TECHNOLOGY AND CONFLICT: GOVERNING PROGRESS TO DEFEND HUMANITY

A law to regulate killer robots: a matter of social, ethical, and juridical urgency for global security

2000–2025 25°

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INTRODUCTION

> **"Everyone knows that science is a double-edged sword. Science increases the power of humankind, which can then choose where to direct it. Whenever great progress is made, we must reflect deeply on what is right and what we should not do"**
>
> Giorgio Parisi, Nobel Prize in Physics (2021) [1]

Current technological transformations in the defence sector raise profound and urgent questions that go well beyond military logic. The most controversial innovations include **autonomous weapons systems (AWS), which represent a critical frontier for the entire international community**. Capable of identifying and striking targets autonomously, without direct human control at the moment of engagement, these technologies call into question the foundations of international humanitarian law, of individual and collective responsibility, and of the general ethics that ought to form the basis for all decisions regarding human life.

In a world where algorithms designed by humans now have an increasing role in decision-making processes, including in very high-impact areas like security and armed conflict, the world is faced with an inescapable question:

What kind of society do we want to build?

Are we ready to accept a world where machines decide who lives and who does not?

For Etica Funds, which is committed to the promotion of a responsible and sustainable economy, this reflection is closely linked to our role as responsible investors. **Understanding the nature and implications of autonomous weapons also means asking questions about the basic principles of innovation and security, and about the kind of future we are helping to build**.

This report seeks to offer a clear overview of one of the most relevant technological and ethical questions of our time, by contributing to the debate, promoting awareness and reinforcing the commitment to international regulations that protect human life and dignity before all else.

1 Translation of preface in Farruggia, F. (ed.). (2023). *Dai droni alle armi autonome. Lasciare l'Apocalisse alle macchine? [From drone to autonomous weapons. Do we leave the Apocalypse to machines?]* FrancoAngeli

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WHAT ARE AUTONOMOUS WEAPONS?

The debate on **autonomous weapons systems (AWS)** has intensified in recent years, but **an internationally recognised legal definition still does not exist**. These weapons systems are characterised by their **operational autonomy**, namely the ability to function without the direct intervention of a human being. Their autonomy is made possible by the combined use of sensors, computer vision, algorithms, and **advanced artificial intelligence (AI)**, though not all AI used in a military context is designed for use in autonomous weapons systems[2].

Without an exact regulatory definition, recourse is often made to a classification of autonomous weapons systems based on the **level of human control in the decision-making cycle**:

However, this classification has considerable limits, since the blurring lines between the models due to technological developments are making it harder to distinguish between an on-the-loop and an out-of-the-loop system.

Today, the use of autonomous weapons is no longer confined to experiments. Academic research and several media articles report that these technologies are already used in real operative missions[3]. Here has been a **progressive dehumanisation of the decision-making process**, where the human role is increasingly reduced to mere 'rubber stamping', while the logic of algorithmic efficiency prevails over the ethics of responsibility.

Human-in-the-loop

in these systems, **the human operator approves each individual decision**. This is the case for traditional armed drones, where the pilot manually controls the target and the attack. Albeit equipped with automated functions (such as the localisation or visual identification of targets), engagement remains a human prerogative.

Human-on-the-loop

these **semi-autonomous systems** are capable of selecting and attacking targets autonomously, but **subject to - weak - human supervision**. Here, the operator maintains the power of veto or intervention during the operation, albeit often with noticeably short reaction times. This model assumes that the human is **informed but is not necessarily involved** directly and continuously in the decision-making process.

Human-out-of-the-loop

in this case, the system is completely autonomous and carries out the engagement cycle, from detecting the target to neutralising it, without any human supervision or intervention after initial activation. **It is the category most closely associated with "killer robots"**, and the most controversial from a legal and ethical perspective.

2 United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs – UNODA. (2023). *Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS)*. UNODA; United Nations. https://disarmament.unoda.org/the-convention-on-certain-conventional-weapons/background-on-laws-in-the-ccw/

3 Several media articles report that these technologies are already used in real operative missions (New York Times, July 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2024/07/02/technology/ukraine-war-ai-weapons.html) Rosendorf, O., Smetana, M., & Vranka, M. (2022). Autonomous weapons and ethical judgments: Experimental evidence on attitudes toward the military use of "killer robots". Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 28(2), 177–183. https://doi.org/10.1037/pac0000601 Rosendorf, O., Smetana, M., & Vranka, M. (2023). Algorithmic Aversion? Experimental Evidence on the Elasticity of Public Attitudes to "Killer Robots." Security Studies, 33(1), 115–145. https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2023.2250259 Malinconi, M., & Rossi, J. C. (2023). Sviluppo e applicazioni delle armi semi-autonome e autonome letali [Development and application of lethal semi-autonomous and autonomous weapons]. Farruggia (2023), 76–977.

WHY SHOULD WE BE WORRIED ABOUT KILLER ROBOTS?

The questions raised by the growing autonomy given to machines cannot be considered marginal or be fixed by simply tweaking the technology, since they are directly involved with the way we understand the exercise of force, moral responsibility and the **intrinsic value of human life**. They also raise serious doubts about respect for **international humanitarian law and human rights law,** as well as **profound ethical and strategic concerns**. For a fuller understanding of the significance and reach of the use of autonomous weapons, it is therefore necessary to analyse their main implications from a legal, technical, ethical and strategic perspective.

Legal issues

One of the most critical aspects linked to the use of autonomous weapons concerns their compatibility with international humanitarian law (IHL), which governs the conduct of armed conflict and imposes fundamental obligations for the protection of civilians. Two key principles of international humanitarian law – distinction and proportionality[4] – are particularly important in the context of autonomous technologies. Another legal aspect concerns the issue of responsibility.

- **Distinction:** the principle of distinction requires the ability to distinguish between military targets and civilian objects, and to recognise those who, even if combatants, no longer represent a threat (*hors de combat*). The ability to interpret and contextualise is typically human and cannot be reproduced by algorithms.
- **Proportionality:** the principle of proportionality prohibits attacks where the expected collateral damage is excessive in relation to the tangible and direct military advantage. This evaluation, by nature, requires moral and cognitive capacity (empathy, understanding of the context, experience), characteristics which are not found in machines.
- **Responsibility:** who is responsible if a AWS hits an illegitimate target or causes civilian victims? Machines, which lack moral and legal agency, cannot be held responsible. At the same time, it may be unfair to attribute the blame to a commander or programmer, especially if the weapons system was operating beyond their meaningful control. This opens a dangerous "responsibility gap", which puts the very system of international humanitarian law into crisis and undermines the principle of accountability in armed conflict[5].

Technical issues

Autonomous weapons systems also pose technical and operating issues if systems become too complex for human users to understand and could thus produce unpredictable and inexplicable effects. Unpredictability and inexplicability are main causes for concern, due to the potential consequences not only for civilians, but for upholding the rules of conflict and overall strategic stability[6].
Some of the underlying factors of errors include:

- **Algorithms based on incomplete or biased datasets**, then programmed into autonomous weapons systems run the risk of biased technologies making determinations related to life and death.
- **Sensitivity to anomalous or unforeseen inputs**, which makes them vulnerable not only to spontaneous malfunctioning, but to intentional manipulation by hostile counterparties[7].
- **Complex and dynamic scenarios such as war** further increase the margins for error[8].

The unpredictability of autonomous weapons is, therefore, a structural characteristic, not a mere temporary anomaly.

4 Additional Protocol I, Geneva Convention, 1977, Articles 41, 51, 52

5 Matthias, A. (2004). The responsibility gap: Ascribing responsibility for the actions of learning automata. *Ethics and Information Technology*, *6*(3), 175–183. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10676-004-3422-1
Sparrow, R. (2007). Killer Robots. *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, *24*(1), 62–77. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5930.2007.00346.x

6 Rosendorf, O., Smetana, M., & Vranka, M. (2023). Algorithmic Aversion? Experimental Evidence on the Elasticity of Public Attitudes to "Killer Robots." *Security Studies*, *33*(1), 115–145. https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2023.2250259

7 Amoroso, D., & Tamburrini, G. (2021). Toward a Normative Model of Meaningful Human Control over Weapons Systems. *Ethics & International Affairs*, *35*(2), 245–272. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0892679421000241

8 Latella, D., Siroli, G. P., & Tamburrini, G. (2023). Caratteristiche, prospettive e problematicità dell'Intelligenza Artificiale [Characteristics, Perspectives and Problems of Artificial Intelligence]. Farruggia (2023), 43–60

Ethical issues

In ethical terms, ascribing the decision over life or death to a machine is a **violation of human dignity**, where the victim is not given the possibility to be recognised as a person and is instead reduced to a mere object, numerical data, or a set of coordinates. This issue cannot be solved by technological progress: even the most precise and reliable system would undermine human dignity as it reduces people to data points, which could result in injury or death. . Therefore, even with minimal margins for error, **the absence of moral capacity makes these systems ethically unacceptable**.

9 Sharkey, N. (2010). Saying "No!" to Lethal Autonomous Targeting. *Journal of Military Ethics*, *9*(4), 369–383. https://doi.org/10.1080/15027570.2010.537903
Altmann, J. (2013). Arms control for armed uninhabited vehicles: an ethical issue. *Ethics and Information Technology*, *15*(2), 137–152. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10676-013-9314-5

Strategic issues

With the use of AWS, technology is at risk of becoming an incentivising factor in conflict, raising **serious geopolitical and strategic concerns**.

- **Global instability**: the possibility of conducting war operations without risking the life of soldiers can **lower the threshold for the use of force**, making war more "acceptable" and frequent, with wide-scale destabilising effects[9]. IIn this sense, technology does not act as a deterrent but is at risk of becoming an incentivising factor
- **Automated escalation of conflict:** algorithmic interactions between autonomous systems can generate unpredictable results that are difficult to control, which may result in escalation without human control (with the risk of friendly fire, incorrect targeting or cyber-attacks).
- **Arms race**: AWS have **relatively low costs** and less need for personnel, factors which facilitate their purchase even by non-state players or authoritarian regimes.

"The development of military systems has now led us extremely close to arms with lethal capacities where the three operational phases – initial activation, selection of the target and final decision on the attack – are completely automated, namely independent from human will and judgement. But we believe that humans should always have significant control over the use of a weapon.
The risk would be to leave decision-making involving human life to an algorithm that operates at such a speed that human control and verification is impossible.
This is why we must act now. We have a unique opportunity in history to keep Pandora's box closed, but to achieve this there must be political willingness."

Francesco Vignarca, Campaign Coordinator – Rete Italiana Pace e Disarmo (Italian Peace and Disarmament Network)

ITALIAN PUBLIC OPINION AND AUTONOMOUS WEAPONS

A key player in the international debate: social consensus

In a democracy, the legitimacy of political and military decisions is closely tied to **social consensus**. This applies even more to weapons that raise profound ethical questions, such as autonomous weapons and their ability to select and eliminate targets without appropriate human control.

Recent studies[10] show that public opinion can influence the effective use of these technologies in the field, as well as the legislative and diplomatic processes intended to regulate or prohibit them.

International humanitarian law already recognises the importance of **public conscience** through the **Martens Clause** (1899 Hague Convention), which **considers weapons that contravene the "dictates of public conscience"[11] unlawful**. Though the exact meaning of the clause is subject to diverging interpretations, it has appeared many times in negotiations on controversial weapons (e.g. anti-personnel mines and chemical weapons), acting as a tool of moral and political pressure[12]. Public opinion can therefore directly guide political decisions and treaties.

In addition to law, **history also shows that democratic leaders tend to avoid military decisions that are met with strong popular opposition**: during the Cold War, for example, pressure from scientists and citizens was decisive in the regulation of nuclear arms. The same can happen today with AWS, provided that information is communicated clearly and effectively, in order to reach and raise the awareness of an increasingly wider audience.

10 Tomz, M., Weeks, J. L. P., & Yarhi-Milo, K. (2020). Public Opinion and Decisions About Military Force in Democracies. *International Organization*, *74*(1), 119–143. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0020818319000341
Chu, J. A., & Recchia, S. (2022). Does Public Opinion Affect the Preferences of Foreign Policy Leaders? Experimental Evidence from the UK Parliament. *The Journal of Politics*, *84*(3), 1874–1877. https://doi.org/10.1086/719007

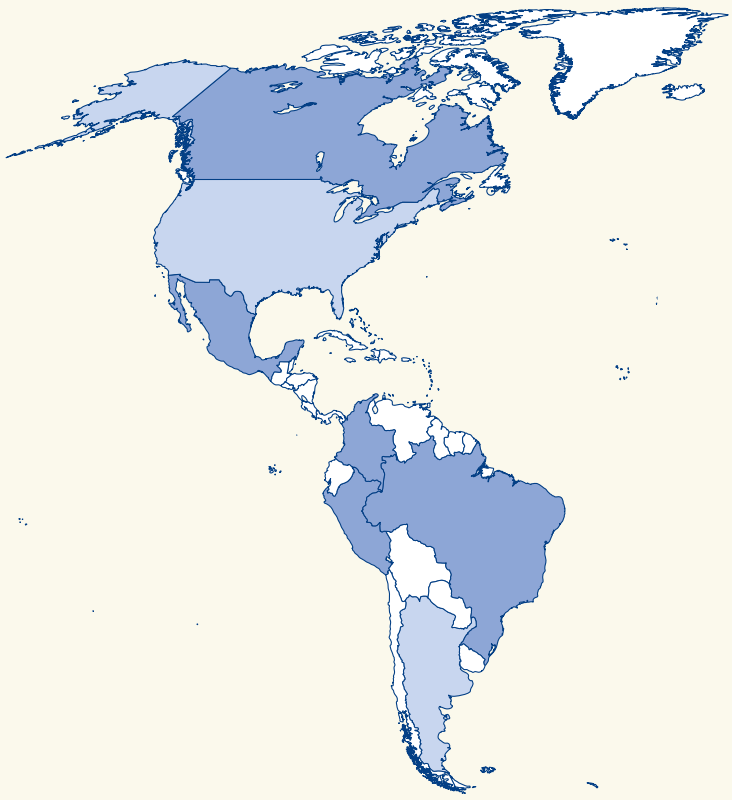
11 Bertieri, S., & Iaria, A. (2023). Il diritto internazionale umanitario e la sfida delle armi autonome all'intus-legere [International humanitarian law and the challenge of autonomous weapons to the intus-legere]. Farruggia, 2023a, 142–159.

What do international surveys tell us?

In recent years, several international opinion polls have sought to measure public opinion towards autonomous weapons systems, confirming **widespread distrust or refusal**. One example is the **2020-2021 Ipsos poll[3]**, conducted on a sample of citizens from **28 countries**, in which 61% of respondents were against the use of AWS, with the highest opposition in Sweden (76%), Türkiye (73%), Hungary (70%) and Germany (68%). The only exception was India, where 56% of respondents were in favour.

Fig. 1 – Percentage of opposition to autonomous weapons in 28 countries
Source: Archivio Disarmo report using Ipsos data (2021)

Percentage of opposition to autonomous weapons in 28 countries



Naturally, the perception of AWS is also influenced by the political context and the dominant narrative in individual countries. In China, for example, there is greater "techno-optimism", attributable in part to the tendency of public opinion to align with government positions, also driven by the presence of limited room for disagreement[14]. Even in different political systems, such as the United States, the **perception of an external threat** impacts the support for autonomous weapons. More recent studies[15] show that the perception of an external threat can increase support for AWS but does not eliminate the interest in treaties and forms of multilateral regulation. In general, these data show **growing public awareness, often with positions relatively more prudent than those of the government**. This gap between public orientation and institutional positioning represents significant data for assessing the political and social sustainability of autonomous military technology development.

Data collected by Ipsos between 2020 and 2021 indicate a **growing opposition** to autonomous weapons systems, suggesting a strengthening in this stance over time. Comparison with previous polls conducted by Ipsos in 2017 and 2019 shows how a gradual increase in public awareness of the ethical, legal and technical implications associated with these technologies is accompanied by a more defined opposition to their use.

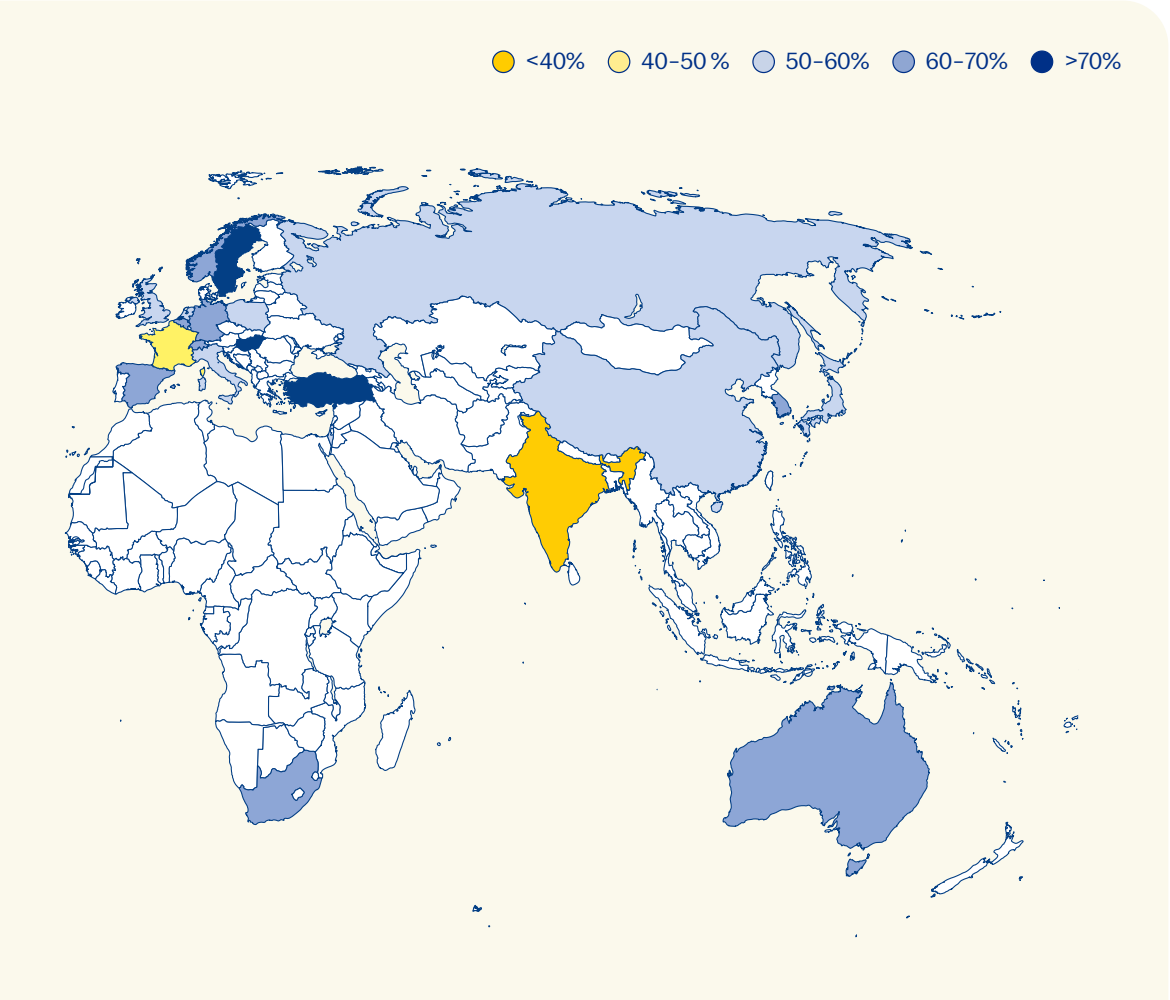
In all polls considered, **the reasons for opposition converge around several recurring critical issues: accident-proneness, gaps of responsibility and the implications for human dignity**.

12 Sparrow, R. (2017, November 14). *Ethics as a source of law: The Martens clause and autonomous weapons*. Humanitarian Law & Policy Blog. https://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2017/11/14/ethics-source-law-martens-clause-autonomous-weapons/
Rosendorf, O., Smetana, M., & Vranka, M. (2023). Algorithmic Aversion? Experimental Evidence on the Elasticity of Public Attitudes to "Killer Robots." *Security Studies*, *33*(1), 115–145. https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2023.2250259

13 Ipsos. (2021, February 2). *Global Survey Highlights Continued Opposition to Fully Autonomous Weapons*. Ipsos. https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/global-survey-highlights-continued-opposition-fully-autonomous-weapons

14 Rosendorf, O., Smetana, M., Vranka M., & Dahlmann, A. (2024). *Mind over Metal: Public Opinion on Autonomous Weapons in the United States, Brazil, Germany, and China*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5021966
Qiao-Franco, G., & Bode, I. (2023). Weaponised Artificial Intelligence and Chinese Practices of Human–Machine Interaction. *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, *16*(1), 106–128. https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/poac024

15 DiGiuseppe, M., Paula, K., & Rommel, T. (2025). *AI on the Battlefield? Revisiting Public Support for LAWs*. https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/s8ab5_v1



Italian public opinion

In line with the trend seen at the international level, in Italy, the public opinion also expresses an overly critical position against the development and use of autonomous weapons. Data collected by various polls between 2017 and 2025 show a significant evolution in public perception of the issue and highlight a growing opposition founded on moral, technical and legal considerations.

An initial relevant indicator comes from polls conducted by Ipsos **in over 20 countries** in 2017, 2018 and 2020[16]. According to the Ipsos poll in 2017, **54% of Italian citizens were against the use of killer robots in a military context**. The percentage rose to 58% in 2018 and to 59.4% in 2020, marking **growing opposition** to the use of autonomous weapons. This trend also reflects findings in other countries that took part in the poll.

The main reasons for opposition to autonomous weapons in Italy are aligned with those found at global level. In 2020, according to Ipsos data, 68.3% of Italians against the use of autonomous weapons said that these systems overstep an unacceptable moral threshold, stating that "machines should not be allowed to kill". The main causes for concern include the lack of control and human responsibility (41.5%) and the risk of technical malfunctioning, reported by 28.7% of respondents.

Alongside the Ipsos data are the opinion polls conducted in Italy by **Archivio Disarmo** in 2019[17] and 2025[18], which show even more decisive opposition to these weapons (69% in 2019 and 74% in 2025). As for the reasons for the opposition in 2025, respondents indicated their main cause for concern as the risk of errors or technical malfunctioning, followed by the difficulty of ascribing responsibility in case of accidents and the perception of ineffective human control. Furthermore, there are fears that the use of autonomous weapons could favour an increase in the risk of armed conflict. These data suggest **an evolution in the critical focus over the years: the initial moral condemnation has gradually created space for greater attention on the tangible and systemic risks associated with adopting these technologies.**

Fig. 2 – In favour of and against autonomous weapons in Italy
Source: Archivio Disarmo report using Ipsos data (2017, 2019, 2021)

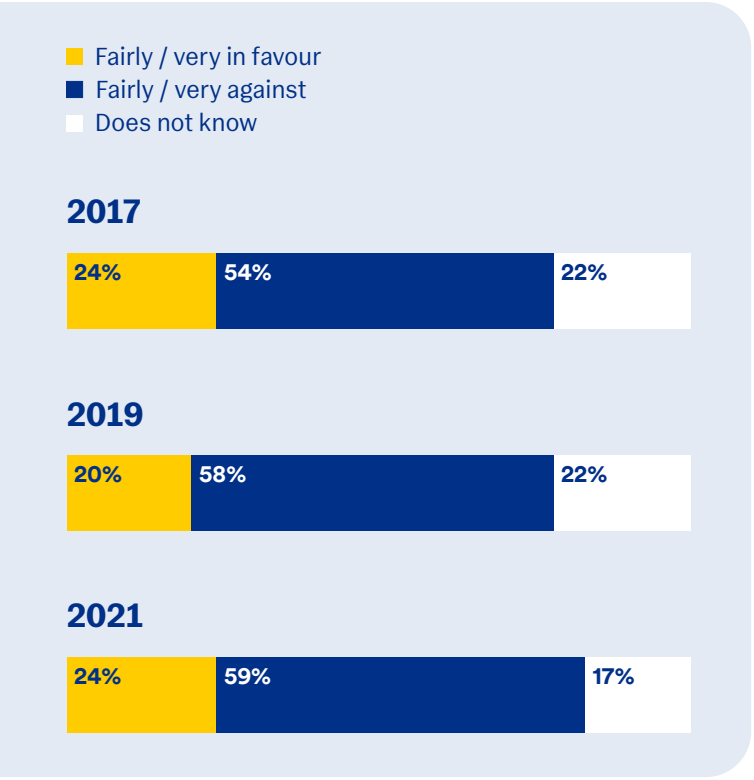
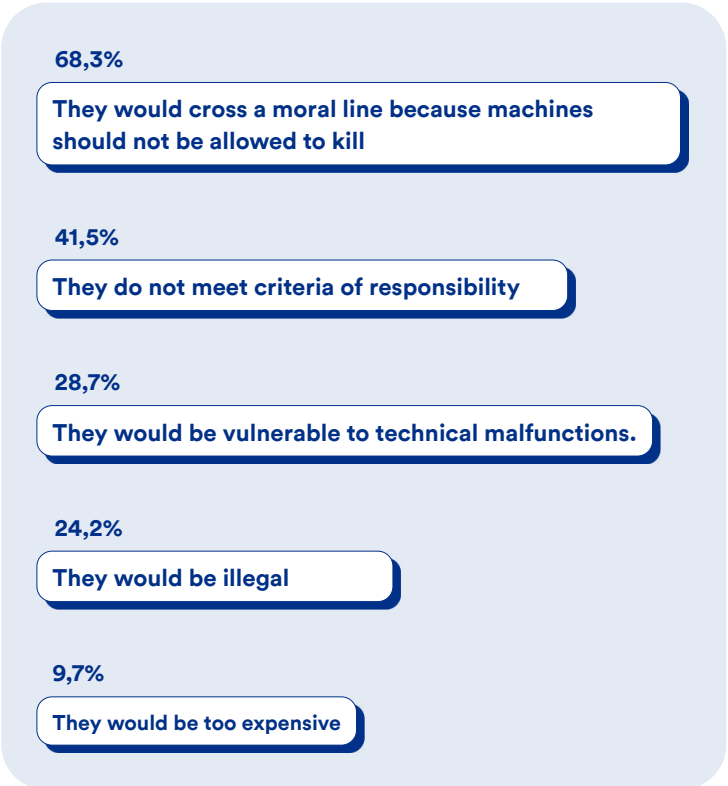


Fig. 3 – Main concerns of Italians related to the use of autonomous weapons
Source: Archivio Disarmo report using Ipsos data (2021)



The polls conducted by Archivio Disarmo offer an important glimpse into the **relationship between socio-demographic variables and opposition to autonomous weapons**. The changes in the **gender gap** are particularly relevant: in 2019 women were much more against (73.4%) than men (65%), but this difference is substantially nil in 2025, highlighting an opposition that is now almost uniform between the two sexes. On the other hand, **age continues to be a discriminating factor**: in both polls, opposition increases with age, exceeding 80% for the over 65s, likely due to an increased perception of the risks and less enthusiasm for technological innovation, unlike the younger groups, which are often fascinated by the potential of these systems. The **level of education** also shows interesting trends: in 2019 favour for autonomous weapons was minimal among those who had only primary or middle school education (26%), it rose among high school graduates (30%) and reached the maximum among university students yet to graduate (43%), before dropping once more among graduates (31%), perhaps in relation to older age or greater critical maturity developed through more consolidated study.

Another aspect not to be underestimated is **how informed the population is** on the issue of autonomous weapons. The polls indicate that the majority of Italians have limited knowledge about the technical and operating characteristics of autonomous weapons; as a result, the widespread opposition expresses sentiment more than a judgement gained through in-depth analysis. Nevertheless, comparable studies conducted by Archivio Disarmo – on nuclear weapons, for instance – show that, once more complete information is received, opinions rarely change direction, but tend rather to solidify, confirming the foundations of the initial ethical and political concerns expressed. This data highlights the need for **solid technical and legal literacy**, which is essential not only for understanding the implications of autonomous weapons, but also to transform citizens from spectators into informed participants in the debate. In this way, they can become a strategic lever in driving political decisions and reinforcing their country's role on the international scene.

"It is clear that many present rulers would not only like to have the maximum resources possible and imaginable, but also the same drive from those they govern. Fortunately, this is not possible, at least not entirely. Despite the current symptoms of involution, in democratic and pluralistic societies citizens still have the possibility to interfere with government decisions. This is how in the stronghold of international and strategic policy, which is hyperprotected by the monopoly of specialists and secrecy, public opinion has the right and duty to take part in decisions. Artificial intelligence is symbolic in this case and therefore it is unsurprising that AI is where citizens' concerns are focused. Researchers and organisers of civil participation aim to ensure that in the field of autonomous weapons, as with other weapons that people find alarming (nuclear, chemical, biological, etc.), there is greater citizen engagement. Engagement in terms of quantity – initiatives to support if not prohibit, at least the regulation of research, development and adoption of killer robots – as well as quality, for a transition from the legitimate yet insufficient sentiment of aversion, to the mature awareness created by knowledge."

Fabrizio Battistelli, President of International Research Institute Archivio Disarmo

16 Polls conducted commissioned by the Stop Killer Robots Campaign. Ipsos. (2017, February 7). *Three in Ten Americans Support Using Autonomous Weapons*. Ipsos. https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/news-polls/three-ten-americans-support-using-autonomous-weapons; Ipsos. (2019, January 22). *Six in Ten (61%) Respondents Across 26 Countries Oppose the Use of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems*. Ipsos. https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/news-polls/human-rights-watch-six-in-ten-oppose-autonomous-weapons; Ipsos. (2021, February 2). *Global Survey Highlights Continued Opposition to Fully Autonomous Weapons*. Ipsos. https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/global-survey-highlights-continued-opposition-fully-autonomous-weapons

17 Farruggia, F. (2023b), 127–141.

18 The results of the Archivio Disarmo *Difebarometro no. 12* (2025) poll will be published in the Research Report presented to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, which commissioned the report. The interpretation in this text is the exclusive responsibility of Archivio Disarmo and does not represent the position of the Ministry

TOWARDS AN INTERNATIONAL TREATY ON AUTONOMOUS WEAPONS

Why a treaty is necessary

In the context of growing automation that permeates every aspect of daily life – from domestic appliances to surveillance systems – even the use of force is at risk of becoming automated. **Autonomous weapons systems (AWS)**, or "killer robots", capable of identifying, selecting and hitting targets without direct human intervention, are at one extreme of this transformation.

The main steps towards a treaty

Since 2014, autonomous weapon systems have been discussed as part of the **United Nations Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW)**, a global international humanitarian law instrument and Its purpose is to ban or restrict the use of specific types of weapons that are considered to cause unnecessary or unjustifiable suffering to combatants or to affect civilians indiscriminately. To date, there are 128 UN Member State parties.

In 2016, a **Group of Governmental Experts (GGE)** was established with the task of analysing the risks of and proposing rules for autonomous weapons systems. Despite over a decade of meetings to discuss these systems, the debate remains at an impasse on matters of procedure and definitions, while the rapid evolution of artificial intelligence has further widened the gap between technological developments and existing provisions of law.

Faced with this stalemate, the international community – also driven by civil society – has pushed for an **alternative outside of the CCW to address autonomous weapons**, which has now received concerted global attention at the UN General Assembly.

In 2023, the United Nations General Assembly approved an **initial historic resolution** recognising the urgency of addressing the ethical, legal and security implications of autonomous weapons systems. It requested that the Secretary-General draft a report on the matter by gathering opinions from States and other stakeholders. The resulting report reiterated the clear concern about the lack of progress by the CCW and the need for new international regulation by 2026.

At the United Nations General Assembly on **2 December 2024**, **166 States voted in favour of Resolution 79/L.99 on killer robot**, which confirms the need to begin negotiations on an international treaty that prohibits them. Only 3 countries were opposed, while 15 abstained.

This **second resolution** takes account of the persistent calls from the current UN Secretary-General to conclude **a binding treaty by 2026**, and established a **new multilateral forum for informal consultations** under the aegis of the United Nations General Assembly in 2025, recognising the threats of autonomous weapons to global security and the risk of exacerbating existing conflict and humanitarian crises.

Despite staunch support, the text still did not set out the formal start of negotiations, since certain States were against it, notably the United States. Nevertheless, the Resolution keeps the debate alive in a **wider context** than the CCW, offering the chance to develop political agreements and paving the way for tangible developments in 2025 and the potential start of negotiations in 2026.

The role of civil society

The push for a new international regulation also comes "**from below**". The **Stop Killer Robots Campaign**, with support from over two hundredorganisations across the world, has helped to bring this critical issue to the diplomatic fore at a global scale.

THE STOP KILLER ROBOTS INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN

Formed in October 2012 and launched publicly in 2013, the Stop Killer Robots Campaign is a growing global coalition that operates with over 270 organisations from civil society in 71 countries. The campaign is led by a steering committee of NGOs, which constitutes its main governing and decision-making body, formed of four international NGOs, a network of regional NGOs and four national NGOs that work at international level.

Mission

The Stop Killer Robots campaign is an international coalition of non-governmental organisations that seeks to counter threats to humanity and human dignity through the adoption of a new international treaty to prohibit and regulate autonomous weapons systems (AWS). The campaign supports the development of legal and other norms that **ensure meaningful human control over the use of force**, **counter digital dehumanisation**, and reduce automated harm.

Vision

Stop Killer Robots works for a world:

- in which we **respect** each other's **inherent dignity**;
- where we all **take responsibility for how our choices regarding technology change the relationships** between us, individually and collectively;
- in which technology is developed and used **to promote peace, justice, human rights, equality and respect for law**; and
- where people **work together**, as activists, to build a better society and **overcome inequalities and systems of oppression**.

In summary:

LESS AUTONOMY, MORE HUMANITY.

Objectives

In response to the challenges posed by autonomous weapons systems, the campaign aims to:

- **build and strengthen social norms** that **reject autonomous killing** by machine in warfare, policing, border control and other circumstances;
- demand **meaningful human control**, which ensures responsibility and accountability, in any use of force;
- counter digital dehumanisation and to **protect human rights**, now and in the future;
- build recognition that **we are individually and collectively responsible** for developing and shaping the technologies that frame interaction between us;
- **challenge the inequalities and oppressions** in society that are reproduced or exacerbated through technology.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A LAW FOR THE FUTURE

The action of the campaign is centred around the demand for an **international legally binding international legal instrument** that prohibits autonomous weapons systems and imposes significant human control in all decisions linked to the use of force, in order to:

prevent the automation of life-and-death decisions

protect human rights and international humanitarian law

prevent a global autonomous arm race

establish ethical boundaries for technological development

Not only do autonomous weapons systems represent a new generation of arms, but a **change in paradigm in the relationships between war, technology and humanity**, with challenges that go beyond the regulatory domain.
For this reason, numerous scholars, national and international bodies, players from the world of investments – including Archivio Disarno, Rete Italiana Pace e Disarmo, Stop Killer Robots and Etica Funds – are asking for the urgent adoption of international rules that impose ongoing significant human control and **prohibit the development and use of fully autonomous weapons systems**, at least until it can be demonstrated, with rigorous and transparent criteria, that these systems reliably respect international humanitarian law, the standards on responsibility and the dignity of individuals.

Read the statement by Etica Funds and Stop Killer Robots

09/2025

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Courtesy translation; Italian version shall prevail.


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