

Populist Politics and Transatlantic Security

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How does populism affect burden-sharing in international organizations? While the causes and consequences of rising populism have drawn much attention from researchers, transatlantic burden-sharing captivates not only scholars, but populist politicians themselves. More than just a defense economics question, burden-sharing is at the core of hierarchy and order in the transatlantic community. Yet no research to date has empirically analyzed the relationship between populism in national politics and burden-sharing. Using evidence from a new index of populist electoral strength, and a purpose-built burden sharing dataset, I find that the higher the share of seats in a state's parliament held by populist parties, the less that state spends on agreed priorities for collective defense: populist politics is associated with adverse burden-sharing outcomes in the transatlantic community.

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What does an “age of populism (Krastev 2011, 15)” mean for international politics? The study of burden-sharing in international organizations has shaped modern international relations and international political economy (Blum 1952; Olson and Zeckhauser 1966). Allocation of resources to and within budgets is the among the most significant strategic decisions states make (Gray 2010). Populist² politics is also a central topic in diverse fields.³ Despite a recent “populist surge (Mudde 2016, 25)” disrupting politics in Western societies, there has been little empirical analysis of the relationship between populism and international organizations, and none on the effect of populism on the international politics of burden-sharing. This is an important gap, because burden-sharing, or “the distribution of costs and risks among members of a group in the process of accomplishing a goal (Cimbala and Forster 2005, 1),” is central to the concept of international order and the functioning of international regimes (Lake 2007; Pratt 2018).

While the causes and consequences of populist influence have generated significant debate, effects on international order and organizations remain unclear. Populist politicians themselves, however, are interested in international politics. While an “America First (The White House 2017, 1)” foreign policy approach has garnered much attention, “us first” foreign policies elsewhere have not. The U.S. continues, meanwhile, “bolstering American influence by . . . reasserting American sovereignty and the right of all nations to determine

² I understand populism as a “thin-centered ideology,” separating society into “two homogeneous and antagonistic camps (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017, 5).” I contend that this style of politics translates to the international arena as “us first” foreign policies.

³ Including political economy (Eichengreen 2018), comparative politics (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2018; Tucker 1956), and sociology (Badie and Vidal 2018; Hofstadter 1955).

their own futures (The White House 2019a).” What are the likely effects of U.S. emphasis on sovereignty rather than multilateral institutions? Is U.S. support for populist figures in allies like Italy, Hungary, the United Kingdom and Poland likely to lead to allies “paying what they should ... for their defense (Trump 2017)?” How, in short, do populist politics influence transatlantic burden-sharing?

I draw on three strands of literature to develop and test a theory that populist politics dampen burden-sharing, as NATO and the EU have defined it. The first relates to socio-economic causes of populism, the second to the effects of populism on national and regional political institutions, and the third to the international relations implications of populism. I test my predictions using electoral data from 1980 to 2019 charting the performance of authoritarian populist parties in national elections (Johansson Heinö 2019), and a purpose-built burden-sharing data set containing a variable that captures defense spending on capabilities and operational contributions, sought by both NATO (Stoltenberg 2018b) and the EU (European Council 2016). NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg refers to “3 C’s” of burden-sharing: Cash (defense share of GDP), Capabilities (equipment share), and Contributions (operating & maintenance share). Because it captures national effort on shared priorities established by two international organizations central to the current international order, this variable is a valid measure of the concept of international collective action⁴ in the field of defense. Combined with a set of theoretically

⁴ Actions designed to mitigate problems arising from conflicting interests or lack of information acting as obstacles to joint action, and the lack of mechanisms to enforce agreements (Olson 2009).

important covariates, these two variables allow me to test the relationship between populist electoral success and the critical strategic issue of transatlantic burden-sharing.

The central finding is that increased populist vote share is associated with reduced spending in the areas NATO and EU leaders have agreed to increase spending. Populist politics result in burden-shifting⁵ rather than burden-sharing. As populist vote share rises, countries reduce overall defense budgets, slashing equipment and operating and maintenance (O&M) funding in particular. Not only did heads of state and government publicly agree to aim to spend 20% of defense budgets on equipment as part of the Wales Pledge and in the European Council, equipment spending is also what acquires the capabilities that they have agreed to develop (Stoltenberg 2018a). O&M spending is likewise the origin of operational contributions to shared priorities.

In particular, this burden-shifting behavior is predicted by right-wing populism, whereas the association between left populism and burden-shifting is small and statistically insignificant. This is consistent with the “thin-centered” conception of populism, suggesting that populist burden-shifting is driven by isolationism and opposition to international organizations among populist parties and voters (Verbeek and Zaslove 2017). Yet the populist aspect is critical – governments led by right parties tend to spend more on shared defense priorities, even as right-populist vote share drives such spending down. “Us

⁵ “Maneuvering for advantage, in the sense of burdens avoided by shifting them to someone else . . . think[ing] long and hard about how to coax an expanded effort from their partners and/or deflect pressures from the others for an increased effort by their own state (Thies 2015, 17).” In the context of “3C’s” burden-sharing, this entails reducing equipment and O&M expenditures. I will use this term throughout the article, as it differs slightly from “free-riding (Goldstein 1995)” in alliances and is more similar to the concept of “easy-riding (Cornes and Sandler 1984),” but benefits from the clear definition above.

first” foreign policy appears to dampen transatlantic burden-sharing. The relationship also appears to be driven by populist vote share rather than populist participation in government, suggesting it results from “competition for votes” rather than “competition for government (Wolinetz and Zaslove 2018, 33–39).” Populist politics influences burden-sharing whether or not populist parties are in government.

In addition to the inclusion of government participation in my statistical models, I also conduct Granger causality tests and two-stage least squares (2SLS) analyses, including sensitivity analyses, to further test the robustness of my findings, with similar results. The results are robust to the use of several alternative measures of populist electoral success, leaving me confident that they are not a result of subjective selection of variables in a contested conceptual area, and that they are likely to be externally valid. The use of these alternative measures is also important in light of definitional and conceptual debates in which scholars, for example, suggest that terms like populist radical right (Mudde 2007; Verbeek and Zaslove 2015) are “conceptually flawed (Norris and Inglehart 2019)” and should be jettisoned. At least in terms of foreign policy outputs, varying definitions appear to capture similar behaviors.

My analysis relies on observational data, resulting in limitations in drawing causal inference. My findings shed light, however, on a previously unexplored area that is of critical importance to international order⁶ and organizations, as well as to security and

⁶ Here I adhere to Deudney and Ikenberry’s (1999, 179) explanation of the postwar order as distinguished by a set of “multifaceted and interlocking features”— “co-binding security institutions, penetrated American hegemony, semi-sovereign great powers, economic openness, and civic identity.”

defense strategy. Moreover, the results of the 2SLS analysis, combined with anecdotal evidence, point toward a causal relationship.

In sum, my findings suggest that support for populist politicians and parties in Europe is unlikely to improve transatlantic burden-sharing. Instead, rising populist vote share augurs poorly for the kinds of defense investments that improve capabilities and operational readiness. If populists indeed promise “unambiguous victory (Krastev 2017, 75),” in a context of threat, conspiracy (Miller, Saunders, and Farhart 2016), confrontation (Müller 2017), and instability (Mounk 2018), a paradoxical and dangerous situation is likely: the core of the current international order will simultaneously become more *prone* to conflict and less *prepared* for it (Stein 2015). Whereas security scholars have identified structural factors eroding the relevance (Glaser 2019) and durability (Mearsheimer 2019) of the current international order, I find that populism in domestic (and occasionally transnational) politics is a significant risk factor as well.

Collective Action and Populist Politics

Students of collective action have long focused on burden-sharing in international organizations (Blum 1952; Schelling 1963). Early work concluded that outputs of international organizations like the UN (Schelling 1955) and NATO (Olson and Zeckhauser 1966) were public,⁷ thus subject to free-riding. Defense effort depended upon national wealth: the richer a state was, the larger the share of its wealth it would devote to defense.

⁷ Meaning non-excludable (the cost of excluding non-payers from benefitting from the output is prohibitive), and non-rivalrous (non-payers can benefit without diminishing benefits of payers).

Subsequent work, however, conceptualized collective defense as a “joint product,” meaning that military expenditures “provide multiple benefits – deterrence, damage-limiting protection in wartime, and the pursuit of nation-specific interests – that vary in their degree of publicness *among* allies (Sandler and Hartley 1995, 20).” Spillovers from other allies’ defense spending became a key variable explaining burden-sharing behavior, as did the extent to which allied strategies limited the publicness of security and defense among allies.

International relations scholarship later identified important interactions between domestic and systemic variables in shaping state behavior (Chaudoin, Milner, and Pang 2015; Nye et al. 2012). Walt (1985) focused on threat as a key independent variable, and later refinements affirmed the likely effect of threat on defense spending (Nordhaus, ONeal, and Russett 2012). Fang (2008) highlighted the role of international institutions in shaping domestic politics, while others have focused on the effect of domestic political and institutional factors on state behavior in the international arena (Gartzke and Gleditsch 2004; Hofmann 2013; Leeds 1999). Fordham (2002) addressed the interaction of the two levels on defense spending during the Cold War. Balfour et al. (2016, 16) described a “perpetual loop” of interdependence between national and international politics.

While scholars have addressed the role of party politics in shaping international behavior (Hofmann 2017; Milner 1997; Rathbun 2007), and the role of international factors in the rise of populism (Milner 2019), few (Balfour et al. 2016; Verbeek and Zaslove 2015) have explored the international implications of this rise. None has analyzed the relationship between populist national politics and defense burden-sharing.

This is a significant gap, as there are at least two theoretical reasons to think that such a relationship would exist. First, populist opposition to global elites (Goodhart 2017), and established patterns of compromise (Hatemi and Fazekas 2018) makes it likely that populist politics would result in an “us first” approach to burden-sharing. Scholars have analyzed the demographic (Rooduijn and Akkerman 2017; Tolbert and Hero 1996), social (Dancygier and Saunders 2006; Tavits and Potter 2015), and financial (Algan, Guriev, Papaioannou, and Passari 2017) causes and implications of globalization-driven populism. Yet no analysis has examined the likely material, distributional, and strategic effects of populist reactions against real and perceived costs of globalization.

Second, the domestic and regional implications of populist politics likely extend to the international arena. As mainstream parties react to populist challengers by moving toward their positions on salient issues (Meguid 2005), challenging the future of international organizations and the broader international order, those shifts should affect defense spending choices. The direction of those effects is not obvious – will states increase defense investment based on rising nationalism and as a hedge against fragmenting order, or will they pursue an “us first” approach and exploit the existing order to burden-shift to their allies?

I argue that more right-wing populist influence in domestic party politics will lead to more “us first” burden-shifting internationally because of right populists’ nationalist and unilateralist tendencies, and skepticism toward multilateral cooperation, combined with the continuing utility of “blaming (Schlipphak and Treib 2017)” international organizations

while benefiting from their outputs. The following section explores that theoretical approach in detail.

Theory: Populism and Burden-Sharing

The literature on the international causes and consequences of populism at the state level has developed substantially of late. No published study has systematically explored, however, the relationship between populism at the national level and international collective action or, more specifically, burden-sharing. Related work examining the determinants of populism, along with its effects on national and regional politics, offers important insights. I build on three strands of this literature to develop my theory on the relationship between populist politics and collective action in the transatlantic community. The first explores socio-economic causes of populism, the second explores effects of populism on national and regional political institutions, and the third explores the implications of populist politics in the international arena.

Socioeconomic Determinants of Populism

The literature on the socioeconomic determinants of populism includes both material and ideational factors. Material factors include weak economic growth, sometimes endemic to the international system (Baum and Lake 2003). Globalization may also stimulate “domestic conflict between owners of locally scarce and locally abundant factors (Rogowski 1987),” increasing worker insecurity (Scheve and Slaughter 2004), leading to an increase in support for radical right parties (Colantone and Stanig 2018). The populist

right's ability to make use of hostility toward migrants is related to such insecurity, particularly among voters with low transferrable skills (Pardos-Prado and Xena 2018).

I argue that this connection between economic insecurity associated with international systemic factors, like financial crises and income inequality, combines with a weakening of welfare states, fiscal strain, and nativism to lead to a particular populist-shaped foreign policy approach.

This particular aspect of populist-shaped foreign policy relates closely to the role of authoritarian attitudes and mistrust in populist politics (Dustmann et al. 2017; Inglehart 1971). I argue that the personal authoritarianism and mistrust associated with populist politics at their origin drives leads to an inward-looking, compromise-averse foreign policy approach. I contend that this approach affects state behavior internationally mainly by placing pressure on mainstream parties to co-opt elements of populist approaches.

Such an approach to foreign policy aligns with popular definitions of a "thin-centered ideology", separating society into "two homogeneous and antagonistic camps (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017, 5)." It may have psychological or dispositional origins: "there appears a likely role of narcissism in the rise of populism (Hatemi and Fazekas 2018, 885)," with modern populist politics appealing to interest in individualism, group superiority, entitlement, and identity politics. The manicheanism and conspiracy theorizing associated with populism (Miller, Saunders, and Farhart 2016) map as clearly onto foreign as they do domestic policy.

In this context, we might expect rising populism to lead to rising defense spending – most interpretations of Thucydides’ triptych regarding military buildups and expansive foreign policy include fear as a key component (Bagby 1994). Scholars focusing on authoritarianism in populist politics suggest that this is likely to be associated with increased resources for police and military (Norris and Inglehart 2019). Building on theories associating authoritarianism negatively with wider group loyalty and collective action (McDermott 2004), however, I contend that in the current security environment, characterized by lack of agreement on threats and challenges within the transatlantic community, populist-inspired foreign policies are more likely to exploit allies than they are to vanquish adversaries, occasionally even aligning with international rivals against domestic ones. The right-populist inclination to “draw voter attention away from interests altogether and focus on values (Tavits and Potter 2015, 745),” reduces incentives to contribute to international collective action. If populism is indeed characterized by confrontation, corruption and clientelism, we should expect populist politics to drive states to a more particularistic conception of both values and security, also limiting contributions. Militaristic talk is merely a rhetorical “façade (Norris and Inglehart 2019, 452).”

Among the members of the transatlantic community that Bechtel, Hainmueller, and Margalit (2014, 835) studied, attitudes toward bailouts during the recent global financial crisis were not determined by economic standing. Instead, “social dispositions” were more salient: economic nationalists were loath to support foreigners, even within Europe, while “cosmopolitan affinity and other-regarding concerns” were associated with support for bailouts. Such individual opinions can and do aggregate to affect foreign policy (Holsti

2004; Mattes and Weeks 2019). I build on such findings to argue that rightwing populist politics push mainstream parties (and thus national foreign policy) in a more particularistic and less cosmopolitan direction. I predict that this shift will lead to decreased burden-sharing, which is driven as much by organizational pressure from allies as it is by external threats (Becker and Bell 2020).

Implications of Populist Politics – Domestic, Regional, International

Although most research has focused on the determinants of populist politics, scholars have also analyzed effects of populist politics. This research is fairly well developed at the domestic level, less so at the regional level, and is underdeveloped at the international level.

Research on populism and domestic party politics finds that populist parties have caused mainstream parties to “absorb the blow (Wolinetz and Zaslove 2018, 310)” of their rise by enlisting their support and incorporating or co-opting some of their positions, or by governing in coalition with them.

I argue that both by competing for votes and by competing for governments (or cooperating in governments) with mainstream parties, populist parties are likely to affect defense policies in ways that dampen burden-sharing. In addition to the ideational and dispositional reasons outlined above, electoral politics and governance create an additional incentive to burden-shift as populist vote share increases. Because modern right-populist parties in particular seek to appeal simultaneously to nativist strands and to statist strands

in the domestic electorate, they may be forced to choose “whom to betray (Afonso 2015, 271)” in formulating policy. Defense investment offers an interesting escape route for such choices: economic nationalism and anti-immigration positions can satisfy populist electorate desires. Because anti-EU and anti-NATO are also common populist positions, the electoral costs of reneging on commitments made to partners in the context of those organizations are likely low (Adams, Ezrow, and Wlezien 2016). Whether the influence comes from government participation or from policy shifts designed to accommodate populist voters, populist-influenced governments may also seek electoral benefits not only by limiting defense spending, but also by shifting resources from the capabilities and contributions NATO and the EU seek from members, and into personnel, which can satisfy domestic constituencies that might otherwise not be. This is consistent with populist behavior in other institutions, such as “backlashes” against international courts (Voeten 2019).

Scholars have also suggested that the rise of populism may lead to the splintering or “suicide (Krastev 2017, 95)” of Europe, or the international order (Ikenberry 2018). The implications of such a splintering for “3C’s” defense spending are unclear: will states respond to the increased risk of disorder by purchasing insurance in the form of defense capabilities? Will states burden-shift and pass the cost of such insurance to their larger allies who underwrite the system itself? I argue that rightwing populist politics, while contributing to the splintering itself, will also favor responses to the splintering of the latter sort – the urge to blame national and allied elites along with migrants will overcome the urge to defend against external risks shared with allies. Marine Le Pen’s approach to Russia

and the United States (Foucquet and Viscusi 2018) and populist-governed Italy's 2019 Memorandum of Understanding with the People's Republic of China engaging Italy's support for China's "One Belt, One Road" initiative are examples of this tendency.

Scholarship on the international implications of populist politics thus far have only shed indicative light on these sorts of questions. Scholars have noted populist unilateralism and opposition to multilateral organizations (Liang 2016; Zaslove 2008). Sloan (2018) warns that populist politics make the West more vulnerable to external and internal threats. Schematically, though, this analysis suggests merely that "illiberal (Orbán and Tóth 2014)" populist-right politics will unmoor countries from the values that unite Europe, the transatlantic community and the international order. While Becker and Malesky (2017) found that ideational factors are associated with material burden-sharing behavior, no scholar to date has analyzed such a relationship as it applies to populism.

Scholars have, however, convincingly argued that international variables actually drive domestic politics in some cases and even that international behavior of states may be affected by international variables *through* domestic politics (Fang 2008). Foreign policy is certainly likely to be linked to domestic institutions (Gartzke and Gleditsch 2004; Leeds, Mattes, and Vogel 2009), public opinion (Kertzer and Zeitzoff 2017), and politics (Pollins and Schweller 1999). Holsti and Rosenau (1996) contended that domestic populism affects foreign policy, while scholars (Palmer 1990; Whitten and Williams 2011) have also argued that domestic political economies affect burden-sharing. No research, however, has analyzed the effects of populist politics on burden-sharing.

Recent research on the U.S. role in international order has suggested risks associated with an “America First” foreign policy (Boucher and Thies 2019; Drezner 2019). What about “Italy First?”, “Germany First?”, or “Hungary First?” Only single-country case study research (Verbeek and Zaslove 2015) addresses how populist politics in Europe affect foreign policy, and no empirical research has evaluated the relationship between populist politics and strategic burden-sharing. I contend that as the vote share of populist – and specifically rightwing populist – parties rises, burden-sharing gives way to burden-shifting. Verbeek and Zaslove’s (2017, 395) expectations of populist positions on salient foreign policy issues, reproduced in Table 1, suggest why this may be so. Because of the particular ways, outlined above, that rightwing populist politics shapes governments’ approaches to audience costs (Kertzer and Brutger 2016), multilateral commitments (Leeds, Mattes, and Vogel 2009) and international collective action (Cadier 2019), I expect right-populism to be associated with defense and security burden-shifting.

Table 1: Expected Positions of Populist Parties on Salient Foreign Policy Issues (Verbeek and Zaslove 2017)

	Populist Radical Right	Populist Market Liberal	Populist Regionalist	Populist Left-Wing
<i>General Attitude</i>	Isolationist - opposed to multilateral deployment of the military	Economic cosmopolitan - open to multilateralism	Undefined - foreign policy should serve the region	Social cosmopolitan - international arrangements to protect the weak and counter existing hegemony
<i>Regional (including European) integration</i>	Opposed to Europeanization	In favor of open market	Depending on how the EU affects their goals for more autonomy	Critical of Europeanization, but more willing to engage with international organizations than the PRR
<i>Trade and finance</i>	Protectionist	Open	Depending on whether globalization serves prosperity in the region	Protectionist because of labor displacement
<i>Transborder migration</i>	Opposed	Not necessarily opposed	Unclear	Not necessarily opposed

These pressures from populist politics interact with NATO's political economy to encourage burden-shifting. Historically, European security has been perhaps more prone to domestic preferences trumping strategic ones (Carrubba and Singh 2004). This tendency shapes not just overall defense spending, but also burden-sharing as defined by NATO and the EU. The economic nationalism of right-populist parties suggests that their increasing influence will likely be reduce appetites to contribute an international public good.

Similarly, the analysis of populist foreign policy inclinations above, combined with joint product theorizing on transatlantic burden-sharing (Murdoch and Sandler 1982) suggests that greater populist electoral strength will be associated with “easy-riding (Cornes and Sandler 1984, 580)” or “burden-shifting (Thies 2015, 151).” Moreover, populist electoral strength will be associated with the use of military spending for domestic, non-military ends, such as increasing employment or softening the effects of fiscal austerity (Becker 2019; Whitten and Williams 2011). Finally, the populist tendency to focus on internal rather than external threats means that their influence may curb the influence of external threats in defense spending choices.

By using NATO's “3C's” definition of burden-sharing, now shared by the EU, I combine these tendencies for testing in a single hypothesis for Western societies that are members of the transatlantic security community⁸ (Pouliot 2008):

⁸ “A specific configuration of interests, institutions and identities (Risse 2016, 22)” that ensures “dependable expectations of peaceful change (Deutsch 2015, 5).” For both theoretical and empirical purposes, this community includes all NATO and all EU members (Sloan 2016). Military geography and overlapping treaty commitments bind all 35 states to mutual defense as a practical matter.

H1: As the share of right-populist parties rises in legislative bodies, the share of GDP devoted to collective defense will decline.

Empirical Analysis

The foregoing leads me to include populist vote share in a simple “3C’s” burden-sharing model:

$$3C = f(\text{PS, GDP, SS, UEM, FRI, T}) \quad (1)$$

PS is the vote share accorded to populist parties (disaggregated into right and left share for hypothesis testing). GDP is the natural logarithm of Gross Domestic Product, SS is spatially adjusted spillovers from allied defense spending, UEM is unemployment, FRI is the EU’s Fiscal Rules Index score, and T is external threat. Table 2 summarizes the variables in equation (1) and their hypothesized relationships with “3C’s” burden-sharing.

Table 2: Independent Variables

Independent Variable	Equation	Hypothesized Effect on Burden-Sharing	Operationalization/Source
Populist Vote Share (overall, right, left)	<i>PS</i>	(-) Populist Parties seek to shift defense burdens	TIMBRO, ParlGov, CHES
Log GDP	<i>GDP</i>	(+) Larger economies spend more on defense	World Bank
Log Spatial Spillins	<i>SS</i>	(-) Allied spending enables burden-shifting by acting as a substitute for national spending	NATO
Unemployment	<i>UEM</i>	(-) Unemployment results in burden-shifting	World Bank
Fiscal Rules Index	<i>FRI</i>	(-) Increasingly stringent Fiscal Rules results in burden-shifting	European Commission
Threat	<i>T</i>	(+) State-centric threats discourage burden-shifting	Walt, author calculations

Data and Measurement

3C is the dependent variable – “3 C’s” spending in country *i* in year *t*, calculated as:

$$3C = \frac{e + o}{GDP} \quad (2)$$

Where *e* is equipment expenditures and *o* is O&M expenditures in 2016 USD.

NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg (2018a) articulated the significance of this variable:

“Burden sharing is about spending, it's about contributions, it's about capabilities, so we speak about the three Cs, cash, contributions and capabilities. And of course the cash, the money, has to be put in to good work, for instance investing in new capabilities or financing contributions like training missions in Iraq.” Non-NATO EU heads of state and government have also endorsed this approach to burden-sharing in the context of the European Council (2016). Figure 1 shows that the burden-sharing gap is greater in capabilities and contributions than it is for overall defense spending.

Figure 1- Non-U.S. Share of Transatlantic Defense spending (Overall and “3 C’s”)

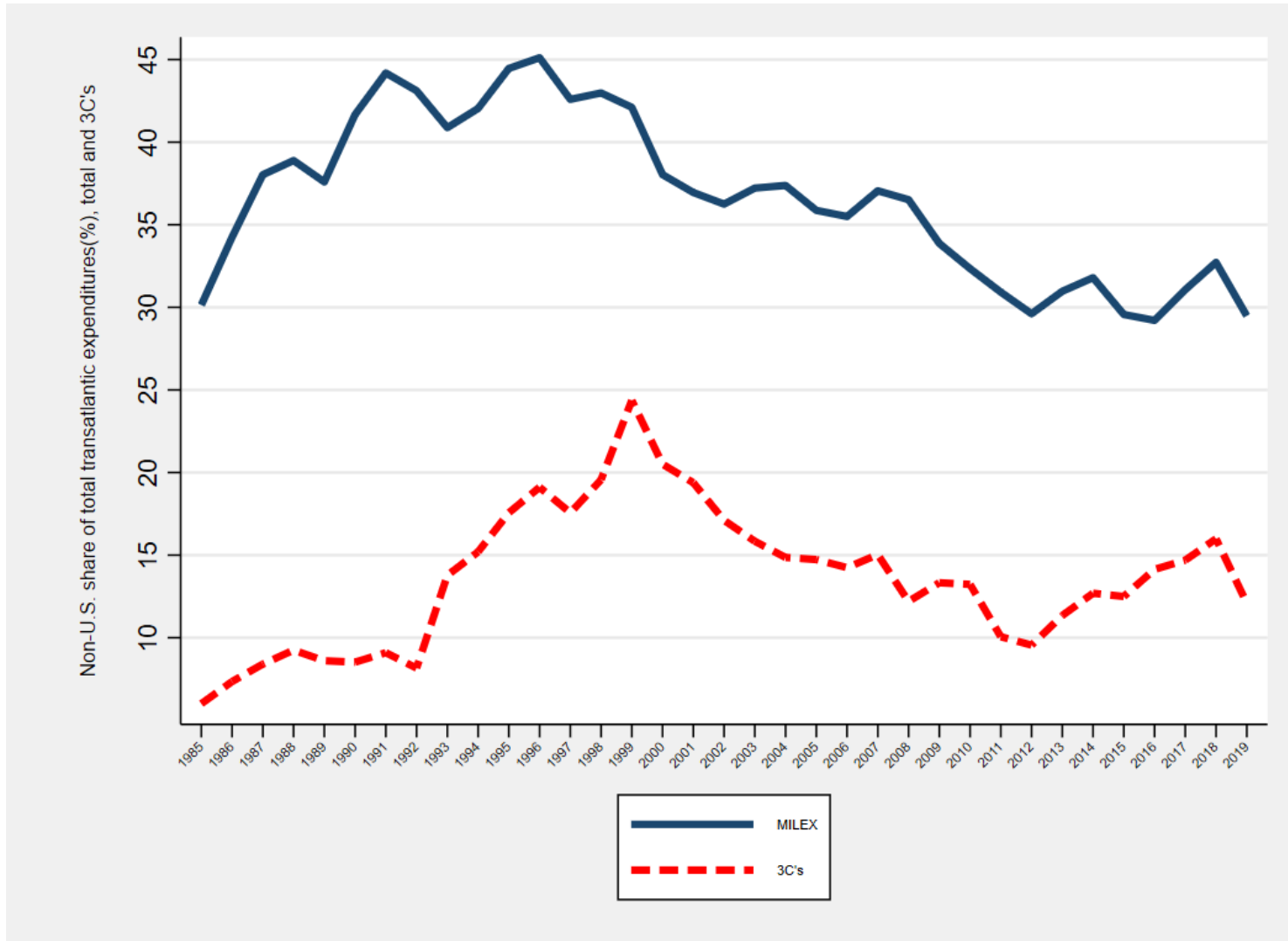


Table 3 visualizes the value of this “3C’s” metric. International security scholars have questioned the extent to which metrics popular in the defense economics literature and with policy makers capture actual contributions, yet suggest such contributions cannot be measured quantitatively (Oma 2012). Column 1 demonstrates that the “3C’s” metric correlates tightly with the canonical military burden metric of burden-sharing, but also with widely accepted (EDA 2018; NATO 2013) “output metrics (Hicks and Rathke 2018, 10).” Column 2 affirms scholars’ (Bove and Cavatorta 2012) choices to focus on disaggregated defense spending – the 3C’s metric captures both overall defense effort and contributions to shared priorities (Haesebrouck 2017).

Table 3: 3C’s and “Outputs”

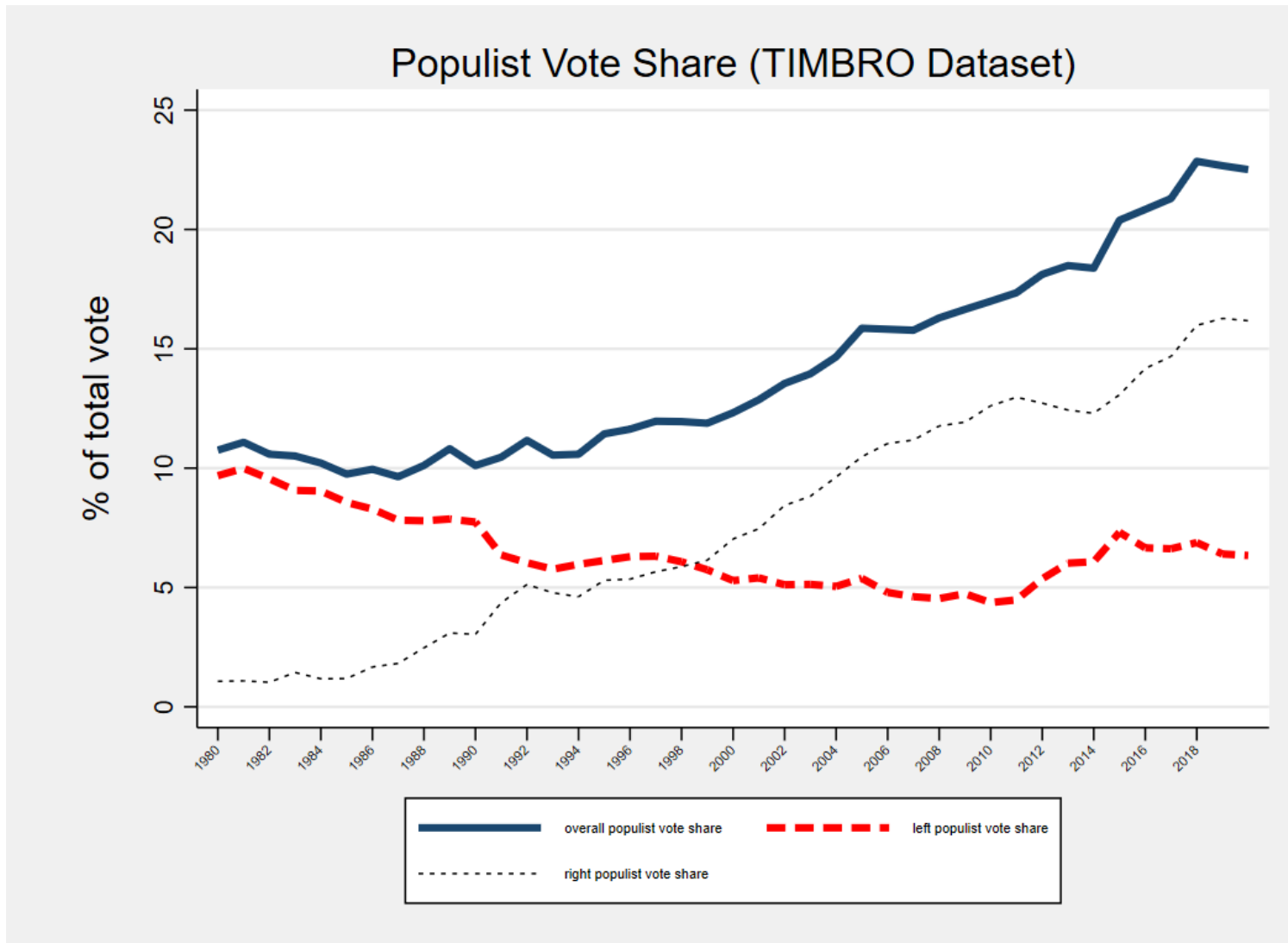
Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 "3C's" Metric	1					
2 Traditional Military Burden Metric	0.8976*	1				
3 Deployability	0.3045*	0.161	1			
4 Sustainability	0.3913*	0.1412	0.4883*	1		
5 ISAF Troops/Capita	0.4343*	0.3438*	0.3667*	0.5741*	1	
6 Haesebrouck Libya Score	0.4787*	0.4056	0.4756	0.6351*	.	1

* = significant at 1% level

PS is the populist vote share in country *i*’s legislature in year *t*, as reported in the TIMBRO authoritarian populism index, “a comprehensive outlook on the growth of populism in European politics [that] includes all European consolidated democracies (Johansson Heinö 2019),” widely used in recent populism research (Foster and Frieden 2019; Gidron and Hall

2017, 2019; Stankov 2017). The share reflects results from every party in all elections to national parliaments. TIMBRO identifies populist parties based on the parties and elections in Europe database (Nordsieck 2015) and the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Bakker et al. 2015). Appendix A includes a more detailed discussion of TIMBRO methodology, a complete list of parties included and rationale, alternative metrics used in robustness analyses, and the matrix of control variables listed in table 2, including summary statistics. Figure 2 visualizes populist vote shares since the first year of the TIMBRO index, 1980.

Figure 2 –Populist Vote Share



Results

To test *H1*, I estimate the following equation:

$$3C_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PS_{it-1} + \delta X_{it-1} + \varepsilon \quad (3)$$

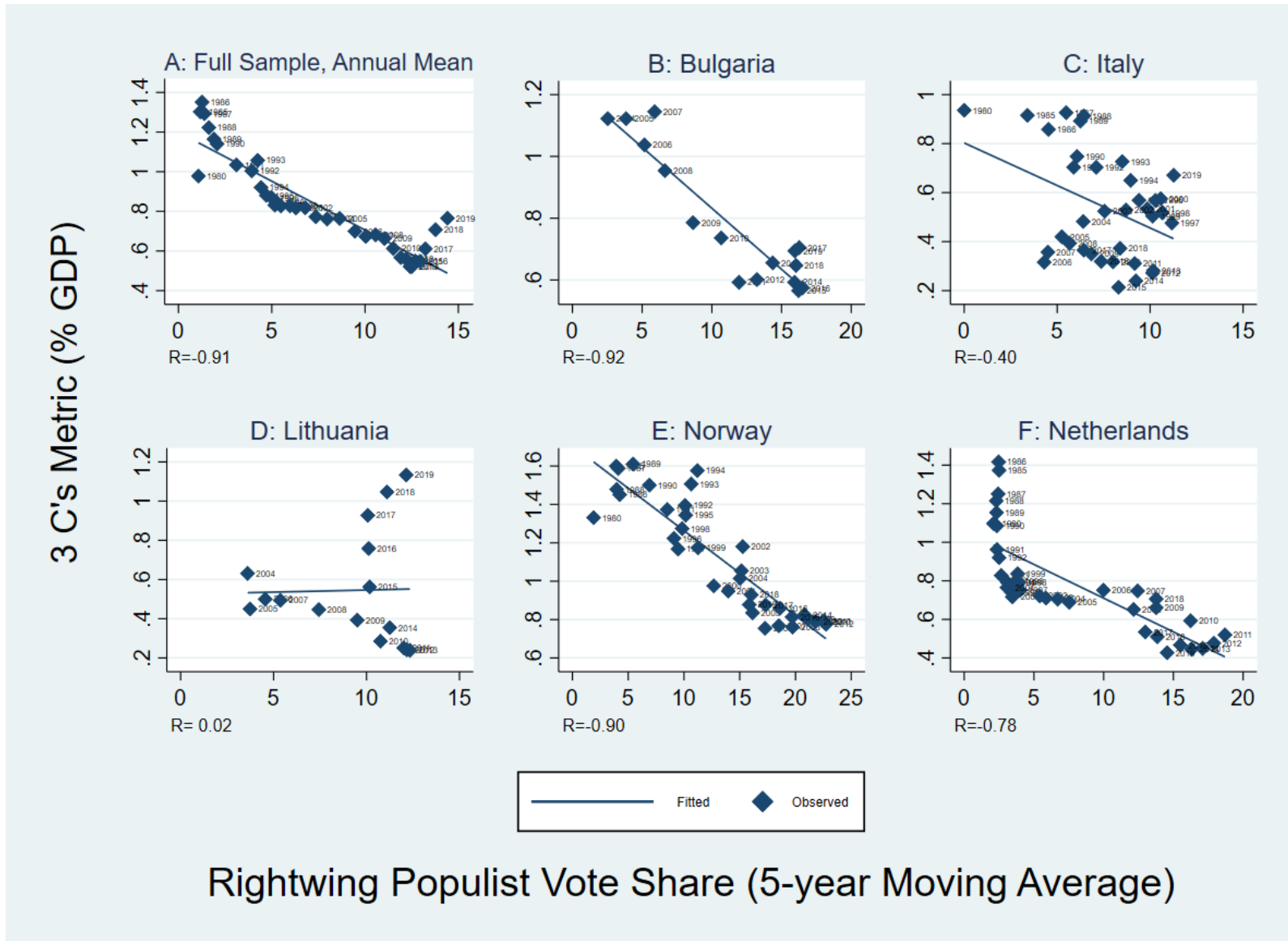
$3C_{it}$ is “3C’s” defense spending, discussed above. PS_{it-1} is the TIMBRO populist index’s populist vote share, lagged by one year. In successive models, I disaggregate populist vote share into left and right populist vote share. For robustness checks, I substitute ParlGov and CHES variables⁹ for the TIMBRO vote share. X_{it-1} is the matrix of control variables to address omitted variable bias, discussed in detail in appendix A. Because the data may be experiencing panel specific shocks, and because the number of time periods (24 years) is less than the number of countries (28 in fully specified model), I employ a Prais-Winsten regression and panel corrected standard errors (ε) (Beck and Katz 1995) with a panel-specific auto-regression process (AR1) to address potential serial correlation.

Table 4 presents the results. I first establish the bivariate relationship in Model 1, before testing the strength of that relationship by adding control variables. Figure 3 visualizes this bivariate relationship between populist vote share and “3C’s” burden-sharing. Panel A demonstrates a strong relationship throughout the sample, while panels B-F demonstrate

⁹ Appendix A

strong relationships within countries. The unclear relationship in Panel D suggests that the relationship may be mitigated by vulnerability to Russia, affirming the use of a threat variable in the multivariate analysis. Appendix A discusses the controls added to the PCSE models in sequence.

Figure 3: Populism and “3C’s” Burden-Sharing



Because the addition of these theoretically relevant control variables does not rule out omitted variable bias, I make use of a set of instrumental variables that are likely exogenous to electoral preferences regarding specific policy issues, candidates, or parties. Models 6 and 7 depict the results of the use of a cluster of European Social Survey (2018) – ESS - responses that Norris and Inglehart argue (2019, 489) captures “authoritarian values” as an instrument for right populist vote share in a Two-Stage Least Squares (2SLS) model. The responses are to questions measuring the importance a respondent assigns to being in safe and secure surroundings, to doing what one is told and following rules, to behaving properly, to having a strong government that ensures safety, and to following traditions and customs. Because this variable captures dispositional and personal values (Schwartz 1992), it is unlikely to translate directly into government choices regarding defense spending, but instead its effect should manifest only through the variation in electoral preferences associated with variation in this variable. Similarly, libertarian values¹⁰ at the level of individuals are personal and dispositional, rather than political, thus mitigating the risk of endogeneity.

The instruments thus meet three critical 2SLS requirements. First, each is a key causal determinant of votes for populist parties. Second, as personal and dispositional factors, they meet the independence assumption by being “unrelated to omitted variables we might like to control for (Angrist and Pischke 2014, 106).” However, because economic distress

¹⁰ The importance a respondent assigns to doing different things in life, having an exciting life, being creative, being free, and listening to people who are different from the respondent (Norris and Inglehart 2019, 490).

can influence both authoritarian attitudes and defense spending (Ballard-Rosa, Rickard, Malik, and Scheve 2019; Scheve and Slaughter 2004), I include lagged GDP change in the 2SLS model.

Third, they satisfy the exclusion restriction because the electoral influence of populist parties is the only likely channel through which such personal values are likely to affect defense spending. There is no reason to believe that national strategic and fiscal planners consider the personal dispositions of individual voters directly when considering what resources to invest in defense, or, in particular, in deciding how to allocate those resources to shared transatlantic priorities once they are in the defense budget.

Public mood measured at the country level could still influence policy choices even if not reflected in votes, but in practice this appears not to be the case: Schilde, Anderson, and Garner (Schilder, Anderson, and Garner 2019) found that EU defence policy has been consistently popular over three decades, yet defense expenditure did not follow. ESS data points in the same direction – there is no statistically significant relationship between, for example, beliefs that it is “important that government is strong and ensures safety (ESS 2018)” and 3C’s spending. Additionally, there is no statistically significant relationship between my authoritarian values instrument and “willingness to fight (Anderson, Getmansky, and Hirsch-Hoefler 2020)” aggregated at the national level, a strong predictor of both overall and “3C’s” spending. Finally, positive associations between authoritarianism (Eckhardt and Newcombe 1969; Wilson and Machain 2018), populism (Liang 2016) and militarism bias any possible direct effect of such voter dispositions away from my hypothesized relationship.

Nonetheless, the extent to which the instrument satisfies the exclusion restriction may remain questionable, so I use the “plausibly exogenous (Conley, Hansen, and Rossi 2012)” test for an instrumental variable that may have greater than zero correlation with the unobserved error term. The test yields positive upper and lower bounds when gamma is .1 or greater, suggesting that a slight relaxation of the exclusion restriction is appropriate, and that a 2SLS analysis can usefully augment my PCSE analysis.

Table 4: Correlates of “3C’s” Spending

VARIABLES	Bivariate Models			Fully Specified Models		2SLS Models (Right Populism)	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
	Populist Vote Share (Overall)	Populist Vote Share (Right)	Populist Vote Share (Left)	Populist Vote Share (Overall)	Populist Vote Share (Right)	Authoritarian Values Instrument	Libertarian Values Instrument
Populist Vote Share (5-year ma)	-0.00335*** (0.00118)	-0.00381*** (0.00115)	-0.000904 (0.00314)	-0.00190 (0.00142)	-0.00263** (0.00113)	-0.0253** (0.0106)	-0.0288*** (0.00895)
ΔGDP (log, 1-year lag)				-0.121 (0.163)	-0.132 (0.163)	1.037 (0.695)	1.075 (0.742)
Spatial Spillins (log, 1-year lag)				-0.281*** (0.0499)	-0.274*** (0.0495)		
Unemployment Rate (1-year lag)				-0.0121*** (0.00314)	-0.0122*** (0.00313)		
Fiscal Rules Index (1-year lag)				0.00637 (0.00988)	0.00584 (0.00972)		
Threat (1-year lag)				0.00146*** (0.000451)	0.00147*** (0.000434)		
Populist Participation in Governmen				2.46e-05 (0.0221)	0.00182 (0.0220)		
Crisis Indicator (=1 if year >2008)				0.0263 (0.0271)	0.0258 (0.0267)		
Constant	0.734*** (0.0469)	0.730*** (0.0540)	0.690*** (0.0469)			0.882*** (0.123)	0.921*** (0.105)
Country Fixed Effects							
Prob>F (excluded instrument)						0	0
Observations	645	645	645	516	516	373	373
R-squared	0.415	0.377	0.374	0.736	0.758	-0.987	-1.288
Number of Countries	30	30	30	28	28		
Model AIC/BIC						405/413	514/522
Baseline AIC/BIC						-316/-167	-316/-167

Standard errors in parentheses
 *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

The key finding in Table 4 is that rightwing populism appears to uniquely dampen 3C's defense spending. The bivariate relationship between the vote share for rightwing populist parties and "3C's" burden-sharing (model 2) is negative and significant, and is robust to the addition of controls for public choice and joint product theories, domestic and regional political economy variables, and a threat variable. The addition of an indicator variable for government participation indicates that the relationship holds irrespective of whether populist parties actually enter government – rising vote shares appear to compel mainstream parties to "absorb the blow" of rising populist influence by shifting burdens of collective action to allies whether populist parties are in government or not. The inclusion of an indicator variable capturing the 2009 global financial and economic crisis and its aftermath ensures that the results are not simply an artifact of period-specific developments. Models 4 and 5 include these controls plus country fixed effects, capturing any national particularities not addressed by the domestic-level variables in the model and ensuring the results arise from changes within national politics over time, and not systematic cross-country differences in behavior. The coefficient on rightwing populist vote share, unlike that of leftwing and overall populist vote share, remains negative and statistically significant throughout.

The coefficient of 0.00263 on right populism in model 5, significant at the 1% level, is very similar to that in the bivariate relationship between populism and "3C's" spending. For each additional percentage point of the overall legislative vote right populist parties garner in a 5-year moving average of national legislative elections, the state concerned spends .0026% of GDP less on collective defense priorities. For a country like Italy, the 1.95-point

increase in that figure would correspond to a cut of approximately \$95 million. In reality, “Italy will cut €450 million (U.S. \$512.3 million) from its planned defense spending in 2019 by suspending helicopter and missile purchases and canceling an office move by the defense ministry to help shore up social welfare and tax cuts (Kington 2018).”

The coefficients in columns 6 and 7, the 2SLS models, is larger than in the PCSE models, likely due to the instruments capturing systematic variation while dropping the stochastic element of variation (Wooldridge 2015, 479–80). While my primary purpose in using the instruments is to address endogeneity, they also serve this purpose – reducing bias and strengthening coefficients. It is unsurprising that the second stage results are similar for libertarian and authoritarian values, as the two measure opposite concepts and the sign inversion is captured in the first stage. Because the authoritarian values instrument relates more directly to rightwing populist politics, I focus on it for my analysis. The coefficient of -0.0253, significant at the 5% level, suggests an effect nearly ten times larger than the association in the fully specified PCSE estimate. So, in the case of Italy, nearly twice as large as actual estimated defense cuts for 2019.

Because of irregular variation in “3C’s” defense spending associated with the long-term capital investment of equipment expenditures and the event-driven nature of O&M expenditures, we should not expect estimates to precisely predict ongoing evolutions in defense spending. The fact that the strong negative relationship is robust to a full set of controls and a 2SLS analysis leaves me confident that the results do not arise from typical econometric problems, and that causality likely flows from populist politics to “3C’s” burden-sharing and not vice versa.

Robustness and Extended Validity

I nonetheless include several robustness checks to further challenge the results above.

Table 5 depicts the first set of those checks. Models 1-6 replicate the fully-specified model in the main analysis, but substitute, in sequence, a series of alternative measures for rightwing populism. The independent variable in Model 1 is generated by combining a combination of authoritarian anti-EU, and left-right scores in the ParlGov dataset (Döring and Manow 2016) with party vote shares. In Model 2, I use only the authoritarian score and vote share. Models 3-6 use CHES data, separating populist and authoritarian scores and combining them with vote and seat shares in sequence. Together, the results depicted in columns 1-6 leave me confident that the results in Table 4 are not artifacts of variable selection or period effects, as the fact that the CHES scores are only available for later years combined with the crisis dummy strongly suggest that the observed effects are consistent across periods. The signs in each of the models align with those in the main analysis, although the results are often not statistically significant. This points to the benefit of the larger number of observations in the TIMBRO data. The insignificant results in column 7, using precisely the same set of observations as in column 5 of the main table, indicate that the results are not due to rightwing parties being in power, but to particularities of populist right parties gaining vote share.

Table 5 (Robustness Tests): Alternative Measures of Populism and Disaggregated Defense Spending

VARIABLES	OLS - Fully Specified						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
	ParlGov Auth. Pop.	ParlGov Authoritarianism	CHES Authoritarian Vote Share	CHES Authoritarian Seat Share	CHES Populist Vote Share	CHES Populist Seat Share	Right-Leaning Government
Independent Variable (1-year lag, 5-year ma)	-0.176 (0.111)	-0.0222 (0.218)	-0.000970*** (6.56e-05)	-0.000975*** (6.60e-05)	-0.00236 (0.00390)	-0.00233 (0.00384)	-0.0277 (0.0398)
ΔGDP (ln, 1-year lag)	-0.120 (0.172)	-0.123 (0.171)	0.0563 (0.292)	0.0563 (0.292)	0.0563 (0.292)	0.0563 (0.292)	-0.125 (0.161)
Spatial Spillins (1-year lag)	-0.272*** (0.0488)	-0.266*** (0.0510)	0.191 (0.287)	0.191 (0.287)	0.191 (0.287)	0.191 (0.287)	-0.298*** (0.0477)
Unemployment (1-year lag)	-0.0140*** (0.00323)	-0.0139*** (0.00324)	-0.0212*** (0.00440)	-0.0212*** (0.00440)	-0.0212*** (0.00440)	-0.0212*** (0.00440)	-0.0125*** (0.00318)
Fiscal Rules Index (2-year lag)	0.00605 (0.0104)	0.00629 (0.0107)	0.0140 (0.0142)	0.0140 (0.0142)	0.0140 (0.0142)	0.0140 (0.0142)	0.00539 (0.00978)
State-Centric Threat (1-year lag)	0.00142*** (0.000482)	0.00127*** (0.000441)	0.00100 (0.00122)	0.00100 (0.00122)	0.00100 (0.00122)	0.00100 (0.00122)	0.00138*** (0.000425)
Populist Government	-0.00805 (0.0231)	-0.00606 (0.0238)	0.0210 (0.0301)	0.0210 (0.0301)	0.0210 (0.0301)	0.0210 (0.0301)	-0.00475 (0.0218)
Crisis Indicator	0.0244 (0.0261)	0.0244 (0.0265)					0.0270 (0.0268)
Constant	3.194*** (0.293)	3.088*** (0.293)	0.686 (1.808)	0.728 (1.811)			2.331*** (0.271)
Country Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	460	460	147	147	147	147	516
R-squared	0.776	0.761	0.906	0.906	0.906	0.906	0.728
Number of countries	28	28	28	28	28	28	28

Panel-Corrected Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

It is difficult to ascertain the extent to which these findings are generalizable beyond the transatlantic community. Data for both the independent and dependent variables is less available outside that community. Authoritarian and populist phenomena differ among regions – while recent populist successes in Southeast Asia, for example, have different origins than those in Europe, Kurlantzick (2018) suggests they will have similar policy effects. Similarly, even as Brazil’s Jair Bolsonaro has strengthened relations with the Trump administration, which plans to designate Brazil a “major non-NATO Ally (The White House 2019b),” fiscal challenges have dampened Brazilian defense spending (Host 2018) as they have for European states. Should disaggregated defense spending data or populist vote share data become available for a number of Asian or Latin American states, for example, scholars could validate the analysis above externally to the transatlantic community by determining if these anecdotes reflect systematic relationships.

Discussion

Populism is widely regarded as one of the most significant political phenomena of the current period. Yet despite prominent discussions among theorists and practitioners about the likely foreign policy effects of populism, very little empirical work has theorized and tested such effects. This study provides some initial insights to begin filling this analytical gap.

The key finding is that rightwing populist politics dampens burden-sharing as NATO and the EU have defined it. As countries experience higher populist vote shares, they spend less on the capabilities and contributions to collective defense and security that they have

formally agreed and urged one another to invest in. The analysis above shows that several measures of populist influence in national politics correlate strongly with reduced “3C’s” burden-sharing. Moreover, by using social dispositions at the individual voter level as instruments for voting behavior, I am more confident that the relationship is causal.

This relationship between populist politics and burden-sharing has significant strategic implications. My analysis suggests that, all else equal, if the five-year moving average of the right populist vote share in each NATO ally were to rise by one standard deviation (or 9.75) in 2020, overall spending on “3C’s” priorities would fall by roughly .2 percent of GDP, or approximately \$80 billion, around ten percent of total NATO defense spending. Put another way, if each NATO ally had spent .2 percent more of GDP on defense in 2018, for example, four additional countries (France, Lithuania, Poland, and Romania) would exceed the NATO aspiration of spending two percent of GDP on defense.

One important question arising from this finding is whether it is populism itself that drives this relationship, or some sub-component of populist politics. The breadth and simplicity of the definition of populism as a rhetorical style bifurcating people from elites has ambiguous implications for this question. For instance, it is possible that what TIMBRO captures as populism actually includes some form of isolationism, the effects of which are more significant than those of populist politics. This is unlikely for two reasons. First, general understandings of isolationism among IR scholars as “voluntary and general abstention by a state from security-related activity in an area of the international system in which it is capable of action (Braumoeller 2010, 354)” distinguish the concept of isolationism from populism. Second, one of the few studies of the effects of populism on the

foreign policy of a particular state (Verbeek and Zaslove 2015) finds that populist parties do not necessarily or uniformly seek abstention from security-related activity, but rather do so as a function of whether a particular international activity supports their notion of the popular will. Nonetheless, scholars may consider jointly modeling the effects of populism and isolationism on foreign policy outputs.

Beyond identifying populism's effects on the strategically crucial area of defense spending, this study's approach may also be useful for scholars analyzing other areas in which populist politics may affect foreign policy. For example, does populist influence affect national policies toward European integration, relationships with external powers and approach to great power competition, willingness to participate in multilateral operations, foreign aid, foreign direct investment, or trade policy?

This study offers suggestive evidence that populist politics may indeed affect such important foreign policy questions. Because defense spending is such a central strategic question, it is likely that rising influence of populist parties also causes states to move away from multilateralism and collective action in areas beyond defense spending. This suggests that rising vote and seat shares for populist parties in the West is a bigger risk to European integration than previously thought (Mudde 2013). It also suggests that China may experience additional "wins (Chatzky 2019)" like Italy's decision to join its Belt and Road Initiative, or the UK's equivocation regarding the use of Huawei for 5G infrastructure in spite of U.S. requests to the contrary (Bond, Parker, and Fildes 2019). Likewise, Russia may be able to develop further "special relationships (Janjevic 2018)" with populist leaders or mainstream governments feeling pressure from the former. Future research could build on

this study's approach to test hypotheses implied by these sorts of anecdotes. My findings similarly suggest that rising populist influence may also dampen participation in multilateral operations, foreign aid and investment, and enthusiasm for multilateral trade agreements. Future research could build on this study and the wealth of recent research on the domestic and regional causes and effects of populist politics to address these important questions.

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