



ITALY

MAJOR FORCES



RISING COST OF LIVING PRESSURES AND CONCERNS ABOUT THE QUALITY OF THE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM



FEELING THAT INEQUALITY IS INCREASING AND ORDINARY PEOPLE ARE NOT GETTING THEIR FAIR SHARE



HIGH SCEPTICISM OF POLITICIANS

WHICH ARE CONTRIBUTING TO:



A BREAKDOWN IN SOCIAL COHESION



A BREAKDOWN IN THE SOCIAL CONTRACT BETWEEN THE PUBLIC AND THE GOVERNMENT



WHAT THIS MEANS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

Despite high levels of support for development and widespread recognition of the domestic benefits to this spending, support falls apart once presented as a trade off with domestic priorities. This is true even for groups who are more sympathetic to development.



PATHWAYS TO BUILDING SUPPORT:

Evidencing messaging that demonstrates the impact development can have on relieving migration pressures and leaning into development as a tool for disaster relief.

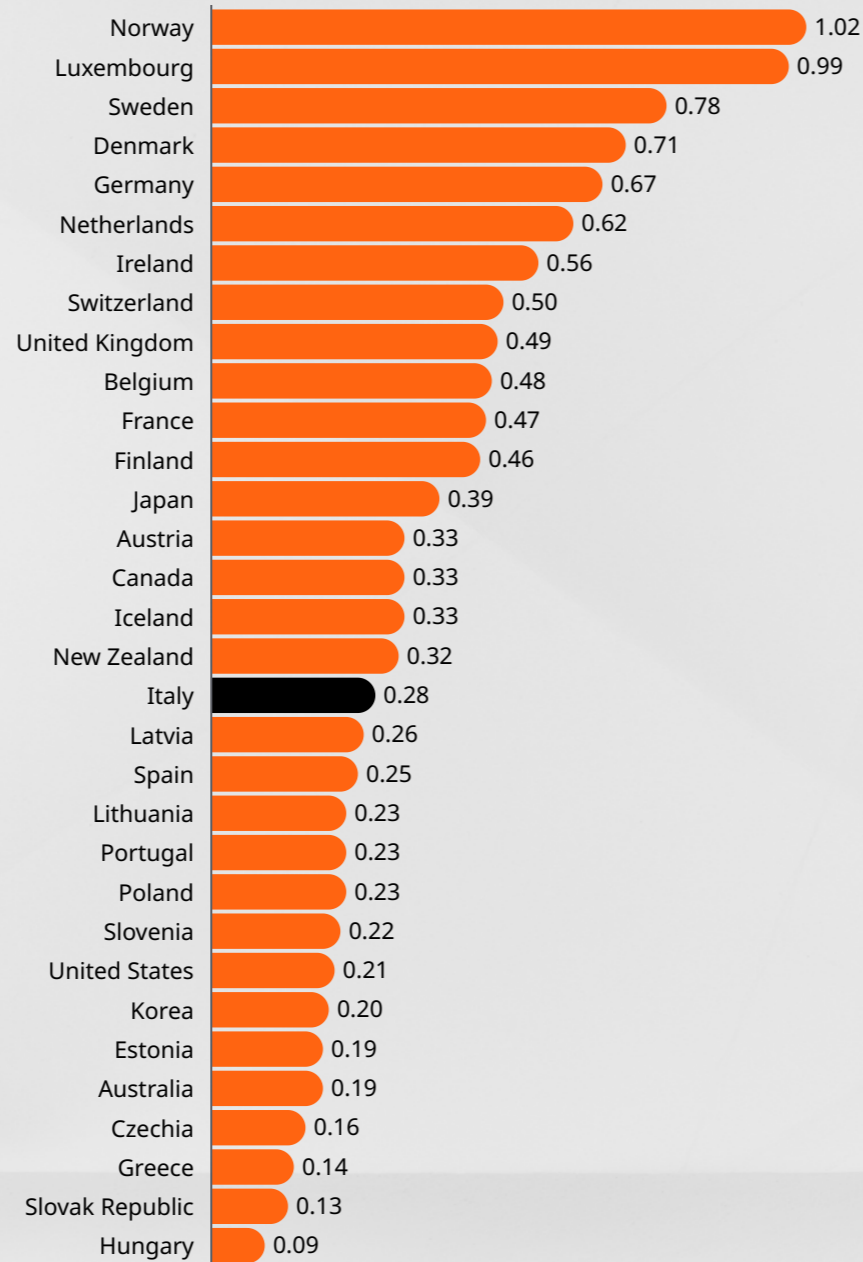
SUMMARY

Rising cost of living pressures and concerns around the quality of the healthcare system are dominating public concern in Italy. There is a widespread feeling that inequality (both within Italy and globally) is increasing and that ordinary people are not getting their share of the country's wealth. Italians are feeling increasingly less connected to the people around them and are highly sceptical of politicians.

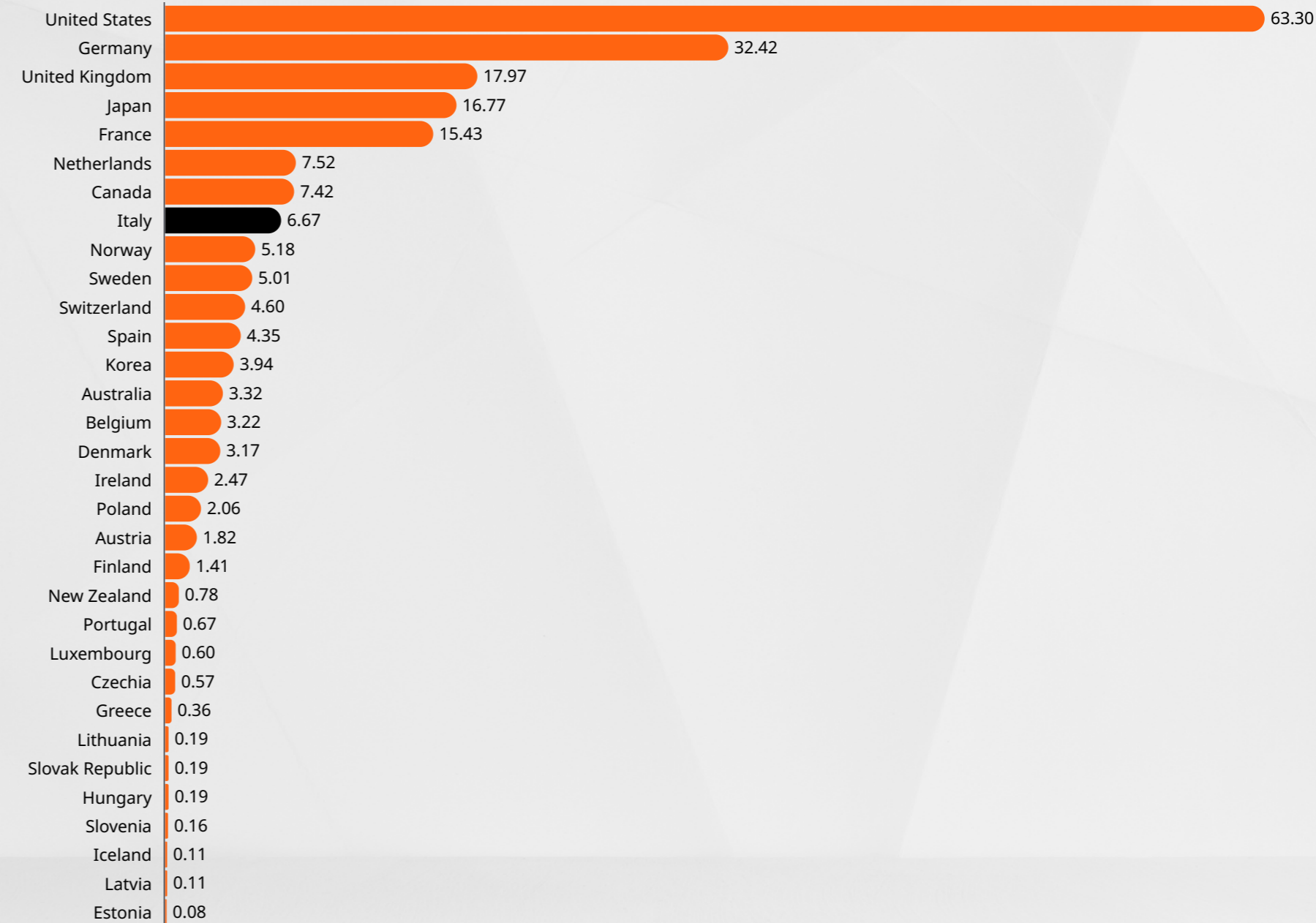
However, despite these domestic concerns, there are high levels of support for the government to work on solving international issues, such as climate change or global poverty. Indeed, it is this type of work - investing in renewable energy, supporting development programmes in other countries, and helping other countries when they suffer from disaster - that the public believe builds respect for Italy on the international stage.

Support for international development is high across the political spectrum and the benefits - both to the recipient country and to Italy - are widely understood, particularly amongst older populations. The relationship between international development and reducing levels of migration to Italy was a particularly clear and convincing message both in the poll and focus groups with right-leaning and centrist voters.

However, while the public consensus on international development is relatively strong in Italy when viewed in a vacuum, this support falls apart in the context of domestic priorities - even for more sympathetic groups (e.g. left-wing voters). Development budgets in Italy are not immediately under threat, but growing domestic pressures combined with low trust in the government could create an environment where support crumbles across the political spectrum. Future advocacy in Italy to build public support for international development must, therefore, address these underlying challenges rather than tweaking messaging or spending priorities.



ODA as percent of GNI (grant equivalent) in 2024

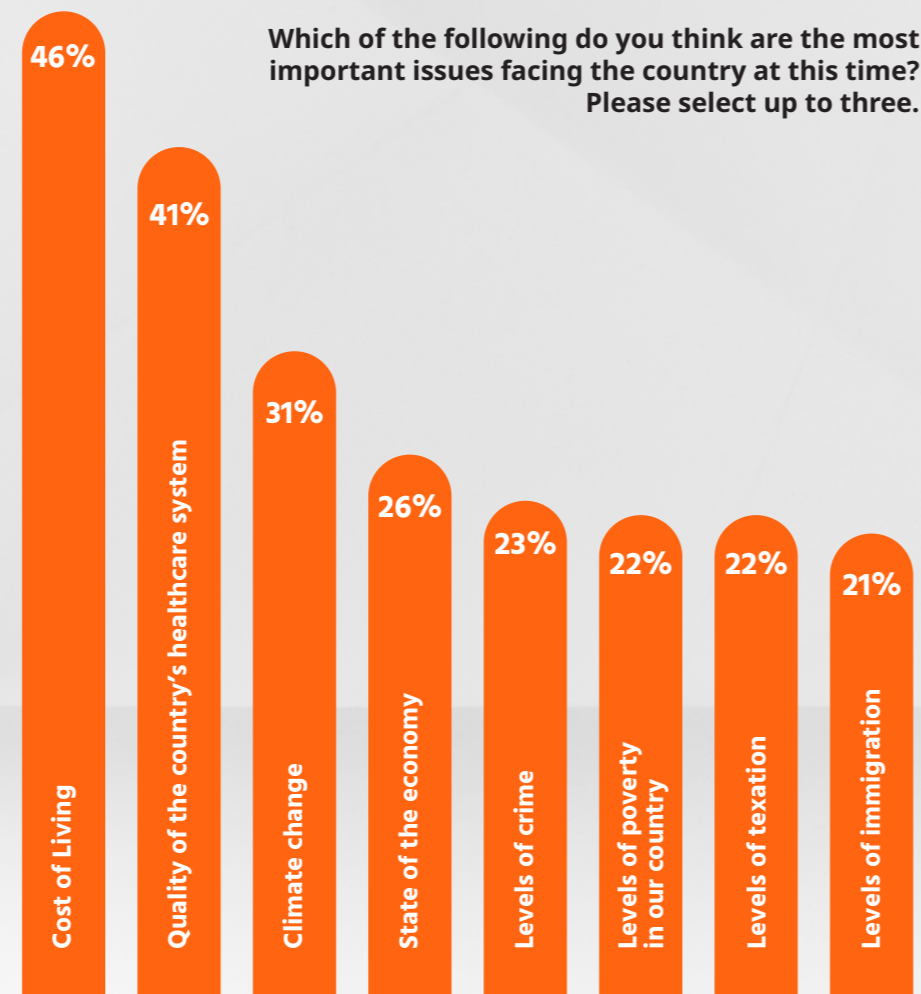


ODA - grant equivalent in 2024, USD billions

THE MAJOR FORCES DRIVING THE POLITICAL AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE

Concerns about cost of living, the quality of healthcare and growing inequality dominate the public discourse.

Two-thirds of Italians think that the standard of living for the average person in their country is decreasing and 75% believe the gap between the rich and the poor is growing. Only 17% of the population think that ordinary people get their fair share of the country's wealth (compared to 56% who disagree) - this is broadly true across the political spectrum but is most pronounced for Democratic Party voters (11% agree vs. 67% disagree) and people who did not vote in the last election (9% agree vs. 68% disagree).

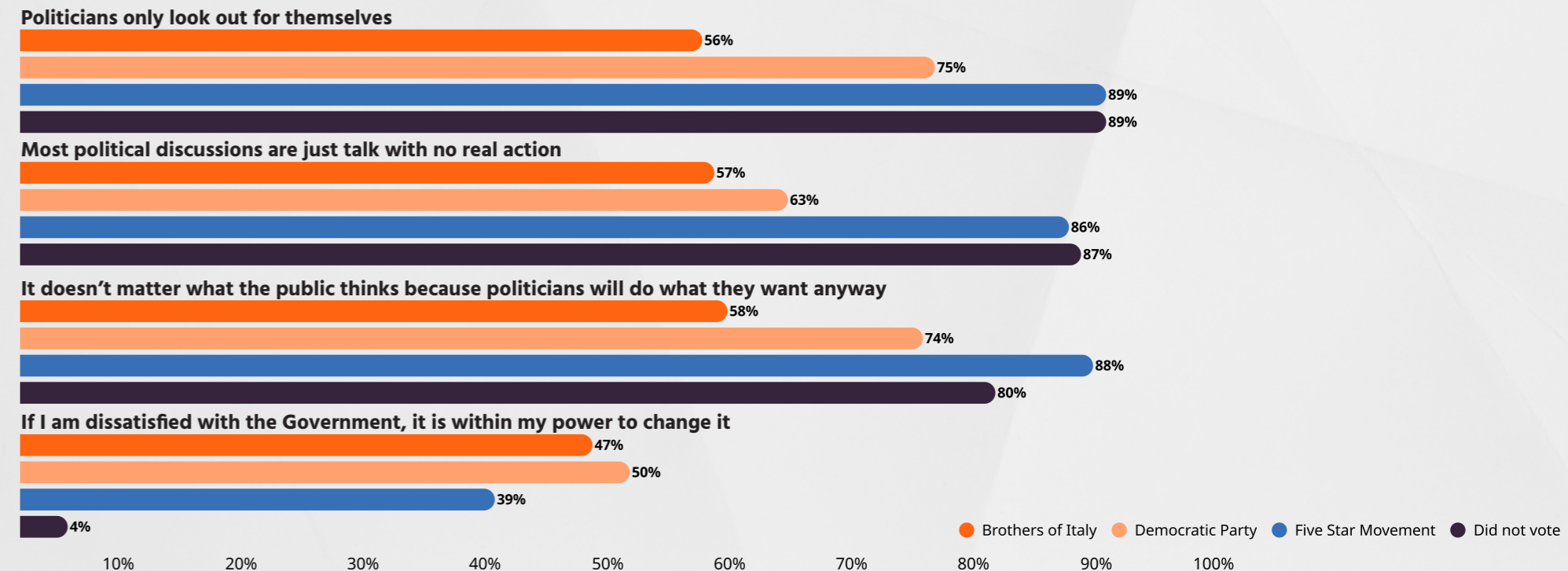


Low trust in the government and widespread feelings of political disempowerment.

Nearly half of the country (45%) does not trust the national government at all and the country is split on whether the government can be trusted to spend the national budget in a way that is 'in my best interest' (39% agree vs. 41% disagree). Trust in the national government is lowest for Five Star Movement voters - 67% of these voters do not trust the government at all compared to 62% of Democratic party voters, 58% of people who did not vote, and

just 15% of Brothers of Italy voters. Further, the public think that politicians only look out for themselves (81% agree) and that it doesn't matter what the public think because politicians will do what they want (80% agree). These sentiments are consistent across political voter groups, with the strongest sense of dissatisfaction and disempowerment held by Five star Movement voters and those who did not vote in the last election.

Please indicate your level of agreement for the following statements. Net support



Combined, these forces are driving a breakdown in social cohesion, with 53% of Italians feeling increasingly less connected to the people around them. This is relatively consistent across age groups and political orientation. **These sentiments are also driving a breakdown in the social contract between the public and the government**, with 41% of Italians saying they do not trust

the government to spend the budget in a way that is in their best interest. For participants in the focus groups, the government's inability to transparently and effectively manage the state budget was a core reason they rejected the idea of any new taxes.

LOOKING OUTWARD: FEELINGS TOWARDS INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY & MULTILATERALISM

Italians across the political spectrum want their government to work on solving global issues like climate change and global poverty (86% agree), and indeed a majority of the public believe Italy has a responsibility to help people in other countries when they are in need.

84% of Italians think that poverty is one of the biggest issues in the rest of the world and 65% of the public believe it's important for their government to reduce poverty in other countries (this is highest amongst Democratic party voters, with 71% agreement but is broadly consistent across voter groups). Further, 62% believe their country has a responsibility to help other countries in need - this is consistent across voter groups, with 57% of Brothers of Italy voters agreeing, 72% of the Democratic party voters, 73% of Five Star Movement and 53% of people who did not vote in the last election.

The public care about Italy's international reputation, with 86% of the public thinking it is important that other countries have a positive view of their country. Further, the public are proud of their leadership on climate and development and believe these activities build international respect.

This is true across the Democratic Party, Five Star Movement and people who did not vote. However, Brothers of Italy voters disagree - these voters see 'standing up for our national values' and 'standing up for our economic interests more loudly' as the key ways of garnering international respect.

“IN ANY CASE, WHEN IT COMES TO HUMANITARIAN AID ITALY IS ACTUALLY VERY GOOD, ESPECIALLY IN PROVIDING LOGISTICAL SUPPORT. IT'S ONE OF OUR STRONG POINTS, AND THE GENEROSITY OF ITALIANS IN THIS AREA HAS NEVER BEEN LACKING.”

*Female,
Right-leaning Voter, 40s*

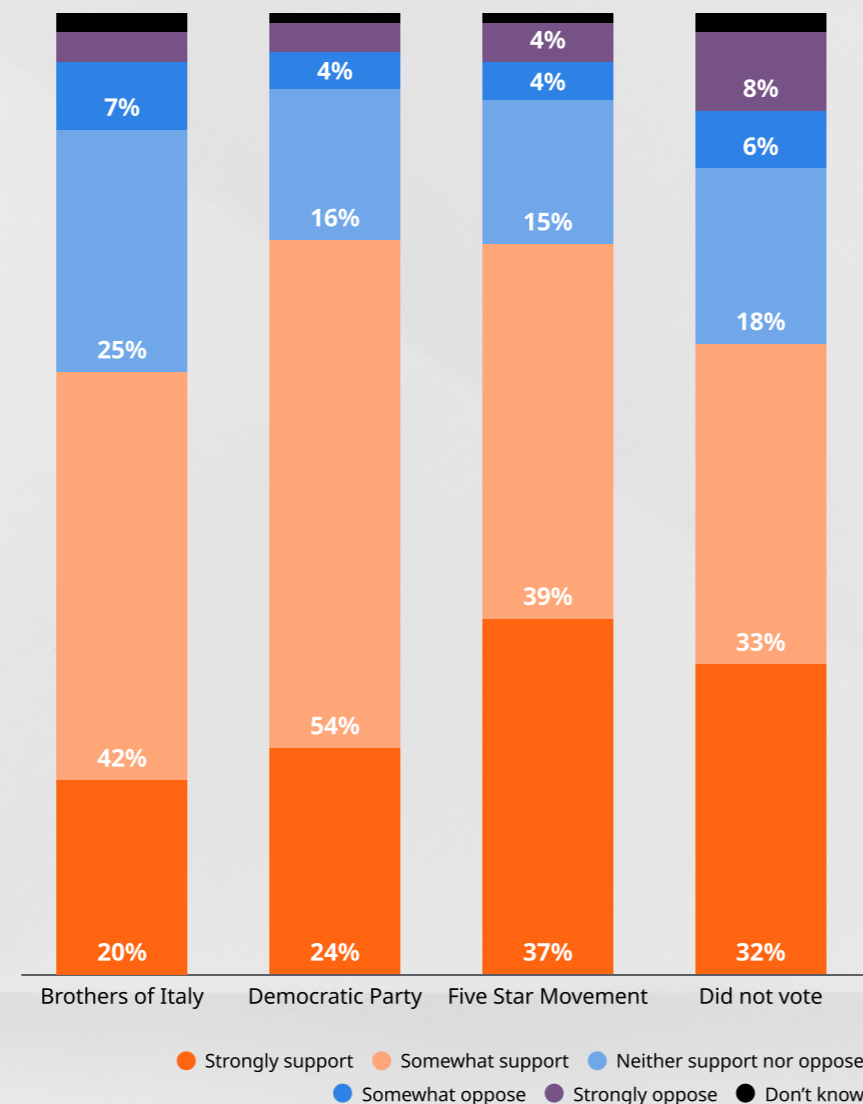


CURRENT ATTITUDES TO INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Support for international development is high across the political spectrum in Italy.

This was found both in the poll and focus group results. 53% of Italians think the country spends the right amount or too little on international development vs. only 24% who think Italy spends too much. This was broadly consistent across voter groups - with 54% of Brothers of Italy voters thinking Italy spends the right amount or too little on international development, 58% of the Democratic Party voters, and 59% of Five Star Movement voters. The main reasons for wanting to reduce the budget were consistent across both the poll and focus groups - that people 'at home' need help first, Italy cannot afford it, and there is no transparency around how the money is spent.

To what extent do you support or oppose Italy spending money to reduce poverty in developing countries, such as by providing food assistance, or helping to construct vital infrastructure like schools or wells?



"1% IS FINE WHERE IT IS. IT'S DEFINITELY NOT 1% THAT SHIFTS THE BALANCE IN OTHER SECTORS. IT'S IMPORTANT, BECAUSE WITHOUT THAT 1%, MAYBE WE'D STILL HAVE INFECTIOUS DISEASES LIKE MEASLES AND POLIO IN THE WORLD. THESE INFECTIOUS DISEASES COULD REACH ITALY. WE'VE ALREADY SEEN HOW QUICKLY DISEASES CIRCULATE, SO OUR CHILDREN COULD BE AT RISK. FOR ME, 1% IS NOT A FIGURE THAT IMPACTS OUR NATIONAL BUDGET."

Female, Centrist Voter, 40s



"BETTER TO SPEND MORE IN ITALY THAN ABROAD. AFTER WHAT YOU JUST TOLD ME, I DON'T DISLIKE THE AID GIVEN ABROAD, AND I REALLY LIKED IT, BUT IT'S TRUE THAT WE HAVE SO MANY INTERNAL PROBLEMS TO FIX."

Male, Centrist Voter, 30s



"COMPARED WITH OTHER NATIONAL EXPENDITURES, IT'S ACTUALLY QUITE SMALL. SO I THINK THIS PERCENTAGE CAN DEFINITELY BE MAINTAINED. IF SUCH RESULTS ARE ACHIEVED WITH SO LITTLE, DESPITE CORRUPTION, IT ENCOURAGES KEEPING AT LEAST 1%."

Female, Right-leaning Voter, 20s



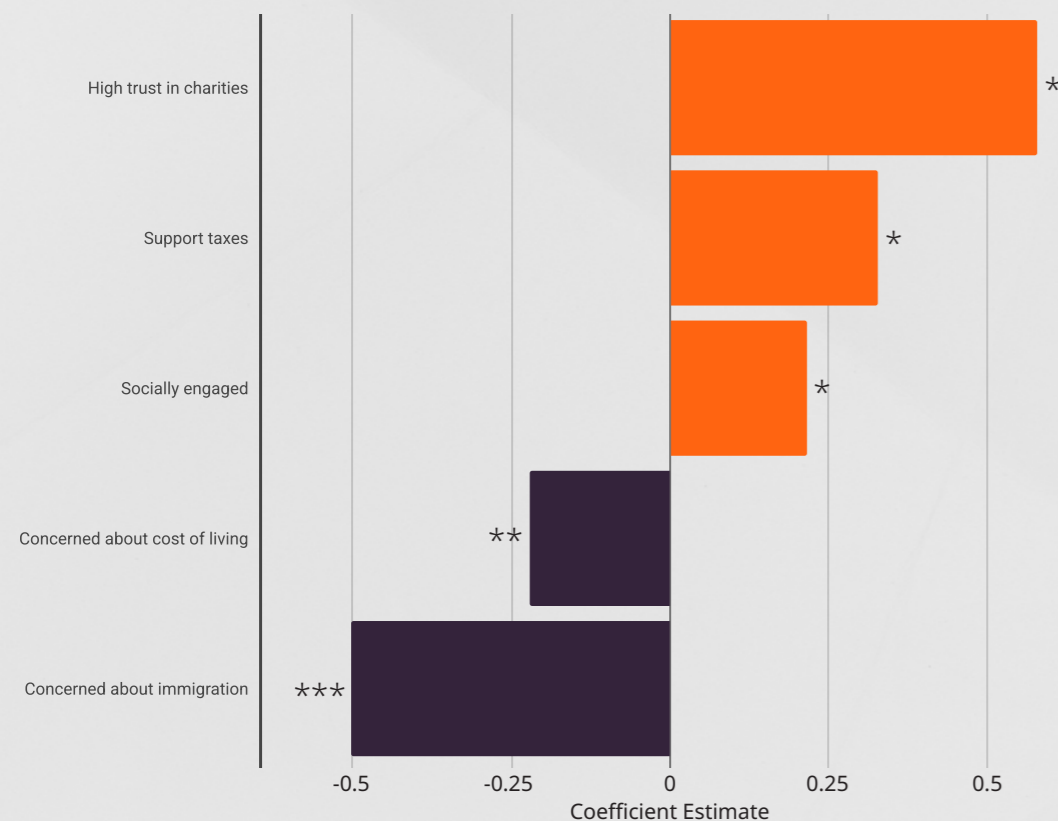
"I WOULD ALSO INCREASE DOMESTIC SPENDING, BECAUSE ITALY REALLY HAS MANY PROBLEMS. IDEALLY, PRIORITIZE OUR COUNTRY WHILE KEEPING THE CURRENT FOREIGN AID PERCENTAGE, AND THEN SEE IF THERE'S ANYTHING EXTRA TO INCREASE."

Female, Right-leaning Voter, 30s

The main predictors of support for international development were having high trust in charities, supporting higher domestic taxes in exchange for better public services, and being socially engaged⁶. Drivers of opposition to development in Italy were being highly concerned about the cost of living or immigration.

Significant Predictors of Support for International Aid in Italy

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001



⁶ Social engagement is defined as those who have taken part in signing a petition, donating or volunteering, sharing political content on social media, or attending a protest. Supports taxes represents those who would support increasing taxes in order to improve public services. 'Concerned about Immigration: 1' represent those who selected immigration as one of the top three issues facing Italy today.

Some of the main reasons for opposition cited in the poll and focus groups included concerns around affordability, the need to help people at home first, a lack of transparency, and concerns over corruption and waste. In the right-leaning focus group, many participants believed corruption was unavoidable both in Italy and abroad, seeing it as “part of human nature” and “part of our country, of all countries in the world”, which left them sceptical that money could ever be channelled efficiently. In the centrist group, perceptions of waste, corruption, and mismanagement were common, fuelled by a lack of transparency over how funds were allocated, which projects were chosen, and what outcomes were achieved. This scepticism was compounded by wider distrust in Italian media and political leaders.

“I don't see the professional skills in Italy—neither in the current government nor in the recent ones—that would be able to effectively manage public money for humanitarian aid wisely.”

- Female, Centrist Voter, 40s

Despite relatively high levels of in-principle support for international development both in the poll and focus groups, when the public are forced to trade off between policy priorities, support falls apart - this is true for voters across the political spectrum. When asked how they would like to see the government spend a new hypothetical pot of €10 billion, international aid was the policy area with the lowest level of support. Spending on the armed forces and national defence also received low support, particularly from Democratic Party and Five Star Movement voters. This is perhaps related to the timing of the fieldwork, which took place 30th June - 6th July, only a week after the 2025 NATO Summit in The Hague.

Improved funding for healthcare

Construction of new infrastructure projects (e.g. new roads, rail lines, etc.)

Increased social support for people out of work

Increased investment in renewable energy infrastructure

Investment in schools and universities

Increased spending on police and the justice system

Increased spending on the armed forces and national defence

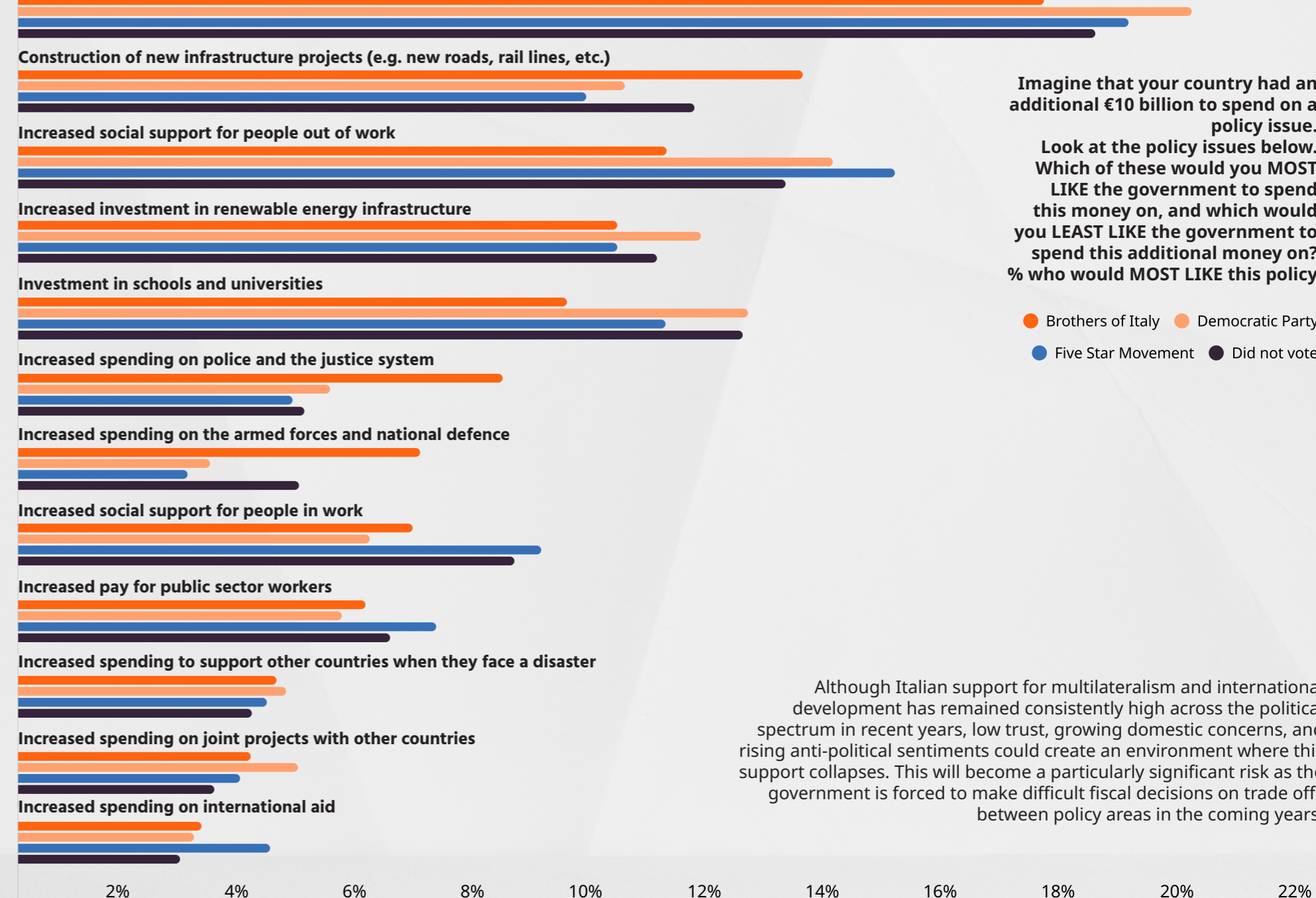
Increased social support for people in work

Increased pay for public sector workers

Increased spending to support other countries when they face a disaster

Increased spending on joint projects with other countries

Increased spending on international aid



Imagine that your country had an additional €10 billion to spend on a policy issue.

Look at the policy issues below. Which of these would you MOST LIKE the government to spend this money on, and which would you LEAST LIKE the government to spend this additional money on? % who would MOST LIKE this policy

Brothers of Italy (orange), Democratic Party (light orange), Five Star Movement (blue), Did not vote (dark blue)

Although Italian support for multilateralism and international development has remained consistently high across the political spectrum in recent years, low trust, growing domestic concerns, and rising anti-political sentiments could create an environment where this support collapses. This will become a particularly significant risk as the government is forced to make difficult fiscal decisions on trade offs between policy areas in the coming years.

PATHWAYS FOR BUILDING PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

We tested three pathways for building support for international development:

1. Changing the way it's framed
2. Changing how it's spent
3. Raising new tax resources to fund it

We found limited routes to building support for development from these pathways - most reform options received lukewarm support and led to marginal shifts for certain groups. The mutual benefits to international development - particularly around reducing migration flows to Italy was particularly convincing for centrist and right-leaning voters. However, the lack of trust in the government is a fundamental threat to building further support for development - none of these reforms to messaging or spending priorities will matter if the public continue to think the government fundamentally cannot be trusted to properly manage the budget.

Changing the way it's framed.

We tested a few different framings for international development, including:

1. As a tool for poverty reduction (e.g. focused on 'traditional' development programmes in education, health and nutrition)
2. As a tool for disaster relief (e.g. focused on humanitarian relief)
3. As a tool for sustainable economic growth (e.g. focused on job creation)

There was a relatively even split in support for the more 'modern' framing of development around building sustainable economies compared to the 'traditional' framing around poverty alleviation. This was true across the political spectrum (e.g. 40% of Brother of Italy voters prefer the traditional framing vs. 46% prefer the modern framing; 42% of the Democratic party voters prefer the traditional framing vs. 45% prefer the modern framing).

Framing development as disaster relief was also more popular across the political spectrum - particularly for right-leaning Brothers of Italy voters - compared to framing as poverty reduction. For Brothers of Italy voters, net support for international development spending jumped from 61% to 69% when presented as disaster relief rather than poverty reduction.

We also tested 'mutual benefit' arguments, to understand the degree to which the Italian public believe that development spending can have positive benefits on the recipient country and the donor country (in terms of supporting the growth of new trading partners, decreasing the price of food or energy, and decreasing migration pressures). In both the poll and focus groups, we found these arguments to be well understood and convincing to the Italian public - particularly around migration. Indeed, 'reducing migration pressures to our country' was identified as a top benefit of investment in other countries, second only to 'helping reduce poverty in other countries'.

The idea that spending abroad leads to benefits at home was more obvious to older Italians - 48% of 65+'s said reducing migration pressure to our country was a main benefit of investment abroad vs. 27% of 18-24 year olds. Further, 35% of 65+'s also saw 'creating new markets for businesses from our country' as a main benefit of this spending, compared to just 22% of 18-24s.



"I THINK THERE IS AN INFLUENCE, MAYBE WE DON'T PERCEIVE IT IMMEDIATELY, BUT OVER THE YEARS, YES, I THINK THERE IS—ON MIGRATION FLOWS, THE ECONOMY, HEALTHCARE."

Female, Centrist Voter, 40s



"INVESTING WITH LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY PROJECTS—LIKE LONG-TERM HEALTH PROJECTS—MAKES SENSE IN MY OPINION. WE GET SOMETHING IN RETURN, LIKE MORE SECURE BORDERS, BETTER CONTROL OF MIGRATION, BETTER ENERGY AGREEMENTS."

Female, Centrist Voter, 40s

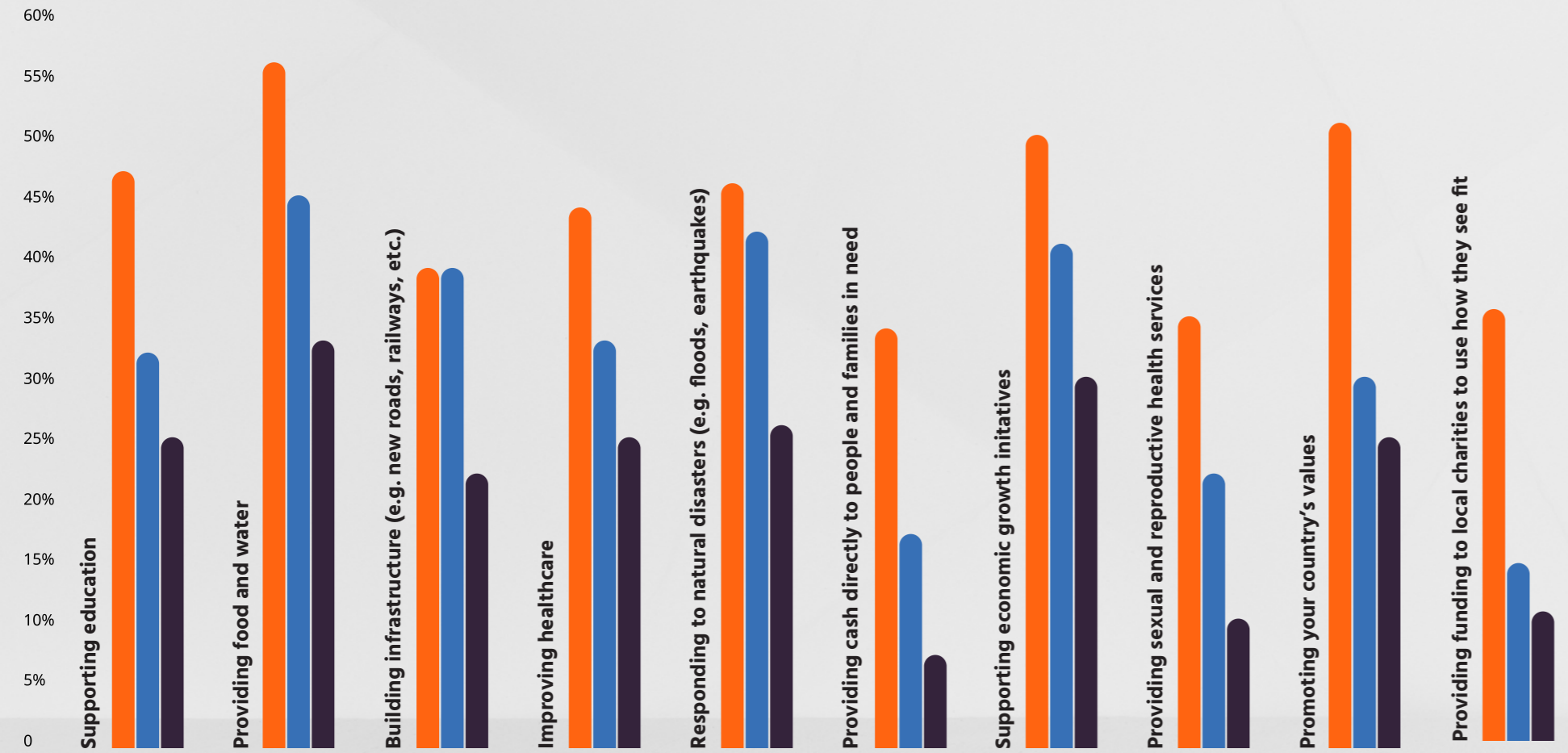


"I THINK ITALY IS STILL ONE OF THE G7/G8 COUNTRIES, SO WE HAVE A LOT AND EAT EVERY DAY. INVESTING IN HUMANITARIAN ACTIONS, IN MY VIEW, THE RETURN SHOULD BE THAT OTHERS LIVE DECENTLY. THAT'S THE ONLY RETURN, AND MAYBE IT PREVENTS DESPERATE PEOPLE FROM RISKING THEIR LIVES CROSSING TO ITALY BY BOAT."

Male, Right-leaning Voter, 50s

Changing how it's spent.

In Italy, all spending options were met with net support across the political spectrum - with left-leaning voters reporting the highest levels of support across the board, followed by lukewarm support from centrist voters and the lowest levels of support for right-leaning voters. The highest levels of support across voter groups was related to providing basic humanitarian relief (food and water, and responding to natural disasters) and support for economic growth initiatives. By contrast, the lowest levels of support was for providing cash directly for families or local charities as well as sexual and reproductive health services.

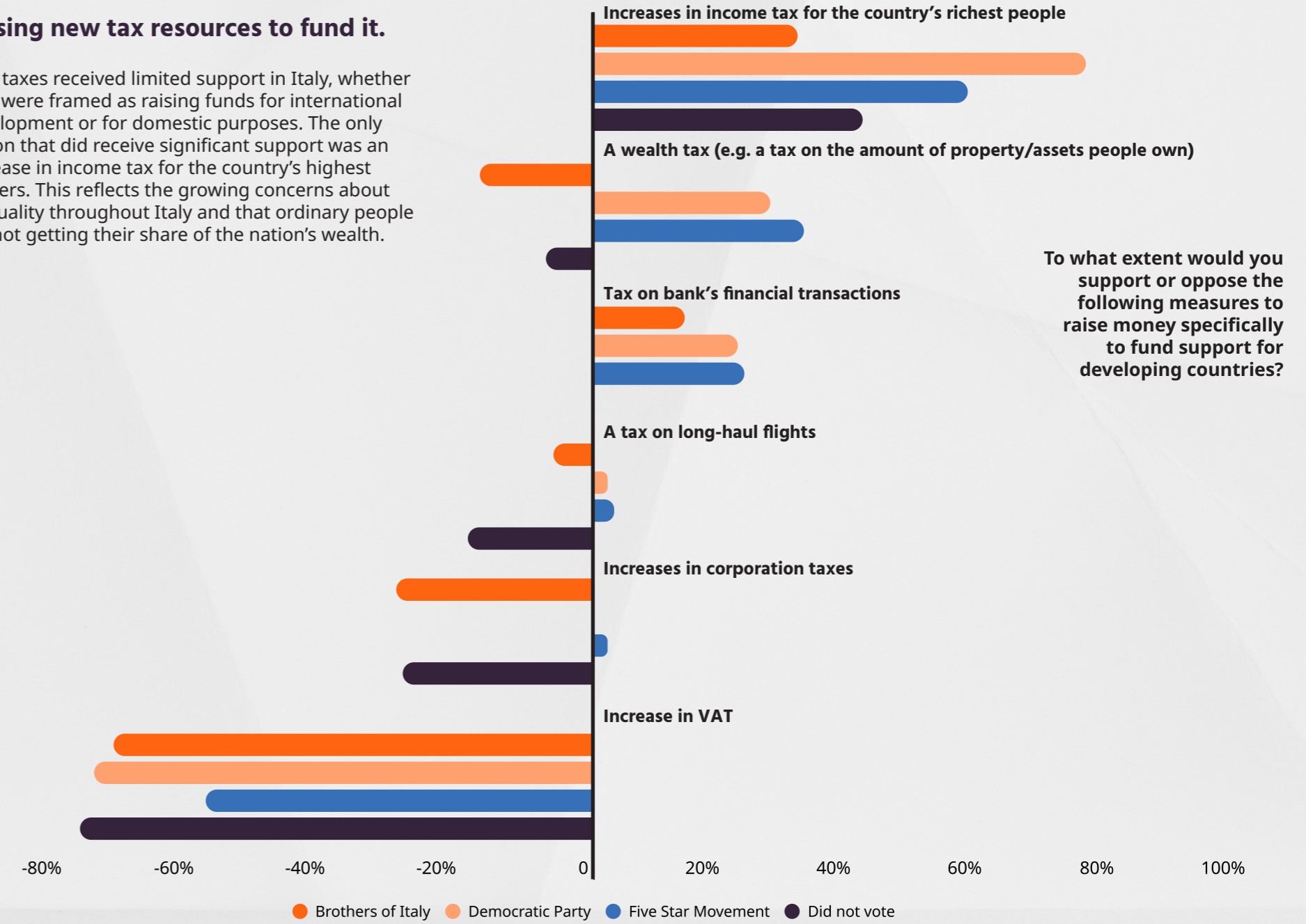


Imagine that aid spending in your country was focused on X. To what extent would you support or oppose your country spending more money to reduce poverty in developing countries in this scenario? Net support

● Left ● Center ● Right

Raising new tax resources to fund it.

New taxes received limited support in Italy, whether they were framed as raising funds for international development or for domestic purposes. The only option that did receive significant support was an increase in income tax for the country's highest earners. This reflects the growing concerns about inequality throughout Italy and that ordinary people are not getting their share of the nation's wealth.



To what extent would you support or oppose the following measures to raise money specifically to fund support for developing countries?

● Brothers of Italy ● Democratic Party ● Five Star Movement ● Did not vote

When we explored this in the focus groups, most participants in both the centrist and right-leaning groups rejected the idea outright, citing Italy's already high tax burden and the risk of misuse. A tax targeted only at the wealthiest individuals or highly polluting industries generated little enthusiasm and was often met with sarcasm. Opposition to new taxes often boiled down to scepticism that these taxes could lead to any meaningful outcomes and addressing tax evasion was seen as a more urgent priority than creating new levies.

[REFERRING TO THE TAX] "I THINK THIS IS A PROVOCATIVE QUESTION, ONE THAT ALREADY HAS A "PRE-WRITTEN" ANSWER. NO ONE WOULD SERIOUSLY CONSIDER IT, AND NO PARTY OR MOVEMENT WOULD RISK PROPOSING IT, SO NO. I'M AGAINST IT."

Male, Centrist Voter, 50s

"BEFORE ADDING TAXES, THERE'S A LOT TO BE DONE IN FIGHTING TAX EVASION. WE COULD COLLECT A LOT MORE AND IT WOULD BE VERY EFFECTIVE FOR INTERNATIONAL AID TO TRACK DOWN THE 100 MILLION TAX EVADERS IN ITALY RIGHT BESIDE US."

Female, Centrist Voter, 40s

"YOU'RE ADDING YET ANOTHER TAX! AS I SAID BEFORE, IT'S OBVIOUS THAT AVERAGE ITALIANS WOULDN'T AGREE."

Male, Centrist Voter, 30s

"IF WE WERE CERTAIN OF THE RESULTS, WE'D PAY THE TAX. THE PROBLEM IS, NO ONE CAN GUARANTEE OUTCOMES, AND WE KNOW HOW MUCH PROMISES ARE WORTH IN ITALY."

Female, Right-leaning Voter, 30s

"IF THERE ARE CONCRETE RESULTS, I'LL PAY THIS TAX—AND EVEN TWICE. IF IT CUTS THE NUMBER OF IMMIGRANTS COMING TO ITALY, I'LL PAY TWICE."

Male, Right-leaning Voter, 50s

