



JULY 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. The quantitative phase was completed with 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

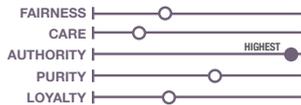
- Optimistic, they strongly believe that the Italian economy is both better now than one year ago, and that it will improve over the next five years.
- More proud of their Italian identity than any other segment; do not feel that Italian identity is disappearing.
- Compassionate, they feel a strong sense 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

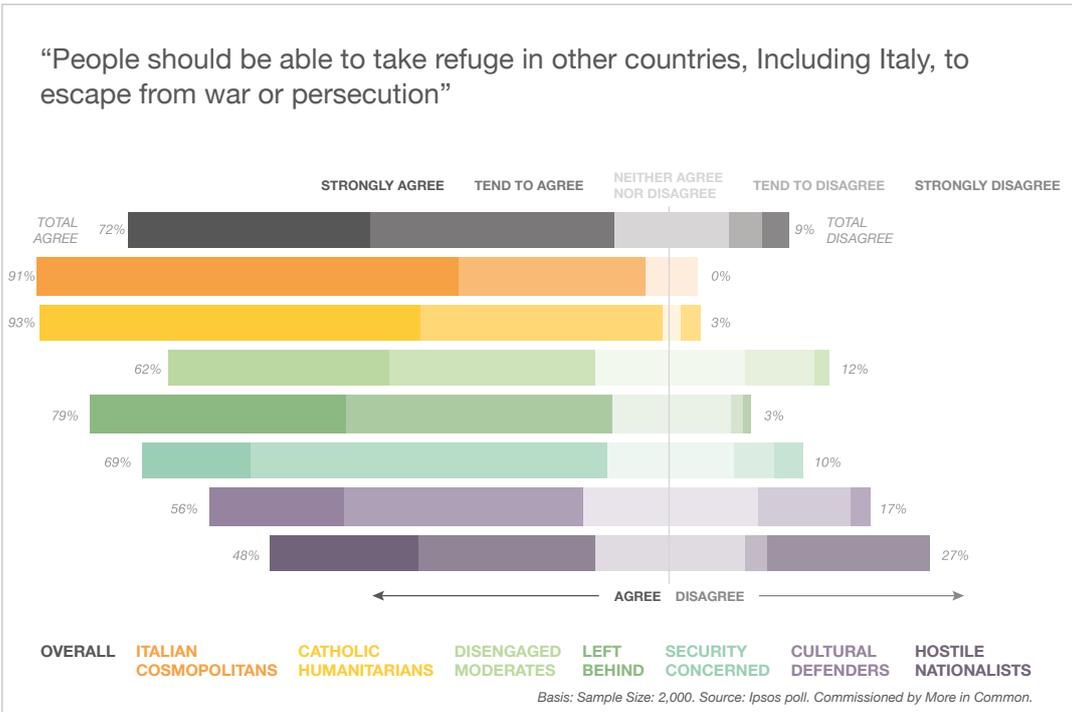
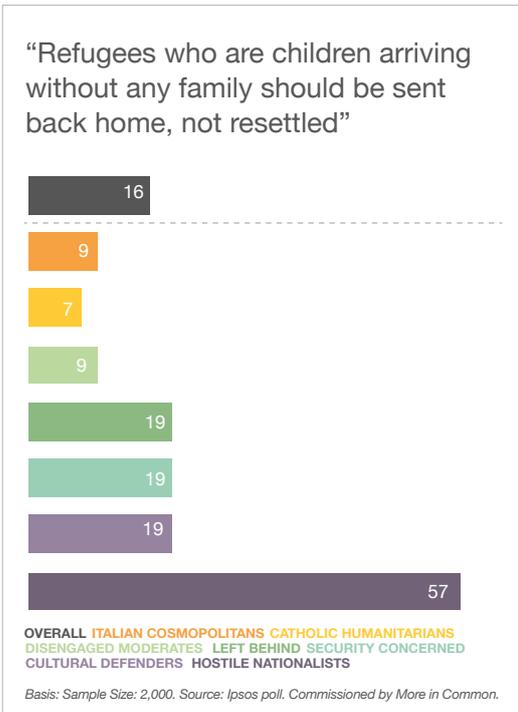
Unemployment, immigration, crime, the economy, tax burdens

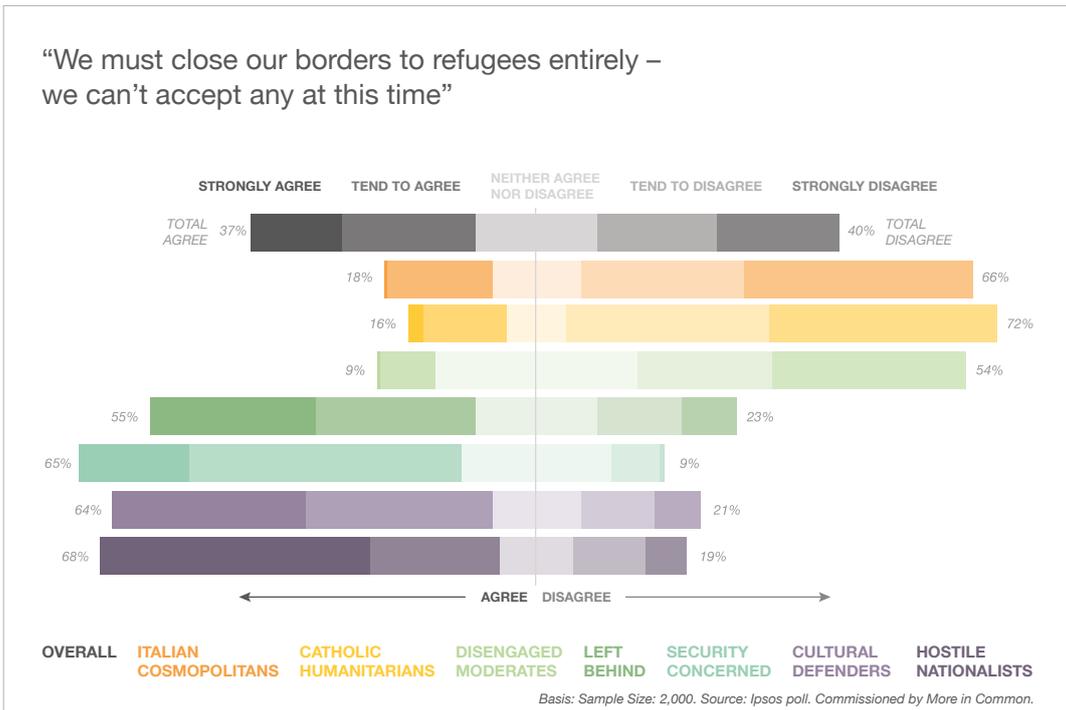
- Optimistic about the future of the Italian economy, and believe the impact of globalisation has been positive.
- However, more pessimistic about their personal prospects and the future of Italian society
- Anxious about threats to Italians' security, from both crime and terrorism. They see other issues 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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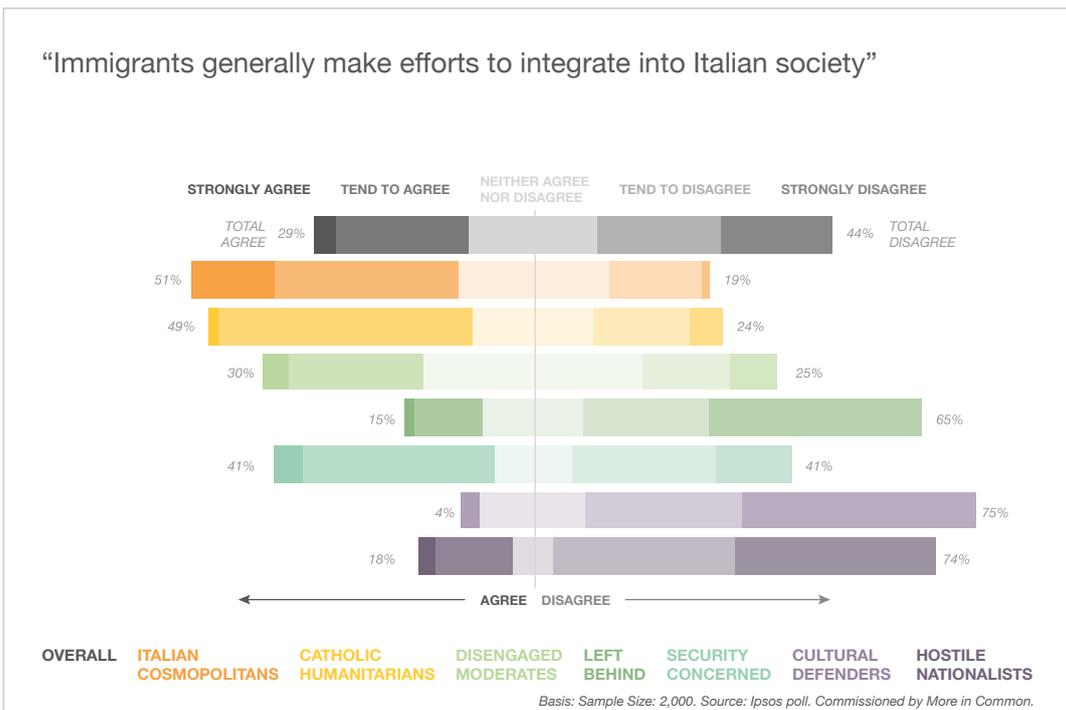
## Key findings: Italy's seven segments

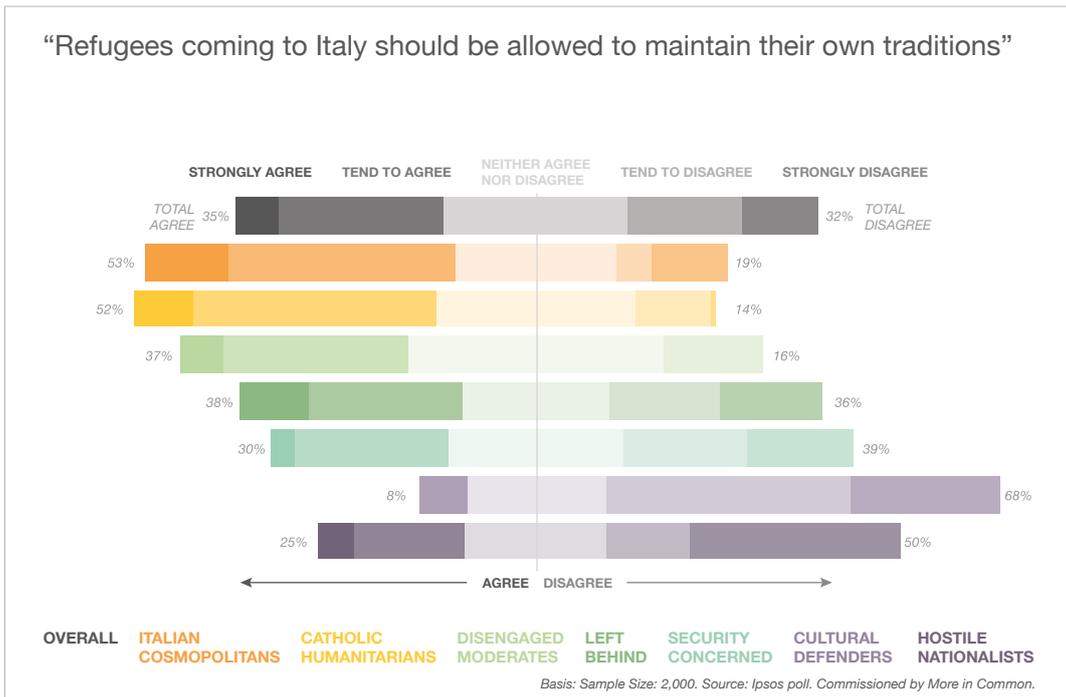
1. **Italians understand the differences between migrants and refugees, but they tend to see them as one big 'out-group' ('the other').** In circumstances of increased polarisation, people are more likely to view issues through the group identity lens of an in-group that is being threatened by hostile 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.





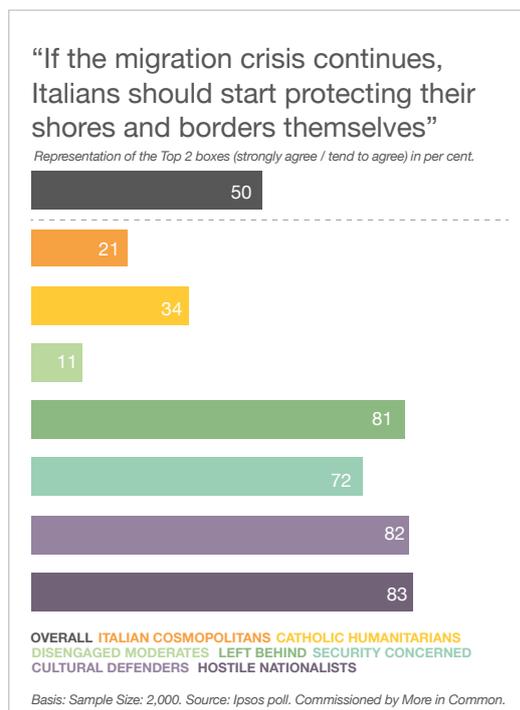
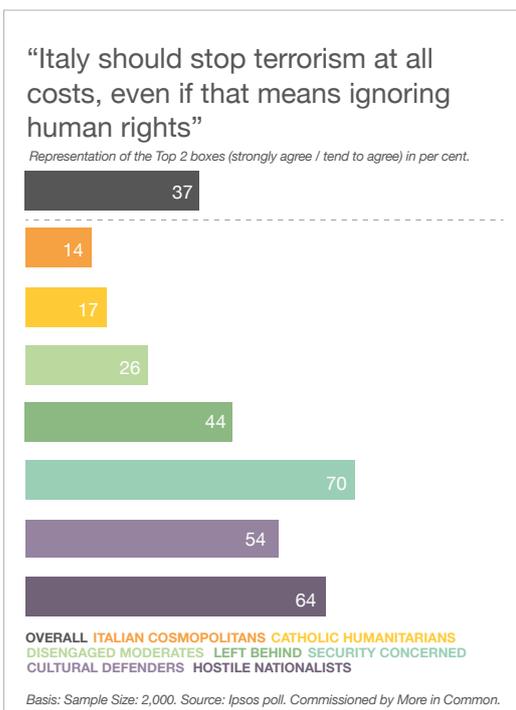
**6. Many Italians doubt that newcomers want to integrate into Italian society.** The open segments believe that migrants try to integrate, and the Disengaged Moderates blame the system for making it harder for them to integrate (such as by not providing legal papers and through reception systems that 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.



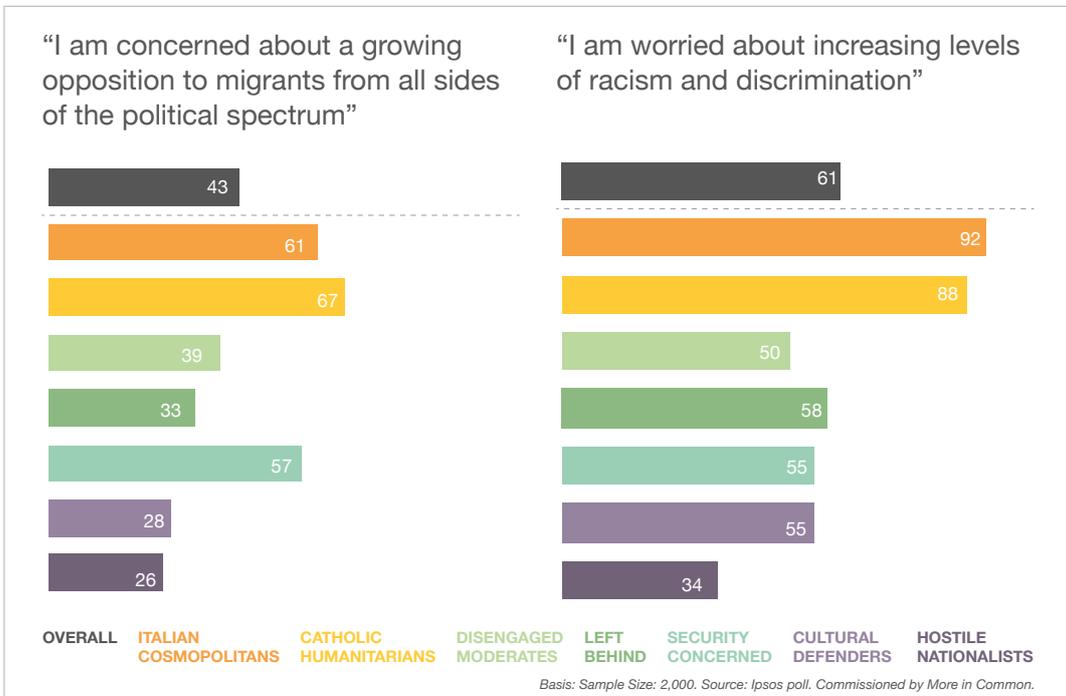


7. **Italians feel abandoned by the European Union’s failure to support Italy in responding to the arrival of asylum seekers in Italy.** This is true even among strong supporters of the EU. However the segments disagree on how Italy should respond to the EU’s failures.

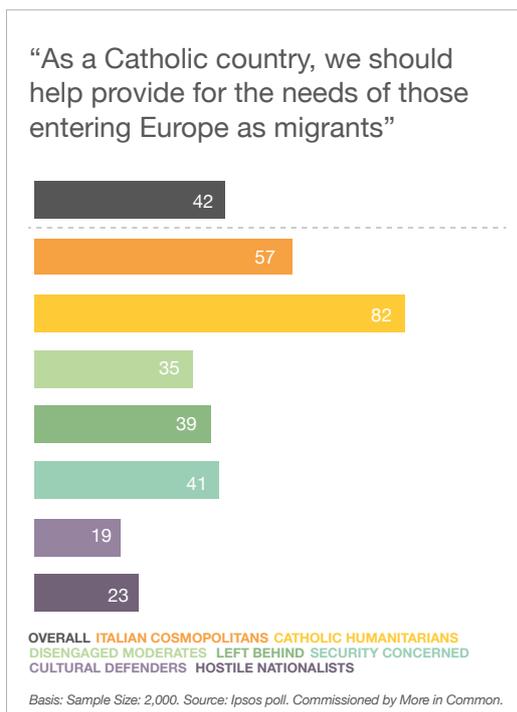
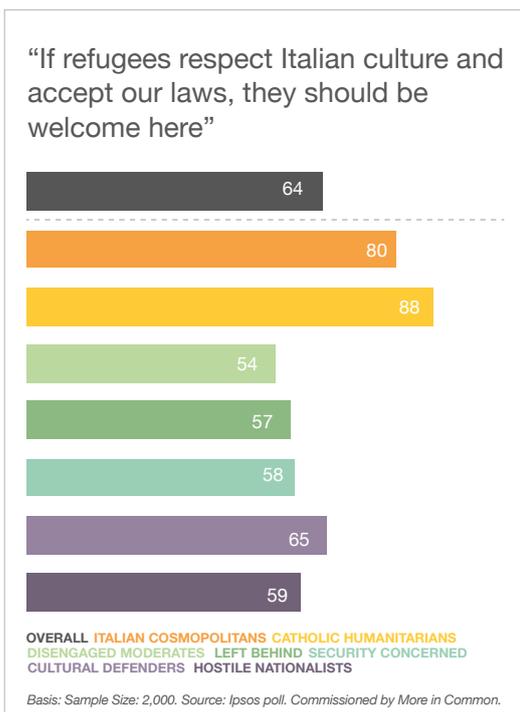
8. **Italians have become more open to authoritarian populism and extreme positions because of the combination of economic austerity, a sense of cultural decline, widespread corruption, the loss of faith in Italian institutions, and the failures of the political establishment.** Authoritarian values 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%.*