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ABSTRACT

In recent years, a research agenda on the party politics of military interventions has flourished. However, considerably less attention has been devoted to analysing party positions on the decision to provide military assistance to an actor involved in the conflict. This article focuses on Italy's support for Ukraine after the 2022 Russian invasion. Triangulating quantitative and qualitative data, we examine party positions and how they evolved from the Draghi to the Meloni government. We find that moderate parties have generally been more supportive than extreme parties except Brothers of Italy, whose stance is still coherent with its own peculiar core values.

KEYWORDS

Italy; political parties; military aid; Ukraine; Russia; parliament; quantitative text analysis; interviews

Introduction

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has been largely conceived as 'a shock'. Scholarly debate in International Relations (IR) and Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) has increasingly addressed the ways through which domestic actors deal with shocks, fostering change (Hermann 1990). After the end of the Cold War, following a so-called 'domestic turn' in IR (Kaarbo 2015), the interest in the relationship between cabinet characteristics and state conflict proneness grew considerably (Koch 2009; Palmer, London & Regan 2004). A specific research agenda exploring the party politics of military interventions abroad naturally followed, highlighting how the conflict between the hawkish right and the dovish left has overlapped with one between committed moderates and uncommitted radicals (Ostermann & Wagner 2023, Rathbun 2004; Wagner 2020). However, states may not intervene directly in existing conflicts, putting their troops' 'boots on the ground'; instead, they provide military external support to one of the parties engaged in a conflict, whether a state or non-state actor. The perceived failures of the interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya have decreased public support for military missions, pushing governments to choose military aid instead. Therefore, it is also worthwhile to investigate party support for that kind of foreign policy decision. Unfortunately, there is a lack of systematic research examining the party politics of military support.

What are the drivers of parties' attitudes towards military assistance? Drawing on expectations deriving from the existing research on the party politics of military interventions, this article aims to address the question. The manuscript examines the case of Italian support for Ukraine in the aftermath of Russian aggression starting in February 2022. Italy sent military weapons and equipment to Ukraine, similar to other Western countries. The Italian case is particularly fruitful for analysing party positions on security policy, given the comparatively high extent of fragmentation in the party system and government alternation (Coticchia & Vignoli 2020a; Vignoli 2020). In the context of military support for Ukraine, we shifted from the large coalition technocratic Draghi to the right-wing Meloni cabinet, allowing us to control for the intervening impact of government-opposition dynamics on party positions (Ostermann & Wagner 2023). To empirically assess such positions, we triangulate a quantitative analysis of parliamentary votes and debates on the shipment of military aid towards Ukraine with a qualitative analysis of semi-structured elite interviews and other primary and secondary sources. As much as interventions abroad, military assistance to Ukraine stimulated curvilinear support across the left–right axis in Italy: radical left parties were the most critical, centrist parties were the most supportive, and radical right was somewhat less supportive of centrist parties. *Fratelli d'Italia* (Brothers of Italy, FdI) was the exception as it staunchly supported this foreign policy decision even during the Draghi cabinet when it was the only opposition party. In line with the existing literature (Vignoli, Ostermann & Wagner 2022), we also show the instrumental use of debates by governing parties who are sceptical of military aid: *Lega* (The League) and *Movimento 5 Stelle* (Five Star Movement, M5S) (only during the Draghi cabinet) in our case.

The paper provides two main contributions. First, it offers an original, detailed, and cross-time analysis of Italian parties' stances on the war in Ukraine across Draghi and Meloni cabinets. Second, the manuscript fills the literature gap on parties and military assistance, paving the way for further research on the same unexplored topic.

The article is structured as follows: First, we review the literature on party politics and security policy, highlighting the gap in military aid. We then introduce our case study, stressing the peculiarities of Italy's party system, foreign policy, and relationship with Russia. Subsequently, we describe our data and the method we used to analyse them. We then report and discuss our empirical findings. Finally, we conclude by connecting our results with the existing scholarly debate.

The party politics of security policy

By bridging the gap with comparative politics, FPA research has emphasised parties and foreign and security policy, investigating the possible drivers of parties' attitudes (Haesebrouck & Mello 2020; Raunio & Wagner 2020). A rising debate on

populism and foreign policy change has also analysed the conditions under which populist leaders can overcome domestic and international constraints to bring about change in international politics (Chrysogelos et al. 2023). The literature on parties and foreign policy has produced some relevant findings from empirical cross-time and cross-country analyses (Ostermann & Wagner 2023, Rathbun 2004; Vignoli, Ostermann & Wagner 2022). First, politics does not stop at ‘the water’s edge’, and parties play a crucial role in shaping foreign policy. Second, ideology matters. ‘Research in recent decades has accumulated evidence for a partisan theory of foreign policy: leftist governments tend to be less inclined to use armed forces and more inclined to commit to international law and institutions. They also tend to be less supportive of free trade and spend more on development aid’ (Raunio & Wagner 2020, p. 523). Studies should thus examine ‘not just whether parties matter in foreign policy-making but how, when and where they matter’ (Hofmann & Martill 2021, p. 306). Indeed, beyond a traditional ‘hawks and doves’ view on the differences placed along the left–right dimension to explain party positions and behaviour in foreign policy (Palmer, London & Regan 2004), research has focused on the relevance of *core values* for parties, such as multilateralism and protection of human rights in the context of military operations (Haesebrouck & Mello 2020; Rathbun 2004). Relatedly, empirical analyses have confirmed the existence of the above-mentioned ‘curvilinear model’ to describe how parties vote on security and defence policy: from extreme opposition at the left to the maximum support for military operations at the centre, with a slight decline at the right (Ostermann & Wagner 2023; Vignoli 2022; Wagner 2020). Third, being part of the government deeply affects the party’s decisions, fostering significant changes (Coticchia & Vignoli 2020a). Fourth, parties’ attitudes vary across foreign policy questions, from international trade to development. For instance, ‘legislators for left parties are in general more likely to support development aid [...] while right-leaning legislators are more supportive of free trade’ (Raunio & Wagner 2020, p. 519). The scholarly debate on foreign aid has confirmed the relationship between the level of development aid and cumulated leftist power (Thérien & Noël 2000), as well as the fact that the more an executive is favourable towards the military, the more it spends on defence as opposed to aid, and vice versa (Wenzelburger & Böller 2020). Other authors have recently focused on parties and defence spending, revealing how populist radical right parties support military expenditure but ‘remain sceptical of international cooperation’ in the context of transatlantic burden sharing (Becker & Mellon 2023, p. 4). Finally, scholars have illustrated that right-wing governments support arms supply, sustaining industry exports and lowering trade barriers (Comola 2012).

Oddly enough, although the literature has highlighted ‘how parties make a difference’ on foreign aid (Thérien & Noël 2000, p. 151), military export, and defence spending, the issue of military assistance did not attract considerable attention. Lanoszka and Becker, who have recently examined the drivers of military aid to Ukraine *before* the Russian invasion of 2022, define military

assistance as: *'the provision of military hardware, equipment, training, and expertise. It can be gifted, provided with financing, or purchased outright'* (Lanoszka & Becker 2023, p. 175). While the literature has examined the different sets of considerations (strategic, economic, and risk) that shape arm transfer policies (Thrall, Cohen & Dorminey 2020), a partisan theory of military aid has rarely been assessed.

What are the drivers of parties' attitudes towards military assistance? If several studies have investigated determinants of arms transfer at the state level, the parties' decisions on military aid have hardly been studied in detail. Therefore, the political relevance of the topic at the time of the war in Ukraine – and the gap in the scholarly debate on parties and foreign policy – require further analysis. According to Lanoszka and Becker, the 'discussion on military assistance to Ukraine remains absent' (2023, p. 173). Future studies should thus use "increasingly detailed data on military aid to Ukraine, investigating the decision-making process 'of specific cases' (2023, p. 190). As suggested by Becker and Mellon, 'future research could make use of emerging discourse analysis techniques' to evaluate the influence of parties on the political agenda in defence (2023, p. 4).

This paper aims to assess the validity of claims and hypotheses developed in studying the party politics of military interventions in the context of more limited military aid. In particular, we focus on the ideological cleavage. Does such conflict occur about the decision to aid another international actor militarily? To what extent does the partisan theory of defence policy explain parties' stances on military assistance? We address such questions by examining the case of Italian parties and the decision to supply weapons to Ukraine. Clearly, military aid and missions abroad are not the same topics, presenting different stakes for parties. Thus, one might assume some differences in the attitudes of political actors.¹ Though the above-mentioned scholarly debate on parties and military interventions) remains vital to develop our claims on the case of Italian military aid to Kyiv in the absence of specific analyses on this issue.

First, we expect parties' attitudes towards military assistance to fit the 'curvilinear model' (Ostermann & Wagner 2023).² In other words, we assume a cleavage between moderate parties supporting military support and extreme parties opposing it. In the context of Western European democracies, mainstream moderate parties promote a liberal approach to foreign policy, emphasising the importance of integration into multilateral fora such as the EU and NATO and the alliance with the United States. They are also generally keener on justifying the use of force based on values such as protecting human rights and democracy. Therefore, we expect them to support military assistance in such cases. To the contrary, extreme parties have recently contested the so-called liberal order and military interventionism, adopting a pacifist and sometimes

¹We thank an anonymous reviewer for this point.

²Such model has been empirically confirmed also in the case of *Italian* parties and military missions (Coticchia & Vignoli 2020a; Vignoli 2022).

(especially for the far right) even isolationist approach to foreign policy. Therefore, we assume they are more sceptical of sending military aid to other countries. Second, we suppose that the traditional government-opposition dynamics are vital to understanding the evolution of the parties' stances on military aid, from Draghi to Meloni, highlighting a potential shift in the viewpoint of parties according to their presence in the coalition government (Coticchia & Vignoli 2020a). We generally expect governing parties to support military aid to Ukraine due to the pressure from the external environment and, conversely, opposition parties to oppose to present an alternative point of view on the issue that might resonate with (parts of) the electorate. Third, and relatedly, we assume that such a government-opposition dynamic would be more robust in votes than in debates. In other words, in line with recent comparative research on parties and missions abroad (Vignoli, Ostermann & Wagner 2022), we can expect to see the possible gap between the actual votes on political decisions and the discourses, which could be exploited to signal criticisms to a reluctant constituency. In particular, governing parties with a sceptical position on the issue may use debates to voice such criticism, only to return to the ranks during votes.

As suggested, Italy offers a stunning variance regarding the ideological leaning of the parties in government, party leaders, and composition of coalition cabinets. The war in Ukraine also came at a very peculiar time even for the lively Italian politics. A large coalition technocratic government led by former ECB president Mario Draghi ruled the country in February 2022. This cabinet fell a few months afterwards to be replaced in Fall by a right-wing government, which confirmed the decision to support militarily Ukraine. In the face of a lack of change in the foreign policy output, such government alteration enables us to look in detail at the impact of government-opposition dynamics on party positions. Interestingly, Italian parties also differ in terms of previous relations with the country against whom the military assistance is provided, i.e. Russia.

Italian parties and their attitudes towards Russia

The Italian foreign policy has often promoted dialogue and cooperation between Western allies and Russia (Siddi 2019). The scholarly debate has emphasised several reasons behind this sort of pro-Russian attitudes among Italian parties: from economic ties (especially in the Northern regions) to energy dependence, from the legacy of the communist past of the left to the current radical right's alignment with Vladimir Putin's regime in terms of conservative values and geopolitical narrative (Makarychev & Terry 2020). Even after the 2014 Russian invasion of Crimea, Italian governments and parties shared – with different emphasis – the need to (re)integrate Russia into the global order, fostering dialogue and cooperation with Moscow. Italy participated in several missions on

the EU Eastern border in the last years but nevertheless attributed strategic priority to the 'Enlarged Mediterranean', further demonstrating not to consider Russia as a vital security threat. In other words, the concern towards the Russian menace has been significantly lower in Italy than in many other European countries. However, as remarked by Natalizia and Morini (2020), notwithstanding its positive attitudes towards Moscow, Italy has always aligned with main allies such as the United States, France, and Germany during periods of crisis.

As was suggested, Vladimir Putin had various supporters in Italian politics. Silvio Berlusconi had been his friend for more than two decades. Berlusconi considered the NATO – Russia summit in Pratica di Mare (2002) as one of his greatest successes in foreign policy (Diodato & Niglia 2018). Still, he went beyond the constant attempts to improve the relationship between the West and the Kremlin, openly justifying the invasion of Crimea while making jokes about the lack of freedom and democracy in Russia. Among Italian 'Russian sympathising parties' (Bordignon, Diamanti & Turato 2022), Lega under the leadership of Matteo Salvini, played a very active role in recent years, also signing an agreement of cooperation with Putin's party, United Russia, in 2017 (Albertazzi, Giovannini & Seddone 2018). Salvini himself frequently praised Putin, viewing him as a political model, and supported Russian actions even in Crimea (Makarychev & Terry 2020). Moreover, Lega (The League) voted against a motion in the EU Parliament censuring the attempt to murder the leader of the Russian opposition, Andrey Navalny (Coticchia & Verbeek 2023). Finally, Lega contested Italy's participation in NATO operations of air policing at the EU's Eastern border while opposing the sanctions against Russia following the invasion of Crimea (Vignoli 2022).

The links between FdI and Putin were less evident, despite Meloni having often positively emphasised the policy positions adopted by the Russian leader, especially concerning the EU and the defence of national identity and sovereignty (Zulianello 2019). Meloni viewed Russia as part of the European value system, defending Christian identity and fighting jihadism (Meloni's autobiography, quoted in Bruno & Fazio, 2024, 15). In addition, FdI aimed to end the sanctions against Russia after it invaded Crimea. At the same time, the document approved by its second congress (2017) highlights the need for a tight relationship between Russia and Europe. Five Star Movement (M5S) also expressed sympathies for Putin's regime. For instance, it contrasted the EU sanctions, considering Italian interests as subservient to European and NATO allies (Siddi 2019). In 2016, an M5S delegation met in Russia with the leadership of United Russia. Both M5S and Lega portrayed Russia 'as a partner rather than a menace' in their Yellow-Green coalition government's 'contract' in 2018 (Coticchia 2021). Other parties – PD, Italia Viva, and Azione – distanced themselves from such attitudes towards Putin, adopting a different stance while criticising those connections with the Russian regime.

Things changed after February 2022. Parties modified their views on Russia to varying degrees. While scholars examined this evolution (see Appendix), a comprehensive cross-time investigation of the stances of the main Italian parties on military assistance to Ukraine is lacking.

Data and methods

We focus on eight actors: *Alleanza Verdi-Sinistra* (Green-Left Alliance, AVS), *Forza Italia* (Go Italy, FI), *Fratelli d'Italia* (Brothers of Italy, FdI), *Italia Viva-Azione* (Italy Alive-Action, IV-Azione), *Lega* (The League), *Liberi e Uguali* (Free and Equals, LeU), *Movimento 5 Stelle* (Five Star Movement, M5S), *Partito Democratico* (PD). LeU (*Sinistra Italiana*, *Possibile*, and *Articolo 1*), AVS (*Sinistra Italiana* and *Europa Verde*) and IV-Azione are coalitions of parties rather than parties, but they are considered jointly as they formed unique parliamentary groups. These political actors represent most of the fundamental party families: green-radical left (LeU and AVS), social democrats (PD), liberals (IV-Azione), Christian democrats-conservatives (FI), and radical right (Lega and FdI). This variation in party ideology makes the Italian case particularly fruitful for analysing domestic cleavages in foreign and security policy and, specifically, military aid to third countries. Our analysis spans two cabinets: the technocratic Draghi cabinet and the right-wing Meloni cabinet. FdI is the only party that did not support the Draghi cabinet. *Sinistra Italiana* (SI), the most left-wing party within LeU, did not vote in favour of this government upon its assignment. Instead, the right-wing Meloni coalition government comprises FdI (as a senior partner), Lega, and FI. AVS replaced LeU in the radical left side of the political Italian landscape, moving from legislature XVIII to XIX. Therefore, we can compare the behaviour of the same seven actors across two different cabinets.³

To comprehensively examine these parties' positions on military support for Ukraine, we relied on parliamentary debates and votes in 2022 and 2023, referring to two bills of law decree conversion: law n.28, 5 April 2022, and law n.8, 27 January 2023. The first bill granted Ukraine 12 million Euros of military support through 'non-lethal military equipment and material'. It also concerned the participation of Italian troops in NATO air surveillance operations in Eastern Europe and initiatives aimed at increasing the alliance's capacity to use force in the short term. Furthermore, the bill contained various measures regarding the security of diplomatic staff abroad, the reception of Ukrainian refugees, the natural gas supply, and more. The second bill, presented by the Meloni government shortly after its establishment and approved soon after by parliament, renewed the commitment for 2023. The parliament has dealt with the issue of the war in Ukraine and its repercussions on the Italian economy in several other

³Other parties are excluded due to the small and inconsistent presence in Parliament.

instances since the beginning of the crisis. However, military support for Ukraine was debated and voted by all parties only in a few instances.

The ‘Draghi Bill’ debate occurred during eight parliamentary sessions in March 2022.⁴ The final votes took place during the last sessions in each chamber. In the Chamber of Deputies, 92 per cent of the MPs voted in favour of the bill, 6 per cent voted against it, and 2 per cent abstained; in the Senate, 86 per cent supported the bill, 14 per cent opposed it, and none abstained. The cabinet turned the second vote at the Senate into a confidence vote. The debate about the Meloni bill spanned across four sessions in January 2023. The votes took place on 11 and 24 January, resulting in slightly smaller majorities: 82 per cent at the Chamber of Deputies and 80 per cent at the Senate, with 17 and 18 per cent of votes against.⁵

Since parties constitute our analysis object, we aggregate individual debates and votes at the party level. In the debates, we also combined speeches at the Chamber of Deputies and Senate.⁶ At the same time, we differentiate debates and votes across the two bills above to examine variations in general trends and party positions. For the debates, we obtain 14 documents, 1 for each party across the two bills. For the votes, we instead have the absolute and relative number of ‘yes’, ‘no’, and ‘abstentions’ across parties, Chambers, and bills.⁷

The quantitative analysis of votes is self-explanatory, as votes can be counted and reported in tables. However, debates are an essentially unstructured form of data, as much as any other type of text. To quantitatively analyse the debates, we have to transform them into structured data, employing a ‘Text as Data’ approach (Benoit 2020; Grimmer, Roberts & Stewart 2022). Following standard practice, we turned our document into a document-feature matrix, reporting frequencies of words across documents. To reduce the dimensionality of the matrix, we removed punctuation, symbols, numbers, hyphens, separators, and commonplace words like prepositions and articles (also known as Stopwords). We also removed uninformative and technical words, such as ‘*Signor*’ (‘Mister’) and ‘*Presidente*’ (‘President’). In addition, we considered combined words associated with international politics and the conflict in Ukraine as single tokens, such as ‘*Federazione*’ (‘Federation’) and ‘*Russa*’ (‘Russian’). To decrease heterogeneity across the bills and make comparability easier, we removed all those words that were not present in at least three documents.⁸

We applied the scaling algorithm Wordfish to this matrix (Slapin & Proksch 2008). Wordfish assumes that the occurrence of the words across documents is

⁴See Appendix for details.

⁵For the full descriptions of debates and votes, see Tables A1 and A2. in the Appendix.

⁶We have no reasons to believe that MPs affiliated to the same party spoke significantly different about this issue across the two chambers.

⁷The aggregation at the party-level of debates is necessary to guarantee an effective application of quantitative text analysis but obscures intra-party politics. Using votes and interviews, we are instead able to identify rebels and dissenters within the party.

⁸See Tables A3 and A4. in the Appendix.

drawn from a Poisson distribution, where the probability of observing the event is not correlated with the probability of the previous event. Such distribution of word frequencies is obtained by combining a parameter capturing the importance of a word to distinguish between documents with another parameter representing the position on the latent dimension, conditioned by both document and feature-fixed effects (Benoit 2020). In practice, the more a word occurs in a heterogeneous manner across texts, the more it contributes to placing an actor across a dimension. In this sense, Wordfish is considered an unsupervised scaling method that does not define the dimension a priori but lets it emerge from the distribution of words. Therefore, it is particularly suited for estimating party positions from texts in contexts when there is a lack of consensus and established knowledge regarding the dimensions, and the author does not want to introduce a bias in the estimation process. For instance, studies have already employed it to estimate party positions on military interventions in Italy (Vignoli 2020; Vignoli, Ostermann & Wagner 2022). However, literature on party positions on military external aid is basically non-existent. This makes a strong case for using Wordfish rather than other supervised scaling algorithms such as Wordscores (Laver & Garry 2000).

We complemented this quantitative analysis with 17 qualitative semi-structured interviews (see the Appendix) with experts, Ministers, the Undersecretary of the Draghi and Meloni governments, and MPs of all the parties examined. Thus, the empirical analysis triangulates secondary and primary sources (votes, interviews, official documents, parliamentary debates).

Empirical analysis

Debates

As a first step in this empirical analysis of the parliamentary debates, we scrutinise the scores attributed by Wordfish to specific words in the debates about military support for Ukraine and deriving party positions. Figure 1 presents the words contained in our document-feature matrix, distributed in the typical ‘Eiffel Tower’ shape according to their *beta* and *psi* scores. The *beta* score grasps how many words occur *heterogeneously* across documents; the *psi* score grasps how many words occur *homogeneously* across documents. In other words, the *psi* score measures how frequent a word is across all documents, while the *beta* score measures how frequent a word is in some documents and not others. Therefore, the *beta* score is a discriminating parameter: it contributes to distinguishing actors’ positions depending on their use of certain words but not others. *Beta* scores are attributed on a scale ranging from negative to positive scores: the more negative or positive the score, the more that word is used by a particular group of actors but not others. Words with more extreme *beta* values contribute decisively to placing an actor towards one pole of the

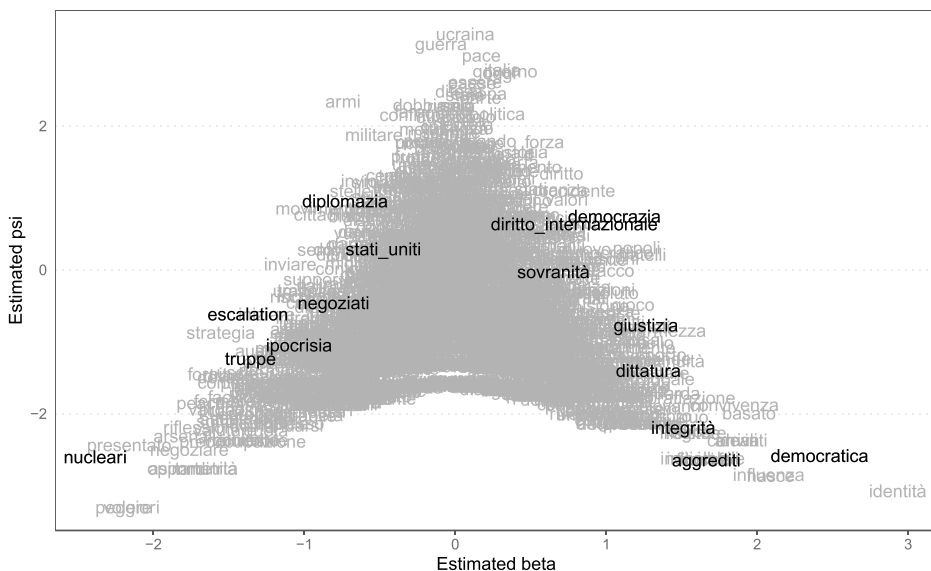


Figure 1. Most (and least) discriminating words.

dimension. We set the documents of AVS and FdI about the Meloni bill as negative and positive parameters to presumably obtain a dimension ranging from less to more support. The selection of these documents as parameters is a minimal form of input merely aimed at indicating desired cleavage direction. It does not affect the size of the word scores and deriving positions but rather their polarity.⁹ In fact, as already suggested, Wordfish is an unsupervised method that generates scores based on word frequencies across documents. It is up to the researcher to validate the scores and derived positions. *Psi* scores also take negative and positive values: the more homogeneously a word occurs across documents, the larger the scores and vice versa.¹⁰

The word with the largest *beta* negative score is ‘*nucleari*’ (‘nuclear’), conveying the fear of the use of nuclear weapons by Russia in case of prolonged conflict. Some of the words with most negative scores are associated with the idea of finding a diplomatic (‘*diplomazia*’) solution to the conflict, through a negotiation (‘*negoziati*’) with Putin, avoiding an ‘escalation’ of the conflict and the deployment of troops (‘*truppe*’) on the ground. Notably, the United States (‘*Stati Uniti*’) is associated with this pole of dimension, as if it were considered responsible for the continuation of the conflict. The first and second words with the most positive *beta* scores are ‘identity’ (‘*identità*’) and ‘democracy’ (‘*democrazia*’). They can be associated with a narrative

⁹If we invert these parameters, we obtain the same scores just with opposite signs. If we use other similar documents, the same scores are resulting. It is also worth noting how these two documents turns out to not to be the ones presenting the most negative and positive scores respectively.

¹⁰Thus, the words with more negative and more positive *beta* scores tend to have smaller *psi* scores, while words with close to zero *beta* scores tend to have larger *psi* scores.

emphasising that the conflict is essential to preserving Ukrainian identity and European democracy. Other words with largely positive scores stress that Ukraine was illegitimately attacked (*'aggredito'*) and its sovereignty (*'sovranità'*) violated by Russia, a dictatorship (*'dittatura'*), in an act that goes against the principles of international law (*'diritto_internazionale'*). Words with the largest *psi* scores are predictably 'Ukraine' (*'Ucraina'*), 'war' (*'guerra'*), and 'peace' (*'pace'*). 'Weapons' (*'armi'*) has a very large *psi* score but, notably, a slightly negative beta score. To sum up, it seems that the latent dimension reflects a scale in which the negative pole is associated with a 'spiral model' conception of the conflict, in the context of which military aid might lead to an escalation and the positive pole with the necessity to support Ukrainian resistance and defend liberal values.

Figure 2 presents the party positions across the two decrees generated from word presence across documents and their scores, with associated measures of uncertainty.¹¹ To test our hypotheses about the impact of ideology on cleavages on this issue, we follow by analysing parties from left to right as divided into three groups: radical left and M5S,¹² PD and IV-Azione, and the right-wing coalition, composed of FdI, FI, and Lega.

In this order, M5S and radical left coalitions (LeU and M5S) present the two most negative scores in both decrees. They are significantly distanced from all the other parties. Their scores decreased even further, moving from the Draghi towards the Meloni cabinet. The findings concerning these parties align with the linear (left versus right) and curvilinear (moderates versus radical) hypotheses of support for military aid derived from the literature on military intervention. These scores partially confirm the impact of the government-opposition dynamics as these parties supported the Draghi government but not the Meloni government – although part of the LeU coalition did not vote for Draghi either.¹³

For M5S, the choice of sending military aid was 'morally and ethically complicated', but it was conceived in a phase when 'the Ukrainians had to be allowed to defend themselves from the Russians' (Interviewee 7).¹⁴ M5S was displeased by Draghi's forceful response to the war in Ukraine, advocating a more diplomatic approach that could distance Italy from the US and NATO.¹⁵ In parliament, M5S openly asked to 'abandon belligerent positions'

¹¹See Table A6 in the Appendix. We conducted a pooled analysis of both decrees as robustness check, changing the trimming of the document feature matrix to only those words occurring in 2 out of the 8 party-level documents. There is a strong correlation with these estimates ($r = 0.93$). For the position plot, see Figure 1 in the Appendix.

¹²The M5S has been considered for years as an 'hybrid populist party' (Bordignon & Ceccarini 2015). Yet, beyond its recent ideological evolution under the Conte's leadership, research had already illustrated how 'M5S has maintained a broadly "pacifist approach" to security policy (Coticchia & Vignoli 2020b).

¹³Except for the PD (*infra*), all parties reduce (in a limited or in a more significant way) their level of support from 2022 to 2023. 'War fatigue' could consistently explain such decrease.

¹⁴According to the reconstruction by a former M5S Minister, 'the most complex Council of Ministers' was that of the decision of sending weapons to Ukraine: despite the 'personal hesitations that everyone had', the decision was approved at the unanimity' (Interviewee 7).

¹⁵M5S was initially shaken also by the case of Vito Petrocelli, vice-president of the Senate committee on foreign affairs. Petrocelli defected on multiple votes on the issue and, after some hesitations, M5S decided to oust him.

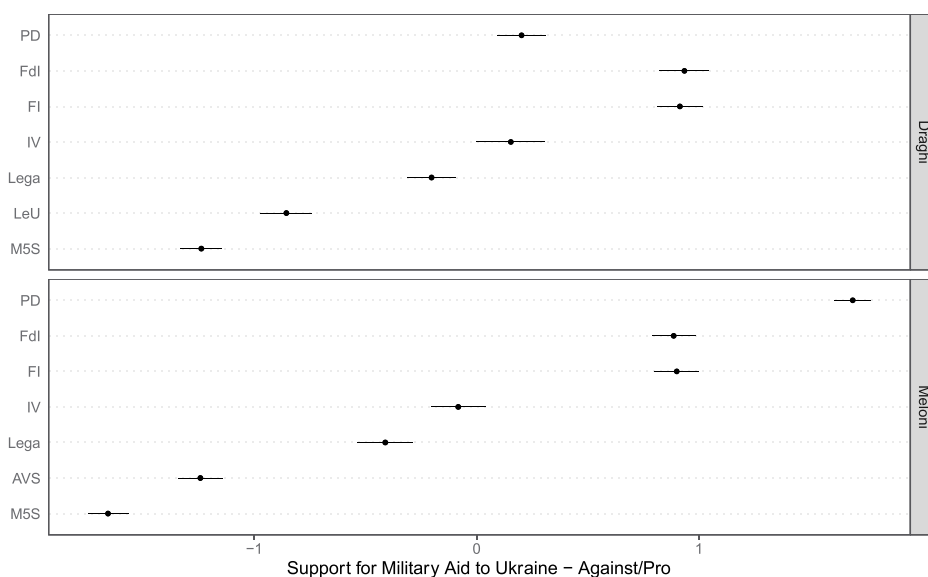


Figure 2. Positions extracted by Wordfish, by party and decree.

while the party leader Giuseppe Conte hoped that the EU would not pursue NATO's harsh response to the crisis. However, part of M5S did not share such criticism, as it undermined Italy's credibility and, most importantly, the government's stability. The rift within the party between the 'pro-Draghi' and the 'anti-Draghi' was so deep that former M5S leader and then Minister of Foreign Affairs Luigi Di Maio left the party because of its blackmailing attitude towards the cabinet.

According to a former Minister, 'M5S did not change its position because of the new Meloni executive, but rather such evolution occurred *already* during the Draghi government, since May 2022' (Interviewee 7). Following Draghi's government collapse during the electoral campaign, M5S reaffirmed the importance of imposing sanctions on Putin's regime. The party's manifesto called for an international conference to 'find a diplomatic solution to the criminal invasion of Ukraine'.¹⁶ However, once in the opposition, the M5S 'came back to the pacifist left' (Interviewee 4). M5S voted against the EU mission of training Ukrainian forces because the party 'backs military presence only if it is a support to security and democracy' (Interviewee 7). M5S proposed a more diplomatic approach to find a solution to the enduring crisis, consisting of the end of military aid, that, nevertheless, 'does not equate to giving Russian troops the green light to occupy Ukrainian territory' (Interviewee 7).

Right after the invasion of Ukraine, LeU supported the Draghi government in its decisions to participate in sanctions against Russia and provide support for the Ukrainian people but also firmly pushed for a diplomatic solution. 'We need

¹⁶Dalla Parte Giusta: Cuore e Coraggio per l'Italia di Domani', M5S's 2022 general election manifesto, p.232.

to work to avoid a military escalation that would have unimaginable consequences', Federico Fornaro, an Art.1 (article 1) MP, claimed in parliament.¹⁷ This crisis exposed the rifts within LeU between Art.1 and SI. Indeed, Nicola Fratoianni, SI's leader, defined the Italian government's decision to send military weapons to Ukraine as a 'dramatic mistake' taken during an 'Atlanticist hangover'.¹⁸ After this speech, Fratoianni voted against the government's majority motion and proposed his own, advocating against the shipment of weapons and NATO enlargement. In any case, the two parties shared a similar narrative based on antimilitarism. During another parliamentary debate, *Articolo 1* Fornaro warned that Italy's alliance with the US should be 'loyal and not faithful' and underlined that a diplomatic solution to the crisis is viable only if NATO 'stays at its place'.¹⁹

As expected, during the electoral campaign, radical left parties strongly contrasted the Italian military aid to Kyiv. In its manifesto, AVS called for a halt to sending military support to Ukraine and committed to a diplomatic solution to the crisis.²⁰ As the new cabinet followed the steps of its predecessor on the war in Ukraine, the radical left coalition stood firm in opposing such a stance. AVS opposed NATO's missions in Eastern Europe, considering it a 'military escalation' that 'does not solve the conflict' (Interviewee 9), voting against Italy's contribution to the EU's operation of military assistance in Ukraine EUMAM in June. From the perspective of AVS, there is a clear continuity between Draghi and Meloni, who invested in an 'Atlanticist narrative' (Interviewee 9).

PD presents the third most positive score in parliamentary debates over the Draghi bill and, by far, the most positive score during the Meloni bill.²¹ Therefore, PD supported military aid to Ukraine more consistently than parties located at its right in Italy's political spectrum, particularly the far-right populist Lega. IV-Azione presents a position close to zero in both instances, much different from the negative positions attributed to Lega. Therefore, the position scores extracted for PD and IV-Azione point towards a curvilinear rather than a linear party cleavage. They also cast shadows on the presumed impact of government-opposition dynamics as these parties kept similar positions moving from the government to the opposition benches. A former Minister of Defense affirmed that 'since the very beginning, PD has supported the Ukrainian population and their right to defend, also through external economic and military aid'. (Interviewee 2). PD justified its position on arms delivery, in line with Italian

¹⁷Parliamentary report 646, 25 February 2022, p.17.

¹⁸Parliamentary report 648, 3 March 2022, p.34.

¹⁹Parliamentary report 697, 19 May 2022, p.49.

²⁰'Programma Alleanza Verdi-Sinistra', 2022 General Elections.

²¹At first glance, it is surprising how PD increased its extent of support moving to the opposition after elections. We believe that such estimate is driven by the consistent use of some of the words with the largest beta scores ('identità', 'giustizia', 'dittatura') by moderate PD exponents, including the Senator Pieferdinando Casini. On the whole, after 2022 the PD attempted to better develop a narrative coherent with the main values of the party (interviewee 14, *infra*).

allies, focusing on the fact that ‘thanks to the support provided to Ukraine, the black flag of Putin is not waving in Kyiv’ (Interviewee 14). In a few words, the PD believed Ukraine had to be supported in its right to defend itself” against illegal aggression (Interviewee 2).

A few weeks after the debate, in March 2023, the 37-year-old Elly Schlein became the party’s first female leader. She advocated a more substantial effort to find a diplomatic solution to the Ukraine crisis and demonstrated scepticism towards the possibility of reaching 2 per cent of the GDP for military expenditure. The effect of the leadership change in PD’s foreign policy approach was evident as PD vocally turned against the bilateral cooperation mission with Libya, which it sponsored a few years ago, expressed in August 2023. However, the party also voted in favour of Operation EUMAM in Ukraine. As affirmed by a former Minister, ‘the PD has reiterated such position in every parliamentary debate, approving all the measures, including the shipment of armaments’. Indeed, ‘the new party leader has often confirmed such political view’ (Interviewee 2). A current member of the new Secretariat, while highlighting such ‘continuity’, considered the focus on values and ‘principles’ as the ‘main novelty introduced by the new Secretary’. (Interviewee 14). Overall, the party’s core values were relevant to understanding the PD’s attitudes.

IV-Azione presents scores very close to zero during the debates about the Draghi and Meloni bills. That could be interpreted as a middle-ground position about military aid towards Ukraine. However, these parties have been solid supporters of such foreign policy decisions. The position extracted through Wordfish has been affected by the tendency of these MPs to see the Ukraine crisis within the contexts of Italian foreign policy and international politics. For instance, in 2022, MP Roberto Giacchetti (Azione) compared the refugee policy towards Ukraine with the one proposed by the far right on the southern border, while Davide Faraone (IV) stressed the relevance of increasing military expenditures in Italy. During the debate about the ‘Meloni Bill’, Ivan Scalfarotto (IV) analysed the roots and consequences of the Russian Invasion. It is also worth pointing out how these parties kept virtually the same position despite moving out of the government after the 2022 general elections. Interviews reveal their considerable support for the shipment of military aid. Azione ‘maintained an exemplary coherence’, along with ‘the firm positioning in the Western community’ (Interviewee 17). According to Azione’s spokesperson for Defense and Security, the continuity between Draghi and Meloni is also explained by the ‘lack of a detailed debate on war’ (Interviewee 12).

The right-wing coalition split during parliamentary debates over military support for Ukraine. While FdI and FI present strongly positive scores across Draghi and Meloni bills, the estimated position for Lega is slightly negative. These estimates fit neither the linear nor the curvilinear model because of the diverging positions of the two far-right parties. However, it perfectly aligns with previous findings about core values and support for military interventions in

Italy, juxtaposing Fdl's militarism and Lega's isolationism. The consistency of Fdl support for sending military weapons to Ukraine, as well as Lega's persistent opposition to this foreign policy decision, defy the assumed effect of government-opposition dynamics

Despite the public attention devoted to the controversial Berlusconi's statements on the war in Ukraine, FI's support for military aid for the Ukrainian resistance has been 'absolutely staunch' in parliament, according to a former Undersecretary of Defense. This interviewee emphasised the problematic moral effort made in sending weapons, confronting 'Catholic values' with the 'values of Atlanticism, United Nations, law and sovereignty'. However, 'no one has ever questioned the principle of military support for Ukraine' (Interviewee 6). Moreover, in the words of another FI Undersecretary, the war in Ukraine 'was a shock', both for Italy and for the EU, but 'the supply of lethal weapons to a state militarily attacked in Europe constitutes a watershed' for the European Union (Interviewee 10). After the elections, 'Forza Italia remained solid and united' (Interview 10) in support of Ukraine. Therefore, from the FI's perspective, 'there has been a perfect continuity between the government Draghi and Meloni' (Interview 6).

As one of its MPs suggested, Fdl has adopted an 'Atlanticist stance' from the beginning. The aim of the shipment of weapons to Ukraine was 'to support Ukrainian people after the crazy Russian invasion and to stabilise the EU because the Ukrainian failure would be a problem for Europe and Italy' (Interviewee 15). Once again, the support for military assistance to Kyiv is perceived as in line with the central values of the party. Indeed, according to another Fdl MP, the party 'has kept a posture of firm condemnation against Moscow's unilateral action, a position also in line with the Atlanticist view that came both from the Almirante's experience of the MSI and from that of AN' (Interviewee 16).²² From the opposition benches, Fdl criticised the cabinet's insufficient focus on preventing potential economic repercussions of the crisis and a shift towards a more compromising approach towards Russia. In other words, Fdl even considered Draghi's position as too soft.

Against accusations of having supported Putin in the past, party leader Giorgia Meloni, a frontrunner in the polls, repeatedly pledged commitment to aligning with US and European partners on this issue. In its 2022 general elections manifesto, Fdl emphasised that its foreign policy will help the international community support Ukraine.²³ As a senior government partner, Fdl maintained the same level of support. The transition has been marked by 'substantial continuity of views and initiatives, as demonstrated by the solid and coherent parliamentary votes on the aid packages' (Interviewee 16). While experts emphasise 'the continuity of the Atlanticist defence policy'

²²Giorgio Almirante was the former leader of the post-fascist *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI), which then became in the 1990s *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN).

²³'Pronti a risolvere l'Italia', Fdl's 2022 general election manifesto.

for right-wing coalition parties (and especially FdI), the risk of 'losing credibility once at government' arguably played a vital role in shaping this position (Interviewee 4). According to a FdI MP, 'A national activism, which is in the spirit of the Italian right', has been 'combined with reliability and active action in the NATO alliance and with the ambition for a stronger EU' (Interviewee 16). Another FdI Senator claimed the party kept the same position *despite* 'understanding that Italians could be tired of the war' (Interviewee 15).

On the contrary, Lega has been quite sceptical of military aid to Ukraine. It found itself in a challenging position when Russia decided to invade Ukraine: it could not openly defend Putin anymore. On 1 March, during the parliamentary debate, Matteo Salvini, Lega's party leader, clearly distinguished 'the aggressor state from the state that was aggressed'. According to a party MP, 'February 24th was a watershed, and the League immediately underlined its geopolitical positioning, firmly anchored to the West' (Interviewee 8). However, as time passed, the Lega's position on the issue slightly changed. In April, Salvini argued that 'he would like the government to make an effort to strike a peace deal'.²⁴ Lega was one of the parties that expressed more substantial concerns about the impact of the crisis on the Italian economy, particularly about the rise of gas prices. During a parliamentary debate, Stefano Candiani, a Lega Senator, said the party would support the government 'only if it acts to limit the economic consequences of the war'.²⁵

After the end of the Draghi government, Lega openly questioned Italy's stance in the Russia–Ukraine conflict. In its electoral manifesto, Lega committed to finding a diplomatic solution to the crisis with a peace conference. It acknowledged the importance of NATO as a 'guarantor of mutual defence' but, at the same time, cast some doubts on the enlargement of the alliance. During the campaign, Salvini claimed that the sanctions on Russia 'were more of a damage towards Italy'. Lega has 'emphasised the importance of not abandoning the attempt to reach a ceasefire, or a peace, which should be, however, a just peace', distinguishing the aggressor from those who attacked (Interviewee 8). Accordingly, 'save human lives' and bring 'more stability in a tormented area and at the gates of Europe' are interpreted as the main aims of diplomacy (Interviewee 8). Despite being part of a right-wing cabinet this time, the League reiterated its unconvinced positions. However, Lega joined the Meloni cabinet and supported the new government's foreign and security policy, sustaining the decree that extended military aid to Ukraine and the operation of EUMAM in Ukraine. Thus, for an MP, the League maintained 'the same position during the Draghi and Meloni governments' (Interviewee 8).

²⁴'La svolta pacifista, Salvini sterza ancora e si avvicina a Conte', *La Repubblica*, 27 April 2022.

²⁵Parliamentary report 443, 21 June 2022, p.103.

Votes

Table 1 reports the party lines during the four votes on these bills and the absolute percentage of rebel votes within each party. All parties voted in favour of the Draghi law decree on military support for Ukraine at the Chamber of Deputies. This is also the result of a compromise regarding the bill's content among the many coalition parties. Even government parties with critical positions, such as the League and M5S, supported the law decree. However, Fdl also voted in favour of the bill, consistent with the position expressed during the debates. Besides Fdl and FI, all parties had rebels on this very salient vote. Notably, the radical left LeU coalition completely split between SI, against sending military support towards Ukraine, and Art.1, in support of this choice. The decision to cast a confidence vote on the bill at the Senate undoubtedly contributed to reducing the number of rebels. It incentivised the only party in the opposition, Fdl, to vote against it.

In line with the positions extracted with Wordfish, the vote on the renewal of military support was more polarised, mainly along the government-opposition line, both at the Chamber of Deputies and at the Senate. Fdl, FI, and the League voted favouring the second law decree. Consistent with their position during the debates, PD and IV joined the government and supported the shipment of military aid towards Ukraine again. M5S and the radical left voted instead against this time, more coherently with their stated position. The return to the opposition and the war fatigue are essential to explain such behaviour. The changes in the radical left coalition, composed of two strongly pacifist parties, were also relevant in determining the votes against the renewal of military support. Interestingly, PD was the only party presenting dissenting votes in these votes. This could be interpreted as the emergence of dissatisfaction within the PD over this foreign policy decision after the elections and the resignation of Enrico Letta as party leader. A 'pacifist culture', which features factions of the PD (and to whom the new leader belongs), is also expressed by political actors who came back to PD from *Articolo 1* (Interviewee 5). In this regard, on 20 January 2024, PD split again over the issue as three key exponents voted in favour of a right-wing majority's motion approving further shipment of weapons to Ukraine in 2024, while the rest of the party abstained.²⁶

Comparing debates and votes, we find substantial confirmation of our expectations. Considering M5S as a radical left party, we observe the presence of a curvilinear model of support for military aid in the debates, as moderate parties are generally more favourable than extreme parties. The far-right Fdl constitutes the most relevant outlier from this model. The impact of presence in government does not emerge very clearly from the debates as some governing parties voiced their criticism over military aid towards Ukraine (M5S during the

²⁶'Armi all'Ucraina, il PD si astiene ma Guerini, Quartapelle e Madia votano sì alla risoluzione della maggioranza e del terzo polo', *La Repubblica*, January 20, 2024.

Table 1. Vote on the law decrees about Ukraine by party (absolute number and percentage of rebels in parenthesis).

Party	Law Decree Draghi		Law Decree Meloni	
	Chamber of Deputies	Senate	Chamber of Deputies	Senate
LeU-AVS	Yes (4–0.4)	Yes (0)	No (0)	No (0)
M5S	Yes (4–0.04)	Yes (1–0.02)	No (0)	No (0)
PD	Yes (1–0.01)	Yes (0)	Yes (1–0.02)	Yes (4–0.14)
IV-Azione	Yes (1–0.06)	Yes (0)	Yes (0)	Yes (0)
FI	Yes (2–0.04)	Yes (0)	Yes (0)	Yes (0)
Lega	Yes (0)	Yes (0)	Yes (0)	Yes (0)
Fdl	Yes (0)	No (0)	Yes (0)	Yes (0)

Draghi cabinet and Lega in both bills). Overall, parties presented a high extent of consistency in debates, irrespective of changes in government composition. The impact of domestic politics is significantly more evident when it comes to voting: none of the actors in government defied the party-opposed military support. However, some parties supported the bill from the opposition benches: Fdl at the Chamber of Deputies during the Draghi government, PD and IV-Azione during the Meloni cabinet. This further shows the relevance of ideological leaning and – especially – core values in explaining support for military aid.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have analysed the party politics of military aid, an unexplored dimension of conflict among political parties. In particular, we have focused on the case of Italy's support for Ukraine in the conflict against Russia following the events of February 2022. Through the triangulation of parliamentary debates and votes with interviews and other primary and secondary sources, we have investigated existing cleavages in this issue and how they changed from the Draghi to the Meloni cabinet.

Our results show that party positions on this issue in Italy greatly reflect those on military interventions. They point more to a curvilinear rather than a linear model of support. Radical left parties and M5S (especially after the first months) have strongly opposed the decision to send weapons to Ukraine. They underlined how they might further exacerbate tensions in the conflict, leading to escalation and even the use of nuclear weapons. Social democrats, liberal and conservative parties (PD, IV-Azione, FI) have been very supportive, instead of stressing the relevance of helping Ukraine protect itself and defend democratic values against Putin's authoritarian regime. While the radical-right Lega's opposition is consistent with this model, Fdl's backing constitutes a considerable deviation from the curvilinear model (Baldini, Tronconi & Angelucci 2022). It can be explained through the party's emphasis on the defence of national sovereignty, at home and abroad, and the crucial incentive to present itself as a credible governing party. Moreover, 'Atlanticism' emerges as a crucial value for the party, especially from the interviews. This value was pivotal for the party in affirming its international reputation before the 2022 elections even in

front of a sceptical constituency (Basile et al. 2023). On the whole, the role of core values (Rathbun 2004) appears relevant for understanding parties' attitudes.

In line with the existing literature (Ostermann & Wagner 2023; Vignoli 2020), we also find that domestic politics fundamentally shapes party positioning on this issue. However, this is much more evident in parliamentary votes than in parliamentary *debates*. Indeed, some governing parties signalled their scepticism about the decision to support Ukraine militarily: M5S and the Lega did it during the approval of the bill under the large coalition Draghi cabinet, and Lega did it again during its renewal as a junior partner of the right-wing Meloni government. These dissenting parties toed the line when it came to voting. Vignoli, Ostermann and Wagner (2022) highlight how the German parties' positions on the intervention in Afghanistan were also subject to the same changes across debates and votes. This element further underlines how foreign policy issues remain a lower salience issue for which governing parties are unwilling to bring the cabinet down. Finally, intra-coalition dynamics emerge as vital to understanding some parties' 'tactical' behaviour (see especially Lega) in their vocal claims rather than in actual votes properly. Such decoupling between behaviour and rhetoric could be a strategy adopted by parties to balance external pressures and domestic constraints. Comparative analyses could better assess under what conditions this approach is adopted and when it is effective towards both allies and public opinion.

In this article, we purposely concentrated our attention on domestic-level variables as determinants of party positions on military aid. This does not mean that international factors do not play any role. Instead, in the context of middle powers such as Italy, the pressure deriving from allies may produce changes in party positions. Fdl's apparent turnaround can also be interpreted as a response to such external stimuli. Before that, M5S has considerably changed its foreign policy approach, moving from the opposition to the government (Coticchia 2021). Further research should attempt to better integrate domestic and external determinants of party positions on foreign policy issues.

At the methodological level, the paper shows that Wordfish may be an appropriate and effective tool to accurately estimate party positions from parliamentary speeches, identifying latent dimensions of conflict. In fact, as an unsupervised scaling method of text, it does not require any input from the researcher to identify the ideological dimensions and locate actors on it. This is a considerable upside in investigating domestic conflict over military support when there is often a lack of consensus about the nature of the cleavage and who is on which side. In our context, Wordfish effectively captured a conflict between Italian parties on the shipment of military weapons towards Ukraine, pitting spiral model thinkers against liberal warriors. Using a mixed-method approach, we validated the position extracted through this algorithm with elite interviews. We believe that automated text analysis should be more often complemented with such forms of qualitative data to offer more substantive and sound results.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Appendix

The party politics of the war in Ukraine

By examining the reaction to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Wondreys focuses on the heterogeneity in the far-right parties (FRP), identifying several categories of FRPS in terms of stances on Putin: 'Russia friendly', 'Russia hostile', and 'Russia neutral' (2023, 3). The author collocates FdI in the second category while the Lega in the third one (due to its hesitant support to Kyiv). Carlotti (2023) confirms such findings by focusing on the tweets by Lega and FdI. The author illustrates the evolution of their views on Russia (2013 – July 2022), revealing that 'while the Lega strenuously endorses Putin's Russia, FDI appears to be more cautious and not so much stable through time' (Carlotti 2023).

Several studies have illustrated the attitudes and behaviours of Italian parties during the war in Ukraine (Bruno & Fazio 2024; Coticchia & Verbeek 2023). However, most of these analyses describe the positionings of these parties, relying on votes or speeches (of selected actors), often covering a limited period. Others investigate from a comparative perspective, the parties' attitudes, yet avoid providing a detailed examination of military assistance.

Further details about the debates

The parliamentary debate concerning the 'Draghi Bill' took place during eight parliamentary sessions in March 2022: 8, 14, 15, 16, and 17 March at the Chamber of Deputies and 30 and

31 March at the Senate. We only cover the last session at the Chamber of Deputies. In the first session, the debate revolved around the bill's conformity to the article 11 of the Constitution, which (in its first part) prohibits Italy's participation to war. In the following sessions, it pivoted on the amendments and issues not associated with military support. The debate about the Meloni bill spanned across four sessions: 10 and 11 January at the Chamber of Deputies and 23 and 24 January at the Senate.

This article focuses on eight political actors.

Table A1. Description of the debates.

Decree	Date of the debate	Chamber	Included in the analysis
Draghi	8 March 2022	Chamber of Deputies	No
	14 March 2022	Chamber of Deputies	No
	15 March 2022	Chamber of Deputies	No
	16 March 2022	Chamber of Deputies	No
	17 March 2022	Chamber of Deputies	Yes
	30 March 2022	Senate	Yes
	31 March 2022	Senate	Yes
Meloni	10 January 2023	Senate	Yes
	11 January 2023	Senate	Yes
	23 January 2023	Chamber of Deputies	Yes
	24 January 2023	Chamber of Deputies	Yes

Table A2. Description of the votes.

Vote	Chamber	Yes	No	Abstentions	Percentage of yes	
Law Decree Draghi	Chamber of Deputies	367	25	5	0.924	0.063
	Senate	214	35	0	0.859	0.141
Law Decree Meloni	Chamber of Deputies	215	46	0	0.824	0.176
	Senate	125	28	2	0.806	0.181

Table A3. Distribution of MP speeches by party.

Party	Speeches
AVS	4
FdI	9
FI	10
IV-Azione	6
Lega	12
LeU	5
M5S	10
PD	9

Table A4. Description of the aggregated party-level documents.

Party	Decree	Tokens (words)
FdI	Draghi	5607
FI	Draghi	6733
IV	Draghi	3344
Lega	Draghi	6681
LeU	Draghi	5258
M5S	Draghi	7368
PD	Draghi	6398
AVS	Meloni	6641
FdI	Meloni	6953
FI	Meloni	6788
IV-Azione	Meloni	5301
Lega	Meloni	4744
M5S	Meloni	6780
PD	Meloni	7738

Table A5. List of interviewees.

- 1 Former Italian Minister of Defense (A), 24 July 2023;
- 2 Former Italian Minister of Defense (B); 26 September 2023.
- 3 Italian journalist, defence expert, 26 July 2023;
- 4 Italian Research Analyst, IAI Rome, expert on Italian defence and NATO, 27 July 2023;
- 5 Italian MP, *Partito Democratico*, Member of Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, 28 July 2023;
- 6 Former Undersecretary of Defense, *Forza Italia*, 5 September 2023;
- 7 Former Italian Minister, *Movimento 5 Stelle*, Member of Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, 18 September 2023;
- 8 Italian MP, *Lega*, Member of Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, 19 September 2023;
- 9 Italian MP, *Sinistra Italiana*, Member of Foreign Affairs Committee, 21 September 2023;
- 10 Undersecretary of Defense, *Forza Italia*, 26 September 2023;
- 11 Former Undersecretary of Defense, 2 October 2023;
- 12 Former Italian General, *Azione*, in charge of 'Security and Defense', 20 July 2023.
- 13 Research Analyst, Berlin, expert of (German and) Italian defence, 5 September 2023;
- 14 Italian MP, Member of Foreign Affairs Commission, *Partito Democratico*, in charge of 'Foreign Affairs', Rome, 30 October 2023;
- 15 Italian MP, Member of Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, *Fratelli d'Italia*, 6 November 2023;
- 16 Italian MP, Member of Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, *Fratelli d'Italia*, 4 December 2023;
- 17 Italian MP, Member of Defense Committee, Italia Viva – Azione (Azione Popolari Riformatori), 28 December 2023

Table A6. Full positions.

Party	Decree	position
AVS	Meloni	−1.242
FI	Draghi	0.915
FI	Meloni	0.900
FdI	Draghi	0.935
FdI	Meloni	0.887
IV	Draghi	0.154
IV	Meloni	−0.082
LeU	Draghi	−0.855
Lega	Draghi	−0.202
Lega	Meloni	−0.410
M5S	Draghi	−1.237
M5S	Meloni	−1.657
PD	Draghi	0.202
PD	Meloni	1.691

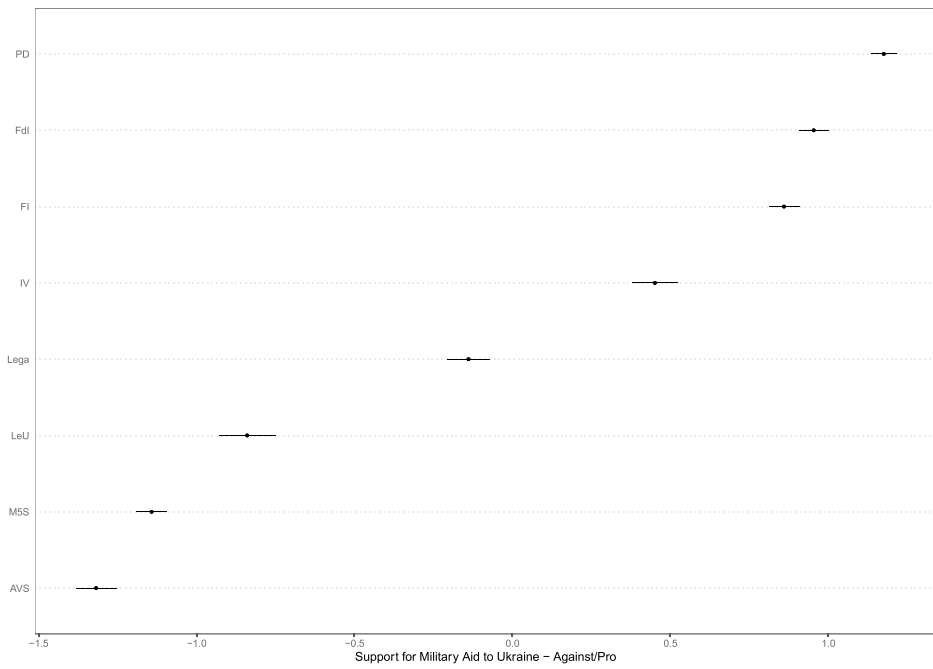


Figure A1. Pooled analysis of party-level documents with standard error.