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Explaining the persistence of domestic military deployment: evidence from *Operazione Strade Sicure*

1. Introduction

In Europe, State–military relations have undergone a process of transformation, during the last century. Following WWI, the armed forces were deeply involved in national politics, while, after WWII, their role started to recede, with some exceptions, namely civil reconstruction and humanitarian assistance. With the end of the Cold War, military budget started to decrease, but with several European states increasingly relying on the armed forces for internal security functions.[1] In recent years, the trend increased, with more European countries increasingly relying on the armed forces for internal security functions.[2] Italy represents an early case, since starting from the '90s, different governments began deploying the military to assist law enforcement agencies in urban patrols, partly due to the absence of a clear distinction between internal and external threats.[3]

Operazione Strade Sicure (from now on OSS) fits into this context, being the most extensive domestic commitment in terms of personnel and resources by the Italian Armed Forces and aiming at preventing and countering crimes and terrorism by deploying military personnel near sensitive targets.[4] It was implemented for the first time in 2008 by the then Berlusconi IV government, as an extraordinary, temporary measure, with a duration of 6 months, renewable once,[5] but its extensions over time progressively transformed it into a permanent component of Italy's internal security apparatus. Under OSS, military personnel are deployed to carry out

three different activities: protection of sensitive targets; external supervision of reception centres for immigrants; patrol of the territory.[6]

The research on OSS is limited, and focused on its role on the militarization of public spaces[7] and on the organisational and institutional perspective.[8] The paper aims to fill the gap, by analysing the possible drivers that led to the implementation and maintenance of OSS for almost two decades, making three contributions: (1) it offers the first systematic quantitative analysis of OSS; (2) it tests structural, security-based, and perception-based explanations; (3) it provides empirical evidence that challenges the dominant interpretation of OSS as a response to crime or terrorism.

2. Theoretical framework

The aim of the article is to analyse the possible motivations underlying the implementation and maintenance of OSS since 2008. A first possible explanation concerns the reduction of personnel in Italian police forces, particularly *Polizia di Stato* and *Arma dei Carabinieri*: the intent is to investigate if OSS covers a decrease in police forces.[9] If the interpretation holds, the OSS personnel should be negatively associated with the size of the police forces, suggesting a potential logic of substitution. A second explanation concerns security threats: the aim is to understand if OSS is a response to an increase in reported thefts, terrorist attacks, or casualties from terrorism. These three points are at the base of OSS implementation.[10] In this case, the increase of OSS personnel should be positively correlated with an increase of thefts, terrorist attacks or casualties from terrorism. Finally, a third explanation considers OSS as a response to an increase in population fear of thefts, terrorism attacks, or a declining trust in law enforcement agencies among the Italian public. Existing research suggests that security actors may be used to produce a reassurance effect.[11], [12] If correct, OSS personnel's increase should be positively associated with an increase in fear among the population and negatively associated with trust in police forces. In conclusion, it is important to bear in mind that the three explanations are not mutually exclusive.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data and variables

The analysis relies on second-hand annual data covering the period 2001–2023. The timeframe is not arbitrary: the year 2001 has been chosen

considering the 9/11 terrorist attack and its role in shaping antiterrorism policies, including in Italy.[13] For this reason, the dataset covers the 2001-2023 timeframe. However, since OSS was launched in 2008, the dependent variable is available only from that period onward. Consequently, all multivariate analyses are conducted on the common time window 2008-2023.

The dependent variable, OSS personnel, was drawn from Mazziotti di Celso[14] and represents the number of military personnel deployed within Italian territory for OSS. As the original figures are collected on a monthly basis, annual averages were computed. Owing to the start of the operation in 2008, the series covers the period 2008–2023. Official figures for 2019 report 7,565 units; however, this value includes temporary deployments related to specific events and local emergencie.[15], [16] Given their limited temporal and geographical scope, these contingents were excluded in order to preserve the comparability of the annual series.

Polizia di Stato personnel, which data cover the 2001-2023 period and has been drawn from *Ministero dell'Economia e delle Finanze*'s website,[17] with the exception of the data for the year 2023, which has been retrieved from the document *La pianificazione strategica del personale della Polizia di Stato, allegato 4*.[18] The personnel include non-managerial staff (personale non dirigente), managers (dirigenti) and students (allievi).

Arma dei Carabinieri, which cover the 2001-2023 period. The data from 2001 to 2022 and has been drawn from *Ministero dell'Economia e delle Finanze*'s website,[19] while the data for the year 2023 is available on the official website of the *Arma dei Carabinieri*.[20] The personnel include non-managerial staff (*personale non dirigente*), managers (*dirigenti*) and students (*allievi*).

Total thefts, which includes pickpocketing and muggings. They were collected from ISTAT, more specifically, the data from 2001 to 2014 were collected from the historical series of the crimes reported by the police to the judicial authority by type of crime – years 1955-2014,[21] while for the data from 2015 to 2023, it has been used the data of offences reported by the police forces to judicial authority.[22]

Fear of thefts, which includes muggings and pickpocketing, represents the percentage of people who declared to be frequently concerned over the fear of being robbed in Italy for their own self or their family, from 2005 to 2023 and were collected from *Fondazione Unipolis*[23] year by year. Missing data for 2006 and 2008 were linearly interpolated. In 2020, two observations were available (January and May), the January value was maintained to avoid distortion relation to COVID-19 lockdown period.

Terrorist attacks represents the terrorist attacks occurred from 2001 to 2020. The data were collected from the Global Terrorism Database by the University of Maryland.[24] Terrorist attacks is defined as: «the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a nonstate actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation», as defined by GTD.[25]

Terrorism's casualties represents the victims of terrorist attacks from 2001 to 2020. The casualties are intended as both fatalities and injured people. The data were collected from the Global Terrorism Database by the University of Maryland.[26]

Fear of terrorist attacks represent the percentage of people that affirm to feel frequently concerned on terrorist attacks for their own self or their family, from 2005 to 2023. The data have collected from *Fondazione Unipolis*.[27] Missing data for 2006 and 2008 have been linearly interpolated, while the missing data from 2011 to 2014 have not be considered, limiting the analysis's accuracy. In 2020, two observations were available (January and May), the January value was maintained to avoid distortion relation to COVID-19 lockdown period. In 2023 two observations were available (July and November), the July was maintained to avoid distortion related to major geopolitical events occurred in October 2023.

Trust in law enforcement agencies represents the percentage of respondents who affirmed to have *molta* (high) or *moltissima* (very high) trust in law enforcement agencies. The data were collected from different reports made by Demos & Pi.[28]

3.2. Data analysis procedure

The analysis has been articulated as follows: initially, a description of the data, to find eventual long-term patterns, anomalies and turning points. Secondly, a Pearson's correlation to assess the presence of linear relationship between the OSS personnel and the independent variables. Thirdly, linear regression analysis to assess if the variables have a statistical influence on OSS personnel. Finally, a multiple linear regression to assess which predictors better explain OSS personnel variance, when considered together.

Initially, a multinomial regression analysis was envisaged, but it was excluded due to inconclusive results.

3.3. Limitations

This study is explorative and it is not able to detect a causation between the variables, being limited to the identification of eventual statistical

correlations between them. Furthermore, it is important to underline two limitations related to the analysis. A first limitation concerns the small number of the observation under investigation. The analysis covers the period from 2008 to 2023 (N=16), and for some variables the number of valid cases is lower, reducing statistical power. A second limitation relates to the inconclusive result of the multinomial regression analysis, which does not allow to exclude the presence of spurious relationships. These aspects should be taken into consideration when interpreting the findings.

4. Data description

4.1. OSS personnel

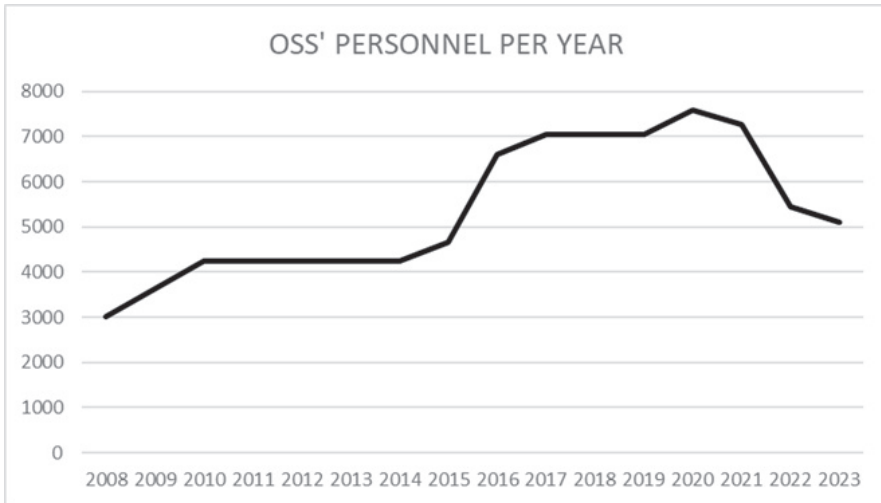


Figure 1 – OSS personnel per year
Source: Author's elaboration based on Matteo Mazziotti di Celso (2024)

Fig.1 shows how OSS personnel have evolved over time. After the first increase in 2009, the personnel level remained stable between 2010 and 2014. Between 2015 and 2016 a sharp increase happened (+29.68%), marking a structural shift in the scale of the operation. Between 2016 and 2019 a second period of stabilization occurred. In 2020, a last increase occurred, bringing the deployed soldiers to their peak (7,594 units), coinciding with the COVID-19 emergency. Starting from 2021, OSS personnel declined, particularly between 2021 and 2022 (-33.84%). Despite the contraction, the level of personnel deployed remained significantly

higher in 2023 (5,100 units) than in the early years. The positive variation between 2008 and 2023 (+70%) suggests an intensification of the military commitment to domestic security tasks.

4.2. *Arma dei Carabinieri* personnel

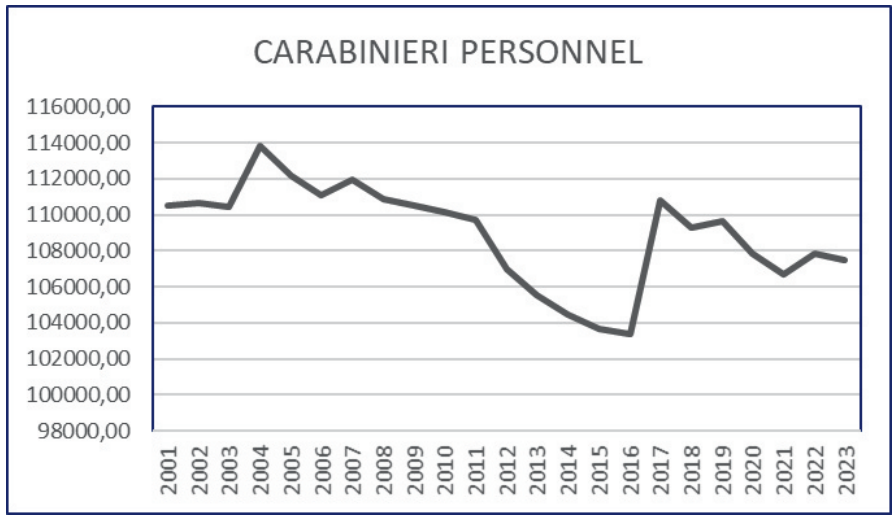


Figure 2 - *Carabinieri* personnel per year
Source: Author's elaboration based on official data from *Ministero dell'Economia e delle Finanze* and *Arma dei Carabinieri* websites (2001–2023)

Fig. 2 shows the evolution of the *Arma dei Carabinieri* personnel in the timeframe. In the 2001-2010 period, the personnel remained relatively stable, with some minor fluctuations. Between 2011 and 2016 the number of personnel experienced a phase of sustained decline occurred, reaching its lowest value in 2016 (103,374 units). Finally, in the 2017-2023 period, following a sharp rebound in 2017 (+6.68%), personnel entered a new phase of stability, with only a minor tendency to decline. Overall, despite the mid-2010s contraction, the long-term trend appears to be relatively stable considering the 2001-2023 variation being limited (-3%). However, the post-2017 recovery did not fully restore the early 2000s' personnel levels.

4.3. *Polizia di Stato* personnel

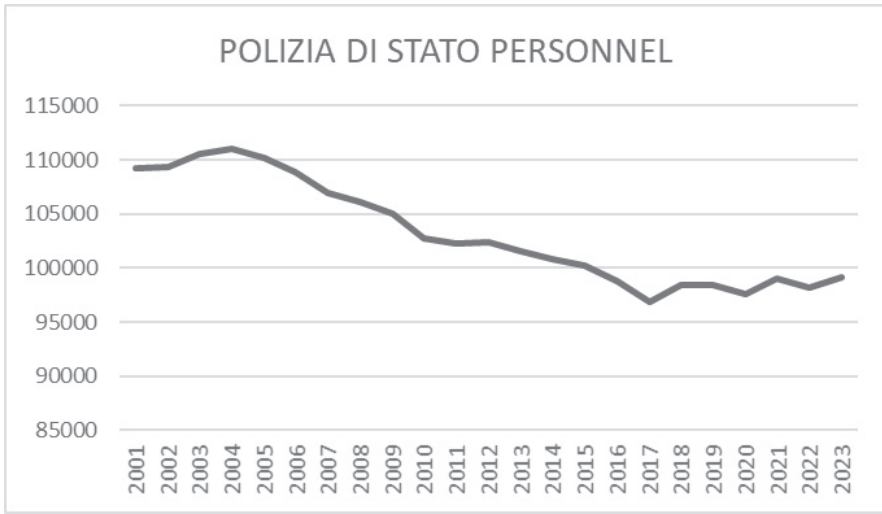


Figure 3 - *Polizia di Stato* personnel per year
Source: Author's elaboration based on *Ministero dell'Economia e delle Finanze* website and *Polizia di Stato* personnel planning document data (2001-2023)

Fig. 3 illustrates the evolution of *Polizia di Stato* personnel between 2001 and 2023. Although a slight increase in staffing levels between 2001 and 2004, when police personnel reached its historical peak (111,026 units), since 2005 it undergone a slow but constant decrease until 2017 (96,891 units). After 2017, the personnel levels stabilised, even with a modest tendency to increase, as indicated by the highest annual increases registered in 2018 (+1.68%) and in 2021 (+1.48%). Despite this partial rebound in the last years, the overall long-term trend remains negative, with the 2001-2023 variation showing a significant decrease in police personnel (-9.27%).

4.4. Total thefts

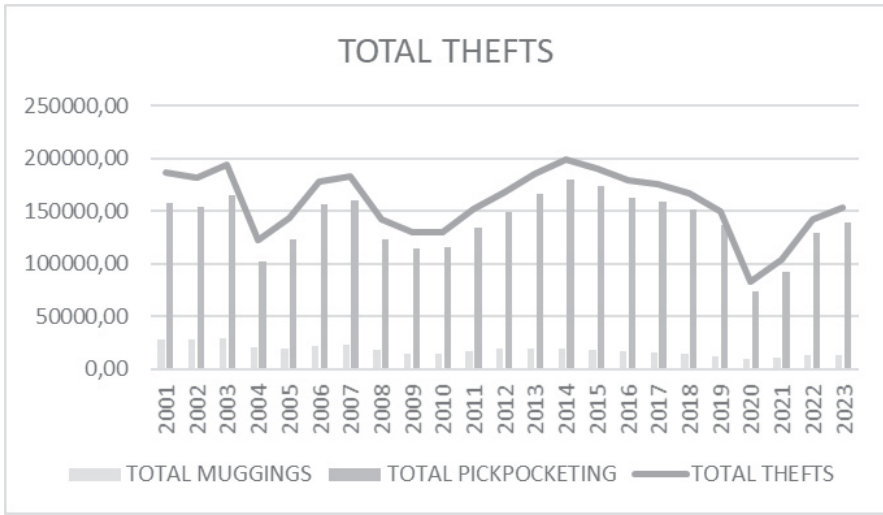


Figure 4 - Total thefts per year
Source: Author's elaboration based on ISTAT data (2001-2023)

Fig. 4 depicts the evolution of total thefts (pickpocketing and muggings) between 2001 to 2023. The period 2001-2010 is characterised by marked fluctuations: after an increase in 2003, thefts sharply decline in 2004, then rebound in the 2005-2007 triennium and finally decrease again between 2008 and 2010. Between 2011 and 2014 thefts increase to their historical peak (198,714 thefts). From 2015 onwards, a gradual downward trend is observed, until 2020 when an abrupt fall in thefts occurred (83,336 thefts), probably related to the mobility restrictions during COVD-19 pandemic. From 2021 onwards, thefts partially rebounded, likely reflecting a normalisation of urban activity. Overall, the long-term trend over the 2001-2023 shows a significant decrease in thefts (-18.17%). Notably, pickpocketing accounts for the majority of thefts, while muggings represent a minor share of the phenomenon.

4.5. Fear of thefts (muggings and pickpocketing)

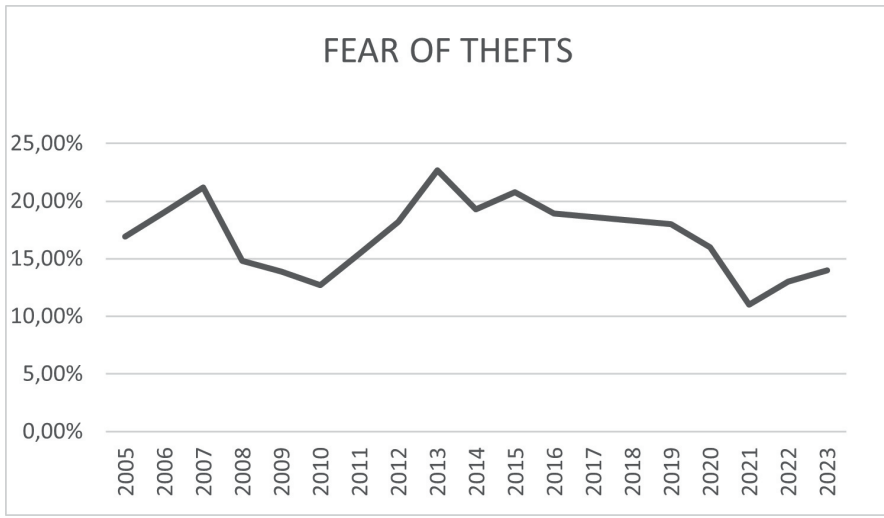


Figure 5 - Fear of thefts per year
Source: Author's elaboration based on *Fondazione Unipolis* data (2005-2023)

Fig. 5 shows the trend of the responding declaring to be frequently concerned over the fear of being robbed in Italy for their own self or their family, from 2005 to 2023. After an increase in fear of theft in the first sub period (2005-2007), it decreases until 2011, when it starts a slight increase that led, in 2013, the fear at its historical peak (22.70%). Between 2014 and 2019, fear remained almost stable. In 2021, the historical minimum (11%) occurred, which could be caused by restrictions due to the COVID-19 emergency, which were still partially in place at the time. In recent years, an increase has been observed, likely due to post-COVID-19 normalization, yet fear remains lower than in 2005.

Overall, despite some fluctuations, fear of theft appears stable, averaging 16.99%. The long-term trend shows a slight decreasing trend, with fear of theft decreasing from 16.90% in 2005 to 14% in 2023. Notably, the periods of greatest fear do not correspond to either the start of the operation or an increase in military engagement, anticipating a lack of correlation between the two variables.

4.6. Terrorist attacks

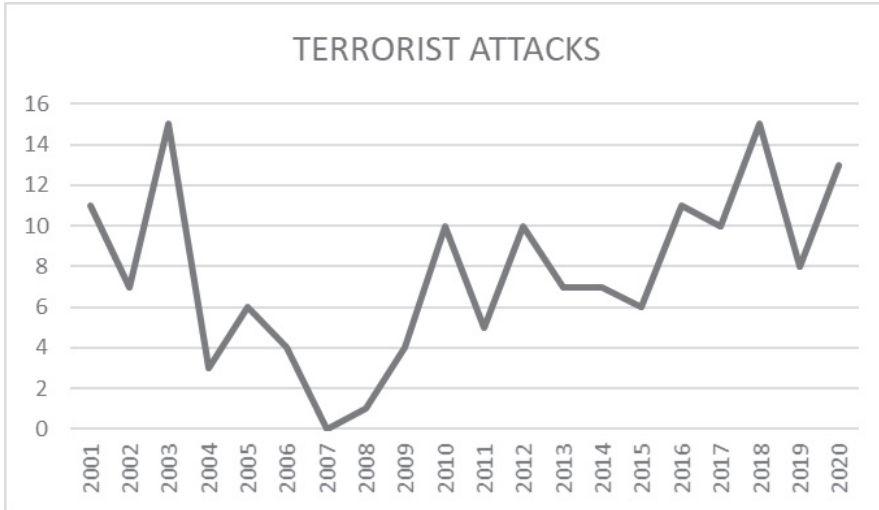


Figure 6 - Terrorist attacks per years
Source: Author's elaboration based on Global Terrorism Database (GTD) data (2001-2020)

Fig. 6 shows the terrorist attacks' trend in Italy from 2001 to 2020. After the first historical peak in 2003 (15 events), it starts a trend of sharp fluctuations, with important decrease and increase, especially in 2007 (0 events) and 2008 (1 event), that is the historical minimum, while in 2018 reached the historical peak again, but without stabilizing. Overall, terrorist events are characterised by a non-linear and highly fluctuating pattern, marked by isolated peak followed by rapid contractions. Regarding the long-term trend, although a slight increase in terrorist attacks between 2001 and 2020, especially in the 2016-2020 period, it is important to underline that terrorist attacks are a low and volatile phenomenon.

4.7. Terrorist attacks' casualties

Fig. 7 and 8 depict the evolution of casualties from terrorist attacks from 2001 to 2020. The variable is characterised by the presence of an outlier in 2003, when 15 terrorist attacks occurred and 51 casualties were recorded. However, this was the results of a single event: on 19th November 2003, ammonia was reportedly injected in water bottles, provoking 50 individuals to be injured, with no fatalities reported. Furthermore, only one other event

provoked an injured, with no victims (START). The outlier represents an anomaly rather than a trend in attack severity or lethality.

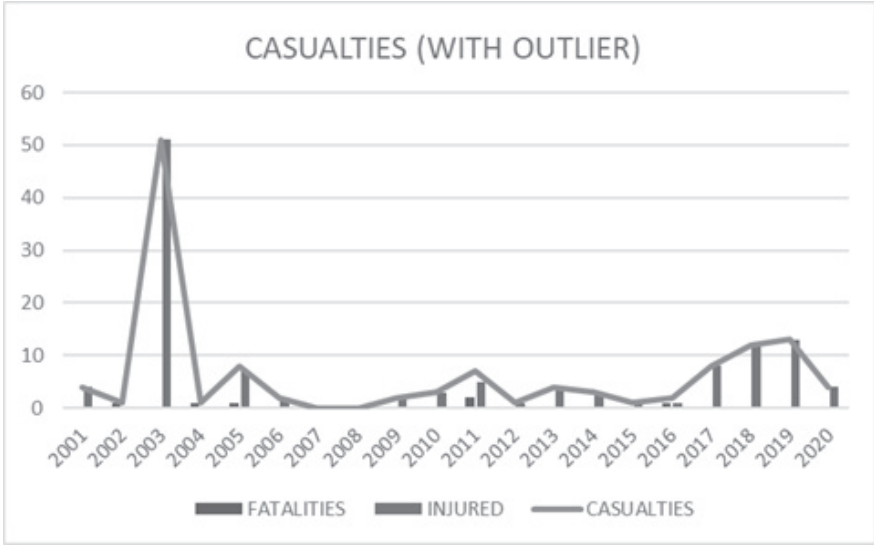


Figure 7 - Casualties from terrorist attacks per year (with outlier)
Source: Author's elaboration based on Global Terrorism Database (GTD) data (2001-2020)

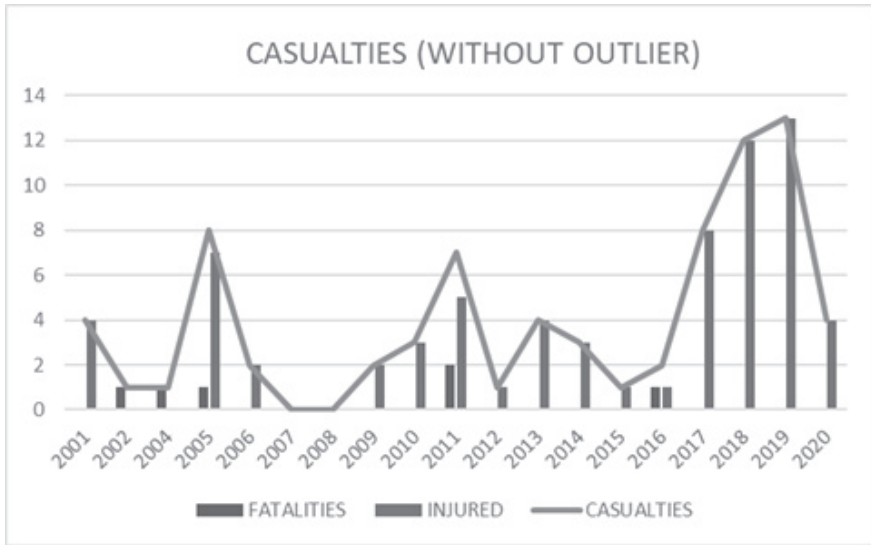


Figure 8 - Casualties from terrorist attacks per year (without outlier)
Source: Author's elaboration based on Global Terrorism Database (GTD) data (2001-2020)

Once excluded the outlier, Fig. 8 shows that the number of casualties remained consistently low, ranging between 0 and 13 per year. The 2001-2016 period is even more stable, with a range between 0 and 7 casualties. Between 2017 and 2019, there is a slight increasing in casualties, during which second peak occurred in 2019 (13 casualties), followed by an immediate decline in 2020.

Interestingly, the lowest value occurred in the 2007-2008 biennium, when no casualties were registered in both years. Although, this is in line with the number of terrorist attacks in these years, the timing is noteworthy, since it precedes and coincides with OSS implementation and suggest the introduction of the operation did not follow phase of increasing lethality in terrorist attacks.

Overall, the casualties remain low and volatile for entirety of the observed period, reflecting the episodic nature of the terrorist violence in Italy. Moreover, of the 127 casualties registered, only 6 are fatalities, showing that not only the number of casualties is limited, but also an extremely low fatality rate.

4.8. Fear of terrorist attacks

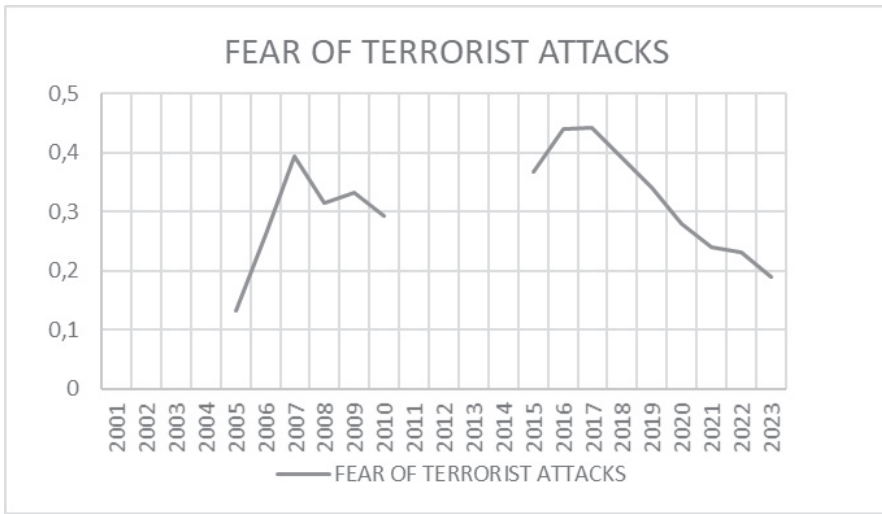


Figure 9 - Fear of terrorist attacks per year
Source: Author's elaboration based on *Fondazione Unipolis* data (2001-2010; 2015-2023)

Due to the lack of available data in the 2011-2014 timeframe, the fear of terrorist attacks' trend is divided in two distinct periods. During the first

one, from 2005 to 2010, fear saw a quick grow from 13.20% in 2005 to 39.30% and then having a slight decrease, remaining around 30%. During the second period, from 2015 to 2023, fear has grown, arriving to 36.70% in 2015, continuing to grow until 2017, when it reaches its historical peak (44.30%). After that, the fear starts a steady decrease that continues until 2023, when it reaches 19%.

Overall, the trend does not appear to be linear, but rather alternating period of increase followed by periods of decrease and despite the decrease occurred in the last 6 years the percentage of people who fear terrorist attacks remains higher than in 2005. It is worthy to note that the period of higher fear, does not match with the period with the highest registered events nor with the periods with highest casualties. A possible interpretation is that Italian public could be influenced more by major terrorist attacks occurred in Europe, which saw its period of major events between 2014 and 2018[29]. However, this interpretation should be taken cautiously, since it does not explain the high level of fear in 2007. Another, complementary, explanation could lie in the saliency of terrorism in political and media discourse, which may have amplified the fear and, in the later years, may be displaced by other dominant issues, such as the war in Ukraine after 2022.

4.9. Trust in law enforcement agencies

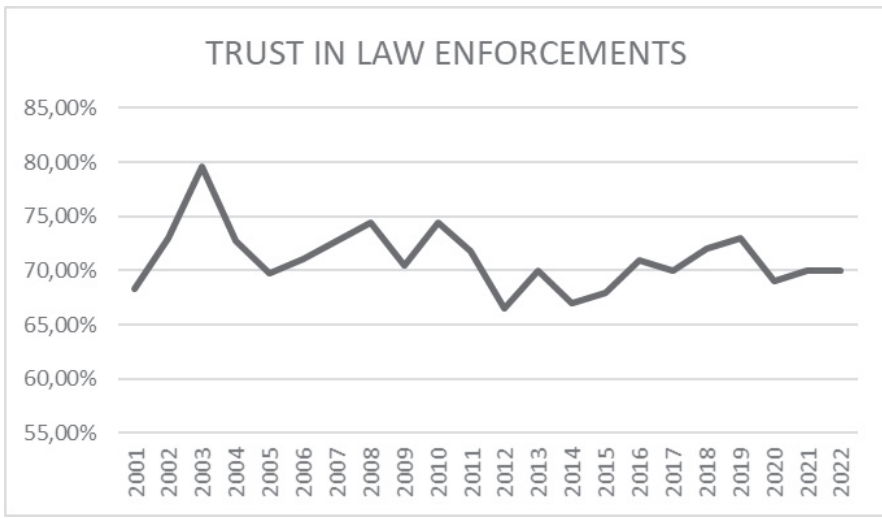


Figure 10 - Trust in law enforcements agencies per year
Source: Author's elaboration based on Demos&Pi data (2001-2022)

Fig. 10 shows the perceptions of respondents declaring to have *molta* (high) or *moltissima* (very high) trust in law enforcement agencies. Confidence is extremely high and stable over the entire analysis period, ranging from a low of 66.50% in 2012, to a high of 79.60% in 2003. The fluctuations are minimal and the variable does not appear to be experiencing a long-term decline, with more than two-thirds of the population having confidence in law enforcement. Overall, the data do not provide evidences of a structural of public trust.

5. Analysis and discussion

Variable	r	p
Total police forces	-0.611	0.012
Polizia di Stato personnel	-0.884	<0.01
Arma dei Carabineiri personnel	-0.061	0.821
Total thefts	-0.283	0.288
Fear of being robbed	-0.002	0.993
Terrorist attacks	0.780	0.002
Casualties from terrorist attacks	0.647	0.017
Fear of terrorist attacks	0.199	0.536
Trust in law enforcement agencies	-0.04	0.884

Table 1 - Pearson's correlation between OSS personnel and independent variables

Variable	R	R-squared	F	p	Unstandardized B	Standardized coefficents Beta
Total police forces	0.611	0.373	8.322	0.012	-0.224	-0.611
Polizia di Stato personnel	0.884	0.781	50.003	<0.001	-0.500	-0.884
Carabinieri personnel	0.061	-0.004	0.053	0.821	-0.037	-0.061
Total thefts	0.283	0.080	1.220	0.288	-0.014	-0.283
Fear of thefts	0.002	0.000	0.000	0.993	-1.099	-0.002
Terrorist attacks	0.780	0.609	17.124	0.002	324.21	0.780
Casualties from terrorist attacks	0.647	0.419	7.922	0.017	245.60	0.647
Fear of terrorist attacks	0.199	0.039	0.411	0.536	39.206 (p = 0.539)	0.647
Trust in law enforcement agencies	0.041	0.002	0.022	0.884	-27.09 (p = 0.884)	-0.041

Table 2 - Linear regression between OSS personnel and independent variables

	R	R-squared	F	p
Model	0.949	0.900	26.92	<0.001

Variable	Unstandardized B	Standardized coefficents Beta	p
Polizia di Stato personnel	-0.393	-0.700	0.003
Terrorist attacks	76.450	0.184	0.281
Casualties from terrorist attacks	61.212	0.161	0.245

Table 3 - Multiple linear regression between OSS personnel and independent variables

5.1. Substitution between military and police forces

Table 1 shows the results of Pearson's correlation. Regarding the correlation between OSS personnel and the total police forces, it shows a negative and moderate correlation ($r = -0.611$, $p = 0.012$), shows the presence of a moderate correlation between the use of the armed forces and the decrease in police force personnel. Considering the different trends that the two police forces experienced between 2001 and 2023, they were also considered separately, to verify whether the correlation strength varied. Considering them separated, the analysis showed a strong negative and significant correlation between the variation in OSS personnel and that of State Police personnel ($r = -0.884$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting a substitution effect. On the other hand, the correlation with the Carabinieri was found to be weak and not very significant ($r = -0.061$, $p = 0.821$). This finding suggests that the substitution effect would be present, but only between OSS and State Police personnel.

The linear regression analysis confirms the results of the previous analysis. Total police forces shows a statistically moderate negative relationship with OSS personnel ($\beta = -0.611$, $p = 0.012$). The model appears to be able to explain only 37.3% of the variance (R-squared = 0.373), suggesting that other factors have played a role in influencing the total police forces' trend. Once disaggregated, the replacement logic appears to be highly selective: for Polizia's personnel, the analysis reveals a strong and highly significant negative effect ($\beta = -0.884$, $p < 0.01$) and the model comes to explain 78.1% of the variance (R-squared = 0.781). This finding suggests that changes in State Police staffing levels are a key factor in predicting changes in OSS staffing. On the other hand, Carabinieri's personnel shows no statistically significant association with the

deployment of soldiers (β = -0.061, p = 0.821), even its predictive power appears almost zero, being able to explain only 0.4% of the phenomenon (R-squared = 0.004). Finally, multiple linear regression shows that the variation in Police's personnel has a very strong and negative correlation (β = -0.700, p = 0.003) and the model would be able to explain 90% of the variance in OSS personnel (R-squared = 0.900).

The result is particularly important as it would confirm what the *Corte dei Conti* (Court of Auditors) proposed, namely that OSS would be implemented and extended over time in order to cover a decrease in police force personnel, at least that of the State Police. This result is even more impactful as, as shown by Table 4, Italy is one of the EU member countries with the highest rate of police forces per 100,000 inhabitants, well above the EU average. Furthermore, although the decrease in the number of State Police personnel is confirmed, it is not the only police force operating in the area, precisely for this reason the rate of law enforcement in Italy has varied minimally over the years, ranging between 452.73 and 442.66, at least in the period 2014-2023.

TIME	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
GEO (Labels)										
Belgium	338,68	336,06	333,23	335,21	362,94	335,60	336,99	335,72	338,29	335,87
Bulgaria	388,80	311,92	425,43	398,47	407,69	410,98	419,62	420,98	444,27	451,63
Czechia	374,64	373,69	378,46	380,70	377,38	378,31	375,10	384,19	381,09	363,02
Denmark	188,25	186,10	186,15	188,27	191,14	192,44	194,07	195,27	193,48	192,53
Germany	302,89	301,69	297,31	298,88	295,68	297,60	301,27	306,83	311,06	316,98
Estonia	310,76	297,82	298,57	296,05	295,12	301,40	306,25	295,70	289,16	:
Ireland	277,91	:	:	:	345,60	359,71	362,82	352,03	342,51	334,69
Greece	477,77	485,18	489,75	493,96	494,97	507,52	524,74	520,38	533,67	543,00
Spain	371,54	365,60	361,43	360,20	362,50	367,36	369,90	375,73	379,84	378,04
France	316,90	322,70	320,48	322,22	322,18	357,02	358,97	359,99	:	:
Croatia	484,18	489,60	487,58	493,38	492,00	498,79	507,03	513,53	536,29	528,01
Italy	452,14	449,61	452,73	442,66	447,67	450,16	447,43	448,94	450,13	450,31
Cyprus	578,90	581,10	572,90	585,05	570,10	562,51	548,20	546,76	555,76	565,91
Latvia	458,46	458,19	428,60	425,82	244,73	234,59	233,48	232,41	224,18	215,35
Lithuania	322,20	305,18	290,18	289,02	293,60	285,77	280,91	275,53	268,64	262,31
Luxembourg	323,82	311,21	310,28	309,31	329,23	319,76	325,66	350,39	366,60	470,79
Hungary	373,45	377,87	391,77	406,36	403,17	386,19	384,45	378,94	378,12	377,29
Malta	506,60	491,71	487,11	492,94	481,18	462,15	435,90	417,55	407,75	392,03
Netherlands	305,67	298,85	298,88	294,56	293,28	291,64	290,84	295,50	291,19	286,00
Austria	327,95	325,65	332,35	333,79	342,77	352,10	358,36	359,76	356,03	351,41
Poland	260,04	260,20	263,35	260,11	259,92	260,24	257,91	265,68	273,74	263,10
Portugal	443,10	451,59	451,47	449,25	450,52	442,08	442,78	438,33	452,78	440,18
Romania	265,23	263,21	241,98	242,53	256,09	257,05	256,97	247,95	262,61	266,58
Slovenia	391,74	345,49	346,82	347,07	343,08	342,40	345,54	349,79	347,81	334,58
Slovakia	414,59	411,23	405,80	404,91	402,67	403,49	387,83	378,73	377,74	369,09
Finland	140,63	140,56	137,21	132,04	132,72	133,51	136,97	136,80	137,49	139,45
Sweden	201,83	204,19	203,28	197,51	198,02	199,63	202,78	206,04	210,30	218,41
England and Wales	222,46	215,13	211,78	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
Scotland (NUTS 2021)	323,08	322,88	320,00	318,58	:	:	:	:	:	:
EU average	350,57	346,69	531,62	352,11	348,	347,78	347,88	347,76	350,41	353,86

Table 4 - Police personnel for 100.000 inhabitants in EU countries
Source:https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/crim_just_job/default/table?lang=en, regarding Italian data has been made by myself because EUROSTAT had available data for years 2015, 2016, 2019, and 2020 only. The data regarding the police officers has been drawn here: https://contoannuale.rgs.mef.gov.it/it/web/sicosito/occupazione; while the data regarding the Italian population here: https://www.tuttitalia.it/statistiche/popolazione-andamento-demografico/, accessed on 30/07/2025

5.2. Crime and terrorism

Regarding the security explanations, Pearson's correlation shows a correlation coefficient, although negative, weak and not significant ($r = -0.283$, $p = 0.288$) between OSS personnel and total thefts. Regarding terrorism-related variables, terrorist attacks have a strong and positive correlation with variation in OSS personnel ($r = 0.780$, $p = 0.002$); in turn, casualties from terrorist attacks shows a moderate and positive correlation compared to OSS personnel. The findings would seem to suggest that only terrorist-related events, and the victims associated with them, would be linked to an increase in military forces deployed on national soil, while thefts would not have had a link.

Linear regression analysis confirms previous results. Total thefts show a weak inverse relationship ($\beta = -0.283$, $p = 0.288$) and an ability to explain variance of only 8% (R-squared = 0.080), suggesting that other factors played a role in influencing OSS personnel. On the other hand, terrorist attacks have a strong and significant relationship with OSS personnel ($\beta = 0.780$, $p = 0.002$), managing to explain 60.9% of the variance, suggesting that it is another key factor in predicting OSS personnel variance. Lastly, casualties from terrorist attacks show a moderate positive relationship ($\beta = 0.647$, $p = 0.017$) and appears to be able to explain 41.9% of OSS personnel's variance.

The multiple linear regression analysis models, although being able to explain 90% of the variance of OSS personnel (R-squared = 0.900), it is not driven by terrorist-related variables. In fact, both terrorist attacks ($\beta = 0.184$, $p = 0.281$) and casualties from terrorist attacks ($\beta = 0.161$, $p = 0.245$) lose statistical significance when considered together with Polizia di Stato personnel.

These results suggest that the security-based interpretations are not able to explain the deployment and maintenance of OSS during the years, weakening the justification at the very base of its implementation securitarian.

5.3. Fear and trust

Regarding the perception-based interpretation, none of the variables taken in consideration to measure the citizens' perception has shown a significant correlation with OSS personnel. In fact, the results of Pearson's correlation show that fear of thefts' correlation coefficient is null and non-significant ($r = -0.002$, $p = 0.993$), terrorism attacks fear shows a positive and very weak correlation coefficient ($r = 0.199$, $p = 0.536$) and likewise

trust in law enforcement agencies shows a negative, weak and non-significant correlation ($r = -0.04$, $p = 0.884$). These results suggest that the citizen's fear played no role in the deployment of military for public security and the lack of trust neither.

Moving to the linear regression analysis, its results confirm the previous outcome: fear of thefts appears to have no correlation with OSS personnel ($\beta = -0.002$, $p = 0.993$) and the model is not able to explain any of the OSS personnel's variance (R-squared = 0.000). The absence of a weak but non-significant correlation has been confirmed for fear of terrorist attacks ($\beta = 0.199$, $p = 0.536$), with its model being able to explain only 3.9% of OSS personnel's variance. Trust in law enforcement agencies appears to have a negative, weak and non-significant correlation ($\beta = -0.041$, $p = 0.884$) and its model explains almost none of the OSS personnel's variance (R-squared = 0.002).

In conclusion, these results strongly suggest that citizens' concerns about thefts did not play a role in the implementation of OSS and its maintenance. Likewise, the results confirm what the trust in law enforcement agencies' trend already suggested: polices forces are very popular among the population and there is no evidence that OSS implementation was driven by a need to reassure the population. These results seem to confirm this interpretation. Overall, the analysis weakens the perception-based explanations.

6. Conclusions

The article provided a longitudinal quantitative evaluation behind OSS's implementation and maintenance over the years. The aim was to clarify which explanations better suit the Italian deployment of armed forces, by testing three alternative explanations, namely securitization, reassurance and institutional reassurance. The empirical analysis shows that the variables bounded to threat and perception-based explanations display systematic association with OSS personnel deployment. Initially, terrorism-related variables appeared correlated, but their explanatory power lose strength when considered together with police personnel-related variable. On the other hand, Polizia personnel's contraction has a strong and robust relationship with the variation in OSS personnel, indicating a selective substitution dynamic rather than a generalized militarization driven by security emergencies. As a result, the Italian case suggests that the existing framework of domestic military deployment's explanations overlook an

important institutional driver: the substitution of declining police force personnel capacity. In this regard, military involvement is triggered by as an organizational response to structural constrains within the policing system or budgetary burdens and not by public fear of objective threat levels. Nonetheless, given the explanatory nature of the study, and the small numbers of observations causal inferences is not confirmed. Future researches should integrate political decision-making processes, budgetary dynamics, and comparative cross-national evidence to assess if similar substitution mechanism operates in the broader European contexts.

NOTE

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