in Italy are economic migrants rather than refugees. Approximately half of the 92,000 claims for asylum finalised in 2017 were rejected, lending some support to public perceptions that many who want to come into Italy as refugees do not have a legitimate legal claim to be in Italy<sup>4</sup>.

### THE FRAGMENTATION OF ITALIAN PUBLIC OPINION

Issues of identity and belonging – and questions about the ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ of society – are playing an ever-greater role in public debate in European countries. These are complex issues that are not always well understood by traditional public opinion research – especially as many people themselves hold conflicting views about them.

More in Common’s research involves asking a large number of questions of a statistically representative sample of national populations, in order to develop a deeper understanding of the changing landscape of opinions around values and identity that are re-shaping national politics and social attitudes. The outcome of this research is a segmentation of national populations, into groups with similar attitudes. The views of these groups range across a spectrum from ‘open’ to ‘closed’. As many commentators have noted, this spectrum powerfully explains the profound shifts we are seeing in many societies<sup>5</sup>.

More in Common has conducted similar research in France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Greece. In each of those countries, either four or five distinct segments emerged from the segmentation analysis. The attitudinal segmentation model identifies segments which can be grouped into three categories: ‘open’, ‘closed’ and ‘mixed’. This last group are called the middle segments. Those in the closed groups are generally suspicious of immigration and free trade, they are suspicious of elites and they hold to narrower and more exclusive views of national identity. Those in the open segments are more positive about engagement with the world and specifically with immigration and free trade (although some do not believe that globalisation has been beneficial for the economy). They support the idea of an open society that welcomes migrants and refugees. The middle segments are distinguished by a mix of open and closed views, and are often driven by different concerns, such as the economic and cultural aspects of immigration, concerns about security from crime and terrorism, or a broader disengagement with social and political debate.

In Italy, the same methodology identified a larger number of segments – seven in total. Even within those seven segments, there was greater variation in beliefs and opinions than was found within the segments in other countries. Just as Italy has more political parties than other European countries, it also has greater diversity of opinion on issues of identity and belonging, as well as on issues of immigration, refugees and diversity. This fragmentation is consistent with the country’s historical past and the strength of regional identities.

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<sup>4</sup> In 2017, 92179 processing of 82,179 asylum claims was finalised. 46,376 of those claims were rejected: [http://popstats.unhcr.org/en/asylum\\_seekers](http://popstats.unhcr.org/en/asylum_seekers) An even smaller number of claims were successful: <http://www.libertacivilimmigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it/documentazione/statistica/i-neri-dellasilo>

<sup>5</sup> The Economist (30 July 2016), “The new political divide”; The Economist (30 July 2016) “The Drawbridges”; Henry Olsen (6 September 2017) “Forget Left v Right; It’s In v Outs”, *UnHerd*

Among the seven segments identified in the research:

- At one end of the spectrum, two segments hold more open views and are supportive of migrants and refugees (Italian Cosmopolitans and Catholic Humanitarians).
- At the other end, two other segments hold more closed views and oppose newcomers of almost any kind (Hostile Nationalists and Cultural Defenders).
- Three middle groups, the Disengaged Moderates, Left Behind, and the Security Concerned. Approximately half of the Italian population belongs to one of these middle groups. Far more than in other countries, Italy's middle groups each lean towards either open views (Disengaged Moderates) or more closed views (Left Behind and Security Concerned). However, they are distinct from the open and closed groups in the extent and intensity of their support or opposition, the drivers behind their policy choices, and their levels of engagement with those issues.

While Italy has many distinctive features, the position of around half of the population in middle groups is consistent with the research findings in France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Greece. As in those countries, people in the middle groups do not share the unambiguous views of those at either end of the spectrum. Each of the three middle segments prioritises different issues and is driven by different values and concerns. Understanding those differences – and especially the characteristics of middle groups – is essential to understanding the landscape of public opinion, and avoiding simplistic descriptions of Italy as having become hostile to migrants, as evidenced by the increased support for populist parties such as Lega and M5S.





# 2

## Methodology

## 2.1 LIMITATIONS OF EXISTING RESEARCH

This report aims to fill a gap in the existing body of public opinion research data in Italy. Most opinion polling on the issues explored in this report involves responses to a small set of direct questions about specific issues, providing limited explanation for those responses. Some studies go further by making associations between responses and other social and economic issues, or demographic and psychographic factors such as the respondents' core values. Few studies have attempted to build a more complete picture of the interconnected nature of attitudes towards identity, immigration and Italy's response to the surge of migrants and refugees into Europe in recent years.

Media coverage often focuses on people who hold strong views at opposite ends of the spectrum. Much less attention has been paid to the large number of Italian people who hold mixed views about their country's refugee intake, its immigration policies and Italy's place in the world. As noted above, this report suggests that half of the population belongs to groups with mixed views (sometimes described as the "conflicted middle" or "anxious middle"). Middle groups are typically more open to changing their views, although it is difficult to identify individuals' openness to persuasion and what might change their views, since self-reporting is not always an accurate guide to explaining how an individuals' views are formed or changed.

## 2.2 PRESENT RESEARCH

The current research combines the large-scale sampling of professional polling with critical insights from social science. As such, we believe it provides one of the most comprehensive pictures to date of Italian public opinion on these issues. The research was conducted with two main aims. First, it aims to identify clusters within the Italian voting population that cohere in their core beliefs and attitudes. Second, it serves to bridge the gap between traditional polling research and more theoretically driven social science.

The research contained both a quantitative and a qualitative phase. In the quantitative phase, a total of 2,000 participants were recruited forming a representative cross-section of the Italian voting population. The research, conducted during late 2017 and the first half of 2018, was undertaken in partnership with Ipsos, a global market and opinion research specialist. It engaged a representative sample that reflects the composition of the Italian citizenry with quotas on age, gender, geography, educational level, and income. Statistical weights were used to correct for over and under sampling of certain groups. The survey combined both Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) and Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI).

Respondents answered questions relating to their demographic characteristics, including gender, age, geography, educational level, income, ethnicity, religious identity, and media consumption habits. They were asked questions relating to the issues of greatest concern to them, their political views and affiliations, familiarity with refugee and immigration issues, their understanding of different terminology in the refugee and migration debate, their personal experience with refugees and their responses to different policy approaches and framings.

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This study employs a cluster analysis methodology that draws on a range of attitudinal characteristics of the Italian public. The cluster analysis included a factor analysis, and the use of random forest and discriminant analysis techniques. This form of segmentation provides a rich composite picture of how a population is divided in its views, going beyond basic demographic factors to show how networks of attitudes and opinions are connected. It identifies the profile of the population segment most ready to take action to support refugees and migrants; the profile of those most hostile; and the profile of the groups with mixed views, including the sub-group of those who are most open to change their minds.

In the qualitative phase concluded in April 2018, mixed-gender focus groups discussions were conducted with two of the middle groups, Disengaged Moderates and the Left Behind. These two groups were selected as they are the groups where it was felt that qualitative research could provide the most insight, especially as the quantitative analysis for these groups highlighted conflicts in their views and values.

### 2.3 MORAL FOUNDATIONS THEORY

In order to obtain a better understanding of how Italians form their moral judgments and how values influence their political behaviour, we sought to explore what in social psychology is referred to as core beliefs. Perhaps the most influential assessment of the differences between right and left is a framework put forward by Jonathan Haidt and colleagues known as Moral Foundations Theory.<sup>6</sup>

People differ in the principles they apply when making moral decisions. Moral Foundations Theory has identified a set of “moral foundations” that underlie people’s moral judgments. Researchers divide the moral world into six distinct categories:<sup>7</sup>

- **Fairness/Cheating:** relating to proportionality, equality, reciprocity, and rendering justice according to shared rules
- **Care/Harm:** cherishing and protecting others
- **Authority/Subversion:** submitting to tradition and legitimate authority
- **Purity/Disgust:** abhorrence for disgusting things, foods, actions
- **Loyalty/Betrayal:** standing with one’s group, family, nation
- **Liberty/Oppression:** freedom from oppression or domination

For example, in the United States, the extent to which people rely on these moral foundations when making judgments appears to cleave along ideological lines: while liberals tend to focus on harm and fairness, conservatives tend to place more emphasis on authority, purity, and loyalty. In studies, people have been asked to rate the importance of each of these categories in their moral thought. Liberals tend to rate as most important fairness, harm and liberty. Conservatives, by contrast, also rated fairness and harm as somewhat important, but they also deem the three other foundations as equal important. These results suggest that conservatives are sensitive to some moral values that liberals don’t prioritise.

<sup>6</sup> Graham, Haidt, & Nosek (2009).

<sup>7</sup> Haidt (2012).

Moral Foundations Theory was included in this study of Italian public opinion, with the goal of identifying whether it could help explain differences in attitudes. This was done by using an abridged version of the Moral Foundations Questionnaire, which identifies the moral foundations on which people rely to form their views on specific issues. The questionnaire includes a variety of questions designed to assess reliance on each foundation separately. For instance, participants' reliance on the harm foundation is assessed by their agreement or disagreement with such proposition as: "One of the worst things a person could do is hurt a defenseless animal". Similarly, their reliance on the Purity foundation is assessed by their response to the proposition: "People should not do things that are disgusting, even if no one is harmed". In analysing survey responses to these questions, the next step was to identify whether individual segments placed more emphasis on some foundations rather than others.

The alignment of moral foundations to different segments has implications for the effectiveness of the messages that are targeted to those groups. Communications that emphasise the values most relevant to those audiences are more effective, for example, than communications that are grounded in the values of the communicators. This helps explain why efforts at persuasion on contested issues are often ineffective. People different in their moral values and priorities, and a better understanding of those different moral priorities can help move people beyond an impasse. By understanding viewpoints on contested social and political issues in terms of values—a process called **moral translation**—we may be able to find common ground between previously opposed sides, defuse conflict or at least facilitate greater shared understanding.

# 3

## Attitudinal Segments in Italy

The seven segments in this report each reflect a group comprising between 7 and 19 per cent of the Italian population, based on differences in their views across a range of issues relating to their identity, belonging, and the open and closed issues of immigration, refugees, diversity, and national identity. As noted above:

- two segments espouse open views: the Italian Cosmopolitans and the Catholic Humanitarians;
- two segments espouse closed views: the Hostile Nationalists and the Cultural Defenders, and
- three middle segments are found to espouse a mixture of open and closed' views and are driven by different concerns and priorities: the Disengaged Moderates, the Left Behind and the Security Concerned.



### THE OPEN GROUPS (28 PER CENT)

The Italian Cosmopolitans and the Catholic Humanitarians share many open traits and beliefs on the issues of identity, immigration and refugees. Their strongly held sense of national identity and the motivations behind their stances often set them apart from other segments. Both groups overwhelmingly support the principle of asylum and have taken action to help refugees in Italy. Where other segments perceive a threat to the country's Catholic heritage, these open segments are more likely to see it as their duty as a Catholic country to help those fleeing war or persecution. Both segments are proud of their country's history but they are worried about increasing levels of racism and discrimination. That said, they are to be distinguished by the values that motivate them - with one group reflecting a more modern, secular outlook and the other a more traditional humanitarian outlook that is shaped by Catholic values.



## ITALIAN COSMOPOLITANS 12%

54% FEMALE 46% MALE

### KEYWORDS

Confident, optimistic, proud Italians, youth and pensioners, multifaith, left or center-left, human rights advocates, middle to upper income range

### POLITICAL IDENTITY

Strongest identification with left/centre-left of any segment (72%), slightly below average 5SM supporters



### CENTRAL ISSUES

Unemployment, the political situation, globalisation, public health

The Italian Cosmopolitans espouse open views more strongly than any other segment. They are most likely to see themselves as citizens of Europe and of the world, and they dislike nationalist groups. They believe that immigration is good for Italy's economy and its cultural life. This reflects their optimistic outlook towards their own prospects and the direction in which the Italian economy and Italian society are heading. The Italian Cosmopolitans are similar to the cosmopolitan segments in other countries – the Confident Multiculturals in the Netherlands, the Liberal Cosmopolitans in Germany and the Multiculturals in France – apart from the fact that they do not view globalisation positively for their national economy. Although they see Italy as a divided country, they do not believe immigration is dividing the country. They are most likely to see migrants as “similar to them”. 53 per cent of Italian Cosmopolitans have done something – from sharing stories online, to volunteering, to partaking in rallies – to help refugees, the largest proportion of any segment.

Compared to the cosmopolitan segments identified by More in Common in France, Germany and the Netherlands, the Italian Cosmopolitans host an unusually large number of people with lower levels of education (82 per cent left education after high school). This could, however, be a reflection of the fact that many of them are still studying or belong to an age cohort where educational opportunities were much more restricted. They have a considerably higher proportion who are not

attached to traditional religious faiths: 50 per cent are either non-believers or practice other religions. While 72 per cent of this segment identify with and vote for parties on the left or centre-left, a significant portion of this segment do not vote regularly.

While they are moderately proud to be Italian, Italian Cosmopolitans do not feel that Italian identity is disappearing, nor that Italy should be talking about protecting its Catholic heritage – a trait that distinguishes them from the Catholic Humanitarians. Italian Cosmopolitans are more secular in their outlook, and those who identify with a religious faith are more likely to say that faith does not influence their views. They do not believe that Islam and Italian society are incompatible.

Italian Cosmopolitans feel strongly connected to non-government organisations such as human rights movements. They are the least likely to criticise NGOs for their efforts to save the lives of asylum seekers in the Mediterranean. Members of this group are more likely to oppose secessionist movements within Italy, although one quarter (26 per cent) are open to the idea of breakaway regions. Most believe Italy should not distance itself from the European Union. Like most Italians, the Italian Cosmopolitans believe that the EU should be taking more responsibility to help refugees, but they also strongly believe that the Italian government, NGOs and volunteer organisations should do more to address the situation.



## CATHOLIC HUMANITARIANS 16%

57% FEMALE 43% MALE



### KEYWORDS

Dedicated Catholics, optimistic, welcoming, compassionate, proud Italians, Pope Francis supporters, older, similar income levels to the national average

### POLITICAL IDENTITY

Supporters of traditional parties of both the centre-left and centre-right, lowest proportion of 5SM supporters

### CENTRAL ISSUES

Unemployment, the economy, the political situation, retirement provisions

The Catholic Humanitarians are distinctive among Italy's seven segments for the extent to which compassion shapes their views. On the whole, Catholic Humanitarians are not more educated than the general Italian public, although they are often fairly well-off financially. 71 per cent are active Catholics. Over half (57 per cent) identify with either the centre-right or centre-left, and express greater support for the Democratic Party and Forza Italia.

While more in this segment than in any other group describe their country as "welcoming" and "open", Catholic Humanitarians recognise that their country is "divided". Catholic Humanitarians are the most optimistic segment in Italy. They are even more likely than the Italian Cosmopolitans to believe that the Italian economy is both better now than it was one year ago, and that it will improve over the next five years. While the majority see unemployment as the most important issue facing Italy today, Catholic Humanitarians are also concerned about social and economic inequalities, and care for the elderly. They are prouder of their Italian identity than any other segment, and they do not perceive Italian identity to be disappearing. Catholic Humanitarians are the group most likely to disagree that Italy should protect itself from the world today. They have a sense of loyalty to other Italians, in particular with those living in their neighbourhood.

Catholic Humanitarians hold open views, welcome refugees and immigration, and feel warmer than any other group towards Muslims. Their faith informs these attitudes, and they strongly agree with Pope Francis on the need to welcome refugees. Far more than other groups, they believe that the Church should do more to help refugees, and they also express concern that Italy's Catholic heritage should be protected. Their concern for refugees is driven by a strong sense of duty – in part due to their country's history of solidarity and compassion for those in need. They are the most likely to agree that compassion for those who are suffering is the most important virtue a person can have. This viewpoint manifests itself in several ways. They are the segment most likely to have made a financial contribution to support refugees arriving in the country, and they want to see a greater focus on supporting unaccompanied refugee minors. They are most adamant that the EU should do more to help Italy respond to the migration crisis. They strongly believe that Italy should remain a single country, and do not want their country to distance itself from the EU.

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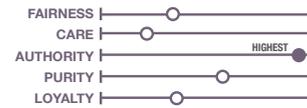
### **THE CLOSED GROUPS (24 PER CENT)**

The closed value groups perceive migrants and refugees as different from them, feeling this more strongly than the other groups. Both the Hostile Nationalists and the Cultural Defenders hold highly negative views towards Islam, and they are among the segments most likely to believe that Italy should protect itself more from the outside world. Both support sending migrant boats back across the Mediterranean, even if that causes the loss of lives, and protecting Italian shores and borders themselves if the situation remains unresolved. They describe their country as “weak”, “angry” and “divided”. The two groups share many closed traits and beliefs on the issues of identity, immigration and refugees in Italy. They are similarly influenced by the moral foundations of authority and purity. However, these two segments differ in the intensity of their views, and in the extent to which their views are shaped by their personal identity.



## HOSTILE NATIONALISTS 7%

49% FEMALE 51% MALE



### KEYWORDS

Traditionalist, personally optimistic, nationally pessimistic, middle-aged, Low and middle income groups, angry, largest number in lowest income brackets

### POLITICAL IDENTITY

Strongly identify as right or centre-right, highest level of support for Lega (three times national average)

### CENTRAL ISSUES

Unemployment, immigration, crime, political situation and corruption

The smallest segment within Italian society, they are also the group that holds the most closed views. Many Hostile Nationalists feel that it is hard for people like them to do well in Italy. 62 per cent are active Catholics. They are proud of their country's history and believe that Italy should protect its Catholic heritage from outside faiths and beliefs. However, they do not feel a sense of Catholic duty to assist migrants entering the country and they are most likely to disagree with Pope Francis that Italy should be more welcoming towards refugees. This segment also stands out for the belief that men and women have different roles to play in society.

Hostile Nationalists believe the economy is rigged to benefit the rich and powerful. Their pessimism about their country's future is framed by a distinctly negative view of immigration (the most negative of any segment). They believe immigration is dividing Italian society into opposing groups and draining Italy's limited resources. Many think that migrants create health risks for Italians. They identify unemployment and immigration as the top two issues facing Italy today, and want Italian workers to be given priority over migrants in the job market. They want Italy to protect itself more from the outside world, and they are in favour of entirely closing Italian borders more strongly than any other group.

As well as espousing the most negative views of migrants and refugees, Hostile Nationalists have the most negative views of Muslims. They believe that Islam and Italian society are incompatible and that Italians who have concerns about Islam are discriminated against more than Muslims

themselves. They are the least trusting of media reporting about immigration issues, believing that media outlets are afraid to portray migrants negatively. They are far more likely than other segments to perceive refugees as "dishonest" (53 per cent) and "violent" (46 per cent). Part of their distrust of refugees stems from a belief that most migrants who seek asylum in Italy are in fact economic migrants seeking to exploit their country. Many Hostile Nationalists (57 per cent) support sending home refugees who are unaccompanied minors. Nevertheless, nearly half (46 per cent) say that they still agree with the principle of asylum. Hostile Nationalists are least likely to associate with people espousing different opinions on refugee issues, and almost none have ever met a refugee. They feel comfortable expressing their opinions on the issues surrounding migrants and refugees.

Hostile Nationalists demonstrate a disposition towards authoritarianism. They want Italy to have a strong leader who is willing to break the rules to fix the country's problems. More than any other segment, they believe that the threats confronting Italy will require human rights protections to be flouted. They support action to stop terrorism "at all costs", and believe that the government should constrain rights and freedoms when there are threats to public order. They most strongly support sending smugglers' boats back across the Mediterranean and they advocate the defence of Italian borders and shores by Italian citizens themselves. They support the distancing of Italy from the EU more than any other segment and they feel connected to political parties, as well as nationalist groups in defence of the nation.



## CULTURAL DEFENDERS 17%

39% FEMALE 61% MALE

### KEYWORDS

Italian identity, angry, weak and divided Italy, blue collar, middle aged, unemployed, Middle to higher incomes, largest number on higher incomes

### POLITICAL IDENTITY

Stronger identification with right and centre, higher support for Lega and Fratelli d'Italia, lowest for PD



### CENTRAL ISSUES

Unemployment, the economy, immigration, crime, political situation, disappearing Italian identity

The Cultural Defenders hold similar views to the Hostile Nationalists, but with less intensity. They are especially concerned by the cultural impact of immigration, because they feel strongly that Italian identity is disappearing. Many Cultural Defenders are middle aged (31-50 years-old) and this segment has a higher proportion of men than women. Cultural Defenders mostly have an average level of education and permanent employment, generally in blue collar jobs. 43 per cent of this segment are non-believers or lapsed Catholics. 42 per cent identify with the political right, or centre right, and many express support for Lega or Brothers of Italy.

On a personal level, the Cultural Defenders are moderately hopeful. They think that their circumstances are likely to improve or remain the same over the next five years. This is in stark contrast with their assessment of the future of Italian society, which they believe is deteriorating. They believe that immigration is burdening Italy's welfare system and taking resources away from needy Italians. They feel migrants are being given unfair priority over Italians in accessing benefits, housing and public services. They see migrants and refugees as very different from themselves, though they are no more likely than other segments to view them as "bad", and they are less likely than the Hostile Nationalists to view them as "violent".

Cultural Defenders feel proud to be Italian but feel that Italy's Catholic culture is under threat. They reject the ideas that refugees enrich Italian culture and that migrants try to integrate into Italian society. They want refugees to learn Italian, respect

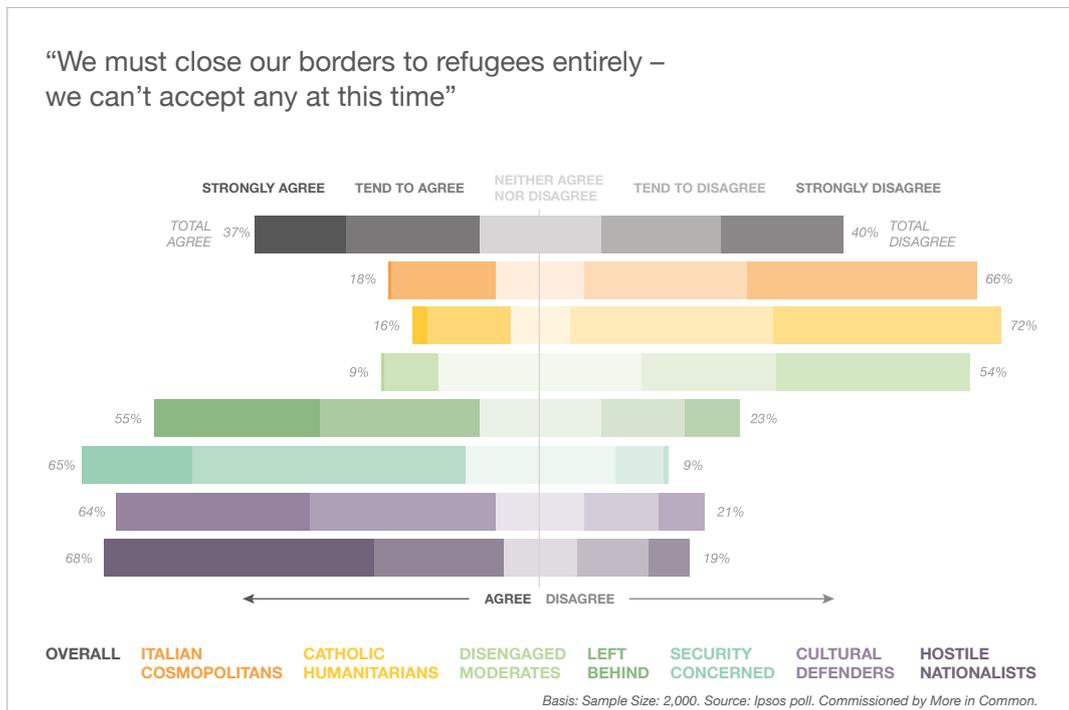
Italian laws and culture and abandon their own traditions. They believe even more strongly than Hostile Nationalists that Islam is incompatible with Italian society, and hold very negative feelings towards Muslims.

Their cultural concerns are framed by a distinct lack of trust in others. They believe that most people seeking asylum in Italy are economic migrants who are taking advantage of Italy's welfare services. They distrust the media in their reporting about topics such as immigration and refugees. Cultural Defenders also distrust traditional parties and politicians, feeling that elites do not care about people like them. They also feel least connected to their neighbourhoods, but they feel strongly connected to their favourite sports teams. Some feel connected to nationalist political movements.

Cultural Defenders describe Italy as "angry", "fearful" and "weak". Many wish for a strong leader to fix the country's problems, while others, more than any segment, support secessionist movements. As opponents of globalisation, they wish Italy would do more to protect itself from the outside world, and support the closure of Italy's borders. 51 per cent support sending back smugglers' boats across the Mediterranean, even if this risks the lives of those on board. However, they still value compassion and they disagree with the idea that unaccompanied minors should be sent back to their countries of origin. They nevertheless believe that it is acceptable for governments to restrict human rights where there is a threat to public order.

### THE MIDDLE GROUPS (48 PER CENT)

Italy's middle segments comprise almost half the population. Similar to our findings in France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Greece, they hold a combination of open and closed views, which in turn are shaped by differing moral priorities. The three middle groups differ significantly from each other, as well as from the middle groups in other countries. Overall, people in these groups have not engaged deeply with the issues of identity, immigration and refugees in Italy and are more likely to hold neutral views. This is especially true of those in the Disengaged Moderate segment.



Superficially, it may appear that the middle segments actually belong in either the open or closed groupings. However, a more detailed analysis of their responses suggests significant differences from more committed and unambiguous open and closed groups:

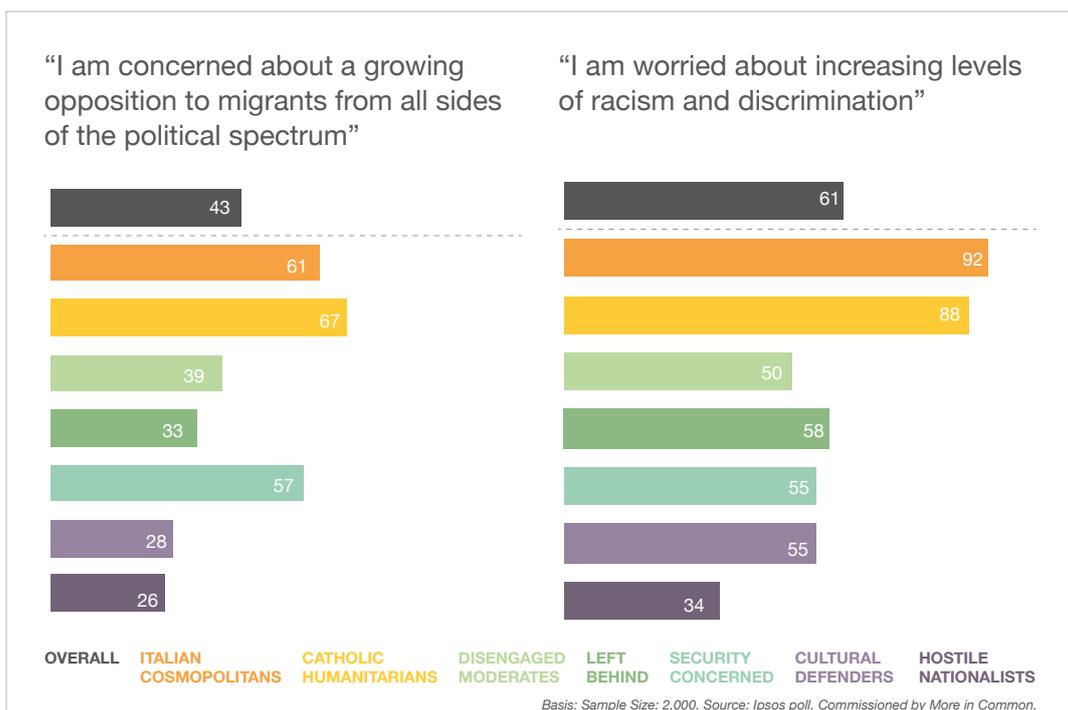
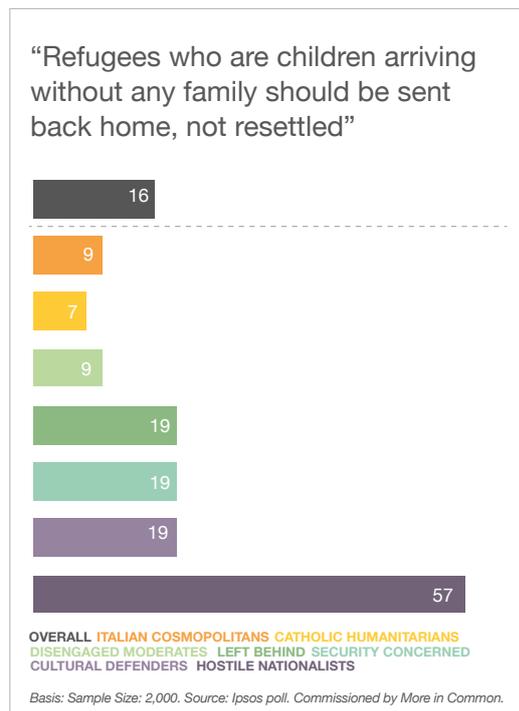
- 35 per cent of the Security Concerned and 23 per cent of the Left Behind “strongly agree” that they are worried about rising levels of racism and discrimination, compared with only 9 and 10 per cent of the Hostile Nationalists and Cultural Defenders respectively. Similarly, 40 per cent of Hostile Nationalists and 27 per cent of Cultural Defenders disagree even with protecting and helping young and unaccompanied refugees, while this is true for just 13 and 14 per cent of the Security Concerned and the Left Behind.
- The Security Concerned are evenly divided as to whether immigrants generally make efforts to integrate into Italian society (41 per cent agree, 41 per cent disagree, and 15 per cent are undecided). This puts them closer to the open segments than the closed segments on the issue of integration. They also differ from the closed segments on

their assessment of the cultural impact of immigration on Italy. These results suggest that if their security fears are adequately addressed, this group would be more welcoming of migrants and refugees and less aligned with closed views.

- Disengaged Moderates have higher levels of uncertainty than the open segments, and their distrust of the system makes them skeptical of immigration even though they empathise with immigrants.

Two of the middle segments are more closely aligned with the closed segments when it comes to the impact of immigration and closing the borders. However, they strongly disagree with the closed value segments that unaccompanied minors should be sent back home. Similarly, the middle segments are more worried than the closed segments about increasing levels of racism and discrimination in the country - although not as worried as the open value segments.

Arguments in support of migrants and refugees based on Italy's heritage of solidarity also resonate more with the middle segments than the closed segments.





## DISENGAGED MODERATES 19%

56% FEMALE 44% MALE

### KEYWORDS

Young, students, white collar, educated, personally optimistic, politically disaffected, uncertain, similar pattern of income levels to national averages, with slightly more in middle to upper range.

### POLITICAL IDENTITY

Highest proportion with no clear political identity, otherwise spread across the spectrum with above-average support for 5SM and below-average for Forza Italia



### CENTRAL ISSUES

Unemployment, the political situation, corruption, social services, public administration

The Disengaged Moderates are the largest segment in Italy. They often do not express a view on issues of national identity, immigration and refugees. When they do express their views, they are likely to voice positive attitudes that are more aligned with the views of the open segments. They are well educated and 34 per cent pursue education to degree level or higher, the highest of any segment. Many are still studying, while those who work are more likely to hold white collar jobs, such as teaching. Their views are not shaped by faith, and they have only weak attachment to political parties, although some express support for the Five Star Movement or the Democratic Party.

Disengaged Moderates generally do not hold strong opinions or participate in debates about issues. They are uncertain about the prospects of success for people like them and whether people like them have a say in politics and society. While they do not generally feel pressured to think a certain way about these issues, they feel that reporting by the Italian media on these issues is often unfair and inaccurate. They believe that Italian institutions at local and national levels, as well as the church, need to be more accountable, more open and more transparent. As focus group discussions with members of this group revealed, they feel that Italy's traditional system is broken and that political parties do not care about people like them.

The Disengaged Moderates are unsure of whether immigration is good or bad for their country from both an economic and cultural perspective.

Their views on migrants and refugees appear to be shaped by a sense of empathy, seeing them as members of their 'in-group'. They particularly empathise with young migrants. Disengaged Moderates have generally warm feelings towards refugees and migrants, as well as towards Muslims. They do not believe migrants have made it harder for Italians to find work, or that they are given priority over Italians when it comes to benefits, housing and public services.

“ Young people, they seem to me to be clever, willing to work. I imagine them alone, without a family and looking for social improvement.”

Disengaged Moderates take some pride in being Italian, but they do not regard loyalty to family or nation as especially important. They are unsure whether Italian identity is disappearing nowadays. They most often describe Italy as “divided” and “weak” but also as “welcoming”. They are likely to feel that, as a Catholic country, Italy should prioritise the needs of migrants. They are less anxious about Italy protecting its Catholic heritage. Since they do not feel threatened by immigration, Disengaged Moderates do not support radical measures to stop migrants arriving in Italy. Many worry about increasing levels of racism and discrimination in Italian society. They tend to believe Italy should live out its traditional values of solidarity and compassion and accept more refugees. The majority of the Disengaged Moderates want to help protect young and unaccompanied refugees.



## LEFT BEHIND 17%

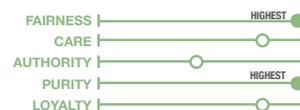
56% FEMALE 44% MALE

### KEYWORDS

Older, retired, traditional, uneducated, anti-elitist, pessimistic, middle to lower incomes, very few on higher incomes

### POLITICAL IDENTITY

Stronger identification with right and centre-right political identity, second highest supporters of Lega



### CENTRAL ISSUES

Unemployment, immigration, crime, political situation, corruption, education

The Left Behind feel that changes in Italian society and the prolonged economic crisis have affected them more than other Italians. A majority (61 per cent) are not currently working, and 33 per cent are aged over 65. More than any other group, they are angry about the political system, elites and globalisation.

The Left Behind are deeply pessimistic and believe radical change is needed, but they are mostly politically inactive. Many do not feel that traditional parties care about people like them.

More than any segment, the Left Behind believe that the Italian economy is rigged to advantage the rich and powerful. They are less likely than any other segment to believe that it is easy for someone like them to succeed in Italy. They appear to view the issue of immigration through the lens of their anger against Italian elites, Italy's economic troubles and their diminishing prospects.



*The economic gap between households is clear enough now. With these incoming flows of foreigners, you can see how an Italian family in distress has no housing, while the migrant family gets it. This is what is turning us nasty towards them."*

To them, migrants are an 'out' group. They recognise that migrants are often willing to work harder and for less money, and feel this has made it more difficult for Italians generally to find work. For the Left Behind, immigration is dividing the country and putting additional strains on the welfare state. Some of their concerns arise from the perception that migrants do not make an effort to integrate into Italian society.

The Left Behind feel trapped between Italy's past glory and its uncertain future. Their historic roots as Italians give them a sense of stability in a time of uncertainty, and they feel that there is no room right now in Italy for people whose roots are elsewhere. While they say that they are not especially proud to be Italian, many feel that Italian identity is disappearing and that more should be done to protect its Catholic heritage. They feel more pressure to think or act a certain way about migrants and refugees than any group, and believe that the media are afraid to portray migrants negatively. They often harbour cold feelings towards Muslims, refugees and migrants, yet they are the least likely group to know a refugee.

Despite these sentiments, the Left Behind support the principle of asylum and do not believe that child refugees should be sent back to their country of origin. Overall, their views of immigration are shaped by their broader sense of disenchantment. They feel that other European countries have betrayed them by not helping and that the European Union should do more to help. They also worry that welcoming large numbers of refugees encourages more people – including those who are not living in war zones – to come to Europe. They doubt the motives of asylum seekers, believing that many are in fact economic migrants seeking to exploit Italy's welfare services.



## SECURITY CONCERNED 12%

48% FEMALE 52% MALE

### KEYWORDS

Older (31-64), centre-right, Forza Italia, tradition, unemployed, divided and weak country, angry, threat, middle incomes, few on higher incomes

### POLITICAL IDENTITY

Identify as Right/Centre-Right; votes spread across M5S, FI, Lega and PD but with stronger support for M5S



### CENTRAL ISSUES

Occupation and unemployment, immigration, crime, economy, tax burden

The Security Concerned is the middle segment that leans more towards closed views, and that is especially sensitive to perceived threats to the security of their community and Italy more generally – especially from crime and terrorism. They are an older segment (concentrated among age groups ranging from 31-64), have lower levels of educational attainment (46 per cent did not go beyond a junior high school education, more than any other segment) and they typically have either blue-collar jobs or are retired. Many live in the centre of the north or centre of south of the country.

The Security Concerned see their country as angry, weak and divided – but also as tolerant. Unlike the Left Behind, they are more optimistic about their future prospects, even though they have a more negative view than any other segment of recent developments in the Italian economy. Unlike most other segments, many believe that globalisation has been good for the Italian economy. Yet they also believe that Italy should protect itself more from the outside world. This reflects the fact that their concerns are focused on security threats rather than economic issues.

The Security Concerned view issues on the open/closed spectrum through the lens of security threats. They believe that Italy needs to take steps to stop terrorism at all costs, even if that means ignoring human rights. They worry that refugees coming to Europe are more likely to become extremists than Italian Muslims, and they perceive migrants and refugees to be “violent”. They are most likely to believe that Italy should protect itself from the outside world, they strongly support closing Italian borders and they feel that because of the terrorist threat it is too dangerous to let

refugees into Italy. If the government and the EU were unable to stop the flow of migrant boats into Italy, they would support Italians acting as vigilantes. They sympathise with a more authoritarian worldview, supporting the idea of a strong leader to fix the country, even if such a leader would break rules in the process. They think of Catholicism less through the lens of humanitarian responsibility and more in the context of needing to protect Italy’s Catholic heritage from the threat of outside faiths and beliefs.

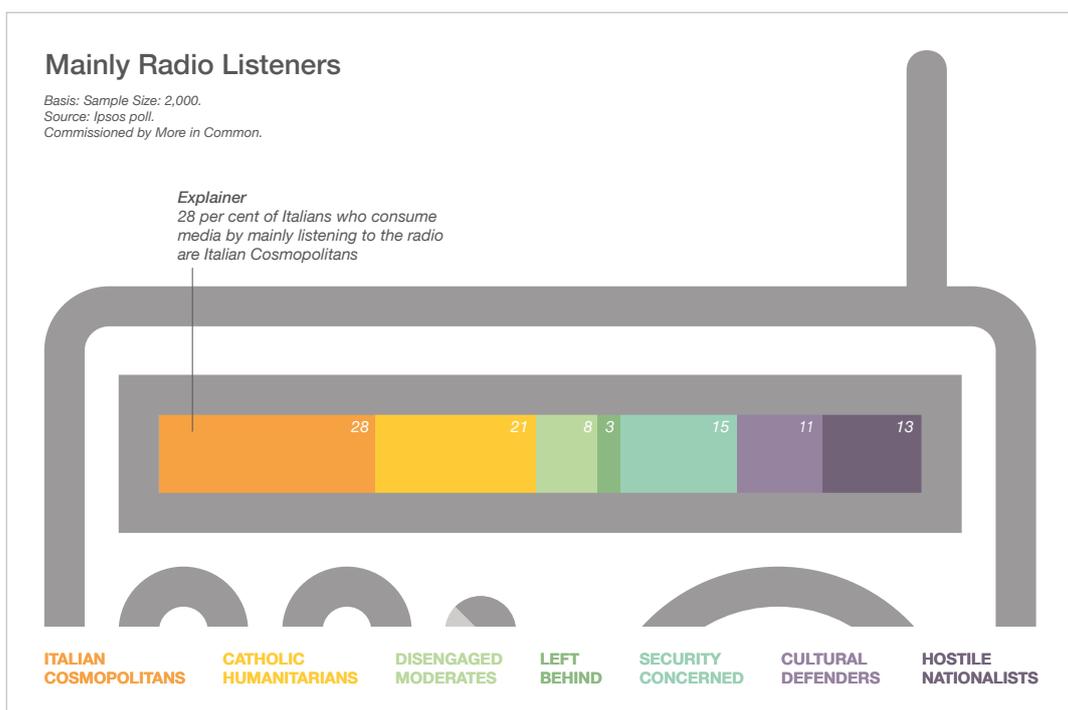
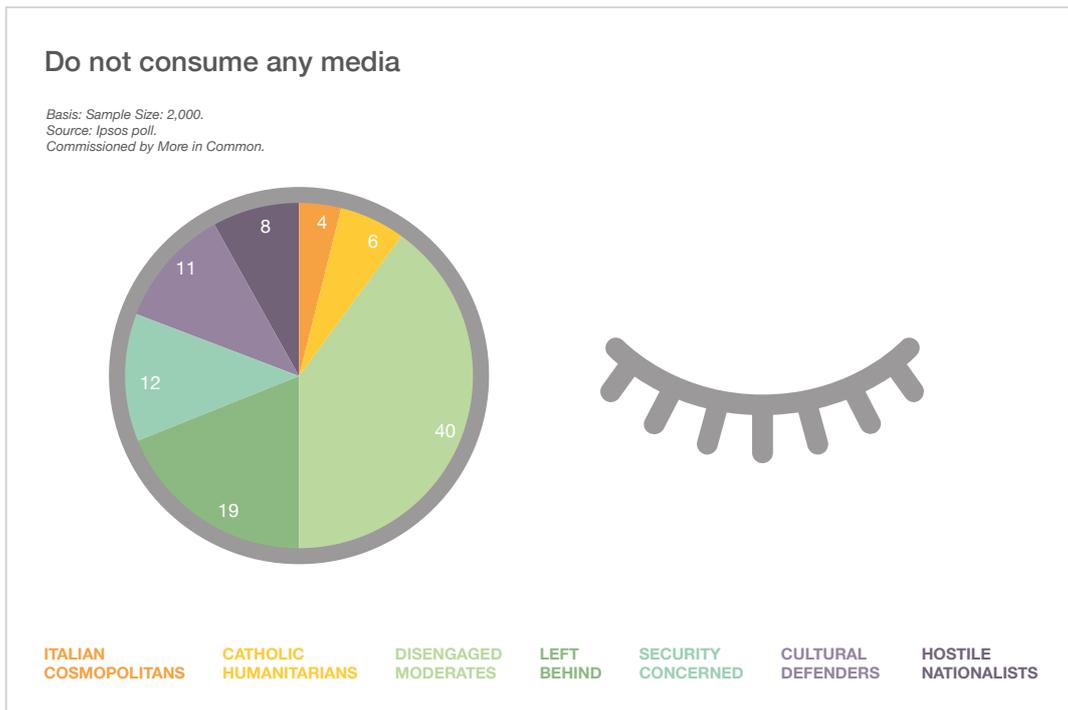
The Security Concerned see migrants, refugees and Muslims as ‘out-groups’ that comprise a threat to Italy’s security. They therefore have relatively negative views of those groups, and they do not believe that refugees should be able to stay in Italy permanently. They believe that immigration is dividing the country, that the media are particularly afraid to portray migrants negatively, that migrants create a health risk for Italy and that migrants have made it harder for Italians to get jobs. They are the second most likely (after the Cultural Defenders) to think that Islam and Italian values are incompatible. They report a higher level of contact with refugees than most groups, with almost half (47 per cent) saying that they live near to a refugee first point of contact registration centre – un Centro di Prima Accoglienza e Soccorso (CPAS).<sup>8</sup>

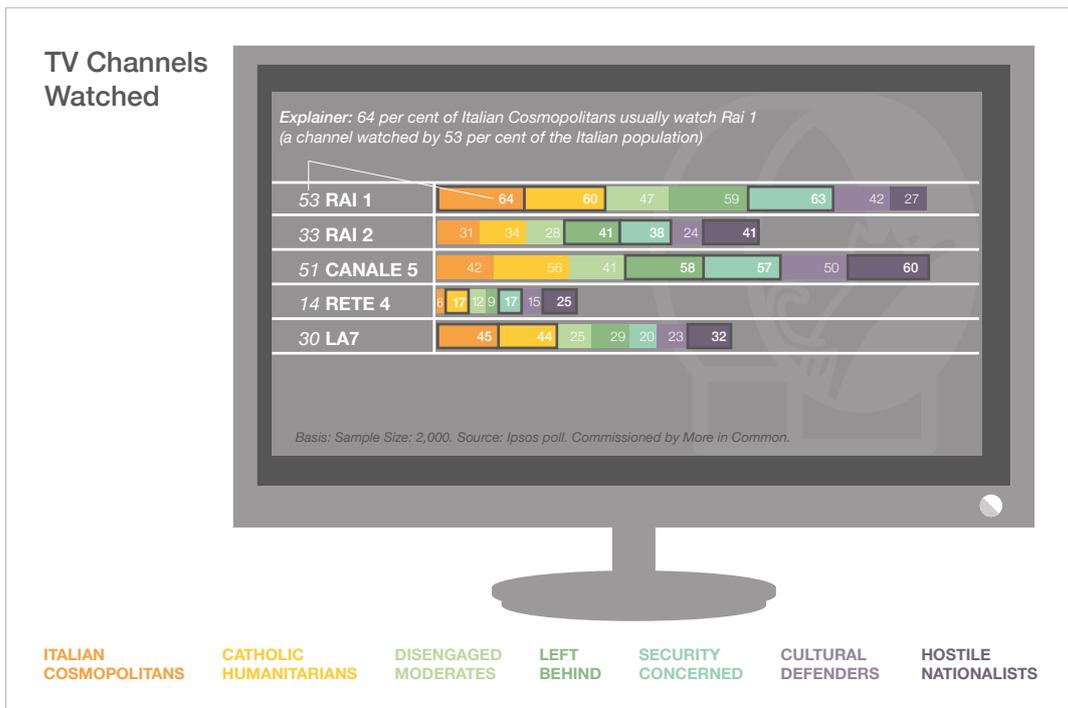
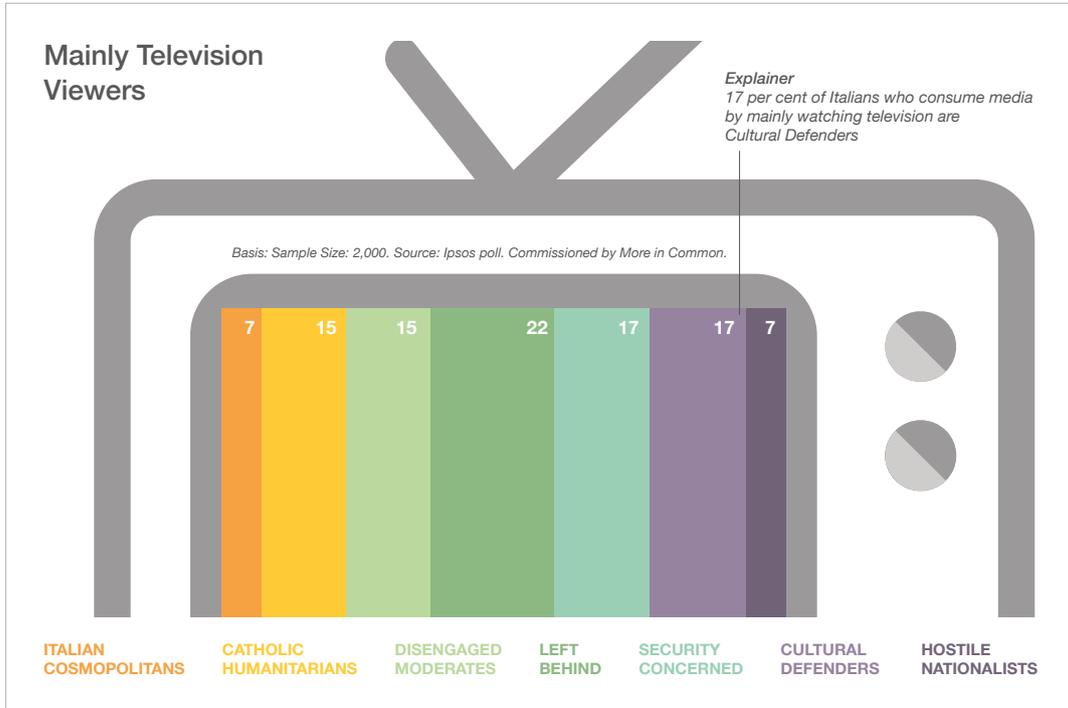
At the same time, they feel some conflict in their views. For example, the Security Concerned are also worried about the growing opposition to migrants from all sides of the political spectrum, and increasing levels of racism and discrimination.

<sup>8</sup> There are 14 CPAS across the country, thus, this might be more based on perception than actual proximity.

### 3.1 THE MEDIA CONSUMPTION HABITS OF THE SEGMENTS

The media consumption habits of the seven segments vary significantly. In Italy the open and closed segments consume information from different sources, while the middle groups share a mixture of media consumption habits with both the open and closed segments. This explains how they receive competing narratives and versions of events. The segments can be reached through the following sources and media:





### Mainly Newspaper Readers

Basis: Sample Size: 2,000.  
Source: Ipsos poll.  
Commissioned by More in Common.

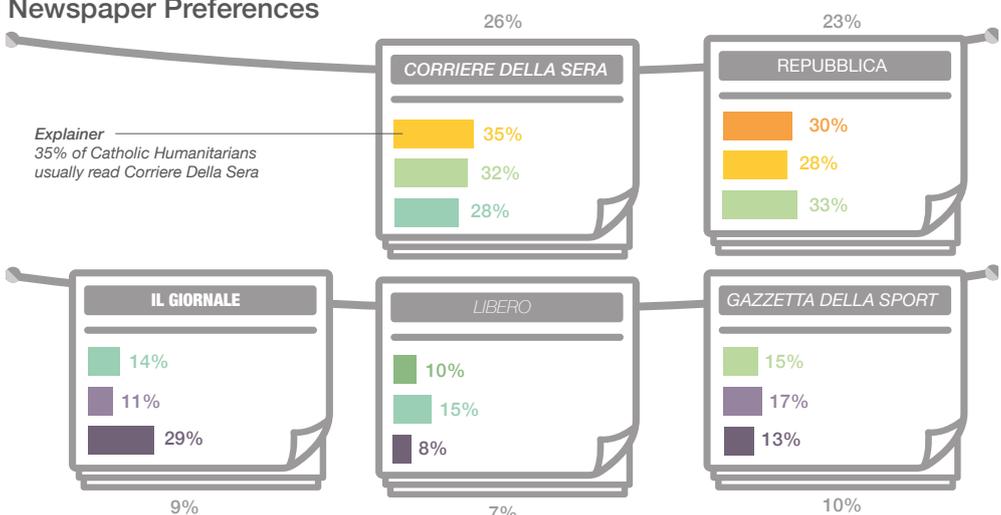
**Explainer**  
12 per cent of Italians who consume media by mainly reading newspapers are Catholic Humanitarians



ITALIAN COSMOPOLITANS    CATHOLIC HUMANITARIANS    DISENGAGED MODERATES    LEFT BEHIND    SECURITY CONCERNED    CULTURAL DEFENDERS    HOSTILE NATIONALISTS

### Newspaper Preferences

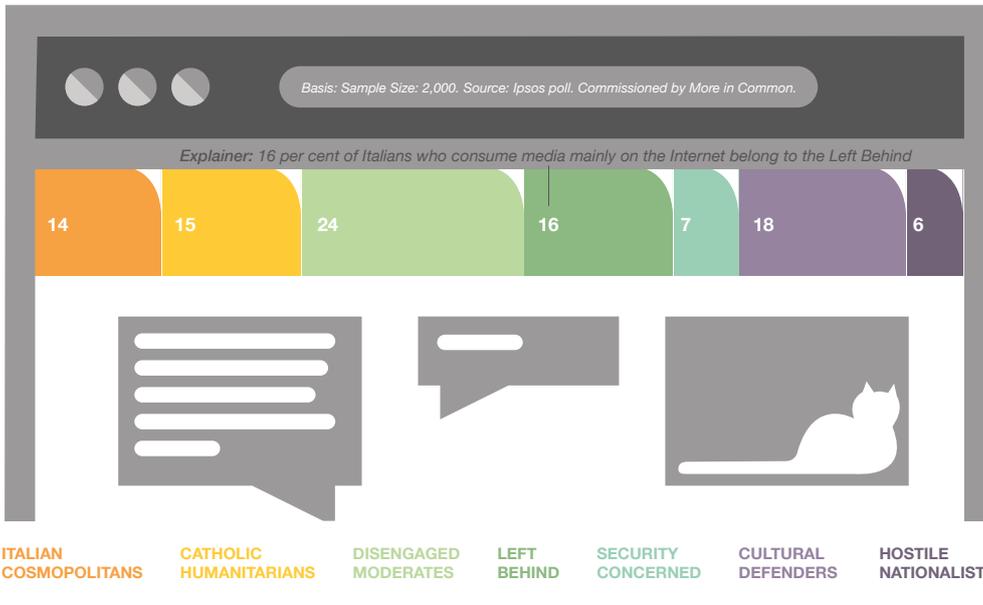
**Explainer**  
35% of Catholic Humanitarians usually read Corriere Della Sera



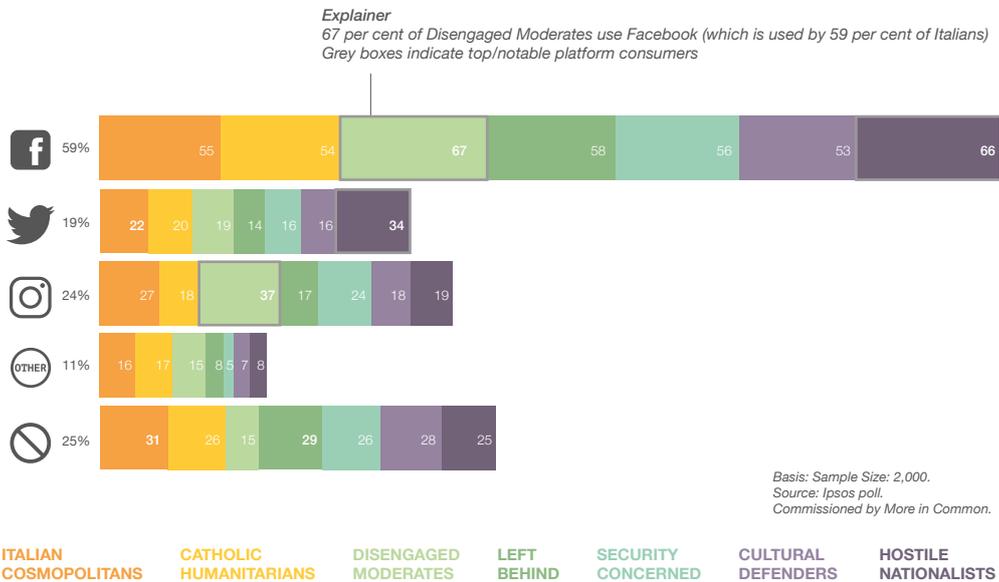
Basis: Sample Size: 2,000.  
Source: Ipsos poll.  
Commissioned by More in Common.

ITALIAN COSMOPOLITANS    CATHOLIC HUMANITARIANS    DISENGAGED MODERATES    LEFT BEHIND    SECURITY CONCERNED    CULTURAL DEFENDERS    HOSTILE NATIONALISTS

### Mainly Internet Users



### “Do you use any social network?”

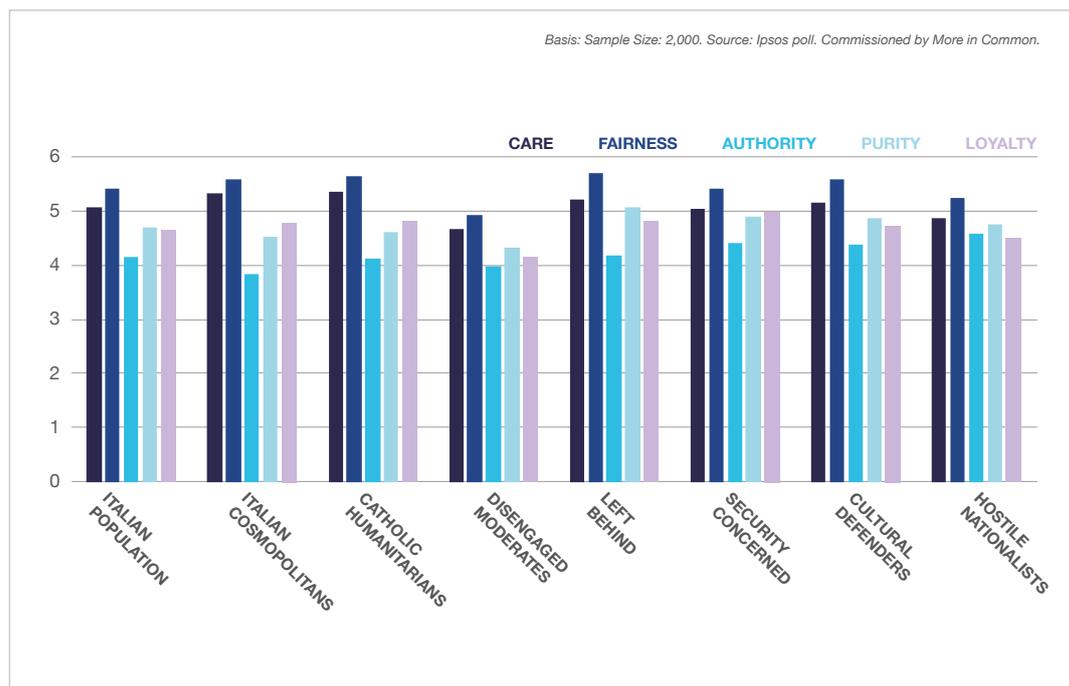


### 3.2 MORAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE SEGMENTS

To better understand the underlying values that shape their attitudes, the survey adapted a set of questions drawn from Moral Foundations Theory, a way of understanding moral judgment that has become prominent in recent years owing to the work of American academic Jonathan Haidt.<sup>9</sup> Based on the analysis of tens of thousands of responses to questions from cultures around the globe, Moral Foundations Theory observes that humans form moral judgements based on a set of distinctive ‘foundations’. These foundations reflect how individuals process and prioritise among competing moral impulses. The foundations that support each segment’s moral system can help explain why different arguments and messages resonate more effectively with some groups and not others. Broadly speaking, those with conservative values give higher priority than those with liberal values to three foundations: authority (respect for their group’s leading figures, traditions and institutions), loyalty (commitment to one’s in-group), and purity (responsiveness to disgust, often in religious contexts).

The question of prioritisation of values is especially relevant in the context of refugees and migration. Host country citizens must consider the harm and injustice that the migrants are escaping (care and fairness foundations), while simultaneously considering the impact that irregular migration from different countries has on respect for the law (authority foundation), cultural norms and morality (purity foundation) and preservation of their group’s interests and institutions (loyalty foundation).

In Italy, we observe that this overall pattern holds true: the clearest distinctions can be found between the most liberal segments—the Italian Cosmopolitans and the Catholic Humanitarians—and the most conservative segments—the Left Behind and the Hostile Nationalists. For instance, the Italian Cosmopolitans value the foundations of care and fairness much more highly than they do the authority foundation (with respective differences of 1.5 and 1.7 higher on a 6 point scale).



<sup>9</sup> Haidt (2012), *The Righteous Mind*, Pantheon Books

The moral judgements of the Left Behind rest heavily on fairness as well, but they appear to think of fairness less in terms of equality between people and more in terms of applying the same standards to different people. They oppose cheating (another side of the fairness foundation) and perceive migrants and refugees as individuals who cheat the system and benefit unfairly from it. Messages that tap into this sentiment are thus more likely to be convincing. They also rely more heavily on the purity/disgust foundation than other segments. Up to 61 per cent of the Left Behind believe that migrants pose a health risk for the country (compared to an average for the Italian population of 39 per cent). Political rhetoric around diseases brought by migrants may activate the purity/disgust foundation for this group.

The moral judgements of the Security Concerned rest more heavily on the foundations of loyalty and purity. Jonathan Haidt has identified the original trigger for the Loyalty foundation as “anything that tells you who is a team player and who is a traitor, particularly when your team is fighting for other teams.” It seems that the Security Concerned view migrants and refugees as individuals who – as foreigners – are less likely to be loyal to the country and more likely to betray it by attacking it.

The Cultural Defenders score higher on authority and relatively high on loyalty, and the Hostile Nationalists place the highest emphasis of all the groups on the authority foundation. This foundation is tied to the urge to respect hierarchical relationships. For these segments, migrants and refugees do not respect Italian laws and culture, defying Italian structures and identity and the ability to establish control in the country, a control that they already view as weak (and which, they believe, requires a strong leader that will enforce it). This also helps explain why this group expresses more willingness to take aggressive action to maintain the border, even at the risk of endangering the lives of migrants.

Italian segments whose behaviour is most shaped by the moral foundation of care are most likely to have donated to the refugees’ cause over the past twelve months. One third of Catholic Humanitarians, and one fifth of both the Italian Cosmopolitans and Left Behind donated money, food, clothing, or other items to help refugees. Overall, the Italian Cosmopolitans have done the most to help in the last year. One quarter (27 per cent) of this segment shared positive stories about refugees online (twenty per cent above the average), one in ten contacted a politician or signed a petition to ask them to support refugees (eight per cent above average), and a greater share of this segment than any other spent their time volunteering or attending rallies (16 per cent for each activity). In contrast, nine in ten Cultural Defenders, eight in ten Hostile Nationalists, and three-quarters of the Left Behind and Security Concerned did nothing to help refugees over the same time period.

We would highly recommend that anyone designing communications or campaigns, or analysing public opinion, takes into consideration the moral foundations of the segments we have identified, and what can trigger them. Far-right populist movements have been very effective at exploiting fears and anxieties by underscoring messages that tap into the purity, loyalty, and authority foundations. This is in stark contrast to messages based on the care and fairness foundations sent by most organisations in the social sector. Exploring how to positively trigger the moral foundations of each group could be a new avenue to build support for pro-migrant and refugee policies and activities.

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### 3.3 ITALIAN CATHOLICS

Perhaps no nation is more influenced by its Catholic heritage and identity than Italy, even though Italian society has become increasingly secular in recent generations. Italy is the seat of power of the Roman Catholic Church. It has supplied more of the Church's pontiffs than any other country; indeed, every Pope between 1523 and 1978 was of Italian origin. Unsurprisingly, Catholicism is an important part of Italian identity and tradition – even to many who are not practising Catholics.

More in Common's research in Italy suggests that Catholicism influences attitudes to questions of identity, in/out group affiliation, migrants and refugees in two distinct ways. First, it creates a strong humanitarian impulse, especially among the faithful. The segment with the highest number of the most dedicated Catholics is the Catholic Humanitarians. They are distinctive because their strong humanitarian values are shaped not by the values of cosmopolitanism, but much more by a sense of duty to welcome the stranger and provide hospitality to the poor and needy. Catholicism also influences Italian attitudes insofar as people see faith as an integral part of the country's cultural heritage, which must be preserved because of how it has historically shaped Italian identity. This view is more commonly found among people in closed segments, many of whom reject Pope Francis's call to support refugees.

The insights from this research in Italy underscores some comparable insights from a more detailed study of the attitudes of French Catholics by More in Common in 2018. In contrast to general perceptions in France, the research demonstrated that French Catholics have more open views than the overall French population. The insights into Italy's Catholic population from this study are more limited, and a similar study entirely focused on Catholics would be needed to provide insights comparable to those in France. Nevertheless, we can see that Italian Catholics are more optimistic about the trajectory of Italian society – both in the past year and their projection for the next five – than non-Catholics. They feel prouder about being Italian than non-Catholics. The stronger their faith, the more they take pride in being Italian: 71 per cent of dedicated Catholics, 56 per cent of frequent church-goers and 57 per cent of occasional church-goers feel proud to be Italian (in contrast with 36 per cent of non-believers).

Overall, Italian Catholics do not support the principle of asylum more than non-Catholics, but they do feel more strongly that Pope Francis is right that we should be more welcoming of those entering Italy. This message seems to resonate with Catholics who, in other contexts, might be less convinced by pro-refugee and migrant messages. Catholics also seem to be more concerned than other Italians about potential links between people coming into Italy as refugees and the threat of terrorism. Non-Catholics, on the other hand, are less likely to support measures such as protecting the borders themselves if the migration crisis continues.



# 4

## Perceptions of The State of Italy and The World

#### 4.1 ITALIANS' OUTLOOK

Italy is the largest economic power in southern Europe and the fourth largest economy in the European Union. Italy has been significantly impacted by the 2007-2008 financial crisis, and by longstanding corruption. The majority of Italians agree that the most important issue facing Italy today is unemployment (66 per cent) - youth unemployment, although decreasing, is still above 23.5 per cent.<sup>10</sup> The next most important issue, according to 36 per cent of Italians, is immigration.

It may therefore come as little surprise that Italians describe their country in negative terms. More than half of Italians (53 per cent) believe that “weak” is an accurate description of Italy, followed by “angry” and “divided.” Only 5 per cent would say that “optimistic” or “open” would accurately describe Italy, and the percentage is even lower for “confident.”

In general, most Italians feel that their overall economic and social situation has remained stagnant over the past year. However, 39 per cent believe that the economy is the same or faring worse (43 per cent), while up to 60 per cent believe that Italian society is deteriorating. In looking to the future, opinions are evenly split on whether the economic situation will improve for the economy. The majority predicts that things will get better or remain the same for themselves and their family, and opinion is split on whether things will remain the same for Italian society (30 per cent) or get worse (43 per cent). The emphasis on the deterioration of society, which is perceived to be greater than the downturn of the economy, and unrelated to personal circumstances, corresponds to similar trends observed by More in Common in other European countries.

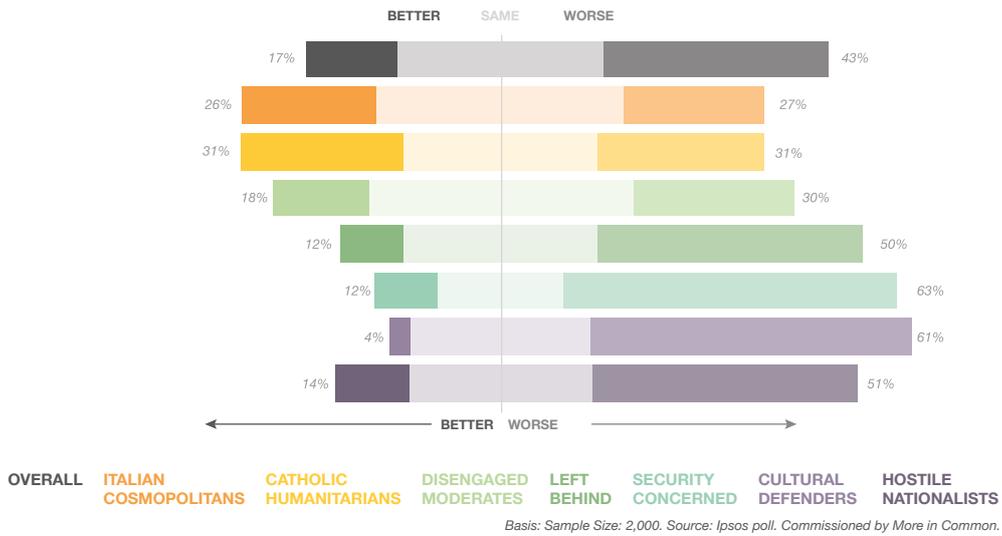
There are few significant differences on these issues between age cohorts and genders, while regional differences have some limited influence on perceptions of Italy's prospects. Italians in the north-east and north-west are slightly more likely to believe that the Italian economy will deteriorate than Italians elsewhere, and half or over half of the people in these regions believe that it is going to get worse for Italian society. They feel even more strongly that the situation for Italian society has gotten worse over the past year (a sentiment that is held by the majority of the population and by at least half of Italians across regions). On the contrary, people in the centre south are more likely to believe that prospects for themselves and their families will improve (41 per cent) and that the Italian economy will be stronger.

In general, Italians' outlook is rather pessimistic. There are, however, significant differences between segments. The open segments are overall more optimistic. Notably, 40 per cent of the people in these groups – and 45 per cent of the Security Concerned – believe that things are going to get better for themselves and their families. The stance of the Security Concerned is not at odds with their drivers and beliefs. Their scepticism of migrants and refugees is largely fuelled by fears of terrorism and security threats, and does not appear to be linked to concerns about the country's economy or their own financial circumstances.

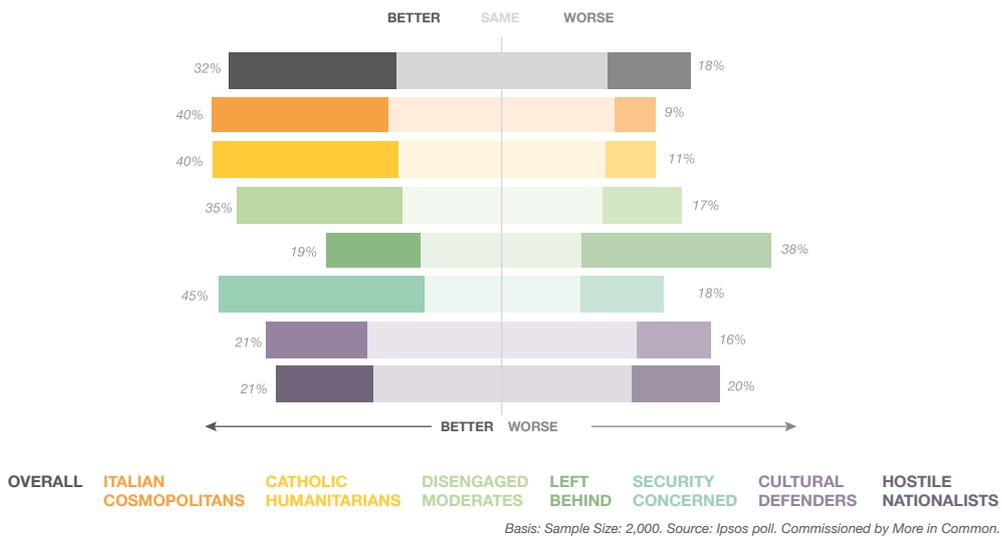
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<sup>10</sup> Unemployment for Italians between 15-24 years is 23.5 per cent; for Italians between 15 and 29 it is 17.5 per cent.  
[http://dati.istat.it/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=DCCV\\_TAXDISOCCU1](http://dati.istat.it/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=DCCV_TAXDISOCCU1)

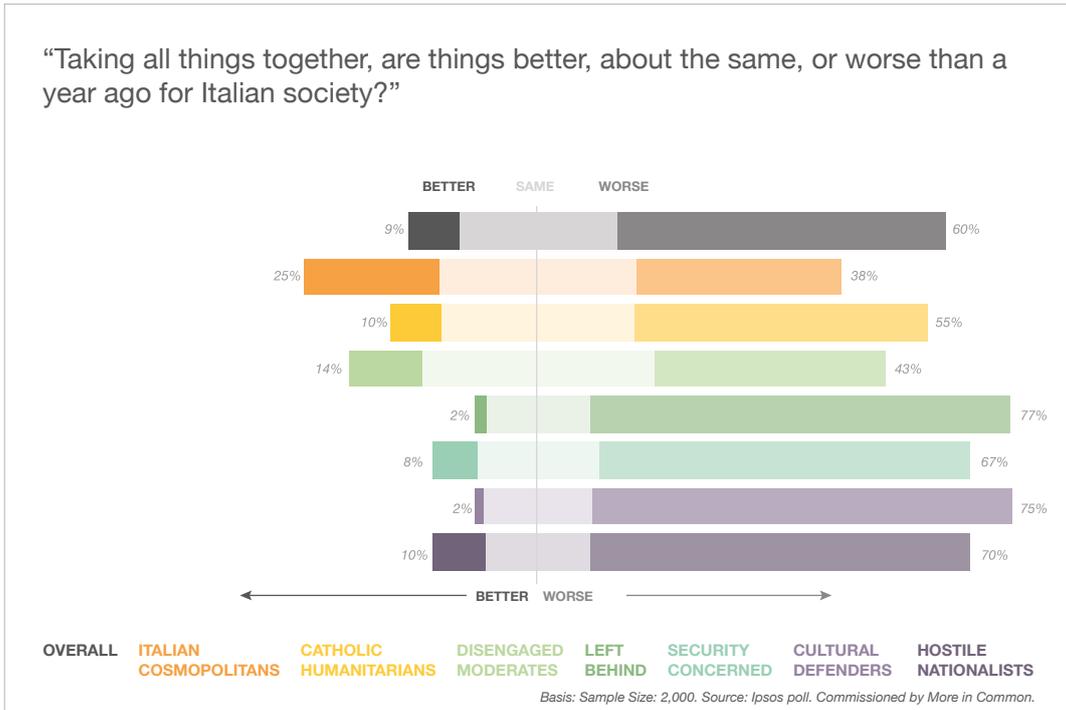
"Taking all things together, are things better, about the same, or worse than a year ago for the Italian economy?"



"Thinking about the next five years, do you expect things to be better, about the same, or worse for you and your family?"



When it comes to the future of Italian society, more than half of Catholic Humanitarians, Italian Cosmopolitans, and Disengaged Moderates believe that the future will be better or the same.



The Cultural Defenders stand out, with more than three quarters of them believing the future will be worse for Italians – a reflection of how strongly they view the country through the lens of culture and tradition – while 52 per cent of the Left Behind and 60 per cent of the Hostile Nationalists feel that way.

Attitudes of the Disengaged Moderates about the state of the economy and society, and their feelings towards the outside world, are largely influenced by their daily lives. They feel that they are in an uncertain and unstable situation and that financial security is unattainable. They don’t know what awaits them in the future and young people in this segment are trying to figure out how to navigate a world that offers much less stability than that of their parents, which was characterised by wellbeing and financial security.

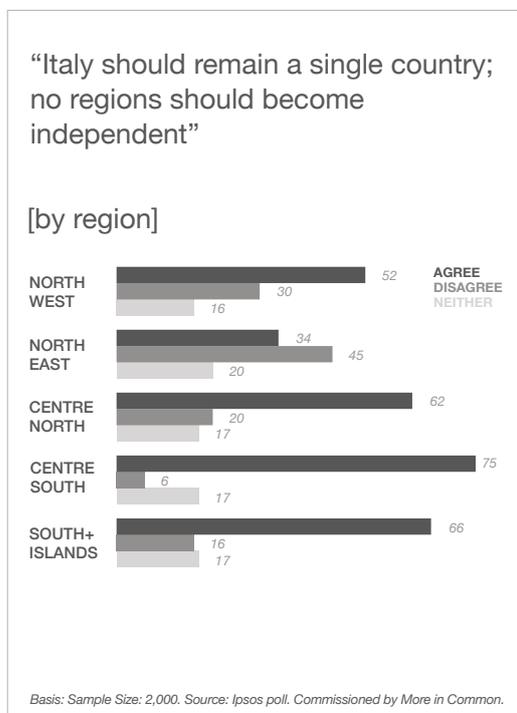


The future is so uncertain ... there’s people in Italy who got their pensions as early as their 50’s, while people in my generation expect to get a pension when they’re 90”

*Disengaged Moderates*

The disenchantment that most Italians feel towards their own country and their affinity with regional realities does not translate into support for secession. Overall, 59 per cent of Italians agree that Italy should remain a unified country without any regions becoming independent. Only 22 per cent disagree. Support for secession is highest among the Cultural Defenders (40 per cent disagree that Italy should remain a single country), the Hostile Nationalists and the Italian Cosmopolitans (26 per cent of each disagree).

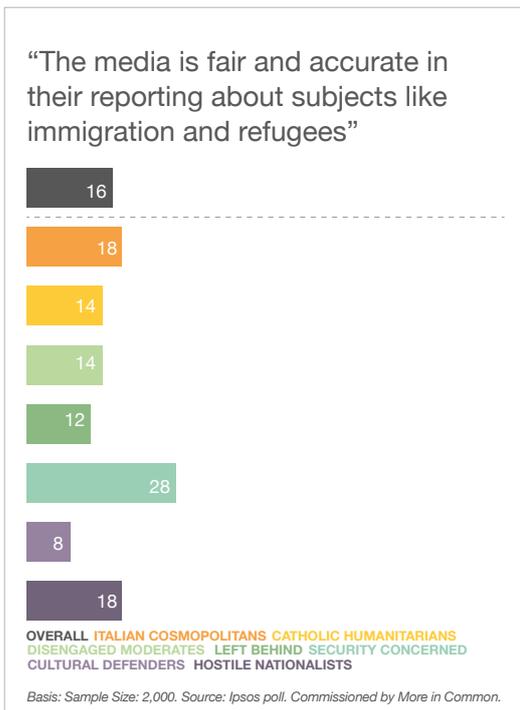
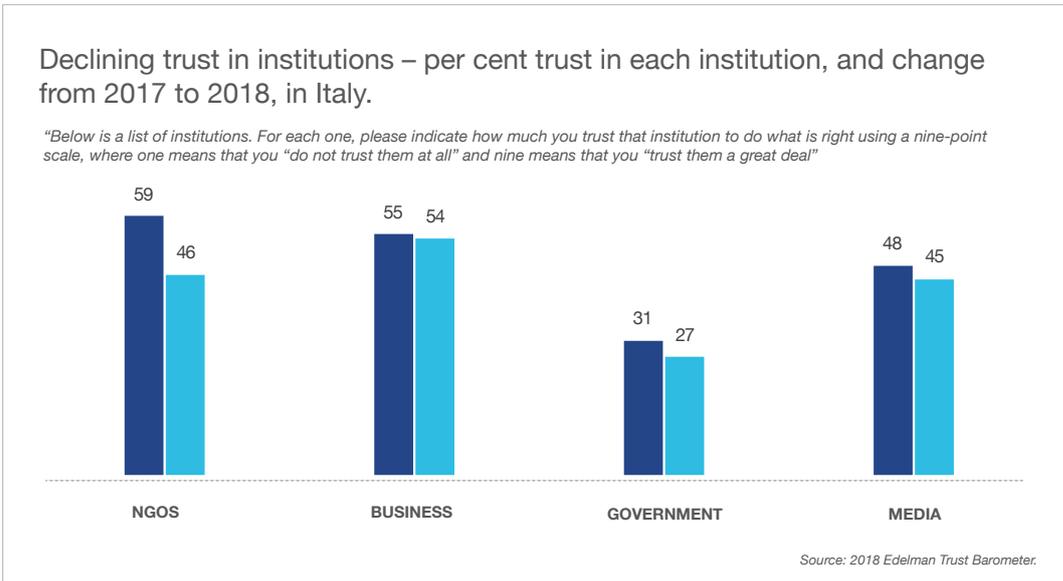
There are differences on this issue depending on the region, as there is greater support for regional independence in the north east of Italy. In the north east, 45 per cent of Italians disagree that Italy should remain a single country. Just 6 per cent of Italians in the centre south and 16 per cent in the south and islands agree that some regions should become independent.



#### DISTRUST OF INSTITUTIONS AND THE MEDIA

In Italy today, trust in institutions such as NGOs, businesses, government, and the media is declining. While NGOs used to be the most trusted of Italian institutions, in 2017 trust levels fell by more than ten per cent over the course of the year. Businesses have now emerged as the most trusted of institutions. In Italy, businesses are also seen as the institutions most likely to move the country forward (34 per cent agree). This sits in contrast with trust in government in Italy, which is seen by six in ten Italians as their most broken institution.<sup>11</sup>

11 Edelman Trust Barometer - Italy Report. 2018.

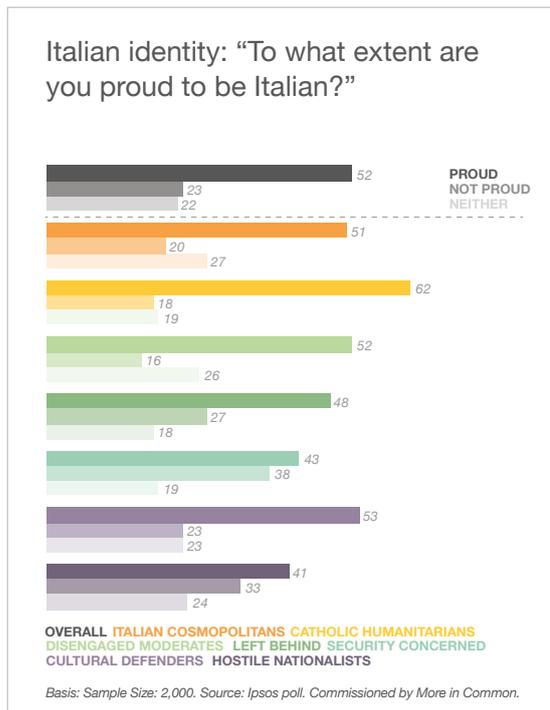


Under half of Italians (45 per cent) express trust in the media. This low trust level is underpinned by concerns about the media’s agenda and reporting standards. While 72 per cent of Italians believe that the media are more concerned with attracting big audiences than with reporting, 69 per cent believe that media outlets sacrifice accuracy in a bid to break stories first. Meanwhile, 68 per cent believe that the media supports a particular ideology when informing the public – a possible reflection of concerns relating to Silvio Berlusconi’s media and political involvement, as the founder of Mediaset and president of Forza Italia. While confidence in search engines and social media platforms (now trusted by 53 per cent) has decreased over the last six years, confidence in journalism – traditional and online-only media – is slowly increasing (now trusted by 67 per cent).<sup>12</sup>

12 Edelman Trust Barometer - Italy Report. 2018.

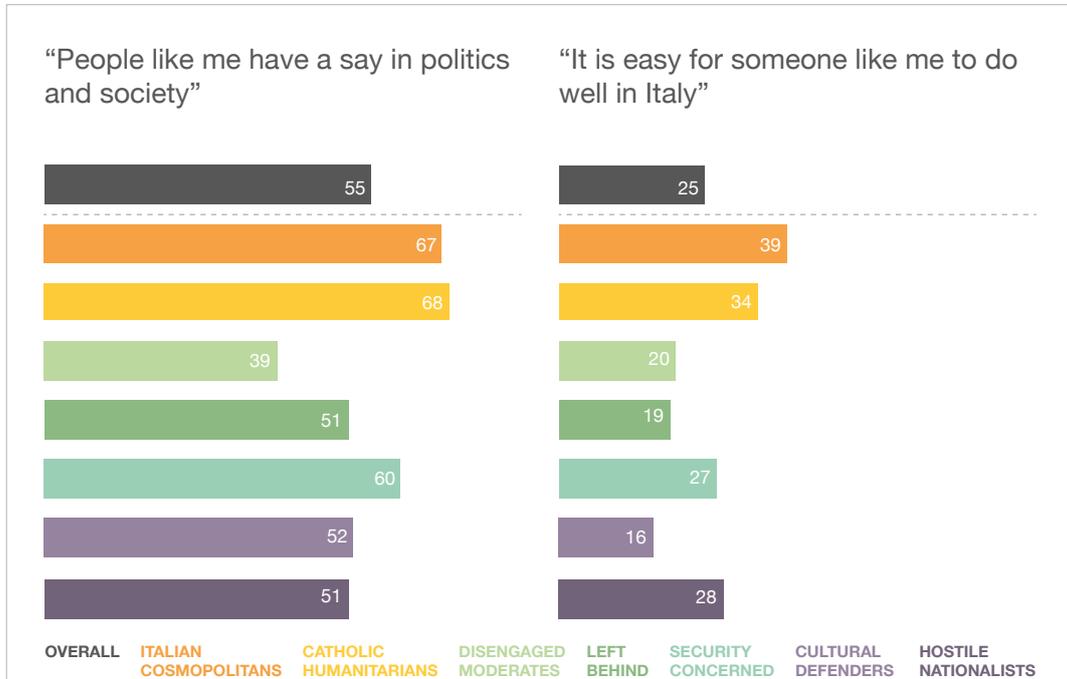
Nevertheless, in Italy there is particular mistrust of media reporting on immigration and refugees. While 45 per cent of Italians express their trust in the media, just 21 per cent trust its reporting on these issues. Disagreement that the media’s reporting is fair and accurate is at its highest in the north west and north east of Italy (72 per cent and 68 per cent disagree respectively). Reporting is most trusted in the south and on Italy’s islands (trusted by 27 per cent), influenced by proximity to the issue, though even there 50 per cent do not trust media reporting on immigration and refugees. This highlights a discrepancy between what Italians are seeing or experiencing and what they are hearing and between facts and perceptions.

Distrust of media reporting can be found among both open and closed segments of the population. Seven in ten Italian Cosmopolitans, Cultural Defenders and Hostile Nationalists disagree that media reporting on immigration and refugees is “fair and accurate”. Just eight per cent of Cultural Defenders agree with the statement, the lowest of all segments. However, open and closed segments are at loggerheads when it comes to unpacking the media reporting approach, namely whether they are afraid to portray migrants negatively, even if the reporting is accurate. While the open segments and the Disengaged Moderates do not agree with this proposition, the closed segments, the Left Behind and the Security Concerned decisively agree (at 69-81 per cent agreement).



A lack of confidence in the Italian media is undermining public trust and the pursuit of truth. While 63 per cent of Italians admit to no longer being sure “what is true and what is not”, 65 per cent agree that they do not know which politicians to trust.<sup>13</sup> Almost one quarter (24 per cent) of Italians now believe that people like them do not have a say in politics and society. Moreover, almost half (47 per cent) of Italians disagree that it is easy for people like them to do well in Italy. It is within this context of discontentment with the status quo and distrust of institutions that anti-establishment or anti-migrant populists have surged to prominence and power.

<sup>13</sup> European Commission. 2018. “Fake News and Disinformation Online”. Special Eurobarometer. (February). Retrieved from <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/FLASH/surveyKy/2183>

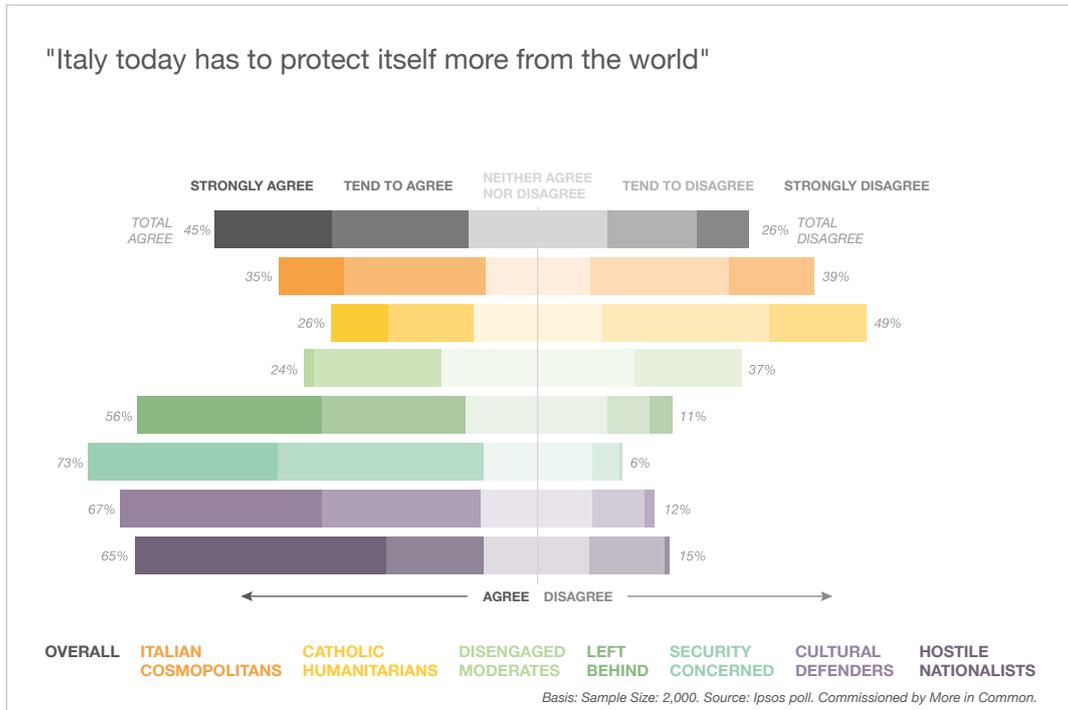


## GLOBALISATION

Globalisation is considered the source of many of Italy's problems. Of all the countries where More in Common has conducted its research to date, only in Greece is globalisation viewed more negatively than in Italy. As many as 55 per cent of Italians believe that globalisation has had negative economic consequences, while only 16 per cent would say that the consequences have been positive.

The Security Concerned are the segment most likely to agree that the economic consequences of globalisation are positive for Italy (32 per cent), followed by the Catholic Humanitarians (25 per cent) and the Disengaged Moderates (24 per cent). Yet significant percentages of the Security Concerned, the Hostile Nationalists, and the Italian Cosmopolitans also do not express an opinion on this matter, while more than 50 per cent of the Cultural Defenders, Left Behind, and Italian Cosmopolitans believe that the economic consequences of globalisation have been negative although probably for different reasons.

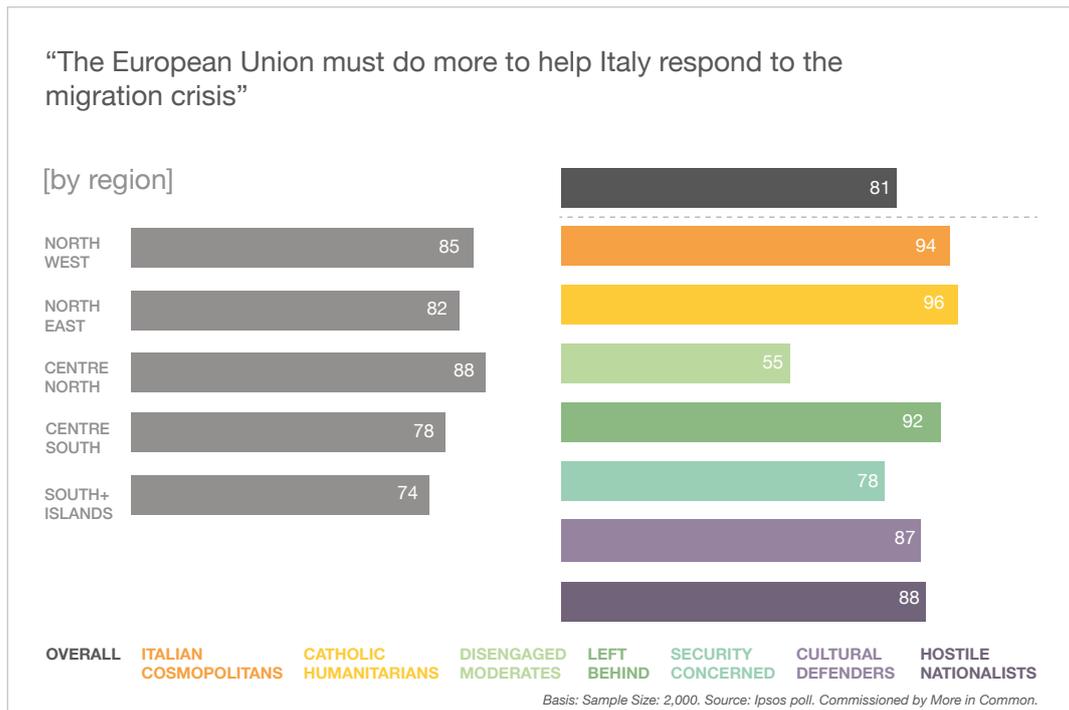
At first glance, it might seem surprising that the Italian Cosmopolitans are not more enthusiastic about globalisation, unlike cosmopolitans in other countries. However, Italian Cosmopolitans may feel differently because of how they view their own prospects and the country's economic performance in the past ten years.



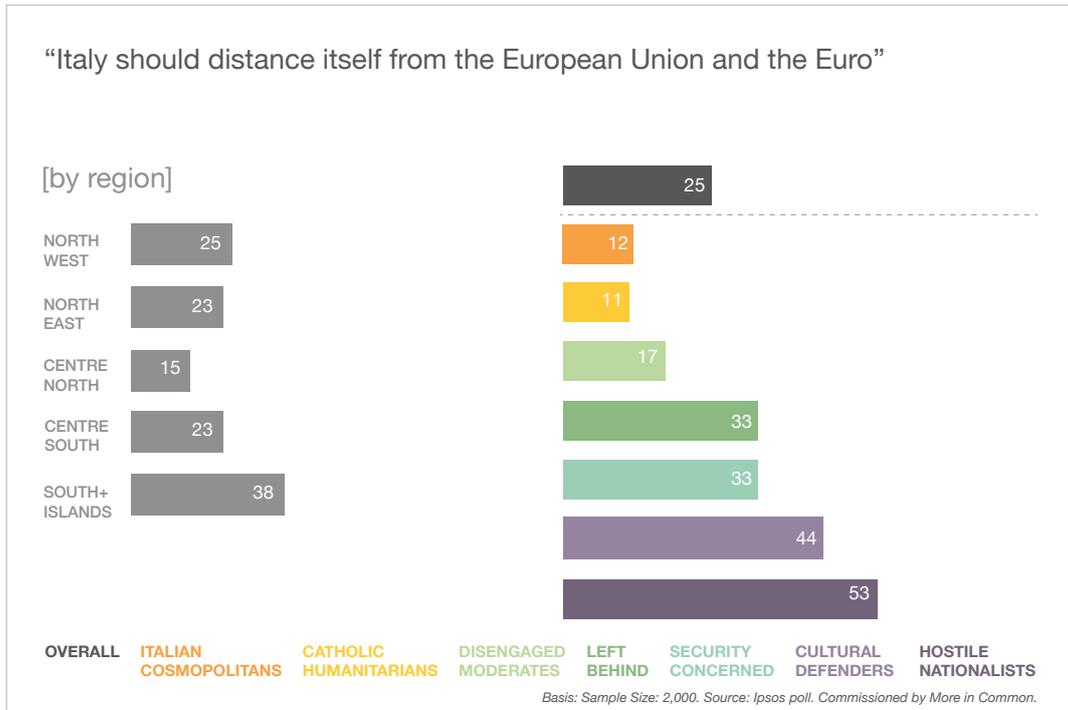
One source of agreement between four of the segments is on the need for Italy to protect itself more from the world. The Hostile Nationalists, the Cultural Defenders, the Security Concerned, and the Left Behind have similar levels of agreement on this matter. The same segments agree at similar levels with the idea that Italian identity is disappearing, suggesting that there is a connection between the need to protect the country and the need to protect Italy's heritage (see section on identity below).

## 4.2 ITALY AND EUROPE

Italians from all walks of life believe that the European Union should have done, and should do, more to help Italy manage the migration crisis. This perception is held all across Italy without much distinction by region or segment.



Despite frustrations with the European Union, the majority of Italians still don't believe that Italy should distance itself from the European Union and the euro (52 per cent vs. 25 per cent who would support distancing). This tension between frustration and disenchantment with the EU and a simultaneous desire to remain a part of the union has also been observed in Greece – the other European country that has been extremely affected by both the financial and the refugee crises.



At the regional level, there are differences in attitudes towards the EU. The south and the Italian islands are more divided on the question of whether Italy should distance itself from the EU. All other regions see higher degrees of support for remaining close to the union.

Differences are even more acute between segments. Italian Cosmopolitans and Catholic Humanitarians strongly reject the idea of distancing, as do the Disengaged Moderates, albeit less strongly. The Hostile Nationalists are the only segment that clearly rejects the European Union and the euro, while the Left Behind and the Cultural Defenders are more divided.



# 5

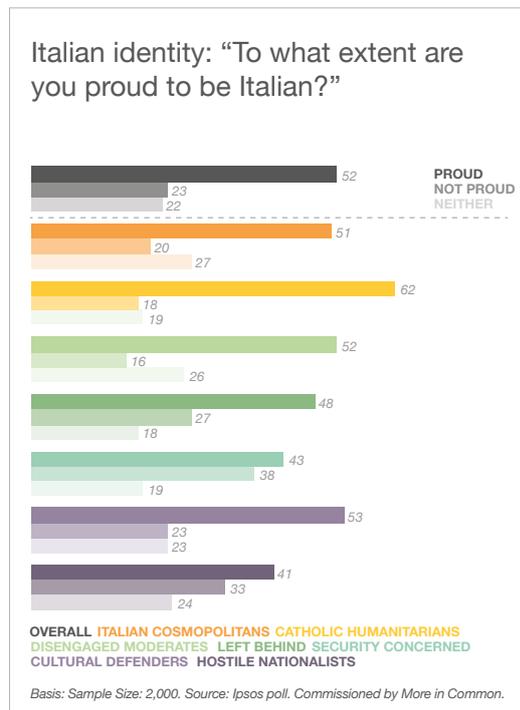
## Italian Identity

## 5.1 OVERALL RESULTS

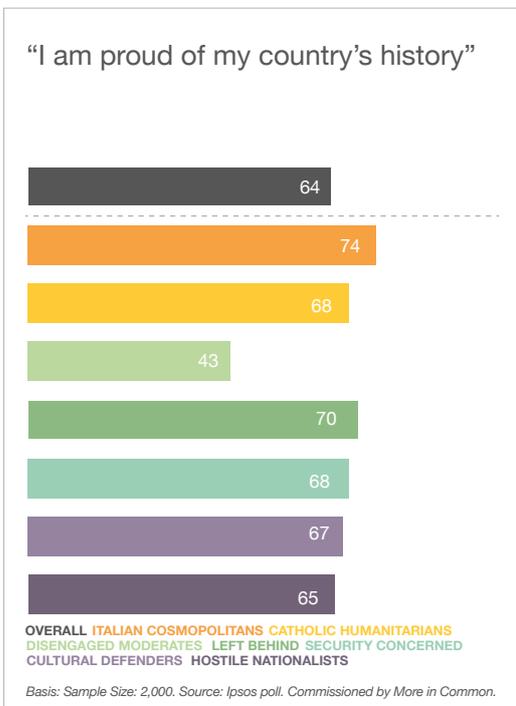
This section of the report discusses findings related to perceptions of Italian identity, to provide a wider context to attitudes towards migrants and refugees examined in section 6. Nevertheless, public debate about Italian identity is now very wrapped up in discussion of the migration crisis, so the following section also references those attitudes, to the extent it helps us understand Italians' feelings of national pride and anxieties about the loss of identity. Section 5.2 provides deeper insights into the contrasting perceptions of two of the middle groups -- the Disengaged Moderates and the Left Behind -- whose views are strongly influenced by the opposing perceptions of the open and closed segments.

Analysis of Italians' sense of identity often highlights its complex and contradictory character, reflecting the country's unique role in world history, the strength of local allegiances and a tradition of self-criticism in national debate. Debates about national identity point to the lack of a sense of national belonging and a collective image of Italian identity.<sup>14</sup> This makes it more difficult to draw conclusions from quantitative research into Italian identity, because the same responses can often be given for very different reasons. For example, one of the notable findings from the research is that Italians in the closed segments actually express less pride in Italian history and identity than many in the open segments, which typically are associated with weaker patriotic feelings.

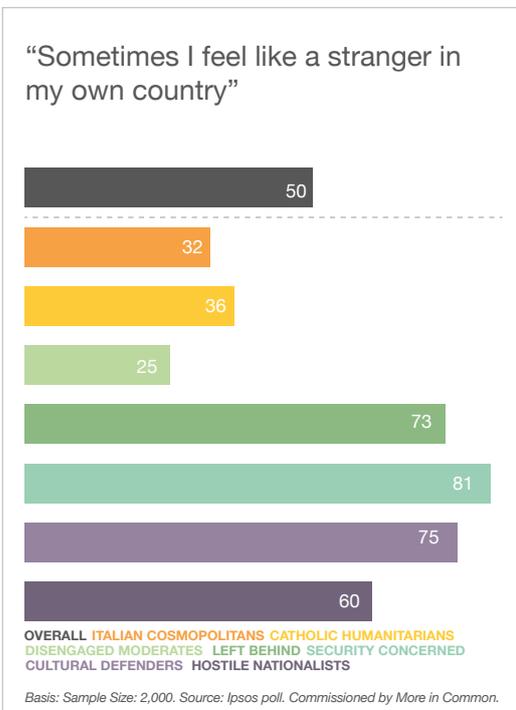
Overall, 52 per cent of Italians surveyed say that they are proud of being Italian, 23 are not, and 22 per cent are neither. Among the segments, the groups who identified with more closed nationalist views report lower levels of pride, perhaps reflecting their disenchantment with the current state of Italy. Those with the greatest pride are the Catholic Humanitarians (62 per cent are proud of their identity), followed by the Cultural Defenders, the Disengaged Moderates, the Italian Cosmopolitans, and the Left Behind. The least proud are the Security Concerned and Hostile Nationalists, both of whom have a higher proportion expressing pride than not (dividing 43-38 and 41-33 per cent respectively).

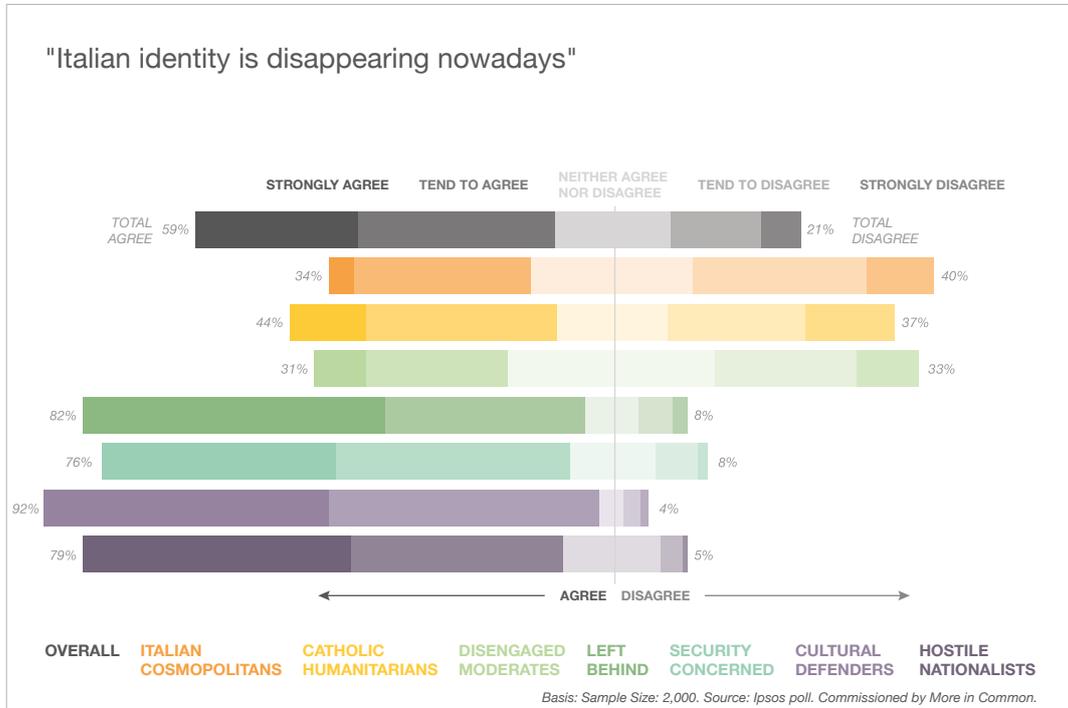


<sup>14</sup> For example, see the report of an Aspen Institute Italia forum on Italian identity in 2011 <https://www.aspeninstitute.it/en/programs/italys-past-and-national-identity-reflection>



Italian history evokes stronger feelings of pride than contemporary Italian identity. On a scale from 1-6 (most to least proud), some 64 per cent of Italians rank their pride in Italian identity at the higher end (choosing 1 or 2 on that scale). Overall, 86 per cent place themselves on the scale of 1-3 expressing some positive sentiment, compared to 14 per cent on the scale of 4-6. Most of the segments have similarly high levels of pride, with Italian Cosmopolitans slightly higher than any other group. The one exception to this high level of pride is the Disengaged Moderates, amongst whom just 43 per cent chose a ranking of 1 or 2 - 22 points below the next closest segment. When the responses to this question are cross-tabulated against political identity, the lowest levels of pride are found among supporters of Left parties or Lega (55 and 57 per cent respectively choosing 1 or 2), while higher levels of pride are found among supporters of the established parties, Forza Italia and the Democratic Party (79 and 66 per cent respectively). Part of the appeal of Lega is their promise to restore their supporters’ sense of pride in being Italian.





The segments with more closed views are far more sensitive to a loss of cultural identity than the open segments and Disengaged Moderates. When presented with the statement, “sometimes I feel like a stranger in my own country”, there is agreement from around three quarters of the Security Concerned, Cultural Defenders and Left Behind. On the other hand, only around one in three in the open segments agree. Overall, 50 per cent agree with this sentiment.

When asked whether they agree that Italian identity is disappearing, responses are even stronger. 91 per cent of the Cultural Defenders feel that Italian identity is disappearing, with similarly high proportions amongst the Left Behind (82 per cent), Hostile Nationalists (79 per cent) and Security Concerned (76 per cent). A majority of Italian Cosmopolitans and Disengaged Moderates disagree with this proposition, while there is slightly more agreement from Catholic Humanitarians (44-38 per cent), possibly reflecting their perceptions of the decline of the Catholic Church’s place in Italian life. Overall, Italians in the more open segments are less concerned about the erosion of national identity than those in open segments in Germany (the Liberal Cosmopolitans) or France (Multiculturals).

Academics have noted a historic pattern that a retreat to a narrow form of identity -- that may be based on nation, blood, religion, ideology or some other identity marker -- is common when people feel threatened by change. A perception of external threat can be a catalyst for the activation of authoritarian predispositions and their expression in intolerant behaviours.<sup>15</sup> These insights help to explain the findings of More in Common’s research in Italy as well as other countries, where those in the closed segments generally report higher levels of concern about economic, cultural and security threats, as well as stronger attachments to more narrowly defined forms of identity (such as forms of national identity that are more exclusive).

<sup>15</sup> Authoritarianism has been studied by Dr Karen Stenner, who argues that 'normative threats' (threats to the normative order) are a threat to the ways in which people think about identity in a group context - the oneness and sameness that makes "us" an "us". She highlights the roles played in construction of group identity by demarcations of people, authorities, values and norms that define who "we" are and what "we" believe in. Stenner, Karen *The Authoritarian Dynamic*, Cambridge University Press: New York, 2005.

## 5.2 PERCEPTIONS OF IDENTITY AMONG LEFT BEHIND AND DISENGAGED MODERATES

The tension between more open and more closed conceptions of Italian identity plays out strongly among the middle groups. We undertook more detailed research into attitudes towards Italian identity amongst two of the middle groups: the Left Behind (whose attitudes are closer to the closed segments) and Disengaged Moderates (who lean towards the open segments).

The significant and sustained impact of the financial crisis on Italians in the Left Behind segment during the past decade, appears to have heightened their suspicion of outside threats (for example, they have the strongest disagreement of any segment with the proposition that globalisation has had a positive effect on Italy). Qualitative research suggests that those in the Left Behind segment hold more narrowly defined notions of Italian identity, often with undertones of nativism and distrust of outsiders. In discussions with members of this segment, they argued that Italians have a superior character to other nationalities, because they are more kind, warm and welcoming, as well as more creative. They distinguished Italians from people of other cultural backgrounds, arguing that Italians are more respectful of laws (a sentiment that is definitely not shared by all segments) and that as a result, “strangers” who do not respect laws are taking advantage of Italians, enjoying more rights and gaining the upper hand. They also discussed how Italian identity is something that is intrinsically related to a way of being, thinking, and behaving, and not something that can be learnt by a newcomer.



You must have your Italian-ity in the way you think and act. I’m not sure that a non-Italian - someone who was not born and raised in Italy - can think like an Italian... it’s difficult. Italian-ity is something you have inside.”

This is an exclusionary definition of identity, because it characterises Italian identity as something indefinable and therefore makes it especially difficult for newcomers to be accepted as Italians. It is unclear what a newcomer can do to become Italian when the essence of Italian identity is “something you have inside”. The conversation within this group suggests that an important challenge in addressing perceptions of migrants as ‘outsiders’ is to better understand how to engage and broaden conceptions of Italian identity.

Discussion of Italian identity with the Left Behind segment showed that many see migrants as an outside group that is threatening Italian identity, suggesting that the arrival of migrants is resulting in the emigration of native-born Italians:



Our youth are leaving the country to find jobs, because Italy isn’t offering much, but also because of the uninterrupted flow of people coming from abroad.... We’re losing our identity, rules are broken.”

“

I notice the barbarisation of our population, because many of these people commit crimes and there's a sort of involvement of our people.”

Migration is therefore an important factor in the way that the Left Behind perceive Italian identity as being under threat. The suspicion toward migrants, and the perception that they do not integrate or become truly Italian, is also related to a wider perception that migrants are rivals for limited economic resources with the native born population.

“

We have now a different perception of things : within a more equal society the arrival of people from outside wouldn't have had the same impact as it does now. Our rights are shrinking: in healthcare, in employment, in defence of basic services ... public opinion goes crazy when you have people who are sleeping in their cars, while they see foreigners being hosted in hotels.”

Among the middle groups, the perspectives of the Disengaged Moderates differ sharply from the Left Behind. The qualitative research into the perspectives of the Disengaged Moderates offers further insights into why they differ from the Left Behind. In fact the Disengaged Moderates are less likely to believe that Italian identity is disappearing than any other segment. Discussion of Italian identity with members of this segment highlighted the multi-layered nature of Italian identity, in particular the strength of city and regional attachments that make them part of a community within a larger community. Several commented that they see being Italian as being part of a sum of different “populations” of people who have multiple identities. This more nuanced perspective on Italian identity makes them less concerned about a perceived loss of cultural identity, and more open to considering newcomers as part of the mosaic of Italian identity.

The Disengaged Moderates share with the Left Behind pride in aspects of what makes Italians a unique population, in particular referencing Italians' creativity and genius and in a historic sense, the defining cultural influence of Italy on Western culture.

In discussing contemporary Italian identity, Disengaged Moderates nevertheless express frustration with the way in which Italian society has moved away from its values. They believe that Italians are distinctive for their values, placing greater importance on the bonds of family than other nationalities. Even though they feel Italian, many feel that the country has lost its way. The tension between the grandeur of Italy's past accomplishments and the reality of its present often surfaces in these discussions.

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“

I am proud of being Italian, but I am not proud of Italy. I'm passionate, genial ... I embody the Italian character... but if I look at Italy, at how services are offered, at how the country is managed, I am not proud at all. We're stuck with the Roman Empire.”

Disengaged Moderates have a broader conception of Italian identity than the Left Behind. They do not think that someone needs to be native-born to be Italian. Instead, they emphasise integration and absorption of Italian culture.

“

I'd say that if you're a foreigner, in my opinion you acquire the Italian citizenship in the moment when you get integrated in your local Italian community, in the space where you live.”

“

The most important is to have the country close to your heart. I can imagine you want to have a family here, raise your kids; if this is not so, you'll go elsewhere.”

Disengaged Moderates also highlight openness and empathy towards others as distinctive Italian characteristics, although they recognise that there is a tension between current migration debates in Italy and what they see as Italian characteristics of welcoming and empathy.

“

We Italians, when we travel abroad, are empathetic, while locals here are not that empathetic with foreigners coming to Italy.”

Identity thus operates very differently for these two middle segments - indeed, on questions of identity the two segments seem to reflect the wider polarisation between open and closed views of identity and migration. Both the Disengaged Moderates and the Left Behind have positive conceptions of Italian identity, but the contrast between open and closed views are reflected in their differing conceptions of Italian identity. The Disengaged Moderates recognise a gap between today's realities and what they see as true Italian character and identity (being welcoming), but they tend to blame their own society rather than migrants for this. For people in the Left Behind segment, Italian identity appears to give them a greater sense of belonging in a time of uncertainty and weakness, but in a way that creates an 'us' versus 'them' dynamic with migrants, who are perceived as being very different from native-born Italians. This narrower definition of Italian identity leaves no room for people with roots somewhere else, who are perceived as competitors for resources and sources of threat to Italian identity.



# 6

## Attitudes Towards Immigration and Refugees

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## 6.1 REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS: DISTINCT CATEGORIES?

The prominence of debate about immigration policies in recent years has raised awareness of the distinctions between different forms of migration. Italians demonstrate relatively high levels of understanding of the definitional differences between refugees, asylum-seekers, migrants, and economic migrants. Tested on these definitions, 67 per cent correctly identified the definition of ‘refugee’, 59 per cent that of ‘asylum-seeker’, and 80 per cent the definition of ‘economic migrant’.

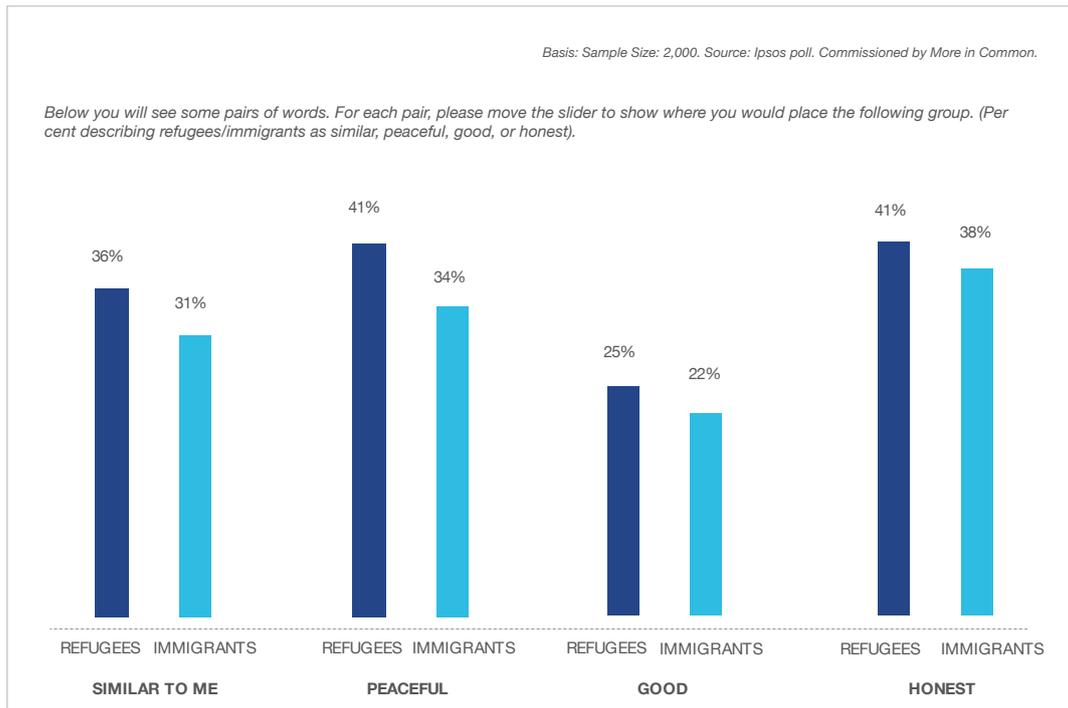
60 per cent of Italians agree that refugees are different from migrants because they had no choice about leaving their home country. Unsurprisingly, the highest levels of agreement with this proposition are among the open segments, but perhaps more surprising is that 70 per cent of the Left Behind, and 63 per cent of the Security Concerned, also agreed. In this respect the middle groups differ from the closed segments, where agreement with this proposition is much lower at 43 and 50 per cent for the Hostile Nationalists and Cultural Defenders respectively. The proportion of Hostile Nationalists that disagree with this proposition is also much higher than for any other segment: 22 per cent disagree strongly, compared to an average of 5 per cent across the population. Only 6 per cent of Cultural Defenders strongly disagree with the proposition, highlighting the intensity of suspicion among the Hostile Nationalist segment.

While Italians are conscious of the distinctions between a refugee and a migrant, most Italians ascribe similar personal attributes to both groups when asked. Refugees are generally perceived slightly more favourably. On the attributes of “good” and “honest”, the difference between refugees and migrants was just 3 per cent; on the attribute of “peaceful” (as opposed to violent), the gap was 7 per cent.

Two factors help to account for this. First, Italians perceive that many who are coming to Italy to claim asylum are not genuine refugees (that is, they are not escaping war or persecution) but are economic migrants, in search of a better life. This is also reflected in public debate which most often refers to newcomers merely as migrants, not making distinctions between different migrant categories. Indeed, half of the asylum claims finalised in 2017 resulted in rejection of the application. Second, as More in Common’s research in other countries has shown, perceptions of migrants and refugees are mainly influenced by individuals’ attitudes towards ‘the other’, i.e. people who are different from them. Those who are more positively disposed towards refugees are also more positively disposed towards welcoming migrants in general, including from non-refugee backgrounds; and the same pattern is largely true for those who oppose refugees and migrants. The vast majority of Italians therefore express similar attitudes towards the reception of refugees and migrants.

It is worth noting as well that around one third of the population does not make generalised character judgments about migrants and refugees. They remain neutral when asked whether migrants and refugees are good, similar, peaceful, or honest. Those who are comfortable to make generalisations about the groups do not distinguish strongly between migrants and refugees.

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## 6.2 THE 'OTHERING' OF REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

Social psychology highlights the important role of group identities in how people perceive others and process information. The group or groups to which we belong, defined by factors such as race, religion, tribe or ideology, influence the way in which we interpret the world around us without us even being consciously aware of those influences.<sup>16</sup> This influence becomes more significant at times when people are feeling more threatened, and they retreat to more narrowly defined group identities.

In circumstances of increased polarisation, people are more likely to view issues through the group identity lens of an in-group that is being threatened by hostile out-groups - in other words, “us” versus “them”. This means that they begin to interpret complex issues through the lens of the potential gains or losses to the in-group. Xenophobic populists intensify the strength of group identities by advancing polarising narratives centred on conflict between the interests of in-groups and out-groups. Public debates in Italy reflect this playbook, with media and politicians who advance narratives around native-born Italians’ interests needing to be defended against the threats from migrants. A typical example is Lega’s claims that Italians are being exploited by migrants who are gaining specific benefits (such as housing and welfare) at the expense of other Italians.

Research on social dynamics and group affiliation has shown that humans experience what is known as intergroup bias. In essence, this means that individuals favour their own group over others, creating what is known as an ‘empathy gap’ toward outsiders. Group membership influences not only people’s beliefs about the world but also how they perceive others’ motivations. They are more likely to view people in perceived threatening groups or rival groups as being alike, an assumption that they would not apply to their own group.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Yudkin, Daniel. 2018. *The Psychology of Authoritarian Populism: A Bird's Eye View*.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

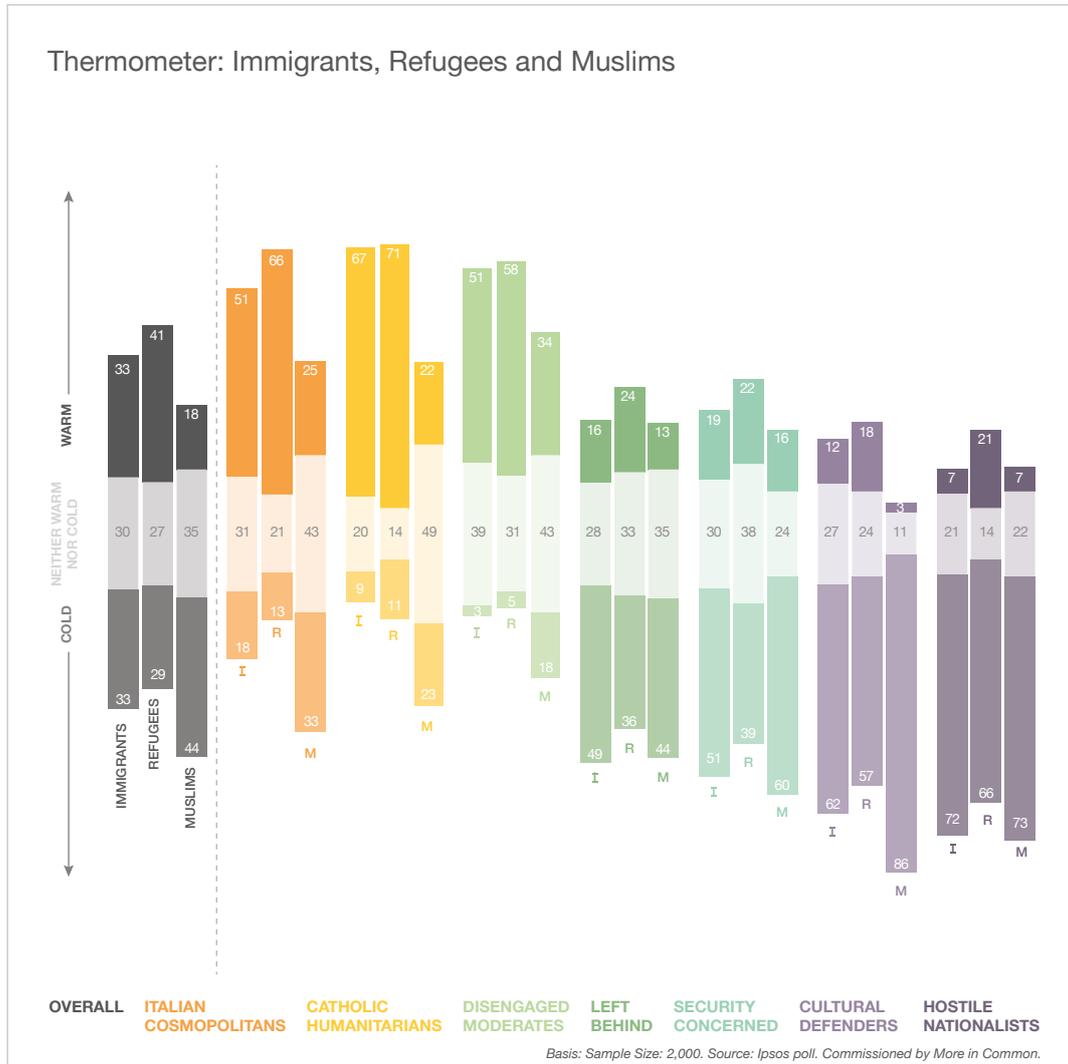
In Italy as in other European countries, migrants and refugees are often seen as an out-group whose members are alike. Only one in three Italians feels that refugees or migrants are similar to them, with a slightly stronger identification with refugees. The strongest sense of identification is felt by the open segments, which helps to explain why they feel greater empathy towards these groups. The Italian Cosmopolitans identify slightly more with migrants (reflecting their stronger emphasis on economic issues) while the Catholic Humanitarians identify slightly more with refugees (reflecting their emphasis on compassion). Among the middle groups, Disengaged Moderates do not make distinctions between refugees and migrants, just like the closed segments. Disengaged Moderates show empathy with migrants, particularly younger ones. They see young migrants as people like them: desperate to find opportunities in a broken system, and willing to work hard (see section 6.3.1.). The Security Concerned are divided almost evenly in how they view refugees and migrants. Although they lean towards seeing refugees and migrants as different, the group is split three ways.

The survey also examined the strength of in-group and out-group feelings through a series of questions including a 'feelings thermometer'. This is a device commonly used in research methodology, in which respondents are asked to express their feelings about other individuals or groups in terms of 'warm' or 'cold' feelings.<sup>18</sup> Warm feelings suggest that respondents identify positively with that individual or group, while cold feelings suggest weak connection or even hostility towards them.

The survey responses revealed large differences in attitudes between the segments, with differences as large as 60 per cent (between the Catholic Humanitarians' 67 per cent "warm" feelings toward migrants, and only 7 per cent of Hostile Nationalists sharing that sentiment). The results confirmed that Italians do not strongly distinguish between migrants and refugees, although they do hold slightly warmer feelings towards refugees. Italian Cosmopolitans, Catholic Humanitarians, and Disengaged Moderates feel warmer towards both groups, while the Left Behind are split towards refugees but colder towards migrants who they view in more negative terms as a threat to their economic interests (see section 6.3.2). The Security Concerned, Cultural Defenders and Hostile Nationalists feel cold towards both groups.

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<sup>18</sup> Lavrakas, Paul. 2008. "Feeling Thermometer" in *Encyclopedia of Survey Research Methods*. Retrieved from <http://methods.sagepub.com/reference/encyclopedia-of-survey-research-methods/n183.xml>



Taken together, the results of the feelings thermometer and similar/different identification question show a clear pattern. Most people in the open segments and Disengaged Moderates seem to view refugees and migrants as part of their in-group. The closed segments, on the contrary, view migrants and refugees negatively and as part of the out-group. Finally, the Left Behind have generally colder attitudes, but they also see migrants and refugees as most distinct.

These findings have important implications for the way in which campaigning organisations target each of the segments of the Italian public. In particular, efforts that focus on strengthening in-group identity with refugees (showing their similarity to Italians), rather than, for example, portraying them as an ‘out-group’ in need of support, may weaken hostility towards them.

### 6.2.1 FOCUS: THE DISENGAGED MODERATES AND IMMIGRATION

Disengaged Moderates are the group least likely to take a stance on immigration issues. People in this segment are primarily concerned with their own future and a perceived lack of opportunities in Italy to get ahead. Many belong to what is sometimes described in Italy as a 'lost generation'. These are young men and women who were told as they were growing up that if they studied they would obtain a secure job and a stable future. Instead, many now find themselves in low-paid, insecure and unrewarding jobs. Some cannot even find employment at all. Others in this segment include pensioners, who are often struggling with limited resources while also viewing the prospects for future generations with concern.

A key point of difference between the Disengaged Moderates and the Left Behind, who have also been hard hit by Italy's extended economic crisis, is that the difficulties faced by Disengaged Moderates appear to have made them more understanding of migrants. They identify similarities between their difficulties and the struggles of migrants. As the quantitative research in section 5 noted, the Disengaged are less likely than any other group to say that migrants are different from them (only 12 per cent say that migrants are different or somewhat different).

The Disengaged Moderates distinguish between migrants who were forced to leave their countries as a result of persecution or conflict, and those who left in search of better opportunities. However they still have empathy for these economic migrants, appearing to identify with the difficulty of their lives and also with their youthful optimism. Disengaged Moderates also make connections between the journey of migrants to Italy today, and migration patterns in Italy's past. They also note Italy's history of regional divisions, where people from the South moved to the northern regions in search of a better life. Similarly, in the past decade many young Italians have gone abroad to improve their career prospects. This readiness to relate migrants' experiences to those of other Italians demonstrates the Disengaged Moderates' willingness to see migrants as part of a larger in-group to which they belong. While they agreed that there are problems with migrants engaging in criminal activity, they did not appear to blame the migrants themselves.

“

Young people, they seem to me to be clever, willing to work, I imagine them alone, without a family and looking for social improvement.”

“

I travelled to Africa, and in ten days I never met a white [person]... people there look at you ... many young people there look at Europe as a mythical place, you felt they wanted change, ... it's a bit like us and the USA.”

“

If you decide to stay in Italy and do not have a job, you're stuck, you become prey for bad people. Maybe you have not even come here with that intention, but then you get entangled into it”

“

... the large companies in the North are Lega supporters but then they take advantage of these people. Italians lose their jobs and are pushed away. Many foreigners are favoured and Italians feel cast aside.”

### 6.2.2 FOCUS: THE LEFT BEHIND AND IMMIGRATION

While many in the Disengaged Moderates segment think of migrants as similar to themselves (and therefore part of their 'in-group'), those in the Left Behind tend to see migrants as an 'out-group' that helps them to define their 'in-group'. For the Left Behind, migrants are not people just like them in distress, but rather are to blame for the new realities that are threatening their own future. They do not reject the idea that they could ever be in solidarity with migrants, but they appear to feel little affinity with them, and would prefer to help them in their countries of origin.

“Wouldn't it be better to help them where they live? To help them with goods, with food, money?”

When asked about the costs and benefits of immigration, they are clear that the costs outweigh the benefits.

The Left Behind associate migrants with rule-breaking and see migrants as people who come to Italy to do harm. In focus group discussions, participants from the Left Behind segment focussed on illegal migrants (the clandestini) when discussing immigration, asserting that they come with a deliberate intention to take advantage of the services that the state provides to Italians and, in some instances, to commit crimes. They also worry that migrants to Italy do not respect the country's rules or culture.

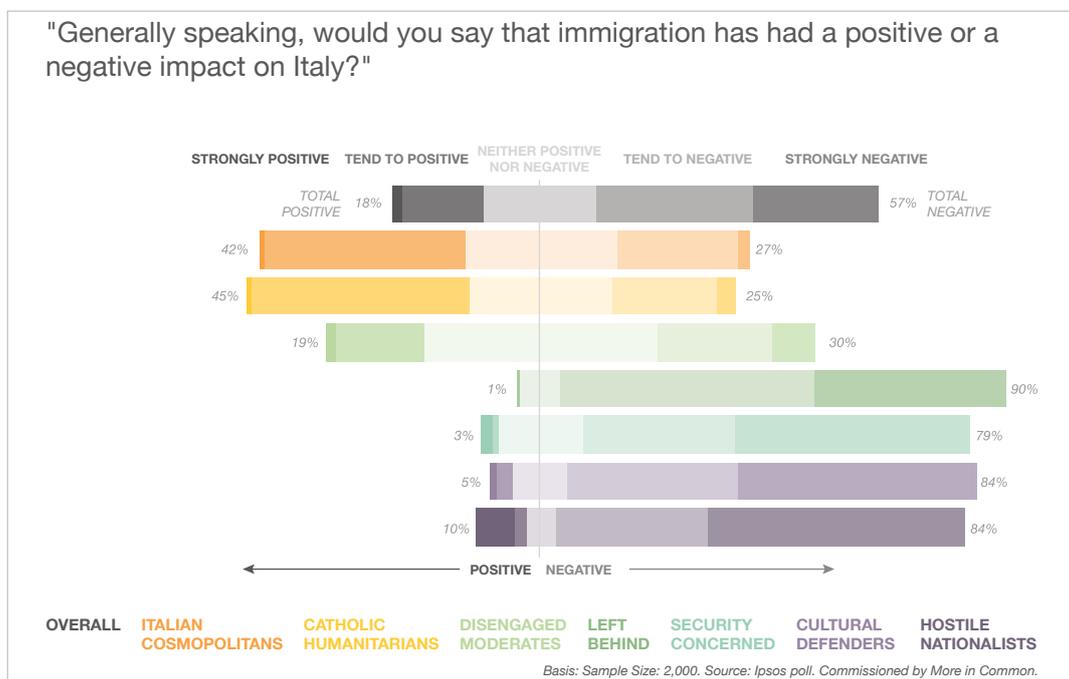
“No respect for the receiving country. We are culturally different. They don't stick to the rules because they come from places where rules do not exist, and we cannot cope with that.”

“I would like them to be well mannered, respectful, to show respect for our culture.”

One reason for emphasising these rules is the low trust that people in the Left Behind segment feel towards the Italian state. Like other segments, they fear a loss of control associated with admitting migrants who do not observe the rules of Italian law and culture (notwithstanding their recognition that Italians often do not follow the rules themselves).

### 6.3 IMPACT OF IMMIGRATION

Like a majority of their European counterparts, Italians generally tend to have negative impressions of the overall impact of immigration in their country. Only 18 per cent of Italians believe that immigration has had a positive impact on Italy, while 57 per cent believe it has had a negative impact (23 per cent state say neither). Even among the open segments and the Disengaged Moderates, more than one in four believe that the effects of immigration have been negative. These views are also consistent across the country, with relatively little regional difference (contrary to common perceptions that northern Italians are more anti-immigration than those in the south).

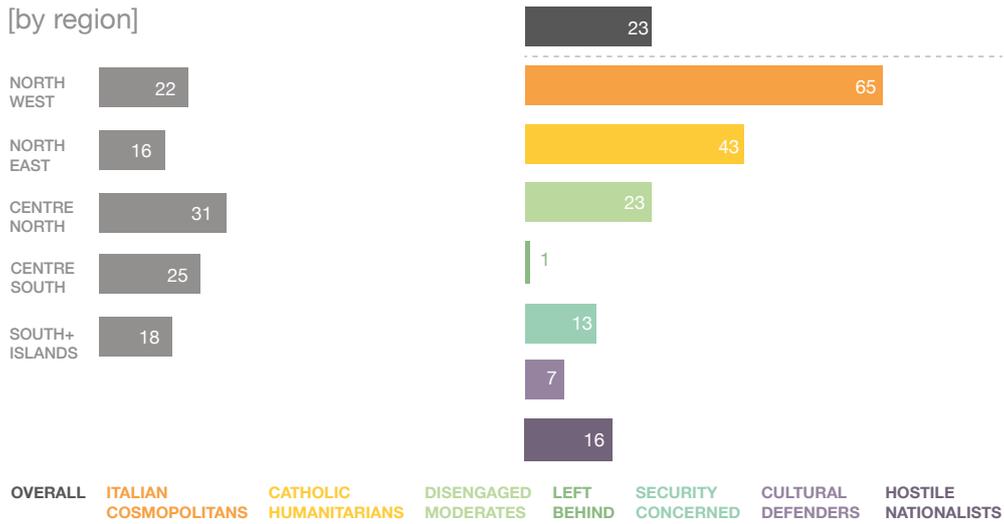


The most widely held negative perceptions associated with immigration in Italy relate to its **economic effects**. Overall, 52 per cent of Italians believe that the impact of immigration on the economy is negative, while just 23 per cent believe it is positive. A quarter chose neither response. Only the open segments have higher positive than negative assessments of its economic impact. The Left Behind segment's concern for economic issues is reflected in having the least positive view (1 per cent) and the most negative view (84 per cent).

One perception that emerges from the study is the widespread belief that immigration has divided Italy. Even among the open segments, one-third of Italians believe that immigration has contributed to social divisions. The question of the cultural impact of immigration divides the segments. Italian cosmopolitans (73 per cent) embrace immigration for making Italy a more vibrant and exciting place to live. However, 86 per cent of Cultural Defenders disagree. Overall, only 26 per cent of Italians agree that immigration has been good for Italian culture, while 46 per cent disagree. A further 26 per cent chose neither response.

“Immigration nowadays is good for the Italian economy, bringing in new skills, new opportunities, and drive to succeed”

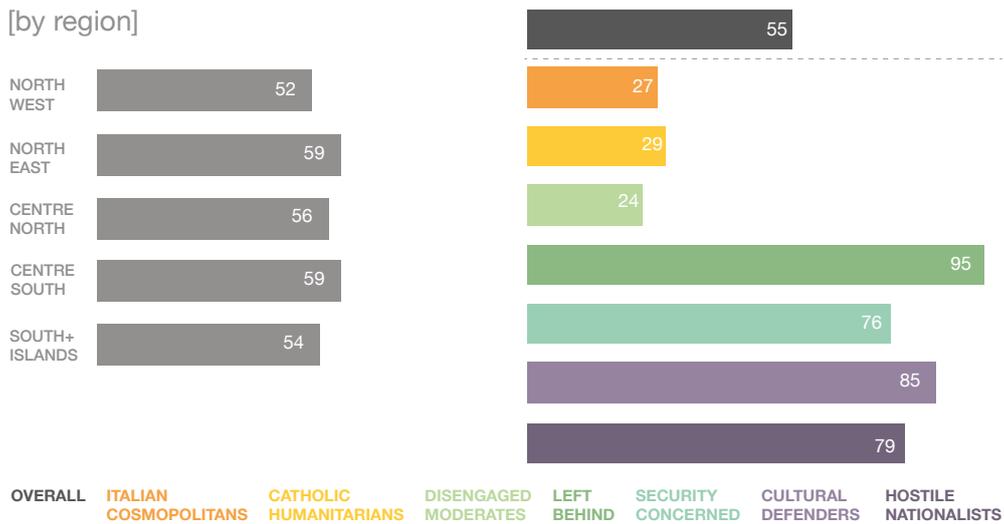
[by region]



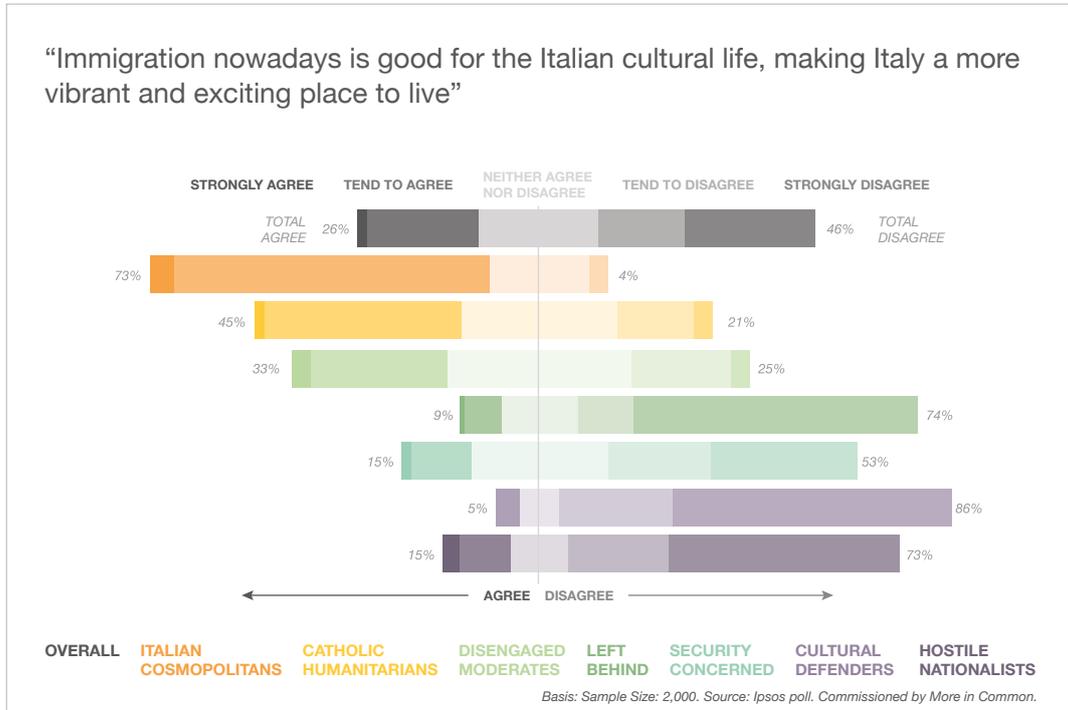
Basis: Sample Size: 2,000. Source: Ipsos poll. Commissioned by More in Common.

“Immigration nowadays is bad for Italy, costing the welfare state and draining resources which could be spent on Italians”

[by region]



Basis: Sample Size: 2,000. Source: Ipsos poll. Commissioned by More in Common.



According to a 2018 Ipsos study of 27 countries, Italy has lower public trust in migrants who have come to live and work in their country than all but three other nations.

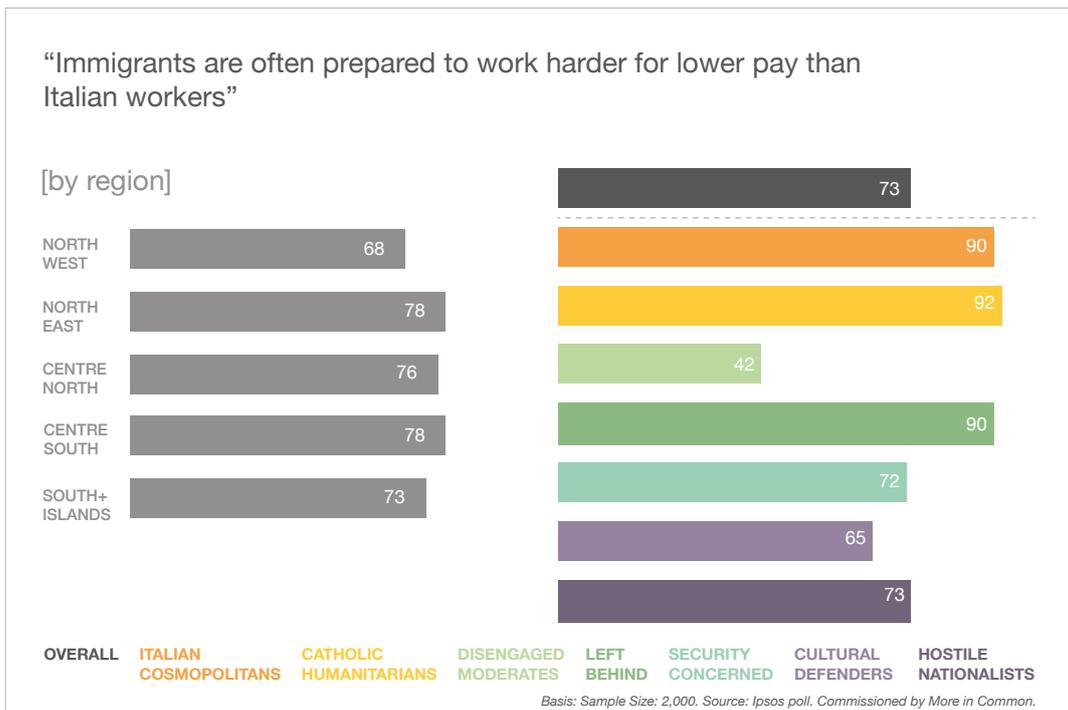
The lack of jobs and pessimism about persistent unemployment means that economic concerns play a greater role in shaping attitudes towards migrants in Italy. Although these concerns are shared across many segments, the Left Behind segment consistently shows the highest level of concern about the economic effects of immigration. The Left Behind overwhelmingly believe (83 per cent) that immigration is bad for the economy due to the fact that migrants displace native born Italians in the labour market. In conversations, some claimed that jobs in Italy are now the monopoly of migrants. Within the Left Behind segment, 90 per cent agree that migrants are often prepared to work harder for lower pay than Italian workers but when it comes to hiring policies, they believe that preference should be given to Italians.

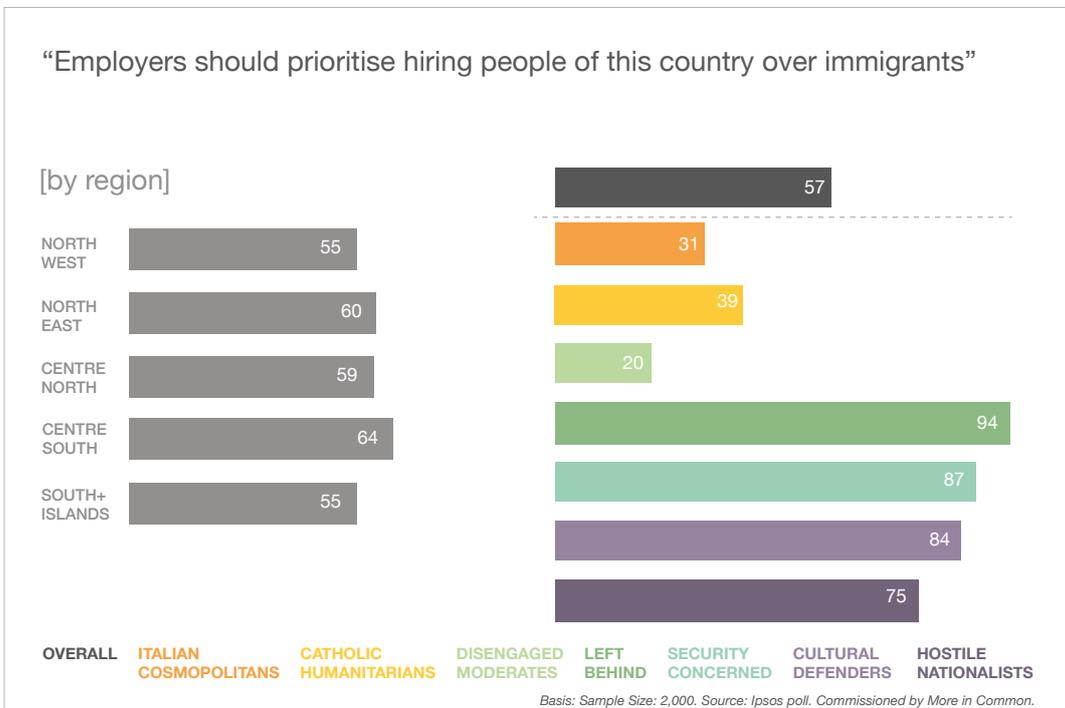
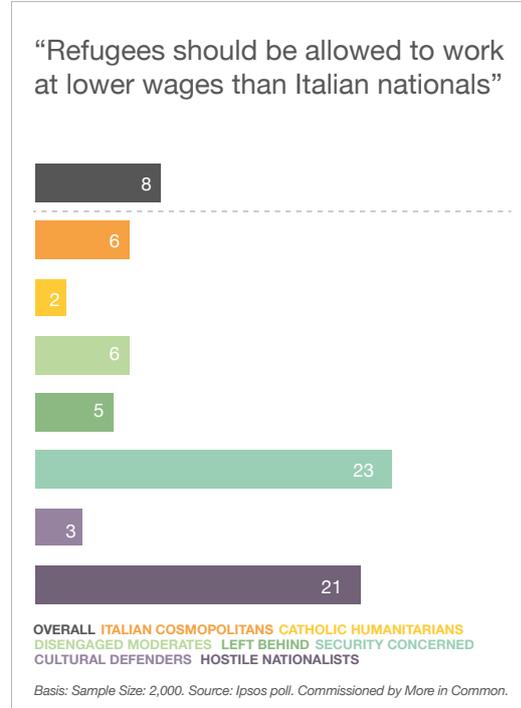
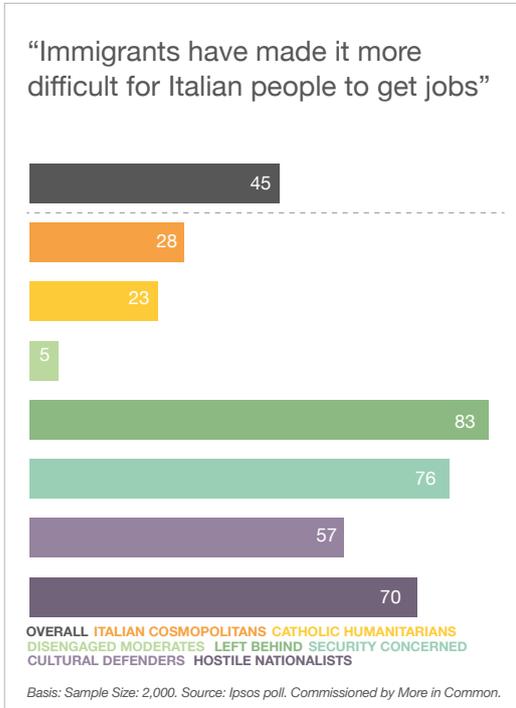
“

There are jobs which are their monopoly ... think of the caregivers.”

“

There is a business behind that, think of the shelters, managed by the politicians. Politicians are taking advantage of that, as the labour costs are getting lower and lower. It is not true that without migrants we would have no caregivers. An Italian cooperative will sack the Italian employees and keep the strangers.”





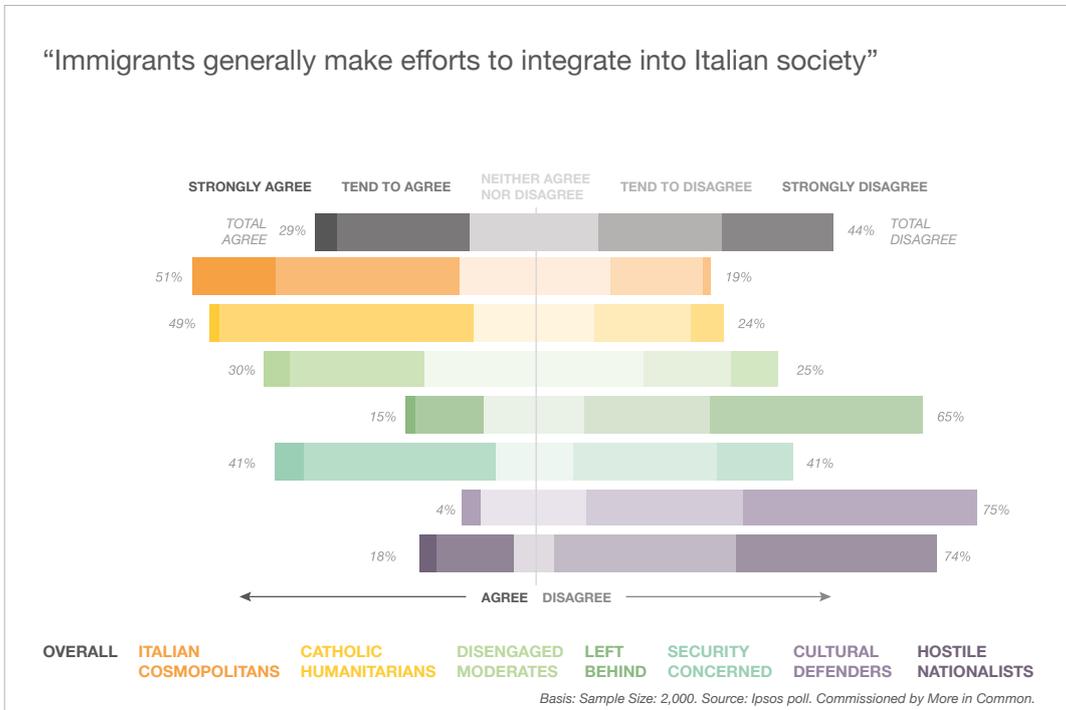
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The closed segments largely agree with the Left Behind, but levels of agreement with negative elements of the arguments are not as high. The Disengaged Moderates are least likely to hold migrants responsible for Italians being out of work, and are least supportive of policies that give preference to Italians over newcomers for jobs.

Given these findings, few Italians support the passage of special labour laws or regulations to help refugees find work. Italians overwhelmingly reject the idea that refugees should be allowed to work for lower wages than Italian nationals, with only 8 per cent agreeing. Curiously the strongest support for this idea comes from the Hostile Nationalists (21 per cent) and the Security Concerned (23 per cent), perhaps reflecting the fact that they are less concerned about the economic issues associated with migrants.

The concerns of Italians about the integration of migrants reflects similar concerns evident in other European countries, including their economic contribution, their willingness to adapt or conform to local laws and culture, their loyalty to Italy and a weaknesses from the government to handle integration. Overall, just 29 per cent of the population believes that migrants make efforts to integrate into Italian society, but there is a split between open, middle and closed segments:

- The open groups believe that migrants integrate (51-19 per cent of the Italian Cosmopolitans; 49-24 per cent of the Catholic Humanitarians).
- The middle segments are less sure: while there is 30-25 per cent agreement among the Disengaged Moderates, 41 per cent express no opinion. The Security Concerned are evenly split between 41 per cent both ways, while the Left Behind (who believe most are economic migrants) strongly disagree, 65-15 per cent.
- The closed groups are undivided, with three quarters of the Cultural Defenders and Hostile Nationalists believing that migrants do not make efforts to integrate.



Conversations with the Disengaged Moderates and the Left Behind provide further insights into the starkly different perspectives of these two middle groups. The Disengaged Moderates are generally confident that integration is possible:

“

You might be born in an Egyptian household, but you’re born here, you are interested in the future of this country, you do not live disconnected from what goes on...”

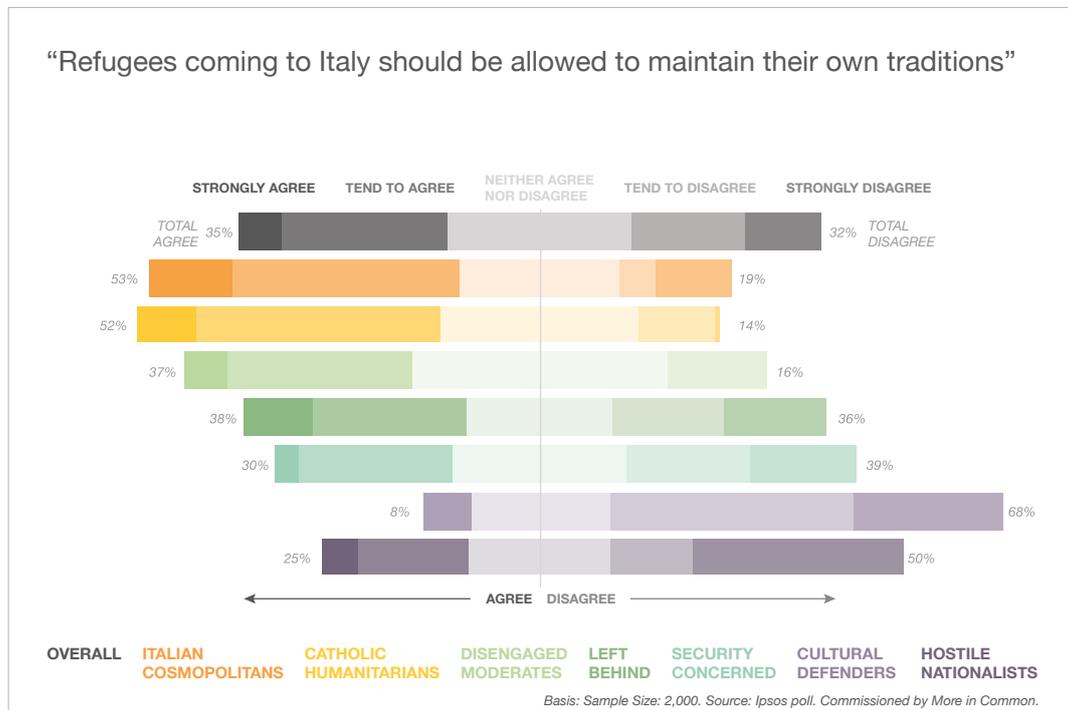
To the extent that some migrants are not integrating successfully, Disengaged Moderates are likely to blame Italian institutions, rather than migrants themselves. They would like to see integration work more effectively, but they believe that the migrant welcoming process and integration efforts are poorly run.

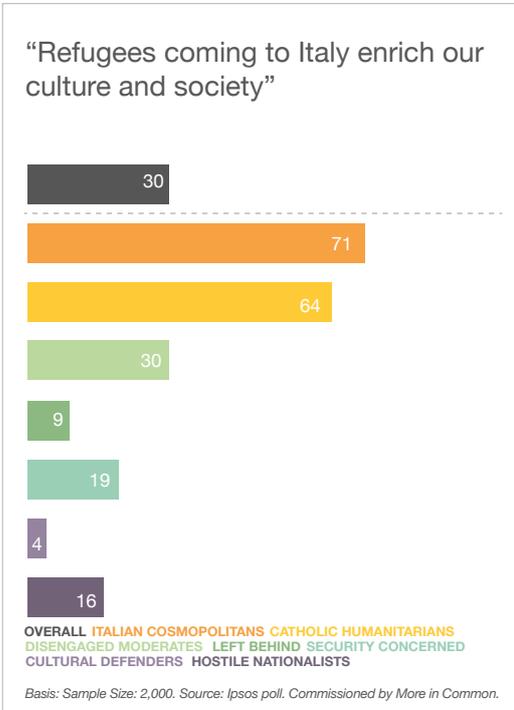
“

These people are ready to do their good share, but very often they are stuck, compelled to wait for papers, for a job, for an opportunity to learn Italian ... at a given point they get lost.”

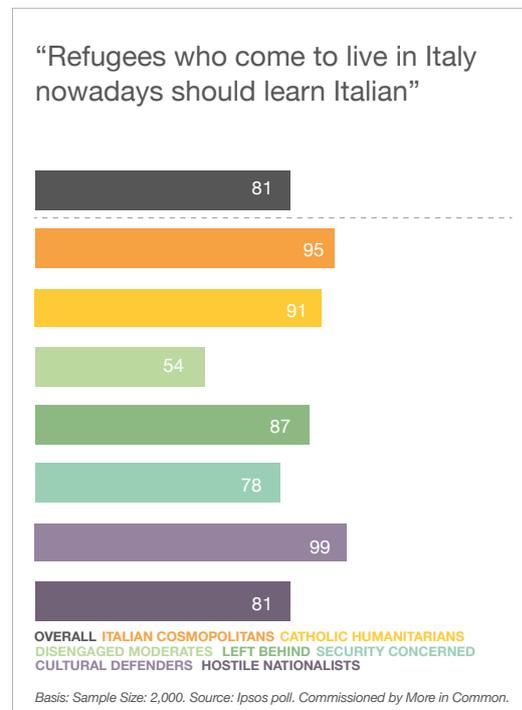
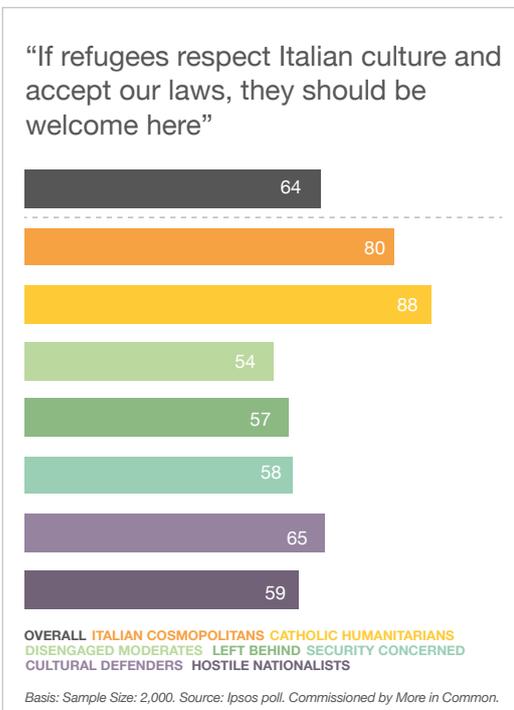
In contrast, when the Left Behind see integration failing, they tend to blame refugees for not putting in the effort of pursuing an education, finding a job, paying taxes, having their papers and sharing an Italian way of living. For them, integration involves migrants taking the initiative of assimilating into Italian culture and not just abiding by laws. Many of the Left Behind doubt that someone coming from abroad can truly become Italian.

Questions about the role of migrants’ cultural traditions once they have become a part of Italian society are a source of disagreement among Italians, and also a source of uncertainty for many. While 35 per cent agree that refugees should be able to maintain their traditions, 31 per cent neither agree nor disagree, and 32 per cent disagree. In each segment there are large numbers of people who neither agree nor disagree. Cultural Defenders more than any other segment feel that refugees should not be able to maintain their own traditions (68 per cent). They also disagree with the argument that most that refugees coming to Italy enrich Italian culture and society (74 per cent). Hostile Nationalists feel similarly: 73 per cent of them disagree that refugees enrich Italy’s culture, and correspondingly only 1 in 4 believe that they should be able to maintain their own traditions. At the other end of the spectrum, 53 per cent of both the Catholic Humanitarians and the Italian Cosmopolitans, believe that migrants should be able to maintain their traditions.



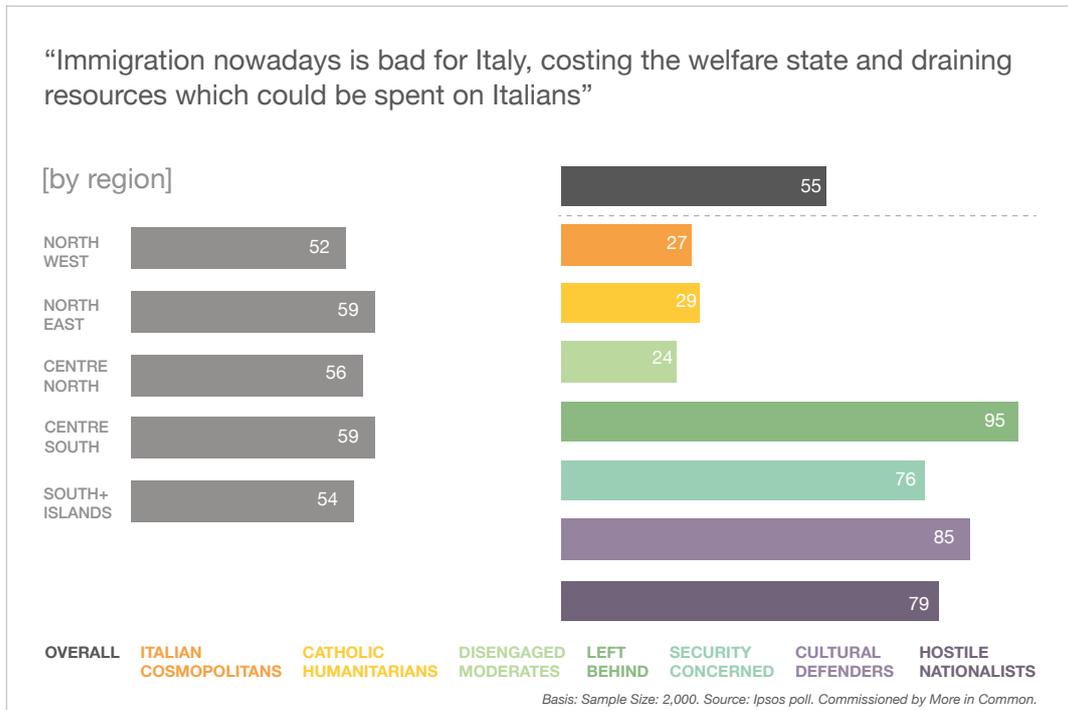


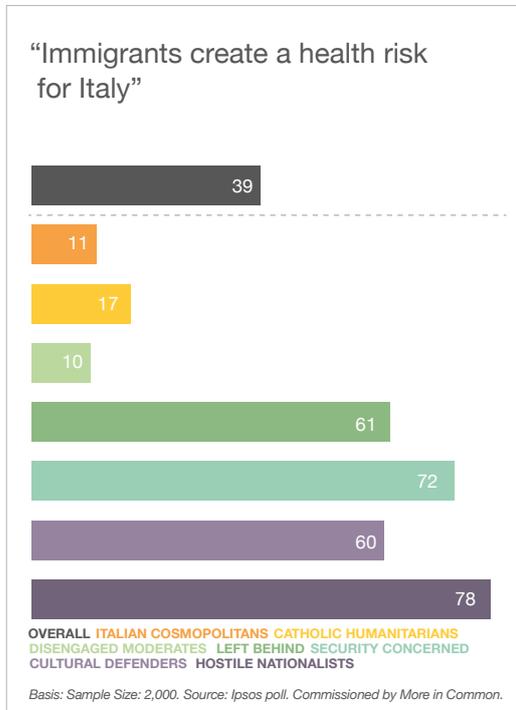
One consequence of these concerns about integration is that all segments welcome the notion that migrants should respect Italian culture and laws. Roughly two-thirds (64 per cent) of Italians agree with the proposition that refugees should be welcome in Italy if they respect Italian culture and accept Italian laws. This highlights a practical insight from moral foundations theory. Given that authority and loyalty are powerful values for many people, seeing the way in which migrants respect Italian laws, customs and show loyalty to Italian identity might help those in closed and middle groups begin to see migrants as belonging to their in-group, rather than an out-group. Even 65 per cent of the Cultural Defenders agree that if refugees respect laws and culture they should be welcome, as do 57 per cent of the Left Behind, 72 per cent of the Security Concerned and 54 per cent of Disengaged Moderates.



Three other features of attitudes relating to migrants in Italy are worth noting briefly. The first is that the one policy on which all Italians come together on integration, is the importance of refugees learning Italian. As many as 81 per cent of Italians believe that refugees who come to live in Italy should learn Italian (support is lowest among the Disengaged Moderates at 54 per cent, but this reflects the pattern in this segment that around 30 per cent tend not to express an issue on these issues). This suggests that the promotion and celebration of Italian language might be able to bring Italians together and demonstrate the enthusiasm of migrants for fully participating in Italian culture and society.

The second is that although north/south regional differences remain influential in society and politics, Italians across all regions appear to share similar views relating to immigration and the economy.





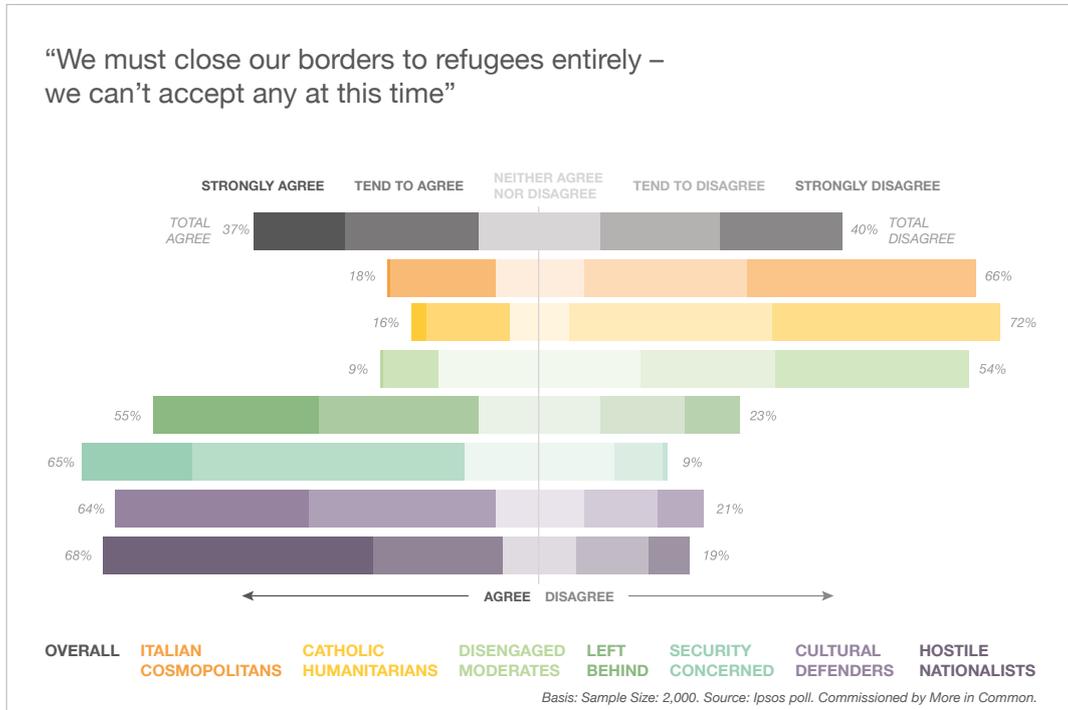
A third insight worth noting is a feature of the immigration debate in Italy that is less common elsewhere in Europe: the link in the public mind between immigration and threats to public health. According to 39 per cent of Italians, migrants create a health risk for Italy (15 per cent strongly agree and 24 per cent somewhat agree). Only 35 per cent of Italians disagree with this proposition. The notion that migrants pose a health risk is most strongly felt by the Hostile Nationalists (78 per cent) and the Security Concerned (72 per cent). Neither the open segments nor the Disengaged Moderates agree with the proposition.

## 6.4 ATTITUDES TOWARDS REFUGEES

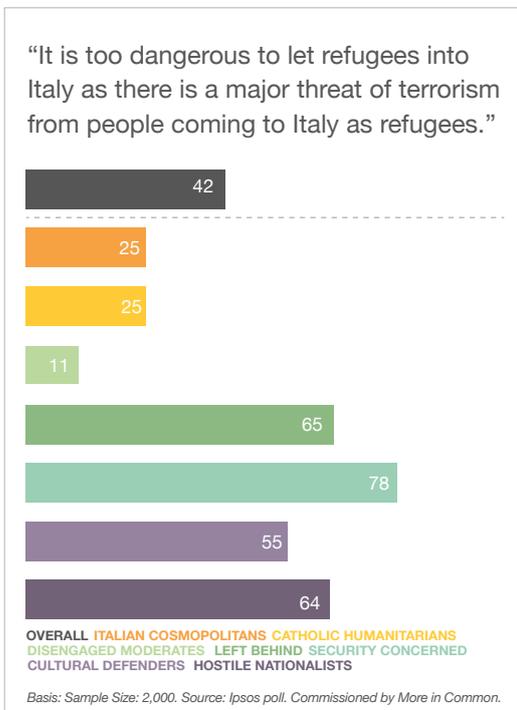
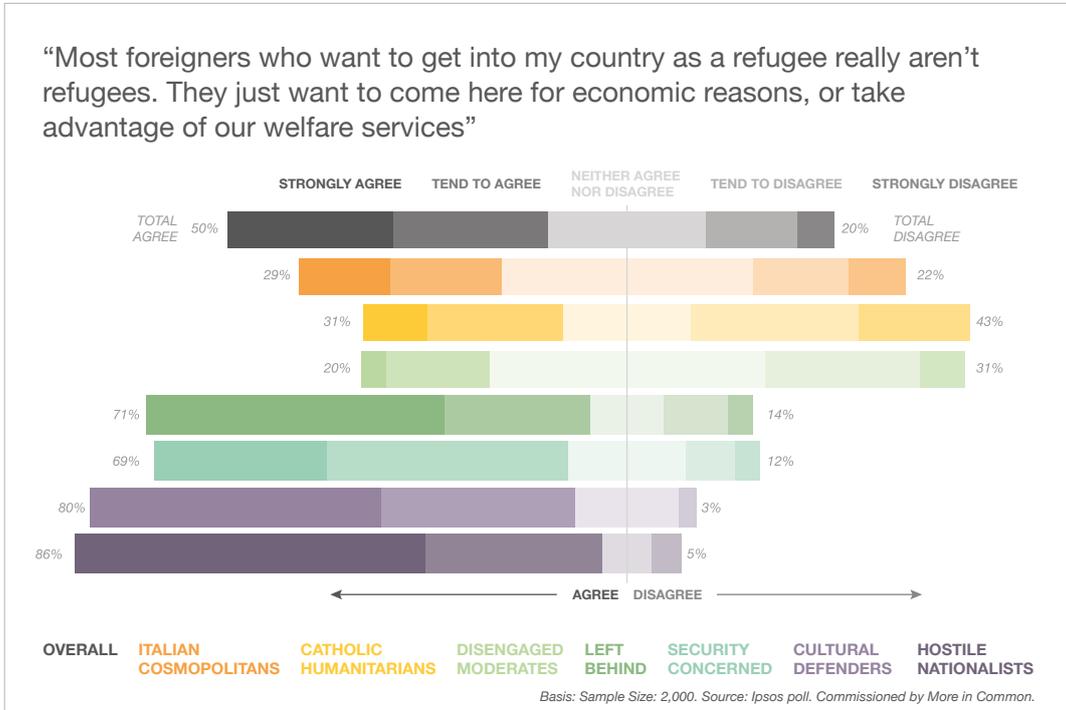
Perceptions of refugees and migrants are closely intertwined, in part because the underlying drivers of those perceptions (an individual’s likelihood to perceive a refugee or migrant as an in-group or out-group member) are the same, and in part because of the circumstances of migrants arriving in Italy, which combine elements of seeking asylum and economic migration. Support for the principle that people should be able to take refuge in other countries such as Italy to escape from war and persecution is 72 per cent in Italy, the same level as the average across 12 countries measured in the 2017 Tent Tracker survey<sup>19</sup>. Only 9 per cent of Italians disagree with this principle. Support for the principle of asylum is consistent across segments, with higher levels of support among the Catholic Humanitarians, Italian Cosmopolitans and the Left Behind. Despite support for asylum in principle, Italians are much less supportive of receiving more refugees in the current environment. This reflects a combination of factors, such as perceptions of Italy’s economic weakness, the challenges associated with absorbing the large intake of migrants in recent years and the fact that many asylum seekers who have come across the Mediterranean do not qualify as refugees under international law.

Segments react in very different ways to the polarising proposition: “Most foreigners who want to get into my country as a refugee aren’t really refugees. They just want to come here for economic reasons, or to take advantage of our welfare services.” Exactly 50 per cent of Italians agree with this statement, including as many as 86 per cent of the Hostile Nationalists, 80 per cent of the Cultural Defenders, but only 20 per cent of the Disengaged Moderates and 29 per cent of the Italian Cosmopolitans.

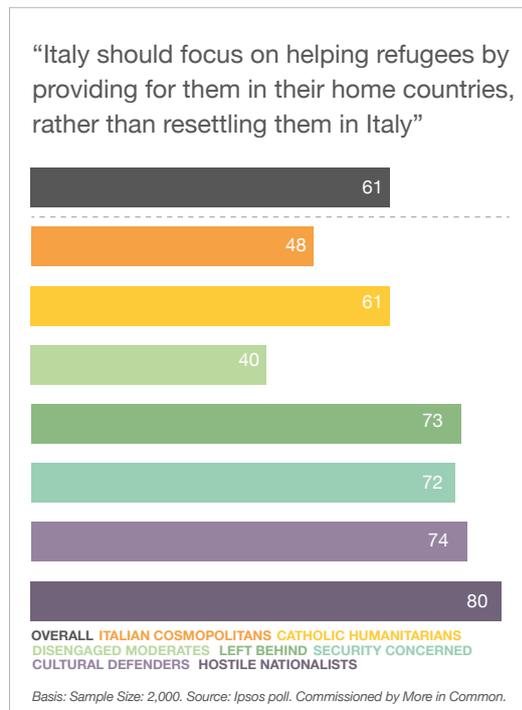
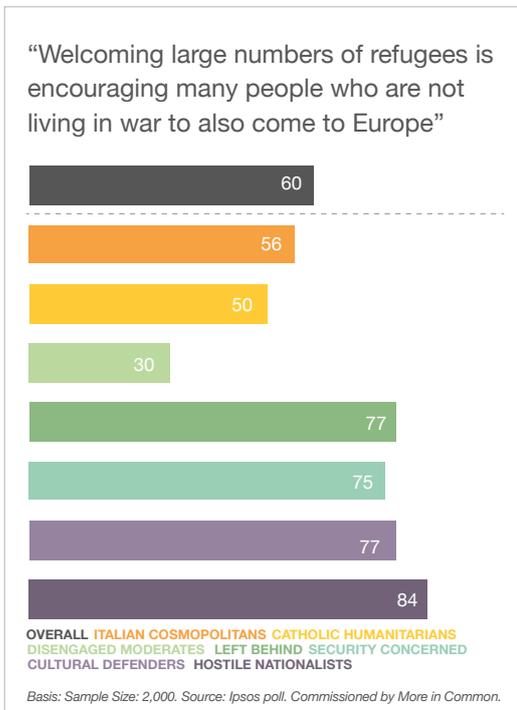
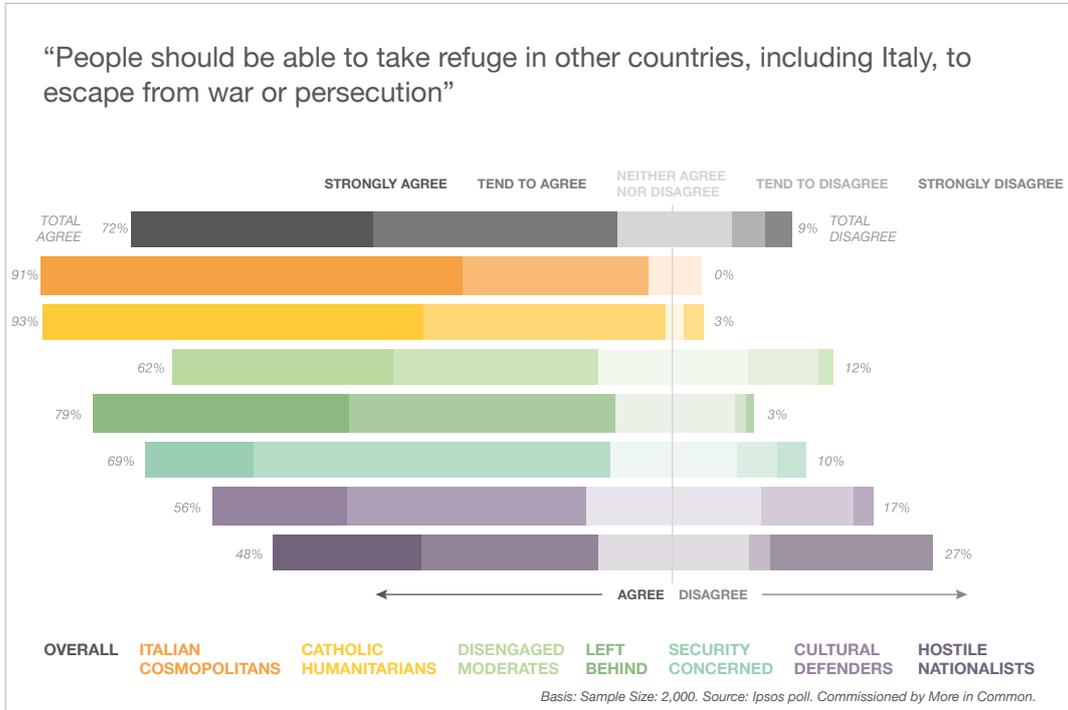
19 Tent Foundation. 2017. Public Perceptions of the Refugee Crisis. Retrieved from: <https://www.tent.org/resources/tent-tracker-public-perceptions-refugee-crisis-2017/>



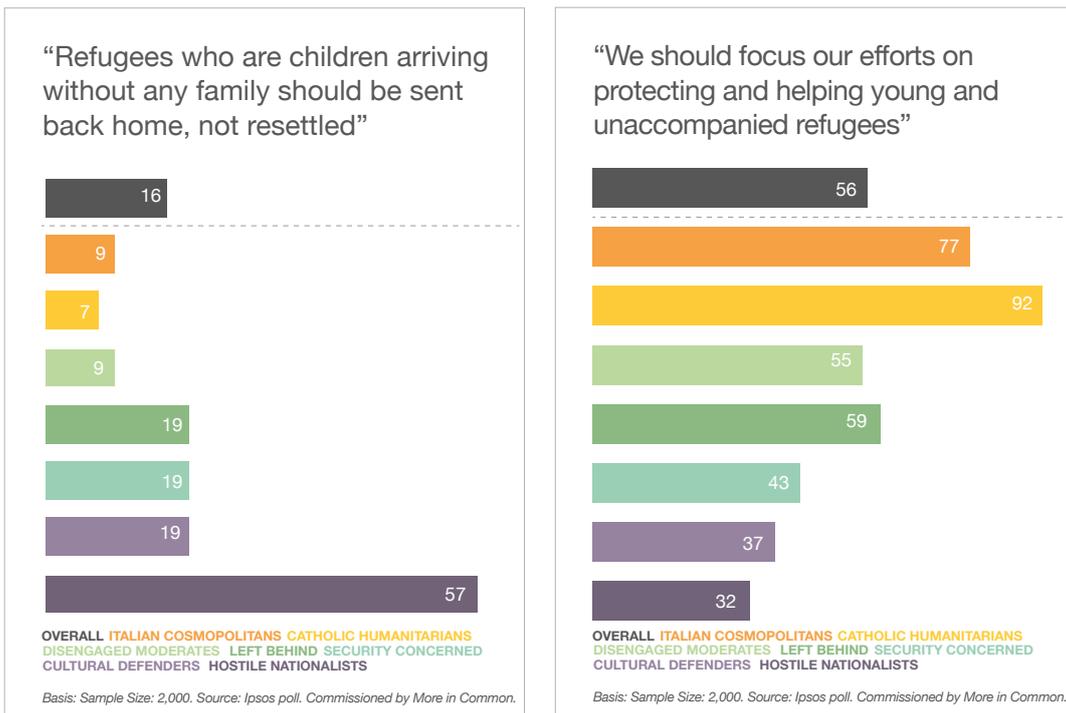
An important finding from the research concerns the level and intensity of support for the proposition that Italy cannot afford to accept any refugees at this time and should close its borders. This has the strong support of only 15 per cent of Italians, and overall support of 37 per cent. It is opposed by 40 per cent (with 21 per cent saying neither). The segment most opposed to shutting migrants out is the Disengaged Moderates, followed by the Catholic Humanitarians. The Hostile Nationalists are most supportive of border closure (a total of 68 per cent support), while the Security Concerned, and Cultural Defenders also agree, but are not quite as convinced. 55 per cent of the Left Behind also agree.



The attitudes of Italians towards refugees are strongly influenced by their own values and priorities. For example, there is 78 per cent agreement with the proposition that refugees coming to Italy pose a major threat of terrorism within the Security Concerned segment, higher even than the Hostile Nationalists and the Left Behind (at 65 and 55 per cent respectively). Most also agree instinctively with the proposition that allowing newcomers to stay will encourage more to come, including those who merely want a better life.



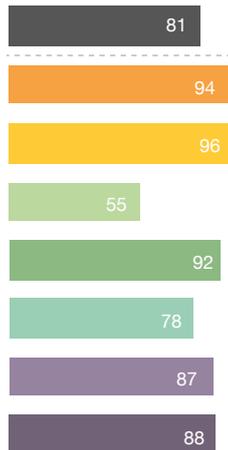
Given the option of Italy focusing on providing for refugees in their home countries rather than resettling them in Italy, 61 per cent of Italians choose the former. Support for this proposition range from 48 per cent of Italian Cosmopolitans to 80 per cent of Hostile Nationalists, 74 per cent of the Cultural Defenders, 73 per cent of the Left Behind, and 61 per cent of the Catholic Humanitarians. Disengaged Moderates are far less certain, with only 40 per cent agreeing, 12 per cent disagreeing and 40 per cent neither.



Refugee children constitute an exception in the minds of many Italians, with much higher levels of support for their resettlement in Italy. There is widespread agreement on prioritising support for young and unaccompanied refugees. 56 per cent of Italians support this proposition and only 13 per cent oppose it. The Catholic Humanitarians, followed by the Italian Cosmopolitans, are the segments most strongly supportive of focusing on the young. The Hostile Nationalists (32 per cent) and the Cultural Defenders (37 per cent) are the least supportive while the Left Behind particularly (and to a lesser degree, the Security Concerned) side with the open segments. This is a good illustration of why the Left Behind and Security Concerned belong in the middle, even though on many issues they may share views with the closed segments.

Further evidence of the greater sympathy among Italians for the circumstances of children comes from the 60 per cent agreement that unaccompanied children should not be sent back to their former countries. Only among the Hostile Nationalists is there a majority (57 per cent) in favour of sending them to their home countries and not allowing them to be resettled in Italy.

“The European Union must do more to help Italy respond to the migration crisis”



OVERALL ITALIAN COSMOPOLITANS CATHOLIC HUMANITARIANS  
 DISENGAGED MODERATES LEFT BEHIND SECURITY CONCERNED  
 CULTURAL DEFENDERS HOSTILE NATIONALISTS

Basis: Sample Size: 2,000. Source: Ipsos poll. Commissioned by More in Common.

One issue that brings all segments together is the view that the European Union should step up its role to support Italy. An unambiguous 81 per cent of Italians believe that the EU should do more to help Italy respond to the migration crisis. 51 per cent of Italians say that Italy should not continue to support refugees unless wealthier European countries contribute much more.

#### 6.4.1 FOCUS: THE DISENGAGED MODERATES AND REFUGEES

In conversation, Disengaged Moderates discuss refugees as people who had no choice but to leave their home country and seek protection elsewhere. The prominence of conflicts in the Middle East in national news, leads many to feel sympathetic as they understand the genuine reasons people have to leave their home countries. They are welcoming and hospitable and do not believe that hospitality encourages greater numbers of people to come to Italy. They are also more likely to identify positive examples of refugees who are doing their best in very difficult circumstances:

“

Like that guy, a refugee... he cannot have a job, so he keeps a street in Milano clean; he bought a broom and he sweeps the dirt and trash away. People are happy to see that he's playing his part in our society.”

To the extent that they are critical of Italy's immigration policies, Disengaged Moderates tend to be critical of the state and its agencies rather than individual refugees. Nevertheless, many hold back from expressing opinions on controversial issues, and do not see a reason to involve themselves in following news about the migration crisis or helping out directly.

#### 6.4.2 FOCUS: THE LEFT BEHIND AND REFUGEES

The Left Behind are more distrustful than the Disengaged Moderates and have less empathy towards refugees. They recognise the moral imperative to welcome refugees and this matters more to them than the formalities of international treaties that Italy has entered. They want to limit assistance to people who they feel are truly escaping from an emergency and dislike the idea that refugees have rights to demand help from Italians.

“

I don't want to feel obliged by someone, otherwise things change.”

On the surface, the Left Behind draw a distinction between migrants and refugees. They recognise that refugees are people in need of protection and empathise with them. They view refugees as people who are “scared, hungry, grateful, cooperative, and honest”. People who would prefer to go back to their country of origin but cannot. However, they suspect that the overwhelming majority of newcomers to Italy are not refugees, but “clandestini” (illegal migrants).

“

Refugees are scared, hungry, grateful, cooperative and honest. Migrants are not poor people because travelling costs money. [The migrant is] overbearing, allergic to rules, to habits, he's clever and doesn't know the meaning of democracy.”

#### 6.5 NGOS AND ACTIVITIES IN SUPPORT OF REFUGEES

The Italian values of hospitality, welcome and care for the poor are reflected in the practical efforts of Italians to help refugees. Over the past twelve months, one quarter of Italians have done something, online or offline, to support refugees. One in six Italians made a financial donation or donated clothing, food or other items to help out. This was the most common way that Italians of all ages and in all regions provided help. Italian millennials are the age group most active in support of refugees. People in the 18-30 age range were six times as likely as other age categories to take part in a rally to support refugees, and at least twice as likely to volunteer their time. They were also at least twice as likely to have shared positive stories about refugees online, in part a reflection of their higher social media usage. A greater share of Italian students donated something to help refugees than retired Italians.

The survey offers confirmation of social contact theory and the influence of social networks. Italians who have personal contact with someone who is a refugee or an immigrant are significantly more likely to do something to help refugees. In fact, Italians who know a refugee personally are more than twice as likely to donate, six times more likely to volunteer and six times more likely to attend a pro-refugee rally than those who do not. Similarly, Italians who know a migrant are three times more likely to both donate or volunteer. Having volunteers in one's network also makes someone more likely to take action themselves, highlighting the importance of social networks. Italians who know someone who volunteers to help refugees are themselves five times more likely to volunteer, three times more likely to donate, and seven times more likely to share positive stories online, than those who do not have this contact.

	TOTAL	ITALIAN COSMOPOLITANS	CATHOLIC HUMANITARIANS	DISENGAGED MODERATES	LEFT BEHIND	SECURITY CONCERNED	CULTURAL DEFENDERS	HOSTILE NATIONALISTS
Made a financial donation or donation of food, clothing, or other items to help refugees	16%	21%	34%	15%	21%	5%	5%	15%
Shared positive stories about refugees online	7%	27%	9%	8%	1%	12%	2%	1%
Contacted a politician or signed a petition to ask them to support refugees	2%	10%	6%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%
Volunteered some of your time to help refugees	4%	16%	5%	5%	4%	4%	0%	0%
Personally welcomed one or more refugees into your home	1%	2%	0%	1%	1%	1%	0%	2%
Taken part in a rally to support refugees and their rights	3%	16%	5%	4%	0%	0%	2%	1%
None of these	69%	46%	53%	60%	74%	74%	90%	79%

	know someone who is a refugee		know someone who is an immigrant		know someone who volunteers for helping refugees	
	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Made a financial donation or donation of food, clothing, or other items to help refugees	14%	35%	9%	30%	10%	36%
Shared positive stories about refugees online	6%	7%	5%	9%	3%	21%
Contacted a politician or signed a petition to ask them to support refugees	2%	5%	2%	4%	1%	7%
Volunteered some of your time to help refugees	3%	19%	2%	7%	2%	11%
Personally welcomed one or more refugees into your home	1%	4%	1%	2%	0%	4%
Taken part in a rally to support refugees and their rights	2%	13%	1%	5%	1%	9%
None of these	72%	43%	74%	59%	77%	39%

The efforts of non-government organisations to help refugees in Italy have received prominent media coverage, in particular the efforts to save migrants from drowning at sea. This has raised concerns among Italians. Most believe responsibility lies with the European Union (69 per cent) or the national government (30 per cent). Just 16 per cent of Italians believe that NGOs should take more responsibility to help refugees, although this may reflect different

motivations: some taking the view that this is a government responsibility, others that they do not trust NGOs.

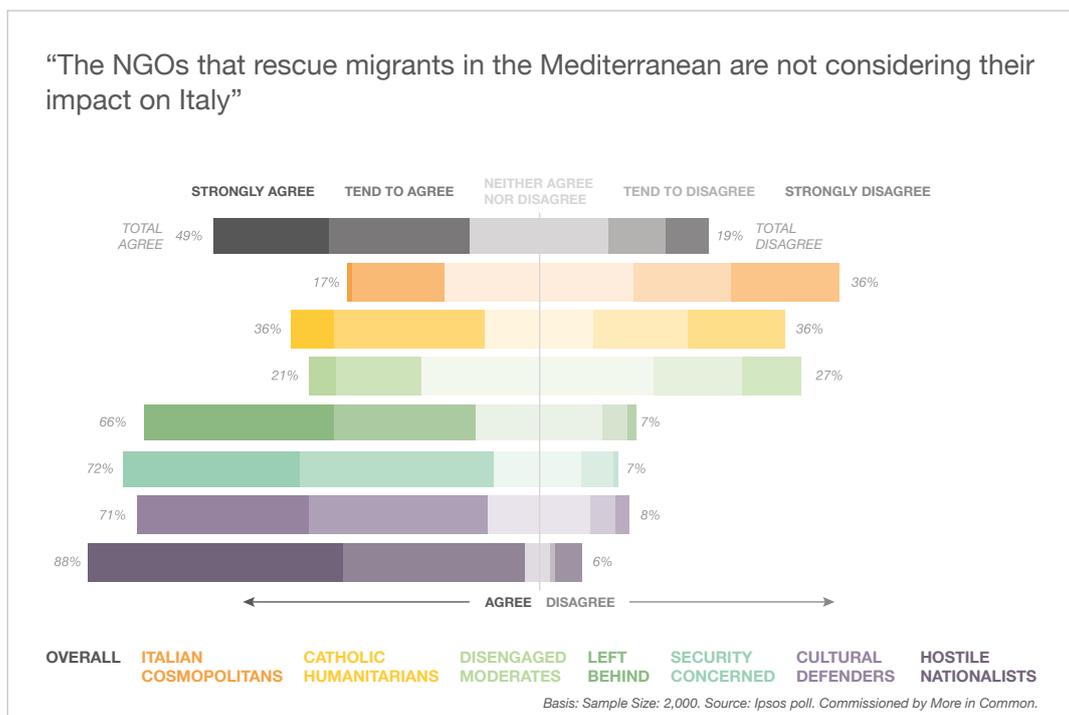
As mentioned in section 4.2 between 2017 and 2018 there was a significant decline in trust in NGOs, from 59 to 46 per cent. This was the largest decline in trust of any institution in Italy, related to both the high-profile role of boats operated by NGOs in the Mediterranean and allegations of misuse of funds provided to migrant shelters in Italy.<sup>20</sup> Overall, 49 per cent of Italians believe that NGOs that rescue migrants in the Mediterranean are not considering their impact on Italy (just 27 per cent disagree). This view is even shared by 40 per cent of the “usual donors to NGOs”. The closed segments hold this view most strongly (88 per cent of Hostile Nationalists agree, as do 72 per cent of Security Concerned, 71 per cent of Cultural Defenders and the 66 per cent of the Left Behind). Conversations with Italians in the Left Behind segment demonstrated suspicions about the motives of NGOs:



The complicity between them and the smugglers has been demonstrated...their boats send a signal and move towards the Libyan shores to collect migrants. In the past migrants were risking their lives out at sea, now the NGOs are almost picking them up at their doors.”



I wouldn't be able to name any, but I don't trust any of them, they are thieves.”

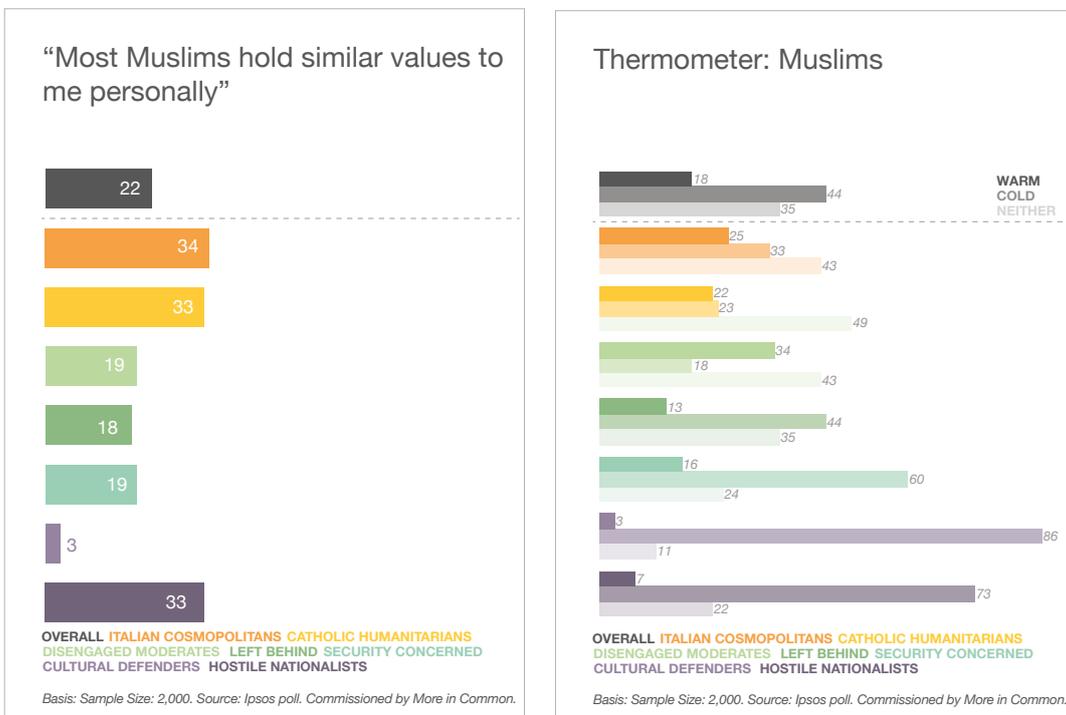


20 Edelman Trust Barometer - Italy Report. 2018.

# 7

## Attitudes Towards Muslims

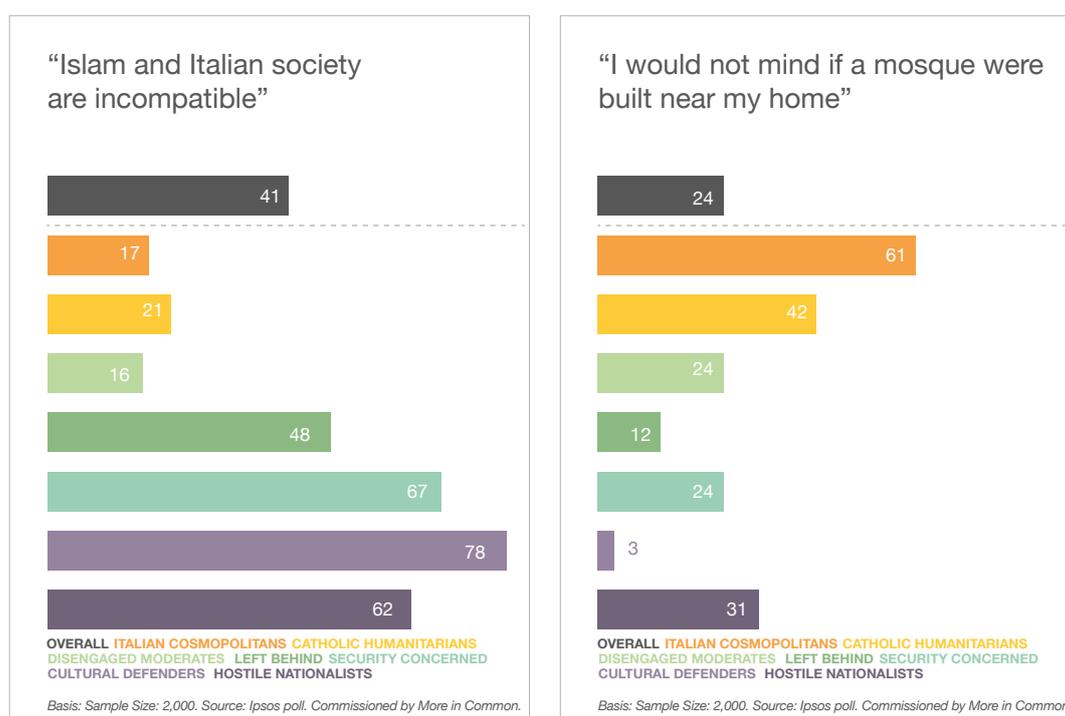
Muslim communities in Italy have increasingly become a focus of xenophobia, alongside people from Roma and Jewish backgrounds. Terrorist attacks in France, Germany, Belgium, Britain and other countries in recent years, have been exploited by right-wing populist voices in politics and the Italian media, intensifying public fear of Italy’s small but growing Muslim population. Public opinion polling has highlighted a wide gap between reality and perception of the size of Italy’s Muslim population. The 2016 Ipsos Perils of Perception report reported that on average, Italians believe that Muslims constitute 20 per cent of the population, in contrast to the reality of around 3 per cent<sup>21</sup>. This gap between reality and perceptions about the size of the Muslim population is larger in Italy than in all but three of the 40 countries surveyed.



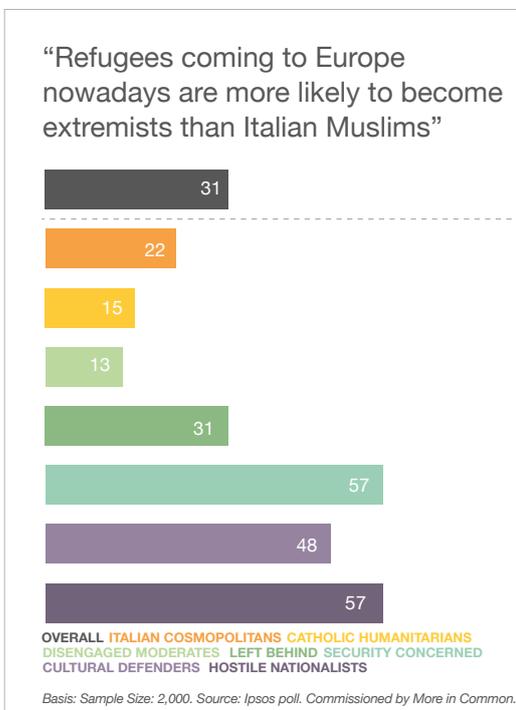
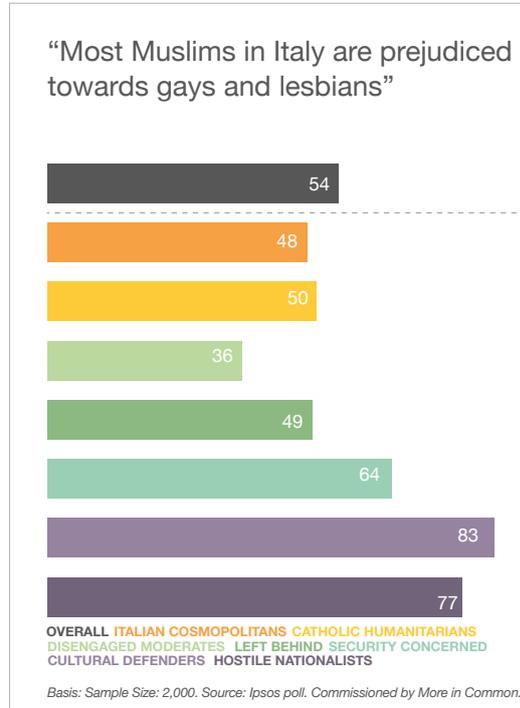
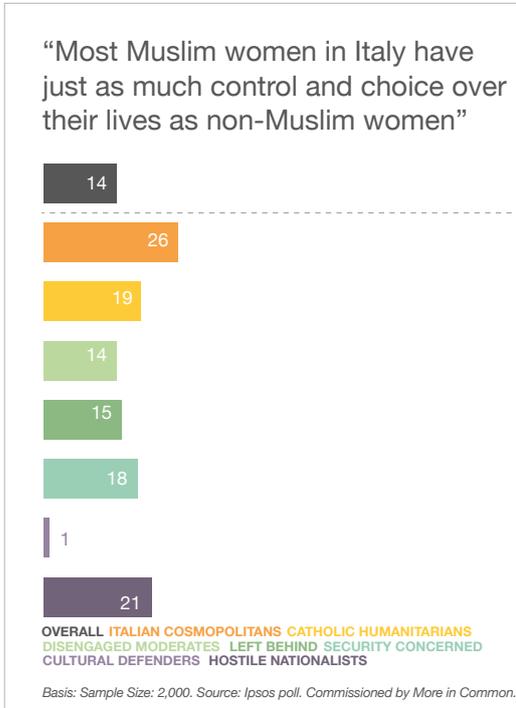
Many Italians perceive Muslims as different from themselves or as “the other”. Approximately half of the population believe that Muslims hold different values from Italians. It is only among Italian Cosmopolitans that a larger number agree rather than disagree that Muslims hold similar values to them personally. Catholic Humanitarians and the Disengaged Moderates are more evenly divided, and the four other segments believe that Muslims hold different values to their own. Cultural Defenders especially feel that Muslims hold different values to them, by a margin of 93 to 3 per cent.

21 Bobby Duffy (2016), “Perceptions are not reality: what the world gets wrong” <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/perceptions-are-not-reality-what-world-gets-wrong>

A high proportion of Italians (35 per cent overall) do not identify having either warm or cold feelings towards Muslim, perhaps reflecting the fact that many Italians do not have contact with Muslims in their daily lives. Those who expressed a view are more likely to identify having cold feelings (44 per cent of the total) than warm (just 18 per cent). The segment with the highest proportion of warm feelings is the Disengaged Moderates (34-18 per cent warm versus cold), followed by the two open segments. The segment with the coldest feelings towards Muslims is the Cultural Defenders (86-17 per cent), followed by the Hostile Nationalists (73-7 per cent).

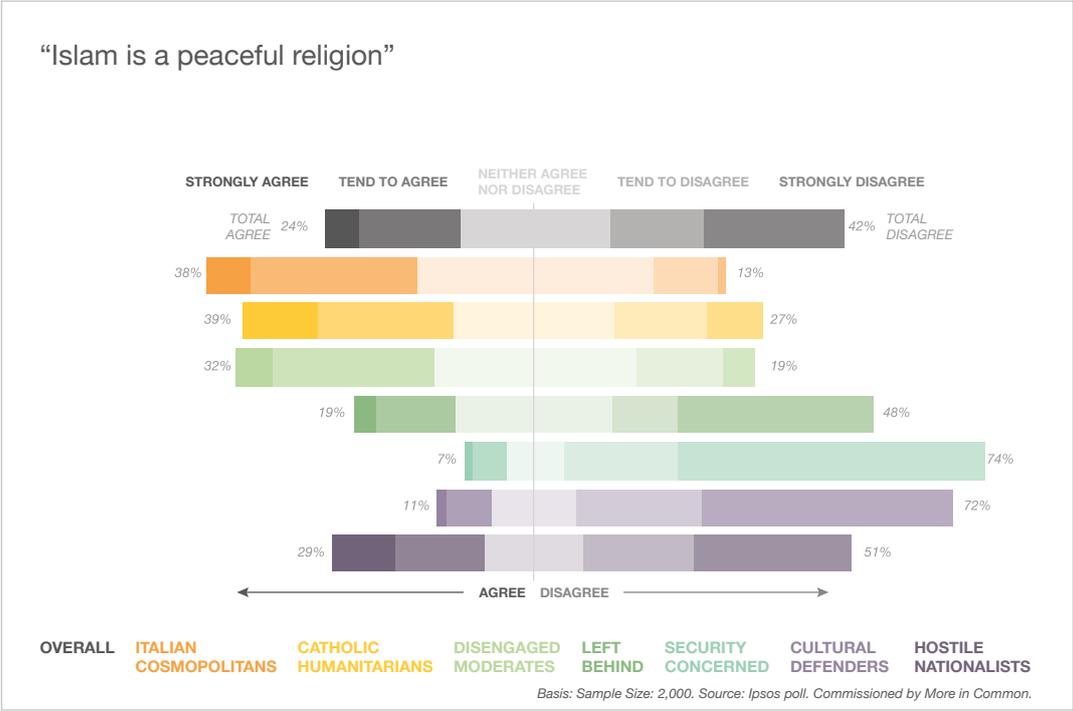


Underlying these attitudes are concerns about the cultural differences between Muslims and other Italians, with 41 per cent of Italians believing that Islam and Italian society are incompatible. These concerns are strongest in the closed segments, in particular among the Cultural Defenders who identify with Italy’s Catholic heritage (78 per cent of them agree that Islam and Italian society are incompatible). These concerns also reflect the influence of claims in the media that Muslims in Italy do not accept Italian laws. Around half (48 per cent) of Italians believe that “most Muslims in Italy would rather live under Sharia law than Italian law”. Even among the open segments, a larger share agree than disagree with this statement. Italians also worry about the visual presence of Islam in their neighbourhood. Although open segments disagree, almost half (47 per cent) of the overall population say that they would object to a mosque being built in their area.

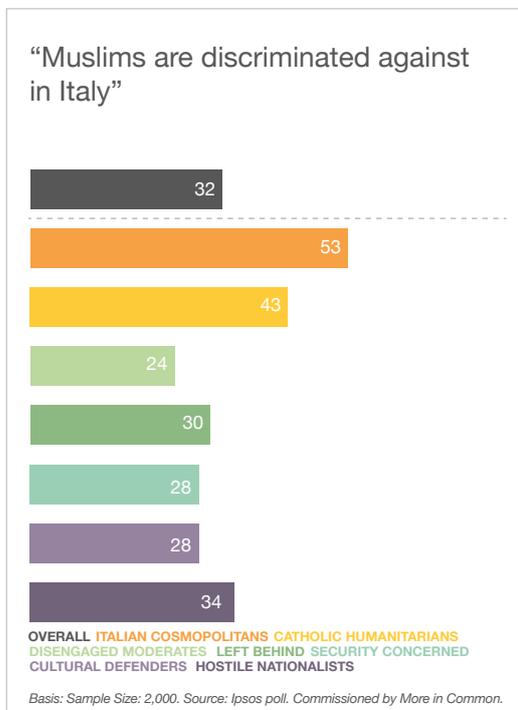
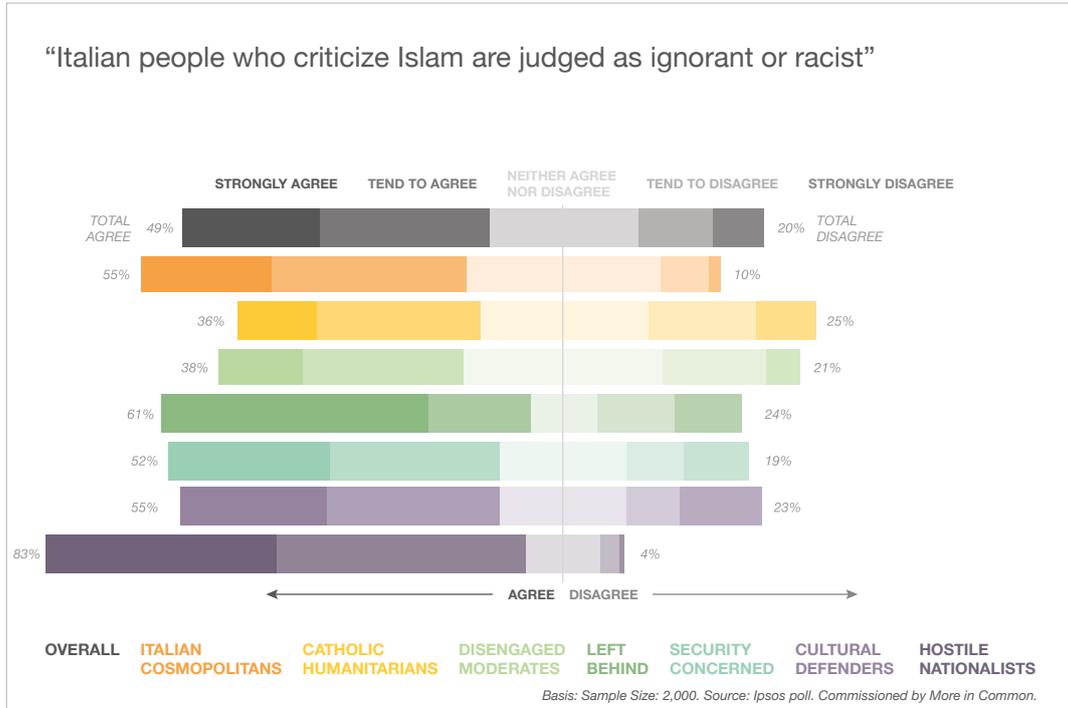


Another factor that influences attitudes towards Muslims is perception of the role of Muslim women in society and Muslims' attitudes towards the LGBT community. Concerns that Muslim women may not have as much control and choice over their lives as non-Muslim women are shared by 61 per cent of the population. Some 54 per cent of Italians also believe that Muslims in Italy are prejudiced towards the LGBT community.

Many Italians also perceive Islam as a threat to national security, with four in ten disagreeing with the proposition that Islam is a peaceful religion. These perceptions are likely to influence attitudes to incoming refugees, who are regarded as more likely to become extremists than Italian Muslims (31 per cent agree, 24 per cent disagree). This presents an opportunity for xenophobic narratives that seek to elevate the fear of Muslims, in order to mobilise nationalist supporters.



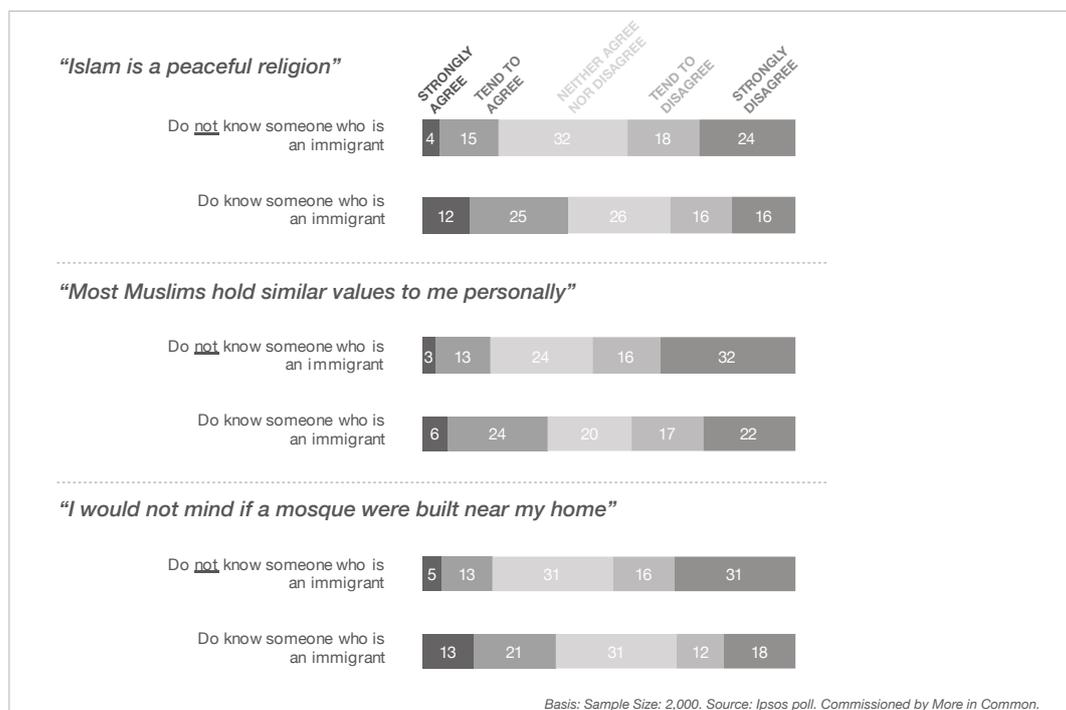
Public debates about identity and difference in many countries generate polemics and tension, accusations of racism and reverse racism, specific voices and opinions being hushed and bias in media treatment. These debates are also evident in Italy even though Italians do not feel restricted in expressing their opinions: just 8 per cent disagree with the proposition that “it is acceptable for me to express myself about subjects like immigration and refugees”. On the other hand, while Italians feel comfortable to express their views, 49 per cent also believe that Italians who criticise Islam are judged as ignorant or racist, and in every segment a larger proportion agrees with the statement rather than disagrees. Hostile Nationalists feel most strongly about this issue, with 83 per cent in agreement.



On matters of discrimination against Muslims, Italians appear relatively evenly divided between those who believe that Muslims suffer discrimination, those who believe that people suffer discrimination because they have concerns about Muslims, and those who do not express an opinion:

- 32 per cent agree that there is discrimination against Muslims in Italy, while 34 per cent disagree.
- By a majority of 33 to 30 per cent, Italians agree with the proposition that Italian people with concerns about Islam are discriminated against more than are Muslims.

Intergroup contact theory, or social contact theory, argues that one of the most effective ways to reduce conflict or distrust between majority and minority groups is through personal contact. Social contact theory also identifies a ‘secondary transfer effect’, where contact with one out-group reduces prejudices held towards both that out-group and other out-groups, reducing anxiety more generally towards the perceived “other”. There is some evidence for this from the survey responses. Italians who know migrants are twice as likely to believe that Muslims hold similar values to themselves and that Islam is a peaceful religion<sup>22</sup>. They are also twice as likely not to mind if a mosque were built near their home. Of course this may be influenced by other factors, such as living in more diverse communities that share more open values. However, the results suggest that one strategy to tackle widespread misperceptions is to generate more opportunities for regular contact between non-Muslims and Muslims (notwithstanding the relatively small size of Italy’s Muslim population), which would help to reduce prejudices and minimise hostile narratives.



<sup>22</sup> The relatively high proportion of Muslims as a share of incoming migrants makes this question a useful, although imperfect, analogue for asking about whether the respondent knows someone who is a Muslim.



# 8

## Threats to Democracy and the Rule of Law

As a system of government and social order, liberal democracy relies on people believing in a shared sense of community and destiny. Different groups within a society may sometimes be in disagreement, but in a healthy democracy there is a collective commitment to the pursuit of the common good and not only the interests of specific groups. Universally applicable rights and the rule of law protect members of a society from individual injustices and provide a foundation for addressing wider social inequities.

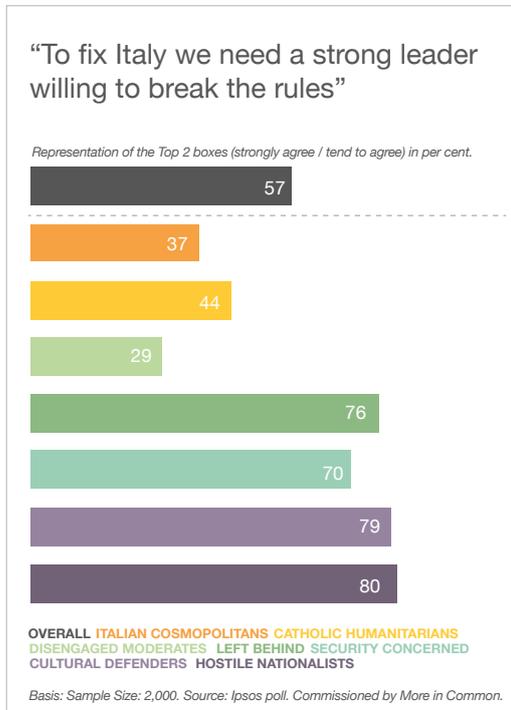
These crucial elements of liberal democracy come under threat when polarisation and the ‘othering’ of minorities weaken a community’s sense of shared destiny. Universal rights can become seen as instruments for one group to assert its rights and privileges against another. The danger of polarisation and tribalism is that it weakens a society’s collective commitment to pursue the common good, as groups fight against each other for a maximum share of power and resources, even if at the expense of collective good. These dynamics are increasingly at play in democratic societies with the rise of authoritarian populism. The ‘othering’ of minorities is therefore more than a threat to migrants and refugees. It is a threat to democracy itself.

The threat of authoritarian populism in Italy has emerged against a background of prolonged economic crisis, distrust of political elites and the media, ineffective leadership, perception of widespread corruption, frustration with perceived weakness and mismanagement of immigration, inadequate support from the European Union, and a loss of cultural identity for Italians. The growth of parties such as Lega and Fratelli d’Italia creates the opportunity for the reassertion of authoritarian populism with its familiar tactics: the othering of minority groups, the exaggeration of crises into emergencies, demands for extreme responses that bypass institutions and curtail fundamental rights and freedoms, a delegitimisation of the ‘system’ (the rule of law and democratic processes), a supreme appeal to an exclusive group identity defined by populists themselves.

One measure of a country’s vulnerability to authoritarianism is its appetite for a strong leader free of the constraints of negotiating with parliaments, bureaucracies and sub-national governments.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps reflecting frustration with the fractured nature of its political system, there is remarkably strong public support in Italy for this undemocratic style of leadership, even without a charismatic candidate in mind. When asked whether Italians believe that their country needs a strong leader willing to break the rules to fix the country, 57 per cent agree. It is worth noting the dissonance between the impulse for a strong leader who projects authority and defies the rules, while also emphasising the need for migrants to obey rules and norms.

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<sup>23</sup> Mounk, *The People Vs. Democracy*, 108.



Among the closed segments and the two middle segments that lean towards more closed views, support for the proposition of a strong leader ranges from 70 to 80 per cent; among the other segments, there was still support but at much lower levels. Italian Cosmopolitans have much higher opposition to the rule-breaking strong leader proposition than any other segment (52 per cent opposed). Fewer Catholic Humanitarians opposed than supported the proposition, possibly reflecting a more traditional view of leadership. Openness to a strong ruler is lowest for Disengaged Moderates, who appear less attracted to the simplistic solution of an individual leader and more concerned about the quality of their leadership.

“

A leader is needed anyway ... a leader that listens to everybody, though... Someone like Pertini.”<sup>24</sup>

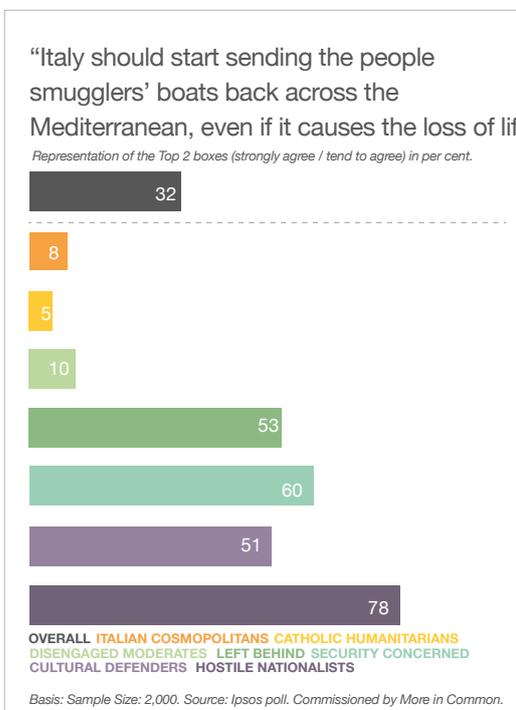
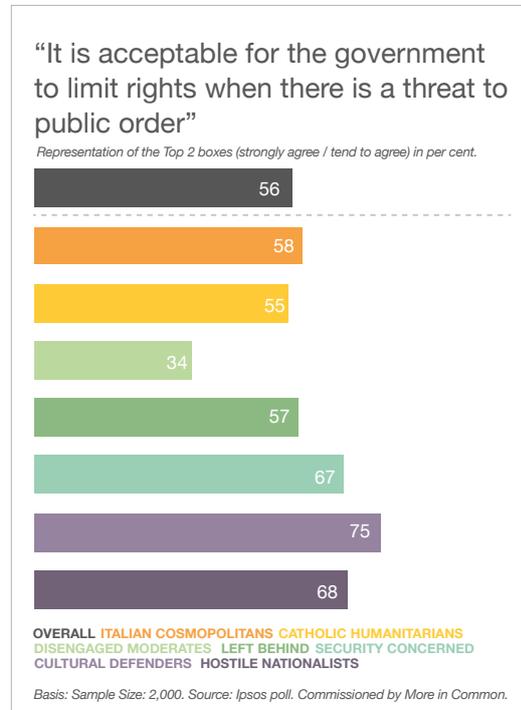
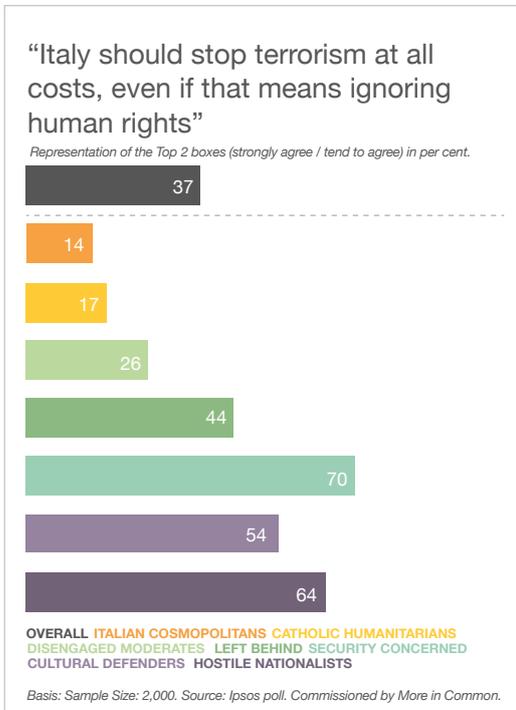
“

We do not need a hero, we need an honest person who has the common interest close at heart.”

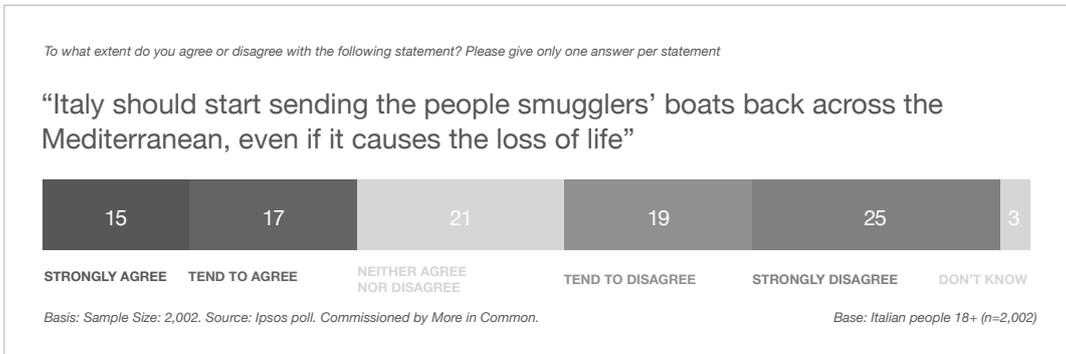
Several questions in the survey probed potential support for extreme measures in connection with threats to public order, terrorism and control of Italy’s sea borders. Even without a specific threat, there is strong support for extreme measures in principle:

- 56 per cent agree it is acceptable for the Italian government to limit rights when there is a threat to public order. The only group with less than 50 per cent support for this proposition is the Disengaged Moderates.
- The more extreme proposition that Italy should stop terrorism at all costs, even if it means ignoring human rights, has 37 per cent support and 43 per cent opposition overall, with lower levels of support among both the open and middle groups (with the exception of the Security Concerned).

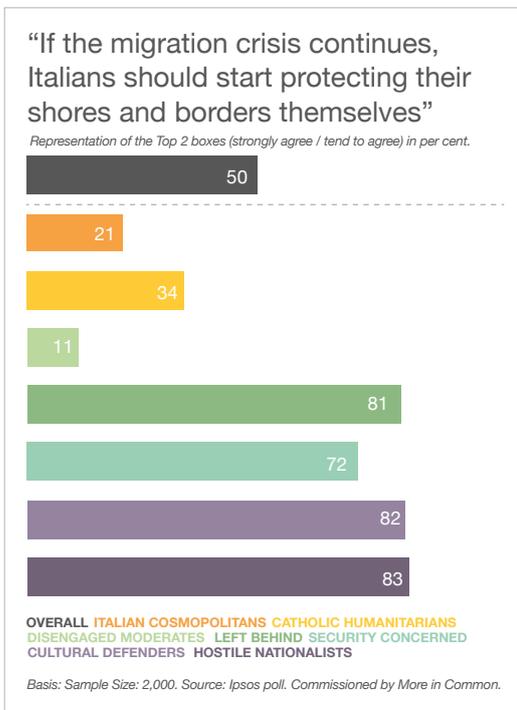
<sup>24</sup> Sandro Pertini was Italy’s President between 1978 to 1985. Pertini is held in high regard in Italy, both as a courageous opponent of Italian fascism early in his life, and as a larger than life figure who devoted his life to public service.



In overall terms, Italians reject the extreme proposition of Italy sending people smugglers’ boats back across the Mediterranean even if it causes the loss of life, by a margin of 12 percent (44 per cent to 32 per cent), with 21 per cent neither agreeing or disagreeing. This question is one of the most polarising in the survey, with strong disagreement from 60 per cent of the Italian Cosmopolitans and 53 per cent of the Catholic Humanitarians (and overall opposition from these two groups of 77 and 81 per cent respectively). At the other end of the spectrum, the only source of strong support is among the Hostile Nationalists, with 78 per cent overall agreement, of which 55 per cent “strongly agree”.



These responses reflect the polarisation between open and closed views that has been developing in many societies in the northern hemisphere in recent years. The open segments and the Disengaged Moderates empathise with migrants as individuals and their views are shaped by concern about human life and dignity. Other segments tend to think of migrants and refugees as a homogeneous ‘out-group’, rather than as individuals. They are more likely to question migrants’ motives for trying to enter a country unauthorised. Rescuing them would validate the newcomers’ assumption that they can illegally come to Italy, strengthening the ‘pull’ effect (see section 6.5.) as well as allowing newcomers to impose different cultures values upon Italy without respecting Italian culture and laws.



Italians’ distrust of their government’s handling of immigration is highlighted in the higher level of support for ordinary Italians taking the law into their own hands, such as through vigilante action. Fifty per cent agreed with this proposition, while only 23 per cent disagreed. Levels of support for this measure from the closed and middle segments are higher than support for sending boats back across the Mediterranean. Even among the open segments there is the greater support for this drastic measure compared to the proposition to send boats back across the Mediterranean.



The threat to liberal democracy in Italy is becoming as serious as at any time since the Fascist era in the 1930s. Italians are frustrated by a decade of economic stagnation and both the political establishment's self-interest and its inability to take the country forward. An out-group (migrants and other minorities) has emerged that can be easily scapegoated by extremist rhetoric. There is low public trust in existing institutions and Italians are willing to contemplate radical solutions in terms of their politics and especially the response to the migration crisis, which threatens Italians' sense of territorial integrity and sovereignty. Italian media has low levels of public trust and a weak record of independence in the recent past (during the Berlusconi era). The Five Star Movement, in theory the senior coalition partner, has little clear definition in policy or ideological terms, making it far more likely to become a junior partner to Lega, which has a much more clearly defined authoritarian populism identity. The stakes are high, and an alternative narrative that brings Italians together around a unifying and inclusive vision is urgently needed.

# 9

## Communication Strategies

As in other countries, authoritarian populists in Italy are benefiting from a collision of economic, social and political circumstances that has weakened civic trust in established political forces, and made Italians more vulnerable to divisive narratives that portray migrants and refugees as an out-group that threatens culture, security, public health and standards of living. Italy's extreme right is connected to wider European networks of activists who share strategies and increasingly sophisticated campaign tactics. The governing coalition partner Lega party is allied with a network of extremist parties from several countries including France, Germany, the Netherlands, Austria and the Czech Republic<sup>25</sup>. Lega's strategy duplicates the blueprint of similar parties: targeting migrants and refugees with divisive security, economic and cultural policies and entrenching narratives of in-group/out-group conflict and threat.

The surge in support for populists in the 2018 election reflected the strength of Italians' frustrations with the status quo, including with the handling of immigration. Public concern draws from a variety of economic, cultural and security consequences of immigration. The goal of Italy's extreme nationalist parties is to amplify all of those concerns in order to entrench the 'us' versus 'them' narrative, putting social cohesion at risk as extremist policies and narratives enter the mainstream. It is clear from the study that the middle groups in Italy - comprising half of the population - lack confidence in the country's ability to manage immigration, making this proportion of the population vulnerable to extremist narratives.

Italy's anti-immigration narratives are driven by a clever manipulation of emotion and identity rather than by factual arguments. Individual instances of alleged crimes by migrants are often exaggerated and portrayed as universal representations of the consequences of immigration. They are used as stories to manipulate perceptions in the face of factual evidence about declining rates of crime involving migrants<sup>26</sup>. Furthermore, a distrust in traditional sources of information, such as the government and the media, make it more difficult to counter the effect of negative anecdotes.

However, in advancing 'othering' narratives that target Italian migrants and refugees, populists come up against some genuine obstacles that makes Italians more resilient to 'othering'. Italians clearly support the principle of asylum, are concerned about rising levels of racism and discrimination, and see traditions of solidarity, hospitality and empathy as deeply connected to Italian character and culture. These narratives also run up against the realities of Italian history - as a nation and people with a deep history of centuries of migration that serves to undermine the divisive "us" versus "them" narrative.

There is significant value in researching the views of the middle segments as this creates a more informed understanding of the way in which open and closed values compete in people's thinking about controversial issues. One example of this is that middle groups overwhelmingly reject the rising level of racism and discrimination. Only 17 per cent of Italians say that they are not worried about this trend. Many segments that support radical measures to assert control of the borders also have high levels of concern about increasing levels of racism and discrimination. Even the Security Concerned, who support vigilante groups and sending back smugglers' boats, agree that this is an issue of concern (55 per cent agree and just 14 per cent

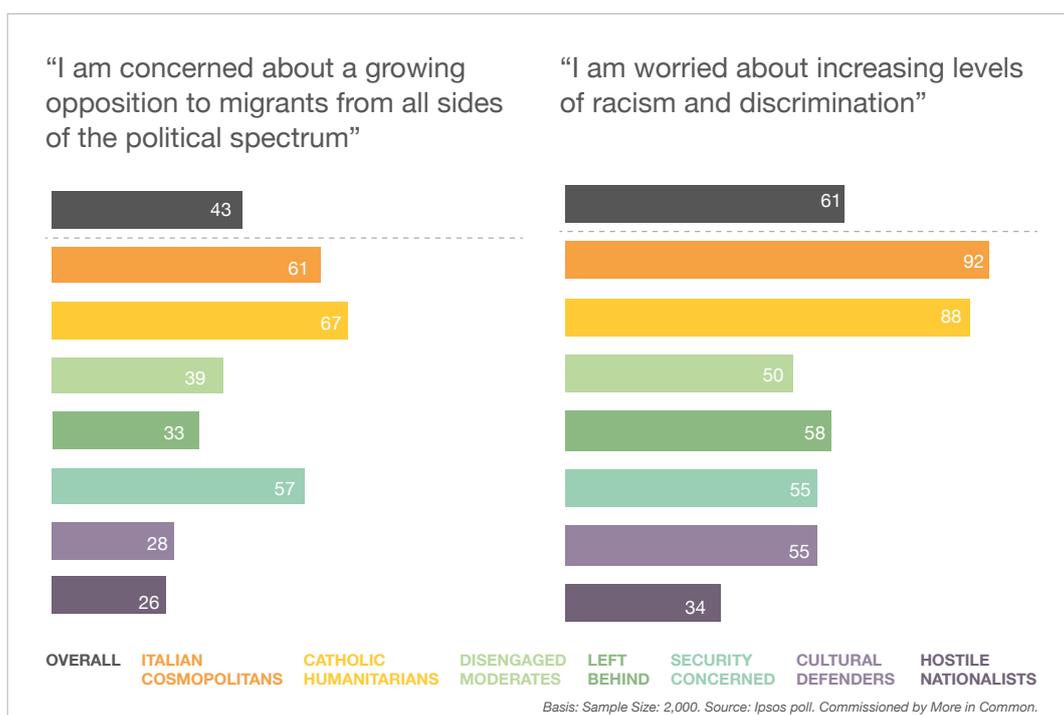
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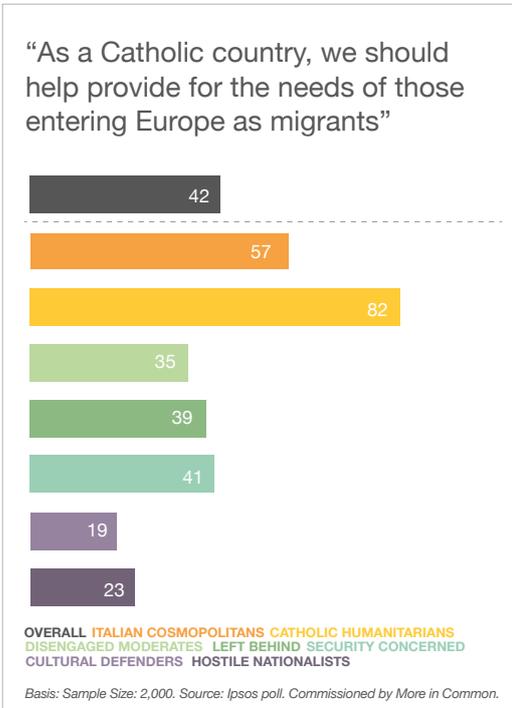
25 Deutsche Welle (May 2 2018) "Europe's far-right populists eye EU elections at Nice rally" <https://p.dw.com/p/2wzCd>

26 For example, see Donato Di Carlo, Julia Schulte-Cloos and Giulia Saudelli (2018), "Has immigration really led to an increase in crime in Italy?" <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2018/03/03/has-immigration-really-led-to-an-increase-in-crime-in-italy/>

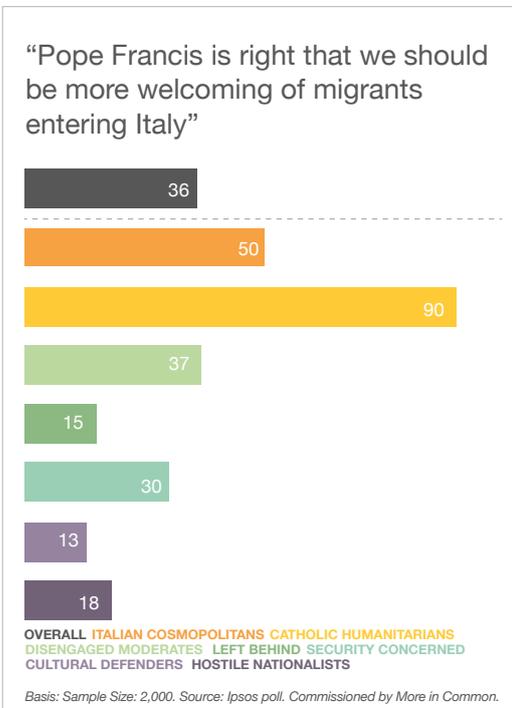
disagree). Only within the Hostile Nationalist segment are there more people who are not concerned by rising racism and discrimination (50 per cent) than who are (34 per cent). This suggests that Italians are conscious that overt racism is wrong and they are concerned not to be seen to support it (perhaps reflecting Italy's own past experience of Fascism in the 20th century, but perhaps also reflecting its social unacceptability). At the same time, they might justify policies that treat migrants unequally on the basis of Italy's economic, security or cultural interests.

Italians also express concern about anti-migrant sentiment. Asked about "growing opposition to migrants from all sides of the political spectrum" 43 per cent say they are concerned, 21 per cent not say they are not, and 33 per cent do not choose one side or the other. This question splits the segments between the open group plus the Disengaged Moderates and Security Concerned on the one hand, against the closed groups and the Left Behind on the other. The strongest concern is registered by Italian Cosmopolitans (61 per cent) and Catholic Humanitarians (67 per cent).





Another important connection between some middle audiences is Italy’s Catholic faith and traditions. Unsurprisingly, this is exceptionally strong among Catholic Humanitarians, for whom 82 per cent agree that as a Catholic country, Italians should provide for the needs of those entering Europe as migrants. This proposition also has broader resonance, with 42 per cent of Italians agreeing. The resonance of a statement so supportive of migrants with many in the closed groups, the Security Concerned and the Left Behind is notable. It suggests there is an opening for communication efforts that elevate Italians’ sense of pride in the country’s Catholic heritage and their cultural identity as warm and hospitable people, with the goal of linking this heritage to the current moment.



The survey also tested a statement from Pope Francis relating to migrants entering Italy. The statement has 36 per cent overall agreement, but very strong resonance with Catholic Humanitarians (90 per cent) and to a lesser extent with the Italian Cosmopolitans (50 per cent). Among the Security Concerned, 30 per cent also agree, reflecting their conflict between feelings of empathy and solidarity towards refugees (as seen on other questions) and their anxieties about the security implications of welcoming outsiders.

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Nevertheless, Pope Francis' message does not resonate with the Left Behind or the closed groups. Qualitative research with the Left Behind suggests that many in this segment feel that his appeal for Italians to be more welcoming does not take into account the political and territorial realities facing Italy. This confirms the assumption that arguments in favour of refugees and migrants that build only on their needs and the moral or legal duty alone will not be convincing for this segment. The Left Behind also need to feel that there is a benefit to the wider community from immigration, and not only a cost.

### COMMUNICATION WITH SPECIFIC SEGMENTS

Given the wide variety and deep complexity of Italian public opinion on these issues, different communications strategies are necessary to address the specific concerns of different segments. The Left Behind, Security Concerned, Cultural Defenders and Hostile Nationalists all perceive migrants as members of an out-group and a threat. Finding ways to speak to the moral values of Italians in these groups is therefore essential to tackle closed views.



I do not think we will need to deploy the army to guard our borders, but our geographical position is clear, and since we are where we are, we should organise things so that we manage the situation ... let's get organised, let's manage this and take advantage of it."

Italians in the Left Behind segment are influenced by messaging frameworks that establish migrants as competitors for jobs and the limited resources of the community. These concerns will obviously change if wider economic conditions change; they might also shift if people in this segment can see the benefits that migrants bring to the wider community and to themselves personally. The fact that migrants undertake low-paid work that other Italians are reluctant to undertake is unlikely to be persuasive for them. Rather, they need to see that migrants are directly improving the prospects of Italians in the context of broader ongoing economic insecurity.

For Italians in the Security Concerned segment (and to some extent others), perceptions of rising crime and security threats are driven by broader perceptions from social media and news reports, rather than objective evidence. There are limits on the extent to which communications efforts can counter these fears. For the Security Concerned, security threats are so serious that they will justify almost any measure to protect Italians. An important insight from the questions on moral foundations is that the foundation of “loyalty” is stronger for this segment than any other. Because security threats affect an in-group to which they feel strong loyalty, this group supports more extreme measures against out-groups. A key opportunity for engaging this group is in demonstrating the loyalty of migrants to Italian people, culture and values so that they are seen as part of an in-group rather than a threatening out-group. Practical approaches may include showcasing the role of migrants in protecting Italians - such as through their service in Italy’s armed forces, emergency services or law enforcement - to counter false associations between migrants and crime or terrorism.

Within the closed segments, Hostile Nationalists appear entrenched in their opposition to immigration and only personal experience is likely to shift their perspective. There is greater potential to engage Cultural Defenders through communications strategies as they are more likely to be responsive to seeing examples of immigrants embracing Italian culture and values. Some 65 per cent of Cultural Defenders agree that refugees should be welcome in Italy if they respect Italian laws and culture - more than any other segment other than the open group. Mainstream media coverage tends to highlight examples of the opposite, so a concerted effort is needed to demonstrate the real-world integration stories of migrants into Italian cultural life - in areas such as language, sport, food, community activities and entertainment.

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# 10

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this report is to improve understanding of public opinion in Italy and improve communication efforts, whether they are in government, business or in civil society. More effective public engagement starts with a better understanding of the public mindset. By analysing public opinion through the lens of the different segments within the Italian population, this study provides valuable and actionable insights into the ways in which Italians can counter the forces of polarisation and othering, whilst strengthening public support for inclusion and social cohesion.

As the report illustrates, many Italians do not have fixed open or closed views about minority groups such as migrants, refugees and Muslims, and many who have concerns about the management of the immigration system also want their country to be welcoming and to practice hospitality. This highlights the importance of avoiding simplistic assumptions about the views or beliefs of Italians, such as assuming that concerns about the integration of migrants into Italian culture translates into support for extremist policies.

The key recommendations emerging from this report are as follows:

- 1. Italians need a coherent alternative to the narrative of extremist nationalism.** The extreme nationalist narrative empathises with Italians' frustration with their political system and the combination of poor leadership, economic stagnation, high unemployment, widespread corruption, impacts of globalisation and perceptions that governments have lost control of immigration policy. The appeal of this narrative is that it engages and affirms these frustrations, condemns those perceived to be responsible (Italian elites), identifies out-groups that pose a threat to Italians (minorities such as migrants, Roma and Muslims), promises solutions (such as radical action to stop migration, enforce deportations and re-assert Italian identity) and speaks to people's desire for a better future. To counter this narrative, more is needed than simply defending existing institutions and rebutting each frustration point-by-point. Instead, a broader alternative narrative is necessary, one that also speaks to Italians' current frustrations but promises change and offers a way forward that gives hope to all Italians together.
- 2. There is a large and potentially receptive audience for a more inclusive narrative of a patriotic Italian identity that projects a bigger 'story of us' for Italians.** Key elements of a patriotic narrative would include: fostering pride and a sense of belonging, affirming welcoming and inclusive values as core elements of civic identity, highlighting what Italians can achieve if they come together, promising change and providing a credible pathway to a future that benefits all parts of Italian society. A patriotic narrative should call out the threat of divisive and polarising accounts and expose the self-interest of those who use those narratives. It should also harness the widespread rejection of racism and discrimination by Italians while being sensitive to conveying this message in ways that do not alienate middle audiences (such as by being perceived to speak down to people in the middle segments). The key to countering anti-migrant attitudes is to highlight what native-born Italians and migrants have in common, in order to build a story of migrants as part of the 'in-group' rather than as a hostile 'out-group'. Instead of emphasising the differences between migrants and other Italians, communications

should put greater focus on the realities of migrants' enthusiasm to integrate into Italian society, embracing aspects of Italy's national and regional cultures and values, as well as respecting customs and laws. This does not need to be done to the exclusion of migrants maintaining customs or traditions that reflect their own cultural backgrounds, but it is important to also demonstrate a willingness to embrace Italian culture and values, and to see migrants as part of the solution and not the problem.

3. **Restoring order and confidence in Italy's migration system is essential in countering extremist narratives.** As long as Italians feel that Italy is failing to manage the arrival of migrants from across the Mediterranean, and is not receiving adequate support from the European Union, extremist opinions will garner support among Italians. Even in the context of declining numbers of migrants arriving to Italy, there is now an entrenched perception that Italy has lost control of its borders that is reinforced by any irregular people movements. This perception makes Italians vulnerable to efforts to create a sense of crisis in order to justify extremist policies. Future crises – manufactured or real – should be anticipated, and communications strategies prepared to deal with those crises, to address people's anxieties and to project confidence.
4. **To anchor a majority of Italians towards the values of hospitality and inclusion, communications efforts should mostly focus on the least polarised groups** - the 48 per cent in the **middle groups**. Italian Cosmopolitans and Humanitarian Catholics are already convinced of the importance of these values, and Hostile Nationalists (and to a lesser extent, Cultural Defenders) are too resistant to be persuaded to adopt new attitudes in the short term. Messages that target people in the middle groups should resonate with the perceptions and attitudes belonging to each of those segments. For example, communications that highlight the importance of protecting the community from threats will have a positive effect in reaching the Security Concerned.
5. **Rather than being the target audience for communications, Italian Cosmopolitans and Catholic Humanitarians should be the target audience for mobilisation efforts.** The challenge in mobilising people in these two segments around efforts to reach the wider Italian population is that to be effective, they need to use approaches that work for those target audiences. The arguments that they find persuasive may not be effective for most other Italians, because of differences in their values and perceptions. In addition, experience from other countries suggests that middle groups often find cosmopolitans condescending and judgemental, while humanitarians can come across as weak and naive about the malicious intent of out-groups. Careful thought must therefore be given to the specific context in which individuals in these segments can be most effectively mobilised.

- 6. Civil society should focus on how to shift Disengaged Moderates from disengagement and distrust towards seeing value in strengthening their communities.** The Disengaged Moderates do not perceive migrants as members of the out-group but rather empathise with them. However they have much lower levels of interest and engagement in these issues compared to those in the open segments. Their inaction reflects a combination of not feeling motivated to engage more strongly, and not feeling that their engagement makes a difference. Disengaged Moderates are both sympathetic to migrants and suspicious of the authorities. More research is needed to understand ways in which they can be engaged and persuaded of the importance of the values of welcome and inclusion. For them, confidence in the immigration system, in particular the management of asylum claims, needs to be restored. Demonstrating the EU's willingness to help Italy will be critical in addressing these concerns, as they partly arise from a sense that Italy has been left to address these issues alone, rather than part of a collective European effort. Disengaged Moderates think Italy is vulnerable due to its geography, but they also think that the problem can be solved.
- 7. Efforts to reach Italians who have experienced economic hardship in recent years, especially those in the Left Behind segment, need to emphasise the economic benefits that migration can bring to them and their communities.** Many in the Left Behind segment feel suspicious and fear competition between migrants and native born Italians. Therefore, advocacy that calls for increased provisions for migrants may deepen oppositional sentiment within this group. This is an especially challenging area for civil society since many Italians see migrants as competitors for a limited number of jobs who suppress wages for Italians. Addressing these concerns may have more impact than any other change in policy or communications but it requires thoughtful work at both a policy and communications level.
- 8. Given the heightened perception of external threats, efforts to communicate with the Security Concerned (and other Italians anxious about crime and terrorism) should demonstrate an understanding of their sense of uncertainty and insecurity.** Individual stories that break down perceptions of the out-group of migrant Italians threatening the in-group of native-born Italians, may include migrants working in emergency services, law enforcement and defence. The voices and stories of Italian migrants themselves are especially important here, since direct communication from them can break down the 'othering' and help Italians to better understand migrants as individuals and not as a homogeneous group. Communications may highlight acts of courage and bravery taken by Italians in 'out-groups' to protect those belonging to 'in-groups', or show how people from those backgrounds share a similar sense of insecurity and are taking action to make their whole communities safer. Given the Security Concerned segment's sensitivity to perceived threats, it may be difficult for many in this group to become advocates of inclusion, but at the very least it is worth trying to inoculate them from extremism.

- 9. Given the importance of Catholic faith to many Italians' sense of identity, Catholicism can play an important role in engaging middle groups.** Notwithstanding a fall in church attendance and the loss of credibility resulting from clergy abuse scandals in recent years, Catholicism remains an anchor for many Italians in a time of uncertainty and rapid change. However, in reaching Catholics beyond those already in the Catholic Humanitarian segment, communications should not only speak to the values of care, compassion and welcoming the stranger. Communications should also build upon other moral foundations of Catholicism and the ways in which it connects to Italians' identity: through values, cultural heritage and sense of belonging that it can foster. For example, one approach worth testing is the resonance of stories of Catholic migrants integrating into parish life in Italy, emphasising how they are contributing to parish, schools and community services as part of the Catholic community. This could help to break down the in-group/out-group dynamics described in this report, connecting migrants to a deep-seated part of Italian identity.
- 10. For the closed segments, communications efforts should not ignore the Cultural Defenders segment, whose views are considerably less extreme than those of the Hostile Nationalists.** Those within the Cultural Defenders segment are unlikely to be the early target of communication efforts, since they are harder to reach and persuade. However, this group is also the softest target for far-right forces that have already locked in support from the Hostile Nationalists. Already many in this segment are voting for extremist parties. Therefore, greater efforts are needed to reduce the allure of extremism and hatred to the Cultural Defenders and Security Concerned as well as to the Left Behind, but in ways that reach these segments and speak to their genuine concerns. Communications that highlight migration as an ongoing part of the richness of Italian culture, and the willingness of newcomers to adopt Italian customs and culture, may provide reassurance to this segment. Efforts to engage Catholics may be important for this segment, with one in five Cultural Defenders saying that their faith influences their views concerning refugees and immigrants.

## CONCLUSION

This report demonstrates that despite increasing public concern about migration policy, most Italians reject extremist attitudes towards migrants. A large majority support the principle of asylum for those in need, and their sense of responsibility to people seeking protection from war, conflict and persecution remains strong. Italians regard hospitality and welcoming people as fundamental traits of Italian society. Nevertheless, there is deep apprehension about Italy's ability to successfully manage migration and little confidence in the government and the country's economic prospects.

With this research, More in Common's goal is to inform the debate about public perceptions of refugee and immigration policy in Italy, convey how Italian attitudes towards these issues are evolving, and help shape future research. More broadly, our goal is for this research to advance the public debate about open and inclusive societies that has been provoked by the rise of populist anti-immigration parties across the world.

This research forms part of a larger initiative that began in 2016, to respond to the growing and serious threats to open and inclusive societies. Across the developed world, existing organisations that have focused on issues of migration, refugees and human rights that have traditionally led these public debates are struggling to respond to a complex and rapidly changing environment in which the issues they work on have gone from second-order to top-order issues on the political agenda. New infrastructure is needed to respond to the increasingly sophisticated, well-resourced and targeted communications strategies of authoritarian populism and 'othering' narratives.

More effective public engagement starts with a better understanding of the public. But this is insufficient in of itself. Understanding public attitudes needs to translate into action to build a stronger civil society infrastructure that engages a wider number of people from a more diverse range of society, using new approaches. This is urgently needed if Italians are to turn the tide on the threat to the character of Italian society and the future of the nation.

**A**

**Media  
Appendix**

## MEDIA CONSUMPTION HABITS IN ITALY (EXTENDED)

The media consumption habits of the seven segments vary significantly. The open and closed segments obtain information from different sources, while the middle groups share a mixture of media consumption habits with both open and closed segments. The sources of information that individuals receive clearly influence their understanding of events and the way in which they are influenced by competing narratives.

Which TV channel do you usually watch? (% yes)

	ITALIAN POP. TOTAL	ITALIAN COSMOPOLITANS	CATHOLIC HUMANITARIANS	DISENGAGED MODERATES	LEFT BEHIND	SECURITY CONCERNED	CULTURAL DEFENDERS	HOSTILE NATIONALISTS
RAI 1	53	64	60	47	59	63	42	27
RAI 2	33	31	34	28	41	38	24	41
RAI 3	35	45	47	32	38	25	25	30
RAI 4	9	9	13	7	6	15	6	16
RAI 5	11	14	12	16	6	17	7	9
RAI NEWS 24	18	14	27	22	17	15	16	6
CANALE 5	51	42	56	41	58	57	50	60
ITALIA 1	31	22	31	32	34	29	31	39
RETE 4	14	6	17	12	9	17	15	25
LA7	30	45	44	25	29	20	23	32
TV8	15	17	20	15	7	19	16	15
NOVE	12	10	11	13	10	16	12	14
REAL TIME	16	11	20	14	17	11	19	14
DMAX	11	5	15	14	12	6	10	13
FOCUS	13	9	17	16	15	8	12	15
GIALLO	7	5	12	6	5	9	5	7
CIELO	11	5	12	11	18	11	7	19
TGCOM24	13	12	16	12	17	12	14	16
LA7D	6	6	13	6	2	7	4	5
MEDIASET EXTRA	6	1	9	7	6	12	4	3
TOP CRIME	9	13	12	6	10	9	6	12
LA 5	8	8	14	9	4	6	8	5
ITALIA 2	3	1	5	5	3	3	2	4
IRIS	8	4	18	5	7	9	5	14
PARAMOUNT	9	7	12	6	11	11	8	6
RAI MOVIE	10	8	24	7	10	6	6	5
RAI STORIA	7	5	15	6	7	2	6	10
RAI PREMIUM	5	4	11	4	5	5	1	2

### How long do you normally watch TV? (% yes)

	ITALIAN POP. TOTAL	ITALIAN COSMOPOLITANS	CATHOLIC HUMANITARIANS	DISENGAGED MODERATES	LEFT BEHIND	SECURITY CONCERNED	CULTURAL DEFENDERS	HOSTILE NATIONALISTS
LESS THAN 1 HOUR	11	18	4	14	9	5	12	9
1 TO 2 HOURS	40	34	47	40	35	40	38	53
2 TO 3 HOURS	30	27	20	34	34	30	34	24
3 TO 4 HOURS	12	15	11	7	16	17	9	7
4 TO 5 HOURS	4	2	8	2	3	3	6	3
MORE THAN 5 HOURS	4	4	11	3	1	5	1	4

### Those who watch TV only (% yes)

ITALIAN COSMOPOLITANS (12% OF TOTAL POP)	CATHOLIC HUMANITARIANS (16%)	DISENGAGED MODERATES (1%9)	LEFT BEHIND (17%)	SECURITY CONCERNED (12%)	CULTURAL DEFENDERS (12%)	HOSTILE NATIONALISTS (7%)
15	29	8	15	5	22	6

### Do you usually read these newspapers? (% yes)

	ITALIAN POP. TOTAL	ITALIAN COSMOPOLITANS	CATHOLIC HUMANITARIANS	DISENGAGED MODERATES	LEFT BEHIND	SECURITY CONCERNED	CULTURAL DEFENDERS	HOSTILE NATIONALISTS
CORRIERE DELLA SERA	26	18	35	32	22	28	24	19
REPUBBLICA	23	30	28	33	21	23	14	15
LIBERO	7	4	4	5	10	15	4	8
IL FOGLIO	4	3	4	5	2	5	3	5
IL SOLE 24 ORE	11	6	10	11	11	14	14	18
LA STAMPA	9	4	13	17	11	3	6	6
IL GIORNALE	9	2	7	4	10	14	11	29
IL FATTO QUOTIDIANO	10	5	10	12	13	13	6	11
L'AVVENIRE	3	1	3	3	1	4	3	3
GAZZETTA DELLO SPORT	10	4	7	15	7	8	17	13
TUTTOSPORT	4	1	3	9	1	2	3	4
OTHER (LOCAL NEWSPAPER)	14	17	12	8	13	17	15	23

### Do you usually buy these newspapers? (% yes)

	ITALIAN POP. TOTAL	ITALIAN COSMOPOLITANS	CATHOLIC HUMANITARIANS	DISENGAGED MODERATES	LEFT BEHIND	SECURITY CONCERNED	CULTURAL DEFENDERS	HOSTILE NATIONALISTS
CORRIERE DELLA SERA	10	11	16	11	8	8	7	6
REPUBBLICA	9	19	12	13	6	5	3	4
LIBERO	3	0	1	3	5	7	1	1
IL FOGLIO	1	2	1	3	0	2	0	0
IL SOLE 24 ORE	5	1	2	7	1	4	9	9
LA STAMPA	4	0	5	6	5	2	0	5
IL GIORNALE	4	0	2	4	7	3	5	11
IL FATTO QUOTIDIANO	2	1	3	2	2	1	1	1
L'AVVENIRE	1	0	1	3	0	1	0	1
GAZZETTA DELLO SPORT	6	1	3	5	4	7	14	3
TUTTOSPORT	1	0	0	4	0	1	0	0
OTHER (LOCAL NEWSPAPER)	8	7	7	4	11	13	6	12

### How often do you read a newspaper? (% yes)

	ITALIAN POP. TOTAL	ITALIAN COSMOPOLITANS	CATHOLIC HUMANITARIANS	DISENGAGED MODERATES	LEFT BEHIND	SECURITY CONCERNED	CULTURAL DEFENDERS	HOSTILE NATIONALISTS
6-7 TIMES A WEEK	17	17	11	23	14	14	25	20
4-5 TIMES A WEEK	15	14	16	12	13	22	13	15
2-3 TIMES A WEEK	21	25	20	24	16	24	20	20
ONCE A WEEK	13	7	18	11	17	17	9	13
LESS THAN ONCE A WEEK	34	37	36	32	40	24	33	32

## Do you use any social networks? (% yes)

	ITALIAN POP. TOTAL	ITALIAN COSMOPOLITANS	CATHOLIC HUMANITARIANS	DISENGAGED MODERATES	LEFT BEHIND	SECURITY CONCERNED	CULTURAL DEFENDERS	HOSTILE NATIONALISTS
FACEBOOK	59	55	54	67	58	56	53	66
TWITTER	19	22	20	19	14	16	16	34
INSTAGRAM	24	27	18	37	17	24	18	19
OTHER	11	16	17	15	8	5	7	8
NO	25	31	26	15	29	26	28	25

## Social network activities (% yes)

	ITALIAN POP. TOTAL	ITALIAN COSMOPOLITANS	CATHOLIC HUMANITARIANS	DISENGAGED MODERATES	LEFT BEHIND	SECURITY CONCERNED	CULTURAL DEFENDERS	HOSTILE NATIONALISTS
VISITING BLOG/ FORUMS	32	21	26	32	31	41	41	35
KEEP IN TOUCH WITH FAMILY	46	27	49	50	57	47	43	44
POST PICTURES	35	40	28	42	36	27	37	29
DISCUSS POLITICS & NEWS	24	33	20	19	18	41	20	33
PLAY	20	15	16	17	25	24	23	13
MEET NEW PEOPLE	16	19	16	14	9	28	13	14
K.I.T.W. FRIENDS FAR AWAY	40	38	44	33	60	38	39	31
WORK AND ADVERTISING	16	16	10	21	14	13	31	5
PASS THE TIME, RELAXING	56	57	56	58	63	40	59	52
STAY INFORMED	43	64	45	34	43	33	43	50
OTHER REASONS	4	1	4	1	1	0	13	12

